

# From Mega-Lith to Mack Daddy:<sup>1</sup> Hip Hop Mantra and the Hidden Transcript of Matter

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Its like you're the instrument and the universe is playing you—DJ Qbert

Rhythm finds expression in the healing arts that use incantation and repetition of powerful phrases to affect mental and physical states. Like different radio frequencies that inhabit the same “space,” the different rhythms of the body, soul, spirit, and “other” can coexist in the same space of the person, a person who takes as self-evident that he or she lives in a multidimensional universe. Rhythmic entrainment can also unfold these dimensions under disciplined conditions. . . . (Bynum 1999: 94-95)

There is a mutability in the boundary between self and other, between substance and force, between life and death. . . . Because it is a highly personalized world and the consciousness is not isolated but rather localized in certain areas, boundaries are inherently permeable by other personhoods and so, clinically speaking, it is not a matter of “What is the matter with you?” but rather “Who is the matter with you?” (Bynum 1999: 96-97)

## Bop-Hop Prelude

This is a probe of planets, of skin, of worlds between words, of sympathetic-sonic-soul-magic trapped in a def-shout, caught in a jazz note, locked inside a

horn, layered in a rain storm, rocked in a vibrated cave of rave-dancing bison, fried in the pie of sky, in the high-rising laminate of syncopated fate, of fight, of star-light, of night, inside your head, crawling out your eyeball like a misplaced squeal, like an earful of warring colors, like sex inside a sentence, like a seismic serration of the world-code, seeking healing in the sound, seeking five bodies to live in, seeking to synctify soul through a world-whole, seeking to probe the primal lobe of strobe-truth, through every layer of cell. This is the jack-up of get down, the frown on the face of god, the laugh of the dead, the grin of goldilocks at the top of your head, bleeding red over the midnight bed of lost lovers and flavors of pulled back covers, revealing the dread of black at the bottom of the stack. This is the lack of limitation, like matter musing on its own beginning.

## Introduction

In our time, the “stuff” of creation has increasingly become subject matter for the creation of stuff. The relationship of the human community to the rest of the created order is increasingly mediated by the commodity. Matter no longer matters; it is simply there to be altered, picked, dug, designed, molded, modified, manipulated, masticulated, metabolized, minced, mythologized, mercurized, monumentalized, and made over. The last 500 years have witnessed a scale of human intervention into the biosphere and its mineral substrata that is patently unprecedented and practically lethal. In the mix, what might be called the “religious imagination of matter” is no longer merely a matter for religion. The apocalypse is upon us and its name is the machine. It has perhaps already won. The essay that follows is in large part a paean to what may be one of the only things the machine cannot so far be taught to do: entrance itself into ecstasy. But then, it is not clear that human beings can be so taught either.

What is clear is that trance and its stimulants remain definitive of human being and becoming as far back as the hand can grope and the eye gaze. The search of consciousness for alternative consciousness may well be constitutive of the phenomenon itself (Goodman 1990: 219-221). Not only have we been (thus far at least) in our short blip of history, *homo religiosus*, as Eliade, et al. would opine, but *homo* “trance-iosus.” Mere glance at the list of pastime preoccupations in the local entertainment guides of our urbane urbanities would suffice to convince. Stomp-stepping in the stadium or popping and locking under the strobe-light at night belie the lie of loving rationality (Rose 1994: 39). Modernity is starved for alterity (Reed 1983: xi). The drive to dive headfirst into some kind – any kind! – of delirium is irrepressible. We come from the bloodline of shamans. For those of us tending towards the immobile—there is either kind of screen to cream our eyeball. Our teens know the trick only too well; the postmodern “parent” *par excellence* answers to the channel-changing wrist-flick or the mere tickle of a mouse-button. Instant trance-in the form of “eloquent ozone” or (the

peripatetic prance of) pixel-flow! The mind on matter, miniaturized.

But the shamanistic search for the shape-shifting Crow (on channel 62 where I come from) or the Wolf of midnight howls of revenge (channel 7?) is simply morphed into a machine-blend, not banished. Even dance delivers the new demon—the “robot” is nothing if not an old instinct to unseat the regnant power of the age by caging its call *inside* the body. Shamans have long shamanized sickness by way of shifting its locus to the battlefield of the bone-in-motion within themselves. Spirit-war wrestled into the warp of the mental-scape interior to the cape of skin. The nape of *their* neck, arguably, was made to raise hair.

But here we border on something that is not as ancient as the animation I have so far augured. “Skin borders,” in modern battles, are almost everything (Du Bois 1961: xiv). Race has become the ultimate category of the controlling eye, bearing police batons and prison bars in its wake, bearing bombs, bearing fate (Du Bois 1961: 16; Davis 1993: 149). The trick of the eye in seeing “black” into brown, in casting olive as obsidian, and observing tan as the opposite of transparent, is shape-shifting at its “best” form of worst (Du Bois 1961: 15-16; Perkinson 2002: 19, 51). The resulting supremacy, I would argue, is modernity’s sorcery (Perkinson 2003). Whiteness as the ultimate rightness—conjured from the pink-when-I’m-done-at-the-sink, blue-when-below-32, red-when-caught-dead-in-embarrassment, green-when-vomiting-in-the-latrine, yellow-when-afraid-of-my-fellow, but otherwise pallid and sallow skin-prattle of folk who look like me!

In the resulting history, mythologies of matter have become the mere handmaids of an intractable light-supremacy (Berendt 1992: 21-23, 27-31; Esteva and Prakash 1998: 75-76; Rorty 1979: 181). The register of the eye is now the measure of the velocity—and virtuosity—of all else. Big “bang” is only lately and belatedly that; it is first of all a radiance that kills. And the speed that defines is today virtually deified in its seemingly singular line of design. Never mind that 9/10ths of all that matters—all that is “matter”—is apparently dark. Light, by any observable feature of its various “white” embodiments, appears to be quintessentially flight—away from its origin, away from communion, away from earth, away, arguably, from itself. At least, such is the argument here. “White,” “sight,” “flight” and “might” all seem to implicate each other in the great global take over that is modernity. But the one thing such an absolute project seems to lack is delight—a red-hot, “night-time is the right-time” delirium of desultory and defiant love of matter in all of its multitudinous possibilities of becoming bodies. The body has been re-packaged as a commodity and sold for a dime. The capacity for entrancing that body is being conjured away by an Invisible Hand.

In what follows, then, I propose to juxtapose the oldest testament of the drive to contrive the trance—rock art of the Paleolithic era among South Africa’s San and Europe’s clans alike—and the latest wave of raving desire to rock, bop, hip hop the “material surround” of human becoming with resonant meanings of rhythm. Notice my chosen code here is not visible text, but aural texture,

not the hieroglyphs of the roving eye, but the slips, slides and glides of the unclose-able ear. And here, obviously, the license taken is laughably large: rock rhythm of the entranced cave-dark (presumably giving rise to “third-eye” visions that can not be seen by the physical eye) and hopped up rhyme of the stark ghetto. But the urge is itself urgent: matter is fast becoming our last “enemy” in the form of ineluctable pollution operating at the level of the nano-crystal. My claim is that we are fast losing the modality of the multiple, under tutelage of hard matter, in opting for an easier, but deadly, mathematics of the Monolithic One. The number here cuts across physics and metaphysics alike. In reducing everything to the modern Same – in locking into the imperative of growth alone and at any cost, in taking over the host body of the planet like a renegade cancer cell, converting all other tissues of life into that one logic of expansion, and quickly eliminating any other life projects and dalliances—we may well be evolving into our mutational dead-end. But matter will continue, even if we don’t.

## The Modern

In *nuce*, my argument runs like this: A century and a half ago, Karl Marx tracked the way exchange value effectively evacuates the “object” of capitalist enterprise of the human love and labor that produced it in the first place (Marx 1967: 38, 91, 210; Stallybrass 1998: 185, 196). For Marx, the resulting commodity fetishism is precisely anti-fetishistic. That is its problem. It is a European fetishism of fetishism. In calling the pot “black,” the kettle has thereby masked its own copper tone. Sixteenth and seventeenth century European labeling of certain objects of trade on the West African coast as *fetissos*—as objects revered and ritually palavered into potencies of protection and power by their wearers and bearers—codified an intra-European discourse that marked such an (African) mentality as “dupable” (Pietz 1985: 10; 1987: 23, 37). It could easily be sold a bunch of beads in exchange for gold—the supposedly valuable secured for a slight sum of the valueless. But the “slight,” here, is really a sleight of hand, says Marx, an Invisible Hand orchestrating a global blindness. What disappears behind the calculations is not only the object. Strangely, the human subject, made to appear for the first time ever as “individual,” standing out from the communal network of nature and nurture that produced it, also disappears (Marx 1967: 38, 91). It becomes the mere “place” of a market price, the appendage to the commodity, the name of a meaning that is no meaning, but mere accumulation (Marx 1967: 102-103). Even as every object becomes exchangeable for any other object, every subject begins to suffer a slight suspicion of being the same—and can thus be sold the latest sign of substantiality, the latest confection of salvation and wholeness inside a plastic box (Kilbourne 1996: 3; McGrane 1996: 4).

Much titillating work has been done since, in the name of Marx, on the

social dynamism thus unleashed as a new form of global dis-ease. The confusion that human beings take their meaning from the sheer size and novelty of the objects they own. The mobilization of dollars as the digits of a divine arrival (Frank 2000: 1). The cut-throat competition cantilevering technological advance out over an abyss of self-consuming suburbs and warring third-worlds. The emergence of advertising as the new discourse of deliverance, provoking awareness of the slight Flaw (I don't smell well, don't dress dope, don't feel fly, don't scope like eye-candy in the appraising gaze, don't drive the real deal, don't live large enough inside the gated domain of gain), and then promising paradise inside the package (McGrane 1996: 4).

But, as Peter Stallybrass opines in recent writing, the actual chuckle of Marx over the fetish-phrase is frequently missed (Stallybrass 1998: 184). Marx was not pillorying the genuine thing at all. Actual fetishizing of objects—granting them the power of mnemonics, investing them with the love of a lifetime, the handling of a lived history, the wear and tear of trouble and endearing touch and the tears of rending loss—all of that kind of conscription of objects as living embodiments of human meaning, Marx argued *for* (Stallybrass 1998: 184, 186-187).

The fetishism of the commodity was exactly the loss of that kind of relationship with matter. It was rather a re-making of the material thing as void of any particularity and history, as a mere sign of exchange, a mere harbinger of the great invisible growing "something" that answers to nothing identifiable. Marx decried the fetishism of *commodities*, not fetishism *per se*, argues Stallybrass (1998: 184, 186). It was the eclipse of the object as bearing the marks of subjectivity that draws out the troubled gaze, and troubling word of ire and analysis, of Marx. Modernity is actually the first form of society that tries to opt out of materiality in favor of an invisible calculus of widgets and digits and all manner of charade and parade of empty velocity, pretending to importance, but going ... where? As Stallybrass says,

It is profoundly paradoxical that widely antagonistic critiques of European modernity share the assumption that modernity is characterized by a thoroughgoing materialism. The force of that denunciation depends upon the assumption of a place before the fall into materialism, a society where people are spiritually pure, uncontaminated by the objects around them. But to oppose the materialism of modern life to a nonmaterialist past is not just wrong; it actually *inverts* the relation of capitalism to prior and alternative modes of production. . . . The radically dematerialized opposition between the "individual" and his or her "possessions" (between subject and object) is one of the central ideological oppositions of capitalist societies. (1998: 185)

The later fulmination of eighteenth-century political revolution that ensconces this highly touted, objectless “individual subject” in a panoply of celebrated rights, perhaps realizes its quintessence in the late nineteenth-century ascription of those rights to the “real” individual of the age, the corporation. The advance of the agenda of this “One” continues apace, in our new century, in the promulgation of the transnational agreements that supersede every national sovereignty in the name of liquidity and investment rights. But note even the corporation is without matter; it begins to disclose its essential grin in the PIN number on the plastic ticket to paradise. As the President of one of the prime industrial giants offered as early as the Youngstown, Ohio, plant-closing struggles in the late 70s, “The real business of US Steel is not steel, but money.” Nike and Hilfiger today do not even pretend: the sign, itself, is the new name of the divine (Baudrillard 1981: 143). The product is otherwise just a non-descript body barreling towards its predestination as garbage. The screen of ever-flowing green finds its dream in a simple binary—if not the One, then nothing. Thus modernity.

## The Material

But if the fetish of the commodity is actually the mark of a regress in society—as it is for Marx—it remains apposite to demarcate the kind of regression it represents. The word itself, according to William Pietz, quoting one John Atkins writing in 1737, was “used in a double signification among the Negroes: It [was] applied to dress and ornament, and to something revered as a Deity” (Pietz 1988: 110). Indeed, from the first in such colonial encounters—in contrast to the free-standing idol—the fetish “was associated with objects *worn on the body*,” such as leather pouches strung around the neck containing passages from the *Qur’an* (Stallybrass 1998: 185). The discourse of the fetish—developed in European concern to demonize the practice thereof—delineated a deep distrust of both material embodiment itself and, says Pietz, “the subjection of the human body ... to the influence of certain significant material objects that, although cut off from the body, function as its controlling organs at certain moments” (Pietz 1987: 37). The *fetisso*-object thus represented a threatened “subversion of the [European] ideal of the autonomously determined self” (Pietz 1987: 23). But its elaboration as a European concept seeking to demonize whatever powers might be attributed to its display on the body (through the association of the *feitico* with witchcraft), ironically emerged exactly as Europe accomplished the real material subjugation of those same bodies. The very identity of “Europe” itself—as a project of subjectivity loosed upon the world in a practice of unbridled rapacity—was constituted precisely *in that* contradiction. It comes into being as the subjective delusion of a vaunted “freedom from” material objects leveraged by the enslavement of other material *subjects*.

And here we begin to assemble the necessary pieces of thought to re-think

our history. Marx marks modernity under the sign of the commodity: a slippage of the primitive fetish into a new form of duress. Now no longer mere dress, no longer the power of what is caressed close to the skin for its compulsion of protection—the drive-to-fetishize invests skin itself with augury. The slave is the commodity-form of human matter. Europe-on-the-rise dons Africa as its cloak and disguise, wearing the dark amulet like a bonnet of light, hiding the bite of its own tooth. The white colonial body vaunts itself free from materiality, binds its body in breeches and trusses, boots and hoops, cravats and slats and all manner of windings, while living on the fat of the other body. Cinema studies in our day, for instance, are savvy on the degree to which the modern Euro-American identity has composed itself reflexively and really as a white “talking head” propped up upon a black laboring tread (Dyer 1988: 48, 58, 63). Modern subjectivity is, and ever has been for 500 years, a mentality of light feeding on dark substance. The fetish, however, is Europe itself, in the form of its projection of pallor as power, holding “white” to its quivering naked breast like a charm.

But the tack of this tactic is full of turns and trickery. Yes, slavery emerges in modernity as the new form of witchery, the consumption of “other” flesh in the name of progress. Early Europe mistook impatience for conscience, refused its reflection in the eye of the other subject, submerged the slave in the object, confused the animation thereof for an animality it obviously thought it had tamed, wrote off materiality as that necessary substrate of human becoming that was the lot of mere labor, sat down fat, flatulent and blind on the stoop of the world, as if it were divine. Marx indeed marks the evacuation of the object, in that history, as the ascendance of the commodity-form. But it is equally cogent so to mark the evacuation of the subject in the form of the slave. Hegel perhaps understood this, without understanding that he understood, in virtue of his (in)famous master-slave dialectic. In the process, Europe (thought it) watched itself emerge from the duress, conscious, clean, white, purely itself, basking in utter aloneness, stripped of all dependencies—the titan of all, striding tall over the supine dark body of the slave, giant of the granite globe, gripping hard metal in hand like lightly squeezed mud, shaping a sun, groping the world-groin, full of bombast and belligerence, lost . . . in the mirror of its own inverted cornea.

In that same process, it fundamentally misperceived its own body. Intimacy between the body of the human being and the body of everything else ceased to be immediate and became a surrogated experience. Concourse with matter came to be mediated, first by the slave (from sixteenth through the eighteenth centuries) and then increasingly by the machine (from the nineteenth through the twentieth centuries). Marx’s unmasking of technology as essentially “dead labor”—as the modern form of intercourse with the ancestors, no longer kept tucked in a canister in a spirit-cabinet in the shrine room or in a small stone in the peristyle, but locked in the form of an ever-growing prosthesis, simultaneously extending and attenuating living bodies on the surface of the planet—is seminal to think

with. It also supplies insight on what was made to inhabit the slave body, and all of its racialized, blackened, queered, dolled up, stripped down, eroticized, exoticized, gladiator sportsified, conscripted, incarcerated, McWorldified successor bodies since then. "Between me and the other world is ever an unasked question," once wrote Du Bois (1967: 15). "Between me and the other world," I would agree, "is a whole history of questions, of dead and living embodiments of questions." The modern body is nested in nature in the form of a profoundly powerful, and profoundly silenced, tech-network of living and dead ancestors. I am not simply, and never have been, my own body.

The intuition, here, is that the human body is—like all else that is—essentially holographic in nature. It hosts everything. It needs all. By its naked self, it is, literally, nothing. Modernity has operated, in this view, as a huge category mistake, the erection of a connotation as a basic condition. The hysteria, the tantrum of desire drunk on its own infinitizing appetite, found a hole in the wall of its own European world, crawled through, dared the wave, delivered itself unsuspecting and ignorant into a dazzling domain of unsecured "American" artifacts, circulating in low-tech habitats, declared thanksgiving, set up the table, pulled out the gun, hired the Middle Passage, and sat down. It did not so much trade as take, it did not so much make as mystify. But it also mystified itself. The body is and needs a world of bodies, it needs matter, it needs others that matter. It is not, has not ever been and cannot ever be, an "individual," whether in its own physicality, its own spatiality, its temporality, or its speciation. We are part of all that is. Period. But in the frenzy of fantasy, we have fallen headfirst into a fallacy. As Marx, both laughing and lamenting, says, we have tried to fetishize immateriality itself, to lock up infinity inside of a spirit called "exchange," and pretend the commodity-body does not matter. But infinity, actually, is always a matter of matter.

## The Megalith

An earlier age of the human rage against demise figured the matter differently, however. It is there that we perhaps need to turn to catch reflection of our own image in a mirror that clears the smoke, rather than invites us to disappear. Strangely that mirror was rock. In the title of my essay, "mega-lith" is technically a misnomer. I am not so much concerned with standing stones as with hollowed shelters. It is the word "lith" that does the necessary work. But here the emphasis is not on erection "up" so much as initiation "down." Paleolithic cave art supplies a piquant witness to ancient activities that remain largely a tease. From 37,000 until roughly 11,500 BCE, human beings the world over sought sanctuary in rock wombs that bear the marks of their meaning in modalities that defy the modern eye. Why paint animals inside the bowels of the earth? Why such fantastic creatures bearing monstrous features of hybridity and elision? Bodies half appearing out of cracks in the wall, bodies morphed into bison walking



upright, bodies of humans wearing hoofs, bodies not fully there? The history of the industry seeking to decipher the mysteries has gone through its own shape-shifting process of explanation: art for art's sake; totemism; hunting magic; destructive magic; fertility magic; the modern magic of structuralist fame; solicitation of pre-modern modalities of shamanism (Clottes and Lewis-Williams 1996: 61). As I am no expert in the eloquence of such arts, I am simply here taking up the last and latest favorite as offering a quixotic angle on our own quandary.

There is much to respond to in the allure of these silent graphics of gleam on the sheen of rock wall. Apparently, in some cases, the place was the space of a vaunted kill of feared/loved animal—and the blood of that primal encounter mingled with paint to trace the matter and consecrate the memory. In other cases, it may have been that the place itself communicated, that its cold, its dark, its fantasy-scape of protuberances and indentures, lines and lips and drips themselves “initiated,” or at least induced the kind of body-coma that led easily to trance-vision. In the flicker of candle- or torch-light that must have been the mode of apprehension initially, many of the animal bodies seem to move, disappear, materialize out of nowhere. One supposition is that the first encounter with rock-become-roll-of-revered-deer-flesh was by way of hand, fingers finding seams that suggested beasts-behind-the-basalt. But in any case, thus far, it is shamanic investment that seems best to hint at the meaning of the haunt.

David Lewis-Williams has probed South African San art for decades to try to decode the delirium registered there. Situated in sight of what is now known about trance-experience by way of both ethnology and neurobiology, he offers a tripartite model of the process. A preliminary stage of the search for an altered sense evokes altered vision: “geometric forms, such as dots, zigzags, grids, sets of parallel lines, nested curves, and meandering lines,” as his collaborator Jean Clottes writes (Clottes and Lewis-Williams 1996: 16). “The forms are brightly colored, and flicker, pulsate, enlarge, contract, and blend one with another,” as they are projected, open-eyed, onto walls and ceilings (Clottes and Lewis-Williams 1996: 16). (And perhaps here we need to make a brief mental note of modern teens tagging urban scenes with screams of shouting syllables, oscillating like dream. But in any case ...) A second stage has the subject wrestling these geometric percepts into intelligible shape by way of culturally-coded analogues: a round luminous form may suggest a cup or a bomb for Westerners; in the native southwest of the U.S., shimmering zigzags may become writhing snakes (Clottes and Lewis-Williams 1996: 16). The real deal lies ahead, however.

If a third stage is realized, the precepts swirl into a whirling vortex, condensing towards an endpoint of light that opens out into full-blown hallucination. The vortex is itself shamanic text, the geometrics of the first stage often coalescing into identifiable animals, birds, and people in the curling lattice-like sides of the funnel. At the far end of this mental-tunnel materializes the “bizarre world of trance” (Clottes and Lewis-Williams 1996: 16). As Clottes says:

The geometric percepts are still present, but chiefly peripherally. With one's eyes open, Stage Three hallucinations are, like the geometrics of Stage One, projected onto surrounding surfaces. Western subjects liken these projected images to "pictures painted before your imagination" and to "a motion picture or slide show." They seem to float across walls and ceilings. At the same time, the surfaces themselves become animated. A picture hanging on a wall, for instance, will be seen in three dimensions and with heightened colors, and it may start to move, to come alive. In Stage Three people feel that they can fly and change into birds or animals. . . . Sometimes, they believe they actually become a geometric percept. (Clottes and Lewis-Williams 1996: 17)

And the trance is not simply vision. A Westerner experiencing an altered state said, "I thought of a fox, and instantly I was transformed into that animal. I could distinctly feel myself a fox, could see my long ears and bushy tail, and by a sort of introversion felt that my complete anatomy was that of [such a creature]" (Clottes and Lewis-Williams 1996: 17). And so, too (this theory then holds) with San and cave art depictions of bipartite bodies: an initiate morphs into eland, antelope head perched on top of human trunk. Shaman becomes snake, or seal, or bison looming large. But where the propensity for such altered experience seems to be hardwired into the human nervous system universally, the actual materializations of the manic-mind are culturally particular (Clottes and Lewis-Williams 1996: 19). San see eland, Inuit become bear, Jivaro jerk into jaguar. Power-animals take possession of the pried-open psyche according to the fauna and flora peculiar to that particular ecology. (And we might add, with just another slight peak ahead: "Do hip hopheads then muscle the "machine-power" of their "niche" into an altered skein of dreaming in certain forms of "robotic" dance?).

Clottes notes that the shamanic world traditionally was three-tiered (Clottes and Lewis-Williams 1996: 29). The ordinary world was cushioned above and below by overworld and underworld and the journey-agenda was often imaged accordingly. Where ascension was in order—to search for a cure, retrieve the soul-on-leave, wrestle the dawn-demon—the shape-shifting demanded insight, flight and a bird-body (Clottes and Lewis-Williams 1996: 26). Where descent was the demand, however, cave-crawling suggested snake-skin and wriggle-vision (Clottes and Lewis-Williams 1996: 26-27). Here the work was earth-bound and *chthonic*, going deep into mud, far down the spine, seeking help supine and blind. But in either instance, the instinct is the same: the body is the bible of the beast. The work is to work up one form into another, to become many skins,

multiple kin, to traverse the cosmos by attuning the consciousness, and vice versa, to move between layers of matter, to pile up molecules like sheaths, to travel “morphically.”

Even medieval Europe understood the modality: mystics as early as Origin the Egyptian and as late as Teresa of Spain entrained the mind by way of matter (Eliade 1964: 399, 489). *Spirit* emerged from *soul* constrained by *body* in direct synchronicity with a text read as *inner meaning* mediated by *metaphor* derived from *literal surface* that itself opened up the cosmos of *creation* as harboring both *perdition* and *paradise* (Chadwick 1990: 53). The threefold interior was summoned by way of threefold text to correctly embrace the threefold context. Dante organized the triple play into a comedic Christian classic that structured the dilemma of shaman-travel into a drama of going down in order to get up (Zaleski 1987: 4, 57-58). He literally and literarily had to cloth himself with hell before clothing himself with heaven, to crawl the body of Satan and climb the mountain of purgation before cloning himself as light and then returning to the flesh of this world.

But no matter the precise architectonics, it is apposite to note the worldwide means. Where Origin worked fasting into a synchronizing of inner spirit with outer *archon* by way of corporeal sensing, Voodoo mobilizes muscle into a meaning of Ezulie or Damballah or Gede by way of drum (Desmangles 1992: 93, 119, 125, 131; Walker 1972: 104-115). Candomble coats cranium with spots of delirium, painted with blood of goat, glues feather of rooster onto face, effaces the human distaste for intimacy with any save *this* body alone (Drewal 197: 222; Wafer 1991: 150). San sandwich their bodies in painted rock shelters to “become” swallows to flow with sky (Clottes and Lewis-Williams 1996: 33-36). Nootka dive to the bottom of the sea to return, bloody-nosed and kelp-covered, with healed soul in hand (Clottes and Lewis-Williams 1996: 27). Lakota hook twig under nipple to pull skin up from bone and enter the sun (Walker 1972: 67, 99). The Yaqui ingest peyote to become coyote (Castaneda 1968: 241, 249). The Hopi descends to the *kiva*-navel of the world to seek rebirth (Mooney 1973: 811-814). The Siberian Samoyed goes into a literal cave to be saved by reindeer women (Clottes and Lewis-Williams 1996: 27). And so on. The diversity, here, is a university all by itself.

But note that *out-of-body* experience is by way of being in another body. Spirit transcending matter is by way of alternative matters. The world is not left behind but morphed to reveal its multiplicity. And this is the singular insistence of this argument. The gateways to the spirit world are numerous: drum rhythm, breathing precision, plant eating, blood drinking, vision-seeking in isolation, dream-deciphering in communion with the clan, whirling in dance, chanting in trance, mantric hum, tantric cum, wrapping oneself round with the reindeer-skin of a shaman, wedging oneself into a wall of rock. The work is that of donning matter in a new way, or perhaps otherwise said, perceiving and experiencing the

permeability of bodies one to another. The result is certainly that of alternative consciousness, but seemingly always enveloped in other forms of sensuousness, other skins, other rims of other worlds, fins of fish, feathers of flying eagle, head of bison, writhing side of snake, the quake of mandrake on the lake at midnight. It is one body giving rise to another body.

It is interesting in this light to recognize that whereas for agricultural intensive communities the shamanic decision is felt as spirit-*possession*, hunter-gatherer renditions of the same are embraced as soul *loss* (Clottes and Lewis-Williams 1996: 26). That is, where the community is settled and confined in space, the body gives rise to its alternatives in the form of too much presence inside of too little place, the many inside the one. Where the community roams, on the hand, the experience is complete displacement and the need for retrieval of the one from among the many. In either case, however, the modality of the means means a new modality of the body. The heart of the matter of trance would seem to be the experience of matter as hybrid.

Returning now to our cave-bodies, the reflection waxes wily. At one point, Clottes paraphrases Lewis-Williams to the effect that, for the San, apparently “the rock was like a veil suspended between this world and the spirit world ... the potency-filled paint created some sort of bond between the person, the rock veil, and the spirit world that seethed behind it” (Clottes and Lewis-Williams 1996: 33). Shaman-artists would perhaps then have taken as their task the coaxing of “creatures and spirits of the underworld through the rock . . . making palpable what they experienced and saw on their subterranean out-of-body journeys” (Clottes and Lewis-Williams 1996: 33). Judging from the smudges and handprints, touching the wall appears to have been as important as painting it (Clottes and Lewis-Williams 1996: 33-34). The animated wall-face may have acted as a reservoir of spirit-grace; when potency was needed, tracing an outline or touching an etching may have occasioned something like the conductivity of an electric charge, catapulting the shaman into trance as a spirit-animal (Clottes and Lewis-Williams 1996: 33, 34). The fauna here then are not mere replicas of those outside. Careful attention to minute detail reveals them rather as shaman-bodies ballooned out across the three-tiered spirit-world, morphing through the vortex of enlivened matter, spinning into the space of hybridity, looking back upon their humanity as simultaneously also feral and mineral. The wall is not picture, but panel, hiding its transcript of an altered state like a mysterious gate, waiting, like a stage set for the shaman-initiate to plunge a hand or eye through the molecule and free the animation behind (Clottes and Lewis-Williams 1996: 35).

## The Mack

And having set our own stage now, we can track a new moment of such artistry. It seems clear that part of the trance-task had to do with plumbing the depths,

going down, braving dark and stark “surround,” using cave as a grave-like stimulus to spring elsewhere, free energy, face gravity, growl in the bowels of the ground like a serpentine augur, auguring for spleen-gold. To what degree can we map topography on top of anatomy and psychology? It seems no mistake that cave art works especially with the proclivity of the snake, winding its way down to rest and up to feast (Clottes and Lewis-Williams 1996: 28, 34). Kundalini is at least as old as Egypt, as Edward Bynum makes us aware, imaged as halo of cobra over the head of pharaoh, revered for healing in the caduceus (Bynum 1999: 82, 107). Caves seem clearly to contain refrains of “underworld” work, the shamanic mnemonic of battling for insight and healing in the nether regions of sickness and death.

The idea of a liberation from below shows up in quite varied traditions of critical release around the world—seemingly surging from the earth itself in testaments like that of cures connected with the phonolite stone at the shrine of St. Foy of Conques, France, leaping from river mud in renewing the metal of an exhausted mother in Toni Morrison’s account of escaped slave Sethe struggling for her life on the banks of the Ohio, striking, unbidden, like lightning up the leg from concrete itself in the recent report of a Lakota woman turned Muslim in Atlanta, Georgia (Green 2000: 153-154, 257, 263-266; Hopkins 1993: 71; Stands-Ali 1992: 7). What *Voudou* practices as corn-meal drawings, summoning *lwa*-spirits up the central axis of the peristyle from the midnight realm below, Hindu yoga imagines as a snake-awakening, trained to traverse the seven-station *charkas* along the spine, before cresting in an enlightenment outbreak from the crown of the head, and falling, like a sudden rain of bliss (Desmangles 1992: 101-107; Bynum 1999: 38, 74, 96-97). Is it the psyche we are mapping here? The skeletal track of neuromelanin coatings? (Bynum 1999: 100, 141-142). The spirit-world behind the physical world, hidden like an undetected Heisenbergian cosmos? In a shamanic encompassment of the matter, it wouldn’t matter; it would all be the matter of spirit and the spirit of matter.

A recent comment by an East Indian musician, adept at sitar sounds and synthesizer surrounds, opens the final concern. Hip hop rhyme, he opined at a recent conference, is fundamentally *mantric*, syncopating the rhythmic universe with a sonic probe whose effect, in the Sanskrit lexicon of such things, is that of the *subda-brahmanic* word (Paul 2002: 1, 4-5). In contemporary rap, it represents a vector of percussive intervention aimed at release of the second *chakra*, vibrating sexual energy into electric currents of hard-edged liberation. In the Vedic tradition, such a focus on a complex harmonic of clipped and chopped consonantal effects was understood as intensely manic, aggressively dynamic, and quintessentially male. Saying such, of course, I realize I am instantly out on thin ice, skating wildly off the edge of the acceptable world of left politics, touting a taut that is largely untaught—whether old school or new—and patently dangerous to women and men alike. But the remedy is not in its repression. I am not con-

cerned here primarily for rap's lyrics or its all too often misogynist politics or purile erotics, but rather for the hypnotics of its public effect. How do we read such? What is the heart of the matter of the worldwide chatter of griot-rhyme and sublime hollow-back, "break dance" spines and the spray-gun splatter of loud-shouting letter in the clutter of urban demise we recognize as the postindustrial gutter?

Hip hop culture, I would suggest, is a stiletto to the wall of the ghetto, letting the spirits out. Which kind of spirit-animals you see depends in part on which side of the divide you occupy. Du Bois described his early experience of the racializing gaze—of a grade-school girl refusing his greeting-card-gift with a peremptory glance—as a veil dropping, splitting his world in two, walling him in and resources out (Du Bois 1967: 16). Not merely parental inflection and educational convention intervened between, but ultimately concrete street and the beat of police baton, skin sheath and leaf of lawbook, history and church consistory and mysteries large and small. Color has been made the container of all manner of mythic projection. Shaman-work inside such an epidermal wall of domination has ever looked "black" on the outside. But within the veil, the skin is invested with all manner of rocking spirits of resistance and rhyme, like a time-bomb. "Blackness" is hammered into a living shaman-robe hosting a continuous spirit-battle against the threatened loss of soul . . . or life (Perkinson 2002: 43-44).

The cave of the hour, in our time, I would argue, is this minefield of the walled-in city, walled out of mind, surrounded by sirens, surveilled in the satellite eye, secured by the white lie serving the suburbs more than their fair share of the pie. And here the augury gets interesting, in comparison with past cave-work. The world over, the wall is growing—gated domains of the dollar, gated remains of the hollowed out fodder-field of the poor, each the product of the other, bistro and boutique of the elite "eating" the *barrio*-body of the defeated. The underworld today is an overworld production, North Atlantic neoliberal consumption of Southern substance creating demographic "caves" in waves of migrating maize farmers and rice growers and spice dealers from Afghanistan to Yucatan.

In the last twenty years, a graphic has begun to grow on the underworld wall that divines the rind chewed in the halls of power. But it also augurs an alternative power of pleasure. Its grapheme is primarily rhythmic, even when it writes its mind on the façade of brick, in thick stick syllables oscillating "color" as the new form of contagion. From the dank of ghetto dirt, from under the dark skin, from the cave of raging waves of denied dreams, a defiance has emerged that returns the signature to the signing hand of treaty. GATT and NAFTA, CAFTA and the Euro-Alliance, and all their supporting institutions like WTO, IMF, TABD (the Trans-Atlantic Business Dialogue) and the World Bank are all the creations of fathers who have sons and daughters. The wall that walls in and out has not been able to stop the shout up the spine of a sampled rhyme. White

youth in the suburbs, elite youth of enclosed enclaves the world over, have been penetrated by a sonic intention of animation that defies the public transcription of compliance with subservience (Spencer 1995: 166, 169-171).

The hidden transcript of the matter we all “are” is a vibration of erotic inscription that loves connoption, confection, excitation and interpenetration *writ large*. Just ask Bullworth.<sup>2</sup> More to the point, ask your local evolutionary biologist about the percentage of plumage devoted to arousing the image of desirability. We may think we are presenting the paper to advance the career, but underneath that endeavor, there is a whole “other palaver” that is constantly tickling that more serene surface. At the deepest level, we are all Macks. Humans are indeed possessed, all the time. Matter is itself *mantrically* erotic, vibrating with the pulsars of attraction and repulsion that the laboratory tracks as gravity; sexuality is simply gravity gone humanoid. At the primal level, beneath all our civilizing veneers of vanity, the grin is from the groin, the place where delirium is death-in-drag and *vice versa*, where the one drives to the many and the many show up inside the one. It has ever been the burden of the shaman to divine the devil inside the god, the soul inside the sickness, the beast in the rock, the spirit in the matter, the variation inside the vibration.

What the wall reveals in the cave of old, the rhyme congeals in the rhythm of this new age. Matter is not primarily a commodity, it is the polymorphic possibility of ribaldry in the tightest of places, the most solid seeming space, the most lithic face. This is the triumph over terror Charles Long elaborates in raiding Rudolph the Lutheran’s notion of *tremendum* and swinging it to the time of a people on the rise against their demise inside a shackle (Long 1986: 9, 162-165).<sup>3</sup> Or inside their own skin. And this is where the matter gets most maverick. The epidermal wall is the new shamanic stall—the place of writing wild motion against the granite grain. Melanin is the postmodern surface of the healing spell, but the modality is primarily musicality, not paint. “Paint” has been the control tactic of the colonizing tyranny, making skin yield a curse,<sup>4</sup> making the eyeball king, raising the screen as the ultimate technology of racial supremacy. Today, the necessary counter erupts as time, the off-beat repeat of the bass line, fracturing the design of white melody.<sup>5</sup> The return of the repressed may look messy, pants all baggy, lip leering contumely, *gesture fuming*. But the meaning is reciprocity. What goes round *has* come round. Walls leak. Matter mediates spirit in multiple form on either side of the Mall wall. It is white youth who are dropping the dime, big time, in this country, to buy a sublime fantasy of a surrogated fate inside an outlaw body of party and crime.<sup>6</sup> If we don’t like the vision, perhaps we need to change the action. Blaming the shaman is just more of the same.

I, for one, choose to look in the mirror of rhythmic reflection. What I see there is a white man’s body being morphed into defection, into a multi-colored surprise.<sup>7</sup> But it is also a demise.<sup>8</sup> The meaning of the rap *mantra* in the underworld is indeed:

locked up in the Mack,  
 stacked in the store at the top of the rack,  
 parleyed into a Puff Daddy pleasure-attack,  
 packaged in a pimp-label,  
 made to outsell Public Enemy's more militant fable.

But like Tupac, Chuck D had the Machiavelli-line right on time.<sup>9</sup> It is a Black Planet rising.<sup>10</sup> The move of this *mantra* is not into, but *out of*, the second *chakra*. The next skeletal stop is the sublime navel center of Power. This cave-rhyme is indeed the design of a "Thug" mind,<sup>11</sup> defined otherwise as a Warrior Coming, not to commit crime and do time—but for recompense!

9/11, I'm afraid, was only the beginning. The ultimate meaning of the towers that fell is a death knell: Babylon brought to its knees by the soldier-bees it has trained. The 500-year old fascination with the ratiocination of a short-sighted whiteness that is modernity's mythological self-colonization is merely a slight blight in the unfolding fate of the late great planet earth. The final date is with the heavy-weight sight of a light that is primarily dark. This is matter's true mate. Everything else is mere fronting.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> A "Mack" or "Mack Daddy" is an African American street term for one who is able to "sweet talk" women, who operates smoothly in domain of seduction, who is adept at hustling, who is a "player" (Smitherman 1994: 157).

<sup>2</sup> Reference here is to the late 90s movie "Bullworth," starring Warren Beatty as a white politician who eventually attempts to go "black" in his sympathies and tastes for language and love, who at the end of the story offers that perhaps what the world needs is for every one to sleep with everyone and stop pretending to be able to maintain absolute boundaries between persons, cultures, nations, etc.

<sup>3</sup> Reference here is to Long's work in taking up Rudolph Otto's phrase *mysterium tremendum et fascinans* as a category for religious comparison across cultures and breaking it in two on colonial experience, claiming that where Europe seemed merely to be confirmed in its sense of superiority and of God as (merely) "fascinating" in the colonial encounter, indigenous groups around the globe were forced to know the Absolute as an inscrutable and overwhelming power of "Tremendousness" and "Fear," and themselves as contingent and "creaturely."

<sup>4</sup> As in the so-called "curse of Ham," theologically deployed by colonial Europe to "explain" the inferiority it projected and imposed on the dark-skinned populations it conquered and pacified. "Race" emerged as the European shorthand by which visual appearance was encoded with epidermal significance and eternal consequence. Racialization is above all a manipulation of perception by way of a preconception of derogation.



- <sup>5</sup> Afro-Diaspora populations have regularly used “time” and “timing” as a resource to displace their oppression through white control of space (of land, of residential mobility, of institutional life, etc.). Making innovative use of West and Central African modalities of “off-timing” and polyphony has been a primary tactic in bending dominant codes (of language, of culture, of gesture, of dress, of music, etc.) to an alternative meaning (controlled by communities of color) (Thompson 1983: xiii-xvii; Perkinson 2002a: 1-3).
- <sup>6</sup> As of the late 1990s, white youth comprise roughly 70% of the market for rap music in the U.S.
- <sup>7</sup> That is, my own attempt to defect politically from “whiteness” and work vocationally against the power and privilege it assembles and concentrates as a form of supremacy and global mastery.
- <sup>8</sup> “Whiteness” as a meaningful category will someday, by force of resistance by people of color or by sheer evolutionary dilution, disappear.
- <sup>9</sup> The references here are to rapper Tupac Shakur’s release entitled “Machiavelli” and Public Enemy’s vocalist Chuck D.
- <sup>10</sup> From a Public Enemy album.
- <sup>11</sup> Shakur’s “Thug Life” theology used the term as a kind of historical acronym for an “original sin” of white making: “the hate u (you) gave little infants fucks everyone.”

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