Epistemological Quandary

Why Hip-Hop Scholars Must Ground Their Transcultural Arguments in the Work of Fernando Ortiz

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Abstract *Hip hop, particularly outside the United States, has been characterized as a transcultural phenomenon since the late 1990s. While many scholars have contributed to this engaging, and still emerging, academic discourse, no one has done so in a principled manner. As Nadja Gernalzick and Gabriela Pisarz-Ramirez have shown, cultural critics and commentators across the humanities have thoroughly neglected Fernando Ortiz, the Havana-born cultural anthropologist who coined the term transculturation nearly 60 years ago. Understood as an epistemological quandary, this chapter seeks solutions. Which aspects of Ortiz's thinking can help us properly explain hip hop as a transcultural force? Moreover, how can his materialist analytical mode, which I call Ortizian dialectics, strengthen analyses of identity, hybridity, and place in hip hop? To what extent does his neoculturation concept confirm hip-hop scholars and practitioners who have trumpeted the culture's 'newness' for decades? Finally, what reasons might there be for overlooking Ortiz, and what remedies must researchers conjure and apply to cure this intellectual malady?*

Introduction: Ethical Scholarship, *bitte*!

In the preface to *Transmediality and Transculturality*, Nadja Gernalzick and Gabriela Pisarz-Ramirez (2013) pulled back the curtain to make an astonishing revelation. Up until that time, no one researching, lecturing, or writing about literature, culture, or the arts as transcultural phenomena in the English or German-speaking worlds had rooted their scholarship in the work of Fernando Ortiz, the Havana-born lawyer, ethnomusicologist, and polymath who coined the term *transculturación* to explain the complex socioeconomic and cultural changes Cuba had undergone since European colonial contact. "Many of the scholars applying the concepts of transculturation, transculturality, and transculturalism to various contexts outside of Latin America today," they write, reference Mary Louise Pratt's *Imperial Eyes: Travel Writing and Transculturation* "while eliding that the term transculturation was coined by Ortiz in 1940, long before Pratt's study" (xvi). They further assert that if "Pratt's appropriation of the term transculturation had been more true [*sic*] to the comparativist spirit [her study] professes, Ortiz's work in her book might not have been relegated to a single footnote" (ibid.). In effect, Pratt lifted a term Ortiz had coined in correspondence with Yale University's Bronislaw Malinowski in the 1940s (Reichardt 2018: 68–9) and placed it like a plundered New World jewel atop what eventually became a widely cited book.

Similarly, scholars in the German-speaking world uncritically relied on a series of articles philologist Wolfgang Welsch penned in the 1990s, whom Gernalzick and Pisarz-Ramirez assert also did not "consider the history of the term as it relates to Ortiz's writings" (xxi). Instead, Welsch counterfactually speculated in a short conference paper from 1991 that Nietzsche may have been the originator of the concept (Welsch 1994). Similarly, media theorist James Lull, whose *Media, Communication, and Culture: A Global Approach* has been influential in hip-hop scholarship in Germany, defines transculturation as "a process whereby cultural forms literally move through time and space where they interact with other cultural forms and settings, influence each other, produce new forms, and change the cultural settings" (2000: 242). Missing from this definition

are two crucial elements: human agency—after all, cultural forms do not move themselves—and a reference. What is the origin of Lull's authoritative-sounding definition? It is impossible to say because he provides no citation. Failing to reference the originator of the concept, let alone apply his ideas, constitutes a major breach in intellectual integrity, particularly among scholars with careers based, at least in part, on their introduction of the term transculturation to the English and German-speaking worlds. Can we get some ethical scholarship, please?

Transcultural Hip-Hop Studies: State of the Field

In hip-hop studies, this type of transgression would be akin to talking hip-hop history without acknowledging the early contributions of Robert Ford Jr. or Nelson George, two young music journalists who chronicled New York City's nascent hip-hop scene for *Billboard* magazine in the late 1970s. Their observations were vital for outsiders to understand what was happening on the ground. While Ford went on to produce rapper Kurtis Blow, he also mentored Russell Simmons, the co-founder (together with Rick Rubin) of Def Jam Records (Caramanica 2020). More recently, Nelson George, who has published and spoken on hip-hop culture for decades, consulted on the short-lived Netflix series *The Get Down* (2016–17), a fictionalized retelling of the rise of hip hop in The Bronx in the 1970s. Since George and Ford reported on working-class culture from the streets, neglecting them would be an affront to the working-class people who spawned the culture. Doing so, however, would paradoxically remain true to the spirit of hip hop. After all, The Sugarhill Gang lifted rhymes from Grandmaster Caz's little black book for their surprise breakout hit "Rapper's Delight" (Chang 2005: 131). Regardless of hip hop's penchant for 'taking' or 'borrowing,' neglecting predecessors is not cool.

As a doctoral student in 2015, I was stunned when I stumbled across Gernalzick and Pisarz-Ramirez's revelation because I, too, had published and given conference talks about hip hop as a transcultural force without considering Ortiz. In my defense, I assumed my predecessors

had done their homework, but that is no excuse. In retrospect, I recall feeling a twinge of pain like the one Marcellus Wallace (Ving Rames) referred to in *Pulp Fiction* (1994) when Wallace, an underworld crime boss, instructs Butch (Bruce Willis), a washed-up prize-fighter, to ignore pride on the night of the fight Wallace has paid him to throw. I took a step back and dusted myself off. Surely someone must have consulted Ortiz, I thought, so I scanned the indexes of the three major works in hip-hop studies with articles that forward transcultural arguments.

Alastair Pennycook namedropped Ortiz in *Global Englishes and Transcultural Flows* (2007), but, like Pratt, he only gives him a single shout-out in the footnotes without applying any of his ideas. Neither the editors nor the contributors to the discipline-defining *Global Linguistic Flows: Hip Hop Cultures, Youth Identities, and the Politics of Language* (2009) cite Ortiz or work through his ideas. The same applies to the editors and contributors to *Hip-Hop in Europe: Cultural Identities and Transnational Flows* (2013). As South Bronx rapper KRS-One famously asked, "Why is that?" Shaken but not deterred, I scanned the bibliographies of all the books, articles, and essays I had collected on hip hop in Germany and the United States, the scope of my research. Alas, no one had referenced Ortiz, including me. The point is not to name and shame but simply this: Yo, let's keep it real.

What does that mean in scholarship? To read, think critically, ask questions, and to write, talk, and challenge one another to extend our collective knowledge with the utmost integrity possible. I also think it means not to be afraid to admit when one has made a mistake. So I'm going to keep it real right now: I should have known better. As early as 2008, Christoph Schaub, a German literary scholar, had sounded the alarm on the casual use of the adjective 'transcultural' in hip-hop scholarship (247, footnote 1). Could it be there was no firm politically stable understanding of the term, as Schaub noted, because no one had bothered to work through Ortiz's ideas? As Marwan M. Kraidy points out, the trend throughout the 1990s was to blend (2005: 1). Had 'tran-

scultural' simply become a synonym[1] for terms like heterogeneity and 'glocalization' (Robertson 1992), cultural hybridity (Bhabha 1994), polycultural (Rose 1994), syncretism and pluralism (Potter 1995), tricultural (Ickstadt 1999), multiculturalism (Mitchell 2001), or postmulticultural (Chang 2006: 4)? By neglecting Fernando Ortiz, particularly through the cavalier use of a term he coined, hip-hop scholars have opened a major epistemological quandary. If we want to remedy this lack of intellectual integrity and transparency in transcultural hip-hop studies, we must bring Fernando Ortiz and his thoughts on transculturation into the cipher. Which aspects of his landmark work *Cuban Counterpoint: Tobacco and Sugar* can better enable us to understand and explain hip hop as a transcultural phenomenon?

In this chapter, I want to do three things. First, I want to focus on one small passage from the opening pages of his book to show how we might proceed. Second, I want to consider another of Ortiz's coinages, neoculturation, which he devised to describe new cultural forms that arise from transculturation, particularly how hip-hop scholars, and even producers, often characterize hip hop as a 'new' cultural form. As brief as these observations may be, I hope they encourage researchers to return to Ortiz's seminal work to harvest and apply his thinking with greater transparency. In the third and final part of this article, I speculate why Ortiz may have been overlooked, which includes careerism, cultural chauvinism, western propaganda, and institutional resistance. Above all, it is my hope that these three interventions will stimulate a spirit of reassessment and deeper inquiry and reflection among hip-hop researchers, critics, and commentators so that our work may become more rigorous, accountable, and reputable.

1 Prof. Dr. Ulla Haselstein of the John F. Kennedy Institute for North American Studies (FU Berlin) torpedoed my graduate school dreams with this deceptively disarming question when I interviewed for a position at the Graduate School in early 2013. I didn't have an answer for her then, and it took me another couple of years to appreciate the thrust of her inquiry. Shout-out!

Counterpoints: This/That, and More

Ortiz examined sugar and tobacco, Cuba's main agricultural exports, to explain the complex changes European colonization had wrought on the island. Through a dialectical materialist method indebted to Marx and Engels (via Hegel), the genius of Ortiz's approach are the metaphorical analogies he unfolds to reveal a plethora of contradistinctions.

> Sugar and tobacco are all contrast. It would seem that they were moved by a rivalry that separates them from their very origins. One is a gramineous plant, the other a solanaceous; one grows from cuttings of stalk rooted down, the other from tiny seeds that germinate. The value of one is in its stalk, not in its leaves, which are thrown away; that of the other is its foliage, not its stalk, which is discarded. Sugar cane lives for years, the tobacco plant only a few months. The former seeks the light, the latter shade; day and night, sun and moon. The former loves the rain that falls from the heavens; the latter the heat that comes from the earth. The sugar cane is ground for its juice; the tobacco leaves are dried to get rid of the sap. Sugar achieves its destiny through liquid, which melts it, turns it into a syrup; tobacco through fire, which volatizes it, converted into smoke. The one is white, the other dark. Sugar is sweet and odorless; tobacco bitter and aromatic. Always in contrast! Food and poison, waking and drowsing, energy and dream, delight of the flesh and delight of the spirit, sensuality and thought, the satisfaction of an appetite and the contemplation of a moment's illusion, calories of nourishment and puffs of fantasy, undifferentiated and commonplace anonymity from the cradle and aristocratic individuality wherever it goes, medicine and magic, reality and deception, virtue and vice. Sugar is she [sugar cane, *la caña de azúcar*]; tobacco is he [*el tabaco*]. Sugar cane the gift of the gods, tobacco of the devils; she is the daughter of Apollo, he is the offspring of Persephone. (Ortiz 1995: 6)

Sugar? Tobacco? Hip Hop? The dissimilarity of these subjects is perhaps one reason scholars have not linked to Ortiz directly. Yet the way he teases out metaphorical difference along binary opposition is instruc-

tive. For it is from these counterpoints that he began to develop a theory to explain complex sociocultural change—first in Cuba, but potentially in the United States, where, in the 1965 revision of his book, he suggested transculturation might also be taking place (ibid.: 103). What happens if we apply Ortiz's analytic calculus to the term hip hop itself?

Though explanations about its origins vary, the prevailing story maintains that Keith "Cowboy" Wiggins of Grandmaster Flash and The Furious Five playfully pitted 'hip' and 'hop' against each other to tease a friend who had decided to join the military (JayQuan 2005). Soon after, influential early MC Lovebug Starski popularized it (Caramanica 2018). Yet Ortiz's dialectic allows us to approach the term in at least one novel new way while staying true to Cowboy Keith's playful, jesting spirit. Where smoking necessitates burning to release tobacco's intoxicating chemicals (and was once considered 'hot' or 'cool'), tobacco becomes a corollary for 'hip.' Likewise, sugar, which provides people with short bursts of energy, becomes a stand-in for 'hop.' In an Ortizian sense, hip hop can be understood as a 'cool' and/or 'hot' cultural 'energy' which, like Cuban tobacco and sugar, has swept the globe and animated people of all faiths, colors, and creeds. Framed in a slightly different manner, the rhymes that intellectually intoxicate us are the smoke; the music that physically propels us is the sugar. While these analogies may seem facile, are they that far off the mark? Hip hop gets us high and gets us dancing. 'Music the sugar, rhymes the smoke' is one result of an initial application of what we might call Ortizian dialectics.

Nor should we stop there. His dialectic helps to unfold hip hop's numerous internal logics, which, following the impressive array of abbreviations H. Samy Alim put forward in *Roc the Mic Right: The Language of Hip Hop Culture* (2006), one might call Hip Hop Logic (HHLg). Typically framed as opposites, these orientations include, but are not limited to

- Regions (uptown/downtown, East/West Coast, domestic/foreign)
- Markets (commercial/independent, charts/underground)
- Styles (hard/soft, conscious rap/party music)
- Rivalries (gangs/crews, beefs and battles)
- Sexuality (hetero/homo, straight/gay)

- Status (super stars/nobodies)
- Values (dissing/respect)
- Authenticity (real/fake)
- Race (Black/White)
- Class (rich/poor)

and so on. Why does hip hop do this? Does hip-hop duality simply flow from, and thus appeal to, human mortality, i.e. birth and death? Does it stem from capitalism and the drive to enrich oneself as much as possible à la 50 Cent's *Get Rich or Die Tryin'* (2003), or does hip-hop duality arise, as Paul Gilroy reminded us, from the unfinished business of overcoming the "Manichean dynamic" of "black and white" (1993: 1–2), which still shapes, and plagues, western democracies? Perhaps hip-hop duality originates in how the world's great religions frame morality within conceptualizations of right and wrong, good and evil, heaven and hell, or the sacred and profane (Miller and Pinn 2015: 4). Perhaps these dualities are extensions of the electro-analogue era (on/off) or, further still, the age of advanced digital silicon computing (I/O, input/output). After all, the original hip-hop DJs utilized faders (A/B) to move back and forth between the percussive breaks on two different—though ultimately the same—records to keep the beat going. A/B faders further empowered hip-hop DJs to blend disparate forms of music to fashion more musically complex breakbeats. In truth, hip-hop duality may stem from these and still other binary figurations but resuscitating and applying Ortiz's 'counterpoints' to hip hop with transparency invites us to scrutinize some of the culture's core assumptions with renewed candor, vigor, and creativity.

Why would Ortiz begin with contradistinctions? For one, binaries allow for ease of categorization, understanding, and, ultimately, identification. Yet while it is easy to imagine oneself as this or that, it takes concerted effort to be this *and* that: to find the courage required to imagine oneself, and others, outside the status quo—that is to say, to think 'beyond the binary' and become something more. By formulating his transculturation concept within such figurations to explain how Cuba had become something different, Ortiz seemed to suggest that we move be-

yond them. Importantly, he carried out his dialectical analysis fifty years before the 'trend to blend' became the rage in the 1990s. Has hip hop undertaken a similar project? After all, hip-hop DJs have been blending disparate musical forms long before academics, to quote James Brown, urged us to 'get on the good foot.'

A cursory glance at some of the biggest names in hip hop reveals that binaries are well suited for creative exploitation. For as much as Chuck D's booming bass voice defines Public Enemy, Flavor Flav, the group's hype man, is a jester persona whose countervailing treble voice bolsters the seriousness of Public Enemy's Black cultural politics. Similarly, West Coast gangsta rap by Ice-T, N.W.A, and Cypress Hill emerged when chart hits by MC Hammer, DJ Jazzy Jeff and the Fresh Prince, Tone Lōc, and Vanilla Ice flourished. Acclaimed rapper Tupac Shakur was as renowned for his contemplative, philosophical nature as for his hardcore street smarts. The Notorious B.I.G. could be tough and cuddly, but Christopher Wallace was also known as Biggie Smalls. (Ortiz: "Always in contrast!") Nor has this creative 'split' been strictly limited to the United States. In Germany in the early 1990s, Die Fantastischen Vier (The Fantastic Four) released chart-friendly pop rap akin to early output by The Beastie Boys while Heidelberg's Advanced Chemistry dished out blistering social critiques (Elflein 1998). Binaries, it seems, are the 'sugar and smoke' of creativity. In retrospect, Keith "Cowboy" Wiggins hit upon genius. Had he chosen other vowels, we might not be talking about hip hop but 'hep hup.' Hep means cool (hep cats), and hup is often deployed as an interjection (Hup! Hup! Hup!) to get soldiers moving. Hep hup is the only other possible formulation that captures the spirit of Cowboy Keith's retort.

Could hip hop—which is Black first, everything else second—be transcultural at its core? If we understand transculturation to be inherently Black, then hip hop, even in the United States, could be more accurately understood as a transcultural phenomenon. Understanding hip hop in this way might help advance the project of Black liberation to overturn the persistent, despicable racism that props up White supremacist societies—certainly in the United States, but also anywhere else racism rears its ugly head, including Cuba, which was a

deeply White supremacist society under Spanish colonial rule. Can we understand transculturation as inherently Black? We may if we return to Ortiz and apply his thinking honestly. As he reminds us repeatedly in the first half of his book, West African slaves were pressed into the brutally harsh working conditions of Cuba's sugar plantations while migrant Spanish laborers did the considerably less demanding work of tobacco cultivation. As in the United States, racist ideology ordered Cuban society into strict hierarchies so Europeans could get rich and, in terms of labor, get off easy. In my reading of *Cuban Counterpoint*, transculturation could, and perhaps should, be part and parcel of Black culture. For that to be the case, however, scholars must carefully work through Ortiz's concepts if we are to have any chance of applying them in a politically meaningfully way.

Neoculturation: Nueva, Nouveau, Nieuwe, Neu, New, Nü?

As Gernalzick and Pisarz-Ramirez remind us, Ortiz coined transculturation "to replace the concepts of deculturation and acculturation which focused on the transition of one culture into another more powerful one" (2013: xiv). He did not, however, abandon those concepts entirely, perhaps because he empathized with the people who experienced the savage cruelty of transculturation in the colonial era. Ortiz argued that

> the word *transculturation* better expresses the different phases of the process of transition from one culture to another because this does not consist merely in acquiring another culture, which is what the English word *acculturation* really implies, but the process also necessarily involves the loss or uprooting of a previous culture, which could be defined as deculturation. In addition, it carries the idea of the consequent creation of new cultural phenomena, which could be called neoculturation. (ibid.: xiv–xv)

While there is much to unpack in the above quote, especially if we want to locate "the Black" in transculturation (not to mention sympathize with

people who lost their languages, cultures, and histories after imperial systems bent on domination robbed them of life, liberty, and their innate right to human dignity), I want to focus on Ortiz's notion of neoculturation, which casts a long shadow over hip-hop culture. Before we apply it to hip hop, however, we must consider how Ortiz derived it from his observations of colonial Cuba.

To explain neoculturation, Ortiz visually recounted how indigenous cultures across the Americas inhaled finely ground tobacco into the nose through bifurcated tubes (Ortiz: 111–133). Where artifacts found in various locations over time were similar, yet different, Ortiz suggested that these implements evinced the rise of the new, i.e. the adoption of a heretofore unknown cultural practice in other locales by different people using similar utensils albeit with slight modifications. It is an astute observation. In essence, a kind of *Tabaklust* (tobacco craze) drove innovation. Yet it was not only indigenous Americans who fell under the plant's intoxicating spell. Tobacco, Ortiz wrote, "ran through the world like wildfire" to become "adopted by the Europeans on the other side of the Atlantic, thus giving rise to a profitable trade" (ibid.: 183). Where indigenous Americans sniffed tobacco through tubes, Europeans pinched and snorted snuff. Like some connoisseurs in the Americas, Europeans preferred smoking, which led to the proliferation of pipes, all of which were the same in function, similar in form, and more-or-less stylized with ornate designs. Furthermore, this desire to enjoy tobacco led to the development of cigarettes, another innovation. Add to that vaporizers and crystal-clear cotton mallow rolling papers, and the drive to innovate continues today. In each case, a new vehicle is developed to deliver tobacco's highly sought-after nicotine buzz.

Just as this explains the spread of tobacco out of Cuba into colonial America and across the Atlantic to Europe, so too does it help to understand the spread and development of hip-hop culture. In terms of music, the link to the Caribbean is not Cuba *per se* but Jamaica. DJ Disco Wiz, an early innovator in New York City, attests that Bronx-based DJs "had powerful 'Jamaican bass bottoms,' large speakers custom-built by Bronx-dwelling immigrants from the island" (Katz 2012: 26). As agents of cultural transfer, these individuals brought the sound system to The

Bronx and continued developing it. DJ Kool Herc, who reportedly had the most powerful system, organized competitions known as battles not unlike Kingston's famed sound system clashes (ibid.). Furthermore, the "shout outs, boasts, and disses of microphone-wielding DJs and MCs that evolved into rap [were] similar to the sound system practice of 'toasting'" (ibid.). Through people, some of whom were migrants (but also US-born citizens), rap music developed from street-based Jamaican music-making practices, and early hip-hop DJs eventually infused the percussive rhythms of funk breakbeats with a variety of musical genres, including Latin music and rock. None of this history is new, but since developments in The Bronx occurred across countries and cultures, hip hop in the United States seems to have arisen through a process of transculturation, at least according to Ortiz's formulation of the principle. This underscores why we must explicitly apply his thinking if and when we argue that hip hop is a transcultural phenomenon.

Just as the spread of ornate insufflation tubes and pipes for smoking demonstrate neoculturation, so too has hip hop been adopted and adapted, two words which help us get around the pejorative term appropriation. New styles of rap music—often similar, sometimes different, and always more-or-less stylized—have developed on both sides of the Atlantic and all over the world. Nor is it an exaggeration to argue that hip hop exemplifies Ortiz's neoculturation concept. Scholars have emphasized its 'newness' for decades. For example, Justin A. Williams writes that

> the fundamental element of hip-hop culture and aesthetics is the overt use of preexisting material to new ends. Whether it is taking an old dance move for a breakdancing battle, using spray paint to create street art, quoting from a famous speech, or sampling a rapper or a 1970s funk song, hip-hop aesthetics involve borrowing from the past. When these elements are appropriated and reappropriated, they become transformed into something new, something different, something *hip-hop*. (2013: 1)

The utilization of 'past forms' is not unlike adopting and adapting existing methods to consume tobacco. Both reflect the human impulse to make cultural practices from other people and places meaningful elsewhere. As with the creation of ornate pipes, stylized forms of rap music with lyrics in various languages and sounds culled from an array of musical sources achieve essentially the same result as their American counterparts: they pump people up, get them dancing, and give them a wicked buzz. Music the sugar, rhymes the smoke.

Consider how Mark Katz characterizes hip-hop dance, which he describes as a "new, exciting style of dance [that] could not have flourished without the invention of the disc jockey" (2012: 15). He further asserts that "a rich, new art form came into being" through collaboration (ibid.: 16). New terminology such as b-boying, b-girling, popping and locking (the US West Coast influence), and breaking soon appeared to describe new dances based on moves inspired from various Afro and Latin American dance traditions as well as the dramatic kicks and leg sweeps prominent in the martial arts films of the 1960s and 70s (Banes 2004: 18). Hip hop, Katz concludes, "is a unique art form and cultural phenomenon" (2012: 23). Outside the US, hip hop is commonly referred to as a transcultural art form. Does its uniqueness, or newness, justify the transcultural label even in the United States?

Further evidence of hip hop's neocultural dimensions is seen in the practices of its founding DJs. Kool Herc, Grand Wizard Theodore, Grandmaster Flash, and Afrika Bambaataa pioneered techniques. Herc was one of many Jamaicans who brought sound system culture to The Bronx; Theodore is credited with inventing the scratch; Flash perfected Herc's breakbeat methodology and Theo's scratching technique; and Afrika Bambaataa is celebrated for imparting hip hop with musical eclecticism (George 2004: 50). Not unlike people who fashioned tools to imbibe tobacco, hip hop's founding DJs learned from and taught each other, even while protecting their secrets. With origins in the Caribbean and innovation in The Bronx, one could assert, following Ortiz, that their activities brought about the transculturation of New York City, the United States, Germany, Europe, and anywhere else hip-hop deejaying and rapping have been adopted and adapted. Hip hop in The Bronx

in the mid-to-late 1970s can be understood as transcultural *and* Black because its founding figures engaged in behaviors and practices which adhere to Oritz's neoculturation principle.

There are other ways to locate the 'new' in hip hop's utilization of past forms. Following the groundbreaking scholarship of Juan Flores and Raquel Z. Rivera, Katz traces hip hop's musical antecedents to include funk, salsa (and other forms of Latin music), disco, and various 'urban influences,' all of which were prevalent in The Bronx (2012: 30). The "Latino influence on hip-hop," he writes, "is deeper and more pervasive than the contributions of any individuals" because "Latin music, particularly, from Cuba and Puerto Rico, has been part of the Bronx soundscape since the 1940s" (ibid.). Moreover, mashups of Latin and African American music had been common there since the 1950s (ibid.), with salsa and hip hop sharing a "predilection for hard-driving syncopations and percussive breaks" (ibid.: 31). In retrospect, these rhythmic similarities functioned as a kind of 'membrane' to bridge and fuse communities and cultures. Interrelation, interaction, and collaboration among diverse people in The Bronx evince a 'synergizing effect,' which gave rise to the new cultural form we now know as hip hop. Katz's passing reference to Cuba further warrants introducing Ortiz to the hip-hop studies cipher because he devoted considerable effort to understanding the development of African musical instruments across the Caribbean (Lapidus 2005: 237). Including sound system technology, these instruments and the music they enabled eventually made it to New York City to inform hip hop—the blueprint, so to speak.

Scholars are not the only people who emphasize hip hop's newness. Many of the producers Joseph G. Schloss interviewed for *Making Beats: The Art of Sample-based Hip-Hop* (2004: 30) draw attention to newness. Recounting his experiences as an emerging producer, Prince Paul claims that he couldn't "describe the whole feeling of how it was, because everything was so new and so fresh." Steinski, a producer respected for his mid-80s sampling experiments released on Tommy Boy Records (ibid.: 88), states that "one of the best things about hip-hop" is "that there's a lot of room in it for new shit, for anomalous shit, for all kinds of stuff" (ibid.: 10). Following Russell A. Potter, Schloss notes that producers took "mu-

sical sounds, packaged for consumption" and remade them "into new sounds through scratching, cutting, and sampling" (ibid.: 31). Schloss further emphasizes, following Tricia Rose, that the looping of breakbeats led to an entirely "new aesthetic" (ibid.: 31–2), where sampling and looping created "a radically new way of making music" (ibid.: 33). Just as DJs fashioned 'new' compositions by isolating and looping percussive breaks from vinyl records, the advent of digital samplers "greatly expand[ed] the creative horizons of the modern composer" (ibid.: 34). To underscore this point, Schloss notes that Public Enemy and their production team, The Bomb Squad, "were self-consciously breaking new ground" which, in turn, was "an inspiration to other producers" (ibid.: 40). The Bomb Squad radically altered hip-hop production, and producers who have drawn inspiration from them are hardly relegated to the United States. Many artists in Germany emulated The Bomb Squad's approach in the 1990s. In an Ortizian sense, The Bomb Squad fashioned pipes ('bombs' or 'bomb tracks') to inspire people elsewhere to devise their own. Numerous producers following their lead in countries all over the world helps to explain, in part, why Public Enemy occupies such an esteemed position in the global hip-hop pantheon.

The 'new' is so lauded in sampling culture that producers often gain credibility for reusing old records in new ways, which Schloss argues "can alert the thoughtful producer to new strategies and techniques" (ibid.: 85) to drive innovation. While all musicians irrespective of genre strive to break new ground to distinguish themselves, when respected figures such as DJ Shadow contend that hip hop "should be understood as an *omnigenre*, a genre of music that includes all others" (Katz 2012: 24), we should pause, reflect, and ask deeper questions. If hip-hop DJs have been pioneering methods and technologies, and producers and beatmakers have been blending elements from a variety of musical traditions since the 1970s, could hip-hop music be transcultural at its root, even in the United States? If so, what does that hold for the country and Black cultural politics?

The importance of the new is not merely the view of scholars or artist-practitioners but of fans. One may assume—safely, I think—that hip hop 'blew up' in The Bronx, New York City, and across the United States be-

cause its sound and style caught people by surprise and thrilled them. The same holds true elsewhere. In the German context, Horst Tonn has stressed rap's novelty, writing that the early years of hip hop

> are in retrospect associated with pioneering improvisation and a vaguely felt sense of the emergence of something radically new. At the same time, the attraction to Hiphop [*sic*] was intuitive and very personal. Some of the early Hiphoppers [*sic*] describe their first encounters with the culture in terms of epiphanic moments, of a sudden revelation or an intuitively perceived affinity. 'Energy' is the most frequently used term when they describe their immediate first responses to Hiphop [*sic*] culture. (2004: 278)

The new rap language, a hot new high: music the sugar, rhymes the smoke. The widespread use of the adjective 'fresh' to describe beats, rhymes, fashion, dance, and graffiti further evidences hip-hop culture's predilection for newness. That young people, according to Tonn, felt part of something 'radically new' confirms that 'fresh' cultural forms were emerging in Germany, first, through the reception of rap music (Strick 2008) and, later, through entirely new forms of music via adoption and adaptation—which, again, helps us sidestep the pejorative term 'appropriation.' After all, hip hop's founding figures appropriated music from various sources to forge breakbeats. While Timothy S. Brown (2006) has described young people in Germany who responded intuitively to rap music as the (African-)Americanization of German culture, their receptiveness invokes acculturation (as per Ortiz's transculturation model) as well as H. Samy Alim's notion of a "Global Hip Hop Nation." If hip hop constitutes the neoculturation of Germany both prior to and after the Fall of the Berlin Wall, the same must hold true across the United States; otherwise, why did hip hop spread like wildfire? Since people in the American south, Midwest, and West Coast caught the East Coast hip-hop bug in the late 1970s and early 1980s, apprehending hip hop as a neocultural—and, thus, transcultural—form in the United States seems long overdue.

Beyond personal taste, one might understand the resistance to hip hop in the US as a backlash against the 'African-Americanization' of a White supremacist society. Thanks to funk, soul, disco, R&B, jazz, the blues, and ragtime before it, that process had been occurring for nearly 100 years before hip hop got going in The Bronx. If Ortiz's speculation that transculturation was also happening in the United States is accurate, then people who dismiss hip hop as an 'illegitimate' form of music may be revealing their reluctance to accept profound cultural changes, i.e. the hip-hop revolution. Isn't hip hop's wide appeal and commercial success one of the reasons given for why Barack Obama was able to become president? It may have also been why Bill Clinton, another Democrat, was able to play saxophone on *The Arsenio Hall Show*. While a large portion of the country gave Obama a mandate to govern (as well as to bomb numerous countries around the world), his rise to political prominence incensed a significant portion of the US population. Though I have not done the research, I suspect that Obama's detractors were not hip-hop aficionados. But perhaps they were. People are oftentimes stuttering contradictions.

Why Has Ortiz Been Neglected: A Minor Oversight, or Something More?

Fernando Ortiz's *Contrapunteo cubano* was published in 1940. Translated into English in 1947, he expanded it in 1965 to add, as Dagmar Reichardt has noted, the entire second half of the book, including the term transculturation, which he did not expound upon at length. Why would Ortiz introduce the concept but not develop it? Given how he added the term just four years before his death, two answers might be his advanced age and the desire to establish a lasting contribution to the then emerging discipline of postcolonial studies. Given that Ortiz lived through electrification and witnessed the advent of radio, two devastating world wars, and other technological advancements, e.g. transistors, atomic energy, satellite communications, and the beginnings of modern computing, he may have envisioned greater changes on the horizon. For example,

the production of reliable low-cost electronics in Japan and Taiwan via transnational capitalism, which got underway in the 1960s, has been a boon to hip-hop culture. Today, China is at the fore. While Ortiz was expanding his book, the US Congress passed Public Law 89–236 ("Immigration and Nationality Act of 1965"). To what extent did that legislation influence the families of Kool Herc and Grandmaster Flash to emigrate to The Bronx from Jamaica and Barbados, respectively, and to what extent did Ortiz envision the impact people of the Caribbean would continue having on the United States? Given hip hop's massive social, cultural, and economic impact (both 'at home' and abroad), these questions strike me as sensible. Since they arise when we introduce Ortiz to hip-hop studies, why has he been overlooked?

Mary Louise Pratt caused a sensation when she introduced the term transculturation in *Imperial Eyes* in 1992. Her book quickly 'blew up' in adjacent disciplines and has been widely cited. Duke University Press reissued *Cuban Counterpoint* in 1995, almost surely as a response. Today, Pratt is Professor Emerita at NYU, which raises a question: how could an eventual professor of Spanish and Portuguese Languages and Literatures overlook Ortiz's seminal work in translation, but especially in Spanish? To be fair, the world today is very different from the late 1980s and early 90s. With more information at our fingertips than ever before, scholars and hip-hop artists have benefited immensely from the digital revolution. But is that a legitimate excuse or explanation?

Pratt is not alone. Wolfgang Welsch's most compelling article on transculturality went to press in 1999. In it, he helpfully delineates slippery terms like multicultural, intercultural, and transcultural, yet Ortiz does not inform Welsch's concept of transculturality, which is strange given how both men discuss deculturation and acculturation at length. Heinz Ickstadt, an Americanist at the Free University of Berlin, explicitly described the stylized Turkish German rap music of Aziza A as transcultural in a short article published in the same year. With no mention of Ortiz, Ickstadt also got caught up in the trend to blend, which may speak to the profound impact Cornel West's essay "The New Cultural Politics of Difference" (1990) had on American Studies and African American Studies. The worst offender, however, is James

Lull, who defines transculturation as though he developed the concept himself. Why have these scholars, many of them distinguished and now retired, done this? Is it laziness, dishonesty, or something else? Like most sectors, higher education and publishing are about distinguishing oneself and making a mark—many marks, in fact—if someone hopes to have a career. Perhaps the explanation is that simple: make a name for yourself to get a chair in the Ivory Tower and RSVPs to the best parties. Write it down and move on.

Lest you think I am some flippant contrarian, I fully admit that these scholars expanded my intellectual horizons immensely. Pratt's concept of the contact zone is intriguing, and Sina A. Nitzsche (2012) has compellingly applied it to hip hop in Germany to argue that *Wild Style, Style Wars,* and *Beat Street* opened a 'medial contact space' in the mid-1980s which allowed young people in East and West Germany to imaginatively connect with hip hoppers on the US East Coast. To bolster Nitzsche's argument, the Anglicized German verb *connecten* remains meaningful in leftist German hip-hop circles today. Thanks to globally distributed extraction-production networks that have provided audio-visual technologies over the last half century, the medial space Nitzsche describes was not only transatlantic but transnational. Was it also trans-cultural? A transparent application of Ortiz's ideas might shed light on that question.

Why did Mary Louise Pratt only give Ortiz one reference in her footnotes? Perhaps she sought to shift the focus away from men and Eurocentrism. She is free to do so, of course, and I support such efforts *im Allgemeinen*, but if some disciplines in the humanities have devoted themselves to unwinding colonial transgressions, and Pratt plucked Ortiz's neologism from *Cuban Counterpoint* and tucked it in her satchel like a dusky New World jewel, excuse me, but isn't that an example of a Eura American exploiting pre- and post-revolutionary Cuba for personal gain? If true, the decision to do so was as much a prelude to 50 Cent's *Get Rich or Die Tryin'* as it is an example of vulture capitalism *par excellence*. Even though she is not responsible for hip-hop scholars choosing not to review Ortiz's work or apply his thinking, Pratt's intel-

lectual negligence should not be explained away as a mere oversight, innocent or otherwise. In the end, she seems to have set a trend.

There may be other explanations. The relationship between the West and Cuba has been strained since the 1959 revolution, and certainly well before that. As a US citizen I sometimes need to remind myself that Cuba is just 90 miles off the coast of Florida. Again, I defer to KRS-One: "Why is that?" Because anti-communist propaganda defined the Cold War and propaganda works. Repeated ad nauseam it stunts minds and thwarts inquiry. *Cuba is communist! A Soviet satellite, the Evil Empire! Fidel Castro is the devil incarnate, Mephisto in the flesh!* Such efforts continue today with the villainization of Hugo Chávez, Venezuela's former president, or Nicolas Maduro, its current head of state. These shenanigans make Cuba feel as though it were on some distant planet, and it might as well be. For even after a brief period of rapprochement under US President Barack Obama I still cannot legally travel there as a US citizen. Have we avoided Ortiz due to latent cultural prejudices we are not even consciously aware of? If so, then decolonizing our minds will entail more than clever sloganeering. As Margaret Kimberley (2022) noted following Queen Elizabeth II's death, we must reject the forms of conventional wisdom too often passed off in the press, both popular and academic, if we are to have any hope of liberating ourselves from the persistent, pernicious impulses of colonialism in the present.

Finally, there may be institutional resistance. Routledge, an imprint of Taylor & Francis, published Pratt's *Imperial Eyes*. Routledge also put out Alastair Pennycook's *Global Englishes and Transcultural Flows* and the influential collection *Global Linguistic Flows* edited by Alim, Ibrahim, and Pennycook. Indeed, Routledge has brought out many titles devoted to hip hop. In a practical sense, we would be nowhere without that publishing house's commitment to the culture, but let's not be naïve: even in academic publishing hip-hop titles offer tantalizing prospects for profits. But for whom? I pitched a book proposal that seeks to unwind these issues to Taylor & Francis and got stonewalled through two peer reviews before I finally gave up. How far would any publishing house go to get to the bottom of its own ethically questionable scholarship?

Nevertheless, these titles and many other books and articles profoundly shaped my thinking when I first encountered them as a graduate student at the John F. Kennedy Institute for North American Studies in Berlin in the late 2000s. Danny Hoch's scintillating contribution to *Total Chaos* (2006) touches upon many of the dynamics that fueled the rise of the Global Hip Hop Empire. While Hoch does not characterize hip hop as transcultural, introducing Ortiz and building upon the insights of previous scholars, none of whom have worked through or applied his thinking, could help us do just that. It is apparent following Gernalzick and Pisarz-Ramirez's revelation, however, that the humanities (and hip-hop studies) has got itself in an epistemological bind. It is my hope that this collection, for which I am grateful to contribute, begins to address this deficiency. If we are to have any hope of properly maintaining and developing this field with the rigor it deserves, then we must revisit Ortiz's metaphoric dialectic, resuscitate his thoughts on transculturation, and determine the extent to which they can invigorate the hip-hop studies toolkit. Given these revelations, such an effort must be undertaken with candor, vigor, and full transparency. Anything less would still be hip hop, but going above and beyond might be "DY-NO-MITE!," as J.J. often quipped in the 1970s TV show *Good Times*.

Conclusions: "To Ortiz or Not to Ortiz, That is the Question" (12-inch Remix)

Like sugar and tobacco in Cuba, hip hop has profoundly changed the Americas, Europe, and the world. Fernando Ortiz's term for that process—transculturation—offers untapped potential to pursue new lines of inquiry. His metaphoric dialectic opens doors, but he also makes valuable insights on a range of issues including economics, capitalist production, commerce, and culture, which could be of service to hip-hop studies. Hip-hop researchers who want to run the transcultural jewels, to paraphrase Killer Mike and El-P, must apply Ortiz's ideas if we wish to have intellectual integrity in this discipline.

Like the United States, Cuba was subjected to brutal White supremacy. West African people were pressed into the harsh work on sugar plantations while Spaniards got off easy with tobacco cultivation. While these historical facts must be delicately addressed, we need not get bogged down in dour-faced seriousness. Staying true to hip hop's playful attitude and its penchant for dissing and respect, we can simply get busy. In time, hip-hop researchers might refer to Fernando Ortiz as Big Daddy Fern or DJ El Dorado à la Transcultural. Perhaps most importantly, locating "the Black" in his transculturation model could do much to secure Black liberation and equality, which has clear implications for us all, regardless of whether, or perhaps especially because, some people still need convincing.

Cuban Counterpoint is a rich text that has been sorely underutilized. It takes time and considerable effort to appreciate Ortiz's insights let alone connect them to a late-20th century pop cultural phenomenon. Like Shaolin Fantastic (Shameik Moore) in *The Get Down*, I had to roll up my sleeves and get to work. According to that retelling of hip-hop history, Shaolin did not master the art of the breakbeat overnight. There were many stops, starts, missteps, and failures before he unlocked its secrets and eventually perfected and advanced it. As Nelson George has noted, Joseph Saddler, who later fashioned himself as Grandmaster Flash, was a technologically gifted teenage Barbadian immigrant in The Bronx "fascinated by records and audio circuitry" (2004: 45). In the German context, Irina Schmitt (2005) has characterized young people who followed the lead of early US hip hoppers as a 'transcultural avant-garde.' Even in the United States, hip hop is understood as working-class culture. It is already widely understood as a migrant, or migrating, culture in the German-speaking world. Why can't it be that in the US, particularly in lieu of the Great Migrations, which were by no means unproblematic, including despicable episodes of racist terror that forced Black flight northward? Given how Ortiz accounted for the horrors of colossal change in colonial Cuba, the rise of hip hop in the United States might be better understood as a process of transculturation. As a cursory glance at any pre-Columbian map of North America will attest, the development of United States *and* hip hop occurred across regional,

cultural, racial, ethnic, class, and linguistic borders. This suggests that we might have to consider the United States to be a neocolonial society. Since hip hop projects American values around the world and gets people dancing, does that make hip hop neocolonial art?

As someone who grew up in the working-class milieu of a rural western New York b(l)ackwater, I admire the perseverance the writers of *The Get Down* imparted on Shaolin Fantastic. As an analogue for anyone who not only endeavors to learn but innovate, Shaolin is a compellingly flawed character who nevertheless did the work. If Ortiz's neoculturation principle explains the rise and spread of new cultural forms, then the producers of *The Get Down* may have inadvertently told the story of the transculturation of the United States. It is, of course, a matter of perspective. Was hip hop born in The Bronx, or did it start in Jamaica? Did it start in Jamaica, or did Cuba play a role some decades, and even centuries, prior? If tracing origins to understand the influence West African people have had on our world is 'your thang' (Salt-N-Pepa a la Ortiz: "Always in contrast!"), that story runs 400 years deep. While transculturation may have been happening much longer than we'll ever know or truly understand, that doesn't mean we should not try. Though his focus was Cuba, transparently applying specific elements of Ortiz's model to other national contexts could help us draw a plethora of infinitely deeper connections to Mama Africa. The people whose destructive and creative energies coalesced in colonial Cuba eventually radiated upwards into the Americas to cross the Atlantic and wash over Europe and much of the world. What stops us from pursuing the implications of those historical facts today?

Is it a reluctance to undermine the project of Black cultural politics and its on-going push for socioeconomic justice and equality? Has too much been invested in explaining hip hop, like other forms of music, literature, and culture, as Black? It has been thirty years since Stuart Hall (1993) intervened to ask what the "Black" is in Black popular culture. Since then, many scholars have helped us better understand the influence of Latinas and Latinos on early hip hop culture. Do we shy away from deeper reflection of Hall's question because we don't want to open a pandora's box that might shake cultural narratives to their foundations? All we must do is introduce Ortiz to hip-hop studies, transparently apply

his ideas, and distill an understanding of transculturation that places Blackness at its core. And why shouldn't we? Ortiz had a deep interest in the broader influence West African people had on Cuba, the Caribbean, and the Americas. Were he alive today, I suspect Ortiz would agree that transculturation is Black first, everything else second—or is it messier than that?

Since the 1990s scholars have written exhaustively about postcolonialism, but did colonialism ever end? Stefan Engel (2003) argues that it morphed into neocolonialism. Again, does that make hip hop neocolonial art? Given how he devised the term neoculturation to explain how new cultural forms emerge, Ortiz might characterize it thusly. Does neoculturation apply to hip hop? Considering the extent to which scholars and producers have described it as new, I see no reason why not. Again, what stops us? Surely hip hop can be Black and more. Indeed, it already is. Hasn't the predilection of producers to infuse rap music with elements from other cultures been one hallmark of their cultural power and the aesthetic allure of hip-hop music? What would the Wu-Tang Clan be without the inspiration its members drew from Asian martial arts culture, which they brilliantly grafted onto Black music thanks to hip hop's open aesthetic disposition? Frankly, I don't want to know. As the saying goes, *Wu-Tang Forever*.

As Mary Louise Pratt wrote in the preface to *Imperial Eyes*, "Intellectuals are called upon to define, or redefine, their relation to the structures of knowledge and power that they produce, and that produce them" (1992: xi). Just two years later, Tricia Rose, the First Lady of Hip Hop Scholarship, reminded us that the "future of insightful cultural inquiry lies in those modes of analyses that can account for and at the same time critique the raging contradictions that comprise daily life" (1994: xii). She continues: "When a comfortable fit between theoretical concerns and the limits of an oppositional practice is revealed, the reason may not be because the practice itself has failed to work in oppositional ways but, instead, that the theory could not in some way account for the conditions that shaped the practice and its practitioners." (ibid.)

Could Ortiz aid us in our efforts to better understand hip hop? By today's standard of advanced academic theory (which, in its worst man-

ifestations, obfuscates rather than elucidates), his thoughts on transculturation are hardly complete. In fact, his prose, which reads like C.L.R. James's *The Black Jacobins*, harkens to a bygone era. At times, however, Ortiz's insights are refreshingly straightforward. But one cannot simply copy and paste from *Cuban Counterpoint* and dash off to the next hot cultural theory to assemble an impressive theoretical scaffolding to get a professorship. If we want to apply Ortiz's insights about 18th and 19th-century Cuba to the digitally interconnected world of the late 20th and early 21st century, his text demands "interpretive study of epic proportions" (Font, Quiroz, and Smorkaloff 2005: xii). Although colonial Cuba and our present-day world are separated by hundreds of years, they are not dissimilar. By Ortiz's account, 19th-century Havana was a rocking place with people from all four corners of the globe. New York City in the 1970s was no different. The same is true of other metropoles, yet people there have been allowed to speak truth to their former colonial overlords. Why is it taking so long for the ghosts of Havana to do the same?

If we want to be taken seriously as individual scholars or collectively as contributors to an emerging field that remains true to the working-class roots from which hip hop sprang (up to and including the workers who assemble music-making technologies in Asia), we must do the work. To riff on Will Smith, do not be afraid to get jiggy with *Cuban Counterpoint*. With his material, philosophical, moral, and political commitments to better understanding Afro-Cuban culture, not to mention his suggestion that transculturation was also underway in the United States, I suspect Big Daddy Fern would approve. Let's roll up our sleeves and get busy, y'all.

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