Remixing Relationality:
‘Other/ed’ Sonic Modernities of our Present

by

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Abstract  

Far from simply playing music, the turntable has, in recent decades, been transformed into a musical instrument. Those that play these new instruments, called Turntablists, alter existing sounds to produce new sonic arrangements, exceeding the assumed use value of the turntable. The turntable’s transformation from record player to instrument captures one of the ways in which Afrosonic sound making activities refuse to conform to existing paradigms of music making in the western world.  

Throughout the African diaspora, it has been the musics from various regions and nations that continually capture the attention of the world’s music connoisseurs. This dissertation examines the ways in which careful consideration of the sonic innovations in Afrodiasporic cultures produce alternative paradigms through which we might analyze contemporary life. The following chapters interrogate turntablism, remix culture and hip hop music as subtexts that elaborate a foundational narrative of Afrodiasporic life. These subtexts are used as tools to examine the various ethnoscapes of Black Canadian life, official multiculturalism and notions of home within the African diaspora in Canada.  

The dominant narrative of the African diaspora explored in this work, housed within the sonic, elaborates a relational conception of freedom and modernity born out of the
particularities of Afrodiasporic life in the west. In this sonic narrative, participation becomes the key index by which freedom is understood, embodied and enacted. Consequently, a notion of relationality, deeply indebted to the Afrodiasporic experience, is utilized throughout this dissertation to access a conception of the human that lay outside of western Europe’s enlightenment definition.
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Introduction

Soundsystems are one of the black diaspora’s most enduring and frequently unacknowledged cultural institutions (Chude-Sokei, 1994:96).

It’s in music that you get this sense that most African Americans owe nothing to the status of the human (Eshun, 1998:193).

Music subverts the limits that are imposed on the Afro-Creole subject when reduced to “symbolic Negro” within a code of objectification, from the totality of his possibilities to a unit of labour within the capitalist paradigm (Wynter as cited in Maysles, 2002:92).

The Struggle

“Instead of sleeping in the national assembly, government ministers should have listened to our albums,”1 is one of the ways a member of France’s hip hop communities reacted to the rioting

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1 Emcee Rim K from French Rap Group 113 as cited by (Schofield, 2005).
that rocked France in late 2005. For many youth of North African and Arab ancestry, hip hop music has been a soundtrack documenting the continued miseries of overpolicing, overt racism and the overall aggressive exclusion of the non-white and Muslim populations relegated to France’s suburbs. Rap groups in France have been in constant friction with politicians and the justice system, demonstrated either by a war of words or through police sentencing and the ban of rap lyrics (Gentlemen, 2003). Although it appears as though politicians, like current president Nicholas Sarkozy, were offended by certain rap lyrics, it is clear is that politicians and other influential individuals were either unable or unwilling to hear the message of the songs; they were unable or unwilling to read or decipher the texts produced by hip hop culture. Hearing the message of a hip hop song is not an obscure academic skill or the obsession of idol pubescent youth, rather it is a practice of active listening that is inherently participatory. More clearly, active listening is inherently participatory, and it is the employment of skills that allows one to decipher, imagine or refashion ideas transmitted through music.

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2 During this period of social unrest more than two hundred and seventy towns across France experienced rioting, a direct response to the accidental deaths of Zayed Benna (of Tunisian ancestry) and Bounca Traoré (of Martiniquian ancestry). These two youth were playing football when they were approached by a law enforcement official who they feared would ask them for documentation to support their French citizenship. Consequently, they attempted to elude the official (along with Muhittin Altun who was electrocuted but not killed) by hiding in an electrical field.
After the accidental deaths of Zyed Benna and Bounca Traoré, many powerbrokers unread and consequently unheard the prophetic rhymes of France’s hip hoppers that eventually materialized when rioters burned more than 200 cities in France. Tracks like Group 113’s “In Front of the Police” or Joey Starr’s “They Don’t Understand” narrate the ways in which youth were growing increasingly frustrated by the state as they became cognizant of their exclusion (Schofield, 2005). For the various hip hop songs that detailed the “hatred running through their arteries” or that advocated the burning of cars as a means to be heard (Gentleman, 2003), the actions of this hip hopper were democratic articulations based on the ideals of liberté, égalité, and their unfulfilled desire for fraternité.

While media outlets drew a linear relationship between the riots and rap music, with headlines and stories such as, “French Rappers’ Prophecies Come True”, “French Right Reviles Rappers” and “Should Hip Hop take the Rap for Rioting?” France’s politicos responded with proposed legislation to attack aggressive lyrics, continuing a trend of reactionary litigation aimed at punishing Rappers and their lyrical sincerity (Muggs, 2005). Just as media and politicians could not decipher the pain of excluded hip hop youth, philosophers like Salvoj Žižek (2005) and France’s Jean Baudrillard (2006) also easily misdiagnosed the situation. Although Žižek argues that the “philosopher’s task is not to propose solutions, but to reformulate the problem itself, to
shift the ideological framework within which we hitherto perceived the problem” he does not even venture into the discursive terrain of France’s hip hop culture when attempting to make sense of the riots in France (Žižek, 2005:01). Instead, through his isolated detachment and/or his unwillingness to take hip hop music seriously as a philosophical text, Žižek claims:

Is this sad fact that the opposition to the system cannot articulate itself in the guise of a realistic alternative, or at least a meaningful utopian project, but only as a meaningless outburst, not the strongest indictment of our predicament (2005: 01)?

If a leading philosopher finds these riots meaningless, especially as they were clearly articulated more than a decade earlier by hip hop music, then where is the shifting of the ideological framework? Perhaps the strongest indictment of our predicament might be the establishment’s inability, or outright refusal, to seriously consider marginalized human beings as something more than the ‘opposition’. Žižek’s overdetermination of ‘the opposition’ means he can only hear what is articulated within the sayability of his discursive imagination, such as a “utopian project.” Instead of focusing on the actuality as articulated by hip hop youth, Žižek decides to pontificate on violence by examining American movies (this is Žižek’s discursive terrain), missing completely the political strategies and struggles that many of France’s youth are creatively
enunciating through hip hop music (Žižek, 2005). Žižek relies upon his training in film studies to “shift the ideological framework”, not imagining hip hop culture to be an adequate site of debate. In Žižek’s estimation, his interest in creative texts allows for his philosophical assessments of society, yet, black musics—as creative texts—somehow remain unacknowledged as legitimate sources of information.

Jean Baudrillard makes a more earnest attempt by suggesting that the riots in France are a microcosm of the collision of “two irreconcilable universes,” which he calls the “ironical sign of globalization” (Baudrillard, 2006). Clearly, Baudrillard’s terms can be read as West and ‘Other’,³ with Arabs, Africans and Asians constituting a homogenous group and worthy of less specific analysis. He further suggests that:

> The superiority of western culture is sustained only by the desire of the rest of the world to join it. When there is the least sign of refusal, the slightest ebbing of that desire, the west loses its seductive appeal in its own eye (2006:07).

³ I use ‘Other’ and otherness to refer to a highly fluid ideological field that attempts to capture either the real or imagined differences between social groups that is often projected by dominant groups onto less powerful groups. As Jonathan Rutherford suggests, this site of difference is a “repository of our fears and anxieties” (Rutherford 1990).
If we look at the practice of politicians, either taking legal action or considering legal action against France’s hip hop Emcees, what becomes clear is that the West has not lost “its seductive appeal in its own eye” (Baudrillard, 2006). The litigation suggests a rigid enforcement, using tools of the state to ensure the West’s ideal of capitalism and democracy proceeds unruffled.

The litigation route to quell the ‘noises’ of the unhappy oppressed populations in 2005 France is reminiscent of the various ordinances and colonial measures, from South Carolina to Colombia, in which African and African descended populations’ musical expressions were outlawed from the 1600s onwards. I say ‘musical expressions’ here because the resiliency of African and Afro-diasporic sound-making activities did not focus or were limited to one kind of instrument. An example from the Antiguan government in 1723 demonstrates the resiliency of Afro-diasporic sound-making practices as various prohibitions attempted to prevent enslaved individuals’ musical expression via various wind and percussion instruments. Enslaved individuals were banned from “beating any Drum, or empty casks, or great gourds, or blowing Horns, Shells, or loud instruments” (Gaspar, 1985). This legislation demonstrates the importance of music and sound-making to oppressed populations for whom music and sound-making might have been the only audible form of representation possible.
In Trinidad and Tobago the colonial government had to be both extra meticulous and wide-reaching as demonstrated in the Peace Preservation Ordinance of 1884, which suppressed stickfighting, torch processions and drumming—the ordinance had to be revised by 1945 because other materials were unconventionally utilized to produce music. The addition of “noisy instruments” into the language of the revised ban in 1945 helped the colonial government deal with the innovation of the steelpan as the 20th century’s newest instrument. These same kinds of legal entanglements with music making practices could be found in Salvador de Bahia, Brazil and as far north as South Carolina (Fryer, 2000). These ordinances and legal activities share a similarity with the French government’s concern with prosecuting hip hop emcees. These authorities were unable to decipher or unwilling to read sound making practices as more than noise disturbances, yet at the same time cast music and music making as inciting violence or, as anti-national sentiments, in the case of France. What if we were to seriously consider the sound and music we extrapolated from the various sonic inventions and interventions within the African diaspora? What if Žižek, Baudrillard and various French politicians heard and deciphered the alterity in the works of Joey Starr, 113, or took seriously Disiz La Peste’s album, *The Extraordinary Stories of a Youth in the Banlieue*? Thinking of these various contraband sound activities (French hip hop musics alongside other Afro diasporic musics made under colonialism) as collections of information of the lives of the oppressed, or as records of lived
experiences, allows us to continue a trajectory of thought interested in excavating not just the meaning behind these music making activities, but also the alternative conceptions of our present that are lodged within these musics and sound-making practices.

**THE RECORD**

A record, whether legal, archival or musical, is a device designed to hold information. This information is deemed important and thus worthy of collecting, usually stored for future reference. The recorder of the information makes a value judgment when they decide to record, choosing what sounds or information to capture. But records, especially in a colonial archive, always reveal as much about the recorder as the situation that is being recorded. The ideological and social residue of the contemporary moment is trapped within the record and invisible to the recorder. Thus, every Blue Note, Chess or Motown record speaks eloquently of African American experiences but also documents the extension of capitalism’s tentacles to manufacture new markets and commodify new objects.⁴

⁴ One only has to think of race records and the desire to create a market of white consumers of black musics by using white individuals on the cover of these records, such as Chess records, home of Etta James and Muddy Waters.
Similarly, if we turn to the use of the vinyl record in hip hop music it immediately becomes clear that the record’s use far exceeds its technological design (Gilroy, 1991). The manipulation of the vinyl record by the hands of disc jockeys as well as via the use of a mixer might tell us something about the ideological and social contexts that make hip hop music possible. Like legal records or archival records, the vinyl record also stores information that is believed to be useful in the future. Although the vinyl record, as entertainment device, has intentionally been made obsolete by the cassette, these records still contain valuable information about our futures. It is the relationships formed between what is imagined to be obsolete, and the ‘excess of modernity’, that are of interest to this dissertation. The record, and the ways in which Afrodiasporic populations reinterface its relations of production are important precisely because this relationship is a site at which our current governing regime of knowledge/power/capitalism loses its abrasive hold on contemporary western society. The DJ/record relationship is the site where ‘use value’ means something beyond classical Marxist language’s intimate economic connotation. Instead, use value, as it is deployed in this dissertation, comes to signify the creative emergence of useful relationships of meaning-making. For example, to speak of the use value of a turntable in the era of turntablism, is to understand it as contributing to the identity formation of a Turntablist as musician and artist. To turn Marxist language in on itself when thinking about Afrodiasporic populations who historically have had highly regulated
relationships to capitalism, is to recognize that the language of the economy is not universally applicable and that the arena of sound might prove to be more insightful and useful in articulating the intricacies of Afrodiasporic life than our contemporary impoverished paradigms.

The B-side

Like a coin, every recorded vinyl is circular with information inscribed on each surface. Both the coin and the record are time contingent; mints press new coins and record companies press new vinyl. Unlike a coin, only one side of a record is highly valued by its user, while the other side is at times ignored. The A-side of a record presents us with the commercial single, the song the record company wants its audience to consume. This side of a record is considered to have the most commercially viable song, it receives advertising monies and is usually the subject of a music video and commercial radio airplay in North America.

The B-side is the side of a record both radio disc jockeys and consumers have traditionally ignored. When the A-side of a record is playing its surface is facing the user, as the textual inscription of record label designed information rotates at different velocities 78, 45 or 33 and 1/3 revolutions per minute on 12 inch and 7 inch records. At this moment, as the needle

5 One widely known exception was in Jamaica between 1973 and 1974. (See Dalton, 2004:215)
amplifies analogue signals of sound, the user can look at the record, read its surface and recognize its properties. The needle reads the record, details the content of the information inscribed on the A-side and spreads this information to all listeners within earshot. These acts of interaction and communication between record and user lock the record’s B-side in a set of relations in which one side’s audibility demands the muting of the other side. While the ‘message’ of the A-side is amplified for all those in ear range, the B-side must remain facedown and must rotate at the same revolutions per minute as the A-side. In this dialectical relationship, the B-side’s audibility is determined by how well the A-side is recorded and the possibility of being heard is dependent upon how the A-side is received by the audience. The B-side is the record’s excess; at times it is loaded with an instrumental or accapella, other times the b-side contains a different song. At any rate, the B-side according to the chronology of its alphabetical location is imagined to be ‘secondary’ to the A-side. Most importantly, the disc jockey determines the life of the B-side, deciding when to shed light on this side. The disk jockey (DJ) (in public or commercial settings) decides when and if the B-side will ever have its inscribed information amplified for all to hear.

**This Record**

As Rinaldo Walcott has asserted, Black people are the “b-side to modernity,” (Walcott, 2006) the ignored, obscured and uncelebrated side of our contemporary times. Taking cues from B-boys/B-
Houston A. Baker provides us with the notion of “B-ing” and “B-style”, the alternative aesthetics and lifestyle of hip hop youth (Baker, 1993). It is important to remember that, alongside the B-side craze of dub music in Jamaica, (Dalton, 2004), early hip hop music was originally the instrumental B-sides to 12 inch singles of various genres (Nelson et al., 1985). It was in a newly decolonized Jamaica where B-side instrumentals rose to prominence, despite the role of 45s in youth consumption of rock music in the 1960s. In considering the significance of B-side versioning on 45-RPM records, it is important to highlight that 45s became very popular in Jamaica at exactly the same time as former colonies were finding their political voices in independence movements. B-side instrumentals did not narrate the western world’s various social uprisings of the 1960s, but they did somehow manage to become an important element in the lives of young Jamaicans. With this in mind, Baker’s use of the term B-ing and Walcott’s connection of the B-side to modernity become essential launching points to begin probing the intellectual possibilities of the B-side.

In this dissertation, I ‘play’ the B-side of the record of modernity, amplifying, echoing and excavating narratives, various sonic engagements and ideas to make audible the polyphonies of

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6 These individuals would eventually be known as breakdancers. They were named B-Boys and B-Girls by DJ Kool Herc as he noticed they would wait until the bridge or break in a song to dance (Chang, 2005).
the African diaspora. The various sonic engagements examined in what follows expand on Louis Chude-Sokei’s provocative assertion used to open this introduction. Instead of understanding soundsystems as mobile discotheques consisting of individuals and electronic equipment, I elaborate this understanding to include the various linguistic and oral strategies that do not necessarily have a relationship to electronic technologies. Thus, to think of various sonic and oral engagements in the African diaspora as an institution is to recognize their structures, properties and their continued utility in the West, and under capitalism. This means that practices of signifying: the dozens, repetition, intentional stuttering, and improvising form important sites where sonic practices and strategies are deployed by Afro-diasporic individuals. Various works are essential to expanding this notion of a soundsystem; in particular the works of Barry Chevannes, Kamau Brathwaite, Tricia Rose, Walter Ong, Geneva Smitherman, Édouard Glissant, Verna Pollard, Maureen Warner-Lewis and James Snead have been extremely useful (Braithwaite, 1984; Chevannes, 1994; Glissant, 1992; Ong, 1982; Pollard, 2000; Rose, 1989; Smitherman, 1977). Therefore, the record elaborated here is not simply about music, but more generally engages various facets of sound.

As Louis Chude-Sokei, Houston Baker, Clyde Woods and others have asserted, within Afro-diasporic groups there exists a sonic space where the accumulated experiences and native
knowledges of these groups are articulated (Baker, 1984; Chude-Sokei, 1994; Woods, 2007). This dissertation is firmly situated in this sonic space and intellectually indebted to the theorizations of Tricia Rose, Houston A. Baker, Louis Chude-Sokei, Sylvia Wynter and others. This space of the sonic is free of the evidential and visual bias of Western science and reading practices, what Chude-Sokei calls the “objective bias of literacy” (Chude-Sokei, 1994). What this means is that a written dissertation is necessarily inadequately equipped to convey what we find in the blues matrix (Baker, 1984), at the hip hop crossroads (Rose, 1994), in reggae’s riddim method (Marshall, 2006) or the epistemological matrix of soundsystems (Chude-Sokei, 1994). But importantly, by understanding this space as a structured episteme what becomes possible are various analyses, encounters and paradigms by which we might imagine other kinds of futures and alternative modes of existence. The sonic as a unit of analysis is detailed in the following pages, as it forms the central mechanism upon which this work pivots.

This discursive space of sonic/oral practices is a site where a non-foundational Africa reverbs and echoes throughout. Although no direct, unaltered pure ‘Africa’ can be directly identified (in the vein of evidential research) for example in turntablism, or in steel pan, it is the structure of the sonic and sound-making practices that this dissertation argues is at the core of ‘other/ed’ kinds of modernities and futures. For Chude-Sokei, the discursive space of the sound/culture
nexus is where “Africa ceaselessly extends and invents itself” (80): his notion of Africa suggests the possibilities of non-foundational Africas. What this means is that different versions of Africa [Africas] are engaged under different circumstances and for different purposes. For example, the Africa that Saidiya Hartman encounters in Lose Your Mother is not the same Africa that Kwodo Eshun encounters in his Afrofuturist speculations and wanderings (Akomfrah, 1996; Eshun, 1998; Hartman, 2007). Hartman’s return to Africa is a sobering lesson in alienation and diasporic homelessness. Africa becomes in Hartman’s work an impossible recuperation of a “lost mother amongst a dizzying array of McRoots tours and other commercialized slave route tours” (163). Similarly, Chude-Sokei’s Africa extends and reverberates throughout various soundsystems making possible a technological subversion at the core of the only possible Zion. Accordingly, for him a new “Africa” can be located within the “postmodern networks of multinational capital” (82). Chude-Sokei pushes for the consideration of a technologically accessible Africa, a non-physical unreturn to a reinvented Africa, ostensibly a new encounter of a lost past via sound. Interestingly, Hartman’s return to Africa is through networks of capital, a Ford Foundation fellowship, it is unfortunately a terrifying process of (un)recovery and solidification of her African Americanness.
If we turn to filmmaker John Akomfrah’s version of Africa, we encounter a digitally accessible Africa, one that can be visited and returned to innumerable times. The digital as a form of technology is engaged by Akomfrah in a useful fashion, for him “the digital is about reformulating the relationship between us “ …providing humans with an opportunity to get closer to something we didn’t before” [Akomfrah as cited in *Afro @ Digital* (Bakaupa-Kanyinda, 2003)]. In his film *Last Angel of History*, Akomrah explores the future through music, focusing on the ways in which Afrodiasporic populations on the margins, as alien populations, present other kinds of possible futures for humanity. His idea of a digitized diaspora is one that cannot return to Africa proper but can revisit African polyrhythmically while suspended in between the new world and the old world as diasporically homeless ‘aliens’(Akomfrah, 1996).

Akomfrah’s digital version of Africa differs dramatically from Hartman’s alienating return to a physical Africa, which differs from Chude-Sokei’s sonic Zion. These three Africas, a digital, a physical and a sonic oscillate throughout this work, providing the groundwork for a sonic Afrodiasporic conception built around diasporic sensibilities and aggressively enforced
unfreedom.\textsuperscript{7} The discursive space of sound taken up in this work is understood as a realm that elaborates a participatory ethos that houses an alternative conception of the human. The participatory ethos then is a way of conceiving and participating in the world through sound that owes its particularities to the diasporic conditions of Africans in the west.

In this dissertation, the participatory ethos extends African polyrhythmic tendencies, particularly under duress in diaspora, to be read as democratic interventions into our modern world systems of Afro diasporic sounds and sound-making practices. Erik Davis’ conception of the “Black Electronic” is useful as it takes up African polyrhythm through the “electroacoustic spaces” that we find in Paul Gilroy’s transnational, non-foundational conception, the Black Atlantic (Davis, 2008). Davis’ central concern is to examine the encounter between African polyrhythmic sensibility and electronic instruments. For Davis, African polyrhythm “carves out a unique and powerful dimension of acoustic space by generating a “nomadic” space of multiplicity…” (56).

Antonio Benítez-Rojo also works through this notion, thinking through the Caribbean via a polyrhythmic paradigm, highlighting its opacity and non-linearity (Benítez-Rojo, 1995). Davis demonstrates how African polyrhythmic sensibility helps one move through the multiplicity of

\textsuperscript{7} This notion of unfreedom is borrowed from Sylvia Wynter’s work, grouping the various hegemonic practices that continue to make freedom elusive for Afro diasporic populations.
acoustic space and one could extend this to the multiplicity of subjecthoods\textsuperscript{8} fostered by the expansion of capital in the West.

If John Chernoff suggests “in African music there are always at least two rhythms going on” (Chernoff as cited in (Davis, 2008) and Sylvia Wynter suggests, “there is always something else beside the dominant logic going on” (Wynter, 2000) when referring to the West’s current governing logic, then an examination of Afrodiasporic sound, its connection to African polyrhythm and the governing structures of the West is extremely powerful. African polyrhythm, when understood as part of a sound/sonic instituting knowledge system, highlights how versions of being human, versions of Africa (in diaspora) and versions of democracy are made possible. These versions/multiplicities are long-lost relatives of African polyrhythm extended throughout a knowledge system structured by sound and sound-making practices. At stake then is an alternative conception of being human that exists beyond our current modes of being, a conception that finds ways to move through the dominant logic of being human, at times translated through turntables or steel drums.

\textsuperscript{8} I am reflecting here particularly on the resistance to objecthood of the enslaved and the double consciousness of enslaved Afrodiasporic people.
This intellectual inquiry begins from within the native and insurrectionary knowledges (Foucault, 2003) of Afro diasporic sound, acknowledging the various limits of our contemporary knowledge systems whose structures and policing mechanisms belong to western Europe. The trajectory of this dissertation takes up Fred Moten’s rhetorical inquiry, “What if we let the music take us?” (Moten, 2003:96). So instead of dismantling European modernity, *Remixing Relationality* wanders through afro sonic life to imagine how the “cut n’ mix” attitude” (Hebdige, 1987), evidenced in Grandmaster Flash’s “Adventures on the Wheels of Steel”, as well as the work of the Jamaican “version” can move us past base-superstructure formulations⁹ to what Kwodo Eshun calls remixology, “the science of the sequel” (Eshun, 1998). My understanding of base-superstructure formulations, following Louis Althusser, is that the reproduction of a social formation depends on the reproduction of the same conditions of its production (Althusser, 1971). This argument follows in rigid and linear fashion that dispossesses individuals of agency. In turning to Afrosonic innovations this dissertation attempts to interrupt this linear, overdetermining postulation, which discounts the very real strategies of representation and self-determination¹⁰. Instead, the sonic explorations in this work follow Stuart Hall’s third path of understanding how difference is articulated, somewhere between Althusser and post-structuralist

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⁹ Here I am referring to Louis Althusser’s notion of “Ideological State Apparatuses” see (Althusser, 1971)

¹⁰ In chapter 4 the examination of Motion’s poetry exemplifies the point being made here.
Thus, the versioning, remixing, turntablism and dub sonic innovations explored in this dissertation demonstrate Hall’s notion of “no necessary correspondence” between state apparatuses (the economy included) and the rise of specific social formations (Hall, 1996a).

This work should not be read as an exhaustive exploration indebted to the methods and structures of ethnomusicology. Instead, this work is invested in sonic genealogies, moving archeologically through the ideas that structure specific music making practices, as well as the historical conditions that make possible the various musical and sonic practices in the African diaspora.

Remixing Relationality is informed by Diaspora Studies and Cultural Studies specifically bringing into focus the ways in which Afrosonic explorations complement and challenge major themes in the study of diasporas. By valorizing the underappreciated side of modernity, the B-side, Remixing Relationality avoids the eradication, decontextualization or commodification of difference by treating the B-side as pedagogic (hooks, 1992; Lorde, 1984). What is hoped is that a more elaborate conception of the human might be glimpsed, one that can satisfy Sylvia Wynter’s call for a “new scientific order of knowledge able to confront and deal with the hybridity of our modes of being human” (Wynter, 2001).
Importantly, *Remixing Relationality* is not interested in ignoring the record’s A-side—which symbolically identifies the dominant narratives of the Western world. Rather, the work is more interested in creatively engaging how we might listen to the commercial single and the underground rarity at the same time. Such a feat might sound silly if taken solely on the level of the literal, but taken both literally and theoretically it is a task of enormity with the potential to inform another kind of social politics. In fact to *hear* both sides of modernity is to sonically operationalize W.E.B. DuBois’ foundational contribution of “double-consciousness” to the field of black studies (DuBois, 1961/1903). The “second-sight” that DuBois described as the gift of the American Negro is an apt metaphor for articulating the dualities that continuously circulate in a life of double-consciousness.\(^{11}\) To listen to both the A-side and B-side of a record requires a duality of attention to the sonic—this skill set is found in the mixing techniques cultivated by the club disc jockey interested in keeping crowds dancing. Similarly, to hear the A-side of the Western world, while simultaneously attending to the underbelly of modernity—the B-side—a sonic double-consciousness is essential. But it is not enough to actively listen. A utilization of a “poetics of relation” via rhizomatic thought helps us find relationships between the A-side and the B-side, between the dominant and the ‘Other,’ and between the remix and the commercial single (Glissant, 1997:11). In utilizing Glissant’s term, a poetics of relation, I gesture towards a

\(^{11}\) DuBois (1965) p. 215
consciousness that is both cognizant of multiplicity, yet interested in intersection, collaboration and ‘othered’ kinds of relationships. I call these obscured relationships ‘othered’ because they are seemingly excluded from dominant discourse. They at times contradict and disrupt the regulating structures of unfree life in the west. These ‘othered’ kinds of relationships, the collaborative and relational approaches to viewing the world expose and contradict the carefully crafted social exclusion that plagues non-white and impoverished individuals and communities.

Glissant’s notion of a poetics of relation is central to the trajectories explored through this dissertation, operationalized to help theorize the paradigmatic possibilities of sound. Defined as “a dialectics of rerouting”, Glissant’s poetics of relation is a conceptual “rhizome of multiple relationships with the Other…” (Glissant, 1997). Glissant uses the term Relation to describe a space of flux and disorder directly in contact with the unforeseeable, an encounter of the “Other” (Glissant, 1997). He employs the term “donner-avec” to gesture at a relationship of understanding in space of Relation, where the French verb donner (to give) is understood as “generous, looking out toward” (212n5). Translated, donner-avec (give-with) is used by Glissant to signify a generous with one’s interpretation or generous in the encounter of the “Other” and the collisions of cultures. Glissant’s terminology is an excellent theoretical tool for thinking about social difference and the inevitable contact between cultures. As a conceptual tool, a
poetics of relation in this dissertation is used to generously interpret the various sonic materials found in the African diaspora. Thus, the textual analysis through this dissertation are products of a trajectory of thought interested in exploring shared knowledges, and relational systems of knowledge production made available via the encounter of the Other.

If we begin from a place where recognition of a notion of “relational singularity”, as Weheliye puts it (207), exists, or from Glissant’s conceptualization of culture as totality\(^\text{12}\), then we can begin to see the connections between seemingly disparate narratives and sounds. The notion of a “relational singularity” is helpful in two ways. Firstly, this notion stands in direct contrast to ideas of autonomy and the autonomous individual. The Enlightenment tradition bequeathed intellectual tools whose primary axis of understanding is underwritten by Europe and European conceptions. The theoretical tools bequeath to the west are not universal contrary to their marketing strategies and binaristic hegemonic discourses. They are particularistic and enforced hegemonically, especially since Guttenberg’s invention of the printing press and the violent expansion of nation as a conceptual organizing tool (Anderson, 1983). Secondly, Weheliye’s ‘relational singularity’ captures specific \textit{and} relational difference, allowing for broader

\(^{12}\) Glissant’s culture as totality is a heterogeneous conception of the diversity of our present world, via language, culture and race. See \textit{Poetics of Relations} p, 133 footnote 1 for Glissant’s detailed explanation.
conversations where connection and relationships are highlighted over disjuncture and individuality. For example, the notion of a ‘relational singularity’ suggests how a hip hop song is both the creative invention of James Brown and Rakim at the same time.\textsuperscript{13} Such a disposition allows us to look past the split between the ‘Othered’ and the dominant, the remix and the original, as to not fetishize the practice of exclusion\textsuperscript{14} by examining the interrelatedness of, say, the ‘singularity’ of the human being as a social construct.

If we follow DuBois and suggest that citizens of the black diaspora are longing to “merge his [sic] double self into a better and truer self” (215) what might be the mechanisms by which one details his or her “message for the world” (ibid)? Is it possible that a “truer” and “better self” is the message for the world? If the life of doubleness indicated by black double consciousness presents the world with an opportunity to hear both A-side and B-side, the dominant and the underbelly versions of the modern world, might this be a “message for the world”? DuBois is very clear in his linking of the dualities of double-consciousness, particularly when he wrote “The Gift of Black Folk: An Essay on the Contribution of the Negro to American Nationality.”\textsuperscript{15}

\textsuperscript{13} In Eric B & Rakim’s “Paid in Full” they sample James Brown’s Funky Drummer, just one of hundreds of examples in which hip hop sampled James Brown.

\textsuperscript{14} Stuart Hall is usefully cautious in his call to not fetishize the practice of difference (see Hall 1996).

\textsuperscript{15} See DuBois manuscript “The Gift of Black Folk: An Essay on the Contribution of the Negro to American Nationality” at the Beneicke Library, Yale University.
In this text it was DuBois’s goal is to “set forth…the effect which the Negro has had upon American life”, reading the “twoness” together to examine issues such as the “emancipation of democracy” in the United States.16

Similarly, Frantz Fanon in his essay “The Fact of Blackness” elaborates DuBois’s double consciousness so that the duality of American and Negro is expanded to include the category of the human versus blackness. Both Fanon and DuBois work through their double consciousness by pointing to the inconsistencies and false dichotomies found in the terms “American” and the “Colonizer”. Sylvia Wynter continues Fanon’s project, expanding his human (colonizer)/blackness predicament by outlining the problematic way in which the notion of the human has been inherited in the Western world, thus challenging the concept of the human in its entirety. Her focus on the biocentric notion of the human moves Fanon’s intervention to new intellectual terrain. When Wynter begins one of her interventions by excavating the initial conversation between Cenu Indians and Christopher Columbus, we immediately sense that

16 At our contemporary moment it is clear that Barack Obama’s “A More Perfect Union”16 intervention follows a Duboisian trajectory more than a century later. In this speech Obama intertwines the dominant and the ‘other’, expressing the clash of ‘races’, black and white that Glissant sees as productive of relation (2005 xii). Using his family as his example, Obama articulates the rage of the black experience and the fear and ignorance of the white experience to cleverly embody and represent the connect between the two. In “A More Perfect Union” speech, Obama both articulates and becomes the relation using a double consciousness to excavate the most intimate of connects between blackness and whiteness in the United States.
perceiving blackness as the antithesis of the human is a more contemporary creation of the biocentric man (Wynter, 1995). Martiniquan Édouard Glissant follows a similar trajectory of second sight thinking, searching, errantly he might say, for a relationship between the “twoness” of his Creole and French linguistic inheritances as well as his languages’ relationship amongst the world’s literatures. Thus, major thinkers of the African diaspora have continuously utilized a dualistic double consciousness approach that calls into question the absence of relation.

Glissant’s notion of ‘errant thinking’ allows for generous interpretations of our contemporary moment, making possible connections where we might have imagined mutual exclusivity. For Glissant, errant thinking is a non-linear method invested in what is relative, and interested in knowing the world via the encounter of the Other, but is not interested in “summing it up” or possess the world (Glissant, 1997: 21). This form of thinking engages the unknown, socially constructed difference but like the rhizome root “non-predatory root stock” errant thinking does not dominate an encounter with the Other. For Glissant rhizomatic thought takes up identity as a network of connections and relationships with the Other, the very opposite of nationalist thinking that attempts to homogenize under the terms of ‘the nation’ (Glissant, 1997:11).
According to the translator of *Poetics of Relation*, Betsy Wing, Glissant repeatedly “destabilizes standard” [xii] French language as he continually established contact with unforeseen relations made possible through his conception of culture as a totality. Glissant’s refusal to see anyone language in a linear or “monolingual” manner allows him to think through language using a form of thought that he claims is more in sync with the “chaos-world and the unforeseeable” boundary (Glissant, 1997). Again, Glissant’s intervention is made possible by a multi-consciousness that is racial/colonial as well as linguistic. Glissant’s continual destabilizations of standard French are not dissimilar to the work of the B-side remix, in that remixes help make ambivalent the ‘authority’ of the A-side commercial single just as Kréyol, Creole and nation language free the masses from the authoritative and restrictive not-descriptive-enough colonial language. Thus, in this dissertation, errant thinking becomes a strategy for reading sonic texts, allowing for a non-dominating engagement with the numerous possibilities of sound. Across a number of sonic texts, an errant thinking textual reading practice allows for the emergence of a new set of relations between sound-making practices and individuals, one that does not default into a consumer/commodity relationship.

**Sound Cultures**

By leaning on the works of DuBois, Fanon, Wynter and Glissant *Remixing Relationality* begins from what Cornél West has coined a “politics of difference” (West, 1990). West calls for an
intellectual agency interested in examining the particularities of social difference(s) so as to formulate “discursive and institutional networks” interested in demystifying existing power structures and establishing more open and multidimensional positions that better relate to the complexities of our world (p.29). Clearly, by beginning with the B-side as a conceptual grid of the sonic afrodiaspora, this dissertation is a work committed to opening other avenues of thought by which to consider our black life in the Western world. While Glissant’s units of analysis range from language to society, *Remixing Relationality* is deeply invested in the sound cultures inherited from the African Diaspora found in Canada. Sound cultures is an umbrella term used to capture the various sonic utilizations, experimentations, utterances and articulations found, and at times encoded, within Afrodiasporic sound experiments and practices. Under this umbrella we find the postmodernist adventures of turntablists, the science of the breakbeat, the sound experiments of Jamaican dub, and the linguistic maneuvers of ‘dread talk’.

The sonic is the chosen unit of analysis for three reasons. The sonic is, first, immaterial and anticipatory. It is a living archive, in which deterritorialized afrosonic practices document life. Songs, chants, linguistic innovations and sound-making activities historize and capture a structure of feeling for the enslaved individual denied access to the scribal traditions that dominated Europe. The sonic is an immaterial mode of production whose immateriality allows it
a fluidity and malleability through which to document social change before the consequences of such a change are material (Attali, 1985). In Jacque Attali’s estimation, sound and various sonic creations actually anticipate social change, allowing us to hear the future before any form of material representation is possible. For example, if we listen to the uptempo happy horns of Jamaican Ska from 1958 onwards, we can hear the euphoric anticipation of a pre-independent Jamaican society, long before a national anthem or flag were sung or flown (Dalton, 2004; Bradley, 2000). By the time Jamaica’s economy had slowed in growth and the reality of continued dependence became clear during Prime Minister Michael Manley’s years, the music slowed down to a crawl, a ‘Rocksteady’ sound emerged, almost void of the horns from an earlier period (Bradley, 2000).

Secondly, the non-empirical space of the sonic offers more than anticipatory revelations of the future, it also allows for a mixture of components, sounds and ideologies in temporal formations. The mix is the inventive terrain of the club disc jockey, a space of impermanence that houses an aesthetic that sheds light on Afrodisporic experiences in the west. The idea of the mix is to bring two or more, previously separate sonic entities together for a harmonious sonic union, albeit a temporary existence. While entertaining dancing party patrons the disc jockey works to ensure a continuous flow of music as to keep people dancing. This tactic involves tempo shifts,
sonic layering, pitch manipulation and velocity consciousness to bring two opposed sounds into a tempo and temporal union. DJ Spooky calls this a “temporal space of representation”, a space that can appear and disappear before written word can document the DJs unsponsored transaction (Baker, 1984; Miller, 2004). Aesthetically, the mix is a perfect metaphor to understand the continual collisions between Western Europe and the African diaspora so that we might think through how two very different societies, operating at different velocities, accentuating different sounds, syncopate and mix at specific moments.

If we follow the trajectory of Sylvia Wynter we come to an understanding of the soundscape of Jamaican dancehall as the creation of “an aesthetic space” (Wynter in Maysles, 2002) in which patrons experience what I would call an outernational articulation of elsewhereness where the body escapes from the hegemony and racial oppression of the moment, in short, a temporal freedom. Similar to Baker’s “blues matrix” (1984) or Chude-Sokei’s “sound/culture nexus” (Chude-Sokei, 1994) this space of sound, mentioned earlier is where we find the “non-linear” free association, “non-sequencial mediation” of the blues (Baker, 1984:05), the genre-bending, the meta-level cognition of the remix and the subaltern “language” of dub that speaks of cultural memory.
The formulations of sound posited by Miller, Wynter, Chude-Sokei and Baker point to the ways in which the sonic [in]forms notions of space and geography. If we turn to the work of Clyde Woods the connection between afrosonic life and the production of geographic knowledge becomes clear. For Woods, the Blues tradition is a site of geographic knowledge production where connection to the plantation and the formalization of neo-liberalism are recurring disturbances. The Blues according to Woods, addresses a social-spatial dynamic of marginalized African Americans producing a measure of time/space that speaks intimately of the strictures of plantation and neocolonial times (Woods, 2007). By highlighting the various analogic, symbolic, dialectical, polyphonic and intertextual modes of reasoning embedded within the Blues tradition, Woods excavates alternative knowledge production and ‘othered’ modes of reasoning that may aid the disciplinary crisis across academia.

The sonic as a unit of analysis is critical to capturing Afrodiasporic life as it is, as Weheliye explains, the “principal modality” by which Afrodiasporic cultures have been expressed and documented (Weheliye, 2005). Sound became an (unintentional) archive where the daily pains and pleasures of Afrodiasporic life were expressed and archived in song—this might explain why Queen Victoria cried as she heard the Jubilee Singers (Dubois p.2). Leroi Jones’ attentive study of work songs to primitive and classic blues, to ragtime and jazz meticulously
demonstrates how the music captured the social and psychological developments of African Americans beyond the institution of slavery (Jones, 2002 (1963)).

Similarly, if we turn to Negro spirituals such as “Swing Low Sweet Chariot” or “Go Down Low Moses” the strategic uses of sound in the African diaspora become clear. Beyond capturing pain and pleasure, the sonic archive of the African diaspora housed specific instructions and directions to freedom in Canada. One could say enslaved Africans could hear freedom in the sonic roadmaps to the sky in the directions to follow the North Star, long before they crossed the Mason-Dixon line. The blow of the abeng in Jamaica’s cockpit country or the sounds of the drum in the Colombian hinterland were both significant sounding-making procedures that exceeded what the Western world calls entertainment. Thus, to think through the sonic as a unit of analysis is to search for the underlying, strategic use of sound, understanding it as a living archive whose opacity and encodedness both ensures documentation and (in the most idealistic of worlds) prevents infiltration.

The final reason why the sonic is a useful analytical unit is because it is deterritorialized, easily exceeding the national boundaries instituted by European colonialism. The sonic holds a healthy disrespect for socially constructed boundaries such as race, documenting, yet operating in excess
of, the strictures and structures of a Western world system installed by Europe. Various musics, especially from the Caribbean, express a deterritorialized sentiment in which cross border creative fertilization occur and musics such as salsa are enhanced through experiences in New York (Flores, 2005). In this sense, music allows us to think beyond segregated thought patterns, to understand how the relationships can be created out of differences, as in the case of Salsa, between New York and Puerto Rico or the case of Reggaeton between Puerto Rico and Jamaica. Juan Flores understands Salsa as a “stylistic remittance” in the Caribbean diaspora, a form of non-hegemonic transnationalism from below reminding us of the kinds of transformations witnessed in Ska music once it reached London, England. After the south London/Brixton riots of 1976-1977, the emergence of two tone interracial Ska bands like the Specials or English Beat demonstrated the transnational potential of the sonic (Heathcott, 2003). Indeed, if we follow the diasporic route of Ska, as Joseph Heathcott (2003) attempted, we notice a continuous pattern of Ska’s negotiations with social difference. In Jamaica, when Chinese-Jamaican performer Byron-Lee took up Ska music, the class barriers that barred ‘poor people’s music’ from commercial radio play were temporarily overcome. Similarly, the interracial twotone Ska band moved beyond the social construct of race to lay claim to a diasporic and socially disruptive sound.
Working with and through the sonic makes clear the ways in which double consciousness is operationalized in the Afro-diaspora. In this dissertation I demonstrate how the sonic presents us with a paradigm of relationality that move us beyond a euro-inherited dichotomous worldview, creating connections through differences. Through a double consciousness disposition, the sonic materials of the African diaspora, when taken as a theoretical point of departure, facilitate our arrival at a perspective that seeks relationships that connect in the face of diversity. The disposition of sound in the African diaspora is one that is comfortable with the heterogeneous realities of our present world, presenting us with tools to re-examine about life in the Western world. This relational negotiation stems from the position of the African in the Western world, not merely in an American/Negro binary as DuBois showed, but also in a Human/non-Human relationship, a relation that, as we’ve seen through Wynter’s identification of the Cenu Indians, far exceeds an African American paradigm. By moving through the afro-sonic matter in Canada, and refusing to disentangle these projects from the Caribbean and the United States, this dissertation interrupts the normalized ways in which the African diaspora in Canada are imagined as secondary, non-existent or reactionary. Through hip hop, dub, remix culture and the various linguistic adventures of nation language, the afro sonic diaspora contains indigenous tools for dealing with difference. Leroi Jones’ “changing same” conceptualization is a difference management system in which ‘playing the changes’ forms the crux of a double consciousness
worldview distinct from prevailing binaristic ideology. Thus, fundamentally, this dissertation examines the productive friction and fiction of thinking through Afrodiasporic engagements with sonic matter.

The Beginning

I begin my analysis from a space, both literal and figurative, between sound technologies and the Afrodiasporic individual, what has been called sonic afro-modernity (Weheliye, 2005). Seminal to any critical sonic adventure is a consideration of the turntable as an electronic sound technology that has been called upon to ‘do more’\textsuperscript{17} by Afrodiasporic populations. Hip Hop DJs and Turntablists have transformed the turntable into an instrument that eventually outsold the guitar as America’s most purchased instrument. In his challenge of the turntable as an instrument, Charles Mudede, understands the turntable to be making metamusic; his assertions are, at least to me, limited (Mudede, 2003). In contrast, Alexander Weheliye rightly documents the invention of the phonograph as a critical juncture because it produced a disjuncture between

\textsuperscript{17} If we look at the innovations of the hip hop DJ, beginning with the invention of the scratch, what becomes clear is that the turntable is being asked to not just play music but also invent new sounds. Thus, turntables are refashioned to do music more than simply play music from a vinyl recording. This is fully explored in chapter 2.
sound and source, or what he calls sonic afromodernity (Weheliye, 2005). With the playing of
the record, the listener does not have an immediate visual presence with which to assign
authorship, making the music more ‘ephemeral’ according to Weheliye. Following this, I am
suggesting that in the space between the sound technology and the song exists the disc jockey, a
technician of the sonic, who produces sonic geographies of relationality and thus new or
different socio-political narratives.

The disc jockey has been at the centre of sonic Afro-modernity working diligently to express life
in a similar tone as the ‘twoness’ forced upon Afrodiasporic individuals in the West. The DJ
exists between the turntables and the sound, revamping the potentialities of the sound
technology, making the turntable an instrument through innovative scratching techniques. The
turntable’s transformation into an instrument is similar to impoverished Afro-Trinidadians’
utilization of disregarded oil pans, in that both make modernity’s excess into instruments of
national stature. If we look to the Cruzan context we will again find Quelbe music turned into a
national treasure, created through the use of excess household products.

These innovative refashionings of vinyl records, turntables, oil drums, mufflers, folks, and other
consumed and discarded items highlight a sensibility of how Afrodiasporic individuals relate to
notions of freedom, autonomy, technology, consumption and sound. These sonic innovations are also interventions into how we might imagine what it means to be modern, beyond simply the idea of consumption. Using a technique of mixing two records and remixing previously existing sonic material the DJ is the ‘mechanism’ by which the “negro’s message” for the world might be heard. The DJ engages both sides of the record deciding which side to ‘make audible’ for the public, but is also privy to the B-side, the excess of the record where elaborations such as remixing exist, revising or making ambivalent the ‘originality’ of the (dominant) A-side.

Relationality in the title of this work refers to the interconnection between things, more specifically, the relationship between interconnected ideas, places, peoples and theories. Other definitions of relationality such as Douglas Strum’s, focus on the dialectic between alienation and solidarity (Sturm, 1998). Strum focuses his notion of relationality around the idea of justice as solidarity, deeply rooted in a social justice perspective for as he asserts, “each of us…is a living distillation of generations of interaction (09).” Instead of glossing over the contingencies and differences that constitute who we are, this dissertation is focused on the relationships and interconnection of ideas and peoples that circulate as part of the African Diaspora.
Remixing Relationality is equally indebted to both the hip hop disc jockey and the pioneering works of both Paul Gilroy and the late Edward Said. These individuals, in their respective fields, whether it has been vinyl manipulation, literary deconstruction or the inauguration of the Black Atlantic as unit of analysis, have demonstrated the interconnectedness of things previously imagined as separate. This is the work of relationality—to connect and relate. As Glissant has eloquently articulated, relational thinking is a method of understanding our current social world that refuses to accept as natural the binaries and dichotomies that circumscribe western life. The most visible example of the way in which disconnection, rather than interconnection dominates our present is to look at the concept of ‘nation’. As a “community of sentiment” or an “imagined community” (Anderson, 1983), nations exclude at the same time that they include. Prior to the rise of diaspora as a scholarly unit of analysis, the nation as a concept held strict geographic boundaries that encouraged one to mutually exclusively conceive of the Germanic tribes, the Normans and the Franks.

Interestingly, the increasing popularity of diaspora studies provides tools for us to think about the connections between ideas, ‘races’ and countries. Importantly, it has been diasporic individuals such as the Martiniquian Glissant or Jamaican-American DJ Kool Herc that have operated through the relational thinking inherent in double consciousness. These two figures, Glissant
through language and Kool Herc through the creation of the breakbeat, work through a construction of a series of relations to present us with another way in which to organize both our thoughts and our social world.

I turn to DJ Kool Herc to explain how Afrosonic adventures such as hip hop DJs make connections central to their practices, exemplifying a dynamic Afro sonic politics of difference. There are two distinct ways in which the DJ conducts itself as a relational entity: first, in mixing different tracks the DJ actively seeks out similar instrumentation, sounds and song structure and then matches the tempo of two different tracks to create a harmonious\(^\text{18}\) sonic union. The act of mixing and remixing as cultivated in house music and by club DJs is the clearest way in which the DJ exemplifies a relational politics. The second way in which DJs foreground relationality as an approach is in relating to their audiences and acting as a ‘soul controller’, that is as a participant in the bodily control of dancing individuals (Broughton & Frank, 1999). The DJ either finds tracks that match the mood of the audience by reading the crowd or the DJ participates in a call and response, playing music so as to incite a response or an increase in energy level of the audience. This approach does not occur in the Greek tragedy, the classical

\(^{18}\) In this context harmonious means the laying of hi-hats over other hi-hats and the matching of downbeats of both tracks to create a relationship between the two records in which sonic differences are temporarily unified.
piano performance or in other arenas where an audience exists. In essence, the DJ must find a relationship between the music they play and the people who dance to it; there is no detached, presumed autonomy on the part of the DJ, nor is there a desire for objectivity. Instead, there is reliance on relational rather than rational thought.

Kool Herc’s initial experiences that formed the groundwork for hip hop culture, what he called the “merry go-round” exemplifies the ways in which DJs operate through a relational politics. Herc observed that his patrons in the early 1970s would wait for the bridge or the breakdown of a song before energetically dancing to the ‘funkiest’ part of the song. Instead of playing the entire song, Herc—utilizing a “cut n’ mix” mentality identified by Hebdige (1987)—moved the needle to the breakdown segment of the vinyl record (Chang, 2005). Rather than allow his creativity to be subdued by the lengthy not-so-funky parts of the song, Herc interrupted the record and
revamped its use value\textsuperscript{19} so as to create a song that was more in tune with the desires of the Break Boys\textsuperscript{20}. Herc explains:

I cut off all anticipation and played the beats. I'd find out where the break in the record was at and prolong it and people would love it. So I was giving them their own taste and beat percussion wise.\textsuperscript{21}

Herc developed the breakbeat, which became the foundation upon which hip hop music and drum and bass have been built. The breakbeat signifies the moment in which the structures of the sonic, the participatory ethos facilitates a remapping of an entity no longer deemed finished. Democracy and freedom, as designed by the west, lose their relevance, as the former commodity (the Afrodisaporic individual) exceeds the format of the technological commodity (the record). In this moment when new subjectivities are made possible, where the former commodity does not enter a new stage of unfreedom as a consumer, the DJ arrives at a definition of freedom as a

\textsuperscript{19} I use ‘use value’ here, clearly indebted to Marxism, but am particularly interested in using this term outside of its economic roots. Use value traditional has meant “the distinction between the usefulness of a commodity produced within an economy” (Jary & Jary, 2000). The version of use value utilized in this work is about the value of creativity versus the practice of consumption. Classical Marxist language of the commodity is versioned here, refusing a totalizing conception of the term and elaborating a generous interpretation of the term to articulate the creative adventures of the economically marginalized.

\textsuperscript{20} Break Boys were youth that decided only to dance to the breakdown or the bridge of a song. B-Boys is the abbreviated term commonly used within hip hop culture, outside of the culture these youth are called break dancers.

creator, a creative collaborator in the subjective meaning of the record. A new definition of
democracy lay inside the breakbeat, where participation is not hegemonically dictated through
the ballot, but instead the DJ participates in the creative possibilities of both their subjectivity
and the properties of the prepackaged overdetermined entity of capitalism.

Afrosonic relational politics are also explicitly exemplified by the modern day hip hop emcee, a
progeny of the DJ set. In the early years of hip hop, before the development of the modern day
Rapper, there was a master of ceremony\textsuperscript{22}. This job of the emcee was to motivate the crowd to
keep on dancing. The emcee used various lyrical tactics, like short rhyming couplets, to
announce to the audience the skill of the DJ or the supremacy of the soundsystem. The emcee
had to navigate the record the DJ played and had to determine how to enhance the mood of the
dancing audience. If the audience was looking a little tired or somewhat disengaged, the emcee
might encourage them to keep up or increase anticipation of the next track. The emcee was, and
continues to be, an expert of intertextual references, finding a connection or forging a link
between things, especially between things that cannot be visually captured at that moment.

\textsuperscript{22} Master of ceremony is commonly referred to as an acronym M.C. or spelt as emcee.
The emcee took these relational actions from behind the DJ booth into the recording studio and self-fashioned a sonically intricate relational and deeply intertextual lyrical repertoire. Today, both the Rapper and the Emcee engage in lyrical episodes that exemplify how relationality sonically operates in the Afrodiaspora. The Emcee and the Rapper are distinguished by their affiliation with hip hop culture. The Rapper is seen as being somewhat disconnected from the culture and solely engaged in rhyming rather than ‘moving the crowd’. Through allusion, pun, metonymic elision, repetition, double entendres and intentional slippages, the emcee finds and forges relationships between words and ideas. Two classic examples come to mind where the redefinition of words and concepts are made possible via relational means. The word emcee, originally meaning master of ceremony and still used as such, was revised by the highly respected Emcee, Rakim Allah of the 1980s group Eric B and Rakim. The title emcee, abbreviated in hip hop culture as the initials mc, was defined by Rakim to mean “move the crowd”. This move doubly played in the word emcee, first by using the abbreviated initials m.c. Rakim made the abbreviation an acronym and secondly, Rakim defined its terms in relation to the dancing audience found at a hip hop jam.

A relational politics is at play in Rakim’s lyrical innovation, where the very conditions of existence of the title emcee relies on, and is related to, the performer’s audience. There is no
attempt to disconnect or maintain boundaries between the performer and audience. The abbreviation made acronym gestures at the centrality of signifyin(g) within the politics of relational representation.\textsuperscript{23} Rakim’s innovation keeps the audience and emcee in close ideological and emotional proximity. In fact, following Rakim’s position—an Emcees’ prowess is evident when s/he successfully engages in a call and response with the audience; thus a master of ceremony has mastered the call and response.

Similarly, if we look to KRS-1’s “the Sound of the Police” we are treated to a metonymic elision that fosters a more critical understanding or analysis of machinations of over policing. KRS-1 repeats the word officer eight times until word slippage occurs and overseer begins to sound like officer. KRS-1 then asks us to check the similarity and he proceeds to list the connections between the overseers on a plantation and the operation of the police in black communities or impoverished neighbourhoods. KRS-1 deconstructs:

overseer, overseer, overseer, overseer, (x2)

Yeah officer from overseer,

You need a little clarity?

\textsuperscript{23} Here I use Henry Louis Gates definition (1988). Gates defines signifyin(g) as an Afro-American rhetorical strategy, a “double-voicedness” involving formal revision and intertextual relations that plays on the chain of signifiers and the meanings attached to words (pp.51/52).
Steeped in the oral inheritance of African-American vernacular practices, KRS-1 practices a poetics of relationality, seeking interconnections rather than thinking the police and the overseer as separate and mutually exclusive entities. If we revisit Tricia Rose’s pioneering work in 1994, we will find an extensively detailed “illustration of the relationship between rap music as a musical text and as a communal African American social discourse” (Rose, 1994). The examples cited above by Rakim and KRS-1 are reflections, rather than aberrations, of an African American social discourse in which a politics of relationality, rooted in a Duboisian double consciousness, is a salient feature.

Rakim and KRS-1, two of the most important and widely respected American hip hop Emcees, exemplify the intricacies of Afrosonic relationality. In Rakim’s emcee innovation we become attuned to the difference between Rappers and Emcees, by having a clear connection between the emcee and the audience s/he is to motivate or ‘move’ the crowd. It was KRS-1 who actually took Rakim’s notion further by making clear the difference between an emcee and a rapper.25 This

distinction has kept the hip hopper critical of the commericalization of hip hop that often separates the emcee from the rapper and party goers. KRS-1’s officer-overseer connection heightens the consciousness of listeners to the ways in which overpolicing effects impoverished communities. Relationality as a concept and tactic allows for a heightened consciousness that demystifies the present-day machinations of Western capitalist life.

One final example of relationality at work in the world of hip hop culture is the intertextual referencing practices contemporary Emcees and Rappers use in their lyrics. Intertextuality refers to the action of referencing different ideas, times, texts or genres into a momentary event. In hip hop lyricism intertextuality operates just as a footnote or citation operates in an academic paper; it lends credence, respect and authority to the idea or concept that is being espoused. At times the intertextual reference ideas from elsewhere repeat or rephrase words from other songs that are highly respected or the intertextual reference provides a vivid metaphorical description of the emcee’s lyrical dexterity and relational politics. For example, in Kanye West’s “Jesus Walks” he performs a consciousness-raising intertextual reference. Kanye suggests:

“we ain’t goin’ nowhere but got suits ‘n cases.”

Geographer David Harvey might classify this line as a form of analogic reasoning. For Harvey analogic reasoning is a mode of thinking that seeks connections, pushing metaphors, and illuminating underlying unities in disparate phenomena. To borrow from Harvey, West’s lyric “seeks analogies to illuminate phenomena in one area by examination of another” (Harvey, 2001: 229). Interestingly, as Harvey calls for analogic reasoning to save the discipline of geography, we are reminded of Glissant’s poetics of relation, and the productive work of rhizomatic thought. If we return to Erik Davis’ notion of the Black Electronic and African polyrhythmic/poly metric sound structures, West’s intertextual stylings become clear.

Kanye West displays his heightened double consciousness by engaging in a triple entendre commenting on the prison industrial complex, its intimate relations to young black men and the aesthetics of upward mobility. On a number of levels, West utilizes metaphors, puns and a metonym to connect a number of ideas to get his point across, a clear mastery of, and an Eshu-like tricksterization of the English language. West demonstrates how African polyrhythmic orientations navigate sites of multiple sound/meaning, refusing to isolate or dominate. His deeply encoded diction allows for the oscillation of numerous meanings, hinting at a B-ing whose pluri-consciousness are allowed to intermingle unsuppressed.

27 Eshu or Esu is the trickster who sits at the crossroad in Yoruban-based religious worldviews such as Santeria.
West’s reference to suits and cases suggest on a surface level he is referring to a particular aesthetic arrangement; a business suit and a briefcase. The briefcase and the suit are standard business world attire, worn by business people and are considered to be a sign of, if not, wealth, at least the veneer of social progress or class mobility. West dispels this idea with the preceding double negative, “we ain’t goin’ nowhere” clearly speaking of a lack of social mobility. In referring to suits, again the surface level reading suggests West is referring to clothing, as West is infamous for his love of clothing and shopping. Once we deduce West’s allusion to a lack of social mobility, we infer that suits, although it sits next to cases in this sentence is referring to lawsuits, and court cases—a significant source of social immobility. West’s play on words are layered beneath two abbreviations of lawsuit and court case. In this sentence suits and cases are metaphorical elisions that signify on the aesthetics of social mobility and allude to the machinations of the prison industrial complex. The triple entendre in this lyric is that “suits ‘n cases” refers not to suitcases but rather to social mobility, the predatory prison industrial complex and politics of African-American conspicuous consumption.

Cleverly, in order for this lyric to make any sense Kanye West draws a number of relationships between aesthetic signification, the prison industrial complex, social mobility and the plight of
the African American. West, using vernacular practices indebted to the African American experience, presents us with a relationship-seeking pattern of thought that connects a number of facets of Afro diasporic life while remaining opaque in a manner Glissant would appreciate. West accomplishes what Avtar Brah calls “analytical frames capable of addressing multiple intersecting axes of differentiation” in her push for “theoretical creolizations” (Brah, 1996). West’s “analytical frame” or “analogic reasoning” is a relational politics that engages in the instability of meaning, a notion delineated through his experiences of being both Black and American. There is a double consciousness at work here as West relies on both metaphors and puns from the EuroAmerican literary tradition as well as the signifyin(g) practices of African American life. West’s deeply encoded rhyme is the epitome of a politics of relationality that works through and with the oral inheritances of the Afro diaspora. The following chapters continue West’s lead by detailing how, using various techniques and strategies of sound, the African diaspora presents us with notions of how difference and similarity might be lived and dealt with via the sonic within the context of the western world.

CHAPTER BREAKDOWN

Chapter 1, entitled “Versioning Black Canada—Syncopating Temporalities in Black Canadas”
takes up Paul Gilroy’s suggestion that Afro-diasporic groups live in a “syncopated temporality” by exploring the various Afro-diasporic communities in Canada (Gilroy, 1993a: 281; 1996). Gilroy is interested in capturing the ways in which Afro-diasporic individuals are part of a “different rhythm of living and being” (ibid.). I use this notion of a syncopated temporality to survey the various expressions and experiences of Afro-diasporic peoples in Canada. The chapter pivots on the “version” as a sonic tool that illuminates the various forms of blackness that make the African diaspora in Canada a layered and highly differentiated experience. The chapter posits that Black Canada is a temporal subject position that various Caribbean, African American and Continental African people walk into and step out of, offering a syncopated way in which blackness operates in Canada. I suggest Black Canada can be understood as Black Canadas because it features a variety of cultural and ethnic mixtures that accentuate specific issues and concerns and exist at certain moments.

The second chapter, entitled “Turning the Tables: “A Gift from the ‘New World’ to the Old World” focuses on turntablism as an example of the sonic operation of a participatory ethos. The chapter explores what ideas, histories or structures have made possible the art of turntablism and asks how this might activity might productively disrupt or re-arrange our present systems of thought. The chapter also asks: What does turntablism tell us about our current conceptual
itineraries around culture, Afro-diasporic sound, the relationship between human and machine and the connection of different entities? The idea of participating in the sonic matter, evident in the innovations of the turntablist is further explored to advance further discussions around the meaning and problem of freedom within Western modernity.

Chapter 3, “Dubbing the Remix and its Uses” explores remixing, remix culture and its Jamaican ancestor, dub music. Art installations, panel discussions, soft drinks and running shoes are some of the arenas where remixing (and discussions around it) can be found in today’s society. The chapter highlights the disruption that remixing and remix culture has had on consumer culture while utilizing the concept of remixing to postulate the potentiality of relational thinking through the remix. Dub music is illuminated and detailed as remix culture’s precursor and allows for an interrogation of the ideas that make remixing possible. This chapter captures echoes and reverberations of versioning and the ‘cut n’ mix’ mentality, examining the connections between these sonic interventions and thought processes related to the African polyrhythmic practices of sound making.

The fourth chapter of the dissertation entitled “Connect the T.Dots-Remix Multiculturalism” details how Canadian hip hop music can operate as an conduit to espouse an organic form of
multiculturalism that exists beyond state control. The chapter takes up the lexical intervention of
the word T.dot, a vernacular of hip hop origins, used to describe the city of Toronto. The chapter
builds on the notion that sonically, political interventions are possible within the terrain of state-
sponsored multiculturalism.

Chapter five, “Reppin’ ‘Home’ in the T-Dot” examines the ways in which constructions of home
in the African diaspora are sonically arranged and deployed in Toronto. The instability of such
an arrangement, of a ‘home’ is both contested and solidified by independently produced hip hop
and dub poetry by Afro Caribbean youth of the 1.5 and later generations. Sonically, spatially and
linguistically, the chapter details the various means by which, via hip hop music, as a temporal
home is created in diaspora for Black Canadian youth by utilizing social difference as an entry
point into the politics of ‘otherization’. The chapter brings together the relationships that might
exist between hip hop’s representational practices an a cultural studies approach to representation
expressed through the works of Sut Jhally, Stuart Hall and Paul Gilroy.

In the conclusion, entitled “Sonic Tech_knowledgies of Freedom, Or Beyond ‘Biocentric
Man’. A Sylvia Wynter Remix” I begin from Fred Moten’s critical intervention explored in his
2003 work In the Break: The Aesthetics of the Black Radical Tradition. Moten’s analysis of the
commodity who speaks becomes the starting point for a reconsideration of the category of the human via the kinds of interventionalist practices of the sonic Afrodiaspora (Moten 2003). This chapter is concerned with exploring the concept of black technologies offered by Kodwo Eshun (Eshun 1998) and positing an important interface between black folks as former commodities and the sonic technologies of today utilized by DJs and recording artists. I suggest the work of the former commodity’s utilization of sonic technologies such as the turntable operate through a conception of the human that exceeds our current fashioning of humanness.
Chapter 1

Versioning Black Canada—Syncopating Temporalities in Black Canadas

Order is, at one and the same time, that which is given in things as their inner law the hidden network that determine the way they confront one another, and also which has no existence except in the grid created by a glance, an examination, a language; and it is only in the blank spaces of this grid that order manifests itself in depth as though already there, waiting in silence for the moment of its expression (Foucault, 1970: xxi)

Black Canada does not exist, at least not in a singular homogenous form. Black Canadians exist and Blacks in Canada exist; yet Afro-diasporic peoples living in Canada fail to satisfy the narrow criteria of a ‘nation’. A shared language, culture or politic, or even a certain kind of ideological stability, are some of the criteria by which one defines a nation. From Hayti in 1804 to post-911 Canada, ‘nation’ as an ideological tool has consistently failed to capture the varied experiences of black diasporic populations. This is to say that a bounded and unified nation/territory cannot account for the heterogeneity of black histories and contemporary experiences. Within this
limited understanding of nation, Black Canada exists most fervently as a mechanism of ‘order’, a rhetorical and ideological strategy utilized by various camps of scholars, activists and politicians as needed. Black Canada acts as a marker (that can only be temporal) that attempts to capture a heterogeneous Blackness, for the purposes of conceptualizing, defending and mobilizing Black peoples in Canada. Significantly, the work Black Canada does is to ‘order’ the heterogeneities of Blackness in Canada into a useful package capable of navigating a world more comfortable with sameness rather than difference. Black Canada abides by the terms of nation which necessarily obscures the very transnational, multi-local ways in which Black people live in, beyond and between nation as a concept and nation as a reality.

Methodology

In order to begin thinking about the paradigmatic possibilities of Afro diasporic sound and sound-making practices a variety of texts and performances are examined in this dissertation. I focus on specific conduits and outcomes of sound and sound cultures produced in and through the black diaspora: dub, remixing, versioning, turntablism, and hip hop’s intertextual lyrical innovations are examined throughout the following chapters. These sonic entities and practices posit and perform inclusive and ethical relationships to the foundational tenets of western modernity. These Afro diasporic musics and sound-making practices operate as obscured
knowledge systems producing ways of knowing and living that elaborate a participatory way of negotiating and creating meaning. Importantly, the sonic practices and materials examined throughout this dissertation are understood as intellectual resources that are not part of western society’s empirical arrangements, and are thus not connected to the reproduction of western society.

In order to understand a living and operationalized notion of the participatory ethos, this dissertation examines the DJ’s sonic ingenuity as well as the thought processes that make possible DJ mixing techniques. DJs such as Grandmaster Flash, DJ Dopey, DJ Spooky and music producers such as Jamaica’s King Tubby are key innovators that illuminate the participatory facets of Afro sonic modernity that are central to imagining other versions of our present. The work of the DJ allows us to uncover and operationalize ideas of creative co-authorship when thinking about the relationship between humans, sound and technology.

Hip hop music, videos and live performances are all central to demonstrating a participatory ethos that structure Afro-diasporic peoples’ continued pursuits of freedom. Through interviews, poems, music videos, hip hop music and culture is excavated for its conversations with western notions of nation, multiculturalism, freedom and social inclusion. These texts are read not only
for their unique properties but also for their discursive interventions into our present order of knowledge. Usefully, Paul Gilroy reads black expressive forms as unsteadily positioned both inside and outside of the “conventions, assumptions and aesthetic rules” of modernity (Gilroy, 1993:73). Therefore, the above-mentioned musics, musical practices and performances are analyzed as markers of an Afrodisporic subjectivity that structure participatory relationships with ideas and items assumed to be final or exclusive. The sonic data in this dissertation are read and mobilized as tools capable of reimagining how to make ideals such as freedom a possibility for all humans.

Toronto Poet and Emcee Wendy ‘Motion’ Brathwaite, and the linguistic practices of Rastafarianism move the analysis along, beyond music to look at other oral and sonic features of the participatory ethos. Motion’s poem “Connect the Tdots” and what has been called ‘Dread Talk’, the language of Rastafarianism, demonstrate how meaning making is attempted by Afrodisporic oral innovations within the anti-black machinations of western society. Both of these examples are activities and ideas structured by relational understandings of our governing codes and languages, demonstrating an interest in working with the English language to produce liveable discursive spaces for Afrodisporic peoples.
Outside of both music and orality, I utilize a publically displayed store sign in Toronto to demonstrate what remixing might look like once extrapolated from its musical origins. The sign appears to abide by a cut ‘n mix logic, refusing rigid ethnic categorization and seeking relations between disparate spaces and ideas. In addition to the store sign, internet message boards postings are examined by music fans and youth as they attempt to make sense of and seek support for their dislocation from an ancestral homeland. The two message boards are understood as inventive spaces that highlight the intersection of cyberpublics and diasporic public spheres, a generative space where anonymity and the politics of representation illuminate the intricacies of Afro diasporic life.

**Blackness in Canada and Black Canadas**

Blackness in Canada sits at the intersection of the hegemonic construction of the nation, the reality of a doubly diasporized peoples and the necessity of rhetorical and ideological mechanisms of mobilization. The nation, as constructed by Europe, is an organizing tool that constructs homogeneity out of social difference. Diasporas continually disrupt the idea of the nation, importing and strategically utilizing resources from elsewhere to inform one’s present situation. Black Canada is an idea that rests on an imaginary unity, taking its cues from the European conception of nation. The various black diasporas that call Canada home continually
challenge the assumed unity of nation, and the possibility of unity based on the social
collection of race. It is the most recent east African diasporas in Canada that have reinserted
clanship, lineage and the emphasis of ethnic particularity over blackness and nationality (think
Oromos) than that the other kinds of relations between Afrodisporic populations are becoming
plausible. Because Black Canada encompasses an ideal of unity inherited from the idea of the
nation, the other realities of black diasporas—a diversity of languages, religions and customs
continually disrupt and disorder the unifying mechanisms attempted by the idea of Black
Canada. It is relational (and therefore generous) notions of self that diverse (oftentimes
reinforced by violent and maliciously discriminatory social practices) Afrodisporic populations
find ways in which to secure Blackness as a space of subjecheidhood.

Black Canada is a homogenous assumption; whereas the idea of Black Canadas may more
accurately capture the realities of Afrodisporic people in Canada, Black Canada is a political
statement meant to do a particular kind of work. From Nova Scotians to Somali, the varieties of
Black people in Canada consistently disrupt the order and ordering of the idea of Black Canada.
To lump a Somali, Ghanaian or Nigerian person living in Canada into the category of Black
Canadian is to produce a certain kind of violence, which not only reproduces colonial attempts at
erasing the African and human subjecheidivities of enslaved peoples, but also over-invests in the all-
encompassing capturability of our present language. The underlying erroneous assumption is that the words and concepts inherited from Europe possess the ability to accurately capture the worldviews of non-European populations. However, although Black Canada as an idea has its short-comings, we cannot simply throw it out the window. Politically, from within, Black Canada as an idea has served as weaponry in important battles. Importantly though, to arrive at a more clear understanding of Blacks in Canada a lexical shift is demanded. This shift might take the form of a flexible and plural notion of Black Canadas, an idea that encompasses flux, that reflects the lived reality of being Black in Canada and connects the varieties of Black folk who comprise the Black diaspora.

While it has been argued that Blacks in Canada are connected through the experience of racism (Henry, 1981; Winks, 1971), racism does not overdetermine nor can it account for the constitutive differences amongst Black peoples in Canada. The geopolitics of space, the colonial residue of class and the routes of diaspora fragment and diversify of Afro diasporic populations in Canada, demanding we reconcile our reality to better conceptualize our existence. With this in mind I mobilize the language of diaspora, not only to help us get past “the nation thing” (Walcott, 2003) but to also capture the tensions of home and there, stasis and movement and utilize the potential interventional work that a diasporic sensibility can foster. Therefore, the term
Afrodiasporic is utilized to describe various Black peoples in Canada as it gestures towards the fracture and dispersement that characterizes much of the Black populations in Canada, but does not leave out Africa as an important sign of inheritance and powerful stimuli of the imagination (Tettey, 2005). Importantly, diasporic identities are, as Stuart Hall reminds us, “those which are constantly producing and reproducing themselves anew, through transformation and difference” (Hall, 1990: 235).

“Afrodiasporic Canadian” as a concept captures the geopolitics of space, the terror of colonialism and the movement of Africans to and within the west since the late 1500s; it is not just a response to racism. The lexical and conceptual shift I take up, from Black to Afrodiáspric, is interested in capturing the politics of space, the continuing terrorism of neocolonialism and the innovative routework of Afrodiasporic populations. The reality of our postmodern present is one that has been captured by Arjun Appadurai’s notion of flows and scapes (1996). An ethnoscape according to Appadurai is a “landscape of persons who constitute the shifting world we live”, such as tourists or immigrants (Appadurai, 1996). Of particular interest is his notion of ethnoscape as the slippery “landscape of group identity” that ethnographers must be attentive to the field (Appadurai, 1996). Ethnoscapes are slippery slopes where identity can no longer masquerade as a coherent and unchanging entity.
For my work, ethnoscape highlights the fluctuating identity politics and ethnic particularities diverse Black populations must maneuver in a ‘multicultural’ Canada and learn to become black. Black Canadas, then to return to this notion, are the continual and temporal intersections of various ethnoscapes, of ethnically or religiously particular Afro-diasporic groups in Canada.28 The collision between electronic media, diasporic desire and the imagination produce ethnoscapes that stand in contrast to diasporic communities whose similarities may be as extensive as their differences. Electronic media and technologies facilitate articulations and utterances of diasporic sentiments and subjectivities, making clear linguistic, generational and ethnic specificities that form the basis of the versions of blackness that constitute Black Canadas. Electronic media and cyberpublics allow for the re-imaging of ‘home’, solidification of previous ethnic or cultural boundaries or the circulation of constructed memories.

The media saturation of today, evidenced by the growing popularity of media convergences (Jenkins, 2004) and oppositional culture jamming (Jenkins, 2004) continues to remind us that there is no homogenous, unfragmented reality. Similarly, the populations that might be

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28 Ethnicity is defined here as the shared characteristics of a social group which often include customs, beliefs, traditions and language.
categorized as part of Black Canada exist in no uniformity, nor in isolation from the “electro-modernity” (Miller, 2004) that fragments reality. Various electronic technologies complicate and disrupt many of the conventional ways we might think about Afro-diasporic life particularly within the west, where these electronic technologies oversaturate the marketplace.

The challenge then of thinking about the fragmented and intersecting ethnic particularities amongst Afro-diasporic populations in Canada is to find relationships or spaces of commonality within the heterogeneity of these populations. To meet this challenge I work with a concept from within the sonic particularities of Afro-diasporic histories. Specifically, I turn to Jamaica’s soundsystem culture. Soundsystems were mobile discotheques that were inexpensive replacements for bands in late 1950s and early 1960s Jamaica (Chude-Sokei, 1994; Dalton 2004; Bradley, 2000). The soundsystem has been understood as “one of the black diaspora’s most enduring and frequently unacknowledged cultural institutions” (Chude-Sokei, 1994:96n4). Within soundsystem culture versioning was a technique Selectahs utilized to garner the participation of dancehall patrons. The technique involved playing the instrumental version of a very popular song and having the audience sing the words directly after the original version.

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29 The Selectah is the member of the soundsystem responsible for selecting and playing the records. Other members include the soundman, the owner and the DJ or toaster.
was played (Dalton, 2004:217). Ruddy Redwood is credited with being one of the first soundsystems in Jamaica to experiment with this creative participatory practice, he explains:

I start playin’… I put on “On the Beach” and I said, I’m gonna turn this place into a studio’, and I switch over from the singing part to the version part, cut down the sound and, man, you could hear the dance floor rail, man – everybody was singing (Dalton, 2004: 217).

Versioning is also the process whereby an original song is reproduced in a slightly altered different key, arrangement or wording. Cultural theorist, Dick Hebdige, in his important study of Caribbean musics, *Cut N’ Mix*, explained versioning as “different kinds of quotations.” In this process, an original version of a song “take on a new life and a new meaning in a fresh context” (Hebdige, 1987:14). Versioning is the active insertion of difference into the original or known; it is openly democratic practice that dislodges the authority of the original and espouses an alterity whose newness produces a certain kind of pleasure. In reggae music the term “version” refers to an instrumental side of a 45-inch acetate record. “Versioning” is the act of taking an instrumental track and providing one’s unique take on the record. Versioning occurs when an

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30 when recorded versioning is called a dub plate and is usually a promotional material used to support a particular soundsystem.
emcee/toaster alters the original elements of a song; in essence it is an act of signifyin’ according to Gates analysis. Usually there are specific elements of a song that are kept in the newly signified creation, such as a melody or key, which exist in the new creation alongside altered words, keys or melodies. Versioning can be understood through Derrida’s notion of différance, as a “‘weave’ of similarities and differences that refuse to separate into fixed binary oppositions” (Hall on Derrida, 1972; Hall, 2000). So the meaning created in each new version is inscribed within a system of references, playing upon prior meanings while building its current meaning through excessive referencing to prior versions.

Literally, hundreds of versions of one riddim can and do exist, several reggae artists utilize the year’s most popular “riddim(s)” competing to see who can created the most engaging version. Hebdige takes the notion of versioning in reggae music and applies this to our understanding of black popular culture in general. Thus, for Hebdige “versioning [is] at the heart of all Afro-American and Caribbean music”(11). In taking up Afrodiasporic black popular culture, Dick Hebdige’s Cut ‘N’ Mix usefully outlines the aesthetic practices of Caribbean musics, particularly reggae and hip hop (Hebdige 1987). For Hebdige, “cut ‘n’ mix” is the idea that “no one owns a rhythm or a sound” (141). As such, Hebdige understands the roots of Caribbean musics as never fixed, rejecting the idea of origin and root in favour of a deep engagement with one’s routes.
What makes *Cut ‘N’ Mix* especially important is the ways in which the centrality of origin or root is deferred in Hebdige’s recognition and analysis of routes. As a white Englishman who never visited Jamaica prior to the completion of *Cut ‘N’ Mix*, Hebdige’s important contribution to scholarship on the aesthetics of Caribbean music further underscores his point (156-157). If we extend Hebdige’s idea, then no one Afrodiasporic population conceptually owns Black Canada but only temporarily engage and utilize the concept while simultaneously recasting questions of place, identity and authenticity.

But Hebdige does not, however, take us further than the cut n’ mix idea. His analysis gets stuck at the *products* of such cut and mixing to the detriment of thinking about the ideas that fuel such processes. DJ Spooky and Kodwo Eshun keeps the analysis moving by connecting the dubplate to postmodern thought and Walter Benjamin’s take on the art of mechanical reproduction (Eshun 1998). For these Afrofuturists, 1968 marks at least one beginning of postmodernism (Miller 2006; Eshun 1998). By thinking of music as theorizing itself, Eshun pushes our thinking about Afrodiasporic musics beyond simply examining the products of the music.

The concept of versioning makes the foundational antiphonic nature of Afrodiasporic musics visible and extends how we might imagine the concept of doubleness at the heart of DuBois’s
double consciousness. A performer must constantly be aware of their audience’s disposition, making performers conscious of their own music and their audiences’ desires. Thinking about participation, oppressed populations, freedom and call and response, versioning as a modern day extension of the call and response provides a way to interrogate the centrality of sonic matter to Afro diasporic life. Versioning, when deployed discursively, helps us think about the ways in which Afro diasporic peoples in Canada continually refuse, accept and negotiate and/or reject the numerous and homogenizing calls into a black subjecthood.

Black Canadas are understood throughout this chapter as versions, as explicit and intentional insertions of difference into an originary and homogenizing narrative. Black Canadas versions Black Canada by inserting social difference and ethnic particularity into the narrative of black unity. Consequently, this chapter contends that Afro diasporic Canada exists as a number of fragmented temporalities in various ethno and culturescapes, influenced by a “smiling Canadian racism” and mediated by the mediascapes that crisscross our present. Thus, by conceptualizing and reading the overlapping diasporas that comprise ‘Black Canada’ through the language of the version this chapter highlights how Black Canada as unifying process of ‘order’ is disrupted by the syncopation of ethnic and racial temporalities that characterize Afro diasporic life in Canada. I borrow the word syncopate from the music world where to syncopate means to modify a
musical rhythm by shifting the accent to a weak beat of a musical bar. Blackness, in this metaphor, is the musical rhythm whose sonic properties are modified by overlapping black diasporas in Canada. The shifting accent from black unity to Afro diasporic diversity modifies blackness and Black Canada to versions of Black Canadas. The term syncopate is used to capture the fluctuation, realignment and accentuation of versions of Black Canadas that refuse to signal in any unified or clear fashion. Like its musical usage, Syncopate means to capture the way in which various Afro diasporic populations accentuate their cultural, ethnic, social and political differences, often disrupting an imagined or desired black unity.

The title of this chapter gestures towards the works of DJ Spooky and Paul Gilroy, both of whom have suggested Afro diasporic life operates as syncopated temporalities (Davis, 2006; Gilroy, 1996). More specifically, DJ Spooky in explaining his artistic style to interviewer Erik Davis reconciles his movements between African-American culture, academic culture and media culture as a syncopation of these different fragments of his persona. For DJ Spooky the African-American experience is about pulling together the “fragments of the shattered culture” [DJ Spooky cited (Davis, 2006)]. While I do not necessarily agree African America is a shattered culture, what can be taken away from Spooky’s statement are the ways in which African Diasporic identities can and do contain many different facets. For Gilroy, syncopated temporality
refers to how modernity is lived by Black folk—not exactly ‘on time’ with European culture but still modern nevertheless (Gilroy, 1996).

Working from these two usages, I understand the various layers and ethnicities of the Afro diaspora in Canada as temporalities that syncopate under the heading Black Canada, or under the signifier of blackness. Consequently, this chapter is organized first by engaging in an in-depth examination of the versioning of Black Canada via overlapping diasporas and their syncopation as conceptual tools. From Jamaican Maroons to Somali refugees, Canada has been home to various continuous and discontinuous flows of Afro diasporic populations. These flows have been subject to conflict, friction and collision, allowing for no linear or neat conception of blackness in Canada. Thus this chapter looks at the overlapping nature of the heterogeneous black diasporas in Canada, paying attention to the populations of black people who present themselves as ‘already here’. These populations, such as Black Nova Scotians and Ontario descendants of the Underground Railway do not get read as diasporic subjects, nor do they necessarily utilize the language of diaspora, but they do influence the ways in which incoming black diasporas in Canada are positioned in the nation and position themselves in transnational ways. Often times, the struggles of the latest wave of immigrant black populations get articulated
without overt references to those black populations that faced similar difficulties in the 1800s and early 1900s.

The following section examines the spatial nature of Afrodiasporic life in Canada focusing on the spaces, spheres and cyberpublics that elaborate how the rhetoric of multiculturalism, the violence of Canadian racism (Phillip, 1998) and the encoded opacity of the black public sphere, shape how Afrodiasporic peoples dwell, shift, align, conflict and syncopate temporal identifications of Afrodiasporic life in Canada. This section outlines how Afrodiasporic peoples mediate and are mediated by various forms of technology and media. The notion of cyberpublics and the digital sphere capture how I am interested in thinking about media, technology and Black Canadas. This section details how various spheres and spaces intersect to capture the polyphony of Black Canadas and their status of becoming.

The final section of this chapter offers a contemporary example of how hip hop culture’s intertextual and hybrid maneuvers suggest the plausibility of Black Canadas as a temporary version of Black Canada. By turning to hip hop culture this final section is able to enter a black public sphere were the slipperiness of flexible ethnoscapes demonstrate the varied velocities and versions by which we might imagine Black Canadas to exist.
Hip hop music and culture is useful here because it displays the tensions of a diaspora space as various artists from Antiguans to Somalis, articulate their diasporic sensibilities in Canada mindful of the entanglements of being Afro diasporic, as well as those that claim to be ‘already here’ in Canadian society, the numerous generations from Birchtown in Nova Scotia to Grey County in Ontario. Hip hop moves through a number of spheres and scapes and embodies a diasporic sensibility (Walcott, 1997), making it an apt tool to bring together the various aspects of Afro diasporic life in Canada discussed throughout this chapter. In this final section, the analysis of both lyrics and images gesture at the excesses of diasporic blackness and the deterritorialized desires of those for whom the rigidity of a fixed notion like Black Canada is continually disrupted.

Where You’re from and Where You’re at:31 The Overlapping Nature of Black Diasporas in Canada

Canada has been home to various black populations for more than four hundred years. This centuries-old presence astonishes most people that call themselves Canadian. At no point in this country’s history have the Black populations been homogenous in language, ethnicity or national

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31 This title is borrowed from Del F. Cowie (2004) who sampled Eric B & Rakim’s “I know you got soul” in the title of his article in T-Dot Griots: An Anthology of Toronto Story Tellers.
origin. Instead, various push factors have catapulted Afro Caribbean continental Africans and African Americans populations into Canada from various parts of the world, from as far as Madagascar to as near as New England. The African diaspora in Canada has diverse geographic origins and its influx into this nation has resisted any kind of uniform chronological pattern. The result has been and continues to be a multilayered and multiethnic population encompassed under the category Black Canadian. The notion of “overlapping diaspora,” to borrow a term used by Earl Lewis (Lewis, 1995), best describes Black Canadas, where a politics of difference highlights how various populations are differently positioned in society and within the Black diaspora in Canada. Thus, overlapping is utilized as an adjective to identify a range of diasporas from Afro-Caribbean retirees bent on returning ‘home’ (Nelson, 2004; Plaza, 2006) to Francophone youth in Ontario (Ibrahim, 2004) or continental African youth in Alberta (Kelly, 2004) who access what they perceive to be a universal Blackness via American media imperialism.

Unlike most other locations of Blackness worldwide, state-sponsored multicultural ideology in Canada tries to discipline non-anglophone or francophone identity in this country into neat manageable packages of culture that work to obscure race and its nefarious activities in peoples’
lives. The multiple layers that comprise the Black Canadian experience are uneven, and rife with inequities that are accentuated by disciplinary forms of Canadian racism.

Two other populations of Afro diasporic peoples, the exiled Jamaican Maroons and free African American populations, entered Canada on quite different terms. The Jamaican Maroons’ valiant and violent efforts to protect their freedom in cockpit country differ significantly from the nocturnal flight of many African Americans on the Underground railway or the escape with British Loyalists to a country not interested in war. The Loyalists lured into Canada by promises of land suggests these peoples wanted to stay in Canada to at the very least take advantage of the government’s offer of free stolen land. The Loyalists’ migration signified a commitment to the nation and a willingness to defend its borders. For the exiled Jamaican Maroons and the free African Americans Canada was a temporary place of exile. The exiled Maroons held a very different connection to space in Canada, this land was punishment for rebellious Maroons but was an opportunity for African Americans. Canada as a geographic space meant very different things for Black Loyalist and Jamaican Maroons. For the doubly diasporized Maroons, they were forced into a ‘diaspora space’ in Nova Scotia where they had to contend with those Black populations already rooted in Canada (Lockett, 1999). The inability or unwillingness of Maroons to think of themselves as Canadian was influenced by the cold reception provided by Black Nova
Scotians and evidenced in their opting to move to Sierra Leone after less than a decade in Canada (Hinds, 2001; Walker, 1976).

Black Loyalists in Nova Scotia exerted a limited social capital embedded in their “already here” status over the incoming Maroons within the diaspora space of Maritime Canada (Brah, 1996). Black Loyalists knew the social and geographic terrain of their new home, they knew the language and had limited networks to obtain work. The Maroons, as a new black diaspora in Nova Scotia, whose presence overlapped with the recently arrived former African-Americans, could not successfully navigate the social terrain. But the Jamaican Maroons held a different kind of influence as the British crown supposedly recognized them as a ‘sovereign nation’, and used this limited power to move them to Sierra Leone. In this overlapping diaspora space, blackness was not the glue that held together vastly different Afrodiasporic groups. Racism, however real and rabid, did not help unite Maroons and Black Loyalists (contrary to Robin Wink’s analysis). Racism did not make Maroons and African Americans a homogenous black community, it did not erase their ethnic particularity. The version of Black Canada we can extrapolate from the Maroons in the Nova Scotia episode is not one of a united front against racism but rather the collision of two struggling populations in which the varied circumstances of their diasporic routes interrupts a linear unified notion of blackness. The presence of the
Maroons shifted the rhythm of blackness in Canada from an imagined and colonially projected homogeneity to accenting how the contingencies of space and diasporic routes version the concept of Black Canada to allow a thinkable notion of Black Canadas.

Similarly, by the early 1900s blackness in Toronto involved multiple and diverse registers through which one might think about being Black in Canada. Keith S. Henry paints a picture of Toronto’s black populations during World War 1 by lamenting that:

There was almost no sense of a black personality in Canada because of the small numbers, the wide dispersion of black communities, their highly variant origins… (Henry, 1981).

Is it Henry’s phenotypical analysis of this black population, his understanding of community as unity, or his experiences of pervasive racism that persuade him to desire a black personality? Henry seems unable to imagine multiple registers of blackness and unwilling to place an emphasis on their “highly variant origins”. In contrast, Stanley G. Grizzle’s personal memoirs suggest reasons for certain cleavages within the black communities in Toronto during the Great Depression. Grizzle tells us that two organizations served Toronto’s black communities during the financial hardships of the 1930s, the United Negro Association (UNIA) and the Home
Service Association (Grizzle, 1998). The dark-skinned and Caribbean populations went to Garvey’s UNIA, while the American and lighter skinned people obtained help from the Home Service Association, which they ran. While Henry suggests origin and geographic dispersion as reasons for the lack of a “black personality in Canada”, Grizzle’s account inserts colour as a key factor in the divisiveness of Black Canada. Proximity did not suggest a similar or a positive ‘personality’, according to Grizzle’s account.

In Toronto, the UNIA located at 355 College Street and the Home Service Company at Bathurst and Queen Street were within a thirty-minute commute of each other. Furthermore, Grizzle’s ability to access both organizations suggests that his Canadian-born status did not require that he staunchly take up his parents’ Jamaican heritage. For Grizzle’s parents and their generation it appears that British subjecthood was used as a buffer to refute the possibilities of a unity based on blackness. Besides deploying nationality, skin colour/shade became another tool by which African Canadian as a unified subjecthood unthinkable. Colour appeared to be an organizing principle, so that darker skinned individuals who most likely felt comfortable at the UNIA imagined a different Black Canada than patrons of the Home Service company that Grizzle claims was patronized primarily by lighter skinned African Americans (Grizzle, 1998).
Black Canadian, or African Canadian, as Grizzle describes himself, were processes of becoming, unstable entities utilized for specific concerns, so that demands around employment equity became African Canadian concerns rather than Caribbean Canadian concerns. The sayability of African-Canadian was a temporality that syncopated and aligned itself along important battle lines around racism and employment. Today, almost more than half a century later, emancipation day celebrations on Cape Breton island evidence how the temporalities of cultural identification syncopate, as Caribbean flags wave proudly despite years of political lobbying and organizing within the Canadian political system. Understanding the identity of African-Canadians requires we think about flexible ethnoscapes as the play of multiple subject positions and identities in relation to the dominant logic of their social location to negotiate spaces of self-definition and cultural innovation. To celebrate one’s Caribbean heritage on Cape Breton island despite making Canada home is to avoid an “amputation of the past” as Fanon would say, and resist a certain kind of cultural violence (Fanon, 1967). To play or syncopate one’s subject possibilities to the most advantageous position even as a temporal identification, suggests ethnoscapes to be flexible identities making spheres malleable to circumstance.

The unevenness in the Black diaspora in Canada is owed not only to race, gender and class but also to how the Canadian state manages these ‘differences’ for its own purposes. For example,
seasonal farms workers from the Caribbean pick fruit in Ontario each summer for minimal wages without any benefits. Access to night schools, and other educational outlets that might give these workers a chance to obtain a better job the following summer are limited if they exist at all. The seasonal workers, despite contributing to provincial social services through taxation are denied access to these programs their tax monies help run, which ensures the state can exploit their labour in forthcoming years, a classic case of neoliberal “flexploitation” based on a socially constructed ‘otherness’. These Black workers are part of a general tendency where Canada consistently places populations under erasure. Katherine McKittrick’s work on black geographies details how certain black spaces in Canada, such as Hogan’s Alley and Negro Creek Road, have been forcibly erased by the Canadian governments (municipal & provincial) (Fatona, 1994; McKittrick, 2002, 2006; Walcott, 2002). Accordingly, of interest to this dissertation is the geopolitics of Blackness in Canada and attempts to resist erasure via the creation of alternative realties through the manipulation of electric technologies that can provide us with avenues by which to read blackness in Canada in spheres and spaces with minimal governmental interference.
How does one read Black Canadas?

From varied geographic origins, to diverse mother tongues, to the manner in which Afrodiasporic peoples entered Canada, overlapping and layered are two useful ways to characterize Blackness in this nation. The overlapping and unevenness of blackness in Canada is demonstrated by the flows into and out of inaccurate racialized identities and nationalities that are at times prescribed by the government. For example, as the Canadian government refused to acknowledge Eritreans as such before the victory of the Eritrean Liberation Front (ELF), Ethiopian was an ethnic label forced onto (but not accepted) by Eritreans by a Canadian population unwise to their political struggles (Sorenson, 1990). Similarly, in the generational layering of this diasporic community, Eritrean youth in schools encounter African, Black or Ethiopian as the subjectivities these youth were called into regularly.32

In accessing the hidden arenas where flux, temporality and Black Canadas lay, I turn to Afrosonic cultures where various engagements with sound importantly map various expressions of otherized Blackness in Canada. Where the language of diaspora falls down, the language of Black popular culture captures the difficult disorder of overlapping diasporas in Black Canada. The versioning of Black Canada and syncopation of Afrodiasporic ethnic identities can uncover

32 See the discussion board at www.eyac.com.
three overlapping spaces/spheres that encompass the various textures of Black Canadas while remaining firmly grouped in the multiple realities of late western capitalism.

The notion of the diasporic sphere extends Habermas’s public sphere (1962) and demands that we take seriously the kinds of experiences and desires diasporic people bring to bear on their locales as well as Brah’s notion of diaspora space and Prina Werbner’s notion of diasporic space (Brah, 1996; Werbner, 2002), where entanglements from various corners of society muddle the presumably neat trajectories of diaspora life. A diasporic public sphere necessarily intersects with Black public spheres, debating, critiquing and illuminating the multiple positionings of blackness in the west. This intersection, where Black public spheres meet diasporic publics produce polyphonic Afrodiasporic publics sometimes articulated in Arabic, Somali, Yoruban, Kreyol or Patois in Canada. Jenny Burman’s ethnographic look at Eglinton West in Toronto (1998) brings into view a site where diaspora space intersects with physical space, a location that secures some of the many dimensions of the black public and diasporic spheres.

Since at least 1998, when Burman published, “At the Scene of the Crossroads, ‘Somewhere in this Silvered City:’ Diasporic Public Spheres in Toronto”, computers and the popularity of the
internet have become important areas where Habermas’ discussion of public spheres is extended, challenged, and revised. Thus, alongside physical and sonic spheres where Afro-diasporic life expresses itself, cyberspace and digital culture must also be considered. A cyberpublic or digital sphere is a space that takes into consideration how media, technology and human beings continually negotiate their relationships to each other in order to influence a wider world. Within Canada, the overlapping layers of Black diasporas articulate their uniqueness in cyberpublic forums, and through various other digital spaces, such as social networking sites and blogs. Diasporic public spheres do not exist in isolation from digital public spheres, in fact they operate mutually to reveal some of the more nuanced articulations of their particularities. The final polyphonic space/sphere I engage in this chapter is the Black public sphere. Defined by Mark Anthony Neal as spaces where Black popular culture critiques itself, the Black public sphere performs alternatives to mainstream ideals and exists in a semi-autonomous state (Neal, 1999). Tapping into this sphere helps identify ideas and mechanisms through which the hip hop generation articulates their diasporcity within, against or beyond multicultural rhetoric.

Today the Black Canadas are culturally, linguistically and ethnically much more complex, encompassing more continental Africans with new sets of concerns. For some, Canada is imagined as a temporary home, that is until one saves enough for retirement or a new
government enters power at ‘home’ or when the war ends at ‘home’. Both the similarities and the
differences between Black diaspora populations involve rivalries, conflict and pain. For example
while Eritreans and Ethiopians are both from the horn of Africa, and they may be both fleeing
war, a history of ethnic warfare and rivalry counterpoises what Canadians often mistake as
sameness (Sorenson, 2005). Although the multiple erasures of Black spaces such as Nigger
Rock, Hogan’s Alley or Africville and the homogenizing tendencies of popular media make life
for Blacks in Canada particularly difficult, counter publics keep alive pertinent and progressive
debates around the nature of Afrodiaspotic life in Canada. For example, an important part of the
counterpublic sphere are films by Afrodiaspotic Canadian filmmakers Sylvia Hamilton and
Andrea Fatona that examine issues around erasures of blackness and social diversity within black
communities in a multicultural Canada.

Polyphonic Spaces and Spheres

Our epoch is one in which space takes for us the form of relations among sites
(Foucault, 1986).

In many spaces in Canada we find what Jenny Burman refers to as ‘diasporic public spheres’
(Burman 1998, 2001). For Burman these are spaces of “dispersed collectivities, oriented toward
the same former dwelling-place” that make perform ethnicity visible (195-6). Importantly these
are scenes of “intertextuality,” where the performance of migrant subjectivities become apparent,
as well as where conversations between ‘Canadian’ and ‘immigrant’ take place. Diasporic public spheres, according to Pnina Werbner, are spaces where diasporic consciousness is enunciated through debates, generational disagreements, or the ‘dilution’ of moral or religious worldviews in the west (Werbner, 2002). These conversations take place within the milieu of diaspora space where other immigrants or older generations influence or critique recent arrivals or new generations. Diasporic public spheres speak of both elsewhere and here, past and present, constantly articulating dual belongings and gesturing to the kinds of excess immigrants bring to bear on the idea of Canadianness.

A focus on diasporic public spheres requires clarification on two fronts. First, an examination of a diasporic public sphere does not necessarily yield insights solely of Black life, or one culture or ethnicity. A diaspora space, as Avtar Brah has suggested, is a complex arena where both movement and stasis influence how we understand diaspora. Most locales in Toronto and Canada are not rigidly enforced racially segregated spaces—thus Black folk often interact with other ethnic and racialized groups.33 These interactions are usually significantly structured by one’s class position so that impoverished First Nations groups or recent immigrants often share

33 With the exception of places like Shelby and Birchtown in Nova Scotia where longstanding racism, segregation and race riots have been a stubborn feature of the society.
many of the same social spaces. The Malvern area of Scarborough, Toronto’s largest borough illustrates my point. In this space, an influx of ethnic Tamils from Sri Lanka entered a space formerly dominated by Caribbean migrants. Daily interactions at the mall, schools and in various public spaces influence how the existing Caribbean populations understand themselves in relation to the nation state, particularly through the Anglo-Caribbean migrant’s English fluency and knowledge of local procedures. Similarly, AfroCaribbean Canadians might understand a notion of Black Canadian that recognizes the shared concerns of young males and law enforcement. In this Caribbean-Sri Lankan encounter, it is young males who are particularly visible in their taking up of black urban dress and linguistic mannerisms. Here, the markings of black urban culture, such as clothing and language, provide spaces where young Tamil males perform their social otherness and explore identity.

Secondly, diasporic public spheres are in conversation with national narratives that celebrate cultural difference and therefore might ironically express a range of diaspora-related subjectivities and conditions, such as idealized notions of home. Thus, diasporic public spheres are not just about discourses of diaspora, they also eloquently speak of the conditions of the home space, elsewhere, and the imaginings of a return. Diasporic public spheres hit the ground in various ways, pointing to diverse versions of blackness in relation to the nation. Lloyd’s
barbershop on Bathurst Street in Toronto exemplifies this versioning. Since the days when Black hair was a political statement in the 1960s and 1970s, Lloyd’s was a physical space where various black populations converged, conversed about politics and exemplified the texture and tensions of being (or becoming) Black in Canada. Today inside Lloyd’s various pictures of haircuts adorn the wall, chronicling hip hop’s hightop fade, the S curl from the funk era and of course, the afro from the days of the black power movement. Therefore, Lloyd’s barbershop has been a site where blackness as protest, blackness as a soulful essence and blackness as conspicuous consumption has continually versioned how blackness in the Canadian nation space get imagined. Framed and enlarged with a gold autograph sits a picture of Canadian, turn British Boxer Lennox Lewis. The photo speaks volumes of the diasporic conversations that take place inside this barbershop. Lloyd’s is a site at which the diasporic public sphere meets diaspora space, a physical space where the latest headlines in the Share or Pride community newspapersor the latest antics of Mike Tyson or the latest Tiger Woods win demonstrate a community consciousness that is about more than the local.34

34 Share and Pride are two weekly community newspapers that service the Caribbean communities in the Greater Toronto Area.
Bathurst street in Toronto is one major intersection west of Spadina. It has been a racialized space of otherness where the city’s Jewish populations were relegated to at the turn of the century. Bathurst street became a new immigrant enclave to many Black populations and newly arrived Afro-diasporic migrants because the already racialized and Jewish populations were the only peoples to rent spaces to Black folk (Brand, 1994; Grizzle, 1998). Consequently, Bathurst Street became the location of the Home Service Club, steps to the UNIA at 355 College and the site of various West Indian grocery stores, salons, bookstores and barbershops that catered to Black people in the city. The subway stop at Bathurst street still resonates (in 2007) with the aroma of baked goods, such as gizzardas, patties, and various other foods to service the traffic of Black folk who would grocery shop, visit their doctor or get their haircut on Bathurst. This subway station was also home to Black Panther memorabilia in the 1970s, Malcolm X hats in the late 1980s and other material vestiges of black consumer culture (however commodified). In this space, newly arrived Caribbean immigrants and Canadian-born Blacks would intermingle, attend dances or shop at Third World Books & Crafts or research at the Library of Black People’s Literature together.35 For Dionne Brand, a new immigrant in 1970, Bathurst street and subway station was ‘home’ (Brand, 1994). If, according to the Canadian government, “multiculturalism

35 Today this space is home to A Different Booklist, an alternative bookshop that caters to the black community and its allies.
ensures that all citizens can keep their identities,” then black identities, from Nation of Islam followers to Black Power advocates, to consumeristic hip hop youth, fluctuate and vary at velocities that government policy cannot closely follow.

For Brand, Bathurst street and subway station operated as the site that gave birth to her politicization, a space where one went from Negro to Black in the 1970s. If, following Stuart Hall, “identities are names we give to the ways we are positioned and position ourselves” (1995) then Brand’s use of Bathurst is significant. Interestingly, as Brand recites the ways in which Bathurst station and the corner of Bathurst and Bloor contain fond memories, her understanding of this space moves through different eras of blackness refusing essentialized or static renditions of black culture. From the Black Panther type cultural awareness to the consumptive popularization of Malcolm X by Spike Lee, Brand captures vignettes of a changing ethnoscape of blackness. If Brand were to enter Bathurst station today, she might remark at the lack of political activity in this space, but might also marvel at the East African family who have added samosas to the gizzardas and patties in the aromatic station’s bakery.
Attached to Bathurst, via public transit, is Eglinton West, a space that housed and continues to house many Black owned shops, such as Jamaal’s Caribbean Tailor or Carib Jewellers. On any given day, the latest sounds of Kingston, Jamaica or the fresh vegetables from Trinidad take over the air and sidewalk from Oakwood along Eglinton eastwards to the Eglinton west subway station at the Allen Road southbound highway entrance. Along this strip of road, Randy’s Jamaican Patties meets Nigerian hairstyles, which rhythmically bob to the latest songs imported from New York by Treasure Isles or Monica’s Cosmetics. Various hair salons play the latest mix-tapes from Toronto or New York, while contentious issues such as Michael Jackson’s latest nose job or the latest police shooting of a Black man form casual conversation. More recently, Nollywood has arrived at Eglinton West via cheap DVDs that make this space less Caribbean and more Afrodiaphoric. Thus, politics, popular culture and black consciousness in Afrodiaphoric sites such as hair salons on Eglinton West intertwine Black public spheres with diaphoric public spheres. Digital technologies, like Nollywood DVDs, make the African diaspora more accessible, so that cyberpublics become an additional sphere of importance in the negotiation or re-imagining of cultural identity. It is from these technologies we learn about the different religious and familial connections between West African society and the Caribbean. Thus, black

36 Jamaal’s Caribbean Tailor has recently fallen victim to the economic crisis of late 2008, since my last field visit to Eglinton West in 2007.
diasporic identity politics are mediated by cyber, diasporic and black public spheres, making complex any negotiation of blackness.

To examine Blackness in Canada we must also take seriously the role of media in late capitalist society. According to Fredric Jameson, the logic of late capitalism seeks out the autonomous and semi-autonomous spaces where culture once existed in order to create new markets (Jameson, 1991). The media and the intensification of advertising occupy increasingly larger segments of our reality and everyday experiences. Electronic media in particular, such as the Internet, i-pods, blogging and instant messaging are new resources that dramatically revamp the Black diasporic experience. According to Appadurai, these media “offer new resources and new disciplines for the construction of imagined selves and imagined worlds” (Appadurai, 1996). But these media do more than illuminate the workings of identity; electronic media highlight both the existence of ethnoscapes, and the manner in which these ethnoscapes become flexible and make visible the overlapping and layered heterogeneity within black diasporic communities in Canada.

The latest vernaculars forms various creole languages in the Caribbean transported through song, or the newest dance or hairstyle all travel to Canada via music and videos, and make Canadian multiculturalism’s language of the ‘preservation’ of culture an out of touch ideal. For example,
the music video by Michie Mee, a hugely popular hip hop emcee in the late 1980s, called “Jamaican-Funk Canadian style” located her Jamaican heritage firmly both within a Canadian nation space as well as gesturing to the roots of funk music in America. Her hairstyle, “door-knocker” earrings and seamlessly transfers between patois and Canadian English, as well as between toasting and rapping, performed what multiculturalism might look like (both visually and figuratively) beyond the language of preservation. Her work within the Black public sphere espoused through the language of diaspora and hybridity, illuminate and expand the heterogeneity of the Black public sphere. Her connections to the New York’s hip hop scene, her unwillingness to relinquish her Jamaican roots and her desire to present her work in a Canadian style (see the appendage to her video title) exemplify the articulate productive instability of flexible ethnoscapes.37

The rise of cyberpublics extends the polyphony of black publics and diasporic spheres, complementing Afrodiasporic spaces with non-geographically bounded sites of representation and discussion. For example, the debut album of Alberta based emcee Cadence Weapon, largely ignored by Toronto’s hip hop underground, is an electronically based fusion of samples more

37 Michie Mee worked with Boogie Down Productions a hugely famous American hip hop group, introducing them to Toronto in 1986. She later recorded “Elements of Style” with BDP emcee KRS-1 introducing her as the dopest emcee in Canada (1987).
reminiscent of London’s grime sub-genre of hip hop. Cadence Weapon gained industry attention in Europe by working with popular British white female rapper Lady Sovereign and posting various remixes on-line. Utilizing cyberpublics Cadence Weapon refused to enter what is regarded as a Caribbean-centric and a Toronto-centric hip hop scene in Canada. The Internet provided Cadence Weapon with a forum for his creative critique of Canadian hip hop and alignment with British grime music. Cadence Weapon’s use of an electronic and digital public made possible his entry into the industry as local support for his sound in Alberta or Canada could not catapult him towards a recording deal here. Cyberpublics allow for the evasion of geographic barriers and hegemonic physical spaces, like Toronto. In the case of Cadence Weapon he was able to access the British grime market and fashion himself a career in the music industry, despite and possibly because of his ability to circumvent Canada’s dominant and hegemonic market. In order to access a Black public through hip hop music Cadence Weapon would have to present a piece of sonic material that local Black audiences could appreciate, electronic media nullified such a requirement.

While many music artists today utilize electronic technologies to produce and market their work, they, like black diasporic populations, express or relieve the tension of “living here/remembering

there” through electronic technologies (Clifford, 1994). It is important to situate the contemporary Black Canadian experience within the media and technoscapes that traverse much of our globalized present. By watching world news reels for the latest news from ‘home’ or bargaining for a long-distance phone card with the clearest reception, the Afro diasporic Canadian utilizes (cyber and electronic) technologies to access Black publics and diasporic spheres. Electronic space, as Saskia Sassen reminds us, is a space that allows for spatio temporal compressions and drastically rearranged social possibilities (Sassen, 1998).

The technological ability to wire funds through banks and companies such as Western Union or Senvia, compress time and space, just like phone cards to allow immediate access to family or to catch up on political gossip. Without certain technologies like the compressed music format, mp3, whose small data size allows for the instant transfer of Kingston’s latest dancehall hit to arrive in Toronto within an hour of its completion and the kinds of translocal diasporic identifications that nurture diasporic publics would be impossible. Cyber technologies and publics provide access to the materials that make generational and ethnic black diasporic overlaps visible, through self-fashioning and imagination.

39 Message boards of cultural groups like Eritrean Youth Association are such spaces of diasporic negotiations.
According to Ella Shohat, “the politics of new media…are imbricated in the politics of transnational economies” (Shohat, 1999: 217). It is the consumption of new media and its use that make transnational yearnings and porous national boundaries visible. The conspicuous consumption and fetishization of mp3 players, i-pods and various other pieces of technology by Afro diasporic youth, engulfed by late capitalism, suggests the continuance of alternative cyber, diasporic or black public spheres. For Black people in Canada, message boards, mp3s sent by email and the cyberworld are all tools that help articulate the kinds of cultural complexities and expressions that make diaspora a formidable concept in detailing the lives of Black peoples worldwide. Thus, we cannot ignore the kinds of relationships that exist between Afro diasporic peoples and technology or forms of new media. For example, message boards on the Internet allow groups such as the Eritrean Youth Action Committee to discuss generational, language and race issues that arise in the heterogeneous and overlapping scapes and spheres of black life in Canada.

The interweaving of technologies and Afro diasporic lives also plays a vital part in resistance to the kind of static cultural preservation encouraged by state-sponsored multiculturalism. The newest hairstyles, clothing trends and songs enter Canada through downloaded mp3s, YouTubed

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40 www.theeyac.org
videos or via one of the daily flights from Toronto to the Caribbean. Due to today’s hypermediated society ‘immigrants’ in Canada can remain completely engulfed in the changing trends of ‘home’. This ability, to be instantly attuned to social or political scenes fostered elsewhere, feeds the situated and positioned polyphonies and the temporal identifications of Black Canadian life. The ways in which various groups utilize technology suggests that a preservation model of culture promoted by the Canadian government is not necessarily representative or in tune with the masses.

**Overmediated Realities**

Technologies of our present make counterdiscourses, diasporic public spheres and counterhistories/present viable options for thinking beyond the disciplinary force of state-sponsored multiculturalism. For example, for many fans of reggae music in Toronto, the website [www.reggaemania.com](http://www.reggaemania.com) is a vital arena where local events and the politics of reggae music are housed. The site is maintained by Ron Nelson, a legendary DJ in Toronto and viewed regularly by thousands of music fans and club goers. On the site a discussion board allows anyone logged into the site to weigh in on various topics. Many of the postings are made in patwa/patois and some are in between standard English and Jamaican patois, with various inconsistencies in spelling. This website works as a space where the connection to an imagined
‘home’ or elsewhere is actively sought, while host nation (Canada) politics are mitigated through active retention practices (via patois). These message boards, under the heading Communication on the site, operate as diasporic cyberpublic spheres and house the various manners in which the retention, reiteration and re-imagining of patois expresses a desire that is anything but static or governable. In this space where hundreds of people regularly express their opinions if they “feel a way about things happening in [their] dancehalls”, diaspora politics and diasporic expressions are concurrently played out. For example, in the very act of attempting to write Jamaican patois, these ‘chatters’ bridge the divide between a strong Afro diasporic oral tradition and the scribal biases of eurosociety, highlighting how hybridity and mixture confound the governmental desires of official multiculturalism.

A closer look at Somali-Canadian hip hop emcee/poet, K’naan the Dusty Foot Philosopher, reveals how we might connect remixing and Black cultural identification. Born in Mogadishu, K’naan Warsame migrated to New York City at age twelve and eventually settled in Toronto. K’naan’s live shows have been in demand around the world, to the tune of 450 shows in two years (Honigmann, 2007). As a member of the Somali community in Canada, K’naan was invited by the Canadian Broadcast Corporation to speak on the removal of the Islamic Courts Union from power in Mogadishu in January 2007.
Although recognized by the radio show host as a “Somali rapper” who lives in Toronto, K’naan’s visible and articulate presence speaks volumes of the Black diasporas as he is positioned as a spokesperson for the Somali community (Galloway, 2007). K’naan has gained a reputation as an individual concerned with Somalia’s geopolitics and unconcerned with the braggadocio image branding characteristic of Western hip hop markets. K’naan actively rejects Black American rapper discourses around sampling and bling, instead defining himself as part of another culture (Honigmann, 2007). In his myspace descriptors he lists himself as playing folk music, a clear divergence from other hip hop artists’ self-naming practices. But K’naan’s mastery of poetry, emceeing and performance places him at the pinnacle of hip-hop culture, highlighting an inconsistency. His musical accolades span two continents and at least three countries. K’naan, in rejecting a part of his identity, as a ‘rapper,’ accentuates his Somali background to obtain increased media attention to the plight of his former home.

Strategically, Black male rapper is an identity utilized for K’naan’s political project—to reduce negative and stereotypical portrayals of Africa in the West. In various interviews and articles where attention is focused on K’naan’s various musical achievements, K’naan interjects his views on the geopolitics of clan-based systems in Mogadishu. At these moments, K’naan
interlaces three spheres with his concerns over the governing of Somalia. As an emcee in Canada, K’naan enters the Black public sphere with his various performances and album releases. And although K’naan has mastered many of the nuances of encoded Black popular culture, he offers no codes or apologies when critiquing the music industry when he states “I’m not an entertainer/I’ve never been a clown” (K’naan, 2007). His endorsement of the Islamic Courts Union, and his detailing of the clan-based system in Somalia catapulted him into the Somali diasporic sphere, as he critiques both traditional clan systems of Somalia that are carried to Canada and the western vilification of Muslim governing systems.

In fact, K’naan’s first release, “Soobax” was a lyrical lash out to the warlords controlling much of Mogadishu in 2003. Soobax, a Somali word for “come out”, was a hip hop single, released and circulated on vinyl that straddled both the Somali diasporic sphere and the Black public sphere in North America. In a classic call and response fashion, K’naan draws on his resources as first world hip hop emcee to participate in the debates over Somalia’s geopolitics. Rather than simply cataloguing his displeasure over the situation, K’naan called out to Warlords, calling on them to stop hiding, it was a call to become part of the discourse, rather than simply critiquing the situation. The third sphere he interlaces with his geopolitical concerns is the cyberpublic sphere, with his website www.knaanmusic.ning.com that details his travels, performances and
thoughts via a blog diary. In the cyberpublic sphere K’naan addresses how his blackness is taken up around the world, detailing his trials and tribulations in places like Sweden.\(^{41}\)

“Soobax” exemplified how various spheres can and do overlap and intersect, presenting a disordered version of blackness in Canada where hybridity and diaspora interrupt idealistic notions of unity. “Soobax” demonstrates that the “belonging” and “pride” in one’s ancestry that Canadian policy is interested in fostering is not a process that can work without a transnational framework. Similarly, neither the English nor French languages could convey the meaning K’naan was interested accomplishing. K’naan’s rhymes, in both Somali and English, allow him to enter in a transnational dialogue to address concerns such as security and ancestral pride.

“Soobax” is an interesting B-side to some of hip hop’s standard conventions, such as its hyperlocal identifications and concerns. Hip Hop culture and music, from the United States, to Cuba to France focuses its actions and concerns around local politics. K’naan’s diasporic concerns around the corruption of Warlords in Somalia get articulated in a local context as a North American released song, versioning the idea of hip hop’s hyperlocal identifications and inflections. By releasing this song in Canada, K’naan’s “Soobax” operates as a syncopated

\(^{41}\) See the video for Kicked Pushed on www.knaanmusic.com
temporality, allowing for the accentuation and representation of Somalia’s geopolitical situation pushing for further inclusive conceptions of blackness in Canada.

The CBC radio interview of January 11, 2007 can be read as a demonstration of how K’naan syncopates the temporal ethnoscape of immigrant as he transcends a homogenous black Canada within a diasporic public sphere. K’naan was positioned in this interview by Matt Galloway as a representative of 200,000 Somalis who live in Toronto. In terms of identity positions, K’naan as Rapper, Black or African took a back seat to those identities (Black Canadian, Somali) that can advance his goal. K’naan actively moves between Black Canadian, Somali and Rapper to produce another kind of discussion: a positive and enlightened discussion of Somalia’s geopolitics. The version of black Canada K’naan presents is a deeply diasporic one, one that works through difference (in this case geographic and religious) and is not overdetermined by racism or idealized as unified. The rhythm of blackness in Canada is shifted by K’naan’s public sphere intervention, which syncopates blackness to accentuate religious diversity within blackness in Canada.

Hybridity and creolization are important parts of any diaspora, but they both fail to capture the ways in which K’naan is positioned and positions himself (self-defined and externally imposed)
moving throughout to achieve this goal to intelligently shed light on the geopolitics of Somalia’s plight. K’naan’s refuses to subscribe to a notion of black unity or a Black Canadian identity as the outernational pull factors that characterize diasporic subjectivities orientate this diasporic Somali’s political concerns. These pull factors, such as his concern for family members in Somalia, heighten the ways in which diaspora enters into negotiations of one’s social positioning. Thus, K’naan does not perform the rapper subjectivity to the detriment of Somali geopolitics, but he does utilize the public sphere provided to him as ‘rapper’ to articulate concerns about clanship politics both in Mogadishu and Toronto.

Embedded in black public spheres and diasporic public spheres are alternative worldviews, ‘othered’ strategies that help navigate the racisms and the longings of Afro diasporic life. Some of these strategies or paradigms, suggestions or models that riff, refashion or remix what is “already there,” such as static definitions of Canadian, or culture. For example, some Eritrean parents rebuke their children who assimilate into American styles of dress and vernacular speech patterns. These parents do not want their children to “act black.” Interestingly some of these children develop a Black pride/consciousness even though black may have not been a category taken up in their (or their parents’) homeland. Overlapping diasporic, black and cyber public spheres present youth with many avenues and a variety of images from which to self-fashion
their identities. They do not follow linear trajectories that flow from Immigrant to Canadian; rather they navigate through subjectivities such as black, African or immigrant. These children learn to maneuver through the shifting temporalities of blackness in public. For example Oromo youth are constantly read as only Ethiopian, their ethnic specificity is lost on most non-East African people. So that as Sorenson (1990) recognizes with Eritreans, and Kumsa (2005) notices amongst Oromo youth, the Canadian, Eritrean or Oromo elements of one’s self-identification are stressed in certain situations, bent or localized to deal with their realities as they change daily (Kumsa 2005). Similarly, for some Afro diasporic Francophone youth in Canada, imaginative performances of American hip hop culture allow these youth to flexibly enter into an urban black ethnoscape as a belonging strategy (Ibrahim, 2004). Like K’naan, Afro diasporic youth learn how to syncopate their identities, negotiate their positioning and utilize technology and alternative spheres to make their lives and futures livable in the Canadian context.

“Contingencies make us what we are”42

…we live inside a set of relations that delineates sites which are irreducible to one another and absolutely not superimposable on one another (Foucault 1986).

42 Foucault, 1984 p.46.
Afrodiasporic peoples in Canada demonstrate flexible ways in which they position themselves both within the nation and transnationally. In Canada, discursively rendered as ‘others’ and non-Canadian, Afrodiasporic populations demonstrate a remarkable diversity that exceed the nation’s current “objective mode of truth” (Wynter, 1995). As Canada’s excess, Afrodiasporic populations disrupt the governing logic of multiculturalism, revealing the limits of this state-sponsored discourse. The innovative ways in which Canada’s governing politics are exceeded allow us to ask important questions including “What programs, paradigms or procedures can we extract from sonic Afrosonic life reconceptualize our understanding of the African diaspora Canada?”

Reading Afrodiasporic life in Canada through the sonic provides us with another ‘mode of truth.’ This ‘truth’ reveals that Afrodiasporic subjectivities, identities, and ethnicities never remain static, we “keep on movin’”, discursively in and out of various categories regardless of governmental projects and legislation (Walcott, 1997). The versions of Black Canada presented by the diversity of Afrodiasporic populations as syncopated temporalities highlight a mode of truth that directly contradicts homogenizing notions of nation. Black Canadas is the conceptual intersection of various flexible ethnoscapes while the idea of Black unity is simply based on racism is constantly interrupted by the syncopation of these flexible Afrodiasporic ethnoscapes.
It is the contingencies and slipperiness of syncopating ethnoscapes that reveal how the versioning of a homogenizing notion such as Black Canada produces other modes of truth about our contemporary condition.

The relationship between the temporal subjectivities, raced and otherized identities and positions, hegemonically thrust upon, but not overdetermining, Afrodiasporic life in Canada presents us with another logic for living our present. The contingencies that comprise shifting identifications and identities of Afrodiasporic life in Canada, need not and do not follow the assumptions of enlightenment, or the fixed and stable language of nations. What I have demonstrated throughout this chapter is to disclose how we might use vestiges of the Afrosonic diaspora to rethink our present order. The shifting and temporal identities and subjectivities of Afrodiasporic Canada served as an object of my application of thinking through the sonic and technologies as a starting point of analytical inquiry.

By using versioning conceptually this line of thinking refuses to discount Afrodiasporic expressive culture as solely entertainment, or a product for capitalist consumption. The oppressive and mutually exclusive ways in which Blackness is imagined, maintained or forced upon individuals are not overdetermining processes. If we recognize how temporality, difference
and flux are elements of Afro diasporic life that can be organized, negotiated and lived in a manner that does not alienate the Afro diasporic individual. The ways in which Afro diasporic youth continually disrupt a unified and homogenous conception of Black Canada frustrate any attempts at which a specific order of Blackness in Canada can be obtained and utilized.

The slippery flexible ethnoscapes these youth navigate via cyberpubics such as reggaemania.com or www.theeyac.org, or diasporic public spheres K’naan engaged at CBC radio and the black public sphere via hip hop music, suggests Black Canadas to be a moment of intentional revision and versioning, whose temporality is evident at the completion of a specific political project. The language and idea of the version I have employed here is an example of how we might begin to think through sound. In the following chapter, attention is paid to the turntable as instrument and as conceptual tool, extending a notion of sound thinking to take up the new sets of relations sound technologies make possible. The version and the idea of syncopating temporalities belong to a much larger set of Afrosonic engagements, the following chapter will begin exploring some of these rarely (un)excavated engagements.
Chapter 2

Turning the Tables: “A Gift from the ‘New’ world to the Old world”

“[African musicians sought] not …to combine sounds in a manner pleasing to the ear”

[but] “simply to express life in all its aspects through the medium of sound… to translate everyday experiences into living sound” (Francis Bebey as cited in White, 2005).

if modernity is more simply, but with better theoretical foundation,

understood as the ‘mixture of things’ actually produced by accelerating technological change, it becomes clear that, in fact, modern societies may well vary widely in their nature (Morley, 2007).

“Things ain’t the same for gangsters, but I’m too famous to kill these prankstas,” begins DJ Dopey’s word phasing routine at the World DMC championships in 2003. Sampling a Dr.

43 I borrow this phrase from Sylvia Wynter who uses this term to describe the new discourse of Antillean as espoused by Martiniquian thinkers; Aimé Césaire, Frantz Fanon and Edouard Glissant (Wynter, 1989).

44 Word phrasing is a technique used in DJ battles where by words and phrases prerecorded on vinyl are manually and rhymically recontextualized to convey a new sentence or phrase.
Dre record, the young Filipino Canadian prepared his audience for a soundclash, heightening the anticipation of his routine. DJ Dopey continued to build his stage presence, using a cross fader and mixer to cut in and out of two vinyl records, demonstrating the essence of DJ battles, two records, a mixer and imagination. “When these beats bang, it’ll drive you insane,” DJ Dopey continues to ventriloquize his message through a Dr. Dre track, continuing a legacy of lyrical warfare that has its roots in the Jamaican dancehall (Cooper, 2004). Various other selected samples of Dr. Dre’s rhymes, such as “the best to emerge, the world is mine” and the song’s chorus, “I see you watching me…” provide further context of Dopey’s decidedly boisterous stage persona. This winning routine, like most successful turntablists routines, involve a response from their audience, but only if the turntables are made to call in a manner considered creative within hip hop culture.46

Turntablism is an extension of hip hop DJ culture; it involves dramatically altering the sonic properties of a vinyl record using a mixer and two turntables. The Turntablist departs from the DJ by refusing to play records in the linear and commonsense manner they were designed—that

3 DMC is an acronym for Disco Mixing Championships, an annual competition considered one of the most prestigious and difficult to obtain titles.

46 For example, the art of digging for rare samples is a core part of hip hop dj sampling, to demonstrate this skill as Dopey did in his routine and to recontextualize samples of these sounds is to adhere to hip hop’s conventions of sampling and digging.
is from needle to record, and from the beginning of a record to its end. Rather, Turntablists select specific portions of a record and play this sound like a musician in a band. In fact, many Turntablists perform together similar to a band, where each person is responsible for playing a specific instrument. The only difference is that these instruments are on prerecorded vinyl records.

In DJ Dopey’s routine he decides to take a horn sample from a big band record and play this horn, rhythmically rubbing both the vinyl and the turntable platform to achieve the desired sound. Turntablism diverges from, the sampling patterns of hip hop music creation, by actively manipulating a specific sound in a variety of ways with the DJ/Turntablist’s hands. Turntablists engage in various techniques to manipulate records such as word phasing, mentioned above, as well as scratching, crabs and beat juggling, amongst others. In his winning routine, DJ Dopey exceeded these conventions by first removing one record from the turntable and then tapping the needle on the turntable’s metal platform at rhythmic intervals to create a new beat; Dopey uses one hand to move between pushing the metal platform at his desired speed, and cutting the sound of the record in and out of audibility using the mixer’s crossfader. As it is tapped against the metal platform of the turntable, the needle exceeds its initial functionality, and is transformed into a hand that engages a drum refashioned out of a turntable. Dopey’s winning routine, easily
considered an exemplary engagement with hip hop’s musical culture, was both informed and made possible by much earlier sonic innovations tested and refined by Jamaican soundsystem culture.

Turntablism, with its routes in hip hop DJing and Jamaican soundsystem culture, is a sonic activity that highlights alternative notions of, and engagements with, a conceptualization of modernity that lay beyond the intellectual and scholarly foci of western European thought. Following David Morley’s provocative inquiry used to open this chapter, if we think of modernity as the “mixture of things”… “produced by accelerating change” then the act of turntablism brings into focus how humans imagine and produce creative mixes interweaving themselves throughout various technologies and velocities of technological change. What is interesting about turntablism is that it operates through a medium that is seemingly outmoded and no longer a serious part of consumer culture; it is not longer viewed as modern in the sense that cassettes, compact discs and mp3s have replaced the record as sonic medium of choice for your average consumer.47  Turntables, like the ex-enslaved individual, are modernity’s excesses of

47 When in 1998 the turntable outsold the guitar as most popular instrument, this signaled that the modernity of vinyl had shifted, as sales of vinyl records increased.
having served its purpose and are discarded in favour of new and more intense forms of capital accumulation.

As a sonic engagement that comes out of an Afrodisiapreric sound culture, turntablism is a black expressive cultural form, one that takes critical cues from the oppressive conditions under which Afrodisiapreric cultures have dwelled in the west. This does not mean only descendents of Africans can engage in turntablism, rather in direct contrast to such essentialism, turntablisms involves aesthetic values and sound making innovations that can be integrated into other kinds of social realities. Therefore, DJ Dopey’s routine related in the opening of this chapter debunks the kinds of essentialist claims that attempt to connect authenticity and blackness. Because sound can be disembodied and separated from its creators, black musics are precariously positioned, ripe for capitalist exploitation, but also aptly situation as paradigmatic in terms of testing new terrains of meaning-making and knowledge production. From the call and response of the version in the Jamaican dancehall to DJ Kool Herc’s repetitious merry-go-round invention, Afrodisiapreric sonic engagements, particularly as they relate to sound technologies, redesign the relationship between human and sound-making machines.
Importantly, Paul Gilroy has suggested that black expressive cultural forms “transform the relationship between the production and use of art, the everyday world, and the project of racial emancipation” (1992:74). Where Gilroy is interested in advancing a project of the eradication of ethnic absolutism and reads black expressive cultures accordingly, this dissertation is more interested in thinking about freedom and the project of liberation.48 More specifically, this dissertation is interested in the relational ways in which turntables are used to propose alternative notions of freedom and remap a project of liberation that lay beyond the language and customs of Western law and liberalism. This chapter contends that turntablism, as an Afro Diasporic sonic activity, restructures the relationship between former commodities and today’s technological commodities such that freedom is understood as the ability to participate within the meaning-making structure of sound-making devices.

While the project of racial emancipation and tensions of Afrosonic modernity continue to be essential parts of the Afro Diasporic sonic experience, as Gilroy and Weheliye contend

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48 The project of liberation I am referring to here is related to the elusiveness of the freedom promised by the end of the institution of slavery. I use the term project to connect the various attempts, arenas, avenues and procedures, from Nat Turner to Nanny and from Zumbi dos Palmares to Violet Desmond, that sought spaces of dignity outside bondage.
respectively, there is also a narrative of human freedom embedded within sonic practices and indebted to Afrodisporic experiences. Thus, Patrick Taylor importantly suggests:

Liberating narrative grounds itself in the story of lived freedom, the story of individuals and groups pushing up from below… to reveal the ambiguity and multilayeredness of reality (Taylor, 1989).

The narrative of freedom excavated in this chapter uncovers how sound and their relationships to technological commodities become the arena where alternative notions of freedom are developed, engaged and articulated. So just as the Blues were an alternative space of critical discursive engagement and knowledge production (Neal, 1999; Woods, 2007), the turntable and eventually turntablism invite us to engage alternative definitions of freedom within the realm of the sonic via the technological. Turntablism pivots on the act of creating multiple meanings as demonstrated by jazz improvising, troubling both consumer culture stimulated by manufacturers’ planned obsolesces and the very meaning of the human experience. By manipulating records, DJs and Turntablists trouble the archives of knowledge production that guide our contemporary world. Instead of demonstrating an ‘objective’ detachment and reverence to preexisting musics, these musicians engage in call and response and participatory activities, building upon aesthetic and oral traditions from the African diaspora.
Turntablism is informed by what I call the participatory ideal—an organic ideal interested in participating in or forming connections with objects and ideas, in a relational fashion. Throughout the African diaspora the participatory ideal has been more poignant and visible due to the conditions many enslaved Africans survived. The participatory ideal produces discursive incisions into notions of freedom, the autonomous individual and the ‘rational being’ positing other[ed] and invalidated alternatives to our present mode of ‘truth’.

The act of turntablism negotiates the intended use-value of information housed on vinyl recording reinterfacing and reloading the medium with different kinds of information, such as how one might imagine their relationship to the supposed fixed and predetermined pillars of our current mode of existence, such as consumption in the Western world. The record (both vinyl and legal) then symbolizes the stability and the supposed predeterminacy of our times, while the Turntablist is the rebellion within our present order, refusing to submit to the chronology and rigidity of words and sounds captured on the record.

The intersection between technology and Afrodisporic individuals is the most unlikely space to uncover new perspectives on human existence because as commodities and former commodities, technology and Afrodisporic people are often ignored beyond their assumed ‘use value’. What I
mean by this is that the thinking, rational, full human was not a conception white America was willing to extend to the formerly enslaved. In order to maintain their social privilege, white America\textsuperscript{49} was unwilling to imagine that those who were once human chattel were capable of contributing to society in a manner beyond bondage. Similarly, technologies are not normally imagined as being capable of functioning beyond a single specialized usage, so that record players play only records and telephones are used only to make phone calls.

The intersection between former commodities and today’s technological commodities is a generative space to begin thinking about the role of sound in the enunciations of Afro diasporic life. As may appear evident, I begin from a cultural politics of difference—a different mode of articulating as well as documenting the indices of Black life in the diaspora—in order to arrive at a notion of life that does not solely rely on the structures of thought inherited from the West. The difference I am interested in is not anti-western, nor is it a static difference with an identifiable origin. Rather, the difference explored throughout this dissertation is interested in the yet to be made, the encounter and the collision of two different worlds and value systems. Cornel West, in his landmark essay, suggests the initiation of a new cultural politics of difference

\textsuperscript{49} Excluded here are groups like the Quakers and other Abolitionists.
can connect the moral and the political with “the particularities of our alternative visions, analyses and actions” (West, 1990).

In this chapter, the focus is on the space between Afrodisporic expressive cultures and various sound technologies that are home to ideas and methods by which the “particularities”, of other modernities and the syncopation of identities operate and frustrate various regimes of power. At this “scene of subjection” (Hartman, 1997) where Aunt Hester met the master’s whip, the sound of the speaking commodity did not follow Marx’s ventriloquist act and discuss its use value; what Fred Moten identifies is a denial of commodity status by a full human, expressed via the sonic—Aunt Hester’s scream (Moten, 2003).  

Today, black bodies in the West continue to sonically render themselves into personhood and revamp that category of human, just not under the same circumstances as Aunt Hester. Electronic sound technologies have elaborated the means by which sonic articulations are made by Black folk, but the underlying assertions and desires remain the same as Negro Spirituals: a desire to transcend a dismal present and imagine a livable future. This chapter is organized by first

50 Fred Moten cleverly details Karl Marx’s inability in Capital Volume 1 to imagine a commodity that speaks. Moten returns to a scene in Fredrick Douglass’ autobiography in which Aunt Hester is being whipped and Douglass is forced to witness this (Moten, 2003).
exploring the relationship between the language of diaspora and the various practices and sites of afrosonic sound. The chapter moves on to outline the DJ’s important positioning as connected to both the music and their dancing audiences. In the next section I detail the art of turntablism elaborating on its usefulness for thinking the present and stressing its potency to disrupt the “always rhetorico-discursively regulated modes of human life” (Wynter, 1989:645). The final section focuses on Rastafarian linguistic practices and how they exercise their relationality, elaborating on how we might want to think about the role the sonic can continue to play in designing other kinds of human experiences and meaning-making relationships.

To tackle some of these issues, I turn to various activities and performances of the DJ in both the Caribbean and the West. I utilize various DJ and Turntablist performances to help think through the commodity/human/technology conversation stated earlier. Soundsystem culture, the predecessor to North American DJ culture, provides for another set of sonic practices that articulate a specific relationship between Afrodisporic peoples and sound technologies. At the end of the chapter, I turn to the sonic matter found in Jamaica, particularly around the linguistic practices of Rastafarianism and soundsystem culture to gesture backwards to other sonic experiences. I turn to these two spaces within Jamaican culture to help outline the possibility that the participatory ethos might belongs to a particular Afrodisporic logic.
Thinking Through the Sonic Diaspora

The language of diaspora has its limits, especially when dealing with the African diaspora. This at times rigid language, such as William Safran’s categorizing and ordering of diaspora (Safran, 1991), but it allows for an examination of the discursive hegemony of the ‘nation’ as a concept. At times, diaspora gets deployed as if it has no relationship to nation, both denying yet remaining within a binaristic language; an unfortunate inheritance of euro-enlightenment thinking. But to think about the concept of diaspora through the multidirectional routes of sound lends us an additional tool that does not lock us into the meanings and language that undergrid contemporary notions of diaspora based upon the Jewish diaspora paradigm. What I mean by this is that words like exile or longing, while very applicable to the Jewish diaspora, become burdensome when thinking about enslaved Africans who continually refashion notions of exile, home and longing. Sonic diasporas do not present us with entrenched binaries of home and host or become entangled in the language of exile or loss. Instead, through examinations of sound in the African diaspora, we are treated to the mixed up, unpure, unruly behaviour of sound that Eurocentrism has not been able to contain with the enforcement of copyright laws, colonial bans or lawsuits.

Unlike sound, census data, surveys and interviews capture aspects of diasporic populations that lay within the categorical/discursive positions defined by the nature of the ‘study’. Sound is both a site of personal agency and a documenter of hidden histories (Jones, 2002).
The idea of a sonic diaspora, the dispersal of sounds is central to thinking differently about Afrodiasporic peoples. The definition of sonic diaspora that I am interested in using is focused primarily upon sound, but includes more. I use the notion of a sonic diaspora as a term that encompasses both the material and metaphysical realities of life in the African diaspora as well as the strategies, routes, processes and experiences that have significantly shaped Afrodiasporic life. For example, in the training of a Senegambian Griot, the methods of remembering are just as important as the histories remembered. Thus, sonic diaspora is conceived in my work as more than oral creations encompassing processes, technologies and tactics that make sonic diasporic matter possible. Given the history of forced migration, oppression and the outlawing of literacy amongst Afrodiasporic peoples in the Western world, a move to the oral arena of the African diaspora may prove central to attaining a different kind of analysis of Afrodiasporic life.

In African diaspora studies attention to the sonic has the potential to deal with the gap in translation which Edwards coins a ‘décalage’ (that which resists translation) (Edwards, 2005). In the process of seasoning, while the newly enslaved individuals learnt the local pidgin, the daily violence of the plantation hindered the process of translation in any linguistic, religious or social sense. Incomplete, inadequate or fractured translations, in both languages and cultures, led to
new world amalgams such as Haitian vodun or Dutch Papiamento. The décalage of many Africans in the West can be found inside the sonic life of the formerly enslaved, making possible for Houston A. Baker to determine that, “a blues matrix possess enormous force for the study of literature, criticism and culture” (Baker, 1984).

Importantly, Afro-diasporic life makes itself audible; both in the past and today, via oral inventions such as dub poetry and through musical endeavours such as Nigerian drum literature or politically charged Caribbean calypsos. Academic inquiries have been keenly observing this alternate non-scribal arena of enunciation since at least the last years of western slavery. The most recent scholarly works term such inquiries “sonic afro-modernity” as expressed in Alexander Weheliye’s *Phonographies* in 2005. Weheliye develops the term “sonic Afro-modernity” following an analysis of Ralph Ellison’s Prologue to *Invisible Man*. Here, Ellison is understood as:

> having formulated a model of subjectivity in relation to sound technologies which bears witness to the specificities of black like while also gesturing towards a more general condition of Western modernity (Weheliye, 2003).
Inquiries into AfroSonic life in the Americans began with both Ellison’s *Invisible Man* as well as Leroi Jones’s *Blues People*. I say “began” because in these works (rather than anthropological works) Africans were actually acknowledged as agents rather than just objects. Many prior anthropological studies were perpetrators of the object/subject analytical view. Ellison and Jones distinguished themselves from earlier studies that documented folk songs or other forms of orality by examining the role of, and work produced by, the sonic matter Afrodiasporic peoples created and consumed. Rather than simply documenting the emergence of Blues music or the activities peoples took up around such music, like dances or social gatherings, Jones sought to illuminate the trajectory by which Africans became American. *Blues People* takes a look at the ways in which Africans in America attempted to formulate roots, as Americans, a process through which Jones pays attention to the routes – the diasporicity of these peoples. So Jones’ work not only complements what Mark Anthony Neal and Paul Gilroy have called ‘alternative public spheres’, but he does so thoroughly attentive to the sonic matter – the work songs, the Blues and the Jazz of Africans in the United States. Now Jones’ documentation of the move from African to American pivots on a binary logic. While Jones rightfully acknowledges the “brilliant amalgam of diverse influences” that compose “Negro culture,” he also appears to formulate “white man’s culture” and “negro culture” as mutually exclusive spaces (2002:80).
Ellison’s critique of Jones’s work clearly highlights this; he claims that Jones ignored the “intricate networks of connections which bind Negroes to the larger society” (Ellison, 1955).

While in the 1950s and 1960s the term sonic diaspora was not sayable, it is precisely because of Leroi Jones’ analysis in *Blues People* and “The Changing Same” that we can conceive of sonic diaspora as a conceptual tool. Thus, by 2005 scholars such as Alexander Weheliye utilize the sonic diaspora as “an important zone through which to theorize” (Weheliye, 2005:05).

Importantly, theorizing through the sonic is a way to answer David Chariandy’s provocative question:

> How do we adjust our current methodologies to adequately show how diasporic people adopt, transform, and contest both ‘Western’ and non-Western epistemes in order to produce new forms of knowledge?\(^{51}\)

While I am not convinced that scholars must “show how diasporic people adopt,” I am certainly interested in adventuring through sonic matter to excavate new forms of knowledge that continually get overlooked as either ‘primitive’ or as solely entertainment. A number of engagements with the sonic diaspora, such as Weheliye’s *Phonographies*, Gilroy’s research on

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black musics, Tricia Rose’s *Black Noise*, Mark Anthony Neal’s *What the Music Said* as well as Baker and Moten’s contributions, suggest possible answers to Chariandy’s inquiry. But as Robin D. G. Kelley has suggested, we cannot ignore the black radical imagination and its relationship to Afrosonic matter (Kelley, 2002). Significantly, it has been the collision of the black radical imagination with various forms of sound technology that has allowed for continued engagements with future possibilities and alternate ways of living with and through difference. This is where theorizing possible futures of Afrodiasporic life become possible with the scholarship of Kwodo Eshun, DJ Spooky and others. For, as Eshun explains, in his work the sonic is “extend[ed]… outwards, thereby getting at [a] feeling of impossibility which this music often give you” (Eshun, 1998).

The sonic diaspora as a conceptual tool allows us to become attentive to a number of arenas within the African diaspora that are often overlooked or that escape conventional methodological approaches. For example, histories, politics, emotions and social processes can all be heard through paying attention to the sonic elements involved in Afrodiasporic life. Conventional information gathering techniques such as census and other state run apparatuses do not, perhaps cannot, adequately detail the hopes, dreams, imaginings of Afrodiasporic populations. In working with the notion of a sonic diaspora, I hope to encompass all of the oral technologies —
from utterances to highly articulate, correctly enunciated public speeches, to capitalist infused musical creations (think: Motown Records) — that peoples of African ancestry in the diaspora have employed over the last four centuries. The usefulness of a concept such as the sonic diaspora is that it operates as an alternate arena where oral traditions are documented, where histories are recorded, and as an arena where change, both on the macro and on the micro level, occur. So for instance, the Spanish presence in pre 1655 Jamaica can be heard in the streets of Kingston, Brixton, Queens and Toronto three hundred and fifty-one years later via the silent H that exists in today’s Jamaican patwa/patois. Similarly, the moans and grunts we find in present day R&B can be related back to the pain of slavery, ever present in the slave sublime, as DuBois would assert “the articulate message of the slave to the world” (Dubois as cited in Gilroy, 1993). Not only does the sonic diaspora document histories, emotions and politics; it also captures what gets lost in the binaristic, ethnic absolutist assertions that often obscure plural antecedents and origins.

Sonically, attention to the details of any specific Afro-diasporic music can reveal what Juan Flores calls, in regard to Salsa music, “the musical baggage, the stylistic remittance of the diaspora” (Flores, 2005). This ‘baggage’ includes not only music, but also aesthetics, routes and histories. What might be the baggage of turntablism? Also, of what use is such “musical
For many scholars, this musical baggage—the sonic diaspora—has allowed for critical investigations of the relationship between Afrodiasporic peoples and Western modernity. Thus, Paul Gilroy is able to formulate the notion of a counterculture of modernity, while Craig Werner can postulate on an “AfroModernist aesthetic” (Werner, 1994), and then there is Weheliye’s sonic Afro-modernity (Weheliye, 2002). Similarly, in Eshun’s Afrofuturist engagement with black popular culture issues of the human and posthumanism proliferate within his writings (Eshun 1998, 2003). Alongside investigations of Afromodernity, humanism and posthumanism, technology also becomes a central topic of investigation, as apparent in Weheliye’s recent analysis of the vocoder (1998) and phonograph (2005).

Technology becomes important in the African diaspora, not only for what it makes audible but also for the ideas, engagements and ethos it illuminates. Afrodiasporic engagements with technology have ranged from the gramophone and the phonograph at the turn of the 20th century to MSN messenger, MP3s and MP4s of today. These engagements highlight the ways in which an Afrodiasporic aesthetic orients a de-authorizing, anti-modernist/postmodernist ethos. If we follow Craig Werner’s insights into the role of the communal in Afromodernist aesthetic practices, where authority is made ambivalent by call and response activities, the apparently subversive engagements with technologies by Afrodiasporic peoples become open arenas where
Afromodernist aesthetics are made clear (Werner, 1994). For example, mobile soundsystems in the late 1940s in Jamaica showcased how Jamaicans engaged with sound technologies rather than passively accepting the limitations posed by either the unaffordability of live bands or the stasis of sound equipment. Likewise, the recording of musics via various technological devices and its transformation removes a certain authoritative grasp music holds over its listener (Gilroy, 1987). Thus, by exceeding the presumed usage of sound technologies, Afrodiasporic peoples demonstrate their radically different modernist thinking and relationships to technology.

THE DJ

The disc jockey stands at this important intersection between sound technologies and Afrodiasporic innovations, shaping new ways to continue the project of freedom whose terms and conditions are yet to come. The disc jockey uses various devices such as turntables, samplers, and drum machines to enunciate, refashion or remap the social location of blackness—that disjunction between social perception and subjective understanding/reality (Moten, 2003). The DJ interacts in an unmediated fashion with the turntable, in control of a stylus and needle whose job it is to extract sound from acetate or wax. While DJing the disc jockey is trapped in a nexus of having to please their audience, while having to utilize this particular sound technology to achieve this goal. There exist two conversations at this moment, one with a machine which
determines the next conversation with the audience. The DJ uses their hands to intervene on the playing record choosing which part to repeat, which words or sounds to emphasize. The creation of the breakbeat is a clear starting point.

In participating in the sounds that emanate from a vinyl source, the DJ violates the ‘authority’ of the record, not only suggesting, but also materializing other ways/narratives by which we can sonically/aurally experience the record. For the DJ of Afrodiasporic ancestry, whose history may involve the commodification and enslavement via the transatlantic trade, the conversation between DJ and electronic sound technology is an important muted interaction. The ideas that drive a DJ to spin the record back, make thinkable the isolation of a breakbeat or the mixture to different records into one soundscape are the ideas of this muted conversation between technological commodity and former commodity. Do various forms of sound technology induce new processes of thought? Do sound technologies speak for, or extend the ‘voice’ of the formerly enslaved? With these questions in mind, I am interested in teasing out the sonic utterances (maybe a scream), suggestions or demands of an alternative understanding of how peoples, ideas, or positioning within the African diaspora are, or can be connected to revamping our present “modes of truth” in light of the multiple realities of our present. In other words, I’d like to uncover another logic by which the syncopating temporalities of identities in the African
diaspora in Canada might make sense. What do these two forms tell us about our current conceptual itineraries around culture, Afro-diasporic sound, the relationship between human and machine and the connection of different entities? My work here poses the possibility of thinking beyond the sonic creations of Afro-diasporic peoples as solely entertainment, but instead as sonic adventures that house delegitimized forms of knowing and living that cannot enter our present system of knowledge, yet holds the potential to radically alter how we might think of the connection between things.

Two art forms that connect much of my interests in the intersection between Afro-diasporic peoples and sound are turntablism and the practice of remixing. Remixing will be taken up at length in the following chapter. Turntablism is inextricably linked to the art of the DJ. Although the DJ is an acronym for disc jockey, in today’s hypermediated and technologically saturated ‘globalized’ present the function of the disc jockey has changed significantly. At one time on commercial radio the disc jockey introduced new records to an audience he could not see and performed different forms of entertainment between the records and commercials. Many of the most popular Afro-American traditional commercial radio Disc Jockeys, such as Daddy-O Daylie or Dr Hep Cat, were steeped in African American vernacular practices that paved the way for many of today’s hip-hop emcees and DJs (Toop, 2000). Interestingly, in the Jamaican music
scene the DJ is not the person that plays records, rather the person who is the vocal piece of a
soundsystem. This is an interesting riff of the chatty disc jockeys from New Orleans, Memphis
and Miami that dominated much of the airwaves in Jamaica prior to independence (Bradley,
2000; Dalton, 2004). Today, as the word disc jockey is used only in the most archaic North
American musical settings, the DJ is an entertainer and performer who uses records to interact
with a dancing audience’s emotions. The term ‘soul-controller’ captures the essence of what the
modern club DJ does. The main job of the DJ is to ensure their audience continues dancing and
enjoys themselves. Such a task includes measuring the level of enjoyment of each song via call
and response, digging for tracks that people may not know but might want to dance to and
creating a continuous narrative of sound that encourages people to communicate their
appreciation for such sounds through dancing. Great DJs are known as those who practice a
certain sensitivity to their audience’s emotions, a “musical editor” (Broughton, 2006) who
participates in the emotionscape of the dance. The DJ first came into being as a ‘soundsystem’
man in Jamaica, as a cheaper alternative to live bands who roamed the countryside and brought
the latest musics to his/her publics (Bradley, 2000; Dalton, 2004). For the rugged terrain of
Jamaica and high percentage of rural dwellers, traveling bands – many people with many
instruments – was not ideal physically or financially. One man with many records, a huge
amplifier and the ability to come to your town made for a greater proliferation of musical enjoyment by the rural and the urban, the poor and the not-as-poor.

Today, in certain musical genres, DJing involves more than the playing of records or the controlling of souls. In hip hop DJing, various techniques, such as chirps, scratching and beat juggling have redesigned the interaction between human DJ and machine technology. These techniques have increased the ways DJs manipulate vinyl recordings and suggest a particular kind of relationship between blackness and technology, a relationship not interested in obeying certain rules of engagement. Instead of a ‘hands – off’ reverence for the sounds recorded on vinyl, DJs and Turntablist enter into the project of sound making by using their hands (and voices at times) to interrupt the narrative of a record to tell a different kind of story. These new stories vary with the DJ; they are both stylistic engagements with hip hop culture as well as engagements that defy the already determined discursive structure of entity/sound engagement.

The most known facet of various hip hop DJ’s repertoire is the scratch. Developed by Grandwizard Theodore in 1977, this 15 year old aspiring DJ accidentally rubbed the turntable’s needle over the surface of the vinyl recording (Benedictus, 2002). He was simply following his Mother’s orders to turn down the music in his bedroom when his haste caused the needle to produce a new noise once in ‘illegitimate’ contact with the vinyl. Theodore’s contraband error
was unknowingly the foundation of a new sound, the scratch, which grew to form the basis of numerous other techniques. Today scratching is understood as a rhythmic manipulation of a record whose sound is sometimes chopped in and out by the crossfader of a mixer (Benedictus, 2002). Turntablism is one art form that grew out of the tricks hip hop DJs mastered on two turntables.

**Turntablism: Turning the Tables of Thought?**

The turntable has traditionally been a device that played vinyl/acetate recordings. It has a tone arm and needle that descend upon the acetate or vinyl and makes aurally legible the sonic matter of humans and their environment. The phonograph, the ancestor of the turntable, originally made possible the separation of the human from its sonic creations. Once the amazement of such separation wore off, the urge for participatory action with the music pushed the turntable beyond its intended function, rearranging its supposed use-value. This is where a nuance must be acknowledged; the DJ plays recorded music on the turntable while the Turntablist develops new music using the turntable. As French-Canadian Turntablist and DMC World Champion D.J. A-Trak denotes, DJs are entertainers while Turntablist are musicians (Webber, 2000). The Turntablist excavates various sounds and arranges them in a new sonic order that relies as much
on a rhythmic pattern or re-ordered sounds as on their audience who must confirm the intelligibility of this new creation. Thus, the call and response feature of Afro diasporic life is central in the confirmation of a Turntablism’s creation: heads and hands must move in rhythmic unison, responding to the call and its creative manifestations.

Turntablism is the avant-garde offspring of hip hop Djing. It has developed as an art form interested in rearranging sounds found on records rather than simply playing the music on the records for entertainment purposes. In 1998 the National College Radio Association submitted a formal definition of turntablism to the Canadian Radio and Technology Commission. Accordingly, turntablism can be defined as:

Manipulation of previously recorded track(s) to the extent that they are substantially altered from their original format, and that the continuous or consistent alteration of the previously existing track(s) continue for one minute or more. 53

Consequently, a Turntablism has been understood as “a person who uses the turntables not to play music but to manipulate sounds and create music” (Babu, 1996). The proliferation of Turntablists as band members, especially outside of the hip hop genre testifies to the distinction

between DJs and Turntablists (see Sugar Ray, Beck, Nelly Furtado). As a music making form, Turntablism calls into question the relationship between human and sound technology by reformatting the ‘use value’ of the turntable. Starting with 15-year-old Theodore, and extended by Grandmaster Flash in 1982 (see the Adventures of Grandmaster Flash on the Wheels of Steel), scratching and DJ tricks annihilate a submissive reverence to machines and the assumed separation between human and machine. Just as the call and response of Afro diasporic life changed the relationship between performer and audience, the DJ moves between performing for an audience, enjoyment with the audience and the total destruction of the invisible barrier between record and individual. These forms of relations, for an audience, with an audience and oscillations between performer and audience, speak to the new formations of being the DJ formulates.

Before turntablist became a usable word, hip hop DJs were experimenting with various techniques after the monumental introduction of scratching. Most of the techniques that today form the backbone of turntablism, such as cutting\(^{54}\) or transforming\(^{55}\) were practiced by hip hop

\[^{54}\] Cutting is the quick use of a mixer’s fader to move from one turntable to another, thus rapidly changing the sonic arrangement either through doubling, deletion or repetition.

\[^{55}\] Transforming is a technique whereby the record is dragged back and forth with one hand while the second hand uses the mixer’s cross fader to allow short moments of sound audible. The audible moments are usually sounds of the record being dragged backwards thus creating an entirely new sound. The technique got its name from its sonic
DJs in vigorous competition to see who could develop the freshest style. The earliest, most celebrated and best visually documented example was Grandmaster Flash’s “Adventures on the Wheels of Steel” in 1982, where Flash rearranged the sound of various records using two turntables and a mixer in his kitchen.\textsuperscript{56} Flash cut between two of the same records repeating the same sonic arrangement by using the crossfader and switching between two turntables in successive counts until the original songs were barely recognizable. “The Adventures of Grandmaster Flash on the Wheels of Steel” is an apt aural and visual beginning of what has become known as turntablism. Using two turntables and a mixer, Grandmaster Flash played the instrumental of “Good Times” while interdispersing different sound bites/samples that explicitly acknowledged his DJing prowess. At various points throughout the 7 minute routine Flash flips back and forth between the instrumental to “Another one bites the Dust” and “Good Times”, two songs whose narrative emphasize Flash’s skills at defeating other DJs and rocking a party. In another part of the routine Flash scratches the downbeat section of the first record while “Good Times” continues to play. Flash’s rhythmic scratches mimic the bassline of “Good Times”, both interrupting yet adding to the record currently playing. Another variation of Flash’s engagement with these records is his repetitive scratch sampling of the word “good,” an act that has been resemblance to the popular cartoon Transformers. The transformer scratch was developed in Philadelphia by DJ Jazzy Jeff and DJ Cash Money (Pray, 2001/2002).

\textsuperscript{56} See Grandmaster Flash in the film \textit{Wild Style} by Charlie Ahern.
enshrined as the most recognizable component of turntablism since its rise. Turntablism became the heading under which the inventive DJing tricks of the hip hop DJ were nurtured into an entirely new component of hip hop culture.

At the core of turntablism is what some might call an ‘unorthodox’ use of the turntable and its components such as the needle and tone arm. Such ‘unorthodoxy’ appears only as such through modernist lenses, where authority and detachment dictate ‘correct usage’. For example, instead of using the turntable’s needle to extract sound from the vinyl, Turntablists, such as Canada’s DJ Dopey, refashion the needle into a sort of drum stick, tapping it against the record to achieve a new sound. 57 Another way to understand the actions of the Turntablist is as an attempt at fostering a communal participatory sentiment, which subsumes the individual to the community. On a macro level, antiphony and call and response techniques are transcribed into a technologically driven aural, rather than oral, sentiment uniting audience and performer, thus fostering a critical alternative public sphere (Gilroy, 1993; Neal, 1999). On a micro level, the Turntablist’s “records are deprived of the authority and reverential treatment appropriate to a fixed and artistic statement” (Gilroy, 1987). The Turntablist demands participation from the vinyl in the processes of making coherent sound, all while cannibalizing the dominant order.

57 See World DMC Finals 2003 DVD.
(Gilroy, 1987). Not only is the authority of the dominant order made ambivalent, the pleasurable aural creations suggest a certain kind of alterity, where the visual is not privileged over the aural.

Besides important methodological contributions to thinking about difference, turntablism continually signifies on our notions of linear time. Just like the remix, chronology and genre are thrown out the window, as are all other boundaries, in search of a rhythmic aural pleasure that sutures its constitutive elements. As a controller of the tactile, spatial, frequential, compositional and auditory elements of records, the Turntablist enacts a multifaceted deconstruction of sound, time and organization (Veen, 2002). Through the eyes of the Turntablist difference becomes compositional possibilities, not that which should be shunned, segregated or eliminated in direct opposition to how social difference is treated in Western liberal democracies (Lorde, 1984).

What might all this mean for regular people, such as a young person who may have never seen vinyl records before? What conceptual tools does turntablism provide us with? As an art form deeply indebted to Afrodisporic musical and performative traditions, turntablism centers improvisation, technological subversion, communal participation and aural pleasure. How might turntablism provide new paradigms for thinking about overlapping Afrodisporic communities and their negotiations of difference(s)—religious, pheontypical, ideological—within both Afro
communities and larger society? Theoretically, scholars have already begun working with the possibilities of thinking about race and nations through turntablism lenses (Snapper, 2004).

Turntablism as an art form, in its open-ended participatory structure, has become an arena where the boundaries of ‘race,’ culture, geography and gender (to a limited extent) crumble. Thus, worldwide competitions include peoples from the Philippines to France. In fact, the first manual on turntablism, written by a middle aged white male, featured a long section of interviews with professional Turntablism, all of them non-black. Such racial boundary bending and openness within this art form makes turntablism an ideal formation through which to study the negotiation of difference. Canada, as home to two DMC world champions in the past decade, the French-Canadian D.J. A-Trak and the Philipino D.J. Dopey, is an ideal site to locate the machinations of difference, turntablism and the Afro-diasporic aesthetic. What might be the logic that informs the art of turntablism and its antecedents?

**Speaking the Sound of Today**

Turntablism and the remix exist within a family of related sound making interventions within the Afro-diaspora, such as Steel Pan from Trinidad and Quelbe from St. Croix. This relationship consists of utilizing what has been refused, discarded, in essence working with the b-side of
globalization\textsuperscript{58}, such as empty oil drums or outdated vinyl or old car mufflers to create new and exciting forms of music. Steel orchestras developed in Trinidad in the early 1900s; it was the last instrument invented in this century. Originally bamboo was the material of choice for the making of sound by Trinidad’s poor Blacks prior to the 1930s, after which iron and metal became the music making material of choice (Dudley, 2003). Poor Black Trinidadians took discarded oil drums and learned to beat different section of the oil drum to produce melodies that imitated classical works by Bach, Mozart and the likes. Prior to independence the steel pan was considered a “lower class nuisance,” nothing more than noise made by the country’s poor African populations. By 1962, the steel pan came to symbolize the defiance anti-colonial attitude of the Trinidadian masses under Eric Williams. Quelbe, also called Scratch Band, is a music native to St. Croix consisting of the utilization of discarded household items such as cups, forks and spoons to produce music. In 2004 the Virgin Islands made quelbe its official music, after emerging while the island was under Danish rule.

Did Steelpan and Quelbe speak of anti-colonialism long before the masses could speak in such a language? What ideas about sound motivated poor Trinidadians to beat bamboo and metal sheets and black communities in St. Croix reinvent the use-value of household items? What

\textsuperscript{58} Rinaldo Walcott (2006) first used this metaphor that is so precise I had to borrow it.
is/was the relationship between these sound making activities and Afro-diasporic identities, practices of resistance and technology?

Quelbe and the Steelpan, turntablism eloquently speaks to the post-structural, post-modern multi-ethnic, cultural/racial realities of the Northern Western hemisphere. The massive availability and affordability of various cutting-edge technologies and electronic devices in North America make Canada and the United States feasible arenas of engagement with turntablism and the remix. While work as been done on the relationship between race and turntablism in the United States (Snapper, 2004), the socio-cultural governmental project of multiculturalism in Canada provides for a more fractured and hegemonic state practice around issues of the multi’s that constitute late capitalism. For example, Canada’s official policy of multiculturalism encourages immigrants to preserve their cultures and celebrate their differences, amongst other things. Thus, as some critics of the policy assert, Canada becomes a fragmented nation full of different mosaics that divide the nation into ethnic enclaves (Saloojee, 2004). In the United States, culture, ethnicity and race take a backseat to the nation’s hegemonic ‘melting pot’ practice, so that American rather than a hyphenated American title becomes the preferred terms of identification. The difference is, although in both countries people live lives that do not necessarily correspond to the nation’s prescribed race and ethic relations strategies, Canada has made the rhetoric of
multiculturalism their national policy supported by law. Part of Canada’s official policy calls for the “preservation” and “celebration” of cultural difference. Not only does this create what Stuart Hall calls “consumerist/boutique” multiculturalism (Hall, 2000), it also fixes and calls for performances of static migrant ethnicities that can be recognized as authentic and thus part of the ‘multicultural’ nation (Walcott, 2001).

In his critique of state-sponsored multiculturalism, Rinaldo Walcott suggests “multicultural discourse attempts to make us all the same by making us different” (Walcott, 2001:132). Within the ordering of the nation through multicultural discourse the governmental process assumes that if the nation’s ethnocultural differences are all recognized as such, contained within and respected by the language of tolerance, then diversity cannot disrupt their created sameness through an overarching multicultural governmental project. This multicultural project rests precariously upon the assumption that culture is static and cannot slip beyond its boundaries to mix with another culture. In fact, the language of ‘tolerance’ works to solidify boundaries between ‘Canadians’ and ‘Others’ ignoring relational realities. Yet relationality connects different peoples through their commonalities, which is not always race, ethnicity or nationality.
The lower-class ‘nuisances’ and ‘noises’ of the African diaspora, much like Francis Bebey’s thoughts used to open this chapter they speak the sound of their present, sonically render their socially prescribed difference audible. Speaking the sound of the present involves, at times, subverting the governing/dominant modes of thought and engagement from society’s periphery to arrive at a poetics of beyond. But to think of the steel pan, quelbe, and turntablism as avant-garde aspects of their times is to necessarily trap their genius within the confines of our present order, a space they have exceeded as evidenced by their very existence. As Kodwo Eshun reminds us, art forms are “epistemological metaphors” (Eshun, 1998), epistemes yet to come. The sound-making processes of turntablism, quelbe and steel pan gesture beyond both the fracture of postmodernism in North America and American paternalism in St. Croix towards the immateriality of tomorrow before such futures become material or concrete, as demonstrated in Steelpan’s anticipation independence in Trinidad (Attali, 1985). Not only do Afro Diasporic soundscapes make blackness a part of the landscape in a geographic sense as McKittrick (2006) suggests, but with their intimate entanglements with European high culture, such as Mozart, or Enlightenment thinker, these soundscapes and practices formulate other and organic subjective modes of being. To find Mozart in discarded oil tins in Trinidad, to forge indigenous culture from the excess commodities of a successful Monroe Doctrine or to articulate other modernities
in a beyond postmodernist fashion are all activities of an Afro-Modernity obscured but never silenced.

**The Event of Sound Making/ The Process of Sound -Thinking**

Because turntablism is a one contemporary form of many sound-making practices in the African diaspora, the focus here is on its potential to rethink our present conceptual itineraries around culture, identity and technology. What might be the episteme turntablism metaphorically suggests? The act of deconstructing and recombining various components of sound to form a new aural soundscape is instructive in thinking about living with difference in the Western world. Turntablism not only relies on inherited soundscapes and the human as agent, its art is its demolition of the familiar, the intentional insertion of sonic difference and suggestions of recombined newness. These actions are what Paul Gilroy in *Postcolonial Melancholia* calls for, a critical perspective that might “nurture the ability and the desire to live with difference on an increasingly and divided but also convergent planet” (Gilroy, 2004:03). The cultural and racial differences that we live with in Canada differ from other postcolonial societies as there is no ancestral past that we can return to, there was no utopia as Senghor, Nyrere and other leaders in decolonizing Africa sought.
Turntablism is about making new sounds with various bodily techniques to transform old existing sounds into new rhythmic patterns. Canada has inherited a Eurocentric model of sociality that attempt to overdetermine other modes of living, such as an organic multiculturalism we find in the Caribbean hundred of years before Canada became a nation. Modeling our thinking and sociality after the actions of the Turntablist provides us with methods to revamp our current order/knowledge regime in order to accurately parallel the realities of the post-modern, situated and temporal multi-realities of present-day Canadian life. The Turntablists ask via ingenious routines, ‘what can be made with these sounds that has not been heard before?’ To extend this trajectory of thought, the Canadian government, with its need for immigrant labour, might ask ‘what new sets of relations can we envision with the new populations that our country desperately needs?’ What makes this line of inquiry almost impossible is power, the desire for it and the desire to maintain it. Necessary to the task of operationalizing turntablist thought is the intentional desire to disrupt contemporary thought processes and mechanisms of reproducing power.

Just as the Turntablist interrupts the expectation of sound based on previously-heard rhythms, the DJ in Jamaican soundsystem culture also reformats the sound of records via vocal interruptions. Like the Turntablist, the DJ participates in the event of sound-making by interrupting the record
while it is playing. The DJ toasts on the record, endorsing the soundsystem he works for by adding sound bites to the record that is playing. At this moment of sound-making, the DJ turns down the sound of the record playing and speaks his mind over the record. Sometimes the DJ just adds sound bites, or mimics the sound of a gun going off, or at other times the toasting will involve speaking on current social topics. For instance, at a dance that took place June 2006 involving two of Jamaica’s biggest soundsystems, Stone Love and Bass Odyssey, the DJ took the liberty of inciting people to shout out their support for the sound only if “them never kill baby” or if they “love dem mudda”. In these continuous interruptions of the record, the DJ inserts and asserts themself in a non-dichotomous way, the event of sound-making is democratic, involving interruption and call and response tactics in an interesting fashion. Such sound-thinking, as Weheliye terms it, involves understanding a certain relationship between the individual and the record, thinking of sound as something connected to the individual, another area for subjective representation. Turntablism comes out of the idea of the navigation of these soundscapes in Jamaican soundsystem culture, where the (re)negotiations of the individual, freedom and representation take place.

In turntablism, the event of sound-making involves circumventing the normalcy of sonic reproduction, the playing of a record takes a back seat to playing with a record. Take for
example DJ Dopey’s 2003 routine (mentioned at the opening of this chapter) in which he lifts the stylus off the record and drops the needles on a playing record in a rhythmic fashion, producing a continuous rhythmic pattern, in essence a new beat. Rather than altering an existing sound as Turntablists before him, DJ Dopey displaced the record as the central sound-making device, opting to utilize the needle for such purposes. The ideas that motivate such actions constitute recognition of the multiple possibilities for sound-making beyond the prescribed role of record player. Like the toasting of the DJ in the Jamaican context, Turntablists enter into the structure of sound-making as agents participating in the redesign of the said structure. The Turntablist operationalizes a participatory ethos, one that refuses to separate meaning-making and the human, refusing to believe in the finality of prerecorded sound. The dichotomy of entity and individual is shattered, forming new episodes of sound-making whose ‘legitimacy’ does not belong to an enlightenment inherited concept of the autonomous individual or state determined freedom. The sound-thinking behind these activities are ripe with epistemological potential pertinent to rethinking our present. Thinking through turntablism interrupts the modes of human life whose assignment of value is based on a dichotomous conception of self/other, civilized/savage with the later completely devalued.
In its disruption of linear hegemonic ideas of order and process, turntablism disregards inheritance by not utilizing the turntable for its proposed function; the ‘playing’ of records. Instead, Turntablists interrupt the grooves of any record and redesign the aural arrangement of sometimes more than one record at the same time. Beat juggling, transformer scratches and aggressive rhythmic scratching and sampling techniques suggest that the functions of the sounds within the grooves of the record are outdated and malleable.

Ostensibly, turntablism exists as a new mode of being/knowing/interaction that alter our current ways of being in accordance with the nature of a hypermediated, fractured, postmodern reality in multicultural Canada. These two forms of sound-making rely on a subversive use of technology that is seeped in an Afro-diasporic ethos of participation.

Turntablism, as an extension of the hip hop DJ’s deconstructive tricks is an art form born out of the idea of participating with the vinyl recording. Stopping and restarting, talking over the record or via a crossfader, repeating the break section in records all come out of this idea of participation as freedom. For example, if we turn to the notion of the call and response, interaction and crowd participation are fundamentally a part of the performance. When DJ Kool Herc first isolated the breakbeat, he was exemplifying the fundamental connection of the African
diaspora to notions of freedom as a non-linear, participatory activity. To continuously repeat the breakbeat section of records meant the DJ participated both physically and sonically into reordering the sonic arrangement. This action, quite distant from European notions of performance and audience, was simply the response of the call and response gift the Afro-diaspora brought to the ‘new world’. Turntablism, in its altering of recorded songs, is an expression of the relationship between the African diaspora and ideas around modernity, technology and ideals of freedom. This is precisely the moment where freedom is extracted and articulated beyond unfreedom, the success of the liberal emancipation project. DJ Kool Herc’s creation of the breakbeat is a clear demonstration of the participatory ethos but is also connected to longer oral strategies found in the African diaspora. Patois, Kreyol, Krio and Papiamento are all languages from the African diaspora that are oral strategies of survival, they form part of an ongoing struggle to make meaning out of alienation, linguistic mixture and oppression. These languages are organic and participatory, so that their creativeness need not abide by hegemonic governing codes around language (primarily because they are excluded from these supposedly privileged structures). Although some of these languages are beginning to be documented, it is their oral nature and survival that distinguish them as part of the sonic diaspora. Walter Ong reminds us of the important struggle embedded in the oral traditions, when he claims:
Writing fosters abstraction that disengages knowledge from the arena where human beings struggle with one another. It separates the knower from the known. By keeping knowledge embedded in the human lifeworld, orality situates knowledge within a context of struggle (1982: 43-44).

Like the Afrodisporic languages listed above, but more politically charged and intentional, the speech patterns of Rastafarism, known as “dread talk”, innovatively detail the importance and power behind the participatory ethos.

‘Dread Talk,’ a relational and participatory sound.

Rastafar!, a faith-based collective born out of Jamaica’s economic woes in the 1920s and 1930s, is another space where the sonic vestiges of the African diaspora house important alternative and counter narratives. Rastafarianism is the belief in the divinity of Haile Selassie as the descendent of King Soloman. Worship, dress, diet, familial lifestyle and speech are all dictated by the tenets of Rastafarianism. Interestingly, it is in their speech where we find evidence of the participatory ethos. Some scholars suggest “Rastafarians have done to colonial symbols what the Enlightenment is reputed to have done to tradition, authority and faith” (McFarlane, 1998).
Rastafarian speech patterns negotiate a space somewhere beyond their euro inheritance of the English language and the vernacular patois of the masses in present day Jamaica. The use of the pronoun I replaces the ‘mi’ pronoun found in Jamaican patois. According to Velma Pollard’s study of the language of Rastafari, the use of I is meant to eliminate the attachment to slavery and oppression that the use of ‘mi’ is connected to (Pollard, 2000). Mi is considered a way to refer to oneself as an object, because in Jamaican patois me and mi are used as both subject and object (Edmonds 1998). According to Ennis B. Edmonds, I-an-I is an “expression of the oneness between two (or more) persons and between the speaker and God” (Ibid: 33).

The pronoun I is also used in the rearrangement of words such as vital, which becomes Ital, and creator becomes Ireator. The sounds of words are also changed in order to remove what is perceived as oppressive ideas in language. For example, in Rasta speech one does not refer to themselves as understanding, rather ovastand (as in the opposite of under) is used to alleviate the reference of being beneath a certain level of knowing. Ovastanding is an indication of a desire of Rasta culture to remove all oppressive mechanisms of Eurocentrism. These word-rearranging endeavours point to the importance of sound in constructing livable conditions within Rastafarian worldviews. An interviewee of The Twelve Tribes of New York City explains the rationale behind I-an-I:
We refer to one another [other Rastas] as “I-an-I”—we don’t make no one a second person. We just say “I-an-I,” because every person is a first person. “I-an-I refuse to comply with the shitstem” (Randall. 1998).

Clearly, by removing the second person, dread talk creates “a new sense of self that leads to a new vision of values” that intertwines sound, power and a liberatory conception of the self (McFarlane, 1998). I-an-I is an aggressive attack on chain-of-being ideologies that have suppressed black populations within Christianity. I-an-I remaps the ideological coordinates of Afrodiasporic populations in the popular imagination, who traditionally have been at the bottom of these chain of being arguments, furthest away from a presumed white-skinned God. When I-an-I is used it expresses an awareness of, on the part of the individual, a new and revamped relationship with their creator. I-an-I refuses the individualism of liberal western thought and instead self-fashions a relationship with their creator. This self-fashioning is the explicit belief that one can participate in the definition of, and relationship to, their God. I-an-I as an oral/sonic rearrangement expresses the ideal of participation in defining one’s God and their relationship to their creator.
Importantly, a rearrangement of these words reveals how one particular aspect of the African diaspora sonically expresses aspects of the participatory ideal. I-an-I indicates that all people are active agents and not passive objects as was forcefully asserted under enslavement. These active agents attack present systems of meaning exhibiting a willingness to engage with the meaning-making ability of words by intentionally signifying on words and their connotations. This engagement is a form of participation interested in revamping both the meaning of certain words, and our own passive relationships to the words we use. The idea of freedom expressed by this sonic rearrangement of words is radical in that it redesigns the terms of freedom, so that ideological emancipation is possible. Importantly, it is the sound of the word, rather than its scribal use, that is emphasized in Rasta speech. Scribally these word rearrangements exist but their existence is initiated through their sound. The sound of words repeated often, especially if they are interpreted as oppressive, produces a sonic violence that becomes normalized through the repetition of daily speech. It is the sound of a word that is met by average folk daily on the streets in the highly oral cultures of the African diaspora. So that Rasta sonic revisions of words are a form of direct participation within both the structure of the word and the sound of the word. These sonic rearrangements are democratized forms of liberation that operate through and are made possible by a participatory ideal. These Rastafari innovations create relationships with ideas and objects; they state a presence that interferes with the meaning-making potential of
words inherited from enslavement and Eurocentrism. This form of relationship making holds more meaning to individuals rather than the temporary disjuncture between systems of oppression, sometimes called emancipation.

**Differently, Still**

To think through the various sonic innovations and interventions in the African diaspora requires a different orientation. The DJ can no longer been seen as a person who plays music, just as the language employed by Rastafarians can no longer be considered a ‘broken language’. Thinking through music demands a renewed theoretical investigation and exploration of the various structures that make our current mode of existence possible. If difference is the “plurality of discourses, the perpetual slippage of meaning [and] the endless sliding of the signifier” (Hall, 1996a:12) what does utilizing afro sonic innovations, as continuously navigating multiplicity and versions, provide us with?

Keeping in mind that meaning is always relational and connected to a system of absences and presences, the work of the Turntablist to make music from already recorded sounds, to create different versions from something believed to be a complete entity, then turntablism presents us with tools to destabilize our current regimes of thought. DJ Dopey’s 2003 DMC winning
performance highlights how “African-derived aesthetics, social norms and standards and sensibilities are deeply embedded within the form even when it is being performed by individuals who are not themselves of African descent” (Schloss, 2004:03). DJ Dopey, like the linguistic innovators of dread talk, demonstrates that meaning is not final and that participating within the structure of an entity, idea or language might lead to a different conception of freedom unavailable through our current constructions of knowledge and social systems. The thought processes that inform turntablism, when lent to a wider project, like the conceptualization of the human become viable alternatives in reconsidering the oppressive structures that dictate the lives of non-white bodies in the west.

The inability to reconcile difference within European thought is not a feature of the participatory ethos discussed in this chapter. When we conceive of sound as an institutional structure of native knowledge, the pluralities that constitute African polyrhythmic sensibilities are illuminated and the human as a relational concept is made visible. Turntablism and dread talk are but two episodes in the sociogency of B-side life and B-ing. The next chapter explores remix culture and dub music, elaborating the participatory structures and comfort with multiplicity demonstrated in the B-side to modernity.
Chapter 3

Dubbing the Remix and its Uses

Narrative originality lodges not in making up new stories, but in managing a particular interaction with this audience this time - at every telling the story has to be introduced uniquely into a unique situation...the formulas and themes are reshuffled rather than supplanted with new materials (Ong, 1982: 41-42).

North American affluence and an established pattern of socialization centered around conspicuous consumption has allowed for the emergence of a popular culture-informed notion of remixing. Remixing is an attempt to make ‘art’ or music out of bits and pieces of other already created pieces of culture. Remixing was first attempted by Jamaican music producers in the 1950s when they engaged in acts of versioning. Avant-garde artists, such as Marcel DuChamp and Andy Warhol, also engaged the concept of remixing; this involved recycling and recontextualizing objects, long before the contemporary terms of the remix were available. Currently, remixing is an activity engaged largely by the technologically savvy, through which computer based artists, such as Girl Talk and DJ Spooky, invent their sonic innovations. Remix
culture has emerged in western society as an ensemble of recycling, borrowing, and re-contextualization that challenge current legal frameworks around private and exclusive ownership, corporate copyright culture and authorship (Boisvert, 2003; Lessig, 2002; Miller 2006; Schutze, 2003). For artists such as DJ Spooky or advocates of free culture, such as Creative Commons founder Lawrence Lessig, remixing is both about artistic creation and battling the tyranny of corporate ownership and copyright culture.

Remixing has been a topic of debate in various circles outside of DJ culture, with analyses produced in documentaries, books, and art exhibitions that provide a plethora of material engagements with this seemingly ‘new’ idea. The remix, in its most basic form, is a sonic (now also visual) adventure whereby a track believed to be an ‘original’ can either gain new elements of sounds or lose elements of its composition which alters its overall soundscape. The result is a new song that is both familiar yet unfamiliar; it becomes a temporary combination of nostalgia and newness. The remix can take many forms such as layering a famous Diana Ross a cappella for “I am Coming out” over a Jamaican-made Dennis Al Capone dub/rocksteady instrumental for “Guns of Navarro”. For Jamaican listeners the familiarity of Diana Ross’s voice combined with the popularity of “Guns of Navarro” would produce both a disruption of what listeners might call
the ‘original’ and possibly the pleasure of hearing Diana Ross’s shrills over a rocksteady beat.\footnote{My use of ‘familiarity’ here does not come without the recognition of the conditions of power that allow for U.S. cultural imperialism to become evident in the popularity of American R & B in the island of Jamaica.}

This type of remix happens all the time in hip hop music but the revised track is rarely defined or categorized as a remix. For example, the instrumental for Diana Ross’ “I’m Coming Out” was used in 1998 by Puff Daddy to create Biggie Smalls’ hit “Mo’ Money, Mo’ Problems”. It was not called a Diana Ross remix, primarily because Biggie’s baritone rhymes were interrupted by a chorus that sampled Ross’s lyrical composition.\footnote{My use of Biggie Smalls, rather than his more famous title of Notorious B.I.G., is intentional. I want to gesture towards a preservation of the underground title of this emcee, whose name deploys a certain play on words that expresses his connection to or entrenchment within Afro-American poetics of signifyin’.} Remixing, mixing and the combination of old and new or refused and popular are foundational to the making of hip hop music. The processes of sampling, unaffectionately referred to as “artistic necrophilia” (George, 1998) by Mtume (another artist sampled in Biggie Smalls song) both pays homage to an older song while seeking new sonic compositions. Sampling and remixing highlight the ways in which hip hop is a hybrid entity whose potency lays in its ability to destabilize (usually hegemonic) notions of origin and authenticity.

But before getting caught up in discussions around remixing it is important to return to Jamaican soundsystem culture and the sonic experiences of the African diaspora in the west to historically
contextualize the remix. Thus this chapter opens with Walter J. Ong’s take on narrative originality amongst ‘cultures with high oral residue’ (Ong, 1982) to help us think about remix culture as an activity, rather than a phenomenon, that is connected to enslaved African populations in the west, one of the new world’s oral cultures. Ong’s quote at the opening of this chapter highlights a way in which we might understand remixing as a logic related to the world view of non-western cultures.

If narrative originality, as Ong suggests, is about managing one’s interaction with an audience through reshuffling existing narrative material, what becomes clear is that the practice of versioning and eventually remixing is an extension of this practice. Remixing as a form of narrative originality, a narrative of non-western peoples, presents us with a logic that rests uneasily in some aspects of the west. For example, in clubs and music remixing excites peoples and presents an audience with newness. In the realm of intellectual property rights, the capitalist system of exploitation requires new markets, concepts and products to drive its ceaseless commodification of everything and anything possible.

In this chapter, remixing is understood as a contemporary system of organizing information belonging to the logic of non-western, non-scribal, knowledge system. Accordingly, remixing is
positioned here as part of a family of sonic practices belonging to a participatory ethos outlined in the previous chapter. Remixing, beyond its material practices, involves an open participatory structure, invested in democratic enunciations and the disruptive potential of forging newness out of present circumstances/materials.

Remixing does not present us with new material in the sense that we experience pictures and songs created from scratch, but rather, remixing is about reshuffling, bricolage and recontextualizing already existing materials. As such, this chapter offers a reading of and engagement of remixing that oscillates between the historical, ideological and material relations with sonic practice, providing fertile ground through which to launch a critique of our present modes of existence. To utilize a conception of the remix as a disruptive intervention, this chapter operationalizes remixing as a deciphering practice (Wynter, 1992), one that highlights systems of meaning and attempts a “transvaluation of values.” Following this line of thinking is Sylvia Wynter’s notion of “rethinking aesthetics”: a useful and necessary activity to avoid reproducing the systems of thought that make today possible (Wynter, 1992). To think of remixing as an aesthetic practice is to first refuse the artificial consumption/creator dichotomy that deeply restricts the possibilities of humans to become expressive beings. Remixing pivots on a value system based not on material consumption but rather on creative collaboration, reuse and
recycling. The potency of the remix is that it refuses static and hegemonic meaning and thus value; it holds the potential to change the meaning and value of all it engages. At stake here is the potential of remixing and its associated thought processes, to disrupt systems of meaning-making by separating “social and material production” from “cultural production” (Wynter, 1992). This process then, of remixing as a deciphering practice, places special emphasis on the demystification of the rhetorical discursive maneuvers of the dominant logic that make genre (in the case of music) a rigid and ‘natural’ system of categorization. To separate the cultural production from social and material production is to begin to demystify our present social world. The works of artists, once separated from the social and material forces that shape western society, present us with options and attitudes not offered by the dominant logic. According to Angela McRobbie’s assessment, the space of music has been the site where innovation, experimentation and argumentation can occur particularly for oppressed communities because of the logic of racial exclusion (McRobbie, 1999).

To further elaborate a progressive politics of remixing, this chapter begins with a historical contextualization of the remix as it relates to the experiences of Afrodiasporic groups and elaborates on the antecedents provided by Jamaican dub and relates this back to the process of versioning discussed in chapter one. I then focus on current material engagements with remixing,
moving through art performances and exhibits, DJ mixes and consumer capitalist culture’s highjacking of the concept. The chapter concludes with a critical engagement with remixing at the level of the idea, examining how remixing as a deciphering practice suggests a re-evaluation of our aesthetic values that might challenge our present systems of meaning-making and thus knowledge construction.

A Historical Contextualization of the Remix

If we return to the relationship between the enslaved individual and the enslaver, the idea of narrative originality and the continual destabilizing of the narrative of enslavement via gran and petit marronage (Lewis, 1983) suggest a deeper reconsideration of how we might imagine the conceptual yield of the remix. The various forms of resistance captured in the historical literature on transatlantic slavery, from poisonings to flight, suggests we might think about the enslaved individual’s various forms of resistance as efforts to recontextualize the narrative, (if we can think of one’s lived experience as a narrative, which is certainly plausible under the conditions of the institution of slavery) of ownership and enslavement. If we return to the pivotal scene in the autobiography of Fredrick Douglass when he battles Mr. Covey, resistance, as a recontextualization of one’s narrative is made clear. “You seen how a man was made a slave, you shall see how a slave was made a man” (Douglass, 1993:75) is how Douglass begins his two
hour battle with the ‘nigger breaker’ Edward Covey. Douglass describes his success in this battle as a pivotal “epoch in my humble history” (75). This confrontation, as part of Douglass’ personal journey to freedom, is representative of the narrative of the enslaved and their disruption of the systems that regulated their socially-sanctioned oppression.

The relationship between owner and the enslaved individual then was constantly retold, recontextualized, renarrarated by Maroon communities such as Ganga Zumba in Brazil’s Quilombo dos Palmares or Nanny in Jamaica’s cockpit country. Was this attempt to re-author the narrative of enslavement the original remix? Is such a question even useful? Rather than search for origins, I am interested in how the relational identity of enslaved individuals fostered various forms of identification. Because of W.E.B. DuBois’ enormous contributions to the study of black life we have from the post-emancipation era the extremely useful conception of double-consciousness. Did enslaved populations experience double consciousness, that of constantly shifting between subject and object? An answer to this inquiry might imagine the relationship between the Turntablist and their turntable or the Dub Engineer and mixing board. The numerous histories of rebellion and revolution suggest that commodity status was a temporal and hegemonic identity that was constantly transgressed. At the point of contact, where Africa meets Europe, creolization theory suggests the existence of an infinite number of possible outcomes
(Glissant, 1992). Remixing then is about the productive possibilities of the encounter, or the collision, where two or more systems of knowledge and value interact or intertwine.

The notion of the mix found in DJ culture is one useful strategy to think about the complex ways in which sound relates to the experiences of Afrodisporic peoples. The mix is a temporary moment of transition where the DJ attempts to introduce a new record to their audience by matching the tempo of the existing, or currently playing record. In this temporal moment, beats per minute are matched as the drums and high-hats of the new song are layered on top of, or mixed into the existing sounds; in essence it is the "interfacing of different grooves" into a new "totality" (Weheliye, 2005).

Theoretically, such circumstances have been elaborated upon by a number of Afrofuturist thinkers such as Kwodo Eshun and DJ Spooky (aka Paul D. Miller). As highlighted by these two thinkers, the concept of the mix lends itself to theorization when it is understood as a "multivalent temporal structure" which produces seamless interpolations between objects [to] "fabricate a zone of representation" (Miller, 2004, 2006). The remix references and extends the idea of the mix by revising an existing song with the addition or subtraction of elements such as vocals, or instrumentation. Other theorists, such as Eduardo Navas, have attempted to categorize
and elaborate different kinds of remixes. Navas, in focusing solely on musical remixes, explains there are three types; the extended, the selective and the reflexive remix (Navas, 2007).

The logic of the remix owes its inventiveness to the process of ‘versioning’ born out of Jamaica’s emerging and energized music scene. The remix is believed to have originated in Jamaica’s soundsystem culture in the late 1960s, when various DJs toasted on the version side of a record (Veal, 2007; Miller, 2006). As explored in chapter 1, versioning involved refashioning an instrumental backing of a song, through the participation of the audience and a toasting DJ. In Jamaica, once American rhythm and blues (R&B) records were no longer entering the island via seasonal migrant labourers returning home from places like Georgia, soundsystems started recruiting locals to sing over the instrumental side of records (Bradley, 2000:08). 61 The person in control of the microphone was the Toaster, the emcee of the soundsystem whose job it was to incite the audience to dance. Toasting, the act of improvising words over a version side of a record, citing various topics pertaining to the dancehall itself or society in general was an early proto remix. At times these words were incitement for the crowd to show their appreciation or to dance, at other times toasting involved singing the original words or altering the words of the song to pay homage to the soundsystem (Barrow, 2004).

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61 These instrumental sides, as mentioned in chapter 1, were called versions.
The logic of remixing borrows and extends the cut ‘n mix notion Hebdige provided in 1987, thinking outside of ownership and intellectual property rights to deal with the limited musical possibilities of Jamaica’s post 1958 musical scene and the limited electronic possibilities of the mid 1980s post Manley era, when dub musical innovations exploded (Veal, 2007).\textsuperscript{62} The creative possibilities that came out of Jamaican soundsystem culture have often been portrayed as Jamaicans of limited means inventing extraordinary things (Veal, 2007). This very well may be true, the producers and engineers echo this sentiment, but this does not help us understand the thought processes involved with interrupting a record. The idea, that no one owns a sound (Hebdige, 1987), at the core of remixing is one way to begin thinking about what (beyond lack of legal repercussions) structures the ideational possibilities of Jamaican soundsystems.

The prevalence of remixing in today’s musical culture owes much to the emergence of dub music in Jamaica as it is connected to the emergent innovations in disco, house, hip hop and bhangra. Dub music consists of various electronic alterations to soundscapes, such that within the existing structure of the song different instruments are echoed, sounds and lyrics are mixed in

\textsuperscript{62} The end of seasonal labour contracts in the southern United States halted the flow of American Rhythm and Blues which were staples of popular soundsystems such as Tom the Great Sebastian, Trojan Sound and Sir Coxsone’s Downbeat.
and mixed out of the song and new sounds are introduced in a non-linear unpredictable pattern (Bradley, 2000; Veal, 2007). Dubs originally referred to one-off acetates (eventually called Dubplates) which were meant for previewing new music in the 1960s (Barrow, 2004). Dubplates are prerecorded endorsements of a particular sound by a popular reggae artist; they usually follow the melody or lyrics of a popular tune (usually a tune sung by that same artist) inserting the name of the soundsystem and praise for that sound’s skills. The improvisation of the DJ/emcee sonically alters the ‘original’ composition, producing another version of a song that was possibly a crowd favourite. Artists would eventually record over these ‘specials’ or exclusives (another name for Dubplates), a practice that continues to be integral to the reggae music scene today. Peter Manual and Wayne Marshall have called the dubplate experience the “riddim method”, a distinctive approach to musical composition, ownership and the creative process (Marshall, 2006). In the Jamaican music scene various artists use the same instrumental backing, now called a riddim, to record their own version. Since “Mi Sleng Teng” was released in 1985 it has become normal for several artists to ‘compete’ on the same riddim instead of stifling creativity through endless litigation and sample clearance. In fact, as Paul Gilroy noted there was at least 239 different recordings over the “Mi Sleng Teng” riddim (Gilroy, 1987). In this way, Jamaica’s riddim method anticipated the concept of creative collaboration we currently see deployed in the creative commons debates.
Precisely around the same time that electronic dancehall riddims were beginning to be produced, another sonic innovation, dub music, was being explored. Dub has been described as “raw riddim” by Prince Jammy, because it usually involved just the bass and the drums of a given track, minus the melody and instrumentation (Dalton, 2004). Jammy continues, “Dub jus’ mean raw music, nuttin water-down” (Ibid.). Dub music was invented by King Tubby, an electrical genius who created his own amplifier with extraordinary bass, who first began experimenting with studio mixing boards as instruments that could ‘play’ specific sounds within a track (Dalton, 2004). Phillip Maysles describes the ‘Dub Organizer’ as one that “constructs aesthetic space through a process of removal, alteration, and layering” (Maysles, 2002). In the process of creating a dub version, the engineer extracts specific sounds or instruments and either eliminates them, accentuates them using echo and reverb, or moves in and out of the soundscape in an unanticipated fashion with irregular timing (Dalton, 2004; Veal, 2007). The Dub Organizer (the engineer/producer) strips a song down to just its drums and its bass and then proceeds to reassemble the song in a different arrangement throughout the song.

Dub music then, is the deconstruction and reconstruction of the encounter, the collision between Africa and Europe, between former commodities and today’s technological commodities. In this
encounter the former commodity, the formerly enslaved African engages and works alongside the ‘modern’ via the technology of the mixing board in the case of dub, (the turntable in the case of hip hop). Rather than passively accepting the structure of the song or the limits of the equipment, the actions of the Dub Organizer, informed by a participatory ethos, engage the structure and sonic properties of the song. The former commodity refuses the assumed use/value of the mixing board. Instead of simply bringing two sounds together, the Dub Organizer seeks out a different sonic entity and engages in various aspects of sonic alteration, like echo chambers, to imagine and configure another use value of the mixing board, mirroring the process by which a DJ transforms a turntable into an instrument. While some might suggest a humanization of technology, I read this as the former object’s attempt to unfinish entities, that is to project the possibilities of exceeding one’s socially proscribed limits, much like the work of the petit and gran marronage mentioned earlier.

Dub music, just like the linguistic interventions of Rastafarism explored in chapter two, operates through a mode of understanding the world as a process, as unfinished projects that can benefit from the agency of Afrodiasporic peoples. This logic, its participatory desires and actions can
also be traced through current remix culture, where bootlegs\(^{63}\) and mash-ups\(^{64}\) add to the ways in which digital culture has made music more democratic.

Dub is an ancestor of present day remixing as it involved the intimate reordering, and reimagining of specific sounds within a given soundscape. Interestingly, dub versions are usually placed on the B-side of record singles, a haunting reminder of that underbelly, that forgotten side of modernity according to Rinaldo Walcott’s analysis (Walcott, 2006). Dub versions became commonplace within popular music as several non-reggae artists released B-side dubs, such as Madonna\(^{65}\) and Soul II Soul.\(^{66}\) Dub music then becomes the location of the playing out of a participatory ethos that refuses a complete and isolated definition, so that both Teddy Riley and Soul II Soul are authors of “Keep On Movin’” and Madonna and Paul Oakenfold both participate in the making of the track “Celebrate.”

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\(^{63}\) Bootlegs are largely understood a unauthorized duplication of existing music or video material. See Peter Rojas (2002) [http://dir.salon.com/story/tech/feature/2002/08/01/bootlegs/index.html].

\(^{64}\) Mash ups are similar to remixes, they are vocals of one track superimposed on the instrumental of another (Rojas, 2002).

\(^{65}\) See Madonna’s “Celebrate” (Oakenfold “12 Dub).

\(^{66}\) See Soul II Soul’s “Keep on Movin” B side (Teddy Riley’s Rubba Dub) Virgin Records 1989.
Contemporary Engagements of the Remix

One of the first remixes, in the North American popular culture arena, is credited to Tom Moulton for his 1977 remix of MSFB’s “Love is the Message” (Broughton, 2006). As the pioneer of 12-inch records, and dance music remixes, Tom Moulton has a cult like status in remix circles. Popular culture remixes, the heart of remix culture, consists of people utilizing computer technology to remix the most popular and danceable songs using various snippets, samples and instrumentals. Some of the most popular Remix DJs rely heavily on what has been made possible by computer technology, such as the former chemical biologist (Greg Gillis) Girltalk, literally cannibalize popular musics and ravage popular memory to connect a string of well-recognized popular sounds. Girltalk has gained infamy for using a computer program to sample thirty seconds of popular songs and mixes them together. He has been at the center of a number of documentaries and legal controversies as his practice of remixing conflicts with much of the musical establishment in the United States.67

In contrast to Girltalk, DJ Spooky is a socially conscious and thought-provoking remix artist, as he regularly engages both music and video remixing. Spooky’s work usually engages political

67 Two useful documentaries are Good Copy, Bad Copy (2007) and R.I.P. A Remix Manifesto (2009).
themes like the film *Birth of a Nation*, or the Middle East conflict. Consider for example a track on DJ Spooky’s “Ghost World Africa Now” remix which layers the vocals of a dialogue regarding Nelson Mandela’s freedom over a popular hip hop instrumental called “Locked Up” by a Nigerian living in America, Akon (Spooky, 2007). This remix is both a didactic history lesson for the generation of youth who have only known a free Nelson Mandela and an attack on models of categorization that would like to think politics and entertainment are separate, or imagine a revolutionary and a rapper as two irreconcilable, unrelated and *unrelatable* entities.

Chronology and geography are disrupted by this remix which utilizes the African diaspora’s heterogeneity to pose a challenge to the insular ideas of nation that diaspora consistently disrupts and invalidates.

Since the early 2000s, various groups have taken an interest in remixing. At a very simplistic and consumptive level, industries have sought to capitalize on the popularity of the word. For example, the soft drink Sprite was one of the earliest companies to develop a drink called Tropical Sprite Remix in 2003. The soft drink featured fruit flavours mixed with the traditional sprite carbonated drink. More recently Nike offshoot, the Jordan Brand, has created a series of

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shoes called the *Jordan Fusions* that utilizes elements from different seasons\(^6^9\) of Air Jordan shoes and other popular Nike shoes and combines them into one shoe. Both companies, Nike and Coca Cola sought utilization of the term and concept to market a type of newness to attract potential consumers.\(^7^0\)

In the art world, a roundtable discussion, called *Remix and Feedback* held at the Emily Carr Institute in 2004, an exhibition and roundtable called *The Mix: Conversations on Creolization and Artist Community Collaborations* at A-Space Gallery in Toronto in 2004 and a traveling exhibition called *Remix: New Modernities in a Post Indian World* in 2008 have interrogated the applicability of the concept of remixing to the world of art and identity.\(^7^1\) At the *Remix and Feedback* roundtable DJ Spooky envisioned the remix as a way to resist cultural passivity, while other panelists cautioned against the forgoing of the creation of new cultural models (Lai, 2004). The tone of the panel, as reported by Adrienne Lai, moved between caution over government control and corporate control. One panelist provocatively proposed himself to be the embodiment of the remix exemplifying his post-identity politics. Adrienne Lai’s overall

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\(^6^9\) Jordans are released according to the playing season and are numbered chronologically starting in 1985

\(^7^0\) Sprite is owned by Coca-Cola.

\(^7^1\) *Remix: New Modernities in a Post Indian World* exhibited at the National Museum of the American Indian, Smithsonian Institute in Washington D.C., the Heard Museum in Phoenix, the Art Gallery of Ontario in Toronto and the George Gustav Heye Center, National Museum of the American Indian in New York City.
assessment of the panel, despite its failure to address gender, was to see it as understanding the remix as a useful tool of resistance against dominant narratives and a way of “interrogating narratives and owning memory” (Lai 2004:02).

*The Mix*, curated by Andrea Fatona, was not an explicit interrogation of the concept of remix. Rather it was an opportunity to have a diasporic exploration of creolization, hybridity and transculturation. This exhibit and roundtable was interested in taking up issues of identity amongst Caribbean and Caribbean Canadian populations, and sought to explore alternative discourses to multi-ethnic life that lay beyond Canadian state policy. In Honor Ford-Smith’s review of the event, she importantly highlights the hyphenated, multiple identities that belong to a social group called “Caribbeans” (Ford-Smith, 2004:02). By moving from the abstract levels of transculturation, hybridity and creolization to the lived experiences of students, emigrants and Canadian born individuals in Toronto, Ford-Smith highlights how we might understand an embodied notion of the (re)mix. The intervention of a new social group called the “Caribbeans” that Ford-Smith hints at is an important moment to reflect on the role of the Caribbean in bringing theory to the ground to examine how these theories live within people. In the next

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72 These “Caribbeans” are explored in more depth in Chapter 4.
chapter, the Caribbean is explored more fully alongside a lived and operationalized notion of the remix.

In continuing the interrogation of the relationship between identity politics and remixing, *Remix: New Modernities in a Post Indian World* was a Smithsonian exhibition that traveled from Phoenix to Washington to New York and Toronto from 2008-2009. This exhibit featured work from a range of artists of varying degrees of Native ancestry who engaged in self-knowledge and self-definition (Gerald McMaster as cited in Baker & McMaster, 2007) and played with intimate moments of engagements with their socially constructed otherness and their ancestral ties (Baker, 2008). These artists, whose ethnic heritage is detailed in the promotional material, engage notions of the “Post Indian” as important moments, wrestling conceptual control over the ‘Indian’ in America’s social imaginary. In several pieces Nativeness intersects with hip hop, video games and skateboarding culture, pushing their audience to imagine Natives as more than historical stereotypical figures. Essays in the exhibition catalogue understand hybridity as the defining experience of Native Americans as reflected by the strategies of mixing and matching found throughout the exhibit. The catalogue, however, fails to detail the differences between hybridity and the remix, refusing to push the discursive terrain of the remix. Invariably, hybridity is a state of being, such as being ‘doula’ or ‘mulatto’ while remixing is an intentional,
artistic act. What distinguishes the two is that remixing is an intentional act whose end goal is
the creation of newness, while racial hybridity under colonialism was about increasing one’s life
chances. In the post-colonial era, discourses around racial hybridity are concerned with
destabilizing entrenched racial hierarchies, while many lived experiences are about abiding by
established value systems to benefit from the rewards of epidermic capital. While one could
argue, especially under colonialism, that racial hybridization is an intentional act, it is the
progeny, not the person that desired the hybridness who lives the hybrid life. Religious
hybridization, under these same colonial conditions, was about avoiding persecution, not
necessarily intent on creating newness by fusing two religions. Creolizations, racial and
religious hybridity, under either colonialism or post-colonialism, were and are deeply connected
to the social constraints imposed upon individuals and groups. In contrast, remixing does not
seek to confirm or intentionally disrupt society and its established regimes of value, rather
remixing seeks to create newness from the encounters of sonic difference.

By actively taking up the remix these artists bring into crisis much of society’s “always already
discursively instituted speaking/knowing/feeling subjects” (Wynter, 1992:239). Western
societies have not been constructed to accommodate the contradictory lives of those in-
As Adrienne Lai suggested and the *Remix* exhibit demonstrated, remixing interrogates narratives, highlighting the contradictory ways the west socially and discursively constructs and obscures to its advantage. For example, *New York Times* art reviewer Ken Johnson typifies this identity conceptual crisis when he claims the exhibit “makes Indianness nebulous.” Johnson further explains, “it becomes unclear what it means for a person to identify himself or herself as Indian or as an Indian artist” (Johnson, 2008). Rather than positing the facets of a post Indian identity, Johnson is troubled by his inability to know, grasp or have conceptual control over the remixed subjecthood of the ‘Indian’. Like the category of the Caribbean, as an identity label, the espoused post-Indian, the hybrid metaphor, mixing artists, in *Remix* allude to specific hegemonic sites of governmentality such as multiculturalism, or the rigid and frozen social construction of the American ‘Indian’. Instead of tackling the provocative questions raised by *Remix*, reviewer Ken Johnson discards much of the exhibit as “fashionable recycling”, asking for a “new language of forms and metaphors to illuminate the complexities and contradictions of contemporary experience” (Johnson, 2008). Apparently, Johnson also wants this language to be comfortable and accessible, which would be next to impossible given Johnson’s Eurocentric conception of knowing and desire to know all.

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73 We just have to think of the kinds of social disruption made possible by racially mixed individuals from Louis Riel to Fredrick Douglass Frida Kalo to Vincente Guerrero to Gloria Anzaldua.
Echoing Difference, some concluding remarks.

Johnston’s (2008) review of *Remix* is a useful starting point to begin talking and thinking about the potential of the remix as a conceptual tool that general society might take seriously in imaging equitable futures. The practice of remixing troubles much of our present systems of knowledge construction and subjectivities because it pivots on a relational mode of existence. Remixes are past, present and future combined. They rely on memories, nostalgia and the past, equally as much as they rely on the present, the experiential portion of the sonic experiment. According to one assessment, remix music “organizes collective memories” from other times, places (Maira, 2000:334). Thus, remix music and remix as a concept allows us to engage the various routes, territories and times that constitute the diasporic experience—across race and ethnicity.

Remix music becomes an apt site to capture the collisions of times and places, the actual materiality of the encounter of the unknown. If we turn to London born-Sri Lanka raised visual and recording artist, M.I.A. 74, it is apparent that much of the conceptual yield of dub, remix and

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74 M.I.A.’s real name is Mathangi Arulpragasam, and known in the visual arts world as Maya Arulpragasam for short.
version can be operationalized outside of the black body. As a musical artist M.I.A. has been the perfect embodiment of the remix posited in the 2004 *Remix and Feedback* panel and Andrea Fatona’s *The Mix* exhibition mentioned earlier. Utilizing the sonic stylings of Jamaican toasting, hip hop vernacular and referencing her Tamil and South London routes, M.I.A. exploded onto the music scene in 2004. She had been called the “future of music” by one of hip hop’s most prestigious emcees, Nas, and her uncategorizable hybrid style has been described as “mish-mashed, electro-ragga groove and conscious couplets” (Collins, 2005).

Her first track is most telling of her remix sensibility, “Galang” is a mixture of the Jamaican patois phase “go along” and the name of the South Asian gingerroot galangal. That track and others feature eclectic oscillations, echoes and refractions of Jamaican patois, American hip hop vernacular and London slang. M.I.A. echoes London’s playful mixes of Jamaican soundsystem culture that began with the importation of ska and two tone (Heathcott, 2003) but her Sri Lankan upbringing reverbs this transatlantic crossing of sound. In her work, we are treated to the intentional, not just hybrid, stylings such as her opening line to “Sunshowers”: “I bongo with my lingo, and beat it like a wing yo/From Congo to Colombo, can’t stereotype my thing yo” (2005). M.I.A.’s diasporic rootless, routings across genre, continent and race allows her music to resonate with a number of ‘markets’ making it difficult to categorize her. Her explanation of her style is
simple, she states “I just try to reflect how we live today”, “you get exposed to everything. I’m kind of like a walking mixtape” (M.I.A. as cited in Empire 2005). M.I.A. echoes Glissant’s chaos-monde theorization, refracting through the language of hip hop culture, her very espousal of her style demonstrates her interconnected diasporic sensibility that refuses to obey by the barriers of language, culture or nation and opts instead to make artistic the collision between third world and first world, between black musics and south Asian culture.

Like the dub organizer, M.I.A. snatches various aspects of her lived soundscape (her narrative) and remixes these phrases, sounds and styles, leading to descriptions of her sound as “new and boundless” (McKinnon, 2005) and as “explod[ing] the precious small-mindedness of national and generic divides” (Jennings, 2006). Instead of utilizing her various encounters with other cultures as ammunition for the oppression or eradication of social difference, M.I.A. becomes a creative collaborator in the articulation of her hybrid and globalized narrative. In her various interruptions of national boundaries and musical genres, she also refuses to separate the political from ‘entertainment’. M.I.A. named her first album, Arular, after her father’s secret code name in the fight for a free Tamil Eelam when he battled alongside the Eelam Revolutionary Organization of Students. She has also been very outspoken in regards to the Sri Lankan conflict.

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75 A mixtape is a compilation of different music tracks made by a hip hop dj and originally recorded on a cassette.
involving the Tamil Tigers (Baron, 2009). Importantly, it is M.I.A’s willingness to engage the political and highlight the issues of “third world” plight that the world benefits from. Her genre-bending newness brings her heightened attention, which provides for a platform where poverty, prostitution and the oppression of minority populations can be heard on an international scale.

Here M.I.A. reminds us of K’naan and his multiple stylings that both reference and resist North American hip hop culture. Like M.I.A., K’naan borrows words from the Somali language and relies on the inherent braggadocio boasting of the hip hop emcee, while addressing the plight of Somali pirates or the overtly violent gun-filed reality of Mogadishu today. By bending genres and borrowing electro sounds to accompany Jamaican-like toasting and American hip hop vernaculars M.I.A., just like K’naan, is the embodiment of the remix, versioning a diverse array of prior sounds and genres, grabbing the attention of her audience by building various meanings into her oeuvre.

The meaning created in each new version is inscribed within a system of references, playing upon prior meanings while building its current meaning through excessive referencing to prior versions. This sonic activity represents future thoughts as it makes productive the unforeseen aspects of the encounter between different musics, discourses and memories. Remi
demonstrates a sonic variety of Glissant’s systematic/Archipelagic thought that he prophesizes is coming:

Another form of thought is developing, more intuitive, more fragile, threatened, but in sync with the chaos-world and the unforeseeable (2005:119).

Thinking about Glissant’s concept of culture as totality and chaos-monde, meaning the “immeasurable intermixing of cultures” (Glissant, 1997), remixing as a conceptual tool takes on added significance when we begin to read it as a tool of decipherment. The act of remixing then refuses to abide by the boundaries of our present organization of music, cultures, thoughts and memories. Remixing as a tool of decipherment highlights how cultural production, when separated from social and material production, might produce other kinds of aesthetic value schema and systems of meaning.

As such, remixing forms part of a participatory ethos, a knowledge system structured through the sonic, because it conceptually posits and executes other modes by which humans and machines, specifically sound technologies, operate in a different kind, but nevertheless useful manner. Foucault’s notion of subjugated knowledge is useful as it allows us to understand the remix, as a tool of decipherment, as a form of local and autonomous criticism engaged in non-centralized
theoretical production, whose validity is “not dependent on established regimes of thought” (Foucault, 2003). Such local forms of criticism are strategically positioned at the bottom of the hierarchical arrangement of knowledge systems, precisely because they elaborate society’s contradictions, exposing the seams of society’s social constructions. As the legal battles of copyright logic versus free culture advocates rage on, remixing—a contraband activity that violates private ownership and copyright—tells us something about our current arrangements of culture as commodity and its privatization that governing ideas and ideals wish not to express. Creative collaboration in the form of remixing suggests another mode of subjective being that is based on the creative utilization of sonic/social difference not in an exploitable manner but rather in a democratic spirit of collaboration. The acceptance of multiplicity and its engagements with difference inherent in remix culture, dub and versioning provides pathways for thinking beyond our current systems of segregated thought. In short, “without the ability to remix we simply cannot be human because culture becomes a passive rather than participatory interaction with the external world” (Chance, 2005).

Remixing helps us depart from the eurosecular enlightenment models invested in “chain of being” hierarchical ordering, in which Black people are consistently positioned as less than. As a rich epistemological and methodological practice, remixing provides important clues as to how
to live in our current postmodern, hyper-mediated reality. As part of the participatory ethos, remixing, like versioning, turntablism and dub, continue to posit and present ‘othered’ kinds of relations, not just between sound and the human but also between humans and their technologies. Like Marshall McLuhan, I am interested in the ‘message’ of these sonic practices, but more concerned with how the human as a conceptual category is affected, how the human comes to be, how former commodities might enter, critique or by-pass modes of being ‘human’ that Wynter suggests are ‘always rhetorico-discursively regulated’ (Wynter, 1989). The sonic innovations explored in the previous chapters disrupt our ‘rhetorico-discursively regulated’ present, explore other subjectivities and modes of being human that borrow, signify and extend the ways in which sound operates within Afro diasporic cultures. Thus, various forms of behaviour, categorization, hierarchical ordering and other vestiges of Eurocentric thought become precariously positioned as unnatural in the face of the deciphering power of the remix. In the chapters that follow, remixing as a conceptual tool is utilized to begin rethinking both state-sponsored multiculturalism in Canada and diasporic notions of home amongst Afro diasporic youth in Toronto.
Chapter 4

“Connect the T.dots”\textsuperscript{76}—Remix Multiculturalism:

After Caribbean-Canadian\textsuperscript{77}, Social Possibilities for Living with Difference

If, following Canada’s Governor General, Michælle Jean, the time of ‘two solitudes’ has passed, then new cognitive tools are needed to reframe how we understand the relationships between the multiple cultures that populate our nation.\textsuperscript{78} Accordingly, Jean suggests we “eliminate the spectre of all the solitudes and promote solidarity among all the citizens who make up the Canada of today” (Jean, 2005). The new tools required for such a task do not and cannot completely lie in the hands of the government, for too often Canadian newcomers are read and utilized solely

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\textsuperscript{76} The title of this chapter borrows directly from a poem created by Toronto poet and emcee Motion.
\textsuperscript{77} I am indebted to Rinaldo Walcott for this term, which formed part of the title for a panel discussion in 2005. I would also like to thank panel members Andrea Davis, Andil Gosine, Andrea Fatona and Lyndon Phillip all of whom generated important ideas on this panel that have influenced this chapter.
\textsuperscript{78} The term two solitudes were developed by British Prime Minister Benjamin Disraeli who in his 1845 novel, \textit{Sybil}, used this terminology to refer to the growing social divides after the industrial revolution. In Canadian politics the term has been used to describe the French and the English as ‘two founding nations’ whose linguistic and political differences were so vast they were deemed nations. Two solitudes is a pervasive myth that tries to cleanse Canada’s imperialist past by erasing all Indigenous presence.
\end{flushright}
through the lens of the economic. The people of Canada who have been imbued with labels such as ‘immigrant’, visible minority or refugee are often relegated to low income jobs, such as taxi driving and other less desirable jobs. Yet these communities must necessarily be integrated into a (re)conceptualization of Canadian life, if we are to take multiculturalism as national policy seriously.

One way to begin thinking about reconceptualizing Canadian life under multiculturalism is to imagine what social life beyond the hyphenated-Canadian label might look like. The phase “After Caribbean-Canadian” is one such voyage of the imagination that begins with the cultural capital and creative works of Canadian newcomers. If indeed we have reached, what Carol B. Duncan calls the post-multicultural moment (Duncan, 2005), where culture is made messy from the ground up, then this should be our starting point for theorizing our current existence of life with difference.

Both Canada and the Caribbean were home to large numbers of diverse Asian populations long before any kind of official or national rhetoric was devised or espoused. In Canada, Punjabi men and Chinese Railroad workers faced a xenophobic Canadian public, from the parliament buildings in Ottawa, to the streets of Vancouver where the Asiatic Exclusion League of
Vancouver marched in the thousands in the 1890s. These actions foreshadowed, (or encouraged) the Federal Government of Canada’s Exclusion Act of 1923, meant to curb Chinese migration to Canada. For Indian men and women who arrived in Trinidad or Guyana in the middle of the 1830s and 1840s, or the Chinese men and women who made Jamaica or Cuba their new home, xenophobic is not the best word to describe their new homes at the time. Rather, Asian men in the Caribbean entered spaces where Mulatto, Indigenous Indians, African and European populations already existed for decades and worked alongside various free and unfree black and white people (Look Lai, 1993; Scott, 1991). Although there are no official policies celebrating or managing the region’s diversity, it is no stretch of the imagination to conceive of the Caribbean as a multicultural space as early as the 1600s.

At the exact moment when an anxious British North America eagerly sought Northern Europeans to ‘settle’ the western plains of Alberta, Saskatchewan and Manitoba, British Caribbean colonies were engaged in a similar recruitment project. Contract Asian labour was welcomed in British colonies such as Guyana, Jamaica, Trinidad and Tobago, with Indian labourers arriving in 1838 and Chinese labourers arriving in 1851 (Look Lai, 1993). Smaller islands, such as St. Lucia, Grenada, St. Vincent and Nevis were also home to Indian populations by the end of the first decade of the 1900s (Mangru, 1993). By the beginning of the 20th century,
as Asian labour was firmly installed as a social buffer between the newly emancipated Africans and the planter-class Europeans in the Caribbean, Canada was just beginning to ‘let in’ male Asian labour, starting with a small number of Japanese men in the 1870s and culminating with fifteen thousand Chinese men in 1880. The Chinese head tax suggests my use of ‘let in’ may be a little off, but it does convey the sentiment of the day. In fact, with the arrival of the Komagata Maru in 1914 on the shores of British Columbia, 400 mainly Punjabi men were not ‘let in’ to Canada.

Discrimination and racism were hallmarks of modern Western Canadian society during the early 1900s, as newspapers hyperbolically reported on the ‘yellow peril’. These reports coincided with a head tax imposed by the Canadian government (that increased exponentially) which was not a part of the Caribbean social landscape some fifty years earlier when Indian and Chinese men and women were coaxed and deceived into signing indentured contracts to work in the Caribbean. While many Chinese men traveled to the United States and then Canada in search of gold, the Chinese and Indian men and women who migrated to the Caribbean were actively sought by depot stations in Northern Calcutta and from the Fukien, Shenzen provinces and the Canton and Swatow regions in China (Look, Lai 1993: Mangru, 1993). Unlike the dangerous work of cutting
through mountains to build the Canadian Pacific Railway, Asian labourers in the Caribbean worked first in sugarcane and rice fields, and some eventually became part of the merchant class.

Given that British colonies in the Caribbean mixed Asian, European, Indigenous and African populations half a century before Canada, what might an always already multicultural, multiracial Caribbean bring to bear on Canadian multiculturalism? If we are to imagine Caribbean migrants to Canada as something more than menial workers, as people with cultural capital who are accustom to living with and alongside racial, religious and cultural differences, what kinds of conversations about social difference and multiculturalism can these populations contribute to Canadian discourse?

The purpose of this chapter is to detail how we might conceive of, as well as live with social difference, beyond the scope of Canadian governmental policy and within the agency of individuals. Reading various texts, such as foods, spoken word poetry and hip hop culture, this chapter contends that the AfroCaribbean presence in Canada has a long history of relational politics that can and does speak to Canadian multiculturalism from various sites of social difference. Following my earlier discussion on technology, race and music, I define difference, as the various forms of human expressions—the discursive creations of various sectors of society
that are significantly invested with meaning—that have come to define the western experience. Thus, depending on how one is positioned by the dominant discourses in their society, difference can be construed as religious, sexual, ethnic, linguistic, racial or cultural. Depending on location, difference can be infinitely defined, but for my purposes I operate with an idea of difference as those points of contention that make some western spaces exclusionary and oppressive. Thus, race, language, and religion are three modes of social difference that trouble the homogenizing narrative of nation in the west.

This chapter is interested in illuminating the ways in which racial, religious and cultural differences in Canada are understood and lived by the Caribbean diaspora and its children living in Canada. As a state sponsored initiative, multiculturalism is an ideological system whose meaning making power is significantly under the control of the Canadian government. This does not mean people are without agency or duped by multicultural rhetoric, but the terms by which one can be ‘multicultural’ as outlined by government policy, obscure other ways by which people deal with social difference. Tolerance, as a central part of the multicultural rhetoric, suggests a distancing from, but respect for forms of social difference. Use of the term ‘tolerance’ is a discursive strategy that positions social difference as deviant from a ‘norm,’ creating a hierarchy where the ‘norm’ must put up with people who are not deemed normal.
Multiculturalism within a bilingual framework—the Trudeau government’s compromise—clearly demarcates the norm. English and French hegemonically structure ‘ethnic others’ participation in Canadian society within certain limits. People who have lived in diverse societies come to Canada with ideas of how to live with others who do not share the same skin colour, religion or culture. Such ideas, however thorough or under theorized, never surface, as they are smothered by terms like ‘tolerance,’ and ‘visible minority’; these “organic” ideas are the ignored cultural capital of Caribbean newcomers to Canada.

The ideas Caribbean newcomers to Canada hold towards social difference are not always innocent, at times they are unabashedly racist and this appears to be the premise upon which multicultural policy is based. In short, as many authors have suggested, multiculturalism in Canada tends to be one giant, uncritical celebration of “steelpan, saris and samosas” (Donald & Rattansi, 1992: 2). But, in heeding Stuart Hall's request that we continue to grapple with siphoning some conceptual control over multiculturalism, I work with a concept of multiculturalism as an open signifier (Hall, 2000). I utilize Glissant’s notion of “errant thinking” to generously think of multiculturalism as something that exists organically beyond governmental design, a notion whose connections and relationships are not yet fully explored. Thus, I am interested in the insurrection of other forms of subaltern cultural interactions
(immigrants’ cultural capital) in an attempt to formulate another logic of living with multiple cultures and social differences. My position rests upon the idea that Canadian state-sponsored multiculturalism is one, not the only, way to live with forms of social difference. The hegemonic position of the dominant narrative of multiculturalism as policy mutes some of the forms of living with difference immigrants embody and enact on a daily basis.

The term “After Caribbean-Canadian” in the title of this chapter suggests that Canadian identity and Caribbean identity can move beyond their hyphenated partnership that signifies dual, but not always equally valued, subjectivities amongst diasporic populations. Caribbean-Canadian and other hyphenated identity labels operate on the assumption that the two parts of the hyphenation exist as mutually exclusive categories, as if they never overlap or bleed into one another. The “After” in the title suggests two things; first that these categories of Caribbean and Canadian are contingent in time and space and their meaning-making abilities are limited. Secondly, the “After” in the title of this chapter urge we think of Caribbean and Canadian as two ideas that can blend into one another, overlap or share commonalities. Further, to imagine such overlap, blending or contribution to the other, suggests that Canadian and Caribbean as ideas hold important information that can inform one another. One major point of contention with such an idea is the notion of identity-loss, what parts of each identity or culture get lost in the blending or
mixture of these two seemingly disparate categories, Canadian and Caribbean? Another point of contention is “After Caribbean-Canadian” an idea worth dislodging from the spaces where one’s identity is currently invested? A social cost-benefit analysis such as this will forever remain in this dialectical trap, allowing the oppressive and exclusionary mechanisms of Canadian society to continue its work of ‘otherizing’ the ‘ethnic’ populations of Canada.

My approach is deeply invested in a notion of diaspora as an open signifier that works with and through difference, hybridity, versioning, creolization, remix and mestizaje (Hall, 2002). Diaspora theory offers a way to critique binarisms because it is defined by is heterogeneity and by its hybrid conception of identity that operates through difference (Gilroy, 1993: Hall, 1990). Thus, diaspora signifies more than the act of dispersal, it suggests a certain subjectivity amongst the diasporic, a disposition filled with outernational connections, yearnings and nostalgia—in a sense, a diasporic subjectivity. In constant negotiation between here and elsewhere, diasporic identity is consistently in flux, always in a state of becoming (Hall, 1990), reflecting its hybrid unstable nature.

Working through Glissant’s notion of errant thinking and the poetics of Relation (Glissant 1997), I want to suggest that the Caribbean cultural residues found amongst the Caribbean diasporas and
their children in Canada may provide us with other paradigms from which to imagine living with social difference. For Glissant, errant thought is a intellectual practice invested in acknowledging, encountering and interacting with other cultures in a non-dominating, rhizomatic fashion. Accordingly, errant thought is concerned with exploring the relations between the diverse elements of the world beyond the damaging relations of ‘discover’, ‘conqueror’ or ‘traveller’ (Glissant 1997:20). To apply Glissant’s conceptualization of errant thinking to the idea of Caribbean identity and Canadian identity is to look for the commonality or the relationship between the two categorizations. Errant thought then, in an effort to move away from the national and ‘rooted’ identities associated with colonialism (and its posts), in Glissant’s formulation is about approaching the notion of identity beginning not from a position of opposites or opposition but from relationalities. To build on Glissant’s theoretical contributions is to understand that living with difference in the west might mean living with intersecting and contradicting discourses and ideologies whose interactions are continually under surveillance and regulated by hegemonic forces and regimes of truth. Under such circumstances meaning is continually ruptured, so that identity, meaning and discourse are continually challenged, revised or incorporated. Given that the west has been build on a mixture of rooted nationalism and silenced cultural diversity, Glissant’s errant thinking is an enabling methodological textual reading practice.
This chapter engages the relationship between the Caribbean and various forms of racial, religious and cultural difference, dating as far back as the sixteenth century. I turn to the Caribbean as an alternate space within the west where difference is a constitutive element of its genesis. Following Rinaldo Walcott, the Caribbean is taken up as an ‘incubus’ of the new world (Walcott, 2006), a space where race, racial mixing and social difference were critical issues long before ‘multiculturalism’ became a discourse in Canada. Next, I turn to the Canadian context to examine how racial, cultural and religious differences exist under state-sponsored multiculturalism. This sections asks what does the language of multicultural policy in Canada tell us about how the government imagines the constitutive elements of Canadian society? This section outlines the many criticisms levelled at the Canadian multicultural policy, highlighting some of the policy’s shortcomings. The final section of this chapter highlights the existence of an alternative Caribbean-indebted notion of living with difference that suggests the existence of subaltern forms of multiculturalism is an organic, free from state mediation, social practice/reality.

In order to locate other spaces where difference(s) lives and intersect, I turn towards the Caribbean where enslavement, indentureship and colonialism have, to a certain extent, forced the
continuous interaction of difference in the form of various racial, religious populations. This
turn is made not simply because these 'victims' of colonialism are often marginalized or ignored,
but, as Paul Gilroy has suggested in the Black Atlantic, because there is a conversation between
Afrodiasporic life and the tenets of modernity. In fact, Paul Gilroy, borrowing Zygmunt
Bauman’s “counterculture of modernity” terminology, positions black musical expressions as
countercultures to European modernity as they continually exceed the boundaries of race and
nationality (Gilroy, 1993:36). Gilroy further encourages analysis of black expressive culture that
understands them not as a “succession of literary tropes” but as a “philosophical discourse”
(Gilroy, 1993:38-39).

Accordingly, the approach in this chapter is specifically interested in breaking down hierarchies
of knowledge production and to disrupt the assumption of the invalidity of subaltern
knowledges. As such, Afrodiasporic people are situated not only as subjects (rather than
objects), but also as paradigmatic and didactic in formulating counternarratives (a counterculture
according to Gilroy and Bauman) to western thought and alternative forms of representation
(Hall, 1989: 442).
Methodologically, I return to a concept of the remix in black popular culture to initiate such a conversation. As noted earlier in this project, theoretically the concept of the mix lends itself to new ways of imagining difference in the world when it is understood as a "multivalent temporal structure" which produces seamless interpolations between objects [to] “fabricate a zone of representation” (Miller, 2004, 2006). Fabricated zones of representation present meaning-making opportunities as spaces that test ideas not already materially possible or in direct opposition to the reigning regime of thought.

Aisha Khan’s recent study of race and religion in Trinidad employs mixing as a literal and metaphoric notion “for all forms of experience where biogenetic, social or cultural boundaries are challenged or transgressed” (Khan, 2004a:02). Khan’s work is important as she examines racial and religious ideologies that appear to be the fabricated zones of representation that DJ Spooky also refers to in his definition of mixing sonic entities. Khan reads mixing, both its literal and metaphoric manifestations as “both unspoken bogey and voiced barometer of modernity and progress” (Khan, 2004a:13). Of interest here is both the re-combinative process of 'mixing' two different entities and the outcome, the transgressive and temporal creation of newness. The process of mixture, that occurs regularly on the ground, can be theoretically useful for it presents another way in which differences, (in DJ Spooky’s example different songs) can
(co)operate even if it is only to temporarily produce something new. Thus, following Khan’s lead we cannot simply leave the notion of the remix attached to an Afrodisasporic musical tradition if it can inform the construction of, as Gilroy desires, a "...political mentality... more comfortable with the idea of multiplicity" (Gilroy, 2000) or more specifically, cultural difference.

The outcome of the mix, DJ Spooky’s useful "zone of representation" is also a ripe arena for pondering the possibilities of cultural mixing. The outcome of the mix, a site of newness, much like Homi Bhabha's 'third space', significantly troubles the original entities that compose the mix, making ambivalent the assumed authority of any particular entity. This is not the sole benefit of thinking through the mix and its outcome. The 'new totality' or 'zone of representation' presents options that have not been made material but can, even in their temporal existence, inform one's politics as to the nature of existing relations and the possibility of future relations.

Versioning and the remix are activities born in the Caribbean that mirror the trajectories of racial, religious and cultural collisions in the region (Hebdige, 1987). For example, the uptown/downtown class divide in Kingston, Jamaica is a result of a cultural collision wherein rural youth migrated to urban spaces to produce music that transgresses class and political
boundaries. Rather than stress roots and ‘origin,’ remixing and versioning creatively manipulate routes, and inheritances. These actions put to work the ideas of Caribbean writer and theorist Edouard Glissant in which he elaborates on modes of thought and language that seek to relate to one another rather than exclude. What follows then is an attempt to examine the contingent and temporal zones of representation when other, foreign, notions of cultural mixture collide with Canadian state sponsored multiculturalism, tolerance and static separateness, remixing this seemingly singular notion into a diffused plural state.

The Caribbean, Counter-Culture par Excellence

The Caribbean is a space where, "strangers from every other part of the globe collide…” (Hall, 1990: 243) and is thus a fruitful site for examining the mixing of racial, religious and cultural difference(s). The forced and contractually obligated movement of peoples from Asia, Europe and Africa have all contributed to making messy the clean cut, neat and tidy ethnic absolutist ideas about nation, identity and 'race' propagated by European colonialism. The migration of religions, spices, folklore and more accompanied most indentured and enslaved migrants, ensuring the formation of numerous plural societies in the Caribbean. The Caribbean is the

79 The Seaga-Manley handshake made possible by Bob Marley on stage at a 1978 concert is what I consider a temporary political boundary transgression.
home of a number of syncretic religions such as Santéria and Vodun, ‘new world’ ethnic recombinant labels such as Akan or Coromantee, as well as home to a number of musics and dances whose origins are both scattered across the sea and were/are invented in the local.

In Caribbean religions, their genesis consists of a number of mixtures: both internal to the African diaspora and in conversation with the western imposition of Christianity and the laws that sought to eradicate Afro and Indo religious worldviews. Thus, while vodun is commonly marked as Haitian, it is a mixture of Dahomean and Fon religious outlooks (Barnet, 1997). Similarly, Santería embodies a creative mixture of African and Catholic Saints due to the kinds of legal restrictions originally imposed on the practice of almost anything African. One could easily turn to myalism in Jamaica to find evidence of a syncretic (African/Christian) mixture of religious worldviews (Schuler, 1991). In terms of Indo Caribbean religions, only Hinduism, to a small extent, expresses mixture or divergence from tradition (Vertovec, 1996). Creolized as they were, these religious forms adapted to ‘new world’ circumstances, incorporated divergent elements and found ways to survive colonial systems.

In the realm of ethnicity, such mixing occurs both between cultures and within certain 'races'. For example, the ethnic group known as Akan or Coromantee in the west is, or was at one time,
an umbrella term containing a number of peoples of different languages and cultures who
inhabited the coastal regions of what is today Ghana, such as the Ashanti, Akim, Fante, and Ga
(Kiyaga-Mulindwa, 1980). Such ethnic mixing within the broad category of African was also
not unfamiliar to the Maroon societies who absorbed many runaways from various African
ethnic groups as they existed in limited freedom alongside the institution of slavery (Kopytoff,
1978). Similarly, another mixture, the almost infamous miscegenation between different 'races'
in the Caribbean are well articulated in the number of new categories drummed up by colonial
authorities such as mulatto, quadroon (¼ black), and octroon (white and ¼ black); the list
extends to more than 20 such categories in the Spanish Caribbean and alarmingly more in pre-
revolution Saint Dominigue. Clearly then, Colonial authorities sought to categorize and thus
make knowable and manageable social difference and racial mixture in the Caribbean.

One specific scenario sums up the kinds of messiness involved in everyday life in the
Caribbean. In discussing the Jamaican coat of arms, the current Prime Minister, Edward Seaga,
of Syrian extraction, passionately argued for a reconsideration of the Arawak men who donned
the coat of arms for a country consisting of nearly 90% people of African decent (Hall, 1995:05).
For Seaga, a Harvard educated anthropologist who developed a Chinese Jamaican Mento
superstar in Byron Lee and who held significant sway in the poorest and blackest
neighbourhoods like Tivoli Gardens in West Kingston, multiplicity and social difference appear to be facets of Jamaican social life Seaga readily embraced, albeit for political or financial gain.

How then does the governance of social difference occur in a space such as this? The Jamaican national motto, "Out of Many, One People", widely understood as a desire rather than reality, (Nettleford, 1970) suggests both society’s cultural reality and the political desires of the nation. It appears as though the conundrum of formulating unity within diversity has yet to be solved, but has been brushed under a rug called “One People”. Are there policy possibilities for untidy combinations of racial and cultural difference in Canadian multiculturalism? What can Canada learn from the histories of the Caribbean’s centuries of racial and cultural mixing?

The mixing of cultures, religions and races has not occurred in the Caribbean without anti-Chinese riots, Indian and African political rivalries and many other negative consequences. This does not mean Chinese Jamaicans such as Tony Wong do not relate to Mao Zedong as intimately as Bob Marley or blend their callaoo with bok choy (Wong, 1998). Similarly, although the region is home to numerous scholars such as Nancy Morejón, Jose Martí, Kamau Brathwaite and Edouard Glissant who theorize various forms of creolization, this does not mean anti-Haitian, anti-black sentiments did not pollute Trujillo’s Dominican Republic. The Caribbean’s immense
intellectual and social contributions to ideas about racial and cultural mixing are not uniformly enjoyed by all elements of Caribbean society. For some Indo-Caribbeans, creolization and mixture are xenophobically seen as a dilution or loss of Indian culture, caste system boundaries and/or religious worldviews (Khan, 2004; Sheller, 2001). Instructive for us is that within the messy mixtures that Caribbean nations have had to face during nation building are commentaries, at times restrained or obscured, on liberal western notions of individualism and the interconnectedness of difference.

In fact, anti-miscegenation laws in the French Caribbean in the early 1700s and the hierarchy of colour in the Spanish and British Caribbean speak eloquently about that which they attempted to deny: racial mixing. Lady Nugent’s intimate detail of various interactions during her visit to Jamaica sheds light on the relationship between creole language acquisition and the proximity of white and black women in colonial Jamaica (Bush, 1981). Mixture, hybridity, and mestizaje are all excellent starting points in attempting to dissolve the “imagined barriers between cultures” (Gilroy, 1993:02). These points are not always complicit with enlightenment ideals or with the corner stones of western liberal-universalism, universal citizenship and cultural neutrality of the state (Hall, 2000:228). Further, elaborate theorizing from a position of difference or regarding various forms of mixing have rarely in the Caribbean been initiated by the government.
The particularities born of the Caribbean region, enunciated by a number of theories such as Negritude, Transculturism, Creolization, Noirism, Creolité or Antillanité are born out of the intermingling of the region's three inheritances according to Aimé Césaire and Leopold Senghor's metaphors; "Présence Africaine, Présence Européenne and Présence Americaine" (Hall, 2005:240). Such theorizing of social difference begins, for French Caribbean scholars, from the site of language. For example, Antillanité is a concept understood as "a multiplicity of relations … held in place by a complex process of attraction and repulsion" (Burton, 146). Glissant’s use of Antillanité, as “a method and not a state of being” is concerned with connections rather than separations, seeking to link cultures across language barriers (Glissant, 1997:196). Clearly, such theorizing does not comply with a notion of individualism that encourages shedding the 'burden' of culture nor is it a top down endeavour managed by the state.

Cuba's intellectual heritage, analyzed and promoted by Jose Martí, has been grappling with social difference in the form of cultural and racial mixing for more than a century. Some Caribbean scholars, such as Antonio Benitez-Rojo, claim that creolization has been occurring on the ground in places like Cuba since the late 1500s (Benitez-Rojo, 2005). The process of creolization, where for instance Hakka Chinese in Jamaica began mixing bok choy and callaloo,
clearly outlines culture as a dynamic and open signifier rather than static and closed entity in need of governmental management. Such radical visions of culture cannot enter the language of a Canadian official multiculturalism interested in preservation and tolerance because governing dynamic entities such as culture is antithetical to the bigger nation-state identity.

The theorization of difference and cultural mixing in the Caribbean has not been an entirely masculinist project. Black Feminist critiques of Western Feminism have also rooted themselves in a notion of difference by highlighting the absence of issues of race. Indo-Caribbean critiques of the Afrocentricity of Afro-Anglo-Caribbean feminism(s) point to a continued exclusionary use of race while highlighting how Indo-Caribbean women participated in the reconstruction of an Indo-Caribbean patriarchal system (Patricia Mohammed as cited in Rhoda Reddock, 2001). Rhoda Reddock's own contribution to the conceptualization of difference suggests we begin with examining how "constructed differences have contributed to how we have conceptualized ourselves" (Reddock, 2001:208). In thinking through organic multiculturalisms in Canada as they sprout from the experiences of the Caribbean diaspora, gender difference also becomes an important starting point from which to understand the circulations and relationships of social difference.
What emerges from various social and intellectual legacies in the Caribbean is a picture where a number of different facets of society have engaged with various notions of creolization and living with and through discourses of race, religion and culture in no ‘pure’ form, is an organic idea, free from government mediation, of how to live with difference. This on-going engagement has not been solely the work of scholars, elites or otherwise materially privileged individuals. Ordinary everyday people, especially in their continuous movement in search of work throughout the Caribbean, also have developed ways in which to understand and live in diverse societies. One migrant to Toronto in the 1970s, interviewed by Carol B Duncan, regarded what Canadians call diversity as unfamiliar to her. This Vincentian immigrant, Sister Maria, assumes that a ‘mixture’ of people and interconnected ethnic communities is normal and everyday:

I found Canada [ ] not too bad because I moved to Aruba and I've get to know the different cultures there, it wasn't really hard for me coming and meeting the same kinda people or just a color of people here. 'Cause in Aruba I have the people from Holland. You know we have the people from 'statia (St Eustatia) which is more … kinda Carib-looking, you know, half-breed people, you know, very tan…. And they have a mixture of people in Curacao, which is Spanish… they are from Venezuela. You know, American Canadian … so it wasn't really a big chill for me (Duncan, 2003).
What Sister Maria, along with numerous Caribbean scholars and feminists reinforce is that ideas about difference and cultural mixing are not solely under the jurisdiction of the government, nor is it singularly tied to language, race or class. Sister Maria exemplifies how the Caribbean is a fruitful site where numerous ideas of difference proliferate, are theorized—both from the ground up and from institutions down—and where Canadians can learn how to tackle issues of living in a society of many cultures.

**State-sponsored Multiculturalism in Canada**

The creation of an official policy of multiculturalism in Canada came in 1971 under Pierre Trudeau’s government. Until the late 1960s Canada’s immigration policy was explicitly racist. Coincidently, Afro-Caribbeans were able to enter Canada at times when labour shortages crippled the potential prosperity of major urban or industrial centers. For example, under the Household Service Worker’s Scheme of 1955 Caribbean women were welcomed into Canada providing they were single, without a child and that they returned to the Caribbean once their contracts had expired (Calliste, 1993). Caribbean men were welcomed to parts of the Maritime Provinces only when labour shortages from World War One threatened to slow production at the dangerous coalmines. Numerous reasons were created to keep black folk out of Canada, the
most popular being the unsuitability of these populations to the Canadian climate (Troper 1972).

Canadian Prime Ministers Mackenzie King and the official ‘opposition’, future prime minister,
Robert Borden were but two of the most prominent endorsees of such sentiments.

The goals of the Canadian Multiculturalism Policy are to combat racism, provide equal
opportunity, promote diversity and cross cultural understanding and respect human rights. In
1988 when this policy became law all federal agencies and departments were made to follow the
tenets of Canadian multiculturalism. What this meant is that organizations could obtain funds
from the government to ‘preserve’ and celebrate their cultural heritage.

The multiculturalism policy in Canada today is in a bruised and battered state. The legislation
has been accused of depoliticising, as well homogenizing immigrant life, constructing
governable categories such as 'visible minority' and fracturing possibilities of national cohesion–
just to name a few critiques (Bannerji, 1994; Bibby, 1990; Bissoondath, 1994; Fleras, 2004;
Saloojee, 2004; Thobani, 2000; Walcott, 1993). Thus, the inability of 'multiculturalism' to
produce any kind of sustainable intervention into the inequality that circumscribes the lives of
'visible minorities' has led many to understand this national project as a failure. Undoubtedly,
the advancement of this idea in the past quarter century has produced a plethora of literature that
continually highlights such failures (Walcott, 1993; Bissoondath, 1994; Bannerji, 2000; Day 2000; Fleras, 2004; Saloojee, 2004). The commonalities in such diverse responses to state-sponsored multiculturalism should be noted. Importantly, there is a continued effort to grapple with the limited conceptual terrain state-sponsored multiculturalism occupies.

The Canadian government assumes that their idea of multiculturalism exists in ideological isolation; nothing average people, especially not ‘immigrants’ espouse could somehow contain any type of useful knowledge about living with diversity. What exactly qualifies the government to manage multiculturalism other than their hegemonic ‘democratic’ power and their stranglehold on resources? Stuart Hall is instructive in such discussions when he reminds us that “multiculturalism is not a single doctrine… and it does not represent an already achieved state of affairs” (Hall, 2000:210). To be fair to the Canadian government, Canadian Multiculturalism is a governmental ideal, an unfinished project that is always in process. As an unfinished utopian ideal, state-sponsored multiculturalism might benefit from looking towards those spaces and people with whom multiculturalism or multiracialism has always been a way of life.

Multiculturalism, long before it became law in 1988, seeped into social institutions so that children at school were encouraged to celebrate the three Ss (saris, samosas & steelpan) (Donald
and Rattansi, 1992). Expos, conventions and festivals heightened their awareness of our cultural heritage. In the school system when children are encouraged to explore their cultural background, they are simultaneously taught through the hidden curriculum, whose culture is valued, what languages are acceptable in school and whose history counts. This exercise of power is not all encompassing or omnipotent, but as Foucault reminds us “the exercise of power creates and causes to emerge new objects of knowledge and accumulates new bodies of information” (Foucault, 1994). These new “objects of knowledge,” the “immigrant,” becomes a discursively decorated landscape where ‘otherizing’ language becomes the graffiti inscribed onto the body of the non-white, creating both literal and figurative bodies of information. Literally, these bodies become hypervisible when unemployment numbers are up as new immigrants always “take jobs away” or when terms like ‘visible minority’ heighten the public’s awareness of non-whiteness. Figuratively, these immigrants are bodies of information in as much as they are decorated with Canadian-made discourses around social difference, assimilation and tolerance—intimately detailing what kinds of social practices are deemed worthy of being assimilated.

Essential to the search for alternatives to state-sponsored multiculturalism is to be attentive to the ways in which Canada’s Indigenous communities are absent from most discussions around multiculturalism. Attention to the ways in which multiculturalism completely ignores the
specificities of Aboriginal life is instructive in highlighting how an unwillingness to engage with 
the cultural capital of ‘ethnic’ communities can be detrimental. The current environmental 
‘crisis’, for example, that has recycling and hybrid cars en vogue is indebted to a European 
system of thought that refused to recognize Indigenous knowledge systems (Kincheloe, 1999; 
Battiste, 2000). Such systems of knowledge and lifestyle choices involved, amongst other 
things, what we might consider recycling today, composting, and a desire to reduce waste. 
These ‘innovations’ in North American society form part of an Indigenous knowledge system 
that is more than five hundred years old.

If eurocentrism and then Canadian multiculturalism were willing to engage with or learn from 
worldviews such as those developed on Turtle Island, rather than dominating Indigenous 
societies, global warming might not be such a pressing concern of ours today. A radical 
multiculturalism from below, or organic multiculturalisms, are implicit recognitions of the 
plurality of ways of living inherit in a culturally plural society. In Toronto there are various 
spaces where the politics of an organic multiculturalism are evident, take for instance a 
Caribbean grocery store in North York, a northwest borough in Toronto pictured below.
The above photograph is of a grocery store in Toronto, Caribbean Foods Supermercado Hispano. It claims to specialize in African, Canadian, East and West Indian, Newfoundland and Spanish Foods. Such interesting signage demands we ask how can and why does this grocery store exist in such a confusing manner? What ideas regarding the relationship between cultures made possible the existence of this sign? Furthermore, does the lack of commas suggest we not separate these foods in a way we may have become accustomed to? In this scenario, a number of different foods are combined underneath the heading of grocery store in what seems like an

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80 I borrow this title from a graduate student conference held at OISE/UT in 2005 at which I presented some early thoughts from this chapter.

81 I use confusing here to address the possible effects of the signage on individuals that strictly abide by and believe ‘race’ nation and ethnicity as impermeable and mutually exclusive categories.
indecisive mess of foods categorized underneath provincial, continental and linguistic headings. Visually, the store's sign layers Caribbean Foods on top of Supermercado Hispano, yet highlights the latter in black lettering. Those two titles are followed by smaller lettering that appears to further explicate, or make messy both Caribbean and Hispano, offering us a generous interpretation—an example of Glissant’s notion of errant thinking—of Caribbean or Hispanic supermarket. Such generous conceptions of a grocery store are always messy endeavours, never neatly organized and categorized according to western Enlightenment inheritance. Defiance of our governing ideological order is the exact starting point by which we can demystify the seemingly natural ways by which our thoughts are organized.

Importantly, the sign also disrupts the Anglophone assumptions of Caribbean in Toronto, reminding us of the various linguistic components of the Caribbean. This mixture, in obeying a bricolage sensibility found in various forms of Black popular culture, puts into jeopardy the often-mistaken for static, and seemingly mutually exclusive, racial categories that state-sponsored multiculturalism requires to validate its existence. While physically, the signage does contain a certain physical permanence it is the interpretation—the meaning derived from the signage, that remains fluid and impermanent. The messiness of its mixture refuses to comply

82 Interestingly enough this particular sign no longer exists, new ownership has erected a new less provocative sign.
with prior notions of culture or state-sponsored multicultural logic. In utilizing the language of specification, the very language used in Eurocentric notions of higher learning, specifically the idea of the university, specialization is ‘misused’, remixed from a solely euro-interpretation to a broader more encompassing concept.

Supermercado Hispano’s mix attempts to interconnect a number of differences through the sale of foodstuff and thus make messy prior notions one might hold regarding culture and its apparent disconnectedness in Canada's hierarchical order. For example, if one were to attempt to classify this grocery store as a space of ‘otherness’, serving ethnic communities or immigrant populations, then the presence of Newfoundland in the store signage disrupts such simple attempts. One could argue (and some have) that White Newfoundlanders in Toronto are immigrants and they are differently positioned to a certain extent, but phenotypically – the basis of much of Canada's multicultural logic – Newfoundlanders can and do gain access to the category of Canadian. On another level, the presence of Newfoundland in this mix of ‘cultural' foodstuff points to a history of interconnected histories between the Caribbean and Canada. Newfoundland and other Maritime provinces were and still are key suppliers of dried codfish to the Caribbean. In the 1700 and the 1800s fish, rum and ice were all commodities that connected British North America
to the Caribbean. Newfoundland in this mix forces an acknowledgement of long histories of entanglement that are so readily dismissed at certain moments.

Significantly, Supermercado Hispano's foodstuff remix, its intentional reordering of the relationships between certain foods, forces both customers and non-customers (thanks to the bright signage) to re-examine, by way of confusion, what Canada means by multiculturalism. Its attempt at inclusion, even if motivated by capital accumulation, serves as an example of where ordinary people on the ground grasp the idea of multiculturalism and make it their own. More importantly, the signage suggests there is a disconnect between legislation and how multiculturalism is lived on the ground, never totally in sync with governing logic. In the signage, it is significant that Caribbean Foods is given primacy for the diversity found in Caribbean foodstuff. Fruits, vegetables and spices have all migrated to the Caribbean region over the last 500 years from India, South America, Africa and Southern Europe, helping to create the national dish on many islands. The brilliance of Caribbean Foods/Supermercado Hispano is that it refuses, despite its inherent diversity, to focus exclusively on the Caribbean and opts instead to expand the category Caribbean and refuse the kinds of limitations associated with static notions of culture.
Another refusal, organic in nature and indebted to the Caribbean diaspora has been the lexical intervention of Afro-Caribbean youth in carving out a space of belonging in Toronto in the mid-1990s. The refusal I am referring to is encoded in hip hop music where the word “T-dot O-dot” operates as a practice of representin’ that refuses the exclusionary practices of the host nation and highlight their presence in the city and the hip hop nation worldwide. In 1994, the hip hop community in Toronto was suffering from a creative drought. The huge success of the city’s first wave of hip hop artists from 1988 to 1994 had died down. Michie Mee, Rumble and Strong, Maestro Fresh Wes amongst others, saw their radio spins and public appearances decline. Few artists received regular rotation on the country’s music video station and the highly anticipated third album of Maestro Fresh Wes, *Naah, this Kid Can’t Be from Canada*, received little consumer or radio support. While artists like Kish and Organized Rhyme received heavy rotation, their following in the hip hop community was sparse.

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83 The phase T-dot O-dot is believed to have been developed by an emcee named K-4CE see Del F. Cowie “T-Dot: “It Ain’t Where You’re from, Its Where You’re At” (Cowie, 2004).

84 See Murray Forman (Forman, 2004) for further clarifications on the notion of representin’ in hip hop culture. This concept will be elaborated in the next chapter.
Following the 1992 Yonge street ‘riots’, a municipal sponsored program called *Fresh Arts* trained young aspiring hip hoppers in production and recording and business acumen. By the late 1990s these youth, primarily of Afro-Caribbean inheritance, were writing, producing and distributing their music throughout the city of Toronto. One of the most enduring legacies of these primarily Trinidadian, Guyanese, Bajan and Jamaican youth has been the creation of word the T-dot O-dot. Steeped in the linguistic inheritances of Afrodiasporic verbal ingenuity, these youth produced a significant social intervention into the politics of place by renaming the city of Toronto. In classic signifying style, the official abbreviation for Toronto, T.O., became T-dot O-dot, where the small and insignificant period that separated the two letters becomes as important as the two letters. This period became a phonetically pronounced part of the abbreviation; it was as if a generation of Afro-Caribbean youth had announced their belonging to Toronto, both literally and figuratively directly in the center of the city rather than accept the marginalization ‘otherized’ peoples face. T.O., as it was announced by city officials and the media, suddenly become T dot O and was circulated throughout the city via vinyl recordings played weekly on

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85 Along one Toronto’s main arteries, Yonge Street, Canadian youth rioted, looting shops and smashing the windows of more than 100 stores. Some claim the riot was in response to the Rodney King trial in Los Angeles in May 1992, while others claim it was a response to the anti-black racism found in Toronto. The Ontario government commissioned a report analyzing the concerns of young people around racism and social exclusion. See Stephen Lewis’ *A Report on Racism* 1992.
college radio stations, mixed and remixed by hip hop DJs, like Mastermind, DJ X and DJ Grouch.

A decade later official municipal spaces and institutions such as the Toronto Public Library have taken to the word T-dot in their attempt to market themselves to youth. Local sports commentators and less than hip radio announcers have all attempted to upgrade their stock by using the word T-dot a decade after its creation. One could read the significance of the word ‘dot’, as a representation of the overlooked, under-appreciated, usually immigrant population whose foreign degrees relegate them to menial work on the fringes of society. The insertion of the dot as a pronounceable and inflated entity in the middle of the abbreviation of the city outright refuses a peripheralized existence, opting to revamp the meaning of living in Toronto. By dragging the city into a remixed state, infusing it with new meaning defined by centered immigrants/others and circulating this newly remixed meaning, the Afro-Caribbean youth in 1994 Toronto produced an important intervention directed at redefining belonging, home and the contours of Afrodiasporic life in Canada. What might appear as a meaningless act of hip hop slang or a game of semantics, is the act of forging belonging and making home in diaspora.
One member of the Afro-Caribbean hip hop community during this era, Wendy “Motion” Brathwaite elaborated on the T-dot-O as a lexical intervention in her award-winning spoken word/ dub poem entitled Connect the T.Dots. Motion is a co-founder of one of Canada’s longest running hip hop radio show, The Masterplan Show on CIUT 89.5fm. She is author of two collections of poetry, 40 Dayz published in 2009 and Poetry in Motion published in 2002. In her collections of poems, Motion brings the “movement of hip hop music and culture to [her] poetry”, mixing spoken word pieces with lyric from recorded tracks (Brathwaite, 2002:11). She explores the complexities of negotiating her black womanhood, its connotations of ‘strength’ and its entanglements with hip hop’s overly masculine performance in poems such as “Strong” and “Freestyle”. Motion also highlights the overpolicing and surveillance of black bodies in Toronto dipping her hip hop slanguage in a creative ovastanding of Rastafarian vernacular, as he considered herself to be “Representin’ the I to I” (Brathwaite, 2002:61).

In 2002 the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation, a crown corporation interested in promoting Canadian culture, commissioned Wendy “Motion” Braithwaite to produce a spoken word poem as part of the National Poetry Face-Off. Motion, a member of both Toronto’s spoken word community as well as the hip hop community, developed and performed a poem called “Connect

86 Motion is no longer on the Masterplan Show.
the T. Dots”. In the poem Motion paints a picture of a multicultural Toronto where the city’s residents are not overdetermined by their culture(s) and ‘difference’(s). Instead the people of Toronto are described through Motion’s poem as interconnected through the emotion of love. As corny as the idea of this poem may sound, it serves as an important sound document that illustrates how we might live with and through a multiculturalism from below.

Importantly, “Connect the T.Dots” produces two significant ruptures in the Eurocentricity of the Canadian cultural landscape. Firstly, it resists the page, meaning that this poem, despite the publication of *Poetry in Motion*, has not been published on paper. For all those deeply Eurocentric analyses that discount oral histories, especially Benedict Anderson’s claim to “imagined communities,” via the printing press, Motion’s poem and ‘insurrectionary knowledge’ literally does not exist. Its aural/oral basis does not meet the narrow requirements of concrete scientific proof; it eludes all attempts to grasp the poem in a Eurocentric tangible way. Secondly, “Connect the T.Dots” resists the suggestions of Canada’s official multicultural policy, that of cultural separation and retention – resisting a static notion of culture to embrace a connectedness beyond the limitations of cultural boxes. Her interpretation of official multiculturalism is broad and generous, a Glissant-like form errant thinking that includes average people as agents of culture, not as passive recipients of a governmental solution to ethnic diversity.
Connect the T.Dots is a transgressive text deeply encoded within the Afro diasporic discourse of signifyin’ (Gates Jr., 1988). According to the words of the poem, it is a text about love. On another level this dub poem is about revamping how Canadians, especially those racialized by the media and the state, think about state-sponsored multiculturalism and their roles within this governing process. Wendy “Motion” Brathwaite is one of those “new objects” that emerged due to the Canadian government’s exercise of multicultural discourse. Trained and accredited as a schoolteacher this young emcee and poet has evidently taken in the multicultural lessons of the day. As expressed in “Connect the T.Dots”, Motion displays a heightened notion of the importance of culture and the necessity of living with difference.

Interestingly, as a product of the Ontario school system Motion does not exemplify Althusser’s Ideological State Apparatuses thesis; there is no linear base-superstructure effect here.87 If indeed the education system is a major ideological state apparatus and it inculcates citizens with the ruling power’s ideas, we should find in Motion’s poems, owing to the influence of the Multiculturalism Act, a static performance of social difference and an attempt to contain

87 Louis Althursar’s Ideological State Apparatus (ISA) thesis suggests that a social formation’s beliefs are shaped by society’s institutions that enforce the dominant logic of the government (Althusser, 1971). For Althusser, following Marx, the ideological, legal and political practices of any social formation will necessarily correspond to the economic base of society which will inculcate society by the functioning of ideology.
heterogeneity. In fact, this poet/emcee disarticulates a governmental strategy by focusing her
ergies where the Multicultural Act does not – towards sameness rather than difference, on
connection rather than separation. Motion formulates a new Relation by focusing on shared
knowledges and operating through what Glissant terms “rhizomatic thought” – a poetics of
Relation where “identity is extended through a relationship with the Other” in a non-totalitarian
fashion (Glissant, 1997:11). Motion’s poetry does not impose her Caribbean/Rasta/Hip Hop
subjectivities onto the city of Toronto, its peoples or its culture. Instead, Motion reads her social
landscape and creatively engages with her social difference, but not in a overdetermined way.
What I mean by this is that Motion does engage the language of preservation and cultural
separation, as a linear bases-superstructure reading by Althusser might espouse. Instead, Motion
demonstrates Stuart Hall’s claim, that there is no guarantee that the ideology of a social
formation or group directly corresponds to their economic relations of capitalist production
(Hall, 1996a). Motion, as an Ontario-licensed schoolteacher, one who teaches according to the
provincial curriculum requirements, does not reproduce the ideological terrain that renders
ethnicity and culture a static entity in need of preservation.

By positing another way to think about living with difference Motion answers Paul Gilroy’s call
for a critical perspective that might “nurture the ability and the desire to live with difference on
an increasingly divided but also convergent planet” (Gilroy, 2005:02). Motion frees herself (and other subordinated populations) from governmental hegemony by transgressing the neat, static, performed ethnicities prescribed by the official policy and interpret what it might meant to live with social difference using her cultural capital. Instead of strictly adhering to a ‘Caribbean’ identity, that is always erroneously read by the media as Jamaican, Motion expands her rhizomatic identity engaging in Canadian society as a poet who focuses on the local, rather than an imagined ‘home’. Her local reflections find commonalities in the local grocery store, connections between unknown people. As a member of the hip hop community Motion has published research on the hip hop community, further extending her efforts beyond official multiculturalism’s focus on race, ethnicity, religion and origin.

Motion’s award-winning poem, “Connect the T.Dots” is her personalized refashioning, her remix and extension of this creative word/sound intervention. Drawing on the metaphorical rendering of immigrant folk as dots in the larger urban center of Toronto, Motion dragged the signifier (the city) and took this meaning in a new direction. Motion ethnographically details the micro happenings of a multicultural city, highlighting the most minute, seemingly insignificant and taken for granted interactions such as the beauty in chasing one’s toddler through the grocery store. Her attention to the various interactions of the micro, nurtured by a Caribbean cultural and
vernacular residue, intimately articulates a willingness to engage social difference, allowing her analysis of life in Toronto to connect rather than separate the workings of ‘difference’ she observes daily. At times she focuses her attention on her students warm greetings before each class or the plight of young mothers visiting incarcerated partners in the Don Jail\(^{88}\). Only once in her sound document does she make a mention of cultural heritage in her references to three Caribbean islands. It might seem odd to contend that “Connect the T. Dots” is a poem about multiculturalism when there is only one mention of ‘culture’. The absence of rhyming off various ethnic groups or detailed and intricate observations in different ethnic enclaves is precisely the moment at which Motion encodes, in a very opaque Afro diasporic way, her counter to the Canadian state’s vision of living with difference.

When Rinaldo Walcott rightly observes “multicultural discourse attempts to make us all the same by making us different” (2001:132) he highlights the fine threads that connect the state-sponsored discourse to the lived experiences of immigrants and in particular the Caribbean diaspora in Canada. Accordingly, this state-sponsored project requires the performance of a static “migrant ethnicity” which rests quite unhappily on the periphery of Canada’s “founding fathers” the English and the French.” Part of “migrant ethnicity” or what Walcott has termed in

\(^{88}\) The Don Jail is Toronto’s local jail.
another space “migrant subjectivity,” – a notion that better encompasses the recent generations born in Canada, is the centrality of ‘difference’ as an everyday experience in the lives of Afro-diasporic Caribbean peoples (Walcott 2006).

The Caribbean basin for the last 450 years as been a mélange of various religions, ideas, political outlooks and, at times has been home to nefarious schemes of ‘race’ mixing. In short, the Caribbean has been the center of intentional and unintentional difference mixing. Part of the “migrant ethnicity or subjectivity” Caribbean migrants and their children live is an idea of difference that is organic and unregulated by the government. When Stuart Hall suggested “the multi-cultural question [  ] suggests that the moment of difference is essential to defining democracy as a heterogeneous space” we need not directly connect democracy with government (Hall, 2000:235). What “Connect the T.Dots” essentially does is put forth another logic of living with difference that is informed by the cultural capital of Caribbean peoples. By refusing to segregate various ethnicities and cultures in society and to begin one’s analysis focused beyond and before differences, “Connect the T. Dots” begins with the sameness of human emotion: a sameness that exists in ‘different’ people. Motion is dealing with what fellow Toronto emcee Wio-K calls “a science that every heartbeat knows”.

The format of Motion’s poem, in the style of dub poetry, gestures at not only to a powerful inheritance of an oral tradition, but also suggests that Caribbean immigrants in Toronto and their children possess the tools, in the form of cultural capital, to radically reconfigure the ways in which the heterogeneous populations of the Western world might live with and through their differences. “Connect the T.Dots” exemplifies how a politics of relationality gets articulated and deployed in the Caribbean diaspora through innovative uses of sound. The heterogeneous space Motion outlines in her poem is a space that her sonic narrative captures and analyzes from a perspective that seeks relation in a manner Glissant could appreciate.

The examples of 'multiculturalism from below' highlighted throughout this chapter can be read as the mobilization of subaltern particularities and notions of living with difference that stand in direct contrast to state-sponsored multiculturalism in Canada. Of particular use have been the idea of mixture and the Afro diasporic practice of remixing to propose other ways in which peoples of different cultures languages and religions might live together. These habits and customs, if taken as paradigmatic, propose that multiculturalism is a not a singular doctrine owned by the government and suggests other methods of living with difference.
What Motion’s poem, Supermercado Hispano and Sister Maria’s comments do is present remixed versions of state-sponsored multiculturalism. These examples of remixed multiculturalisms rely on, and extend, the idea of state-sponsored multiculturalism inserting personal or cultural ideas around living with difference into their lived experiences. The three examples provide in this chapter bring together lived and organic notions of living with social difference to bear on the state-sponsored version of living with difference—multiculturalism. The temporal zones of representation that resulted from the collision between organic understandings of living with social difference and Canada’s official policy, these remixed multiculturalisms, provide a glimpse of another kind of political logic to inform possibilities for tomorrow. In the next chapter, a closer look inside the sonic innovations of Afro-diasporic youth in Toronto elaborates other kinds of relationships between the state and its Afro-diasporic population can be gleaned from reading Canadian hip hop as a diasporic text.
Chapter 5

Reppin’ ‘Home’ in the T-Dot.

…we’re all trapped in a diaspora and looking for a home.

Kamau\(^90\)

home is best understood as an amalgam, a pastiche, a performance…

[it is] an enacted space within which we try on and play out roles and relationships of both belonging and foreignness.

Angelika Bammer (1992)

Misrepresentation will never happen while I’m rapping.

Wio-K\(^91\)

Before the Mason-Dixon line was drawn, before the formerly enslaved found Canaan, one could hear freedom. “Swing Low Sweet Chariot”, “Wade in the Water” and “Go Low Moses” were encoded and opaque sonic maps to freedom. The dispersal of individuals who fled bondage via the Underground Rail Road identifies an unspoken diaspora, contained within the geographical


boundaries of North America\textsuperscript{92}. This massive movement of people was a dispersal of individuals made possible by both ingenious sounds of ‘singing’ enslaved peoples as well as Ms. Tubman’s noble and fearless, gun-packing ways. Importantly, for enslaved individuals, British North America, despite its terra incognita status for most Europeans, was a temporary home for those seeking freedom. Evidenced by the dramatic decline of Black peoples in Canada after the emancipation proclamation in the United States, Canada appeared to be understood by many as a temporal ‘home’. Mary Ann Shadd, Harriet Tubman and other high profiled individuals all went back ‘home’ to the United States. Thousands of African American refugees did not opt to stay, demonstrating Canada as ‘home’ for blacks to be an unstable, and possibly premature, notion (Winks 1997). Thus, before this country officially became Canada the relationship between Black people in Canada and the idea of home was a complicated and fluctuating affair. In combination with the exodus of African Americans, the Canadian state has also been influential in the ways in which Canada as a home for Afro diasporic individuals might operate. The deportation of various Caribbean born, but Canadian raised individuals, alongside the aggressive

\textsuperscript{92} Of course unspoken in these foundational narratives of a morally astute Canada the ‘good’, are the roles of Mexico and Seminole land in Florida, so that the often invoked connection between the north and freedom is rife with contingencies, discrepancies and silences. Canada’s geographic position as opposite of the south helps facilitate its binaristic positioning within the institution of American slavery.
deportation of Caribbean domestics and Caribbean students in the Sir George Williams Affair muddle diasporic workers and students’ attempts at conceiving of Canada as a home.\textsuperscript{93}

Mary Ann Shadd, Nathanial Dett, Harriet Tubman and other notable early Black peoples in Canada provide us with an important way to think about the temporality of home, amongst an African American diaspora not deemed as such. The frequent border crossings of Tubman and others allow us to ask what was/is this unstable referent called ‘home’ for Black individuals in Canada? Blackness in Canada often gestures beyond the nation’s boundaries so that the often asked question “but where are you really from?” becomes the normalized way blackness is ideologically (in the case of deportees physically) pushed outside the nation (Shadd, 1994; Walcott, 2001).\textsuperscript{94} But home and away is a false dichotomy, neither are stable coordinates nor mutually exclusive. In Toronto, AfroCaribbean populations express unstable yet strategic sentiments of home through their creative works in hip hop culture and beyond.

\textsuperscript{93} The Sir George Williams Affair occurred at what is now Concordia University in Montreal in 1969 when Caribbean studies staged a sit in protest in a computer lab after their repeated complaints against their professor’s bias treatment of them was dismissed by school administration. The affair culminated into what was called a ‘riot’ in which computers where thrown out the school’s window, students and police were injured and the veil of black equality in Canada was removed. Students that participated in this ‘riot’ were jailed and or deported back to various Caribbean countries (see Forsythe, 1971).

\textsuperscript{94} Since not all blackness in Canada is diasporic Shadd’s annoyance at the unCanadianizing questions of her “island of origin” are particularly noted.
This chapter contends that Afro diasporic youth in Toronto since the late 1990s have engaged in acts of re-appropriation, identity juggling and temporal meaning-making maneuvers as well as linguistic innovations that demarcate Toronto as an unstable site of ‘home’. Accordingly, a notion of ‘home’ is represented through signifying practices embedded in the words and images of post 1993 Toronto hip hop culture. The notion of ‘home’ detailed here resembles the sonic activities of the turntablist; home is a temporal, recontextualized, and continually altered concept designed by diasporic peoples. Hip hop culture is an apt lens to examine utterances of home because its relational discourse challenges dominant and dichotomous discourses of home, continuously highlighting how socially constructed otherness always reveals the society’s seams and the constitutive positioning of immigrant and otherized populations in the construction of our present social world. It is hip hop’s robust relational and intertextual mechanics\textsuperscript{95}, seamlessly woven throughout turntablism, emceeing and djing that makes it an optimal tool for an in-depth analysis of diasporic constructions of home. Importantly, because hip hop culture is a hyperlocal medium this chapter’s examination of representations of home take into consideration Jenny Burman’s useful assertion that “home can only be reconstituted in dialogue with the new locale” (Burman, 2006). For example, while hip hop songs calls one to “represent your city”

\textsuperscript{95} Revisit chapter 2 for an in-depth exploration of these claims.
while other less popular hip hop songs talk about “hearing the city breathe deep breaths” within these articulations of one’s local city are diasporic yearnings, connections and constructions.96

But before I take up hip hop culture in Toronto as a window to the ‘true’ or authentic lives of Afrodiasporic youth it is useful to return to Leroi Jones’ *Blues People*. Jones provides a trajectory of thought that grasps the experiences of Black folk in the United States through the emergence of blues music. Jones’ suggestion that “each phase of the Negro’s music issued directly from the dictates of his social and psychological environment” structures the trajectory of this chapter (Jones, 2002/1963). Importantly, I am uninterested in identifying the ‘authentic’ life of Afrodiasporic youth, (Kelley, 1998), for any search for origins, authenticity or realness can easily digress into an essentialized understanding of blackness and its nefarious uses in the academy. Instead, I focus on the unstable, those fractured positionings that refuse a linear coherency. Accordingly, I take up the city of Toronto as a diasporic city whose existence is a relational affair continuously in conversation and transformed by the latest (overlapping) diaspora (Burman, 2006). Within this diasporic city I am specifically interested in the sonic in[ter]ventions of its Afrodiasporic youth.

96 For example on a song entitled “Respiration”, the Emcees on this track elaborate on their intimate relationships with their city, while the group has decided to name themselves Blackstar, after the UNIA ships Marcus Garvey organized to return to the African continent.
Consequently, I turn to Mark Anthony Neal’s excellent study of the black public sphere. The blues did not simply document the happenings of Black life; as Mark Anthony Neal points out, the blues was also a space where critiques of the Black Church and the liberal bourgeoisie took place (Neal, 1999). While some might argue that *Blues People* proceeded along a thin essentialist line, Mark Anthony Neal’s *What the Music Said* presents us with a more diverse relationship between Black folk and their musics. As an element of the black public sphere, blues music and other black musics present contradictions, arguments and critiques of black life as well as mainstream society. In a sense blues music and other black musics capture a wide range of conversations and intellectual transformations, with a sense of home being just one small element of this sonic spectrum. Hip hop music allows for the illumination of various contradictions both within the culture, especially through gender constructions, and in broader society (Layli Phillips, 2005). In this chapter, hip-hop music in Toronto functions as an arena where one might find specific details of Afrodiasporic life, especially for the 1.5 and second generation AfroCaribbean youth.\footnote{The 1.5-generation I refer to here is those individuals born in outside of Canada but raised in Canada. These individuals often demonstrate a dual consciousness of Canada and elsewhere thus their hybrid understandings of their social lives are useful analytical tools.} Importantly, this chapter is attentive to the contradictions, the
disagreements and the critiques that threaten any homogenous or harmonious ideal of Afrodiasporic youth identity or notions of home in diaspora.

To arrive at this unstable notion of home I follow the linguistic practices of Afrodiasporic youth as well as their innovative usages of space across the city of Toronto. As we know, culture is not a static entity (Hall, 1990, 1996; Yon, 1995); anthropologist Daniel Yon describes Caribbean-Canadian identity as “situated among many discourses” (p. 490). Consequently, I am interested in how such positionings of Caribbean-Canadian identity and culture occur, the nature and paths of what Yon refers to as the “symphonic interception and collisions” of sites of identification (Ibid.). Yon’s metaphorical wordplay is apt, hinting at the importance of the sonic as an arena where interesting alignments and reformulations occur.

Just as the hip hop DJ’s art is a way for thinking about narrative (Hudson, 1999), the sound making practices of turntablism provide useful ways of thinking about the instability of ‘home’ as a site of identification. The act of turntablism is governed by aesthetic rules that value re-appropriation, repetition, mixture/hybridity and recombination. Ironically, such values are not foreign to the Afrodiasporic experience; they are at the core of what it means to have been colonialized and diasporized. Thinking of turntablism in this way, as a sonic practice that
intimately recontextualizes some of the founding experiences of Afro diasporic life, is useful for developing alternative paradigms by which to understand Afro diasporic cultures in the west. Thus, instead of understanding constructions of home as unstable and ambivalent, they become temporal innovations whose impermanence is precisely what makes their intervention adaptive and potent and thus progressive.

In keeping with Paul D. Miller’s notion of the mix as a “fabricated zone of representation” my oscillation between representation and reppin’ attempts to capture the liminal existence of home amongst Afro diasporic youth. By enmeshing a cultural studies academic term with an ‘illegitimate’ hidden transcript (Scott, 1992) from the streets, this chapter examines the space of meaning-making where reppin’ and representation intersect and speak to one another. While there is nothing written, to date, that connects Nas’ “Represent”98 and Stuart Hall’s politics of representation, the double entrendre implications of these terms, together, provide a useful framework to read Afro diasporic temporal innovations of making home. My use of the term reppin’ is meant to capture the aforementioned acts of re-appropriation, identity juggling and

98 Nas is one of hip hop’s premier Emcees. He rose to prominence in the early 1990s and released his first album *Illmatic* to critical acclaim in 1994. Nas has been praised for the depths and complexities of his rhymes which focused on the inner workings of dispossessed life in Queensbridge projects, in Queens New York. Topics on *Illmatic* ranged from the incarceration of his peers (“One Love”), commemorating fallen community members (“Memory Lane”) and the perils of life in New York City (“New York State of Mind”).
temporal meaning-making maneuvers and linguistic innovations. This rhetorical move “offer(s) a strategy for the construction of modern temporality” (Weheliye, 2005:83) suggesting a viable space of analysis if we are to think of the ideological overlap between reppin’ and representation.

Nas’ 1994 track “Represent” is somewhat of a canonical work as this song, and his album, *Illmatic*, captures the encoded nuances upon which much of hip hop culture’s symbols and meanings are derived. Nas opens the track with a thick ethnographic take on his surroundings:

> Straight up shit is real and any day could be your last in the jungle

> Get murdered on the humble, guns’ll blast, niggas tumble…

> The streets are filled with undercovers, Homicide chasin’ brothers

> The DA’s on the roof, tryin’ to watch us and knock us

Nas aligns himself with street culture, describing both his peers and the predators he lives amongst. In the next verse Nas describes himself as an extra legal “type of fella”, highlighting his high school drop out status and his fashionable dress code, his stylized “walk with a bop”. By the end of the track Nas honours his peers by shouting them out, highlighting the community that raised him and nourished his skills. Nas both calls out names of relatives, producers and friends

99 Represent has appears as representin’ or reppin’ within hip hop music, see Smif N Wesson “Tims in hoods check” or Jim Jones “Reppin’ time”. 
as he also provides a geographic connection to the spaces that he represents, the projects and other city spaces that hold meaning for him and his peers. Nas’ “Represent” is an ethnographic, biographical and geographic survey that highlights where and how meaning enters Nas’ consciousness. This track’s critique of social institutions such as law enforcement and the school system cements “Represent” as an accurate portrayal of the ways oppressed African Americans relate to their openly bias institutions that structure black histories and lives. Importantly, rather than have Nas’ track operate as a mechanism for generalization, I use “Represent” as one example of the instability between versions and interpretations of a term that informs much cultural studies work.

The definition of representation that comes out of cultural studies is interested in reading the ways in which information is positioned, particularly by mainstream social institutions and media outlets. A politics of representation in its earliest articulations primarily sought to counteract the ideas and images circulated by mainstream media and secure a way to understand how meaning is made. Accordingly, representation is the way in which we understand meaning to be transmitted through signs and signifying practices. It is the way in which meaning is given to the things depicted, rather than a literal reflection or distortion. According to Stuart Hall, representation is an active process that is constitutive of the image or event it portrays (Hall as
cited in Jhally, 2005). Representation points to the ways in which we come to know through the framing practices of others, such as the media or others with power. Discourse and language are the basis upon which two people can share in a specific understanding of something. At stake in the practice of representation is not only the power to define, but the kinds of social and political possibilities that come from how one’s dress, race or language is made to take on social meaning. If as Hall claims “nothing meaningful exists outside of discourse”, then meaning comes after the process of representation. In this case then representation is a discursive positioning of images or events so that a desired meaning can be discerned.

In contrast, Nas’ “Represent” and hip hop’s discourse around representing focuses on capturing the lives of people who relate primarily to hip hop culture and street culture primarily and critiquing social institutions as a secondary activity. To represent in the same fashion as Nas is to present an image or notion of an individual, group or space which both expresses and relies upon a system of values and meaning that is alternative to prevailing dominant meaning-making institutions. For example, when an emcee is reppin’ they demonstrate a rhyming style that demonstrates one’s ability to engage in important signifiers (such as spontaneity or indirection) within the African American vernacular tradition (Smitherman, 1977). It is between these two approaches, a politics of representation and hip hop’s practice of reppin’, that I look for diasporic
constructions and notions of home. Practices of reppin’, then, signal within this work the convergence and continued oscillations between the sonic/oral techniques of representing and a political concern with the meaning-making tactics of the state and dominant media.

This chapter begins with a look at how ‘home’ as a concept in diaspora studies and transnationalism is understood and deployed. I avoid reiterating the dialectical trap where home is a romanticized place of comfort that is constantly juxtaposed to the mythical homeland whose static rendition is more a work of nostalgia than accuracy. Instead, I concentrate on the ambivalent and unstable utterances we find in late modernity, in particular the continual slippage of belonging that AfroCaribbean youth experience and the continued temporal innovations that suture this slippage. I situate sonic home-making innovations/interventions within the practice of reppin’, a specific mode of appreciation emcees do in their songs. To understand the effect of reppin’, I turn to linguistic and spatial manifestations of this practice. By examining both the spatial dynamics in Toronto hip hop videos and the lyrical content of various independently produced hip hop tracks, I pay attention to how space is managed and re-made, gesturing towards a flexible notion of ‘home’ in diaspora.
The Unstable Coordinates of Home

The flexibility of home is a temporal mix, that is how sonic diaspora language helps us move past home and host as stable coordinated/signposts of meaning. Home has been conceptualized by various scholars as a psychological/emotional/imaginative state (Morse, 1999; Walters, 2005; Brah 1996), a physical space (Nelson, 2004; Persram, 1996), as well as performances, and constructions or enactments (Naficy, 1999; Bammer, 1994). Andrea Davis’ feminist African Canadian lens productively situates home as “a spiritual location of self and its multiple identities” (Davis, 2005:04). Davis’ definition is useful for not only does she engage the idea of multiple identities but she also identifies home as a resting place of historical memory, thus, a resting place of contradiction and irreconcilable pasts.

The idea of ‘home’ has been a staple in diaspora studies because of its entanglement with the idea of exile, a founding notion from the Jewish diaspora. For Avtar Brah home is a mythic place of desire in the diasporic imagination (Brah, 1996). According to Sara Ahmed’s understanding of Brah’s notion of home, it involves the locality of sound and smell (Ahmed, 1999). Ahmed is invested in a notion of home that involves “encounters between those who arrive and those that leave” (340), in an attempt to avoid the home/away binary that fixes and stabilizes ‘home’. Ahmed troubles the fixity and comfort nature of ‘home’ that Nalini Persram
asserts. Persram understands ‘home’ as a place where there is “being but no longing,” (Persram, 1996) but this move attempts to make home a site of purity. If home were such a comfortable, pure space of being then we would not have diasporas and diasporic peoples. Furthermore, longing in Persram’s formulation somehow sounds like a close relative to nostalgia, excluding the possibility of extended desire for consumer items to be understood as a form of longing. The kinds of media imperialism that foster the growth of desire for foreign items cannot be discounted in a situation of diaspora. In many situations home is a reality where war exists, where poverty is pervasive and where fond memories dwell; thus it is a site of both nostalgic pleasure and traumatic pain. In some cases to return home is to rupture the pleasure and purity of an imagined home as “farweners” in Jamaica or “comebackees” in Guyana, come to symbolize the machinations of foreign (multinational or economic) control or even become victims of violence (Davidson, 1968; Nelson, 2004). The return of migrated middle class Caribbeans acts as a materialized embodied and constant reminder of the flight of talent, potential and capital that has characterized many nations in the Caribbean. For some Jamaicans, returning to Jamaica meant the United Kingdom became ‘home’ in a sense as it housed memories, and nostalgic renditions of a more adventurous time in one’s life (Davidson, 1968).
Home is both a psychological state and a physical space; neither is fixed, rather the ideas of home are called upon to do specific kinds of work at specific times. For diaspora studies, the idea of home makes possible explorations of memory and materializations of nostalgia, so that stories, music and/or rum gain a renewed significance as these vestiges of home are re-imagined and creatively rearticulated, especially via literature. It becomes the stable measuring stick to compare the present to the past, as well as to highlight the immigrant’s dramatically altered state of being. The notion of home makes possible comparative studies as well as cases for authenticity and origin. When conceived as “retrospective signposts” in visual, acoustic and tactile space home becomes a notion trapped in time, a permanent member of yesterday (Dath as cited in Morse, 1999).

As a theoretical concept, home lay at the necessary intersection of the future and the past, a place where the present becomes possible through the utilization of memory and the imagination. Ahmed’s notion of home as the “impossibility and necessity of the subject’s future, rather than the past which binds the self to a given place” is productive in that it helps to solidify her position as resisting the fixity of home. But as Wendy Walter suggests, contemporary Caribbean writers such as Michelle Cliff or Caryl Phillips articulate a notion of home not as a site of return

100 Cecil Foster’s fictional short story, “The Rum” comes to mind here.
but diaspora as home itself, that can be ‘returned to’ through writing. Walters moves towards a concept of home closer to what Angelica Bammer (1992) or Hamid Naficy (1999) might support. Naficy is also not wedded to a static understanding of home; he understands home to be anywhere, a transportable, temporary act of the imagination (Naficy, 1999).

Jonathan Rutherford’s notions of home also resists a certain kind of geographic fixity; he defines home as “the making of a sense of self and identity”. Rutherford is concerned with identity politics rather than diaspora, thus his understanding of home is not geography, it is personal. Accordingly, home for Rutherford is a sense of personal integrity that comes from self-representation and recognition (Rutherford, 1990). But unlike Bammer, Davis and Naficy, Rutherford does not reject a certain kind of stability of home, rather he uses home as a “motif for a culture that values difference” (Ibid.: 25). Dietmar Dath’s notion of homes as “origin stories” that are “made” (as cited in Morse, 1999) echoes Rutherford’s rather personal take, allowing us to move away from ground, territory and stasis.

Walters, Bammer, Naficy and Rutherford miss the actual physicality of ‘home’ where home is a site of pain, loss or trauma. Home for some, especially the second generation of Afrodiaskan peoples, can be a torturous space that reeks of exclusionary practices, racism and social
immobility. Distorted pre-fabricated images of African-Canadians that stereotype them as immigrants, criminals, and “disruptive elements” make living in Canada unhome-like (James, 2001). Under the weight of centuries of racism and exclusionary practices, notions of Canada as home in the future are cloudy. A notion of home embedded within the past for this generation allows for the very diverse histories that underscore the heterogeneity of blackness in Canada to surface. Hall is instructive here if we want to think about a notion of home embedded in the past, for he asserts:

There can, [... ] be no simple ‘return’ or ‘recovery’ of the ancestral past which is not re-experienced through the categories of the present: no base for creative enunciation in a simple reproduction of traditional forms which are not transformed by the technologies and the identities of the present (Hall 1996b:448).

Rather than dream of a ‘home’ in the future or reminisce on an ancestral ‘home’, Afrodiasporic youth have spoken into existence and circulated an idea of Toronto as a temporal home. The history of the word Tdot documented in Chapter 4 suggests new modes of belonging to Canada (at least Toronto specifically) have taken root. So that rather than succumbing to the impossibility of belonging as Rinaldo Walcott has asserted (2001), Afrodiasporic youth have begun to make sense of self and their identities through practices of self-representation. These
youth use rhymes, videos and dress to articulate counternarratives to Blackness as unCanadian, inserting their sound, body or visuals into dominant narratives of Canadianness. These youth both represent in a hip hop sense as well as operate through a form of representational politics that cultural studies theorists might appreciate.¹⁰¹

**Representation…Represent…Reppin’**

If we turn to Murray Forman’s definition of “representing” within hip hop culture another notion of representation is articulated. Forman asserts “representing…involves creating a broader profile for the home territory and its inhabitants while showing respect for the nurture it provides” (Forman, 2004:208). While Forman connects representing with the discursive construction of the ‘hood as home’, he also explicitly highlights the ways in which those that nurture and support the community are highlighted within rap discourse. I would add to Forman’s description that various ethnographic analysis by emcees vividly paint pictures of how marginalized communities imagine themselves and self-fashion within the machinations of otherizing hegemonic texts and social landscape. For example, Nas self-fashions his ability to represent by describing himself as “rapping with a razor under my tongue” or “walking with a baseball cap turned backwards”, both modes of self-fashioning on the margins of dominant

¹⁰¹ See below for an idea of how to represent in a hip hop sense.
society. In this way hip hop creates images and makes meaning that is more than geographic, relying on the connection between self, space, sound and style.

If we look broadly at how images of Black Canadians or specifically Afro-Caribbeans in Toronto are positioned, adjectives such as distorted or criminalized clearly articulate the ways in which these populations are represented. Openly discriminatory immigration policies (as mentioned in chapter 1), and institutionalized racism (think here the effect of zero tolerance policies in Ontario schools), including the well circulated historical myth that “Negroes” could not bear the harsh Canadian winters, that accompanied early racist Canadian immigration legislation, are all representational strategies that produce a narrative of Canadianness that does not include its Black populations. Shadd’s frustrations noted earlier in this chapter exemplify how black people are ‘othered’ within the representational regimes dominant in Canadian discursive practices of imaging itself. The otherizing that takes place within the nation is vividly and well documented in the works of Green (2001), Phillip (1998), Walcott (2001), Clarke (1997), Foster (1996) and Tettey (2005).

Yet, while an all-encompassing distorted and pathologizing picture of is inherently violent Black culture is painted, Afrodiasporic populations are neither silent nor overdetermined. An organic
process of the reppin’ by Afro diasporic youth in Toronto can be read via the independent hip hop records produced in the city. Turning towards hip hop’s creative acts in the city is important, as Murray Forman reminds us that in rap music the “city and its multiple spaces” are the foundation of rap’s cultural production (Forman, 2004). More specifically, the city is made audible via explicit citations and digital sampling as the “aural textures of the urban environment” are reproduced (Ibid.). Forman’s formulation of representing and Hall’s understanding of representation neatly overlap, (keeping in mind that all meaning is relational) allowing for an interpretation of hip hop culture’s meaning-making power.

The meaning-making Hall highlights as constitutive of representation is precisely the activities hip hoppers engage but through processes that are designed and defined within the realm of hip hop culture. Some of these processes, as detailed by Forman, include shout outs to one’s crew, frequent references to specific streets, spaces and boroughs and digital sampling of the city. This last technique, digitally sampling the city frequently involves capturing the sound of the subway, or in the case of Scarborough emcees, capturing the sounds of the Railway Transit.102

102 These samples can be found in Bishop’s “Kipling to Kennedy” and Ron D’s “Toronto”
Reppin’ captures the slippage from ‘high’ academic discourse to the actual meanings that circulate in the streets. Thus, image representation and meanings are not solely created by institutions, but are also challenged by creative communities. In the alternative meaning making worlds of creative arts communities and subaltern populations, poor does not necessarily correlate with disempowered and blackness does not solely correlate to criminality. In this way reppin’ highlights the oppressed as agent and operates as a counternarrative to the insidious attacks on Afro diasporic urban life by mainstream media. Importantly, reppin’ signifies, in an Eshu kind of way in this dissertation, the indetermination at the crossroad of academic theorization and hip hop street signification.

The dominant narratives of capital accumulation, individualism and black criminalization are both reflected and refracted in activities of reppin’ so that ‘keeping it real’ can mean recycling narratives with a criminal residue or relaying life in the ‘hood as it is understood. Reppin’ in this sense is slippery, but it is useful because it captures temporal innovations sometimes demonstrating how the dominant logic is subverted. For example, if we look at K’naan’s remixing of the popular Kid Cudi track “Day ‘N Night,” K’naan dislodges the meaning of this song, by talking about the pirate situation off the coast of Somalia instead of engaging Kid Cudi’s very North American weed-smoking adventure. K’naan rhymes:
dayless nights, I see pirates in the ocean late at night
they roam around and can’t wait to fight,
watch out for pirates roaming late at night (at at at night).

revising Kid Cudi’s original chorus:

Cuz day and night

The lonely stoner seems to free his mind at night,

He's all alone through the day and night,

The lonely loner seems to free his mind at night (at at at night).

K’naan’s version, “Dayless Nights” uses the same beat as “Day N’ Night”, but instead focuses on the geopolitical situation in Somalia. K’naan takes on the persona of a Somali pirate and a Somali civilian, highlighting the perils of landmines and the possible hunger of pirates at sea. So K’naan is “keeping it real” in a hip hop sense because he shines light on his reality growing up in Mogadishu and the plight of his people, he is representing his hood in a sense. For Cudi his ‘keeping it real’ is about detailing weed-smoking experiences.
Hip Hop culture in Toronto

The means by which humans govern themselves and organize their economic lives are contingent inventions and developments, emerging from the most diverse historical circumstances (Hunter 1992:348).

By the middle of the 1980s hip hop acts from New York City were regularly performing in Toronto. Toronto’s proximity and huge population of Caribbean youth provided the pull factor for emerging artists interested in testing new material (Rinaldo Walcott in the Manifesto documentary 2008). Attendance at hip hop ‘jams’ and concerts have been reported to have been around two thousand people due to the relative obscurity of hip hop music prior to record distribution deals and the internet. By 1986/87 AfroCaribbean youth were creating and performing their own version of New York’s latest cultural invention; the Caribbean influence was prominent, exemplified best by a borrowed reggae baseline in Jamaican Canadian Rumble and Strong’s “Crazy Jam.” Signed to a label from London, England, recording tracks at King Jammy’s studio in Jamaica while living and distributing his records in Canada, Rumble exemplified the hybridity by which Forman reads black Canadian hip hop (210). By 1989

103 In the mid 1980s only two radio shows in Toronto played hip hop music and both were on low frequency college radio stations, Fantastic Voyage at CKLN 88.1 Fm and The Jam Factor show at CHRY 105.5fm. DJs that hosted parties like the Monster Jam relied these stories in the (untitled) Manifesto documentary (2008).
Jamaican-Canadian emcee Michie Mee and Afro-Guyanese emcee Maestro Fres Wes became recognizable heavyweights in the industry, selling thousands of records and performing alongside major acts from New York City.

Like the music of Rumble and Strong, Michie Mee also recorded in Jamaica, expressing an unapologetic Jamaican Canadian hybridity in her highly successful Jamaican Funk (Canadian Style). Maestro’s “Symphony in Effect” did not borrow much from his Guyanese background; instead his extranational sonic borrowings came in the form of American hip hop styling’s with a panAfrican tint. Like one of his role models, Big Daddy Kane, Maestro wore a black tuxedo, brandished an emblem of the African continent and ensured his cameo was “in effect.” This era of Toronto’s first hip hop artists, is easily described as deeply hybrid, taking in both Americanism and Caribbean culture to form a local Canadian sound firmly embedded within Afrodiasporic oral traditions.

To look more closely at the ways in which a notion of home is articulated via forms of representation within Toronto’s hip hop community, I deconstruct four texts examining their lyrical, visual and spatial meaning making strategies. The analysis consists of three hip hop tracks produced between 1998 and 2001. These texts are: “Tdot Anthem” by Instinctive
Reaction to Struggle (IRS, pronounced errrrss), “BaKardi Slang” by Kardinal Offishal, and “Where I’m From” by the late Black-I. Through these works it is possible to read various meaning making strategies that both align with the conventions of hip hop culture but also contest images and ideas circulated by dominant media.

These works express what Sara Ahmed calls “the lived experience of being-at-home” (1999), with ‘home’ being an unstable reference point. As I highlight below, these works are not simply observational ethnographies commenting on the city of Toronto, as it exists. Rather, what is at play are outernational yearnings, dialectically imagined counterhegemonic projections and direct refusals of the state’s otherizing apparatus. These texts are in conversation with their locale, reflecting and refracting Afrodiasporic life in Toronto. To support my position I begin with the sonic and then move to the visual representational strategies employed in these tracks.

“Tdot Anthem” is, rather than being an ode to the city, a complete revisioning of the Toronto city space in which young people take on Caribbean cultural traits. On this track IRS claims they are from a city where “we all rude”, where you “cannot find a girl without an attitude” and “where the flows’ tight”. The city, accordingly to IRS, is “full of pure badman”. Initially, these assertions appear rather offensive, but read within the context of the Caribbean cultural residues
it is not as insulting as one might imagine. The Badman, born out of Jamaica’s 1960s Rudebwoy subculture is an affirmation of an unwillingness to be exploited within the capitalist regime. Similarly, to be rude or if one has an attitude, this is seen as a tool to resist exploitation and oppression.

A heteronormative and gendered reading of rudeness, understands the female that is rude is a self-knowing woman of integrity, a quality that heightens the intensity of the male-female pursuit. IRS, in this discursive move actively engages in a utilization of Caribbean culture to meet their needs in Toronto, using, in the language of Nassy Brown, “diasporic resources” (2005:42). The Caribbean vernacular found in “Tdot Anthem”, besides sprinkling the track with flavoursful lyricism, expresses one of the fundamental tactics by which ‘otherized’ AfroCaribbean youth engage in identity politics, representin’. Outernational yearnings, both in a nostalgic fashion and a revised edition, become toolkits, diasporic resources by which counter identities are posited and fashioned. For these youth, as both Canadian born and part of the 1.5 generation utilization of counter, encoded or opaque meaning making strategies carve out spaces for identity negotiation rather than acceptance of state otherizing strategies. Such diasporic resources help circumvent the limits of Toronto time and space, calling into question the limits of the local/present. For McKittrick, this local present “cannot do the work of black Canadian
geographies”, thus the space IRS seeks to represent cannot and does not rely solely on the discursive terrain of the nation state (McKittrick, 2006). IRS’s spatial refashioning of the host nation, through creative linguistic metaphor usage retrieves the appropriate tools for navigating the discursive terrain of a Toronto dominated by educational, judicial and political institutions modeled on European procedures and understandings. These tools rely on vestiges of AfroCaribbean culture and thus must transcend national borders to achieve its goal in the host nation, a goal that arguably is about securing a sense of belonging and comfort. Linguistic acrobatics and sonic ingenuity, indebted both to the Caribbean and to the Afrodiaspora experiences, are tools to make protectively opaque the necessary sonic weaponry to battle social inclusion.

IRS represents in a fashion that does not mimic the posturing of ‘gangster’ rap as Gilroy and Forman would have it. In fact, IRS explicitly rejects the popular rating system, from the commercial magazine The Source and their five mics. Members of the Toronto hip hop community are shouted out, honouring the members of the community that purchase and support their music, play their videos, spin their music and attend their shows. Thus, community radio stations CIUT, CHRY and CKLN are part of the shout out. Recognition to the community that supports and nurtures IRS’ art is a counterhegemonic activity that stresses alternatives to the
pathologizing discourses that paint hip hop culture with the misogynistic brush of rap music. Importantly, unlike the images of gangster rap that proliferate in mainstream media, women are in large part absent from the video. The only woman in the video is a Circle crew member, Tara Chase, whose lyrical prowess rather than shapely figure is where she gained her critical acclaim from her hip hop peers. In the video there is no performative distinction between the men in the video and the lone woman, Tara Chase—they all clamor for representational space in front of the camera. Chase’s womanhood does not find a specific representational form, her gestures and body language replicate the other men in the video, highlighting hip hop’s binarism in which female Emcees are offered two rigid subject positions—a masculinist posturing or an oversexualized and objectified eye candy. Tara Chase’s presence in the “Tdot Anthem” video highlights how progressive hip hop crews attempt to walk outside of the misogynistic rapper stereotype but still remain trapped within the masculinist/sexualized female emcee binarism.

The video for “Tdot Anthem” is a spatial exploration of their identity politics, centering their activities at Toronto City Hall and outside an independently owned and operated late night fast

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104 This has not always been the case, Queen Latifah in 1989 was one of the first widely visible female Emcees able to successfully create a space womanhood and emceeing were harmoniously represented. Most highly visible Female Emcees have since occupied extreme corners of the male/female binarism as Rappers like Bo$$ and Da Brat take up masculinist poses while at the other end of the spectrum Lil’ Kim and the Foxy Brown have occupied overly sexualized positions in the hip hop industry.
food joint, Johnny’s Burgers. For the majority of the video emcees Blackcat and Korry Deez stand on stage at a podium in the courtyard of Toronto city hall. As they reassure us of their crew’s lyrical dopeness, IRS also outlines exactly how they will relay their ethnographic survey of their Toronto. Part imagination, part nostalgic “Tdot Anthem”’s cityscape renderings are as important as the relayers of the information. At the podium IRS purposely inhabit a space embued with power, the political and physical center of the city. Blackcat and Korry Deez, as AfroCaribbean children of immigrants, center themselves in the middle of Toronto and force their way into the discursive machinations of a city in which marginalized nonwhites are too often silenced, criminalized or homogenized (Case, 2002; Clarke 1997; James 2001; Phillip 1998).

Similarly, alongside the usual conventions of a hip hop video, the crew shots and bboying, IRS also shoots part of the video in Scarborough outside a well-known late night burger stand, Johnny’s. Although Johnny’s is not owned or run by AfroCaribbeans, to shoot the “T dot Anthem” video in this space signals a political alignment with the independent small business owner. Johnny’s is a small free-standing fast food joint, orange on the outside with picnic benches and humble seating inside. Directly across the street is a location of the Pizza Pizza food chain, brightly lit and hugging the southwest corner of the intersection. Scarborough has long
been Toronto’s eastern borough known for its massive contribution to hip hop culture from the dances at L’Amoreux highschool\textsuperscript{105} to the rise of Maestro Fres Wes in the late 1980s. As Scarborough born and bred emcees, IRS shoots part of their video in honour of the community and space that nurtured their talents, they are reppin’ a version of Scarborough that exist outside of the overly violent portrayals of the borough which serve only to pathologize both the space and the vast immigrant populations which now live there. In this shot, by filming outside of Johnny’s, IRS is in conversation, not only with the often-pathologized space of Scarborough but also with the small independent entrepreneur.

A reading of “Tdot Anthem” illuminates the utilization of Caribbean cultural tropes as diasporic tools to reinvent a different kind base superstructure relationship (Althusser, 1971; Williams, 1983). As products of the Toronto’s education system (including the post-secondary system), a dominant Ideological State Apparatus, as Althusser claims, Korrey Deez and Blackcat do not appear to reproduce the conditions of their emergence as ‘otherized’ non-Canadians. Instead of reinscribing themselves as marginal to the center of the Toronto and its politics, IRS posits

\textsuperscript{105} High school dances at L’Amoreux were highly significant to the growth of hip hop culture in Toronto as it was in the heart of a newly developed Caribbean suburban community. More significant, is that this space attracted AfroCaribbean youth from across the city, forming an important crosscity convergence of newly migrant and already settled populations.
another, more central, relationship to society’s institutions and ideologies. Importantly, they lyrically and physically secure a discursive and literal centrality as non-marginalized, non-immigrant Canadians. Thus, the version of Toronto outlined by IRS, is a B-side, a muted narrative made inaudible by dominant A-side discourses that alienate Caribbean populations.

Importantly, to read “Tdot Anthem” with the language of diaspora, and understand this song as a rendition of the diasporically homeless, is to miss how IRS takes up power as central to their desire to rep themselves in their city, rather than rehearse the overused narratives of longing, exile, displacement and dislocation. Instead, if we follow the suggestion of Jacqueline Nassy Brown to read diaspora as a relationship rather than solely a condition, then what becomes clear are the circulations of power that have brought IRS to the center of the city reppin’ a discourse that understands them not as overdetermined but as active meaning-making agents.

In combination with their detailed lyrical display, IRS, through the negotiations of space produce another meaning, albeit temporal, of how an immigrant youth might relate their city. By operating through the very tropes of otherness used against them by the state, IRS with diasporic resources like “Badman” and the innovative contradiction Tdot, they recycle and layer black histories like a DJ mixing records. IRS speaks the Caribbean and African American vernacular
maneuvers to construct an ethical space of home where inclusivity is possible. These temporal
einventions operate through modes of reasoning that understand the nefarious possibilities of
origins, and remain routed in the African oral tradition by choosing to borrow, improvise and
remix. This mode of both reasoning and existing, reflecting the turntablists’ art and a cut n’ mix
attitude evades a concrete reading by disciplinary hegemonic forces interested in taming and
making culture static. Living life in the mix and continually participating in the development and
redevelopment of meaning, a participatory ethos, allows IRS’s art to speak with a generation
whose routes root them in spatio-temporal processes that question all existing culture regulating
bodies.

...language functions equally as an identity-grounding home under conditions of

displacement and a means of intervention into identity-fixing cultural agendas.

Bammer (1994: xvi)

In Kardinal’s “Bakardi Slang” we witness this Canadian born of Jamaican descent emcee ride
through various communities such as Eglinton West and Jane and Finch, all spaces well
populated by African and Caribbean immigrants.106 “BaKardi Slang” is a track that details the
linguistic differences between American and Toronto hip hop. Lyrical ingenuity evidenced in the
combining of the name of a popular Cuban rum and this emcee’s stage name is one starting point

106 See Jenny Burman’s “At the Scene of the Crossroads, ‘Somewhere in this Silvered City’: Diasporic Public
by which one can begin to highlight the numerous intersections between Caribbean and Canadian culture. Kardinal’s politics of representation presents his audience with a hybrid riff of American hip hop underscored by significant translations from New York hip hop slang to Toronto’s Caribbean influenced vernacular. Lyrically, Kardinal lists various terms, moving from the New York hip hop terminology to the Toronto hip hop terminology, he explains:

- We don’t say “you know what I’m sayin’”/T-Dot say “you done know”
- We don’t say “hey that’s the breaks”/we say “yo, a so it go”

Kardinal continues at another point in the song:

- A shoe’s called a krep/a big party is a fête
- You talking about watch where you going/ we talkin’ about mind where you step.

Again, elsewhere Kardinal makes unequivocally clear the difference between Toronto hip hop and New York hip hop by explaining; “When u talking about a thug, we talking about a shotta.”

In these lyrics Kardinal carves out a space in which a pan Caribbean vernacular tradition is substituted for an American hip hop vernacular, where Shotta is a preferred Jamaican terminology for gunmen and modern-day Rudebwoys. In this formulation of what the Tdot is,

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107 The Canadian culture in this equation comes from Kardinal’s stage name that he took from one of his history textbooks while sitting in class one day.
Trinidadian (by way of Haiti) words like fête, exist alongside Jamaican slang such as shotta, in a diverse snapshot of Caribbean, rather than Jamaican, as popular media erroneously reports, culture in Toronto. By the end of the track Kardinal is explicit in his refusal to homogenize Caribbean culture in Toronto, by lyrically representing the Bajans, Haitian, Guyanese and Grenadians in his shout outs. He explains why he seeks to correct the inaccurate perception of all black people as Jamaicans:

Ya’ll think we all Jamaicans,

When nuff man a Trini, Bajans, Grenadians, a whole heap of Haitians, Guyanese and of the West Indies combined.

To make the T Dot o Dot one of a kind.

Rather than lamenting the few similarities between black folk in Canada as Keith Henry (1981), George Elliot Clarke (1997) and others have consistently done, Kardinal opts to resist a homogeneity that privileges his Canadian-Jamaican ancestry. He presents us with a flexible mentality comfortable with the idea of multiplicity, a mentality Gilroy calls for in his project to annihilate ethnic absolutism (Gilroy, 2000, 1992). In almost answering Clarke’s rhetorical inquiry, “must all blackness be American?” Kardinal produces a sonic landscape that refuses to be American, that refuses to belong to the nation via a static performance of ethnicity under state-sponsored multiculturalism (Walcott, 2001) yet indulges in it’s doubleness and instability
strategically using its invocation of elsewhereness to belong to a particular spatiotemporal moment (Walcott 2001, Gilroy 1997). Immersed in a vernacular tradition Gates has already outlined (1988), Kardinal’s hip hop excursion in Afro-diasporic oral culture exposes its uncapturability within the constraints of Canadian dominant discourse, producing a slippery excess of Canadianness necessary to carve out new spaces of belonging. BaKardi Slang’s sonic analysis exemplifies how reppin’ operates as a counterhegemonic system of representation, based within a political alignment with hip hop culture. Despite being of Jamaican ancestry himself, Kardinal destabilizes the criminalization of blackness by first denying the homogenization of blackness as Jamaicanness and then correcting the city’s reductionist readings of Caribbean populations to highlight the Haitian Caribbean communities of Caribbean origins that are excluded from popular discourses around a singular Anglophone Caribbean ‘community’. Kardinal’s concern in this song is not the expression of an overall revised notion of Canadianness. Instead Toronto is the direct target of his reppin’, engaging in a politics of place that understands diverse Caribbean identities as connected to and concerned with space and its political baggage.

To reassure views of the multiplicity of blackness and caribbeanness that constitutes the Tdot, Kardinal visits various locations of blackness in Toronto. These sites, such as Vaughan and
Oakwood, Jane and Finch, Eglinton Avenue West at Oakwood are all, both symbolically and physically, crossroads. As Tricia Rose reminds us, hip-hop exists at the crossroads where desire meets postindustrial resource (1999). In Kardinal’s case, these crossroads are where Caribbeanness meets the frigid, iced-over landscape of Canada. At the crossroads Kardinal visits in the video, the locations of various kinds of Caribbean diasporic cultures, Kardinal reminds us of Eshu at various physical locations in Canadian white settler society. Here Kardinal is the trickster, bringing sound and space together to flip the script and counterhegemonically rewrite belonging in an encoded sonic language undecipherable by the policing tentacles of state-sponsored multiculturalism. In the video as Kardinal rhymes about shoes being called a crep, while his automobile skids in and through icy intersections such as Vaughan and Oakwood, “BaKardi Slang” produces a temporal belonging that seeps into the consciousness of Caribbean youth, repelling the traumatic moments in which blackness, Caribbeanness and otherness are smudged together to unCanadianize diasporic Caribbean Canadians.108

Like IRS, Kardinal’s lyrical stance on women significantly contrasts to mainstream hip hop’s at times degrading presentation. Kardinal describes the women he admires in his city “…my ladies lookin’ hot, screwface, kissing teeth, representing the Tdot.” Like IRS’ descriptive “can’t find a

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108 See Kardinal’s interview in Urbanology Magazine Summer 2005.
girl without an attitude”, Kardinal positively correlates Tdot women with other Caribbean cultural traits. Screwface is a term that describes an unpleasant facial expression often found on the faces of hard to please Toronto hip hop audiences. Toronto, since being dubbed the Tdot O has also been nicknamed the Screwface capital in 2000 by artists and radio show host Theology-3 (Theo-3, 2000 Aveling, 2008). The etymology of screwface is Jamaican; a term used to describe the facial gestures of an unpleasant experience or the face one puts on in a harsh or unfamiliar environment. In Bob Marley and the Wailer’s 1971 track “Screw Face” he suggests screwface is a protective mechanism, he explained: “coward man gonna keep some bones and all violent men are gonna weep and moan”. Marley seems to suggest screwface will help protect the nonviolent person from being preyed upon. He continues “screwface know a who fi frighten…screwface will frighten screwface”. In Barry Chevannes academic work on Rastafari culture, he highlights screwface as a Rasta “non-violent form of aggression” and a “tense facial expression” (1994:208).

Screwface is not solely a Jamaican affair, as the Badjohn that makes Trinidad his home also engages in these facial flexings, albeit having a predatory rather than protective function. Transported into the context of urban Toronto, screwface can be seen as a particularly Caribbean

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cultural resource utilized in hostile environments. A hostile environment can be both, on a microscale, an impoverished neighbourhood, or on a macroscale a western metropolis. In the British context, rapper Dizee Rascal further explains the meaning(s) of the term screwface on his 2003 track “Stop Dat”:

Screw face means keep well away, stay away
Screw face means get out of my way
Screw face means I jus wanna walk not talk.110

From both Bob Marley and Dizee Rascal we get the idea that screwface is a public sphere apparatus to both protect or defend oneself from undesirable conditions. Theology-3 breaks down the screwface in the Toronto context to Toronto Star staff reporter Nick Aveling:

People build up a shield because of these problems, and the way we all communicate with each other—our body language and speech—is reflective of that. So that created the Screwface Capital mentality, which isn’t hate, but indifference (Aveling, 2008).111

111 These are daily troubles like working for minimum wage through a job agency or getting hassled on public transit that Theo mentions earlier in the article.
As a public sphere Caribbean protective strategy, screwface has seeped into mainstream/non-Caribbean Toronto culture, albeit with a creolized twist. In the diaspora, beyond Marley’s interpretation screwface becomes more than a protective mechanism. Within the hip hop community, as expressed by non-Caribbean artist Theo-3, screwface is about indifference rather than protection. In Kardinal’s praises for screwfaced Tdot women, his praise is not about screwface as indifference or protection but rather screwface as a Caribbean inheritance that helps write the Toronto diaspora space as something more than alienating, white and hostile. Interestingly, for hip hop artists engaged in AfroCaribbean culture in Toronto, like Theo-3 (despite his Greek ethnicity) screwface is read as a protective mechanism, a form of indifference, but not celebrated as a Caribbean diasporic inheritance as Kardinal performs it.

By refusing to exclude, as most hip hop videos do, the kinds of women that do not meet the media’s light-skinned, slim and whitened version of black women, “BaKardi Slang”’s counterhegemonic gesture turns to Caribbean culture as a resource. “BaKardi Slang” engages in a politics of reppin’ by both honouring the community that nurtures hip hop culture and creating meaning where misrepresentation has occurred.\footnote{112 For more on the representation of black women in hip hop videos see the documentary Breakin’ In: The Making of a Female Hip Hop Dancer (2005). Also see McKeown (2003) and Wong (2006).} There is an important part of reppin’ that
happens in “BaKardi Slang” in which a hyperbolic dialectical imagination sutures cultural fissures. For while not all women in Toronto have an attitude or engage in screwface it is the valorizing of these activities which increase their likelihood in the public sphere, reinterpreting the negative connotations of teeth-kissing in Caribbean families and the public school system.

“BaKardi Slang”’s illumination of teeth-kissing as an important facet of Caribbean diasporic culture in Toronto is extremely important to the reppin’ of home Kardinal articulates. Kiss-teeth has been defined as “an interactional resource used to negotiate moral positioning among speakers and referents” (Figueroa, 2005:76). Kiss-teeth is an embodied paralinguistic, paralexical oral gesture, also known in the Eastern Caribbean as chups(e) or suck teeth in North America, that can signify a range of emotions from frustration to disrespect to indifference (Cassidy and LePage, 1980: Figueroa, 2005). Esther Figueroa intricately catalogues the “language” of kiss teeth by identifying a long liquid vibrating chupse that expresses defiance, the “thin hard chupse of disdain” and the effortless chupse of indifference” (Figueroa, 2005:73). Chupsing is an important oral tool of specific use to Afro diasporic populations whose linguistic diversity sought to find effective mechanism to convey meaning under the most oppressive conditions of enslavement. Kardinal’s willingness to highlight and valourize kiss-teeth or chupse in the middle of his video reinscribes this Afro diasporic inheritance, not as solely as defiant
countercultural activity, but as important cultural mechanism located within the B-side version of Toronto espoused in “BaKardi Slang”.

Clearly, representations of Toronto as ‘home’ do not connect in a linear, uncomplicated way to any espoused form or engagement with Caribbean vernacular. For many, engagement with Caribbean diasporic culture speaks more of one’s political project; Theo-3’s project is not as much about protecting and valorizing Caribbean oral traditions of inheritance, as it is about querying the problematics of the Toronto hip hop market. Mind you Kardinal’s project is not simply one of cultural pride and promotion, as a ‘starving artist’, the project of fostering a market for one’s music coincides with the positive representations of Caribbean culture in Toronto.

Regardless, the convergence of a market orientated project and a cultural promotion project is extremely useful for building cultural space. In “BaKardi Slang”, the visual used to represent the screwface attitude in the video is of a short-haired, medium complexion black woman whose body is not meager.\textsuperscript{113} This woman’s appearance reflects Eglinton West styling’s as opposed to the typical light-skinned, skinny and smiling woman found in many hip hop videos. In a frame

\textsuperscript{113} Meagre (marga as spelt by Bennett, 2003) (also spelt mawga) has a specific connotation in Jamaican culture (and possibly many other Caribbean countries), signifying both poor nutrition and/or lack of opportunity.
dedicated entirely to this Eglinton West female prototype in the “BaKardi Slang” video one hears the kissing of her teeth on cue with the lyrics to the song. Kardinal’s praise of this woman’s looks and her willingness to engage in Caribbean cultural activities like kissing her teeth and screwface demarcate her as “representing the Tdot”. In this instance, what Kardinal calls representing does not solely correlate to Forman’s notion which has more to do with positively highlighting one’s ‘hood and nurturing community’. For Kardinal, these women are representations of an inclusive city that valorizes Caribbean culture effectively enunciating their ‘difference’ via the kissing of their teeth. Kardinal reads these actions as meaning making activities that decenter Toronto as a white settler society in favour of a discourse that includes the marginalized Caribbean populations within definitions of Torontonian and thus Canadianness.

Thus, Toronto as the Tdot O dot is not simply a vernacular intervention meant to carve out spaces of belonging. As part of an Afrosonic diasporic sphere, Tdot Odot is a temporal sonic innovation, relying on an engagement with sound to imagine and procure another kind of Toronto. Like diasporic public spheres, in Afrosonic diasporic public spheres there exists collisions, disagreements, intersections, nostalgia and yearning that are expressed through a number of sonic mediated activities like videos, clubs and mixtapes. One clear example of this tangled web of hybrid crossings is the award winning mixtape Reggae Meets Hip Hop Volume 8
by Toronto soundcrew the Soul Controllers. The mixtape featured a mixture of reggae, hip hop, soul and rhythm and blues, usually with reggae a cappellas and several different instrumentals. This mixtape utilized hip hop remixing techniques, combined with reggae dancehall style signatures like fog horns and wheel backs: mixed by Caribbean born mixed heritage youth and circulated in New York city the work signaled an exhaustive alternative to stagnant renditions of a monolith homogenous blackness that feed ethnic absolutism. *Reggae Meets Hip Hop Vol. 8* demonstrates where the black public sphere overlaps with diasporic spheres to mix, defy and refashion rigid notions of race, culture and genre, prior to materialize the consequences of disobeying the fabricated boundaries of the current regime of truth. The mixtape then is a sonic argument against static renditions of cultural purity and retention but rather interested in creatively engaging the collisions of culture characteristic of Glissant’s chaos monde conceptualization.

While Kardinal’s critique and reordering of Toronto to the Tdot is a linguistic intervention spatially situated, Black-I, another Toronto emcee engages in representative practices of meaning making utilizing dominant codes of information dispersal. Black-I’s track, “Where I’m From” is a thick ethnographic description of Toronto forming a scathing critique of mainstream institutions while centering the humanity of black peoples in the city. The video moves between
Black-I as news anchor Frank Mint and Black-I as emcee. The screen shots of the news anchor scene are filled with information of plausible and desirable news headlines. The people in the video are all black and the news audience is an adolescent white boy and his mother, who hesitantly allows her son to watch the news, while he snacks on some popcorn. Black-I speaks directly to the space of the disciplined ‘othered’ bodies, he enunciates his visible minority status.

The news ticker reads a Willie Lynch quote, while headline news mentioned by Frank Mint include: Sex trade Workers with an Explanation; Da Bwoy Dem In 2001 Scandal involving 9 Veteran Police Officers; Terrorist Bill C-36 and Racism in the Justice System. Alongside the negative news Frank Mint has a special report in which the community asks for more political attention towards the death of black people and also covers a stop the violence event. Rather than simply mimicking mainstream newscasters, Black-I’s video engages in the geopolitics of black life in Toronto. The video content and form connects power and space to demystify the seemingly natural dichotomy of the dominant culture as good and minority cultures as bad.
The video provides a space for the mothers of slain black youth called United Mothers Opposing Violence Everywhere (U.M.O.V.E)\textsuperscript{114} to be seen and heard.\textsuperscript{115} Black-I’s emphasis on this space for representation is made clear via the centrality given to Marilyn Ortega of U.M.O.V.E. Ortega is inserted into the video, the music is muted and the camera zooms in to provide a clear picture of this distraught mother. Ortega both mourns her son, but also rightly critiques the justice system, she elaborates:

Because that morning not only my son died a young girl 23 was killed also. And they are saying they still don’t have enough evidence but they say ‘we know who killed your son’ [crying] I miss my son…

In contrast to the popular media, the fabricated news cast in the video Megacity News, vows to “inform and educate” implying this is lacking in mainstream media. Ms. Ortega metaphorically inserts the dead black female body of Chantel Dunn back into this conversation, highlighting

\textsuperscript{114} U.M.O.V.E. is a non-profit organization formed in 2001 by the Mothers of victims of violence. Their mission is to provide support to victims of violence. October 21, 2004 was proclaimed U.M.O.V.E Day of Non-Violence by Toronto’s Mayor in a proclamation that progressively highlighted racial violence amongst a list of forms of violence that helped expand the general public’s understanding of violence.

\textsuperscript{115} Importantly, the clip of Ms. Ortega, U.M.O.V.E member, was included in “Where I’m From” years before the city of Toronto created the above-noted proclamation, providing a space of representation for U.M.O.V.E in a publically accessible format long before the municipal government and its representatives. In this way, one could see Black-I’s reppin’ as prophetic.
Part of Black-I’s reppin is to give voice to those silenced in this city, allowing members of his community to speak for themselves.

Combined with the Megacity News, the lyrical content of the song takes its viewers on a journey throughout spaces of blackness in Toronto. In typical hip hop representin’ style, Black-I calls out and calls himself into numerous spaces of blackness, affirming the communities that help him hone his skills while calling positive attention to spaces of otherness often vilified in dominant media. Black-I in his chorus connects himself to known ghettos, he calls out:


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116 Chantal Dunn was shot and killed in February 2006 while picking up her boyfriend from a local community center. Her boyfriend was the intended target of the shooting. Dunn was memorialized at her University, see public lecture "Every (body) Matters: Contesting a Raced Discourse of Violence in the Canadian National Consciousness" A Memorial and Lecture in Honour of Chantel Dunn (1986-2006) by Dr. Andrea Davis.
Visually, we are treated to grainy footage of street signs such as Empringham and Baymills and young children playing outside. Rather than glorifying the ‘hood’ life, as is often the charge to young rappers, Black-I both lyrically and visually presents ideas and images of blackness in Toronto in an attempt to garner another, or a new kind of meaning. The images included in the video for “Where I’m from” highlight the ways in which practices of representin’ in hip hop culture converge with representational practices found in cultural studies. Black-I’s reppin’ then involves a critique of the institutions of meaning-making that cultures studies theorists are most concerned with, as well as the lived reality if the people in community housing in Toronto.

Like “BaKardi Slang” and “T-dot Anthem”, “Where I’m From” firmly places the racialized black body within the nation not only by calling out sites of blackness in Toronto, but by also stitching a Canadian flag onto his jean jacket. This practice, of stitching a Canadian flag onto one’s outerwear is reminiscent of Canadian travelers who seek to protect themselves from being labeled an arrogant American in Europe or elsewhere. Like traveling Canadians, Black-I is negotiating his ‘unfamiliar’ body through (un)known spaces, symbolizing, how this emcee, and black bodies in general, simultaneously operate within the nation and beyond its borders. Black-I’s after market stitched Canadian flag illuminates a desire to negotiate how his body is read within the nation state. This act suggests Black-I, despite acknowledging that “T.O. adopted me
from yard”, chooses to highlight his affiliation to the nation rather than become the recipient of an unwanted reading as outsider or ‘Other’. As a Caribbean diasporic youth, the choice to sew a Canadian flag onto one of the most recognizable pieces of hip hop urban gear, the jean jacket, highlights the very deliberate ways Black-I problematizes his socially prescribed unCanadianess. If we understand the aesthetic, following Iain Hunter as “a distinctive way of actually conducting one’s life,” a collection of techniques and practices that bring a certain subject into existence, then Black-I’s Canadian flag reads like a desire to make Canada home (Hunter 1992:348). If Rutherford’s (1990) description of home as the “making of a sense of self and identity” (24) is correct, then Black-I, IRS and Kardinal are all reppin’ a notion of ‘home’ through their bodies, language and spatial maneuvering. Similarly, on issues of diasporic homelessness Sara Ahmed suggests:

> the lived experience of being-at-home hence involves the enveloping of subjects in a space which is not simply outside of them: being-at-home suggests that the subject and space leak into each other, inhabit each other (1999).

Black-I’s “Where I’m From” is an interesting site of reppin’ as he clearly acknowledges Jamaica as his birth place, yet decides to situate his identity in black Toronto spaces. Like Dionne Brand’s rendering of Bathurst street station as a home that birthed her black consciousness
Black-I’s explicit connections to spaces like Jane and Finch serve to highlight both the origins of his black consciousness as well as the community that nurtured his verbal prowess. Interestingly, both Brand and Black-I are engaged in spatiotemporal renderings of home, as the spaces they both discuss in their works are, in Brand’s case no longer a hub of Afrodiasporic consciousness and in Black-I’s case, quickly succumbing to the gentrification process or demographic shifts of middle-class mobility.

In a sense Ahmed is correct to say that space and subject inhabit one another; the Canadian space has influenced how explicitly Black-I dubs his Canadian identity to echo an Afrodiasporic griot-like consciousness. As demonstrated in “Where I’m From,” Black-I connects an ethical treatment of the black body as integral to his identity as a Torontoian “adopted from yard”. In Black-I’s dub, the connection between Canadian culture and hockey, frigid winters and white skin are extracted from his identity mix, obscured by an accentuation of a critical black consciousness that echoes a firmly rooted presence within the nation. Like Canadian travelers in

117 Regent Park, Canada’s first public housing project has recently been grazed and slowly more expensive condo are being built.
118 A significant number of Caribbean families that formerly occupied Scarborough have not moved outside Toronto in search of free-standing homes in the Durham region.
foreign lands, Black-I’s flag denotes his outsider status, his diasporic consciousness, and at the
same time his overt desire to refuse the markings of otherness placed on his body.

To understand the works of IRS, Kardinal and Black-I as examples of “being-at-home”,
according to Ahmed’s view, is too simple. There is no existing analysis or conceptualization
within which these sonic innovations neatly fit, nor is there a desire to legitimize these practices,
as they theorize themselves quite well. They do not seek a return or try and recover a lost
Caribbean Canadianness, although this might actually exist. Rather they refashion the present
and provide speculation, scattered possibilities for tomorrow in a medium whose opacity protects
its potentiality. While scholars have detailed quite intimately the ways in which they understand
the notion of home amongst diasporic communities, few have mentioned the ethical
requirements of home. What I mean by this is home, in order to be a space of comfort, must be a
space of continuous ethical and moral alignment with diasporic populations by refusing to
engage in alienating educational practices and cultural homogenization; hip hop and oral/sonic
culture is not one of these alienating forms. The interventions of the above-noted artists signal a
desire to address issues of inequity around racism, space, musical marketability and belonging.
“You’re tuned into T.O. Creole at its Best.  
Half of Ya’ll will never overstand the rest,”

MarveL119

In Jonathan Rutherford’s understanding of home and identity, he is interested in the emotional and personal facets to identity construction. Significantly, his analysis is guided by utilizing Raymond William’s notion of structures of feeling. Rutherford explains: structures of feeling “enable us to move beyond some discrete linguistic realm and …fully address subjectivity and the making of identity” (1990:23). This chapter has already detailed several linguistic innovations and interventions, but there is another obscured aspect of home-making through language still to be illuminated. Specifically, it is the transformation of Caribbean creole language in the diaspora and its significance in the processes of home-making that has often gets overlooked. Attention to sonic transformations in Caribbean creole in the diaspora can benefit from Toni Morrison’s assertion “the vitality of language lies in its ability to limn the actual, imagined and possible lives of its speakers, readers, writers” (Morrison, 1999:663). It is the possible, not-yet imaginings that are detectable and articulated in the linguistic and sonic transformations we find in Toronto hip hop music.

Toronto hip hop artists are very conscious of their Caribbean inflected speech and the ways in which Jamaican patois both dominates and is inflected with localisms from the Toronto setting. Wio-K rhymes in “Sunlight,” “…without no Caribbean background, but still bussing slang that’s Jamaican, but I’m not Jamaican/ but at least I’m first generation, Canadienne”. Here Wio-K highlights his use of Jamaican patois despite his non-Jamaican heritage, demonstrating the hegemony of Jamaican patois amongst Caribbean diasporic youth in Toronto. Also, in this rhyme, Wio-K highlights his ‘othered’ Canadian status by aligning himself with French Canadians by calling himself Canadienne. In chapter 1 and earlier in this chapter, artists such as Michie Mee and Kardinal Offishal demonstrated the pervasiveness of specifically Jamaican patois in Toronto hip hop culture.

A voicemail recording from Wio-K’s album *In Real Life* perfectly captures the lexical and semantic transformation witnessed in Toronto Caribbean inflected creole. A friend of Wio-K’s leaves his message: “Wio, what’s gwaning man? Its me T.R.A.C.K.S. still.” (DJ TRACKS on Wio-K’s album *In Real Life* 2007). The verb gwan, meaning to go in Jamaican patois, becomes gwaning within the Toronto hip hop scene. Gwan is a verb whose usage extends from Jamaica to Guyana to St. Vincent, where it’s meaning changes according to the locale (Allsopp, 2003). For example, in St. Vincent gwan can mean ‘go and do’, while in Guyana gwan can mean ‘go
away’, or ‘get out’ (Allsopp, 2003:276). In Jamaica, gwan can refer to one’s behaviour or performance and in Belize it is used as a verb for goin(g) (Ibid.). In Toronto, this verb is treated and transformed by standardized English by adding an “ing”. Importantly, while gwan exists in Caribbean Creole dictionaries gwaning is not a word that exists in print, it is at the very edge of our semantic possibilities, it exists solely in the oral/sonic.\(^{120}\) If we keep in mind, Toni Morrison’s words, that “language arcs towards the place where meaning may lie” (Morrison, 1993), we can understand gwaning as a lexical shift of immense significance.\(^{121}\)

Salikoko S. Mufwene’s *The Ecology of Language Evolution* is useful in helping us make sense of gwaning. Mufwene explains:

> Linguistic change is inadvertent, a consequence of ‘imperfect replication’ in the interactions of individual speakers as they adopt their communicative strategies to one another or to new needs (2001:11).

Gwaning then can be understood as a communicative strategy that is coping with new environmental circumstances: the collision of two knowledge systems, “Présence Européenne”

\(^{120}\) Gwan is detailed in *Dictionary of Caribbean English Usage* edited by Richard Allsopp. The internet’s open and participatory structure, particularly wikis, has provided a space where experimentations with writing this word down has occurred as far back as 2001 on message boards, and on urbandictionary.com.

\(^{121}\) The word gwaning has also been seen spelt gwan’ing and wa gwan(ing).
and “Présence Africaine” as Stuart Hall usefully suggests (Hall, 1992). Gwaning is not about a return to some forgotten past but it is more an example of the collisions of a “chaos monde” (Glissant, 1997) where the violence of the encounter (and then collision) produces new kinds of words and meanings. From this collision, Afro diasporic populations, as was highlighted in chapter 1, produce versions—new and differentiated meanings and modes of conveying meaning.

At this moment of treating this Jamaican verb as a standard English word, Afro diasporic youth both decenters the dominant discourse that demands standard English and also transforms the meaning of gwan. Gwaning sits at the intersection (collision?) of Jamaican diasporic creole and standard Canadian English. This intersection, much like the locations Kardinal visits in “BaKardi Slang”, is where postindustrial desire meets Afro diasporic life and nostalgia. Rutherford reminds us, “when the margins resist and discovers its own words, it not only decentres the dominant discourses and identities that have suppressed it, but also transforms its own meaning” (1990:23). Although gwaning is a decentering of standardized English, it does not necessarily decentre the hegemony of Jamaican patois (Toronto edition), as one would have to have knowledge of the rules of Toronto’s edition of Jamaican patois in order to subvert these rules.
Gwaning, as the result of the collision of two systems of knowledge, is a way of making Toronto ‘home’ for diasporic youth whom are excluded by the dominant discourse and whose diasporic subjectivities cast them outside of ‘authentic’ Caribbean culture, especially by those directly from the region. This lexical invention/intervention is an indigenous word whose existence is firmly routed in the experience of a being diasporic, a sonic distortion that dubs gwan, yet refracts standardized English language. By being grounded in the sonic, gwaning, resists materialization, becomes a temporal sonic innovation that transforms or dubs Toronto as home. Like the word Tdot, gwaning, as an invention of Afro-diasporic Caribbean youth in Toronto is a form of reppin’ slippery enough to opaquely operate as a site of identification that does the same work as discourses in the ivory tower and the grassroots significations in diaspora spaces like Eglinton West. It is likely that gwaning still has yet to complete its transformations, keeping in mind that in the early 1990s Tdot was espoused as “Tdot Odot”. Gwaning, may become the gwanings very shortly.

Still Though…

Like the Turntablism who juggles at various tempos and microseconds of a song to create a new sonic arrangement, the temporal construction of home evident in Toronto hip hop music presents us with a radically different notion of home. None of the definitions of ‘home’ detailed earlier in
this chapter successfully captures the sentiments of Afrodiasporic youth in the same way as hip hop culture. Some definitions were spatial, emotional, traumatic or bricologe-based. While none of the definitions were temporal and rooted in the sonic, they were conversant in various spatial and bricologe processes like the notion of the Tdot as home elaborated in this chapter. The notion of home excavated from hip hop culture routed itself through language, space, and the comportment of self are sites where the emergence of temporal spaces of belonging for Toronto’s Afrocaribbean populations were represented. At various calibrations and velocities, crossing any national boarder and elaborating heterogeneous forms of racial representation, hip hop music in Toronto since the mid-1990s make discernible a particularly useful diasporic construction of home. In this B-side version to various Diaspora studies theorists’ understanding of home and homelessness, rather than a home shrouded in the language of loss, designed around unrecoverable histories and imbued with feelings of exile, and alienation, hip hop’s sonic culture, through a politics and practice of reppin’ Toronto, utilizes temporal and transportable acts of the imagination that procure a useful relationships to the state.

Reppin’ is about correcting misrepresentation and presenting alternative less damaging representations that are operationalized within the codes of hip hop culture. Reppin’ is then a representational practice that produces livable versions of our present reality, existing
somewhere between hip hop culture and academic/institutional notions of representation. Importantly, the kind of ‘home’ we find constructed and related by hip hop culture relies on an ethical vision that understands and is willing to battle otherizing practices of the state.

Canada is a home ‘in a way’ because the world is a house and Canada is a room where the heating is the best (Yon 1995: 492).

The apparently ambivalent connection to Canada this interviewee relays, in Yon’s study, expresses how diaspora as a relationship to the nation can operate as a resource. For this youth, Canada is part of a globalized world in which its usefulness must align with a diasporan’s ethical demands. Like this youth, home, as sonically designed and detailed by the hip hop artists examined in this chapter is an ethical demand for and creative innovation of ideological space. This space creatively formulates new relationships between immigrants and others, between state and racialized bodies, finding and articulating new meanings using outernational tools, like language and culture, designed and consumable in media formats, circulated by the state for mass consumption. It is in this space, this temporal sonic invention and intervention of ‘home’ works to counteract the trauma of unbelonging and intentional state otherization practices helping to imagine and produce livable presents and hopefully inclusive and desirable futures.

The version of home Kardinal, IRS and Black-I make possible are B-sides to the dominant
In their creative revisioning, and at times prophetic insight, these hip hop Emcees espouse a relationship of blackness to the nation that requires a slight re-versioning from the dominant modes of pathologization and cultural disvalue. The home that becomes audible on the B-side of Canadian culture is one where humanity is loaded into the echo chamber, so that Ms. Ortega and other women that bear the burnt of gun violence are seen and heard. According, in this home called Tdot, the word Caribbean is given a little reverb so that society can hear from the mouth of Jamaican that Caribbean includes Haitians, Grenadians and Guyanese peoples. We also find in the Tdot, echoes of Caribbean cultures, words and kiss-teeth, all of which find a positive social value amongst hip hop artists interested in dubbing out the harmful elements that prevent Toronto from becoming home. Black-I, IRS and Kardinal represent Toronto as the Tdot channeling their sonic creativity through various electronic and visual technologies to create records (both vinyl and archival) that document a version (a remixed Toronto) of what it might mean to be home in the diaspora.

The analysis of reppin’ in this chapter relies upon an understanding of a definition of sound as a constitutive system of knowledge that recovers and houses various aspects of the African
diaspora. Clyde Woods, in his work on knowledge systems and the blues, make possible for us a way of thinking about sound, not just as a subjectivity but as a specific tool that makes black life in the west liveable (2007). In the following chapter, I explore the ways in which sound can be understood as a technology useful to Afro-diasporic populations that have consistently been defined as outside of or in excess to the European conception of the human.
Conclusion

Sonic Tech_knowledges of Freedom, Or Beyond ‘Biocentric Man’. A Sylvia Wynter Remix

... if the human is a “purely biological” being as we now assume, then how can you have different orders of consciousness?” How could the medieval have ‘consciousness’ of the world in a totally different manner than their descendents in America (Wynter, 2006:30)?

Five snapshots from the Afrosonic diaspora:

In concluding this dissertation, it is helpful to look across a number of Afrosonic musical genres in a variety of national spaces to better grasp the relationships between seemingly disparate musical practices across the African diaspora. In Trinidad in the early 1900s, amongst the used and discarded, between the excess of oil drums of industrialized society, and the ‘excess humans’ of modernity we find the creation of the last instrument in this century: the steel pan. Impoverished Afro-Trinidadians advanced complex rhythms, imitating European classical works by Mozart and Bach, amongst others (Dudley, 2003). The sound of the steel pan becomes the national soundscape easily forming the soundtrack of Trinidad’s decolonizing endeavors of post 1962 and beyond.
In St. Croix, one finds the formerly enslaved utilizing the excess of capitalism—discarded commodities of modern societies—to speak of the social conditions of the island as well as narrate a difficult to document past. Quelbe, also called Scratch Band music, consists of the utilization of discarded household items such as cups, forks and spoons to produce music. On December 17, 2003 the Virgin Islands passed a bill to make Quelbe its official music. Originating under Danish rule during the period of enslavement, quelbe sonically documented the lives of the enslaved and newly free, particularly after African drumming and singing were outlawed in 1672 and 1733.

In the 1970s, in New York City, Clive Campbell, a teenaged DJ and recent immigrant from Kingston Jamaica, could not get his audience to dance to his reggae music. DJ Kool Herc (as Clive Campbell is known) switches from Jamaican reggae to American funk music, and decides to repeat the break segment of these funk records using two copies of the same record by cueing the needle of each turntable to the middle of the record (Chang, 2005; Toop, 2000). The verses and choruses on these records are disregarded in favour of the ‘funkiest’ part of the record—a wordless free form departure from the song’s structure. This teenager gives birth to the
breakbeat: a deconstructive innovation that has become a core element of hip-hop, jungle and drum n’ bass musics.

In Peru, one can find the nation’s Afro populations well documented (if not re-imagined) in a wooden vegetable box, (the cajón) an adapted Church offering box (the cajita criolla) and a dried donkey jawbone (the quijada de burro) (Skoog, 1997). These three items were transformed, after the drum was outlawed, into instruments that are still in use today. The cajón today is the national instrument of Peru.

In the 1990s various hip-hop deejays from the United States unite to form bands such as the X-men and the Invisible Scratch Pickls. These Black youth and Filipino youth extend the South Bronx innovations of the 1970s and 80s and revamp the use value of vinyl by isolating prerecorded sounds and rhythmically altering the sonic properties of former songs. These youth call themselves Turntablists, they transform the turntable from record player to instrument using a mixer and various techniques that involve manipulation of vinyl recordings.

These five musical engagements are not normal. One does not normally fashion instruments from donkey jawbones or car mufflers. Continuously, repeating the middle section of a song or
rubbing a vinyl record back and forth until it becomes sonically unrecognizable also is not

*normal*. Normal is that which Europe has decided, circulated and regulated in the western world since 1492. Discourses of normalcy are not innocent; rather they are invested with hegemonic power, systematically devaluing the unrecognizable. Normal, in relationship to music, involves following a set pattern of notation, as well as being taught how to play a pre-existing instrument by a music ‘teacher’. Improvising, mixing and versioning are not ‘musical’ notions taught by the western cannon, these techniques are the most useful ‘not normal’ interventions and innovations of the Afrosonic diaspora.

I am interested in the ‘not-normal,’ following a trajectory of thought Katherine McKittrick maps out regarding the geographic spaces inhabited by “Others”, what she takes up, after Wynter, as ‘demonic grounds’ (McKittrick, 2006; Wynter, 1990). Demonic grounds are spaces where the minoritized, the racialized, the gendered and the marginalized creatively respond to the dominant modes of being. It is from these spaces, via the creative narratives of the excluded, we gather a sense of what it means to live under hegemonic regimes of race, heteronomativity, class and ability. Thus, the goal of this conclusion is to discern how AfroSonic cultures might articulate alternative notions of freedom, democracy and the ‘human’ through various sound experiments across a number of countries. The previous chapters have explore how ideas such as remixing,
turntablism and dub are operationalized or embodied by individuals like K’naan and M.I.A. In this conclusion the concept of *sonic tech_knowledgies* is mobilized to capture the diverse ways Afro-diasporic populations formulate ways of knowing, and to identify the uses of indigenous information systems to articulate their relationship to broader social processes that too often circumscribe their lives.

In bringing these five sonic engagements together I seek to avoid what Ralph Ellison recognized in Leroi Jones’s *Blues People* as a failure to highlight “the intricate networks of connections which binds Negroes to the larger society” (Ellison, 1955:253). This work is interested in engaging the relationship between Afro-diasporic peoples and sound technologies as they are produced in and shaped by ‘larger society’. These examples of sonic adventures from the western hemisphere highlight for me a counterdiscourse to western man’s formulation of rational man’s appropriate avenue of intellectual expression. Given the illegal conditions by which enslaved populations sought western literacy as well as the outlaw of the drum in several national spaces, there existed no possibility for the manufactured ‘Others’ to enter the discursive terrain of the human other than a total disregard for indigenous ways of knowing. By this, I am referring to Aimé Césaire’s notion of the processes of “thingification” installed by colonialism onto its subjugated populations which actively sought to destroy sonic avenues through which
enslaved populations made sense of their world (Césaire, 1972:42). The tenets of modernity and the rigid requirements of ‘enlightened perspectives’ forced into obscurity the sonic ways in which enslaved populations in the west navigated their oppressive realities.

Throughout the African diaspora in the west, we find oil drums that document the transition of the Trinidadian mind from colonized to independent, youth deconstructing vinyl, detailing exactly how the postmodern live poststructurally. We also find ‘former commodities’ utilizing excess commodities to wrestle the idea of ‘freedom of speech’ into their corner of the ring. The various experiments with sound technologies we find throughout the African diaspora do far more than entertain, especially for the dispossessed. These experiments help bring to the fore some of the most blatant failures of the European conception of the ‘human’. Clearly, part of this failure stems from the ways in which notions of autonomy, rational thinking, freedom and democracy have been unable or unwilling to include the formerly enslaved.

Technology is popularly understood as “the application of scientific knowledge for practical purposes” or machinery based on such knowledge. Beyond just knowledge for practical purposes, technologies are also symbolic and aid in the meaning-making process (OED, 2002). For many nations the development of technology is as much about bragging rights as it is about
meeting the needs of its citizenry. Too often technology is associated with social progress, in an erroneous equation that follows an imaginary linear path. Today we think of cell phones and computer chips as technology, but I want to think on a smaller scale, especially when taking into consideration the dispossessed or the enslaved. Knowledge is something we imagine to be gained through education and experience, for those populations systematically excluded from formal education, experience forms a major part of the acquisition of knowledge. Importantly, Paulo Freire’s notion of humans as praxis helps illuminate how Afro diasporic individuals are agents who through reflection and action move from objects to subjects in the historical process (Freire, 1970). The title of this chapter combines knowledge and technology to form tech_knowledgies, to signify ways of knowing, avenues by which to enter our present through the exploration and manipulation of sound.

Similarly, in this work, as mentioned in chapter two, Afro sonic diaspora refers to the songs, grunts, vernacular, musics and mannerisms that come out the dispersal of African peoples across the western world. My interests lay more in the actual processes of making music, an arena often overlooked in the study of sound. I read the arena of sound in the African diaspora, following Foucault, as forms of ‘insurrectionary knowledge’, part of the unauthorized, illegitimated utterances of chattel and former commodities (Foucault, 2003). These unauthorized
insurrectionary knowledges operate in a form I call sonic tech_knowledges, that is the explicit intersection between the former human commodities who were technologies of capital accumulation (the enslaved) and the sound making devices fashioned and refashioned in the west by these enslaved human technologies. This intersection produces and documents ways of seeing and knowing that refuse to obey the restrictions of European man’s manufacturing of the ‘enlightened individual’. Sonic tech_knowledges are knowledge systems embedded within aurosonic matter, tools that help Afrodiasporic peoples negotiate life within capitalism and colonialism. Houston Baker’s “blues matrix”, Clyde Woods’s formulation of a blues geography, and Louis Chude-Sokei’s sound/culture nexus are all detailed analyses of Afro sonic tech_knowledges discussed earlier in this dissertation (Baker Jr., 1984; Chude-Sokei, 1994; Woods, 2007).

It is from here that I began my analysis, a space of otherness—demonic grounds as Wynter articulates—to answer the question: How does Man’s Otherness present alternative notions of the ‘human’ using sound? I turn to the scenarios that opened this paper to help navigate systems of knowing and modes of being human obscured by the “ocular bias” of the west (Perkinson, 2002). In this concluding chapter I begin with an exploration of the connection between Afrodiasporic individuals and their sound-making endeavours. Next, I move to a discussion of
the ideas of Sylvia Wynter; in particular, I move through her argument regarding the genres of Man, and the overrepresentation of Western Bourgeois Man as the only recognizable mode for being human. It is here where I rethink certain ideals such as democracy, freedom and rationality. In the final section, I turn towards remix culture and turntablism to gesture to the alternative ways in which we might conceptualize our present mode of being.

**The Demonic Ground of Sound**

For artists and critical consumers, music expresses and documents some of the most difficult aspects of human life, such as the pain of racism and second class citizenship. For colonial authorities, music (especially that produced by the ‘wretched of the earth’) was a synonym for rebellion; it posed the possibility of a social uprising. Goat-skinned drums could communicate far and wide, its message incomprehensible to some, but more importantly this illegible sound could incite a rebellion, possibly signaling an end to a carefully constructed colonial social ‘reality’. This ‘reality’ was one in which the non-European was discursively posited, then these groups were aggressively positioned outside/beyond the limits of Christianity and western rational thought. The social construction of the heathen prior to the Crusades as well as the social construction of the vagrant in the post-emancipation Caribbean are two such practices of
aggressive and exclusionary positioning that constitute a small segment of the social reality instituted by the west.

According to geographer Clyde Woods, the “act of making music parallel[s] an intellectual transformation,” is an often-overlooked aspect of black musics (Woods, 2007:69). These overlooked sites, when carefully excavated, demonstrate how such intellectual transformations can become productive arenas to reconsider carefully constructed realities and our governing modes of truth. If we turn to the work of Turntablists, we can ask what is the intellectual transformation within Afro diasporic populations in North America? As elaborated in chapter two, “A Gift From the Old World to the New”, turntablism demystifies the rigid consumer/producer relationship in which music recorded onto vinyl is proposed as a solely consumptive entity. Turntablism, like black musics, consistently highlights and play upon the seams and frictions inherent within the current regime of truth, whether that be colonialism or capitalism. Unfortunately, Turntablism also gets recooperated by capitalism at the very point at which it poses an alternative conception of human existence. For example, by the end of the 1990s prominent Turntablists like DJ Q-Bert and DJ Craze were endorsing stylus companies like Stanton and Shure; their activities become fodder for late capital, not tools to rethink our present order.
An early analysis of hip hop culture by Harry Allen of the *Village Voice* in 1988 suggested hip hop humanizes technology (Rose, 1989). Tricia Rose takes Allen’s notion further by suggesting that rap simultaneously technologizes orality as it humanizes technology (Rose, 1989:369). Rose was concerned with the ways in which rap reconstructs the human voice alongside drum machines and samplers. Rose’s concern was very much about the role of rap as a sound technology and the ways in which it interfaced with technology, and our social/cultural worlds. Rose’s formulation is a much earlier and more focused notion of black sound as a technology that Kwodo Eshun addresses in *More Brilliant Than the Sun: Adventures in Sonic Fiction*. Eshun understands sound as a “sensory technology”, as a black technology that relates back to 18th and 19th century Africa (Eshun, 1998:192). Eshun describes black culture in the present as “a series of machines, synthetic technologies” (Ibid.). Although Eshun’s argument walks a thin essentialist line, the ideas he incubates, like Allen’s and Rose’s humanizing of technology and orality respectively, suggests further exploration is required of this potentially rich area of investigation. If the sonic documents much of black life as, Rose, Eshun, Weheliye, Jones and I discuss in this dissertation, what might music-making activities tell us about the signposts of our current regime of truth? What exactly does ‘versioning’, turntablism, quelbe or the steel pan tell us about the guiding intellectual principles of our time?
If we turn to pre-independence Jamaica we find an array of sound experiments that stretch into the 1980s with King Tubby’s invention of dub. When the United States closed its doors to Jamaican migrant labourers, the flow of southern American soul music also ended. Jamaica popular music consequently became more creative, moving further away from the American soul trio model and looking instead to satisfy the local market for music. The accidental recording of an instrumental backing on separate track lead to the creation of the vinyl recorded instrumental (Barrow & Dalton, 2004). This curious accident enhanced the sonic artillery of the dancehall sound clash, as invigorated dancers added the words to the instrumental backings of their favourite songs (Bradley, 2000). But what were the ideas that structured the very possibility of its occurrence? This form of music making, where the disc jockey encouraged audiences to participate in the structure of the song suggests an accompanying intellectual transformation. This practice is what later would be called versioning—an act similar to a cover song, where one would improvise lyrics, either similar or dissimilar, to a familiar instrumental backing (Hebdige, 1987). The work that this practice did within the dominant modes of thought—which constructed a binary between intellectual and bodily expression—was to disrupt the classificatory systems that distinguished static recorded song from animate living person. Aesthetically, delight was not recorded as a detached process only expressed through polite clapping at the end of the
performance. Instead, the delight was enacted through participation within the very structure of the performance. Such an intellectual transformation, similar to Leroi Jones connection between the beginning of the blues and the end of gang-labour in the southern U.S., involves a reconceptualization of self outside of the categories that structured society.

The overrepresentation of Man as the only mode of being human becomes exposed as a contextual and culturally sanctioned position, when Kingstonian dancehall attendees and British subjects refused to subscribe to the rigid notions of society’s regime of truth. To read this moment simply as a meaningless act of self-expression is to devalue and dehumanize the agency of the human being. To miss this point is to continue to read Man’s Other as simply the irrational, savage, heathen whose functioning in society cannot evidence anything meaningful.

The act of versioning not only de-centers the central component of the vinyl—the lyrics of a song and its instrumental backing—but it also calls into question the status of the periphery/the marginal. The very authority of the center, in this case the recorded song, is replaced by the desires of the excess of modernity, the non-European, the poor, the formerly enslaved, the otherized. Important to notice here is the role of the technologies and commodities of being ‘modern’: the 2-track recorder that Clement Dodd accidentally recorded an instrumental on, the vinyl records imported to Jamaica by farm labourers, the discarded oil drum from Trinidad’s
navigation of the oil industry. These connections suggest there is an important relationship between these former commodities and our present day technologies and commodities.

Like the instrumental backing, the steel pan was born out of the desire of disposed peoples who sought to refashion an entity to suit their own purposes. Rather than using oil drums as containers as they were formerly used, these oil containers were altered into another sonically useful drum. Colonial residues influenced the remaking of classical compositions on these oil containers but this activity suggests something further about the rejection of classificatory systems that might have posited Bach ‘high class’ and poor Afro-Trinidadians as the complete opposite. What might have been the intellectual transformation with the steel pan? An easy argument to make is to highlight the ways pan players mimicked European classical musics. To consider steelpan music within the logic of sonic tech_knowledgies is to understand this hybrid remixing of sorts as Man’s Other’s transgression of the boundaries of enlightenment thought as a democratic process of freedom seeking. The steelpan as a form of insurrectionary knowledge, like turntablism and other black musics and sound making practices present us with understandings and worldviews that run counter to the dominant logic of our time. If we turn to Wynter’s use of the interventions of Césaire, Fanon and Glissant this other worldview becomes clear. Wynter highlights what she calls the “new discourse of the Antilles”, the notion of the
human as “a everywhere culturally relative” (Wynter on Glissant, 1989). In Richard Burton’s elaboration of Antillanité, we come to understand this concept as a “relation identity”, a “multidimensional polyvalent conception of identity” (Burton, 1995). A discourse of the Antilles is therefore an open-ended multiplicity of relations, exemplified in the diverse collisions and encounters of creole language. Thus, for dancehall patrons, in singing with the instrumental of their favourite song, they formed a relationship with the song, as culturally relative to the soundscape. Similarly, as Turntablists reconfigured the ‘use value’ of recorded vinyl they highlight how the human can operate as a relational actor connecting alternative worldviews to current overconsumptive realities in the west.

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**Beyond Biocentric Man**

For Sylvia Wynter, her main concern is to trace the development of Western bourgeoisie Man as an overrepresentation of the category of ‘human’ (Wynter, 2003). Wynter looks towards the conversation between the Cenu Indians and Christopher Columbus to begin thinking about the limits and structures of our present conceptual agendas (Wynter, 1995). Accordingly, Wynter identifies two constructions of Man (Man1 and Man2) that have come to represent the entire category of the human. Man1 was invented alongside Christianity, his orientation was religious and his encounters with non-Christians produced constructions of the heathen. Man1 subscribed
to a rigid and religious hierarchical chain of being model, placing himself above the savage brute
but below prefect divine nature.

Man2, who developed almost concurrently, is the present conception of the human we are most
familiar with. Secular, political and a state actor, Man2 developed alongside the rise of the
biological sciences. During colonialism and the rise of Europe Man2 “reconfigured humanness
by ideologically re-presenting itself as “world” humanness”—an idea we can see in the birth of
the discipline of Anthropology. Man2 is biocentric, overinvested in his physical being that
classifies the world according to the ideals biological reasoning and wealth. Thus, gender, race
and sexuality are always produced as an excess—as an addition to the rigidity of the Western
Bougerious man. Biocentric man is detached, rationale and autonomous, encumbered by the
Church and author of the “violent classificatory systems” that attempts to organize the entire
earth (McKittrick, 2006).

In agreeing with Richard Rorty’s claim that “our present “objective” mode of truth is only true
within the specific terms of our present culture’s self-conception” Wynter makes possible a
ground to begin critiquing our present (Richard Rorty as cited in Wynter, 2005). For example,
within colonial Trinidad the ‘truth’ within that regime was that Bach and Mozart represented the
pinnacle of musical performance. It was only within independence, that is within a new conception of the Trinidadian, that the steel pan became an instrument proper. A new order of truth made it possible for Trinidadians to respect Steelpans as sonic tech_knowledgies that can produce a certain kind of decolonizing work.

Wynter’s analysis begins by centering the *wretched of the earth*, the otherized and disqualified, to highlight how there is “always something else besides the dominant cultural logic going on” (Wynter, 2000). Accordingly, this space is fertile ground for a critical intervention into the structures and logic that make today possible. Thus, although classical works were one of the main productions of steelpan artists, there was something else going on. We are often only able to read these practices as mimicry, when in fact there was a process of self-identification occurring with and through the steelpan.

Biocentric man’s excess, the formerly enslaved African, via her sonic adventures, suggests a reconsideration of biological determinist claims to humanness. Using both discarded elements of capitalism and its technological innovations such as the turntable, Afrodiasporic populations demonstrate a relational conception between sound and self. As the steel pan documents the journey of the colonized mind to emancipation, the turntable speaks eloquently of the potential
of supposedly obsolete vinyl and hegemony of technology. Turntablists’ use of the turntable contradicts the manufacture’s conception of this item. Turntables were made to play music not make music. Yet through a relational understanding, the human and technology mutually leak into one another, allowing for other kinds of relations that exceed both the social prescriptions of contemporary society. The human, when conceiving of itself as related to a specific externalized entity, can alter and extend the usefulness of such an entity, evading the restrictions of our present mode. Rather than technologize the human as Tricia Rose claims, I want to suggest that these sonic engagements humanize and speak for the former commodity. For the quelbe band member or the hip hop DJ, enlightenment does not solely mean to posit universal truths or analyze the texts of French philosophers. These sonic engagements suggest alternative avenues by which one might understand the modern human being.

Afrosonic adventures refuse to define humanness as solely a biological affair. In revamping the use value of the turntable, the oil drum and other items, afrosonic engagements articulate a system of knowing that understands the human as a relational entity. For former commodities, such as the formerly enslaved African, these unconventional interactions with sound aid in the development of alternative modes of humanness. This mode of being human understands itself as coming into existence through the participation in the reconstruction/redefinition of sound and
sound-making activities. As an extension and substitute of the voice, afrosonic engagements construct a mode of humanness through sound that revamp the relationship between humans and technologies. The voice and sound produce a mode of humanness, available to those defined as non-human, in which freedom is about one’s level and ability to participate in the making of political knowledge. Within the dominant regimes of thought, freedom is understood as a legal right, something that requires documentation and evidence. Afrosonic music and music making practices allow us to view and perhaps live, the tenets of freedom in a slightly different way.

**Participation as Freedom**

To situate turntablism, the Jamaican soundsystem and remix culture within a larger discursive arrangement of which existing scholarship is concerned, I nestle these sonic acts within the idea of participation as a form of freedom. The traumas inflicted upon Africans brought to the West have been a topic that has obtained considerable academic attention. Part of the debasement of enslavement was the denial of everything but the most basic necessities, such as water, raggedy clothing and minimal nutrition. Love, affection, choice, and movement were but a few of the luxuries the free could not afford. Thus, the enslaved human being was denied an array of experiences today that we should consider part of the human. Emancipation in the Caribbean
and in other regions brought new expectations and the formerly enslaved actively sought limited forms of self-determination and certain kinds of legal protection (Marshall, 1996).

The idea of self-determination connotes ideas such as the ability to choose where to live, the ability to decide where and when to have a family, as well as what occupation to choose or vegetable to grow. On a micro level self-determination is harder to determine; there is a point where the idea of self-determination dissolves into choice, usually on such a small scale that others do not notice. For example, when and how to cut one’s hair, what to eat for dinner or how to dress are acts of self-determination so micro that few others care or take notice. Nevertheless, these aforementioned activities were and are part of freedom, a sensation so new in the late 1830s (for the anglo-enslaved world) that the size of the choice did not matter. This feeling of freedom, of choice and self-determination, is a quintessential element that separated chattel from human which not only pervades but structures the experience of former commodities in the African diaspora.

I want to back up for a second, to examine freedom from a not-so romanticized human ideal perspective. Borrowing from David Scott, who extends Foucault’s governmentality intervention, I want to examine freedom as the reformation of the existing power relations between the
governed and the governor (Scott, 1999). For the free and unfree alike, the idea of freedom was entangled in a dialectic where the opposite of bondage came to define freedom. But when we utilize Scott’s perspective we see freedom as another strategy that attempted to refashion the formerly enslaved into governable objects that would take part in a market, extend capitalism’s yield and be objects through which the extraction of labour could take place. As is clear in today’s late capitalist present, the disciplinary forces of consumption and market capitalism were/are keywords by which freedom as a governmental project produces hegemonic space.

Liberalism’s 1832 project sought to make individual autonomy, rights and the market a new vocabulary of the emancipation project. Consequently, for historians whom study the slave emancipation and notions of freedom, their research gets caught in the language of liberalism of the mid 1800s. David Scott recognizes this in Holt’s *The Problem of Freedom*, where a progressive narrative significantly informs Holt’s project. For example, some historical analysis focus on how the newly freed took advantage of wage labour opportunities or other market-related interactions. Or, as Woodville Marshall discusses, some historical analyses focus on the language and ideals around legal institutions, rights, and navigation of the contingent terms of freedom (Marshall, 1996). Unlike the cited examples of Marshall and Holt, Rebecca Scott has captured the ways in which the language of freedom was not always so clear cut and
uncontested. In her work, we learn how in Cuba, in the aftermath of slavery terms such as “ownership” were not operationalized solely via a legal definition (Scott & Zeuske, 2002:675). Scott demonstrates how ownership of several pigs, which could be eventually sold to purchase one’s freedom, became symbols of access to personal freedom (Ibid.). While clearly the unfree had access to the economic and thus legal realms of society, Scott’s work suggests the legal language of freedom did not hold an undisputed grasp on the unfree’s symbolic meaning-making activities.

The failure of colonial and the post emancipation legal system to extend in a meaningful way the supposed impartiality of the law highlights exactly why we should be suspicious of the language of liberalism’s post 1834 project. The legal system was so corrupt that a “liberal minded Barbadian Attorney General, Henry Sharpe plainly explained, “there is no justice to be obtained, from a court and justice here, in cases of wrongs committed against Slaves, and free coloured persons” (Newton, 2005: 592). Amelioration reforms, attempted by British authorities, did not extended better protection under the law for enslaved individuals despite its articulated position. Instead, Amelioration operated to “modernize” the system of bondage, effectively fixing the holes in the process of unfreedom (Newton, 2005:592).
Instead of examining the effectiveness of legal and liberalist notions of freedom, my interests here lay in grasping a conception of freedom that lay outside or beyond the liberalist language of British emancipation and the political/secular conceptions of biocentric man. To this end, the notion of participation is inserted into the hegemonic language of rights, autonomy and the individual. Participation is defined by the Oxford English Dictionary simply to “take part”. Rather than utilize terms loaded with meaning, with the hegemonic discursive strategies of the project of freedom, I turn to ‘participate’ to unencumber my analysis. I am well aware that participation in the market, or in democracy are specific strategies that exist, but my interests lay in the micro interactions that speak outside of and beyond the language of the free market and individual autonomy. I do not want to ignore the various governmental strategies that curtail freedom as another kind of governing project, but I want to think around, outside of these obvious modes that circumscribe this thing called freedom. In its simplest form, participation is formulated here as the unencumbered freedom individuals sought and continue to seek.

Participation as a rhetorical device allows for the rethinking of a certain type of freedom within the institution of slavery. For example the spiritual “Follow the Drinking Gourd” exemplifies how the idea of participation opens up an analysis of freedom. To engage in helping runaways, to participate in these acts of freedom seeking is an act of freedom itself, despite its containment
within the institution of slavery. As has become clear with the aid of numerous academic inquiries, what has become ‘Negro Spirituals’ at times doubled as lyrical maps to freedom, tools to help those on the Underground Railway find their way. For those in the fields singing, “Swing Low, Sweet Chariot” sending these encoded messages was about reinterfacing the relationship between bondage and freedom (Willis, 1862/1909). What I mean by this is that utilizing the voice, as their only technology of freedom, the enslaved sought to participate in designing a particular notion of freedom while also aiding in the procurement of freedom for the runaway. To simply take part in oral maps to freedom is to quintessentially participate in a definition of freedom unattached to notions of the individual, market or autonomy. This mode of participation does not rest on a dialectic on which its definition precariously rests on the negation of bondage. In its most basis terms, the freedom I articulate here, to participate in, to take part of, is the way in which I want to think about the relationship between sound/sound technologies and the formerly enslaved human.

‘Other/ed’ Kinds of Humans, words in closing.

Thinking through sound and sound-making processes as sonic tech_knowledgies allow us to see how Afrodiasporic populations not only challenge the prevailing modes of our present sociological and ideological order but also how these practices act as tools to help us operate
beyond closed and static systems of the ‘human’. The kinds of music making practices I detailed are methods by which I want to think of landscapes of knowing and being that move past the inadequacies of our present conception of the human. Oftentimes the term remix is associated with music and sound making practices, as elaborated earlier in this dissertation. The remix as a concept always signifies on the mix, which is always already the (hybrid) reality of black popular culture (Hall, 1992). This dissertation has taken the idea of mixing beyond the realm of sound connecting it with ideas around being human and the uses of technology. In art communities, the remix has already become central to certain kinds of dialogues, where the idea of the self as an embodied remix fosters anti-essentialist conceptions of identity as a useful tool to speak and act against dominant narratives (Lai, 2006). Unfortunately, as the concept of the remix becomes more widely known, it is increasingly becoming recuperated by legalistic language as battles around copyright are waged.

By bringing together Sylvia Wynter’s conception of ‘the overrepresentation of man’ with the sonic strategies of turntablism, remix culture and other Afrodiasporic sound experiments, I began my analysis of our contemporary moment from an illegitimate space. To participate in the structure of a record through physical manipulation, or to remap the use value of items considered capitalism’s excess, sonic tech_knowledgies gesture at other ways to speak about
democracy and freedom. These ways do not privilege biocentric man, instead they look towards
the relationship between man and technology/machine to discern the articulation of the concerns
of the *wretched of the earth*. To remix Sylvia Wynter’s work means to start from both a position
outside of the disciplinary powers of our current regime of truth as well as taking seriously the
possible contributions of Man’s Other to revamp what it might mean to be human.
References


Discography/Soundography


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