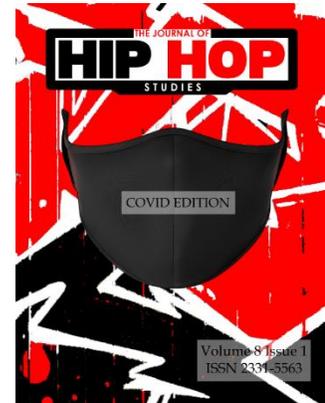


"A Different Type of Time": Hip Hop, Fugitivity, and Fractured Temporality

Pedro Lebrón Ortiz

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Pedro Lebrón Ortiz

In this article, I seek to explore Hip Hop as an expression of marronage. I identify marronage as an existential mode of being which restitutes human temporality. Slavery and flight from slavery constituted two inextricable historical processes, therefore logics of marronage must also constitute contemporary human experience. I argue that Hip Hop offers a distinct way of affirming and expressing one’s existence through what has been called a “maroon consciousness.” In the same way that maroons created new worlds free from the tyranny of slavery, Hip Hop offers the Hip Hoppa a space free from colonial logics.

The present article is divided into four main parts plus a conclusion. The first part lays out the theme of the article in which I suggest that racialized and colonized subjects inhabit a fractured temporality but Hip Hop, understood as an expression of marronage, allows the Hip Hoppa to situate themselves within a sutured time through the development of first-order consciousness. The second part introduces the crux of the article: marronage and its potential relationship to Hip Hop. The following part reflects on the concept of marronage and challenges understandings of dehumanization as omnipresent within contexts of oppression. In other words, to understand marronage as a phenomenon, one must resist the urge to believe that the dehumanization of the racialized/colonized subject is internalized as universal and complete. Fundamental to an understanding of marronage as a phenomenon and an existential mode of *being* is the recognition of a humanity that survived genocide, kidnapping, the Middle Passage, and enslavement, however fragmented. It is this humanity that allows the racialized/colonized subject to recognize their condition as oppressed subject and provides the space for them to move towards liberation. The fourth section reflects on “Yak Thoughts” by Young M.A. through marronage as an analytic to make the general point of this article, which is a conception of Hip Hop as a site of fugitivity which produces, and is produced by, a maroon consciousness.

I. We’re Supposed to Be Finished

In her poem “Duality of Time,” Afro-Caribbean Colombian poet Dinah Orozco Herrera states that: “When the death bell rings, life responds in chorus.”¹ I read Orozco

¹ Dinah Orozco Herrera (Ashanti Dinah), “Duality of Time,” in *Las semillas del Muntú* (New York: Nueva York Poetry Press/Abisinia Editorial/Editorial Escarabajo, 2019), 38. All translations from Spanish are my own.

Herrera as describing the temporality which the wretched of the Earth inhabit, one where the guarantee of death harbors the possibility of life in as much as in death lies an irremediable pulsation for life. Put differently, the premature death imposed on racialized and colonized subjects through diverse and differential time-fracturing technologies produces a life-affirming drive.² Similarly, in the 1999 track "Nas is Like," Nas opens with the lines "Freedom or jail, clips inserted, a baby's being born / Same time a man is murdered, the beginning and end."³ I take Nas as articulating the same duality of time that is the subject of Orozco Herrera's poem; that life and death are "extracts of the same blood,"⁴ that death brings with it the possibility for life. In what follows, I suggest that Hip Hop as a culture was born of an existential way of *being* produced from conditions which impose a premature death on the racialized/colonized subject. In other words, Hip Hop culture is an expression of the subjectivity of those "who have learned to live in the womb of death,"⁵ within a fractured temporal schema. Hip Hop is an expression of a suffering that allows those who embody the former – the Hip Hoppa⁶ – to manifest themselves within "a different type of time" as Dave East put it.⁷ Hip Hop, in so far as it confronts the structural violence of racial capitalism and imperialism, provides a space to exit the fractured temporality imposed by Euro-American modernity, enabling a distinct temporality not bound to the strictures of Man.⁸ Hip Hop, then, could be understood as a site of fugitivity which produces, and is produced by, a distinct way of *being* in the world. Hip Hop could be understood as the

² For a reflection on how debt functions as a time-fracturing technology which manifests differentially across race/gender/class lines, see Rocío Zambrana, *Colonial Debts: The Case of Puerto Rico* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2021). Puerto Rican militants and theorists Shariana Ferrer-Núñez and Zoán T. Dávila Roldán stated the following as it pertains to debt as a time-fracturing technology: "Debt marks bodies/peoples banishing them, impoverishing them, extracting from them and robbing them of the possibility of a future." See Shariana Ferrer-Núñez and Zoán T. Dávila Roldán, "Nosotros contra la Deuda," in *¿Quién Le Debe a Quién?*, ed. Silvia Federici, Verónica Gago, and Luci Cavallero (Buenos Aires: Fundación Rosa Luxemburgo/Tinta Limón Ediciones, 2021), 43. This theft of "the possibility of a future," it seems to me, could be understood as the fracture of human temporality.

³ Nas, "Nas is Like," track 13 from *I Am ...* (Columbia, 1999).

⁴ Orozco Herrera, 38.

⁵ Nathalie Etoke, *Melancholia Africana*, trans. Bill Hamlett (London: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2019), xix-xx.

⁶ I borrow this term from Travis Harris, "Can It Be Bigger Than Hip Hop?: From Global Hip Hop Studies to Hip Hop," *Journal of Hip Hop Studies* 6, no. 2 (2019): 17-70.

⁷ Dave East, "Type of Time," *Kairi Chanel* (Mass Appeal Records, 2016).

⁸ I am invoking Sylvia Wynter here, who referred to the "present ethnoclass (i.e., Western bourgeois) conception of the human, Man" as the overrepresentation of the human. In other words, Man refers to a specific way of expressing one's humanity. See Sylvia Wynter, "Unsettling the Coloniality of Being/Power/Truth/Freedom: Towards the Human, After Man, Its Overrepresentation – An Argument," *CR: The New Centennial Review* 3, no. 3 (2003): 260, <https://doi.org/10.1353/ncr.2004.0015>.

cultural expression of a sovereign ontology which affirms a *world*⁹ that is distinct from the Euro-American *world* that is bound up in anti-Blackness and imperial impulses.

My conception of fugitivity does not merely imply “an ontology that has Blackness always *on the run* and as such always in flight *away* from the structures that govern a priori the anti-Black world,”¹⁰ as Kevin Eubanks put it in his discussion of Fred Moten’s “‘fugitive ontology’ of blackness.”¹¹ Rather, I conceptualize fugitivity as *marronage*, in which the singular and collective subject always already has the potentiality to affirm a *world* distinct from that of Euro-American modernity while engaging in a confrontation with Euro-American modernity in an effort to bring about its destruction, to bring about the end of the [Euro-American] *world*. In this sense, I agree with Eubanks’ conception of Hip Hop as a “counter-performance” which, following Jared Sexton, necessitates a “turn toward blackness” and “as such, [a turn] toward an unprecedented confrontation with the oppressive productions of anti-blackness.”¹² In this sense, I conceptualize *marronage* as the execution, necessarily, of a double movement. On the one hand, *marronage* should be conceived as the affirmation of an ontological sovereignty, a way of *being* in the world that stands on its own foundation. To spit it differently, *marronage* could be conceived as a particular genre of the human free from the strictures of the Human. As such, *marronage* should not be understood merely as a dialectical negation, dissolving itself within the dialectical movement of Euro-American ontology. Rather, *marronage* should be understood as the affirmation of a distinct *world*, this as an ontological totality, which structures one’s *being-in-the-world* and *being-with-others*. There is resonance here with Sexton’s conception of Black life and Black art, which according to Eubanks, is a “black life and black art that takes place neither *in* nor *for* an anti-black world but rather *in* and *for* a world in which *that* world does not live, a black world, and it is, consequently and following Sexton’s clearing, only *in* and *out* of this world that an authentic black freedom and optimism can position itself to emerge.”¹³ In other words, this primary affirmation of ontological sovereignty is a fundamental first movement in a liberatory struggle for racialized/colonized subjects.

⁹ The term “world” in italics is meant to denote an ontological totality that structures one’s experiences, hopes, dreams, interpretations of physical phenomena, and so forth. See Pedro Lebrón Ortiz, *Filosofía del cimarronaje* (Cabo Rojo: Editora Educación Emergente, 2020); Enrique Dussel, *14 tesis de ética: hacia la esencia del pensamiento crítico* (Madrid: Editorial Trotta, 2016).

¹⁰ Kevin Eubanks, “After Blackness, Then Blackness: Afro-Pessimism, Black Classical Hip Hop as Counter-Performance,” *Journal of Hip Hop Studies* 4, no. 1 (2017): 8.

¹¹ Eubanks, 5.

¹² Sexton quoted in Eubanks, 8; Eubanks, 8.

¹³ Eubanks, 9.

It seems to me, then, that one could interpret this movement away from an anti-Black *world* – which is the *world* capitalism and empire have created – as the movement, or rather, the affirmation of a *world* structured by “a different type of time,” one not governed by the metronomic explosions of government-issued pistols and authoritarian clock card machines. In other words, the Hip Hoppa comes to inhabit a sutured time, a human time, in as much as Hip Hop is understood as the affirmation of that “black world” that Sexton describes. Afro-Cuban MC Rxnde Akozta, on the track “No Taim Tu Lus,” raps, “No tengo tiempo pa’ perderlo, prefiero ir cultivando rimas luego recoger el fruto y defenderlo / Mantenerlo fresco como en los noventa, mijo / Si no respondo a los mensajes es que ando con mi hijo / Ahora soy dueño de mi tiempo, mi tiempo no es dueño de mí gracias al rap y al público aun sigo aquí.”¹⁴ These bars invoke a conception of Hip Hop as a mode of flight away from the time-fractured *world* of racial capitalism and Euro-American modernity. In addition, it seems to me that Rxnde Akozta is also saying that, because of Hip Hop, and the fans that support him, he’s still *here*, which is to say, one can take him to be affirming that his continued material existence is safeguarded from the violence of the Euro-American *world* thanks, at least in part, to Hip Hop.

On the other hand, marronage as fugitivity unfolds into a direct confrontation with the structures of Euro-American modernity. Historically, marronage, understood strictly as flight from the plantation, by and large, was insufficient to ward off the imperial drives of the Euro-American *world* and its political devices. To be sure, although certainly there are maroon communities throughout the Western hemisphere today that are direct descendants of maroon communities established during centuries past, many maroon communities entered into agreements with the colonial state to their detriment in the long term,¹⁵ had their territories encroached upon by nascent capitalist enterprises and/or colonial expansion,¹⁶ or became politically irrelevant after abolition. As such, marronage eventually passes a critical threshold and mutates into revolution.¹⁷ This resonates with Eubanks’ reflection on the works of Frank Wilderson and P. Khalil

¹⁴ Rxnde Akozta, Pielroja, and Portavoz, “No Taim Tu Lus,” *Qué Bolá Asere*, 2018. In English, these bars would go something like “I don’t have time to lose, I prefer to cultivate rhymes then pick the fruit and defend it / Keep it fresh like in the nineties, homie / If I don’t respond to your messages it’s ‘cause I’m with my son / Now I own my time, my time doesn’t own me, thanks to rap and the fans I’m still here.”

¹⁵ See for example Franklin W. Knight, *The Caribbean: The Genesis of a Fragmented Nationalism*, 3rd ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012), 67.

¹⁶ See for example Marcus P. Nevius, *City of Refuge: Slavery and Petit Marronage in the Great Dismal Swamp, 1763–1856* (Athens, GA: University of Georgia Press, 2020), 101.

¹⁷ Leslie F. Manigat, “The Relationship Between Marronage and Slave Revolts and Revolution in St. Domingue-Haiti,” *Annals of the New York Academy of Sciences* 292 (1977): 421; Lebrón Ortiz, *Filosofía del Cimarronaje*, 158.

Saucier and Tryon P. Woods and tracks by The Coup, Notorious BIG, and Mobb Deep, when Eubanks states that: “In these examples, Hip Hop clearly recognizes and seeks to come to terms with the gratuitous structural violence of black life, and, as I would like to argue here, realizes precisely what Wilderson says is really wanted of black art and what Saucier and Woods say is wanted in Hip Hop studies, that is, a more ‘direct reflection’ on the structural basis of black captivity.”¹⁸ Examples of this are too numerous to lay out here, but to offer one, we could take Neek Bucks’ track “Pain,” when he raps that: “I knew mama could lose me to the game / This right before they tried to school me to the game / I managed to maintain my name through the war / The grave just explains all the pain we endured / Wasn’t tryna be no doctor or dentist / Was on the block with them hittas / *God was with us, we’re supposed to be finished.*”¹⁹ In this particular joint, Neek Bucks is speaking on the “structural basis of black captivity,” articulating a reflection on Black life in the context of the United States, also applicable to the Global South in general. What I would like to highlight from the bars quoted is Bucks’ recognition of the fractured time that constitutes the life, or lack thereof, of those racialized as non-white as well as the ways in which racialization overdetermines one’s *proyecto*,²⁰ or sense of futurity. “We’re supposed to be finished” posits a recognition of the necropolitics which governs the life and death of the wretched of the Earth. Similarly, Puerto Rican trap artist Darell, on the track “Un Barrio,” sings the following hook: “De un barrio ... / De ahí vengo yo / Donde se mata y venden drogas / De ahí vengo yo / Donde el trabajo es dentro un punto / De ahí vengo yo / Donde una madre llora un hijo / De ahí vengo yo ...”²¹ Darell is speaking on the limited economic possibilities for impoverished individuals from particular communities (“de un barrio, de ahí vengo yo”), which in turn drives them towards the illegalized, though constitutive, underside of the capitalist economy (“donde se mata y venden drogas [...]

¹⁸ Eubanks, 7–8.

¹⁹ Neek Bucks and Benny The Butcher, “Pain,” *Neighborhood Hov* (H4 Records, 2021); my emphasis.

²⁰ Enrique Dussel, *Philosophy of Liberation*, trans. Aquilina Martinez and Christine Morkovsky (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock Publishers, 2017), 24. The term “proyecto” in Dussel’s work is used in the Heideggerian sense.

²¹ Darell, “Un Barrio,” *LVV: The Real Rondon* (Sony Music Latin, 2020). This hook could roughly be translated as “From a hood ... / That’s where I’m from / Where people kill and sell dope / That’s where I’m from / Where work is at the drug spot / That’s where I’m from / Where a mother mourns her son / That’s where I’m from.” There is another theme at play in this album as well which falls outside the scope of this article but could be a topic for a future reflection. As one listens to *LVV: The Real Rondon*, one notices that it contains an aesthetic and subject matter that would suggest that Darell was explicitly gesturing towards narco culture and narco corridos. For a phenomenal study of narco culture, see Carlos Alberto Sánchez, *A Sense of Brutality: Philosophy after Narco-Culture*, Kindle (Amherst, MA: Amherst College Press, 2020) and Sayak Valencia, *Gore Capitalism*, trans. John Pluecker (South Pasadena, CA: Semiotexte, 2018).

donde el trabajo es dentro de un punto"). Far from merely a glorification of narco culture, Darell is speaking on the confluence of space/racialization/poverty and the death drive which constitutes it ("donde una madre llora un hijo"). Nevertheless, and as I suggested above with Rxnde Akozta's bars, Hip Hop provides the (meta)physical space to affirm one's own humanity while simultaneously confronting the "gratuitous structural violence" of the Euro-American *world*, thus producing a life-affirming impulse by way of a sutured time.

II. From Fractured Time to Fugitivity

When Martinican psychiatrist, revolutionary, and thinker Frantz Fanon stated, in reference to the Indo-Chinese revolution of 1946, that it was not because they "discovered a culture of their own that they revolted. Quite simply this was because it became impossible for them to breathe, in more than one sense of the word,"²² Fanon recognizes the way in which fractured time is ultimately bound up with a fundamental will to life; that "behind the face of one [death], lies the other [life]."²³ Michael E. Sawyer beautifully articulates it this way: "Because the Black Subject is Human the fracturing of a coherent relationship with Time through physical and metaphysical coercion awakens the desire of the aggrieved subject to return themselves to the coherence of Human-ness that is indicated by being properly situated in Time."²⁴ The events of May 25, 2020, made Fanon's insights particularly salient yet again, while also highlighting Orozco Herrera's insight that "life and death are [...] extracts of the same blood."²⁵

For approximately nine minutes and twenty-nine seconds, the world watched through social media as the life was violently expelled from George Floyd, a forty-six-year-old Black man from Minneapolis, MN (US), by a white police officer.²⁶ While some white folks may have watched in horror, racialized people watched the events as the manifestation of what seems to be the eternal return of anti-Black violence. Some three months prior, on February 23, 2020, twenty-five-year-old Ahmaud Arbery was chased down and killed by white vigilantes near Brunswick, Georgia (US).²⁷ One month later, on March 13, 2020, twenty-six-year-old Breonna Taylor was shot and killed while she slept by white police officers as they executed a questionable, if not illegal, search

²² Frantz Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*, trans. Richard Philcox (New York: Grove Press, 2008), 201.

²³ Orozco Herrera, 38.

²⁴ Michael E. Sawyer, *An Africana Philosophy of Temporality: Homo Liminalis* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2018), vii.

²⁵ Orozco Herrera, 38.

²⁶ Evan Hill et al., "How George Floyd Was Killed in Police Custody," *The New York Times*, May 31, 2020, <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/05/31/us/george-floyd-investigation.html>.

²⁷ "Ahmaud Arbery: What Do We Know about the Case?," *BBC News*, June 5, 2020, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-us-canada-52623151>.

warrant.²⁸ While the extrajudicial killings of Floyd, Arbery, and Taylor were the most salient in 2020, the evidence that these cases were certainly not the exception but the rule is too ample to recite here. In fact, according to *The Washington Post*, 1,218 Black men and boys and forty-seven Black women and girls were fatally shot by police officers between January 2015 and June 3, 2020.²⁹ These numbers do not include extrajudicial killings by white vigilantes, nor does it include extrajudicial killings by police officers through means other than their service pistols (therefore Arbery's and Floyd's killings are not included in this database). Numb, racialized subjects filled the streets in revolt.

But numb, nonetheless. What I am highlighting is the impact racial capitalism, white supremacy, and colonization have on one's mental and emotional well-being. The Euro-American *world* can bear down on one's soul. On the track "Trauma," Meek Mill highlights this point when he says "Ain't no PTSD's, them drugs keep it at ease / They shot that boy twenty times when they could'a told him just 'freeze' / Could'a put him in a cop car / But they let him just bleed."³⁰ Similarly, Young M.A. in her track "Yak Thoughts" states: "Paranoid, ever since I seen my brother dead / Observing n[...], yeah, that's why I'm always one ahead / Try and get these fucking evil thoughts out of my fucking head / It ain't normal when you gotta bring your gun to bed."³¹ While I will circle back to "Yak Thoughts" below, I want to remind the reader of the multiple tracks in Hip Hop which explore the mental and emotional effects of oppression. From Biggie's "Suicidal Thoughts" to DMX's "Ready to Meet Him," Hip Hop is riddled with a dialectic of tracks which reveal a suffering subjectivity, on the one hand, and on the other, a subjectivity who simultaneously confronts and flees from the *world* of Euro-American modernity.³²

The suffering of Black people was precisely Fanon's point when he referred to the lack of breath in a colonial context.³³ Revolt for the wretched of the Earth becomes a

²⁸ "Breonna Taylor: What Happened on the Night of Her Death?," *BBC News*, October 8, 2020, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-us-canada-54210448>.

²⁹ "Fatal Force: Police Shootings Database," *The Washington Post*, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/graphics/investigations/police-shootings-database/>. Accessed on June 3, 2020. Unfortunately, material limitations inhibit accessing the database to report current numbers. Nevertheless, the trend is clear.

³⁰ Meek Mill, "Trauma," *Championships* (Atlantic / Maybach Music, 2018).

³¹ Young M.A., "Yak Thoughts," *Off the Yak* (M.A. Music/3D, 2021).

³² Notorious B.I.G., "Suicidal Thoughts," track 17, *Ready to Die* (1994; remastered 2004, Bad Boy Records); and DMX, "Ready to Meet Him," track 6, *Dark Man X* (UMG Records, 2020).

³³ Certainly, the lived experience of the Black subject within the territorial bounds of what is referred to as the United States of America can be described as internal or domestic colonialism. See for example, Pablo González Casanova, *De la sociología del poder a la sociología de la explotación. Pensar América*

biological necessity; it is not teleological nor is it a product of culture or ideology.³⁴ This is why Fanon stated that he was "willing to feel the shudder of death, the irreversible extinction, but also the possibility of impossibility."³⁵ In a nod to Heidegger, who understood death as antithetical to *Dasein*, to [white] *being*, in as much as when death *is*, *Dasein* is *not*, the opposite is true for Fanon. As a [Black] *being* constituted by a temporality that is "marked as death,"³⁶ it is better for the racialized/colonized to risk extinction if it leads to potentially limiting death to mere possibility, thus reinserting oneself into a true human temporal schema. Certainly, "when the death bell rings, life responds in chorus."³⁷

When death is taken as a point of departure, life responds in chorus on multiple registers. Undoubtedly, contemporary human experience is constituted by the logics of slavery, the ultimate expression of racial capitalism.³⁸ One of the ways in which life historically responded in chorus under such conditions was through acts of flight from the plantation, known as marronage. While historiographical and anthropological studies have tended to distinguish between *petit* and *grand* marronage, i.e., between short-term and long-term flight, recent studies have taken a more philosophical approach.³⁹ If it is true that Hip Hop can be understood as a "counter-performance"

Latina en el siglo XXI (Mexico/Buenos Aires: Siglo XXI Editores/CLACSO, 2015); Robert L. Allen, *Black Awakening in Capitalist America: An Analytic History* (Trenton, NJ: Africa World Press, 1992), 2.

³⁴ This point is further elaborated in Pedro Lebrón Ortiz, "Against the Mythological Machine, Towards Decolonial Revolt," *Theory & Event* 24, no. 3 (2021): 787–815, <https://doi.org/10.1353/tae.2021.0043>.

³⁵ Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*, 193.

³⁶ Sawyer, *An Africana Philosophy of Temporality*, 113.

³⁷ Orozco Herrera, 38.

³⁸ Germán Carrera Damas, "Huida y Enfrentamiento," in *África En América Latina*, ed. Manuel Moreno Fraginals (México: Siglo XXI Editores México, 2006), 35; Cedric J. Robinson, *Black Marxism: The Making of the Black Radical Tradition* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2000).

³⁹ Examples of historical or anthropological texts include Nevius, *City of Refuge*; Lennox Honychurch, *In the Forests of Freedom: The Fighting Maroons of Dominica* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2019); Ruma Chopra, *Almost Home: Maroons between Slavery and Freedom in Jamaica, Nova Scotia, and Sierra Leone* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2018); Daniel O. Sayers, *A Desolate Place for a Defiant People: The Archeology of Maroons, Indigenous American, and Enslaved Labourers in the Great Dismal Swamp* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2015); Sylviane A. Diouf, *Slavery's Exiles: The Story of the American Maroons* (New York: New York University Press, 2014); Benjamin Nistal-Moret, *Esclavos, prófugos y cimarrones: Puerto Rico, 1770–1870* (San Juan: Editorial de la Universidad de Puerto Rico, 2004); Richard Price, ed., *Maroon Societies: Rebel Slave Communities in the Americas* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1996); examples of texts that explore marronage philosophically include Pedro Lebrón Ortiz, *Filosofía del cimarronaje* (Cabo Rojo: Editora Educación Emergente, 2020); Edizon León Castro, "Acercamiento crítico al cimarronaje a partir de la teoría política, los estudios culturales, y la filosofía de la existencia" (PhD Diss., Ecuador, Universidad Andina Simón Bolívar, 2015); Edizon León Castro, *Filosofía de las existencias desde el cimarronaje* (Ediciones Abya Yala, 2021); and Neil Roberts, *Freedom as Marronage* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2015).

through which a “black *Dasein*” is revealed,⁴⁰ I suggest that it could relatedly be understood as an expression of what I have termed *maroon logics*,⁴¹ which can be defined as the multidimensional manifestation of marronage constitutive of the contemporary human experience of those subjects whose humanity has been rejected within the “white power network.”⁴² Specifically, I would suggest that Hip Hop was born from a particular state of *being* manifested through what Afro-Ecuadorian thinker Édizon León Castro has called a *maroon consciousness*, which he defines as comprised by a two-step process through which the enslaved subject first develops a consciousness of being dehumanized, then a rejection of that dehumanization through a reconstruction of the *self*.⁴³ Put differently, maroon consciousness is a first-order consciousness produced through the decolonization of *being*. This tracks with Eubanks’ theorization of the revelation of a black *Dasein* which reveals itself in Hip Hop as a praxis that “in the turn toward itself blackness comes to *know* itself through the structural violence at the ground of its existence.”⁴⁴ In short, I would like to suggest that Hip Hop was birthed from a maroon consciousness, inserted within the revolutionary struggles of “Afro-America,”⁴⁵ for as Travis Harris has asserted, Hip Hop is indeed an African diasporic phenomenon.⁴⁶

For the remainder of this article, I briefly elaborate concepts related to contemporary philosophical theorizations of marronage and suggest that the subject that embodies Hip Hop culture could be understood as the embodiment of a subjectivity constituted by a maroon consciousness, thus suggesting the liberatory (decolonizing and abolitionist) effect Hip Hop could have. Particularly, I suggest that Hip Hop can serve as a medium through which the dehumanized subject can develop a first-order consciousness. This is to say, because the “colonized subject’s awareness of Being is therefore distilled from the oppressive material conditions of Western domination that shape the individual’s psyche and ontology,”⁴⁷ the

⁴⁰ Eubanks, “After Blackness, Then Blackness,” 20.

⁴¹ This term was first introduced in Pedro Lebrón Ortiz, “Maroon Logics as Flight from the Euromodern,” *TRANSMODERNITY: Journal of Peripheral Cultural Production of the Luso-Hispanic World* 9, no. 2 (2019), <https://escholarship.org/uc/item/5k54f73z>.

⁴² Walter Rodney, *The Groundings with My Brothers* (London: Verso, 2019), 11.

⁴³ Édizon León Castro, “Acercamiento al cimarronaje” (PhD Diss, Universidad Andina Simón Bolívar, 2015), 184; León Castro subsequently published his dissertation as *Filosofía de las existencias desde el cimarronaje* (Quito: Primera, 2021). For this article, I will remain in dialogue with the 2015 dissertation.

⁴⁴ Eubanks, “After Blackness, Then Blackness,” 20.

⁴⁵ See Julius S. Scott, *The Common Wind: Afro-American Currents in the Age of the Haitian Revolution* (London; New York: Verso Books, 2018).

⁴⁶ See Harris, “Can It Be Bigger Than Hip Hop?”

⁴⁷ LaRose T. Parris, *Being Apart: Theoretical and Existential Resistance in Africana Literature* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2015), 109.

racialized/colonized subject can always ever see themselves through the eyes of the Other: the eyes of the white, imperial, capitalist man and woman. Hip Hop, then, provides a discursive and artistic space through which the subject can develop a sense of *self* distinct from that imposed by the racial capitalist order. In this way, Hip Hop can be understood as an anticolonial or "decolonial" aesthetic which "very directly challenges, not only each basic coordinates of modernity/coloniality, but its most visceral foundations and overall scope."⁴⁸ It seems to me that Young M.A.'s joint cited above, "Yak Thoughts," and its accompanying visuals, which I will return to in the closing moments of this article, is a salient example of Hip Hop as a space for the development of first-order consciousness, of a black *Dasein* knowing itself "through the structural violence at the ground of its existence."⁴⁹ With this in mind, this article should not be understood as definitive nor exhaustive, but rather as an attempt to view Hip Hop through the framework of a philosophy of marronage to potentially provide alternative readings of Hip Hop as a phenomenon embedded within the broader legacy of marronage as resistance to colonialism, racial capitalism, and anti-Blackness.

III. The Hip Hoppa as Maroon

Hip Hop, I suggest, was born from a distinct existential way of *being* produced within a double movement. On the one hand, there is the assertion of an ontological sovereignty, a *being* for oneself. On the other, this *being* comes to know themselves with greater focus through a confrontation with the structural conditions which impose a premature death. As Mozzy rapped early in 2020, after the killings of Ahmaud Arbery and Breonna Taylor and also commenting on the mass incarceration of racialized/colonized subjects, "Crackers killing unarmed Africans, we ain't solve that / That shit be hard for me to turn the other cheek / I get to tweaking, thinking 'bout my people dangling from a tree [...] I ain't got no friends, just lawyers and paralegals / If the life of Blacks matter, then why we ain't treated equal?"⁵⁰ It is this lived experience of the racialized/colonized subject which produced Hip Hop as an existential mode of *being*, then as a culture, and which gives Hip Hop as a musical genre its distinctly political aesthetic.

Furthermore, the parallels with marronage are salient. For example, James O'Neil Spady has commented that the insurrectionary talk of the Denmark Vesey

⁴⁸ Nelson Maldonado-Torres, "Outline of Ten Theses on Coloniality and Decoloniality," *Caribbean Studies Association*, October 23, 2016, 27.

⁴⁹ Eubanks, "After Blackness, Then Blackness," 20.

⁵⁰ Mozzy, "Unethical & Deceitful," *Beyond Bulletproof* (Mozzy Records/EMPIRE, 2020).

conspiracy constitutes a form of “psychic marronage.”⁵¹ The decision to “create space within the city”⁵² to plan the botched 1822 revolt can be interpreted as analogous to the decision to create space within the city, which manifests as the Cypher, to express discontent with the socioeconomic conditions of 1970s New York or the decision to create space during the 1990s in Puerto Rico to protest the politics of *Mano Dura Contra el Crimen*,⁵³ while both instances presupposed a form of *being* that is distinct from the dehumanized *being* the hegemonic order sought to craft. Put differently, to “create space” first requires the emergence of a maroon consciousness.

It is this maroon consciousness which I argue is constitutive of Hip Hop. As Grand Mixer DXT put it,

Here comes this guy saying his name is Afrika Bambaataa, and for me I go to this party, and I’m hearing these beats and I’m seeing Zulu and Afrika and it automatically made sense. I grew up where I was taught and conditioned when I see Africa or hear African or anything like that, I’m running. I’ve been trained to disconnect from my heritage. Bambaataa and the Zulu Nation, that whole ideal rescued that consciousness for me.⁵⁴

It seems to me that what Grand Mixer DXT is articulating here is the fact that colonization and slavery aimed to erase ways of expressing one’s existence or humanity as African through physical and metaphysical coercion. In this sense, Grand Mixer DXT’s comment could be understood as the articulation of a maroon consciousness in as much as he is articulating the two-step process León Castro identifies as constitutive of a maroon consciousness. This is, a two-step process through which the dehumanized subject first develops a consciousness of *being* dehumanized or rather a consciousness of the rejection of one’s humanity, then a rejection of that rejection through a reconstruction of *being* through a primary affirmation of ancestral knowledge and ways of *being* tempered to a particular sociopolitical context. In other words, the dehumanized subject recreates their sense of *self*, a true first-order consciousness, through a rejection of their dehumanization or rejected humanity, never truly

⁵¹ In Richard Bodek and Joseph Kelly, eds., *Maroons and the Marooned: Runaways and Castaways in the Americas* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2020), 31.

⁵² James O’Neil Spady, “Belonging and Alienation: Gullah Jack and Some Maroon Dimensions of the “Denmark Vesey Conspiracy,” in Bodek and Kelly, 31, <https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctv11sn6b2.6>.

⁵³ In short, *Mano Dura Contra el Crimen* was a policy instituted by former governor Pedro Rosselló, supposedly to fight crime. In effect, the policy resulted in an increase of police repression and brutality and a deepening of the criminalization of poverty, particularly within Afro-Puerto Rican communities. See for example Marisol LeBrón, *Policing Life and Death: Race, Violence, and Resistance in Puerto Rico* (Oakland, CA: University of California Press, 2019); Mayra Santos-Febres, *Sobre Piel y Papel*, 3rd ed. (San Juan: Ediciones Callejón, 2011), 94–115.

⁵⁴ Darby Wheeler, “The Foundation,” *Hip Hop Evolution* (HBO Canada / Netflix, 2016).

internalized in the first place, for as Grand Mixer DXT stated "that consciousness" was "rescued," not produced.

The Black experience in the United States of America, and the experience of the racialized in the Global South more broadly, it seems to me, is constituted by the problematic that the great W. E. B. Du Bois identified over a century ago. In *The Souls of Black Folk* (1903), Du Bois stated that "this American world" is a "world which yields him no true self-consciousness, but only lets him see himself through the revelation of the other world."⁵⁵ "It is a peculiar sensation," he continues, "this sense of always looking at one's self through the eyes of others, of measuring one's soul by the tape of a world that looks on in amused contempt and pity."⁵⁶ In other words, the racialized/colonized subject never manages to develop a true sense of *being* in as much as we are always already "radically inserted"⁵⁷ within the world shaped to a large extent by racial capitalism, a *world* which seeks to dehumanize us. Nevertheless, as I have argued elsewhere,⁵⁸ I do not think this dehumanization is ever totalizing. To put it differently, it may be that racialized/colonized subjects are not *dehumanized* but rather our humanity is rejected. To explain, the experience of colonialism and slavery collapsed the trans-ontological into the sub-ontological or colonial ontological difference,⁵⁹ which means that beyond *being* was collapsed into *sub-being*—what Puerto Rican philosopher Nelson Maldonado-Torres has called the *coloniality of being*.⁶⁰ When the coloniality of being sediments in a subject's sense of the *self*, the question "why go on?" manifests, "a question that illuminates the condition of the damned of the Earth."⁶¹ The problem, it seems to me, is that if one assumes that the coloniality of being is ubiquitous, it would inhibit all possibility of resistance. "Why go on?" implies an existential pessimism which closes off the possibility of revolting against the current order. "Why go on?" implies a sterility which inhibits creative potentiality.

⁵⁵ W. E. B. Du Bois, *The Souls of Black Folk*, Restless Classics (Brooklyn, NY: Restless Books, 2017), 9.

⁵⁶ Du Bois, 9.

⁵⁷ Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*, trans. John Macquarrie and Edward Robinson (Oxford: Blackwell, 2001), 174.

⁵⁸ Particularly in "Resisting (Meta) Physical Catastrophes through Acts of Marronage," *Radical Philosophy Review* 23, no. 1 (2020): 35–57, <https://doi.org/10.5840/radphilrev2020219103>.

⁵⁹ By this, I do not mean to conflate the particularities of colonialism and slavery, a critique Selemawit D. Terrefe levels against Maria Lugones' conceptualization of decolonial feminism in the former's text "The Pornotrope of Decolonial Feminism," *Critical Philosophy of Race* 8, no. 1–2 (2020): 143.

⁶⁰ Nelson Maldonado-Torres, "Sobre la Colonialidad del ser: contribuciones al desarrollo de un concepto," in *El giro decolonial. Reflexiones para una diversidad epistémica más allá del capitalismo global.*, ed. Santiago Castro-Gómez and Ramón Grosfoguel (Bogotá: Siglo del Hombre Editores / IESCO-UC / Pontificia Universidad Javeriana, 2007), 146.

⁶¹ Maldonado-Torres, 150.

It is the rejection of the ubiquity of the coloniality of being that provides the space through which an alternate consciousness can develop. As León Castro has stated, “The colonizer failed to completely empty that humanity, and that is what will generate political action, starting from the taking of consciousness.”⁶² This understanding is fundamental for explaining the multiple modes of resistance racialized/colonized subjects enact on a quotidian basis, on multiple registers, from artistic expressions of resistance to community organizing to revolt. This reality – that the coloniality of being is not ubiquitous – is particularly salient when one considers the historical experience of marronage.

León Castro theorizes marronage from a Fanonian framework to explore the ways in which marronage constitutes “political action from a denied humanity, fractured, mutilated, imploded.”⁶³ Indeed, the subject kidnapped from the African continent and enslaved in the so-called New World was, like First Nation peoples, subjected to apocalyptic levels of coercion and oppression, leading to the rejection of their humanity.⁶⁴ However, the historical experience of marronage and the existence today of communities descended from those maroon communities established between the sixteenth and eighteenth centuries evidence that “the condition of non-being [...] is not ontological[;] their condition of humanity still persists in the memory of the enslaved, and this is their existential ontology.”⁶⁵ Or as Fanon put it, “Confronted with a world configured by the colonizer, the colonized subject is [...] made to feel inferior, but by no means convinced of his inferiority.”⁶⁶ It is the persistence of humanity as ontology of the enslaved that serves as the cornerstone for the development of a maroon consciousness, a process through which the maroon subject returns that “dispossessed humanity” to themselves through the reconstruction/reinvention of the *self*, using its fragmentation as a point of departure.⁶⁷ In other words, the process of developing a maroon consciousness is the process through which a racialized/colonized subject can develop a first-order consciousness by affirming their humanity, never truly stripped away, and by struggling against the forces that seek to dehumanize them. In the process,

⁶² León Castro, “Acercamiento al cimarronaje,” 152.

⁶³ León Castro, 227.

⁶⁴ On the notion of “apocalypse,” see Gerald Horne, *The Apocalypse of Settler Colonialism: The Roots of Slavery, White Supremacy, and Capitalism in Seventeenth-Century North America and the Caribbean* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 2018); Gerald Horne, *The Dawning of the Apocalypse: The Roots of Slavery, White Supremacy, Settler Colonialism, and Capitalism in the Long Sixteenth Century* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 2020).

⁶⁵ León Castro, “Acercamiento al cimarronaje,” 181.

⁶⁶ Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*, trans. Richard Philcox (New York: Grove Press, 2004), 16.

⁶⁷ León Castro, “Acercamiento al cimarronaje,” 157.

through the becoming of a maroon consciousness, the subject constitutes themselves within a sutured time, a human time, for it provides the space to struggle against the time-fracturing mechanisms at play.

There is a latent tension, then, in a maroon subjectivity between the affirmation of forms of ancestral knowledge and *being* albeit fragmented, and the ontological weight of coloniality that can settle in the consciousness of the enslaved and maroon subjectivity, and from which one must free oneself in the process of affirming an *Other world*. This tension between affirming an *Other world* and struggling against the *world* of Euro-American modernity and racial capitalism is what I have identified as two elements of a maroon subjectivity which can be referred to as analectical and sociogenic marronage.⁶⁸

I borrow the term "sociogenic marronage" from Jamaican political theorist Neil Roberts, who, drawing on the Fanonian concept of "sociogenesis," coined the term to refer to decolonizing revolutions, particularly the Haitian Revolution, as an example of marronage as flight from the oppressive forces of modernity through permanent institutional change.⁶⁹ I believe that one can also read sociogenic marronage as an element of maroon subjectivity which drives the subject in that direction. The term "analectical" I borrow from philosopher Enrique Dussel, who in his *Philosophy of Liberation* states that "the analectical moment is the *affirmation* of exteriority; it is not only the denial of the denial of the system from the affirmation of the totality. [...] To affirm exteriority is to realize what is impossible for the system [...] what has not been foreseen by the totality."⁷⁰ For example, marronage is not merely the denial of slavery (which constitutes a denial of the humanity of the enslaved). Rather, marronage constitutes a primary affirmation, that of one's humanity, which "has not been foreseen by the totality" of Euro-American modernity. Therefore, I define analectical marronage as the affirmation of a distinct way of expressing one's existence and humanity predicated on ancestral ways of *being*.

The two elements of a maroon subjectivity, the sociogenic and analectical components, manifest as basic aspects of the human experience for racialized/colonized subjects in multiple dimensions. It is this which I have denoted as "maroon logics," which are responses to racial capitalism and anti-Blackness produced from a maroon consciousness. An example of maroon logics may be political actions such as radical

⁶⁸ Lebrón Ortiz, *Filosofía del cimarronaje*, 117–142.

⁶⁹ See Roberts, *Freedom as Marronage*, 113–137.

⁷⁰ Dussel, *Philosophy of Liberation*, 160.

autonomous organizing.⁷¹ Fundamental to an understanding of marronage as “life respond[ing] in chorus” when the enslaved subject is faced with premature death are the ways in which creativity manifests on multiple registers.

If the development of a maroon consciousness involves using those ancestral memories tempered to a new sociopolitical reality, irremediably there is a creativity that manifests itself in countless cultural, social, and political spaces. Numerous anthropologists have highlighted the creativity of maroon communities, strictly understood.⁷² As Nina de Friedman has stated, “in the history of Black creativity in America, maroon formations are fundamental.”⁷³ It is this creative legacy of the manifestation of the new when faced with death, oppression, and the annihilation of *Other worlds* that I refer to as *creative transcendent acts*, and which Hip Hop may be a paradigmatic example of.

Creativity refers to the formation of the new, to what did not exist before, to the innovative and valuable. Creativity itself, in the context of marronage, is an expression of freedom as the affirmation of an *Other world*, in as much as an enslaved subject, in the strict sense, whose life is dictated in its totality by the enslaver, and who has fully internalized the coloniality of being, does not think of themselves as being capable of creating absolutely anything. According to the Puerto Rican poet and revolutionary Clemente Soto Vélez, “one has consciousness of freedom, when one lives in body and soul the revolutionary life of *creative intelligence*.”⁷⁴ I read Soto Vélez as indicating that freedom, in its broadest sense, implies the unfolding of creativity. Vodoun, in its Haitian expression, for example, did not exist prior to the kidnapping and enslavement of African subjects. It was valuable in the sense that it allowed the enslaved to maintain ties with their ancestral ways of knowing and *being* even while enslaved, in addition to providing the normative ethical principles that Leslie Manigat saw as crucial for the Haitian Revolution in as much as it facilitated the production of a revolutionary consciousness,⁷⁵ and that Neil Roberts identified as *vèvè architectonics*, the “blueprint of freedom that an individual or collectivity imagines in an ideal world.”⁷⁶ León Castro puts it differently, stating that maroon communities, in the strict sense, “are not reduced

⁷¹ Pedro Lebrón Ortiz, “Reconstructing Locality through Marronage,” *APA Newsletter on Native American and Indigenous Philosophy* 20, no. 1 (2020): 3–11.

⁷² A reading of Richard Price, ed., *Maroon Societies: Rebel Slave Communities in the Americas* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1996) makes this point clear.

⁷³ Quoted in León Castro, “Acercamiento al cimarronaje,” 18.

⁷⁴ Clemente Soto Vélez, *Obra Poética* (San Juan: Instituto de Cultura Puertorriqueña, 1989), 77. Emphasis added.

⁷⁵ Manigat, “Marronage and Slave Revolts,” 421.

⁷⁶ Roberts, *Freedom as Marronage*, 126.

to the simple fact of resistance, but rather also create, recreate, and open a wide range of communal strategies with a great capacity for creativity."⁷⁷

Transcendence refers to the surpassing of, or going beyond, the sociohistorical context, its effects, and the Manichaeian structure of the colonized world.⁷⁸ In *Black Skin, White Masks*, Fanon critiques the *Négritude* movement—a movement which sought to affirm Blackness through the exaltation of African history and culture—when he stated that “[i]n no way does my basic vocation have to be drawn from the past of peoples of color” and “I am not a prisoner of History. I must not look for the meaning of my destiny in that direction” due to what he saw as the reversal of the Manichaeian structure.⁷⁹ Fanon closes *The Wretched of the Earth* with a similar appeal, stating that “if we want humanity to take one step forward, if we want to take it to another level than the one where Europe has placed it, then we must innovate, we must be pioneers.”⁸⁰ In other words, one must seek to push beyond one’s current context into the realm of the unimaginable for the current order, but always rooted in an *Other world*, in a *being* otherwise.⁸¹

By *act*, I seek to invoke a praxis that stems from the racialized/colonized singular “I” or the collective “we.” It is not a directive or command imposed from above, but rather refers to that transpluriversal impetus from below that drives the racialized/colonized to action. Here it is worth remembering Fanon’s quote above which highlighted the fact that the Indo-Chinese did not revolt because they discovered a particular culture. Fanon then closes out *Black Skin* stating that the Antillean—the racialized/colonized subject in his text—“will undertake and carry out this struggle not as the result of a Marxist or idealistic analysis but because quite simply he cannot conceive his life otherwise than as a kind of combat against exploitation, poverty, and hunger.”⁸² In other words, the struggle will not be imposed by a vanguard academic or intellectual class, celebrities, the non-white entrepreneurial class, nor by a vanguard revolutionary subject, but rather it will be carried out by the oppressed, subaltern masses. Therefore, we can define a creative transcendent act as a praxis and process from below in the formation of consciousness and subjectivity that stems from an *Other world* and which seeks to surpass the current sociopolitical conditions of subjection through innovative institutions and ways of relating. These acts can occur in the political, cultural, epistemological, economic, ecological, and ontological dimensions.

⁷⁷ León Castro, “Acercamiento al cimarronaje,” 18.

⁷⁸ “The colonial world is a Manichaeian world.” Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*, 6.

⁷⁹ Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*, 201, 204.

⁸⁰ Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*, 239.

⁸¹ Lebrón Ortiz, “Reconstructing Locality through Marronage,” 5.

⁸² Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*, 199.

Characteristic of creative transcendent acts is that they manifest in moments of suffering, pain, and death. For example, Cameroonian philosopher Achille Mbembe states that “[t]he human figure is by definition plastic. The human subject par excellence is the one who is capable of becoming another, someone other than himself, a new person. It is the one who, constrained to loss, destruction, even annihilation, gives birth to a new identity out of the event.”⁸³ From the traumatic and apocalyptic experience of enslavement and deculturation, for instance, emerged a variety of social, political, and intersubjective practices, such as a new Creole and maroon identity.

“When the death bell rings,” creativity is a fundamental aspect through which a new way of *being* can emerge, and is affirmed, when “life responds in chorus.” This new way of *being*, this maroon *being* in the context of racial capitalism and anti-Blackness, manifests, it seems to me, as an anticolonial aesthesis which is foundational to Hip Hop. In this way, Hip Hop should be understood not only as a musical genre, but as a metaphysical, cultural, and discursive space produced by a maroon consciousness which constitutes a first-order consciousness. That is, it provides a space through which the racialized/colonized subject can forge a sense of *self* away from the white imperialist gaze of the dehumanizing hegemonic order, always already with the understanding that their humanity was never completely vacated by the oppressor.

Although outside the scope of this article, it may be worthwhile to linger a bit longer on the notion of the creation of space in its relation to Hip Hop.⁸⁴ To be sure, the creation of space—a constitutive element of marronage—is paradigmatic of Hip Hop. The B-Boy and B-Girl not only create space to manifest their *being* as Hip Hoppa in the form of the Cypher, as the MCs do, but also, at least at one point in time, by way of the cardboard dance floor. With a piece of cardboard, any physical space could become a Hip Hop space. Similarly, the DJ could convert any physical space into a Hip Hop space by way of their turntables, mixer, speakers, and a crate of records. Graffiti artists, in turn, would transform the decaying spaces of late capitalism into wonderful Hip Hop artistic spaces. In many cases, these Hip Hop spaces are produced outside the purview of mainstream artistic spaces, which are permeated by logics of anti-Blackness. In this sense, the Hip Hoppa could be conceived as a variation of Ralph Ellison’s Invisible Man, for as Michael E. Sawyer states, “[t]he Invisible Man chooses to locate himself in a permanent *zone of non-being*, the cave where he retreats and begins to locate his truth of

⁸³ Achille Mbembe, *Critique of Black Reason*, trans. Laurent Dubois (Durham: Duke University Press, 2017), 133.

⁸⁴ I owe this brief reflection to Travis Harris, who posed some thought-provoking questions and remarks while reading an earlier draft of this manuscript. This may be the topic of another reflection, which engages more readily with work being done in Black Geography studies, for example, to think through the relationship between Hip Hop and space as seen through marronage as an analytic.

self."⁸⁵ It must be noted that the zone of nonbeing in Fanon is a reference to nonbeing in the Sartrean sense, which relates to the indeterminacy of freedom.⁸⁶ For Fanon, the Black subject does *not* have access to the zone of nonbeing because there is an "historical-racial schema"⁸⁷ that overdetermines them. Hence, to remove oneself from the purview of the white gaze allows one access to the zone of nonbeing.

In this sense, the Hip Hoppa – as MC, as B-Boy/Girl, as DJ, as graffiti artist – has the potentiality to create a space, in a material and metaphysical sense and in a way analogous to how the maroon creates the *palenque*, that allows them to plunge into the zone of non-being to craft, or affirm, a distinct *being*, and express their genre of humanity. In other words, the Hip Hoppa could be conceived as maroon, in a broad, philosophical sense, who crafted a first-order consciousness through an affirmation of the *self* and through a confrontation with the structural violence that conditions, in great measure, Afro-diasporic life. In this sense, the Hip Hoppa reinserts themselves within a human time.

IV. Reflections on Yak Thoughts

It seems to me that the lyrical arrangement and themes on "Yak Thoughts" by Young M.A., as well as its accompanying visuals, allows us to reflect on Hip Hop as a site that provides space for the emergence of a first-order consciousness; of a subject who inhabits a "different type of time." The video starts off with Young M.A. walking through a doorway of what seems to be an abandoned building, potentially a school. Within the first few seconds of her walking through the doorway, one notices that her face is covered by her hair. In fact, for the first two verses, her hair is covering her face essentially the entire time. In addition, Young M.A. is walking within dark, shadowy hallways, which renders her face unintelligible, for the duration of those first two verses. This recalls Mexican philosopher Carlos Alberto Sánchez's comment, in the context of a discussion of Judith Butler's theory of mourning in relation to narco culture, when he states:

Who counts as human? The answer seems to be anyone who is capable of mourning, anyone who deserves mourning, anyone with a "face," anyone who stands in embodied relationality with me; ultimately, to "count" as human is to have a face, to be in communion with others, and most importantly, to be embodied.⁸⁸

⁸⁵ Sawyer, *An Africana Philosophy of Temporality*, 260.

⁸⁶ Maldonado-Torres, "Outline of Ten Theses on Coloniality and Decoloniality," 13.

⁸⁷ Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*, 91.

⁸⁸ Sánchez, *A Sense of Brutality*, 141.

In other words, what I would suggest is that, through her facelessness, Young M.A. is gesturing toward the recognition that as a young, Black, lesbian woman in the United States her humanity is rejected. As we saw with Fanon above, the coloniality of being produces a sense of despair. Hence, immediately she spits that she's "Smokin' and drinkin', drinkin' and smokin' / Hopin' for hope, but I'm hopeless / Too much distractions, I'm losin' my focus / Too much pain, could barely notice the beauty in things." As she continues walking through the gloomy hallways, the camera going in and out of focus and face still covered, she continues speaking on pain, trauma, mental health, and self-medication.⁸⁹ She says that she "ain't just drinkin' the Henny now / I'm abusin' it / I don't even get a buzz because I'm used to it / In other words, I feel numb, I'm immune to it." As Young M.A. spits that second verse, she is surrounded by dim red lights shining through doorways flanking her on both sides, which produce an eerie red aura which covers her body. This may be a gesture toward the "gratuitous structural violence of black life."

However, after the second verse and as the interlude is playing, which consists of her speaking over the beat, Young M.A. takes a corner as she walks through the building before light shines on her face as she flips her hair back. She raps, "No doorman, it's Young M.A. who open doors up," as she walks through the doorway which leads to what seems to be either a school cafeteria (those with stages) or a small theater. Young M.A. walks right in front of the stage, face completely lit and exposed. She raps, "I built my brand from the floor up / Came from the bottom, made some hundreds then I doubled my commas / Went from wearin' white tees to cashin' out on designers / But still rock white tees, still humble, I promise." The glorification of consumer culture notwithstanding, what we see as Young M.A. walks into the cafeteria or theater is the emergence of the Hip Hoppa, the transition from a subject who is submitted to the time-fracturing technologies of racial capitalism to the subject restituted within a human temporal schema. For, as she raps on the last two bars, "[l]ike this hunnid racks I'm holdin', I will never fold / Goin' back broke, that's a place I'll never go." If poverty functions as a time-fracturing mechanism, the assertion of not going back implies being situated in a coherent relationship with time, being situated within a sutured, human time.

The accompanying visuals to "Yak Thoughts," it seems to me, allows us to bear witness to Hip Hop as counter-performance, as the emergence of a Black *Dasein* that gets to know themselves through a confrontation with the structural violence of the Euro-American *world* by way of a reflection on the pain and trauma produced by it and

⁸⁹ See Dana Miranda, "Approaching Cadavers: A Philosophical Consideration of Suicide and Depression in the African Diaspora" (PhD diss, University of Connecticut-Storrs, 2019).

the expression of a full human subjectivity who manages to wrest free from its grasp. We bear witness to a maroon consciousness.

V. To Spit Godly

This paper did not seek to present a hermeneutical reflection on Hip Hop artistic productions, nor fully elaborate marronage as an existential phenomenon, but rather it has been an attempt to contribute to the ever-growing scholarship on Hip Hop by briefly viewing Hip Hop within recent philosophical frameworks of marronage. Crucial to an understanding of marronage as a phenomenon and an existential mode of *being* is the recognition of a humanity that survived genocide, kidnapping, the Middle Passage, and enslavement, albeit fragmented. It is this humanity that allows the racialized/colonized subject to recognize their condition as oppressed subjects and provides the space for them to move towards liberation. It is this double movement, these two elements in tension, that I see operating in what León Castro called a maroon consciousness. On the one hand, a maroon consciousness is constituted by the affirmation of ancestral ways of knowing and *being* that in Hip Hop is expressed through a return to the sonic landscapes of the Black tradition that had been censored or disavowed in a time where disco dominated the airwaves. In other words, there was an affirmation of an *Other world* during the incipient moments of Hip Hop as a cultural movement and way of *being*. On the other hand, a maroon consciousness is constituted by the recognition that it inhabits a world which inhibits a pure return to tradition, thus requiring the subject to push back against dehumanization and disavowal through a creative potentiality that manifests in multiple dimensions.

The point of departure for this maroon consciousness is the premature death the racialized and colonized are subjected to. But, as Dinah Orozco Herrera and Nas have pointed out, there is a duality of time by which death is irremediably bound to life. It is the guarantee of death within the world of racial capitalism and anti-Blackness that provides the impetus for the manifestation of a creative potentiality that characterizes marronage, and Afro-Diasporic artistic traditions broadly understood. I conceptualize this creative potentiality as acts of creative transcendence, by which I mean that when faced with annihilation, the racialized/colonized subject harnesses a creativity through which they are able to surpass their current socioeconomic and political condition through the production of innovative sociopolitical institutions, mutual aid initiatives, or, as in the case of Hip Hop, forms of cultural and musical expression. This is particularly salient in the transformation of the turntable from a passive listening device to a musical instrument. In reflecting on "Yak Thoughts" by Young M.A., both its lyrical content and accompanying visuals, this essay sought to think through marronage as an analytic to make the general point of this article, which is a conception of Hip Hop as a

site of fugitivity which, as a culture, produces, and is produced by, a maroon consciousness.

It is this maroon consciousness which I believe was operating during what is understood as the emergence of Hip Hop. In this sense, Hip Hop consisted of a particular way of *being*, *being* as maroon, before it coalesced into a cultural expression. This Hip Hop subjectivity, as maroon subjectivity, serves to create space within the world of anti-Blackness and racial capitalism for the racialized/colonized subject to develop a true first-order consciousness away from the dehumanizing gaze of the white Other. In his song “Otherside of America,” Meek Mill describes the lived experience of Black subjects living within the world of anti-Blackness and racial capitalism, but not before stating that “Mama let me sip the forty, I was just a shorty / Then I started spittin’ godly, then they said record me.”⁹⁰ Mill’s emphasis here on “spittin’ godly” and the effects it had on his sense of *being*, I would argue, serves to highlight that Hip Hop provides a space in which dehumanized subjects can affirm their humanity but also establish a sense of *self* that is distinct from “measuring one’s soul by the tape of a world that looks on in amused contempt and pity” as Du Bois had highlighted.⁹¹ As such, Hip Hop can be interpreted in a broad sense as a *palenque*, or maroon town, ordered by a human temporal schema that allows its inhabitants to resist and thrive in spite of the conditions of oppression imposed by racial capitalism, with death ever looming. Certainly, “when the death bell rings, life responds in chorus.” And it is deafening.

⁹⁰ Meek Mill, *Otherside of America* (Atlantic/Maybach Music, 2020).

⁹¹ Du Bois, 9.

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