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“Goddamn That DJ Made My Day”:
The Hip-Hop DJ’s Use of the Kairotic Moment

by

Justin M. McCarthy

A Thesis

Presented to the Graduate and Research Committee

of Lehigh University

in Candidacy for the Degree of

Master of Arts

in

English

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“Goddamn That DJ Made My Day”: The Hip-Hop DJ’s Use of the Kairotic Moment
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Abstract

The purpose of this project is to advance the discussion on the ancient Greek term “kairos” by uncovering and analyzing the ways in which it can be used as a tool for social justice and liberation. As a scholar of Hip-Hop culture, I initially found the ancient rhetorical device becomes useful in the study of DJing, especially with respects to composition. As the foundational element of Hip-Hop culture, I understand that the art of DJing is vastly understudied. It has come to my attention that DJing can be studied not only for its compositional implications or its technological invention, but also for the art form’s capacity to strategically promote unity for underrepresented or marginalized groups and foster community through its use of rhetoric. In this essay, I will attempt to locate the social justice implications of hip-hop culture, while examining the importance of kairos to the rhetorical and compositional strategy of the Hip-Hop disc jockey.

*Now Dr. Seuss and Mother Goose both did their thing
But Jam Master's getting loose and D.M.C.'s the king
Cause he's adult entertainer, child educator
Jam Master Jay king of the crossfader
He's the better of the best, best believe he's the baddest
Perfect timing when I'm climbing I'm a rhyming apparatus
Lot of guts, when he cuts, girls move their butts
His name is Jay, hear the play, he must be nuts
And on the mix, real quick and I'd like to say
He's not Flash, but he's fast and his name is Jay.*

"Peter Piper", Run D.M.C.

When analyzing Hip-Hop culture and its rhetorical devices, most envision the emcee. The emcee, or rapper, is the clever wordsmith conveying rhythmic poetry over drum patterned beats. Over the past forty-years, the emcee has been praised, studied, and memorialized from inner-city barbershops to the ivory towers of the academy. The lyrical technique and ability of The Notorious B.I.G., Rakim, Eminem, Lauryn Hill, Nas, and many more are common conversation within Hip-Hop circles. Much of Hip-Hop scholarship focuses on this cultural subject and his/her oratory skills, style, and use of rhetorical technique, while unfortunately other elements of Hip-Hop culture are ignored and understudied. Rhetorical techniques are practiced and conducted by all the performing elements of Hip-Hop, including rapping, graffiti writing, b-boying (break dancing), and especially, the art of DJing.

A Hip-Hop DJ's location, whether it is a dance club, concert hall, or a battle, is a space of persuasion. It is an individual, armed with only two turntables, a mixing

console, and a set of speakers communicating to an audience. It is the DJ's responsibility to move the audience, to encourage emotional response, to shock the crowd, and to interact with the listeners. A DJ can remix preexisting music, blend genres, and break rules to incite a crowd and maximize excitement. The DJ is judged solely by the audience, as they attempt to compose sets, which aim to communicate ideas and foster community. This forty-year-old art form is indeed about skill and technique, but most importantly, it is about timing.

The Hip-Hop DJ is the cornerstone of Hip-Hop culture. It was the DJs of New York City who are responsible for the initial development, growth, and dissemination of the culture. From DJ Kool Herc, throwing the first Hip-Hop party in 1973 to the thousands of DJs currently travelling the globe, the message has always been the same, to quote Hip-Hop legend KRS-One, "Peace, Love, Unity, [and] havin' fun." ("Classic") While the emcee has been the center of attention within the culture, as well as by those who conduct academic research on the culture, DJs have been at the forefront of technology, creativity, and have reached every corner of the earth by "talking with their hands." Professor Tricia Rose argues, the "mixture of orality and technology is essential to understanding the logic of rap music; a logic that, although not purely oral, maintains many characteristics of orally based expression and at the same time incorporates and destabilizes many characteristics of the literate and highly technological society in which is practitioners live." (85) Rose calls for an understanding of Hip-Hop's participants as technologically advanced musicians, which I believe one must be to engage in the art of DJing. As an element of the larger culture, audiences, through their interaction,

inventiveness, and as previously stated, their timing, judge DJs in a number of ways. As a rhetorical practice with such a strong focus on keeping time and improvisation, I thought it interesting to measure this practice against theories of more traditional modes of rhetoric. In this essay, I examine contemporary theories surrounding the ancient Greek term, “kairos”, or the opportune moment, and its relation to the Hip-Hop DJ, in order to highlight the use of Hip-Hop culture as a social justice tool.

I also wish to address my application of an ancient Greek oral tradition to examine an Afro-diasporic cultural production. It is not my intention to hoist European derived thinking above other paradigms or theories, but rather to engage with contemporary composition scholars who aim to understand and enhance the field. Many Afrocentric theories, such as “call and response”, offer suggestions about the timing practices of Hip-Hop, but I believe kairos is a theory, which will in tandem, illuminate the power of Hip-Hop DJing as a rhetorical tool.

Before discussing the power of kairos and how the Hip-Hop DJ possesses and accesses this power, I wish to examine why the DJ is important to Hip-Hop culture and historically disenfranchised communities. Over the last few decades, scholars produced an acceptable amount of Hip-Hop related scholarship and it seems that there are some disputes as to what the initial project was for Hip-Hop. I believe some critics have romanticized the foundation of the culture and have in turn, created a nice, clean folktale of disadvantaged youth, overcoming their woes through artistic expression. Other accounts, like Dan Charnas’ book, *The Big Payback*, frame the foundation of the culture as a pure business venture for all those involved. Although I believe there are

true aspects to both of these retellings, it is my contention that social justice and liberation has always been the project and goal of Hip-Hop culture.

DJing as a Social Justice Practice

In order to properly analyze the role of Hip-Hop culture as a tool for social justice, we must first examine the formation of this cultural phenomenon. KRS-One, a Hip-Hop pioneer and now elder statesman, maintains in a radio interview conducted on the TRGGR Radio show at the University of Massachusetts-Amherst's station WMUA, that to discuss the history of Hip-Hop culture, one has to first understand that Hip-Hop is a culture comprised of multiple elements. Secondly, he argues that for one to truly embrace Hip-Hop culture, one must seek the origins of the culture. He argues:

“There is a difference between history and origins; you can't have a real history without a comprehension of an origin. Not how did something come about, which is history; this happened, this happened, but why did something happen. We are never going to have true history until we get this origin right. The origin of Hip-Hop has less to do with “A” happened, then “B” happened, then “C” happened then “D” happened. The origin has to do with what were the causes, what were the events in nature that caused Hip Hop to be.” (Turner, T. Rose)

What the revered Hip-Hop legend means by this is that we must obtain a comprehensive knowledge of the socio-economic and political world from whence Hip-

Hop emerged, in order to understand how the culture came to be. Through this formulation, Hip-Hop culture does not start with the coining of the term Hip-Hop or the first rhymes recorded, but is rather tied to other African diasporic cultural traditions, American and global politics, and the economics of space and time.

The many folk narratives of Hip-Hop culture have different origin points, as some wish to connect the culture to earlier African-American culture traditions and genres. It is fair to argue that Hip-Hop is connected to the spirituals of the Southern plantations, as well as to the generations of blues and jazz musicians throughout urban America. Author and activist, Sister Souljah, argues “when you hear the tribal beat and the drums, they are the same drums of the African past...” (Rose, 62) This viewpoint of Hip-Hop’s origin story is rather narrow and for the exploration of this essay, we need to think more broadly about the influences of Hip-Hop culture. It is imperative to understand the larger scope of events which have created the culture of Hip-Hop. Tricia Rose in her seminal text, *Black Noise: Rap Music and Black Culture in Contemporary America*, upholds the idea that Hip-Hop is derived from earlier generations, but argues that the culture is specifically unique to its time and space. Rose maintains, “Rap’s black sonic forces are very much an outgrowth of black cultural traditions, the postindustrial transformation of urban life, and the contemporary technological terrain.” (63) Therefore, this essay also attempts discover the uses of Hip-Hop as a social justice tool by uncovering the social conditions which fostered the inspiration to create the culture of Hip-Hop.

Jeff Chang in his canonical Hip-Hop Studies text, *Can't Stop, Won't Stop, A History of the Hip-Hop Generation*, highlights the notion that "Master Architect" Robert Moses' construction of the Cross-Bronx Expressway was a leading factor in the development of the socioeconomic conditions which crippled the South Bronx throughout the latter half of the 20th century. Rose adds to this conversation by stating, "Moses's Cross-Bronx Expressway supported the interests of the upper classes against the interests of the poor and intensified the development of the vast economic and social inequalities that characterize contemporary New York." (31) Chang notes that as residents became displaced, poverty grew, political power became limited, small businesses began to fail, and crime rates rose, white residents, largely supported via the G.I. bill (which disproportionately supported white veterans), migrated north to the suburbs of Westchester County, New York. (12) As affordable public housing replaced the former homes of the South Bronx, poor African-American and Latino families moved to these former Jewish and Italian neighborhoods, for their piece of the American Dream. Chang characterizes this plan as "a modernist catastrophe of massive proportions" due to the 60,000 Bronx residents that were "caught in the crosshairs of the Expressway" (11). As hundreds of thousands of jobs eventually left the South Bronx and slumlords began to recruit African-American and Latino youth to burn properties down for insurance money, we began to see a dire community fighting for survival.

As one might suspect, with such overtly grotesque concentrated poverty in the South Bronx, all aspects of life suffered, especially education. As former generations of African-American and Latino youth in the 1950s and 60s were afforded musical training through public education and community organizations, such as churches, the youth of the South Bronx were searching desperately for a tool for self-expression. Rose believes “hip hop transforms stray technological parts intended for cultural and industrial trash heaps into sources of pleasure and power.” (22) It is the ingenuity of black and brown youth of the South Bronx which created the culture of Hip-Hop.

In 1973, a young Jamaican-born DJ by the name of Kool Herc (short for the divine hero, Hercules), lived in the South Bronx and brought with him a cultural practice, which would inspire what we now know as Hip-Hop. Championing a style of music production that incorporated chanting over records and seamlessly blending records together, Kool Herc became the world’s first Hip-Hop DJ. I wish to be clear that it was a DJ, which brought this new style of music production and performance to New York City and realized that young people needed hope, fun, and positivity amidst the burnt-down apartment complexes and the danger of street life. It was the DJ, Kool Herc, who hosted the first Hip-Hop party on August 11, 1973 in a recreation center located at 1520 Sedgwick Avenue in the South Bronx. Influenced by Herc’s music and style, young people all over the Bronx and eventually the rest of New York City began collecting records, so that they too could control the crowd at the next community event. Rose points out that “Early DJs would connect their turntables and speakers to any available

electrical source, including street lights, turning public parks and streets into impromptu parties and community centers.” (51) These young Hip-Hop DJs were creating space for community development and engagement, while pushing forward a new cultural phenomenon. The DJ is the cornerstone of Hip-Hop culture and the first generation of Hip-Hop DJs set out to re-imagine their communities and inspire change.

As more young people were inspired to become DJs throughout the late 70s and 80s, this newly formed community set criteria, which mostly highlighted creativity and precision. To be praised, accepted, and supported as a DJ, you need to be able to sonically capture and connect your audience. In the early 1970s, there was no such thing as an emcee yet, and there most certainly were no rap recordings. Therefore, DJs imagined remixing and reengineering previously recorded music and repurposing preexisting technologies. Old family turntables were now being coupled and the “break” sections of old funk, disco, jazz, and soul music were being seamlessly blended together through tempo manipulation. The mixing and blending of records became the primary technique of DJing. As later generations incorporated “scratching” and “toasting” (which would later become emceeing), mixing was the most essential skill that a DJ could possess. This technique of mixing and blending sounds together allowed for DJs to create specific moods, evoke reaction, and tell stories. As a competitive practice, DJs often held battles to see who could impress an audience more with their performance. Afrika Bambaataa, another well-known DJ of the inaugural generation, was known for battling and shocking the audience through repurposing music and sounds into dance

music. An example of Bambaataa's style and creativity would be mixing disco or soul break beats with familiar children's albums, such as School House Rock, which would be an unpredicted pairing. The ability of the DJ to insight emotion was measured by the crowd's response to the mix. Unbeknownst to these young musicians, their creativity and ingenuity would eventually captivate minds and spirits around the globe, becoming one of the world's most popular communicative tools.

With mixing being the most important technique of the Hip-Hop DJ, timing is unequivocally critical to this skill. As DJs begin to create stage names, many boasted about their skill and ability. Names such as "Mix Master Mike", "Grand Master Flash", and "DJ Quik", were monikers that represented certain skills that DJs felt they possessed. Rose finds that like "many African and Afrodiasporic cultural forms, hip hop's prolific self-naming is a form of reinvention and self-definition. (36) Among the ruin and the desolate, black and brown youth were able to reinvent themselves through naming, into superheroes tasked with uplifting their communities. Henry Louis Gates also comments on the practice of naming in African descended cultures in his foundational text, *Signifying Monkey*. Gates argues that naming be "drawn upon as a metaphor for black intertextuality". (87) Both Rose and Gates view the naming practices of the Hip-Hop generation as a necessary strategy for self-realization and survival. In the context of Hip-Hop culture, being the fastest and most precise DJ on the "wheels of steel" earned you top honors in the community and brought in more gigs, publicity, and opportunities to lead the community. As we see with just a few of the legendary DJ names, there has

always been an importance of timing to the art of DJing, and later I will discuss why the concept of “kairos” is central to our understanding of Hip-Hop as a tool to promote social justice and liberation.

The sense of hostility and hopelessness that emerged as a byproduct of the harsh social conditions in the South Bronx culminated in the early rhymes of Hip-Hop artists. The cultural production of young people growing up amongst these conditions became reflective, personal, and untamed. Rap music became a mirror into one of America’s most volatile ghettos, which became a theme for rap artists, which continues into the contemporary moment. In DJ Grand Master Flash’s 1982 socially conscious record, “The Message”, Melle Mel (A member of Flash’s crew) explains with precise intent the nature of living amidst crime, abject poverty, and communal dysfunction. Melle Mel lyrically paints a portrait of the South Bronx during this period on the last verse on the track. The emcee writes:

A child is born with no state of mind
Blind to the ways of mankind
God is smilin' on you but he's frownin' too
Because only God knows what you'll go through
You'll grow in the ghetto livin' second-rate
And your eyes will sing a song called deep hate
The places you play and where you stay
Looks like one great big alleyway

(“The Message”)

The harsh reality and rawness of New York City’s ghettos comes alive in these lyrics. Melle Mel begins by producing a Christian framework to portray how the socioeconomic conditions of the South Bronx will oppress individuals within the society. The emcee conjures the image of the Supreme in order to critique mankind’s place in the oppression and subordination of poor folks of color in the United States. As Melle Mel continues in the verse, he comments on the intense effects of poverty, where entire communities become “great big alleyway[s].” (“The Message”) The individual, who is the focus of the record becomes subjected to the treatment of a system unwilling to change. Melle Mel articulates that the subject will admire those involved in illegal underground economies, drop out of school, and eventually commit suicide as a casualty of the prison industrial complex. The emcee commences his verse with the following words:

It was plain to see that your life was lost
You were cold, as your body swung back and forth
But now your eyes sing the sad, sad song
Of how you lived so fast
And died so young

(“The Message”)

In this pivotal verse, Melle Mel brilliantly evokes the image of the human eyes to portray the pain of being subjected to a world of poverty and violence. The verse starts with the eyes of the subject singing hatred for the world and ends with the image of sad, unfulfilled eyes, as the subject meets their demise. The story told on this recording is an early example of how Hip-Hop artists are committed to social transformation, as these young people were consciously objecting to the world they inherited.

Kairos and the Hip-Hop DJ

In her 2004 book, *Bodily Arts*, Professor of English at Pennsylvania State University, Debra Hawhee compiled numerous nuanced theories on the ancient Greek term *kairos* to help map the rhetorical limitations and possibilities of the subject. Through studying the contemporary scholarship on these ancient philosophies of rhetorical timing, I was amazed at how related the practice of DJing is to the concept of *kairos*. Hawhee begins her chapter on *kairos* by delineating the difference between *kairos* and another ancient Greek term relating to time, *chronos*. She contests that as *chronos* is concerned with the quantity of time, “*kairos* marks force.” (66) It is in the *kairotic* moment where, as Hawhee argues, “quality, direction, and moment[s] of discursive encounters” occur. (66) For the rhetor, it is a brief window or moment in time that calls not for a decision, but the right decision. In speech, capitalizing on the *kairotic* moment is critical and powerful, but I argue that it is just as central to the practice of DJing within Hip-Hop culture. As DJing is about communicating emotion and producing affect from an audience, it is imperative that the DJ’s timing and selection is exact. Therefore, minimizing mistakes within a DJ’s performance produces little opportunity for criticism from an audience. Similar to a speaker or poet, there are moments or pockets of time presented to DJs as opportunities to capitalize and maximize response from an audience. This sometimes-hard lesson can be found in the words of the poet Pindar as he wrote about speech, proclaiming, “If you should speak to the point by

combining the strands of many things in few words, less criticism follows from men”.

(67) Following this formulation, timing, music selection, and behavioral recognition of the audience are of the utmost importance to the Hip-Hop DJ.

An Aristotelian understanding of the term *kairos* is related to the “accommodation model”, later coined by James Kinneavy in the 1980s. Kinneavy claims that the accommodation model occurs when “*kairos* directs the rhetor to consider and adapt to the tones and moods of the situation at hand” (68). Aristotle understood this spatial recognition and taught students to recognize the dynamic of the audience, in order to produce the most powerful speech. Hip-Hop DJs possess the same Aristotelian understanding of reading the audience and pandering to their requests and needs. This not only means that DJs need to have a wide array of music in their collection, but they have to be able to understand what specific demographics prefer musically. Also, assuming a certain demographic will enjoy a certain record can only get you so far, DJs have to feel the vibe and mood of the audience, as an audience is always in flux. One has to understand and read signs from the crowd and how they relate to the records being played. Therefore, no DJ set will ever be the same, as the audience and mood will never be the same. Through a simple misrecognition of your audience, a DJ will easily fail at connecting with the community.

It is important to revisit our original thesis at this point, as our discussion of kairos grows. The use of this ancient literary device enables us to understand the extraordinary expertise and genius of the Hip-Hop DJ. If we believe that the project of Hip-Hop is to liberate societies from oppressive forces, then the DJ, as the central figure must be precise and committed to their craft. As the community builder, the educator, and the maestro, the DJ must speak to their audience effortlessly and without mistakes, as this will not connect people in the intended fashion.

Another way that scholars have understood kairos is through the “creation model”, conceived by James Baumlin. Baumlin’s creation model states that the speaker possesses the ability to create his or her own kairotic moments. As DJs perform routines of mixes for their audiences, the use of this model is present as well. The DJ, largely through his or her ability to manipulate tempos and select records according to speed and sound, is able for example, to slow down the tempo to simmer the excitement of a crowd, ultimately to mix in a popular or exciting record to instantaneously inspire the crowd to movement. The creating of “perfect moments” is part of the skill set of a talented Hip-Hop DJ. Both the accommodation model and the creation model, as Hawhee maintains, are “grounded in utter confidence in one’s own ability to produce kairos anew” (68). It is clear that the Hip-Hop DJ engages both models presented by scholars in order to produce and maintain the proper audience response for sonic connectivity and transformation.

Contemporary Examinations on Sophist's Take on Kairos

The Sophists, Gorgias and Protagoras, as well as the rhetorician Isocrates, believed that there were innate powers related to kairos. In the last few decades, much scholarship has been produced proposing nuanced articulations of their ancient wisdom. Scholars have wrestled with the limits and possibilities of the concept over the last twenty years and have had much to say on the topic. A number of rhetoric and composition scholars, such as John Poulakos, Janet Atwill, and Scott Consigny, present modern interpretations of kairos and it is my goal to measure their concepts against the culture of Hip-Hop, in order to uncover their applicability to the practice of DJing.

Hawhee clearly articulates the positions of both Poulakos and Consigny, by stating “both...point to the immanence of kairos – the kairos of here and now” (69). In *Sophistical Rhetoric in Classical Greece*, Poulakos argues, “the rhetor who operates mainly with the awareness of kairos responds spontaneously to the fleeting situation at hand, speaks on the spur of the moment, and addresses each occasion in its particularity, its singularity, its uniqueness”. (69) The location of the kairotic moment is central to Poulakos’ text, as previous scholarship has misunderstood the importance of kairos and speech. Poulakos notes in “Towards a Sophistic Definition of Rhetoric”, “scholars who have discussed the place of kairos in classical Greek rhetoric have generally located the meaning of the term outside the actual production of the oration.”

(89) Essentially, Poulakos argues that early scholarship believed the kairotic moment occurs either before or after the speech itself and not in the moment. (89) This nuanced theory by Poulakos creates new possibilities for the concept, as rhetors become viewed as “hunter”, actively searching for the opportune moment, to claim for themselves. In relation to the practice of DJing, it is the nature of the DJ to do just as Poulakos describes and become this “temporal genius” and seek out moments to heighten intensity, response, and emotion from the audience.

As boastful as early Hip-Hop culture was, from its battle culture to the lyricism highlighting the rhetorical skill of the emcee, DJs were not excluded from this cultural aspect. As rap crews developed in the late 1970s and early 80s, the DJ was central to the group dynamic. The DJ was often a writer, producer, and engineer. Also, crews most certainly did not shy away from celebrating this key figure. Run-DMC had DJ Jam Master Jay, Public Enemy had DJ Terminator X, and DJ Grand Master Flash was the leader of the Furious Five. With the Hip-Hop community understanding the importance of the DJ, emcees would often engage in a verbal celebration of the genius of their group’s “turntablist”. Very often, Run-D.M.C. wrote lyrics about the skill of their DJ, from being “the master of the disco scratch” to “there’s not a break that he can’t catch”. (“Jam Master Jay”) The group even paid respect to the achievements and skill of other New York City DJs like Grand Master Flash in the lyrics, “He’s not Flash, but he’s fast, and his name is Jay”. (“Peter Piper”) This celebration of temporal genius, in terms of timing, technique, and quickness, is in direct accordance with Poulakos’ version of kairos.

In Scott Consigny's *Gorgias: Sophist and Artist*, we are offered another version of Poulakos' conception of kairos. Consigny's text is written using athletic terms and speaks to kairos from the viewpoint of a competitive athlete. However, I believe that his theory can be extracted and applied to the practice of DJing. The main argument he proposes about kairos is that the kairotic moment occurs in the moment and not outside of the activity. This formulation by Consigny borrows from other arguments about kairos' timing, but what separates this theory is the idea that kairotic moments arise for different people, in different ways. Consigny articulates, "What is an opportunity for a highly skilled and powerful archer at a given moment in battle will not be an opportunity for a weaker, less-skilled, and less alert archer who is unable to discern an opportunity or act effectively in the situation." (88) For Consigny, kairos is about seizing the opportune moment and reacting properly at the opportune time, but he also contends that one has to possess the ability to see the moment for them to take advantage.

While both Consigny and Poulakos are mostly concerned with immanence and improvisation (although Consigny begins to understand the need for skill), Atwill adds to this conversation the ancient Greek notion of *techne* (which loosely translates to craftsmanship). In her book, *Rhetoric Reclaimed*, Atwill argues for a certain knowledge that is associated with kairos by stating, "" knowing how" and "knowing when" are at

the heart of kairos.” (59) Atwill’s understanding of kairos overlaps with Consigny’s, as it speaks to the subject’s knowledge of their craft and when the device applicable. She also contends that craftsmanship is a necessary function of kairos and that one must be devout to their craft to be able to seize their moment. She asserts, ““ knowing when” is difficult to gauge, let alone teach, and it must be achieved through practice”. (59)

Although Atwill’s argument was intended to explain how athletes must train and practice to be ready for competition, I believe that this is true for orators and the Hip-Hop DJ. To be able to create the right moment or take advantage of it, a DJ or speaker has to have the mechanics ready at his or her disposal, which obviously requires tremendous practice. Missing a cue, when mixing two records together will produce a terrible response from the audience, creating hostility instead of fostering community. There is a level of commitment that a DJ needs to maintain, in order to be able to perform for his or her audience. Once again, Run-D.M.C. helps us understand this idea in their appropriately titled ode to their band mate, “Jam Master Jay” by rhyming:

He’s Jam Master Jay
The big beat blaster
He gets better cause he knows he has to
In ’84 he’ll be a little faster
cause only practice makes a real jam master

(“Jam Master Jay”)

Atwill’s understanding of practicing rhetorical techniques in order to seize the kairotic moment is central to understanding the DJ as a composer. The DJ must work

continuously to maintain the skill level and timing necessary to captivate an audience.

Portrayals of Kairos

Artists throughout time have personified Greek gods in paintings, sculptures, and etchings. The traits and characteristics of the deities play a large role in their portrayal, as they help communicate stories. Kelly A. Myers in her essay, “Metanoia and the Transformation of Opportunity”, analyzes different artist’s renditions of Kairos, the god of opportunity. Myers describes the most common depiction of Kairos as a “young, athletic man with wings on his feet and back that propel him swiftly forward.” (1) I believe that the idea of Kairos being youthful and athletic speaks to the way in which one’s rhetorical skill needs to be practiced and trained. Through this aspect of Kairos’ depiction, it is clear that a rhetor is not to be satisfied with their skill level, but rather to continuously push forward, like an athlete in training. This physical depiction of the Greek god aligns well with Atwell’s understanding of practice and repetition being central to the rhetorical method of kairos.

Another common portrayal of Kairos contains a sphere that remains under his winged sandals. Myers explains that, “[Kairos] often balances on a ball or wheel to illustrate his unpredictability”. (1) As one can imagine the difficult and uncertain nature of having a spherical object under their feet, one can begin to understand the connection these artists are attempting to make to the improvisational nature of rhetoric and communication. Again, Consigny and Poulakos, speak to the importance of

improvisation to the rhetor. It is difficult to argue against this theory, as speakers (as well as DJs) will encounter different crowds, with different desires and needs.

The last major artistic trait often depicted on Kairos, and perhaps the most important, is his hair. Myers explains, “As the god of opportunity approaches, his long forelock of hair is clearly in view, offering a brief moment in which the god can be seized.” (1) As the god of opportunity, and the opportune moment, Kairos needs to be captured. The hair on his head is the only way to snatch this god (or opportune moment), as he is amazingly fast. A “forelock” on the front of his head, with the rest of his skull bald, is the most common illustration of Kairos. The idea behind these artistic expressions is to note that the opportune moment is something to catch, and if missed by a split second, the opportunity will have passed. If one can be proactive enough to catch Kairos’ forelock, then they seized an opportunity. This depiction connects with the action of the speaker, as timing can play an immensely important role in the effect of a speech or debate. This is most certainly true to the Hip-Hop DJ’s practice, as missing an opportunity can disrupt the performance and the experience. As a Hip-Hop DJ for over ten years, I have encountered many situations behind the turntables, where I missed a cue or my timing was slightly off. This experience, as a DJ or as a speaker, can leave an individual with a negative feeling of disappointment. This feeling is sometimes so strong that you pinpoint your mistake in your mind and it festers there for considerable amounts of time. Every once in a while, I will recall events that I DJed and can still remember the mistakes that I made, sometimes more clearly than the aspects that I did

well. As these memories come back, I feel a similar sense of discomfort, which can begin to feel like a haunting. Myers explains this feeling through Kairos' counterpart, the goddess, *Metanoia*.

Metanoia and the Hip-Hop DJ

As Kairos is the Greek god of opportunity, the inseparable counterpart is the goddess Metanoia. Metanoia, to quote Myers, “resides in the wake of Opportunity, sowing regret and inspiring repentance in the missed moment.” (1) She is the goddess that fills a subject with a sense of sorrow and remorse, as the kairotic moment passes without being captured. As I have previously framed Hip-Hop culture as a social justice project, coming out of the housing projects of the South Bronx, New York, I will build upon Myers’ understanding of metanoia to better articulate the importance of the concept to the practice of DJing and its ability to effect social change.

As artist’s portrayals of Kairos have depicted the ancient god as youthful, quick, and athletic, Metanoia has been given a different treatment. Myers, again, helps us to understand the different artistic renditions of Metanoia and what the nuances signify. As she examines Jean-Jacques Boissard’s painting of the goddess of regret, we find the depiction of Metanoia as a vengeful character, holding a whip. (Myers) This illustration illuminates Metanoia’s wrath, as failing to seize an opportune moment can be fill an individual with pain. The more common rendition of Metanoia, depicts the goddess with her counterpart Kairos. The most famous of these depictions must be Girolamo da Carpi’s painting, *Chance and Penitence*, where Kairos is pictured in typical fashion with his hair exposed and the sphere located under his feet. In the painting, Metanoia seems

to be located in the shadow of Kairos, bearing an opposite emotional state. Carpi's portrayal of Metanoia with her head lowered, while wearing black clothing speaks to the concept of metanoia and how it can provide a sense of sorrow to an individual who missed an opportune moment.

Another aspect of Carpi's *Chance and Penitence*, which Myers provides a reading of is the connectedness of the two gods. It appears that the two figures are joined at the hip, forming an intimate relationship in the artwork. One cannot decipher where Kairos ends and Metanoia begins in the painting. This depiction shows how intertwined these two concepts are and how quickly one can turn into the other.

In Richard Benjamin Crosby's 2009 essay, "Kairos as God's Time in Martin Luther King Jr.'s Last Sunday Sermon", lies an argument which proposes kairos' capabilities have largely been overlooked. The aspect of the concept that has been disregarded, according to Crosby, is its "inherent rhetorical power", which not only has the ability to change one's mind, but also has the ability to move the soul to change. (2) Rhetoric and human communication has the capacity to captivate and move individuals to new thought and belief. This sentiment is reminiscent of famous orators, who have moved mass amounts of people towards social change and equity, such as Martin Luther King Jr., John F. Kennedy, and Malcolm X. I believe the same is true for the culture of Hip-Hop, as emcees such as KRS-One and his late DJ, Scott La Rock called for social justice

and knowledge production through records like “Stop the Violence”, “Illegal Business”, and “Necessary”.

So how does the Hip-Hop DJ fit into this formulation? It is the Hip-Hop DJs responsibility to uplift the souls of their audience. The Hip-Hop community is historically a community not unfamiliar with the social and political woes of society. As many members of the global Hip-Hop community share a certain collective marginality, it is the artist’s responsibility to provide hope and positivity in spaces which otherwise might be filled by poverty and all that comes with impoverished conditions.

Hip-Hop has always been a social justice project and the DJ has been its messenger. The Hip-Hop DJ’s responsibility is creating positive energy and building community for oppressed peoples globally. The culture’s best are constantly re-imaging sonic combinations and practicing to produce seamless, transformative work for communities, who very much need uplift. Although DJing is not thought of as traditional rhetoric, we can see from this essay how kairos and DJing are used to move people, both physically and emotionally. DJing is the foundation of Hip-Hop culture and timing is the primary element.

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VITA

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