Part One

Ben: So, I wanted to start this remix lecture with an excerpt from Public Enemy's iconic song "Fight the Power" for two reasons. First, this is a great example of the DJ as producer as griot. The production team for this song, The Bomb Squad, layered this introduction with so many samples that really funnel the band's influences—that's James Brown, Sly and the Family Stone, Funkadelic—into the beat of the song making it a part of the present where Chuck D can build on this work through his lyrics, which ask his audience to build a better future. Second, I love that the rapper, Chuck D, name drops one of the samples. That line—"sound of the funky drummer—is an allusion to the drumbeat being sampled. That is Clyde Stubblefield's performance on James Brown's song "Funky Dummer," but it has since been used in, like, countless hip-hop songs. It's incredibly iconic. Just give it a listen:

(Clyde Stubblefield from James Brown's "Funky Drummer")

Anyway, before we jump too far into today's lecture, I feel like I should do some housekeeping stuff. First, I have not listened to your sonic reflections or your audio essays. My life, just like everyone else's, is hectic right now. Last week I did personal conferences with all of my 101 and 201 students— that's roughly 64 Zoom conferences, and I was fucking tired. However, I did have time to read through y'all's comments to each other on *Slack*, and I am really impressed by how carefully you listened to one another and how generously you provided feedback. I also eavesdropped on your discussion of the English exit exam, which gave me a really good chuckle. Please go ahead and keep using *Slack* as a space to talk and share ideas. You can also ask me questions on there—I just turned on notifications, so I will respond to anything on *Slack* as quickly as if you emailed me. So, if you have a question that you think other people might want an answer to as well, like you want some clarifications on Sonic Reflection 8 or something—just go ahead and ask it on *Slack*, and I will answer publicly.

To that point, someone did ask me to clarify Sonic Reflection 8, and I told them to think of it in terms of Adam Banks's explanation of the DJ as griot. Banks argues that the griot is a time-binder—a historian, adviser, and keeper of the culture—who brings the past to bear on the present moment and enables us to envision new futures. This, I think, is important because we often see the past as either separate from the present—and maybe the present separate from the future—or the past as determining the present or determining the future; however, Banks, quoting Manning Marable, argues that the griot has a more complicated understanding of temporality: "The Black intellectual must *actively* engage the past in such a way that it tends to obliterate the boundaries that appear to divide the past from the present, and from the future" (53). Still, this is not simply determinative as the griot is also and advisor who helps the community to transform the culture of which they are a

part (27). The griot's role is inherently communal. Banks claims that the griot's role is "not to 'break 'em off' with all he or she knows or even to 'break it down' as if the griot has all the knowledge relative to a given situation but to create conditions where a community creates its own collaborative texts" (51).

Now, I am not asking you all to create a communal history; instead, I am asking you to tell me a personal story, which is also fairly griotic. As Banks, paraphrasing the work of Beverly Moss, says, "One final rhetorical strategy that the preacher as griot must employ is identification. He or she not only must be able to tell *the* story but also must be willing to share *his* or *her* story in order to create a relationship with the audience" (50). So, I am asking you to tell the class the story of your education: where you came from, where you are, and where you are going. And, I am asking you to do this like a DJ by mixing, layering, breaking, scratching, sampling, looping, fading, and doing what you can to take them *there* (5). This is a pretty amorphous prompt, and I really encourage you to have fun with. Play with samples, play with layering, do some weird sonic shit and take us there. Most importantly, remember that the lexicological (that is the linguistic meaning) isn't always the most important part of the story. Play with sound.

So yeah, that is Sonic Reflection 8, besides that I think the changes I am making to the course in order to make it fit an online format are pretty straightforward. I decided to make the course asynchronous because I don't know what y'all's lives and schedules look like now that we can't be on campus, so I am not going to demand you be somewhere at a specific time. I decided to post an audio lecture each week because this is a sound class—also, audio allows you to listen to me while doing other activities—though there is a transcript if you want to read along. And just as an aside, I did not type our all of the lyrics to the music in the transcript; instead, I included link to the *Genius* pages so you can check them out it you are interested. I decided to post the lecture every Wednesday because it split the difference between our Tuesday meeting time and our Thursday meeting time. I decided to keep the sonic reflections both because I think they are educational and because it provides a rhythm for the course. Besides that, personal conferences will be held via Zoom, and I already created the sign-up sheet for the Week 15 conferences—you can access it on *Slack* now. Though that sign-up sheet is not just for y'all; it is also for my 201 students and my 101 students, so sign up for a meeting time asap.

And that should take care of housekeeping stuff, which is good because I am tired of talking. Let's take a minute or two to listen to a few famous, though fictional, Black radio DJs through time, and then we will come back and talk about Banks's book. Just a content warning, there are references to drugs, genitalia, sex, and violence in these samples, so if that's something you're not comfortable with, just skip ahead about three or four minutes.

[*Parliament's "P. Funk (Wants to Get Funked Up))*](#)

Part Two

Ben: Alright. I'm back. Let's talk about the book. I'm actually really happy with the logical progression of the course sequence here. We started with Ceraso, who was really interested in how we experience sounds with our bodies; then, we read Ratcliffe, who was interested in how we use sound to relate to other individuals; now, we are reading Banks, who is invested in how we use sound to build community. So, we are slowing moving ourselves away from the self and towards the world writ large. I didn't plan on this, but I am really happy about it.

Now, Banks starts his book claiming that he is hoping "to scratch, to interrupt, to play a while in the grooves of two records—[1] disciplinary conversations about African American rhetoric and [2] those about multimedia writing.—to begin to blend and loop them while posing one question: how can African American rhetorical traditions and practices inform composition's current endeavors to define, theorize, and practice multimedia writing?"

So basically, Banks wants to use African American rhetorics to inform how the discipline of rhetoric understands writing across multiple media—that's music, oration, writing, digital media, etc.—how do we do this is the twenty-first century. And, more specifically, Banks wants to build this understanding using the "everyday practices of everyday people," what he refers to in Gramscian terms as "organic intellectuals" who construct culture from the bottom up (2-3). For him, the DJ is one such figure because the DJ is a griot. For Banks, this relationship to the griot means that the DJ is a rhetorical actor, a canon maker, a time binder, someone who is sustained by the local communities of which they are a part. As a griot, the DJ combines cultural knowledge with creativity, technical skill, and knowledge of their audience to create important and effective texts. However, Banks isn't really always talking about actual DJs in this book; rather he uses the practices of the DJ to think through a wide range of compositional practices: "I use the theoretical or conceptual work that the mix, remix, and mixtape do as lenses or ways to contextualize my study of a wide range of [B]lack multimedia rhetorical practices" (7).

So, aside from a brief chapter summary, that's the introduction. Chapter One, then, starts with a discussion of the importance of multimedia in rhetoric and composition, and he cites Andrea Lunsford's statements about the importance of delivery—that's the fifth canon of rhetoric—as evidence for this claim. He then discusses how white scholars tend to write scholarship on multimodal rhetorics that use remix without thinking about the (Black) culture in which remix was created. He says this appropriation means that scholars don't often seen the:

wide range of cultural practices, multiple literacies, rhetorical mastery, and knowledge of traditions that DJs in the [B]lack traditions represent that make them griots, link them to other griotic figures, and offer a model for writing that thoroughly weaves together oral performance, print literacy, mastery and interrogation of technologies, and technologies that can lead to a renewed vision for both composition and African American rhetoric. (13)

From here, after a brief note about how anyone arguing against Ebonics in the classroom needs to be retired, Banks provides us with a brief history of linking technologies with Black identity including Ishmael Reed's character Pap LaBas, Ted Grace's pedagogies, and the story of Shine and the Titanic before moving onto thinking about the DJ as griot specifically. For me, the most interesting part of this section is the definition of griot he gives on page sixteen, "an archivist, a canon maker, time binder, someone with an encyclopedic knowledge of traditions, a searing and searching awareness of contemporary realities, and the beat matching, text-blending abilities to synchronize traditions, present realities, and future visions in that future text" (16). This works really well with his definition just seven pages later on page twenty-three, where he says:

Binding time, linking past, present, and future, the griot is keeper of history, master of its oral tradition, and rhetor extraordinaire, able to produce or perform on demand for whatever segment of the tribe requires it and whatever the situation demands—celebration, critique, preservation, connection. The griot and the tradition of stories that makes up the griot's craft reflect both participation in and resistance to the larger order and link past, present, and future, even in the midst of physical and psychic dislocation. (23)

And its important to remember that this is not a passive role. The griot interprets current events, raises social critique, entertains, and passes down communal values (25). This is an extremely important and active role in the community, one that Banks claims is central to African American life.

He then goes on to list the characteristics and practices of such griots—be they DJs or something else—on page twenty-six. Now, I am not going to read that entire list, but I will note these characteristics combine abstract skills like audience awareness, ethical comportments, and cultural knowledge with concrete skills like the ability to research, compose, and move between media. He highlights four of these characteristics in particular: knowledge of cultural history, mastery of technology, knowledge of their audience, and connection to the community. I think this is what makes these griots digital. It's their engagement with contemporary technologies and their "intense commitment to craft that rhetorical excellence requires" (30). Its not enough to have a message, a digital create has to be able to create a legitimately engaging text in order to be an effective rhetor, and that requires technical skill

And, really this kind of skill is vital to any rhetor, especially one who cares for their audience and is part of the community, which I think leads us to Chapter Two, but I need another break. So here is a solo DJ track called "Lesson 6: The Lecture," from Jurassic Five's self-titled album, which was released back in 1998. If you're not into this, just skip like five and a half minutes. Enjoy!

[*Jurassic 5 "Lesson 6: The Lecture"*](#)

Part Three

Ben: Hello again. Let's talk about Chapter Two. If the Introduction provides us with the questions, topics, frameworks, ethical considerations and scholarly conversations that guide this study; and Chapter One introduces us to the figure of the griot, the digital griot, and the DJ as digital griot, then Chapter Two is all about how thinking griotically, like a DJ, can help us to engage with the community.

And Banks starts with the idea of the mix—the sampling, arranging, and layering aspects of music or writing. The mix is individualistic—every artist mixes differently—and Banks contends, "a writer's particular mix and the view of music, language, and tradition that it espouses might be as important as a linear vocal or instrumental performance, that it *is* the performance, that it is the point, the thesis, the argument" (35). And Banks uses this idea of mix to think about the community work he did in Syracuse when he was just an Assistant Professor—like me!

He tells us his moves pretty straightforward on page thirty-six

> After exploring the role the griot might play in guiding one's approach to community work, I present some of the story of how I have tried to build on this approach and then offer an outline of a community course based on the digital griot—a course that present my take on the theoretical and pedagogical mixes that are necessary to teaching writing and to teach African American rhetoric in a multimedia sense. (37).

So—after a brief discussion about Common, Mr. DJ, and Questlove—Banks starts talking about community work, and why he has been tentative to do any or to talk about any of the work that he does do. He starts by sharing concerns that scholars who do service-learning, study community literacies, or generally engage with or study groups outside of the academy are just pimping their services to build their own scholarship and secure their careers. He worries, "they don't *really* care about the folk"; however, he acknowledges that this is a fairly misguided argument, most scholars do care, but there are good critiques of community work nonetheless (40). Namely, the problem is that some scholars use communities to do literacy work, rather than using the literacy practices in which they have expertise to help build and strengthen communities; Banks specifically calls out Lorraine Higgins, Elenore Long, Linda Flower, and Ellen Cushman for doing this. And he identifies the need for "critical distance" as articulated by David Coogan as the problem for this.

And this critical distance is a problem for Banks, who wants to identify and be a part of the communities he is working with. So, he looks at two models for this kind of engagement: Beverly Moss's work with African American churches and Manning Marable's guide for Black activist scholars. From Moss's work, Banks learns that the griot—in this case the preacher—has to engage in community knowledge building practices. It is not enough for the griot to lecture an audience, they need to enable the audience to participate. It is not about distributing knowledge, it is about creating—co-creating—knowledge as a community. From Marable, Banks learns that the activist must be "Time binder. Permanent persuader. Civic actor. One who actively works to build community, works with community, speaks to and, at times, on behalf of community. Committed to the poor. Willing to resist. Working toward transformation rather than reform" (54).

Then, Banks tells us his own story. He, apparently, never wanted to be a public intellectual like Cornell West, Michael Eric Dyson, bell hooks, Adolph Reed, Kimberle Crensahw, Robin Kelly, or Derrick Bell; rather, Banks wanted to do local community work (56). And he got his opportunity when a senior scholar pushed him into setting up a working group for a grant she had recently acquired. Banks talks about how he mixed this community group to engage Syracuse's African American community. He talks about the topics, the advertising, the location, the conversations, the projects, the successes, and the failures. He even provides us with synopses of nine subsequent courses and writings from two participants.

He then ends the chapter by giving us a guide to creating such a course. He provides us with course goals, readings, and activities. I mean you could read this Chapter, and then go create your own community group, but I don't think that's exactly Banks's goal. He is aware that mixes are idiosyncratic. He offers us his mix in hopes that we might better create our own. He also offers us this insight:

> No mix is perfect, and no mix is ever guaranteed to work, but the mix as a set of rhetorical practices that asks rhetors to value layering, balance, transition, timing, priority, proportion, and selection can allow a synchronizing of multiple discourses and a synthesizing of difficult binaries even as it allows a place to stand within those discourses and binaries, no matter how temporary such a stance might ultimately be. (84)

So, yeah. That's all I have to say about the Banks readings for this week, and I think instead of ending with another DJ example, I am going to end with just a damn well mixed song, one that fits with Banks's own old-school aesthetic. Enjoy Marvin Gaye's "Inner City Blues (Make Me Wanna Holler)."

Peace.

(Marvin Gaye's "Inner City Blues (Make Me Wanna Holler)