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Town All Day: A Vibrant and Affective Ecology of Sound

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Town All Day: A Vibrant and Affective Ecology of Sound

By

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B.A., Seattle Pacific University, 2009

A thesis submitted to the
Faculty of the Graduate School of the
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This thesis entitled:
Town All Day: A Vibrant and Affective Ecology of Sound
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has been approved for the Department of Communication

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The final copy of this thesis has been examined by the signatories, and we
Find that both the content and the form meet acceptable presentation standards
Of scholarly work in the above mentioned discipline.
This thesis presents an urban ecology as a semi-bounded and permeable way of conceptualizing cities that encompasses the symbolic, material, and embodied while embracing vibrancy and affectiveness. By taking a communicative approach, and drawing on theories of publics and counter-publics, culture, sound, place, and the everyday, I argue that it is imperative that we understand the interplay between human and non-human agents. Using Seattle hip hop as a case study to demonstrate a sonic urban ecology, this project also forwards that sound is woven throughout urban ecologies as a tie that binds them together, holding fast in its many forms. It is not simply music, but the intrinsic rhythms, resonances, and intensities of sound that enable it to act as a unifying force amongst the human and nonhuman.
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CHAPTER 1
THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK AND METHODOLOGY

Introduction

The first day of my career as a graduate teaching assistant, I stepped into my first class of the day and anxiously began introducing myself to the students. Feeling out of place, both geographically and professionally, I found myself rambling a bit out of nervousness. Unsure of how much to tell them, I mentioned that I was from Seattle, and that I had spent time after college working in the music industry. Hardly expecting a response to these brief comments, I was startled when a student immediately yelled out, “Do you know Macklemore!??” I certainly knew who Macklemore was (a Seattle rapper), and I had in fact worked indirectly with him while living in Seattle, but I did not know him on any level that would warrant answering yes to that question. Moreover, I was surprised by the fact that I had managed to move nearly 1,500 miles from the place I had lived and worked in, only to be immediately reminded of what I had left behind. I had no idea that Macklemore was so well-known outside of the Northwest (a funny thought now, given his platinum status and recent Grammy nomination), nor did I think for a second that my students would be fans of his work.

Upon reflection, I said that I was aware of who Macklemore was, and in fact we shared many friends. Without elaborating much, I mentioned that many of my friends were deeply involved in the Seattle hip hop community, and that they represented a place I missed very much. When I had time to think for a moment after class, I smiled at the thought that something I was so fond of, even proud of, had managed to make its way halfway across the country. The place I
came from felt so connected, so tied together by music. My life had, in many very literal ways, been orchestrated by the symbolic, material, and embodied nature of music (Endres & Senda-Cook 2011), and it was all very specifically located in Seattle. The triad of the symbolic, material, and embodied is used by Endres and Senda-Cook to explicate a theory of place, and will be used as a framework for this project, as it is able to encompass the theoretical framework behind the three-fold methodology to follow in this project.

The more I thought about it, the more I realized that my support for local music was place-based in social, cultural, and sonic ways. The idea that my sense of place was, and continues to be, symbolic, material, and embodied will carry on throughout this project. In the symbolic sense, the music I associated with Seattle was not contained to Seattle and traveled to Boulder as a means of identification, appreciation, and shared meaning. Materially, the city of Seattle is used as an artifact for this project—a place I lived in, remember, and visit. Though it is gestured to through images, art, and maps, it still stands in its own right with elements like buildings, roads, and parks. This fusing of the human and nonhuman, of language and matter, will appear throughout this project, and is explained further in this chapter. For the purposes of this project, the embodiment can be found in my body, those who remain in Seattle, and the researching body that revisits the city and connects with other bodies.

This project reflects on my own history and how my experiences might translate to other cities and neighborhoods, and what it might look like to see cities as ecologies constituted by sound. There are social implications of the binding properties of sound that are applicable to other places. The goal of this project is to consider an ecology of sound that speaks to the cohesiveness of an urban community, drawing on theories of publics and counter-publics, culture, place, and the everyday. In using the term ecology, as opposed to simply importing
theories of place, publics and counter-publics, culture, and the everyday, this project will emphasize the overlapping and interplay between the human and the non-human, as well as the vibrancy and affect that are integral to an understanding of sound as constitutive of an urban ecology. Though the term has not been used much by communication scholars, especially as anything other than a reference to its biological meaning, I hope to explicate the rhetorical potential of an urban ecology premised on sound, which will be articulated throughout this chapter.

Urban ecologies have been theorized by an interdisciplinary confederation that includes, but is not limited to, urban planners, designers, geographers, land use experts, and ecologists. Ecologists have defined the field writ large as, “The scientific study of the processes influencing the distribution and abundance of organisms, the interactions among organisms, and the interactions between organisms and the transformation and flux of energy and matter” (Likens 1992, p. 8). This type of study is not limited to any particular scale, though until recently the idea of an “urban ecology” was largely rejected by ecologists because of the dominant role that humans played in it (McDonnell 2011). Currently, ecologists and others accept the study of the development of cities as a legitimate topic of ecological study, since the human impact on ecosystems is now undeniable. As ecologist McDonnell says, “…human actions have altered the distribution of organisms as well as the transformation and flux of energy and matter at global scales” (McDonnell et al. 2009, p. 8). The scientific approach to an urban ecology is applicable to this study so far as it provides a tangible, embodied understanding of the interplay between living organisms, and incorporates humans and nonhumans into the same ecosystems. What it does not include, however, is space for object agency, as its nonhuman actants are still living organisms. McDonnell offers the following definition of urban ecology, “Urban ecology
integrates both basic (i.e. fundamental) and applied (i.e. problem oriented), natural and social science research to explore and elucidate the multiple dimensions of urban ecosystems” (McDonnell 2011, p. 9). This project aims to incorporate not only living organisms, as urban ecologists do, but material objects as nonhuman agents as well. Where urban ecologists have focused on the importance of bodies, though perhaps not framing it that way themselves, this project will also include the material objects of an urban environment, as well as the symbolic ways in which urban ecologies are represented. This thesis will argue that one way that cities are symbolically represented is through sound. The role of nonhuman agency (of both the living and non-living) will be explained throughout this chapter.

Political scientist Jane Bennett offers a helpful way to think about the composition, implications, and complexity of political ecologies premised on vibrancy in matter, bodies, and symbols. In her book *Vibrant Matter*, as well as her larger project, Bennett emphasizes the importance of intersections where the human and nonhuman interact, overlap, and coexist. She compares political systems to natural ecosystems, and uses the term political ecologies to consider loosening “the tie between participation and human language use, encountering the world as a swarm of vibrant materials entering and leaving agentic assemblages” (Bennett 2010, p. 107). In the following passage she explains the importance of considering nonhuman agency within the larger context of political ecologies. Where Bennett’s focus is on the political implications of this perspective, my focus is on sound as the vibrant element that unites the ecology of a city.

Theories of democracy that assume a world of active subjects and passive objects begin to appear as thin descriptions at a time when the interactions between human, viral, animal, and technological bodies are becoming more and more intense. If human culture is inextricably enmeshed with vibrant, nonhuman agencies, and if human intentionality can be agentic only if accompanied by a vast entourage of nonhumans, then it seems that the appropriate unit of analysis
Bennett calls for new conceptions that take current theories of place and incorporate distributive agency, account for human and nonhuman interaction, and play with the idea that we cannot limit our theories by ignoring the fluidity and interplay found within what she terms political ecologies. Though we come from divergent disciplinary backgrounds, the argument to follow here is not wholly different than Bennett’s argument that vibrancy is the binding force of ecologies, as this project argues that sound is a vibrant force, and in turn can be the uniting element of ecologies.

The implications of sound as constitutive of urban ecologies are not only that there is a need within communication studies to address what it is that holds cities together, but that people experience sound in symbolic, material, and embodied ways (Endres & Senda-Cook 2011), much as they experience cities. Current theories of publics and counter-publics, culture, place, and the everyday all hint at this, but none quite encompass all that the term ecology can. Jenny Edbauer, perhaps the only rhetorician to take up the word ecology as a rhetorical construct as opposed to referencing its biological definition, uses the term to critique current uses of the rhetorical situation as limiting the various elements that comprise a situation into distinct and discrete categories. She makes a claim for use of a “rhetorical ecology” instead and says, “We must therefore consider whether our popular models reflect the fullness of rhetoric’s
operation in public. Rhetorical ecologies are co-ordinating processes, moving across the same social field and within shared structures of feeling” (Edbauer 2005, p. 20). Though Edbauer’s definition of a rhetorical ecology is closer to my employment of the term urban ecology than previous uses of the rhetorical situation, it still leaves out the materiality of cities in favor of processes. I agree with Edbauer’s emphasis on the fluidity and flux of rhetorical situations, and those terms will be used throughout this project, but social and political processes are not the entirety of what I argue should be encompassed by the term ecology. This project will draw on the aforementioned theories as they each have particular focuses that are helpful for understanding what an ecology looks like.

The vibrancy, or the thingness of sound, can be understood through our own embodied experience of it. When sound is created in a room, the number of bodies in the room can drastically change each person’s experience of the sound. Bodies soak up sound waves, instead of letting them bounce off like walls do. This absorption demonstrates not only the physicality of sound but also the permeability of our relationship with it. It can literally enter into our bodies in a way that makes it part of us, not just our identity or memory. “There is something about vibration and its resonating effects on material bodies that generates pleasure, a kind of immediate bodily satisfaction. For Darwin, this seems as close to a universal postulate as anything he claims: rhythm, vibration, resonance, is enjoyable and intensifying…” (Grosz 2008, p. 32). Viewing sound as vibrational, in Grosz’s mind, is also to see it as existing on a spectrum of intensity that can provoke, evoke, or seduce. Where Bennett talks about coalescing, I insert that sound is one of the primary means by which this occurs. Sound is inherently vibrant, and thus exists as the connective tissue of ecologies.
Just as vibrancy evokes a felt response in the physical, material sense, the affectiveness of sound conjures up a more visceral reaction. The two work in tandem, as they are both lesser-acknowledged elements of sound, at least within rhetorical studies, and often play off of one another to engender a more well-rounded understanding of, for the purposes of this project, urban ecologies. I will be offering a very brief description of affect that clearly ties to the description of vibrancy provided above. As a resident of Seattle, and someone who worked in the music industry there, I experienced both the vibrancy and affective forces at work in the city. The more deeply I experienced the city, the more engrained in its shapes and processes I became, the more tangible the matter around me felt. Everything in a city vibrates, but in a city like Seattle, it comes about in some very explicit ways. As I walked by music venues, the windows rattled with the pulsing of a heavy bass inside, and I could feel the rhythm of cars driving by me as their weight compressed the ground underneath. At the same time, looking at an old familiar building, walking a well-worn path, or watching a friend’s band play, would evoke a felt response unaccounted for by any physical descriptors. This affect, this intensity, is important to this project because it helps tie the human and nonhuman in ways that other theoretical approaches cannot.

Affect is the actualization of potentiality, the moment-by-moment flicker experienced as felt response.

*Affect arises in the midst of in-between-ness: in the capacities to act and be acted upon. Affect is an impingement or extrusion of a momentary or sometimes more sustained state of relation as well as the passage (and the duration of passage) of forces or intensities. That is, affect is found in those intensities that pass body to body (human, nonhuman, part-body, and otherwise), in those resonances that circulate about, between, and sometimes stick to bodies and worlds, and in the very passages or variations between these intensities and resonances themselves. Affect, at its most anthropomorphic, is the name we give to those forces—visceral forces beneath, alongside, or generally other than conscious knowing, vital forces insisting beyond emotion—that can serve to drive us toward movement, toward thought and extension, that can likewise suspend us (as if in*
I expect the particular sounds, or music, that I will be analyzing to move me, to evoke ‘visceral forces,’ and to ‘suspend’ me. As Massumi claims, “The thinking-feeling of dynamic sound-form effects an experience of vitality affect in lift-off from the body” (Massumi 2011, p. 145). The idea that sound is a thing that possesses power in vibrancy is inherently connected to its affectiveness. Much like space and place (explicated later in this chapter), they are two distinct ideas, yet are inseparable from each other.

Within the context of this project, sound will sometimes be used interchangeably with the term music. Given my personal experience and history, I will be using music to represent the larger idea of sound, as the tie that binds communities, neighborhoods, or entire cities together as ecologies. Music can exist as a symbolic representation, often through lyrics, and can articulate shared meaning that unites people in common understanding. Materially, music can take different forms, as it has inherent physical properties but can also be captured, recorded, and reproduced in a variety of tangible formats. Music is also material in its origins through the work of musicians, their performances, their practice spaces and neighborhoods. The Seattle hip hop scene is one of these material forms. It is embodied so far as it is a felt phenomenon, a force that can literally enter human bodies, bounce off walls, and seep into our everyday lives. Sound directs our movements, and can help us understand the material world. When I refer to music, I am talking about organized sound, or sound that has been manipulated into forms that we understand because of its time signatures, cadence, tempo, volume, and rhythm. Communication scholars have addressed music in its lyrical form (Smith 1980,
Knupp 1981, Cummings & Roy 2002, Purnell 2002, Gonzalez & Makay 1983), and have broached the idea of the music itself as a rhetorical force, but have not put ideas of sound or music in conversation with place, or as this project argues, ecologies.

In an effort to commemorate and specify the material influence of sound and music on my hometown, in this chapter I lay out a theoretical framework that is supported by the methodology and analysis to follow. The project will focus on the ways in which sound is constitutive of urban ecologies as material, symbolic, and embodied (Endres & Senda-Cook 2011). I will also argue for the constitutive nature of ecologies, drawing on existing theories of sound, publics and counter-publics, culture, place, and the everyday. Drawing from Habermassian public sphere theories that have been taken up by scholars inside and outside of rhetoric, I argue that although people are an integral part of ecologies, they are simply one element among many, and rhetorical theories of publics and counter-publics tend to be human-centric. The ideas encompassed in public sphere theories are a useful component of an ecology of sound, and will be explained further in this chapter, but their treatment of the sensory and the everyday does not account for sound as a vibrant and affective binding force. I will also briefly touch on cultural theories that provide an account of sub-culture, which, like public sphere theories, only partially explains the Seattle hip hop scene.

This chapter will also discuss theories of place while taking into account both cultural and human geography in conversation with communication scholarship, which attends to the symbolic, material, and embodied elements of place (Endres & Senda-Cook 2011). I will address the relationship between space and place, and make connections between geographic and communicative approaches. As noted earlier in this chapter,
place locates, connects, and identifies people well beyond its physical location. Place theory eliminates the weight of place as a single site on a map or a fixed interpretation of what a place is and how it works in the work of geographers and communication scholars. I also argue for use of the word ecology instead of the term place, as it is able to encompass more than what current theories of place have offered.

As well as attending to place, I gesture to theories of the everyday in order to tie place to experience. Just as rhetorical treatments of publics and counter-publics tend to be human-centered, they underestimate the value of sensory experience and the everyday ways in which we encounter it. Scholars such as de Certeau, Thrift, and Lefebvre remind us that the everyday is the cultural milieu in which publics, cultures, and places circulate and enable sound to contribute to the coherence of a community. Once this theoretical framework is laid out, I will provide a description of the methodology to follow.

**Toward a Sonic Theory of Urban Ecologies**

In order to begin an argument for urban ecologies (a term that exists as a subfield, as explained above, but not in the same way that this project uses it) as constituted by sound, I will first explicate what I mean by sound as it is treated by musicologists and cultural geographers. There is something profoundly affecting about sound. The way a train whistle or chord progression evokes particular emotions is so difficult to articulate it might be better left to poets. Although the argument for this thesis pertains to sound in its most broad sense as symbolic, material, and embodied (Endres & Senda-Cook 2011), I will be focusing on music as it encompasses both the affective dimension found in all sounds, as well as a discursive element, which points to the ways in which artists
construct their ecologies. For the purposes of this thesis I will give a very brief
description of musicology’s approach to sound, which has recently made the turn to
incorporate ideas of space and place, as well as cultural geography’s approach to sound,
which has tended to discuss sound only in relation to other topics such as place and
memory (Butler 2006, DeSilvey 2010). In addressing these non-communicative
disciplinary approaches to sound, I offer connections to ideas of place that have yet to be
made in communication scholarship but are helpful for understanding the ecological
nature of sound.

Musicologists have largely treated music as a field of study that attends to types,
regions, and technicalities. It was not until recently that the discipline really took a
critical approach into consideration. In the last decade or so, musicology has made a
move to embrace critical and cultural theories in ways that attend to issues of identity,
space, place, and memory (Whiteley 2004, Williams 2001). Although attention to space
and place in musicology is an exciting advancement, it is still in the beginning stages and
largely deals with space and place as providing social and cultural backdrops,
narrativized by music, and a form of both identity and industry construction (Whiteley
2004). This treatment relies on a simplified conception of space and place, which is an
issue also found in cultural geography.

Since our vernacular usage of the word place is most closely tied to a geographic
understanding, it is important to address how cultural and human geographers have
theorized place. Geographers have historically placed a large emphasis on place as a
rooted location, and prioritized it over mobility (Massey 1991, Massey 2005, Cresswell
2004). They have theorized about the importance of place, but it has been largely
dependent on a material understanding and they have not ventured into the symbolic 
nature of place until recently, with the exception of Yi-Fu Tuan, who was writing about 
space and place as far back as 1977. The idea was that “place matters” in regards to 
fields of study ranging from health to social protest, but its importance has been relegated 
to the location where things occur, not the occurrence itself (Kearns & Moon 2002).

More recently, Martin and Miller offered a much more nuanced understanding of 
place when, drawing on Lefebvre, they wrote, “places are not only shaped by the 
processes of capital. Places are also shaped through flows of signs and meanings that 
interact and are negotiated in specific locations” (Martin & Miller 2003). They also 
argue that place is an integral component of identity, and emphasize the importance of a 
sense of place as we commonly refer to it. It deals with a sense of privacy and belonging, 
and is at its core a meaningful location (Cresswell 2004). Place is the located production 
and consumption of meaning. Lastly, Cresswell brings in to play the idea of social 
behavior as a placed phenomenon, where everyday social behavior is either “in-place,” 
and reifying the status quo, or “out-of-place,” which is disruptive to the everyday. That 
cultural geographers have begun drawing on Lefebvre is telling, as rhetorical scholars 
have made a similar move (Ackerman 2003), which says to me that there is room for 
interdisciplinary conversation about place that can be fruitful for all involved.

When engaging in conversation about place, it is imperative to bring space into play as 
well. The concepts are intrinsically connected, and operate in tandem, though they are distinct in 
their own right. Though the focus of this thesis will be on place, it would be neglectful to not 
address space, as they are inherently distinct but interrelated. Space has been theorized as a void 
(Casey 1996, Cresswell 2004), social and political (re)production (Lefebvre 1991), ontological
territory (DeLanda 2006), and the sum of interrelationality (Deleuze 1987). What I will lay out here is a distillation of these ideas into a functional explanation of space that will serve to both compliment and contrast the idea of place. The main theory of place I draw on emphasizes the symbolic, material, and embodied aspects (Endres & Senda-Cook 2011), all of which factor into a sonic urban ecology as is explained in this chapter, and explored through the methodology to follow in this project.

There are two common misunderstandings of space. The first is that space refers to some sort of grand void, a vacuum without substance or consequence. This, however, is not the case, as space exists as a social production, processual by nature and laden with meaning. As Edward Casey asks, “Are we to believe that human experience starts from a mute and blank ‘space’ to which placial modifiers such as ‘near,’ ‘over there,’ ‘along that way,’ and ‘just here’ are added, sooner or later: presumably sooner in perception and later in culture?” (Casey 1996, p. 15). To answer his question: no, we should not acquiesce to the idea that there is nothing to space, though we should also not assume that space is infinite. Lefebvre claimed that space is an economic, social, and political production (Lefebvre 1991), while Hayden takes it a step farther by arguing that, “The production of space begins as soon as indigenous residents locate themselves in a particular landscape and begin the search for subsistence” (Hayden 1997, p. 20). Endres and Senda-Cook offer a rhetorical perspective on space as it, “…refers to a more general notion of how society and social practice are regulated (and sometimes disciplined) by spatial thinking (e.g., capitalist mode of production or gendered notions of private and public spaces)” (Endres & Senda-Cook 2011, p. 260).

The second common misunderstanding is that space necessarily precedes place. When one assumes that space is a substance-less void, it tends to follow that place is an instantiation of
space, that place is created \textit{from} space. However, this is not a “rib of Adam” scenario, and Casey rails against this misconception by arguing that in fact place “precedes knowledge of space” (Casey 1996). Casey’s argument borrows Kant’s claim that “all our knowledge begins with experience,” and advances the idea that if experience precedes knowledge, and experience is how we become aware of our emplacement, then we must become aware of place before space (Casey 1996). Once again, Endres and Senda-Cook offer an explanation of the relationship between space and place, “Although we characterize space as more general or abstract than place, we should not be tempted to assume that space is just a blank slate into which meaning is imbedded to form place. Rather, both space and place are socially constructed and imbued with meaning” (Endres & Senda-Cook 2011, p. 260).

The relationship between space and place is one of interrelationality and reliance on one another, yet one does not necessarily precede the other. Even more importantly, if space cannot account for experience, then for the purposes of this project, place is a more appropriate body of theory to draw on for sonic ecologies. The significance of experience and the everyday will be explicated throughout this chapter, and thus the focus on place. “If, according to Lefebvre, space is created through the flows, networks, and movements in the operation of capital, then place represents the interaction, interruption, or settling (however temporary) of flows in specific nodes” (Martin & Miller 2003). Each influences the other, and the interplay between the two is integral to an understanding of both as connected and distinct. Place is also able to address the three-pronged approach taken in this project of the symbolic, material, and embodied (Endres & Senda-Cook 2011), which makes it more applicable than theories of space. It takes into account the material aspects of a city as it looks at the physical structures that comprise these environments. The buildings, roads, and parks, are all encompassed within the material aspects
of place, just as the ways in which people represent place through artifacts functions as the symbolic. It is also important that theories of place take into account the physical bodies that occupy a place, as they experience the everyday and play an integral role in relationship with the nonhuman elements of a city.

This thesis will focus on a conception of place in service of an urban ecology premised on sound as a vibrant and affective force. I will begin with an overview of how rhetoricians have broached the concept of place, incorporate views from cultural geography, and eventually end with an understanding of urban ecologies that draws on theories of place but offers a way to incorporate sound as its constitutive force.

Much of the scholarship in the field of communication addressing place uses it as a means by which we can understand other topics such as social movements, memory, or identity (Endres & Senda-Cook 2011, Dickinson et al 2006, Dickinson 1997). Rarely is place the actual focus of the work, an issue I believe warrants attention. Communication scholars who discuss place have thus far argued that places themselves are inherently rhetorical. Traditional rhetorical assumptions about place were, as we are reminded by McKerrow, simply that space and place were outside forces that may influence discourse, yet they were not rhetorical artifacts on their own (McKerrow 1999). This explanation leaves much to be desired, not the least of which is the vibrancy and affective power found in place. Current rhetorical scholarship now has a slightly more nuanced understanding of place, which largely draws on Lefebvre, though with different results than geographers making a similar move.

Though one might be tempted to think of place as loci (i.e. rhetorical places) (Mortenson 2008, Dickinson 1997) or topoi (i.e. places of invention) (McKeon 1973,
Endres & Senda-Cook 2011), neither one gets at the meaning of place forwarded for this project. Loci “draw together a wide range of cultural and historical resources” (Dickinson 1997), while topoi refers to locations within arguments and lacks “concrete physical aspects” (Rubinelli 2006, Malpas 2012, Endres & Senda-Cook 2011). Both terms hint at pieces of a more robust conception of place, but do not encompass it in its entirety.

One concise explanation is that, “Place refers to specific locations (e.g., a city, a particular shopping mall, or a park) that are semi-bounded, a combination of material and symbolic qualities, and embodied” (Endres & Senda-Cook 2011, p. 259). This definition is helpful particularly within the context of this project, as it fits nicely with the idea of Seattle hip hop as an exemplar of how sound functions in place, and constitutes urban ecologies. In conceptualizing place as symbolic, material, and embodied, Endres and Senda-Cook allow for discursive representations, the materiality of cities, and the bodies that occupy them. This thesis argues that sound permeates each element, thus constituting a sonic urban ecology. Sound is material, symbolic, and embodied, and by looking at Seattle hip hop in particular we are able to see how place is not just the sum of parts, but an assemblage of overlapping and interrelated pieces. The term tends to evoke the addition of discrete pieces, whereas an assemblage (more accurate for this project) refers to non-discrete overlapping bits that are interrelated and permeable (DeLanda 2006). Rhetorical scholars have addressed physical places such as tattoo parlors, museums, and monuments, but thus far their work has set these places in relation to topics such as urban spaces, memory, or place in protest, not that place should be understood as constituted by sound.
In contrast to the idea that places are rhetorical only insofar as their meaning is discursively constructed, this project adopts the perspective that places themselves hold rhetorical power. As Endres and Senda-Cook explain, “Place is a rhetorical phenomenon. Instead of merely arguing that people make meanings for places through discourse, we argue that places, imbued with meaning and consequences, are rhetorical performances” (Endres & Senda-Cook 2011, p. 260, Casey 2006, Ethington 2007). For the purposes of this thesis, I will argue that a more current understanding of rhetoric might view it as a sense-making art, a means by which we understand the world around us. To be clear, I do not think that this understanding limits us to language, and in fact benefits from a wider understanding of what can be rhetorical. To say that a place is rhetorical, at least in this context, means that the construction of place (which may or may not include discursive elements) is imbued with meaning and “says” something. Dickinson et al refer to this “intersection of physical and cognitive landscapes” as “experiential landscapes” (Dickinson et al 2006). They include the sensory, the material, and the locational in their definition, which is essentially like Endres and Senda-Cook’s definition, except that Dickinson et al do not account for bodies, which Endres and Senda-Cook do. Both scholars attend to the fact that non-human agents have the ability to direct, organize, call, and seduce us in ways that humans cannot (or simply do not), which indicates that they are “saying” something.

The idea that nonhuman actants are rhetorical speaks to their agency, a concept that is crucial for this project not only because it allows for interaction between humans and nonhumans, but it speaks to the larger assemblage of an urban ecology that draws on vibrancy and affect. This is also important because it means that sound, as symbolic,
material, and embodied, has agency just as Bennett attributes agency to nonhuman agents in the passage quoted earlier in this chapter. She offers worms as an example of nonhuman actants within a natural ecosystem that possess the power to both perpetuate and disrupt the system depending on the amount of agency they have and the way in which it is put to use. Bennett’s notion of ecology embraces the tiny and the grand, as she has also put it to use discussing the east coast electrical grid.

Perhaps the main difference between how rhetoricians (Endres & Senda-Cook 2011, Dickinson 1997) and geographers (Tuan 1977, Cresswell 2004) have treated theories of place is that within communication scholarship place is not seen as an instantiation of space. Endres and Senda-Cook, as well as other rhetoricians, attend to space and place as separate but interrelated phenomena, which is a closer representation of what Lefebvre argued for. Geographers, to my reading, sometimes see space as location without meaning, and place as location imbued with meaning (Cresswell 2004). The implication of this understanding is that it is highly human-centric and posits that people are what grant meaning to space and without people there would be no place to speak of. This is troublesome to me, as it lacks an understanding of the interplay and permeability of our world, and fails to acknowledge the possibility that things have meaning without placing humans at the top of an agentic hierarchy. Scholars that have, to date, formed theories of place (as well as publics, counter-publics, and cultures and sub-culture) are arguing that these things are essentially verbally constructed, which in turn makes them essentially human. People certainly play an integral role in the construction of place, but they are not the be-all-end-all.

Another distinction between communication and geographic theories about place is that geographers such as Tuan and Cresswell emphasize the importance of experience in conceptions
of place, a claim that is more implicitly made in communication scholarship. As previously mentioned, Kant’s claim that experience precedes knowledge is helpful for thinking about the importance of place, and Tuan makes a similar argument. Tuan’s explanation of experience is especially helpful here because it can serve as the bridge for communication scholars between a traditional discursive approach to rhetoric and a perspective that leaves room for things, spaces, and places to be rhetorical. We experience rhetoric, it is not just the language used that impacts us, but there is a material agency of things that act upon us. In this way, we can experience place.

As we exist in ecologies, we experience the everyday as something largely dependent on place. One way in which we understand this everyday place-ness is through the acting out of it. The ways and modes by which we experience place have an enormous impact on our understanding of it. Though we idealize and commodify the skyline, the epic panorama, the way we most frequently experience places is on the ground. We “blindly” walk, drive, bicycle, or otherwise maneuver our way to, through, and from places in a way that defies rigid social systems (de Certeau 1993). De Certeau makes the argument that walking in the city is the most true form of experience, and that people cannot see the city as they experience it. A god’s eye view, or the panorama, provides vision without experience. Thus, people construct the city as they walk in it. He compares walking directly to language, as they “are both creative acts where you can improvise, make connections, take short cuts, take thousands of decisions in the present” (Butler 2006, p. 894). This understanding of our everyday experience is highly rhetorical, seeing the city as a textual form.

Though de Certeau’s attempts at theorizing the ‘evasive everydayness’ (Morris 1998) are limited due to a heavy emphasis on a ‘text-based model of representation’ and a limited
archetypal explanation of how walking is people’s primary mode of movement (Thrift 2004), she
does begin an important conversation. It is reductionist to say that we live in a post-pedestrian
city, and there are moves in urban centers to return to an emphasis on walking (or cycling) as a
practical and environmentally friendly means of transport, but driving is still an integral way in
which people experience the city. In the fourth chapter of this thesis I will address both the
pedestrian and non-pedestrian ways in which I experienced Seattle, nodding to de Certeau and
Thrift in the process.

It is through driving that Thrift picks up and expands de Certeau’s argument to discuss
the importance of driving in what he argues is a post-pedestrian society. He envisions driving as
a form of embodiment, and cars as extensions of their human drivers. Both authors, although
neither says it explicitly, are attempting to get at the ways in which people interact or play with
place.

A different approach to this interaction with place can be seen in Debord’s *Theory of the
Dérive*, in which he explains,

> In a dérive one or more persons during a certain period drop their usual motives
> for work and action, their relations, their work and leisure activities, and let
> themselves be drawn by the attractions of the terrain and the encounters they find
> there. The element of chance is less determinant than one might think: from the
dérive point of view cities have a psychogeographical relief, with constant
currants, fixed points and vortexes which strongly discourage entry or exit from
certain zones. (Debord 1981)

It might seem as though the aformentioned theories require a physical place in which
people can choose to move, but this thesis proposes that in fact sound can serve as an articulation
of place, a way in which a city is constituted and something we experience. Through both a
mental and physical engagement, we can interact with sound in a way that indicates its place-
ness.
Despite the fact that it is an oversimplification of Lefebvre (he did not argue that space was a pre-place void), viewing place as the instantiation of space enables a slightly more simplified understanding of place that might be helpful in some contexts. Despite an appreciation and attempted integration of the non-human, we are limited to a human perspective and a human lived experienced. Perhaps this is where our drive to systematize comes from, but our own everyday is all we have. We cannot pretend to know what the everyday would be like absent of human presence, nor can we fully understand our role as it might be seen by any other living beings. What we can do, however, is make an effort to understand place as it exists as a rhetorical ecology, assuming a distributed agency that allows us to account for human experience. Place “is the terrain where basic social practices ... are lived out. Place is where everyday life is situated” (Merrifield 1993 as quoted in Martin & Miller 2003). As geographer Yi-Fu Tuan explains, “Experience thus implies the ability to learn from what one has undergone. To experience is to learn; it means acting on the given and creating out of the given. The given cannot be known in itself. What can be known is a reality that is a construct of experience, a creation of feeling and thought” (Tuan 1977, p. 9). Communication scholars are inherently concerned with human experience, and Tuan’s explanation of experience fits nicely within an understanding of place that, I argue, is rhetorical in nature.

Part of understanding the thingness of sound as a vibrant and affective force requires acknowledging the materiality of sound as a physical phenomenon. Anyone who has felt the physical vibration of music knows this material embodiment well, and the way in which it can direct. Sound is vibrant, both in this physical sense and its
power. “Things lure us, provoke us, direct us, charm, or hex us. The voice that is heard is only in this singular material thing, which we come upon by chance” (Lingis 2009, p. 274). It is possible to view sound as possessing (or being possessed by) an “energetic substantiality,” a thing of glorious potentiality (Bennett 2004). I would like to make it clear that I do not believe that humans are what grant sound and music its agency, and that we can understand the power of sound through a distributive lens that rejects a hierarchical structure of agency (Connolly 2011). Bennett describes this non-hierarchical conception of agency when she says, “…to acknowledge nonhuman materialities as participants in a political ecology is not to claim that everything is always a participant, or that all participants are alike. Persons, worms, leaves, bacteria, metals, and hurricanes have different types and degrees of power, just as different persons have different types and degrees of power…” (Bennett 2010, p. 108). As Bennett explains, it is not that a nonhuman actant has the same type or degree of power as a person, but it does have power that must be acknowledged in order to understand our interaction with it and the ways in which it can act on us.

This affective and vibrant power of sound can also be seen in its accessibility. As Grosz says, “Of all the arts, music is the most immediately moving, the most visceral and contagious in its effects, the form that requires the least formal or musical education or background knowledge for appreciation…Music has long been recognized as the most seductive of the arts, the one that most immediately enhances a sense of well-being, the art that most directly enchants (or equally infuriates)” (Grosz 2008, p. 29). We are frequently at the mercy of sound and music in a way that we are loath to acknowledge.
Thus, it can serve as an organizing force that binds people together into communities, neighborhoods, and cities.

In looking at the construction of an urban ecology, it is helpful to draw on rhetorical public sphere theories as they look at the discursive groups of people, which are an integral element of ecologies. In order to understand the interplay between humans and nonhuman actants, one must get a grasp on how the human element has been theorized. What follows is a brief discussion of publics and counter-publics as they have been addressed by rhetoricians. When it comes to discussing discursive groups, rhetoricians prefer the terms public and counter-public as opposed to discursive communities. There is a lineage of rhetorical theorizing on the subject(s) that begins in the mid 1980s, frequently drawing on Habermas’ conceptualization of the “communicative public sphere,” and continues today with scholars like Michael Warner. This thesis will situate the terms public and counter-public within the larger project, and will offer a brief overview of the concepts and their inherent relevance to this thesis, as well as their connection to ideas of culture and subculture. More broadly, the idea of a sonic urban ecology forwarded in this thesis draws on these theories to address the symbolic, material, and embodied framework of the larger project.

As publics were originally imagined, the public was a bourgeois notion of all people “within the field in question” (Warner 2002). This was not limited by scale, and could indicate anything from a school to a nation (Warner 2002). As Warner points out, to speak of a public indicates that there are others. In rhetorical discourses, these “others” are counter-publics, a term that has shifted in meaning significantly over the last two decades. Early on, counter-publics were thought simply to be discursive groups, which formed in explicit opposition to the public.
Counter-publics served as a way to address the existence of difference, though not on an individual level.

As critical scholarship took up the idea, however, counter-publics became associated with a means for the oppressed to express dissent and disrupt hegemonic power. Counter-publics were not just oppositional groups, but held emancipatory power through the dialectic of serving as “spaces of withdrawal and regroupment” while also functioning “as bases and training grounds for agitational activities directed toward wider publics” (Fraser 1992). Felski framed counter-publics as an expression of “oppositional identity” (Felski 1989), which correlated with Fraser’s claim that counter-publics serve a dual purpose—withdrawal and publicity.

Moving forward from the aforementioned critical approaches, I take up Michael Warner’s framework for understanding publics, and in turn, counter-publics. Warner’s conceptualization of publics and counter-publics is particularly helpful for this project as it makes a simpler claim about what constitutes a counter-public. Though in certain contexts Felski’s two-pronged approach might be more effective, here it is easier to see the Seattle hip hop scene as against a larger public, though not entirely separate from it. Warner offers that publics are self-organized through discourse, “a relation among strangers,” both personal and impersonal in regards to public speech, are constituted through the attention of members, and are a “social space created by the reflexive circulation of discourse” (Warner 2002, p. 62). At first glance this framework does not leave much room for the existence of counter-publics, as it seems to be all encompassing. However, in this instance Asen and Warner are in relative agreement about what constitutes a counter-public. While Asen claims, “Counterpublic signals critical awareness that participants in the public sphere sometimes join with others and set themselves against wider publics and their discursive exclusions” (Asen 2000, p. 426), Warner says,
“…because they differ markedly in one way or another from the premises that allow the dominant culture to understand itself as a public, they have come to be called counterpublics” (Warner 2002, p. 81). In essence, they both make the claim that counter-publics come to exist in explicit discursive contrast to the dominant hegemonic public discourse. Though these explanations of publics are human-centered, they do broach the symbolic (discourses), material (products), and embodied (people) elements that frame this project, though I prefer the term ecology over public for what its ability to encompass vibrancy and affect in a way that public sphere theories do not.

Within the context of this project it is most appropriate to view the public sphere as Hauser describes it, “a reticulate structure,” an interconnected web of discursive spaces with permeable boundaries (Hauser 1998, 1999). Thus, counter-publics are not simply reducible to distinct groups, but are instead interwoven and overlapping. This bears a resemblance to the way that Bennett talks about vibrant materials in ecologies, the main difference being that Hauser’s claim is human-centric. In arguing that the public sphere is more than just a discursive community, Hauser also claims that it is constituted by experience and the senses, or for the purposes of this theoretical frame, sound and the economy of music. As a result, Hauser’s articulation of the public sphere is helpful for this project but is still distinct from the larger argument I make here since it is human-centric. This project aims to take this understanding of publics and counter-publics and place it into a larger assemblage of an urban ecology that is not limited to human agency and experience.

Often, the tendency in counter-public theory has been to reduce counter-publics to particular places, people, or topics (Asen 2000). The assumption being that there must be a common thread that unites people into forming a counter-public. Asen warns against this
inclination, pointing out the problematic nature of such an assumption, and the potential consequences of reductionism. Such reductionism fails to acknowledge that people may occupy multiple counter-publics, and encourages a false binary between publics and counter-publics.

One problematic in introducing the idea of publics and counter-publics in this project is that the framing of my exemplar as the “Seattle hip-hop community” suggests a counter-public based on a people, a topic, and a place. In order to avoid such reductionism, it is important to note the permeability of this particular assemblage, as well as the role of the counter-public within the larger framework of this project. I must simultaneously acknowledge the problematic of “picking” a counter-public to study, while also finding a pragmatic way in which to exemplify the platial constitutive nature of sound. As Asen warns, it is reductionist to simply pin down a counter-public based on a place, people, or topic. While I am naming my site as the Seattle hip hop scene (which would appear to include a place, people, and topic), I acknowledge that this entity exists in flux, with permeable boundaries that are non-discrete. This project seeks to treat the Seattle hip hop community as a counter-public, without reducing it to its place, people, or topical identity. It is not entirely reliant on those things, but an assemblage of many elements to create a place constituted by sound.

To be clear, for the purposes of this project I will be looking at the counter-public of Seattle hip hop, a distinct but not entirely separate group that operates both outside of, in relation to, and within many surrounding and overlapping publics and counter-publics. It is not so easy to pin down as it may seem given my naming of it, though such naming is a necessary evil of discussing the importance of this particular counter-public as a means for understanding an urban ecology. The counter-public discourse is just one element of the larger assemblage of place that traverses discursive, material, and sensory
terrain. For this thesis, I will attempt to interpret differently the human-centric bias in the rhetoric of publics and counter-publics in order to construct a larger assemblage that is open to distributive agency, affect, and vibrancy.

Though there is a historical discord between cultural studies and rhetoric, the similarities between ideas about publics and counter-publics, and the ideas of culture and subculture are clear and are worth mentioning for the purposes of this project. The field of rhetoric has taken a cultural turn as of late, though the uptake of the terms culture and cultural has gone in a couple of directions.

In *At The Intersection*, Thomas Rosteck argues that one of the biggest issues surrounding the idea of culture in rhetorical studies is that it has not appeared regularly, and when it has appeared it is often used as a taken-for-granted, used to mean anything from a shared value to general situation or context (Rosteck 1999). This is a problematic usage at best, as it glosses over the term and focuses on the particular to the point of ignoring the constitutive nature of texts. Similarly, in *Cultural Studies in the Future Tense*, Lawrence Grossberg argues that much of the recent work done under the umbrella of cultural studies has become lazy and inadequate because it makes assumptions about its objects of study, methodologies, and theories (Grossberg 2010). Grossberg argues that scholars cannot simply assume that a group they see as preexisting constitutes a “culture,” and they must establish what constitutes that particular culture as well as the particular ways in which that culture should be studied. This is a similar concern to Asen’s—they are both arguing that one cannot simply pin down a group, whether they refer to it as a counter-public or a sub-culture, that is assumed to exist.

Rosteck’s solution to the problems he sees as existing within the rhetorical field’s use of culture is to develop a practice that “would understand both that rhetorical discourse represents
the shared meanings of a particular society in history and that such discourse is itself a cultural practice that shapes history. In short, a revitalized sense of culture might bridge the apparent gap between text and context…” (Rosteck 1999). It is hardly new to say that rhetorical studies could do well to attempt to cover both the textual and the contextual (McGee 1985, Bitzer 1968, Biesecker 1989), and Rosteck offers little more in theorizing how exactly it is rhetorical scholars should define culture.

Following this, Grossberg has accused communication scholars who deal with culture of overlooking social processes and the material world in favor of what are essentially textual representations of what we assume to be culture (Grossberg 2010). In addressing this concern, Sloop and Olsen call for a more nuanced usage of the word culture within rhetorical studies, one that closely aligns with the aforementioned understanding of publics and counter-publics, and helps bridge the gap between these ideas and the conceptions of place to follow. Sloop and Olsen define the rhetorical use of culture as, “the circulation of meanings and pleasures that provides the materials out of which identity and knowledge can be (temporarily) fixed” (Sloop & Olsen 1999). One helpful piece of this definition of culture is that it takes into account both the material and the symbolic, without privileging either. It also emphasizes the fluidity and flux of culture, a significance also brought into current definitions of publics and counter-publics. This constantly changing nature of culture can at best be, as Sloop and Olsen argue, temporarily fixed, which requires rhetoricians to acknowledge either the fleeting nature of their work, or theorize in a way that accounts for fluctuation.

The Seattle hip hop community both circulates discourses and produces sounds that do not fit within the dominant discourses of mainstream hip hop, resulting in material cultural products that (re)produce it. The fixity of the culture is temporary by nature, and
is always changing. For example, the face of Seattle hip hop has changed drastically since Sir Mix-A-Lot days, and has transformed into a more experimentally-oriented community that is producing music that is often far outside the scope of mainstream hip hop. Given this explanation, it can be seen as a sub-culture that is in flux, swirling aside, but not entirely separate from the more dominant hip hop culture. There is overlap with mainstream hip hop, and there are points of agitation with it, which makes the Seattle hip hop scene a sub-culture that must be understood as a distinct but non-discrete entity.

Although place has been conceptualized in both cultural geography and rhetoric in a way that appears primed for a conversation about the role of sound in place, I argue here that place is not adequate, and propose the use of the word ecology instead. The word ecology is more fitting because place does not quite encapsulate or leave room for vibrancy and affect in a way that is critical to this project. Ecology opens up space for the discussion of vibrant matter, as well as a more fluid and permeable milieu than the term place implies.

To date, the field of communication has not treated ecology as a spatial construct. Media studies scholars have used the term in regards to media ecology, but it is used as a metaphor of the scientific use of the word ecology and does not encompass nearly as much as is needed for the purposes of this project. Media ecology is simply the attempt to make explicit the technological specifications of media environments that are by nature implicit (Scolari 2012). This is only vaguely connected to the way in which I propose the term could be used in communication studies. The only other time communication scholars use the word ecology in any substantial way is in environmental communication when they are actually referring to the scientific usage of the word.
Despite their differences, the terms assemblage is frequently used, especially by Bennett, when talking about ecologies. The idea of an assemblage is an effort to theorize the everyday in a way that attempts to account for the interrelationality or interplay of our lived experience. As DeLanda explains, “the realist social ontology…is all about objective processes of assembly: a wide range of social entities, from persons to nation-states, will be treated as assemblages constructed through very specific historical processes, processes in which language plays an important but not constitutive role” (DeLanda 2006 p. 3). Bennett and DeLanda differ in their conceptions of assemblage in that Bennett is focused on a living, fluid, and dynamic interaction between things and people, while DeLanda emphasizes the social and political systems at play.

Bennett then uses the term ecology instead of assemblage to theorize the everyday. She makes this move because assemblage gets at the thingness of the everyday, and place gets at the locationality of the everyday, but ecology encompasses both facets of the everyday into one conceptual term (Bennett 2010). It is not as simple as an ecology existing as the sum of its parts, for these parts are fluid, but the ecology provides some bounding while still allowing for permeability.

Drawing on Dewey and Ranciere, Bennett uses the term ecology to aid in her description of the vibrancy of things. In order to discuss the fluidity and flux of place without limiting it to human agency, Bennett explains, “This assemblage is an ecology in the sense that it is an interconnected series of parts, but it is not a fixed order of parts, for the order is always being reworked in accordance with a certain ‘freedom of choice’ exercised by its actants” (Bennett 2010 p. 97). In this case, actants are not just people, but are things as well- the material objects that surround us in our everyday lives. Thus, Bennett is arguing for a type of object agency, one
that not only recognizes the importance of the material objects around us, but also emphasizes the interrelationality between human and non-human agents. The interplay is important here, as it enables one to embrace an understanding of distributed agency that attempts to eliminate the tendency to assume human agency as existing on the top of a hierarchy. This is not to say that humans and mailboxes have the same agency, “It is to appreciate multiple degrees and sites of agency, flowing from simple natural processes, through higher processes, to human beings and collective social assemblages. Each level and site of agency also contains traces and remnants from the levels from which it evolved, and these traces affect its operation” (Connolly 2011 p. 22). Such distributed agency opens up room for an understanding of the interplay between the material, symbolic, and embodied place that Endres and Senda-Cook argue for, and the vibrancy of things that Bennett argues are integral players in an ecological worldview.

Much like musicologists and communication scholars use place to discuss topics such as memory and identity, cultural geography has used sound as a means to address memory, identity, and “engagements with the past in place” (DeSilvey 2010). Sound is talked about as, “artworks which create aural landscapes in which meaning is performed and co-created through the participation of listening, embodied subjects” (DeSilvey 2010). It can represent, capture, and create.

Sound can also disorient, as Tuan argues, “Subjectively, however, space and time have lost their directional thrust under the influence of rhythmic sound. Each step is no longer just another move along the narrow path to a destination; rather it is striding into open and undifferentiated space. The idea of a precisely located goal loses relevance” (Tuan 1977 p. 128). Whether or not one accepts this argument in its entirety, from personal experience I can attest that there is merit to the idea that music can drastically change one’s experience of place. One
might find their feet stepping in time to a drum beat, or slowing down to match the pace of a gentle refrain. Likewise, the existence of headphones has changed the ways in which we navigate based on our sonic isolation. What happens when you longer hear the car coming before you see it? Tuan does, however, mention our orientation to things based on volume of sound, and argues that we measure proximity and distance based on the tone and volume of people’s voices (Tuan 1977).

Alternately, cultural geographer Toby Butler argues that sound has the ability to locate, to situate us in place instead of removing us from it. In researching and creating sound art walks Butler has found that sound, even when absorbed via headphones, does not necessarily take us out of our place but can in fact connect us to it through narration, music, and other sounds that represent the place one is in. He says, “Listening to memories on a walkman in the outside world can actually give us a semblance of this feeling [a sense of place]. The acts of voicing and listening to stories seem to easily entwine with the rhythm of walking and the effect for some can be very powerful, a drifting kind of ompholos” (Butler 2006 p. 904). Butler has worked to create “sound walks,” where a person listens to a narrative about a particular place on a walkman while walking the same routes to the same places as the person they are listening to. One can purchase a sound walk for any number of neighborhoods in New York City, and listen to a person narrate their story of living in the area, as well as instruct you as to places to go and people to see. These walks enable you to aurally tap into someone else’s experience of place (Butler 2006). However, Butler forwards an understanding of sound as a means by which we are located in place and can experience memory, not as the thing that actually constructs place itself. A connection that Butler makes is the tie between our experience of the everyday, sound, and place. Using sound art walks as an exemplar, he argues that they “have an added dimension because they can be a
‘live’ embodied, active, multi-sensory way of understanding geographies in both time and space” (Butler 2006 p. 905).

Now that I have rearticulated a number of theoretical claims, I will offer a summary as well as a brief explanation of how they work in concert with one another. One assertion I have made is that sound is a vibrant and affective force, gesturing to both the visceral and physical ways in which we interact with it. A second claim I have made is that counter-publics, though comprised of people, are “reticulate structures,” permeable and fluid, circulated by discourse, the senses, and experience. Another assertion is that place is semi-bounded, politically and socially processual, and encompasses the symbolic, material, and embodied (Endres & Senda-Cook 2011). I also claim that we make sense of our everyday in an urban environment through sensory experience, interaction with the material, and embodied encounters. Lastly, I claim that an ecological framework allows for the acceptance of a human/nonhuman dialectic. What I will carry forward in this project, drawing on the aforementioned theoretical assumptions, is the argument that we can understand cities as sonic urban ecologies. As people, we experience the everyday through interaction with both human and nonhuman actants. As a vibrant and affective force, sound permeates these interactions in symbolic (i.e. discursive), material (i.e. captured, performative), and embodied (i.e. physical vibration) ways. By adopting an ecological framework, we enable the human and nonhuman to interrelate and circulate, thus manifesting in communities, neighborhoods, and cities. Discourse, sensory experience, and embodiment circulate and weave together to constitute ecologies that are injected throughout with sound. As an organized form of sound, music serves as an example of the binding potential of sound by operating through our everyday experience, our symbolic, material, and embodied understanding of place, as well as our interaction with both the human and nonhuman actants that surround us.
In forwarding an argument for an “ecology of sound,” this thesis will provide evidence to support the aforementioned theoretical claims. It will explore the ways in which communication scholarship might benefit from this more robust understanding that incorporates theories of sound, publics and counter-publics, culture and sub-culture, place, the everyday, and ecologies. What follows is an explanation of the methodology of this project and how it will support the larger argument.

Methodology

The purpose of the established theoretical framework, and the thesis project at large, is three-fold. The first goal is to trace sounds vibrant and affective properties in order to understand a lived urban ecology. Sound and place are not two distinct entities that happen to cohabitate, they are in fact interrelated and permeable. By articulating the vibrancy of sound in an urban environment, I will be able to provide a fluid and built conceptualization of place. Cities are ever changing, always in flux, but are still constituted in ways that we would do well to understand in order to better understand our urban environments. There are implications for the practical applications of everyone from urban designers to city officials, as well as people on the street. The second purpose is to construct a series of human geographic maps that will also contribute to this understanding of the fluidity of sound and place. These maps will, quite literally, plot out the locations in which sound, more specifically music, lives in the city of Seattle. This will demonstrate the interplay between place and sound, the physicality of the interrelationality. The third purpose is to take the vibrant and affective nature of sound in tandem with its human geography to explain an urban ecology.
This thesis is most obviously relevant to the city of Seattle, as an articulated place, and has implications for musicians and politicians alike. The mayor of Seattle has an office of film and music, run by a former colleague of mine, and this research can provide a way for people in such positions to understand and begin conversations about how an urban ecology is constituted by sound. Beyond Seattle, however, there are many cities that have a sonic identity, and I believe that this research can speak to these places as well. Any city that is so dictated by sound, by music, can view this research as an insight into what makes them where, not who, they are. To analyze how musicians make spatial gestures in their music, to understand the sensorial composite of the music of a particular city, to see the political implications of places constituted and constructed by sound, is to understand life in an urban ecology. These implications are also not limited to cities that have a thriving music scene, because all cities have vibrancy and affect in some form, whether it be industry or another form of art, and in possessing that vibrancy and affect, they can be viewed as ecological.

Given the stated purposes of this thesis, it is fitting that the methodology be three-fold as well. The three parts of this methodology will work together to serve the greater purpose, which is to demonstrate the constitutive nature of sound as vibrant and affective, and as constitutive of an urban ecology.

The first portion of this methodology is geographic in nature. It will provide a visual, spatial, and material context for what will be discussed in the following two sections, as well as represent the symbolic, material, and embodied ways in which an ecology exists. The symbolic representation can be seen in the discursively constructed map, as well as the construction of the maps in general as symbolic representations of the ecology of Seattle hip hop. They represent the embodied nature of my fieldwork, as well as the material production of sound by
demonstrating the spatial orientation of live music venues where hip hop is performed. The maps will capture the spatial element of place that cannot be accurately described through a non-contextual or discursive approach. There is a cartographic element of place that is not recognized in the other two pieces of this methodology, and the maps will fill this gap while offering an overlay of sound and place as vibrant, affective, and locational through their representations of the symbolic, material, and embodied elements of the sonic urban ecology.

The second element of this methodology is to perform a rhetorical analysis of the discourse of local music, specifically hip hop, to analyze the spatial gestures found within. This effort will provide a discursive backing for the idea that the linguistic elements of music can serve to build place. Where the next method relies on sense and non-textual artifacts, this element ground the study in discourse. Though it is not a new idea to claim that discourse constructs identity, with a slight twist this thesis proposes that the discourse of local hip hop constructs and constitutes an urban ecology, and in fact plays an integral role in how and where ecologies exists. This discursive aspect of the methodology also serves to tie both the non-contextual and human geographic elements of this study together.

The third piece of this methodology is ethno-rhetorical, and will treat life in the city as a rhetorical artifact. In using the term ethno-rhetorical I indicate a methodology that is based on a rhetorical framework but employs fieldwork that draws on ethnographic practices but does not perfectly resemble them. My study was not done over an extended period of time, but was a brief revisit of an already familiar place and experiences. The theory with which I approached my site was largely rhetorical in nature, keeping in mind theories of place, publics, culture, and the everyday as articulated by rhetoricians. I also drew from non-rhetorical theory, but made the connections to rhetorical work. As someone who left the city a year and a half ago, I must
acknowledge the problematic nature of pursuing the following methodological approach having only past-memory and a two-week visit in December of 2012, during which I will re-immerses myself. In acknowledging this problematic I will turn it into a lens by which I can view the city with both the affection of a long-distance relationship and the infatuation of reconnection. Ethnographers go to their sites, and they attend to events and situations. Rhetoricians attend to texts and situations (Biesecker 1989, Bitzer 1968). When conflated (Pezzullo 2003, Simonson 2010), one can attend to city life as a rhetorical site, taking both the present nature of ethnography and the inherent rhetoricality of sound as objects of analysis (Wiley 2010). “Just as we perceive objects where they are, in space, and we remember events where they are, in the past, that is, just as space and time are not in us, as Bergson reminds us, so sensation is not in us either. We are in it whenever we sense, and it brings us to where sensation occurs, in the artwork itself” (Grosz 2008 73-74). Just as Grosz argues for the space-ness of objects and the past-ness of events, this methodology argues for the vibrancy of sound and its location, its place. This also suggests that the idea of sound as an ecology, an assembled place.
CHAPTER 2
THE GEOGRAPHY OF SEATTLE HIP HOP

Introduction

As noted in the first chapter, this project draws heavily on theories of place that calls for an ecological orientation to the sonic life of the city. With an ecological framing that draws on place, there is a cultural geography at work in my theory and methodology, necessitating the use of maps to locate and define the region of the city that I study. Although rhetorical theories of place attempt to remove the burden of a fixed point on a map, and instead turn their attention to the semi-bounded encapsulation of the material, symbolic, and embodied (Endres & Senda-Cook 2011), they still discuss place as a located phenomenon. Geographic theories of place treat it as the located production and consumption of meaning (Creswell 2004). The discursive construction of an urban ecology incorporates talk of specific locations, and the fieldwork I conducted was located as well. With this in mind, it is important for this project to offer a material representation of its placed nature. The visual context for understanding a sonic ecology is also helpful for orienting oneself to the remaining chapters of this thesis, as it offers a way to see the spatial orientation of the discursive analysis and ethno-rhetorical fieldwork. Both remaining methodologies are oriented to a specific place (or clusters of places), and the following maps offer a visual representation of the symbolic and embodied ways in which sound constitutes an urban ecology.

The maps in this chapter are not typical city maps. At a base level, they represent Seattle just like any tourist map would, though each has its own exception. I offer four maps: one provides a discursive representation of a sonic ecology; one demonstrates the spatial orientation of live music performances, and the last two demonstrate the locations and routes taken during
my fieldwork in Seattle (presented at different scales). Individually, they each have implications for a sonic ecology, but they can be viewed in conjunction with each other to provide a layered account of a sonic urban ecology. Though these maps cannot literally vibrate, they can offer a visual depiction of where and how sound (a vibrant and affective force) exists, what patterns might emerge within that located existence, and a temporarily fixed picture of Seattle hip hop as constitutive of an urban ecology. The vibrancy of sound is important because it speaks to its ability as a nonhuman actant to assemble with other nonhuman and human actants in the framework of an ecology. As Connelly reminds us, “When you think about the vitality of ‘actants’ in larger assemblages that make a difference to those assemblages, modes of vibrancy below life that take on some aspects of micro-agency become important” (Connelly 2011, p. 25). Vibrancy is the way in which nonhuman agents can interact with humans within an ecology, and since sound is inherently vibrant, it serves as the binding force of sonic urban ecologies.

What follows in this chapter is an explanation of the methodology behind each map, followed by the maps themselves. For each map, I offer a description of what can be seen in each map, and I will conclude with a description of how these maps serve as symbolic reference points for a sonic urban ecology. In mapping out a cartographic diagram of Seattle using its hip hop as a constitutive force, it becomes clear that there are specific ways and means by which sound constructs cities. This thesis is premised on a symbolic, material, and embodied conception of ecologies, and the maps presented in this chapter address each element with a different methodological approach. While the first chapter established that sound is the binding force of urban ecologies, this chapter aims to spatialize the ways that it can discursively represent, pulse through and affect people, and embody lived experience.
The Geography of a Sonic Urban Ecology

One of the purposes of the lyrical map featured in this chapter is to provide a spatial, visual addition to the lyrical analysis in the third chapter of this project. Another is to offer a material representation of one element of an urban ecology. The goal of the third chapter is to bring rhetorical criticism to bear on the lyrical content of the music I map first here. Both the map presented in this chapter and the following chapter utilize songs written by Seattle hip hop artists about the city itself. The rhetorical analysis provides a discursive lens, while this map will provide the visual accompaniment to allow the reader to see the locations mentioned in the lyrical content of Seattle hip hop songs in a way that allows for spatial orientation. It is one thing to know names of places, but it is another thing entirely to see where places are located in relation to each other and the city as a whole.

The idea for a discursive map came about before this thesis project was even proposed. While taking an introductory class in Geographic Information Systems (GIS), I was unsure of how to combine my interests as a rhetorician with my newfound abilities using mapping software. The map I produced was a way to spatially orient the rhetoric of Seattle hip hop. Curious about what it might look like to visualize the places that Seattle hip hop artists talk about in their songs, I created a map that plotted specific locations mentioned in several songs, and was surprised when the results did not match my expectations. I had expected the artists to talk about locations in certain areas of Seattle because of the ways in which neighborhoods are territorialized, but what I found was that the specific locations did not match up with the places in which many Seattle hip hop artists live and work. I began the project assuming there would be more coherence between where I knew Seattle hip hop artists tended to live, as well as the broader neighborhoods they would represent in their songs, and the more specific locations they
mentioned. What I found was a disconnect between the neighborhoods mentioned and the more specific locations. The implications of this are explicated later in this chapter. The map I created for the aforementioned GIS class was the impetus for this chapter, and played a large role in the larger project presented here.

Cultural geographers such as Kenneth Foote emphasize the importance of plotting and re-plotting places that transition over time. This gestures to the idea that even the idea of place as geographers theorize it is transitory, shifting, and always in flux. Our collective memory, identities, and commemorative practices are all shaped by place, which remains a located phenomenon, despite the fluctuating nature of the scene within. Geographic Information Systems can be used not just to measure and calculate, but can also be used to point out this transitory nature, and provide representations of symbolic, material, and embodied sites—whether they be sites of tragedy (Foote 1997), memorial, or sound.

When choosing which song lyrics to cull for locational mentions, I focused on a few main criteria. The first artists I looked to were the three responsible for the songs used in the second chapter of this thesis. I obtained the lyrics for three Blue Scholars albums and one EP, two Macklemore albums and a number of miscellaneous songs that he has released, and Jake One’s White Van Music album. I culled through the songs, and noted every mention of a specific location. Some of the places mentioned are as large as an entire neighborhood, some as small as a specific intersection. I created a spreadsheet that included the artist, the name of the location, its address, and geographic coordinates, which are required for the actual mapping of these locations. The places included restaurants, parks, streets, neighborhoods, music venues, intersections, sports stadiums, or even bodies of water. Some were historical mentions of places
no longer in existence (even if the building itself is still standing, several of the businesses are no longer operational).

It is important to take into account that this is not an effort to provide a fixed representation of an urban ecology, and I want to be clear that this is something that is always in flux. For the purposes of this project I will be using existing references because it is a snapshot of the constitutive nature of Seattle hip hop. New music is being created daily, with new references that are equally important, but I must acknowledge the limitations of my position as a researcher, then use the tools available to me (existing recorded Seattle hip hop) to provide an example of how Seattle hip hop is constitutive of an urban ecology.
Figure 1
One thing that becomes evident upon viewing the lyrical map (Fig. 1) is that the vast majority of the locations are clustered around the middle of the city longitudinally. There are only four locations north of the Ship Canal, and only two south of the 1-90 interchange. The remaining locations fall mostly in the Downtown area and Capitol Hill. Given that on a neighborhood level, most hip hop artists in Seattle talk about Beacon Hill and other South Seattle neighborhoods, this does not mesh with the more specific locations that are mentioned. Thus, the neighborhoods that they mention do not clearly align with the specific locations. This contradiction has implications for notions of publics and counter-publics in relation to place, if rappers are talking about places where they go to do things (destination locations) instead of the places that they claim some sort of territorial ownership over in a more broad sense.

In the discussion of publics found in the previous chapter, I took up Michael Warner’s definition of publics as a “social space created by the reflexive circulation of discourse” (Warner 2002). This has interesting implications for the discourse of Seattle hip hop, as there is a disconnect between the larger areas that are frequently represented in lyrical content, and the specific locations that largely fall outside of those areas. This disconnect is significant, as we assume a sort of discursive cohesion among counter-publics since they require a unifying force to bind them together. If one takes the Seattle hip hop community as a counter-public, a group set against the wider public discourses of mainstream hip hop, their “circulation of discourse” in relation to how they address place would seemingly need to be more cohesive than it actually is. Instead, there is a difference between the more territorial representations, the larger places in which many of these rappers live and work, and the specific locations they mention which often fall outside of those areas. This counter-public experiences a lived existence that is quite distinct
from the places they travel to, likely to accomplish tasks (ie music venues to perform, grocery stores to buy food, restaurants to eat, etc).

Alternately, the roads mentioned are almost entirely in, or cut through, the Beacon Hill neighborhood of South Seattle. The purpose of roads is to provide a space for movement, whether it be on foot or on wheels. By emphasizing roads the way they do, and in the places they do, the rappers are highlighting the fact that the roads are a path by which they are taken away. You do not hop on a road to stay where you are, so it seems fitting that in an art form frequently emphasizing escape (both literally and figuratively) that artists would stress the geographic method of escape.

The three main roads referenced in the songs are Interstate 5, Beacon Ave S, and Rainier Ave S, all of which run North-South and are nearly parallel to each other. Both Beacon Ave S and Rainier Ave S are home to much contested space, as they are generally lower income areas with a history of attempted gentrification. Both roads also cut through significant portions of the 98118 zip code, which has been named by the US Census as the most ethnically diverse zip code in the entire United States. There is something to be said for the naming of those streets above others, and the choice to talk about them as spaces of territorial contestation. The diversity found within the 98118 zip code is largely representative of the Seattle hip hop community as a whole. The community is not bound by race or class, and a large majority of the community lives in South Seattle. There are large immigrant populations that live in the same areas, which Seattle rappers address in some of their songs that call for the people to rise up and fight back against the economic and political oppression that often exists in these areas.

The purpose of the second map, depicting locations of music venues, is to provide the reader with an idea of the places within Seattle where music is created in a live setting. This is
significant to the overall project as it spatially represents some of the vibrancy of Seattle hip hop. Live music performance is one way in which people experience the materiality of sound—they feel it’s vibration, they stand together in rooms meant to extrapolate the best sound from any particular source, and the sound bounces off walls, soaks into bodies, and exerts a palpable pressure. As Brian Massumi describes sound, “Its local signs are incorporeal: sound waves. Pure energy forms, directly perceptually-felt as rhythm in an amodal in-between of hearing and proprioception on a border zone with thought” (Massumi 2011, p. 145). Music venues are an organized place in which people experience this, they stand, move, or otherwise dance in relationship with sound, their physical location, and the people around them.

The data for this map was obtained using a combined effort of my prior knowledge of music venues in Seattle, using Google to search for places unknown to me, and asking members of the Seattle hip hop community about where they or their fellow artists perform. This is not an all-encompassing map, but it does make an effort to adequately and fairly represent the places where Seattle hip hop artists perform their music.

The first step I took in creating this map was to create a spreadsheet to chart the places I knew of based entirely on prior knowledge and experience. This included several venues that are well-established in the city and are operating in a legal realm. These venues have generally been around for years, and in some cases, decades. I also recorded venues that no longer exist but were well-known as places where hip hop performances occurred. In order to confirm that I was recalling information properly I confirmed the information with online research. After recording music venues I was already aware of, I ran the list I had created by several members of the hip hop community to make sure I was accounting for as many significant places of performance as possible.
The second map (Fig. 2) depicts the locations of music venues and recording studios around Seattle. With the exception of a few outliers, the venues tend to be clustered around the Ballard, University District, Downtown and Capitol Hill neighborhoods. Neighborhoods that are venue-less, or nearly so, include everything south of the I-90 interchange (virtually the entire South half of the city), Queen Anne, the Central District, and West Seattle. Given the income distribution in the city—the majority of the wealth tends to be located north of I-90—it makes sense that this would be the case. From a business standpoint it is logical to operate in places that can afford to sustain you. Another logical business decision is that the venues which are not clustered in a night life-centric neighborhood fall on major roads where there is likely to be foot traffic or vehicular traffic.

Capitol Hill has long been a neighborhood known for its night life, so it makes sense that it would be home to several venues. Within a matter of a few blocks someone could see a show at Highline, Barboza, Neumos, The Comet Tavern, or Chop Suey. There are also several houses in Capitol Hill that host live music shows, but they do not advertise their locations since they do not operate legally. The neighborhood is home to a high concentration of music venues, which perpetuates its existence as a destination for those seeking entertainment. Several of these venues also fall close to, or parallel to, Interstate 5, the main highway that goes through Seattle and cuts the city in half.

Perhaps what is more interesting about this map is not where venues are located, but where they are not located. Queen Anne is largely seen as a residential area with very little night life, its long-standing record store, Easy Street Records recently closed, and it is not a center of cultural production for the city. The neighborhood is also prohibitively expensive for most
artists and musicians. It is also important to note that the places in which much of Seattle’s hip
hop is created, South Seattle, are not home to places where people can perform their music live.
There is a big discrepancy between where the music is created and where it is performed. As the
structure of the old music industry shifts, and crumbles, artists have greater access to recording
equipment that enables a high level of production in a simple home studio. Such access has
changed the hierarchy, as it enables artists to create their music without having to rely on
professional audio engineers, and without having to pay for studio time. Thus, the artists stay
home, and the divide between where they record (places that used to be scattered more
throughout the city), and the places they perform.

The purpose of the final map, based on my fieldwork, is to provide the reader with a
visual depiction of the places I visited and routes that I took while performing my research in
Seattle. This map represents the embodied element of The research for this particular map was
done while visiting Seattle for approximately a week during December of 2012. The intent of
the fieldwork was to document the experience of the everyday, and to attend to the affectual and
vibrant nature of sound and the city. In analyzing the field notes from this research for the
previous chapter, it became apparent that many of the locations mentioned, as well as routes
taken, are much more clear to me spatially as a former resident of the city than they might be to
an unfamiliar reader.

The locations and routes for the final two maps were pulled from my field notes from the
time I spent in Seattle, which were written nightly after returning from the city, and serve as the
basis for the fourth chapter of this thesis. They represent an everyday experience of someone
situated as both researcher and former resident, both familiar and observational. The patterns
that emerge are indicative of a typical day for someone living in the city. In plotting the
locations and routes from my field notes in a cartographic way, I hope to show the relationship between places I traveled, where I spent time, and the importance of those places and routes in relation to the larger picture of Seattle hip hop. There are correlations between the places I went, and the everyday representations of the city as constructed discursively in lyrical content and the locations where music is captured and performed. Many places I visited and routes I took during my fieldwork overlap with places mentioned in the lyrical content of Seattle hip hop songs, as well as the venues pictured in the second map. This is not coincidence, nor intentional, as it is the result of the binding force of sound as it runs through each element of the project (and an ecology at large). Tying multiple elements together, sound orchestrated my movements as a researcher and former resident, it pulsates as a vibrant and affective force in live music venues, and emerges in discourse to construct an ecology.
This last map of the series (Fig. 3, Fig. 4), displayed at two different scales, presents the locations and routes taken during my fieldwork in Seattle. As can be seen on the maps, the vast majority of my time was spent in the Capitol Hill neighborhood, which is indicative of where much of my time was spent as a resident of Seattle as well. In fact, nearly everywhere I went during my fieldwork was within walking distance of everywhere else. Though I never lived in Capitol Hill, when I worked there I spent all my working hours there, as well as nearly all of my free time (partially due to convenience). I continue to feel drawn to the neighborhood, as it is home to some of my favorite places, and as a result some of my favorite walking routes as well. As a resident, it was not as though I was walking aimlessly, it was always a means to an end, but that does not diminish the importance of a pleasant route or a favorite shortcut.

As previously stated, the purpose of these maps is to visualize and bring a geographic approach to understanding an urban ecology. Rhetoricians have made claims about the meaning and significance of place (Endres & Senda-Cook 2011, Dickinson 1997, Dickinson et al. 2006, Ackerman 2003), generally calling on Lefebvre to say that discourses and experiences are spaced (and I argue, placed) situations, and have begun making the move to see space as sign (Ackerman 2003). “Lefebvre…urges us to find the extraordinary in the ordinary moments and places of everyday life, and to do this, we must approach spatial analysis of an interplay of signs and representations” (Ackerman 2003, p. 85). Given this understanding place, there is an inherent spatial element to understanding how an urban ecology is constituted. Where Lefebvre argues that place is social space, I argue here that an urban ecology is something more—something placed, spatially located, and grounded in the material world. This materiality must also be placed in conjunction with the symbolic and embodied elements of an ecology.
The term ecology, unlike the term place, is able to encompass the material, symbolic, embodied. Coming out of the biological sciences, its initial use was meant to describe the interaction between living organisms. Communication scholars have used the term to refer to a “media ecology,” as well as in scholarship pertaining to environmental work, but it has yet to be used to describe something both the human and nonhuman in interplay with each other. The term ecology aims to incorporate our experience of the everyday, and draws in an acknowledgement of distributive agency. The maps pictured in this chapter represent the symbolic, material, and embodied elements of an ecology. Though ecologies are by their nature fluid and permeable, traits that are not representable in static maps, the maps featured in this chapter are able to offer a snapshot of an urban ecology as it is temporarily fixed. By observing the maps both individually and in conjunction with each other, one can see the constitutive nature of sound through lyrical content, vibrancy, and embodied everyday experience.

Though sound exists both as a physical property and a symbolic resource, these maps visualize the reality of the placed nature of sound as well. The idea that sound constructs “aural landscapes” (DeSilvey 2010) is helpful in understanding its potentiality, though it does not encompass the entirety of the argument of this project. There is an intersection between the idea of an aural landscape and Cresswell’s explanation that a landscape is something seen from the outside, something to be looked at instead of lived inside of, like place (DeSilvey 2010, Cresswell 2004). The implication then, is that an aural landscape is heard as an outsider, as an audio voyeur. Therefore, to experience the everyday of an urban ecology one must experience sound “on the ground.” For example, my ability to listen to music created by Seattle musicians while halfway across the country allows me to hear the “aural landscape,” but it does not situate me as a living, moving part of the urban ecology in which that sound was created. In order to
experience the ecology, I must understand the ways in which it is represented, as well as the material and embodied elements of it as well.

Lastly, these maps are an integral piece of the bigger argument presented in this thesis because when viewing the maps in conjunction with each other it shows that the spatial connections that exist through music have persuasive force and are, as a result, rhetorical. The force exists in the patterns, and in the binding of a community through music and its political and economic implications. These will be explicated in the following chapters, but the maps pictured above provide the spatial orientation needed to understand a sonic urban ecology.
CHAPTER 3
DISCURSIVITY IN THE CONTEXT OF AN URBAN ECOLOGY

Introduction

As someone who did not grow up in Seattle, but in a rural suburb an hour South West, there was always an allure to the “big city.” It seemed so full of potential, full of people who were creating music and art, and perhaps most appealing to me- it was full of people who were nothing like me. After spending the first eighteen years of my life surrounded by people who looked just like me, from economic backgrounds just like me, with parents just like mine, I desperately wanted to be immersed in something different. I recognize that it takes a vast amount of privilege to think like that, and to have the support to make that desire a reality. As a white, straight, middle-class American, I have experienced a life of privilege. When I moved to Seattle for college, I became a part of a community I had, to date, only been able to watch from a distance. I threw myself into volunteering at The Vera Project, an all-ages, volunteer-run, non-profit music and arts organization, and became someone impassioned and driven by the felt importance of music and art.

The attractiveness of the city never waned for me, and I grew to see in various ways the significance of music in regard to place. The city, for me, was not just a place to create and listen to music, but was actually constituted by the music itself. The music made the place, whether it was through the people involved, the physical locations in which it was created and captured, or the ways in which the lyrical content discursively constructed a place I could attach meaning to. I walked down streets mentioned in my favorite songs, I ate at restaurants featured in the music videos, and I played in the same parks they did. This constructed place, always in flux, was somewhere I came to see as symbolic, embodied, and material. It was not just about
the physical locations, but the people, attitudes, relationships, community, spaces, and most importantly, the sounds that permeated it all.

**Methodology**

As one element of a mixed methodological approach, in an effort to demonstrate a sonic urban ecology, this chapter will provide a rhetorical analysis of three Seattle hip hop songs. In order to establish the discursive construction of an urban ecology I will attend to the ways in which these songs address the culture and counter-public of Seattle hip hop, as well as experiences of the everyday. This analysis will also pay especially close attention to notions of place, as it has been established in the theoretical framework. Just as an urban ecology encompasses more than just physical locations, or place as it has been theorized by both rhetoricians and geographers, this analysis will look at a variety of elements including people, places, weather, and everyday experience, in order to bring to light the ways in which Seattle hip hop artists discursively construct an urban ecology.

As someone who was firmly situated in the Seattle music scene for years before moving to Colorado, I had been particularly enamored with the hip hop community. After graduating college I worked at a music venue that frequently hosted local hip hop shows. In fact, for several years the venue hosted a three-night run of shows in December that featured local hip hop group Blue Scholars as headliners, with a rotating cast of opening acts. Each year, all three nights would sell out and the city would rally together around the opportunity to support local hip hop.

My situated role in this study is important to acknowledge up front, as it both inspired the direction of this study, and places me in a particular relationship with the city at large, the music industry within it, and the hip hop community as well. My role was that of both laborer and
community member, someone situated as an observer who was also intrinsically tied to the production and reproduction of Seattle hip hop as constitutive of an urban ecology. There is a coding that takes place within this artistic practice that is primarily accessible to those with a prior knowledge of the locations, people, and art. It was with this practice in mind that I chose the songs that I did for this analysis. To those without prior knowledge the music still lures and provokes, but in a different way— one that prompts the listener to either seek out an understanding of the subject matter or be content with a more limited comprehension of the ecological nature of the music.

Hip hop is not a newly popular genre for Seattle, as one of its most (in)famous artists, Sir Mix-A-Lot, represented the town in the late 80s and early 90s with party-ready songs like Baby Got Back and Posse on Broadway (the main street in Seattle’s Capitol Hill neighborhood). In 1990, Mix-A-Lot’s debut album, Swass, was certified platinum. No other Seattle hip hop artist had gone platinum since Mix-A-Lot, until January 2013 when Macklemore and Ryan Lewis’ song Thrift Shop went double platinum. This is not to say that there was not an enormous amount of hip hop being produced in Seattle in the interim, it just happened to be a more insular and community-oriented phase that did not seem to care whether or not anyone from outside of the northwest knew it existed.

Seattle hip hop is distinctly different from much of what is circulated mainstream radio and other media forms. Despite mainstream hip hop’s reputation for capitalizing on hyper violence and misogyny, that trend has never held traction in Seattle, and the hip hop artists that come out of the city tend to forward a more left-leaning political agenda, as well as a penchant for cheap thrills and an unmatched hometown pride in mediocre sports teams. Seattle hip hop is unabashedly self-referential. The independent weekly newspaper, The Stranger, is home to a hip
hop column called *My Philosophy*, written by Larry Mizell, Jr. (son of one of the famous Mizell brothers, Fonce), in which he explains,

> Far as I can tell, the current narrative in rap (and perhaps all pop music) is all about the all-consuming desire to be famous, as that’s the highest order of human experience. There is no love, no self-worth, just the fame (if you’re shallow and stupid) and the money (if you’re shallow and smart). In case you haven’t noticed, artists parroting that mainstream party line aren’t finding a lot of success here. The folks who want to hear that kind of shit are already programmed to treat it like disposable background music. There’s no real support for it here. I think, for reasons specific to our region, far more people want to hear something from the soul, something that speaks to them. (Mizell 2011)

Even in discussing the inaccessible nature music entirely devoted to having and experiencing everything in excess, Mizell argues for the importance of place, and what it means to be from and represent (and, I will argue, construct) a specific place. There are particular ties that bind communities, or neighborhoods, together, and Mizell’s statement holds weight for the larger picture to be explained here— that an urban ecology is constituted by sound. The following analysis will explicate how artists discursively constitute an urban ecology through an assembling of various pieces, which overlap and interrelate with each other.

In choosing which songs to analyze for this study, I looked for songs that focused on the city of Seattle as their main theme, created by Seattle artists, in order to look at the intentional discursive moves made. I also chose three songs that had music videos that were equally focused on Seattle in their visual representation, which not only provides a bridge between the representation found in the maps and the lyrical content, but also opens up the analysis to include the ways in which the artists visually depict their lyrical content. For the purposes of this project I felt that it was important to have the discursive and visual elements of the songs working in tandem, as it provides another visual, spatial component to the project. In part, it is important because when artists create videos that very obviously correspond to their lyrical content, as the
following artists have done, it shows a commitment to the topic at hand, which in this case is the discursive construction of an urban ecology. Another reason for the importance of the visual representation is that it provides the viewer, the voyeur, the outsider, with a visual depiction of the lyrical content of the songs. When I hear mention of specific locations in Seattle hip hop songs, I already know what the artist is referencing and what it looks like, where someone unfamiliar with the city would not have the same prior knowledge.

The three songs I chose for analysis are *Home* by Jake One, *The Town* by Macklemore, and *Joe Metro* by Blue Scholars. There was no attempt made to emphasize commonalities between the songs until after they were already chosen, when the sheer volume of overlapping themes became apparent. What follows is a brief description of each song, with relevant details about their creation, years of release, and an explanation of any details needed to understand the forthcoming analysis. After contextualizing each song, I will discuss common themes found in the lyrical content and music videos, and then forward an analysis of how these songs discursively construct an urban ecology.

The first song I chose for this analysis was created by prolific Seattle producer Jake One. Although he is firmly based in Seattle, Jake One (real name Jake Dutton) has largely produced songs for artists outside of the Pacific Northwest, including several artists from 50 Cent’s G-Unit, Snoop Dogg, Kendrick Lamar, and Drake. He has a well-established relationship with Minneapolis-based record label Rhymesayers, who released his solo album (a term I use loosely given the abundance of guest appearances, as he features rappers on every song). The album, *White Van Music*, was released in 2008 and featured rappers from all over the country. The breakout track, however, was a song called *Home*. Aptly titled, the song features Seattle rappers Vitamin D, C Note, Maine, and Ish spitting over a smooth Jake One beat. *Home* is the last track
on *White Van Music*, which makes it feel all the more important in the cycle as it serves to bring the album back home.

The video for Home is both soft and funny, featuring a humorous Sir Mix-A-Lot cameo at the beginning, and a penchant for diffused lighting and muted colors. It features each rapper on the song performing their verses, each in a different location essential to the song or community in some way. Jake One hardly appears in the video, and when he does it is a fleeting shot, usually from the side or behind, but never head-on. The video was created by Zia Mohajerjasbi, who also created the video for Macklemore’s *The Town*, Blue Scholars’ *Joe Metro*, and a plethora of other videos for Seattle hip hop artists. Mohajerjasbi is also the brother of Blue Scholars producer Saba Mohajerjasbi.

The second song chosen for this analysis is Macklemore’s *The Town*, which was released on December 15th, 2009 on *The Unplanned Mixtape*. The song was written and released prior to Macklemore’s recent skyrocketing fame, and takes a decidedly endearing, historical, and youth-focused approach to its treatment of the emerald city. Macklemore, raised in Seattle’s Capitol Hill neighborhood, frequently talks about “the town” (an affectionate nickname for Seattle frequently used in the hip hop community) in his songs, but this one in particular provides a perspective on the city from someone both deeply imbedded in it and now experiencing unprecedented fame outside of it. Macklemore has only released two full albums in his career, but his recent success has found him performing on late night television shows and arena-sized venues around the world. His single Thrift Shop has gone double platinum, an almost unheard of feat given that his album was independently released and he has remained adamant about not signing to a record label.
Similar to the video for *Home, The Town* video features a plethora of well-known places in Seattle, as well as cameos by a multitude of Seattle rappers and other members of the hip hop community. In line with Moherjerjasbi’s style, the video utilizes soft diffused light and close-up portrait shots, indicating a nostalgia and pride in the Seattle hip hop community. Something that gets addressed both lyrically and visually is the importance of youth access to music, a topic that has long been a source of conflict between Seattle city government and its citizens.

The final song chosen for this project is *Joe Metro* by Blue Scholars, which was released on June 12th, 2007. The song is much more political than the previous two, which is typical of emcee Geologic (also known as Prometheus Brown). Blue Scholars, one of Seattle’s most established hip hop acts, consists of producer Saba Mohajerjasbi (known as Sabzi) and emcee Geologic (real name George Quibuyen). They are Seattle based artists who have largely been headquartered in the 98118 area code, an area of Seattle that was, according to the 2010 census, the most ethnically diverse region of the entire country. Blue Scholars promote a highly critical and intellectual line of thought, frequently broaching topics such as police corruption and abuse, racism, poverty, and the power of people to implement change.

The *Joe Metro* music video depicts Quibuyen riding the bus from his home to downtown Seattle, as well as walking through various parts of the city. The video, like the song, takes a slightly more serious attitude than the other two, and addresses what it is like to ride public transit in Seattle. As the song discusses issues of race and poverty in the city, the video depicts these things as well, showing homeless people, the elderly, as well as the diversity Quibuyen points out as only being found on public transportation. This third video, just like the previous two, was created by Zia Mohajerjasbi, but its rougher quality would indicate that it was created
in the earlier stages of his career. His trademark lighting is nowhere to be found, and the video strikes a slightly darker tone than the other two.

Analysis

One of the first things that becomes apparent when listening to these songs and watching their respective videos is that the people of Seattle, as well as the ways in which people experience the city every day, are constituted by the sounds created within and about the city. What follows is an exploration of the ways in which people are depicted both lyrically and visually throughout the songs, to account for the discursivity of an urban ecology. One way in which this is manifested is through discussion of the people who comprise the human element of an ecology. This attention to the importance of people gestures to theories of publics and counter-publics, and emphasizes the roles people play, as well as how they are a part of the community that is set in contrast to the larger mainstream hip hop culture.

In listening to the songs and watching their videos, one will notice is that there are several people that are featured in at least two, if not all three, of the music videos. Each person holds a very specific role within the community, and there is a reason for their appearances. To begin, Macklemore appears in the barbeque scene at the end of the Jake One video, celebrating with several Seattle hip hop artists and other community members.

Larry Mizell, Jr., the columnist mentioned earlier in this chapter, appears in both the Jake One and Macklemore videos, at the concluding barbeque and as a quick portrait shot (wearing a Seattle Seahawks tee shirt) at the 2:39 minute mark, respectively. Mizell’s role in the community is multi-faceted, but if nothing else he has come to serve as a historian for the community, narrating and archiving the local happenings on a weekly basis with equal parts
eloquence and snark in his *My Philosophy* column. In *The Town*, Macklemore claims, “Despite the drama/ there’s respect and camaraderie/ every time one of my friends is mentioned in *My Philosophy*/ it’s a right of passage.” Mizell was also one half of the rap duo Cancer Rising, one third of They Live/Mash Hall, and now DJs for the group Don’t Talk To The Cops and has a weekly hip hop show called Street Sounds on local independent radio station 90.3 KEXP.

Another important person who makes an appearance in both the Jake One and Macklemore videos, as well as a lyrical mention in *The Town*, is Melissa Darby (known as Meli). Darby founded and ran a local promotion company called Obese Productions for nearly a decade, through which she booked and promoted both national and local hip hop shows in Seattle. Meli became virtually the sole hip hop booker in town for years, but her role in the community was not limited to her business. She was able to keep the business going because she was a member of and understood the community. One of the first things one learns when working in the music industry is that there is such a thing as “hip hop time,” which means you do not expect hip hop artists to show up on time for their own shows, and they frequently do not arrive until after they are supposed to be on stage (as opposed to the standard of at least two hours before doors to the show open). For many industry workers this is a point of contention, but Meli knew how to get artists in the building in time to perform, and understood how to make her shows happen smoothly while satisfying both the venue staff and the performers. It should not be underestimated how difficult a task this is. As a type of gatekeeper in the community, people knew that if Meli was running the show, then she was the person in charge of the guest list. As Macklemore says, “That’s right/ when you put on a show/ and watch the people seepin’ in between the creases and the doors/ hittin’ up Meli/ or sneakin’ in cuz they’re broke.” This meant
that she would get several text messages and phone calls before shows from people asking her to let them in for free.

The fourth verse on Jake One’s Home features Ishmael Butler, formerly “Butterfly” of the Grammy award-winning early 90’s hip hop group Digable Planets. Butler now functions as one half of hip hop duo Shabazz Palaces, who have released all of their albums on the famous Sub Pop label that is very firmly situated in Seattle and was home to Nirvana. Butler also appears briefly in the video for The Town, demonstrating once again the sheer volume of cross-over between various creative endeavors. An interesting piece of Butler’s verse comes in the middle when he says, “from the CD/ we is all just alike/ panthers and gangstas raised us up right/ when the chips crash stand yo ass up and fight.” Although he is not referencing specific individuals, Butler’s point is not lost- if you grow up in the CD (the Central District, an area to the southeast of Capitol Hill) you will likely face hard times, but when you do, you are strong and you fight back. Though Butler is referring to his own childhood, the sentiment rings true even today as there continues to be serious contention over actions of the Seattle Police Department, especially in particular neighborhoods around the city.

In The Town, Macklemore raps, “my greatest teachers/ B self and Vita/ Wordsayer was my mayor.” Vita is a shortened version of Vitamin D (born Derrick Brown), a long-standing local producer who also happens to rap the first verse on Jake One’s Home. Again, Vitamin D is someone who has long served as a hub of the community, working with a variety of artists both as a rapper and producer, and providing many a Seattle rapper with just the right beat to write to. The lyrical reference to Wordsayer is about Jonathan Moore, a local talent manager who started the Red Bull Big Tune Beat Battle (a competition in which producers go head to head with beats)
with Vitamin D. Over and over, one can see the same people being mentioned in the lyrical content of hip hop songs, or featured in their videos.

There is a woman who is featured in the first two music videos who is important to mention. Rahwa Habte is an integral part of the Seattle hip hop community, though perhaps in a more roundabout way than the people previously mentioned. Habte is a long-time activist in Seattle, fighting for rights for everyone from the LGBT community to refugees and homeless youth. In all her work she has managed to emphasize the importance of the arts, and music in particular, and currently sits on the board for The Vera Project, an all-ages, non-profit music and arts organization. Rahwa co-founded an Eritrean restaurant called Hidmo in the Central District, which quickly became a hub of the hip hop community. Rappers would meet there, eat there, and even work there from time to time.

Lastly, both Macklemore and Blue Scholars reference “good medicine,” which was a group of Seattle rappers that collaborated for one live performance at Seattle’s famous Bumbershoot Festival in 2007. Good Medicine was perhaps the one and only time that such a large number of Seattle hip hop artists performed together for an audience of around 5,000 people. In the outro of The Town, you hear a conversation in which the participants are reminiscing about the Good Medicine performance and one person says, “When we did that Good Medicine set, probably my favorite, at some point everyone from the town was on stage and there’s like five thousand people out in the crowd, it was just like, doin’ it dope style.” Contained within the song itself, Macklemore also says, “it’s good medicine/ that Chief Sealth woulda been proud of.” This line references Seattle’s namesake, Duwamish Native Chief Sealth, who was known for his attempts to work with, and not against, white settlers. In Joe Metro, Quibuyen raps, “Dope to see Khalil back/ the medicine is good again,” which is talking about rapper Khalil Equiano, who was
a member of Good Medicine and had recently returned to Seattle after living elsewhere for some time.

This depiction of the people of the Seattle hip hop community resembles a counter-public premised on sound. As established in the first chapter of this thesis, publics and counter-publics are not necessarily two completely distinct entities, as there is overlap and fluidity. Just as Seattle hip hop may be a counter-culture within the city of Seattle, and within the broader context of mainstream hip hop, its members are also members of other counter-publics, as well as the public of the city at large. Individuals are certainly not limited to belonging to one counter-public, nor are they exempt from the larger picture, as they still participate in the systems that dictate the public sphere. They are not stuck in any one group, and may float in or out at any given time. This flux plays an important role in the existence of an urban ecology by continually creating and recreating the counter-public. The counter-public addresses the human-centric element of the larger ecology, allowing for permeability and a woven-together assemblage in which people play a part.

Moving on from the people that comprise the Seattle hip hop community, the places mentioned in the lyrics of the songs are another integral element of this discursive and material ecological construction. All three songs mention specific places, as the videos depict them, and the overlap should be noted for its self-referential nature. Seattle rappers tend to rap about Seattle, and these songs and videos treat specific places in ways that reify their specific construction of the city. What follows will be a brief overview of some of the more important places mentioned and visually referenced in the songs and videos, followed by a discussion of the everyday as it is depicted in the videos.
First of all, it is worth mentioning that hip hop artists are notorious for representing their territory by shouting out its area code. This is a long-standing tradition and is certainly not unique to Seattle rappers. However, it is still a representation of place, something that both locates (both in the cartographic and cultural uses of the term) and dislocates (rappers use their area code to distinguish themselves from others). The very first line of both the Macklemore and Jake One songs is a reference to the Seattle area code- 206. Macklemore starts with “Now when I say two oh/ you say/ nah, you know the rest,” which indicates that his audience already knows what he wants them to say and does not need him to prompt them any further. Similarly, Vitamin D starts Home with, “206, you know this,” again, pointing to a familiarity with both the number and the place it signifies.

There are multiple specific locations that are mentioned either lyrically or are visually depicted in the videos that hold some significance to the Seattle hip hop community, or even the city at large. One of these places is Dick’s Drive-In, a drive-in burger joint with six locations around the city. They are cash-only, with a cheap and overly simplified menu, and quick service as a result. The opening scene of the Jake One video takes place at the Dick’s Drive-In located on Broadway Street in the Capitol Hill neighborhood. The place is significant for more than just the nostalgia it seems to embody (each location looks just as it did when it was founded in 1954), but it provides a communal eating place for people who find themselves in the neighborhood, especially late at night. There is no seating at Dick’s, so people end up eating either in their cars, on their cars, around their cars, or just standing in the parking lot or on the sidewalk. The Capitol Hill location is prime, because it is surrounded by night life, and people who are looking for cheap food at 2AM. The neighborhood is filled with everything from sports bars to gay
clubs, live music venues and cupcake and ice cream shops. It is where a large portion of the city goes to celebrate the weekend, and Dick’s is a common stop along the way.

I distinctly remember going to my first concert in Seattle when I was a junior in high school, and finding myself at Dick’s afterward with my friends. We were excited about the show we had just seen and stuffing our faces with greasy burgers and milkshakes while standing around my old Volvo. Surprised by how cheap it was, it became our routine to grab dinner there every time we were in the city for a show. It became a part of our lives not just for its cheap food or accessibility, but for it’s home-ness, the sense of belonging it gave us to eat where everyone else in the city ate. We might have grown up in a rural suburb, but when we ate at Dick’s we were just like everyone else, performing a metropolitan persona with our insiders’ knowledge of where to get a good burger.

The significance of Broadway in Seattle (one of the main streets in Capitol Hill) is not just located, but historical. Sir Mix-A-Lot, Seattle’s first hip hop export, wrote one of his hit songs about the street (and features Dick’s Drive-In in the video), and as Mizell wrote, “Have you done your homework? That is to say: Hiphop’s prime directive is to flip shit, reanimate the lost and dead, breath new life. So you have to know what came before in order to keep it all moving” (Mizell 2011). Mizell then goes on to recommend specific Seattle artists and albums that people should listen to if they want to understand how and why Seattle hip hop got to where it is at today. This emphasis on history, on understanding roots and progression, is a piece of the puzzle of Seattle hip hop’s construction of an urban ecology through sound. As Macklemore says, “Wordsayer was my mayor/ and things have changed/ but I carry the torch and what I do with that flame/ is lit every time that I step on the stage.” He is able to acknowledge that he learned his craft from a strong lineage of vibrant Seattle hip hop culture and there is a weight to the
responsibility he bears. Much like academics, rappers are taught to give credit where it is due, to respect the tradition, and then move it forward in new and exciting ways.

Another location that gets mentioned or pictured in all three songs/videos is Yesler Avenue, a street that runs the width of the city, West to East. It begins at the waterfront, runs through the historic Pioneer Square neighborhood, then runs up and across Interstate 5. Yesler continues on through the Central District and toward Lake Washington, though it does not actually meet the water. The significance of Yesler Avenue cannot be emphasized enough, as both Pioneer Square and the Central District have historically been neighborhoods of contention in the city. Both places have been, at different times, plagued by poverty and violence yet are still vibrant and integral to the culture of the city overall. Butler raps in Home, “Union, Jackson, Yesler, 2-3/Boy I stay ooo-wee,” which is a reference to the specific area of the Central District where 23\textsuperscript{rd} Street crosses Union, Jackson, and Yesler.

The specific locations mentioned lyrically and depicted visually in these songs and their respective videos speaks to the way in which members of the hip hop community discursively construct the place-ness of an urban ecology. The locational element, the physical bounding of an urban ecology enables it to “take place” in a temporarily fixed way and gives rise to our understanding of neighborhoods, or even a city at large. The import placed by these artists on particular places (re)produces the social, economic, and even aesthetic significance of them in relation to the larger ecological construction. When discussing the placed nature of these songs, the idea of history, or lineage, also comes into play.

There is a distinct history of contestation when it comes to people of all ages having access to live music in the city of Seattle. There has long been a back-and-forth between the citizens and city government, venue owners, and those in charge of regulating places that sell alcohol. The
short version of all of this is that it is prohibitively expensive for music venues that house bars to host all-ages concerts. They have to pay for extra security, and must follow extensive protocols to keep minors out of drinking areas. As a result, some fantastic always all-ages venues have sprung up around the city (though currently only one remains), and there has been fruitful dialogue for decades about the importance of live music for young people. It has also been frustrating for those young people in the city who simply want to be able to see music performed live, but cannot due to their age. There have been regulations put into place such as the infamous Teen Dance Ordinance (overturned in 2002), which was cost prohibitive enough that virtually all all-ages music performances ceased to exist within city limits. In response, organizations like The Vera Project were created, in an effort to provide spaces for people of all ages to watch, create, and capture music and art. Thus, historically, there have been physical locations that have served as contested places, as well as issues of access and age-based discrimination, and places created in response to said discrimination. Macklemore addresses this issue head-on in The Town when he mentions RCKNDY, Langston Hughes, Sit N Spin, and The Paradox, all places that frequently (or exclusively) hosted all-ages concerts. Langston Hughes is the only place on that list that is still around, though it’s existence is tenuous due to it’s non-profit status. Macklemore also takes time in the song to discuss the symbolic importance of these material places. He says, “They’re tryin’ to shut down the clubs that my city rocks/ Now Mister Mayor, why would you enforce and ordinance/ music it saves lives these kids out here are supportin’ it/ and through the art form/ we’ve learned the importance of/ community, truth, to the youth/ so they know what’s up,” and later, “but the kids in the front/ they bring out the passion dude/ make noise throughout the show/ and not only when we ask ‘em to.” Through this plea, Macklemore is able to emphasize the importance of the symbolic consequences of contested material places.
The history of contested space in Seattle is closely tied to the ways in which people have experienced, and continue to experience, the everyday of life in an urban ecology. The past dictates, or at the very least lends shape to, the present and people’s experience of the current everyday. Though this next section is about more than just a specific locale, it directly ties to de Certeau and Thrift’s ideas about place and the everyday, or our lived experience as an understanding of the everyday. As explicated in Chapter 1 of this project, de Certeau wrote about the experience of walking through the city as the authentic experience of an urban environment because walking in the city means that one is, quite literally, in it. Humans tend to valorize the panorama and fetishize the skyline, when our everyday reality is that we are on the ground, walking through the city just like everyone else.

What one finds, however, in looking at both the lyrical content and visual depiction of these songs about the city is that rappers construct the city at both the ground level and the voyeuristic perspective from above. "His elevation transfigures him into a voyeur. It puts him at a distance. It transforms the bewitching world by which one was ‘possessed’ into a text that lies before one’s eyes. It allows one to read it, to be a solar Eye, looking down like a god” (de Certeau 1993, p. 127). The authenticity of hip hop requires that rappers rap about their everyday as it is the same as everyone else’s everyday. They walk the same streets as everyone else, but their unique position as artists gives them an option to speak from another perspective as well. As writers of the everyday, they are also voyeurs. As Geo raps in Joe Metro, “Hop the 48, off to pay homage/ It stops often, I jot my observations, watchin’/ Citizens walkin’ off the Joe Metropolitan.”

This split perspective can be seen in all three songs/videos, in which the camera shots alternate between the street level and the grand skyline. In Home, each rapper spits their verse
while walking down the street, each in a different location, but walking nonetheless. At a couple of points the camera shows a much wider view, with the album’s signature white van in the middle, and an open view of the city of Seattle. *The Town* switches perspectives in a much more dramatic way, alternating between portrait-style shots of people standing on the streets of the city and a view of Macklemore rapping on top of a famous tea house in the International District that affords a stunning view of the city from the south. Just as de Certeau sees the panorama or view from above as a way of reading the city as text, the camera angle showing Macklemore on top of the city enables one to see him as writing the city as text. In the video for *Joe Metro*, the camera alternates between showing Geologic riding the bus, walking down city streets, and rapping from roads that overlook the city, again giving both the perspective of the voyeur and the insider in the same person. “Is the immense texturology spread out before one’s eyes anything more than a representation, an optical artifact? Is it the analogue of the facsimile produced, through a projection that is a way of keeping aloof, by the space planner urbanist, city planner, or cartographer. The panorama-city is ‘theoretical’ (that is, visual) simulacrum, in short a picture, whose condition of possibility is an oblivion and a misunderstanding of practices” (de Certeau 1993).

In all three videos, despite a lyrical emphasis on the everydayness of place, of experiencing place, Mohajerjasbi makes the decision to depict views of the city from above, which I believe is a move to place the viewer as an outsider, a voyeur at certain points, no matter how connected they might feel to the content of the songs. As Macklemore says, “Now lookin’ over the city’s the only thing that keeps me calm/ scattered thoughts jotted down by this pen in my palm/ it’s like my city stands still/ the world looks on/ if I could only capture its beauty and put it in a song.” When he talks about viewing the city from above, he is only able to see it as an outsider,
as he imagines others see it. No matter how familiar one is with a skyline, it does not convey the place-ness of a city the way an on-the-ground view does. We do not experience cities from a distance, but on the ground.

It is this ground-level experience that de Certeau is so enamored with, this idea that our “real” everyday is found while walking in the city. As previously mentioned, despite the god’s eye views of the city scattered throughout the videos, they all manage to spend significantly more time showing people walking in the city. The songs also spend more time lyrically discussing the phenomenon of walking in the city. In Joe Metro, Geologic says, “Most talk, but don’t walk, the path of the righteous/ despite this/ I measure each step, walkin’ closer to my final destination of death,” and then later, as he gets off the bus, “I thank the navigator once and walk fast/ I walk past the next round of cats to jump on it/ locked deep in thought, we ride around in silence/ and cross Rizal Bridge/ I watch each step, walkin’ closer to my final destination of death.” Not only does Geo use walking as a literal means by which to get on and off the bus, but he talks about walking as a metaphorical journey from birth to death, with each step getting him closer to the end of his life. Just as being positioned above the city enables one to see, walking in the city enables one to experience what they cannot see. As de Certeau says, “They walk—an elementary form of this experience of the city; they are walkers, Wandermänner, whose bodies follow the thicks and thins of an urban text they write without being able to read it” (de Certeau 1993, p. 128). The image and description of the rapper walking in the city, rapping words that build the world up around him as he goes, creating and producing an urban ecology that he cannot read as text but can instead experience and constitute through sound.

De Certeau saw the city as a text, and walking through the city as a rhetorical act that is equivalent to composing, or the turning of phrases. Just as writing involves style, so does the act
of creating a route through the city. This direct textual comparison is the main issue that Thrift
takes with de Certeau’s argument in Driving In The City. If one sees walking as the primary way
in which cities are written, then what becomes of a post-pedestrian city? Much walking is the
result of driving, bussing, or cycling, and de Certeau does nothing to account for the myriad
ways in which the “linguistic turn” could be taken in the context of the city. Thrift’s interest is in
articulating the city as more than simply the stylistic result of walkers, and he calls for a
treatment of driving through the city as just as another crucial way in which a city becomes
constituted.

The emphasis on the importance of driving in the city can be seen across these three songs,
both lyrically and visually. In Home, Sir Mix-A-Lot makes a cameo at the beginning, where he
gets into an orange Lamborghini in front of Dick’s Drive-In and peels out. At its most basic
level this could be seen as a status symbol- hip hop royalty getting into a high-end vehicle just to
prove his wealth to the much less wealthy rappers behind the song. Digging a little deeper,
however, this scene is about experience. Not very many people, especially struggling musicians,
can afford to buy a Lamborghini. Those who can afford to own a luxury car experience driving
in the city in a much different way than those who are relegated to walking, cycling, or public
transportation. The comfort level of one’s mode of transportation drastically impacts their
experience of the city, and how they construct the everyday. At the 1:20 minute mark of the
Home video, the viewer sees a white van pull up next to Vitamin D, who is walking on the
sidewalk while spitting his verse. Jake One is driving the van, and local rapper J. Pinder is in the
passenger seat. They pull up next to Vitamin D, talk for a couple of seconds, then drive away.
The white van represents of a period of time in which rappers would hustle their tapes and CDs
out of the back of a van, when getting a record deal was the only feasible way for musicians to
really “make it,” and if you could not get signed to a label you were relegated to selling your music from your vehicle. Again, this could be seen as a simple issue of social status, but there is much more significance to the dichotomy between the Lamborghini and the nondescript white van. They are two drastically different ways to experience the city: one embodies wealth, luxury, and a comfortable view, while the other embodies survival, struggle, and a decidedly less comfortable experience.

In *The Town*, Macklemore broaches the idea of driving in the city when he says, “Town pride heart blood sweat tears I-5 North Southside/ Vibe live/ Ride down these city blocks/ It never will be stopped.” Similar to the representation of a struggling existence in Jake One’s *Home*, Macklemore talks about how it takes hard work to sustain a town pride, ostensibly because being a musician does not mean one will be able to make a living off of local support alone. He talks about the geographic range of the city by using Interstate 5 as a connector between the North and South sides of the city, and follows that with “Ride down these city blocks,” indicating a navigation of the city via motor vehicle. When he says “it never will be stopped” he is not talking about simply driving in the city, but the ecology that is constituted in part by experience of the city via driving. Sound will continue to constitute and reconstitute an urban ecology, and one of the ways in which people understand this place-type experience is through driving in the city.

Continuing with Thrift’s argument that we live in a post-pedestrian city, he claims that when people experience the city by driving, their vehicles become mobile extensions of their human bodies (Thrift 2007). When one utilizes public transportation, they become part of a larger body, one that travels through a city with other confined bodies. Simultaneously enabled and disabled, transported and trapped. If automobiles are the embodied extensions of their drivers, then
passengers on a bus are subject to the emotions and whims of the driver, themselves a part of the extension. In *Joe Metro*, this embodied vehicular experience is spelled out as Geo describes public transportation as a sort of microcosm of the city as a whole. Part of his experience is the abundance of other people, riding the same bus at the same time, but getting on and off the bus at different places, which enables a variety of experience within one bus. He describes “Proletariats and wayward sons/ With old Filipino men speakin’ in their native tongue/ And the day is just begun/ Greeted by the scent of a bum/ Smelling something like beer, barf, and dung/ A brother in repose in the back all alone/ Marinatin’ in a pair of half-broken headphones...” and later, “Seen it all, sittin’ sideways with my townmates/ Only place left where majority is brown-faced.” Geo provides this cross-section of the public, a kind of experience of the city found within a contained, bounded space (in the vernacular). He talks about seeing the “gold and green” while looking out the window, and references the view from the bus as being different than how one would experience the city on the ground level. Geo admits to being at the mercy of the driver (“it stops often”), but also sees this as simply part of the experience.

**Conclusion**

As established in the first chapter, this thesis makes the argument for a sonic urban ecology, drawing on theories of publics, counter-publics, culture, place, and the everyday. By drawing on the aforementioned theories and conceptualizing the interplay between them, we can see how a sonic urban ecology is constituted. A case study of Seattle hip hop is just one way in which this confederation of theoretical claims may be explicated, and a rhetorical approach to this construction one piece of the larger project. In an effort to demonstrate an ecology of sound, this
rhetorical analysis provides a methodology that enables language and visual representation to construct an urban ecology.

One piece of an urban ecology is the public and counter-publics present in conjunction with places, history, and the everyday. In the lyrical content and visual representation of the songs analyzed for this portion of the project, the emphasis on the human element of an urban ecology is clear. People seen as members of the hip hop community in Seattle are mentioned in all three songs, as well as depicted in the videos. There are multiple people who are either talked about or shown in two or more songs and their respective videos. The songs discuss people as an integral part of the community, and as such they are discursively constructed as pieces of the greater urban ecology. The public and counter-publics are both addressed in the songs in ways that (re)produce the placed-based nature of the music and thus the ecology at large.

The maps in the second chapter of this thesis forecast the phenomena gathered in this chapter, with a specific gesture to the importance of located sites. In emphasizing the placed-based nature of the songs chosen for this analysis, it is imperative to acknowledge the actual physical locations mentioned in the lyrical content as well as visually depicted in the videos. The places portrayed in the songs and videos cover a scaled range from specific restaurants to entire neighborhoods, freeways, and everything in between. Each place holds meaning for the community, and their value is articulated in a variety of ways. There is historical value held in many of the places, as well as economic value, and the ability of a place to draw people together. There is also an emphasis on places of contestation, and the role that they play in the how ecologies are constituted. This emphasis on material places also gestures back to the maps pictured in Chapter 2, where the patterns and spatial orientation of material places is represented visually.
The historical nature of an urban ecology becomes especially clear in this particular case study. Hip hop is an art form based largely on history, and the ability of artists to take what has already been created and flip it to make something new. There is an emphasis on knowing one’s past, and knowing where an art form has been in order to know the possibilities of where it can be taken next. This emphasis on lineage can be seen across all three songs in this analysis, as they discuss the ways in which people and places have changed over the years, and what that means for the fluidity of the urban ecology.

The last piece of this analysis is a look at the ways in which the songs and videos address the everyday experience of the city. The artists walk, drive, and bus through the city, and write or visually represent the experiences in different ways. They address the different points of view available to one based on their mode of transport, and treat experience as de Certeau and Thrift might-a means by which we can understand the everyday. The videos alternate between an on-the-ground approach (either walking or driving), and a gods-eye view that shows the city skyline as an epic panorama. The different views depict different realities, as de Certeau would argue that rappers literally write the world around them as they walk through the city, though they cannot see it as they go. The view from above, the emphasis on the landscape, is an outsiders perspective and provides the viewer with a view that does not require prior knowledge.

In concluding this portion of the project, it should be noted that there are implications of this analysis that far outreach this particular case study. This study of Seattle hip hop is indicative of so many other cities that are endowed with a sonic identity, and find themselves as bound communities or neighborhoods which are ecological in nature and constituted by sound. Seattle is not the only city to base much of its identity on its musical history and output, as this is common for cities that have strong musical lineages. The political implications here are that it
takes a more robust understanding of how urban ecologies are constituted by sound to understand the elements that contribute to an urban ecology in the first place. This approach is an attempt to offer an understanding of urban ecologies in order to better understand their implications. Each piece is wrapped up in the others, and their inseparable nature has political implications for cities as urban ecologies. They draw on theories of publics and counter-publics, places, histories, the everyday experience, and constantly permeated by sound as the underlying unifying force of it all.
CHAPTER 4

AN ETHNO-RHETORICAL RETURN AND THE TRANSFERABILITY OF A SONIC URBAN ECOLOGY

As the world trends toward growing urban environments and people across disciplines theorize ways to create and maintain successful neighborhoods and cities, it is becoming more and more important that we conceptualize these places in a way that accounts for more than just economics, politics, or social dynamics independent of each other. It is becoming imperative that we understand what it is that binds communities of people together in urban environments, and what I have offered in this project is a way to approach such questions from a communication perspective, drawing on theory from a variety of disciplines and arguing for an ecological lens through which we can and should view cities. The goal of this project is to take my situated position as a former resident of Seattle and researcher, and provide the reader with ways to envision what that sonic urban ecology is like as a place, as lived experience, and as discursive groups of people.

Despite its origins in the biological sciences, and primary use as a term that only addresses living organisms, I argue in this project that the term ecology is the best one we have for describing cities as they exist in constant flux, with interplay between humans and nonhumans, semi-bounded and encompassing the symbolic, material, and embodied. As Amin & Thrift argue, “An everyday urbanism has to get into the intermesh between flesh and stone, humans and non-humans, fixtures and flows, emotions and practices” (Amin & Thrift 2002, p. 9). We must find a way to encompass these things within our theories in order to offer a robust conceptualization. I also argue that sound can be constitutive of an urban ecology, as it exists as
a vibrant and affective force that runs through ecologies. Within this project I draw on theories of publics, culture, place, and the everyday to emphasize the various elements that comprise a sonic urban ecology. These theories come from a variety of disciplines, and in a real sense this clustering represents an ecology too, as one disciplinary thread cannot encompass all that is needed.

Last Spring, I decided to take a Geographic Information Systems class. I was newly interested in the rhetoric of space and place, and thought that taking a geography class might offer me a different perspective that could help inform how I thought about place. It did, but when coming up with a final project for the class, I was not entirely sure how to join my rhetoric background with geography software. I wanted to look at Seattle hip hop, and the way that hip hop artists talk about place, to see if patterns emerged, or what the lyrics might say as far as the importance of specific places. What I came up with was a map that served as the precursor to the first one found in the second chapter of my thesis.

Although this thesis has personal roots, it is about much more than just my city, my musical preferences, and my experiences. It is about what binds a located community together, and how sound can serve as a uniting force in vibrant and affective ways. It is about taking an ecological perspective, one that accounts for the interrelationality of human and nonhuman actants and lets them play together to more accurately represent our everyday experiences.

Yes, my own history has certainly informed this project, but that does not limit its implications. Every city has ties that bind, some more tightly than others, and it is important that communication scholars address this phenomenon because at a base level we are interested in interaction. Whether that interaction is between a speaker and an audience, individuals in conversation, organizations, or between people and their environments, we look to see the
interplay. I argue in this thesis that looking at cities as ecologies, as semi-bounded, symbolic, material, and embodied places that embrace the vibrancy and affectiveness of the everyday, enables us to see what holds them together. Urban theorists use the term rhythm to discuss the “teeming mix of city life” that is encompassed in my use of the term ecology (Allen 1999, p. 56). Amin and Thrift argue, “The rhythms of the city are the coordinates through which inhabitants and visitors frame and order the urban experience…Indeed in the city of manifold practices across its hundreds of spaces, there is a surprising absence of chaos and misunderstanding, partly owing to the repetitions and regularities that become the tracks to negotiate urban life” (Amin & Thrift 2002, p. 17). This claim that rhythm is the means by which people understand the everyday in the city is helpful in understanding the complexity of cities as urban ecologies, and speaks to the importance of sound within said ecologies. Thus, I also argue that sound can be the thing, the vibrant and affective thing, that weaves throughout an ecology to pull it together. Hence, a sonic urban ecology.

This chapter will attend to the third methodology employed, while also drawing the larger project to a close. While this thesis began with my academic return to Seattle hip hop, it will end with a literal visit to the city, and a reflection on leaving and the transferability of a sonic urban ecology. The methodology for this particular portion of the larger project involved three different elements. In an effort to attend to the vibrancy and affect of sound I attended a live hip hop performance, while addressing the everyday experience of the city by walking and driving through Seattle, writing routes like texts and taking field notes after the fact.

Although there is not a strict precedent set for what ethno-rhetorical methodology looks like, this chapter summarizes some of the existing rhetorical work that has utilized fieldwork, and provides a rhetorical construction of a sonic urban ecology using fieldwork done in Seattle. In
this chapter I will explain what the current understanding of ethno-rhetorical methodology is, review some recent work done under its banner, explicate the differences between existing work and what I have done for this project, then provide an ethno-rhetorical account of Seattle as an urban ecology based on participant observation. This will be interspersed with concluding remarks, and will end with a discussion of the transferability of the ideas presented in this thesis.

There has been minimal research done under the label of ethno-rhetorical methodology to date. Just as the meeting of cultural studies and rhetoric calls for some middle ground between text and context, ethno-rhetorical methods attempt to utilize qualitative research methods such as participant observation to bring experience and context to the foreground of rhetorical criticism and analysis in order to provide a more robust picture. Ralph Cintron, Phaedra C. Pezzullo, Peter Simonson, Danielle Endres and Samantha Senda-Cook have each published research combining participant observation with more traditional rhetorical methods. These works each make compelling arguments for the use of ethnographic research methods to enhance what is available to scholars using strictly textual artifacts.

Arguing from a critical perspective, Pezzullo offers that ethnographic research, and participant observation in particular, can provide rhetoricians with the opportunity to record or capture discourses that are left out of mainstream textual production. Given Pezzullo’s particular interest in publics and counter-publics, this argument is especially pertinent, as rhetoricians frequently limit themselves to texts that carry a certain level of cultural weight. This penchant for “popular” texts ignores the potential significance of texts that have not reached any level of popularity, and the reasons for their obscurity.

The second argument that Pezzullo offers for the potential of qualitative research methods in rhetorical scholarship is that participant observation enables researchers to study discourses that
simply have not been recorded yet, an impossible feat for traditional textual analysis. Pezzullo’s emphasis here is on the capturing of cultural performances, but I argue that the importance of studying unofficial or not-yet-captured discourses can be translated to understanding the everyday as well. There is a significant difference between studying another person’s account of the everyday, a mediated experience, and studying one’s own, unmediated, experience of the everyday. As a researcher, my experiences are not recorded until I put them to paper, and to study the experience of others, although no less valuable, is simply not the same. To talk about the everyday without accounting for my own everyday would be negligent, as it overlooks the situated nature of field work and participant observation. This can result in a false sense of objectivity, or at the very least presents the researchers experience as more representative than it could possibly be.

Perhaps the most important element of this particular argument from Pezzullo is that public discourses are emergent, which cannot be accounted for in traditional rhetorical criticism. This is especially important for this project, as there is a strong emphasis placed on the fluidity and flux of urban ecologies, which is difficult (if not impossible) to address without utilizing ethnographic research methods. Using something similar to participant observation for this project enables me to discuss the emergence of cities, and their transitory nature, in a way that I simply cannot by only using textual analysis.

Furthering Pezzullo’s claim that there is no substitute for on-the-ground experience, Endres and Senda Cook offer the idea that co-presence is better than mediated experience. Obviously this is not true for every rhetorical project, but it is for those that attempt to better understand situation, context, experience, and sensory data. There is a place for traditional textual criticism, but that place is not where these projects reside. When one wants to critique dominant
discourses, or access underrepresented or silenced voices, what better way than to explore said discourses first-hand, instead of relying on others accounts.

Also in line with Pezzullo’s claim that participant observation allows a researcher to account for the emergent nature of cultural performance, Endres and Senda-Cook argue “that being present can allow the researcher to document something as seemingly nebulous and non-textual as how place is constructed in protest” (Endres & Senda-Cook 2011). This project is arguing for a similarly hazy idea—that sound is constitutive of urban ecologies—and thus can benefit from an ethno-rhetorical approach as well.

Although this portion of the project will draw on existing uses of ethno-rhetorical methods and the ways in which the authors mentioned above have opened up the conversation to make way for further combinations of qualitative research and rhetorical scholarship, there are some important differences. Where the aforementioned studies utilize fieldwork in and effort to be present, to capture not only the lived experience of everyday rhetoric and its scenes, I have used fieldwork to experience the everyday as it relates to a sonic urban ecology. This work does not focus solely on discourse, though it is certainly mentioned, but is more interested in the ways in which the vibrancy and affect of sound enters into our everyday lives and serves as a rhetorical force through which we conceptualize the everyday. The attention of this work is aimed as much at place, movement, and visceral forces than it is at conversational discourses.

When it came to conducting the fieldwork for this project, the choice of which performance to attend was the result of a few boundaries—I had a two-week period in which I would be in Seattle and available to attend a show, so time was a factor. My aim was to attend a performance by a local hip hop artist that I was at least somewhat familiar with, preferably at a venue I was familiar with as well. Neither of those two standards was too difficult to meet. Having worked
in the Seattle music industry for several years, I made connections at virtually all the venues in town, as it is a close-knit industry. For the purposes of this project the show needed to be typical of my everyday experience when I resided in Seattle. There were two shows happening while I was in town that were possibilities, but I chose one over the other for its location and artists. While working in the music industry in Seattle it was rare that I found myself having to pay to attend a concert, since friends working at other venues would let me in for free. Thus, I opted for a $12 show with slightly lesser known artists and a more familiar venue (there was a more expensive show happening at a venue that opened after I left Seattle). So on the evening of December 22nd, 2012, I found myself at The Crocodile, a historical music venue in the Belltown neighborhood that has been a staple of the music community since 1991. The headliner that night was a rapper named Nacho Picasso, a relatively young artist who has been steadily receiving more attention over the past two years, both on a local and national level (Weiss 2011, Mizell 2012, Soderberg 2012). There were several local opening acts as well. I attended the show with a friend, and waited until getting home after it was over to take notes, since it would not be a typical experience for me to take notes while actually at the performance. Throughout the evening I took some scratch notes on my phone to jog my memory, and then fleshed out a full field note upon getting home that evening.

The second piece of my ethno-rhetorical methodology was to walk in the city. As imprecise as that might sound, it was very intentional and purposeful, as the main goal was to experience the city in a way that nodded to de Certeau and enabled me to situate myself as a I did while residing in the city. For the vast majority of my time spent in Seattle, I did not own a car and relied on my own two feet, a bicycle, or public transit to get me around in my day-to-day life. Whenever I had the time to do so, I preferred walking above other forms of transport for the
view of the city it provided me, and the experience of being on the ground. I always felt that I
got to know the city better when I walked through it, partially because traveling at a slower speed
meant that I had more time to observe the city around me, and partially because walking felt
grounded, and made me feel as though I was not just an entity distinct from the environment
around me but that I was in fact an integral working piece of an urban ecology (though I did not
have the vocabulary to articulate it at the time). While back in the city I walked as much as
possible to engage in the experience as I once did.

Given the difficulty of writing and walking at the same time, I did not attempt to take notes
while actually walking in the city. What I did instead, a move that I believe more accurately
reflects the experience of the city anyway, was to walk as I normally would, to places I normally
would and with people I normally would. At the end of the day, I would go to a coffee shop and
would write out a field note about the day, narrating my experience in a way that both
acknowledged the difference between being a resident and visitor, and still situated myself as
always embedded in the city.

The final piece of this methodology was to drive in the city. Though my time in Seattle was
largely vehicle-less, I did own a car for pieces of that time, and had plenty of friends who owned
cars as well. As Thrift argues, as cities are more and more designed around vehicular transport
and less around walking, it is negligent to assume that walking is somehow a more “real”
experience of the city than other forms of moving through it (Thrift 2004). Much of the walking
done in cities is a result of driving, and it must be incorporated into our understanding of the
everyday. Though I disagree that we live in an entirely post-pedestrian society, I do think it is
important to incorporate driving into our theories of the everyday.
Another reason that driving becomes more important for the purposes of this project is that driving is an integral part of my return visits home; in fact, it has become much more a part of returning home than it ever was when I resided there. The reason for this is that I stay with my family when I return home, and they do not live in the city proper, but in a rural suburb about an hour away, which requires driving to get to the city itself. It is important to acknowledge this element of the experience as it becomes part of the memorial lens I must dawn as a researcher, someone who is no longer situated in the same way I once was. Just as Thrift points out, to get to the city to walk or bus or bike, I must drive. It is a part of my everyday experience, and thus must be a part of this project.

Again, given the impossibility of driving and writing at the same time, this piece of the project necessitated waiting until I was no longer mobile before writing out field notes. Since my time in Seattle required driving simply to get home at the end of the day, I would write scratch notes in my phone about the driving I did throughout the day, and then wrote out more extensive notes upon my return home each day.

As a communication scholar, and not an urban theorist, I chose to address both the human and nonhuman elements of an urban ecology. As a field of study, urban ecologists are closely tied to biology, and study only the living elements of urban environments. The urban ecology journal subheading says “An International Perspective on the Interaction between Humans and Nature.” Although this is not entirely unrelated to my project, these studies do not account for the agency of things, not just nonhuman living things, but non-living things. I am not interested solely in the interaction of the living, but the incorporation of the non-living as well.

In researching for, and writing this project, I realized that it could easily turn into something much, much bigger than what you have sitting in front of you. I draw on multiple
bodies of theory, from a variety of disciplines, which ran the risk of being too much to scale down. So, I made choices. I chose to draw from disciplines outside of communication because there are scholars found in geography, political science, and critical theory who are addressing questions of nonhuman agency, the role of sound, and place, in ways that communication scholars have yet to, and I felt that it would be beneficial to the overall project to incorporate their work to advance a communication perspective.

I chose to draw on theories of publics and counter-publics because rhetoricians have addressed this in significant and thorough ways already, looking at how groups of people are bound together through the circulation of discourse and shared experience. Counter-publics are groups set in opposition to the larger public, though there is allowance for overlap and permeability. As Hauser explains, they are a reticulate structure. This explanation helps to address the grouping of people within an urban ecology, from a communication perspective, but it is decidedly human-centric. As is demonstrated throughout this project, drawing on rhetorical theories of publics and counter-publics gestures to the human element of an urban ecology, which is a limited but integral piece. I take up Michael Warner’s definition of publics as “social space created by the reflexive circulation of discourse” (Warner 2002), and counter-publics as people who set themselves apart from the dominant cultural discourses, as a way to frame the Seattle hip hop community. Seattle hip hop exists in fairly stark contrast to mainstream hip hop, both discursively and sonically, though it is not so different that it has a different genre name, or cannot be recognized as hip hop. It has a deep historical lineage that can be seen in its treatment of politics and the history of both the city and the people who occupy it. The counter-public of Seattle hip hop also sets itself apart from the city as a whole. Although a quick glance at the music might lead one to believe that the artists are attempting to represent the city at large, when
looked at more closely it can be seen that they are in fact representing certain groups of people or certain neighborhoods, but not the entire city.

When looking at the maps featured in Chapter 2, the counter-public emerges in particular areas, and does not span the entirety of the city. As far as a human geography goes, looking across the maps indicates that the places mentioned in Seattle hip hop songs form patterns that illuminate particular areas over others. The way in which the artists discursively construct and (re)produce their own counter-public can be seen in both the particular places they mention, but also the people they mention. There is much overlap in the people mentioned within Seattle hip hop songs. Just within the three songs used in this project there are multiple occasions where someone is either mentioned in multiple songs, featured in multiple videos, or some combination of the two. This self-referentiality reproduces the community in a way that simultaneously maintains its existence in relation to the larger city and hip hop mainstream, and sets in in contrast to both. It is as if the artists are claiming that they are residents of Seattle that create a type of music called hip hop, and thus belong to a larger group, but make a point of emphasizing points of antagonism that set them apart and reify their uniqueness as a “reticulate structure” (Hauser 1998). This human component of cities, the bodies that live and move within them, are an important piece of an urban ecology. They do not comprise the entirety of its existence, but their interplay with the nonhuman actants is crucial to understanding the vibrancy and affectiveness that exists within an ecology. For the purposes of this project, people are one way in which sound is manifest, both in its creation and interpretation, and thus provide an integral piece of the larger ecology.

One thing that explains this web of people well is the phenomenon in Seattle called a “mixed bill,” which is when a show takes place that includes artists from drastically different
genres of music. One of my favorite examples of this was on January 1st, 2010, a day normally reserved for hangovers and taking it easy. Instead, people packed the Comet Tavern to see New York fuzz punk band Japanther play a show with local Seattle hip hop act Champagne Champagne, and the crowd went equally nuts for both groups. I remember laughing while watching my friend Larry, a hip hop music columnist and sometimes rapper, pogo-ing up and down with joy while Japanther’s distorted guitars and insistent drumming rattled the windows of the bar. Although I am sure there are multiple theories about the success of the mixed bill in Seattle, my personal take on it is that the city’s musical lineage was largely born out of grunge (an answer to dissatisfied punks), and even Seattle rappers are known to wear Nirvana shirts just as frequently as any hip hop gear. The rock history persists in unique ways, meeting the hip hop present to create moments that seem a little surreal.

All that to say that it is not uncommon to see friends from different walks of life at the same concerts, because people are not limited by genre. When I went to see Nacho Picasso play during my research visit home, I met up with a friend who also wanted to see the show, but I fully expected that we would run into people we knew while there. Oddly, we ended up spending most of the evening observing the nights events like voyeurs, feeling a little out of place and confused about the dynamic of the evening.

Granted, a lot has changed since I moved from Seattle in mid-2011- the city has done extensive construction on its light rail line, new venues have opened, some have closed, and the murder rate has skyrocketed. In light of these things, maybe it should not have been a surprise that there was palpable tension throughout the show, but it caught me off guard none-the-less. In years of attending hip hop shows in Seattle, I had never seen a real fight, but in one night of watching Nacho Picasso I saw three separate fights large enough to warrant being broken up by
security guards. So, not only were the people largely unfamiliar to me, but there was a vibrant tension in the room that I had never experienced before and was admittedly uncomfortable with. This vibrancy is transferable in so much as it speaks to why people listen to music. People listen for the rhythm of the city, and this can be felt anywhere. Even the rhythm of the city might manifest itself in different ways in different ecologies, but music is one way in which it can be felt.

Perhaps the one moment of the show that felt like the type of community moment I remembered was Nacho Picasso’s performance, at which point several of his friends got on stage with him to “hype” him (and arguably just to have a chance to be on stage). They filled the stage, crowding him and chanting “Moore Gang!” (Nacho’s crew) repeatedly whenever they had the chance. It felt familial, in some ways, but a bit alienating in others, since few people in the crowd are actually a part of Moore Gang or really connected to it in any way. Ultimately the show felt strange. I felt the tension between being dislocated, a researcher come back to a former place of residence acting as a voyeur, and as a member of a community I still felt tied to through symbolic interaction while away.

The rest of my time in Seattle, though less purposeful, still involved much human interaction. To exist in that urban ecology required spending time with friends, which turned out to be an easy task. Still finding myself magnetized to the same places I frequented as a resident, as a visitor to the city I would go to my favorite coffee shops, bars, or restaurants, and would inevitably run into friends and acquaintances at each place. It took very little effort to spend a significant amount of time with familiar faces. I went to a coffee shop to do some reading and writing, and the barista would remembered me even though I had not been there in two years. While at the coffee shop I posted a photo of the shop online, and within half an hour a friend
who had seen it stopped by to talk. When I decided to walk a block away to the bar at the venue I used to work at, there would be at least two friends there at any given time that I could catch up with.

One of the most important elements of going home, of (re)locating myself, is catching up with friends who still work at venues or bars around town. The abundance of mutual friends allows the conversations to feel familial, and enables a level of ease that comes with a high degree of comfort. People love to talk about other people, and these conversations engenders the (re)production of a counter-public that I can participate in despite being geographically separated from it. I can be made aware of that status of various venues, bands, and their management without even living in the city. This is due in part to technology and the relationships it enables me to maintain, but it is also largely a result of in-person conversations that perpetuate the culture. Though, where people continue to (re)produce the community, physical places can serve to both reify existing culture and, when changed or destroyed, drastically impact the ecological dynamic.

Drawing on theories of place to explicate the idea of an urban ecology, I looked at geographic and communicative approaches, both of which rely heavily on Lefebvre. What they both offer is an understanding of place as not only location imbued with meaning, but the political and social processes present as well. Rhetoricians see places as rhetorical performances, not simply discursive constructions. Again, this understanding speaks to the idea of located experience and the experience of location, but does not account for the vibrant and affective dimensions that I argue are imperative for an ecological perspective. One benefit of Lefebvre’s (and subsequent rhetoricians’) explanation of place, is that it removes the burden of a physical location in favor of semi-bounded political and social processes. This de-emphasis on a
rooted physical location allows for the symbolic elements of place to travel and fluctuate, less restricted by locationality. When Seattle hip hop artists tour through Colorado, and we spend time together here, we construct an understanding of “our place” based on shared meaning in that moment, which is a circulation of discourses that often includes talk of particular places and people. It involves catching up, and conversation that frequently returns to notions of place that include the physical location of Seattle, though we are able to symbolically represent it elsewhere.

Although the understanding of place taken in this project draws heavily on Lefebvre, it does not completely eliminate the locationality of place. Though it moves to lessen the emphasis on physical location, it still requires its existence. The importance of the bounding of physical location can be seen across this project, both in the symbolic ways in which it is represented, and its actual material existence. In looking at the maps of lyrical content, music venues, and my fieldwork, it becomes apparent that there is in fact a geographic component to the idea of place that is inseparable from the processual elements. Place must be comprised of both in order to function as it does.

The idea of the agency of things that is found within rhetorical definitions of place, also plays a vital role in this project, and can be seen throughout the chapters. Not only does the importance of object agency become clear in the materiality of cities, but this project forwards a conceptualization of sound as material and agentic, vibrant and affective. This became especially clear during my fieldwork, which enabled me to experience both the vibrancy and affectiveness while attending a live hip hop performance, as well as while experiencing the everyday of Seattle through the lens of someone embedded in the hip hop community.
I find myself drawn to the same places over and over again whenever I revisit Seattle. On this particular trip I realized that not only do I frequent the same coffee shops, bars, venues and even parking spots, but also I am expressly uninterested in places that have come to exist since I left (with the exception of one coffee shop which was opened by a friend of mine). In the two years since I have been gone, two of my former bosses have opened two separate restaurants, a new venue opened in the University District, and numerous other restaurants and bars have popped up around town. However, they are not a part of my memory of the city and thus have never piqued my interest, especially not in the context of this project. The creation of new places is evidence of the fluidity and flux of an urban ecology, to be sure, and it warrants mentioning, especially given my reaction to the change. If I were still living in Seattle, still experiencing the everyday of the urban ecology, this change would be incorporated into my experience and my memory. As an outsider, a voyeur, change not only appears more drastic since my everyday is not physically located in Seattle, but it is not part of my memory or the temporarily fixed snapshot of the city I have provided in this project. Amin and Thrift, drawing on Benjamin, do not say that one must be a resident of a city to theorize about the everyday experience there (Amin & Thrift 2002), as one can act as a meditative walker, or flâneur, but they do acknowledge the limitations of this perspective as only being able to capture particular elements or observations. I argue that the flâneur is an observer, an experiencer, and a voyeur of sorts. There is a limitation to how much they can know as a non-resident, only so much of the symbolic will transfer as it does for those who are intimately familiar with the rhythms of a particular city.

While visiting the city I found myself largely back in places that felt comfortable to me based on previous patronage, personnel or proximity. There are certain neighborhoods I frequent
more than others, and that decision is largely based on music. As someone familiar with the local music scene, the people involved, and the places it manifests itself within, I tend to associate certain types of music with particular neighborhoods in the city, and my choices of where to go are often dictated by whether or not the music of that neighborhood matches the mood I am in. For example, the Ballard neighborhood is home to more folksy acoustic music. Thus, if I am feeling particularly nostalgic or emotional, I will find myself in Ballard, usually near the water or walking the streets of the traditionally Scandinavian neighborhood headed toward the train tracks. It is a quaint place, full of coffee shops, a cupcake shop, and numerous boutique clothing stores. There are also a couple of long-standing record stores that draw people in from all over the city.

Alternately, I associate the Capitol Hill neighborhood with a more active nightlife full of hip hop, dance music and crowded bars with hipster DJs. This association is certainly due in part to the time I spent working on the Hill at a music venue that was home to said hipster DJs and lots of hip hop and electronic music shows. Not only is the neighborhood chock full of bars and music venues (likely the highest concentration in the city), but it is also home to several places to get cheap late-night food that fuels the nightlife. It is an easy place to end up if you are not sure what you want to do but feel like going out, as the options are seemingly endless. While visiting on this most recent trip I found myself repeatedly drawn to Capitol Hill. It is home to my favorite coffee shop, which served as a perfect home base for making plans while in town. There is a quiet upstairs area in the shop, with dark heavy tables and a pleasant view of East Pike Street. My affection for that particular spot is born of the quiet, above all else, because in a neighborhood so explicitly built around sound and noise, and in a constant state of flux, the upstairs of Café Vita feels like a place where time slows down a bit.
Another place I was routinely drawn to was Moe Bar, which is the bar attached to the music venue I used to work at. As someone who does not drink, Moe Bar has a strange appeal for me. I have always enjoyed the atmosphere, as the owners have taken careful measures to keep it feeling calm and subdued with exceptionally dim lighting, thick dark wooden tables, a dark brown leather bench that runs the entire length of one side of the bar, one small white candle on each table, and deep red glass lighting fixtures that hang down over each table. Despite the fact that the music played is often aggressive punk music or bass-heavy hip hop, the place usually feels relaxed. When I worked at the venue that is attached to Moe Bar, I would join the whole crew (security guards, sound techs, light techs, and barbacks) at the end of each show as they enjoyed their “shift drinks” (each staff member gets a free beer after each show). At the convergence of people and place, I have many fond memories of those nights, decompressing with friends after a long night of work, and gaining favor with them by giving my shift drink to whoever wanted it that night. Thus, I found myself at Moe Bar at some point almost every night I spent in the city during this visit. I no longer know all of the bartenders, but that has not dampened my love of the place. It is still dark, loud, and somehow peaceful.

One place I also visited repeatedly while in town is the restaurant Pho Cyclo. I never realized how fond I was of Pho, the Vietnamese soup, until I left Seattle for a place with almost no Pho restaurants. In Seattle they are on nearly every block, and are touted by many as being a cure-all for everything from the common cold to a hangover. Upon returning to Seattle, I was excited to have good pho again, and I found myself at one particular spot multiple times. I would convince friends to meet me there, though it did not take much persuading, and I even went by myself. There is no memorial significance to Pho Cyclo over any other pho restaurant in town, but since I found myself in Capitol Hill over and over, it was the closest one that I knew
was consistently good. The physical location of the restaurant was placed at a higher priority than any other factor.

Another place of significance is not one that I had ever been to prior to this trip home. Although it might seem contradictory, the place had such a large impact on the trip that it cannot go unmentioned. Due to a scheduling issue, I had to spend my last night in the Seattle area at a friend’s apartment on Capitol Hill instead of at my parent’s house in the suburbs. He and I spent that night going to multiple bars, enjoying the neighborhood in a way fitting of one’s last night in town. We played pinball at The Unicorn, met up with an old college friend of mine at The Redwood, and ended up playing with modified Polaroid cameras back at his place. Before going to sleep, my friend told me he had to show me something and we made our way to the roof of the building. The view was exceptional. As we stood in the dark, huge grins on our faces, we looked out over the entire city. It was all there, spread out in front of us, lit up beautifully, and silent. We could see everything from the University district to the Space Needle on Queen Anne, down to Beacon Hill and the Stadium District. Seeing a place like that, all of it, requires silent appreciation, and we stood there for quite a while taking it all in. At that moment we were both inside and outside the city, enjoying the landscape from a gods-eye view while just moments earlier walking and experiencing the city as participants in the everyday. We watched the city as voyeurs, knowing that we would soon return to a different view.

In looking at how scholars such as Lefebvre, de Certeau, and Thrift have theorized the everyday, it becomes clear that people do not exist independent of the world around them, but in fact interact with it. We walk, drive, and bicycle through cities, unable to see the bigger picture but only what is within our immediate purview. Here there is a distinct connection between these theories of the everyday, and how geographers such as Cresswell have talked about place.
De Certeau refers to a god’s eye view of the city as being voyeuristic, but not participatory. We can see cities from elevated views, but to have such a view means that one is outside of the city, and not inside it. Similarly, when distinguishing between landscapes and place, Cresswell argues that landscapes are something we see from the outside, as voyeurs, but places are what we live in, what we experience.

As someone who spent the majority of her time as a Seattle resident without a car, I learned to appreciate other forms of transportation and generally became wary of city driving. It was rarely necessary, so it became intimidating. When visiting, however, I required a car to get from the suburbs to the city. I would drive to the city, find a place to park, and then spend several hours using other modes of transport. I have frequently been accused of “driving like a grandma,” which usually equates to me being overly cautious and slow. On this trip, however, I found that my confidence on the road was at an all-time high. My experience of driving in the city became an adventure, instead of something I had to endure just to get to a place where I could leave the car behind. This shift in experience was likely the result of a shift in perspective, or a changing lens through which I was seeing my own city. Instead of simply being a member of a community, a resident who knew how to navigate without a car out of necessity, I was a researcher with wheels. I was figuring out how to navigate the city by car just as I was learning how to research my own reality - as a voyeur.

Similar to the change in my experience of driving and parking in the city, I also found slight differences in how I walked in the city. When I worked on Capitol Hill I would not hesitate to cross any street at virtually any time, often making seemingly foolish choices to run across a busy street because I was confident that the cars would stop for me whether or not I had the right of way. I also knew the streets well enough to be able to know how long it would take...
me to cross them. Often when I was walking at night I would find myself walking in the road instead of on the sidewalk because I was so comfortable with the area. During this visit, however, I found myself sticking to sidewalks and crosswalks as if I were a train unable to leave the tracks. I was wary of walking out into the street unless it was very obviously clear of cars, and I found myself taking slightly longer routes to get places simply because they felt marginally safer. Suddenly I was willing to walk an extra block or more to avoid dealing with cars.

The blindness that de Certeau attributes to walkers in a city felt very real during these times. As someone suddenly not as familiar as I once was, I was made aware of my own obliviousness. I could not see what was coming, or what was around the corner, and instead of embracing that as I used to, I let it dictate my movements. The way in which I constructed the city was detached, perhaps by my new role as a researcher, and I was likely paying closer attention to my movements than I would have before. Where and how I walked was under the microscope in a way it never had been before. I was walking with different purpose, less focused on the destination and more on the routes too and from each place. During this visit I noticed that I was intentionally walking around puddles (a common feature of Seattle streets and sidewalks), where as a resident I just stomped right through them, ignoring the unpleasantness of wet shoes and socks in favor of being too cool to bother avoiding them. As a visitor, I was less willing to deal with wet feet if it simply meant taking an extra step or two around a spreading circle of water.

On my final morning in Seattle, my friend and I rode the bus from his apartment to our friend’s coffee shop. It had been quite some time since I had ridden public transit in Seattle, despite having done it nearly daily as a resident. As a visitor, especially with a suitcase in tow, the bus seemed foreign and uncomfortable. Thrift argues that vehicles are extensions of their
human drivers, subject to their whims and emotions. When riding public transportation this takes on new meaning, with several bodies contained within one vehicle but only one person in control of its direction and speed. As a rider, the bus is a tenuous place to be, since you are subject to the drivers actions but have some mobility within the vehicle, and some control over where it stops. Passengers are not a part of the vehicle, but are contained within it, trapped together but also mobilized at the same time in ways they would not be otherwise.

From the coffee shop I took the light rail to the airport, a different experience entirely. Technically there is someone at the helm, but the light rail is so automated that the human component of the driving is virtually nonexistent. Strangers do not usually interact on the light rail, and despite its emptiness it is occupied temporarily by transit police every few stops who check peoples tickets to make sure they are valid. It is decidedly more sterile than the bus, and provides a drastically different view as well. The bus transports people on a ground level. Despite being taller than your standard car, busses travel with cars in the same lanes and through the same places. Alternately, the light rail is either underground in a tunnel or above ground on raised tracks, depending on which part of the city you are in. The tunnel provides no view at all, save for the harsh concrete walls, while the raised tracks offer a rather stunning panorama of certain parts of the city. Much like the switch back and forth from street view to gods-eye view mentioned in the previous chapter in regards to the music videos, the light rail provides a similar view. When you see the city from above, you feel like an outsider, a voyeur privileged by a view that residents typically do not see.

The connection between place and sound can perhaps be best articulated through this understanding of the everyday. As de Certeau describes the everyday, we “blindly” walk through cities, constructing them as we go with our routes, stops, and starts. We cannot see the
bigger picture, the city as a whole, because we exist on the ground level and that is the truest form of experience. De Certeau compares walking to writing, saying that we compose the cities around us as we live our everyday lives. Hip hop artists help the “blind” to see by describing the street, the everyday experience, to their audiences. At this symbolic level, they enable the transference of experience by description, and by communicating desire. And, although we worship the skyline, and go to great lengths to see a panoramic view, that is the perspective of the outsider. A voyeur sees things from a god’s eye view, the landscape, while the insider sees their immediate environment. Thus, an outsider cannot understand the lived, day-to-day experience. Similarly, to anyone situated outside of the Seattle hip hop scene, there is only so much they can know. They can look at it from the outside, as audio voyeurs, but there are limitations to that perspective. As someone who lived and worked in Seattle, situated in the music industry, I was (and continue to be) privy to information, connections, understandings and meanings that only an insider would be. I have been granted access to a lived experience that enables me to be an on-the-ground participant, not just a voyeur but an actant, engaged in the sonic urban ecology. In order to understand the lived experience of an urban ecology, one must experience sound “on the ground.” Therefore, this project aims to take my situated position as a former resident of Seattle and researcher, and provide the reader with ways to envision what that sonic urban ecology is like as a place, as lived experience, and as discursive groups of people.

As previously mentioned in this project, vibrancy and affect are important for understanding a sonic urban ecology for a couple of reasons. Firstly, sound exists as both a physical entity as well as a visceral force. Anyone who has stood close to a speaker emitting a low frequency can attest to both elements. Sound very literally vibrates, existing as waves of pressure which can reverberate off walls, or pass right into human bodies. When audio
technicians sound check a band, they have to take into account that an empty room sounds much different than one full of bodies. Bodies absorb sound waves in a very tangible way. Whether it is the low rumble of a car passing by as you walk down the sidewalk, or the pulsing of the floorboards of a dance club, we frequently and easily experience the vibrancy of sound. Even Darwin pointed to the vibration of sound as an intensity which produced bodily pleasure.

Such intensities can also be seen in the affectual power of sound. Neurologists have taken up Kant’s claim that music is “the quickening art,” and study the impact of music on the human brain. Taking dementia patients who are otherwise inert, nearly mute, and seem to have lost any sense of self, neurologist and author Oliver Sacks has seen exceptional improvement when providing them with their favorite music. The patients light up, move around, and are able to carry on conversations after listening to music, and seem to regain a sense of self. “So in some sense Henry [a dementia patient] has been restored to himself. He has remembered who he is, and he’s reacquired his identity for a while through the power of music” (2011). Similarly, music and its quickening, or intensity, can breath life into a city as well, permeating the human and nonhuman elements of which it is comprised, and binding it together as a fluid and dynamic urban ecology. Music does not just “quicken” the human brain, but is a force with larger scale implications. These implications can be political, as Grosz says,

> Art is intensely political not in the sense that it is a collective or community activity (which it may be but usually is not) but in the sense that it elaborates the possibilities of new, more, different sensations than those we know. Art is where the becomings of the earth couple with the becomings of life to produce intensities and sensations that in themselves summon up a new kind of life. (Grosz 2008 p. 79)

This “new kind of life” need not be limited to living organisms, but can be understood as a kind of life that includes interaction between human and nonhuman actants. This interplay between the human and nonhuman is imperative for a sonic urban ecology, as it allows for the
symbolic, material, and embodied aspects to exist simultaneously and in relationship with one another.

In looking at the ethno-rhetorical fieldwork conducted for this project, it can be seen that sound runs through it all, and music in particular serves as a binding force in this urban ecology. It acts as the connective tissue between those who’s livelihood is reliant on it, but it is also the inescapable factor woven into every interaction, every body, every movement, and every building. As I experienced the city and wrote about it, it became clear that each element of my research was not only impacted by music, but that it is inextricably tied to each and every piece of the experience. It shaped places, orchestrated directions, and commanded attention. It proved to be a driving political force, a social indicator, and a mode by which people oriented themselves to each other and their everyday. As humans, we are able to understand sound as symbolic through language, tone, volume, etc., whether in musical form, or everyday conversation. We use sound to represent emotion and experience all the time. In its material form, sound can be performed, captured, and duplicated. We also experience sound as an embodied phenomenon, absorbing it, letting it become a part of us.

Music, as an organized form of sound, has long been a powerful force. It has restorative power, is used therapeutically, and manifests shared meaning. It is affective in that it evokes a visceral response, and has the ability to intensify and resonate within and between bodies, whether they be human or nonhuman. Certain chord progressions have the power to bring us to tears, or fill us with joy. For the purposes of this thesis, music is vibrant and affective and serves as a uniting force, as something that permeates each element of an urban ecology to hold it together. I chose to focus on Seattle hip hop not only because of my own relationship with it, but because of its opposition to mainstream hip hop, which sets it’s artists apart as a counter-public,
as well as its propensity for representing Seattle, as well as specific locations within the city, in its lyrical content, as well as the political and social impacts it has on its community members, the material city, and the processes within the city at large.

The three-part methodology presented in this project takes an ecological perspective, and I knew that just performing a rhetorical criticism would not be sufficient. It would be able to address the discursive elements of the project, but not the material or embodied. Therefore, I chose to perform a three-part methodology that would encompass the symbolic, material, and embodied elements of an urban ecology, emphasizing sound as the vibrant and affective force that binds it together. When creating the maps for the second chapter, I addressed the symbolic and material elements of the ecology, by providing a visual representation of lyrical content, as well as the material locations of sound performance and capture. The maps themselves are material artifacts that describe the symbolic (lyrical), and material (performative), and embodied (fieldwork) ways in which sound is not only a located phenomenon, but can weave throughout an ecology. Finally, the fieldwork conducted for this project, which I have labeled ethno-rhetorical, uses a rhetorical framework (places are rhetorical performances) to address the embodied nature of the everyday experience. I did not perform an ethnography, as I did not spend an extended amount of time at my site, but I did utilize some ethnographic ideas in doing my research. I attended to the tension between being a researcher, as well as someone who had previous engagements with the site. I took notes on my experiences, and let the data speak to the ecological framework, instead of forcing it to fit a mold.

Lastly, there are implications of this project for the field of communication. To date, communication scholars have not studied what it is that holds cities together, what binds them as fluid and permeable communities. Organizational communication scholars come close, but they
tend not to scale their work up to the city level, and rhetoricians have theorized about place as a rhetorical performance and the discourses that circulate in particular areas, but neither gets at the heart of what this project is about. This thesis, although it draws on theory from a variety of disciplines, does in fact make a communicative argument for a sonic urban ecology. As communication scholars, we largely study interaction. Traditionally, this has meant interaction between people, though scholars within organizational communication subscribing to the Communicative Construction of Organization (CCO) theory have begun to incorporate human interaction with nonhuman agents (Fairhurst & Cooren 2008). Rhetoricians have also begun treating places as rhetorical performances (Endres & Senda-Cook 2011), but have not made the argument for what binds a place together. If communication scholars study interaction (whether it is between people, a speaker and audience, or people and objects), there should be an inherent line of inquiry into the communicative force at work in interactions that result in ecologies. Not only does sound communicate, but places, people, and material objects do as well, and if they constitute an urban ecology then it should be of interest to communication scholars.

Rhetoricians in particular are in a position to ask questions about ecologies, moving forward from place, as a way to understand the cultural milieu in which we are all immersed. This project offers an ecological lens through which we can understand urban environments as constituted by sound, and drawing on theories of publics, culture, place, and the everyday.

In closing, I would like to offer that this project has implications for how we understand cities, as it utilizes theory from a variety of disciplines that can all benefit from the interaction. For communication scholars, it offers a way to conceptualize cities that has yet to be addressed, not at this scale, and not with this ecological lens. Even urban planners and geographers might
benefit from adopting an ecological perspective that incorporates the human and non-human, and allows for sound to be a vibrant and affective force that permeates and binds.

What I have presented here is an urban ecology as a semi-bounded and permeable way of conceptualizing cities that encompasses the symbolic, material, and embodied while embracing vibrancy and affectiveness. This project offers that sound is woven throughout urban ecologies as a tie that binds them together, holding fast in its many forms. It is not simply music, but the intrinsic rhythms, resonances, and intensities of sound that enable it to act as a uniting force amongst the human and nonhuman. By understanding cities as sonic urban ecologies, we are able to better understand their flux, flows, and points of unity. We can understand the interplay between feet and pavement, and the very real vibrancy of the kick of a bass drum as it reverberates through our bodies.
REFERENCES


