

ABSTRACT

Rhythm, Rhyme, and Rhetoric in *12 Years a Day Django*

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This thesis examines the rhetoric of *12 Years a Day Django*, a contemporary written rap battle performance by rapper Daylyt. Three major arguments are advanced. First, written rap battling is a genre worthy of greater scholarly scrutiny. Second, a rapper's style of flow can be racialized, meaning listeners "hear" race when the style is performed. Third, rappers' flow can be a potent source of subversive and vernacular rhetorical action, which is enabled in part by the racialization of flow. These arguments are cultivated through a contextual and textual analysis of *12 Years a Day Django*. In developing these claims, this thesis seeks to demonstrate the utility of applying rhetorical methods of study to rap battling and flow in order to further the project of putting performance and rhetorical studies into productive intersection. This thesis further aims at aiding in the resuscitation of aural-rhetorical theory and criticism.

Rhythm, Rhyme, and Rhetoric in *12 Years a Day Django*

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A Thesis

Approved by the Department of Communication

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Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of
Baylor University in Partial Fulfillment of the
Requirements for the Degree
of
Master of Arts

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August 2016

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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I would first like to offer my sincere gratitude to Dr. Samuel Perry, without whose kind guidance this project would not have been completed. I also express my thanks to my other wonderful committee members, Dr. Mathew Geber and Dr. Anne-Marie Schultz, for their patience and assistance. I would also like to thank my former advisor, Dr. Leslie Hahner, for her continuous support for my academic endeavors. Finally, I would like to thank Dr. Andy Hogue, another former committee member whose support was invaluable in the early writing of this thesis.

DEDICATION

To my parents, for their love and support in getting me here.

CHAPTER ONE

Introduction to Daylyt, Rap Battles, and Rationale

Standing on ashy bare feet, picking cotton with manacled hands, and garbed in what might be described as slave regalia, rapper Daylyt (Davone Campbell)—a black man from Watts, California and self-proclaimed member of the infamous Grape Street Crips gang—does not fit the image of someone about to perform in a rap battle. Daylyt (easily identifiable even in costume because of the tattooed mask of popular comic book hero Spawn on his face) seems more out of place given his location: a stage in Ontario where he stands ready to battle a white man from Nova Scotia (rapper Pat Stay) in front of a predominantly white audience. If his attire seems incongruous with the event, his introduction to the audience is even more jarring. Daylyt turns to a figure onstage behind him—a man dressed in a black robe, colonial-style wig, and a Ronald Reagan mask—and asks, “Is it okay for me ta speak, massa?” The slave master grants permission, and Daylyt follows up by asking “What’s my name is?” The master tells him, “Your name is Number Five, boy.” Daylyt faces the audience and parrots the master, declaring, “My name is Number Five” (*Daylyt vs. Pat Stay*, 2014) If the meaning of Daylyt’s costuming was ambiguous, this exchange is not. Daylyt signals quite clearly that he is performing the as a slave labeled Number Five.

The performance stages a dialectical conflict between Daylyt, the slave, and the slave master. Before performing in the first ‘round,’ Daylyt professes to a desire to not rap. After a brief verbal exchange with Daylyt, the slave master (a role performed by battle rapper 100 Bulletz, Mathew Karstens, a black Canadian man) responds by mock-

whipping him while exclaiming “Rap, nigger! Rap!” Daylyt acquiesces. Over the course of the performance, the slave master repeatedly directs Daylyt to perform certain styles of ‘flow’—referring to “the rhythmical and articulative features of a rapper’s delivery of the lyrics” (Adams 2008, np.)—under the threat of the lash. Daylyt stages a rebellion in the third and final round. Refusing to rap any longer, Daylyt seizes slave master’s whip and uses it to chase the (former) master offstage. In spite of his protest against rapping any further, Daylyt returns to the stage and performs a final style of flow. Each style of flow arouses an expectation and desire within the white members of the live audience that become sources of subversive rhetorical action.

The subversive action of Daylyt’s flows results from the narrative of the performance and its enacted message. The narrative of the performance, post-hoc entitled *12 Years a Day Django*, is a tale of Daylyt successfully rebelling against the slave master. The slave master, however, is a mimetic representation of all whites as contemporary slave masters; upon losing the battle to a white man, Daylyt thus remains enslaved in spite of his seeming emancipation. It is a tragic and intentional twist.

The battle was a title match for Canadian rap battle league King of the Dot. Winning the title of King of the Dot Champion carries with it a physical trophy, and an ironic one in the context of Daylyt’s performance—a gold neck chain. The symbolic significance of battling for a chain while dressed as a slave was not lost on Daylyt. Cognizant that his performance would not resonate well with the live audience, Daylyt chose to perform as a slave because the act of losing would convey that ‘the chain remain the same’—a term in the hip hop lexicon for the notion that black Americans remain slaves within American society (Smitherman 1997). Through its narrative and enacted

failure, *12 Years a Django* thus stages “a paradigmatic incident that can serve as an exemplar for the state of racial relations in this country” (Rowland and Strain 1994, p. 222). As Daylyt puts it:

If you a black male, if you a, not even a black male, if you are a African American, or even if you a mixed black and white nigga, if you got any nigga in you, you should love what I did....I was just showing the true colors of what life really is. Whether we want to accept it or not, whether we want to accept or not, we still slaves to this day. (Campbell 2014f)

Underscoring this message, Daylyt claims the moral of the narrative is that, even in standing up and seemingly beating “the white man,” “no matter what, if I beat the white man still gon’ win” (Campbell 2014f). In other words, Daylyt beat the literal slave master but not the figurative one—he drove the Reagan-masked master offstage only to see the fire of his rebellion smothered by his loss to Pat Stay.

The message and means of the performance might seem amiss given that it occurred in front of a predominantly white audience in Canada. As with most contemporary rap battles, however, *12 Years a Day Django* was live-streamed online and later uploaded on Youtube. The rhetorical and cultural work of *12 Years a Day Django* is accomplished by exploiting the racial and locational politics surrounding the performance and technologies of visual recording and circulation. Daylyt’s use of flow is able to articulate and enact subversive and vernacular cultural commentary and critique because of where *12 Years a Day Django* occurred, the visual recording of the performance and its circulation on the internet, the racial composition of the live audience, the general racial segregation of contemporary rap battling’s audiences, and the rhetorical constraints marshalled by genre and audience.

The thesis examines rap battling as a genre and *12 Years a Day Django* as a rhetorical performance in hopes of developing these claims. It first argues that written rap battling is a genre deserving of greater academic scrutiny, particularly from rhetorical scholars. The multimodal rhetoric of theatrical performances within that genre and the way in which these performances structure the relationships between modes of address makes them unique texts for exploring the functions of modes of address both independently and in relation. Further, their simultaneously live and mediated nature and circulation among racially-diverse mass audiences makes them potentially productive sites for examining the multimodal rhetoric of performance and its intersection with race. Building on Norman K. Denzin's (2003) recognition that radical black theatre wields a powerful weapon in the fight against racism and white hegemony as well as Nicole Hodges Persley's (2015) claim that hip hop theatre can be a potent platform for addressing diverse black experiences, institutional inequality, and social injustice, this thesis argues that theatrical written rap battle performances can be powerful sources of vernacular and subversive cultural commentary and critique. This thesis demonstrates this in practice through a textual analysis of *12 Years a Day Django*.

This thesis additionally seeks to help recover the rhetorical study of aurality and delivery by analyzing Daylyt's use of flow and its intersection with verbal and visual discourses as sources of subversive and vernacular rhetorical action in *12 Years a Day Django*. It argues that the current literature on the articulative and suasive functions of flow could be productively supplemented by a rhetorical perspective. Specifically, conceptualizing styles of flow as rhetorical forms offers a useful means of assessing and understanding flow's capacity to function as a subversive and vernacular discourse.

Indeed, Daylyt's styles of flow in *12 Years a Day Django* rhetorically work to arouse and then subvert the stylistic expectations and desires of the white members of the live audience. In employing styles of flow in this manner, Daylyt models for black audience members a method of enacted subversion that may be a potentially productive response to the way in which white desire works to create and sustain black subjection.

Justification

This thesis seeks to make timely and productive interventions in several interdisciplinary conversations regarding the cultural and rhetorical significance of rap battling, the functions and significance of aural and multimodal rhetorics (specifically, rappers' style of flow and its intersection with verbal and visual discourses), and the contestation of the racial status quo through rhetorical performance. Much of the rhetorical and cultural work of *12 Years a Day Django* occurs through the use of aurality, whose function as a source subversive and vernacular rhetorical action derives from how certain styles of flow are racialized by generic expectation and the diverging stylistic desires of rap battling's racially-segregated audiences. This thesis therefore initiates the rhetorical study of written rap battling at the levels of genre and performance. Broadly speaking, this project highlights the cultural and rhetorical significance of rap battling and its amplification by the shift to the written format, as well as the mutual productivity of rhetorically studying (written) rap battling for the study of both rap battling and rhetoric.

Written rap battling is first culturally and rhetorically significant because of its massive popularity and influence on the rhetorical trajectories of rap and hip hop. It is further rhetorically significant because of the confluence of rhetoric and race in some

performances, its expressive practices—specifically, its aural and visual theatrics—and the unique ways in which the relationships between performer, performance, and audience are structured. Collectively, these considerations make written rap battles excellent sites for conducting inquiries that further three laudable and ongoing projects within rhetorical studies: putting rhetorical and performance studies into productive intersection, recovering the study of aural rhetoric, and broadening the study of multimodal rhetoric.

A Preview of Rap Battling as Context

12 Years a Day Django, represents a culmination of many meaningful generic changes in rap battling. The battle in which the performance occurred was orchestrated, promoted, staged, and distributed by King of the Dot (KOTD), a Canadian-based rap battle league—one of the most prominent in the world—that routinely features battlers from across the globe. Performances in leagues such as KOTD are pre-written, meaning battlers write their lyrics and prepare and rehearse their performances prior to the live performance. Once a thoroughly-derided format, “written” battling has come dominate rap battling as a whole and taken the genre’s popularity to previously unexperienced heights. And a key factor in this success has been the incorporation of visual theatrics within battle performances—a rhetorical evolution in the genre spearheaded by Daylyt, and one to which *12 years a Day Django* contributes by being (arguably) the first theatrical rap battle performance displaying a unified narrative developed over the course of the performance through the holistic use of verbal, visual, and aural discourses.

To unpack these claims, it is useful to first examine the key differences between contemporary written battling and its predecessor, freestyling battling. Freestyle battles

are characterized by impromptu exchanges in which rappers spontaneously compose and rhythmically deliver rhyming lyrics.¹ Although competitors may have some knowledge of one another, freestyle battles typically offer little time to research and prepare lyrics for an opponent, and rapping pre-written rhymes is often considered unacceptable by performers and audiences. Most often, battlers are expected to provide their verse (‘spit’) over a rhapsodic instrumental (a ‘beat’) provided on the spot by a deejay. In contrast, written battlers know their opponent weeks in advance, as well as the number and length of ‘rounds’ in the battle. The expectation is that rappers will prepare for the battle by writing their lyrics and rehearsing their performance beforehand. ‘Written’ battles also overwhelmingly omit the use of a beat for rappers to deliver their lyrics over, preferring instead an *a cappella* format. Concomitant with these differences has been the establishment of the rap battle ‘league’ format, in which an organization (‘league’) routinely orchestrates, promotes, stages, and distributes battles for profit.

These differences have produced several changes that increase the cultural and rhetorical significance of battling. The written format has made battling’s popularity “bigger than ever” (Kangas 2013a) and its profile and cultural reach have unquestionably “ascended to new heights” (Mansell 2014). The once-niche activity held in small hip hop clubs and on street-corner stages is increasingly “mainstream,” expanding its visibility and influence in hip hop and the broader public sphere (see: Kangas 2013a; Glaysher 2014a; Glaysher 2014b; Kangas 2014a; Mansell 2014; Bellini 2014; Kipling 2014; Reuters 2014; Kelly 2015; Hunte 2015). The second chapter of this thesis will offer a number of probative indicators of rap battling’s popularity and cultural reach.

¹ The use of the term “freestyle” here is intended to comport with its use in contemporary scholarship about rap. The term, however, has been subject to meaningful historical revisions which will be discussed in the first chapter of this thesis.

Additionally, the shift to written battling has prompted meaningful changes in how battles are orchestrated, promoted, and circulated. Contemporary battles are orchestrated and circulated much like a boxing match or mixed martial arts fight. Typically, a written battle league arranges several individual battles to be held at a single event where each battle takes place in front of a live, ticket-buying audience. At the event, battles are sequenced according to their crowd appeal. Matches between battlers without a high degree of name recognition or that do not stir a particularly strong degree of anticipation within audiences are placed at the bottom of the ‘card’—meaning they occur towards the beginning of the slate of battles—and matches between more prominent rappers or that inspire a great deal of anticipation are placed towards the top, gradually building towards the most-anticipated ‘headlining’ battle of the event. Leagues announce and promote both individual battles as well as the event as a whole on their website, social media pages, and Youtube channel. Major events usually have a live-streamed press-conference the day prior that is recorded and uploaded on Youtube. The battle event is similarly live-streamed and individual battles are recorded on video, edited, and uploaded on Youtube and/or the league’s website.²

The production and circulation of written rap battles in this manner means the performances straddle a line between, to borrow a phrase from hip hop performance scholar Greg Dimitriadis (1996), ‘live performance and mediated narrative.’ The simultaneously live and mediated nature of written battle performances expands the possibilities for exchange between performers and audiences as well as audiences’ evaluation of and reception to performances. These possibilities, however, also establish

² Live-streaming has only become common in the last few years. Early written battles were only held live, recorded on video, and circulated on Youtube or the league’s website.

a series of competing and sometimes contradictory impulses regarding who and how performances ought to address. The combined effect is that contemporary battle performances are both constrained and enabled by the capacity for (or perhaps necessity of) addressing multiple audiences simultaneously.

The significance of these possibilities is heightened by the racial composition and division of contemporary rap battling's audiences. Although many rap battle fans view battles from multiple leagues online, the primary audiences of different battle leagues—and specifically the two major North American leagues in which Daylyt performs, King of the Dot and SMACK/Ultimate Rap League—are segregated along racial lines. KOTD's audience is predominantly white, while URL's is predominantly black. Different racial audiences often harbor different expectations and desires for styles of performances, and leagues cater to these different audiences by booking performers who adhere to the expectations and desires of their primary audience. The performance styles of battlers and the expectations and desire of a league's primary audience are mutually constitutive. The racial composition and segregation of rap battling's contemporary audiences establishes additional constraints and possibilities for performances as simultaneously live and mediated texts. *12 Years a Day Django* demonstrates how the segregation of contemporary rap battling's audiences offers novel possibilities for subversive and vernacular rhetorical and cultural work.

Finally, the shift to written battling has altered battling's content and expressive practices. In general, written battle performances are more substantive, nuanced, and polished than their freestyle predecessors. The ability to research opponents, choose topics, write lyrics, and rehearse beforehand lends itself to the development of thought-

provoking verbal content, inventive lines of argument against opponents (called “angles”), witty punchlines, and more complex wordplay. “It’s a more intricate form. It’s [more] intelligent [and] well-thought-out,” explains battler Noshame (Jolie Drake, 2015), due to the ability to “study” and “prep” (see also: McComasky 2012; Kinsella 2015). Kangas (2015b) offers an instructive analogy for understanding the core difference of freestyle and written battling in this regard: the former is akin to improv comedy, while the latter offers the “intricate, nuanced live performance” of theatre.³

Comparing written rap battling and theatre is especially apt given the increasing use of what Persley terms ‘hip hop theatrics’—hip hop expressions incorporating visual and aural aesthetics—in written battles.⁴ The luxury of prior preparation and rehearsal affords battlers the ability to thoughtfully and effectively incorporate visual and aural theatrics as part of their performances. As a reflection of this capacity, visual discourses of gesture, facial expression, attire (especially costumes), and props manifest regularly within battle performances. The *a capella* format, Kangas (2015b) adds, also sharpens the intricacy and nuance of aural performance because battlers are not required to deliver their lyrics over a beat (see also: McComasky 2012). Battlers are able to use aural elements such as pauses, the modulation of tone, volume, and pitch, and speed of delivery for articulative and suasive effects; they can “stretch rhymes, slow things down, speed things up and basically do whatever they need to do to get their message across with no restrictions” (Glaysheer 2014a). Styles of flow can similarly be used for rhetorical

³ Inasmuch as “performance reads and enacts the liminal” it necessarily emerges in a dynamic play of improvisation between time and space regardless whether the format is written or freestyle (McGill 2006).

⁴ Persley is referring specifically to hip hop-related theatrical productions (e.g. plays, musicals, etc.) but her terminology is suitable for conceptualizing the nature of visual and aural discourses in contemporary rap battles, which is suggested by the common use of ‘theatrics’ as a descriptor for such discourses by participants in rap battle culture.

purposes, and also display greater complexity and nuance than those found in freestyle performances. The preparatory capacity allows for the development of more intricate rhyme schemes and rhythmic patterns and the *a capella* format offers greater latitude in the use of cadence and the timing of delivery (see: Kinsella 2015). In short, theatrical written battle performance are thoroughly and meaningfully multimodal and use aural discourses for rhetorical purposes.

Similarly, studying flow through a rhetorical lens can effectively grapple with the relationships between context and performance that may influence flow's rhetorical functioning within a performance, which, it will be explicated in the next section, is an aspect of flow extant scholarship either fails to consider or does so in a limited and deficient manner. Battles are key sites for rhetorically contesting race and racism and this capacity has been accentuated by the shift to written battling. The confluence of written battling's unprecedented degree of cultural influence, the circulation of its performances to live, mediated, and racially segregated audiences, and its capacity for articulating substantive content creates novel possibilities for accomplishing significant cultural work through the nuanced articulation and enactment of culturally syncretic, resistive, and subversive social commentary and critique. Theatrical written battle performances are uniquely deserving of rhetorical study for their use of aural and multimodal rhetorics, particularly as the relationships between and among rhetor, performance, modes of address, and audiences in such performances are uniquely structured in ways that resist the privileging of any single mode of address within the rhetorical action of a performance.

12 Years a Day Django is an exceptional site for initiating the rhetorical study of written rap battling towards these ends because it 1) indexes aforementioned the culturally and rhetorically significant developments within battling; 2) uses aural discourse as part of the rhetorical action of the performance and the rhetoricity of this discourse derives, in part, from its intersection with verbal and visual modes of address; 3) is uniquely informed by generic constraint; and 4) is a radical performance aimed at critiquing and upending the racial status quo, which is especially significant given the cultural milieu in which the performance occurred.

Rap Battling, Rhetoric, and Performance

In the eyes of hip hop scholars, journalists, performers, and fans, rap battling is often viewed as quintessential or foundational to hip hop. Emblematic of such sentiments, Ice Cube (O'Shea Jackson Sr., 2013) insists that “the essence and the origin of hip-hop is to battle” (see also: Rose 1994; Carter 2001; Boyd 2004; Johnson 2007; Bradley 2009; Glaysher 2014a; Kelly 2015). No pillar of hip hop—e.g. rap, DJ-ing, break dance, and graffiti—has been more actively and profoundly shaped by battling than rap, where battling has played a particularly prominent role in forging the art form as well as hip hop as a whole. Music journalist Elijah Wald relates battling’s long-standing and contemporary impact on rap and hip hop in remarking that rap battling has been “central to hip hop from the beginning” and encourages fans’ continued belief “that no one can be a true [rapper] without battle skill” (2012, p. 194; see also: Hess 2007; Kipling 2014; Hip Hop DX 2014; Glaysher 2014a; A.L. Smith 2014). Scholars David Diallo and T. Hasan Johnson add, respectively, that rap battling is an important “social and symbolic space” (2007, p. 318; see also: Alim et al. 2010) whose evolution has been immensely influential

on “the development and trajectory of hip hop’s aesthetic” and expressive practices (2007, p. 545; see also: Gladney 1995; Marriot 2013; Edwards 2013). Leading hip hop scholar H. Samy Alim (2004a) has even gone so far as to label rap battling a key “mode” of hip hop. These ardent acclamations regarding rap battling’s significance firmly suggest battling is deserving critical scrutiny.

The extant literature on rap battling, however, fails to reflect the strong sentiments expressed about the genre’s rhetorical and cultural significance. As recently observed by one of the foremost scholars of hip hop pedagogy, Christopher Emdin (2016, p. 156), the literature on rap battling is relatively sparse and the dearth of critical scrutiny is increasingly glaring in light the genre’s vigorous resurgence. Compounding the general paucity of scholarship on battling, the study of rap battling has largely been confined to (a combination of) ethnographic and linguistic (Cutler 2003; Alim 2004a; Alim 2004b; Alim 2006; Spady et al. 2006; Cutler 2007; Cutler 2009; Lee 2009; Alim et al. 2010; Alim et al. 2011; Rizza 2012; Cutler 2014; Williams and Stroud 2014) or pedagogic perspectives (Alim 2004b; Alim 2007; Emdin 2010; Emdin 2011; Emdin 2013a; Emdin 2013b; Davis et al. 2014; Paris and Alim 2014; Emdin 2016) and has hitherto been exclusively concerned with *freestyle* battling. None of these observations obviates the significance of the insights produced by the available literature on rap battling—on the contrary, the shift to the written format highlights the need for further critical attention to the genre by adding weight to the rationales for the study of battling proffered by current scholarship—but they nevertheless denote the exiguousness of extant scholarly engagement with the genre.⁵

⁵ That scholars have hitherto exclusively studied freestyle battling is unsurprising given that the freestyle format was predominant from rap battling’s inception until (roughly) the very period in which the

While a single study of written battling will certainly neither resolve the general scantiness of scholarly study nor redirect it entirely toward written battling, this thesis hopes to impel further interdisciplinary study of written battling by a) establishing a convincing case for sustained scholarly scrutiny of the genre and its performances—particularly from rhetorical studies—and b) offering an instructive introduction to written battling for interested critics. Shifting analysis to written battling—both at the level of genre and performance—elaborates upon and expands the (rather restricted) rationales for studying rap battling proffered by the extant literature. The available rationales find common ground with the concerns and objectives of rhetorical studies and specifically warrant the rhetorical study of written battling as a means of putting rhetorical and performance studies into productive intersection.

A vital component of the field's broader shift towards connecting rhetorical and cultural studies (Rosteck 1995; Rosteck 1999; Rosteck 2001; Mahan-Hays and Aden 2003; Hamera 2007; Owen and Ehrenhaus 2011),⁶ rhetorical studies has experienced a “renaissance” of scholarship at the intersection of rhetorical and performance studies (Gencarella and Pezzullo 2010, p. ix; see also: Morris 2014) as rhetoricians have embraced the generative possibilities of “scholarship that considers performance as a rhetorical event and as a rhetorical act” that can be “more richly understood” when examined as a rehearsed, audienced, and contextually situated performance event

nascent study of battling began take shape. It is only over the past decade, as the literature on battling blossomed, that the freestyle format became marginalized. The vast majority of battles, or at least those produced for mass audiences, now utilize the written format. As argued in the previous section, this shift is responsible for the popular resurgence of battling related by Emdin (2016), but he undersells the magnitude of this resurgence and, likely due to his pedagogic perspective, fails to note its implications for battling and the study thereof.

⁶ Linking the study of rhetoric and performance has strong ideational roots within the field of rhetorical studies, see Wilkins and Wolf 2012.

(Daughton and Stucky 2014, p. 120-121). Catalyzed by the convergence between rhetorical and performance studies' concerns, theories, and objectives,⁷ this renaissance has deepened scholarly understandings of both performance and rhetoric,⁸ and, some scholars argue, bears the "potential to advance critical interventions that would promote more inclusive, pluralistic, and agonistic (that is, contesting) public cultures" (Gencarella and Pezzullo 2010, p. 8). Two especially poignant motivations for the renaissance in the rhetorical study of performance that inspire this thesis—and which should inspire the broader study of rap and written rap battling—are rhetoricians' rightful interest in the study of race⁹ and the recognition that performance can work with and embody race's specificities and complexities (Flores and Moon 2002, p. 200; Flores et al. 2006, p. 184). Lisa A. Flores (2014), in her provocative essay on "Why Critical Race Rhetoricians Need

⁷ Building on Dwight Conquergood's (1991; 1992; 1998) deft demonstration that performance and textual paradigms should be combined in the evaluation performance as well as McKerrow's (1989) "Critical Rhetoric" and one of its intellectual progeny, Ono and Sloop's (1995) "Critique of Vernacular Discourse," a key impetus for these efforts has been the recognition that performance "embodies and drives a sustained critique of discourse" and offers a critical interpretive tool and lens to examine the reconfiguring of dominant power relations (Calafell 2014, p. 116). As Conquergood, the godfather of performances studies argues, "performance is the key to interpretative decodings of oppositional practices enacted even in the teeth of power" (Conquergood 1992, p. 90). Although not without tension, performance and rhetorical studies also converge in their commitment to the Socratic pedagogical imperative of critical self-reflection; their criticism, invitation, and production of talk about civic discourse and exploration of the possibilities and potentials of human connection; their concern for vitalizing discourse, precipitating thought, dramatizing conversation, and promoting social justice; their reliance on context and contingency; their anti-essentialist commitments and dramatic perspective of power in public culture; their belief in the rhetorical value of iterability; and, perhaps most crucially, their insistence that the world is "rhetorically constructed and performatively realized" (Conquergood 1992, p. 81; Gencarella and Pezzullo 2010; Spry et al. 2014, p. 91; Wander 2014, p. 99; Owen and Ehrenhaus 2014, p. 87; Pezzullo 2014, p. 97; Fenske and Goltz 2014).

⁸ Among other things, rhetoricians have shown that a rhetorical perspective on performance can illuminate what performance celebrates and critiques as well as the mutually constitutive relationships between rhetor, performance, and audience (Daughton and Stucky 2014, p. 121) and that such a perspective can deepen rhetorical studies by helping scholars interpret the ways in which people occupy subject positions and arrive at more complex approaches to studying embodiment, resistance, and cultural nuance within performance (HopKins 1995, p. 235).

⁹ As Brenda J. Allen aptly states, "Race merits theoretical and practical attention because it is an enduring, contested phenomenon with important implications for communication studies, and for transforming society" (2007, p. 259).

Performance Studies,” astutely observes that it is conversations about race which “capture the significance of performance for rhetoric even as none names either” (p. 94). Much of the “rich body of rhetorical inquiry” about race is devoted to its intersections with rhetoric and performance and this literature has furnished considerable insights regarding the study of race’s symbolic and social dimensions (Anguiano and Castañeda 2014, p. 109).

A sizeable corpus of scholarship warrants the rhetorical study of rap as a constructive means for advancing this critical project. Briefly stated, rap is an art in which rhetoric, race, and performance meaningfully converge. Scholars within rhetorical studies (Aldridge and Carlin 1993; Ono and Sloop 1995; Smitherman 1997; Dawkins 1998; Best and Kellner 1999; Cummings and Roy 2002; Kopano 2002) and numerous other disciplines across the (rather nebulous) field of hip hop studies (Rose 1991; McDonnell 1992; Lusane, 1993; Decker 1993; Rose 1994; Potter 1995; Abrams 1995; Henderson 1996; Martinez 1997; Sieving 1998; Stapleton 1998; Walcott 1999; Lunine 2000; Tietchen 2000; Kitwana 2004; Baldwin 2004; Dyson 2004; Hess 2005; Kubrin 2005; Akom 2009; Ball 2011; Baker 2011; Pyatak and Muccitelli 2011; Rabaka 2013) have demonstrated that rap is a critical means of articulating black identity, empowerment, resistance, subversion, and agency. In constructing and affirming black communal identity, critiquing the conditions of black marginalization and subjection, and challenging hegemonic white domination, rap serves as both a powerful extension of black rhetorical and cultural traditions (Kopano 2002)—traditions that imbue the genre with significant suasive and affective resources—as well as a potent vernacular discourse, a discourse that is culturally syncretic (i.e., primarily culturally affirming, and possibly,

but not necessarily, counter-hegemonic) and resonates within the particular community that produced it (Ono and Sloop 1995, p. 23-25; see also: Lunine 2000, p. 265). Rap also bears an “indissoluble connection with live performance” (Dimtriadis 2009) and utilizes a broad range of non-verbal expressive practices (Wood 1999; Best and Kellner 1999; Kopano 2002, p. 207; Androutsopoulos and Scholz 2003; Marshall 2006; White 2011). While these findings suggest that rap performances may be worthy sites for investigating the intersections of rhetoric, race, and performance, the generative potential of such inquiries remains unrealized as rhetorical studies’ discussion and analysis of rap remains woefully wanting (Tinajero 2013).

Contemporary written rap battles are outstanding sites for conducting rhetorical inquiries that rectify this dearth of engagement. Shrewd analyses performed by Alim and others (Cutler 2007; Cutler 2009; Alim et al. 2010; Alim et al. 2011; Rizza 2012; Cutler 2014; Williams and Stroud 2014) have demonstrated that the racialized (and racializing) discourses of battle performances can (re)produce, contest, and subvert dominant constructions of racial identities, meanings, and hierarchies, making battles important sites for staging meaningful rhetorical contestations of the racial status quo. The circulation of battles among mass audiences increases the influence of these contestations on broader culture and the preparation and rehearsal for performance allows written battlers to develop more meaningful and nuanced social commentary and critique. The racial segregation of rap battling’s audiences also creates novel possibilities for performances to operate as vernacular discourses. In these ways, contemporary written battles performances can engage in more significant cultural work than freestyle

performances and, as a consequence, are excellent sites for expanding and deepening rhetorical studies' engagement with rap through textual analysis.

Finally, this thesis seeks to demonstrate that the application rhetorical methods of analysis can productively supplement the insights of prevailing methods of study. As previously noted, much of the scholarship on battling relies primarily on ethnographic and linguistic notions of performance as the basis for textual analysis, complemented with additional theories from cultural/performance studies (Cutler 2003; Alim 2004a; Alim 2006; Spady et al. 2006; Cutler 2007; Cutler 2009; Lee 2009; Alim et al. 2010; Alim et al. 2011; Rizza 2012; Cutler 2014; Williams and Stroud 2014). Chapter Two will argue and demonstrate that rhetorical methods can productively supplement these perspectives, thereby justifying and contributing to the converging of rhetorical and performance studies on the basis that injecting a rhetorical perspective into the study of battling can offer productive contributions to the scholarly conversation.

The Rhetorical Functions of Flow

The primary object of inquiry within *12 Years a Day Django* the aural rhetoric the performance, or, more specifically, Daylyt's use of flow. Across the range of disciplines involved in hip hop studies there is a shared and overwhelming emphasis on lyrics of rap as the source of articulating identity, affirmation, resistance, subversion, and agency (e.g. Rose 1991; McDonnell 1992; Lusane, 1993; Decker 1993; Rose 1994; Potter 1995; Abrams 1995; Henderson 1996; Martinez 1997; Dawkins 1998; Sieving 1998; Stapleton 1998; Best and Kellner 1999; Walcott 1999; Tietchen 2000; Kitwana 2004; Baldwin 2004; Dyson 2004; Hess 2005; Kubrin 2005; Akom 2009; Ball 2011; Baker 2011; Pyatak and Muccitelli 2011; Rabaka 2013)—and rhetorical studies is no exception (e.g. Aldridge

and Carlin 1993; Smitherman 1997; Lunine 2000; Cummings and Roy 2002; Morrison 2003; Miyakawa 2003; Dangerfield 2003; Calhoun 2005; Fraley 2009). The substantial scholarly attention to rap lyrics may be justified on a number of grounds,¹⁰ but it nevertheless fails to grapple with the full range of rhetorically significant discourses within rap. Like hip hop more generally, rap is a multimodal rhetoric irreducible to its verbal discourse because its aural and visual expressions are key communicative components (Wood 1999; Best and Kellner 1999; Kopano 2002, p. 207; Androutsopoulos and Scholz 2003; Marshall 2006; White 2011). Subsequently, privileging the lyrics-as-text, vernacular or otherwise, elides consideration of and/or undersells the significance of rap's broad range of performance practices (Emdin 2011; White 2011, p. 20; Jenkins 2013, p. 4). Rhetorically studying the flows of *12 Years a Day Django* is a mutually productive endeavor for scholarly conversations about hip hop, rap battling, flow, and aural and multimodal rhetorics.

The study of rap's aural discourse—rappers' flow, “the rhythmical and articulative features of a rapper's delivery of the lyrics” (Adams 2008, np.)—is perhaps more marginalized than any of rap's other non-verbal discourses. Although recognized in academic circles as “crucial” (Adams 2008), “essential” (Miyakawa 2005, p. 75), and “indispensable” to rap and the study thereof, flow arguably remains rap's least studied and understood component (Edwards 2013, p. ix). This oversight is beginning to be corrected by a diminutive body of scholarship recently, and prematurely, labeled “flow studies” (Kautny 2015)—which posits that rappers' flow is equally if not more important

¹⁰ Such grounds include that the “lyrics form a substantial and distinctive component of rap music” (Androutsopoulos and Scholz 2003, p. 468), that its poetic saturation indicates a lyrical focus (Cummings and Roy 2002), and that the “lyrics provide the foundation for the overall meaning of rap” (Aldridge and Carlin 1993, p.105). The latter will be specifically contested within this section.

than their verbal discourse and “vital in ensuring both the persuasive and the aesthetically enticing delivery of the lyrics” (Nærland 2014)—but the study of rap’s aural mode remains wholly inadequate.¹¹ More to the point, however, much of this literature has focused on flow’s ability to facilitate lyrical articulation by, for example, emphasizing a word to enhance its force or alter its meaning (Miyakawa 2005; Rice 2006; Adams 2009b; Williams 2009; Edwards 2013; Nærland 2014; Edwards 2015; Kautny 2015). This is a significant finding because it refutes the notion, relatively common in early hip hop scholarship, that flow is a strictly aesthetic or ornamental device (Rose 1994; Wood 1999) as well as claims that the “lyrics provide the foundation for the overall meaning of rap” (Aldridge and Carlin 1993, p.105), but emphasizing this function of flow reduces the aural mode to an instrumental role in facilitating verbal articulation, thereby (re)privileging rap’s verbal mode as the sole or primary source of rhetorical action and providing a very limited frame of reference for conceptualizing what flow does for its performers and audiences.¹²

¹¹ Kautny, to my knowledge, is the only scholar who uses the term “flow studies” as a designation for the work of scholars studying flow. There is, however, only a little over a handful of scholars that seem involved in this effort, and the collective body of scholarship they have produced cannot total more than two dozen books and articles. Even less if the scholars of “flow studies” are the few directly referenced by Kautny (Cheryl Keyes, Adam Krims, Kyle Adams, and himself). Although skeptical that this scholarship can be deemed its own field, for efficiency’s sake the term is used within this thesis as a loose heading for scholarship discussing flow.

¹² Several attempts have been to demonstrate flow’s articulative function outside of lyrical analysis. As will be detailed later, these works, in addition to displaying their own idiosyncratic oversights, all share an (over)emphasis on flow’s ability to articulate identity that still provide a limited consideration of flow’s possible rhetorical functions. The exception is the early scholarship of Kyle Adams (2008), which proposed that critics ought to entirely disregard the semantic meaning of lyrics and focus on the unifying narrative created by the interaction between vocal flow patterns and the sonic organization of a rap song. Adams backed away from this claim following Justin A. Williams’s (2009) rightful response that Adams’s reasoning proves the inverse of his point—the presence of narrative unity should dictate an analytical approach focused on the lyrics. Adams (2009a) concedes this point and admits he overstated his original case for disregarding the lyrics entirely. In a recent chapter in *The Cambridge Companion to Hip Hop* (2015), Adams characterizes his earlier work as suggesting that analyzing studying flow facilitates lyrical analysis, thereby (again) reducing flow to an instrumental role.

The dearth of study and discussion of rap's aural mode is mirrored by rhetorical studies' general inattention to aural rhetoric. As Aczél (2013, p. 223) observes, "aural discussions are omitted practically from contemporary rhetorical theory; rhetoric's aural dimension seems to be forgotten or unheard" (see also: Johnstone 2001; McKee 2006; Lunceford 2007; Lambke 2013; Romano 2015). Contemporary rhetorical investigations of aural rhythm also similarly privilege the analysis of rhythm's facilitation of verbal articulation (Campbell and Jamieson 1978; Wilson 1996; Micciche 2004; Rappaport 2010), thus emphasizing the same instrumental role as studies of flow. And in both hip hop studies and rhetorical studies, the marginalization of aural study produced by the privileging of verbal discourse is reinforced by secondary, visual bias. A review of scholarship in both fields reveals an affinity for the analysis of visual discourses, particularly within studies of the non-verbal modes of multimodal rhetoric. In this regard, the study of aurality in both fields exhibits how the study of sound across humanities has been overshadowed by attention to visual and print culture, in what rhetorician Greg Goodale terms a "captivation by visual culture" that found its apex in the print cultures of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries (2011, p. 5).

In spite of this ocular and discourse-centric history, scholars from a wide variety of disciplines have successfully labored over the past two decades to carve out a space for sound and voice as subjects worthy of rhetorical analysis. An entire interdisciplinary field of "sound studies" has been bred from this scholarship, placing sound at "the genesis of a scholarly sonic boom" (Stone 2015, np; see also Schlichter and Eidsheim 2014).¹³

¹³ Determinations of which scholarship falls within the scope "sound studies" are rather tenuous given the relative youth of the field. The term is used here to reflect the breadth of disciplines—such as anthropology, geography, ethnography, paleoarcheology, Biblical studies, film, theatre, performance, art, and media and technology—that have taken up sound as an object of study since, roughly speaking, 1990

Peculiarly, however, rhetorical scholars have contributed little to this genesis. Indeed, the rhetorical study of aurality is in desperate need of resuscitation. I say “resuscitation” because the omission of aural discussions from rhetorical theory is a relatively recent phenomenon, a reflection of a slow withering of aurality’s study within the field.¹⁴ According to Goodale’s (2011) survey of the *Quarterly Journal of Speech* and its predecessor, the *Quarterly Journal of Speech Education*, sound—and particularly orality/aurality¹⁵—was an important subject of study for rhetoricians in the early twentieth century but received increasingly less focus over time and has dissipated almost entirely as an object of study (see also: Gunn 2015; Hawhee 2015). Although in disagreement about its cause, several scholars have similarly identified a diminution in rhetorical scholarship that studies and theorizes aurality and further noted its incongruity with the broader history of the Western rhetorical tradition.¹⁶ Aurality’s suasiveness has

(although many of these works draw upon older theorists such as Roland Barthes, Theodore W. Adorno, and Murray R. Schafer).

¹⁴ The two major exceptions to this observation are Joshua Gunn’s (2004; 2007; 2008a; 2008b; 2010; 2011; 2014; Gunn and Rice 2009) numerous rhetorical analyses of voice—largely informed by psychoanalytical perspectives on rhetoric and concerned with the affective dimensions of sound—and Greg Goodale’s (2010; 2013) examinations of aurality within American presidential address (see also: McCormick and Stuckey 2013), which is also a topic in his (2011) book, *Sonic Persuasion: Reading Sound in the Recorded Age*, a wide-ranging study of sound and voice.

¹⁵ The conflation of the two terms here is deliberate, intending to reflect that early twentieth-century rhetoricians used the terms interchangeably or hyphenated the two (i.e., oral-aural rhetoric).

¹⁶ Kimbrough (2002), in a thorough and compelling analysis, sources the trend to the denial of the agency of the voice by structuralist and post-structural theories, slowly diminishing the study of aurality in proportion to the increasing purchase of those theories within the humanities. In analyses focused on the field of rhetorical studies, Goodale (2011) attributes this trend to a general dominance of ocularcentric study and fascination with visual/print culture while Valiavitcharska (2013) locates an explanation in the turn towards neo-Aristotelean criticism, which she argues produced a focus on the study of argument that overshadowed the study of aurality within rhetorical theory. Johnstone (2001) claims aurality’s marginalization resulted from a common belief within the field that centralizing the study of a/orality was “too narrow, too traditional, too old-fashioned (p. 122). Similarly, Gunn (2004; 2007; 2008; 2010; 2011) argues, generally, that resituating “the text”—which can be any communicative discourse—as the field’s object of inquiry is responsible for the withering attention to aurality. Gunn and Rice (2009) add that the social sciences and humanities found a common object in speech at the field’s inception, which created an incentive to marginalize speech because of its affective dimensions—an incentive reinforced by a desire to

attracted the attention of rhetoricians throughout the vast majority of Western rhetorical study, an important and much-discussed subject of theorization for rhetoricians from ancient Greece through the mid-twentieth century (Johnstone 2001; Kimbrough 2002; Johnstone 2005; Lunceford 2007; Johnstone 2012; Valiavitcharska 2013; Gunn and Dance 2015). In light of this history and the increasing interdisciplinary interest in aurality, the contemporary dearth of aural-rhetorical theory and criticism is becoming progressively more conspicuous, providing an impetus for rhetorical critics to breathe new life into discussions of aurality's rhetorical dimensions.

Some critics, sharing the ancient belief that “the aural qualities of speech are powerful elements of persuasion,” (Lunceford 2007, p. 99), have recognized the need to resituate aurality as an object of analysis within rhetorical studies. In his analysis of Martin Luther King Jr.'s “I have a Dream” speech, Al Weitzel (1994) makes a persuasive case for incorporating the study of aurality into contemporary rhetorical criticisms by demonstrating that it can produce rich and novel insights into rhetorical processes. Brett Lunceford (2007) and Greg Goodale (2011) respectively add that the study of aurality can sharpen rhetorical studies' conceptions of pathos and ethos and illuminate their construction within a text, as well as uniquely ‘open’ textual artifacts in a manner that produces remarkable insights into cultures and individuals. Goodale (2013) has further demonstrated how vocal timbres can impact political deliberation and performed a good deal of insightful study on the rhetorical evolution of, and cultural politics surrounding,

separate the emerging field from the elocutionary movement. Extending Gunn's earlier work, Gunn and Dance (2015) recently pinpoint the “death” of aural-rhetorical studies to 1997, when “speech” was, in their view, abandoned “as an object of disciplinary identity” and completely eclipsed by “communication” (p. 65). They attribute this to “an instability of disciplinary objects in general” and the “instability of speech as ‘our’ titular object in particular,” silencing speech both for practical reasons and its increasing association with the unmanly or youthful (2014, p. 65; see also: Gunn and Rice 2009).

aurality within American presidential address (Goodale 2010; Goodale 2011; Goodale 2013; see also: McCormick and Stuckey 2013). In his study of Henry David Thoreau's theory of the voice, Andrew C. Hansen (2008) locates a rationale for the study of aurality in the recognition that the suasiveness of speech is culturally-mediated and able to operate independent of verbal content.

Similar to Hansen, Joshua Gunn, the staunchest advocate of resuscitating the study of aurality in rhetorical studies, argues speech is powerful, magical, and dangerous, and thus important for rhetorical critics to study. There is, he concludes, "something more in speech than speech" (2007, p. 361)¹⁷ Gunn mourns and laments the loss of speech criticism within the field of rhetoric and thus makes "an intentionally polemic call for its return in the examination and criticism of contemporary cultural and theatrical performances" (2004, p. 92-93; see also: Gunn 2007; Gunn and Rice 2009; Gunn 2010; Gunn and Dance 2015). Gunn, Goodale, and others have recently reiterated Gunn's initial call for rhetorical scholars to engage critically with the study of sound and voice through a variety of disciplinary perspectives (Gunn et al. 2013; see also: Goodale 2011) Valiavitcharska (2013) makes an even more specific call for rhetorical critics to recover the study of aural rhythm in rhetorical theory, which has been a key dimension of aurality

¹⁷ The claim that speech possesses magical qualities is contemporaneously echoed by Ward and Tsukaraha (2003), among others, but dates back to ancient Greek rhetorical treatises. In a somewhat famous example of how this claim has long been a source of debate among rhetorical critics, Gorgias' insistence on the magical properties of speech, which he likened to the effects of narcotics on the body (Lunceford 2007), was rejected by Aristotle, who favored the principled study of speech that affective criticism resists (Kennedy 2003, p. 90). Scherer (2003), primarily examining the work of Aristotle, Quintilian, and Cicero, concludes that the powerful and affective impact of speech has been recognized throughout Western history. In addition, Lunceford (2007) invokes studies from numerous disciplines regarding 'the science of orality' to demonstrate that some of the claims about aurality's affective dimension are physiologically verifiable, from which he concludes that the "issue of how speech affects human beings should be a primary concern in rhetorical scholarship" (see also: Elder 1999). Although this thesis will not explore rhythm's magical/affective dimension, it is worth noting that aural rhythm was a critical ingredient in the magical capacity of speech in ancient Greek writings (Johnstone 2012) and that bio-musicological studies support the connection between aural rhythm and the articulative capacities of speech (Rappaport 2012).

studied by Western rhetoricians as far back as pre-Attic Greece (see also: Gronbeck 1993; You 1994).

This thesis seeks to take up the call of Gunn, Goodale, and Valivitcharska by studying the rhetorical functions of rappers' flow and, specifically, the use of flow styles as part of the rhetorical action *12 Years a Day Django*. Complementing findings that aural rhythm facilitates verbal articulation and adds to its suasiveness, this thesis break new ground by positing that Daylyt's use of flow is a source of subversive and vernacular rhetorical action. In doing so, it hopes to add weight to Valivitcharska's call for further study of aural rhythm. Valivitcharska's work examines the study of aural rhythm in medieval Byzantine and Slavic rhetorical treatises while the works of Gunn and Goodale, the leading proponents of resituating aurality as an object of inquiry in rhetorical studies, have provided almost no consideration to rhythm. Thus, contemporary rhetorical studies has almost no engagement with the study of aural rhythm in contemporary rhetorical performance, and what little scholarship is devoted to the matter is almost exclusively concerned with aurality's role in facilitating verbal articulation. This thesis endeavors to show that aural rhythm can accomplish other rhetorical ends within contemporary rhetorical performances and add emphasis to the need for further study of aural rhythm as part of resuscitating aurality's study within the field.

Method and Organization of Chapters

This thesis applies rhetorical methods of study to the context and text of *12 Years a Day Django*. Understanding context is critical to unpacking the rhetorical and cultural work of the performance because it emerges "ways of viewing and valuing the world and out of arrangements of power, and...the action is situated in the context that generated it

and that encapsulates its response” (Klope 1994, p. 41). Chapter Two initiates the contextual analysis of *12 Years a Day Django* by providing a history of battling constructed through the lens of rhetorical genre.

Genre is an aspect of context that strongly informs the emergence of rhetorical performance because it instructs a rhetorical community on how to view and value performance, and reflects and sustains the arrangement of power between performer, performance, and audience. Further, performance as a radical and vernacular political act “emphasizes performer creativity to ground possibilities for action, agency, and resistance in the liminality of performance as it suspends, questions, plays with, and transforms social and cultural norms” (Langellier and Peterson 2006, p. 155). The ways in which genre instructs battle audiences on how to interpret battle performances and creates power relationships between performer and audience operationalize constraints on battler performance, which in turn create rhetorical possibilities for performers willing to violate them. The rhetorical action of *12 Years a Day Django* pivots upon the constraints of genre, which become points for subversive articulation with the performance.

Chapter Three contextualizes the constraints of genre to Daylyt and *12 Years a Day Django*. It argues that Daylyt is the focal point of a controversy regarding the use of visual theatrics whose theatrical battle performances provoke unique cultural criticisms in light of battling’s racial and locational. The controversies Daylyt’s theatrics engender are the intended results of his method of constructing performances, which are intended to create controversy by breaking expectation. Daylyt uses this method to create possibilities accomplishing subversive and vernacular cultural work. Accomplishing such is facilitated by Daylyt rhetorical strategy of staging resistance through play, which

occurs in all of Daylyt's discourses both in and out of battling. This chapter examines the controversies surrounding Daylyt, his method of constructing performances, and rhetorical strategy for accomplishing and assesses how understanding these contextual factors can productively inform our understanding of the rhetorical action and cultural work of *12 Years a Day Django*.

Chapter Four concludes the contextual analysis of *12 Years a Day Django* by investigating the relationship between flow, context, and the rhetorical action of the performance. Through a review of the literature on flow, it argues that current scholarship is deficient in its discussion and analysis of flow's rhetorical functions, particularly with respect to how contextual circumstance may inform flow's use as a source of rhetorical action. This chapter first proposes that flow can be used for subversive and vernacular purposes that have not been thoroughly investigated by scholars and then proposes that conceptualizing styles of flow as rhetorical forms is a productive means of grappling with how flow is able to accomplish this rhetorical work. Briefly stated, the expectations and desires aroused by flow can be subverted or critiqued through adroit exploitation of the arousal, which is the lynchpin of the subversive and vernacular rhetorical action of *12 Years a Day Django*. A necessary component of this rhetorical action is the racialization of flow styles within the rap battle community, which this chapter examines when identifying the flow styles of *12 Years a Day Django*. Chapter Four further situates the study of flow within *12 Years a Day Django* within ongoing conversations about aurality and multimodality within rhetorical studies, arguing that the study of flow is an ideal means of resuscitating the study of aurality and delivery.

Chapters Five and Six analyze the ‘text’ of *12 Years a Day Django*. Chapter Five analyzes the dramatic structure of the performance and the discourses of Daylyt’s first round. Chapter Six examines the discourses of Daylyt’s second and third rounds. A seventh and final chapter, in addition to summing the key findings of this thesis, argues that *12 Years a Day Django* is a cultural significant performance in light of the cultural milieu it inhabits. It concludes by proposing future avenues for research regarding battling, flow, and the rhetorical study of aural rhythm.

CHAPTER TWO

A History of Hip Hop and Rap Battling

This chapter initiates the rhetorical study of rap battling and *12 Years a Day Django* by providing an adulated history of rap battling constructed through the lens of rhetorical genre. Alim et al. (2010) have demonstrated how a generic lens provides valuable insights into battle performances and entreated further studies of rap battling as a genre, as well as textual criticisms informed by generic understanding. Their study, however, offers a very fledgling understanding of battling as a genre. Their work is focused on a single battling venue in Los Angeles and, as the first scholars to use genre to refine the textual analysis of battles, they necessarily expend the majority of their energy explaining the sociological conception of genre and justifying its application to the study of battles. Alim et al. (2010) do not provide a great detail on the constraints genre imposes on battle performances, particularly with respect to non-verbal discourses, nor do they explain the relationships between performer, performance, and audience that instantiate these constraints. This chapter builds on their work by elaborating on the generic constraints of battling across the modes of address in battling and, in subsequent chapters, using an understanding of these constraints to assess the subversive rhetorical action of *12 Years a Day Django*.

To cultivate these arguments, the rhetorical history in this chapter will reveal how the purpose of battling, its expressive practices, and the desires and expectations of its audiences are mutually constitutive of one another and congeal into rhetorical constraints governing the production of battle performances. Most relevant to *12 Years a Day*

Django, audiences’ diverging preferences for performance style—which tend to be geographically and racially specific, manifesting differently depending on where a battle league is located and their primary fan base—have a very real and direct influence on the expressive practices of performance, including the use of visual theatrics, choice of topoi, and styles of flow. This creates a self-reinforcing feed-back loop in which the expectations and desires of the audiences shape the expressive practices of battlers and vice-versa. A rhetorical lens on battling’s history clarifies these considerations, and thus offers a productive means of attenuating textual analysis to the constraints of genre.

Furthermore, a rhetorical lens on genre is well-suited to the study of battling’s history because it yields a convenient demarcation of three different eras of battling—the Party Era (1970’s-1981), the Lyricist Era (1981-1999), and the Theatrical Era (1999-Present).¹ Each era is demarcated according to meaningful changes in battling’s purpose, topoi,² expressive practices, and modes of circulation with their respective generic contours identified through the use of available scholarly histories, statements by hip hop performers, and (brief) textual analyses of battles and battle performances.³ Textual

¹ I am not the first to suggest there are distinct ‘eras’ of battling, as different eras are alluded to by many battlers in conversations regarding the origins of battling, how and why they began battling, and distinctiveness of written battling. The demarcation I have proposed follows from major changes in the generic contours of battling as dictated by a rhetorical perspective, but this may not precisely align with how participants in battle culture understand the different ‘eras’ of battling. As one example, this chapter sources the inauguration of the contemporary era to the 1999 battle between Supernatural and Juice (both as a result of generic analysis and statements from some participants) while battler Swave Sevah (Shane Russell, aka the Black Sour Ranger, 2015)—one of the oldest contemporary battlers with a decades-long battling career—places the beginning of the contemporary era in 2002, with an international freestyle battle event held at a Chinese massage parlor in New York called “Happy Endings” (which served free Heineken’s before 11 p.m. and to people wearing sneakers).

² Topoi is a contested term in rhetorical studies, but it is used here in the Aristotelian sense of a common source of argument. The ‘topoi’ of battling is general the ‘authenticity’ of each battlers’ identities.

³ Although not explicitly considered in many of the major treatments of genre, circulation, as Mary Stuckey reminds us, “impinges on every aspect of rhetorical theory and criticism” with logics “fundamental to the study of public address” (2012, p. 609). Inasmuch as genres are instantiated by cultures and cultures are established through the circulation of texts, adding circulation to the discussion of genre

analysis offers probative support for and practical demonstration of claims made by scholars and performers by indexing changes within the genre, further demonstrating the utility of rhetorical methods by navigating the tension between providing “a comprehensive account of a subculture too vast and intricate” to be fully covered without making recourse to too many allusions that only initiated readers understand or didactic explanations that are essentialized or simplified (Lunine 2000, p. 259).

As a final note, the history provided in this chapter is preliminary and necessarily incomplete. It is, to my knowledge, the first adulated history of battling from its inception to the present moment. There are utilitarian essentializations and simplifications made that future scholarship can hopefully correct. Nevertheless, in light of battling’s noted historical and contemporary significance to rap and hip hop more broadly, this chapter offers a significant contribution to the relatively-sparse literature on the history of hip hop (Alridge and Stewart 2005) and will hopefully serve as a useful introduction to the genre for interested critics.

The Party Era: 1970’s-1980

Assessing a starting point for the history of rap battling is not a straightforward task. The critical consensus is that battling originated, in the form that is currently recognized as such, in the early 1970’s among communities of color in the Bronx that birthed hip hop as a whole. A precise date of inception is nearly impossible to determine and, in light of this temporal uncertainty, I have chosen to (somewhat) ambiguously designate battling’s starting point as the early 1970’s.

seems like a ready extension of current thinking regarding both subjects. Regardless, the means by which battles are recorded and circulated is uniquely relevant to the study of *12 Years a Day Django* so a discussion of circulation is included.

A complete rhetorical history of battling might begin long before the inception of rap battles in the form that would be contemporaneously recognized as such. Most histories of rap begin with its rhetorical and cultural predecessors, such as the spoken word performances. Rhetorician Baruti N. Kopano's (2002) examination of rap as an extension of the black rhetorical tradition, for example, traces the genre's roots all the way to ancient East African and Egyptian poetic competitions. Similarly, a thorough rhetorical history of rap battling might trace its cultural and rhetorical lineage back through swing band conductor competitions, the vocal improvisations of scat performers such as Cab Calloway, the competitive rhythmic-speaking competitions of black radio DJs, the stride piano competitions of Harlem rent-cutting contests, and even to the poetic competitions referenced by Kopano (Perkins 1996; Kopano 2002; Wald 2012). As Wood (1999) and Ogbar (2007) demonstrate, however, the similarity between rap's expressive practices and earlier cultural/rhetorical expressions—and specifically black and Afro-diasporic rhetorical/cultural expressions—can lead critics to contradictory and, occasionally, demonstrably incorrect conclusions about rap's cultural and rhetorical influences. Further, as Dimitriadis (1996) rightly observes, choices about which prior expressive practices influenced rap often rest on scholars' own theoretical aims and suppositions rather than empirical observation. Cognizant of these concerns, this chapter refrain from readily drawing connections between battling and earlier expressive practices on the basis of their similarities and begins the historical analysis of battling with its inception in the form recognized as such.

The expressive practices of early rap battles mirror many of those of found in rap in general, including the use of black vernacular English, repetition, stylin', lyrical

quality, improvisation, call and response, indirection, braggadocio, and soundin' out (manipulation of volume and musical quality to create message), among others (Smitherman 1997; Kopano 2002; Cummings and Roy 2002). Battling also bears stark similarities to 'playin' the dozens,' a ritualized exchange of humorous insult common to the black community that many rappers cite as training for battling (Neff 2009). All of these practices, with degrees of variation, can be found in battles throughout the genre's history. Similar expressive practices do not necessarily have the same meaning in battling simply because the same technique is employed, but rather a variety of factors connects these cases and makes them comparable and the comparison is useful for beginning to understand rap performances (Walser 1995, p. 208).

The use of these expressive practices in Party Era battles uniquely supported the purpose of battles during the period, which was to act as engaging and entertaining compliments to DJ performances. DJs sought to create and maintain a party-like atmosphere and, to this end, hired "rhyming emcees" to supplement their performances. As mixing records became a competitive art so, too, did the performances of rappers (Keyes 1996, p. 223). In the earliest contests, two rappers would "challenge each other to rhyme over a DJ's live turntable routine" to see "who could rock the crowd the most," with the winner decided according to the crowd's reaction (Hess 2005, p. 301; Kangas 2015a). A skilled battle rapper was thus one who could cajole the audience into participating in the party.

The expressive practices of battling during the Party Era reflected battling's party-priming purpose. Battles were light-hearted affairs, often revolving around the exchange of braggadocios claims and humorous insults as well as the solicitation of audience

participation in call-and-response exchanges. Rappers also “talked intermittently, using phrases like ‘get up’ and ‘jam to the beat’...to motivate the audience to dance while the dj mixed records” (Keyes 1996, p. 229). There were no common topoi for rap battles at this time. Battlers were expected to “freestyle,” referring to a style of free-form rhyming that had no common or unified subject matter. The result was that battlers frequently spouted non-sensical lyrics or “gibberish” (Edwards 2013; Edwards 2015). Rappers’ flow during this period, both in and outside of battles, were apt for entertaining the crowd and maintaining the party-like atmosphere. Rappers used what Krims (2000) labels an “old school” style of flow, which is characterized by light subject matter, few syllables per bar, and simple rhyme schemes and rhythmic patterns that would seem “sing-songy” by contemporary standards (p. 49; see also: Bradley 2009). The old school style of flow sported by these ‘party MCs’ comported well with the levity of the events at which rap performances occurred, providing playful verbal content in a manner that was both engaging and easy for the audience to follow.

The circulation of battles at this time, or perhaps their lack of circulation, shaped battlers’ expressive practices. Battles were generally not recorded and circulated beyond the live event, obviating the ability to address non-live audiences and, consequently, removing any need for battlers to consider the reception of their performance by audiences outside of the immediate, live performative context. Battlers, therefore, strictly addressed their performance to the live audience and this was reflected in their use of expressive practices centered on engaging the live audience in a dynamic interaction. As battles became recorded and circulated in subsequent eras, performers were able to address multiple audiences, which subsequently allowed for the development of

performances directed towards non-live audiences both in terms of content (the meanings or messages of the performance) and expressive practices (the means by which the content is relayed to audiences).

For the purposes of this thesis, the most important aspect of the Party Era was the way in which the purpose and skills of battling were uniquely unified. In other words, battles were strictly held to entice live crowds into participating in and enjoying the ‘party’ and thus the ‘skills’ involved were necessarily those that provoked enthusiastic and jovial response from the audience. Transformations in the genre would complicate this easy relationship, as changes in the purpose and expressive practices of battling would alter what was considered to be a skilled as well as what was considered to be entertaining. These alterations eventually produced the different expectations and preferences for visual and aural styles exhibited by battling’s contemporary white and black audiences. In *12 Years a Day Django*, these diverging stylistic and desire expectations create the rhetorical possibilities for subversion that Daylyt exploits.

The Lyricist Era: 1981-1995

The Lyricist Era is marked by a number of significant changes in the generic contours of battling, all of which began with a battle that is almost inarguably the most important to the intertwined histories of battling and hip hop: a 1981 contest between Kool Moe Dee (Mohandas Dewese) and Busy Bee Starski at the famed Harlem World Club. The battle was a stylistic clash whose resolution—a resounding victory for Kool Moe Dee—reshaped both battling and rap as a whole. Busy Bee’s style epitomized that of party-era rap battlers. Also known as “Chief Rocker” Busy Bee, he was first and foremost a rapper “who could rock the party and hype the crowd” and was “arguably the

best party [rapper] of the time” (Bailey 2014, p. 50; Hip Hop DX 2015). Kool Moe Dee, on the other hand, was an impressive lyricist and rhythmically-complex rhymers (the latter claim being relative in light of contemporary standards of rhythmic complexity). He had a style similar to the one being popularized by Melle Mel, which utilized the percussive effect of short words, greater rhythmic complexity and fluidity, and unexpected internal rhyme schemes (Rose 1994). The battle was a contest between two distinct styles of rapping, and the decisive victory of Kool Moe Dee forever altered the purpose, topoi, and expressive practices of rap battle performances as well as those of rap as a whole.

The battle itself was a spontaneous affair. At the club’s open mic night, Busy Bee provided an exemplary party-MC performance, successfully exhorting the audience to “clap [their] hands” and “scream” as well participate in several other call-and-response exchanges. During the performance, as Kool Moe Dee tells it, Busy Bee engaged in some “theatrical [Muhammad] Ali shit” by declaring himself the best MC and virtually *undefeatable* (Bailey 2014, p. 50; Dewsee, no date). Kool Moe Dee took offense and set himself up to perform after Busy Bee. In his performance, Kool Moe Dee made a significant innovation: rather than engage Busy Bee on the grounds of who could best move the audience, he instead shifted the focus from the crowd to Busy Bee. Kool Moe Dee attacked Busy Bee through a series of biting personalized insults regarding Busy’s status as an MC (an abbreviation for “Master of Ceremonies,” an early term from what would become known as rappers; Dimitriadis 1996). In doing so, Kool Moe Dee paired his personal punchlines with more intricate cadences and rhyme schemes that drew approval from the audience. Simply put, KMD did not engage the audience in a dynamic interaction, but rather claimed and demonstrated that he was the better *rapper*.

Although neither rapper felt they claimed a decisive victory that night, audiences deemed Kool Moe Dee victorious. Crucial here is that the battle is—by broad scholarly consensus—the first to be recorded and circulated beyond the live event at which it took place (Bailey 2014, p. 50). Bootlegged tapes of the battle were quickly and heavily circulated and shortly thereafter after more battles would be recorded and their tapes circulated through an underground economy of insider tape-traders (Monroe 2005; Kangas 2013a; Kangas 2015a).⁴ Secondary and tertiary audiences deemed KMD the decisive victor, and that reception reshaped battling and rap as a whole.

So complete was Kool Moe Dee's victory that battling became a staple of every rapper's repertoire practically overnight (Bailey 2014, p. 50). Rappers could no longer claim to be the best based upon their ability to hype the crowd; rather, rappers had to demonstrate significant lyrical and aural skills. This change in battling ultimately reshaped rap, as it heralded a shift from rappers being slick-tongued comedians to storytellers and social commentators by "shifting the aesthetic value of rapping above party pleasing" (Johnson 2007, p. 545; see also: Grimes 2007; Bradley 2009; Marriot 2013). Legendary rapper KRS-One (Lawrence Parker) puts a fine point on Kool Moe Dee's impact in this regard, claiming that if KMD had lost the battle "nothing [rappers are] saying today would be said ... It would not exist" (Hip Hop DX 2015). Hip hop philosopher Julius Bailey (2014) specifically explicates how Kool Moe Dee's victory

⁴ As would be the case with all subsequent developments in rap battles' methods of circulation, audio recording and circulation on cassette tapes expanded the cultural reach of rap battling by transporting battles to new places and audiences. It is possible that the informal circulation of rap battle tapes contributed to the global diaspora of rap battling. Rose (1994) suggests that the global diaspora of hip hop began with black and Puerto Rican army recruits carrying bootlegged cassettes of DJ performances to stations around the world, diffusing the genre as they bartered and sold the tapes in new locales. It is plausible that rap battles were circulated in the same manner. Regardless, after the Kool Moe Dee-Busy Bee battle the circulation of bootlegged battle tapes became more commonplace (likely due, at least in part, to the increasing availability of recording technology during the 1980's) and continued to expand the genre's reach.

altered the representational culture of battling and rap, arguing the battle “united an entire culture on the basis of a *show* (represent) *and prove* (battle) attitude that is shared by all forms of hip-hip” such that rapping “became a symbolic space in which [an] individual represents [themselves] in order to establish [their] persona as *ultimate* in relation to all the other inhabitants of that space. (Bailey 2014, p. 50).

The immediate result of the inauguration of showing and proving in battling was a restructuring of battling’s purpose and topoi, which came to center upon claiming and demonstrating that one had the skills perceived to be crucial to one’s status as a rapper. Moving away from the entertainment-focused performances of the Party Era, battles became sites for rappers to fight for recognition and credibility by claiming and demonstrating their lyrical and aural skills (Bailey 2014, p. 51). To this day, battles remain sites for rappers to improve their abilities and gain recognition and credibility through Darwinian contests of rap skill (Gladney 1995; Cutler 2007; Elysee 2011; Wald 2012; Hip Hop DX 2014). Many major rappers—including Biggie Smalls, Eminem, Eydea, Kendrick Lamar, Cassidy, Jae Millz, and Meek Mill, among others—began their career by proving their rap skills through battling.

The cultural politics of showing and proving manifests in *12 Years a Day Django* in Daylyt’s repeated demonstrations of his incredible competency with the various styles of battling. Daylyt attempts to establish himself as the ‘ultimate’ battler by skillfully demonstrating his ability to perform in almost any style. These demonstrations are one of the clearest indications within the ‘text’ of the performance that Daylyt loss to Pat Stay was designed; he could have won the crowd by acquiescing to their stylistic preferences, but simply chose not to. This directs us to examine Daylyt’s discourses in light of the

enacted and intentional ‘failure’ of the performance. Within the text, it also provides the rhetorical grounds for suggesting subversion is a possible and productive response to rhetorical constraint. Daylyt’s familiarity with all styles and knowledge of the audiences to whom these styles appeal facilitates their employment for his own rhetorical purposes, enabling Daylyt to articulate subversive and vernacular cultural commentary and critique by adroitly exploiting the expectations and desires aroused by each style. Daylyt construction of himself as the ‘ultimate’ battler thus enactively demonstrates the subversive possibilities inherently provided by any presumed constraint.

The representational politics of showing and proving also defined the rhetorical and heightened the entertainment value of battles. Rappers became expected to establish their identity as the ultimate in their musical catalogue—which famously inspired a number of ‘battles’ (or, more accurately, rivalries or ‘beefs’) that occurred via the release of “diss” songs, such as the Roxanne Wars between Roxanne Shanté and The Real Roxanne and the Bridge Wars between Boogie Down Productions and Juice Crew.⁵ This expectation inherently established a competitive dynamic within rap that added to its popular appeal, enhancing the enjoyment audiences derived from witnessing the competitive display of skill involved in battling. In a broader sense, gaining credibility through showing and proving—even outside of battles—became the key exigency giving rise to and constraining hip hop performance. Fighting for credibility, according to rhetorician and hip hop scholar Marcia Dawkins, came to define the rhetorical situation of hip hop of hip hop as a whole (2010, p. 470; see also: Hess 2007; Cutler 2007). This

⁵ A complete history of battling ought to include a discussion of how such ‘beefs’ influenced the more formalized form of rap battling, but for reasons of space and relevance I have refrained from doing so here. Without going into detail, I believe rap battles and “diss” tracks are distinctly different types of texts, which is briefly and tentatively suggested by Hess (2007) and Weinstein (2007). For a brief synopsis of the history of beefs, see: Parmar and Bain 2007, p. 141.

expectation that battlers are in a fight for credibility is a source of cultural critique within *12 Years a Day Django*. By designing a deft demonstration of his prodigious rap skills to ‘fail,’ Daylyt reveals how the stylistic preferences of white audiences belie the notion that upward mobility in battling, as with America as a whole, is meritocratic. Daylyt demonstrated his rap skills, but did not do so by performing the styles of flow desired by the live white audience (or rather, perform them in the manner desired) and, as a result, lost the battle. It is not enough for Daylyt to simply demonstrate his skills to win the battle and move up the ranks of battling, rather he must do so in the manner dictated by the expectations and desires of white audiences. These expectations and desires are racialized in the sense that they are informed by particular views of blackness and uniquely constrain the performance of black battlers, two considerations Daylyt raises through his use of flow. The ultimate message is that battle community shares the white supremacist structure of America, which works to instantiate and maintain black subjection and white dominance by disciplining bodies that do not form to the expectations and desires of whites.

The mentality of direct conflict and zero sum fights impacted the broader cultural and rhetorical trajectory of rap by influencing the development of authenticity politics within hip hop culture, which also expanded the topoi of battling. As “gangster rap” emerged in the 1980’s, rappers “radicalized [rap’s] poetic and brought it to all the aggressive bravado of the street gangs that had been kept at arm’s length from the genre” (Bailey 2014, p. 51). In and out of battles, the iconography of guns and streets became commonplace in battles, as did themes of hypermasculine violence, revenge, and retribution that contrasted sharply with the styles of Party Era rappers (Forman 2002, p.

157). Street credibility became connected to “what [a rapper] did, could, and would do in real life circumstance” to support their claims to having an ultimate identity (Bailey 2014, p. 52). Battlers expanded the topoi of showing and proving beyond rap skills and criminal identity. Soon, rappers had to demonstrate the authenticity of their other assumed identities (whether criminal, racial, gendered, etc.). The expectation remains that battlers argumentatively or performatively establish the authenticity of their own identity (or identities), as well as debunk the authenticity of their opponent (Cutler 2007; Ogbar 2007; Alim et al. 2010; Alim et al. 2011). The individual subjects contained under the header of authenticity are broad—including knowledge about the competitor’s life, and any details pertaining to his or her dress style, hair, rap crew, hometown, family, personal history or battling skills (Cutler 2007, p. 12)—but the general sense that battlers will be in contest over how they live up to their identities (typically) structures the lines of argument within battling.

The discourses of *12 Years a Day Django* are not aimed at contesting the authenticity of Daylyt or Pat Stay, but the politics of authenticity in battling are sources for subversive articulation. Eric King Watts (1997) describes how authenticity politics (re)produces or (re) privileges a ‘gangsta’ or ‘street’ orientations as “the means for successful performance.” In a process he labels “spectacular consumption,” the gangsta /street orientation is reproduced both as a cause and effect of how black rappers “compelled to maintain their celebrity status by ‘authenticating’ their self-presentations in increasingly grittier street [or gangsta] terms” and how black rappers maintain their status through their commodification for (white) consumer consumption (p. 50-51). Daylyt’s use of flow reveals how this process operates in battling and further subverts the

expectations and desires it creates within the live white audience. Daylyt uses a persona that performs a pathological blackness, but his flow omits themes of criminality and violence to subvert the live white audience's desire for him to perform such. In other words, it leaves unfulfilled the desire it arouses. This allows Daylyt to critique the desire and the way in which it constrains the performances of black battlers, and more broadly suggests the productive possibilities of subversion.

Finally, Kool Moe Dee's victory influenced the development of flow styles in and out of battles. The sing-songy, 'old school' flows that had been dominant in rap fell out of use, replaced by complex rhythms and rhymes involving "multiple rhymes in the same rhyme complex, internal rhymes, offbeat rhymes, multiple syncopations, and violations of meter and metrical subdivisions of the beat" that have been associated with rappers such as Rakim—whose flow, considered to be the aperture of the 1980's style, was heavily influenced Kool Moe Dee and Melle Mel (Krim 2000, p. 4; Dewsee, No Date). The evolution of rappers' flow styles as well as the generic purpose and modes of circulation of battling during the Lyricist Era are indexed by a 1989 battle between Lord Finesse (Robert Hall) versus Percee P at the Bronx's Patterson Projects, home to Percee P. Although not nearly as influential as Kool Moe Dee-Busy Bee, Lord Finesse versus Percee P stands out as one of the first, if not *the* first, rap battles to be visually recorded. The rarity of such footage—especially of rappers who would go on to be enormously influential in hip hop—is related by Lord Finesse, who insists that "The craziest thing about that battle to this day is that [somebody] actually had a camera to tape it" (Hall 2011). The use of visual recording technologies to produce and circulate rap battles

would not become commonplace until the Theatrical Era, but the advent of visual recording in battling is noteworthy in and of itself.

What is equally significant is how the battle marks the continued evolution of battlers' flow styles. The styles of both Lord Finesse and Percee P reflected the increasing complexity of flow styles during the 1980's, but Percee's particularly demonstrated the continuing evolution of rhythmic complexity within battlers' flows. A 'fast rap' pioneer, Percee had an intricate flow that innovated on the styles being popularized by rappers such as Rakim (Aldave 2002).⁶ It was tight and syncopated yet simultaneously fluvial, smoothly grafting dense internal rhymes onto the beat. The uniqueness and skill Percee displayed in his flow is suggested by Lord Finesse, who recalls that "When them lyrics came outta [Percee's] mouth and he started spittin' ...I was fucked up. Like, wow. I never heard a style like that. I never heard a flow like that" (Hall 2011).

The skill Percee exhibited in his flow is also relevant to the transforming purpose of battles during the Lyricist Era. Battles were not, as Lord Finesse puts it, "staged" or "set up to entertain" as they had been during the Party Era (and would be in later battles) (Hall 2011). Battles were localized contests over who was the best rapper and the battle between Lord Finesse and Percee P, instigated by a dispute over who was a better rapper and thus centering on each rappers' lyrical skills, perfectly captures "that time, that era, that moment" (Hall 2011). But Lord Finesse suggests a neat exclusivity, or perhaps dichotomy, between battles being performed to demonstrate rappers' skills and battles being performed for entertainment that would prove false in later years. As audiences

⁶ 'Fast rap' is a term for rapping 'double time,' meaning delivering lyrics at twice the speed of the beat.

developed greater appreciation for rap as an art form, the display of rap skills involved in battling became entertaining. Thus, the purposes of battling were slowly intertwined as battles could be contests of skill and the contest could entertain audiences.

12 Years a Day Django plays with the way in which battles can be entertaining contests of rap skill. Daylyt displays his skill through his use of complex flows, but fails to win the battle because this demonstration does not entertain the live white audience. Daylyt's flows do not gratify the expectations and desires they arouse, preventing the audience from deriving the pleasure normally received from the styles Daylyt performs. This is the cornerstone of much of the subversive and vernacular rhetorical action of the performance.

The intertwining of battling's purposes—to display rap skills and to entertain audiences—is further fostered by a battle two of Oakland's most popular underground rap crews, Hieroglyphics and Hobo Junction. Sparked by a misunderstanding over a guest feature on Hobo Junction's album *Boxcar Sessions*, the two crews squared off against each other in early 1994 on the hip hop radio program the *Wake Up Show*. Although ostensibly a contest over which rap crew was superior, the battle was the first to be promoted and circulated by a radio program as a form of mass-entertainment. As hip hop icon and co-host of the *Wake Up Show*, Sway (Sway Calloway), explains

[W]e got promotion with getting [hip hop magazine] *Rap Pages* involved. To have *Rap Pages* involved back then, that was our Internet. We built that up for a couple of weeks... We promoted the date that it would happen all the way to the last hour to... get as many people... to listen in. And that was the first battle that we ever promoted like that with that technique..." (Calloway 2014).

The promotion was successful. The battle's incredible popularity helped the *Wake Up Show* become one of the highest-rated rap radio programs in the country, in turn leading record labels to scout and sign new underground rap talent that performed on the show (Kangas 2015a). Bootlegged tape recordings of the battle circulated via the same informal channels as Kool Moe Dee versus Busy Bee (Monroe 2005). Sway claims listeners as far away as Japan and the Netherlands heard the battle, although it is unclear if the circulation of bootlegged tapes was responsible for this diffusion (Calloway 2014). In addition to creating a powerful vehicle for the discovery and signing of rappers, the popularity of the battle demonstrated the capacity for battles—and particularly battles designed to competitively display each performer's rap skills—to appeal to mass audiences. The popularity of Hieroglyphics-Hobo Junction is one of several indicators of battling's commercial potential that influenced the inauguration of written battle leagues.

The battle between Hieroglyphics and Hobo Junction is additionally significant for initiating what hip hop historian Dana Scott (2014) labels “the style wars” in rap battling. The styles wars stemmed from changing conceptions of the term ‘freestyle.’ Since their inception, all rap battles were ‘freestyle,’ but the meaning of the term evolved over time and this evolution shaped performer and audience expectations in contradictory ways unearthed by the Hieroglyphics-Hobo Junction battle. In the Party Era, as well as much of the Lyricist Era, freestyle referred to the style of freeform rhyming noted in the previous section. These freestyle rhymes were expected to be written prior to a battle. Battles were not about who could spontaneously compose the best lyrics, but rather who could creatively and skillfully place their written lyrics in relation to a beat. Over time, however, the term freestyle came to denote a spontaneous performance. It meant that a

rapper was spontaneously composing and delivering lyrics (colloquially referred to as “going off the head” or “going off the dome”). This conception of freestyle created a different set of expectations for battle performances because it emphasized skilled, improvised verbal composition over the skilled improvisation of flow.

The battle between Hieroglyphics and Hobo Junction brought to light the contradictions between these two understandings of the term freestyle and their respective implications for battling and hip hop. Accusations from Hieroglyphics that Hobo Junction wrote their lyrics sparked a controversy regarding the acceptability of written lyrics in battles. History has vindicated the position of Hieroglyphics and their supporters, as the conception of a freestyle as a spontaneously composed and delivered set of lyrics came to dominate hip hop culture and the use of written lyrics was—until the emergence of written battling—viewed as unacceptable by both battle performers and audiences. Even after the popular emergence of written rap battling, a degree of controversy remains over whether written battles are genuinely rap battles because their performers do not freestyle their lyrics.

The debate over what is an acceptable form of ‘freestyle’ rapping has been overshadowed by a new “style war” that centers on the acceptability of visual theatrics. Proponents laud theatrics for pushing the boundaries of battling, while detractors decry that theatrics marginalize the lyrical skills involved in rapping by incentivizing the prioritization of the use of eye-catching and entertaining theatrics over the deft demonstration of lyrical ability. Daylyt is the focal point of this controversy, and his theatrics are source of unique cultural criticisms that his rhetorical method and strategy are designed to elide or reverse. These arguments are developed within the next chapter.

Towards the end of the Lyricist Era, battling more extensively congealed into a form of entertainment. The Hieroglyphics-Boxcar Junction battle presaged this change by demonstrating the commercial appeal of battles, but it was the advent of Scribble Jam in 1996 that truly marked the commercialization of battling. Billed as America's largest hip hop festival, Scribble Jam featured a freestyle rap battle tournament with rappers from across the globe competing for a monetary prize in bracket-style elimination tournament. Not only did Scribble Jam provide early exposure for prominent rappers such as Eyedea and Eminem—whose careers were (in part) launched by the quality of their Scribble Jam performances—but it further demonstrated the commercial viability of battling as a form of mass entertainment. Scribble Jam also furthered the use of visual recording and circulation, as the tournament produced video recordings of each tournament's battles and sold yearly compilations of them on DVDs.

Two years after Scribble Jam, battling would hit the internet as a result of the founding of the first rap battle league (an organization that solely and routinely orchestrates battles), the Ell Oh Crew (1998), which was followed by leagues such as New Jerusalem (1999) and Sacred Society (2001). These leagues were the first to set up battles individually; there was no winner-take-all tournament a la Scribble Jam. These leagues circulated freestyle battles via text, audio, and video on their websites. None of these leagues experienced the degree of success currently enjoyed by written leagues such as the Ultimate Rap League (URL) and King of the Dot (KOTD), but they are significant to the trajectory of rap battling for establishing the league format and bringing rap battling to the internet.

The shift to visually recording and circulating battles as a means of mass entertainment wrought by Scribble Jam and battle leagues created exciting new rhetorical possibilities for battle performances. Visuals, for obvious reasons, had greater salience and performances could be addressed to non-live audiences. Rapper Juice, for example, exploited this potential in his 1997 Scribble Jam battle against Eminem. Seeing that Eminem was drinking a Budweiser beer, Juice demonstrated his freestyle skill by delivering a sets of lines whose beginning letters acronymically spelled ‘Budweiser.’ Although it was possible to verbally reference a visual element at the battle prior to the shift in circulation, the freestyle skill involved in such an act, and thus its entertainment value, likely would have been missed by non-live audiences. Furthermore, multimodal circulation created a latent possibility that visuals could be more deliberately incorporated into battlers’ performances to convey unique messages or to entertain audiences. Commercial circulation also created novel possibilities for addressing audiences in diverse ways. These possibilities figure prominently within battle performances until the Theatrical Era.

The Theatrical Era: 1999-Present

The possibilities for visuals to be further incorporated into battle performances began to be realized in the battle that inaugurated the current Theatrical Era of battling: the 1999 contest between Supernatural and Juice. The battle was presented by the *Wake Up Show*, but was visually recorded and circulated on the show’s website in addition to being played on the radio. It was a freestyle contest, but one that was decided by the effective use of hip hop theatrics rather than freestyle skill. This was an unexpected twist—both battlers had serious freestyle credentials, and the contest was intended to

settle a debate among fans over who was the better freestyler. Supernatural was known as a freestyle virtuoso capable of rhyming any word he was given (Keyes 1996; Calloway 2000). Juice, for his part, “had [a] flawless style...so flawless that people thought he wrote rhymes” (Calloway 2000). True to form, Juice opened the battle with clever multisyllabic end-rhymed punchlines delivered with a tight, technical cadence. Supernatural, too, stayed true to his reputation by rhyming rebuttals to Juice’s punchlines and freestyling about being in the battle.

But it was Supernatural’s theatrics that proved to be the key to victory. Supernatural chanted and stomped around the stage in a Rick Flair-style strut and tore down flyers containing Juice’s picture, and delivered his lyrics with a charismatic ethos. The audience reacted with roaring approval. As Sway explains, it’s “not always about what you say when you’re battling for a crowd. It’s also about how you present what you say...[Supernatural] won the crowd. [They] went crazy...he made it...freestyle theatre” (2000). It would be nearly a decade before visual theatrics would be regularly incorporated into battles, but Supernatural’s performance was the tipping point for this development.

Additionally, the battle received, likely due to its promotion on the internet, a degree of circulation previously unexperienced by any battle. In the words of rap battler, former battle league CEO, and current manager of KOTD’s West Coast division, Lush One, Supernatural versus Juice was the first to become “something there was national attention on and people cared [about] from across the world” (Hyams 2013). *Wake Up Show* listeners from South America to Asia called in to request that the battle be played on-air (Calloway 2000). This global popularity helped further establish the commercial

viability of rap battling, which was instrumental to the success of contemporary written battle leagues. It also provided the impetus for the development of battle content for television, including HBO's *Blaze Battle* (2000), a one-off freestyle tournament similar to Scribble Jam; MTV's *Roc-a-Fella MC Battles* (2002) and MTV2's *Fight Klub* (2006), both of which were short-lived; and the introduction of the "Freestyle Friday" segment on BET's *106 & Park* (2001), which has disappeared at times from the show, but has most recently resurfaced as *Ultimate Freestyle Friday*, co-produced by written battle league SMACK/URL.

The wide-ranging impact the Supernatural-Juice battle had on the expressive practices and popularity of battling strongly influenced the development of written battling. According to Lush One, Supernatural versus Juice "was the beginning of this whole era of [written] battling" (Nick Hyams, 2013). Supernatural's performance showed that theatrics could be highly entertaining and effectively interwoven with the display of rap skill, which was an inventive response to how battles were becoming understood both as entertaining contests of skill. Supernatural demonstrated that the expressive practices involved in displaying one's rap skills and entertaining the audience were not exclusive and could even be complimentary. His performance was a crucial antecedent to contemporary theatrical rap battle performances, many of which, including *12 Years a Day Django*, combine skilled uses of flow with provocative visual theatrics.

The controversy engendered by the use of visual theatrics largely stems from differing conceptions within the rap battle community regarding battling's purpose and the expressive practices suited to those purposes. Contemporary rap battles contain a spectrum of expressive practices with those suited to the display of skill at one end and

those suited to entertaining the audience on the other. Some performers and audience members strongly prefer one set of practices over the other. Subsequent chapters will connect these preferences to the racialization of flow styles and the rhetorical action of *12 Years a Day Django*.

The development of written battling, and particularly its *a capella* format and incorporation of visual elements, was pushed along by the DVD-magazine SMACK (Streets Music Art Culture and Knowledge), founded in 2003. Its co-founder, Tony “Smack” Mitchell, sought to take advantage of the increasing availability of visual recording technology to provide a visual medium for underground hip hop content, essentially creating a visual mixtape for underground rap artists (Black Enterprise 2012; Hunte 2012). It was a novel idea for the time; it would be another two years before Youtube would mainstream the production and circulation of non-music video visual hip hop content. Buoyed by the success of Eminem’s 2002 film *8 Mile*—which featured dramatized scenes of freestyle battles between Eminem’s character, Rabbit, and other rappers that may have been the first viewing of a rap battle for many audience members (Hess 2007)—one of the most popular features of SMACK DVDs were the rap battles included at the end of every issue. SMACK battles were performed *a cappella*, which meant battlers had to demonstrate greater aural alacrity given the absence of a beat to structure their verses. This format was the prototype for the one used by the globally-successful written battle leagues that emerged a few years later. This format is largely responsible for the genre’s recent resurgence (Hunte 2012; Fequiere 2016).

As had been the case with Scribble Jam DVDs, SMACK's distribution method limited accessibility to casual battle fans (Hip Hop DX, 2014).⁷ This changed with the inauguration of the "World Rap Championships" (WRCs) in 2006, a 2-on-2 freestyle *a capella* rap battle tournament orchestrated by the now-defunct internet television site JumpOff TV. The WRCs' method of circulating video-recorded battles on Youtube was adopted by the first written leagues, KOTD, Grind Time Now, and Don't Flop. All were founded by battlers from the WRCs in 2008. SMACK, facing declining sales as a result of internet-based visual hip hop content, shuttered its DVD-magazine in 2009 and re-invented itself as SMACK/Ultimate Rap League, also utilizing the written format and circulating video-recorded battles on Youtube.⁸ Circulating battles on Youtube helped engender the resurgence in battling's popularity by making battles readily accessible to casual fans.

Participants within rap battle culture have attributed the shift to the written format to a number of causes, but three emerge as the most compelling: some battlers were already writing lyrics (which was inevitable due to a variety of factors), those battlers were winning, and they were winning because written performances are simply higher in quality and more entertaining than most freestyle performances. The ability to research, prepare, and rehearse performance prior to the event enhances the substance and nuance

⁷ In its infancy, Smack printed the DVDs himself and circulated them hand-to-hand and its peak in 2007 Smack was moving around 50,000 copies nation-wide to small music retailers (Black Enterprise 2012). While it was "a worldwide platform for Hip Hop information passed through the hood network - word-of-mouth, hand-to-hand" (Hunte 2012), it nevertheless reached a rather small audience.

⁸ SMACK initially attempted to compete directly with the production of visual hip hop content on Youtube with SmackTube, a website exclusively featuring SMACK content. Unable to keep pace with the videos and clips rappers were uploading to Youtube and recognizing they had established a niche market for battles that other organizations were capitalizing on, SMACK's founders decided to reorient their business model towards orchestrating and distributing battles. Arguably "the most popular battle league" and the "world's largest and most influential platform for MC battle culture" today, SMACK's ready-following of battle fans and hip hop connections allowed them to out-manuever their competitors (Fequiere 2016).

of verbal content, the inventiveness of lines of argument, the wittiness of punchlines, and the complexity of wordplay and flow. Cumulatively, these changes make contemporary written battles better suited for consumption as mass entertainment. “The main reason modern battles are done like this is definitely for entertainment value,” argues Decoy (Gary McComasky, 2012), a battler and the founder of Australian written battle league, Got Beef? He adds that it’s important to audiences that “every diss, retort, conversational rebuttal can be heard and digested” which is only possible in the written format (McCormasky 2012). Battler and co-founder of Don’t Flop, Cruger (Freddie Scott-Miller 2015), further suggests the entertainment value of written format has opened battling to “new people who might not usually listen to rap.”

The incorporation of visual theatrics is an equally significant source of written battling’s entertainment value that strongly influences the genre’s popularity. The deliberate incorporation of visual elements largely began with battlers on SMACK DVDs using visuals to define their individual personas, such as famed battler Murda Mook’s use of a doo-rag as a signature of his personal style. According to rap battler and founder and CEO of KOTD, Organik (Travis Fleetwood, 2015), the inauguration of visual personas was instrumental in creating the popular appeal of rap battling and continues to influence the popular reception to battling. Written battle performances, however, employ a more diverse array of visual elements, and for more diverse purposes, than any freestyle performance—a unique result of the *a capella* format. As Decoy explains:

Theatrics plays [sic] into rap battling now. In the old battles over beats that you would have to wait to see on a DVD, the rappers had to be filmed from so far away because otherwise the loudness of the beats would distort the sound and such. In this new format, rappers are filmed close, they are heard by all, and they even get the chance to show off to the crowd with a cheeky glance, or the pop of a collar, or a funny impression. (McComasky, 2012)

Such visual theatrics can be used to enhance the suasive effect of verbal discourse, serve as probative support for verbal claims, and, above all, to entertain the audience in any number of ways. That the use of visuals enhances the popular appeal of battling is evidenced by the fact that the many of the most popular battles—particularly those said to “go viral” due to their extensive circulation on the internet—feature performances incorporating visual theatrics.

The increased quality of verbal and aural discourses, the ability to effectively incorporate visual theatrics, and the popular appeal of battling are all indexed by the 2012 battle between Loaded Lux and Calicoe at SMACK/URL’s second annual marquee event, Summer Madness. Frequently dubbed post-hoc, with degrees of variation, the biggest rap battle event in hip hop history (see: Battlefix 2012), the event drew a crowd of nearly two thousand, including hip hop celebrities such as Diddy, Busta Rhymes, Loyd Banks, Q-Tip, and Cassidy. The battle between Lux and Calicoe, although snubbed for the headlining spot on a card stacked with high-profile battles, was one of the most highly anticipated of the event.

The battle was a quintessential clash of the old and new guard of battle rap. Lux—a battler since elementary school, a popular performer on SMACK DVDs, and member of *106 & Park*’s “Freestyle Friday” Hall of Fame for his seven-week reign as the show’s champion—had been one of the most successful and popular freestyle battlers of the early 2000’s and was returning to battling after a years-long hiatus. It would be his first battle in the written format. Calicoe, on the other hand, had predominantly excelled in the written format; he started battling for URL in 2009 and quickly became one of their most popular performers. Battle fans had been eagerly speculating about a battle between Lux

and Calicoe even before URL announced the match, creating a high degree of hype for the contest.

Although not entirely for the reasons expected, the battle did not disappoint. Music journalists quickly and widely lauded the battle as iconic, ranking it one of the most important battles in hip hop history. Lauren Carter (2012) labeled it as “The rap battle to end all rap battles,” and Chaz Kangas similarly hailed it as not only “the type of battle that happens once in a lifetime, but the type of battle that only happens once” (Kangas 2015c). *Complex* rated it as the second-greatest battle on Youtube (Rosenthal and Rosenthal 2013) and prominent figures in battling such have rated the virally-circulated contest among the most influential and definitive battles of the contemporary era. Lush One (Hyams 2013) argues the battle “transcended Battle Rap” by uniting the entire culture, spawning internet memes that circulated outside the “battle-sphere,” and even getting Jay-Z to quote Lux’s charismatic refrain from the battle, “You gon’ get this work”—a catchphrase which has since worked its way into the hip hop lexicon (Kangas 2015c). Lush One (Hyams 2013) and Kangas (2015c) have equated Lux-Calicoe with Kool Moe Dee versus Busy Bee and Juice versus Supernatural in terms of its influence on battling and hip hop.

The laudatory critical reception to the battle was largely informed by Lux’s performance, which uniquely and effectively mixed high-quality lyrics, effective flow and charismatic delivery, and visual theatrics in what has been hailed as a “performance for the ages” (Thomas 2012). It was Lux’s stunning visual theatrics that truly stole the show. Lux showed up to the battle in a three-piece suit and led a faux-funeral procession through the audience on his way to the stage, replete with a full-sized (although poorly

constructed) wooden casket. Women “mourners” in Lux’s entourage yelled out “Amen!” and “Hallelujah” as they approached the stage and openly cried at various points in the battle, grieving for Calicoe’s passing. Lux and his entourage even handed out obituaries to the audience. The approach was original and provocative, incorporating visual theatrics in “a level of psychological warfare never before seen in a rap battle” (Carter 2012). The novelty of the approach, of course, entailed a degree of risk for Lux because there was no basis for forecasting how audiences might react. But the gambit paid off—Lux was overwhelmingly deemed the winner and the battle remains, due to Lux’s performance, one of the most viewed and commented upon.⁹ As battler Pass puts it, the battle was “awesome because of Loaded Lux, plain and simple” (Pass 2013).

Equally significant about Lux’s performance was his “jaw-dropping,” “one-of-a-kind,” and “progressive” third and final round (Kangas 2013a), in which Lux delivered a verse acclaimed as “one of the best that the underground scene has witnessed in some time” (Thomas 2012). Lux’s verse leveled strong attacks at Calicoe that contained meaningful social commentary, discussing the struggles and significance of black fatherhood, condemning gang-affiliated lifestyles, and praising the consciousness-raising efforts and cultural resistance of figures such as Marcus Garvey, Nat Turner, and Harriet Tubman. Moreover, Lux’s delivery was as theatrical as his visuals; he packaged an “unprecedented amount of charisma” with “outstanding bars” and a style of delivery

⁹ A necessary caveat here is that Loaded Lux versus Calicoe is one of the highest viewed and commented upon battles where performers rap in English. Non-English battles in the Philippines-based written league FlipTop, for example, regularly receive more views on Youtube and other sites hosting battle content even for battles considered to be of average or low quality. After crunching the numbers on various battle leagues’ Youtube subscribers, number of videos, total number of views, and videos with more than a million views, T.O. Battle Blog (2014) concluded that “Filipino league Flip Top [sic] is to the rest of battle rap what Shaquille O’Neal is to Verne Troyer” (see also: Adre 2015).

“fixed to please a commercial crowd without dumbing down his lyrics; a feat many of the greatest lyricists dream of” (David Williams [Drect], 2012; see also: Hyams 2012).

Lux’s performance demonstrated the rhetorical evolution of battling on several levels. The viral circulation of the battle showed that rap battling’s increasing popularity had reached unprecedented heights, offering a platform for engaging in meaningful cultural work through the articulation of social commentary and criticism—a capacity Lux demonstrated in his third round. Further, Lux’s mix of clever, hard-hitting lyrics and, in the words of battler Okwerdz (Brian Peeples, 2013), “the theatrics of Battle Rap that people get addicted to” expanded rap battling to “a whole other level.” In perhaps the most acclamatory account of the battle, Kangas (2015c) claims Lux’s performance changed “the entire face of battle rap...forever” by mixing skilled lyrical articulation with “performance elements” that showcased “how the next level of rap battles had arrived.”

12 Years a Day Django falls within and expands the arc towards using visual theatrics in battling that Lux’s performance helped establish. Daylyt is pioneer of using visual theatrics in rap battling, and *12 Years a Day Django* is arguably the first performance that uses visual theatrics to construct a unified narrative over the course of the entire performance. The rhetorical action of Daylyt’s visual and aural discourses, however, is informed by the way in which genre uniquely imposes constraints on Daylyt. The concluding section briefly sketches this claim, while the next chapter explores it fully.

Conclusion: Rap Battling’s Resurgence and 12 Years a Day Django

This chapter has hopefully provided a useful introduction to the historical-generic context of *12 Years a Day Django*. In addition to its significant influence on the

trajectory of hip hop, battling's rhetorical evolution has instantiated a new style war regarding the use of visual theatrics. Skilled rapping and visual theatrics are expressive practices that at opposite ends of the spectrum between those suited to a view of battles as contests of lyrical skill and a view of battles as sources of entertainment. While performances such as Supernatural's versus Juice and Lux's versus Calicoe demonstrate the two are not exclusive, these competing views have produced a debate over the use over visual theatrics. There is a new 'style war' regarding the acceptability of visual theatrics that, like the stylistic clash of Kool Moe Dee and Busy Bee and the (free)style war of Hieroglyphics and Hobo Junction, may come to shape hip hop as a whole. Explicating the terms of this generic debate and its relevance to *12 Years a Day Django* is the core objective of the next chapter.

CHAPTER THREE

Written Rap Battling, Visual Theatrics, Daylyt, and *12 Years a Day Django*

Rap battling is more popular and influential than ever. Written leagues exist across the globe in countries such as Norway, the Philippines, the United Kingdom, Germany, Sweden, Australia, and South Africa. Battle videos garner millions of views on Youtube, leagues' websites, and other internet-based hip hop outlets and the viewership for live pay-per-view streams can reach tens of thousands. An entire industry has been borne as leagues now generate more money than independent record labels through their multiple revenue streams (Hunte 2014; Fequiere 2016). Tickets to live battle events, which typically sell-out theaters and clubs that can seat over a thousand audience members, range in price from tens to hundreds of dollars with pay-per-view sales and the revenue from Youtube advertising providing even more income. Prominent battlers are paid tens, and possibly hundreds, of thousands of dollars per performance (Hip Hop DX 2014; Kangas 2014). The American Society of Composers, Authors and Publishers even pays royalties for battle videos. Some rappers have made battling their sole career, earning a living from their performance payments and royalties; several have reportedly signed exclusive contracts to perform in a certain league (Hunte 2014; Hip Hop DX 2014; Fequiere 2016).

Further indicating of battling's popularity and cultural reach is the involvement of major hip hop icons and performers. Drake, Jadakiss, DJ Skee, Kid Capri, Fabolous, Q-Tip, Busta Rhymes, Kool Herc, Diddy, Sway, Ebro, KaySlay, and Fab 5 Freddy have all attended, hosted, and/or co-promoted battle events. The music of rap battlers has been

cosigned by major hip hop industry rappers such as Eminem, Dr. Dre, Drake, Slaughterhouse, and Jadakiss (Hip Hop DX, 2014). Ab-Soul even included a battle with Daylyt as a bonus track on his recent album, *These Days*. Platinum-selling rappers Cassidy, Canibus, and Madchild have come out of rap battle retirement to try their hand at the written format, and rapper Nick Cannon issued a \$100,000 challenge to battle any written battle rapper. Snoop Dogg and Eminem have founded their own written leagues and the latter even produced a rap battle reality television show for cable network FuseTV, prompting KOTD to consider creating its own reality show (Hunte 2014). Eminem and Greek billionaire and battle rap enthusiast Alki David, whose online video streaming service FilmOn has a channel dedicated to rap battling, seek “to do for battle rapping what UFC did for MMA” by turning rap battling into a fully-fledged mainstream commodity (Rosenberg 2014; Kangas 2014). By some accounts, it already is (see: Hunte 2012; Kangas 2013a; Glaysher 2014a; Glaysher 2014b; Kangas 2014; Mansell 2014; Bellini 2014; Kipling 2014; Reuters 2014; Kelly 2015; Hunte 2015; Fequiere 2016).

If the preceding indicators were insufficient to denote mainstream status, rap battling also receives coverage from mainstream news outlets such as *CNN*, *Forbes*, and the *Wall Street Journal* as well as hip hop news sources such as *Vibe*, *The Source*, *Complex Magazine*, and *World Star Hip Hop*. There are also numerous battle-specific news sources and online forums as well as Raptfm, a website that allows users to battle one another while also serving as vehicle for discovering and signing talent from the battle rap community. Google made the Rap Battle Network one of its first paid-subscription Youtube channels. Rap battle-based internet memes circulate outside of battle culture and the hash-tagged names of rap battle events trend on Twitter. Former

NBA star and basketball analyst Kenny “The Jet” Smith has compared Chris Paul and Stephen Curry to prominent written battlers Murda Mook, Charlie Clips and Shotgun Suge to explain several points in panel discussions on TNT’s *Inside the NBA*. Perhaps most telling, written battles have been parodied by popular comedians such as Chris Rock, Keegan-Michael Key, and Jordan Peel.¹

What these indicators first suggest is that battling has an unprecedented degree of popularity and cultural influence, which in turn suggest its power as platform for articulating sociopolitical commentary and critique. Daylyt takes full advantage of this potential. His method for constructing performances is designed to increase his public exposure in order to facilitate deeper cultural work. Daylyt accomplishes this work by staging resistance through play, a rhetorical strategy that accomplish subversive and vernacular culture work through playful deception, misdirection, and manipulation. Understanding these contextual factors illuminates the subversive and vernacular rhetorical action of *12 Years a Day Django*.

To that end, this chapter is divided into three sections. The first examines the controversy surrounding the use of visual theatrics within the battle community, a controversy that primarily derives from competing views of battles as sources of entertainment and battles as competitions of lyrical skill. As both the most prominent performer of visual theatrics and skilled lyricist, Daylyt and his theatrical performances are at the center of this controversy. Because the acceptability or appropriateness of visual theatrics is unsettled within the battle community, the constraints of genre are

¹ Outside of written battling’s popularity, rap battles in general are increasingly ubiquitous—they are in a record-breaking Broadway musical, on primetime and late-night network television shows, at World Wrestling Entertainment events, at the opening of the Superbowl, and on Facebook, Twitter, and Tinder.

countervailing on Daylyt as a performer. His theatrical performances are also sources of unique cultural criticisms because of the racial and locational politics of battling. The second section examines Daylyt method of constructing performances and rhetorical strategy, with an eye towards how the latter enables Daylyt to turn the racial and locational politics of battling to his rhetorical advantage within *12 Years a Day Django*. These politics seemingly impose rhetorical constraints on Daylyt, but also provide the possibilities for subversive and vernacular rhetorical work. Daylyt capitalizes on these possibilities by acting as a rhetorical trickster, staging resistance by playing with the constraints of genre. The second section analyzes some of the ways in which Daylyt's strategy of playful and resistive subversion manifests within *12 Years a Day Django*. A third section concludes by summing the key findings of this chapter.

Daylyt and Politics of Visual Theatrics

Examining the commentary on any rap battle internet forum would reveal that the use of visual theatrics is a source of ongoing controversy among rap battle fans.² Opponents of their use generally argue that the use of visual theatrics represent a lamentable departure from the true spirit of battling as a contest of lyrical skill. Commentators at rap battle news outlet *CatchaBody Magazine* provide some emblematic examples of such critical sentiments. They decry that theatrical performances have carried written battling corrupted the essence and roots of battling by promoting battles-as-entertainment and creating an incentive for battlers to “one up each other” by doing “something more extreme each time for a bigger shock value” (Chandler 2015). These

² Such forums include the Youtube comment section on rap battle videos, s, battle news outlets and blogs, and the user forums of leagues' websites and battle sites such as rmbva.com, rapbattling.com, and the Reddit.com sub-forum (subreddit) r/rapbattles (in addition to league and battler-specific subreddits such as r/KingoftheDot and r/Daylyt).

commentators suggest there is nothing valuable about visual theatrics, and further express fears that “the lyrical aspect” of battling will disappear entirely as battler focus “solely on [theatrical] performance” (Chandler 2015).

It is interesting that the criticisms and fears expressed about the influence of visual theatrics on hip hop culture mirror those made by hip hop scholars concerned with the influence of visuality on rap as a whole. Gladney (1995), for example, laments that “the pre-eminence of literary skill—i.e., ‘having skills’—in hip-hop has diminished in proportion to the increased prevalence of video, since video has transformed an oral, linguistic, and sonic art form into one that includes a very influential visual component” (p. 298). Decrying in similar fashion to the commentators at *Catchabody Magazine* that visuality has corrupted rap’s essence, Gladney laments the influence of visuality on hip hop for reducing the importance of mental and verbal agility, which he views as the essential skills of rap that were traditionally found within battles. In general, criticisms that rely on the notion that visuality was absent from rap in some bygone primordial era stem more from revisionist value judgments than from neutral analysis of hip hop’s history (Hayman 2013) because theatricality has always been a part of hip hop (Persley 2015, p. 85). Regardless, as potent means by which socio-political commentary may be articulated the study of battling’s theatrics merits further study (Persley 2015, p. 86).

What the controversy over visual theatrics in written battles suggests is that participants in battle rap culture are themselves debating the proper place of visual theatrics within hip hop. Like previous style wars, the resolution of this controversy may significantly impact the trajectory of hip hop culture by determining which skills are considering important in rap as well as what visuals are considered acceptable within hip

hop performance. What this means for the study of *12 Years a Day Django* is that the boundaries of genre are unsettled because whether and in what forms visual theatrics are acceptable are sources of ongoing debates. The rhetorical action of *12 Years a Day Django* is informed by this controversy. It imposes countervailing generic constraints on Daylyt, with additional constraints resulting from the racial and locational politics surrounding his theatrical performance. These constraints are sources of subversive and vernacular rhetorical action in *12 Years a Day Django*.

Daylyt is the focal point of the style war over the use of visual theatrics. Daylyt has incorporated visual theatrics into his performances to a degree and in manners unprecedented in battling. In one theatrical performance, Daylyt stripped down to what he terms a ‘hammock thong’ made from a cellphone charger and napkins. In another, he performed as Malcolm X. Other examples include performing as Batman and a Vegeta (a character from popular Japanese cartoon series Dragon Ball Z); pulling out a deck of cards and insisting that his opponent draw one (ala a magic trick); lying down on stage, putting his head on a pillow, and pantomiming sleeping; placing his hands down his pants before tapping one on his opponent’s face; holding out a bucket and soliciting donations from the audience in exchange for rapping more bars; flashing the live audience with his genitals; attacking his opponent with comically oversized boxing gloves; choking an audience member (who was possibly ‘planted’ by Daylyt); and attempting to literally defecate on stage. As British battler and battle-blogger Mos Prob (Adam Feldman, 2014) suggests in his examination of Daylyt’s influence on battling, “No one has pulled off [visual] antics on such a large scale before...and no one has treated them as a serious part of the form either.” Mos Prop and others provide accurate comparisons between Daylyt’s

work and the genre-altering performances of comedian Andy Kauffman and rocker GG Allin (Feldman 2014; Weiss 2015).

Largely as a result of his visual theatrics, Daylyt has achieved a degree of celebrity almost unrivaled in battling. KOTD (2013) has even suggested that “any conversation revolving around battle rap will eventually turn to Daylyt” and that “Despite, or perhaps due to, his antics, Daylyt has gotten just about as close to a household name as any battle rapper can.” But his use of theatrical ‘antics’ also extends beyond battling, manifesting within his parodic music videos and video blogs. Daylyt’s theatrical performances virally circulate over the internet via Youtube (on both rap battle channels and his personal Youtube Channel, 1SPAWNONLY), battle leagues’ websites, and sites such as VLAD TV and World Star Hip Hop, in addition to being discussed and circulated via television, radio, and word-of-mouth (War Report Interview). As a result, Daylyt has not only become “one of the most successful and in-demand battlers working today” (Kangas 2013b) but also “much more than a battle rapper” as “one of the most fearless gonzo artists of the online video medium” (Weiss 2015). Similarly, *Vibe* columnist Jasmina Cuevas (2013) has claimed Daylyt “has not only made a name, but a brand for himself” through his use of visual theatrics.

Daylyt’s large scale use of visual theatrics has made him the focal point of battling’s new style war. It is not, however, simply that his use of theatrics as a whole are controversial or that his specific choice of visual tactics (e.g. stripping on stage, etc.) are a source of consternation. Rather, Daylyt is recognized as both a prodigiously skilled lyricist and wholesale proponent of visual theatrics, the latter often with a distinctly comedic and shocking bent. Because his performances can contain strong lyricism or

gimmicky theatrics, Daylyt essentially embodies the tension between viewing battles as contests of lyrical/literary skill and battles as sources of mass entertainment, making him the locus point of the controversy regarding visual theatrics. What this ultimately produces are countervailing rhetorical constraints on him as a performer, which he plays with and subverts within *12 Years a Day Django*.

That Daylyt is a pioneering proponent of visual theatrics has been sufficiently demonstrated but the recognition of his lyrical skill deserves some explication. A cursory examination of evaluations of Daylyt as a rapper and battler would find numerous expressions of a sentiment similar, although usually slightly less acclamatory, to that of battler Danny Myers (2014), who hails Daylyt as “the best lyricist in the world” (see also: Feldman 2014). Daylyt’s lyricism is exhibited through his use of a unique, wordplay-heavy style of flow alternatively termed the “quill style” or, less frequently, the “elbow style.” The lyrical skill manifested in the style has made it quite popular with battle audiences; so popular, in fact, that Daylyt has initiated a “Quill movement” comprised of battlers imitating his style and fans calling for additional battlers to do so.

The widespread recognition of Daylyt’s lyrical skill, his unprecedented use of visual theatrics, and his popularity converge in evaluations of Daylyt’s performance to make him a locus of the larger debating regarding the acceptability of visual theatrics. When performing theatrics in lieu of displaying his rap skills, Daylyt’s performances are pointed to as the end of the slippery-slope, the trepidation-inspiring void of skilled lyrical demonstration that could supposedly take over battling as a whole if theatrics become acceptable as means of entertaining audiences. Evidencing the existence and excessiveness of such criticisms, Mos Prob (2014) has explicitly answered the charge that

Daylyt is “ruining” rap battling through his large-scale use of visual theatrics. The concern shared a large number of participants in battle culture, Most Prob aptly describes, is “Whether Daylyt is going to elevate the culture as a form of pulp entertainment or if, in completely undermining the lyrical element of battle rap, he is flushing it down the...toilet.”³

The first relevant implication of the way in which Daylyt embodies the controversy regarding visual theatrics is that it produces counter-veiling rhetorical constraints on Daylyt as a performer. Audiences both expect and desire Daylyt to display his exorbitant rap skills and perform visual theatrics, and choosing one or the other necessarily draws criticism from a segment of battling’s audiences. Heightening the salience of the issue is that Daylyt did not get much acclaim until he started performing visual theatrics; it is, at least in his view, what launched him to success and fame, and occurred prior to debuting his unique ‘Quill style.’ Rap battle news outlet battlescene.net provides a useful summation in this regard, arguing that Daylyt’s theatrics “are becoming his brand” but fans should question whether Daylyt has “another agenda” because he is “continually using the excuse that antics is [sic] what has brought him his notoriety” while, in their view, underestimating “that fans inherently like him because of his unique delivery.” They tenuously conclude: “most fans want to see Daylyt minus the antics.” On the other hand, both Daylyt and battle promoters have claimed his theatrics are responsible for many of his bookings, which suggests that audiences have a desire to see

³ Most Pro concludes Daylyt is not destroying rap battling while accurately labeling some of Daylyt’s performances as “the clickbait of the battle rap universe.” It is more accurate to say that Daylyt creates as much as he destroys, which is his stated intention.

Daylyt's theatrics (Mitchell 2014; Weiss 2015).⁴ The divergent desires regarding Daylyt's manner of performance—e.g. displaying lyricism versus using visual theatrics—ultimately create countervailing rhetorical constraints on Daylyt *12 Years a Day Django* provide possibilities for subversive articulation that Daylyt exploits.

Critical to the subversive and vernacular rhetorical action of *12 Years a Day Django* are the racial dynamics of contemporary battling. As Daylyt relates, (2014) the audiences of contemporary rap battling are “very segregated” along racial lines, particularly those of URL (predominantly) and KOTD (white). This segregation is also locational in terms of live audience. URL hosts battles in New York City, while most of KOTD's are in Canada.⁵ The locational and racial politics surrounding where and to whom and Daylyt performs his theatrics give rise to cultural criticisms uniquely applied to Daylyt. Situated against the contextual backdrop of the racial segregation of battling's audiences, *where* and *to whom* Daylyt performs his theatrics are unique sources of criticisms regarding the potentially negative effects of his performances on black culture.

Exemplary of criticisms in this regard, rapper Aye Verb (Chaz Dunacan), in a battle several months before *12 Years a Day Django*, called Daylyt a “house nigga” who performs theatrics in “white leagues for less pay” for “the same motherfuckers that sold the slaves” and then returns black leagues and does “gimmicks and preserved out raps” that are “setting [black Americans] back.” The historical analogy drawn between Daylyt and a ‘house Negro’ is telling; it indicates a concern with how Daylyt's upward

⁴ Kangas (2014b) labels the battle community “split over Daylyt's actions.” He similarly suggests “most proponents of battles will proudly exclaim the importance of rhymes” and that fans “tune in to see” intricate rhyme schemes and innovative flows and “don't want to see” Daylyt “pushing the limits of what can be done in a battle.”

⁵ KOTD has an American division, which does regularly host battles within America. These battles tend to have a more racially diverse live audience.

mobility—his success in battling—might be predicated upon acquiescing to subjection. Aye Verb is not alone in expressing such criticism, though his choice of analogy is somewhat idiosyncratic. It is much more common for Daylyt to be derided as a contemporary black minstrel on the same basis that Aye Verb compares Daylyt to a 'house Negro'—in other words, that Daylyt advances his career by performing exclusively for the enjoyment and benefit of whites without regard for how the images he circulates may negatively impact black culture, similar to how both 'house Negroes' and black minstrels personally profited by behaving in ways that conformed to the expectations and desires of whites.

Understanding the racial and locational politics surrounding Daylyt's visual theatrics is necessary for apprehending the subversive and vernacular rhetorical action of *12 Years a Day Django*. *12 Years a Day Django* turns the segregation of rap battling's audiences into a rhetorical advantage, using it as a source of subversive and vernacular rhetorical action. This rhetorical and cultural work are facilitated Daylyt's method and rhetorical strategy, which are explicated in the following section.

Daylyt's Rhetorical Method and Strategy

There is, as he insists, a method to Daylyt's madness. An examination of Daylyt's interviews and videos blogs yields three primary rationales around which all his theatrical performances are constructed: 1) all controversy is good; 2) the best way to garner such controversy is to do the opposite of what people expect; and 3) negative reactions will eventually turn into positive ones. Daylyt operates according to the maxims that "All publicity is good publicity. All controversy is good" (2015c). Gaining public exposure is the organizing principle of Daylyt's performances. He, in his own words, does not "give

a flying fuck about the Celebrity Theatre” or “about battle rap in general” because his “ultimate goal is exposure” (Campbell 2015a). Controversy is simply a means of gaining that exposure.

The way Daylyt attempts to engender such controversy is to act in the opposite of audience expectations, which, in his view, will ultimately turn negative reactions into positive ones. As Daylyt describes his method:

[I]f everybody goes right, never run right. I'm not gonna make my style to please people to follow what they like. I sit in my room and go ‘What's something that nobody would ever think to say?’ They may not like it or get it, but sooner or later they'll be on my style” (Kangas 2013b).

The latter part of this statement is most important—Daylyt recognizes that not all of his audiences will immediately “like” or “get” his performances, and he simply does not care because, in his view, naysayers will (eventually) come around to his way of thinking.

This is an established marketing concept. As an illustration, Kentucky Fried Chicken recently chose to continue an advertising campaign hated by a fifth of its viewers. When discussing the rationale behind maintaining an ad campaign that provoked such a large degree of animosity, Greg Creed, the CEO of KFC’s parent company Yum! Brands, stated he was “actually quite happy that 20% hate it, because now they at least have an opinion. They’re actually talking about KFC, and you can market to love and hate; you cannot market to indifference” (as quoted in Peterson 2015). Daylyt similarly professes his method as part of a “big marketing plan” to make him figuratively “a bigger name” and literally “thousands of more dollars” (Campbell 2015b). Marketing is indeed Daylyt’s “most on-point skill” because no other battler “causes [as] much commotion on Twitter, on forums or by word of mouth with as much frequency” (Feldman 2014).

With the foregoing considerations withstanding, Daylyt's description of gaining exposure as his 'ultimate goal' is a bit of a misnomer. Successful marketing, particularly through his use of theatrics, is a means to a larger end. As Daylyt explains, "I battle rap because I need to get the spotlight. Why do I need to get the spotlight? Because I got a bigger purpose. Take advantage of all opportunities, and that's my goal: so with the view on me, I can show the world my view" (Campbell 2012). It is noteworthy that Daylyt provided this statement in the pre-battle interview for his battle with Rich Dolarz, the battle in which he debuted what was arguably his first antic: donning a ski mask and rapping in a violent and aggressive criminal persona (a persona performed in additional battles and now referred to as 'ski mask Daylyt').

Daylyt's insistence that the controversies his theatrics engender are a productive means from accomplishing vernacular work results from his life experiences. In many ways, Daylyt is a quintessential member of the "hip hop generation."⁶ Born in Watts in the mid-1980's, Daylyt was raised in the shadow of the 1965 Watts Rebellion, large-scale deindustrialization, and white flight and black urbanization.⁷ His formative years were thoroughly influenced by the sort of economic social and economic plight experienced by black Americans nationwide, including the deleterious effects of gang culture. Daylyt grew up near the intersection of 103rd and Grape Street, a mere block from the Jordan

⁶ Coined by cultural critic Bakari Kitwana (2002), the "hip hop generation" refers to black Americans born between 1965 and 1984. Surrounded by unique political, social, and economic circumstances created by the wake of the Civil Rights movement—both its legislative achievements and failure to eradicate systemic and structural racism and discrimination—the black power and black arts movements, de-industrialization and neoliberal globalization, and statist counter-violence to the black freedom struggle (COINTELPRO/mass surveillance, the war on drugs, and mass incarceration), black youth turned to hip hop, and predominantly rap, as an outlet for social commentary and critique. As Chuck D famously put it, rap became black America's CNN. And in doing so, hip hop transformed from simply a musical genre to a salient feature of black life, uniting a generation with shared concerns, experiences, and expressions.

⁷ Daylyt is/was thirty according to a 2015 article by *L.A. Weekly* (Weiss 2015), placing his birth year at 1984 or 1985.

Downs projects. In addition to being one of the five major flashpoints of the Watts rebellion, the projects were home to the Grape Street Crips, the largest Crips clique in Watts both in terms of membership and territory. Daylyt lived his first eight years amidst the ‘crack epidemic’ and attendant surge in gang violence in South Central Los Angeles and tellingly describes his childhood as a real-life version of a *Grand Theft Auto* video game. Proximity to gang culture produced contact and eventually affiliation—Daylyt joined the ranks of the Grape Street Crips and claims to carry the scars from bullet wounds as proof.

After finding success in the local LA battle scene, Daylyt struggled to adapt his ‘street’ style to the written format, which especially in its early years was dominated by comedic battlers.⁸ His debut of the ski mask against Rich Dolarz was the turning point in his written battling career, launching his meteoric rise to rap battle stardom. Daylyt supplies that his use of theatrics “came about after [he] went through a period of

⁸ By Daylyt’s ready admission, rap was a very important part of his life growing up (Kangas). So, too, was battling; Daylyt’s mother rapped and battled under the moniker Lady P, making him perhaps the first second-generation rap battler. Daylyt began his career as a student at Jordan High, quickly making an impact on the local freestyle battle scene. After initially being “suckered” into battling at The Pit, a club renowned as proving ground for battlers, Daylyt quickly became “addicted” to the cheers of the crowd and, subsequently, a regular in the Los Angeles’ battle scene (Kangas; Cuevas). Rubbing shoulders with and battling against the likes of Kendrick Lamar (at the time rapping under the name K-Dot), future KOTD champion Dizaster, and Compton ratchet-rap pioneer AV LMKR (Label Me Krack Rated), Daylyt made a name for himself by “battling any opponent willing to get in the ring with him” sometimes taking on five or six battles a night in front of a crowd of hundreds (Cuevas, Vibe). By the mid-2000’s Daylyt and his Krak City Crew, whom counted Dizaster and AV LMKR as members, achieved a large degree of local renown that segued into attention from major hip hop personalities (Weiss). Daylyt’s performances in particular drew the attention of legendary rappers such as Method Man and Redman, who flew out to Watts to see him perform (Cuevas). Daylyt appeared to be on the cusp of greater stardom, well-poised for a promising rap career. But in an ironic twist of fate, Daylyt’s career was temporarily derailed by the emergence of written battling. The local freestyle battle scene dwindled as battlers gravitated towards written leagues such as Grind Time Now and, recognizing that his somewhat ‘street’ style was out of place in a format dominated by comedic humor, Daylyt moved to San Bernardino and began working at Walmart. By 2009 the lure of the new scene proved too much to resist, and Daylyt began battling in California-based written leagues Grind Time Now and The Jungle. Daylyt struggled to find success early on in his written battling career, however, because his style did not comport with the preferences of early written battle audiences (Weiss 2015).

questioning life: why we were here and what we were living for” and deciding that he could use his performances for greater purposes (Weiss 2015). It is difficult to understate how deeply and firmly embedded this belief is in Daylyt. The mask of comic book hero Spawn tattooed upon his face signifies the parallels Daylyt perceives between himself and the hero, a parallel which a) derives from Daylyt’s view of his personal history; b) hinges upon the belief that provoking negative reactions is a means for accomplishing a broader purpose; and c) informs his entire approach to battling. As Daylyt elucidates:

Me and Spawn have a lot of things in common. A lot of people look at me as a good guy now, but I wasn't always like this. In my younger days, I did a lot of things that I shouldn't have done, like anybody who grew up in Watts. But, as I got older, I understood my purpose in life and what I needed to do. What I do in battle rap I did to make everybody hate me, for the greater purpose of making them love me in the end. Same thing Spawn did. Yes, he sold his soul to the devil. But what did he do at the end of the day? He killed the devil. The singularities in that character and how my life is structured are almost identical. (Campbell 2014b)

The ‘greater purpose’ to which Daylyt alludes is, generally speaking, accomplishing vernacular work. Daylyt promotes himself as ‘not a rapper’ (both a signature catchphrase and title of one of his mixtapes) because he sees himself as less a performer than a commentator and critic with a positive influence on the black community. Citing the empowering messages of Public Enemy as a key influence on his work, Daylyt describes his music catalogue as “positive music, positive hip-hop” meant to “open up some peoples’ eyes” about salient social issues affecting the black community while simultaneously providing syncretic messages of black empowerment and resiliency (Cuevas 2013). In battling, Daylyt (2015d) perceives himself as a much-needed “father to the black side of the battle community,” whose primary concern is that black battlers may “set [black Americans] back millions of years and sacrifice lifetimes

of opportunities” in exchange for access to the SMACK/URL stage.⁹ Discussing and critiquing the implications of the relationship between personal gain and popular success, often as a specific example of how materialism can negatively impact black life, is a consistent feature of Daylyt’s work.

Daylyt’s visual theatrics are uniquely connected to the parallel drawn between himself and Spawn. As stated in “Watts (W.e A.re T.awt T.o S.ervive)” —a consciousness-raising anthem from his album, *I am Spawn* (2013), produced around the time Daylyt began incorporating theatrical ‘antics’ into his public performances—Daylyt hopes “the camera shit kill [his] old life.” In other words, Daylyt hopes his visual performances separate his current work from ‘the things he shouldn’t have done’ prior to finding a greater purpose. The vernacular work yielded from this purpose has reached a possible apex in *Daylyt: I’m an Animal*, a film—written, directed, and produced by and starring Daylyt—whose purpose is to symbolize how “life could be much better” for black Americans if they were not “stuck” in many ways (Cuevas 2013).

Some of the ways in which *12 Years a Day Django* follows Daylyt’s method of constructing performances are likely obvious. Performing as a slave in front of a predominantly white audience in Canada was, as one might expect, highly controversial and garnered a lot of exposure for Daylyt. Additionally, *12 Years a Day Django* was intended to ‘open peoples’ eyes’ to the ‘fact’ (as it stands in Daylyt’s view) that black Americans remain slaves. But unpacking the vernacular dimensions of the performance

⁹ This claim should be taken with a grain of salt, as Daylyt has notoriously feuded with the leadership of SMACK/URL at various times. Nevertheless, claims that black rappers may sacrifice too much for access to stardom and, in doing so, damage the black community are consistently advanced by Daylyt in interviews and video blogs.

requires a bit more interpretive effort, usefully furthered by examining Daylyt's rhetorical strategy for accomplishing this work.

Daylyt can be productively understood as a trickster and his rhetorical strategy as 'resistance through play.' A trickster "embodies and acts out various social tensions, pushing the limits of what is both possible and desirable, often through subversion and humour" and embodies ambiguity and ambivalence, doubleness and duplicity, contradiction and paradox (Spandler 2008, p. 87). They 'play' with established constraints and structures through improvisation, innovation, experimentation, frame, reflection, agitation, irony, jest, clowning, comedy, and carnival (Conquergood 1989; see also: VanSlette and Boyd 2011). Daylyt is, by his own admission, "always fuckin' with people," particularly with respect to race and racism, in his public discourse (Campbell 2015d). Daylyt claims to be "living in an antic" because it is not even possible to confirm his style of speaking—he switches between white and black vernacular English to fuck with people (Campbell 2014f). The theatrical visual theatrics Daylyt performs are simply part of "the fuckery" (Campbell 2014g). Daylyt and others also consistently describe as him as 'trolling'—an internet slang term for deceiving another individual(s) for one's own purposes, usually manipulating another individual to feel outraged—further denoting the trickery involved in Daylyt's performances (Weiss 2015). According to Daylyt, his theatrical 'trolling' in battles is directed at the same vernacular ends as all of his performances (Weiss 2015).¹⁰

¹⁰ Not all of Daylyt's theatrics are directly aimed at accomplishing cultural work. Similar to how some hip hop theatrics simply entertain while others articulate socio-political commentary and critique (Persley 2015), tricksters' play sometimes provides harmless release instead of radical possibilities for social transformation (VanSlette and Boyd 2011). Daylyt's theatrics, too, sometimes provide entertainment rather than social commentary and critique. The entertainment value of Daylyt's performances, and especially his visual theatrics, earn him fans and get him booked for future performances (Mitchell 2013; Weiss 2015). Absent any entertainment value, Daylyt would not have a massive platform for circulating his

Daylyt's play takes many forms: deliberately hyperbolic and bombastic statements,¹¹ contradictory explanations and answers to questions,¹² and innovative and parodic visual theatrics in rap music videos and battle performances, among others. Using such play to articulate resistance to the material conditions of the hip hop performer occupies a key discursive role in the constitution of rap's 'hidden transcript' of resistance, which engages in symbolic and ideological warfare with the institutions and groups that symbolically, ideologically, and materially oppress black Americans (Hess 2005, p. 298; Rose 1994, p. 100-101;). Theatrical battles performances are excellent sites for staging resistance through play because the liminality of performance—its instantiation of a temporary and fleeting discursive space between community and social structure/hierarchy—offers rhetorical possibilities for those willing to play with the existing social order and its terms. Play is also fundamental to battling,¹³ and its linguistic practices embody carnivalesque subversion (Rizza 2012). Scholars have noted that that

critical performances to mass audiences. His non-critical performances thus enable his critical ones. By occasionally performing some theatrics for entertainment Daylyt makes it almost impossible to predict when, where, how, or (in a narrow sense) why Daylyt will perform theatrics. This buoys the staging of resistance through play by making his theatrics an unanticipated and potentially disruptive force (Vizenor 1988). This is the genius of Daylyt's strategy, to which Dizaster (Bashir X, 2014) provides an instructive analogy: Daylyt is not so much Spawn as he is Batman's nemesis, the Joker. Daylyt may seem, in Dizaster's words, like a "fucking idiot" for his clownish theatrics, but ultimately "he's a genius" because he routinely and unexpectedly causes disruption while remaining "the guy Batman [read: battle rap] wants to kill and just can't" (X 2014). Daylyt, too, notes parallels between himself and the Joker, referring himself as "the Joker mixed with Batman" while strongly emphasizing his connection to the former on the basis that he and the Joker both use antics and gimmicks that defy expectation and disrupt the routines of rap battling (Campbell 2014, t-rex; see also: TWR 2014).

¹¹ Daylyt gives the examples of saying things such as "I hate white people" or "I don't like black people" or that "racisms boils down to bigger dicks" (Campbell 2014 racism).

¹² Daylyt's consistently contradictory public discourse in interviews and video blogs is a source of complaint for some audience members. Daylyt once claimed in an interview, for example, that he was born in Santa Monica and has never been to Watts (Campbell TWR). In another, Daylyt pointed out that he may not even have a Spawn mask tattooed on his face: it could be a consistently reapplied Henna (temporary) tattoo that casual observers cannot distinguish from a permanent one.

¹³ Play occupies a central role in the motivation and outcome of battling and its devices, techniques, and rituals are central to discourses (Lee 2009; Morgan 2009; Williams and Stroud 2014).

costuming aural styling can mask a potent mode of subversion in rap performance (Potter 1995, p. 2; Hess 2005), suggesting that theatrical play in battling can be a powerful strategy for articulating, contesting, and negotiating social understandings of race as well the racial dynamics in which the performance is situated (Cutler 2007; Cutler 2009; Alim et al. 2010; Alim et al. 2011; Williams and Stroud 2014).

Daylyt demonstrates as much by staging resistance through playing with the unarticulated assumptions, beliefs, and understandings of the racial status quo through his theatrical battle performances (Potter 1995, p. 132-133). Specifically in *12 Years a Day Django*, Daylyt reveals how white desire instatiates and sustains black subjection and white supremacy, a key argument consistently advanced within his public discourse.¹⁴ Daylyt acknowledges discourses that he is not legally “owned” by anyone, but still expresses that he is a “fuckin’ slave” because his “last name is Campbell” so he “[belongs] to somebody” (Daylyt 2014d). The implication is readily apparent—the surnames of black Americans reveal the continuing cultural trauma of slavery inasmuch as black Americans still use the names foisted upon their legally enslaved ancestors by white owners. *12 Years a Day Django* more specifically pertains to the ‘facts’ that “the white people still paying us [black Americans] at the end of the day” and “as long as we work for the dollar bill itself with the white man on the dollar bill we're all slaves” (Campbell 2014e). This is first a claim about the ways in which the dominant social and economic status of white Americans is materially and symbolically represented by the lack of black Americans on U.S. currency. But, more crucially, it is also a claim about the

¹⁴ We must be wary of trusting the veracity of Daylyt’s statements given his trickster status, something Daylyt is keen to remind his observers. There are times, however, when he claims to speak truthfully about his views on race and racism and he also professes certain beliefs and views with enough consistency that it is reasonable to conclude Daylyt holds them sincerely. That the chain remain the same is one such view.

relationship between black Americans and white Americans in terms of economics—black people remain slaves because they are forced to work for white money. White desire drives the flow of that money, thus creating the conditions of black subjection.¹⁵

Daylyt's firm belief that white economic power and desire congeal to establish and maintain black subjection dictates his use of fuckery as a subversive strategy of resistance. Daylyt is not beholden to any desire or expectation because he ignores them or acts in the reverse. His fuckery masks his agency; white people are paying him to do and say whatever he wants—to break expectation, to engage in fuckery—rather than what they want. Whatever Daylyt does merely adds to his own mystique, inciting further interest in his work that pays monetary dividends. His seeming acquiescence to the moneyed influence of white desire games the system, so to speak. As Daylyt (2014, danny myers) phrases it, “at this moment [he] can say and do whatever the fuck [he] want” and still get paid for the views his performances generate.

12 Years a Day Django models Daylyt's fuckery as a productive response to black subjection. Whereas “[m]ost people sell they soul for Jordans” Daylyt feels he does not sell himself out in the same manner because he gets paid for doing and saying whatever he wants (Campbell 2014d). A primary message of *12 Years a Day Django* is that subversively breaking the expectations and desires that constrain performance can be a powerful means of turning the terms of subjection to one's rhetorical advantage. By

¹⁵ Although not cast in terms of subjection, it is widely recognized in performances studies that economic imperatives both constrain and enable the possibilities for black performance (Catanese 2011). One may also note here the rather Marxist take Daylyt has on racism, e.g. a result of economics. Similarly, Daylyt believes “we [humanity] are all one” and that racism is a means of dividing groups for the purposes of social control and protecting the established order. In *12 Years a Day Django*, these views produce an emphasis on the material and particularly economic effects of racism and white supremacy on black communities.

enactively demonstrating this through his use of flow, Daylyt models a potent method of enacted subversion that can be adopted by his black audience members.

In addition, *12 Years a Day Django* stages resistance through playful mis/indirection, deception, and manipulation, the means by which blacks tricksters accomplish subversive and vernacular cultural work. As a black rhetorical strategy, this ‘tricksterism’ emerges from what John Arthos Jr. (2001) labels “the imposed structure of the divided allegiance of black life” (p. 43). Informed by W.E.B. Dubois’s notion of double-consciousness, Arthos argues the black American experience is characterized by a fundamental “status duality,” an inability to either accept the values of the white culture that devalued black Americans or to escape their own history and identity. The resulting double bind, a “structured ambiguity” in black experience, creates a specific cultural role for black rhetors and performers to speak in two directions simultaneously, at once to the community which protects and the community which threatens; black rhetors and performers must necessarily orient their discourse to the opposing poles of black life by at once addressing, at the surface, the (white) slave master and, at a deeper level, the (black) slave (Arthos 2001, p. 43). Tricksterism is a means by which this need is rhetorically navigated and managed.

Through deception, mis/indirection, and manipulation, tricksters turn the dichotomy between surface and depth to their rhetorical advantage, charming external white audiences while conveying deeper vernacular meanings to black audiences. Henry Louis Gates Jr., one of America’s foremost black literary critics, famously argued that exploiting the ambiguity and polysemy of language for vernacular purposes (what he calls Signifyin’) serves as “the rhetorical principle” of black vernacular discourse after

studying ‘trickster tales’¹⁶ and the black literary cannon (Gates 1988, p. 44).¹⁷ The extensive vernacular adaptation of tricksterism in the African diaspora and particularly within the American context (Arthos 2001; Watts 2001; Watts 2002; VanSlette and Boyd 2011) reflect a practical necessity impelling the use of tricksterism as a rhetorical strategy. Eric King Watts (2001) supplies that successfully managing the status duality of black American experience through deception has often been necessary for black survival. “Historically,” writes Watts, “black folk survival often depended upon such white misperception as in the way that white folks mistook references to ‘freedom’ in plantation as signifying a celestial release rather than a worldly one” (2001, p. 191; see also: Arthos 2001, p. 43-44). Because of this survival imperative, black tricksters “mask their faces against the blows of white supremacy” such that “white racists are tricked into believing no challenge to their authority” accompanies their performance (Watts 2001, p. 191).¹⁸

¹⁶ ‘Trickster tales’ feature a weaker animal character tricking a more powerful animal through ambiguous and polysemous language use to demystify the latter’s presumed superiority (usually a monkey and a lion, respectively). Such tales date back to Yoruban mythology, but were popularized in America near the beginning of the nineteenth century.

¹⁷ Rhetorician Kermit E. Campbell (2005) challenges Gates on this point, arguing that one should not consider the trickster figure the sum total of black vernacular rhetoric and/or Signifyin’ as the sine qua non of black vernacular discourse, which he charges both Gates and (some) rhetoricians as doing. Curiously, Campbell does not cite Ono and Sloop (1995), who suggest that rap should be understood as a black vernacular discourse because of its cultural syncretism and possibly resistant articulation. Campbell seems to offer much the same reading of rap as “definitive of rhetoric in the African American vernacular” (p. 24) because of its cultural syncretism as a product of black rhetorical/cultural traditions and its function as a contemporary rhetoric of resistance. Whether or not Campbell is correct in either a) his reading of Gates and others as treating tricksterism/Signifyin’ as the epitome of black vernacular discourse or b) his claim that that such a treatment is a misrepresentation of the black vernacular tradition is ultimately irrelevant. My quotation of Gates is intended to indicate that tricksterism has historically been a significant black rhetorical strategy for accomplishing vernacular work.

¹⁸ The mask to which Watts refers is both literal and figurative. The ambiguity and polysemy of language can ‘mask’ vernacular rhetorical action. Sometimes, however, a physical mask can similarly be a guise for a potent mode of subversion, particularly in the context of rap (Hess 2005). Daylyt employs a ski mask for this purpose in *12 Years a Day Django*.

The subversive and vernacular rhetorical action *12 Years a Day Django* is similarly masked at the surface level, and use the racial segregation of its audiences for its rhetorical advantage. Differences in the interpretive skills possessed by white and black audiences determine the transparency or opacity of a given performance, enabling hidden vernacular meanings to be passed along through the rhetorical resources of skilled performance and allowing black rhetors/performers to deceive and manipulate whites without penalty.¹⁹ Because the interpretation of flow is largely governed by the cultural mediation of its rhythms, Daylyt flows are able to offer subversive articulations of black agency, messages of resistance, and relatively candid affirmations of black culture unbeknownst to live the white audience. The intersection of Daylyt's flows and his visual theatrics further cuts at the pretensions of white audience members by positioning them and their desires to see Daylyt perform certain styles as objects of ridicule. *12 Years a Day Django* ultimately acts to 'turn the tables' on white hegemonic domination while remaining unbeknownst to whites, thus challenging and potentially disrupting entrenched white authority (Conquergood 1989; Arthos 2001; Watts 2001; Schutzman 2005; VanSlette and Boyd 2011; Willems and Chabal 2014).

Daylyt's visual and aural discourses in *12 Years a Day Django* tap into one of the performance traditions used to criticize him by analogue; namely, the American tradition of black minstrelsy. Daylyt is not the first rapper to be derisively accused of minstrelsy. In contemporary scholarship, pop culture commentaries, and even the performances of rappers themselves, associations are drawn between rap and minstrelsy as a means of disparaging rap for its promotion of racially stereotypical notions of blackness that, in the

¹⁹ Daylyt overtly suggests as much in *12 Years a Day Django*, claiming that those who are not 'listening' to his performance are trained not to do as much.

of view these commentators, produce any number of harms on black performers, their audiences, and American race relations generally (Pharcyde 1992; Lagrone 2000; Kitwana 2002; Kitwana 2006; Little Brother 2005; Heaggans 2009; Smith 2010; White 2011; Rabaka 2011; Muhammad 2012; Taylor and Austen 2012). These commentators share with Daylyt's detractors a "conventional view" of minstrelsy, which maintains that the racial (and racist) performance practices of minstrelsy were strictly as sources of cultural racism, racial domination, and anti-blackness.²⁰ Challenging this view, scholars such as Eric Lott, W.T. Lhamon Jr., Luis Chude-Sokei, and Karen Sotiropoulos, among others, have persuasively argued that black minstrelsy accomplished far more complex vernacular work than the conventional view of minstrelsy allows.²¹ *12 Years a Day Django* is a contemporary example of how the rhetorical resources of minstrelsy can be marshalled for vernacular purposes.

For Lott, Lhamon and others, black minstrelsy was not simply a capitulation to the racial fantasies and demands of white audiences, but rather "a principal site of

²⁰ The conventional view was popularized by academia in the 1970's and 1980's and predominates in American cultural memory, see: Lott (1993 p. 8-9) and (Lhamon 2012, p. 34). Historians supporting the conventional view made minstrelsy what "they told themselves it was – that it was simply about the unfortunate and laughable black, and that the power of its expression had to be contained and controlled, as its audience had to be denied its traditional social license" (Cockrell 2012, p. 65-66). These historians missed what critics of rap as minstrelsy miss about rap as a genre: "the complex ways that some artists...play with stereotypes to either subvert or reverse them" (Dyson 2010, xvii). Subversive performance in battling is not nearly as widespread as it is in rap in general, but Daylyt's body of work certainly provides ample of evidence of its existence in battling. Perhaps, as battler Real Deal (Trevor Weller, 2014) claims, "Battle rap needs Daylyt. Straight up."

²¹ A necessary caveat here is that the claims that black minstrelsy engaged in complex cultural work are contested by scholars not invested in the conventional view of minstrelsy. Saidiya Hartman (1997), for example, argues that the racial dynamics underlying and facilitating minstrel performances delimited the possibilities for performance such that subversion and transgression were impossible on the nineteenth century minstrel stage (although she does find the quotidian adaption of minstrelsy's expressive practices was a source of agency for black Americans). Similarly, Eric Lott, who believes that the dynamics of minstrelsy tilted towards transgression, has persuasively argued that Lhamon's *Raising Cain* (1998) pushes the case for minstrelsy as a subversive practice "way beyond the minstrel show's ability to sustain it" by underselling the influence whites on black representation to the point that Lhamon "too often leaves the slaves in chains" (2002, p. 147). Black minstrelsy is offered here merely as a point of comparison for apprehending the rhetorical action of *12 Years a Day Django*.

struggle in and over the culture of black people” (Lott 1993, p. 18).²² Much like contemporary battling, this struggle was multifaceted and predicated on the complex relationships between black performers and their segregated audiences, which required performers to tap “into both the performance traditions of their audiences and the cultural negotiations they indulged in just outside the door” (Johnson 2012, p. 6). These complex relationships afforded black performers the ability to turn around and mobilize the practices of minstrelsy for subversive and vernacular purposes such that “what might at first seem to be a mere reiteration of the deplorable history of racism” became “a profound challenge to its foundational parameters” (Tukhanan 2001, p. 12; Lhamon 2012, p. 27; see also: Schroder 2010). The “sophisticated” minstrels engaging in such work—who range from Billy Kersands to Chris Rock—appropriate negative codes to invert them, scoffing at and exaggerating the “bigoted condescension of their performers,” and ultimately performing “their disenfranchisement as part of their oppression.” (Lhamon 2012, p. 34-35). Black minstrelsy could also be a form of culturally syncretic political activism, a way for black performance to forge a dialogue

²² Minstrelsy provided both the earliest injection of a popular notion of blackness into the public sphere (Lott 1992; Lott 1993) as well as the earliest popular construction of blackness that black Americans provided themselves (Lhamon 1998; Lhamon 2012). Lott and Lhamon are making two similar but distinct claims, and the difference between the two is an important one. Prior to the 1840’s, minstrel performers were exclusively white. These performers provided the first popular conception of blackness available in the public sphere, but black performers did not participate in its construction. Although, at least in the analyses of Lott and Lhamon, early white minstrel performers did, on occasions, accomplish transgressive and subversive cultural work that was sympathetic to the plight of black performers and audiences, it was not until black performers gained access to the minstrel stage that black people participated in the construction of blackness. The key finding of Lott and Lhamon is that black minstrels played upon the differences between the conceptions of blackness provided by white performers and the conceptions they themselves provided in order to construct culturally syncretic performances that relayed transgressive and subversive messages (primarily) to their black audience members. *12 Years a Day Django* plays with the audiences desire to see Daylyt perform certain racialized flow styles in a similar manner.

with their black audience that included a critique of American racism from behind the minstrel mask (Schroeder; see also: Chude-Sokei 2006; Sotiropoulus 2009).²³

In *12 Years a Day Django*, Daylyt's visual and aural discourses tap into the black minstrel tradition as part of the subversive rhetorical action of the performance.²⁴ Daylyt is likely passingly familiar, at the very least, with the embodied racial imitation of minstrelsy because he has performed a battle in whiteface makeup and another dressed as a KKK member in order "to be a black guy who acts like a white guy" (Cuevas 2013). Daylyt's embodied visuals in *12 Years a Day Django* are not racially imitative in this sense, but nevertheless perform the a similar symbolic function as the slave costumes of early black minstrels. Early Minstrel shows marketed their theatre as an authentic depiction of slave life and culture, and minstrel characters were costumed to signify their slaveness. Daylyt's slave garb in *12 Years a Day Django* makes him what Sammond (2012) calls a "vestigial minstrel," an "an indexical marker" that obliquely gestures to the Old South, the plantation, and slavery (p. 170). This marking helps Daylyt embody the

²³ Rhetorical scholarship has also found that nineteenth century black Americans used racial imitation outside the minstrel stage to exercise civil liberties, pursue civil rights, and threaten white domination; see: Wilson 2003.

²⁴ This is not a suggestion that that Daylyt intends his performance to be read in terms of black minstrelsy or that his audience would understand his performance in such terms. Rather, as Stephen Johnson astutely observes, "the blackface minstrel tradition has never left us" (2012, p.2). Minstrelsy continues to influence popular expressive practices that are, at times, seemingly disconnected from traditional minstrel performances or, at the very least, have a connection that goes unnoticed performers and audiences, emerging in popular culture and performance even as its practices seemingly recede from the horizon.²⁴ Lahmon attributes this to the "lore cycle" of black minstrelsy that "binds, confirms, and channels the correspondences embodying" these performances (2012, p. 24; see also: Lhamon 1998). He adds that "the connections are tenuous enough that players and their audiences in their midst may not recognize them, although the pattern is apparent in the long view" (2012, p. 35). Cole and Davis (2013) similarly argue that minstrelsy "continues to travel through time and space frequently unmoored from knowledge about its antecedents" (p.7; see also: Epp 2003; Osborne 2006; Chude-sokei 2006). The implication of these observations for the study of popular culture and black performance is perhaps best stated by Spike Lee, who poignantly remarks that people "don't need to apply burnt cork to be doing minstrelsy in these times" (2001). And even if one disagree with such claims, their reiteration by a variety of scholars and cultural commentators "suggests the enduring legacy of minstrelsy as a point of comparison for representing blackness" (Nowatzki 2010, p. 167).

position of all black Americans as slaves as part of the dialectical conflict of the narrative.

Daylyt's rhetorical use of racialized flow styles additionally follows the tradition of using racial imitation as a disguise for resistance. Adroit use of racialized aural expression (aural-racial imitation) was a key way in which minstrels articulated cultural commentary and passed covert messages in dialogue with their black audiences. For example, black minstrel performers would alter their intonation or pronunciation to convey vernacular messages unbeknownst to white audience members (Schroeder 2010). Voice also marked racial authenticity in a number of ways, which provided a guise for tricking and cutting at white authority without white recognition of such (Lhamon 2012). The racialized flows of *12 Years a Day Django* are used in much the same manner, covertly conveying subversive and vernacular messages to black audience members and tricking the live white audience to responding to Daylyt's performance in ways that confirm the veracity of his subversive criticisms.

Used in this way, racial imitation is a rhetorical tactic that flips the charge that Daylyt is a minstrel. The embodied critique of the performance is a hallmark of Daylyt's rhetorical tactics in battling. As Daylyt explains, "Instead of saying something, I would do something....I'm not going to say a rebuttal, I will just do one! And that's pretty much how I come up with...my tactics" (as quoted in Cuevas 2013). Another embodied critique of *12 Years a Day Django* refutes the charge that he a 'house Negro'—namely, the critique enacted through the failure of the performance. Daylyt designed *12 Years a Day Django* to lose the battle. In video blog posted to his Youtube channel after King of the Dot announced his battle with Pat Stay, Daylyt (2014) stated "I don't want to be a

winner, yo'. I want to be the biggest loser ever" (a sentiment echoed in post-battle interviews as well). Daylyt even tells Pat Stay leave the KOTD chain at home because he does not "care for that," declaring instead that they should "put on a show."

The intentional failure of the performance is a stylistic violation of generic propriety that challenges the notion that Daylyt is a house Negro. The reception to Daylyt's theatrics is often determined by the perceived appropriateness to the rhetorical situation of the battle. For example, some audience members view Daylyt's theatrics as more acceptable against certain opponents based on the stylist match-up it creates. Some perceive Daylyt's theatrics as less acceptable at major battle events. *12 Years a Day Django* was specifically criticized for its occurrence in a title match, the fact that Pat Stay was Daylyt's opponent, and that it occurred in front of a Canadian audience. In Daylyt's view, audiences foremost wanted to see him 'out-rap' Pat Stay, which seems to be generally supported by online commentary after the battle.²⁵ Out-rapping Pat Stay, however, is not inherently exclusive with the vernacular critique of *12 Years a Day Django*. Daylyt could have dressed as a slave and still out-rapped Pat Stay. Doing so would have seemingly confirmed some of the primary messages of the performance. Daylyt is demonstrating his competency with the full spectrum of perceived skills in battling, and out-rapping Pat while also using visual theatrics would have thoroughly demonstrated such. Moreover, winning the chain would seemingly offer greater support for the notion that the chain remain the same. Winning the battle in such a manner would

²⁵ This is preference is likely an outcome of Daylyt's 'Quill movement' and the way the battle with Pat Stay was promoted. The wordplay skill of Daylyt's 'Quill style' is slowly coming to dominant the styles of URL battles. The live audience in KOTD likely expected and desired Daylyt to perform this style because a) he is the leader of the Quill movement, b) he usually performs the quill style when not performing visual theatrics, and c) KOTD promoted Daylyt as a worthy challenger for the KOTD title on the basis of Daylyt's quill style, releasing a promotional video featuring a short monologue about the battle from Daylyt under the title "The Quill Returns."

have shown that acquiescing to the demands of the white audience—specifically, their desire to see him out-rap Pat Stay—results in slavery, both symbolically represented by the chain and materially enacted in the sense that, as a KOTD Champion, Daylyt would lose his ability to choose his own opponents for the immediate future. By designing the performance to fail, however, Daylyt violates the expectation that he will out-rap Pat Stay, which conveys a response to the criticism of Daylyt as a house Negro.

Winning the battle by out-rapping Pat Stay, even if Daylyt performance staged a coercive dynamic between the slave master and his performance, would have conveyed that upward mobility can be achieved by acquiescing to the demands of whites (e.g. Daylyt becomes champion by performing in the manner desired). Daylyt would have gone from field Negro (Number Five) to house Negro (KOTD Champion). The intentional failure of the battle thus plays with the expectations dictated by genre and circumstance in order to enactively subvert the criticism that Daylyt's theatrical performances make him a house Negro. Keep in mind here that the performance is patterned after Daylyt's career; Daylyt is 'freed' by losing the chain, both within the narrative of the performance and within his own career. The failure of the performance *12 Years a Day Django* therefore stages a 'rebuttal' to the claim that Daylyt is a house Negro.

Conclusion: Context and 12 Years a Day Django

This chapter has elaborated on the contextual analysis of *12 Years a Day Django* by investigating the constraints genre imposes on Daylyt and the ways Daylyt and *12 Years a Day Django* play with these constraints for subversive and vernacular purposes. This discussion, however, has focused primarily on Daylyt's visual discourses on how

they are connected to the racial dynamics of battling. The next chapter will develop a similarly line of analysis with respect to Daylyt's flow styles within the battle. In the same way that tricksters and minstrels conveyed hidden vernacular meanings to black audiences by exploiting how their aural discourses would be interpreted by white audiences, Daylyt plays upon the racialization of flow styles in order to articulate hidden subversive and vernacular messages within *12 Years a Day Django*.

CHAPTER FOUR

Flow, Multimodality, and *12 Years a Day Django*

Recovering the study of rhythm is an important element in the resuscitating the broader study of aurality. At the very least, rhythm deserves greater rhetorical scrutiny because of its ubiquity. “Every work of art possesses a rhythm,” writes musicologist and neuroscientist Michael H. Thaut, because rhythm arranges a work’s physical elements into form-building patterns with a discernable structure of organization (2005, p. 4). Substitute ‘rhetorical performance’ for ‘work of art’ and we have a good idea of how rhythm operates within every rhetorical act. This chapter explores the relationships between rhythm, form, and meaning-making to further illuminate the rhetorical functions of flow within *12 Years a Day Django*. In this exploration, this chapter identifies the meaningful contributions the study of flow in *12 Years a Day Django* offers to scholarly conversations about rhythm, flow, and multimodal rhetoric.

The first section reviews the interdisciplinary literatures on rhythm, rhetorical form, and flow. It first sketches how the rhetorical function of rhythm is mediated by context then examines the literature on flow. It argues that current scholarship either displays insufficient attention to context when analyzing flow. It then proposes that understanding flow as a rhetorical form is a productive means of assessing how context informs the rhetorical work of flow within rap performance.

The second section operationalizes this claim by analyzing the flow styles of *12 Years a Day Django*. It argues that certain styles of flow are ‘racialized’ within the rap battle community as a result of how they are used to appeal to different racial audiences

with divergent views on battling's purpose. Daylyt's racialized flows arouse expectations and desires within the audience that he plays with for subversive and vernacular ends. This section identifies the core features of the flows of *12 Years a Day Django* and briefly suggests how they rhetorically operate within the performance. As part of this analysis, reference is made to some of the visual discourses of *12 Years a Day Django*. The third section of this chapter argues that analyzing flow's intersection with visual discourses is generative for flow studies and rhetorical scholarship, demonstrating how delivery takes on especial significance in the age of electronic media. A fourth and final section concludes by reviewing the key findings of the chapter.

Rhythm, Rhetorical Form, Flow, and Context

The rhetorical work of rhythm is thoroughly contextual. Rhythmic meaning is contextually mediated by its perception by the audience, which requires an anticipation or expectation—a “demand for something to come”—and a fulfilment of that expectation through ordered recurrence (You 1994, p. 362-363). Musicologist Edwin Gordon describes this process as “audiation,” in which rhythm is translated by the audience and imbued with contextual meaning; rhythm is thus to music what thought is to language.¹ As he explains, “As we listen to speech, we give meaning to what was said by recalling and making connections with what we have heard on previous occasions. At the same

¹ Rhetorical critic Laura R. Micciche (2004) has taken this notion even further, arguing that how people think and give shape to ideas are intimately tied to the rhythms of written and spoken discourse. Biomusicological studies of rhythm support this claim by showing that music and language are processed in many of the same areas of the brain; that rhythmic ability is correlated with linguistic ability; and that rhythm causes behavioral and electrophysiological priming effects that are indistinguishable from those evoked by sentences. Each suggests that the rhythmic aspects of language may help convey narrative meaning (see: Thaut 2005; Rappaport 2010). But this is merely a ‘hard science’ confirmation of what rhetoricians have known about rhythm for millennia. Gorgias argued that meaning in human experience could only be communicated and apprehended through measured and balanced use of rhythm, which conveyed meaning according to patterns of thought (Struever 2015).

time, we are anticipated or predicting what will be heard next, based on our experience and understanding.” (2009, p. 11). Rhythm is decoded in the same manner. The recognition of rhythmic pattern by audiences creates an expectation and anticipation based upon their experiences with music, which then provides the performance being audiated with contextual meaning (Gordon 2009).

Flow studies is just beginning to grapple with the role of context in determining the rhetorical functions of flow. Musicological analyses of flow predominant within the literature and often divorce textual and contextual analysis. Scholars such as Krims (2000) and Adams (2008), for example, have explicitly endeavored to analyze the articulative and suasive functions of flow within performance absent a consideration of context.² Elysee (2011) has noted some of the ways in which the lack of attention to context, specifically in Krims’s (2000) work, raises a variety of theoretical and practical concerns that limit the insights of closed textual analyses of flows. Oliver Kautny (2015, p. 101) has recently and rightfully entreated further contextual/textual analyses of flow on the basis that its meaning-making is dependent on contextual factors that should guide textual analysis. My analysis of flow in *12 Years a Day Django* will demonstrate how contextual analysis can offer new insights into flow’s rhetorical functions within a performance, particularly as a source of subversive and vernacular rhetorical action.

My analysis stems from the recognition that the meanings provided by flow are dictated by cultural audiation. In other words, rhythm has different meanings in cultures and communities such that they interpret the meaning of rhythm differently. As Walser (1995) astutely observes in his ground-breaking study of the rhythmic rhetoric of Public

² For Krims, the stated intention is to demonstrate contextual analysis unnecessary to apprehend the articulative functions of flow, but even he cannot sustain this claim in practice. Contextual analysis emerges in several places within his work, which belies the claim that the two can be neatly separated.

Enemy: “rhythmic rhetoric demands social explanations, for notes produce meaning only as they unfold in communities” (p. 206). The cultural mediation of rhythm imbues flow with the potential to serve as a source of subversive and vernacular rhetorical action. Walser (1995), for example, suggests that disparate cultural competencies possessed by white and black audiences influenced the former’s early reaction to rap’s rhythms as cacophonous “noise” that represented as nihilistic threat, while the latter viewed them as a source of cultural affirmation. I will argue that the different ways the white and black audiences of *12 Years a Day Django* respond to the styles of flow performed Daylyt allows him to convey hidden subversive and vernacular meanings.

Demonstrating this claim makes generative contributions to flow studies. Current scholarship on flow is deficient in its attention to flow’s vernacular functions. Musicological studies of flow that attend to its meaning-making function typically refrain from thoroughly considering how flow is connected to vernacular cultural work, if they do so at all.³ Early scholarship on flow (Rose 1991; Lusane 1993; Rose 1994; Abrams 1995; Walser 1995; Keyes 1996; Martinez 1997) analyzed its vernacular work, but did so in a highly limited way. These studies almost exclusively analyze the vernacular

³ Krims (2000), for example, supplies that these issues are worthy exploring but explicitly refrains from addressing them. This analytic choice leads Krims to make certain maneuvers that undercut the value of his work and, most crucially, raise questions regarding the significance of the cultural work in which flow is, by his own admission, implicated. Krims contribution that flow can be a means of identity articulation comes through a close textual reading of Ice Cube’s “The Nigga Ya Love to Hate” (1990), in which he argues Ice Cube’s use of flow was a lynchpin of articulating a “black revolutionary identity.” Krims defines this as an identity constructed for black revolutionary politics, but it is decidedly unclear what these politics are. Krims does not elucidate any aim they might have or anything they are attempting to revolt against. Krims is able to identify certain discourses and events that Ice Cube is responding to in the lyrics (and how Ice Cube is responding through flow in addition to lyrical articulation), but the general claim that there is a black revolutionary identity being articulated rings a bit hollow because what Ice Cube is revolting against is unclear. Is it the police? The prison industrial complex? The government? Capitalism? The lyrics of song suggest it could be any, all, or some combination of these depending on how the critic wants to read it. And, by leaving unaddressed the issue of how the articulation of identity is connected to the rhetorical contestation of systems and structures of power, the significance of this articulation is questionable. What this ultimately underscores is the need for considering context when analyzing flow and the cultural work it performs

functions of polyrhythms, which stands as a severely limited engagement with flow's vernacular capacity because it examines only one rhythmic feature of flow. Several of these works (Rose 1991; Lusane 1993; Rose 1994; Abrams 1995; Martinez 1997) also seem to suggest that the mere existence of polyrhythms in rap is significant because, due to their cultural history, they are axiomatically culturally syncretic and resistive. The cultural racialization of polyrhythms as an aspect of 'black rhythm' certainly connected their use by early black rappers to vernacular cultural work, but implicit assumption that these rhythms are automatically culturally syncretic and resistive is analytically tenuous.

In addition, the connection between polyrhythms and the vernacular functions of flow has been undermined by rap's aesthetic evolution. Put simply, rap's aesthetic progression has reduced the cultural significance of polyrhythms that underlie its professed connection to vernacular rhetorical action. In the contemporary era of rap polyrhythms are everywhere, including the songs of white rappers. There was undoubtedly a cultural significance to Chuck D using polyrhythms to articulate and rage against the fear of a black planet, but it's difficult to take seriously a suggestion that the same can be said about the polyrhythmic flows of Meek Mill or Riff Raff.

My study of *12 Years a Day Django* updates the line of analysis within these studies by demonstrating how the cultural mediation of a flow *style* allows Daylyt to articulate subversive and vernacular messages. In doing so, this thesis additionally builds upon scholarship that analyzes flow as a rhetorical device for articulating identity. Following Krim's (2000, p. 2) demonstration that flow is "directly and profoundly implicated in rap's cultural workings (resistant or otherwise), especially in the formation of identities" numerous scholars have examined flow's capacity for articulating identity

(Forman 2002; Miyakawa 2005; Marshall 2006; Forman 2006; Woods 2009). To differing degrees, these scholars all recognize that the features of flow are subject to racialization (i.e. being read as a marker of racial identity) and cultural mediation. In other words, flow's features may be culturally encoded with racial meanings that in turn direct audiences on how to interpret flow. This thesis extrapolates this claim further to suggest that a flow style itself can be culturally encoded with racial meaning. In *12 Years a Day Django*, this racialization provides possibilities for subversive and vernacular articulation.

This line of analysis is implicitly supported by the extant literature. One of Krims's (2000) key innovations is the provision of a genre system of flow by identifying and categorizing common styles (which will be explicated as necessary within this thesis). Krims's categorizing of flow styles into a genre system implicitly provides that certain flow styles are recognizable to audiences, which alludes to the possibility that a flow style—as opposed to a single rhythmic feature—is implicated in the cultural work of a rap song. If a style of flow recognizable to an audience, it would seem to follow that the employment of such a style within a performance could be used for various rhetorical ends. I will argue that a *style* of flow can be racialized and subsequently used to as a source of subversive and vernacular rhetorical action

To assess how this subversive and vernacular rhetorical work occurs in practice, I propose that a style of flow can be productively understood as a rhetorical form. In his widely-cited work on rhetorical form, Kenneth Burke defines it as “the creation of an appetite in the mind of the auditor, and the adequate satisfying of that appetite,” or, alternatively, “the arousing and fulfilling of expectations in the audience” (Burke

1931/1968, p. 31; Burke 1964, p. 104). It is likely obvious how the arousing and fulfilling of expectations Burke attributes to form mirrors the way rhythm creates an “expectation for something to come.”⁴ It should come as no surprise, then, that Burke posits that the arousing and fulfilling of expectation in rhetorical form is “exemplified in rhythm” (Burke 1931/1968, p. 141).⁵

To fully grasp flow’s function in the rhetorical action of *12 Years a Day Django*, we have to move beyond a strict consideration of form in relation to audience expectation to consider its relation to audience desire. In his later work, Burke (1961) partially altered his notion of form as an arousal and fulfilling of expectation to suggest it is also “an arousing and fulfilling of desires: one part of a work leads the [audience] to anticipate

⁴Ancient Greek understandings of the voice’s relation to rhetoric also structured Western thought regarding the voice for over millennia. Socrates transformed the discussion of rhythm and rhetoric initiated by Plato by subordinating rhythm—and, more broadly, style and delivery—to the enunciation of truth in speech. Aristotle shared in the Socratic understanding of speech—here specifically referring to *voiced* rhetoric—as a locus point of truth. This followed from the widespread belief among both pre-Attic and Attic and Greeks that there was a hierarchy between spiritual and physical elements, with voice serving as a mediator between the two. This belief led to an identification of voice with truth and authority, which inaugurated what Kimbrough (2002) calls the “phonologic” tradition of the voice that continues to dominate Western thinking to this day. In the American social context, the belief that voice is a marker of truth produced the belief that voice—and particularly that the rhythms of one’s voice—was a marker of racial identity, a notion that has held sway from the colonial era to the present day.

⁵ The notion of rhythm as a rhetorical form is one of the most deeply-rooted and long-standing concepts in rhetorical studies. Indeed, the concept is embedded in the etymological origin of the word rhythm itself. Rhythm derives from the Greek *rhythmos*, an abstract noun derived from *rein*, meaning “to flow.” But *rhythmos* did not refer to fluidic movement, to rhythm as it would be contemporaneously understood, in Greek writings until the Attic period. Pre-Attic Greeks understood rhythm not as a form but as form. Democritus explicitly treated *rhythmos* as *shkema*, the latter meaning form. In the title of Democritus’s treatise traditionally translated as “On Forms,” form is “*rhythmon*” (which, incidentally, makes the more accurate translation of the title “On the Rhythmicity of Atoms”). The use of rhythm as form can be found in the writings of other pre-Attic Greeks such as Heroditus, Leucippus, Aeschylus, Sopocles, Xenophon, for whom *rhythmos* never meant rhythm but rather distinctive form, proportioned figure, arrangement, and disposition whose conditions of use extremely varied. In these writings, which were ensconced in atomist philosophy, *rhythmos* was not static form, but designated the form in the moment that it was assumed by what was moving, mobile, and fluid (You 1994, p. 366-367). The exception to this usage of *rhythmos* in pre-Attic Greek writing can be found in Plato’s writings. In *Symposium*, Plato writes that “rhythm results from the fast and the slow, contrasted, then in accord” (as cited in You 1994, p. 366). In *Laws* Plato specifies that “the order in movement is called rhythm” (as cited in You 1994, p. 366). These Platonic understandings of rhythm became the foundation of how rhythm is understood within Western thought (Fraisie 1982).

another part and to be gratified by the sequence” (np., as cited in Burke 1964). The difference is a small but crucial shift in emphasis. Expectation and desire often walk hand in hand, but the latter suggests a desire on the part of the audience for a particular end even if it does not conform to expectation. As Burke supplies:

In a tragedy...the destruction of the hero may be "logically" indicated, regardless of our sympathies. Here the term "expectation" would fit best. The principle of "poetic justice" (with the triumph of good and the vanquishing of evil) would be the clearest instance of developments for which the term "desire" would be a better fit. (1964, p. 104).

Understood in this light, rhythm arouses desires within the audience for a particular result. As Valiavitcharska (2013) summates in her discussion of rhythm and Burke’s work: “By its very structure, rhythm sets up expectations and creates temporary desires, which it fulfills, delays, or frustrates” (2013, p. 185).

What the conception of flow style as rhetorical form provides is a powerful tool for assessing the relationship between context and flow’s subversive and vernacular functions. Context dictates the desire and expectation rhythm arouses because, due to its audiation, rhythm does not actually ‘create’ an expectation or desire so much as it plays with the latent expectations and desires of the audience. For a form to operate rhetorically there must be some latent recognition that informs the audiences’ expectation and desire, which has been noted in later studies of form such as Campbell and Jamieson (1978). In *12 Years a Day Django*, Daylyt uses racialized styles of flow to arouse expectations and desires within the live white audience for the purposes of subversive and vernacular critique. Identifying these styles and the way in which they are racialized within the battle community is the objective of the next section.

Before moving to discuss the flows of *12 Years a Day Django*, it is worth noting how the study of Daylyt's flows as subversive and vernacular discourses contributes to rhetorical studies. First, it expands our understanding of rap as a vernacular discourse. The major rhetorical treatments of rap as vernacular discourse predominantly focus on its verbal discourses (Ono and Sloop 1995; Lunine 2000; Campbell 2005). The critique of *12 Years a Day Django* illuminates how aural discourse can play a significant role in rap's vernacular work.

Second, demonstrating that aurality can be a potent mode of rhetoric through which race is constructed and contested offers a productive challenge to the preeminence afforded to visibility as the medium for racial identification and, by extension, as the locus for contestations of race in rhetorical performance by rhetorical and performance studies. In two representative examples, performance theorist Elizabeth Bell (2008, p. 198) argues race is "enacted *through the visual*" and rhetorician Lisa A. Flores (2014, p. 94) claims "the body is a primary, if not *the* primary, carrier of racial meanings" (emphasis in the original in both cases). In contrast, sound studies emphasizes the importance of aurality to constructions of racial identity, popular understandings of the meaning of race, and the contestation of race and racism in black performance. Eduardo Mendieta (2014) pushes this claim to the extreme, arguing that sound, and especially voice, epistemologically marks race prior to visualization. Goodale (2011) similarly identifies a collective "propensity to believe that the voice is the truest and surest marker of the self" that directs audiences to "hear" race in the voice (2011, p. 92).⁶ Further, he

⁶ Goodale's claim can be traced back to Aristotelian and Socratic theorizations about the voice. There was a widespread belief among ancient Greeks that there was a hierarchy between spiritual and physical elements, with voice serving as a mediator between the two. This belief led Aristotle and Socrates

adds, “where the body operates synechdochically to represent the person, the voice *is* the person” and thus “the voice more than the body” defined race for much of the twentieth century (2011, p. 95). While settling the question of whether voice or vision is the primary marker of race is outside the scope of this thesis, the study of aurality as a means of contesting the racial status quo in rhetorical performance at the very least deepens the rhetorical investigation of the intersection of rhetoric, race, and performance and may even impel rhetorical critics to reconsider the supposed primacy of visuality in the rhetorical contestation of race and racism.

Third, providing greater attention to aurality in black performance may also help offset some of the “default Eurocentric bias” in the way rhetorical studies conducts, frames, and disseminates studies of race, as identified by several prominent rhetorical critics (Anguiano and Castañeda 2014, p 109; see also: McPhail 1997; Nakayama and Martin 1999; Jackson 2000; Shome and Hegde 2002; Collier 2005; Hendrix 2005; Hopson and Orbe 2007; Allen 2007; Griffin 2010). Many of these criticisms are structural in nature (i.e. publishing standards that reflect white and Eurocentric biases) and hence cannot be remedied simply by a shift in what or how rhetoricians theorize. At the same time, Brenda J. Allen’s (2007) call for rhetoricians to theorize race by incorporating theories from other disciplines and to theorize the “discursive processes by which humans learn about and perform race” (2007, p. 262) as a response to rhetorical studies’ deficiencies in studying race serves as a stirring motivation for linking studies of sound and voice, rhetoric, and performance. Aurality is a key means by which people come to identify and demarcate race, creating and sustaining popular notions of racial

to associate speech with truth and authority, which inaugurated what Kimbrough (2002) calls the “phonologic” tradition of the voice that has dominated Western thinking to the present day.

essence, authenticity, and difference. As such the interdisciplinary study of aurality in rhetorical performance offers a new and exciting avenue for investigating and theorizing the rhetorical construction and contestation of race within rhetorical studies.

Kathleen Welch (1993) offers further support for the claim that the study of aurality can offset some of rhetorical studies' Eurocentric biases. The oversized attention to visual and print cultures in rhetorical studies' is a result of the logo- and ocular-centric biases of European thought; non-European rhetorical traditions attach greater significance to the power of the spoken word. Hence, by examining the dynamism of spoken discourse, rhetorical studies can "better include non-European groups that have historically been excluded and marginalized" (Welch 1993, p. 28; see also: Porter 2009). Black culture specifically pays particular attention to "not just what [is] said but they ways in which it [is] said and the contexts in which it [is] embedded," placing a larger premium on *how* something is said than its semantic verbal content (e.g. privileges aural delivery over verbal articulation) (Levine 1978/2007, p. xvii; see also: Cummings and Roy 2002; Morrison 2003).⁷ This notion is particularly pronounced Afrocentric theorizing, which argues that black language use is inherently lyrical and that black culture is characterized by an oral tradition. Effective use of aural rhythm, Afrocentrists argue, is "a basic measure of the successful speech" and is "the basis of African American transcendence" (Asante 2011, p. 49). While this thesis refrains from engaging in an Afrocentric analysis of *12 Years a Day Django*, studying aural rhythm in performance nevertheless attenuates rhetorical studies with the embodied specificities of

⁷ If one agrees with Gunn and Jenny Edbauer Rice that "the human voice has as much to do with the saying as it does with what is said" (2009, p. 217), then this notion is not exclusive to black culture. Their claim, however, underscores how the cultural study of aurality can potentially enhance our understanding of rhetoric as a whole.

black communication and culture and, in doing so, may offset some of the field's Eurocentric assumptions regarding the preeminence of the visual as the medium for identifying racial difference and conducting rhetorical contestations of race.⁸

Flow, Racialization, and 12 Years a Day Django

This section turns to discuss the racialized flow styles of *12 Years a Day Django*. We must first define 'flow' to have a better understanding of how a style is identified and manifests within the text. Flow is a term that signifies the unique form of rap's prosody that differentiates rapping from the vocal performances of earlier black performers and contemporary spoken-word performers (Salaam 1995; Walser 1995). In other words, flow is rap's unique, artistic, and aesthetic aural form; *to flow* is *to rap*.

What defines flow is a subject of a healthy and ongoing scholarly debate as scholars continue to develop and refine a conception of flow that a) conveys its uniqueness as a specialized form of prosaic delivery whose iteration both extends and breaks the cultural/rhetorical traditions from which it hails and b) accounts for the full range of aesthetic and articulative techniques and features found in flow while maintaining its ultimate contingency. To reduce a very complex discussion to digestible terms, the problem with defining flow is its *affective* dimension. Flow has a unique 'groove' that is felt in its creation and sustainment of rhythmic motion, continuity, and circularity (Rose 1994; King 2001; Miyakawa 2005; Kautny 2015), but what causes this feeling is difficult to identify and describe, and perhaps entirely ineffable. In the words of legendary rap pioneer Kool G (Nathaniel Wilson), to understand what makes a performer

⁸ For an overview of the significance of aurality in Latin@ and American Indian cultures see: Romano 2007 and Selfe 2009.

a rapper, “you gotta hear it, you gotta feel it” (as cited in Edwards 2009, p. viii; see also: Kautny 2015, p. 104). The affective dimension of rhythm resists linguistic classification, which is one of the reasons why scholars have expended a great deal of energy debating its definition and identifying and categorizing its techniques, features, and styles—and continue to do so.

Rather than grapple with the entirety of the definitional literature, this thesis adopts Kyle Adams’s (2008, np.) definition “all of the rhythmical and articulative features of a rapper’s delivery of the lyrics,” equivalent to “what instrumentalists call ‘technique,’ a set of tools enabling the performer to most accurately convey [their] expressive meaning” with the caveat that flow’s primary and distinctive feature is its rhythmic *quality*. This quality is the “play of sounds” between rhythm and rhyme in flow (Kautny 2015, p. 2013), understood as a rapper’s “ability to exploit the rhythm, rhyme around the rhythm, and yet be able to faithfully return to the rhyme on time” (Alim 2004, p. 551).⁹ The provided conception of flow leaves open the possibility that any articulative features of the voice can be found in flow while maintaining its aesthetic distinctiveness. Such features include: timing and cadence (Salaam 1995; Miyakawa 2005; Woods 2009), textual accents, (Rose 1989; Miyakawa 2005) correlation with backbeat (Krimms 2000;

⁹ As Edwards argues, rhythmic quality is the only indispensable component of rap in because “if you have great rhythm, you can still be considered to be rapping, even with basic content and rhymes and an unremarkable voice” (p. 1). Hence, defining the rhythmic quality of rap is a source of almost as much discussion as the term flow (Rose 1995; Salaam 1995; Keyes 1996; Keyes 2002; Krimms 2000; Miyakawa 2005; Edwards 2013; Kautny 2015) but I have chosen to follow Kautny and Alim because the ‘play’ of sounds connects the definition of flow to the affective ‘groove’ of rap (2015, p. 103). It is indeed the playful combination of rhythm and rhyme that truly distinguishes rap from other styles of vocal performance. The unique and enchanting quality of rap’s rhythms and rhymes is what attracted music entrepreneurs to record and produce rap music (Keyes 1996) and captured the ears of mass audiences with rap’s first single, the Sugar Hill Gang’s 1979 hit, “Rapper’s Delight” (Dyson 1991; Cummings and Roy 2002). Alim’s description of the play of sounds is especially useful for the study of flow in written rap battling given battling’s a *cappella* format. Although the relationship between rap’s aural and sonic rhythm is significant and unique, emphasizing this relationship, as some scholars do, as a distinguishing feature of rap would seemingly suggest that a *cappella* rap is not truly rap (incidentally, some commentators have argued that written rap battling is not truly rap on this basis).

Miyakawa 2005); word length, dynamics, vocal quality, pitch, and pronunciation (Woods 2009), timbre (Rose 1989; Woods 2009), syncopation and uses of meter (Krimms 2000), syllabic stress (Keyes 1996; Krimms 2000; Adams 2008; Kautny 2015), rhyme placement (sometimes called a rhyme scheme or rhyme complex; Rose 1989; Krimms 2000; Marshall 2006). A ‘style’ of flow can possibly be discerned according to any of these features, but rhythm and its relation to rhyme are likely paramount in making a style recognizable to audiences. At the very least, these will be the primary bases for identifying the racialized styles of flow Daylyt performs in *12 Years a Day Django*.

Further and firmer grounding for the claim that flow can be racialized can be found in the sound studies literature. This scholarship posits that sound and voice construct identity and listeners hear identity in both, in what Goodale (2011) terms, respectively, the race of sound and the sound of race. The two are mutually informing—beliefs about race get projected onto sound and voice and hearing sound and voice confirms these beliefs in the minds of listeners. As Nina Sum Eidsheim (2014) explains,

broader notions of sound and voice entrain and support a more general listening for difference, and, by extension, that values and beliefs, including those regarding race, are identified and, as a result, seemingly confirmed, like self-fulfilling prophecies.

One of the most significant aspects of sound that has been subject to such racialization has been rhythm, both in its aural and sonic forms. This is reflected in the scholarship that analyzes the vernacular action of polyrhythms in flow as well as Kajikawa’s (2015) provision that rap music sounds race in the way described by Goodale and Eidesheim (see also: Walser 1995; Quinn 1996).

I want to develop the more limited claim that a style of flow—and specifically the intersection of its lyrical themes, rhythms, and rhyme schemes—sounds race, which in

turn provides possibilities for subversive and vernacular articulation. The latter claim is supported by interdisciplinary scholarship on aurality, race, and performance, which has shown that aurality has long been a source of demarcating racial identity and difference, and, subsequently, also been a source of resistance and subversion for black performers (Smith 2001; Kimbrough 2002; Ramsey 2003; Douglas 2004; Rath 2005; Smith 2006; Rath 2008; White and White 2006; Courbould 2007; Pinkerton and Dodds 2008; Kainer 2008; Smith 2009; Soper 2010; Stoeve-Ackerman 2010; Goodale 2011; Eidsheim 2011; Isaksen 2012; Golston 2013; Eidsheim 2014; Newland 2014; Stone 2015). The racialization of aurality, for example, enabled some of the subversive and vernacular rhetorical action of black minstrel performances. The differences in pronunciation used by black minstrels to convey hidden messages and dialogue with black audience members relied on differences in how white and black understood the voice as a marker of race. What signified blackness in aural discourse depended on the race of the individual, and lack of cultural competency with respect to this signification meant whites missed the vernacular meanings of performance.

In battling, the racialization of flow results from how styles appeal to the divergent stylistic preferences of battling's white and black audiences. That rap battling's audiences are racially segregated among leagues and that white and black audiences have different expectations and desires is well-understood by members of the rap battle community, although, like with rap more generally, it is often conveyed through "racial code words" (Kajikawa 2015, p. 3). Fortunately, rap battler Caustic (Daniel Stefani, formerly Kid Caustic) makes both this segregation and use of coded language clear when

remarking that KOTD has a more “wholesome fan base” than URL, to which he laughs and explains:

“that’s PC [politically correct] shit right there... Wholesome? That’s a fun word for white people. It’s just two different demographics, people looking for two different things... the hood wants one thing and... the rest of hip hop’s fan base wants something else... there’s so much segregation among the community.” (Stefani 2014, 2:11)

The respective audiences of KOTD and URL expect and desire to be entertained in different ways. The former tends to value comedic content (humorous insult) while the exhibits a preference for street-themed content and skilled rapping. These different valuations of the entertaining qualities of battling in turn result in different preferences for styles of flow. As rap battler Dirtbag Dan (Daniel Martinez, 2014) explains:

There is [sic] the more funny guys that tend to be King of the Dot... Then there’s the URL/SMACK end. That’s more like gun bars and more like double-entendres, wordplay and stuff like that. It’s not like it doesn’t happen in King of the Dot. Both styles happen in both leagues. But one league is more intensive on it versus the other.

Dirtbag Dan is assessing these stylistic preferences in terms of what performers do rather than what audiences enjoy, but the latter structures the former. To plainly state what is likely obvious, battlers do what audiences enjoy because it’s what gets them booked for future battles. Forman (2006) has noted how the demands of audience influence rappers’ flow, arguing that flow responds to the local flavor of where an artist develops; the stylistic expectations of the local audience strongly influence the style of flow a battler adopts and develops. Daylyt illuminates how the segregated stylistic preferences of battling’s segregated audiences informs the stylistic choices of battlers. He explains:

When you’re in the studio and you’re making a song, you have to ask yourself, “Ok, what crowd is this song going to?” Because it’s almost impossible to make a song that everybody likes... in battle rapping, the crowds are segregated as well. You have people that like street type of bars. You have people that like jokey bars

or you have people that like complete 100% talking about real life stuff. (as quoted in Cuevas 2013)

There are two racialized styles of flow in *12 Years a Day Django*: the “URL style” and the “multi style.” As the ‘street’ descriptor for URL’s performers and audiences implies, the *topoi* of the style are themes and representations of criminality, masculinity, and violence—they are very much akin to the *topoi* of ‘gangsta’ rap. Its rhythms displays the complexity of the new school style popularized since the 1980’s, involving “multiple rhymes in the same rhyme complex, internal rhymes, offbeat rhymes, multiple syncopations, and violations of meter and metrical subdivisions of the beat” (Krimms 2000, p.4). The racialization of ‘URL style’ is not difficult to apprehend. The style strongly resembles that of most gangsta rappers, so it more or less sounds race to the same degree that Kajikawa (2015) posits of rap as a whole.

What makes the ‘URL style’ distinctive is its heavy emphasis on the use of wordplay (double meaning based on homophonic sound) within internal rhyme schemes. The wordplay is grouped around a single verbal theme, and a rhyme scheme typically ends with an end-rhymed ‘punchline’ designed to elicit a boisterous response from the audience. A ‘punchline’ in this sense is not necessarily comedic—and, indeed, often is not—because the ‘punchlines’ in URL generally end a wordplay-laden scheme with a particularly clever use of wordplay that (typically) attacks their opponent. Hence, the line ‘punches’ even though it is not a comedic ‘punchline’ (which is also contrasted with how ‘punchlines’ are understood in KOTD as comedic, akin to the ‘punchline’ of a joke). The verbal themes of the URL style typically center on gun iconography, violence, and criminality.

Daylyt's use of the style in *12 Years a Day Django* mixes the wordplay and topoi of the URL style with the comedic punchlines more commonly found in the performances of KOTD battlers. This stylistic mixture intersects with Daylyt's verbal articulation in order to affirm the superiority of the URL style as a skilled form of flow as well the desire of black audiences to see the style performed. This intersection further helps Daylyt establish the white live audience's desire for comedic styles as an object of ridicule, subversively cutting at that very desire. This subversion is reinforced by Daylyt's use of the 'white' style of flow, the 'multi style.'

The 'multi style' is defined by a percussive-effusive rhythmic style and usage of forced multisyllabic rhymes ('multis'). According to Krims (2000), the percussive effusive style possesses a tendency to spill over "the rhythmic boundaries of the meter, the couplet, and...of duple and quadruple [rhythmic] groupings" (p. 50). The percussive style typically involves "a combination of off-beat attacks with a sharply-attacked and crisp delivery" and often falls "into fairly regular and predictable rhythmic patterns" marked out points of staccato and pointed articulation (Krims 2000, p. 50-51). The rhythmic style lends itself to delivering the comedic punchlines found in KOTD because it's sharp, staccato articulation makes the rhyme scheme easy for the audience to follow during the set up.

The rhyme schemes of the 'multi style' is based on a single, multiple syllable 'assonance rhyme' (a 'multi'). An assonance rhyme does not possess single a syllable consonant pair, but rather 'rhymes' similar vowel sounds. Because a rhyme is often believed to be composed of both a vowel and a consonant sound, it is questionable whether 'multis' are 'rhymes' in a strict sense. Nevertheless, rappers, rap fans, and rap

producers consider the use of multisyllabic assonances to be rhyming so I am using the same consideration here even if such rhymes would not be universally understood as such by scholars.

In rap battling, ‘multis’ are often ‘forced’ or ‘stretched’ to the point of abstraction. For example, “you look like Ellen Degeneres fell into a lemon pit,” with “Degeneres” and “lemon pit” enunciated to ‘rhyme’ their similar vowel sounds. Semantically the lyric makes sense, but under scrutiny it is revealed to be essentially meaningless. There are no pits filled with lemons to fall into. Even if there were, what possible situation would there be in which Ellen Degeneres falls into one? Further, how would falling into a lemon pit alter her appearance? The lyric makes sense semantically but essentially conveys no meaning, and hence the multisyllabic rhyme is ‘forced’ to the point of abstraction. The ‘skill’ involved is one’s ability to invent ingenious multisyllabic assonance rhymes, usually by creating a long string of rhymes using the same set of similar-sounding vowels.¹⁰ The multi style’s tendency to promote the delivery of meaningless lyrical content is a source of derision for Daylyt (Campbell 2016), a derision that manifests within the rhetorical action of *12 Years a Day Django*.

Understanding the latter claim requires explication of how the multi style is racialized within battling. Daylyt provides that the white audience of rap battling “really likes the multis” when discussing the nature of segregation in the rap battle community. The example he gives is a battle between Cassidy, a prominent underground rapper with a street style of flow that resonates with black audiences, and Dizaster, who is known for

¹⁰ The quintessential example of how enunciation can ‘make’ words ‘rhyme’ is provided by Eminem. In an interview with 60 minutes, “rhymes” the word ‘orange’—thought to be impossible to rhyme—in the following scheme: “I put my orange/4 Inch/Door hinge in storage/And ate porridge/With George.” The “rhyme” is made possible the manner in which Eminem enunciates the syllable-consonant pairs in ‘orange.’

his skilled use of a multisyllabic style of flow that resonates with white audiences. In Daylyt's view this battle was "segregated" because of the two performers distinct flow styles and the audiences to whom these styles are articulated. The multi style is predominant in KOTD, where using multisyllabic rhymes is considered to be a "base requirement" for performing (Aveling 2010). With some degrees of rhythmic variation, all of the King of the Dot champions prior to *12 Years a Day Django* had extensively used the 'multi style.'

In much the same way the URL sounds race by through its association with the styles of mainstream gangsta rappers, the white style is racialized in part due to its association with Eminem. Marcia Dawkins (2010) suggests that by 2005, Eminem had become a brand associated with a *particular style* of music (emphasis mine, p. 481). Although she does not provide clear description of what is particularly about this style, the multi style in battling can be productively understood as an iteration of Eminem's styles. To 'do multis'—the direct command the slave master gives Daylyt in *12 Years a Day Django*—is almost synonymous with rapping like Eminem. English scholar and hip hop critic David Caplan (2014) provides good indication of the prevalence of multisyllabic rhymes in Eminem's style of flow in suggesting that "A single quatrain by Eminem features more examples of identical, multisyllabic, forced, and mosaic rhyme than an entire volume of *The Best American Poetry* anthology" (p. 135). Unofficial Dr. Dre biographer Jake Brown goes too far in suggesting that Eminem's multisyllabic style of flow "invented" new styles of flow, but his claim nevertheless serves as an equally good indication of how multisyllabic rhyming has become associated with Eminem (2006, p. 66). Eminem's flow has also been noted to display the percussive-effusive

rhythmic style (Woods 2009). That this style multi style is racialized is supported by Cutler's analysis of freestyle battling. Her analysis shows that non-white battlers draw comparisons between the styles of their white opponents and Eminem's in order to mark their opponents as white. Summarily, disparagingly comparing white battlers using the multi style to Eminem was a common rhetorical strategy of black battlers in the early years of written battling.¹¹

In *12 Years a Day Django*, Daylyt uses the multi style to subvert the expectations and desires of the white audience to see him perform the style. He first stages a verbal exchange with the slave master that conveys how the desire of the white audience to see the style coerces black performance. Daylyt then mixes rhythm and rhymes of the multi style with the wordplay of the URL style to deftly and covertly ridicule the multi style and the audience's desire to see it. This is part of articulating a broader critique of how white desire creates and maintains black subjection and demonstrating subversion as a response (as discussed in the previous chapter).

There is a third and final style performed in *12 Years a Day Django*, which Daylyt performs in the third round after chasing the slave master offstage. It is a style Daylyt alternatively terms the "Quill style" or the "elbow style."¹² Both labels illuminate the style's core features. The term "quill" refers to its emphasis on complex, layered wordplay that can only be accomplished in written verses (e.g. a freestyle could never

¹¹ See: Math Hoffa vs. Iron Solomon (2011).

¹² The term "Quill style" has been in parlance in the battle rap community since before Daylyt's battle with Pat Stay. The term "elbow style" was first used by Daylyt in a video blog posted to his Youtube channel on January 15, 2015, nearly two months after his battle with Pat Stay. Daylyt said the elbow style was entirely new, but has since used the terms "quill" and "elbow" somewhat interchangeably. He tends to more specifically use the term "the elbow" to describe a particularly powerful or significant bar in a performance where he employs the Quill style. For simplicity's sake, I will use the term "Quill style" to refer to Daylyt's unique style of flow from here on.

display such complexity). The term “elbow” refers to the how the “punchlines”—or, more accurately, “elbow lines”—are rhythmically placed within a rhyme scheme in such a way so as to be unexpected and hard hitting, much like the use of an elbow strike in a mixed martial arts match hits harder than a punch and is difficult to anticipate as part of a combination of strikes.¹³ The reference to mixed martial arts deliberately contrasts Daylyt’s style of flow with the ‘boxing’ style of flow that served as a forerunner to Daylyt’s style. The seminal example of the boxing style is Lord Finesse’s flow, which pioneered a method of placing unexpected punchlines within rhyme schemes (as opposed to simply putting punchlines on end rhymes; see: Hall 2011). The key difference is that the elbow style employs multiple and layered punchlines within a single rhyme scheme, which reinforces the inability to expect the punchline and creates a longer, denser, and more complex combination of punches/strikes.

Assessing that the ‘Quill style’ is the third and final style of *12 Years a Day* *Django* requires some interpretive work. At issue is whether or not Daylyt is performing one or two styles in his final round. At the beginning of the round, the slave master orders Daylyt to don a ski mask to perform his most recognized persona, ‘ski mask Daylyt.’ ‘Ski mask Daylyt’ is Daylyt’s violent and criminal alter ego. Ski mask Daylyt’s style of flow is generally ‘street’ or ‘gangsta,’ a sort of idiosyncratic take on the URL style. Daylyt expresses that the ‘ski mask style’ is “for regular hood niggas” that want to hear “regular hood shit” while the ‘Quill style’ is designed for “niggas who graduated from Virginia

¹³ The reference to mixed martial arts deliberately contrasts Daylyt’s style of flow with the “boxing” style of flow that served as a forerunner to Daylyt’s style. The seminal example of the boxing style is Lord Finesse’s flow, which pioneered a method of placing unexpected punchlines within rhyme schemes (as opposed to simply putting punchlines on end rhymes; see: Hall 2011). The key difference is that the elbow style employs multiple and layered punchlines within a single rhyme scheme, which reinforces the inability to expect the punchline and creates a longer, denser, and more complex “combination” of “strikes.”

Tech, that knows about molecules and membranes and shit” (Campbell 2014f). Through his flow and the ski mask’s status as a symbol of criminality, ski mask Daylyt performs a pathologized blackness. The ‘ski mask style’ is not ‘racialized’ in the sense that audiences recognize it as a marker of blackness, but it nevertheless arouses the desire to see a pathologized blackness performed.

The flow of ‘ski mask Daylyt’ in *12 Years a Day Django* plays with this desire by actually performing his ‘Quill style’ while masked as ‘ski mask Daylyt.’ This is alluded to within the text, as ‘ski mask’ Daylyt states his “word set is Quill” amidst a richly complex rhythmic pattern and wordplay-based rhyme scheme laden with declarations of his lyrical skill. This subverts the desire for the audience to see him perform a pathological blackness, which also offers a series of vernacular messages within the performance.

After Daylyt removes his ski mask and chases the slave master offstage, Daylyt comes back and performs a ‘hood’ version of the ‘Quill style’ that more closely resembles Daylyt’s usual ‘ski mask style.’ For the purpose of clarity, from this point forward I will refer to the flow performed by ‘ski mask Daylyt’ within *12 Years a Day Django* as the ‘ski mask style’ as and style he performs afterward as the ‘Quill style.’ The ‘ski mask style’ subverts the audience’s desire to see a pathological blackness, while the ‘Quill style’ fulfills. This serves to reinforce the subversive rhetorical action through its interaction with the dramatic sequence and enacted failure of the performance. By performing a pathological blackness after rebelling against the slave master and then losing the battle, Daylyt suggests that black Americans will remain slaves regardless of what they do. In other words, acquiescence to the demands of white desire is insufficient

to ensure Daylyt's freedom, which helps convey that his method of enacted subversion is a productive response in light of the inability to alter the terms of subjection.

Flow, Delivery, and 12 Years a Day Django

The previous section has hopefully illuminated the racialization of flow styles and how this racialization informs the rhetorical action of *12 Years a Day Django*. As the analysis of *12 Years a Day Django* thus far has suggested, thoroughly assessing the rhetoric work of Daylyt's flows cannot be accomplished without attention to Daylyt's visual forms, such as his slave costume and ski mask. This section argues that analyzing the rhetorical actions enabled by flow's intersection with verbal and visual discourse is a potentially generative endeavor for flow studies and rhetorical studies.

Extant scholarship on flow has not thoroughly explored flow's relationship to visuality. As McKee argues, however, sound is "not a fixed, isolated mode, nor should it be considered in isolation" (2006, p. 352). Further, different modalities naturally carry different possibilities for articulating identities, cultural expression, and resistance (Selfe 2009) and their intersection within vernacular texts can perform unique functions in rhetorically contesting systems and relations of power (Enck-Wanzer 2006). That flow studies has not explored these possibilities is likely attributable to limitations of the rap texts in which aural and visual discourse occur. Flow probably performs the same functions in the live performance of a rap song as it does in its recording, with no new meanings provided by the embodied visual discourses of live performance. There is possibly some unique rhetorical action enabled by the intersection of flow and visuality within music videos, but rap music videos necessarily hierarchize the modes of address

within the performance, prevailing certain modes over others in the articulation of meaning.¹⁴

The privileging of certain modes of address within the rhetorical action of rap music videos does not dejustify their study, but rather highlights the generative possibilities of studying written rap battles. Darrel Enck-Wanzer (2006) has shown how the study of vernacular performances that refuse the privileging of any single mode of address can yield new insights into the rhetorical contestation of power. *12 Years a Day Django* is an excellent example of how theatrical written rap battles can be novel sites for conducting such study. The simultaneously liveness the initial performative context in which theatrical rap battle performances take place precludes the privileging of any single mode of address in the articulation of social commentary and critique. Rappers choosing

¹⁴ This privileging stems primarily stems from the fact that music videos derive from the songs to which they are set—the song is produced before the video is conceived (Vernallis 2004, p. x; Railton and Watson 2011, p. 2). Straw (2005) usefully conceives of this relationship between song and video in terms of a “palimpsestic text,” a text that is written over another (p. 12). Music videos as palimpsestic texts beget the subordination of the visual mode to other modes of address in several ways. This first occurs through the addition of (an)other author(s) to the music video as text: the videomakers. While rap artists do play a role in conceiving of and editing the visuals of music videos (Roberts 1994), the director is typically the one who designs and edits the video using the song as a guide (Vernallis 2004). The narrative produced in music videos thus has (at least) two authors, both of whom hierarchize verbal, aural, and sonic modes of address above the visual. For rap artists, the song must be conceived of as an enclosed narrative prior to the production of the music video; it must have a narrative absent visuality, which necessarily subordinates the visual to the verbal, aural, and sonic and suggests that the visual is never necessary for the articulation of meaning. Directors must follow this hierarchy by using a song as a guide for conceiving and editing the video. The subordination of the visual to other modes of address is reinforced by the relationship between song and performance. Music videos have a decidedly commercial agenda—they are first and foremost commercials to sell the song from when they derive (Vernallis 2004, p. x; Railton and Watson 2011, p. 2). This exigency dictates that the visuality of music video must principally contribute to expanding the circulation of the song, rather than complement its narrative meaning. In practice, this means that video makers engage in practices of setting images to music “in which the image gives up its autonomy and abandons some of its representation modes” (Vernallis 2004, p. x) Often, the role of visuality is reduced to an instrumentality that enables or facilitates other rhetorics; the video is edited to accentuate the song’s aural and sonic rhythms, and the aural, sonic, and visual modes are situated in relation to one another to emphasize verbal articulation by obscuring some aspects of the lyrics and highlighting others. The filmic techniques and strategies of visual narration in music video production and editing do color audiences’ understanding of verbal articulation and affect its meaning, but this is ultimately a tertiary form of meaning-making because it cannot operate independent of verbal articulation (Vernallis 2004; Railton and Watson 2011). To sum, the nature of music videos as texts necessarily privileges non-visual modes of address in articulation.

to utilize visual theatrics must design their performance with all modes of address in mind so that a rhetorically-consonant narrative is established. All modes of address are implicitly placed on equal footing even as certain modes take on a greater role in the articulation of meaning within a given performance, providing novel possibilities for utilizing different modes both independently and in concert with one another in the process of articulation.

The rhetorical possibilities enabled by the intersection of verbal, visual, and aural discourse underscore the need for further rhetorical study of aurality in relations to the multimodal rhetoric of performance. The Western rhetorical tradition long studied aurality in terms of its intersection with verbal and visual discourse, grouping together the study of aurality with the bodily aspects of oratory or performance (gestures, facial expressions, etc.) under the rubric of “delivery” (*action/pronuntiatio* in Roman rhetoric, *hypokrisis* in Greek; Porter 2009).¹⁵ In spite of this historical attention, the study of delivery has largely disappeared from contemporary rhetorical scholarship (Johnstone 2001; Lunceford 2007; Porter 2009; Lambke 2013).¹⁶ This is an oversight worth

¹⁵ Beginning with classical Greek rhetorical treatises, aural-rhetorical theory and criticism has typically been thoroughly multimodal. Ancient rhetoricians considered effective oratory to be dependent on embodied visual and aural elements of performance (Sheridan et al. 2005). In her examination of the material and conceptual linkages between rhetoric and athletics in ancient Greece, Debra Hawhee (2004) further contends that rhythm, one of the three pillars of Greek rhetorical pedagogy, connected aural and bodily modes in rhetorical training and practice. In Aristotle’s formulation of delivery as the fifth canon of rhetoric, he emphasized that the suasiveness of aural rhythm depended on its relation to bodily movements as well as the subject of speech (e.g. verbal discourse; Suppes 2009). Following these classical origins, the Western rhetorical tradition consistently studied and theorized aurality and aural rhythm with respect to their intersection with verbal and visual discourses. Indeed, Gunn and Rice (2009) suggest early twentieth century communication scholars shared with ancient rhetoricians “the assumption that speech is a meeting place of the human body and language” (p. 216).

¹⁶ A safe conjecture as to the cause(s) is that the same explanations proffered for the dearth of contemporary aural-rhetorical theory and criticism apply to the dearth of delivery’s study as well. Gunn and Rice (2009) have also suggested that the discipline of Speech, the predecessor to rhetorical studies, sought to distinguish itself from the elocutionary movement during its early and formative years. Given elocution’s emphasis on delivery as a necessity for effective oratory, it stands to reason that scholars seeking to separate speech from elocution would marginalize the study of delivery.

correcting, for delivery has not only “long been recognized as one of the most significant elements of the speaker’s art” (Johnstone 2001, p. 123), but is also ethical and political because it informs public deliberation and the circulation of ideas (Trimbur 2000). If the study of the voice yields new insights into public deliberation, cultural norms, and patterns of identification (Gunn 2010; Goodale 2011; Goodale 2013), such insights are “enhanced by the addition of the visual dimension” (Weitzel 1994, p. 54). Because of its vernacular use of embodied visual and aural discourses, *12 Years a Day Django* is an excellent site to begin recovering the rhetorical study of delivery as part of resuscitating the study of aurality.

In particular, *12 Years a Day Django* demonstrates some of the rhetorical possibilities of created by delivery that result from the confluence of performance and electronic technologies of visual and aural mediation. As argued over two decades ago by rhetoricians Kathleen Welch (1990; 1993) and Bruce Gronbeck (1993), delivery has acquired new significance as aural and visual modes tend to be co-present, relational, and dominant in electronic media (see also: Lambke 2013). The intersection of the aural and the visual has allowed performance to radically re-emerge as a powerful means of communication—the disembodied has been re-embodied by the use of simultaneously visual and aural/sonic recording technologies. Delivery takes on special urgency as a form of simultaneous communication whose liveness holds a good deal of the performative power of discourse. A performer’s choices about delivery, Welch rightfully posits, creates different rhetorical possibilities for meaning-making and interacting with audiences (1990, p. 26).¹⁷ Similarly, the visual recording and circulation of rap battle

¹⁷ Welch concludes that delivery has been revived and reconstituted for the present era, which in her view necessitates the revivification of its study across the humanities, and particularly rhetorical

performances on the internet uniquely requires rappers to address multiple audiences, which simultaneously offers new possibilities for reception and exchange between rappers their audiences that can be exploited through adroit use of the visual mode (Elysee 2011).

The study of *12 Years a Day Django* confirms the canniness of Welch and Gronbeck's analysis. Daylyt uses the intersection of verbal, visual, and aural discourses to create the dramatic narrative and facilitate the subversive action of the performance. He further exploits the possibilities for reception and exchange with non-live audiences through an apostrophe created through the intersection of verbal, visual, and aural discourses. "Apostrophe" refers to a "deflected address." As Nathan Stormer (2004) explains, "A rhetor who apostrophizes turns away from the (presumably) primary audience to face another entity." This 'turn' is quite literal in *12 Years a Day Django*, as Daylyt looks directly into a camera and tells "his people" that he has a "plan" to take them to the "Promised Land." Daylyt's flow also facilitates this deflection, which directs his address to black audience members viewing the performance online. This deflection enables the subversive and vernacular rhetorical action of the performance, revealing how the intersection of verbal, visual, and aural discourse and the performance's status as a live and mediated narrative creates meaningful possibilities for vernacular rhetorical action.

studies, to prevent encroaching elitism from rendering them impotent, impractical, and unproductive. It's a provocative argument, but not one that need be sustained to justify the contemporary study of delivery.

Conclusion: Flow, Multimodality, and 12 Years a Day Django

This chapter has added another important layer of context to *12 Years a Day Django* and indicated how it informs the rhetorical action of flow within *12 Years a Day Django*. The racialization of flow styles creates possibilities for subversive and vernacular articulation within the performance. Conceptualizing flow styles as rhetorical forms is a useful means of apprehending how this articulation is enabled by context. Flow arouses the latent desires and expectations of the audience, and how Daylyt performs racialized styles of flow allows him to play with and subvert the expectations and desires of the live white audience.

This chapter has concluded the contextual analysis of *12 Years a Day Django*. The next two chapters will textually analyze the discourses of *12 Years a Day Django* with an eye towards the use of flow as a source of subversive and vernacular rhetorical action.

CHAPTER FIVE

Textual Analysis of *12 Years a Day Django* Part One

The previous chapters foregrounded the textual analysis of *12 Years a Day Django* by examining the contextual factors influencing the production of the performance. Armed with an understanding of the generic and situational constraints as well as Daylyt's method and strategy, this chapter begins to analyze *12 Years a Day Django* as a 'text.' This chapter will first examine the narrative and dramatic structure of *12 Years a Day Django* and then analyze the discourses and rhetorical action of Daylyt's first round. Accordingly, this chapter is divided into two sections.

The first section proposes that *12 Years a Day Django* should be read as a holistic narrative, as suggested by the title of the performance and Daylyt himself. It then examines the narrative and dramatic structure of *12 Years a Day Django*. The performance can be productively understood as a tragic drama. In addition to offering a useful overview of *12 Years a Day Django*'s storyline and major plot points, the analysis deepens the understanding of the text by revealing how the dramatic structure contributes to the rhetorical action of the performance. It concludes with the observation that the dramatic sequence of the performance is patterned to match the evolution of Daylyt's written battling career, which is crucial to much of the rhetorical action of the understanding the performance.

The second section analyzes Daylyt's first round. The dramatic action introduces the central conflict of the storyline—namely, the dialectical confrontation between Daylyt and the slave master. The rhetorical action is four-fold. First, Daylyt verbally

constructs a series of mimetic relationships between the narrative of the performance and the story of the black struggle for gratuitous freedom, which ultimately allows him to embody the positionality of black Americans as slaves. Daylyt's personal struggle as a slave is the same struggle of all black battlers, of all black rappers, and all black Americans with the terms of subjection. Daylyt and the slave master are in dialectical conflicts as the embodiments of the positionalities of white and black Americans as masters and slaves. Second, Daylyt suggests he is enacting a productive method of responding to black subjection that can be modeled by black audience members. Third, Daylyt introduces two key themes of the performance that enact subversive critiques, which he models for the audience: 1) that black subjection is created and sustained by white desire 2) black counter-violence is potentially necessary but insufficient to change the master/slave relationship between white and black Americans that is embodied and critiqued by the performance. Fourth, Daylyt indicates that the performance is directed to black audiences through the use of apostrophe. A third and final section briefly concludes by outlining how the analysis within this chapter will be extended in the next.

Throughout the analysis of this section, connections between Daylyt's claims, historical context, and scholarship on black performance are highlighted to suggest a) that Daylyt's claims are neither idiosyncratic nor baseless, and b) the magnitude of what is at stake in confronting and contesting the racial status quo through *12 Years a Day Django*. The significance of these understandings will be explored further in the conclusion to the thesis.

Reading the Narrative of 12 Years a Day Django

The overriding object of inquiry within this thesis is Daylyt's use of flow within *12 Years a Day Django*. However, it is impossible to separate Daylyt's flows from the other dramatic and rhetorical elements of the performance. Indeed, *12 Years a Day Django* is intended to be read as a unified narrative, which is first suggested by the title itself. The filmic references in the title are not idly made—Daylyt characterizes the performance as “not even a battle” but rather “a legitimate movie” (Campbell 2014f). Given Daylyt's work as a music video and film director, we can assume with an adequate degree of confidence that he is familiar with dramatic structures and, by extension, that his choice to characterize his performance as a ‘movie’ indicates that his performance will follow narrative conventions familiar to moviegoers. *12 Years a Day Django* is very much a story; it features characters and a plot structure that (loosely speaking) moves from exposition to climactic resolution.

In addition to directing us to read the performance as a dramatic narrative, the title *12 Years a Day Django* indicates the plotline. A pastiche of the titles of two films—*12 Years a Slave* and *Django Unchained*—whose plots both feature a slave being released from *de jure* slavery by a white man. The title *12 Years a Day Django* very much reflects the basic plotline of the performance: Daylyt (Number Five) is a slave who will be freed by a white man. The performance centers on the conflict between Daylyt and the slave master, who coerces Daylyt into performing different styles of flow until, in the dramatic climax, Daylyt forcefully rebels against the slave master and is seemingly emancipated.

There are additional layers of subtle complexity. Daylyt claims that Pat Stay helped “free me aka the slaves by not letting them get back in those chains” (Campbell

2014e). This is both a literal and symbolic reference. As a result of losing the rap battle between Stay and himself, Daylyt does not receive the KOTD champion's chain, thus avoiding a literal chain—the prize for the battle. Additionally, he is not restricted by the constraints that accompany being champion, thus avoiding a figurative chain imposed by the rap battling community. The tragedy is that Daylyt's emancipatory dramatic climax of the performance is fleeting. Daylyt beats literal/dramatic slave master, who stands as an embodied representation of the positionality of whites as slaves, only to lose to Pat Stay, who is as much a slave master as any other white person. The message is that Daylyt remains subjected to the whims of white desire, which is enactively conveyed by his loss. The narrative of *12 Years a Day Django* thus embodies the master/slave dynamic between whites and blacks that was not, and could not, be resolved by the *de jure* end of slavery. The narrative of *12 Years a Day Django*, in its intertwined dramatic action and enacted failure, thus mirrors the history that Daylyt is trying to show his audience—*de jure* emancipated slaves experienced a moment of optimism that they were truly free only to realize that they functionally remained slaves.

The dramatic form of *12 Years a Day Django's* narrative contributes mightily its rhetorical work. Its linear plot progression and characterization closely resemble a tragic drama, a structure which creates a powerful nexus between the dramatic and rhetorical action of the performance. Daylyt's introduction functions like a prologue, introducing Daylyt as Number Five and foregrounding the plot by making clear his enslaved status. Then plot then unfolds over the course of the battle's three rounds, a format well-suited to a three-act dramatic structure. The dramatic sequencing of *12 Years a Day Django*, however, does not neatly follow a three act structure because the central conflict of the

plot is introduced prior to the exposition—a (faux) whipping coerces Daylyt into rapping at the very beginning of the first round, before Daylyt delivers a single lyric. The first round otherwise functions like an exposition in the sense that it introduces the social situation Number Five inhabits (which is also mimetically representative of the situation experienced by Daylyt, black battlers, black performers, and black Americans as a whole). The second round features the rising action—Daylyt’s performance of specific flow styles at the behest of the master--and the third contains the climax and falling action, Daylyt’s rebellion and his subsequent performance of his signature style of flow without an element of coercion.

The characterization of *12 Years a Day Django* similarly resembles that of tragic dramas. Daylyt, as Number Five, is not simply an individual; he is a mimetic representation of all black Americans as slaves (alluded to outside the text in Daylyt’s claim that Pat freed him, ‘aka the slaves’). In this way, Daylyt is more a ‘character type’ than individual, which allows him to act as an instrument of social commentary and critique. This is reinforced by the dialectical conflict of the rising action between Daylyt and the white slave master, dramatizing, the master/slave relations of American society that necessarily produce black subjection and which are then embodied in the enacted failure of Daylyt’s loss.

The tragic dramatic form underlies the rhetorical action of the performance. The characterization and plot structure allows each instance of Daylyt’s coercion to ‘argue’ that black Americans are still enslaved while also serving as a point for subversive articulation. The subversive articulation represents the primary thematic response embodied within the performance—to subvert the desires of whites by any means

available, a message uniquely conveyed to black audience members viewing the performance online. The subversive dimension of the performance, however, precludes the moment of catharsis that typically accompanies tragic drama. There is no reconciliation of the broader master-slave relations embodied by the performance, just as the potential for a cathartic reconciliation in race relations at the end of *de jure* slavery broke apart on the rocks of white supremacy and gave way to *de facto* slavery.

The chronology of *12 Years a Day Django* further contributes to the dramatic and rhetorical action. Each of Daylyt's coerced flow styles sets up a subsequent aspect of the performance. More crucially, the climactic dramatic action uniquely plays with the audience's desires and expectations because of its placement in the third round. As Daylyt explains, "My trademark is something in the third round. People follow me because they're waiting to see what I do in the third round" (as quoted in Cuevas 2013). Thus, the expectations and desires Daylyt subverts throughout the performance reach their apex in the third round, providing a uniquely powerful potential for subversive articulation that Daylyt realizes through the dramatic and rhetorical action of the third round.

The dramatic sequencing of *12 Years a Day Django* is also patterned after Daylyt's own career, which uniquely fosters possibilities for subversive articulation. Daylyt struggled to find success in early battling because his flow style was neither strictly 'street' nor comedic, the styles that dominated the early written battle scene because of their popularity with the primarily white audiences of the earliest battle leagues. It was not until Daylyt performed as 'ski mask Daylyt' that he began to gain a significant fan base and receive bookings against top competition. The popular appeal his

ski mask persona and other theatrics engendered affords Daylyt the ability to do and say whatever he wants in battling, freeing him in a sense. The dramatic sequence of *12 Years a Day Django* parallels this development; Daylyt performs styles of flow as dictated by the slave master during the second round. After performing as ‘ski mask Daylyt’ at the slave master’s behest in round three, Daylyt rebels and chases the slave master from the stage. In turn, Daylyt is able to perform the ‘Quill style’ of his own volition.

Sequencing the narrative of *12 Years a Day Django* to parallel Daylyt’s career enables much of the subversive articulation of the performance. By constructing a mimetic relationship between the way in which the expectations and desires of white battle audiences have constrained him as a performer and the constraints placed on black Americans as a whole by the expectations and desires of whites, Daylyt is able to position the live white audience of *12 Years a Day Django* as unwitting participants in his coercion to show how whites as a whole participate in the coercion of black bodies and, further, that this coercion is produced by white desire. By using flow to subvert the coercive constraints placed upon him as a performer, Daylyt simultaneously models a method of subversively responding to the terms of black subjection that can then be adopted by black audience members.

This section hopefully provided a useful summation of *12 Years a Day Django’s* storyline and revealed how its dramatic structure contributes to the rhetorical action within the performance. With this knowledge in mind, we can now move to analyze Daylyt’s first round.

Round the First

Daylyt is dressed in brown slacks and suspenders, an off-white collared shirt (which looks to be linen), and a large, wide-brimmed, circular brown hat. His feet are barefoot and, although it is difficult to see, ashy (intentionally made to look so by Daylyt by applying a mixture of body powder and oil). Daylyt's hands are manacled, a weighted ball hanging from the chain linking them together. In his hands is a small tuft of cotton, which he picks at throughout most of the battle. Daylyt very much looks a slave.

Prior to Daylyt's first round, Daylyt was introduced as Number Five. Daylyt performed second during the battle—meaning Pat Stay performed his first round before Daylyt—so this introduction did not immediately lead into the development of the narrative. During Pat Stay's first round, Daylyt stands silent and stoic, looking down dejectedly at his cotton-picking hands with an occasional glance up at Pat Stay. When it is his turn to perform, Daylyt looks to the audience and asks if they can hear him. Some shouts and cheers suggest they can. Satisfied with the response, Daylyt turns to the slave master—dressed in a Ronald Reagan mask, colonial wig, and black robe with a whip in white glove-clad hands—who has been silently standing obliquely behind Daylyt, just in front of the hosts and VIP audience members on stage.

With his back turned to the audience, Daylyt engages the slave master in a verbal exchange. Daylyt remarks that he has performed a lot battles within the past month, and requests a “day off” from rapping. The master responds that Daylyt is going to “rap his whole life” because that is what Daylyt was “born to do.” Daylyt protests, insisting that he will not rap because “he just can't.” The master seemingly assents to Daylyt's request not to rap and then directs him to stand a few feet away on stage. As Daylyt turns to

follow the master's instruction, the master yells "I said rap, nigger! Rap!" and (lightly) strikes Daylyt's back with the whip. Daylyt cries out and falls to his knees. As he rises, Daylyt agrees to rap, while he pleads that the master not beat him further. A few murmurs and some nervous laughter in the audience accompany a long pause while Daylyt stands straight and composes himself.

This exchange between Daylyt the slave master introduces the central conflict of the storyline: Daylyt is a slave being coerced into performing. I argue that Daylyt mimetically embodies all black Americans as slaves and the slave master all white Americans as slave masters, and that the exchange suggests that subjection is an innate feature of black existence instantiated by white desire and sustained through coercive violence. This is indicated by the Master's remark that Daylyt is going to rap his entire life because that is the purpose of his existence. In other words, Daylyt exists to perform at the whim of the master, just as black Americans are positioned as objects subjected to the behavioral expectations and demands of whites. Much like Daylyt's performance is compelled by the slave master's whip, other black Americans refuse such demands at their own peril. The many forms of anti-black violence stand ready to discipline unruly behavior, through such means as police shootings of unarmed black Americans; police profiling, 'broken windows' and stop and frisk programs, and mass incarceration; allowing black Americans to (suspiciously) die in police custody; denying adequate access to housing, healthcare, and employment; and restricting the exercise of *de jure* rights such as bearing arms and voting, among a myriad of others (James 2013; Taylor 2013; Geary 2014).

After the exchange with the slave master, the audience gives an indication of what they expect to happen as several members of the crowd shout “BARS!” “Bars” is a reference to a style of rapping most often associated with rappers in SMACK/URL; it’s a style of flow Daylyt will perform later in the battle at the master’s behest. The shouts from the crowd thus unwittingly reveal one of the expectations Daylyt is going to subversively critique. The audience’s demand for a certain style operates as a constraint on Daylyt as a performer, much like the desires of whites impose constraints on other battlers, rappers, black performers, and black Americans as a whole. Recalling Watts’s work on spectacular consumption, white expectation and/or desire constrains black rap performance by producing an orientation toward street/gangsta flow styles such as the URL style. In other spheres such as employment and education, black behavior is similarly constrained by white expectations, specifically the expectation that blacks ought to “act white” in their academic and professional behavior (Kochman 1981; Fordham and Ogbu 1986; Ogbu 2004; Tyson et al. 2004; Akom 2008; Carbado and Gulati 2013). In explicitly demanding that Daylyt perform according to their expectation, the audience members shouting for “bars” may as well be the slave master on stage, something Daylyt will directly intimate as the battle progresses.

At this point, Daylyt finally begins to rap. Analyzing his verbal discourse is difficult because it conveys double meanings through the use of homophonic wordplay. The majority of Daylyt’s lyrics semantically convey that many of the traumatic material conditions of black life are the artificial results of white desires that masquerade themselves and the conditions they produces as natural and neutral. The prevalence of black gang affiliation, black-on-black violence, lack of black upward mobility, and the

murder of black Americans by whites are posited as the results of white greed. As one member of rap battle internet forum rmbva.com aptly describes, Daylyt's first round is "the story of the black plight under white supremacy for the past 250 years." Daylyt further suggests that black violence is a necessary response to the subjection instantiated and sustained by white desire.

Daylyt's use of word play constructs the series of mimetic relationships between himself, black battlers, black rappers, and black Americans as a whole. His verse contains over twenty homophonic references to the names of battlers or employees of KOTD. The homophonic wordplay converges with his semantic articulation to convey that the racial relations of rap battling mimic those of America as a whole. The layered articulation establishes the series of mimetic relationships between his performance and black Americans. His lyrics articulate the common conditions of black life and his wordplay suggests the white desire that produced and sustains them similarly conditions the performances of himself and other black battlers. The same applies to the levels of abstraction between black battlers and black Americans; white desire conditions the performances of black rappers and black performers.

The layered articulation is clear in Daylyt's opening lines, which lay out his thesis: "Like we forgottna cotton pick/And the avi dey display to our planet/Is the obstacle/Just another one of the man's plantations for a plant/They planted/They made it as organic as possible." The underlined/italicized words are the homophonic references to KOTD employees.¹ "Avi" is a reference to Avi Rex, the KOTD cameraman, while "organic" is a reference to KOTD founder, CEO, and host of the battle, Organik. As is typical for

¹ For the rest of this section, the homophonic references to KOTD battlers will be underlined/italicized within the quoted text and parenthetically explicated after the quotation.

Daylyt's verses, there are additional layers of homophonic articulation. "Avide" is French for greed; "avi dey display" refers to both the greed displayed by whites ("avide display") and the Avi who displays KOTD battles ("the Avi they display") to the world as obstacles to black upward mobility. The references to cotton-picking and plantations suggests that the contemporary situation is no different from slavery.

The homophonic articulation further suggests that that whites created and maintain black subjection while making it appear as though black subjection is natural. The "plantations for a plant they planted" translates to "plantations for a plant, they *planned it.*" Daylyt carries this wordplay further, suggesting the "plant" whites planted on plantation was made to be as organic (natural) as possible. In other words, whites designed black subjection just like they designed the plantation system, but made it appear that this was a natural rather than artificial construct. Viewed mimetically, Daylyt is arguing that contemporary black subjection is intentionally designed and maintained by whites, but made to appear as natural and neutral.

Daylyt then connects enforced black subjection to the material conditions of black life. White greed pushed blacks to focus on gaining wealth, which in turn had black "kids twisted" such that they grew up with "reverse lives" (homophonic references to KOTD battlers Kid Twist and Reverse Live). Daylyt continues: "We sold our cane to our own kind/Joined gangs/Threw up the fingers/Made our own brothas lay to rest/The race we had it mixed up/We was fightin fa peanuts" (Arcane, Fingaz, and Pnut). This is a clever reference to how white supremacist colonialism initially structured black life in America and continues to foster the problematic material conditions experienced by contemporary black Americans. White avarice was pushed onto black bodies, in turn making black

Americans ‘backward,’ so to speak, through the adoption of gang-affiliated lifestyles, the sale drugs in their community, and the killing of other black Americans over the money involved in the drug trade.

Daylyt continues this line of analysis by suggesting that whites deliberately seek to keep black from escaping these conditions. Whites inspire the false hope that black Americans can “get outta the low picture” (Loe Pesci) if they “pocket checks.” “Pocket checks” is another homophone, this time invoking tripple-meaning. It first refers to making money, as in pocketing a check. It also refers to tapping the pockets of one’s opponent during a rap battle to convey confidence, disrespect, and question the authenticity of battlers who purport to live gang-affiliated or ‘street’ lifestyles. Pocket checking an opponent signals that a battler is not afraid of being attacked for doing something completely disrespectful. If the opponent does not physically respond, it can be interpreted as a sign that they are not truly as ‘gangster’ as they purport. A “pocket check” is also a term for an armed mugging. Daylyt is expressing all three meanings simultaneously to suggest that blacks competing with one another and committing criminal acts for money is a fruitless endeavor because “there’s no way to make the po’ richa” (Po Rich).

Daylyt’s rationale for why blacks cannot become richer is made clear over the next few lines. When whites realize black economic gain allows them to move out of the material conditions and social position whites have foisted upon them, they “lift up HK’s with unlimited ammo/and dey be da one to pull it.” “HK” is a slang term for a gun made by Heckler and Koch; Daylyt is suggesting that black upward mobility and attempts to change their material and social conditions are suppressed by antiblack violence from

whites, who are armed with high-quality guns and lots of ammunition (both literally and figuratively). And with “every shotty [whites] aim” there is “just anotha brother brainless,” a poignant observation that black achievement often results in black murder.² The killers, Daylyt points out, typically remain unidentified and their victims forgotten, or “just anotha brother nameless” (Knamelis).

Anyone familiar with America’s tragic racial history, and specifically its numerous anti-black pogroms, can recognize that there is a great deal of truth to Daylyt’s critique. There is perhaps no better example of the violent white suppression of black social and economic advancement than the 1921 bombing of Greenwood, Oklahoma, a suburb of Tulsa that was home to the most affluent black community in America and known as ‘black Wall Street.’ In roughly a day, whites killed more than three hundred black Americans, looted forty square blocks containing more than black homes in addition to hospitals, schools, and churches, and destroyed one hundred and fifty black businesses. White police officers and National Guard members detained six thousand black Tulsans and nine thousand were left homeless (Christensen 2013). The severity of violence in Tulsa is possibility unmatched by any other anti-black pogrom in American history—whites even used crop dusting planes to fire-bomb black neighborhoods. The damage this pogrom had on the struggle for black freedom and equality is incalculable.

Anyone familiar with this history also knows that the bombing of black Wall Street is also a tale of failed armed Black resistance. And, In Daylyt’s words, this is “where the situation get tricky, people” (Tricky P). Black resistance might be potential necessity for overthrowing the existing racial order, but it also might be insufficient for

² The latter statement might be a reference to Mike Brown being shot twice in the head, though I am not certain Daylyt is drawing that connection.

doing so. “War,” according to Daylyt, is “the only option.” This is a view Daylyt expresses in numerous interviews, where he explains that ‘war’ in this context is black revolutionary counter-violence against anti-black violence. Such revolutionary violence, however, may also be insufficient to alter the structural positioning black bodies as slaves because, as has already been observed, whites are simply better-armed.

Daylyt again contextualizes this claim through wordplay to mimetically construct a relationship between the racial relations of battling and the broader American racial order. In comparison to the overwhelming ammunition possessed by whites, Daylyt suggests, all “blacks had to fight back wid/was a *hundred bullets*.” The underlined/italicized term is a reference to rapper 100 Bulletz, who is not only playing the role of slave master on stage, but is also the only prominent black Canadian battle rapper. One hundred bullets is not enough to overturn anti-black violence, just as a single black battler cannot change the violent coercion of black performance in a league dominated by white fans and performers. Daylyt also articulates how black counter-violence is a product of antiblack violence rather than its cause. That war is the only option is attributed to the lack of opportunities for black social and economic advancement, the failure of “pocket checks” to produce meaningful change in prevailing racial order.

Daylyt’s claims that black violence is both necessary and insufficient to change the racial status quo and that black-counter violence is a product rather than a cause of anti-black violence are neither baseless nor idiosyncratic. The claim that black counter-violence is a necessity for radical social change has storied roots in the black freedom struggle, most notably being endorsed in the early years of Black Panther Party (Illner

2015), and the tension between its necessity and insufficiency has been a subject of black cinema (Rowland and Strain 1994). Both claims are also supported in the construction of historical context and recent academic theorizing. Black revolutionary movements have empirically been met with a backlash of statist counter-violence that quashes these movements and arguably undermines chances for structural change.

In a paradigmatic example, the U.S. Counterintelligence Program, COINTELPRO, mounted a campaign of “domestic warfare” against black families with the aim of suppressing black militant groups attempting to mobilize revolutionary anti-state violence in the wake of the Civil Rights movement (Fletcher et al. 1993, p. 18). A COINTELPRO communique infamously declared, “The Negro youth and moderates must be made to understand that if they succumb to revolutionary teaching, they will be dead revolutionaries” (as cited Glick 1989, p. 60). According to Parker (2007), COINTELPRO continues to operate unabated, targeting both black youth and hip hop itself. Greg Thomas (2008; 2009) uses the historical context of COINTELPRO’s counter-insurgency as the basis for arguing that antiblack violence enables and encourages black counter-violence. Other scholars such as Frank Wilderson (2010) similarly regard black violence—whether in the form of black-on-black violence, homophobia, or misogyny, or counter-violence against the state—as a product of antiblack violence and a necessity for overturning the existing racial order (see also: Saucier and Woods 2014).

The next significant articulation within *12 Years a Day Django* is a suggestion from Daylyt that white people will not understand the meaning of his first round and his performance as a whole. He claims that his statements are “facts,” and that if people are “not listenin’” it’s because “they straight coached.” Daylyt is intimating that if people

disagree with the “facts” he provides it is because they have been taught to do so. This is a reference to white people, which is made clear by his use of apostrophe and his use of flow.

Just after Daylyt claims people are “coached,” he seemingly concludes his round by delivering the only direct attack on Pat Stay—calling Pat Stay a “fake Canadian gangster”—and turning away from the audience. But as the crowd lightly cheers, typical at the end of any round, Daylyt turns back and approaches a camera at the front of the stage. Looking directly into the camera with his face center-frame, Daylyt slowly states: “but I look my people in the eyes/and tell y’all I got a plan/if ya unastand what I’m a saying/I’m a take my people to da Promised Land.” There is quite a lot being conveyed here for a mere four lines. In claiming that he is “looking his people in the eyes” by staring straight into the camera, Daylyt employs a verbal and visual apostrophe, directing his address to the black audience members and, specifically, black viewers online. This is the clearest indication in the performance that *12 Years a Day Django* is intended for black audience members and especially is *not* directed towards the live, predominantly white audience.

The apostrophe is highlighted by Daylyt’s use of flow of the course of the first round, which, understood in conjunction with the apostrophe, also reveals that Daylyt is openly suggesting that white people will not understand his performance. Daylyt’s (loosely) alternates between two styles of flow identified by Krims (2000): the “sung style” and the “speech-effusive style.” These are not styles explicitly recognizable as such by the audiences of *12 Years a Day Django*, which is to say they are not rhetorical

forms.³ Quite the opposite in fact—Daylyt’s use of flow styles serves to draw attention to his verbal discourse and enactively demonstrate that the white live audience will not understand the meaning of the performance. This mystification of the meaning of the performance is the lynchpin of much of the vernacular and subversive rhetorical action, as it allows Daylyt to hide affirmations of black performers, mock the live white audience and, most crucially, make the live audience members unwitting participants in the coercive master/slave dynamic the performance critiques.

Daylyt opens and closes the first round with flow that is slow, measured, and heavy in caesura, much like the “sung style” identified by Krims (2000) because of its resemblance to spoken language or spoken-word poetic performance.⁴ In the middle Daylyt performs a more complex flow closer to a “speech-effusive style.” The speech-effusive style features enunciation and delivery close to that of spoken language, but also has irregular and complex polyrhythms and internal rhyme schemes (Krims 2000, p. 52). Both styles are featured heavily in Daylyt’s flow in the middle of the round.⁵ The sung

³ Krims identifies “styles” according to common rhythmic patterns and rhyme schemes found in the flows of multiple rappers in order to create (sub)generic system of flow (e.g., using flow styles to identify sub-genres of rap). Many audiences recognize nuances between different rappers’ flows, but Krims’s vocabulary for discussing flow styles is not utilized by rappers, fans, and producers (Woods 2009), and, as such, the “styles” he identifies would not create any unique expectation or desire in audiences. The caveat is that the use of rhythm in the flow styles Krims identifies would implicitly be recognized by audiences even if they do not have the formal vocabulary for describing the style of flow. Audiences would therefore have an expectation regarding “what is to come” in a given song or performance in terms of its flow. My point nevertheless stands: these styles are not operating as rhetorical forms *12 Years a Day Django*. As such, my use of stylistic terminology (e.g. style, style of flow, etc.) in this section is only used to simplify my analysis by adopting Krims terminology. The stylistic terminology in subsequent chapters implicitly conceives of styles of flow as rhetorical forms and my analysis will bear out why this conception is productive for apprehending the styles of flow as sources of rhetorical action.

⁴ The descriptor of “sung” is somewhat of misnomer here because Daylyt’s flow is not sing-songy. The “sung style,” however, displays enunciation and delivery that is the most similar to spoken language or spoken-word poetic performance. Krims (2000) applied the adjective “sung” because this style is most commonly associated with very early rappers who used a sing-songy delivery.

⁵ Daylyt uses a number of internal rhymes that are syncopated between beats and fall irregularly on the first or third beat, as opposed to the down beats on two and four. This syncopation and irregularity

style is markedly slower and less-rhythmically complex than the speech-effusive, although the latter is still relatively simplistic.

The use of simplistic flow styles draws attention to the verbal discourse and, when read in conjunction with Daylyt's verbal and visual apostrophe, suggests that white people will not understand the meaning of *12 Years a Day Django*. Daylyt is articulating messages that he wants the audience to pick up on, and a more complex style would be antithetical to that purpose because it would make it difficult to understand the meaning of his articulation. This is evidenced by Daylyt's use of visual gestures, specifically tapping his head at various times to invite the audience to 'think' about the meaning of his lyrics as slowly delivers them. Daylyt's ending lines—"if you unastand what I'ma sayin'/I'ma take my people to the Promised Land,"—similarly stresses the importance of comprehending the verbal discourse of the first round for understanding the meaning of the entire performance.

The conjunction Daylyt's flow styles and the use of apostrophe enactively reveals that whites are the ones will not understand the performance. The apostrophe makes it clear that Daylyt's performance is directed towards online audiences, which makes the use simplistic flows somewhat conspicuous. A more complex style would have made it difficult for the live audience to comprehend the verbal articulation while uniquely affording online audiences the possibility of comprehension. A highly complex flow style could have furthered the purpose of the apostrophe by mystifying the verbal articulation for the live audience while simultaneously providing online audiences the ability for

occurs more frequently as the round progresses, in what Krims (2000) calls a "rhythmic acceleration" from a more "sung style" to one that is more complex and percussively syncopated. Towards the end of the round, Daylyt decelerates to a style closely matching spoken language.

comprehension.⁶ But by making the comprehension of the verbal articulation available to both audiences, Daylyt is making a statement about *why* audiences may not understand the meaning of his lyrics even if they comprehend them at a semantic level. If the live audience does not understand what Daylyt is verbally articulating it's not because of a lack of clarity on Daylyt's part; rather, any lack of understanding is due them being "coached" not to *listen*. And by suggesting that "his people" will understand what he is saying, Daylyt is obliquely conveying that white people are the ones not listening.

Finally, the concluding lyrics indicate that Daylyt is modeling a method of response to the conditions critiqued by the performance. If one is able to understand the meaning of the performance, Daylyt suggests they will see how he is going to take his people "to the Promised Land." The "Promised Land" is, of course, a Biblical reference to the land promised by God to the Israelites upon their exodus from Pharaoh's Egypt. The term has history within the rhetoric of black freedom movement as a metaphor for racial equality, perhaps most notably in Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.'s (1968/1986) prophetic declaration that "we, as a people, will get to the Promised Land." Daylyt is clearly positing that his performance will move his people towards freedom, a freedom from subjection that was not realized by the *de jure* end of slavery nor the legislative achievements of the Civil Rights movement. Daylyt has already suggested that violent insurrection is insufficient, which will be further confirmed by his loss; if blacks stand up to the white man, to paraphrase Daylyt, the white man is still going to win. Faced with

⁶ In general, more complex flow styles make it difficult to for audiences to understand the semantic dimensions of lyrics. In rap songs and the videos of rap battles this does not stand as an overwhelming obstacle to lyrical comprehension because audiences can replay the performance in order to understand what they may have missed on their first listen. Indeed, some battle rappers perform complex flows for their "play back value," meaning the flow is deliberately too complex for the live audience to be able to fully apprehend their lyrics and that audiences can derive new meanings from and appreciation for their performance by watching it multiple times online.

the possibility of an unwinnable armed confrontation, black Americans must find a way to respond that does not provoke the antiblack violence that constitutes and sustains black subjection and white hegemony. So the key question is: what is Daylyt's "plan" for getting his people to the Promised Land?

The answer is the method of enacted, subversive critique Daylyt models throughout *12 Years a Day Django*. Enacted and subversive critique is demonstrated by Daylyt as a potent method for simultaneously working within and challenging the constraints imposed on black life by the confluence of white desire and hegemony. Daylyt takes on what Athos (2001), Watts (2001; 2002) and Grau (2014) describe as a hermeneutic role for tricksters. Hermeneutic knowledge, suggests Watts (2002), is predicated on the capacity to make sense of shifting lived experiences and that *immitatio* links together rhetoric and hermeneutics in a generative relationship. Watts invokes the same understanding of *immitatio* provided by Michael C. Leff, which refers to the speaker's capacity to accurately assess the practical requirements of circumstance and marshalling rhetorical resources to manage those requirements. *Immitatio* functions hermeneutically by teaching others how to manage the exigencies and constraints of rhetorical performance.

Black tricksters historically performed this hermeneutic role as a practical necessity. The adaption of the trickster figure to the context of American chattel slavery forged a praxis for managing the constraints imposed on black behavior and performance by the expectations and desires of white slave owners. Slave tricksters hid "subversion out in the open by feeding images to the master the pleased, while all the time [concealing] the very messages that most undermined the master's authority" (Athos

2001, p. 44). Tricksters offered an ideal model of deceptive and subversive behavior that could be utilized by black Americans as a survival mechanism against the violent conditions created by white supremacy. This made the art of the trick a “strategy of resistance” whose “resilience through time speaks to the persistence of subjugation” (Arthos 2001, p. 45).⁷

The model of enacted, subversive critique demonstrated by Daylyt speaks to the continuance of black subjection and white supremacy. It further offers a potentially productive response to subjection, particularly in light of the potential insufficiency of revolutionary violence to alter the racial status quo. Subversive critique lays bare the white-imposed constraints on black performance and the violent coercion that underlies them. It cuts at the pretensions and desires of the white slave master without the slave master recognizing such. By modeling a method of enacted, subversive critique that can be modeled by black audiences, *12 Years a Day Django* operates as a radical performance that aims to upend and transform the racial status quo. In this way, *12 Years a Day Django* demonstrates the possibilities for radical black ‘theatre’ to act as a powerful weapon in the fight against racism and white hegemony (Denzin 2003).

There are, of course, limits to the possibilities enabled by black subversion (Hartman 1997; Watts 2002; Young 2007). In the context of rap, performances intended as subversive and potentially liberatory may augment rather than subvert the reigning racial imagination and the terms of the contemporary racial order by reinforcing stereotypes (White 2011) and provoking further surveillance and policing of black

⁷ Sophisticated similarly performed a hermeneutic role by diagnosing the structural dilemma faced by black Americans and demonstrating one way to spin free of it (Lhamon 2012, p. 27).

bodies.⁸ Hence the ‘productivity’ of Daylyt’s modeled method of enacted subversive critique is questionable. Regardless, however, that Daylyt is intending to model subversive critique as a method for responding to subjection informs our understanding of the rhetorical functions of his use of flows and the cultural work of the performance.

Conclusion: Looking Towards the Next Two Rounds of 12 Years a Day Django

Because there are two rounds of *12 Years a Day Django* left to analyze, the final remarks of this chapter serve more as an interlude than a conclusion. I suggest four key considerations as we head towards textual analysis of the next chapter. First, the dramatic structure of *12 Years a Day Django* informs the rhetorical action of the next two rounds. Specifically, it allows each instance of Daylyt’s coerced performance of flow styles and visual theatrics to “argue” the broader messages of the performance: that the chain remain the same and that subversive critique is a productive response to this circumstance. Second, the vernacular and subversive action rhetorical action is predicated, in part, on the inability of the white live audience to understand the meanings conveyed by Daylyt’s use of flow or recognize themselves as participants in Daylyt’s coercion. Third, the vernacular and subversive rhetorical action of the latter two rounds of *12 Years a Day Django* is predominantly *non-verbal*. There is never an explicit verbal

⁸ Gray (1995) similarly argues that the representations of blackness provided by rappers may inadvertently contribute to the policing of black bodies even as they attempt to subversively (re)appropriate the policed black body for their own ends, making these representations “as complex as they are troubling” (402). This is a significant concern because, as an empiric matter, rap music provoked criminal justice surveillance of rap music venues and performers (Herd 2009). Nielson has (2009; 2011) also demonstrated that policing and surveillance has complicated the possibility of resistance in rap. In her analysis, even songs that resist policing and surveillance recognize that such resistance is self-defeating when targeting police who are more organized, powerful, and technologically advances, and thus such songs ultimately show opposition leads to entrapment rather than liberation. In short, police surveillance culture compromises resistance through rap because as rappers learned how to ‘fight the power,’ the power learned how to fight back (Nielson 2011, p. 351). Further, rap lyrics are now being introduced as evidence of defendants’ guilt in criminal trials (Kubrin and Nielson 2014).

articulation of social commentary and critique; the vernacular and subversive labor is performed strictly through the use of aural and visual forms, although sometimes the meaning conveyed or rhetorical significance of these forms is verbally suggested. Fourth, black counter-violence as a necessary but insufficient response to black subjection and white hegemony is theme further developed by the dramatic and rhetorical action of the performance. Keeping these considerations in mind will considerably clarify the arguments developed about Daylyt's use of visual and aural forms within the next chapter.

CHAPTER SIX

Textual Analysis of *12 Years a Day Django* Part Two

Daylyt's first round in *12 Years a Day Django* contained several key rhetorical actions. Daylyt did not, however, employ flow styles for subversive and vernacular purposes. This rhetorical work begins in Daylyt's second round, in which he performs the 'URL style' and the 'multi style' at the slave master's command. Analyzing the discourses of Daylyt's second round is the objective of the first two sections, which respectively focus on the rhetorical actions of Daylyt's use of the 'URL style' and his use of the 'multi style.' Daylyt's use of both styles extends the (some of) the themes introduced in the first round, and additionally subverts the expectations and desires they arouse while simultaneously conveying several vernacular messages.

The third section analyzes Daylyt's third round. The analysis of flow styles within the round is complicated by the fact that Daylyt performs as 'ski mask Daylyt,' but does not perform the usual style of flow associated with the persona. I argue that Daylyt is performing his 'Quill style' while masked as 'ski mask Daylyt' for subversive purposes, which is reinforced by how the style is performed after Daylyt concludes performing as 'ski mask Daylyt. A fourth section summates the core findings of the chapter.

Round the Second: The URL Style

Daylyt's second round begins with a verbal interaction between Daylyt and the slave master. Daylyt queries, "What should I rap about this time, massa?" The slaver master replies that he already "told" Daylyt to "rap expeditiously," referring to the slave master's command to "hit 'em with them URL bars" at the end of the first round. The "URL bars"—from hereon, the "URL style"—is the first racialized style of flow Daylyt performs. Intermixed with this style are comedic punchlines—which are substantially less prevalent in the URL style than most of the popular styles of flow in KOTD—and verbal articulation of how the locational politics of the performance shape the live audience's reception. Weaving together the URL style with comedic punchlines and explicitly identifying the locational politics surrounding the performance allows Daylyt to covertly ridicule the live audience's preference for comedic styles and begin positioning the audience as unwitting participants in the coercion of his performance.

After the verbal exchange with the slave master, Daylyt begins his raps with a "rebuttal" (sometimes referred to as a "flip"). In rap battling rebuttal is, as the term implies, a response to something an opponent has said or done during the battle. Some battlers "pre-write" rebuttals by predicting potential arguments their opponent might make and writing a clever response, but generally performing a rebuttal is the only aspect of battling where a battler's ability to freestyle rap comes into play because it requires skilled verbal improvisation. Daylyt's rebuttal fall into the latter category, as he freestyles an attack on Pat Stay using a reference to Pat's shoes.

The rhetorical effect of a rebuttal is generally to gain the crowd's favor by altering the argumentative force of an opponent's lyrics—for much like a rebuttal in a more

traditionally-conceived debate, a strong response to an opponent's claim can shift the momentum in one's favor—but in this case it is used to show that Daylyt is skilled in every aspect of battling, that he can 'do it all.' This introduces a theme that ties into the subversive action of the round and the enacted failure of the performance. Daylyt is claiming and demonstrating that he can adeptly perform any skillset in battling, which, if true, means he is capable of conforming to any stylistic expectation to win over the audience. That Daylyt refrains from doing so underscores his own agency—losing is a conscious choice for him rather than a result of a failure to acquiesce to the stylistic demands of the audience. This theme will be elaborated on later in the round.

After the rebuttal, Daylyt begins delivering his written lyrics using the URL style of flow. From this point until he shifts to the multi style, Daylyt's lyrics are broken up into various "schemes"—a series of lines using a particular rhyme pattern and generally grouped around a single topic or argumentative angle—that are clearly delineated by long pauses between each. The semantic verbal articulation of the first two schemes are especially significant. He first raps:

I said the crowd still feelin' me
due to my ability to rap most
of the time I don't *show it*
So my *opponents* get to *preppin' wrong* and never
see what they *steppin' on* until I remind them where the *flow at*

This scheme indicates that Daylyt's use of the URL style is going to demonstrate his prodigious ability to rap. It's also possible to read this as a broader suggestion that Daylyt's use of flow throughout the battle will demonstrate his skill; reminding the audience "where the flow at" could mean his performance as a whole is going to display his rap skills. Either way, Daylyt begins to enactively demonstrate the claim through his

use of flow as he delivers the last three lines. Daylyt is arguably not even rapping when delivering the first two lines because the rhythmic pattern matches that of spoken-word performance and neither line contains any rhymes. But, as the density of the last two lines indicate, Daylyt quickly accelerates his rhythmic cadence.

Daylyt's rhythmic transition is sleek and skilled. Daylyt initiates the rhyme scheme on the last beat of the third bar, an interesting choice because, given that the beat falls within the spoken-word flow, one does not expect that the final two words will begin the scheme. The unexpected rhyme placement, however, accentuates the rhetorical effect of the rhythmic acceleration. By initiating the rhyme scheme just before the acceleration and rhyming immediately after the acceleration begins (e.g. "show it" and "opponents") Daylyt accentuates the feeling of rapid movement created by the rhythmic acceleration while making it feel smooth and natural. The combination of rhythmic acceleration and placement of multisyllabic internal rhymes—the AB AB CDE CDE AB pattern of the italicized lyrics—in the last three lines displays Daylyt's abilities

Daylyt's next scheme introduces two hallmarks of the URL style and key signatures of Daylyt's personal style, wordplay and punchline. These are paired with an intricate rhyme scheme. To wit:

I go kill with *average* even
when they got home field *advantage* yo Pat the *fight*
is *right* in ya *hands* just
don't *throw it* this is ya big
chance to win off the mouthpiece
exhales
But just don't *blow it*

The combination of the "win off the mouthpiece" line followed by Daylyt's theatrical exhale suggests blowing an instrument, setting up the "don't blow it punchline." More

crucially, Daylyt's reference to "home field advantage" raises the issue of location as a significant determinant of how his performance will be responded to by the audience. The verbal articulation of Daylyt's next scheme makes this connection more explicit and turns Daylyt's use of flow into a source of vernacular rhetorical action. Daylyt raps:

That one shoulda got two horns off top *Vi/*
king I'm who dey *likin'* it
don't matter where *I hang* I'm
in wolf *mode that mean* I will forever come in first *dog*
that's *exactly* why you should fear *my name*

The second and third lines further highlight the significance of location to the reception of Daylyt's performance, although they seem to suggest his performance will resonate with the audience regardless of location (e.g. 'it don't matter where Daylyt hangs'). The latter, however, is belied by the lyrics in the first bar. Getting "two horns off top" is a reference to how URL blares two horn-sounds in response to strong punchlines from battlers; its placement at the top of the scheme creates a suggestion that previous scheme *should* elicit a strong, as it would in URL. But it did not—the audience remained largely silent after the punchline was delivered.

Recall that Daylyt's first scheme indicated his intention to display his formidable rap skills. Daylyt demonstrates as much through the rhythmic fluidity, clever wordplay, and complex rhyme patterns of the second and third scheme (respectively, AB AB C C D EF D EF and AB AB CD E FG E FG CD). Daylyt, however, is aware that his skilled use of the URL style is not likely to resonate with the live audience, which is made clear by placing a pre-written reference to the lack of response from the audience at the beginning of the second round. So when Daylyt says his bars "*should've* gotten two horns off the top," he is suggesting that audience *should* be reacting to a skilled demonstration of flow,

while signaling that he knew prior to the performance that they would not. His opening remark that “the crowd still feelin’ [him]” supports this ironically. The crowd *should* be feelin’ him because of his skilled use of flow, but they are not reacting because it is not something they particularly appreciate in battle performances. In other words, the intersection of verbal articulation and aural style conveys that that live audience does not, but should, appreciate Daylyt’s use of the URL style.

The verbal-aural interaction initiates Daylyt’s ridiculing of the white audience’s expectations and desires—one of the cornerstones of the subversive function of Daylyt’s use of flow throughout the performance and particularly his use of the multi style in the latter part of the round. The suggestion that the audience does not, but should, appreciate the skill involved in performing the black style of flow—skill which would likely elicit approving response from the predominantly black audience of URL—subtly casts on aspersions on the white audience’s desire to see battlers perform other styles. Daylyt more specifically derides the live audience’s preference for comedic humor over skilled flow through the intersection of lyrical articulation and flow in his next three schemes. Each features the wordplay and gun-iconography characteristic of the URL style, but are simple with respect to the complexity of rhythm and rhyme pattern and end on a comedic punchline. Each scheme is delivered in the spoken-word style with which Daylyt opened the round.

One example suffices to explicate the claims to follow. Daylyt raps: “I’ll tell ya this I’m not asking for/help when the flare gun/bang I crack heads when I lift cans/Can ya spare some change?” The wordplay creates a humorous double-meaning, suggesting both that Daylyt regularly commits violence with guns and that he begs for money. A flare gun

is typically used to signal for help, but Daylyt is conveying that when he uses guns (“cans”) it is to “crack heads,” e.g. inflict cranial damage on another person. Daylyt turns this into a joke in the last line by cupping his hands together and holding them up to Pat Stay as if begging for money; the connotation is that Daylyt also ‘lifts cans’ like someone addicted to crack-cocaine (“crack head”) begging for money.

As would be expected for a live audience at a KOTD event, the live audience of *12 Years a Day Django* laughs, claps, and cheers their approval to the comedic punchline, as they do with the humorous punchlines of the next two schemes as well. Daylyt thus refines, through enactment, the point made by the verbal-aural intersection of the previous schemes. In other words, the audience’s reaction to his comedic punchlines demonstrates they are entertained by clever jokes instead of a skilled demonstration of flow. But in light of Daylyt’s suggestion that the audience *should* be entertained by the latter, this articulation derides the audience’s preferred desire for humorous lyrics over skilled rapping.

In doing so, Daylyt subversively responds to the way in which the audience’s preference for comedic punchlines operates as a constraint on battlers. He seemingly accedes to the audience’s desire to hear comedic punchlines (e.g. performing in accordance to their stylistic preference) but simultaneously ridicules that desire through the intersection of his lyrics and style of flow in the previous schemes. By making this desire the object of ridicule, the audience’s reaction to each comedic scheme becomes the true “punchline” in each instance. Daylyt is subverting the very constraint to which he seemingly conforms; he gives into the live audience’s desire for comedic verbal

articulation, but his lyrics and use of flow simultaneously mocks that desire and the reaction from the audience that serves to confirm its existence.

At the same time, Daylyt reveals that the way in which white desire constrains black life is neither natural nor neutral. Because the articulation of Daylyt's scorn for the white audience's desire is predicated on their reaction to his comedic schemes, Daylyt illuminates that their desire is primarily responsible for their evaluation of and response to performance. The performances of black battlers are shown to be artificially restricted by white desire. Further, Daylyt's use of a racialized style of flow as a source of articulation indicates how black battlers within KOTD are uniquely subject to this constriction; to be booked, most black battlers must alter the style of their performance while most white battlers do not. Daylyt's use of flow thus conveys how white desire uniquely subjects black Americans to a constraint unexperienced by whites. Keeping in mind the mimetic relationships constructed in the first round, Daylyt is continuing to convey that black subjection is created and maintained by white desire.

The subversive effect of Daylyt's verbal-aural articulation is heightened by the white audience's failure to understand themselves as the ultimate objects of derision. As Daylyt suggested at the end of his first round, how an audience member responds to his lyrics indicates whether or not they are listening, not simply hearing his lyrics in a material sense but actively comprehending their meaning. And Daylyt's use of flow again reveals that the white members of the live audience are the ones who are not listening. If they understood the meaning conveyed by the verbal and aural articulation of his first three schemes, the white audience members would recognize that laughing and cheering in response to the next three schemes is a source of derision and, we can reasonably

assume, they would likely refrain from doing so. But whether resulting from simple ignorance with respect to Daylyt's articulation in this case or from a lack of the requisite cultural competency to understand it in any case, the white audience's approving response to Daylyt's comedic punchlines confirms their failure to fully understand Daylyt's articulation, which further positions their reaction as an object of ridicule and, subsequently, mocks the audience itself.

This positioning in turn works to cut against the way in which the audience's desire for comedic performance imposes a rhetorical constraint on Daylyt, reinforcing the subversive critique articulated by Daylyt's performance in the round thus far. Simultaneously making and concealing the live white audience as an object of ridicule reveals and scoffs at the pretentiousness of the imposition. Daylyt's verbal-aural articulation first reveals the live white audience's underlying presumption that he ought to perform in a manner that conforms to their stylistic expectation and desire. By then establishing the audience's desire, the reaction that confirms that desire, and ultimately the audience itself as objects of ridicule without their recognition of such, Daylyt covertly sneers at the white pretension that he and other black Americans should meekly accede to their subjection by acting or performing in ways that conform to white desire.

This rhetorical action additionally offers a clandestine challenge to white supremacy. The operative logic informing the white pretension that Daylyt reveals and lacerates necessarily postulates that black conformity to the demands articulated by white desire should be privileged over the realization and display of black agency. This is the logic of white supremacy—that white hegemony must be protected and maintained at all costs, including, or perhaps especially, if the cost is continued black subjection. Daylyt

renders visible this logic and the way it operationalizes constraints on black life by tricking the white audience into reacting in a way that confirms both. And in using this reaction to sneakily jeer at the audience's participation in the logic and operations of white supremacy, Daylyt exemplifies how tricksters are able to "capitalize on slipperiness to reconfigure a power relationship" by creating "an alternative order in which boundaries are called upon as temporary signatures or endorsements that maximize rather than delimit access to agency" (Schutzman 2005, p. 284). Daylyt is demonstrating to black audience members how they can act under the conditions of subjection without acquiescence to them, maximizing the possibilities for agency in a situation designed to thoroughly delimit them.

As a final point for consideration, Daylyt's ridiculing of the audience's desire for battlers to deliver humorous lyrics over demonstrating their aural skills also functions as a source of cultural syncretism by affirming both the performance styles URL battlers as well as black audiences' desire to see those styles. Mocking the white audience's stylistic preference for battlers to deliver humorous lyrics over demonstrating their rap skill derides both the comedic style and white audience's preference for it, which implicitly and conversely conveys that the skill displayed in performing the URL style makes it superior and, further, that the desire of black audiences for the style is more meritorious than the white desire for a comedic style. The intersection of Daylyt's lyrical articulation and use of flow thus allows the latter to function as an affirmation of black expressive practices.

After delivering the three comedic schemes, Daylyt again rhythmically accelerates from the spoken-word style to the URL style, marking the final appearance of

the URL style in *12 Years a Day Django*. This time, however, the scheme ends in a comedic punchline—an adroit mixing of the URL style with the comedic style of white KOTD battlers used to show and prove his familiarity with all styles, which in turn highlights the significance of the performance’s intentional failure. But first some explication of the scheme is necessary.

The rhyme pattern of the final scheme is actually initiated by the prior comedic scheme. Almost identically to his first scheme, Daylyt places the inaugural rhyme in a line delivered in a spoken-word style just prior to a rhythmic acceleration. The rhetorical effect, too, is equivalent; it creates a smooth transition from the slow, measured spoken-word style to one with significant rapidity, lyrical density, and rhythmic complexity. I have included the final two bars from the comedic scheme to highlight this transition:

Ya face I gotta *socket*
You like the plug

But I said I’m back to break ‘em *spleen*
choppin’ you *seen Pac* when this thug life was on a dirty *flow*
We *clean moppin’*
team droppin’ we lift up forty nine’s
box, you *seen Hopkins*
pause as audience reacts
No *Batman* but you *seen Robin* mean
stalking mean stocking blast weapons think I don’t like
Ash Ketchum I’m tryna give his *team rockets*

The semantic meaning of the lyrics rather obviously contains a violent and aggressive lyrical theme, which the terms “break ‘em” and “spleen choppin”” indicate to even the most uninitiated audiences. What may be less apparent are the violent suggestions conveyed through coded colloquial language and wordplay. “Team droppin”” refers to beating down and/or killing Pat Stay’s friends and/or criminal associates—hence “droppin”” Pat’s “team” or, alternatively, ‘crew.’ “Forty nine’s” refers to forty nine-

millimeter handguns, the guns Daylyt and his crew will presumably ‘lift up’ to ‘drop’ Pat and his associates. The word “Hopkins” in the third line is both noun and a verb that reinforces the articulation of a second. As a noun, it refers to illustrious boxer Bernard Hopkins. As a verb, it refers to how Hopkins would famously beat down his opponents.⁹ Both meanings further suggest that Daylyt will beat down Pat Stay and his crew.¹⁰ “Batman” and “Robin” in the fourth line are both plays on words that further reinforce this meaning. Transcribed differently, the line could read “no bat, man, but you seen robbin’”—a suggestion that Daylyt can rob people even without the assistance of blunt weapon. But viewed according to the original transcription, Daylyt is also conveying Batman’s sidekick, Robin, can ‘stalk’ his enemies without Batman’s assistance. Both meanings convey that Daylyt does not need assistance from anyone or anything to beat down Pat. The final two bars create a humorous punchline. Ash Ketchum is the protagonist of popular cartoon series *Pokémon*, who consistently foils the plans of the evil Team Rocket. The lyrics thus humorously suggest Daylyt is trying to “blast” Pat Stay’s team with rockets, the opposite of what Ash Ketchum would do.

The scheme is significant because it weds the violent and aggressive verbal themes of the URL style with the comedic punchlines common to the styles of white KOTD battlers. And through the intersection of lyrical articulation and flow, Daylyt is showing and proving his superiority as a rapper. The first line indicates that Daylyt is making a transition and connotes the significance of such by cleverly and creatively

⁹ As evidence for this interpretation, the third entry for “Hopkins” on urbandictionary.com states: “This is one of the best known names in the streets and the boxing ring to pull a hopkins is to beat down your opponent like the man himself Bernard Hopkins. All should fear gettin a hopkins.”

¹⁰ There is an additional possible and congruous meaning conveyed by the second and third lines. “Forty nines” may be a reference to the San Francisco 49ers, a National Football League team. To “lift up forty nine’s box” could be a reference to scoring a touchdown (box being a term for the end zone of a football field).

conveying a double meaning. Semantically, the line initiates the violent and aggressive theme of the scheme. At a deeper level, the line conveys that the transition to a more complex style rhetorically meaningful. “But” suggests a transition while “I said I’m back” indicates a return to the URL style. “Back to break ‘em” conveys the object or purpose of this transitory return to the URL style—to ‘break’ Pat Stay. In other words, Daylyt is explicitly indicating that he is moving from delivering comedic schemes to delivering one that is violent and aggressive and will demonstrate his aural skill.

Daylyt’s flow matches his lyrical articulation. Daylyt says the lyrics forcefully and the rhythmic rapidity conveys a feeling of aggression that is reinforced by the lyrical density of each bar and the percussive syncopation of the lyrics’ syllables. It is easily the most rhythmically complex flow Daylyt has performed thus far in the battle. Together, Daylyt’s verbal articulation and flow suggest he is performing with a degree of skill capable of destroying Pat Stay.

The reaction of the audience supports the interpretation that Daylyt’s flow in the final scheme is quite skilled. At both the pause marked in the middle as well as after Daylyt delivers the final line, the audience reacts with a loud and collective ‘oooooo.’ This reaction, however, does not obviate the subversion hitherto enacted by Daylyt. Rather, it simply confirms what Daylyt suggested in his first two schemes—his flow is so advanced that, when he chooses to show it, he is capable of winning over audiences regardless of where the battle takes place. The ultimately implication is that the demands of the audience fail to constrain him as a battler, or rather that the constraint itself is a bit absurd when applied to him as a performer. Daylyt is both claiming and demonstrating

that by being conversant in all styles he is able to fluidly switch his tactical approach to a battle to win the audience on whatever terms he chooses.

Through this demonstration, Daylyt tips his hand with respect to the intended failure of the performance. We know from interviews and video blogs before and after the battle that Daylyt had no intention of winning; indeed, he believed he was fully capable of beating Pat Stay but did not seek to do so. This scheme indicates in the ‘text’ of the performance that losing the battle was a conscious choice. Daylyt is demonstrating that his skill as a performer allows him to win over audiences regardless of what their expectations and desires are, which by extension suggests that winning or losing is a choice on his part. If he loses the battle then it is because he deliberately intended to do so, not because Pat Stay is a better rapper or because he is incapable of swaying the audience.

A final consideration about this scheme is that one of its lines is independently significant. Specifically, the lyrics “you seen Pac when this thug life was on a dirty floor, we clean moppin’” refers to Daylyt changing his style of flow and performance after his first few written battles. “Pac” is a reference to the late rappers 2Pac, which is indicated by the phrase “this thug life” as 2Pac famously had the phrase “Thug Life” tattooed above his navel (“Thug Life” was also the name of a rap group founded by 2Pac, as well as the eponymous title of their lone studio album). But this is another play on words containing a double meaning. Early in his written battling career, Daylyt was an active member of the Grape Street Crips while living in the dilapidated projects of Watts, California. During this period, Daylyt utilized a rather typical “street” style of flow that failed to get him much acclaim from audiences. The line is a reference to changing both

his lifestyle and flow. He had a “thug life” and a “dirty *floor*” (pronounced by Daylyt as “flow”) until he ‘mopped’ both of them up.

The rhetorical significance of this line is incredible. It first connects *12 Years a Day* to something Daylyt said after the battle—that he must give thanks to Organik/KOTD for providing a pathway out of Watts (Campbell 2014e). If one understands Daylyt’s history as a battler, it reveals the connection between his the alteration of his flow style and removing himself from the impoverished and gang-affiliated life he had been living. It was not until Daylyt changed his flow that his performances resonated with audiences—hence ‘mopping’ up his flow in turn allowed him to clean up his life and leave Watts.

In light of Daylyt’s intermixing of the URL style with comedic humor, the placement of this line also offers a subtle rejoinder to the claims that he is a sell-out (or, alternatively, a house Negro or minstrel). By placing the line prior to his use of the multi style, Daylyt is suggesting that even though he found success by changing his flow he did so while maintaining his uniqueness as a rapper. He did not gain success by performing in the style most common to white battlers and most preferred by white audiences. Rather, he forged a style that was both uniquely his own *and* appealed to white audiences. This is a key component of the method of subversive critique Daylyt is modeling. Daylyt does not whole-sale conform to the expectations and desires of white, but instead exploits those expectations and desires to enable him to perform in a manner of his own choosing. The message is that it is possible to maintain individual and cultural uniqueness even under subjection by playing with white desires and expectations, which Daylyt does in practice by weaving the URL style with the comedic punchlines common

to most styles in KOTD. He does so again through his use of the multi style, which we shall turn to examine now.

Round the Second: The Multi Style

After completing the final scheme performed in the URL style, Daylyt turns to the slave master and asks if “that’s enough for ‘em, massa?” The master affirms that it is, but then directs Daylyt “do somma them mults, boy.” Daylyt protests, noting that he has “never done mults.” The master replies, “You in Canada now, boy, do some mults!” This is an explicit reference to the locational politics of the performance. As previously noted, mults are particularly common to the performances of KOTD battlers and highly desired by KOTD’s audience. Given that KOTD is based in Canada, the master’s remark calls attention to the live audience’s expectation and desire for Daylyt and other battlers to “do” mults even if that is not a characteristic feature of their styles. In this exchange, the master mimetically represents how location and audience expectations and desires converge to coerce battlers into performing certain styles. The racial undertone is clear; the Canadian audience is predominantly white as are the majority of Canadian battlers, and as such the white Canadian audience’s desire and demand to see a black rapper perform in the style of white Canadian battlers necessarily denotes that the demand is thoroughly racialized and implicated by the power dynamics between white audiences and black battlers.

There is an additional layer of complexity to the interaction between Daylyt and the slave master that shapes its rhetorical work. After Daylyt agrees to the slave master’s repeated command to “try some mults,” the slave master specifies that Daylyt should do “some mults like [the slave master’s] great, great, great, great, great nephew, Jeff” who

“was a champion once.” “Jeff” is rapper and former KOTD champion Hollohan (Jeff Hollohan, aka GOD, the Genius on Drugs). Hollohan’s style of flow is a paradigmatic example of the multi style. Hollohan is known for jamming “a hundred multis into a couple seconds” (Hollohan 2009) and doing so in the percussive-effusive style identified by Krims (2000).¹¹ If it was unclear what was meant by “doing multis,” the audience now has a specific point of reference that creates the expectation for what is to come.

But the reference to Hollohan does more than induce an expectation of the style Daylyt is about to perform. The slave master has stated that Hollohan is his five-time removed nephew. This is not an idle reference. Hollohan is Pat Stay’s best friend and, in a 2013 battle between the two, Pat Stay alleged that Hollohan previously had a racist, white nationalist tattoo on his back which Hollohan had covered up—specifically, “White Pride Worldwide with an Iron Eagle below it” (Stay 2013).¹² Some subsequent digging into Hollohan’s personal history by rap battle fans turned up an interesting finding. In a thread entitled “Race War At School” in the forums of the website scooterresource.com, a discussion was had among the site’s members about racial conflicts that occurred in their respective high schools. In this discussion, user Kevin11 (2008) alleged that “jeff hollohan [sic] started like the biggest skin head vs. blacks war [at Prince Andrew’s high school] ever.” The thread in which Kevin11 posted was linked on rapmusic.com and then circulated on popular rap battling forums such as Reddit.com’s r/rapbattling subreddit.

No one has been able to confirm the veracity of Kevin11’s claim, but in light of Pat’s

¹¹ An example may clarify. An exemplary one is from Hollohan’s 2009 KOTD title match battle Kid Twist, in which he raps: “So he watches my videos scared and his pants get warm and wet/cause lately you started screaming because you’re demandin’ more respect/why would’ve Organik have placed a tyrannosaurus rex vers/us Alanis Morissette” (Hollohan 2009).

¹² It was later alleged by others online that the tattoo included a swastika. In general none of these claims can be confirmed, but Pat Stay’s well-known status as Hollohan’s best friend has given some credence to Pat’s specific allegations.

allegations about Hollohan's former tattoo many battle fans have accepted it as true (although the significance of Hollohan's alleged racist history has been a somewhat divisive issue on online forums). It also does not help that Hollohan sported a shaved head in his first few years of battling for KOTD.

In light of Hollohan's alleged history, the revelation that Hollohan is descended from the slave master takes on greater significance than simply indicating what style Daylyt is about to perform. Keep in mind that the slave master also suggests that Daylyt should perform the multi style because he is "in Canada" and that Daylyt protests the command to perform the style on the basis that he has never done so. In addition, Hollohan won the KOTD championship by 'doing' multis, meaning that the connection between his use of the multi style and the desire of Canadian fans to watch him perform it was productive of Hollohan's personal success in battling. By implication, Canadian fans have made a racist, white nationalist battler successful and this success has created the expectation and desire to see Daylyt adopt that style. Doing multis like "Jeff" thus explicitly intimates the racial and racist dimension of the slave master's command, perhaps usefully described as a shift from undertone to overtone.

The exchange between Daylyt and the slave master further continues one of the key themes of the battle: that the terms and conditions of black subjection are instantiated and sustained by white expectation and desires. The exchange independently stages an incident exemplary of the broader racial relations *12 Years a Day Django* inhabits. Daylyt is being told that his performance should conform to the expectation and desire of white, which is no different than when any other black American is told, whether explicitly or through socialization, to behave a certain way in exchange for individual

advancement and upward mobility. And again, the coercive mechanisms behind this command creates pressure for obedience. For Daylyt as Number Five, this mechanism is the slave master's whip; for Daylyt as a battler, it is the loss of potential bookings; for other black Americans it is the myriad of forms of antiblack violence that discipline unruly black bodies. Regardless of what form the mechanism takes, Daylyt's point remains the same: these mechanisms all serve to instantiate and sustain black subjection. Daylyt's exchange with the slave master stages this dynamic for the audience to see, which further works to position the audience as participants in his coercion. This positioning will be completed in the third round.

After his exchange with the slave master, Daylyt seemingly acquiesces to the master's command. He turns to the live audience and asks, "What rhymes with Patrick? Anybody knows?" Asking the audience about a potential rhyme is a common call and response technique in rap battling, and is typically used to set up a complex and unexpected multi (i.e., rhyming the word or phrase in question with another word or phrase not suggested by the audience) and/or to set up a comedic punchline (e.g., "You know what rhymes with Germaine Williams? Never made millions!"). By hailing the live audience in this manner, Daylyt creates the expectation that he will provide a multi-syllable rhyme. Daylyt characteristically breaks the expectation.

After several suggestions for possible rhymes are shouted out by the audience, Daylyt simply says "Charron's balls," eliciting laughter from the audience. Charron is a prominent white Canadian rap battler—and one whom uses the multi style and focuses on comedic punchlines—who was infamously 'beefing' with Pat Stay at the time of *12 Years a Day Django*. Daylyt is making a joke to the audience by breaking their

expectation, providing them with a humorous reference that does not even rhyme with “Patrick.” But the audience misses the bigger ‘punchline’ here: Daylyt is again ridiculing the audience’s desire to see the multi style, and possibly suggesting the multi style is itself a joke. This is made clear by Daylyt’s use of the multi style in the last scheme of the round. Daylyt closes the distance between himself and Pat Stay, delivering the following lyrics directly into Pat’s face:

You look like Tommy
Piswano who bought me some tacos
Two packs of nachos onside of a Tahoe

Daylyt then turns to the audience, who stays silent after these lines are delivered, and asks, “What y’all didn’t catch that, no?” “Catch” refers to comprehending wordplay. Daylyt is making a symptomatic argument: the audience would react if they understood his wordplay, they do not react, and therefore they must not understand his wordplay. This sets up the next few lines, in which Daylyt ‘explicates’ the wordplay by altering his pronunciation of key words. Turning back to Pat Stay, he raps:

If ya buy me I ta-tot those
You get two packs it’s not yo’s on/
side of a Tahoe, shells like a taco

What Daylyt deftly combines the multi style with the form of wordplay found in the URL style. “Ta-tot” is an onomatopoeia for the sound a gun makes when fired, hence “ta-tot those” refers to shooting a gun.¹³ “Two packs” refers to two clips of ammunition and “shells like a taco” refers to the shell casings emitted from those clips. Collectively, the lines convey much the same meaning as the final scheme of Daylyt’s URL style—Daylyt

¹³ Using onomatopoeias for gun sound is quite common in battling and the “ta-tot those” would likely immediately register as such to battle fans. Daylyt also makes this clear by visually motioning as if holding a gun when delivering the line.

will inflict violence on Pat Stay. Daylyt has thus mixed the wordplay and violent gun iconography of the URL style with the multisyllabic rhymes of the multi style.

Daylyt's mixing of the two style significant in itself. Daylyt has expressed in interviews that the way most battler perform the multi style is not particularly skilled because such battlers simply demonstrate that they can complexly rhyme without providing much semantic substance. The first scheme is indicative of such simplistic multi syllable rhyming—Daylyt provides an AB AB AB AB rhyme scheme using the 'a' and 'o' vowel sounds but his lyrics semantically convey nothing of note. Daylyt has claim Pat Stay looks like someone who bought Daylyt food, a claim which has no argumentative or rhetorical force. By clarifying that this scheme contained wordplay with argumentative force—the articulated claim that Daylyt is willing to and capable of inflicting violence on Pat Stay—Daylyt is conveying that black performers are able to perform a white style of flow with greater skill than white performers. And by demonstrating this through a combination of a white style with features of a black style, Daylyt indicates both the simplicity of a white style of flow and the pretentiousness of white audiences to appreciate it as a complex and entertaining style. In short, Daylyt's inclusion of wordplay 'blackens' the multi style to affirm the superior rap skills of black rappers and black audiences' expectation and desire to see these skills displayed through performers' use of flow.

The manner in which Daylyt combines the URL style and multi style reinforces this rhetorical action. Generally, a battler explicates their wordplay to show that the wordplay is so clever that it requires repetition to comprehend. This is seemingly the case here because the wordplay is not immediately obvious, but the wordplay is not obvious

precisely because it is so forced and simplistic. “Tacos” and “ta-tot those” do not rhyme, even as assonance-based rhymes, given the addition of an extra vowel and consonant pair. The two phrases are thus not completely homophonic. Daylyt must additionally add “you get” to the second scheme to make the different meaning of “two packs” make semantic sense. Similarly, he adds “shells like a taco” at the end to create the ‘punchline’ (here meaning a powerful summative line, not a comedic punchline). “Nacho” and “not yo’s” is also one of the most obvious homophones possible, as it has even been the subject of commonly known joke (“whose cheese is it!” “not yo’s!”). Daylyt is intimating that the multi style requires so little skill that including the most basic even wordplay would improve it significantly. It is a subtle way of further casting aspersions on the style and the desire of the live audience to see the style performed by Daylyt.

Daylyt’s final scheme using the multi style similarly uses forced and simplistic wordplay. Daylyt raps:

You feel like you da man, Randy, ya macho
Until I come in march ‘em
I go at Em, and it’s not Marshall
Y’all don’t catch that, no?

The question in the last bar is dripping with irony. Rather than disguising the wordplay, Daylyt’s pronunciation of the middle two lines makes the homophones abundantly easy to catch. The live audience again stays silent after Daylyt finishes the scheme. Daylyt’s question is not a serious suggestion that the audience’s lack of reaction is due their failure to comprehend his wordplay. Daylyt has made his wordplay clear and easily comprehensible; the question is a means of violating the expectations of the audience. Presumably excited to see Daylyt perform the multi style, something he has never done, the audience’s desire is not gratified by the way in which Daylyt performs the multi style.

Rather than provide a series of complex multi syllable rhymes like the audience would expect from the multi style, Daylyt offers simplistic two-syllable rhymes and, in lieu of a more complex multi syllable rhyme scheme, incredibly obvious wordplay. The audience's lack of reaction reflects their lack of gratification rather than comprehension. Daylyt's use of the multi style thus in his terms "fucks with audience," rather than satiate the expectation and desire it raises.

Round the Third: The Quill Style(s)

Daylyt's audiences both expect and desire a major a major stunt or reveal in the third round of his battle performance. Daylyt gestures at this such within *12 Years a Day Django*. Before the third round, Daylyt whose manacled hands are picking cotton, exclaims, "Let's go! It's show time!" The 'show' is donning a ski mask to perform as 'ski mask Daylyt,' which results from another verbal exchange between Daylyt and the slave master. This exchange extends Daylyt's critique of how white desire instantiates black subjection and foregrounds the use subversive use of flow.

In the second round, Daylyt intimates that the live audience's desire to see perform in a particular manner is racist. The exchange between Daylyt and the slave master that precipitates Daylyt's performance as ski mask Daylyt more explicitly conveys this message. Daylyt turns to the slave master and asks, "what do you want me ta do this round, massa?" The slave master tells Daylyt he is "tired of lookin' at your skin, boy" and directs Daylyt to "Put this [ski] mask on." Daylyt does so—while feigning ignorance about how to put the mask on—to the sounds of approving cheers and applause from the audience. That the slave master compels Daylyt to perform his ski mask persona under the specter of corporeal punishment first suggests that Daylyt's is performing his ski

mask style because whites want to see it. The slave master's rationale explicitly conveys the racial and racist overtones of this dynamic; Daylyt is not simply performing as ski mask Daylyt because he's "in Canada," but because the slave master does not want to see Daylyt's black skin. The racist nature of this dynamic is thus clearly staged for the audience to see.

In staging this dynamic, Daylyt again subverts the way it constrains him as a performer by mocking the audience's unwitting participation in this coercion. Daylyt seemingly gratifies the audience's expectation and desire to see a major stunt in his third round and, as might be expected, the audience responds with approval. The ironic twist is that the audience either does not recognize or fully appreciate the racial and racist implications of this dynamic that Daylyt is identifying and criticizing. Even after hearing the slave master tell Daylyt to wear the ski mask to hide his skin, the audience cheers their approval. Daylyt has essentially enacts the dynamic he stages, revealing the live audience as unwitting participants in the coercing of his performance. This is reinforced by Daylyt asking the audience, after donning the ski mask, "y'all want me to rap?" to which he is met with more cheering. Daylyt is asking the audience if they wish him to do as the slave master commands and they gleefully affirm their desire to see him do so. Daylyt, of course, is mocking both the live audience's inability to recognize this participatory coercion and their inability to interpret the meaning of the staging of coercion.

Daylyt's maneuver to make the audience participants in his coercion also calls out the white audience's self-deception that they are somehow distinct from the slave master. Of course, *12 Years a Day Django* is intended to show that black Americans remain

slaves which, by extension, positions whites as slave masters. In making the white audience participants in the coercion of his performance, Daylyt directly intimates the latter claim. This simultaneously draws attention to the broader deceptive moral distancing whites go through to absolve themselves of their participation in racism and white supremacy. According to Yancy (2008), violent scenes of white terror are viewed by many whites as anomalous, “something of which only ‘those racist whites’ are capable,” which distances themselves from such acts while “obfuscating their own racism through the act of disavowing only a *particular form* of racism” and, in turn, serves to create “deep forms of self-deception” (xvii). The white members of the live audience would presumably not consider themselves racists or modern-day slave masters, but Daylyt’s deft use of enactment belies the deception involved such thinking. When given the opportunity to decry the violent coercing of Daylyt’s performance, the audience does the opposite—they applaud this coercing, revealing their enjoyment of Daylyt’s status as a slave. In other words, Daylyt articulates that the audience derives pleasure from the staging of subjection, from the essential fungibility of black bodies as articulated in the performance. To add emphasis to the point, Daylyt is received by boos and jeers when chasing the stage master offstage, confirming that the audience has no desire to see Daylyt emancipated because it undercuts their enjoyment.

The subversive work of Daylyt’s use of flow derives from the how his ski mask persona codes the interpretation of his performance. ‘Persona,’ here, is not used in the rhetorical sense of the term but rather refers to a rapper’s construction of a distinct identity differentiated from the one typically performed. Such additional identities go beyond a change in name, comprising distinct artists with individual personalities, unique

styles of flow, and signature physical images—typically, a physical mask that signifies the additional persona (Hess 2005, p. 298-299). Greg Jacobs of rap group The Digital Underground, for example, usually performs as “Shock-G” but at times performs as “Humpty Hump,” a sexually aggressive persona marked by a personalized Groucho Marx-style mask and distinctive style of flow. In *12 Years a Day Django*, ‘ski mask Daylyt’ is performed to subvert the live white audience’s desire to see Daylyt perform a pathological blackness. The ski mask arouses the desire, which is then subverted by his use of flow. Daylyt does not perform the gangsta/street flow style typical of ‘ski mask Daylyt’ in *12 Years a Day Django*; rather, he leaves the white audience’s desire to see Daylyt perform a pathological blackness ungratified by performing a style much closer in form to his ‘Quill style.’ It is a powerful example of how a literal mask can disguise a potent mode of subversion as part of staging resistance through play (Potter 1995; Hess 2005).

To explicate this claim, we must understand the connection between blackness and criminal pathology, white desire, the representational meaning of the ski mask, and the narrative of *12 Years a Day Django*. The black body is a site for the production and projection of both negrophilia and negrophobia, an object simultaneously feared and desired by whites. Yancy (2008) provides that the result of these contradictory projections is that, in the eyes of whiteness (and antiblackness as well), “the black body *is* criminality itself” (xvi). The equivocation between black bodies and criminality apriori constitutes a pathologizing of blackness as criminal, which Fred Moten describes as the “already existing ontic-ontological criminality of/as blackness” (2008, p. 187; see also: Sexton 2011). Lewis Gordon (2000) similarly remarks, “In our antiblack world, blacks

are pathology” (p. 87). As Watts (1997) reminds us, the desire of whites to see rappers perform a pathological blackness produces rappers’ orientation towards using street/gangsta styles of flow.

Daylyt’s ski mask persona arouses within the live white audience the expectation and desire to Daylyt perform a pathological blackness. The ski mask is a symbolic with powerful representational meaning as a symbol of criminality. One wears a ski mask in the commission of a crime to preclude identification by witnesses, hence the ski mask symbolizes one’s criminal status. This representational meaning has been contextually established within rap, where the ski mask is understood as a potent symbol of a rapper’s criminality. 50 Cent’s (2005) song “Ski Mask Way,” for example, refers to making money through robbery and extortion as the “ski mask way” of life. Eric Diep (2014) at *XXL Magazine* finds well over a dozen examples of prominent rappers donning ski masks to signify their criminal status, leading him to quip: “What rapper doesn’t do it the ski mask way?” Daylyt’s ski mask persona taps into the representational meaning of the ski mask. ‘Ski mask Daylyt’ is an individual who lives the ski mask way, as reflected in his extended references to violent and criminal behavior.

Daylyt’s performance as ‘ski mask Daylyt’ in *12 Years a Day Django* exploits the intersection between the visual form of the ski mask and the aural form of Daylyt’s flow for subversive purposes. Extending his critique of how white desire instantiates black subjection, Daylyt uses this interaction to reveal how the process of spectacular consumption operates within battling and critique the process. Crucially, this rhetorical work is enabled by the placement of Daylyt’s use of the persona within *12 Years a Day Django*. Daylyt’s debut of ‘ski mask Daylyt’ was the turning point in his career, and

arguably resulted from his performing of a pathologized blackness. Because *12 Years a Day Django* is patterned after Daylyt's career, the placement of the ski mask persona within the dramatic sequence of the performance indicates how spectacular consumption operates within battling.

When written rap battling first emerged in 2008, Daylyt perceived his street style of flow as ill-fitting for the nascent written scene because the predominance of joke-based performances—many of which, perhaps not so incidentally, were performed by rappers using the multi style of flow (Weiss 2015). In his earliest battle performances, Daylyt nevertheless sought to separate himself from West Coast street/gangsta rappers by demonstrating the complexity of his wordplay and ability to rap about more than “Chuck Taylors, low riders...[and] gangbangin’” (Campbell 2012). His lyrics contained references to movies, video games, comics, and cartoons alongside depictions of violence and criminal behavior. These references were a source of derision among battling's audiences (Campbell 2012). A probable explanation as to why is that references to things typically associated with white people contradicted the expectation that Daylyt would perform a pathological blackness. Indeed, Daylyt claims to “break the medium” of rap battling because he is “a black dude from the hood that do all the stuff that white people do” (Campbell 2014g). His attempt to delineate himself from gangsta/street rapper provoked unstated questions about his authenticity.

As time went on, the street/gangsta style of flow became more popular in battling. In Daylyt's words, rap battling “went from jokes to people with actual bars” such that “The game was forming into the style [he] had prior” (as quoted in 2013). True to form, Daylyt perceived this as a transformation as an exigency to change his style to break

expectations. In his view, he “had to do something different” because “Once battle rappers learn a format, everybody does it. When I saw everybody was dope, that meant dope is the new wack. What's good if everybody was good?” (Campbell 2013). It was then that Daylyt debuted his ski mask persona. When Daylyt debuted the ski mask persona, the representational meaning of the ski mask overcoded his lyrics. Although the flow of ‘ski mask Daylyt’ still contained ‘white’ references, the ski mask signified his criminal, pathological blackness in a way that put to rest any doubts about his authenticity regardless of whatever references he used. Bolstering this coding, ‘ski mask Daylyt’ excessively displays his pathology. ‘Ski mask’ Daylyt is hyper-masculine, violent, and criminal—so much so that Daylyt claims he sometimes refrains from employing the persona because it scares people (Campbell 2014f). To put it simply, Daylyt, like many rappers before him, became successful by performing a pathological blackness made discernable to his audiences.

What this anecdote suggests is that the process of spectacular consumption operates within battling. Daylyt’s employment of his ski mask persona stages this process for its audiences. The slave master, the embodied representation of all whites as slave master, orders Daylyt to perform as ski mask Daylyt, representing how Daylyt was compelled to adopt the persona because of the stylistic desires of battling’s white audience members. His use of flow, however, subverts this desire by refusing to provide a performance of pathological blackness.

Generally, Daylyt’s use of ski mask style of flow emphasizes verbal articulation, showcasing Daylyt’s wordplay and intertwining pop culture references and street themes. In *12 Years a Day Django*, however, the street themes are minimal and Daylyt’s use of

the style revolves entirely around complex wordplay. Most crucially, the rhythm and rhyme scheme of Daylyt's flow are more complex than in any other ski mask Daylyt performance. In fact, the flow is so complex it is difficult to comprehend all of Daylyt's lyrics on the first listen. At this point more than any other, Daylyt is showing the audience 'where the flow at.'

The stylistic contrasts make the 'ski mask style' much closer in form to Daylyt's 'Quill style,' which in turn works to subvert the audience's desire to see Daylyt perform a pathological blackness. By minimizing the street themes within the flow style and making his lyrics difficult to comprehend, Daylyt refrains from gratifying the live audience's desire to see Daylyt perform a pathologized blackness. Further, Daylyt conveys that the white desire to see performances of pathologized blackness operates as a unique constraint on black performers and is parasitic to black artistic expression. As with other black rappers, Daylyt's display of rap skill was not enough to make him a successful rapper; the mimetically represented narrative of *12Years a Day Django* suggests he and others must also *act out* a pathologized blackness in order to have popular appeal. This constraint is part and parcel with the continued positioning of black Americans as slaves—opportunities for upward economic mobility in the entertainment industry are limited by the desire of whites to see black performers act out a pathologized blackness.¹⁴ By correlation, white desire parasitizes black artist expression by allowing white rappers who do not suffer such constraints to use a black artistic form for their own economic gain and by simultaneously limiting the range of black creative expressions that can garner performers a living wage. Situated against the narrative of Daylyt's

¹⁴ The flip side to this desire, of course, is that the pathologized conception of blackness rappers perform likely serves as an obstacle to black employment in other economic sectors.

performance, the stylistic shift in the use of the ski mask style of flow suggests that, regardless of what advantage black rappers may have been the normative situational status of blackness (Alim et al. 2010), the rap industry, like America as a whole, is anything but meritocratic.

The stylistic shift also enacts a response to delimiting condition of white desire. Daylyt's innovative use of his own style of flow suggests that even under the constraints imposed by the white audience it is possible to display one's uniqueness and perform in ways that do not fully gratify to white desire and, indeed, critique that desire itself. It indicates what Daylyt has intimated throughout the battle there are always possibilities for responding to the delimiting conditions of black performance that subvert or rupture those same restrictive conditions. The shift simultaneously recognizes and responds to the potential perversity of Daylyt's method. Doing the unexpected inevitably turns the unexpected into the expected. The ski mask style was unexpected at first, but now is demanded by audiences. By innovating his own style, Daylyt is demonstrating that there are always possibilities for subversion.

The final style of flow Daylyt perform is somewhat of an instance of his 'Quill style,' but bears strong similarities to his usual 'ski mask style.' In the middle of the third round, there is an exchange between Daylyt and the slave master that sees Daylyt remove his ski mask and ends with Daylyt seizing the master's whip and using it to chase the slave master offstage. The implication is that Daylyt has successfully rebelled against the slave master and, freed of coercive constraint, is able to perform how he wants. He gives an aggressive performance, half-shouting his lyrics directly into Pat Stay's face. Each bar

is a gangsta-themed humorous set up and punchline using wordplay. The rhythm is much simpler than Daylyt's 'ski mask style,' even though the reverse is typically the case.

The stylistic irregularities reinforce the subversive and vernacular dimensions of Daylyt's 'ski mask style.' Daylyt is positing how his method of enacted subversion offers possibilities for vernacular work. In Daylyt's view, his theatrics were a stepping stone to being able to get his messages out to a wide audience—theatrics provided him popularity, and popularity gave him a platform for addressing mass audiences. Hence, after debuting ski mask Daylyt, Daylyt was able to construct performances that conveyed vernacular messages to a degree that was not previously possible. It 'freed' him to engage in significant cultural work by performing how he likes. *12 Years a Day Django* mirrors this by showing that Daylyt is able to perform however he chooses after his coerced performance as ski mask Daylyt.

Daylyt's 'Quill style' further works to reinforce the subversion of the 'ski mask style.' To a certain extent, Daylyt's use of the style gratifies the audience's desire for him to perform a pathological blackness. This set up the critique embedded in the enacted failure of the performance. Even in acquiescing to the demand for a pathological blackness without explicit coercion, Daylyt still loses the battle. The employment of the 'Quill' in this manner suggests that no matter what Daylyt or other black Americans do they will be subject to the whims of whites and, as such, the chain very firmly remains the same. Daylyt can beat the literal slave master on stage, but he cannot be the figurative slave master that everyone white person represents by virtue of the fact that black people are effectively subjected to their whims. Understood in relation to the narrative of *12 Years a Day Django*, Daylyt's use of the quill style reflects the cruel optimism inspired

by the *de jure* end of slavery—for a fleeting moment, it seemed like black Americans would be free from the sort of subjection that was the hallmark of chattel slavery. But time quickly bore out that this was not the case, and *12 Years a Day Django* reveals the continuing subjection of black bodies in the contemporary socio-cultural and political moment. The narrative of *12 Years a Day Django* mimics America's tragic racial history: it begins with a staging of gratuitous violence whose trauma lingers over the entire performance; the narrative centers around a dialectical conflict between master and slave that ends with the slave's formal emancipation; and it concludes by demonstrating that this formal emancipation failed to provide black Americans with freedom. In this way, *12 Years a Day Django* is both a history and a paradigmatic demonstration of broader contemporary race relations, which are characterized by a master/slave dynamic and the positioning of black bodies as slaves.

Conclusion: A Brief Summation

Daylyt's second and third round display several instances of using flow as a source of subversive and vernacular rhetorical action. He uses the intersection between his visual and aural discourses as an additional source of subversive action. In doing so, Daylyt provides ample demonstration of how his method of enacted subversion can be a productive response to subjection. The final chapter will assess the significance of this rhetorical work in light of the cultural milieu *12 Years a Day Django* inhabited and the scholarly conversations in which this thesis has sought to productively intervene.

CHAPTER SEVEN

The Cultural Significance of *12 Years a Day Django* and Avenues for Future Research

In narrativizing and enacting a demonstration of black Americans continued status slaves, *12 Years a Day Django* stages a “paradigmatic incident [that] can serve as an exemplar for the state of racial relations in this country” (Rowland and Strain 1994, p. p. 222). The claim that ‘the chain remain the same’ has circulated within hip hop for decades, but *12 Years a Day Django* occurred within a cultural milieu that made its iteration of the message especially timely and urgent. *12 Years a Day Django* occurred on November 22, 2014,¹ amidst a large and growing national conversation about the killing of black Americans by police as well as the burgeoning of the Black Lives Matter movement. In the months leading up to the performance, America was gripped by a series of high-profile cases of police officers killing unarmed black civilians. The fatal shooting of Mike Brown by police officer Darren Wilson was a particular source of national dialogue and a series of protests in Ferguson, Missouri and across the nation. It is unclear when Daylyt agreed to take the battle, but it was announced by KOTD on October 14, 2014—sixty six days after Brown was killed and weeks before the more than hundred days of protests reached their conclusion. Days before the announcement, thousands of people from across the nation gathered in Ferguson for days of marches and rallies led by Brown’s mother in protest of her son’s shooting as well as other police killings of black civilians nationwide. These and other protests were a key part of the broader arc of the Black Lives Matter movement.

¹ It bears mentioning that this was the same day Tamir Rice, a twelve-year-old black boy, was fatally shot by police in Cleveland, Ohio.

12 Years a Day Django occurred two days before the announcement that a grand jury declined to criminally indict Wilson for fatally shooting Brown and was intended to foreshadow the verdict. In Daylyt's view, that the chain remain the same meant Wilson's exoneration was inevitable and he "had to" put this "in front of [people's] eyes before the trial" (Campbell 2014f). Since Daylyt's remarks, an extensive Department of Justice investigation of the shooting challenged the prevailing cultural narrative about the case by finding that Wilson had acted lawfully and in probable self-defense. Alleged witness testimony suggested Brown had his hands up in an implicit plea for Wilson to 'don't shoot.' 'Hands up, don't shoot' (typically accompanied by a 'hands up' gesture) became a slogan and rallying cry of the Black Lives Matter movement. The DOJ's 102-page report about Brown's shooting concluded the reports that Brown had his hand up were not credible; forensic evidence and other eye witness testimony strongly suggested that that Brown struggled with Wilson for control of the officer's firearm and may have been charging at Wilson at the time he was fatally shot.

Since release of the DOJ report, the Black Lives Matter movement has marched on, arguably coming to "define this generation's ongoing struggle against persistent state-sponsored violence with black bodies as its target" (Bailey and Leonard 2015). In light of the report, some commentators and activists have questioned whether Brown's killing should be the cause célèbre of the movement. Jonathan Capehart (2015) at the *Washington Post*, for example, wrote that "we must never allow ourselves to march under the banner of a false narrative on behalf of someone who would otherwise offend our sense of right and wrong." Black Lives Matter activists countered that Capehart and others missed a key point of the Ferguson protests: "No matter how Wilson and Brown

confronted each other, Brown was shot several times, including in the head. He was not wrestled to the ground or Tasered. In a matter of seconds, Brown was viewed expendable enough to shoot and kill.” Regardless of whether the purported facts of the case support this interpretation, the disposability of black bodies has since been highlighted by, among other things, more police killings of unarmed black civilians; the conspicuous deaths of black civilians in police custody such as Sandra Bland; and Dylan Roof’s mass-murder of nine black Americans at a prayer service in Charleston, South Carolina. The DOJ’s report also detailed and documented a pattern of vicious and systemic racism in the policing and court practices of Ferguson’s criminal justice system, bringing to light the silent plight of local black community, contextualizing the anger and resentment behind the Ferguson protests that focalized around Brown’s killing, and serving as a potent symbol of the righteousness of the long-standing and deeply-felt mistrust of police by black Americans and powerful indexical marker of America’s structural and systematic anti-black racism.

From certain scholarly perspectives, the disposability of black bodies is intimately connected to structural master/slave relationship between whites and blacks in America. In particular, academic “theorists of structural positionality” (Wilderson 2010, p. 58), often referred to as ‘Afro-Pessimists,’ have posited that the disposability of black bodies and the antiblack violence which reflects and maintains that disposability both result from the structural positioning of blacks as slaves. In the view of Afro-Pessimists, this positionality can only be changed through structural critique and revolutionary violence. By extension, much of this scholarship is thoroughly skeptical of the transgressive and liberatory potential of black performance as well as the productive possibilities of its

scholarly study.² The theories of Afro-Pessimism also strongly and productively challenge the theory and criticism of black performance within rhetorical studies (Watts 2015) and performance studies (Sexton 2011). As such, rejoining Afro-Pessimist theory with the aims, theories, and methods of our field is part of a much larger project that is well beyond the scope of this thesis.³ The Afro-Pessimist insistence on the positionality of blacks as slaves and the necessity of revolutionary violence, however, indicates the significance of *12 Years a Day Django*'s staging of an incident that demonstrates as much to its audiences.

Contemplating the significance of performance in the wake of Brown's killing, Dreama G. Moon and Michelle A. Holling (2015) write that performance creates "moments to have radically different kinds of conversations about race and the practice of racism." *12 Years a Day Django* created such a moment and provoked conversation about black positionality. According to Daylyt, some black viewers changed their evaluation of *12 Years a Day Django* after learning of the verdict in the Wilson trial. Some of those who criticized him for "fucking around" came to respect his performance because they, too, recognized the continued status of black Americans as slaves (Campbell 2014f). At the very least, that some viewers of *12 Years a Day Django* were persuaded that the chain remain the same indicates the power of performance to influence the circulation of ideas and public deliberation. That Daylyt persuasively conveyed his

² Saucier and Woods (2014; 2015) have leveled a provocative critique of the vernacular study of hip hop performance on this basis, leading to an insightful and nuanced exchange with Forrester (2015) regarding why and how scholars ought to study hip hop performance.

³ I agree with Eric King Watts (2015) that this project is well-warranted and also believe there are adequate responses to the Afro-Pessimist criticisms applicable to this thesis, but the level of engagement necessary to create a compelling response and productive contribution to the scholarly conversation is prohibitive to offering such.

message through his embodied visual and aural discourses confirms that delivery is both political and ethical (Trimbur 2000).

Daylyt's adroit exploitation of the technologies of visual and aural/meditation to accomplish his subversive and vernacular work additionally demonstrates the significance of delivery in the electronic age. Daylyt uses the live and mediated nature of the performance to turn the segregation of battling's audiences to his rhetorical advantage, capitalizing on the unique possibilities for meaning-making and interacting with audiences enabled by the confluence of battling's segregation and the live and mediated nature of the performance (Welch 1990; Gronbeck 1993; Elysee 2011). The apostrophe within *12 Years a Day Django* directs the performance to black audience members viewing it online, deftly taking advantage of the liminal space of performance to articulate vernacular messages. Daylyt's use of flow to subvert the desires of the white live audience and repeatedly manipulate them into reacting in ways that confirm his critique of how white desire instantiates and maintains black subjection reveals how the initial liveness of performance holds a great deal of performative power (Welch 1990; 1993). By positing his method of subversive critique as a productive response to black subjection, Daylyt's flow conveys unique messages to black audience members online. This further suggests the power of delivery to accomplish vernacular work through deft use of technologies of mediation.

Some of the novel possibilities for reception and exchange between performer and audience created by these technologies (Welch 1990; Elysee 1993) enabled the conversations about race described Moon and Holling (2015). As is typical of any major battle, Daylyt versus Pat Stay was discussed within the online battle-sphere of blogs,

battle forums, and news sites. As is typical of Daylyt's theatrical performances, *12 Years a Day Django* was the focal point of discussion about the battle. Viewers discussed the meaning and significance of Daylyt's performance on in the comment section of Youtube and various online rap battle forums, several of whom connected the performance to the broader dynamics of contemporary race relations. Such discussion would not have been possible absent the mediation of *12 Years a Day Django* by visual/aural recording. While such conversations may regrettably and inevitably continue to "escape a collective 'us'" (Moon and Holling 2015), their brokering creates possibilities for transforming the broader dynamics of American race relations.

We should perhaps be skeptical of the possibilities that such transformations occur. This is at the heart of the Afro-Pessimist critique of performance (studies) and insistence on the necessity of revolutionary (counter)violence for altering black subjection. In his preliminary discussion of why rhetorical studies might engage with Afro-Pessimist thought for rhetorical, Eric King Watts suggests "thinking through Blackness as a condition of possibility for rhetorical action and social justice is a life-long pursuit that, given the tragic killing of Michael Brown...feels especially burning" (2015, p. 276). *12 Years a Day Django* supports both lines of reasoning. The performance postulates that black subjection is likely inevitable, so deeply ingrained and firmly maintained that revolutionary violence is not only necessary but even insufficient for altering the racial status quo. To put it in Daylyt's terms, war is the only option but the white man is probably going to win. Daylyt's rhetorical use of use of racialized discourses as sources of rhetorical action—or rather, his exploitation of the subversive and vernacular possibilities created by playing with the performance of blackness—

emerges from this recognition. Daylyt's use of flow demonstrates the subversive and vernacular possibilities present even under the terms of subjection, modelling for his black audiences a potentially productive method of responding to subjection in light of the suggested insufficiency of revolutionary violence to alter the prevailing racial order.

Understood within the context of widespread and deadly state violence against black bodies, the method of enacted subversion Daylyt models within *12 Years a Day Django* takes on special significance. Like black tricksters before him, Daylyt is imparting a means surviving under the reigning terms of subjection. Daylyt offers a compelling demonstration of how seeming acquiescence to white expectations and desires for black behavior and performance can mask a potent mode of subversion and significant vernacular work. Enacted subversion is shown to be a potent means of accomplishing vernacular work while avoiding violent and potentially fatal reprisal from the disciplinary mechanisms of antiblackness.

But here we must recognize a potential problem with the rhetorical study of vernacular performance. In an insightful and provocative response to Sloop and Ono's essay on "Out-law Discourse" (1997)—an extension of their 1995 work on the critique of vernacular discourse—Kendall R. Phillips (1999) points out that producers of vernacular discourses may have very good reasons to keep their messages hidden. In practical terms, the potential pitfalls of making those messages available to non-vernacular audiences must be balanced against the potential gains of those messages being heard. As Ice Cube (1994) once remarked in an interview with bell hooks, "even though [white people are] eavesdropping on [black] records, they need to hear it" (1994, p. 151). The messages conveyed in performances such as *12 Years a Day Django* can reveal to white audiences

the conditions and concerns of black life, a likely prerequisite to transforming the racial status quo. Illuminating these messages for non-vernacular audiences can thus be a productive endeavor.

An elaboration by Phillips, however, makes the preceding claim less compelling. He notes that vernacular communities may not want to be “brought into the arena of public surveillance,” and this seems especially so when their discourses are being hidden for the purpose of avoiding violent and potentially fatal disciplinary reprisal. Moreover, the rhetorical labor of uncovering those sedimented messages may have a uniquely deleterious outcome. Not only are those messages revealed, but we also instruct others on how those messages are being hidden and how to uncover them. For those invested in maintaining the racial status quo, this information could be used against vernacular groups. In uncovering the sedimentary meanings of vernacular performance, might we be unwittingly handing dominant forces the playbook of the marginalized and leading them to learn how to effectively respond? If so, might we unintentionally contribute to the defeat of vernacular resistance?

This is a very real and practical concern, particularly for the study of hip hop performance. According to Nielson (2009; 2011), resistance in rap may already be self-defeating. Police, who are more organized, powerful, and technologically advanced than any of rap’s resisters, learned from rap the methods of resistance used by black Americans and proffered by rappers, and with this knowledge they were able to more effectively survey and police black communities. In short, as rappers learned and taught others how to ‘fight the power,’ the power learned how to fight back (Nielson 20011, p. 351). Whether this makes rap’s resistance self-defeating, as Nielson concludes, is in the

eye of the beholder. The struggle between marginalized and dominant groups necessarily causes the strategies of each to adapt to on another. The danger for rhetorical critics is that uncovering rap's vernacular discourses may reveal how marginalized groups are adapting, and thus inadvertently teach 'the power' how to more effectively wage a counter-insurgency. The study of *12 Years a Day Django* conducted within this thesis, and particularly its revelation of Daylyt's method of enacted subversion could be a future source of information on how to recognize and clamp down on black subversion.

This is a problem without an easy solution. Indeed, vernacular criticism has plodded on after Wander's criticism without much in the way of further discussion about its dangers. Wander anticipated as much. Vernacular criticism increases the political relevancy of rhetorical studies, creating a powerful justification for the work with little in the way of practical disincentive (Wander 1997). Moreover, if we are committed to the study of rhetoric for rhetoric's sake—which is to say, to better understand how and why people communicate without regard for a particular object—then we ought be engaged in the study of vernacular discourse in any case. What we are faced with is a dilemma. How do we justify the study of vernacular discourse in light of the potential harm that study may cause to its producers?

The simplest response is that my fear overestimates the influence of rhetorical scholarship. It is admittedly unlikely that anyone will read this thesis or any other vernacular criticism with the explicit intention of learning how to combat black subversion. The problem, however, is that this notion guts the practical justification for vernacular study. If we must admit that our work will not have a broader impact on public discourse in order to justify vernacular study, then we have conceded that our

work will lack the relevancy that that vernacular study supposedly brings. In this light, it is exceedingly more difficult to ethically justify vernacular study given its potential to harm vernacular communities.

Working out the broader justifications for vernacular study will take greater analysis than can be provided here, but a unique case can be made why the study of *12 Years a Day Django* elides some of the raised concerns. Daylyt *wants* observation. Not in the sense that he seeks to be actively policed, but rather that everything he does is designed to attract additional attention from some audience. He also does not completely ‘hide’ his vernacular work. Daylyt makes it quite clear that he *wants* people to look for his vernacular messages and that’s *why* he seeks attention. He wants people to know about that he has a ‘deeper purpose’ and provides insight into his method, strategy, and tactics because he believes it facilitates his vernacular work. When people understand him and what he is doing, they are able to discern the messages within his performances that he wants people to see and hear. Without disregarding the concerns over the results of revealing these messages, it seems reasonable to justify the vernacular criticism of *12 Years a Day Django* on the basis that its performer welcomes and even invites vernacular study. The vernacular criticism of Daylyt’s performances may also contribute to his project by helping his audience members understand the messages he is trying to relay. In short, vernacular rhetors may in general have good reasons to keep their discourses buried, but Daylyt invites us to uncover his. Only time will tell if doing so produces indelible harm on him or others, but it is comforting that the producer of the vernacular discourse under study indicates his consent to its rhetorical study.

This discussion has hopefully provided greater illumination of the significance of *12 Years a Day Django's* cultural work. It has also indicated some of the potential contributions made by its study and answered a major criticism. The rest of this chapter will assess additional contributions made and provide avenues for further research.

This thesis has made a sustained case for the significance of rap battling as an object of study. The first chapter of this thesis offered a preliminary adulated history of rap battling as a genre, which could be usefully elaborated upon through extended ethnographic research and textual analysis. The construction of this history through the perspective of rhetorical genre has hopefully shown the utility of rhetorical methods of study for the generic study of battling, so I entreat rhetorical scholars to aid in the task of explicating the boundaries of the genre. The urgency of this work will only increase as battling continues to expand in popularity and cultural reach.

Further rhetorical study of rap battles as texts is also warranted. Their unique status as live and mediated texts enables many rhetorical possibilities worth exploring and their rhetorical delivery makes them worthy texts of study for critics interested in aural and multimodal rhetorics. Of particular interest are the theatrical performances of the genre. Vernacular theatrical performances such as *12 Years a Day Django* should attract interdisciplinary attention from scholars invested in the study of black performance, black theatre, and particularly black hip hop theatre.

Beyond the vernacular study of theatrical rap battle performances, future research might consider written rap battles as sites of intercultural exchange. International battles between rappers of different nationalities are increasingly common. Given that the global diaspora of hip hop has produced many nationally-specific styles of hip hop, a stylistic

clash between international rappers could be a meaningful intercultural exchange. The confluence of “grime music” and hip hop, for example, produced “grime rap” in England, a unique style of rap. “Grime rappers” sometimes battle opponents from other countries, creating a stylistic clash of national rap styles that rarely occurs in any other format. Examining these clashes as intercultural exchanges might be fruitful for the study of intercultural communication as well as a means of countering the noted ‘Americentrism’ of hip hop studies.

This thesis has made four primary contributions to the scholarly conversation about flow, each of which deserves additional research. First, this thesis has shown that a style of flow can be racialized as much as a single feature of flow. More work interpretive work on styles of flow and racialization could reveal the racialization of additional styles. A related avenue of research would be investigating how styles may also be gendered. Second, the textual analysis of *12 Years a Day Django* has demonstrated that flow can be a source of significant subversive and vernacular rhetorical action. Future studies could examine other subversive or vernacular uses of flow, possibly through the lens of gender in lieu of or in addition to race. Third, this thesis has revealed how the intersection of visuality and flow within hip hop performance can create unique possibilities for subversion. It is uncertain what insights future studies of this intersection could yield, but a case has been made for this intersection as rhetorically meaningful. Fourth, this thesis has further that conceptualizing flow styles as rhetorical forms can be a productive means of assessing flow’s subversive and vernacular rhetorical work, offering an apt tool for apprehending how context informs the rhetorical work of flow. This does not require much in the way of future research, as much as it is a tool that

can be adopted in future analyses of flow intent on studying its interaction with rhetorical context.

Some of these suggested avenues are potentially generative for rhetorical studies. Studying the rhetorical work of aural discourse both independently and in relation to other modes of address can breathe new life into the study of aurality and delivery, especially as the study of *12 Years a Day Django* has shown that aurality can be a potent vernacular discourse used to stage a meaningful rhetorical contestation of the racial status quo. Future studies could examine the rhetorical work of aural discourse in sites beyond the performances of rap and battling.

One especially generative path forward for rhetorical studies of aurality is the affective criticisms of aural rhythm. There are very few studies of aural rhythm in rhetorical studies, and none dedicated to its affective dimension. The latter is particularly peculiar for three overlapping reasons. First, Joshua Gunn's attempted resuscitation of speech criticism rests largely on affective theory and criticism. Second, he and others have (e.g. Gunn and Rice 2009; Gunn and Dance 2015) have argued that the affective dimension of embodied speech is a key factor motivating the marginalization of its study in rhetorical contemporary theory and criticism. Third, aural rhythm's affective power has been at the core of its study and as well as source of consternation in the Western rhetorical tradition. Indeed, rhythm has generally been treated as having greater affective power than any other element of speech, and thus uniquely dangerous.

Providing a useful indication of sentiments in this regard, philosopher and cultural theorist Emmanuel Levinas warned that rhythm is "the ultimate rhetorical tool" because

its affect could so extensively blur the boundaries of self and other that one could be lead to suspend proper judgment and give up one's freedom in exchange for the experiencing communion with the other (as cited in Valiavitcharska 2013, p. 1). In his view, this made rhythm uncontrollable and dangerous; Levinas was wary and suspicious of rhythm's emotive power and effect on the psyche. This is the same sort of anxiety to which Gunn attributes the marginalization of aurality's study.

The anxiety towards aural rhythm has roots within the Western rhetorical tradition that long pre-date Levinas's work. In early Greek rhetorical theorizing, aural rhythm's affective power was both a motivating consideration in its study as well as a source of consternation. Gorgias, Plato, Aristotle, and Isocrates all recognized that aural rhythm possessed incredible affective power whose persuasiveness was potentially unmatched by reason and logic. It was magical, narcotic, and above all *dangerous*. Although rhythm could bring about the well-orderedness of the soul (the state in which irrational impulses do not interfere with rational command and the soul can be said to be virtuous; Asmis 2015) it could also be a tool of dangerous sophistry.⁴ Since ancient Greek theorizing, the persuasive power of rhythm has both been a source of great interest and anxiety within the Western rhetorical tradition.

What the long-held recognition of aural rhythm's persuasive power as an affective device suggests is that analyzing aural rhythm is a crucial part of resuscitating the study of aurality and delivery within rhetorical studies. Affective criticism of flow is a potentially productive route for this effort. Much like Gorgias equivocated the affective

⁴ This is a brief and reductionist account of rhythm's treatment within ancient Greek rhetorical theory. There are meaningful differences between each rhetorician's views of rhythm, but I am offering a very general account to simply to indicate that aural rhythm's affective dimension has been an important source of rhetorical theorizing.

response to speech with the bodily effects of narcotics, rap's aural discourse has been likened a powerfully intoxicating and addicting substance (Androutsopoulos 2009). The use of aural rhythm in other modes of black performance could be equally productive given aural rhythm's cultural significance within Afro-diasporic communities and the wide recognition of rhythm's affective dimension within black culture. The gendered dynamics of rhythm could also be a source of fruitful inquiry.

All the foregoing are merely suggestions for potential courses that future studies could take. Regardless of whether or not these lines of inquiry are pursued, the study of *12 Years a Day Django* has yielded numerous insights into battling as a genre and the rhetorical work of aural/ity/flow. It is my hope that this serves as a basis for future studies of aural rhetoric as part of a broader effort to resuscitate the study of the aural/ity and delivery within rhetorical studies. It is also hoped that this study provides an impetus for further studies of aural/ity as a source of vernacular discourse as well as studies of rap battling both at the levels of text and genre.

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