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PLACE-MAKING THROUGH PERFORMANCE: SPOKEN WORD POETRY AND THE RECLAMATION OF "CHOCOLATE CITY"

by

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Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements

For the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy in

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DEDICATION

I am the byproduct of so many wonderful mentors and thinkers, particularly the women who shaped and influenced me, prayed and fought for me, as well as encouraged and pushed me forward. This is for *you*: Mommy(head), Mudear, & Gwen(nie-poo). Know that I love you to the moon and back, and then some!

For those ancestors that fought and aspired for these kinds of educational opportunities and achievements. Thank *you* for enduring endless subjugation and brutality so that *I* could chase and capture dreams.

And for the future generations of Blackademics, especially women, who will embark upon this PhD journey… *I* pushed so that *you* could too!

This is for *y'all*!

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Chun. Whether it was in class or in the personal moments in between, know that your advice and mentorship is just one of the few reasons I survived with some sense of confidence and sanity. Your support will never be forgotten. And, to my teachers / mentors beyond the walls of UofSC: Drs. Jen Roth Gordon, Debra Vidali, Amanda Beth Godbee, and Erica Britt. Thank you for viewing me not just as a mentee but as a future scholar and colleague in training.

Often, it becomes easy to overlook people behind the scenes. But considering my path to the PhD was very much a winding road, full of administrative hiccups and pitfalls along the way, I know – more than anyone – I / we, in the ANTH department at UofSC are a product of two unsung heroes: Claudia Carriere and Cat Keegan (RIP). You wonderful women deserve so much praise and every award there is for your work and assistance. Consider this my standing ovation for all that you have done for me and for Anthropology (students).

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ABSTRACT

Predominantly situated in an area formerly known as Black Broadway, my research is based on long-term immersion in the District's network of Spoken Word poetry and poets. Specifically, I focus on two key sites that offer contrasting depictions of open mic culture: Busboys and Poets, a D.C.-based chain located in several well-known neighborhoods undergoing gentrification, and SpitDat D.C., a grassroots (and often displaced) movement known as the area's longest running open mic series. At these venues, many artists – especially native and long-term residents of the area – illustrate the Black experience along with a fascinating correlation between place, performer, and performance, specifically where place is being denied or redeveloped.

By utilizing a scalar analysis of "place," where I consider how the design, layout, and purpose of a venue; the geographical setting (e.g., region or neighborhood), or the mood / atmosphere are all salient influences on the performance event, this research showcases Spoken Word's affinity for the performative act of "placemaking" – an urban-planning studies concept borrowed to illuminate the reciprocal (and sometimes toxic) relationship between D.C.'s Black inhabitants and policymakers. In its original context, placemaking is an approach to redevelopment used to embolden citizens to design and/or revitalize a community for "maximized shared value" (Project for Public Spaces).

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However, this research employs thematic, discourse, as well as interactionist approaches to verbal art as performance – to create a thick description of Spoken Word poetry and highlight placemaking as an empowering linguistic social act by which local artists fight to own, (re)claim, and/or move about freely in spaces they belong.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

AAE ..... African American English

AAL ..... African American Language

ATL ..... Atlanta, GA

AAWL ..... African American Women's Language

BBP ..... Busboys and Poets

BLM ..... Black Lives Matter

CK ..... Crochet Kingpin

DBB ..... Droopy the Broke Baller

D.O.P.E. ..... Director of Poetry Events

ECAC ..... Emergence Community Art Collective

IAAR ..... Institute of African American Research

FB ..... Facebook

FGTM ..... From Gumbo to Mumbo

ME ..... Mainstream English

PM ..... Pages Matam

RP ..... Received Pronunciation

RTR ..... RealTalkRaps

SDDC ..... SpitDat D.C.

VAP ..... Verbal Art as Performance

VAT ..... Verbal Art Tradition

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Motivations for the Study

Predominantly situated in an area formerly known as Black Broadway, this ethnographic research is based on long-term immersion in the District of Columbia's network of Spoken Word poetry and poets. Specifically, I focus on two key sites that offer contrasting depictions of open mic culture: Busboys and Poets, a D.C.-based chain located in several well-known neighborhoods undergoing gentrification, and SpitDat D.C., a grassroots (and often displaced) movement known as the area's longest running open mic series. At these venues, many artists – especially native and long-term residents of the area – illustrate the Black experience, along with its linguistic traditions. But this investigation focuses on the ways in which both venues and poets are influenced by or how they respond to erasure of Chocolate City. This motivation has resulted in a concentrated analysis of the relationship place intimacy, place identity, and place-making. And each of these concepts branches out into a collage of subtopics, as themes subsumed within a larger conversation about verbal art performance as aesthetics and affect.

This study explores the above by engaging with context-based analysis of Spoken Word poetry culture. While preliminary interests were geared towards

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researching and establishing a fine-grained analysis that could capture an overview of the art's genre conventions, instead the poets and poetry quickly *(re)placed* these motives. That said, conversations and observations of D.C.'s Spoken Word poetry network that moved between both BBP and SDDC did highlight one facet of this verbal art tradition: its anchoring in what is described as the chronotope of the "here and now" (see chapter 3). This attention to context is by no means a novel concept within verbal art as performance scholarship; however, the ways in which place is observed does expand how place is defined and thus could (or even should) be analyzed in future studies.

What the findings of these study will show is that Spoken Word is a experiential and multisensorial art form that draws as much from its material surroundings as it does from the socio-cultural climate, the emotions and cultural competence of the participants, and the atmospheric elements present within the space. Thus, this research was prompted to assess a more nuanced understanding of place, or what Doreen Massey describes as a "constellation of processes" (qtd in Pink 2009), and its relationship performance, specially Spoken Word related events. And it was this endeavor that made visible that D.C.'s ongoing redevelopment and the resulting displacement experienced by native Washingtonians was not just mere background noise that garnered historical contextualization. Instead, it was a salient part of the constellation that should be equally considered with this place-related study.

Where urban planning prompts more policy-related interventions and where sociolinguistics ordains an attention to linguistic features, this study opts to extend and thus contribute to both disciplines by highlighting (verbal) arts like Spoken Word as deserving of more attention within African American Language (AAL) and urban

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planning studies. Such performances are sites of intervention by interrupting whiteness while both performing and celebrating Blackness as well as realizing as performative contestations of place-hood identity and dispossession, which are the results of gentrification. That said this work moves beyond Gabriella Modan's (2009) foundational ethnographic work on Mt. Pleasant, one of the District's more recently gentrified neighborhoods, as how the arts ascribe "spaces of representation." Where her analyses contend with residents negotiating multiple identities via language use and use of place-based discourses around safety / comfort, this work focuses on the tensions between Native and elites (transplant / gentrifier) communities, with the former's discourse being grounded in a notion of rootedness as a method for social intervention.

In short, this work moved beyond the typical and foundational assessments of place as shown within classic studies of verbal art as performance within linguistic anthropology and gravitated towards sensorial ethnography found within human geography as a means to capture both the poetic / performative aspects of the culture as well as the phenomenological occurrences. The poets who so graciously allowed me into their experiences as artists and residents of this unique space (our nation's capital) showed me that their works are often a reflection of their emotional realities and – what Sarah Pink describes as – a "sensory" ways of knowing, embodying, and mediating place (2009: 4). Overall, this work serves as "meeting points between ethnography, scholarship, intervention and art" (Pink 2009: 4), an analytic framework that emplaces the findings in ways that can both highlight Spoken Word poetry while also depicting the experiences embodied by Native Washingtonians as place intimacy and memory.

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1.2 Scope and Limitations of the Study

Field Site and Participants

This ethnographic research took place over 16 months of fieldwork spanning the years 2015-2019 in the District of Columbia and surrounding metropolitan areas where Spoken Word open mic culture is observed. Ethnographic research on forms of communication is one of the mainstays of the field of linguistic anthropology. It is a tradition which enjoins a focus on the multiple functions of linguistic forms and discourse practices as part of people's daily lives and requires long term immersion. Early forays into the field (spring 2015 and summer 2016) enabled me to identify appropriate performance venues, network with artists, and secure tentative permission to work with several Busboys and Poet (BBP) hosts. January 15th, 2018, I began full field immersion involving participant observation, video-ethnographic recordings of performances, and interviews with BBP hosts, featured poets, and patrons. These conversations kept suggesting I also observe a different venue, SpitDat D.C., to serve as a contrastive frame of reference. SpitDat observations proved to be quite telling and thus became my secondary field site, with participant observation and interviews started in August of 2018. With both sites' approval and collaboration, I immersed myself in an extensive network of artists, many who performatively criticized the ongoing gentrification and attempted extinction of D.C. culture, including its folklore.

More than a year of fieldwork was dedicated to two phases of research: the first aim was to answer "the who" of Spoken Word culture – i.e., assessing the folk and folk dynamics (Bauman 1983, Dundes 1977, Finnegan 1991). The second and primary concern was to answer "the how" – i.e., how *these* folk represented the art form, how did

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they emplace themselves within *this* environment (D.C.), and how did their emplacement influence *their* utilization of the verbal art tradition. This second phase required observing and documenting the layout, décor, and surrounding neighborhoods of each venue – with specific focus on how space, setting, and mood and the corresponding social relations prompts particular manifestations of the art from (Flores 1994). To accomplish these objectives, I observed and/or filmed at two to three open mic events per BBP location (seven sites in total), as well as six open mics at SDDC (see chapter 5 for more details on these spaces). Furthermore, I collaborated with as well as shadowed and/or interviewed 20 poets. All interviews were audio-recorded and later transcribed. While these poets ranged in skills and tenure, all can be considered highly skilled veterans, for they all served as hosts and/or features of the events I observed.

It should be noted that I also sought to interface with other audience members, or open-micers (i.e., those who shared their works as non-features or hosts), as well as BBP staff and affiliated sponsors. However, as this research progressed and I needed to narrow the scope, I decided to focus on how the open mics were facilitated, including how spaces were "managed" and by whom. Thus, this study placed more emphasis on hosts (i.e., those in a facilitator roles) and features (i.e., those who are highlighted with long, interrupted stretches at the mic). As chapter 3 and 6 will further convey, these two groups have a prominent influence on the way in which the event is structured and how the open mic culture is "packaged" and "delivered" to the audience. Thus, their involvement has implications for understanding how mood is established and have proven ability to read spaces. Thus, their metapragmatic talk made for fruitful analyses of space and place's impact on performances and vice versa. Specifically, three poets were

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invited to be primary consultants and collaborators on this project: Pages Matam as Directory of Poetry Events (D.O.P.E. of BBP) and Droopy the Broke Baller and Dwayne B. the Crochet Kingpin (co-hosts of SDDC). Because they serve as managers and facilitators for both participating open mic series, their approval, expertise, and insights were vital in the success of this work.

While the focus is on veteran performances, it should be noted that there are examples included by open-micers who were not in a feature or host role. In order to showcase the themes at play, it was necessary to include works that spoke to the presence of gentrification – i.e., establishing the socio-cultural climate's influence on everyday practices of the art form. One of these performances offered the chance for me to perform a cross-event analysis (Wortham and Reyes 2015), where multiple iterations of the poems was observed over time. Both individual cases offered invaluable resources for highlighting the universal or customary conventions of the genre and performance situation.

Why BBP and SDDC?

Ethnographic interviews with poets were initially broad and all-encompassing. The conversations evolved from eliciting general definitions of Spoken Word to zeroing in on the particulars of a poet's experience. In the elicitation of interviews, poets would detail their experiences at BBP or SDDC and sometimes both. They would also characterize their experiences with hosting, performing at and frequenting these venues that have been impacted by D.C. gentrification. I chose often to leave these moments as open-ended as possible, usually letting our conversations evolve from personal narrative accounts documenting their experience(s) as artists or audience members towards their

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narratives of nostalgia and remembrance – especially for D.C. Natives. Considering that the erasure of Blackness and Chocolate City was a common trope that would surface in these performances, or in regular conversation for that matter, it was not difficult for me to prompt participants' responses to these topics. In many cases, the participants were willing to divulge their opinions and vent their frustrations on the matter.

While latter chapters will delve more intently into the different aspects of performance and place, the first two data chapters in this dissertation are focuses on those oral histories that describe the history of D.C. poetry and its evolution over the past two decades. In many cases, these stories may counter or challenge the position or opinions of subject-matter experts in urban planning or even policymakers in the area. But it should be noted that the goal of this project is to observe the on-the-ground manifestations of place – including the loss of place – how those realities impacted performances, and why Spoken Word poetry offers a viable example for such observations. And with BBP and SDDC as my field sites, given their influence and reputations for being key contributors to D.C.'s poetry scene, many of these narratives also positions these sites within the discussion in very salient and telling ways.

While these both these spaces offer a plethora of rich data, contributing equally to the motives of how Spoken Word is grounded in the "here and now" (or context) and thus ideal for characterizing the tensions between Natives and gentrifiers in D.C., I had to adopt different methods for observing each venue. The descriptions in sections 5.1 and 6.3 delve more into the comparative features of both BBP and SDDC; however, as this section notes the limitations of this research, it is important to note how the contrastive

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accessibility and attention to community fostered or hindered capturing audio and/or visual data.

BBP's successful investment in media / marketing has resulted in a reputation that is both local and national. And with Andy Shallal's, the owner of BBP, positioning himself as a brilliant entrepreneur, artist, and activist, he, too, has become an iconic D.C. figure – so much so that Mayor Muriel Bowser has tapped him for multiple committees and projects, including serving as Chair of the Workforce Investment council and the 2020 ReOpen D.C. committee (Nycz-Connor 2015, Hayes 2020) [1]. It is the combination of these endeavors that he has been able to procure relationships with famous writers, political figures, and social activists – many who are frequent patrons of BBP[2]. Thus, having cameras on the premises was by no means a rare occurrence. In fact, I was able to film alongside several journalists and documentarians when Angela Davis came for an interview and book signing. This facet of BBP's reputation as well as its more elaborate and spacious design afforded me the access to film without severely impacting the interactions of its patrons. And given IRB's allowance for filming public behavior without permission, I took the liberty to do so quite frequently, which resulted in more filmed performances.

However, at SDDC, where there is a more intimate and minimalist setup that fosters a reprieve and sanctuary for its insular community, filming was highly disruptive

[1] Andy Shallal ran against then incumbent Vincent Gray and Ward 4 council member Muriel Bowser in 2014. However, he did not garner enough support and Bowser was elected as mayor.

[2] In 2016, President Barack Obama takes former inmates to the flagship location of Busboys and Poets for lunch. These individuals were commuted by both then President Obama and former president George W. Bush.

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to its facilitation of the art form. Hence, filming required a special touch to remain incognito while honoring the privacy of those who did not want public attention (e.g., transgender members in transition or closeted LGBTQIA+ artists). In this context, I filmed only those features and participants who gave preliminary permission, as well as for the benefit of capturing the space before and after the open mic – most of which is done through photography. This results in less visual capture of performances. That said, I resorted to field notes, post-event journaling, and analytic memos to record observations from SDDC.

Considering these two different styles, the ways in which this study analyzes and includes data from my immersion in spaces is reveal in the limited transcription and reliance of more description for certain events. This study recognizes that as a linguistic anthropological study, the norm is to include details via transcribed interactions. However, where this is not possible, the default is to utilize traditional ethnographic expositions that summarizes my observation. While these differences are quite salient and does impact the data set observed within this study, the hope is that explicating these experiences will show a conscious attention to respecting spaces, participants, and their unique needs.

Spoken Word Poetry vs. Slam Poetry

With chapter 3 intentions of defining and describing the generic conventions of Spoken Word, this work cannot proceed with at least the mention of Slam poetry's existence. To what extent these are similar or separate art forms is a point of contention resulting in varied opinions across artists. For example, many would define Slam as Spoken Word simply placed within a competitive framework – in that it is judged and

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scored by the audience. Brandon Alexander, AKA RealTalkRaps, has even gone so far as to say that "Slam is the battle rap of poetry," with most people agreeing the battling is very much a part of the Hip Hop universe and a form of rap. Others, however, would challenge this idea, claiming it a completely different genre and culture (i.e., with its own rules of participation and audience expectations). In fact, when this study was awarded a University of South Carolina's (UofSC) Institute of African American (IAAR) fellowship, one of the Institute's requirements included participating in an introductory retreat / orientation. There, fellows introduced their projects and entertained questions from one another. And this project was met with many questions about how I would contend with the fact that Slam Poetry was not Spoken Word but is a version "appropriated by a White male." As this statement indicates, aligning these genres can generate visceral reactions and polarizing conversations.

Considering that many of the Spoken Word poets I observed also perform in Slam competition, and do so successfully, these art forms, at minimum, exist along the same spectrum of performance poetry. But the fact that many reputable Spoken Word artists who do not participate in Slam situate it as outside of their capabilities, interests, or expertise, there is room to also suggest that both genres while related are clearly recognized as their own crafts with contrastive frameworks. While I have my own opinions, having observed both Spoken Word and Slam at BBP and beyond, contrasting or comparing these genres are outside of the scope of this project. Instead, I choose to restrict the language in my interviews to define Spoken Word on its own merit without being in contra to Slam.

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To avoid eliciting contentious conversations that can distract from the motives of this project, this work does not reference Slam Poetry. It is my hope that this research marks the foundation, and hopefully jumping off point, for future research. I also recognize that choosing to engage an art form that is new to anthropological inquiry is accepting the task for laying the groundwork that may determine the conversations that follow – i.e., in terms of what gets taken up, circulated, and reproduced. And this includes how futures studies proceed and what data they have to contend with. Furthermore, since the study is taking place at a time where Spoken Word poetry has not yet been explored anthropologically and Slam Poetry is just being explore ethnographically (Johnson 2017), it is necessary to tread carefully. Therefore, all examples, excerpts of transcripts, and findings that are used in this document will be samples of Spoken Word culture only – both as it is preserved in D.C. as whole and at BBP and SDDC in particular.

1.3 Ethical Considerations

This work sees its "participants" as not just "cultural brokers" but as "consultants" (Bauman 1992, Molina and Evers 1999, Webster 2009). However, I utilize a more flexible understanding of the term, as some were mentors who I shadowed and conversed with both in and outside of the venues / performances, while others were experts and advisors, who I merely observed or interviewed in situ. It should be noted that I make no distinction between the two, but the point is to convey that the poets here are the experts – not me. I simply bear witness to these performances and the context of which they happen and work to make sense of it all both linguistically and anthropologically.

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As such, all works mentioned here belong to the authors and have only been used to investigate the practices described in each chapter. Also, certain characterizations and quotations were either generalized and some participants identified by alias. This was to preserve the reputations of the artists as well as relationships with the venues and hosts mentioned throughout the study. This work recognizes that their words are not just their craft but, in many ways, are also their lifeblood (or livelihood). Therefore, this research was orchestrated and now depicted here with consideration of this fact.

1.4 Chapter Outline

One of the more ambitious goals of this project pursues the traditional aims of ethnography, which pursues a descriptive definition and depiction of Spoken Word for an audience with no familiarity with the art form. However, this project also recognizes readers who are part of Black culture and thus familiar with Spoken Word poetry or similar VATs, such as Hip Hop. As a scholar / representative of academe and a native anthropologist, I straddle the line of both insider and outsider in ways that lets me engage a diverse audience, including those in my academic and cultural / linguistic community. This goal required observing from the perspective of an audience member as well as capturing descriptions from the vantage point of the experts, i.e., practitioners of this poetic tradition. Chapter 3 focuses in large part on the findings from thematic analyses that assessed the most "common" descriptions of Spoken Word across interviews. This chapter seeks to convey the tradition as a four-dimensional performance that merges text, voice, body, and interaction. Thus, it concludes with a breakdown of the participation framework, which is used to distinguish the art form from other performances and poetic tradition.

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While chapter 3 provides a general overview of Spoken Word, chapter 4 focuses on the particulars of context, situating D.C.'s socio-cultural climate at the time of this study. In doing so, this section sets the "foundation" of place, which is described as the "setting" – i.e., per the conceptual framework of this study (see chapter 2). With the assistance of news clips (both digital and print), social media, and observed conversations, this study is able to trace the public outcry of the D.C. community in response to campaigns and speeches seeking to remove Black residents from the local narrative and history. This chapter describes the campaigns and negative attacks on local residents, which sought to reimaging the "new D.C.," while highlighting the resulting protests from Black Natives. This background is used to situate the ways in which the climate of mourning – in losing one's home space(s) – is taken up and reflected by poets and their performances.

Where chapter 4 observes place in terms of the environment as the background or the larger "performance-scape" for D.C. poetry, chapters 5 – 6 pursue different perspectives within specific places, starting from the structures (or building perspective), to the design and layout, and concluding with the ambiance (or "vibe"). First, chapter 5 explores the ways in which Spoken Word, as it is practiced in the two open mic venues of BBP and SDDC, portrays the places and spaces in which the art form occurs. This reveals how artists enact a close relationship to their cities in ways that is described as place intimacy, where there is a connection to edifices that goes beyond the material. This bond is explored and situated as an evocation of the essences of spaces and how it rings true to other African American traditions. If chapter 5 focuses on evocation of spaces, chapter 6 underlines on how bodies *experience* these spaces. However, the emphasis is on

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talk and poets' metapragmatic awareness of how "vibe" – the emic term to describe the ambiance or energy of space – and qualia – semiotic connections of particular qualities – influences their performances. This explanation delves into how verbal art as performance as an encompassing analytic framework includes affect, not just in terms of the audiences' experiences but in the ways in which the performer (or poet) responds to their multi-sensorial read of a space.

And finally, chapter 7 concludes the analysis portion of this study but combining the arguments from the proceeding chapters, connecting all aspects of place by examining Spoken Word through once specific hybrid performance. By providing a thick description of the two-man show entitled *From Gumbo To Mumbo*, this section is able to convey how the socio-climate, resulting dispossession and displacement, as well as Natives' place intimacy informs certain poetic performances in ways that showcases the art form's proclivity for social commentary and advocacy. By further engaging with the Peircean approach to semiotics and the ways in which material structures index particular expectations of performances and behavior, this chapter also serves to illustrate how Spoken Word can disrupt the status quo of white public space. Overall, this discussion works to fully posit a performance in situ and supports the DC Native Movement as well as other sentiment and protests from the community – all working to reclaim ownership of their home and place identity as belonging.

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CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Theoretical Frameworks

As an investigation of Spoken Word poetry and its relationship to an urban space undergoing gentrification, this research utilizes a multidisciplinary theoretical framework. First and foremost, the inquiries driving the overarching analyses are rooted in anthropological studies, given that the main agenda is to interface with and provide "thick description" of a cultural group and customs (Geertz 1973). However, in pursuit of the context for the interrelatedness of the places, persons, and practices depicted in this study requires a collaborative approach from disciplines beyond the four fields. As such, this work merges cultural and linguistic anthropology (Bauman 1992), which both attend to expressive forms in artistic traditions and, especially, ethnopoetics, with sociolinguistics (especially the strong tradition featuring studies of African American Language(s), as well as human geography and urban planning.

This work remains true to studies of AAL, which pushes for linguistic diversity. Where there is often standard of monoglot ideology that results in the policing of minority languages (Hill 1998, Silverstein 1996), particularly those within African American speech communities, the goal is to foster a shift in the ideology that villainizes and criminalizes AAL speakers (Morgan 1994). The goal of many AAL studies is to

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show and celebrate the creativity and innovation that undergirds the language variety. Furthermore, the analyses presented in these chapters will elucidate African American (verbal) art and cultural tradition in ways that promotes recognizing their significance to their communities.

Simultaneously, an equally important goal of this study is to also inform redevelopment practices within spaces that impact marginalized communities and their cultural practices. Particularly in urban centers, performance venues and artists are often untapped resources for examining how communities shape and embody place and contribute to the ways in which their existence is vital to the shaping and maintaining the "soul" of place. As such, this section references the contributing conversations as they intersect at the nexus of these disciplinary traditions, including how they allow for traditional ethnographic and ethnopoetic work even as it serves to inform future urban planning policies. Overall, this framework supports a nuanced assessment of verbal arts traditions and its relationship with place, specifically with attention towards race, space, and place politics.

Defining Place

Linguistic Anthropology and Setting

At the heart of verbal art as performance scholarship, especially recent studies (Dent 2009, Fox 2004), there has been a constant acknowledgement of the ideological dimensions of genre, place, and space. The ways in which it is has been approached is through discussions of genre. For example, Alexander Dent (2009) explains the connection between Brazilian 'country music', música caipira and música serteneja, is a performative execution of rural genres, which "propose the absolute necessity of

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recollecting oneself as rural, culled from an ideal past, rich with the blood of brothers" (80). In other words, genre mandates certain persona-work that indexes qualities of value to the artistic form – for Brazilian country music for instance, that is the nostalgia of the past and rural spaces.

Dent's (2009) use of the Bakhtinian concept of chronotope showcases how generic conventions informs the portrayal of characters in alignment with particular configurations of time and space. And it is through this discussion that this study is able to situate Spoken Word as a genre linked to performances of the "here and now," allowing artists to emplace themselves in their (immediate) surroundings. It is important to mention that "here and now" does operate at various spatial and temporal scales. Together, time-space works within the Spoken Word to connect memory to the present time – enacting identities as modern-day griots – while often speaking to topics of immediate relevance and thus urgency. Through a verbal art as performances framework, this study can illuminate how genre denotes certain persona work and how this work can productively engage certain critiques of society (e.g., música caipira's disapproval of disappearing rural lifestyles).

Dell Hymes, whose research is situated at the nexus of folklore and ethnopoetics and communicative competence, was one of the earliest within the American tradition of linguistic anthropology analyzing performances in relation to context. His seminal work establishing the ethnography of communication is grounded in his S-P-E-A-K-I-N-G model, which situates "S" (for "Setting," or "Scene" in some formulations) as being one of the key facets of any given performance. This concept includes both the physical and the psychological setting (1974: 55-56). In other words, Hymes notes that speech events

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are shaped by the context in terms of both time and space as well as the "cultural definitions" of their surroundings, which shapes how actors internalize their surroundings.

However, Spoken Word has also informed this study's awareness of the complexity of place that goes beyond the chronotopic generic framing as well as the setting as a simplistic, concrete unit. By delving also into the discussion human geography's interest in concepts like "scales" and "scapes," this study is able to depict the ways in which Spoken Word's sensitivity to place as conveyed within various perspectives that realizes as divisible interrelated embedded units.

Place as Scales and Scapes

Human geographers and anthropologists have both utilized the term "scale" to posit that particular sites and experiences are observed and understood based on perspective – or vantage point – of the observer. From a human geography perspective, scale has been used to describe the ways and pathways in which people interact with their environment (e.g., landscapes, cityscapes). Likewise, environmental anthropologist, Anna Tsing (2000) explains that there are various "points of view" to consider when choosing to illustrate certain places. There are certain "flows" (of capital, technology, resources, and – in this case – participants / residents) that are apparent on one level of representation; however, one must remember to expand their imagination to include other less salient ways of mapping out flows of movement and engagement with certain terrains. For example, grazing cattle will experience the landscape quite differently from that of an earthworm.

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Each perspective considers and assesses what is most perceivable and/or accessible to that particular "scale" of interaction. So, as the cattle relies heavily on saplings that become meadows and that then forests, representative from this perspective will divide the landscape in terms of the meadows and forests. However, for the earthworm that exists within the rich soils underneath these meadows and forest, its pathways and way of orienting space requires a new interpretation of the landscape. Tsing explains, that "to tell the story of this landscape requires an appreciation not only of changing landscape elements but also of the partial, tentative, and shifting ability of the storyteller to identify elements at all" (2000:327). Of course, she used the model established here to analyze the flows of globalization, but in keeping with his method, I will apply the same logic to performance, in general, and Spoken Word poetry, in particular.

While there is a growing literature within linguistic anthropology on scale (Lempert and Carr 2016), it should be noted that this chapter will not focus on semiotic acts of "scale-making." These noted semiotic "scale-making" practices, while likely prevalent in my data set, fall outside of my intended use of the term. Instead, I focus on my role as an audience members and ability to dissect multiple levels of place as perspectives of which to observe performances in ways that go beyond the macro vs. micro dichotomy or global vs. local scales (Wortham 2012), as too many details are missed (especially regarding place in terms of art, participants, performances).

This idea is by far a novel venture, as both human geographers and anthropologists have moved the notion of scale being much less about "preordained hierarchical framework" (e.g., large vs. small, global vs. local) and instead focuses on "a

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contingent outcome of the tensions that exist between structural forces and the practices of human agents" (Marston 2000). And Marston draws on Howler (1998) to expand the ways in which people map movements of these human agents to include not just size and level but also to factor in relational dimensions. Hence notions of structural forces could be replaced relational forces (i.e., social interactions) to consider how these agents are primed to engage with and exist in particular spaces. So, beyond size and level – as seen with cattle and earthworm contrast – it becomes necessary to explore lateral perspectives of various human agents interacting on the same plane but from different participant roles.

In short, this chapter will examine the entire social "ecology" of place, which entails different perspectives of place that will then allow analysis of more varied points of views but within the same frame. Keeping these notion of perspective in mind, this section will utilize a scalar analysis to situate how places aid, impede, or recontextualize performances (including conversation within performances) and how performances influences or recontextualizes space.

In thinking of phenomenological place-related studies, in terms of both how people identify themselves in relation to their environments and how environments impact people's daily lives and routines, various geography and urban planning studies have helped me conceptualize the ways in which I seek to analyze the performance space. In both fields, there is much scholarship on how a setting's "flows" impact (positively or negatively) optimal habitation of their neighborhoods. This interest in "pathways" for movement conjunction with layout and even interaction as a guiding function for these movements brought me to other topological metaphors I found quite

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useful for explaining performance venues and the ways in which participants interact in these spaces.

These metaphors that human geographers and environmental anthropologists often use emerged out of cross-disciplinary discussions of globalization (Appadurai 1990, Heyman & Campbell 2009, Moore 2004), starting with Appadurai, who is accredited with bringing the term 'scapes' to define and analyze other kinds of 'terrains' -- i.e., outside of the traditional landscapes and city-scapes -- to anthropology. While he uses this term to dissect "flows" as it relates to globalization by looking at bodies, objects, and information, it is his focus on movement in ways that supersede physical boundaries that is of particular use to this study. As Salazar (2013) explains, "by using the notion of scapes, we can explore the dynamics of various place-making flows, from the personal to the institutional and from the local to the national, transnational, global, and diasporic."

Where Appadurai posits the ideas of ethnoscapes, technoscapes, financescapes, mediascapes, and ideoscapes, I extend his ideas by observing what I imagine as the ecology of performance-scapes. This concept allows for examining and illuminating the "flows" of people (e.g. transplants and developers as they clash with D.C. natives and artists), "flows" of capital (i.e., as the art form become commercialized and commoditized), and in combination with a reworked approach to verbal art as performance, "flows" of verses (i.e., the ways in which affective lyrics can move and impact spaces in imperceptible yet salient ways).

Place-ing a Verbal Tradition via Interdisciplinary Conversations

Spoken Word poetry is a performative performance poetry hat has its origins in African American language and culture. Given this art form's reputation for performing

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ethnic and gender identity and critical civic engagement, it has been studied immensely within education, rhetoric, and Black studies as a tool to promote inclusive pedagogies and diverse literacy communities (Biggs-El 2012, Fisher 2003, Reyes 2006, Weiss and Herdon 200l). It has been taken up especially by recent PhDs (Johnson 2006 and Keith Jr. 2019). These studies aside, the verbal art tradition would benefit from an ethnographic descriptive and analytical perspective as founded within the ethnography of communication and in particular ethnopoetics (Rothenberg 1985, Hymes 1981, Tedlock 1983, Sherzer 1990, Webster 2009). With that goal in mind, this study seeks to define the genre, especially for those who have never encountered this tradition, as well as to situate the practice for future studies in (linguistic) anthropology, especially ethnopoetics, a movement that has long been interested in the oral arts.

As the name suggests ("ethno," that is), ethnopoetics is in grounded ethno-graphic practices are meant to observing poetics – not just in poetry, but performances of all types – that move beyond Westernized traditions, forms, and epistemologies (Tedlock 1977). Thus, a large concentration of early ethnopoetics was dedicated to the forms and practices of indigenous groups, some of which were intensified by the "glorification of a distant past." Today, that term has been reclarified to place all poetics as ethnopoetics, thereby placing all ethnicity into question and bringing to bear the same consideration of a "fully human poetics," e.g., hieroglyphics, well as contemporary forms (Rothenberg and Rothenberg 2016: xiii). Where linguists and folklorists are usually concerned about generalities, ethnopoetics are interested in the unique and particular, locating structural linguistic features in addition to prosodic and paralinguistic ones embodied in a specific

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iteration or artist (Bauman 1992, Hymes 2003, Jakobson 1960, Rothenberg and Rothenberg 2016, Tedlock 1983).

This work descends from the Americanist tradition of anthropology – i.e., the Boasian practice that recreates the European philological tradition: documenting oral traditions as texts to produce linguistic descriptions. However, latter scholars utilized Hymesian and Tedlockian efforts and strove for ethnographic depth, documenting cultural performances in situ. Thus, the greater goal was to observe how the forms refuted Western ideas that certain races and languages – and thus poetic performances – were primitive or inferior. Furthermore, the more recent traditions also sought to remove romanticized notions of the poetics and focus on expressive forms as being attached to certain ethos and patterning that bear meaning (Bauman 1983, Webster 2009). And eventually, these interests evolved into documenting oral performances and their aesthetic values in terms of affective social actions (Hymes 2003, Bauman 2013) and as well as audience competence (Briggs 1988). And in its most recent forms, this turn looks at poetics as generative of culture (Sherzer and Webster 2015).

In its original inception, ethnopoetics emerged out of the desire to draw upon cross-disciplinary strengths in folkloristics, linguistics, and anthropology – a "practical poetics" in pursuit of oral performances connected to the Other (Tedlock 1983). And when the verbal art as performance framework merges with ethnopoetics, it enables consideration of how performances are keyed (i.e., setup for interpretation), all which emerges from ethnography of communication framework. Through the totality of these collaborative perspectives is grounded is analyses of hybridization and interdiscursivity, a track that follows the original work of Richard Bauman and his development of verbal art

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as performance (VAP), which was first inspired by insights from Raymond Williams's cultural Marxism to now the works of Mikhail Bakhtin. And through these Marxist frameworks, VAP work is able to observe how local minority communities, their arts, and artists engage with the political economy – i.e., via their day to day realities – in ways that critiques domineering social structures.

Within these merged traditions (folklore, ethnomusicology and verbal art as performance) some researchers have fostered fruitful conversations about poetics and place, showcasing how cultural productions are not just sensitive to but also speak to performers / groups' relationship with their immediate surroundings. And indeed, some scholars' analyses have utilized linguistic studies and narrative analyses to highlight this connection through the ways in which stories and language affirms this connection (Basso 1988, Basso 1992, Feld and Basso 1996). Scholars in this tradition also have to take caution not to produce romanticized notions of rurality, equating it with stereotypic and racialized assumptions of what it means to be indigenous to a place and being especially in tune with the land (Webster 2015). This will be discussed at length below under the subsections, "Places Making Folks" and "Folks Making Places" respectively.

The early work of folklorists within Black communities, like Zora Neal Hurston (1934), Roger Abrahams (1970) and Gwaltney (1980) often did not fall prey to these kinds of romanticized depictions, though they too had to contend with a different set of class-based racializing assumptions about urban communities, and then Black urban communities. It is within urban studies where one can see that this different set of scholars have explored the communal ties of urban Black communities and how they foster intimate relationships with the spaces they inhabit (Keene, et al. 2010, Newman

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and Wyly 2006) and this complements a parallel aim in folklore, to intentionally expand its foci to include Asian and African oral literatures and folklore (Finnegan 1991, Finnegan 2012, Harkness 2014, Rothenberg 1985). And as these fields have often worked to document and rescue certain forms from obscurity as well as to engage all poetics as ethnicized performance (Tedlock 1977), this study recognizes an oversight in situating African American verbal art traditions, particularly that of Spoken Word poetry.

This oversight was originally noted by sociolinguists who have been the main preservers of African American linguistic and verbal art forms. Their focus has been on traditions that emerge from Hip Hop, the Black church, and language play embedded within comedic performances as well as everyday conversation (Smitherman 1977; Green 2000; Lanehart 2001, 2015; Rickford and Rickford 2000). While this work has served to substantiate AAL, by exploring its systematic features within verbal art practice, only recently and within the newly established subfield of Hip Hop Linguistics has it delved into how these art forms function to establish group / community cohesiveness and to critique dominant ideologies – or both. The ethnographic work of Alim (2006) and Morgan (2009) both zero in verbal traditions of rap and Hip Hop cultural practices, particularly where it concerns itself with generational, regional and neighborhood identity. Both are studies that help situate Spoken Word as a relative of the tradition.

Finally, working in tandem with ethnomusicologists (Feld and Basso 1996), ethnopoetics and ethnography of communication scholars have worked to situate the collaboration between music and cultural meaning or identity as well as emotive and rhythmic sounds that are embedded in songs and lyrics (Feld 2012; Fox 2004). And in doing so, they have fostered the practice of participant observation and ethnography

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through apprentice-like training, as seen with African / Wolof drumming researchers (Chernoff 1979; Tang 2007). This type of work served to make ethno-studies more inclusive of contemporary Black folklore, paving the way for even more nuanced studies of Black "body-musicking," and the ways in which creative expression is an embodied and social practice (Gaunt 2007).

Such work has showcased how these (folkloric) performances are not solely the *doing* of elicited productions culture, but that often these are embedding everyday interactions (Bauman 1992; Mannheim and Vleet 1998). And when elicited, they can merge with other traditions in ways that create interdiscursive and intertextual connections, in that a conversation can provoke a narration or a narration can provoke a song (Bauman 2004; Kroskrity 2013). Furthermore, the two fields have observed how such forms are used to evoke certain time-spaces, construct particular identities, and express community values – all while (re)defining or validating particular genres of performances (Dent 2009; Fox 2004). The collaboration of ethnopoetics and ethnomusicology has been quite productive, so much so that ethnomusicology offers much insight into Spoken Word performance, a form that is the fusion of lyricism and musicality.

It is the collective analyses of these aforementioned scholars within which the current study is situated. They collectively prompted me to move beyond solely defining and exploring aesthetics of the art form and instead to situate Spoken Word open mics as sites for observing place identity and memory – continuing the work of a few ethnographies of Slam / open mic culture (Fisher 2003; Johnson 2017; Somers-Willett 2003). Specifically, it is "place-ing" Spoken Word poetry in conversation with urban

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anthropology, urban planning studies, and human geography that argues for key considerations of artists and artistic spaces within urban renewal projects in current and future contexts. And overall, by observing African American art forms in concert with urban life (and the issues that come with living while Black in redeveloped area), this work will challenge what it means to be "indigenous" in the traditional sense, and thus what constitutes as belonging.

A "New" Indigeneity

Asserting Place Intimacy & Identity

Urban studies scholarship concerned with its impact on urban areas has brought to bear how urbanization results in a different social field that produces other forms of social actors "hosts and guests" or even "locals," "neighbors" or "tourists" (Leite and Swain 2005; Lew 1987; MacCannell 1976). This work provides an ideal relational framework to distinguish who belongs to particular areas through labels that signify their relationship to place and how they behave (or should behave) in these spaces. Thus, these terms index certain "rights" and levels of ownership that impacts their roles within a local community. This literature works to analyze urban spaces undergoing gentrification, unfolding the cultural clashes between elite gentrifiers who claim certain rights versus "Natives" who (should) naturally possess particular rights underscored by belonging.

That said, one of the ways in which linguistic anthropology distinguishes itself from other fields concerned with language in how it views speakers as members of a community. Consider Duranti's (1997) explanation:

> This means that linguistic anthropologists see the subjects of their study, that is speakers, first and above all as social actors, that is, members of

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> particular, interestingly complex, communities, each organized in a variety of social institutions through a network of intersecting but not necessarily overlapping sets of expectations, beliefs, and moral values about the world (3).

As such, studies within the field can and often do observe the ways in which individuals enact their memberships to various community groups, as well as their allegiances to particular ideologies or institutions. However, as Duranti describes the "golden days" of linguistic anthropology as being those that embraced its interdisciplinary roots – not expecting any one discipline to answer all questions – this study embraces multidisciplinary understanding issues of identity, community borders, and belonging. And therefore, places linguistic anthropology – specifically a verbal art as performance framework – in conversation with the aforementioned urban studies scholarship.

In order to achieve the aims of this research, which includes how Spoken Word poets forge relationships and addresses dislocation caused by gentrification, this work also takes into account studies from anthropology of tourism, urban anthropology, human geography, and sociolinguistics. Each field's perspective highlights the ways in which the interactions between urban renewal policies, elites' takeover, and local resistances results in the (re)creation of borders and the (un)whitening of certain spaces. In urban centers where gentrification is ongoing, many social roles and their definitions are called into question, especially as this overlap of racialization and spatialization policies stir-up territorialism. For example, "regeneration" or urban renewal projects as spatialization policies are reconstructed to prompt a "a return to the city" by attracting middle class

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white populations without taking into account subsequent clashes between groups can prompt and (re)define notions of belonging in these areas.

Belonging is an ideal that is constantly negotiated through linguistic performances as well as through identity categorizations. Such classifications and descriptions are embedded with not only *who* is part of a group but *how* this group is positioned within society and in confrontation with particular institutional figures and their policies. Indigeneity refers to an identity that is forged in being an indigenous people and thus considered home-grown and rooted in the terrain. Thus, indexing this aspect of self is central to establishing one's emotional and spiritual connectedness to land and association with land rights and ownership. Furthermore, where indigeneity is used as a marker for belonging, similarly other community and social labels are designed to construe who can perform certain roles and what entitlements these positions afford. In other words, situating oneself as "indigenous" has both symbolic and pragmatic implications, and with it comes certain ways of being (in)able to move about the world while advocating against land dispossession and dislocation.

Where performance of one's indigeneity evokes an intimate relationship and, therefore, rights to the lands they and their ancestors have inhabited, African Americans, usually operate from a constant perspective of displacement. Thus, they are never able to draw on similar discussions in ways that Native Americans have been observed in public consciousness and anthropological inquiry – i.e., their connection and intimacy with the land and their entitled (permitted or theorized) proprietorship of the space they inhabit. However, in Washington D.C., where ownership is being denied or redefined, Native residents take on the discourse of indigeneity to situate their connections to their urban

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spaces. And given that Spoken Word allows the speaker, or performer, to become a social actor who does not just describe the material world but is able to redefine it, poets combine both discursive practices to (re)situate themselves as belonging.

An "Ethos" of Preservation & Resistance

Spoken Word as a performative and transformative act, affords poets a unique ability to first call out master/hegemonic narratives (Jones 2017), while also preserving affiliations to the spaces they inhabit. They can then reclaim what has been physically lost through language and oral performances, and especially where these performances can be taken up and circulated. These performances become cultural memory for one's home and/or a memorialized version of home. As will be discussed in chapter 3, the art form's ability to speak to the cultural zeitgeist, creates a chronotopic "here and now" sense urgency and vehicle for social commentary, addressing socio-cultural and socio-political issues that plague our society. Thus, its practitioners can use the generic conventions to craft and/or index certain ethos by conversing with and embodying correlations of time-space (Dent 2007).

Where ethnomusicology and linguistic anthropology provides a framework to showcase how Spoken Word poets connect their craft to Wolof griot traditions (Irvine 1996; Tang 2007), Thomas Hale's (2007) foray into African oral literature has prompted his work on griots as the persons who are living archives. His work delineates the ways in which through their performances artists are positioned as prime "witnesses" and, therefore, "archivists" who can both record and mediate incidents of significance to their communities. Taking a cue from Hale's definition, Spoken Word will be approached in this study as descending from griot traditions, where storytelling is not just remembering

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a past, but rather provides the "social glue" of societies. Furthermore, similar to Wolof insult poems (Irvine 1996), Spoken Word utilizes a non-Western participation framework in order to recontextualize the performance event in ways that places in-group members at an advantage of comprehending and thereby executing cultural norms. And where marginalized communities are usually relegated to the fringes (Hill 1998, 2001) of public dialogue that may seek to situate their identities in certain fashions, verbal art forms are not only viable for critiquing dominant structures but can be used to for communities to convey their own histories and practices via "their own voice" (Kroskrity 2013).

Semiotics of Place

Spoken Word is very much concerned with what language can *do* (Hymes 1972; Rosaldo 1982). Hence, this study relies on situating functions of Spoken Word performances as a process of "doing," where language has a direct impact on reality, such as how persons or places are perceived and acted upon. Often performativity has been utilized in the construction of identity, where gender is a continual performance and not given (Butler 1988). Specifically, certain semiotically mediated acts (e.g., a signature) (re)produce a self as citizen (Cody 2009). Likewise, this study will illustrate the ways in which place too is also not a static concept, but it is (re)produced via the acts of those that can evoke and harken back to memories of a particular site. These acts have semiotic value in that they can index identity categories – including qualities associated with particular characteristic or personae – as well as establish connections between images, sounds or even societal status. As Mannheim (1999) explains, Peircean iconicity is described as when a "sign by virtue of its own quality and [a] sign of whatever else partakes of that quality" (107). When these qualities are reproduced and taken up as

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“emblematic” of certain identities, or in this case of this study, i.e., persons in relationship to certain places, the “co-textual relationship” can be evoked with purpose to establish alignments (Agha 2007). In more recent work, this is referred to as a rheme (or rhematic interpretant) following Peirce’s trichotomy of interpretants (Ball 2014).

Mannheim goes on to say that “one analytic goal of linguistic anthropologists and other ethnographers is to make these iconic linkages explicit,” especially because they often perform boundary work between social group categories in semiotic acts of social differentiation and distinction (109). Verbal art traditions, like Spoken Word, utilize their performance to associate themselves with particular reading of time and space (Dent 2009), with class culture (Fox 2004), with (or away from) certain groups (Irvine and Gal 1999), or with places and their traditions (Coupland 2011; Johnstone 2011). Where language has been used to create these “linkages,” this has been discussed in terms of how a dialect is indexically presupposed to be an intrinsic part of a speaker’s personae or regional identity (Gal 2013; Hill 1995). Where performance is concerned this discussion has gravitated towards analysis of speech genres, requiring use of voice, body, lyrics, or talk evoke place-related affiliations (Feld and Basso 1996). Spoken Word is examined here from both aspects, indicating further why fusing ethnopoetics, ethnomusiciology, sociolinguistics is not only productive, but necessary for a holistic approach to this form.

However, via ethnopoetic considerations of the expressive function of language, verbal art traditions can highlight how audiences are influenced and impacted by multisensorial performances. Descriptions of these experiential process can also be linked with qualities (produced in context as qualia). This study posits that participants’ talk of

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their experiences within spaces are often named, and these meta-cultural labels are assigned meaning through their socio-cultural context. Hence, this research observes this kind of talk following Gal (2017), who explains: "qualia may be named in metapragmatic discourse. In addition, conventionalized qualities (qualia) can be displayed and made palpable in the poetics of interaction even if they are not labeled nor widely discussed" (33). In other words, where positioning qualities are conscious or unconscious, the ways in which places are semiotically linked to embodied experience offer valuable insights for analyzing place-related performances.

That said, beyond being embedded with personae-place information, poet's interpretation of tokens of qualia in a venue can further influence performers' motives and methods for engagement. The findings highlighted in this study show that performers who have experience with diverse performance situations know they must make sense of these qualities and adjust accordingly, determining the appropriate delivery and content that will achieve their intended experiential results (Harkness 2017). In fact, interviews revealed not only do these spaces have very clear contrasting vibes, but the qualities indexically realized as qualia, alter how performers perceive their role and thus approach the mic, both literally and metaphorically. The ability to interpret experiential data and align its semiotic meaning has been explore further explored by Gal (2017). She explains it as follows:

> Qualia are the embodied, conventional, and experienceable forms of abstract qualities. … The qualia of experience are not inherent in objects; they are the result of the way persons, relying on conventional discourses (interpretants), embedded in institutions, take up objects and experiences

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> (Chumley and Harkness 2013). It is the construal of the same qualia in many different experienceable objects and events that results in iconic (resemblance) relationships (32).

This delineation of "vibe" in this study (see chapter 6) illuminates this embeddedness by highlighting the ways in which it manifests in poets' discourse.

Overall, the idea that places and their qualities are not only "felt" but are discernable by those who interact and perform in said space these propels this inquiry forward to ascertain how shape the performance frame. And in doing so, finding here convey that the qualities of the energy produced should be considered a key component of the performance situation – one that is worth assessing for researchers of performance and interactions.

Transforming Place and Space

Un(Whitening) Public Space

While "place" can be understood as a specified locale, "recognizable" by a larger audience as specified and tangible destinations (or gathering sites), place studies have defined space as a more abstract "area" that is invisible but is, nevertheless, "sensed" and "experienced." This literature has mainly been used as part of this study to showcase the ways in which urban places and spaces impact how sites are planned as well as inhabited. However, when applying the same literature to a semiotic framework of place and space in conjunction with standardizing certain forms of talk and policing others, it becomes possible to explore how dominant cultures and their privileged forms also influence other modes of interaction within public spaces.

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For example, Hill's (1998, 2008) research focuses on the abstract space known as "white public space." This work, in conjunction with Urciuoli's (1996) study on Puerto Rican's in New York, described "spheres of talk" that were deemed appropriate for certain linguistic codes. Urciuoli speaks mostly about bilingual speakers having to function with an awareness of two bounded spaces: inner spheres of talk vs. outer sphere of talk; the former described home life and intimate circle where the latter consisted of the public and among strangers (Hill 1998:681). Hill (1998:682) explains that such boundaries worked to protect and uphold 'White public space,' sites where "practices of a racializing hegemony, in which Whites are invisibly normal, and in which racialized populations are visibly marginal" are legitimized. African Americans – and other minorities – are constantly policed for allegedly infringing on White public space by speaking their 'delegitimized' variety. AAL, according to the norms of White public space is rhematized as the speech of lazy, untrained and 'un-American' people. Minorities too can internalize this racializing dominant ideology – especially for those who wish to survive and thrive within the context of dominant culture (Morgan 1994; Roth-Gordon 2011).

Status Quo of Place Iconicity

Discussions of white public space are productive for understanding how dominant culture constructs notions of belonging within public dialogue as well as within public spaces. That said, the discourse that situates who and what behaviors are standardizes also polices those groups and behaviors that are considered deviant and, therefore, are contextualized as inappropriate for public space. And speakers must

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constantly observe contextually what is suitable, often via (sub)conscious recognition of the overarching "rules: that govern instances of talk.

In Silverstein's (2003) analysis of conversations, he reveals that it is both micro-social and macro-social institutions that govern the expectations and mandated responses attributed to certain spaces. As interactions become ritualized occurrences – meaning 'patterned' in a way that lets interactants recall similar conditions of talk – eventually exchanges bear their own "indexical iconicity, by which a ritual(ized) text appears to achieve self-grounding in the (relatively) cosmic absolute of value-conferring essences" (2003:203). Working in conjunction with Gal's definition of qualia, the ways in which presupposing ideologies about places are semiotically signaled, either overtly or covertly, offers a method of analysis for how spaces can become racialized.

Where gentrification often results the removal of local Black / minority residents and a "whitening" of public spaces, certain neighborhoods and venues are ascribed with rules for access. As such, public spaces become semiotically link with ideologies of racialization, where the status quo and acceptable norms are connected with Whiteness. This discussion is especially fruitful for examining sites undergoing gentrification, where privileging certain norms for interaction can determine who has access to particular spaces and how they govern themselves. This is particularly salient in D.C., where tourists and transplants are privileged over born and bred Washingtonian and long-term residents – a tension that plays out in Native resistance. This study on Spoken Word poetry, observes this push back from an artists' perspective, showcasing how verbal arts can overturn said ideologies and evoke their own participation frameworks and thus norms of appropriateness. Where these scholars can be utilized to analyze place iconicity

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that are tied to toxic redevelopment campaign, it is important to note that place has been iconized in emblematic ways, and persons can draw on place-related symbols to evoke intimate (and positive) connections to areas of importance (e.g., home). This over of relevant literature will explore this idea further in conjunction with place-making and reclamation of places.

Disrupting the Status Quo

Verbal art as performance scholars have also showcased how a particular performance frame can impact the ways in which stories, poems, plays, songs and other verbal art are presented by the artists to their viewing audiences. Furthermore, these sites also have salient influences on the ways in which the participants understand and make sense of interaction. Certain performance events allow for the temporary overturning of societal rules. And it is during this particular suspension of the natural order of appropriateness that performances can contest or highlight constraining societal norms (Seizer 2000). If there are highly salient contrasts between everyday interactions and performances, especially where there are boundaries between – whether that is gender, racial, or geographically induced – one can see how verbal arts are empowering for those who are controlled by the status quo. But also, these "pauses" can be utilized by minority community to rearticulate who is in power and then control the space long enough to contest dominant culture.

Reflecting the "Soul" / "Souls" of a Place

Places as Embodied / Emplaced Experiences

The notion of embodiment as addressed in recent literature within linguistic anthropology, ethnomusicology, and human geography, is rooted in sociologist, Pierre

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Bourdieu's discussion of habitus. Bourdieu (1990:55) explains that social practices – i.e., "thoughts, perceptions, expressions, and actions" are "historically and socially situated conditions of its production." In other words, a person's enactment and reproduction of particular rituals, routines, or performances are established by previous iterations of similar productions in ways that make it identifiable as a subset of earlier forms. Essentially, any current or future practices – or habits – can be attributed to and classified as within a particular "genre" – or category – of dispositions and activities.

Bourdieu (1990) goes on to express that within these classifications there is a limited and yet infinite capacity of "conditions" that allows for a certain freedom – in that it allows the individual creativity that distinguishes their actions from others. However, he suggests there is also a certain presupposed determinism of social practices as individuals are conditioned in ways that realize unconscious yet predictable productions (or performances). This idea connects to bodily hexis, a concept that suggests these practices become ingrained into one's mind and body via socialization into certain rituals and routines (1990:69). Upon successful reproduction and then authentication (or confirmation) of norms, these enactments become taken for granted dispositions.

This concept of embodiment has been explored in several scholarly works, particularly in ways describe "natural" and "naturalistic" performances as the result of socialization processes – i.e., the results of both coaching and mimesis (Atkinson 2016) in everyday cultural routines (Wirtz 2014). But the term has also been employed in ways through which place and memory can be personified and expressed through particular performances – such as music, poetry, and storytelling. Thus, embodiment hints to bodies, rituals, performances, and products of performances being reservoirs of history

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and memory, particular those that reference ideals, qualities, and norms that are of value and authenticated by other practitioners of the same performance genre (Atkinson 2016; Bauman 2008; Feld and Basso 1996).

While embodiment is a useful concept for understanding routines and rituals, especially as it relates to performance, it has also been assessed in recent scholarship as limited in isolation of other concepts regarding social practice(s). In Sarah Pink's (2014) work on emplacement, she explains the need to move beyond understanding one's practices of knowing as behaviors and responses that are so embedded into one's experiences *and* associations that they defy a rational and intentional 'doing' – or what scholars labels as embodied practices. Through her practice of sensory ethnography and observing the performance of bullfighting, Pink does acknowledge that many parts of any given performance are indeed embodied, such as the ways the torero (or bullfighter) performs the cape passes – as these were ingrained via other simulated and realized performance events. However, she also recognizes that there is more at play, as every bullfight or performance event is embedded in its own ecology – with new factors that alter the performance situation. Considering this notion, Pink argues that there is also the need to assess the "sensuous interrelationship of body-mind-environment" that then "enables a fuller interpretation of the … place-event with a complex ecology" (344). Hence, she positions "emplacement" as this phenomenological consideration of said relationship, which includes the ways performances and participants will interact with and adjust for each performance's specific ecology.

Pink's work poses such questions as, what happens when a bullfighting event that usually occurs within an open stadium with a massive audience and consideration of

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the weather is repositioned in an enclosed or more intimate space? An example of a drastic shift is to examine the ways in which Flores (1994) makes sense of how new elements introduced to a given environment will consequently alter the entire performance situation. He observes this by examining the Los Pastores event, a folk drama that is rooted in its affiliation with "labor of gratitude" or gifting, which is "coterminous with the performance itself" (1994:297). This act of the audience – community members who attend and offer "a threshold gift" – is a critical linking process central to this folk genre. Being situated in the barrios for in-group audiences bespeaks to these practices in ways that are not replicated in other contexts. There is a mutual gifting in barrio performances, i.e., labor acts and hosting in exchange for the performance. However, when it removed from this context, the performance event shifts, for performances are constitutive of the social relations and cannot be "abstracted" from them (Flores 1994:278). Thus, when Flores observes the same performance in front of tourists at a local mission, the incorporation of a "fee" counters the "gift-exchange" behavior that is intrinsically linked to Las Pastores. In other words, this shift in place and corresponding social relations, impacts the genuine realization of the performance event, i.e., the art form's original intent and natural interaction is lost when it displaced from its normal setting.

Where Flores specifically focuses on the rituals of "gifting" and the ways in which participants' cultural competence – or lack thereof – influences the performance event and the social relations that govern them, Pink's strategy of observation expresses that 'natural environment' is of no consequence. Instead, the shift requires that performers *emplace* themselves in the new environment. Thus, it is the social actor's (or

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performer's) responsibility to be sensitive to both the new elements introduced and removed, adjusting in ways that may override or shape one's embodied practices. And, consequently, achieving emplacement may require some recontextualization and reconfiguration that will impact what delivery and/or forms of interactions are deemed appropriate for the new situation. Pink's observations can be easily translated for other performance events, especially in analyzing Spoken Word's dialogic relationship between poet and the participating audience is a key contributor to the performance. Even of more importance is Pink's discussion of emplacement as ways to assess the relationship between the roles of the hosts, a feature poet, and the space's ambiance (or "vibe").

In summation, Flores's analysis of audience's understanding and execution of participant norms in conjunction with Pink's ideas of emplacement warrants an in-depth consideration of how the ambiance or "vibe" aids, hinders, or merely alters the expectations and executions for artistic expression in Spoken Word. And this section will explore that while an art form's practices may embody place, in that they evoke as well as index place- and performance-related histories and memories, they should also be viewed as responding to the places and spaces in which these performances occur.

Place, Memory, and Feeling

Place-related studies of expressive forms in anthropology have been attuned to the fact that many cultures experience landscapes and/or the spaces they inhabit (e.g., performance venues, time-space) in palpable ways, so much so that the relationship is depicted in their linguistic practices (e.g., place names – Basso 1988, Pagliai 2000), folklore (Feld and Basso 1996; Wirtz 2014), as well as in manifestations of performance

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events (Dent 2009; Flores 1994; Fox 2004). Even ethnomusicology has sought to connect music with the construction of identities, connecting the musical event to memories and group consciousness of place (Solomon 2000). For example, Thomas Solomon explains that the work of anthropologists and human geographers inspired him and other ethnomusicologists to explore "how places are not simply pre-existing backdrops for activity, but rather are actively made and imagined by people through social processes" (2000;258). His study, which was situated in Bolivia and observed the Carnivale-related song genre called wayñu, focused on the inseparable nature of embodiment and emplacement when assessing the cultural ways "felt experiences" (i.e., the sensorial encountering) of one's environment / the physical world were expressed via music and folklore.

Solomon's study is a particularly useful point of entry towards understanding the ways in which Spoken Word's open mic spaces, the participants, and their interactions not only influence the performance event itself but are materialized within an individual's physical and psychological experience with said spaces and personal connections. And this experience translates into in-the-moment phenomenological interpretations (i.e., sensorial and emotional responses) that merge and accumulate as memories. In fact, event and place-related discussions documented within this research reveal that like landscapes spaces' "affective presence" preserves and relays previous "experiences and feelings of those who came before and made that place, and interpolate those experiences and feelings" of those presently in the space as well as for future participants (Solomon 2000:276). In short, these experiences create affective chains of

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semiosis between past and present interpretations of a moment, allowing for identifiable and categorical descriptions of experiential qualities affiliated with performance spaces.

Folks Making Places

From an Urban Planning Perspective

As people have made their ways from rural spaces to city centers, topics related to urbanism has been garnering an increasing amount of interest and relevancy across several disciplines. And given society's interest with modernity, mass production, globalization, and industrialization, scholarship has been required to not just observe but address the ways in which this has impact on the world at large, the city center, and even on rural spaces. Navigating domestic rural-to-urban migration required a consideration for how migration between these spaces impacts the federal or local economy as well as identity formation practices on the ground (e.g., rurality vs. urbanity). However, before delving into the urbanism's impact on the individual, it must be noted how place first informed the material aspects of establishing city centers.

When thinking of place-related studies, especially as it relates to urban spaces like D.C., urban planning studies have offered a variety of texts for first defining place and for understanding why policies focused on city planning and redevelopment are necessary to understanding place histories. By first establishing the difference between place and space, urban planning scholars have ensured that these terms are not used interchangeably and with precision in order to home in on specific locales and its physical structures (or places) versus the internal, abstract, and perceptual areas (or spaces). For example, Casey (1996) makes it clear that places are holders of spaces but not vice versa.

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Furthermore, these fields have engaged with the ways in which politics and economics informs strategies for constructing and designing urban areas. For example, studies have shown how urban renewal projects often reconfigures places in ways that have racialized spaces as well as spatialized races (Davila 2014; Modan 2008; Summer 2019). This aspect of gentrification is what lends itself to the displacement and erasure of certain minority and socio-economic groups – given that race and SES are often intertwined. And while this has a clear implication for Black residents in D.C., the District's redevelopment has also impacted the arts and artists in the area.

Even more recently, urban planning studies have delved into more philosophical discussions about how spatialization policies results in positive or negative impacts on residents. Scholars show how urban centers functions as spaces that are constantly negotiated socially, experienced emotionally, as well as perceived mentally and spiritually. And it is within this framework that placemaking has become a popular paradigm for assessing and meeting both the physical, experiential, and sensorial aspects of revamping neighborhoods in distress. While it has its detractors – i.e., those who criticize the implied biases that privy certain stakeholders over others, placemaking studies have asserted the idea that urban planning should consider the "soul" of a place and how a design represents the identity and character already instill by those who use these spaces.

From an Anthropological Perspective

Returning to anthropology, our discipline has been quite involved in these discussions as well. These contributions derive from a subfield entirely dedicated to analysis of urban spaces (i.e., urban anthropology) to various specialized perspectives on

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place-related discussions, as seen with linguistic anthropology and relevant fields (e.g., ethnopoetics, ethnomusicology, and folkloristics). And it through linguistic anthropology's focus on verbal art as performance, which heavily emphasizes context, that fully delves into the ways in which performances are emplaced environments.

Anthropologists have contributed immensely to academic conversations relating to place – both in terms of defining the concept for the discipline as well as utilizing the subject as an entry point to investigate or depict how groups identity or interact with place(s) part of their history and ecology. When it comes to defining the concept, knowing how to distinguish between place and space has been a key discussion, especially considering some tendencies to use these concepts interchangeably.

Anthropologists have even had to contend with the idea that the ways in which the field (or rather the ethnographer) understands places, or trained to interpret informant's interaction with spaces, can proceed to create problematic hierarchies. For example, Leach (2006), comments on his observation of his "Nekgini-speaking friend" Yamui as he carves out inanimate object that, for the anthropologist, is representative of a power but, for the carver, *is* power. Along with "hierarchical and ready-scaled descriptive apparatuses," his examination of power within places and places within persons, Leach as suggests "the logical 'scaling' of persons in places that encompasses them must be overturned (2006:149, 151). This work is not the first to address place and persons as being intertwined. Leach drew upon Basso's (1996) discussion of "senses of place" to showcase this point.

While urban planning studies and urban geography may observe the construction of places (or spaces) as influential on the people that inhabit them – whether

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that results in forms of mental, emotional, of even physical implication – linguistic anthropology's focus on spiritual connection bring to light a point that often policymakers ignore. While urban studies have increasingly considered the philosophical aspect of urban renewal projects, taking into account the "soul" of sites via placemaking practices, this praxis still positions locales and human experiences as separate entities as opposed to being interconnected and reflexive. But also, it ignores the ways in which performances sites are integral sites worth creating and preserving when (re)imagining urban spaces. And lastly, urban planning and urban anthropology scholars often overlook the power art as being in dialogue with place.

Placemaking and Reclamation of Place

As previously stated, this term placemaking has been used by many scholars – from linguistic and urban anthropologists to urban planning studies and policymakers. Thus, it is quite loaded term with varied underpinnings, depending on its usage. However, for this study, "placemaking" is utilized to position performative speech acts that entextualize place-related symbols, sounds, tastes, and cultural references to ground and emplace the performers and performances in the local setting or the location being indexed. But, within the context of a gentrifying D.C., poets' placemaking is used to establish and *create* place by stating and shaping exactly what it is – specifically where place is being redefined and belonging is being recontextualized or denied.

Keeping with the goals of placemaking from a city planning philosophy perspective, which pursues inclusion of community relevant spaces and "optimizing" current infrastructure and its character as reflected its populace. I borrow the concept to describe the empowering speech act by which local Spoken Word artists fight to

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(re)insert their own histories and memories into the public narrative that seeks to redefine Chocolate City. In utilizing what I observe as placemaking performance, these poets demonstrate their embodiment of D.C. and therefore are a vital part of its place identity. In short, this stratagem challenges what is lost when "outsiders" define said "shared value" that essentially marginalizes and erases a cultural group. Spoken Word, being a transformative performance empowers its participants by providing a space to challenge dominant groups and their ideologies while situating their identity as belonging. Hence, these artists are given agency to craft their own sense of home that counters D.C. policymakers' construction of the "New D.C." The do so within their genres, often via the invocation of emblems of place, discussed in the next section.

Sensorial & Semiotically Mediated Emblems of Place

In his work on linguistic repertoire, Agha (2003) explored the ways in which Received Pronunciation (RP) "has come to count as a status emblem in British society, an emblem of speaker status linked to a specific scheme of cultural values" (231). While his work is centered on the process of enregisterment of a particular "phonolexical registers" and therefore is more dedicated to the analysis of linguistic forms, this study utilizes his discussion of "emblems" as it refers to other status symbols embedded within place-making performances. Thus, in this case, I examine how poets embed "emblems of place-making" within their performances to assert intimate connection to place (e.g., placenames, sounds, and tastes). As Agha depicts on RPs emblematic statue, he provides argues that "cultural value is not a static property of things or people but a precipitate of sociohistorically locatable practices" (2003;232). And it is this explanation that will be utilized to discuss how place-making makes use of emblems – i.e., references imbued

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with their own histories – with sign-values that, when used performatively, solidified one's belonging.

Placenames

Basso (1988) has done extensive work on "placenames" as a means to link storytelling and memory by those who have an emotional connection to these sites and/or understand the histories and accounts associated with these places. Hence, his work showcases how a cultural system of communicative practices engendered in specific linguistic practices highlights a cultural group's intimate relationship with the places they encounter – both physical and metaphysically. While the generation of Western Apache that Basso worked with, drew upon placenames to index moral stories attached to these sites, essentially what was key to this study is the ways in which a singular name can evoke a memory and one that is rooted in deep social consciousness of particular group. Hence, when a placenames is spoken in particular contexts, those familiar are quickly able to not only recall memories associated with these spaces but the sensorial experiences connected to these recollections.

What Basso posited that when a speaker engages with the landscape interactionally, where they "put their landscapes to work," using them symbolically and for their performative capacities – they are not just describing the material world. Thus, Basso urges researchers to place close attention to the place-naming conventions (or toponyms) in everyday speech, for they can reveal meaningful association between a person and their history, social affiliations or conceptualization on themselves in relation to others. I draw on these findings by showing them also at work in particular ways within Spoken Word poetry performances.

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Another example of how place-names are deployed pragmatically by speakers is analyzed by Irish-Canadian Literature scholar Katrin Urchel (2012) who states the following observation about place: Remembering places begins by naming them, and place names figure prominently in the works of the authors considered here. In the diaspora, places can only be remembered through visual and verbal signs, such as photographs and names. Place names unlock places, enabling identification with them, which reinforces the significance of such names as placeholders of memory… (39). She, like Dent, draws on Bakhtinian principles of chronotope to posit that "diasporic writers" create prose that are less about places themselves and more so about their perception of place, specifically the "temporal layers" that interconnect place with cultural memory and meaning beyond one individual's experience.

For D.C. Natives, many placenames are all that is left of a specific time and place, as their changing landscape and performance-scape leaves behind a wake of spaces and places that no longer exist. For this reason, even the term "Chocolate City" has meaning. That said, there are many other easily taken-for-granted placenames aka "shout-outs" to places of importance mentioned by D.C.-based or native poets.

Tastes

Food culture is undoubtedly another huge indicator of place. There are just some cuisines that have amassed "celebrity" in their own right, especially now that being a self-proclaimed "foodie" draws symbolic capital in its own right (Bourdieu 1986). But, in some contexts, a dish, spice, or flavor evokes the "essences" of particular places and/or groups. David E. Sutton's (2010) breakdown the ways in which foods (or taste) are not

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just connected to sense and memories, but they can be used to assert "taste distinctions" – or as markers of social status.

Where the Washington D.C. is accredited with two foods as a large part of its food scene, one is intentionally highlighted in this study to showcase how conversations about food culture can showcase how groups associated with certain cuisine are classified and pushed to the fringes (Fritz and Ramanathan 2019). That said, where minority / cultural performances utilize the "pauses" of societal norms to reclaim spaces, they can also exploit these moments to redefine how tastes and food culture is represented. And in doing so, they redirect the narrative to realign places with favorable qualities.

Sounds

Feld (2012), the founder of anthropology of sound, established the relationship between the Kaluli's musical forms and their expression and experience of emotions as sentiment. Many of his observations showcased how the Kaluli drew inspiration from the sounds present in their environment – one in particular were muni bird calls – and translated them into meaningful reflections of their connection to the places they visited each day or to the woes of sadness triggered by loss and mourning. His work conveys highlights the ways in which sounds not only perform but evoke "embodiments of feelings." Feld also depicted the ways in which a cultural group draws its expressive forms from the "soundscape" within their natural environment. Kaluli weeping songs reveals as much about the performers' emotional state as it does about their connection to place – a reality that made more evident by the sound symbolism found within their linguistic system.

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Similar to the ways in which tastes are negatively depicted, even sounds – or rather musical traditions – are emmeshed with the societal debris of racism and racialization in ways that demean certain performance genres. This study showcases that the criminalization of GoGo, a genre of music that indigenous to D.C., has provoked protests by Washingtonians who fight against the ostracization of their cultural practices. In their responses to cultural genocide, they heighten the cultural clashes between gentrifiers and Natives by positioning the performance in relationship to a long history of place identity. In doing so, they are able to posit the genre as indigenous to the area, thereby positioning themselves in the same fashion.

Overall, the explanation of these scholarly contribution to place and performance all work to situate Spoken Word performances as functional sites for establishing place and group identity as well as aesthetically significant. And considering the ways in which Washington D.C. has only been recently accounted for in anthropological literature (Prince 2016; Summer 2019), observing this verbal art tradition through the context our of nation's capital and its socio-cultural and socio-political movements is beyond necessary. This study showcases that observing performances in urban sites are particularly useful to ethnopoetics (and ethnomusicology for that matter), and consideration of performance culture and spaces are key to urban studies. In short, this multidisciplinary framework harkens back to the "golden days" of linguistic anthropological studies (Duranti 1997), but hopefully building connections to new disciplines and conversations.

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2.2 Conceptual Framework: Updating Contextual Studies

Introducing Performance-Scapes

In considering the above, this study tries to analyze one specific genre of performance from different levels to encounter how place talk and bodies flows within these spaces and thus can I extend the notion of 'scape' as ways of observing place (and space) in relationship with interaction. As I specifically focusing performances, I thought to position my goal for analyzing interaction by illuminating performance-scapes, as "scapes, by analogy to landscapes, are given material shape and meaning by human action" (Salazar 2013), but while retaining the ethnography of communication framework and revised to focus on verbal art as performance as a special kind of social action as theorized by Bauman (1992, 2004, 2008).

For anthropologists, investigations of people's environments have considered social, emotional, and even moral connections to landscapes, as seen with Basso's discussion of "lived topographies" for his study on the Western Apache. Throughout my fieldwork it became quite clear that it insufficient enough to consider Spoken Word performances simply from one perspective (e.g., the audience's or the artist's) but also at the obvious level of representation (i.e., performances in relation to immediate spaces such as its edifice). But as people began to assert their experiences within place in conjunction with mood, I began to ponder this emotional attachment and the ways in which artists' purview of space allowed for certain modes of engagement with the performance venue and other humans agents in the space. But also, as participants began to distinguish their experiences by drawing comparison between different locales, I also focused on the points of comparisons being made.

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Hence, I tried to imagine what are the "planes" of interactions that will help me map out the specific "performance-scapes" of these interactions. Why "performance-scapes"? By treating these sites as performance-scapes, I am able to highlight the visible layout as well as operationalize these otherside intangible "pathways" that social interactants use "move about" the space or within the performance (i.e., in relation to talk and performance). And in doing so, a scalar analysis of these perspectives procures ways of understanding place and performance from a more expansive and hierarchical format -- so not just the ways locales and edifices inform interaction but also how layout and ambiance are "salient" structural and relational forces that motivate interactions.

Defining the "Perspectives of Place"

In looking at various scales of place, it observed that such a framework would limit the insights this study could hone for its analyses. For just focusing on macro vs. micro conceptualization would ignore the idea that place is best understood as a spectrum of multiple spatial perspectives. When combing scales with the concept of scapes, one can focuses on more nuanced assessments of place as embedded units – best visualized as "nesting" entities (see Figure 2.1 below). And each "scale" offers a different vantage point (or perspective) for observing the aforementioned flows of performance-related capital and resources. In order to understand the ways in which these Spoken Word culture in D.C., and possibly in other regions and art forms, it is necessary to identify and define these perspectives and how they work towards dissecting performances.

For the purposes of this study, space will be dissected into the following categories and with attention to these definitions.

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1. Setting: refers to the locality or external positioning of a space within a larger schema (e.g., region, city, neighborhood) and its immediate environment or surroundings (i.e., relation to other edifices or community spaces, like parks).
2. Building: refers to the actual edifice that is used to assign function and purpose of the internal activities and spaces (e.g., a temple or church equates to worship; a restaurant to dining; a home to personal living space).
3. Layout: refers to the design or arrangement of décor and furnishings in ways that governs function / and flow, or the ways in which people are prompted to move about and organize in a given area.
4. Decor: refers to the furnishings and interior style, including the use of branded merchandise / logos, art / murals, lighting, and color scheme.
5. Ambiance: refers to the emotive intangible qualities that resonates as the mood or feeling of a space.

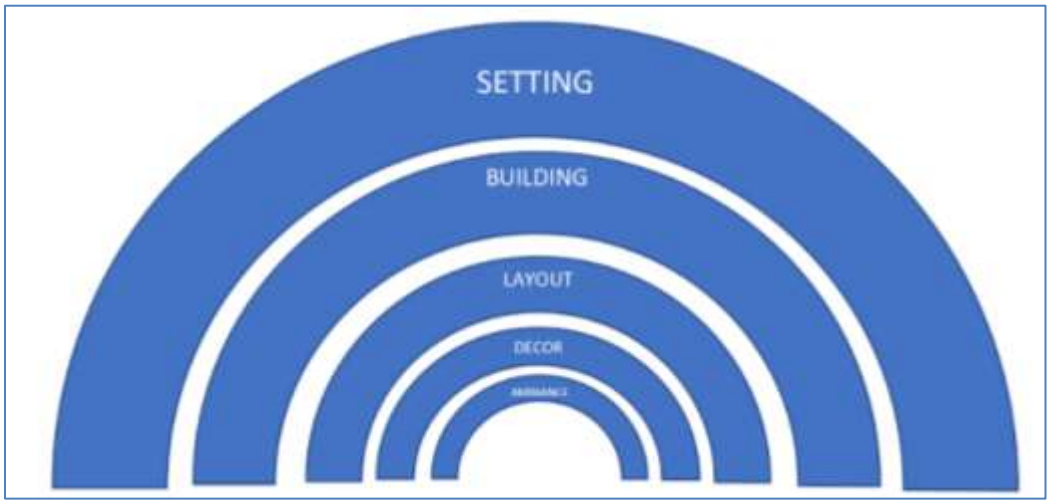

Figure 2.1: Space Features Relationship

Given the above classifications, one can see that there is an association between perspectives. As one category envelops another, there is a level of influence that flow to

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subsumed categories. For example, a neighborhood appealing to wealthy transplants seeking to enjoy the eat-live-play lifestyle may presuppose multi-functional buildings that incorporate apartments above restaurants, shops, and grocery stores that promote a balance of accessible nightlife and homey comfort. Furthermore, this may indicate the need for new builds, resulting in the renovation redesign of outdated buildings that are still welcome in the area as well as the exclusion or removable of spaces that fall outside of the trendy scope of such settings. For another example, a building's purpose will presuppose certain functions (e.g., a church used for worship) and thus impact the ways in which the layout is executed to organize participants for particular activities (e.g., prayer, fellowshipping, or study). And given this understanding, the genre of activities mandated for the space likely influences the style of décor included, which will be used to create the ambiance needed to support said activities (e.g., a church feeling welcome and to promote a connection to spiritual entities and community members).

Overall, the concept of performance-scape and these identified perspectives offers a way of assessing how a performance is influenced by and responds to each embedded unit of place. And it is the observation of contextual events and local open mics as well as conversations had with my consultants (and participants) that prompted this breakdown – revealing that verbal art traditions can and may require different analytical frameworks and interpretations of data. This is seen in the ways that Spoken Word poetry mandates filmed performances in order to fully capture and relay a fleshed-out depiction of the art form as well as its influence on Washington D.C.'s socio-cultural climate, and vice versa – all of which informs how place is best understood in this context and likely for scenarios.

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2.3 Methodological Framework

Valorizing (African American) Oral Histories and Arts

Building on the methods outlined in the introductory chapter, another method deployed in this study is to historically situate the form through ethnographic methods, which enables an exploration of how AAL VATS root members of the African Diasporic no matter the routes they were forced to take. As I will discuss in chapter 3, the definition of Spoken Word poetry and its origins are a complex concept to describe. In large part, this is due to the very nature of Spoken Word culture's roots – the fact that it descends from a people, history, and (oral) traditions that have not always been honored in Western epistemologies. Given that African Slaves and their descendants were victims of anti-literacy laws, denying their access to reading and writing, much of their early history was not documented – at least not from an African American point of view (Rasmussen 2010). Considering that Western intellectualism is grounded in honoring written literacy as a superior form, this places oral histories as a subpar means of documentation.

Even more of an issue is that some of the earliest examples of Black historians publishing for scholarly consumption, scholars like W.E.B. DuBois and Robert Benjamin Lewis, did not occur until around the Civil War – what historiographer John Hope Franklin considers as the first generation of Afro-American history (Trotter 1993). And this period used mostly narrative and Biblical texts to ground their work. It was not until the second generation, where W.E. B. DuBois was joined by Carter G. Woodson, focused on "the growing emphasis in American and Europe on a systematic or "scientific" approach to historical scholarship (Trotter 1993: 12-13). Because the written word has been primed as the ideal method of maintaining works and words for perpetuity – and

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those who cannot or do not write rely solely on oral transference and preservation of their histories – much of the folklore and oral cultures are in danger of being lost altogether.

To fully posit the origins of Spoken Word is to engage in folkloristics and to encounter some of the issues of oral culture and origin stories – i.e., there is no definite answer. In other words, a researcher like myself who will undertake the task of asking the community members about the definition of what the art form is and where it came from must be open to the range of descriptions, as it is safe to assume that the answers will vary. Of course, there are many consistencies; however, diverging responses are inevitable, considering these and definitions are usually based on that person's specific individual experience with the art form. And to make matters more complicated, Western-based curricula, with its attention to page poetry or European oral forms, has ignored Spoken Word as a viable poetic tradition. Thus, secondary source materials, especially by academic experts – the go-to means of providing evidence within the academy – is quite limited. And even then, these sources are often grounded in Western ideals and iterations of poetic features.

Hence, this study instead utilized ethnographic practices (i.e., informal survey/elicitation technique, participant observation of naturally occurring performances as well as open-ended interviews) to ascertain the ways in which Spoken Word poets will define their art, particularly the artists within timeline and site of my fieldwork. My approach to documenting Spoken Word as an expressive form does not seek to provide an indisputable and overarching description but one that is relevant to the time and place of this study. The hope, then, is to start the process of extracting common descriptions in order to prompt other scholarship and descriptions that will solidify and expand the

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definition, with the consideration of oral histories given by cultural experts as well as linguistic analyses that may posit a lineage of traditions that bespeaks its influenced.

And lastly, it should be noted that this study does not feign to believe that this will provide a complete and undisputed explanation of Spoken Word. In fact, more could and *should* be done to analyze the tradition from a sociolinguistic perspective that both builds on and extends the foundational work of so many AAL scholars – those who while inform this work is not heavily discussed. Instead, the goal is merely to begin the work of piecing together a complex history of Spoken Word poetry as well as situate the role of AAL VATs in anthropology, especially in terms of ethnopoetics and folkloristics studies. These practices are positioned within this study as the embodiment of expressive forms, a concept of relevance to verbal art as performance scholarship. But also, this text moves to showcase the interactional and metapragmatic work at play within the art form – a novel endeavor that extends past / current AAL studies while adding to anthropological conversations on African American folklore. That said, the findings presented here are only a glimpse of the art form's facilitation as it was observed and experienced by one ethnographer who has been in contact with one community in a specific region, at a very concrete and crucial moment in time. The hope is to entice further observation and analyses of Spoken Word cultural and linguistic practices.

Place-ing "Place"

In first trying to ascertain exactly the characteristics of place, I decided to perform an impromptu experiment on the subject matter. For my peers and social network, I asked, "When I mentioned the word place, what do you think of?" I executed this game of word association knowing that there are millions of definitions available –

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both in various dictionaries but also with place-related studies and scholarship. For example, there are endless amounts of texts that dedicates themselves to delineating the differences between “place” and “space” (Coleman and Collins 2006, Low 2009, Low and Lawrence-Zuniga 2003, Tuan 1979). Nevertheless, my goal was to ascertain the most rudimentary and foundational understandings that are utilized and reified by everyday persons. Furthermore, I desired to ascertain the mental images prompted by the term as well.

Hence, I first started this study with venturing over to the Merriam-Webster dictionary, which admittedly assisted me with “laying out” my perspectives of place (see analytical framework section / section 2.3), noting that there were several connotations associated with each definition. But first, I eliminated the verb forms of the term in order to focus on the goal of this study – i.e., the noun form. There were a few distinct denotations, including place as a residence or building; place as status or condition; and then place as location or area. While this study obviously addresses the status and positionality of Washington Natives, local artists, and transplants, such a discussion falls outside of the scope for this section. Thus, I am left with place being a reference for specific sites as well as types of structures / edifices while space denotes a general or abstract site. In other words, spaces are within places and space is derived from place (Coleman and Collins 2006).

Still, I put this information to the side and allowed it to “marinate” within the deepest part of my subconscious and decided to pursue a different approach. To understand the ways in which the word is realized with the consciousness of everyday person, I enacted a super informal survey within my social network, utilizing word

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association. I chose a list of five random words, choosing to focus on nouns in hopes to make the survey less ambiguous, and asked them to speak out the first thing that comes to mind. To further ensure I had no skewed perspective of my influence I decided this method to avoid asking "how they define place" or "what is place to you." Instead, I wanted a reflex response. The sample words included a combination of the following: "moon," "chair," "dog," "floor," "chocolate," "car," "cat," and "window." And finally, I included the most important term, "place." Below is the breakdown of the responses collected (Table 2.1).

Table 2.1: A breakdown of Word Associations in place-related survey given to participants.

DH	Beach	Type / Memory
SP	Go	Definition / Function
SG	Peace / Home	Memory / Type
JH	Live	Definition / Function
FH	Home	Type / Memory
AP	Location	Definition
BG	Home	Type / Memory
LW	Home	Type / Memory
TJ	Sunset / Beach	Type / Memory
ND	City	Type

Based on the responses above, I was able to discern that my definitions of place were plausible – in that most would consider the term for its broad and general definition,

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in reference to a feeling or memory (as seen with "beach or home"), or by identifying a particular type. Of note, that even without including a modifier, such as "happy place," many referred to places that evoked a happy memory, never one that conjured negative emotions. And the most popular answer, interestingly, was "home." Even the response "live" has semantic connections to the idea of "home."

Overall, as shown by Coleman and Collins (2006), place is contextual and cultural. But nonetheless, it is important and even when mentioned in general terms often indexes images and functions of with emotional significance. While my research – both scholarly and ethnographic – and instincts suggested that place as definition, as type, and as symbolic entities, this test supports my approach should resonate with most. And given the context of the study, as people fighting for spaces / places of importance and their homes, if nothing else, I hope the remaining sections in this chapter will resonate intensely with those in D.C.

Transcription and Orthographic Practices

Coding for Performance in relation to Place

This analysis portion of this project included performing heavy rounds of content (thematic) analysis to identify re-occurring themes of "place," "placehood," and "placement" (or what I now refer to as placemaking practices). As different conventions highlight different analytic decisions, I am utilizing a diverse range of transcription methods to explore the linguistic and cultural phenomena taking place at both venues (Duranti 2006). Specifically, I draw from both the ethnopoetics and interactionists' traditions, as Spoken Word is both poetry and a performed conversation – hence, the need for practices that can highlight both the art form's literary (or genre) and interactional

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conventions (Goodwin and Goodwin 2004; Goodwin 1990; Ochs 1979). Not only will such work allow me to focus on moment-by-moment interactions between the observable corporeal participants, but I can begin to imagine a framework where "place" is recognized as another contributor – or a projected "discursive figure."

Specifically, Goodwin's (1990) approach to the He-Said-She-Said accusations occurring within Black youth peer activity, including how she tracks shifts in participation shaping social organization, will guide the analysis of Spoken Word culture. Taking from her explanation of the value of participation framework as a method of analysis, she notes how speakers "integrate participants, actions, and events, and thus constitute key resources for accomplishing social organization within face-to-face interactions" (10). By observing the shifts in participation frameworks in Spoken Word poetry, this study is able to address the very core of my research question, which seeks to investigate interconnections of place, participation, and practice. Considering these practices and traditions of transcription, I utilize the following conventions (see Figure 2.2. below).

And the results of this investigation is procured based on assessing the value of poetics / performance and place from three perspectives: 1) in terms of venue (i.e., the décor, layout, branding/mission), 2) in terms of environment (i.e., the influence of Washington D.C. and neighborhood demographics and culture) and 3) in terms of personal affiliations (e.g., reference to one's home country or hometown as identity-forming entities). These perspectives are explored in the approaches described below.

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CAPS	Increased volume and stress
- (hyphen)	Clipping of word / phrase
... (ellipses)	Long pause w/ maintained intonation between phrases (1+ sec), indicating mid-thought
. (period)	Down talk indicating finality of thought with long pause (1+ sec), indicating finality of thought
, (comma)	Short pause (under 1 sec) indicating intention to continue
! (exclamation point)	Stress and rising intonation at the end of the phrase, seemingly indicating exclamation and emphasis
? (question mark)	Rising intonation at end of phrase, seemingly indicating a question, confirming agreement / understanding, or positioning a note of curiosity.
^ (carrot)	Rise in intonation between phrases, of preceding word
– (dash)	Overlaping talk of the previous sentence
[ ] (brackets)	elided or inferred words not uttered by the speaker
( ) (parenthesis	commentary on setting / other's actions (not speaker's) co-occuring / impacting with speaker
(**) (parenthesis + asterisks)	commentary on speaker's co-occuring actions, body language, or manner of talk
{ } (curly braces)	indicates indiscernable chatter / muttering
: (single colon)	elongation of the preceding vowel (1 sec or less)
:: (double colon)	elongation of the preceding vowel (1+ sec)
**	speaker voicing another character or voice not their own
italics	Logs / not quoted material.

Figure 2.2 Transcription conventions and coding key.

In terms of venue:

The analysis will highlight specific uses of language that reference BBP's reflexive awareness of how its spaces guides function and practice or that establishes its distinctive facilitation of the art form. For example, such phrases as "here at Busboys and Poets, we…" to delineate rituals and rules of practice may be signaled as relevant to this area of study. Also, particular references to the naming of spaces – such as when hosts provide the background on the performance area (e.g., the Langston Hughes or Pearl Bailey room) – can be of merit in this category. And finally, any signage or branded language that posits not only a collective identity but the way in which this features supposes rules for engaging in the space (e.g., references to the "tribe" or tribal statement) will be highlighted as well.

In terms of environment:

This analysis will assess the ways that Washington D.C. and the DMV as a whole is recognized as a character, overarching theme, and/or influence within various

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performances. For example, with the nation's capital being merely a few miles away and D.C.'s proclivity to provoke civic engagement and political conversations, BBP will host events that encourages reflexive art and conversations around elections, public policy, etc. Hence, the portion of this study will home in on language that shows the symbiotic relationship the venue, the performance (or art form), and the city's (or neighborhood's) culture. In many instances, this will include attention to language choice (e.g., neighborhood vernacular), allusions to key landmarks (e.g., Ben's chilli bowl, the Mall, HowardU) and local culture (e.g., GoGo music, mumbo sauce, half smokes), signifying placenames (e.g., "Chocolate city," DMV, SE), and themes (politics / elections, D.C. gentrification, commuter life).

In terms of personal affiliation:

As Spoken Word provide artists with the opportunity to 'perform' one's identity, place in terms of home-country or hometown is often a recurring theme in characterizing one's self. For instance, a poet from Detroit uses extended metaphor to showcase her undying love to the place that 'raised' her. Or poets may use language or embody personae that portray particular national or regional identities, such as when a poet from Honduras proclaimed to be "third-world as fuck."

Coding for Participation Framework Analyses

And taking point from Goodwin's (1990) work on Black children, I will utilize simplified conversation analysis to understand the interactions between participants (i.e., artists and audiences). This method is extremely useful because Spoken Word interaction functions more like a conversation, where artists expect and encourage viewers to 'talk back' to them. In this analysis, the goal is the highlight the audience engagement. Hence,

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transcription will focus on any feedback cues (e.g., snapping, " yas" / [ya::s::], "amen") and its co-occurrence with particular content / message or stylistic features. In other words, the goal is to observe what procures an aligning response from the audience.

Also, transcription will be attuned to comparative analysis of various hosts' introductory education for new BBP attendees. In these moments, their language has the specific purpose of delineating the relevant and acceptable conversational / feedback cues that should be used to engage with the art form. The analysis will observe whether there is a standardized approach to delineating this information or if there is nuanced attention to demographics or reflective of the host's personal style for engaging his/her audience.

Coding for Performance and Virtuosity

Preliminary investigations of Spoken Word at BBP point to several key factors of performance as being salient markers of delineating between veteran, veteran-in-training, virgin status. Some of these include the ability to voice and embody various personae and concepts (e.g., gesture and facial expressions), utilize literary features (e.g., metaphor, alliteration, parallelism), employ strategic rhetorical devices – especially from the African American VAT (e.g., signification), and exploit prosodic elements (e.g., pacing / rhythm, intonation, vowel lengthening) at will and for aesthetic value. For example, various stylistic choices can be made to index particular characters or simply for the purposes of showcasing one's "ill-literacy," or poetic skill (Alim 2011). Hence, transcription of all open mic and feature performances will highlight these elements and compare their usage between veterans and virgins of the mic, with the goal being to assess not just when these features are used but how and why these are employed.

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Also, poets' elicited reactions to performances will be transcribed to observe their responses to artists, having them identity what performances or performance features "works" or works against being authenticated — feedback that will be used to extract definitions of virtuosity. In the moments, the transcript will be used to observe the co-occurrences of the speaker's feedback and the recorded performances, focusing on any language that marks an artist's proficiency with the artform or lack thereof.

Advocacy, Audience Awareness, and (Conscious) Orthography

This study is sensitive to reflect not only the content and themes that are presented in the participants' responses and narratives but considering that this research wants to highlight the preservation and celebration of AAL and AAL VATs, the transcription practices used here also is done to reflect that ways in which these participants utilize AAL linguistic forms. In many ways, this is to normalize not only "Black Talk" but the transcription of this language variety in ways that reflect the syntax, prosody, and suprasegmental features that are persistent with reflecting the culture from an insider perspective. Considering I am a black anthropologist, in many ways I exhibit a dual identity of being both an insider and outsider – the former as I am African American and have become part of the Spoken Word community here in many ways, as both a novice writer/performer and enthusiast, and the latter because I am not a professional performing poet or long-term D.C. resident, but also as a researcher I, in many ways, represent the institution / academia.

That said, while engaging with these groups and hearing our conversations during my analyses, I became very aware of how much I was utilizing talk that I had often "shelved" while moving through predominantly white institutions and circles, i.e.,

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unless I was engaging with other Black grads and researchers. Of course, these forms of code-switching are very common to those who are bi- and multi-dialectal within many communities. But in this case, I found myself speaking more often than not participating in AAL discourse practices. And given, when I talk to friends and family in the culture via text, chat or other social media posts, I often see the citation of certain key phrases and spelling to reflect the Black talk. For example, #DemThrones on Black Twitter became a cultural phenomenon, as it used insider / cultural references, icons, and speak to geek out on the fantasy world of Game of Thrones while still making it very known that the thread was operating within the realm of Blackness.

It is not uncommon to see people represent AAL (almost phonetically) via text lingo such as "nah mean" – as it becomes a meaningful way of expressing a thought in a way that "you know what I mean" does not. Like H. Samy Alim's work, this study utilizes similar forms of orthographic representation to convey the speaker's linguistic patterns and tone, especially since a marked changed in linguistic forms – i.e., from AAL to other varieties (including Mainstream English) and languages – to represent a shift in tone or footing via a different voice / character. That said, it is important, many of these orthographic choices are not standardized, so one may utilize slightly different spelling or variation of forms (e.g., "yaaassss" or "yaaaaassss" "YAS hunty") to convey similar thoughts or expression. Hence, some creative license may be debated in how I chose to represent the forms.

Nevertheless, the goal is to reflect the ways in which I believe community members would read and could likely hear how these speakers spoke and understand the tone. This choice is controversial, but it is one I believe is important to relaying the

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importance of Spoken Word culture and D.C.'s preservation of Chocolate City, where AAL is very prominent and celebrated. Furthermore, this choice mimics the production of critiquing dominant culture and overturning white Public space to reconstruct belonging as outsiderness (see chapter 7). As Alim (2006) discusses the limitation of Mainstream English (ME), he notes that speaking in Black Language "takes the burden of the communicative work off of the speakers of marginalized languages and puts it squarely onto those of dominating languages (14). The same goes for reading conversations in Black language – between me and my participants – and the transcribed performances. Thus, conscious choices to creating what Gates (2014) refers to as "speakerly texts," where I use Black language to talk about Black oral arts and culture in ways that is recognizable and readable by AAL speakers – seeks to suspend the norms of writing scholarship in ways that would likely alienate this groups. This "privileging of oral speech and its inherent linguistic features" is a nod to those, like Zora Neale Hurston, and the ways in which representation is a rhetorical strategy (195).

And finally, this work not only seeks to valorize AAL and its speakers through the orthographic representation of Black talk within performances and conversation when reading this work, but it also reframes the community's positioning with how this group is referenced. Taking a cue from several sources, including a Blackbirds / Black Twitter #Fortheculture movement in 2017 and the recent art series by Robert Rohaun Stephenson, entitled "Portraits for the Culture" (Dickey 2017; Quander 2020), the term "The Culture" is used to refer to the Black Americans, particularly the African American community. By evoking this phrase, this study indexes and therefore creates an interdiscursive link to discourse and texts – including artistic performances – that

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reflexively articulate what and how Blackness is. Not only does the choice work to, again, challenge dominant notions of insiderness but also to validate that African Americans are people of culture.

The aforementioned labeling is further supported by conscious representation of capitalization throughout the text. By choosing to capitalize Black and leave white in lower-case, it to engage in orthographic activism – i.e., using spelling and type script to argue to challenge certain realities and reconstruct new ones. In this case, where Blackness is usually marginalized, othered, or ignored, all representations in this document will act in contrast to the zeitgeist, acting to make the invisible visible and the unheard heard.

Analysis of Visual Artifacts and Images

While the above sections puts forth how the data is captured via the audio recordings and transcription (i.e., conversations and performances), it should be noted that where visual artifacts are viable to the analysis (e.g., maps, photography, and video) they are used to supplement these tools. Because Spoken Word is a 4-dimensional art (i.e., with contributions from words, voice, body language, and interaction), any description or transcription will never capture the soul and complexity of the performance (Pink 2004). Thus, it was necessary to film majority of the performances for further analysis. Of course, I was aware that the camera / recording devices can impact the ways in which performers or participants interact (Abu Lughod 2008), and I realize what gets filmed can point to certain biases of the research (Collier 2014). However, as Collier explains "film records … extend the trail of tangible information, for the refinements of observation missing from raw written notes can be found reliably in film records" (82).

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And given Spoken Word's complex participation framework and the need to capture all aspect of the performance, the need to document these nuances superseded the risk of influence.

Overall, this study draws on multimodal methodologies, including the content analysis that will be employed for print media and spatial analysis to understand the ways people are impacted by that spaces they inhabit – and vice versa (Friedman and van Ingen 2011; Hsieh and Shannon 2005; Keating 2000,). Where digital and visual materials (e.g., signage, web content, and photos) are utilized, they will be assessed in terms of their semiotic value (Blommaert 2010), showing how these images contribute to BBP's overall agenda of provoking art and fostering community (i.e., guiding its patron's performance, participation and practice within the space).

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CHAPTER 3

OVERVIEW OF SPOKEN WORD POETRY

As an enthusiast of Spoken Word poetry, and someone who has mostly grown up in predominantly Black circles, I have often assumed that a familiarity with Spoken Word culture is common. However, it is through this study that I realized how unknown this genre is, especially for those outside of The Culture. Having been a resident of the DMV for several years, i.e., before my doctoral education, I had the pleasure of being within close proximity of D.C.'s saturated network of open mics – including several BBP locations. However, it was only upon visiting my hometown of Atlanta, another "chocolate city," that I realized the access to Spoken Word open mics that Washingtonians and their fellow DMV neighbors enjoy is very much *un*common.

While the art form was present in the Atlanta area, even a born-and-bred ATLien had to go in search of it. And furthermore, it was not until relocating to Columbia, S.C. – a smaller city with limited diversity and a modest cultural arts scene – that I discovered what it was like to be in a "Spoken Word poetry desert." Other than a few specialty events and restaurants with sporadic open mic nights,[3] I lacked the weekly dose of poetry I was privy to in the DMV. My own ignorance to Spoken Word as foreign concept was challenged when others inquired about my research, as I was prompted to

[3] A local organization called The Watering Hole did have a presence in the Columbia area, and was dedicated to developing a "tribe" for poetry writers and performers.

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define the art form – a request that used to confused me. Now, I assume any person I encounter has little-to-no knowledge of Spoken Word, though admittedly I assume more familiarity depending on a person's age, ethnic/racial identity, proximity to Hip Hop and Black culture, or general level of "woke-ness."

However, as I continuously aimed to define the genre, I was often met by push-back from non-Black persons who did not agree with me grounding the art form in African American culture or by poets who felt it necessary to ensure I separated the genre from other forms of performance poetry. Such debates led to an intense search of definitions generated by in-group members (i.e., poets) or other subject-matter experts (e.g., academics). Unfortunately, this often led me away from a comprehensive definition that at least met my own intuitions of the art form, and satisfied the questions I still had about Spoken Word's origins. Furthermore, such sources were usually non-academic or anecdotal forms of information, which makes it difficult for a researcher who is writing for a mostly academic audience, as source credibility is a huge issue. I also did not want to subscribe to the ideology that degrees and titles are the only means for confirming one's expertise or that written texts are the only vehicles for credible information. Instead, I desire to give a voice to practitioners of Spoken Word with a long history of honing one's craft as well as those with a documented reputation.[4] Hence, all of my interviews started with the following questions:

1. How would you define Spoken Word poetry for a person who has never encountered the art form before?

[4] Reputation in this context was measured by their affiliation with BBP and SDDC, two reputable venues in the area, by local and national presence (e.g., awards and invited appearances), as well as via snowball sampling methods thru peer networks.

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2. How would you define Busboys and Poets (BBP) for a person who has never attended before?
3. How would you define SpitDat (SDDC) for a person who has never attended before?

The definitions and descriptions provided in this chapter offer a summative overview of the answers acquired from all of the participants that were gracious enough to lend me their time and insights. This information was supported by my examination of the art form – i.e., shadowing participants and recording open mic performances. Note: this chapter establishes a baseline of Spoken Word poetry in general, and therefore, a more detailed description of both venues will unfold over several chapters.

3.1 Defining the Genre: A Tricky Business

A Poetry of Context

One of the biggest issues of trying to define a concept, a genre of art, or even a language or culture is that there are multiple understandings of each category. And, given that this study is trying to define this Spoken Word for anthropological studies – with special attention ethnopoetics audiences—any description posited as the overarching "this is what Spoken Word is" will inevitably draw challenges from those that have observed performances in a different country, state, region, or neighborhood. Hence, to witness an open mic in a predominantly African American region, like Washington D.C., will yield different observations than observing the art in a different region or neighborhood.

The same holds true for witnessing the art in a space that is crafted for large-scale, dramatic performance (e.g., a theater) vs. those that establish a smaller and more

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intimate setting (e.g., a person's home). In essence, Spoken Word poetry is an art form that is very much sensitive to its surroundings (time and space). And, it is an art form that is always evolving. Hence, this study will often intently delve into the contextual factors that influence and are reflected in Spoken Word performances, observed in a particular time and space (or place) – i.e., in D.C., specifically BBP and SDDC, during the years 2018 and 2019. But, this study will also elucidate that there are indeed certain standards and customs expected whether it is performed in D.C., Detroit, the U.S. or beyond – though of course, language variations and cultural context will impact how these forms are regarded and realized.

Initially, any definition used to categorize a group, a culture, or even art form starts from a basis that essentializes the very individuals, customs, or craft it seeks to define. And, usually, such a definition draws on either the most popular, visible, or dominant qualities – what Spivak (1990:11) describes as "strategic essentialism." Consequently, any foundational definition will ultimately fail at the ability of capturing all instances and contexts under which a concept, art, language or cultural group exists. What inevitably takes place is a critique of the original assessment in favor of variation or a more inclusive understanding. To accomplish the goal of setting the foundation of what Spoken Word poetry is, and what it isn't, being context-specific is necessary to avoid the criticisms of ignoring variation. However, it is necessary to provide a general conceptualization of the art form. Thus, for this chapter, Spoken Word is described in broad terms, providing characterizations only when confident that context would not impact or alter the outcomes.

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Complicating Origins

Performance poetry, in general, has been linked by scholars to the days of antiquity (i.e., in Ancient Greece and Rome), where public audiences were entertained by theatrical interpretations of lyrical verse (Palmer 2014). This description of performance poetry presupposes that all poetry that is to be read or spoken out loud has its roots in Eurocentric and Western traditions of art. However, it is important to understand this claim ignores African oral poetry, which has its own lineage of works that fall outside of Western traditions. And in fact, this chapter will operate under the claims that Spoken Word is linked to African American traditions via African traditions (Finnegan 1991, 2012), i.e., oral performance influenced and preserved in the traditions of Slaves and their descendants.

This chapter will also validate this claim by showing how the oral tradition is embedded in and influenced by African American linguistic and cultural traditions and, therefore, by African linguistic and cultural traditions – especially considering that African American language (AAL) itself has been linked to West African languages (Green 2000; Rickford and Rickford 2000; Smitherman 1977). Thus, such a description contradicts the claims that all oral poetry links back to Greek epic poems that were also comprised to be read aloud. That said, an in-depth discussion problematizing Eurocentric origin stories is far beyond the scope of this study. Instead, this section will draw heavily from AAL scholars that have done the work of linking the language to West Africa and have described how AAL VATs are a rich example of AAL linguistic and cultural features (Green 2002; Rickford and Rickford 2000; Smitherman 1977; Weldon 2003).

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While this study situates Spoken Word as an African American VAT, to say that it always draws on concepts of African American language and culture ignores when it is performed for predominantly non-Black (or even non-American) audiences. This is not to say that topics regarding Blackness would be irrelevant to these audiences or would not emerge, but that it is not an absolute qualification to define it as part of the genre conventions. In fact, it is the goal of this study to showcase how the art form is a mirror of its immediate settings, in terms of time and in terms of place, making analyses referenced in this study as just a starting point for situating the art form. Nevertheless, it is equally important to give credence to its roots. Like Hip Hop, Spoken Word may travel far and wide and be recontextualized to fit with diverse socio-cultural contexts; however, ignoring its connections to African American culture erases a large part the history and identity of this art form.

At best, the origin story of Spoken Word is alluded to by linking the culture to other African American traditions or its appearances in resurgence movements (e.g., the Harlem Renaissance or Black Arts movements) (Jones 2011). But even these descriptions are often created as side notes to other more in-depth discussions of artistic and cultural movements, such as Hip Hop. In short, Spoken Word poetry has yet to truly receive the full dedication and attention as other folklore and performances/oral arts. Thus, it is necessary to provide a foundational overview of the art form, including its inception, influences, intent, and impact. Even more so, it is necessary to provide a comprehensive description of the linguistic and anthropological mechanisms at play as well. Therefore, the remainder of this chapter will focus on its more recent ancestry and manifestation in modern contexts.

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The Black Arts Movement

Several sources (both oral histories and secondhand texts) have explained that the contemporary version of this Spoken Word poetry emerged during the Black Arts movement (1965-1975), a period of time recognized for its resurgence of Harlem Renaissance artistry. As such, Spoken Word poetry is directly infused with equal parts of poetry, jazz, and social commentary. While Spoken Word follows suit with formalized poetic traditions (i.e., in terms of rhyming, alliteration, repetition, and use of simile/metaphor), there is heavy emphasis on rhythm, word play, and improvisational execution. From a performance aspect, it is best described as "poetry written on a page but performed for an audience" (The Nelson-Atkins Museum of Art). And considering its embeddedness in African American culture, one can best describe it as a blend of linguistic interplay (e.g., prosody, voicing, language variation, etc.) that draws heavily from AAL. Often poets embody linguistic and cultural practices that are markers of Black identity, especially where such cues are central to enacting issues of relevance to The Culture.

It should be noted that an entire thesis could be dedicated to connecting Spoken Word back to African oral forms, especially in order to fully explore the underlying mechanisms of the linguistic forms. For example, one could explore the prosodic variables of pacing, intonation, tone and stress to note the influences of AAL and their presence in Black poetry and oral performances (DeBose 2015; Green 2002; Rambsey and Whiteside 2015; Thomas 2015). While these types of analyses would offer a significant contribution to linguistic and anthropological study, such work would require

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intense descriptive and historical linguistic analyses, which is not the main objective of this dissertation.

Alternatively, this work delves more into the performative aspects, participation frameworks, and socio-cultural influences of this verbal art tradition. Therefore, any analysis provided here serves only to provide a working definition and foundational description of the art form. In short, the following sections constitute a foundational synopsis. The goal, though, is so that audiences who have never experienced Spoken Word culture can have a basic understanding of it – especially enough to appreciate the larger observations and findings of this ethnographic project. Furthermore, the hope is to provide a springboard from which future scholars can take point in developing a more in-depth analysis.

3.2 Spoken Word's Influences & Executions

Spoken Word poetry is a genre of performance poetry that has captured the interests of many, especially those within or in close proximity to African American and/or Hip Hop culture as well as those that travel within various types of artist circles. This increased interest led to commercialized and mediatized forms of the poetry, which produced shows like Def Poetry Jam and Verses and Flow – television shows that sought to highlight the culture. When watching these types of productions, it becomes clear that Spoken Word poetry is as diverse a genre as any other art form. Depending on the styles – including its influences and executions – any art form gets typified into several sub-genres. Nonetheless, there are still broader genre conventions that guide audience and artist expectation. Thus, Spoken Word is no different from any other performance genre.

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This section seeks to capture these standard conventions in hopes to provide a solid foundation for readers who have no concept of this type of performance poetry. It should be noted that any description of this performance will fail to capture its comprehensive qualities and contributions to (African) American culture in specific detail; however, any specific elements described here are those that are of most importance to the analysis provided in subsequent chapters. Also, it is important to note, that all interviews started with the following ice-breaker question to have artists speak meta-linguistically about their art: "How would you describe Spoken Word poetry for those that have never encountered the art before?" As many artists responded with their own definitions of the art form, it was clear that their answers reflected their experiences, goals, and agendas for participating in the D.C. art scene. Hence, many definitions did not mirror each other exactly, offering some competing ideas about what makes the art relevant, how it should be performed, and what makes for a virtuoso talent in this genre of performance. With this said, there are many common themes that were posited in each definition.

Across the board, the recurring themes posited within artists' descriptions of the art form includes the following descriptors: "poetry," "storytelling," "theater," "music," and "community." These themes are used to illuminate the standard conventions and performative features that guide audience expectations and artistic executions – all of which are utilized to craft a poem for the stage. This style of "presentation" is quite different from what one would encounter in a poetry reading, where the audience remains silent, or pieces labeled as "page poetry," i.e., poetry written for the eye. The Spoken

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Word moniker is used to specify works that are crafted for the ear. The ways in which that is achieved will be discussed in the sections below.

Evidently, It's Poetry

While Spoken Word performances are very much categorized by their facilitation of language, expression of identity and cultural norms, and influences from contextual influences (e.g., place/location), it is still very much classified as a genre of poetry. Because it diverges from the formulaic structures of "traditional" or page poetry, many critics often oppose such a classification. Within this enacted criticism is the issue with which an art that operates as 'poetry' but "does not work as successfully on the page" or seems more analogous to 'Black poetry' – since the culture's linguistic stamp is clearly imprinted on performative aspects of the art form (Beasley 1996). For some, though, the description, as "performance poetry," is not a welcome categorization as it suggests that the emphasis is more on theatrics than content. And even Jones (2011:185) quotes Tony Medina who contests that the name Spoken Word has a pejorative connotation, as its been used to distinguish the genre from "literary art or art period." However, this work recognizes that Spoken Word artists are indeed writers and that the designation is merely to situate the form as an *oral* tradition. It should be recognized that the genre still utilizes poetic elements and literary forms found in page poetry.

For example, when hearing a Spoken Word piece, one could easily identify metaphor, simile, alliteration, and, of course, rhyme. Importantly, as works may even begin, or end, on a page, they are essentially written, or constructed, in stanzas and verses. The difference is that the ways in which these elements must be clear, digestible, and engaging enough for an audience who does not have the luxury of having the words

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in front of them nor an hour-long analysis. Furthermore, there is a rhythm and a "flow" that happens when executing each verse – a stylized performance that shapes the work in the same way that a song or rap, which is poetic in nature, is shaped by its delivery and context. In fact, in response to misinformed attacks on Spoken Word's literary credibility, Beasley (1996) suggests that its true name should be 'contextual poetry,' as its strength lies in the comprehensive circumstance under which the art is performed. These contextual factors include the speaker's persona; the historical, socio-cultural, and political backdrop; cultural customs and traditions; the setting or venue; and the audience/listeners—all discussed in the subsections below.

Beasley also admits that because Spoken Word is a live event, with the emphasis being placed on the "here and now." In other words, the genre operates as a perishable medium. Thus, its value is not measured in its "lasting" capability but the open, interactive social engagement—a communal exchange. Where Page poetry allows the best chance for achieving perpetuity, performance poetry is a temporal interactive act. Therefore, these two art forms display divergent value systems and require their own distinct framework for analysis. Jones (2011:184) captures this brilliantly yet succinctly by differentiating the two with his explanation:

> "Today's poets, through their intertextual investments in previous Black Arts movements writers, render the speaking voice, orality, and the hearing ear, aurality, as essential for the successful realization of the poem."

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In short, Spoken Word is poetry in the same way that a lion is a cat. There are core resemblances to the other but also incredibly salient contrasts that impact the way it is perceived and experienced by those that interface with the two.

Essentially, it's a Conversation!

One of the key elements of Spoken Word poetry that positions it differently from page poetry and even other staged performances is the ways in which it constructs a live conversation between those on stage (the hosts/poets) and audience. More explanation of how this exchange takes shape will be described in the succeeding section. However, the main take-away here is that Spoken Word culture is shaped by its lack of barrier (or fourth wall) so much so that the performance frame is not "complete" without the in-the-moment dialogue (or feedback) provided by audience participants. This interactive component is very much rooted in the African American cultural tradition of call and response – a practice that is found in the Black church/preaching styles as well as in Hip Hop. Hence, many who are a part of, or adjacent to, The Culture can easily adapt to this style of interaction even if they have never been to a Spoken Word open mic before (Britt 2011; Green 2000; Morgan 2009; Smitherman 1977).

One of the reasons for this adaptability hinges on how call and response functions as part of the socio-cultural habitus and the (body) socialization that occurs as result (Bourdieu 1977; Wirtz 2014). Also, the fact that Spoken Word has been taken up by media and mainstream culture, the circulation of performances – whether in real life, on social media, or art/films – serves as an education for some as well. For example, upon my move to D.C., many of my friends had never been to an open mic before. However, because of our familiarity with Def Poetry Jam and films like the

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aforementioned *Love Jones*, we were prepared to at least do the signature "snap" that becomes recognizable as proper feedback cue. Those who are familiar with and socialized into these norms understand their roles to ensure this exchange is present in ways that does not hinder the overall performance of those on stage.

In other words, Spoken Word poetry is not just a verbal art that happens in a vacuum; it is rooted in interaction or social practice. Poets, open-micers and enthusiasts understand this idea and thus can enact the interlocutor roles, processes of turn-taking, the "register" (or appropriate speech) that is part of this culture. That said, as people "acquire" – or more correctly, are socialized into – the norms of conversation or social customs, newcomers are provided the same opportunity. This education is usually part of the experiences as well, which is governed within the host's role. Overall, the function of each participant and the ways in which they execute their roles – i.e., the participation framework – is what maintains the interactive that is characteristic of this genre.

Embedding Narratives

One of the most salient aspects of Spoken Word as a genre is that while it is classified as a poetic tradition, it seamlessly embeds other genres of performance into the overall makeup of the art form. Not only is it more than possible to see a poet move effortlessly between poetry and song or rap, but it is just as expected for performers to delve into personal accounts / narratives. For this reason, Spoken Word poets are more than writers/authors; they are also storytellers as well as the main speaker in an emerging conversation. However, there are multiple ways of understanding these qualities of storytelling and their importance to both the genre of the art form as well as their application to studies of performance in anthropology: 1) from a verbal art as

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performance lens (Bauman 1975, 1984), via an interactionalist perspective (Koven 2012), and African (American) cultural traditions (Finnegan 1991, 2012; Smitherman 1977).

Three Perspectives of Spoken Word Storytelling

Genre Virtuoso

In terms of the generic convention of the art form, Verbal Art as Performance (VAP) provides an entry point to understanding the use of language for asserting and maintaining the expectations of being a virtuoso performer. (See latter sub-sections for more on hosts and features, who are categorized as skilled talents.) Through this lens, every manner of speaking for the poet on stage – whether it is considered in verse, conversational, or narrative form –is all part of the performance frame. And, as Bauman (1975:293) states, "Performance involves on the part of the performer an assumption of accountability to an audience for the way in which communication is carried out, above and beyond its referential content."

Unlike a poetry reading, within Spoken Word – especially for a feature poet and / or host – it is anticipated that they will move in between works with some sort of transitionary form of dialogue with the audience. And in doing so, the poet can easily shift between moments of sharing their personal stories –where they draw on experiences, histories, or current events to setup / contextualize their next piece – and then into actual executions of their work. As such, Spoken Word is one of these "annoying" types performances, i.e., annoying for scholars who rely on concrete categories; while in many ways, the art form falls into the category of poetry and at the same time its dialogic nature. The ability for the poet to shift between voices allows the shift between forms. Hence, Spoken Word is considered a blended form (Bauman 1992).

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This blend means that every part of the exchange *is* part of the performance frame, including the moments that are considered outside of the poetic text and more so aligned with storytelling and narration.

Importantly, it should be noted that poems themselves can also insert multiple characters (or personae) which can be used to enact a narrative voice. However, the content of the poem itself can also be fashioned as one long account, or reflection, of a past self or experience. Therefore, it not enough to gauge Spoken Word through poetic analysis but as the weaving together of multiple genres, all working to shape this tapestry-like performance.

The Gift of Gab

Because Spoken Word performances are essentially an embedded form wrapped into one massive dialogue, this art form should also be understood beyond a verbal art as performance genre: it should be analyzed for its interactional proclivities and qualities. To assist with this type of analysis, the aforementioned moments of shifting between forms, and more specifically voices, are best observed through Michelle Koven's (2002) framework, which examines narratives in terms of interlocutory roles. Koven (2002:178) classifies these modes of speaking into three categories: 1) the actual 'story' (a past event), 2) the conversation (the 'here and now'), and 3) the performance (the connection between the two); she labels each category as author, interlocutor, and character roles, respectively.

In terms of the interlocutor role, artists usually operate within the mode of mostly when they are first at the mic. I refer to this segment of talk as the 'setup', as it is used to prepare audiences for the actual performance. During this segment, the artist may

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introduce themselves, offer a bit of insight into who they are as an artist, or establish the premise of their poetry. Particularly when a poet is performing the role of the host or feature – explained in more detail in section 3.2 – having more time to work the stage means more time to delve into the "here and now" exchanges, or conversations, that can create an entire experience that looks different from someone sharing a piece or two as an open-micer.

The actual work itself, the text / poem being presented, often marks the shift into a combination of authorial and performance modes. Where Koven (2002) suggests performance mode is viewed when the speaker takes on different "characters" or personae, Spoken Word poets complicate this notion because they are constantly doing this work – even when speaking at their performed "self." As explained above, poets can easily enter their poems via a narrative, craft their piece as poetic 'story,' and/or embed a story within the body poem, which essentially takes on the authorial voice. Hence, the elements were these artists with the authorial is best understood in looking at tenses (to indicate an account of the past) while the performance work can best be captured as poets voice and embody different characters, described later in this section, which are markedly different from the performed self. This persona ascribed by the artist's name, a version of themselves that is thickened throughout their set and across performances. In essence, the authorial and performance modes capture all forms of speaking that fall outside of the "here and now" or "in the moment" version of the "real"/artist self.

During these here-and-now repartees, the poet can take a moment to just "shoot the breeze" with the audience, interrupting their flow to add some context or chitchat on the content being discussed. It is during these moments that an artist can fully encapsulate

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their work as interlocutor vis-à-vis a sporadic vent session about breakups, harmless disses (or insults) with certain audience members, or even just a brief moment of counsel with the audience on rising threats in the community/larger public. As described below, Elle D. Koon, 2Deep the Poet, and Charity Blackwell were just a few poets that offered a glimpse into this conversational banter.

Elle, who I noted as having *mastered* the art of conversation, interlaces her poems with expositional banter that feels like a one-on-one "girl chat." Jokingly griping with the audience on the woes of dating – some of which serves as interjection or tangential tirade within the poem itself – it easy to see when she enters the interlocutor mode. The same is true for 2Deep, who has fashioned a whole persona around razzing people in the audience, especially those who interrupt her moment or try to "steal her thunder." She is quick to break out of her poem and say, "excuse me but can you shut the fuck up!", to which the audience, who is familiar with her persona , will endorse her sentiments. Charity, on the other hand, showcases the quintessential setup mentioned earlier in this section. Before entering in the work she intends to share, a poem on Wokeness, she takes a moment to warn the audience about not paying attention to the cultural climate. Recognizing that the poem essentially speaks for itself, she begins and ends by imploring the audience to be woke, not for the sake of a hashtag or optics but for true advocacy and growth. It is the interlocutory mode that allows for the intimate and personal touch that is needed for these genuine exchanges.

The above observation indicates that interlocutor roles are often intertwined and work simultaneously together, as Koven's (2002) framework allows, and Spoken Word poetry is a clear example of how this occurs. From this, there are some "tell-tale" signs

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that mark a shift between these roles. For these virtuoso poets, they each used language and mannerisms that are vastly different from the execution of their work, showcasing that the authorial vs. interlocutor roles are not just marked with changes in content but can also be marked with shifts in prosody and body language that realizes a contrastive delivery. While this study recognizes that this assertion deserves more attention, such an analysis falls outside of the scope of this dissertation. However, this fact supports the idea that shifts are salient and observable.

The Modern-Day Griots

Considering that African cultures – and therefore the cultures of descendants, aka the Diaspora – are largely shaped by oral traditions (Finnegan 1991, 2012; Smitherman 1977), it is no surprise that much of the history and customs are preserved within people and their performances. In fact, there were those in some African societies who were tasked with and dedicated to the cause of becoming living archives: the griots. In essence, the griots were considered by community members as embodied histories and memories as well as their cultural gatekeepers. However, Thomas A. Hale (2007) makes it quite clear that any singular label, such as "storyteller," that seeks to describe the role of a griot is a mere understatement, at best. Hale, does dedicate part of his work towards delineating their prowess and reputation for being masterful verbal artists. But this is grounded in the mode of transmissions and execution of ceremonies and life-events that are tasked with witnessing, documenting, and then conveying to others – reasons why they are described as the "social glue" as well as "time-binder … who links past and present" (57, 23). This is no different for many of those in this study who describe Spoken Word poets as successors of the griots traditions that Hale describes.

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Much like Spoken Word, which has its resurgence during the Harlem Renaissance, Hale (2007:4) points towards another revival of this time-period, and that is the ways in which people have reclaimed their ties to Griotism, casting themselves as "modern-day griots." It is because of their vastly important role to their ancestor's society that African Americans have "identified with griots" in very interesting ways. Thusly, they have taken up the term "griot" as "a sign of respect for those who know about the past, are artists in various media, or are simply high achievers" (Hale 2007:4). (See Table 3.1.)

Table 3.1. An excerpt of an interview with Elle D. Koon.

EDK	And so I think that's what Spoken Word art is, being able to:, showcase a part of yourself in kind of that, griot kind of way.
	And, be able to just engage people on a different level so that they can see, your perspective on life, your perspective on your feelings and what you're going through ... in life and hopefully they are able to relate to you and bring a certain of, toGEtherness.

Hale also posits that "griot" is a term that is rooted in African Americans' quest to own their cultural identity as both descendants of a lost history and respected tradition as well as those who preserve and (skillfully) transmit cultural memory and arts for posterity. Many interviews confirmed this very ideal. In several instances, poets referred to themselves or their fellow poets using this very term. And as several chapters will show in further detail, essentially, those that embrace this term see themselves and their work as succeeding and continuing the work of their ancestral traditions. Nevertheless, whether or not they consciously enact their roles using a direct correlation with griotism, their narratives are evidence that they are indeed preservers of history and cultural memory as well as ambassadors and interpreters of their culture.

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Narratives of the "Here and Now"

Bakhtin's concept of "chronotopes" offers a way of analyzing Spoken Word's genre conventions, specifically by understanding the art form's relationship with both time and space (as well as personhood). As such, this study follows in line with ethnomusicologist Alexander Dent's (2009) work which delves into Brazil's música sertaneja - a musical genre that heralds rurality while rejecting modernity. To accomplish this, he first provides his understanding of chronotope, stating that is not just the "copresence of time and space (a given, as stated)…but the nature of the relationship between them" (63). He explores this concept in order to map *música sertaneja* practices, showcasing how notions of "time + space" necessitate semiotic content and behaviors that index particular values.

For example, in *música sertaneja*, Dent (2009) explains, that "country" references both "bygone days" (time) and "rurality" (space). As such, the genre molds the ways in which the art form is crafted, including topics that are prevalent and relevant as well as the way in which personhood is manifested and evaluated. In other words, for a person to participate in this world, that artist must reflect these "chronotopic properties" (Dent 2009:63). It is not so much about where the person resides or even whether they are considered as a contemporary artist; the artists can live within city center but their music must represent themselves in ways that connect them with "country"– i.e., utilizing themes and crafting an identity that aligns them honoring the past and embracing rural spaces.

When looking at Spoken Word performances, there is a similar anchoring to time + space, but this genre considers its foundation as being rooted in "here + now."

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These deictic forms act as "shifters" in that they reference both spatial and temporal "locations,' which are in relation to the live-speech event. Furthermore, their referential information also conveys indexical meaning that is used to craft a particular performance ethos required of the genre. So, unlike the example shown within Dent's study, where time-space was perceived as very concrete and fixed, grounded in Brazilian migrants' nostalgic longing for place that is oriented towards the past, Spoken Word's orientation is connected to the whereabouts of the speaker.

Because of this notion, the genre has a sense of relatability, relevancy and urgency that works well in reflecting and responding to timely issues[5]. Additionally, this means that the genre makes it prime for mirroring different spaces, whether it be venues in different neighborhoods, regions of this country, or even other nation-states. If a performance takes place in Washington D.C., during the height of gentrification, it is expected for performances to reflect an urgent resistance to this movement and for the poet to personify a conscious activist against gentrification. The same holds true for a Spoken Word performance that takes place in South Africa and references the ongoing impacts of apartheid or a New Zealander speaking on the Maori struggle[6]; each performance is contextualized to serve the time-space of which it inhabits (see Table 3.2 below.)

[5] The sense of urgency / "here + now" narratives was a phenomenon observed in person as well as captured in the data. However, native born Washingtonian, BBP host, and internationally recognized poet / educator Jonathan B. Tucker confirms and affirms this notion via his publication on Spoken Word pedagogy (Tucker 2020).
[6] See performances by by Te Kahu Rolleston, a New Zealand based poet who writes about Maori culture.

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Table 3.2. Example of Here+Now in relation to topics of relevance.

	Here	Now
The Big Chair, Gentrification, Violence,	Anacostia / S.E. D.C.	2019
Muriel Bowser, (Loss of) Chocolate City, Mumbo Sauce	D.C.	2019
#Resist, Election, 45 administration	U.S.	2016
Covid-19, George Floyd, BLM	U.S.	2020
Themes of relevance to:	Enter sample neighborhood, region, nation-state, etc.	Enter sample day, month, date, year, etc.

However, what happens when a poet travels away from their homeland? Does the poem lose its sensitive context? The short answer is no, because at the end of the day, the anchoring point is "here": the space of the world occupied within and around the poet themselves. Or, what if a poet talks about the past, e.g., a historical moment that took place hundreds of years ago? Does that poem violate the genre conventions? Again, the answer is "no," because that poem is likely to still be anchored in having relevance to "here": the time that is constructed as the remnants or results of said historical event. For example, many works will harken back to historical movements and moments of oppression, such as poem in response to colonialism, slavery, Civil Rights, and Jim Crow eras; however, much of it is borne out of the need to situate the continuing disenfranchisement that Blacks, particularly African Americans, face as well as the community's undeniable propensity for resilience. In other words, narratives that harken back to earlier times are still contextualized with current day relevance.

Thus, an African American poet can address lynching, mapping a connection to the systematic killing of their ancestors as synonymous with police brutality of today, or a Lebanese poet can use poems to evoke and advocate against the wars in the Middle East

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by situating the ongoing violence he observes in his new home of Melbourne[7]. In sum, the poem is not limited to immediate conceptualizations of locality and the clock or calendar. However, the very notion of here + now is that poems are performed in ways that are relevant to who is speaking or listening – whether present physically or even spiritually – and results in some kind of transformation or action (e.g., a shift in mentality, experience (un)expressed emotions, or address a particular cause). Given Spoken Word's attention to here +now narratives, a poet is the prime example of being a modern-day griot, in that they are witnesses and mirrors of culture and society and reporting them in accessible and practical ways. They can craft or defend their positionality, express personal revelations, as well as address the social climate.

Narratives of Social Commentary

Spoken Word poetry, as a context-driven oral art form, relates to the world and those around them by describing and responding to timely matters. Therefore, it is common for poets to utilize Spoken Word performances to assess that current time-period's "state-of affairs." In doing so, Spoken Word is primed for social commentary, using performance for calling out the dominant groups that have oppressed minorities (e.g., BIPOC, women, LGBTQ+, indigenous groups). And, in the same way that a time capsule would preserve and capture elements of nostalgia for societal and cultural norms or materials of relevance, making it accessible for / to latter generations, Spoken Word performances operate in a similar way. By observing performances from a given place,

[7] See performances by Abdul Hammoud, a Melbourne based poet who often uses poetry to connect with homeland and culture of Lebanon.

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space, and time, one can gain insight into the policies, narratives and ideologies that were salient and part of public consciousness.

For example, at the time of this study, the nation had just come to grips with the election of the 45th administration as well as the new occupant of the White House. As such, there were ongoing conversations about sexual harassment and rape culture associated with the president-elect's infamous "grab them by the pussy" comment. Furthermore, consistently being observed and reflected within poems was the BLM movement that had reignited with the deaths of Philando Castile and Alton Sterling. Hence, many poets responded to these movements with their own repudiation of toxic masculinity, rape culture, police brutality and unchecked racist ideologies that were creating unsafe spaces for women and minorities. Because of the high number of D.C. Black residents, many of the performances observed as part of this study specifically addressed issues that infringed upon Black-owned and occupied spaces as well as Black art, bodies, and voices.

And now, with the advent and increased popularity of social media, open mic and feature performances are being recorded, circulated, and archived in many of these platforms, such as YouTube. With the genre's tendency to reflect and document the political, social, and cultural movements at play at a particular time, future viewers who visit what are now current performances will be able to access documentation of today's current events and relevant topics. For instance, future viewers can revisit Spoken Word performance between the years of 2017 to 2019 and observe discourse around and responses to various (hashtag / political) movements – such as #BLM, #meToo, #WaterisLife, #TimesUp, and #Resist. This ability to capture its current moment is just

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one of the reasons why it positions the verbal art form as a chronotopic reflection of here + now.

Narratives of Positionality

Given that the genre often deals with timely social issues and ideologies of oppression and/or personal trauma experienced as a result of the social systems that give rise to them (e.g., toxic masculinity, white public space, homophobia, and transphobia), Spoken Word poets have the ability to position themselves in opposition to and in alignment with particular principles or values. Furthermore, individuals can enact certain intersectional identifications by race, ethnicity, gender expression, sexuality, etc., utilizing their time on stage as performative expressions that solidify themselves as certain categories (e.g., female, queer, Black, American). And where oppressive forces seek to standardize language and/or endorse ethnocentrism and assimilation, the art form's capability to "call out" or challenge these ideologies allows for the reclamation of power and ownership of one's cultural and linguistic norms.

Particularly in D.C., where local community members are seeing a loss / erasure of "Chocolate City," a salient number of performances were crafted to either assert their claim on the area, position the new inhabitants as outsiders, or celebrate the iconic symbols and lingo that are synonymous with the area (e.g., Mumbo sauce, the term "Moe," go-go music). By doing so, locals could perform and thus solidify their "indigenous rights" to D.C. as well as juxtapose their positionality with that of the gentrifiers encroaching on their home territories. Because of this ability to shift the current (toxic) reality and discourse to craft a new reality or redirect the conversation in

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favor of the poet's motives, Spoken Word is an art form of "transformativity" (i.e., activities / performances that enact change) and empowerment (Jones 2017).

Narratives of Revelation

Allowing for shared moment of connectedness is another aspect of Spoken Word poetry, and these moments are often realized with personal and intimate performances. As the here + now allows for an anchoring that is attached to the poets themselves, the art form prompts its participants to reveal and narrate very personal experiences and trauma. These pieces will often evoke a feeling, memory, or experience in ways that can give their audience more insight into who they are as individuals. And while many pieces will address communal trauma that are of importance to a given artist, the pieces that recount personal and intimate details (i.e., showcase individuality) are often the most memorable. For example, Spoken Word veteran Pages Matam described the difference between a Black person who spoke on the pain involved with the brutality of slavery versus abuse from a past lover or parent. While the former is a valuable narrative in its own right, he notes there is more profundity in relaying first-hand experiences vs. events observed from a distance – a notion that other artists agreed with.

When asked to describe what Spoken Word is, several artists hinted at or overtly stated the need for some sort of transparency and truth. Modise Sekothe, a South African poet who was featured at both BBP and SDDC while on a poetry tour in D.C., mentioned that the performances he most appreciates involve a process of "stripping" (of the self), which creates the transparency that leads to relatability and shared identity. In her own definition of Spoken Word, poet Elle D. Koon shows agreement with this sentiment, as she claims the need for poems to "showcase a part of yourself." Elle goes on to explain

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that whether the poet takes on the voice of distant and omniscient narrator to express the experiences from a distance or uses the imperative mood to converse with, command, or call out a present or absent audience, the process should still feel personal in some way. She clarifies that such personal insight and vulnerability *is* what opens the door to reliability. In other words, poems that achieve this feat allow the audience participants to see themselves in an artist's experiences. And, in doing so, this allows for a sense of communal identity, even if for a moment.

Allowing for shared moments of connectedness is just one aspect of such personal and intimate performances; it can be an act of transformativity when one confronts their pain and "battle demons" as one poet mentions. Pages does assert that this can be used to manipulate the audience, i.e., artist using personal trauma to "pimp their pain" for entertainment, shock value, or to produce empathy that results in positive audience feedback. But, overall, most artists have expressed that poems with the most impact partake in the "stripping" process. Thus, there are always a number of artists who will use the stage to come to terms with deep seated struggles. And this was no different with those observed during this study. But it should be noted that poems that work within the realm of personal revelation can simultaneously work in tandem to express social commentary as well as to posit one's positionality.

Embodying the Genre

Spoken Word, as performed poetry is as much about the linguistic and literary features as it is the artistic word play, which highly skilled artists or features can embody and evoke as different personae. The artists moreover use body language and shifts in prosody to create boundaries between characters. In doing so, they can then delineate

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their own voices from that of the persons or even ideologies that are integrated within a performed conversation. (Note: characters include their own performance persona as well as the individuals involved in the actual narrated events.)

From a performance aspect, artists are expected to exaggerate these elements so that audiences enjoy both the oral and visual aesthetics produced during an act. But as Bakhtin / literary scholar Donald Wesling (1993: 310) notes, poetic prose utilized as 'social intentionality'– as seen with many border or diaspora cultures – is fundamentally dialogic. This is definitely a description observed within Spoken Word, which can be subversive. Infused with polyphonic practices, characterizations can be utilized to insert, evaluate, and interact with multiple entextualized figures, especially those that represent ideals and/or parties being "put on blast" by the poet (Morgan 2002; Rambsey and Whiteside 2015). In many cases, voicing is specifically marked by embedded instances of reported speech (Koven 2002; Wesling 1993; Wortham 2001). Koven, for example, notes that this form of quotation allows narrators the opportunity to assume a voice that is noticeably different from their own – i.e, allowing contrast between a "here and now" self that occurs in conversation or storytelling mode used to reflect on past events. A previous study on Spoken Word notes how this aspect of Spoken Word not only allows one poet the ability to put on multiple selves but to enact an entire confrontation or interaction. These "conversations" assert quoted speech as representation of oppressive voices, making these performances ripe for critiquing dominant culture (Jones 2017).

Voicing can also simply be the act of personifying inanimate and intangible entities and ideologies. While this study does not delve deeply into, and therefore does transcribe with attention to shifts, prosody or mapping body language outside of the

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poet's gaze, embodiments are mentioned to showcase the ways in which poets characterize the places and spaces of importance to them. One performance depicted in Chapter 7 offers insight into the ways in which the poets' not only reflect their own sentiments but convey the thoughts of other Natives undergoing loss of their home spaces. This dramatization of "taking on" others' roles is known as double-voiced speech (Bakhtin 1984), where an individual will internalize the words of others and redefine those words to establish their own voice. This Bakhtinian principle is readily observable in the performance mentioned in this text but also in so many other Spoken Word performances, as virtuoso talents learn to work their body, face, and inflection to perform various characters. It is this aspect of the art form that make Spoken Word performances multi-dimensional and thus best experienced live.

Extending / Connecting the Traditions

Given that Spoken Word has its roots in African American verbal and cultural traditions, the ways in which these are realized bear the influences of AAL linguistic and discourse features – all of which work to connect Spoken Word to other AAL oral arts. For example, John and Russell Rickford (2000), whose scholarship shows African American English (AAE) as a linguistic and cultural marker for a marginalized speech community, position the language variety as having an intrinsic musicality and poetic capability. They first showcase this by tracing AAE's incorporation into the literary realm, illustrating how writers give "voice" to their characters by incorporating the dialect within dialogue. (This, of course, is keeping with a Bakhtinian framework; Bakhtin praised the novel as well as "dialect poetry" for this exact allowance.) Their illustration works to position the double-voicing (bi-dialectalism and double-meaning) of

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Black figures in literature but also used by African Americans in everyday speech. Rickford and Rickford also trace the roots of rap or Hip Hop culture, asserting their affiliation to earlier cultural forms that have made their way into the "mainstream," like the stylized and improvisation 'scatting' acts of jazz as well as the soulful and emotional execution of blues and even gospel. By showing the permeation of AAE and its nuanced coding ability as a perpetual commonality across these styles, they allow this study to position Spoken Word as just another notch along the continuum.

Of more relevance to Spoken Word research is poets' utilization of African American VATs including signification, toasting, and rapping (Alim 2006; Green 2002; Morgan 1996, 2000). And even more salient is Spoken Word's interactional features, which draws from call and response practices found within the Black church. In fact, it is the use of in-the-moment feedback cues - a salient and necessary part of the performance frame - that differentiates this style of performance poetry from poetry readings and other theatrical performances. All of these speech acts and traditions are found in other African American cultural art forms, including that of Jazz and Hip Hop as well as AAL-based insult games (Alim 2006; Green 2002; Morgan 1996, Morgan 2002; Smitherman 2007). As such, these other AAL forms are considered to be predecessors to Spoken Word performances.

My study specifically focuses on the speech acts and interactional practices of signification, call and response, as well as braggadocia / toasting. Chapter 7, for example, observes how two artists bring in the Dozens – a well-known example of signification and word play, used between two or more persons trying to "one up" the other (Smitherman 2007). Particularly, this work showcases these practices in action to situate

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poets' identity, to call out and critique dominant culture, as well as to craft both place- and audience-centered delivery.

3.3 Spoken Word: an Interactive (Verbal) Art

The Participants

As observed at both BBP and SDDC, as well as other poetry venues in and outside of the DMV area, there are several key members, or rather participants, that are needed to complete the Spoken Word performance frame: the host, the audience, the poets / feature, and the space. Each one has its own dedicated roles and "rules for engagement" that are an expected part of Spoken Word culture in general and then for both BBP and SDDC cultures in particular. While certain norms can be determined by the agendas and culture of the venues that facilitate an open mic (e.g., a host's guidelines that may support his style of hosting), there is a baseline standard for who and how one engages in this type of performance art.

The Host

Many of the artists that were interviewed throughout this study were considered veteran and accomplished poets in that they have either been tapped to serve as the host of an open mic or as the feature poet for an event. The host is observed and described to be a key participant in the performance frame – if not the anchor for the entire interaction – as this role often guides, influences, or controls the mood (or vibe) of the event. Then Atlanta-based poet Brandon Alexander Williams (aka RealTalkRaps) posits just how vital it is for open culture (see Table 3.3).

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Table 3.3. An excerpt of an interview with RealTalkRaps.

RT	Um:: (pause) so that can be you know that can be discouragi- I've been to some pretty bad open mics. (*laughs*) What can make an open mic bad is, really the host and the DJ.
	And that's the same thing for any party! Any event! You know like.
	You can be at a party. A:LL: your favorite in the world are there and the DJ is terrible. You not gon have a good time.
	You know or...you're at an event. Thats...great has great artists but host is wack. And you like, why would he say that. (*laughs*) You know after this person just got off the stage. Or, why would he introduce them like that.
	And so. The DJ and the host...they uh they curate the energy for the enTIRE night.
	And that's one thing that like if you don't know how to MC. You should not be hosting.

Per RealTalk's explanation, the host can make or break the open mic, stating that the role is comparable to the DJ of a party – if either a host or DJ "is wack," then it alters the ways in which others experience that event. In many ways, this explains why BBP requires all hosts to audition, knowing that the person can become the face, so to speak, of that evening's open mic. And in many ways, people start to select which venues and nights to attend based on their opinion and connection to the host. For example, 2Deep the Poet explains that many of the people who frequent 3rd Thursdays at BBP Hyattsville does so because they have become accustomed to her style of hosting and performing.

Also hosts may often utilize their own works to serve as a buffer between open-micers. This act serves multiple functions: either to maintain or increase the energy level, help satisfy the expectations of the patrons, or to offer a palette cleanser between acts that may have failed to register positively with the audience. Hosts can also use their works to balance the energy. For example, hosts may sense the need to shift the mood towards light-hearted tone with a more humorous piece or calm the ruckus with an intellectual

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tone. As Pages Matam (PM) states below, the goal for the host is “not really … to perform per se”; however, it is their role to assess the mood and facilitate in crafting both an entertaining but also a safe space for people to share their work (see Table 3.4).

Table 3.4: An excerpt of an interview with Pages Matam (PM).

PM	You know I'm saying but it's some of those ways to like … being respectful and accountable to the space.
	For all parties involved even I as a host. I have to make sure like I'm staying in line and and you know I'm sayin like … make sure I'm like holding the space together.
	I'm not really here to perform per se. I can make it entertaining as al- but my MAIN JOB (pause) is to hold the space together. And make sure everybody is good.
	It's to facilitate. Not to take over and and you know have my own show for two hours. You know I'm saying it's to facilitate.

With this role may also come administrative tasks, like managing the open mic sign-up sheet, locating potential features poets and other talents that can showcase their work (e.g., a visual artist, band, or solo musician), as well as marketing their event to the masses. In fact, one of the reasons BBP hosts are selected is their ability to achieve or bring with them a following, as this ensures the venue will have a recurring set of patrons. Overall, the main objective of the host is to “hold the space together,” as Pages states and “make sure everyone is good” (see Table 3.2 above).

The Poets & The Feature

Of course, no open mic would be possible without the participation of those who choose to take to the “mic” and share their poetry, whether they are performance-ready pieces or works-in-progress. Every venue has its rules of engagement, which fosters the number of pieces and / or the amount of time any given poet has to share their works. But, what is important to note is that for an open mic, the poets showcasing their pieces offer a wide range of experience and skill. Furthermore, the set list for the evening is

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determined by a sign-up list that is first come, first served. Also, poets can choose their order based on how / when they sign up. Hence, while the format can center around a particular theme (e.g., love, queer poetry, etc.), for the standard open mic there is no structure. Open-micers can come prepared to share a particular piece or they can choose to gauge the room and select poems they feel best suit the audience and the mood. Given that the sign-up sheet determines order, unless the host intentionally jumps around to mix up the vibe, topics and tones may continuously shift throughout the event. Though, as stated in the previous section, a host is constantly assessing the mood and therefore may add persons to the list and/or move performers out of order to give audiences proven talent (as poets become recognizable) in between more novice participants. Still, an open mic is by definition an "open" experience, meaning it is accepting of all who desire their chance at the mic, and it is, by definition, a spontaneous (or emergent) event. Because it is shaped by the attendees, the open mic on any given evening can never truly be duplicated.

One of the most exciting parts of the open mic is the portion where the set list is put on pause and the stage is cleared to make way for the feature poet. During this time, they are given uninterrupted stretches of time to engage with the audience as they see fit. Of course, this includes sharing their original poems, some of which will read works from books they have authored. But also, this can include intentional moments of talk, song, or reflections that serve as overarching or embedded narratives to move between pieces. Some, just choose to "spit," letting the poems speak for themselves. Format aside, what is consistent is that those who feature are given prominence because of their earned

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reputation, as observed by the host or sponsors of the event who know them through their own social network of artists or have encountered their body of work at other events.

Pages Matam, referenced above, is also the Director of Poetry Events (D.O.P.E.) for BBP and thus is deeply versed in how features are both selected and then how they function as part of an open mic event:

> "If you want to feature we can also about, which just takes a certain level of criteria for you to be able to feature you have to be able to have certain levels of accomplishment and things that you've done. So that we can get you on our stage because we wanna show that like someone who's featuring means they like know they craft and their aBOUT this. And they gon give you a good time a good show and good words. You know I'm saying. We not just gon put Joe Schmoe from down the street to be a feature. And pay you money to feature."

In short, part of the reason for having a feature poet is to provide an example of virtuoso talent and / or to showcase up-and-coming artists as those to watch in the future. But, aside from the hosts, it is the combination of all those who brave the mic that truly crafts an open mic experience – which can be hit or miss, given variability in open-micers and features' talents as well as their ability to engage / connect with others in the space.

The Audience

Within the verbal art form of Spoken Word poetry, other than the poet's delivery, the audience's role is probably the most distinct element in distinguishing this genre from that of a poetry reading. In the latter form, page poets verbalize their written

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words, which is mostly written for a reader's eye (i.e., to be engaged with in text form, or on the page). However, as previously mentioned, Spoken Word is poetry that is written to be heard by a live and interactive audience. Hence, Spoken Word while not entirely prepared for audience approval is cognizant that it will be delivered to an audience and, therefore, keeps this motive in mind.

Furthermore, the audience is primed to engage with the poet / performance by delivering real-time feedback, which would look like inappropriate interjections by other performance standards. In fact, many hosts – not just as BBP or SDDC – will take a moment to educate those first encountering the open mic scene / a Spoken Word event, socializing attendees into the process of participating. In doing so, hosts will offer several methods of engagement, including the act of snapping, the most stereo-typified means of giving positive feedback.

The snap is so synonymous with the verbal art tradition that one can index (or even mock) the genre by emulating the quick-paced snapping action. This standard feedback, or what Pages calls "sexy rain," works especially for this art because it is quiet enough not to disturb the performance and yet still informs the poet that their words are evaluated positively – be it as a sign of agreement with the content or an authentication of the skills executed with the verse.

Aside from the traditional snap that the public is familiar with, there are many other allowances for audience feedback. Many of these cues draw from the AAL tradition Geneva Smitherman (1977) refers to as call-response (or call and response), where audiences are expected to "talk back" to the speaker. As seen within Black preaching styles, the most common expression of these can be the well-known "Amen" that is even

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used in secular circles to indicate agreement. However, Smitherman (1977:104) explains the general definition of call-response, which allows for a more expansive view of the dynamic between potential interlocutors: the "spontaneous verbal and non-verbal interaction between speaker and listener in which all of the speaker's statements ("calls") are punctuated by expressions ("responses") from the listener." Thus, there is no limit to the options one can use as part of their "talk-back" to the performer or speaker.

With that said, responses are usually contextual. So where there are predominantly Black audiences, one can hear anything from an "m::" – the noise one makes when something "tastes" good – or the famous "ya::s::," which is borrowed from African American Women's Language (AAWL) and/or gay male culture – depending on one's source (Spears 2009; Troutman 2001). But within poetry communities, the actions get more creative and attuned to the situation. For example, when visiting BBP Hyattsville area, a person shouted, "Oh I wish I wrote that!" Another example of venue- or community-specific creativity is Black (and Hip Hop oriented) reference "Bars!" and thus SDDC's use "Varsity Barsity." And one of the more standout options was experienced and explained by RealTalk, when he narrates his first encounter at an open mic in Baltimore, where a person threw a pen on stage. He jokingly expressed his anger and readiness to set the "heckler" right, when someone clarified the action as a compliment, with the biggest expression of awe being when someone threw their whole notebook on stage, indicating "there's nothing left to be written you've said it all." The point is that all such responses are used to praise a verse as being a dope line or the poet as being a skilled lyricist.

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RealTalk's unfamiliarity with the pens shows even some encouraged interjections are region, place, or host-specific. For example, the D.C. Youth Slam Team created what they called the "awkward giraffe," which is best described as raising one's arm and letting their hands fall limp as if shooting in basketball or waiving down the offering plate in church – the latter of these references again taking from Black church culture. But BBP and SDDC hosts have taken up these cues from the youth, including them in their "participation education" given at the start of each open mic event.

Given the above, it should be noted that the term "audience" is, therefore, misleading for this type of participation framework. Inherent in the term is the premise that audiences are mere "onlookers," operating outside of the performance frame. That said, there been considerable scholarship on the need to diversify this term, showing that audiences engage with speakers / other interactants based on what is perceived as appropriate for that given interaction or genre of art (Flores 1994; Georges 1979; Goffman 1981; Goodwin 1986, Goodwin 2000; Tedlock 1977). Furthermore, ethnopoetics has moved towards the idea that verbal art is very much a co-constructed form, which recognizes the audience as equal parts involved if not central to the performance frame (Bauman 2011:711).

Silence, while possible – and for poet and former BBP host Rebecca Dupas can indicate an intense attention and connection with the content – is not the standard appropriate behavior expected for audiences attending a theatre performance or poetry reading. For many Spoken Word enthusiasts who are Generation X, Millienials, and beyond, they have acquired the rules of "talk back" culture through social engagements and a "word" or "forreal" heard from friends in every day conversations, to hear elders

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shouting a casual "preach Preacher!" during sermons, or even parents yelling "don't go in there!" at the movie or T.V. screen – all influential instances that informs interactive feedback in open mics. Thus, feedback cues are as diverse and creative as "characters" the who attend said events. Nevertheless, while the words or actions may vary from audience to audience or place to place, what is clear is that the art from function is inherently dialogic.

Space / Place

One recurring observation throughout my fieldwork is the ways in which the spaces were salient contributors to or influences on the performances that took place within them. Ethnopoetic and folkloristic scholarship have, for many years now, shown how places can either shape, hinder, or aid particular performances – i.e., the art form is noticeably impacted by a location or venue change (Flores 1994; Seizer 2000). While it is clear that the design can impede or alter the function of space, what these poets drew my attention to is their acknowledgement of the space as a present "being" or at least the representative of a person it honors. In many cases, for both BBP and SDDC, the host would request the participants to not just acknowledge but show gratitude towards the rooms in which these events were held. The practices prompted this study to invest observation of how the "space" is referenced in performances, an analysis that chapter 5 more closely explores. But, for now, this section situates the idea that "space" is an active and essential part of the "performance situation" – not merely as an indeterminate expanse that houses said performance but as influential stakeholders of the art form.

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Participation Framework

As explained above, being grounded in African American cultural traditions, the audience is equally involved in the facilitation of the act. However, there is order within this malleability and flexibility that Spoken Word prescribed. First, a poet will engage in a narrative to establish the premise for the poem. As such, they are the principal interlocutor with authority to guide and regulate the exchange with the audience. In the same way that there are cultural norms for when a conversant can respond in an agreement with the person speaking or when interjections of feedback are seen as disruptive, Spoken Word operates within the realm of appropriateness. With gaze, tone, or other cues, the poet can engage interaction with the audience or shift the mood so that the audience is prompted to listen closely. Again, skilled hosts and feature poets learn how to master this negotiation so that the performance stays interactive while sharing their crafted works. That said, it is not simply the duty of the host, feature, or open-micer to maintain this framework of overlapping interaction. But this aforementioned "realm of appropriateness," or suitable timing for in-the moment feedback, adhered to is first and foremost governed by the tenet of "respecting the mic." This philosophy is often upheld by open mic norms and /or maintained by the hosts' facilitation of the event; however, the turn-taking elements of Spoken Word culture are just like any other conversational / cultural practice; participants can be socialized into understanding how to engage appropriately.

While deference is expected for poets at the mic, Spoken Word operates quite differently from "podium talk." This kind of event is framed so that the audience is attentive through silence and may give applause at the end of major breaks / pauses or the

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very end of the speech event. An example of this is seen at poetry readings, a form of podium talk, where to produce interruptions while the speaker is in process could be read as lacking decorum or as a violation of the social codes understood by those who attend such an event. Enthralled silence aside, a crowd that does not ever "talk back" or relay some sort of response in Spoken Word event can easily be interpreted as 1) the artist is not worthy of such recognition or 2) the audience is not following (i.e., digesting) the points established. Thus, part of "respecting the mic" is also expressing gratification when something is conveyed in such a way that evokes an immediate response—this timing, then, is also informative as it validates a line so that it encourages emphasis for future performances.

This divergence from traditional 'podium talk' norms alludes to Irvine's (1996) work on Wolof griot poets and Goodwin & Goodwin's (2004) call for frameworks that allow for diverse manifestations of participant roles and responses. In fact, Goodwin & Goodwin go so far as to assert that a hearer should be redefined as a 'participant,' which is particularly appropriate for Spoken Word events, where audience involvement requires 'proactive' interactions. This involvement is not only crucial to an authentic exchange within this VAT, but such responses are needed to ratify the artist's position and / or validate their level of skill. In short, audience members are not merely onlookers, or 'listeners'—they should be actively present and part of the emerging conversation.

3.4 Final Thoughts

The goal of this chapter was to observe the ways in which verbal art traditions, particularly that of the African American influenced Spoken Word poetry, offers an accessible resource for observing timely issues and topics as well as the ways in which

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artists/individuals position themselves within in timely discussion, their communities or places of belonging and larger society. As chapter 3 has illuminated, Spoken Word poets perform chronotopic reflections anchored in “here and now” aspects of time-space. Thus, many open mic events and works presented at these sites are grounded in and are conversant with discussions of current events and their social, cultural, and political impact both nationally and globally. And, because Spoken Word poetry responds to timely hotbed topics and socio-political trigger points, a common theme at open mics in the D.C. area is the ongoing impact of gentrification on Natives and long-term residents, particularly the Black inhabitants and their businesses. Based on this observation, Spoken Word poetry is sensitive to context but grounded in “here and now” narratives. Thus, performances tend to not only express personal bouts of revelation and contention with one’s positionality, but they also communicate relevant social commentary with a sense of urgency. Thus, this genre is ripe for community building as well as social activism.

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CHAPTER 4

SETTING THE FOUNDATION

In order to establish the mood and situation of D.C., my field site upon the time of my entry, and to showcase the fluid connection of place from the top-down all the way to its on-the-ground realizations and responses of institutional impedances, I will start from the very top: with setting (i.e., per my "perspectives of place" established in Chapter 2). The goal is to depict the region as it was in January of 2018, which was in the midst of heavy redevelopment. This fact becomes important as poetry performances were very much responsive to the District's changes. But in order to analyze the linguistic and performative tools that poets would use to reestablish their position as belonging and reinstitute D.C. as Chocolate City, it becomes necessary to first examine the loss these artists and residents were encountering.

As established in Chapter 2, this chapter will describe and illustrate each scale and perspective D.C.'s performance-scape, including its "flows" in terms of performance-related capital, spaces, events, and bodies / experiences as well as any (in)tangible impedances. This includes observing the art form and its surrounding ecology (setting), relationship to the visible material structures (buildings), as well as how it contributes to intangible qualities of place (ambiance). Furthermore, the setting – defined as the backdrop or ecology of Spoken Word culture in the District – is explored in detail, portraying the region's shifting land / cityscape, and resulting political, social

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and cultural implications. In doing so, this chapter reveals how each aspect of place is influenced or reflected by Spoken Word poetry.

Also, this chapter will expose the dominant ideologies that beget the policies responsible for D.C.'s "cultural genocide" – as Washingtonian and SpitDat regular Nikki D. explains it. In doing so, the summaries and inclusion of interviews, artifacts / articles, and performances will highlight how the impacts of gentrification occur in diverse forms through dominant ideologies; discriminatory language; and the mockery, elimination, and commoditization of its symbols and culture, which are as detrimental as harmful toxic redevelopment policies, if not more so. The factors will be examined individually as well as collectively to elucidate just how gentrification results in the erasure of local identity and culture. And lastly, this depiction of loss lends towards illustrating the mourning experienced by D.C. natives and long-term residents, particularly those of color, which will eventually be linked (in chapter 7) to on-the-ground resistances via place-making performances.

4.1 A City in Transition, A Climate of Mourning

A Tale of Dis-PLACE-ment by Nikki D

Throughout my time circulating through D.C's "performance-scape," I observed over a hundred open mics. Those events allowed me to meet and intermingle with everyone from poets, musicians, visual artists, and community activists who often frequent open mics to share their community cries of grief and resistance as well as inspiration used to fuel their own artistic endeavors. The sessions were structured and felt quite different depending on if one was at BBP or at SDDC. (Chapter 4 will go into further detail.) Where BBP offered a clear cut, non-negotiable time limit, SDDC's only

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rule was a 1-piece set. But the set itself was not time managed very strictly, and thus people often used that time to express their raw emotions, which could range from the day's successes and frustrations to personal epiphanies and battles. And within these moments of dialogue were cathartic vent sessions and validation from the Amen corner. Thus, the performances and conversations happening at SDDC offer a microcosm of the larger issues of relevance to The Culture and the local community.

One day at SDDC, there was a stark air of grievances about the recent infringement of gentrification – a persistent theme across performances at BBP as well. When Nikki D., a local artist and activist, approached the floor to divulge her thoughts before sharing a shorter work, she unleashed a clear attack on those responsible for the ongoing redevelopment of the area. Refusing it to call it gentrification, too sterile for her liking, she named it "cultural genocide," saying that is exactly the result of the process: "to erase an entire people."

While this was not the first time such a label was used to point to the effects of gentrification, this was the first time I had been present to see the words formed as part of a narrative/performance and to witness the immediate reaction of those listening – a completely different encounter than reading it and digesting it from afar and out of context. In this case, there were groans and communal responses from the aforementioned Amen corner that affirmed and channeled Nikki's frustration. This collaborative espousal of grief makes sense given that many of SDDC's community members are either long-term residents who have witnessed the whitewashing of Chocolate City or are born-and-bred Natives who must contend the loss of home. Not to mention, the latter group was also witnessing not just their erasure from the present, but

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their historical influence on the area's rich culture was under threat as well. This combined, challenged their belonging altogether.

In a personal conversation with Nikki D., I was fascinated to hear that she was not only an "elder" of the community – i.e., one who has witnessed the changes of the area over a longer period of time – but also an artist who *wears* and *drives* her art around town. Nikki D. crafted an "art car" and a fashion-sense that reflect her unapologetic pride in her culture as well as her infuriation with local and national government. This creative venture included a picture of Andy Shallal who is BBP's owner but also Muriel Bowser's opponent in the last election, something that was new information for me at the time. And it was very clear that she was not impressed with the now incumbent for many reasons. Of those reasons was the sense of "self-hatred" she displayed via the policies that ignored local Natives – particularly the poor and elderly – while privileging White dollars. (Other reasons and critique will be highlighted in greater detail in the next section.) But, the fallout from Bowser's policies is why Nikki D. was excited to share and thus document her feelings about the redevelopment going on in her backyard, though I was unprepared to find that her first-hand view should be taken literally.

When Nikki D. invited me to her neighborhood in N.E.D.C., I was first amazed at how pristine the buildings and yards were in the front. However, she abruptly interrupted my moment of admiration with a short walk to the backyard, where there was a shocking site: huge bulldozers surrounding the neighborhoods and large piles of dirt and gravel from demolition of a nearby residence. In fact, we held most of our conversation on top of a dirt mound and construction site that offered a bleak and unavoidable eye sore and reminder of the destruction of buildings that once were and the

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impeding encroachment of a gentrifying neighborhood. This site embodied the paradox of death and birth that is part of toxic urban renewal campaigns, which often take for granted the history and emotional connection of those who've birthed, raised, lost, and grieved families on the very land that is nothing more the latest business venture for wealthy developers.

Within Nikki D's artistic expression of unapologetic Blackness was also a public outcry criminalizing the powers-that-be responsible for the demolition and loss that was becoming commonplace to the area. After seeing the backyard burial ground behind her newly redeveloped home, her clothing and car took on a new meaning; they are a metaphorical display of anger and grief – the very sentiments of loss – that shrouds the Black bodies (the Natives and residents) who must witness the demise of their neighborhoods and cultural markers of home.

Bye, Bye Chocolate City – Hello Vanilla Town

In many ways, the breakdown of foundational literature that informs this study has highlighted the importance of place and place identity, especially in regards to the ways in which conflicting parties relate to one another through the delineation of space -- i.e., whose space it is and whose it ain't. And for D.C., the place under observation for this research, there is an ongoing clash between the Natives as well as other long-term residents and the policymakers, developers, and transplants whose presence has contributed to the reimagining of the District. This reconstruction of Chocolate City – a labeling that references not only the high concentration of Black residents representative of the region's population but more specifically their influence over local history and culture (e.g., its cuisine, music, poetry and folkloric performances) – has resulted in the

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elimination of Black-owned businesses and predominantly Black and/or low-income housing and neighborhoods. Instead of local "mom and pop" establishments and affordable housing units, what has surfaced are lofts and high-rises, retail and restaurant chains, and added amenities that lend themselves more toward the live-work-play model that encourages an influx of non-native, wealthy "elites." And thus, many Black D.C. Natives and long-term residents have had to contend with the loss of their beloved Chocolate City.

Currently, D.C. is quickly becoming a space that no longer welcomes or reflects the historical fingerprint of its Black inhabitants as evidenced by the ways in which go-go music, mumbo sauce, and the former Black Broadway arts scene – prominent symbols associated with D.C. culture – have either been eliminated or are viewed as endangered, a direct correlation to the ongoing gentrification and reimagining of the area. This reimagining of D.C. requires pushing out of the old, majority-Black or immigrant communities to create a more "modern" urban space and entertainment scene made for wealthy and "diverse" populations, particularly millennials and transplant professionals in search of trendy living. Thus, any sighting of a new Trader Joes, Starbucks, and Whole Foods has become synonymous with redevelopment and the inevitable displacement and cultural genocide that is widespread in not just D.C. but other predominantly Black cities, such as New York City, Philadelphia, and San Francisco-Oakland (see Figure 4.1).

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Cities with High Levels of Black Displacement

Metro	Tracts	White Avg	Black Avg	Asian Avg	Hispanic Avg
Washington D.C.	33	525	-617	71	120
New York City	26	382	-574	96	179
Philadelphia	16	770	-737	102	18
San Francisco-Oakland	13	279	-517	110	150
Houston	8	-127	-648	14	137
Portland, OR	7	747	-622	-6	-27
Atlanta	7	704	-702	68	5
New Orleans	7	120	-1075	5	56
Baltimore	5	110	-673	22	235
Los Angeles	5	234	-280	260	255
Charlotte	4	411	-621	8	2
Richmond	4	408	-413	36	23
Dallas	4	-52	-701	13	54
Austin	4	500	-523	19	-175
Pittsburgh	3	-140	-935	26	20
Jacksonville	3	185	-704	-10	27
NATIONAL	187	404	-593	62	97

Figure 4.1. The impact of gentrification in major cities across the U.S. (NCRC.org).

The U-Street Example: Black Broadway No More

As the previous section explains, the area designated as our Nation's capital has developed a reputation for "the most gentrified city by percentage of eligible neighborhoods that experienced gentrification" (NCRC.org). Though gentrification is often framed as urban renewal, redevelopment usually comes at a cost, specifically for cities' Black and brown residents. Probably the greatest example of redevelopment resulting in the displacement of Black residents and their dispossession of property (neighborhoods and businesses) is that area known now as the U-Street Corridor. And given that this area was once center of Black art, it is necessary to understand exactly how much was lost during the transition – particularly for the poetry community.

Before the area took shape as the now trendy and diverse space that it is today, the U-Street Corridor was famously called Black Broadway. This historic area offered a

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plush scenery of theatres, clubs, and restaurants that were known to showcase legendary talents such as Jelly Roll Morton, Louis Armstrong, Billie Holiday, and Pearl Bailey (BlackBroadwayonU). And, of course, the area was often frequented by one of the area's most famous – or rather legendary – residents Langston Hughes, who is also the inspiration for Busboys and Poets (About Busboys). While the street has changed over the years, for many it maintains the spirit of Black Broadway's focus on Black arts and attractive nightlife for its Black residents. Eventually, this translated into the establishment of a thriving poetry scene, offering a mix of venues that would provide a buffet-like selection of open mics. Back then, as poets Drew Anderson details, there was enough offerings to ensure a poetry event were happening every night of the week but with enough fair play between venues to allow for each business to successfully thrive without the threat of monopoly.

While not born in the area, Drew aka "Droopy the Broke Baller," has resided in the D.C. area for more than half his life. Having attended and graduated from Howard University and becoming one of the area's more prominent poets, Droopy has witnessed firsthand the shift that has been frequently called "the loss of Chocolate City." Also, as a host of 3rd Tuesdays at the 14th & V flagship location for 10 years, an area that has been described as unrecognizable for those who grew up nearby, Droopy was very much acquainted with drastic changes since BBP's inception in 2004. So, when he invited me to tour the area with him to really get a picture of the transition that has taken place over the last decade, I jumped at the opportunity.

On September 19, 2018, we took advantage of one of the last days of guaranteed warm weather before fall brought its colder temperatures. Droopy escorted me around the

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former Black Broadway district. Through his description and narration of the area's poetic history, I was able to imagine the shift from a thriving poetry scene to the current site of defunct buildings, juxtaposed by trendy watering holes and yoga studios. In order to capture the full experience – at least through his perspective – Droopy suggested that we start our journey at BBP's flagship location (at 14th and V) and end with Bohemian Caverns – or at least the shadow of the iconic venue.

While following Droopy from BBP's doorstep and down to the corner of U and 11th, he talked endlessly with a mix of enthusiasm and sadness about the many cafes and restaurants he frequented as a young poet in pursuit of any and every open mic he could find. Back then, he informed me, there was a spot for every character and taste, for every night of the week. We passed by former sites of Mangoes (just outside BBP), Urban Energy (between 15th and 16th), Bar None (known now as Pure Lounge), Mocha Hut (the second home of SDDC 2005 – 2009), Kafa House (11th and 12th), and finally the famous Bohemian Caverns. But today, there is an endless arrangement of taquerias and shops that are an ever-evolving door of change – a commonality for businesses struggling to find footing and audience in a burgeoning restaurant and/or retail district.

As Droopy reflected on his past, he pointed out the countless newer establishments in juxtaposition to the dilapidated spaces that were undoubtedly causalities of the rising property taxes and big business competition. The sad reality and irony of gentrification is how one person's dream (e.g., urban renewal) is another's nightmare (e.g., displacement). The same street that serves as a beacon of change signaling the arrival of a modern D.C. simultaneously functions for Natives as a hopeless reminder of what is being lost. This paradox was evidenced by the cacophonous mix of

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chatter from predominantly White, well-to-do residents in search of the best happy hour deals interlaced with the cries of predominantly Black homeless men and women begging to receive a bit of financial assistance from the patrons.

Knowing this history, U Street, for me at least, is no longer a symbol of forward movement and prosperity; it is a site that whispers the ill-fated hopes of what could have been: a space for Natives and tourists alike to congregate and/or partake of Black excellence - the royalty and genius musicians, artists, and activists of our time. Post this venture down U Street, I revisited with the intent to envision the Chocolatey goodness, the allure of 1920's music and streets clamored with glamourous Black elites rushing the streets, making their way into the various night spots. I stared at Bohemian Caverns and pictured Black bodies swaying as they mimic the infamous bellows in Cab Calloway's "Minnie the Moocher." I visualized the Black lindy hoppers "jukin and jiving" to Duke Ellington and The Washingtonians, one of his earlier bands who played throughout the area (BlackBroadwayonU).

Actually, it was not so long ago – 2006 to be exact – that the former owner Omrao Brown tried to preserve and restore the site, then known as "the Cave," as D.C.'s premier spot for jazz (West 2016). However, those efforts failed and Bohemian Caverns is officially now defunct. As a former resident of the area, I am particularly regretful, having never had the chance to enjoy this historic venue firsthand. Instead, I must rely on the oral histories of people like Droopy, as the U Street they knew exists only in the collective conscience of a privileged few. That said, the Caverns has survived many closures before – seeing several attempts of revitalization and with many successful runs. But as Droopy shares his experiences with this location, including Verses open mic on

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Wednesday nights, his sadness conveys a finality and loss of hope for any future resurgences. For now, the memories that echo from the disparaged remains of Black Broadway serves as another tough loss for Natives and the local artist community.

4.2 First It's Symbols and Then It's People: The Language of Erasure

For many, it is clear that Chocolate City is not just under threat but is purposefully targeted for elimination. Many who attest to this fact have expressed a sense of defeat, as if it is almost too late to reverse; they position themselves as in disbelief, with such statements as "I don't know how this happened!" This statement is an interesting sentiment in that it assumes that the changes somehow suddenly took shape or that such a loss seemed unimaginable. However, literal and cultural genocide never happens "out of the blue"; it is slow and calculated, often starting with a shift in the ways in which those in power portray, name, and speak of those under threat. My research on D.C. has been a learning opportunity to understand how such a progression occurs, starting with seemingly harmless, annoying oversights and microaggressions that later manifest as overt policies of dispossession and displacement.

For urban planning studies, the tactic for exploring gentrification often involves a close consideration of the local government and how these city planning policies lead to a decline of vulnerable populations, i.e., low-income, elderly, and minority residents. With this kind of analyses, the steady decline away from its status as a Chocolate City is quite salient (see Figure 4.1). The increased presence of White residents in places once-deemed "too dangerous" is a simple but tangible piece of evidence to depict D.C.'s transformation, as jokingly noted in Figure 4.2 below.

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Figure 4.2: A meme taken from Black Twitter, an online subculture often used to mock or call out dominant culture.

However, as I began to converse and immerse myself in the communities of D.C. artists as well as local students and professionals, it became clear that the attempts to ostracize Black bodies and culture went beyond urban planning policies. The erasure includes the ways in which D.C. was situated in public discourse, (social) media, and local advertising. And in fact, one of the most notable instances of cultural genocide observed, received as even more of a personal attack and betrayal, came from D.C.'s very own D.C. born-and-bred mayor, Muriel Bowser[8], who participants – and locals in protest – pointed to as a contributor to the symbolic violence of gentrification and the Whitewashing efforts part of reimagining and modernizing the District.

[8] During the final moments of writing this document, Bowser had instituted a Black Lives Matters mural, written in bright, bold letters as a reminder to the 45th administration. However, she was criticized as taken a "performative" stance while ignoring the needs of her Black constituents. She was also accused of publicity seeking, considering she was also on the short list for Biden's VP search for his 2020 Presidential run for office (Zauzmer 2020).

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The Go-Go Example: #(Un)MuteDC

When entering the field, I observed a palpable tension between D.C. elites (i.e., the policymakers, developers, transplants) and the Natives – i.e., a labeling Washingtonians appropriated to represent their struggle. For Natives, their displacement is not only representative of a loss of housing but also their local arts and folklore. For example, go-go music, described as its only "true indigenous" art form, "was once ubiquitous here, but most newcomers today have never heard it" (Hopkins 2012). However, many Natives have responded with their own advocacy via protests and movements, such as #unmuteDC, to remind some and inform others that Chocolate City is very much alive and deserves its honor. As Natives utilize social media, merch, and even the arts to fight back to reclaim their territory and establish belongingness, it is easy to observe the ways in which top-down, arbitrary boundaries (e.g., state, city, district and/or country lines) demarcate place but also on-the-ground performances can counter dominant culture's imagination of the new D.C.

One incident that exemplifies this fact took place while I was wrapping up fieldwork in the District, when I was able to actually observe the confrontation between new and old residents in real time. The convenient timing of this incident helped to substantiate my intuition that the District's redevelopment strategies were fueling a cultural clash between Natives and transplants. During April of 2019, a petition was organized in response to a transplant's attempt to silence go-go music. The Go-Go scene was once very rich and prominent throughout the District, but now it has been minimized to underground parties and rare appearances at music concerts and festivals or in areas outside of D.C. proper.

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In spite of being pushed to the fringes, there were places where, for decades, Go-Go still resounded loudly for the whole neighborhood to hear. These traditions were like a beacon of hope that Chocolate City was very much still alive. On the corner of 7th and Florida Avenue, a local MetroPCS store would situate speakers outside its doors and blast the iconic rhythmic beats. According to Victoria Sanchez of ABC News, this decades-long practice had encountered no issues or complaints. However, when a new resident called the corporate office, the music was silenced, triggering a petition and rallies to "#UnMuteDC" (ABC7 2019).

In order to resist the infringement of gentrifiers and their threats on Black expression, the neighborhood flooded to the corner of 14th and U – seven blocks from the PCS storefront – and held a go-go featuring one of the area's most respected bands. It only took a day for T-Mobile leadership to announce that the music would resume in the Shaw neighborhood with a vow to work with neighbors to compromise on the volume (Figure 4.3).

Figure 4.3 - The Twitter page and response to #UnMuteDC protest from T-Mobile CEO.

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While this was a victory for the organizers of #UnMuteDC and Natives, New Yorker contributing writer Brianna Younger (2019) concisely yet descriptively surmises the undertones of this clash:

> "Still, the reality that it took thousands of people mobilizing to undo the actions of a few disgruntled people is a sinister tell about who matters most in our society and who is considered entitled to public expression and public space."

She goes on to quote former federal prosecutor Paul Butler, who explains the difference between gentrifiers – i.e., acting on the racism, privilege, and entitlement often displayed by dominant culture in white public space – and those who ascribe to be a new "neighbor." He states, "the gentrifiers are not wanting to share—they're wanting to take over" (Younger 2019). This mentality is found not only with the issues provoking #UnMuteDC, but even with conflicts between Howard University students and neighbors who persist in using The Yard, the historical landmark and greenspace part of the campus, as a dog park. As one of the transplants took to the airwaves to express his sentiments by demanding people to respect "our community" or "move the campus," it was just another showing of how gentrification reframes who is a (valid) representative of said community. Furthermore, it is another attempt to erase the history of those who have long contributed to and thrived in the areas long before such neighborhoods became attractive to White and wealthy elites.

The Native Campaign Example

This pattern of erasure, which ranges from hostile takeover to benign neglect, persists in other public arenas, such as the local media and advertising campaigns. In fact,

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there were many protests underway, including a wave of marches where participants proudly showcased their "NATIVE" merch, just so there was no confusing who belongs and whose home was being destroyed by development (Figure 4.4).

Figure 4.4: Example of Twitter Feed with "NATIVE" Campaign

Particularly one movement came under fire. It was accused of whitewashing the narrative of resistance told by persons of color, particularly D.C.'s Black natives and residents, which depicts their experience with the ongoing gentrification in the area. In 2018, the local publication, *Washingtonian Magazine*, released an article with ads as well as complementary social media posts with hashtag advocacy for their "I am Not a Tourist. I Live Here" campaign. However, their readership was quick to respond and

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callout the “bleaching” and thus erasure of the minority / Black experience, as none of the ads reflected any person of color. Given D.C. is still approximately 47.7% Black and 44.6% White, natives who responded on social media reminded some and informed others that D.C. is still Chocolate City – at least for now. But then, the angry respondents who attacked the “I am Not a Tourist” branding, did not stop there.

Alongside their public outcries, Natives decided to respond by creating their own campaign with the messaging of “Native, I’m From Here.” Upon first look, there is similarity between both campaigns’ tag lines. In many ways, though, the Natives’ response having occurred after the new source’s campaign shows an intentional allusion to its predecessor. The messaging’s interdiscursive connection allows the Native campaign to not only juxtapose their positionality of belonging against the proclamation “I am Not a Tourist. I Live Here,” but they are able to place conditions on what belonging means. Note that there are subtle but significant linguistic choices and changes made between campaigns. The Natives’ tag line removes the verb “live,” which indicates a state of existence or residence. The verb “live” is also written in present tense, which indexes the now, meaning “I live here in this moment and time.” However, by switching the lexical choice to “from,” a likely purposeful action, the speaker(s) makes a powerful claim about locality and place-hood.

To fully understand this argument, it becomes necessary to breakdown the entire phrase syntactically and lexically. “I’m” is the contracted form of “I am,” with “am” being the copula “to be” (also an auxiliary verb). And in this case, “am” is used as a linking verb that connects the subject “I” with a prepositional phrase “from here.” It is clear that a “be-verb” is used to indicate presence or existence. But, what is more

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important is the preposition "from" that follows the linking verb. Prepositions convey spatial information (i.e., location and time), and in this case, "from" used to mark a starting point or note something as "deriving from" a certain point. In this context, "from" is used to indicate the subject's origins or birthplace, foundation, or roots. So, the entire phrase "I'm *from* here" denotes a clear statement of not only *existing* in a certain place – in the now – but being *of* that place – rooted in its beginnings/history. And in fully comparing the two phrases, the "I am NOT a Tourist" the choice "not" is an adverb when used in concert with the auxiliary verb that is used to negate or refute a claim. Hence, its usage suggests someone asserting a counterargument to the claim "You are a Tourist." – or at minimum posed the questions – i.e., "Are You a Tourist?" Both campaigns then are representative of a struggle over who belongs as insider and who is deemed a visitor, or outsider.

But upon further investigation of the Washingtonian campaign, one can see the insertion of a comma used in between "Native" and "I'm From Here." In this case, the comma is used to offset a parenthetical phrase, which provides clarification or extra information for the preceding clause. However, English grammar provides approximately eight types of parentheticals, depending on the source. Without listing all, the Native campaign makes use of what is described as the summative modifier, which renames or sums up the preceding clause or phrase. Thus, the "I'm From Here" renames or sums up what a "Native" is, just in case the reader may not understand or does not want to acknowledge the meaning. The rhetorical strategy offers a clear and unmovable position minus a defensive tone, almost as if there is no argument: it just is. Nevertheless, there is

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also D.C.-based merch available with just the word “Native,” which has an even more powerful assertation that no explanation is needed – another tactic to publicly proclaim belonging.

In reviewing these old FB posts archived on social media feeds, I was able to observe the two advertising campaigns as well as the countering conversations / movements that occurred in 2018 (Figure 4.5). This history of social media interactions allowed this study to illustrate the ongoing tension that persists between Natives and transplants, policymakers and residents, and their alignment with either the historical or reimagined versions of D.C. These incidents also highlights the linguistic strategies used to demonize particular place-related symbols and images breeds the socio-political climate conducive towards the inevitable cultural genocide that is part of gentrification.

Figure 4.5: Picture of NATIVE merch worn by Washingtonians in protest (Photo credit: Garry Williams Jr.).

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Similar to the #UnMuteDC and "Native, I'm From Here" campaigns show, Washingtonians are not merely accepting the elimination of their home and culture without a fight. And, the use of the NATIVE merchandise adorned to visually position their claim on the territory is all the more impactful when placed in the frame of protests, as seen in the picture above (Figure 4.5). That said, the battle for Chocolate City is a fight that is not solely transpiring within the context of public (social) media and protest discourse but is one that commences on stage within the performances of the local artists community. It is from this vantage point that individuals can creatively yet explicitly depict the emotional impact of having to witness and slowly mourn the loss of one's home space and culture.

The Mayor Bowser Example

About halfway through my year of fieldwork, I was invited to step away from my research to enjoy some of the D.C. theater scene, which is just as plush and plentiful as its poetry network. Many theatres in the area are dedicated to making theatre culture and content more inclusive of minorities and representative of their experience, particularly those within the Black community. On this particular evening, I was invited to Studio X for a brilliant production entitled *The Fall* – a depiction of student-organized protests at Rhodes University in South Africa. While settling into our seats, I witnessed a conversation between Dwayne B., one of the main poets I shadowed and consulted for the year, and his companion for the evening. The two were deep in discussion about their frustration with their city's mayor – not an unusual topic of conversation for D.C. residents, as Muriel Bowser has been targeted for favoring redevelopment at the expense of D.C.'s Black elderly and low-income residents. But, this time, the conversation was

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less about policies and more about her problematic Facebook (FB) post and attempts to defame Mumbo sauce.

To fully depict the controversy of what could be seen a meaningless FB rant, it is important to breakdown D.C.'s food scene, particularly its carryout culture. Anyone immersed in the local fare will quickly note that mumbo sauce is a staple condiment. While it has been argued to be native to Chicago, D.C. residents have adopted this red, tangy substance as its own – i.e., a symbol of Chocolate City (Bowean 2013). In fact, its popularity has made it attractive to commercialization and thus is now offered at higher-end restaurants and packaged in local grocery stores[9] (Figure 4.6). The best mumbo sauce is arguably (at least by my participants' suggestion) located at carry-outs in areas where outsiders, especially White transplants, are less likely to frequent. Still, finding this condiment is not a difficult feat. In fact, if a person goes to any carryout in D.C. and order wings, fries, fried shrimp, or chicken fingers, that patron can automatically expect this sauce to appear in the bag and to be asked if they desire extra, as really the entrees are just a vehicle for the sauce.

I remember my first experience with Mumbo sauce and those who gave me my first lesson about life in D.C, when I was actually requesting barbeque and blue cheese to go with my chicken nuggets and wings. As someone in the room put it, "clearly you ain't from round here." I honestly did not get the big deal; it just looked like an imitation of ketchup and cocktail sauce to me. But, once I had my first taste, like many others, I was

[9] The spelling for the packaged and commercial brand is spelled as Mambo Sauce for licensing purposes (Ballad 2018).

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hooked. And afterwards, I was not only demanding extra sauce, but I would even be offended when they put only one in the bag.

When I moved away to South Carolina for graduate school, I even tried to concoct my own replica, to no avail. And in bonding with other D.C. exports, we would grumble about how no sauce – not even Chick-Fil-A or hot sauce – would do the trick. In

Figure 4.6 Picture of Capital City's Trademarked "Mambo Sauce," a commercialized version based in D.C.

short, as someone who has only resided in D.C. for three years – i.e., before this study – I recognized the close relationship between D.C. Natives and their beloved mumbo sauce. Hence, Bowser's faux pas is so revealing.

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It was the week of Thanksgiving 2018, the perfect time to have foodie discussions as people are inundated by thoughts of what to cook, bring, or expect on one of the biggest food-related holidays in existence. Hence, it was not by chance that Muriel Bowser took to her FB page to express the following: "Is anybody else annoyed by Mumbo sauce? I wish people would stop suggesting that it is quintessential D.C. I'm just saying I was a full-grown woman before I had heard of mumbo sauce! So there, I've said it" (CNN.com). Of course, this quickly invited responses from the public, especially those in the D.C. area. While some agreed with her sentiments, many retorted with questions about her Washingtonian status. For example, one user exclaims, "I thought she was from D.C. …" (CNN.com). However, even more telling were the conversations I had offline over the next few weeks and beyond.

As I sat and listened to the sentiments of Dwayne B., who was born and raised in Southeast D.C. (S.E. D.C.), it was clear that her comments were seen not only as problematic because it attacked a symbol of D.C.'s food culture, but given her policies and support of gentrification in the area, it seemed to represent her stance on what is and is not part of the D.C. she exists in, imagines, and plans to support. And considering that she took to such a public platform at a time where D.C. citizens were questioning her loyalties, this linguistic performance alluded to the erasure that was already underway in physical form. Where her words in any other given context would have just sparked a debate about mumbo sauce, in this political and cultural climate, her words were indicative of an internal assessment of what counts as parts of D.C. worth preserving. And given that Natives – who are predominantly of African American descent – will not just claim the sauce as representative of their regional identity but also rock fashion attire

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that attests to the fact (Figure 4.7 below), Mayor Bowser's claims outwardly displayed what residents suspected was a deep self-hatred and indifference towards Black Natives and their culture.

This example of language as a performative act, where words are transformative of real-world social realities, and not just the way people represent these realities, is not a new insight (Austin 1975; Butler 2006; Rosaldo 1982). Previous studies have shown that language can shift and transform the ways in which action, objects, or persons are

Figure 4.7: Artist with T-Shirt dedicated to D.C. culture, with wording "Mambo Sauce, Go-Go, & Half Smokes."

understood, accepted as viable, and become social facts. For example, Austin's classic example of a minister pronouncing someone as married actually marks the ritual transition from the couple being single to the exact moment where they are declared as married. In other words, the actual act of saying something is makes it so. That said, this is conditional, as it is based on a person's authority to not just verbally speak a proclamation but – in conjunction with power bestowed upon them –can then assert such statements as true. In the case of the marriage example, the one who pronounces the

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couple as married has to been seen as invested with the authoritative powers to perform the act of marrying. Hence, when the words of the pronouncement are spoken, it is both the words and the act that align to create a new reality.

Given this assessment, it is not just Mayor Bowser's intention to dissociate D.C. from mumbo sauce (or vice versa), but as the political figure her words have authority and power behind them to (re)define and (re)develop what is accepted as part of this reimagination. The post actually enacted Bowser's stance to modernize and distance her vision of D.C. from the past, including mumbo sauce (and its lovers), which she aligns with the old D.C. But up to this point, one could only presume to know her internal beliefs and feelings about the District and its Natives. Her FB statement, however, illuminates and substantiates her intent to disengage with Chocolate City, where Black residents are plentiful, and its culture and folklore are not only accepted but respected.

While gentrification had been well underway before Bowser and even before the infamous, performative social media post, it shows the connection between the language that proceeds or parallels massive threats and an execution of genocide. In the case of many historical events such as in Hitler's Germany or the more recent events in Rwanda, a word (e.g., cockroach) is introduced to subjugate one population and create distance between that group and the now privileged population. Thus, by the time actual policy comes to bear fruit, the dominant group has become desensitized to the plight of the other. The language enacts inequality that is taken up into public consciousness and validates any actions that beget the elimination of marginalized group.

For many on FB who bore witness to Bowser's post, that moment marked a shift from the possibility to the reality of attempted cultural erasure not just by outsiders but by

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their very own. In other words, that post had real-world implications over D.C.'s trajectory, validating how its inhabitants are to be treated by stakeholders (i.e., transplants, developers, and policymakers) who benefit from leaving old norms and symbols in the past. At least, that is what my companion and his friend – as well as many others I have observed over the year – insistently deemed to be the case but emphatically chose not to accept.

4.3 The Spoken Word Community Claps Back!

Upon making my rounds to both BBP and SDDC, I noticed early on a pattern of themes developing across venues and performances. As previously discussed in Chapter 3, Spoken Word is often a performed reflection of "here and now" narratives, where the stories and topics broached are rooted in timely matters and conversations in progress, at various scales. The art form, thus, situates a chronotope that produces the sense of urgency that advocacy requires. Considering this notion, it is no surprise that many performers and performances observed during 2018 and 2019 were in response to the hot topic of gentrification in D.C. In many ways, because the erasure of Chocolate City was felt deeply and widely throughout the district, there was no aspect of the culture that was left untouched, including D.C.'s housing / residences, cuisine, music, and its arts.

While there are many instances of poets – both veterans and novices – utilizing the "stage" to expel their frustration and grief with D.C.'s redevelopment and their loss of home, there are two incidents that were standout performances. One was shared by SpitDat feature C. Thomas and demonstrates a savory delivery and brilliant use of metaphor. The other, performed by an open-micer who will be referred to here as "TB,"

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fashioned her poetic piece as an elegy ballad filled with tongue-in-cheek verses and presented at Busboys' Brookland location.

While both sites offer contrasting styles of facilitating their open mic series and events, what they share is the opportunity to give artists of all experience levels and styles a chance at the mic and platforms to channel poeticized expressions of hurt, pain, frustration, and loss. The following sections will highlight the art form itself as the tool for expelling such emotions, especially as a timely conversation with the socio-cultural and socio-political issues at play. Thus, the goal in this section is not to contrast the culture of these two sites. (See chapters 3 and 7 for more contrastive analyses of BBP and SDDC spaces and open mic culture.) Instead, these works offer an example of the ways in which artists used their craft to call out gentrification practices in the District which privilege Whiteness while also appropriating cultural symbols and eliminating spaces aligned with Blackness.

And now, A Gentrification Ballad?!

As a local chain with seven locations, BBP provides an open mic for nearly every night of the week, making Spoken Word poetry extremely accessible to all tourists and residents throughout the DMV area. As discussed in chapter 2, it was my goal to attend each available open mic at least once, in order to observe whether BBP maintained a fluid style of open culture or adapted its brand to meet the characteristics of the surrounding neighborhoods. This afforded me the opportunity to hear many poems by artists of different calibers of expertise. While it was clear that features and hosts would provide showstopping performances, having perfected their craft and delivery for the optimal affect, every now and then, I would encounter well-done pieces done by novice

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writers. Of course, the artists sometimes lacked some of the nuances of delivery; however, the content often still reflected the same depth of emotion and relevance as veteran performers.

One evening, at BBP's Brookland's open mic, I observed novice open-micer TB share a poem called Independence Day, a seemingly harmless and patriotic endeavor given its reference of July 4th – a day marked by parades and fireworks. But, framing the holiday within the artist's context, of witnessing the eradication of her history and home, positions a similar irony observed in C. Thomas's work. TB's work expresses the hypocritical nature of the nation's capital, as the site for some of the best 4th of July celebrations, yet also a site marred by the way it infringes on the rights of its native-born citizens, provoking persistent act of resistance (Figure 4.8).

Figure 4.8: A real estate sign shows the growing tension as "gentrify the" was added before "district."

To start, TB introduces her works as "gentrification ballads," which utilize an interesting lexical choice, for "ballads" are usually reserved to mark arts associated with "folk culture." The term folk is often used to reference practices (artistic and mundane

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habits) that harken back to the days of antiquity, with norms established by an anonymous group preserved through oral exchange. While the artist may not have perceived such an insight, conscious or subconscious choices are still impactful to the read of the work being presented. For this work, it shows that Spoken Word culture as representative of a folk, history, and culture that speaks to "unknown" but preserved ancestral ties and practices – in this case, the practice of oral poetry influence by enslaved African and their descendants.

Furthermore, folk art is often used to reflect locally bound groups and practices that are often juxtaposed with elites and high art. TB makes it clear that her audience includes those not in power; they are people who are victims of the process that contrasts between dominant (or mainstream) culture and the marginalized groups. This idea is conveyed before the start of the poem where she exclaims, "Oh, this is all y'all for neighborhoods where round 4th of July you don't know if it's bullets or fireworks" (Line 1.) This statement alludes to the fact that fireworks carry a certain polysemous sonic iconicity that simultaneously indexes different experiences for different groups. For those who have endured areas associated with poverty and violence, it is necessary to be able to distinguish between the sound of celebration and the sound danger – and thus can be triggering in a similar fashion to way in which a soldier returning from war may respond to a car backfiring.

But of even more importance is the historical association with the holiday, given that while the nation itself was deemed "free" and independent of its former "tyrannical" leaders (the British government), African Americans were still living as property (or slaves) under the forces of a tyrannical force (the American government). Hence, TB's

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work points to contrasting experiences that comment on racial as well as socio-economic differences and how that aligns groups with certain privileges and rights – particularly those associated with the 4th of July (Table 4.1). This contradiction speaks to a similar contrast when observing D.C. being inundated by White faces smiling and waving flags, a display of patriotism, while also contributing to Natives' eviction and ostracization.

Table 4.1 An excerpt from artist TB's "gentrification ballad, performed at BBP Brookland's open mic.

1.	T. B.	It's called Independence Day. Oh, this is all y'all for neighborhoods where round 4th of July you don't know if it's bullets or fireworks.
2.	Audience	(*laughing and clapping*) Ye:a:h!
3.	T.B.	It seems fitting to detonate a block of the city you're losing in the name of independence.
4.		When you are powerless, grab a weapon.
5.		Stick your chest out.
6.		Light a {quarter} stick of dynamite and let it fly, in the name of an America that framed the constitution that never included you.
7.		Claim a national anthem that ridicules your fight for freedom.
8.		And centuries later makes it clear that property value increases as you decrease.
9.	TB	Rip it a part, and it'll stay ripped until you have been removed.
10.		Then!
11.		It will be branded historic.
12.		And murals with your dark faces will grace the sides of buildings in name of cultural preservation.
13.	Audience	Da:::mn! (*clapping*)

The artist continues her mockery of the holiday by sarcastically encouraging her audience to join in the celebrations and watch "property value increases as you decrease" (Line 8). T.B.'s work comments on gentrification's dehumanization of Natives and their connections to their home turf. And yet, at the same, within urban renewal campaigns, there is often this performative memorialization and celebration of Blackness that allows the city to reference and appropriate the rich history it simultaneously destroys – similar to the way in which Americans utilize tropes of Native American identity for its sports

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teams while systematically working to oppress the people aligned with these cultural markers. (Actually, the Washington Redskins had come under attack for this exact faux pas.)

She highlights this duplicity in Lines 10-12, which are especially poignant; they showcase the paradox within D.C.'s attempt at "cultural preservation," where Black bodies are removed but "dark faces" are immortalized in the form of murals (Figure 4.9). Overall, this work critiques these attempts to display diversity and celebration of Black excellence in areas where Black businesses and residents are increasingly becoming non-existent. T.B.'s ballad not only expresses the frustration of Washingtonians, but it also serves to highlight false pretenses of liberty and justice under which America markets its greatest feature, freedom.

Figure 4.9. A mural of prominent Black figures on the walls of a business on U Street. (Photo Credit: Tiffany Marquise Jones).

C. Thomas's Poet "Spin" on Laundry

Another poem that deserves highlighting was observed at SDDC by a veteran poet well established in the world of D.C. poetry. As previously noted, artists and hosts

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associated with BBP often frequent and feature at SDDC. Thus, it was not too surprising when I happened to catch C. Thomas, a host at BBP's Takoma location and its limited Queer poetry series. However, having never observed him in more than a host role, I was pleased to catch by happenstance his feature at SDDC. I was particularly curious because 1) I had never witnessed a lengthy set of his own works and 2) the first piece was scarily relevant to this study and thus drives home the point of how Spoken Word is a tool of emotion and affect as well as advocacy and resistance. In short, I was not disappointed – both in terms of the content illustrating what, at the time, seemed to be predictable patterns of themes but also in terms of hearing one of the cleverest critiques of gentrification.

I have obtained several examples where gentrification is confronted head on without any subtle allusions, offering unrestrained brutal honesty and emotion-filled exclamations. However, C. Thomas's "How to Gentrify Laundry" uses a blend of natural wit, controlled rhythm / pacing, and extended metaphor to disparage D.C.'s redevelopment (see Table 4.2).

Table 4.2: A transcription of C. Thomas' "How to Gentrify Laundry," performed during his feature at SDDC.

1.	How to gentrify laundry.
2.	Separate clothes, whites from colors, no mix-matching. Never blend.
3.	Fill machine with hot water. Add whites.
4.	Whites only, bleach to make whiter, brighter, pure, no color guard, no rings around the collar.
5.	Wash all dirt away. Stains. (*pointing to hand to indicate color*) Not wanted.
6.	This is when whiteness matters.
7.	Rinse well, spin cycle, hang to dry. White sheets in the wind.
8.	Cool.
9.	Crisp.
10.	Privileged.
11.	Full of life.
12.	What's up SpitDat? (switching into conversation / out of performance mode.)

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By relying on audiences' knowledge of washing clothes, he utilizes specific lexical choices and descriptions to create an intertextual chain between discourses related to laundering practices and the U.S. sociohistorical relationship with segregation.

For example, lines 2-5 makes a clear statement on who is eliminated in the process of gentrification, using such phrases as "no mix-matching," "never blend" "no color guard" to indicate that Whiteness is not only favored but separation (or segregation) is often pursued with the intent to "cleanse" away (or eliminate) "dirt" (aka Blackness). While redevelopment is always marketed for both newcomers and locals as a colorblind process, C. Thomas uses intertextual and interdiscursive connections to assert just the opposite. While linking his own text of poetic allusions (e.g., the separation of clothes) with the "texts" and terminology associated washing dirty clothes, C. Thomas is able to align persons of color as being an unwanted "stain" or blemish while using generic and contemporary usage of "bleaching" to showcase the intent of sanitizing and "purifying" areas soiled by color. Thus, gentrification is depicted as the tool for creating boundary between an elevated Whiteness and the subordination and erasure of a racialized Blackness.

Equally compelling is the invocation of the ongoing mission and advocacy of Black Lives Matter juxtaposed with America's persistent ideology of white supremacy. In Line 6 and 7, C. Thomas evokes images of lynching with the phrase "hang to dry" and the KKK with the description of "white sheets in the Wind." This imagery casts an interesting irony, showcasing the contradiction of gentrification, which directly or indirectly attempts to "purify" urban centers, and the controversial and toxic "stain" on fabric of American history. In other words, gentrification is a "cloaked" form of ethnic

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cleansing that reproduces the systematic racism and structural violence associated with Antebellum South and Jim Crow.

4.4 Final Thoughts

D.C.'s transition from Chocolate City to a more diverse, trendy, and modern urban center is a complicated and problematic venture. On one hand, urban renewal projects are intended to revitalize and restore dilapidated buildings and revive the local economy, ostensibly to make the city a desirable and livable environment. However, the questions is: desirable for whom? To be clear, this chapter seeks to show that the context of revamping spaces is not the ultimate issue. Instead, it is the practice of cultural genocide and dispossession that procures the emotional outrage of Natives. And, Washingtonians draw on indigeneity to highlight a persistent American tradition and to violate the rights of those who lay claim to land, or in this case to urban spaces in Chocolate Cities.

With D.C. being *the* original Chocolate City, buy by no means the first or the last to experience the erasure of their history and culture, Natives' experiences are useful benchmarks for other urban renewal projects. It highlights what should be avoided by policy makers. But also that the well-tuned response by citizens can achieve even the smallest victories of checks and balances to preserve the home that is theirs.

Overall these incidents of erasure show imbruing tension: a battle between Natives and gentrifiers, between history, nostalgia and honoring of the past and "renewal" and modernist discourse paving a way towards the future, between the old, outmoded Chocolate City and the reimagined new D.C. By using social media, including the circulation of images and hashtags, Black Twitter and Instagram clap backs has

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allowed for swift mobilization and responses to call out toxic dominant ideologies at play. Also, the works highlighted in this section showcase how Natives utilizing artistic responses, particularly Spoken Word poetry performances, to display their anguish and suffering as well as to critique the powers-that-be that enact toxic redevelopment policies. Both poems are a sample of a prominent persistency for poems to broach the subject of gentrification, as observed throughout my year in the field. However, these two illustrate what is the trauma, strain, and pain of living in a place where their culture is simultaneously being appropriated and eliminated and under the façade of "renewal." And thus, there is a deep-seated resentment and grief present throughout District.

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CHAPTER 5

BUILDIN IT UP, BREAKIN IT DOWN, & LAYIN IT OUT

Many studies within ethnopoetics and performance have observed that practices are sensitive to the places (or context) in which they occur (Flores 1994; Goffman 1981; Seizer 2000) and that societies and groups reflect their relationships with place via their linguistic and artistic practices (Basso 1992; Feld and Basso 1996; Feld 2012). While Spoken Word culture considers and interacts with place in similar ways, the culture as it is observed within D.C., also reveals that the art form includes place as part of the interaction. Furthermore, the way in which the host may engage with those in the audience reveals the art forms can also (re)create place (i.e., its spatial boundaries or even its purpose / functionality) in ways that inform that edifices or venues are not just these passive objects that encase cultures. But also, those that use these spaces, particularly within urban areas, do not just exist or reside *in* them, but they develop intimate relationships *with* them. These insights are just one of the many reasons why Spoken Word is essential for ethnopoetics research but also why performance venues are central to cities and, thus, to redevelopment projects.

Where chapter 4 situates the socio-cultural climate of D.C. as what surrounds and, therefore, influences Spoken Word / open mic venues in the District, this chapter will delve into open mic spaces themselves – or least the two observed as part of this study. In other words, the goal of this part of the analysis is to narrow in scope and

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"reduce" in scale in order to understand the structural components of place and how it fits within this verbal art tradition. To do this, this chapters moves beyond Spoken Word practices in general and focuses on how it is practiced in two prominent venues in D.C.: BBP and SDDC. More specifically, this analysis zeroes in on how these venues fit within D.C.'s Spoken Word performance-scape as well as how these venues not only respond to their setting but actively craft their own identities as facilitators / preservers of Spoken Word culture.

By building up the status quo of place as containers of space (and the activities within them), this chapter shows that Spoken Word as a genre and how it is practiced in these venues metaphorically breaks downs walls and lays out its own foundation through which place and performance are understood. In other words, the analyses performed in this chapter will illustrate how people's behaviors are informed by an edifice's integrated partitions (or layout) – which usually are included to organize bodies and flows of interactions – as well as how interactions, talk, and/or performances may produce invisible, emergent "structures" / boundaries which in turn further influence activities in the space (Beeman 2010; Goodwin and Goodwin 2004; Hymes 1971).

That said, this chapter will show that performances can override and reconstruct the original intentions of how a space was designed, making it sensitive to the participants' motives and interactions. To accomplish this objective, this section will emphasize the following aspects of space: 1) its function and semantic inferences, 2) as affect laden entities that trigger memories / emotions, and 3) as typified structures for participation in live performance that prompt particular manners and customs of appropriateness – in no particular sequential or hierarchical order.

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5.1 A Tale of Two Open Mics

While Spoken Word poetry genre has certain continuities despite where performances occur (standards discussed in chapter 4), the way in which the art form is facilitated can differ across venues. And, because this study focuses on the landscape, or rather "performance-scape" of D.C. poetry, it is necessary to contextualize two prominent open mic sites, which served as the field site for this research. It should be noted that these two sites are not being ranked in any way, as both BBP and SDDC are highly respected open mics, recognizable as the "place-to-be" for any Spoken Word artist residing in or visiting the area. These were the sites chosen specifically because of my own experiences with BBP and then the recommendations of participants who pointed me to SDDC. As conversation developed about BBP, it became clear these those acquainted with both open mics placed them in juxtaposition to the other, and it became my goal to observe why.

Needless to say, there are a vast number of poetry events and open mics in the area, many of which are sponsored and organized by participants in this study. However, as BBP is arguably one of the most notable (or recognizable) in D.C. and SDDC is indisputably the longest-running series in the area, they are used to offer a snapshot of how Spoken Word is influenced by gentrification as well as how the artists critique local policies for urban renewal. And finally, because the performances were captured at both open mic venues, this section will describe and contrast each site in order to provide the necessary context to establish the performance situation (Bauman 1984). Also, this section will illustrate the complexities of how BBP and SDDC represent the art form,

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including how they balance community, authenticity, accessibility, and capitalistic prowess.

"Where Culture and Politics Collide"

BBP is a chain throughout the metro-D.C. area, boasting seven locations stretching from Hyattsville, Maryland to Shirlington, Virginia, with weekly open mics taking place Monday-Thursday and other specialty poetry events for the weekend. BBP 14th and V's open mic takes place every Tuesday, Hyattsville's every Thursday, and Shirlington's every Monday. Each location offers a dedicated weekly event, with each facilitated and promoted by well-known poets from and established in D.C. For example, 4th Wednesdays at 450 K belongs to host and Spoken Word veteran and SDDC co-host Dwayne B., AKA the Crochet Kingpin – a key participant in this study. Because of its incorporation of reputable talent from the local community, BBP has garnered a reputation as being synonymous with D.C. poetry – for some that is. However, controversially, for many in the community, BBP also represents the same massive takeover associated with other new chains that have (re)located to the area at the expense of several smaller businesses.

The flagship location for BBP was established in 2006, in the historic "U Street Corridor." At the time of this study, owner Andy Shallal had successfully erected and maintained six locations and was in the process of establishing a 7th in the Southeast quadrant of D.C., known as the BBP Anacostia[10] The premier of its open mic night was the last BBP open mic I attended, an event that marked a victory for those in S.E., as the

[10] The Anacostia location opened at the tail end of this study and thus is not captured in detail. I was able to attend the premiere open mic, which took place on March 19, 2019.

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sector of the District usually gets "a bad rap," associated with crime, poverty, and predominantly Black neighborhoods. However, as chapter 7 will show in further detail, coming for S.E. is a symbol of pride. Either way, having a BBP location in the area will usually elicit responses from the media as well as D.C. residents, noting the venue as a symbol of change for some and a warning of impeding gentrification for others. Regardless, the opening of Anacostia conveyed that BBP has indeed maintained its trajectory for growth and success[11].

"Chain, Chain, Chain": Poetry meets Entrepreneurship

Founder Andy Shallal, an avid anti-Iraq War advocate and lover of poetry, established this venue as a space for "art, culture and politics to intentionally collide" (Busboys and Poets). The owner's biography notes that his interest in open mic culture as a political forum is particularly true of BBP's motivations for the space, as its tribal statement describes the site as a "place where politics and culture collides" – clearly noted by the "Resist" merch available and worn by the staff. That said, while SDDC makes no formal attempts to market and merchandize its aims outside of the venue, its open forum for testimonial-style sharing makes it so that any and all topics – i.e., that do not infringe on other people's safety and humanity – are welcomed. Andy's attention to and incorporation of Spoken Word open mics as one of the venue's prime events is evidence of the genre's proclivity for urgency and relevancy, thus useful as a performance of resistance and activism.

[11] However, BBP Anacostia was still developing its open mic, I did not include my observations of that site in this study.

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While poetry is heavily promoted at BBP, it's prominence as a venue also attracts other performers, including musicians and comedians. In fact, one night BBP venue captain and host Droopy the Broke Baller made an interesting and sly assertion by saying "just another night at Busboys and Comics" – evidence for just how much the genre has become a mainstay. This, of course, has provoked some aggravation by those who seek out the poetry open mics and performances BBP has become recognized for, but the venue's premise to welcome all artistry takes precedent. And, capitalizing on this shift as well as diverse palettes, BBP integrates other non-poetry specialty events – e.g., events centered around storytelling, comedy, and jazz. That said, there are also Slam and Spoken Word poetry events dedicated to different demographics (e.g., youth open mic, college night, Queer and ASL poetry) as well as those emphasizing different genres and themes (e.g., eroticism, loves, as well as issues of race and gender).

Aside from its emphasis on arts and politics, BBP provides a comprehensive "nightlife" experience with its own restaurant and bookstore, specialty food and drinks, elaborate design and atmosphere, as well as a more advanced production schema for performances / events. Because BBP locales are often located in highly visible and crowded retail districts or newly gentrified live-eat-play neighborhoods, they not only serve as a gathering spot for artists but also those looking for a leisurely pit stop. Furthermore, the venue has garnered a reputation for its distinctive inclusion of conscious eating, e.g., sustainable sources, gluten-free and vegan options, as well as farm raised meats and vegetables. Due to this practice, BBP's brand has been positively evaluated, realizing in several awards and certification, including "Best of D.C. For" recognitions by the Washington City Paper as well as the Responsible Epicurean Agricultural Leadership

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(REAL) certification by the United States Healthful Food Council (Figure 5.1). The latter of these awards is an a honor given for helping "connect people who want healthful and sustainable food and beverages with the restaurants that provide them" (PeoplePill.com).

Figure 5.1. An award found on BBP premises that shows its local success for conscious eating (Photo Credit: Tiffany Marquise Jones).

Overall, BBP's attention to chic, modern design style as well as higher price points for its cuisine as well as received media attention is one of the many reasons why this venue sits in contrast to SDDC. (Note: more evidence of this contrast is further developed in Chapter 7.) But also, it is these tools of marketing that are responsible for its success. Also, it is BBP's reputation for expansion that deems it has taken over D.C. poetry, garnering the description as a "benevolent monopoly" by one its long-term hosts and Native Washingtonian poet. The argument that BBP is a benefactor or contributor of gentrification, however, remains in dispute and should elicit further inquiry, as the same artists astutely notes that correlation does not always equate to causation. The relocation of its 5th and K venue to what is now the 450K location has been cited by Andy as a

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product of gentrification, commenting that higher rent is not just an issue for small businesses. Nevertheless, poets have commented on BBP as a well-tuned "machine" that is tough for smaller open mics to contend with, though SDDC has done so with some creativity.

The Tribe Called BBP

One of the cleverer aspects of BBP's branding is the way in which patrons and poets are fashioned as part of a 'tribe,' equipped with its own tribal statement and culture for facilitating Spoken Word culture (discussed further in Chapter 6). In fact, it was this terminology that prompted my ethnographic observation. Unlike other locales that offer 'open mic nights' or Spoken Word performances in a piecemeal fashion, BBP was developed, designed, and directed with the goal of being fully dedicated to lovers and performers of poetry. Also, it was established with the attention of celebrating and preserving D.C.-based artists. Hence, participants like Pages and Droopy (among others) spoke highly of Andy's endeavors that he sought out those from the area, including observing and consulting with SDDC, in creating his own foray into the art form. Thus, artists associated with BBP are usually well situated in the D.C. community at large, whether they are Natives or long-term residents of the area. In many ways, this fosters a sense of local identity and community as well.

That said, those visiting for the first time or from outside the D.C. area are not positioned as unwelcomed, and in fact, many hosts will prompt a shoutout in order to recognize those traveling from afar. In doing so, people from all over the nation as well as abroad get to represent their hometowns. But also, the hosts' emphasis of community rules – e.g., "community seating" – constructs the sense that those are bonded by poetry,

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if nothing else for a moment. Droopy best demonstrates this by including the "community poem," which is constructed by circulating sheets of paper where everyone contributes a line, building on to others' additions. He caps off the evening by reading the lines, cementing the idea that even temporal communities can create "interesting" pieces. But this use of language and performative action along self-entitled merch available solidifies that "Tribe" is not just a reference instituted in passing, but it is an identity that BBP is thickened throughout one's experience at the venue (Wortham 2004).

Where #SpitHappens

As the previous section situates, on one side of the spectrum sits BBP, where the emphasis is on the art form as a product (or entertainment) and as performance (of art and activism). However, on the other side of the spectrum is SDDC, a more "underground" and grassroots movement known as the area's longest running open mic series. As people inquired about my interest in BBP, I was often met with the questions of "Have you been to SpitDat yet?" This question invited me to expand my scope to this influential open mic series, and of course with further insight, it becomes clear why this site deserves observation.

Having established itself as a training ground for current and future artists – those within Spoken Word culture and other performance arts – it has garnered the attention of local artists as well as those passing through. In fact, several artists on book and poetry tours made it a habit to include SDDC as one of their stops, both in order to showcase their work as well as to absorb inspiration from other great artists. Artists like Chicago-native RealTalkRaps (known now as Brandon Alexander Williams), one of those pushing me to include SDDC, and South African poet Modise Segothe, featuring at

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both BBP and SDDC while on the performing through the area, portrayed this as a rare Spoken Word experience. This reputation resulted in word-of-mouth advertisement, as the community was always inviting guests to both witness great artists and to hone their artistry, marketing that was the life and blood of SDDC, given their low-key setup.

At the time of this study, that first site for SDDC was at the Emergence Community Art Collective (ECAC) building – that is before it became the underground SDDC Speakeasy, which now operates out of a community member's basement – a location disclosed only upon request. Both spaces operated under a certain cloud of mystery and thus had limited accessibility. Unlike BBP who has mass marketing on its side to attract its patrons, SDDC is known mostly by hearsay or reputation. And with the ECAC tucked away in a residential area in unassuming house-on-the-hill, an old house that speaks to D.C. history, it is the quintessential "hidden gem." And those lucky enough to find this site also had to work hard for their night of poetry, as one had to climb an insane number of stairs – about three flights – to first access the edifice.

Those who could survive the climb to the porch were then awaited by several persons, clearly familiar regulars, embracing, dapping, and catching-up about their respective weeks. For those not part of the crew of usual suspects, there is balanced benign disregard that welcomes the more reclusive types who desire an understated entrée in the scene. In fact, it was only after a few weeks of attendance that I received a nod of acknowledgement – one that says, "hello and welcome." Then, with one more flight of stairs, you finally access the room where #SpitHappens.

The space used at the ECAC is the epitome of minimalism. Yet, it is likely the space's simplicity that makes it such a warm space, that and the fact it is in the home of

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former ECAC owner Sylvia Robinson. SDDC was "housed" in a one-room space on the top floor of a community center that was easy to miss if you were not looking for it. There was no elaborate décor and hardly any production equipment – not even a microphone or stage to rely on; instead, there were basic chairs opening toward the "front" – whichever direction chosen for the evening – providing a sort of make-shift staging. There were a few speakers (as needed for those presenting music), a podium, and a sheet of paper that served as the sign list. In short, everything utilized in the space serves a practical function.

Take me to Church!

What is clear from visiting SDDC is that the series is by no means as accessible as BBP. Director of Poetry Events Pages Matam notes that BBP's familiar restaurant atmosphere encourages anyone to just walk in -- whether they are aware of the open mic atmosphere or not. Even co-hosts Droopy the Broke Baller and Dwayne B. have spoken openly about this issue, noting why this notion of visibility vs. invisibility works for and against both sites in very interesting ways. BBP's first look is one of any happy hour and coffee shop meeting space – a setting that many people - both inside and outside of Spoken Word culture – are socialized into and thus feel at ease entering. And, for those who require a bit more research before attending, there is a lot of information available on Google and their website to put a person at ease.

With SDDC on the other hand, information is provided via social media posts and word-of-mouth promotion. Between the SDDC FB page and the hosts and features individual social media, the series has been able to maintain a consistent following for 18+ Years. That said, as Pages jokes, those unfamiliar to SDDC have to be prepared to

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seek out their venue, give three knocks and a code word, and then feed solely on the artists' words as there is no food or drink to distract a person. Of course, this is an exaggeration of sorts. The point of this illustration is that those interested in attending are either in the know or must work to gain the knowledge - this is not a straight-forward process, as it was not clear if the information provided on their FB was up to date as there is no description of the space online. Hence, locating the ECAC requires folks to embrace their adventurous side, given the venue is not situated in the hustle and bustle of nearby business and arts districts. However, upon hearing that SDDC is by nature poets' "Spoken Word church" – a term I often encountered – as well as the fact that community members often invites others to attend, the hospitality shown and indexed through language and behavior still finds a way to allure even the most unassuming and introverted persons.

#Issa Vibe, Not Just a "Tribe"

Upon capturing my first impressions of the SDDC, as well as to observe the culture of the community in juxtaposition to my observations of BBP, I first acknowledged the "closeness" of those who attended the open mic. It seemed like there was more of a familiarity between those who frequented SDDC, realized especially by a group of regulars who attended every week without fail – community members like Motorcycle Jesus and Fleetwood Deville who are memorable artists in their own right. While all venues have their regulars, it was easier to observe the crew of "faithfuls" in SDDC's compact environment, whereas BBP locales were always filled with tons of first-timers / tourists visiting the area. And, Pages explained that their data confirms having a high turnover rate. One of the personal touches of SDDC is that community

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members are featured on their birthdays. In many cases, SDDC has been known to give novice poets their first opportunity at feature opportunities, practice that helps build up one's confidence while also establishing a reputation and credibility within poetry's network – both in and outside of D.C.. Those who are highlighted each week are also "gifted" with a donation supplied by members as well as a pamphlet signed by all in attendance – said to serve as a memento of their achievement and encouragement during hard times expected for any veteran and budding artist.

Personal touches and all, SDDC's ability to amass a dedicated following is quite a feat, especially considering the open mic series has often experienced shutdowns and relocations. This displacement, in many instances, has been the result of the ways gentrification begets a constant shift as small and Black-owned businesses succumb to high taxes and competition. Likewise, gentrifiers themselves have posed a threat to SDDC's existence. Dwayne B. recalls an incident where members were enjoying a bit of open-air performances, filled with impromptu freestyles and banter, and they were met with water thrown outside a resident's window in protest of the noise. After several complaints to police, the community left their temporary setting and remained "homeless" for about six months, until finding themselves at the ECAC for over a decade, which was its 5th location.

Because of these interruptions, the co-hosts have had to constantly relocate and rebuild their numbers with each move. In spite of this, the SDDC community thrives, as so many rely on it as a weekly therapeutic and/or performative outlet. Thus, these loyal members *always* find their way to the open mic series. Also, there is no "extravagant" setting or huge marquee beckoning for attendees' patronage. Instead, the agenda is

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simple: express your heart; bear your soul; share your art. It is because of SDDC's mission, longevity and history of resiliency that co-hosts of the open mic explain that it is best described as a movement, not a location. Simply put by Dwayne B., "it's a vibe," with a trajectory that speaks to how a spirit of a "space" is driven less by an edifice and environment and more by its purpose, practice, and participants.

5.2 Put some "Spec" on that Mic

Both in the years of frequenting Spoken Word poetry venues, especially BBP, and even then as a scholar-observer of the art form, I witnessed a prevailing tenet for "respecting the mic," a cultural-based code for how to engage when a poet is at the microphone. However, during my research where I was able to observe both the performances and audience interaction, I also noticed how audience members reacted when this tenet was being broken. At one of the weekly college events, an open mic-turned audition for Howard University's slam team, a few people shouted to other audience members, "listen to the poet!" This response was aimed toward the people who were either scoring content too harshly and/or speaking over the artist at the mic. This observation prompted me to delve a bit deeper, and thus I spoke with Pages about this facet of the culture in general and this audience members' correction in particular.

While his insights were somewhat dissimilar from my interpretations of this principle of respect, his explanation was very telling and began to focus on not just the verbal art tradition, but the spaces in which the events are facilitated. Pages stated that "I think. The question of respecting the mic is more so on the person who is at the microphone. THEY have to respect the mic. Which is in turn respecting the SPACE that you're in and **honoring the space** that you're in." t was this statement that steered my

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anthropological gaze towards how not only those in the audience honored this premise but specifically how those at the mic would attempt and/or realize this custom.

Urban Communities and Place Intimacy

The discussion of the intimate connections between people and their artistic expression in relationship to place is not a novel idea within the discipline. In fact, the long-established norms of anthropology have been rooted in, in many ways, the romanticization of bygone days and the depiction of rural (e.g., pastoral or agricultural communities) and indigenous peoples as intrinsically connected to their lands (Boas 1925; Dundes 1977; Finnegan 1991). For linguistic anthropology – particularly ethnopoetics – and similar fields like ethnomusicology and folkloristics – the efforts towards preservation of forms and folklore has often highlighted and reified this relationship.

For example, Basso's (1992) study calls attention to Western Apache's tradition to evoke place-names and for anthropomorphizing landscapes as moral-inducing figures. Through the analysis of their stalking stories, Basso (1992:102) explains the Western Apache's traditions reveals that "oral narratives have the power to establish enduring bonds between individual and features of the natural landscape, and that as a direct consequence of such bonds, persons who have acted improperly will be moved to reflect critically on their misconduct and resolve to improve it." This model is not just a conceptualization of the land, but also works to highlight how Apaches see themselves. A practice often displayed with other rural and indigenous communities' songs, tales, and storytelling practices (e.g., evoking place-names) is the tradition to mourn over loss of lands or connect place to specific memories (Feld 2012; Feld and Basso 1996).

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Valentina Pagliai (2000) updates this sentiment by looking at Tuscan verbal art, entitled the *Contrasto*, uses humorous exchanges that situates and contrasting depictions of place. In doing so, the poets perform their intimate connections to spaces – evoking their familiarity with the landscape, its histories, and its reputation to index particular ethnic identities. In these dueling performances, places can emerge and shift as definitions are situated and challenged. However, what remains is that in the process identity are also negotiated, as they are affixed to these characterizations. Thus, the battle to place, de-place, and re-place is a clashing of identity formations as well. Overall, both Basso and Pagliai's works show – through analyses of different performances of place – the belonging is established via one's relationship to locales being referenced.

The performance of verbal art or folklore does not only ascribe relationships to place identities and histories, but these cultural productions work to preserve expressive forms and peoples' connection to their traditions (Minks 2002). Thus, identities are not just linked to the content and context of performances but to the actual act. And, as communities move and shift, or are displaced from their home-spaces, performances can keep intimate connections to continuous perception of self. This is particularly useful for understanding why D.C. poets *doing* of Spoken Word not just indexes connections but reproduces and thickens these connections across speech events (Wortham and Reyes 2015).

As more attention is given to acts of creating place and performing placehood identities, it becomes more important to engage with urban spaces, especially within the U.S. to show the identity work is fostered domestically and by overlooked communities. Ethnopoetics has room to include both performances in connection with urban areas and

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Black communities within these spaces. For the most part, such work that has emerged out of urban anthropology, human geography, and urban planning studies (Keene et al. 2010; Newman and Wyly 2006). These scholars have examined cultural erasures and other forms of dispossession due to the gentrification that is sweeping through America's cities, and particularly in Washington D.C. (Prince 2016; Summers 2019). Each discipline adopts its own framework for exploring urban folk and their intimate connections to place. Within the context of Washington D.C., where Natives are facing the loss of their beloved "Chocolate City," the impact of these losses are extremely visible via the analysis of spatialization politics and racialization ideologies and resulting economic or socio-cultural challenges. However, the intimate relationships to urban spaces and the emotional trauma of displacement are just as evident in the practices of verbal art forms like Spoken Word.

Place as Figures in Spoken Word

As previously discussed in section 5.1, BBP is one of the area's most popular venues for open mics. With that being said, it is also a successful restaurant chain with standard design elements incorporated across all venues, establishing brand awareness and recognition. An example of BBP's attention to branding is found in its practice to name each of its venues after a prominent artist or activist. In many instances this person is a revered and founding figure of Black Arts (as seen with the Langston Hughes room) or is a regionally salient political figure and so too is honored in a venue (as seen with the Marion Barry room). This orientation to different "ancestral figures" was constantly oriented to in BBP Spoken Word performances, particularly by the hosts, whose voices command the most attention at the mic throughout the event. Hosts achieve this by often

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drawing participants' attention to the space by addressing its namesake, evoking the space as a present and sentient being.

For example, during a BBP specialty Slam competition, Pages asked that all poets stepping to the mic would make sure to honor Pearl Bailey, the figure who was not only painted on the walls of the Brookland location but also watching their performances (Figure 5.2). He would go on to mention that it was the poets' duty "to make her smile." This served to not only place the space as another figure/participant in the art form but more importantly as a proximal and prominent audience member to satisfy. This motivation was not solely built on the premise of audience expectation but also out of deference to one's ancestors and elders – a premise that is very much part of belief systems throughout the African Diaspora.

A similar act of observance for evoking and honoring unseen figures was taking place at SDDC's ECAC location. While the event space is not named after a public figure per se, the site is often referred to as the home of Sylvia Robinson, the late owner and manager of the ECAC. In the same fashion as discussed above, the co-hosts and artists who knew her would often memorialize her by showing Sylvia/the space gratitude. By establishing the ritual of recalling her memory and narrating her contribution to SDDC's longevity, the edifice and Sylvia's presence become inextricably linked. So, in rare instances, when there came a time to "manage" or call out the community's behavior as inappropriate or not befitting of the experience, the co-hosts – and even others' with shared connection to the former owner – would declare such action was disrespectful not only to the space but to Sylvia herself.

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Figure 5.2 BBP Brookland's Mural Dedicated to Pearl Bailey. (Photo Credit: Tiffany Marquise Jones).

In one unrecorded but observed event, host Dwayne B. took it upon himself to handle "family business" by addressing certain offenses taking place in the ECAC. These transgressions ranged from not being fully committed to attending the actual SDDC event – i.e., gathering outside during open-micer's sets – to overstepping boundaries and treating the space as if it were theirs to rule without regard and consideration. After Dwayne B. addressed the room, another SDDC regular, who I will refer to as "Kamar," made a lengthy speech that essentially summarized Sylvia's legacy, stating that many newbies were not aware of the space's history. Thus, he requested that everyone honor Sylvia by monitoring their behavior and recognize that they are essentially disrespecting her home, to which someone added "and your home." This directive is significant because so many artists when they approach the proverbial stage to share, they often started by saying it felt like returning home. In many ways, members regarded the ECAC

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space as the art's and artists' refuge – a provision that was clearly Sylvia's goal by letting SDDC utilize the space for more than 10+ years. And furthermore, given the context where Native's home space was being overrun and disrespected by outsiders who had no knowledge or respect of D.C.'s history, it is likely that this reprimand resonated with the many Natives and long-term residents in attendance.

Of equal and additional importance, and aside from issues of disrespect, there were moments of reverence offered to the space. Before sharing commenced, either Droopy or Dwayne B. would often ask people "give it up" for the space – provoking claps, cheers, and snaps that were enregistered signs of gratitude. Sylvia was often spoken of as forever present, so much so that when SDDC felt urged to vacate the ECAC following conflicts with the new board, the connection to Sylvia/the space was one of the main reasons for SDDC co-hosts' desire to stay put. It was clear that their emotional attachments to the site were less about the loss of physical property but more so about their deep-rooted sense of history and connection to Sylvia, whose spirit was associated with the material structure. Their motivations for treating the structure as a sacred site were as much evoked by the edifice's likeness and cultural practice's resemblance of the Black church as it was about the space being aligned with an elder and champion whom they sought to honor through SDDC's work.

5.3 Building / Breaking the 4th Wall

Designed for Place Intimacy

The term "intimate" when used as an adjectival modifier with the noun "space" or "place" creates a specific impression about the mood as well as the design of a particular venue or event. For example, if a person describes SDDC or even BBP's

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newest addition, the Anacostia location, a typical response will include the phrase, “it’s an intimate setting” to express the closeness of those in room – in terms of proximity and familiarity. The former of these (i.e., proximity) has more to do with a site’s structural design. If a room’s square footage is vast, its layout quite expansive and compartmentalized, or the furniture/seating positioned very distant from one another, there is a perceptible detachment that allows for more separate, sequestered, and detached interactions. Whereas if the enclosed area is small, the layout is open and inclusive, and seating is fashioned to foster group interactions over individual conversations, the space will produce an intimacy that lends itself to group cohesion.

Section 5.1 presents a contrast between both venues that examines the differences between the commercialization of BBP spaces and the intimate, underground setting of SDDC. This analysis includes assessing the challenges that come with how these spaces have been conceived and perceived by their owners and patrons. It delves intently into how the norms of performance (i.e. the presupposed behaviors and manners of appropriateness) are semiotically prefigured and refigured in response to the constructed environment. Beyond this perspective, this section also shows how performances can (re)create perceivable “boundaries” that supersedes the physical structure established within a place setting. By doing so, this will lead into an in-depth discussion in subsequent sections and chapters, delineating how the warp and weave of semiotic practices and values impact the relationships between place (and space), interactions, and verbal art.

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(Inter)Acting Spatial Distance

One of the most telling scenes about the ways in which participants can influence how a space is defined occurred on a night when venue captain Sll'im Williams was set to host for the open mic at BBP Shirlington. On this particular visit, the interaction between Slli'm, the "V.I.P." table (set aside for the feature poet and guests), and the audience changed my perceptions about the ways in which physical structures influence place intimacy and group cohesion. In fact, it was during this session that I observed how much influence a performer's interactions with an audience can either reinforce or override the presupposed intentions for interactions established by the layout and design of a space. However, to understand the interactional dynamics examined – both in response to and in spite of the space's design – it is first necessary to establish a context for BBP Shirlington in contrast to other sites observed as part of this study.

The (Paul) Robeson room used for Shirlington's venue is different from the other BBP locations in that it has greater depth, where the audience member furthest from the stage (i.e., the back of the room) to the base of the stage (i.e., the front of the room) creates a long rectangular shape. This is completely different from the box-like, more intimate spaces of 450K and Anacostia BBP locations or even that of SDDC – both when it was at the ECAC and now its current space for the SpitDat Speakeasy (a basement). In these spaces, the distance from the stage to the final row of tables and chairs is quite small, making it impossible to hide individuals or conversations present in the space. These sites created a more communal feel that is synonymous with shared activity. This is not the case for every BBP location, however,

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The only other rival venue, in terms of the depth of performance space at BBP Shirlington is that of the Hyattsville location, the largest of BBP's spaces. In fact, this space was so massive and its arrangement so widespread that there is often a distinct separation from the audience and stage, creating the challenge of open-micers having to compete with audience chatter. However, this can be managed if the host effectively manages the behaviors and noise level in the space. Still, features and novices also recognized that Hyattsville's space fostered a culture and attracted a particular audience that requires a confidence and skill that demands attention – as seen with one of Hyattsville's hosts 2Deep the Poet. Actually, 2Deep is known for her style of confronting issues head-on, choosing to start the event by stating that though she is on stage "we can hear you" and that noise violations would prompt a friendly "shut the fuck up" if need be. Her boisterous yet no-nonsense personality worked well to mediate such a large space. However, it was not for every poet / host, as the space was deemed intimidating by even long-time host and artist Dwayne B. (I even found it quite difficult to film/observe with the endless amounts of side-conversations.)

While Shirlington's length and open-concept layout created similar problems, the culture fostered at this location as well the type of audience it attracted made for a different mood and feel (to be further discussed in Chapter 6). Sli'im assessed that in his experience he found that for his location, "the audience is there to listen." It was a sense that people actually came for the poetry and really paid attention to the content spoken at the mic. This was quite evident by my observations of a table of two who were chatting obsessively; they clearly stood out from the rest of crowd, who was engaged with the

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stage. Furthermore, I got to witness a different night, when host Kanikki Jakarta conversed at length with an open-micer who took issues with certain verses in her poem. However, while it was clear that BBP Shirlington patrons did cue their attention toward the person at the mic, what I came to learn was that the social dynamics was just as much about the hosts' interactions with the audience as they were about the types of personalities attracted to the space. In other words, performances can aid or hinder spatial boundaries, cultural norms, and audience behavior as well.

Most times, when filming at BBP Shirlington, I sat in the back of the room where my camera could remain out of sight for most of the participants. It is from this vantage that I got a comprehensive view of *all* the activities occurring throughout the event. And, in observing Slli'm's style of hosting, I noted that it frequently revolved around juggling between several conversations – i.e., those between himself and the other hosts and feature sitting at the V.I.P. table and between himself and those sitting in the audience (see Figure 5.3). During many of these exchanges, he embarked upon noticeably long stretches of impromptu "sidebar" conversations. But in one particular instance, while on stage he joked with his wife for several minutes. It was then that I became aware that his gaze and manner of interaction worked to create a barrier of sorts (aka 4th wall) between the audience and the stage (see Figure 5.3).

As previously explained in Chapter 3, the participation framework for Spoken Word is designed so that there is an on-going conversation between the stage and the participants in the audience. Thus, its model for audience interaction is unlike theater performances where the 4th-wall boundary is a standard practice and the audience expects to be an onlooker (or observer) of the event's activities (Figure 5.3).

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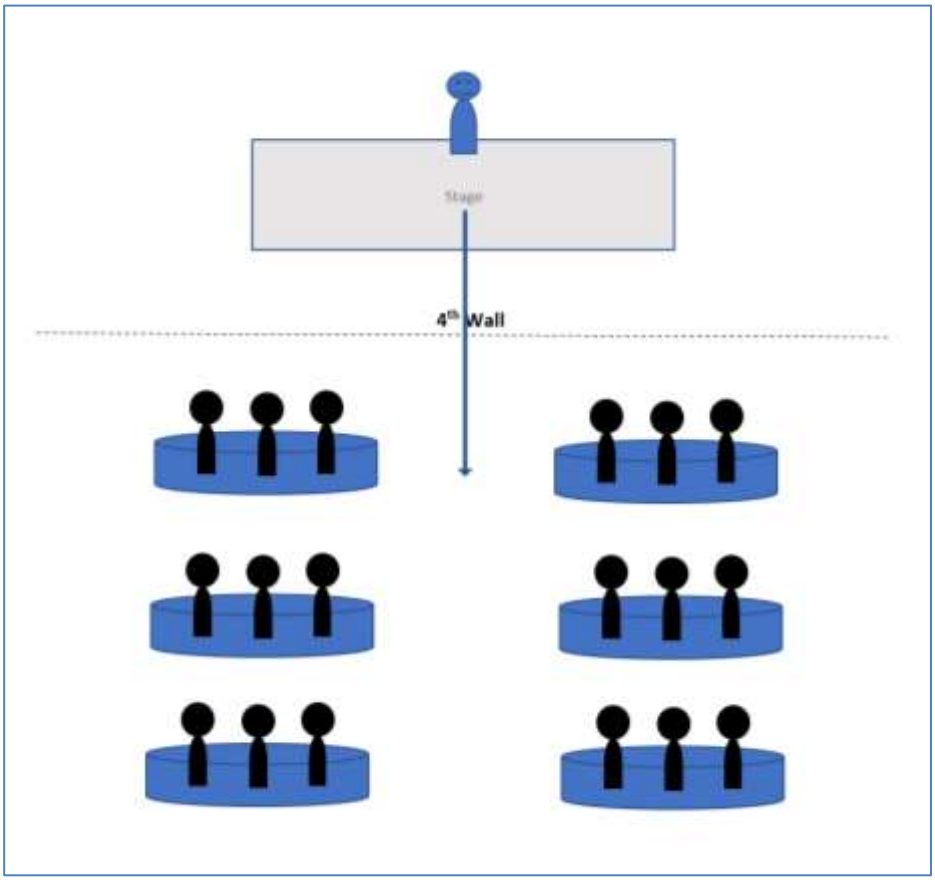

Figure 5.3. The Typical Theatre Setting where the "4th Wall" is upheld as the Standard.

Though Shirlington's layout is an open space that allows for more people to both see and engage with the stage, as stated previously, such depth can also encourage "pockets" of side conversation. The best comparison between a space with greater depth (a rectangle) versus a slightly smaller and more intimate layout (a square) can be understood when imagining a long banquet as opposed to a bistro-style table. The former creates difficultly for the entire table to interact. Thus, in this setting it is more likely for a person to engage with those closest to them (i.e., those within ear shot). Whereas, with a bistro-style table, the seating and spatial arrangement is more inclusive, as all parties are

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in close proximity of all speakers at any given time. Therefore, each participant has greater autonomy and equal opportunity to participate and redirect the conversation – unless of course when a speaker's gaze is solely directed to a particular interlocutor, ratifying a sole person as the target audience and positioning others and overhearers (Goffman 1981; C. Goodwin 1986). This is unlike a banquet-style table where it is clear that those seated at the head of the table are the formal hosts and persons in charge of guiding the conversation – whether that be to engage the whole table, such as with a toast, or to alienate parts and encourage smaller side conversations.

The ways in which a host can cutoff or include all participants is very similar to the way in which Sll'im engaged with his audience or with his wife at the side table. For example, when Slli'm turned toward the left side of the room for long stretches of playful banter, he created the "4th wall" barrier, which then positioned his audience into the voyeuristic perspective that is characteristic of the theatre setting (see Figure 3). This experience, of course, did not fully break the participation framework as established by Spoken Word's rules of engagement, as anyone could from the audience could have asserted themselves by commenting on the host's interaction. In fact, one bold female audience member did just that, redirecting Sli'im's gaze back to the audience. However, most people read the cues (his gaze and body language being directed to the side of the room) and either took to simply observing or having their own side conversations in their segment of the room.

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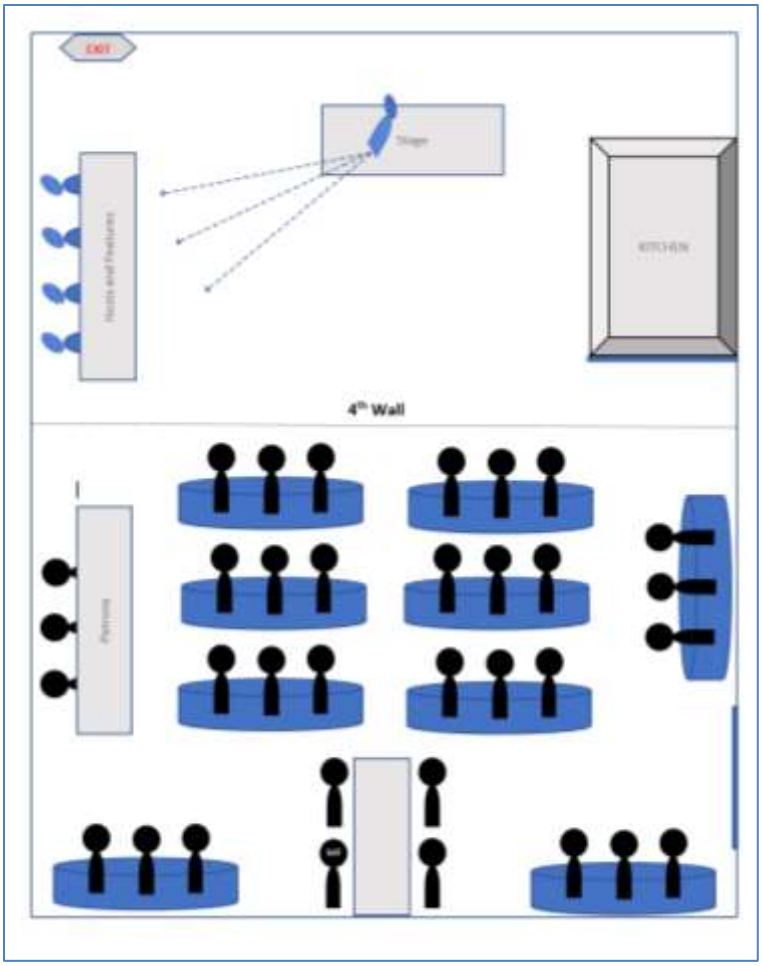

Figure 5.4 A Model of the interaction where Shirlington's host enacts the 4th Wall with body language and gaze.

Eventually, Slli'm seemed to notice that he was losing his audience. It is then when he began to redirect his jokes and taunts to a lady seated further back into the crowd. When doing so, this immediately broke the 4th wall and reopened the space, making the interaction inclusive of the audience (see Figure 5.4). And, with this shift in gaze and interaction, a more inclusive conversation developed, ratifying all parties in the audience on again, including those seated further back into the room (Goffman 1981).

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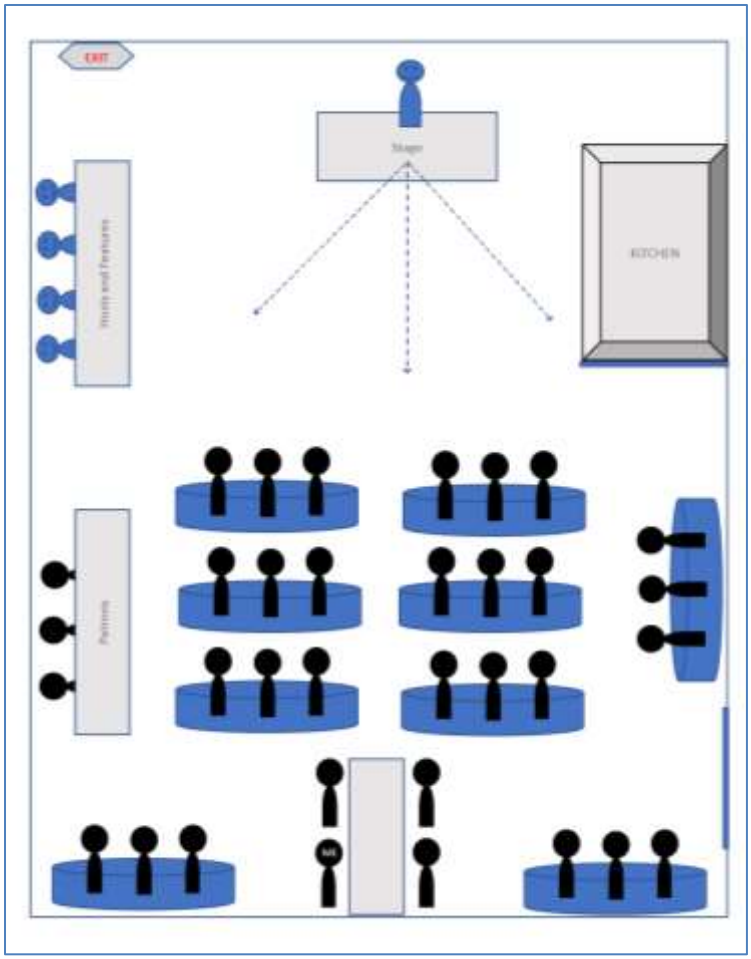

Figure 5.5. A Model of the Interaction with BBP's host shifting Gaze to include all parties in the space.

These models of interaction showcase just how participants and their behavior are key components for assessing and creating spaces and the ways in which appropriateness of interaction manifests. Even within performances with a more inclusive participation framework, the emergent social components can impact how these norms manifest. Thus, it is important that ethnographic analyses take into consideration the interactional dynamics that allow for flexible interpretations of appropriateness that move beyond status quo rules of engagement. In other words, moving beyond how places (or spaces) and performances (or verbal art traditions) prescribe certain behaviors, choosing

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to describe interactions can create opportunities to unveil the ways in which participants may be operating under resistance or with agency to revise top-down manifestation of appropriateness.

5.4 (Re)Purposing Place / Space

As Section 5.3 illustrates, performances and interactions within performance space can either maintain the boundaries of spaces or recreate them for the purposes of the art form. This is observable where Spoken Word "violates" the norms that establish the stage as denoting the 4th wall barrier that prompts audience as spectators instead of participants. But also, Slli'm's interaction also showcased how emergent interactions can even go against the customs of the verbal art tradition, simply by choosing to enact certain boundaries with gaze and interactional cues. This discussion offers just one of the ways in which interactions can influence participants read of the space and rules for engagement.

Spoken Word also offers examples where performers can not only challenge or enact both structural and unperceivable boundaries, but poets can craft a mood and prompt interactions that index an entirely different performance situation and / or frame. However, this in many ways is predicated on not just the actions of the poet but the recognition and uptake of the contextualization cues produced via the performer's embodiments (e.g., voicing and body language). With successful interpretation of the shift as well as cultural competence of the new situation, a performance can completely repurpose the space, taking a turn at the mic and turning into an elaborate church service.

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This section will explore this facet of the Spoken Word culture in order to, again, depict the power of both performance and participants in creating the place or space they inhabit.

One Poet, Two Venues, Two Scenes

One of the few performers I observed across several spaces – both at multiple BBP locales and several times at SDDC, was BBP's Youth mic host and D.C. Native Malachi Byrd (aka Malpractice). Having been named as D.C's first Youth Poet Laureate as well as receiving several awards and titles in performing with and coaching several slam teams / poetry organizations, it is fair to say the Malachi is one of our nation's capital's most reputable artists. Only 21 years of age at the time, it was quite amazing to see him spit rhymes and rip verses while commenting on issues surrounding police brutality and growing up Black (male) within today's socio-cultural climate. One of his more memorable pieces, "Butters," offers a partially comical, mournful, and wrathful outcry about the beauty and resilience of Black bodies.

Told through the sermon-like style, Malachi delivers a poem about being ashy (the results of dry skin), where he gives "commandments" to avoid one of Black folks extreme no-no's while giving "praise" for *all* the butters (cocoa, shea) that rid Black bodies of this cultural faux pas. However, the first half of the poem is marked by its humorous satire that depicts ashiness as a sin committed by the Black body, whereas the latter half of the poem comments on the violence and subjugation as sin committed *on* the Black body by society (see Table 5.1, line 29).

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Table 5.1: An excerpt of poem “Butters” performed by Malachi Byrd (aka Malpractice).

1.	MB	I used to start fires with my handshakes.
2.		My fist used to be a recycling bin filled to the brim with powered donuts.
3.		My body…
4.		Drier than the Republican Party.
5.		Cuz it's politics to this skin shit.
6.		In middle school, my face made the Sahara look like the Amazon.
7.		My Black bush was a July sandstorm.
8.		My Black fist pick would push out a gust of dandruff, my elbows felt like the bottom of new Timbs, y'all I swear to God, you don't know betrayal
9.		Until you are at the end of a perfect date…
10.		the music low…
11.		the doors unlocked…
12.		and you lean in for the kiss of your life…
13.		and you get a papercut on your lips.
14.		I was so ashy I got called back for the job interview.
15.		So wilted, weathered, waterless and white, I waved a policeman and THAT nigga waved back.
16.		That shit is a work of the Devil, and that’s when I found God, Sweet salvation from Satan’s scorn and the ash for his fire Genesis 1:27…
17.		So God created cocoa butter in his own image.
18.		Forgive me father for I have sinned on commandment three.
19.		Thy shall not take thou melanin in vain.
20.		Forgive me smoo:th-skinned Father.
21.		For not alerting my friends of the blizzard that would hit their wrists and ankles. (inhales)
22.		Commandment nine, (inhales) thou shall not bear false witness to thy neighbor. (inhales)
23.		I repent, lavishly lotioned Lord…(inhales)
24.		for all of the cracked lips and pasty palms in my community. (inhales)
25.		Please forgive the ashy for they do not know what they do. (inhales)
26.		We praise you, (inhales) all moisturized aloe vera, aquafina accented God.
27.		Because you have blessed us (inhale) …
28.		with the Butters …
29.		In a world, that always wants to see us burn.
30.		How to accept the skin that you are in,

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31.	MB Aud	EVEN when its covered in ash now aint that metaphor for the Black body's resilience, for resurrection, how to see the holy in yoself; | (*snapping*)
32.	Aud	Ya::s::
33.		Black don't crack, | (*snapping)
34.		cuz we don't let it.
35.	MB Aud	We moisturize cuz our bodies are all we got, I moisturize. | Ya::s:: (*clapping*)
36.		Like this world may have me greet God at any more moment, and I need to be prepared. Let the church the say "I am prepared!"
37.	Aud	"I am prepared!"
38.		Church say "I am prepared"!
39.	Aud	"I am prepared!"
40.		I am prepared…
41.		To take the name, of the coconut oil, the olive oil, and holy shea.
42.		And let the church say,we refuse to be…
43.		as-she. [Ashy said more like Ashe, which means Amen.]
44.	PM:. Aud:	Yeeeeeaaaahhh | *Clapping and yelling*

While the referential content of the words themselves are quite effective, what makes observing this poem meaningful is having heard it *three* different times over the course of a year, with three different types of audiences: 1) a smaller, fledgling open mic night with a predominantly White crowd at BBP, 2) a college-aged event with a predominantly Black crowd also at BBP and 3) a mixed-aged and predominantly Black crowd at SDDC. However, the focus on this section will look more closely at the first and third iteration of these performances, as they offer the most contrast – especially given what the earlier part of this chapter reveals about the two venues.

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One of the tactics that Malachi uses across all venues is the co-occurring yet contrastive set of features he deploys between the first half (lines 1-28) and second half of the poem (lines 29-44), all of which involve shifts in pacing, volume, and tone. He accomplishes this with a mix of more elongated sentence structures mixed with shorter verses in addition to emphatic repetition (e.g., "we moisturize" and "I moisturize"). In a conversation we had about this performance, he explained that it was intentional to ensure that the audience would not miss the importance of the 2nd half's content – since the first part he ensures the humor is apparent. He also pairs the intensity of his voice with an affective display of anger, frustration, and passion. Thus, it is the combination of both heightened emphasis of paralinguistic features as well as the abrupt shift in content – from a comedic roast to vehement indictment of White supremacy and the resiliency of Black bodies – that cues the attention of every person in the room.

Through these contextualization cues, he prompts his audience's awareness of the thematic shift (Gumperz 1992). So, no matter the venue, audiences react to his crescendo with cheers, clapping, and various other typical feedback cues (e.g., snapping) – for even without cultural competence, sound relays valuable information that triggers a meaningful response (Jakobson & Waugh 2002). But what is salient and noteworthy for the following analysis is the way in which the verbal art and its framework (i.e., the relationship between poet, audience, space) was able to transform the space in one environment/iteration in ways that it did not in the other.

The Shift to Malachi the Minister

The first crowd that Malachi addresses took place at BBP's Brookland location. It was the night I anticipated meeting Pages for his feature. But just before leaving, he

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texted me stating that I might not want to make the drive that night. And when I asked why, he mentioned that the crowd and the energy was "wack." But, Pages being the busy man he is, it was rare to capture him on stage as a feature. So, I joined him, meeting his mentee Malachi in the process. Both were cutting up and being "extra" in order to distract themselves from the boredom they were suffering. This was an example of a host who had not only crafted a following and successful weekly event but also could interpret what 'the energy' (discussed in chapter 6) can look like in a room full of those less familiar with the art form. Note: unfamiliar is not posited here because of the racial identification of those in the room, but the ways in which the persons present did *not* interact with the open-micers the host, and vice versa. In fact, there were hardly people in the room who wanted their turn at the mic – clearly most choosing to observe than participate. But, in order to "set the mood" for Pages, Malachi took to the mic with "Butters."

The transcription above conveys the poem / performance that was delivered in Scene #1. (Note: the performance for Scene #2 was not transcribed but instead described due to constant interjections. But Scene #1 can be used as the baseline for audience response.) Furthermore, the transcription provided shows that words, while not meaningless, are not the prime focus in this section – as he spoke the same words in both spaces. It was his delivery and simultaneous interaction with the audience [and vice versa] that (re)purposed the space as something other than for what it was originally intended or being enacted before the performance.

In the first setting, those who were in the audience presented themselves as minimally aware of the interaction required for Spoken Word. Several scholars put forth

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the idea that performances authenticate certain identity factors – many of which can place an individual as an in-group member of a particular culture, community or practice (Bucholtz and Hall 2004, ref). Proper enactments, such as knowing how to engage through appropriate audience participation, are part of the performance frame required to successfully co-create Spoken Word. And, actually, it was the audience's failure to reproduce these essential elements throughout the open mic that prompted Pages – when it was his turn at the mic – to take a moment to (re)educate the audience on the norms for interaction. His action is another piece of evidence of the lack of cultural competence displayed by those in attendance that night. However, it also the contrast between both events that highlights just how much the social and performative interactions will not only solidify the performance frame but it can also transform the space/scene entirely.

When Malachi delivers his poem in Scene #1, there are a few snaps and applause here and there. However, most of the space is filled with Page's over-the-top feedback, working to compensate for the lack of energy. Page's interaction was so evident, that Malachi breaks frame for a sidebar exchange (Table 5.2 below):

Table 5.2. An excerpt of the performance from Setting #1 where Malachi breaks frame.

MB	"I used to start fires with my handshakes…"
PM	Haha::
MB	(*breaks into laughter*)
	Shut the fuck up Pages!
PM	(*continuous chuckles*)
MB	You know the poem!

In this moment, the scene is barely functioning as the standard format of an open mic. However, as he climaxes in pitch, the audience interaction remained mild-mannered. It is not until a few audience members begin executing the expected feedback (e.g.,

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"ya:s::" in lines 32 and 35), alerting others to the considerable void of responses, that others once silence start to engage. And when Malachi prompts the audience in call and response with the lines, "Say, I am prepared!" again only a few responded in tandem with the proper response (to repeat the phrase mimicking his pace and tone).

However, in Scene #2, at SDDC, Malachi once again is called to the mic to pave the way for the feature poet. This time, he is not tapped by the feature but by Dwayne B. the co-host. He asks Malachi to "shift the energy" – an element of Spoken Word that is discussed in more detail in chapter 6. This time, when Malachi takes the stage, the room is attentive towards the poet from the onset, filling the space with the necessary church-like responses as the content demands. Interjections and m:hm:: and snaps as well as "c'mon now" were persistently interlaced with Malachi's verses. And upon the poet's climax to the finish, people begin standing up, waving their hands, and fanning themselves. All of a sudden the metaphorical church *became* a church in format and practice. It is evident that the crowd was responding in part to the structure which enacted the content expected in the church scene, with lines such as "Because you have blessed us … with the Butters" (line 27 and 28). So, as the audience begins performing Black church traditions, mimicking the elders with their fans and saying "ye:::s:" throughout, Malachi continues and escalates his performance, emphasizing his pitch, pauses, and volume. At this point, he is fully taking on the sermonizing styles complete with "fire-breathing" (inhales) that indexes "holy ghost-filled" pastor.

It is then that Scene #2 is no longer recognized as a standard open mic event at SDDC; it is a mid-week service as SpitDat Baptist of Washington D.C. By the time Malachi reaches the last few lines laden with the call and response, "Say I am prepared,"

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everyone was on their feet ready to chant back in return, “I am prepared.” Malachi welcomed this with noticeably more repetitions than in Scene #1, which laden his pacing back and forth and clapping to his own rhythm. It is clear, that he was feeding off of the audience’s responses, and they in turn were feeding off his performance. But the demonstration of both Spoken Word cues as well as the appropriate responses as part of Black church traditions mean that there was a different level of competence presence in the room.

The contrast between Scene #1 to Scene #2 is, in large part, due to the fact that SDDC is a venue that 1) is filled frequented by a predominantly Black audience that is familiar with AAL VATs, and 2) the venue itself caters to a more culturally competent audience. Either way, it is the combination of the two that allows for observing the performative shift: from Spoken Word poet performing to his audience to Minister Malachi Byrd sermonizing to his flock. Hence, the space itself becomes what the art form demands, what participants perform, and what social interactions signal. In sum, physical structure, while semiotically relevant in determining the motives and function of a space as well as the behavior of those in attendance, (verbal art) performances have the ability to overturn this paradigm so that spaces respond to the bodies interacting inside them.

5.5 Final Thoughts

The discussions and illustrations in this section work to challenge and re-establish understanding of place intimacy for urban Black populations. These findings serve to counter the limited and/or problematic conceptualization that characterizes urban sites as lacking the same significance for its residents as it does for rural communities. While city centers are often casted as transient spaces with edifices that are up for grabs

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and therefore temporal residences for low-income occupants, the analyses depicted in this part of the text extends place intimacy to urbanites like those in the D.C. area. And this, in many ways, is demonstrated through Spoken Word poets in residence in both BBP and SDDC who interact with spaces, evoking these sites as present and sentient beings. Thus, gentrification not only displaces those who are pushed out by the elites that take over the area, but they are robbed of their identities and histories, which are tied to the spaces they have long owned and occupied.

In many ways, this recalls a similar struggle and sense of loss experienced by Native Americans, whose land ownership rights were denied and whose customs were impacted as a result. This affirms why Washingtonian Natives appropriate discourses of indigeneity in order to reclaim and perform their emotional ties to their home territory. In short, urban planning policies can learn from performances that occur in the regions they seek to "redevelop." By observing Spoken Word in D.C., for example, policymakers would be able to acknowledge the importance of honoring residents' connections to their lands (or urban spaces in this case). Furthermore, it is also important that preserving performance venues are seen as part of urban renewal projects.

Aside from these insights, this section also showcases that verbal arts like Spoken Word not only grant participants the ability to perform their place intimacy but allow for momentary agency to overturn status quo norms of space. The performances delineated above reveal how top-down understanding of place and their semiotic relationships to behaviors are limited in understanding how place can impact performance and vice versa. Both Slli'm and Malachi's interactions offer examples of

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how spatial boundaries can be upheld, overturned, or repurposed for the sake of the art but also manifested through emergent interactions and conversation.

While Spoken Word, in many ways, affirms that (verbal art) performances are context-driven events, they are not bound to the preestablished norms often dictated by spaces. However, it is up to the participants to reproduce, challenge and uptake new norms through their modes of participations. And since Spoken Word poetry thrives on "in-the-moment" and culturally competent interactions, observing audiences' sensitivity and response to the ways in which a poet can cue a different performance frame offers valuable insights for ethnopoetics as well as performance scholarship in general.

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CHAPTER 6

AMBIANCE: THE *FEEL* OF HOME

Up to this point, this study has sought to distill the ways in which place – in terms of setting (i.e., D.C.'s socio-cultural and socio-political climate) and in terms of infrastructures (i.e., certain types of buildings and their layouts) – impacts Spoken Word performances, its participants, and their practices. With this chapter, the discussion will further integrate the interconnectedness of place, performance, and participants by assessing the sensorial topography and sensual experiences of specific spaces, events, and interactions at a precise moment in time. Thus, these analyses will pursue and address the intangible and imperceptible facets of performances as it relates to *ambiance*, the element of this study's "perspectives of place" framework that is most proximal to participants' perception. This perspective is one that is depicted (see Figure 2.1) as being encompassed in and thus influenced by a building's design and layout.

However, as this study will feature a novel event-level form of place-making through performance (chapter 7), this chapter will constantly relate the ambiance and feedback loop of individual actions that influence and are influenced by the emotional and sensorial aspects of spaces and performances as qualia (see chapter 2 and below). In short, this is a reminder that place is not treated as a hierarchy with concrete tiers that work in isolation from the others; instead, each perspective is part of, intersects with, and/or is impacted by the other perspectives of place.

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This chapter will also draw upon excerpts from transcribed interviews and performances as a means to access participants' in situ and reflexive conceptualization of the term ambiance as well as its effect on Spoken Word performances and performance spaces, specifically as it manifests at BBP locales and SDDC. Thus, the goal is to highlight the ways in which performances and interactions realize a certain culturally salient notion of "energy" and how that sensation flows throughout the space(s), impacting participants' physical, mental, and emotional dispositions. Assessing these imperceptible and intangible aspects of performance may be a difficult process, of course. However, by homing in on speakers' metapragmatic awareness of spaces – via their observed emic lexical choices about ambiance as emplaced qualia– this chapter posits that, while difficult, such analyses are not only plausible, they are necessary parts of place-related studies.

Finally, this chapter delineates example indexical signs (as typified qualia) of ambiance that have been realized within cross-event iterations of particular events and participants' experiences of particular spaces. This analysis also includes the ways the affective presence that is felt and observed imprints on and can be recalled in one's memory. However, in doing so, I will utilize the emic descriptions as it appeared most in transcripts, as the "vibe" as well as alternative and comparable expressions used, such as the "feel" or "energy" of a space. Before detailing this notion of vibe and the ways it was realized in participant's metapragmatic talk about both BBP and SDDC and their open mic cultures, it is important to relay how Spoken Word poetry is best explained as not just a verbal art tradition heavily marked by a performer's virtuosity. Spoken Word

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should also be understood as embodied and emplaced experiences that further showcase how place is expressed in the art form and how art creates spaces for emplacement.

6.1 Embodying the Practice and Emplacing the Performance

Long before there was any inclination that this study would zero in on D.C. natives' / poets' intimate connections to place, the goal of this research was to document Spoken Word poetry and open mic culture, including the key components of the performance frame and participation framework. As noted in chapter 3, the central participants are the host, the poets (i.e., the novice or lay open mic-ers and veteran or featured poets), and then those remaining participants typically called the "audience." (chapter 3 has already addressed how the term audience can be misleading, given that Spoken Word's audience are not passive onlookers.) Of the three, many participants' conversations highlight the importance of one individual: the host. The significance of this role was first made clear during the fieldwork process, as it was necessary to connect with hosts as a point of "entry" into various open mic spaces, particularly those within BBP and SDDC. The managers and owners of each event space may sponsor and support the poetry events; however, it is the job of the host to take "ownership" of these events. Every poet interviewed attested to this fact, describing the host's role as an essential element to a "successful" open mic event. And as most of these interviewees have performed in this capacity, they were personally aware of the responsibilities attached to this role.

In many ways, the hosts are the "gatekeepers" of an open mic, as they are usually in charge of facilitating the event, preparing the event space (e.g., set up, sound checks, collaborating with the DJ, or accompanying musicians), securing the feature

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poets, managing the set list, and most importantly crafting an atmosphere that is not only safe and inclusive but engaging. The latter of these responsibilities refers to the ambiance of a space, a vital part of any performance event but an especially salient factor for Spoken Word. Ambiance can influence who the event / venue will attract as its base audience, how they govern themselves, as well as how each individual experiences the space. Not only does the feel of the space largely impact or influence those sharing very intimate and personal accounts and compositions, it can aid or hinder the transcendent and transformative effects of the artists' presentation of their work. And thus, the ambiance – or the "feel" / "energy" – is situated as another element of the performance situation that must be observed, documented, and understood, especially within ethnopoetics, ethnomusicology, and other performance-related analyses.

While ambiance can be used to assess any mood of a space or event, this section will connect the concept to the objectives of a venue (or space) as well as how it aligns with the event host's intentions and/or audience's expectations. And when the two work in tandem, the ambiance achieves the ideal essence of that type of event. By exploring the ways in which performers – i.e., the hosts, feature poets, open mic-ers – characterize BBP across its locations and SDDC, this analysis will highlight that while ambiance is not perceivable that does not mean it is inaccessible or unobservable.

Place (and Space) as Constructed Identity

As participants began to characterize each venue's ambiance, it became more apparent that this concept was synonymous with situating a site's identity, so to speak. Thus, no event space, even if it was dedicated to the same genre of performance (e.g., Spoken Word) or founded under the same brand identity (i.e., with BBP locales) should

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be expected to craft that same ambiance or place identity. Sarah Pink's (2014) analysis gives additional insight into this notion.

Pink explains that "place" is best understood as something indeterminate and shifting instead of concrete and static. To better situate this fluid understanding of place, she utilizes Massey's (2005: 141) definition as her basis: place is "the coming together of the previously interrelated, a constellation of processes rather than a thing" and that "'the elements of this 'place' will be, at different times and speeds, again dispersed'" (qtd in Pink 2009). Hence, a performance will, or should, shift in consideration of newly introduced elements. And thus, for every event and every place, a fresh assessment must be made to ground – or emplace – one's performance.

For Pink's explanation of embodied vs. emplaced performance, she utilizes the bullfighter's ecology as the model for her analyses. In this environment, the matador (or torero) bring both a sense of embodied practices that must also be emplaced with awareness of how his practices will be shaped by the network of variable (e.g., beings, sounds / noise, the type of arena, the weather, etc.). And for this environment, the animals are seen as part of the network. *Before* the torero enters the arena, he has been trained in the skill of bullfight; the body movements, such as the way he moves his cape, become a "instinctive" response, given the intense habitual training used to socialize the individual into the art of bullfighting. At some point, these movements become habit – or embodied practices. However, Pink argues that this manner of socialization alone is not responsible for torero's ability to execute his performance. Instead, he must emplace himself by become sensitive to the aforementioned factors that may impact his execution of the routines of bullfighting he now embodies.

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Similarly, a poet must consider not only the audience participants and the physical structure of the space, but they must assess *all* factors that can impact the energy (or vibe) of the space. For BBP specifically, this would include the presence of noises from the restaurant, servers, and "tourists" – elements that are not a factor for SDDC. And for SDDC, open-micers will find a venue without a microphone or stage, and therefore must shape their delivery for this consideration. And, while the events in this study did not have to assess the wildlife part of this ecology, thankfully so, D.C. artists do have to contend with a "beast" of a different sort (gentrification). And though this is best described as an intangible force, it is part of the performance-scape that is very much present (i.e., it is observable through environmental changes and has a salient impact on the community).

As Pink's framework allows for assessing an environment for its own factors – meaning her assessment of emplacement applies across different types of settings – redevelopment can be situated as a "variable" that artists are also responding to, while performing across the District. And considering that several artists noted the need to move about the performance-scape aware that they must contend (or collaborate) with the "superpower" that is BBP, given the chain's successful commercialization of the art form, is evidence for including gentrification as part of artists' strategies for emplacement.

Overall, it is the totality of all possible factors that constructs a certain *feel*, or what will be assessed by participants as the "vibe" of place. It should be clear, that "vibe" – unlike many other tangible and physical variables – is an ethereal quality that is solely experiential in nature. Nevertheless, the "feel" of a place provides a certain "character" or

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identity that can be identified and ascribed a certain type (or label). And these labels, or positioning of experiential qualia, contributes to the "identity" of a place. By utilizing the basis of Pink's approach, specifically the ways in which the network of factors produces and realizes as sensorial effects, this study will ground its observation of place identity / "ambiance" as a vital part of a performance ecology – a part that must be evaluated in order to fully emplace oneself in that environment.

"Curators of Energy"

While immersing myself in various environments, it was very clear to me that each site had its own unique feel, or atmosphere. And it was also apparent that place – in terms of setting and design – was a noticeable contributor to a space's ambiance. But the extent to which ambiance served as a key factor in Spoken Word culture and artists was only accessible through narrative and discourse analysis. Within the body of transcribed interviews, there emerged a salient pattern: poets' persistent awareness and description of the space's "energy." In fact, it was one of the earliest conversations I had with veteran and dual Atlanta- and Chicago-based poet RealTalkRaps, who now performs as Brandon Alexander Williams. He delineated the importance of ambiance in a memorable and creative way that no simple summary of his words can do his insights justice.

At the time of our interaction, RealTalk was on his book tour and had been scheduled to feature at several BBP locations. During our conversation, I was more centered on trying to map the "landscape," or rather performance-scape, of Spoken Word in general and D.C.'s in particular. Thus, my questions at this point were very broad in nature, aimed at defining the art and key components, the roles of participants, as well as the ways in which BBP was the key contributor to D.C.'s plush Spoken Word culture.

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But, in sharing his insights on the participant framework and participant roles, RealTalk made a succinct, significant statement that guides the analysis throughout this chapter. As shown in the transcription excerpts below, RealTalk mentions that the host's main role is to "curate the energy" in the space (Table 6.1).

Table 6.1. Excerpt of an interview with RealTalkRaps (Excerpt #4).

Interview with RealTalkRaps	
1.	Um:: (pause) so that can be you know, that can be discouragi- I've been to some pretty bad open mics. (*laughs*)
2.	What can make an open mic bad is, really the host and the DJ.
3.	And that's the same thing for any party! Any event! You know like.
4.	You can be at a party. A:LL: your favorite people in the world are there and the DJ is terrible. You not gon have a good time.
5.	You know or...you're at an event. That's...great, has great artists but host is wack.
6.	And you like, why would he say that. (*laughs*) You know after this person just got off the stage. Or, why would he introduce them like that.
7.	And so. The DJ and the host...they uh they curate the energy for the enTIRE night.
8.	I tell the DJ like alright boom, door at 8 ... so from 8 to 8:45, play like, you know I'm saying, R&B and like …Boom-bap Hip hop that's it. Don't play nothing else after that. He like aiight and he get it!
9.	And I'm like cuz the energy has to be curated a certain way.
10.	And so then, I'll tell the band right at 8:45, you got whatever song he's playing start playing that and then freestyle get your jazz freestyle on.
11.	So then as people sitting there waiting on the show to start, they hear like "al-alright i like this i like the vibe in here!" ...
12.	Um, and then it's like the live band plays and then they like (*cocks head to the side*) "oh this some^" they like "oh this some ... this some sexy type" (*laughs*) "some Love Jones type" you know.

Before explaining his assessment of the participant roles and the host's specific duties, RealTalk typifies what makes for a good or bad open mic experience. He accomplishes this by reconstructing a scene that he qualifies as "a good experience." In narrating a sample constructed dialog, he describes how an event can have a solid line-up in terms of virtuoso talent but still measures as a "wack" event (line 4). And this further establishes the need for host' intervention and control of the atmosphere. RealTalk's

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metapragmatic talk goes on to model some of the steps he takes to help "curate the energy" in contrast to the bad host who can't give instructions to the DJ (lines 8-12). It was this line of metapragmatic questioning that provoked our foray into the "feel" of an event. As he explains, there is a certain "element" in the room that is felt, or rather experienced, by those who are a part of the event. In this context, RealTalk refers to this as "the energy" or "the vibe." And he explains in line 8 (see Table 6.1 above), this "element" can be identified in many ways and thus is a shifting reference that relies on individuals' "read" of space or event to determine what type of vibe is present.

It is RealTalk's description that also stages – pun intended – the idea that ambiance is not always an element that just exists; instead, his meticulous narrative, plush with detail that places him and me in a narrated event scene, exposes that the participants themselves, especially the hosts, can and actually should intentionally cultivate this aspect of the performance. His phrasing was loaded with so much insight as well as the particularly curious lexical choice that any linguistic anthropologist's antennae would have been piqued, particularly his usage of the word "curate" (lines 7 and 9). But the idea that "energy" is often referenced in various other interviews and discussions of space, RealTalk's declaration prompts a deeper analysis of ambiance.

6.2 Place-ing the Vibe

After it became apparent, through RealTalk's and other's interviews – to be further explored in section 6.3 – I began to push conversations with artists towards labeling and describing their experiences at each space. Specifically, when asked to define or describe BBP or SDDC for audiences who had never encountered these spaces, artists' almost always moved beyond the material focus and even the interactional

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dynamics; they often focused more on the spiritual and emotional realm of their experiences. As they began to discuss their engagement with BBP locations and then BBP in comparison to SDDC audiences, their descriptions almost always positioned each space as having a certain energy, feel, or "vibe," to be exact. And within the usage of these lexical choices was the ability to situate certain qualities of a space, i.e., to "read" and interpret each environment's and its crafted "identity."

The ability to position (or place) the vibe requires an individual is able to aggregate recollections of their previous experiences and create a comprehensive portrait that acknowledges the qualities of persons attracted to locale in tandem with space's "personality" (or its sensorial and emotional features). And it is this information that then allows the poet to place the way they choose to engage in such spaces, i.e., constructing a suitable delivery for the vibe of the space. As previously discussed, this process of reading and matching or responding to the space energy is what allows for emplaced performances. This idea means that a poet sharing pieces at BBP and SDDC – even if performing the same pieces – may be delivered so as to create a different affect, taking into account the "constellation" of variables that are present for each setting. And, for these two venues, the variables are polar opposites from each other.

The Vibe of the "Tribe"

Because BBP is a chain with seven locations, it is not as easy to assess its overall ambiance in the same manner as SDDC's environment, which is a single-site operation. BBP. Unlike SDDC, BBP has venues stationed in several well-known neighborhoods throughout the DMV (i.e., D.C., Maryland, and Northern Virginia). Of course, there are some similarities across each locale (i.e., in terms of design, motives,

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and presentation) that create a chain identity and lend itself to brand awareness (discussed also in chapter 3). This consistency crafts a reputation so that those familiar with the brand or those even visiting for the first time know what to expect. This continuity is achieved with their tribal statement, merchandising, menu options (e.g., some proprietary specialty drinks, such as the D.C. Tap Water) as well as some design details that are "must-haves" at each location. Many of these are easily spotted when entering the space, while others required a more in-depth discussion with BBP's head of marketing Alicia Byrd.

When asked to position the one consistency across locales, she explained that every site includes a mural created by Andy Shallal, the owner and founder of BBP. Another aspect of consistency is the process of selecting and designing the space around a particular poet, musician, or advocate or D.C.'s history (e.g., the Marion Barry room), elements my study has delved into in chapter 5. While these practices ensure there is some continuity across sites, each location has its unique layout and décor, particularly the event spaces designed with consideration of the artist, activist, or politician for which it was named. But also, BBP locales are influenced by their neighborhood and thus establish "characters" unique to each site.

Like any other major urban center, D.C.'s residents are by no means a homogenous group. In fact, each quadrant is quite different from the others, marked by the demographics of residents, style of buildings and homes, as well as the businesses and/or attractions that are part of the area. As BBP locations are positioned in different quadrants as well as outside of D.C. proper – i.e., in Maryland and Virginia, each locale in many ways reflects the local culture, this vibe, in a sense, both matches as well as

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influences who will likely frequent each venue. For example, as discussed earlier in the chapter, venue captain of the Shirlington location Slli'm states that the audience frequenting his locale is "a listening audience," while Dwayne B. provides a lengthy breakdown of the first four BBP locations established. His characterization links each site as the four houses of Gryffindor, denotes that they each craft and reflect a vibe that jives with each neighborhood's distinct "personality."

The fact that BBP locales often have a dedicated following that is attracted to its unique place identity, seemingly, there should be no clear-cut ambiance established for the entire organization of BBP. However, when asked to describe the venue for a person who had been, interviewees were prompted to gauge the most comprehensive description of BBP's vibe. Most participants framed their description around the mission of the space, which is the same across locales. And it is this agenda, reputation, and brand identity that grants the ability to posit BBP's overarching ambiance, i.e., despite each chain location offering some level of individuality. For example, collectively BBP was described by host Droopy as an "open, tolerant village," which was evidenced by the space's Tribal Statement – a mission statement that seeks to create a safe space all persons – as well as an expressed policy for community seating – an expectation that no table or seat would deemed reserved or "off limits." Where ritual and routine is the driver of SDDC, rules of "fellowship" were enforced by BBP's branded language. They were displayed on the walls, menus, and merch – often encapsulated by the word "TRIBE," as well as referenced by the hosts during the preliminary phases of each open mic.

Also, it is BBP's consideration and consistency for its elaborate and stylish layout and décor that also drives the ways in which participants situate the site's

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overarching place identity. Participants utilized phrases such as "grown and sexy," "hipster," or even "bougie," to situate BBP's atmosphere. These were used to denote the site's elaborate production setup, the restaurant and bar suitable for a happy hour, the café snack bites or fancy (and expensive) meal and even bookstore with a selection of texts for the environmentally, politically, and socially conscious. These descriptions index a place identity and culture that projects and attracts a mature, intellectual, and classy crowd. Such markers are standard to the overall feel of BBP, with the exception of specialty or themed events such as the youth and college open mic nights, which are donned in a more lax and "urban-esque" feel. (For those who are part of The Culture, this type of ambiance is referenced as lit, turnt up, poppin, etc.) For the most part, those in attendance at BBP's open mics were usually dressed to be seen (on stage on within the crowd) i.e., clothed in trendy fashions or in work attire that was just as suitable for a night out, or to make a statement.

In short, while BBP locales were attentive to each site's neighborhood vibe and though hosts are tasked with the responsibility to "curate" the night's energy, the chain still manages to create a sense of uniformity – i.e., a recognizable brand identity that indexically presupposes an overall vibe. Noticeably, the ambiance constructed or realized at BBP spaces is, in many ways, in direct contrast to SDDC's culture during its time at the ECAC as well as the SpitDat speakeasy series.

The Vibe of the "Church"

As far as the ECAC's structural design, layout, and décor, it is clear that there was a connection between the physical aspects and the "vibe" that resonates with most who visited the space – a label that denotes its unique place identity. However, it was

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also the social engagement between participants entering the space that allowed me to see why people referred to it as "Spoken Word Church." As people awaited the start of the open mic, there were hugs and detailed catchups between the members of the community, which parallels the fellowship of an old Southern Black church. And as "the doors of the church opened," without prompting many participants immediately began setting up: sitting out chairs, distributing water bottles underneath each seat, and signing up for the night's set. Thus, there was a sense a ritual and routine that spoke to people's comfort in the space as well as an awareness of the cultural norms.

To provoke a bit of community bonding, co-host Dwayne B would often present an informal topic or pose questions to discuss with one another – an ice breaker of sorts – as he worked to get things ready for the evening's happenings. This question could be something as simple "what was the last movie you watched?" And conversations would flow easily, that is until the hosts would call out "Lions and Tigers and Bears!" in order to elicit the response "Oh my!" – SDDC's ritual call to attention that insiders know all too well. Hence, the atmosphere produces a sense of individual acknowledgement, at minimum, to close familiarity, at best. So, while it was my priority to mostly observe, SDDC is just one of those places that promotes interaction between its participants. Thus, I was not too surprised by the ways in which people engaged at "the mic," which consisted of more time for longer elaborations of personal commentary in the form of spontaneous rants, weekly acknowledgements and announcements, as well as trigger warnings or disclaimers. These co-occurring speech genres harkened back to testimony time at my family's church.

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Given SDDC's social culture, the layout and physical details of the space is really what drives the metaphor of an old Southern Baptist church house. (The overall setup is established in chapter 3; however, design is reiterated here to convey the ways in which it bears influence on the vibe of a space.) Design-wise, the ECAC offered the exact opposite atmosphere that BBP sites features, with its bare-bones layout and minimalist décor. The rectangular room was simply, with white walls, two rickety A/C units and a ceiling fan that was mostly for décor – as judged by the heat – as well a small transportable brown podium. There were no mics. There was no stage. There was no bar or kitchen. Participants were not met by a host or line leading to purchase tickets, nor were they served for the evening. Instead, everyone sits and performs on equal "footing," they seat themselves and often assist with the setup, and they are beseeched to donate a dollar in support of the space and featuring artists. A small Folgers coffee cannister sat on the podium – later to be used as the "collection plate" where persons could make their contribution. Next to the can was a single sheet of white paper, or what is immediately recognizable – for those who attend SDDC or other open mics – as the sign-up sheet.

Aside from garnering its church-like classification, the way in which persons assessing SDDC's "personality" would also use words such as a "homey-type vibe" and the persons frequenting were always referred to as "community" or "family." While BBP used branded language (e.g., TRIBE) to create this feel, it is actual familiarity and ongoing engagement that solidified this for SDDC patrons. And where BBP had to contend with maintaining continuity across its different locales, SDDC had to content with never having a consistent locale. In fact, Dwayne B. stated that SDDC itself was a vibe, an energy that is created and preserved no matter where it is located physically.

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This idea, of course, has been tested and proven true, considering that the open mic series has been displaced and relocated several times. Of course, SDDC is not immune to the influence of the physical structure, but the agenda very much ensures that no matter where it takes place, the vibe SDDC is known for is maintained.

6.3 Reading the Room, Verbalizin the Vibe

Place and Metapragmatic Awareness of Space

Throughout my conversations with D.C. poets, the notion of place "identity" was very consistently pinpointed by several artists, both consciously and subconsciously. For example Slli'm, the host and venue captain for BBP Shirlington, noted that the crowd that frequents his location is as a "listening crowd." BBP's D.O.P.E. Pages positioned Hyattsville as the "bougie crowd that don't come down to D.C." And Dwayne B., host venue captain BBP 450K, situates the first four established BBP locations as equivalent to the houses of Gryffindor, a Harry Potter refence that denotes each space's temperament and proclivities. What these descriptions showcase is that "vibe" is not only about how poets feel in the space but also who is attracted to the space and they behave in the setting. When hosts and features can position the audience participants as fitting a certain persona, they are then able to craft their performances in ways that meet audience expectations or even to challenge them in unexpecting ways. The ability to connect one's performance – including the content as well as style of delivery – to the content, marks a poet's metapragmatic awareness of place identity and /or vibe.

Having had several conversations that inspired me to consider ambiance as a part of the performance situation, I started to pay attention to the *way* poets described each venue, especially in contrast to one another. In many instances, just by asking hosts

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and features to describe BBP and SDDC for someone who has no concept of either place, I was able to acquire lengthy accounts of their experience(s) in each venue. Considering that often my participants were asked to consider BBP and SDDC separately, the very fact that I juxtaposed or mentioned only these two spaces invited contrastive descriptions of both sites. When illustrated by these participants, each venue was constantly and distinctly aligned – whether consciously or unconsciously – with specific meanings, where labels were used as "sign vehicles" to index not necessarily the site itself but the relationship between a location, its ambiance, and audience expectations. These attributions showed clearly that poets were – again, consciously or unconsciously – shifting between styles based on emotional and sensorial experiences.

Most of the poets interviewed as part of this study, no matter *where* I met them (i.e., BBP or SDDC) had a relationship with both spaces, with the exception of a couple of feature poets. Thus, it was easy to acquire their sentiments of both spaces as well as their understanding of each place's identity, or culture, in juxtaposition to the other. It should also be noted however, that some of interviews conducted on either of the premises likely impacted their answers. For example, there were indeed circumstances where poets' financial dependency – i.e., as an "contract employee" of the venue – provoked some level of self-consciousness that could have precluded an honest depiction of the environment. Nevertheless, each interview yielded lexical choices that situate BBP and SDDC in relationship / alignment with particular motives and performance goals.

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Table 6.2. A breakdown of word associations regarding BBP vs. SDDC.

BBP	SDDC
Perform	Share
Entertain	
Compete	
	Spoken Word Church
	Home
	University
	Family

Table 6.2, displayed above, shows the most popular (or rather common) descriptions utilized when speaking about the ambiance (i.e., the energy, feel, "or vibe") of the space. And it was a contrast that was playing out consistently throughout conversations. In fact, the first time I was pointed to a poet's metapragmatic awareness of describing one's performance style or motives was when Dwayne B. explained that "I hardly ever perform, but I *share* a lot." His emphasis and breakdown of the term proved to be a helpful guide towards noting others making similar distinctions. For instance, Elle B. Koon –mentioned in chapter 3 – was very adamant about not referring to herself as a Spoken Word "artist." Rather she called herself a "writer" (see Table 6.3 below). And, the reason for her hesitation actually drew upon parallel assumptions informing Dwayne B's. distinction between "perform" vs. "share."

Table 6.3. Excerpt of an interview with Elle D. Koon.

EDK	Well, it's just so funny, uh::, that ... you asked me this question, because I look at Spoken W- Word as something that has changed over the years?
	It's not exactly something that I even label myself as, as Spoken Word artist.
	I'm just a writer.
	And I: READ my poetry and I PRESENT my poetry. And kind of w-, in a way where I want people to learn about me?
	And so I think that's what Spoken Word art is, being able to:, showcase a part of yourself in kind of that, griot kind of way.
	And, be able to just engage people on a different level so that they can see, your perspective on life, your perspective on your feelings and what you're

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	going through ... in life and hopefully they are able to relate to you and bring a certain of, toGEtherness.

In another segment of our conversation, Elle actually evaluates Spoken Word as being aligned with – at least in the wider public consciousness – certain tendencies to "over-perform" in a disingenuous fashion. She does this by entering into a mode of talk that uses a hyper-exaggeration of prosodic inflections and body language, saying artists "MOVE, Their HANDS like THIS." It is a metapragmatic enactment of a stereo-*typified* performance that mimics and mocks the art form, one that is often executed in a similar fashion by lay persons emulating the genre. This is especially seen by those in The Culture, who often gravitate towards a scene that takes place in another prominent 90's work within Black cinema: Higher Learning. In the film, the artist utilizes particular bursts of phrases (i.e., pacing) while enlonging vowels in sing-song fashion – a form of delivery that is now deemed antiquated or associated with early performances of poetry. (This was affirmed by Pages Matam, who explained the contemporary style as moving away from this model.) But as Elle D. Koon transitioned into her "mimicry" of those who "perform," she utilized the same over-emphasis on vowel lengthening with the same over-execution of body language, denoting that there is a presentation-style that relays conscious attention that is aligned with "performing." This type of delivery is positioned in contrast to an in-the-moment relation with the present and the audience that seems more genuine.

Dwayne B. denoted this same tendency in the following conversational exchange (see Table 6.4 below). When he claimed that "performing is like I'm coming in with like a plan, I'm tryna, get you, to, do, THIS," he suggested that there is a clear motive when one is in the mindset of "performing." The mindset of "sharing" relays a connection with

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the present and those taking in the moment as well. Hence, there is a level of intimacy and metaphoric "undressing" of the artist's self to denote a vulnerability and revealing of one's deepest thoughts "in this moment," as Dwayne B. explains.

Table 6.4. Excerpt of an interview between Tiffany Marquise Jones and Dwayne B.

TMJ	… What should a good performer do?
DLB	Shi:::t. Um::. You know I'm the wrong person to ask that. Cuz I. Am. Not looking for yo-. So. *sigh*.
	To honestly answer this question, I need to back track a bit. I don't perform often, I SHARE a lot.
	Um. I think sharing and performing are two different things.
	Cuz like, um: … performing is like I'm coming in with like a plan, I'm tryna, get you, to, do, THIS. Right?
	Where sharing^, it's more about me. *hand placed on chest* It's more about like where I'm at, in this moment, and how like I need to, to do do something to feel better.

Based on these accounts and interviews, the word "performing" indicates entrée to a purposeful assessment and cognizance of the space and the ability to execute a performance strategy. In other words, a performer can clearly observe, take in, and respond to the environment that draws from a clear awareness of their emplacement in the moment, but not so removed that a person is unfeeling or droid-like. Whereas sharing stems from a deep-seated need to reflect upon and express one's internal mental and emotional state as opposed to their environment. In short, the vibe allows for a moment of sharing or it prompts a clear method of performing, and thus this is where ambiance has semiotic value that is not only perceivable, it also drives interaction.

Juxta-p(r)osin the Church and the Tribe

As several participants I observed and interviewed during this study frequented both sites, it was not difficult to prompt contrastive descriptions of space. What emerged from our conversations was an even deeper sense that vibe is associated with a given

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performance. As poets relayed their ability to read the read and adjust accordingly – as well as being able typify vibes and explain this process – it became clear that they have a metapragmatic awareness of the experiential, spatial-temporal, and social dynamics of the venues they encounter. And it is this readability and adaptability that made for a great contrastive profile of both BBP and SDDC. In fact, in two separate interviews by two unacquainted artists, this study was keyed to certain terminology as indicators of artists' metapragmatic awareness. For example, Dwayne B. and Modise, another poet I observed in both spaces, subconsciously used the terms "perform" and "share" in very salient ways, revealing a nuanced contrast between BBP and SDDC venues. Both artists used "perform" to describe their work with BBP, while "share" was reserved for their experiences at SDDC.

Given Dwayne B's explanation but also the term's inherent connotation, these associations were quite telling, as both "perform" and "share" were almost always used in mutually exclusive ways, their association with a given space relayed how artists were typifying the moods of each venue as well as how they were responding to (or cueing up their performances for) each setting. In a sense, these terms both recognize a difference between audience expectations for artists as well as the artists' expectations for audience cultural competence within each venue. While both places have both a long history in the area and the reputation for being a "must" for experiencing and participating in the D.C. Spoken Word poetry scene, they – in many ways –exist on opposite ends of a spectrum.

BBP has not only been aligned with D.C.'s thriving arts and nightlife scene – thanks to its position in popular and redeveloping D.C. neighborhoods, high profile guests (e.g., Dr. Angela Davis and President Barack Obama), and inclusion of some of

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D.C.'s / the nation's most recognizable poets – but the space and merchandising aligns the space with money / capital. As Droopy states, BBP "is an attractive space … you got your mics, you got food, and you got drank." And with the inclusion of a stage, microphone, and lights, the space offers a high production value so that the audience is primed to see a show and thus the artist is primed to *put on* a show, or "perform."

Furthermore, as several BBP locations are situated in flourishing live-work-play neighborhoods with heavy foot traffic, it is no longer a low-key insider only joint. Instead people just walking by, whether they are locals, transplants, college students, tourists, can easily happen upon this chill venue with both eats and entertainment, without much effort. Hence, the audience will also be a mixed bag of those who are hip to the rules of engagement for Spoken Word poetry and those who are completely unfamiliar with the art form. This prompts even more pressure for artists to accentuate their performance value as it may be the first and only representation of their art, their work, and this space.

However, at SDDC, the absence of this symbolic tech, accessibility, and saturation of novice observers (or even spectators) prompts an entirely different experience for both poets and participants. As Modise explains, there is a feeling that this audience "is with you" in a way that is not as perceptible at BBP. Regarded as the unofficial "Spoken Word church" or eventually what became the "Spoken Word Speakeasy," there is a sense of consistent community who are not only "in-the-know" of the both the space and have the cultural competence developed through engrained social norms (or habitus). This competence is one of knowing how to engage with the art in general, but also in terms of SDDC's customs of ritualized calls-and-responses that take place every evening. While the hosts will provide some contextualization to inform new

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attendees, those who are able to join in without prompting demonstrate their competence through performance of these rituals. In fact, it was when I could join in myself that I finally felt part of the community.

As for SDDC's space, the room itself is very minimalist. Both ECAC and the next space (the Speakeasy basement) are void of any stage or microphone, official sale of food – only those that delivery, donated or brought in – nor is there prominent merchandising or marketing. Hence, it relies on a word-of-mouth and community guidelines that are self-governing. As witnessed when first experiencing SDDC and the hosts' breakdown of rules, members not only joined in on the ritual in a collaborative fashion, but they would also remind the hosts of rules that were not given – prompting various forms of call and response that indicated competence and familiarity of SDDC's history, folklore, and culture. Hence, there was a sense of family and familiarity that allows for a "sharing" of one's words, stories, experiences – without the need for perfection. While many of the members are veterans, features, working poets, there is a persistent observance of these artists sharing works-in-progress, pieces that may never see a larger public audience, or even just sharing other-people's-poetry (OPP) that is deemed appropriate for the moment.

Vibe as expressed through Qualia

Performers who have experienced diverse performance situations know they must "read" the vibe and determine how to give an appropriate delivery and content that will prompt the poet's intended experiential results. In fact, interviews revealed not only do these spaces have very clear contrasting vibes, but the indexical signs of the perception of abstract qualities in the world, or qualia, altered how features and host

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perceived their role and thus approach the mic, both literally and metaphorically (Chumley and Harkness 2013; Gal 2017). Furthermore, while the participants and structural elements can shape the performance frame, poet's interpretation of these token signs is in fact the cultural manifestation of the energy produced and is a key component of the performance situation. These aspects of place are "felt" and, therefore, discernable by those who inhabit the space.

The discussion of vibe in this section will breakdown the ways in which those part of Spoken Work and/or Black culture participate in conversations interpretations of qualia as space ambiance or vibe. Of more importance, though, is the way in which spaces are observed and labeled in ways that realize as recognizable culturally salient types (or assessment of vibe) even as they are individually experienced.The ability to assess and express a vibe requires a sensitivity to the spatial-temporal, social, and experiential facets of ambiance. This process is best explained by drawing on Aaron Fox's (2004) ethnomusicological work on country music and working-class culture in Lockhart, Texas; scholarship that is foundational to this analysis.

In his analysis of the country music genre and its importance to the Lockhart community, Fox explored veteran performers' and enthusiasts' descriptions that they provided him in conversations about what local country music performances meant to them. Through this work, he was able to zero in on two reoccurring phrases: "to feel" and "relate to." By deconstructing the semantic meaning of each phrase he established and explained that "feeling" and "sentiment" were not only often conveyed but were an expected component of country music. Fox further unpacked how these requirements translated in terms of the verbal (lyrics) and the embodied (musical) elements of country

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music performance, using a diagram to map out the semantic axis of each phrases and their connection to the listener's experience (see Fox 2004:156). Following Fox's reasoning, I posit a similar deconstruction and analysis of ambiance (see Figure 6.1 below). It is important to note the ways in which the discussion of vibe has conceptual, phenomenological, and relational implications for addressing the interrelatedness of space and performance. The next few sections will detail how the term "vibe," as well as words deemed comparable and interchangeable with the descriptor, reveals and conveys spatial-temporal, social, experiential meaning as it matters to the relationship between space and Spoken Word performance.

Experiential Meaning

The basis of "vibe" is to convey the ways in which an interpretation of a space connects environment, décor (i.e., lighting, color scheme, artwork, and furnishings), interactions, and performances (musical, dance, or poetry) as well as with co-present others (artists and audience) both sensorially and phenomenologically. When someone uses the term "vibe" in general, the meaning automatically denotes a connection to that person's sensorial and emotional experience with another person (e.g., "we are not vibin") or with a space (e.g., "it has a pretty cool vibe"). The focus on this section will demonstrate how significant ambiance is to performance- and place-related studies, especially in consideration that evaluation of both are filtered through participants' senses and emotions.

Recalling Pink's framework of emplacement, when a person enters a setting, they are consciously or unconsciously reacting to that setting. However, even if a person does not actively reflect on their feelings within a space, their mood and experience is,

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nevertheless, impacted. Still, the relationship between performance and space, specifically within Spoken Word, is that hosts and poets *are* attuned to the experiential components of the art form and venues. Hence, this is why RealTalk's mention of the host's role to "curate the energy" is so telling. In a sense, what he is really conveying is the idea of "setting a mood" or "creating a vibe" that will evoke a particular quality, memory, or feeling within those experiencing the event.

Over time, a host can be a major part of establishing a particular vibe and thus will attract a following that will support the host or frequent their particular night at BBP or across venues. This reputation is established and solidified over time and talk about one's reputation "circulates" within networks, which validate their virtuosity even more by those in attendance. But, there is also the notion that a venue – given its branding, setup, décor, and motives – can "curate" a specific vibe that then becomes synonymous with its identity. For example, SDDC consistently was referenced as having a "churchy" or "homey" vibe. In many ways, this references the closeness of the community members but also how the space is crafted as an intimate setting that allows participants a certain level of comfort and safety that may be absent in other performance venues, especially as gentrification challenges D.C. Natives' belonging in public spaces. Nevertheless, while the host or place identity can mean that a site has established a reputation for relaying a particular vibe, it should never be assumed that an ambiance is static, as so much of the term is impacted not just by the space but by the participants and their interactions taking place within the space.

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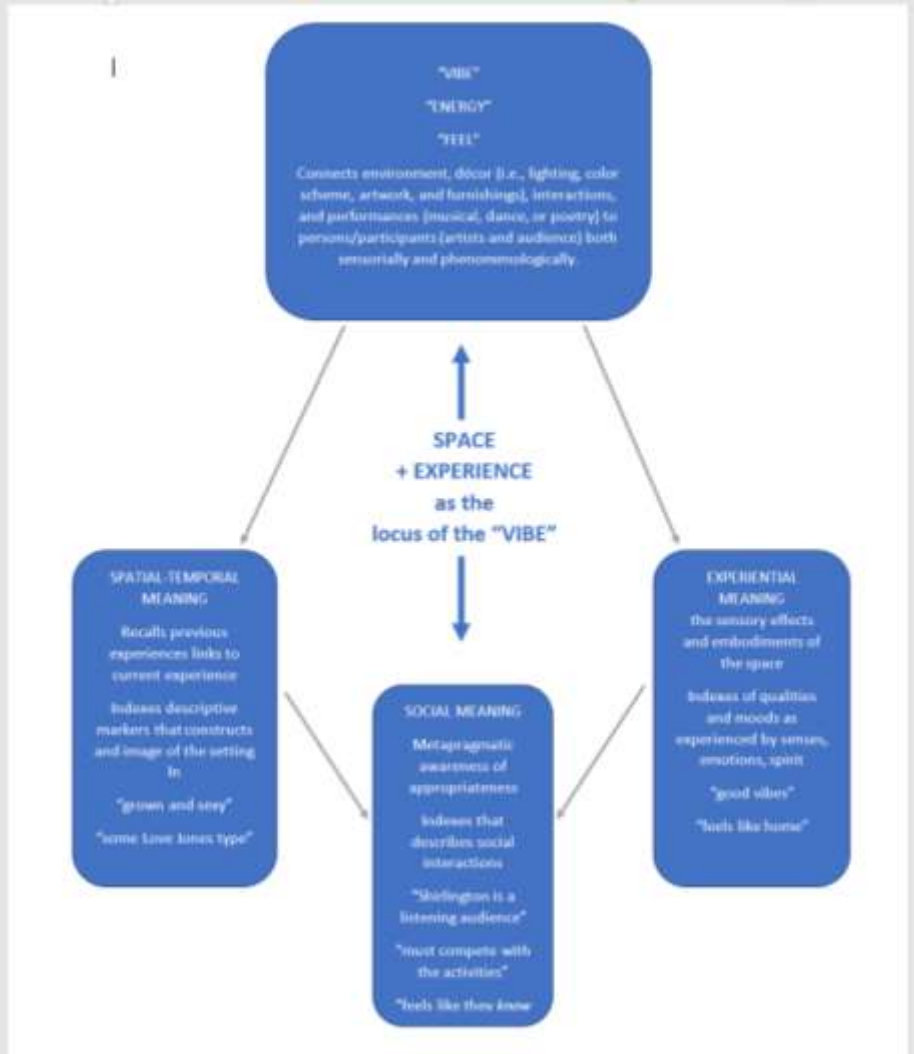

Figure 6.1. A visual depiction of "vibe" as it relates to the experiential facets of Spoken Word performances and venues.

Social Meaning

Considering that a performance ecology is never the same – because there are always new persons, performances, and interactions contributing to the environment – the ways in which people encounter space(s) or place(s) will shift as well. Given these dynamic interrelations, no space just is. In many ways it is apparent that a place's "identity" can be impacted by a shift in the actual arrangement, décor, or even lighting, providing a completely different look of the space. And beyond the physical and material

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implications, layout and décor changes will also have social ramifications. For example, incorporating family-style or banquet-style tables verses rows of chairs will impact the ways the space is perceived but also how movement and interactions are organized. However, as new persons inhabit the space, they bring with them a unique set of experiences and personalities along with the new connections that will emerge. These social dynamics can impact the space as well.

Continuing with this thought, an open mic host can also create a completely different mood from another host, as they have particular visions and styles of facilitating the event. Also incorporating other visual artists (e.g., a live band and painter), as I witnessed on several occasions, can completely shift the atmosphere from when a host operates alone. For example, when Dwayne B. was hosting a brand new BBP space (the 450K's location), he mentioned that his strategy was to "fill the space with as much as possible." He did this to work around the awkward layout of the new space as well as to cultivate a particular mood for the evening. Where other hosts struggled to adjust, Dwayne B. expressed the need for adaptability, a requirement of emplacement, as opposed to assuming the standards for the old 5th and K location, 450's predecessor. Even I felt that the evening at 450K had a really nice vibe.

The host's attention to the arrangement of the space – having a painter to the right of the stage and the band fronting each poet's words when requested – created a completely different mood and made for nice transitions between artists. One on the hand, it was interesting to hear poets request musical accompaniment with specific songs that could enhance the delivery of one's text. On the other hand, having more elements to engage the eye and the ear can create a fuller visual and aural experience. It can also

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detract from the focus of the poets and poetry. At the same time, having an event without music or other art forms can lend itself to more moments of "dead air" when not handled properly.

Essentially, each host has their own style and vision for a given event. And, as hosts attend to the "feel" of their open mic, they also realize varying pros and cons that will attract certain participants and deter others. Even the smallest shift in the performance ecology can instigate different engagements between poet and the participating audience as well as the participants and the performances. But as a site becomes known for eliciting a particular "vibe," the space will generate its dedicated following – i.e., particular population with specific "palates" or tastes – that is satisfied by the locale's "personality."

This idea leads back to place identity, but in ways that realize social consequences. For example, 14th and V is the flagship BBP locale with a well-known history for showcasing artistic excellence. While it is accredited with presenting many poets of the highest caliber, such a distinction also attracts many open-micers with no intent to perfect their craft. This can lead to some veterans like Droopy to criticize that these open-micers merely desire to obtain their five minutes of fame. Artists, like 2Deep the Poetess however thrive as her brash, larger-than-life, tell-like-it-is style tends to attract people who can handle it and are drawn to this type of environment. She attracts large crowds who will laugh with her, going so far as to even provoke the host's comedic insults and witty commentary. Overall, no adjustment to the space is made without some sense of social fallout – be it with good, bad, or ugly implications. And thus, a host or

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producer of an event, must consider the ways in which their environments on this level so that can emplace their performances in ways that match ambiance or vibe.

Spatial-Temporal Meaning

A person trying to position the "vibe" of a space has a myriad of options (or descriptors) that can be used signify a certain quality of that space. Note: any one *token* of "vibe" is experienced as a novel coming together of elements. At the same time, that token inherently recalls prior experiences that have been generalized by a participant (performer or patron), which are assessed as qualitatively different *types* of vibe. So, if someone labels the environments as a "homey space" or that it has a "chill vibe," it is evident that the individual has encountered other spaces with what they perceive to be synonymous with the same feel or energy. This process happens in an instant as the person enters the venue and gathers the "data" needed to read the space.

Furthermore, assessments of ambiance must be assignable in ways that others can access the same connection of spatial-temporal meaning. For example, if someone asks, "so, how was the event?" or "what is BBP like?", both the person asking and answering must have personally experienced environments within the same categorization, or typification (Agha 2007). The idea is that the use of said term, description, or stereotype is so frequent that is become solidified in meaning to the point others can presuppose that this sign indexes the same particular qualities.

Outside of the usual adjectival markers of "good" or "bad," some common descriptions are "chill," "rachet," "grown and sexy," "low-key," and so forth. If the vibe is "rachet," there is a sense that the quality may be less refined, will have a younger crowd, will likely showcase trap hip hop music and culture, and resemble a club

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atmosphere. While “grown and sexy vibe” may call for a more reserved setting, with jazz and neo-soul as the music of choice, may speak to a more mature audience and resemble more of a lounge or jazz bar. Many of the terms referenced by RealTalk as well as those that are commonly accepted terms have cultural significance. Whether or not someone actually agrees that the description suits the vibe is negligible; the qualities they index are clear enough for emic use and thus relays how the users has read the vibe of the space.

There is also the ability for someone to borrow or utilize pop culture references to reference a particular mood or feeling. For instance, when RealTalk mentions in his statement (see Table 6.5 below) that “this some sexy type” and followed by “some Love Jones type” vibe, many would understand the description of “sexy.” However, the hearer of the message, that a place has a “Love Jones type” vibe, would have to be in the know about the movie being referenced. Otherwise, the point being made is moot. As mentioned in the introduction of this chapter, it was an important movie for The Culture as it was a popular and well-embraced product of the 90s, a high point for Black cinema. But also, its incorporation of Spoken Word poetry created a resurgence of the verbal art tradition.

Table 6.5. Excerpt of an interview between Tiffany Marquise Jones and RealTalk.

RTR	So then as people sitting there waiting on the show to start, they hear like “alright i like this i like the vibe in here!” …
	Um, and then it’s like the live band plays and then they like (*cocks head to the side*) “oh this some^” they like “oh this some … this some sexy type” (*laughs*) “some Love Jones type” you know

In the movie, the art form was used by one of the central characters, Darius Lovehall, a smooth talker who used poetry to woo a love interest. But it was the mood set by atmosphere – a dark café lounge, with a mature (or “grown and sexy”) crowd, and

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poetry was set to music by a smooth live jazz duo. The co-occurring signs within this film produce memorable imagery that a person who knows the film will easily recall. Thus, the recipient who understands the reference can recall and associate the co-occurring qualia of that image to the place being described in the present. Thus, the social-indexical values assigned, in many cases, are audience specific in that they guide the hearer's focus towards a particular quality and/or source of imagery from a horizon of infinite possibilities. They can also perform the boundary work of cultural values determining who is indeed a part of a group as well as who is deemed an outsider. In this case, as this movie is important to The Culture, one would assume that an African American – especially one that is of age upon the film's release – would indeed understand, as RealTalk assumed I would.

Overall, the main takeaway from this line analysis is that in order for a performer or participant to have the ability to select a commonly used and accepted description of the vibe, there has to be mutual shared understandings of similar space with similar qualities across time. Furthermore, if a unique description is taken from pop culture or other place reference (e.g., "a speakeasy feel") or if other qualities are recontextualized to position the ambiance of a space (e.g., a "homey" vibe), the language implies a metapragmatic awareness that bespeaks to a person's past experiences and their ability to translate that for current or future audiences that will encounter these spaces.

6.4 Final Thoughts

In many ways, each site, BBP and SDDC, provides a salient enough contrast to show the ways in which emplacement is key to any performance. Given that open mic culture is presented in each setting in very contrastive ways – neither good, bad, nor

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indifferent, but different indeed – reading the room is a necessary skill for hosts and feature poets. The ability to sit in a moment and interpret what is required to reciprocate or reflect the "vibe" means to be attuned to the experiential, spatial-temporal, and social facets of a space in that moment. It is then that a poet can translate that into a performance that achieves the flow and transcendence that artists and audiences seek in these spaces (Bauman 1984; Beeman 2010; Coupland 2011).

Because vibe is based on sensorial experience, it is a concept that is innately subjective. For one person, it can be a "some sexy type" or "some Love Jones type" vibe, whereas for another person, it can be a completely different descriptor. However, if someone asks, "so, how was the event?" or "what is BBP like?" the answer should never be assumed as fact. It is similar to someone assessing the weather as being too chilly and thus necessitating a jacket versus someone comfy enough to wear shorts; it depends on the individual's exposure to and/or agreement with certain elements. That said, there is some "truth" within this variability. Where temperatures can range between what is comfortable to one versus another, there is a point at which it is inarguably hot or cold. That is the difference between a person's experience being *situated* in a performance (the vibe) versus the actual performance *situation* (the context).

That said, vibe – while individually evaluated, it is a feel (or atmosphere) that it is co-produced by the amalgamation of interactions between participants in the performance space. There vibe is not merely linked to space and fixed by locale. While venue owners can brand their spaces by establishing particular place identities – those that index certain ambiance-related qualia (or qualities), the vibe can be altered and reinterpreted with new variables (décor, persons, visuals, attractions, interactions, and

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facilitation of the performance event). Thus, it is a concept that must be constantly assessed when observing performances and performance spaces.

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CHAPTER 7

PERFORMING AND TRANSFORMING PLACE

As previous chapters have discussed, the D.C.'s "performance-scape" has been constantly in flux, adapting to the ways gentrification has redefined some of its prominent spaces. This study has been mostly concerned with the ways D.C.'s Spoken Word network of poets and patrons have adapted and responded to these changes – specifically gentrification in the Bus Boy and Poets' (BBP) and SpitDat D.C.'s (SDDC) communities. For example, chapter 4 has detailed how smaller independent open mics that were once situated in the abundant body of Black-owned businesses are now defunct or have been displaced. And SDDC's history of displacement is also evidence to this issue, as it had to postpone its open mic sessions when the sponsoring business site closed as well as when it was pushed out by gentrifiers' complaints of disruptive presence.

Given the demise of independent businesses, the disappearance of Chocolate City's historically Black spaces (e.g., Black Broadway) as well as the rise of BBP and main street eateries and entertainment spaces, artists have had to make some tough choices. Do they opt to craft a more in-group following and exclusive existence by choosing to do backyard events or use community centers tucked off the beaten path? Or do they align themselves with BBP and other "mainstream" spaces out of necessity for the art / artist to survive? As for the co-hosts of SDDC, they have managed to negotiate

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space on both sides of the spectrum as well as in-between – i.e., they have set up residency in venues that function as hybrid spaces and that prompts interdiscursive practices. This chapter describes how gentrifying pressures, both in terms of spatial and audience composition, led members of the SDDC to develop a hybrid performance space that while in a more mainstream performance venue and inviting a mainstream audience, uses poetic form and performance to mark levels of inclusion in the spoken word performance space.

As shown in the contrastive description in chapter 5's "Tale of Two Open Mics, BBP established a highly accessible and commercialized distribution of the art form, whereas SDDC's co-hosts have modeled another path. SDDC first made a major move from the Emergence Community Art Collective (ECAC), housed within a more residential area, to an undisclosed and hidden location, in a community member's basement. In some ways, they retained a modicum of obscurity, generating an insulated system that continues a low-key and underground existence.[12] While acting as co-hosts for SDDP, both Droopy the Broke Baller and Dwayne B. (aka Crochet Kingpin) not only work in collaboration with BBP as open mic hosts and venue captains for the 14th and V. and 450 K locations, respectively, they have never shied away from mainstream sites. Thus, they are not necessarily opposed to "place-ing" the art form within mainstream sites, which include, a theatre, bookstores, or "hipster-esque" watering holes within

[12] Not long after this study's completion, SDDC secured a monthly residency at Woolly Mammoth theatre in D.C. This series runs concurrently with their weekly SpitDat Speakeasy, which is in an undisclosed location. Thus, they have cultivated a blend low-key and public spaces with varying levels of accessibility. Like many open mics during the covid-19 crisis of 2020, SDDC has also instituted digital presence while sheltering in place – once again showing Spoken Word is adaptable and responsive to various contexts (https://www.woollymammoth.net/events/spit-dat-in-residence.).

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gentrified neighborhoods that attract diverse audiences, including elites and transplants that are unfamiliar with the art form. Instead, they navigate and perform across different venues and audiences, with distinct approaches and performances.

Droopy and Dwayne B. moreover, have taken artistic license in remediating their style of Spoken Word performance to produce a two-man show, mixing poetry, rap, and drama in the form of a novel theatre-going experience. The production titled, *From Gumbo to Mumbo* (FGTM), is a mix of griotism and thespianism, and situates Spoken Word as ideal for performative place-(re)making performances. Specifically, the SDDC co-hosts depict communal loss through poetic word play, AAL cultural traditions, as well as a humorous double-voiced exchanges, to narrate their communities' experiences in creative ways that connect with in-group community members who are present while (re)establishing and (re)claiming their home space. In remediating the art form in a novel venue and through a hybrid performance genre, the artists also remade what is typically a passive theater-going experience for audiences new to the spoken word art form into an active audience experience.

In the following sections, I provide background to how the play was inspired (7.1). I describe what the theatrical performance was like attending to the construction of a hybrid interdiscursive dialogue among the performers and audiences (7.2). I then describe the ways the audience uptake impacted the performance among three different specific shows (7.3). Lastly, I develop the role of particular interdiscurisve linguistic forms in place-making showing how the flip the performance place-making order of indexicality.

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7.1 Two Poets, One Act

With D.C. being the nation's capital, a site that houses the institutions of the federal government, it is no surprise that the area has seen more than its fair share of protest. This was especially true during the period of my research between 2018 and 2019. chapter 4 provided a glimpse into the social milieu at the time of this study, including the Native merchandise and #UnMuteDC campaign as well as online clap-backs in response to Mayor Bowser's denigration of mumbo sauce. These issues were widely circulated through social media and the local news as well as in everyday conversations. Given Spoken Word's practice of reflecting the zeitgeist, said societal debates were entextualized as a shared urban-Black experience while also being spatiotemporally emplaced in the D.C. context. It was in the production of *From Gumbo to Mumbo* that both poets clearly demonstrate Spoken Word's strengths to serve as a vehicle for what this chapter situates as the performative practice of place-making.

The Foundation

SDDC co-hosts Droopy and Dwayne are both D.C.-based poets. However, it takes a listener only a minute to hear that the former was born-and-bred in the Big Easy (aka New Orleans). With his mellifluous accent, "Who Dat" love for "dem Saints," and iconic N'awlins lingo, Droopy is *the* quintessential representation of his hometown. And he makes sure everyone knows it. Dwayne B., on the other hand, eats, sleeps, and breathes all things Southeast. A true Native Washingtonian, he can attest to the ongoing changes in his hometown, with many poems dedicated to the loss of his history and childhood memories. Together, they have created a show that serves as an ode to their home turfs, a motive that is indexed through the title *From Gumbo to Mumbo*.

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When asked how FGTM originated, specifically the parts that critique gumbo and mumbo, Droopy and Dwayne B. described the day they ventured into a gentrified restaurant and partook of its version of mumbo sauce. While Dwayne B, is a self-described native connoisseur of mumbo sauce, Droopy, the Howard alum and longtime resident also knows mumbo when he tastes it. In fact, many of my "off the record" conversations with Dwayne B. revolved around this condiment, as I often wondered which spots were the best places to get the "real stuff" – in his expert opinion.

Needless to say, the sauce did not measure up to their standards – so much so they started an impromptu back and forth of insults, mocking the restaurant's failed attempt. They explained how it started with a simple "this taste like abc" or "this taste like xyz"– with "abc" and "xyz" being any random metaphor that two tipsy poet-rappers could conjure up on-the-fly. A few of these actually made its way into the final version of piece, which will be analyzed in latter sections of this chapter. In short, the exchange sparked an idea which grew into a funded residence at a local theater and a performance which is now making its way up the eastern shore board. Thus, what was originally a private joanin-like (*teasing)* banter between two poets calling out an appalling reproduction of mumbo sauce is transformed into a polished and performance-ready version that is laced with place-making rhymes. This now public critique of gentrification also celebrates all things New Orleans and D.C. through emblematic displays (See Figure 7.1 below).

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Figure 7.1 Performers Displaying New Orleans (Saints) and D.C. flags.

The Production

In the West End neighborhood of D.C., another gentrified community, there is a local venue known as the Keegan theatre, a place many elites frequent to enjoy a night of traditional musicals and play (see Figure 7.2). However, for several weeks in March and April 2019, West Enders got a little more education than they bargained for, as SDDC co-hosts were in residence with their theatre-esque Hip Hop and Spoken Word production. A part of Keegen's PLAY-RAH-KA series directed by Duane Richards II (Figure 7.3), FGTM ran from March 18th to April 7th, in 2019. While it was advertised for the mass public, Keegan's marketing materials also note that the production was "presented through support from Children's Theatre Foundation of America and D.C. Commission on the Arts & Humanities." These grants also funded showings for D.C. Public Schools field trips along with a post-show workshop (Keegan Theater Facebook page). Hence, this production was not just *about* D.C., it was woven *into* the fabric of the community by educating local youth on their community's issues.

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Figure 7.2 Keegan Theater Front Entrance (Photo Credit: Tiffany Marquise Jones).

Figure 7.3 Keegan Theater's PLAY-RAH-KA Series (Photo Credit: Tiffany Marquise Jones).

After each viewing, the poets provided time for post-show discussion. This provided an interactional frame where members of the audience could ask about the inspiration behind the play, get the poets' take on "who serves the best gumbo and mumbo", which was my question on night #1, or share their admiration for the work, praising its timeliness and honesty.

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The Presentation

As soon as the lights dim, it was obvious that FGTM was not the average theater-going experience. The co-hosts spoke over the loudspeakers, asking people to silence they phones, otherwise they "gon be jih like guh," stated by Dwayne B. in his hometown's lingo. Droopy agrees by saying, "fo sho lil woe!" Both made it clear that they plan to represent and evoke the places (and local speech varieties) of importance to them. And just before their first number, they reminded people that this was a type of show where the audience must "interact but not distract." In other words, they encouraged people to get involved as the participation framework of Spoken Word-based performances demands. But, it was not until when the lights returned to set that they dove head-long into their representation of the Gumbo and Mumbo of New Orleans and D.C. cultures.

As the stage lights are lifted, the famous New Orleans brass band sound filled the space and Droopy jumped out with the signature umbrella, the Saints beanie and hoodie, topped off with black and gold sneakers. He kicked off their duet with a warning, "ya'll gotta listen a lil close cuz I got a little bit of an accent, ya heard me!" Again, there was no intentions to adapt to the audience by watering down their full representation of home. And this was made that much clearer when Dwayne B. took over his portion of the song starting with the hook "comin from I'm from" and flowing in verse.

Table 7.1: An excerpt of Dwayne B.'s / CK's rap from FGTM (Part 1).

CK[13]	I was made in Southeast.
	Raised in Southeast.
	Spit flows at rap shows and {inaudible} in Southeast.

[13] Noted here as CK for Crochet Kingpin to avoid confusing DB (Dwayne B.) and DBB (Droopy the Broke Baller).

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	Been shot, met women, and got laid in Southeast.
	Worked hard, got a job, and got paid in Southeast.
	I stay Southeast.
	Even when I'm outta town, folks see the way I rock my crown and sa::y.
DBB	Southeast!
CK	It's a bunch of folks that scared to come around…
DBB	Southeast!
CK	Many folks ain't neva been found…
DBB	Southeast!
	Talk the wrong stuff to the right one in Southeast bullets spray.
	You ain't neva lost a son in Southeast.
	We rock T-Shirts wishin {love ones rest in peace}.
	{They choke on defeat.}
	Beat they feet in Southeast.
	The heat in Southeast.
CK DBB	All blocks is hot. | All blocks is hot.
DBB	Feds run up in spot where you eat in Southeast.

Jumping ahead a few verses, the content shifted from the context of Southeast's history and reputation to life post-gentrification. This shift in content reflects the abrupt transition into a new reality for both Dwayne B. and other Southeast Natives.

Table 7.2: An excerpt of Dwayne B.'s / CK's rap from FGTM (Part 2).

CK DBB	Things Change! | Things Change!
DBB	New whites in Southeast.
	Comfortable, bought some land, raise a fam in Southeast.
	Jog past liquor stores…
	Bikes in the street.
	Making money working at Homeland Security.
	{New homes buildin}in Waterfront in Southeast.
	Didn't know the value of my properTY in Southeast.
	My hood turnin good, rent risin for me.
	Landlord sayin it's time to pay a higher fee.
	But I'm SO Southeast!
CK DBB	Even my DNA, double helix seems to just say Southeast! | Southeast!

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DBB	That's the way of the beast.
	Best be prepared to change my life around and represent PG.

While this particular performance is more of a rap (rhythm and poetry) than Spoken Word (poetry with rhythm), the content and delivery set the stage – pun intended – for all that was to come. These verses showcased who the poets are in terms of their styles as lyricists and Natives seeking to acclaim and reclaim places. Their display of embodied and materialized emblems reinforced this poetic positioning. At the same time, in order to stay true to the poetic and oral traditions that they draw upon, the poets had to counter any expectations that some may have had regarding traditional theatre. Throughout the evening, Droopy made it a point to not just break the 4th wall, he literally transgressed it by jumping off stage to rock out with the audience in addition to spitting verses as he paced through the center aisle. And Dwayne B. in his own manner, did so by evoking his early breakdancing days. As his voice over performs a poem reflecting his come up from childhood, he embodied the content with a few quintessential B-boy moves. He started with a bit of top-rocking, before moving into a few six steps, and then completed the segment with a nip up.

Throughout, both Crochet Kingpin and Droopy staged solo and duet virtuoso hybridizing performances with seamless transitions between moments filled with all-out humor, intense frustration and rage, and a few seconds for tears. In short, it was an hour-long, multisensorial variety-style show dedicated to unapologetic Blackness, a celebration of African American language and culture, which recaptured some Natives' sense of the essences of New Orleans and D.C.

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The Impression

As the play ran for a course of three weeks, I had the pleasure to observe and film it on three separate occasions. I was able to document and analyze several performances – both as a performance text in relation to its various co(n)textual iterations. I draw on Anthony Webster's (2008) analysis of how Navajo poet Laura Tohe's performance of the ostensibly same poem across multiple performances reveals how different audiences respond to and impact the performance experience for both performers and audiences. Given Spoken Word's highly interactive audience format, I consider how an audience of outsiders can impact the vibe of the performance. For example, each night there were distinct audiences with completely different vibes. My first viewing was on a Sunday night, where the audience in attendance were few in number. Aside from me and a few friends that came in support of my work as well as in support of the artists, there were only a few parties present on this night. There were four additional clusters of people: a White mother-daughter duo sitting near the exit, three elderly White patrons siting behind my group, a Black family with several kids in the very back, and a Black mother-daughter duo in the front row. The mother from the last group turned out to be a reviewer of the show. The patrons were so few, that it was noticeable to all when the white mother grabbed her daughter's hand and left in anger during Droopy's "Speak American" poem.

It was this night that FGTM had a few elites in from the neighborhood who had little to no knowledge of Hip Hop and Spoken Word. Nor did they seem to be aware that the production aimed to impart a critical lesson about D.C. and America's racist history. I observed this from some of the patron's pre-show chatter. Their conversations revealed

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that these were regular theatergoers attending the various events playing on a given night. But, in this case, they had no idea of *this* show's content. I silently noted this as the person behind me –one of the three older White individuals – were reading the playbill aloud. I tried my best to hold my laughter as they questioned "What exactly is a B-Boy?" which is how the bio described Dwayne B. This is a known reference in the culture of Hip Hop as a male that does breakdancing. So, from their lack of knowledge, I could infer they did not possess cultural competence of Hip Hop let alone Spoken Word. They further pontificated on what they were expecting to see, seemingly nervous by mention of Hip Hop. But having paid their tickets, it seemed they were inclined and curious enough to stay – in spite of feeling this was not be a typical theatre-going experience.

As point of contrast, the other two nights were filled with D.C. artists, natives, as well as the SDDC "fam" or community members. As such, this event had a completely different "vibe," from the first night I observed. This was in large part due to members' competence in the diverse embedded performance and discourse practices, (i.e., Spoken Word, Black verbal and insult culture, D.C. histories / memories, etc.). Of most important, they were versed in the practices of call and response that are inherent to that of a Spoken Word event. Thus, their engagement fed back into the fold of the performance, completing the frame with the necessary interaction.

And while the show was jammed pack with different performances – some in the form of poetry, others in the form a rap – the poets deployed all to position themselves in intersectional ways. First, with respect to gender ideologies were *men* growing up with toxic forms of masculinity. Second with regard to race, they were *Black* men who have been deemed threats to society. Third, with respect to political economic

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factors, they were *marginalized* Black men witnessing the loss of their home space. The first few pieces within the production provided context for who they were as individuals, the center pieces focused on their individual passions (as performers, educators and activists), and the final segment focused on their experiences as Black men navigating love and loss. And throughout the entire performance, sandwiched between pieces, were recounted memories and other expressions of love of their hometowns. In this way abstract macro-sociological categories of social differentiation like race, ethnicity, gender, and socioeconomics were personalized in poetic expressive forms.

Embedded in their critiques of American racial ordering projects and accounts that illustrate the socio-political struggles of Black and Brown citizens are moments of revelation: the essence of "stripping" not only representative of loss but substantiating the need for men to cry. However, the narratives communicated through their performances were not solely melancholic in nature or focused on being disenfranchised. In fact, the poem "From Gumbo to Mumbo" – the foundational piece for which the production is named and serves as this chapter's main focus (see 7.2) – spoofs the Family Feud, a famous game show now hosted by Steve Harvey. This allusion and interdiscursive link was utilized to showcase inside-outsider conflicts produced by gentrification.

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Dwayne and Drew brilliantly present hefty topics: bullying, isolation, suicide, romance, love, fear, family, money, position, power, politics, friends without the all-too-familiar aggressive and ornery approach. Clearly, you have here two fully invested and developed Creatives who understand just how the influence of words spoken can either depict life or distort it. Their portrayal in dialogue with each other or a moments shared with Self as the main character, or as the actors state, "….watching Self, playing Self" translates so clearly.

The transitions from one scene to the next are fluid and unanticipated. The actors exit and re-enter from different parts of the theater, an intimate space that seats no more than 150, jumping off the stage or appearing into the aisles, switching off so that each has spotlight. At the end, the gentlemen graced us with Q&A time.

We discover that Drew, from New Orleans, has been in the DC area for almost 20 years teaching in schools and touring the nation as a proclaimed Spoken Word Artist. Dwayne, the DC native, breaks it down for the us what an authentic MUMBO Sauce looks and tastes like, contrary to those that have tried to appropriate the recipe in DC restaurants the best of it can only be found at a CarryOut. His favorite is the one on Good Hope Road SE.

I was inspired by these two Artists for bringing an artform that's often tucked away in late night coffee cafes or on college campuses.

From Gumbo to Mumbo is completely profanity FREE. No hints of it, beeps, blurs or filters that suggest the use or even the need for Foul Language. This is a rare interpretation of Urban Culture and it is why middle school aged students are encouraged to attend. *Recommended for everyone 10 and older.*

From Gumbo to Mumbo, written and performed by Drew Anderson and Dwayne Lawson-Brown . Director Duane Richards II . Set Designer Matthew J. Keenan . Lighting Designer Jason Arnold+ . Projections Designer Patrick Lord . Properties / Set Dressing Designer Cindy Landrum Jacobs . Costume Consultant Alison Samantha Johnson . Sound Consultant Gordon Nimmo-Smith . Assistant Director / Stage Manager Magenta Howard . Produced by PLAY-RA-KAH . Reviewed by Kayla Harley.

Figure 7.4 Review by Kayla Harley from D.C. TheaterScene.com.

All in all, Droopy and Crochet's production is evidence for how Spoken Word enables the development of modern-day griots – especially for those who have earned the respect for their skill to capture and recount noteworthy stories that serves as the "social glue" for the community. In effect, the production was quite successful, garnering a positive review on D.C.TheatreScene.com by Kayla Harley (see Figure 7.4 above) (Harley 2019). She states, "I was inspired by these two Artists for bringing an artform that's often tucked away in late night coffee cafes or on college campuses." By Harley's statements, the production will only continue to expand and bring D.C.'s story to more

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audiences, which is further proven by their repeat of FGTM but in Baltimore's Charm City Fringe Fest[14]. Per their response to all of the positive feedback, they plan to take this show to the Kennedy Center as well as on a national tour, with motivations to spread their love for the art forms and places that made them.

7.2 What is Place-making Exactly? (And what do poetics have to do with it?)

At its most basic level, the paradigm of place-making in urban planning can be described as the process of creating and establishing "place." However, a more in-depth description highlights the process as a form of redevelopment that seeks to embolden citizens to design and/or revitalize a community for maximum shared value (Project for Public Spaces). For city planning purposes, this process focuses on utilizing and drawing on the current infrastructure of a given neighborhood and creating (or revamping) public spaces with the intent of optimizing residents' overall health, contentment, and communal ties with these spaces and with other residents.

In many ways, this works to create an "urban character," or place identity, that first reflects the people that inhabit these areas and then, secondly, focused on redeveloping the edifices and streetscapes. Hence, per its proponents' perspective in urban planning, place-making is philosophy that specifies development *should* invite and take into account the locals and new residents that most likely will inhabit these spaces. This is the exact opposite of what D.C.'s development has proven to be (Prince 2016, Summer 2019). Place-making as a principle does have its critics – a concern that is beyond the scope of this study. But the intentions of reflecting the "soul" of a

[14] This event took place October 16-20, 2019 – post the conclusion of this study.

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community and the actual "doing" to (re)shape or (re)construct a place is the premise utilized here for this study.

When taking the basic underlying principle of place-making into account, the making of place is not just as an action but also the ways in which people talk about and embody their surroundings. In essence, people *make* places, through performative talk and coinciding and reoccurring actions. In other words, the creation of place is not something that happens once but it is a concept that is positioned and reaffirmed over and over again – what cross-event scholarship positions as identity "thickening" (Wortham 2004, Wortham and Reyes 2015). To fully deconstruct place-making as always semiotically and interdiscursively mediated through chained speech acts – one that is highly visible in Spoken Word performances in general but especially in FGTM, this section will delve more intently into one poem – along with the context provided in the initial rap – that is the namesake of this production.

Team Gumbo and Team Mumbo Play the Dozens

Drawing on Diss / Insult Culture embedded in AAL (Alim 2006, Green 2000, Smitherman 1977) – the two poets mock the commoditization of local fare in the context of gentrification. While the poets both speak to the gentrification happening in their home cities of Nawlins and D.C., and thus uses gumbo as the targeted symbol in the former context, the brand in questions is that of the infamous Mumbo Sauce for the latter case. (Yes, the one that Mayor Bowser put on blast and critiqued as overstated and underwhelming, and basically should not be inherently tied to D.C.) By doing so, they mock the commodification of the local fare using the AAL discourse practice of signification.

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Signifying is described as interactive verbal wordplay that weaves "highly stylized lying, joking, and carrying on with such virtuosity as to inject one's message with metaphor and eloquence while elevating one's social status parodying one's interlocutors or their attitudes and behaviors" (Rickford and Rickford 2000: 81). These poets construct their performance around the big battle of insults known as the Dozen, a speech genre found in AAL diss culture. By placing each other as outsiders – i.e., those who claim knowledge often without the historical knowledge – and then juxtaposing the ways in which they themselves are insiders – i.e., the gatekeepers of D.C. and New Orleans culture, they are able to use parody and joking to comment on the gentrification happening in their hometowns. For N'awlins of course Droopy represents gumbo as the targeted symbol in the former context, while Dwayne B. defends D.C.'s beloved Mumbo sauce (see chapter 4).

Figure 7.5: A comparative example of the Dozens and an excerpt from FGTM

And as depicted within Figure 7.5 as well as Tables 7.1 and 7.2 the yo' mama parallelism of the Dozen provides the micro-generic framing for this interaction within the hybrid performance production. Both Droopy and Dwayne B. proceed to deploy this genre of as interdiscursive practice to "call out" the commercialized / faux reproductions by those who try to emulate but fail to capture the signature taste of mumbo.

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Table 7.3: An example of the Dozens, a form of African American insult culture and signification.

Speaker 1:	Yo' mama so dumb, she thought a quarterback was a refund!
Audience:	O::h:::
Speaker 2:	Well, yo mama so hairy, it look like she got Buck Wheat in a headlock.
Audience:	O:::H:::!

Table 7.4. An excerpt of FGTM, showing the ways the Dozens is incorporated.

Speaker 1:	My gumbo taste like …
Audience:	*insert snaps or other cues*
Speaker 1:	But eh yo gumbo taste …
Audience:	*insert snaps or other cues*
Speaker 2:	Well, my mumbo¸ taste like …
Audience:	*insert snaps or other cues*
Speaker 2:	And see yo mumbo taste like …
Audience:	*insert snaps or other cues*

Thus, praises and disses were met with the same response expected by onlookers of the yo' mama jokes (i.e., the standard "O::h::") to indicate the diss was effective – or on point. The audience approval would also be shown through other call and response cues appropriate within a Spoken Word open context, which could be anything from a snap to a "Ya::s::," "Bars!," or "Amen!." While both poets equally represent their hometown with poetic prowess and heart, in the following section, the focus will highlight Dwayne B.'s (Crochet Kingpin) contributions as he represents D.C., the place this study is devoted to documenting.

Emblems at Work

Analyses of some of the performative tools that are available to these artists illustrate how place-making happens through spoken word performances. Spoken word poets evoke and then substantiate their versions of place through their expressions of "placehood" (a la reppin my hood). Both Droopy and Dwayne B. pour their souls into

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representing the best and worst aspects of the places they call home. In terms of the best, they evoke all of the affective and sensorial emblems of their cities as the "home" they are from and became who they are in, as situated in Agha's work (2003), including their homes' placenames, sounds, and tastes that are easily identifiable as qualities of both D.C. and New Orleans.

Where y'all from baby: Southeast!

The use of placenames in narrative performance has been observed as representing an intimate relationship (or kinship) with the spaces they index. Scholars note that they can be evocative of certain memories and position the speaker as staking a strong connection with the area (Basso 1988, Pagliai 2000). And while the term "southeast" (S.E.) in any general context would simply reference a geographic region or direction, in the District, it is a place with a controversial yet rich cultural history. As such, just mention of the area provokes a reaction for both insiders and outsiders alike. For the latter, while it is an area in gentrified transition, Southeast can represent a place of violence that is often avoided by "tourists" and/or those who are not familiar in navigating the area. But, for poet Dwayne B., who shares his ode to the area in FGTM, it is clearly embraced as his home.

Considering he uses such statements as a place where "bullet spray" or qualifiers like "you ain't neva lost a son in Southeast" he is not ignorant to dangers associated with the area. Simply put, he does not deny this aspect of its history. Nevertheless, he goes on to say that he "bleeds" Southeast, showing that despite the good, bad, and ugly, home is part of him. His reverence goes beyond depicting the individual poet's connection with the place; it also gives him "street cred" having survived and thrived in an area with its

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violent history and negative reputation. His naming and claiming of this space in public not only reframes the depiction of this area as being unimportant and in need of eradication, but his representation affirms that one person's "prime real estate" and "investment property" is another person's history, lifeblood, and thus identity.

Why is the S.E. part of D.C. significant even for those who live in other quadrants? The same could be asked of Southside, Chicago, or Compton, in Los Angeles County as collective representations of spaces indexical of blackness across the U.S. S.E., D.C. still one of the few places that is clearly and positively evaluated by D.C.'s Black and native residents. People speak these place names with pride. Not only is S.E., D.C. still one of the few places that are clearly associated with D.C.'s Black and native residents, staving off gentrification for some time, but it holds additional semiotic value related to pride of place as well. There are just certain blocks, neighborhoods, and cities that automatically evoke pride and a clear association with a particular neighborhood, region, state, or territory. These evocations of local pride can circulate more broadly through music and visual art forms, as places and their affective emblems become bundled and indexical of the concepts such as locality, authenticity, and Blackness. In turn, the popularization of such affective emblems might be reinforced through the ways cities attract tourism and situate themselves via marketing or appearance in pop culture.

However, within Hip Hop and Black culture, cities acquire their (in)famous reputation through shoutouts. For example, Atlantans, could not have survived the 1990s and early 2000s without hearing a reference to its "Zone 3" district – appearing in the films like *ATL*. Also, the area known as "Bankhead" is forever claimed by ATL rapper T.I. – a site with its own complicated history but popular enough to lend its name to a

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once popular Atlanta-based dance (the Bankhead bound"). And lastly, "SWATs" (or Southwest Atlanta) was / is an ingrained part of "ATLiens" vocabulary, as seen with Outkast and Goodie Mob. While even ATL's neighbor Decatur, GA (my hometown!) got its own shoutout and popular designation "The Dec" thanks to Ghetto Mafia. (And for the sake of authenticity I must incorporate my own personal shoutout to "The Dec!")

It should be noted, though, that reppin a particular place to involve place identity or native affiliations is not based on accuracy. This idea essentially means that a person can *claim* or acclaim a place when it appears in a shoutout – within a poem or rap – without actually being born and bred in that exact site (Dent 2009). Instead, the specific part can be used to index the general (or whole), especially if the localized placename has acquired recognition for the greater city, state, or region. In looking at other placenames that garnered much attention within The Culture, e.g., Magnolia Projects, Bankhead, Compton, Bronx, many of these areas are associated with violence and/or poverty. And as rappers and Spoken Word artists use their craft to espouse the troubles of or draw attention to their everyday struggles, it is clear why their surroundings would make an appearance or two in their lyrics and poems. However, these shoutout are as much about reclamation as it is about just proclamation of a designation. As seen with FGTM, Dwayne B.'s nod to S.E. invites a resounding response from other natives – either from that same area or at least aware of the song he utilizes. In other words, he prompts others' to "rep" their home territory even if it's only a testament to their ability to survive and thrive despite the tough rearing it provided. Hence, within this context, the placenames S.E. aligns itself with are not only about Washingtonian identity but also with resilience and unapologetic pride within The Culture.

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Go-Go Gone? Nah Moe!

While D.C.'s connection to its soundscape is a "far cry" – pun intended – from the Kaluli's translation of natural sounds into affective expressions (Feld 1996), what is consistent is that particular sounds evoke feelingful associations with memory and sentiments of place/home (Webster 2006). For D.C., the sound of home is found in their much maligned "native" art of GoGo. And as explained in chapter 4, gentrifiers have lobbied local officials to create and implement policies which seek to eradicate its existence. And as that chapter further revealed, many Natives refused to see its culture threatened, protesting with GoGo music, commemorating the form in their fashion, and evoking its essence in poetic form, as seen in FGTM. Thus, the very fact that Dwayne B. incorporates a moment of rhythmic b-boxing to immolate that sound of Go-Go is no accident. It was the very act of "creating space" for an art that has been displaced. His intentionality may simply be less about a protest of policy and more about eliciting a response by audience members, but either way, the fact that it resonates with Native audiences in the room is evidence of sounds with a deeper meaning.

In fact, when Crochet says "my gumbo taste like" and promptly begins a reproduction of GoGo that is easily identifiable by other Natives, he asserts his connection to the area. Furthermore, responders who immediately join in both authenticate his Nativehood as well as affirms their own. Of course, whether or not someone is fully *in*, in terms of knowing the musical genre versus just a funky beat, may be tough to tell. But the way Dwayne B. states that his mumbo tastes like GoGo is a powerful connection for both emblems as indexing the real D.C., i.e., the D.C. he wishes to celebrate and preserve.

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Having spent many years in the area, as a huge fan of Hip Hop and R&B, I can attest that GoGo is a form of music unlike any other. While it definitely showcases influences from other genres, the pitch and patterning of percussive sounds are quite distinct. Thus, whether or not the audience response indicates their recognition of the form, Dwayne B.'s inclusion is a moment to shoutout his love of home and to create a stage for the music that raised him. Nevertheless, its inclusion harkens back to the GoGo concerts of days past, was a statement that GoGo is in "la sangre" or the blood of the people (Wirtz 2014). Therefore, it ain't goin nowhere!

Mumbo, not Mum-Faux Sauce!

Recognizing authenticity as it pertains to mumbo sauce (and commercialized "mum-faux" version), FGTM effectively uses the power positioning of placemaking by the dissing failed attempts to reproduce the real D.C. version. Furthermore, by juxtaposing these attempts with being equated to the same welcoming as "racist cops" or at best described as "gentrification juice" – in honor of Snoop Dog's "gin and juice" track. This insult works to challenge those who have flooded the New Orleans and D.C. regions with the intent to imitate or even erase local / Black culture. Not only do these statements situate these folks as outsiders but their culture and appropriation as counterfeit and up for public mockery.

Even more noteworthy is the secondary part of the insult structure, where the focus now moves to the fo' real homegrown, authentic, native-approved versions of gumbo and mumbo. The secondary part of this diss is key here, because otherwise the focus would be on the problem alone – the imposing elites, their disrespect of local culture, and thus attempts to erase it (and its creators) from existence. But, instead, the

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artists point back to who and what is part of the real D.C., i.e., Chocolate City. By entextualizing the history, sounds, rhythms, flavors, landmarks and place-names that only Natives would know these artists not only (re)frame the narrative of what constitutes as authentic to place in both contexts – i.e., New Orleans and the District – but they further reinforce in the public imagination the histories, Natives, and culture that is under threat. For example, Crochet uses "b-boxing" – where a person mimics the sound of a drum machine with their mouth, to infuse rhythms that insiders will clearly recognize as GOGO. This genre of music is yet another local art form that has been pushed to the fringes, given its association with Black and the low-income population. And just a few lines later, he goes on to mention how "feds beat the street instead of us beatin our feet," the "beat yo feet" phrase refers to a dance said to have emerged out of the go-go scene (Quander 2018) – hence makes use another use of locality and insider knowledge.

By instituting these symbols of insiderness attached to D.C. culture, these artists not only celebrate the histories, Natives, and culture that is under threat, but they (re)frame the narrative of who and what are considered local to the area. For those gentrifiers who find themselves witness to a crowd of people engaging, singing along, and celebrating with artists when these references are mentioned, it becomes quite clear that they are not privy to said knowledge and therefore have become positioned as the outgroup members. For this moment, outgroup members are "placed" – whether consciously or unconscious by the artist – as onlookers whose experiences are not the status quo norms assigned cultural capital in this situation. Thus, elites finally are able to embody the minority experience as they have to reorient themselves to engage in

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unfamiliar customs, “google” or remain ignorant to an unfamiliar lexicon and histories, and/or become socialized into unfamiliar norms and traditions.

In short, FGTM performances remind some and inform others who the real local community members are and have been long before Whiteness invaded Chocolate City. So, when Summers (2019) states “for whom?” is place-making responsible for pleasing and attracting, “From Gumbo to Mumbo” challenges that “whom” by reminding the audience of who the original emplaced community has been, is, and will continue to be.

7.3 Art Interrupts Biz as Usual

While it may not have been Droopy and Dwayne B’s intention, FGTM showcased Spoken Word’s ability to shift the form-feeling of the space (i.e., the vibe) as well as “place” the disenfranchised in a position of power. By taking residence in a theatre in the heart of the city center, the production created a momentary contact zone. And given how gentrification results in the specialization of spaces and spatialization of races, whenever “the twain shall meet,” there is often a salient cultural clash. Furthermore, access to certain spaces becomes politicized and ingrained with power and class struggles. But, the form and content of FGTM sparked a much-needed education, conversation, and reorientation.

(Re)Defining (White) Public Space

Jane Hill (1998, 2013) has done substantial work on situating and describing what she labels “white public space.” She uses this term to reference the domain of public discourse and public spaces where “practices of a racializing hegemony, in which Whites are invisibly normal, and in which racialized populations are visibly marginal” are legitimized (682). Given how Whiteness has become enregistered as the behavioral

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standard for such spaces, social interactions in white public space are characterized by how minorities' behaviors are policed by expectations that pressure these groups to assimilate accordingly. This is definitely seen in entertainment venues and performance spaces – or even in graduations where certain forms of "celebration" are seen as undignified. Similarly, whereas traditional rules of theatre-going and being a proper audience member involve waiting for the official "end" of an act or play to applaud and otherwise being silent throughout which reflects Eurocentric participation structures, FGTM complete upends this notion.

Both poets offered a glimpse into the grief and anger experience by Natives in the city, which was an education for those who lack this awareness. Their content and post-discussion forum allowed people to discuss the impact of what they had engaged with on stage, hopefully prompting further dialogues by Natives and transplants alike. And, finally, they establish – if only for the two hours of the production – a slight reorientation toward both those who have been placed on the margins of D.C. society and those who enter it as privileged and entitled. The remainder of this chapter will showcase this feat by highlighting Spoken Word's ability to challenge the status quo, as the poets use the art form to substantiate their own agency and reorient labels of "outsider-ness" and "belonging." Hence, to fight back with the performative act of place-making and to do so in sites that 1) produce a contact zone, 2) provoke a "subtle" cultural clash, and 3) offer cultural critiques – all of which are dimensions of performance as social action. In short, FGTM is a clever, creative, and aesthetically intensified microcosm of the struggles of those who both survive and thrive in the midst of trauma and loss, while (re)claiming the land, or space, that is theirs.

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Operating on premises as established by Blommaert (2007), this example highlights the "agentive force" of the site of struggle produced through the emplacing performances of FGTM and the ways this force impacts audience participation (i.e., their authenticated execution and performance of cultural competence). Within the distinct FGTM performances that I observed, different linguistic ideologies associated with particular institutional norms or values were invoked by insider and outsider audiences. By making explicit the different orders of indexicality informing meaning-making, spoken word poets make explicit the clashing ideologies informing linguistic and discourse practice to invoke and re-orient participants to D.C, if momentarily, as a Native place, rather than a generic elite space.

As Blommaert explains, "multilingual individuals could become inarticulate and 'language-less' by moving from a space in which their linguistic resources were valued and recognized into one in which they didn't count as valuable and understandable" (2). While he was using this example in the context of migrant children being relocated to areas where their linguistic competence is redefined as "illiterate," as they must now acquire and execute competence in their new language, in the context of this study, I position "multilingual individuals" as those who are competent in various spaces and its embedded forms of participation. That is to say, those who have been socialized into the practice of being a theater-goer will understand how audiences are to engage with the stage in respectful ways – i.e., mostly in silence until the end of an act or the final curtain call. However, what happens when this audience visits an open mic event for the first time. In this environment, those who draw from their theater-going experiences will be

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challenged and thus they may be deemed “illiterate” when it comes to the new genre of activity.

However, what is even more interesting is when the edifice itself, and the indexical relationship between space and engagement, is not the sole means for dictating appropriate forms of participation. For example, with FGTM, a Spoken Word performance is taken to the theater stage. Where the theater calls for certain style of engagement, the practice of the art form requires a completely divergent form of participation, where there is ongoing, in-the-moment audible feedback. In this instance, there are competing -- or even conflicting -- orders of indexicality at play (Blommaert 2007:3), where a “good” user within the theater-going experience becomes a “bad” user within the Spoken Word poetry experience. Hence, what Blommaert refers to “moves in space” and its impact on competence is just as much a part of the linguistics-based conversations of ethnopoetics and performance as it is regarding migration and diaspora.

One example of this is seen as the poets and competent audience members consistently break the 4th wall, overriding the status quo. Recognizing that many would not understand this practice, the poets told me to encourage audience participation and feedback when present at the show. And of course, there were many people present in the audience who were unmovable and continued to honor the 4th wall. Though, it is also fair to say many were likely overwhelmed and unlearned in the practices of call and response participants, as seen with the trio seated behind me at the first performance I attended (see section 7.1). I even tried to speak loudly, providing a model of interaction that could serve as the encouragement for them to join in: to snap, yell, and respond to the performers as if they were part of the conversation. However, it was in this moment, I

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noted the reorientation for the few out-group attendees and thus how this entire experience was a critique of Whiteness in itself. For the competence that is required to authenticate oneself as privy to The Culture – aka Black culture, and specifically Spoken Word's culture, means moving beyond the norms embedded in Eurocentric values and customs.

Checks and Balances (Outsider ←→ Insider)

Consider Merriam Webster's definitions of "reorientation": to denote the ability 1) "to change the orientation or direction of (something or someone);" 2) "to reacquaint (someone, especially oneself) with a situation, environment, etc.; and 3) **"**to direct (something) toward the interests of a different group." Given the impression of FGTM previously discussed in section 7.1 as well as the way in which this section has demonstrated its ability to upend white public space practices, these definitions are quite fitting. The work of place-making performances like FGTM first inserts the gentrifiers into a performance frame of which they may be forced to relinquish control and interpretive "ownership" of the space, it (re)positions Natives and long-term residents as proprietors of the city, and – one can hope – will encourage people on both sides to re-see how they interact with their environment.

A key takeaway is that FGTM and other comparable performances – particularly those in residence in venues that attract elites and gentrifiers – serve to challenge the presumed hegemony asserted by dominant culture over public space. As the art form put the poets / performance in a position of power (i.e., on the stage, with a mic, and at center focus) it grants them agency and the ability to put elites "in their place" – pun intended – and to define the real D.C. as Chocolate City. Hence, these cultural productions provide a

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much needed "check and balances" to Whiteness, to the powers-that-be (i.e., policymakers in support of problematic redevelopment campaigns), and to those who infringe upon their home turf as rudely as a houseguest entering a neighbor's home and proceeding to help themselves to the fridge, settle in, and put their feet on the coffee table. In a sense, FGTM reminds some and informs others whose house it is, and therefore, elites are prompted to govern themselves as tourists or occupants, depending on one's permanence in the area. Overall, place-making performances within Spoken Word poetry is the very essence of performativity; for, as it is spoken, words (re)purpose the space / place, an action which then becomes the new reality.

7.4 Final Thoughts

When understanding the role of gentrification in the area, where Natives are placed as outsiders and the elites display an unwarranted and ahistorical ownership of the District, this "break down" of White public space and its ideologies is quite significant. FGTM's debut in a high-class area that has definitely witnessed more than its share of redevelopment – with its neighborhood brownstones now renovated to point they are priced out of most Native's budget – provides an in-the-moment challenge to D.C. gentrification. Those who have taken possession of the area enter the theatre expecting the status quo. But as more local, Black-owned venues close due to financial hardship, open mics are finding their ways to other types of venues. While, there is the traditional open mic backdrop: coffee shops, bookstores, and community centers, performances like FGTM are finding residences in playhouses that puts The Culture and its traditions in direct contact with elites.

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For FGTM, via its utilization of Spoken Word customs and participant configurations– if but for a moment – places its Native performers Crochet and long-term resident and Howard alum Droopy in the position of power to dictate norms. And in doing so, those who tend to operate as prescribing what is appropriate and customary (i.e., dominant culture) are now positioned as outsiders and thus needing to assimilate. And considering that FGTM is very much an overt critique of gentrification, the interactional elements offer a meta-analysis of D.C. local's opposition to the erasure of Black culture. This ironic shift is just one example of the ways in which cultural art forms and productions offer minorities not only a sense of agency to lay claim to their spaces and to position their history and culture as valuable, but they are also primed to counter the dominant ideologies that infringe upon them. FGTM offers a small bit of hope that with funding opportunities and support of local performance venues like the Keegan Theatre, some of Chocolate City and its influential art form.

Furthermore, during their performance in FGTM, they captured and expressed the mood of their time while creating a ceremonial space for D.C. Natives and residents to celebrate and own their identities and cultures. In doing so, they (re)purposed the traditional theatre venue and, for a moment, overturned the standard norms to authorize the dialogic style of a Spoken Word experience. This action along with utilizing in-group knowledge and language that situates their oppressors as guests or trespassers, deliberately othering these groups in the process, they (re)define place not only as a location, but as memories privy to only those who have contributed to their histories. And in doing so, they determine exactly who these gatekeepers are, and it is not the gentrifiers – unlike what the mayor, local media, and tourist-sponsored merch may suggest (see

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chapter 4). Through their roles as poets and, more specifically, modern-day griots (Hale 2007), they not only perform the roles of witnessing and reporting key moments in history – i.e., the undergoing change in D.C. – they advocate for their communities and reaffirm their mantra: Native We ***Been*** Here!

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CHAPTER 8

REFLECTIONS

8.1 A Brief Summary: What Place is / is not?

Observing both BBP and SDDC as well as following the stories of Native Washingtonians in D.C. have revealed so much in terms poetry, performance, resistance, and reclamation. This work is just a starting point to all that can be learned and what can be contributed to the fields of anthropology, linguistics, and urban planning studies. And even what has been unveiled here is a complex untangling of how (poetic) performances impact various perspectives of places within D.C.'s "performance-scape." In spite of these complexities, this work can simply be understood through three basic "take-ways."

1. **Place is not (always) a passive backdrop.**

And in the case of Spoken Word, places as interactional and material spaces can be evoked and engaged as the result of a unique participation framework that allows participants to "give honor and gratitude to the space." These practices convey that places and spaces have a presence and sentience that is felt and observed – findings that are salient and worth exploring.

2. **Place thrives via embodied histories and memories by its community members.**

This idea challenges that ways in which racialization and characterization of urbanity is conceived and understood in relation to place intimacy. Poets within the D.C.

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community reveal that urban folk have deep ties with their "lands" that are comparable to those in rural spaces. Thus, gentrification strips residents of their history and memory.when prioritizing profit over people. Nevertheless, as observed with Spoken Word culture, as SDDC – who claims that "SpitDat is not a building it's a people; it's movement," as long as the people of D.C. remain, so will Chocolate City – in body or in spirit.

3. **Places can be preserved through poetics and place-making performances.**

Spoken Word poetry as a genre by design favors creative interdiscursive performances, which serve to craft an atmosphere (or "vibe") that semiotically links to emblems of place, as well as to position its performer as visible and in power of a public conversation and allows artists to overturn the status quo of public white space. Furthermore, by evoking and embodying the placenames, flavors and sounds of home, place-making performances counter the erasures and cultural genocide that stem from toxic redevelopment campaigns.

In sum, these three points are, at minimum, what I hope this study conveys to its readers and to future scholars of ethnopoetics. From these findings, I hope other cultural productions, especially within urban space, can showcase how much performing / verbal arts and venues are just as much of a part of the social fabric and, therefore, infrastructure of cities. They cannot be understated in their capacity to shape, foster, and reflect the "soul" of a place. Therefore, they are key to anthropological studies, to urban studies, and to community members, especially those pushed to the fringes of society.

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8.2 Why Spoken Word Matters…

…to (Cultural and Linguistic) Anthropology?

Essentially, what this study shows is that place, while we understand it from the many scales of the physical infrastructure – from the setting / site, edifice, design, decor – is as much about the actual ambiance (i.e., feel or "soul") of a place. And in many ways, this can impact the interaction that occurs within any space as much as, if not more, than the ways in which a top-down analysis and semiotic interpretations of how space index or *mandates* activities. So, while a church can be an actual edifice that presupposes and situates appropriate ways of engaging within said space, the members and their actual connection to one another, the mood created by their practices, and their shared cultural knowledge of the activity can override the material aspects and design intentions. Thus, people – through their (verbal art) performances – can establishing a new norm or systems of appropriateness. In other words, understanding participants, their manners, rituals, and the ways in which they talk about, interact with and acknowledge spaces are key resources for understanding the correlation between places and performances.

Regarding how we are socialized to interpret categories of place from the top-down, observing a traditionally "public" event in one's home or an intimate open mic at a theatre can provide productive conversations about how audiences are impacted – especially in contact zones where cultural clashes ensue (e.g. in a gentrifying neighborhood). For example, Dwayne B. once mentioned in his narrative about the transition from the ECAC to the SpitDat Speakeasy, that there was a need to re-educate community members on how to enter the new frame of the community event and act within the guidelines of respect that the owner's home demand. This study did not have

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time to engage much with the Speakeasy, but Dwayne B. mentions that people "became comfortable" at the ECAC. When he reminded his SDDC-goers to respect the space, with Kemar's pushing for others to treat the event space as their home, this was actually challenged by an audience member who cautioned the danger of that by stating "No! Treat it like they are *entering* someone *else's* home!" What this tension conveys is there are also competing forms of competencies in place. What a person internalizes as appropriate depends on one's "home training," which can range drastically, to an almost OCD-level of care and to complete neglect.

Hence, "curators" of the energy of an event, such as an open mic's host(s), are *key* participants of the space and the ways in which appropriateness is realized. Both Pages and RealTalk mentions this term in separate interviews, making it a salient piece of evidence that also points back to who "owns" the space. In a sense, they not only define the modes for education and socialization that establishes the rules of engagement as well as police those who violate these rules, but they are also in charge of establishing and maintaining a certain mood / atmosphere. These entanglements of place, practices, and performance – particularly in what they convey in terms of community values and methods for socializing and authenticating certain manners of appropriateness – are useful conversations to both cultural and linguistic anthropologists. Spoken Word poetry's complex co-production of habitus / embodiment and emplacement, especially when events are shifted or displaced to new sites, can produce meaningful conversations to which both subfields can contribute.

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…to (Urban) Studies of Communities and Identity?

Where ethnopoetics observes emplacement from the phenomenological perspective, collaborative work with urban studies offers a unique position to explore verbal art traditions and their impact on urban centers, especially those undergoing gentrification like D.C. This form of scholarship cannot just document places and the ways in which they are racialized but also be applied by those policymakers who seek to counter toxic spatialization practices as well as preserve the history and "souls" of places. Hence, this study has been concerned with bridging questions of place-related design and policies with performance and poetics studies. The hope is to reveal that the nexus of the two can inform renewal projects that seek preemptive considerations of its populace as opposed to a posteriori responses and counteractions.

By considering the ways in residents (especially local artists) embody and experience places, as opposed to privileging outsiders' a priori knowledge, urban planning policymakers can help foster design aesthetics that reflects the history and local cultural as well as offer practical ways of building community gathering spaces. Furthermore, in working to protect cultural arts centers founded and utilized by grassroots organizations and art programs, like SDDC, art communities can be become a resources and potentially collaborative contributor towards positive placemaking-inspired redevelopment campaigns. Protecting artists and their art forms *ensures* the stories, memories, and expressive culture – the elements that also shape the "vibe" of places that attracts tourists and transplants – are protected as well.

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…to African Americans and other Marginalized Groups?

Cultural Significance and Societal Impact

Given the tensions conveyed throughout this study, particularly in chapters 4 and 5 and 7, this study shows that Spoken Word poetry is a verbal art tradition that is primed to be a performance of resistance. Through the art form's intrinsic affinity for depicting and prompting "here and now" relevancy, poets can speak to current events as well as address any political, social, cultural issues at play within their communities or society at large. Furthermore, because D.C.-based poets and venues have been observed as honoring its sites and felt attaches to their spaces (or place intimacy), they adopt an identity of indigeneity that evokes a narrative of land rights and ownership. Thus, they "protect and serve" their home space and culture.

When examined in a more nuanced fashion, these practices not only harken back to African / African Americans struggled of being denied places of ownership but also the spiritual traditions to preserve culture but also to evoke ancestral-like ties with spaces they inhabit. Seeing Spoken Word as a continuum of oral and cultural traditions as experience and practices by their predecessors are key conversations to understand the roots of heritage still at play. Thus, ethnopoetics (or even ethnomusiciology) that specifically that focuses on African American verbal arts traditions should collaborate in order to flesh out these connections.

Preservation and Advocacy of the (Oral) Arts

Veteran poet RealTalk Raps (AKA Brandon Alexander Williams) refers to himself as the "modern day griot." However, for the poets who consulted on this project, this research positions them *all* as skilled artists and as brilliant storytellers, specifically

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those who perform narratives of relevance to Black people. Therefore, they, too, engage within the griot tradition, i.e., performers who served as historians, advisors, diplomats, and spokespeople. By utilizing musical and verbal performances, these artists create artistic preservation of culture and history. Similar to Hale (2007) definitions, scholars agree that a griot's role is to "keep the past alive by remembering and articulating it for others." (www.bucknell.edu). This definition and explanation, in many ways, defines the purpose of Spoken Word poetry and the ways in which poets serve their community.

Communal Watering Hole

If nothing else, this work on Spoken Word in *this* context, confirms that it is an art form suited for preservation, advocacy, *and* community-building. Events like both BBP and SDDC weekly open mics offer a sense of belonging and group identity. It is important to note that the term "community" should be viewed in terms of a spectrum, not just a static and everlasting unit. Even if an individual only visits a given venue once and in passing, their connection with the Spoken Word community and to others in space is realized, even if for a moment. This is made possible by the fact that both BBP and SDDC create village-like communities, where membership does not require having intimate knowledge of the other. Instead, it is built on the practice and participation in the art form in the "here and now."

On one hand, there is the kind of community that is purported under the purpose of a specific venue's motives and brand. For example, BBP attempts to foster a somewhat temporal group identity via their incorporation of a tribal statement and merch that refers to members as a "tribe."

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Figure 8.1 A Piece of Art that Displays BBP's Tribal Statement.

So for this venue, there is not only a familiar connection with like-minded individuals who practice or enjoy Spoken Word but a (possibly brief) shared commitment to creating a safe space of all creeds, colors, and codes of beliefs (see Figure 8.1). On the other hand, for SDDC there is a sense of stability offered through persistent, intimate connections that allows for the formulation of cohesive group identity. When people return after long sabbaticals away, they often say that it feels like "coming home." Thus, there is the ability to recognize and come to know individuals on a personal level as well as by their poetry and commitment to the art form. In this case, people can function as a "family" of sorts.

Either way, spaces that offer meaningful engagement, whether they are brief or long-lasting encounters that develop into relationships over time. And thus, people can come to relay their works and, thus, a part of themselves with a sense of belonging and visibility that can be therapeutic as well – a therapy that is often needed by marginalized persons who suffer from trauma due to their race, ethnicity, gender, or sexuality.

Healing through Experiential Art

One of the most interesting descriptions of Spoken Word explains they ways in which poet must "strip" themselves and audiences should "feel" something – i.e., there is

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some level of transformation and release that happens as a result of these performances / interactions. While this study could not venture further into this connection, this work acknowledges how empowering performances of catharsis can be. Whether performing or hearing these types of stories, there can be some sense of "becoming" or "transforming" – e.g., from being a victim to becoming a survivor, from living isolated and closeted to finding community and freedom, or from being a passive observer to an activist for social change / justice.

In other words, Spoken Word poetry invites mindful acts of performativity that may also lead to "transformativity" (Butler 1988, Jackson 2002). For example, poet C. Thomas, the poet who penned "How to Gentrify Laundry," also expressed his insights on being a Black, gay male and the hardships he endured through his affiliations with Black and Christian communities. By sharing his story, he not only reclaimed his power by calling out (aka "putting on blast") anti-gay ideologies and placing homophobia on trial (Jones 2017), but he also invited others to heal from comparable ostracization. By presenting one's story with intentionality to create a sense of personhood or enact some part of themselves that has been critiqued, poets can also transform how people make sense of others within these identity categories.

Overall, what oral arts do is to go beyond scholarly viability and creative entertainment to offer "safe spaces." This process is similar to the ways in which African slaves found "freedom" under bondage and heavy surveillance of Slave owners. By preserving certain cultural performances and/or even embedding their traditions is other forms, Spoken Word culture and venues dedicated to this art offer the disenfranchised, at minimum, a mode of escape and, at best, a means of protest and and/or spaces they

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control. Thus, people come not only engage with the art form but to liberate themselves via sharing personal memories and bonding shared experiences. In doing so, members of society who often feel unheard and go unseen are given a voice and platform to position their ideas and voices as significant, with the other participants able to witness this transformation and validate this fact.

8.3 Where Do I/They Go From Here?

The I: Future Contributions and Implications

As with any study based on long-term ethnography, there are often too many findings to convey in one work. And this proved to be no different, offering so many details and observation that deserve further examination. Many of these discoveries speak to the complex relationship between commercialization of art and social or monetary capital. Furthermore, by examining an art form that fully divulges personal trauma and pursuits of healing my "antennae" were often pulled towards the complicated and, sometimes, controversial interactions when arts venues become therapy centers. These curiosities proved to be too complex to investigate in conjunction with other motives. Thus, the following sections describes opportunities for further contributions, either from the current data set or from expanded research endeavors.

Studies of "Authenticity"

One observation that surfaced regarding Spoken Word's value is that it is seemingly on track for an inevitable "come-up" – i.e., it is on track for entering the mainstream as a marketable and, therefore, profitable mode of entertainment. Such visibility offers a viability that has been pursued by its Spoken Word artists as well as

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scholars of AAL, including its oral art forms. However, does this mean that the verbal art tradition is subject to similar feats as seen by other co-opted art forms?

Spoken word veteran Pages Matam believes it is only a matter of time that the art form will meet that same fate as its predecessors. He stated, "as soon as White people figure out how to market this, it's over." While, any attempted exploitation does not equate to a successfully uptake of commodification and appropriation, it is understandable why Pages (and others) are ambivalent about wanting the art form placed "center stage" in terms of public awareness. And much of the fear is ingrained in uncertainties of *who* will receive proprietorship and how will that impact the way the art form is produced, packaged, and presented. In other words, will the verbal tradition remain true its "roots" – i.e., the culture and community that birthed this art form? Or, will it eventually become another hostage of appropriation, being praised for its social capital by outsiders (e.g., lingo with from Black Twitter or Hip Hop) while having negative connotations or limited profitability for in-group practitioners? The following sections highlights the "product" of commodification that is both currently at play and potentially at stake – matters worth observing in future studies.

Processes of Folklorization

Within the topic of folklorization there are several principles that situate the ways in which performances are observed, objectified, packaged, and distributed in current contexts and by particular groups, especially a dominant cultural group. In many ways, when a genre of performance is "folklorized" it is positioned as harkening back to bygone days and traditions, leading to certain processes of fetishization, ethnicization, exoticization, and commodification. It should be noted that for a performance or tradition

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to be folklorized it not necessarily entail that all of these processes must occur nor does it mean it will occur in the same way across all contexts. The process described here is similar to what ethnomusicologist Ruth Helloer-Tinoco (2005) positions in description of Viejitos dance. She states that "what is important to note is that … the Viejitos Dance was presented within performance frameworks as an 'authentic' and 'representative' artistic practice of the P'urhépecha people, establishing the dance as 'folklore' through processes that may be regarded as folklorization" (50). In this description, she explains the ways in which the process of folklorizing is the very act of *positioning* a form in ways that functions as folklore. Thus, there is this distancing and othering that point to bygone days but also that revel in the sense that aligning with an "other" through an "authentic" performance or artifact allows for a peek into "their world." In other words, it creates a being that is not of this time, this world, or this civilization. And by wanting these symbols that index a temporal entrance into the other's space and cultural practices, it produces the need to also romanticize and commodify said performances and artifact.

This process if very much at play with Spoken Word culture observed in D.C. For one, there is the temporal distancing that connect certain folk and norm with the "Chocolate City" AKA the "old D.C." But also it takes into consideration the older traditions of Black performance and culture as Spoken Word is part of the continuum of verbal art traditions that harken back to Africa, to Slavery, to Civil Rights, and to even the evolution of Hip Hop. Hence, the commodification of BBP allows those who would never enter or have access to, either because of lack awareness and cultural competence or confidence to enter said spaces. If but for a moment, these persons are allowed a brief window to "peer inside." And furthermore, this interest to connect with Spoken Word

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also (re)frames what is considered the most "authentic" representation of that art, in ways that will seem true enough to the culture but also palatable enough that out-group members will pay to be a part of it. Hence, there are many issues with authenticity and demands it places on the performers and performances.

Authenticity, Audience and Risk

There is an interesting question that surfaced as I observed the issues of accessibility as it relates to proximity and convenience: who will seek out "imitation" when the distance to "authentic" product or performance is less visible and/or inconvenient. In distinguishing BBP and SDDC, accessibility is probably one of the biggest markers of difference – as the former is a highly publicized chain that often attracts high-profile celebrities and government officials with the latter being a more low-profile, grassroots / community-oriented undertaking. Hence, one visiting the area could easily happen upon a BBP locations, notice it as a trendy restaurant, and feel comfortable walking without even being cognizant of or seeking out its open mic culture.

On the other hand, those who come to SDDC either know it by reputation or sought out the venue as someone is familiar with the art form and is looking specifically to engage with a reputable open mic series that focuses on the craft. That is not to say that poets / those with insider knowledge will not seek out BBP. In fact, its reputation as well as noticeable attention to ambiance and show-quality production will still draw those who use the stage to hone their skills as well as to engage with other artists. For BBP it is both/and, where there is an appeal to the "tourist" audience and community members alike. However, for SDDC, if a person is present some insider knowledge of the culture and art form is usually expected.

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Note, that when I utilize the term "tourist," I am borrowing from Lew's (1987) interpretation where he states that "tourists are, by definition, outsiders and places which are primarily intended for them tend to focus on security and the minimization of risk" thus "these safe attractions frequently occur in a staged, inauthentic and highly structured environment where tourists primarily relate to the promoted or advertised image, rather than direct experience of the site" (560). He utilizes MacCannell's (1976:lll) description of "marker involvement," to explain that the tourist less primed to seek out authenticity over risk, as the tourist is "more interested in the label that is attached to the attraction than the attraction itself" (561).

When it comes to seeking out cultural productions for a means of entertainment or cultural capital, convenience and accessibility can impact the ways in which an intangible good – i.e., an experience – is both marketed and to whom it appeals. And this notion includes as to how accessible does one want or need to be to maintain its viability. For BBP and SDDC, both may draw the tourist, an outsider just seeking to pass through in order to gain contact with said culture. But convenience can separate the kinds of tourists who will be drawn to certain spaces vs. those who seek a certain kind of authenticity. In short, convenience comes down to what one is not willing to risk, and that includes the fear of engaging with a new environment or group as well as being judged as an outsider.

For BBP, they make this risk almost negligible, for those who enter this space may not be aware of how to engage with Spoken Word per se, but having the open mic experience wrapped inside of fine dining and typical nightlight (with its bar and restaurant) will still draw a complete novice who does not want to risk the awkwardness

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of being an outsider. Furthermore, the diversity of the crowd that it draws, especially given that these locations are in visibly gentrified area, can appear as much "safer" for a tourist passing through. On the other hand, SDDC's location at the start of this study, the ECAC is accessible in that is available and reachable, but it off the beaten path. Thus, seeking to engage with this venue comes with a certain risk of the unknown.

Tourism and "Performed" Authenticity

Anthropologists have long questioned and/or critiqued the use of the term "authentic" as a description of cultural performances or artifacts. Linguistic anthropology – thanks to Bucholtz and Hall's (2005) work on identity – have deferred to using authentication as a measurement of interaction, as it suggests that one's performance is not only evaluated by members with demonstrated cultural competence but that such performances are not one-time occurrence. In fact, these performances can take multiple reproductions of competence before it is authenticated as appropriate. But what happens when there are no persons with cultural competence around or are economically disenfranchised and, therefore, are at the mercy using stereotypical images or interactions to procure a profit? Who then decides what is valid acts reproduction? And does absence or lack of agency make for greater incorporation of stereotypical artifacts and performances (i.e., essentialized and enregistered symbols and acts)?

For example, Cohen (1988) explains the relationship between tourism and performance of culture in his description of commoditization: "In particular, "colorful" local costumes and customs, rituals and feasts, and folk and ethnic arts become touristic services or commodities, as they come to be performed or produced for touristic consumption" (372). And in some cases, these "colorful" acts and artifacts are often

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derived from ceremonies and folk art that are based on exclusive experiences and interactions performed within a cultural group. Thus, reproduction of these community practices for outsiders presents a sort of conflict. Specifically in areas where tourism is the lifeblood of its economy, a local ethnic group may be tempted to reproduce and sell its sacred cultural ceremonies and symbols in order to perform and make accessible those acts and items that tourists seek in order to have an "authentic" cultural experience.

Cohen (1988) further explains this process of gearing cultural products towards an "external public" as an exploitative process, especially because it pressures the group to assess authenticity by its audiences' expectations and standards. Given that authenticity may be built on commercialized images that is marketed to attract such tourism and actually defy what would be an authenticated interaction, what is actually sold is reproduction of norms validated by incompetent actors. Thus, rituals and craft products may be significantly changed at the expense of meaning that is significant to its producers, while consumers leave believe they have had is valid.

Overall, this exchange grants consumers with the social capital of coming in contact with a rarely encountered group or rarely acquired commodity or experience – or their romanticized version of these, at least. For scholars like Greenwood (1988), these public-oriented performances strip the producers of their rights to establish authenticity and exclusivity and thus diminishes ownership over their community-based practices (26). Others believe, however, that authenticity emerges. In other words, a cultural act can be reproduces with consideration of public consumption (Medina 2003) -- i.e., take on a whole new meaning and motive that includes procuring both the economic capital as well as the public interest necessary to preserve a cultural group, which seems to be the

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case with BBP's growing popularity (Cohen 1988). As Cohen explains, commoditization mostly likely occurs when a culture is in decline (382) – or under threat, which is the case with D.C. poetry and impending gentrification. The question remains: if the commoditization of culture is an act of survival, does the shift of meaning and accessibility lead to more benefit than harm?

Economics and Ownership

Another question that arises when analyzing the relationship between business and arts, or the owners and sponsors venues and the artists who utilize them: who benefits, particularly when those being employed are more in need of sustenance than ensuring authenticity? Verbal art forms – while seeking to redefine the world – is clearly a limited tool of transformation, especially when the participants of said art lack the economic resources and power to institute change or even to govern their art. Goffman's (1981) framework of participation and his delineation of "speaker roles" can be applied to "economic roles" of producing art forms like Spoken Word, especially in terms of how to view each participant's said contribution and thus "ownership" of the art. In short, who own its products and thus deserves the profit? While the poets, on one level, are the faces (authors and even animators) of their performances, the event owners or sponsors (principals) maintain a vast amount of control in the ways in which the art form is evaluated, made accessible, and therefore rendered as effective.

Within the context of D.C., where the land and culture thrive off of the groundwork – i.e., economic and even cultural contributions – of African Americans, Spoken Word poetry is very much a reflection of that history and lineage. And especially now that the art form has proven a viable commodity that has resulted in huge success for

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BBP. But how does this translate as success for the artists / art form? On one hand, an art's "commodifiability" makes the art visible and of cultural relevance to outsiders – i.e., larger society as a whole. However, this visibility begs the question: to what degree does the process of commoditization and increase in entertainment value also render the forms as lacking "authenticity" or even practicality? While the poets themselves and the art form are being recognized, procuring a following (either on social media or in performances spaces), and even receiving compensation, how does that realize in terms of tangible transformation in the material world (e.g, marketability / validation, social capital, activism and social change)?

In many ways, the BBP model is praised as offering its participants (the poets) a quantifiable means of valuating their art form, especially where it is usually difficult and up to the artists to market, quantify/qualify, and generate capital. That said, to what extent this "price" is fair is still a question, especially given the ways in which smaller venues and artists find it difficult to establish their own foundation within the BBP-era. Hence, it has been described by some poets as "a benevolent monopoly."

On the other hand, under the guidance and protection of exclusivity, what SDDC makes up for in terms of "genuine" concentration on and production of the art, it lacks in terms of accessibility and ability to negotiate and stake its claim / territory. (This is contra to BBP's capability, which expands and establishes chains across the DMV, thus thriving within the ongoing redevelopment and impact of gentrification.) Given that the co-hosts mostly survive by utilizing spaces temporarily granted to them, SDDC's open mic series was / is at the mercy of market (demand / interest in their "product") and also more vulnerable and more susceptible to gentrification's impact – at least until it was moved

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to co-host Dwayne B's home (SpitDat Speakeasy). Thus, while SDDC may procure and maintain the art and its cultural capital, there are still real-world implications of not having economic capital and thus control over the spaces under which the performances take place, such as the performances being subjected to the principal's motives and beliefs about the artists, art form, and the space. In short, the trade-off that folkloric art must navigate speaks to the minority experience as a whole: how does one substantiate their claim without economic capital, and to what extent does procuring economic capital also risk cultural capital. And more importantly, is the risk worth it?

Expressive Culture as a Modality of Healing

Part of what I observed during my time with the Spoken Word community in D.C. is the proclivity for deep "sharing" of personal and communal trauma. And while I chose to focus on the gentrification overtaking D.C., there are other issues plaguing the Black community and that is their mental, emotional, and spiritual health – or lack thereof. Many people in my community use open mics / verbal art traditions as "sites" to express and expel their pain with a like-minded audience who can understand and share similar frustrations and pain. And once again, given Spoken Word's attention to timely matters (in 2018-2019), this meant the art's ability to delve into topics like Black Lives Matter (the criminalization and elimination of Black bodies), MeToo and TimesUp (violence towards women), Resist (45 administrations' racist rhetoric) as well as movements not yet given a hashtag. Thus, poets were able to address the toxic masculinity, homophobia, transphobia, and church trauma that is prevalent within the Black community.

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This ability to serve as space to address contentious matters and traumatic experience is why open mics are similar to other "healing circles" and "wailing rooms" that are necessary components of the Black experience – from Slave songs heard in the fields by my African ancestors to the sermonizin, prayin, and shoutin by "Colored church folk" fighting Jim Crow. As Spoken Word is a continuum of preserving community and inspiring Black resilience, I have my sights set on a complementary project(s) that would be inclusive of other sites of Black trauma narratives.

Where my dissertation fieldwork consisted of witnessing a disenfranchised community find "healing" via verbal artistry – a "stripping of oneself" Spoken Word artists use to celebrate and promote Black resiliency in the midst of persistent trauma – this practice is hardly a novel idea for the African American community. In fact, I seek to illustrate that Spoken Word is an extension of survival practices and communal cries that are showcased in other community spaces and art forms (e.g., the Black church and Hip Hop). Thus, this current work has room for expansion by first highlighting these open mic experiences as communal "wailing rooms" and "healing circles" for expressing and exposing transgenerational trauma embodied within the African American experience.

Furthermore, I hope to observe these practices in juxtaposition to what is an uprising of mental health discourse and advocacy within the Black community, where many Black celebrities and professionals are using their media platforms and fame to promote Western and specialized types of healing (i.e., behavioral health care inclusive of talk therapy and psychiatry). For example, Taraji P. Henson, has become a vocal advocate of reversing not only the stigma of these forms but to position mental healthcare and treatment as a cultural necessity. But what happens when new-age wisdom clashes

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with age-old traditions? For example, Taraji exclaims, “we can’t just pray it away” – “it” as a reference to depression and other mental illnesses. These judgements construct the self-reliant, do-it-yourself or “pray-it-away” mentalities as misconstrued acts of Black resiliency. Such beliefs both reproduces harm and counteracts recovery. Thus, what is revealed is a conflict between “professional” modalities and tools for expressing and healing trauma versus those that are part of African American cultural and verbal traditions. Thus, my future inquiry poses the following questions: 1) How do notions of personhood that are part of Western / “professional” modes of healing belie the communal approaches that are prevalent in African American culture? 2) How is one modality positioned in contra to the other, in terms of accessibility, legitimacy, quality, and productivity? How is each modality placed within the narrative(s) of the African American resilience – i.e., perceived as upholding or dismantling authenticated healing practices tied to Black culture and identity?

Overall these explorations of authenticity, ownership and healing are jumping off points to which more work can be done for ethnopoetics, African American studies, economic anthropology and medical anthropology. This dissertation, then, opens the gates to numerous examinations, those that I have dispelled briefly above as well as those I have yet to consider.

The They: A Story of Resistance & Resilience

As previously illustrated in chapter 4, Spoken Word is primed for social commentary and advocacy. However, as I explained my project to one local resident, I was taken aback by her response; she expressed that she believes the war on gentrification is already lost, explaining that it is “too late” to overturn at this point. In her

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words, was this sense that Spoken Word performances who attest Natives' displacement and work to situate their belonging were of no consequence. And while I usually approach my life and thus this research from a place of optimism, I must recognize the question that arises because of these sentiments: Given that Spoken Word poetry is used for comfort as well as profit while the plight of its patrons and Black neighbors continues, what does this mean for such performances?

To what extent it can galvanize and prompt true civic engagement – or observable victories that spark change – is unanswerable, at least by this study's findings. What has been observed, however, is that this verbal art tradition mimics its predecessors in that it empowers the disenfranchised, offers a cathartic recharge and community engagement, and procures resilience in spite of an oppressive existence. And like our ancestors who used other VATs in the same capacity, it is through expressions of loss, grief, and even outrage that they found the will to trudge forward, i.e., to live to fight another day. As I delved into realities of linguistic performances of the D.C. residents / poets and their actual impact on the outcomes of gentrification, the performative responses of place-making is not just evoking a new reality and provoking (potential) action, but it *creates* a new reality; Thus, it *is* action.

As scholars of performativity showcase (Butler 1988; Rosaldo 1982), it is not the label that produces identity categories (i.e., race, ethnicity, gender). Instead, it is the ongoing (re)productions of habits that then solidifies a that identity (Wortham and Reyes 2015). In other words, as Washingtonians *perform* their status as belonging, and every iteration of these performances serve to reconstruct their position as belonging. Thus, I would say to the despondent respondent, that these Spoken Word performances do not

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happen in a vacuum. They exist in a socio-cultural context where they operate alongside the DC Native Movement protests. And it is the totality and co-occurrence of verbal, cultural, and material reproductions of belonging that engenders Nativehood (and vice versa). Hence, these place-making Spoken Word performances *are* the embodied expressions of resistance and resilience – acts that declare: the fight is not yet won, but it is also not yet done.

As the saying goes – "necessity it the mother of invention," the need for survival has birthed so many communal and verbal practices that is linked to Black resiliency. And Spoken Word is no different. Given how it is performed and narrated by my community's cultural gatekeepers – i.e., modern day Griots – through this verbal art, their practices inspire Black folk to "keep on, keepin on." And the push against oppression by D.C. natives inspire other chocolate cities to "keep on pushin." Either way, it is up to those who perform within this tradition as well as those observe, listen, and are inspirited to change to seek out forward movement and improvement. I hope this glimpse of their story and performances at work inspires them to do just that!

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CHAPTER 9

EPILOGUE

9.1 Observing Loss from a Place of Empathy

The Personal Connection

From the erasure of the once prominent go-go scene to its signature mumbo sauce, the local culture, cuisine, and folklore of Chocolate City was clearly under threat. And next on the endangered list were the actual Black bodies that inhabited and influenced the District. As developers and elites' presence became more prevalent, the "Natives" – aka Washingtonians born and bred in the area – were positioned as a threat to the new and improved D.C. As gentrification removed mom and pop stores and housing developments in favor of corporations like Starbucks, Whole Foods, and Trader Joe's as well as eat-live-play high-rise residences – i.e., symbols of redevelopment, wealth, Whiteness, and hipsterdom – the harder it became to see the Black-owned and inhabited establishments that one would expect to see in the heart of Washington D.C.

Hence, watching as Natives fight to (re)establish, (re)claim, and (re)position these iconic symbols of place – i.e., those sounds, tastes, textures, placenames, and histories – that emplace these individuals as "native" to the local ecology has been incredibly emotional. Through my own attempts to "write out" my experiences through poetic verse as I engaged with the culture, I found more and more in connection to their narratives of trauma *and* resiliency. And thus, this research has been as much of a journey

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of personal reflection and rebirth post loss as well as the fight to take back my "place" in society, in academia, and in my own story. For some, a need to celebrate condiments, labels, and rhythmic expression may seems meaningless. But it is only through the impeding threat of erasure or loss of one's seemingly mundane possessions that one can understand the importance of such nostalgia and memory – concepts that often keep us connected to particular places, spaces and times as well as communities and histories. Hence, in following Washingontians' journeys, I have experienced my own moments of empowerment and healing – i.e., as an observant outsider. I only hope that this story reflect back to my consultants the ways in which their story has a larger impact and hopefully encourages them to continue their work It has been my honor and privilege to partner with the many artists and residents in documenting this season of not loss but of reclamation.

A Poet-Scholar in the Making?

In many ways, the process of participatory observation – specifically where I engaged in developing and presenting (or "sharing") my own poetry – validated the vulnerability, craftmanship, and courage required by this art form. It was a "stripping" indeed – one that revealed an interesting parallel between what I was observing, in terms of Washingtonians experiences at the time, and my own journey of navigating a personal loss. Because Spoken Word prompts an anchoring in the "here and now" – a chronotope that produces urgency, relevancy, and raw honesty – a poet at the mic often express pain that either is still fresh, being processed, or is applicable to others who are present. Hence, I was "forced" to examine existing emotional battles, display scars from past trauma, or expose wounds that were not fully healed. And considering that what mostly

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defined me during the moments of my fieldwork was having to navigate the end of my engagement and resultant displacement, it was a fortuitous (and sometime tortuous) irony that I submerged myself in a culture also grieving its own losses.

In fact, I do believe this overlap allowed me to produce many little works of poetry that not only afforded me a few snaps, but more importantly, it allowed me deeper understanding of how difficult such sharing can be because it *is* so personal. Hence, the right space, ambiance, and audience, is vital. I was grateful to have encountered a feeling of welcome and acceptance at both the SDDC speakeasy and BBP Anacostia.

9.2 Study of Hope?

When I first began my doctoral studies in Linguistics, I had a different kind of social justice project in mind. I was initially drawn to forensic sociolinguistics to study systematic biases in institutional settings, which critical scholars have called "white public space." In particular, I wanted to study cases where Black persons, serving as a witness for public testimony, were misrepresented in ways that perpetuate structural violence in legal settings, including other forms of confrontation with the law. The inciting event for this topic was the mistreatment of Rachel Jeantel (the star witness in Trayvon Martin's trial) as well as conversations surrounding the controversial and deadly "arrests" of individuals like Sandra Bland and Philando Castille. Quickly, my observations led me down a tortuous road, as I devoted hours to transcribing some of the racist sentiments spoken in the media in response to each incident.

Eventually, I realized that these recordings were traumatizing and potentially triggering to my readers. Instead, I opted to engage with practices for coping with trauma that also are creative, uplifting, and depict forms of Blackness that better represent Black

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experiences. It was then that I decided to combat my interest in Black language, Black bodies, and language / actions of the oppressor from a different angle. Instead, I would explore the ingenuity and cultural capital of our verbal traditions and the ways in which they position my community as storytellers and as activists. However, I had no idea that this would also reveal a larger story for Black people in predominantly Black cities and the ways in which this art form captures these stories of both oppression and resilience.

As an ATL-metro native who has seen its city lose that Atlanta "feel," I became deeply invested in the Washingtonian protest movements.

Perhaps this study is driven by my own wishes for my hometown's response, especially after seeing historically Black churches demolished to make way for a new stadium (Christian Today) seeing my own childhood home being "flipped" and marketed at price points that many Natives cannot afford.[15] Having left Atlanta in 2011 and floating back and forth to D.C. – a resident there from 2011 to 2014 and then from 2018 until 2020 – I have been able to observe the good, bad, and sometimes ugly aspects of Washingtonian life. Aside from being introduced to the conversations surrounding the "loss of Chocolate City" and the "DC Native movement," I became acquainted with Spoken Word poetry. And it is through the eyes of the poets, who utilized the art form's generic conventions to address gentrification and reclaim their cities, that I gained great insight. So, while this work is a study of loss, it is also a depiction of what beauty can

[15] The current mayor at the time of this study is Mayor Keisha Lance Bottoms. In 2020, she responded to rampant gentrification with a moratorium on development in the Westside area, an area where its residents have been complaining that they are being priced out of their homes (11Alive News). https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Kd_n7ZHZMJQ Kirkwood is one of these areas, and the sight of my childhood home.

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emerge when performance + (place – home) = resistance. This is a tribute to Washingtonians as well as Black persons in other "Chocolate cities" with the hope they get inspired to keep fighting the good fight!

9.3 A Tribute Haiku

What Happened to Chocolate City?!

The tourists may come,

Our footprints fade with time, but

Choc'late City lives!

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