MAS MOVEMENT: TOWARD A THEORY OF CARIBBEAN RHETORIC

A Dissertation in

English

by

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ABSTRACT

This project situates, describes, and analyzes some of the characteristic discursive practices of Caribbean people in the context of a distinct rhetorical tradition. Rhetoric is viewed in this study as communicative activity precipitated by the constellation of social, psychological, spiritual, and material consequences that have shaped the history of the region and continue to impact contemporary expression. The dimensions of Caribbean rhetoric therefore reflect constructions of social reality and allow practitioners and scholars to approach and analyze the issues and challenges faced by Caribbean people. Objects of study include the novels of Earl Lovelace, the prophetic musical performances of David Rudder, and the transformative possibilities afforded by Caribbean discursive activity in digital environments. I use the "Caribbean Carnivalesque" as a major trope for referring to Caribbean behavior that is founded on the *epideictic* and is tuned specifically to social commentary, agitation, and change. The trope is deployed for two primary purposes: as a key rhetorical device operating among Caribbean people; and as an effective theoretical device for considering how Caribbean people participate in different forms of democratic deliberation and interaction with other groups. Overall, the project strives for an understanding of the Caribbean rhetorical tradition as one of the possible means of approaching, managing, and improving the social circumstances Caribbean people face. It is meant to provide not simply an understanding of the Caribbean presence in American society, but also a greater sense of the rhetorical possibilities that exist for Caribbeans in multiple contexts.
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The shortcomings are mine.
For Layla
Carnival on Frederick Street, Port of Spain, 1888, by Melton Prior for the Illustrated London News
Oho. Like it starting, oui? Don’t be frightened, sweetness: is for the best. I go be with you the whole time. Trust me and let me distract you little bit with one anansi story:

Nalo Hopkinson, *Midnight Robber*, 1

It doesn’t matter what you say, as long as you say it in that sexy Caribbean accent.
Anonymous

Labor Day. Crown Heights in Brooklyn. 1999. There I was, standing in the middle of Eastern Parkway covered from head to foot in blue paint. My costume: shorts and jungle boots, a rough tail, and a leather rum pouch around my neck. The day had already begun to cool, and our band, the Blue Devils, had long since dispersed, moving back along the parade route to mix into the other bands and, for as long as possible, make the day last. I, too, would go back to join them—wining, chipping, drinking, jumping, grabbing, pushing. But before I did, there I was, standing in blue. From a distance, those of us in the crowd—often swelling to the millions—seemed indistinguishable from each other, which is the case with crowds. More remarkable was the fact that up close, in the midst, when the differences might have been most apparent, they mattered less and less. Then it occurred: exactly how many carnivals had I missed? What if this carnival, the opportunities we have to cohere, and the direction of our efforts were used to make something meaningful and lasting? I knew well enough what some of us did, but what more could more of us do? There’d be a time and place more appropriate for that kind of thinking. I acknowledged the profundity of the moment and went back to doing what I had come to do: wine, chip, drink, jump, grab, and push.
I came to the United States in 1989, settling first in the Bronx then, three years later, moving to Brooklyn, where all of we does be and, in the words of Lord Nelson, “all ah we is one family.” I lived with my mother, who had come in 1985 to “make a better way” for us—for me. My mother’s sister, who had been in America since 1960, had petitioned for my mother to join her. My aunt was doing the right thing, according to my family and established immigrant custom, by “opening a way” for her sister who, in turn, opened America to her son. There seemed no viable option for either of us in Trinidad—my mother had not finished high school, I was about to finish, and the opportunities seemed frightfully limited. America, as the thinking went, was the place to be.

So we came.

Family and the Caribbean community were the only things that saved me from the total, fearful, identity-stealing assimilation that was the fate of many pre-1965 immigrants, and of many others since. Nothing but my family and the community stood between my preconceived notions of assimilated Caribbean people and actually becoming one myself. The scope of my world was defined by a dominating Caribbean presence; nearly everyone I knew was Caribbean, most by birth. Of course, many had been in America a long time. Many more had come since 1965. We were strongly, stubbornly Caribbean. For those who choose to live outside the protection of a familiar community, the reality seems to present a troubling ultimatum: assimilate or go home. The fact is a simple one, really: there is no identity without practice, no power without community.

About a decade after I stood on the Parkway, half-naked in blue, watching a carnival fade, more questions came: What rhetorical options are available to Caribbean people as a distinct group? Under what circumstances can collectivity be achieved, maintained, and directed for political agitation? Who among us is using language for this purpose? What
aspects of rhetorical practice are employed and what do participants respond to best? How (if at all) does this discourse reach the intended audience (whether Caribbean or not) and what can be done to facilitate the successful transmission of ideas, ideals, and plans that potentially define it as discourse? The exploration of these questions is the focus of this project in rhetoric. This introductory chapter examines some of the dynamics of a viable Caribbean Ethos, proceeding on the assumption that this phenomenon provides the necessary basis for identification among immigrants in America as much as it does in the Caribbean.

With regard to the full and equal participation of Caribbean people in the grand experiment of democracy, I am specifically concerned with the study and development of a rhetoric that has made this participation possible, with mixed results, for Caribbeans in the last four decades of Caribbean immigration to America, specifically to areas like New York City and its environs. In other words, I am not interested solely in the formation of a marginalized Caribbean identity or a community of exceptional outliers but in the efforts that have been made by Caribbean rhetors who use the vernacular tradition to maintain a Caribbean identity while facilitating and ensuring a greater degree of participation as Americans. By no stretch is this project an exhaustive study of the phenomenon of Caribbean rhetoric; rather, it is an introductory study of the complex and undertheorized rhetorical tradition on which further productive discussions may be founded.

Moreover, I am responding to the “Ellisonian-like invisibility” of Caribbean issues and concerns within the academy. It exists, hidden in our related fields, and from time to time we catch glimpses and opportunities to discuss it more extensively. Noted linguist Peter A. Roberts, for example, conducted an exhaustive study of Caribbean language; in her dissertation, educator Joyce Harte gave an account of her personal experiences as a Guyanese student in America; and compositionist Shondel Nero has produced some very
important scholarship on the performance of Caribbean students in the composition classroom. But on the whole, the field of Rhetoric in particular has been slow to pay close enough attention to this gradually increasing part of American society.

One of the objectives of rhetoric as I see it with regard to this project, therefore, is not so much to preserve the identity of a particular social group, as to gain an understanding of the effective discourse practices that have been preserved as identity. That said, I think it would be beneficial to see the purpose of my project not just in Caribbean terms but also in the broader context of the study of contemporary rhetoric. In other words, this discussion of Caribbean rhetoric in American society, while restricted here to Caribbeans, is not an essentialist position. What will, at times, seem like essentialist attempts at distinction actually spring from: (a) the capacity of rhetoric to actually represent some of the characteristics and activities of the social group in which it is practiced; and (b) my heightened concern with the fact that a Caribbean presence in America is conflated with, or subsumed under, a generalized African American social category, despite key cultural differences between these groups and the effects of these differences at certain points of contact.

**CARIBBEAN AMERICAN? NOT SO FAST**

Caribbean people who immigrated to America prior to 1965 have traditionally been viewed as assimilationists and frowned upon by those in their native islands. For example, the image of the *freshwater Yankee* has made its way into the cultural consciousness as a powerful critique of assimilators and an equally powerful deterrent to what was considered “pretending” to be American—an American who *used to be* Caribbean. I have found myself trying to prove my authenticity to aunts, uncles, and cousins who are convinced of my total assimilation; I was certain that I would resist any impulse to burn my cultural bridges simply
in order to fulfill the demands of my new society. For many Caribbean people, it is the same promise never to change or forget where they come from. I wrote poems as a way to chronicle my resistance. For a large number of other immigrants who thought the transition would not occur without confirmation, Green cards, convenience marriages, and work permits were the chosen texts. The narrative was not a new one.

In 1965, the U.S. Immigration and Naturalization Service abandoned the national origins quota system, which put an end to the trend of race and region-specific policies that favored European and Asian immigrants; this allowed for a greater influx of Caribbean immigrants than ever before. This, in turn, resulted in the implementation of aggressive de facto ghettoization in urban hubs like New York, Boston, Miami, and Washington, DC. The Caribbean population exploded, and the degrees of separation, assimilation, and integration became more pronounced as different social groups competed for space, jobs, and respect.

As a result, Caribbean immigrant subjectivity saw the third stage of its great American transformations—with the first two stages occurring in the mid-17th and late 19th centuries, respectively. Characteristic of the third stage is a growing complexity of blackness and shared identity among incoming Caribbeans, their American-born Caribbean children, and native-born African Americans. The nationalist and pan-Africanist rhetoric of the Black Power Movement contributing to the social climate both domestically and in the Caribbean further encouraged the complexity of this third stage. In earlier decades, Caribbean immigrants had settled in Harlem, then the Bronx, where a significant presence still exists. During the third stage, however, Flatbush Avenue in Brooklyn blossomed into a heavily populated American hub, connected from its mid-point and further southbound by Eastern Parkway, Church Avenue, Glenwood Avenue, and Avenue I. These arteries enabled a move eastward to Utica Avenue, Rockaway Parkway, and Ralph Avenue and into the communities
of Crown Heights, East New York, Brownsville, Canarsie, and Midwood. Essentially, though, many Caribbeans did not move too far from their central community and unofficial capital, Flatbush. This convergence undoubtedly enabled previously marginalized people to revive, reaffirm, and renew their respective rhetorical traditions.

By Caribbean, I refer primarily to people of African descent from the Anglophone nations of Jamaica, Trinidad and Tobago, Guyana, Barbados, Grenada, Antigua-Barbuda, St. Lucia, St. Vincent, Dominica, St. Kitts, Nevis, Anguilla, and Montserrat who have spent a significant part of their lives in the United States of America. I also include in this group the children of Caribbeans who have spent all or the majority of their lives in America during this post-1965 period and who self-identify as Caribbean American (but who may switch to African American as the situation might demand). I focus specifically on these so-called “new immigrant” communities that have formed in cities like Brooklyn, New York—one of the largest concentrations of Caribbeans in America.

Certainly, members of the Caribbean community all engage in and utilize rhetoric to our own ends, but this study will focus more broadly on how Caribbean rhetors utilize traditional rhetorical methods to express and assert ourselves, identify similarities and overcome our differences, and successfully interact in the public sphere. Notions of difference do persist, which can be (and often are) inferred as much on the basis of phonological difference as on semantic incongruence, essentially making the practice of language a practice in difference making among varied nationalities. Considerable similarities certainly exist among Caribbean people. These similarities persist and fuel the supranational identity that allows us to understand, communicate, and efficiently cross-pollinate our linguistic practices when we share the same space—the unofficial federated spaces of
Flatbush and Nostrand Avenues in Brooklyn, Gun Hill Road in the North Bronx, and Jamaica Avenue in Queens all come to mind.

Sociological categories and trends notwithstanding, the question still remains: with respect to rhetoric in particular, what does it mean to be Caribbean in America? Simply being here is not enough.

**IDENTIFICATION, PLEASE**

The familiar expression “You’re not Caribbean til you come to Brooklyn” suggests, ironically, that people from individual islands in the Caribbean have their first experience of being a part of the region—rather than apart from it—when they are all forced to share not only the same circumstance but also the same physical space. Trends in politics, education, and economy over the past decade, or so, have somewhat complicated the sense of a totally fragmented and conflicted Caribbean region in favor of a more unified Caribbean, and the effects of globalism have become ubiquitous; however, the expression does still beg a series of important questions: Where, as Caribbeans in America, can we find ourselves, and how? What motive or series of motives fires practice?

Catherine John suggests that the oral and physical expressions peculiar to Caribbean people point to “an alternate register of consciousness, one that at its most profound seems to connect to ancestral knowledge in both conscious and unconscious ways.” While there is no doubt that these manifestations of culture may hold a strong visceral, what John calls “psychospiritual,” significance, I am also concerned with the possible social capital that these manifestations can be harnessed to secure and the means by which this occurs. Identification on a rhetorical level, then, becomes the fundamental imperative of the Caribbean rhetorical project.
Derek Walcott notes, “being both Caribbean and American is an ambiguity without a crisis.”\textsuperscript{10} For him, there should be no meaningful distinction between the two cultures. To the extent that we can examine the performances and utterances through a lens that places ambiguity (or crisis) in the context of rhetorical negotiations that take place in local and global contexts, the rhetoric produced can prove invaluable—with Caribbean elements used to synthesize (and problematize) American experience. The Caribbean rhetorical tradition can thus be regarded as the definitive symbolic action achieved through the strategic use of vernacular elements in changing contexts to secure continual interpretation and understanding of the world. More than that, it enables these speakers to put that understanding to use and have an impact on the societies of which they are a part.

However, the implicit persuasive aspect of rhetoric is contingent upon the general willingness of the social formation I identify to be referred to as such, a fact that will influence the degree to which they either accept or reject the rhetorical agenda implicit in this project. Because rhetoric relies so heavily on the intersection of myriad social and idiosyncratic factors, and involves degrees of probability rather than certainty, we must take as always already the possibility that for any number of very practical reasons a particular rhetorical appeal—whether collective or individual—simply may not take. The convergence of languages, ideologies, religions, and cultures that define the Caribbean as a region has brought with it the growing need not only to resist total assimilation but also the tendency to limit one’s interaction—and the expressions that shape them—to one’s own native group. This can complicate the successful rhetorical enactment of what it means to be Caribbean in America. While identification, agreement, and action are all possible, they cannot be thought to exist \textit{a priori}. 
I refer not only to the choice of being Caribbean *versus* that of being American, but also to the subnational-supranational tensions that still persist among the natives of different Caribbean nations. Ironically, these phenomena exist along with and also in direct contradiction to rhetorical imperatives to coalesce. Take, for instance, the notion that I alluded to earlier: “all of we is one.” This popular trope of unity has been used to characterize the Caribbean Ethos. It relies on the presumption that all of we agree. This is not necessarily always the case, however, as this “agreement” can frequently break down at various points of interaction and (very quickly) in times of conflict. As a prevalent rhetorical problematic, how we see ourselves as Caribbeans in America is particularly relevant when we reflect on the larger concern, given the composition of Caribbean roots. An understanding of tradition can help us address this. Additionally, and as a result of the dilemma variable affirmations can sometimes pose, this discussion presumes that Caribbeans, as a group, are still very much in the dawn of our self-definition in American society. This fact places us in a rather precarious position because of the vulnerability and susceptibility to competing social forces. However, it is also a position that carries with it an opportunity to construct an ethos that rests stably enough on a framework of traditional practices that persist and enable dialectical adaptation to life in the American multiculture.

One of the consequences of an effective rhetorical performance, identification builds on the sense of the familiar in the employed methods of recall and optimism in order to underscore shared interests and shared benefits in a given situation. In the perceived absence of an urgent need to identify in America as a supranational (regional) bloc, subnational differences between Caribbeans often rear up and narrow nationalistic nostalgia can prevail. Among Caribbean people in America, the choice to self-identify or differentiate goes on constantly as subjects move between expressions of subnational and supranational identities.
This dynamic, like all rhetoric, is contingent upon the situation and on a combination of personal, social, cultural, economic, and ideological leanings. Sometimes it works, and questions of inauthenticity are not broached. However, since we respond most efficiently to the symbols our language(s) represent because of the particular/peculiar significance and inherent meaning supplied by them (and by us), then it is reasonable to assume that access to certain symbols enables certain linguistic codes to be transferred among members of that specific group.

As a fundamental carnivalesque process, identification is an articulation of collective agency and cultural intention, existing as a realistic desire for successful participation in contemporary American society; such participation enables productive social change that is initiated by a representative social formation that, in this case, includes Caribbean people. With identification as an exemplary aim, Caribbean rhetorical performance can effectively incorporate “products of…[the] highly energized interaction of history and memory [which] stand at the nexus of personal and collective memory” and put them to use in American contexts. In so doing, it helps define the parameters and potential of Caribbean rhetorical activity. I approach this type of activity in terms of what I call the Caribbean Carnivalesque, drawing on the most pervasive form of Caribbean public expression—the Carnival—as a framing metaphor. As an activity, Carnival involves the strategic interplay of numerous rhetorical modes and perspectives. I further posit that it occurs as a predominant rhetorical method that takes hold despite the obvious aspects of insularity, fragmentation, and dissolution that exist among us. Rather than use it as a means of defining the Caribbean and its people, I use it here as a means by which Caribbean people can define the(ir) world. The carnivalesque perspective, which I discuss at length in the following section, gives us a way of seeing how difference can be strategically put aside to achieve collective benefit.
THE CARIBBEAN CARNIVALESQUE

The role the carnivalesque has played in the history of Caribbean consciousness, contexts, and expression, and its role as a definitive metaphor for the Caribbean imaginary makes its importance considerable as a key topic in rhetoric. Of course, Caribbean carnivalesque expression is not limited only to the Trinidadian version. Bahamas, Belize (British Honduras), Martinique, Nevis, and St. Vincent, to name a few, all have carnivals. At one time or another, as many as fifty separate carnivals have been identified globally. And in places where it seems to cause interference with native festivities, the adaptability of the carnival has offered more possibility than conflict. Unfortunately, Caribbean carnivalesque activity is traditionally linked too narrowly to the specific times of the year during which the ritualization of circumstances and contexts is permitted, when performers are given license (in the somewhat measured approval that is received from official government) to express themselves and be taboo. The truth, however, is that no performance in the Caribbean repertoire is more public, and no appeal to audience is more grand, graphic, visceral, and unapologetically democratic than those definitive aspects of the carnivalesque. At this point, I am not as concerned with the individual festivals as I am about what the carnivalesque as a whole embodies in terms of an identifiable ethos. The performance of the Caribbean Ethos is under pressure from commercialization and a contemporary reshuffling of priorities that dictate its celebration and allowances as a gift, of sorts, meant to discourage the circumstances that might lead to real resistance in public spaces: carnival as privilege, rather than a right. In this project, however, the festival is adequate in this project for little more than a glimpse of the ethos. Manifestations of the carnivalesque exist in multiple genres—embodies, for example, the literary, theatrical, cinematic, and musical aspects of cultural production—forming a repository of constitutive modes and motives. This suggests that the
actual “celebration” of a formalized Carnival is preceded by an ethos that determines the language, style, and worldview of Caribbean folk, providing a scope that is much broader and more far-reaching than the sanctioned occasions for pageantry and critique.

There is little doubt among Caribbeansistscholars that the carnivalesque, originally conceived, represents vernacularized social action at a complex level, incorporating African, European, and Asian languages, cultures, and consciousnesses, resulting in a characteristically Caribbean expression. Selwyn Cudjoe, for example, defines the carnivalesque as:

[A] culture of laughter, picon, festivity, and ole talk [sic] that regenerated itself through the dynamic of a people’s experience and defined itself paradigmatically through the first nascent outburst of Carnival festivity in all of its polysemous and polysemantic richness. In this context, the creative transformative process that was taking place in the wilderness consisted of a situation in which the Creole inhabitants (the native population) took over…Here, of course, one saw the emergence of the subaltern, the emergence of the underground culture that was being submerged by officialdom and colonial rhetoric and practices.13

Occupying that liminal space between revelry and revolt, which can confound and intrigue the rationalist and epistemologist alike, the carnivalesque seems to bear the overtones of pragmatist self-definition and adaptability that make it particularly suited to engage and interpret a series of teleological issues that occur in changing contexts. As a strategic response to tragedy and conquest that comprise Caribbean history, carnivalesque discourse was meant not to elide but to incorporate these realities, subsuming the troubling history and
making it contribute to the invention and operation of major discursive forms—including the calypso, the pan, the mas, and, above all, the complex ethos of symbolic use and deliberate action that infuses each of them. The carnivalesque had come to symbolize, “freedom for the broad mass of the population and not merely a season for frivolous enjoyment. It had a ritualistic significance, rooted in the experience of slavery and in celebration of emancipation from slavery.”

John Cowley augments this characterization in his initial description of the diametre, a world populated by “unfortunates,” who were the marginalized masses of the enslaved, post-emancipation natives, and immigrants—the real-life progenitors of the contemporary carnivalesque:

Unfortunates were seen as an incomprehensible underworld, and feared and loathed accordingly. Thus the diametre came to be made up of stickmen, singers, drummers, dancers, prostitutes, (another meaning of jamette), bad johns (swashbucklers), matadors (madames), dunois (jamette rowdys), makos (panders), obeahmen (practitioners of magic) and corner boys. All were associated with a culture that revolved around the barrack-tenement yards of Port of Spain and similar locations elsewhere on the island. Migrant groups competed with one another, and more established settlers, for territory. At the same time, the diametre flaunted themselves (especially during the masquerade) to sustain their identity and draw attention to their plight in a society in which they were decried.

What Cudjoe and Cowley both describe is a complex ethos of lived experience that is based implicitly on ways of seeing and constructively negotiating the world within the constraints
of culture, class, and power. At bottom, therefore (or from the bottom), is the notion that
the carnivalesque functions as a discourse of counterdominance that not only resisted the
sanction of the ruling class but openly rejected it as fundamentally contrary to an agenda in
freedom. The overarching imperative of the carnivalesque is *epideictic* that is tuned specifically
to social commentary, for the purpose of agitation and change. The point, despite material
limitations, is *not to hide*, but to display. It is, therefore, a way of seeing and being seen that
gives us a way of knowing the world through process and repetition, the construction of new
knowledge, controversial meanings, and the insistence on alternative perspectives of reality.
The carnivalesque, in other words and with the conscious designation and adherence to
specific roles, represents the recurrent taking and taking back of one’s life through the
ritualization and constant revision of emancipation as a process in self-assertion.
*Emancipation*, therefore, is at the heart of the Caribbean carnivalesque complex of expression
among the so-called underclass of Caribbean society who, out of the necessity to re-
emancipate themselves through assertion (rather than by edict), constructed an
epistemological framework from the fragments of psychological shipwreck that persisted
into the present, shaping what we know—and what we think we know—about Caribbean
identity today.

There is no shortage of scholarship describing the carnival as nothing less than a
rhetorical repositioning of an underclass that endured the oppression meted out by the
plantocracy of the late 18\textsuperscript{th} century, with carnival as a festival taking shape near the mid-19\textsuperscript{th}
and coinciding with contemporary theories of social behavior and public discourse.
However, the theories of Mikhail Bakhtin are used most often in academic circles as the
default reference to the carnival as a form of public behavior that coalesces among
underclass factions and wells up to threaten the official authority of the state. Bakhtin’s
theorizing legitimizes chaos as discourse, rather than bathetic performance, so much is owed to the general notion that he made popular. Taking Bakhtin broadly, for example, Cudjoe reminds us that culture occurs as a system of signs that coalesce in response to a dialogic situation. From Bakhtinian *heteroglossia*, Cudjoe gleans the notion that meaning takes shape at the point of utterance: the idea that although the appropriation of words, symbols, and sounds can hardly be debated for their originality, they have all been infused over time with the intentions of the performers. However, Caribbean rhetorical activity—whether imitation or originality, appropriation or abrogation—and the preoccupation with fragmentation and coalescence, as well as the consequences that occur “in the wilderness,” seem to suggest a pragmatism peculiar to the region that remains to be adequately fleshed out. Bakhtin cannot, and should not, be avoided outright; but by virtue of some of the key social factors between 18th century Europe and the 18th century Caribbean being so different, and when we look at what Caribbean people have done with the carnivalesque since then, it is clear that there is more going on than just a general bourgeoisie affinity for the grotesque and the poor imitation of that affinity by the underclass.

Some critics resist the tendency to directly associate the Caribbean carnivalesque with Bakhtin’s discourse, which they locate primarily in Russian dialogism. For, even as the Bakhtinian construct problematizes notions of the grotesque, mockery, laughter, and the mask that jibe with Cudjoe’s definition earlier, the limitations in his formulations are glaring when applied to the Caribbean region, specifically. Christopher Shinn writes, “[t]he notion of carnival-masquerade…applies not only to parodic twists of language—‘carnivalized discourse’—but to performative spaces of carnival rituals and masking within, among other places, a wider New World African Diaspora…[in which] language (text, speech acts, rhetorical tropes, etc.) is one, but not the only, constitutive part.” Gerard Aching has also
argued that, while useful in terms of a basic understanding of the carnivalesque as a strategy of oppressed people in general, “Bakhtin’s work on Rabelais’s literature… elucidates homogeneous class formations that differ substantially from the multiethnic, transnational, and class-straddling populations that participate in carnivals and popular culture in the Caribbean today.”

This is a point emphasized by Antonio Benítez-Rojo who, considering the fundamentally binary structure of the Bakhtinian version as anathema to the complexity of Caribbean culture that is fully immersed in the carnivalesque, sees it applying only minimally.

It was this same rationale of assertion on our own terms that caused the rejection of French ways of knowing the world by Toussaint L’Overture and the Black Jacobins, the same rationale that prompted Marcus Garvey’s agenda for repatriate freedom. It was what caused C.L.R. James to opine, as he read excerpts from one of L’Overture’s letters, “Blacks were taking their part in the destruction of European feudalism and Liberty and Equality; the slogans of the revolution, meant far more to them than any Frenchman.” What has evolved is a distinct epistemological category of rhetorical invention in the context of the carnivalesque that bears—due to the confluence of such tributaries—a nuance quite unlike the societal upheaval of the French Revolution, rooted firmly in the islands, in the sensibilities of the people there, and of those who come from there.

The carnivalesque in this project operates along what can be considered a continuum of discursive substantiation; that is, it involves the synthesis of symbol and material through discursive (i.e., imaginative, linguistic, and physical) means. As a paradigm that can essentially make sense of the discursive activities of Caribbean folk, the carnivalesque enables the contextualization of intent, action, reception, and reaction with a default engagement with dominating or oppressive forces; it elasticizes discursive processes and methods of recursive
argumentation with the strategic manipulation of language and symbol; and it mediates adaptive practices and responses to dynamic outcomes. It endows Caribbean rhetors with the flexibility to move, in other words, between materially substantive and discursively substantive poles, from mere performance to substantive rhetorical assertion to an increased probability of dialogue and critique, then back toward actual *praxis* in the world.  

A question of authenticity and self-assertion prompted the exigence for this kind of discursive movement. Concurrently, the pressure to define the parameters of that authenticity in specific, if not original, terms intensifies the discourse of authenticity in Caribbean thought. Read from this particular, critical perspective, the tenor of the carnivalesque changes significantly from an exercise in joy to a more calculated series of activities.

**CONCLUSION**

As I have noted above, my particular interests lead me to read Caribbean rhetorical activity through the carnivalesque, which I consider the overarching trope of the tradition—the master trope. Subsequent chapters will attempt to substantiate this claim. As I see it, the success of this project rests on a combination of methodologies that expose us to the various modes, forms, and genres of discourse that are applied in these communities. And while much scholarly work exists on aspects of the social, economic, political, and educational conditions faced by Caribbeans in America, this project is specifically concerned with how Caribbean and Caribbean American discourse and rhetorical performance shape and are shaped by these conditions.

That is to say, the issue of a Caribbean rhetoric is not only the question of *what* it is or whether there are dimensions we could identify as characteristically Caribbean—a review of the constitutive parts in the following chapter will hopefully achieve that. It is,
additionally, an issue of the practical use to which it could ultimately be put, given what we understand of how the rhetoric plays out in American contexts. At stake is the struggle for a degree of agency that could facilitate meaningful participation among Caribbean people (in an American mainstream, for instance) toward the attainment of a shared vision of prosperity, equality, and depth. Rather than the exoticism to which our rhetorical tradition is often subjected, I want to suggest a pragmatic view of Caribbean rhetorical performance that claims the vernacular tradition as a means of redress for circumstances that play out in America. Particularly, it can be an essential measure for effecting real change in a world full of nihilism and despair, fear and apathy, injustices and cruelties in our homes, streets, and schools.

A discussion of rhetoric, particularly that of vernacular speakers, cannot be separated from a discussion of language and language attitudes, so I will use this issue to contextualize the discussion of rhetorical features, genres, and figures of the tradition that are outlined in Chapter Two, “Framing a Rhetorical Tradition.” Naturally, all the items that make up the tradition cannot be adequately portrayed, but this chapter provides a representative sample to acquaint the reader with the exigency that gave rise to these performances in the first place and the subsequent role of the tradition in the affirmation of Caribbean identity in contemporary times.

Chapter Three, “Earl Lovelace and a Theory of Caribbean Ethos,” discusses the textual application of the carnivalesque ethos in the work of one of the region’s premiere authors. Continuing my use of the carnivalesque as a critical lens, in Chapter Four, “Rhetoric and the Musical Masque,” I look at the trajectory of calypso music and the moves calypsonians have made to facilitate a sense of conscientization, cultural self-awareness, and understanding. I describe the strategy of calypsonians to illustrate how the music is used to
embody prophetic sensibilities and deployed for a deliberative function through critique, reflection, and negotiation.

Chapter Five, “Dynamics of Tradition in the Digital Yard,” outlines the ways contemporary spaces—the classroom and the Internet, for instance—function as surrogates, substitutes, or upgrades of traditional Caribbean spaces like the yard as fora for the sharing of ideas and the dissemination of information relevant to the Caribbean community at large.

Ultimately, my overarching concern is with a deeply democratic ideal and the continuous experimentation that must take place towards the attainment of that ideal, as well as the degree to which Caribbeans feel themselves a part of that experimentation and success. In the concluding chapter, I outline some possible directions for continued research in Caribbean—and, eventually, Caribbean American—Rhetoric.
[T]he very cardinal sin is to depart from the language of everyday life, and the usage approved by the sense of the community.

Cicero, *De Oratore*, II, iii

What is the source of my information?
Pepper sauce!

Fayola Joseph-Browne, Personal Conversation

Caribbean rhetoric in contemporary times is based on the strategic use of what Kenneth Burke calls “terministic screens,” which can be described as aspects of language used symbolically to direct the attention of a particular audience, the effectiveness of which are developed in accordance with the meanings and ways of knowing specific to that audience. Screens such as these enable people to make sense of, negotiate, and critically respond to the myriad social, economic, political, religious, and educational circumstances that arise in the course of everyday life. For Caribbean rhetors, they result from the rhetorical interplay of traditional discursive patterns and features—or *rhetorical modes*—used by people from multiple Caribbean countries that support rhetorical invention. The major modes of Caribbean Rhetoric are: code-switching, call-response, wordplay, circumlocution, boasting/shaming, proverbs, the sermonic, and nonverbal/visual semantics. As the examples in this chapter will show, these modes do not operate discretely. Rather, they overlap, mixing with other modes, for optimum effectiveness—each of them acting as a supplement to the others. In their most basic roles, the rhetorical features help ground epistemology in the form of identifiable expressions. As such, their function within the larger discussion of the Caribbean rhetorical tradition cannot be overstated.
Precipitated by the constellation of social, psychological, spiritual, and material consequences that have shaped the history of the region and continue to impact contemporary expression, the dimensions of Caribbean rhetoric embodied in these features reflect not only the imaginative constructions of social reality; they also reflect or allow us to read the larger social realities of our life experience. Through the use of these rhetorical modes, Caribbean people are empowered to circumvent standard forms of communication in favor of more efficient delivery; that is, we refer to and rely on them to filter discourse in ways recognizable and relevant to us. A discussion of rhetoric is meant to push further into questions of intent and outcome to understand the ways rhetoric contributes to or debilitates the operation of the Caribbean Ethos. Exemplified in the genres that house them, these modes will be the focus of this chapter. Before I delve into the specific forms, however, it would be helpful to consider the sociolinguistic contexts that gave shape and exigence to the features in question.

NEGOTIATING [WITH] LANGUAGE

The way Caribbean people use language to engage in discourse grew out of a situation wherein speakers experienced a gradual shifting from native languages to pidginized forms, and then eventually to the creolized forms spoken by Caribbean people today. The language and discursive practices that make up the character of Caribbean meaning still endure. According to Peter Roberts, Caribbean language shares features that are found in all other dialects of English but also possesses features that are unique to the region, features which have developed as a result of slavery and subsequent circumstances of language development in the Caribbean.²
Subtle features in Caribbean language range from intonations, such as nasalized vowel sounds that stress the vowel sound and change the inflection of the word (e.g., waaw instead of want) to differences in inflection between Standard English and Creole English. The latter differences may involve consonant clusters (ting instead of thing; dat instead of that; wantin instead of wanting; learnin instead of learning) and vary more from territory to territory than do the syntactical features shown below. These contribute to the delivery and semantics of different exchanges, helping to determine whether the speaker is able to identify with the audience or elicit a favorable response or reception. Some of the features speakers, readers, and listeners are bound to use, encounter, and recognize include the following in Table 1:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Zero-copula (absence of be in sentence construction)</th>
<th>Verb Tense (verb + s, verb + in[g], had + verb); use of habitu[als (doer)</th>
<th>Serial Verb Construction</th>
<th>Multiple Negation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The child crying</td>
<td>He living downstairs</td>
<td>Bring come, carry go</td>
<td>Me ent do nothing whole day</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>She fighting them</td>
<td>I does work hard</td>
<td>Never see, come see</td>
<td>You ent go see nothing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jumbie riding you</td>
<td>He does make he own clothes</td>
<td>Where you now coming</td>
<td>Him no know</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>All of we does do it</td>
<td></td>
<td>Me na [go] back out</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Intransitive Sentences</td>
<td>Transitives and Indefinite Pronouns: me, mi, be, she, dem, all you</td>
<td>Modal Auxiliaries (conditional, probable, able, moral: mus, musi, can, would, could</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Water gone this morning</td>
<td>The man [an] them</td>
<td>I could go now?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The flour spoil</td>
<td>Them book and them heavy</td>
<td>Me can go on for days.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Party done early</td>
<td>All you ain’t know, nah</td>
<td>I could go to the bathroom?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 1: Sample Syntactical Features of Caribbean Languages
What these factors suggest is that a productive understanding of Caribbean language and expression relies on a consideration of mutual intelligibility—that is, recognition of phonological, syntactic, and semantic similarities that outweigh differences. I take the identical approach for reading the Caribbean in terms of rhetoric, as well.

Scholars agree that the members of the plantocracy felt it was necessary to minimize the probability of subversion and revolt on their plantations by suppressing the language and customs of African slaves to the Caribbean—languages the slave owners were well aware of but found incomprehensible. From an academic standpoint, the debate over the origin and validity of Caribbean languages has led to troubling theories, some of which have sought to substantiate the position traditionally held by ruling classes. Some held that people of African descent were physically and physiologically incapable of achieving a standard communicative competence due to heavy tongues, big lips, and inferior brains. A poor alternative was the West African Portuguese Pidgin Theory (WAPP), which stressed the notion of a lingua franca that was intended to account for the mutuality among Creoles the world over but failed to account for the fact that these creoles included words from target languages other than Portuguese and, specifically, that it retained West African linguistic elements and vocabulary.

The Caribbean response was to legitimize their languages and, simultaneously, to rehabilitate the image of the speakers themselves. In 1869, for example, J. J. Thomas compiled *The Theory and Practice of Creole Grammar*, a volume that coincided with the burgeoning identity that began to coalesce in the Caribbean. Thomas’s text was unapologetically political, intended to bridge the instruction of French Creole speakers and enable comprehension among standard English speakers in Trinidad who knew enough about the creolization process prior to that to refer to the *patois* as “broken.” Thomas sought
to reverse that thinking. In more recent times, there arose the need for a theory that could more effectively account for the development of native creoles in the Caribbean that would also seriously consider the presence of African linguistic elements in the respective creoles—something the WAPP simply did not make room for. The Creole Hypothesis appeared to provide the needed balance, or at best explain the linguistic dynamics that existed between European superstrate speakers and African substrate speakers, offering a continuum along which language acquisition and communicative competence take place. Embedded in it is an approach to rhetoric that seemed also to articulate cultural awareness and intentionality with regard to a particular language situation.

The Creole Continuum, as John Rickford puts it (citing DeCamp), “refers to a situation where a continuum of intermediate varieties develops between creole and standard poles as creole speakers experience increased motivation and opportunity to modify their speech in the direction of the standard language.” With greater exposure and opportunity to participate in mainstream culture in the Caribbean and the metropoles, more Caribbean people felt the practical need to assimilate and gain higher communicative competence with the standard forms. These rhetorical negotiations with language mirrored larger social perceptions of what it meant to be Caribbean, coming at a steep price that often included ridicule, exile, fear, reprisal, and shame. For others, there was no amount of social mobility worth abandoning the creole, the community, or the tradition. More relevant to my purpose, then, are the dynamics of linguistic ambivalence and rhetorical negotiation that took place between poles of standard and nonstandard language use that encourage Caribbean subjectivity to be practiced on its own terms—and, further, how they constitute rhetorical invention, rather than be mere supplements or reactions to a set of social circumstances.
Rickford’s observation is therefore instructive for how we might approach Caribbean communities through language and link historical contexts to the development of rhetorical practices. According to Rickford, “[P]idgins and creoles are often centrally involved in problems of social, economic, and political development in the communities where they are spoken: in attempts to reform and upgrade the educational systems, and in efforts to establish a new cultural identity or forge a new means of artistic expression.” Suffice it to say that the languages of Caribbean people are not corruptions of the standard due to stupidity or an inability on the part of the speakers to assimilate; rather, much like the speakers themselves, these languages exist in deliberate relation to and in contention with privileged forms.

Overall, it has been convincingly demonstrated that Caribbean languages—literally, what Caribbean people say and the specific forms characteristic of the languages they use, in terms of grammar, phonology, and semantics—are rule-governed and redundant, and must be approached as languages *in their own right*. The most significant aspect of this theory, as far as rhetoric is concerned, is the implication of rhetorical intent, the notion that the speakers played a deliberate role in the development of the creole and that they opted to use it deliberately in a range of contexts, despite the pressures to adhere to the standard language. Further proof of this intent resides in the modes themselves, which shape the discourse through similarity of circumstances and the vernacular methods we use for encountering the world, surviving it, and, in some cases, transcending its limitations. As a consequence of history, these methods emerge within the context of ambivalence toward language and negotiations with it.

Language ambivalence is a point that Caribbeanist thinkers understand implicitly and seize upon as a metaphor for discussing the broader dimensions of identity in the Caribbean.
Their critical stances on language bridge critical gaps between what people say, their intentions or motives, and the effect of their language on certain audiences. Frantz Fanon opines that, “[t]o speak means to be in a position to use a certain syntax, to grasp the morphology of this or that language, but it means above all to assume a culture, to support the weight of a civilization.” The rhetorical situation that Fanon describes here emphasizes the fact that there are strategic choices that must be made as to what language one speaks in a given situation and with a given audience, and that those choices are fraught with social tension (not just the problematic inculcation of what is “proper” and “improper”). In terms of language use—in American contexts, for example—potential pitfalls in ethos must be negotiated once the choice has been made to identify (or differentiate) oneself within a linguistic gauntlet. This tension is at the heart of the rhetorical ambivalence that Caribbean speakers experience, even in their interactions with other Caribbeans. This excerpt of Louise Bennett’s short narrative poem, “Dry Foot Bwoy,” bears out the notion of negotiating ambivalence and the potential failures of that negotiation, taken from the perspective of a native Caribbean:

Wa wrong wid Mary dry-foot bwoy?
Dem gal got him fe mock,
An wen me meet him tarra night
De bwoy gi’ me a shock!

…
Me start fe feel so sorry
De po bad-lucky soul
Me tink he come a foreign-lan
Come ketch bad foreign cole!
Me tink him have a bad sore-throat
But as him chat-chat gwan,
Me fine out sey is foreign twang
De bwoy wasa put awn!

The spectrum of ambivalent sentiments embodied in this poem—which ranges from concern to ridicule, sympathy to frustration—illustrate the depth of vernacular oral expression and rhetorical invention. Evident in Bennett's poem, furthermore, is the moral imperative to which the speaker seems to adhere and which is at the heart of the ambivalence toward the “dry-foot bwoy”—it is, in fact, what fuels the critique and justifies the speaker's scorn and pity. For the speaker, the critique is not of the standard, in and of itself, but of the attitude toward language that the “bwoy” possesses. His performance is a pretense—a putting on of a linguistic mask that does not impress anyone. Instead, his poor performance of the “foreign twang” seems to be taken at first to be some sort of illness—a cold. He is seen, at best, as an oddity, someone in search of a language, and no one without one.

We learn, through the encounter with language, to negotiate hard times and the virtually irreconcilable tension between survival and ambition, aggravated by what Patrick Bryan calls “the Scylla of low wages and the Charybdis of unemployment.” In the performance of tradition, language negotiation represents an effort to understand the problem of language use(s) and attendant discourses of ideology, as well as our role with respect to both. For instance, in Jan Carew’s Black Midas, Shark, the protagonist, reflects on his own sociolinguistic ambivalence:
Books had made me divided in myself and I knew I would remain that way as long as I lived. On the one hand, the language of books had chalked itself on the slate of my mind and, on the other, the sun was in my blood, the swamp and river, my grandmother, the amber sea, the savannahs, the memory of surf and wind closer to me than the smell of my own sweat.  

Because no person or set of people is simply predisposed to oppression, in an asymmetrical power relationship of the type Shark experiences, there is always inordinate pressure to acquire the standard in the way Rickford describes, sometimes begrudgingly.

Similarly, in George Lamming’s *In the Castle of My Skin*, the theme figures prominently in the narrator’s musings:

Perhaps we would do better if we had good big words like the educated people. But we didn’t. We had to say something was like something else, and whatever we said didn’t convey all that we felt. We wouldn’t dare tell anybody what we had talked about. People who were sure of what they were saying and who had the right words to use could do that. They could talk to others. And if they didn’t feel what they were saying, it didn’t matter. They had the right words.

Language was a kind of passport. You could go where you like if you had a clean record. You could say what you like if you know how to say it. It didn’t matter whether you felt everything you said. You had language, good, big words to make up for what you didn’t feel.
G., like Shark, recognizes the effects of language on each other. The problem is described above as not simply a situation in which language users who are familiar with either being obliged or forced to negotiate with certain social standards merely choose one or the other—polarized between acquiring one exclusively or rejecting the other completely in favor of their respective vernacular sensibilities. Lamming’s narrator and his friends go beyond choice to figure out a course of rhetorical intentionality with regard to language, a result that can come about only because they are acutely aware of the ideological strain of language choice, not just as an arbitrary linguistic phenomenon but also as a way of being in the world.

Shark and G. both represent the Caribbean vernacular rhetor’s turmoil with the imposition of language and ideology that threaten to eclipse all they know with all they know they must learn. At the same time, however, the weighted context of identity formation and assertion in the Caribbean, which resulted from the combination of vernacular traditions and European inculturation, underscore a sensitivity to the intersection of cultures that took shape in the crucible of Caribbean culture, as well as a Diasporic sensibility. This forged an approach to rhetorical invention that is, according to Paula Burnett, “the assertion of cultural self without the denial of that assertion to others, and the sharing of as much as can be shared.” The modes that make such assertion possible and successful for the vernacular rhetor will be discussed in the following section.

**Major Modes of Caribbean Rhetoric**

The rhetorical modes serve primarily as the traditional foundations on which contemporary performances are based. Speakers who are consistently exposed to, and consciously use, these embedded forms are particularly attuned to their preponderance in all
aspects of Caribbean culture, not to mention the occasions and locations that help define and determine rhetorical delivery. Take, for example, the description of “shit talk” offered by Ezra Griffith:

[It is] a Bajan form of discourse that was conducted in fluent patois and centered on just about any conceivable subject as long as it did not personally concern any of the participants. The conversation was fuelled by rum and the pork chop, a centrepiece of Bajan cooking. The expression “bare shit-talk” refers to shit-talk in its most concentrated form.

Not everybody could participate in bare shit-talk up in our gap. Participants had to have outgoing personalities and had to be willing to make argumentative assertions with unbridled confidence and, generally speaking, in a loud voice that was accompanied [by] hand gestures signifying premeditated arrogance.

... Such arguments rarely relied on any objective element to make the case. A preference for one of these two world-class cricketers was best established with a loud voice, artful cricketing motions, and the capacity to hold forth extemporaneously, employing assertions unambivalently.13

As Griffith’s account implies, these features must work together—that is, for shit talk to be shit talk. What is important here is not that Griffith’s observations accurately describe Bajan discourse, per se, but that the features he identifies combine to make the discourse persuasive
enough to reflect a vernacular worldview. That is to say, these expressive features and social situations are plainly recognizable to others from the region because the social factors often mirror each other from island to island—the ritualistic elements of food and drink, the confident style, the motion of hands to complement verbal delivery, the arrangement of facts, and the reliance on particular appeals. For the sake of clarity, I highlight these modes and the genres in which they generally tend to be used below in Table 2.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Mode</th>
<th>Primary Genre(s)</th>
<th>Characteristic(s)</th>
<th>Rhetorical Motive(s)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Code-Switching</td>
<td>All Genres</td>
<td>Deployment of Multiple Linguistic Registers</td>
<td>Resistance, Assertion</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wordplay</td>
<td>All Genres</td>
<td>Pun, Innuendo, Slang, Improvisation, Exclamatory Idiophones</td>
<td>Prowess, Power Display, Sexuality, Profanity, Vulgarity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Circumlocution</td>
<td>Dialogue, Music</td>
<td>Indirection, Misdirection</td>
<td>Avoidance, Aggression</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Call-response</td>
<td>Sermon, Speech, Musical performance</td>
<td>Call and Response between Rhetor and Audience (or vice versa)</td>
<td>Bonding, Authorization, Acceptance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Boasting/Shaming</td>
<td>Picon, Calenda, Music, Sermon</td>
<td>Intimidation, Profanity, Mockery, Exaggeration</td>
<td>Criticism, Prowess, Power Display</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Proverb</td>
<td>Symmetry, Chiasmus, Repetition</td>
<td>Succinct, Symbolic, Formulaic</td>
<td>Causality, Threat, Natural or Universal Order</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Sermonic</td>
<td>All Genres</td>
<td>Sermonic (Messianic and Jeremiadic)</td>
<td>Liberation, Service</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nonverbal Semantics; Visual Semantics</td>
<td>Steups, Kuya mouth, Twist-mouth, Cut-eye; Dance, Flight, Travel Reportage, Narratives of Immigration and Exile</td>
<td>Oral and Physical Embellishments in Tone, Intonation, or Action; Moving/Stationary Bodies in Physical Space, Acting, Acted Upon</td>
<td>Critique; Physical performance, Negotiation, Power, Resistance</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2: The Major Modes of Caribbean Rhetoric

Code-Switching

When members of the same group meet, the particular language they use determines certain codes of behavior that can, for instance, either renew bonds of common identity or
signal a difference. I might greet another Caribbean person by asking, “Wh’am now?” or “What’s the scene?” Or, when entering a room for the first time, I repeat my greeting, “Morning, morning” or “Afternoon, afternoon,” to which I will likely receive a response that may also be repeated. Similarly, to certain Caribbeans I will say, “Respect,” which has a number of different meanings (hello, thank you, I agree, calm down, or respect) depending on the context of the conversation or rhetorical situation in which it is said. Each of these greetings, used effectively, provides the necessary comfort and access to further conversation, letting the speakers proceed with the knowledge that we are authentic Caribbean people with common experiences and frames of reference. No need to perform the learned Americanness. Not around we. We understand. In contrast, some speakers choose not to offer such sentiments in the same form to non-Caribbeans, choosing rather to greet in the standardized form: Hello, Good Morning, and so on.

The strategies of appropriation and abrogation—to master the standard or discard it for the creole—that are inherent in code-switching can form the horns of a rhetorical dilemma that rhetors routinely face. The lines of distinction are not always so clearly drawn, however—a fact Caribbean rhetors rely on for coding their intentions. That is to say, some of we does do it for fun. Some of we does do it for spite. And some of we does do it for so, but is never really just for so. Even so, it still have a whole set of Caribbean people digging a real horrors with the way how they does talk and interact with each other on a day-to-day basis—not just in the literature and thing, but in real life. And is like they don’t get tired of jumbicing their own children for talking the same way. And is like they forget that what they theyself learn about language and that the attitudes them develop as a consequence was often learned by the hook or the crook. I could still hear them: Not “some of we does” but “some of us do.” Not “I done eat” but “I’m finished.” Not “ova dey” but “over there.” Not
“reverse back” or “go down downstairs” or “go up upstairs.” And I know I go get rag up for writing this, and all. Small thing. On top of that, they steady taking basket\textsuperscript{17} from the uninitiated as to whether the talk they talking is not only “correct” or “proper,” but also meaningful, all in spite of the rich, complex linguistic and intellectual traditions upon which their talk is derived and the overarching sociopolitical significance that accompanies it.

In other words, to talk like \textit{me ain’t know nothing about proper, and if I know, I don’t care} is to throw nonstandard sand in standard rice. To talk like \textit{this} involves a rhetorical choice. \textit{I talking like this to show you a form}—that is, to make a point, to demonstrate a particular ethos that is grounded in specific language use. Put another way, even though many Caribbean people hold that their language varieties—varieties some of them speak exclusively—are broken, improper, and inferior, these performances are steeped in rhetorical intent. By extension, proverbs hold far more than meaningless truisms that are better left unshared and untaught; songs and dances do more than represent vestiges of a savagery we should just as soon forget. The choice, either to creolize the standard or standardize the Creole, signifies attempts to use language as a tool to broach critical conversation in recognized and recognizable terms in order to facilitate discourse. Both strategies, according to Ashcroft et al, “mark a separation from the site of colonial privilege” and underscore a complex strategy of polydialectical communication.\textsuperscript{18}

Unfortunately, the negative view is maintained by many Creole speakers who, in the protracted encounter with empire and their contemporary encounters in the Diaspora, feel compelled to acknowledge the status given to standardized English and the corresponding marginalization of their own Creoles; what’s worse, they too often succumb to these tensions at the expense of their representative cultural expressions. The fact still remains, however, that the choice to code-switch is rhetorical in every sense, with a peculiarity of
expression that is spoken, sung, heard, written, read, danced, and danced to. Our worldview unfolds as a culture of vernacular expression, recognizable not only on the linguistic level in terms of tone or syllable stress, but also in terms of complex semantic inventions and the strategic arrangement and application of rhetorical forms. To reiterate, then, we use the language for so (that is to say, easily, without any great difficulty), but never really just for so (that is, not just for display, but in line with specific motives).

Such motives are evident in Merle Collins’s “Shadowboxing,” for example, as the narrator describes the attendees to a birthday party, a party that would later form the backdrop for a lengthy discussion of the political environment in Grenada. However, before any political conversation, per se, becomes apparent, notice how Collins switches seamlessly between the standard and creole forms to appeal to an audience that understands and expresses its Caribbean sensitivities through such language:

Desiree looks around the table. There will be seven of them—Danton, the biggest boy, born the year of the invasion, said he was doing something in the piece of ground behind the house and he would come soon. Trust Danton to find something to do right at this time! Anyway, seven of them including Danton: her mother, Miss Ty, sitting there with her grey afro and cream pant suit and looking well nice—figure slim and trim, not like she, Desiree, getting bigger everyday; Tantie Velma, who take her in after she get pregnant with Danton and run away before Miss Ty find out—Tantie Velma looking like young girl in tight jeans and pink sleeve-less top in spite of her size; Dawn, hair pulled back with that green and red band round the roll at the back—the child look good with that style, she
have the face for it, the high forehead and the father big eyes—Dawn
with her eyes on the television though it not on.  

The subtle shifts in language neither impede the accuracy of the description nor
detract from Collins’s characterization of the female body, traditions of strength, and
complicated matriarchal roles. In fact, these features help to emphasize a political
commentary on the tensions of language choice, and its use in society and in literature,
which precedes a discussion of politics proper. The initial utterance in Walcott’s
“Pocomania” also evokes the ethos of creolized speakers and performers in their symbolic,
cosmological, and spiritual encounters. Language is used here to foreground the apparent
paradox of godly perfection and material fallibility:

De shepherd shrieves in Egyptian light,
The Abyssinian sweat has poured
From armpits and the graves of sight,
The black sheep of their blacker Lord.  

At another point in the continuum, poet Michael Smith launches a scathing linguistic
performance in “Mi Cyaan Believe It,” juxtaposing the basilectal language choice with subtle
references to the nursery rhyme elements of his own childhood schooling that he
interrogates and then manipulates:

Mi cyaan believe it
mi seh mi cyaan believe it
room dem a rent mi apply widdin but as me go in cock-roach rat and
scorpion also come in
one good nose haffi run but mi nah guh dong sit dong pon high wall
like Humpty Dumpty
mi a face mi reality
one lickle bwai come blow him horn
me look pon him wid scorn when me realise how mi five bwai pickney
was a victim of the trix dem call partisan politics
an mi bun mi belly and mi bawl
Mi seh mi cyaan believe it\textsuperscript{21}

The speaker’s coded references to the two nursery rhymes—“Humpty Dumpty” and “Little Boy Blue”—effectively evoke aspects of empire at the metropolis and in the colony with a performance that undermines the education system that was intended to eradicate such speech. Again, language is the image the speaker puts on display for the audience to notice: the speaker implies, on the one hand, that while he has neither the privilege nor the inclination of the elite, he is also aware that the fragility they both share is more likely to be expressed in partisan politics (used here as a synonym for “class”) that maintains the separations that he and his children ("pickney") have little choice but to endure. The implicit question in “Mi Cyaan Believe It” may be articulated thus: “\textit{How can I believe?” Conversely, though, there is little doubt that Smith was puzzled over how—or how effectively—he would engage with disbelief in the face of glaring social injustices. Similarly, there is, along with his outrage, the parallel desire \textit{to} believe and to effectively articulate the paradox.
Wordplay

Wordplay can be described as the subtle manipulation of rhetorical devices—such as *double entendre*, metaphors, puns, and repetition—to cast a veil of ambiguity, complexity, and humor, in a given performance. The rhetor exhibits enough *savoir-faire* to avoid censorship with an overt delivery. The key here is not necessarily to hide the intended meaning of the word or phrase that is being used, but to maintain an air of play that is meant to euphemize the delivery and thus take the edge off a potentially offensive effect. This tactic can free the rhetor to take certain liberties with the audience—or for the audience to take liberties with the performance itself.\(^22\)

Ribald humor and *double entendre* are also predominant features of Caribbean wordplay, as with Anthony “Gabby” Carter’s hit “Dr. Cassandra”:

She give me one injection in my midsection

I did not have to pay

Then she give me something and tell me swallow

Fever gone right away

When you coming back, Sandra,

when you coming to give me medicine?

Be quiet, boy, I’m you doctor.

I come here to take your pressure.\(^23\)

The chorus of “Cassandra” makes use of the question-answer structure—a deliberate call-response—that engages the audience. But notice the *double entendre* Gabby puts in play in order to avoid a direct sexual proposition. Gabby is not attempting to hide the fact that his
request is sexual—the pun on “coming” is obvious, the sexual act metaphorically represented as “medicine” that only Cassandra could administer, and the additional metaphor of sex as “pressure” that Cassandra is expert at taking. He also makes clear that it is not so illicit an arrangement between himself and Cassandra—“I did not have to pay”—even as the numerous repetition of the act itself demonstrates the sexual stamina they both share:

She jook, jook, jook, jook, jook, jook

(I’m your doctor)

She jook, jook, jook, jook,

jook, jook, jook, jook, jook, jook, jook, jook, jook24

The double entendre is also a feature in Gregory Isaacs’s rockers hit, “Night Nurse,” that had many an unsuspecting child singing along to plaintive sexuality:

Tell her it’s a case of emergency

There’s a patient by the name of Gregory

Night nurse

Only you alone can quench this here thirst

My night nurse

Oh, the pain is getting worse25

The effectiveness of double entendre as rhetorical wordplay is further seen in its use as a mode of critique for deeper social issues that are made palatable through the lens of sexual innuendo. Slinger Francisco (“The Mighty Sparrow”) is the master of this move. His oeuvre
of calypso tales—which includes such classics as “Saltfish,” “When It Bald It Better,” “Jook for Jook,” “Leggo Meh Stick,” and “Bendwood Dick”—makes ample use of double entendre as the preferred device. Using ribaldry to comment on the effects of colonialism and its racial effects in “Congo Man,” he sings:

Two white women traveling through Africa
Find themselves in the hands of a cannibal headhunter
He cook one up and he eat one raw
It taste so good that he wanted more

The song, which was released in 1965 and banned in 1969, progresses through themes of invasion, capture, consumption, subjectivity, and disgust. Using the most taboo of indulgences for the black man—contact with a white woman—Sparrow discusses the problems that follow from an encounter between the civilized and the savage. The cannibal Congo man resolves his immediate situation by “eating” the women and all they represent. The debilitating effects of the Congo man’s consumption of the white female body is a voracious obsession with what whiteness has offered:

Aye a yay, I envy the Congo man
I wish it was me
I want to shake he hand
He eat until he stomach upset
And I never eat a white meat yet

It does, however, beg a question: Does Sparrow really envy the Congo man? No. He neither envies him nor wishes he were in the same position because he, in fact, has suffered
from the same effects and knows it all too well. His suggestion in the song that had he been in the same position as the Congo man, he would have “taken them back to their husbands,” highlights the false-comparison between himself and his “big brother,” who has no allegiance to the white man. The trick of his comparison, of course, is that even though Sparrow gives the impression of civility, chivalry, and generosity, noting that he “never eat a white meat yet,” his sympathy remains with the Congo man. Consumption has corrupted the Congo man—the colonized mind, by extension—and is a point of contention for Sparrow. The concern here is not that white women are particularly delectable or desirable for Sparrow or the Congo man (he is already a headhunter when they meet him), or that Africans are essentially savage (he did “cook” one woman before eating her). Rather, it is the irony of influence that each society has had on the other, the preconceived notions each possesses, and the potential dangers such ignorant encounters could yield (and have yielded). Sparrow manages, with a masque of sexually ambiguous reference, to turn the offense on the offending subject and to ask which is the more reprehensible act—and why.

Calypsonian David Rudder uses metaphor (in a less ribald manner) to emphasize people’s collective and individual reactions to economic hardship, with the fête functioning as a rhetorical foil for his commentary. In his “Madness,” Rudder describes what the parameters of that madness actually entail:

I jump the wall about twelve o’clock and

I gone inside

Stand up there in the people’s fête

My eyes open wide

Everybody inside there like they are feting hard

But when I look at their faces mamayo
Like they are going mad
It must be the budget that the man
From Whitehall did read
‘Cause all of them inside of there like
They suck a crazy seed
That kind of head couldn’t come from weed^{29}

Rudder uses this as an entry into political commentary. More broadly, this metaphor also functions as a vehicle to describe the carnivalesque as a rhetorical occasion in which notions of control and chaos contribute to an analysis of vernacular social behavior, attitudes, and expectations that manifest within a particularly Caribbean worldview. What we do in certain circumstances, Rudder implies, is mediated by what we want to do and what we actually can do.

3 Canal’s “Mud Madness” argues for a primal—that is, anti-intellectual—approach to life during J’Ouvert (Jouvay), the early morning opening of the Shrovetide Carnival:

- Is liberation and renewal of this madness potential
- This rhythm detrimental, it is exponential
- It go cause a infection in the whole of your system
- Bringing bout resurrection
- It go leave you in a mess!
- This is a mud mud mud mud mud
- mud mud mud mud mud madness!^{30}
The rationale—“Everything is mud. From mud then back to mud again”\textsuperscript{31}—is based on ritual and an understanding of the cyclical nature of life. It is, in effect, an existential argument that adheres to the notion that life does not end but continues. It echoes Genesis 3:19—“Dust thou art, and to dust thou shalt return”—a staple in Christian funeral rites.\textsuperscript{32} This, however, is literally an earth-based reading of experience that reserves lofty notions of the otherworldly in favor of more visceral celebrations of life and death, unity, freedom, and letting go. As the carnival begins, 3 Canal’s “Mud Madness” is a call to action, an assertion for those “children running” to have a chance to belong, or to take that chance. The ritualistic “letting go,” then, is necessary in order to enable one to “hold on” as part of an organic whole.

In addition to its basic role as a device for playing on words that are similar but differ in meaning and context, wordplay in the Caribbean rhetorical tradition is also utilized as a prelude or a segue to a criticism or insult. It relies not on exactitude but on the parallelism that exists between the referent object and the punned object. Take the following example:

\begin{quote}
\end{quote}

Derived from Winston “Explainer” Henry’s hit song,\textsuperscript{33} the pun on “house” enables an indirect reference to be made to the House of Parliament that was modeled after the British system of government. The pun shows the speaker’s implicit and acute understanding of the political structure of the country, not to mention an underlying dissatisfaction with the goings on there. Additionally, the speaker’s use of an additional semantic marker—“kicksing,” or joking—is constructed comparatively as benign “kicksing” (the one engaged in at home) and potentially dangerous “kicksing” (performed in Parliament, where the stakes
are apparently higher and the consequences for regular citizens more telling). The sentiment is related to the notion that “joke is joke, but damned joke ain’t no joke.” Furthermore, there is a value distinction that the speaker makes between private and public behavior, showing an acute awareness of place and audience. Because public behavior, and that of politicians charged with maintaining the equilibrium of the country especially, carries with it such a responsibility, the speaker implies that Parliament is no place to “kicks.”

In Jean Binta Breeze’s short story “Sunday Cricket,” the pun is used as an improvisational tool. In the story, the narrator expresses grave disappointment at having to attend church instead of the cricket match she had planned with her friend, Bredda B. Resolved to endure the service by the most expedient means, Bredda B opts for sleep. As the service goes on, the intensity of a guest pastor reaches high pitch, and the congregation bursts into applause:

De whole church give a firm an loud clap han. Is dis rise Bredda B, im jump up quick, like im late fi heaven, clappin im han an hollerin out ‘Im mek a double century or im out?’

As soon as dis come out im mout, de laughin bus out fresh from de back an de vex face dem turn roun from de front. Sista B put dung her hymn-book an staat head out troo de side door so can come een troo de back door fi im. My madda face tight like no joke cyaan mek fi at leas a year.

Is Bredda Jerry save de day, ah have to give it to dat man. Im answer Bredda B right back. ‘Out? Out? Nooooo…Not out, never out. We have a openin bat dat never out. None like Him been aroun for centuries. An church, if you have Him on you side you cyaan lose,
no, you cyaan lose. My openin bat, your openin bat. Mek im lead dis
team today. Jesus! What is His name?... Jesus! Call on His name…’

De whole congregation bawl out, ‘Jesus’. All de backbencher
dem come een, ‘Jesus’.  

These performances rely on a cleverness and spontaneity on the part of the speaker, who is able to “trope” effectively—that is, to “turn” the meaning of the word, image, or sound—to suit the context of the exchange. In the former example, the off-handed delivery is used to emphasize the irony of a government that shirks its duties by kicking, while the latter example implicates the entire audience by drawing on the pun. Having turned the meaning to match their rhetorical intent, the speakers are able to direct the course of the exchange.

Some literary characters are named according to their rhetorical traits and the potential commentary such traits may encourage. In In the Castle of My Skin, Lamming’s progressive teacher/politician, Mr. Slime, seems intended to provoke commentary. Slime’s intentions are fairly well concealed from the community he serves and ultimately betrays. In fact, he is praised for his forward-looking ethos, which resonates deeply for those in the vernacular class who, because they had neither means nor opportunity, celebrate his success as if it were theirs. However, the reader is alerted from the moment Slime is introduced. The rhetorical import of this pun for the reading audience is the degree to which an obvious danger to the community is not only accepted, but also trusted with its welfare. Throughout the novel, Lamming frequently juxtaposes the vernacular with metropolitan concerns in the Caribbean and America, which the protagonist, G., goes to great pains to negotiate with and resolve.

Circumlocution
In the Caribbean rhetorical tradition, the art of circumlocution operates in the service of three distinct verbal strategies: avoidance (indirection), broad challenge (direction), and trickery (misdirection). As such, circumlocution deals broadly with the technique of “saying without saying” whether out fear or aggression. In its first form, avoidance, the intent is to minimize the probability of confrontation by taking steps to ease tension, as Aldrick attempts in *The Dragon Can’t Dance*.

… What could he really tell Fisheye? Fisheye had charge of the boy, and if he wanted to beat him, what could he (Aldrick) do?

‘Shoulda go and lift some weights before I come to talk to him,’

Aldrick thought. ‘And learn some jujitsu.’ And it was in this spirit that he approached Fisheye.

‘What the hell you doing there alone on this culvert, man?’

Fisheye doesn’t answer, and Aldrick might have suspected that all was not right; for this manner of approach, this aggressive and anticipatory and conciliatory humour was the means by which men said to each other what they had to say, while avoiding conflict.

‘I just bring home your son. I hear you does beat him for nothing.’

‘So what?’

‘So,’ he plunged on, for he was aware of the boy standing tensely beside him. ‘So, I come to warn you. If you beat him again I going straight in the gym and lift some weights and learn some jujitsu and come back for you.’

‘I ain’t making joke tonight,’ Fisheye said coldly.

…
'I still have to talk to you about the boy,' Aldrick said, turning to leave.

‘You better don’t talk that talk tonight.’

‘When I lift the weights I will talk,’ Aldrick said.

‘Lift plenty,’ Fisheye said.

Aldrick walked home very slowly. He was not happy with himself…

In addition to the pretended aggression Aldrick uses to deflect Fisheye’s rage, circumlocution can take an understated though more antagonistic form, as with Cleothilda’s half-hearted admonition of Sylvia in the same novel:

Sylvia seemed unconcerned; and as she bent in that jubilant curtsy to take up her bucket, and Guy started to ease away, Miss Cleothilda intent on blunting Sylvia’s triumph and asserting her own power, calls out sweetly, ‘Sylvia, wait! I think I have a dress here that could fit you—if your mother would let you take it.’

Circumlocution can also take the form of gnomic markers that are deployed to help define either the ethos of the performer or the tone of a certain rhetorical performance. Key features of this are succinctness and subtlety. That succinctness is evident in the linguistic structure—the grammatical and syntactical features—but also in the layers of meaning, context, space, and time in which the statement is delivered.

Circumlocution is also deployed in the service of tricksters like Anansi (or Ti-Jean, Zayen, Brer Rabbit, Monkey), the spider-god of Caribbean folktales, his alter egos Rabbit
and Monkey, or his modern-day counterparts. According to Louis James, Anansi’s roots as a magical trickster can probably be traced to Ashanti folklore (though James has pointed out that a derivative of the word “Anansi” has been used to refer to folklore in general).  
Anansi, who uses trickery to outwit his stronger opponents, is a central representation of the vernacular ethos in folklore. His art of artifice makes him a paradigmatic hero of people with little recourse but to resort to strategic verbal contortions in order to see their desires met—basic amenities, such as food, or respect among others in his community. And though a tale here would be too lengthy, see how he is characterized in the prologue to “Riding Haas”:

Who deh like Hanaansi? Who so sly in di whole whole bush?
Who so patient as di lee spider-man? Who so sharp like di edge of di sword-grass, so weak until the muscle of the strong get expose to laughter and contempt—.  

Anansi is a pragmatist in the sense that he knows what works, and he adapts constantly to shifting contexts and situations. As such, he performs the role of intermediary for a notion of rhetoric based on the practical application of circumlocutory tactics—whether through compliment, insult, coaxing, or playful challenge—to bring about desired effects, or those most profitable.

Call-Response

Described by Geneva Smitherman as “spontaneous verbal and non-verbal interaction between speaker and listener in which…the speaker’s statements are punctuated by expressions by the listener,” the practice of call-response has a number of purposes, which include (and are not limited to) politeness, incitement, and acknowledgment, the
intensities of which vary according to different speaking situations. Call-response may even involve a temporary reversal of primary speaking roles—that is, the caller becomes respondent and *vice versa*. Typically, call-response involves an interaction between performer and audience that is meant to encourage the performer, to urge that he continue speaking, that what is being said is not only appreciated but also appropriate and in context.

The response functions as an authorization, in other words, that lets the speaker know that the listener is sympathetic and receptive and that it is no imposition to go on. The performer, in turn, acknowledges the participatory role of the audience, soliciting responses by asking questions or even pausing strategically during the course of a performance so the audience has the opportunity to respond. Performances such as these are designed to implicate the audience in the performance, with the call-response marking the perimeters of a particular performance so the audience is always aware of their place and responsibility.

Chief among these responsibilities is the necessary suspension of disbelief in order to receive the full, intended effect of the performance, which can range from indoctrination and the reification of worldview to the elaborate explanations of the way things are in the world. According to Smitherman, “[call-response] enables traditional black folk to achieve the unified state of balance or harmony which is fundamental to the traditional worldview.”

Though it is observed most often in a sacred context—that is, at a church service, or at other religious gatherings—call-response is also performed in secular social contexts as well. This form of dynamic interaction can, for example, take the form of openings and endings that occur with tales:

    Storyteller: Crick?
    Audience: Crack!
Storyteller: Crick, crack!
Audience: Monkey break he back for a piece of pommerac!

Storyteller: Mout open?
Audience: Tory jump out!

Storyteller: Wire Bend?
Audience: Story end.

Conteur: Tim-Tim.
Audience: Bois Chaise.
Conteur: Qui sa Bon Dieur mete assu Laterre? (What things has God put on Earth?)
Audience: Toute chose. (Everything.)

Conteur: E di queek (or Mesieur)
Audience: Quack.

Caribbean rhetors in contemporary settings outside of the Caribbean also use call-response in order to establish, develop, and maintain connections between themselves and their audiences. This bond can be described as the combined psychic and physical attachments that exist in varying degrees of intensity between the performer and the audience. It is achieved and maintained through the establishment of identification, with the response confirming the subject’s acceptance of a particular identity—thus, a bond is created that
supersedes the limitations of the current location, connecting the audience instead to their cultural roots. This occurs as a result of directional identification—that is, the means by which the ethos of the performer and that of the audience are aligned as a singular entity through conscious acts of distribution or convergence—designed to reinforce the performer’s intent as being in line with the welfare of the audience.

As Figure 1 illustrates, the performer can be either the distributor of identifying aspects that members of the audience actively accept on a subnational level or the locus for collective identification on a supranational level.

Distribution can be achieved in a number of ways. Many performances, for example, begin with the salutatio—a ubiquitous act of strategic acknowledgment that takes the form of an unapologetically unadorned roll call between subject (the audience) and referent (the pan-Caribbean performer, everyman):

- Anybody from Antigua?
- Anybody from Barbados?
- Anybody from St. Lucia?
- Jamaica?
- Trinidad?
Tobago?

Guyana?

To each interrogative, members of the audience respond in the affirmative (often most energetically for their own native country). Needless to say, they take umbrage should their country be neglected from the roll, and some performers have been known to include every island and as many cities just to avoid breaking the bond. Other performers opt to flip the script, inverting subject-referent positions and displaying themselves to the audience as inclusive examples to be emulated. This strategy is as common as the previous form, occurring as identifying aspects that the performer represents and on which the audience can converge for a common experience—namely, the performance. Nadia Batson’s “Caribbean Girl” accomplishes just that:

You bring out the Trini in me
You bring out the Bajan in me
You bring out the Vinci in me
You bringing me…you bringing me

You bring out St. Lucian in me
Bring out the Antiguan in me
You bring out Jamaican in me
You bringing me…..you bringing me
Your Caribbean girl⁴³
The performer negotiates with the audience, attempting to supplant the presumed penchants for subnational attitudes with a collective—that is, supranational—sensibility. By tapping into the psychic, social, political, economic, and epistemological similarities that inhere in the various musical traditions and persist in individual Caribbean societies, the astute performer works for coalescence, thereby making nativity something of a moot point in favor of a more progressive ethos. Though trained upon a progressive agenda, the performer remains connected to the mutual tradition, using the aspects of the past to convene and maintain the contemporary enactment of a Caribbean Ethos. Depending on the strength of the bond that the performer has established over time, the salutation may often go unspoken, the acknowledgment of the audience articulated in cheers. For some performers, appearing on stage is salutation enough—though the savvy performer will rarely begin without refreshing the bond previously established with the audience.

Of course, the possibility of breakdown occurs when, whether live or recorded, the music fails to deliver, fails to maintain the psychic bonds, or alters the bond in a significant way. Provided that such a disconnect does not occur—and the delicate relationship remains intact as a result—there is a greater likelihood that the prophetic, critical, or liberatory agenda of the rhetor will be enacted and positively received. This involves, among other things, a call to action that can motivate dynamic, collective, social activity and counteract cultural amnesia by generating a response.
Boasting/Shaming

Disputatious verbal exchanges set the backdrop for the boast, which allows rhetors to display their virility, strength, and verbal prowess. In “Stepping Razor,” Peter Tosh opts for directness, using simile to warn his enemies with a boastful tone that he is not to be trifled with:

If you wanna live,
You better treat me good

…
I’m like a stepping razor.
Don’t you watch my size.
I’m dangerous, dangerous

Another key example of this, *piong*, is known by various names—old talk, blagging, and shit-talk, for instance—but the essence of this rhetorical exchange is singular in focus and precise in its effect. A key figure in the *piong* tradition is also the Midnight Robber. Speeches were traditionally delivered extemporaneously with one single objective: to show that no other Robber was better. Vasco De Freitas offers a sample:

Rollo the Ganja is here, so don’t be surprised because you have never yet seen me here before! But I was in this trade for many many long years, roaming for my father. I passed through Bulgaria, Sweden, Copenhagen, and Denmark, Australia, Hungaria, Russia, Prussia, and also [incomprehensible] and I have never yet get destroyed.

…
The day I was born the world greatest tribulation was ever known. Deafening thunder rolled for more than twenty-four hours consecutively. Over six hundred villages, cities, and streets were washed away by floods and hurricane. And here comes a vision! So hand me that mysterious weapon, similar to the one that Samson defeated the Philistines with. And if you want to die a criminal death, I shall send you to the lonely wilderness where the birds of the air and wild and ferocious beasts of the jungle were [?].

...

From the eyeless regions of the lost century came I invincible,undauntable, and impregnable criminal master. More actual sound efforts are incorporated into the delivery of speech. When I speaks he cry and sobbed and robbed his eyes like a child. Men, women, children wail.

...

Wheresoever I lay my battling arms, green grass may never grow, sun may never shine, lightning may never flash, thunder may never roar, volcanoes refuse to explode, and even mankind refuse to grow!

The rhetorical complement to the boast is, of course, the shame it is intended to cause in the opponent—though it is fundamentally different from the kind of shame Aldrick feels when his pretended boast fails to work with Fisheye. These are expressed, in contrast, as direct insults woven into a performance. The Robber, for instance, in his quest to shame,
recognizes no boundaries imposed by genre, as all language users are subject to his performance. Rival genres of the carnival season received particular scorn:

Or in a *ping* in a calypso war when your paltry verses are done with your dunce head, I will have some fun. I will give you rocks to eat for bread and you will be numbered among the dead. Your body will be going down the road, but your spirit will remain under my control. For whenever the death bell toll my flag unfurl for rebellion.\(^47\)

Religious occasions also allow for shaming, either through sermonic confession or the calling out of members of the audience. This calling out is somewhat circumlocutory in form, since it does not directly identify the subject; rather, the subject is implied. It is achieved in this example with the repetition of a universal “You”:

‘You who stand outside the palings of grace scoffing and jeering, you who feel too proud to humble yourself before what is Great and Good, remember it will be noted against you in that Book of books that on this night you heard the call and rejected Christ. You said to him, away with you, I have chosen the enemy. You who hide because you’re ashamed, you’ll be found out, and you who run because you’re afraid, you will be caught.’

…

He repeated the story of the fig tree, and suddenly the woman burst into tears and threw herself forward in a confused outpouring of confession.\(^48\)
Needless to say, such strategies often hit their mark. Boasting and shaming also have a collaborative character, as in the *calypso war* that emerged during the 1930s. Often, performers would share the boasting platform, successively taking the lead while the others sang the chorus. In “Don’t Break It I Say,” The Growling Tiger, King Radio, and The Roaring Lion issue a threat of what will ensue if the traditional Carnival were to be outlawed. With each line interspersed with the refrain, “Don’t Break It I Say,” they sing:

[T]: I am the Growling Tiger, high priest of Mi Minor  
[R]: Murder, water, blood in the gutter  
[L]: I am humble, noble, and king of the jungle  
[T]: I am the Science Master, I worse than Dracula  
[R]: If you break up my band I go live in the station  
[L]: I am King of Science and Master of De Laurence  
[T]: Not Power, Liddelow, or Mavrogorado  
[R]: Not even Harvey Cooper, the famous Cut Outer  
[L]: In reality, this is real ferocity

Not all boasts were directed at the establishment. Calypsonians, having made the transition from singing “single-tone” French Creole *lavvays* to “double-tone” calypsos, laid out their boasts and their willingness to battle anyone at anytime. Here is Lord Executor in “War,” dismantling the abilities of his rival Wilmouth Houdini:

At last the hour of vengeance is at hand, I am in the land,  
At last the hour of vengeance is at hand, I am in the land,  
The Lord Executor’s word of command,
With my glittering sword in hand,

Tell Houdini this is the hour of destiny,

In this colony

Those who boast that Houdini can sing,
in my opinion they know nothing,

For it’s all propaganda, deceit and pretence,

He hasn’t got a shadow of intelligence,

The money that was spent on his slates and books,

Has not improved his manners and looks,

He has a good inclination, but foreign education,

In this colony

Drawing on the disputational ethos of the *picong*, these wars rely on the improvisational skills of the rhetors involved—perhaps even more so than in the epic speeches of the Robber.

The prevalent subtext of each of these boasts is the assertion that no form of oppression can stifle the indomitable vernacular spirit. There is no fear.

Proverbs

Whenever we falter, and many times before we do, that oft-repeated lesson of caution, of promise of doom, of even the brilliance in strategic folly, comes in the form of proverbs. The proverb is fundamentally an appeal to the authority of established modes of knowing, to perceived and accepted truths. A mother, for example, uses a familiar proverb to caution her son: “Frien does carry you, but dey doh bring you back” (Friends carry you,
but they don’t bring you back). The proverb stresses not so much a distrust of friends as a sense of personal responsibility. According to its placement prior to or following a particular event/instance, the same statement can also serve as commentary and a form of confirmation of the proverb’s effectiveness, not to mention that the authority of the tradition is reinscribed. They signify a psychic equivalent of that place we can go to when, with nowhere else to go at a given moment, something must still be reached for, must still be said or done—indeed, because the moment calls for it. When my uncle Peter drowned, for example, people who attended the wake were heard to utter the same words, a truism confirmed by his death, “Friend does really carry you. They don’t bring you back.”

In addition to their service in instruction, proverbs are a testament to the resilience of the communities from which they emerge not because they constitute a collection of what is known and thus remembered arbitrarily, but because what is known and remembered is worth remembering, having worked effectively and subsequently repeated over time. Some proverbs embody aspects of the sacred (T’ief f’om t’ief make God smile⁵¹) and others the secular (Good sense beat obeah⁵₂), while others bridge the sacred and secular in order to achieve their maximum significance (When you come a church, bring you own hymn book [and try no read from mine]⁵³). Many contemporary proverbs—or those using the proverb form in context—refer to sports, drawing on metaphorical commentary (e.g., stay in your crease, a cricket reference) that Caribbean people recognize. Structurally, as Table 3 indicates, they employ familiar devices, including metaphor, symmetry, chiasmus, and irony:
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Metaphor</th>
<th>Symmetry/Asymmetry</th>
<th>Chiasmus</th>
<th>Irony</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Chop don’t leave mark in water.⁵⁴</td>
<td>Before face an’ behind back no a one.⁵⁵</td>
<td>Go buckra⁵⁶ cow- pen fe count cow, no drink him milk; but when you drink him milk, no count him cow.⁵⁷</td>
<td>Servant does ease you foot but hurt you heart.⁵⁸</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cockroach ent have no right in fowl party.⁵⁹</td>
<td>One day for watchman; one day for t’ief.⁶⁰</td>
<td>Good thing not cheap; cheap thing not good.</td>
<td>Many a mauger cow you see a common a bull mumma.⁶¹</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>You have to play dead to catch corbeaux⁶² alive.⁶³</td>
<td>Dog don’t eat dog.⁶⁴</td>
<td>Money is no problem. The problem is no money.</td>
<td>Good nature make nanny goat tail short.⁶⁵</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A old stick of fire don’t take long to catch.⁶⁶</td>
<td>Dog don’t make cat.⁶⁷</td>
<td></td>
<td>Friend does carry you, but they don’t bring you back.⁶⁸</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 3: Sample Proverb Forms

Peter Roberts argues that in form, meaning, and context, Caribbean proverbs are saturated with the negative because the historical domination of Caribbean people forms the core of vernacular experience.⁶⁹ In the slavery-colonialism dynamic, it is obvious Europeans had more to be positive about than the Diasporic Africans, but what Roberts seems to hint at is a deeply ingrained and critical *response* to the potentially traumatic situation based on an accrued sense of moral imperative that was forged in a traumatic context. In other words, the practical wisdom, or *phronesis*, that the proverbs secure reflects the normative phase of the vernacular worldview that has developed through sustained practice in response to negative experiences. From the above examples, these degrees of negativity certainly stand out. For instance, there is negative wording (e.g., *no, don’t*), negative moods or themes (e.g., *death, defeat, loss*), and negative context-determined purposes (e.g., *deterrent, corrective*) for the proverbs above. But there is more than negativity to these proverbs, even though many begin there.
“The strategy of the proverb is to direct by appearing to clarify,” writes Roger Abrahams, “by simplifying the problem and resorting to traditional solutions.”\textsuperscript{70} He goes on: “[a] proverb works primarily by cloaking a recommended course of action in the garb of artful expression…[giving] the impression that much thought has at some time been given to the problem to which the proverb is presently addressed.”\textsuperscript{71} As a catalogue of human interaction and the unfolding of events in the natural and supernatural world, proverbs enable rhetors and audiences to articulate and respond to principles of ethical behavior based on logical, aphoristic models, to simultaneously shape potentials and probabilities of future interactions and outcomes.

Bruce St. John uses proverb in this very way, foregrounding the folly of regional imitation in politics, industry, and economics in “Bajan Litany;” in this excerpt, notice, also, the call-response dynamic and its role in underscoring the overall critique of an audience that goes uncritically along:

\begin{itemize}
  \item \textbf{Follow pattern kill Cadogan} \hspace{2cm} \textbf{Yes, Lord}
  \item \textbf{America got black power?} \hspace{2cm} \textbf{O Lord}
  \item \textbf{We got black power} \hspace{2cm} \textbf{Yes, Lord}\textsuperscript{72}
\end{itemize}

Louise Bennett makes a similar rhetorical move in “Independance,” to comment on the skewed sense of actual independence in Jamaica during the 1960s:

\begin{itemize}
  \item \textbf{When daag marga him head big, and}
  \item \textbf{When puss hungry him nose clean;}
  \item \textbf{But every puss and daag no know}
  \item \textbf{What Independence mean.}\textsuperscript{73}
\end{itemize}
Traditional proverbs, then, form the bases of truth upon which adherents draw their ways of seeing and knowing and formulating the world of experience, attempting to live their lives according to the order set by the normativity of these notions. However, although these proverbs retain much of their structure as the reason for their successful oral transmission, they are subject to improvisation, modification, and applicability because they evolve both in terms of structure (linguistic and syntactic) and use (context and place). The effectiveness of proverbs lies in their ability to weather repetition without devolving wholly into cliché, a quality that is insured by the timeliness of application and their flexibility.
The Sermonic

The sermonic tradition in Caribbean rhetorical tradition typically uses one (or a combination) of four major components that rely on the arrangement of the broad rhetorical appeals to achieve the desired effect: a confession, the expression of a jeremiadic thesis, a series of appeals, and a concluding meditation. These features are laid out in more detail below in Table 4.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Feature</th>
<th>Main Characteristics</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Prostration/Confession</td>
<td>Self-referential and self-deprecating gesture, designed to identify with the audience and to minimize degrees of separation that exist between rhetor and audience who must be united in struggle in order to achieve success or meaningful change.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jeremiadic Thesis</td>
<td>Direct or indirect articulation of exigence, usually a crisis or problem currently afflicting society as a whole, with repercussions on a local, regional, or global scale.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appeal i. Pathetic</td>
<td>appeal to emotion, primarily with allusions to the tragic (slavery, colonialism, etc.), effects (trauma and nihilism), and the capacity for transcendence; emphasis on pathos, logos, and ethos as means of implication.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appeal ii. Dialogic</td>
<td>appeal for interaction that grows out of the urgency expressed (mainly, but not exclusively) in the pathetic appeal; emphasis on aspects of Socratic dialogue, ethos.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appeal iii. Dogmatic</td>
<td>a more rigid appeal, designed as a formative set of concepts for constructive social operation that corresponds to a shared vision; emphasis on aspects of parrhesia, bios, and ethos.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Meditation</td>
<td>Appearing at beginning and/or end of discourse, it operates as a practical demarcation of discursive boundaries (akin to the formulaic beginnings and endings that appear in tales).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strategy</td>
<td>Carnivalesque Characteristics</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Syncretic</td>
<td>Vernacular articulations between sacred and secular; there is a fundamental reliance on gnosis (knowledge of the metaphysical) and phronesis (practical knowledge, wisdom) that drive the resonance and effectiveness of this form. Construction: the establishment of the hero as a public figure of a group character (ethos) for secular demystification and confrontation of the status quo; fundamental reliance on ethos, bios, and parrhesia. The hero is constructed in syncretic contexts.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Divergent</td>
<td>Diametre (heroic, dystopian) masqueing: characterized by a primarily aggressive, acerbic, negative tone, active expression, physical, retention of revolutionary themes; the agenda is restrictive. Trickster (heroic, disguised) masqueing: throwing words, positive tone, passive expression, verbal, revolutionary themes; the agenda is adaptive.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Convergent</td>
<td>Prophetic Vision: the tone is recuperative; positive; major emphasis on sermonic. Dystopian Critique: the tone here is apocalyptic; negative; major emphasis on manifesto.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conciliatory</td>
<td>Critical historiographic/revisionist remasqueing and the emergence of the critical carnivalesque in contemporary discourse as an appeal for civic cooperation.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 4: Major Strategic Characteristics of the Sermonic
In *The Wine of Astonishment*, when the community can no longer remain silent to the religious persecution they have had to endure, Bee, their religious leader, launches into a sermon that exhibits all these features. I include it below as it appears in the novel, highlighting each sermonic component:

   And Bee raise his head from his reading and look at the few of us packed close together in the corner where the building wasn't leaking, and his voice was low and the rain was soft, beating on the roofing, and we was quiet and listening.

   ‘Brethren, tonight I come to bow my head and to lift up my head,’ Bee say and right away his words touch me and I answer,

   ‘Blessed!’

   [Confession]  ‘I come tonight,’ Bee say, ‘to make an confession and to give a direction.’

   And Sister Ruth cry out, ‘Sweet Jesus!’ and raise the hair on my head.

   ‘I come tonight,’ Bee say, ‘as a man who stumble in the wilderness for nights, and my eyes open now. I see the light! I see the light!’ Bee cry out, ‘I see the light!’

   ‘Amen,’ the congregation say.

   ‘Brethren,’ Bee say, his voice was soft now and sorrowful and brave and pleading, ‘I is the shepherd that cause the sheep to go astray.’
‘...astray...’ And we was answering him, leading him on, drawing out his words with our own as in the old way.

‘...that have you moving from mountain to hill, so we don’t know...’

‘Jesus, we don’t know,’ the congregation say.

‘I mean,’ Bee say, ‘we don’t know if we is fowl...’

‘Say it, Leader.’

‘...or feather. If...’

‘Merciful Father.’

‘...we black...’

‘Jeeus!’

‘...or white. If...’

‘Oh Lord!’

‘...we going...’

‘Going, Saviour, going.’

‘...or coming. If we up...’

‘Jehovah!’

[Thesis] ‘...or down. We don’t know who we is.’

‘Tel us, Leader. Tell us who is we.’

[Appeals] ‘We,’ Bee say, ‘...we is Shadrack, Meshack and Abednigo that burn in the fiery furnace and ain’t come out yet...’

‘Tell it!’

‘We is the day that don’t have no rest...’

‘Saviour!’
‘We is the cutting grass that they trample and dig out and sprout up roots again…’

‘Beloved!’

‘We is sticks that don’t bend and don’t break. We is Egypt…’

‘Oh Jesus!’

‘Ethiopia…’

‘Lord!’

‘We is Judah…’

‘Oh Israel!’

‘…Solomon, the Queen of Sheba. We is love that rise up, the earth that don’t fall down. We is corn and water.’

‘Amen! Amen!’

‘I is the shepherd of the sheep and the servant of the Lord,’

[Ultimatum] Bee say. ‘And if we must worship…’

‘Beautiful Lord!’

‘…If we must worship we must worship in Spirit…’

‘And in truth, Jeesus!’

‘If we must worship we must worship with a ringing of the bell and bringing of our souls with a joyful noise unto the Lord…’

‘Ooh Lord!’

‘Who is greater than the Lord?’

‘Yeeah!’

‘…for he will carry out…’

‘Yees!’
‘...and he will bring you. He will search you and he will turn you...’

‘Jeeus!’

‘...He will touch you with his right hand.’

‘Oh God!’

‘Lift up your heads, oh ye hills!’ Bee cry out.

‘Yeees, Leader!

‘Lift up your heads, oh Jerusalem! Lift up your voices, oh Judah! Lift up your voices, oh Israel! Lift up your voices, oh Ethiopia! Lift up your voices...’

‘Yeees!

[Meditation] And now with the congregation answering him, Bee voice was getting stronger, and all the sadness and anger in his soul poured down in his words.74

More than mouthpiece, the performer is charged with the task of “taking us there” and bringing us back, trying all the while not to lose the audience or get lost in the liminal space he must cover in the move from point to point—between history and future, reality and possibility. In In the Castle of My Skin, the narrator describes a sermonic scene:

The voices had stopped singing and the preacher stood again.

He made the plea for the others’ salvation while the worshippers like a supporting cast reinforced it. They understood perfectly when they should intone the amen, or break into singing. And they knew what hymn suited the particular incident.75
The preacher strikes a more solemn—though no less familiar—tone in his sermon. The jeremiadic thesis draws on the certainty of death and the well-known refrain that “many are called, but few are chosen.” The emphasis in this sermon, however, is on the ultimatum:

You must make your choice now, for I say that for such of you, and there are many here, I put it to you that there will be no tomorrow. For you there will be no tomorrow.\textsuperscript{76}

Embodying the psychic, physical, and emotional aspects of interaction, the sermonic is one of the foremost vehicles that operate as an expression of syncretic forms and practical epistemologies playing out in the public and private spheres of everyday life. We see also how the sermonic opens up onto other possibilities for rhetorical action and social change. Recall, for instance, Eva’s observation at the end of Bee’s sermon in \textit{The Wine of Astonishment}:

\begin{quote}
And now with the congregation answering him, Bee voice was getting stronger, and all the sadness and anger in his soul poured down in his words.\textsuperscript{77}
\end{quote}

The application of the sermonic, in terms of the carnivalesque, yields an analysis of action and interaction, motive and motion, call and response that are deployed to help draw the soul up, out of Bee as a voice getting stronger—strong enough, in fact to allow the words to now be a container for his anger and sadness. The congregation’s pains are poured, as well, into their own words, thus enabling them to rise in the occasion.

But it is not just about celebration, though. It is not just about the “Amen” and the clap and go home, voiceless and empty-handed. It can’t, in other words, be \textit{just for so}. To be rhetorical, in my view, would mean that the performance would not only aid in the encounter with and understanding of the world, but that it could also improve probabilities
for improved circumstances. The question, given this, would be: How could a response to the overarching paradigm of struggle in which the sermonic and the rhetoric itself are couched—or even a sense that the paradigm as rhetoric exists—pave a way out of struggle? How to make the implicit explicit? Aime Cesaire's self-analysis in *Return to My Native Land*, may at least help us clear some brush. He writes:

‘My mouth shall be the mouth of those calamities that have no mouth, my voice the freedom of those who break down in the prison holes of despair.’

And on the way I would say to myself:

And above all, my body as well as my soul, beware of assuming the sterile attitude of the spectator, for life is not a spectacle, a sea of miseries is not a proscenium, a man screaming is not a dancing bear….’

Cesaire offers something of a preface to Bee’s sermon—what we find in it is a motive for activism in Cesaire’s wish, and the activation of it in Bee’s sermon. Imagine Cesaire’s articulation of motive as, quite frankly, a call, to which Bee responds. The carnivalesque, as an altered state of consciousness, confirms the rhetor’s Virgilian role, as Bee’s performance illustrates, through (or between) symbolic action and deliberate activity. The call is not only to a supernatural power, but also a call to action on the part of rhetors, as well.
Nonverbal Semantics

Whenever words seem to fail in the course of verbal interactions, Caribbean rhetors resort to nonverbal semantics to express themselves or to augment verbal expression. They can be described as the range of what Rickford refers to as “‘ordinary’ rituals involved in everyday behavior: how people walk and stand; how they greet and take leave of each other; what they do with their faces and hands when conversing, narrating, or arguing, and so on.” In “Turn Thanks to Miss Mirry,” for example, Lorna Goodison describes a series of nonverbal semantics as an alternative to standardized forms of language expression:

She could not read or write a word in English

but took every vowel and consonant of it

and rung it around, like the articulated neck

of our sunday dinner sacrificial fowl.

In her anger she stabbed at english, walked it out,

abandoned it in favor of a long kiss-teeth,

a furious fanning of her shift tail, a series of hawks

at the back of her throat, a long extended elastic sigh,

a severing cut eye, or a melancholy wordless moaning

The steups (also cheups, stchoops, chups, or kiss-teeth in the example above) is the noise produced by sucking air through pursed lips and along the side teeth; in cases where the actual sucking sound is not used, the gesture is euphemized somewhat with either (i) the actual word being uttered or written (“Chu,” “Chuh,” “Steups,” etc.), or (ii) the lips being
pursed as if to steups, but stopping short of making the sound. The duration of the steups relates directly to the degree of these sentiments—the longer the steups, the more egregious the issue it is meant to serve as a comment on. There are also derivatives of the steups that manifest in certain contexts where the full steups will not work as well. These include the twist-mouth or kuya mouth. The twist-mouth is the motion of twitching the lips to the side to express or emphasize a noteworthy or ironic point. Kuya mouth is similar to the twist-mouth, except that it is usually deployed as a substitute to pointing with the hand. The lips, then, are used to bring attention to either a person or situation on which the rhetor chooses to comment in secret—that is, without the knowledge of the subject being commented on.

The steups—represented textually as an onomatopoeic word—is used to express disgust, disrespect, insubordination, impatience, anger, and frustration:

You coulda tell somebody…steups…Farrow was down here too…wah you does say again? Better friends.81

Although there can be some ambiguous intentionality connected with the deployment of the steups, depending on the time and context it is used, it should not be confused with circumlocutory delivery of the type discussed above. Therefore, while the rhetor may attempt to cover the true intention of the deployment—“I have something in my teeth”—the effect of the gesture is unmistakable. Additionally, it is also used to effectively show empathy, regret, and relief, which must be shared for it to be successfully expressed.

Nonverbals also communicate that the rhetor intends to be seen and heard by the subject, rather than have their protest displayed to a secret, sympathetic audience. Thus, in response to the extended speech of the Robber, replete as it is with insults and threats, an offended (or defeated) rhetor is as likely to steups. Or, if a particular performance—such as a
lecture or sermon—fails to stir or fails to have any satisfactory effect, an unconvinced audience member will step up to show disapproval. For instance, during the composition process (or a lecture preceding it), many of my Caribbean students would step in frustration when they felt unable to craft what they hoped would be a “proper” response to their essay prompts. Others repeated the action when they received their papers and the results were not what they expected. Rather than conveying a sense of powerlessness or surrender that would effectively bring an end to any perceived assault, they are forms of argumentative engagement that influence the tone of certain interactions.

The cut-eye when deployed for a direct effect also violates those facts about oneself that one maintains control over and access to. As such, they function as insults that invade aspects of the subject that the subject means to control in the course of interactions with others. According to Rickford:

“[T]he argument is waged as much with words as with eyes, each protagonist ‘cutting up the eyes’ on the other in a threatening and belligerent fashion. But there may be no verbal argument at all. In any situation where one wishes to censure, or challenge someone else, or convey to him that he is not admired or respected, a cut-eye may be conveniently employed.”

The cut-eye can be described as the gesture of moving one’s eyes horizontally or vertically, as if surveying another subject, for the purpose of communicating dislike or disapproval. The attentive rhetor who also wishes to be persuasive will either adjust his delivery to avoid these negative responses or will simply cease the delivery altogether.
By nonverbal, I do not mean to suggest a limitation to oral performances that seem to defy enunciation. Oral performances, whether verbal or nonverbal, are usually accompanied by elements of physical movement. The storyteller, calypsonian, pastor, and politician all gesticulate for rhetorical effect and enhance the effect of their verbal delivery with motion. Sometimes, of course, physical performances form the total expression. Dance is the foremost example. Suzanna Sloat has pointed out that the dances of the various islands, each with their own languages, “evolved in somewhat different ways, but with a noticeable common dance language or vocabulary” that evokes the notion of mutual intelligibility sociolinguists have noticed in the different Creoles of these islands. Hence, the moko jumbie dance in Trinidad speaks more directly to the Junkonnu dance of Jamaica than natives from these and other Caribbean countries have been apt to do.

As a rhetorical mode, dance signifies an agenda through physical performance; or, at the very least, it signifies an awareness of the situation that demands this kind of engagement, not just a dance for nothing but as a mode of survival, a coping mechanism. This coping can seem to resemble escapism from the pressures poor people face, such as in “Dem Belly Full.” Rather than succumb to a litany of social injustices, people are entreated to forget them and dance:

- Forget your sorrows and dance
- Forget your troubles and dance
- Forget your sickness and dance
- Forget your weariness and dance

But Marley understood quite well that dance held a liberatory force that was not based on escaping from these issues, but reprioritizing them—that is, dance supersedes the
troubles, sorrows, sickness, and weariness. It bears, in other words, a rhetorical force that can be harnessed to deal with these problems. Lovelace also posits dance as a strategy that is both anticipatory and reactionary:

Dance! There is dancing in the calypso. Dance! If the words mourn the death of a neighbour, the music insists that you dance; if it tells the troubles of a brother, the music says dance. Dance to the hurt! Dance! If you catching hell, dance, and the government don’t care, dance! Your woman take your money and run away with another man, dance. Dance! Dance! Dance! It is in dancing that you ward off evil. Dancing is a chant that cuts off the power of the devil.
Dance! Dance! Dance!\(^5\)

Additionally, in Paule Marshall’s *Praisesong for the Widow* Avey Johnson goes through a spiritual reconnection with her grandmother through a series of visions. These visions are of her and her grandmother on the Sea Islands of the coast of South Carolina, but they occur and intensify while Avey is on a cruise in the Caribbean. When Avey ends up in Carriacou, at the invitation of an elder who is retuning to the smaller island off Grenada for the Big Drum festival, Marshall exposes the reader to the shared spirituality of African Americans and Caribbean people. Avey’s grandmother was a Shouter, similar in many ways to the Shouter Baptists and the Shango Baptists sects of the Caribbean. The elders congregate to perform a sacred dance, the Juba, and their movements are surprising and frightening in their familiarity. As she begins, at first reluctantly, to dance, to feel the spirit, to become one again with the features of spirit that bind, rather than with those that separate, Avey experiences
the reiterative recall that dancing allows.\textsuperscript{86} Having gone through the rituals of expurgation and purification, she is able to dance:

Arms bent, she began working her shoulders in the way the Shouters long ago used to do, thrusting them forward and then back in a strong casting-off motion. Her weaving head was arched high. All of her moving suddenly with a vigor and passion she hadn’t felt in years, and with something of the stylishness and sass she had once been known for.\textsuperscript{87}

Avey’s rhetorical implication into the practice of the vernacular tradition stresses not only the resonance of persistent cultural elements in the African Diaspora, but also the fact that some of these elements get expressed through the body in motion, rather than with words.

CONCLUSION

Caribbean rhetorical performance is not simply a matter of linguistic diversity or similarity. Beyond mere language variety, traditional rhetorical devices are used to shape, modify, reinforce, or even control certain outcomes. The features resound at some of the most visceral levels of our identity, marking us Caribbean wherever we are and aiding in the sanctioning of performance as struggle and art. Additionally, the combinations of topical and tropic characteristics that the performer uses to convey shared meaning to an audience mark musical performance as a discursive act that is specifically intended to reify the discursive bonds that exist between them, as well as contribute to the overall achievement of critical consciousness within the larger multinational social group. As a result of the critical
reification of self-awareness being achieved in a participatory context, a dynamic
transference of ethos from performer to audience is possible, with the audience aspiring to a
level of accountability that carries over into everyday life and beyond the parameters of the
musical performance. So what can begin as straightforward interpellation often develops into
full-fledged collaborative choral performances. This direct contact between the performer
and the audience evokes the ceremonial dynamics that are at the heart of vernacular
interaction, therefore serving in no small part to underscore the importance of tradition in
the performer’s role and responsibility: rebuke, reinforcement, disputation, narrative,
prophetic vision.

These fully communal performances—or those imagined in the absence of a physical
performer—are transformative acts that help Caribbean people grapple with challenges,
injustices, and atrocities. Their effect, therefore, should be considered for the degree to
which performers are able to align intention with reception. Obviously, the entire corpus of
Caribbean expression cannot be relegated to these few examples. The point I want to
emphasize, however, is this: Scratch the surface of any genre of Caribbean expression, and
the language can be found, evoking distinct vernacular characteristics that continue to be
practiced. The vernacular Caribbean rhetor’s obvious and predominant focus with the
narrative of vernacular identity and the histories hidden behind them suggests a dual
approach that is: 1) sustained by an ethical responsibility to present and represent, as
faithfully as possible, the intricacies of that identity for our aesthetic consideration; and 2) a
rhetorical enterprise, also ethically based, that gestures more directly towards the
development of a discursive model and allows a distinctly Caribbean identity not only to
flourish but also to do “work” on our behalf in the Caribbean and places out of the
Caribbean where we settle. The Caribbean rhetor’s portrayal of language, culture, and
identity are the articulations of an ethos that grows out of the internalization and subsequent externalized performance of rhetorical strategies, practices, and tradition. These articulations will become even more apparent in the following chapter, which reads the carnivalesque as a viable rhetorical methodology.
**CHAPTER 3: EARL LOVELACE AND A THEORY OF CARIBBEAN ETHOS**

* Alone, all a man could do is play a mas’*

Earl Lovelace, *The Dragon Can’t Dance*, 204

A culture based on joy is bound to be shallow.

Derek Walcott, “The Muse of History,” 14

[The] symbolic act is the *dancing of an attitude*…

Kenneth Burke, *The Philosophy of Literary Form*, 9

The epic of Caribbean history formed an extended rhetorical situation, which bred heroes and heroines, guardians, and representatives both physical and metaphysical, whose concern for the communities and constituents was nothing short of their liberation and participation as recognized and recognizable members of society in spite of resistance from the ruling class. The original French-inspired Carnival, functioning primarily in jest as the social leveler among the plantocracy, had become “incompatible with such a [diverse] society. It had either to die or to change its character substantially. The former became the hopeful prediction of the upper classes for over half a century; the latter is what actually happened.” What also happened was that various forms of rhetorical strategy managed to survive in genres of literary production to which traditional figures had access. Among these are the street theatre, with the body as text; the ritualistic dance and song that gave birth, in tone and structure, to the prophetic music of calypso; and the semi-sequestered spaces where reflective soliloquy and transformative dialogue continue to occur, and where history and memory intersect. In short, what also happened was a carnivalesque ethos began to flourish in the varied performances of the *diametre*. These are the same practices that, over time, have enabled productive rhetorical negotiation of multiple public spheres, so they
certainly demand our attention for the insight they could offer into the democratizing practices of Caribbean folk.

Also, since rhetoric is concerned primarily with the transmission of ideas and agendas, as well as the consequences of transmission in a particular group that operates in the pursuit and realization of public discourse, political power, and the probability of social change, then it must inevitably involve attention to how the events in a tradition play out and how they can be interpreted by an audience that is able to synthesize the conglomeration of symbols that form the tradition into the myriad contexts of contemporary discourse.

Basically, it involves an understanding of ethos—that is, an understanding of the role and responsibility of the rhetor who either intends or is appointed to serve the community to which he belongs.

This chapter theorizes on the presence, deployment, and significance of the Caribbean Ethos in three Lovelace texts—*The Wine of Astonishment*, *Salt*, and *The Dragon Can’t Dance*—as a way to better understand the historical and contemporary ambivalence of Caribbean cultural expression that was introduced in the previous two chapters. A survey of these three novels reveals attempts by the author to persuasively articulate the Caribbean Ethos and to show how characters depend on that ethos to articulate their circumstances.

Lovelace forwards his conception of ethos by using his characters as types, or models, which demonstrate it as life practice—as a *mas rhetorica*. These novels illustrate how Lovelace, through the self-discovery and subsequent efforts of his characters, orchestrates the deployment of an ethos that claims moral superiority from a traumatic history and forges a contemporary ethical position stable enough to speak from the lower social echelons. In other words, such an ethos is formatted to address injustices and other ills, and it is activated when the practitioner plays a *mas* for the audience. The rationale for this particular course of
inquiry is rather simple: insofar as symbolic language (as well as style and worldview) constitutes “equipment for living”2—and it is through such language that the carnivalesque is primarily formed, operates, and frames experience—creative works produced in and about Caribbean people should be viewed not merely as resources to mine for examples that substantiate the existence of the carnivalesque, but more formally as rhetorical manuals in which the modus operandi that authors and characters apply are actually hypothesized upon, tested, and proposed as a possible modus vivendi that is representative.

Amid what he called “the embarrassment of riches in research about Carnival,” anthropologist Daniel Crowley attempted to describe the contemporary mas man: “He spends more time and thought, has a more extensive vocabulary, and is more praised for innovation in the creation of Carnival masques than any other aspect of his culture.”3 Crowley additionally makes a key distinction between masques and masks that is fundamental to my understanding of the carnivalesque and determines my use of the former term in this project; it therefore deserves inclusion here. He writes:

> [t]he word ‘masque’ indicates that the band wears costumes based on a theme from history, current events, films, Carnival tradition, from the imagination, or from a combination of these. It is thus differentiated from ‘mask,’ the covering of the face and/or head sometimes worn by masquers. In local pronunciation both are ‘mas’ but clearly differentiated concepts in the minds of the masquers.4

Viewed as masques, we are able to see that the objective of people who play dragons, demons, bats, sailors, and clowns is not to be read as authentic performances, per se, instead, they are performed as rhetorical re-presentations and must be read as such, with the use of these figures
as rhetorical gargoyles that communicate an intention or appeal in symbolic terms in order to illustrate the real effects of injustice as they are perceived in the lives of the practitioners. For the target audience, which may consist of perpetrators or complicit subjects, the performed consequences may be their deeds symbolically re-presented to them. Such re-presentation can only be symbolic since the vernacular cannot truly replicate the actual mechanisms of power by which they are constrained. I want to make clear, though, that this discussion is primarily about the carnivalesque as an ethos that informs the traditional and contemporary celebrations, not that these celebrations are deterministic.

Lovelace’s characterizations of the carnivalesque are indispensable for exploring aspects of Caribbean consciousness because they illustrate the potential of the dance to be both framework and tool. However, it is in their application that they become truly indispensable, the way in which they function as examples of the rhetor’s encounter with and ongoing critique of debilitating brands of ideology, hegemony, and domination that all tend to resist the impression that there is a real need for the critical awareness we associate with the Caribbean carnivalesque. This latter quality can be referred to as the author’s symbolic argument with history. In keeping with a rationale that draws on symbolic forms of awareness and negotiation, the Caribbean Ethos will be explored in this chapter as a series of ritualistic maneuvers that align with fundamental aspects of resistance, self-discovery, and obligation from the vernacular perspective. Specifically, I refer to the combative carrés of the Calenda, the solo contortions of the Limbo, and the adaptability of the Dragon dance.

Lovelace employs these dances in order to make symbolic sense of material social action, viewing the carnivalesque not just as a site of public memory, but also as a course of action with an eye toward the future. Thus, they provide a frame for Lovelace’s project, signifying aspects of emergent ethos in terms of the carnivalesque—as performances that
unfold in conversation with the world, rather than function narrowly as self-contained expressions of insular identity. Drawing on the fundamental structure of these dances, Lovelace effectively constructs scenarios in which the ethos is actually practiced in order to illustrate the proactive characteristics and prospective failures of the carnivalesque; he then infuses participants with the active means to arrive at a conscious statement of purpose that correspond to the structural features. These dances, therefore, help illustrate ethos and are the apparatus with which Lovelace accomplishes two important objectives: to cement behavior in the vernacular tradition, and to make its reading and application serve as part of a broad humanist agenda.

On the part of the author, whose abstract formulations involve the mind and body in the composition and execution of an abstract rhetorical act, ethos may be perceived as pronouncements of an approach to living—to life—that the author means to convey. I want to suggest that Lovelace’s close attention to what he refers to as “man’s view of himself, the search as it were for his integrity” is part of an ongoing attempt to construct and theorize the elements of practice that constitute a Caribbean Ethos. He constructs protagonists who not only embrace the carnivalesque, but who also internalize it to such a fundamental degree that no rhetorical imperative or action can be separated from it—not just carnivalesque in situation or context, but in content and character. This is articulated by Lovelace as “a New World challenge” that his fiction addresses, and which I understand as his articulation of an ethos that is under pressure to begin and be subsequently practiced on its own terms in an extensive dancing of Caribbean attitude in language and style. Unfortunately, dancing can easily be misconstrued as an alternative to directly addressing—say, through verbal means—the problems Caribbean people face. This can, as a result, lead to a consideration of dance as either a rhetorically hollow substitute for rhetorical involvement or a veiled performance.
Needed, therefore, is a reconceptualization of dance as a rhetoric, as a key symbolic action, as performance, rather than pretense.

It is, indeed, a fine line the rhetor walks between the pretense and performance, one which must consistently be reflected upon, analyzed, and practiced. Following the discussion of the individual novels, I will return to this delicate interplay as I discuss the mas rhetorica more extensively. But, simply put, Lovelace shows that Caribbean people do not just dance for nothing, for dancing sake, or just to celebrate for Carnival or Labor Day in Brooklyn or Caribana in Toronto, or reify the legacy of emancipation. Rather, the dance is a mode of discourse steeped in the carnivalesque, an attempt at, among other things, survival and sovereignty. And when viewed in this context, the enactment and consequences of negotiation—the sometimes very uncomfortable balance between tradition and ambition, or the resistant affirmation of individuals in the face of change, for instance—the purpose of the dance as a path to self-discovery and service seems less abstract. As I note in the previous chapter, dance is often used as a rubric for dealing in symbolic practice and material consequences, a move Lovelace makes in *The Dragon Can't Dance* with a painful, joyful, and ritualistic anticipation of Carnival:

> Dance to the hurt! …If you catching hell, dance, and the government don’t care, dance!... Dance! Dance! Dance! It is in dancing that you ward off evil. Dancing is a chant that cuts off the power of the devil. Dance! Dance! Dance!™

Dance, in other words, signifies an agenda; or, at the very least, it signifies an awareness of the situation that demands this kind of engagement. Therefore, as a premiere mode of Caribbean rhetoric, it offers us another way to approach and understand the ethos
Lovelace so meticulously constructs. Between sound and silence, dance announces. It teaches. It warns. It re-calls, using the body as effectively as the guttural cry or the spoken word. Far from being a primitive, pseudoscientific, or nonrationalist performance, dance is an ideological maneuver(ing), a statement of position, and a constant, gradual modification of rhetorical motives. The body enacts motives, as the performer actively carves a space out of extant social pressures, creating a meeting place for the intersection of rhetorical exigencies.  

It is a clear preoccupation with the metaphorical and material in Lovelace’s fiction that leads to the basic claim that the body is the medium, the language that the rhetorical dance makes use of to forward a discursive agenda. Such performance is indicative of the rhetor’s attempts to go further than the immediate spatial limitations of the memory and, in so doing, makes action meaningful. According to Pierre Nora, for example, “Memory installs remembrance within the sacred; history, always prosaic, releases it again.” However, while Nora claims, “Memory is blind to all but the group it binds,” Wilson Harris reminds us that attached to the ability to remember oneself as part of a group is a revived ability to envision, imagine, and even foresee. The ability to act in the shared interests of humanity is, essentially, a reference to responsibility. The body itself is viewed “as inimitable art, inimitable multifaceted, living fossil extending into all organs, objects, spaces, stars and the ripple of light.” This humanist underpinning is a key aspect of the personal reconstitution and social responsibility implicit in all aspects of the carnivalesque—a force that binds practitioners to the entire tradition and defines their performances.

The dance, therefore, extends the dancer’s concern beyond himself and into the world, unfolding in such a way as to place destruction and reconstruction at discursive loggerheads that impact and act upon the rhetor. The epideictic display—practiced both as
an act of seeing and being seen—results in an attempt at teleological leveling, an opening of democratizing space and opportunity designed to disrupt what Wilson Harris calls the “tautology of tyranny.” Rhetorical practice, in this sense, offers a practical alternative to forgetting and threatens to subvert the futility and anachronism of mere recall that resists an uncritical dependence on the past. Through the interplay of history, memory, and concept, the rhetor is able to re-call some of the formative and transformative practices that not only enabled us to survive emancipation, but that also equip us dually for a broader inclusion in contemporary democratic life while simultaneously negotiating the constant threats of erasure that such participation might entail.

**Badjohns and Emergent Ethos in *The Wine of Astonishment***

Bolo, the foremost badjohn of the Lovelace novels, comes fully formed out of this tradition of combat and places himself into forced articulation with a people in crisis—people who, at one time, were his people. And the contentious dance of calenda is the shaper of his nobility; he was, “the champion stickfighter, the king.” From his early appearance in the novel, his mystique is apparent, and leading up to the series of spiritual deaths he endures as the fearless hero and eventual bane of the community of Bonasse, it is clear that Bolo’s unyielding internalization of calenda is the key to understanding his breakdown. Bolo’s ethos comes out of a display tradition that sanctions calenda as a cohesive, even centripetal, force of critical performance, rather than as destruction. He is a stickfighter. Lovelace offers a clear conception of the rhetorical situation that makes the calenda particularly relevant as a site of memory and performance in contemporary society: we dance calenda not only to affirm, but also to defend. The narrator Eva recalls the
undeniably heroic status of the Bolo she knew in “[the] seven years before the [Second World] war,”17 which brought American G.I.s to the island:

The whole village talk ‘bout him. They say that in the stickfight ring, the gayelle, it don’t have a man to stand up in front of him. They say he don’t fight just to win battles for himself, for him stickfighting was more the dance, the adventure, the ceremony to show off the beauty of the warrior. And he do it with love and respect, more as if he was making a gift of himself, offering himself up with his quick speed and rhythm, as if what he really want was for people to see in him a beauty that wasn’t his alone, was theirs, ours, to let us know that we in this wilderness country was people too, with drums and song and warriors.18

Gordon Rohlehr further corroborates this:

Stickfighting was part of a tradition which was simultaneously chivalric, aristocratic and proletarian. The boasting of the batonnier was not a matter of pose, but had its roots in magic and obeah…[H]e sough[t] an immunity to his opponent’s blows. His rhetoric was a serious one, a formalized verbal prelude to a game in which manhood, status, identity within the group and on rare occasions life itself were at stake.19

Beneath the tragedy of his personal disintegration, however, beyond the boundaries of his madness and eventual dehumanization, the inevitability of an unceremonious death,
are the rhythms of calenda being beaten and sung, recalling and reinscribing a rhetorical
situation and emboldening him to act: “Everything is ripe for battle,” notes the narrator,
“The drummers beating, and chantwells is singing this song that is to stickmen the terrible
lamentation and anthem and invitation and warning…”

Bolo is the personification of assertive power, the full expression of an adamant and
indomitable warrior spirit that seeks immunity from the social inequality of his day. His
aggression counterbalances the fortitude we see in the community’s religious leader Bee,
whose apparent tendency to vacillate in the face of oppression belies a level of patience that
Bolo finds debilitating. While Bee seems unsure about whether or not to “break the law” by defying the Shouter Prohibition Ordinance and the added ban of Carnival between 1942 and 1945 during World War II, Bolo has already decided on the course of action he thinks the community should take: “We have to kill Prince,” the symbol of oppressive authority. We see Bolo attempting to battle the ghost of history, symbolized in his mock fighting with a handkerchief instead of the unbreakable poui shafts that were the key accoutrements of the dance:

…[O]ne day the Spirit fly to his head and he jump in,
dancing, Bee say, with a sadness and a loss too, and a smooth tallness
that bring water to the eyes of those who remember him in a real
battle; but all the men wanted was to have fun.

It is a battle that has left him almost too bitter for words—and definitely more bitter
than smart. By this, I mean he exhibits none of the play dead to catch corbeaux alive or stoop to conquer strategies of a trickster. That would have required even more time than had already been wasted, in his opinion, waiting for things to improve when they only got worse.
Enough time had passed. But it would be a mistake to cast Bolo uncritically as an antiheroic, arhetorical brute and dismiss him, thus. His function, rather, is that of a foil, which Lovelace uses to frame emergent ethos more generally—that is, as a concept applicable to Caribbeans, not just the heroes who emerge from among them.

In a basic sense, it is true that Bolo unleashes his fury on the very people he would protect. This particular reading is not unproblematic, however. After all, Bolo’s unraveling is actually a reasonably volatile reaction to issues that have their bases in historical precedent: sociocultural erasure and the community’s apparently complicit role in it, exemplified by its submission to the criminalization and subsequent silencing of religious worship with the *Shouter Prohibition Ordinance*, the rapid, catastrophic social and moral decline brought on by external influences, specifically the American military presence, the so-called “new heroes” on the island; and the added ineptitude of local leaders to curtail these effects. Ironically though, his sacrificial aggression is unable to elicit a reaction from the people that would, in turn, frame collective liberatory action against him as the self-appointed effigy of their oppression. Despite his sacrifice, members of the community are still under obligation to assert themselves. His ultimate carré—the brutal kidnapping of Brother Primus’s daughters—is, as Eva puts it, “the battlefield that Bolo bring the village to.” His transgression is a localized re-presentation of the external pressures on the community. Bolo takes them out of an abstract context—though the effects were felt—and places them as a direct and immediate risk that the community is forced to address. Bolo’s calenda attempts but ultimately fails to motivate praxis by becoming a tangible threat, a flesh-and-blood representation of the systematized oppression that has loomed over the vernacular community for generations. So, on a basic level, he does provoke action. There is very little of Bee’s vacillation as he confronts Bolo’s contradictory rhetoric of coercion:
This thing you do…this thing you do is more than overbearing. This conduct is something we can’t accept. You been going on for a long time now, doing what you like, taking what you want. I can’t believe you think that nobody don’t care what happen. I can’t believe you think that you will go on and nobody will ever tell you nothing….

Lovelace seems to pour all the tragic heroic beauty of post-colonial life and the colonial inheritance of struggle and oppression into Bolo, cultivating in him an ethic and an expression for which there could be no response from the outside but silence, no recourse but to silence. Bolo’s descent into chaos, performing madness by unleashing his irresolvable personal aggression on the community is certainly meant to be rhetorical—to bring about an urgent, and necessary, change.

But even though Marjorie Thorpe convincingly argues that “the image of the black West Indian as courageous victim is superseded [in *The Wine of Astonishment*] by the presentation of the black West Indian as authentic hero-figure,” Lovelace takes it a step further, using Bolo to demonstrate and deconstruct noble savagery as a redeeming characteristic. Bolo is undone by his own resistance to change; in so doing, he has managed to elide the very ethos that he intends to motivate into action. Bolo, who “wouldn’t rest until he kill somebody,” is not the exemplar of ethos for a changing world. Instead, he represents a critique of nostalgia, the fate of one who is more concerned with “trying to dance back something that was going away” than with making any adjustments for what remains to be seen.
Bolo is ultimately a relic, a far too rigid back-in-the-days badjohn who rejects the fundamental adaptability his own tradition of the carnivalesque, minimizing it to the point of being a singular agenda of violent resistance. Of course, violence can itself be metaphorically reconstituted—which can then be provisionally molded into defined modes of attack, parry, damage, and defense—transforming resilience into active resistance. However, it is eclipsed by Bolo’s vision of history. The unwavering commitment he shows leads inevitably to his death, a death that proves useless:

His death didn’t take away from us the burden that was ours and that is ours even today. His dying ain’t solve no problem for us. It just give us the chance, if we so weak to take it, if we so dead to hold on to it, to put aside our human challenge and blame it all on Bolo, make him the victim and the sacrifice, make him Christ…because it was easier…than for people to take upon their own self in their own life the burden that is theirs from being human in the world…It just give us the chance to pretend that his death solve the problem.

Lovelace grants his audience no reprieve when it comes to working on one’s own ethos. One does not simply get rewarded an ethos by default, forfeit, or counterpoint, in other words; and, as a consequence, one is directly responsible for the rate of its development and the subsequent actions it takes. Calenda, Lovelace reminds us, is not only Bolo’s to perform. In terms of design, there is basic rhetorical significance in the fact that each of these elements is referred to as calenda—the whole thing is one. The dynamic of calenda is such that the absence of any element—the body, drum, or voice—would render
the performance benign and its rhetoric ineffective. *Prima facie*, the performance of calenda is
a collective performance in which each performer must pull his own weight. Rather than
allow Bolo’s death to justify the community’s temptation to satisfy the requirements of ethos
through force and tragic sacrifice, Lovelace casts ethos as self-discovery, as something the
rhetor himself must take personal responsibility to realize (before the people can achieve and
practice it collectively). It is not in the insufficiency of heroism, nor is it in the futility of
activism that Lovelace situates the exigence for personhood—rather, it is in the assertion
that must occur *in spite of these factors*. It is no small detail that Lovelace endows both the
calypsonian Clem and Eva, the narrator, with a scope that enables them not only to live with
change, but also to notice the promise it brings at the end of the novel:

[On] a spot where a old house fall down…is a steelband tent,
and in this tent is the steel pans, and playing these pans is some
young fellows, bare-back and with tear-up clothes, and it have two
girls dancing to the music that they playing; but I not looking at the
girls, I listening to the music; for the music that those boys playing on
the steelband have in it the same Spirit that we miss in our church:
the same Spirit; and listening to them, my heart swell and it is like
resurrection morning.33

The contexts of persecution and prohibition these characters have been made to
endure supply a fitting—if not explicitly strategic—precedent for reading the carnivalesque
in terms of the risk of failure that we see with Bolo. For it is from that standpoint that
Lovelace is able to provide his conception of ethos emerging as a critical alternative, or
counterpoint, to the version we see in Bolo—thus establishing actual self-discovery as the
more effective rhetorical choice. However, our understanding of the ethos itself should not be misconstrued as simply an enactment of rhetorical failures but as a means of differentiation, an alternative that encourages participation in the realization and practice of an equitable life, rather than the wrenching of that life from those who seem to possess it (or power over it in the form of institutions).

*Ethos*, in other words, is not posited as a quality that grows out of opposition to certain actions, but by taking opposition as the always-already, Lovelace recommends the establishment of ethos as a discovery that is itself at the very heart of action. Additionally, it is the inquiry of it that increases the chances of progress amid the carnival of complex life experiences. Such inquiry is evident in *Salt*, as characters labor for a sense of self in shifting contexts—finding, in the process, a way to *get through*.

**NEGOTIATION AND THE LIMBO SENSIIBILITY IN *SALT***

The activation of a limbo sensibility is a recognizable mode of survival, a coping mechanism for “getting through” that runs deep in our culture and in the “lived practices” that shape the way we move through the world. It is an articulation of the choices we have made (and continuously have to make) in the process of moving. Lovelace repeatedly suggests that we learn again to look inward to counteract the encroaching will to forget and lapse into erasure. From its beginnings as a ritualistic dance performed at wakes, limbo goes beyond the literal contortion of the body—which basically involves bending over backwards to negotiate a pole held horizontally at navel-height. It signifies a more pronounced liminality that designates the *space in-between* as a site of articulation with numinous elements and material life. At the same time, though, the point of the limbo is not that one stays there indefinitely, as if in some spiritual backwater. That combination of traditional ritualistic
African dance and the clear religious connotation of a Dantesque holding station for pre-Christian souls infuse the maneuver with rich subtext is of little doubt, what with the consequence of syncretism in the region and Lovelace’s own tendency to saturate his narratives with religious symbolism. But it expresses the fundamental temporality of situations of stagnancy and the futility of taking the practice of mourning beyond the ritualistic limits set by the dance itself. According to Molly Ahye, “the body, weighted by sin, goes through the cleansing process while it passes through the mythical waters, to rise clean and free from sin and pain, is sure surely an emblematic action of hope. The limbo exudes an aura of mysticism, and when observed in a serious phenomenological context, it cannot just be dismissed as light entertainment.” The dance dictates that the rhetor must go through in order for it to be considered a complete maneuver.

The ability to endure life—literally, to get through it—is undergirded by an obligation to a sense of hope in order to accept the challenges that come with living. The conflict that results between the hope and the challenge occurs largely with oneself, an internalized process of self-awareness, which the rhetor must undergo. The limbo functions paradoxically, thus, as an epistemological framework upon which Caribbean consciousness is based and, simultaneously, as a discursive tool for demystification. This is because it involves not only the symbolic action of a shared cultural consciousness that far exceeds the parameters of emancipatory and Shrovetide festivals in terms of time, space, knowledge, and rhetorical intention, but also the literal action of individuals in the midst of everyday life. Lovelace makes early gestures in the novel that such an abstract sensibility is rooted in experience—a deliberate way of looking at life from one’s position as a subject who is self-aware. This sensibility is demonstrated, for example, when the protagonist’s mother, Miss May, is introduced:
And with the laborious delicacy choreographed by her pains eased herself down unto the step where the sun was brightest and rested there, her eyes shut, her breath inhaled, the metronome of her mind keeping time to the rhythm of her distress, trying to find within the music of her pain a space in which to breathe. And when she did, she opened her eyes sparkling with gratitude to chuckle with reproachful admiration for the pain, saying softly, ‘Like is kill you really come to kill me,’ in her mind glancing at it sidelong, as at an acquaintance sitting there beside her.35

But perhaps more profound and problematic, from a rhetorical standpoint, is the persistence of the powerful tendency to place one sensitivity in direct conflict with the other in a mechanism of choices. What results is the virtual suspension of the subject to a liminal space that requires from the subject the ability not only to negotiate it but also to survive it as a rite of passage into a clearer conception of self. These mechanisms also manifest more broadly as stark binaries that separate the performer from actualization through the operationalizing of symbolic power. Frantz Fanon refers to such binaries as a “manichean delirium”—for example, white-black, rich-poor, standard-nonstandard, elite-vernacular, etc. These tend to afflict and mystify, leading to a privileging of the superior position as an unattainable default. The fallacy of rigidity these binaries assume make acquisition and social mobility difficult. For many Caribbeans, this tension has also meant the dogged pursuit of education: immigration, island scholarships, studying and living abroad. In a general sense, this tension often manifests itself as a juxtaposition of worldly ambition and tradition—the latter being (mis)construed as a primitive way of knowing the world.
The sensibility that attends such rhetorical situations and choices are embedded in the texts as a strategy that each character falls back on in times of necessity: the ability to struggle, persevere, and *hold strain*, amid encroaching social pressures in order to get through. Within the given circumstances of struggle, therefore, limbo becomes a major expression of survival and resilience that allows the rhetor to adequately deal with inherent limitations. Hearkening back to the rupture and resultant accretion of African (or proto-Caribbean) traditions while simultaneously reinforcing the contemporary ability to survive the frustrations and limits of African Diasporic life, Wilson Harris characterizes the limbo as, “reflect[ing] a certain kind of gateway to or threshold of a new world and the dislocation of a chain of miles.”\(^{36}\) Limbo, as the example will show, is an invocation of the memory as a preparatory activity that is put in play, but only insofar as it will suffice as a methodology for negotiating the virtually irreconcilable tension between survival and liberatory ambition in contemporary times—what Harris calls a “renascence [sic] of a new corpus of sensibility” that places Diasporic African culture in conversation with a larger, more diverse “architecture of cultures.”\(^{37}\) JoJo, the quasi-ancestral character in Lovelace’s *Salt*, is in such a place. He represents a prototypical *Caribbean* who must recall and refashion his traditional rhetorical skills in order to *become Caribbean*; he had to “put aside the depth of this loss…and find a way in his mind to claim this new world.”\(^{38}\) Faced with the unyielding reality that he “had lost track of the exact place he had come from,”\(^{39}\) Jojo uses the modes available to him so he could place some claim on the place he had come to know as his home:

He had to learn how to conjure power out of his situation of powerlessness. He learnt the power of parody, of ridicule, of *double entendre*, of grand charge, of mamaguy, of pappyshow. He learned to divine the degree of vulnerability of a person. He learned the songs,
the dances, beating drums and singing at wakes and at estate games.

...[He] presented himself as a freeman, going through the most elaborate stratagems to get himself off work gangs, managing by his own luck and cunning...his unconquerable spirit, his trickery, his flattery, his sham, his dreams...

He had to think and work things out. He had to find meaning in his captivity, his enslavement, his enduring, to re-examine his relationship with women, his role as a man, he had to think of power, of what it was, of what must be its function. He had to think of the world, of life, what was it, was it a matter of domination by the strongest, what was man, what was tribe and people and race and country? He had to re-examine all the old questions, to look again at the old songs, the old sayings, the stories,—the meanings. 40

The situation is one that would either force capitulation or motivate a sense of contingency as options for survival. The breakthrough for him is a process that Lovelace emphasizes with the trademark lyricality of long, introspective sentences. Skill by skill, move by move, Jojo builds the ethos required to deal dialectically with his circumstances and, thus, get through. It is a process that begins when Jojo’s focus shifts from ruminations of who he “could be,” and which can end only with an acceptance of who he must actually become. The adaptability he shows comes out of an examination of the consequences of his current circumstance and the actual performance of the skills he recalled. One can see just how he avoids getting stuck in between the challenge of the situation and the hope of surviving it;
for him, the promise of success that the skills seem to provide cannot sufficiently take the place of actually practicing them.

Part salvation, part debilitation, limbo itself is innocuous when it comes to actual resolution—that is, it never resolves this tension for us, nor does it pronounce any judgment for our failure to resolve these issues for ourselves. Instead, it is we who are left to choose or change our minds—this or that, neither or both. In other words, what we see is Lovelace’s suggestion that an approach to dialectic must be fashioned anew from one’s ability to negotiate the traditional and the contemporary, the ability to manage the past and prepare for the future. We also see the pragmatist strains throughout, with virtually no consideration paid to questions of whether consciousness precedes context, or vice versa; instead, there is emphasis on the practical and ultimately more timely attention to self-awareness that must, of necessity, be activated. This foundational sociocultural tension is also borne out as the narrator recalls the misguided escapism that emerges out of Miss May’s frustration when he was still a child:

[M]y mother thankful to her God that we not living next door to them [Africans], not by those drums that would giddy up your head and full you up with a power African and useless that point you back to a backward people that can hardly help theyself, far more help you, can only make you shame, can only drag you down deeper into the dark.

To her the onliest thing to save us is the education that she begging me to learn.

Because without it you have to dance below the limbo pole.

You have to bend low and flex your spine and bend your back and try
to come out on the other side of the stick without your knees touching the ground.\textsuperscript{41}

The juxtaposition is clear, the choice apparently an obvious one for the narrator’s mother: go to school, or end up with no recourse but to struggle, to contort between the intractable conditions and systemized constraints of black life that also include the tendency to hamper another’s progress.\textsuperscript{42} Beyond the expression of a relatively simplistic resistance to the exoticism and spectacle, the significance of limbo resonates as a site of (trans)formative resilience, sometimes to tragic ends, that is recognizable as a space in which we can actively engage various social pressures.

Alford George, like JoJo, knows he must do the same thing before he can assume his new identity. Alford suggests that “we do not know who we are. And we will never know until we see ourselves with new eyes.”\textsuperscript{43} The “new eyes” Alford imagines are really not so new at all, only forgotten. Similar to Jojo, Alford’s aspirations for greatness are reprioritized, making “who he is” the real impetus for action, instead of the preoccupation of who he “could have been.” He is driven to confess this when, after being shamed by a coconut vendor for being nothing more than a pretender, a “pappysow,”\textsuperscript{44} he relents:

I have forgotten my mission. I have become part of the tapestry of pretence at power. I who ought to have been disturbing this numbing peace have now become keeper of that peace. I have joined the gang of overseers that help to keep this place a plantation.\textsuperscript{45}
Lovelace has Alford respond to what he has always known, and what, by extension, we as an audience might be inclined to agree to when it comes to the recognition of a strategic reservoir from which we collectively sip:

[That he] had to find his way back to the people from whom he had stood apart from the beginning, from whom he had tried to escape, to embrace his shame, to claim his outrage and so lay claim to a future of dignity. He had been too long underneath the limbo pole erected for him to pass under in order to be admitted to that other world that for too long had been the world.46

Alford’s mask is what he develops when he is apart from the community—in it, but not of it—so for him to realize his place and role, he must remove the mask, return to the community, and face the demons he perceives. The manifestation of these demons bears a strong resemblance to Bolo’s: political corruption, complicity, wasted opportunities, pride, and shame. Lovelace charts his “getting through” in increments that include the childhood dream of leaving his world behind for a better one; the disdain he holds for the students he feels forced to teach; his disillusionment with political office; the hunger strike; and, of course, the trials that lead eventually to humbling himself to his lover. To crystallize the point, Lovelace reminds us that it is a legacy of knowing—and remembering—that makes Alford’s return to the community so poignant as a rite of passage in the tradition. His own mother had been warned to do the same. When, as a growing child, Alford’s ability to speak was hampered, she made her way back to the Spiritual Baptist faith for a cure, or a resolution, from Mother Ethel. Intertwined with self-righteous rebuke, a simple pronouncement was issued: “Nobody ain’t tell you you have to come home to your
nation?” The subtext here is that nobody can tell you to “come home;” try as they may, no return is possible without the self-conscious willingness to do so.

At the end of the day, to engage in limbo is a rhetorical choice that is solely the rhetor’s to make. There are undoubtedly going to be real consequences to the hard choices one makes—as with the choice to train that gaze away from vernacular tradition and into the tradition of book learning, or with the choice to return, as a hopeful prodigal to the people and to the tradition. However, implicit in Lovelace’s articulation of ethos is a message no less basic than that which we see at the beginning of Salt: go through to get through, but, in the midst of going through, remember; re-member, or be left with no recourse but to struggle with who you are, to contort between the intractable conditions and systemized constraints of an anonymous life, another life, or a sensibility less Caribbean. A limbo that remains unresolved is no limbo at all.

DAEMONIC SYMPATHY IN THE DRAGON CAN’T DANCE

The position of the rhetor in search of a self that emerges in Salt is congruent with Lovelace’s hero, Aldrick Prospect, prior to his self-discovery in The Dragon Can’t Dance. Lovelace is clearest of all in this novel about the crucial difference between two forms of play—pretense and performance—such that “playing a mas” is formally developed as an ethos coming into its own. He does this by constructing Aldrick as a character who is not the uncontested hero of the novel, but one who is “arguably” so. Lovelace’s plotting and subsequent playing out of Aldrick’s ethos gives us a way to read how the process of self-awareness can be put to rhetorical work. He does this by having Aldrick evolve from being a man behind the mask he uses for Carnival to being a rhetor who uses masqueing to negotiate the carnivalesque (which is broader in scope and deeper in effect than the festival). Like
Alford, Aldrick wears a mask, a literal mask in the form of a dragon costume. We can, for that reason, take the use of symbolism as *de facto*, which frees us to ask a more pertinent question: how much is *mas* and how much man? Aldrick’s performance of the dragon—and of the *diable-diablu*, or devil, that spawned it—harnesses the terror of the underworld with the seeming intention of breaking out of that underworld and into a better life. This is an imperative that seems to place him directly in alignment with the general democratizing forms of the carnivalesque. However, even though Aldrick is a *mas man* himself, his skills of invention are reserved for the mask he prepares. And the compromise he makes to “play” dragon actually forestalls meaningful confrontation. It is, basically, a form of noble cowardice—as contrasted with Bolo’s ultimate ignobility—that has the rhetor essentially pretend to play the role mandated by the ethos he has taken pains to discover.

Owing to the fact that the space created by the carnivalesque is mutual, neither owned nor inordinately monitored, it is also a space that is primed for rhetorical possibility in which one’s ethos can potentially flourish in the presence of and in cooperation with an audience. Lovelace’s treatment of the vernacular ethos and rhetorical imperative with respect to an audience is most fully developed in this novel. Up to the point in the novel where, in protest, he refuses to dance the dragon—under the guise of “catch[ing] a breath…to see what I doing on this fucking Hill”—Aldrick’s battle with history is ultimately realized as an inadequate preparation for times in which apathy and social dispersion seem the order of the day. The regret of purely self-serving actions, which we see in Alford’s epiphany in *Salt*, leads Aldrick to recognize the exigence that would justify some kind of dance:

I here *playing* a dragon, playing a masquerade every year, and I forget what I playing for, what I trying to say. I forget, Philo. Is like
nobody remembering what life is, and who we fighting and what we fighting for...\(^4^9\)

When the social situation reaches a critical point where rhetorical performance must be reconfigured for effect, the form that the actual dance would take is under pressure to change. That is, it must be differentiated from playing mas to making mas in order to be effective as a clarion call for an audience that seems to miss the larger issues of rampant murder and prostitution. His only recourse—if he is, indeed, true to his ethos—is to change the form of the performance, to have his dragon evolve to suit the situation and, thus, do the work. In this sense, we see how Lovelace constructs Aldrick as the Caribbean rhetor in a critical stage of pragmatist development, in which he begins to understand that only the true face of the rhetor will suffice. We recall from earlier that the process of the Caribbean carnivalesque is founded on an ethos that allows for the repetition of a certain brand of emancipatory assertion that actually resists hidden appeals. The distinction that Crowley observed between performance and rhetorical practice speaks directly to strategy and means of persuasion as part of the repertoire, or rhetorical skill set, which comprise the Caribbean Ethos assertion. As we opt for play as performance, rather than as pretense, we see that effect is achieved not through hidden appeals but through direct appeals that are conceived and symbolically performed by rhetors—that is, the appeals, not the rhetors, are symbolically veiled as a dance that defies the obvious, and the rhetors themselves are exposed to their audience and the public. In carnivalesque terms, this would mean that the unfolding future into which the Caribbean rhetor enters must be confronted with a masque tradition, rather than be masked as tradition. At stake, therefore, is the crucial need to perform as oneself—that is, as a rhetor engaged not in pretense but in the display of ethos—“playing a mas.”
According to Ramchand, “Lovelace recognises the necessity of veils but points to the saving virtue of being conscious of one’s veils as veils, as well as the dangers of allowing the veil to become the permanent mask.”

To miss the contemporary relevance of such a practice is to miss the rhetorical significance of a recuperative project in democracy.

The intricate construction of particular sites of carnivalesque expression that would enable the revisioning of a potentially democratizing practice to take place is repeated every year in the ritual of Aldrick’s preparation for Carnival in *The Dragon Can’t Dance*, pointing to a methodology that can be applied more directly as an approach to rhetorical performance:

In truth, it was in a spirit of priesthood that Aldrick addressed his work; for, the making of his dragon costume was to him always a new miracle, a new test not only of his skill but of his faith: for he knew exactly what he had to do, it was only by faith that he could bring alive from these scraps of cloth and tin that dragon, its mouth breathing fire, its tail threshing the ground, its nine chains rattling, that would contain the beauty and threat and terror that was the message he took each year to Port of Spain. It was in this message that he asserted before the world his self. It was through it that he demanded that others see him, recognize his personhood, and be warned of his dangerousness.

…

He worked, as it were, in a flood of memories, not trying to assemble them, to link them to get a linear meaning, but letting them soak him through and through.
The implicit attention that Aldrick pays to history and memory in the process of **mas-making** and the tendency to “[work] it all into the latticework of this [present] dragon, into the scales and threads, the exodus,” describes the **rhetorical convergence** and unification of possible motives that are required for a particular rhetorical situation to take form and through which the rhetor can more clearly “see,” as well as interpret and act. But these factors only provide an opportunity for Aldrick’s discovery; they do not ensure it.

Fundamentally, Aldrick’s strategy involves a desire for agency and justice, the fulfillment of which is contingent upon an implicit understanding of how rhetoric operates among the folk who form the Caribbean society, and whose rhetorical agency has been largely ignored or fundamentally misrepresented. From a more informed vantage point, and equipped with a critical lens designed for this hitherto undertheorized rhetorical formation, we can gauge the parameters of relevant spheres of communication, gauging **how public** we want these spheres to be (or how private), as the practices discussed here are deployed in these spaces for deliberate effect. But Lovelace also pays attention to the fact that the world is getting smaller, its scope becoming more singular—homogenous, even—and as a result, the dragon must necessarily expand to meet this constricting view before it overwhelms and makes him prematurely obsolete for his audience.

The **mas man**‘s project is rhetorical, then, because it suggests a designed attempt to raise and breathe new life into the collective consciousness of the audience by portraying aspects we recognize and remember—aspects of ourselves which, in the course of living, may have atrophied. The means and methodology the rhetor uses to achieve this, as well as the agents he puts into play are, therefore, configured for reception by a contemporary audience. Once dressed as a dragon—that is, armed both materially and symbolically with the mask—the **mas man** erupts, fully equipped, for a turn in public. At least, this is what
Lovelace leads us to believe. Now dressed, Aldrick dances, and the transcript of his nascent ethos is put on display, along with that of the people who “scrimp and save and whore and work and thief to drag out of the hard rockstone and dirt to show the world that they is people.”

He dances the carnivalesque to represent, and to put his conception of performance in practice, threatening the status quo and engaging the mechanism of power that binds him:

For two full days Aldrick was a dragon in Port of Spain, moving through the loud, hot streets, dancing the bad-devil dance, dancing the stickman dance, dancing Sylvia and Inez and Basil and his grandfather and the Hill and the fellars by the Corner, leaning against the wall, waiting for the police to raid them. He was Manzanilla, Calvary Hill, Congo, Dahomey, Ghana. He was Africa, the ancestral Masker, affirming the power of the warrior, prancing and bowing, breathing out fire, lunging against his chains, threatening with his claws, saying to the city: ‘I is a dragon. I have fire in my belly and claws on my hands; watch me! Note me well, for I am ready to burn down your city. I am ready to tear you apart, limb by limb.

We cannot fail to note the contentious, boastful affirmations that are reminiscent of the midnight robber’s speeches, which were discussed in the previous chapter. Evident, also, is the symbolism of escape from the hellish life of despair and dispossess. These tropic maneuvers (including the code-switching he employs) are particularly noteworthy because they illustrate the breadth of applicability these performances inhere.
The dragon dance, like the others, is biographical—even autobiographical—but as a rhetorical performance, the dragon dance is effective not because people thought it was an actual dragon, and not because they were in awe of a man acting like a dragon ought to act. Its effectiveness, Lovelace shows us, is based on the fact that it is a man in an attempt to be a man. What remains for Aldrick is the realization that the ethos he seeks in the people—evinced in the need to “show the world that they is people—is also the ethos he needs to understand his place in the world, among the people, and in their service. This “fact” corresponds to the somewhat postmodern dispersal of the novel’s core community of Calvary Hill. It is only when he is immersed in the true process of carnivalesque invention—that is, a cycle of creative energies that feed the stages of self-construction, self-destruction, and, eventually, self-conscious reconstruction—that his tension is resolved, and he is able to do the work of playing a mas. For Aldrick, the tension is heightened in his encounter with realities that exist beyond the purview of the festival that possesses him. He attempts to possess the moment as well when he performs the dragon dance during carnival. He is symbolically and materially embodied in the rhetorical moment, physically inscribed as a site of display, and circumscribed by the constraints of his subject position in the broader society. But Aldrick does not quite get to the point of self-discovery until his mask is removed.

The “drama of self-acquisition,” as Melvin Dixon put it, does not end with the assertion of one’s being in the world. There is still work to be done. During the dance, the rhetor obviously deals with hard choices on the way to self-discovery—taking pressure, making sense out of nonsense, working through history and memory, and fighting erasure. However, the significance of the dance, the rhetorical purchase that it could provide as symbolic action, has implications that go far beyond the individualistic pursuit of the dancer.
himself—beyond the dusty rings, broken sidewalks, or the graying asphalt. That is to say, the
dragon dance is also inductive, in that it takes for granted that what is being articulated is
always already understood by certain members of the audience who have internalized the
message pre-performance and who recognize the translation and articulation of the body as
an affirmation of ethos. But for a changing audience and a changing time, such a
presumption tends to fall short of its intended effect because the target audience is also a
moving one. Deep inspection of the dance as rhetoric, particularly the public dance Aldrick
performs, reveals what is true of all rhetoric: that persuasion is not ever a foregone
conclusion and that there is nothing inherently persuasive in the dance itself that would
ensure change for the assertive rhetor, or for the audience that witnesses the performance.57
As rhetoric (or counterrhetoric), dance must involve the audience as much as the dancer.
This affirming act requires the establishment and maintenance of psychosocial bonds—in
essence, a call and response.

Dance is meant to be inclusive, as it allows rhetorical exigence to be manifest and
maintained in the context of a shared experience; the lines of distinction between performer
and audience, while theoretically easy to maintain, are less clear when we see how “lived
experience” disrupts order in favor of an evolving, organic, even anachronistic, practice of a
rhetorical tradition. In Aldrick’s case, what people think really does matter. What this means
is: for members of his audience, to witness the performance is to participate directly in the
assertion of an ethos under pressure. To witness is to identify. The dancers who traditionally
danced the dragon in the streets obviously engaged each other in the most direct way; but
there is no carnivalesque without the people who gather to create it, not only implicating
themselves in the drama but also immersing themselves in it, letting it soak them “through
and through.”58 When the matrix of involvement between performer, audience, environment
and context, is disrupted and the centripetal force diminishes, and when nothing comes of the drumming and chanting, Aldrick’s energies lose their focal point and purpose; appropriately, it is also very the point at which the metaphor breaks down to reveal the discursive core: Lovelace’s project is not to have Aldrick escape but to encourage the opening up of mutual spaces for productive action.

UNMASKING THE MAS RHETORICA

Lovelace’s imperative can be described aphoristically: discover yourself for yourself, do not depend on the leadership to do self-liberatory work for you; for leading is serving, and only one who is self-aware and primed to serve can lead. The overall approach to the notion of ethos, as a fundamental characteristic that precedes actual practice in neighborhoods or nations, emerges from a point of self-definition, not simply as an argument against history to satisfy a narrow definition of nationhood, but as a critical, subjective response to the present and to a future that is inescapably true and imminent. It is conceptually akin to the familiar axiom that “every pot [should] sit on its own bottom,” just that once the stewing of one’s ethos is complete, the community can be fed and, thus, benefit from the yield.

As rhetorical expression that always bears the risk of eschewing political awareness in favor of joy, the Caribbean Carnivalesque can be regarded as the very embodiment of resilience in struggle and the negotiation of differences, harnessing among the people what Richard Schechner refers to as “[their] ability not only to tolerate but actually raise high consciousness and put into play, in the actual practices…the performance of these differences.”59 In other words, taking “high consciousness” to be comparable in nature to a critical awareness that facilitates motives for justice through the performance of difference, the carnivalesque has the potential for achieving democratic consciousness among
historically dispossessed people that takes form through practice. Beset by shifting contexts and mechanisms of power, performers employ vernacular strategies of rhetorical display—as a means of negotiation with other performers and with members of the audience, for instance—in order to foster, maintain, and adapt this consciousness to (cor)respond to the shifts as they occur.

This is not a failsafe theory, since all rhetorical performance is subject to slippage. But we can make some assumptions. However problematic such correspondence between shifting contexts may be, the freedom to express opinions in characteristically Caribbean terms that we see in Lovelace’s work suggests that there is a system of expression at work here that extends beyond the parameters of a few days of splendor, going more deeply and broadly into the private and public lives of performers and spectators, reaching those who attend or boycott the festival, and affecting those who have never known of it. This is because, as rhetoric, there is the imperative to move beyond constricting parameters, always in an attempt to engage not only the occupants of what Victor Turner might describe as a “liminal” space, where others of the vernacular reside. This engagement, then, implicates those who, through spectatorship or participation, either attend the performance or are informed of it. Carnivalesque rhetors understand, or are taught, that they are the authors and editors who, though constrained by the social and economic realities, can still engage in forms of individual and collective activity that will allow them to navigate the currents of other discourses—power, for instance—if not change their course altogether to their benefit.

The Caribbean rhetor understands, also, that being seen requires action, and being taken seriously depends as much on adaptability as it does on efforts of persuasion. Through Aldrick, Lovelace shows that ethos cannot exist without the commitment to sustained
practice. This sense of commitment, along with a self-sustaining consciousness, can result in collective action that surpasses retreat, restraint, or regret. These actions presuppose the inevitability of failure and the ineluctability of being underclass. The basic point is two-fold: first, the rhetorical strategies employed by Caribbean people make use of the supernatural and divine, so there is, in the tradition, the practice of making a rhetorical situation where there appears to be none; second, it is not enough to sit in wait for divine or supernatural intervention, or for a situation to simply present itself without the committed participation and continued involvement of a conscious Caribbean bloc.\footnote{The thing about being seen, though, is that once it is accomplished, the rhetor’s responsibility to display is heightened. That is to say, the preoccupation with seeing and being seen, which Lovelace posits as his protagonists’ fundamental enacting of a rhetorical agenda, constitutes an epideictic that the performer ironically uses to bring about potentially democratizing circumstances, what Harris refers to as a “self-confessional blindness, blindness to self-destruction and the destruction of others.”\footref{harris}}

The Caribbean Ethos that comes up in Lovelace’s fiction is no \textit{tabula rasa}, despite the humanist vision. It does not elide the tragedy of the past. Though it may be perceived as new or emergent, it still bears the stain of colonialism and the history that foregrounds the impulse to strive for self-definition that takes place along the whole trajectory of Caribbean history—including slavery, emancipation, colonialism, nationalism, independence, postcolonialism, regionalism, and globalism. However, Lovelace treats history as an illusion from which the attentive eye must turn—a dream from which Caribbean people must wake—if anything progressive is to be accomplished. The representative or characteristic responses to pressures and problems that ensue in the course of living emerge, therefore, as an extended argument in which Lovelace attempts to bracket history in terms of its practical
application by privileging the individual and collective will of the people. According to Jennifer Rahim, “[at] the core of these concerns is the primacy of people as the shaping resource and force of history; the necessity of safeguarding the values of freedom, dignity and equality on the individual and collective levels; and the propagation of respect for the place where people make their home.”

Even so, Lovelace makes clear that his main audience is Caribbean people, not just those in Trinidad where each of these novels is set; people “from Martinique and Grenada and St Lucia and from wherever they bring them” all augment the essential Caribbean identity Lovelace brings to form—much in the way calypsonian King Radio (Norman Span) asserts in the patois calypso Texilia, his multiple nationalities expressed in a singular identity that transcend particular space: “Manman mwen c’est gen Martiniquais, / Papa mwen c’est nom saint-Lucien.” In terms of a rhetorical project that reaches far beyond the shores of archipelagic nations, the setting of these narratives is incidental. In fact, Jennifer Rahim emphasizes that, “to name Lovelace a national writer is not to imply that his investment in writing the nation does not simultaneously entail an embrace of the transnational and, for that matter, the universal. In short, his vision while concretized via an ongoing exploration of his native Trinidad and Tobago does not suffer from the malady of parochialism in the worst sense of the word.” However, Lovelace also consistently subscribes to the carnivalesque notions of fragmentation and coalescence, particularly to the extent that it can serve as a justification for minimizing jingoism and nativity in favor of more pressing matters of social (in)justice that are common to all Caribbean peoples.

That said, the sustainability of a “nation” is not a topic Lovelace tries to avoid. The quest for personhood is part of the cultural milieu of post-independence fervor and failure in which significant attempts were being made by the region’s writers, poets, dancers, and
musicians to actually define a Caribbean Ethos that would not only be sustainable through practice, but also one that could effectively counteract the apparent tendency to forget what was really at stake—namely, self-determination. So it makes sense that Lovelace would root his novels in such a theme and time. It serves, furthermore, as an available platform from which to stage his project in dramatic self-assertion—as Rahim observes, “[the] natural outcome of this belief in the opportunity history has provided the region is the emergence in [Lovelace’s] thinking of the nation as the primary context for refashioning the future. The nation is the place or ground of human endeavour, where people of various backgrounds, persuasions and gifts, by their investment in the landscape, make democratic claims on belonging and ownership.” It is clear that the argument central to these texts is not an argument for denial; for, indeed, without history, no tradition would exist for us to discuss. However, Lovelace engages in a necessary reordering of priorities that would more effectively support and promote conditions for awareness. History is not to be escaped from but reasoned with, managed, understood, and reconfigured as experience that can be broadly applied.

This has the added effect of priming Caribbean people—particularly immigrants—for the experience in metropolitan spaces that would compel them to deliberate across differences in order to prosper as citizens of a vast transnational community. One quickly gets the point that though the author acknowledges limitations with respect to the nationalistic staging of episodic treatments that are representative of (proto)typical Caribbean Ethos, the underlying humanist conception of that ethos—not to mention the obvious sociological movement of peoples in and out of the region—is subject more to the limitations of practice than place. To be Caribbean, then, does not seem to suggest a particularly exclusive preoccupation with place or jingoistic singularity in these texts. The
same applies to rhetorical practice as for the performance of identity in this respect because the permutation of the carnivalesque involves a plurality that is encompassing, and includes the concerns of this vernacular formation in transnational contexts.

Lovelace suggests that, “when we think about culture, we have to think about cultivation. One cultivates culture through practice; it’s a lived experience.” It follows that the more practiced we are in aspects of the tradition, the clearer the message it embodies, the more visceral its effect, the closer we are to the ethos of the tradition. We can, the closer we are, feel the tradition working on us because we identify fundamentally with it, having accepted and internalized it as being meaningful to us and for us. We bring our identity—manifested in the practice of a Caribbean Ethos—to bear in the face of social tensions.

Thomas Farrell, explicating praxis in the classical tradition, further substantiates this notion of practice, arguing that, “rhetoric derives its materials from the real conditions of civic life, the appearances of our cultural world.” As part of the African Diaspora, rhetors have always understood that the hard choices are inevitable in any encounter with or attempt at civic life. This is a phenomenon of rhetoric that generations have understood intuitively. Lovelace effectively taps into that intuition, raises the memory, and brings what “we know we know” into sharper relief.

Implicit in these encounters is a vigilance and attention to care, a movement through the world with a sense of fragility and the need to protect the fruits of that cultural labor. Critical awareness, then, can only be achieved through an informed practice—praxis—that subscribes to a particular sociocultural agenda. Rhetorical practice, in other words, does not appear, fully formed, on the scene but, instead, grows out of a rhetorical tradition. This makes the process of cultivating a Caribbean Ethos more feasible, and more probable, for the social formation Lovelace represents. The author even catalogs some of the primary
tropes, themes, and genres that not only constitute a Caribbean Ethos, such that one can also deduce in the deployment of these categories a roadmap—a plot—of how typical characters become rhetorical beings capable of engaging life, and mediated by the need to praise, instruct, counsel, complain, dispute, ridicule, or gossip.

For Lovelace, the carnivalesque is not a fossil that should be examined through a fixed lens of history but an evolving methodology for rhetorical display, upon which the symbolic performances of rhetorical appeals are based. The real significance of the carnivalesque ethos, by extension, is its role in the rhetor’s preparation for a changing world. The metaphor for that change is the carnivalesque. Adaptability to that change or set of changes constitute the rhetoric with which I am most concerned, and the effectiveness of consequent adaptations is where I believe that rhetoricality can be located. Examples of adaptability are seen in transplanted communities, whether physical, metaphysical, psychic, hyperspatial, or hyperphysical. We gauge effectiveness by measuring and comparing probabilities, desires, and outcomes, which are all undergirded by intention, invention, reinvention, and critique. Concurrently, it is Lovelace’s manipulation of the carnivalesque as rhetorical practice, occurring beyond the veneer of celebration, which equips us as rhetors for the possible transformation of unequal power relations that it can allow. Because literary texts deliberately isolate social formations and rhetorical tropes, they allow us to read, as rhetorical case study, the interplay and coalescence of practices that make up the ethos of the diametre.

**CONCLUSION**

Rhetorical effectiveness in a certain group depends on relevant practices that are sanctioned by the members of that group. An approach to culture that pays serious attention
to the tradition and the deployment of symbols to rhetorical effect can help us better understand the personal significance and broader sociocultural implications of an ethos so recognizably typical in the rhetorical tradition, particularly among those of us who make up the representative group and feel an increased need to engage in the cultural displays of that group. A clearer conception can then facilitate more effective and productive discussion of the relatively undertheorized topic of Caribbean rhetorical practice. Ultimately, a key objective of this approach is the construction of a solid theory (since there is none), a method(ology) for looking at these discursive practices, and the (re)configuration of these aspects in order to secure a meaningful place and role for the Caribbean rhetor in contemporary society—whether one can hold one’s own, as it were, as an individual and as part of an increasingly global scene.

The consequences of enslavement and emancipation—specifically, the formation of an underworld, or diamètre, that helped breed carnivalesque strategies to deal with the realities of an emancipation into poverty, homelessness, squalor (for those with homes), dispossession, and disenfranchisement—manifest similarly today and in the different sites where Caribbean people and their carnivals end up settling. And in America, where Caribbean people use cultural expressions to negotiate separation from their respective lands of origin and to forge a connection to a society without paying the full price of assimilation for that connection, carnivalesque expression can be just as powerful an exercise in nostalgia and escapism as an engaged political action in awareness. My repeated attempts to frame it as rhetoric should demonstrate my preference for the latter, but it more importantly suggests a breadth of applicability that may be of use for Caribbeans, in general. We may ask, for instance, of what use now are the reception and performance of a tradition of struggle,
dissatisfaction, accountability, and critique, that sustained people in decades past but has now seemed to run aground amid the established obstacles of contemporary life?\(^7\)

Problems can certainly arise when we attempt a one-to-one application of the epideictic—such as conventional definitions of virtue, virtuosity, and morality that inhere in the Classical tradition—because these concepts are different for every social formation. However, when the rhetorical activity that we encounter with the carnivalesque operates within normative constraints of a society we seek to be a part of (indeed, because opting out is not possible), the performance of rhetoric is equally valid as practice—if, for no other reason, than these performances work by resisting the normative by provoking inquiry, witness, and critique through the use of available means that are all based on a set of rhetorical precepts and the performance of actions that contradict established rules and values.\(^2\) The Caribbean carnivalesque, because of its nature as a space for the thrashing out of conflicting discourses by conflicted rhetors, is one of the most appropriate starting points for theorizing Caribbean rhetorical activity and for reading the displays that may even sometimes fall short of or conflict with desired outcomes in our public lives. So while it is clear that it is not the literal Hell from which Caribbean people come—nor hope to return to after the dance—there is still much to do, much further to go. The carnivalesque is one way to get there, though it remains to be seen if it will remain dormant, or if it will be revived in light of current problems.

The point is not merely that the ethos is carnivalesque—that is, in flux, adaptable, contingent—but that its realization prepares the rhetor to negotiate the dynamics of the carnivalesque not necessarily in the rhetor’s control. What we see in Lovelace’s work is the presumption of what Caribbean people have sought from the beginning: an answer to that question of where we find ourselves, and how memory, history, imagination, and foresight
all combine to facilitate the conscious transmission of knowledge and a contingent tradition. The basic imperative is to foster discourse that undermines the existing limitations of hegemony, dominance, and inequality. We do it, “not because we own anything,” as Aldrick argues, “not because we have things, but because we is.” Thus, the performance is a clear articulation of the Caribbean Ethos as it prepares the rhetor for a life in the mainstream. Aldrick’s real mas—his use of the carnivalesque—is simply the better alternative to the instrumentality we see with his use of a costume. And just as the miniaturization of natural systems to fit symbolically on the body enables one to read certain acts of composition—the rhetorical composition of ethos, specifically—through a lens of symbolic instrumentality, so does the conscious rhetor harness those symbols for service beyond the limitations of his own body. Lovelace shows that part of the rhetor’s responsibility—of being himself—is forged in the path he takes to service and the achievement of the greater good.

The carnivalesque, as I have made clear, represents more than is easily seen in the streets, so to focus too narrowly on the event as celebration would be to elide the existence of a more fundamental imperative for equality and, in so doing, strip the display of its rhetorical qualities. One can, for instance, embody carnivalesque sentiments and, based solely on those sentiments, reject the festivities that take place without being outside the scope of the carnivalesque. If there is a problem with seeing the carnivalesque beyond festival boundaries, then, I argue that it is a problem of seeing what is being shown, of understanding what is being done, and of recognizing and acting upon one’s role in it. Taken more broadly, we can say that when Caribbean rhetors “play a mas” for the audience—that is, the images and variations of themes they employ (while appearing to disengage the rhetor from the performance)—they actually open a space for the interplay of conflicting
discourses, the play of interpreted actions, and consequences that follow from the deliberate use of *rhetorical masques* that the audience can witness or possibly engage with. Performance of the carnivalesque, then, achieves its fullest expression when it confirms the rhetor’s and his audience’s role in the context of *masqued* performance.

The Caribbean author’s symbolic action, as a part of that practice, not only engages the audience in a generic communicative act; from a rhetorical perspective, he also establishes a particular relationship that is saturated with the characteristic motives, intentions, actions and reactions of both author and audience. In other words, this relationship is predicated on the deployment of, and response to, certain identifiable rhetorical moves that highlight aspects and actions in a carnivalesque context. If we pay attention to the instruments of rhetorical *re-presentation* at the author’s disposal, and the extent to which they combine to form the major methodological underpinnings of this framework, it becomes fairly obvious for whom the discourse is meant to have the greatest rhetorical effect as a way of putting shared meanings to rhetorical work.
CHAPTER 4: PERFORMANCE AND PROPHETIC SOUND

Don’t even try, stranger, to understand it.
David Rudder, “Tales From A Strange Land II: Crossing The Bridge.”

Me speak to all the children. Me speak to everything that moveth and liveth pon the earth…. And me say what me see ina dem heye.¹ Me see [what] type of intention ina dem heye—a where music is. Me no know if me ha dem look dey, you know. But me know which musician me can look pon and know if im is a real musician.

Bob Marley, Talkin Blues #3

We never thought of the lyric. The lyric was there, it was cute, but we didn’t think of what it meant; but at that time, nobody else would think of it either, because we weren’t as morally open as we are today and so, a lot of stuff—really—no excuses—just went over our heads.

Andrews Sisters, Swing It, 76

In this chapter, I contextualize the rhetoric of calypso music that has served as the erstwhile soundtrack for the ideological coming of age taking place in the region and the world. The intent here is to illustrate the extent to which this music has contributed to an overarching Caribbean rhetorical tradition and practice in American contexts. Beginning with traditional calenda music and ending with a discussion of calypsonian David Rudder’s prophetic project, I will examine aspects of Caribbean musical performance in relation to political and prophetic traditions, particularly their role in shaping conceptions of the Caribbean Ethos, the carnivalesque, and their usefulness in deliberations of democratic import.²

Prefiguring the grand metaphors of the carnivalesque in the conception of cultural identity and rhetoric, the music of Caribbean people is an accurate record of the discursive development that has taken place in the Caribbean over time. But it is also a signification of how knowledge is created, distributed, appropriated, manipulated, and then re-distributed
within the familiar contexts of Caribbean rhetorical tradition and the shifting (and constraining) contexts of transnational life. Likewise, as a bearer and purveyor of that knowledge, that performer is most effective who embodies, and thus combines, the local (subnational), regional (supranational), and global (transnational) sensibilities of his audience in order to address issues playing out beyond the immediate discourse community. For, while the imperative—say, a better life—may be supranational in scope and one we likely all share and can possibly aspire to collectively, we are simultaneously prevailed upon by myriad subnational characteristics that supply us with the terministic screens that filter such an imperative for us. We depend on the performer to negotiate those poles of sensibility for us—and, as important, with us.

The ethos of each performer, as his methodology makes explicit, occupies distinct strategies for rhetorical effectiveness that rely on the ability to recognize what the audience requires and to provide them with it. This enables performers to work on establishing discursive bonds of differing intensity and achieve persuasion at different degrees, depending, for example, on who attends the performance and to what extent they are willing to be moved. The critical consciousness that fuels rhetorical performance is also a result of the synthesis of things felt (perceived) and experiences known (conceived), the interplay of which help determine these differing degrees of persuasion, or if audiences get what they want. That is to say, successful rhetorical performances are not static exchanges of intent for persuasion among audience members, but the result of a number of persuasive interactions that can overlap from time to time, as the performer attempts to make as broad or as narrow an appeal as possible under the given (and, quite often, changing) circumstances. This versatility is indicative of the rhetorical impulses and contingencies that have been a part of
Caribbean musical performance from the very beginning when, along with other cultural practices, enslaved Africans would use music and song for their survival in the New World.

**FROM INCEPTION TO CRITICAL INTENTION**

As anthropologist Jonathan Bilby affirms, the immense popularity of Caribbean music is, in a literal sense, a testament to the resilience and versatility of discourse in this particular art form, having endured because the contemporary listening audience actively identifies with a Caribbean Ethos and thus responds, collectively, to the themes and strategies the music embodies. These are elements rooted firmly enough in tradition to make their way through time as an indelible mark of empire, a result of syncretism and the appropriation of traditional European songs and instruments subsumed by African traditions in what is commonly referred to as the Caribbean crucible. This versatility is undergirded by a problematic conception, however, that serves the myth of Caribbean intellectual simplicity. For example, ethnomusicologist Peter Manuel opts for the crucible metaphor as well, describing a Caribbean “with its particular combination of white political power and black demographic power, and of insular isolation and maritime cross-fertilization—[in which] these musical elements simmered, effervesced, and eventually bubbled over.” This position is reified by default, even though historians have shown that the musical performances of enslaved Africans bore specific rhetorical import from the moment of their enslavement.

While there is the presumption of a well-earned reflexivity in the formation of Caribbean music, the consequences of that reflexivity can too easily be construed as stemming solely from a basic—even instinctual—reaction to a rhetorical situation in which they bore no significant agency. In other words, the *situation* allowed a certain craftiness at best, but from it we can too easily conclude that these subjects were only *acted upon*—
“bubbling over” without the presumption of a stirring up of constitutive intention. On the contrary, Caribbean popular music distinguishes itself as rhetoric in various ways that suggest more sophisticated, and systematic, intent. Just as Caribbean slaves, limited by the physical environment and the unavailability of viable escape routes, had to fashion means of passive resistance, contemporary performers engaged in these traditions facilitate the transference of messages through the manipulation of sound, silence, symbol, and physical movement, their responsibility infused with what the language itself provides in terms of individual perception and a shared worldview.⁹

The peculiar history of the Caribbean Ethos—fragmentation and contingent coalescence—began as a situation specially designed for counterdiscursive¹⁰ practices to flourish, and to persist. The crisis was obvious: hitherto indigenous traditions were fragmented by traumatic experience. The resilience and adaptability of these traditions would see their first test in the degree to which coalescence as a cohesive body was possible in the midst of traumatic circumstances. Contemporary Caribbean music, as a result, bears much of the structural and ideological features that have been successfully retained from the vast repertoire of sacred and secular songs brought to the region and used specifically to make sense of the new world they were sold into. These songs have been performed over the last four and half centuries and play a central role in defining the Caribbean Diaspora as it is today. They are not merely embedded in the tradition as relics of a forgotten past but endure as fusions of phronetic and gnostic interpretations.

Put another way, these rhetorical performances are reflective of an accumulation of common wisdom fused with knowledge of the divine (and varied forms of expressing them both). And they persist because tradition is put into deliberate interaction with a history of changing situations, for which both the common wisdom and the application of faith would
be necessary. The resulting practice not only relied on prophetic deliverance out of the hell of oppression for otherworldly reward, but also fused the representative aspects of resilience in the physical realm to aspects of spiritual reward in the metaphysical one. Patience fused to praxis for a life in the present. Vernacular strategies worked as deliberate forms of identification, a practice performers and conversants use to achieved a sense of authenticity and discursive utility for a wide range of deliberate rhetorical purposes. Work songs, for instance, were employed for this purpose, embodying resilience, attestation, and resistance on a material plane:

    I never get weary yet
    I never get weary yet
    Forty long years I working on the road
    And I never get weary yet

Biblical selectivity, additionally, was a strategy that slaves and former slaves found already in use by members of the clergy who, under the direction of the plantocracy and the disaffected European elite, used the Bible to justify the continued oppression of peoples in the new Caribbean. African slaves would use these references, as selectively, to counteract that oppression. The resistant sentiments of the work songs were, in effect, adjoined to the assuredness of reward and yearnings for justice and repatriation that were already common themes in Spirituals and Psalms put to music, as the following examples illustrate:

    Sign my name with a golden pen
    A golden pen, a golden pen
    Sign my name with a golden pen
    Sign my name again

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By the rivers of Babylon
Where we sat down
And there we wept
When we remember Zion

In fact, one can speculate that the use of Psalm 137 by the slaves, from which the “Rivers of Babylon” example is derived, provides a crucial example of selective syncretism and interpretation that goes beyond the choice to use creole in discourse. The revolutionary subtext of the song actually lay in the parts of the hymn that remain unsung, as part of the text that remains hidden from public view or performance. Following promises to God that they will not forget him in the midst of their sorrow, the message turns when the speaker adopts a tone of vengeance:

7. Remember, O Lord, against the sons of Edom the day of Jerusalem, who said, “Raze it, raze it, to its very foundation!”
8. O daughter of Babylon, who are to be destroyed, happy the one who repays you as you have served us!
9. Happy the one who takes and dashes your little ones against the rock!

The strategy of selectivity, *prima facie*, emphasized a degree of patience as the means of dealing with insurmountable struggle. The expression of grief as a prelude to action makes sense, however, in light of the remaining text that saw the fall of Babylon as inevitable. Caribbean people used biblical references selectively to articulate their enslavement and oppression in ways that did not fall all the way into despair, or go to such extremes as to
necessitate the kind of violence we see in the latter half of the psalm. The destruction of	heir present-day oppressors—like the raiders who were the landless “sons of Edom”—was
as certain as the fall of Babylon. In this context, it is clear that the enslaved in the Caribbean
relied as much on “dilatory time” as on direct violence for the successful deployment of their
strategies, tempering the urgency of their sorrow with a most violent promise of
retribution—not “wait and see” but “wait to do.”

Of course, this is not to imply that there was no impulse to combine patience with
violence or the threat of violence; indeed, early practitioners would find that in the limited
spaces of island plantations that the certainty of impending violence—and the resulting fear
of reprisal among the elite—could prove as effective a strategy as acquiescence. Nonetheless,
chantwells,\textsuperscript{13} the vocal leaders of this oppressed social class, emboldened by the performative
power of their constituents, exhibited an ethos that complemented and contradicted their
disenfranchised status as virtual non-members of “respectable” society. As such, the nascent
articulations of agency that were embedded in calypso music disrupted the sensibilities of the
ruling class with the composition and performance of verbal assaults on the ruling class and
appeals for religious, social, and economic freedom would saturate these songs and
depended wholly on the rhetorical prowess of the chantwell.

“Language for the chantwel [\textit{sic}]…was power,” we are reminded by Gordon
Rohlehr. “[T]he word,” he writes, “was magic, its form, incantation, its purpose inspiration
and celebration.”\textsuperscript{14} The chantwell was the proto-calypsonian—singer, griot, and chronicler—
who was trusted with the transmission of urgencies, injuries, problems, praises, and other
matters of rhetorical import. The predominant mode of delivery, the \textit{calenda}, was sung in
Yoruba, French Creole,\textsuperscript{15} and (much later) English, and is the structural form upon which
calypso music is based. By this time in the late 19\textsuperscript{th} century, the calenda had become a
general term for the range of musics (and dances) retained from early Canboulay celebrations (not including the worksongs, some of which, like the ones above, were sung in English). It stands out, therefore, as an illustration of the strategies forged in the midst of the most dire social situations, strategies indubitably designed to correspond to a specific constellation of circumstances: inequality, injustice, unemployment, oppression, hegemony, and complicity, all of which were successfully hewn from the rock of Western imperialist experience. As a soundtrack to the carnivalesque, the calenda, which had remained in practice despite the gaze of authorities, was the musical equivalent of the batonniers’ (stickfighters’) rhetorical preambles and part of the carnivalesque continuum.

These songs, steeped as they were in confrontation, disputation, and display, underscored the rhetoric of self-assertion and self-determination taking place in the 19th century among the diamètre (the vernacular underworld culture), whose traditional codes of conduct superseded official rule. The response to self-assertion, of course, was censorship. In the wake of the Water Riot of 1903, however, calypso reemerged in the public sphere, which Cowley speculates as an indication of “possible links between songsters, Carnival bands, the black elite, and a radical commitment found in some contemporary songs.” This era of the oratorical calypso renewed serious anxieties among the elite who took measures not to provoke further insurgence along with the verbal onslaught they were sure to receive as a result of prior attempts at censorship. This development did little to ameliorate the tension, especially because the elite was historically aware that conflicts in the vernacular underworld always bore the likelihood of being redirected toward them—they never could forget the sentiments of revolt that formed the subtext of the Canboulay of previous years.

Above and beyond the realm of myth, the early calypsonian was literally engaged in the demystification of extant social circumstances, for which he and his constituents suffered
unjustly under the oppression and corruption of the state. The performance is the deliberate attempt to *equalize* the discourse, or at least to approach their interactions with the real ruling class on level grounds to appeal for a better quality of life. As rhetorical equals, an important Manichean distinction is possible between the just and the unjust: the one(s) making the appeal as injured and the one(s) responsible for the conditions that make the appeal necessary. The reality of struggle, when viewed from this perspective, appears less like the inevitable oppression of inferior victims and more like a struggle based on circumstances that could be addressed and changed on a platform of moral—if not economic—equality.

“TEN THOUSAND TO BAR ME ONE”

Evolution of the genre notwithstanding, contemporary Caribbean music draws directly on this initial construction of the vernacular ethos in public discourse in order to shape how experience is interpreted. It remains consistent with the tradition of political and prophetic impulses, interpretations, commentary, entertainment, education, and uplift that play out at appropriate times and places, in a specific recognizable form, and on behalf of the representative group. These interpretations and strategies work in concert in the majority of traditional calendals and across the entire range of their performance in song and dance—from Trinidad in the very south of the Caribbean to New Orleans, the unofficial northernmost Caribbean colony. These interpretations helped shape the shared perceptions of the audience, as well as the public personas of the *batonnier* and the *chantwell*, illustrated in the following example:

When I dead bury my clothes
I don’t want nobody to cry for me
When I dead bury my clothes
Put everything in the cemetery

The political subtext was never too far beneath the surface, though, never too heavily masked but just deep enough to maintain an air of tension that the ruling class would rather have ignored. “When I Dead” is also a logical prophetic appeal for justice that had its real intention/attention directed upward, signifying on the apathy of the ruling class. Additionally, while it is not clear whether the singer is afraid of death or not, there is a certain acceptance of death’s inevitability—not “if” but “when I dead.” The song, in other words, begs a series of questions that amplify the socioeconomic pressures people were made to endure. What possessions of value were there to leave behind? What will or inheritance would be left in the event of death? Would the sentiment be different if there were something to lose? Would there be the same kind of tensions, ethnic or otherwise, if there were some modicum of equality in the distribution of wealth and ownership of property? Conflict was unavoidable, and the social situation, as these songs illustrate, was as much a determining factor as the apparent boastfulness that successfully addressed the devastating effects of conflicting discourses that were unfolding at the turn of the 20th century.

These strategies issue from the perspective of a marginalized vernacular sensibility that shaped the ethos of the traditional political calypsonian and the role traditional rhetorical concepts play in the prophetic discourse of contemporary Caribbean musical performance. “If,” the calenda constantly infers, “you, as a ruling class, would rather quell the propensity for violence in the streets, then radical changes in policy would have to be made.” Songs like “When I Dead” and “Man, Man, Man Peter” are not plaintive appeals to the sympathy of the ruling class for undue special treatment—recall, “I don’t want nobody
to cry for me”—but ultimatums inspired by the prophetic. The demand was for a fair opportunity for the marginalized in lieu of dire consequences.

The transition from calenda to the modern calypso, in keeping with the hard negotiation of conflicts and social contradictions, was not an easy one. Among authorities, the symbolism was often too thick to decipher, even when they had the luxury of detailed explanations. While they attended performances (in plain clothes) and mingled with audiences in the know, the double-tone *double-entendre* that had become the preferred style had many of them dancing to the insults directed at them; for those unaware attendees, the unveiled threats inherent to the single-tone would prevail, albeit in a more technical form, with jazz arrangements that were borrowed from their counterparts to the North, adding yet another dimension to the masque of musical accompaniment.

As calypso appeared to grow in legitimacy as an art form at the dawn of the 20th century, prominent middle-class businessmen offered corporate sponsorship to singers as a way to minimize the prevalence of the type of disputational music of the calenda that had traditionally instilled so much anxiety among them. If the government had no real luck, it was felt—at least unofficially—that economics would do the trick. They made efforts to silence the calenda, enticing calypsonians to move away from the distastefully revolutionary themes and the litanic call-response structure of single-tone for a more melodic double-tone structure that didn’t reinforce the *sans humanité* attitude that the calenda would engender. J. D. Elder notes that this was a period of flux, managed by attempts to “improve the calypso in literary style, introducing more complex musical form while using the litany forms of the kalinda-songs [sic] as the basic melodic framework.” The strategy was new, but the motive was a familiar one: to let the calenda, and its ethos of hard confrontation, die a natural and unheralded death.
The hope was that this predecessor of more “civilized” calypso, and Carnival that bred it, would simply fall out of practice for want of official approval and, more important, elite sponsorship. These, it was hoped, would have assured the calypsonians’ employment (and the growth of commercialization and professionalization). The stage was set for a dilemma that would pit performer against performer, each forced to negotiate a bottom line that offered little room for interpretation: if performers wanted to eat or have their songs recorded, they would have to “clean up” their songs. But it was as ill-advised (and ill-devised) a strategy as the attempts by police to control the stickfighting bands in direct, physical contact that resulted in the Canboulay Riots in 1881.23

The expression of this “split” was played out as a conflict of tones, styles, and language responding to changes in middle-class corporate interest in the music and subsequent attempts to control rising musical talents. But it was also obvious that the growing trend of corporate preference, under the pretense of shying away from the openly obscene songs of the calenda and moving towards a more dignified aesthetic, was seen by some as more pointedly a rejection of the already ill-treated vernacular masses and thus a further crippling of the possibilities for economic strides that so few performers had been able to make. On the one hand, there was still a significant portion of the underclass who took recourse in the more combative “single-tone” ethos as an expression of collective identity and outrage at being maligned and consistently marginalized to the point of being locked in the limbo of persistent declension and hope. There is no doubt that many calypsonians suffered as a consequence of this trend, preferring to perform exclusively in the tradition of their predecessors because they read the play and understood that certain opportunities were not available to them. They were not simply “admiring the ladder”24 that tradition had provided but were, instead, relying on extant tradition in the absence of
alternative recourse to help mitigate the economic paralysis they were made to experience. The portion for them was not prosperity, but disenfranchisement, unemployment, and squalor that only worsened after emancipation in 1833. It was clearly in protest that some maintained the unsettling style of the single tone songs that were most effective in alleviating their own despair and disrupting the smooth operation of the status quo—a recourse that was further justified by the unrelenting disregard they continued to be shown as a result of their choice to maintain the tradition in this way.25

For other more fortunate calypsonians, however, there were still important transformations of rhetorical style and delivery in calypso that had to be supervised. Calypso was still young in the early decades of the 20th century, and performers had to organize and adapt. But this was no new thing to be learned. Tradition had provided the means. It was nothing less than a re-articulation of the trickster-god Anansi—the first [representation of the vernacular] pragmatist [impulse]—albeit in somewhat more updated apparel. The early avatars had not evolved so much that they could not recall the strategies inherent on the traditions of transplanted Africans to the Caribbean. They could still channel Anansi’s duplicity, revert to complex circumlocution and oratory of the most rarefied sort, and sing their protest well within earshot of the most conservative censors and impresarios.

As authorities devised a way to censor the calypsonian, the calypsonian devised a way to re-present his ire and put on display the very things he should have been punished for. Experience had taught them well that rhetorical assaults take many forms. For the survival of calypso and their professional careers, some would bend and, through masqueing, evoke the revolutionary spirit of the Canboulay. This sensibility would carry over to the subgenre of war calypsos that addressed moments of local concern with events taking place on the international stage. Errol Hill, for example, illustrates just how seamless these calypsonians
negotiated injustices, as well as the balance that the carnivalesque masque would ensure: giving utterance to hidden transcripts, while articulating the effects of international power moves. According to Hill, “[a] major part of his repertoire will consist of songs that are directed against an opponent, whether this antagonist be a rival singer, a sexual partner, a notorious badjohn, an unpopular public official, an aggressor country, or an oppressive system of government.” In other words, wartime was as good a time as any for the calypsonian to expand the prophetic scope of his critique. As a rhetorical delivery system that sought balance through implication and critique, the calypso was more than ready for deployment during the Second World War. Atilla the Hun’s (Raymond Quevedo) satirical 1937 commentary on American president Franklin D. Roosevelt’s visit to Trinidad bears this out. Audiences would get exactly what they wanted—and needed—from their calypsonians. To those for whom the song was complimentary, Atilla could not have been more so:

Oh, we were privileged to see, the Democratic President of the Great Republic With his charming and genial personality And his wonderful urbanity We were struck by his modest style And was intrigued by the famous Roosevelt smile No wonder everyone was glad At the great honour shown Trinidad.

It must have been flattering, if not a bit amusing, to hear Atilla’s verbosity on such display. However, to those audiences for whom experience had shown a less friendly face and tone, and who were also very familiar with the traditional circumlocutory tactics of their
calypsonians, Atilla’s epideictic was of critique, not of praise. The commentary was on a more sinister exercise of American military strategy and foreign policy: Trinidad, along with other British colonies Bahamas, St. Lucia, Jamaica, Antigua, and Guyana (then British Guiana) were merely pawns in the early negotiations of the Destroyers for Bases Agreement of 1940 between the American President and the British Prime Minister for a period of ninety-nine years. Audiences, likewise, understood the proverb “all skin teeth ain’t joke”: that there was more style than substance in Roosevelt’s attempts to wrest whole countries from Great Britain, and that Roosevelt had come like Janus “to intrigue” and to protect American interests in a time of war. The “compliment” was, in fact, a warning, for those who had ears to hear, that the Manifest Destiny had increased in intensity with regard to the Caribbean region—the majority of which had been under European control prior to Great Britain’s problems with Germany.

Looking past persuasion to motive, it becomes clear that the apparently divergent choices of the performers—whether to resist from the margins or from the center—speak less to a comparative rhetorical success and failure than to the effectiveness of the different methods in which that success was made to unfold. Each type of performer—whether he favors tradition more heavily or innovation—made choices that corresponded to a particular analysis of the contexts in which they operated and in relation to the opportunities they were or were not afforded. The chantwell didn’t disappear as sponsors had hoped—he was just playing dead for a time, traversing the diamètre, and waiting in plain view to the opportunity to catch corbeaux alive. And there were plenty corbeaux to catch, critique, and convince overseas, as calypso moved steadily through its Golden Age, and, in the process, being claimed by almost every Anglophone Caribbean island that wished to be viewed and publicized as being the birthplace of the form.
Behind the Bridge and Across the Border

Just as calypsonians like Lord Kitchener (Aldwyn Roberts), Young Tiger (George Browne), and Lord Beginner (Egbert Moore) had negotiated the virtual immobility of their social situations and gravitated toward the United Kingdom, professional musicians had been coming to live, perform, and record their music in the United States for some time. In fact, although the trend really took off in the 1920s when Gerald Clark immigrated and solidified his position in the New York music scene with his band, The Caribbean Serenaders, recordings were being made as early as 1912 with Lovey’s String Band. And audiences—Caribbean and American—would gather to hear them. Calypsonians like Atilla the Hun (Raymond Quevedo), Growling Tiger (Neville Marcano), Roaring Lion (Rafael De Leon), and Executor (Philip Garcia), who had secured their own notoriety at home, would see their musical rivalries span oceans and cultures in the 1930s, their “wars” against opponents like Wilmoth Houdini (Wilmoth Hendricks) being played out in the same Decca recording studios as Bing Crosby and other mainstream American greats. Their performances of officially banned calenda and sans humanité songs were revolutionary, in that they were able to successfully record and distribute songs of protest in an international market. They were more than aware of the historical and rhetorical significance of the moment, and took opportunities to comment on this new dimension of experience. In 1935, Atilla would record “History of Carnival” with Clark’s Serenaders:

From a scandal and hideous Bacchanal

Today we’ve got a glorious carnival

We used to sing long ago nuneos and pusenio

But today you can hear calypso

On the American radio.
The irony of calypso’s reception abroad was not lost on Atilla who, not (ever) missing the chance for pointed social critique, commented in less than covert terms on the traditional scorn calypsonians were made to endure at home:

A prophet has no honour in his own land
The truth of that proverb I now understand
When you sing calypso in Trinidad
You are a vagabond and everything that’s bad,
In your native land you’re a hooligan
In New York you’re an artist and a gentleman
For instance take Lion and me
Having dinner with Rudy Vallee.\(^{36}\)

It was clear that Atilla cast his lot with tradition, casting an critical eye to history even as the market seemed open to him. The gesture was not simply one of complaint; they were doing quite well, as the song suggests. More pointedly, it was an effort to identify with the ethos of the traditional calypsonian, many of whom were deliberately sidelined. King Radio (Norman Span), along with Roaring Lion and Growling Tiger, would also declare their loyalties, proclaiming themselves “Masters of Mi-Minor”\(^{37}\) in the 1930s with the production of extemporaneous works like “Don’t Break It, I Say,”\(^{38}\) announcing in no uncertain terms the revival of the calenda for a contemporary international audience: “Radio, the Lion, and the Tiger, singing in America!”\(^{39}\) declared Lion in the final lines. The thesis of the song comes in the form of a threat—“Don’t Break It, I say”—for which numerous reasons are given that speak to the singers’ prowess in magic and battle and intended as boastful flourishes characteristic of the form and made commonplace by the chantwells of the
previous century. They were, together, high priests of the musical form and masters of the occult in the tradition of de Laurence, immune to pleading and plight. But the genius of the calypsonians, their true claim as to the validity of their “playing dead” approach, is that they were able to manipulate the form so successfully, even outliving some of its major adversaries—“Not even Superintendent Major, the tyrant inspector…not Power, Liddelow, or Mavrogordato.” Indeed, “[n]ot even my mother, my father, my sister, my brother” could break the band they now perceived. They proposed a new bottomline: the band, now a metonym for calypso and the carnivalesque, simply would not be broken, even as experience had caused it to bend. It would not break, but instead evolve to an even greater level of critical reception in the 1940s, creating moments that further illustrate the crucial difference between masked and masqued performance.

In 1946, for example, Alan Lomax hosted the *Calypso at Midnight* and *Calypso After Midnight* shows with The Duke of Iron (Cecil Anderson), Macbeth the Great (Patrick McDonald), and Lord Invader (Rupert Grant) headlining. Showing a keen awareness of American politics and their particular role as commentators on issues of American politics that reverberated with international relevance, these calypsonians cemented their place in the American milieu. If they had not been involved in world politics before—or at least to an extent that went beyond the Caribbean region—they did not let on. They had taken the show on the road. The exigence was clear, and the occasion for speaking on international injustices had come.

America had proved a haven, thus far, for calypsonians, and the infatuation meant that audiences were probably more amenable to commentary. Of course, they knew there was an omnipresent exoticism that ran along the perimeter of their performances. This was, no doubt, aided by the enduring fascination with black culture in general that, according to
Cowley, was rooted in the success of Jubilee and black-in-blackface minstrelsy.\textsuperscript{42} But it was also a factor that allowed a deftly arranged rhetorical performance to be used to achieve rhetorical effectiveness that culminated in an unmasked appeal to reason. Again, not a new thing to learn. They would use it to negotiate with the audience, to establish the discursive bond with the audience that would get them to where they needed to be in order to do the greater prophetic work. Three key moments mark the concert—billed as a “calypso invasion” by Lomax, and so defined by the opening number—as an historical milestone in the development of Caribbean rhetoric in American contexts: Iron’s rendition of Atilla’s “Roosevelt in Trinidad,”\textsuperscript{43} Macbeth’s rendition of “Rum and Coca-Cola,”\textsuperscript{44} and Invader’s “God Made Us All.”\textsuperscript{45} It was Invader’s performance, though, that capped the presentation.

Opportunity was not so much given as it was made: Lord Invader, by then already endeared of the audience, extended the concert to complete what had become a deliberately arranged series of addresses on civil rights both spoken and sung. And as Lomax, pressed for time because the concert had run long, negotiated with management and the audience for a suitable closing number, Invader’s appeal to the “better angels” in “God Made Us All” would make the rhetorical agenda clear:

\begin{quote}
We are not against the white people in anyway, 
for they made us what we are today. 
We must offer thanks to Abraham Lincoln, 
Queen Victoria, and Booker T. Washington. 
We are now in a world of civilization, 
and yet there is so much discrimination. 

But God made us all and in Him we trust.
\end{quote}
Nobody in this world is better than us.

Now listen what I am outlining to you
Negroes fought in World Wars I and II
Some lose their lives, others lose a hand
We fought gallantly for the united nations
So if we negroes are good enough to fight
I don’t see why we can’t have our equal right

For God made us all and in Him we trust.
Nobody in this world is better than us.46

The event was the equivalent of a diplomatic tour. This kind of performance was not anomalous. The politics of prophetic calypso was inspired by more than simply an acquiescence to the elitist attempt to sanitize the traditional calenda. On the contrary, what we see is a creative manipulation of available means to achieve an end that was both politically acute and economically advantageous. What chantwells had done prior to emancipation would be revised for a new system of survival in which the calypsonian would try to make his name. The mock battles—which were encouraged for the entertainment of slave-owners, then played out on plantations, streets, and stages—now sold among American audiences with about as much of the popularity that we see in contemporary sales—not egregious by any stretch—but they also immortalized the ethos of struggle, politicizing it on an international stage, and for those who had ears to hear as part of an international audience.
It was so prevalent, in fact, that Wallace Thurman was compelled to note that, “the Negro from the British West Indies… creates and has a disagreeable problem. Being the second largest Negro Group in Harlem, and being less susceptible to American manners and customs than others, he is frowned upon and berated by the American Negro.” Though it was clear that the appeals made by Invader and others were intended to encompass a broad Diasporic audience, the friction was hard to ignore—some might even say inevitable. For decades, in fact, as Harold Cruse notes, “native New York Negroes frowned on the West Indians mainly because the islanders presented a threat of competition for jobs available to blacks,” even though the music market remained segregated for much of the twentieth century. Nevertheless, concerts such as these further popularized pan-Caribbean shows from Harlem to Broadway in New York and clear across the country. Everyone, it seemed, was in on it—from Louis Jordan to Louis Farrakhan (then called Calypso Louie), from Maya Angelou to Ella Fitzgerald. And record companies like Decca, RCA-Victor, ARC-Brunswick, and Columbia did not hesitate to capitalize on the frenzy with thematic “series” for their mainstream audiences. But by then, the path had already been blazed and paved. It was time for the “Calypso Craze” to begin in earnest.

As the Mighty Sparrow (Slinger Francisco) was solidifying his position as a première calypsonian in the region, Harry Belafonte would also score in 1956 with Calypso, the first platinum-selling record in music history. Like his predecessors, Belafonte embodied the Caribbean Ethos, although from a young age he had already been fairly well-exposed to American culture and its own set of contradictions. As a young man, Belafonte had already been heavily influenced by the socialist discourse that defined the cultural scene in the wake of the Great Depression, and equally by black nationalism that had Cyril Briggs, Marcus Garvey, W.E.B. Du Bois, Paul Robeson and others at its vanguard. Out of this milieu, he was
able to fuse an ethos of struggle with political articulation, which he would use for the liberation of marginalized people, not only those in the African Diaspora. His motive utilized a basic, effective strategy that had long been a characteristic of the dual heritages of which he was now a part. In an interview with Cornel West, Belafonte discussed his project at the time:

When I sing the ‘Banana Boat Song,’ most people see it as some whimsical, fanciful little tale that brings charm and delight to the listener. But to me, it’s about a human condition that was very real to me as a child in Jamaica and very painful and extremely oppressive…. I always thought that if people came to embrace my art and began to sing my song, they would want to know who I am. And if I could get them to the next level of that curiosity, I would politicize them to death. 50

Unfortunately, many audiences would remain at the level of stunted appreciation, less impressed with the content than with the fact that the performer had managed to hold a tune. In the context of missed interpretations, however, there was little mystery as to who the dancing bear really was. The die was cast (and recast). It was, ironically, engineered by recording companies that sought unsuccessfully to eclipse the growing popularity of rock-n-roll music with the apparently more sanitized songs from Belafonte’s repertoire.

America: never really the outside world, and always in need of new articulations for a people in search of ever-broadening perspectives. It signified a set of common hardships that the calypsonians recognized and was able to address from their own experiences in the diametre. Performers would have to embark on what seemed to be their most ambitious
rhetorical project to date. This was the period that firmly established calypso as a facet of mainstream American culture, preceding the massive influx that was to come when the Origins Quota Act was repealed by the Johnson administration in 1965. The test of tradition continued, but with a constant eye kept on the core prophetic values they attempted to share with the world.

**REVISING THE PROPHETIC IMPULSE**

The rhetorically effective performer depends on an ethos that remains more or less intact in order to counteract missed interpretations in a range of situations, becoming more nuanced and savvy as the form evolved but always embodying a certain integrity, a basic responsibility to the demands of the audience, and a critical responsiveness to the circumstances at hand. The discursive bonds that were established with the audience during these formative years of the political calypso, in which strategies of masqueing, contingency, and re-presentation were already mastered, coincide with "sites of memory," aspects of a usable past, a nostalgia that can be put to productive use in changing times. But all this would have to be done—if it were to be done effectively—in the midst of constant negotiations with a mainstream that would not only sustain the prophetic calypsonian's career, but would also allow his prophetic message to reach a global audience. No longer content to scream from the margins as a disaffected underclass, the calypsonian had to run a new gauntlet. This became especially apparent as the tenor of rhetorical agendas shifted to overtly radical dystopian and prophetic discourse that played out in the turbulence of the late 1970s and the early 1980s.

By the late 1980s, the Caribbean was a region that, in the changing global political context, could no longer remain satisfactorily protected by the illusion of insularity, jingoism,
and nationalistic myopia of the 1950s and 60s—incidentally, the decades of failed attempts at Federation and Independence for the major islands. The impetus for expression, then, was the result of a situation both imposed on these performers and, to a significant degree, perceived and crafted by those who recognized their roles as public figures. During that time the push for self-determination and national independence blinded many to continued interference from the metropoles of Europe and the heightened American involvement throughout the region. Lord Invader had made it known with “Rum and Coca-Cola” in the 1940s that American G.I.s were running wild in Trinidad, and Mighty Sparrow chronicled the aftermath with “Jean and Dinah” in 1956. There would be other chances for even more pressing critique decades later, as the rising tide of soca would ultimately prove.

The region was in a crisis of Orwellian dimensions, and the time for island-bound navel-gazing had long passed: Reagan had invaded Grenada and Maurice Bishop was assassinated in 1983. Haiti had been thoroughly scoured by the Duvaliers by 1986. Trinidad was finally waking up from the hangover of an oil boom that somehow failed to ameliorate poverty when an oil crisis soon followed and threatened to destroy the nation’s economy. Jamaica and Guyana were just as badly off. Calypsonians seemed poised—if not compelled by an exigency too hard to ignore—to offer themselves and their music as a way out of and through the mire of late 20th and (now) early 21st century despair, using the dynamics of sound-motion in performative creolization to engage in counter-imperialist discourse.

Whereas during slavery, and well into the era of colonialism, there was a clear distinction between the oppressor and the oppressed—with the buffer class of _mulatto_ professionals—positions of government were now occupied by people who looked like the people they governed. This would be the greatest disappointment the vernacular masses of the region would ever have to face, for instead of metropolitan oppression the threat was a
local, recognizable one. As what seemed to be a strong regional sense of identity in the Caribbean began to show serious signs of wear, rhetors adapted calypso music to engage frustrated audiences in discourse. There was little to be made sense of here: it was not change, but exchange, more of the same, a new danger. People had grown weary with words—tired of the “lyrics”—and the resulting malaise in the region was the backdrop for a transformation in tone and tempo that seemed to disregard words altogether in favor of an expression that was much harder to fake, one that had always expressed and alleviated the hurt of vernacular life: Dance.

They also employed rhetorical masqueing by means of convergence, marrying prophetic and dystopian impulses that were supported by interpretive, selective readings of religious, spiritual, and metaphysical signs (and wonders) as a methodology for praxis and for counteracting nihilistic tendencies coming to bear on a social scale. Some calypsonians, having been constructed as heroic figures (ethoi) and having thus received sanction from the public as viable representatives for them, were under pressure to revive the form by returning to fundamental values in the tradition. There remains, among this group, a dual emphasis: a prophetic vision, which is characterized by discourse directed to the audience from the perspective of an observer who identifies with the marginalized masses; and the dystopian critique, characterized by the rhetor speaking directly to the establishment as an intermediary for the masses. As a result, convergent discursive performances combine sermonic discourse (utilizing messianic and jeremiadic strains to achieve and maintain discursive bonds) and programmatic organization (characterized by critical consciousness, political mission statements, manifestos), primarily in an attempt to traverse the sometimes tragic distance between psychic and social poles—in other words, between implicit ways of knowing drawn from retained and appropriated sources and explicit ways of living in an oppressive system.
of slavery and colonialism; between crippling nostalgia and progressive action; between psychic trauma and the material force of a hope that is constantly reinforced on stage and off.

As a precursor to the dance of effective interaction, performers must engage in various quasi-ritualistic methods aimed at (re)situating their intentions and renewing the discursive bonds they have formed with the audience in the articulation of prophetic impulses. Effective performance, then, is the fulfillment of a contract long established between the symbolic action of the performer and the audience that ensures safe passage through the difficulties that befall us in our everyday lives. The symbolic nature of the contract enables intention and effect to pass freely between performer and audience. This is an important act, especially for an audience engaged in a project of justice, equality, liberation, and progressive social action for which the involvement, commitment, and consistency of the performer is a critical component. For instance, in 1986, Gypsy (Winston Peters) revived the metaphor of shipwreck in his sermonic prophecy of doom following an oil crisis that threatened to upend the economy of Trinidad:

Captain, this ship is sinking!
Captain, these seas are rough!
The gas tank almost empty,
No electricity,
The oil pressure reading low.
Shall we abandon ship,
Or, shall we stay on it
And perish slow?
We don’t know x3
Captain, you tell we what to do

The song, aimed directly at then Prime Minister George Chambers, the successor to Dr. Eric Williams, avoided the satiric double entendre, instead evoking the ship and shipwreck to effectively influence public opinion—which, by then, had risen to fever pitch. Chambers’s tenure ended with the following election, owed at least in part to Gypsy’s implication that there was no need for a leader who, in his inability to “tell we what to do,” showed that he could not lead. Indeed, the impending (but preventable) catastrophes of a local society echo King Austin’s dire observations of a world without its moral compass in 1980 with “Progress:"

Today when I look around in the world, what do I see
I see footprints that man has left on the sand
While waking through time
I see fruits of our ambitions
Figments of our imaginations
And I ask myself, when will it end, when will it end?
It is plain to see universally this land is not bountiful as it was
Simply because in its quest for success
Nothing stands in man’s way
Old rivers run dry, soon the birds wouldn’t fly
The mountains will be no longer high
And when I really think of it I does wonder why, oh why?
Indeed, in the matter of Caribbean prophetic discourse, there was no meaningful
distinction being made between national, regional, and international contexts, not when
problems seemed pandemic. For some calypsonians, all seemed a dystopia, for which hellfire
and brimstone was the only logical prescription. In 1987, Stalin set a familiar apocalyptic
theme in “Burn Them!” as he entreats god, and then St. Peter directly, for an opportunity to
judge world leaders guilty of crimes against humanity:

Peter you doh know, de pressure that I undergo
From these mad man and woman,
I feel de full weight of they hand
They make their oppressed law,
they never care ‘bout de poor
Peter these people had their day,
well now is time for Stalin to play

Peter wait, I say Peter wait,
Peter look Ian Smith by de gate
(bun he, bun he)
Peter, I doh want you to make fuss,
remember I want Christopher Columbus
(bun he, bun he)
Peter, look de English woman
who on South Africa refuse to put sanction
(bun she, bun she)
Peter, I just doh care what you do,
but Reagan going in de fire too

(bun he, bun he)

Why?... 55

It was in the shadow of such regional and international discontentment that David Rudder seemed to burst fully formed onto the scene, having gestated the previous decade as a mas-man apprentice and singer-songwriter for Charlie's Roots, a brass band based in Lord Kitchener's calypso tent. Called “King David” since winning the Young Kings, Calypso Monarch, and Road March titles in 1986, with “The Hammer,” a metonymic masterpiece composed for panman Rudolph Charles, and “Bahia Girl,” an exploration of African musical roots in the region, Rudder was soon anointed to lead audiences to the levels of critical consciousness from which they had either strayed or been distracted. Rudder joined the cadre of revolutionary performers like Black Stalin (Leroy Calliste), Chalkdust (Hollis Liverpool), Cro-Cro (Weston Rawlins), Brother Resistance (Lutalo Masimba), Karega Mandela, and others already fully engaged in the articulation of broad vernacular concerns, at home and abroad just as the pioneers had. 56

However, in contrast to Stalin’s tone in “Burn Them,” Rudder’s defiant inclusion “among the wicked ones,” as he sings in “No Restriction,” is meant to deliberately signify his interruption of the already uneasy conversation taking place globally combined with an imperative to speak on behalf of the demonized underclass inhabitants of the disaffected post-Adamic ghettos of the Caribbean, America, Africa, and Europe. And because his commentary was directed primarily at the audience, he would temper the tone of his message, opting for an agenda designed for healing rather than hellfire:

No restriction on the friction.
I say we gonna work it out tonight
Jah Jah people jamming up together
And making everything alright
...
I say we gonna work, baby work, baby work, baby…  

Mass action in the context of the carnivalesque is, in Rudder’s words, “the last intimacy,” but to dispel interpretations of the orgiastic, Rudder’s reference to “Jah Jah”—that is, God’s—people imbues the “touching” he calls for with an acute sense of mass ritual, of mass reconnection. The call is founded on the tradition of religious meetings that, in the midst of prayer, entreat their congregants to hold hands, hug, and kiss each other as a means of negotiating the things that, collectively, they would be better equipped to face and endure.  

The point is not to elevate Rudder, or any calypsonian for that matter, to the station of prophet, per se. He would be remiss, and conspicuously outside the parameters of the form, if he did not acknowledge and participate from time to time in the ribald, the wry humor, and the sexual innuendo. It is difficult to miss the insinuations of vigorous activity in the above example. In “Bahia Girl,” additionally, he makes no bones about his unbridled sexual attraction for the anonymous Brazilian girl—and “as a man with a plan…[he] couldn’t waste no time.” And when he performed “Bahia Girl” at Skinner’s Park in San Fernando, Trinidad, for the first time, the audience of a few thousand replaced the Shango chant with versions that punned “bam bam,” a euphemism for the buttocks, which went something like:

Dem police have AIDS in dey bam bam!
Or, for those less inclined to confrontation and more toward romance, there was this version:

    Girl, let me just play up with the bam bam!

    No, this is flesh and bones music as much as it is music designed to make the spirit dance. The aim, therefore, is to illustrate that the distinctiveness of his prophetic message operates in conjunction with an entertainment component, which combine to form his total project—to teach and entertain in a manner consistent with a progressive rhetorical stance. The overarching urgency of the situation, however, produced a Rudder who is concerned not only with the current state of affairs that affect Caribbean people, but also what moves, methods, and negotiations are necessary to improve them. His vision is of a specific future for his people, which he expresses through the terministic screens of deeply democratic desires located in the traditions of lamentation, critique, and praise common to the whole Caribbean Ethos. As such, his music is saturated with the melodic dirges of Africans that were overlaid with the language of plantations and colonies, balancing the oratorical modes with the plain language of ballad calypsos that had become firmly rooted in Caribbean culture by the 1930s.60

    Rudder’s music also represents a confluence of contemporary musical styles that further articulate the arc of his humanism and widen the scope of those he appeals to as an audience. Every musical influence we see in Rudder is a marker on the vast terrain of his project. We hear the Hindu tabla and tassa drums throughout, the racing repetition of Afrobeat in “I Remember Fela”61 and the questioning Cuban jazz flavor in “Compay Segundo,”62 an electric guitar practically ripping the flesh off the sound in “Visions of Paradise.”63 But the influence of spirituality is paramount, and his background in the Spiritual
Baptist faith is most prominent in his music, unabashedly incorporating the intrusions of Christianity that defined not only the shape of festivals but also the face of worship in the Caribbean.⁶⁴ “High Mas I”⁶⁵ is a deliberate gesture in this vein. A revision of the Lord’s Prayer, the song proceeds on the same imperative we see in the New Testament, functioning as a minor repository for Rudder’s prophetic discourse and evidence of his application of the vernacular mandate that forms the core of meaning for his own ethos and, by extension, his rhetorical delivery.

A self-identified Spiritual Baptist, Rudder’s music represents a particularly Yoruba-infused version of the Baptist religion that was brought to the island in 1815. Thus, there is a greater affinity for the polyrhythmic constructions of the drum as a fundamental material aspect of performance and identification. Rudder eschews overt Christianity in his music, choosing instead to go further back (or deeper in) to the more heavily West African-based Shango performance that emphasized spirituality, possession, and the drum as the basis for his rhetorical project. These aspects are also the psychological and material predecessors (or primal equivalents) of the contemporary carnivalesque, the Canboulay, and the steelband—a link Rudder would establish at the outset with “The Hammer”⁶⁶ and maintain throughout all of his oeuvre, observing no significant distinction. His live performances are nothing less than massive rituals, with people “catching power.” These symbols resonate among audiences who not only recognize the connection Rudder attempts to draw, but also accept the offer of discursive connections because they see themselves in the representations of cultural heritage and practice. Overwhelmingly he defers in his music to allusions of transcendence that constantly shape his rhetorical appeals, reminding the audience of what they are engaged in, and of their responsibility. References to heaven and hell and to the sanctity of music as a transporting, curative force are interspersed with extensive chants,
prayers, incantations, and speaking in tongues. At other instances, they are less overt, used instead to frame prophetic narratives like “The Hammer.”

In “The Hammer” Rudder pays tribute to legendary pan arranger Rudolph Charles, a figure larger than life, whose death prompts a frantic search for his spirit. This search involves a transformation from Charles (who he only names in the waning bars of the song) to “a man [who] had a hammer [that] used to follow him to and fro.” Before the first verse ends, the “man” becomes “the old hammer” and then, finally, “Hammer.” “The Hammer” is a call to Charles, the responses to which can only be interpreted semiologically in a spiritual context:

> As we gather round that day,
> I hear Sister Sheila say
> How last night she see a sign
> She see the Hammer and he doing fine.

When the transformation is complete, and Charles’s conversion from man to myth is better understood, Rudder makes a conclusive allusion that would link Charles’s spiritual transition to the music and the people left behind. Charles becomes endowed with the power of Shango, the orisha of thunder. Sings Rudder:

> Same time thunder roll, she bawl out, “You see?
> He done start to tune a pan already!”

The loss of Charles, in Rudder’s view, signals the end of an era in Carnival, with the most notable of these repercussions being the disappearance of the traditional Dragon mas that roamed the streets and to which Charles was closely associated:
Well, the Dragon don’t walk he trail no more

The commentary was successful because of the deliberate transformation from subject to a more profoundly recognized series of associated metaphysical objects that were able to underscore the [pathetic] appeal to emotion. Using grief as an opportunity to offer critique, Rudder’s identification of a crisis in culture and tradition coincided with a broader threat to the future of the carnival and the Caribbean Ethos as a whole. In other words, Rudder’s complex musicoreligious lament serves a larger metaphorical function as a critical commentary on a people in search of its collective soul—a people that, of necessity, must embrace a critical consciousness or enter into a state of consciousness in order to not only endure current inequities, but also to aspire and work toward improved social conditions.

This sense of urgeney would be further underscored with the death of another music legend, rapso trailblazer Andre Tanker in 2003, and we see Rudder issue deep tribute in a similarly transformative fashion, with a search that doubles as a commentary on the state of the Caribbean soul in need of what Tanker, the ancestor, offered. The musicoreligious link is even more explicitly drawn on an intertextual level in “One More Hosannah,” as Rudder signifies directly on Tanker’s musical vision, specifically in his most recognizable chant, “Sayamanda.” In Tanker’s version, the singer describes the “chain of culture” that represented the mutuality in Diasporic expression:

From pole to pole and corner to corner

(Hold on. Hold on!)

Behind the bridge and across the border

(Hold on. Hold on!)
Rudder appropriates the above lyrics to describe the scope and desperation of his own search for Tanker:

I looking from pole to pole

Behind the bridge, across the border

To find you I had to talk to one or two orisha.

Adjoined to the appeal to ancestors to return and do some of the work of healing (and the nihilism of that divine delay), Rudder’s own spiritual scope and the depth of his musical apprenticeship become apparent, and useful, as he establishes his ethos by announcing some of the major signposts in his musical lineage in “Calypso Music,” a combination of deep genealogical history and metamusical discourse that places him squarely within the tradition and, thus, endows him with the responsibility and the ability to lead. He looks back constantly to train his vision forward; “Calypso Music” begins with the drum—really, an analysis of the drum’s call—in the form a call to which there is an emphatic, affirmative response:

Can you hear a distant drum bouncing on the laughter of a melody?

Yeah, yeah!

And does the rhythm tell you come, come, come?

Does your spirit do a dance to this symphony?

Yeah, yeah!

Does it tell you that your heart is afire?

Oh yeah!

Does it tell you that your pain is a liar?
Oh yeah!

Does it wash away all your unlovely?

Well, are you ready for a brand new discovery?\textsuperscript{74}

The materiality of the drum, as Epstein illustrates, surpasses mere nostalgia. It survives as one of the instruments slaves on the Middle Passage used when they were forced to dance on the decks of slavers to stave off depression, suicide, and insurrection.\textsuperscript{75} Like the Baptists who were persecuted until 1951,\textsuperscript{76} the drum endures as an elemental symbol of assertion and resistance, a common thread among the extant religions of the Caribbean Diaspora, which includes the Shakers in St. Vincent, Myal and Kumina/Pocomania in Jamaica, Big Drum and Beg Pardon in Grenada and Carriacou, Macoumba and Umbanda in Brazil, Santeria in Cuba, Vodun in Haiti.

All of these religions—syncretized though they obviously were—thrived on an ethos that was beyond the categorizations of the traditionally Christian and so beyond simply folding under the pressures of religious impositions (though the tendency for dogma lingers). Even the practice of syncretism, then, served a dual purpose: to incorporate European practices both as religious veneers and as a means of strategically resisting the hegemonic imposition of European religion.\textsuperscript{77} Rudder invokes this vernacular hermeneutic of the drum as the basis for a fundamental appeal to the Caribbean Ethos in preparation for dealing—and helping us to deal—with the hegemony at play on the contemporary world stage. The implicit assumption is that a crucial spiritual component had been forgotten and was in dire need of recall. This assumption is based on the moral imperative that defines Rudder’s project. And although he expresses a deep suspicion of fundamentalism in the guise of religious piety, as in “Visions of Paradise,” he is deeply reverent of the ancestors of
the art who intercede on our behalf with the orishas who constitute the pantheon of his faith. In fact, he takes the syncretic process even further: in the same way as he does with Charles and Tanker, he appeals to authority in “Calypso,” which intersperse each chorus in a way that seems to require neither mask nor adornment as he evokes some of the pioneers of calypso. In the first refrain he sings:

    I say that I am the seed
    of the Growling Tiger now!

In the second:

    I say that I am the seed
    I’m the seed of Atilla now! I’m like a Hun!

And the third:

    I say that I am the seed,
    I’m the seed of the Spoiler now! I wanna fall!78

Each line, each reference, is a challenge to the audience to remember: we have been calypsonians from the very beginning and have retained the capacity to achieve our best. “From the day the first chantwell lead his band, the real jamming start, and today we jamming still,” he proclaims. And while Rudder himself does not hesitate to call on the spiritual resources of tradition, his greater lesson is that of self-discovery as a concomitant practice. For Rudder, as for all performers who rely on tradition as a bridge to progress, memory fuels the prophetic and attends the experience of self-discovery in which the engaged agree to take part—Yeah, yeah!—and resist total declension in the process. But it
does not ensure success—or even suggest possibility for success—without work. The potential for a better life, a life washed clean in the traditions of fragmentation and coalescence, is dependent upon our ability to locate, examine, and interrogate some of the hitherto unarticulated aspects of Caribbean history, culture, and life to which we can collectively attest but often do not. We must, of our own volition, sound the complex depths of the Caribbean Ethos for that chance to engage in a spiritual and physical “dancing of attitude.”

HOMILY, OF SORTS

Whether Caribbean music is approached in terms of global resistance to empire or of more narrow attention to the insular formation of creole perspectives, the performer’s accountability remains constant as a key conceptual factor, allowing them to respond in ways that maintain the convergence—which, if unchecked, can break down over time. Calypsonians like Rudder, vigilant of this risk, compose with a definite prophetic agenda: to speak to the people, to pull them together. Inherent in the relationship between Rudder and his whole audience is a mutual capacity for the exploration of a hope that something positive, even wonderful, might result: calypso. In other words, the “brand new discovery” that Rudder proposes is not brand new at all, not in the sense of being unknown. Rather, it is the recall that results when the tragic past is not forgotten but used as the impetus for transcendence to a higher reality.

The quality of Rudder’s prophetic intention is paramount, therefore, because it determines the quality of the message, directing and altering it on a fundamental level. However, any deterministic notion that he was suggesting something other than the reception and interpretation of symbols cannot hold in light of changing contexts. In other
words, what seems to be somewhat of an antiquated neo-Platonist view of ethos\textsuperscript{80} as a singular spiritual gift metaphysically bestowed, located in the soul and accessed by looking into the eyes, is actually a very practical syncretic articulation of the nature of symbolic performance that relies on the deployment of ideas, manipulation of emotions. It involves the capacity to move the audience with music and words and is more closely related to notions of ethos and motive as social constructions, agreed-upon conventions, shared meanings, and measures of identification that are undertaken by rhetors in their dealings with audiences in specific cultural contexts.

Rhetorical maneuvers of this sort are as prevalent in their contemporary forms as they were historically—albeit significantly less popularized than other more commercially buoyant, though vacuous, counterparts in music (and cultural production, more generally). Performers like Rudder have managed to retain a pattern of rhetorical motive and performance that is consistent with the forms we recognize as coming out of attempts to effectively reconcile tradition with innovation—or tailor each to the other in ways that matter. And what does this require? Above all it requires, as we have seen, more than a passing familiarity with the features being deployed—something along the lines of proficiency with the degrees of rhetorical effectiveness offered by the various modes of the tradition, which (as the tradition itself shows) are significantly determined by the creative use of art and artifice for the masqued display of confrontation, disputation, and direction. This is a fact that would be lost on performers like the Andrews Sisters and Robert Mitchum who, enamored with the music, failed to grasp the significance of songs like “Rum and Coca-Cola” in the way it was intended. It is despite such attitudes that the prophetic calypsonian established himself as one of the foremost voices of vernacular consciousness to
emerge in the Caribbean in the late 20th century as one of the cultural developments to bookend the cold war. This is not a panacea, however. Indeed, the kind of malaise we saw in the 1980s has become far too easy to observe in Caribbean music today, even more so as emphasis on substance seems to have diminished; it is true that, for the last few decades, the oratorical calypsonian has had to defer to the rise of soca, and reggae has had to compete with dancehall as performers and their audiences continue to grapple with the injustices of everyday life. This is not your great-grandfather’s music, one could argue, and it certainly is true that one culture’s noise is often a sub-culture’s protest. To some, it will appear that the ethical paths laid out by tradition have largely been eschewed for nihilism in recent years, as have been the responsibilities that attend the part. This neglect, they might argue, has occurred in favor of mainstream market survival and at the expense of the people’s interests with which these performers have been traditionally charged. However, as long as frustration among dispossessed people continues to be expressed in a “profoundly malicious cry to upset the existing social order,” as Carolyn Cooper accurately puts it, there will be a need for the prophetic voice that will help shape it. Then is, not just with Rudder but with all performers of the prophetic, the chance that the discovery might yield further tragic consequences, but the hope, generally, is that it would yield good. Intractability is—has always been—a cause to work even harder to resist. And it is in such circumstances, the prophetic is most needed—most effective. For people accustomed to various forms of struggle in their respective native islands and in America—from making ends meet to immigration, employment to education—we recognize that even the small probability of good is cause for fanfare and is raison d’être for the Caribbean vocalist concerned primarily with notions of the prophetic. The probable fulfillment of a shared
hope and the subsequent recognition of potential that rises out of and reaches beyond the
grip of extant tragedy, degradation, and apathy are justification enough for the attempt.
Astute audiences know this and engage collectively on the strength of that hope, responding
with whole hearts when they are convincingly called into being because of it. According to
Bill Warren:

Prophetic articulations of the urge for transcendence point to
what satisfying our underlying restlessness might mean on a larger
social scale. These expressions often stem from impulses that are
evident in their negative and mystical counterparts, such as outrage
and empathy, yet they ultimately are more social and political in
scope. Prophetic voices tend to be less transparently spiritual, more
worldly or outwardly directed, than their mystical counterparts.
Prophetic voices are more visionary and constructive than those of
negationists. When prophets resist unjust structures and conditions,
they do not merely decry or seek to dismantle them; they envision
and, in some cases, establish something better in their place.⁸⁴

Given that, then, where do we go from here? Even the unintended motto of our
most heavily trafficked port of entry, New York, might prove prophetic. For people
accustomed to being down who have never truly discarded their hope, there can only be one
response: Higher. The prophetic vision, for rhetor and audience alike, has always been under
threat of being overrun by the tragedies we witness in the events of everyday life: a culture
on the brink of losing itself, a government so engrossed in its own corruption, and the
deterioration of the family, the death of interpersonal relationships, to name only a few. Its failure, though, can only come on the heels of a tradition’s death, not its disregard.
CHAPTER 5: DYNAMICS OF TRADITION IN THE DIGITAL YARD

Hello Kevin I am Making a Email For You. I Love You. I Hope That You Are Fine.

Layla Browne, Personal Email Correspondence

We are all little filmmakers, directing on a pathetically small screen—yet broadcasting to a potentially infinite audience. This in itself is conflicting (not to mention corrupting) but more important, what are we making? What are we inventing? What are we saying that has not been said before?

Jennifer Helfand, “Dematerialization and Screen Space,” 35

Transformation presents us with three challenges: we must engage in a different way of seeing, one that allows us to recognize the constitution of the status quo through rules and through the enactment of those rules; we must evolve and deploy a different way of speaking, an alternative discourse that allows us to use language in ways that exceed its representation; and, finally, we must live in different ways so that change is neither co-opted nor short-circuited.

Kristi Fleckenstein, “Bodysigns,” 761

Caribbean rhetorical practice is, at varying times, informal, nonlinear, narrowly self-serving, or utilitarian in focus, with distinctive modes of discourse used to develop and maintain a connection among members of a particular community. These characteristics also potentially enable interaction between the community in question and others. This is especially true for the kind of activity that takes place in digital environments, which is the focus of this chapter. As the Internet opens up to more varied communities, and these communities bring their own varied traditions, mores, and sociolinguistic codes to bear in a space where those respective identities can possibly flourish, normative conceptions of social practices are not only challenged but also redesigned according to more complex approaches. A Caribbean presence, operating in this vein, helps disrupt the mythos of
exclusivity and the rigidity of a raceless, genderless digital environment colonized by early adopters who had the means and wherewithal to flourish when others simply could not. Such a presence also begs the question, more specifically, of what potentially liberatory work can Caribbean rhetorical activity achieve in such an environment given the contrasting effects of marginalization and interaction with mainstream technologies. Or, put another way, given that online activity is related but not identical to face-to-face interaction, how do Caribbean people strategically apply the dynamics familiar to them—such as rhetorical masqueing—while making use of mainstream technologies more publicly?

Although a high volume of online activity, in general, has been observed by many, and has been described as a trend that developed as a post-9/11 phenomenon in American society,\(^1\) my contention is not simply that the use of technology by Caribbean people allows them to connect with other Caribbean users on various social levels, maintain contact over long physical distances, and share information relevant to the survival of the community as a whole—though all of these certainly occur and remain possible for a growing number of users, the “late adopters.” This is easily observed in the abundance of culturally specific sites that represent certain islands or the region.

In this chapter, I explore some aspects of Caribbean rhetorical activity in technological environments in an effort to discuss probabilities, opportunities for change, and imperatives for the development of technological infrastructures that encourage real participation. Using a digital analogue of the traditional yard to describe the secular spaces Caribbean users congregate and interact online, I discuss two types of carnivalesque activity that take place: collaborative composition and rhetorical implication. Collaborative composition involves: the strategic use of dialogic reasoning (through “old talk” and gossip) in the creation of a text and the discursive bonds and parameters set by Caribloggers
(Caribbean Web Loggers). After that, I introduce the issue of rhetorical implication as a way to discuss the dynamics of interaction between Video Dancehall Queens (VDQs) and their critics. I also discuss the effect of other relatively mainstream representations of Caribbeans and their potential as usable texts.

THE YARD 2.0

Acts of positioning are constrained and contextualized according to the spaces in which they play out. One such space is the yard. In Caribbean culture, the yard’s function as a forum for open dialogue is well known and plays a fittingly central role in the transmission of vernacular ideas and ideals. Not only was the yard an indispensable element in the development of calypso competition, but it was also a site for the formal and informal sharing of information in the course of everyday life. As a sociological phenomenon, the function of the yard is a direct result of the continued ghettoization that followed emancipation and the fact that the newly emancipated slaves had no real chance at owning property—land especially—because they had no economic base. People congregated in small barrack houses, many of which were often built surrounding a yard or bordering an alley in a style similar to the quarters during slavery. The proximity of houses and the density of people meant that they had, and created, opportunities for shared discourse and collective action. Some of these frequently turned into grand theatrical confrontations, allowing for the exhibition of the characteristic verbal and performative features—from the “cuss-out” to the challenge, from the bacchanal to the romance. The importance of the yard can also be observed in a number of works that use the yard as a metaphor to situate the carnivalesque; in a great deal of the representative literature, the yard is a repository for characters who are often maligned, easily misinterpreted, and always marginalized.
A digital perception of the rhetorical masque, enabled by an online community of familiar speakers and writers, and held together by the transmission of common topics, adds a key dimension to the scope and reach of Caribbean rhetorical activity. The activity places a demand on the tradition to change in order to remain relevant and on the community’s need to preserve and practice their collective identity in widening forums in productive ways. But it also demands a reconceptualization of the traditional yard, where online participants can perform masqueing. The rhetorical activity that takes place in the yard may not be immediately obvious from a basic profile—say, on popular social networking sites like Facebook or Twitter. However, the potential benefit of digital yards like these depends on the opportunities they provide for expression, engagement, and consciousness among a local group, while functioning concurrently as one of the main indicators of that group’s presence in a contemporary mainstream society. In other words, the usefulness of the space is measured by the degree to which it is, literally, used. Key aspects of Caribbean discourse intersect and interact with normative discourse online, where similar and divergent interests, concerns, frustrations, and desires are shared. “Subordinate communities,” A. Suresh Canagarajah reminds us, “need to cope with the power of the dominant codes and discourses out there in the contact zone where different communities interact.”4 Put differently, users do not engage in parallel discourse by dismissing the system out of hand. They cannot, in spite of the seemingly non-negotiable aspects they may encounter. Instead—and by applying a Caribbean lens (through sound, text, and motion) to the activities they engage in while in the yard—it becomes more apparent that they change the meaning of the space and what it can do.
OLD TALK AND NEW TEXTS

Substituting keyboards and screens, images and audio, for actual face-to-face interaction, some of these sites appear to maintain a sense of authenticity because they apply an ethic implicit in the practice of Caribbean rhetorical activity, replete with orthographic shibboleths. In other words, the primary media and the forum (space) have certainly changed, but the ethos of the users (both rhetor and audience/conversant), the ethical code of the rhetor, and the unrelenting sense of identification and identity that gives rise to, connects, and maintains them have all given the sense that they have survived the process of digitization intact. They vary in type—static, dynamic, e-commerce, discussion groups, blogs, informal member groups, or different hybridized versions that combine services and emphases into one site. Users can Twitter, Facebook, hi5, MySpace, and Reply-All their way into a culturally, linguistically, and rhetorically over-determined space without fully giving up what they hold fundamentally as their own culture, language, and rhetorical tradition.

One such practice is old talk—an informal free-flowing conversation that can touch on numerous topics. This form of rhetorical activity plays an important, though sometimes contrary and controversial, role as a cohesive social force—simultaneously agitating and suturing our varied assumptions of Caribbean identity. Calypsonian Shadow (Winston Bailey) offers the following description of old talk that frames and emphasizes what users do—online or otherwise—as a reflection of real Caribbean life:

If you tell she a little secret about Jack,
How he kiss up Imelda down in the track,
She run down the road to tell Rosemarie,
“I go tell you something, don’t tell nobody.”
She tell and she tell and she tell and she tell;
She tell and she tell till she forget who she tell;
She come back to you with the same story,
“I go tell you something, don’t tell nobody.”

Obviously, Shadow is not describing the Internet, but he does show what old talk adds to the vitality of his, or any, discourse community: a network. Old talk can, thus, be used as a guiding metaphor for understanding how Caribbean rhetorical activity is expressed online. In fact, many Caribbean Internet users refer colloquially to their social interactions in related terms. Facebook, for example, is rather unflatteringly referred to as *maacbook* or *fasbook*, both references to the performance of publicizing one’s own business—and minding everyone’s else’s. This vernacularized connotation implies not so much an intrusion or interruption of social norms, but the rhetorical implication of the rhetor and audience in a continuous narrative. Subscription to this narrative requires identification, participation, and implicit commitment. But more important is that the phenomenon of old talking online involves a blurring of the audience’s options for judgment because it involves the conflation of private information with public sharing practices. Users engage in a predetermined set of Caribbean codes of old talk in technologized spaces, as what Karel McIntosh refers to as a negotiation of the “brazenness and transparency of the social media environment.”

It certainly is the case that the perceived ubiquity of computer technologies and the reality of the Digital Divide have served well as justifiable diversions from the equally important issue of existing access and activity online among Caribbean users. Despite the boundaries, Caribbean rhetors are equipped to redefine what they can do there, testing its elasticity, and reshaping it into a space where their familiar discourses can flourish. As we
discuss the effect of power as it unfolds in so-called dominant discourses in mainstream media, however, there are numerous sites of local discourse that also contribute to the shaping of the Caribbean Ethos online and connect those who subscribe to that ethos to the larger world. The way they conceptualize, or make sense of, this activity relates closely to the frames and features they employ offline in everyday contexts.

When the performance of everyday rhetorical strategies—through the use of language, culture, and worldview—is infused with an ethos of negotiation in the digital yard, we can get a richer sense of how Caribbean users respond to normativity and control in the digital spaces they choose to meet. The following discussion of a spontaneous chat session provides a good illustration of this. On Facebook, users J and B engage in a session of old talk. This particular conversation revolves around a central topic of free will in the course of human activity that unfolds as a complex prophetic commentary. Supplementary themes and references are strategically deployed throughout the discussion. These include religion, impropriety, government, oppression, the paradox of church and state, sexual deviance, pop culture, hegemony, and retribution. And they were used at various points to initiate, frame, posit, exemplify, rebut, and concede aspects of the argument.

Differences between traditional oral exchange and one that takes place online in text complicate the efficiency of the discussion. For example, the sequencing of the exchange affects the flow of comment and response in the first few lines, making it somewhat difficult to follow:

J: in fact he allowed us to have free will so he could be entertained
B: me too. but, assuming there is no intention of separating the two (church and state) where does the accountability lie?
J: accountability is only to appease the masses when water get more than flower padna

is like the cowboy x story on sesame street

B: i dont know if i buy the god-as-voyeur narrative (a la George Carlin)

lol

i hear yuh

but it could also be like black bart, tho

also sesame st

you recall bart was, in fact, repentant, at the end of the skit

J: accountability is a temporary condition to appease the people and distract them from the greater ills that continue to blight them
cowboy x wasn’t tho, he keep fucking up the town, but the people were happy

When J gives his initial opinion of the paradox of “free will” that is provided by an omnipotent God for the purpose of entertainment, B’s response immediately following bears no reference to it. In fact, B’s response to J’s initial statement of the paradox is actually delayed for some time. B’s first comment seems to be aligned with one of J’s earlier points and uses that common ground as a platform to initiate a question of “accountability” with regard to “church and state.” J’s first response is to B’s question of accountability. Following the newly introduced tangent, J remarks at first:

accountability is only to appease the masses when water get more than flower padna
is like the cowboy x story on sesame street

J then follows another reference to the fallacy of accountability with a further explanation of the “cowboy x” reference as a metaphor for hegemonic capitulation that occurs in lieu of actual liberatory action:

accountability is a temporary condition to appease the people and distract them from the greater ills that continue to blight them
cowboy x wasn’t tho, he keep fucking up the town, but the people were happy

Appearing a few lines (and minutes) later, B’s response is entered: “i dont know if i buy the god-as-voyeur narrative.” However, the skepticism of B’s comment is presumably bracketed, as B opts to respond to J’s Sesame Street reference instead of expanding on his opposition to “god-as-voyeur.” But what is it that sets this exchange apart from other non-Caribbean ones? This example is key because it affirms the interconnected relationship that makes successful authoring and co-authoring possible in the digital yard. The ethos of the author and potential co-author validates the authenticity and relevance of the text they create. Underlying this collaborative activity is the factor of identification that enables the activity between J and B to function organically and effectively in normative digital space. This occurs, in spite of the basic limitations I describe above, through the use of recognizable rhetorical features that are practiced in the everyday lives of Caribbean people (and, presumably, in the everyday lives of J and B).

I submit that a significant portion of their online activity is not done for originality’s sake—that is, to found a new discourse in digital contexts, per se—but to raise awareness
through articulation, negotiation, critique, agitation, and humor in order to navigate and resolve possible conflicts that emerge in the context of a shared value system. In other words, the activity, though constrained within normativity, is generative in outlook. It also abides by its own frames of normativity, following recognizable patterns of expression and practice that show up in the tradition. Additionally, in order to maintain the authenticity of the exchange, both J and B use numerous modes of Caribbean discourse. Orthographic features are used, as illustrated in Table 5, to replicate some of the verbal (syntactic and phonetic) features of a creolized language variety.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Orthographic Feature</th>
<th>Examples (with standardized corollaries)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Interpellations</td>
<td>Padna (partner, friend), My brother</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Zero Copula</td>
<td>is like (it's like, it is like); be keep (he keeps)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>i letting (I'm letting); water get (water gets [to be])</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>i go leave (I'm going to leave, I will leave); you right (you're right)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inflectional Spelling</td>
<td>bun burn, can't, cannot; de the; dem them</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>kyab mother; dey they, their, there</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>madda I, of; dat that</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>ab you; dis this</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>yuh you; they they, their, there</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>mab me, my</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Subject-Verb Agr.</td>
<td>priest molest, water get, dey kick,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maxim &amp; Exclamations</td>
<td>When water get more than flower (when things are out of balance, out of sync, or out of control)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Is fire for all ab dem (It's fire for all of them)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Bun dem (burn them!)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>well/yes (exclamation, formulaic signaling beginning or conclusion of exchange)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 5: Orthographic features
This is not a static practice; J and B consistently move back and forth along the Creole Continuum, relying on their familiarity with acrolectal, mesolectal, and basilectal linguistic features for effectiveness—though, as the conversation goes on, basilectal features seem to be preferred. To emphasize their outrage, for example, J and B use a highly creolized variety when the conversation takes on a deeply apocalyptic tone, and the relatively abstract, quasi-esoteric treatments and references are discarded in favor of concrete examples like the fall of AIG:

B: i mean, is 6 of one, 1/2 doz of the other, so we dont really need to split he=airs on this
J: maybe becase we put more weight on accountability tto God
B: is fire for all ah dem
J: but yuh right...condemn de lot ah dem
B: i go leave the condemning to the master, but they go get what they have to get, tho
J: well i letting de master kno now dat ah support de condemnation
B: indeed! a little black stalin vibes
bun dem!

They arrive at a point of total agreement—“is fire for all ah dem” and “…yuh right..condemn the lot ah dem”—when the mode of retribution is put forward. Though B initiates this segment of the exchange, J later substantiates it with his own anecdote; B responds in kind:

J: dat is why dey kick mih outta confirmation class
ah wouldn't yield
B: they kick me out after

J: but from young ah question dey bullshit

B: and i didnt care

some shit just didnt make sense to me

This moment of reflective practice plays a more important role than the dated reference to Sesame Street characters of the 1970s. Using specifically Caribbean language to identify and authenticate their exchange, J and B authorize each other to take certain liberties. They also feel free to speak personally on the topic at hand. The confessional display, for instance, not only reinforces the prophetic as an overarching framework for the operation of justice. It also allows them to engage freely in a form of syncretically charged skepticism: while they admit belief in a “higher power,” they resist deep identification with traditional forms of worship and ritual. While little can be said about the implications of their exchange on an interpersonal level, this example illustrates how language, culture, and worldview enable forms of negotiation to play out in the digital yard. Having set social, cultural, and epistemological frameworks of language, style, and worldview that frame tradition and constitute its practice, Caribbean and other Diasporic peoples have long “hacked or jacked access to and transformed the technologies.”13 And J and B appear to be encouraged by a history of adaptability that has served many immigrants and citizens who have had to find a way, or make one when none seemed available. This adaptability and resilience underscore the apparent malleability of their discourses to seemingly foreign environments, as well as the practices they permit.14

Furthermore, J and B demonstrate that Caribbean rhetorical activity can be put to work as a mode of collaborative critique and (at times) nonlinear dissemination. They also
demonstrate that the use of this mode(l) contributes directly to the complex ongoing performance of Caribbean expression in mainstream contexts. The issue here is not whether Caribbean rhetorical activity is good and bad, or right and wrong. Rather, J and B show that practitioners, through a selection of topics to talk about or act upon, can determine if the talk they generate will be used to encourage active interaction, or if the action deserves a response. Their interaction is indicative of an ethos that many Caribbean users subscribe to online, as well as the efficiency with which their performances are disseminated. In this context, the carnivalesque plays out as a dramatic reenactment of social opinion, with J and B relying on sustained ethos to express their positions. They express and engage with the persistence of situations of general dissatisfaction as an act of collaborative composition that culminates in raised awareness.

J: well yes padna..thanks for the intellectual stimulation and discourse...ah could rest easy now

B: knowing yuh not alone

look for me, men, i here

J: fuh dat

B: but i going and sleep, tho

J: definitely, we go pick up

B: yeah, my brother

J: yeah padna, bless up

B: laters

Using tradition as the critical lens, they indulge in a conversation that works pragmatically as a counterweight to what they perceive as the total failure of a concept or past
act by allowing them to reconceptualize and revise it. In other words, their conversation is pragmatist in the sense that it considers primarily who they are as Caribbean people and the methods they employ as a mode of critique.

More than a method of sharing information, old talk has a suasive function as a mode of discourse. It constantly reinforces the many social and interpersonal bonds that exist in a community. It also helps define the paths that community may take to move through the world, to endure it, and to embrace its seemingly divergent influences. Within the community, and especially among those who are privy to the issue at hand, it plays a definitive role: rhetor, act, audience, context, and consequence all inhabit a space that can invite or repel strict moral judgments of right and wrong; it also offers those present the option to participate, whether passively or actively in the resolution of different outcomes. At the same time, however, the cohesive action cannot be celebrated as a static achievement with results for a sequestered community alone. Online, as is the case offline, the efforts to cohere must be continually reinforced with a critical awareness of potentially jingoistic fractures and existing ethnic conflicts.

**WHOSE TO SAY?**

In addition to collaborative textual production, a chief factor in gauging the overall effectiveness of a text produced by members of a community is the degree to which it is public—that is, the degree to which it is considered accessible to a public that can see, read, and respond to it in whatever form. Implicit in the old talk mode(l) between individual users, however, is a major limitation with respect to accessibility. Furthermore, it raises doubts about just how much ground this kind of network activity really covers and who it might reach as its “public.” Short of its inclusion here, J and B’s exchange might never have been
read by anyone but them. However, Caribbean rhetorical activity, expressed more publicly as blogs, can elicit judgment, censure (or censorship), and critique for wider audiences in ways private chat sessions may not be able to. This factor of “publicness” goes directly to establishing an ethos that would sustain interaction by satisfying some of the familiar tenets of Caribbean discourse in public spaces, such as: issues that contribute to the common good, the constitution of images and representations of Caribbean people in public, and the establishment of shared (and shareable) codes that can aid in the framing of these issues and images for consumption by a Caribbean audience.

The “Caribbean Blogosphere” began to take shape around 2001. According to the Caribbean blogroll on KnowProSE.com, there are, at present, 124 (active) reported blogs, with more Caribloggers literally clamoring to be added to the roll. However, no conclusive list of active blogs exists, mainly due to the mercurial nature of the genre and the fact that most online activity consists of browsing sites as passive readers, not as authors. The resulting texts, therefore, function as somewhat of a microcosmic realization of what early adopters generally intended the internet to be: a “channel to an available and authoritative source” that could facilitate but not necessarily dictate communication, according to Amy Tracy Wells. Wells found that “[by] opting for the internet in many cases, they [choose] the channel that could link them to the most people and sources, or literally the most ‘social’ selection,” according to their interests, values, and beliefs. A December 2005 Data Memo bears this out, reporting that 9 percent of adult Americans created blogs, while 27 percent read them. In 2008, those numbers increased to 12 percent and 33 percent, respectively.

As we have seen with the old talker, caribloggers are, for better or worse, entrusted with a narrativistic role of spreading the word about issues relevant to Caribbean people, letting them know what is going on, and keeping the talk (that is, the subject at hand) in
circulation. Global Voices Online (globalvoicesonline.org) editor and cariblogger Georgia Popplewell, for example, maintains a Twitter profile, which she uses to keep her followers informed about upcoming events—Earth Hour, for instance, during which time she patrolled her neighborhood and submitted progress reports on her observations. At the same time, though, the cariblogger can sometimes assume, and attempt to enact, a more direct responsibility for himself, as solipsistic critic, than for the audience. For, even though blogs are more public than chat sessions, they should not be prematurely misconstrued or misinterpreted as a discourse too revealing, or truly public, when the text itself actually fails to reach, refer to, and interact with a public. Sometimes, the dynamics are worked out in the development of publicized, reflective discourse practices, and the lines that sometimes get drawn between rhetors and audiences.

Explaining his primary reason for blogging, for example, Taran Rampersad of KnowProSE.com admits that, “every writer has a story. Something drives them to write—to share their perspectives. In my case, it was a need to document things really for myself.” What Rampersad seems to imply here is that in the likely event that the narrative and commentary evolve—that is, either grows or diminishes to a series of salient facts—the rhetor’s ethos/ethic that he has worked over time to establish retains the essence of what the original message was meant to communicate because it was intended for the cariblogger primarily. Furthermore, there is the implication that the informality and nonlinearity of the transmission and the subsequent interpretation of a disembodied audience does not erase this self-interest but, instead, demands it. By electing to blog, it follows, each agent accepts this responsibility to himself as a default, attempting only secondarily to balance what is intended with what is actually produced and subsequently consumed by an audience.
However, when he posts, some people do read; when he posits, some people are likely to engage; and when he suggests, some people may, in fact, respond. This is a paradoxical version of the discursive bonds that exist between rhetor and audience: for example, whereas the relationship may be formed through the recognition of familiar discursive moves, the reality of the medium means that the bonds may be too attenuated, or stretched too thin, to achieve real cohesion between rhetor and audience. Rampersad recognizes this as a paradox that he is both aware of and tries to avoid outright:

[A]s I learn more, my focus shifts, and as my focus shifts, I end up writing about more. Typically, I write what I think, and try to explain it to others. Not everyone does that. But if everyone in the world was like me, the world would make sense and I would have nothing to write about. :-) I think everyone who is writing on the web from the Caribbean needs to consider why they write what they write, and why they read what they read. In fact, I think that on a global level, people need to consider these things. As far as myself – I'm all over the place. I don't really have a focus on issues; I just write what I know or what I don't know and want to know.  

Ramchand offers something of a caveat; it suggests that while there may be an inherent responsibility to the audience that undergirds the message itself, superseding its actual transmission and infusing the rhetor’s role with a sense of utilitarianism (whether that role is assumed or imposed), the cariblogger can easily avoid the role by choosing monologue over
dialogue. However, the recognition of this contradiction and its inclusion in Rampersad’s explanation is a recursive act, which allows the reader to gain access to Rampersad’s revision process—thus, turning the monologic expression into a dialogic exchange. Eventually, Rampersad’s attempts to reconcile his own self-interest with the apparent conflict of audience expectations reveal a growing concern with audience, as well as the reception of a public(ized) script they contribute to simultaneously:

Weblogs are participative, and the quality of the people who participate by leaving comments really defines a weblog to me. But I’m not claiming to be a good example of what a weblogger should do—in many cases, I am not. I write long entries (though I recently did add a QuickProSE category), I don’t write on one topic alone, I cross topics a lot, and I don’t really write with the audience in mind.  

Despite his protestations and apologias, framed as an abdication of authority to speak on a subject, it is clear that Rampersad sees audience operating parallel to, if not fully in concert with, his own conception of a cariblogger’s role as a provider and receiver of usable text, noting that, “The audience typically comes back and tells me what is on their mind, and that feedback can really be worthwhile—if you have quality people participating.” And even though he claims not to write for the audience, his direct, explicit reference to the type of audience he would prefer functions as an invitation. In fact, the provocative solipsistic tone works more effectively as an invitation than a declaration of his conceit. 

Beyond merely keeping readers up-to-date or dealing reflectively with the role they play in the success of a blog, however, there is a logical path to empowerment that runs through the digital yard and other internetworked spaces. The possible coalescence of the
discourse community acting on its shared understanding and on deliberate acts of
knowledge-making demands a certain degree of interaction, using topics and discursive
features that are recognizable and applicable in multiple contexts. For example, cariblogger
Attillah Springer writes, in a post titled “Dear Rihanna”:

Pardon the intrusion in your personal affairs. I expect you are used to
it, by now.
Your love life isn’t my business. In truth I didn’t care to know the
details of your life at all until I heard about what Chris Brown did to
you.
And I don’t know if my words will have any effect on you, but I feel
like I have to say it. Not just for you, but for myself and for all the
young women out there who are your fans, who enjoy the
entertainment you have chosen to share with us.
…
This scares me, Rihanna. Especially since women like you are role
models. The epitome of this bizarre construct called modern woman.
You, the post feminist self-determined Barbie, who have money, a
top career, men the world over who practically worship you and
thighs to make the rest of us women die of jealousy. You who are all
these things can’t possibly accept such behaviour from a man.
I fear that the news of your return to your abuser sets a bad
precedent to all the Caribbean girls becoming women who admire
you, your rise to fame, your spectacular claiming of Hollywood. You,
a regular Bajan girl that could be any regular other girl from any
regular other island.24

The imperative Springer attempts to highlight is obvious, and her concern for Rihanna and
“all the Caribbean girls” is palpable. But on Cheese-on-Bread, the topic is deepened, with a
commentary that fosters a more dialogic exchange. As reason #2 for “Why Rihanna Would
Marry Chris Brown,” cariblogger Bajegirl fuses a familiar tabloid talk show approach with a
commentary grounded in tradition, writing:

She’s really pregnant. Well, time will tell soon enough ‘cause as we
Bajans say, you can hide and buy land, but you can’t hide and work it.25

The proverb is later evoked by one of her readers in the form of an acrostic poem, titled “So
Confused.” Its use in response to Bajegirl’s commentary serves to substantiate a basic
prophetic agenda of care, connection, and service to the community, one which is consistent
with Bajegirl’s ethos. A few weeks after her list of reasons, Bajegirl reintroduces the Rihanna-
Chris Brown moment in the context of a more serious discussion of domestic violence,
social complicity, and the subsequent murder of Sophia Phillips by her boyfriend:

yet another Barbadian woman lost her life to domestic violence.

…

I have lost count of the number of women who have died in the last five to
10 years at the hands of their husbands or boyfriends. One beat his wife to
death with a piece of wood in front of their children; another abducted his
girlfriend from her workplace and killed her. Yet another stalked his ex-
girlfriend mercilessly all over the island, finally catching up to her and murdering her near the home she was secretly staying.\textsuperscript{26}

There is no indication in this post that Bajegirl intends to continue the frivolity of light gossip that appears in her previous post; rather, Rihanna’s story and the urgency of Phillips’s murder are used as a rhetorical masque to emphasize the seriousness of the problem. In fact, Bajegirl’s commentary extends to members of the broader community offline, as she chooses to rely on a traditional sense of shared responsibility to frame her outrage and to shame her audience into action:

How many more women are going to die before the authorities and all of us take this issue of domestic violence seriously? Almost daily many of us see and hear women being brutalised by their partners, yet we’re reluctant to get involved because “we don’t want to get involved in other peoples’ business”. Since when do Bajans don’t want to get involved in other peoples’ business? Only when it matters, it seems.\textsuperscript{27}

Bajegirl does not end with the sensationalistic treatment of Rihanna’s misfortune; on the contrary, the episode only helps Bajegirl publicly reinforce her own understanding of community responsibility and the counterproductivity of “not getting involved.” Bajegirl’s contribution to the knowledge community cannot be overstated, especially the way she uses the exigency of a popular topic to masque the broader commentary. Of course, the risks of the message deteriorating and its rhetoricality failing are ever-present, but it is this same fragility of rhetorical exchange that fuels the imperative to engage, driving the agenda and shaping consequence among caribloggers and their audiences with every transmission, post,
or reading. Access and involvement are based not only what the rhetor says but also on the
fact that the rhetor and audience choose and are permitted to take part in a sanctioned,
potentially self-regulating exchange. To the extent that caribloggers like Popplewell,
Rampersad, Springer and Bajegirl choose to be representatives and credible sources to
communicate publicly on our behalf, and we with them, there is the implicit expectation that
the narrative will definitely evolve into understanding. This “understanding” is implicit
because it falls within the rubric of traditional response and expectation that function among
rhetorically astute Caribbean practitioners, though its expression may not immediately be
clear to others.

The point is not to claim exception unduly, but to begin to illustrate paths of
interaction that are generative rather than reductive. Similar to the chat session between J
and B, the medium employed by caribloggers is, in and of itself, innocuous. It is the insertion
of values and meanings that determine the effectiveness of their transmissions. Online
activity, situated within a carnivalesque framework can be used not only to downplay the
differences and emphasize the connections, but also to further emphasize the notion that the
activities occurring online do not simply resemble rhetorical activity as “cultural analogy,” but
are, in fact, cultural and represent highly complex, and ongoing attempts at praxis. Like
Caribbean culture itself, there are strong tensions intersecting in the digital yard that threaten
to undo much of the interaction and collaboration we notice online, and in particular in the
kind of texts we create, use, and sometimes are. But efforts to frame orality, textuality, and
physicality as inclusive discourse go a long way to bridging discursive gaps between the
marginalized and the mainstream. At issue here, then, are the rhetorical choices authors
make to achieve these, and other, “public” issues, in the transition from solipsistic to civic
discourse.
I Broadcast Myself

Conventional sensibilities resist, often vehemently, the outward, out of season, displays of the human body. It is a well-known, though somewhat inaccurate, understanding of the carnival as a time of sanctioned licentiousness and lewdness that has its place in time and location. One of the great myths, in fact, is that during carnival the class barriers that stand year-round are broken, but once the festival ends, things quickly shake back into place and the barriers get reassumed. Thus, the practiced response to the offensive act hinges on whether the actor has any “shame” or “decency.” This is a source of contention between tradition and mainstream notions of respectability that the Video Dancehall Queen (VDQ) helps to evoke and maintain through the continued transmission of these visual texts that push against the expectations of convention. In carnivalesque terms, therefore, the imperative for interactive display is never suspended because the conflicting conditions that demand carnivalesque expression remain—not the least of which is freedom of expression. Among those who do not recognize a shift in their social status during sanctioned periods of the year, the questions of respectability and decency become objects not necessarily to resist and undermine, as much as to engage and negotiate with. The timeliness (kairos) of the contemporary sanctioned festivity is eroded for a greater, more urgent, performance of daily life, such as the assertion of oneself in the midst of constraining circumstances online. Instead of disqualifying the act, therefore, its effectiveness is emphasized as a rhetorical display of carnivalesque negotiation and implication.

The fascination with and consumption of the black female body is an historic one, but the VDQ does not fit so neatly into racist, ethnic, or misogynist frames. But how avant-garde or paradigmatic is the video dancehall queen? Not very. It is, however, clear that her use of the rhetorical masque is implicitly understood and expertly practiced. On film, as in
the fantasy-spaces of the dancehall, Carolyn Cooper suggests that “exhibitionism conceals ordinary imperfections … [and is where] old roles can be contested and new identities assumed.” When viewed through a carnivalesque lens, these rhetors exhibit and unsettle a set of established precepts that makes them not only worth looking at as examples of the rhetoric, but as exemplary rhetors whose agenda of strategic display serves a key purpose of self-representation online.

Cooper describes the ethos of the dancehall queen performance in Jamaican dancehalls as “an act of self-conscious female assertion of control over the representation of her person. Woman as sexual being claims the right to sexual pleasure as an essential sign of her identity.” Cooper’s point can certainly be observed in many videos, in which females routinely simulate masturbatory behavior—rubbing their groin area and gyrating in mock striptease, for instance. According to Cooper, “it is the prize money, which guarantees a measure of economic independence, however, temporary,” which is seen as the primary motivating factor. And there is, indeed, some very popular, and explicit, footage of VDQ competitions and trailers that advertise videos for sale online. But the ethos of the VDQ seems to differ from the more traditional dancehall queen, even ones portrayed on the traditional films Cooper studies. Of course, one is not hard-pressed to find economic incentives being publicized, even for the self-published versions, which feature young women not in costume but in regular clothes. The vast majority of these self-published videos, however, are filmed with phone cameras, or other low-resolution periphery devices, and then uploaded to YouTube—at a general rate of about once a month. Beyond the fact that their performances allow dancehall queens, in Cooper’s view, to “savor [and allow others to savor] the sensuality that had been repressed in [their] everyday existence,” there
is generally little evidence of an overarching desire for monetary benefit that defines the
dancehall queen online. The pleasure, it seems, is grounded in the display itself.

The interplay of tradition and innovation online provides an environment that may
be used to express the previously suppressed though not necessarily oppressed views held by
a significant portion of the vernacular. The VDQ makes use of her cyber-environment,
actively reshaping conceptions of intent and interpretation that occur between rhetors; the
resulting discourse shows real, though problematic, attempts to write and rewrite vernacular
codes of online [mis]conduct. By opening up her constructed self for the simultaneous
pleasure, consumption, and critique of her audience, the VDQ turns the gaze into a
carnivalesque dialectic, where the tradition and innovation are used simultaneously to thrash
out issues of status quo and change, and where materiality and semiotics intersect and are
put in conversation with status quo and change. The attempts at substantiation, then, occur
at the points in the continuum at which intersections occur for the performer and the co-
performer (or producer, or accomplice) of the text—as forms of active speech, or body
language.

To begin with, there are a few important factors at play here that readily enable the
audience to observe aspects of the performative and underscore the rhetorical stakes the
VDQ negotiates: the hypersexuality of the female body in motion; the deliberate
exhibitionism inherent in the performances; and the critiques that are published by viewers.
When these factors—extrapolated here for clarity—converge, they have the potential to
foster critical awareness of what people do online and the effects they produce. In the
following section, I discuss how these factors are negotiated.
The dynamics of exchange between rhetors (VDQ and critic) make it possible to gauge the efficacy of prevailing values or codes that Caribbean rhetors may practice in order to maintain control—or attempt to take control—in the digital yard. Based in part on their divergent interpretations of Caribbean Ethos, the VDQ and critic both manage to disrupt the status quo by venturing outside the normal parameters of acceptability: the content of the VDQ performance disrupts the more conservative set, while the critic attempts the countermatriarchal, paternalistic, misogynistic, abusive role in order to control, undermine, or sabotage the VDQ’s assertion altogether. It is the articulation of constant discursive fragmentation and coalescence, though, that clears the way for productive discourse and deeper understanding of how meaning is shaped in technologized environments.

The critic is drawn into the exchange, but then actively sets out to manipulate it by disrupting the VDQ’s set of values that prescribe her own sense of decency. While the “real” author of the video seems relatively protected, and somewhat removed from the act by placing an avatar—or alter-ego—to perform symbolically on her behalf, the virtually unmonitored spaces and channels tend to relax the stricter codes by which rhetors and their audiences abide, which then undermine the defense of VDQ anonymity. When the displays are published, audiences are implicated in the potential effectiveness of a rhetorical display—or the failure of it. The critiques these performances generate add a provocative dimension to the rhetorical act that may even contradict the desired type of interaction, as audiences enact a degree of entitlement not only as co-authors of the exchange between themselves and the VDQ, but also as co-authors of the VDQ herself and the performance. The rhetorical power of the video, as the following examples illustrate, is underscored by the quality of commentary directed toward the VDQ. This rhetoric of display has a dialectic
dimension to it—or a possible one—because we see plainly how hypersexuality is used to invite, encourage, and provoke a response; while the critique is obviously intended to influence the videographer’s choice to remove the video or let it remain. Despite having set a standard for commentary on her videos, the content of comments 5MANAGEMENT155 receives illustrates a virtual disregard for what she has established as acceptable codes of interaction:

you pretty damn sexy mah

BAD ASS FUCKIN' VID!! i LOVE THE FX, YO!!! LOVE THE WAY U DO IT LIKE DAT!!

shawty, where u at? I wanna grind dat up like coffee then beat it down like Ali!

Commenters also actively attempt to manipulate issues of authenticity by applying what I refer to as orthographic shibboleths—that is, they perform creolized language features (such as tonal semantics and culturally specific idiomatic references) in writing that can possibly be used to critique or compliment the VDQ directly:

yo my gurl ur fukin greeeezy you bom bom bom bloodclawt sell off
yah fuk ...drop dead my gurl fukkkkkkkkkkkkkkkkkkkkkkkkkkkkkk
kkkk!!!!

ENERGY MASH UP DI PLACE SELLOFF

These somewhat unambiguous comments make use of both African American Vernacular English (AAVE) and Creolized English (CE) features. And of course, not all of the commentary is directed to the VDQ, although the content of the video does initiate an
exchange; some commenters engage in lateral dialogue with fellow viewer-commenters, referring to the video, both the performer and the technology used, only tangentially:

whud song is on here?

nice whining btw.. :39

very nice40

nice vid effects what software did u use?41

Deh chune is from Turbulence one of deh top DJ dem from JA called Notorious42

Though such exchanges make use of linguistic features similar to J and B’s exchange above, I think the dynamics of interaction between VDQs and their critics differ significantly. Judith Butler questions whether speech acts fail to fully constitute the subject in spite of their interpellative nature. According to Butler, even though these speech acts successfully constitute a subject through discursive means, what is to ensure the resulting constitution is “final and effective?” “Is there,” she asks, “a possibility of disrupting and subverting the effects produced by such speech, a faultline exposed that leads to the undoing of this process of discursive constitution?”43 The rhetorical masque affords such a possibility for the VDQ and the critic by clearing a discursive space—a digital analogue of the yard—that would suspend the hard power of clashing interpellations and make the exchange less taboo. These videos are not pornographic, but due to the power of language and language users to construct meaning, these performances are far too easily construed as vulgar, further adding to the perception of the black dancing body as taboo hypersexual object. The irony, of course, is the fact that some of the commentary blurs the lines of acceptability. In a reversal of roles, the commenter (now fully empowered and authorized to denigrate the video in
creole) engages in a concentrically designed/targeted performance of offensive speech: making the video (VDQ) the object and (along with the audience) listener. The potential insult or “injury” to the dancer, then, is not only meant as an attempt to place a mark on the body as offensive (that is, vulgar, slack, dirty, sexy, fat, hot, etc.) but also to demarcate or delimit what the video, the body in it, or the owner of it are able to do. This can often come in the form of a compliment.

The quality of a compliment that can easily be inverted and read as an insult speaks, of course, to the ironic nature of vernacular discourse in general. For example, the first comment, by breezz00, can be translated roughly as “Great job!” To achieve some degree of authenticity, breezz00 issues a series of features, which range from a textual representation of an oral gun salute—“bom bom bom”—to tonal semantic terms that are intended to mimic and authenticate breezz00’s awe and appreciation:

“fukkkkkkkkkkkkkkkkkkkkkkkkkkkkkkkk.”

Additionally, breezz00 includes the expletive “bloodclawt,” a reference to sanitary pads and menstruation that is used interchangeably to express surprise or anger. The double meaning of the bloodclawt—that is, blood cloth—does not constitute anything particularly egregious, nor does it betray breezz00’s veiled attempt at identification and compliment to be an act of claiming superiority over the body in motion. Critics thrive on this kind of ambiguity because they can mask insult and injury as compliment.

By extension, the potential injury to the newly reconstituted audience—that is, the VDQ, along with passive readers—hinges upon the success of this reversal and the reestablishment of discursive hierarchy from which the critic can be most effective, and the VDQ least empowered to challenge what the critic attempts to set as taboo, which then
depends on a consequent choice to be offended or affected (that draws upon the practiced ethos). According to Butler (reading Mari Matsuda), “[t]he listener is understood to occupy a social position or to have become synonymous with that position, and social positions themselves are understood to be situated in a static and hierarchical relation to one another. By virtue of the social position he or she occupies, then, the listener is injured as a consequence of that utterance. The utterance also enjoins the subject to reoccupy a subordinate social position.”

On the other hand, the potential offense that video commentary can cause is duly catered for and more accurately constitutes the tradition in conversation with innovative means of transmission. For instance, about a month after posting her video, “NO INTRO NEEDED,” 5MANAGEMET155 responds to the overt objectification and suggestive violence of the comments that get posted by biggrayray11, babyboi3000, and LordBlacknWild to her video, “tek time badbwouy”—that is, “take your time, bad boy.” Though it is not clear if the statement was directed to any singular commenter, the warning suggests that. The videos posted by members like mslikklebit and flexi07 similarly illustrate the dissonance of intent and interpretation, as well as their attempts to manage that dissonance. For instance, while mslikklebit maintains a greater degree of anonymity on her YouTube channel (opting to direct viewers to her MySpace.com website, which advertises her professional occupation as a dancer), she does offer justifications for the quality and content of some of her videos, which range from boredom to insomnia to practice. These seem to bear the rhetorical intent of deflecting harsh criticism and critical efforts to define who the VDQ really is.

By contrast, flexi07 is more forthcoming than mslikklebit, doing more to make a differentiation between her personal identity and the avatar she posts online. On her
First of all im not much of a dancer...Lol everybody keeps saying what are you talking about but honestly i do all this for fun. To be honeast i didnt really know how to dance so im mainly doing these videos to see my progress and to get some critism (about my dancing not about my character) my dancing has nothing to do with my character i dnt wlk around half naked of the street lol.How i dance in my videos is basically how i dance in a club and i dont care what anyone has to say about it. I was born in Jamaica and came to england when i was very very young so sooo slightly diluted but i will still tell you where to go suck out if you come pon di page and try start up stupid internet arguements i dont have time for haters! you will be blocked, deleted, cursed out etc. Im here to have a lil fun and share my talents Hopefully people can pick up a few moves or learn somthing off me or maybe i can learn sumthin and i would like to here some feedback off some Jamaicans Cos back in the day i didnt know how to dance and i wanna make sure ive got it on lock. Any requests or comments is cool got to here the good with the bad just not the negative vibes. 

The justification for the videos that flexi07 provides may lead the casual reader to categorize her intentions along the lines of self-improvement, or even a public service, where others can “pick up a few moves.” In the event that the reader is not so inclined, there is a
degree of preemptive posturing. Similar to mslikklebit, flexi07 draws on the rhetorical effectiveness of carnivalesque implication—the masque—through which the audience is deterred from harsh insults and “negative vibes” by being invited to provide a certain type of commentary. Contrary to the fact that flexi07 purports not to “care what anyone has to say about it,” there is an attempt to protect herself from the attacks of a hostile audience by applying a set of recognizable discursive masqueing moves. For instance, she takes a self-deprecating stance as an amateur with much to learn, despite the accolades she has received from “everybody.” This establishes her as a humble, though qualified, dancehall queen who bears no ill intention. The humility flexi07 introduces herself with is shortlived as she takes a more aggressive tone, which is directed to a specific segment of her viewing audience: “haters,” who have already set a precedent for offensive commentary.

As a supplement to her disdain, and to the potential responses to her own attack on haters, flexi07 reminds her audience of the bold Caribbean heritage that she maintains, deploying a few shibboleths to demonstrate her authenticity. To preempt the likely possibility that commentary for self-improvement would be outweighed by persistent misogynistic claims on her digitized body, flexi07 code-switches to perform her own authenticity and issue a warning to her potential audience, promising to tell them “where to go suck out if you come pon di page and try start up stupid internet arguments.”

In response to textual attacks, the VDQ asserts herself as a body on offense, making the explicit implication that the attempts at domination will be resisted. And it is the refusal to comply with the attempts to silence that places the VDQ squarely in place to trouble, critically address, and enact hypotheses of subjectivity that go against the sensibilities of the status quo. And thus, the great irony of the contemporary carnival narrative as allowance and sanctioned revelry is challenged by the ethos of the carnivalesque rhetor who uses
technology to provoke the “repressed” fantasies of the audience. In doing so, the VDQ evokes the kind of critical dialogue that makes the carnivalesque such a central framing device for Caribbean rhetorical tradition. By forcing the viewer to address the false repression, rhetors encounter the exercise of choice that performer and audience can make, with the ultimate objective of operating along the lines of a carnivalesque agenda.

These masqued articulations, therefore, bridge the performative and illocutionary (perhaps even reversing the latter or turning it on its head), in that they not only make a statement of implied intention and positionality of the rhetors involved in the exchange, but they also confirm the idea that “saying is also a doing” that produces consequences. In other words, when the decision is made to post the videos, the performance has a perlocutionary character added onto it. They do not, in fact, shed the illocutionary (the dance is still the dance, so to speak), but implicate the audience more deeply in the performance, thus drawing them into conversation, compliment, critique, or abuse.

The VDQ is not only an innocuous avatar, but also a figure that employs the rhetorical masque through the strategic application of anonymity or pseudonymity. And since only a target search keeps her hidden from a wider viewing public, and since 89 percent of Internet users use search engines for information, it is only a matter of time before the VDQ comes out of hiding and is actually broadcast to a global audience. Public opinion cannot satisfactorily be inferred from this particular social activity. But by opening up the expression and exchange, the public is given the opportunity to observe alternative discursive strategies, or “newer ways to mean,” which rely on the VDQ’s negotiation of critical opinion. Performer and critic both engage in the potentially public sharing of internally persuasive (or generally unpublished/unbroadcast/vernacular internal persuasive) discourse.
The rhetorical masque of self-representation and anonymity that are central to the
carnivalesque help create complicated assertions of Caribbean identity online: the nature of
online environments further emphasizes the unpredictability of the roles performers and
audiences have, the nature of their interactions, and the effects; and the temporal “social
structure” of the technological medium derigidifies the possibilities for domination and (it is
hoped), simultaneously, reinstitutes possibilities for assertion and the practice of
empowerment that is reflective of the carnivalesque. The masque serves two major purposes
for power assertion: first, the statement is generalized to represent more than just the
performer but a particular type or ethos to which the performer subscribes; second, the
move to be anonymous, rather than dispossess the performer of any agency, actually
reinforces it by keeping the audience at enough of a distance to deflect and manage personal
attacks. But because the rhetor and audience are bound up in the act as part of an ongoing
narrative, anonymity does not fully protect a rhetor from the potential repercussions of an
act that unfolds for an audience already implicated in the consequences of that act. Neither
does it absolve the critic. Rather, it orders the discursive activity.

What the VDQs are trying to prove is less important than what they, through
demonstration and subsequent interpretation, actually end up persuading their audience of.
Intentions, in light of the critique they generate, are secondary to their importance as causal
agents in public contexts. This is not to posit anonymity as an ideal mask for the ethos of the
performer or the critic, nor to suggest that either is inherently bound to abide by vernacular
codes by using an alias. Rather, anonymity here is viewed as an option—a deliberate
choice—that rhetors make in order to participate in the act. It would, indeed, be a slippery
slope to presume that through anonymity the author is excised altogether from the
production of the video, its distribution, or its effect. On the contrary, publishing and self-
representation in these videos encourage alternative readings of the gaze and of the gazed upon—that is, the VDQ’s manipulation of the audience’s enactment of that gaze in the construction of the rhetorical masque. The critic is contemporaneously implicated in the textual and rhetorical effectiveness of the videos the VDQ produces. The masque of anonymity, however, also confirms the critic’s manipulation of access to the VDQ, which reifies the constructed nature of the stereotype.

These paradoxical factors help frame the rhetorical masque that the VDQ uses to negotiate attempts by some critics to frame, define, and control her. By authoring and posting the video, the VDQ manipulates the reconstructed image of herself as a hypersexual object in order to make rhetorical assertions of her own power and self-definition within the constraints and contexts created by the image. It thus becomes possible to discern more closely how these factors function as discourse, rather than unilateral delivery that carries no effect.

There is no question that as one of the fundamental markers of identity, dance is more than just the movement of limbs but an expression of embodied wisdom that the repetition of effective vernacular events throughout history provides to the dancer. That is to say, there is a definite process of interpellation that the VDQ responds to, which can be synthesized as the tradition. Similarly, there are elements of that same tradition that authorize censure by critics (or a critical audience) in public spaces, who also rely on interpellation to control the behavior of those members who subscribe to it. This confluence of roles places the rhetors at potential loggerheads, with provisional forms of interpellation—deployed by VDQ, critic, and audience—that can threaten to cancel out the other if not for the situatedness that the tradition provides. Thus, even though the critique does bear abusive tones that can set discursive parameters (of language and meaning) that influence how the
VDQ is constructed and engaged with, the VDQ’s own masqued negotiations demonstrate self-assertion that disrupts the power of the abuse. There is the presumption that she is not only beset by language that defines her person, but that she also has the means, through masqueing, to handle how that language is used on her. Thus, while there is no denying the possible negative consequences that result from the speech of the critic, there is the equal possibility that the VDQ’s assertion ends up working.

The initial consequences make the performance perlocutionary, a characteristic the commentaries themselves assume, reflect, and complicate, as they develop over time into complex interactions with the video (as a stand-in or body-double for the performer's person) and with other commenters. It is this process that allows the videos to serve as lightning rods for the distribution of exigence that drive the engagement of different participants and what they construct and contribute to the effectiveness of a given text.

**REVISING MISREPRESENTATION**

According to Henry Jenkins, “convergence” involves “technological, industrial, cultural, and social changes in the ways media circulates within our culture…[and which] include the flow of content across multiple media platforms…and the migratory behavior of media audiences who will go almost anywhere in search of the kind of entertainment experiences they want.”\(^{50}\) What this phenomenon also enables is the kind of cultural convergence in New Media contexts that is essential for productive Caribbean rhetorical activity, successful deliberation, and social action. In Jenkins’s view, this “participatory culture” operates in contravention to more passive forms of media interaction.\(^{51}\) From the point of view of the carnivalesque, the notion of social activity having an implicating effect on the performer (that is, saying *and*/*as* doing) is a fundamental tenet of rhetoric.
To this point in the chapter, Caribbean rhetorical activity online can be described as *technologically enhanced cultural commentary* that recognizes the limits to access but also builds upon available opportunities for participatory practice. Such activity thereby influences the effectiveness of what audiences see and read as the making of an audio-visual-physical-text. From the vantage point of this kind of technologized activity, we are better prepared to discuss the implications of key themes in Caribbean discourse—such as access and representation—that produce and support agency among practitioners. It is my feeling, however, that even though Caribbean rhetorical activity in digital environments can do important work as public discourse in ways more formal and private methods may not be able to, the spaces available can sometimes be too limiting. In certain contexts, the limitations of online assertion and interaction may serve to exclude Caribbean folk than to publicize a broad Caribbean sensibility, providing yet another instance in which the probability of rhetorical success is weighed against what we can readily observe online. In lieu, therefore, of greater participation in a Pan-Caribbean vision, there are numerous texts available for users to develop important forms of identification, interaction, and critique.

Ideally, if the space provided for an activity were itself neutral, then where would the values come from, if not from the users of that framework? This assumes that *how* we read depends more basically on the set of values that exist *a priori*, which are then brought to bear in the activity, and which influence the reception of certain relevant texts. In other words, just as computers connect us to the world, our worldviews shape the scope of work computers are able to do for us. The rhetor encodes-symbolizes in order to express; the audience symbolizes-encodes in order to apprehend, receive, and accept. The implicit hope is that the symbols themselves are shared or are, in fact, intertwined at critical moments for material effect. This is not always the case, particularly when one’s stake in a discourse is
muted or misconstrued as a result of unequal power relations, such as we see with the
general ownership of media and technology providers. Some users of the space—the
Internet, in this case—typically become “users” out of a kind of privilege.

Part of the danger Caribbeans face, in terms of misrepresentation, comes from
technologies that are used on us, rather than by us. So even as Caribbean people are
displayed in recognizable terms, stereotypes notwithstanding, the fact that we do not fully
control the spaces where we communicate can lead to troubling effects. But the situation is
not a hopeless one. In the 1990s, for example, the comedy sketch show, In Living Color,
featured Damon Wayans and other members of the cast as a “typical” Jamaican family
named the Hanleys who had multiple jobs. The skits, named “Hey Mon,” drew on the
stereotyped idiom as a form of mockery and a disturbing reification of the tensions between
Caribbeans and African Americans that have soured relations between the two groups for
more than a hundred and fifty years. Similar contemporary opportunities for inquiry,
analysis, and critique exist online in a number of genres.\textsuperscript{52} There is, in fact, no shortage of
usable texts for counterrhetorical analysis or argumentative rhetoric on social themes
relevant to Caribbeans. Aligned somewhat with the tradition of using felt-covered muppets
as a rhetorical mask for controversial commentary, the dubiously named “Jamaican Elmo”
offers little in the way of novelty; by this, I mean the portrayal of negative stereotypes of
language and culture, and the performer’s interpretation of Jamaican homophobia (directed
at Ernie and Bert) make an appearance, despite the fact that the performer seemed to be
performing an entirely idiosyncratic, and absurd, interpretation of “Jamaicanness.”\textsuperscript{53}

In 2006, Malibu Rum launched its “Seriously Easygoing” commercial campaign of
videos in multiple media formats, which asked viewers what life would be like if “we
Caribbeans took life as seriously as the rest of the world,” the response being that we would
never have “invented” Malibu Rum.\textsuperscript{54} A series of short films featured Caribbean non-actors, exploring the hypothetical scenarios that followed some recognizable themes: gridlock, road rage, and parking spaces. Even more serious themes included the obsession with haute couture and winter collections, ultraselective dress codes (no doubt based on the criteria of the in couture), and military-type training in order to “serve” as fishermen. The videos, which went viral within days of their release, obviously present a troubling constellation of stereotypes/misconceptions of the Caribbean and its people, what they look like, sound like, and do. “Easygoing” is used here as a synonym for simple-minded and poor. Some got the joke. Others did not.

More important, these videos, now out of the hands of Malibu and redistributed online, blend normative discourses with vernacular ones and provide an opportunity to discuss phenomena of “convergence” with respect to Caribbean representation. We did not “invent” Malibu or any other rum, but are instead shaped by the technologies of enslavement, colonialism, bureaucracy, and industrialization. These technologies are, incidentally, the same ones that helped invent the Caribbean as the rum-producing capital of the world and its image as a paradise. What the videos inadvertently describe, however hypothetically, are some of the fundamental issues negotiated by Caribbeans online. Beyond the absurdity of the image of Caribbean people dressed in rags and purported to be the “inventors” of a multimillion-dollar corporation, is the cultural convergence that occurs and allows us to view examples of the masque in practice. Thematically, though, they highlight some of the rhetorical dangers faced at these convergences, placing the viability of Caribbean Rhetoric under strain, but also demanding its effectiveness through strategic and critical (counter)practice.
Such participation is a resonant feature of technology and Caribbean rhetoric alike. The threat of looming passivity that has resulted from fragmentation and distance from home communities, even those we make home, can be addressed with an agenda for participatory culture that encourages and creates collective intelligence—or collective meaning-making—for enhanced media power among users. Retooled for application in Caribbean contexts, the practice of rhetorical convergence quite simply allows more to get done on behalf of community (online and otherwise) and by members of it who previously had not been able because of lack of access, skepticism, or straight resistance. The development of an online ethic that encourages belonging on a global scale is key.

In terms of the Caribbean carnivalesque, online activity, as an opportunity for discursive implication, enables rhetorical convergence of a sort somewhat different from Jenkins’s version: it fosters rhetorical invention by encouraging the reclamation and redeployment of the familiar (that is, the combination of various recognizable symbols).  

CONCLUSION

Caribbean rhetorical activity online still occupies something of a middle space, existing between the inner circle of the singular, personal reflectivity of an individual cariblogger and the wider outer rings of a multivoiced, multidimensional global community—or, between formative and normative categories of control. For the critical new media citizen, accountability, ever an issue in deliberative rhetorical activity, becomes even more central when a stake and urgency are not only recognized but also enacted by way of authors taking “critical responsibility” for their published work. It is not my intention, therefore, to excuse or absolve any particular rhetor, nor to advocate inordinately for one or the other. On the contrary, I want to suggest that, as representative types in the larger context
of the carnivalesque, the old talker, cariblogger, and video dancehall queen each has an implicit responsibility to represent the general Caribbean Ethos more accurately than the singular type. They require neither excuse nor absolution in the performance of the carnivalesque. What remains to be seen, however, is the degree to which these performances embody criticism or activism in public over time.

Perhaps the most exciting aspect of these phenomena and the discussion I have attempted here will be obsolete technologically but will still maintain some forms of continuity through the constancy of tradition in practice that would make use of the available means in ever more productive ways. For now, though, Caribbean users should not simply be content to take for granted the modes of inclusion and exclusion that help define a presence online and provide some meaningful degree of access, even though that access may be difficult to achieve and negotiate. Anyone can browse, and anyone listening or reading can have access to the information divulged—or at least they should. The likelihood of this access being transformative, however, seems to rely equally on trust as on fact, on whether one can take as authentic the information shared from the rhetor, then share it as authentically. The emphasis is on the delivery, the authenticity of the performance that (we convince ourselves) resonates deeply, even if we read it on a screen. It is, in essence, a relationship that relies on the ethos of the agent (the rhetor), the quality of the message, and the fusion of those two in the practice (performance) of Caribbean rhetorical activity. This dynamic maintains the relational and rhetorical ties in a community and is the framework upon which an enduring and evolving narrative is constructed. Content is replaceable, ever changing, and can often be rendered moot in the broader scope or among a diverse audience with equally diverse interests and techniques of discursive engagement.
Caribbean communities are still in the process of social and democratic integration, online and off. At the same time, there is a collective, vernacular understanding that “[t]hey do not (or they no longer) conceive of a ‘mainstream culture’ outside of what they themselves have to offer to human civilization. They see themselves as part-determiners of that mainstream and not as outsiders to be let in,” resisting the full pressure of what Jennifer Helfand calls the “univernacular.” This perspective not only suggests a modification of the limbo sensibility to fit a more global worldview; it also signifies an attempt to negotiate within seemingly non-negotiable spaces.

In the digital yard, the constancy and reliability of the rhetor provides social cohesiveness that is as flexible as it is grounded. The subsequent activity is a recursive expression of a people’s resistance and creativity, an example of functional, critical, and rhetorical literacy. It is, furthermore, the expression of a people’s attempts to change, redefine, and reframe the parameters of their narrative—both individual and collective—instead of their having no choice but to jettison one narrative for another. Caribbean rhetorical activity, put another way, is symbolic and material, a rhetorical practice reflective of a people’s extended desire for self-determination and subjectivity. The so-called late adopters, seen one way, are coming after much of the programming foundation has been well laid and made more user-friendly. Seen another way, and perhaps more accurately, is their manipulation of technologies that are more enabling. The fact is that they (we) do not have to be burdened with highly technical programs, but can, instead, be free to participate in the ongoing evolution of digital environments and, thus, have a hand in what that evolution means and where it takes us.

The point, ultimately, is that no rhetoric is hardwired for activism. But questions of how the activity already extant can be turned toward *praxis*, how it can all be put to
productive use in myriad environments, and what trajectory will need to be addressed as part of an agenda in democratic participation. Assuming the message is authentic and that the rhetor has no personal stake in changing the facts of the message, we can turn our attention more fully to the delivery of the message and the channels that either enable or inhibit its movement through a community. The true potential of Caribbean rhetorical activity in *internetworked public hyperspaces* will be realized when such activity as intimate, insular communication broadens to include deliberate (or deliberations on) representation and conscious expression. The solidarity that Caribbean rhetorical activity can provide is meant for all the members who are included in the distribution—or, for those who choose to include themselves in it.
CONCLUSION; OR, LAGNIAPPE FOR THE CARNIVALESQUE

Looking forward and looking back, nah.
You could finish [it] now.
Rene Farrow, Frankie’s Bar, April 4, 2009

Sing from your own hymnbook.

This dissertation is an exploration of the structure, practice, and application of Caribbean rhetoric. It is, in essence, an attempt not only to sing from the hymnbook of my own Caribbean tradition, but also to demonstrate some of the lengths Caribbean people go to so we can compose hymns of our own—on our own terms and in our own terms—for the work of self-assertion, negotiation, and service. Certain limitations inhere when doing a project such as this. To begin with, I have not attempted to provide a catalog of Caribbean Rhetoric to which one can easily turn to any singular aspect and indentify it as definitive practice. A project that seeks to identify activities and modes will fall short of the full hundred; who uses them, the circumstances under which they are deployed, and the range of outcomes must be considered separately for clarity’s sake. No attempt was made to cover the vastness and depth of Caribbean culture, or fully account for its rhetoric. This is not to undermine the project in its current form, however. It, too, is a rhetorical act—my participation in the carnivalesque, my own display and re-presentation of Caribbean discursive practices. As a result, I think some of the more obvious aspects of Caribbean rhetorical activity will be easier to detect. For example, one may start to become a bit more attuned to instances of wordplay, circumlocution, and double entendre as a result of the partial taxonomy provided in Chapter Two; the mechanisms of the mas rhetorica may gain
traction and viability as a way of reading non-Caribbean texts; the emancipatory discourse in the calypso music will be even more apparent; and the politics of representation online may broaden to include the opinions and critique of Caribbean folk.

Also, what will not be in doubt is the fact that there is such a thing as Caribbean Rhetoric. What will be clear, as well, is that the Caribbean carnivalesque, as I have laid it out in this project, *should not be relegated to the enactment of festivals observed in the streets at sanctioned times; and even when these rhetorical acts are observed in the streets, the rhetorical intentions inherent in what is being observed can easily be misinterpreted if the critical lens of the Caribbean carnivalesque is not put to use.* These are some of the key tenets that push the project forward, demanding the continuous application of the carnivalesque in different spheres, as well as a deeper understanding of the scope of rhetorical masquing on the part of Caribbean practitioners. A framework has been constructed. But even though I have identified key aspects of Caribbean rhetoric, and have shown examples and instantiations of it as extant practice, the scope of rhetorical work I envision for and with Caribbean people would make this effort inadequate if I were to end here. As such, this dissertation is not only an exploration, but also a staging point for the materialization of future work. Materialization of the carnivalesque in contemporary times, like the mastery of any one of the traditional modes, hinges on a single criterion: practice. The practice of looking backward and forward at the same time to revise aspects of the past and equip ourselves for changes to come; the practice of critical inquiry in real contexts for real effects; and the practice of a vision of democratic participation that is shared across oceans and differences in the face of debilitating hegemony.

Together, these points of practice have been my signposts for navigating this project and making sense of the carnivalesque. More important, they have helped me forge a path to
further inquiry. It is fitting, therefore, that I draw upon these practices to underscore the depth and significance of the Caribbean carnivalesque; the relevance and timeliness of its deployment in American contexts and its capacity to implicate the audience in the rhetorical act; and the vast range of transformative outcomes acts like these permit.

LAS LAP

What is the value of intuition without inquiry? On the parkway that day in 1999, I had quickly decided that the time for critical reflection was not in the midst of the bacchanal. Now, ten years later, the memory is still a good one—if also a bit sad, for all the carnivals I have missed since then cannot be gotten back. And while it is tempting to remain in that moment, replaying the nostalgia like a mas, it is not enough to remember it. Nostalgia that only turns inward yields little that can be useful for a project in rhetoric—it is selfish. The carnivalesque, as a rhetorical perspective that I have described in this dissertation, cannot only provide a nostalgic view of a people and their practices; on the contrary, it also has to be an attempt to move past the inexplicable sense of loss and the cognitive dissonance of a past that can too easily forestall pragmatic approaches to consequence by coloring experience solely in romantic, purist, or primitivistic terms. That memory of myself in blue—with fork and horn and tail—is a nagging question that asks what merit there is in remembering if action is not forthcoming. It was a call to which I have attempted here a partial response.

Partial, because I have not explored the full arc of the mas rhetorica that I discussed in Chapter Three, but each of the phases—Bolo’s unbridled resistance, JoJo’s epiphanic moment of self-assertion, Alford’s negotiation of limbo, and Aldrick’s understanding of service—seem more familiar to me now that I have attempted to plot some of the key points
on that arc. There can be no promises made, for, as we know, expectation will often be undone by experience, despite our preparations for what we think they may bring. This can lead to disappointment and disillusionment, but also to inventiveness—or, as the canon suggests, invention. Despite the obvious limitations, then, I continue to rely on the traditional practice of taking and making opportunities in ways consistent with the carnivalesque. This is especially so when the probability of meaningful outcomes holds so much promise.

**IN THE CLASS**

The possible repercussions of these liberatory activities lead me inevitably to consider whether there could be such a thing as a carnivalesque pedagogy. This involves efforts to design and provide more equitable instruction in writing for Caribbean students, many of whom fit into the category of “non-traditional” (when they are anything but!). I have argued explicitly for the existence and practice of Caribbean rhetoric from the very beginning—thus, by extension, I imagine a pedagogy that is an alternative to some of the current debilitating approaches that seem to elide notions of awareness, repertoire, and access that rely specifically on a Caribbean rhetorical tradition. I envision a pedagogy that will encourage the development of productive composition based on methods students bring with them to class: the beauty, potential, and rhetorical power of their representative rhetorical features. In this, I do not think I am alone.

My rationale is a fairly straightforward one: since the carnivalesque serves as a means of constructing Caribbean people’s encounters with the world, it follows that Caribbean students’ compositions would, to a certain extent, reflect the capacity of carnivalesque expression to contribute to knowledge-making from the Caribbean point of view. It is possible, for instance, to draw upon the structural and thematic features and their various
instantiations in this project for such a purpose. In other words, I consider the possibility of a carnivalesque pedagogy as one that will systematically interrogate the specific composing practices of Caribbean students. In this sense, the carnivalesque as pedagogical practice would not be viewed merely as an abstract metaphor, but as a practice—as the dramatic reenactment of social opinion in different contexts, in writing, that grows out of an established rhetorical tradition. Activation of the carnivalesque as a practice in composition could work as a traditional counterweight to debilitating attitudes—say, of total failure or the absolute insurmountability of an examination.

In Summer 2008, I had the opportunity to put some of my provisional ideas into practice. I taught two intensive writing workshops at Medgar Evers College of the City University of New York (CUNY) in Central Brooklyn. I was to prepare students who had not passed the hour-long CUNY Assessment Test (CAT) in Writing to possibly retest at the end of four weeks. Students in both courses continued to be haunted by many of the conservative language ideologies (and their racist overtones) that were discussed in Chapter Two; like many of us, they were taught to consider the language they speak to be substandard, improper, and broken. They had, however, come well armed to engage in one of the many battles they would have to fight in order to be taken seriously. Despite the conflicts in curriculum and policy they encountered, there was an unflinching resistance to being viewed as basic people whose “basic” writing reflected fundamental deficiencies in language, culture, personality, and worldview. I raised the question a few years ago at the Conference on College Composition and Communication, based on my own experiences as a basic writer, English tutor, and adjunct instructor at a CUNY college. And while I have not fully fleshed out the intricacies of a pedagogy that is specifically “carnivalesque,” I am reasonably confident that there could be one. This is not the place for an extensive
discussion of a theory of carnivalesque pedagogy, but I think there is a place for it as Composition scholars continue to grapple with ways to serve the students in their courses.

The dire need for this specific pedagogical approach was compounded when, in an attempt to liaise with the college’s senior reader for some insight on what pedagogy among mostly Caribbean students looked like (as opposed to what it was in theory), she said, “They’d be fine, once they stop making those stupid errors.”

“How stupid errors?” I asked.

“Yeah, you know… Grammar and stuff.” The senior reader, despite not being trained as a compositionist, was directly responsible for deciding who would pass or fail the CAT based on the quality of composition produced, which depended on nothing other than the absence or presence of “stupid” errors. Such an enduring attitude is a threat to the enactment of rhetorical power among CUNY’s disenfranchised students, further accentuating the fact that much of the contemporary discussions in the field of Composition have failed to trickle down to some of the lower academic echelons.

To the extent that the spoken word, the written word, and the dancing body constitute texts that are deployed to foster a sense of identification between like-minded group members through coded practices, they can be perceived as rhetorical performances that are masqueraded for the realization of actual material consequences (compositions, specifically). This, I believe, can also be applied in/to the classroom. Let me add, though, that there is no silver bullet, not even in the carnivalesque—on route to the democratization of one’s pedagogy, there is no end to the set of permutations such a practice endures and the tragic consequences these permutations may often yield. I was able to use it as a lens for examining how students reconceptualize their approaches to composition, and how they make use of (rather than discard) what they know. So the promise is there. But although I
practiced a pedagogy inspired by the carnivalesque from a fairly stable theoretical perspective, with encouraging results, what came out in the wash of actual practice was that there still remains significant work to be done.

L’Union Fait La Force

Inauguration Day. Washington, DC. 2009. There I was, standing in the middle of the Washington Mall covered from head to toe. My costume: jeans and hiking shoes, a wool hat, blue winter coat, and a wool scarf around my neck. The day was cold, but not too cold, and the band of strangers—shouting Obama!—had been slow to disperse. Moving slowly back toward the Reflecting Pool, they gathered spontaneously in large mixed groups to, for as long as possible, make the day last. I, too, would join them—wining, chipping, sniffling, talking, laughing. It is a familiar story. There I was, indistinguishable in the crowd of millions, my individuality utterly inconsequential, which is the case with crowds. Up close, in the midst, differences mattered, but in ways I did not expect and had only imagined. One group consisted of Haitian musicians—maybe Haitian Americans?—who spoke with each other in their distinctive Kreyol but played long improvised verses of “We Shall Overcome,” the anthem of the Civil Rights Movement and non-violent protest. Their homemade drums and trumpets, beaten and blared. Familiar. Then it occurred. This event was a carnival somewhat like the ones I have recalled, imagined, and missed over the years. But it bears some critical differences that are worth highlighting here. Given the opportunity to cohere that day, for instance, we seemed to cohere with a distinct rhetorical purpose that saturated the entire celebration. We were performing, in no uncertain terms, an explicit agenda for renewing America’s promise and practice of freedom, justice, and equality.
I must be realistic: all performances remain subject to hegemonic views of the world, and we were no exception. At the same time, however, the spread of homogenizing discourses has prompted the development or reemergence of counterpractices and counterdiscourses like the carnivalesque that resist homogeny through the practice of difference. Among these practitioners, “difference” is the familiar, and encroaching hegemony the alien or unfamiliar thing. The relevance of self-assertion is inherent in performances like this one and all the ones I have laid out in this project, the carving out of available spaces for negotiation between traditional and mainstream discourses, the persistence of prophetic work, and the achievement of critical consciousness. One of the objectives of rhetoric as I see it working in this project is not so much to preserve the identity of a Caribbean people, as it is to gain an understanding of that group’s traditional practices and its means of participation in other discourses and contexts—especially hegemonic ones. The challenge, beyond simply pointing out differences, is actually understanding them, working out how they can be approached to the benefit of every member of every group. Facing the challenge, I think, is part of what it means to experiment with democracy. It may even be part of what it means to be Caribbean American.

Democratic impulses in Caribbean rhetoric bespeak a desire to exist and be recognized as an important part of the American citizenry—a fact that is further underwritten by the choice many have made to be or become American. Democracy is organic and multifaceted, rather than merely political, a fact that no doubt contributes to its complexity and the problems we encounter in defining it. For my purposes here, I consider democracy to have the following characteristics: it ensures the right to be heard as members of the American citizenry and helps legitimize the collective expressions of an immigrant social group in the public sphere; it provides access to policy change (the act of voting, for
example); it is not limited to native or naturalized citizens, but to all the members of a nation, even if that nation is made up of distinct communities. Democracy, then, should function as a means of participating, allowing people to partake in whatever opportunities are available in American society—these include economic, political, and educational opportunities. And in the absence of these opportunities, democracy makes space for subversion, transgression, protest, or acquiescence to take place in the interest of justice at various levels of Caribbean American society—family, community, classroom, and the interstices. It is the manifestations of those rhetorical practices in the society that are viable objects of study.

A viable stand-alone theory for a truly distinct “Caribbean American” vernacular rhetorical activity is yet to be developed. It will take time, of course. But as more Caribbean Americans are born and grow up in America—and, as a consequence, outnumber those originally from other islands—I hope more data will become available for such a study. A vision of such work assumes that those Caribbean Americans will continue to practice recognizably Caribbean aspects of a rhetorical tradition or forge a tradition that can be distinguished for its Caribbean American characteristics. In lieu of this, I will use the Caribbean tradition as a frame for understanding what I consider to be a nascent form of Caribbean American pragmatism. The heart of this pragmatism will be the ongoing effort to establish and maintain a sense of rhetorical identification as members of the same social formation. The conversation of a “Caribbean America,” at this early stage, will tend necessarily to be abstract and theoretical. But this is to be expected. If not to be a red herring, attempts to negotiate changes that take place must be preceded by an understanding of what these activities constitute.
Derek Walcott suggests that “[a] culture…is made by its cities…but not cities in the accepted sense.” But real or not, situated or imagined, aspects of social isolation, integration, and assimilation contribute to the rhetorical situation that is life in America, just as “Being American” and being thought of as “American,” affect the trajectory of a Caribbean rhetorical tradition. And as more native Caribbeans opt not to return to their lands of origin, or see no difference between home in America or in the Caribbean, there is greater need to assert our presence by creating a “city” where we can live and thrive. Suffice it to say, however, that Caribbean rhetoric in America is not the rhetoric of separate islands or tiny enclaves. It is the cohesive force of a growing number of people, functioning as a principal constitutive reason for and direct manifestation of the collective, transnational identity that shapes Caribbean America as a social formation worthy of scholarly attention.

If, as Americans, we are serious about democracy—defined earlier as a means of access to social, civic, political, and educational participation and success—then we must be serious about how we engage all the cultures and identities that coalesce to form a more humane America. To ignore this fact is to contradict the ideals of democratic involvement and the possible advantages of that involvement.

This, of course, assumes that when we petition for “equality” we actually mean it, because tacit in the Caribbean American experience is the desire to be recognized as Caribbean and American—equally—rather than simply be relegated to anonymity or subsumed under a generalized social category, as scientific discourse has been apt to do. If, as scholars, we are serious that language functions as a prominent factor in the recognition, development, and appreciation of distinctive identity in a multicultural society, and that our understanding of language and identity helps direct discourse toward aspects of change, then it is necessary to engage Caribbean American society and rhetorical practice. And if, as
individuals, we are serious about maximizing the capacity of other individuals who live in these communities, then serious attention must be given to the ways they interact—whether in the classroom or the prison, the street corner or the corner store, in Brooklyn or Long Island.

As I have repeatedly stated, the Caribbean carnivalesque operates on an imperative of social commentary that is publicly displayed—for praise or blame, compliment or critique. In contemporary times, it involves the recognition of a rhetorical imperative that emerges out of the circumstances of everyday life and sustains Caribbean people in our encounter with the constraining effects of mainstream discourse and institutions. The event was national, in the sense that it was attended by people in the process of practicing their citizenship as Americans, but on their own terms. Furthermore, the articulation of this imperative in such open terms allows Caribbean people to identify the possibilities and implications that follow from their practice of a rich Caribbean tradition, and to use that tradition as a means of rhetorical negotiation with others. This is what I mean when I refer to invitation; in addition to the opportunity and exigence of the day in general, the space created by the band replicated the dynamics of the calend for a collective attempt at uplift. As we strive for a more democratic America, an America more equal, more safe, more faithful to its promise, I look forward to doing the kind of work that will help deepen our understanding of Caribbean people in American society in a systematic way, and to the greatest effect. The work begins with harboring a working conception of both Caribbean identity and rhetoric—not as the other half of a binary in which opposition is privileged, intersection is downplayed, democratic possibility is displaced by improbability, and the agency and individual experiences of Caribbean people continue to be ignored.
Coda

As a rhetorician, I am obliged to choose contingency over providence. After all, the coalescence was aided by the *zeitgeist* of the main event—the Inauguration of Barack Obama. As a Caribbean rhetorician, I am also compelled to think of how the ordering of particular circumstances and Caribbean people’s characteristic response to them demonstrate the endurance of prophetic sensibilities—the Caribbean Ethos—and whether these sensibilities contribute to (or detract from) a shared sense of democratic deliberation. Despite the sometimes overwhelming limitations we face as Caribbean people, the ritualization and revision of traditional practices—of song, dance, joy, cohesion—enable us to override the tendency to capitulate when situations seem to be at their bleakest. Relying on liberatory aspects of the past, we are able to envision and put into practice the conditions that make forms of liberation probable now. In addition to the management of multiple and often conflicting discourses that can be achieved, there is the constant work that must be carried out to establish, demonstrate, and maintain coalescence among practitioners through the use of similar language, expression, ideology, and other discursive features. Concurrently, the success of these practices relies on the willingness of the audience to be implicated in the performance, such that participation (even persuasion) may occur—from the efforts to understand the strategic deployment of languages in the public sphere to interrogating the readability of marked bodies in the context of a specific Caribbean Ethos.

The Caribbean Ethos continues to evolve and be performed in contemporary times, out of which can be discerned significant rhetorical strategies, from koine and code-switching to tropes that bind these communities together across the region and in the U.S. So when we speak of a Caribbean rhetorical tradition, it must be understood, the performance of historically determined creolized forms cannot be divorced from the fact
that deliberate epistemological positioning and intention often underscore such performance. Speakers speak out of a history—or, more accurately, a memory of history—that has shaped their identity. Identity, in turn, infuses spoken performance with particular rhetorical weight, enabling collective subjectivity to be practiced wherever our numbers are significant enough to support it, or our social conditions serious enough to demand it.

Embedded in every rhetorical exchange is an ethos upon which the conversants rely in order to make their verbal exchange not only comprehensible but meaningful, convincing, familiar, and authentic by using language, style, and worldview in characteristic ways. Ultimately, though, the success of this or any project in Caribbean Rhetoric will be the result of engaged dialogue that occurs at the various points of intersection and flourishes in the context of constructed meanings and events. Through such dialogue, a propagation of exigencies will undoubtedly occur that could help us take into fuller account the social, political, economic, material, spiritual, and linguistic conditions in (and under) which we exist from day to day. Such dialogue may even allow us to become the kind of agents who reevaluate our cultural production in greater numbers for the specific purpose of uplift. Consistent with the tenets of the carnivalesque, this project in Caribbean rhetoric is only the first stage, an introduction to cultural, linguistic, and religious inheritance, interpretation, and expression on the vernacular level. And like the carnivalesque, it acknowledges the trauma of our past but does not remain there.
NOTES

Chapter 1: Introduction; or J’Ouvert for an Agenda

1 The family trope has also been in use for some time and has been used to refer to Caribbean people in general. The image is used, for example, as the chorus of Lord Nelson’s 1982 calypso, *Family* and is a recurring commentary in Earl Lovelace’s 1979 novel *The Dragon Can’t Dance.*

2 The definition of “immigrants,” according to U.S. immigration law as, “persons lawfully admitted for permanent residence in the United States” (Yearbook 4), is complicated by the tendency among nonimmigrants to remain in the U.S. illegally, or by those who gain legal immigration/citizenship status while here.


4 Roberts, *West Indians and Their Language.*

5 Harte, “And Dances with the Daffodils.”

6 Shondel Nero, *Englishes in Contact.*

7 Portes and Rumbaut, in *Immigrant America,* suggest that the 1965 repeal was only partially responsible for high levels of immigration, but makes more sense when taken in conjunction with efforts to escape serious economic hardships in their native countries. However, Matthijs Kalmijn, writing almost a decade earlier, found in “The Socioeconomic Assimilation of Caribbean American Blacks” that immigrants from British Caribbean countries assimilated with greater success than Hispanophone and Francophone immigrants, with later generations outperforming African Americans economically.
This “Second Wave” status seems more colloquial than based in historical fact. Forde reminds us in *Caribbean Americans in New York City* that Caribbeans had been coming to New York, as free persons, since 1656 (6).


12 Scher, “From the Metropole to the Equator,” 45.


15 Cowley, *Carnival, Canboulay, and Calypso*, 72. These are not unique types, of course, having counterparts on every island with a high percentage of emancipated slaves.

16 The need to “re-emancipate” operates as a commentary of the inadequacy of the official gesture of the 1830s. Novelist Earl Lovelace notes that these now former slaves were “emancipated to nothing” because there was no infrastructure in place to support a population that had to provide for itself in a society that had previously taken their labor for free. It was designed as a negative reinforcement, with the condition of enslavement being the better option for survival. The strategy failed.

17 Cudjoe, *Beyond a Boundary*, 176.


21 James, “A New View of West Indian History,” n.p.

22 This notion of a continuum of substantiation that runs between materiality and discourse is developed from a conversation I had with Krista Radeliffe at the Burke Lecture, which
she delivered at The Pennsylvania State University on April 25, 2008. The conversation centered on the basic strategies involved in fostering discourse that include not just critique but blame, and planning past blame, as part of a rhetorical agenda. The continuum is, therefore, a tool for understanding certain theoretical negotiations, not just in terms of the carnivalesque but also in terms of theoretical positions that are transferred and applied (in this case) to issues of Caribbean rhetorical activity. For example, it allows us to understand the compatibility of Fleckenstein and Selber: seeing-functionality, speaking-critical, and living-rhetorical.

Such a breakdown is necessary because of the overwhelming need to acquire an actual sense of belonging.
Chapter 2: Framing a Caribbean Rhetorical Tradition

1 Burke, *Language as Symbolic Action*, 44.

2 Roberts, *West Indians and Their Language*, 16.

3 This is by no stretch an exhaustive survey of Caribbean linguistic features, but it is an example of aspects I have observed in my interactions with Caribbeans from different countries. For a more detailed discussion, see Roberts *West Indians and Their Language*.

4 According to Roberts, sentences such as these can involve as many as four verbs in immediate or close succession.


6 Ibid., 3.

7 Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*, 17-18.


11 Lamming, *In the Castle of My Skin*, 154


14 *A whole set of…people*: many people.

15 *Digging real horrors*: to be “really” deeply bothered by a situation, person, or practice.

16 *Jumbieing*: to bother; to interfere inordinately with; to derail or prevent. Derived from the noun *jumbie*, which is a ghost, especially a bad one.

17 *Taking basket*: to accept unreliable advice; to be fooled, as in the proverbial “taking a basket to hold water.”

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In many Caribbean parties, for example, “Hey Pocky A-way,” by New Orleans funk group The Meters, is often translated as a call, “Hey Fuck Away,” to which the response is usually an emphatic “Haul your mothercunt!”

23 Carter, “Dr. Cassandra.”

24 Ibid.

25 Isaacs, “Night Nurse.”

26 Francisco, “Congo Man.”

27 The song appears on more than a dozen albums between 1965 and 1988.

28 Ibid.

29 Rudder, “Madness.”

30 Manwarren, et al, “Mud Madness.”

31 Ibid.

32 Genesis 3:19.

33 Henry, “In Parliament They Kicksing.”


35 Lovelace, The Dragon Can’t Dance, 63-66.

36 Ibid., 21.

37 James, Caribbean Literature in English, 26-27.

38 Young, “Riding Haas,” 55.

39 Smitherman, Talkin and Testifyin, 104.
40 Ibid.


42 Ibid. The closing exchange in patois appears to be a francophone pronunciation of “Crick? Crack.”

43 Batson, “Caribbean Girl.”


45 Tosh, “Stepping Razor.”

46 De Freitas, “Rollo the Ganja.”

47 Ibid.

48 Lamming, *In the Castle of My Skin*, 181.


50 Garcia et al, “War.”

51 *T’ief f’om t’ief make God smile*: karma, cosmic irony, divine justice. God does not have to expend but so much energy to punish when the actions of the wicked are eventually visited upon them.

52 *Good sense beat obeah*: Sometimes logic is more effective than magic.

53 *When you come a church, bring you own hymn book*: Handle your own affairs. What’s mine is mine, so get your own.

54 *Chop don’t leave mark in water*: As in matters of faith and suspicion, some offenses, though impossible to prove, are equally impossible to refute.

55 *Before face an’ behind back no a one*: What you do in secret is not the same as that which you would do in plain view.

56 *Buckra* (also *bockra*): Metonym. A white man. The plantocracy.
57 Go buckra cow-pen fe count cow, no drink him milk; but when you drink him milk, no count him cow: If you transgress, don’t wait around to get caught. Translation mine. Original in Lawton, “Grammar of the English-Based Jamaican Proverb,” 127.

58 Servant does ease you foot but but you heart: Luxury often comes at too high a price, often one’s own peace of mind. Do for yourself what you can, instead of depending inordinately on others.

59 Cockroach ent have no right in fowl party: Know your place, where you are welcome, and where you are not. Know yourself and where you belong.

56 One day for watchman; one day for t’ief: Have patience. No system is perfect, particularly systems of exclusion. Everybody will have an opportunity, or make one, in due time.

57 Many a manger cow you see a common a bull mumma: We all come from the same place, despite the power differentials that get constructed later on. Translation mine. Original in Lawton, “Grammar of the English-Based Jamaican Proverb,” 127.

62 Corbeaux: A vulture.

63 You have to play dead to catch corbeaux alive: When all else fails, subterfuge (trickery) is sometimes the most effective strategy.

64 Dog don’t eat dog: Beware of nepotism. Only a fool would expect, in this case, that you would eschew favoritism and turn on your own. Of course, in the most dire times, a dog is likely to eat anything.

65 Good nature make nanny goat tail short: Kindness is too often taken advantage of. Translation mine. Original in Parsons, “Proverbs,” 324.

66 Old stick of fire don’t take long to catch: Nostalgia and the activation of memory. Dormant passions—love, especially—are easily aroused. Parsons, “Proverbs from Barbados and the Bahamas,” 324.
Dog don’t make cat: Certain results are to be expected in certain situations, particularly in reference to the operation of its fundamental systems. Discrimination and the awareness of difficulties that inhere in situations of fundamental difference.

Friend does carry you, but they don’t bring you back: Self-explanatory, but also widely applied as a caution in a variety of situations.


Ibid., 31.


Lamming, *In the Castle of My Skin*, 179.

Ibid., 180.


Goodison, “Turn Thanks to Miss Mirry,” 12.

Brian Adonis, personal communication with the author.


Sloat, ed., *Caribbean Dance from Abakua to Zouk*, viii.

Cogil and Barrett, 64. It was performed by Bob Marley as on the album *Natty Dread*.


Chapter 3: Earl Lovelace and a Theory of Caribbean Ethos

1 Hill, *Trinidad Carnival*, 10.

2 See Burke, *Philosophy of Literary Form*, 61. See also Burke’s essay “Literature as Equipment for Living,” 293.

3 Crowley, “The Traditional Masques of Carnival,” 194.

4 Ibid.

5 Carré: Pronounced *carray*. A stickfighting maneuver, designed to threaten attack as much as to defend oneself against one. Carré, therefore, corresponds to particular rhetorical situations and adjusts itself accordingly as situation evolve.

6 It important to note that the calenda in this chapter is one element of a tripartite structure—dance, song, and audience. In the following chapter, my references to calenda will be limited to the song’s role in the genealogy of calypso music; and in the chapter that I deal with spaces, some reference will be made to the public nature of the calenda as audience.

7 Similar to how the rhetorical modes develop their effectiveness by overlapping and combining, Lovelace’s project evolves as a dynamic cross-referential exercise.


10 Even though the gayelle occupies physical or literalized space, as opposed to the implied space of the limbo ground, their rhetorical purpose is “not [as] places but stages or sites on which the drama of self-acquisition is played” (Dixon 21).


12 Ibid.
13 Harris, *The Carnival Trilogy*, ix.

14 Ibid., xiii.


16 Says Lovelace, “[we] are, to a large extent, living in what can be called a culture on the defensive. We have to defend ourselves in what it means to be human. Affirming in order to defend” (Saunders 16).


18 Ibid., 22. Emphasis added.


21 Ibid., 50.

22 This Ordinance lasted from 1917 to 1951, when it was finally repealed.


24 Ibid., 24.

25 Ibid., 22.

26 Ibid., 118.

27 Ibid., 118-119.


30 Ibid., 25.

31 I resist calling Bolo a purist for the obvious legacy of syncretism and complex interpretation that form the Caribbean Ethos. By definition, his, or any character’s, place in the context of the carnivalesque circumvents notions of purity.

33 Ibid., 146.
34 Ahye, “In Search of the Limbo,” 256.
35 Lovelace, Salt, 8.
36 Harris and Bundy, Selected Essays of Wilson Harris, 157.
37 Ibid., 158.
38 Lovelace, Salt, 173.
39 Ibid.
40 Ibid., 171-172.
41 Ibid., 44. Emphasis added.
42 It is interesting that such frustration does not stem from competition or ambition, but from an apparent lack of it.
43 Ibid., 122.
44 Ibid., 129.
45 Ibid., 130.
46 Ibid., 258. Emphasis added.
47 Ibid., 22. Ironically, this statement also helps feed Lovelace’s humanist agenda while not explicitly turning the notion of parochialism on its head. The demons I refer to, however, are certainly recognizable and thus generalizable.
48 Lovelace, The Dragon Can’t Dance, 110.
49 Ibid., 110. Emphasis added.
50 Ramchand, “The Dragon Can’t Dance,” 179.
52 Ibid., 31.
53 Ibid., 28.
See Squires, “Rethinking the Black Public Sphere: An Alternative Vocabulary for Multiple Public Spheres,” 446-68. In the article, Squires argues that there ought to be more flexible ways of talking about the public discourse practices of marginalized groups—citing enclave, counterpublic, and satellite, as examples.

Lovelace, *The Dragon Can’t Dance*, 115.

Ibid.


Cozart-Riggio and Schechner, 11.


However, faced with the reality of substandard education and socioeconomic inequality, it would seem that Caribbeans (and Caribbean Americans, alike) have the opportunity to interrogate the rhetorical tradition on which their discursive features are based, and to put these in critical conversation with factors that seem remotely to determine the parameters of their lives.

Harris, *The Carnival Trilogy*, xix.

Rahim, “The Nation/A World/A Place to be Human,”


Span, “Texilia.” “My mother is from the slaves of Martinique,/My father is a St. Lucian,” from the English translation provided in *Trinidad Loves to Play Carnival: Carnival, Calenda and Calypso from Trinidad 1914-1939*.

Rahim, “The Nation/A World/A Place to be Human,”


These may include fractured social relationships and fractured mode of relating, which manifest openly and very near the surfaces of interaction between groups in certain settings and discursive contexts.


According to Ramchand, “[T]he effect of an all-embracing omniscient method as an instrument in characterisation [sic] and as a source of the novel’s lyrical tone has been carried out as a necessary preliminary. The procedure permits, and helps to justify the generalisation [sic] that the world of *The Dragon Can’t Dance* is a web in which each character is in turn the main character visibly bound to the other characters” (“The Dragon Can’t Dance” 179).
Chapter 4: Performance and Prophetic Sound

1 *And me say... beye:* I say what I see in their eyes—that is where music is.

2 The provisional distinctions between different types of calypso music—the *kaiso,* with its emphasis on sociopolitical commentary and criticism in a distinctively circumlocutory oratorical form; the sexually suggestive, ribald humor of *soca,* and, later, the mainly parrhesiastic impulse of *rapso*—are consistent with the styles for which most performers are primarily known. These musical subgenres can be characterized as a complex of semantic, tonal, and perspectival differences that mirrored the larger sociocultural changes taking place. There are other categories, of course, which reflect in important ways the innovation of Caribbean performers and their ingenuity in the area of entrepreneurship and music production—some of this will be made apparent in the discussion here, but it is by no means exhaustive.

3 See Epstein *Sinful Tunes and Spirituals,* 3-17.

4 Performances, in contemporary contexts, are not only designed for the edification and liberation specific audiences, but are also deliberately deployed in mixed audiences.


6 Manuel, *Caribbean Currents.*

7 Ibid., 1.

8 See any number of scholars on this common point. But especially Epstein (1977).

9 More explicitly, I categorize in terms of *language* (specifically, the use and interaction of sound, silence, face, and body); *style* (for example, the guttural cry, the application of conceptual and structural tropes, the emphasis on polyrhythmic constructions, and the use/modification of appropriated European musical forms in the assertion of voice, self,
nation); and worldview (for example, selectivity of secular and spiritual morality, the fusion of sacred conservatism and secular liberalism, the ideo/epistemology of the tale and proverb and sociopolitical topicality).

10 Or discursive counterdominance.

11 Psalm 137.

12 Ibid.

13 From the French “chantuelle.”

14 See Rohlehr, *Calypso and Society in Pre-Independence Trinidad*, 43. In addition, these songs also functioned as epilogues or chronicles of failed stickfighting encounters, as “Bagai Sala que Pocheray Moin” illustrates, or as supplication for having lost, such as “La Reine Maribones.”

15 Cowley (1994) notes that, even following the French “capitulation” of the island of Trinidad to the British in 1797, “black culture also reflected [an] African-French-Caribbean bias, including the establishment of ‘patois’ (Caribbean French Creole) as a lingua franca” (10).

16 The pressures of censorship by the ruling class and by law enforcement that culminated in the Canboulay Riot of 1881 had been fairly successful in pushing the stickfighting bands back to their “incomprehensible underworlds,” (Cowley 1996, 72) and with them the majority of chantwells who were the voices for “societies” of batonniers like the Damas and the Wartloos, who were engaged in battle. The calenda was subsequently banned in 1884 as part of the Peace Preservation Ordinance—formerly, the Torch Ordinance of 1884, ratified January 25—but the tradition was actively maintained in spite of efforts to suppress it (Cowley 1996, 100). As a matter of fact, the abandonment of the traditionally symbolic cariso songs—the first of which were sung by women (hence, chantuelles)—for even more
confrontational songs of protest, as Rohlehr points out, was actually exacerbated by the very attempt to silence them (Rohlehr 1990, 54).


18 Rohlehr (1990) suggests that the ethos of the chantwell harbored a degree of versatility that was both proletarian and aristocratic in its performative characteristics. The image of the hero and heroine, equivalent to the traditions we know from other more familiar epics are easy to imagine when we look at the boast as a generic form. However, the implication seems to unfold in ways that speak to a certain distinguishable subjectivity that is expressed with a Caribbean difference.

19 This construction of the heroic in Caribbean music directly challenged the trope of the “grateful slave” that was dominant in the emergence of race as a category in the English and American literature of the previous centuries.

20 See Rohlehr, *Calypso and Society in Pre-Independence Trinidad*, 43.

21 Without mercy.

22 Elder. “Evolution of The Traditional Calypso of Trinidad and Tobago,” 7.

23 Cowley, *Carnival, Canboulay, and Calypso*, 84. This riot followed the banning of *Canboulay* (creolized form of *Cannes Brulées*, canes burning) processions through the streets with torches. Traditional stickfighting bands organized in protest to the restriction.


25 This particular dimension of the Caribbean Ethos would take another course along the underside of society—remaining in the *diametre*—where it would seethe until circumstances clamored for a voice justified enough in its protracted struggle to fashion an ethos that could persuade a people to rise and take action. The mainstream was not yet ready for the marginalized *parrhesiastes* to break in with the force of ineluctable outrage, with what would
become *rapso* in the 1970s and then later explode at the turn of the millennium, not merely to engage that mainstream culture but to address those of us who were actually marooned within it. And the disdain remained mutual.

26 Hill, “Calypso and War,” 63.

27 Quevedo, “Roosevelt in Trinidad.”

28 The success of the calypsonian as rhetorical masquer could hardly be doubted, since the same cohort that “praised” Roosevelt were engaged in bitter censorship games with the local colonial government. Most notable was the concurrent banning of Lion’s songs “Netty Netty” and “Sally Water” in 1936 and 1937, which was then followed by a performance in New York for Roosevelt himself at the Waldorf-Astoria Hotel.

29 *Private Laws*, 2406-2408. See also Fullberg-Stolberg, “The Caribbean in the Second World War,” 82-140.

30 This proverb refers to biding one’s time for later reward. A *corbeau* is a vulture, a carrion crow.

31 Crowley, “Towards a Definition of Calypso Part II,” 117.

32 From “Sayamanda,” by Andre Tanker. The strains most often prevalent in Caribbean America—calypso and reggae—mirror their reception and popularity in the Caribbean and have, as a consequence, been afforded the most attention over the past decades. So I will start with them. However, the general critique of these forms and their divergence from established prophetic sensibilities speak to conceptions of ethos that supersede individual subgenres. All Caribbean music is therefore implicated.

33 Led by George “Lovey” Baillie, the band had numerous names, as Cowley points out. Lovey’s band recorded with Victor and Columbia on their trip to New York. However, they were known for performing another form of Caribbean popular music—the paseo,
vals, and Spanish vals—not the calypso that came later with Executor, Lion, Atilla, and others.

34 Noblett, “The Golden Age of Calypso,” Article MT099 - from Musical Traditions No 4, (1985), http://www.mustrad.org.uk/articles/calypso.htm. According one source note, “This is a phonetic rendering, the precise meaning is unclear.”

35 Quevedo, “History of Carnival.”

36 Ibid.

37 Calendas sung in the third (Mi) of the Do-Re-Mi scale in a minor key.


39 Ibid.

40 Ibid.

41 Ibid.

42 Cowley, “West Indies Blues,” 188.

43 Quevedo, “Roosevelt in Trinidad.”

44 Grant, “Rum and Coca-Cola.”

45 Grant, “God Made Us All.”

46 Ibid.


48 Cruse, The Crisis of the Negro Intellectual, 120.


50 “Harry Belafonte,” in Restoring Hope, 4-5.
Nora’s concept of lieu de mémoires addresses the possible intersections that occur between history and memory, creating “sites” that enable us to see, “on the one hand, the decisive deepening of historical study and, on the other hand, a heritage consolidated” (12).

Peters, “Sinking Ship.”

Ibid.

Devines, “Progress.”

Calliste, “Burn Them.”

See Rohlehr, “We Getting the Kaiso That We Deserve,” 82-95.

Rudder, “No Restriction.”

Rudder Interview, No Restriction: The Concert.

Rudder, “Bahia Girl.”

See Rohlehr, Calypso and Society in Pre-Independence Trinidad, 125.

Rudder, “I Remember Fela.”

Rudder, “Compay Segundo.”

Rudder, “Visions of Paradise.”

See Cowley, Carnival, Canbouley, and Calypso.

Rudder, “High Mas I.”

Rudder, “The Hammer.”

Ibid.

Ibid.

Ibid.

A reference to Tanker’s “chain of cultures” described in “Sayamanda,” incidentally, the song’s title invokes another Tanker song, “Hosanna,” which itself reflects the syncretized tradition subscribed to by performers like Rudder.
Tanker, “Sayamanda.”


Rudder, “Calypso Music.”

Ibid.

See Epstein, Sinful Tunes and Spirituals, 3-17.

See Shouters Prohibition Ordinance, 1917 and Shouter Prohibition (Repeal) Ordinance, 1951.

See Mullin, Africa in America, 194-212.

Rudder, “Calypso Music.”

See Manuel’s Introduction to Caribbean Currents (2) on this. Manuel posits these as opposing concepts, but I regard this as another example of the Caribbean Ethos that is constantly negotiating apparent contradictions with respect to its identity formation.

See Jones, A History of Western Philosophy, 115 and Jones, 296-97. This notion of ethos, according to Jones, is a reference to the tradition of Neo-Platonism that emerged in the 3rd century, AD and drew on the obscure work of Plotinus.

The end of the Cold War is generally marked with Reagan’s challenge to Gorbachev in 1987 to “take down this wall!”

Cooper, Noises in the Blood, 5.

A Nietzschean treatment here might also be appropriate, particularly with regard to the pessimism, restlessness, and malaise identified in his major nihilistic strains, but it seems altogether pretentious when the elders’ refrain seems to apply here as well as any high talk: the more things change, the more they stay the same. The proverb summarizes in plain terms what Nietzsche was facing and what we face now. The recognition of persistent tragedy, and the virtual absence of meaning that often results, was never a reason to
choose apathy over struggle, never a cue to stop trying altogether and simply let things end up where they end up.

Notes to Chapter 5: Dynamics of Tradition in the Digital Yard


2 The overabundance of moralistic counterstatements to Carnival that appeared in print from the inception of the African-dominated version of long-held European fêting further illustrates the sense of tension, social anxiety, and outrage that existed across the full expanse of the ruling and middle class in the Caribbean when, by the mid 19th century, the traditional masqueing turned unapologetically black. See, for example, Hill, Trinidad Carnival.

3 Authors who recognize this take strategic advantage, magnifying the vernacular and relying on the significance of their spaces to amplify the realities of economic degradation, the frustrations of being fixed into a forced sense of community, and the seeming inability of anyone—whether inside those spaces or outside of them, in the spheres of greater influence—to make a difference. In Minty Alley, for instance, C. L. R. James (1939) uses the trope of the yard as a key encapsulating factor in the discursive practices of the community. James’s short story “Triumph” also uses the yard as the main contextualizing space. The yard, in fact, serves a double rhetorical function, being both public and private, agora and idios. In In the Castle of My Skin (1970), the narrator is acutely aware of the role of physical space as a determinant for certain types of discourse. There is the vibrant exchange of goods and talk, a chance for members of the community to renew their public relationships and kept abreast of what is going on in the community that they might have missed—in the case the novel, an impending riot precipitated by fact that the entire community was renting from a landlord who lived in a great house.
Canagarajah, “Safe Houses in the Contact Zone,” 173.

This is a set of textual displays that are intended to authenticate users as members of a certain group. This is usually based on creolized (and some phonetic) spellings, as well as syntactic choices that exhibit the rhetor’s familiarity and belonging. This is an obvious appeal to authority, the consequence of inauthenticity ranging from sanction (and measured acceptance) to exclusion.

Shadow, “Gossiping.”

That is to say, one “macos” or is being “fast.”

See Senior in “The Story as Su-Su, the Writer as Gossip,” 50.

McIntosh, “Social Media Swirls in the Caribbean,” 32-5.

According to Norris, “The concept of the digital divide is understood as a multidimensional phenomenon encompassing three distinct aspects. The global divide refers to the divergence of Internet access between industrialized and developing societies. The social divide concerns the gap between information rich and poor in each nation. And finally within the online community, the democratic divide signifies the difference between those who do, and do not, use the panoply of digital resources to engage, mobilize, and participate in public life.” (Norris 2001, 4).

There are also more general orthographic abbreviations that further authenticate the users or display their familiarity with chat/text literary practices (lol, tho, etc…).

Also “flour.”

Banks, Race, Rhetoric, and Technology, 45.

This is a point not missed by scholars in the field of Composition. See, for example, Carter “Argument in Hypertext.” Carter highlights the close similarity—or compatibility—between oral performance and technological textual development and illustrates one of the
uses to which an orally derived hypertextual discourse might be put. According to Carter, “[T]his navigation involves such actions as selecting parts of the hypertext, deciding which other parts they want to jump to, and displaying the document in ways that make sense to them. Within hypertext the reader can become something of a co-author because the order of a nonsequential document is determined only at the time of the reading” (4).


The term “Caribbean Blogosphere” is largely colloquial. Technorati’s “State of the Blogosphere” does not include statistics on Caribbean blogs. One can further speculate that it more accurately represents the ethnic diversity of the region. For instance, some of the more popular blogs include Caribbean Free Radio, KnowProSE.com, and Nicholas McLaughlin’s Blog, which are managed by an African Caribbean woman, an East Indian man, and a Creole White man. See McIntosh “Blogging in the English Speaking, Caribbean.”

16 Wells, “A Portrait of Early Internet Adopters,”
http://www.pewinternet.org/~/media/Files/Reports/2008/PIP_Early_Adopters.pdf.pdf

17 Ibid.

18 Fox and Madden, “Generations Online,”


20 Rampersad, “The Caribbean Blogosphere,” KnowProsSE.com Blog,

21 Ibid. Emphasis in original.
Ibid.

Ibid.


Ibid.

I focus on the cariblogger’s role because it is relatively more sustained, and thus more stable, than the infrequent commentary of the readership. The cariblogger’s commentary, then, takes on more of a perlocutionary affect—that is, bringing about greater possible consequence than one is likely to see with the commentary.

Cooper, Sound Clash, 127.

Ibid., 125-6.

Ibid., 127.

See http://www.pewinternet.org/trends/Internet_Activities_7.22.08.htm, which reports that in November 2004, 19 percent of American adults used the Internet specifically as a tool for “creating content.”

Cooper, Sound Clash, 128.

bigrayray11, comment to “NO INTRO NEEDED.”

babyboi3000, comment to “NO INTRO NEEDED.”

LordBlacknWild, comment to “NO INTRO NEEDED.”

breezz00, comment to “NO INTRO NEEDED.”
BKZMA718, comment to “NO INTRO NEEDED.”

niniloco, comment to “NO INTRO NEEDED.”

AbsoluteLust, comment to “NO INTRO NEEDED.”

zesims, comment to “NO INTRO NEEDED.”

CHEMICALELEMENT, comment to “NO INTRO NEEDED.”


Ibid., 18.

5MANAGEMENT155, “NO INTRO NEEDED.”

Flexi07 YouTube Channel, http://www.youtube.com/user/flexi07.

Ibid.


Jenkins, *Convergence Culture*, 2.

Ibid., 3.

Even the “Hey Mon” skits are available for download on YouTube.

I will not attempt a reading here, but what is clear is that the performance runs in total contravention to the type of rhetorical masqueing I have described as central to the success of productive carnivalesque activity.

There was a second campaign released that capitalized on the success of the seriously easygoing one, which solicited people to create their own commercials in a contest.

Rhetorical convergence also complicates the claims we can make about the nationality of the performer and who has a stake in representing Caribbean images. When we have only broad, overarching themes from which to view these performances, it may become necessary to generalize the performance as Caribbean (and American, which one can detect
from the preliminary conversations videographers have) and *rhetorical* without essentializing.


Notes to Chapter 6: Conclusion; or Lagniappe for the Carnivalesque

1 There is precedent for my tying composition directly to the carnivalesque. In 1847, the Secretary of State for the Colonies laid out a mandate for English language education that had as its aim, “diffus[ing] a practical grammatical knowledge of the English language as the most important agent of civilisation for the coloured population of the colonies.” Notable, therefore, is the fact that while the Secretary was dictating how education ought to be handled for the masses, those same masses were asserting their right to their own language in the form of public expressive culture. It also had the added effect of broadening the scope of native speakers, who were able to adopt and practice the standard at different levels of proficiency.

2 The national motto of Haiti, “Strength from Unity.”

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