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Between Rebellion and the Spectacle: Analysis of the Songs of the Hip-Hoppers of Bogotá

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Abstract

This chapter analyzes the lyrics of the songs of hip-hoppers from Bogotá. Such analysis privileges the way such songs are staged, as well as the tensions that emerge between their proposal of social mobilization and the show. In effect, the spectacle is constituted at the same time, in a tool of mobilization, as in an obstacle that deactivates the hip-hoppers' discourse. There are three key narrative axes: the presentation of street life; the critique of social order; and the memory of hip-hop itself in Bogotá. Through these narrative strategies, young people build a representation of themselves, their reality, and their work.

Keywords: political spectacle, youth cultures, discourse analysis

1. Introduction¹

On June 5, 1995, a group of hoppers took the Plaza de Bolívar, located in Bogotá, Colombia. Its purpose is to denounce, through its art, the death of hundreds of young people from the popular neighborhoods fallen at the hands of social extermination, who saw in them “dangerous bodies” that had to be eliminated. Report, resist, confront, mobilize are some of the verbs that have found life in hip-hop since its origin. Indeed, since the 1970s, a musical style has developed in New York in which the DJs mixed music (“scratching” the acetates) with the improvisations of the “Masters of Ceremonies” (MC) in the middle of parties where they invented dances that gave rise to rap and break dance [2]. These music and their dances were spread through films and records that played on youth radio stations in the 1980s. Hip-hop reflects a long and complex tradition of Afro fights in the United States that, marginalized from the sociopolitical spaces of society, found in this art a powerful tool of denunciation, vindication, and participation [3].

Here, the lyrics of the hip-hop songs of Bogotá are analyzed. This analysis emphasizes how these songs are presented to the public, as well as the tensions that arise between their proposal of social mobilization and the show. In effect, the spectacle is constituted at the same time, in a mobilization tool, as in an obstacle that deactivates its discourse. “Remember that hip-hop is the one that

¹ This document includes several sections of the thesis presented by the author to qualify for the title of Doctor en Estudios Políticos y Relaciones Internacionales (Phd, in Political Studies and International Relations). See: Uribe [1].

creates the consciences of the ‘parche’,² of the corner, that defends a group of beliefs; that this is the culture that prepares revolutions with a little science, prepares minds for solutions.”³ Hoppers define themselves as movement, as participants in a mental revolution, that is, an alternative culture. However, unlike other movements, hip-hop is characterized by its fluidity, as well as by the informality of its links, so it applies what McDonald [5] has defined as “experience movements,” that is, of mobilizations that are not structured in more or less established organizations, but are activated according to the circumstances and the bonds of solidarity. These new social movements, in Arditi’s words, “would turn out to be a sort of ‘prophets of the present’, not only because they discover the conflicts in the dominant power relations, but also because they are agents that create alternative cultural codes” (quoted in [6], p. 13).

In this sense, conceiving hip-hop as a cultural movement means assuming that its activity is not aimed at the conquest of the State, but defends and promotes another type of society; it means recognizing as a central element that their work surpasses the political-electoral plane and is deployed in strictly social spaces (on the streets, at parties, etc.) in constant tension with their context. It is not, then, a social mobilization that is directed against a clearly placed opponent, nor does it have a relatively established repertoire of actions, nor with a continuous and relatively organized action; it is intended to revolutionize the minds, in other words, to disrupt the “dominant discourses” offering another way of seeing, understanding, and relating to the street, symbolized by them as a place of creativity, not violence or exclusion.

Now, experience of Bogota street made music, graffiti, and break dance, sometimes, is packaged as a product of cultural consumption that serves to promote movies, as well as clothes and energy drinks (for example, Red Bull is a sponsor of international events), among others. In the same way, the concerts, the musical productions, the tours of many groups, the visibility in the media, put young people in contact with the world of entertainment.

At least two characteristics of the relations established between hip-hop and the show must be highlighted: (1) these scenarios “disconnect” the groups from their local problems, given that the new events neither intend to challenge the public nor join the mobilization social, but entertain, sell, and promote artists and (2) what could be called “entrepreneurship” of the groups, because they must accommodate the logic of production of shows, with new characters, such as managers, directors, choreographers, among others.

This tension within hip-hop goes hand in hand with what they have called “the commercial” [7, 8]. For Pérez [7], the dilemma lies in what is considered commercial and refers to the emergence of artists prefabricated by labels in the United States: “These artists gave rise to make the difference between legitimate hip-hop, which leads content, which contributes, proposes, and rap, the commercial side” ([7], p. 124). Some hoppers reject this type of mediation, others intend to use them to communicate their message, others take advantage of them to achieve some economic success, but the desire to be the voice of the street and to offer a “protest with proposal” remains a concern of the movement.

In the present text, hip-hop in Bogotá is defined as a cultural movement that generates plurivalent and multidirectional relationships according to the context in which it is immersed. While many hoppers remain in their position of “protest with proposal” from the street, many others reaffirm it in the scenarios to which they have been able to access through cultural industries (events, digital platforms).

² Group of friends from a neighborhood.

³ Presentation of the Estilo Bajo group at the “Festival Hip Hop al Parque” in 2013. See: [4].

Others, on the other hand, have moved toward “more commercial” musical proposals, taking social criticism to the background. This type of position keeps the movement in constant tension, not only with the society they criticize, but internally. This is reflected in the lyrics of his songs. The following analysis addresses these songs as discursive creations that not only reflect the tensions experienced by Bogotá hoppers, but also constitute tools for struggle, communication, marketing, and mobilization in the city.

For this reason, the present document analyzes a set of songs that collect in a general way some of the characteristics of the hip-hop movement described here.

2. Discursivity and interpellation

Van Dijk [9] understands discourses as units of language that can be systematically analyzed through the approach of two dimensions: the textual and the contextual. The first one gives an account of the structures of the discourse in terms of its grammar, syntax, and semiotics (structures of meaning). The second relates these structural descriptions to contextual properties, such as cognitive processes and sociocultural representations or factors ([9], p. 45). For this author, this distinction facilitates the analytical description and the formation of the theory. However, this differentiation is a “metatheoretical” artifact because in reality “we only have cognitive representations of the rules of discourse and of the strategies of their application in the production of discourse and in understanding” ([9], p. 45). In other words, those who use discourses apply rules to make what they say intelligible and these rules depend on the corresponding contexts of production, circulation, and feedback. However, “discourse can have general, abstract or context-free properties, which can be explained by a certain type of discourse grammars, and properties that vary through different contexts (situations, speakers, etc.) in the same culture” ([9], p. 45).

Van Dijk argues about the presence of a pragmatic component that transcends the analysis of the forms and structures of meaning, to emphasize the social act in which the discourses are used. The analysis of this component must specify the types of speech characteristic of a culture, as well as the rules that determine in what conditions these speech acts are appropriate. On the other hand, the author raises the categories of style and rhetoric. The first alludes to the choices made by the speaker, that is, the type of expressions he prefers to use against other possible ones offered by the context. The second refers to the strategies used by those who express themselves to persuade others, that is, they study the sociopsychological aspects of persuasion.

Now, in our work, we privilege the last elements pointed out by Van Dijk: pragmatism, style, and rhetoric, since we intend to understand hoppers’ discourses in the context of their articulation between mobilization and spectacle. So, the “staging” category aims to specify how hoppers use their speeches. But for this, it is necessary to analyze how these discourses are composed in rhetorical terms, in other words, what enunciation strategies they use and how they construct their identities (presentation of themselves) and strive to challenge the public (which can be partially assimilated with the notion of Van Dijk’s rhetoric).

In later works, Van Dijk develops what he calls as critical discourse analysis (ACD). The fundamental objective of this analysis is to demonstrate social and political problems through discourse analysis. It is based on the idea that those who have power have mechanisms to build and disseminate discourses that seek to shape social reality [10]. The ACD aims to establish how discourse contributes to the reproduction of inequality and social injustice by examining who has

access to legitimate discursive structures. So, his analysis focuses on what he calls power abuse, that is, the strategies of use, legitimacy, and construction of domination. This type of study aims to identify the resources of domination used by the elites, the power they exercise by controlling the actions of others, as well as the definition of who can speak, about what and when.

This chapter does not directly analyze domination. It addresses the ways in which hoppers have constructed a representation of themselves, the kind of relationships they have developed in the process and the corresponding context. So, the emphasis is on the hip-hop side. However, the interest to understand the inequalities between those who build and project the speeches remains.

On the other hand, Santander [11] points out a key characteristic of discourses: their opacity. “We know that the language is not transparent, the signs are not innocent, that the connotation goes with the denotation, that the language shows, but also distorts and hides, that sometimes what is expressed directly reflects what is thought and sometimes it is only a slight indication, subtle, cynical” (p. 208). This opacity can be approached from the contrast between different sources of information and is present in the interaction between the researcher and the subjects. In the present investigation, the discussions about the internal tensions showed some of the less visible, more “opaque” aspects of the process through which the hoppers have been constructed. This opacity is not deepened in the present work, because it goes beyond the expected scope.

Santander [11] points out that interest in discourses constitutes a call for the recognition of differences, so that they display notions such as identity and culture in conditions of inequality. “Obviously, language plays a central role in cultural and identity issues, much more prominent than in social class problems” (p. 209). The speeches are also understood “as a place where prejudices, stereotypes, negative representations, etc. they are re-produced” (p. 209). In this way, the discursive is a key dimension in the analysis of links and social relations. Then, the analysis of the discourses should show the opaque in the context of disputes over identities in the contemporary world.

It is necessary to refer to the way in which discourses interact and contribute to the creation of the social reality of individuals. Hall [12] understands identity as a tension between the culturally planned subject positions and the creations of oneself. It has, on the one hand, the existence of “discourses” that operate in the constitution of individuals, defining the ways in which they relate to themselves; on the other hand, the forms of self-creation that the subjects display emerge, who, based on the rules of constitution of the “I,” propose other forms of being. There will be an articulation between the positions of the subject and the subjects themselves, that is, a “correspondence not necessary” that is based on contingency. Now, it can be said that the way discourses operate in the construction of identity refers to the way in which the former addresses the subjects, as Butler puts it in his book “*Dar cuenta de sí mismo*” (give an account of himself). In this context, a process is required that makes necessary the constitution of “I” (as a subject that is capable of narrating itself), capable of developing the parameters through which that self becomes intelligible to itself and for others. This constitution of the self and the contingencies that are giving form to its narrative is crossed by creative dynamics that are relational.

Butler [13], in relation to the construction of the “*Cuerpos que importan*” (bodies that matter), offers some key elements to broaden this perspective: gender constitutions⁴ are defined as acts of a performative nature. From his perspective,

⁴ It is worth mentioning that a man or woman with predetermined masculine or feminine characteristics is not born, but that the genders, the attributes that are given to some and to others, are developed according to historical tensions of diverse nature. From this perspective, sex (the biological data), sexual orientation, and gender role cannot be confused.

the body is the materialization of possibilities that are historically conditioned and circumscribed. Hence, gender is displayed as an action, a corporal style, a performative, dramatic, and nonreferential task (in the sense that it is not the expression of a transcendental idea—or biologically predetermined—of being human, but rather it is the effect of a series of cultural productions). This performance, this dramatization of the genre has strong punitive consequences, while the others (the spectators) tend to sanction those performances that do not correspond with what was expected. From this perspective, she insists on the need to address the ways in which the world is produced through acts of subjective experience.

The discourses in action, when addressing the public, contribute to build others. Thus, for example, discourses on young people contribute to their definition of themselves and their assumption of certain perspectives and behavior established by others [14–16]. In this sense, the speeches interpellate the subjects proposing references to define what they are, what they can do, say, and even wish, thus contributing to create a spectrum of possibilities framed and socially labeled [17].

In conclusion, it can be said that the analysis of hip-hop as a cultural movement requires the analysis of several interrelated processes:

- Those that allow the visibility of the actor in question (creation of a youth culture, in terms of [18]). These include the construction of a “we,” based on the shared experiences and the daily encounter (self-affirmation);
- His speech, that is, the elaboration of a way of understanding the social world, of confronting the conflictivity from the perspective of the actor and of interpellating his audience (creation of new modes of existence, in terms of [18]);
- Its staging, that is, the way those identities and their discourses are put into circulation, their intentions, their means, their scope, and problems;
- Its reflexivity, understood as the process of internal discussion that contributes to reworking the way they define themselves and their work (self-affirmation);
- These processes allow us to analyze the relationships, the actors, the conditions, the means, the articulations, and the identity tensions.

It must be said that the present work does not address hip-hop consumers or their resignification strategies. However, the traditional distinction between producers and consumers in this case is porous because hip-hop is at the hands of fans, not requiring expensive equipment or instruments (this will be discussed later).

This chapter analyzes the way hoppers use their songs both as a spectacle and as a mobilization tool, that is, highlighting the effort to “represent” the universe of the streets and to “create” consciousness. Emphasis is placed on the staging of the songs from the analysis of their lyrics and videos to identify how they use the spectacle.

It should be mentioned that the analysis of the songs and their discourses articulated a selection process and one of “decomposition” and “recomposition.” First, a group of artists that can be considered representative of the city of Bogotá was chosen. For this, two criteria were taken into account: (1) that had been presented in “Hip Hop al Parque” (Hip Hop to the Park)⁵ and (2) that had been referred in the interviews developed around the process of construction of the history of Bogotá hip-hop⁶. This list totals 38 groups and soloists. Once this set of artists was obtained, two or three of their most played songs were selected on YouTube, to

⁵ The largest hip-hop festival held in Colombia.

⁶ Interviews collected within the framework of the doctoral thesis from which this article emerges [1].

reach a total of 89 songs⁷. These songs were classified according to their central theme in four categories: underground experience (33 songs), social criticism from the ghetto (39), critical memory of hip-hop (11), and love-lack of love (6).

After the songs were selected, they were classified according to the content of their central theme⁸, with which four main categories were obtained: underground experience, social criticism from the ghetto, critical memory of hip-hop, and love-lack of love. Then, from a first analysis of these enunciation strategies, the songs were classified and then a more detailed analysis of the ways each category organizes the presentation of itself (the way the hoppers describe and describe their context when singing) and the interpellation of the public, identifying with it both the dynamic that hoppers use to make sense of their work and their world, as well as some of the characteristics that shape their relationships with other actors.

3. Underground experience: hip-hop as “conscience” of the street

This type of songs appeals to the ghetto, to violence, to survival, to drugs, to fear, but also to tragic heroes, to “heroes-delinquents,” to characters that “end badly”: “Criminal care [...] lives are falling [...] The moon in its mirror kills” [19]. In this world of darkness where lives fall, hip-hoppers appear as street narrators: “That’s what I come bringing / concrete disorder / See, I control the brain.” But, in this violent environment, his singing only achieves a precarious control: “sanity I have lost [...] Live this shit, playing, jumping / That is the barbarism, so that it defends itself: only beasts and liquor arrive at the table” [19].

The singer then presents that world of barbarism, of “concrete people” who defend themselves from beasts and consume liquor. The ambiguity of the street is presented in this way: rumba, adventure, fear, and creativity. From these seemingly contradictory experiences, a certain “mental liberation” is sometimes developed, a certain critique of the violent actors, a certain conquest of oneself that usually acquires the tone of a moral. This is another of the senses that hip-hop acquires as creative survival of the streets: observe and narrate, but at the same time, define what happens and in doing so, self-define.

My friend the “traqueto” (trafficker) became so obvious

that a child with a disability would discover it directly.

They will take it, why run, nothing to do,

If he tries to escape, they will kill him.

Direct to the “cana” (jail), confiscation of goods [...]

⁷ This list of groups, soloists, and songs can be controverted by diverse connoisseurs; nevertheless, it is necessary to say that these 89 productions allow to construct a very approximate panorama of which it happens in this level of the speech of hip-hop of Bogota.

⁸ For this, an analytical technique similar to that described by Van Dijk [9] was applied: it is a reduction procedure in which secondary information is discarded to establish the argumentative nucleus. According to him, discourses are units of language that have a textual and a contextual dimension, that is, cognitive representations (text) and rules of comprehension and application (context). Unlike Van Dijk, it was not intended to obtain a macrosyntax. What was sought in the songs was denominated as strategy and enunciation: presentation of itself (how is described who sings) and strategy of interpellation (what pretends to “produce” in the audience to which it is directed).

After having a lot of money, return empty-handed, begging for bread [...]

They say that what comes by water, by water goes away [20].

This friend “traqueto” (trafficker) had grown up in the neighborhood and got money, but in the end, he goes to jail without the help of the “hard”: the song mentions that “the bosses do not appear”. After this trajectory of excess returns to the neighborhood with “el parche” (with the group of childhood friends) to continue living their worries, their hardships and all with the old moral of the popular saying: “what comes by water, by water is going.” In several of these songs, a similar structure is evident, the boom (success with money, with women, with robberies) and the subsequent fall of the characters (prison, death) that lead to a moral.

In this way, some of the facets of the street are evident: that of the dark world that fosters fears, but also that of the artistic cunning that portrays that world. It is a way (among others) of starting rap as “popular artistic revolution”: the esthetics that from the ghetto, with its ambiguity, interpellates the senses and feelings of the public.

As an expression of the ghetto, these types of songs give voice to the underground perspectives: criminals, but also uprooted people, who live situations of violence and poverty. These voices are at the same time, in tension against the socially consecrated order: the consumption of marijuana is claimed, they express the desires and customs of delinquents, they remember the shooting, the robberies, the beatings. Hence, one of the recurring characters of this type of songs, be the thief:

He was born with bad manners

he likes to dock, he likes to steal

coats and grab everything you find: jewelry, cards.

Then he walks like a corded gentleman

acting well normal [21].

These thieves are also presented “from within,” from their own voices, from their action: “quiet cucho hijueputa” (old man, son of a bitch) / pass me the money from the box / fast or I shot. And as in other issues, his sordid desires appear: “I’m bored, I want to kill someone.” And his sorrows: “They “se echaron” (murdered) my partner for “faltar a muchos” (for hurting many) [...] I am like that, and so I will die in my law.” These lives are played out in fear: the fear it provokes in others, but also the one that must be controlled in order to launch the robbery: serial drug addict [...] there is no fear in his heart / nothing moves him / is surrounded by death / likes the fear that all the people cause him [22].

So, the association between fear, the street, violence, and drugs constitutes key issues of this type of song. In some cases, it develops as a story in which the characters achieve success and then end with jail, failure, death, and of course, with a moral, with a teaching. In other cases, it is only a story that speaks from the ghetto, its pleasures, and sufferings:

I'm not from this world, you damn bum

I go deep into the abyss, my steps go aimlessly.

Without being of this world, I fire it and I understand

I am a sane maniac more in disagreement.

I'm not from this confusing, diffuse world

tell me who put me in this fucking world [...]

People are filled with hate and hate my soul is fed [23].

This “real hip-hop” understands its reality as that which emerges from the streets, from uprooting, from crime, from prisons and presents it unadorned, crudely. However, hip-hop can be a process of transformation that opens the spectrum of the celebration of the culture of violence through the “morals”:

The blows of life were the ones that changed me

My life was transformed by musical notes:

he learned in the neighborhood what he did not learn in school

survive in a world full of beasts [the street] that shaped me as [...]

Rapporteur of many areas [24]

The hoppers as urban chroniclers, as rapporteurs, confront the audience and confront each other through their stories. Here, there are several interpretations that, although seemingly opposed, are paradoxically complementary: the narration of violence, the enjoyment of excess, even self-destruction, on the one hand, goes hand in hand with the subversion of certain conventional representations about what happens on the street (like drugs). These two narratives can be understood as the vindication of another way of seeing, of another type of temporality and spatiality (like night), which in any case are reconciled through morals and the desire to live in other conditions.

These narratives and subversions, this ability to relativize the universe of the street offering their own voices, “opposing” the idea that this is the origin of “evil,” in short, this ability to destabilize the current representations about the actors of the street, with its ambiguity and cruelty, is the central element of this type of narrative, of this discursivity. Here, hip-hop is a resource for many who are faced with the daily life of the streets: rhyme to stay alive. But, another type of song uses this art as a shield: rhyming to fight.

Proud of who I am

the experience is my teacher

my room has been the streets in this gigantic city

where mathematics is learned with coins.

To survive, is the most extensive issue [...]

Respect the bandits

It is not easy to be outlawed

also prostitutes for being friends of the cold

respect to the competition for being my biggest critics

the same to those who are slaves of their own vices [24].

4. Social criticism from the guetto: hip-hop as resistance

Hip-hop is linked to the tradition of struggle for the cultural, social, economic, and political recognition of African-Americans [3, 25]. In other countries, the racial character of the struggles of the hoppers does not emerge. However, these young people transform and reappropriate the claims against the social order by building their own struggle against marginality [26]. In this sense, as suggested by Potter [25], Hoppers crossed the lines of race, gender, and social class, particularly in the 1990s, becoming a transnational culture capable of mobilizing various groups deprived of their rights.

“The hip hop culture confronts the establishment, characterized by institutions, traditional values, the mass media and cultural industries; thanks to their expressions, youthful worlds appear that are different from the ways of being previously constituted and determined” ([27], p. 134). Hip-hop is then defined as a resistance and a counterculture that recomposes the community social order destroyed by violence, so that its action “has implicit in itself the minimum to open the way to the construction of social relations: they motivate to use the time in activities other than war” ([8], p. 56). For this reason, hoppers are able to confront the values of modern society, undermining their ethical foundations.

“Warriors of the rhymes,” point their darts to politicians, to the media, to the State. It is not enough to survive, it is committed to transforming the street, and for this, they use the complaint: “The sickness of this sick society / everything has a price, a price for friendship. / The night to sin / sin to confess and understand that the church is a profitable business” [28]. This attitude not only questions institutions, it also addresses everyone: “A lie abounds in this world without conscience / where the most conceited only live from appearances. / The indifference has been taken to my country / the war and the violence do not let us smile” [29].

The lyrics are eloquent when questioning what the hoppers themselves call “society”: their violence, their forms of exclusion and domination, their values. In this case, it is about assuming oneself as “being conscious,” not only because of the reflection on reality, but because of the effort to describe the suffering they have experienced. Here, “real” hip-hop acquires another meaning: it is not only about expressing violence, but about giving an account of those aspects that are less evident of that reality, precisely, of undressing it.

In this line of expression, it is necessary to refer to the song “Acciones sin respuesta” (Actions without response) by Diana Avella and Lucía Vargas: “To whom is the denied answers attributed? / Who is asked why nothing happens?” Then, the artists raise a complaint: “imposed are the laws and the population blinded / choosing oppressors, sinning for their ignorance.” The description of the situation is presented in the third person; however, when they take position, the narrative changes: “My conscience asks why the media hide the ambition of a fascist government / the death in silence of many trade unionists.” In this way, the meaning of different institutions is questioned: “Trying to look for reality / both the bourgeois and the worker turn on the television in the same channel.” Then, the chorus: “Actions without answer / this is the guerrilla / in the third world is two gang. / All the workers with left fist up, left fist up” [30].

After all this criticism, the singers interpellate the audience talking sarcastically: “And you calm, sunk in the pain of so many injustices. / From the past to the future there is only the nightmare. / In the soul of the slave the wound is greater / because without knowing the history, it is only necessary to repeat it: / mental liberation, it is the only way out” [30]. Then, Diana Avella and Lucia Vargas ask the leaders of the country to understand the situation: “And if only they understood the despair of the people.” At this point, a collective project is proposed: “resisting, fighting, the spirits flying / warning the souls of what is happening.” Thus, they conclude, mentioning their names: “Diana Avella and Lucía Vargas.”

In this song, the interpreters, when describing the manipulation of the powers, appear as victims of the “oppressors.” In this way, they describe aspects of the armed conflict generated by the forced displacement in the country: “war as the price of bread,” that is, the war product of the ambition of the powerful. It appeals then to an audience that can be mobilized by the questions, the descriptions, and the position taking of the song: “mental liberation is the only way out,” “resistance,” “the left fist up.” It is, of course, to provoke, to disturb, but not because of the harshness of the narrative, but because of the need to assume a critical stance, to free oneself from comfortable positions.

Now, while the themes of the underground experiences are developed around the voices of the ghetto, here, it is intended to question, interrogate the audience as an accomplice of the established order. Involving-bothering, denouncing are keys to the hip-hopper strategy.

"Bad policies, economic crises,

the situation is critical and complicates

Many preach, but they do not apply.

And is that from above [...]

everything looks very good and it is not like that.

But really those who enjoy the good benefits are a few

at the ribs of the sacrifices of the many" [31].

The hoppers criticize the authorities, the police, the politicians. They are characters of corruption and death, because “I only see drugs, weapons, deaths and evils / Corruption, robberies and passional deaths” [32]. But, it is not enough to describe or denounce. As mentioned, the singers question the audience: “What is your position? / How to continue in a world without anything touching us? / How to create awareness if there are no open minds?” [32].

To the description of unjust situations are added questions addressed to the audience, with the intention of involving them in social and cultural mobilization: “wanting to change the world when we do not change ourselves / when the heart is a trunk where cynicism is kept and selfishness towards our neighbor” [33]; in other words, it is no longer about surviving but about transforming the world around them. In this framework, some issues confront specific institutions and practices, such as military service, fashion, anorexia, etc.: “Military service, with me you will not finish / service that binds me and forces me to murder. / He sends me to a crazy world where you have to shoot” [34].

With luminous images “La Fikty,” by Caoba Nikel, satirizes the world of show business⁹: “Girl of zero in conduct / was not born to be educated / on weekends she is seen drunk by the ‘Zona T’¹⁰. / He has <everything peeled>¹¹ because he says he was born with his business incorporated.” His business is linked to entertainment and feeds on the tabloid press. “And how does he do it? / I do not know What is the business? / Know you: it does not matter if they call you a fool / climber or a culip-ronta (promiscuous) / do not get angry if you shout guaricha (prostitute)”. In this way, the show business appears as a glamorous business that hides the sordidness of a prostitution that is advertised through scandals.

Other songs address anorexia to criticize entertainment. “Rosa”¹², also by Caoba Nikel, describes the drama of a girl who wants to enter the world of modeling; however, the demands of the agencies lead to eating disorders. The first images of Rosa present her as a student of a popular neighborhood. The singer enters the bedroom where she dreams of being a model to tell the story: “Rosa was a beautiful / vain girl, face and body of Goddess / glamorous. / Everything to be a model / her dream, her passion, her longing.” The images present the fantasies of Rosa that she expresses through mimicry, changes of clothes, her way of walking, in short, her life turned into a fashion show.

But they demanded to be very thin on the catwalks, even if it looks ugly.

They must be "gomelas" (conceited, glamorous) like the European ones.

For agencies Rosa never worked

they just said 'if you're not skinny, no' [...]

Desperate to try to change his luck

Rosa began to flirt with death

with girdles, purges, laxatives, energizers

slimming pills, pineapple, tuna, milk of magnesia. [36].

In the end, it is narrated how anorexia is worshiped: “he did not commit suicide, Rosa simply withered.” As you can read, this type of topics addresses the world of entertainment using the songs to question it; in other words, the show is used to question the show itself. It is worth mentioning that Caoba Nikel has been a television actor playing several secondary and commercial roles, so it can be inferred that these themes speak “from within” the universe of fame.

In any case, the sordidness, harshness, and cruelty of the streets, as well as the dark world of show business, emerge in hip-hop to unsettle and question the audience. “Today he will go to the streets looking for a way out of poverty / or maybe another lifestyle. / Money is his destiny / his body is the way [...] / Money is the most important thing, the rest is worth nothing” [37]. Now, from all these, the

⁹ The fragments of the song are taken from the video of the song that was published on YouTube in 2011. It is produced by FunkStudios [35].

¹⁰ Area of expensive nightclubs in Bogotá.

¹¹ Wearing little clothes, almost naked.

¹² The fragments of the song are taken from the video posted on YouTube in 2010. This was directed by Serio Rojas. See: [36].

audience can ask the following questions: To what extent and in what way have we become accomplices of those who “govern us”? Do we follow the play of the powerful? We grant them, in some way, the power that subjugates us?

Social criticism from the ghetto assumes this key characteristic: given that violence destroys meaning, that is, since it upsets the meaning of life, hoppers face the task of inventing other senses, other reasons to live, other reasons to believe. “The innocents fall straight to the pavement / their bodies are cold because of a shooting [...] / Vices in every corner [...] Thanks to my mother because it is because of her that I have lived / thanks to the hip-hop that made that life” [38]. The voice of the ghetto appeals to the ambiguity of the street (to pleasure and fear) to interrogate the world in which they live and at the same time, addresses the task of building other scenarios. Hence, they strive to achieve a “critical proposal,” a popular artistic revolution.

It could be said that it is a “viral” strategy: the hopper activists in the topics presented in this chapter intend to infect, pollute the minds that are imbued in the universe of fame, consumption, and success. It can be said that it is not a frontal war that attacks the bastions of contemporary domination, but that it constitutes a kind of “low profile invasion,” of an infection, of sabotage. But, these viruses, these saboteurs, when playing in the terrain of the streets and platforms, are confronted with the logic of entertainment. Here is a reflection of Deleuze regarding philosophy:

Not being a Power, philosophy cannot fight battles against the powers, but maintains, nevertheless, a war without battle, a guerrilla war against them [...] And, as the powers do not conform with being outside, but rather they are introduced to each one of us, thanks to philosophy we are all constantly in conversations or negotiations and in guerrilla warfare with ourselves ([39], p. 5).

The metaphor of the virus, of hip-hop as an infection, refers to the guerrilla warfare that each one keeps with himself: mental warfare, mental liberation, superior state of mind. Here, we must underline that this construction of itself, in dialog, negotiation, and confrontation with the powers, can be at the same time a mechanism of reproduction of these, that is, an opportunity to reorganize the possible and manage the desire, to reproduce the subjectivities in terms of consumption and fear. The entertainment, even better, the show, is a scene of struggle: take the streets, the squares, the platforms to make hip-hop consciousness, to question the State, the military, the macho men, the sponsors, the television, to modeling, in any case, to disturb the public, to invite them to see and act differently in everyday life. But, it is also a place to achieve recognition as an artist, the point of arrival of a long process that the hoppers have walked from the streets: through their songs, they have discovered that they have something to say and that they can make themselves heard.

5. Critical memory of hip-hop

But, this task of mental liberation has implied the need to critically review what happens inside hip-hop itself. This revision implies, on the one hand, the construction of a collective memory, but on the other, the approach of tensions between groups and styles. It must be said that the process of articulating common efforts in hip-hop is not at its best: rivalries and struggles obviously fragment the efforts. But, the description “inverse” could also be applied, because despite the tensions and divisions, “combos” and “parches” (groups) meet and

collaborate in the events that are organized throughout the city, while developing some collective processes that have led, for example, to the “Hip Hop Declaration for Peace” (promoted by the Fundación Familia Ayara). It must be said that one of its organizational and mobilization tools is precisely the challenge, the confrontation: the rivalries between “parches” are solved through the “batallas de gallos” (artistic confrontations), to the point that physical violence can be transformed into symbolic aggression.

The conflict is not alien to hip-hop; it is part of its raw material: the street. As has been shown through their songs, the hoppers claim themselves as survivors of the ghetto, expressing their ambiguities from a raw voice, but also formulating a critique of the media, politicians, celebrities, etc. This attitude is also directed toward your own story:

Making an account of my life

I think I worked with enough dedication.

I've been here since the beginning of rap

since the nineties when there was nothing to listen

with crazy clothes, according to neighbors [...]

persecuted by the "tombos" (police) for my culture [40].

Persecuted by the police in a neighborhood that had no public services, in which children grew up with gangs. The young people made hip-hop to sing what they wanted to say: “Mrs. Rima was the one who gave us the visa. / Surprise warns, rhyme storms are approaching.” Affirming existence in the context of violence and exclusion is one of the recurring elements of hip-hop: “Day by day we saw it / the street told us / in this world where we live, selfishness abounds.” But as warriors who survive infecting their art “Our virus is transmitted [...] / Hip hop is a state of global consciousness” [41]. This is how the essential components of hip-hop are drawn: consciousness, cunning, neighborhood, ghetto, exclusion, warriors, world consciousness virus.

The song “Falsedades” by Tres Coronas speaks to young people who intend to imitate the lives of the “bandits.” In this song, the artists address the audience, talk to him, ask him, challenge him, and even threaten him: “Tell me what you try to hide [with] your pod (attitude of evil) / behind your screen, your form and your band / your false tricks, your belly? / If you are not the boss / tell me who you are going / tell me, tell me what you achieve?” Then, the interpreters warn the youth: “When a burst of bullets you hear / tell me if you soften. / Be careful with what you say.” The singers now appear as guides of the youngest ones appealing to their experience: “Welcome here is my territory / tropeles (fights) cartridges (knives) puyas and chuzos (knives). / Those who endure are not many. / I am your cucho (teacher), I teach you what is and how much I fight.” Once again, the singers threaten those who dare to pass for “bad guys”: “You better go home, your chupo is waiting for you. / Culicagado (child with diapers). Know what I read in your eyes. / I barely raise my voice and you get snot.” From here, we describe the practices of those who have been labeled as “Culicagados,” as children who presume: “You hear rap in your car locked. / You smoke, you take a drink and you think you’re bad. / Take out the gun we’ll see who has balls.” It is about questioning hoppers who do not sing what they live but imitate “real” groups to get attention. The chorus synthesizes the question:

“They are bad guys. / They walk in band and always aggressive [...] But when they are alone, they walk shit / The real walk quiet” [42].

Through these songs, the meaning of hip-hop is reconstructed. The real hip-hopper does not make a fuss, nor does he present himself as the “hard guy” (the best one). It requires another attitude: “You are nobody even in your own projects. / You think you’re in fashion. / You say you sell drugs / when you have not even touched a gun. “Menso” (idiot).” Well in the end, “better stay quiet. / In this water there are piranhas and you are the fish,” because in any case the announced thing can happen: “I warned you “mijo” (son). / That was not the destination / it was the path you chose. Now you are sorry / scared for giving them aggressive / you are threatened by talking things that have not happened” [42].

In this case, the public is defined in a direct way. It is about the hoppers themselves. They are not only questioned for their ingenuity disguised as arrogance, but for their inability to behave according to their own fancies.

It can be said that this narrative strategy appeals to the logic of “challenges” (of artistic confrontations): each one of the participants defines himself as the master of the situation and through his improvisation aims to win (humiliating) the contender. In this way, a criticism is presented against the “false” hoppers and real hip-hop is claimed. In this review of what has been and is hip-hop is staged a series of conflicts between groups, which also points to various conceptions of the cultural movement: “Before you criticized / you told me to shut up / and now I see you out from my neighborhood” [43]. The singer addresses rival groups that have abandoned hip-hop consciousness to tell stories of the underworld, in an effort to achieve fame:

Neither you, nor your "combato" (group) I want to see you here

mischievous rappers conceited for having weapons.

They think they're wonderful with twenty drugged girls.

What happens? You are wrong!

I'm not interested in how many have killed

If you want to talk about that, my ears are closed [43].

The fame and the street are problematically related: the second feeds the artists with themes to attract the public, but why is it sought? That is, what is the point of talking about crimes, fear or violence? For the authors of the songs that have just been quoted, it is not only about selling records, or feeding the imaginary that the entertainment industry exploits, there is more: “What makes me happy is to be able to sing / what makes me faithful It’s the love of rap. / I do not have to pretend when I’m on the street / I have to follow the path of what I am.” Claim the street, vindicate themselves: “I have fought with many people for what I do / I have defended my actions / but if I have to die, it will not be in vain” [44]. This genre is built on an option of freedom to express what you think, what you live, hence real hip-hop involves a commitment to the realities of the streets, a commitment that takes three dimensions: the expression of harshness, the mental revolution, and the reflection on the own work hoppers.

For these hoppers, the question is “to be the street that conquers itself,” which defines itself through violence made art. “Since I entered the culture / I do not stop representing the mature rhyme / looking for the top [...] / What’s the fag / singing of

streets if your whole life depends on your father and mother?” This is a hip-hop that worries about infecting its listeners to promote mental warfare: “There are children who die of hunger / and you think you are the son of satan. / They will be the experiences / also the experiences / the science that studies the streets in a correct way” [44]. It is about the denunciations of the street, of its criticisms, experiences, and follies.

6. To finish: enunciation strategies

Hip-hop appeals to several recurring elements in its esthetics, that is, it builds a style that aims to mobilize meaning: to represent the street, to infect, to develop mental warfare, to seek cultural liberation. This style then seeks to mobilize ways of feeling to propose ways of living (in the sense proposed by [45]): to disturb through the moral, include themselves as part of the story, incarnation of the excluded, and enunciation of the complaint.

As central elements of its enunciation strategy, the following can be highlighted:

- **Underground experience:** it is about the violent experiences of the street. Fundamentally refer to scenes of various kinds that are narrated as their own experiences, in which emerges a “we” that mentions their own perspectives of the world, hence their tone of unveiling (as it allows to see what “veiled,” the hidden) and of claim. References are included to childhood, to the ways of living in the ghetto, as well as to the crimes from the perspective of the perpetrators, but also, of the victims. The presentation of yes is developed around the enunciation game that alternates the expression in the first person (me, us) and the narration of events that occur to others (in the third person). In this way, those who do not usually appear in the media acquire a voice that interrogates those who listen to them. These topics include narrations that can be considered “celebrations of violence” (turning heroes into criminals) as well as criticisms of it (narrating the pain suffered by the victims of exclusion and pain).
- **Social criticism from the ghetto:** in these issues, the State, the government, the rich, the violent, the show business are questioned. In them, the singers are claimed as constructors of their own history. In this case, the presentation of itself appeals to terms such as consciousness and reality: the rapper is staged as the one that shows what others prefer to hide, alluding to what “affects us all” (exploitation, bad government, violence). Here, the “we” refers less to a group and more to “the society” in general, that is, from these narratives the ways of being a man and being a woman are questioned, touching on topics such as abuse, spectacle, anorexia, among others. In this type of songs, rather than exposing experiences of the ghetto, it raises a criticism from within, with which the street acquires another meaning: it is not only the place of the excluded who struggle to survive, but it is a scenario of capable creation to go to the city and to ask him questions about the way in which the city lives.
- **Critical memory of hip-hop:** these are themes that review the history of the movement and question different ways of being hip-hoppers. In these songs, the rappers are questioned, their aspirations, as well as the “lies” they offer in their rhymes. Artists present themselves as “real” artists with street experience who warn (question) the most inexperienced artists questioning their interest to become part of the “show business.” Even when these themes approach the conception of hip-hop as a resistance, they reveal the tensions of the movement, the discussions that develop within it.

But, as has been discussed, hip-hop expresses the ambiguous logic of the street. On the one hand, the underground experiences express the voices of the excluded, of the victims and of the perpetrators, questioning the violence from its protagonists, or resignifying said violence. All this is with the purpose of achieving “survival through style.” On the other hand, the construction of itself based on the criticism of exclusion and violence, criticizing the State, capitalism, television, celebrities, etc. Finally, narrating and questioning themselves in songs that challenge other hip-hop groups. This complex set of aspects combine to enrich the traditional perspectives that have approached the movement, either focusing on hip-hop as a “resistance” or highlighting its “glorification” of violence. Bogota hip-hop then expresses ambiguities of the urban environment, tensions that their cultures have turned into a discourse, into an expressive-viral tool that has been staged in different scenarios.

However, some of the artists move toward the production of romantic songs that are not distinguished from the proposals coming from other types of music: “I always dreamed that between you and me everything would be fine / I was wrong. / Now I look at you and I do not see the woman I fell in love with / she left” [46]. The love and the lack of love, the desire, the conquest and the lack of love, are the topics to be treated. “Love me as I love you / that is the way / and I will become your slave” [47]. Like many themes of this type, the drama of love is based on the unity of lovers that allows us to affirm “you are my life.” In this type of song, the singers say little about the social conditions in which the story unfolds. It is a song that presents the dilemma of love of any person.

For some activists (for example, Juan Habitual), these types of expressions are valid because they are part of the searches carried out by each artist, their reflections, their moments, their world. For others, they are songs that “perratean” (destroy) the movement, that is, that make it commercial and impoverish its transgressive character. It is difficult to distinguish the motivations that originate these expressions: experiences of the composers, or, strategies to “triumph” in the cultural industries and sound on the stations, or, even a mixture between both “reasons”?

As it has been argued in this writing, hip-hop is a cultural movement that seeks to reclaim the culture of the streets, to propose ways of thinking, feeling, and living different from the one that “society” imposes. To revolutionize minds, to disturb consciences, to rise up against the political, social, and economic institutions of which you feel excluded. However, the spaces to which they have had access through the show generate tensions within the movement: while some hip-hoppers take advantage of these scenarios to continue carrying their “protest with proposal,” many others have opted to change the speeches of the “ghetto” for proposals with greater commercial reception.

But, this process is open and moves around internal discussions, their mobilization strategies, and the conditions offered by the medium. As a result of this, opening may occur that the marketing of hoppers’ products strengthens their “protest with proposal,” or, on the contrary, it may happen that commercial mediations are added to the cultural products that associate hip-hop with easy sex and the violence. It is also possible for the groups to come together, create their “jams” and join forces to face collective causes, or on the contrary, everyone “defends himself alone”: “there are several who have managed to cross the border and have become important, but as people, not as a movement, do you understand me?” (Toño, personal communication, August 2, 2011).

This fluidity of hoppers’ cultural mobilization does not allow them to be described or analyzed as a structured social movement. It is not only about groups that act against a social “enemy” and that have also been able to solve problems of


resource mobilization (internal or external, in the sense of [48]). Hoppers' actions occur in a specific context and express the contradictions of their society. In this case, the young people-street found a musical genre that allowed them to contact other young people, popular organizations, public entities, as well as musical entrepreneurs or radio producers, theater, even television. While these young people mobilized against the extermination and acceded to the scenarios, some of them ventured into the entertainment business, making "rebellion" a commodity. This multiplicity of phenomena allows us to speak of hip-hop as a cultural movement in terms of the so-called "experience movements" that McDonald [5] has theorized: articulated in a network, mobile, built from bonds of solidarity that are activated to face specific tasks and not for the development of a relatively established program. Hip-hop then develops mobilization strategies from the contradictions of the society of contemporary spectacle, taking advantage of the possibilities it offers and facing the limits that it imposes.

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