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POP GOES THE COMP CLASS: MUSIC AS RHETORIC IN THE FIRST-YEAR WRITING COURSE

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ABSTRACT

This thesis explores the use of popular music as rhetoric in the first-year composition class. I investigate the emotional and scientific elements of music and sound, as well as the best-known forms of rhetoric and composition pedagogy theory, including: cognitivism, current traditional rhetoric (CTR), and post-structuralism. In order to demonstrate the application of these theories, I present a rhetorical analysis of the rapper Future. Finally, in making my case for using music in the composition class, I discuss the socio-political implications of hip-hop's role in popular music.

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Chapter 1

Introduction

While I have heard plenty of undergraduates say "I hate English" or "I hate writing," I have never heard a single student say "I hate music."

This could simply be a result of the fact that music, unlike English composition, is not a required class. Perhaps there would be more music haters if there were a required freshman Music Theory course that demanded "fluency in all clefs" and a "fundamental understanding of musical notation as well as the ability to produce clean, legible, pencil notations" (Smith).

Fortunately, music can be understood and analyzed in blissful ignorance of the technical vocabulary of music theory, virtually the foreign language of music theory. Music is as fundamental to the human experience as any other art form and is likely the most universal, the most accessible, and the most widely experienced. Much of the beauty of music stems from its ability to transcend cultural and linguistic barriers as a means of expression. But to explain music requires facility in written and spoken language, such as English. And even if music's beauty cannot be explained at all, which a lot of musicians maintain, it can certainly be explored. Commentators have long argued about the root of the emotional response to music, whether, as Tina Turner once famously doubted, love has anything to do with it. Peter Kivy, for example, claims that "[t]hose who report emotional reactions to music are confusing the pleasure they take in the beauty of the music, in all of its expressive individuality, with the feeling of the emotion expressed" (Kania).

Among America's student population and among the general population as a whole, music is almost universally loved. Writing, on the other hand, is not so adored; as a result, a pervasive lack of proficiency in writing plagues our citizens. As an English major, I am a member of the minority of students who derives satisfaction from reading and analyzing texts, refining my writing style, and expanding my vocabulary. Having served as a Writing Center tutor for students in all levels of English composition courses at Penn State, I see how these courses can be daunting, especially to prospective students who are reluctant readers and writers.

In no way is my thesis going to be a call for students to switch from a STEM to a liberal arts major, but I think, as my title suggests, that I might be able to propose some ways that today's popular music might be used as a means of teaching rhetoric so as to make it exciting and accessible for all manner of English students, from the senior Engineering major who has avoided his one required composition class until his last semester to the eager first-year bookworm who has enough English credits to bypass an entry-level class but is taking one anyway, for "enrichment" purposes.

If I were to integrate complex music theory with already-complicated rhetoric and composition in an entry-level English course, I suspect I would fail to convert the English-haters and maybe create some additional music-haters as well. Hence, I plan to equip my students with a vocabulary and techniques that will aid them in evaluating the rhetoric of all forms of text, from songs to poems to advertisements. My plan for this thesis is, first, to investigate the field of music psychology, particularly studies that focus on music and emotion. To refute the aforementioned argument advanced by Kivy, I would attest that music elicits genuine emotional responses in almost everyone. Because of music's universality and the ease with which it is consumed, relative to the effort required to understand the dense and unfamiliar classic literature

of Chaucer or Shakespeare, I would expect my students to be more engaged and invested in their work, possibly even forgetting about their fifteen-week-long sentencing to a mandatory composition class.

In the next chapter, "The Affect and Effects of Music," I will investigate the emotional and scientific elements of music and sound. In chapter three, "Composition Pedagogy Theory: Teaching Rhetoric Through Popular Music," I will outline my approach for teaching rhetoric through popular music and will explore rhetoric and composition pedagogy theory by analyzing various models by which writing is taught, including: cognitivism; current traditional rhetoric (CTR); and post-structuralism. For my fourth chapter, "Future: Rapper as Rhetor," I will showcase a rhetorical analysis of rapper Future and his strategies and struggle to maintain authenticity and artistic integrity while appealing to a core fan base that does not necessarily share his background. Finally, in my conclusion, I will discuss the socio-political implications of hip-hop's role in popular music.

Chapter 2

The Affect and Effects of Music

"Unlike a novel, a landscape painting, or a sculpture of Apollo, music is 'not a copy' of anything in the visible world," wrote Nietzsche in *The Birth of Tragedy* (ix). Instrumental music, in particular, appears to contain no concrete references beyond the scales and rhythms with which it is composed, which makes it difficult to analyze for its philosophical or rhetorical value. For some, including Plato, sound and music distract from the knowledge to be gained from reading and writing. Additionally, Plato thought that music, because of its emotional appeal, "prevented lovers of knowledge from knowing the world" (Goodale 3). Obviously, these sentiments don't represent Plato's most important philosophical contributions to modern thought; however, they do seem to reflect a general reluctance to incorporate music, especially popular music, into academic studies. Only recently has popular music been accepted as curriculum, probably because of its relative simplicity in comparison to classical composition. But as I will argue through my analysis of Future, there are innumerable complex aspects of popular music that can be analyzed independently of the technical language of music theory and without requiring knowledge of the technicalities of music theory and composition. Precisely because of the emotional appeal that Plato so derided, music has the power to persuade and move people; therefore, music can be considered a kind of text using rhetorical techniques similar to those employed by rhetors. Still today, sound is commonly considered the poor relation of other media. Visual theorists, for example, in line with Plato's attitude, "privilege image over sound"

(Goodale 9). My aim in this thesis is not to engage with this argument, for it seems futile to quibble over two, probably equally influential, components of sensory experience. Moreover, sound so often complements image with purpose and effectiveness, showing that both senses play an important dual role in eliciting emotional response. A recent fMRI study by Thomas Baumgartner "showed that emotional responses to negative (fearful or sad) pictures were considerably stronger when pictures were presented together with fearful or sad music" (Juslin 317). But before I get into the details of brain activity and the network of the "amygdala, hippocampus, parahippocampal gyrus, and temporal poles" that appear to excite emotion, I want to delve deeper into the philosophical question: how does music affect us?

Just as a performer might describe her approach to music as an expression of "feeling," Nietzsche employs similarly non-scientific language to evince music's power: "In song and in dance man exhibits himself as a member of a higher community: he has forgotten how to walk and speak, and is on the point of taking a dancing flight into the air" (5). Speaking of a mysterious "Primordial Unity," Nietzsche posits that music has the ability to vanquish the sense of self, causing the "Dionysian emotions" to awaken, "in the augmentation of which the subjective vanishes to complete self-forgetfulness" (4). The communal participation in creating and enjoying music, then, represents for Nietzsche its cultural capital. If one updated the cultural terminology in *The Birth of Tragedy,* Nietzsche could very well be mistaken as a proponent of rave culture. Replace "German Middle Ages singing and dancing crowds" with "ravers and clubbers," and his famous essay sounds eerily similar to post-modern claims that some kind of ecstatic, collective consciousness is achieved in Electronic Dance Music (EDM) nightclubs. According to Dr. Bryan Rill at Florida State University, "participants [on the dance floor] enter into powerful trances that have the capacity to reshape notions of self and personhood" (Rill).

Nietzsche foreshadows this assertion, professing that, “at the evangel of cosmic harmony, each one feels himself not only united, reconciled, blended with his neighbor, but as one with him, as a member of a higher community” (5). Electronic instrumental music, the kind typically blared at ear-splitting decibels at techno/EDM clubs, could easily be labeled a “Dionysian art” because the strident tones and thumping rhythms have a “visceral effect upon the listener without representing any definite object” (Nietzsche ix). Dionysus, being the “god of intoxication,” is associated with “dark chaotic energies” (Nietzsche ix), which would seem to suggest that any art linked to him would be morally suspect, perhaps even contemptible. As Nietzsche puts it, the Dionysian artist becomes “altogether one with the Primordial Unity, its pain and contradiction, and he produces the copy of this Primordial Unity as music…” (16). The pain represented in Dionysian music, then, reflects the pain of humanity as a whole: “The ‘I’ of the [musician] sounds therefore from the abyss of being: its ‘subjectivity,’ in the sense of the modern aesthetes, is a fiction” (Nietzsche 16). The emotions relayed by a performer, from passionate love to cold contempt, should ideally mirror the universal archetypes that can be shared by any human – that is to say, they are, rhetorically, universally persuasive.

Though profound and worthy of attention, Nietzsche’s theories on music also tend to veer toward a romanticized, idealized view of the musician and his or her role in the production of this Dionysian art. Speaking of a model performance, he stresses that a “man is no longer an artist, he has become a work of art: the artistic power of all nature here reveals itself in the tremors of drunkenness to the highest gratification of the Primordial Unity” (5). While this line of thinking remains relevant in modern criticism of popular music performance, it fails to acknowledge the artist as rhetor, as manipulator of his or her posed identity. Performers today are lauded for their expression of “raw emotion” onstage, which completely ignores the fact that

a performance, in itself, is artificial and hinges on the effectiveness of a crafted persona. True, this fact, as Jason Toynbee of The Open University points out, does not "prevent performers from trying to transcend the rhetorical dimension of music and to *truly* express themselves" (Bennett 76). But even if the emotions conveyed by a performer were initially genuinely experienced by that person, the perceived gap between the musician and the audience makes the possibility of "natural" expression questionable. The exhibition of "raw emotion" by a performer could be exemplified by, say, lashing out in frustration at a heckler or, perhaps, retreating off the stage out of terror or self-doubt. This has, of course, happened, but not in what would typically be considered a successful performance. The careful instillation of a particular mood through the execution of a scripted song does not demonstrate a performer's uncanny ability to tap into his or her inner emotions, but rather evinces his or her ability convincingly to convey emotion to an audience, ideally to infect an audience with it. Advocating a rhetorical approach to music, I would have to dissent from Nietzsche's belief that certain "artistic powers," which apparently "burst from nature herself," characterize the skillset of the world's most talented producers, instrumentalists, and singers (5).

How, then, does a performer establish credible ethos with an audience, convincing them of his or her emotional, as well as artistic, authenticity on stage and in the studio? Looking at Toynbee's breakdown of performance styles, one understands that an expressive, sincere mode of performance was the first one successfully adopted by early pop stars: Sinatra, for example. This was apparently an unmediated sincerity that "involved the performer giving her/himself over to the audience with both charm and conviction." According to Toynbee, this "direct mode" was the "dominant mode of popular music performance before rock and roll" (Bennett 77). But as rock came to dominate the musical landscape, this deference to the audience became "highly

suspect." Instead, performers started using a *reflexive* mode, one that subtly winked at the whole charade of the performance and attempted to comment on the "fundamentally volatile" relationship between the audience and artist (Bennett 74). Because of the saturation and subsequent exhaustion of the expressive, direct modes, the reflexive method has allowed for a fresh, even postmodern kind of performance, as well as a recovery – a self-conscious recovery – of the old methods; after all, "…expressive or direct performances have an aspect of the reflexive or transformative about them. For without such an inflection, monstrous pomposity and self-indulgence or gross sentimentality become all too palpable" (Bennett 77). Variant performances of authenticity are crucial to the commercial achievement of all musicians. But this authenticity depends also on a self-aware theatricality, one that positions the artist/rhetor on both sides of the performance relationship: there is the performer on stage on the one hand, and then there is the fan in a seat in the venue or festival field, or even at home wearing headphones. The post-modern performer floats indeterminately between the two, paradoxically achieving authenticity by complicating her singular status as performer by acknowledging that she must remain, intermittently at least, an average fan in order to perceive exactly what her fan base wants, expects, and connects with.

Although an innate, untutored enjoyment of music seems present in humans as early as infancy, when notions of self and social construction are undeveloped, mature "understanding and enjoyment [of music] takes place in the theatre of self-definition, as part of the general struggle among listeners for control of meaning and pleasure" (Bennett 20). This means that – in a genre so closely linked to socioeconomic status, culture, class, age, and race – hip-hop artists must present a strong sense of an oppositional identity that can build a "sincere connection" with an aggrieved audience (Peterson 37). Trap music, because of its disruptive, acerbic,

confrontational quality, both in lyrics and in production, cannot be simply enjoyed on a universal level. A baby might coo along to one of Bach's or Mozart's symphonies, maybe even be nurtured by them, but it would be a rare baby who would coo along to Future's "Fuck Up Some Commas." This is not music that is "appropriate" for every listener; in fact, it is the kind that many adults, a baby-boom or even a generation-X parent, for example, would tell you to turn off in favor of the inoffensive crooning of, say, Van Morrison. Trap music, when played in most public spheres, cuts through the atmosphere, purposefully jarring and criticizing the quotidian "sounds and rhythms that seem to represent control" over the lives of the underprivileged who feel they can never achieve upward mobility through the standard, accepted methods in American society. Rappers like Future "enact a drama symbolizing in sound the taming and defeat of an inimical system over which they in 'real' life feel they have little or not control and in which they have to survive" (Bennett 48). Because of the status of these artists as spokespeople for the underground, for the lower class, and for oppressed groups, both their music and their identities will always subvert, never soothe.

But in the ever-globalizing landscape of popular music, it was inevitable that the core sounds of hip-hop would be appropriated by artists who don't share any aspects of the lived black experience that originated the genre. Even someone like Macklemore, whose critical cachet has lately become bankrupt and who has essentially become a laughing stock of the general hip-hop community, has managed to carve, rhetorically, a niche as a socially progressive, trendy spokesperson, and has managed to propel his sticky and markedly "white" sound into the stratosphere, going multi-platinum and, inexplicably to most hip-hop fans, winning Best Rap Album at the 2014 Grammy's. On his marriage equality sermon, "Same Love," Macklemore sounds like he is preaching to a very large choir, congratulating himself on his truly progressive

stance despite being a very straight, very white male. However, this is the type of soothing "message brand" rap the large world of non-rap fans could easily accept. His self-righteous sensitivity, balanced with the sanitized, laborious coolness of "Thrift Shop," obviously comforted an enormous audience, which makes Macklemore a wildly effective rhetor in his own right, assuming his endgame was to sell a lot of records. Although Macklemore's sentiment in his gay-friendly "Same Love" is laudable, the way he delivers the laudable message contradicts its oppositional character. It is a bit surprising, then, that "Same Love" became the anthem for the LGBT community and its supporters, showing that Macklemore's unabashed corniness struck a wide-ranging cultural and emotional nerve even among a long-marginalized and scorned subculture. What I, and many others, see as corniness, a greater majority sees as earnest sincerity, which, enhanced by some maudlin keyboard plunks, created a wave of joy. As Schopenhauer puts it, "Music makes every picture, and indeed every scene of real life and of the world, at once appear with higher significance; all the more so, to be sure, in proportion as its melody is analogous to the inner spirit of the given phenomenon" (Nietzsche 67). Maybe it was Ryan Lewis' convincingly sentimental production, then, that saved Macklemore's trifling, ineloquent lyrics: "If I was gay, I would think hip-hop hates me / Have you read the YouTube comments lately? / 'Man, that's gay' gets dropped on the daily / We become so numb to what we're saying" (Macklemore). As a poem on a page, that's not likely either to gratify liberals or chasten homophobes. But because music that is played to any "scene, action, event," or in this case, lyrical sermon, "seems to disclose to us its most secret meaning, and appears as the most accurate and distinct commentary upon it" (Nietzsche 66), Macklemore's clumsy campaigning appears all the more profound. The widespread enjoyment of Macklemore's music, from a philosophical point of view, is not puzzling; he makes tunes that are "charged with contingent

but powerful associations" and "widely shared across a culture" (Juslin 18) inscribing meaning through easily accessible symbols of language. But what happens when we strip Macklemore's lyrics and we only have Ryan Lewis' instrumental? If a listener responds to what I've called his "sentimental" production, what signifies it as such without the easily interpretable markers of language? This, of course, poses a range of much more difficult questions, ones that can be explored through philosophical and neurological lenses: How does "pure" instrumental music express emotion? Why are negative responses provoked by music, such as sadness, revisited and enjoyed by common listeners (Juslin 21)? Since "only sentient creatures can express emotions," how do musical works, which are not sentient, express happiness, jealousy, and regret (Juslin 25)? Finally, what is emotion?

The latter question should briefly be investigated in order to provide a framework for the music-related inquiries that continually refer to music's appeal to emotion. First of all, we must distinguish the term "emotion" from "feeling" or "mood." Cognitive theory suggests that, although someone may feel angry or jealous, he or she can also feel "hunger pangs, sexual urges, and various itches and tickles, to say nothing of feelings of hot and cold, of heartburn and lower back pain" (Robinson 1). Emotions, therefore, can "involve bodily sensations but are not reducible to them" (Juslin 23). Moods, on the other hand, are not "object-directed and involve general feelings" (Juslin 23), suggesting a state of being "in which one is more apt or ready to get into an emotional state" (Robinson 85). In the mid-twentieth century, many philosophers reacted against the "view that emotions are simply inner feelings," arguing "that emotions should be analyzed as characteristic bits of behavior or as dispositions to behave in a certain way" (Robinson 6). This sort of definition, however, has been abandoned in the most widely accepted theory of emotion today, which can be called the "cognitive" or "judgment" theory.

The judgment theory explains “why the same piece of behavior or tendency to behave in a certain way is sometimes the result of an emotion and sometimes not” (Robinson 7). For example, a murderer could carry out his or her homicidal act because of a hatred for a particular person. The decision to kill can be seen as a result of this hatred. Alternatively, a murderer could commit a homicide because of his or her sense of duty to a gang, terrorist group, etc. In this case, the decision to kill is a result of a sense of duty, not necessarily because of hatred, jealousy, vengeance, or some other predictable emotion that might lead to violence.

Refining the judgment theory, in his 1976 book *The Passions,* Solomon argues that “an emotion is a special kind of judgment,” one that “always involves a personal evaluation of the significance of an incident. It is an evaluative judgment about our selves and our place in the world” (Robinson 10). Central to his theory is that “emotions, like judgments, are – usually, at least – about something or other. Emotions, as philosophers say, have intentionality: they are directed towards something” (Robinson 11). Strange, then, and almost confounding, that instrumental music, which apparently references nothing in the actual world, according to Nietzsche, can have a visceral, emotional effect on a listener. When listeners are saddened by the music’s sadness, “apparently they lack the beliefs that normally underpin such a reaction; for example, they do not think the music suffers, or that the music’s expressiveness is unfortunate and regrettable” (Juslin 21).

How, then, does instrumental music conjure particular emotions without having the necessary rhetorical tools to “convey the contents of proposition” (Juslin 27)? Although music is “highly organized according to quasi-syntactic rules of governance,” there is “not a semantics in music” (Juslin 25) that allows for any sort of elaborate or specific argumentation using music’s “quasi-syntactic rules of governance”; that is, music may be able to refer to or characterize an

emotion, but it cannot defend its thesis using rationality or logic. But music is made using a set of prosodic features – such as contour, phrasing, accent, and volume – and dynamic features – such as pitch, complexity, energy, texture, tension – that can mirror the "character displayed either in the emotion's phenomenological profile, or in the public behaviors through which the emotion is standardly exhibited" (Juslin 27). Additionally, "because music is a temporal art, its expressive character is revealed only gradually, and can be heard only through sustained attention to its unfolding" (Juslin 32). This is why, according to Dr. John Powell, a physicist and classically trained musician, an increase in volume in a music piece can be exciting and can build tension: "our subconscious links an increase in sound volume (people shouting, lions roaring) with possible danger" (141). Many musicians and scholars point, intuitively, if not very empirically, to humanity's primitive experience of sound as a source for our enjoyment of music; Questlove, of The Roots, had this to say about the effects of deep bass:

> There's a certain frequency that will definitely affect you. It's not imaginary or even cultural. It's physical. In the past, if humans felt something that deep, it was a stampede or an earthquake. These days, you feel it, and maybe it takes a second before you realize that you're not about to be killed, but you've been triggered, and off you go (Thompson 123).

Both of these examples, which reflect on volume and bass, respectively, cite fear as the primary emotion elicited by these dynamic structures. This fear or excitement, then, is not abstract or inexplicable, but is intrinsically linked to the corresponding sounds that are associated with dangerous events.

This is all pretty interesting conjecture, but it does not get to the root of music's expressive quality: as a non-sentient entity, does music explicate, within itself, rising fear through an increase in volume? Does a listener perceive a decrease in tempo as an innate emotional signal of the placidity of the music? The *contour theory* proposes that "pieces present emotion characteristics, rather than giving expression to occurrent emotions" (Juslin 31), which means that the dynamic qualities of music resemble emotion characteristics, but do not refer to anything other than themselves. Nietzsche invokes this distinction in his separation of the "universality of concepts" from the "universality of melodies:"

> These universalities are in a certain respect opposed to each other; for the concepts contain only the forms, which are first of all abstracted from perception; music, on the other hand, gives the inmost kernel which precedes all forms, or the heart of things (67).

Although Nietzsche seems to exaggerate the natural, "Primordial" quality of music's power, he does, here, seem to acknowledge the musician as rhetor, as creator of worlds and moods through sound: "When the composer has been able to express in the universal language of music the emotions of will which constitute the heart of an event, then the melody of the song, the music of the opera, is expressive" (67). Listeners who are immersed in a musical piece recognize, most often unconsciously, that they are engaging with a mode that has been created for the sake of immersing them in it. A successful composer conjures accessible emotions that are available on a universal spectrum through sonic techniques, inviting the listener to become absorbed in an artificial environment.

Music's appeal to the emotions can sometimes be recognized as nothing more than a sonic façade, not necessarily representing the actual emotion being invoked by the sound. Visually, a smile supposedly represents happiness, but could mask feelings of anger, depression, etc. In music, a sprightly, upbeat tempo could hide a tone of despondency. In popular music, the contrast between a bright sonic palette and downtrodden lyrical content sometimes produces a surprising emotional effect. If Gorillaz' "On Melancholy Hill" didn't betray its tone with the title, one would probably take the elastic, major chord synth bleeps at face value – the intro to the song sounds positive, even joyous. But when Damon Albarn's filtered, gloomy voice chirps in with – "Up on melancholy hill there's a plastic tree / Are you here with me?" – the jubilant instrumental takes on a completely different, ironic, meaning.

Even if music's expressiveness is, by the nature of its creation, artificial, the emotional responses by its listeners are certainly not. The problem with Peter Kivy's argument, that "those who report emotional reactions to music are confusing the pleasure they take in the beauty of the music, in all of its expressive individuality, with the feeling of the emotion expressed," is that, simply, "people are not often wrong about the identity of their emotions" (Juslin 35). Sure, "we can marvel at the music's complexity and be shocked by its discordant novelty," but many people actually assimilate the emotional character of a song, becoming saddened by a melancholy tune or uplifted by a whimsical jingle, which suggests that while listeners may apprehend a piece of music as not referencing any thing, they nonetheless can imagine things that inspire emotions that the music is encouraging. Even though music cannot itself suffer from its own sadness, it can very effectively summon, for example, "sadness," in its listeners. To return to Nietzsche, we do not pity the dissonant chords or the melancholy melodies, but they nonetheless represent the "universal will" of human emotion that will be applicable to every

listener's experience. They represent the "metaphysical of everything physical in the world, the thing-in-itself of every phenomenon" (65). From music, we "feel our imagination stimulated to give form to this invisible and yet so actively stirred spirit-world which speaks to us, and we are prompted to embody it in an analogous example" (Nietzsche 68).

According to Dr. Stephen Davies, the phenomenon of the "mirroring responses to music's expressiveness…requires rejection or revision of the cognitive theory of the emotions" (Juslin 37) because the response may "feel like sadness or pity, and this makes it true that the music expresses sadness, but the response is not an object-directed, cognitively founded emotion" (Juslin 37). But as I have argued, with Nietzsche's help and a little help from Freud, although music may not be, in itself, sentient, it is a vehicle conveying the vast realm of cathected emotional objects in the entire world of human consciousness. Dr. Davies, in his reluctance to accept music's emotional power, resurrects the essentially discredited behavioral theory of emotion, stating that "listeners are not strongly inclined to act on their feelings; the prime motivators for action are beliefs and desires directed to an emotional object, but these are absent in the musical case" (Juslin 37). As I've mentioned, the cognitive theory, which Dr. Davies claims to support in his analysis, explicitly separates behavior from emotion because of the frequently erroneous assumption of a causal link between them. Therefore, Davies' conclusion, that "music can arouse only rather general feelings, and thereby is capable of expressing only a limited range of emotions" (Juslin 37), is dubious.

Davies' conclusions also seem a little questionable as the introduction to a massive body of academic work that focuses on the concrete psychophysiological responses induced by music. Now the role that science plays in the observation of music's emotional impact is murky because of the tangled "personal, social, and contextual variables" (Juslin 280), but we would be remiss

to ignore the correlation between certain musical effects and the biological responses to them. Most studies reveal, "high arousal or stimulative music tends to cause an increase in heart rate or pulse rate, while sedative music tends to cause a decrease" (Juslin 285), which supports Dr. John Powell's rather obvious conclusion that "increases in tempo, volume and pitch are exciting – and decreases in these three have a calming effect" (142). Only a few studies have been conducted on the effects of performing music on the heart rate, but a particularly interesting one led by Harrer and Harrer found that the "peak heart rate for the conductor Herbert von Karajan occurred during the most emotional passages, rather than those that required more physical exertion" (Juslin 285). Also noteworthy is that "his heart rate was higher while conducting than while flying his jet plane" (Juslin 285), which suggests that emotional investment in performing a musical piece matches, if not exceeds, that of exertion in increasing heart rate.

It is not surprising, then, that a range of other biological responses can be affected by music, including respiration, blood pressure, muscular tension, body temperature, gastric motility, blood-oxygen saturation, and many more. One of the more universally experienced and enjoyed effects of music is the "variety of expressive responses" (Juslin 292) that can be lumped under the heading of "chills." These responses, which include "crying, lump in the throat, shivering, a prickly feeling on the back of the neck, tingling along the spine or in the extremities, and goose bumps" (Juslin 292), have all been consistently supported by empirical evidence. While these responses may not constitute the totality of an "emotion," they all have been linked to emotional states (Juslin 291). Grewe and Sloboda found that "chills were related to distinct musical events, such as a sudden change in dynamics" (Juslin 292). This supports the heavily studied phenomenon of musical expectancy (Juslin 580), which has become recently the most cited and maybe the most important point of scholarship pertaining to music and emotion.

Musical expectancy can be traced to a fundamental, evolutionarily selected human attribute: prediction. Imagining future scenarios, as well as reflexively predicting outcomes in real time, is essential to survival. The cortex, being an "organ of prediction," releases the hormone and neurotransmitter, dopamine, which, recently, has been "linked to the experience of seeking/expectation rather than to the pleasure of consumption/satiety" (Juslin 581). Thus, dopamine's true importance has been recognized as prompting not "the acquisition of particular resources," but the "striving for those resources," which explains why, "when the dopamine system is destroyed, an animal may die of hunger, even when the food is plentiful – simply because the animal is not motivated to eat" (Juslin 581). Repetition in music, then, is not gratifying simply because the stimuli is familiar, but because it encourages our brains to anticipate more of the same in the future.

Understanding how music induces or expresses emotion, under this umbrella of "expectancy," is impossible without recognizing that "music consists of a sequence of sound events that unfold in time. Temporally-rooted phenomena such as anticipation, surprise, and delay underlie important aspects of musically evoked affect" (Juslin 576). Most mainstream research in the psychology of emotion ignores temporality in favor of such visual phenomena as facial expression. Time, however, "permits a listener to engage with a stimulus in an active, predictive way, allowing for dynamic fluctuations in affective responses" (Juslin 576).

How listeners engage with these "dynamic fluctuations" through time depends almost entirely on their sonic acculturation. Musical traditions in the West, East, and Africa all employ different scales, rhythms, and textures that contribute to a listener's learned experience of music. For example, "in Western Music, duple and quadruple meters are more commonplace than triple meters" (Juslin 578). To a Western audience, deviating from this norm is surprising and foreign.

Maybe this is why a triple-time rap cadence, patented by the Atlanta rap trio, Migos, in around 2012, launched them into popularity and spawned innumerable copycats. Today, at least in Western rap music, triple meters have become commonplace, their current lack of novelty perhaps accounting for Migos' descent back into relative obscurity.

Although I generally support the notion that music is a "universal language" that transcends cultural and linguistic barriers, I must acknowledge that the idea of sonic acculturation challenges this because "even if music's expressiveness implicates 'natural' resemblances to behaviors that are trans-cultural in their import, these then are structured according to historically malleable musical conventions of genre and style" (Juslin 34), which makes certain structures and practices foreign to those unfamiliar with them. For example, Turkish music tends to relish in sadness; even a bright, up-tempo backing track usually masks dark, tragic lyrical content. For someone unfamiliar with the Turkish language and its musical customs, the emotional tenor of a piece may be cryptic. But even a cursory knowledge of these customs and a brief exposure to the peculiarities of sound within a culture allow its music to become accessible. Although music may not be quite the "universal language" some hold it to be, it is certainly a lot more immediately accessible than the written or spoken word, which suggests that there might be common ground, across all human cultures, for sonic expression. An American can access and enjoy the music of sub-Saharan Africa and vice-versa – neither party needs the years of practice required to understand the other's communicative language.

As I've stated before, one also does not need to be well versed in music theory to ascertain or explicate the rhetorical effects of music. But in order fully to appreciate the fundamentals of this notion of "musical expectancy," some basic theory must be employed. Many untrained listeners and musicians might be able to distinguish the happy, self-confident

sounds of major chords from the melancholy, mysterious sound of minor chords, without knowing how or why thirds are a half-tone lower in minor key signatures. To put it in layperson's terminology, there are twelve notes to choose from, seven of which make up the major scale. This is the "most closely related group," which "makes them sound good and strong together" (Powell 143). On the other hand, minor keys "involve substituting a couple of the major scale notes for less supportive members of the original gang of twelve," which, even without the addition of a melancholic lyrical accompaniment, results in music that is "generally more mysterious and vague, with less definite punctuation" (Powell 143).

Though Western music generally operates within these major and minor keys, it is important to note that "these two types were selected over time from a larger group of scale systems called modes, which use various combinations of tones and semitones to get from one end of an octave to another" (Powell 151). Working within major and minor key signatures provides familiarity and clarity, which is satisfying, but can also become too obvious and predictable. One way musicians add variety and alter mood is by changing from one key (minor or major) to the other, or by modulating "between different major keys, or between different minor keys" (Powell 145). This practice of modulation, however, usually still represents a fidelity to the scales that we, specifically Westerners, come to expect; when an unfamiliar note, one that might sound "wrong" to the ear, is substituted, this causes surprise. If this pattern of discordancy is repeated and the listener is convinced of its intentionality rather than it being a mistake, listeners often interpret it as a "symptom of impertinence" (Juslin 590). Perhaps this can explain the effect of Future's atonal synth line in his track, "I Serve The Base," upon which I will expand in the third chapter. The pattern of notes, which may have started on a traditional minor

scale, has been shifted slightly in pitch and has been distorted, which contributes to its harsh, raw sound.

According to David Huron and Elizabeth Hellmuth Margulis, this “choreographing” (Juslin 591) of listener expectations evokes a wide range of psychological effects, one of which is the “chills” I alluded to earlier. Among researchers, “there is considerable agreement about acoustical and musical correlates of frisson” (Juslin 594), “frisson” being the pleasurable experience of the “chills.” Besides the most obvious correlate, the “rapid large change of loudness,” others include the “broadening of frequency range, the entry of one or more instruments or voices, the return of a melody, and abrupt change of tempo or rhythm, abrupt modulation, or a sudden change in texture” (Juslin 594). Interestingly, “Music deemed ‘sad’ is roughly twice as likely to evoke frisson as ‘happy’ music” (Juslin 594). But the inducement of the chills may depend heavily on the listener’s emotional state before listening to the music – her particular situation, and the tangled “personal, social, and contextual variables.” Perhaps, then, my having experienced the chills during my first – any many subsequent – listens of Lana Del Rey’s “West Coast” may say more about me personally than it does about the music, and so I’ll risk supplementing all of this science with a personal anecdote.

Just as I have derided Macklemore for his cultural appropriation and corniness, many people, including myself, have accused Lana Del Rey of the same offenses. At some point, for me at least, Lana transcended her own lack of authenticity and actually came to epitomize the gothic drama she plays out in her music. “West Coast” was rolled out prior to the release of her critically acclaimed album, *Ultraviolence,* which came at the beginning of June last year. Because summer was fast approaching, the lazy, shimmering synths and plucky guitars matched the vibe I was experiencing in my own life, inspiring a wave of nostalgia for the previous

summer's trips to the shore, as well as an anticipation of similar ones in the future. The song is down tempo to begin with, but at about the one-minute mark it changes keys and slows down even further, creating a psychedelic atmosphere that plays with our sense of musical expectancy, resulting in the chills – for me at least. Again, the "chills" do not themselves constitute any single emotion, but rather underlie the host of those that are frequently elicited by music, such as "happiness, calm, love, sadness, excitement, and nostalgia" (Juslin 609). For me, the emotions induced by "West Coast" would have been a mixture of excitement and nostalgia. For someone who hates Lana Del Rey and who also doesn't share my memories or nostalgia, all the summery and shimmering synths and decelerandos in the world won't make her like the song.

Through an objective, scientific lens, music's exact effect on the emotions remains in dispute, even with the many studies of the psychophysiological responses to it. As evidenced by my research and my anecdote, many of these effects rely on specific tastes, notions of identity, and acculturation. Lana Del Rey's work may never appeal universally, but if a few million listeners, including me, can buy into her shtick, her music is worth analyzing – not for its universal aesthetic values but for its cultural relevance and rhetorical prowess.

Chapter 3

Composition Pedagogy Theory

Teaching Rhetoric Through Popular Music

Considering someone like Lana Del Rey a rhetor allows the listener to treat her music as a text. Treating music, even of the instrumental variety, as a text, allows the listener to dissect it in the same way one would analyze a poem, novel, or an essay. “There can be little doubt that the primordial affective experience of music can neither be replaced nor fully captured by words” (Juslin 213). We can try, however, and our efforts can yield both philosophical and pedagogical rewards. My hope is that, by using a multimodal approach to teaching composition, students will be more excited about writing as well as encouraged to think critically about sound and music in a way they may never have before.

The idea that composing is a “concept that travels across modalities” (Palmeri 27) is not new. Janet Emig, in her 1971 study, *Composing Processes of Twelfth Graders*, argued, “When people are composing in writing, they are selecting and ordering words; when people are composing a painting or composing a symphony, they are selecting and ordering auditory or imagistic elements” (Palmeri 27). Therefore, not only compositions of literary, visual, and auditory texts can operate under similar principles and vocabularies, but analyses of said texts can function quite similarly as well; if one were rhetorically to analyze a poem for tone and purpose, one could easily transfer these terms to a musical setting, while also taking into account

the vast repertoire of components that are specific to music – such as rhythm, melody, and texture – that contribute to an author's tone or purpose. Compositionists traditionally focus on alphabetic writing in their pedagogical strategies, but Emig radically suggested that English teachers have "much to gain by studying and teaching other forms of composing" as a means of gaining greater insight into "invention (planning) and revision (reformulating)" (Palmeri 28).

Emig's particular brand of composition theory falls under the category of "cognitivism," which focuses primarily on process and the mental structures that drive the process of composing (Berlin, Rhetoric 480). Linda Flower and John Hayes, in their extensive research on the composing process, have come to the conclusion that problem finding is the common thread among all creative enterprises (Palmeri 30). Just as a musician might take the time to "explore the many possible ways she might represent and rearrange" a series of sonic elements, a "writer composing a research-based essay would be well advised to consider a wide variety of sources on a topic, exploring ways he might creatively transform and combine those sources to develop a novel argument" (30, Palmeri). This theory not only connects the compositional strategies used in different modes of art, but it also broadens our concept of art and creativity, especially regarding writing. The term "creative writing" usually refers only to genre-based efforts in poetry, fiction, or creative nonfiction. Because "critical writing" refers to and analyzes these kinds of texts and does not produce "original" content, per se, it is often not considered a creative pursuit. But as evinced by Flower and Hayes' study, the same creative energy is needed to "develop a novel argument" as is needed to paint a still life or write a song.

Either way, the concept of "original" content, the kind apparently produced in music or fiction, is flawed. All art is allusive, and every artist owes some, if not most, of her creative ability to the founders and perpetuators of her particular field. The most obvious example of this

indebtedness is when a producer samples another musician's work. Ideally, a producer will re-contextualize the sample in some way, for an ironic or emotional effect, but often these rips are seen as inelegant, gratuitous, wholesale thefts of an artist's work, which has led to a number of lawsuits recently, especially in the hip-hop industry. But even if a musician is not engaging in the risky game of sampling, her work – if it can be assigned any sort of label from "rock & roll" to "hip-hop" to "ambient" – is either an imitation of, a refinement of, or an expansion upon the existing narrative of the genre. Even pioneers of certain genres, or artists who appear to transcend categorization, cannot be interpreted outside the influence of their predecessors. This holds true for every canonical art form, from the literary to the musical to the visual.

To make these assertions valuable for the composition student, I want to stress the importance of textual reference in any kind of writing. "You should always have a text in front of you when you are writing," is probably the most frequent piece of advice I offer as a tutor in Penn State's writing center. Too often, I engage with essays from students that provide non-specific, sweeping generalizations about concepts. Clearly, many students have not had much practice reading or writing with purpose, which is evidenced by their inability to craft a cogent argument, if any argument is present at all. When reading many papers, I find it obvious that the student has been writing off the top of his or her head, which lends itself to a lot of fluff and little substance. To relate this to music, artists do not just spawn classics from their innate talent and genius; their craft is perfected over years of practice, from studying and analyzing the work of their peers and predecessors. For a musician to create a sophisticated song in any genre, she must first be able to identify the necessary components and their temporal layout, including, but not limited to, rhythm, melody and harmony, depth, and texture. A writer, then, even a freshman composition student, must be able to identify the many rhetorical devices that are used to bolster

an argument – such as syntax, grammar, diction, detail – in order to craft a legitimate argument herself.

For students to be rhetoricians of popular music, they must first be able rhetorically to analyze texts, such as poems and speeches, that are more straightforward and, it could be argued, less complex spatially and temporally. For this hypothetical intro-level course, "Pop Goes the Comp Class," there would clearly need to be a focus on the fundamentals of rhetoric, the historical evolution of the study of rhetoric, and an application of these to a modern conception of composition as well as a modern curriculum. Because every body of thought that has been established about rhetoric –from the current-traditional to the cognitivist to the post-structuralist – has value, I will not align myself with one of them, but rather will pick and choose the aspects of each theoretical model that I see fits into my potential teaching style and working definition of rhetoric. As James Berlin said, "No system can be looked upon as true for all times and places" (Rhetoric 12).

Although the current-traditional paradigm offers invaluable insight on the properties of argument, it tends to oversimplify the writing process as an expansion on a predetermined thesis of a particular subject. From experience, I know that sometimes I do not have my thesis worked out until a few pages have been written. Before becoming a writing tutor, I might not have placed so much importance on process, because I was confident in my writing and never reflected much on my own techniques. Seeing such erratic, unfocused papers from capable, bright students tells me that their writing processes have not been fully cultivated. The other troublesome part of the current-traditional model is its disregard for the audience as part of the rhetorical situation. As I will evince in my next chapter – which examines Future's rhetorical navigation of the hip-hop industry – audience plays a huge role in modern applications of the

rhetorical situation, particularly in the realm of popular music. For these reasons, I cannot wholly endorse the current-traditional model, but I certainly will not deride it nor ignore its contributions.

The cognitivist theory, as I have already briefly investigated, is equally valuable and is probably a direct counter to the product-favoring principles of CTR proponents. This model focuses almost entirely on the writing process, specifically the mental processes of writing that "fall into three stages: the planning stage, further divided into generating, organizing, and goal setting; the translating stage, the point at which thoughts are put into words; and the reviewing stage, made up of evaluating and revising (Berlin, Rhetoric 481)." I cannot support the universal application of this strictly linear, hierarchical notion of composition, nor can I support the fact that, as James Berlin mentions, "The rhetoric of cognitive psychology refuses the ideological question, resting secure instead in its scientific examination of the composing process" (Rhetoric 482). However, as I mentioned earlier, the research by Flower and Hayes does shed light on the commonalities in the processes of composers of all genres and modes of art, which could make critical writing more of an exciting prospect for students if they view it within a more creative, artistic territory.

If I had to align myself with a theoretical model, I would turn towards post-structuralism, which reveals rhetoric as the "subversive, poetic sub-conscious" ("Postmodern") of the supposed logic of language. Sharon Crowley, one of the proponents of this model, states, "Any theoretical discourse that is entitled to be called 'rhetoric' must at minimum conceive of rhetoric as an art of invention, that is, it must give a central place to the systematic discovery and investigation of the available arguments in a given situation" (Composition). In relation to the current-traditional model, which is the dominant paradigm in high school composition studies, post-structuralism

allows for and encourages a writing style that challenges the linear, often restrictive, "five-paragraph" method; importantly, it also conceives of the "arguments generated by rhetorical invention as both produced and circulated within a network of social and civic discourse, images, and events" (Crowley Composition).

In many ways, post-structuralism serves as an amalgamation of what I see as the "best" components of the previous models. Although much of the scientific, psychological research by Flower and Hayes on the composing process remains invaluable, the cognitivist's refusal to engage with ideological variables makes this model somewhat inapplicable to the kind of writing I practice and the teaching I aspire to practice. The current-traditional system provides structure and clarity to both writers and readers, but is ultimately restrictive and limits creativity. For Crowley, the unfortunate fact "is that the situation of the first-year composition course, inside a universal requirement, staffed by a scandalously low-paid and contingently-hired faculty, renders intellectual sophistication a luxury" (Composition).

Current-traditional rhetoric is a notably dated theoretical model, but it is still taught and enforced in high school and middle school because the five-paragraph method is required on standardized tests. Admittedly, the method is workable and effective when writing under time constraints, but the fact that students are carrying with them a constrained, compartmentalized view of reading and writing into college is problematic and is surely the topic for another paper. As a prospective teacher of the first-year composition class, I have to think about how I will engage with my students and improve their writing skills. To do this, I will have to ignite in many of them the idea that writing is an exciting, worthwhile venture. This task might sound easier in theory than in practice, but I hope that music can provide this spark.

Chapter 4

Future: Rapper as Rhetor

In order to demonstrate the application of the theories I have discussed thus far, I will in this section present a rhetorical analysis of the rapper Future's attempts to maintain authenticity and artistic integrity while simultaneously aspiring to mainstream popularity.

"They tried to make a pop star and they made a monster" (Future, Serve), snarls Future on his seminal third album, *Dirty Sprite 2*. The title, signifying a sequel to one of his earliest mixtapes, *Dirty Sprite,* suggests a return to Future's roots as a hardnosed, ruthless street rapper. Future, born Nayvadius Wilburn, cannot be considered a "conscious" rapper in the same manner that Talib Kweli or Common can for their examination of social issues, but he does display an uncanny ability to read the current climate of hip-hop culture, capitalizing on his carefully crafted identity as an authentic street artist, a voice for the thousands of underprivileged kids who occupy the socioeconomic status that Future once did before he gained popularity. But how does one maintain this image in the wake of celebrity status, lavish wealth, and the general capability to remove himself from the harsh realities of the ghetto? This is a perennial problem for rappers who base their narratives on personal struggle: what is there to talk about when their socioeconomic problems disappear? As hip-hop scholar James Peterson puts it, "Being underground is, at best, a temporary and always contested state of authenticity for hip-hop artists" (Peterson 22). Unfortunately, many risen rap stars fail to summon the sense of urgency that fueled their earlier recordings and, although they may have achieved a certain level of respect and renown that cannot be denied, their legacies may be tarnished by a noticeable decline

in creativity or apparent interest in the genre (see, for prime examples, recent output by either Lil Wayne or Jay-Z). Future, at age twenty-eight, still has plenty of time to fade into cultural irrelevancy, but for the time being, in 2015, his cachet has never been higher. To see how Nayvadius Wilburn has catapulted his hip-hop project to near-meteoric heights without watering down his music to conform to traditional pop radio standards, consider the arguments he has made for Future's artistic relevance through his story of redemption.

For all intents and purposes, Future is a pop star. Although he would prefer not to be labeled as such, exemplified by the aforementioned lyric, he sold hundreds of thousands of copies of *Dirty Sprite 2* in the first week, earned his first No. 1 on the Billboard 200, and was featured on the mantel of premier streaming services such as Spotify and Apple Music. Future is big not only with his fan base in the hip-hop community, which is enormous by itself, but in the general music community as well. Ironically, this newfound commercial success comes after a failed attempt to cater to a broader audience on his previous album, *Honest.* According to Future himself, he allowed too many other voices into the decision-making process when creating *Honest.* As a result, he released a respectable, yet uneven album that seemed clearly to be vying for crossover success instead of allowing his street anthems to creep organically onto the charts. So concerned was he with regaining his artistic integrity after the disappointment of *Honest* that he moved from L.A. back to his native Atlanta, where he holed up in the studio for months on end, preparing the content that would eventually lead to *Dirty Sprite 2* (Kelly).

Think of Future as a rhetor, and assume that all of his artistic decisions and even some of his personal life decisions after the release of *Honest* and leading up to *Dirty Sprite 2* all served a rhetorical purpose, which was to reclaim his narrative. On one of the standout tracks of *DS2,* "I Serve The Base," Future sneers, "They should have told you I was just a trap nigga," "they"

being either or both the label executives who tried to make him a pop star and his former fiancé, Ciara, with whom he recently had a very public breakup. With rumors of the split being due to Future's infidelity, this "trap nigga" won't apologize or make excuses but rather brashly asserts his untamed masculinity. He expands on this on tracks such "Groupies," whose refrain, "Now I'm back fuckin' my groupies" (Future, Groupies), is repeated twenty-four times. Misogynistic, aggressive, and offensive, Future gives a shout-out to pretty much any rapper in the history of the genre. What does distinguish him, however, is his acute self-awareness in claiming these three, politically incorrect, attributes and the effect their sounding will have on the listener.

It may seem like a stretch to compare Future's self-conscious playing the "rap game" with the ancient rhetorical teachings of Aristotle. Still, I want to risk connecting Future's keen awareness of the necessity to re-persuade his fan base of his authenticity and at least one of the fundamentals of ancient rhetoric:

> Ancient rhetoricians knew that audiences are never neutral: that is, they never receive a rhetor's discourse neutrally or objectively. The reception accorded any discourse depends as much upon the rhetor's relation to the community and her relation to the issue discussed as it depends upon the content of her discourse (Crowley xii).

In this analogy, Future would be the rhetor and his community would be an audience eager and willing to listen to disrespectful, offensive, if not raw trap music. In a documentary that is addended at the end of *Dirty Sprite 2* as an audio file, Future impersonates the voice of a fan questioning his authenticity: "'[Future] had all these hits and he wrote songs for [this artist and that artist], he wrote R&B songs. But what about now? He came in and there was a time for

him'" (Future, Like). Noticing the kairos of his situation – kairos being an ancient Greek rhetorical term signifying timing and exigence – Future goes on in his own voice to justify the return to his roots: "I came back and dropped nothing but street records. After achieving a certain amount of success in the industry, I realized I needed to come back to my essence, to my core fans, and deliver something that they can accept and feel great about. And accept me as one of their own, like I never left" (Future, Like). The old saw: sincerity is key; once you learn how to fake that, you've got it made.

At this point, I have engaged mostly with Future's prose arguments for his reinstatement as rap's most controversial and polarizing figure; sure, these assertions bolster his image and ethos, but they're ancillary and would mean nothing without convincing evidence that he has redeemed himself by successfully returning to the "authentic" trap music with which he began his rap career.

Trap music, a sub-genre of rap, is characterized by deep, propulsive bass, usually delivered by an 808-drum synthesizer. The rhythm tracks employ an unusually high BPM range, from 130-180 (Classic hip-hop ranges from 70-95 BPM.) Trap's range is characteristic also of techno and EDM, so fans familiar with the latter might expect a fast and hectic sound, which some trap music does employ, but because of complex syncopation and an elongated kick/snare ratio, the trap beats are more often slower, creating a woozy, drugged-out affect. The first to pioneer the sound were Southern rap producers such as Zaytoven, who, when paired with the likes of a gleefully maniacal emcee such as Gucci Mane, propelled the genre into the mainstream. After Gucci Mane went to prison, the torch was passed to another Atlanta native, Future, who, along with Zaytoven and his primary collaborator, Metro Boomin, have taken the

genre into new sonic and lyrical realms, introducing distortion, which adds a new, paranoid, affect, as well as a musicality that is rare in hip-hop, let alone street rap.

The backbone of Future's "I Serve The Base" in *Dirty Sprite 2* is a heavily distorted, atonal synth line coupled with insistent, thunderous 808s. Ornamenting the synth line are digitized yelps and an intermittent *Blade Runner*-esque synth that accentuates the original sequence. Because rap music generally employs simple, repetitive chord structures, most variation comes from production effects, changes in rhythm or drum patterns, and, of course, stylistic choices by the rapper. In this particular track, a simple change at the 1:20 mark of hi-hats from a 16th-note to an 8^{th-}-note pattern provides a welcome release of tension. Future, who often raps in double or triple-time, relies on a subtler approach in this song, offering an in-pocket flow and a resigned, if slightly menacing, tone. To achieve this Future mixes conflicting imagery. When one-liners like, "I was depressed and now my mind back home," are immediately followed by the stanza, "A product of the roaches and them ash trays / I inhale the love on a bad day / Baptized inside purple Actavis," the message suggests that his mind may indeed be "back home," but his home is probably a place of excessive drug abuse and anxiety. The content of Future's lyrics, from "Actavis" to "roaches and them ash trays," deals primarily with ghetto subject matter; however, the contrast between his facility with sophisticated English and the subject matter is what provides unexpected resonance. Future does not just smoke marijuana; he is a "product" of the roaches. Future does not merely drink purple Actavis; he was "baptized" inside it (Future, Serve).

The title, "I Serve The Base," is loaded with implications. First, it testifies to Future's primary purpose in composing *Dirty Sprite 2*: his return to a loyalty to his core fan base. Second and third meanings, organically linked to the first, hint that Future is serving his fan "base" with

lyrics infused with "base" topics that are rapped over beats with a heavy musical "bass." And then there is the base visually implied by the technicolor fog of the album's cover art, which was originally intended for a chemistry text, this one recalling Future's too-enthusiastic indulgence in codeine, Xanax, and other artificial anodynes. Considering that "I Serve The Base" is the second track on *DS2*, which is normally the spot designated for the best or most representative piece of an album, it can easily be deemed the synecdoche not only of this album but even of Future's entire career. Whether any of this is encouraging – for Future, the man, as well as Future, the representative of hip-hop culture – is of course more than debatable. Assuming that his image is not totally affected – which is to say, rhetorical –and that many of his lyrics are less crafted than the unfiltered confessions they try to convince his listeners they genuinely, authentically, are, Future the person might be in big trouble: "His prodigious drug use has moved beyond boasts to cries-for-help; if his lyrics are true, he's doing Xanax and Percocet and Lortabs and molly by the handful, washing it down with Hennessy and the dirty Sprite of the title" (Kelly).

Not only has Future openly admitted to being addicted to drugs; he seems also to be suggesting—see, for example his confessing that "I inhale the love on a bad day"-- that his relationship with fame and his fan base is similarly an addiction. Although taking Future's words at face value might be naïvely to be just taken in by his rhetorical mythmaking, it might be irresponsible to dismiss the literal meanings of the words of a man who takes his validity as an artist and storyteller this seriously; yes, Future may be a rhetor who capitalizes on his deftness with melody and rhythm as well as his knowledge of the leanings of the rap community, but he is also a person who prides himself on being honest, as his last album title overtly indicated. His way of connecting with his "base" audience, those hailing from the ghettos of Atlanta or, more universally, those hailing from any predominantly black, disadvantaged neighborhood in an

American city, is uniquely dependent on his sharing many of their most self-destructive tendencies:

> I'm in a different environment. The majority of the time I'm living lavishly, I'm in a five star hotel or a five star restaurant. But I come from nothing – I come from the streets. So sometimes I go back and I reminisce and I get back into the streets that raised me. And I want to see the people that was a part of my life before my success. And when they see me being successful, maybe that can motivate them to be successful in their lives (Future, Like).

Here Future claims authenticity by claiming that he continually returns to the ghettos that raised him and by maintaining relationships with anonymous ghetto-dwellers who remain there. To translate this to his music, he must preserve the ghetto vibe in the studio; he reminisces about the times when he was poor and hungry and he transfers this energy into his songwriting. Future is very convincing; nobody, to my knowledge, has yet contested his "realness." Future's particular brand, however, poses a moral problem for many hip-hop scholars and black studies academics: "For some artists, 'keepin' it real' means rapping about being a killer and a drug dealer, for others it means critiquing and challenging the artists who think they must rhyme about being a criminal in order to be authentic" (Peterson 21). Peterson clearly, implicitly, would prefer the latter. Future is clearly an example of the former.

I began by conceding that Future cannot be considered a socially conscious rapper – unlike, for example, The Roots, who are "constantly battling colonizing forces within and external to hip-hop cultures, including consumerism, violence, and notions of masculinity"

(Peterson 11). Future seems loudly to endorse and effectively to perpetuate the tropes of "consumerism, violence, and… masculinity." But before writing off Future as just another misogynistic, morally and culturally bankrupt, hip-hopping hooligan, consider that the politics of his unusually self-conscious "trap" implicitly critiques the social conditions of his "base." Referring to the culturally subversive qualities of bebop, Eric Lott claims, "Militancy and music were undergirded by the same social facts; the music attempted to resolve at the level of style what the militancy fought out in the streets" (Peterson 30). Sonically both Future's lyrics and also his performance of them is confrontational and full of tension, which can be said to mirror the social unrest spawned by the recent notorious instances of police brutality in so many U.S. cities. While many, including many African-American opinion leaders, criticized the riots in Ferguson, Baltimore, and elsewhere as a senseless and even hypocritical response to police brutality, many also understood this response to be rational, organic, maybe even necessary and ultimately effective. Killer Mike, a definitively socially conscious rapper, went on *Real Time With Bill Maher* to justify these acts: "People ask, 'Why are you burning down your own community?' Well, because of black people being denied loans, black people being snookered out of their homes, and gentrifiers coming in, they are living in a community they do not own. They are renters" (Real Time).

While Future does not produce outright protest songs that directly comment on these injustices, he does "use cloaked speech and disguised cultural codes," as well as a highly symbolic aesthetic, to "comment on and challenge aspects of current power inequalities" (Peterson 23). Most hip-hop scholars, however, would deem Future's lyrical content as too ignorant for Future to be credited as a valuable contributor to the culture: "Too many rappers actually rap about having the 'flyest chains.' But a popular artist's love for gold chains cannot be

interpreted outside of the memory of the chains that bound slaves during middle passage" (Peterson 74). For Peterson, Future's materialism reflects the same value system that was instrumental in suppressing his own ancestors. But to counter this I would note that the materialism of rappers like 2 Chainz —the fetishizing of gold chains, for example– can represent no ironically blind endorsement of a particularly vicious racist past but rather a radical re-appropriation of formerly racist symbols to re-empower black culture, not unlike the radical re-contextualizing of, for prime example, "nigga." A particularly impressive rhetorical feat accomplished not by any particular rhetor but by an entire, underprivileged, subculture in the U.S.

To say whether Future, himself, would endorse this rhetorical analysis of his artistry is questionable, no matter that it is mostly flattering to him. Reflecting on his music in interviews, he often relies on the nebulous term, "feeling," to describe his approach. "It's all about feeling. When I say, 'I woke up in a new Bugatti,' you could never have driven a car in your life, and you will still sing along to those lyrics" (Future, Like). But he does here capture some of the appeal of his music: a certain, increasingly populous, cohort of listeners perceive the urgency and passion, and resentment, in Future's voice. Even though many, perhaps most, of this cohort might not be able to relate personally to his lyrics or to his background as a child of the black ghetto, we can share vicariously his confidence and his charisma. We root for Future to win, to achieve a raucous and rebellious success in a society that would prefer to have kept him down. In winning, Future "serves the base." The dark side of his music – the side that makes it speak to a wider base – is its anxiety and insecurity. Through his trap poetry, Nayvadius Wilburn conveys a potent mixture of dread and excitement for a Future that awaits an entire millennial culture, both black and white.

Chapter 5

Conclusion

The title of my thesis is “Pop Goes the Comp Class,” but I could also have called it “Hip-Hop Goes the Comp Class”; by now the historically black art form has infiltrated the mainstream and become a backbone of and template for modern popular music. Lana Del Rey’s new album *Honeymoon* employs distinct hip-hop drums for her languid, Hollywood-fetishizing soundscape. Recently Taylor Swift enlisted Kendrick Lamar for a remix of her hit song “Bad Blood.” And Juicy J, founding member of Three Six Mafia, backed up Katy Perry’s anthem “Dark Horse.” Lana, Taylor, and Katy, who have all benefited from rap collaborators and rap song structures, represent the top tier of popular music in the U.S. While Lamar and Juicy J also benefited from these collaborations, both financially and in popularity, most hip-hop artists – even successful, well-known ones – never see the Billboard charts and remain on the fringes of the music business. As hip-hop has been permitted to occupy a small place in the mainstream, traditional family-friendly radio has found a way to commodify the sound and style while suppressing the culture and disguising the content, thereby paradoxically both bringing rap to the forefront of popular music and pushing it to the margins.

In his new Broadway musical *Hamilton*, Lin-Manuel Miranda tries to bridge the historical and cultural gaps between black and white America by using the “aesthetic, political grammar” (Caramanica) of hip-hop to tell the story of founding father Alexander Hamilton. The play, according to *New York Times* cultural critic Ben Brantley, “convinces us that hip-hop and

its generic cousins embody the cocky, restless spirit of self-determination that birthed the American independence movement" (Brantley). By using this hip-hop grammar to convey the narrative of America's inception, Miranda is transplanting a black voice into the very center of the white tradition, as well as ironically managing to compete on the popular music charts with the soundtrack to a musical, a feat rarely seen since the early 1960s. Miranda may not have rewritten history, but he is certainly tagging America's historical beginnings with a black marker, equating the struggles of Hamilton with the struggles of African American ghetto-dwellers: "Like the early gangsta rap stars, the founding fathers forge rhyme, reason and a sovereign identity out of tumultuous lives" (Brantley).

But as progressive and deconstructive as *Hamilton* is, it still raises the same ethical issue as Taylor Swift's appropriation of black culture. In an interview with Jon Caramanica, Miranda says that he has found a way for hip-hop essentially to save musical theater (Caramanica). This seems agreeable enough, but in the context of black art being used to invigorate white traditions and make them cool again, it is, of course, also problematic. Hip-hop, unlike musical theater, does not have to be saved; it is at the vanguard of popular culture, constantly reinventing itself and reestablishing the sonic foundation for popular music. Its popularity among white audiences is and has been vital to its success as a genre, but now that its influence has spread to all corners of the world and all segments of popular culture – not to mention academic culture, as witness Peterson et. al and this very thesis – its own roots have been somewhat forgotten. Silent appropriation breeds forgetfulness.

In no way am I claiming to be a rap traditionalist or a rap historian; no traditionalist would give so much credit to Future, who throws all conventions, including a lot of rap and hip-hop conventions, out the window. I am, rather, a proponent of genre-bending: let rap appropriate

pop sounds, let pop appropriate rap sounds, let distinctions melt away. The problem is that our repressed, sanitized mainstream culture waters rap down. What we get on the radio might sound stylistically like rap music, but it is without any semblance of its identity or culture. Even if we have Kendrick Lamar or Juicy J – two respected, authentic rappers – on a pop record, we don't hear any of their background. We get co-opted versions of these artists who have to pander to the conventions of their white collaborators in order to be heard for the thirty seconds of a song that inevitably makes it appear "cool" to the masses. Juicy J, who is notoriously vulgar and belligerent on his own recordings, contributes a chaste, curse-free, confectionary verse to Katy Perry's "Dark Horse." Here, Juicy J is wholly assimilated into Katy Perry's world – not necessarily a bad or particularly conservative world, but certainly not Juicy J's world.

The world of popular music, that of Hot 100 or XM radio, is a conservative one, however, which is significant because this is the exclusive source of music for most listeners. The entire world of popular music, not just the one curated by corporate radio, is a much vaster one, one that includes the whole repertoires of Future, Kendrick Lamar, and Juicy J – not just their cameos in conventional pop but their full catalogues and mission statements that relay aspects of a lived black experience that is unknown by most, white, consumers of conventional pop. What W.E.B. Dubois once said of Negro Spirituals – "There is no true American music but the wild sweet melodies of the Negro slave" (Du Bois 558) – might be said today of rap and hip-hop. As America staggers and stumbles its way into the twenty-first century, racial injustice continues to be the central irritant to America's complacency. Civic engagement is fundamental to the study of rhetoric, so I think as a rhetorician I have a responsibility continually to remain mindful that race matters. The opening line of Kendrick Lamar's "Alright," which has served as the de facto anthem for the Black Lives Matter movement (it will never be played on your local

radio stations if you live beyond the reach of, say, Hot 97), goes, “Alls my life I has to fight” (Kendrick). If we can look at this fight through this music, and if we consider this music through a rhetorical lens, perhaps we can begin to hear all of what is only marginally represented in the pop mainstream, maybe even reach some sort of understanding of a very real part of America that is hidden from from the sight of too many Americans, the “pure human spirit” that is as present in the underprivileged as it is in their more fortunate contemporaries. A country is only as worthy as its treatment of its least advantaged citizens; the “dead-weight of social degradation partially masked behind a half-named” racial “problem” must be made visible (Du Bois 557). Hip-hop and rap loudly proclaim and fully name this problem. Rhetorical analysis might help to reinforce the agency of what Ralph Elison once famously labeled the invisible man.

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ACADEMIC VITA

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Education

Schreyer Honors College, Pennsylvania State University, September 2012-December 2015.
- B.A. in English
- Honors thesis; Dr. Debra Hawhee, advisor

Study Abroad Experience
- Participant, Study Abroad Institute of European and Asian Studies, spring semester 2015 (Berlin, Germany; Istanbul, Turkey; and St. Petersburg, Russia through Humboldt University)

Hollidaysburg Area Senior High School, high school diploma, 2012.
- Gifted IEP; academic interests: humanities, English, writing, literacy issues
- Member, National Honor Society

Foreign Languages
- German (advanced)
- Spanish (basic)

Work Experience
- Fall 2014-present: Writing Center Tutor, Penn State University
- Summer 2014: Lifeguard, Vairo Village, State College, Pa.
- Summers 2011, 2012, 2013: Lifeguard, Sunbrook Manor Apartments, Duncansville, Pa.
- 2011-2012: Lifeguard, Hollidaysburg Area YMCA

Certifications
- May 2013: National Lifeguard re-certification, Hollidaysburg Area YMCA
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Scholarships and Honors
- Member, National Society of Collegiate Scholars
- 2015: Denny Family Scholarship in English for outstanding academic achievement, Penn State University
- 2015: Study Abroad Grant, Schreyer Honors College, $650.
- 2014-2015: Gerald L. Bayles Memorial Scholarship, Penn State University
- 2012-2015: Academic Excellence Scholarship, Penn State University
- 2013-present: Dean's List, Penn State University
- 2012: "20 Under 20: Future Leaders of Central Pennsylvania" Award, *Altoona Mirror*
- 2011: Frederick Douglass and Susan B. Anthony Award for Outstanding Commitment to Social Justice (presented by the University of Rochester at Hollidaysburg Area Senior High School)
- 2009-2012: President's Education Awards
- 2002-2012: Honor Roll (continuously, elementary through high school)

Scholarships and Honors, *continued*
• 2009: First Place, Lincoln Bicentennial Essay Contest
• 2004: First Place, Maryland Young Authors Writing Contest
• 2003: First Place, *Boston Review* Poetry Contest (judge: Robert Pinsky, former Poet Laureate of the United States)

Community Service and Extracurricular Activities
• 2010-2014: Advisory Board Member, grant writer, and fundraiser for First Book Blair County, a nonprofit organization that provides books for children living in low-income households. I attended board meetings, wrote grants and fundraising appeals, and organized fundraising events.
• Fall 2013: Literacy tutoring internship, Adult Learning Center, Central Pennsylvania Institute of Science and Technology, Pleasant Gap, Pa.
• 2010-2013: Judge, Cheerios New Author Contest
• 2012: Participant, Leadership Jumpstart, Penn State University
• 2011: Organizer and volunteer instructor, "Just for Kicks" soccer program for ages 6-11, Hollidaysburg Area YMCA.
• 2009-2010: Leadership Blair County Youth program of the Blair County Chamber of Commerce (Class of 2010).
• 2008-2012: Varsity soccer team (starter), Hollidaysburg Area Senior High School (2010 District Champions)
• 2011: Varsity tennis team, Hollidaysburg Area Senior High School
• 2007: Organizer, "Home Runs for the Homeless" program; personally raised more than $2,000 for the Emergency Shelter Project Homeless shelter in Altoona, Pa., by initiating and implementing this fundraising program.
• 2006-2007: Youth Advisory Board Member, Hollidaysburg Area Public Library