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**MUSICAL BORROWING IN HIP-HOP MUSIC:  
THEORETICAL FRAMEWORKS AND CASE STUDIES**

**Justin A. Williams, BA, MMus**

**Thesis submitted to the University of Nottingham  
for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy**

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**Musical Borrowing in Hip-hop Music: Theoretical Frameworks and Case Studies**  
**Justin A. Williams**

**ABSTRACT**

‘Musical Borrowing in Hip-hop’ begins with a crucial premise: the hip-hop world, as an imagined community, regards unconcealed intertextuality as integral to the production and reception of its artistic culture. In other words, borrowing, in its multidimensional forms and manifestations, is central to the aesthetics of hip-hop. This study of borrowing in hip-hop music, which transcends narrow discourses on ‘sampling’ (digital sampling), illustrates the variety of ways that one can borrow from a source text or trope, and ways that audiences identify and respond to these practices. Another function of this thesis is to initiate a more nuanced discourse in hip-hop studies, to allow for the number of intertextual avenues travelled within hip-hop recordings, and to present academic frameworks with which to study them. The following five chapters provide case studies that prove that musical borrowing, part and parcel of hip-hop aesthetics, occurs on multiple planes and within myriad dimensions.

These case studies include borrowing from the internal past of the genre (Ch. 1), the use of jazz and its reception as an ‘art music’ within hip-hop (Ch. 2), borrowing and mixing intended for listening spaces such as the automobile (Ch. 3), sampling the voice of rap artists posthumously (Ch. 4), and sampling and borrowing as lineage within the gangsta rap subgenre (Ch. 5). By no means are the case studies intended to be exhaustive, but they provide examples which demonstrate that a thorough study of musical borrowing in hip-hop requires attention to the texts (hip-hop recordings), their reception, and wider cultural contexts.

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‘Because mutiny on the bounty’s what we’re all about’.  
—The Beastie Boys, “Rhymin’ and Stealin’” (1986)

## **–Introduction–**

This thesis begins with a crucial premise: the hip-hop world, as an imagined community, regards unconcealed intertextuality as integral to the production and reception of its artistic culture. In other words, borrowing, in its multidimensional forms and manifestations, is central to the aesthetics of hip-hop. This study of borrowing in hip-hop music, which transcends narrow discourses on ‘sampling’ (digital sampling), illustrates the variety of ways that one can borrow from a source text or trope, and ways that audiences identify and respond to these practices. Another function of this thesis is to initiate a more nuanced discourse in hip-hop studies, to allow for the number of intertextual avenues travelled within hip-hop recordings, and to present academic frameworks available with which to study them. The following five chapters provide case studies that prove that musical borrowing, part and parcel of hip-hop aesthetics, occurs on multiple planes and within myriad dimensions. By no means are the case studies intended to be exhaustive, but they provide examples which demonstrate that a thorough study of musical borrowing in hip-hop requires attention to the texts (hip-hop recordings), their reception, and wider cultural contexts.

From its onset, hip-hop music was founded on the manipulation of pre-existing material; DJs were borrowing from instrumental excerpts from records (known as ‘breaks’ or ‘breakbeats’) to craft their sets, either looping passages with two copies of the same record or stringing passages together from different records. (See Chapter 1 for a longer description of hip-hop music’s origins.) Joseph Schloss writes that ‘The looping aesthetic ... combined a traditional African American approach to composition with new technology to create a radically new way of



making music.’<sup>1</sup> As digital sampling technology improved and became more affordable in the mid-to-late 1980s, many of the hip-hop DJ practices (such as ‘crate digging’, looping and collage techniques) shifted to that of the ‘hip-hop producer’. As digital sampling emerged in hip-hop culture, it has been said to align itself with the early days of the hip-hop aesthetic: ‘Indeed, the story of sampling is a tale of technology catching up with the DJ, of equipment being created that could do faster, more accurately and more easily what a DJ had long been able to’.<sup>2</sup> Brewster and Broughton argue convincingly that sampling was just a faster, more complex and permanent way of re-creating what the DJs had been doing all along.<sup>3</sup>

Because of the tightening of copyright legislation for sampling in the late 1980s and early 1990s, collage-style albums like those from Public Enemy and De La Soul would be too expensive to make commercially in the mid-1990s and after.<sup>4</sup> Hip-hop music production post-mid-1990s is too varied to define comprehensively, but it often includes a mix of technology such as samplers, sequencers (machines that put the samples together), synthesizers, drum machines, and more traditionally

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<sup>1</sup> Joseph G. Schloss, *Making Beats: The Art of Sample-Based Hip-Hop* (Middletown: Wesleyan University Press, 2004), 33.

<sup>2</sup> Bill Brewster and Frank Broughton, *Last Night a DJ Saved my Life: The history of the disc jockey* (London: Headline, 2006), 267.

<sup>3</sup> For a more detailed history of sampling, see Hugh Davies, ‘A History of Sampling’, *Organised Sound* 1, no. 1 (1996): 3–11 and Gavin Kistner, ‘Hip-Hop Sampling and Twentieth Century African-American Music: An Analysis of Nas’ “Get Down” (2003)’, M.Mus Dissertation (Université Laval, Québec, 2006), 26–72.

<sup>4</sup> I do not deal with issues of copyright at any great length because its impact is largely tangential to my aims, as I choose to focus on the aesthetics of hip-hop recordings and their reception. I would argue that copyright clearance has been extremely influential, and in many instances limiting, on what can be produced in mainstream hip-hop, but that is another dissertation-length project too large in scope to be included here. See Kembrew McLeod, *Owning Culture: authorship, ownership and intellectual property law* (New York: Peter Lang, 2001), in particular, Chapter 3 ‘Copyright. Authorship and African-American Culture’: 71–99. Jessica Litman, *Digital Copyright* (Amherst, NY: Prometheus Books, 2001). Joanna Demers, *Steal This Music: How Intellectual Property Law Affects Musical Creativity* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2006). *Music and Copyright*, eds. Simon Frith and Lee Marshall, 2<sup>nd</sup> Edition (London: Routledge, 2004). Siva Vaidhyanathan, *Copyrights and Copywrongs: The Rise of Intellectual Property and how it Threatens Creativity* (New York: NYU Press, 2003). Lawrence Lessig, *Free Culture: The Nature and Future of Creativity* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 2005).

‘live’ instruments. The most unifying sonic thread within hip-hop, I would argue, is the particular drum timbres that have their origins in 1970s funk.<sup>5</sup>

The openness of the funk break allows hip-hop producers to sample and borrow from myriad types of music and other sounds, and additionally, permits a high degree of tempo manipulation. This is how a breakbeat like the introduction from The Honeydrippers’ “Impeach the President” (1973) can be looped and used with Beethoven’s Für Elise for Nas’s “I Can” and also be used on the synthesizer-heavy “Chronic (Intro)” produced by Dr. Dre. Both examples fit neatly in the hip-hop music genre, yet utilize strikingly disparate material.<sup>6</sup> Rhythmic structures act as the anchor or structural foundation, leaving seemingly limitless possibilities for sonic organization. The foundational role of the drum and its specific timbres, as in many African-based musics, is what gives hip-hop its identity as a genre. Even when the drums are not present (such as in an a capella rap), I would argue that particular drum sounds are implied as counterpoint to the rapper’s delivery. As its primary defining features, then, the timbral and rhythmic characteristics of hip-hop music allow for such varied borrowing practices within the genre.

### **Musical Borrowing, Digital Sampling and Signifyin(g)**

In academic studies of hip-hop’s musical appropriations, ‘sampling’ has been the dominant term, usually without any in-depth or critical description.<sup>7</sup> For example,

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<sup>5</sup> For a description of the linkage between timbre and genre in the context of jazz fusion, see Steven F. Pond, *Head Hunters: The Making of Jazz’s First Platinum Album* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2005), 147–149. This is not to say that these 1970s sounds stay entirely intact within hip-hop; these timbres can be, and are often, manipulated in the studio to differing effect.

<sup>6</sup> The Nas version uses primarily the top voice of Für Elise, and is rhythmically modified for the new context. An even more ubiquitous breakbeat in hip-hop is James Brown’s “The Funky Drummer” (1969), specifically, the instrumental break from James Brown’s drummer Clyde Stubblefield. See Mark Katz, *Capturing Sound: How Technology has Changed Music* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004), in particular, Chapter 7, ‘Music in 1s and 0s: The Art and Politics of Digital Sampling’, 137–157.

<sup>7</sup> Recent exceptions include Felicia M. Miyakawa, *Five Percenter Rap: God Hop’s Music, Message, and Black Muslim Mission* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2005), Chapter 5, ‘Sampling, Borrowing, and Meaning’, 100–122, and Katz, *Capturing Sound*.

Joanna Demers' article on the lineage between gangsta rap and 1970s blaxploitation film begins: 'Musical borrowings, or samples, have long been a means of creating lineage between hip-hop and older genres of African-American music such as funk, soul, and rhythm and blues'.<sup>8</sup> I find it more productive, however, to create a distinction between musical borrowing and digital sampling as a special case of musical borrowing. This is a distinction that Felicia Miyakawa adopts in her study of borrowing in Five Percenter 'God Hop', as she makes the distinction between digital samples and 'quotations'.<sup>9</sup> This terminology is also problematic, as one can quote digitally, which is why I have chosen to use the terms 'autosonic quotation' and 'allosonic quotation' from Lacasse to differentiate between sampled and non-sampled quotations, respectively.

A number of frameworks have been used to discuss sampling in hip-hop, and for reasons of space, only a few crucial perspectives can be summarized here. Russell Potter describes sampling as raids, politically subverting traditional author functions as well as traditional roles of production and consumption.<sup>10</sup> His reading of hip-hop is largely through a postmodern lens, and one that sees the play of postmodernism, in this case, to be highly political, as a form of resistance and a strategy for solidifying communities and traditions.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> Joanna Demers, 'Sampling the 1970s in Hip-hop', *Popular Music* 22, no.3 (2003): 41–56.

<sup>9</sup> Miyakawa, 102. Miyakawa provides a useful survey of previous academic writing on sampling, and her perspectives on borrowing and sampling in hip-hop most resemble my own in terms of acknowledging sampling as a specific case of borrowing, that it is one of many compositional tools in hip-hop, and that sampling and borrowing can have multiple functions depending on the particular context.

<sup>10</sup> Russell A. Potter, *Spectacular Vernaculars: Hip-Hop and the Politics of Postmodernism* (New York: State University of New York Press, 1995), 42. Other examples of hip-hop studies utilizing frameworks of postmodernism include Richard Shusterman, 'The Fine Art of Rap' in *Pragmatist Aesthetics: Living Beauty, Rethinking Art* (Oxford: Rowman and Littlefield, Inc., 2000), 201–235, and Cheryl L. Keyes 'At the Crossroads: Rap Music and Its African Nexus', *Ethnomusicology* 40, no. 2 (1996): 239–240.

<sup>11</sup> Potter, 44.

Potter also describes sampling as a form of Signifyin(g), a concept theorized by Henry Louis Gates Jr. in African-American literary studies, and adapted to black musics by Samuel A. Floyd Jr. To quote Potter:

Simply put, Signifyin(g) is repetition with a difference; the same and yet not the same. When, in a jazz riff, a horn player substitutes one arpeggio for a harmony note, or ‘cuts up’ a well-known solo by altering its tempo, phrasing, or accents, s/he is Signifyin(g) on all previous versions. When a blues singer, like Blind Willie McTell, ‘borrows’ a cut known as the ‘Wabash Rag’ and re-cuts it as the ‘Georgia Rag,’ he is Signifyin(g) on a rival’s recording.<sup>12</sup>

Like swing music, hard bop, bebop, cool, reggae, dub, and hip-hop, these musical forms were Signfyin(g) on what came before them. Furthermore, musical texts Signify upon one another, troping and revising particular musical ideas.<sup>13</sup> These musical ‘conversations’ can therefore occur between the present and the past, or synchronically within a particular genre.

Signifyin(g), as Gates writes, is derived from myths of the African god Esu-Elegbara, later manifested as the trickster figure of the Signifying Monkey in African-American oral tradition.<sup>14</sup> Gates writes, ‘For the Signifying Monkey exists as the great trope of Afro-American discourse, and the trope of tropes, his language of Signifyin(g), is his verbal sign in the Afro-American tradition.’<sup>15</sup> To Signify is to

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<sup>12</sup> Ibid., 27.

<sup>13</sup> Richard Dyer offers a useful summary of Signifyin(g): ‘This term has been developed in African-American criticism to describe a distinctly African-American mode of indirect expression, including the use of improvisation, metaphor, performance, repetition and syncretism, embodied in specific cultural forms and practices. Importantly, signifying, though not realist in form, is rooted in the real, in African-American history and experience. Signifying is playful but urgent, its strategies of indirection those of survival, of being able to talk about the forbidden subject of one’s own condition of existence; its tropes carry with them the memory of the realities of African experience in America.’ Richard Dyer, *Pastiche* (London: Routledge, 2007), 79.

<sup>14</sup> For a summary of the tale of the Signifying Monkey, see Henry Louis Gates Jr., *The Signifying Monkey: A Theory of African-American Literary Criticism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989), 55–56, and Potter, 83.

<sup>15</sup> Gates, 21. Ingrid Monson, David Metzger, and Gary Tomlinson use the concept of Signifyin(g) effectively in jazz contexts: Ingrid Monson, ‘Doubleness and Jazz Improvisation: Irony, Parody, and Ethnomusicology’, *Critical Inquiry* 20, no. 2 (1994): 283–313; David Metzger, Ch. 2, ‘Black and White: Quotations in Duke Ellington’s “Black and Tan Fantasy”’ in *Quotation and Cultural Meaning in Twentieth Century Music* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 47–68; Gary Tomlinson ‘Cultural Dialogics and Jazz: A White Historian Signifies’, *Black Music Research Journal* 22 (2002): 71–102. David Brackett uses the concept in his analysis of James Brown’s

foreground the signifier, to give it importance for its own sake. The language of the monkey is playful yet intelligent, and can be found in hipster talk and radio DJs of the 1950s, comedians such as Red Foxx, 1970s blaxploitation characters such as Dolemite, and in countless rap lyrics. It should be stated that in addition to Signifying as masterful revision and repetition of tropes, it also includes double-voiced or multi-voiced utterances which complicate any simple semiotic interpretation.<sup>16</sup>

Samuel Floyd uses Gates's theory of Signifyin(g), along with Sterling Stuckey's concept of the 'ring shout', to apply to black musics, placing much of African-based music-making into what he calls Call-Response, with musical Signifyin(g) as its master trope.<sup>17</sup> It is through the writings of Gates and Floyd that we can see continuity or similarities between African-American musics and literature that repeat and revise tropes, that are largely self-referential and self-critiquing, that are double- or multi-voiced and that respond and interact within their particular communities. These ideas and qualities are no doubt important to hip-hop studies; to argue and prove that hip-hop culture openly celebrates its intertextualities places it firmly in the lineage of the African-based music-making both Gates and Floyd outline.

The sampling of classic breakbeats, to use but one example, is certainly a foundational instance of musical Signifyin(g) in hip-hop, musically troping on and

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"Superbad". David Brackett, *Interpreting Popular Music* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000). In hip-hop studies, notable applications of Signifyin(g) include those of Demers, Kistner, Katz, Perry, and Mickey Hess, *Is Hip Hop Dead?* (London: Praeger, 2007), 98–101.

<sup>16</sup> In addition to the trickster figure, the figure of the griot is also important here, the West African poet/musician who is responsible for retaining the cultural memory of a community and passes it along through oral tradition. The connection between a community and its cultural memory will be exemplified in Ch. 1 on borrowing from the internal history of the hip-hop world.

<sup>17</sup> Samuel A. Floyd Jr., *The Power of Black Music* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995), 96. Sterling Stuckey, *Slave Culture: Nationalist Theory and the Foundations of Black America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988).

responding to what has come before.<sup>18</sup> Linked with the concept of Signifyin(g) is Bakhtin's concept of dialogism, as well as that of the multi-vocality of texts, two aspects also related to hip-hop's intertextuality.<sup>19</sup> Signifyin(g), dialogism and intertextuality are crucial academic frameworks in which to understand hip-hop's borrowing practices more generally. While aforementioned frameworks are crucial to what follows, I move beyond these concepts to investigate the different ways that hip-hop recordings Signify on earlier material without necessarily using this terminology at every instance.

Making Beats, Joseph Schloss's 2004 ethnographic study of sample-based hip-hop, is largely concerned with the practices and 'ethics' of a relatively small, albeit tight-knit and influential, hip-hop producer community. I choose to cast my net wider than he does, focussing largely on reception rather than the production, as well as utilizing the entire hip-hop recording rather than just the production of the beats. Schloss's study has been undoubtedly important in forwarding the study of sample-based hip-hop, particularly emphasizing the role that aesthetics has in the motivations to sample from a particular record.<sup>20</sup> His interviews and insights are crucial to the study of hip-hop compositional process.

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<sup>18</sup> 'Musical signifyin(g) is the rhetorical use of pre-existing material as a means of demonstrating respect for or poking fun at a musical style, process, or practice through parody, pastiche, implication, indirection, humor, tone play or word play, the illusion of speech or narration, or other troping mechanisms'. Floyd, 8. Potter writes, 'Even in a track not explicitly identified as a "payback" or "answer" rap, the numerous instances of Signifyin(g) on previous rappers' turns of phrase, combined with the verbal "shouts" thrown out to peers and heroes, continue to build a complex historical web of influence, confluence, and effluence; it is not so much that hip-hop tells history, it's that it is history.' Potter, 117. For more on dialogism, Signifyin(g) and intertextuality, see Graham Allen, *Intertextuality* (New York: Routledge, 2000). See also Mikhail Bakhtin, *The Dialogic Imagination*, ed. Michael Holquist (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1982).

<sup>19</sup> For an example investigating the dialogics of rap music, see Elizabeth A. Wheeler, "'Most of My Heroes Don't Appear on No Stamps": The Dialogics of Rap Music', *Black Music Research Journal* 11, no. 2 (1991): 193–216.

<sup>20</sup> Schloss believes, as does Miyakawa, that political and symbolic motivations for sampling are largely overstated by scholars as compared to the aesthetic reasons for doing so. He writes that 'symbolic meaning is almost universally overstated by scholars as a motive for sampling.' Schloss, *Making Beats*, 146. He argues convincingly for his group of producers that 'The hip-hop discourse is primarily concerned with aesthetics. Simply put, sampling is not valued because it is convenient, but because it is beautiful.' Schloss, 65.

It is worth considering what sets digital sampling apart from other forms of borrowing, as it arguably has radicalized music making and listening. Chris Cutler provides one definition:

Digital sampling is a purely electronic digital recording system which takes samples or ‘vertical slices’ of sound and converts them into binary information, into data, which tells a sound producing system how to reconstruct, rather than reproduce it. Instantly ... It is stored rather as discrete data, which act as instructions for the eventual reconstruction of a sound (as a visual object when electronically scanned is translated only into a binary code).<sup>21</sup>

In one of the most engaging studies of digital sampling to date, Mark Katz also explains the process:

At present, the standard sampling rate is 44,100Hz, meaning that every second of sound that is sampled is cut into 44,100 slices; typically, each of these slices is given a sixteen-digit binary number, which allows for extremely fine gradations in measuring the amplitude of a wave. Sampling can therefore be fast and fine enough so that the human ear perceives a continuous and faithfully rendered reproduction ... A sample can be a fraction of a waveform, a single note from an instrument or voice, a rhythm, a melody, a harmony, or an entire work or album. Although sampling, particularly when done well, is far from a simple matter, the possibilities it offers are nearly limitless.<sup>22</sup>

Digital sampling, particularly its ability to reproduce sounds or groups of sounds so accurately, has changed the landscape of music in a number of ways.<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> Chris Cutler, ‘Plunderphonia’, in *Audio Culture*, eds. Christoph Cox and Daniel Warner (London: Continuum, 2004), 149.

<sup>22</sup> Katz, 139.

<sup>23</sup> Though writing on digital sampling has largely been in the context of hip-hop music, it is important to note that the sampler was first used in rock and pop music, and continued to be used alongside hip-hop production. Wayne Marshall points out that the first ‘authentic’ hip-hop sample, in that it digitally sampled a funk song, was actually from the progressive rock band Yes, who sampled Kool and the Gang’s ‘Kool is Back’ for ‘Owner of a Lonely Heart’ in 1984. Wayne Marshall, ‘Giving up Hip-Hop’s Firstborn: A Quest for the Real after the Death of Sampling’, *Callaloo* 29, no. 3 (2006), 887. Digital samplers were often used for ease and cost effectiveness, such as for using a guitar or horn line instead of hiring musicians, and producers Pete Waterman and Hugh Padgham have admitted to using samplers to these ends. Earlier tape-based ‘samplers’ such as the Mellotron were used by bands such as King Crimson as early as the 1960s. See Mark Cunningham, *Good Vibrations: A History of Record Production*, 2<sup>nd</sup> Edition (London: Sanctuary, 1998), 313, 329. Eric F. Clarke, ‘The Impact of Recording on Listening’, *Twentieth-century Music* 4, no. 1 (2007), 55. Andrew Goodwin, ‘Sample and Hold: Pop Music in the Digital Age of Reproduction’ in *On Record: Rock, Pop, and the Written Word*, eds. Simon Frith and Andrew Goodwin (London: Routledge, 1990), 270–271.

Additionally, one also needs to consider how new technologies extend rather than replace existing musical practices. Katz embraces multiple traditions that predate sampling by considering Public Enemy's "Fight the Power" as a digital form of Signifyin(g), linking it to African traditions, while at the same time acknowledging sampling as a form of musical borrowing which has long history in Western classical music. He believes that what sets digital sampling apart from other quotation is what he calls 'performative quotation'—'quotation that recreates all the details of timbre and timing that evoke and identify a unique sound event.'<sup>24</sup>

Tricia Rose also noted in her groundbreaking study of rap that although sampling technologies have radicalized rap music, the music has kept its link with earlier African-American musical traditions.<sup>25</sup> She argues convincingly that we must locate rap as the intersection between traditional practices and the state-of-the-art technology. Intertextuality within hip-hop culture can be said to be at a similar intersection: at one end are African and African-American artistic cultures and traditions, and at the other end are newer technologies like digital sampling which allows practitioners to extend older traditions in new and varied ways. Each composer and listener hears particular, albeit varied, elements from this chronological imaginary spectrum, and from this, larger patterns and questions can emerge for the purposes of scholarly inquiry. For example, in this thesis, the

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<sup>24</sup> Katz, 140–141. Katz later writes, 'Sampling is most fundamentally an art of transformation. A sample changes the moment it is relocated. Any sound, placed into a new musical context, will take on some of the character of its new sonic environment. Every "Funky Drummer" sample, however recognizable, leads a distinct life in its new home. Thus, the sound and sense of a two-second drum break may change radically from song to song, even if the patterns of 1s and 0s do not.' Katz, 156.

<sup>25</sup> Rose writes, 'At the same time as rap music has dramatically changed the intended use of sampling technology, it has also remained critically linked to black poetic traditions and the oral forms that underwrite them. These oral traditions and practices clearly inform the prolific use of collage, intertextuality, boasting, toasting, and signifying in rap's lyrical style and organization. Rap's oral articulations are heavily informed by technological processes, not only in the way such oral traditions are formulated, composed, and disseminated, but also in the way orally based approaches to narrative are embedded in the use of technology itself.' Tricia Rose, *Black Noise: Rap Music and Black Culture in Contemporary America* (Middletown: Wesleyan University Press, 1994), 64. Imani Perry argues that with hip-hop, technology was simply used to reproduce sounds already aesthetically pleasing to an African-American audience. Imani Perry, *Prophets of the Hood* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2004), 13.



investigation of how earlier material is borrowed in (mostly) 1990s and 2000s hip-hop music has unearthed questions on larger issues, most broadly, questions of history (Ch. 1), genre (Ch. 2), space (Ch. 3), death/memorial (Ch. 4), and lineage (Ch. 5). Each chapter begins with these broader themes and ideas from within hip-hop culture, narrowing toward closer readings of hip-hop texts to show how text and context work together to elucidate these broader ideas.

I have chosen these case studies based on the compatibility between specific musical examples and these larger issues, as both the examples and topics that I have selected have received less scholarly attention in the field of hip-hop studies than, say, race or gender (though gender appears most overtly at the end of Ch. 3). Race and gender are most certainly relevant and important to the following case studies, but I chose to open less-explored hermeneutic windows in the interest of expanding the interpretive vantage points in hip-hop studies. Space permits only a few case studies and themes, and will be added to in future volumes (See ‘Directions for Future Research’ in Conclusion).

### **Musical Borrowing in Hip-hop**

The terminology chosen for the first half of my PhD title deserves some explanation, as it will help to expand on the opening premise of its introduction. First, I consciously use the term ‘hip-hop’ instead of ‘rap music’, even though all the subsequent case studies fall under the latter classification as well. (I do not investigate other hip-hop musical forms such as turntablism or an artist like DJ Shadow who does not rap.) My decision to use ‘hip-hop’ stems from the fact that the instances of borrowing that I highlight in this study are part of a larger hip-hop aesthetic that encompasses all the so-called ‘four elements’ of hip-hop culture

(rapping, DJing, graffiti, and breakdancing).<sup>26</sup> For example, Schloss writes of borrowing as lineage in terms of incorporating ‘foundational’ moves in contemporary b-boy (breakdancing) routines. Borrowing and quotation are arguably just as important to b-boying as it is to rap music. He also adds that ‘Graffiti writers, for example, often use specific letter styles as tributes to their teachers, while stylistic lineages are also valued—and can be heard—in hip-hop production.’<sup>27</sup> Potter shares this view when he writes of all of hip-hop’s elements: ‘Instead of grand projects cut from a single block, hip-hop rebuilds art from parts, mobile and recombinant’.<sup>28</sup>

My decision to use the term hip-hop, then, is threefold: one, to emphasize that my music examples reflect wider processes throughout multiple artistic forms considered part of a wider ‘hip-hop culture’. Second, that there exists a wider hip-hop community, an imagined community, that interpret these intertextualities, and third, that my work acts as an ‘open text’ in an effort to initiate a dialogue with others interested in borrowing in hip-hop cultures. It would be most fruitful to collaborate on a comparative analysis of borrowing in graffiti, hip-hop music (rap music and turntablism), and breakdancing in future scholarly endeavours. I discuss only one of these elements in great detail at present, but implicit in this study is the fact that these practices and attitudes are manifest in multiple realms of hip-hop culture.

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<sup>26</sup> For a more thorough explanation of differences between ‘rap music’ and ‘hip-hop music’, see Adam Krims, *Rap Music and the Poetics of Identity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press), 10–11 (hereafter cited as *Rap Music*).

<sup>27</sup> Joseph Schloss, *Foundation: b-boys, b-girls, and hip-hop culture in New York* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009), 67.

<sup>28</sup> Potter, 8. Tricia Rose provides considerable detail describing how graffiti, breakdancing and rap music all demonstrate the features of ‘flow, layering, and ruptures in line’, an important example that considers hip-hop culture and its multiple artistic elements together in scholarly analysis. Rose 38–61.

Furthermore, I use the term ‘musical’ to encompass all aspects of hip-hop texts, sound recordings and music videos, to include aspects of quotation and references in lyrics and music-video imagery, in addition to the ‘musical’ complements to the rap delivery (known as ‘the beat’).<sup>29</sup> My aim is to emphasize sounds rather than present a lyric-based approach, and it is important to state here that I am looking at music in the broadest sense. Though the thesis engages deeply with social cultures and contexts, my investigations begin and end with the musical texts, seeking a deeper understanding of meaning within these recordings, and what their reception says about larger cultural practices.

I use the terms ‘beat’ and ‘flow’ to separate the delivery of the rapper(s) from its ‘musical’ complement, acknowledging that they are nevertheless inextricably linked. I do want to foreground all sounds in the musical text of the recording, mediated by their socio-historically situated interpretations, while concurrently recognizing that music can also act a mediator.<sup>30</sup> And this musical text, what one might call the ‘music itself’, quoting Adam Krims, ‘is not, as some contemporary musicology would have it, a mystification but rather a crucial, highly planned, and controlled social object.’<sup>31</sup>

‘Borrowing’ is a term which creates the widest net for my purposes, but I could have easily used the word ‘appropriation’, or even stronger value-laden terms such as ‘stealing’ or ‘theft’. (The title ‘Musical Theft in Hip-hop Music’, however, suggests too large a value judgment for my taste.) The fact is that artists have ‘stolen’ since time immemorial: Shakespeare from Ovid and Plutarch, Renaissance

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<sup>29</sup> It is important to emphasize that I am using the term ‘text’ throughout the thesis in terms of the recording as text, rather than simply text as in written hip-hop lyrics. I use the term ‘flow’ for the delivery of rap lyrics, and the term ‘lyrics’ to discuss the semantic aspects of the lyrics.

<sup>30</sup> This sentiment reflects Krims’s observations that music is mediated but itself acts as a mediator. Adam Krims, *Music and Urban Geography* (London: Routledge, 2007), xxxvi (hereafter cited as *MUG*).

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, xvi.

mass composers from Gregorian chant, Bartók from folk melodies, Bob Dylan from everyone, and blues singers from each other. Jonathan Lethem writes, ‘As examples accumulate ... it becomes apparent that appropriation, mimicry, quotation, allusion, and sublimated collaboration consist of a kind of sine qua non of the creative act, cutting across all forms and genres in the realm of cultural production.’<sup>32</sup> Of course, by no means is the term ‘borrowing’ value free, quite the opposite. To borrow something implies that it should be returned in tact, or that it can be. As will be shown through the following case studies in this thesis, the use of pre-existing materials and styles transforms both new and old contexts. Nevertheless, a term needed to be used, and I use the term ‘borrowing’ because it sidesteps the ethical arguments and negative connotations in favour of more detailed analysis, and because I wish to place these hip-hop practices within a well-established lineage of musical borrowing in both African-based and European-based musics.<sup>33</sup>

## Definitions

Some of my terminology is borrowed from other realms of scholarship (Lacasse, Dyer, Fish, Anderson) that have rarely been applied to studies of hip-hop culture. Other terms I have constructed out of necessity to fill gaps in the discourse

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<sup>32</sup> Jonathan Lethem, ‘The Ecstasy of Influence: A Plagiarism Mosaic’, in *Sound Unbound: Sampling Digital Music and Culture*, ed. Paul D. Miller (London: MIT Press, 2008), 28–29. His essay is particularly noteworthy because his endnotes reveal that every sentence from the essay has come from a different source, either directly quoted or paraphrased.

<sup>33</sup> To quote Katz at length: ‘As a form of musical borrowing, the roots of digital sampling reach back more than a millennium. Consider just the Western musical tradition: medieval chants freely incorporated and adapted melodic patterns from earlier chants; dozens of Renaissance masses were based on the melody of the secular song “L’homme armé”; a similar craze raged centuries later when composers such as Berlioz, Liszt, Rachmaninoff, Saint-Saëns, and Ysaye “sampled” the chant *Dies irae* (“The Day of Wrath”) in their instrumental works; Bach reworked Vivaldi’s music; more than a century later Gounod returned the favor, adding a new melody to Bach’s *Prelude in C Major* and calling it *Ave Maria*; Mahler cannibalized his own earlier vocal works in several of his symphonies; Ives quoted George M. Cohan’s “Over There” in his song “Tom Sails Away”; Bartok parodied Shostakovich’s *Leningrad Symphony* in his *Concerto for Orchestra*; and so on and so on.’ Katz, 139–140.

(e.g. intra-generic versus inter-generic borrowing, historical authenticity, post-mortem borrowing), and they will be fully explained with examples in the following chapters. These case studies demonstrate the wide range of complex borrowing practices in hip-hop music recordings in a manner that no previous scholarly study of rap music has done. Borrowing, then, becomes a lens and framework with which to tease out meanings in hip-hop culture.

It is important to note that the ‘beat’ encompasses not only percussive elements of a rap song, but the entire complement to the rapper’s ‘flow’ (i.e. delivery of lyrics).<sup>34</sup> Schloss defines a ‘beat’ as ‘musical collages composed of brief segments of recorded sound’<sup>35</sup> I will extend this terminology to encompass all sounds that are not the ‘flow’, including non-sample-based material as well.

Later chapters discuss a concept that I call the ‘basic beat’, a structural layer or core layers of the musical complement that change little for a significant duration of the song. My transcriptions in the following chapters highlight mostly harmonic and melodic layers involved in the basic beat.<sup>36</sup> Of course, rap music’s layers will more often than not fluctuate throughout a given song, with sonic additions and subtractions, manipulations of digital samples, and even sharp changes in aspects of the ‘basic beat’,<sup>37</sup> but the looped nature that defines much of hip-hop music lends itself to having a structural layer that does not change. Though I do not go as far as to locate an *Ursatz* in a given hip-hop song, and I would argue that Schenker’s theories are ill-suited to African-based musics, layering forms an

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<sup>34</sup> As a rapper is often called the MC (‘mic-controller’ or ‘master of ceremonies’) in journalism and other writings, I will use both terms synonymously, as well as the more general term artist (as in recording artist) where appropriate.

<sup>35</sup> Schloss, *Making Beats*, 2.

<sup>36</sup> I could have included the rap flow, lyrics and percussive layers of the beat in these transcriptions as well, but in most instances I wanted to focus on the melodic and harmonic aspects of the beat. My transcriptions are largely intended to complement the sound recording, not to replace them. A longer explanation on my notation and transcription of musical examples can be found in Chapter 2.

<sup>37</sup> The concept of a ‘basic beat’ is strongly indebted to Krims’s *Rap Music and the Poetics of Identity*, in particular, his discussion of layering and analysis of Ice Cube’s “The Nigga Ya Love to Hate”. Krims, *Rap Music*, 93–122.

important structural component in hip-hop. Furthermore, the function and qualities of these layers are crucial to the aesthetics and reception of the music. As Krims writes in his groundbreaking *Rap Music and the Poetics of Identity*, ‘the sonic organization of rap music—both the rapping itself and the musical tracks that accompany it—is directly and profoundly implicated in rap’s cultural workings (resistant or otherwise), especially in the formation of identities.’<sup>38</sup> I take this argument further to embrace sampling and other borrowing practices (which Krims does not engage with in any detail) to highlight the importance of musical borrowing to this music and its reception.

The ‘texts’ on which I choose to focus are primarily commercially successful hip-hop recordings produced in the United States. I also include references to music videos and films in instances where appropriate. I concentrate on hip-hop recordings because it offers the most possibilities for borrowing practices while usefully narrowing the scope of such an already broad project. Third, recordings comprise my objects of study because they are the cultural products most widely disseminated in terms of hip-hop reception.<sup>39</sup> These recorded texts are the product of a number of agents, though I tend to name the group, artist or producer as shorthand for the complex network of collaboration actually involved in the creation of these products. For this study, I have relied on my own interpretations of these texts, as well as secondary books, articles and media reception (mostly) in the form of journalism that supplement these observations. Magazines such as *Rolling Stone*, *The Source*, *Rap Pages*, journalism anthologies

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<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, 2.

<sup>39</sup> Live performances, recorded live performances, and ‘live’ aesthetics within recordings are important to the ideas in this study (particularly Chapter 1), but in the interest of space, I chose commercially-released hip-hop recordings as my primary texts for investigation. Though this project engages with a number of academic fields, I have been influenced in this respect by the growing subfields of musicology that use recordings as their primary texts. Examples include those involved in the Association for the Study of the Art of Record Production and the AHRC Research Centre for the History and Analysis of Recorded Music (CHARM).

(such as Da Capo Best Music Writing), and internet-based journalism have been particularly useful texts for media reception.

As stated earlier, to emphasize the difference between digitally sampled sounds and other borrowed sounds, I employ the useful distinction between ‘autosonic quotation’ and ‘allosonic quotation’ from Serge Lacasse. ‘Autosonic quotation’ is quotation of a recording by digitally sampling it, as opposed to ‘allosonic quotation’, quoting the previous material by way of re-recording or performing (like a quote in jazz performance) rather than sampling from the original recording.<sup>40</sup>

In addition to this distinction, rarely detailed in academic writing on sampling are differences in ‘sequencing’, the act of putting samples in some sort of sequential order. Mark Gillespie makes the distinction between ‘syntagmatic sequencing’ and ‘morphemic sequencing’, where the latter samples short sounds (such as a snare hit), and the former utilizes longer musical phrases and passages.<sup>41</sup> For example, The Bomb Squad’s early-1990s output demonstrates morphemic sequencing whereas Puff Daddy or Eminem (discussed in Chapter 5) often use longer loops in their productions.

I also make a distinction between intra-musical discourse and extra-musical discourse, and the two often work together in interesting ways. I have already discussed the power and agency that the ‘music itself’ can have—and that deep meanings can be produced through elements within the music (i.e. the intra-musical discourse, or in the terms of music semiologist Jean-Jacques Nattiez, a musical

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<sup>40</sup> See Serge Lacasse, ‘Intertextuality and Hypertextuality in Recorded Popular Music’, in *The Musical Work: Reality or Invention?*, ed. Michael Talbot (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2000).

<sup>41</sup> Mark Gillespie, ‘“Another Darkchild Classic”: Phonographic Forgery and Producer Rodney Jerkins’ Sonic Signature’, M.Mus Dissertation, (Université Laval, Québec, 2006), 98. He also differentiates between sample-based producers (e.g. The Bomb Squad) and sequence-based producers (e.g. Puff Daddy).

object's 'immanent properties' at the neutral level).<sup>42</sup> Biographical and other narratives regarding the artist as well as interviews, fan discourse, academic attention and other media are all extra-musical discourses which also influence the reception of hip-hop recordings (the 'narrative mediation' of music reception). Much of the following acknowledges both intra- and extra-musical discourse as contributing to the main points in the chapters; to use an example from Chapter 1, a nostalgia for hip-hop's past is often demonstrated in extra-musical discourses (books, interviews, documentaries) and in intra-musical ones (auto- and allosonically quoting earlier artists, sampling 'classic' breakbeats, alluding to previous styles). The two inform each other, and one purpose of this thesis is to direct attention on the intra-musical discourse to balance better its relationship with other extra-musical discourses usually given more weight in hip-hop studies.

### **Textually Signalled and Unsignalled Borrowing**

As stated previously, the initial premise of the thesis is that hip-hop presupposes an unconcealed intertextuality. Much of this has to do with the hip-hop community's expectations (its 'generic contract'),<sup>43</sup> but this is not meant to imply that all hip-hop musical texts draw attention to their borrowing equally. In his book on pastiche, Richard Dyer points out that pastiche as an imitative artistic form is 'textually signalled' as such; in other words, the text itself draws attention to the fact that it contains imitative material. Catherine Grant and Christine Geraghty, in the context of film adaptation theory, believe that textually signalling is crucial to

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<sup>42</sup> Jean-Jacques Nattiez, *Music and Discourse: Toward a Semiology of Music*, trans. Carolyn Abbate (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1990), ix.

<sup>43</sup> Heather Dubrow, in terms of the novel, has described genre as a contract between reader and audience, and the idea of a 'generic contract' has been developed most fully in musicology by Jeffrey Kallberg. See Jim Samson, 'Genre', in *Oxford Music Online* (formerly *Grove Music Online*), available at: [www.oxfordmusiconline.com](http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com) (accessed 10 August 2009). Heather Dubrow, *Genre* (London: Taylor & Francis, 1982) and Jeffrey Kallberg, 'The Rhetoric of Genre: Chopin's Nocturne in G Minor', *Nineteenth-century Music* 11 (1987/88): 238–261.



an adaptation, that the film somehow recalls the source novel: ‘the most important act that films and their surrounding discourses need to perform in order to communicate unequivocally their status as adaptations is to [make their audiences] recall the adapted work, or the cultural memory of it. There is no such thing ... as a “secret” adaptation.’<sup>44</sup> In the case of pastiche and film adaptation, and in forms like parody and homage, recognizing that these works are referring to something that precedes them is crucial to their identity as that form, necessary to their working as such.

The table below, from Richard Dyer’s study of pastiche, shows how pastiche as imitation ‘fits’ into qualitative categories as compared to other forms of imitation: whether it conceals its imitation as plagiarism and forgeries do, whether the text itself draws attention to its imitation (to be ‘textually signalled’) or not, and whether the imitative form, by its nature, already suggests some sort of pre-conceived evaluative response (as in ‘parody’).

CONCEALED		UNCONCEALED	
NOT TEXTUALLY SIGNALLED		TEXTUALLY SIGNALLED	
EVALUATIVELY OPEN		EVALUATIVELY PREDETERMINED	
plagiarism	copies	pastiche	emulation homage
fake forgery hoax	versions		travesty burlesque mock epic
	genre		parody

**Table 1. From Richard Dyer, *Pastiche* (London: Routledge, 2007), 24**

<sup>44</sup> Catherine Grant, ‘Recognizing Billy Budd in Beau Travail: Epistemology and Hermeneutics of Auteurist “Free” Adaptation’, *Screen* 43, no. 1 (2002), 57. Quoted in Christine Geraghty, *Now a Major Motion Picture: Film Adaptations of Literature and Drama* (Plymouth, UK: Rowman and Littlefield, 2008), 3.

In the context of hip-hop music, those knowledgeable of a broad range of hip-hop styles will see that the genre does not actually fall neatly into just the ‘not textually signalled’ or ‘textually signalled’ categorization.<sup>45</sup> Though I argue that unconcealed borrowing forms a crucial part of hip-hop aesthetics, hip-hop songs can textually signal their borrowing overtly or not do so, and both approaches can be manifested in a number of ways. Consider two songs discussed in subsequent chapters, “Rebirth of Slick (Cool Like Dat)” by Digable Planets (discussed in Chapter 2) and “Who am I? (What’s my Name)” by Snoop Doggy Dogg (discussed in Chapter 3). The hiss of vinyl can be heard faintly in the introduction of “Rebirth of Slick”, textually signalling that some of the song has its roots elsewhere, that elements have been borrowed. In contrast, “Who am I?” contains many elements derived from earlier songs but was re-recorded in a studio (apart from its two-bar introduction), and does not contain any vinyl popping or hiss characteristic of sample-based hip-hop songs. In other words, “Who am I?”’s intertextuality is not textually signalled. Its sources of material are not obvious in themselves, and to a young listener unknowledgeable of 1970s soul and funk, it can sound strikingly ‘original’ (as it did to me when I first heard it at age 11).

This distinction shows that hip-hop recordings can be categorized based on whether or not the borrowing employed draws attention to its past or not. Many times, digitally sampling a well-known lyric or beat is akin to showing part of its ‘inner workings’, or at least signalling that it has its origins elsewhere. And in other

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<sup>45</sup> Dyer actually does consider hip-hop as pastiche, but includes it in what he calls a pasticcio form, a ‘combination pastiche’ as opposed to an ‘imitation pastiche’. Certainly not all hip-hop music could accurately fit as pasticcio as he defines it, but a number of examples do. Dyer is most likely narrowly considering collage-style hip-hop production such as The Bomb Squad in his categorization, as he considers combination pastiche as combining ‘things that are typically held apart in such a way as to retain their identities.’ Dyer, 21. Other pasticcio forms he includes are Brazilian Tropicalism, cento, contrafactum, capriccio, and photomontage. He gives hip-hop and other examples of combination pastiche little detailed attention, as imitation pastiche is the primary subject of his book, and is what concerns the chart above.

songs, such as in the Dr. Dre example, borrowings will be streamlined into sounding new, though their inner parts are taken from songs decades earlier. To include Dyer's bifurcation into the metaphor, textually signalled borrowing in a work is to show some of its working parts, and not to signal its derivations is akin to creating an illusory originality. To consider music in such a way shifts the argument from how original a work actually is, to how original it appears to be. At the risk of overgeneralizing major music genres, both rock 'n' roll and rock music's intertextualities have been generally more concealed and textually unsignalled in terms of their intra- and extra-musical discourses than those of hip-hop, though any such statement is always more complicated at a closer level of detail.<sup>46</sup>

Examples of 'textually signalled' borrowing in hip-hop music include, but are not limited to:

1. *In lyrics and 'flow'*: Drawing attention to the source of a quotation, for example, when 50 Cent says in "Patiently Waiting" (3:43): "Snoop said this in '94: "We don't love them hoes." (from Snoop's "Gin and Juice" 0:55) 50 Cent also imitates Snoop's delivery of the line as a true allosonic quotation of the text, as well as attributing the source of his quotation in the lyrics. Another example is using short snippets of dialogue from television or radio which seem incongruous to the other parts of the song (such as the autosonic quotation 'Meanwhile, deep underground somewhere outside the city' (1:50) on Jurassic 5's "High Fidelity").

2. *In beat*: Textually signalled borrowing in hip-hop beats includes vinyl hiss and popping, scratching, looped beats, chopped up beats (as producers and rappers may use a sample as an opening phrase, and proceed to chop the phrase for its basic beat, such as Kanye West on his own "Champion" and on Talib Kweli's "In the Mood"),<sup>47</sup> using breakbeats that fall firmly within the breakbeat canon, heavy collages of sound (The Bomb Squad, DJ Shadow), and sped up samples (such as Kanye West's "Through the Wire"). In addition, the sampling could be textually signalled if the borrowed fragment 'doesn't quite fit' with the rest of the material; for example, being slightly out of tune with other elements (the 'de-tuned layers'

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<sup>46</sup> The 'birth' of rock 'n' roll and bebop are described in some histories as radically new, that these musics were a radical break from previous practices rather than borrowing, extending, and Signifyin(g) on them. In other words, the extra-musical discourse conceals their borrowings to a certain extent. For a critique, see Chris McDonald, "'Rock, roll and remember?': Addressing the legacy of jazz in popular music studies", *Popular Music History* 1, no. 2. (2006): 126–142. To use an inverse example, the subgenre of 'Theme and Variations' is unconcealed through its title, and arguably textually signalled through its format.

<sup>47</sup> For audio examples and an explanation of fragmentation versus unity in hip-hop music see Justin A. Williams, 'Beats and Flows: A Response to Kyle Adams', *Music Theory Online* 15, no. 2 (2009), available at: <http://mto.societymusictheory.org/issues/mto.09.15.2/mto.09.15.2.williams.html>.

that Krims discusses) or if the duration of the sample does not fit any ‘regular’ pattern (i.e. 4 or 8-bar pattern).

These distinctions are important to make, in light of the fact that on an abstract level, ‘everything is borrowed’, a phrase that I myself borrow from an album title of the UK hip-hop group The Streets.<sup>48</sup> But what is compelling for my purposes is how particular communities incorporate borrowing, celebrate it or conceal it, and discuss it. It is from here that I outline hip-hop as an imagined community, for my purposes, the most appropriate way to preface this study and to answer questions regarding borrowing reception in hip-hop music.

### **Hip-hop as Imagined Community**

It is safe to say that hip-hop culture has become its own ‘art world’ (to invoke sociologist Howard Becker’s influential study).<sup>49</sup> This is a concept fundamental to Schloss’s approach to studying hip-hop, both his groundbreaking book on sample-based hip-hop production and his book on b-boying. He acknowledges that hip-hop culture is self-reflexive and self-critiquing:

But to understand hip-hop’s powerful self-critique, we need to understand hip-hop on its own terms. Not only because it has interesting symbolic, political, and social implications (although they are important), not only because it confirms our theories about the work of art in the age of electronic reproduction (although that’s valuable, too), but simply because the way hip-hop sees the world is itself a legitimate and consistent and fascinating intellectual system.<sup>50</sup>

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<sup>48</sup> Daphne Keller writes, ‘Human culture is always derivative, and music perhaps especially so. New art builds on old art’. Daphne Keller, ‘The Musician as Thief: Digital Culture and Copyright Law’ in *Sound Unbound*, 135. Lethem writes, ‘Any text is woven entirely with citations, references, echoes, cultural languages, which cut across it through and through in a vast stereophony. The citations that go to make up text are anonymous, untraceable, and yet already read; they are quotations without inverted commas. The kernel, the soul—let’s go further and say the substance, the bulk, the actual and valuable material of all human utterances—is plagiarism.’ Lethem, 43.

<sup>49</sup> Howard Becker, *Art Worlds* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1982).

<sup>50</sup> Schloss, *Foundation*, 3–4.

I claim that this hip-hop world is an ‘imagined community’, to borrow a term from Benedict Anderson’s writings on nationalism.<sup>51</sup> To quote Anderson, ‘It is imagined because the members of even the smallest nation will never know most of their fellow-members, meet them, or even hear of them, yet in the minds of each lives the image of their communion.’<sup>52</sup> A given community will be maintained through print and electronic media, solidifying traditions, histories, identities, and cultural objects that contribute to its continuity (such as a ‘national anthem’ and/or era-defining events and individuals). As in any nation, its demographic contains a number of highly heterogeneous negotiating identities. To be a fan and practitioner of hip-hop music (in any of its forms and subgenres) is to belong to a musical culture, and it is toward this culture that borrowing practices are aimed, including the listeners that interpret it most thoughtfully.

In 1999, perhaps not coincidentally the year after hip-hop officially outsold country music as the United States’ best-selling music genre, a number of journalists acknowledged the existence of a ‘Hip-hop Nation’. To quote from Touré’s ‘I live in the Hiphop Nation’:

I live in a country no mapmaker will ever respect. A place with its own language, culture, and history. It is as much a nation as Italy or Zambia. A place my countrymen call the Hiphop nation, purposefully invoking all of the jingoistic pride that nationalists throughout history have learned on. Our path to nationhood has been paved by a handful of fathers: Muhammad Ali with his ceaseless bravado, Bob Marley with his truth-telling rebel music, Huey Newton with his bodacious political style, James Brown with his obsession with funk.<sup>53</sup>

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<sup>51</sup> Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edition (London: Verso, 1991), 6. Schloss also mentions Anderson’s book in *Making Beats*, 4. Dimitriadis utilizes Anderson’s concept for rap music briefly and to different ends. See Greg Dimitriadis, *Performing Identity/Performing Culture: Hip Hop as Text, Pedagogy, and Lived Practice* (New York: Peter Lang, 2001), 27.

<sup>52</sup> Anderson, 6.

<sup>53</sup> Touré, ‘I Live in the Hiphop Nation’, in *Never Drank the Kool-aid* (New York: Picador, 2006), 333. Other articles include Christopher John Farley, ‘Hip-hop Nation’, *Time*, 8 Feb. 1999, and Neil Strauss ‘The Hip-Hop Nation: Whose is it?; A Land with Rhythm and Beats for All’, *New York Times*, 22 Aug. 1999. Russell Potter realized this half a decade earlier when describing rap music as a vernacular of its own separate ‘nation’, comparing it to earlier artistic forms: ‘Yet there is an

Touré recounts that there is no single President of the nation, but a number of MCs who act as Senators: ‘Unlike rhythm and blues, hip-hop has a strong memoiristic impulse, meaning our senator-MCs speak of themselves, their neighborhoods, the people around them, playing autobiographer, reporter, and oral historian.’<sup>54</sup>

The self-referential nature of this imagined community is crucial to understanding the intra-musical and extra-musical discourses in the genre. As hip-hop matured as a genre, observed journalist Oliver Wang, hip-hop became an internalized discourse. The number of peer references, linguistic idiosyncrasies, and quotes became a feature of not just rap lyrics and music, but also of the journalism: ‘Once the music and culture had a long-enough internal history, writers began to write more insularly. References no longer had to bounce off people, idea, and events outside of hip-hop; a writer could simply nod to someone or something within hip-hop, and readers understood.’<sup>55</sup> The same can be said for intertextual references within hip-hop recordings—the listeners understood many of the references. References not only draw attention to hip-hop’s internalized discourse, but often draw attention to various traditions outside of hip-hop as well. And what is considered intra-generic rather than outside the genre is largely evaluated by who is listening, and by an ever-shifting play of signifiers that may or may not become embedded in a generic nexus or world.

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uncanny resonance between the situation of the late Troubadours’ Provençal, Dante’s Italian, the bluesmen idealized by Baker, and Sadat X—all are poets in a language without a nation, or rather, with a nation that exists outside of or against a nation, a culture whose condition is that of exile, wandering, and resistance to a dominant power.’ Potter, 56.

<sup>54</sup> Touré, 334–335.

<sup>55</sup> Oliver Wang, ‘Trapped in between the Lines: The Aesthetics of Hip-Hop Journalism’, in *Total Chaos*, ed. Jeff Chang (New York: Basic Civitas Books, 2006), 167.

## **Borrowing and ‘Originality’**

As evident throughout music history, each musical culture treats borrowing and originality differently. For example, certain early music cultures will resemble the hip-hop world in its unconcealed intertextualities, in that borrowing was a large part of the compositional practice, and overtly so. Major forms of polyphony up to 1300—organum, discant, and motet—were all based on existing melodies, usually chant. Masses in the sixteenth century could be divided in terms of cantus firmus mass (or tenor mass), cantus firmus/imitation mass, paraphrase mass, or parody mass.<sup>56</sup> These earlier cultures show that a notion of musical creativity in terms of pure originality was anachronistic for that time period. Compositional practice involved reworking pre-existing material in an unconcealed manner, particularly akin to sample-based hip-hop, in contrast to nineteenth-century Romantic ideologies where composers often denied their pre-cursors in an attempt to appear purely original.<sup>57</sup> As Raymond Knapp writes, ‘nineteenth-century composers endeavoured to create original masterworks consisting primarily of musical clichés on all levels, while somehow disguising from their audiences the fact that they had, in an important sense, heard it all before.’<sup>58</sup> While this quote could be applied to much of popular music today, hip-hop music largely celebrates its intertextualities and references, and knowledgeable listeners will no doubt understand certain references even when the borrowing is not overtly textually signalled.

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<sup>56</sup> See J. Peter Burkholder, ‘Borrowing’, in *Grove Music Online*, ed. Laura Macy, available at: [http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com/subscriber/article/grove/music/52918?q=Borrowing&search=quick&pos=1&\\_start=1#firsthit](http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com/subscriber/article/grove/music/52918?q=Borrowing&search=quick&pos=1&_start=1#firsthit) (accessed 16 September 2007).

<sup>57</sup> One example is Beethoven, who in 1798 denied knowing Mozart operas, though he had written several variations on Mozart arias years earlier. Christopher Alan Reynolds, *Motives for Allusion: Context and Content in Nineteenth-Century Music* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2003), 102.

<sup>58</sup> Raymond Knapp, ‘Review of *Motives for Allusion* by Christopher Reynolds and *Quotation and Cultural Meaning in Twentieth-Century Music* by David Metzger’, *Journal of the American Musicological Society* 58, no. 3 (2005): 740.

(Unconcealed, yet not textually signalled, as in Dre's Chronic-era productions and Dyer's classification of 'copies', 'versions', and 'genre'.)

African-American arts have been criticized for centuries as being imitative rather than original, a claim strongly rebuked in Zora Neale Hurston's essay 'Characteristics of Negro Expression'. She writes, 'It has been said so often that the Negro is lacking originality that it has almost become a gospel. Outward signs seem to bear this out. But if one looks closely its falsity is immediately evident.'<sup>59</sup> She argues that it is 'masterful revision' that is really meant by the concept of 'originality', considering that all great art reworks previous art to varying degrees.<sup>60</sup> Since African-American culture has concealed little its imitations and influences, one can see how an earlier European-based notion of originality would misread them, not to mention various underlying racist assumptions involved in this criticism. A parallel could be made with more contemporary criticisms of digital sampling as uncreative or as theft. A more productive alternative, however, is to recognize hip-hop as sharing characteristics of many other African-based practices, qualities that LeRoi Jones/Amiri Baraka locates in 'black music', what he calls the 'changing same'.<sup>61</sup> Though my project concentrates on elements within the hip-hop world rather than outside it, I do acknowledge that hip-hop culture fits appropriately in the tradition of dialogism and masterful revision that Gates and Floyd develop under the concept of Signifyin(g).

The twentieth century did see, however, a return to overt, unconcealed borrowing in Western art, from the citations in T.S. Eliot's Modernist poem 'The Waste Land', to Duchamp's 'Fountain', to the plethora of post-WWII art labelled 'postmodern' (musique concrète, pop art, installation art, mash-ups, etc.). Jonathan

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<sup>59</sup> Quoted in Gates, 118.

<sup>60</sup> Ibid., 113–118.

<sup>61</sup> LeRoi Jones, 'The Changing Same (R&B and New Black Music)'. In *Black Music* (London: MacGibbon and Kee, 1969), 180–211.



Lethem goes as far as to say that collage ‘might be called the art form of the twentieth century, never mind the twenty-first.’<sup>62</sup> In addition to collage styles, perhaps most directly influential to the birth of hip-hop music were the preceding dance music styles that involved manipulating records to new ends—disco and Jamaican dub music most specifically. Hip-hop is no doubt a product of its time and could be considered a convergence of contemporary technology, twentieth-century collage cultures, African-based musical practices, and European-based borrowing traditions.

In addition to how a musical culture treats the concept of originality, another important question to ask of a musical culture is whether or not it places more value on the individual or the collective. It is safe to say that the Romantic musical world placed its emphasis on the individual, and this ideology has seeped into rock music most noticeably. Hip-hop music is not without its individual ‘stars’, as the culture often intersects with Romantic/individualistic notions of authenticity quite forcefully, but these stars will also use references and intertextualities to bolster their own stardom, and later artists can reference these stars to heighten their own authenticities. (See Chapters 4 and 5 for examples of this.) In other words, while individuality certainly exists in hip-hop culture, it is frequently supported by a collective or collaborative ethos in line with those of jazz, funk, gospel, and other African-based musics that place a high emphasis on the collective.

Consideration of a particular art world in musical borrowing studies, whether it is fourteenth-century French sacred music, nineteenth-century German instrumental music, modernist classical works, or hip-hop music, becomes a useful focus in order to investigate the ideologies, concerns, and interpretive potential of

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<sup>62</sup> Lethem, ‘The Ecstasy of Influence’, 28.

the genre. Thus, I carve a space for this imagined hip-hop community for multiple reasons: this space is perceived by many to exist, thus, its members communicate (musically and extra-musically) as such, and locating this space makes the study more fruitful from the vantage point of borrowing hermeneutics.

### **Imagined Communities as Interpretative Communities**

In studies of borrowing, there is always the question of whether to favour compositional process or cultural reception, or to invoke Nattiez, to place emphasis on the poiesic dimension or the esthetic, respectively.<sup>63</sup> Christopher Reynolds, in his study of allusion in nineteenth-century German instrumental music, asks whether an allusion needs to be recognized in order to be successful. He says that it does not, and writes that ‘Allusions are therefore more important for how music is made than for how it is heard.’<sup>64</sup> Or should the focus be placed on reception; to quote David Metzger’s study of quotation in twentieth-century music: ‘Recognition then forms a crux for quotation, especially in its role as a cultural agent. Simply put, if a borrowing is not detected then it and its cultural resonances go unheard.’<sup>65</sup> And if the latter is to be preferred, whose reception is it exactly? For Metzger, it is the study of ‘cultural agency’ in quotation,<sup>66</sup> though he does not always devote sufficient space to locating and describing the cultures that would recognize those quotations. More importantly in this case, how can a study of musical borrowing in hip-hop not simply become the private reflections of an idiosyncratic white middle-class academic such as myself, risking a danger of implicitly making the spurious claim that these references on which I chose to focus as a musicologist can generally be heard by ‘all’?

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<sup>63</sup> Nattiez, 11–15.

<sup>64</sup> Reynolds, 182.

<sup>65</sup> Metzger, 6–7. Knapp’s review of the Metzger and Reynolds books makes the point that the two books’ differing approaches could benefit from “‘talking” to the other”. Knapp, 747.

<sup>66</sup> Metzger, 6–9.

The answer lies within the imagined community of hip-hop. Most crucially, this imagined community is also as an ‘interpretive community’, to make reference to Stanley Fish and reader-response theory. Fish writes:

Indeed, it is interpretive communities, rather than either the text or the reader, that produce meanings and are responsible for the emergence of formal features. Interpretive communities are made up of those who share interpretive strategies for not reading but for writing texts, for constituting their properties. In other words these strategies exist prior to the act of reading and therefore determine the shape of what is read rather than, as is usually assumed, the other way around.<sup>67</sup>

In any given reference in a rap song, some listeners will understand the reference, and some will not to varying degrees. This is not to suggest there are one or more fixed meanings, nor a dialectic between ‘past’ and ‘present’, or necessarily between a hip-hop song and its ‘source’ sample, but multiple imagined ‘sources’, based on the previous knowledge of specific songs, artists, or genres. It is the reading and misreading of these sources, as reflected by constantly shifting and negotiating interpretations within hip-hop’s imagined communities that form the foundation of this project. These hip-hop interpretative communities (to which, as a fan and scholar of hip-hop music, I also belong) bring their experiences to the understanding of hip-hop texts, shaping and inflecting that text through the interaction involved in the listening and interpreting experience.

Despite variations inevitable with a group’s interpretation of any given utterance, I would argue that there exists an audience expectation that hip-hop is a vast intertextual network that helps to form and inform the generic contract between audiences and hip-hop groups and artists. And in many cases, hip-hop practitioners overtly celebrate their peers, ancestors, and musical pasts, though reasons why this is so may diverge, and how references and sources are textually

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<sup>67</sup> Stanley Fish, *Is There a Text in this Class?: The Authority of Interpretive Communities* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1980), 14.

signalled (or not) varies on an imaginary spectrum that roughly corresponds to a timeline of traditions and technical innovations. Whereas certain rock ideologies that borrow from Romantic notions of musical genius attempt to demonstrate an illusionary originality, hip-hop takes pride in appropriating and celebrating other sounds and ideas. It is reflective of a long lineage of African-American and Pre-Romantic-Western music making which has embraced the collective in different ways.<sup>68</sup>

Musical codes can work on a number of levels in borrowing, and not simply along the lines of signalled and unsignalled, or autosonic versus allosonic borrowings. Musical codes can exist on the level of genre recognition (in the case of jazz in Chapter 2), or that of a recognizable artist voice (in the case of 2Pac and Notorious B.I.G. in Chapters 4 and 5). In other words, listeners do not have to have knowledge of the exact song being borrowed for it to communicate meaning. And again this will vary amongst listeners: some will know the exact song, some will recognize a genre, and some will realize that it could reference a number of elements, as hip-hop is often a multi-vocal discourse. Two examples will suffice.

Ingrid Monson, discussing Signifyin(g) in jazz, uses the example of John Coltrane's "My Favorite Things" as an example of ironic Signification, troping on a Broadway song and transforming it into a song with new meanings.<sup>69</sup> The hip-hop group OutKast also cover "My Favorite Things" on *Speakerboxxx/The Love Below* (2003), with a prominent 'drum and bass' feel, and include a soprano saxophone characteristic of Coltrane. In analysing the OutKast version, are we to

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<sup>68</sup> Album sales as a measure of popularity could certainly be used to support the idea that a sample source will be recognized. For example, in choosing a popular (in the sense that it sold a large number of units) song from the past (the use of "Superfreak" for MC Hammer's "U Can't Touch This", and more generally, Will Smith songs and Puff Daddy's choice of sample material), one could assume that the source will be more recognized than an obscure or highly-transformed sample.

<sup>69</sup> Monson, 'Doubleness and Jazz Improvisation', 291. Gates also uses these two songs as an example of Signification. Gates, 63.

consider this a two-way relationship between the OutKast and Coltrane version because of the soprano saxophone, or can we also include the original Sound of Music version in the analysis? Borrowing in hip-hop is highly multi-vocal, and there may be more than one ‘source’, or in fact a lineage that complicates any sort of dialectical reading between ‘old’ and ‘new’ texts.<sup>70</sup>

A second example involves how best to theorize the relationship of James Brown to hip-hop culture. Elizabeth Wheeler, in her study of the dialogic nature of sampling, states that ‘quoting James Brown is always an act of homage.’<sup>71</sup> But it may be worth asking this rhetorical question in light of the framework of this thesis: at what moment does ‘homage to James Brown’ become a more general (or generic) homage to hip-hop? Or is it now always double-voiced, that is, is it demonstrating a quasi-DuBoisian double-consciousness, at once representing both hip-hop and funk? Wheeler’s comment was in 1991, only eleven years after the first hip-hop on record. But eighteen years after Wheeler’s article at the time of this writing, perhaps rather than homage to James Brown and funk music, it has become homage to hip-hop as its own self-conscious genre. The possibility is open that the racial, political and other associations attached to James Brown stay intact, and that a James Brown reference now represents both hip-hop culture and James Brown as one its forefathers. These meanings depend on who is interpreting the samples (as James Brown’s voice and breakbeats are normally sampled rather than borrowed), but treating James Brown as hip-hop signifier can potentially show that academic discourse on hip-hop can engage thoughtfully with references from

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<sup>70</sup> One example of a complex song genealogy is the long and varied history of the “Apache” break in hip-hop and other electronic musics. See Michaelangelo Matos, ‘All Roads Lead to Apache’ in Eric Weisbard, ed. *Listen Again: A Momentary History of Pop* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2007), 200–209. Posted with examples on Oliver Wang’s Soul Sides blog (19 April 2005), available at: <http://www.soul-sides.com/2005/04/all-roads-lead-to-apache.html> (accessed 5 August 2009).

<sup>71</sup> Wheeler, 200.

within its own genre, in addition to the vast amount of previous academic discussion on sampling's link to pre-hip-hop forms.<sup>72</sup>

Ingrid Monson, in the context of jazz, has provided a useful explanation of the varied ways that borrowing can be utilized and interpreted within a musical culture:

The reference may be as specific as a melodic quotation from a particular piece or as diffuse as a timbre or style of groove. It might be from within or without mainstream jazz repertory. The important point is that a chain of associations may be set off that engage the listener and unite her or him with a community of other individuals who share a similar musical point of view. Quotations are only the most obvious examples of the thick web of intertextual and intermusical associations to which knowledgeable performers and listeners react. Theoretically almost any musical detail or composite thereof could convey a reference, so long as a community of interpreters can recognize the continuity. The key here is 'community of interpreters' (which includes both performers and audience), for a sonic detail becomes sonically meaningful and actionable only in an at least partially shared context of use.<sup>73</sup>

Monson locates a jazz community that will understand the web of intertextual references, similar to the kind of interpretations and communications from the hip-hop communities in the following chapters.

In this introduction, I have outlined some of the primary concerns of this project, that the hip-hop world includes a high degree of intertextuality within its aesthetics, and that hip-hop cultures form an interpretive community that recognize a number of these references. With the premise that hip-hop music largely adheres to this unconcealed borrowing aesthetic, an emphasis on the collective reflective of

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<sup>72</sup> In addition to Wheeler, other examples include Katz, 140–141; Rose, 64; Andrew Bartlett, 'Airshafts, Loudspeakers, and the Hip Hop Sample: Contexts and African American Musical Aesthetics', *African American Review* 28 (1994): 639–652; Nelson George, 'Sample This' in *That's the Joint: The Hip-hop Studies Reader*, eds. Murray Forman and Mark Anthony Neal (London: Routledge, 2004): 437–441; Portia K. Maultsby, 'Africanisms in African American Music', in *Africanisms in American Culture*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edition, ed. Joseph Holloway (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2005): 326–355; See also Demers, 'Sampling the 1970s in Hip-hop'.

<sup>73</sup> Monson, 303, 305.

many genres of African-Diaspora, there exist a few initial levels to consider in hip-hop borrowing analysis:

- 1) Allosonic versus autosonic quotation
- 2) Textually signalled versus unsignalled (adaptation versus nonadaptation, does it sound digitally sampled, or does it draw attention to the fact that it is borrowed?)
- 3) recognition of borrowed song or artist/group
- 4) recognition of borrowed genre
- 5) intra-generic borrowing versus inter-generic borrowing

Intended as a starting point rather than an unchanging framework, the thesis initiates a discourse that moves beyond surface notions of ‘sampling’ and deeper into the complex details of musical borrowing in hip-hop music. Only when we pick apart the intricacies of borrowing can we observe and appreciate how complex the web of affiliations actually is.

The imagined community of the hip-hop world prepares the framework for the first case study in Chapter 1. In this chapter I locate borrowing as a demonstration of ‘historical authenticity’, using signifiers said to belong to the hip-hop world’s past as a marker of authenticity within the genre. This is a special case of what I call ‘intra-generic borrowing’, literally borrowing from elements said to represent hip-hop culture. As hip-hop on record is now over thirty years old, there exists a vast network of signifiers already imbedded in this generic nexus. This form of intertextuality only strengthens this already self-conscious genre, and shows one particular strategy for artists and groups to establish authenticity in a genre that is often obsessively concerned with such matters.

Chapter 2 shifts the framework from intra-generic borrowing to inter-generic borrowing, sampling or borrowing from another genre. This case study explores the sampling of jazz music in hip-hop as suggesting a high-art identity of sophistication and intellectualism in the subgenre commonly categorized as ‘jazz rap’. I make the case that these ‘jazz codes’ were recognized by a mainstream

United States audience because of the ubiquity of a specific style of jazz in the 1980s. Furthermore, jazz's associations with 'art music' and with the black middle class were key aspects to the dominant ideology for jazz in the 1980s, and I show that these connotations were reflected in the recognition and reception of jazz codes in late-1980s/early-1990s rap music. This study of cross-generic interaction is a particularly fruitful method in borrowing analysis, a hermeneutics rarely approached in popular music studies.

Chapter 3 begins to explore musical borrowing for particular playback spaces, more specifically, for the automobile. I focus on Los Angeles-based gangsta rap producer Dr. Dre and his albums *The Chronic* (1992) and *Doggystyle* (1993). Dr. Dre consciously decided to use fewer samples in his production at this time, instead choosing to re-record pre-existing material. This study also underlines music's intersections with geography, both the influence of urban geography on music production and the geography of particular listening spaces. As borrowing is central to hip-hop's ethos, Dr. Dre's production reflects how musical materials become re-used for a new space, updated and customized for the automotive listening experience.

Chapter 4 shifts the borrowing focus to digital sampling, but instead of writing about digital sampling in the context of hip-hop beats as other studies have done, I wish to look at digitally sampling the voice of the rapper. In particular, I will discuss the voice as relic, deployed to reference the hip-hop martyrs Notorious B.I.G. and Tupac Shakur. Rappers Jay-Z (Shawn Carter) and Nas (Nasir Jones) both imbed these late artists in examples of what I call 'post-mortem borrowing', i.e., the use of a recording (sound or image) of a deceased artist with great cultural heft (e.g. Elvis Presley, Kurt Cobain, Freddie Mercury, John Lennon, Michael Jackson). In post-mortem borrowing, the authenticity lies in the recorded sound or



image, in spite of its recontextualization. Close investigations of examples involving the Notorious B.I.G. (by Jay-Z) and Tupac Shakur (by Nas) will compare the sonorities of the old and new contexts, a juxtaposition which demonstrates the fact that the sonority of the beats themselves, often neglected in studies of rap, are integral to the presentation of any rap song. Thus, when the voice of a deceased rapper is used in a new context, both the voice (with its biographical associations) and sonorities from the beat all provide meaning. Rappers who use the symbolic immortality of hip-hop martyrs Tupac Shakur and the Notorious B.I.G. to their own ends create specific identities for both the deceased artists and themselves, both creating memorial processes and encouraging canon formation.

Chapter 5 is a companion to Chapter 4, as they deal with similar themes, notably allusions to and borrowing from the canonized rappers Tupac Shakur and The Notorious B.I.G. As Chapter 4 looked at some of their contemporaries, Chapter 5 looks at the ‘next generation’ of artists, the construction of Eminem and 50 Cent into a particular gangsta rap lineage. I look closely at Eminem’s production style, his ‘sonic signature’ as providing an authorial presence beyond his rapping. For example, 50 Cent’s “Patiently Waiting”, produced by Eminem, shows a web of references which places 50 Cent as an heir to a lineage which includes Eminem, Dr. Dre, and ‘ancestor’ Tupac Shakur.

As Richard Shusterman has written, ‘Artistic appropriation is the historical source of hip-hop music and still remains the core of its technique and a central feature of its aesthetic form and message.’<sup>74</sup> This practice fits within a long lineage of other musical genres and cultures, but appropriation in the digital era means that there are even more possibilities that hip-hop practitioners can utilize to create their music. Bounding the hip-hop world as imagined community makes the discussion

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<sup>74</sup> Shusterman, ‘The Fine Art of Rap’, 202.

more productive, and the variety of case studies presented is an attempt to approach borrowing from different hermeneutical angles, in order to draw the greatest knowledge from the most perspectives. As Gary Tomlinson has expressed, ‘the deepest knowledge will result from the dialogue that involves the largest number of differing vantage points.’<sup>75</sup> Though these recordings are open to many interpretations, the following chapters intend to show that intertextuality is a crucial part of hip-hop music’s composition and reception.

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<sup>75</sup> Tomlinson, ‘Cultural Dialogics and Jazz’, 82.

‘Hip hop today thrives on a sense of its own past.’<sup>76</sup>  
—Bill Brewster and Frank Broughton

‘Some say this is the first generation of black Americans to experience nostalgia. And it all showed up in the music.’<sup>77</sup>  
—Nelson George

‘With hip hop, born in the Bronx, these guys created something out of nothing. That’s amazing. That’s alchemy. That’s magic.’<sup>78</sup>  
—Johan Kugelberg

## **–Chapter 1–**

# **Historicizing the Breakbeat: Hip-Hop’s Origins and Authenticity**

The complex relationship between an artistic culture and its history can be investigated from two large-scale methodological angles. First, there is the relationship between that culture and its historical influences and precedents, linking past to present to form a network of lineage or traditions. The second method looks at the relationship between a (self-conscious) culture and its own internal history: its origins, development or evolution, and its defining features.<sup>79</sup> Though elements of a culture shift over time, the importance of their defining features (e.g. lifestyles, worldview, philosophies, images, objects and products) are what keep cultural objects bounded in an imagined community.<sup>80</sup> While such objects and concepts are never fully bounded in actuality, these features are the crucial signifiers which form cultural identity, and to many, its essence. Despite the contestation that some of an art world’s essentialism may invite, the truth content (Wahrheitsgehalt) of an artistic culture is of great importance for those who participate in that culture. In popular culture, more specifically popular music, this

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<sup>76</sup> Brewster and Broughton, 254.

<sup>77</sup> Nelson George, *Hip-hop America* (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1998), xi.

<sup>78</sup> Johan Kugelberg, *Born in the Bronx: A Visual Record of the Early Days of Hip Hop* (New York: Rizzoli International Publications, Inc., 2007), 31.

<sup>79</sup> While boundaries between internal and external dynamics of a culture are by no means impermeable, I outline these two hermeneutical methods because they are often utilized by academics, fan cultures, and the media to investigate and construct particular artistic cultures.

<sup>80</sup> For a longer explanation of the imagined community of hip-hop culture, see the Introduction to this volume.

‘truth content’ is part of a larger issue, widely theorized in popular music scholarship, known as authenticity.<sup>81</sup> This chapter, by way of the second method (internal cultural hermeneutics), explores the links between hip-hop’s self-conscious cultural history and notions of authenticity.

African-American culture, and its reception, has had a unique and problematic relationship with history, exposed to interpretations ranging from praise of artistic lineages (Floyd 1996; Stuckey 1987; Gates Jr. 1989; Cobb 2007; Demers 2003; Dyson 2007) to claims of having no history at all (Hegel’s contention of African culture’s ‘historylessness’/Geseichtslosigkeit as antithetical to Europe’s).<sup>82</sup> In terms of art produced by African-Diasporic communities, there may exist what Lois Zamora calls an ‘anxiety of origins’ within North American and Latin American (more specifically ‘New World’) literary cultures.<sup>83</sup> Zamora writes, ‘I consistently find that an anxiety about origins impels American writers to search for precursors (in the name of community) rather than escape from them (in the name of individuation); to connect to traditions and histories (in the name of a usable past) rather than dissociate from them (in the name of originality).’<sup>84</sup> Zamora sees the use of traditions, clichés, interest in origins, and repetition as a result of this historical anxiety.

More specifically, links between hip-hop and earlier forms of African or African-American expression have also been abundant in scholarship. These include connections with griots, Jamaican toasting, jazz, blues, and 1970s

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<sup>81</sup> Sarah Thornton writes, ‘Authenticity is arguably the most important value ascribed to popular music ... Music is perceived as authentic when it rings true or feels real, when it has credibility and comes across as genuine.’ Sarah Thornton, *Club Cultures: Music, Media and Subcultural Capital* (Middletown: Wesleyan University Press, 1996), 26.

<sup>82</sup> James A. Snead ‘On Repetition in Black Culture’, in *Out There: Marginalization and Contemporary Cultures*, eds. Russell Ferguson et. al (London: The MIT Press, 1990), 215.

<sup>83</sup> Lois Parkinson Zamora, *The Usable Past: The Imagination of History in Recent Fiction of the Americas* (Cambridge University Press, 1997), ix.

<sup>84</sup> *Ibid.*, 5.

blaxploitation film. Citing polyrhythmic structures, funk music, improvisational elements, sound systems from the Caribbean, cries, shrieks, and moans, Michael Eric Dyson writes, ‘Although hip hop had its African American artistic womb in the Bronx, we know its narrative of origins ranges far beyond those borders. When we’re talking hip hop, we’re already speaking about black Diaspora.’<sup>85</sup> Joanna Demers notes the importance of sampling and referencing 1970s culture in hip-hop music, predominantly citing blaxploitation film of that era.<sup>86</sup> In her view, sampling creates a lineage with the past, one of the many frameworks in which sampling get theorized (including postmodernism, politics of resistance, and as homage to name a few).

While the connections with pre-hip-hop ancestry are often useful and enlightening, my interest lies in analyzing hip-hop history and borrowing from within the ‘hip-hop world’ or the ‘Hip-hop Nation’ (see Introduction). Rather than consider long-term or cross-generational links with earlier forms of African-American arts, I wish to consider hip-hop as its own cultural field for hermeneutical investigation. Hip-hop discourse acknowledges, and debates within, its own field with its own intra-cultural traditions, and this genre consciousness amongst fans, artists, and media are crucial both to identity and understanding. Exploring these more internalized dynamics will help elucidate notions of cultural definition, canon formation, and authenticity. I intend to investigate borrowing from within the hip-hop world, focusing on the origins and romanticization of a ‘pre-recording’ hip-hop performance culture as a source of hip-hop authenticity. A number of artists and groups borrow from the ‘old school’ as representative of an

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<sup>85</sup> Michael Eric Dyson, *Know What I Mean?: Reflections on Hip Hop* (New York: Basic Civitas Books, 2007), 46–47.

<sup>86</sup> Demers, ‘Sampling the 1970s in Hip-hop’, 53.

historically authentic hip-hop identity. I call this concern with hip-hop history historical authenticity.<sup>87</sup>

Borrowing from this cultural arena, artists develop a nostalgia for ‘the party’, which is seen as the quintessence of 1970s hip-hop. The 70s hip-hop party is situated within a romanticized urban space, as an escape from issues of poverty, race, and gang warfare. The energy of the community, engaged in a symbiotic relationship with the DJ, fostered creativity, innovation and fun. The ‘party’ is an important arena which claims hip-hop authenticity, and I would argue, a significant presence within the imagined community known broadly as hip-hop culture.

Rather than theorize answers to why genre self-consciousness is so abundant in hip-hop, I intend to show how the specific relationship between hip-hop and its own history is embedded within hip-hop music.<sup>88</sup> For a genre as intertextual as hip-hop, it is surprising that issues of intra-generic borrowing have not been discussed in any detailed way.<sup>89</sup> Concern with hip hop’s internal history is more prominent with some artists than others; artists such as KRS-One, Common, and Nas comment on hip-hop as a larger ‘culture’ and, as I will argue, borrow from the early period of hip-hop to signify authenticity. Artists who assert and invoke the past as the essence of true hip-hop demonstrate that knowledge in a number of ways. Historical authenticity in hip-hop becomes an extra-musical and intra-musical debate which contributes to construction of these genres and communities.

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<sup>87</sup> Historical authenticity could be applied to a number of genres from blues, to jazz, to early music (‘historically informed performance’). It is best defined as the belief that a musical form was more ‘authentic’ and of greater value at some idealized earlier point in its internal history. For the purposes of narrowing my argument, I choose the period of pre-recorded hip-hop (1973–1979), early 1980s hip-hop performance cultures that were said to extend/continue these earlier practices, and their recorded representations (e.g. Wild Style, “Grandmaster Flash on the Wheels of Steel”).

<sup>88</sup> One can theorize many reasons why artists feel the way they do about their racial, national, musical, and artistic histories, but this is beyond the scope of this chapter.

<sup>89</sup> Passing references to homage to earlier rap artists occur in both Schloss and Miyakowa, while Imani Perry spends a few pages on nostalgia and homage to hip-hop’s ‘old school’. Perry, 54–57.

## Historical Accounts of the Origins of Hip-Hop

While it is not the aim of this chapter to show how it really was ('Wie es eigentlich gewesen'),<sup>90</sup> it is important to present some accounts of the origins of hip-hop music as a frame of reference. Many of these accounts have evolved from interviews over the years, and various anecdotes have become canonized through frequent citations in books, magazines and documentary films. Since hip-hop's origins were largely unrecorded (which contributes to the mystique), I doubt that we will ever have a totally accurate account of how it was; but these accounts are nonetheless important in forging a usable past for historical authenticity.

For certain hip-hop purists, the truest form of hip-hop culture existed from 1973 to 1979, before hip-hop was 'commercialized' in the form of recordings. It was during this time period that what became known as the 'four elements' of hip-hop arose in the South Bronx (graffiti, breakin', DJing, and MCing). These artistic movements were linked, all sharing the same urban space, with artists often engaging with more than one of these elements. The following will give an account of those early days, culled from various secondary sources.

Though graffiti and what became known as breakdancing emerged as early as the late 1960s, no specific date is associated with their birth. The origin of hip-hop music, however, can be traced back to a single time and place: 1520 Sedgwick Avenue in Morris Heights (in the Bronx) on August 11, 1973 when Jamaican-born DJ Kool Herc threw his first party. What separated Herc from other DJs at the time was that he did something different with the records. First, he used two turntables (as contemporaneously used in disco to create a smooth flow from one song to

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<sup>90</sup> Nineteenth-century German historian Leopold von Ranke, who wrote, as a young man, in his first historical work, that the role of history is simply to show what actually happened—'Wie es eigentlich gewesen'. Leonard Krieger, *Ranke: The Meaning of History* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1977), 4.

another), and he began to monitor the crowd for responses.<sup>91</sup> Second, he decided to use the instrumental break of records, since that was the part of the record that dancers seemed to like the most. The often quoted account is from David Toop's 1984 book *The Rap Attack*: 'Initially, Herc was trying out his reggae records but since he failed to cut ice he switched to Latin-tinged funk, just playing the fragments that were popular with the dancers and ignoring the rest of the track. The most popular part was usually the percussion break.'<sup>92</sup> Herc developed a technique called the 'Merry-go-round' where he would play a continuous flow of breakbeats, one after the other. He was then able to use the same breakbeat on two copies of the same records, alternating the two to create a continuous instrumental flow. A number of breakbeats are mentioned in these accounts, most notably the middle section of James Brown's "Give it Up or Turnit A Loose" and The Incredible Bongo Band's version of "Apache" [CD Example 1]. Brewster and Broughton provide a quote from an interview with DJ Kool Herc:

Herc recalls the records he used that night. "There was the 'clap your hands, stop your feet' part of James Brown's 'Give it up or Turnit A Loose', 'Funky Music Is The Thing' by the Dynamic Corvettes, 'If You Want To Get Into Something' by the Isley Brothers and 'Bra' by Cymande." All This was topped off with the percussion frenzy of the Incredible Bongo Band's "Apache", a record destined to become Herc's signature tune, a Bronx anthem, and one of the most sampled records in hip hop.<sup>93</sup>

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<sup>91</sup> Herc recounts, 'I was smoking cigarettes and I was waiting for the records to finish. And I noticed people was waiting for certain parts of the record'. Quoted in Jeff Chang, *Can't Stop Won't Stop: A History of the Hip-Hop Generation* (London: Ebury Press, 2005), 78–79. This was the birth of the 'breakbeat', as Grandmaster Flash defined it as the 'best part of a great record', the moment when, 'The band breaks down, the rhythm section is isolated, basically where the bass guitar and drummer take solos' (as told to Rose, *Black Noise*, 73). David Toop writes, 'In the Bronx, however, the important part of the record was the break—the part of a tune in which the drums take over', David Toop, *Rap Attack 2* (London: Serpent's Tale, 1992), 14. Many of these accounts of the breakbeat can be found in Schloss, *Making Beats*, 31–32; Chang, *Can't Stop Won't Stop*, 78–79; Rose, 73; Toop 12–14, 60; Nelson George *Hip-hop America*, 17–18; Anthony Bozza, *Whatever you Say I Am: The Life and Times of Eminem* (New York: Three Rivers Press, 2003), 129; John Leland, *Hip: A History* (New York: Harper Perennial, 2005), 297–327. S.H. Fernando, *The New Beats* (New York: Anchor Books, 1994), 4–5, Brewster and Broughton, 227–246; *Yes Yes Y'all: The Experience Music Project Oral History of Hip-Hop's First Decade*, eds. Jim Fricke and Charlie Ahern (Oxford: Perseus Books Group, 2002); and Kugelberg.

<sup>92</sup> Toop, 60.

<sup>93</sup> Brewster and Broughton, 230.



There is no debate within the hip-hop community as to who invented hip-hop music: DJ Kool Herc is universally recognized and respected. Accounts almost always note his unusually large sound speakers (a tradition brought with him from the Caribbean) as well as his own size (6'5" tall). As the story goes, after a few parties, Herc began to establish a reputation for himself in the Bronx.

Afrika Bambaataa organized his first party in November 1976 at the Bronx River Community Center, inspired by Herc's break-centred style, as opposed to a song-centred DJ style.<sup>94</sup> He founded an organization called the Zulu Nation to promote an end to gang warfare in the Bronx. He played a wide variety of records: in addition to funk music, he played instrumental portions of The Monkees, The Beatles, Aerosmith, and Kraftwerk.<sup>95</sup> For Bambaataa, using the instrumental fragment eradicated an element of racial identity and genre categorization; artist and genre mattered less than sound and danceability. Bambaataa, in a 1984 statement to David Toop frequently cited by historians and academics, said:

I'd throw on *Sgt Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band*—just that drum part. One, two, three, BAM—and they'd be screaming and partying. I'd throw on the Monkees, "Mary, Mary, where are you going?"—and they'd start going crazy. I'd say, "You just danced to the Monkees". They'd say, "You liar. I didn't dance to no Monkees". I'd like to catch people who categorise records.<sup>96</sup>

His individualism was effective only insofar as he was a leader of a musical democracy. In other words, if the crowd had not responded favourably to the records, it would not have worked. The events became extremely popular, and partygoers went all over New York City to look for the eclectic records that

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<sup>94</sup> Bambaataa defines this concept: 'Break music is that certain part of the record that you just be waiting for to come up and when that certain part comes, that percussion part with all those drums, congas, it makes you dance real wild. You just let all your feelings go, but that break is so short in the record, you get mad, because the break was not long enough for you to really get down to do your thing. As soon as the break part comes, boom, the singing or music part comes right back and the break part is gone.' Quoted in Leland, 322.

<sup>95</sup> It is said that Bambaataa obtained records by groups like Kraftwerk from the 'record pools' that were organized amongst DJs from other genres. Brewster and Broughton, 246.

<sup>96</sup> Quoted in Schloss, *Making Beats*, 32.

Bambaataa played. The astounding variety of his records frequently became a metaphor for peace and co-existence in later reception.<sup>97</sup>

As Schloss and others have stated, hip-hop gave rise to a new way of thinking about records and making music.<sup>98</sup> Rather than ‘linear’ harmonic progression in a ‘Western Art Music’ sense, the repetition (‘looping’) of dance music creates a pleasure arising from a process, rather than satiating a goal-oriented desire (what Luis Manuel Garcia calls ‘process pleasure’).<sup>99</sup> Broadly speaking, the breakbeat was part of an artistic tradition of recontextualizing ‘found objects’,<sup>100</sup> adapting and appropriating records to fit new contexts for collective enjoyment and active engagement. It was a form of musical fetishization, but unlike Adorno’s criticisms on fragmented listening, I do not use the term in a pejorative sense. Dancers were now able to enjoy the pleasures of their musical fetishes to the fullest. Most important, this music culture began as a dance culture; it was about the energy of parties. The breakbeat involves a freedom, a freedom of the DJ as listener to foster creativity with the collage of cultural information he/she had available. The focus on the dancer and the community invokes what Herbert Gans calls the ‘user-orientation’ of popular music as opposed to the ‘creator-orientation’ of high art music and its canons.<sup>101</sup> This early hip-hop focus on the party conjures

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<sup>97</sup> For an example, see Leland, 327.

<sup>98</sup> Schloss, *Making Beats*, 33.

<sup>99</sup> Luis Manuel Garcia, ‘On and On: Repetition as Process and Pleasure in Electronic Dance Music’, *Music Theory Online* 11, no. 4 (2005), 5. His typology of pleasure, adapted from Karl Bühler, includes three types of pleasure: satiation pleasure, function pleasure, and pleasure of creative mastery.

<sup>100</sup> Toop, in an interview with Bill Brewster, comments on Johnny Dynell’s comparison of Grandmaster Flash to Marcel Duchamp as the ‘breakthrough of the found object’, elevated into art in the twentieth century. Interview on [djhistory.com](http://www.djhistory.com), available at: [http://www.djhistory.com/djhistory/archiveInterviewDisplay?interview\\_id=32](http://www.djhistory.com/djhistory/archiveInterviewDisplay?interview_id=32) (accessed 16 Feb 2008). See also Shusterman, 205.

<sup>101</sup> Herbert Gans, *Popular Culture and High Culture: An Analysis and Evaluation of Taste*, 2<sup>nd</sup> Ed. (New York: Basic Books, 1999), 102.

up notions of the pleasure-field, as described and theorized by Richard Middleton, a ‘loss of the subject’ in experiencing *jouissance*.<sup>102</sup>

The importance of collectivity and audience to historical authenticity cannot be overstated. While the individual innovators are acknowledged and celebrated, the notion of the collective (crews, audience, battles, community, diversity) became intertwined with hip-hop. As was the case of many cultural births, the diverse mix of people found in an urban environment played a crucial role (what Robin Kelley calls ‘polyculturalism’).<sup>103</sup> Dancers and DJs mutually influenced each other, and it is safe to say hip-hop music would not have formed and expanded in the Bronx without either.

Other DJs began to emerge and improve on the conceptual approach initiated by DJ Kool Herc, such as Grandmaster Flash,<sup>104</sup> credited with advances in mixing, and Grand Wizard Theodore, who is credited with inventing record scratching as a turntable technique.<sup>105</sup> MCs arrived soon after, speaking over the instrumental tracks and forming groups and associations with certain DJs.<sup>106</sup>

As time passed, parties grew and reputations increased. In 1977, a blackout gave opportunity for the looting of turntables and other equipment, increasing the

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<sup>102</sup> Richard Middleton, *Studying Popular Music* (Milton Keynes: Open University Press, 1990), 287–289.

<sup>103</sup> Polyculturalism, as explained by Chang, describes generally how multiple cultures influence one another. Jeff Chang, in *Total Chaos* (New York: Basic Civitas Books, 2006), xv. The term was coined by Robin D.G. Kelley and became a central topic in Vijay Prashad’s book on cultural exchange between African and Asian cultures. Vijay Prashad, *Everybody was Kung Fu Fighting: Afro-Asian Connections and the Myth of Cultural Purity* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2002).

<sup>104</sup> Leland writes, ‘Flash, with his technological experience, work ethic, and proclivity toward showmanship, made Flash the most technically gifted of the early hip-hop DJs. Since he had been an electronics major at Samuel Gompers vocational school, he was able to make a cross fader which gave him the ability to hear one record while another was playing. This way, he could make a seamless transition from one record to another’. Leland, 322.

<sup>105</sup> Bambaataa said, ‘Grandmaster Flash brought the quick-mixing into the hip-hop culture. Then you had the scratching and needle dropping of the Grand Wizard Theodore, and that’s when the whole movement started changing to another direction’. Quoted in Fricke and Ahearn, 65.

<sup>106</sup> Herc’s first MCs were Coke La Rock and Clark Kent. Grandmaster Flash first had MCs Cowboy and Melle Mel, both later part of his Furious Five. Bambaataa had Soulsonic Force, The Jazzy Five, and Planet Control. DJ Breakout had Funky Four (Plus One More), Cold Crush Brothers worked with DJ Charlie Chase, and Grandwizard Theodore would become DJ for Fantastic 5. Brewster and Broughton, 250.

number of DJs in the Bronx. By October 1979, hip-hop music reached a much greater audience with the release of the first hit rap single, “Rappers Delight” by the Sugar Hill Gang. It received copious amounts of radio play and sold numerous units. This was the moment when hip-hop music reached a national audience, and eventually the whole world.

### **The South Bronx and Wild Style (1982)**

Hip-hop’s origins in the South Bronx became the romantic mythology of an artistic culture born out of dismal socio-economic conditions. City planner Robert Moses built the Cross-Bronx expressway in 1959, which went through working-class ethnic communities. Many middle-class families left the Bronx, and poorer groups were relocated into blue-collar housing units (‘slums’). The South Bronx became a symbol of ruin, poverty and the apparent hopelessness of postindustrial abandonment.<sup>107</sup> Afrika Bambaataa had said, ‘It was so bad in the South Bronx, they said it was the worst place in the United States. And there was the culture of hip hop, this music. We always had the musical aspect in the Bronx. And we had the drugs, the dope, the coke—that was plaguing the community’.<sup>108</sup> The energy of parties in the Bronx was created in isolation (away from any media coverage), as if the trope of the alienated, suffering artist could now be applied to an entire community.

Frequently cited as the most accurate representation of the early hip-hop period, the film *Wild Style* (1982) has had a colossal effect on hip-hop culture. The film depicted the urban landscape of the Bronx, along with the co-existence of these new artistic ideas in various party scenes. Melle Mel (of the Furious Five),

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<sup>107</sup> For a more detailed account of these conditions see Rose, 30–34, and Chang, *Can’t Stop Won’t Stop*.

<sup>108</sup> Quoted in Kugelberg, 16.

said in an interview, ‘Wild Style, that was the one movie that captured more of the true essence of hip hop’.<sup>109</sup> Though filmed in 1981, Wild Style is considered the quintessential hip-hop film because it sought to capture the energy of pre-recording, pre-1979, hip-hop.

Written, produced, and directed by Charlie Ahern, Wild Style was the brainchild of Frederick Braithwaite (Fab 5 Freddy),<sup>110</sup> who contributed music and acted in the film. The plot centered on a young graffiti artist named Ray (painting under the name ‘Zoro’, and played by real-life graffiti artist Lee Quinones) who chose to isolate himself from the graffiti crews, though he becomes romantically involved with Rose (Sandra ‘Lady Pink’ Fabra), who leads one of the crews. The film includes a number of performers, including MC Chief Rocker Busy Bee, Grandmaster Flash performing in his kitchen, breakdancing from the Rock Steady Crew, and a rap battle on a basketball court (the ‘basketball throwdown’) between the Fantastic 5 and the Cold Crush Brothers. The climax of the film is the ‘jam’ at the East River Park Amphitheatre. Set against a graffiti mural backdrop of two hands shooting lightning bolts toward a large blue star (painted by Quinones), this party/jam featured Busy Bee, Grandmaster Flash as DJ, a number of breakdance groups (including The Rock Steady Crew), Treacherous 3 MCs, and Lil’ Rodney Cee and K.K. Rockwell (formerly of the Funky Four +1, now under the name Double Trouble) performing a rap entitled “Double Trouble”. After their rap, Grandmaster Flash cuts and scratches Chic’s “Good Times”, as if to re-territorialize

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<sup>109</sup> Melle Mel, *The Freshest Kids* (2002). Directed by Israel, USA: QD3 Entertainment. 94min, (30:07).

<sup>110</sup> Fab 5 Freddy was an important artist and cultural intermediary on the 1980s hip-hop scene. He was a rapper, graffiti artist, and music video director who brought hip-hop to a larger audience in the early 80s. In 1988, he became host of *Yo! MTV Raps*, the first show on MTV dedicated to rap music. He directed such music videos as Nas’s “One Love” and Boogie Down Productions’ “My Philosophy”. He made connections in the early 1980s with the downtown art scene to feature works by graffiti artists such as Jean-Michel Basquiat, conceiving of, and collaborating with Charlie Ahern to make *Wild Style*.

it for pre-1979 hip-hop.<sup>111</sup> Flash's virtuosic DJ riffs on the song continue, with images of the outdoor party, persisting through to the end credits sequence.

Ahern writes that 'Wild Style was the first movie to capture hip-hop culture at its roots'.<sup>112</sup> Fab 5 Freddy said that the intention of the film was not to portray the scene as it was in 1982, but from a few years before (pre-"Rappers Delight"). Fab 5 Freddy writes, 'When we were making Wild Style, we wanted to set the movie in the 70s. Because "Rappers Delight" had already come out, MCs were making records, so we wanted to go back a few years earlier, and set it at a point when hip hop was completely underground, when the form was raw and pure'.<sup>113</sup> Using real graffiti artists (such as Quinones and Fabra) and musicians adds to the perceived realness of the film, as Quinones comments to Ahern in 2007: 'you was in the moment. It was a magical, special moment. You captured an innocent moment, like, we weren't acting'.<sup>114</sup>

The climactic gig at the Amphitheatre in the film demonstrates that, although the genre largely uses pre-recorded materials for its musical sources, this version of hip-hop authenticity strays little from the authenticity of the 'live gig'.

Sarah Thornton writes:

While authenticity is attributed to many different sounds, between the mid-fifties and mid-eighties, its main site was the live gig. In this period, 'liveness' dominated notions of authenticity. The essence or truth of music was located in its performance by musicians in front of an audience. Interestingly, the ascent of 'liveness' as a distinct musical value coincided with the decline of performance as both the dominant medium of music and the prototype for recording.<sup>115</sup>

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<sup>111</sup> "Rapper's Delight", the first rap hit single, used live musicians to re-record Chic's "Good Times" as the sonic backdrop to the raps performed by the Sugar Hill Gang. Many see "Rapper's Delight" as the moment when hip-hop became 'commercialized', and therefore, inauthentic. Flash, in returning to the original source (and he may have been playing this record pre-Sugar Hill Gang) may have been trying to re-claim the music, regardless of the associations it now had with "Rapper's Delight", which by then had substantial baggage as successful rap commodity.

<sup>112</sup> Charlie Ahern, *Wild Style: The Sampler* (New York: Powerhouse Books, 2007), 2.

<sup>113</sup> *Ibid.*, 197.

<sup>114</sup> Interview with Lee Quinones, *Wild Style*, DVD Extras.

<sup>115</sup> Thornton, 26.

The live hip-hop gig involves creative alteration of pre-existing recordings, whereas the live rock gig is concerned with more traditional forms of originality and instrumental performance; they are both nevertheless symbolic of a ‘live gig’ in their respective genres. In hip-hop, the content is significantly different and involves an arguably more complex web of mixed media (graffiti, breakin’, DJing, MCing, and the audience all elemental to the performance in its idealized realizations), but the form—that of the ‘live gig’—remains the same. In 2007, *Wild Style* was inducted into VH1’s Hip-Hop Honors, acknowledging the influence the film has had on hip-hop culture. *Wild Style* becomes crucial to this study not for investigating its historical accuracy, but for the ideologies it promotes, and how subsequent artists uphold them.

### **Canonizing the Breakbeat, Canonizing the DJ**

As with all significant artistic and cultural movements, histories, origins, and icons become codified and canonized. Hip-hop now has sightseeing tours,<sup>116</sup> a graffiti hall of fame, a music hall of fame (VH1’s Hip Hop Honors); and 2007 saw hip-hop’s first induction into the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame (Grandmaster Flash and the Furious Five). Such canon formations are the product of processes of legitimization as well as asserting particular definitions of ‘true’ hip-hop. *Wild Style* (now having released its 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary DVD edition) and other early hip-hop products (such as the Sedgwick and Cedar Vintage Clothing Co.) contain an element of what David Shumway calls ‘commodified nostalgia’.<sup>117</sup> There is an irony in commodifying nostalgia for an era praised for its ‘un-commercialness’, but

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<sup>116</sup> Available at: [www.hushtours.com](http://www.hushtours.com) (accessed 7 November 2007). For an account of the experience of the tour, see Jason Tanz, *Other People’s Property: A Shadow History of Hip-Hop in White America* (New York: Bloomsbury USA, 2007).

<sup>117</sup> David Shumway, ‘Rock ’n’ Roll Sound Tracks and the Production of Nostalgia’, *Cinema Journal* 38, no. 2 (1999): 36–51.

such is the case for a number of twentieth-century ‘countercultures’. Some of the earliest canonizations in hip-hop culture, in addition to important DJs, were the breakbeats.

A hip-hop breakbeat canon emerged as soon as enthusiasts went to seek out the obscure records that they had heard at parties. Shop owners like Stanley Platzer of Downstairs Records in Times Square would keep track of what their customers would ask for.<sup>118</sup> According to a 1988 article on Platzer, he had been keeping a list of these breakbeats since 1981, and Downstairs Records had a ‘b-boy room’ which had breakbeats from the parties.<sup>119</sup> Fans would make bootleg tapes from the parties, to sell or simply to aid their breakbeat record searches. In 1984, the year of the first national rap tour,<sup>120</sup> two important books on hip-hop were published: Steven Hager’s *Hip-hop: The Illustrated History of Rap Music, Breakdancing and Graffiti* and Toop’s *The Rap Attack*. The latter, still in print and in its third edition, lists many of the early breakbeats used and provides a valuable resource for rap historians and writers.

By 1986, Lenny Roberts decided to compile a selection of these breakbeats onto an album entitled *Ultimate Breaks and Beats*. Roberts was a limo driver who was also a member of the Sound on Sound record pool, and his son was in Bambaataa’s Zulu nation.<sup>121</sup> He taped live hip-hop shows, and was well known in Downstairs Records. With remixer Louis Flores, he eventually created 25 volumes

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<sup>118</sup> Platzer, in 1988, described how he had kept a list for seven years, and artists such as Biz Markie, Jam Master Jay, and Salt-n-Pepa would stop by to purchase his ‘breaks’. John Leland and Steinski, ‘The Big Steal’, *Face Magazine*, March 1988, available at:

[http://www.globaldarkness.com/articles/big\\_steal.htm](http://www.globaldarkness.com/articles/big_steal.htm) (accessed 16 Feb. 2008). See also Chang, *Can’t Stop Won’t Stop*, 172.

<sup>119</sup> Chang, *Can’t Stop Won’t Stop*, 172.

<sup>120</sup> The first national rap tour (The Fresh Fest Tour) in 1984 featured Run DMC, Kurtis Blow, The Fat Boys, Newcleus, Whodini, Dynamic Breakers and the Magnificent Force. They toured 27 cities and grossed 3.5 million dollars. For more historical detail on hip-hop’s early years, see Jeff Chang’s timeline in Kugelberg, 56–59.

<sup>121</sup> Leland and Steinski, ‘The Big Steal’.



of Ultimate Breaks and Beats from 1986–1991.<sup>122</sup> While Roberts’ research in record stores and parties give credibility to these breakbeats, many of which have become omnipresent in hip-hop (“Apache”, “Impeach the President”, “Funky Drummer”), Flores’s contributions should not be ignored. His editing often emphasized the breakbeats, for example, taking the Winstons’ “Amen Brother” and slowing the breakbeat down dramatically at the break (then speeding up again when the horns re-entered).<sup>123</sup> It cannot be overstated how important these collections were for the canonization of certain breakbeats. They served many important purposes: as canon, archive, and as Partin points out, as a ‘do-it-yourself production kit’, since these breakbeat collections coincided with more advanced sampling technologies.<sup>124</sup>

One of the first hip-hop singles (in the eyes of historians and fans) to capture the essence of ‘true’ hip-hop was “The Adventures of Grandmaster Flash on the Wheels of Steel” from 1981. Toop wrote, ““Adventures on the Wheels of Steel” was the first record really to show that rap was something other than an offshoot of disco. Where other released translated hip hop, “Adventures” was as close as any record would ever come to being hip hop.”<sup>125</sup> The single (7:10min long) captured numerous segments from different records, scratching, and layering one record with another. The last two minutes of the song is a call and response between MC and audience, assumedly attempting to create a ‘live gig’ atmosphere. Songs like Afrika Bambaataa’s (and keyboardist John Robie’s) “Planet Rock” (the first hip-hop record to use a drum machine) used allosonic quotations from

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<sup>122</sup> Nat Partin, ‘Review of Ultimate Breaks & Beats: The Ultimate Collection’, Pitchfork, 16 Feb. 2007, available at: [http://www.pitchforkmedia.com/article/record\\_review/41174-ultimate-breaks-beats-the-complete-collection](http://www.pitchforkmedia.com/article/record_review/41174-ultimate-breaks-beats-the-complete-collection) (accessed 15 Feb. 2008).

<sup>123</sup> Ibid.

<sup>124</sup> Ibid.; Schloss points out that Ultimate Breaks and Beats, since it was the ‘original’ breakbeat compilation, has become an original recording in itself in the eyes of many hip-hop purists (and therefore, not an instance of ‘biting’). Schloss, *Making Beats*, 129.

<sup>125</sup> Toop, 107.

Kraftwerk's "Trans-Europe Express" and Babe Ruth's "The Mexican".<sup>126</sup> Though producing with different technology, they were said to capture the party aspect of hip-hop (and also inspired new electro-pop trajectories).

The four DJs mentioned earlier (DJ Kool Herc, Grandmaster Flash, Afrika Bambaataa, Grand Wizard Theodore) have been canonized for their contributions to hip-hop. DJ Disco Wiz commented, 'The main hip-hop entrepreneur was Herc. Then Bam gave an African flavor to it, and once he did that it was off the hook. Flash cut it up, and that took it to a different level. Then Theodore scratched it. That started it—the evolution of hip-hop.'<sup>127</sup> More often, the early hip-hop DJ canon is reduced to 'hip-hop's holy trinity':<sup>128</sup> DJ Kool Herc, Afrika Bambaataa, and Grandmaster Flash. These three cover the geography of the Bronx: Flash was in the South Bronx, Bambaataa was in South-East Bronx, and Herc was in the West Bronx. Brewster and Broughton wrote, 'Herc had the head start and the volume, Flash had the techniques, but Afrika Bambaataa had the records.'<sup>129</sup> The Source magazine had these three hip-hop 'Founding Fathers' on the cover of their November 1993 issue (No. 50).

With historical accounts of early DJs, there seem to be two strands at work: de-canonization (influenced by user-orientation) and re-canonization (focused on creator-orientation). By this, I mean that accounts describe early hip-hop DJ innovations as re-contextualizing excerpts of music, de-canonizing the artists of the original records, and using the sounds to new ends. But these DJs have been praised and (re-)canonized in their own right as great creators themselves, as the

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<sup>126</sup> These borrowed quotations coincide with written accounts of breakbeats used, as Bambaataa is always cited for first using Kraftwerk records at Bronx parties, and Herc is credited with finding "The Mexican".

<sup>127</sup> Quoted in Fricke and Ahern, 23.

<sup>128</sup> This is the caption under the picture of the three DJs in Brewster and Broughton, 241.

<sup>129</sup> *Ibid.*, 243–244.

founders of hip-hop music. What early DJs re-appropriated (and deconstructed for his/her use) have been re-canonized (and reconstructed) in hip-hop.

For the early DJs associated with hip-hop, record selection was more about sounds than about artist or genre. It did not matter who the artist was on the record, or what they were said to represent, be they James Brown, Aerosmith or Bob James. What mattered was how the record sounded, and whether the crowd responded positively. It was instant audience feedback/reception. In fact, Kool Herc used to cover up the labels of his records so that others could not easily discover the name of the artist and song.<sup>130</sup> And in portrayals of Bambaataa in particular, the polyculturalism in the art of the DJ transcended racial and generic boundaries.

As hip-hop's breakbeat canon began to emerge, and as the early hip-hop DJs were canonized, the pendulum swung back to creator-orientation, to iconize the 'grand architect' Kool Herc, known as the 'grandfather' of hip-hop, and Afrika Bambaataa, the 'godfather' of hip-hop. Grandmaster Flash completes the triumvirate that forms the forefathers of hip-hop music, by this view. In terms of hip-hop historiography, the focus shifted back to creator-orientation, as hip-hop media romanticized and iconized these early DJs—what they de-canonized now becomes re-canonized, demonstrating the inevitability of musical canons.

Herein lies the paradox of the hip-hop canon: hip-hop, to quote Neil Kulkarni, 'was resistant to precisely those ideas of fixed cultural worth which other, more hierarchal art forms quickly created for themselves'<sup>131</sup>; but it then became canonized and hierarchical (with classic breakbeats, radio shows devoted

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<sup>130</sup> 'Each DJ worked to keep their exclusives exclusive, and so took up, probably from Herc, the practice of soaking off or obscuring labels to evade tune detection.' Brewster and Broughton, 245. See also Chang, *Can't Stop Won't Stop*, 78.

<sup>131</sup> Neil Kulkarni, 'Kurtis Blow, "The Breaks"', in *Hip-Hop Bring the Noise: The Stories Behind the Biggest Songs* (London: Carlton Books, 2004), 29.

to ‘Old School’ hip-hop, icons of the movement, bus tours, multiple halls of fame, and a presumed ‘Golden Age’ in the late 1980s/early 1990s). Kodwo Eshun’s comment that the break was used ‘to groove rob not ancestor worship’,<sup>132</sup> may contain truth for many DJs, but there is certainly another aspect of contemporary hip-hop culture that uses ‘classic breaks’ as homage or ancestor worship. To give homage is also an act of showing knowledge of your artistic culture and lineage, and flaunting this knowledge lies at the heart of demonstrating historical authenticity in hip-hop. Finally, what these accounts show is that there are always two sides to canon: a group of great individuals placed above others, and that it provides a set of objects, artists and works/recordings for a particular community to share, thus strengthening the notion of that community.

### **How Historical/Nostalgic Authenticity is Presented**

As stated earlier in the chapter, many historical accounts romanticize the pre-recorded period of hip-hop from 1973–1979. In fact, Jeff Chang called “Rappers Delight” ‘The first death of hip-hop’.<sup>133</sup> His history, *Can’t Stop Won’t Stop: A History of the Hip-hop Generation*, is a narrative of decline, romanticizing the South Bronx artistically while simultaneously portraying the dismal economic and social conditions. For him and others, it was when hip-hop was urban, spontaneous, live, full of creativity, and innovative. It was a D.I.Y. culture, where competition was collaboration; it was often perceived as a peaceful solution to gang warfare and was unmediated by ‘business’ (in the form of corporate

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<sup>132</sup> Kodwo Eshun, *More Brilliant than the Sun: Adventures in Sonic Fiction* (London: Quartet Books, 1999), 14.

<sup>133</sup> Chang, *Can’t Stop Won’t Stop*, 127.

infrastructures).<sup>134</sup> And, unlike the misogyny expressed in later rap styles, women had important artistic roles in the earlier eras.<sup>135</sup>

Historical authenticity in hip-hop is seen by many as a live phenomenon about having fun and rocking the party. Though there is no denying that recording hip-hop brought about drastic changes to its form and substance, canonizing the origins of hip-hop through a nostalgic lens contributes to notions of pre-recorded hip-hop as romantic, unmediated space.<sup>136</sup> Knowledge of the history and origins of hip-hop empowers both artist and fan with historical authenticity. For those that evoke the past, whether sampling a classic breakbeat or saying the name of an old legend, these gestures signify hip-hop authenticity.

Borrowing images and sounds from the past to demonstrate historical authenticity utilizes what Thornton, adapting Bourdieu, calls subcultural capital.<sup>137</sup> Historical authenticity is a special case of Thornton's 'subcultural authenticity' which 'is grounded in the performer in so far as s/he represents the community'.<sup>138</sup> A primary motive in this form of authenticity is to ensure that one is representing 'hip hop culture' to the fullest.<sup>139</sup> KRS-One or Nas, while authenticating themselves by flaunting their subcultural capital, represent (and teach) members of

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<sup>134</sup> See Nelson George, 'Introduction', in Fricke and Ahern, iv.

<sup>135</sup> Early hip-hop had a number of important women: Sha-Rock of the Funky Four +1; the all-female MC crew Sequence who were on Sugarhill Records, featuring Angie B who became Angie Stone; Wanda D; MC Lisa Lee; Little Lee; Sweet and Sour; Debbie D; Pebblee Poo; DJ Wanda Dee; The Zulu Queens B-Girl Crew; graffiti artist Sandra Fabra (Lady Pink) and breakdancer Daisy Castro (Baby Love). Blue (later Kool Lady Blue) organized events at Club Negril and Wheels of Steel Night at the Roxy and was the manager of the Rock Steady Crew. It is not that women in hip-hop left, it is just that mainstream hip-hop in the 1990s focused on objectifying women in music videos and rap lyrics, something which early hip-hop did much less of. For one article on the role of women in early hip hop see Nancy Guevara, 'Women Writin' Rappin' Breakin'', in *Droppin Science: Critical Essays on Rap Music and Hip Hop Culture*, ed. William Eric Perkins (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1996), 49–62.

<sup>136</sup> For example, early flyers show that most of the parties cost money to enter, though artist profit can be said to be significantly different from corporate profit, at least in scale. A thorough and critical investigation of these parties, with what little information we do have (flyers, bootleg tapes, etc.) is needed, but at present is beyond the scope of this chapter.

<sup>137</sup> Thornton, 11.

<sup>138</sup> *Ibid.*, 30.

<sup>139</sup> *Ibid.*

the ‘Hip-hop Nation’, a notion that resonates with the idea that these artists acknowledge, work within, help construct what is known as hip-hop culture.

### Typology of Intra-generic Borrowing and Historical Authenticity

	Definition/ Examples	Found in:
<b>A. Image</b>	Breakdancing, graffiti, turntables, live battles, fashion, urban space	Music videos, cover art, CD booklets, live performances, etc.
<b>B. Sampling and borrowing</b>	Using 'classic breakbeats' (e.g. "Apache", "The Big Beat") Scratching and other vinyl sounds	Musical Signifyin(g) in hip-hop beats
<b>C. Peer references</b>	Referencing rappers, historically important DJs, breakdancing crews	Lyrical content
<b>D. Verbal quotation</b>	Allosonic and autsonic quotations from hip-hop films and recordings	Lyrical content
<b>E. Stylistic Allusion</b>	Imitating earlier styles of rap music, flow, or of a particular artist without direct quotation. Using older technological equipment (such as the Roland T-808 drum machine).	Either (or both) beat or flow
<b>F. Nostalgia</b>	Often based on art vs. commerce 'Back in the day' as pure, peaceful, fun, more creative, uncorrupted	Lyrical content, though nostalgia can be a sentiment demonstrated by all above types of borrowing

**Table 1.1**–Historical Authenticity in Hip-hop

#### **A. Image**

Artists and groups use imagery to evoke the historical authenticity of hip-hop as a cultural movement wider in scope than simply ‘rap music’. This includes showing images of breakdancing in music videos (Run-DMC “It’s Like That”, Chemical Bros. “Galvanize”, Wyclef Jean “We Trying to Stay Alive”, which featured the Rock Steady Crew), graffiti (Naughty by Nature’s “Hip Hop Hooray”, KRS-One’s “5 Boroughs”), DJs and turntables (Eric B. and Rakim “Paid in Full”, DJ Premier’s “Classic”),<sup>140</sup> as well as posters made in the style of the 70s hip-hop parties (the CD booklet of De La Soul’s album *The Grind Date*, shown below, and the opening of Jay-Z’s “Roc Boys” video). A number of music videos emphasize

<sup>140</sup> The “Classic” music video is a DJ Premier remix of “Better than I’ve Ever Been”, originally performed by Kanye West, Nas and KRS-One, produced by Rick Rubin and recorded as a single for Nike Records, to celebrate the 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Nike’s Air Force One shoes. The remix adds rapper Rakim to the original lineup. The music video opens with DJ Premier using a digital sampler to compose the beat. Graffiti and turntable images also feature prominently in the video.

the liveness of the hip-hop event, reminiscent of hip-hop's 'live gig'/'rockin the party' aesthetics: Nas's "Made You Look" video ends with an a capella rap in front of a live crowd (similar to Eminem's in the live battle sequences in 8 Mile). To use a much earlier example, Afrika Bambaataa's "Planet Rock" (1982) music video includes early breakdancing footage along with Bambaataa's stage performance. The KRS-One (produced by Marley Marl) "Hip-Hop Lives" (2007) music video surveys the entire history of hip-hop in images so that breakdancing, graffiti and turntablism feature prominently.



Figure 1.1- Inside CD booklet of De La Soul's The Grind Date (2004)

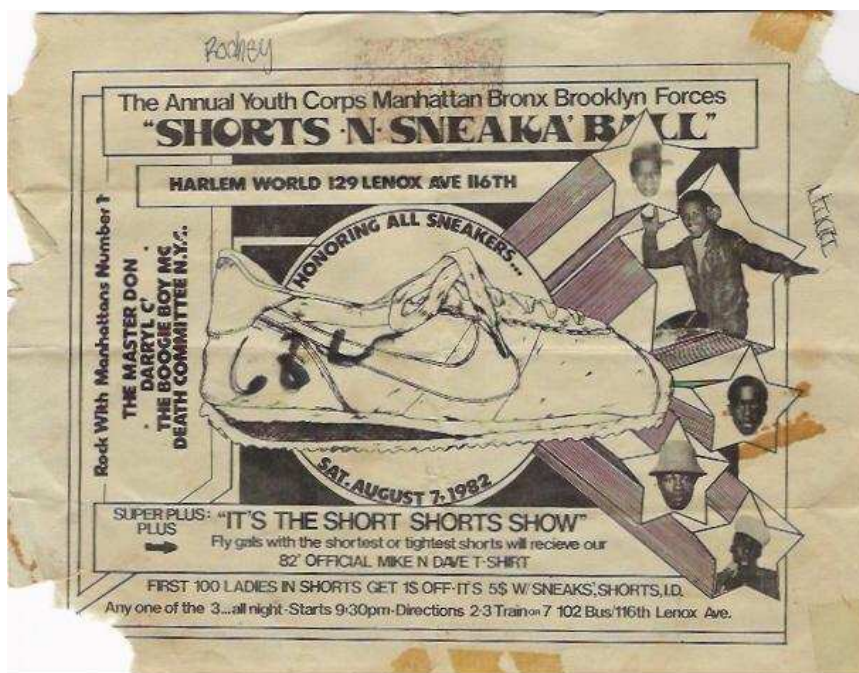


Figure 1.2- Flyer for 1982 hip-hop show, in Kugelberg

Most crucial to the imagery of hip-hop historical authenticity are representations of urban space. The urban landscape of the Bronx provided the landscape for graffiti art on subway cars and buildings, and provided space for



breakdancers and DJs (who wired their systems into lamp posts in the city). Examples of this particular appropriation of urban space can be found in *Wild Style*, in which one scene focuses on the subway trains that emerge into the sunlight of the Bronx, as Lee and Zephyr look at what Ahern calls the ‘rolling art gallery’.<sup>141</sup> This film and many subsequent hip-hop videos focus heavily on a specific manifestation of what Adam Krims refers to as the ‘urban ethos’.<sup>142</sup> The urban ethos of historical authenticity is one that depicts multiple elements or signifiers of hip-hop culture with a focus on the party or jam, epitomized in the collective polyculturalism of the *Wild Style* ‘amp jam’.

A later example of this ‘of the street’ notion of hip-hop as subcultural capital was the Beastie Boys’s performance on *Late Night with David Letterman* in 2004 of “Ch-Check It Out”. While most bands conventionally perform on the side stage of the Ed Sullivan Theatre, they opened by rapping while emerging from the New York subway, rapping down the street, through the backstage area, and eventually onto the stage to unite with their DJ, Mixmaster Mike, already on stage. Inhabiting the spaces of ‘the street’, the geographical specificity of New York City, and the presence of a live DJ are all elements closely linked to early hip-hop historical authenticity. Geography is crucial to many forms of hip-hop authenticity, about which both Murray Forman and Adam Krims have written extensively.<sup>143</sup> Though rap is subject to a spectrum of visual representations,<sup>144</sup> representations of the mid-1970s Bronx as site of hip-hop’s origins continue to be a powerful force as it pervades a large sector of hip-hop imagery.

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<sup>141</sup> Ahern, *Wild Style: The Sampler*, 33.

<sup>142</sup> Krims, *MUG*, 7.

<sup>143</sup> Murray Forman, *The Hood Comes First: Space, Race and Place in Rap and Hip-Hop* (Middletown: Wesleyan University Press, 1992). See also Krims, *MUG*.

<sup>144</sup> ‘The fact that although American rap music has always been associated with the “inner city”—read: black ghetto—the kind of inner city represented, and the relation between that location and the agency of those found there, has, in fact, changed remarkably since rap was first marketed commercially’. Krims, *MUG*, 17.

## **B. Historically Self-aware Sampling and Borrowing**

Some believe that rap music production in general has stayed close to its early roots, and quite self-consciously so. From the perspective of DJ historians Brewster and Broughton, hip-hop has aimed to create the sounds of the street, trying to re-create a particular ethos in a way that other DJ cultures do not strive to represent:

Even now, with a twenty-five-year body of work behind it and an ever more sophisticated approach to production, hip hop is still about recreating in the studio the kind of music that a DJ would make in a basketball park in the shadow of a Bronx tower block.<sup>145</sup>

While this drastically simplifies the multifaceted approaches of hip-hop producers, it goes to show the pervasiveness of the ‘staying true to your roots’ ideology within the genre.

There certainly exists a breakbeat canon, one which communicates a deep signification of hip-hop to knowledgeable interpretive communities.<sup>146</sup> The accepted use of breakbeats from *Ultimate Breaks & Beats* has already been mentioned. In addition, Schloss’s thorough study of b-boying points out the existence of a ‘b-boy canon’, one that has changed little since their origins in the 1970s. For this community of dancers, using the classic breakbeats solidifies their traditions, acknowledges the foundations of their artistic practices, strengthens their community and validates their livelihood.<sup>147</sup>

One of the most canonized breakbeats is derived from the Incredible Bongo Band’s cover of “Apache”, as first used by DJ Kool Herc and featured on a number

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<sup>145</sup> Brewster and Broughton, 228.

<sup>146</sup> The acknowledgment of a ‘breakbeat canon’ exists in a number of hip-hop writings, including William Jelani Cobb, *To the Break of Dawn: A Freestyle on the Hip Hop Aesthetic* (New York: New York University Press), 28.

<sup>147</sup> See Schloss, Ch. 2 ‘History, Community, and Classic B-Boy Records’, in *Foundation*, 17–39. Not surprisingly, the ‘b-boy’ canon includes many songs from the hip-hop DJ breakbeat canon, including “Apache”, “Give it up or Turnit a Loose”, “It’s Just Begun”, and “The Mexican”.

of subsequent recordings [CD Example 1].<sup>148</sup> Examples include The Roots “Thought@Work” and Nas’s “Made You Look” (produced by Saalam Remi), which is significantly slowed down compared to the tempo of the original. The distinctive sound of the bongos is crucial to its recognizability, particularly when producers change the original tempo and add other layers to the beat. The break was cited for its importance as early as 1984: ‘The record on which everybody concurs—the quintessential hip-hop track—is “Apache” by The Incredible Bongo Band’.<sup>149</sup> Kool Herc, in a New York Times article, called “Apache” the national anthem of hip-hop.<sup>150</sup> Other well-known beats circulate widely, such as Billy Squier’s “The Big Beat” [CD Example 2], used by Jay-Z for “99 Problems” and by British rapper Dizzee Rascal for “Fix up, Look Sharp”. Rapper Nas wrote of beats like those from “Apache” and the Incredible Bongo Band’s version of “In-a-Gadda-Da-Vida”: ‘Those breaks are so hip-hop. I’m going to continue to use them again and again’.<sup>151</sup>

Run-D.M.C, perceived by many to usher in a new phase of hip-hop music, were also using beats from an earlier, more localized instance of performance. For example, “Walk this Way”, their famous collaboration with Aerosmith in 1986, supposedly emerged through Rick Rubin recognizing what was known simply as a breakbeat at parties. DMC recalls:

One day me and Jay was in the studio and we was sampling Aerosmith and Rick said, “Yo, do you know who that is?” and we was like, “No, but we like this beat”. We used to always

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<sup>148</sup> The “Apache” break was used early on in hip-hop recordings by Grandmaster Flash for his “Adventures of Grandmaster Flash on the Wheels of Steel”, by the West Street Mob for “Break Dancin’: Electric Boogie”, and by the Sugar Hill Gang for their version of “Apache”. For an extensive history of the “Apache” song and breakbeat, see Michelangelo Matos’s ‘All Roads Lead to “Apache”’ in *Listen Again*, 200–209.

<sup>149</sup> Toop, 114.

<sup>150</sup> Will Hermes, ‘All Rise for the National Anthem of Hip-Hop’, *New York Times*, 29 October 2006, available at: <http://www.nytimes.com/2006/10/29/arts/music/29herm.html?ex=1319774400&en=601060e59bd8f7ee&ei=5088&partner=rssnyt&emc=rss> (accessed 9 November 2007).

<sup>151</sup> *Ibid.*

rap over that beat in the 'hood. We didn't know the group name or anything. So Rick gave us the 411, the whole history of the band. We had our own rhymes over the beat, but Rick said, "No do their lyrics".

When Steven Tyler came into the studio, Jay was cutting up [Aerosmith's original version of] "Walk This Way" and he said, "Here's what we used to do with your record". And Steve said, "Yo, when are you gonna hear me?" And Jay looked up and said, "We never get to hear you. After this guitar riff, it's back to the beginning". And Steve thought that was so amusing. Those guys were real cool.<sup>152</sup>

This rock-rap collaboration, which was so heavily touted at the time, seemed to have been valued as a hip-hop beat to others even before the collaboration occurred. The success of the single canonized it as one of the earliest rock-rap collaborations, and reception in the mainstream media often treated it as an unprecedented occurrence.<sup>153</sup>

Borrowing sounds associated with hip-hop's origins is by no means limited to breakbeats. Cheryl Keyes locates sounds associated with the urban landscape, considering their function as an intensification of the lyrical topics (such as automobile horns and sirens in Grandmaster Flash and the Furious Five's "The Message").<sup>154</sup> While gangsta rap has taken the imagery and sounds of 'the urban' in different directions, artists who try to re-create a party atmosphere on record (usually by adding the sound of audience response) also engage with historical authenticity, what Elizabeth Wheeler labels as part of the 'rock-the-house' subgenre of rap music.<sup>155</sup>

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<sup>152</sup> Brian Coleman, *Check the Technique: Liner Notes for Hip-Hop Junkies* (New York: Villard Books, 2007), 401. DMC, in relation to the use of Bob James's "Take me to Mardi Gras", which was used on "Peter Piper", said 'We had been rhyming over that loop before rap records was even made. We always used to just freestyle over those beats, but for the album song we wrote those lyrics down, while we was on the road.' Brian Coleman, 400.

<sup>153</sup> Rose wrote of "Walk this Way" in a footnote, commenting, 'After expressing frustration over the coverage of "Walk This Way" as a crossover strategy, Run describes his motivation: "I made that record because I used to rap over it when I was twelve. There were lots of hip-hoppers rapping over rock when I was a kid".' Cited from Ed Kierch, 'Beating the Rap', *Rolling Stone*, 4 December 1986. Rose, 195.

<sup>154</sup> Keyes, 239–240.

<sup>155</sup> Wheeler, 195.

The sound of vinyl scratching, one particular technique of the DJ, has also become a production tool to signify authenticity. The sounds of vinyl can invoke nostalgia as well as the ‘digging in the crates’ aspect of hip-hop producer purism. The vinyl popping and hiss can be heard in such records as the Pharcyde’s “Passin’ Me By”, which includes a sample of Quincy Jones’s “Summer in the City”. Toop commented of the use of old records and scratching:

Paradoxically, by making such a practice commonplace they have also made us forget how revolutionary it once was. Rap was finally returning to its origins in the sweat and dangerous chaos of live jams, the adrenalin rush of slamming a scratched-up breakbeat onto the turntable just at the right moment.<sup>156</sup>

As is the case with many once radically sounding musical signifiers, scratching has spilled over into other genres, and it has become so ubiquitous in popular music that it has lost much of its ‘radical’ meaning. With the advancement of recording technologies, vinyl scratches can be produced by a button on the mixing board or laptop computer. It can be a production technique that simply does not have the same contextual relevance as it once did, yet the code itself still signifies hip-hop (and associations with hipness). One example stems from the 1999 Britney Spears debut album *Hit Me Baby One More Time*. One of the singles (“Crazy”) features vinyl scratches, and another, a cover version of “The Beat Goes On”, contains the hissing and popping sound of vinyl.<sup>157</sup>

The use of a DJ at live performances, as well as turntablistic codes on recordings, forms a primary defining feature of historical authenticity. Groups like the Beastie Boys, Jurassic 5, Gang Starr, and Rakim feature DJs as central to their

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<sup>156</sup> Toop, 163.

<sup>157</sup> Other pop artists have collaborated with notable hip-hop producers such as did Christina Aguilera with DJ Premier. Their single “Ain’t no Other Man” uses samples that include the hiss and pop of the records.

aesthetic (and these DJs have equal status to the others in the group).<sup>158</sup> The hip-hop group The Roots, criticized in the past for their decision to use live instruments over recorded samples, is one of the groups most overtly knowledgeable of hip-hop's history. They demonstrate a historical authenticity in a number of ways, but one includes their 'hip-hop 101' segments in live shows, interludes of classic hip-hop songs interspersed with their own songs.<sup>159</sup> Drummer Questlove (Amhir Thompson) of The Roots aims for hip-hop authenticity, but by different means: the timbre of his drum beats aim to sound sampled, as he attempts on his drum kit to recreate many of the 'classic' breakbeats of the late 1960s and 1970s.<sup>160</sup>

### C. Peer References

The use of peer references in hip-hop is abundant and multipurpose: to display associations with a collective (e.g. Native Tongues, G-Unit), to give respect (or disrespect) to contemporaries, to mention the producer of the track (a tradition going back to when early MCs rapped the praises of the DJ), and to give homage to hip-hop icons of the past. The mention of hip-hop icons has a dual purpose: to provide knowledge about the genre's past, particularly to rappers who have been neglected in current times, and to demonstrate some sort of connection with the artists named. For example, Nas's "Where are they now?" (2006) provides a long list of artists that Nas suggests have been forgotten:

Red Head Kingpin, Tim Dogg, have you seen 'em?  
Kwame, King T of King Son  
Superlover C, Cassanova Run  
Antwoinette, Rob Base never showin' up  
You seen Black Sheep, Group Home, Busy Bee?

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<sup>158</sup> The use of a live DJ for tours seems to be of importance for a number of artists, even those who utilize primarily sample-based hip-hop on their studio albums. I recall one concert of Kanye West and Talib Kweli at Brixton Academy (London, UK) in November 2004; both artists had a DJ as well as a featured interlude in the set to display his/her virtuosic talents—similar to jazz, in which a bandleader might let the drummer take a 10–15 minute solo.

<sup>159</sup> Marshall, 'Giving up Hip-Hop's Firstborn': 871.

<sup>160</sup> *Ibid.*, 873.

Ask Ill and Al Scratch “Where my Homies?”  
Leave it to y’all, these niggas left for dead  
Last week my man swore he saw Special Ed  
Rap is like a ghost town, real mystic  
Like these folks never existed  
They the reason that rap became addictive  
Play their CD or wax and get lifted.

The Roots “WAOK Roll Call”, from their Phrenology (2002) album, provides a laundry list of names of influential hip-hop artists, reminiscent of the ‘roll call’ scene in Spike Lee’s *Do the Right Thing* (1989), when radio DJ Mister Señor Love Daddy delivers an extensive list of African-American musicians. This ancestral impulse creates a canon based on African-American artistic expression (in the case of the Spike Lee film), or in the case of The Roots and Nas, a canon based on hip-hop history. Rappers can mention other elements of hip-hop culture (such as KRS-One’s mention of the Rock Steady Crew in “South Bronx”). As in the case of The Notorious B.I.G.’s “Juicy”, while his rap is a rags-to-riches story about his newfound success, these peer references can also be associated with nostalgia for his youth:

I used to read Word Up magazine  
Salt-n-Pepa and Heavy D up in the limousine  
Hangin’ pictures on my wall  
Every Saturday Rap Attack, Mr. Magic, Marley Marl ...  
Peace to Ron G, Brucey B, Kid Capri  
Funkmaster Flex, Lovebug Starsky.

Tupac Shakur, in “Old School”<sup>161</sup> (on *Me Against the World* from 1995), pays homage to earlier artists:

I remember Mr. Magic, Flash, Grandmaster Caz  
LL raisin hell, but that didn’t last  
Eric B. & Rakim was the shit to me  
I flip to see a Doug E. Fresh show, with Ricky D  
And Red Alert was putting in work, with Chuck Chillout...  
I can’t explain how it was, Whodini had me puffin

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<sup>161</sup> The term ‘old school’, like any history, is dependent on context, and I acknowledge the existence of multiple ‘old schools’ and that they may inevitably overlap.

on that Buddha getting buzzed  
Cause there I was  
Them block parties in the projects, and on my block  
You diggi don't stop, sippin on that Private Stock  
Through my speaker Queen Latifah and MC Lyte  
Listen to Treach, KRS to get me through the night  
With T La Rock and Mantronix, to Stetsasonic  
Remember "Push It" was the bomb shit, nuttin like the old school.

2Pac's "Old School" contains an autsonic quotation on the chorus from Grand Puba, a line from the Brand Nubian song "Dedication": 'What more could I say, I wouldn't be here today if the old school didn't pave the way'. Though only iterated once in the Brand Nubian song, the recording is slowed down considerably and repeated multiple times on each chorus (three times on the first chorus, six times on the second chorus, and six times on the third chorus). "Dedication" contains a series of peer references, mostly of contemporary hip-hop artists, at the beginning and end of the song: 'I'd like to dedicate this to P.E. [Public Enemy], I'd like to dedicate this to BDP [Boogie Down Productions], I'd like to dedicate this to the X-Clan, I'd like to dedicate this to Heavy D'.

#### **D. Verbal Quotation**

Regarding sampling from hip-hop itself, Felicia Miyakawa has written:

When sampling from vinyl, DJs tend to avoid taking from hip-hop's own history unless there is a specific reason to do so. As several songs in this study illustrate, however, sampling rap vocals in order to pay homage to rap's historical heavyweights is clearly acceptable.<sup>162</sup>

As will be seen in chapters four and five, the voices of iconic figures of the hip-hop world (e.g. Tupac Shakur and Notorious B.I.G.) are used by artists who pay homage, appeal to authority, or construct themselves in a canon or lineage with such artists. There are myriad ways to quote earlier rappers or to allude to a particular style. Many rappers will paraphrase a quote, or appropriate it for

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<sup>162</sup> Miyakawa, 120.



themselves. For example, KRS-One’s “MCs Act Like They Don’t know” (1995) opens with an allosonic quotation of material from the Kurtis Blow single “The Breaks” (1980), the first rap single to sell 500,000 units. Blow’s version opens as follows:

Clap your hands everybody, if you’ve got what it takes  
Cause I’m Kurtis Blow and I want you to know that these are the  
breaks.

And KRS-Opens (with the same rhythm and vocals emphasis), to a slower tempo:

Clap your hands everybody, if you’ve got what it takes  
Cause I’m KRS and I’m on the mic and Premier’s on the breaks.<sup>163</sup>

Another example of an allosonic quotation of Blow is Nas’s 1996 “If I Ruled the World”, who uses the melody of Kurtis Blow’s “If I Ruled the World”,<sup>164</sup> sung in the later version by Lauren Hill.<sup>165</sup>

Extremely influential to electronic dance music, “Planet Rock” (1982) by Afrika Bambaataa and John Robie (produced by Arthur Baker) has also been canonized in hip-hop and is an extensive source of hip-hop quotation. In particular, one four-bar passage toward the end of the single has been paraphrased by a number of artists:

**Example 1.1**<sup>166</sup>—“Planet Rock” (4:45) [CD Example 3]

Afrika Bambaataa "Planet Rock" (1982)

130 BPM

Voice

*zin-zin-zin-zin...*

For example, Talib Kweli and Mos Def paraphrases it for “We Got the Beat” and Mos Def’s collaboration with the Roots (“Double Trouble”), respectively:

<sup>163</sup> Premier is a reference to the producer, DJ Premier.

<sup>164</sup> The single is from Nas’s second album, *It Was Written*, and is discussed as a ‘radio friendly’ crossover piece produced by the Trackmasters. One review is from Mark Coleman, *Rolling Stone*, 19 Sept. 1996. [http://www.rollingstone.com/artists/nas/albums/album/301203/review/6068277/it\\_was\\_written](http://www.rollingstone.com/artists/nas/albums/album/301203/review/6068277/it_was_written) (accessed 23 Feb. 2008)

<sup>165</sup> The beat (and keyboard line) is derived from “Friends” by Whodini (1984).

<sup>166</sup> Note: all transcriptions in the thesis are my own.

**Example 1.2**—“We got the Beat” (1:58) [CD Example 4]

124 BPM Talib Kweli "We got the Beat"

Voice  
zin-zin zin- zin... come on

**Example 1.3**—“Double Trouble” (5:08) [CD Example 5]

94 BPM Mos Def- "Double Trouble"

Voice  
zin-zin-zin-zin- zin...  
here we go here we here we here we go zin...  
let the pop-pers pop and the break-ers break zin...  
fade out...

“Double Trouble” is a reference to the film Wild Style, and the group Double Trouble (KK Rockwell and Lil’ Rodney C) who performed at the amphitheatre.

Mos Def quotes from the film:

**Example 1.4**—“Double Trouble” (4:25) [CD Example 6]

Original quote: Here’s a little story that must be told,  
about two cool brothers that were put on hold.

**"Double Trouble"**

KK and Rodney C.  
here's a lit-tle sto-ry that must\_ be\_ told. a-bout two cool bro-thers that were put on hold they tried to  
5  
KK and Rodney C.  
hold us back from for-tune and fame they destroyed the crew and theykilledour name they triedto  
9  
KK and Rodney C.  
step on our e - go walk\_ on our pride we're true blue broth-ers stand side by side through  
13  
KK and Rodney C.  
thick and thin from be - gin-ning to end this bat-tle we lost but the war we'll will cause  
17  
KK and Rodney C.  
\_ doub-le troub-le is in the house I'm K K Rock and Rod-ney C we'll turn it out

**Mos Def “Double Trouble” (4:36)** [CD Example 7]:

‘Say, here’s a little story that must be told

About two young brothers who got so much soul.’

(imitation of the same rhythm and inflections as the original above)

The collaboration with Black Thought and Mos Def represents both quotation (from Mos Def) and overall stylistic allusion, recreating an earlier ‘tag team’ style of rap exemplified by Double Trouble (and Run-D.M.C.).<sup>167</sup>

The Beastie Boys’ album *To the 5 Boroughs* (2004) contains a track entitled “Triple Trouble” which also quotes the Double Trouble rap from *Wild Style*:

“Double Trouble” (*Wild Style*) (0:00): If you (if you), wanna know (wanna know), the real deal about the two (let us tell ya), let us tell ya we’re double trouble girls and we’re doing it just for you. [CD Example 8]

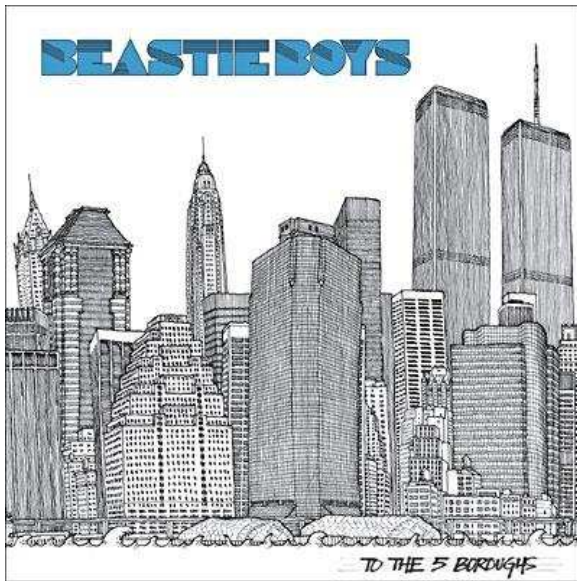
“Triple Trouble” (*Beastie Boys*) to the same rhythm (1:18): If you (if you), wanna know (wanna know), the real deal about the three, well let me tell ya, we’re triple trouble y’all, we’re gonna bring you up to speed. [CD Example 9]

DJ Mix Mastermike scratches and fragments the opening from “Rappers Delight”. Their entire album can be interpreted as homage to the early days of hip-hop, with a number of quotations and stylistic allusions to early hip-hop. In addition, the cover of the album is a cityscape of New York City, including the two towers of the World Trade Center, perhaps a nostalgia for pre-9/11 society. Alan Light writes their album was ‘never straying from pass-the-mix-style old-school beats and rhymes.’<sup>168</sup>

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<sup>167</sup> ?estlove writes in the liner notes: ‘Initially, Talib Kweli laid some vocals down as well, but when the song was formatted there was only enough bars for two mc’s, and BlackThought insisted on doing some Run-D.M.C. ’85 tug of war style ... making both BT and Mos “I’m only 12 blocks away” Def sound like the true successor’s to Lil Rodney C and KK Rockwell’s empire.’ ?estlove, liner notes, *The Roots, Things Fall Apart*, MCA, 1999.

<sup>168</sup> Alan Light, ‘Beastie Boys: White Dudes in the House’, in *Spin: 20 Years of Alternative Music*, ed. Will Hermes and Sia Michel (New York: Three Rivers Press, 2005), 81.



**Figure 1.3-** Beastie Boys- To the 5 Boroughs (2004)

**Example 1.5**

## "Double Trouble" from Wild Style

Lil' Rodney C

KK Rockwell

Audience

6

Rodney C

KK Rockwell

Audience

14

Rodney C

KK Rockwell

Audience

18

Rodney C

KK Rockwell

Audience

22

Rodney C

KK Rockwell

Audience

26

Rodney C

KK Rockwell

Audience

Say ho Say ho

ho ho

Speaking: Hey ya'll, New York City, you ready to party? You all ready to party? If y'all

Yeah Yeah

rea - day to part - y Say ye - ah Say yeah

yeah

Say hell yeah It's like that If

yeah hell yeah

you wan-na know the real deal a - bout the two let us

If you wan-na know the real deal let us tell ya

tell ya we're dou - ble troub - le girls and we're do - in' it just for you

we're dou - ble troub - le girls and we're do - in' it just for

29

Rodney C  
 KK Rockwell  
 Audience

now peo - ple clap your hands clap clap just clap your hands  
 now peo ple clap your hands clap clap just clap your hands

33

Rodney C  
 KK Rockwell  
 Audience

while you're rock - in' to the beat and we got the mas - ter plan  
 come on while you're rock - in' to the beat of the two and we got the mas - ter plan

37

Rodney C  
 KK Rockwell  
 Audience

so clap your hands young la - dies and fly guys if ya wan-na get down  
 young la - dies y'all rea - dy and fly guys

41

Rodney C  
 KK Rockwell  
 Audience

with us get up and eve-ry bo - dy just show your stuff  
 with us get up on the floor and eve - ry bo - dy just show your stuff

45

Rodney C  
 KK Rockwell  
 Audience

now if you don't know the real deal a - bout the two  
 now if you don't know

49

Rodney C  
 KK Rockwell  
 Audience

let us tell ya we're dou-ble trou- le girls and we're do - in' it just for you  
 let us tell ya we're dou-ble trou- le girls and we're do - in' it just for you

Autosonic quotations of other hip-hop media also exist, particularly from Wild Style. Professional basketball player and rapper Shaquille O'Neal used the 'y'all can't ball' quotation (from Waterbed Kevie Kev in 'basketball throwdown')

for “I Hate to Brag” from his debut album *Shaq Diesel*. Nas’s debut album *Illmatic* (1994) opens with the conversation between Zoro and his brother, followed by Wild Style’s “Subway Theme”.<sup>169</sup> This can be also manifested in non-U.S.-based hip-hop, such as the March 1991 German release of LSD’s *Watch out for the Third Rail* (itself a quote from Wild Style) and autsonic quotations of the film for its single “Brand New Style”.

### **E. Stylistic Allusion**

Artists also allude to earlier rap styles, rather than quotation, such as Pharcyde’s “Return of the B-Boy”,<sup>170</sup> which endeavours allusion to earlier hip-hop styles. In this example, the group attempt to emulate an earlier delivery of rap that Krims categorizes as the ‘sung style’,<sup>171</sup> including call and response phrases, record scratching and raps responding to a party atmosphere. In such stylistic allusion, artists and groups can suggest the ‘old school’ without direct references to the past. These allusions occur in both beat and flow, in the case of the former, often utilized by ‘classic’ technology such as the Roland T-808 drum machine.

Hip-hop group Jurassic 5 is exemplary of the ‘tag team’ style mentioned earlier. Their group consists of four MCs (Mark 7, Chali2na, Akil, Soup) and DJ Nu Mark and DJ Cut Chemist; groups of MCs and DJs as a collective group suggests an earlier era of groups such as the Cold Crush Brothers, Funky Four +1 and the Furious Five. As one album review writer comments that Jurassic 5 ‘has spent the past ten years recreating the aesthetic of early rap crews like the Treacherous Three and Crash Crew, intricately weaving their voices in and out of

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<sup>169</sup> Ahern, *Wild Style: The Sampler*, 200.

<sup>170</sup> Pharcyde, “Return of the B-Boy”. Group member Tre recounts: ‘We were trying to re-create old-school style on that one. I didn’t do too well at it [laughs]. But everyone else did.’ Quoted in Brian Coleman, *Check the Technique*, 332.

<sup>171</sup> Krims, *Rap Music*, 49–50.

each other, finishing each other's lines, and harmonizing their choruses.<sup>172</sup> Breihan calls this 'retro formalism', similar to what the Stray Cats did in the 1980s with an earlier swing music style.<sup>173</sup> Trumpeter Russell Gunn stylistically alludes to the electro-pop style of "Planet Rock" in his "Skate King" from the album *Krunk Jazz* (2008). Gunn's music attempts to mix bebop-style heads and other jazz elements with 'beats' from hip-hop and other dance cultures, and although Gunn cannot be placed firmly in a single genre (jazz or hip-hop), he nevertheless demonstrates a hip-hop historical authenticity by alluding to this early hip-hop style.

### **F. Nostalgia**

The element of nostalgia is a particularly pervasive one, both in books on hip-hop, but also in the lyrical topics of rap songs. As Jurassic 5 say in the chorus of "Concrete Schoolyard": 'Let's take it back to the concrete streets, original beats with real live MCs'. "Concrete Schoolyard" also quotes the opening (kazoo line) of Grandmaster Flash and the Furious Five's "Freedom" (which is from a popular breakbeat—Freedom's "Get Up and Dance", anthologized on the *Ultimate Breaks and Beats Collection*).

Common's "I Used to Love H.E.R.", uses a woman as personification of hip-hop culture, lost love as a frequent object of nostalgia.<sup>174</sup> His third (final) verse says:

I might've failed to mention that the shit was creative  
But once the man got you well he altered the native  
Told her if she got an energetic gimmick  
That she could make money, and she did it like a dummy  
Now I see her in commercials, she's universal  
She used to only swing it with the inner-city circle  
Now she be in the 'burbs lickin' rock and dressin' hip  
And on some dumb shit, when she comes to the city

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<sup>172</sup> Tom Breihan, 'Jurassic 5: Feedback', Pitchfork Media, 28 July 2006, available at: [http://www.pitchforkmedia.com/article/record\\_review/37529-feedback](http://www.pitchforkmedia.com/article/record_review/37529-feedback) (accessed 28 July 2008).

<sup>173</sup> Ibid.

<sup>174</sup> Shumway, 38.



Talkin about poppin' glocks servin' rocks and hittin' switches  
 Now she's a gangsta rollin' with gangsta bitches  
 Always smokin' blunts and getting' drunk  
 Tellin' me sad stories, now she only fucks with the funk  
 Stressin' how hardcore and real she is  
 She was really the realest, before she got into showbiz  
 I did her, not just to say that I did it  
 But I'm committed, but so many niggaz hit it  
 That she's just not the same lettin' all these groupies do her  
 I see niggaz slammin' her, and takin' her to the sewer  
 But I'm a take her back hopin' that the shit stop  
 Cause who I'm talkin' bout y'all is hip-hop.

Common confesses his love for an earlier style of hip-hop, one that was associated with 'the urban' ('She used to only swing it with the inner-city circle'), but has now moved out to suburbs and larger audiences. The 'love affair' detailed attests to the self-consciousness of hip-hop culture and its construction (and critique) of hip-hop identity.

Missy Elliot, in a duet with Jay-Z called "Back in the Day" from Under Construction (2002), reminisces about earlier times:

What happened to those good old days?  
 When hip-hop was so much fun  
 Ohh, house parties in the summer y'all  
 And no one, came through with a gun  
 It was all about the music y'all  
 It helped to relieve some stress  
 Ohh, we was under one groove y'all  
 So much love between North and West.

And Jay-Z mentions particular groups and singles as well:

Me and Missy be the new Tag Team  
 "Whoomp! There It Is"  
 We like, Ray and Ghost, A.G. and Showbiz  
 We "Public Enemy #1", our "Uzi Weighs a Ton"  
 This is our house Run.

Elliot mentions fashion (British Knights and gold chains), dances (prep and cabbage patch), and groups and personalities (Salt-N-Pepa, Rakim, Public Enemy, Run-D.M.C., Heavy D, MC Lyte). She also mentions "Self Destruction", a 1989 single which featured KRS-One, Stetsasonic, Public Enemy, Doug E. Fresh, MC

Lyte, Heavy D, Kool Moe Dee, and many others.<sup>175</sup> Brewster and Broughton's view is that hip-hop's 'history is often submerged by its mythology. In place of facts there are a few endlessly repeated fables, some respectful nods to its legendary creators and a great deal of misty-eyed clichés about "back in the day"'.<sup>176</sup>

Others felt that hip-hop needed to return to a previous state. As Q-Tip, MC of A Tribe Called Quest, said of their second album *The Low End Theory*: 'Hip-hop is moving farther and farther away from its true starting point. And what we're trying to do with this album is bring it a little bit closer to home'.<sup>177</sup> While the exact nature of this 'home' is subject to multiple interpretations, this quote is telling; the truth content of hip-hop seems to lie in the past, rather than in the present. The past becomes an authority figure, the 'true starting point' becomes a utopian space and an archetype that becomes the referent for later artists to invoke.

Hip-hop is a genre that frequently wears its history on its sleeve. Demers writes that

Unlike other forms of popular music that attempt to reinvent or subvert tradition for the sake of novelty, hip-hop culture prizes and cultivates its memory, such that lyrics and images of rap songs from the 1970s and 1980s are still accessible and usable to MCs today.<sup>178</sup>

The increasing self-consciousness of hip-hop as a genre culture shifts the focus from sampling James Brown because he is part of a black musical heritage or lineage to sampling his music because it has provided classic hip-hop breakbeats.

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<sup>175</sup> The single was a part of KRS-One's Stop the Violence movement, and the proceeds went to the Urban League. Arguably, this example looks back to the so-called 'Golden Age' of hip-hop (1986–1992), when subgenres flourished in all their diversity, rather than the late 1970s or 1980s. This example still demonstrates, however, the pervasiveness of hip-hop artists to look back at their genre's past, and that the remembrance of peaceful house parties directly reflect the sentiments of others describing the 1970s Bronx parties as a solution to gang violence. I would argue that 1980s nostalgia for 1970s hip-hop has been re-translated as a late 90s/early 00s nostalgia for the 'Golden Age', and similar concerns and desires are expressed in both iterations of hip-hop nostalgia.

<sup>176</sup> Brewster and Broughton, 228.

<sup>177</sup> Quoted in Chris Wilder, 'A Tribe Called Quest: Abstract Attitude', *The Source*, no. 26, 1991, 25.

<sup>178</sup> Demers, 'Sampling the 1970s in Hip-hop', 41.

In other words, James Brown now represents hip-hop music. In investigations of the early history of hip-hop music, we can never go back to this unmediated, unrecorded era, which is one of the reasons why it is laden with such an aura. No other music genre has become as overtly self-referential, in particular, the historically-conscious artists that comment directly on the state of the hip-hop nation.<sup>179</sup>

The many ways that a historical authenticity can be demonstrated in the recordings are subject to overlap and often combined in the same single. One example of this is Nas's "Hip-Hop is Dead" (produced by will.i.am) from his 2006 eponymous album [CD Example 10]. His music video features Nas rapping in a warehouse full of fans, emphasizing the early party and collective elements, including showing images of turntables that accompany his rap. "Hip-hop is Dead" also uses two classic breakbeats, which layer on top of the basic beat at different points in the song, the "Apache" break and Billy Squier's "The Big Beat". The 'break-down' section (3:01) has Nas rapping a capella with a chanting crowd, showing his ability to stage hip-hop as a live phenomenon [CD Example 11]. Vinyl scratches also allude to the time when hip-hop began (as the trope states) with 'two turntables and one mic'. The sampling of Iron Butterfly's "In-A-Gadda-da-Vida" is worth noting since this song was used in the early disco scene and was covered on The Incredible Bongo Band's 1973 album Bongo Rock (along with "Apache").<sup>180</sup>

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<sup>179</sup> Obviously, many other music genres do invoke their genre's past, including blues, jazz, and country. I would argue that hip-hop music has more tools available to invoke such a past, with the availability of digital sampling in addition to earlier modes of reference and quotation. Furthermore, this focus on demonstrating hip-hop's past in the music has led to the belief amongst some that hip-hop is the 'least altered' popular music form, as demonstrated in a quote from Anthony Bozza: 'Hip-hop, in comparison to other African-American musical traditions—blues, jazz, and rock and roll—has remained closest to its roots for the thirty years it has existed. It is possibly the most potent, least altered African-American cultural expression in history.' Bozza, 125. This, to me, does not demonstrate true fact so much as point to the power of historical authenticity's ideologies to lead various commentators to this conclusion.

<sup>180</sup> Francis Grasso, described as the first modern DJ, was said to play "In-A-Gadda-Da-Vida" in the late 1960s at clubs like the Haven in New York. See Brewster and Broughton, 145-146. Nas used

Nas looks back to an earlier era in his lyrics, emphasizing a commercial/non-commercial divide which pervades hip-hop nostalgia rhetoric:

Everybody sound the same, commercialize the game  
Reminisce when it wasn't all business...  
Went from turntables to mp3s  
From "Beat Street" to commercials on Mickey D's.

"Hip Hop is Dead" also reflects the genre's preoccupation with an all-too-real intersection with death and loss. Signalling the death of a genre is not particularly new, and it can be a useful critique of that field, identifying and defining important elements of that culture and what the artist/critic values within that culture.<sup>181</sup> And while many current rappers are technically far more complex than the early MCs and DJs, historical authenticity has little to do with virtuosity ('mastery of your instrument') as much as it does with the fetishization of and nostalgia for the past.

### **The Quest for Origins**

I would argue that this form of hip-hop authenticity is intrinsically concerned with the pursuit of the origin (the 'true starting point' to which Q-Tip alludes). Foucault, in his essay 'Nietzsche, Genealogy and History', quotes Nietzsche from *The Wanderer and his Shadow*:

The lofty origin is no more than "a metaphysical extension which arises from the belief that things are most precious and essential at the moment of birth." We tend to think that this is the moment of their greatest perfection, when they emerged dazzling from the hands of a creator or in the shadowless light of a first morning. The origin always precedes the Fall. It comes before the body, before the world and time; it is

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The Incredible Bongo Band's cover of the Iron Butterfly song for his "Thief's Theme" from *Streets Disciple* (2003). It is not unlikely that this version was played at early hip-hop parties since we know DJ Kool Herc had the record.

<sup>181</sup> Dyson writes, 'When Nas uttered the words "hip hop is dead", he joined a long list of prophets and fed-up practitioners who've announced the death of a field, only to jump-start a new phase of its growth. Author V.S. Naipaul declared the novel dead, then went on to win the Nobel Prize in literature for his highly regarded fiction. Philosopher Richard Rorty declared that philosophy was dead in 1979, and even though he no longer teaches in philosophy departments, he has continued to publish lively philosophical books. And let's not forget, Nas announced hip hop's death on a hip hop album!' Dyson, *Know What I mean?*, 148.

associated with the gods, and its story is always sung as a theogony.<sup>182</sup>

In the case of the historiography of hip-hop, the early DJs (Herc, Bambaataa, and Grandmaster Flash) become these ‘gods’.

The origins, in hip-hop, thus, become the site of truth and purity in the eyes of historically conscious rap artists and writers, an ‘Eden before the fall’, the fall being this ‘first death of hip-hop’ symbolized by commercial success. This historical authenticity reflects an assumption that various popular music genres began in a romanticized space, and that any changes to ‘original’ forms become a corruption of the ideal.<sup>183</sup> But as Foucault writes, ‘What is found at the historical beginning of things is not the inviolable identity of their origin; it is the dissension of other things. It is disparity’.<sup>184</sup> In other words, the idea that hip-hop’s essence can be found at a fixed origin is a romantic illusion.

Yet there remains a purism in historical authenticity which seeks to use the original impulses of the culture as a scripture to guide future creativity. As one breakdancer from the early period commented, ‘It’s like the Bible, eventually you have to go to the original scripture and the original language it was written in, and I think that everybody on the East and West coast need to re-define our dance and take control of it again’.<sup>185</sup> Schloss’s study of breakdancers confirms the

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<sup>182</sup> Michel Foucault, ‘Nietzsche, Genealogy and History’, in *Language, Counter-memory, Practice*, ed. Donald F. Bouchard (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1977), 143.

<sup>183</sup> Leland, writing about the ‘white boy who steals the blues’ trope in popular music, states that ‘It has featured many lead characters, going back to Twain, Dan Emmett, Irving Berlin, Elvis, and on up through Keith Haring, Tom Waits and Eminem, to name just a few ... The story assumes that popular culture begins with Platonic ideal forms, from which descend lesser knockoffs, the least of these being the white rip-off’. Leland, 131. He argues against that notion, commenting that ‘American pop culture begins in the mongrel, not the Platonic. This is hip’s central story. What we call black or white styles are really hopelessly hybrid.’ Leland, 133. Schloss writes, ‘All cultural practices have antecedents and precursors. But the question of where an old style ends and a new one begins is always subjective, political, and to some degree arbitrary. For those that love the old ways, new styles are merely superficial variations of existing practice. For those who love the new ways, the old styles were merely precursors to the true art. It is always a matter of interpretation.’ Schloss, *Foundation*, 131–132.

<sup>184</sup> Foucault, 142.

<sup>185</sup> *The Freshest Kids* (2002). Directed by Israel, USA: QD3 Entertainment. 94min (1:00).

importance of foundational technique, as he recounts the importance of incorporating ‘original b-boy moves’ to acknowledge the history of the practice. Ken Swift tells Schloss, ‘I always try to add some sort of fundamental move in any combination. This way, I keep the traditions of the original style ... The finesse behind fundamentals is serious’.<sup>186</sup>

Journalist Harry Allen likens his search for hip-hop origins to studying the tiny moment right after the big bang:

If this writer could study, with infinite resolution, any early time period, it would be the one dominated by hip-hop culture in New York City before September 1979 and “Rapper’s Delight.” Much of the way scientists theorize that, prior to Myhrvold’s tiny epoch, nature’s four fundamental forces—gravity, electromagnetism, the strong force, and the weak force—were united in one never-to-reappear ‘superforce,’ pre-1979 hip-hop’s four fundamental forces—MCing, DJing, b-boying, and writing—were, they say, united in a way that, after that time, they would never be again.<sup>187</sup>

This hip-hop purism at the centre of historical authenticity has been called ‘hip-hop originalism’ by Adam Mansbach:

Any discussion of hip-hop’s original impulses tends to veer toward rhapsody, dogma, or both. As a well-intentioned but problematic strand of hip-hop originalism emerges, it becomes common to hear hip-hop talked about as if it is a cosmic revelation, bestowed upon Herc, Flash, and Bam atop some Bronx-rooftop equivalent of Mount Sinai. Hip-hop becomes a single narrative in the retelling, a child sprung full-grown from the womb, five-elements-indivisible-for-which-we-stand ... The practices of b-boying, MCing, graffiti writing, and deejaying had never been seen before, but the aesthetic concepts that underwrite them were updated, not invented. As with everything in hip-hop, the key is how everything is put together, and the energy with which it is suffused.<sup>188</sup>

Mansbach compares the originalism to one of conservative Supreme Court Justice Antonin Scalia who ‘defies the founding fathers, insists on strict fidelity to their supposed intentions, and treats dissenters as heretics.’<sup>189</sup> There is a genuine desire

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<sup>186</sup> Quoted in Schloss, *Foundation*, 91.

<sup>187</sup> Harry Allen, ‘Dreams of a Final Theory’, in *Total Chaos*, 7.

<sup>188</sup> Adam Mansbach, ‘On Lit Hop’, in *Total Chaos*, 92–93.

<sup>189</sup> Mansbach, 100.

by certain hip-hop artists to give respect and credit to those that came before them, a very strong ancestral impulse that links them with their heritage and with felt authenticity. DJ Premier, in one interview, said:

If you don't really care about the history of Hip Hop culture, don't mess with it. Buy whatever little albums you buy and play them, they are probably the albums we don't like anyway, but you should really, really respect the history. I was just saying this earlier in another interview, they guy who was interviewing me was like: "You are the godfather," and I'm like: "No, I am not. Stop. Afrika Bambaataa is the godfather." And he was like: "Yeah, but you are too." And I was like: "No." He said: "In the mafia they have different godfathers." And I said: "Well, this ain't the mafia, this is Hip Hop and the godfather is Afrika Bambaataa and the father is Kool Herc. That's it." And he was like: "What about Russell Simmons, ain't he the godfather too?" And I was like: "Nope. He is one of the illest moguls and one of the illest to set up Def Jam and I praise Russell all the way for making Def Jam what it was when it was raw but he ain't no godfather. It's Afrika Bambaataa and Kool Herc is the father, hands down." That's the whole part. And those guys ... think about it, if everyone that loves Hip Hop gave them a dollar each they'd be straight. Just one dollar, just to say "thank you" for creating this whole thing.<sup>190</sup>

Premier goes on to narrate an encounter between Missy Elliot and Kool Herc in which Elliot brushes off Herc, to the anger of Premier who felt she should show her gratitude to the 'founding father', especially considering her own allusions to older hip-hop styles (particularly in her fashion). Often times, this historical impulse emerges from a will to teach others about their hip-hop heritage, just as the Jungle Brothers and other Native Tongues taught aspects of their African heritage. Those who observe hip-hop mythology do not show interest in 1970s hip-hop as simply an interest in the 'retro', but as a return to the roots of a cultural movement. Mr. Freeze, one of the early breakdancers in the Rock Steady Crew, once commented,

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<sup>190</sup> DJ Premier, Red Bull Music Academy, available at: [http://www.redbullmusicacademy.com/TUTORS.9.0.html?act\\_session=368](http://www.redbullmusicacademy.com/TUTORS.9.0.html?act_session=368) (accessed 16 Feb. 2008).

‘The cycle has begun. Styles always start once, they go out of style, then all of a sudden, people get back to the root of things’.<sup>191</sup>

Possessing knowledge of these early hip-hop elements is crucial to both fans and artists demonstrating historical authenticity. Hipness, as enlightenment or awareness, applies to authenticities based on knowledge of hip-hop, being a ‘hip-hop head’, as some call it.<sup>192</sup> This version of hipness manifests as the fifth element of hip-hop: knowledge.<sup>193</sup> KRS-One, who refers to himself as ‘the teacha’, includes ‘Street knowledge, common sense, the wisdom of the elders from way back whence’ in his own expanded list of hip-hop elements (on the track “Nine Elements” on his 2003 *Kristyles* album, and found in the first principle of his ‘Hip Hop Declaration of Peace’).<sup>194</sup> KRS-One links knowledge and movement found in the term ‘hip-hop’ on his single “Hip-hop Lives” (2007).<sup>195</sup>

Hip means to know  
It’s a form of intelligence  
To be hip is to be up date and relevant  
Hop is a form of movement  
You can’t just observe a hop  
You got to hop up and do it  
Hip and Hop is more than music  
Hip is the knowledge  
Hop is the movement  
Hip and Hop is intelligent movement.

This knowledge includes terminology that defines hip-hop discourse. The difference between uttering the word ‘breakin’ (or ‘b-boying’, or ‘rockin’) instead of ‘breakdancing’ is an example of a shibboleth, an ‘in crowd’ word used to

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<sup>191</sup> *The Freshest Kids* (2002). Directed by Israel, USA: QD3 Entertainment. 94min (1:26:00).

<sup>192</sup> Leland, 5.

<sup>193</sup> Bambaataa has been credited with placing knowledge as the ‘fifth element’ of hip-hop. See Chang, *Can’t Stop Won’t Stop*, 90.

<sup>194</sup> Found on KRS-One’s Temple of Hip Hop website, available at:

[http://www.templeofhiphop.org/index.php?option=com\\_content&task=view&id=64&Itemid=39](http://www.templeofhiphop.org/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=64&Itemid=39) (accessed 28 July 2008).

<sup>195</sup> As rappers often ‘answer’ other rap songs, it is highly likely that KRS-One’s “Hip-hop Lives” is an ‘answer record’ to Nas’s “Hip-hop is Dead”.



distinguish members of a group from its outsiders.<sup>196</sup> Likewise in musical borrowing, certain breakbeats serve the function of musical shibboleths, the “Apache” break signifying a deep knowledge of the history of hip-hop. Bourdieu noted that the ‘deep-seated ‘intention’ of slang vocabulary is the assertion of an aristocratic distinction.’<sup>197</sup> This phylactery, knowledge that differentiates specialists from dilettantes, is what Thornton describes as subcultural capital, as well. Perhaps even greater than a ‘will to knowledge’ in hip-hop culture, there is a ‘will to educate’ for artists who acknowledge and wish to spread hip-hop culture. So-called ‘conscious’ rap artists often acknowledge the Afrohumanist importance of knowledge with an eye to teaching that knowledge to others.<sup>198</sup>

## Two Paradoxes

In investigations of nostalgia, hip-hop, and authenticity, multiple seemingly paradoxical elements emerge. The first paradox is the de-canonizing/re-canonizing impulses within hip-hop that I mentioned earlier; at once, there is a celebration of the founding fathers and an early canon, while praising their approaches which largely eschewed bio-mythologies of the artist and music canons.

The second paradox is the romanticizing of a particularly geography associated with poverty and other harsh realities. Krims has written of the economic process ‘by which poverty itself becomes a source of surplus value

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<sup>196</sup> Schloss writes, ‘to this day, use of the term b-boying is seen as an indicator of authenticity, while the term breakdancing connotes exploitation and disregard for the dance’s roots in hip-hop culture (interestingly, the term breaking does not have this connotation and is considered acceptable by most b-boys and b-girls).’ Schloss, Foundation, 60.

<sup>197</sup> Bourdieu, quoted in Thornton, 11.

<sup>198</sup> This will to teach may be more apparent in artists labelled as part of ‘underground’, ‘conscious’ or ‘backpack’ hip-hop. Even the term ‘old school’ suggests a form of education, with an early DJ album entitled *The Lesson*, and other terminology existing, such as ‘to school’ someone. KRS-One espouses these beliefs, calling himself a teacher and poet. Criminal Minded opens with KRS declaring himself a poet and a teacher, and in “My Philosophy” his verses are preceded by the statement, ‘In about four seconds, a teacher will begin to speak’. The focus on knowledge and teaching in hip-hop could also be influenced by Five Percenter culture (Nation of Gods and Earths), a religious/mystical offshoot of Islam started in 1960s New York, which teaches that five percent of people were the ‘poor righteous teachers’ (also now a name of a hip-hop group) meant to ‘civilize the uncivilized’. Miyakawa, 28.

(specifically, relative surplus value) for a certain commodity, namely rap music.<sup>199</sup> In historical authenticity, both poverty and romanticized urban space becomes a commodity. Romanticizing poverty in artists has been a long-lasting trope, particularly amongst bohemian subcultures, but as Krims rightly points out, rap music also intensely focuses on ‘the ghetto as a locus of authenticity’.<sup>200</sup> The poverty and ruin of the 1970s Bronx shown through a romantic lens, as commodity, provide the consumer with possibilities of both *jouissance* and membership into the hip-hop nation. Shumway, paraphrasing Marcel Proust, has written that nostalgia films allow a ‘pleasurable rewriting to occur in the minds of spectators.’<sup>201</sup> While the social conditions of the 70s Bronx were appalling, films like *Wild Style* can give a pleasurable rewriting to the place and era.

These seemingly contradictory elements of historical authenticity in hip-hop culture are central features to hip-hop cultures, and perhaps to ‘black culture’ in general. E. Patrick Johnson believes that certain binaries form the essence of black culture: ‘I suggest here, however, that the mutual constructing/deconstructing, avowing/disavowing, and expanding/delimiting dynamic that occurs in the production of blackness is the very thing that constitutes black culture.’<sup>202</sup> Historicizing processes are a complex site of negotiations, and perhaps more so in African-American cultures, as Johnson seems to suggest. But it is

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<sup>199</sup> Adam Krims, ‘The Hip-Hop Sublime as a Form of Commodification’, in *Music and Marx*, ed. Regula Burckhardt Qureshi (London: Routledge, 2002), 65. The role of technology versus the role of ‘the street’ in hip-hop is also worth noting. Hip-hop’s use of technology has been forward-looking while other elements central to hip-hop are interlinked with history, looking backward. While hip-hop has involved so much technical innovation, historical authenticity focuses on past styles and events rather than looking forward. The main issue here is the use of new sampling technologies to take sounds from the past and place them in new contexts, as well as the use of expensive studio techniques to recount issues of black poverty.

<sup>200</sup> *Ibid.*, 66. Of course, the representations of Los Angeles ghettos in 1990s gangsta rap differ significantly in many ways from the 1970s Bronx ghetto, but nevertheless both focus intensely on ‘the ghetto’ (representing two unique urban ethoi).

<sup>201</sup> Shumway, 49.

<sup>202</sup> E. Patrick Johnson, *Appropriating Blackness: Performance and the Politics of Authenticity* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2003), 2.

important to note that all historiographies and canonizations serve to give unity and continuity to what is, in reality, a fragmented and complex narrative, and while aspects of African-American culture such as hip-hop celebrate these ruptures and ‘rough edges’ more overtly than some, they often create new unifying narratives in the process.

## **Conclusion**

Authenticity is a particularly potent battle ground in hip-hop: fans, artists, and critics are quick to distinguish what is ‘true’ or ‘real’ hip-hop from the inauthentic (a brief survey of YouTube viewer responses to hip-hop videos can attest to this). Historical authenticity is simply one strain of hip-hop authenticity, albeit a particularly potent and pervasive one. It arises from a number of impulses: to canonize, to teach, to legitimate; to territorialize as a response to changes in hip-hop; and to enclose historical authenticity in an arena of nostalgic space. Hip-hop historical authenticity involves knowledge of history within its constructed genre, demonstrated in a number of ways. The use of codes, allusions, and quotes become a form of Signifyin(g), verbal and musical play that reflect the multi-vocal discourses in hip-hop culture and African-based musics.

While all music engages in some form of musical borrowing, the intertwining concepts of history, borrowing, and authenticity in the hip-hop world all contribute to intra-generic borrowing as demonstrating a historical authenticity. As Zamora writes, ‘I agree with Merleau-Ponty that all cultural texts are intertexts, but writers and readers respond to their textual traditions in different ways and for different purposes, often according to the importance given by a culture to its own history and the history of its interactions with other cultures’ (my emphasis

added).<sup>203</sup> A heavily saturated intertextuality is part and parcel of the ‘hip-hop aesthetic’, and since hip-hop often has an equally overt relationship with history, borrowing from its own history is a key feature within the music.

Hip-hop textually signals its own history, making listeners aware of its past in a number of ways. A musical shibboleth such as a classic breakbeat or quotation can educate, demonstrate ‘insider knowledge’, and help define cultural boundaries. Hip-hop’s origins as a performance-based culture rising from the poverty of the Bronx become a source of its ‘essence’ and a source of authenticity. While not the only type of authenticity existing in hip-hop, with the genre now at over thirty years old, historical authenticity will become more significant and widespread as hip-hop undergoes further processes of canonization.

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<sup>203</sup> Zamora, 127.

‘People don’t know what I’m doing basically, because they don’t understand music. All they’re doing is reacting to what they think it remotely sounds like.’<sup>204</sup>

—Wynton Marsalis

‘At the turn of the ’90s, as hip-hop entered its second decade and gangsta rap hardened into hip-hop’s default mode, a counterstrain emerged, shunting aside macho boasting and grim urban reportage in favor of whimsical storytelling, intelligent but still verbally dexterous takes on social issues, and laid-back samples from old jazz, or at least jazzy, records. Among the leading proponents of this more reflective style (including De La Soul and the Jungle Brothers), A Tribe Called Quest was arguably the most accomplished.’<sup>205</sup>

—‘A Tribe Called Quest’, *The New Rolling Stone Album Guide*

‘For doubters, perhaps rap + jazz will=acceptance.’<sup>206</sup>

—Christopher John Farley, *Time Magazine*, 12 July 1993

## **–Chapter 2–** **The Construction of Jazz Rap as High Art in Hip-Hop Music**

Recent histories of hip-hop reminisce over an earlier flowering of rap music genres, often deemed a ‘golden age’ in hip-hop music. Considered to begin in the mid- to late 1980s and ending in 1992, it began with Run-D.M.C.’s rise to popularity and ended with what Jeff Chang calls ‘the big crossover’ in Dr. Dre’s *The Chronic*.<sup>207</sup> For these writers, this golden era represents a time period where multiple rap subgenres co-existed, a flourishing of creativity with a diverse number of rap groups able to share market and media space. It was a world where artists and groups such as N.W.A., Ice Cube and 2 Live Crew existed in the rap mainstream with Public Enemy, Jungle Brothers, KRS-One, De La Soul, A Tribe Called Quest,

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<sup>204</sup> Rai Zabor and Vic Garbarini ‘Wynton Vs. Herbie: The Purist and the Crossbreeder Duke It Out’, in *Keeping Time: Readings in Jazz History*, ed. Robert Walser (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), 342.

<sup>205</sup> J. D. Considine and Mac Randall, ‘A Tribe Called Quest’, from *The New Rolling Stone Album Guide*, 2004, on [Rollingstone.com](http://www.rollingstone.com), available at: <http://www.rollingstone.com/artists/atribecalledquest/biography> (accessed 1 June 2007).

<sup>206</sup> Christopher John Farley, ‘Hip-Hop Goes Bebop’, *Time*, 12 July 1993, available at: <http://www.time.com/time/magazine/article/0,9171,978844,00.html> (accessed 17 August 2007).

<sup>207</sup> See Chang, *Can’t Stop Won’t Stop*, 420. See also ‘Introduction’, *The All Music Guide to Hip Hop*, ed. Vladimir Bogdanov, Chris Woodstra, Stephen Thomas Erlewine, John Bush (San Francisco: Backbeat Books, 2003), viii. In the PBS Special ‘Beyond Beats and Rhymes’, Kevin Powell defines the Golden Era as from 1987–1992. William Jelani Cobb defines the Golden era as 1984–1992, with Run D.M.C. as ushering in a new era. Cobb, 47. Tayannah Lee McQuillar writes of the ‘Golden Age’ of hip-hop as from 1989–1996. For her, this period is defined by the emergence of so-called ‘socially conscious’ rap groups. Tayannah Lee McQuillar, *When Rap Music had a Conscience: The Artists, Organizations, and Historic Events that Inspired and Influenced the “Golden Age” of Hip-Hop from 1989 to 1996* (New York: Thunder’s Mouth Press, 2007), 1.

women such as MC Lyte and Queen Latifah, and pop rap artist MC Hammer.<sup>208</sup> Writers and critics lament the loss of this ‘golden age’ in light of the post-1992 hegemony of gangsta rap in the mainstream, which many consider a poor representation of hip-hop as a diverse art form.

Numerous rap subgenres existed in the late 1980s/early 1990s, not simply based on the wide variety of lyrical content, but also on the eclectic musical styles sampled. By the late 1980s, sampling technologies had advanced and become cheaper: many producers switched from the E-Mu SP-1200 to Akai MPC samplers, which were more flexible and allowed for more complex sampling techniques.<sup>209</sup> Furthermore, copyright lawsuits and sample clearance were not yet the norm. New producers were ‘digging in the crates’ from a diverse variety of records, as epitomized in the groundbreaking 1989 De La Soul album *3 Feet High and Rising*.

One of the styles which began to be sampled and borrowed from on a consistent basis was jazz. In fact, many of the groups that emerged from this presumed ‘golden age’ have been categorized as ‘jazz rap’, a subgenre of a larger category deemed ‘alternative rap’. By 1993, one writer noted a ‘continued spread of the jazz epidemic’<sup>210</sup> in rap music, with jazz influences, samples, and collaborations pervading hip-hop. Rather than draw from only one genre of music as most studies of popular music have done, I wish to investigate the interaction between two genres of music, and how the cultural reception of one affects that of the other.

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<sup>208</sup> An example of this is Rolling Stone’s issue from 23 August 1990, which has a wide variety of rap albums their ‘Charts’ section: MC Hammer (#1), 2 Live Crew (#6), Ice Cube (#12), Eric B. and Rakim (#18), Digital Underground (#21), and Public Enemy (#22). A later example is from Billboard’s ‘Top R&B Albums’ from 13 March 1993: (#1) Naughty by Nature, (#2) Dr. Dre, (#5) 2 Pac, (#7) Arrested Development, (#8) and Digable Planets.

<sup>209</sup> For more detail on this shift, see Oliver Wang ‘Beatnuts: S/T, Diamond: Stunts, Blunts and Hip Hop, Main Source: Breaking Atoms, Pete Rock and CL Smooth: Mecca and the Soul Brother’, in *Classic Material: The Hip-Hop Album Guide*, ed. Oliver Wang (Toronto: ECW Press, 2003), 32. See also Schloss, *Making Beats*, 34–35 and Miyakowa, 107.

<sup>210</sup> S.H. Fernando Jr., ‘Hip-hop Alternatives—Greg Osby 3-D Lifestyles’, *The Source*, July 1993, 73.

After outlining and summarizing the status of jazz in the mainstream culture industries in 1980s America, I will show how a large part of the cultural reception of ‘jazz rap’ took its force from the reception of its jazz sonorities (what I call ‘jazz codes’), linking a dominant ‘jazz art ideology’ to the reception of this rap music subgenre.

Although any attempt to label stylistically or place rap groups within genres is problematic, as Adam Krims suggests, genre systems are ‘simply reference points’;<sup>211</sup> a ‘blunt instrument’ which is a ‘necessary step in grasping representation in rap’.<sup>212</sup> In fact, investigating the creation of genres and categories within the music industry and mainstream media can be invaluable for studies of reception. In other words, while genres are largely stereotypes (or, to invoke sociologist Max Weber, ‘ideal types’), they are constructed and used by the media as structural interpretative frameworks. I use the discursively constructed term ‘jazz rap’ for simplicity, since numerous labels, including hip-bop, jazz hip-hop, new jazz swing,<sup>213</sup> and jazz hop, were given to artists and groups at the time. All of these monikers demonstrate that it was the sonorities of the music, what was identified as jazz, which helped to define this subgenre and became part of a larger ‘alternative’ rap imagined community. Although any given group samples from a number of styles, it was jazz that writers and listeners identified and grasped for their branding. Because jazz was a cultural product familiar to the popular consciousness of various audiences in 1980s America, it became crucial to ‘jazz rap’ reception. Jazz and its ideological associations in the 1980s helped to shape identities for those who sampled from jazz music, informing a hierarchy within hip-hop largely based on the art-versus-commerce myth.

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<sup>211</sup> Krims, *Rap Music*, 92.

<sup>212</sup> *Ibid.*, 55.

<sup>213</sup> Maultsby, 327.

## **Jazz and the 1980s**

In order to locate the emergence of ‘jazz rap’ and its cultural meanings, it is useful to consider the state of jazz in the United States in the 1980s. While it was not a radical or revolutionary moment in jazz history, mainstream jazz (largely in the form of a hard-bop revival) was in the popular consciousness. Numerous forms of jazz were played, either through revivals of older styles, or through new fusions of jazz with other musical genres. What seemed to dominate the public jazz discourse, however, was the notion that jazz was serious art music. The solidification of what I call a ‘jazz art ideology’, largely formed during the bebop era of the 1940s and 50s, was revived in the 1980s, because of ‘neo-classical’ conservative jazz musicians like Wynton Marsalis (to use Gary Giddins’ term).<sup>214</sup> Jazz’s ‘place’, described by Krin Gabbard as the ‘cultural ascendance of jazz in the 1980s and 1990s’,<sup>215</sup> had moved to concert halls, academic institutions, and in close proximity to the classical section of music stores.

Robert Walser noted that ‘by the 1980s, jazz had risen so far up the ladder of cultural prestige that many people forgot it had ever been controversial.’<sup>216</sup> He cited a 1987 resolution by the U.S. Congress that declared jazz had ‘evolved into a multifaceted art form’ and that the youth of America need ‘to recognize and understand jazz as a significant part of their cultural and intellectual heritage.’<sup>217</sup> For America in the 1980s, rife with Reagan-era ideology and rhetoric, it was important that Americans have an art form which they could call their own. Jazz became a symbol for many things: America, democracy, African-Americans, and

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<sup>214</sup> See Gary Giddins, ‘Introduction: Jazz Turns Neoclassical’, in *Rhythm-a-ning: Jazz Tradition and Innovation in the '80s* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1985).

<sup>215</sup> Krin Gabbard, *Jammin at the Margins: Jazz and the American Cinema* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996), 136.

<sup>216</sup> Walser, in *Keeping Time*, 332–333.

<sup>217</sup> *Ibid.*



most important to this study, highbrow art music.<sup>218</sup> Stylistically, the jazz revived in the 1980s was what Nicholson calls ‘the hard-bop mainstream’,<sup>219</sup> and its promotion by a number of ‘young lion’ musicians (including Wynton Marsalis) helped usher the music into membership of the cultural aristocracy.

This jazz ‘Renaissance’ occurred in a number of ways, including the touring of jazz artists, reissues of jazz classics, as well as the aggressive marketing of a younger generation of jazz musicians who promoted older styles. Films like *Bird* (1988) and *Round Midnight* (1986) showed tormented genius musicians, while Spike Lee’s *Mo’ Better Blues* (1990)<sup>220</sup> romanticized the jazz world and put jazz in the cultural consciousness of the hip-hop generation.<sup>221</sup> In terms of print media, dozens of jazz books and autobiographies were published and reissued to create and accommodate demand during this jazz resurgence.<sup>222</sup> Most famously, Miles Davis (with Quincy Troupe) released his autobiography in 1989. The death of prominent jazz musicians revived their memory in the media and exposed them to new audiences. Notable deaths included Thelonious Monk (d. 1982), Count Basie

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<sup>218</sup> It would be counterproductive to engage in a discussion of what jazz is, because composers, performers, and audiences often hold different definitions. While one would be tempted to say that the term has lost much of its meaning, its definition has always been a contested cultural site. ‘Jazz’ continues to broaden as a multidiscursive term whose meaning largely depends on the context of its use; musicians and others often hold very narrow and strict definitions of jazz which clash with those of others. See Alan Stanbridge ‘Burns, Baby Burns: Jazz History as a Contested Cultural Site’, *The Source: Challenging Jazz Criticism* 1, no. 4 (2004): 81–99.

<sup>219</sup> For a more complete description, see Stuart Nicholson, *Jazz: The 1980s Resurgence* (New York: Da Capo Press, 1995), vi.

<sup>220</sup> One single from the soundtrack of *Mo’ Better Blues* was “Jazz Thing” by the hip-hop group Gang Starr (MC Guru and DJ Premier). The song tells a selective history of jazz, uses a number of jazz samples from across jazz’s history, and includes scratching from DJ Premier. The music video and single brought them national attention and was a primary reason the group became associated with ‘jazz rap’ in media reception, though they subsequently tried to distance themselves from the ‘jazz rap’ category. Guru did later engage in collaborative projects with jazz musicians under a series of albums entitled *Guru’s Jazzmatazz*, having four volumes at the time of this writing.

<sup>221</sup> Other jazz films of the 1980s worth mentioning were the Chet Baker documentary *Let’s Get Lost* (1989) and the Thelonious Monk biopic *Straight No Chaser* (1989). The jazz club imagery portrayed in these films would feature in various advertising campaigns, as well as in the promotion and music videos of ‘jazz rap’ groups like Digable Planets. A number of jazz musicians were composing jazz-influenced scores for films in the 1980s and early 90s, including Terence Blanchard, Tom Scott, Dave Grusin, Mark Isham, Stanley Clarke, Lennie Niehaus, Bennie Wallace, Grover Washington Jr., Michel Camilo, Michael Wolff, and Bobby Watson, to name a few.

<sup>222</sup> Christopher Harlos, ‘Jazz Autobiography: Theory, Practice, Politics’, in *Representing Jazz*, ed. Krin Gabbard (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1995), 132–133.

(d. 1984), Benny Goodman (d. 1986), and Dexter Gordon (d. 1990). In the early 1990s, three deaths in particular caught the eyes and ears of the nation, including hip-hop print media: Art Blakey (d. Oct. 16, 1990), Miles Davis (d. Sept. 13, 1991), and Dizzy Gillespie (d. January 3, 1993). Obituaries featured in major national newspapers; for example, Dizzy Gillespie's death made the cover of the New York Times. In hip-hop media, *The Source* printed articles on both Miles Davis and Dizzy Gillespie,<sup>223</sup> and *Vibe* magazine included an article on Sun Ra after his death in 1993.<sup>224</sup>

The *Cosby Show*, the most successful American sitcom of the 1980s, presented an upper-middle-class black family, used jazz musicians as guests (including Tito Puente, Dizzy Gillespie, The Count Basie Band, Jimmy Heath, Art Blakey and Max Roach) and featured jazz-based scoring as music cues between scenes. The show ran from 1984 to 1992 and was the number one show in America for five consecutive years. As Linda Fuller commented of the show:

Everywhere on the show, we see material symbols of a family that is living the American dream. The Huxtables appear to have moved easily into an upper-middle-class status. Not only are both parents professionals, but also their forebears appear to be monied. Tidbits from family stories and old friends' reminiscences let us know that this Black family has been upwardly mobile for a long time. They aren't 'nouveau' but are cultured: they appreciate the theater, enjoy a range of musical types, and take trips abroad.<sup>225</sup>

Though the show had been criticized for avoiding issues of race explicitly, it reinforced jazz's association with the black middle class, a highbrow sophistication that perhaps could be juxtaposed against lower-class African-American

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<sup>223</sup> Todd Williams 'Miles Davis: 1926–1991', *The Source*, January 1992, 13, 92. Ty Williams 'Remembering Dizzy', *The Source*, April 1993, 22.

<sup>224</sup> John F. Szwed, 'Props', *Vibe*, September 1993.

<sup>225</sup> Linda K. Fuller, *The Cosby Show: Audiences, Impact, and Implications* (London: Greenwood Press, 1992), 7. Fuller also discusses *Cosby's* link to advertising a number of products; as of the late '80s, *Cosby* himself earned over 95 million dollars a year. Fuller, 13.

representation in popular culture, namely the ‘hood’ films of the early ’90s.<sup>226</sup> The notion that cultural tastes are associated with class informed audiences that the Cosbys’ proclivity for jazz was linked to their affluent status, and this connection was communicated to American television audiences on a large scale.

TV commercials were also associating jazz with affluence, with jazz used in commercials for Chase Manhattan Bank, American Express, the Nissan Infiniti luxury car, and Diet Coke.<sup>227</sup> In 1988, Yves Saint Laurent designed their fragrance ‘JAZZ For Men’, which ran ads in Rolling Stone magazine and elsewhere.<sup>228</sup> Another ad in a 1991 Rolling Stone featured British jazz saxophonist Courtney Pine modelling GAP turtleneck sweaters.<sup>229</sup> Jazz was marketed with high fashion, partly inspired by Wynton Marsalis’ taste for fine suits and that of the other young musicians who followed his lead. The ‘clean cut’ images portrayed by these jazz musicians suggest the cultural elite, a higher class ethos compared to the working-class images of many rock musicians. While forms of jazz had a clean-cut image before the 1980s (for example, Dave Brubeck and the Modern Jazz Quartet), it had not been as widely associated with highbrow sophistication, and with the black middle class, until the 1980s. And as Diana Crane reminds us, ‘Different types of cultural products are associated with different social strata as a result of variations

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<sup>226</sup> These films include *Boyz n the Hood* (1991), dir. John Singleton, *South Central* (1992), dir. Steve Anderson, *Juice* (1992), dir. Ernest R. Dickerson, and *Menace II Society* (1993), dir. Albert and Allen Hughes.

<sup>227</sup> See Krin Gabbard, ‘Introduction: The Jazz Canon and Its Consequences’, in *Jazz Among the Discourses*, ed. Gabbard (Durham: Duke University Press, 1995), 1–2; Krin Gabbard, ‘Signifyin(g) the Phallus: *Mo’ Better Blues* and Representations of the Jazz Trumpet’, in *Representing Jazz*, 112; and Gabbard, *Jammin at the Margins*, 102; See also Richard Cook, *Blue Note Records: The Biography* (London: Secker and Warburg, 2001), 182.

<sup>228</sup> One example can be found in *Rolling Stone* 565, 16 November 1989, 1.

<sup>229</sup> *Rolling Stone* 600, 21 March 1991, 2. This was part of a larger GAP campaign entitled ‘Individuals of Style’, which featured Dizzy Gillespie, Miles Davis, Maceo Parker, Courtney Pine, and others. See John McDonough ‘Jazz Sells’, *Downbeat*, October 1991, 34.

in taste and wealth.<sup>230</sup> Jazz, as popular cultural capital, began to be marketed with high fashion and other 'elite' tastes.

There was a further institutionalization of jazz in education: middle schools and high schools added jazz bands to their lists of ensembles, universities offered classes and degrees in jazz, and parameters of the music were codified for the purposes of teaching improvisation.<sup>231</sup> New educational institutions intended purely for jazz formed in the 1980s, such as the Monk Institute of Jazz in 1986, just one example of the steady increase in jazz education. By then, the scope of jazz education was widespread; jazz improvisation books and methods were widely available (such as those by Jamey Aebersold, David Baker and Jerry Coker), borrowing methodologies from classical music training and altering them to educate the jazz musician. Mastery of bebop, and the methods of hard-bop, were the basis for contemporary jazz improvisation. Just as four-part harmony and voice leading rules had been codified in classical music education, parameters were codified in jazz: a jazz musician learned the 'correct' scales over certain chord changes, blues 'riffs', 'licks' from canonized improvisers (such as Charlie Parker), and standard repertoire. Or as Grover Sales commented in a tellingly titled book *Jazz: America's Classical Music* (first published in 1984), 'Monk, Mingus, Dolphy and the Miles Davis Sextet with Coltrane and Evans will fuel musicians of the future, just as Bach and Haydn prepare conservatory graduates.'<sup>232</sup> Many of these jazz classes were taught by prominent jazz musicians (who were then able to get a

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<sup>230</sup>Diana Crane, *The Production of Culture: Media and the Urban Arts* (London: Sage Publications, 1992), 33.

<sup>231</sup> For a more detailed account of these developments in jazz education, see 'Jazz 'Training: John Coltrane and the Conservatory', in David Ake, *Jazz Cultures* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002), 112–145.

<sup>232</sup> Grover Sales, *Jazz: America's Classical Music* (New York: Da Capo Press, 1992), 219. As jazz had moved to music conservatories in the 1980s and 1990s, according to Stuart Nicholson, 'it seemed apparent that academicism was breeding revivalism'. Stuart Nicholson 'Fusions and Crossovers', in *The Cambridge Companion to Jazz*, eds. Mervyn Cooke and David Horn (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 250.

steady gig from teaching in conservatories and universities). As Eric Nisensen wrote, ‘The teachers for the most part were of the same generation as Ellis Marsalis [Marsalis’ father, b.1934], so naturally they taught courses in jazz orthodoxy based on the period they knew the best: the post-bop of the late 1950s and early 1960s.’<sup>233</sup>

Wynton Marsalis, more than any other individual, played an important role in the legitimization of jazz in the 1980s. A trumpet player and composer from New Orleans, he was the first recording artist to hold a record contract in jazz and classical music simultaneously (at age nineteen, with Columbia Records), and the first artist to win Grammys in jazz and classical in the same year (1983, repeating the feat in 1984). He co-founded Jazz at Lincoln Center in 1987, firmly placing jazz in the concert hall on a regular basis. Described by Francis Davis as ‘rebellious against non-conformity’,<sup>234</sup> Marsalis held narrow views of jazz that championed the great composers of acoustic jazz while dismissing any non-acoustic jazz as a debased derivative of a pure art form. He was even more abruptly dismissive of pop music and hip-hop. Influenced heavily by jazz ideologies of Stanley Crouch and Albert Murray, Marsalis became, to quote Richard Cook, a ‘jazz media darling in an age when there simply weren’t any others.’<sup>235</sup> Being the subject of interviews in magazines, television, and newspapers as well as hosting jazz programs on National Public Radio and the Public Broadcasting System, Marsalis became the rare case of a cultural producer (musician/composer) who was also a cultural intermediary, a public intellectual whose influence created boundaries, definitions, and tastes for the public. He was (and still is) a gatekeeper of the ‘jazz tradition’ and reaffirmed the notion that jazz was ‘America’s classical music’.

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<sup>233</sup> Eric Nisensen, *Blue: The Murder of Jazz* (New York: Da Capo Press, 2000), 219.

<sup>234</sup> Francis Davis, ‘The Right Stuff’, in *In The Moment: Jazz in the 1980s* (New York: Da Capo Press, 1996), 29.

<sup>235</sup> Cook, 212–3.

By 1990, Marsalis appeared on the cover of *Time* magazine (22 October 1990) under the heading ‘The New Jazz Age’. He was declared a ‘full-fledged superstar’, the article placing his gross income in the seven-figure range. *Downbeat* dubbed the 1980s as ‘Wynton’s Decade’, recognizing him as the chief catalyst for the jazz resurgence.<sup>236</sup> As one writer commented, Marsalis’s ‘neo-traditional stance almost instantaneously [had] become the norm for contemporary jazz’.<sup>237</sup> While many other forces and individuals contributed to a jazz art ideology, Marsalis was emblematic of its 1980s incarnation and largely responsible for its wide distribution. As an outspoken and unavoidable presence in 1980s mainstream jazz, Marsalis was a powerful cultural intermediary in the construction of jazz as art music.<sup>238</sup>

Acknowledging no time and place to be ideologically homogeneous, the cultural constructions of jazz as a ‘serious music’ in the 1980s became the dominant ideology in the media discourse, associating jazz with affluence, sophistication, and a highbrow aesthetic which resists being considered a ‘popular music’.<sup>239</sup> Jazz (or sonorities identified as jazz) was accessible in the 1980s, and the political legitimacy of jazz would affect the reception of those who borrowed its sonorities (whether they intended it or not).

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<sup>236</sup> Howard Reich, ‘Wynton’s Decade’, *Downbeat*, December 1992.

<sup>237</sup> Steve Futterman, ‘Review of *Tune In Tomorrow: The Original Soundtrack by Wynton Marsalis*’, *Rolling Stone* 599, 7 March, 1991 84–85.

<sup>238</sup> For more on ‘cultural intermediaries’, see Keith Negus, ‘The Work of Cultural Intermediaries and the Enduring Distance Between Production and Consumption’. *Cultural Studies* 16, no. 4 (2002): 501–515.

<sup>239</sup> Of course, there were multiple forms of ‘jazz’ in the 1980s, with a number of ideological connotations. Two worth mentioning are more avant-garde streams of jazz, exemplified by John Zorn and Anthony Braxton, and smooth jazz, which was a lighter version of fusion from the 1970s. ‘Smooth jazz’ artists such as Kenny G and David Sanborn are often the focus of criticism from jazz purists, but their albums were commercially successful in the 1980s, becoming its own significant jazz subgenre. But what emerged overall in the 1980s was the dominant notion that jazz, styles of jazz championed by Marsalis, was a highbrow art music linked with sophistication and affluence.

## Jazz Rap

As stated previously, jazz's mainstream in the 1980s was not a revolution or an evolution, but a revival of older styles. Conversely, hip-hop artists began to think about and perform music of the past differently, first through the technology of the turntable, then with samplers and other studio technology to create something new. Both hip-hop and jazz were said to be urban phenomena, began as dance music, and shared rhythmic similarities: hip-hop and 1950s/60s hard-bop jazz were stylistically defined by a dominance of the beat. Although both were largely the product of African-American creativity and innovation, in the 1980s, jazz and rap music were at different stages in their development. Improvisation (more specifically, the ability to improvise in the generic idiom) was linked to authenticity in both jazz and hip-hop.<sup>240</sup> For mainstream jazz, it was what one does with the past that makes one authentic, as well as the technical mastery of one's craft; in certain subgenres of hip-hop, one's ability to freestyle (improvise raps on the spot) and 'battle' rap is the sure sign of authenticity in certain 'underground' rap circles, demonstrated in mainstream films such as the Eminem quasi-biopic *8 Mile*.<sup>241</sup>

Rap groups such as De La Soul, A Tribe Called Quest, Gang Starr, and Digable Planets emerged from the late '80s/early '90s with labels for their music such as jazz rap, jazz-hop, jazz hip-hop, hip-bop, new jazz swing, alternative rap, and others.<sup>242</sup> Most overtly, jazz and hip-hop's shared African-American musical

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<sup>240</sup> Reginald Thomas, 'The Rhythm of Rhyme: A Look at Rap Music as an Art Form from a Jazz Perspective', in *African American Jazz and Rap: Social and Philosophical Examinations of Black Expressive Behavior*, ed. James L. Conyers (London: McFarland & Company, Inc., 2001), 165–166.

<sup>241</sup> On the production side, technical skill and expertise in hip-hop is similarly expected and admired as technical skill is in jazz. Schloss makes the useful analogy that 'Peers would consider a producer who did not own canonical records to be unprepared, in much the same way that jazz musicians would criticize a colleague who did not know the changes to "Stardust".' Schloss, *Making Beats*, 38.

<sup>242</sup> 'Jazz rap' or 'alternative rap' had also been deemed (and dismissed as) 'college boy' rap, no doubt influenced by the highbrow topics of groups like Digable Planets and jazz's associations with

lineage became a focal point (by the artists themselves as well as journalists and academics) in the construction and reception of ‘jazz rap’. Q-Tip of A Tribe Called Quest explained what he perceived as similarities in jazz and hip-hop: ‘Both musics came from the black underclass, and both are very expressive. There were so many similarities, and that made it even better to sample it and rhyme over it.’<sup>243</sup> Pragmatically speaking, these artists’ parents and siblings often had record collections which could be used to sample.<sup>244</sup> In fact, some rap artists had jazz musician parents, most recognizably rapper Nas, whose father Olu Dara occasionally performs on his son’s albums. Rapper Rakim (of Eric B and Rakim) was a saxophone player and had a mother who was a professional jazz and opera singer.<sup>245</sup> Turntablist Grandmaster D.ST (later DXT)’s father managed jazz musicians like Clifford Brown and Max Roach.<sup>246</sup> As Butterfly of Digable Planets raps, ‘my father taught me jazz, all the peoples and the anthem/Ate peanuts with the Dizz and vibe with Lionel Hampton’.<sup>247</sup> In many ways, hip-hop and jazz can be seen as separate cultural institutions, which through exchange intensify their social capital through ideological and collaborative alliances.

Although Africentric lineage and aesthetics are, for a large part, substantial motives in sampling jazz (and its reception), I would like to probe the phenomenon

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college-educated, middle-class audiences. Many groups, such as A Tribe Called Quest, did become popular on college campuses before expanding to a wider audience. College radio stations had successful underground hip-hop communities which would also organize hip-hop events on campus. See Chang, *Can’t Stop Won’t Stop*, 422; Shawn Taylor, *People’s Instinctive Travels and the Paths of Rhythm* (New York: Continuum, 2007), 66; Krims, *Rap Music*, 65.

<sup>243</sup> Quoted in Brian Coleman, 447.

<sup>244</sup> One example of a producer influenced by his parents’ jazz tastes is DJ Premier. See Ty Williams ‘Rap Session—Hip-Bop: The Rap/Jazz Connection’, *The Source*, Sept. 1992, 21. See also in Toop, 189; and Brian Coleman, 164–165, 235.

<sup>245</sup> Chang, *Can’t Stop Won’t Stop*, 258.

<sup>246</sup> Fernando, 140.

<sup>247</sup> Butterfly, “Examination of What” (track 14) on Digable Planets, *Reachin’ (A New Refutation of Time and Space)*, (1:45).



from a different angle.<sup>248</sup> In the specific historical moment of the 1980s, as jazz sampling flourished, the proliferation of a jazz as art music ideology had a profound effect on the reception of jazz rap. Rather than jazz being associated with ‘the street’, it had associations with the black bourgeoisie in mainstream reception.

Many groups that sampled jazz were part of a loose collective called the Native Tongues: the Jungle Brothers, De La Soul, and A Tribe Called Quest formed in New York in 1988, rapping politically and socially conscious lyrics while promoting Afrohumanistic identities. They were inspired by the Zulu Nation, and New York City most directly influenced both their jazz awareness and their knowledge of early hip-hop. Shawn Taylor constructed this particular branch of alternative hip-hop in terms of a lineage amongst the Native Tongues.<sup>249</sup> He described the Jungle Brothers as the ‘worldly, educated, yet cool, elder siblings’ and De La Soul as the ‘hyperactive middle child’.<sup>250</sup> With regard to A Tribe Called Quest, in terms of sound and ethos, Taylor placed ATCQ in a spectrum in between De La Soul and the Jungle Brothers:

While ATCQ was a sample-heavy group, they steered away from the ubiquitous funk and old-school soul samples of their fellow Tongue members and embraced rock and roll and jazz; this musical form would become their signature style, in full bloom on their stellar sophomore offering, *The Low End Theory*. ATCQ was positioned equidistant between De La Soul and the Jungle Brothers. They were socially relevant, proudly black and whimsical, quirky and confident, a near perfect amalgamation of the other two groups. But don’t get it twisted: Tribe hit our eardrums on their own terms, with a sound that was all theirs.<sup>251</sup>

Taylor identified jazz sonorities, in opposition to the ‘ubiquitous funk’ samples of the other groups, a crucial observation which was influential in the construction of the subgenre.

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<sup>248</sup> The term ‘Africentrism’ is used in Paul Gilroy, *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness* (London: Verso, 1993), 85.

<sup>249</sup> Taylor, 7.

<sup>250</sup> *Ibid.*, 7–8

<sup>251</sup> *Ibid.*, 9–10.

As suggested by Krims in his genre classification, the lyrics and imagery of these groups often displayed a bohemian ethos.<sup>252</sup> References would span numerous countercultures, from hippies to Five Percenter culture, beatniks and blaxploitation film. In the case of Digable Planets, overt references to bebop and hard bop musicians were side by side with their rendering of existential and Marxist philosophies. Album titles such as Digable Planets's *Reachin': A Refutation of Time and Space* and A Tribe Called Quest's *People Instinctive Travels and the Paths of Rhythm* project the complexity of subject matter through an insider language difficult to decipher (similar to complex bebop song titles such as "Epistrophy" and "Ornithology"). The obscurity of their lyrics combined with jazz sonorities both signalled a higher artistic plane, the notion of rap as high art and expander of consciousness.

I would argue that the construction of an 'alternative' to the mainstream in rap was also the discursive construction of a high art within the rap music world. I hesitate to use the term 'high art' because of its association with classical music, but when discussing 'jazz rap' as a high art, I do not mean a high art within a general society or culture, but a high art within the hip-hop world. To discuss rap music or hip-hop as an art form, writers will construct certain groups or genres at the top of an authenticity hierarchy, juxtaposed against the lower 'mass culture' of gangsta rap and pop rap. Although artists, reviewers and other commentators may not use the terms 'high art' or 'mass culture', the function of their reception creates this distinction which has been used for at least a century in American culture.

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<sup>252</sup> Krims, *Rap Music*, 65–70. Bohemianism is certainly a feature of the bebop ethos and the language and style of the 1950s 'hipsters'. See Philip Ford, 'Somewhere/Nowhere: Hipness as an Aesthetic', *The Musical Quarterly* 86, no. 1 (2002): 49–81.

## Notation of Examples/Jazz Codes

Identifiable elements which have come to symbolize jazz are what I call ‘jazz codes’, such as a walking acoustic bass, saxophones, muted trumpet, and a jazz guitar to name a few. It may be worth restating that I am more concerned with reception than intention or accurately locating a jazz sample source. As Steve Redhead and John Street have written, ‘Authenticity is rarely understood as a question of what artists “really” think or do, but of how they and their music and image are interpreted and symbolized.’<sup>253</sup> So when Marsalis complained that his listeners are simply ‘reacting to what they think it remotely sounds like’,<sup>254</sup> he acknowledged that authorial intent (or performer intent) may differ greatly from audience interpretation. No matter how many programme notes or talks Marsalis provides his audiences, though these certainly can have influence, he can not restrain the mediation of other sources (such as identifications of or comparisons with other cultural forms). For example, an acoustic bass may signify a ‘live’ jazz aesthetic, even though it may be achieved through digital sampling. If a rap group samples from a 1970s funk horn line, in its old context, it may be identified as funk, but in the newer context, the instrumentation of sax and trumpet may be interpreted as jazz. In regards to meaning, how the sound is interpreted is more important than where the sample came from.

A jazz code may also be defined as what Philip Tagg calls a genre synecdoche—an instrument or musical structure that has connotations of another style or genre, as a synecdoche is a part of something which substitutes the whole concept or object. Tagg writes:

In verbal language, a synecdoche denotes a figure of speech in which a part substitutes the whole, as in the expression “all hands

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<sup>253</sup> Steve Redhead and John Street, ‘Have I the Right? Legitimacy, Authenticity and Community in Folk’s Politics’, *Popular Music* 8, no. 2 (1989): 180.

<sup>254</sup> Zabor and Garbarini, ‘Wynton Vs. Herbie’ in Walser, *Keeping Time*, 342.

on deck” ... A musical synecdoche is by analogy any set of musical structures inside a given musical style that refer to another (different, “foreign”, “alien”) musical style by citing one or two elements supposed to be typical of that “other” style when heard in the context of the style into which those “foreign” elements are imported. By citing part of the other style, the citation alludes not only to that other style in its entirety but also potentially refers to the complete genre of which that other music style is a subset.<sup>255</sup>

In ‘jazz rap’, this may be achieved by the timbre of a particular instrument (e.g. saxophone) and the jazz performance approach to an instrument (e.g. ‘walking’ acoustic bass lines).

According to John Fiske, writing about television, codes function in a ‘rule-governed system of signs whose rules and conventions are shared amongst members of a culture ... used to generate and circulate meanings in and for that culture.’<sup>256</sup> Codes, like music genres, simplify in order to clarify and categorize what is an extremely heterogeneous reality. The audience then interprets meanings with regard to these codes, actively constructing from a text. And since texts are not fixed entities, a particular interpretation will change that text. It is not simply a transmission from media to individual, but a conversation between the two. As Joli Jensen has written, ‘Culture isn’t a message being transmitted, via a sender to a receiver. Communication is not linear, and the sender-message-receiver transmission model of communication has largely been abandoned, in favor of a more interpretive, cultural, ritual view.’<sup>257</sup> Media attempt to fix these unfixed texts within genres and labels, but these texts are always sites of constant shifts and change, interpretation largely depending on the perspective of the listener and/or

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<sup>255</sup> Philip Tagg, *Introductory Notes to the Semiotics of Music*, Version 3, (1999), 26–27, available at: <http://www.tagg.org/xpdfs/semiotug.pdf> (accessed 22 August 2009).

<sup>256</sup> John Fiske, *Television Culture* (London: Methuen, 1987), 4.

<sup>257</sup> Joli Jensen, *Is Art Good For Us?: Beliefs about high culture in American Life* (New York: Rowman and Littlefield, 2002), 6.

interpretive communities. In the context of jazz rap, the socially situated interpretations are with respect to the 1980s mainstream jazz art ideology.

A note on the transcriptions: unfortunately, transcription to score does not explain or show some of the most important elements of jazz codes, in other words, what make them a synecdoche of the jazz genre. Rather than syntactical processes (melody and harmony and other musical features that can be represented in score notation) being the most important parameters, elements such as timbre, instrumentation, and performance approaches are arguably more important to jazz identity. Jazz as a performance approach produces a particular jazz feel (notably, ‘swung’ quavers and expressive sub-syntactical microrhythmic variations)<sup>258</sup> as well as timbre (of the particular ‘jazz’ instruments and the timbre created by jazz performance approaches to those instruments).<sup>259</sup> Admittedly, this is better shown through recorded excerpts than the ‘categorical perception’<sup>260</sup> represented in a musical score. It is the sub-syntactical level of expressive timing (what contributes to Keil’s ‘engendered feeling’) that characterizes a ‘swing feel’. As Butterfield argues, the groove in jazz is not from syntactical processes, but expressive microtiming at the sub-syntactical level.<sup>261</sup> In a more abstract manner, David Horn writes:

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<sup>258</sup> Matthew W. Butterfield, ‘The Power of Anacrusis: Engendered Feeling in Groove-Based Musics’, *Music Theory Online* 12, no. 4 (2006). These variations can either be behind the beat (‘lay back’) or in front of the established tempo (‘drive’ or ‘push’).

<sup>259</sup> Cooke also notes the importance of sonorities in jazz: ‘The concept of sonority as structure has become an increasingly valid way of approaching jazz, whether investigating the largely predetermined balancing of tonal contrasts in Jelly Roll Morton’s music of the 1920s or comparable achievements by Ellington, swing bands, Claude Thornhill, Gil Evans or the Miles Davis nonet. The adaptation of idiosyncratic instrumental timbres to expressive ends has always been a characterizing feature of the finest jazz improvisations, and a defining characteristic of Ellington’s soloists from the late 1920s onwards.’ Cooke, ‘Jazz Among the Classics’ in *The Cambridge Companion to Jazz*, 156.

<sup>260</sup> ‘Categorical perception’ is a term that Eric Clarke uses to describe the way we perceive music in certain durational categories (such as quaver, crotchet, minim, etc.). See Eric Clarke, ‘Rhythm and Timing in Music’, in *The Psychology of Music*, ed. Diana Deutch, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Burlington: Burlington Academic Press, 1999), 490.

<sup>261</sup> Butterfield argues that it is the ‘strategic manipulation of anacrusis that drives an effective groove.’ Butterfield, 4.

There is one further, fundamental way in which jazz acquired an identity, and that was through its sound, or, more accurately its combination of sound, rhythm and timing ... Whatever music jazz found itself alongside, it retained the ability to sound different.<sup>262</sup>

Jazz as sonority, timbre, and engendered feeling help prove the existence of identifiable jazz codes. The transcriptions are a shorthand way of locating their structures in the music on the syntactical level, but the recordings themselves are more sufficient in proving how the music actually works in artist, media, and fan cultures. What follows are detailed descriptions of ‘jazz codes’ in the lyrics, imagery and ‘beats’ of two canonical jazz rap groups: A Tribe Called Quest and Digable Planets.

### **A Tribe Called Quest**

A Tribe Called Quest was formed in Queens, New York City, in 1988. The members of the group were producer/DJ Ali Shaheed Muhammad, MC/producer Q-Tip (Jonathan Davis), and MCs Phife (Malik Taylor) and Jarobi (only on the first album). Their first album *People’s Instinctive Travels and the Paths of Rhythm* (1990) featured a number of jazz samples; the group was often compared to their Native Tongue colleagues De La Soul.<sup>263</sup> For example, John Bush writes, ‘One year after De la Soul re-drew the map for alternative rap, fellow Native Tongues

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<sup>262</sup> David Horn, ‘The Identity of Jazz’, in *The Cambridge Companion to Jazz*, 29.

<sup>263</sup> De La Soul’s debut album *3 Feet High and Rising* (1989) is worth mention in this context because it has become somewhat of a landmark in hip-hop historiography for ushering in a new era in rap music, not to mention ‘jazz rap’, because of their drastically different styles in image, lyrics, and music sampled. Neil Kulkarni wrote of *3 Feet High and Rising* that ‘It was as if we’d been watching a black and white movie for nigh on a decade and then somebody came in and asked for the remote and revealed it had been in colour all along.’ Kulkarni, ‘De La Soul, “The Magic Number”’, 37. Imagery of flowers and bright colours on the album were reminiscent of hippie culture, and according to the group, were promoting a ‘D.A.I.S.Y. (Da Inner Sound, Y’all) Age’. The album sampled a wide variety of records: from French lessons, to the Turtles, Steely Dan, to Hall and Oates. Many tracks contained a string of short samples, creating a collage-like effect. Media reception identified many of these samples, as well as the use of humour and the middle-class ethos of the group (as ‘alternative’ to more political rap like Public Enemy). When The Turtles sued De La Soul for copyright infringement, the music became focal point again, setting a precedent that stifled future digital sampling creativity. Nevertheless, De La Soul became the inspiration for other groups seeking different musical sources to follow an ‘alternative’ mould.

brothers A Tribe Called Quest released their debut, the quiet beginning of a revolution in non-commercial hip-hop.<sup>264</sup> The label ‘non-commercial’ hip-hop was a constructed myth since their albums were for sale in numerous stores, and therefore were ‘commercial’. But what Bush and others presented was the idea of an authentic or ‘high art’ rap music which is an alternative to mass culture rap music, purportedly motivated by commercial interests.

A Tribe Called Quest’s first album, *People’s Instinctive Travels and the Paths of Rhythm*, was released on April 17, 1990. Leader Q-Tip was known to hip-hop audiences from his guest rap on “Buddy” on 3 Feet High and Rising (with fellow Native Tongues Afrika and Mike G of the Jungle Brothers). An excerpt from Q-Tip’s third verse from “Push it Along” will demonstrate the abstract nature of their lyrics:

Money gives a nudge to the poet star bandit.  
Control it, then recluse it, follow, you won’t lose it.  
Mysterious is the tribe for we choose it.  
Although she’s flippin’ crazy, give my love to Gracy.  
God, could you help ’cause this Quest is crazy spacey?  
The pigs are wearin’ blue, and in a year or two,  
We’ll be goin’ up the creek in a great big canoe.  
What we gonna do, save me and my brothers?  
Hop inside the bed and pull over the covers.  
Never will we do that and we ain’t tryin’ to rule that.  
We just want a slab of the ham, don’t you know, black?

Such insider language suggested a locally formed culture marginal to other groups. The album included a diverse array of breakbeats, scratching, and other sounds (such as frogs, “The Marseillaise”, Jimi Hendrix, Spanish guitar, sitar, harmonica, timpani, bongos, speeches).

The album presented a number of jazz codes in its sonic texture. “Push it Along” used jazz guitar throughout and featured an alto saxophone solo after the

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<sup>264</sup> John Bush, ‘People’s Instinctive Travels and the Paths of Rhythm’, allmusic.com, available at: <http://www.allmusic.com/cg/amg.dll?p=amg&sql=10:kzfexqlgldte> (accessed 3 July 2007).

second chorus. Saxophone was also featured “Youthful Expression”, and horns (trumpets, trombone, and saxophone) on “Go Ahead in the Rain” and “Luck of Lucien”. “Luck of Lucien” and “Bonita Applebum” included jazz guitar, and a Fender Rhodes keyboard was used on both “Bonita Applebum” and “Push it Along”. “Can I Kick It?” contains an acoustic bass riff which features prominently in the intro and throughout the entire song.

**Example 2.1**—“Push it Along” (0:51) [CD Example 12]

**"Push it Along"**

Jazz Guitar

**Example 2.2**—“Luck of Lucien” (0:12) [CD Example 13]

Most of the jazz codes on the album are located within the aforementioned songs; but it would be their second album that would be more ingrained with the concept of a cohesive ‘jazz rap’ album.



The Low End Theory, their second album, was released on September 21, 1991.<sup>265</sup> The album featured jazz bassist Ron Carter on “Verses from the Abstract”, and jazz samples span the entire album. Acoustic bass featured heavily on “Excursions”, “Buggin Out”, “Verses from the Abstract”, “Skypager”, saxophone on “Check the Rhime”, “Jazz (We’ve Got)”, “Butter” and vibes on “Vibes and Stuff”. True to the title, the album suggests an emphasis on the ‘low end’ of their sound, with the acoustic bass as a prominent jazz signifier in this context.

**Example 2.3**—“Butter” (1:38) [CD Example 14]

**"Butter" - Chorus**

Tenor Saxophone

The musical notation shows a single staff for Tenor Saxophone in 4/4 time. The melody consists of eighth and quarter notes. There are four triplet markings (indicated by a '3' above a bracket) over the following groups of notes: the first three eighth notes of the first measure, the last three eighth notes of the second measure, the last three eighth notes of the third measure, and the last three eighth notes of the fourth measure. The piece ends with a double bar line and repeat dots.

One recurring theme in Q-Tip and Phife’s lyrics (on *The Low End Theory*) was criticism of the music industry and of more ‘commercial’ pop artists, R&B, and ‘new jack swing’.<sup>266</sup> The song “Show Business” expressed the difficulties of working in the rap music industry. Q-Tip raps:

Let me tell you ’bout the snakes, the fakes, the lies  
 The highs at all of these industry shing-dings  
 Where you see the pretty girls  
 In the high animated world...  
 I gotta speak on the cesspool  
 It’s the rap industry and it ain’t that cool  
 Only if you’re on stage or if you’re speakin’ to your people  
 Ain’t no-one your equal  
 Especially on the industry side  
 Don’t let the games just glide  
 Right through your fingers, you gotta know the deal.

Q-Tip also criticized the music industry and sets himself apart from pop rappers in the album’s first single, “Check the Rhime”:

Industry rule number four thousand and eighty,

<sup>265</sup> The ‘low end’ can have multiple meanings, such as a focus on the lower frequencies in the musical spectrum or a focus on the buttocks or ‘booty’.

<sup>266</sup> New jack swing was a style from the late 1980s/early 1990s that fused hip-hop and R&B into a hybrid pop style. Notable producers include Teddy Riley, Jimmy Jam and Terry Lewis.

Record company people are shady.  
So kids watch your back 'cause I think they smoke crack,  
I don't doubt it. Look at how they act.  
Off to better things like a hip-hop forum.  
Pass me the rock and I'll storm with the crew and ...  
Proper. What you say Hammer? Proper.<sup>267</sup>  
Rap is not pop, if you call it that then stop. (2:54–3:14)

In addition to his criticism of the music industry, in the same song, Q-Tip takes a jab at rap scapegoat MC Hammer, saying, 'Rap is not pop, if you call it that then stop'. Q-Tip goes as far as not only to refer to himself as a rapper, but also as 'The Abstract poet, prominent like Shakespeare'.<sup>268</sup> And Phife invokes a similar distancing from pop on their second single, entitled "Jazz (We've Got)", when he claimed that their songs are 'Strictly hardcore tracks, not a new jack swing' (2:02). The chorus of "Jazz" contains a sample of Lucky Thompson playing the first four bars of the jazz standard "On Green Dolphin Street". The song opens with the group chanting 'We've got the jazz' repeatedly with a jazz drummer (on brushes) and an acoustic bass pedal point.

"Check the Rhime" features a saxophone phrase during the chorus,<sup>269</sup> and "Buggin Out" and "Jazz" include an acoustic bass, jazz signifiers which accompany Q-Tip and Phife's opinions on other genres of music. Furthermore, these jazz codes make such a contrast audible, in other words, sampling jazz (with its high art connotations) provided a musical alternative to R&B and pop rap.

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<sup>267</sup> The term 'proper' is a reference to the catchphrase used by MC Hammer in a 1991 Pepsi commercial, which introduced him as 'MC Hammer: rap star and Pepsi drinker'.

<sup>268</sup> "Excursions" (3:19)

<sup>269</sup> This phrase is sampled from "Love Your Life" by the Average White Band from *Soul Searching* (1976) (also sampled by Fatboy Slim for "Love Life"). The song also samples "Hydra" by Grover Washington Jr. from *Feels So Good* (1975) and the bass line from Minnie Riperton's "Baby This Love I Have" and Steve Miller Band's "Fly Like an Eagle".

**Example 2.4**—“Check the Rhime” (0:05) [CD Example 15]

### Check the Rhime



Just as Wynton Marsalis and other ‘neo-classical’ conservative jazz musicians in the 1980s distanced themselves from ‘pop music’ as other, A Tribe Called Quest was also distancing rap from pop.<sup>270</sup> In order to classify A Tribe Called Quest as ‘true’ hip-hop, Q-Tip defined himself against pop rappers like MC Hammer. Both ‘beat’ and ‘flow’ work together to generate this sense of authentic or ‘uncommercial’ identity. A Tribe Called Quest was using the long-standing art-versus-commerce myth, notions of authenticity that align jazz, so-called ‘alternative’ rap, and other musics. Similarly, criticizing the popular music industry positions A Tribe Called Quest on the ‘outside’, again distancing them from associations of corruption and decay often attributed to mass music.

Another example of this pop/rap binary on the Low End Theory is from the first track “Excursions”. After a four-bar bass intro (with no drums), Q-Tip raps the following verse (to the solo acoustic bass accompaniment):

Back in the days when I was a teenager  
Before I had status and before I had a pager  
You could find the Abstract listening to hip-hop  
My pops used to say it reminded him of bebop  
I said, well daddy don’t you know that things go in cycles  
The way that Bobby Brown is just ampin’ like Michael.

In the opening lyrics, we have the acknowledgement of the Africentric lineage from bebop to hip-hop but again we also have juxtaposition, on the one hand, between black ‘pop music’ such as that of Michael Jackson and Bobby Brown, and

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<sup>270</sup> Of course, this distancing from pop had been a phenomenon before the 1980s: bebop musicians distanced themselves from ‘commercial’ swing music of the 30s and 40s and rock and punk musicians have often defined themselves against pop in lyrics and interviews. Even earlier, Louis Armstrong received criticism for surviving the Depression by having a singing career on Broadway.

on the other hand, hip-hop and bebop. As in “Buggin Out”, “Excursions” opens with an acoustic bass figure that loops throughout the song.<sup>271</sup>

**Example 2.5a**—“Excursions” (0:00) [CD Example 16]

"Excursions" - A Tribe Called Quest

The image shows two staves of musical notation. The top staff is labeled "Acoustic Bass" and the bottom staff is labeled "A. Bass". Both staves are in bass clef and show a repeating eighth-note pattern. The Acoustic Bass staff has a treble clef-like key signature with one flat (B-flat). The A. Bass staff has a bass clef-like key signature with two flats (B-flat and E-flat). A triplet of three eighth notes is marked above the A. Bass staff. Asterisks are placed under certain notes in both staves.

The acoustic timbre sampled here projects the ideologeme of musical authenticity that finds its roots in the legitimacy of both folk music and jazz. On the chorus, they also sample an excerpt from the poem “Time” from *The Last Poets*, a borrowing of both lineage and the cultural prestige of poetry.

**Example 2.5b**—“Excursions” (1:40)

"Excursions" - A Tribe Called Quest

The image shows three staves of musical notation. The top staff is labeled "Trumpet in Bb", the middle staff is labeled "Tenor Saxophone", and the bottom staff is labeled "Acoustic Bass". The top two staves are in treble clef, and the bottom staff is in bass clef. The Acoustic Bass staff has a key signature with one flat (B-flat). The Tenor Saxophone staff has a key signature with two flats (B-flat and E-flat). A triplet of three eighth notes is marked above the Tenor Saxophone staff. Asterisks are placed under certain notes in the Acoustic Bass staff.

<sup>271</sup> This bass riff is from “A Chant for Bu” by Art Blakey and the Jazz Messengers. The original is in  $\frac{3}{4}$  time, and producer Q-Tip was able to copy-and-paste the first two quavers of the bar to create a beat in common time: ‘I took the original bass line, which was in  $\frac{3}{4}$  time, and I put a beat onto the last measure to make it  $\frac{4}{4}$ . I made the drums underneath smack, so it had that big sound. And I put a reverse [Roland TR-] 808 [drum machine] behind it, right before the beat actually kicks in. I loved that Last Poets sample on there, too.’ Quoted in Brian Coleman, 443.

The idea of being ‘uncommercial’ (not ‘selling out’) was a characteristic of authenticity found in a number of music genres and exists as far back as romantic notions of transcendence and timelessness in nineteenth-century music. Bourdieu has written about the idea of economic disinterestedness as a bourgeois production illusion:

If economics deals only with practices that have narrowly economic interest as their principle and only with goods that are directly and immediately convertible into money (which makes them quantifiable), then the universe of bourgeois production and exchange becomes an exception and can see itself and present itself as a realm of disinterestedness. As everyone knows, priceless things have their price, and the extreme difficulty of converting certain practices and certain objects into money is only due to the fact that this conversion is refused in the very intention that produces them, which is nothing other than the denial (Verneinung) of the economy.<sup>272</sup>

Groups like A Tribe Called Quest distanced themselves from ‘pop music’ by suggesting that the latter is solely interested in economic profit. Borrowing from jazz, A Tribe Called Quest used a music whose status was established as a national ‘art form’, and which also espoused the appearance of economic disinterestedness. Both Wynton Marsalis and A Tribe Called Quest used economic denial, a quality of bourgeois production, as testimony of their authenticity.<sup>273</sup>

In terms of media reception, ‘jazz rap’ groups like A Tribe Called Quest were often defined by their sounds in ways that their counterparts in other genres could not be. To quote Crane, ‘Cultural information that is already familiar because of its associations with previous items of culture is more readily assimilated into the core’,<sup>274</sup> the ‘already familiar’ being sonorities (and attached ideologies) of mainstream jazz in the 1980s. The ‘core’, in this case, is the jazz as focal point or

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<sup>272</sup> Pierre Bourdieu, ‘The Forms of Capital’, in *Handbook of Theory and Research for the Sociology of Education*, ed. John G. Richardson (London: Greenwood Press, 1986), 242.

<sup>273</sup> Marsalis frequently spoke out against ‘commercialism’ in music. These debates in jazz have long preceded Marsalis, two examples being jazz fusion in the 1970s and bebop’s distancing from swing music in the 1940s.

<sup>274</sup> Crane, 10.

framework in reviews and articles about these rap groups; and print media such as Rolling Stone, The Source, Vibe and Rap Pages contextualized the jazz samples in terms of class, artistic achievement, and even intelligence.

One Rolling Stone review described the sounds as ‘funkified quiet-storm pseudo-jazz you might expect young Afro-centric upwardly mobiles to indulge in when they crack open that bottle of Amaretto and cuddle up in front of the gas fireplace: plenty of sweet silky saxophones.’<sup>275</sup> John Bush wrote, ‘Without question the most intelligent, artistic rap group during the 1990s, A Tribe Called Quest jump-started and perfected the hip-hop alternative to hardcore and gangsta rap.’<sup>276</sup> One writer expressed that the Low End Theory ‘demonstrated that hip-hop was an aesthetic every bit as deep, serious and worth cherishing as any in a century plus of African-American music ... giving a rap the same aesthetic weight as a Coltrane solo.’<sup>277</sup> Journalist Brian Coleman wrote of the group, ‘Every time they hit the studio they added a serious, studious, jazz edge to their supremely innovative productions.’<sup>278</sup> A record review for their third album wrote, ‘This non-blunt smoking, gun-toting, bitch beating trio rely solely on their street poetry, Zulu delivery and bebop beats to get you up off your ass and into the record store.’<sup>279</sup> Other adjectives used in the media suggested that they were ‘more cerebral’<sup>280</sup> than other styles, had a ‘more intellectual bent’,<sup>281</sup> and were ‘more reflective’.<sup>282</sup> Many

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<sup>275</sup> Chuck Eddy, ‘Review of *People’s Instinctive Travels and the Paths of Rhythm*’, Rolling Stone 576, 19 April 1990, 15.

<sup>276</sup> John Bush, ‘A Tribe Called Quest’, allmusic.com.

<sup>277</sup> Peter Shapiro, *The Rough Guide to Hip-Hop*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (London: Rough Guides Ltd., 2005), 363, 365.

<sup>278</sup> Brian Coleman, 435.

<sup>279</sup> dream hampton, ‘Record Report—Midnight Marauders’, *The Source*, December 1993, 88.

<sup>280</sup> Big B, ‘Record Report—Arrested Development’, *The Source*, May 1992, no. 32, 56. See also ‘Jazz Rap’, in *The All Music Guide to Hip Hop*, ix.

<sup>281</sup> ‘Given its more intellectual bent, it’s not surprising that jazz-rap never really caught on as a street favorite, but then it wasn’t meant to.’ ‘Jazz Rap’, *The All Music Guide to Hip Hop*, ix. ‘An intellectual dimension in rap music also defies categorization. Its most prominent practitioners, De La Soul, represent a distinct middle-class, high-brow style of rap that rejects the props of the gangstas or the Afrocentrists.’ William Eric Perkins, ‘Youth’s global Village: an epilogue’, in

of these descriptions are in comparison with an other, real or imagined, to describe the music as ‘artistic’ or as an ‘aesthetic’— in other words, a (bourgeois) high art comparable to jazz.

### **Digable Planets**

Formed in 1989, Members Butterfly (Ishmael Butler, from Brooklyn), Doodlebug (Craig Irving, from Philadelphia), and Ladybug (Mary Ann Viera, from Maryland) began to write music and shop their demo to labels. *Reachin’* (A New Refutation of Time and Space), their 1993 debut album, sampled from multiple jazz sources on nearly all of the songs. Their single “Rebirth of Slick (Cool Like Dat)”<sup>283</sup> was released in November 1992 in anticipation of the February 1993 album release. A performance on the sketch comedy show *In Living Color* on January 3, 1993 led to a leap in single sales. “Rebirth of Slick” received heavy radio airplay by January, the accompanying music video was prevalent on both MTV and BET, and it had sold 400,000 copies by early February.<sup>284</sup> “Rebirth of Slick (Cool Like Dat)” reached number one on the Billboard ‘Hot Rap Singles’ on Feb 6, 1993 and received a cover article that month in *Billboard* magazine, due in part to the unexpected popularity of their single.

More than the other ‘alternative’ or ‘jazz rap’ groups at the time, Digable Planets most overtly flaunted jazz connections and references, mentioning jazz musicians in many of their lyrics. Their bohemian image had been largely

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Droppin Science: Critical Essays on Rap Music and Hip Hop Culture, ed. William Eric Perkins (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1996), 260.

<sup>282</sup> ‘Among the leading proponents of this more reflective style (including De La Soul and the Jungle Brothers), A Tribe Called Quest was arguably the most accomplished.’<sup>282</sup> Considine and Randall, ‘A Tribe Called Quest’.

<sup>283</sup> The title of “Rebirth of Slick (Cool Like Dat)” is reminiscent of the 1957 Miles Davis album *Birth of the Cool* and may be a subtle allusion to the album. Secondly, Ishmael Butler has stated in interviews that the first half of their album title (*Reachin’*) was an homage to the old Blue Note jazz albums (e.g. *Cookin’ with the Miles Davis Quintet* or *Walkin’*). See Brian Coleman, 169.

<sup>284</sup> Janine McAdams, ‘Planets Probe Rap Frontier: ‘Digable’ Debut Jazzes up Genre’ *Billboard*, 6 February 1993, 1, 81. Irving recalls, ‘That song got to the point where it was just everywhere, on the radio every five seconds.’ Quoted in Brian Coleman, 170.

borrowed from the concept of the 1950s hipster, itself an oblique reference to jazz, using words like ‘cool’, ‘cat’, ‘hip’ and ‘dig’. Jazz, as prevalent in their music and lyrics, was used as a marketing tool for Digable Planets. An ad for the upcoming album in *The Source* contained the headline ‘jazz, jive, poetry, & style’.<sup>285</sup> The *Source* magazine also included pictures of the group in a jazz club setting to accompany their interview, with both male members being photographed with a trumpet. And their first music video, for “Rebirth of Slick”, featured the group performing in a jazz club setting in New York. Jazz became the vehicle which to market Digable Planets and the framework to use for reviews, interviews, and other journalism.

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<sup>285</sup> *The Source*, April 1993. Their ‘hip’ image could be viewed as an extension of De La Soul’s ‘hippie’ image from their first album *3 Feet High and Rising* (which they quickly eschewed in their follow-up *De La Soul is Dead*). While the hipster and hippie represent different eras, both groups and movements emphasize a focus on the individual and belonging to a ‘countercultural’ community.



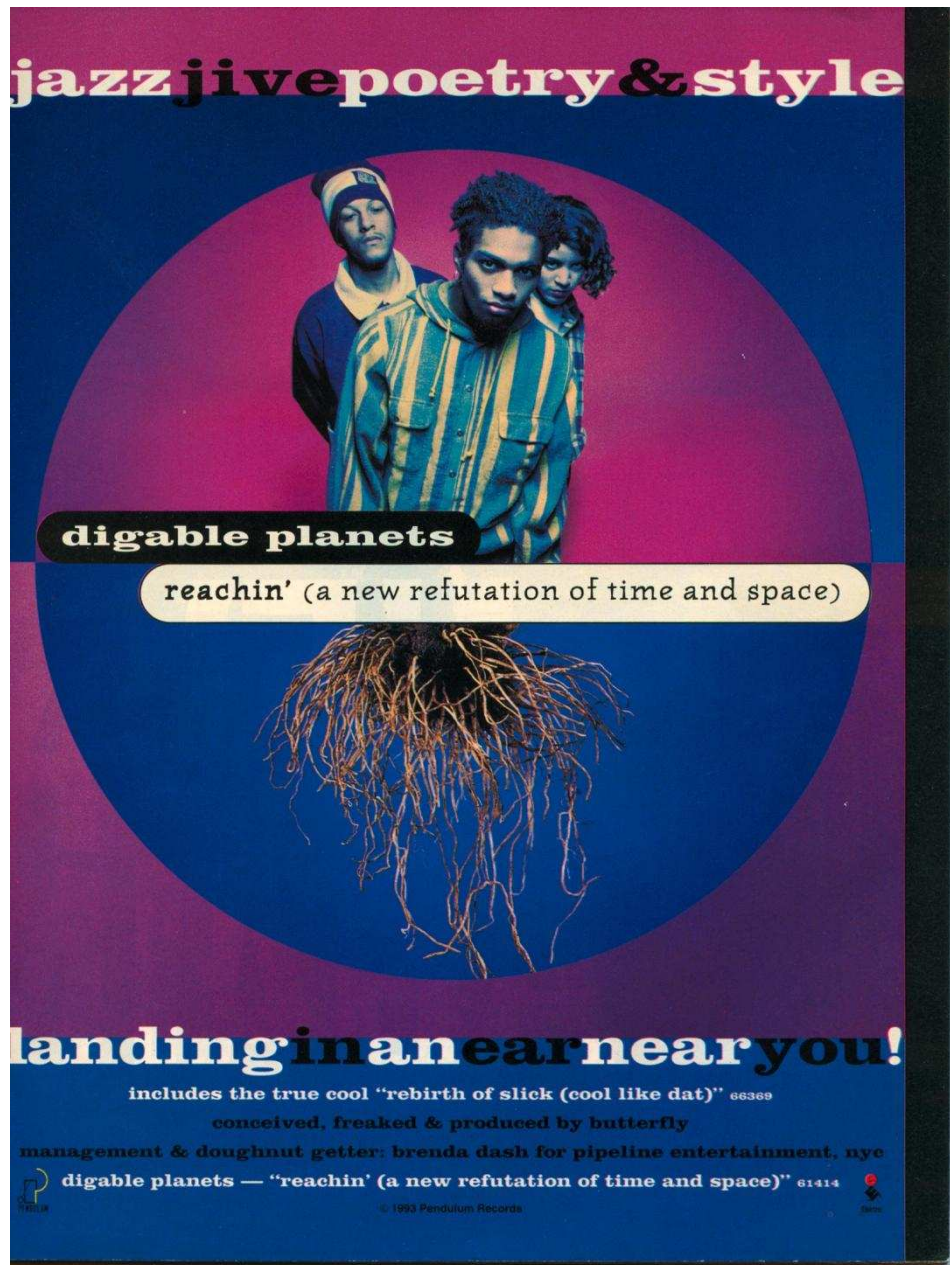


Figure 2.1–Digable Planets advertisement



Figure 2.2—The Source, April 1993



**Figure 2.3—The Source, April 1993**

The complex collage of terminology and cultural references in their lyrics borrowed from multiple countercultures, such as the terminology of the 1950s hipsters and beat poets, spoken word poetry, hippies, Nation of Islam and Five Percenter Culture, ‘old school’ hip-hop (Fab 5 Freddy, Crazy Legs of the Rock Steady Crew), other poetry (The Last Poets, Nikki Giovanni, Maya Angelou), as well as myriad jazz references (Charles Mingus, Charlie Parker, Hank Mobley,

Dizzy Gillespie, Max Roach, etc), references from 1970s blaxploitation film ('Cleopatra Jones') and other signifiers of African-American identity (black iconic figures, Afros and other hair references such as 'don't cover up your nappy, be happy with your kinkin' from "Examination of What"). The nature of the lyrics contained a focus on individuality, with cultural references that transcended generational boundaries. The beats produced for the album were interspersed with a number of jazz codes, particularly saxophone and trumpet licks, but also walking acoustic bass, jazz guitar and piano. As in so many American countercultures, particularly those in the 1950s and 1960s, references to drugs (usually marijuana, as 'nickel bags') complemented an anti-authoritarian atmosphere (speaking against Uncle Sam, the 'pigs', and 'fascist' conservatives).

The concept behind the name of the group was that every individual is a planet that is run by its brain and the 'digable' was inspired by jazz hipster terminology. Frequent use of term 'insects' in their lyrics, according to Butterfly, referenced socialism. He stated in an interview, 'The insect theory is the son of socialist readings. Knowing where you stand in this society you look at ants and their hill, they're always around it, protecting it. Cats is going out getting food, bringing it back. Think of the Communist Manifesto's last sentence, "workers of the world unite." In front of, "of the world unite," you would put anything: it's about unity'.<sup>286</sup> A reference to existentialist writers from the song "Pacifics" became frequently cited in album reviews:

Vibin' off the jams of the crews on Sugar Hill  
Lay around and think ain't nothin to do  
Checkin out some Frommes, some Sartre, Camus  
Mingus' Ah Um, damn Roach can drum.

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<sup>286</sup> Touré, 'Digging the Planets', *The Source*, April 1993, 36. Insect references could also be an oblique reference to jazz standards like "Ladybird".

In only four lines, there are references to existentialist writers, jazz musicians, as well as an old school hip-hop record label (Sugarhill Records). The variety of intertextuality in the lyrics may point to an index of authenticity in hip-hop concerned with knowledge and teaching that knowledge to others.<sup>287</sup> Writers and critics often cited “La Femme Fetal”, which deals with the legal issues of abortion, as exemplary of the group’s politically-conscious lyrics.

The sonic and visual imagery of the jazz club played a significant role in their music, as well as in their media image. At the end of the first track of *Reachin’*, “It’s Good to Be Here” (which included jazz guitar, trumpet, and acoustic bass), an announcer (3:25) begins to introduce the group to the backdrop of a jazz piano vamp, with bass and snapping on the backbeat (beats 2 and 4 in 4/4 time):

Good evening insects, humans too  
The Cocoon Club<sup>288</sup> is pleased to present to you tonight a new  
band  
Straight from sector six and the colorful ghettos of outer space  
They are some weird mother fuckers but they do jazz it up  
So let’s bring them out here, yeah.

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<sup>287</sup> Gilroy identifies pedagogy as one of three important strands within hip-hop: ‘pedagogy, affirmation, and play’. Gilroy, *The Black Atlantic*, 85.

<sup>288</sup> Perhaps a reference to the famous Cotton Club of Harlem as well as continuing the insect metaphor.

**Example 2.6**—“It’s Good to Be Here” (1:25) [CD Example 17]

**"It's Good to Be Here"**

Musical score for "It's Good to Be Here" (1:25). The score is arranged in two systems. The first system includes Trumpet, Jazz Guitar, and Acoustic Bass. The second system includes Tpt. (Trumpet), J. Gtr. (Jazz Guitar), and A. Bass (Acoustic Bass). The Tpt. part features a triplet of eighth notes with the instruction "With echo effects".

**Example 2.7**—“Jazz Club Motive” from “It’s Good to Be Here” (3:35) [CD Ex.

18]

**Digable Planets - Jazz Club Motive**

Musical score for "Digable Planets - Jazz Club Motive". The score is arranged in four staves. The first staff is Keyboard w/piano sound, with "swing feel" and "vamp" markings. The second staff is Bass. The third staff is Ride cymbal. The fourth staff is Finger snaps. The score is in 4/4 time and includes a triplet of eighth notes in the Bass part.

Following this introduction from the announcer, Butterfly introduces the group, then says, ‘the mind is time/the mind is space/a horn rush, a bass flush/ the mind’s the taste/so sit back, enjoy the set, yeah’ and repeats his phrase numerous times during a fade out. The music video for “Rebirth of Slick” features the members taking the New York subway to a local jazz club where they perform with a

Japanese rhythm section to a diverse, yet small, audience. (The entire video is shot in black-and-white.) The irony of this is obvious, promoting a ‘live’ aesthetic of a jazz club for a recording that had been constructed through digital sampling. But these jazz instruments suggest liveness, even if it is not accurately the case.<sup>289</sup> Furthermore, a sound can symbolize liveness without being recorded live: after all, no recording is actually a ‘live performance’, though some signify liveness more than others. Because of the cultural associations with acoustic jazz (in this case, acoustic bass, piano, and drums playing a jazz vamp), these jazz instruments would be ‘heard’ as live, one trait of a particular jazz authenticity which suggests unmediated expression and creativity. No doubt the narration of the ‘announcer’ plays a crucial role in creating a jazz club soundscape as well. A similar effect occurs at the end of “Swoon Units” (track 13), creating a jazz club vibe with a jazz rhythm section and the sound of audience talking (as Butterfly says he is ‘hippin up the nerds’). At the end of the album, each member of the band provides a final stanza with the earlier ‘jazz club motive’ sonic background. These three separate ‘jazz club’ interludes on the album use the same musical material, and it is this repetition (along with repeated listening of the album) of the ‘jazz club motive’ and the use of jazz signifiers within each of the songs which influenced the interpretation of various jazz tropes as central themes or as fundamental to the group’s image and style.

A song that became exemplary of Digable Planets’s style was their first single “Rebirth of Slick (Cool Like Dat)”, in part, because of the high degree of success it received. The introduction consists of 16 bars (4+4+4+4 bars); the first 4

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<sup>289</sup> It is important to note that jazz’s live and acoustic identity was an important factor in the 1980s neoconservative authenticity of jazz (for example, what Marsalis would programme for Lincoln Center).

bars include the solo walking acoustic bass phrase which repeats throughout the song (as Bass figure 1).<sup>290</sup>

**Example 2.8a**—[CD Example 19]

**"Rebirth of Slick (Cool like Dat)"**

The image shows two staves of musical notation. The top staff is labeled 'Acoustic Bass' and 'Bass figure 1'. It features a walking bass line in 4/4 time, starting with a half note on C2, followed by eighth notes: D2, E2, F2, G2, A2, B2, C3, D3, E3, F3, G3, A3, B3, C4, D4, E4, F4, G4, A4, B4, C5. The bottom staff is labeled 'A. Bass' and 'Bass figure 2 (last 4 bars of each verse)'. It starts with a half note on C2, followed by eighth notes: D2, E2, F2, G2, A2, B2, C3, D3, E3, F3, G3, A3, B3, C4, D4, E4, F4, G4, A4, B4, C5. A bracket under the last four bars of this staff is labeled '1-bar rhythm section break going into chorus'.

The second four bars consist of bass figure 1 accompanied by finger snapping on beats 2 and 4. The third set of four bars adds drums, and the fourth four bars add a horn line with saxophone and trumpet. Verses include acoustic bass and drums, with a variation on the bass line (Bass figure 2) every last four bars of the verse. On the chorus, the words “I’m cool like that” repeat every two beats with the horn line from the intro (with the bass and drums).

Bars	"Rebirth of Slick" Intro
b. 1–4	Solo acoustic bass (figure one)
b. 5–9	Bass fig 1 with finger snaps
b. 10–14	Bass fig 1 with finger snaps and drums
b. 15–19	Bass w/ snaps, drums, and horn line

**Table 2.1**—“Rebirth of Slick,” opening bars

**Example 2.8b**—“Rebirth of Slick” chorus (0:29) [CD Example 19]

The image shows four staves of musical notation for the chorus. The top staff is 'Trumpet', the second is 'Tenor Saxophone and Trombone', the third is 'Acoustic Bass', and the bottom is 'Finger snaps'. The key signature has one sharp (F#) and the time signature is 4/4. The trumpet and saxophone parts play a melodic line: C4, D4, E4, F4, G4, A4, B4, C5. The acoustic bass part plays a walking bass line: C2, D2, E2, F2, G2, A2, B2, C3, D3, E3, F3, G3, A3, B3, C4, D4, E4, F4, G4, A4, B4, C5. The finger snaps part shows a rhythmic pattern: a quarter note on beat 2 and a quarter note on beat 4 of each measure.

<sup>290</sup> The bass line also features as leitmotif in “Appointment at the Fat Clinic” (track 11) and “Escapism (Gettin’ Free)” (track 10), not as central to the basic beat as in “Rebirth of Slick”, but as a small moment within the other two songs. This bass line, now associated with Digable Planets’ moment of success, has been sampled by later rap artists (such as E-40 for “Yay Area”).



That particular sonic texture from the chorus (horns, bass, and drums) becomes the central jazz trope in the song. Doodlebug's third verse demonstrates the abstract/specialist language of their lyrics:

We get you free 'cause the clips be fat boss  
 Them dug the jams that commence to goin' off  
 She sweats the beats and ask me could she puff it  
 Me I got crew kid, seven and a crescent  
 Us cause a buzz when the nickel bag a dealt  
 Him that's my man with the asteroid belt  
 They catch a fizz from the Mr. Doodlebig  
 He rocks a tee from the Crooklyn nine pigs  
 Rebirth of slick like my gangster stroll  
 The lyrics just like loot come in stacks and rolls  
 You used to find the bug in a box with fade  
 Now he boogies up your stage plaits twist the braids.

The single reached number 1 on the Billboard Hot Rap chart and number 15 on the Billboard Hot 100 Singles chart, and the album reached number 15 on the Billboard Top 200. "Rebirth of Slick (Cool Like Dat)" also received a Grammy in 1994 for Best Rap Performance by a Duo or Group.

"Last of the Spiddyocks" is lyrically filled with allusions to jazz musicians.<sup>291</sup> The beat features a harmon mute trumpet<sup>292</sup> with reverb and echo (on the chorus) and a sax (on the verse), as well as an acoustic bass throughout.

**Example 2.9**—[CD Example 20]

"Dance of the Spiddyocks"

Trumpet

Harmon mute

With echo and reverb effects

<sup>291</sup> According to Butler, a spiddyock 'was a term from when my dad was growing up, and it meant a real jazzhead type of person. You dressed a certain way and listened to a certain kind of music.' The track includes trumpeter Steven Bernstein and bassist Alan Goldsher playing live, so Butler did not have to pay for an Art Farmer sample he wanted to use. Brian Coleman, 171.

<sup>292</sup> A harmon mute is a specific type of mute for brass instruments which is made of metal and creates a quieter, tinny sound. The mute has a ring of cork around the outside so that air through the instrument can only escape through the mute. It has a sharp, metallic sound which was often used to change timbre of the trumpet or trombone in jazz big band music. It can be played with or without a metal 'stem' inserted in the mute, drastically changing its sound. More than anyone, its sound is associated with Miles Davis who used the mute (without stem) frequently during his long career.

A harmon mute trumpet solo, as an extra layer over the repeating harmon mute riff, is added after Butterfly's second chorus. For many listeners, the trumpet with harmon mute is most representative of the iconic jazz sound of Miles Davis. Lyrically, the references to jazz musicians are plentiful, with mentions of Charlie Parker, Charles Mingus, Bud Powell, Dizzy Gillespie, Hank Mobley, Eric Dolphy, John Coltrane, Ornette Coleman, Thelonious Monk, Max Roach, Philly Joe Jones, Booker, and Jimmy Cobb. Rap culture has always included peer references in their lyrics, and the amount of jazz musicians mentioned here rivals any of the most name-dense raps from other artists and subgenres. One example from Butterfly's first verse provides an example:

Maybe only we was hip to stretchin' out the brain  
I felt like Bird Parker when I shot it in my vein  
I toss these major losses on the Mingus jazzy strum  
Flip off into a nod and dig myself for dyin' young  
It's like cool was the bop and the flair  
I kicks to my pools by the nap of their hair  
I'm pinnin' Uncle Sam for the death of swingin' quotes  
For losin' Bud Powell slidin' over Dizzy's notes  
Was it that the rebirth was the birth for new shit, of cool shit  
The jazz power shower showed the crew was sure legit  
By hey, Prez is since gone, Hank Mo's gone  
They kill the coolest breeze in this land of the free.

The line 'The jazz power shower showed the crew was sure legit' (1:34), exemplifies my point that sampling jazz in the early 1990s added an element of legitimacy to these rap groups. Butterfly later says in the song, 'you down with Diggable Planets you's a hipster' (2:29), and Doodlebug comments, 'I'm digging how these dudes made my buzz a little hipper and angles on the moves really couldn't get no blacker', linking these jazz musicians to both hipness and expressions of blackness. The song ends with Butterfly yet again: 'Infect space y'all/we swing time y'all/it's like milk yeah/it's like be bop/the new scat slips/we got fly kicks/it's like jazz uh/it's like us now' (3:58). The final line, 'it's like us

now’, confirms that the torch has been passed to them, the authenticity of these musicians from an earlier era having become part of Digable Planets’s claim to authority. The legitimacy with which jazz was associated coincides with the intellectualism and intertextuality in their lyrics (‘we was hip to stretchin’ out the brain’). The song ends with the sound of audience applause, once again signifying ‘liveness’.

Media reception of *Reachin’* focused on jazz as a ‘high’ culture aspect of their music. Lyrical references to jazz and musical borrowing of jazz codes featured prominently in the reviews. One article, entitled ‘Planets Probe Rap Frontier: “Digable” Debut Jazzes up Genre’, described their style:

Tapping a musical wellspring that runs from Kool & the Gang and Herbie Hancock to works by Miles Davis, Dizzy Gillespie, and Bud Powell, with lyrical overtones of the works of such writers as Camus, Sartre, and Kafka, Digable Planets introduce a distinctly intellectual element to Afrocentric rap music.<sup>293</sup>

Kevin Powell wrote in his review that Digable Planets ‘is everything hip-hop should be: artistically sound, unabashedly conscious and downright cool. And Digable Planets is the kind of rap act every fan should cram to understand.’<sup>294</sup> Both of these reviews mentioned an element of intellectualism in their music, with the former review explicitly citing the jazz and existentialist references. Another review wrote that *Reachin’* ‘Sampled snatches of music from jazzmen Sonny Rollins and Art Blakey conjure the feel of smoky bebop clubs and two-drink minimums ... these jazzy undercurrents give the album a laid-back quality that refutes the riotous stereotype of rap.’<sup>295</sup>

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<sup>293</sup> McAdams, 81.

<sup>294</sup> Kevin Powell, ‘Review of *Reachin’ (A Refutation of Time and Space)*’ (4 stars), *Rolling Stone* 650, 18 February 1993, 61. Powell is most likely referencing the MC Lyte song “I Cram to Understand You”.

<sup>295</sup> Farley, ‘Hip-hop Goes Bebop’.

A common theme in many reviews of these ‘jazz rap’ and ‘alternative rap’ groups was their appeal to a broad audience, often termed as their ‘accessibility’:

They were accessible without succumbing to a pop mentality. And even when they crossed over with ‘Cool Like Dat,’ they still dropped science and remembered where they came from. They reminded us that men and women are capable of sharing the stage and rocking together just like the old days. And their butter smooth jazz tracks provided soothing diversions from reality. All in all, a welcome blend of style and substance.<sup>296</sup>

Female rappers had been around in the 1980s, but usually as individual artists rather than part of a group (including MC Lyte, Queen Latifah, and Roxanne Shante). Pre-“Rappers Delight” (1979), a time when many perceived hip-hop at its most authentic and localized (see previous chapter), a number of MC groups included females, which did not happen with later recorded rap groups.

Shapiro wrote that *Reachin’* ‘was a big crossover hit among those who got into hip-hop during its sampladelic golden age, but were now scared off by Dr. Dre’s amorality.’<sup>297</sup> This juxtaposition with Dr. Dre is particularly pertinent in the context of Dignable Planets since they had albums and singles released at similar times.<sup>298</sup> Dr. Dre’s *The Chronic*, discussed in greater detail in the next chapter, is often seen as the yardstick historically and generically when gangsta rap begins to dominate the rap mainstream and crosses over into ‘pop music’ realms.<sup>299</sup> Other jazz rap groups had also been directly compared with Dr. Dre, as Kevin Powell wrote that A Tribe Called Quest and De La Soul provided ‘nuthin’ but “P” things: poetry, positive vibes, and a sense of purpose.’<sup>300</sup> This was a reference to Dr. Dre’s

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<sup>296</sup> Editors of *The Source*, ‘Pop Life’, *The Source*, January 1994, 26.

<sup>297</sup> Shapiro, 88.

<sup>298</sup> Both Dignable Planets (“Rebirth of Slick (Cool Like Dat)”) and Dr. Dre (“Nuthin’ But a ‘G’ Thang”) had a single and music video permeating media space at the same time. See *Billboard*, 6 Feb. 1993. Both singles were nominated for the Best Rap Performance by a Duo or Group Grammy Award, with Dignable Planets winning the Grammy over Dr. Dre and Snoop Doggy Dogg.

<sup>299</sup> See Chang, *Can’t Stop Won’t Stop*, 420; and Eithne Quinn, *Nuthin’ but a “g” Thang: The Culture and Commerce of Gangsta Rap* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2005), 161.

<sup>300</sup> Kevin Powell, ‘Review of *Midnight Marauders* and *Buhloone Mindstate*’, *Vibe*, November 1993, 103.

“Nuthin’ But a ‘G’ Thang”, the first single from The Chronic. Thus, when the media reviewed Digable Planets or other jazz rap artists and albums, they contrasted jazz rap with Dr. Dre (and Death Row Records) as representative of a gangsta rap mainstream. These comparisons were in terms of sonorities used, lifestyles promoted, and ideologies. One article states:

In the early 1990s, while Suge Knight's Death Row records dominated hip-hop with artists like Dr. Dre and Tupac, Digable Planets chose the same high road that De La Soul and A Tribe Called Quest had already taken—they all but ignored gangsta culture. MCs Doodlebug, Butterfly, and the sweet-voiced Ladybug combined a positive vibe with jazz samples to create ultra-laid-back joints that provoked head bobbing rather than drive-bys. Their debut, *Reachin'*, invaded college boom boxes and birthed the Top 20 hit and Grammy winner "Rebirth of Slick (Cool Like Dat)".<sup>301</sup>

Placing De La Soul, A Tribe Called Quest, and Digable Planets on a ‘high road’ in opposition to Death Row artists like Dr. Dre and Tupac Shakur juxtaposes the two in terms of subgenre and implies both Digable Planets’ perceived audience and their listening space (‘college boom boxes’). Though both Dr. Dre and Digable Planets were considered ‘rap music’, the two began to represent opposite ends of a rap spectrum.<sup>302</sup>

### **Jazz’s Appropriation of Hip-hop**

If jazz and hip-hop are most often treated as separate musical and cultural institutions, then the linking of the two acted as a symbolic exchange, forming an

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<sup>301</sup> David Malley, ‘Digable Planets’ *Rolling Stone Album Guide*, 2004, available at: <http://www.rollingstone.com/artists/digableplanets/biography> (accessed 1 June 2007).

<sup>302</sup> The Los Angeles ‘alternative rap’ group The Pharcyde began to receive similar treatment, especially in consideration of their city’s association with gang violence, gangsta rap, and the Los Angeles Riots of 1992. One writer noted ‘When L.A.’s Pharcyde blew up in 1992, critics marveled that they came from Los Angeles but *weren’t* gangstas’. Gabriel Alvarez, ‘Gangsta Rap in the ’90s’ in *The Vibe History of Hip Hop*, ed. Alan Light (New York: Three Rivers Press, 1999), 292. Their first album, *Bizarre Ride II the Pharcyde*, was described as ‘the most thoroughly conceived and flawlessly executed of any of the alternative releases of that era ... They constituted a dissident movement against the nascent G-themed music that was quickly becoming the industry standard.’ Cobb, 66.

alliance to increase their social capital.<sup>303</sup> It was a symbiotic relationship between an old style, already infused with cultural capital, and novelty—hip-hop as the new style in the lineage of black expression. The Africentric link formed its own collective network where social capital was important, in light of the disenfranchised and marginalized status of African-Americans throughout history and their struggle for social equality in the United States. Jazz has had a long history of appropriating and transforming other genres of music (Latin musics, rock and avant-garde styles to name a few), and elements from hip-hop seem a next logical step in this history of appropriation.<sup>304</sup> Various jazz musicians began to collaborate with hip-hop producers, rappers, turntablists and DJs, and younger jazz musicians were utilizing sampling technologies in their performances and recordings.<sup>305</sup>

Live collaboration of rap and jazz was attempted as early as 1982, when Max Roach performed with rapper Fab Five Freddy in New York.<sup>306</sup> Miles Davis's final album, released posthumously, was a hip-hop collaboration with producer Easy Mo Bee. In the album entitled *Doo-Bop* (1992), Davis re-affirmed his status as jazz innovator and fusion artist, trying to create a new hybrid with hip-hop. Branford Marsalis was performing live with DJ Premier in the early 1990s and released two hip-hop albums under the name Buckshot LeFonque. Jazz musicians

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<sup>303</sup> Bourdieu makes the distinction between social capital and cultural capital in 'The Forms of Capital', 243–248.

<sup>304</sup> For an important history of 'jazz's practice of appropriation' with a heavy emphasis on jazz's fusion with rock music see Stuart Nicholson 'Fusions and Crossovers', in *The Cambridge Companion to Jazz*, 217–252. See also Stuart Nicholson, *Is Jazz Dead?* (London: Routledge, 2005).

<sup>305</sup> Matthew Bourne is one such example of a jazz piano player who uses samplers as part of his improvisatory performances. See Chapter 6, 'Future Jazz', in Stuart Nicholson, *Is Jazz Dead?*

<sup>306</sup> Fab Five Freddy's godfather was Max Roach, and many prominent jazz musicians were guests in his house as he grew up. As Chang writes, 'He had spent his childhood in casual proximity to Black genius. The bebop elite frequented his family's house, people like Bud Powell, Thelonious Monk, Clifford Brown, and Freddy's godfather Max Roach. His grandfather had been an associate of Marcus Garvey. His father, an accountant, was in the audience at the Audubon Ballroom when Malcolm X was shot. Freddy was born with an awareness of walking proudly through history.' Chang, *Can't Stop Won't Stop*, 147.

Herbie Hancock,<sup>307</sup> Quincy Jones,<sup>308</sup> Wallace Roney,<sup>309</sup> and Greg Osby<sup>310</sup> were making hip-hop influenced albums in the 1980s and 1990s. Dr. Billy Taylor released a ‘jazz rap’ in the song “On This Lean, Mean Street” on his 1995 album *Homage*. Another group worth mentioning is US 3, which originated from two British producers (Geoff Wilkinson and Mel Simpson) working in London. Blue Note Records let them sample extensively from their catalogue, and they produced *Hand on the Torch* (1993), which became the top-selling album on Blue Note Records (up to that time) and the first Blue Note release to reach platinum sales in the US. Their single “Cantaloup (Flip Fantasia)” received widespread radio play and added to the jazz and hip-hop fusion trends at the time. According to Stuart Nicholson, ‘The group’s popularity prompted a re-release programme by Blue Note called the “Rare Groove Series” dedicated to heroes of 1950s and 1960s soul jazz such as Donald Byrd, Grant Green, Gene Harris, Ronnie Laws, Horace Silver and Lonnie Smith.’<sup>311</sup>

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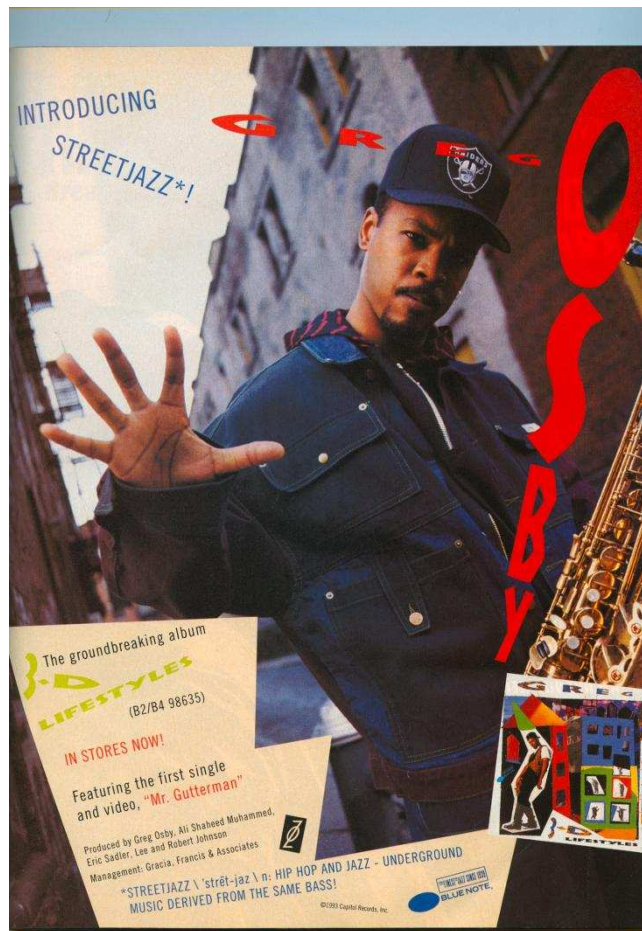
<sup>307</sup> Herbie Hancock, *Dis is Da Drum* (1994), Mercury Records. It is worth mentioning that Branford Marsalis was director of the Tonight Show Band from 1992–1995, starting his position when Jay Leno replaced Johnny Carson as host. The shift in host was accompanied by shift from a Big Band (the ‘NBC Orchestra’) music format to a smaller jazz group (with musicians who played active roles in the ‘neo-classical’ hard-bop jazz revival of the 1980s such as pianist Kenny Kirkland and drummer Jeff ‘Tain’ Watts).

<sup>308</sup> Quincy Jones, *Back on the Block* (1989), which won the 1991 Grammy Album of the Year Award and featured rappers such as Big Daddy Kane, Kool Moe Dee, Melle Mel, and Ice-T, as well as jazz legends Ella Fitzgerald, Miles Davis, Sarah Vaughan, Joe Zawinul, and George Benson. Jones also produced a similar collaboration, *Q’s Jook Joint*, four years later.

<sup>309</sup> Wallace Roney, *No Room For Argument* (2000), HighNote Records. *Mystical* (2005), HighNote Records.

<sup>310</sup> Greg Osby, *3-D Lifestyles* (1993), Blue Note Records.

<sup>311</sup> Stuart Nicholson ‘Fusions and Crossovers’, in Cooke and Horn, 237–238.



**Figure 2.4—Greg Osby’s Street Jazz (advertised in The Source)**

Three years after Gang Starr’s “Jazz Thing”, rapper Guru made a hip-hop album in collaboration with jazz musicians entitled *Jazzmatazz Vol. 1* (1993). In contrast to Gang Starr’s music, it was more of a live collaboration than strictly sampled production work. It featured artists such as Lonnie Liston Smith, Donald Byrd, Roy Ayers, Branford Marsalis, MC Solaar, Ronnie Jordan, Courtney Pine, and singer N’dea Davenport. Guru’s project was striving for a live collaboration among MCs, DJs, and jazz musicians which stayed true to the authenticity of both jazz and rap as urban phenomena.

The introduction of the album opens with a jazz trumpet (Donald Byrd) and Guru’s introducing members who will be featured on the album (similar to what Dignable Planets did on *Reachin’*, and in the jazz tradition of introducing the members of the band during the set). Guru opens:



Peace, yo, and welcome to Jazzmatazz, an experimental fusion of hip-hop and live jazz. I'm your host the Guru, that stands for Gifted, Unlimited, Rhymes, Universal. Now, I've always thought of doing something like this, but I didn't want to do it unless it was done right, you know what I'm sayin'. Cause hip-hop, rap music, it's real. It's musical, cultural expression based on reality. And at the same time, jazz is real, and based on reality.

His monologue is spoken with a jazz trumpet soloist playing in the background. At the time of this writing, Guru has released four volumes in what can now be considered a series of Jazzmatazz albums (Vol. 2 – 1995, Vol. 3 – 2004, Vol.4 – 2007); these albums stage authenticities of both jazz and hip-hop as urban and live phenomena (though portraying that 'liveness' on a recording).

At worst, the jazz musician who used elements from hip-hop or the hip-hop producer who samples jazz can be criticized as gravitating to whatever was commercially popular and profitable at the time. At best, jazz musicians who borrow and collaborate with hip-hop could be said to 'improve' the genre, stay close to their musical lineage, and to try something new in the 'true spirit' of jazz. And like many mentor to prodigy relationships, flaunting the link between the two increases both their status and ingrains their sense of place within that culture or subculture. This locus of inheritance has been discussed in terms of classical composers, such as the relationship between Haydn and Beethoven<sup>312</sup> as well as similar and more recent phenomena in the rap world with Dr. Dre and Eminem (as will be discussed in Chapter 5). Thus, if we extend the artistic genealogy more broadly, jazz and hip-hop are often discussed and presented in terms of a symbiotic relationship. Furthermore, the notion of Africentric lineage becomes a type of narrative mediation in its reception, and the high culture status of jazz provides

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<sup>312</sup> See Tia DeNora, *Beethoven and the Construction of Genius: Musical Politics in Vienna, 1792–1803* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995). An important critique of the idea of socially constructed genius can be found in Peter Kivy, *The Possessor and the Possessed: Handel, Mozart, Beethoven and the Idea of Musical Genius* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2001).

symbolic mediation which influences the descriptions of ‘intellectualism’ in jazz rap.

Many other hip-hop groups, such as Organized Konfusion, Stetsasonic, Main Source, Black Moon, Freestyle Fellowship, The Roots, Quasimoto, and Souls of Mischief could also have been discussed in terms of incorporating a ‘jazz aesthetic’ in their beats as well as their construction within an ‘alternative’ rap genre. While the media gave much less attention to ‘jazz rap’ after the mid-1990s, the link between jazz and hip-hop has continued into the twenty-first century in many different ways, with artists such as US trumpeter/rapper Russell Gunn and UK saxophonist/rapper Soweto Kinch.

As Peter Shapiro notes of Digable Planets’s album *Reachin’*, it was ‘very much marked by the climate in which it was released.’<sup>313</sup> This ‘climate’ that Shapiro alludes to is multifaceted and complex: one factor was the high art status of jazz in the US explained in the opening of the chapter. A second factor was formed by the number of rap artists that began to use jazz samples: groups like De La Soul, Digable Planets and A Tribe Called Quest began to utilize jazz codes in lyrics, music and imagery. A third factor could be considered to be generated by the media, promoting the notion of a jazz and rap fusion, the climate which promoted Digable Planets as ‘jazz, jive, poetry, and style’. A fourth factor was the success of Dr. Dre’s *The Chronic* and its success of promoting a lower-class (so to speak), black urban lifestyle in its music and music videos (not to mention the reality of the 1992 Los Angeles Rebellion, seen on television screens all over the United States). This created the foil to which ‘jazz rap’ groups could be juxtaposed, the latter a black middle class ethos versus the ghettos and gangs of postindustrial Los Angeles. Constructions of identity often involve the positioning against an

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<sup>313</sup> Shapiro, 88.

‘other’; rap genres, as discursively constructed by artists, media, and the industry, worked within these imagined juxtapositions in order to legitimate artists’ own practices.

### **Jazz Codes and Meaning**

Jazz is, of course, by no means univocal. It is important to note that the ‘jazz art ideology’ which I identify is far from being the only identity existing for jazz in the 1980s and other eras. For example, in 1950s film noir, jazz often accompanied the corrupted dark side of the city; jazz projected sex, drugs, and other vices of a depraved urban landscape (e.g. *The Sweet Smell of Success* (1957), dir. Alexander Mackendrick and *The Man with the Golden Arm* (1955), dir. Otto Preminger). As bebop musicians were crafting an elite, virtuosic music appreciated by hipster-intellectuals, jazz-influenced film scores used instruments such as a scooping jazz saxophone to represent the sexuality of a femme fatale. This is still evident in later parodies of film noir, for example on the television cartoon *The Simpsons*.<sup>314</sup> Also, ‘smooth jazz’, which emerged in the 1980s and was criticized by jazz purists, has been featured and parodied on television and in films as ‘elevator music’, Musak, or as musical annoyance while a person is put on hold on the telephone.

Jazz can symbolize a variety of meanings depending on its context and interpretive community, such as high culture, the ‘street’, sexuality, and urban corruption. However, it is jazz constructed as high art, the jazz art ideology which shares space with classical music (in marketing, education, concert venues, and performance approaches) which is distributed in the mainstream of the culture industries in the 1980s. As Robert Fink has written, there is now a re-definition of

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<sup>314</sup> These musical tropes were still used in the 1980s, one example being the use of saxophone in the action series *MacGyver* for a sexually charged fantasy sequence between *MacGyver* and a woman.

art music that includes jazz (and rock); new composers borrow from rock and jazz, and that 'postminimalism's embrace of alternative rock/jazz culture is arty composers turning not away from artiness, but toward it.'<sup>315</sup>

In the case of jazz's musical codes, there is an identification of a jazz identity/style, rather than a need for knowledge of the specific song. With jazz, as an easily identifiable instrumental music that can be linked to an ideology, specific meanings of songs can be less important than what the genre has been imagined to represent. In an attempt to decode meaning, journalists often categorized these 'jazz rap' artists in terms of pre-established frames, jazz being one of these frames. A muted trumpet, or a walking acoustic bass are recognizable signifiers, sonic elements that have become emblematic of jazz (as interpreted by certain socio-historically situated interpretive communities). Similar to earlier jazz albums that used string sections as a sign of class, acoustic bass and horns have become a sign of 'class' in rap music. Jazz in the 1980s became associated with the middle class, and these meanings are brought to groups who sample jazz. Jazz rap became labelled and defined as a counterculture (though the artists themselves do not use the term), an 'alternative' within the rap world, partly defined by jazz signifiers which reinforce pre-existing cultural meanings.

Gary Tomlinson's writing on authentic meaning in music is worth quoting here:

First, all meanings, authentic or not, arise from the personal ways in which individuals, performers and audience, incorporate the work in their own signifying contexts. Clearly the performer can exert only so much influence on the personal context of the listener ... Second and more important, the authentic meanings of a work arise from our relating it to an array of things outside itself that we believe gave it meaning in its original context.<sup>316</sup>

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<sup>315</sup> Robert Fink, 'Elvis Everywhere', *American Music* 16, no. 2 (1998): 146.

<sup>316</sup> Gary Tomlinson, 'Authentic Meaning in Music', in *Authenticity and Early Music*, ed. Nicholas Kenyon (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988), 123.

Tomlinson is championing the abilities of the cultural historian to find meaning in early music performance, but his comments point to the importance of locating a context for the act of relating musical codes ‘to an array of things outside itself’, a crucial component of studying musical borrowing and intertextuality of any era. I would emphasize here that both performer and composer/producer have limited ability to exert meaning on an audience. And while any piece of music is open to an infinite number of interpretations, the specific context of 1980s jazz as high art has lent a certain frame or ‘signifying context’ to various interpretations of jazz rap.

These jazz codes could easily be identified and contrasted with other rap music sonorities that had largely become the norm. For example, the sound of an acoustic bass (“Can I Kick It?”, “Rebirth of Slick (Cool Like Dat)”, “Excursions”) is strikingly different to that of the funk bass or synthesized bass of many rap styles (Dr. Dre’s ‘G-funk’, for example). Or, the use of a jazz guitar (“Bonita Applebum”, “Push it Along”, and “It’s Good to be Here”) is striking in opposition to the use of rock or metal guitars on Rick Rubin’s production work for the Beastie Boys and Run D.M.C. The jazz guitar implies a George Benson sound rather than an Eddie van Halen or Jimi Hendrix sound. A muted trumpet, or certain horn lines, may suggest jazz where in many other styles of rap, horn lines may be synthesized, or more usual, no horns or horn sounds are included whatsoever.

If we take the bifurcation a step further, while early 1990s gangsta rap suggests a listening space of a car or West Coast block party, jazz rap suggests more bourgeois environments, such as the modern day jazz club or a hi-fi stereo system in one’s living room. Jazz rap implied a more introspective or private experience; to be listened to on a walkman as opposed to a dance club (e.g. early

'90s pop rap such as MC Hammer or Vanilla Ice).<sup>317</sup> In other words, musical codes can sometimes imply particular spaces (such as a jazz club), based on a number of factors, including cultural and stylistic associations, and dominant images from our media saturated society. If jazz is said to create a certain 'vibe' or 'atmosphere',<sup>318</sup> then this is further proof that jazz (and other musics) has the ability to imply certain spaces in their recordings.

The divide between 'mainstream' and 'alternative' manifests itself in many forms. As Stuart Hall has written, one of the ideological functions of the media is to classify centre and periphery (as well as promote lifestyles and define reality).<sup>319</sup> But in a subculture, instead of having its legitimacy reinforced, the center becomes the 'inauthentic', and the periphery becomes the authentic. And having a niche, perceived to be followed by few, also helps to solidify the subcultural identity of the periphery. For example, bebop, with its niche authenticity as opposed to swing music, was one particular subculture. The same niche authenticity can be said to exist in folk music, 'art films', 'indie labels', and of so-called 'alternative rap' and 'conscious' rappers.

Using these jazz sonorities helped separate the 'alternative' from the 'mainstream' in rap, and the high art jazz ideology often made audiences more inclined to believe what the groups had to say.<sup>320</sup> Just as Wynton Marsalis used

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<sup>317</sup> Oliver Wang has written of this in terms of a more general trend in hip-hop: 'Whereas the New School era from the mid- to-late 1980s saw the proliferation of larger-than-life hip-hop (both in scope and attitude), the early '90s brought the focus inward, leading to a more introspective aesthetic that required a complementary musical shift'. Oliver Wang in *Classic Material*, 32. And Matt Diehl has described East Coast rap as 'interior', for contemplative Walkman listening on the subway as opposed to the West Coast automobile-centric listening of 'pop rap'. Matt Diehl 'Pop Rap', in *The Vibe History of Hip Hop*, ed. Alan Light (New York: Three Rivers Press, 1999), 129. For more on this bifurcation, see Chapter 3.

<sup>318</sup> For an example of sampling to create atmosphere in Brand Nubian, see Miyakawa, 111–114.

<sup>319</sup> Stuart Hall, 'Culture, Media, and the Ideological Effect', in *Mass Communication and Society*, eds. James Curran, Michael Gurevitch and Janet Woolcott (London: Open University Press, 1977).

<sup>320</sup> Many gangsta rap groups have just as many politically conscious things to say as the so-called 'conscious' rap groups, but perhaps it is jazz that lends added weight in the reception to these 'conscious' groups as more serious.

classical music as a form of cultural legitimacy early in his career, and Sting who later collaborated with jazz musicians to elevate his own status as solo artist,<sup>321</sup> there are often unforeseen consequences to borrowing from or collaborating with other musics with well-established generic identities and the symbolic meanings that accompany them.

These jazz codes have a multitude of meanings amongst a number of interpretive communities. That both jazz and hip-hop are identified as African-American musics may be the most obvious linkage, but as I have shown, the 1980s solidified the notion that jazz was not just an African-American music, but also an African-American art form. A walking acoustic bass, a muted trumpet, or saxophones are sonic elements that have become emblematic of jazz; and ‘sounds’ of jazz enact commentary with these attached, historically situated ideologies in mind.

### **Conclusion**

Using jazz as sonorities of sophistication added legitimacy to a number of groups in hip-hop, while broadening their appeal. Despite protestation of labelling from the artists themselves, groups such as A Tribe Called Quest, De La Soul, Digable Planets, and Gang Starr were largely defined by from what style of music they sampled. Jazz, as a ‘serious music’, added credibility to their messages and criticisms, and at the same time, was a way to distinguish themselves from other streams of rap such as gangsta and pop. What emerges is the classic high art versus mass culture distinction, now used to identify ‘alternative’ groups in the rap world. Hierarchies seem inescapable in music, and rap music’s borrowing from jazz helps

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<sup>321</sup> Sting’s first solo album *The Dream of the Blue Turtles* (1985) included jazz musicians Kenny Kirkland (piano), Branford Marsalis (tenor sax), and Omar Hakim (drums). Sting also performed on Miles Davis’s *You’re Under Arrest* (1985). As early as 1989, popular culture scholars were reading into Sting’s gesture of using jazz musicians as a sign of political legitimacy. See Redhead and Street, 179.

to define 'jazz rap' as a sophisticated 'alternative' as part of hip-hop's own ongoing struggle for cultural legitimacy.



‘I think men’s minds are going to change in subtle ways because of automobiles’.<sup>322</sup>  
—Eugene Morgan in *The Magnificent Ambersons* (1942)

‘We’re conforming to the way machines play music. It’s robots’ choice. It used to be ladies’ choice— now it’s robot’s choice’.<sup>323</sup>  
—Donald Fagen, producer and Steely Dan frontman

‘The music is just in me now, you know ... and I know what people like to play in their cars’.<sup>324</sup>  
—Dr. Dre, producer/rapper

### –Chapter 3–

## **Dr. Dre’s ‘Jeep Beats’ and Musical Borrowing for the Automotive Space**

In comparing the sonic codes in “Rebirth of Slick (Cool Like Dat)” with “Nuthin’ but a ‘G’ Thang” in Chapter 2, I made the point that musical codes can imply certain listening spaces.<sup>325</sup> This chapter follows on from that point and begins to explore musical borrowing for particular playback spaces. Contemporary culture has seen a shift in the character of urban environments, including a trend toward heightened design intensity in interior spaces; increased use of music as a component of design has strongly affected how playback from music recordings inhabits these locations and, in many cases, influences the music produced for them.<sup>326</sup> This study underlines musical borrowing’s intersection with geography, both the influence of urban geography on hip-hop music production and the geography of particular listening spaces. Though a number of spaces could be considered (clubs, concert halls, coffee shops, shopping malls), I have chosen the playback space of the automobile because it has been most influential on hip-hop

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<sup>322</sup> Quoted in Lucinda Lewis, *Roadside America: The Automobile and the American Dream* (New York: Harry N. Abrams, Inc., 2000), 19.

<sup>323</sup> Quoted in Robert Levine, ‘The Death of High Fidelity’, *Rolling Stone*, 27 December 2007, available at: [http://www.rollingstone.com/news/story/17777619/the\\_death\\_of\\_high\\_fidelity/print](http://www.rollingstone.com/news/story/17777619/the_death_of_high_fidelity/print) (accessed 9 June 2008).

<sup>324</sup> Jonathan Gold, ‘Day of Dre’, *Rolling Stone* 666, 30 September 1993, 41.

<sup>325</sup> I make a similar point in comparing different sound worlds created by two versions of 2Pac’s “Thugz Mansion” in Chapter 4.

<sup>326</sup> For a more thorough presentation of this phenomenon, see Krims, *MUG*. Regarding the design intensity of spaces, see Scott Lash and John Urry, *Economies of Sign and Space* (London: Sage Publications, 1994), 15.

music production. My case study focuses on one producer, Dr. Dre, and his creation of a style labelled ‘G-funk’, which according to him, was created and mixed specifically for listening in car stereo systems. As borrowing is so central to hip-hop’s ethos, Dr. Dre’s production reflects how musical materials become re-used for a new space, updated and customized for the automotive listening experience.

Dr. Dre’s compositional process is but one story in the history of the automobile’s shaping of music production. Little has been written on the cross-influences among recorded music, technology and automobility, and yet the automobile has been an important mixing reference in music production since at least the 1960s. This chapter uses Krims’s observations on musical recordings and listening spaces as a starting point, while incorporating the specificities of car audio technology, hip-hop’s intersection with automobility, and how these trends coordinate with the borrowing ethos of hip-hop culture. I will consider not only how rap producers consider the automotive space in production, but also how they borrow from previous musical material, tailoring it for historically-specific playback technology and their idealized listening spaces, just as car customizers individualize automobiles from previous forms and materials.

### **Hip-Hop Cultures and the Automobile**

As it began from playing records through large loudspeakers at block parties in the Bronx (see Chapter 1), much of hip-hop music is still largely characterized by its high volume and attention to the low frequencies in the musical spectrum.<sup>327</sup> Many of these ‘beats’ are intended for listening in car soundsystems, preferably custom (‘aftermarket’) systems with subwoofers. In mainstream hip-hop

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<sup>327</sup> Rose, 75. She also notes similarities with Caribbean musics such as Jamaica’s talk over and dub.

culture, cars and car accessories such as ‘rims’ and grills become cross-marketed in a way that suggests ‘lifestyle’ marketing, together with television shows like *Pimp my Ride* and *Rides* magazine.

The automobile and hip-hop culture form, in a certain sense, a nexus of status symbols (e.g. rims, subwoofers, and car brands) with an accompanying soundtrack. The high status that an upmarket or customized automobile provides to members of the African-American community, according to Paul Gilroy, helps to compensate for the disenfranchisement and propertylessness experienced in African-American history.<sup>328</sup> Gilroy notes that auto-autonomy is a means of empowerment and resistance for African-Americans with a history of coerced labour, and that the custom car is an ongoing process that may be ‘gesturing their anti-discipline to power even as the whirlpool of consumerism sucks them in.’<sup>329</sup> African-Americans, in 2001, spent 45 billion dollars on cars and related products, representing 30 percent of the automotive buying public; yet this demographic only consists of 12 percent of the U.S. population.<sup>330</sup> Race-specific marketing by no means suggests that these accessories are bought solely by the race to which it is targeted, but it projects a certain form of ‘blackness’, real or imagined, that enters the cultural consciousness. Gilroy writes that the automobile is ‘at the very core of America’s complex negotiations with its own absurd racial codings.’<sup>331</sup> Others have suggested that the importance of the car harkens back to religious imagery,

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<sup>328</sup> Gilroy writes, ‘It raises the provocative possibility that their distinctive history of propertylessness and material deprivation has inclined them towards a disproportionate investment in particular forms of property that are publicly visible and the status that corresponds to them.’ Paul Gilroy, ‘Driving While Black’, in *Car Cultures*, ed. Daniel Miller (Oxford: Berg, 2001), 84.

<sup>329</sup> *Ibid.*, 97.

<sup>330</sup> *Ibid.*, 85.

<sup>331</sup> *Ibid.*, 84.

the chariot metaphor symbolizing the promise of freedom from slavery for the Hebrews and subsequently for antebellum African-Americans.<sup>332</sup>

The automobile has been a central accoutrement in hip-hop music videos and album covers, ranging from the gangsta rap of Ice-T, Too \$hort, and Dr. Dre to the ‘Bling Bling’ era of Puff Daddy and Ma\$e, and more recently, in the Southern ‘crunk’ music of Lil’ Jon and David Banner. The automobile (and its powerful sound system) is an object central to the boasting traditions in rap music and earlier African-based art forms such as toasting, as Daz Dillinger raps in “My System”:

‘Cruzin’ down the block/And my system bangin’ out about a million watts/All these suckers wanna stare and jock/And hear my shit subbin’ down the block’.

In the 1980s, in automobile-centric Miami, Florida, there emerged a subgenre of rap known as ‘Miami bass’. This genre was pioneered by DJs emphasizing powerful low-end frequencies, as Miami DJs had direct links to Caribbean soundsystem culture that privileged feeling the music as much as listening to it. Miami groups such as 2 Live Crew made a direct connection with bottom-heavy music and bottom-heavy women on their album covers and music videos (‘Miami bass’ was sometimes referred to as ‘booty music’ or ‘booty bass’).<sup>333</sup> By the late 1980s, the Miami bass scene began to intersect with subcultures of car audio. Advances in car audio technology coincided with the popularity of Miami bass, and in the words of Roni Sarig, was the moment ‘when producers very consciously started pushing the levels of low end further and further. Inevitably, those who liked the visceral experience of booming bass discovered that it was all the more

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<sup>332</sup> Demers, ‘Sampling the 1970s in Hip-hop’, 84. Henry Louis Gates Jr. locates the chariot trope in African-American art forms, as well as its variation manifested in references to trains. Gates, 8.

<sup>333</sup> An early 2 Live Crew hit, the 1986 “Throw the D”, included a B-side entitled “Ghetto Bass”. Member Luke Skywalker (Luther Campbell), a DJ from Miami’s Liberty City neighbourhood and son of a Jamaican immigrant, started his own record label in 1986 called Luke Skywalker Records to promote other Miami groups. Roni Sarig, *Third Coast: OutKast, Timbaland & How Hip-Hop Became A Southern Thing* (Cambridge, MA: Da Capo Press, 2007), 12–19.

intense when confined inside a car'.<sup>334</sup> One hit song by the Miami female rap duo L'Trimm rapped of their love of 'boom cars', as they chanted 'They're always adding speakers when they find the room/Cuz they know we like the guys with the cars that go boom'.<sup>335</sup> Bass music, as popularized largely by 2 Live Crew, expanded in the early 1990s with hits such including "Whoot, There it is" by Jacksonville's 95 South in 1993, "Whoomp! (There it is)" by Atlanta's Tag Team in 1993, and "Tootsie Roll" by Jacksonville's 69 Boyz.

Car audio bass became popular in areas of the South, Texas and California where youth cultures were reliant on cars. "Drop the Bass" (1989) by Miami's DJ Magic Mike became popular in car stereos, and people used to slow the song's tempo for lower bass effects. DJ Magic Mike responded, 'I hated hearing my song like that, it kind of made me mad. So I went to the studio and designed a song that, if they slowed the bass down, it would tear the speakers up. It was done pretty much as a joke.'<sup>336</sup> The song was entitled "Feel the Bass (Speaker Terror Upper)" and became a hit with car audio enthusiasts. As Sarig notes, 'It was, essentially, the first track created specifically for use in cars, a practice that would soon launch an entire industry.'<sup>337</sup> These popular car audio bass albums include Bass Computer (1991) by Techmaster P.E.B. and Techno-Bass (1992) by Beat Dominator, as well as numerous bass music compilations.

Car audio technology and hip-hop music began to evolve in the 1980s, when it became more common for young drivers to have upgraded systems.<sup>338</sup> The use of

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<sup>334</sup> Ibid., 30.

<sup>335</sup> L'Trimm "Cars with the Boom", Grab It! (1988). See also Sarig, 30.

<sup>336</sup> Quoted in Sarig, 31.

<sup>337</sup> Ibid.

<sup>338</sup> One example is from a 1987 New York Times article that described a new, growing interest in 'extended bass response'. Hans Fantel, 'Subwoofers Bolster the Bass', New York Times, 15 March 1987, available at:

<http://query.nytimes.com/gst/fullpage.html?res=9B0DEEDD1638F936A25750C0A961948260&sec=&spon=&pagewanted=1> (accessed 15 June 2008).

the car stereo system is multifaceted. The music can be used for individual driving pleasure or function like a boom box, to accompany and create a space of socialization such as a block party, or it may territorialize (and/or terrorize) the surrounding sonic environment. 'Boom cars' have been a source of both intense competition and neighbourhood frustration. The International Auto Sound Challenge Association (IASCA) was formed in the late 1980s and regularly holds competitions for the loudest and highest quality car sound systems, competitions referred to by enthusiasts as 'sound-offs', 'crank-it-up competitions' or 'dB Drag Racing'.<sup>339</sup> Others see the boom-car pastime as using sound as a weapon, as activist groups in the United States who consider themselves 'victims of audio terrorism' have pressed for legislation to decrease legal decibel levels in cars.<sup>340</sup> The multiplicity of car audio uses demonstrates its interpretive flexibility, and that technology and society influence each other in complex ways. What 'boom cars' show more specifically is that the notion of a 'good'/pleasurable or 'bad'/harmful technology not only differs with users, but also with those who are directly or indirectly affected by a given technology.

Two terms crucial to car audio discourse are 'stock equipment' (what comes with the car, a.k.a. Original Equipment Manufacturer or OEM), and 'aftermarket equipment' (items bought and installed after the automobile purchase). Sound quality as a result of the 'high-fidelity' era has been popular with home audio systems since at least the 1950s, but the market for car stereo quality arrived later

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<sup>339</sup> For more information, see the IASCA website: [www.iasca.com](http://www.iasca.com); See also 'Boom Cars', in *Sports & Recreation Fads*, Frank W. Hoffmann and William G. Bailey (Philadelphia: Haworth Press, 1991), 71–72.

<sup>340</sup> See *The National Alliance Against Loud Car Stereo Assault*, [www.lowertheboom.org](http://www.lowertheboom.org); Anti-boom car legislation is not the first case of communities' seeking legal action for noise pollution associated with car culture, as some citizens as early as 1935 were fighting for laws against the noise pollution stemming from the then-new phenomenon known as drive-in theatres. Kerry Seagrave, *Drive-In Theaters: A History from their Inception in 1933* (London: McFarland and Company, Inc., 1992), 26.

in the early-to-mid 1980s.<sup>341</sup> There is currently a seemingly unlimited range of aftermarket car audio products, including head units that include CD, mp3s, and iPod players, USB ports, satellite radio, as well as audio/visual accessories such as GPS navigation and DVD players. Magazines such as *Car Audio and Electronics* and *Car Sound Magazine* offer information and advertising about the latest products, and catalogues provided by consumer electronics companies like Crutchfield have extensive car audio selections. In 2007, sales of in-car consumer electronics were over ten billion dollars, not a surprising statistic considering that a 2007 study by the Consumer Electronics Association concluded the average American spends 17 hours a week in their car.<sup>342</sup>

The primary object which connects the ‘boomy bass’ of hip-hop to the automotive soundscape is the car subwoofer. Available in the car-stereo aftermarket since the early 1980s,<sup>343</sup> the subwoofer is a large, enclosed loudspeaker (8 to 18 inches in diameter), and like any speaker, is a transducer that turns electric impulses into mechanical energy/sound waves.<sup>344</sup> The subwoofer specializes in producing the lower-frequency waves in the sound spectrum (roughly 20–120Hz), omni/nondirectional sensations of sound perceived as an amalgamation of pitch recognition and a feeling of pressure (as sound measured in decibels is also known

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<sup>341</sup> Andrew Yoder, *Auto Audio*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edition (New York: McGraw Hill, 2000), 96.

<sup>342</sup> ‘CEA Predicts Sales of In-vehicle Electronics will Grow to \$12.8 Billion’. *Carsound.com*, 28 February 2008, available at: [http://www.carsound.com/artman2/publish/news/CEA\\_PREDICTS\\_SALES\\_OF\\_IN-VEHICLE\\_ELECTRONICS\\_WILL\\_GROW\\_TO\\_12\\_8\\_BILLION.shtml](http://www.carsound.com/artman2/publish/news/CEA_PREDICTS_SALES_OF_IN-VEHICLE_ELECTRONICS_WILL_GROW_TO_12_8_BILLION.shtml) (accessed 13 March 2008).

<sup>343</sup> One of the first successful car audio subwoofers was called the ‘Kicker’, built in 1980 by Stillwater Designs in Stillwater, Oklahoma. Over twenty years later, Kicker’s subwoofers could be added to vehicles as a factory- or dealer-installed option in Dodge and Chrysler cars. A number of car audio brands are now contracted with car companies to provide their products as ‘stock’ system rather than aftermarket. Douglas Newcomb, *Car Audio for Dummies* (New York: Wiley Publishing Inc., 2008), 19.

<sup>344</sup> Joe Pettitt, *How to Design and Install High-Performance Car Stereo* (North Branch: Car Tech, Inc., 2003), 59.

as Sound Pressure Level or SPL).<sup>345</sup> In other words, the lower the frequency, the greater possibility that one will begin to ‘feel’ the sound. Without the subwoofer, other noises can cancel the lower frequencies in the music, frequencies which require so much power that one needs a separate amplifier for them.<sup>346</sup> Most road noise is in the 100–200 Hz range, and will cancel out this band of a recording’s audio spectrum, therefore one function of the subwoofer is to bring out the lower frequencies in the music.<sup>347</sup> A custom system creates a division of labour in speaker types, with higher frequencies supported by tweeters, middle frequencies by mid-range speakers, and lower frequencies by the woofers and subwoofers.<sup>348</sup> In choosing these and other types of speakers, one has to think of qualities such as ‘resonant frequency’, the frequency that the speaker naturally wants to vibrate, and ‘transfer function’: ‘a measure of how the volume of an enclosure, such as a room or a car, effects the way a speaker sounds.’<sup>349</sup> The attention given to specific technology such as loudspeaker types (and their playback qualities) and to the character of specific playback spaces are elements important to car audiophiles, and could be a fruitful lens with which to consider and analyze music production and recordings.

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<sup>345</sup> Christopher Anet, ‘An Insight into Subwoofers’, *Resolution Magazine*, Vol. 2, no. 7 (Oct. 2003), 60–62.

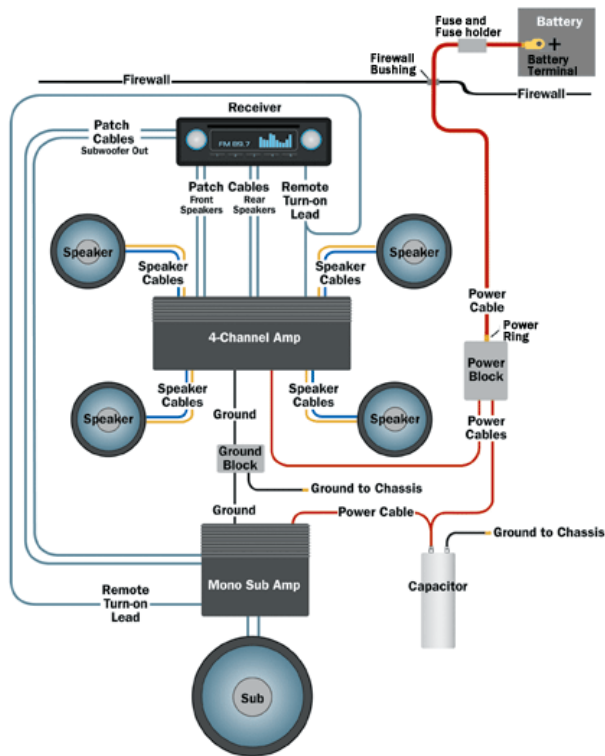
<sup>346</sup> Yoder, 96. Subwoofers normally need to produce 80dB SPL to be heard or felt. Pettitt, 60.

<sup>347</sup> Yoder, 96.

<sup>348</sup> The division of frequencies to certain speakers is provided by a ‘crossover’ which allows some frequencies to pass through and some to be blocked for a given speaker. These frequency levels are called ‘crossover points’ and can be adjusted in custom systems. For example, a subwoofer crossover could have a crossover point of 90 Hz, and the signal would be blocked at any frequency above 90 Hz. Newcomb, 207. These ‘crossover points’ for any given speaker are variable and adjustable, largely dependent on the practicalities of the technology and tastes of listeners and manufacturers.

<sup>349</sup> Polk Audio, ‘Tips, Tweaks and Common Sense About Car Audio’ (Baltimore: Polk Audio), available at: <http://www.polkaudio.com/downloads/12vhndbk.pdf> (accessed 23 July 2008).





**Figure 3.1**—Car audio amplifier wiring diagram

(Diagram courtesy of Crutchfield Corporation ©2003)

Like those inhabiting custom car cultures before them, car audio enthusiasts form a community with shared interests, while expressing a sense of individuality. The design intensity and niche marketing of the car audio ‘aftermarket’ can be said to participate in the so-called post-Fordist society; the fact that *The Car Audio and Electronics Buyer Guide* had 3195 different speakers available in just one year (1998) attests to this.<sup>350</sup> But many forget that the emblematic symbol of Fordism, the Model T, had over 5,000 accessories available in its lifetime, suggesting that the desire to customize the car is as old as automotive mass production itself.<sup>351</sup>

<sup>350</sup> Yoder, 168.

<sup>351</sup> Peter Marsh and Peter Collett, *Driving Passion: The Psychology of the Car* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1986), 36. Before the automobile, coach builders would customize carriages for the rich, as a tailor would do for clothes (carrossiers). It was not uncommon for celebrities in the early automotive era to hire custom designers for their automobiles. Harley Earl and General Motors President Alfred Sloan simply brought the already-existing customization appearance to the wider public in the late 1920s. Hollywood-born Earl, before leading the first Art and Colour division of a major automobile manufacturer, was a custom car designer for celebrities such as Fatty Arbuckle and Cecil B. DeMille. Marsh and Collett, 31; David Gartman, *Auto Opium: A Social History of American Automobile Design* (London: Routledge, 1994), 211.

Rather than invoke discourses of Fordism, perhaps it is more useful in popular music production to invoke the influence of Sloanism, named after General Motors president Alfred Sloan, the creator of the ‘annual model’, who produced different car models in a stylistic hierarchy and led the first separate design division for a car company in the 1920s (led by Harley Earl for over thirty years).<sup>352</sup> Hip-hop music, for example, with its heavy use of borrowing and sampling, adds surface features to old frameworks in some ways analogous to Sloanist production methods, and functions within a constantly shifting subgeneric hierarchy of cultural products.

### **The Automobile and Music Production**

The automobile forms an exemplary object of twentieth-century mass production, transforming time, space, ‘the everyday’, as well as urban and emotional geographies. It is safe to say that this ‘quintessential manufactured object of Fordism’<sup>353</sup> had influence on a number of production methods, including recorded music production. And as Michael Bull reminds us, ‘While the 20<sup>th</sup> century is sometimes interpreted as both the century of the automobile and of the moving image, it is also the century of mechanically reproduced sounds.’<sup>354</sup>

As early as 1922, Chrysler offered the first factory-unit car radio, but few were purchased, and production was soon discontinued. Galvin Manufacturing Company built the first commercially-successful car radio in the early 1930s, known as the Motorola 5T71, an amalgamation of the words ‘Motor’-car and ‘Victrola’. (The company would later change their name to that of their most

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<sup>352</sup> Gartman, 68–75. The term ‘Sloanism’ was used in Karal Ann Marling, ‘America’s Love Affair with the Automobile in the Television Age’ in *Autopia: Cars and Culture*, eds. Peter Wollen and Joe Kerr (London: Reaktion Books, Ltd., 2002), 355. Sloan hired Earl in the mid-1920s to compete with Ford’s Model T. GM’s La Salle, from the Cadillac division in 1927, was the first mass-produced car planned bumper to bumper by one man (Earl). Earl was also the first to put trademarked tail fins on a 1949 Cadillac, inspired by the P-38 Lightning pursuit plane. Gartman, 75, 148.

<sup>353</sup> John Urry, ‘The “system” of Automobility’, in *Automobilities*, eds. Mike Featherstone, Nigel Thrift, and John Urry (London: Sage, 2005), 26.

<sup>354</sup> Michael Bull, ‘Automobility and the Power of Sound’, in *Automobilities*, 248.

successful product.)<sup>355</sup> By 1952, automobile radios were in just over half of America's cars, but had a significant boom after this due to the invention of the transistor in 1953 which made car radios more reliable and affordable. By 1980, the start of a decade which saw the rapid growth of both the car audio aftermarket and rap music, that percentage had increased to 95 percent.<sup>356</sup>

The automobile sound system has been an important listening reference in many styles of music production since at least the 1960s, with the advent of Top-40 radio and the car's role in 'teen cultures'. Steven Pond writes, 'Bowling to the importance of radio airplay, pop producers up to the late sixties routinely calibrated their final mixes to cheap car speakers, which could accommodate only a limited frequency range.'<sup>357</sup> Perhaps appropriately given their location in the car manufacturing Mecca of Detroit, Motown Records were attentive to this new listening market, as by 1963, fifty million automobiles had car radios.<sup>358</sup> Suzanne Smith writes:

At Hitsville Studios the proliferation of the car radio was not overlooked but capitalized on. Both the musical form and the audio fidelity of Motown hits such as "My Girl" and "Shop Around" were well suited and often produced with a car radio audience in mind. Some of the first critical commentary on the Detroit sound noted that 'Motown's light, unfussy, evenly stressed beat, its continuous loop melodies, [are] the ideal accompaniment for driving.'<sup>359</sup>

Motown made their singles extra short to help ensure radio play and tested them for compatibility on car radio speakers. They were also aware that the majority of these car radio listeners were the baby-boomer teenage market they were trying to attract. As producers would tailor their mixes to the car stereo, the needs of

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<sup>355</sup> David McCartney, 'Automobile Radios', in *The Encyclopedia of Radio*, ed. Christopher H. Sterling (New York: Taylor and Francis, 2004), 138.

<sup>356</sup> *Ibid.*, 139.

<sup>357</sup> Pond, 132.

<sup>358</sup> Suzanne E. Smith, *Dancing in the Street: Motown and the Cultural Politics of Detroit* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1999), 123.

<sup>359</sup> David Morse, *Motown and the Arrival of Black Music*, quoted in Smith, 123.

automotive listening surely impacted the timbre and volume of the music produced. As Warren Belasco has written, ‘The greatest success in rock ’n’ roll usually goes to those whose music suits the hyperkinetic formats of the Top-40 stations that transmit primarily to car radios and transistor receivers.’<sup>360</sup>

Radio stations since the 1960s heavily ‘compress’ (i.e. use dynamic range compression) the sounds coming through the airwaves, as compression decreases the overall range of the dynamics to make music sound louder without increasing peak amplitude. Television commercials often compress their sound, which is why commercials often sound louder than the programs. One reason to utilize this ‘loudness’ effect from compression was in competition with rival radio stations, to sound more exciting and keep the listener’s attention; but another reason was to produce a consistent dynamic level that could be heard over the road and engine noise of an automobile. Music producers also use dynamic compression in their mixing for a number of reasons: to compete with other ‘loud’ albums, but also when albums are expected to be played in loud environments such as bars, shopping malls, restaurants, and automobiles.<sup>361</sup>

Automotive listening (particularly with ‘stock systems’, those that come with the car) demands a high level of dynamic consistency; listening to Berlioz’s *Symphonie Fantastique* or Schubert’s *Unfinished Symphony* in a stock system without a compressor can prove to be frustrating. Like earlier technologies of the phonograph record that influenced the length of music composed, the car stereo

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<sup>360</sup> Warren Belasco, ‘Motivatin’ with Chuck Berry and Fredrick Jackson Turner’, in *The Automobile and American Culture*, eds. David C. Lewis and Laurence Goldstein (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1980), 264.

<sup>361</sup> Levine writes, ‘Rock and pop producers have always used compression to balance the sounds of different instruments and to make music sound more exciting, and radio stations apply compression for technical reasons. In the days of vinyl records, there was a physical limit to how high the bass levels could go before the needle skipped a groove...Intensely compressed albums like Oasis’ 1995 *(What’s the Story) Morning Glory?* set a new bar for loudness; the songs were well-suited for bars, cars and other noisy environments.’ Levine, ‘The Death of High Fidelity’.

influenced other elements, such as the timbre of popular music recordings.<sup>362</sup> Furthermore, the ability to record bass, synthesizer and other sounds by DI ('direct injection' to the mixing console, rather than put microphone to an amplifier) provides greater flexibility in altering the sounds once they are recorded.<sup>363</sup> As recording technology improved, so did the ability to tailor music to particular listening spaces.

Unlike car audio technicians who consider the car to be a far from ideal listening environment compared to the home,<sup>364</sup> many music producers speak positively of the automotive listening space. When asked by an interviewer what the ideal listening environment for a minisystem was, producer and artist Stewart Copeland commented:

'I've already got one: the car stereo—which is the first and best minisystem if you think about it. You're in this cocoon where you can have a really big sound in an enclosed environment. Then there's the fact that you're driving with scenery moving past'.<sup>365</sup> He continued to say, 'When I record an album, I spend months listening to it in the studio. I listen to it every day going back and forth in my car. I check it out on tiny systems. And then I hear it coming out of the radio, so I know what it sounds like.'<sup>366</sup>

The 'car test' or 'car check' was and still is used in record mixing, as the car is often the first place that a mix is heard outside the studio.<sup>367</sup> California sound engineer Patrick Olguin states, 'If I'm mixing "unassisted" I'll check the mix in my stock system in my truck, and also check it in my custom system in my

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<sup>362</sup> For examples of how the phonograph changed music composition, see Katz, *Capturing Sound*.

<sup>363</sup> For example, producer Elliot Schneider says that he uses a DI for the bass guitar because 'the amp signal just doesn't have enough definition; it just contributes a lot of low end.' Quoted in Howard Massey, *Behind the Glass: Top Record Producers tell us how they craft the hits* (San Francisco: Backbeat Books, 2000), 60; Of course, other producers may want heavier low end, such as many hip-hop music producers.

<sup>364</sup> As one car audio technician writes, 'To put it bluntly, car interiors are about the worst listening environments imaginable. Your location in the car is set. Listener seating is to the side of acoustic space in relation to the speakers ...'. Pettitt, 20.

<sup>365</sup> Brendan Baber, 'The incredible shrinking sound system', *Bnet.com*, Sept. 1997, available at: <http://findarticles.com/p/articles> (accessed 9 June 2008).

<sup>366</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>367</sup> A cinematic example of this can be found in the film *Once* (2006): after the band records their demo, the engineer takes them out for a drive to hear the mix.

Mercedes.<sup>368</sup> Olguin ensures that his mix works for the majority of car owners (stock systems) as well as for the greater clarity, improved frequency response, and bass extension of a custom aftermarket system. He also mentions that ‘most hip-hop producers have upgraded car systems, so that would definitely be the first acid test for a mix after leaving the studio.’<sup>369</sup> Studios normally have a number of sets of speakers for different instances of listening, selectable at the flip of a switch; and some studios (such as Sony Studios in New York City) have or have had a car speaker system built into the studio as part of their reference speaker configurations.<sup>370</sup> Olguin also has a wireless system, to listen to mixes through the car radio by using a radio transmitter that delivers the signal to the parking lot, in order to hear the mix as it would go through a radio station.

In addition to the car’s now serving as the producer’s listening reference, producers have also become more conscious of the idea that a recording is intended to fill a particular space, rather than to reproduce a performance accurately. Adam Krims notes a trend in new classical music recordings that have shifted their aim from ‘concert realism’ to an ‘abstract soundstage’ that considers particular playback spaces. In hip-hop, the ‘star producer’ will be valued for how his/her music fills a space, such as a car or jeep, rather than what s/he can do in live performance.<sup>371</sup> The trademarked producer will be advertised on albums, assuring listeners that the product that they buy will fill space in a particular way.<sup>372</sup>

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<sup>368</sup> Email correspondence with the author, 3 June 2008. Olguin has worked with a number of commercially successful groups and artists, such as Papa Roach, Black Eyed Peas, rapper E-40, and Cake.

<sup>369</sup> Email correspondence with the author, 19 September 2008.

<sup>370</sup> Hank Shocklee of the production team The Bomb Squad recounted to me the existence of a custom car audio system in New York’s Sony Studios. Hank Shocklee, interview with the author, 8 March 2009.

<sup>371</sup> Krims, MUG, 161. Krims writes that some popular music genres ‘help to provide a soundscape for design-intensive urban interiors, and they do so, arguably, just as classical recordings do, by targeting a soundscape to the design or desired ethos of the private playback space.’ Krims, MUG, 157.

<sup>372</sup> Krims, MUG, 160.

Consideration of the relatively small space of the car interior in production and mixing affects elements such as dynamic compression, how frequencies are equalized, and, in particular, the sound quality of low frequencies (both the aural and tactile/corporeal elements of subwoofer playback). While the opinions of music producers are far from homogeneous, testing music mixes in the car (both stock and custom) has been a rarely acknowledged standard practice; and if we then consider both the playback spaces and speakers involved, we can better analyse the ecology of how a music recording interacts with the listener in particular environments.

### **Dr. Dre and ‘G-Funk’**

Dr. Dre (Andre Young), the ‘chief architect of West Coast gangsta rap’,<sup>373</sup> was born in Los Angeles, California. He was a club DJ, then producer and rapper with groups The World Class Wreckin Cru and N.W.A. (Niggaz With Attitude). After leaving N.W.A., he spent all of 1992 producing his first solo album, *The Chronic*. What emerged was a sound that he christened ‘G-Funk’ (G for ‘gangsta’), inspired by the P-Funk of George Clinton, but also borrowing from Leon Haywood, Isaac Hayes, Curtis Mayfield, and Donny Hathaway, as well as utilizing ‘vocoder’-esque effects similar to those of electro-funk groups like Zapp and Cameo.<sup>374</sup> What results is a highly layered effect, a mix of (often high-pitched) synthesized sounds, live instruments such as guitar and bass, and an added emphasis on low-end frequencies.

One example of this style is the layers of the ‘basic beat’ in Dr. Dre’s “Nuthin’ But a ‘G’ Thang” from *The Chronic* (**Example 3.1**):

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<sup>373</sup> Gold, 40.

<sup>374</sup> This link between Dr. Dre’s music and that of the 1970s is a formidable one, particularly in the borrowing of elements from 1970s funk, and imagery and characters from 1970s blaxploitation film. See Demers, ‘Sampling the 1970s in Hip-hop’.

## Dr. Dre "Nuthin' But a 'G' Thang"

From *The Chronic* (1992), produced by Dr. Dre

### Basic beat layers

The musical score consists of five staves, each representing a different instrument. From top to bottom: High Synthesizer, Electric Guitar, Fender Rhodes, Synth Strings, and Bass. The High Synthesizer staff features a melodic line with eighth and quarter notes, including a sharp sign. The Electric Guitar staff shows a series of chords, some with sharp signs. The Fender Rhodes staff has a sparse, rhythmic pattern with eighth notes. The Synth Strings staff has a melodic line with eighth and quarter notes. The Bass staff has a complex, rhythmic pattern with eighth and quarter notes, including sharp signs.

The high synthesizer riff, derived from Leon Haywood's "I Wanna do Something Freaky to You", has become (in both timbre and melody) an important signifier of Dr. Dre, Southern California, and more widely, of the gangsta rap or 'West Coast rap' subgenre. As New York MC Mims raps of different geographical regions in "This is why I'm Hot" (2007): 'Compton to Hollywood/As soon as I hit L.A./I'm in that low, low/I do it the Cali way', the riff from "'G' Thang" accompanies the stanza.<sup>375</sup>

As opposed to East Coast hip-hop producers at the time, Dr. Dre would rarely sample directly from a record itself. He might use a 1970s record for ideas (a melody, beat, or riff), but had live musicians re-record the sounds that he wanted. After equalizing and sculpting particular sounds, he then can choose to put the sounds through a sampler. He often takes pre-existing drum sounds from recordings, loops them, and gradually replaces each drum part with new ones.

<sup>375</sup> The riff and other snippets from the single are used in a number of international rap singles, as the G-Funk era was often the first experience that non-U.S. countries had with rap music. As Dre and Snoop reached mainstream success in the U.S., they were able to secure international distribution on a larger-scale. One example is the Spanish rap group Arma Blanca, on their track "El Musicólogo", which samples from a number of American hits and DJ Tomek's "G Thang 2008" from Berlin. Ben Folds's cover version of Dr. Dre's "Bitches Ain't Shit" (from *The Chronic*) uses a high-pitched synthesizer in the middle eight similar to one that Dre might use. The Folds cover is characteristically representative of his own piano/singer-songwriter style, but the inclusion of the synthesizer adds another layer of musical signification not normally found on his recordings.



Subsequently, a bass player often records a track over the drums, and other musicians may re-record or improvise, based on various tracks. In re-recording all the material live, in addition to avoiding high copyright costs,<sup>376</sup> Dr. Dre has greater control over all of the individual tracks: he can de-tune, add more ‘low end’ frequency, add effects, apply dynamic compression (to help drown out road and engine noise during playback), add effects, make it sound ‘dirty’ or equalize to his tastes.<sup>377</sup> He often uses a Mini-Moog synthesizer (obsolete since 1982), other keyboards such as Wurlitzer, Fender Rhodes, Clavinet, and Vox V-305 organ, as well as a Roland TR-808 drum machine, employed by many hip-hop producers for its kick drum bass ‘boom’ sound.<sup>378</sup> This flexibility was important to Dre, often labelled a perfectionist in the studio.<sup>379</sup>

Dr. Dre will often utilize a number of musicians to ‘orchestrate’ various sounds that he wants, as producer Scott Storch recounts:

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<sup>376</sup> It is important, here, to draw the distinction between publishing fees and master recording (or mechanical) fees. When Dr. Dre re-records songs, he only has to pay the publishing fees and not the mechanical fees in addition to the publishing, as would be the case if he digitally sampled the sounds. Kembrew McLeod writes, ‘When clearing a sample taken from a record, two types of fees must be paid: publishing fees and master recording (or mechanical) fees. The publishing fee, which is paid to the company or individual owning a particular song, often consists of a flexible and somewhat arbitrary formula that calculates a statutory royalty rate set by Congress.’ McLeod, *Owning Culture*, 91. See also Schloss, *Making Beats*, 175.

<sup>377</sup> ‘Control is Dre’s thing. Every Dre track begins the same way, with Dre behind a drum machine in a room full of trusted musicians. (They carry beepers. When he wants to work, they work.) They’ll program a beat, then ask the musicians to play along; when Dre hears something he likes, he isolates the player and tells him how to refine the sound. “My greatest talent”, Dre says, “is knowing exactly what I want to hear”’. Josh Tyrangiel, ‘In the Doctor’s House’, *Time*, 15 September 2001, available at: <http://www.time.com/time/magazine/article/0,9171,1000775,00.html> (accessed 27 June 2008).

<sup>378</sup> Kurtis Blow says, ‘The 808 is great because you can detune it and get this low-frequency hum. It’s a car speaker destroyer. That’s what we try and do as rap producers—break car speakers and house speakers and boom boxes. And the 808 does it. It’s African music!’ Quoted in Rose, 75.

<sup>379</sup> Most accounts portray Dr. Dre as a ‘studio work-horse’. One journalist notes, ‘Dre works in spurts. This week he’s had three studio sessions of 19 hours or more. Last week he did a marathon 56-hour session. If he didn’t go to the parking lot for the occasional car-stereo listening test, he’d have no idea whether it was night or day.’ Tyrangiel, ‘In the Doctor’s House’. Referring to Dr. Dre, Snoop Dogg has said, ‘I went and did a song with the nigga, the nigga made me do each word, word for word, until I got it right. See what people don’t understand is, when you dealing with Dr. Dre, you dealing with a perfectionist. It’s like if you dealing with God. So you have to be perfection when you do a record with him, because his sound is right, his direction is right. Everybody ain’t prepared for that!’ Nima, ‘Interview with Snoop Dogg’, *Dubcnn.com*, available at: <http://www.dubcnn.com/interviews/snoopdogg06/part1/> (accessed 22 October 2008).

Sometimes [Dre will] have a vision for a record where he'll program a drum pattern and tell musicians such as myself what to play verbatim, and we'll emulate for him, through him. He's capable of doing a lot of the stuff, like playing piano. But he creates a little band. He's orchestrating his little orchestra. And sometimes, I'll be at the keyboard noodling, and he'll be at the drum machine noodling and we'll find each other in that way—all of a sudden, boom, there's a record.<sup>380</sup>

Jonathan Gold also writes of Dre's compositional process in the making of *The*

*Chronic*:

Listening to a Dre beat take shape in the studio is like watching a snowball roll downhill in a Bugs Bunny cartoon, taking on mass as it goes, Dre may find something he likes from an old drum break, loop it and gradually replace each part with a better tom-tom sound, a kick-drum sound he adores, until the beat bears the same relationship to the original that the Incredible Hulk does to Bill Bixby.

A bass player wanders in, unpacks his instrument and pops a funky two-note bass line over the beat, then leaves to watch CNN, though his two notes keep looping into infinity. A smiling guy in a striped jersey plays a nasty one-fingered melody on an old Mini-Moog synthesizer that's been obsolete since 1982, and Dre scratches in a sort of surfadelic munching noise, and then from his well-stocked Akai MPC60 sample comes a shriek, a spare piano chord, an ejaculation from the first Beastie's record—"Let me clear my throat"—and the many-layered groove is happening, bumping, breathing, almost loud enough to see.

Snoop floats into the room. He closes his eyes as if in a dream and extends both hands toward Dre, palms downward. Dre holds out his hands, and Snoop grazes his fingertips with a butterfly flourish, caught up in the ecstasy of the beat ...

Dre comes in from the lounge, twists a few knobs on the Moog and comes up with the synthesizer sound so familiar from *The Chronic*, almost on pitch but not quite, sliding a bit between notes

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Though these journalistic sources often portray information in highly stylized ways, they nevertheless are useful in mapping out Dre's compositional tendencies as producer. While Dre's production is a collaborative process, he most certainly has creative control over the final product.

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<sup>380</sup> Kylee Swenson, 'Captain Contagious', *Remix Magazine*, 1 June 2006, available at: [http://www.remixmag.com/artists/remix\\_captain\\_contagious/index.html](http://www.remixmag.com/artists/remix_captain_contagious/index.html) (accessed 15 June 2008).

<sup>381</sup> Gold, 40.

While the use of drum machine was already common in hip-hop production, Dr. Dre's conspicuous use of synthesizers in the digital sampling era was not. The synthesizer has been a prominent feature of popular music for over forty years (including 1970s groups and artists from disparate backgrounds such as Yes, Wendy/Walter Carlos, Parliament Funkadelic, Sun Ra, Stevie Wonder, Kraftwerk, Genesis, Herbie Hancock, and ABBA). Anxieties toward the synthesizer were expressed, particularly in the 1970s, as they were susceptible to cultural assumptions that electronic instruments were 'cold' and 'inhuman', perhaps because the sounds produce fewer overtones than other instruments.<sup>382</sup> Though keyboards had a mixed reception in the 1970s, Andrew Goodwin points out that a generation of 1980s popular music artists and producers grew up with the synthesized sounds of the '70s. Goodwin writing in the late 1980s comments that, 'pop musicians and audiences have grown increasingly accustomed to making an association between synthetic/ automated music and the communal (dance floor) connection to nature (via the body). We have grown used to connecting machines and funkiness'.<sup>383</sup> He continues to say that

What happened then was that the very technology (the synth) that was presumed in the 1970s to remove human intervention and bypass the emotive aspect of music (through its 'coldness') became the source of one of the major aural signs that signifies 'feel'! This is the sound of a bass analogue synth—often a Moog synthesizer.<sup>384</sup>

A number of producers have shared their proclivity toward using Moog synth for bass. Producer Glen Ballard, when asked in an interview how to deal with getting the low end tight without being flabby responded:

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<sup>382</sup> Kay Dickinson, *Off Key: When Film and Music Won't Work Together* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 124.

<sup>383</sup> Goodwin, 263. Goodwin also points out how while the keyboard musician was once criticized for being cold and alienated, that criticism had often been transferred in the late 1980s to 'musicians' who sit at the computer and choose to compose by way of digital sampler, rather than by playing an instrument.

<sup>384</sup> *Ibid.*, 265.

Get a Minimoog! (laughs) Ninety percent of the bass I do is Minimoog. I think it's the best way to solve low-end problems—that and being real careful with the pattern of the kick drum. Because the Minimoog has three oscillators you can cover so much ground with it, and there are MIDIable versions of them now, you can sequence with them. I've always had such great luck with that as my bass, and you can get an infinite variety of sound with it—the filtering can be incredible, you can adjust the sustain. It has so many colors, and yet it's about the richest bottom end harmonic element that I've ever come across. The Minimoog is just such a workhorse for me—I can't do without it.<sup>385</sup>

Producer Jack Douglas has said for bass, 'I like to use a subharmonic synthesizer because so many systems have subwoofers, you've gotta have stuff to feed that.'<sup>386</sup> Again, perhaps the lack of overtones, and sheer power and directionality of these synthesizers are more accustomed to automotive technology than earlier sonic innovations. Dr. Dre's interest in synthesizers may be influenced by a nostalgia for funk music, a fascination with in earlier technologies, or that he generally finds them to be 'warmer' than a sound sampled from a record. While any attempt to locate his exact reasoning would be speculative, the timbres of synthesized sounds are strikingly compatible to car audio technology and the driving experience. Furthermore, the use of large speakers in both clubs and cars signal attention to the entire body sensations felt by powerful, low frequencies. These (often pleasurable) sensations become part of the musical experience, created through subwoofer technology, the listening environment, as well as the timbres produced by synthesized sounds (and how they are mixed).

At a time when the sounds of rap music were rarely discussed with any detail in journalism, media reception of *The Chronic* discussed sound, in addition to the persona and geography normally discussed at that time. This is partly because of the familiarity of the funk music which Dre interpolates, but also partly

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<sup>385</sup> Massey, 25.

<sup>386</sup> *Ibid.*, 159.

because of what he does to the sounds. His sound is described by one journalist as ‘rumbling bass lines, hyperrealistic sound effects, and beats that hit the bloodstream like a pulp fiction adrenaline shot.’<sup>387</sup> Jan Pareles notes that *The Chronic* was:

The album that defined West Coast hip-hop with a personalized style, G-Funk, that’s simultaneously relaxed and menacing. The bottom register is swampy synthesizer bass lines that openly emulate Parliament-Funkadelic; the upper end is often a lone keyboard line, whistling or blipping insouciantly. In between are wide-open spaces that hold just a rhythm guitar, sparse keyboard chords and perhaps a singalong chorus between a rapper’s unhurried rhymes. It’s a hermetic sound, sealed off from street noise as if behind the windows of a limousine or a jacked-up jeep; it’s the sound of the player, enjoying ill-gotten gains but always watching his back.<sup>388</sup>

Gold wrote, ‘The Dre sound is clean but edgy, deeply funky, featuring slow, big-bottomed, slightly dirty beats and powered by guitar and bass work that is not sampled but re-created in the studio—so that unlike East Coast rap productions—the fidelity of the final product is not inflected by the fidelity of scratchy R&B records that have been played too many times.’<sup>389</sup> Brendan Koerner writes:

Instead of merely sampling funk hits, he hired session musicians to cover their best parts on synthesizers—usually just the catchiest six to 12 notes, slowed down to stoner speed. It was as if Dre took a magnifying glass to every P-Funk classic and zeroed in on the most addictive three-second segments. The whining 10-note synth line in the chorus of ‘F—k Wit Dre Day,’ *The Chronic*’s first single, is unforgettable. And unforgettable singles move albums; how many consumers bought *The Chronic* simply because they couldn’t shake ‘F—k Wit Dre Day’ from their minds?<sup>390</sup>

Robert Marriott wrote that G-Funk was ‘haunted P-Funk laced with synthesized vice’, and that ‘Dre and his collaborators gave body to the laid-back tension that

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<sup>387</sup> Cheo Hodari Coker, ‘N.W.A.’, *The Vibe History of Hip Hop*, 261.

<sup>388</sup> Jon Pareles, ‘Still Tough, Still Authentic. Still Relevant?’, *The New York Times*, 14 November 1999, available at: <http://query.nytimes.com/gst/fullpage.html?res=9F03E6DF103AF937A25752C1A96F958260> (accessed 28 July 2008).

<sup>389</sup> Gold, 41.

<sup>390</sup> Brendan I. Koerner, ‘The Game Is Up: Why Dr. Dre’s protégés always top the charts’, *Slate* Number 1, no. 10, available at: <http://www.slate.com/id/2114375> (accessed 15 June 2008).

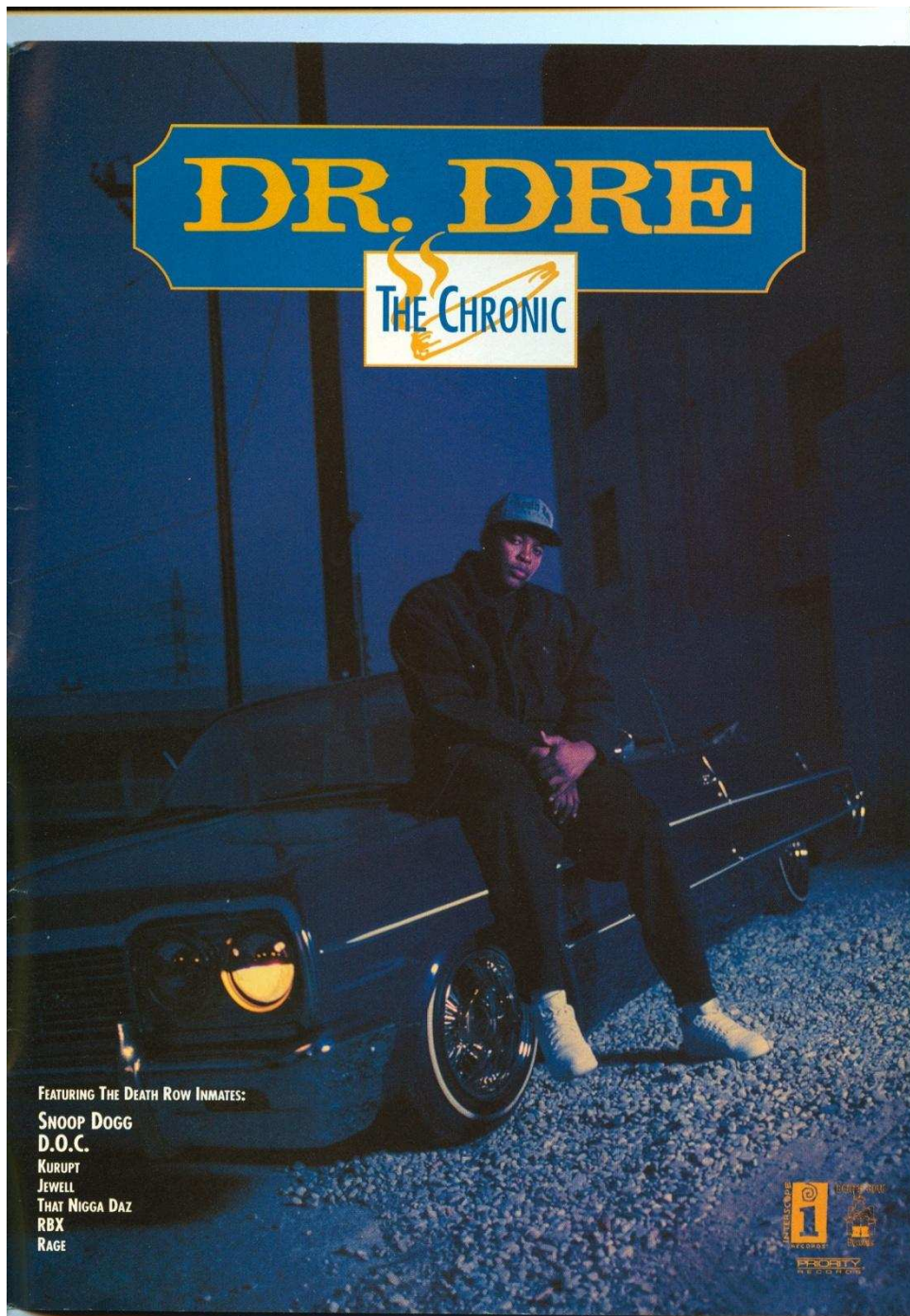
characterizes the life in Los Angeles ghettos. It was depraved gospel.<sup>391</sup> Sound, of course, does not exist in a vacuum, and these examples of media reception indicate both attention to the character of specific sounds and extra-musical discourses which may have influenced these interpretations. The legacy from 1970s funk music forms one recognizable influence, but also the imagery from ‘hood films and gangsta-rap music videos (from *The Chronic*, and earlier videos from N.W.A. such as 1988’s “Straight Outta Compton”) helped to solidify the link of synthesizers and bass extension to a ‘dirty’ sound said to represent the ghettos of Los Angeles.<sup>392</sup> *The Chronic* was advertised in 1992 in hip-hop magazines like *The Source*, with Dr. Dre standing prominently in front of his 1964 Impala, firmly establishing the link between the album and the prominence of the automobile in G-Funk imagery even before the music was released.<sup>393</sup>

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<sup>391</sup> Robert Marriott, ‘Gangsta, Gangsta: The Sad, Violent Parable of Death Row Records’, in *The Vibe History of Hip Hop*, 321.

<sup>392</sup> Josh Tyrangiel has written about Death Row Records president Suge Knight’s ability to understand the importance of MTV airplay in promoting his artists. Tyrangiel stated that ‘By the summer of 1993, the popularity of gangsta rap was no longer debatable. With alternative rock already on the decline, MTV sensed it was missing something big and dipped its tow back in playing videos from Dr. Dre’s solo debut on Death Row Records, *The Chronic*. The response was tremendous. The video for “Nuthin’ But a ‘G’ Thing” was a players’ party, with Dre and his reed-thin protégé Snoop Doggy Dogg acting as the governors of good times, West Coast-style. The song was bangin’, and because the MTV audience hadn’t seen it or heard anything like it, they flipped out.’ Josh Tyrangiel, ‘Hip Hop Video’, in *The Vibe History of Hip Hop*, 141.

<sup>393</sup> Many of Dr. Dre’s lyrics also express the centrality of the automobile to his perceived lifestyle. In “Nuthin’ but a ‘G’ Thang”, he states, ‘You never been on a ride like this before’, and the chorus of “Gin and Juice” begins, ‘Rollin’ down the street, smokin indo’. Nate Dogg raps ‘We’re gonna rock it till the wheels fall off’ at the end of “The Next Episode”, a song from Dr. Dre’s second solo album *Chronic 2001* (1999).



**Figure 3.2– The Chronic advertisement in The Source**

The Chronic went on to become the best-selling hardcore rap album in history at the time, and Dre helped his next production credit, Snoop Doggy Dogg’s Doggystyle, to become the first rap album to debut at number one on the

Billboard charts. This synthesized ‘post-funk’ or ‘post-soul’<sup>394</sup> sound would characterize what is known as the ‘G-funk era’ from 1992-1996, emblematic of a ‘West Coast Rap’ aesthetic still influential in hip-hop production. The Chronic is often described as a crossroads in hip-hop historiography, the point when rap music became less about the rap itself (accompanied by unobtrusive beats), and more about how well the rapper incorporated him or herself within the producer’s beats.<sup>395</sup>

As the above quotations suggest, media reception of Dr. Dre’s production often made the link between the wide-open spaces of the West Coast and the development of G-Funk. To quote Dyson, ‘West Coast hip-hop tailored its fat bass beats and silky melodies for jeeps that cruise the generous spaces of the West’;<sup>396</sup> the ideology of ‘The West’ helped to create a dichotomy between G-Funk’s ‘somatic’ sound (often linked with automotive listening) to the allegedly more ‘cerebral’ East Coast sound. One writer includes pop rap artist MC Hammer (from Oakland, California) in this West Coast aesthetic, and suggests that his sound and implied listening spaces are more conducive to mainstream success:

In no uncertain terms, West Coast rap spelled out the acceptable and unacceptable ways to court mainstream success. On the East Coast, however, it was still just courting. New York rap often seemed deeply insular—the tricky wordsmith pyrotechnics and cryptic references of innovators like Gang Starr, Poor Righteous Teachers, and early Tribe Called Quest was much to be played on Walkmans while riding on the subway or cut up by DJ Red Alert in sweaty afterhours underground clubs. Also, much of it was interior—just listen to Rakim go back to the womb on ‘In the Ghetto’—as well as spiritual, frequently laden with the insider-only rhetoric of Muslim sects like the 5 Percent Nation. West

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<sup>394</sup> Eithne Quinn labels the G-Funk Era as ‘post-soul’, referencing Nelson George’s book *Post-Soul Nation* (2004). Eithne Quinn, *Nuthin But a “g” Thang: The Culture and Commerce of Gangsta Rap* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2005), 143.

<sup>395</sup> For a compelling argument of this, see Kelefa Sanneh, ‘Rapping about Rapping: The Rise and Fall of a Hip-hop Tradition’, in *This is Pop*, ed. Eric Weisbard (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2004), 230.

<sup>396</sup> Michael Eric Dyson, ‘Black Youth, Pop Culture, and the Politics of Nostalgia’, in the *Michael Eric Dyson Reader* (New York: Basic Civitas Books, 2004), 421.



Coast hip hop, in contrast, was driving music, ready-made to blare out of car windows and share with the world. And as Hammer found out with the gargantuan sales of *Please Hammer* ... there are more pop-friendly car drivers in America than subway-riding New York rap ideologues.<sup>397</sup>

This bifurcation between East and West, influenced in part by the sounds of the recordings, would have a profound influence on 1990s hip-hop.

The connection between the sounds of ‘G-Funk’ and their implied listening space merits investigation: Dr. Dre envisioned that the primary mode of listening would be through car stereo systems. He explained in a 1992 interview with Brian Cross:

I make the shit for people to bump in their cars, I don’t make it for clubs; if you play it, cool. I don’t make it for radio, I don’t give a fuck about the radio, TV, nothing like that, I make it for people to play in their cars. The reason being is that you listen to music in your car more than anything. You in your car all the time, the first thing you do is turn on the radio, so that’s how I figure. When I do a mix, the first thing I do is go down and see how it sounds in the car. (emphasis added)<sup>398</sup>

For Dr. Dre, the automotive listening space represents an idealized reference because it is reflective of the way he perceives that people listen to his music.<sup>399</sup>

The centrality of the car to his lifestyle can be seen in a number of Dr. Dre’s music videos from *The Chronic*. Dre’s music video for “Nuthin But a ‘G’ Thang” also featured the car prominently as a crucial part of a day in the life of Compton’s black youth.<sup>400</sup> The video opens with a close-up of Dr. Dre’s car radio with a

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<sup>397</sup> Diehl, 129

<sup>398</sup> Brian Cross, *It’s not About a Salary: Rap, Race and Resistance in Los Angeles* (London: Verso, 1993), 197. A similar sentiment was shared by producer Marley Marl when he said that he made the album *Steering Pleasure* ‘for people who wanna have som’n cool playin’ in their rides. You won’t get the same effect if you play the tracks through a regular system; you need a hype car system. The beats are programmed to make the speakers howl, you know what I’m saying’. Quoted in Keyes, 239.

<sup>399</sup> Rapper Ice-T also expressed an association of his ideal listeners with the car stereo sound system when he said, ‘I pretty much record every record in a matter of a month, maybe two at the most ... We did *Power in L.A.* ... The board was connected to the biggest system we could build that resembled a car stereo system, so we could check how it sounded when real people who would buy our tapes listened to that shit. Big woofers and all that.’ Quoted in Brian Coleman, 249.

<sup>400</sup> Snoop Dogg has been quoted as saying that ‘One of the first things I did with my profits was to buy myself a car, a ’77 cutlass supreme four-door I got off one of the homeboys from Compton for

voiceover from ‘DJ Charmaine Champagne’ (actually a pornographic film star) introducing the track. During the voiceover, the camera zooms out in a crane shot similar to the famous opening of Orson Wells’s 1958 *Touch of Evil* (which also featured the automobile prominently in its opening sequence). The camera eventually shows Dr. Dre, exiting his car to pick up his friend Snoop Doggy Dogg at home.<sup>401</sup> During the music video, there is a twenty second sequence that shows Dre and friends in their cars, driving on the freeway going from the picnic they attended to a party. In addition to Dre’s own 1964 Chevrolet Impala (fitted with hydraulics), the video included many other lowrider cars, as Gold recounts:

Chugging, smoke-spewing old relics burnished to a high shine, bounding and rebounding higher and higher, tossing their passengers about like so many extremely urban cowboys. If you peek into the trunk of any of these cars, you will see 14 car batteries hooked up in series and a row of hydraulic motors mounted where you’d expect to see the spare tire, but you’d better get out of the way when it starts to jump.<sup>402</sup>

The video ends with Dre being dropped off at the same house which began the music video, creating a bookend image of the house and the automobile. Multiple gangsta rap music videos began to show the car’s prominence in the Southern Californian ghetto world, such as Dr. Dre’s “Let me Ride”, Ice Cube’s “It was a Good Day”, Nate Dogg’s “G Funk”, and Warren G’s “Regulate”. Associations of rap music with the automobile became so ingrained that it became the source of parody, such as an early 2000s Avis/XM Satellite Radio commercial that featured three middle class men in business suits, white and Asian in ethnicity, commuting to work, listening and rapping along to Lumbajac’s “2Gs”. The lyrical topic of the

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three hundred dollars. It didn’t drive for shit, and every time you hit the brakes you could hear it squealing like a bitch in heat, but I loved the lines of that car and the way I looked sitting behind the wheel ...’. In Gilroy, 81.

<sup>401</sup> Born Calvin Broadus Jr., rapper Snoop Doggy Dogg changed his MC name to ‘Snoop Dogg’ in 1998 when he left Death Row Records for No Limit Records. I use the two interchangeably throughout the chapter.

<sup>402</sup> Gold, 41.

song ('Make that money man ... I gotta stack cheese')<sup>403</sup> fit the men appropriately, but the commercial subverts the imagined audience for the genre of music, usually presented in myriad representations as lower-class African-American youth.

The geography of California is important, here, as one half of Los Angeles is dedicated to spaces designed specifically, and often exclusively, for the automobile (i.e. freeways, roads, parking lots).<sup>404</sup> Southern California is the site of numerous car-culture births (hot rods, Lowriders, GM's Harley Earl, the pinstriping of George Barris and Von Dutch, the car audio aftermarket), helping to incorporate numerous car-inspired inventions into American life such as the drive-in, the suburban shopping mall, 'cruising', the motel, drag racing, fast food, and trademarked modes of hip-hop production such as those from Dr. Dre. Krims has noted that 'One could certainly argue some specificity to the history of rap music in this case: Los Angeles car culture nurtured the so-called "Jeep beats", tracks mixed specifically for playback in car audio systems.'<sup>405</sup> California also played a crucial role in car customization cultures and the development of the subwoofer.<sup>406</sup> Marsh and Collett in their study of the psychology of the automobile, acknowledge that 'The West Coast of America has spawned more auto cults than any other part of the world.'<sup>407</sup> The car cultures which arose in Los Angeles became mediating cultural practices that helped to shape Dr. Dre's music production techniques.

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<sup>403</sup> 'Stack cheese' is urban slang for making money.

<sup>404</sup> Urry, in *Automobilities*, 30.

<sup>405</sup> Krims, *MUG*, 161.

<sup>406</sup> Though the subwoofer was the product of a number of developments by a number of inventors, Los Angeles was crucial to its development and distribution. In the late 1960s, Ken Kreisel teamed up with Jonas Miller (of Jonas Miller Sound in Beverly Hills) and created M&K Sound in 1974, in which the second floor of the shop was devoted to subwoofers. Kreisel's advancements with subwoofers in the early 1970s originated from a desire to reproduce successfully the low frequencies that he heard from the bass of pipe organs in Los Angeles. He went to Harvard, MIT and Bell Labs to collaborate on acoustical research which influenced his products. Wes Phillips, 'Audio Odyssey: Ken Kreisel of M&K', *Stereophile*, March 1997, available at: <http://www.stereophile.com/interviews/136/> (accessed 21 July 2008).

<sup>407</sup> Marsh and Collett, 85.

Los Angeles has had a long history of automobility, with the automobile as central to everyday life since the 1920s. Ashleigh Brilliant writes that

Los Angeles, as the famous architect Richard Neutra pointed out, was the only metropolis in America whose major expansion occurred entirely within the automobile era and was, therefore, able to incorporate the automobile more completely into its highly artificial landscape than could any already well-established city.<sup>408</sup>

One writer wrote in the 1920s that ‘If California ever adopts a new State flower, the motor car is the logical blossom for the honor.’<sup>409</sup> In the 1930s, a California city planner declared that ‘it might be said that Southern Californians have added wheels to their anatomy.’<sup>410</sup> The mythologies surrounding ‘The West’, the frontier, and their cowboys were updated in the automotive era, represented in the film *American Graffiti* (1973) which depicts ‘cruisin’ teenagers in early 1960s California,<sup>411</sup> to quote the Chuck Berry song, with “No Particular Place to Go”. As Peter Wollen writes of the film, ‘The soundtrack of *American Graffiti* comes straight from the car radio, a selection of music played by the radio station’s charismatic disk jockey, Wolfman Jack’; and commenting of soundtracks to films such as *Easy Rider* (1969) and *Thieves Like Us* (1974), he states that, ‘The car radio and the roadside juke joint have taken over the role of the traditional symphonic score.’<sup>412</sup>

California (through Hollywood and other representations) has also become symbolic of a lifestyle or worldview that mediates the (media) reception of the music (or any other perceivably ‘Californian’ cultural product). Laurence Rickels

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<sup>408</sup> Ashleigh Brilliant, *The Great Car Craze: How Southern California Collided with the Automobile in the 1920s* (Santa Barbara: Woodbridge Press, 1989), 121–122.

<sup>409</sup> *Ibid.*, 27.

<sup>410</sup> Quoted in Urry, in *Automobilities*, 31.

<sup>411</sup> Motown corporation also made a version of *American Graffiti* targeted to an African-American audience called *Cooley High* (1975).

<sup>412</sup> Peter Wollen, ‘Introduction’, in *Autopia: Cars and Culture*, eds. Peter Wollen and Joe Kerr (London: Reaktion Books, Ltd., 2002), 13–14.

has written that California has projected, in addition to other elements, a deep concern (even obsession) with the body,<sup>413</sup> adolescence,<sup>414</sup> and excess.<sup>415</sup> Like popular music, and as *American Graffiti* shows, California's claim to adolescence has successfully fused the 'Californian' ideology and popular music with groups such as Jan and Dean, The Rip Chords, and The Beach Boys. Perhaps the excesses said to be emblematic of California (represented by Hollywood and Los Angeles), have also contributed to the exaggerated bass extensions and high amplitudes in car audio competitions and hip-hop soundscapes.

Some have theorized that the sub-bass frequencies central to hip-hop and other 'urban' music genres are influenced by the urban soundscape, presenting a direct relationship between the sonic elements of an urban environment and the music produced from it and for it. Producer/engineer Ralph Sutton states:

Some people have a predisposition for certain styles of music. I grew up in a 60-cycle domain; I was born in Chicago but we moved to the inner part of L.A. early on, right in South Central. And there's always low frequency going on, whether it's the bus going by, the airplane flying over, the jackhammer in the background. So there are certain frequencies we are exposed to for long durations of time, and, obviously I'm not a psychologist, but I think that has something to do with it. If you grow up in an inner city where this is going on all the time, that gives you a different disposition; there's music in that noise. When you hear construction noise and something falls down, there's your boom-boom right there. A different part of that noise is your snare.<sup>416</sup>

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<sup>413</sup> 'California is that surplus of everything which begins with feeling good about oneself—begins, that is, with the body. California advertises the diverse ways of which the body can be submitted to the interpretive demands made of it. No pain, no gain ... But given new modes of grafting the body with technology and postmodern hermeneutics (the fads and punctures of fashionism), one can no longer simply assert the dogma of the body in pain.' Laurence A. Rickels, *The Case of California* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2001), 3.

<sup>414</sup> 'The association of "psychoanalysis," "the body," "the media," and "adolescence" shares its Central European origins with the other philosopheme—"California"—which has superseded the manifest sense or destiny of the unconscious, the body, the media, the teenager. If postmodernity is postmarked (like the repressed according to Freud) "made in Germany," then California is its address and tech-no-future.' *Ibid.*, 11.

<sup>415</sup> Rickels adds that 'The desire to render California a semiotic placeholder for a vast and complex network of contemporary phenomena is not a new one: the Frankfurt School made California an essential supplement to its spookulations.' *Ibid.*, 6.

<sup>416</sup> Ralph Sutton, quoted in Massey, 293.

His ‘sixty-cycle domain’ refers to frequencies at sixty Hertz (cycles per second), according to Sutton, the frequency of a Roland TR-808 kick drum. Whether to be drowned out as exterior sounds (as iPod earbuds do well), or become one with them, urban sounds have had a direct influence on so-called ‘urban music’ genres. The automobile, as a crucial part of urban socialization, has influenced multiple forms of cultural production (including hip-hop music).

Like the car customization cultures of Southern California, Dr. Dre takes old parts, and puts new features on old frameworks. Through his ‘replays’ (Dre’s term) or ‘interpolations’, he is customizing the music for an idealized community of automotive listeners. His production style has been described as perfecting a ‘gangsta pop formula’,<sup>417</sup> the ‘pop’ aspect most likely alluding to his use of the (usually simple) verse-chorus form and the repetitive ‘hooks’ on the choruses (whether by synthesizer in “Dre Day” and “Nuthin But a ‘G’ Thing”, or by the voice in “Gin and Juice”, for example). The notion of G-Funk as ‘gangsta pop’ was not only influenced by song structure and chorus material, but also by the commercial success that *The Chronic* enjoyed, demonstrating that rap music could be successful in the popular music mainstream, what hip-hop historian Jeff Chang calls the ‘popstream’.<sup>418</sup> Dr. Dre’s production will often craft verse-chorus forms more familiar to non-funk-based popular music by using musical material from funk songs that do not follow this form.<sup>419</sup> The finished recorded product, like the

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<sup>417</sup> ‘The *Chronic* became to gangsta rap what Bob Marley’s *Legend* was to reggae—the record that started a mainstream fan on the true path. Dr. Dre perfected the Gangsta Pop formula with Snoop Doggy Dogg’s *Doggystyle*—pop songs with the hardcore aura intact, rendered broadcast-ready by radio edits that, somehow, didn’t castrate the groove.’ Cheo Hodari Coker, *Unbelievable: The Life, Death, and Afterlife of the Notorious B.I.G.* (New York: Three Rivers Press, 2003), 143.

<sup>418</sup> ‘Just as the gang peace movement desired to mainstream hardcore bangers into civic society, *The Chronic* wanted to drive hardcore rap into the popstream.’ Chang, *Can’t Stop Won’t Stop*, 420.

<sup>419</sup> I hesitate to overstate the case that Dre used entirely new materials in his production. After all, many of the keyboards in his productions were used by Parliament and other 1970s groups. Perhaps the success of the eight-track cassette in automotive listening in the United States had some influence on the use of keyboards and other electronic instruments in the 1970s that would have been most compatible to the contemporary technology, as well. What was new about Dre’s style of

automobile, appears as unified object but in actuality originated from numerous disparate sources. The automobile has over 10,000 parts, but car designers attempt to create the illusion of unity. Like Alfred Sloan, Dr. Dre updates the sounds of 1970s funk, what Vance Packard referred to as ‘the upgrading urge’ of the annual model.<sup>420</sup> The car and Dr. Dre’s productions can be seen as symbols of complexity, of hybridity that reflect a desire to create an object with the semblance of unity.

In addition, the interplay between human and machine in the driving experience may enlighten an analysis of hip-hop (and other) recordings that embrace the hybridity of their ‘human’ sounds (e.g. the voice) and their ‘synthesized’ ones (e.g. drum machine, synthesized keyboards). Rather than situate these recordings as reflecting a large-scale shift from ‘the human’ to the ‘post-human’ in society as Katherine Hayles has suggested, it is more productive in this case to analyse how much of contemporary recorded music is a mix of the human, the synthesized, the acoustic (e.g. string, guitar, drum kit), and of other electromechanical instruments that are so deeply ingrained in cultural consciousness that we give little thought to their status as ‘technological artefacts’ (e.g. electric guitar, electric bass).<sup>421</sup> G-Funk, like many rap subgenres, espouses a notion of ‘realness’. Rather than present a case of ‘posthuman’ ventriloquism by way of cyborg-like voices (Radiohead’s “Fitter, Happier”, for example), the technology used here is derived from a funk-based lineage (‘connecting machines and funkiness’, from Goodwin) that emphasizes the humanness, the realness, of the

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hip-hop production was the re-recording of materials, attention to popular music forms, and the flexibility with which he was able to alter the musical elements and textures of the recording.

<sup>420</sup> Quoted in Frances Basham and Bob Ughetti, *Car Culture* (London: Plexus 1984), 40.

<sup>421</sup> Katherine Hayles, *How we Became Posthuman: Virtual Bodies in Cybernetics, Literature, and Informatics* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999). This echoes the statement from Auner that ‘in no aspect of our lives has the penetration of the human by machines been more complete than in music ... we no longer even recognize complex devices such as a piano as technological artefacts.’ Joseph Auner, “‘Sing it for Me’: Posthuman Ventriloquism in Recent Popular Music’, *Journal of the Royal Musicological Association* 128, no. 1 (2003): 99.

rapper.<sup>422</sup> I would argue further that Dr. Dre’s emphasis on not textually signalling the borrowed material directly (in other words, not digitally sampling or making it sound sampled) helps contribute to this particular sense of realness.

An example typical of Dr. Dre’s early 1990s production that demonstrates this hybridity of material and suitability for automotive listening is the Dr. Dre-produced single “Who am I? (What’s my Name?)”, the debut single from Snoop Doggy Dogg’s *Doggystyle* (1993) [CD Example 21]. The synthesized sounds include a Roland TR-808 drum machine and a Moog synthesizer bass line derived from Tom Browne’s “Funkin’ for Jamaica” from the album *Love Approach* (1979). The basic beat is repeated throughout the song and changes texturally in terms of layering rather than in dynamic range, as it is likely that heavy dynamic compression was used in production to elevate the volume over the road and engine noise of a car. (See waveform below on page 179.) The “Snoop Doggy Dogg” line, collectively sung in the intro, is from Parliament Funkadelic’s “Atomic Dog” and the second vocal line is from Parliament’s “Tear the Roof off the Sucker (Give up the Funk)”, melodically virtually the same, but placed on a different harmonic backdrop/frame/chassis. Vocal line three is a quotation of vocal effects from “Atomic Dog”: ‘Bow wow wow yippie yo yippie yay’.<sup>423</sup> What I call the ‘guitar intro’ (bb. 1–2) is a sample from The Count’s “Pack of Lies” from the album *What’s up front that Counts* (1971), a two bar excerpt with guitar and saxophones. Foregrounded lyrical textures travel among Snoop Dogg’s laid back verses, singing

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<sup>422</sup> Auner discusses Radiohead’s “Fitter, Happier” and Moby’s “Porcelain” as examples of posthuman voices. For an example of the use of the vocoder as an example of empowering femininity in Cher’s “Believe”, see Kay Dickinson, ““Believe”? Vocoder, Digitised Female Identity and Camp’ *Popular Music* 20, no. 3 (2001): 333–347. Unlike these examples, Snoop Dogg’s voice is far from that of a cyborg-esque posthuman ventriloquism. In contrast, the humanness of his voice is supported and framed by the synthesized sounds, male vocal effects, group singing, and the female voice of the coda.

<sup>423</sup> This line from “Atomic Dog” is also quoted (without effects) in “F—wit Dre Day” on *The Chronic*, a song similar in harmonic structure and instrumentation to “Who am I?”



in the chorus, and Zapp-like vocal effects (as Zapp frontman Roger Troutman was known primarily for his use of the ‘talk box’). The track ends with vocals from an uncredited female voice, who sings improvisational-sounding melismas on the name ‘Snoop Doggy Dogg’.

**“Who am I? (What’s My Name)?” Song Structure**

**‘Guitar intro’** (2 bars)

**Chorus**—b. 3—Basic beat begins (4 bars) + Vocal line 1 (4=2+2 bars)

**Verse 1** (12 bars)

**Chorus 2**—Vocal line 1 (4=2+2 bars) + Vocal line 2 (4 bars)

**Verse 2** (12 bars)

**Chorus 3**—Vocal line 1 (4 bars) + Vocal line 3 (4 bars: ‘Bow wow wow

yippie yo yippie yay’ from

“Atomic Dog”)

**Verse 3** (12 bars)

**Chorus 4**—(Double chorus)—Vocal line 1 (8 bars) + Vocal line 2

(8 bars)

**Coda**—twenty bars of female vocalist singing ‘Snoop Doggy Dogg’

After the two bar guitar intro, the basic beat begins (Example 3.2):

### Snoop Doggy Dogg "Who am I? (What's My Name?)"

High synthesizer (8va)

Voices

Keyboard (detuned)

Vocoder

Voice (with effects)

Minimoog bass

The bomb

pitch bend

5

High synthesizer

Voices

Snoop Dog-gy Do - o - o - o - og Snoop Dog-gy Do - o - o - o - og

Kbd.

Vocoder

Voice

the bomb dawg

Bs.

pitch bend

The three verses are primarily rapped by Snoop Doggy Dogg, although Dr. Dre recites a few lines at the end of verse one. The lyrical topics of the song focus on his debut as a solo artist, bragging about his lifestyle, locality of Long Beach, and his collaborations with Dr. Dre.<sup>424</sup> Interestingly, in the music video for “Who am I?” (directed by rapper Fab 5 Freddy), Dre’s portion of the rap includes a visual of him standing next to a white car in front of a house similar to the one in “ ‘G’ Thang”. Though the narrative of the music video has little to do with the automobile, “Who am I?” still demonstrates the centrality of the automobile to Dr. Dre’s lifestyle and status. In the song, each chorus always contains at least one, four-bar iteration of vocal line one (consisting of the repeated, two bar phrase), but each chorus is slightly different, mixing multiple elements from the George Clinton songs that Dr. Dre interpolates. As was characteristic of his production style at the time, Dr. Dre borrows from multiple different songs and constructs a verse-chorus form with them. It is a ‘simple verse-chorus’ form, in that the harmony does not change between verse and chorus, and it is noteworthy that he was able to tailor material with relatively static harmonies into a repeating four-chord pattern (bm, bm/A, G, F#7). The synthesized bass line and high-pitched synthesizers on “Who am I?” are consistent with styles used on *The Chronic*. In fact, “F—wit Dre Day” from *The Chronic* is strikingly similar to “Who am I?” in terms of the timbre of the bass line, its harmonic motion, and the use of high and low synthesizers.

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<sup>424</sup> It is noteworthy that “Who am I?” was Snoop Doggy Dogg’s official debut; emphasizing his realness and humanness would be especially important to ensure future success. Dr. Dre has introduced a number of protégés since that also had debut singles produced by him, including Eminem, 50 Cent, and The Game.

<b>Musical Phrase</b>	<b>Derived from:</b>
Moog bass line	Tom Browne's "Funkin' for Jamaica" (1981)
Vocal Line 1	George Clinton's "Atomic Dog" (1982)
Vocal Line 2	Parliament's "Tear the Roof off the Sucker (Give up the Funk)" (1976)
'Talk box'	Zapp-style (1978-80s funk band)
Low vocal effects and Vocal Line 3	"Atomic Dog" (1982)

**Table 3.1—"Who am I? (What's My Name)?"**

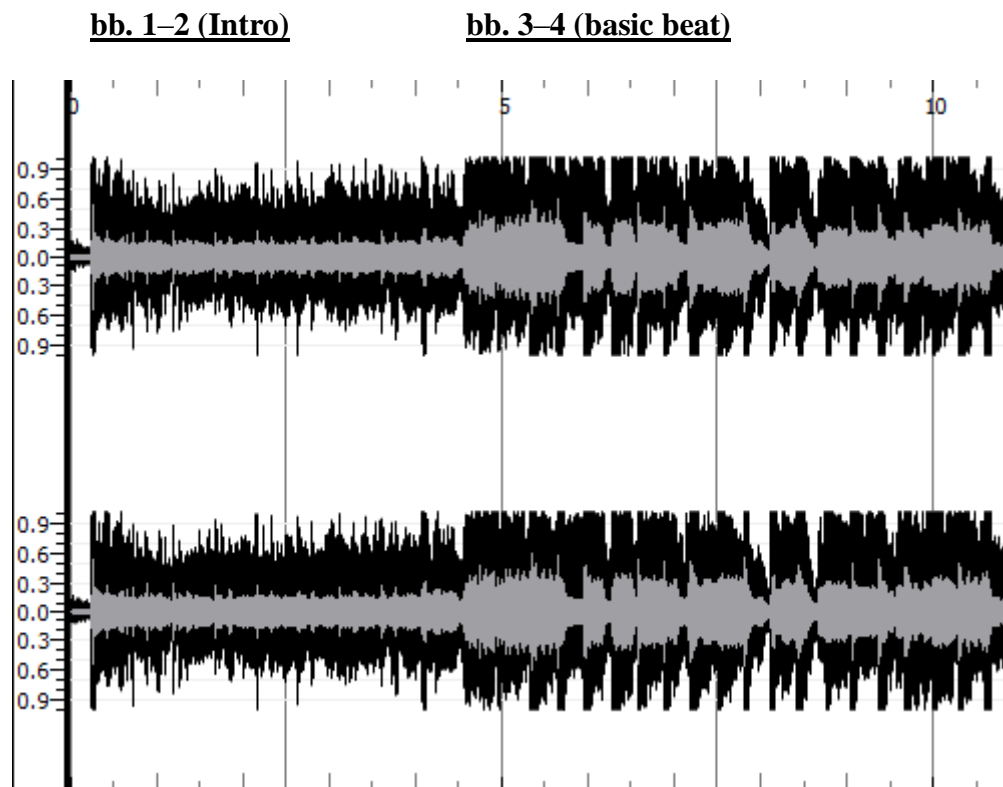
While drum sounds and beats from funk were used since the earliest days of digital sampling in hip-hop, these were usually drawn from the earlier funk of James Brown (e.g. "The Funky Drummer") and other recordings from the late 1960s and early 1970s such as the Incredible Bongo Band's version of "Apache" (1972). Dr. Dre, in contrast, borrows funk music from a decade later, largely from the late 1970s and early 1980s in this example, reproducing stylistic characteristics such as synthesizers and vocal effects.

The decision to open with an early 1970s sample ("Pack of Lies") which never returns in the song may be demonstrating a conscious shift in funk sources, as Dr. Dre has expanded the hip-hop sound palette to reflect later funk developments for the rest of the song's duration. The song opening with a digital sample, quickly yielding to an un-sampled basic beat in a way authenticates this conscious shift. Richard Dyer, in his book on pastiche, includes a chapter on pastiche works within works of art. He cites the newsreel in *Citizen Kane* (film within a film) and the play 'Murder of Gonzago' within *Hamlet* (play within a play). Dyer writes that the 'effect of the inner pastiche is to authenticate the outer form.'<sup>425</sup> In a way, though the 'inner pastiche' occurs at the opening of the song, the purpose of the sample is to contrast with, and authenticate, the realness of the entire song.<sup>426</sup>

<sup>425</sup> Dyer, *Pastiche*, 80.

<sup>426</sup> Of course, sample-based hip-hop can suggest realness as well, explicated in Krims's discussion of The Bomb Squad's production on Ice Cube's "The Nigga you Love to Hate". Krims, *Rap Music*,

As can be heard in the contrast between bb. 1–2 and bb. 3–4, the basic beat of the song appears stretched so that it fills the extreme ranges of its amplitude, something that would be ideal for loud environments such as the rumbling noises of an automobile. The graphic representation of the audio signal in the waveform below shows the differences between the ‘guitar intro’ and the ‘basic beat’:



**Figure 3.3—Opening of “Who am I?” Waveform (from Sonic Visualizer)**

In the waveform, the x-axis represents time and y-axis represents the voltage level of the audio output. The waveform signal shows that the overall amplitude appears expanded compared to the intro, and suggests the use of dynamic range compression on the basic beat. The effect is that bars three to the end of the song sound ‘louder’ and more ‘filled out’ than the intro section, consistent with Dr. Dre’s desire to fill the automotive listening space.

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93–102. “Who am I” may reflect shifting sonic representations of ‘realness’ within the reality rap music subgenre, partly influenced by Dre’s shift away from sample-based production.

### Example 3.3—Comparison of Vocal Line 1

George Clinton "Atomic dog" from *Computer Games* (1982)

Voice

A - tom - ic D - o - o - o - og

Snoop Doggy Dogg "Who am I?"

Voice

Snoop dog - gy do o - o - og

By re-recording vocal lines from pre-existing sources, Dr. Dre can change the harmonic framework of the phrases and adapt them to any given harmony. In vocal line 1 above, for example, the original version contains a harmonic backdrop of D for the duration, whereas the new version has a bass line that suggests a descending progression (bm, bm/A, G, F#7). This creates a different effect, one of less static harmonic motion including relatively strong movement to the dominant before returning to the tonic every two bars. Despite the harmonic differences, the melodic line is similar enough that the allusion to "Atomic Dog" can still easily be recognized. In the Snoop Dogg version of vocal line 1, there is a group singing the melodic line, a quotation that directly signifies the Parliament-style, collectively-sung choruses. Both versions repeat the two bar phrase as well. Lyrically, Dr. Dre takes advantage of the dog/Dogg connection by quoting dog references from "Atomic Dog" at multiple points in "Who am I?"

### Example 3.4—Comparison of Vocal Line 2

Parliament "Tear the roof off the sucker (Give up the Funk)" from *Mothership Connection* (1976)

Voices

"Who am I?" Second Vocal Line

Voices

4 Bm Bm/A G F# Bm Bm/A G F#

A similar tailoring occurs with vocal line 2. Once again, the original from George Clinton's Parliament has a funk groove over just one chord, this time, an E7. There are multiple voices singing in both examples (both shift from monophony to homophony), and the harmonies have changed to reflect the implied harmonies of the new bass line.

The contrast between the high and low synthesizer frequencies in "Who am I?" and other examples in that style are particularly effective in car sound systems, where the highly directional tweeters can exclusively support the high end frequencies, and the power of the subwoofer(s) produce the corporeal sensations from the bassline. The 'human sounds' (e.g. Snoop's rap, collective voices, and female at the end), their locus in the frequency range easiest for humans to hear (3kHz–7kHz), will be supported by woofers/midrange speakers which require much less power than a subwoofer.

The styles utilized in G-Funk (including late 70s/early 80s P-Funk, R&B, and simple verse-chorus form), largely pioneered in rap music by Dr. Dre and his collaborators, spread its influence over a number of subsequent groups. One

example of a rap song that shares timbral style with Dre's G-Funk is the song "Thuggish Ruggish Bone" by Bone Thugs-n-Harmony from their album *Creepin On Ah Come Up* (1994), which uses a mix of high synthesizer, low bass, and the singing of Shatasha Williams. Though G-Funk was considered a "West Coast" style, it was also used by artists said to represent the East coast. For example, The Notorious B.I.G.'s "Big Poppa" (1994) used a high-pitched synthesizer riff derived from The Isley Brothers' "Between the Sheets" in the style of Dr. Dre's production.

Synthesized sounds, dynamic range compression, and prominent bass frequencies are but three elements that seem to be most compatible with the automotive soundscape. The experience of automotive listening is a synthesis of musical technology and automotive technology that must co-exist with each other to be successful; I would argue that a certain aspect of popular music records can be analysed through this particular, historically-specific compatibility. Like the car-driver/driver-car relationship, hip-hop recordings are a mix of 'human' elements and technology, a mix of man and man-made machine. Consideration of a particular listening space, the transfer function of loudspeakers and their resonant frequency, should be acknowledged as an important component of subject position in the listening experience.

As we consider the automotive soundscape in hip-hop recordings, we should allow for alternatives to traditional analysis that accommodate the way that music producers think of sound (in terms of frequency rather than pitch in a Western notational sense).<sup>427</sup> Frequency, playback spaces and speakers, and the

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<sup>427</sup> Evidence of this in hip-hop production may be found in the phenomena of 'de-tuned' layers; if certain layers of sound do not correspond to exact notes in the well-tempered chromatic scale, then this supports the idea that producers think of sound in terms of frequency, rather than in terms of Western pitches. For example, Dr. Dre's "F—wit Dre Day" is in a key somewhere between c minor and c# minor. For more on 'de-tuned' layers, see Krims, *Rap Music*. Not all rap songs are de-tuned, however; for example, "Who am I? (What's My Name)?" is closer to a traditional key than not.



hybrid human-machine element of recordings are all undertheorized facets of popular music production and the automotive listening experience.

## **Conclusion**

As a product of place- and space-specific urban car cultures, Dr. Dre's production techniques reflect a desire to customize and tailor sounds for the automotive soundscape. Automobile production, geographical specificity, and other mediating cultural practices such as car customization cultures have shaped Dr. Dre's and other producers' music production techniques. Perhaps car audio, like the streamlined outer appearance of many automobiles, provides the illusion of unity, sonically suturing the inconsistencies or ruptures in the fragmented bodies of culture, ideology, and subjectivity; like hip-hop music, the automobile is a unique (almost paradoxical) hybrid: both public (on the road) and private (owned), a site of mastery and womb-like comfort, human and machine, symbolizing freedom and dependence (on petrol), at times transcendent and other times suffocating, a fantasy object and the cause of trauma and nightmare, an object-cause of desire and a cause of stress (traffic jams and road rage), a 'symbolic sanctuary'<sup>428</sup> and the cause of numerous fatalities.

Jonathan Bell, in writing of the car's influence on architecture, comments that 'yet our experience of the city, and hence our response to architecture, is almost exclusively conducted through the medium of the automobile: the car defines our space whether we are driving, being driven, or avoiding being driven over.'<sup>429</sup> Marsh and Collett write that 'It is because the car has so much personal value that we have been, and are still, prepared to alter radically the environments

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<sup>428</sup> Michael Bull, 'Soundscapes of the Car', in *The Auditory Culture Reader*, ed. Michael Bull and Les Back (Oxford: Berg, 2003), 371.

<sup>429</sup> Jonathan Bell, *Architecture: When the car and the city collide* (London: Birkhäuser, 2001), 11.

in which we live in order to create societies in which the automobile can feature so centrally.<sup>430</sup> The automobile has had a tremendous amount of influence on many realms of life, a fact that has yet to be thoroughly researched. And if the car does indeed define the spaces in which we live, and the automotive space is largely experienced in terms of sound, then one could say that sound (as mediated through the automobile) and our sense of space mutually influence each other.<sup>431</sup>

There are numerous levels by which one could investigate the automobile's influence on the world's soundscapes, such as the individual experience of car-drivers, the influence of the car on music production, car audio subcultures, and larger national and transnational trends.<sup>432</sup> In 2005, it was estimated that there were over 700 million cars on the world's roads;<sup>433</sup> this statistic suggests that automobility will continue to be a pervasive force in the decades to come, continuing the ever-shifting social, economic and political forces that shape the automobile, and the object's influence on multiple realms of societies. This chapter presents borrowing practices in hip-hop that are particularly conscious of idealized playback spaces, encouraging analysis of particular modes of listening, modes that have in turn inflected the way music recordings are produced.

### **A Psychoanalytic Coda**

The female voice that closes "Who am I?" is particularly conspicuous, as Krims has noted that any substantial female presence of any sort had been rare in 'harder'

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<sup>430</sup> Marsh and Collett, 4.

<sup>431</sup> Bull writes that 'Sound engulfs the spatial, thus making the relation between subject and object problematic.' Bull, 'Soundscapes of the Car', 361; Both Urry and Bull have recognized that drivers experience inhabiting the car rather than inhabiting the road or street on which one drives.

<sup>432</sup> This framework is adapted from the tripartite framework provided by Mimi Sheller in her study of emotion and automobility. Her framework outlines the: 1) micro-level: preferences for individual drivers; 2) meso-level: specifically located car cultures; and 3) macro-level: regional, national and transnational emotional/cultural/material geographies. Mimi Sheller, 'Automotive Emotions: Feeling the Car', in *Automobilities*, 222.

<sup>433</sup> Urry, in *Automobilities*, 25.

rap genres before G-Funk.<sup>434</sup> Stylistically, the singing is derived from ‘softer’ styles such as contemporary R&B (e.g. R. Kelly, Mariah Carey), another ‘human’ element perhaps in contrast with the vocal effects used exclusively for male voices.<sup>435</sup> I use the presence of the female voice as a catalyst to shift the attention briefly from music production to the role of the subject in the listening experience.

In analyzing the role of music in the driving experience, turning to psychoanalysis provides another hermeneutic window to theorize the pleasures of automobility further. Many have noted the importance of sound in early human development: Tia DeNora writes that ‘The first music we hear is inside the womb’;<sup>436</sup> Philip Tagg writes, ‘At the age of minus four months most humans start to hear’;<sup>437</sup> and Mary Ann Doane writes, ‘Space, for the child, is defined initially in terms of the audible, not the visible.’<sup>438</sup> Their comments draw from scientific studies that conclude a child in the womb can hear a regular heartbeat as well as other homeostatic processes to aid development.

Psychoanalyst Jacques Lacan situates the first loss in the history of the subject at the moment of birth. The womb becomes an *objet petit a*, an unattainable object of desire like the gaze, the breast, and the voice, manifested in many objects—what Lacan called the object-cause of desire. For Lacan, the human constant is centred on a lost object, a signifier which can take many forms and be

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<sup>434</sup> Krims, *Rap Music*, 86.

<sup>435</sup> Alexander G. Weheliye considers the melismatic and ‘soulful’ voice of R&B as representing a different form of posthumanism than those described by Hayles and Donna Haraway. See Alexander Weheliye, ‘“Feenin”’: Posthuman Voices in Contemporary Black Popular Music’, *Social Text* 71 (2002): 21–47.

<sup>436</sup> Tia DeNora, *Music in Everyday Life* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 77. She cites research published in *Nursing Times* 88 (1992) and *Nursing Times* 91 (1995).

<sup>437</sup> Philip Tagg, ‘Subjectivity and Soundscape, Motorbikes and Music’, in *The Popular Music Studies Reader*, eds. Andy Bennett, Barry Shank and Jason Toynbee (London: Routledge, 2006), 44.

<sup>438</sup> Mary Ann Doane, ‘The Voice in Cinema: The Articulation of Body and Space’, in *Film Sound: Theory and Practice*, eds. Elisabeth Weis and John Belton (New York: Columbia University Press, 1985), 170. Doane writes that ‘The voice has greater command over space than the look—one can hear around corners, through walls.’

the source of one's drives. Kaja Silverman uses a useful film analogy in the narrative from *Citizen Kane*: Rosebud becomes the 'most profound lost object' for protagonist Charles Foster Kane. For most of the film, Kane amasses objects in an attempt to compensate for this particular loss.

Film theorists in the 1970s have written of the voice (specifically, the maternal voice) as a 'sonorous envelope', an oceanic bath of sounds, which return the subject to his/her first instance of auditory pleasure. As Guy Rosolato writes of the maternal voice which first surrounds the baby, 'One could argue that it is the first model of auditory pleasure and that music finds its roots and its nostalgia in [this] original atmosphere which might be called a sonorous womb.'<sup>439</sup> And as Claudia Gorbman writes, 'The imaginary longing for bodily fusion with the mother [the first other] is never erased.'<sup>440</sup>

David Schwarz has taken up these developments from feminist film theory and writes of listening to music in the concert hall as a form of the 'sonorous envelope'. His examples point to the minimalist music of John Adams and Steve Reich as facilitating a threshold crossing; music as a fantasy thing and a fantasy space.<sup>441</sup>

I would argue, however, that the automobile works better as a symbolic womb, a 'sonorous envelope' or 'sonorous womb' which returns the subject to those pre-natal and neo-natal auditory pleasures (when we were at one with our mother). Perhaps we feel the regular, booming bass beat in a car stereo as similar to a heartbeat, and the 'silky melodies' as reminiscent of the auditory pleasures of the maternal voice. The rhythmic regularity may be likened to the homeostasis that is

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<sup>439</sup> Quoted in David Schwarz, *Listening Subjects: Music, Psychoanalysis, Culture* (London: Duke University Press, 1997), 8.

<sup>440</sup> Claudia Gorbman, *Unheard Melodies: Narrative Film Music* (Bloomington: University of Indiana Press, 1987), 62.

<sup>441</sup> Schwarz, 8.

needed for a child's early development in the womb (one reason why music has been used in respiratory care and in labour to regulate breathing, and for pain management).<sup>442</sup>

If we see the womb as a 'lost object' of desire, then perhaps the pleasures we receive from listening to music while driving is literally a drive to reunite ourselves with a state before birth. And since the aural is also linked to the tactile in the womb, the rumblings of both the car and the sound system speakers may provide a 'total body' sensation similar to being in a mother's womb. The experience listeners may have in their cars, aurally and somatically, may remind us of our development, something we will never have direct access to, ever again.

But we also need to acknowledge the role of mastery in the driving experience, the possibility of attaining the phallus, that elusive object we were unable to provide for our mothers which later manifests itself as symbolic signifier. (To have the phallus, it is said, is to control the omnipotent mother, to be the sole object of her desire.) The automobile provides a level of mastery over space and time, particularly the feeling of domination that America's 'giantism' provides (the Hummer as perhaps its most appropriate symbol), as well as the symbolic mastery in private ownership (in contrast to the railway). We must also consider the phallogentrism, violence, and misogyny of many gangsta rap lyrics which may give the listener, through transference, a feeling of power, control, and/or domination. And one should also consider, following Middleton's groundbreaking work, the mastery involved in the repetition of popular music. Singing (or rapping) along will provide the suture in which we can 'lose ourselves', becoming at one with sound and space. Or to quote Kaja Silverman (from the work of Jacques-Alain Miller and Jean-Pierre Oudart), the experience of suture is that the Spectator-subject fills in for

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<sup>442</sup> DeNora, *Music in Everyday Life*, 82.

the lack or loss (the 'absent one') in the film image, vanishing into the filmic field while gaining 'meaning at the expense of being.'<sup>443</sup>

To quote Wolfgang Sachs, who neatly summarizes the hybrid drive for comfort and mastery in the automobile, 'Because of this symbiosis, it is very easy for human sensuousness to become intertwined with the functions of the technology, thus calling up that peculiar emotional mixture of regression and omnipotence. It is cozy, this tension between security and the thrill of power, between uterus and phallus.'<sup>444</sup> Music helps transform the car into a fantasy space, reminiscent of womb-like comfort while enabling the driver with a sense of mastery.<sup>445</sup>

On the basis that one should not misunderstand the purpose of symbolic signifiers in Lacanian psychoanalysis, I emphasize that I am not directly trying to suggest that one's mother's womb sounds like Dr. Dre, but psychoanalytic perspectives may be one useful pathway by which to read the pleasurable experience of listening to music in cars. The 'peculiar emotional mixture' of the uterus and phallus is perhaps one particular reason why the car has persisted for so long. It is only until we locate the symptoms of automobility in the contemporary state of urban cultures, most crucially the pleasures of the 'sonorous envelope' of the car's interior soundscape, that we can ever hope to find a solution to our dependence on the automobile as an object of desire.

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<sup>443</sup> Kaja Silverman, *The Subject of Semiotics* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1984), 219.

<sup>444</sup> Wolfgang Sachs, *For the Love of the Automobile: Looking Back into the History of Our Desires*, trans. Don Reneau (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992), 133. The intercourse between these two desired objects, the mastery of the phallus and the comfort of the womb, will undoubtedly vary between drivers.

<sup>445</sup> The iPod is a greater technological device to attain the mastery we seek, mastery over space and seemingly infinite playlists, but it cannot necessarily supply the womb-like comfort as sufficiently as the automobile does. While the music certainly provides a large degree of 'warmth' in the 'chilly spaces' of urbanity, we need to acknowledge the importance of the physical enclosure and the Baudrillardian 'bubble' it creates. For an explanation of 'warm' vs. 'chilly' urban spaces, see Michael Bull, *Sound Moves: iPod Culture and Urban Experience* (London: Routledge, 2007).

‘Posterity is to the philosopher what the hereafter is to the believer.’<sup>446</sup>  
—Diderot

‘The hero of yesterday becomes the tyrant of tomorrow, unless he crucifies himself today.’<sup>447</sup>  
—Joseph Campbell

‘Picture yourself goin out as a hero  
Picture mural pictures of us painted all over street corners  
Fans meet to mourn us, while we meet the coroners ...  
Biggie’s back and ’Pac’s, landmarks, history in rap’.  
—Eminem, “It Has Been Said”, Notorious B.I.G. Duets: The Final Chapter (2005)

## –Chapter 4–

# **The Martyr Industry: Tupac Shakur, The Notorious B.I.G. and Postmortem Borrowing**

### **Posthumous Fame, Popular Music, and Society**

The 2000 Up in Smoke Tour included an interlude where Dr. Dre and Snoop Dogg gave tribute to a number of rappers who had passed away (Easy E, Big Pun, and Notorious B.I.G.). They saved rapper Tupac Shakur (who recorded under the name 2Pac) for last, and the audience can be seen in DVD footage standing up, cheering enthusiastically for the deceased rapper. The 2Pac song “Gangsta Party” plays over the loudspeaker as Snoop asks, “Do y’all love Tupac?” The audience responds, “Yeah”. The exchange proceeds as follows:

Snoop: “Well if y’all love Tupac like we love Tupac, Boston,  
everybody in the muthafuckin house let me hear ya say ‘Tu-Pac’”.

Audience: “Tu-Pac”.

(x3) Snoop: “Say ‘Tu-Pac’”. Audience: “Tu-Pac”.

(x2) Snoop: “Say ‘we love you’”. Audience: “We love you” .

(x2) Snoop: “Say ‘we miss you’”. Audience: “We miss you”.

Call and response between performer and audience is quite common at live popular music performances, but this Up in Smoke Tour tribute segment began to take the

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<sup>446</sup> Quoted in Plinio Prioreschi, *A History of Human Responses to Death* (Lampeter: Edwin Mellen Press, 1990), 97.

<sup>447</sup> Joseph Campbell, *The Hero With A Thousand Faces* (London: Fontana Press, 1993), 353.

character of a quasi-religious ritual. The tribute demonstrated both the close proximity of death in gangsta rap culture and the power of (posthumous) stardom functioning as a type of religion within popular music culture. As Eminem raps of stardom, ‘It’s like these kids hang on every single statement we make like they worship us’,<sup>448</sup> and according to David Giles, who has written on the psychology of fame, the figure of celebrity is a ‘conduit for a “higher” entity’ in secular culture.<sup>449</sup>

Posthumous stardom, particularly of artists who die young, often constructs a more intensified aura of authority and cultural power than a living celebrity. Memorialisers intervene to create a portrait of the artist which often involves fitting him/her into larger narratives. This is not to say that the canonization does not begin during an artist’s lifetime, but the postmortem eulogizing and memorializing presents the life and body of work together in retrospect, looking at how artists were a reflection of their society and influenced new directions within it. For example, Kurt Cobain was eulogized as a ‘spokesman for a generation’, that he ‘caught the generational drama of our time’.<sup>450</sup> Their untimely passing is of a ritualistic importance, as deaths of important figures often become events for the media and fans as signposts of eras in their culture. As Douglas J. Davis writes, ‘physical death is such a powerful force in human experience that it has been

<sup>448</sup> Eminem, “Sing for the Moment”, *The Eminem Show* (2002), Interscope Records.

<sup>449</sup> David Giles, *Illusions of Immortality: A Psychology of Fame and Celebrity* (London: Macmillian Press, 2000), 135. For the classic text on stardom in the context of film, see Richard Dyer, *Stars* (London: British Film Institute, 1998).

<sup>450</sup> Anthony DeCurtis, ‘Kurt Cobain: 1967–1994’, *Rolling Stone* 683, 2 June 1994, 30. DeCurtis writes of Cobain: ‘He and his band Nirvana announced the end of one rock and roll era and the start of another. In essence, Nirvana transformed the ’80s into the ’90s.’ David Fricke, in ‘Heart-Shaped Noise: The Music and the Legacy’ (also in *Rolling Stone* 683), writes ‘Cobain’s suicide note is a defining moment in rock and roll for all the obvious reasons’, and in reference to Nirvana’s first hit “Smells Like Teen Spirit”: ‘it takes one song to define an epoch—or at least to mark the starting line.’ Fricke, 66. See also Norman Pecora and Sharon R. Mazzarella, ‘Kurt Cobain, Generation X, and the Press; College Students Respond’, *Popular Music and Society* 19, no. 2 (1995): 3–22. Sharon R. Mazzarella “‘The Voice of a Generation’?: Media Coverage of the Suicide of Kurt Cobain’, *Popular Music and Society* 19, no. 2 (1995): 49–68. Steve Jones, ‘Covering Cobain: Narrative Patterns in Journalism and Rock Criticism’, *Popular Music and Society* 19, no. 2 (1995): 103–118.



extensively employed as a symbol for other cultural events, where one phase of existence ends and another is established in its stead.<sup>451</sup> Journalistic memorializations that link artists with their culture largely concern themselves with conferring on the artist a metaphorical sense of place (into a generation, canon, history or other tropes of the journalistic narrative). Locating artistic identity, which often means trying to find the ‘real’ person behind the image, seems to be of great importance to both media and fans and manifests itself in a number of ways. While the voice of the artist becomes silenced in one sense (the fact Cobain cannot respond to his eulogizers or change his career makes him easier to analyze), the music is often said to ‘live on’, becoming a symbol of the mythical artist and everything the postmortem discourse chooses him/her to represent. The romantic glorification of death in writings, and the presentation of an artists’ works and voice, construct a complex nexus best described as a form of symbolic immortality.<sup>452</sup> Most important to this study, is the use of this symbolic immortality by other artists through digitally sampling the voice or image of a deceased artist.

The aura from dying young surrounds figures in music as diverse as Giovanni Battista Pergolesi (died age 26), Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart (35), Charlie Parker, (35) Jim Morrison (27), Jimi Hendrix (27), and Kurt Cobain (27). Less than two decades after rap music began, Tupac Shakur and The Notorious

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<sup>451</sup> Douglas J. Davies, *Death, Ritual, and Belief* (London: Cassell, 1997), 177. One important death as cultural event was of Princess Diana in 1997. Her funeral was shown around the world, and included Elton John’s performance of “Candle in the Wind” which then went on to become one of the best-selling singles of all time. C.W. Watson goes as far as to consider Diana symbolically as the royal sacrificial victim who died for the British nation’s sins. He writes, ‘just as the blood of martyrs is the seed of the church, so the death of secular social martyrs can be regarded as the seed for the regeneration of the nation.’ C.W. Watson, “‘Born a Lady, Became a Princess, Died a Saint’: The reaction to the death of Diana, Princess of Wales’, *Anthropology Today* 13, no. 6 (1997), 7.

<sup>452</sup> The concept of symbolic immortality, as theorized by Robert Jay Lifton, is discussed at length in the third chapter of his book *Living and Dying*. Robert Jay Lifton and Eric Olson, *Living and Dying* (London: Wildwood House, 1974). See also Lifton, *The Future of Immortality and Other Essays for a Nuclear Age* (New York: Basic Books, Inc., 1987) and Lifton, *The Broken Connection: On Death and the continuity of Life* (Washington DC: American Psychiatric Press, 1999). Giles’ study of fame notes the ‘long literary tradition of presenting fame as immortality, from Virgil (“I too may ... fly in victory on the lips of men”) through to the lyrics of Irene Cara’s song: “Fame! I want to live forever”.’ Giles, 49.

B.I.G. (real name Christopher Wallace, also referred to as Biggie Smalls or simply Biggie) were murdered within six months of each other and became the first rap artists bestowed symbolic immortality.<sup>453</sup> Their ‘feud’ was described as a war between West Coast (represented by Tupac) and East Coast (represented by Notorious B.I.G.) rappers in the media, which even led to speculation that Biggie was responsible for Tupac’s murder and those associated with Tupac murdered Biggie for revenge.<sup>454</sup> In part, because of the unsolved mysteries surrounding the murders of these two rappers, their aura may be more accurately described as a mystique, one which has become a distinguished event in gangsta rap culture (and in the larger ‘hip-hop world’ that I outline in my introduction). Journalists often invoke the phrase ‘post-Biggie era’ or ‘post-Tupac era’, or other phrases which invoke the idea that their deaths signalled the end of one era and the beginning of another. In effect, they have become ‘larger than life’, and also, larger than death. As one author put it, alluding to the tragedy and historical moment of Sept. 11, 2001, ‘2Pac and Biggie have been the twin towering martyrs of hip hop.’<sup>455</sup> Their immortality persists while these artists are remembered and signposted, representative of a time period or social group. The UK newspaper *The Independent*, for instance, labelled Tupac Shakur on the 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary of his murder as ‘a hero of a generation’.<sup>456</sup>

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<sup>453</sup> Tupac Shakur was gunned down at an intersection in Las Vegas following his attendance of the Mike Tyson–Bruce Seldon fight on 7 Sept. 1996. The Notorious B.I.G. (Christopher Wallace) was shot in similar fashion on 9 March 1997 in Los Angeles. Tupac was twenty-five years old and Wallace was twenty-four when they were murdered. As of this writing, no one has been arrested for either murder.

<sup>454</sup> There are a number of theories surrounding both murders which have spawned numerous books and documentary films. See Randall Sullivan, *Labyrinth: Corruption and Vice in the L.A.P.D.* (Edinburgh: Canongate Books Ltd., 2002) and Nick Broomfield’s documentary *Biggie and Tupac* (Film Four, 2002). See also Cathy Scott, *The Killing of Tupac Shakur* (London: Plexus Publishing Ltd., 1997).

<sup>455</sup> Kulkarni, 100.

<sup>456</sup> Andrew Gumbel, ‘Tupac: The Life. The Legend. The Legacy’, *The Independent*, 13 Sept. 2006, 24.

In the creation of a hero system in popular music, the immortality of fame coexists with the artist's creations, the recordings they leave behind. These recordings, which capture the 'spirit' of the artist/hero, convince many that a part of them is still with us. Books and films about the murders have added to the mystique, but the other, more prominent method of keeping the artists within cultural memory has been the posthumous release of tribute albums and unreleased material from Biggie and Tupac.

As with pop artists that preceded the two rappers, their death was profitable. Alan Clayson, writing four years before Tupac's murder, said that 'a death in pop sells records. Before they had a chance to dry their tears, music industry moguls would be obliged to meet the demand kindled by tragedy and rush release the product while the corpse was still warm.'<sup>457</sup> One example of this is Jimi Hendrix, who had released four albums in his lifetime and now has more than thirty official posthumous releases.<sup>458</sup> The publicity received from a romantic or heroic death is what leads Deena Weinstein to call it a 'great career move', as critics celebrate romantic rock deaths 'because they affirm the myth of the artist.'<sup>459</sup>

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<sup>457</sup> Alan Clayson, *Death Discs: Ashes to Smashes: an account of fatality in the popular song* (London: Gollancz, 1992), 88.

<sup>458</sup> Janne Mäkelä, *John Lennon Imagined: Cultural History of a Rock Star* (London: Peter Lang Publishing, 2004), 261. In regards to Hendrix and less 'official' posthumous releases, Steven Roby writes, 'Since his death, more than five hundred recorded titles have appeared that are devoted to him entirely or in part'. Steven Roby, *Black Gold: The Lost Archives of Jimi Hendrix* (New York: Billboard Books, 2002), 2. I would like to thank Jan Butler for bringing the last book to my attention.

<sup>459</sup> Deena Weinstein, 'Art Versus Commerce: Deconstructing a (Useful) Romantic Illusion', in *Starts Don't Stand Still in the Sky: Music and Myth*, ed. Karen Kelly and Evelyn McDonnell (London: Routledge, 1999), 66–67. On the romantic death of artists, Lee Marshall writes, 'It has to be a particular kind of death—a "heroic" death—and it has to be at an early age. Both of these emerge from Romantic ideology. The Romantics valorized youth as a time of both political and aesthetic radicalism ("Bliss was it in that dawn to be alive", wrote Wordsworth, "but to be young was very Heaven"). Youth was a time before the disenchantment of science and rationalism overtook one's self, when the world could be seen through new eyes. It was a time for breaking the rules created by previous generations, and it was a time for excess, to indulge in all the bounteous tastes the world has to offer— drugs, drink, sex, freedom.' Lee Marshall, *Bob Dylan: The Never Ending Star* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2007), 143–144.

In death, the popularity of Tupac Shakur and The Notorious B.I.G. skyrocketed. The first posthumous Notorious B.I.G. album *Life After Death*, released three weeks after his murder, debuted at number one on the Billboard 200 and, as of 2006, was certified diamond (10 million copies sold).<sup>460</sup> In the case of Tupac, at the time of his death in 1996 he had sold 5.9 million records; after nine official posthumous releases, in 2006, the number of phonograms sold had increased to over 36.5 million in the US, rendering him the best-selling rap artist in US history.<sup>461</sup> His first posthumous album sold more than 500,000 copies in the first week of its release, according to SoundScan.<sup>462</sup> His second posthumous album (*R U Still Down?*) includes six pages of ads for ‘official 2pac gear’, including Tupac T-shirts, beanies, bandanas and commemorative phone cards.<sup>463</sup> Tupac iconography looms large, with his face on t-shirts, posters, and public murals all over the world. As Cheo Hodari Coker notes, ‘Tupac’s image itself has become a symbol of cult revolution—sandwiched on the T-shirt racks between Bob Marley and Che Guevara from St. Mark’s Place in Greenwich Village to the tourist shops in Paris’s Montmartre.’<sup>464</sup> Films about Tupac have been released with such titles as *Thug Angel*, *Thug Immortal* and *Tupac Resurrection*. As it became commonplace and profitable for rap artists to have clothing lines after Tupac’s death, he now has one as well, *Makaveli-Branded*, whose website video states, ‘His name is known worldwide ... his words have inspired millions ... and now through

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<sup>460</sup> Recording Industry Association of America, ‘Diamond Awards’, available at: <http://www.riaa.com/gp/bestsellers/diamond.asp> (accessed 20 December 2006). Directly after the death of Notorious B.I.G., many record stores moved his debut *Ready to Die* to the front of their stores, and ordered additional copies of *Life After Death*. One store manager told Cheo Hodari Coker: ‘Whenever an artist dies, we pack the shelves.’ Cheo Hodari Coker, *Unbelievable: The Life, Death, and the Afterlife of the Notorious B.I.G.* (New York: Three Rivers Press, 2003), 250.

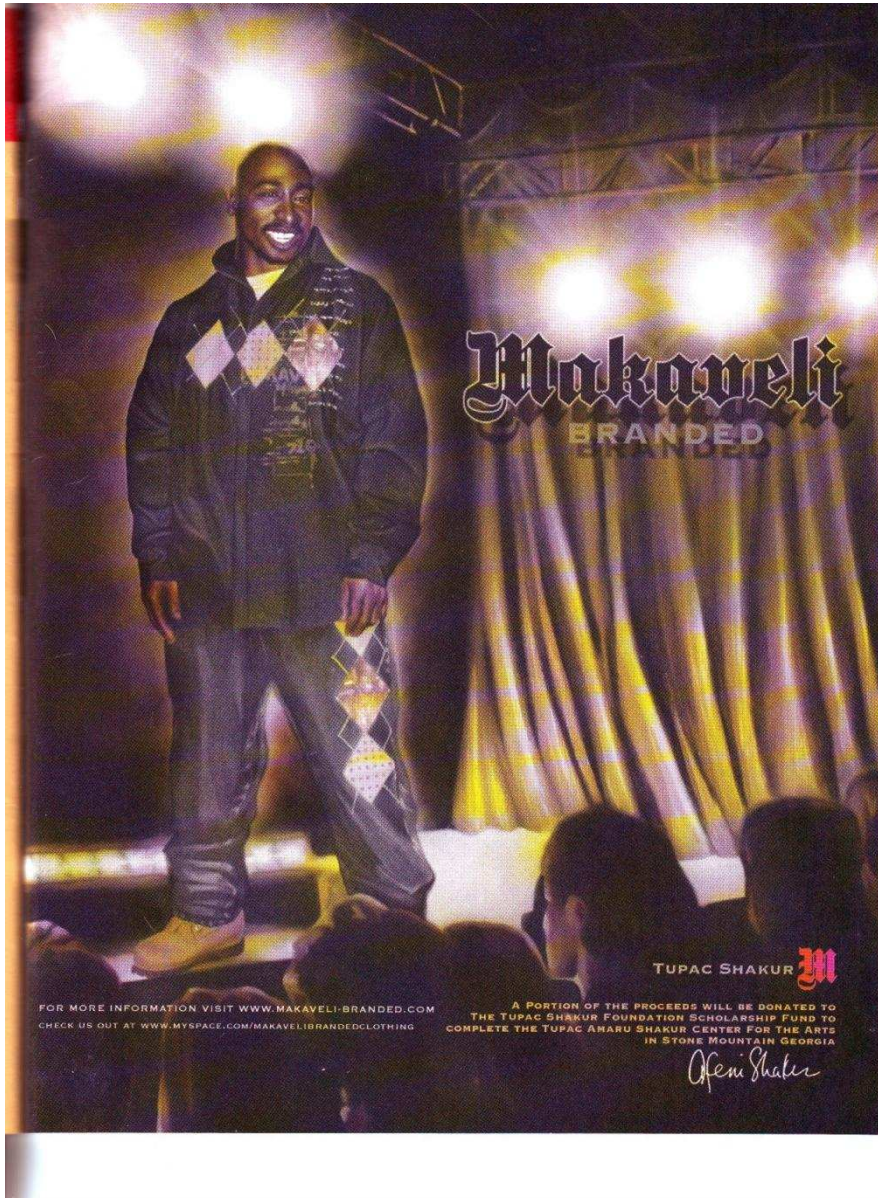
<sup>461</sup> Recording Industry Association of America, ‘Top Artists’, available at: <http://www.riaa.com/gp/bestsellers/topartists.asp> (accessed 20 December 2006).

<sup>462</sup> Michael Datcher and Kwame Alexander, eds., *Tough Love: The Life and Death of Tupac Shakur* (Alexandria: Alexander Publishing Group, 1997), 46.

<sup>463</sup> Rob Sheffield, ‘R U Still Down (Remember Me?)’, *Rolling Stone* 778, 22 January 1998, 53.

<sup>464</sup> Coker, 293.

his clothing line Makaveli-Branded his legacy will continue to live'.<sup>465</sup> One ad in Vibe magazine has a doctored picture of Tupac on a runway wearing the clothes from his clothing line.<sup>466</sup> (Figure 4.1 below shows this example of visual postmortem borrowing.)



**Figure 4.1—Makaveli Branded advertisement in Vibe magazine (Dec. 2006)**

Notorious B.I.G. also takes part in the institutions of tribute and memory that pervade popular culture. One of the most popular songs from 1997 was a

<sup>465</sup> Available at: <http://www.makaveli-branded.com/> (accessed 20 December 2006): 'keeping the legacy alive through fashion'. For a list of clothing lines and hip-hop artists, see Appendix in Emmett G. Price III, *Hip Hop Culture* (Santa Barbara: ABC-CLIO, Inc. 2006), 214.

<sup>466</sup> Vibe Magazine, December 2006, 89.

tribute song to Notorious B.I.G. called “I’ll Be Missing You”, as performed by his producer, Sean ‘Puffy’ Combs (including a sample of The Police’s “Every Breath You Take”). The single went triple platinum after only a few weeks and was the number one song on the pop charts for most of the year.<sup>467</sup> Puff Daddy’s performance of the song on the MTV Music Video Awards became an important event of remembrance:

The September 1997 MTV Video Music Awards, the engineer of so many dramatic hip hop moments, set the stage for the most dramatic of all. With a 50-person choir dressed in white, Combs danced and bopped to the beat of “I’ll Be Missing You.” From a riser emerging near the front of the stage, Sting appeared, singing his original version of his Police hit “Every Breath You Take”. From stage left, Faith appeared, singing the chorus about her slain husband. Above everyone, there was a huge monitor, playing footage from Biggie videos “Hypnotize”, “One More Chance”, and “Juicy”, among others.

Four male dancers came out, spinning and dancing with Combs as he stood at the center of the stage, whipping the audience into a frenzy.

“Clap your hands for Big! Clap your hands for Tupac Shakur! Clap your hands for everybody we lost!” he said, his arm stretched out as sparks rained down from the ceiling, icing the finale.<sup>468</sup>

Many years later, tributes continued to memorialize a respected member of the hip-hop community and to keep him alive in the cultural consciousness. On August 28, at the 2005 MTV Music Video Awards, Puffy and Snoop Dogg contributed to a tribute segment to the Notorious B.I.G. which included a full orchestra on stage, accompanying two well-known Notorious B.I.G. raps (“Juicy” and “Warning”, playing a capella over the loudspeakers). A month later, VH1 presented a Hip-hop Honors Tribute to Biggie. Combs, who was B.I.G.’s producer and a shrewd entrepreneur, was working on the next tribute album, *Duets: The Final Chapter*, which arrived in stores December of the same year. (The album was released by Combs’ label Bad Boy Entertainment). As Roger Beebe argues, music videos like

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<sup>467</sup> Coker, 263.

<sup>468</sup> *Ibid.*, 264–265.

Tupac's "Changes" which present stills and films from the past create structures of mourning in hip-hop culture, structures which are 'specifically designed to encourage mourning.'<sup>469</sup> Both Tupac and Notorious B.I.G. are kept alive in cultural memory through these structures of mourning which take many forms. The production of posthumous albums, bootleg mixtapes, films, books, and other merchandise have all been part of these structures, creating a martyr industry in hip-hop. As Lee Marshall reminds us, stars exist 'because the individual can be turned into a product.'<sup>470</sup>

When artists die young, they become polysemous symbols which can serve a number of purposes, often used as iconic of a particular culture, generation, or historical narrative. Though other figures in popular music have received a type of mythic status or sainthood after their deaths, hip-hop's pervasiveness of borrowing and collaboration, as part and parcel of the aesthetic, creates a unique case of postmortem borrowing. Instead of sampling to construct sample-based 'beats', I intend to look at the digital sampling of voices as an act of artist reception.<sup>471</sup> Rappers who sample hip-hop martyrs such as Tupac Shakur and Notorious B.I.G. add to the creation of new identities, tributes which often become part of new narratives within the imagined community of hip-hop culture. The result complements the ongoing process of a triple-voiced canonization: formulating

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<sup>469</sup> Roger Beebe, 'Mourning becomes...? Kurt Cobain, Tupac Shakur, and the "Waning of Affect"', in *Rock over the Edge: Transformations in Popular Music Culture*, eds. Roger Beebe, Denise Fulbrook, and Ben Saunders (Durham: Duke University Press, 2002), 328. He also cites The Lox's "We'll Always Love Big Poppa" and Puff Daddy's "I'll Be Missing You" as songs which encourage mourning.

<sup>470</sup> Marshall, 129. In the context of Kurt Cobain, Camille Paglia takes this one step further when she writes, 'Cobain's a martyr to the god of rock in some way. Buying his merchandise is like buying the relics of the saints'. Quoted in Steve Jones, 'Better Off Dead', in *Afterlife as Afterimage: Understanding Posthumous Fame*, eds. Steve Jones and Joli Jensen (New York: Peter Lang, 2005), 8.

<sup>471</sup> I use the term 'reception' here in the sense of a composer's reading of an artist as demonstrated through borrowing into their own artistic output, rather than reception in terms of a general audience. For example, Nas borrowing a rap from Tupac to include in his own song reflects Nas's reception of Tupac as rapper and iconic figure within his genre.

sainthood; a musical definition of canon, which involves albums or songs that stand out in the genre; and as part of a Plutarchian ‘history of great men’, having sainted figures stand above their peers as one of rap’s greats. Extra-musical associations with the artist such as biography are paramount, their mystique and these associations becoming embodied in and symbolized by their voice. Using their voices in a new context, what I call ‘postmortem borrowing’, is an example of the recorded voice as relic. I intend to compare similarities and distinctions of two rap contemporaries (Jay-Z and Nas) that use the voices of the slain rappers; the borrowing of the recorded voice, used together with both the music and new raps, comments on not only the reception of The Notorious B.I.G. and Tupac Shakur but also each rappers’ construction of and desire for a sense of place in the rap music world.

### **The Emergence of Tupac’s Postmortem Identities**

Tupac, rather than The Notorious B.I.G., has become the dominant figure of hip-hop martyrdom for a few reasons. Most obvious is that he died six months earlier, so that the memorial project was well underway when the latter significant tragedy occurred. Tupac had also been a star for longer; his image was prevalent in a variety of films and music videos; and he had a slightly longer recording career. Though there is some consensus in academic literature that, on a technical basis, Biggie Smalls was the better rapper,<sup>472</sup> Neil Strauss explains that ‘Shakur was a

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<sup>472</sup> As Armond White writes, ‘for anyone interested in the art of rap, the ball clearly remained in Biggie’s corner.’ Armond White, *Rebel for the Hell of it* (London: Quartet Books, 1997), 186. Both White and Dyson’s books on Tupac make this distinction, as does some of the journalism regarding the East Coast–West Coast feud. USC Professor Todd Boyd makes a telling statement before the preface to one of his books, alluding to Notorious B.I.G., that ‘the greatest rapper of all time died on March 9<sup>th</sup>’. Todd Boyd, *The New H.N.I.C.* (New York: New York University Press, 2003). Though many fans argue passionately on websites who is the better rapper, those who write on Tupac often use Biggie’s rapping prowess as a foil to Tupac’s superiority in terms of message and personality. And though Neil Kulkarni agrees that ‘Biggie possessed way more natural MC talent than 2Pac’, he dismisses both their abilities: ‘I think they were equally bad rappers, equally overrated talents and



better star, a more charismatic presence, a more gifted actor, a bigger lightning rod for trouble, a more complex visionary.<sup>473</sup> This complexity has been the source of the scale and variety of his myth-making. Kamberelis and Dimitriadis make the point that much of it has to do with details of his biography, and songs like “Dear Mama” and “Keep Your Head Up” about personal struggles, to which the youth could relate; they observed that the groups that they interviewed ‘were much less invested in Biggie’s life.’<sup>474</sup> Tupac’s films, music videos, and media coverage have provided an image (and a charismatic bodily presence) to accompany the variety of topics discussed in his lyrics, providing the quasi-sacred texts and philosophies for dissection and symbol creation.

It is important to note that a large part of Tupac’s postmortem identity was created while he was still alive by Tupac himself. Though it is not uncommon for rap artists to engage in a discourse of death, ruminating on their own death in rap lyrics in particular, he may have been obsessed more than others.<sup>475</sup> With tracks entitled “Death Around the Corner”, “How Long will they Mourn Me?”, “If I Die 2 Night”, “Wonder if Heaven Got a Ghetto”, and “So Many Tears”, (in which he raps “I’m having visions of leaving here in a hearse”), Tupac was aware of his mortality. Being shot five times in 1994 also did not help to deter this awareness, combined with the relatively low life expectancy for African-Americans and gang violence in inner-city America. On one track, “Never B Peace” from *Better Dayz*, he raps, ‘How the fuck can you have a childhood when you at the funeral every weekend?’ The culture of death was prevalent in the ghettos of America, as the

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equally deserving of reappraisal.’ Kulkarni, 100–101. The view that both rappers’ abilities were of poor quality is certainly the minority opinion in the academic literature and fan discourse.

<sup>473</sup> Neil Strauss, ‘Hip-hop Requiem’ (originally printed in the *New York Times*), *Tupac: A Thug Life*, ed. Sam Brown (London: Plexus, 2005), 185.

<sup>474</sup> Dimitriadis, *Performing Identity*, 107.

<sup>475</sup> Kevin Powell, who interviewed him for *Vibe Magazine* countless times, said ‘He talked about dying, always’. Quoted in Scott, 91.

gangsta rap genre often tries to depict the harsh realities of ghetto culture. Tupac was a product of this death culture and one of its most vocal narrators.

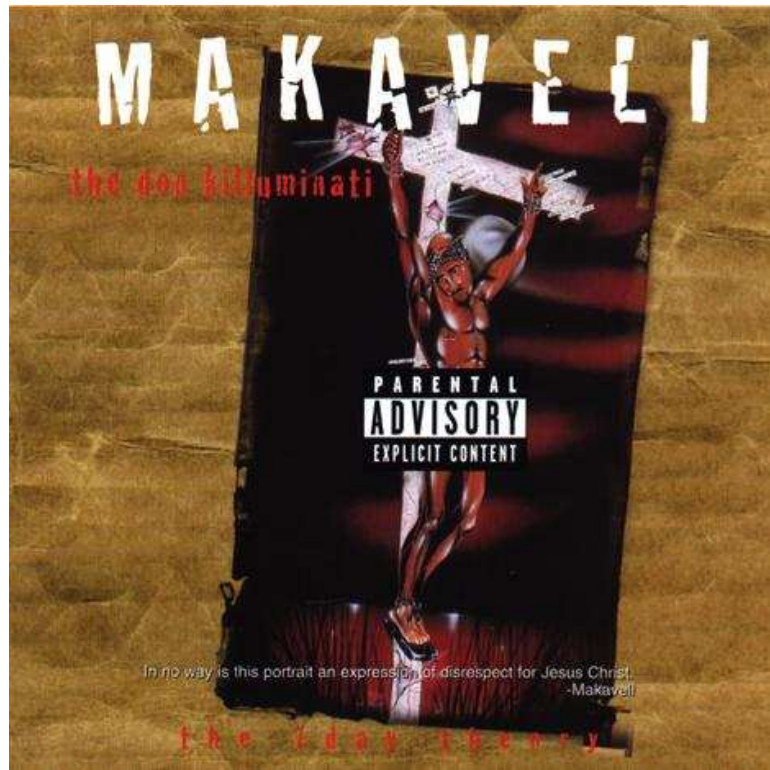
So when the early death seemingly foretold by Tupac became real, there was plenty of material for tributes, myth-making, and canonization. Two days after his death, Death Row Records released the single “I Ain’t Mad at Cha” (from *All Eyes on Me*) which was particularly appropriate for tribute, because the visual images of the music video (recorded months earlier) depicted Tupac shot down, delivering his message of forgiveness in heaven amongst other canonical black musicians (Jimi Hendrix, Louis Armstrong, Miles Davis, and Nat King Cole to name a few). Album sales of *All Eyez on Me* (released seven months before his death) tripled within one week of the shooting, climbing from number 69 to number 6 on the *Billboard* 200 in the course of two weeks.<sup>476</sup> His first posthumous album, *The Don Killuminati: The Seven Day Theory* (under the pseudonym Makaveli), was released by Death Row Records eight weeks after his death. The cover features a cartoon of Tupac being crucified. (Tupac explains the album cover pre-release in one interview by saying, ‘I’m on the cross bein’ crucified for keepin’ it real’).<sup>477</sup> The iconography is striking, no doubt adding to the notion that Tupac was a hip-hop martyr.<sup>478</sup>

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<sup>476</sup> Sam Brown, ed., *Tupac: A Thug Life*, 121.

<sup>477</sup> ‘Last Testament’, in Tupac Shakur, ed. Alan Light (London: Plexus, 1997), 125. The idea that Tupac was a martyr has also been supplemented by the idea of the promise of a resurrection, or at least an alluding to a Messianic return, in various rap lyrics. As one of the members of the Outlawz asks in “One Day At a Time”, from the *Tupac: Resurrection* soundtrack, “So if he died and came back, would he try and save rap?” Rapper 50 Cent proclaims in the first line of the chorus to “The Realest Killaz”: ‘Till Makaveli returns, it’s all eyes on me’, a reference to Tupac’s 1996 album *All Eyez on Me* as well as a reference to Tupac as a messiah figure.

<sup>478</sup> This is far from the only instance of crucifixion imagery or rhetoric in rap and other popular musics. An early example includes John Lennon’s line from the “Ballad of John and Yoko”: ‘the way things are going, they’re going to crucify me’. Rappers have used crucifixion terminology and imagery to make a point regarding disrespect from the media or other artists, such as in N.W.A.’s “Quiet on the Set” from *Straight Outta Compton* (1988), Public Enemy’s “Welcome to the Terrordome”, Eminem’s “Sing for the Moment”, Twista’s “Dirty Game”, and Tupac’s own “Blasphemy”. One of the original rap covers to use the “crucifixion pose” was the 1993 “Dre Dog” album *The New Jim Jones*. Nas’s music video for “Hate me Now” includes him with a crown of thorns, carrying a cross while being stoned by the public, and later images in the video include him



**Figure 4.2—Makaveli (2Pac)—The Don Killuminati: The Seven Day Theory**

Dyson, in *Holler if you Hear Me: Searching for Tupac Shakur*, writes on martyrdom, and it is worth quoting at length:

At least four notions are crucial to the conception of martyrdom: embodiment, identification, substitution, and elevation. The martyr's death embodies, and in some cases anticipates, the death of those who follow. It may be that his death signifies the manner in which his followers, adherents, or comrades could die. The martyr is identified by and with the community that follows him. He is identified as the leader of a group of believers or followers who identify with him as a member of their own tribe or community. The martyr's death often substitutes for the death of his followers, he dies in their place, at least symbolically. For instance, when [Martin Luther] King died, his death changed the black political future in this nation. He died in the place of millions of blacks, since it could easily have been one of them who perished from racial violence. Finally, the martyr is elevated to a high status, even as he elevates the condition of his followers through his death, drawing attention to their hidden or overlooked suffering.<sup>479</sup>

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rapping while up on the cross. Kanye West more recently appeared on the cover of *Rolling Stone* wearing a crown of thorns. See Joe Carter, 'Pop Semiotics: The Passion of the Rappers', *The Evangelical Outpost*, 31 January, 2006, available at:

<http://www.evangelicaloutpost.com/archives/001806.html> (accessed 19 February 2007).

<sup>479</sup> Dyson, *Holler if you Hear Me*, 264–265.

The idea that the martyr dies in the place of his/her followers is a crucial point, and which is why perhaps pop martyrs are said to represent a particular generation or culture. It is highly suggestive of how cultures deal with the death anxiety, as well as of the functions of ritual sacrifice (in this case, symbolic sacrifice) in a given society. It is this elevation to a high status that Dyson discusses that popular artists who die young are able to attain, and the martyr's aura informs both previous recordings and new ones. The iconic status of an artist, partly shaped by the music (both musical figures and lyrical content) and partly shaped by extra-musical mythologizing, is an interplay crucial to studies of music reception.

Tupac's compositional process and quantity of output are worth noting because they contribute to the memorialisation process. As of this writing, nine<sup>480</sup> official posthumous albums have been released featuring commercially previously unreleased material (not to mention the dozens of bootlegs and remixes which would provide plenty of material for another study). The accounts of Tupac as 'workaholic' frequently pervade writings on him.<sup>481</sup> Many describe Tupac running from studio to court appearance to film set, and there are anecdotes of Tupac still working after others would go to bed. Dyson's research points to the oft told anecdote: 'Notorious B.I.G. said that when he once visited Tupac, the latter went to the bathroom, and when he emerged, he had penned two songs'.<sup>482</sup> Tupac's bodyguard wrote that he recorded six tracks in one night after he got out of prison

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<sup>480</sup> This number will often vary in journalistic accounts, depending on what they constitute as an 'official release', which for most includes *The Don Killuminati: The 7 Day Theory* (1996), *R U Still Down (Remember Me?)* (1997), *Greatest Hits* (1998), *Still I Rise* (1999), *Until the End of Time* (2001), *Better Dayz* (2002), *Tupac: Resurrection Soundtrack* (2003), *Loyal to the Game* (2004), and *Pac's Life* (2006). All except the first included Tupac's mother, Afeni Shakur, as executive producer.

<sup>481</sup> Dyson, 10–11. Johnny J, one of his producers when he was with Death Row Records, said 'You know I'd get there about an hour or two earlier, whatever. And I'd just have the track ready. He walks in and hears the beat: "give me a pen and pad, a pencil ... come on give me a pencil. I know exactly what I want to do. Lets go for it" ... In one day we'd do about 4 or 5 cuts a day, depending on the flow'. Johnny J interview, *Thug Angel* (36:00).

<sup>482</sup> Dyson, *Holler if you Hear Me*, 75.

and wrote songs in the movie trailer that he would record later the same night.<sup>483</sup> One journalist writes, ‘Pac was a studio prodigy, more like a one-take jazz musician than a punch-me-in rapper’.<sup>484</sup> The numbers vary concerning how many tracks he recorded after he left prison, but it is usually quoted in the 100–200 song range. One article comments that there were 150 unreleased tracks which Afeni Shakur had to go to court to obtain from Death Row Records owner Suge Knight.<sup>485</sup> The ferocity with which he worked, and the multitude of his rap topics, contributed to the range of characterizations. And with an unknown number of songs still unreleased, the mystique of the unknown is again prevalent; fans hope that he still has more to say.

One reason for the high quantity of material on Tupac is that he can be fit into multiple traditions and frameworks, both academic and popular. One of these includes Tupac Shakur the revolutionary,<sup>486</sup> as his mother Afeni Shakur most famously was a member of the Black Panther party, and was pregnant with her son while in prison.<sup>487</sup> The poverty and struggles such as having a crack-addicted mother are circumstances frequently recounted in Tupac biography, reflecting the romantic concept of the mythologized artist who battles extraordinary circumstances to create art that transcends its time and place.<sup>488</sup> Others have written

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<sup>483</sup> Frank Alexander, *Got your Back: Life as Tupac Shakur's Bodyguard in the Hardcore world of Gangsta rap* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1998), 63.

<sup>484</sup> Coker, *Unbelievable*, 170.

<sup>485</sup> Allison Samuels, ‘Who Stole Tupac’s Soul?’ *Rolling Stone* 789, 25 June 1998, 17. Often mythologized is the Faustian pact Tupac made with Suge Knight: a handwritten three-album contract signed Tupac to Death Row Records in exchange for the 1.4 million dollar bail to be released from jail. Accounts say that with no other option, he signs his life away to be caught up in a record label and lifestyle which eventually leads to his murder.

<sup>486</sup> A story written in many books is that when Tupac was ten years old, when Reverend Hubert Daughtry asked him what he wanted to be when he grew up, and he responded, ‘I’m gonna be a revolutionary’. asha bandele, ‘Meditations in the Hour of Mourning’ in *Tough Love*, eds. Datcher and Alexander, 29. A similar version of the anecdote is in White, 1.

<sup>487</sup> Accounts include White, 16–17 and an interview while Tupac was in prison on the DVD *Tupac Vs.* (2004), (11:55).

<sup>488</sup> Daniel Chua has written that Mozart was characterized as the first ‘poor artist’ (Romantically-speaking), his poverty is a ‘necessary myth’ for biographies as a foil to the freedom of his music. Chua notes that Mozart dies just before the nineteenth century shift from music as material

of Tupac as following a lineage of Black Panthers, and that his more ‘political’ rap lyrics reflect this, as well as his intense style of rap delivery or flow.<sup>489</sup> One church in Kansas City now includes a mural that depicts Martin Luther King, Malcolm X, and Tupac together on the same wall.<sup>490</sup> In addition to Tupac as black revolutionary, his gangsta rap mystique is also placed into a larger tradition of black outlaws (the Shine and Stackolee myths in particular).<sup>491</sup>

Tupac’s religious references from rap lyrics and interviews are also used by authors to varying effects. Essay collections such as *Noise and Spirit: the Religious and Spiritual Sensibilities of Rap Music*<sup>492</sup> locate the Christian messages of rap songs, and this book in particular includes a full chapter on Tupac. A book entitled *Jesus and the Hip-Hop Prophets: Spiritual Insights from Lauryn Hill and 2Pac*,<sup>493</sup> uses Bible verses and various lyrics by these artists to teach messages that correspond to teachings of Jesus. For Tupac, there are separate chapters on songs like “Dear Mama”, “Brenda’s Got a Baby” (about teenage pregnancy), and “Changes”, which is about the need to be socially active to make a change in the world. The book was written by two religious hip-hop fans who seek to translate

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commodity to music as intellectual idea, with Mozart ‘used as the exchange rate.’ Daniel K. L. Chua ‘Myth: Mozart, Money, Music’, in *Mozart Studies*, ed. Simon P. Keefe (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 198.

<sup>489</sup> Dyson, Holler if you Hear Me, 48. An interview with Greg Jacobs (‘Shock G’ of Digital Underground) compares different rappers’ styles, and specifically links Tupac’s delivery and style in his raps with a black revolutionary heritage: ‘Humpty Hump and Slick Rick rhyme from the nasal palette. Nas rhymes from the back of his throat. Biggie is a swinger. He swings like a horn player over jazz ... Pac, on the other hand, Tupac pulled from Martin Luther King, Malcolm X ... it’s like pouring those words out because you mean it. And that’s why, you know, [Does impression of Tupac]: “I never had a father figure, but I was raised by the thugs and the drug dealers, that’s why I love niggas”. That singing that Pac was doing in his stuff’. Interview with Greg Jacobs, in *The Art of 16 Bars: Get Ya’ Bars Up*, directed by Peter Spierer. QD3 Entertainment, 2005, (40:48).

<sup>490</sup> Jordan Harper, ‘All Oddz on Me’, *Tupac: A Thug Life*, 178.

<sup>491</sup> George Kamberelis and Greg Dimitriadis, ‘Collectively Remembering Tupac: The Narrative Mediation of Current Events, Cultural Histories, and Social Identities’, in *Afterlife as Afterimage: Understanding Posthumous Fame*, eds. Steve Jones and Joli Jensen (New York: Peter Lang, 2005), 166.

<sup>492</sup> Anthony B. Pinn, ed., *Noise and Spirit: The Religious and Spiritual Sensibilities of Rap Music* (New York: New York University Press, 2003).

<sup>493</sup> John Teter and Alex Gee, *Jesus and the Hip-Hop Prophets: Spiritual Insights from Lauryn Hill and 2Pac* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2003).

the teachings of their religion into a language that they hope better communicates their message. Theresa Reed's *The Holy Profane* deals with elements of the sacred within black popular music. She is particularly interested in Tupac, showing examples in his lyrics to make the point that God, death, redemption and the afterlife are common themes in tracks like "God Bless the Dead" and "Black Jesuz". Discussing "Hail Mary", she notes that 'References to Christ in this rap are salient because the rapper connects Christ's suffering to his own.'<sup>494</sup> Important to this comparison, Susan Sontag has written that the artist has now replaced the saint as exemplary sufferer in modern Western society, the figure 'to whom we look to be able best to express his suffering.'<sup>495</sup> Tupac can be theorized either through a religious lens, or through a more secular 'suffering artist' role, as he was also one of the first rappers to present (presumed) inner psychological thoughts and feelings within his raps.

The positive messages from selected Tupac songs such as "Dear Mama", as well as many of his culturally literate musings, have provided Tupac's extensive use in the academy. I have cited Dyson's book, which is the best-selling of his eight in print (at the time of this writing), but is not the only book that investigates Tupac, the cultural icon, from an academic standpoint.<sup>496</sup> One of the first instances of Tupac's receiving national press for academic analysis was the class offered at University of California at Berkeley entitled 'History '98: Poetry and History of

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<sup>494</sup> Theresa L. Reed, *The Holy Profane: Religion in Black Popular Music* (Lexington: University of Kentucky Press, 2002), 159

<sup>495</sup> Susan Sontag, 'The artist as exemplary sufferer', in *Against Interpretation* (New York: Farrar Straus Giroux, 1966), 42. Though Sontag considers writers in her essay, it would certainly be appropriate to add various musicians to her thoughtful critique.

<sup>496</sup> Other examples of Tupac in academia include the Greg Dimitradis book *Performing Identity/Performing Culture*, which includes a chapter he co-wrote with George Kamberelis entitled 'The Symbolic Mediation of Identity in Black Popular Culture: The Discursive Life, Death, and Rebirth of Tupac Shakur'. The final chapter of Eithne Quinn's *Nothin But a "g" Thang: The Culture and Commerce of Gangsta Rap*, is entitled 'Tupac Shakur and the Legacies of Gangsta'. One article goes as far as a tenuous attempt to compare the Lacanian 'Real' with the idea of Tupac's manifestation of the 'real' as 'the dominant cultural logic in hip-hop'. Thomas Kane, 'Bringing the Real: Lacan and Tupac', *Prospects: An Annual of American Cultural Studies* 27 (2002): 642.

Tupac Shakur’, taught by student Arvand Elihu: ‘View him in Medieval terms. Substitute the word “sword” for “gun” and watch how his poetry takes on a whole new meaning.’<sup>497</sup> A Harvard University conference in 2003 entitled ‘Tupac Shakur and the Search for a Modern Folk Hero’<sup>498</sup> explored many of Tupac’s traits; according to Mark Anthony Neal, ‘the event examined Tupac’s legacy as an intellectual, a political figure, and an urban folk hero.’<sup>499</sup> Participants discussed his book collection (including *Catcher in the Rye*, *Moby-Dick*, and works by Alice Walker and Shakespeare), and Neal presented a paper portraying Tupac as an ‘organic intellectual’, a concept articulated by Antonio Gramsci.<sup>500</sup>

‘Tupac the intellectual’ has been represented often with images of him wearing glasses. The album cover to *Loyal to the Game* (shown below) shows Tupac in a suit wearing glasses, a contrast to more common photos of him with his shirt off, showing off tattoos, one famously saying ‘Thug Life’ on his abdomen (such as his image on the cover of *Rolling Stone* shown below). The third chapter of Dyson’s *Holler if You Hear Me* focuses on Tupac’s hunger for knowledge. According to Dyson, who interviewed a number of people close to Tupac, he read Kurt Vonnegut, Teilhard de Chardin’s *Phenomenon of Man*, Maya Angelou, Sigmund Freud, and George Orwell. He could quote Shakespeare and listened to many genres of music (including Kate Bush, Eric Clapton, Muddy Waters, Don McLean, Sarah McLachlan, and the soundtrack to *Les Misérables*). He enjoyed the art of Van Gogh, writing a poem dedicated to Van Gogh entitled “Starry Night”.<sup>501</sup>

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<sup>497</sup> Billy Jam, ‘Strictly for my Clazzmatez: Tupac Joins Academia’s Literary Canon’, in Tupac Shakur, ed. Alan Light (London: Plexus, 1998), 147.

<sup>498</sup> The conference was sponsored by the Hip Hop Archive at Harvard, the W.E.B. Du Bois Institute for Afro-American Research and the Program for Folklore and Mythology at Harvard.

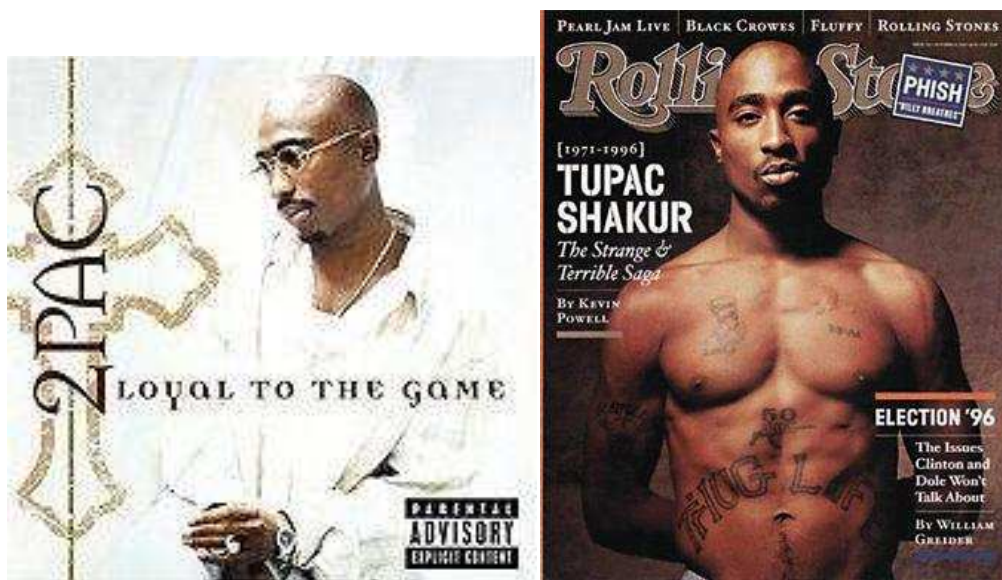
<sup>499</sup> Sam Brown, ed., *Tupac: A Thug Life*, 189.

<sup>500</sup> *Ibid.* Nathan Abrams also shows that contemporary rap artists, specifically hardcore rap artists such as Chuck D, Paris, KRS-One, Grandmaster Flash, and Eric B and Rakim, contain similar characteristics to Gramsci’s concept. Nathan D. Abrams, ‘Antonio’s B-Boys: Rap, Rappers, and Gramsci’s Intellectuals’, *Popular Music and Society* 19, no. 4 (1995): 1–19.

<sup>501</sup> Tupac Shakur, *The Rose that Grew from Concrete* (New York: MTV, 1999), 25.



He saw Kabuki theatre in San Francisco, watched Japanese movies, wrote plays from the age of six, and was an actor before he was a rapper. Most of the biographies note that Tupac spent the beginning of high school at the Baltimore School for the Arts, where he was exposed to much of this artistic culture.



**Figures 4.3—Loyal to the Game (2004) and 4.4—Rolling Stone 746, October 1996**

This intellectual portrayal of Tupac, as one DVD title puts it, is of the ‘hip-hop genius’.<sup>502</sup> He has had two books of poetry published since his death, *The Rose that Grew from Concrete*, first published in 1999 (from poems written 1989-1991) and *Inside A Thug’s Heart*, edited by Angela Ardis, containing letters and poems from their correspondence when Tupac was in jail in 1995.<sup>503</sup> In the case of *The Rose that Grew from Concrete*, Tupac’s mother opens the Preface, ‘I thank God and all my ancestors for the Artistic Tupac, for the Poetic Tupac.’<sup>504</sup> One side of the page contains his original handwriting, the other side a typed version. This gives a sense of authenticity, as well as cultural elevation, the printed book offering intellectual priority over the sound recording or website (not to mention the

<sup>502</sup> Tupac: Hip-hop Genius, Chrome Dreams Video, 2005.

<sup>503</sup> Angela Ardis, *Inside a Thug’s Heart* (New York: Kensington Publishing Corp., 2004).

<sup>504</sup> Shakur, *The Rose that Grew from Concrete*, xiii.

facsimile of his original handwriting). Putting Tupac's message in a book rather than a 'rap record' changes its packaging significantly.

Considering Tupac a poet rather than rapper offers a terminological ploy worth considering. Thomas Swiss, in writing about singer/songwriter Jewel's media coverage regarding her book of poetry, 'Simply to name something 'poetry' or 'music', in fact, is already to invoke someone's values—values that are in some part constructed culturally and dependent on who is doing the naming and for whom.'<sup>505</sup> Using the term poetry, like associations with the word 'chamber music', connotes intimacy and a privacy which audiences demand to invade.<sup>506</sup> Labelling Tupac a poet elevates his status and has been used by academics, in part, to legitimize a problematic and complex icon and his music (and I acknowledge that my own study of him is a part of the academic trend I discuss).

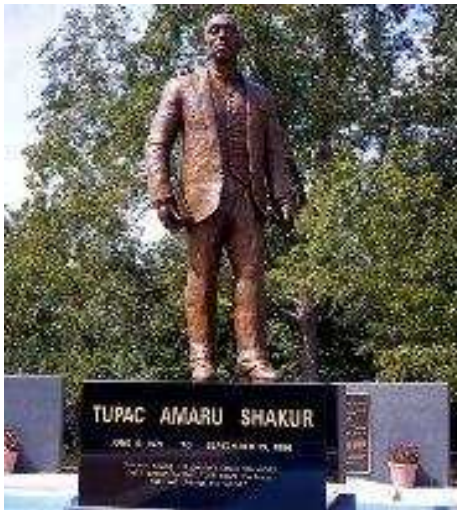
Tupac Shakur, a hero with a thousand faces, provides himself as a placeholder for a number of purposes. His large compositional output (in itself an aspect of the mythology: Tupac the workaholic) allows those who study him to identify the messages on which they wish to focus. Some include Tupac the revolutionary, Tupac the saint, Tupac the Romantic, Tupac the martyr, Tupac the sufferer, Tupac the poet, Tupac the genius, and 2Pac the gangsta rapper. I have noted his

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<sup>505</sup> Thomas Swiss, 'Jewel Case: Pop Stars, Poets, and the Press', in *Pop Music and the Press*, ed. Steve Jones (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2002), 179. The singer/songwriter Jewel published a book of her poetry entitled *A Night Without Armor* (1998). Jewel had been constructed as a poet in the press, and the book was successful, selling 432,000 copies that year. A spoken word CD version was also available. Swiss writes how her endeavour fit the tradition of Bob Dylan, Jim Morrison and Patti Smith of pop music/poets. Like Tupac's poetry books and Kurt Cobain's journal collection, the cover to Jewel's book is handwritten, suggesting a deep form of authenticity. The Notorious B.I.G has also been labelled as a poet and compared to various poets, such as one example by Paul D. Miller: 'People tend to forget that one of America's premiere poets, Biggie Smalls, and another, Walt Whitman, were both from Brooklyn.' Paul D. Miller, 'The City in Public versus Private', in *Total Chaos*, 151.

<sup>506</sup> Or, perhaps, the idea that chamber music gives an audience a sense of eavesdropping on the innermost thoughts and feelings of the composer is what becomes desirable. Chamber music has connotations of an upper-class cultural art form, and poetry may still have links with an aristocratic connoisseurship. For more on the 'covert values' associated with descriptions of music as 'chamber-music-like' see Janet M. Levy, 'Covert and Casual Values in Recent Writings About Music', *Journal of Musicology* 5, no. 1 (1987).

connection to the black revolutionary traditions, his religious nature, ‘positive’ messages in his songs, Tupac as a Romantic artist who suffered in order to bring his message to the people, and his literacy, which makes him a poet representative of the hip-hop intelligentsia. His multifaceted and chameleon-like (some exaggeratedly say schizophrenic) nature allows for political reading, religious reading, academic reading, and a Romantic reading by journalists, academics and fans who wish to frame him in particular narratives. The prevalence of his image in films (*Juice*, *Poetic Justice*, *Above the Rim*) and television (MTV, BET, as well as interviews and footage of his many court cases) adds to this cultural status. The idea of the mythic narrative has always been important to society and the life and lyrics of Tupac have provided ample material to elevate him to mythic status in the rap music and hip-hop worlds. Perhaps the most telling symbol that Tupac has achieved a level of heroic immortality is the seven foot high gold statue which now stands at the Tupac Amaru Shakur Center for the Performing Arts in Georgia.<sup>507</sup>



**Figure 4.5**—Statue, Tupac Amaru Shakur Center for the Performing Arts

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<sup>507</sup> Tupac’s mother Afeni organized the construction of the statue, and is a product of the Tupac Amaru Shakur foundation which she founded after his death.

## **Musician Biography and The Narrative Mediation of Music Reception**

The varied portrayals of Tupac Shakur summarized share two common characteristics: each facet of Tupac has rap lyrics which can be interpreted to support it, and there is an aspect of his life story that will also correspond to the portrayal. As Steve Jones writes regarding posthumous fame:

To a great extent, the performer's presence, once mediated, provides sufficient material with which ongoing construction of celebrity can proceed. Consequently, in the realm of the symbolic construction of celebrity, the performer's 'real' presence is only necessary insofar as the performer may provide additional grist (mediated or otherwise) to add to the potential pool of symbolic material already in the mill.<sup>508</sup>

Kamberelis and Dimitriadis see Tupac's biography as crucial to collective memory, a process they call 'narrative mediation': 'Narratives (especially cultural narratives) are centrally involved in the creation and perpetuation of remembering, especially collective remembering.'<sup>509</sup> Knowledge of an artist's life has always had an effect on interpretation of his/her works. In the case of rap music, the artists' lives (or perceived lives) are often embedded in the recordings. More specifically, aspects of artist biography often can be found in their rap lyrics, an integral part of the intra-musical discourse. This is not to say that extra-musical factors such as album covers, liner notes, websites, and music videos are no longer relevant to interpretation, but within the song, there exists both sonorities and linguistic text which give rise to an identity, in combination with the extra-musical forces.

In 'The Domestic Gesamtkunstwerk, or Record Sleeves and Reception', Nicholas Cook notes that the record sleeve and the music, or more generally, that the 'visual image and musical sound circulate indivisibly, and are consumed

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<sup>508</sup> Steve Jones 'Better off Dead', in *Afterlife as Afterimage*, 5.

<sup>509</sup> Kamberelis and Dimitriadis, 'Collectively Remembering Tupac', in *Afterlife as Afterimage*, 145. They outline four main functions of narratives: mediating between ordinary and exceptional ideas and events, affirming or validating moral or ethical imperatives, regulating affect, and constructing and maintaining coherent social and cultural identities.

together.<sup>510</sup> In other words, the record sleeve, considered an ‘optional accessory’ by nineteenth-century absolute music ideology, inevitably contributes to musical meaning. This applies to the liner notes as well as existing music videos. In addition to these extra-musical factors, the nineteenth-century program note or twentieth-century liner note now manifests itself as imbedded in the rap lyrics: contributing just as strongly to musical meaning as these earlier examples if not more so.

This is enhanced by rap’s consumption as autobiographical rather than fictional narrative. What Kodwo Eshun refers to as the ‘nauseating American hunger for confessional biography’<sup>511</sup> is satisfied in many rap lyrics, interviews, music videos, and films. Perhaps Sontag puts it best when she writes of the desire to read writer’s journals: ‘It is the author naked which the modern audience demands, as ages of religious faith demanded a human sacrifice.’<sup>512</sup> She continues that we are interested in the writer’s soul because of ‘the insatiable modern preoccupation with psychology, the latest and most powerful legacy of the Christian tradition of introspection.’<sup>513</sup> In addition, we have not escaped the Romantic assumption that the composer’s life is embedded in the notes he/she writes (or in this case, the rap’s lyrical content). To listeners, this is an authentic (‘coming from the heart’) musical expression of the life of the artist.

This focus on autobiography, especially in traditions of gangsta rap (as opposed to more party-oriented rap), adds another dimension to the narratives in hip-hop. In other words, the act of uttering the name of a famous rapper is to communicate numerous associations with his/her biography. And the act of a rap

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<sup>510</sup> Nicholas Cook, ‘The Domestic Gesamtkunstwerk, or Record Sleeves and Reception’, in *Composition-Performance-Reception*, ed. Wyndham Thomas (Aldershot: Ashgate, 1998), 115.

<sup>511</sup> Eshun, -004.

<sup>512</sup> Sontag, 42.

<sup>513</sup> *Ibid.*

artist's postmortem borrowing of that voice engages with an even more powerful way of referencing these 'spirits', simultaneously strengthening canons and lineage within the rap music world.

While these postmortem recontextualizations in hip-hop most overtly involve placing previously recorded raps with a new musical complement, it is also worthwhile to note that it forces a recontextualization of interpretation. The sometimes unavoidable influence of perceived artist biography (or, biographical mediation) affects audience reception of the text as well as of the musical structures. In other words, after Tupac's murder (or Cobain's suicide, or Lennon's assassination), we listen to him in a new context, influenced by new media discourse which elevated him to iconic status. It is hardly convincing to state that listening to Tupac in 1995 is the same as listening to the same recording of him in 1997. Or to use a quote from another artist's biography: 'Cobain commits suicide, a suicide which gives his anguished lyrics a new frisson.'<sup>514</sup> One article noted the change in audience interpretation after the death of Karen Carpenter:

After Karen's death, songs such as this ["When it's Gone"] were often reread in a much more complex and sympathetic light. Rather than a little girl fumbling for the words to express her loss, she became instead a deeply introspective and psychologically complex artist ... after Karen's death, much of the Carpenters' work was revived within the cultural memory because suddenly Karen had an artistic depth not attributed to her in life.<sup>515</sup>

This re-reading of and recontextualization of interpretation of Cobain's and Carpenter's music illustrates precisely my point: extra-musical biography, as a type of narrative mediation, has a profound effect on the way we hear music.

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<sup>514</sup> Simon Frith, Will Straw, and John Street, eds., 'Star Profiles II', in *The Cambridge Companion to Pop and Rock* (Cambridge: University of Cambridge Press, 2001), 204

<sup>515</sup> Peggy J. Bowers and Stephanie Houston Grey, 'Karen: The Hagiographic Impulse in the Public Memory of a Pop Star', in *Afterlife as Afterimage*, 107.

### **Postmortem Borrowing: Definition and Examples**

Culturally speaking, borrowing the voice of a deceased hip-hop artist seems less conspicuous than using artists from other genres. Using a Notorious B.I.G. rap seems to be more in concert with the borrowing ethos of hip-hop than if other genres that promote the cult of originality used the voices of Kurt Cobain or Elvis Presley as extensively. Pragmatically speaking, one reason is that it is easier to mould a rap than a melody to a new song or sampled beat, but also that the practice is part of hip-hop's tradition of digitally sampling and borrowing sounds. Thus, when the voice of a deceased rapper is used in a new context, the voice (the timbre of the flow and its nexus of signifieds), the semantic parameters of the text itself, and musical features of the beat/flow interaction all provide meaning.

Another reason why postmortem borrowing in hip-hop seems less conspicuous than in other genres is that multiple voices/collaborators on one hip-hop track is not uncommon. Groups such as the Sugar Hill Gang, Run-DMC, N.W.A. and the Wu-Tang Clan are only a few of the famous examples of commercially successful groups that have multiple MCs, not to mention the number of single MC-albums which include numerous 'guest artists'. The MC persona or the famous producer can successfully co-exist with other MCs or producers on the same album. In other words, to use another person's voice (dead or alive) is aligned with the already-existing collaborative ethos in hip-hop (including its borrowing traditions).

A third reason for rap's hospitality to postmortem borrowing has to do with traditions of DJing and bootleg mixtapes in rap music. Hip-hop's foundational use of two turntables has allowed the beat and flow dichotomy to be mixed from the earliest days of the genre. While one record could be used for its breakbeat, the other record could have an a capella rap, creating an infinite number of

combinations of beat and flow. This same concept could be applied in the form of bootleg mixtapes. Though bootlegs are common to many genres of music, this DJ concept of beat and flow as separate parts of the ‘puzzle’ has produced tapes doctored to feature artist’s raps over beats with which they did not originally rap. As technology made it easier for more people to have studios at home, the process became easier. After Tupac died, there was a slew of bootleg mixtapes out on the underground market, varying in quality, but nevertheless in high demand (early posthumous mixtape titles included *Makaveli 2 and 3*, *Pac 4 Ever: Last Messages* and *The Last Words of Tupac Shakur*).<sup>516</sup> It is important to note, therefore, that the commercial releases I will discuss are part of the DJing and mixtape phenomena; Jay-Z and Nas’s borrowing the voices of Tupac and Biggie, for example, were only producing ‘legal’ versions of existing practices.

Before presenting examples of the postmortem borrowing of Tupac and Biggie, it is worth explaining precisely what I mean by the term postmortem borrowing. Postmortem borrowing is the digital sampling of the voice or image of an artist, after they have died, in a new context. The artist has an aura or mystique, and that aura lost in mechanical reproduction is regained in death as a transcendent spirit. Though many pop music figures have some element of aura which accompanies celebrity and fame, the artist as spirit seems to trump more earthly beings, or at least penetrate the culture differently. Though the artist mystique is difficult to measure quantitatively, I would use the measuring stick of cultural consciousness (visibility in the ‘public eye’) to gage the extent of an artist’s aura. It is crucial to this phenomenon that the sampled artist(s), and their aura, be recognized.

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<sup>516</sup> Samuels, 17.



The other important aspect of postmortem borrowing is the authenticity that comes from using a genuine recording of the artist. Postmortem borrowing does not include Elvis impersonators, because though they borrow a style, it is not an image of the real Elvis.<sup>517</sup> One could mimic a dance step or two from Gene Kelly in *Singing in the Rain*, but it would not be ‘authentic’ unless it were actually the filmic image of him, as his image has been used, manipulated by computers, to breakdance to a remixed version of “Singing in the Rain” for a Volkswagen Golf commercial. It is one level to imitate, parody, or allude to the artist; postmortem borrowing is at the level of direct quotation, even if the quote is manipulated to a certain extent. The closest thing to a literary analogy would be if one were writing something and, to quote a given author, made a copy of his/her quote in his/her actual handwriting. Perhaps this is why Cobain’s journals and Tupac’s poetry books are published in their own handwriting, giving the sense of unmanipulated authenticity. In this age of recording, our idea of authenticity reaches the level of the recorded voice and image. Because of digital technology, these recordings can be easily manipulated, an ethical issue for many, but tangential to its definition. The key to postmortem borrowing is the authority and aura from the actual recording (whether it be sound or image) used in the updated version or hypertext.

These are the two key traits of postmortem borrowing: recognisability (an artist with aura, biographical associations, and image) and perceived authenticity of the source recording. The former reinforces the importance of musical biography: these artists who borrow expect that one knows something about the borrowed artist. Seeing how the use of mystique is framed in postmortem borrowing is the

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<sup>517</sup> One example of digital postmortem borrowing of the image of Elvis was a ‘duet’ performance of Celine Dion and a hologram-like image of Elvis Presley singing “If I Can Dream” for the American Idol 2007 ‘Idol Gives Back’ charity show. Another example is the ZZ Top music video to “Viva Las Vegas” from their 1992 Greatest Hits Album, using Elvis’s image from the eponymous film.

focus of the rest of the chapter. First, however I would like to illustrate a few musical examples of postmortem borrowing.

One of the highest selling, most acclaimed, and most critiqued albums in 1991 was Natalie Cole's *Unforgettable: With Love*. It capitalized on the connection with her famous father, Nat King Cole, featuring the songs he made famous, such as "Route 66", "Mona Lisa", "Smile" and "Nature Boy". The hit single from the album was a duet of "Unforgettable" with her father; producer David Foster mixed her father's old recording of the song with Natalie's newly-sung performance. Any potential hostility toward inauthenticity seems to be absent in media reception, presumably because of its 'family moment' nature. The music video, directed by Steve Barron, juxtaposes a set of live images, Natalie Cole singing, with those of the past, her father in black and white singing on television. There is a dialogue here, of nostalgia and of past and present fused together in music. The album won the Grammy for Album of the Year, and was one of the first times that the possibilities of studio manipulation were presented to the minds and imaginations of popular music fans.<sup>518</sup> Rather than being critiqued for the lack of authenticity in the 'duet', the single was a novelty that the fans could feel they were 'in on'.

One of the main selling points of the 1995-1996 Beatles Anthology three-volume CD collection was that they contained new material, a Beatles 'reunion' of sorts, because the three members alive at the time had recorded from old John Lennon demos. Two such singles were released, each with a music video, "Free as a Bird" on the first volume of the Anthology and "Real Love" on the second. Gary

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<sup>518</sup> The other nominees for Album of the Year were Amy Grant's *Heart In Motion*, Bonnie Raitt's *Luck Of The Draw*, R.E.M.'s *Out Of Time*, and Paul Simon's *The Rhythm Of The Saints*. The other nominated albums certainly were manipulated to some degree in the studio, but the aim of many albums is to present an authenticity of performance or 'liveness'. (Consider another popular album of that year was Nirvana's *Nevermind*, an updated punk authenticity in the form of 'grunge'.) This could not have been the case for Natalie Cole, since the single and music video play on the nostalgia and 'pastness' of her father.

Burns's 'Refab Four: Beatles for Sale in the Age of Music Video' notes the band's 'quasi-religious' function, as well as aspects of the band that help give them mythological status (such as the magical nature of *Magical Mystery Tour* and *Yellow Submarine* films, and the drugs and mysticism of the Indian influences).<sup>519</sup> The Beatles Anthology and its music videos use postmortem borrowing as tribute and history at the same time, particularly "Free as a Bird", which goes through the Beatles' lifespan in a flying bird's-eye-view collage of images.

Another example from this time was Queen's 1995 album *Made in Heaven*; the band's lead singer, Freddie Mercury, had died of an AIDS-related illness in 1991. Analogously to the Beatles' Anthology, the three remaining members of the band returned to the studio to finish unreleased material, some of it recorded not long before Mercury had died. The album opens with a song entitled "It's a Beautiful Day", which begins with a single atmospheric chord, invoking the New Age or ambient style. The tranquillity and peaceful nature of the opening track suggests a sentiment that Freddie successfully went to heaven. Other tracks deal with similar subject matter, such as "Made in Heaven", the gospel infused "Let Me Live", "Heaven for Everyone", and "Too Much Love Will Kill You". The last song on the album is a reprise of "It's a Beautiful Day", followed by twenty minutes of the same atmospheric chord occasionally garnished with short, faint clips (one to three seconds long) of Mercury talking in the studio.<sup>520</sup>

Other, more recent digital duets include Lauryn Hill with Bob Marley on "Turn your Lights Down Low", on *Chant Down Babylon* (1999), Celine Dion with Frank Sinatra on a version of "All the Way", and Tony Bennett with Billie Holiday

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<sup>519</sup> Gary Burns, 'Refab Four: Beatles for Sale in the Age of Music Video', in *The Beatles, Popular Music and Society*, ed. Ian Inglis (London: Macmillan Press Ltd., 2000), 176–177. See also Janne Mäkelä 'Who Owns Him?: The Debate on John Lennon', in *Afterlife as Afterimage*, 177–178.

<sup>520</sup> Perhaps surprisingly, many of the songs which deal with mortality were written by Brian May, and many songs on *Made in Heaven* were recorded years before Mercury's illness.

for “God Bless the Child” on his album *Tony Bennett on Holiday* (1997) which won a Grammy for Best Traditional Pop Performance.<sup>521</sup> Digital duets can also include instrumental soloists, such as soprano saxophonist Kenny G on an updated version of Louis Armstrong’s “What a Wonderful World”, a duet that received much criticism in the jazz world, most vociferously from guitarist Pat Metheny.<sup>522</sup>

Whether it is Natalie Cole recording with her father, the spirit of Elvis in Vegas in a ZZ Top video, John Lennon’s demo resurrected, or Freddie Mercury in an ambient peace, each case exemplifies postmortem borrowing. And in many cases, the memorial project becomes more than just tribute, homage, and pastiche; the aura of the postmortem artist can be used to the benefit of the sampling artist. The construction of a postmortem identity, in this case the rapper as martyr or saint, constructs the existing rap voice as relic. The meanings located in the voice signify aspects of artists’ ‘biographies’, their images and identities.

In postmortem borrowing, the use of the voice is arguably more powerful than image alone. The voice has been theorized extensively in film theory and in popular music studies, to the latter, often citing Roland Barthes’ influential ‘The Grain of the Voice’: ‘The ‘grain’ is the body in the voice as it sings, the hand as it writes, the limb as it performs.’<sup>523</sup> Michel Chion, in *The Voice in Cinema* notes that Lacan placed the voice ‘in the ranks of “objet (a),” these part objects which may be fetishized and employed to “thingify difference”’.<sup>524</sup> The importance of the voice to

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<sup>521</sup> Fred Goodman, ‘Duets with the Dead: Homage or Exploitation?’ *New York Times*. 16 January 2000, available at: [www.nytimes.com](http://www.nytimes.com) (accessed: 22 October 2008).

<sup>522</sup> See ‘Pat Metheny Declares War on Kenny G’, *Vh1.com*, 14 June 2000, available at: [http://www.vh1.com/artists/news/1436591/20000614/g\\_kenny.jhtml](http://www.vh1.com/artists/news/1436591/20000614/g_kenny.jhtml) (accessed 28 January 2008).

<sup>523</sup> Roland Barthes, ‘The Grain of the Voice’, in *Image Music Text*, ed. and trans. Stephen Heath (Hammersmith: Fontana Press, 1977), 188.

<sup>524</sup> Michel Chion, *The Voice in Cinema*, trans. and ed. Claudia Gorbman (New York: Columbia University Press, 1999), 1. Chion and other film theorists writing about Lacanian psychoanalysis cite Lacan’s Seminar XI: *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis*. The seminar was given in 1964, and was the first of his seminars to be published (in 1973). Chion also points out that in Freudian psychoanalysis, ‘everything happens in and through the voice.’ Chion, 1. Another example includes Mary Ann Doane, ‘The Voice in Cinema: The Articulation of Body and Space’ in

human development, and the power of the human voice to arouse emotion, suggest why using the voice of an artist may be more powerful than simply using an image. The earliest scientific writings on the phonograph reasoned that speech had now become immortal; recordings had the ability to transcend death.<sup>525</sup>

Jason Toynbee writes of the voice as central in popular music, as ‘the building block of musical possibility’.<sup>526</sup> And Marshall, writing about Bob Dylan says that ‘the meaning of Dylan’s songs is not “in the words” but “in the voice”’, and that great singers have authoritative voices.<sup>527</sup> These voices have distinct personalities which contribute to their popularity and recognisability. Marshall’s observation of the ‘authoritative voice’ in popular music is important to rapping as well as the singing voice, as great rappers can be said to have authoritative voices. Mikhail Bakhtin, in his essay ‘Discourse in the Novel’, makes the distinction between two types of discourse that can be assimilated by another’s speech: ‘authoritative’ (e.g. reciting by heart) and ‘internally persuasive’ (e.g. retelling in one’s own words). In post-mortem borrowing the voice of a famous artist, seems an intensification of the ‘authoritative word’, a word that is connected to the past with its authority already attached. Bakhtin’s term ‘authoritative discourse’ in the context of the novel is useful here, as he writes that it ‘demands, so to speak, not only quotation marks but a demarcation even more magisterial, a special script, for instance.’<sup>528</sup> Borrowing in the digital era means that a magisterial script is not

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Film Sound: Theory and Practice, eds. Elisabeth Weis and John Belton (NY: Columbia University Press, 1985), 170.

<sup>525</sup> In 1878, one Scientific American article stated: ‘Speech has become, as it were, immortal.’ Quoted in Jonathan Sterne, ‘Dead Rock Stars 1990’, in *Afterlife as Afterimage*, 254–255. Sterne cites a number of early writings on the phonograph which deal with the death discourse regarding early recorded sound and the immortality of the recorded voice.

<sup>526</sup> Jason Toynbee, *Making Popular Music* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 45.

<sup>527</sup> Marshall, 43.

<sup>528</sup> Mikhail Bakhtin, ‘Discourse in the Novel’, in *The Dialogic Imagination*, ed. Michel Holquist (Austin: University of Austin Press, 1982), 342. Also quoted in Reynolds, 84. Bakhtin makes the distinction between ‘authoritative discourse’ in the novel and ‘internally persuasive discourse’,

necessary to convey the voice's authoritative discourse, the words are simply re-presented as they were spoken in the past.<sup>529</sup>

In addition to the voice signifying the (authoritative) figure speaking, the voice can symbolically represent a number of places, eras, genres, or other ideas. For one, the voice could represent a specific place and time, in the case of Tupac, the early-to-mid 1990s West Coast rap world. But on another level, the postmortem voice can be able to transcend time and place because it presently belongs to neither, an *acousmètre* that takes on a ghostly presence in the appropriate context.<sup>530</sup>

It is the authenticity and authority of the recorded voice (with its extra-musical associations, connotations, and resonances) which becomes a symbol of the postmortem mystique that Tupac Shakur and The Notorious B.I.G. have attained within rap culture. They simultaneously represent nostalgia for a specific place-time and a transcendent, almost sublime, status. The status of iconic artists who die young are formed by a synergistic process; what I locate as symbolic immortality of posthumous fame is the product of numerous elements greater than the sum of its individual contributions.

In the following examples, the voices of Tupac and Biggie, recognizable by fans, provide symbolic presence while contributing to new identities. It is the distinctive sound of the borrowed and borrowing artists' delivery (their 'flow'), their biographies as narrative mediator (including image, raps, media), musical aspects of the 'beat', and the act of interpreting them which give rise to these new meanings.

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'which is more akin to retelling a text in one's own words, with one's own accents, gestures, modifications.' Bakhtin, 424.

<sup>529</sup> This also means, of course, that the recorded voice can be manipulated digitally as well, and the next chapter presents some examples of Eminem's manipulation of 2Pac's voice.

<sup>530</sup> The term *acousmètre* is most extensively theorized by Chion, 36.

## **Jay-Z's "A Dream" and Nas's "Thugz Mansion": A Comparison of Postmortem Borrowing**

The third official posthumous 2Pac album, the double album entitled *Better Dayz* (2002), includes two versions of a track entitled "Thugz Mansion". The song is about utopian place which exists beyond the afterlife, a place where Tupac can escape the hardships of life. The version of the track on the second CD (called "Thugz Mansion—7 remix" [CD Example 22]) is what could be characterized as fairly typical to Tupac's brand of hip-hop: it contains synthesized hip-hop beat produced by Seven Aurelius (produced by Johnny Jackson in the original sessions) with guitar and keyboard; it includes three verses by Tupac and a chorus sung by Anthony Hamilton. But the beat to the "Thugz Mansion" that ends the first disc (called "Thugz Mansion—Nas Acoustic" [CD Example 23]) is drastically different from anything Tupac had ever recorded: the beat includes only an acoustic guitar, as played by Michael 'Fish' Herring. There is, in fact, no drum track at all, only the guitar. Produced by Herring and Claudio Cueni, the chorus features a small male choir, sung with close harmonies and overdubbed by J. Phoenix. MCing in the second verse, instead of Tupac, is well-established New York rapper Nas (Nasir Jones). His rap mourns the recent passing of his mother, Anne Jones: 'My love goes to Afeni Shakur/Cause like Anne Jones, she raised as ghetto king in a war/And just for that alone, she shouldn't feel no pain no more/Cause one day we'll all be together, sipping heavenly champagne' (2:11–2:20). He makes comparisons between himself and Tupac, simultaneously placing himself within the same utopia described by 2Pac and the same canonical space.

The sound of the "Thugz Mansion—Nas Acoustic" is worth noting. It is almost as if the instruments used, only voice and acoustic guitar, produce an 'Unplugged' aesthetic that could be interpreted, given the postmortem context, as

the sonic construction of a utopian heaven.<sup>531</sup> This image of heaven described by Tupac is strikingly similar to the heaven portrayed by Tupac in the “I Ain’t Mad at Cha” video, as his rap includes canonical figures in African-American culture (e.g. Malcolm X, Billie Holiday, Marvin Gaye). Furthermore, not having some sort of drum beat makes it extremely conspicuous in its genre. The Seven Aurelius ‘remix’ version uses a more dense layered effect, received as a more ‘authentic’ Tupac beat, something one could dance to, or at least accompany a public space. The ‘acoustic’ version would not be something traditionally played in a club or any typical public setting. It is asking to be listened to closely (as opposed to background or foreground party music). The paucity of instrumentation and no layering gives priority to the vocals and the message that Tupac presents.<sup>532</sup> The acoustic guitar, in the words of Philip Auslander (from Baudrillard), represents a ‘Sign of the Real’, representative of an authentic live performance.<sup>533</sup> The distinction between these two beats, both on the *Better Dayz* album, seems to suggest the difference between music for a private space versus for a public space.

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<sup>531</sup> This ‘Unplugged’ aesthetic was perhaps most apparent in youth culture as part of a series of concerts called MTV: Unplugged, which featured a number of popular groups at the time that essentially played ‘covers’ of their songs with more acoustic instrumentation. See Philip Auslander, ‘Liveness’, in *The Popular Music Studies Reader*, eds. Andy Bennett, Barry Shank and Jason Toynbee (London: Routledge, 2006), 89.

<sup>532</sup> Nas says in one interview, ‘As soon as I heard it [the rap], I was with it. It was something I wanted to do with just a guitar playing, not really drums—something you could hear the words [on]’. Shaheem Reid, ‘On Tupac Video Set, Nas Says Rapper Better than Shakespeare’, MTV News, 3 December 2004, available at: <http://www.mtv.com/news/articles/1458966/20021203/nas.jhtml> (accessed 23 February 2007).

<sup>533</sup> ‘At least since the early 1960s, acoustic playing has stood for authenticity, sincerity, and rootsiness; hence, the dismay that greeted Bob Dylan’s use of an electric guitar at the 1965 Newport Folk Festival. Live performance, too, has long been understood as the realm of the authentic, the true test of musicianship undisguised by studio trickery.’ Auslander, ‘Liveness’, in the *Popular Music Studies Reader*, 89.



### Example 4.1

"Thugs Mansion - 7 Remix" - 2Pac

### Example 4.2

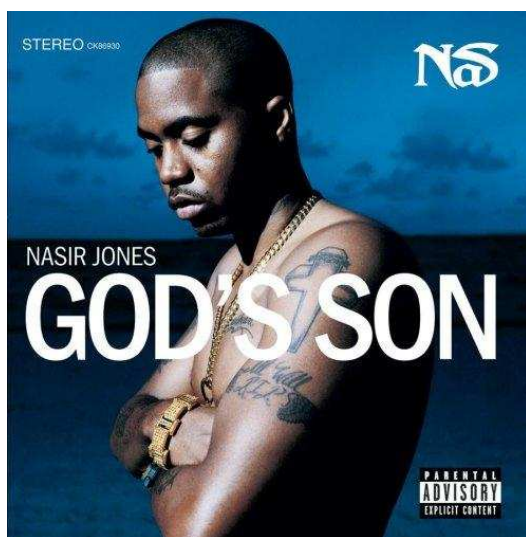
2Pac/Nas "Thugs Mansion - Acoustic"

A $\flat$                       Cm<sup>7</sup>                      B $\flat$ m    D $\flat$ A<sup>7</sup>                      B $\flat$ m                      D $\flat$ <sup>o7</sup>

Rhythmic strumming over this basic chord progression

Rapper Nas (Nasir Jones) used the “Thugz Mansion” acoustic version beat on his album *God’s Son*, released a month after *Better Dayz* on Dec. 17, 2002 [CD Example 24]. Instead of his MC persona ‘Nas’ for this album, he used his real name, Nasir Jones. The cover of the album showed him from the waist up, with no shirt on (Figure 4.6 below). The use of real name and semi-nudity on the album cover again presents an authenticity of intimacy suggesting Sontag’s notion that the

‘author naked’ is what the audience demands (in this case both literally and metaphorically).<sup>534</sup> Using Nas’s real name also suggests what Todd Boyd observes as the ‘aesthetic of realism that so informs hip hop production’.<sup>535</sup> Once again, the use of acoustic guitar also plays on a cultural reference to intimacy. The main difference between the “Thugz Mansion” on *God’s Son* and “Thugz Mansion—Nas Acoustic” is that, on the former, Nas replaces Tupac’s opening lines and first verse with a completely new rap from himself. This difference in framing the track affects its aesthetic effect: on *Better Dayz*, the song form becomes |Tupac’s intro| |Tupac Verse 1| |Nas Verse 2| |Tupac verse 3|, and on *God’s Son*, the scheme is |Nas intro| |Nas Verse 1| |Tupac verse 2| |Nas verse 3| with the chorus from Phoenix between the verses on both versions.



**Figure 4.6**—*God’s Son* (2002)

Nas’s exchange of the first verse and intro with his own quickly changes the implied ownership of the song. While the acoustic guitar and Tupac’s verse act as a memorial structure, Nas’s opening to the song without reference to Tupac makes it his. Instead of the original Tupac intro, ‘Shit, tired of getting shot at/Tired of getting chased by the police and arrested/Niggaz need a spot where we can kick

<sup>534</sup> Sontag, 42.

<sup>535</sup> Boyd, *The New H.N.I.C.*, 116. In this context, Boyd is writing in reference to Jay-Z’s use of his real name in the title of his 2000 album *The Black Album*.

it/A spot where we belong ...’, we now have Nas: ‘I want you to close your eyes and envision the most beautiful place in tha world/if you in the hood, the ghetto street corner, come on this journey, the best journey, it’s a mansion/acres of land, swimming pools and all that, check it out’. Whereas Tupac was looking for a place to end his suffering, Nas’s opening defines him as the storyteller. By narration, it becomes Nas’s song.

The one verse of Tupac that Nas decides to use is the third one from the “Thugz Mansion—7 Remix”, which becomes the second verse of “Thugz Mansion—Nas Acoustic” on both *Better Dayz* and *God’s Son*. It is in the aforementioned verse where his narration is from heaven (again, an aural complement to the visual imagery of his “I Ain’t Mad at Cha” music video):

Dear momma don’t cry, your baby boy’s doin good  
Tell the homies I’m in heaven and they ain’t got hoods  
Seen a show with Marvin Gaye last night, it had me shook  
Drinking peppermint Schnapps with Jackie Wilson and Sam Cooke  
Then some lady named Billie Holiday  
Sang sittin there kickin it with Malcom, ’til the day came...  
Just think of all the people that you knew in the past that passed on  
They in heaven, found peace ay last  
Picture a place that they exist, together  
There has to be a place better than this, in heaven  
So right before I sleep, dear God, what I’m askin  
Remember this face, save me a place, in thug’s mansion.  
 (“Thugz Mansion (7 Remix)”, *Better Dayz*, 2:35–3:20)  
 (“Thugz Mansion (Nas Acoustic)”, *Better Dayz*, 2:45–3:29)  
 (“Thugz Mansion (N.Y.)”, *God’s Son*, 1:40–2:23)

Following this verse from Tupac is the third verse from Nas. At this point, he is no longer narrator or storyteller but has now included himself in the suffering: ‘Cuz I feel like my eyes saw too much sufferin’/I’m just 20 some odd years, I done lost my mother’ (3:07–3:11). Both the death of his mother and the highly publicized feud with rapper Jay-Z were elements of his biography known to fans, the feud highly played up in the media and in songs from both artists.

In addition to placement, the ‘heaven verse’ in Nas’s album is different in one other crucial respect: Tupac’s vocals are doubled as two separately recorded layers. One has to be knowledgeable of Tupac’s behaviour in the studio for a greater understanding of this: he often went into the recording booth with his written rap and would record it twice or three times to create a layered effect.

Shock G (Greg Jacobs) told this anecdote about Tupac in the studio:

He’s gasping for air, he’s got a joint in his hand and he was smoking weed and cigarettes and Newport all night. So he’s missing words here and there. So the way he would do it was like a dotted line principle. When he would gasp for air and miss a line, on this track, maybe it caught that word. So he would triple his vocals to make sure every word was said.<sup>536</sup>

Ta-Nehisi Coates writes, ‘From 1993’s *Strictly 4 My N.I.G.G.A.Z.* to 1996’s *All Eyez On Me*, he would hit the track with his voice perpetually doubled over and in perfect time with the beat, stressing syllables until they bled’.<sup>537</sup> Another observation in the studio from 1994 is recalled by journalist dream hampton: ‘Tupac likes to add effects to his vocals: Chuck D-style reverbs and echoes that give his voice that godly quality’.<sup>538</sup> This effect can be utilized in these memorial recordings to give a sense of omnipresence and ‘larger than life’ quality. Tupac’s voice doubled, contrasted against Nas’s single track in this context, creates the distinction between an earthly voice and one with more aura (a ‘sonic halo’).

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<sup>536</sup> Thug Angel, (34:29).

<sup>537</sup> Ta-Nehisi Coates, ‘Tupac: The Reality Show’, in *Spin: 20 Years of Alternative Music*, eds. Will Hermes and Sia Michel (New York: Three Rivers Press, 2005), 145.

<sup>538</sup> dream hampton, ‘Hell-Raiser’, in *“And it Don’t Stop”: The Best American Hip-Hop Journalism of the Last 25 Years*, ed. Raquel Cepeda (New York: Faber and Faber, Inc., 2004), 132. Her observations reflect the 31 January 1994 Blue Palms Recording Studio session in Burbank, CA.

<b>Song Title</b>	<b>Thugz Mansion—Remix</b>	<b>Thugz Mansion—Nas Acoustic</b>	<b>Thugz Mansion (N.Y.)</b>
Artist	2Pac	2Pac	Nasir Jones
Album	<i>Better Dayz</i> (2002)-disc 2	<i>Better Dayz</i> (2002) - disc 1	<i>God's Son</i> (2002)
Producer	Seven Aurelius	Michael Herring and Claudio Cueni	Michael Herring and Claudio Cueni
Song Form	Intro: 2Pac Verse 1: 2Pac Verse 2: 2Pac Verse 3: 2Pac (heaven)	Intro: 2Pac Verse 1: 2Pac Verse 2: Nas Verse 3: 2Pac (heaven)	Intro: Nas Verse 1: Nas <b>Verse 2: 2Pac (heaven)</b> Verse 3: Nas

**Table 4.1– Comparison of three “Thugz Mansion” versions**

This was not the first time Nas used the voice of Tupac for one of his singles. In the song “Ether” from the 2001 album *Stillmatic* (which is a brutal comeback against Jay-Z’s “Takeover”), Nas samples a slowed down 2Pac saying ‘Fuck Jay-Z’ (from “Fuck Frenzy” on *Until the End of Time*) three times before Nas commences his rap. Nas states later in the song, ‘Who’s the best? Pac, Nas and BIG’. (Jay-Z evokes a similar canon in 1997 from a line in his song “Where I’m From”: ‘I’m from where niggas pull ya’ card ... And argue all day about who’s the best MC: Biggie, Jay-Z, or Nas?’) When Nas calls on Tupac to aid with the ‘diss’ (as in ‘disrespect’) track, and puts himself within the canon between two hip-hop martyrs, it is not the 1996 bodily Tupac, but rather the transcendent, resurrected, and immortal Tupac as symbol that Nas uses. Tupac is an (unwilling) ally to Nas, and using Tupac on *God’s Son* the following year strengthens such an alliance.<sup>539</sup> The implicit assumption when two rappers perform on the same single is that they are allies of some sort; the ‘gang mentality’ of gangsta rap, seems to promote this idea. In addition, reverence toward Tupac by Nas could represent acknowledgement of the canon of historical figures within (and help define) rap’s

<sup>539</sup> The irony of the Nas alliance with Tupac is that Tupac showed his disdain for Nas in some of his records. The opening pseudo-news report from *The Don Killuminati* album opens describing Nas as the ‘alleged ringleader’ of a conspiracy to ‘assassinate the character of not only Mr. Shakur, but Death Row Records as well’. And on the track “Against All Odds” from the same album, Tupac criticizes Dr. Dre, Mobb Deep, Puffy, and Nas, saying of Nas, ‘This little nigga named Nas thinks he live like me/Talkin’ ’bout he left the hospital, took five like me/You living fantasies, nigga I reject your deposit’. Suge Knight considered Nas’s ‘collaboration’ to be ‘Real disrespectful to Pac’. He continues, ‘Don’t go [do a song] knowing a certain individual didn’t care for you’. Shaheem Reid, ‘Suge Knight Calls Tupac/Nas track “disrespectful”’, *MTV News*, 21 April 2003, available at: [http://www.mtv.com/news/articles/1471376/20030418/knight\\_marion\\_suge\\_.jhtml](http://www.mtv.com/news/articles/1471376/20030418/knight_marion_suge_.jhtml) (accessed 23 February 2007).

culture. According to Boyd, Nas is said to have a tendency to ‘embrace history at the cost of all else’<sup>540</sup> which is part of a larger self-conscious historicism in hip-hop (see Chapter 1). Both “Thugz Mansion” and “Ether” use the iconic symbol of Tupac to give legitimacy to a rapper concerned with his own place in the rap music canon.

Turning to Jay-Z: the first track from his *The Blueprint 2* (2002) is entitled “A Dream” [CD Example 26]. In the song, he recounts a conversation he had with the Notorious B.I.G. in a recent dream, which includes a chorus sung by B.I.G.’s former wife Faith Evans.<sup>541</sup> The second verse of “A Dream” is the opening rap of Notorious B.I.G.’s “Juicy” from his debut album *Ready to Die* (1994) [CD Example 25], but with the new beat (produced by Kanye West). Though both Jay-Z and Nas utilize postmortem borrowing for the second verse, unlike the case of Nas’s “Thugz Mansion”, Jay-Z uses a rap fragment which would have been known by all Notorious B.I.G. fans: “Juicy” was the lead single to his debut album *Ready to Die*, a single which debuted at number 5 on the Billboard rap chart and received heavy radio and music video rotation.<sup>542</sup> The single and album received a tremendous amount of press at the time for shifting the focus back on New York after many years of California rap dominance; “Juicy” would be deeply ingrained in the consciousness of listeners.<sup>543</sup>

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<sup>540</sup> Boyd, 90.

<sup>541</sup> Faith Evans also sang on the Puff Daddy memorial song “I’ll be Missing you”. Though they had been estranged at the time of his death, the marriage bond gives an authentic sense of tribute and that Faith has a right to honour her husband (a similar family sentiment to the Natalie Cole’s “Unforgettable”). Jay-Z (as opposed to Nas and Tupac), however, had an actual connection and friendship with the Notorious B.I.G., who appeared on Jay-Z’s debut album *Reasonable Doubt* (1996).

<sup>542</sup> Coker wrote that ‘*Ready to Die* sold 500,000 copies in its first week alone. Suddenly the video for “Juicy” was all over MTV, the radio was playing his song three times an hour, and it seemed like everywhere he went, people knew who the Notorious B.I.G. was’. Coker, *Unbelievable*, 114.

<sup>543</sup> “Juicy” sampled the beat from the 1983 single “Juicy Fruit” by the group Mtume. By sampling a song from the early 1980s, Biggie uses nostalgia, musically, to accompany the rags-to-riches story of his growing up. (‘It was all a dream, I used to read *Word Up* magazine, *Salt-n-Pepa* and *Heavy D* up in the limousine, *Hangin’* pictures on my wall. Every Saturday, ‘*Rap Attack*’, *Mr. Magic*, *Marley*

While 2Pac has arguably received more attention in the wider mainstream, Notorious B.I.G. has received a tremendous amount of respect within hip-hop communities for his skills as rapper.<sup>544</sup> Accounts of his studio practices recall the ability to freestyle his lyrics, and to rap material without having to write anything down.<sup>545</sup> While borrowing in hip-hop is primarily known for sampling breakbeats, the voice of Notorious B.I.G is often sampled by other rappers, before and after his death (examples include Lil' Kim, Method Man, Smitty, Big Pun, and Bossman).<sup>546</sup> One writer comments 'That unmistakable voice coupled with a gut busting wit has made Biggie as sample-able as any break.'<sup>547</sup> Like Tupac, the use of Biggie's voice can signify a number of things depending on the specific narratives that mediate one's listening experience: representing supreme rap skills,

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Marl ...') He gives thanks to those who supported him in the past and describes both the contrast between his past and present living conditions and also the states of rap music ('Remember Rappin Duke? 'Duh-ha duh-ha' You never thought hip-hop would take it this far'). Overall, the lyrics and the musical accompaniment are 'positive' and the sample in a major key. The UK hip-hop magazine *Hip-hop Connection*, in their tribute to Notorious B.I.G. a decade after his murder, refers to "Juicy" as 'uplifting a rap song as you'll ever hear, and one without an ounce of schmaltz to it'. Angus Batey, Andrew Emery, Phillip Mlynar, Rob Pursey, 'Notorious B.I.G.: A Tribute', *Hip-Hop Connections* 209, March 2007, 73.

<sup>544</sup> Comparing Biggie to Tupac, Coker writes, 'Biggie's legacy is different. Wallace's lasting imprint on hip hop is more musical than iconographic. He is a master of flow, of lyrical rhythm and technique—the Jordan to Rakim's Magic. While his catalogue of unreleased records isn't as large as Tupac's, the quality of many of the surviving freestyles is unsurpassed.' Coker, 8. Anthony DeCurtis writes, 'The Notorious B.I.G., for his part, was eminently of this world. He had perhaps the greatest emotional range and straight-up literary skill of any rapper before or after him. His rhymes could be riotously funny on a purely verbal level ("... escargot/My car go ..."), and he could seamlessly move from fury to vulnerability to sensuality to a poignancy within a few lines. His ceaseless profanity—as in so many hip hop lyrics—lends his raps a conversational tone, the language of the streets'. Anthony DeCurtis, 'Word', in *The Vibe History of Hip Hop*, 97.

<sup>545</sup> 'After a beat passed Wallace's screening process, it was off to the studio. The sessions, Mo Bee remembered, were all pretty much the same. he would play the track through the giant studio monitors, and Wallace would sit there in the room, smoking weed and nodding along with the pounding drums, seemingly lost in his own world. And then, just when you thought that all these hours of listening had been wasted, Wallace would stand up, walk into the booth, and perform an entire song off the top of his head.' Coker, *Unbelievable*, 96. In another description of a session, DJ Premier noted the speed at which he recorded: 'It was like he picked the rhyme out of thin air and assembled the pieces in real time, at will. Within less than an hour, the whole song was recorded, three perfect verses'. Coker, *Unbelievable*, 102. One cannot help but consider the last account reminiscent of Mozartian biography rhetoric, perhaps a foil of 'perfection' to Tupac's Beethovenian flawed genius.

<sup>546</sup> Examples include Lil' Kim, "Suck my Dick", Method Man and Mary J. Blige, "I'll be There for You/You're All I Need", Smitty "Diamonds on My Neck" (which uses the hook from "Dangerous MCs"), Bossman's "Untouchable," Big Pun's "Super Lyrical" (which uses excerpts from "One More Chance"), and Michael Jackson's "Unbreakable". Faith Evans uses the "Juicy"/Mtume beat for her 2001 song "Faithfully".

<sup>547</sup> Jerry L. Barrow, 'Under the Influence', *The Source* 207, February 2007, 78.

East Coast rap's return to prominence, mid-1990s rap culture, or as a canonical figure in rap history. Notorious B.I.G. is certainly in an elite canon of 'great rappers', and the tragedy of his death mediates the reception of his voice, mutually influencing those who sample his voice and his own posthumous reputation.

Jay-Z (and producer Kanye West) uses the first verse from "Juicy" as the second verse to "A Dream". Its musical features largely characterize the song as a rap lament: its repeated, descending tetrachord ostinato and presence of the female voice facilitate expressions of mourning within the song. The idea of the lament that became common in Baroque opera was, as Grove Music Online defines it, 'Usually, a vocal piece based on a mournful text, often built over a descending tetrachord ostinato.'<sup>548</sup> These four chords would be in a minor key and follow the progression i-VII-VI-V. (The classic example is "Dido's Lament" from Purcell's *Dido and Aeneas*.) Susan McClary has mentioned this type of chord progression as a pattern 'deeply inscribed in our cultural memories',<sup>549</sup> discussing the pattern in reference to Tupac's song "Tradin' War Stories", from *All Eyez on Me*. She notes that the progression in the song (i-VII-VI roughly) has 'no sense of arrival', considering that it never finishes the pattern to the dominant. ('the point of relative stability' as McClary calls it). It always swiftly moves back to the i chord from the VI. McClary concludes, 'The power and the cultural memory of these patterns is harnessed and with that truncation of it every time, there's a sense that we cannot grieve properly within this music. That we're constantly flipped back to the beginning'.<sup>550</sup> This particular interpretation could partly be influenced by Tupac's postmortem identities, because one potential problem theorizing its association

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<sup>548</sup> Ellen Rosand, 'Lament', Grove Music Online ed. L. Macy, available at: <http://www.grovemusic.com> (accessed 23 November 2006).

<sup>549</sup> Susan McClary, *Thug Angel*, DVD Extras.

<sup>550</sup> *Ibid.*



with grieving is that the song comes from an album recorded and released when Tupac was still alive.

McClary's contention, however, works much better for Jay-Z's "A Dream". In Kanye West and Jay-Z's construction of a lament, their tribute to the dead is intertwined with encouragement of mourning, or at least of an emotional response. It is important to note here that the original "Juicy" is actually in a major key (sampling Mtume's "Juicy Fruit"), and "A Dream" is in the more common minor key (for rap at this time). Though it is not a typical Baroque lament in the sense of a descending tetrachord ostinato, its progression is cyclical and centres on the first three descending chords of a lament. The difference lies in the fourth chord, which returns to the VII. In other words, instead of the Baroque lament i-VII-VI-V, the progression goes as follows: i-VII-VI-VII. Though this progression never reaches the dominant, it is possible to 'grieve properly' to the tribute, not only because the VII often acts in place of a dominant in popular music in minor modes, but also because there are enough lament structures in place that encourage mourning: the song uses descending bass line, repeated ostinato, strings (particularly the cello, though synthesized), and female vocals from B.I.G.'s widow (particularly vocal 'wailing' and mournful 'Ohs' throughout the beat of the song, in addition to her singing 'Was it all a dream?' on the chorus). In addition to the fragment from his popular single "Juicy", there are plenty of musical codes of mournfulness which contribute to the song as a rap lament.<sup>551</sup> James Porter writes that 'The ritual character of laments embodies notions of transitions to another state or world and

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<sup>551</sup> McClary and Walser discuss this concept in their article 'Start Making Sense!': 'Thus to try to make the case that a particular configuration sounds mournful (something that may be obvious to virtually all listeners, especially those not perverted by musical training) is to have to invent a philosophical argument for meaning in music and to try to reconstruct forgotten codes out of centuries of music'. Susan McClary and Robert Walser, 'Start Making Sense!: Musicology Wrestles with Rock', in *On Record: Rock, Pop, and the Written Word* (London: Routledge, 1990), 283.

the possibility of symbolic renewal',<sup>552</sup> and both "A Dream" and "Thugz Mansion" seem to also serve this function of a lament: to suggest musically the transition into immortality.

**Example 4.3—Jay-Z "A Dream"**

Jay-Z - "A Dream"

The musical score for Jay-Z's "A Dream" is presented in two systems. The first system includes four staves: Keyboard layer 1 (treble clef), Electric Guitar (treble clef), Keyboard layer 2 (treble clef), and 4-string Bass Guitar (bass clef). The second system includes four staves: Kbd. (treble clef), E. Gtr. (treble clef), Kbd. (treble clef), and Bass (bass clef). The score features a 7/8 time signature and a key signature of one sharp (F#). The first system includes a note for F#m and a chord change to E, with the instruction "(Bass plays over these harmonies.)". The second system includes a note for D and a chord change to E. The score is marked with a '3' above the first measure of the second system, indicating a triplet.

Like the case of Nas's "Thugz Mansion (N.Y.)", a distinction is made between the voice of the deceased artist and the current recording artist. Reverb and echo are added to B.I.G.'s voice, which is not present in the original recording of "Juicy", digitally creating the aura of symbolic immortality. Also, the tempo is slightly slower than that of the original ("Juicy" originally at 93–94 BPM, and "A Dream" at 86 BPM). Heavy echo on the words 'Starski' and for 'good' of 'it's all good', it fills the space between rap phrases. Both Tupac and B.I.G. are digitally manipulated in the studio to become larger than life, in some ways analogous to the use of 'slapback delay' echo effect for Elvis on his recordings for Sun Records.<sup>553</sup>

<sup>552</sup> Quoted in Rosand.

<sup>553</sup> Effects such as echo, reverb, double-tracking and compression can be used to varying degrees to create such a 'big' sound.

As Middleton writes in the context of blues recordings, ‘The link between disembodied voice (as in echo, for example) and supernatural power is an anthropological commonplace, are totemic ritual masks designed to enable the actor to represent godlike authority not only visually but also vocally.’<sup>554</sup> Like Nas, Jay-Z contrasts his own voice with the reverb and echo of B.I.G. (similar to church acoustics), sonically representing the heavenly qualities of a hip-hop saint.

The layering of the track is also worth noting in “A Dream”: it is significantly more dense than “Thugz Mansion—Nas Acoustic” or B.I.G.’s original “Juicy”. Jay-Z/West’s version includes a heavy drum beat, along with overdrive-effect guitars, guitars playing arpeggiated chords, record scratching, and synthesized piano and ’cello. Its key is somewhere between f#m and gm, lying between two tonal worlds.<sup>555</sup> Midway through each of the two verses, through the sudden omission of overdrive and arpeggiating guitars, the piano becomes more prominent. The voice of B.I.G. along with the piano line invokes the past, utilizing the ‘romantic’ reference of the piano to evoke emotion. One journalist describes the guitar chords as ‘somber’ and ‘Faith Evans’s impassioned vocals supplying the dramatic backdrop.’<sup>556</sup> Another reviewer writes:

Kanye ditches his trademark soul sound for this tribute to Mr. Frank White [Notorious B.I.G.], instead opting for an epic-sounding apocalyptic jaw<sup>557</sup> with full-on ominous piano, bomb-boogie bass, distorted guitar and some sick Premier-type scratching courtesy of the ROC’s [Jay-Z] other super-producer, Just Blaze.<sup>558</sup>

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<sup>554</sup> Richard Middleton, “‘O Brother let’s go down home’: Loss, Nostalgia and the Blues”, *Popular Music* 26, 1 (2007): 56.

<sup>555</sup> The concept of de-tuned layers is one feature of what Krims calls the ‘hip-hop sublime’. See Krims, *Rap Music*, 73.

<sup>556</sup> Coker, 330–331.

<sup>557</sup> The term ‘jaw’ is a Philadelphia urban slang term which is often used in place of any noun, but usually a ‘thing’.

<sup>558</sup> The Mack, “A Dream”, This is a Kanye West Production, available at: <http://www.themack.org/KanyeList.html> (accessed 20 December 2006).

The layering adds to the ‘epic-sounding’ quality, as well as the reverb and echo added to B.I.G.’s voice. If the acoustic guitar in “Thugz Mansion” invoked intimacy, then the beat of “A Dream” suggests urgency. The beat, with its heavy layering, is what contributed to the song’s descriptions as ‘somber’, ‘dramatic’, ‘epic-sounding’ and ‘apocalyptic’. Both the musical structures of mourning and Biggie’s postmortem narrative contribute to these song descriptions.

It is noteworthy that the song only contains two verses, one from Jay-Z and one from Biggie. The scratching, prominent during the last double chorus (2:59), samples B.I.G.’s first phrase ‘It was all a dream’ (though the scratching and phrase occurs throughout the song). The scratching could evoke a similar nostalgia that Biggie had for the 1980s, as scratching was then a prominent feature of the rap mainstream. Even more so, the way the scratches are used, in this instance, evokes the evanescence of Biggie’s voice. The scratches over the double chorus use Biggie’s voice, but chop it up to the point where it becomes unrecognizable. It shortens to one syllable (‘all’), and as the scratches repeat this syllable in a regular rhythm, its pitch descends (a similar effect to the batteries dying during boom box playback, causing the tape to slow down, and the pitch to lower). Just like the dream Jay-Z describes, Notorious B.I.G. returns for a fleeting moment, only for us to be reminded that he is only here in spirit. As the beat finishes after the double chorus, Jay-Z ends by repeating the last few lines of his first verse a capella:

I see I said, jealousy I said  
Got the whole industry mad at me I said  
Then B.I. said, “Hov’ remind yourself  
Nobody built like you, you designed yourself”  
I agree I said, my one of a kind self  
Get stoned every day like Jesus did  
What he said, I said, has been said before  
“Just keep doin’ your thing”, he said, say no more. (3:45–4:11)

Jay-Z’s final verse, with no accompaniment whatsoever, becomes an exposing gesture similar to Nas with acoustic guitar. Furthermore, the repetition of this verse gives it greater focus, and after the voice of Biggie fades into nothingness (along with the music); Jay-Z is the last man standing.

In recounting the dream he had of Notorious B.I.G., Jay-Z raps of B.I.G. as mentor, not so much giving advice as providing the authoritative approval to his career (‘Just keep doin’ your thing, he said, say no more’). Like Nas, Jay-Z also speaks of his own suffering (‘got the whole industry mad at me ... get stoned every day like Jesus did’). When the line ‘It was all a dream’ is exclaimed on the chorus, it is both Biggie’s voice and Jay-Z’s saying it together (with added echo on Biggie’s voice), making even more explicit the presentation of an alliance between these two rappers. And just as in the example of “Thugz Mansion (N.Y.)” on *God’s Son*, Jay-Z’s raps bookend himself in relation to Biggie. It places the deceased artist as the emotional climax in the song. Jay-Z, akin to Nas’s implied ownership, has the first word and the last.

Form	"A Dream"
Chorus	Faith Evans (BIG's widow)
Verse 1	Jay-Z
Chorus	Faith Evans
Verse 2	Notorious B.I.G “Juicy”
Chorus	F.E. with scratching and strings
Verse 3	Jay-Z (a capella), lyrics from verse 1

**Table 4.2—“A Dream” Form**

### Conclusion

Both Nas and Jay-Z use the voice of Tupac and Biggie, respectively, as tribute, but also as an appeal to authority to reinforce their own status as dominant rappers. As Jay-Z rapped on Missy Elliot’s “Back in the Day”, ‘Post-Biggie and

'Pac I gotta hold down the city',<sup>559</sup> many rappers will invoke these names, creating a number of effects: as boasting, as attempting to include oneself in the canon, and as reinforcing key events in the history of hip-hop culture. These voices function as powerful relics, a reference to a 'higher' figure with symbolic immortality. Nas and Jay-Z also immortalize Tupac and the Notorious B.I.G. to a further extent by surrounding their rhymes with lamenting soundscapes; at the same time Nas and Jay-Z immortalize themselves in association with a canon of great rappers, a canon formed before their tributes, but nevertheless adding to the power of that canon. The strong sense of historical identity and frequency of musical borrowing in hip-hop help to facilitate these instances of postmortem borrowing. "Thugz Mansion" and "A Dream" have a shared purpose, to use the iconic symbols of Tupac and Notorious B.I.G. to give legitimacy to rappers still concerned with the future of their own legacies.

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<sup>559</sup> Missy Elliot "Back in the Day", Under Construction (2002).

## –Chapter 5–

# **Borrowing and Lineage in Eminem/2Pac’s Loyal to the Game and 50 Cent’s Get Rich or Die Trying**

In the previous chapter I was able to demonstrate the emergence of various postmortem identities for Tupac and Notorious B.I.G., using two examples of postmortem borrowing from their contemporaries, Jay-Z and Nas. Nas’s “Thugz Mansion” and Jay-Z’s “A Dream” digitally borrow the voices of 2Pac and Notorious B.I.G. respectively, creating tributes through structures of mourning and intimacy while simultaneously including themselves in a canon of great rappers. The topic of this chapter involves borrowing the voices of Tupac and Biggie as well, but by rappers associated with the ‘next generation’,<sup>560</sup> those who rose to prominence (to quote Jay-Z) ‘post-Biggie and Pac’. This chapter focuses on Eminem (Marshall Mathers III) and 50 Cent (Curtis Jackson), two rappers who were not well-known artists in the hip-hop world until after 1997. While tributes from Jay-Z and Nas suggest a shared canon of great contemporary rappers, later artists such as Eminem and 50 Cent participate in studio ‘collaborations’ that suggest lineage construction within their hip-hop world. As hip-hop culture is historically conscious (as seen in Chapter 1), this lineage helps to define particular ‘eras’ in gangsta/reality rap history as well as the ‘great men’ who define them (the ‘history in rap’ to which Eminem alludes in “It Has Been Said”).

Hip-hop media discourse, in its historical self-consciousness, has categorized its world into a number of eras (e.g. ‘Old School’, ‘Golden Age’, ‘Gangsta Era’, etc.), defined in part by the rise of iconic figures that cause or

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<sup>560</sup> As seen in recent histories of hip-hop, ‘generations’ tend to last 5–6 years, with dominant artists, geographical locations, and styles as defining features. Because of the short time span of generations in popular music subgenres compared to those of human life, one might be inclined to call them ‘micro-generations’ within popular music. A similar example of historicization in rock music is demonstrated by the BBC documentary *The Seven Ages of Rock*, which divides the past fifty years of rock music into seven distinct eras.

embody stylistic shifts in image, music, topics, etc.<sup>561</sup> Eminem could be said to represent the micro-generation that follows 2Pac and Notorious B.I.G. (1997–2003), and 50 Cent the generation after him (2003–), though all these rappers share generic space; they are all commercially successful rap icons who belong to the ‘reality rap’ subgenre of rap music as Adam Krims’s genre system defines it.<sup>562</sup> As I will show, Eminem-produced albums such as *Loyal to the Game* (2004) and singles such as 50 Cent’s “Patiently Waiting” help to construct Eminem within a gangsta rap lineage, with Tupac as his ancestor, Dr. Dre his father, and 50 Cent as his heir/protégé.

The postmortem borrowing of Biggie and Tupac as lineage construction forms the subject of this chapter, a phenomenon that revisits many of the themes from the previous chapter: the close proximity of death and memorial in hip-hop cultures, the cultural aura attached to ‘Biggie and Pac’ (and their narrative mediation of these songs), the borrowing and collaborative ethos in hip-hop, the ease of digitally sampling the voice to be added to new musical compliments, and legal/commercial versions of already existing ‘mixtape’ traditions.<sup>563</sup> Through extra- and intra-musical discourse, Eminem and 50 Cent are integrated into a

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<sup>561</sup> These time periods, of course, differ between writers and fans, but I will use one example from William Jelani Cobb to show that there is a historical consciousness that recognizes multiple ‘periods’ of the genre’s history: ‘Art respects no borders and time frames, but for our own concerns, hip hop can be divided into four overlapping eras: the Old School, 1974–1983, the Golden Age 1984–1992, the Modern Era, 1992–1997, and the Industrial Era, 1998–2005’. Cobb, 41. See also Chang, *Can’t Stop Won’t Stop*.

<sup>562</sup> Krims, *Rap Music*, 70–80.

<sup>563</sup> Bakari Kaitwana writes, ‘Mixtape CDs—unlicensed mass-produced CDs in which a deejay creatively mixes emerging and established rap artists rhyming over unreleased and/or previously published music—have been a phenomenon of hip-hop since at least the 1980s (hence the name). By the mid-1990s, mixtape CDs helped break several rappers out of the underground to mainstream hip-hop industry recognition. It was the urban street buzz—generated by their appearance on mixtapes long before securing record deals—that jump-started the careers of artists like DMX, 50 Cent and others. The consumer audience for mixtapes, most certainly in the era before music downloading, was not primarily white suburban youth.’ Bakari Kitwana, *Why White Kids Love Hip-Hop: Wankstas, Wiggers, Wannabes, and the New Reality of Race in America* (New York: Basic Civitas Books, 2005), 92.



lineage, a centuries-old practice in the musical world, now updated in the digital era for hip-hop music.

### **Lineage and Tradition**

As Robert P. Morgan reminds us, musical and artistic lineage is not a natural occurrence, but is largely a social construction: ‘One chooses the tradition one wants, or even creates a unique tradition for one’s own personal requirements. The past is not forced upon the composer, handed down by decree (or ‘testament’); he shapes it himself.’<sup>564</sup> Morgan quotes Stravinsky from *Poetics of Music*: ‘The artist imposes a culture upon himself and ends by imposing it upon others. That is how tradition becomes established.’<sup>565</sup> Hip-hop culture is no exception to this, as its historical self-consciousness contributes to the constructions of continuity and tradition within the hip-hop world.<sup>566</sup>

While the composer is often responsible for the promotion of him/herself into a lineage, it is important to add that tradition is also constructed by a complex web of other influences including fans and the media. To use one example, in 50 Cent’s “Patiently Waiting” [CD Example 36], Eminem raps the lyric:

Take some Big and some Pac and you mix ’em up in a pot  
Sprinkle a little Big L on top, what the fuck do you got?  
You got the realest and illest killas tied up in a knot  
The juggernauts of this rap shit, like it or not (2:09–2:21).<sup>567</sup>

I will return to this song in more musical detail later in the chapter, but a cursory reading of the lyrics shows that Eminem is using some of hip-hop’s

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<sup>564</sup> Robert P. Morgan, ‘Tradition, Anxiety, and the Musical Scene’, in *Authenticity and Early Music*, ed. Nicholas Kenyon (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988), 65.

<sup>565</sup> Quoted in Morgan, 63–64. Stravinsky also writes, ‘A real tradition is not the relic of a past that is irretrievable gone; it is a living force that animates and informs the present ... This sense of tradition which is a natural need must not be confused with the desire which the composer feels to affirm the kinship he finds across the centuries with some master of the past.’ In Morgan, 63.

<sup>566</sup> Historically-conscious hip-hop artists and groups have also made links with pre-hip-hop musical forms in a variety of ways, such as with the music of James Brown, jazz (See Ch. 2), and funk styles. See also Joanna Demers, *Sampling as Lineage in Hip-Hop* (PhD Thesis, Princeton: Princeton University, 2002) and Joanna Demers, ‘Sampling the 1970s in Hip-Hop’.

<sup>567</sup> Eminem, “Patiently Waiting”, 50 Cent, *Get Rich or Die Tryin’* (2003).

‘ancestors’ (Big, Pac, and Big L) to describe and promote 50 Cent as ‘the realest’, not an uncommon gesture in the bragging and boasting traditions of rap music.<sup>568</sup> A well-established rap star’s promoting 50 Cent lends an aura of stardom to him as part of the exchange of symbolic capital found in mentor-student relationships.

The above lyric opens an article by Lynne D Johnson entitled ‘Hip-Hop’s Holy Trinity’.<sup>569</sup> She draws a parallel between the Dr. Dre, Eminem and 50 Cent triumvirate and the claim that Albert Ayler proffered that John Coltrane, in his song “The Father, Son, and Holy Ghost”, was referring to himself as father, Pharoah Sanders as son, and Ayler as the Holy Ghost.<sup>570</sup> Johnson explicitly confirms the lineage by describing 50 Cent as the ‘next Biggie and Tupac rolled into one.’<sup>571</sup> In this case, lineage is constructed through the lyrics of the song (intra-musically) and by media articles such as ‘Hip-hop’s Holy Trinity’ (extra-musically), and the two processes mutually shape one another. Like posthumous fame, lineage is constructed through media, audience, and the works/recording themselves.<sup>572</sup>

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<sup>568</sup> This line could also be a reference to the single “The Realest Killaz” which featured 50 Cent on the Tupac Resurrection soundtrack. The idea of a double-voiced utterance, a concept theorized by Bakhtin, and utilized by writers such as Henry Louis Gates Jr. who believe that the double-voiced utterance is a primary quality of black discourse. For the application of the double-voiced utterance to James Brown’s “Superbad”, see David Brackett, *Interpreting Popular Music* (Berkeley: University of California Press), 123.

<sup>569</sup> Lynne D. Johnson, ‘Hip-hop’s Holy Trinity’, in *Da Capo Best Music Writing 2004*, ed. Mickey Hart (Cambridge: Da Capo Press, 2004), 139.

<sup>570</sup> Since Ayler’s comment was made after Coltrane died, this may be a case of attempting to place himself within a particular canon without having the luxury of a response from Coltrane.

<sup>571</sup> Johnson, 139, 143.

<sup>572</sup> Jensen writes about the multiple functions at work in society regarding posthumous fame: production, consumption, aesthetics, and semiotics. Production encompasses fame from the media, books, films, tributes, consumption from audience needs, aesthetics as a value judgment on aesthetic superiority (that it ‘stands the test of time’, so to speak), and semiotic, as Joli writes that ‘the most popular cultural items are flexible, rich, polysemic texts that speak differently to different people across time and space.’ In terms of a semiotic lens through which to view the fame of Patsy Cline, Jensen suggests that she becomes a collaborative construction of all three—media, audience and her body of work. Jensen ‘Posthumous Patsy Clines: Constructions of Identity in Hillbilly Heaven’, in *Afterlife as Afterimage*, 123.

The construction of musical lineage extends further than Albert Ayler and jazz.<sup>573</sup> Multiple musicians, for example, have mentioned blues icon Robert Johnson in their lyrics, another artist who died young and is said to exemplify his genre. His posthumous fame helps solidify his legend as one of the classic masters of the blues guitar, and he is mentioned in lyrics by Steve Earle, John Fogerty, Lucinda Williams, and Eric Clapton, the last of whom recorded an album of his songs entitled *Me and Mr. Johnson* (2004).<sup>574</sup> Pete Frame's *Rock Family Trees* provides an example of constructed lineage in rock music.<sup>575</sup> Jazz historiography has used the trope of a continuous history of 'great men' and stylistic periods which emphasize continuity and direct transmission between these musical generations, just as a linear trajectory purportedly pervades Western Art Music history, a view exemplified in the writings of Arnold Schoenberg.<sup>576</sup> Paula Higgins convincingly finds earlier cases of intertextuality that emphasize the student-mentor lineage (what she deems 'creative patrilineage') between composers in early laments, particularly in laments for the fifteenth-century French composer Johannes Ockeghem.<sup>577</sup>

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<sup>573</sup> Antoine Hennion states, for example, 'The invention of a tradition and the social production of the past has been traced for several repertoires, ranging from Beethoven (DeNora 1995) to country music (Peterson 1997)'. Antoine Hennion, 'Music and Mediation', in *The Cultural Study of Music*, eds. Martin Clayton, Trevor Herbert, and Richard Middleton (London: Routledge, 2006), 84.

<sup>574</sup> Eric W. Rothenbuhler, 'Robert Johnson's Records', in *Afterlife as Afterimage*, 221.

<sup>575</sup> Pete Frame, *The Rock Family Trees: The Development and History of Rock Performers* (London: Omnibus Press, 1983).

<sup>576</sup> Richard Taruskin writes that Furtwängler's and Schoenberg's approaches 'rely on a sense of continuity—and hence direct transmission—of tradition that many in the twentieth century believe to be lost.' Richard Taruskin, 'The Pastness of the Present and the Presence of the Past', in *Authenticity and Early Music*, ed. Kenyon, 158. Robert Morgan echoes this observation: 'Always implicit in Schoenberg's remarks is the belief that music history is linear in nature—that one compositional development leads logically and inexorably to the next, producing the progressive growth of an ever more varied, complex, and differentiated musical language.' Morgan, 62. For a critique of this as manifested in jazz historiography, see Scott DeVaux 'Constructing the Jazz Tradition: Jazz Historiography', *Black American Literature Forum* 25, no. 3 (1991): 525–560. For examples outside of music see *The Invention of Tradition*, eds. Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992).

<sup>577</sup> Examples include Josquin des Prez/Jean Molinet, "Nymphes de bois" (1497) and Guillaume Cretin, "Deploration dur le trépas de J. Ockeghem" (1497). See Paula Higgins. 'Lamenting "Our Master and Good Father": Intertextuality and Creative Patrilineage in Tributes by and for Johannes Ockeghem', in *Cum maioribus lachrymis et fletu immenso: Der Tod in Musik und Kultur des*

The most striking parallel of lineage construction to the figures in this chapter, however, may be that of Mozart, Haydn and Beethoven. Tia DeNora's *Beethoven and the Construction of Genius: Musical Politics in Vienna 1792-1803* looks at what she sees as the construction of 'serious music' around the characters of Mozart, Haydn, and Beethoven. The story begins, in many ways, with the death of a young Mozart:

Any gap that may have been felt during Mozart's lifetime between his over-learnedness and his more popular works was quickly bridged, however, after his death. During the early 1790s and later, Mozart was hailed (initially in the Prague press) as 'immortal Mozart' whose 'death came too soon both for [his widow] and for Art'—as Constanze Mozart herself put it in the announcement of a benefit concert published in the *Weiner Zeitung* on 13 December 1794 ... This posthumous rediscovery of Mozart revolved around imagery of the composer culled from his life before his genius had reached its fullest flower. The precise genus and species of that flower became the object of dispute, however, as Mozart's posthumous prestige became a resource for the reputations of potential musical heirs. In other words, association with Mozart became a way of articulating status claims.<sup>578</sup>  
(My emphasis added)

DeNora writes of the public and symbiotic student-teacher relationship between Beethoven and Haydn in Vienna, and that Beethoven's forged connections with patrons and other members of society helped him to be perceived as the musical heir to Mozart. The oft-quoted farewell letter from Count Waldstein, as Beethoven leaves to study with Haydn in Vienna in 1792, asserts that 'With the help of assiduous labor you shall receive Mozart's spirit from Haydn's hands.'<sup>579</sup> DeNora writes that others were looking for the heir to the 'immortal Mozart'; and after Beethoven's success, people began to fabricate stories of how Mozart actually heard a young Beethoven play, Mozart allegedly commenting that he was the "man

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Spätmittelalters, eds. Birgit Lodes and Stefan Gasch. Tutzing: Hans Schneider, 2007: 277–314. See also Paula Higgins, 'Musical 'Parents' and their 'Progeny': The Discourse of Creative Patriarchy in Early Modern Europe', in *Music in Renaissance Cities and Courts: Essays in Honor of Lewis Lockwood*, eds. Jessie Ann Owens and Anthony M. Cumming (Warren, MI: Harmonie Park Press, 1997): 170–182.

<sup>578</sup> DeNora, *Beethoven and the Construction of Genius*, 16.

<sup>579</sup> *Ibid.*, 84.

to watch”.<sup>580</sup> DeNora traces the creation of an identity in a specific time and place, the evolution of ‘serious music’ in late eighteenth-century Vienna. Memorial processes surrounding the premature death of Mozart provide him with an auratic symbolic immortality, prompting patrons to speculate on the next great artist to take his place.

Though this example is from over two hundred years ago, it parallels the desire of current fans and journalists to find and label an ‘heir’ to ‘immortal’ figures in music, as well as the apotheosis of that figure following premature death. In *Classic Material: The Hip-Hop Album Guide*, Kris Ex writes of a post-Tupac rap world: ‘And even at this early date, there’s no shortage of would-be heirs to the throne of Thug Immortal.’<sup>581</sup> The digital sampling of 2Pac and Biggie’s voice contribute to the artistic posturing of Eminem and 50 Cent into a gangsta rap lineage. As the associations of Mozart, Haydn, and Beethoven helped to solidify the notion of ‘serious music’ in Vienna, the associations of Tupac Shakur, The Notorious B.I.G., Eminem, and 50 Cent construct and reinforce particular time- and place-specific identities within mainstream rap music.

### **Eminem’s Constructed Identities**

‘White rapper’ Eminem’s rise to stardom in late 1990s media discourse emphasized the constructed lineage between him and his mentor/producer Dr. Dre, in addition to controversies surrounding his race and the misogyny and homophobia of his lyrics. Dr. Dre was featured in Eminem songs and music videos such as “My Name is” and “Guilty Conscience”, and Eminem was a guest rapper on Dr. Dre’s *Chronic 2001* (1999) on “What’s the Difference” and “Forgot About

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<sup>580</sup> Yet there is no evidence in Mozart’s letters that he ever actually heard Ludwig van Beethoven play. *Ibid.*, 114.

<sup>581</sup> Kris Ex, ‘2Pac’ in *Classic Material: The Hip-Hop Album Guide*, ed. Oliver Wang (Toronto: ECW Press, 2003), 156.

Dre”. Early tours featured Eminem rapping Dre’s early solo hit “Nuthin’ but a ‘G’ Thang” which would segue to Eminem’s first single “My Name Is”.<sup>582</sup> In 1999, Eminem’s MTV Music Video Awards performance debut featured a medley of “My Name is”, “Guilty Conscience”, and “Nuthin’ but a ‘G’ Thang”, performing on stage with Dr. Dre and Dre’s earlier protégé Snoop Dogg.<sup>583</sup> The relationship between the two was mutually beneficial: in Dre, Eminem was able to have a certain level of rap credibility, and in Eminem, Dre could be in a mentor role and flaunt his longevity in a genre which had little longevity for its rappers.<sup>584</sup> Todd Boyd writes:

Hip hop has always been a movement interested in history, particularly its own. When considering that many rappers come and go with increased regularity, be it from poor record sales, incarceration, or in some cases, death, Dr. Dre’s long tenure in the game makes him stand out ... he can endorse Em and provide for him the cultural credibility that would not necessarily be available to Em on his own.<sup>585</sup>

In the song “Crazy in Love”, Eminem emphasizes the link between himself and Dre with a list of comparisons: ‘You’re the Kim to my Marshall, You’re the Slim to my Shady, the Dre to my Eminem’. Dre also mentored Eminem in music production techniques, as Eminem’s own production style resembles Dre’s in the heavy use of synthesizers and utilization of ‘pop-style’ choruses. Both artists often invoke the name of the now-iconic Tupac Shakur: Dr. Dre on “The Watcher”, states, ‘I ain’t a thug, how much Pac in you you got?’, and Eminem on “Soldier”, raps, ‘I’m like a thug with a little bit of Pac influence’.<sup>586</sup> These references provide

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<sup>582</sup> Bozza, 167.

<sup>583</sup> Ibid., 65.

<sup>584</sup> Jason Tanz writes, ‘Eminem could also boast a seal of approval from his mentor and producer, Dr. Dre, the former member of N.W.A. whose solo album, *The Chronic*, became one of the most beloved gangsta-rap albums ever. Unlike some other white rappers, Eminem’s top priority seemed to be winning over the respect of the hip-hop community rather than climbing the pop charts.’ Tanz, 161.

<sup>585</sup> Boyd, *The New H.N.I.C.*, 136.

<sup>586</sup> Both references allude to Tupac’s ‘Thug Life’ philosophy, and are the words famously tattooed on his abdomen.

intertextual significations that represent an earlier rap era, one of its canonical star figures, and countless (often exaggerated) associations that the utterance of the name ‘Pac’ might accompany.

While Eminem’s early career has been the subject of much journalistic and other discourse, I focus here on his career post-2002, the year he starred in his quasi-biopic *8 Mile*. The popularity of this film gave Eminem a certain level of legitimization in the mass media and among mainstream youth audiences.<sup>587</sup>

Biographer Anthony Bozza writes:

As with film reinterpretations of classic literature or world history, *8 Mile* became, for those who weren’t already fans, the story of Eminem. It accomplished what Eminem had been trying to do all along: show the world where he came from so that everyone would understand who he was and, maybe, why he felt the way he did. In short, it focused the story for those who couldn’t see it through the music.<sup>588</sup>

Like Tupac Shakur, Eminem used tropes of the suffering artist, as seen in his dysfunctional trailer home life in the film and in autobiographical songs like “Cleanin out my Closet”: ‘Have you ever been hated or discriminated against, I have/I’ve been protested and demonstrated against ... Just try to envision your momma poppin’ prescription pills in the kitchen/ Bitchin’ that someone’s always going through her purse and shit’s missin’/ Going through public housing systems/ Victim of Munchausen’s syndrome’. And like Tupac, Eminem has frequently rapped about his mortality, such as in the song “When I’m Gone”: ‘And when I’m

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<sup>587</sup> Charles Aaron writes, ‘Then with the 2002 film roman á clef *8 Mile*, Eminem made his first sustained effort at maturity, starring as a sensitive, abused underdog with whom it was easy to empathize (he also produced the album’s rousing musical centerpiece, “Lose Yourself,” which won the Oscar for Best Original Song). And on the 2002 album *The Eminem Show*, he struggled to stitch together all three personas, toning down the psychopathic jive, and honestly transcribing his furious personal life into songs that ripped through a newspaper’s worth of topics—race, domestic abuse, parenthood, fame, the FCC.’ Charles Aaron, ‘Eminem’, in *Spin: 20 Years of Alternative Music*, ed. Will Hermes and Sia Michel (New York: Three Rivers Press, 2005), 252. Bozza writes, ‘In 2002, Eminem was the cultural locus of America, the man who in just one year seemed to have garnered the entire world into his card-carrying fan club without having campaigned. In the weeks following the release of the film, ‘Eminem awareness’ was even greater than it was when he was infamous.’ Bozza, 37–38.

<sup>588</sup> *Ibid.*, 35.

gone just carry on/ don't mourn, rejoice every time you hear the sound of my voice'. At the end of his 2004 album *Encore*, Eminem shoots himself, mirroring The Notorious B.I.G., who stages the same gesture at the end of his first album *Ready to Die* (1994).<sup>589</sup>

After *8 Mile*, Eminem produced three songs for the soundtrack to the documentary film *Tupac Resurrection* (2003). Tupac's mother Afeni Shakur subsequently gave him permission to use more material to create an entire 2Pac album, *Loyal to the Game* (2004). Eminem and 2Pac never met each other, as Eminem's professional career began after 2Pac's death, but Eminem has acknowledged his admiration for the rapper in a number of interviews and discussed his debt to Tupac, speaking of what he learned from him:

There's a lot of things about Pac that stood out. Personality. I guess no matter what color you was or where you came from, you felt like you could relate to him. He made you feel like you knew him. I think that honestly, Tupac was the greatest songwriter that ever lived. He made it seem so easy. The emotion was there, and feeling, and everything he was trying to describe. You saw a picture that he was trying to paint. That's what I picked up from him, making your words so vivid that somebody can picture them in their head.<sup>590</sup>

Notice that Eminem used the term 'songwriter', as opposed to rapper. Using the term 'songwriter' to describe Tupac invokes an authenticity from earlier folk styles which were later adapted by rock. In other words, Tupac's 'author function' for Eminem differs little from ideologies of the 'rock star' or 'singer-songwriter'. Marshall's ideological distinction between live performer and the mythical stardom of the songwriter is useful here: 'The singer may be in front of us, but the songwriter is from another lifetime.'<sup>591</sup>

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<sup>589</sup> Notorious B.I.G., "Suicidal Thoughts" and Eminem "Encore/Curtains Down". The Eminem single notably featured Dr. Dre, 50 Cent, and himself.

<sup>590</sup> Shaheem Reid, 'Eminem: Reconstructing Tupac', MTV News, available at: [http://www.mtv.com/bands/t/tupac/news\\_feature\\_102703/index.jhtml](http://www.mtv.com/bands/t/tupac/news_feature_102703/index.jhtml) (accessed 23 February 2007).

<sup>591</sup> Marshall, Bob Dylan, 261.



Unlike Tupac, Notorious B.I.G., Jay-Z, or Nas, Eminem produces many of his own ‘beats’.<sup>592</sup> Eminem has emerged as a successful producer over the years, creating a distinctive sound for himself that can be found on many albums, including his own.<sup>593</sup> For *Loyal to the Game*, Eminem ‘updates’ the production to reflect his own personal style, and includes raps by himself and others associated with him (50 Cent, Obie Trice, Lloyd Banks, etc.). According to one article in *Rolling Stone*, Eminem spent three days and nights in September of 2004 obsessed with making the album.<sup>594</sup> It is noteworthy that Eminem’s own album *Encore* was released on 16 November 2004, and *Loyal to the Game* was released one month later, on 14 December 2004; two projects released one month from each other, produced by the same person, will most likely share similar stylistic characteristics. As I will show, Eminem’s ‘sonic signature’ as producer adds a crucial authorial element to his ‘collaborations’.

Eminem constructs himself into a hip-hop lineage in a number of ways. The most obvious is the linkage created by rapping with his ‘ancestor’ on record. An overt example of this is the morphing from Eminem’s to 2Pac’s voice on “One Day at a Time”. Eminem’s verse ends with ‘And we continue growin’, one day at a time’ (2:11–2:17); during this line occurs the vocal morphing from Eminem to

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<sup>592</sup> Like his mentor Dr. Dre, Eminem has a number of collaborators that feature in production credits, for example, the Detroit Bass Brothers (Mark and Jeff Bass), and keyboardist and producer Luis Resto. When I refer to Eminem as producer, I am acknowledging that Eminem’s sonic signature is a product of these collaborations and not simply Eminem as auteur. Using the term ‘Eminem’s production’ or ‘Eminem’s sonic signature’ is simply shorthand for ‘the result of a number of agents involved in a production credited to Eminem.’

<sup>593</sup> A brief list of Eminem-produced tracks for other artists would include Jay-Z’s “Renegade” and “Moment of Clarity”, Nas’s “The Cross”, as well as tracks for The Game (“We Ain’t”) and 50 Cent (“Patiently Waiting”), to name a few. His star persona as an MC, however, receives much more media focus and promotion than his production work.

<sup>594</sup> Steve Knopper, ‘Eminem Brings Tupac to Life’, *Rolling Stone* 963, 9 December 2004, 36.

Tupac, representing a lineage through vocal effect in the music.<sup>595</sup> [CD Example 27]

Perhaps not as overt a gesture, but nevertheless recognizable by rap fans, is the construction of lineage through Eminem's 'sonic signature' as producer. A sonic signature, as developed in the work of Mark Gillespie, refers to the number of ways a producer or a producer's style can be identified in a recording: literally saying his/her name, recognizable sounds, rhythmic patterns, structural elements, orchestration and timbre, sound-effects, or phonographic staging.<sup>596</sup> Many rap fans are knowledgeable enough to identify producers' sonic identities on rap albums: star producers such as Timbaland, Kanye West, and Pharrell Williams espouse what Krims has identified as 'branding' in recent music trends, as there often exist elements of a 'sonic signature' recognizable by fans (and sometimes imitated by other producers), and consumers will purchase these albums based on the producer-brand.<sup>597</sup> Producer Scott Storch expresses the importance of creating an identifiable production style in reference to Eminem:

People say that his music sounds the same or whatever but anybody can make a beat, the thing they need to realize is you need to create a signature beat so that every time you hear a beat you automatically think "yeah Lil Jon or Dr. Dre or Just Blaze".<sup>598</sup>

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<sup>595</sup> The song includes an opening verse by Tupac, followed by a verse by Eminem. Tupac's lyrics open with the lines: 'Sometimes its hard, to wake up in the morning. Mind full of demons I don't wanna hear them anymore', reinforcing a persona of the suffering artist that constitutes part of his postmortem mythology, a trait which Eminem has used to a much greater extent for his own persona(e).

<sup>596</sup> Mark Gillespie, "'Another Darkchild Classic': Phonographic Forgery and Producer Rodney Jerkins' Sonic Signature', M.Mus Dissertation, Université Laval, Québec, 2006. Gillespie differentiates between 'sound signatures' (non-vocal sonic material) and 'name-signatures' (allonymic—the producer is named by someone other than the producer—and autonymic—the producer names him/herself). His taxonomy of sound signatures includes A) discrete (immediately recognizable sounds, e.g. Timbaland 'flute' sound) B) abstract (e.g. particular rhythmic patterns) C) performative ('feel', use of quantization), D) structural (organization, how the track is put together), E) orchestral (specific combinations of patches), F) sound-effects, and G) phonographic staging. Gillespie, 31.

<sup>597</sup> Krims, MUG, 161.

<sup>598</sup> Quoted in Jake Brown, *Dr. Dre in the Studio: From Compton, Death Row, Snoop Dogg, Eminem, 50 Cent, The Game and Mad Money The Life, Times and Aftermath of the Notorious Record Producer Dr. Dre* (New York: Colossus Books, 2006), 82.

To demonstrate the use of elements associated with Eminem's sonic signature, I will discuss the song "Ghetto Gospel" from *Loyal to the Game* [CD Example 29]. It is worth reiterating that Eminem released his own album, *Encore*, in 2004 as well, and there are tracks which stylistically match each other between the two albums ("Drips" on *Encore* and "Hennessy" on *LTTG*, for example). For "Ghetto Gospel", Eminem samples and sequences lines from Elton John's "Indian Sunset" from the 1971 album *Madman Across the Water* [CD Example 28], and the sampled material is represented by boxes around the lyrics below. The choice of song is apt for memorial, as it tells the tale of a Native American warrior who dies in despair, knowing his tribe faces extinction at the hands of the 'white man'. The voice of Elton John also attaches significations of mourning and loss; as mentioned in the previous chapter, John's "Candle in the Wind '97" is associated with the funeral of Princess Diana as a mass cultural event, and is the best-selling single of all time (37 million).<sup>599</sup>

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<sup>599</sup> A more well-known association between Elton John and Eminem is their famous performance of "Stan" at the Grammys in 2001.

## Elton John—“Indian Sunset”

From *Madman Across the Water* (1971) [CD Example 28]

**Verse A1<sup>600</sup>:** As I awoke this evening with the smell of wood smoke clinging  
Like a gentle cobweb hanging upon a painted teepee  
Oh I went to see my chieftain with my warlance and my woman  
For he told us that the yellow moon would very soon be leaving  
This I can't believe I said, I can't believe our warlord's dead  
Oh he would not leave the chosen ones to the buzzards and the soldiers guns

**Verse A2:** Oh great father of the Iroquois ever since I was young  
I've read the writing of the smoke and breast fed on the sound of drums  
I've learned to hurl the tomahawk and ride a painted pony wild  
To run the gauntlet of the Sioux, to make a chieftain's daughter mine

**Verse A3:** And now you ask that I should watch  
The red man's race be slowly crushed  
What kind of words are these to hear  
From Yellow Dog whom white man fear

[Interlude 1]

**Verse B1:** I take only what is mine Lord, my pony, my squaw, and my child  
I can't stay to see you die along with my tribe's pride  
I go to search for the yellow moon and the fathers of our sons  
Where the red sun sinks in the hills of gold and the healing waters run

**Verse B2:** Trampling down the prairie rose, leaving hoof tracks in the sand  
Those who wish to follow me I welcome with my hands  
I heard from passing renegades Geronimo was dead  
He'd been laying down his weapons when they filled him full of lead  
[Interlude 2]

**Verse C1:** Now there seems no reason why I should carry on  
In this land that once was my land I can't find a home  
It's lonely and it's quiet and the horse soldiers are coming  
And I think it's time I strung my bow and ceased my senseless running  
For soon I'll find the yellow moon along with my loved ones  
Where the buffaloes graze in clover fields without the sound of guns  
And the red sun sinks at last into the hills of gold  
And peace to this young warrior comes with a bullet hole.

**“Ghetto Gospel” chorus (0:06–0:29) [CD Example 29]:**

**(B2, line 2) Those who wish to follow me,  
I welcome with my hands**

**(C1, line 8) And the red sun sinks at last into the hills of gold**

**(C1, line 9) And peace to this young warrior**

**(C1, line 7) without the sound of guns**

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<sup>600</sup> The decision to label verses A,B, and C is based on differences in the harmonic progressions.

The excerpt chosen for the chorus of “Ghetto Gospel” discusses the ‘warrior’, which could be interpreted in this context as a reference to 2Pac. John’s original consists of verses and no chorus, a conspicuous example in light of the songwriter’s oeuvre, but in Eminem’s version, the original material is sampled and sequenced into a chorus. The framing of the Elton John source material as chorus in “Ghetto Gospel” is also an important signature of Eminem’s style, as the manipulation of large portions of pop-rock songs are used as a chorus in singles such as “Sing for the Moment”, “Runnin” and “Crazy in Love”. The sampling of such a large portion of material is what Gillespie terms ‘syntagmatic sequencing’, the source unfolding temporally (with important melodic and harmonic components), as opposed to ‘morphemic sequencing’ which organizes isolated discrete sounds.<sup>601</sup> The chorus is also sped-up from its source tempo (John’s being in e minor and Eminem’s in f minor), a technique frequently used by Kanye West, but a style not as widespread when 2Pac was alive. “Ghetto Gospel”’s form comprises of intro-chorus-verse-chorus-verse-chorus-outro, and this use of contrasting verse-chorus form is conspicuous enough in rap music to draw attention to itself, but also consistent with Eminem’s productions (and those of his mentor Dr. Dre). The verse uses a driving pedal point of repeated quavers, what Allan Moore calls a ‘driving pattern’ in rock, albeit at a slower tempo than most examples from rock music. This musical gesture is audible in many Eminem productions (See Examples 5.1, 5.5, 5.6, and 5.7).<sup>602</sup>

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<sup>601</sup> Gillespie, 75.

<sup>602</sup> Allan Moore, *Rock: The Primary Text* (Buckingham: Open University Press, 1993), 182. This ‘driving pattern’, pervasive in rock music, can be found in the one note riff in 50 Cent’s “In Da Club”, The Game’s “We Ain’t”, Eminem’s “Crazy in Love” and many other singles from these artists. Glenn Pillsbury describes such a pattern in the context of thrash metal, the low E riff in Metallica’s “Whiplash”, which he describes as a ‘rhythmically insistent single note riff’, as part of an ‘energy cycle’. Glenn T. Pillsbury, *Damage Incorporated: Metallica and the Production of Musical Identity* (London: Routledge, 2006), 6.

**Example 5.1**—"Ghetto Gospel" (0:29–0:53)

2Pac "Ghetto Gospel" [Driving Pattern]

Synthesizer

Synth.

**Examples 5.2–5.4:** 'Driving patterns' in rock music

"Smoke on the Water" - Deep Purple

Electric Guitar

Electric Guitar

E. Gtr.

E. Gtr.

"Paranoid" - Black Sabbath

Voice

Electric Guitar

Megadeath - "Symphony of Destruction"

Electric Guitar

Electric Guitar

**Examples 5.5–5.7: ‘Driving pattern’ in other Eminem productions**

50 Cent - "Patiently Waiting"  
Opening beat at 0:08



Synthesizer

The Game - "We Ain't"



Synthesizer

"Crazy in Love" - Eminem




Synthesizer


5



Synth.

What Gillespie calls an ‘abstract sound signature’ is present in the emphasis of the

rhythm  in “Ghetto Gospel” as well, perhaps not as immediately identifiable as a ‘discrete sound signature’ (e.g. ‘tolling bell’ sounds or Eminem’s synthesizer choices), but nevertheless found in a number of his beats (including “Thug 4 Life”, “Crazy in Love” in the bass above, “Mockingbird”, “One Day at a Time”, and Dr. Dre’s “The Watcher”, albeit all at different tempos, and

sometimes resembling the figure ).<sup>603</sup>


<sup>603</sup> “The Watcher”—Dr. Dre Chronic 2001 (1999), “It Has Been Said”—Duets: The Final Chapter (2005), “Thug 4 Life”—Loyal to the Game (2004), “Crazy in Love”—Encore (2004), “Ghetto Gospel”—Loyal to the Game (2004), “Runnin (Dyin’ to Live)”—Tupac Resurrection (2003), “Patiently Waiting”—Get Rich or Die Trying (2003), “Mockingbird”—Encore (2004), “One Day at a Time”—Tupac Resurrection (2003).

The following shows the 'Eminem rhythm' as abstract sonic signature:

**Example 5.8**—(0:05) [CD Example 30]

"It has been said" - Eminem  
(b. 2 of basic beat)

Synthesizer



**Example 5.9**—(0:48) [CD Example 31]

"Runnin'"

Synthesizer



**Example 5.10**—(0:00–0:17) [CD Example 32]

"Mockingbird" - Eminem


Electric Piano



**Example 5.11**— (0:14– 0:18) [CD Example 33]

"Thug for Life" - 2Pac  
(b. 7–8 of basic beat)

Synthesizer



**Example 5.12**— (0:19– 0:24) [CD Example 34]

"The Watcher" - Dr. Dre

Synthesizer





An ‘orchestral sonic signature’ (by definition, a characteristic style of orchestration) is also present, as the highly synthesized sound of Eminem’s production (largely pioneered by his mentor Dr. Dre) includes recognizable sound patches from keyboards and drum machines.

For “Ghetto Gospel”, Eminem takes as his first line of the chorus ‘Those who wish to follow me I welcome with my hands’, followed by the last two lines, which constitute the musical climax of the song; but instead of ‘comes with a bullet hole’, he uses the last phrase from the penultimate stanza, ‘without the sound of guns’. The resulting last line of Eminem’s chorus reads, ‘And peace to this young warrior, without the sound of guns’. Those who solely look at the lyrics may be compelled to try to discover reasons that Eminem would change ‘with a bullet hole’ to ‘without the sound of guns’, since the original arguably works better as a memorial.

For a possible answer to this, one needs to look at the harmonic structures of the two examples. In Elton John’s final verse (verse C1), the descending harmonic progression takes on characteristics of a lament, in concert with the semantic topic of the final verse:

Verse C1: Em–D–C–G/B–Am–G/B–C–D (x5)

The progression descends from a minor i chord, through a series of passing chords, to the relative goal of a minor iv before ascending back to e minor.<sup>604</sup> The last line of the chorus (‘peace to this young warrior comes with a bullet hole’) accompanies the progression Am–G/B–C–Em, with the final E minor chord on the word ‘hole’,

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<sup>604</sup> Like Jay-Z’s “A Dream” from the previous chapter, the descending chords in Aeolian mode suggest a lament that never reaches its relative point of stability of the dominant (according to McClary, Thug Angel, DVD Extras). If we wish to treat these two examples as derivative of rock harmonies, and consider rock’s harmonic language separate in logic from Western classical music as Allan Moore does, then the VII acts as a dominant of sorts: ‘Clearly, the VII-I cadence does not have the finality of the traditional V-I, although it is articulated as a full close in all the examples I have presented. In terms of poetics, it seems to me to qualify the certainty of V-I with ‘nevertheless.’ See Allan Moore, ‘The so-called ‘Flattened Seventh’ in Rock’, *Popular Music* 14, no. 2 (1995), 193.

which occurs on the downbeat as the drums enter. Elton John sings a high G (G5) with the E minor chord on the downbeat ('hole'), an octave jump from the lower G he sings on 'with a bullet', and the moment occupies the position of the song's climax in terms of register and dynamic intensity. For the material to function as chorus, Eminem requires a more cyclical end phrase, hence borrowing the 'without the sound of guns' which accompanies the VI–VII chord pattern, ideal for repetition back to the tonic minor in this context. Below is a harmonic comparison of the two versions, and for purposes of comparative analysis, both versions are in the Eminem f minor:

**Example 5.13**

**Elton Original (transposed up a semitone):**

**Ab: I            V6        vi fm: VII VI    VII                    i    VII**  
**Ab            Eb/G        fm        Eb Db    Eb                    fm    Eb**  
**Those who wish to follow me,            I welcome with my hands**

**i            VII            VI            III6**  
**fm        Eb            Db            Ab/C**  
**And the red sun sinks at last into the hills of gold**

**iv                            III6        VI                            i**  
**bbm                            Ab/C        Db                            fm**  
**And peace to this young warrior [comes with a bullet hole]**

**VI                            VII**  
**Db                            Eb**  
**[without the sound of guns]**

**“Ghetto Gospel” Chorus:**

**VI (add 9) VII6        i        VII VI    VII                    i        VII**  
**Ab/Db        Eb        fm        Eb Db    Eb                    fm        Eb**  
**Those who wish to follow me,            I welcome with my hands**

**VI (add6) VII            VI                            III6**  
**fm/Db        Eb            Db                            Ab/C**  
**And the red sun sinks at last into the hills of gold**

**iv                            III6        VI                            VII**  
**bbm                            Ab/C        Db                            Eb**  
**And peace to this young warrior, without the sound of guns**

Eminem has also added lower bass notes at the beginning of the two phrases in the chorus, a Db on the first Ab chord, and a Db on the f minor which begins the second half of the chorus. The effect is again harmonically cyclical, making the move to f minor in the verse more grounded, toward the ‘focused intensity’ of the one-note driving pattern on f (see aforementioned Example 5.1).

The musical symbolism involved in this track thus achieves a high level of complexity: the chorus uses a voice associated with memorial; the verse features Tupac Shakur, a canonized rapper with an iconic mystique; and the beat is produced by Eminem. Though Eminem does not rap on the “Ghetto Gospel”, the sound is clearly his. “Ghetto Gospel”, has a similar song structure, framing, function, and manipulation of sample to those of the singles “Sing for the Moment” and “Crazy in Love”, and it uses similar orchestration. These similarities are not lost on listeners, as the media reception of the album includes comments such as:

Em is more noticeable on this album than Pac himself, as everywhere is Em, either singing a hook, rapping a verse, or just behind the boards ... He also proves he cannot sample without making it into some fake epic confessional, as the Elton John collabo “Ghetto Gospel” sounds much like “Sing for the Moment” and “Runnin’”.<sup>605</sup>

Another reviewer writes, ‘I thought I was going to be listening to 2Pac, but I was sorely disappointed because it is nothing more than another Eminem release. When Eminem was introduced to 2Pac’s acapellas for this release, I believe he forgot whose album *Loyal to the Game* was, since every song sounds like something off *The Eminem Show* or his latest release *Encore*.’<sup>606</sup> Many of the reviews did not find Eminem capable of producing beats that reflect the ‘real classic sound of Tupac’,

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<sup>605</sup> Premiere, ‘Loyal to the Game’, Sixshot.com, Electronic Hip-hop Magazine, available at: [www.sixshot.com/articles/4719](http://www.sixshot.com/articles/4719) (accessed 6 January 2009).

<sup>606</sup> Dave, Rap News Network, 17 Dec. 2004, available at: [www.rapnewsdirect.com/0-202-259812-00.html?tag=artistnav](http://www.rapnewsdirect.com/0-202-259812-00.html?tag=artistnav) (accessed 6 Jan 2009).

strongly disagreeing with the use of Elton John and Dido samples on the album, and with Eminem's own rapping and singing on the album.<sup>607</sup>

Despite these unfavourable reviews, the album was commercially successful, reaching number one on the Billboard Top 200, selling one million units within three months of its release,<sup>608</sup> and the single "Ghetto Gospel" reached number one in the UK. Despite this, however, the album has been perceived as a 'failure' by many for what I locate as three important reasons: authenticity/originality, responses to death and mourning, and racial identity.

Most of the negative album reviews express arguments of intentionality and authenticity: Tupac was not alive when it was made, Tupac would not have liked Eminem and his crew, and other opinions that reflect and fetishize a notion of the 'composer's intentions'. Reviews and commentators find fault with the time stretching of 2Pac's voice (on "Ghetto Gospel" and others), though this is also common on earlier 2Pac mixtapes. Another frequent criticism is of Eminem's digital manipulation of Tupac's rap syllables to say things that he had not previously said, like the year '2005' and 'G-Unit', the group of rappers that are associated with 50 Cent. In hip-hop it is not uncommon to shout the year, one's name, or the names of others whom one wants to honour at the end or beginning of a rap song. But many critics seem to have a problem with Eminem's manipulating Tupac to reference those he did not even know. While this is a fair criticism with regard to 'historical accuracy' and reflects a drive for authenticity which may privilege live performance over studio manipulations, there is a subtle irony in

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<sup>607</sup>Usman Sajjad, 'Review—Loyal to the Game', *The Situation*, available at: [www.thesituation.co.uk/reviews/05/tupac.html](http://www.thesituation.co.uk/reviews/05/tupac.html) (accessed 6 Jan 2009). Some reviews were more generous, applauding that he was 'helping keep 2Pac fresh in 2004', but most internet reviews I have found were less than complementary. Steve 'Flash' Juon, 'RapReview of the Week—Loyal to the Game', *RapReviews.com*, available at: [http://www.rapreviews.com/archive/2004\\_12F\\_loyalto.html](http://www.rapreviews.com/archive/2004_12F_loyalto.html) (accessed 6 Jan 2009).

<sup>608</sup>Recording Industry Association of America. available at: [http://www.riaa.com/gp/database/search\\_results.asp](http://www.riaa.com/gp/database/search_results.asp) (accessed 20 December 2006).

criticizing such manipulations within a genre that constantly digitally manipulates its source material (and whose practitioners/fans praise the practice). The notable difference, here, is that reviewers may be more angered by the use of a person's voice (and its associations) rather than by a drum sample or other sound. Hip-hop has thrived on using and manipulating previously-existing material for three decades, but some fans now find fault with the practice when one of their own is used to the same ends.<sup>609</sup> This may be simply because Romantic notions of stardom has seeped into hip-hop culture (particularly with Tupac Shakur and The Notorious B.I.G.); various reviewers are using notions of authenticity found and debated in rock and other journalism, but now applied to rap icons.

A second reason for the negative reviews involves cultural rituals of death and mourning. Though the use of Elton John encourages structures of mourning, the album overall is an updated 2Pac album, not a tribute per se. Previous tributes in films, books, and music videos such as "Changes" and "I Ain't Mad at Cha" (and the Jay-Z and Nas tributes discussed in Chapter 4) have memorialized 2Pac and placed him in the past, but this album, with current production techniques, keeps him 'alive' so to speak.<sup>610</sup> As Douglas J. Davies writes of ritual, 'Even in secular contexts, rites are performed to locate the dead firmly in the past and in memory.'<sup>611</sup> Because of the 'updating' of 2Pac, we lose the Lacanian/Žižekian 'second death', the symbolic death that resolves the disruption caused by the first 'real' death.<sup>612</sup> The inability to mourn 2Pac musically on this album is complicated

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<sup>609</sup> This, of course, simplifies the argument slightly, since there are plenty of critics of the practice of 'digital sampling' in general. The important point is that hip-hop fans and writers who might defend the practice generally would be opposed to the manipulation of the voice of an iconic persona within the genre.

<sup>610</sup> The music video for "I Ain't Mad at Cha" is not technically a posthumous tribute since it was created before Shakur died. He did, however, die soon after shooting, and the music video was released posthumously, and was largely received as a tribute.

<sup>611</sup> Davies, *Death, Ritual, and Belief*, 2.

<sup>612</sup> This argument is based on Roger Beebe, 'Mourning Becomes...? Kurt Cobain, Tupac Shakur, and the Waning of Affect', in *Rock Over the Edge: Transformations in Popular Music Culture*, eds.

by the fact that knowledgeable listeners do know that he is dead. Thus, the album may create some sort of rupture without the promise of closure or synthesis. Eminem's album does not put Tupac in the past in a traditional, ritualistic way, and this is what may make critics uncomfortable or even hostile.

Lastly, the hostility toward the album may involve an element of racial prejudice. One reviewer describes an Eminem beat on the album as a 'red-neck style of music',<sup>613</sup> something which less likely would be said of an African-American producer. It is one thing to accept a successful white rapper, an issue highlighted in the racial debates surrounding his debut album; but it is another issue to accept a white man into such a prominent place in gangsta rap genealogy, as heir to 2Pac. To make a parallel to lineage in another place in music history, one reason that Higgins has used the term 'creative patrilineage' for 15<sup>th</sup> century composers is that it emphasizes the exclusion of women at the time.<sup>614</sup> Eminem, as a white male, may suffer from a level of exclusionary hostility as he tries to insert himself into a primarily African-American rap music lineage.

## **50 Cent**

Another prominent figure that emerged in post-1997 gangsta rap micro-generations is New York rapper 50 Cent (Curtis Jackson). Much of the hype began for 50 Cent when he was shot nine times in 2000, before his debut album on Columbia could be released. He had been featured on a number of bootlegs

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Roger Beebe, Denise Fulbrook and Ben Saunders (Durham: Duke University Press, 2002). Beebe argues in his essay that Cobain did not die symbolically because the media continued to treat him as if nothing had changed, by showing the Nirvana MTV Unplugged footage as if it were a new music video. Tupac, he contrasts, was the subject of a number of memorial projects, music videos, such as "Changes", that encouraged mourning. Beebe's article was published prior to the release of *Loyal to the Game*, and I would argue that this 'updated' 2Pac example complicates his dichotomy significantly.

<sup>613</sup> 'To add insult to injury, the song Hennessey contains a constant playing accordion, which sounds like something you would find the Clampetts dancing a jig to in *The Beverly Hillbillies*. This 'red-neck' style of music is something no 2Pac fan should have to listen to with 2Pac's name stamped on it.' Dave, 'Loyal to the Game'.

<sup>614</sup> Higgins, 'Lamenting our Master and Good Father', 278.

previously, including one underground hit in 1999 called “How to Rob”, which ‘dissed’/insulted a number of well-known rappers. The album was shelved, and he began to have underground success with mixtapes, which caught the attention of Eminem, culminating in a joint label deal between Dr. Dre’s Aftermath Records and Eminem’s Shady Records. Both Dr. Dre and Eminem did not hesitate to promote their new find, and Eminem, in particular, allied his new artist with the immortal martyrs of hip-hop, telling Rolling Stone magazine:

One of the things that excited me about Tupac was even if he was rhymin’ the simplest words in the world, you felt like he meant it and it came from his heart. That’s the thing with 50. That same aura. That’s been missing since we lost Pac and Biggie. The authenticity, the realness behind it.<sup>615</sup>

Eminem used 50 Cent as guest rapper on a number of productions, including the Tupac Resurrection soundtrack and *Loyal to the Game*, and he produced a number of songs on 50 Cent’s major-label debut album *Get Rich or Die Tryin’* (2003).

In the first single, “In Da Club” (produced by Dr. Dre), there is the overt recognition of a constructed mentor-student relationship among Dr. Dre, Eminem and 50 Cent. The music video takes place at the signposted ‘Shady/Aftermath Artist Development Center’, where 50 Cent is shown being conditioned in gym training, at a shooting range, and partying in a club while Dr. Dre and Eminem watch through a two-way mirror, wearing lab coats. Lynne Johnson comments on the music video of “In Da Club”:

Displaying Dre and Eminem in white coats watching the doctors from above as they reengineer and reenergize 50 on the operation table not only symbolizes the gods watching down from the sky ideal, but also represents that in fact 50 Cent has post-human qualities.<sup>616</sup>

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<sup>615</sup> Touré, ‘The Life of a Hunted Man’, Rolling Stone 919, 3 April 2003, 48.

<sup>616</sup> Johnson, 141.

His survival from being shot was always an element of his media-disseminated biography, an important instance of the narrative mediation of his music recordings and music videos. The single has a prominent one-note riff driving pattern (like that of “Ghetto Gospel”) as component of its basic beat, (occurring at 00:59-1:52 and 2:24 to the end) played by a guitar. The synthesizer rhythm is Eminem’s signature rhythm described earlier (his ‘abstract sound signature’, to use Gillespie’s terminology), but displaced one quaver earlier.

**Example 5.14**—(0:59)[CD Example 35]

"In Da Club" - 50 Cent

The image displays two systems of musical notation for the track "In Da Club" by 50 Cent. The first system shows the Synthesizer and Electric Guitar parts. The Synthesizer part is written in a treble clef with a key signature of three sharps (F#, C#, G#) and a 4/4 time signature. It features a complex rhythmic pattern with eighth and sixteenth notes, including rests and ties. The Electric Guitar part is written in a treble clef with the same key signature and time signature, playing a steady eighth-note riff. The second system of notation shows the Synthesizer and Electric Guitar parts starting with a measure rest and a fermata over the first measure, followed by the same rhythmic patterns as the first system.

Though this pattern is more often associated with Eminem productions, Dr. Dre and Eminem have overlapping stylistic qualities that make it difficult to differentiate. Lyrically, 50 Cent not only mentions his producers, but also alludes to both his mentors and his gangsta rap ‘ancestor’:

Niggas heard I fuck with Dre, now they wanna show me love  
 When you sell like Eminem, and the hoes they wanna fuck...  
 In the hood then the ladies sayin ‘50 you hot’  
 They like me, I want them to love me like they love ‘Pac.  
 (0:43–0:48, 1:00–1:03)

Media accounts of 50 Cent were rife with comparisons to Tupac, rather than to Dr. Dre or Eminem, citing 50 Cent’s use of religious lyrics, his having been shot, the frequency of death as his lyrical topic, and his ongoing ‘beefs’ with other artists



(most prominently with rapper Ja Rule).<sup>617</sup> As one reviewer writes, ‘Like his Kevlar-wearing predecessor and idol, Tupac Shakur, 50 has charisma up the muzzle-hole’; the same reviewer also stated that they share the same work ethic, 50 Cent having written sixty tracks for his twenty-two song album *The Massacre* (2005).<sup>618</sup> A similarity is also apparent in the iconography of the rappers, as both adopt menacing postures, while flaunting their tattooed, shirtless bodies. Perhaps S. Craig Watkins sums it up best when he writes, ‘The marketing of 50 Cent came straight from the script that guided 2Pac’s meteoric rise and tragic fall.’<sup>619</sup> Stars often fit familiar frames: as Lee Marshall writes, ‘Despite the emphasis on uniqueness, stars’ stories are never unique.’<sup>620</sup> 50 Cent has noted his debt to Tupac and Biggie, writing in *Rolling Stone* that ‘Every rapper who grew up in the Nineties owes something to Tupac’;<sup>621</sup> and he sees both Tupac and Biggie as a source of inspiration: ‘Sometimes I build one CD with Tupac’s best songs, and one with Biggie’s best songs. Then I listen and get ready to go into my next project’.<sup>622</sup>

50 Cent’s postmortem musical borrowing of Tupac Shakur and The Notorious B.I.G. also reinforces his identity as an authentic successor to Tupac and Biggie. Two examples, “The Realest Killaz” and “The Realest Niggaz”, will demonstrate this lineage construction. Using the tapes of a capellas from Afeni Shakur, Eminem had producer Red Spyda produce a song entitled “The Realest

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<sup>617</sup> In the mould of Tupac and Biggie, and Jay Z and Nas, 50 Cent and Eminem (and G-Unit) had a public feud, or ‘beef’, with Ja Rule and his record label Murder Inc. G-Unit produced one single as a ‘diss record’ of Ja Rule in the form of a trope of 2Pac’s “Hail Mary” (originally released under the pseudonym Makaveli) on a DJ Kay Slay mixtape. The single features Eminem, 50 Cent and Busta Rhymes. Eminem sings the opening vocal line associated with Tupac in the original version: ‘Come get me/If you muthafuckas want Shady/If Pac was still here now/he would never ride with Ja/na na na na na na na na na’ (an allosonic quotation of the vocal line, with different lyrics). Eminem, in his rap, accuses Ja Rule of ‘Stealin Pac’s shit like he just wrote it’. Many of the lyrics in this song, and many other diss songs about Ja Rule claim that the rapper is imitating Tupac.

<sup>618</sup> ‘The Massacre’, *Rolling Stone*, 10 March 2005.

<sup>619</sup> S. Craig Watkins, *Hip-Hop Matters: Politics, Pop Culture, and the Struggle for the Soul of a Movement* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2005), 2.

<sup>620</sup> Marshall, *Bob Dylan*, 5.

<sup>621</sup> 50 Cent, ‘Tupac Shakur’, *Rolling Stone* 972, 21 April 2005

<sup>622</sup> *Ibid.*

Killaz” for the Tupac Resurrection soundtrack. The first line of the chorus features 50 Cent singing, ‘Till Makaveli returns it’s all eyes on me’, a possible reference to Tupac as messiah figure (referencing the cover of the Makaveli album), to the 1996 2Pac album *All Eyez on Me*, and also to 50 Cent’s egotism. In the last part of the introduction, 50 Cent says, addressing rival Ja Rule:

Tupac cut his head bald, then you wanna cut yo’ head bald  
(You pussy nigga)  
Tupac wear a bandana, you wanna wear a bandana  
(what do we have here now)  
Tupac put a cross on his back, You wanna put crosses on yo’ back  
Nigga, you ain’t Tupac, this is Tupac. [Then 2Pac verse begins]

The song form consists of an introduction, a Tupac verse, a chorus, a 50 Cent verse, and then a double chorus, and it is generally agreed in the rap community that the song is a response to a Ja Rule song entitled “Loose Change” (dissing 50 Cent). The beat incorporates chimes reminiscent of those in “Hail Mary” from *The Don Killuminati* (and Eminem’s “The Way I Am”), including other bells, gunshot sounds, and synthesized string sounds. When interviewed about the track, 50 Cent said:

That was me and Tupac. I took Tupac vocals, actually, the producer Red Spyda had um, produced the track around the vocals ... The production on the track was a little dated ‘cause Pac had recorded it so long ago that we re-did the production. And it was like, exciting. I enjoy that record more than I enjoy some of my solo records because I got a chance to work with him.<sup>623</sup>

It is interesting to note his comment about the production’s sounding ‘dated’; rather than concern himself with any sort of authenticity toward the time period in which Tupac recorded (and lived), 50 Cent and producer Red Spyda wanted to update the sound and fit 50 Cent into the equation. Just as Eminem puts his ‘composer voice’ onto *Loyal to the Game*, Red Spyda uses a more contemporary sound, both

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<sup>623</sup> 50 Cent, *Tupac Resurrection*, DVD Extras.

referencing 2Pac by using his voice and ‘updating’ the production, inserting 50 Cent in the canonical web of gangsta rap history.

In the same year, the *Bad Boys II* soundtrack contained a track entitled “The Realest Niggas” (also produced by Red Spyda), which features 50 Cent and samples raps from Notorious B.I.G.’s “NIGGAS” (originally produced by Tony Dofat), from the album *Born Again* (1999). As in “The Realest Killaz”, the deceased artist opens the first verse of the rap, and 50 Cent sings the hook; Biggie raps the first two verses, and 50 Cent raps the last verse. The single, for many listeners, was an important introduction to 50 Cent, a shrewd marketing plan to include the single in a film the summer of his debut album. Coker writes of a similar version (“Niggaz”) from a mixtape:

In the summer and fall of 2002, 50 Cent generated a New York City-wide street buzz more notorious than any artist since Biggie himself. So it’s only fitting that the controversial Queens MC would ‘duet’ with Big for one of his now-legendary mixtape albums. Though it recycles Big’s performance on ‘Niggas’ from *Born Again*, ‘Niggaz’ makes a whole lot better use of it. The production from Miami-based boardsman Red Spyda is punchier, G-Unit’s faux Last Poets-style ad libs gleefully interact with Big, and 50 freely flaunts his outlaw-come-favored-son status.<sup>624</sup>

So with “The Realest Killaz”, “The Realest Niggaz”, and other bootlegs, from early in his commercial career, 50 Cent was heard rapping with the martyrs of hip-hop.<sup>625</sup> As opposed to the cases of Jay-Z and of Nas, whose tributes distance the immortalized voice by adding effects such as doubling, reverb and echo, Red Spyda creates an authenticity with the aural illusion that 50 Cent could have been rapping in the same room with Biggie and Tupac.

50 Cent’s “Patiently Waiting” contains the Eminem passage that I cited earlier in the chapter:

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<sup>624</sup> Coker, *Unbelievable*, 330.

<sup>625</sup> His debut commercial album, *Get Rich or Die Tryin’* (2003), was released in the US on 6 February 2003; the *Bad Boys II* Soundtrack was released 15 July 2003; and the *Tupac Resurrection* Soundtrack was released on 14 November 2003 (the film having been released three days earlier).

Take some Big and some Pac and you mix 'em up in a pot  
 Sprinkle a little Big L on top, what the fuck do you got?  
 You got the realest and illest killas tied up in a knot  
 The juggernauts of this rap shit, like it or not.<sup>626</sup>

The track was produced by Eminem, and this excerpt comes from his rap in the middle verse of the song. (50 Cent raps on verse 1 and 3). In “Patiently Waiting” I would argue that the crux of the song, musically and lyrically, is the moment when Eminem says ‘Take some Big and some Pac’, which accompanies the addition of another layer in the song’s beat. Apart from the beeping sounds at the beginning of Eminem’s rap,<sup>627</sup> this is the first point that these higher pitch notes are introduced in the basic beat. These notes, which match the rhythm of the flow and put emphasis on the names Big and Pac, demand attention from the listener, and they are similar to the rhythmic figures in Eminem’s other productions.

**Example 5.15** [CD Example 36]

"Patiently Waiting" (2:09)

The musical score consists of two systems. The first system is labeled 'Synthesizer' and the second is labeled 'Synth.'. Both systems are in 4/4 time and G major. The Synthesizer part has a melody in the treble clef with accents on the words 'Big' and 'Pac' and a bass line in the bass clef with a steady eighth-note pattern. The Synth. part has a melody in the treble clef with accents on the words 'Big' and 'Pac' and a bass line in the bass clef with a steady eighth-note pattern. The score is in 4/4 time and G major.

The new layer begins at the moment that Eminem mentions Big and Pac; in fact, the accents on the words ‘Big’ and ‘Pac’ correspond to the accented rhythms in the new layer. The highest pitches in the texture are in consonance with the lyric ‘take some Big and some Pac’, and this layer strongly emphasizes its accompanying lyric, as John Sloboda has emphasized that there is a ‘general

<sup>626</sup> Eminem, “Patiently Waiting”, 50 Cent–*Get Rich or Die Tryin’* (2003).

<sup>627</sup> The beginning of Eminem’s rap began with a hospital-machine-like beeping to paint the description of 50 Cent’s surviving his gunshots (‘As you layin’ on the table, they operatin’ to save you/ It’s like an angel came to you sent from the heavens above’).

psychological tendency to focus on the top line of any musical texture.<sup>628</sup> This moment is a consonance of beat and flow which solidify the relationship between Eminem and 50 Cent while including them in a web of slain gangsta rap artists.<sup>629</sup>

The examples discussed in this chapter shared a number of common themes and ideas: post-mortem borrowing, peer reference, and elements of Eminem's 'sonic signature' such as the framing and function of samples and synthesized orchestration. The acts of Signifyin(g) and intertextuality discussed in this chapter are similar to the two primary instances of Signifyin(g) in James Brown's "Superbad" as identified by David Brackett: intertextual referentiality and the repetition with variation of small musical figures.<sup>630</sup> These examples link with "Superbad" in that they are consistent with these frequently cited tropes of African-American music making, but they are updated to reflect digital technology and the complex hybridization that occurs within more current African-based popular music identities (e.g. the 'driving pattern' from rock music, and the 'rock star' status attributed to Tupac Shakur). And the intertextuality located in these examples constructs and reinforces notions of canon and lineage that have been apparent in artistic cultures for centuries, albeit in their own temporally and historically specific situations.

## Conclusion

Zygmunt Bauman writes in *Mortality, Immortality, and Other Life Strategies* that 'Future immortality will grow of today's recordings. Tomorrows'

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<sup>628</sup> Quoted in Nicholas Cook, *Music, Imagination, and Culture* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990), 26.

<sup>629</sup> Directly before this moment, Eminem raps 'You know what's coming you muthafuckas don't even know, do you?' The most obvious reading of this declaration is Eminem trumpeting the arrival of 50 Cent on the mainstream rap scene in general, but could also be heard as a double-voiced utterance as introducing 'what's coming' as the crux and climax of the song, including the references to Biggie and Tupac as well as Eminem's signature rhythm.

<sup>630</sup> Brackett, 128.

immortals must first get hold of today's archives.'<sup>631</sup> Eminem's post-mortem borrowing of the voice of Tupac Shakur, and his sonic signature on *Loyal to the Game*, contributes to his artistic posturing as part of a gangsta rap lineage; his 'discovery' of a rap protégé in rapper 50 Cent extends the genealogy further. Eminem-produced 50 Cent songs such as "Patiently Waiting" include a number of intertextual references to Tupac, Eminem, and Dr. Dre, forming a 'constellation' of gangsta rap icons: Tupac as ancestor God, Dr. Dre as father, Eminem as star, and 50 Cent as heir/protégé. These constellations or networks include a sense of historical self-consciousness in which creative patrilineage plays a part. In the creation of a tradition, as Lois Parkinson Zamora has written in the context of fiction of the Americas, one finds a 'usable past' from which to draw. For Eminem, this 'usable past' is the voice of Tupac Shakur, endowed with a cultural aura and signifying a number of emotive meanings. In other words, Tupac represents a mythology, a bio-mythology (to invoke Barthes' discourse on Beethoven) signified by his voice as relic. The notion of myth here suggests a quote regarding blues musicians from Samuel Floyd's *The Power of Black Music*:

The figures and events of African-American music making connect the individual and the group to the realm of cultural memory, to the realm of spirit and myth. And it is myth that privileges the figures and metaphors that validate the blues musicians' music making and their place in the culture. It's all a circle.<sup>632</sup>

*Loyal to the Game* and *Tupac Resurrection* arguably inform us about Eminem and 50 Cent's identity construction more than about the albums' title star—Tupac Shakur. The co-existence of myth (cultural memory) and artistic validation (or canon) has been a centuries-old practice, and now finds itself in a digital guise within selected gangsta rap recordings. *Loyal to the Game* and similar albums

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<sup>631</sup> Zygmunt Bauman, *Mortality, Immortality, and Other Life Strategies* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1992), 57.

<sup>632</sup> Floyd, 231.

demonstrate that memorial processes, lineage and canon formations are manifest in mainstream gangsta rap recordings.

## –Conclusion–

The five preceding chapters substantiate the opening premise that borrowing is central to the aesthetics of hip-hop music. Musical examples as case studies include recordings from ‘jazz rap’, ‘gangsta rap/reality rap’, ‘conscious rap’ and other ever-shifting and overlapping rap music subgenres. I have shown that intertextuality in hip-hop recordings can take the form of autosonic digital quotation as well as allosonic references, and that this can occur in the lyrics, the ‘flow’ of the MC, and the ‘beat’. Borrowing in hip-hop is not simply ‘digital sampling’, but a vast network of processes, strategies, and modes of expression in which digital sampling comprises but one method. Hip-hop embraces borrowing traditions from both African-based and European-based musics, and yet is also a product of its socio-historical and technological situations. Hip-hop, like blues and jazz, is an ‘open source’ culture, and this particular character of these musical cultures is crucial to their aesthetics.<sup>633</sup>

I would argue that one element that differentiates hip-hop from other open source cultures is the sheer density and variety of intertextualities, in part, influenced by what Paul D. Miller calls ‘the electronically accelerated culture of the late 20<sup>th</sup> Century.’<sup>634</sup> The internet has no doubt influenced the way that people think about and discuss music, and Miller argues that the world wide web is a legacy from the way that DJs looked for information from decades earlier: ‘Look at the role of the search engine in web culture as a new kind of thoroughfare, and that role is expanded a million fold—the information and goods are out there, but you

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<sup>633</sup> I borrow the term ‘open source culture’ from Jonathan Lethem who uses it in the context of blues and jazz. Lethem, 27.

<sup>634</sup> Paul D. Miller, ‘Algorithms: Erasures and the Art of Memory’, in *Audio Culture*, 352.



stay in place.’<sup>635</sup> Lee Marshall cites a similar analogy from an email about Bob Dylan’s album *Time out of Mind*: ‘The album is also like a website full of hypertext links to the history blues and folk, with lots of references all the way.’<sup>636</sup> What Miller calls ‘The crowded spaces of info-modernity’<sup>637</sup> demonstrate that advanced societies are perhaps more referential than they have ever been, copyright law permitting, reflecting an intensification of the intertextualities and modes of borrowing in hip-hop culture.

Furthermore, how borrowing functions in hip-hop is largely dependent on the particular context and the interpretive lens one utilizes in reception. I have shown how borrowing from hip-hop’s past can demonstrate a ‘historical authenticity’, that borrowing sonic codes from another genre such as jazz can influence its reception, that borrowing and mixing for particular listening spaces can affect the sonic qualities of the recordings, that sampling the voice post-mortem can align artist in a canon or lineage, and that borrowing musical phrases such as Eminem’s ‘driving riff’ sonic signature can create linkage with the rappers who collaborate with him. These codes and references in the musical text of the recordings have provided a glimpse of the highly varied modes of musical borrowing in hip-hop. At the same time, though this project has been bounded by hip-hop imagined communities quite deliberately, the interplay between intra- and extra-musical discourses has highlighted and developed themes that reflect wider cultural processes than simply within hip-hop culture.

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<sup>635</sup> Paul D. Miller, ‘In through the Out Door: Sampling and the Creative Act’, in *Sound Unbound: Sampling Digital Music and Culture*, ed. Paul D. Miller (London: MIT Press, 2008), 14.

<sup>636</sup> Marshall, 240. The quote is from an email sent to Paul Williams, published in Williams’ book *Bob Dylan: Performing Artist 1986–1990 and Beyond*. Marshall further theorizes on the role of the internet and other technology in experiencing music, and how Dylan’s deliberate use of quotation puts him in relation with various traditions, echoing a similar process in certain realms of hip-hop.

<sup>637</sup> Paul D. Miller, ‘In through the Out Door: Sampling and the Creative Act’, in *Sound Unbound*, 6

## **Directions for Future Research**

There are many other case studies involving musical borrowing in hip-hop that I could pursue in future studies. In addition to a comparative analysis and taxonomies of borrowing in multiple hip-hop ‘elements’ (graffiti, breakdancing, turntablism, etc.), numerous avenues still lie untraveled in studies of rap music borrowing. For example, in addition to borrowing from the jazz genre, I could have chosen borrowing from Bollywood films and its connection with exoticism and Orientalism. The use of electric guitar in Rick Rubin’s productions of Run-D.M.C. and The Beastie Boys as signifying rock music as genre synecdoche, a crossover strategy tangled with issues of race, and borrowing from popular Broadway musicals could also have been potential topics.

In addition to invoking the historical authenticity of the 1970s Bronx, I could have chosen borrowing from the so-called hip-hop music ‘Golden Age’ (1986–1992), as they are both strong cases of intra-generic borrowing and are strongly defined moments within the genre. Gangsta rapper The Game is an important additional figure in borrowing studies, a highly intertextual artist that continues the Dre-Eminem-50 Cent lineage that I constructed in Chapter 5. Other potential research directions include borrowing in the ‘Bling Bling’ era, a more thorough study of hip-hop ‘cover versions’ (both within and outside the hip-hop genre), global cover versions of internationally distributed U.S. rap music, borrowings in Christian rap, and collage styles in albums such as *Endtroducing*, *Paul’s Boutique* and *Fear of a Black Planet*. Some of these may become future scholarly endeavours, but this extensive list of possibilities is intended to demonstrate that at present this is a project of limitless proportions, bounded by the limitations of an academic dissertation.

I would like to conclude by returning to Samuel Floyd, whom I referenced in the conclusion of the previous chapter. Cultural memory, or myth, helps to bind a community together, additionally providing a sense of continuity in a fragmented, disjointed world. Floyd identifies this continuity in the history of African-American music: ‘a compelling cultural and musical continuity exists between all the musical genres of the African-American cultural experience—a continuity that can be seen and traced from the musical characteristics of the ring into the most recent music making of black Americans.’<sup>638</sup> There is much at stake in the discussion of historical continuity and community: not only artistic and cultural validation, but also escaping or denying a culture’s ‘death’, so to speak. In the context of national ‘community’, Benedict Anderson suggested that nationalism served the same purpose as religion in that it could turn fatality into continuity.<sup>639</sup> The use of the ‘symbolically immortal’ rappers Tupac and Notorious B.I.G.’s voices post-mortem is one way to create continuity, but this is also a symptom of a larger desire for continuity in hip-hop and other musical cultures and communities. Hip-hop as an imagined community, a hip-hop nation with origins, subgenres, and landmarked events and icons, maintains its health through the borrowing strategies that I have presented and discussed.

Foundational and integral to hip-hop culture, borrowing solidifies communities in a number of ways: it creates history and lineage, it immortalizes icons, it creates links with other genres, it forges links with an African-American musical past (in the case of jazz, for example), it solidifies subgenres (such as gangsta rap), and it updates older sounds for newer playback technology (such as car sound systems). Importantly, the creation or imagining of a community lends

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<sup>638</sup> Floyd, 10.

<sup>639</sup> Anderson, 10.

its members a continuity also offered by previously dominant institutions such as religion, monarchy, nationalism, and sport. In this way, the hip-hop nation reflects society at large, with its members trying to make sense of a fractured world while simultaneously striving to belong to a community that will last longer than his/her individual lifetimes. Canons, lineage and other traditions, formed in part by borrowing practices, are one particular way in which to celebrate an imagined community and ensure its vitality. Thus, borrowing is hip-hop culture's most widespread, and arguably most effective, way of celebrating itself.

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## **–CD of Musical Examples–**

1. “Apache” by The Incredible Bongo Band (excerpt, 0:00–1:15)
2. “The Big Beat” by Billy Squier (excerpt, 0:00–0:37)
3. “Planet Rock” by Afrika Bambaataa (excerpt, 4:45–5:00)
4. “We Got the Beat” by Talib Kweli (excerpt, 1:58–2:42)
5. “Double Trouble” by The Roots feat. Mos Def (excerpt, 5:08–5:50)
6. “Double Trouble” by K.K. Rockwell and Lil’ Rodney C (excerpt, 4:27–5:47)
7. “Double Trouble” by The Roots feat. Mos Def (excerpt, 4:36–4:59)
8. “Double Trouble” by Rockwell and C (excerpt, 0:00–0:09)
9. “Triple Trouble” The Beastie Boys (excerpt, 1:18–1:47)
10. “Hip-hop is Dead” by Nas
11. “Hip-hop is Dead” (excerpt, 2:45–3:42)
12. “Push it Along” by A Tribe Called Quest (excerpt, 0:51–1:29)
13. “Luck of Lucien” by A Tribe Called Quest (excerpt, 0:12–0:47)
14. “Butter” by A Tribe Called Quest (excerpt, 1:38–2:11)
15. “Check the Rhime” by A Tribe Called Quest (excerpts, 0:00–0:45; 2:54–3:39)
16. “Excursions” by A Tribe Called Quest (excerpts, 0:00–0:45; 1:40–2:40)
17. “It’s Good to be Here” by Digable Planets (excerpt, 1:25–2:15)
18. “Jazz Club Motive” by Digable Planets (excerpt from “It’s Good to be Here”,  
3:35–4:12)
19. “Rebirth of Slick (Cool Like Dat)” by Digable Planets
20. “Last of the Spiddyocks” by Digable Planets (excerpt, 0:00–1:10)
21. “Who am I? (What’s my Name?)” by Snoop Doggy Dogg
22. “Thugz Mansion (7 Remix)”, Better Dayz, by 2Pac
23. “Thugz Mansion (Nas Acoustic)”, Better Dayz, by 2Pac

24. “Thugz Mansion (N.Y.)”, *God’s Son*, by Nas/2Pac
25. “Juicy” by The Notorious B.I.G.
26. “A Dream” by Jay-Z
27. “One Day at a Time” by 2Pac/Eminem (excerpt, 2:11–2:17)
28. “Indian Sunset” by Elton John
29. “Ghetto Gospel” by 2Pac/Eminem
30. “It Has Been Said” by Eminem (excerpt, 0:05–0:25)
31. “Runnin (Dyin to Live)” by Eminem (excerpt, 0:48–1:05)
32. “Mockingbird” by Eminem (excerpt, 0:00–0:17)
33. “Thug 4 Life” by Eminem (excerpt, 0:09–0:20)
34. “The Watcher” by Dr. Dre (excerpt, 0:19–0:34)
35. “In Da Club” by 50 Cent (excerpt, 0:58–1:15)
36. “Patiently Waiting” by 50 Cent