

## Beyond 'Black CNN': Hip-Hop Soundscapes between Lifeworld and Art World

### **Panel Organizers**

Anthony Obst (Freie Universität Berlin)

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Though often attributed to Public Enemy rapper Chuck D circa “Fight the Power” (and later included in his 1997 memoir), the oft-cited description of hip-hop as the “Black CNN” began as apocryphal. When contrasted with its original appearance, the phrase reveals something telling about rap audiences’ troubling preoccupation with realism. In a September 1988 interview with Spin Magazine, Chuck D is cited as calling rap “Black America’s TV station”. The slippage from TV channel, in general, to *news* channel, specifically, is a function of how hip-hop figures as a soundscape in the American imaginary: Rap music is often viewed as a window through which the experiences of Black Americans can supposedly be perceived realistically. Listeners’ expectations routinely posit a zero degree of separation between the lifeworld and the art world—to the extent that rap lyrics have been used as incriminating evidence in US courts. However, hip-hop is not journalism, it is an artform. Its expression is creative and interpretations require attention to metaphor, flow, rhythm, and layers of meaning that do more than deliver realistic content. In other words, making sense of hip-hop soundscapes requires aesthetic sensibilities at least as much as it requires knowledge and awareness of the social, spatial, and historical lifeworld(s) in which these soundscapes unfold.

By attuning ourselves to these soundscapes, we can hear, for example, the political, interpersonal, and psychological sensibilities of hip-hop, as artists develop album and song structures that replicate forms of experience (Thomas 2019) and contribute to or disrupt the sensibilities of their audiences (Skitolsky 2020) in response to the numbing of the senses generated by forms of (US) liberalism and the anesthesia of whiteness. These functions of hip-hop show the significance of its flows through the American landscape as it involves itself in the world-building project of the transformation of American (and global) identities. Its postures, vocabulary, enunciations, and sonics are embedded in practices that produce novel mythologies and ethics, which transform the character of American life. This panel aims to develop a notion of the soundscapes of hip-hop as a concept for tracing the movements of sound, language, location, and forms of consciousness expressed in its aesthetic forms. The presentations of this panel thus explore the functions of hip-hop as a source of representations that shape the (re)production of American social space.

### **Presentations**

#### **So Many Tears: The Sentimental Self and Constructions of Black (Hyper-)Masculinity in Hip Hop Culture**

Hana Vrdoljak (FAU Erlangen Nürnberg)

#### **Deciphering Esoteric Manuscripts – Mythopoesis in Hip-Hop’s Sonic Fictions**

Pius Jonas Vögele (University of Basel)

#### **Abstract Soundscapes: Experimental Hip-Hop and the Aesthetics of Real Abstraction**

Simon Schleusener (Freie Universität Berlin)

#### **Sounds of the Barrio: The Spatiality of Chicano Rap in TV & Film**

Dianne Violeta Mausfeld (University of Bern)