

The Breaks

Intertextuality & East Coast U.S. Hip Hop 1979-1991

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Abstract

This thesis is concerned with an investigation of hip hop music within the bounds as described in the above title. Beginning with an outline history of the genre as a whole, subsequent chapters will move towards fulfilling two aims. Firstly, by means of the construction of an interpretative model of hip hop intertextuality based on the concept of reception theory (as developed within the field of literary studies), an understanding of how the genre prioritises certain interpretations will be gained. Through this, it will then become possible to elucidate the various possible forms of pleasure available to the listener. Secondly, and again with intertextuality as the focus, a history of the musical developments which took place within the genre between the years 1979 and 1991 will be recounted by means of a new periodisation in terms of 'production eras'.

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For Michelle and Nia

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Introduction

My own personal introduction to hip hop came one night in the late 1980s while listening to the John Peel show on Radio One. At the time my tastes veered more towards guitar-based music: the awkward, angular attack of artists such as Captain Beefheart, Bog-Shed and Stump; and American punk acts such as Husker Du, Big Black and Minor Threat. Peel's show was the best place to hear bands like these, so I listened regularly, cassette deck at the ready. But Peel's show was also notoriously eclectic, and several times he played a record which intrigued me: Coldcut's 'Seven Minutes Of Madness' remix of 'Paid In Full' by Eric B. & Rakim.¹ Whilst not immediately enamoured of the track, I realised that this was unlike any music I had heard before, and by the third or fourth hearing I was hooked. At the time, there was very little literature about the genre, and so my further investigations took the 'old-fashioned' route: listening to the radio, reading record reviews, discovering the names of artists involved in hip hop and tracking down their records.

Fast-forward several years, and by the mid-1990s, 'serious' writing about hip hop began to appear. But while books such as Tricia Rose's *Black Noise* and Russell A. Potter's *Spectacular Vernaculars* satisfied the academic and the hip hop fan within me, the musician in me was still asking questions.² In particular, I wanted to know how hip hop worked *as music*.

This is the question at the heart of this thesis: *how does hip hop work as music?* To varying degrees, the above books (along with other works) went some way towards providing answers to this question, but it seemed to me that there was more that needed to be said. The predominant strand developing in hip hop scholarship seemed to be one that involved accessing meaning through lyrical analysis, tied in with socio-cultural discussion. In this regard, Dave Barber noted in 1995 that there was an 'over-emphasis on the lyrical content and the socio/political agenda it draws'³ within writing on hip hop. In a similar vein, Robert Walser has noted that 'despite widespread debates over the meanings and significance of rap, its musical elements have largely escaped all but the most superficial discussion.'⁴ Of course, discussion of the lyrical, social, cultural and political sides of hip hop is important to our overall understanding of the genre, but if we are to fully comprehend it, we need to gain a detailed understanding of its musical content. Hip hop is, after all, first and foremost a form of popular music.

At which point breakdancers and graffiti writers may well shake their heads in despair and stop reading. So before going any further, we need to clarify exactly what the phrase 'hip hop' means, and how it will be used in this thesis.

While the precise origins of the term remain contentious, there is a consensus amongst both hip hop artists and followers of the genre that it consists of four elements: breaking (breakdancing), writing (graffiti art), MCing (rapping), and DJing. Whilst it is not the aim of this thesis to question this understanding of hip hop, the term itself will be used throughout in a more specific sense; that being to refer solely to the music associated with the genre. At the outset, several terms presented themselves as possible ways of referring to this music. 'Rap music' was one such, but while this term is commonly used, it was felt that it would be unsuitable within the context of this thesis, since the central aim is to provide some counterbalance to the analysis of 'rap' (i.e. lyrical content). Another option was 'hip hop

music', and while this would, perhaps, be a more truthful nomenclature, acknowledging the fact that the music is only one part of hip hop, it was felt that its use would simply result in a redundant overuse of the word 'music'. It was decided, then, to use the term 'hip hop' as an abbreviated form of this latter term, and to include this explanation by way of apology to those elements excluded by its use.

While discussing terminology, it seems appropriate at this point to provide definitions for some of the other terms used throughout this thesis with which the non-hip hop specialising reader may be unfamiliar. Two of these appeared in the previous paragraph: MC and DJ, and both are used in nominal and verbal senses. An MC (abbreviated from master of ceremonies or, it is sometimes claimed, mic[rophone] controller) is what is commonly known as a rapper. Taking the place of the vocalist in other forms of popular music, the MC is responsible for the verbalised content of hip hop. To MC, by extension, is the practice of providing vocals for a hip hop performance.

A DJ (abbreviated from disc jockey) is, as in many forms of popular music, a player of records. However, within hip hop the term has more performative connotations. As we will see in the pages that follow, the hip hop DJ does not simply play records, but rather plays with records, using the available technology for the reproduction of music (turntables and a 'crossfader', or channel-switching device) to alter the original in some way. Indeed, so central to hip hop is the DJ that the genre draws distinctions between radio DJs, club DJs and scratch DJs, although individual DJs rarely constrain themselves to one type. Within this thesis, the majority of references are to scratch DJs (those who specialise in transformative scratching techniques). As with MCing, DJing is, by extension, the practice of being a DJ.

Another term that needs some clarification is 'producer'. While the hip hop producer's role is essentially the same as that of the producer in other genres – being responsible for the finished sound of the recording – there is a difference in that the hip hop producer is often the sole creator of the music. Tasks such as drum machine programming, sample selection and editing, and overall arrangement can all fall within the producer's remit.

A detailed discussion of the techniques involved in the three roles mentioned above will follow in chapter three. However, while DJing and production techniques are central to this thesis, MCing techniques will be referred to less often thereafter. The reason for the inclusion of a discussion of MCing techniques is principally to demonstrate the parallel, if separate, developments made in MCing, DJing and production, giving a broader view of hip hop before concentrating solely on the music in later chapters.

Having made the decision to focus on hip hop as music, the next task was to formulate some grounds within which we might begin to understand it. An approach based on hip hop's intertextual practices was decided upon, based on the apparent centrality of intertextuality to the genre. As will be seen in the second chapter, hip hop was founded on an intertextual practice, and continued to employ intertextuality heavily throughout its history. This is frequently made obvious within the music itself (again, we will see exactly how in the pages that follow), and is further underlined in much of the writing about the genre. As we will see in the literature review of chapter one, much of the serious, academic writing concerning the genre was grounded in an intertextual approach, and the same could be said of much of the popular criticism concerning the genre – for example, the 11 July 1987 edition

of the *New Musical Express* bore the cover legend '[s]teal it', referring to the six pages of linked articles within, themed around 'pop theft', of which '[h]ip-hop is the cutting edge'.⁵

With a subject and an approach decided upon, the next consideration to be made was one of boundaries. The sheer quantity of hip hop recordings available meant that it would be virtually impossible to discuss the entire scope of the genre, and so chronological and geographical limits had to be set in place.

Chronologically, it was decided that the analytical work of the thesis should cover the years 1979 to 1991. The earlier of these two dates was the year in which commercial hip hop recordings were first released. Of course, in order to understand these earliest hip hop records, it is necessary to understand the conception of the music at the time. Since this is based on ideas developed during hip hop's first six years as a performance genre, the second chapter will also cover the story of hip hop from its beginnings in 1973.

The reason for choosing 1991 as a closing point for this thesis is not as immediately obvious, but this does not mean that it is entirely arbitrary. The early 1990s saw a definite sea change in hip hop production techniques. Post-1991, the story of hip hop is that of producers' various methods of negotiating the legal and financial constraints placed on them by increasingly litigious copyright holders. In particular, 1991 saw a landmark legal case which can be seen as important with regard to hip hop's intertextual practices. The details of this case are given at the end of the second chapter. Of course, the sound of hip hop in 1979 was very different from that of the music in 1991. With this in mind, a second aim of this thesis must be the tracking of hip hop's musical development over our time-scale. This will take the form of a model of four 'production eras', which will be defined in historical terms within the second chapter and in technical terms within the third, and which will subsequently be referred to throughout the remainder of this thesis, in particular in connection with the analyses of chapter five.

With regard to geographical limits, it was decided to concentrate on music produced in the north-eastern states of the USA. Principally, this involves the birthplace of hip hop, New York, but coverage was extended to include artists from relatively nearby locations such as New Jersey and Philadelphia, since the music they produced was directly inspired by that of New York artists. In fact, this geographical decision was somewhat necessitated by the fact that, during its earliest years as a recorded form of music, hip hop was very much a localised genre within New York City. While hip hop began to spring from other areas throughout the 1980s, in order to cover the genre from its beginnings, the focus on New York was unavoidable.

Of course, this focus does mean that one major strand within the history of hip hop is absent from this thesis, that being the 'gangsta rap' which began to emanate from the West Coast of the USA around 1988 (although hip hop records began appearing in California as early as 1982). While this form of hip hop would ultimately develop a sound quite distinct from that of the East Coast artists, the two were, during the time-scale of this thesis, musically similar. Indeed, there was some collaboration between East and West Coast artists, notably on Ice Cube's 1990 album *AmeriKKKa's Most Wanted*, which was produced by the Bomb Squad, who had previously been responsible for records by Public Enemy.⁶

Notwithstanding this, West Coast hip hop is excluded from this thesis, and this reflects the predominant discussion concerning gangsta rap. Essentially, the most important element of this form of hip hop is usually seen as being its lyrical content. However, while the debate over gangsta rap's glorification/reflection (depending on which side of the argument one takes) of antisocial behaviour is undoubtedly important, the aim of this thesis is, as noted above, is to investigate the *music* of hip hop. The inclusion of West Coast hip hop, and therefore gangsta rap, would only detract from this focus.

Of course the textual analysis of music brings with it its own problematic. As Susan McClary and Robert Walser have pointed out, 'music is an especially resistant medium to write or speak about,'⁷ going on to explain that a sociological approach often fails to explain how the music itself works, while a musicological approach can frequently result in either 'poetic or technical mystification.'⁸ In order to circumvent this problem, two intertwined analytical methods are used here, these being the structural analysis of hip hop tracks and a text/reception model developed through an application of the literary reception theory of Hans Robert Jauss and Wolfgang Iser. The text/reception model is discussed in depth in chapter four, and the development of the methodology of the structural analysis is covered in chapter five, along with its application to actual texts.

This does not mean, however, that more 'traditional' musicological types of analysis were entirely abandoned. Hip hop's largely cut-and-paste approach to making music does not mean that concepts such as melodic phrasing and harmonic development are absent from the genre. Admittedly, they play a smaller part than in much popular music, but they do appear, from time to time. Therefore, where necessary within the analyses of individual tracks presented in chapter five, analysis within these terms is used. Where this does take place, the attempt has been made to be as clear as possible, thus reducing to a minimum any potential 'mystification', to use McClary and Walser's term again.

Additionally in the fifth chapter, following the series of analyses, we will turn once again to previously existing writing on hip hop, in order to discuss the discussions of others within the theoretical framework set up in this thesis. In this manner, it should become possible to demonstrate how the approach taken in this thesis can be beneficial towards a greater understanding of how hip hop works.

The closing chapter will present our conclusions, isolating, through the ideas presented in the earlier chapters, five key factors which, in combination, enable hip hop to 'work' as popular music.

Ultimately, the aim is to propose a system of understanding based on the music itself. Of course, no analytical approach can ever fully encapsulate what is at stake in music – by its very nature, music tends towards the extralinguistic, and writing about it can be said to be a somewhat synaesthetic task. However, the attempt must be made, and it is hoped that the approach taken in this thesis will allow for greater understanding of the extraordinary music that is hip hop.

1. 'Wordz Of Wizdom': Literature Review

As noted in the preceding pages, this opening chapter will be concerned with taking a critical overview of the existing knowledge relevant to both the thematic and disciplinary approaches taken by this thesis. Essentially, this can be subdivided into five broad areas: hip hop specifically; the tradition of orality as influential on African-American culture; wider issues concerning intertextuality within contemporary culture; the textual analysis and semiotics of popular music; and literary reception theory.

The first books concerning hip hop began to appear around five years after the genre's debut as a recorded artform. The most important of these early works is David Toop's *Rap Attack*, currently in its third edition. Toop's approach is historical, telling the story of hip hop in considerable detail while noting the connections between the genre and earlier forms of African-American music. With regard to the question which is central to this thesis – how does hip hop work as music? – *Rap Attack* is, however, of limited use. While Toop does cover hip hop intertextuality (principally in the chapter entitled 'Version to Version'), raising interesting points concerning the dual role of hip hop DJs as consumer/producers and the importance of studio musicians to early hip hop recordings, there is no investigation of the phenomenon. If the book's strength, within the terms of this thesis, is its depth of collated examples regarding the presence of intertextuality within hip hop and its convincing argument for understanding these intertextual practices as belonging to an ongoing tradition of African-American music, its weakness is that it does not address the process of intertextuality: it tells us why, but not how, intertextuality operates within hip hop.

Although principally concerned with caribbean music, Dick Hebdige's *Cut 'N' Mix* (1987) contains one chapter devoted to hip hop. In this, Hebdige notes the connections between hip hop's intertextuality and the reggae practice of 'versioning', furthering Toop's groundwork in locating hip hop within a post-diasporic Black musical tradition. However, like Toop, Hebdige does not investigate the process. While examples of intertextual practices in hip hop are given, and the potential for connotative meaning is outlined (in reference to vocal samples, in particular), there is an underlying assumption of codal competence within the listener.

Tricia Rose's *Black Noise* (1994) illustrates how hip hop can be understood in relation not only to African-American cultural practices, but also how the genre's early development can be understood as being a local response to the social situation in the Bronx of the 1970s. Additionally, Rose offers interpretations of hip hop lyrics and videos which highlight the politics of self-expression involved therein, along with a chapter discussing the role of women in the traditionally male-dominated world of hip hop.

The third chapter of *Black Noise* is the most relevant to this thesis. Here, Rose specifically addresses hip hop as music, and like Toop and Hebdige, pays particular attention to hip hop's intertextuality. Importantly, Rose explains the specific combination of orality and technology that gives rise to hip hop's practice of sampling, noting that simply placing hip hop within an African-American cultural tradition, 'eras[es] rap's significant sonic presence and its role in shaping technological, cultural, and legal issues as they relate to defining and creating music.'¹ Rose's awareness of the

importance of the ‘sonic presence’ of hip hop is further reflected in her noting the importance of quality of sound within hip hop. Rose was the first writer on hip hop to note that sampled sounds give the genre a ‘textural dimension uncommon in other genres and that programmed drum machines cannot duplicate.’²

However, while Rose notes that quality of sound gives hip hop tracks ‘familiar resonances’³, and that this means that issues of recognisability are relevant to hip hop, this is only discussed in relation to copyright law. Although Rose does allow that not every intertextual act within hip hop will be recognised, this is mentioned only briefly – the focus is still very much on the listener’s ability to understand the meaning of recognised samples. As far as this thesis is concerned, *Black Noise* is particularly important because it raises the issue of recognition, without offering a thorough investigation of it. As will be seen in later chapters, issues of recognition will prove to be important to the model proposed here for understanding intertextuality within hip hop.

Another key work is Russell A. Potter’s *Spectacular Vernaculars*, dating from 1995. In this book, Potter argues that hip hop should be understood as both a form of radical postmodernism and as an example of a vernacular artform. At the heart of this formulation are the intertextual musical practices with which this thesis is largely concerned. Hip hop is postmodern, argues Potter, because it is founded on citation, on the re-use of existing material, with the attendant problematizing of the distinction between production and consumption. It is vernacular in the way in which meaning is created through this intertextuality, by means of the set of African-American cultural practices formalised by Henry Louis Gates (of whom, more later) in his concept of Signifyin(g).

Once again, though, there is a reluctance to engage with hip hop as music in *Spectacular Vernaculars*. Potter first illustrates Signifyin(g) by means of a comparison of the lyrics of three different versions of Lowell Fulson’s ‘Tramp’, and even in a section entitled ‘Sound of the Funky Drummer’, ostensibly dealing specifically with sampling, we find the claim ‘[t]he double-edge of sampling can be most clearly seen at play in rap cuts where spoken-word samples are employed.’⁴ Of course, with regard to elucidating meaning, Potter is right: spoken-word samples are the clearest example. However, if we want to see how musical intertextuality is operating, then we really need to look at non-vocal examples.

The last book which can be seen to be particularly relevant to this thesis is Adam Krims’ *Rap Music & the Poetics of Identity*. Krims’ book – like this thesis – is designed to focus on musical detail, providing some counterbalance to the ‘vast majority of rap and hip-hop scholarship which takes the music seriously but gives little, if any, attention to its musical workings.’⁵ In the third chapter of his book, Krims does demonstrate the possibility for close musical reading of hip hop, in his analysis of Ice Cube’s track ‘The Nigga Ya Love To Hate’. Here, Krims’ approach differs somewhat from those of the previously-discussed writers. Whereas Rose and Potter engage hip hop intertextuality without making any detailed inroads into the music itself, Krims does the opposite: here, the detailed discussion of the musical content of hip hop is foregrounded, and issues of intertextuality are somewhat left aside. While this still constitutes both a valid and useful approach to hip hop (indeed, the implied listener model which will be developed within this thesis can explain *why* the various approaches of Krims, Rose and Potter are all valid), Krims’ analysis can be understood as being incomplete. The strength of Krims’

analysis lies in his demonstrating how music, lyrics and 'flow' (the MCs style of delivery) work together to create meaning; the weakness is that Krims makes no mention of the (to these ears) obvious presence of George Clinton's 'Atomic Dog' within the Ice Cube track. Of course, it is possible that this absence is deliberate, an attempt by Krims to focus purely on the musical organisation. However, it can be argued that intertextuality is so important to hip hop (as the previously discussed writers make clear) that to bypass it leaves any interpretation as overly partial.

Of course, these books do not represent the entirety of serious writing about hip hop. However, they are those that are nearest the particular concerns of this thesis. Other writings concerning hip hop, although worthy of brief mention, are focussed away from our particular interests here. One prevalent strand of writing about hip hop is the extrapolation of meaning through lyric analysis. This can be seen in Ronald Jemal Stephens' 'The Three Waves of Contemporary Rap Music', Elizabeth A. Wheeler's "Most of My Heroes Don't Appear On No Stamps", and Geneva Smitherman's "The Chain Remains The Same". Other writers, including Rose and Nancy Guevara have taken a feminist critical stance. Elsewhere, articles such as Pamela D. Hall's 'The Relationship Between Types of Rap Music and Memory in African-American Children' and Houston A. Baker's 'Hybridity, the Rap Race and Pedagogy for the 1990s' have attempted to use hip hop in an educational role. Elsewhere again, writers such as Greg Dimitriadis and Katrina Hazzard-Donald have discussed hip hop in terms of the physicality of dance associated with the genre. Another topic of discussion with regard to hip hop is the genre's ability to inscribe local identity, and the global fashion in which this has happened. Works in this area include Tony Mitchell's *Popular Music and Local Identity: Rock, Pop and Rap in Europe and Oceania* and his edited collection *Global Noise: Rap and Hip-Hop Outside the USA* as well as William Eric Perkins' preface and epilogue to the collection of essays entitled *Droppin' Science*, and Susan J. Smith's article 'Beyond geography's visible worlds: a cultural politics of music'.

Another important body of work with relevance to this thesis is that of writers whose concern is African-American culture. Hip hop is, of course, an African-American form of music, and any attempt to understand it must be informed by existing writing on African-American culture.

Above, we have noted the importance of Henry Louis Gates' formalisation of the concept of Signifyin(g) in influencing Potter's interpretation of hip hop. Central to Signifyin(g) is the 'double-voiced utterance', which operates, as Gates notes in his *The Signifying Monkey: A Theory of Afro-American Literary Criticism*, by means of 'repetition and difference'.⁶ While Potter uses Signifyin(g) principally as a tool for lyrical analysis, within this thesis it will be shown how the repetition (i.e. re-use) and difference (i.e. recontextualisation) of musical elements within hip hop can be a Signifyin(g) practice. Additionally, it will become clear through the course of this work that the creation of meaning through Signifyin(g) is but one possibility available to the hip hop listener.

A second important voice in the field of African-American cultural studies is that of Portia Maultsby. In her 'Africanisms in African-American Music', Maultsby describes three areas of aesthetic significance distinctive to African-American music: style of delivery, sound quality and mechanics of delivery. Of these, the most relevant to this thesis is sound quality. Maultsby writes: 'Descriptions of black music performances over several centuries reveal that timbre is a primary feature that distinguishes this tradition from all others.'⁷ Of course, Maultsby is engaged in a wider discussion of

African-American music, and so she does not discuss the importance of timbre in relation to any one particular genre. Within this thesis, the continuing importance of timbre within African-American music (in the form of hip hop) will be demonstrated, through the concept of ‘consistency of timbre’ which will be shown to be one of the factors crucial to hip hop’s mode of operation.

Another important strand of knowledge which feeds into this thesis is that concerning the analysis of popular music. Within this strand there are two linked sets of writings: those concerned with the analysis of wider patterns within popular music and those concerned with the specifics of individual tracks. Turning firstly to the former, the works of Dick Bradley, Andrew Chester and Richard Middleton are all relevant to this thesis.

In his book, *Understanding Rock ‘n’ Roll*, Bradley posits two musical codes which, in their fusion, ‘form the basis of modern Western popular music’.⁸ These are the ‘tonal-European code’ and the ‘Afro-American code’. Two important differences between these codes are those concerning notions of authorship and the style of repetition apparent within the music.

Tonal-European music is characterised by the importance of a central author-figure, in the shape of the composer, whereas Afro-American music tends to be more improvisatory. As we will shortly see, this leads towards a more communal sense of authorship. This difference between individual and communal authorship, in turn, has an effect on how the music is perceived. In the case of tonal-European music, the composer’s legacy is a *finished work*. That is, ‘the musicians and singers change nothing...never a note, and above all never a chord, is to be changed or omitted’.⁹ Afro-American music, on the other hand, relies on a pooled resource of ideas from which performers can draw during their improvisations. A classic example of this is the country blues of the early twentieth century: ‘The Delta blues tradition...was based on the extensive use of formulaic verses, transferred from song to song to fit the general mood of song and audience; [Robert] Johnson, for instance, shared verses with Mississippi contemporaries like Son House.’¹⁰

It should be noted here that this type of unwritten and improvisatory tradition was not unique to African-American musicians. The European folk tradition, and the American folk tradition derived from it, also operated in this fashion. In regard to this music, Bradley states that it, ‘undoubtedly influenced that of black Americans.’¹¹ Evidence of this is provided by LeRoi Jones (Amiri Baraka): ‘[v]ery early...blues-type songs utilised the structure of the early English ballad.’¹² Of course, this was two-way traffic, with African-American music also influencing white musicians. With this in mind, we have to be careful not to view Bradley’s codal fusion as a process which began relatively recently, but as part of a long-ongoing process. However, it should be noted that technological developments such as recorded music and radio greatly increased the availability of music, and so the twentieth century saw an acceleration in the amount of cross-influencing between different musical traditions.

Musically, Bradley associates the two codes – tonal-European and Afro-American – with ‘extensional’ and ‘intensional’ principles, respectively. Bradley, drawing on the earlier work of Andrew Chester, notes one central difference between these two principles; that being the nature of repetition within each.¹³ In extensional forms of music, ‘[l]arge structures are created by the movement from harmonic key to key, on the basis of quite small amounts of original harmonic and melodic ‘materials’, which are repeated, in identical or slightly altered form, again and again.’¹⁴ By contrast,

intensional music is characterised by ‘the variation of melody, rhythm, dynamics and timbre *within* [original emphasis] relatively small-scale and simple structures and sequences’.¹⁵ Richard Middleton, in his essay ‘“Play it again Sam”: Some notes on the productivity of repetition in popular music’, draws a similar distinction between what he terms discursive and musematic repetition. Here, the former ‘introduces analogue rules on the macro-structural level (a variety of materials and unit-lengths and types, varied quantities of syntactic processes, such as repetition...), while its micro-structure is controlled more by simpler digital choices, many of which are binary’.¹⁶ On the other hand, musematic repetition ‘is seen as operating on a macro-structural level...in a way which is governed by digital (and often simple binary or repetition) rules, while on a micro-structural level...there is a much stronger reliance on analogue rules (for instance, detailed pitch and rhythm inflections).’¹⁷

These two descriptions effectively amount to the same thing. They agree that there are two distinct methods of employing repetition in music, and the difference between them lies in the relationship between repetitive and differentiated elements. In the extensional/discursive model, the differentiation occurs *outside* the repetition. In the intensional/musematic one, it lies *inside*. In chapter three of this thesis, we will see how this work can be useful towards our understanding of hip hop.

With regard to the analysis of specific tracks, and the processes by which they create meaning, important work has been undertaken by Philip Tagg. In his work, Tagg has developed a semiotic system for music, whereby meaning is created both through musical similarities between pieces (and indeed, between musical and extramusical sounds) and by differing semantic roles which may be taken by elements within a piece of music. These various roles are discussed as a sign typology by Tagg in his ‘Introductory notes to music semiotics’, and this is the most relevant part of Tagg’s work to us. Tagg’s sign typology is discussed in detail in chapter five of this thesis, and, as with the work of Bradley and Middleton discussed above, the value of this work will be both demonstrated and enhanced simply by its application to the genre of hip hop.

As well as the various writings on music discussed above, two important concepts from the world of literary studies have some bearing on this thesis, and so merit coverage within this chapter: the first of these is intertextuality; the second is reception theory.

The concept of intertextuality was introduced in the late 1960s by Julia Kristeva, as part of her work on semiotics and literature. Both reflective of and contributory towards the contemporary movement in literary studies away from author-centred, unitary readings of a text, Kristeva’s concept was introduced in her 1967 essay ‘The Bounded Text’: ‘The text is therefore a *productivity*...it is a permutation of texts, an intertextuality: in the space of a given text, several utterances, taken from other texts, interact’.¹⁸ Essentially, what the concept of intertextuality involves is an accepting of the fact that all texts are interrelated, and that no text has a single ‘meaning’, but rather gives rise to multiple semantic possibilities. As Mary Orr notes in her valuable discussion of Kristeva’s work, the concept of intertextuality allows for ‘non-hierarchical and democratically inclusive notions of text’¹⁹ to be forwarded. However, while intertextuality’s democratization of interpretation has allowed for a broadening in the interpretive scope of literary studies, the concept itself has undergone some changes.

In the wake of Kristeva, Roland Barthes furthered the concept of intertextuality in his famous essay, ‘The Death of the Author’. Here, Barthes argues that the result of intertextuality is that the only

point at which the multiple texts which make up any one text can be understood is with the reader. Furthermore, since the reader can only disentangle the various threads from which a text is constructed, rather than deciphering a unitary meaning, the act of reading is, for Barthes, is 'an activity that is truly reevolutionary since to refuse to fix meaning is, in the end, to refuse God and his hypostases – reason, science, law.'²⁰ While Barthes' claim that reading is a revolutionary activity must be tempered by our historical understanding ('The Death of the Author' was written in 1968, the time of revolutionary student activity in France), it can still be seen that intertextuality leads, for Barthes, away from reasoned understanding.

By the late 1970s, intertextuality was well-established as a concept within literary studies. However, while the reader was still at the centre of literary interpretation, the intertextuality which had partially given rise to reader-based interpretations had changed drastically. Instead of being perceived as a democratizing theory, intertextuality was, by this time, interpreted as a foundation through which the reader constructs the 'true' meaning of the text. For example, Michael Riffaterre, in his *Semiotics of Poetry*, writes: 'Then suddenly the puzzle is solved, everything falls into place, indeed the whole poem ceases to be descriptive, ceases to be a sequence of mimetic signs, and becomes but a single sign, perceived from the end back to its given as a harmonious whole, wherein nothing is loose, wherein every word refers to one symbolic focus.'²¹ Here, Riffaterre's 'mimetic signs' are the intertextual references present within the poem under discussion, and the reader's role is to combine the disparate intertextuality into a 'harmonious whole': effectively, intertextuality is here subsumed back under the tradition of the unitary interpretation of texts.

In the 1980s, writing on intertextuality took a more organisational turn, with Gérard Genette's book *Palimpsests*. In this work, Genette proposed a systematic method for understanding intertextuality. Renaming Kristeva's original concept as 'transtextuality', Genette described five sub-categories of transtextual practice. Briefly, these are: intertextuality – now designated as referring only to quotation, plagiarism or allusion; paratextuality – the surrounding features of a text (such as its title); architextuality – the relationship of text and genre; metatextuality – critical commentary; and hypertextuality – transformative textual relationships, such as spoofs and parodies. Genette's work is particularly noteworthy in that it inspired Serge Lacasse's essay 'Intertextuality and Hypertextuality in Recorded Popular Music', a valuable work in that it proposes a model for understanding intertextual practices within popular music. This will be discussed further in chapter four, since it has particular relevance to the model for understanding intertextuality which will be offered therein. Additionally, chapter four will also offer a detailed definition of intertextual practices within hip hop (within the section entitled 'The Break'). However, since this definition forms the starting point for the construction of the interpretive model, to introduce it here would be somewhat pre-emptive. Until that point, our understanding of intertextuality will be in Genette's sense of the term: the quotation of, or allusion to, another (musical) text within a hip hop track.

Finally within this chapter, a detailed discussion must be included of the area of literary theory which has the greatest impact on this thesis, since it forms the basis of the interpretive model which will be formulated: reception theory.

Reception theory first emerged in the 1970s, with its chief proponents being Hans Robert Jauss and Wolfgang Iser, who were influenced by schools such as those of Russian Formalism and Prague structuralism. Iser proposed that literature needed to be understood as having two poles: 'the artistic and the esthetic: the artistic refers to the text created by the author, and the esthetic to the realisation accomplished by the reader.'²² The artistic pole is, of course, that which has traditionally been associated with literary criticism. The aim of reception theory was to attempt to understand literature by studying the other, esthetic pole. This approach was deemed necessary because, as Iser has noted: 'The convergence of text and reader brings the literary work into existence'.²³ That is, the unread text only ever has a potential existence. It is by means of the reader's interaction with the text that that potential is realised. Of course, as we have seen, this focus on reception rather than production was a widespread idea within literary studies of the time.

While the concern for a reception-based understanding of literature was shared by both Jauss and Iser, there was one notable difference between the approaches of the two. Jauss was primarily concerned with literary history, and so his work tended towards broader social and historical issues. Iser, on the other hand, directed his investigations towards the specific interaction between reader and text. This difference is neatly summed up by Robert C. Holub: 'If one thinks of Jauss as dealing with the macrocosm of reception, then Iser occupies himself with the microcosm of response.'²⁴

Whilst one of the aims of this thesis is to examine the changes in hip hop over our time period (perhaps suggesting that we follow Jauss more closely), it must be remembered that our principle intention is a detailed depiction of how hip hop works, and so it is Iser's approach that will be primarily adopted here. In particular, Iser's concept of the 'implied reader' will be called upon in our attempt to explain how hip hop works. The implied reader has been defined as incorporating 'both the prestructuring of the potential meaning by the text, and the reader's actualisation of this potential through the reading process – which will vary historically from one age to another – and not to a typology of possible readers.'²⁵ That is, the implied reader refers to the meaning-creating conjunction of text and reader. However, before going any further, we should discuss some of the potential stumbling-blocks of Iser's version of reception theory.

One of the most strident voices heard within reception theory's own reception was that of Stanley Fish. Like Iser, Fish favours an approach to literature based on readers being productive of meaning. Where the two differ is in the degree of subjectivity involved in this act. Whereas Iser, as we have seen, contends that it is the interaction of text and reader which is responsible for meaning creation, Fish places the reader firmly at the centre of his work. All acts of reading, he argues, are interpretive acts, and it is these acts that are productive of the text: 'intention, form, and the shape of the reader's experience are simply different ways of referring to (different perspectives on) the same interpretive act.'²⁶

Fish's counter-argument was that Iser's implied reader was itself a subjective assumption – an interpretive act on Iser's part which gives rise to a theory lacking 'the independent given which serves to ground the interpretive process.'²⁷ In fact, examples of this subjectivity can be found in Iser's work. For example, when Iser claims in his analysis of James Joyce's *Ulysses* that: 'The reader...will still be continually tempted to try to establish some consistency in all the signs, patterns, fragments, etc.',²⁸ it

could be argued that Iser's reader is, in fact, Iser himself, projecting his own need to establish consistency in *Ulysses* onto his unnamed, virtual 'reader'

However, the importance Fish places on the interpretive act means that his argument can be seen as ultimately self-defeating. In these terms, both his own approach in general and his specific response to Iser must also be understood as being subjective interpretive acts, and so they too must lack that 'independent given'. Whilst possessing some redeeming features – it is vital that the critical writer be aware that they are bringing their own set of culturally-encoded conceptions into play in textual analysis – Fish's reliance on subjectivity necessarily questions the validity of all interpretive acts and so places all attempts at understanding cultural artefacts in a kind of relativistic 'soup'.

A second response to Iser's work came from a group of Marxist theorists who argued that a theory based on reception must be socially grounded. If we are to understand literature in terms of readers, it was claimed, then those readers must be real. Instead of the hermeneutic approach involved in Iser's implied reader, these theorists advocated an empirical approach, involving the interviewing of multiple readers and the subsequent collation of the information gathered. The aim of this approach was to avoid the abstractions involved in the concept of the implied reader, and to provide an objective understanding of reception in real readers.

However, it can readily be seen that the empirical approach is unsuitable for the approach we are taking here. This is because it is solidly anchored in the present. That is, only living readers can be interviewed during the research process, and while this can, over time, gain an historical aspect, there is no way of ever accessing the opinions of past readers. Of course, no approach can ever fully realise this aim, but with Iser's implied reader we can at least make the attempt. Through our knowledge of history (albeit, as Fish would no doubt point out, only a history reconstructed through our interpretations of texts), we can construct a reasonable facsimile of the historical reader's 'horizon of expectations' (Jauss' term for that which the reader brings to the text), and so elicit a likely set of possible responses.

If we are to adopt Iser's model, then, we must accept that the implied reader is an abstraction and that it can lead to an interpretation that is nothing other than the author's own, masquerading as a more general reception. Furthermore, in accepting the limits of our chosen theoretical approach, we must, through this awareness, work to limit their effect. As will be seen, the model used for understanding hip hop in this thesis attempts to do this by allowing for a set of 'implied listener' positions brought about through the juxtaposition of both textual and reception possibilities. While this set of implied reader positions is necessarily limited, it will enable an understanding that any textual interpretation is not definitive and that others are possible, while simultaneously pointing towards the appropriateness of any interpretation. In this way, it is hoped that the shortcomings of Iser's approach will be avoided.

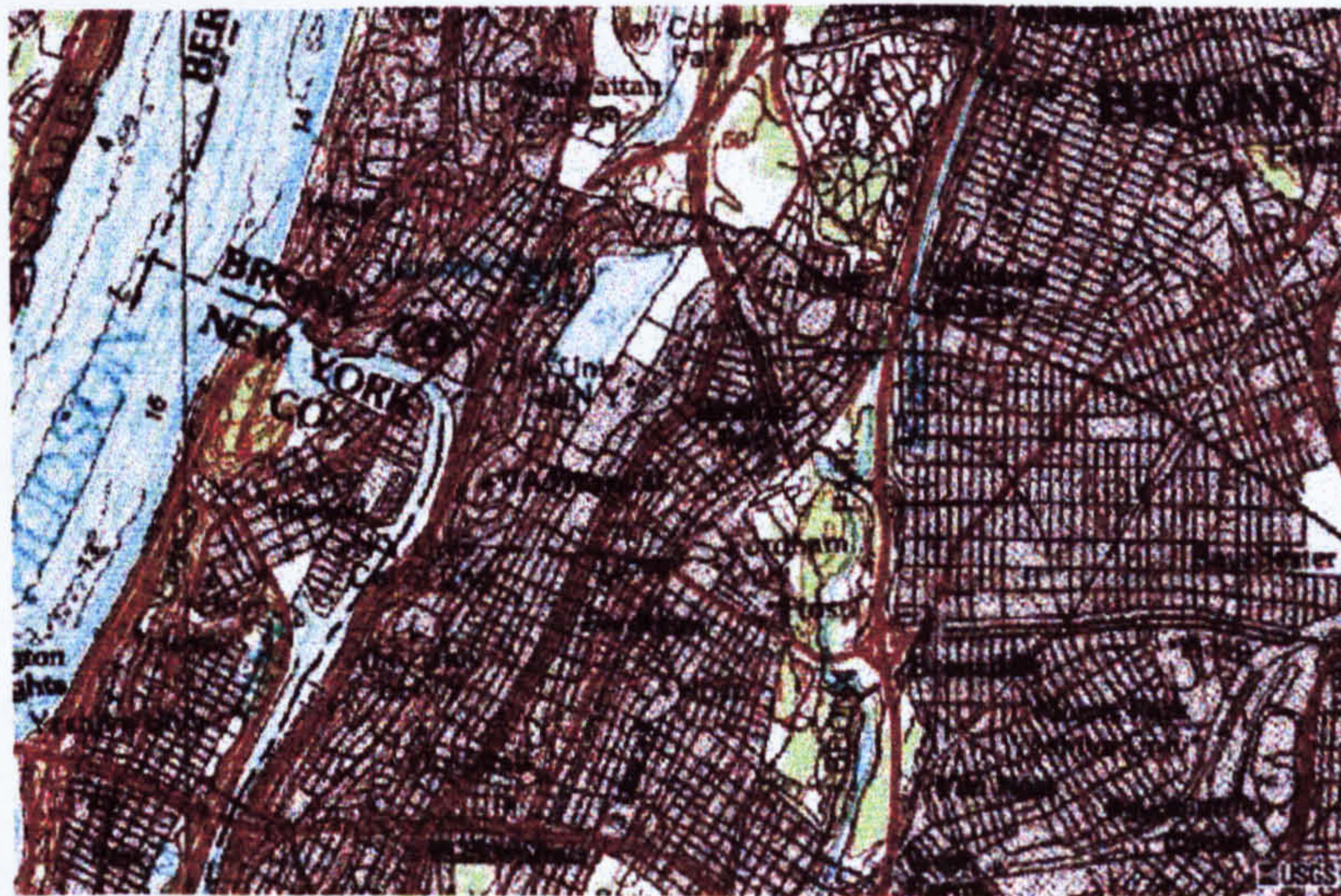
2. ‘Going Way Back’: An Historical Overview 1973-1991

This chapter, along with the one that follows, will be concerned with the development of a periodised understanding of the development of hip hop throughout the timescale of this thesis. While the next chapter will detail the musical and technical differences between the four ‘production eras’ being proposed here, the current one will provide some context for these changes. To that end, what is offered here is an overview of the development of hip hop from its beginnings until the end of our timescale, with the opening section covering the years before hip hop was commercially recorded, the second section covering the time of the first two production eras, and the remaining two sections covering the third and fourth production eras, respectively. Subsequently, the musical differences between the production eras will be demonstrated in a more concrete fashion, in the analyses of chapter five.

The birth of hip hop¹

*Now way back in the days when hip hop began
with Coke La Rock, Kool Herc and then Bam
B-boys ran to the latest jam
but when it got shot up they went home and said “damn!”
There’s got to be a better way to hear our music everyday,
B-boys getting blown away but coming outside anyway –
they try to get outside and see the park,
power from a streetlight made the place dark –
but, yo, they didn’t care, they turned it out,
I know a few understand what I’m talking about.
Remember Bronx River, rolling thick
with Kool DJ Red Alert and Chuck Chillout on the mix
while Afrika Islam was rocking the jams
and on the other side of town was a kid named Flash...*

Boogie Down Productions ‘South Bronx’^{*2}



^{*} Since they don’t feature in the text: Chuck Chillout & Red Alert were early hip hop radio DJs; Afrika Islam was a DJ, also known as the son of Bambaataa.

Hip hop has always had an acute awareness of its own history. The opening quotation, above, is only one example of a hip hop track celebrating the early days of the genre*, but it is useful here in that it introduces us to many of the prime movers of those early days and in that it is geographically specific.³ KRS One, the group's MC, affirms throughout the track that the South Bronx is *the* home of hip hop. However, KRS One's concerns are celebratory, rather than historical, and if any single location can be cited as the place where hip hop began, then it is 1520 Sedgewick Avenue, West Bronx. Sedgewick Avenue can be made out in the map above. It is the road immediately west of the lake slightly north-northwest of the centre of the picture.

It was at this address that Kool DJ Herc, usually cited as the first hip hop DJ, made his debut, in 1973. Although this first appearance was barely public at all – Herc was playing at a party organised by his sister, held in their own apartment block – it was not long before he was playing regularly at local parties. As he gained experience, Herc began to analyse his performances and the crowd's reaction. Noticing that the most enthusiastic dancing took place during the instrumental breaks prevalent in many of the funk records he was playing, Herc came up with the idea of playing only these sections, back-to-back (using two turntables alternately), thus extending the high point. Herc called it the 'merry-go-round'. The name, perhaps unsurprisingly, didn't stick. The idea did.

While Herc's merry-go-round proved popular, it was not the main reason behind his success at the time. At many parties two or more DJs would be present, each with their own equipment, and would try to outdo each other to win over the crowd. Herc's Jamaican upbringing had familiarised him with the huge, bass-heavy sound systems used by the island's DJs, and using this as a model for his 'Herculoids'† set-up, he was simply louder than the competition: 'he'd turn the volume all the way up till the whole system was just shaking. He used to embarrass me quite a bit with that'⁴ remembers one contemporary.

Another Jamaican legacy was Herc's practice of further 'hyping' the crowd, i.e. raising the excitement level of the party by calling out simple phrases ('rock the house', 'yes yes y'all, and you don't stop') during his set. The merry-go-round demanded more of his attention, though, and these basic microphone duties were taken over by Herc's friend Coke La Rock.

The basic ingredients of hip hop had come together, and it was not long before other DJs began to incorporate Herc's blueprint into their own performances, adding their own touches to the developing sound of 'break music', as it was becoming known.

If Kool DJ Herc's strength was sheer volume, Afrika Bambaataa's was eclecticism. While Herc used the breaks from funk records such as the Jimmy Castor Bunch's 'It's Just Begun', Baby Huey's 'Listen To Me' and 'Apache' by Michael Viner's Incredible Bongo Band, Bambaataa would incorporate breaks from rock tracks such as Grand Funk Railroad‡'s 'Inside Looking Out', The Beatles' 'Sgt. Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band' or jazz records such as Bob James' 'Take Me To The Mardi Gras'.⁵ Bambaataa's catholic tastes earned him the title 'Master of Records' and broadened the sonic palette of the burgeoning genre. In particular, Bambaataa's use of funk, rock and jazz (and, indeed, 1960s pop, Afro-beat and even TV theme tunes) marked the new music as an alternative to the concurrently

* See also: MC Shan's 'Living In The World Of Hip Hop' or Just-Ice's 'Going Way Back'.

† Sometimes reported as 'Herculords'.

‡ A rock band, despite the name.

developing sound of disco. Bambaataa has stated that '[t]he Bronx wasn't really into radio music no more. It was an anti-disco movement.'⁶

Despite this, it would be a technology first used by disco DJs which would be incorporated into the mix by the third of the major early hip hop DJs, Grandmaster Flash. Like Bambaataa, Flash had been influenced by Herc's merry-go-round, but found it lacking in one crucial element: flow. Put simply, Flash thought that Herc 'really slipped up. With the monstrous power he had he couldn't mix too well.'⁷

Herc mixed by sight. Rarely using headphones, he would simply locate the break he wanted by looking at the record – the break could be seen as a darker band of vinyl within the track – and while it was possible to link breaks together using this method, simply by starting the second record from the beginning of the break as the break on the first record ended, it was almost impossible not to miss a beat at the point of switching from one to the other. The inevitable result was that 'people would be dancing then they had to stop. So it was unity, disarray, unity, disarray...'⁸

Flash, however, knew that disco DJs were blending records together – as one track neared its conclusion the next would be introduced with the beats already matched, making for a smooth transition. Getting to know Pete DJ Jones, Flash was granted access to his equipment and discovered that the blend was made possible by the DJ's being able to hear a record without it being played out to the crowd. His schooling in electronics allowed Flash to recognise the crucial part as being a single-pole, double-throw switch – that is, a three-position switch which is 'off' when centred and has two independent 'on' settings to the left and right. By wiring one of these switches into a separate channel which led to the headphones but not the speakers, Flash could listen to either turntable regardless of which was playing out. This addition to his equipment allowed Flash to combine Herc's idea of playing only the break sections with the seamless blends of the disco DJs.

With the technology in place, Flash began to work on what he would call his 'quick-mix theory', reducing the time each record would play out before cutting to the next. Using two copies of the same record, even a single bar could, in theory, be extended for as long as the DJ could remain at the turntables. This could be achieved by repeatedly manually rewinding the copy not being heard by the audience to the beginning of the bar within the time taken for the other copy to play through, then simultaneously throwing the switch and releasing the rewind record in time with the music.

Between them, Herc, Bambaataa and Flash had put the musical foundations of hip hop in place: the use of breaks, the eclecticism of sources and the ability to mix quickly and accurately between records. Until around 1977/78, this combination was enough to keep the DJs in the spotlight. Then came the MCs.

As noted above, MCing began with short phrases designed to 'hype' (i.e. stimulate) the crowd, but as MC Grandmaster Caz explains, 'it started getting competitive...you hear somebody and then you would try and outdo them, come a little different.'⁹ This element of competition can be traced backwards through Jamaican toasting, to 1950s radio 'jocks' such as Dr Daddy-O and Douglas 'Jocko' Henderson and thence back into a broad history of African-American vernacular tradition.^{*} In the Bronx of the mid-1970s, it began to change the role of the MC from crowd-hyper and general announcer to that of

^{*} For a fuller discussion of this, see Toop (2000), chapter 3.

performer in his or her own right.* As well as Coke La Rock, other names started to come to the fore, with Cowboy, Melle Mel and Lovebug Starski being amongst the first. By 1978, the first hip hop groups – consisting of both DJs and MCs – were beginning to come together. Amongst the first of these were the L Brothers (DJs Mean Gene, Cordie-O and Grand Wizard Theodore with MCs Kevie Kev, Robbie Rob and Busy Bee) and the Brothers Disco (DJ Breakout, DJ Baron and the Funky Four MCs: Raheim, Sha Rock, KK Rockwell and Keith Keith). Other groups were soon formed in their wake, including the Treacherous Three (Kool Moe Dee, Special K and LA Sunshine) and the Cold Crush Brothers (the aforementioned Grandmaster Caz, Easy AD, JDL and the Almighty Kay-Gee, along with their DJs Charlie Chase and Tony Tone).

The presence of groups brought more overall coherence to MCing. Whereas the first MCs had largely stuck to hyping the crowd, interspersing shout outs to the DJ and a few bars of more structured rhyming now and again, groups began to develop regular routines. These would involve the MCs bouncing rhymes back and forth between them, or sections rhymed in unison.

As the 1970s drew to a close, these changes would signal the end of the first era of hip hop. As the MCs became the focal point over the DJs, so hip hop performances came to resemble not so much parties (where the crowd dances) as shows (where the crowd watches). Partly as a result of this and partly because of the genre's growing popularity, community organised (and locally held) block parties gave way to privately organised club nights at venues such as the T-Connection, the Savoy Manor Ballroom and the Audobon Ballroom. Hip hop, in short, was becoming commercial, and it would not be long before independent, locally-owned record companies would begin issuing a recorded version of the new music.

Early recordings

Before 1979, the only recordings of hip hop were cassette tapes of live shows (sometimes bootlegs, but often made and circulated by the performers themselves). According to Lil Rodney Cee (half of early MC group Double Trouble), it was exposure to these tapes that introduced music industry veteran Sylvia Robinson to the new style of music coming out of the Bronx. Robinson, who had begun as an artist (finding fame with guitarist Mickey Baker as Mickey & Sylvia), had been running a roster of record labels since 1968. Deciding that hip hop had potential, Robinson formed a new label, Sugar Hill, which released its first record in October 1979. 'Rapper's Delight' by the Sugarhill Gang was an instant success, reaching #36 on the national charts.¹⁰

Technically, however, 'Rapper's Delight' was not the first rap record. Veteran funk band Fatback had released their 'King Tim III (Personality Jock)', featuring MCing from the eponymous Tim, one month earlier.¹¹ Three reasons, however, make the Sugar Hill record the more important: i) 'Rapper's Delight' was the bigger hit; ii) it was the record that first surprised and then spurred into recording action the Bronx DJs and MCs; iii) it was more akin to Bronx style hip hop than 'King Tim III'. Further explanation is called for here.

Both records owed their varying degrees of success, in a large part, to the novelty factor – no records meant no radio play, so MCing had previously only been heard in and around the Bronx.

* Most early MCs were men, but female MCs were not unknown.

However, it was the music that made the difference between the two. Fatback's music was original, if somewhat formulaic, funk. But the Sugarhill Gang's music was based on 'Good Times' by Chic.¹² 'Good Times' had been an extremely popular record that summer, and was instantly recognisable. This familiarity, combined with the novelty of MCing (and, indeed, the appeal of intertextuality) proved irresistible to the record buying public.

This same combination was also what made 'Rapper's Delight' sound like earlier hip hop: Fatback's music was not an extension of a pre-existing break, whereas the Sugarhill Gang's obviously was. This, together with the MCing, meant that it sounded similar to what was being heard in the Bronx.

So similar, in fact, that the Bronx-based hip hop artists felt they had been caught out. Grandmaster Flash recalled: 'Why don't I know of this group called The Sugarhill who? The Sugarhill Gang. They don't know of me and I don't know them. Who are these people? They got a record on the radio and that shit was haunting me because I felt we should have been the first to do it.'¹³ There was, in fact, a simple reason why Flash and his contemporaries had never heard of the Sugarhill Gang, and that was because they were manufactured by Sylvia Robinson. The Gang comprised Big Bank Hank, a nightclub bouncer, Wonder Mike, a school friend of Robinson's son, and Master Gee, an unknown aspiring MC from New Jersey. Maybe the pioneers of hip hop had not realised the commercial potential of their music, but when presented with evidence – and from perceived outsiders – they made sure they were quick to be signed to the new labels that sprang up following the success of 'Rapper's Delight'.

Before the end of 1979, records by Bronx-based artists would be released on labels such as Winley, Reflection, Brass and Enjoy*, amongst others. At the year's close, major label Mercury Records earned a seasonal hit with Kurtis Blow's 'Christmas Rappin''.¹⁴ Although Kool DJ Herc missed out, his contribution having come some five years earlier, both Grandmaster Flash and Afrika Bambaataa released several singles in the months that followed 'Rapper's Delight'. The newly-popular MCs were also represented, both in groups (Treacherous Three, Funky 4+1) and as soloists (Spoonie Gee, Lady B).

In fact, the MCs were better represented than the DJs. As noted above, the MCs had become the central figures in hip hop performances, so when records began to be released, it was the MCs who were being featured. Records by Grandmaster Flash & The Furious Five and Afrika Bambaataa & The Cosmic (later Soul Sonic) Force actually featured little, if any, input from either of the DJs. Record labels preferred to use in-house studio bands to recreate the breaks that were popular with the hip hop DJs – the entrepreneurs behind the labels were generally of Sylvia Robinson's generation, and this was simply the way they were used to working.

Once again, 'Rapper's Delight' had set the precedent. The instrumental accompaniment to the MCs on the track might have been Chic's 'Good Times', but it was performed by the Sugar Hill house band, Wood, Brass & Steel. Their sound, along with that of the unnamed Enjoy house band fronted by drummer Pumpkin, was musically dominant in the early years of recorded hip hop. Or, to paraphrase, all the records sounded pretty much the same.

Generally, a track would start with the band quickly establishing the central, repeated, riff. This usually featured prominent funky bass and drum parts (often with additional percussion), which were

* Enjoy had actually been in existence since 1963, but rapidly changed its output to hip hop with Sugar Hill's success.

frequently, but not always, accompanied by guitar and/or keyboards. The MCs would quickly join in, deliver their rhymes for several minutes and the record would end with everything fading out together. Sometimes there would be a few instrumental bars to break up the raps, sometimes not. The preferred format for releases was the 12" single (introduced in the mid-1970s to cater for disco DJs), a format which allowed for tracks to be longer than the three or four minutes a 7" allowed. Most hip hop artists took advantage of this. The average length of early hip hop tracks is around six or seven minutes, with 'Rapper's Delight' (14:31), Funky 4+1's 'Rappin' And Rocking The House' (16:00) and Sicle Cell & Rhapazooty's 'Rhapazooty In Blue' (16:08), in particular, stretching the format, the artists and probably the listeners to their respective limits.

There were few exceptions to this pattern through 1980 and 1981, and this formulaic approach meant that the nascent genre was in danger of becoming uninteresting. This led to some producers introducing gimmicks to make their record stand out: the use of kazoos on Grandmaster Flash & The Furious Five's 'Freedom' is an example of this, as is the existence of 'Check It Out' by Wayne & Charlie (The Rapping Dummy) (a hip hop Archie Andrews?).¹⁵ One record that genuinely did stand out was 'The Adventures Of Grandmaster Flash On The Wheels Of Steel', an attempt to recreate the feel of a DJ's set at a party.¹⁶ Of this track, more in later chapters.

In 1982 and 1983 the sound of recorded hip hop changed. For some time, DJs had been using primitive drum machines, known as 'beat boxes', to augment their sets. In 1982 they began to appear on records. Once again Sugar Hill and Grandmaster Flash would be amongst the first, with 'Flash To The Beat', but the label's fortunes were changing.¹⁷ Largely failing to adapt to the changing sound of hip hop (despite Flash & the Five's 'The Message' being one of the bigger hits of 1982), Sugar Hill gradually became known less for its current output and more for its highly regarded back catalogue.¹⁸ In its place as hip hop's leading record label came Tommy Boy, a label which embraced the newer, more electronic sounding hip hop. And if Sugar Hill could boast about having signed hip hop's prime technical innovator, Grandmaster Flash, Tommy Boy had the 'Master of Records'[†], Afrika Bambaataa.

Using drum machines and synthesisers, Bambaataa recreated elements from two tracks he often used in his DJing sets, Kraftwerk's 'Trans-Europe Express' and Babe Ruth's 'The Mexican', and combined them to form the basis of 'Planet Rock', the record that would largely define the new sound of hip hop.¹⁹ Although the older sound would still be heard until around 1984, its popularity waned with listeners to the genre seeming to prefer the many electronic hip hop records released in the wake of 'Planet Rock'. The Fearless Four's 'Rockin' It'; Grandmixer D.ST & The Infinity Rappers' 'The Grandmixer Cuts It Up' and Double Dee & Steinski's officially unreleased but widely available (at the time) 'Lesson 1 (The Payoff Mix)' all exemplify the newer sound.²⁰

The latter track is also noteworthy in its heavy use of samples. Alongside drum machines and synthesisers, samplers were another piece of new technology taken up by hip hop producers. They quickly proved to be versatile tools, able to create complex sound collages like Double Dee & Steinski's, as well as simpler loops, as in Dimples D's 'Sucker DJs (I Will Survive)', or to take single

* Archie Andrews – famous 'radio ventriloquist' of the 1950s.

† See page 16, above.

sounds and play them back at multiple pitches simultaneously, as with the orchestral ‘hits’ in ‘Planet Rock’.²¹

Despite these musical innovations, the style of MCing had altered little since the first hip hop records. Even when rapping about social deprivation (as in ‘The Message’), MCs’ vocal style had been virtually unchanged – essentially highly accented speech, approaching singing. (For a fuller discussion of styles of MCing, see the next chapter). However, the end of 1983 saw the release of what was to be the first record in (another) new wave of hip hop. Run DMC’s double A-sided single ‘It’s Like That/Sucker MCs (Krush-Groove 1)’ sounded like no hip hop record before it.²² Dispensing with studio musicians and synthesisers, Run DMC primarily employed a drum machine and – importantly – the sound of a DJ scratching to create their tracks. Additionally, the style of MCing was also different from earlier hip hop. Musician and writer Sasha Frere-Jones recalls hearing ‘Sucker MCs’: ‘What’s up? Where’s the rest of the music? It’s just, like, one crazy drum machine beat and these guys yelling. It’s not really a party tune, it has no hook’.²³

While the original sound of recorded hip hop would still be heard (albeit less and less) for a little while and the electronic sound would become more and more distanced from its hip hop roots, Run DMC’s sparse, harsh record with its aggressive vocal style would prove the catalyst for change.

Hip hop in the mid-1980s

As shockingly new as it sounded in 1983, Run DMC’s debut single was, of course, not without its influences. In particular, the five records released on French-owned but New York based label Celluloid (including the aforementioned ‘The Grandmixer Cuts It Up’) all bore the syncopated drum machine patterns favoured by Run DMC. The new sound differed in that all other instrumentation was stripped away, leaving just the sound of the drum machine and that of the DJ scratching. Musically, then, Run DMC’s sound was a development of, rather than a departure from, what had gone before. Lyrically, while the delivery was different, the MCing harked back to previous raps in its content – references to ‘champagne, caviar and bubble bath’ in ‘Sucker MCs’ revisited the theme of an affluent lifestyle which had been heard on hip hop records since the release of ‘Rapper’s Delight’. The differences, however, outweighed these similarities, in part due to two extramusical factors.

Firstly, Run DMC’s look contrasted with that of earlier hip hop acts. Influenced, no doubt, by disco glitz and the cartoonish costumes of 1970s funk act Parliament, hip hop artists had tended to dress ‘up’ for their appearances and photo shoots. This trend probably reached its climax with Tommy Boy signees Jonzun Crew, who resembled nothing so much as three camp rodeo cowboys and King Louis XVI of France in shades. Run DMC, on the other hand, dressed ‘street’ – blue jeans and T-shirts, or track suits (the preferred clothing of breakdancers), with the only nod to costumery being their matching fedora hats.

Secondly, Run DMC were at the forefront of a new generation of hip hop acts – almost literally, in fact, since Run had appeared at twelve years old, billed as the ‘Son of Kurtis Blow’ (admittedly, the first generation of hip hop artists were far from old themselves, being mostly in their mid- to late-twenties by around 1983/84). Artists such as Run DMC, LL Cool J and Schoolly D were all in their

teens when they started releasing records. They had been the young fans of hip hop, and their music reflected their teenage passion for the music.

The hard, drum machine-based style would dominate throughout 1984 and 1985, although the minimalism of early Run DMC would be expanded upon, allowing for some variety. Tracks such as T La Rock & Jazzy Jay's 'It's Yours' and Schoolly D's 'P.S.K. "What Does It Mean"?' varied the formula little: heavy drum machine beats, plenty of scratching and in-your-face MCing.²⁴ The presence of scratching is important, since it represents DJs finding their place in recorded hip hop. Previously, as we have noted, DJing (i.e. the actual physical manipulation of records) had been little heard in recorded hip hop. Now it was in almost every track, and one trend within the new sound was the 'DJ record'. Old school survivor Kurtis Blow's 'AJ Scratch' and Marley Marl featuring MC Shan's 'Marley Marl Scratch' both exemplify the DJ record, in which the MC celebrates the skills of the DJ, which are then demonstrated in a 'scratch solo'.²⁵

These two tracks also exemplify another rising trend of the time: the answer record. The idea of releasing a record as a reply to another record was nothing new in popular music – in 1958 the Miracles responded to the Silhouettes 'Get A Job' with 'Got A Job'; and the Beatles' 'I Want To Hold Your Hand' inspired two answers in the Beatles 'I'll Let You Hold My Hand' and the Beatlettes 'Yes, You Can Hold My Hand'.²⁶ However, the concept proved to be one that hip hop producers found irresistible. One of the first hip hop answer records was the aforementioned 'Sucker DJs', which answered Run DMC 'Sucker MCs'. Marley Marl had produced 'Sucker DJs', and he would go on to produce Roxanne Shante's 'Roxanne's Revenge', the first in a prolonged chain of answers (and answers to answers) to UTFO's 'Roxanne Roxanne'.²⁷ Marley Marl, on his way to becoming one of hip hop's leading producer/DJs, would go on to be involved in several other vinyl battles (of which more later).

As a rule, the harder sound of hip hop musically in the mid-1980s was accompanied by the more aggressive style of MCing introduced by Run DMC. However, the biggest single of 1985, Doug E. Fresh & The Get Fresh Crew's double A-sided 'The Show/La Di Da Di' featured the unique flow of MC Ricky D.²⁸ Slick Rick (as he was to become known), was possessed of a strange, feminine, almost yawn-like vocal style, totally dissimilar to that of his contemporaries. While there had been distinctive MCs before (Melle Mel of the Furious Five, for instance, was instantly recognisable), Slick Rick showed that there was potential, within hip hop, for a much greater variety of MCing styles. Another noteworthy feature of 'The Show/La Di Da Di' was Doug E. Fresh's beatboxing.

The practice of vocally impersonating a drum machine had begun appearing on hip hop records not long after the drum machines themselves. Doug E. Fresh was amongst the first wave of 'beatboxers', along with Darren 'Buffy, the Human Beat Box' Robinson of the Disco Three (who later changed their name to the Fat Boys). Never in danger of becoming a flood, a steady trickle of human beatbox records were released in the mid- to late-1980s, with (in particular) 'La Di Da Di' and the records of Biz Markie confirming the technique's place as a small, but important, part of hip hop history. While beatboxing is usually absent from critical discussions of hip hop, it does raise interesting questions. These will be dealt with in the next chapter, wherein a fuller description of the technique will also be found.

* This is not a recognised term within hip hop, but rather a description: it can be thought of as the hip hop equivalent of the guitar solo in heavy rock music.

Other changes, less directly concerned with the music, were taking place at the same time. As noted above, the 12" single had been the most important format for early hip hop releases. There had been hip hop albums, but they were few in number. Once again, Run DMC provided the catalyst for change. Their eponymously named debut album, released in May 1984, would be certified gold before the end of the year, proving the existence of a previously unknown market for hip hop albums. While singles remained important, there was a marked increase in the number of hip hop albums being released from 1985 onwards.

The shift towards albums was accompanied by another change amongst the record labels. Tommy Boy proved more resilient to change than Sugar Hill (who filed for bankruptcy in 1985), but they would not repeat their early success for some time. Instead, hip hop album success was enjoyed by labels such as Profile (mainly due to Run DMC) and Def Jam.

Although its most successful years were still ahead of it, Def Jam quickly made a vital contribution to the history of hip hop. Having independently released seven singles through 1984, the label struck a deal with 'the biggest record label in the world'²⁹, Columbia Records, whereby the major label would handle pressing and distribution, with creative control remaining with Def Jam. A similar deal would be struck between Marley Marl's influential Cold Chillin' label and corporate giant Warner Music. In the years that followed, this type of arrangement would prove to be the model for much major label involvement in hip hop, although the degree of independence of the smaller labels would vary, with some being wholly owned by their 'partners'.

LL Cool J's debut album *Radio* would be the first big hit for the Def Jam/Columbia partnership.³⁰ The inclusion of two ballads amongst the harder hip hop on the LP is both a reflection of the widening variety of styles within hip hop and a display of the strengthening commercial awareness of hip hop labels. Eventually (in 1988), *Radio* would achieve platinum sales status (one million copies sold), but by the time that happened, another musical shift would have taken place in hip hop.

The hard drum machine-based sound was showing signs of giving way to a more 'organic' style. In 1986 Run DMC released their single 'Peter Piper', in which the drum machine beat was heavily augmented by the group's DJ, Jam Master Jay, cutting between two copies of Bob James' 'Take Me To The Mardi Gras' (and so harking back to hip hop's pre-recording era).³¹ However, for the most part, the more 'organic' sound was due to a change in the way samplers were used.

As noted above, samplers had been used in hip hop production for some time, but through 1984 and 1985, they had been primarily used to add 'colour' – instrumental hits or short vocal samples – while the track was driven by a drum machine. By 1986, hip hop producers were increasingly using sampled drum loops alongside the drum machine patterns. Tracks such as 'Eric B Is President' by Eric B. & Rakim and Boogie Down Productions' 'South Bronx' are both typical of this style of production (both also use samples from James Brown tracks, a tactic strongly favoured by hip hop producers throughout the mid- to late-1980s).³²

'South Bronx' was the second shot in one of hip hop's most celebrated vinyl battles. The affirmation of hip hop's origins was released in response to MC Shan's 'The Bridge' (produced by Marley Marl), which KRS One had interpreted as claiming that the Queensbridge Housing Projects had been the birthplace of hip hop. MC Shan hit back with 'Kill That Noise' ('you can come all alone or

bring all your boys, but if you knew what I knew you'd kill that noise'), before Boogie Down Productions had the final word with 'The Bridge Is Over' ('what's the matter with your MC, Marley Marl, don't you know that he's out of touch? What's the matter with your DJ, MC Shan? On the wheels of steel Marley sucks').³³ Ultimately, the 'Bridge Wars' (as this series of records is often referred to) were to prove beneficial to both Boogie Down Productions and Marley Marl, with both becoming acts of major importance in the 1986/1987 period.

While MC Shan's claim that hip hop originated in Queensbridge was erroneous, there is no doubt that the borough played an important role in hip hop's development through the 1980s. As well as Marley Marl and his associates, Queensbridge was home to LL Cool J, Eric B. & Rakim and the Simmons brothers – Run (of Run DMC) and Rush (Def Jam's business brain Russell Simmons). The Bronx and Queensbridge remained at the heart of hip hop, but the genre's increasing regional radio presence was inspiring artists from further afield:³⁴ Schoolly D, along with MCs such as Steady B and Cool C, called Philadelphia home; New Jersey, as well as being the assembly point of the Sugarhill Gang, had provided Word Of Mouth, who had a major hit with 'King Kut' in 1985; and from Long Island, New York, a group calling themselves Spectrum City had released a single called 'Lies' in 1984.³⁵

While it ought to be pointed out that the Spectrum City single was a failure, it remains noteworthy in that it was the debut release from the next genre-redefining group to hit hip hop. One name-change and three years later, Public Enemy would be at the heart of the next set of stylistic changes within the genre.

Hip hop's 'golden age'

By 1987, Def Jam was enjoying untold success. LL Cool J's second album, *Bigger And Deffer*, quickly outsold his debut, becoming the labels second platinum album of the year.³⁶ The first, released in 1986, was the Beastie Boys' *Licensed To Ill*, which would eventually register eight-times platinum sales.³⁷ The phenomenal sales of the Beastie Boys' album were partially due, no doubt, to the fact that as the first successful white rap group, they played a large part in crossing hip hop over to a white audience.

Although James Brown samples were rapidly becoming almost *de rigueur* in hip hop, much of the Beastie Boys music reflected another developing sound of the time: rock hip hop. In fact, heavy metal sounds had been appearing in hip hop records since Run DMC's 1984 single 'Rock Box'.³⁸ However, where 'Rock Box' had used generic 'metal guitar' played for the track by guitarist Eddie Martinez and tracks such as LL Cool J's 'Rock The Bells' had had distorted guitar hits scratched in, newer rock hip hop tracks were based around specific (and often recognisable) samples.³⁹ The riff from AC/DC's 'Back In Black' appeared in both the Beastie Boys' 'Rock Hard' and Boogie Down Productions' 'Dope Beat', and Run DMC, forsaking their sampler, resurrected the career of Aerosmith by collaborating with them on a version of the latter's 'Walk This Way' ('traditional' instruments and chorus vocals by Aerosmith, scratching and verse vocals by Run DMC).⁴⁰ But while a young white

* The reasons for the non-inclusion of West Coast hip hop can be found in the introduction.

audience may have been initially attracted by rock/rap crossover records such as these, they rapidly embraced hip hop as a whole.

Def Jam was one of the major beneficiaries of hip hop's increases commercial success, but in the autumn of 1987 the label hit a potential stumbling-block when, as a result of an argument over unpaid royalties, the Beastie Boys quit. However, their place as Def Jam's biggest group would soon be taken by the support act on their tour of that year, Public Enemy.

Over the coming months, Public Enemy would develop a more complex, layered sound that was to be hugely influential in hip hop. The signs of their sonic invention were present in their first release for Def Jam, the single 'Public Enemy #1'.⁴¹ Typically for the time, 'Public Enemy #1' relied heavily on a sample taken from a James Brown record. However, 'Blow Your Head' was an atypical James Brown production, featuring, as it did, a buzzing, squelchy analogue synth sound.⁴² It was this sound that was at the heart of 'Public Enemy #1', looped and extended to create a startlingly original hip hop track.

'Public Enemy #1' was followed by a debut album, *Yo! Bum Rush The Show*, which featured the developing Public Enemy sound, but it would be on their second album, *It Takes A Nation Of Millions To Hold Us Back*, that the group would perfect their art.⁴³ The overriding sound of the album was that of multiple looped samples playing simultaneously along with drum machine rhythms, shorter samples (instrumental stabs and small vocal excerpts), scratching from DJ Terminator X and the contrasting vocal styles of MCs Chuck D and Flavor Flav. Flavor Flav was the hype man, urging Chuck D on and providing light relief from the latter's complex and often overtly political rhymes. Representing a benchmark for recorded hip hop, *It Takes A Nation Of Millions To Hold Us Back* is, to this day, frequently hailed as hip hop's greatest album.

But it was only one of many landmark releases in 1988. Several artists released albums which would go on to be labelled 'classics', leading to this period often being understood as a 'golden age' for hip hop.* Amongst these were Slick Rick's *The Great Adventures Of Slick Rick*, Big Daddy Kane's *Long Live The Kane*, EPMD's *Strictly Business* and the Ultramagnetic MC's' *Critical Beatdown*.⁴⁴ While each of these albums had its own identity, all reflected the growing use of samples in hip hop production. Indeed, the two facts are linked. A digital sampler is, by virtue of its capability to reproduce any sound which can be fed into it, a much more versatile tool than a drum machine, and its increasing importance in hip hop meant that producers were working with a broader sonic palette.

Like production, DJing and MCing were also developing. DJs were introducing a wider repertoire of scratches to their craft, altering the sound of their source records through techniques such as the 'transformer scratch' and 'punch-phasing'.[†] MCs, meanwhile, began to use more complex rhythmic patterns and rhyme schemes within their verses.[‡]

1988 also saw the introduction of the 'posse cut' with the release of Marley Marl's 'The Symphony'.⁴⁵ As the name suggests, a posse cut is a record featuring several artists who normally release their material separately, but who form a larger affiliated group, or posse. In the case of 'The Symphony', four MCs were featured: Masta Ace, Craig G., Kool G Rap and Big Daddy Kane. Along

* Issues concerning the canonisation of hip hop will be discussed in chapter five.

† These techniques will be discussed in the next chapter...

‡ ...and so will these.

with Roxanne Shante and Biz Markie, they were collectively known as the Juice Crew. The Juice Crew exemplify the type of posse prevalent in hip hop at this point, with one person (often a producer) being regarded as a central figure around which other artists revolve. Another example of this type of posse was the Flavor Unit, which centred around DJ Mark the 45 King and included MCs Lakim Shabazz, Chill Rob G, Apache, Lord Alibaski, Latee and Queen Latifah. Whilst not as influential as the Juice Crew, the Flavor Unit deserve mention for their promulgation of a more commercial style of hip hop. Offering an alternative to the harder sound of Marley Marl and the dense collaging of Public Enemy, 45 King productions followed in the radio-friendly tradition of artists such as the Fat Boys and Doug E Fresh.

One result of this commercialism was the brief vogue for hip house records, which would feature MCs rhyming to a four-four house rhythm rather than the usual, more syncopated, hip hop beat. Whilst not the only producer making hip house records, Mark the 45 King was probably the most notable: examples of his hip house productions include Lakim Shabazz's 'Adding On' and Queen Latifah's 'Come Into My House'.⁴⁶ Often maligned by hip hop purists, hip house is nevertheless important in that it represents another example of hip hop producers' willingness to experiment within the genre towards the end of the 1980s.

By 1989, samplers had revolutionised hip hop and the stripped-down mid-1980s sound was virtually extinct. Def Jam, the label that had been at the forefront of that sound, had a troubled year. Rick Rubin, chief producer at the label, had left in 1988, heading west to set up a rock label, Def American. There was no new Public Enemy album (the group were embroiled in a furore over alleged anti-Semitic tendencies), and LL Cool J's *Walking With A Panther* was a relative disappointment, both critically and commercially.⁴⁷ While Def Jam faltered, Tommy Boy reappeared in the spotlight.

Tommy Boy had lost its way after the electro boom. Releases by groups such as the doo-wop flavoured Force M.D.'s and electronic popsters Information Society had pushed the label away from its hip hop roots. The exception to this pattern was Stetsasonic, whose albums *On Fire* and *In Full Gear*, released in 1986 and 1988 respectively, were both well received in the hip hop community.⁴⁸ By 1989 Stetsasonic's producer, Prince Paul, was working with a new group called De La Soul, a collaboration that would result in the album *3 Feet High And Rising*. A critical and commercial success, it would be the album which restored Tommy Boy's fortunes (and credibility).⁴⁹

While an eclectic regard to source material had been a part of hip hop since the days of Afrika Bambaataa, *3 Feet High And Rising* took the concept to new extremes. This breadth of source material was hinted at in the album's title, which refers to a sample of Johnny Cash that appears on the album: other sources included LA hippies the Turtles, blue-eyed soul duo Hall & Oates, FM rockers Steely Dan, a French-language instructional record and a children's maths-educational track. In addition to this broad sonic base, *3 Feet High And Rising* was also notable in that it expanded the idea of what a hip hop album could be. Previously, hip hop albums had simply been collections of about eight to ten songs. Of the twenty-three tracks on *3 Feet High And Rising*, nine are less than two minutes long, and act as interludes between the more 'regular' songs. Furthermore, spoken-word interruptions provided the album with a loose concept (concerning game show contestants' inability to answer impossible questions). In the years that followed, spoken-word 'skits' – brief (and frequently comic) spoken word

scenarios heard between tracks on an album – would become increasingly commonplace on hip hop albums.*

De La Soul also formed part of a new type of posse emerging at the time, in which similar-minded (both musically and non-musically) artists would come together without a single, central figure. The Native Tongues posse consisted of De La Soul, the Jungle Brothers, A Tribe Called Quest and Queen Latifah (again). Through albums such as the Jungle Brothers' *Done By The Forces Of Nature* and A Tribe Called Quest's *People's Instinctive Travels And The Paths Of Rhythm* the Native Tongues' sound was refined.⁵⁰ Typically for the time, the sound was sample-heavy. Less typically, it was generally laid-back, being described by one critic as, 'upliftingly dope. It's so sweet and lyrical, so user-friendly.'⁵¹ Unlike groups such as Public Enemy, who layered their samples to aggressive effect, the Native Tongues created warmer soundscapes, and this difference was accompanied by a more relaxed, conversational style of MCing.

A further difference between the Native Tongues' style and that of Public Enemy was in the lyrical content. As we have noted, Chuck D brought political concerns to greater prominence within hip hop. The various Native Tongues' MCs also had a political side to their rhymes, but where Chuck D drew attention to ongoing social problems, they offered a more upbeat outlook. For example, amongst the concerns on *Done By The Forces Of Nature* are the reclamation of African-American history, the importance of community and a celebration of black womanhood, alongside an appreciation of simpler pleasures – a cool breeze on a hot day, relaxing with good food. The thread holding everything together was a concern for all things African (albeit a mythologised, idealised Africa rather than the contemporary model of apartheid and unrest) and because of this, the Native Tongues' music was labelled Afrocentric hip hop.

In fact, both Public Enemy's concerns and those of the Native Tongues are connected through their links with a more widespread increase in spiritual, and particularly Islamic, issues in hip hop at the end of the 1980s. Some groups, such as X Clan and Poor Righteous Teachers, concentrated almost entirely on their allegiance to the Five Percent Nation (the politicised branch of Islam to which some hip hop artists subscribed), while others, such as Brand Nubian and Eric B. & Rakim, found room to rhyme about both their beliefs and other, less spiritual matters.

Of course, such spiritual and political concerns were only one facet of hip hop at the time. By 1990 the genre was well diversified, and the year saw a wide variety of styles on display. There were, for example, artists such as EPMD and a back on form LL Cool J (now being produced by Marley Marl), who released albums which were sonically dense and lyrically aggressive, leading to the label 'hardcore hip hop'. Elsewhere, tracks such as Gang Starr's 'Jazz Thing' and Main Source's 'Looking At The Front Door' were furthering the use of jazz samples within hip hop.⁵² And there was a lighter, more radio-friendly style of 'pop rap', epitomised by groups such as Nice & Smooth.[†]

Essentially, this wide sonic variety was attributable to the still pre-eminent use of samplers in hip hop production. However, a couple of alarm bells had rung as to where this would ultimately lead. In

* See also KMD (1991); Leaders Of The New School (1991)

† Of course, the most successful pop rap of the time was that of MC Hammer and Vanilla Ice. However, since both these artists fall outside of my geographical remit (being, respectively, a Californian and a Texan), they have been consigned to this footnote.

1987, Jimmy Castor had sued the Beastie Boys over the unauthorised sampling of his music. De La Soul ran into similar difficulties when Flo & Eddie sued over the Turtles' sample on *3 Feet High And Rising*. Both cases were settled out of court, but it was apparent that the use of samples to create hip hop was beginning to raise issues of copyright infringement. The legal hammer would fall, but not quite yet.

Whatever the sound, sample-based hip hop was predominant through 1990 and 1991. In 1991, Gang Starr's DJ Premier summed up the production style of the day: 'I loop the samples, then put a drum track over it. From there, I'll add other elements – a hi-hat, horns, piano, funny sounds, whatever it takes to make that track build.'⁵³ However, it was becoming increasingly apparent that what was sampled was important in ways other than the resulting musical effect.

In 1991 both De La Soul and A Tribe Called Quest released their second albums. Both albums were as sample-heavy as their respective predecessors, but where the debuts had simply had track listings, the sleeve notes to *De La Soul Is Dead* and *The Low End Theory* contained comprehensive references to the sources used 'by permission' in production.⁵⁴ Hip hop's increasing success had rendered it more visible, and copyright holders were, as we have seen, growing more aware of how their music was being appropriated. Where producers had been used to sampling from whatever source they wanted, their record labels now began to ensure that permission was being sought, and credit given, for a sample's use.

The growing awareness of the copyright issue by record labels was, in turn, due to the changing pattern of hip hop releases. While newer specialist labels such as Wild Pitch and Payday were beginning to make a name for themselves, more and more non-specialist labels (such as Elektra, Chrysalis and MCA) were releasing hip hop records. Increasing major label presence brought with it increasing industry experience, and in-house legal departments were well aware of potential copyright problems over sampling.

However, the 1991 release of *I Need A Haircut*, the third album by beatboxer and MC Biz Markie, on Cold Chillin' led to a major label finding itself on the wrong side of the law.⁵⁵ One of the tracks on *I Need A Haircut* borrowed an eight-bar sample and the title of a 1972 hit by Gilbert O'Sullivan, 'Alone Again (Naturally)'.⁵⁶ Cold Chillin' had attempted to clear the sample, but had not finalised an agreement at the time of the album's release. The result was a lawsuit issued against Cold Chillin's corporate partners Warner Brothers by O'Sullivan's company, Grand Upright Music. Unlike previous copyright suits, the case went all the way to a ruling, with the judge finding for Grand Upright Music and ordering the album to be removed from circulation, as well as referring the case to the District Attorney for possible criminal prosecution (although none was forthcoming).⁵⁷

While the case did not set any major legal precedent, it did confirm to record labels and producers that the hip hop's age of innocence was over. The very idea that had, seventeen years earlier, been fundamental to the beginning of hip hop – that of taking pre-existing music and presenting it in a new form – was under significant legal pressure. Of course, producers would find ways round the

* A discussion of the production style of this time is included in the following chapter.

problem, either by using fewer samples and paying clearance fees, or by further manipulating samples to disguise their origin, but that is the story of hip hop through the 1990s. Our history ends here.

3. 'Check The Technique': Hip Hop Methodology

Having established an historical narrative in the preceding pages, this chapter will be concerned with a closer investigation of the techniques involved in the creation of hip hop. In this way, we will be able to gain a better understanding of the musical changes undergone by the genre mentioned in the previous chapter. Additionally, a knowledge of hip hop's techniques will be necessary for the analytical work which is to follow. Principally, the focus will be on the three major fields of DJing, production and MCing, although there will also (as promised) be a discussion of beatboxing. Essentially, these areas combine to create the finished sound of hip hop, and it is necessary for our later understanding of that finished sound that they are analysed independently at this stage. To put it another way, if we want to see how hip hop is put together, we must first take it apart.

Of course, as noted in the introduction, our central approach will be based on reception theory, which, since it involves texts and listeners, is not intrinsically connected with hip hop's creative techniques. However, as we will see in the following chapter, one feature of hip hop's being a strongly intertextual genre is that those who make the music are, first and foremost, listeners too. In addition, it can be claimed that hip hop encourages a technical understanding of the genre in its listeners, through its 'transparency of technique'. This will be discussed in detail at a later point, but essentially it involves the tendency within the genre to leave audible traces of the techniques involved in a track's production in the finished track.

DJing

As we have already seen, the first innovation of the hip hop DJ was Kool Herc's merry-go-round: the extension, through repetition, of the break section of a record. This basic technique can be better understood if it is viewed as comprising two distinct components: a dismantling of the source recording with a simultaneous reconstruction of the dismantled elements. With regard to the first of these, Ulf Poschardt notes that DJs had previously 'seen a piece as a unit and revered it accordingly', whereas hip hop DJs 'saw songs as quarries from which they could knock out stones to build their own works.'¹ This comment raises a question as to why earlier DJs had 'revered' records 'as units'.

While there is no definitive answer to this question, two possible reasons can be seen which, in all likelihood, operated in combination. Firstly, there was a perceived fragility of the medium. Originating in the days of shellac discs (which were undoubtedly fragile), this belief had persisted, albeit in tempered form, despite the transition to vinyl. Consumers of records (including, of course, DJs) were advised to 'hold by the edge and label area only', and warned, 'Remember! A worn or chipped stylus will cause irreparable damage to this record.'² While warnings such as these are perhaps more of a reflection than a cause, they do serve to exemplify the understanding that records had to be treated with care. In this light, it is easy to understand why DJs would not want to interfere with the record once playing.

Secondly, commercial and audience expectations also contributed towards the DJs' 'reverence' (to use Poschardt's phrase again). Certainly, record companies, in the interests of maximising exposure, would expect their products to be played in their entirety. Audiences also expected to hear whole songs,

as can be seen in the common complaint concerning radio DJs talking over beginnings and endings of songs.

However, while DJs treated a recorded song as a unitary entity, musicians had a different approach to their material. Since a song is only an idea until it is performed, musicians could take a more recombinative approach, working different ideas against one another: a jazz soloist ‘quoting’ from another song or a medley of popular hits are both good examples here. In their dismantling of the source recording, hip hop DJs can be seen to be applying a distinctly musicianly outlook to the record itself, treating it less as a finished object, and more as a repository of sounds and ideas. This simple shift in attitude is at the heart of hip hop’s strongly intertextual nature.

In order to ascribe some sort of meaning to the second component of this most basic technique of hip hop – the reconstruction of the dismantled elements – we need to remind ourselves of Dick Bradley’s work on musical ‘codes’. As we saw in chapter one, one of the important distinctions between the tonal-European code and the Afro-American code is the type of repetition employed in each, with tonal-European music tending towards extensional repetition (variation occurring *outside* the repetition) and Afro-American music tending towards intensional repetition (variation occurring *inside* the repetition).

It is immediately apparent that the repetition of a section of pre-recorded music is very different from both types of repetition noted above. Since each repetition will be identical to both those that precede and follow it, extensional harmonic development is impossible. The same fact also limits the likelihood of variation within the repeated section, as would be expected in intensionally-principled music. However, employing a slightly different approach will allow us to more readily understand hip hop’s basic repetition of breaks as representing a type of intensionality. Importantly, Bradley uses the phrase ‘*original* [my emphasis] harmonic and melodic ‘materials’” in reference to tonal-European music. The hip hop DJ’s material – pre-recorded music – can never be original in the tonal-European sense: it is collected, rather than composed, by the DJ. A correlation between this practice and the verse-sharing blues artists mentioned above can readily be seen. Furthermore, in structural terms, the unchanging nature of repetition as employed by hip hop DJs noted above makes it more akin to both Bradley and Middleton’s descriptions of the intensional.

We could be accused of proving the obvious here: hip hop was (and still is) primarily an African-American form of music, so it comes as no surprise that in both its deconstructive and reconstructive elements it can be seen to belong to Bradley’s Afro-American code. However, the important points here are i) the fresh challenge to dominant tonal-European ideas (the author, the finished work) implicit in hip hop’s deconstructive practice, and ii) the ‘blank intensionality’ of the repetition, which provided the basic structure around which later developments in hip hop would be incorporated. Amongst the earliest of these developments, as we have seen, was scratching.

Early Grandmaster Flash protégé Grandwizard Theodore is usually credited with the invention of scratching. Once again, it was a deceptively simple innovation, as Theodore explains: ‘A lot of DJs...have one record playing and they’re holding the other record with their hand. But the people that’s dancing don’t really hear it. In the earphones they’re rubbing the record back and forth in order to keep the groove. Only thing that I did was move the mixer over so that people can hear it, and make a little

rhythm to it.’³ While Theodore’s ‘little rhythm’ would be much expanded and altered over time, the basic idea of scratching would remain the same: the physical manipulation of records in order to alter the sound produced, with the audibility of the resulting sound controlled by means of the crossfader on the mixer.

One of the most basic uses of scratching is as a rhythmic *appoggiatura* signalling either the introduction of a break or the start of its next repetition. Here, the DJ alternately pushes and pulls the record so that the first sound (often a drumbeat) is heard forwards and backwards several times, in time with the music being played on the second turntable, before the record is released and the break plays. Several examples of this technique can be heard in ‘The Adventures Of Grandmaster Flash On The Wheels Of Steel’.⁴ With simultaneous use of the crossfader, this can be refined so that only certain parts of the sound (most commonly, only the ‘forward sounding’ pushes) are heard, allowing a greater degree of syncopation to be introduced.

While this innovation gave the DJ more freedom, it also required more of the equipment being used. Rapidly pushing and pulling a record back and forth places extra strain on the motor driving the turntable. Two models – the Technics SL 1200 and 1210 (virtually identical in all but colour) – deserve mention since they proved to be ideal for the needs of the hip hop DJ. Importantly, Technics were equipped with a direct drive which could respond to the DJ’s movements quicker and more accurately than a traditional belt drive. This technological development was instrumental in allowed DJs to develop a variety of scratch techniques, including those described below:

Punch-phasing.^{*} In this type of scratch, a single sound (for example, a horn stab or a guitar hit) is dropped in on one turntable while the second plays the basic break. This technique, frequently used to add emphasis to the first beat of a bar, is notable in that it was the first example of hip hop DJs taking elements from different records and mixing them together, rather than simply extending breaks. This can be understood as the beginnings of a shift in hip hop from a sequential approach to music towards a more synchronous one – the ‘layering’ of sounds which would become essential in hip hop production. This can be heard well in the guitar hits at the start of LL Cool J’s ‘Rock The Bells’.⁵

Transformer scratch. This technique involves the DJ isolating a fragment of the original break, often as little as a single beat, and using it to create new patterns within the original rhythm. This is done by rubbing the record back and forth with one hand (keeping the sound going without letting the record advance) while rapidly moving the crossfader with the other (switching the sound on and off to create the new rhythm). The name, incidentally, comes not from the fact that the original record is transformed into something new, but rather from the fact that the resulting sound was thought to be reminiscent of the animated television series *Transformers*, which was popular at the time of the scratch’s introduction. A good example of Transformer scratching can be hear on DJ Jazzy Jeff & The Fresh Prince’s ‘Live At Union Square (November 1986)’.⁶

Melodic alteration. Whilst not a scratch *per se*, this term encompasses a number of scratches which involve the DJ altering the pitch of the record being scratched by varying the speed at which it is pushed or pulled, in order to recreate a recognisable melody. Individually, these scratches are usually

* These terms are those used by hip hop DJs themselves, aside from ‘melodic alteration’ and ‘vocal cutting’, which are the author’s collective terms for particular groups of scratches.

named after the melody they recreate (such as DJ Cash Money's 'Andy Griffith' and 'Pee-Wee Herman' scratches, which recreated the theme tunes from their respective television shows). Although principally a technique used by DJs in live performance, rather than in the recording studio, melodic alteration merits inclusion as an example of the variety of techniques introduced by hip hop DJs.

Vocal cutting. Again not an individual scratch, vocal cutting is essentially a variation of punch phasing wherein the DJ drops in short vocal extracts from records. This allows the DJ to communicate on a linguistic, as well as a musical, level, and is often used as a way of underlining the sentiments expressed in the MC's rhyme. Once again, DJ Jazzy Jeff & The Fresh Prince provide a good example, in Jazzy Jeff's using the voice of Slick Rick, during 'As We Go'.⁷

Wildstyle scratching. This is a somewhat looser term than those above, encompassing a style of scratching particularly popular from around 1983 to 1985 (the years when DJs began to make their presence felt in recorded hip hop). It refers to a freer type of scratching which combines elements from all the above-mentioned techniques, frequently at some length, to create a constant barrage of scratch effects. Wildstyle scratching can be heard throughout 'It's Yours' by T La Rock & Jazzy Jay.⁸

While the above list is not intended as definitive, it does cover those DJing techniques which were most prevalent during the time covered by this thesis. Having described the techniques above, we can now move towards gaining a deeper understanding of them. With regard to scratching as a whole, it can be seen that if basic repetition of a break gives a kind of 'blank intensionality' (see page 31, above), then scratching goes some way towards filling the blank. Scratching provides the rhythmic (and to a lesser extent, melodic) variation within the framework provided by the repetition of breaks which we would expect from Bradley's description. Furthermore, it is also essentially analogue in nature: while the DJ can only move the record backwards or forwards, the amount of push or pull is controlled by movements of the hand, and can therefore be adjusted by the tiniest of increments.* This analogue variation within a larger digital structure fits precisely with Middleton's description of the intensional.

Another important facet of scratching is its potential to carry multiple levels of 'meaning'. Firstly, there is the sonic/musical sense of the sound – the sound as heard and its relationship with regard to the sounds around it. Secondly, the distinctive sound of scratching has become culturally encoded of itself, and carries connotations of the process by which the sound is created. Thirdly, the scratched sound can refer to the original sound being altered. Of course, any re-use of a pre-existing sound will refer to the original – simply playing a break from a record can be understood as a metonymic reference to the whole record. However, the various types of scratching allow for a range of possible relationships between the scratched sound and the original.

Punch-phased sounds are usually little changed sonically, but are also usually very short. This briefness of appearance distances the new sound from the original, which is referred to generically rather than specifically. For example, a single horn stab lasting only a fraction of a second is more likely to refer to its original only in the sense of 'this is a stab from a record with horns', rather than 'this is a stab from (for instance) Average White Band's 'Pick Up The Pieces''.

* Indeed, DJ Cash Money has described a technique in which the hand appears stationary, acting as a conduit for vibrations set up in the wrist.

Vocal cuts also tend to be little changed, but since, as noted above, they communicate on a linguistic level, their relationship with the original is much more akin to a verbal quotation. Of course, the DJ can alter the tone of voice of the original little, but varied inflections of meaning can be implied – the quote is literally taken out of context, and much of its meaning will depend on its new sonic environment.

In the case of the more transformative scratches – the transformer scratch and wildstyle scratching – the original sound is often radically altered. In some instances, this means that the scratched sound does not refer to its original: the original sound is just that – sound, and changing it into something new can eradicate all traces of the original. More frequently, however, the original is referred to, despite the radical alteration of the sound. There are two main ways in which this works. Frequently, DJs will precede or conclude their transformative scratching with a playing of the scratched sound in its unaltered form, or will incorporate brief but recognisable elements of it between individual scratches. The other way in which the original remains recognisable despite the alteration is through what could be termed consistency of timbre. That is, while rhythm and pitch are susceptible to alteration by scratching, timbre is more stubborn and can remain recognisable despite the alteration. However, since timbre is only one characteristic of musical sound (and a particularly elusive one, at that), it can often lead to a vaguer sense of recognition when used on its own than when it works in combination with the previously-mentioned method. Recognition will be dealt with more fully in later chapters: what is important here is simply the fact that transformative scratching can refer to the original, despite changing the nature of the sound.

Finally, melodic alteration opens further connotative possibilities. This type of scratching is essentially transformative, and so works in the ways described above to refer to the original sound. Additionally, a ‘foreign’ melody (i.e. a melody not heard in the original record being scratched) is introduced, and the new sound refers not only to its original, but to the source of the introduced melody as well.

The factor common to the descriptions of the previous four paragraphs is that the scratched sound is always in a relation of difference to its original. That is, scratching does not simply re-present a sound, but presents sounds in such a way that they can be made to comment upon the original.

Of course, the three levels of meaning of scratching – musical, scratching as process, and commenting upon the original can, and often do, all operate at the same time, making scratching in all its forms a complex and vital technique for the hip hop DJ.

Production

The simplest definition of production is ‘that which is done by a producer’ and, as S.H. Fernando Jr. writes, ‘[H]ip hop...is the producer’s medium. Transcending the role of a musician, the producer is a sonic technician who is responsible for combining and mixing layers of sound into a rhythmic format over which the rapper practices his/her art.’⁹ While this statement usefully encapsulates what is meant by the term production (as well as reminding us that, as a combiner of sounds, the producer must first be a listener), our discussion of the concept must begin with a codicil: it was not ever thus.

As we have seen in the preceding chapter, there were essentially four different eras of production across the time span of this thesis. These can be most easily differentiated by reference to the prominent sound source in each. In sequence*, these are the live band, synthesisers, drum machines and samplers, and it was only in the second of these eras that the figure of the producer began to have much impact on hip hop. Indeed, many of the earliest hip hop records carried no production credit at all. Of course, this does not mean that these records were not ‘produced’, but rather that we have to amend our understanding of what is meant by production. A better definition is ‘the processes of creation and/or selection of sounds and their ensuing arrangement into a finished track’.

Of course, this begs the question of who was responsible for production in the case of the earliest hip hop records. A quotation from Sugar Hill’s Sylvia Robinson will serve to both answer this question and introduce a wider discussion of early production techniques. In a 1981 interview, Robinson states: ‘Our concept is done before we even go into the studio. On ‘That’s The Joint’, the musical ideas came from a record that the Funky Four brought in by Taste of Honey, and we added the funk part to it. We take bits and pieces of stuff and add our own funk.’¹⁰ This suggests that early hip hop production was a communal affair, with sound selection often being the province of the MCs (who would bring in the records over which they were used to performing), and creation being taken care of by the in-house musicians. Interestingly, Robinson uses an inclusive ‘we’ which, while maybe reflecting the close-knit nature of the small independent companies largely responsible for early hip hop records, also implies creative involvement by label owners.[†]

As regards the final element of production – arrangement – it has already been noted in the previous chapter that many early hip hop records consisted of little more than a few bars of music being repeated over and over by the house band. It is immediately apparent that this technique is essentially a version of the primary DJing technique of extension through repetition, and therefore the same implications – the highlighting of the importance of the African-American musical tradition within codally fused popular music and the ‘blank intensionality’ – can be drawn. However, the use of a live band instead of a DJ means that this style of production is essentially a negotiation between hip hop DJing practices and more traditional methods of producing popular music. Thus the challenge to tonal-European ideas is lessened somewhat, since the use of a live band opens the possibility of tracks being understood as a type of cover version, placing them closer to established popular music practices. Similarly, a live band’s ability to employ a traditional type of variation within repetition again brings the resulting music closer to orthodox popular music than repetition by a DJ would.

Finally, before leaving the first era of hip hop production, it should be noted that there were, of course, exceptions to the general process described above. There were tracks (such as Spoonie Gee’s ‘Love Rap’¹¹, which will be discussed in chapter five) which, without straying from the formula of a live band performing a version of the overall sound of a DJ’s performance, did not rely on a recreation of pre-existing music. This type of track is frequently overlooked in discussions of hip hop – admittedly,

* The word ‘sequence’ may be somewhat misleading here, and it should be borne in mind that there was a great deal of overlap between the four production eras.

† It is equally possible that Robinson’s ‘we’ is a justification of her frequently claiming a co-writer’s credit on records released on Sugar Hill, with the attendant financial implications.

they are relatively uncommon – perhaps due to the central importance placed on hip hop’s use of pre-existing music in its creation. But non-reliance on pre-existing material does not mean that a track cannot be understood as being an example of the genre. It does mean, however, that that track is further removed from the basic DJing practices which lie at the root of the music, with the obvious result that the implications drawn from those practices are weakened further.*

The second era of hip hop production was that in which the synthesiser came to play a much more dominant role. As we have seen, it was at this time that the role of the hip hop producer began to more closely resemble S. H. Fernando Jr.’s description above. With the lessening in importance of live musicians to the process (they did not entirely disappear), more control was placed in the hands of the producer. As the music became more electronic-sounding, non-traditional musical skills such as computer-programming and sound-sequencing came to the fore, and it was producers who were first to embrace these techniques.

The inspiration for this second era of hip hop production came, once again, from the earlier hip hop DJs. As well as using breaks from funk and rock records, DJs had also employed tracks by synthesiser-based groups and artists such as Yellow Magic Orchestra, Gary Numan and, in particular, Kraftwerk. The latter’s ‘Trans-Europe Express’ has been described by Afrika Bambaataa as, ‘one of the best and weirdest records I ever heard in my life.’¹² Hip hop producers either emulated the overall sound of the earlier electronic artists or incorporated melodic and rhythmic ideas from the earlier records in their own work, recreating them on their own synthesisers. The former technique means that, during this second era, there were substantially more hip hop tracks which did not refer back to specific pre-existing music, while the latter can again be seen as a negotiated version of hip hop DJing practices.

However, hip hop’s wider musical influences did not disappear during this period: producers did not simply abandon the funk and rock breaks that had already made their mark on the music. Instead, they treated these breaks in the same way as those from the electronic artists, recreating elements from them on synthesisers. This meant, of course, that the resulting music was radically different in terms of its sound from the source material. This, in turn, means that many hip hop records of this era are even closer than those of the preceding one to the traditional concept of the cover version: they offer reinterpretations, rather than re-presentations, of pre-existing music. So, whilst still showing connections to hip hop’s central DJing practices, the synthesiser-based era can be understood as more closely resembling traditional, non-hip hop music production than the era which preceded it (and, as we will see, those that follow).

The second era of hip hop production also saw an increase in musical ‘activity’ within tracks. That is, where tracks from the first era had often consisted of a single phrase of music repeated throughout the entire track with little development or alteration, those from the second era tended to include several different musical ideas, interacting both sequentially and simultaneously at different times within the track. This increased activity led to an increased sense of overall structure to tracks, which could now begin to be understood as comprising separate verses with distinct breaks in between (breaks rather than choruses since they were usually instrumental). Examples of this increasing

* This is actually somewhat of an oversimplification, as we will see in chapter six.

structural organisation can be seen in tracks such as Grandmaster Flash & The Furious Five's 'The Message' and the Fearless Four's 'Rockin' It'.¹³

Another noteworthy fact of this second era is the appearance of hip hop records produced by artists more closely associated with other genres, such as Thomas Dolby, Trevor Horn and the Clash. Alongside these appeared records by non-hip hop artists which were, at the least, informed by the genre, such as Herbie Hancock's 'Rockit' and George Clinton's *Computer Games* LP.¹⁴ It is impossible to say whether these artists were attracted to hip hop because of its more accessible nature (i.e. its resemblance to 'regular' pop music) at the time or whether their presence actually contributed to that accessibility – the likelihood is that both are true, in combination with each other. Ultimately, the crossover nature of this second era of hip hop production would lead to 'electro', as it would become known, being understood as an almost entirely separate genre which, in turn, would play its part in influencing later forms of dance music such as house and techno.

As noted in the previous chapter, the third era of production was a development of the second. Drum machines were as common on records from the synthesiser era as they were from the drum machine era. However, the production style of the latter was marked by a distinctly minimalist approach, and the stripping away of most of the instrumentation left the drum machine to play a much more prominent role in the final sound of a track.

Once again, the close links between DJing practices and production techniques can be seen in this third era. Most obviously, DJs began to finally have much more sonic presence within recorded hip hop, with the sound of scratching frequently being heard alongside the drum machine. There was, however, another, less sonically obvious way in which a negotiated form of a DJing practice was at work, in the programming of the drum machine. The busy, syncopated drum machine patterns which are commonplace in recordings of this era were often attempts at recreating the breakbeats popular with hip hop DJs: for example, the beat behind Audio Two's 'Top Billin'' is based on an attempt to recreate the drum line to the Honey Drippers' 'Impeach The President'.¹⁵ However, where drum machines were ideal for creating the robotic, Kraftwerk-like beats popular in the synthesiser era, they struggled to accurately mimic the sound of a Clyde Stubblefield or Gregg Errico.*

Typically, drum machines of the time were programmed in sequences of sixteen 'steps' to a bar, and so any sound in the original not falling on one of these steps (and in funk drum breaks, there were many) would have to be either left out of the recreated version or shifted to the nearest sixteenth note. While producers could lessen this effect slightly by using two or more patterns, multitracked and slightly offset in time, the resulting drum machine patterns often could often be so different from their originals as to be effectively unrecognisable. Further pressure was put on this already tenuous link between original and recreation by the fact that drum machines simply sounded very different to acoustic drums. The result was that where the first two eras of production had led to a sound that was part DJing practice, part cover version, the third led to a sound that was unlike either.

As might be expected, the minimalist approach to production in the drum machine era led to a comparative decrease in larger structures. While some tracks still displayed the larger structural organisation introduced by the second production era, many were organised along simpler repetition

* Drummers, respectively, for James Brown and Sly & The Family Stone.

lines. Within this, intensional variation would be provided by either the DJ's scratching or by the silencing of the drum machine for varying amounts of time and at irregular intervals (or, indeed, by a combination of the two).

So where the first two eras of production had taken the essentially African-American coded DJing practices and created a more codally fused form of popular music, the third can largely be seen to represent a more African-American coded form of music. Of course, there were exceptions to this rule, with some tracks adhering to a more codally fused model. However, despite the presence in these tracks of recognisable larger structures, the intensional variation provided by scratching and drum machine dropouts was usually retained. It is perhaps indicative of a wider, if usually unnamed, cultural understanding of musical codes that the latter, more codally-fused hip hop tracks (such as Doug E. Fresh & The Get Fresh Crew's 'The Show) were understood as being more accessible 'pop rap', while the more Afro-American coded tracks (such as LL Cool J's 'Rock The Bells') were termed 'hardcore hip hop'.¹⁶

This distinction would continue to be drawn through the fourth era of hip hop production, although the difference between the two styles was understood more in terms of lyrical content rather than musical. One of the defining features of the fourth production era was the rise to prominence of the digital sampler, and this brought with it a broadening of hip hop's sonic palette. The greater variety of sounds being heard within the genre meant that the simple division into two styles became oversimplistic. Additionally, with a greater variety of sounds came a greater variety of arrangement styles as more codally-fused structures began to be heard in tracks tending towards the 'hardcore' (Public Enemy, in particular, frequently utilised fairly regular verse/chorus structures).

Although samplers had been used in hip hop production for some time, the newer models introduced in the mid-1980s had two advantages over their predecessors: they had improved capacity (i.e. a larger digital memory, capable of holding longer samples) and were more affordable. These factors combined led to much greater usage of samplers in hip hop production: the improved capacity meant they were becoming versatile tools for the producer, and thus desirable; and the lower prices made them more attainable.

The versatility of samplers is reflected in the variety of uses to which they were put in hip hop production. These can be grouped into four main categories, as described below.

Loops. One popular use of samplers was the creation of loops – a few bars of music extracted from a pre-existing track and repeated over and over. This is obviously another negotiated form of the DJs extension of breaks. However, using samples created a sound which was much closer to that of the DJ than earlier methods had. It was not a perfect replica, of course – even the best DJs are subject to minuscule differences in triggering the next repetition, whereas the sampler has an unerring digital accuracy. Additionally, sampled sounds were not always re-presented exactly as they had been taken. Effects processors allowed producers to select (to a degree) only the parts of a sound that were useful to them: producer/MC Erick Sermon observes, 'if I was trying to get a sample and there was something on top of it, vocals or whatever then I'd sample it and then filter off all the top.'¹⁷ Filtering is carried out by means of an effects processor which recognises the various frequencies of sound within a sample and is

capable of suppressing a selected range of frequencies. Here, Sermon is describing its use in removing the high-frequency ‘vocals or whatever’, leaving the desired lower-frequency parts of the sample.

At first, the most popular loops were the same drum-based breaks that the DJs had been using for years, but competition amongst producers not only to keep up with the latest popular sound but also to create the next one led to a rapid widening of musical material being sampled and looped. While funk and soul records remained the most popular sources for samples, records from other genres were widely sampled, and parts other than drum breaks began to be used. This, in turn, led to the variety of ‘sounds’ of hip hop records that, musically at least, blurred the line between pop rap and hardcore hip hop.

Stabs, sound-effects and vocal cuts. These three techniques are linked in that they all involve taking short samples from the source and inserting them in the track being produced, usually to emphasise points such as the start of a bar, or of a verse, break or chorus.* Once again, it should be readily apparent that the sampler is being used to recreate earlier DJing practices: punch-phasing and vocal cutting, in this case. Sound effects are distinguished from stabs in that they represent non-musical sounds available to a producer with a sampler (and a microphone) but not necessarily to a DJ, who is dependent on the sounds contained within the records being used.

Cut-ups. Another way in which samplers were used was in the creation of cut-ups, wherein a sample is divided into smaller parts which are then rearranged before taking their place in the finished track. The most commonly occurring example of this is with drum cutups – individual drum sounds taken from a break and rearranged into a new pattern. This can result in drum tracks which are reminiscent of both drum machine tracks (having been programmed in the same way) and looped breaks – the individually sampled drums retain their quality of sound. Again, the technique can be seen to be connected with DJing techniques, being essentially a highly concentrated form of punch-phasing.†

Hidden sampling. As the name suggests, this is the subtlest way of using a sampler in hip hop production. Essentially, it involves the layering of several sampled sounds together in such a way that the original sounds become indistinguishable in the finished sound. The clearest example again involves drums. Producer Bill Stephney explains: ‘You may get a kid who puts a kick from one record on one track, a kick from another record on another track, a Linn kick on a third track, and a TR-808 kick on a fourth – all to make one kick!’¹⁸ While this particular technique is of little use in analytical terms, since the listener cannot ‘undo’ the created drum sound, it merits inclusion as a rare example of a hip hop production technique that does not leave an audible remnant of its process in the finished sound.

Stephney’s quote also serves to point out the fact that drum machines had not entirely vanished from the production equation in the fourth era. In fact, their use was still commonplace, but their role was no longer as prominent. Frequently, the drum machine would be used to ‘double’ (as best it could) a looped drum sample, adding weight to the sound without having any real rhythmic presence of its own. Live musicians also sometimes contributed to the finished sound in this era, although they often went uncredited on record sleeves.

* Arrangement during the sampler era of production will be commented upon below.

† This production technique would in turn influence DJs, with their variation on it, beat juggling, being introduced around 1994.

The fourth era of production was also notable for a wide variety of arrangement styles. Some tracks were intentionally organised, with long periods of musical repetition; others displayed more codally-fused tendencies, with verses and choruses of regular length; others still lay somewhere in between – verses of irregular length with distinctive breaks with a repeated loop running throughout. As noted above, the effect of this was to lessen the musical distinction between ‘pop’ and ‘hardcore’ hip hop, bringing the two together to make the genre both aesthetically richer and more accessible.

It can be claimed that this wide variety of arrangement styles can be attributed to the increased use of samplers. The sampler’s ease of use meant that a simple track could be put together fairly quickly, and its versatility made it easy to then try out different combinations of sounds within that track. Basically, producers were given time to experiment, and the equipment with which to do it. It was this experimentation that led to the variety of styles of arrangement discernible in this era of production.

Taking an overview of all four eras of production, we can see that while arrangement styles and instrumentation have varied over the time span of this thesis, the common thread running throughout is that production techniques consistently hark back to those of the DJ – in particular the central technique of extension of a break through repetition. Furthermore, the vast majority of techniques leave a trace of their process in the finished sound – consistency of timbre in a scratched record or the audible, if subtle, difference between a DJ’s analogue loop and a sampler’s digital one, for example. Hip hop, it could be said, audibly acknowledges its own processes of production. This, as we will see in the ensuing chapters, is a key factor within hip hop, since it encourages the listener towards an understanding of the music in terms of its processes of production, and thus highlights the intertextual practices involved therein.

MCing

As many commentators have pointed out, hip hop MCing has to be understood as an example of an African-American oral tradition which David Toop describes as, ‘stretch[ing] back through disco, street funk, radio DJs, Bo Diddley, the bebop singers, Cab Calloway, Pigmeat Markham, the tap dancers and comics, The Last Poets, Gil Scott-Heron, Muhammad Ali, acapella and doo-wop groups, ring games, skip-rope rhymes, prison and army songs, toasts, signifying and the dozens, all the way to the griots of Nigeria and the Gambia.’¹⁹ Central to this tradition are verbal and linguistic devices such as rhyme, metaphor, metonymy and exaggeration. These techniques all contribute towards a playful (although not necessarily un-serious) approach to language – an approach which, as Henry Louis Gates Jr. notes, ‘turns on the play and chain of signifiers, and not on some supposedly transcendent signified.’²⁰

But while hip hop MCing draws much from this tradition, it is simultaneously a written practice. As Tricia Rose notes, hip hop lyrics are, ‘rhymes, written down first, memorised, and recited orally...[and so] are oral performances that display written (literate) forms of thought and communication.’²¹ The effect of this way of working is that MCs’ rhymes can display a heightened version of the rhetorical strategies drawn from the oral tradition. Once again, a comparison with the Delta blues tradition will clarify matters here.

We have noted above (see page 10) the common use of shared verses within Delta blues. Part of the reason for this is that using one of these verses bought the performer time to come up with something new. Paul Fryer notes that formulaic verses ‘provided the solid base around which singers could improvise, giving them time to think whilst maintaining the song’s rhythm and drive.’²² In hip hop, however, time is not an issue – lyric writing can take as long or as short a time as is required. The resulting oral performance can, therefore, compress several new ideas into much less time than was involved in their invention, so heightening the effect of the rhetorical strategies used.

How this combined oral-written approach manifests itself within hip hop MCing will become apparent through examples given below, but first it should be noted that lyrical content is only one element in an MC’s performance. The lyric is nothing until it is performed, and the MC’s delivery is an important part of the final effect.

Of course, much of the effect of delivery is tied in with Roland Barthes’ famous ‘grain’ of the voice – that which ‘escape[s] the tyranny of meaning’,²³ the extralinguistic *jouissance* experienced by the listener. However, this extralinguistic nature means that the ‘grain’ of the voice is particularly resistant to the kind of deconstructive approach we are taking here. However, it is still possible to discuss vocal delivery through those elements which remain accessible to us: elements such as rhythm (as we will see below, rhythm of delivery is not necessarily always identical with the metre of the lyrics), use of melodic fragments and tone of voice (albeit, in the case of the latter, only through fairly vague adjectival description), and so it is on these that we will concentrate.

Once again, we will see how techniques developed through time by using a model of ‘eras’ – three, in this instance. The first of these is approximately equivalent in time to the first two eras of production, with the remaining two being roughly synchronous with the third and fourth production eras. This approximate synchronicity is due to new production styles being more suited to new vocal styles – and, indeed, vice versa. For example, the ‘sing-song’ style of the first era of MCing (see below) could sound ‘out of place’ against a hard, stripped-down third production era track. The tripartite model of MCing was first suggested in Ronald Jemal Stephens’ article ‘The Three Waves of Contemporary Rap Music’, although Stephens’ remit is wider and he only addresses MCing in terms of its lyrical content.²⁴

With regard to the lyrical content of the first era, Stephens notes the presence of ‘a number of carryover elements from earlier forms of African-American orality’, noting connections with scat singing, call and response and exaggeration.²⁵ Additionally, much use was made of shared phrases, akin to the shared verses of the Delta blues performers. Phrases such as ‘yes, yes, y’all, and you don’t stop’, ‘clap your hands everybody, everybody just clap your hands’ and ‘throw your hands in the air, and wave them like you just don’t care’ could be heard on many tracks. These phrases had been developed in the years before recorded hip hop, in a live environment, and their original purpose can be seen to be the same as that of the shared verses of the Delta blues: buying the performer time to think.

Rhyme schemes of the first era of MCing tended towards rhyming couplets, with each couplet usually lasting two bars. Four-bar couplets, though less common, were also used at this time. The examples below are typical (the start of each bar is marked by the bracketed numerals).

* It should be noted that this is not always true. Some MCs are adept at ‘freestyling’, or reciting rhymes composed on the spot, but this is primarily a live practice. Recorded freestyles are rare, and then are

Two-bar couplets:

'Say I was (1) driving down the street on a stormy night
 Say (2) up ahead there was this terrible fright
 There was a (3) big fine lady, she was crossing the street
 She (4) had a box with the disco beat'

'My (1) brother's doing bad, stole my mother's TV
 Says she (2) watches too much, it's just not healthy
 "All My (3) Children" in the daytime, "Dallas" at night
 Can't (4) even see the game or the Sugar Ray fight'

Four-bar couplets:

'Have you (1) ever went over a friend's house to eat and the (2) food just ain't no good?
 I mean the (3) macaroni's soggy, the peas are mushed and the (4) chicken tastes like wood'

'Al-(1)-low me to introduce myself, my (2) name is Chilly B
 And I'm a (3) sure-fire, full blooded bonafide house rockin' (4) Jam-On Production MC'²⁶

One fairly common variation on this technique was the use of an internal rhyming word in the middle of the first line. This works to set up the rhyme within the first line, 'priming' the listener for the rhyme at the end of the second line. The aim of the MC is then to both satisfy the listener's expectations with regard to the rhyme scheme while simultaneously surprising them with an unexpected conclusion:

'Now you're (1) unemployed, all non-void
 (2) Walkin' round like you're Pretty Boy Floyd'

'Cause I'm a (1) smooth talker, I'm the midnight stalker
 I'm the (2) image of the man they call the J.D. Walker'

'Well you (1) dip dip dive and so- socialise
 (2) How we gonna make the black nation rise?'²⁷

This technique can be traced directly back to the African-American oral tradition, as the following examples show:

'There hadn't been no shift for quite a bit

often recordings of live radio broadcasts.

so the Monkey thought he'd start some of his signifying shit'

'Say 'washing machine'. 'Washing machine.'

I'll bet you five dollars your drawers ain't clean.'²⁸

The thematic content of rhymes from this era was frequently characterised by elements retained from live MCing practices. Many rhymes were essentially elongated exhortations for an (imagined) crowd to dance, with much use of the above-mentioned shared phrases, scat-like nonsense phrases and devices such as lists (of zodiac signs, ages, colours, etc.). However, some rhymes were based around narrative boasts, often at least partially derived from the 'gangster' boasts performed by artists such as Iceberg Slim and Johnny Otis through the 1950s and 1960s – in turn derived from the 'Stagger Lee' or 'Stack O Lee' stories popular in the early part of the twentieth century. Other rhymes again displayed more social and political awareness in describing poor housing conditions and the lack of (legal) opportunities for young black Americans to better themselves.²⁹

Finally, although its direct call to action is rare within the first era of MCing, the example from Brother D's 'How We Gonna Make The Black Nation Rise' quoted above merits particular note, in that it shows how, even in the early years of recorded hip hop, MCs could play with these generic conventions to add meaning to their rhymes. Setting the couplet up with a traditional 'party MC' line – 'Well you dip dip dive and so-socialise', the MC switches into the strongly political 'How we gonna make the black nation rise?' This abrupt switch between two distinct sets of lyrical conventions of the genre not only emphasises the political point, but also allows the listener to question whether their energies are best spent 'so- socialising'.

As regards delivery in the first era of MCing, the most common style was a form of heightened speech which can be described as 'sing-song', with rising and falling intonation. Frequently, the closing rhyme of a couplet was immediately preceded by a peak in intonation, with the resultant dropping away of the voice on the rhyming word serving to underline a sense of closure to the rhyme. Rhythmically, while delivery could be quite complex, words tended to be placed on (or very near) regular divisions within the bar – quarter, eighth or sixteenth notes. As can be seen from the above examples, the use of anacrusis was commonplace, serving to keep a sense of overall rhythmic flow to what would otherwise be a string of individual phrases, varying in rhythm but generally contained within individual bars of the music.

Many of these techniques, both of content and delivery, would be carried over into the second era of MCing. Once again, rhyming couplets were predominant, although some MCs developed their art further by introducing separate internal rhymes to these couplets. Some of these internal rhymes were pointed, 'single-use' rhymes, often heavily stressed and placed on the major divisions of the bar:

'You've been (1) waiting and debating for oh so long
Just (2) starvin' like Marvin for a Cool J. song
If you (3) cried and thought I died, you definitely was wrong
It took a (4) thought, plus I brought Cut Creator along'.³⁰

Other internal rhymes were freer, with a single rhyme being sustained throughout the couplet and falling on both stressed and unstressed syllables (the internal rhymes are italicised in this example):

' (1) *I'm* the root - *my rhyme* the tree
As es-(2)-sential to *my mind* as *my eyes* must see'.³¹

The use of a single, central internal rhyme also remained from the first era. Most commonly, the internal rhyme was in its normal position, but some MCs began to use a reversed form of the technique, with the internal rhyme in the second line:

(Traditional)

'(1) La-Di-Da-Di, we likes to party
We (2) don't cause trouble, we don't bother nobody'

(Reversed)

'I (1) stood on many stages, held many mics
take (2) aeroplane flights at huge heights'.³²

As regards thematic content of the second era, Stephens (rather confusingly) claims that, '[t]he majority of the raps that were a part of this wave were boasts' and 'the most common rap songs of this second wave are the sex raps'.³³ In fact, the former is nearer the truth, both in the sense of narrative boasts and simpler self-aggrandisement. The latter form of boasting was often combined with lyrical slights aimed at other MCs, either specifically or in general. The 'sex raps' referred to by Stephens, although fairly common at the time, were not as predominant as he suggests. These rhymes were 'sex raps' in a nominal, rather than a verbal sense. That is, their concern was not chiefly with sexual acts (although MCs did not shy away from sexual content), but was instead a re-emergence of a long tradition of gender-battles in African-American music: Otis Redding & Carla Thomas' 'Tramp', for example; or the various 'Annie' and 'Henry' records of the mid-1950s (the best-known of which probably being Hank Ballard & The Midnighters' 'Work With Me Annie' and Etta James' 'Roll With Me Henry').³⁴

As noted above, MCs' delivery in the second era was in some ways similar to that of the first era. In particular, the rhythm of delivery and the use of anacrusis changed little. However, the 'sing-song' style gave way to a generally harsher, more shouted delivery, with the rising and falling intonation of the first era being replaced with a tonally flatter delivery, with stress being provided by simply by increasing the volume on the relevant syllable.

Turning to the third era of MCing, we again find a continuance of use of rhyming couplets and the various kinds of internal rhymes seen in the second era. Alongside this, however, styles of rhyming

developed considerably in several ways. Firstly, there was a marked increase in the use of half-rhymes, wherein the rhyme is carried by the vowel sounds despite changes in the surrounding consonants, or vice versa:

‘like a ma-(1)-gician, he draws a rabbit out of a hat, son,
(2) I'm drawing more, like a 44 magnum’

‘(1) I'll get a pen, a pencil, a marker
(2) mainly what I write is for the average New Yorker’.³⁵

Simultaneous with this development was a change in rhyme placement. Whereas previously, MCs had usually enclosed a phrase or sentence within a couplet, they now began to allow them to run on beyond the end of the couplet, with the rhyming word falling within, rather than at the end of, the phrase or sentence. Similarly, rhymes would sometimes be placed on the first half of an individual word, with the remainder of the word appearing in the next line:

‘With (1) speech like a reverend, rappers start severing
(2) And in my lifetime, believe I've never been
Beaten...’

‘I (1) heard it's all observant, hysterical fan-
(2) -natics of the Asiatic miracle man’.³⁶

Finally, the freer internal rhyming style of the second era was developed further, with MCs intertwining separate rhyming ideas within a phrase, switching back and forth from one to the other*:

‘(1) I move swift and uplift your (2) mind
shoot the gift when I riff in rhyme’

‘I ap-(1)-pear right here, and scare and dare, a mere muske-(2)-teer
That would dare to compare, I do declare’.³⁷

As can be seen from the above two examples, these rhyming techniques could be used in combination with each other, giving an overall impression of increased ‘flow’ to the MC’s performance. This idea of flow was further enhanced by changes in the delivery of rhymes. The central rhythmic innovation of MCs in the third era was the delivery of rhymes in strings of triplets, providing a rhythmic counterpoint to the accompanying music. Frequently, this style of delivery would be used for just a few bars within a verse predominantly delivered in the more regular manner, so providing not only

* Parallels can be seen between these MCing techniques and those used by Tin Pan Alley songwriters such as Cole Porter, although any direct influence is unlikely.

counterpoint with the music but also with the surrounding lines. Another contributory factor to the sense of flow was a change in vocal style. The strained, shouted delivery of the second era gave way to a more relaxed, conversational style of MCing which allowed for subtler nuances of intonation, as well as providing a means by which the individual voice of the MC could make its presence felt.

Thematically, the third era of MCing was characterised by diversity. Stephens notes Boogie Down Productions' calls for positivity against society's ills and Public Enemy's militantly political rhymes, but these themes were only two amongst many. In fact, the range of topics addressed was so wide that we cannot hope to do justice to them all here, but a few examples should show how wide-ranging the thematic content of rhymes became. LL Cool J's 'Mama Said Knock You Out' shows the continued appearance of boasting whilst disparaging rival MCs; A Tribe Called Quest's 'I Left My Wallet In El Segundo' concerns itself with an impromptu road trip and (unsurprisingly) the losing of a wallet; De La Soul's 'Jenifa Taught Me (Derwin's Revenge)' deals with adolescent sexual awakenings; and Gang Starr's 'Jazz Music' was both a celebration and a brief history of the eponymous musical style.³⁸ Perhaps the ultimate expression of the diversity of thematic content in the third era of MCing is shown by the few MCs for whom semantic concerns carried less weight. These MCs relied heavily on the sound of their voice and, in prioritising the phonic sense of the words being used, downplayed any potential meaning of their lyrics. It is with a quotation from one such – Public Enemy's Flavor Flav – that we will end our discussion of MCing techniques:

'We got Magnum Brown, Shoothki-Valoothki
 Super-calafraga-hestik-alagoothki
 You could put dat in ya don't know what I said book
 Took-look-yuk-duk-wuk
 Shinavative ill factors by da Flavor Flav
 Come an ride da Flavor wave
 In any year on any givin day
 What a brova know – what do Flavor say'.³⁹

Beatboxing

As has been noted above, the practice of human beatboxing plays a small but significant role within hip hop. Essentially it has but one central technique – that of vocally imitating the sounds normally produced by a drum machine. Although the precise sound of beatboxing varied from performer to performer, the basic pattern was always much the same: the 'kick drum' sound was created through a combined plosive lip movement and voiced low tone; and the 'snare drum' sound was produced by a (usually unvoiced) affricate.

As a voiced performance, beatboxing can be seen as related to the MC's art, but since the sound produced is understood as an instrumental, rather than vocal, part of the track, it can also be understood as closer to the realm of the producer. The beatboxer, then, occupies a unique position, blurring the boundaries between the musical (instrumental) and the vocal, as well as those between human- and machine-made music. So while beatboxing could have been dealt with in either the of the preceding

sections on production and MCing, the practice does not really belong with either, but has to be seen as a distinct technique within hip hop.

As might be expected from a distinct technique, human beatboxing produces a distinct sound. In terms of accuracy of representation, the beatboxer is a long way behind the sampler or the DJ playing records – it is usually apparent to the listener that what they are hearing is not a drum machine, but rather a vocal imitation of one.^{*} However, accuracy of representation is not the chief concern of the beatboxer. Principally, beatboxing is about entertainment, and specifically, clownishness. This can be seen in Biz Markie's reputation as the 'clown prince of hip hop', as well as in the Fat Boys' sustained use of slapstick material in their film *Disorderlies*.⁴⁰ In order to understand this association, we need to understand a little of the history of the practice.

Human beatboxing was born of necessity, as a simple and free method of providing beats for MCs to rhyme with during hip hop's early, pre-recording, years. It was readily accessible for impromptu performances, as well as being a workable substitute for expensive equipment which may have been out of the financial reach of many aspiring MCs. It retained this role until 1983, when the Disco Three, featuring the human beatboxing of Darren Robinson, won a rap talent competition at Radio City Music Hall. Their subsequent single 'Fat Boys/Human Beatbox' was arguably the first appearance of beatboxing on a record.⁴¹ However, once it was commercially recorded, beatboxing was shorn of its original purpose – why use a substitute when the technology is available? This incongruity leaves beatboxing in a somewhat absurd position. This absurdity, in turn, combines with the comically infantile act of making noises with the mouth, leading to the perceived clownishness mentioned above. The recording of beatboxing also had another effect, which we will come to later.

As with the techniques discussed in the preceding sections, beatboxing can be seen to have at least one precursor amongst older African-American musical traditions – a parallel can be drawn between beatboxing and the nineteenth century work song. LeRoi Jones has noted that some work songs 'use as their measure the grunt of a man pushing a heavy weight...to provide the metrical precision and rhythmical impetus behind the singer.'⁴²

As well as the basic 'vocal percussion', other similarities can be seen between the two forms. Both were born from a lack of available instruments. 'It would have been very difficult,' notes Jones, 'for a man to pick cotton or shuck corn and play an instrument at the same time.'⁴³ Similarly, as we have seen above, it would be very difficult for an MC to rhyme to beats created on a drum machine that was still in the shop. Furthermore, the vocal percussion continued to appear in both forms of music once the necessity was removed, when songs were performed away from their original context. Of course the effect was very different in each case. Beatboxing, as noted above, became associated with clownishness, whereas the vocal percussion of the work song was a sonic reminder of hard (and often forced – either under slavery or later, in chain gangs) physical labour.

^{*} It should be noted that at the time of writing, beatboxing is undergoing something of a revival, and that some of the new generation of beatboxers display remarkable imitative skills. Some are so accurate that they almost mask their own presence on record, and their performance is more effective in a live environment. It could be claimed, then, that beatboxing has also become a visual art, at least in that it requires the audience to see the performer.

Despite this difference, it can be seen that both techniques are linked to a distinctly African connection between voice and drum. This is evidenced by two factors. Firstly, vocal percussion is rare in tonal-European music (at least until comparatively recent times, and even then only in the work of avant-garde composers). Secondly, there is the African practice of drum signalling, in which the drum mimics the tones of the speaking voice.⁴⁴ Of course, both work songs and beatboxing are the opposite of this, but what is important is the idea that both voice and drum can play the same role. They are, to a degree, interchangeable, and it is this concept that informs both work songs and beatboxing.

Finally, it should be noted that while the central technique of beatboxing is imitating the sounds produced by a drum machine, other sounds were at times incorporated into the beatboxer's performance. For example, Biz Markie recreated the hook from Whistle's '(Nothing Serious) Just Buggin'' on his 'One Two', and Doug E Fresh mimicked a ringing telephone on 'The Show'.⁴⁵ Again, parallels can be seen with earlier types of African-American music: early a capella gospel singers would sometimes mimic musical instruments with their voices during their performances.

Since there are no recordings of early beatboxing, we cannot be certain, but it is likely that a few of these less percussively-concerned sounds were always present. However, it is also likely that the use of these sounds was furthered by the advent of tracks which used beatboxing alongside real drum machines. Only the earliest beatboxing records used the technique as the sole source of rhythm for the track, and once freed from their role as rhythm-provider, beatboxers could expand their sonic range further. However, while this resulted in some genuinely distinctive vocal performances, it also served to increase the perception of beatboxing as a comical practice, and ultimately led to the technique's relatively minor role within hip hop.

In this chapter, then, we have discussed the techniques involved in creating hip hop with regard to the four areas of DJing, production, MCing and beatboxing. We have seen how many of these techniques have antecedents in older African-American musical practices, and also how the four areas are linked: DJing techniques are often reworked as production techniques; the developments in MCing are broadly synchronised with those in production; and beatboxing brings together the instrumental work of production with the vocal work of MCing. As noted at the beginning of this chapter, the knowledge we have gained of hip hop's creative techniques will be useful in the following chapters. In the next chapter, we will be constructing a model for understanding hip hop based around text and reception: the knowledge of techniques from this chapter will be vital for the textual side of this model. In chapter five, we will be undertaking analyses of selected tracks, and, once again, the technical knowledge gained through the preceding pages will be invoked.

4. 'The Blueprint': A Model For Understanding Hip Hop

Towards a theoretical perspective

Having established, in the previous chapters, an historical sequence and a formulation of different 'eras' within our time-scale, we can now turn our attention to a more formalised theoretical approach to our subject matter. The aim here is to construct a general model for understanding hip hop, which will then be applied to a series of 'case-study' examples in the following chapter.

Of course, the field of popular music, with its many varied facets (amongst which can be included music, lyrics, visual representation and social impact) has necessitated an interdisciplinary approach to its study. Therefore, the first question which must be posed in attempting to formulate a theoretical approach to hip hop must be *how* to study it. That is, of the many different approaches available, which will prove the most useful to our interpretation?

Since the aim of this thesis is to discover how hip hop works as music, it is appropriate to consider a musicological approach. However, this can be seen to present us with problems if it is to be the sole method used. Firstly, musicology was developed as a means of understanding tonal-European music, and as we saw in the previous chapter, hip hop does not form part of that tradition. Allied to this is the problem of the analytical language used. Traditional musicology operates through the system of Western musical notation, which prioritises tonal development, whereas hip hop (again, as we saw in the previous chapter) largely eschews tonal development, instead prioritising those aspects of music which fall outside of the bounds of musicological analysis, such as timbre and intensional repetition. Secondly, as Susan McClary and Robert Walser, point out, musicologists are forced to deal with 'abstractions in sound organisation – abstractions that virtually all members of a society manage to absorb and internalise from an early age, but for which they have no conscious awareness and no vocabulary by means of which to verbalise their responses.'¹ In other words, musicology can be as mystifying as it is revelatory. This does not mean, however, that we should abandon traditional musicology entirely. Certain musical ideas contained within hip hop tracks can best be explained through traditional musicological methods, and so it is intended that, where necessary, this approach will be taken. However, traditional musicological techniques are simply inappropriate for much of the study of hip hop. Given this, it is hoped that a more fruitful approach will be to complement traditional musicological methods by employing a theory first developed within the field of literary studies: reception theory.

Since a detailed discussion of reception theory has already appeared in chapter one, there is no need for any recapitulation, at this point, of the theoretical standpoint it offers. There is, however, one question that requires an answer in order that we can proceed: is this approach valid? That is, can a theory built around the reception of literature simply be transferred to the study of popular music? In order to answer this question in the affirmative, we will look at two key concepts from Iser's theory and argue for their suitability for studying hip hop. The first will be dealt with in abstract terms, while in our discussion of the second we will demonstrate suitability by example.

Firstly, there is the notion of 'text'. The importance of this term within literary studies is that its supersession of terms such as 'work' and 'composition' (in its nominal sense) was not simply an abstract semantic shift, but was rather a signifier of a move away from author-centred interpretations. The focus on text rather than author has meant that literary theories have become, in general, more appropriate for studying other forms of culture in which the notion of authority is problematic. This is particularly the case in those forms of culture which tend towards a more communal creativity, with several (or many) individuals contributing to a cultural artefact, such as film or music.

Secondly, there is the importance of process to Iser's work. We have already seen that the process of reading is one of the central elements which comprise Iser's implied reader. Robert C. Holub further underlines the centrality of process in his note on Roman Ingarden's influence on Iser: 'if the aesthetic object is constituted only through an act of cognition on the part of the reader, then the focus is switched from the text as object to the act of reading as process.'²

At this point, then, we must address the question: in what way, if at all, is the listening process important to hip hop? In order to answer this question, we will concentrate on a particular device used within hip hop which will be termed the 'autonomous Break'. As well as demonstrating the importance of process to hip hop, our discussion of this device will also serve as an initial demonstration of how a text/reception approach can be used to illuminate hip hop. Before describing the autonomous Break, however, we first need to define what is meant by the (capitalised) word Break.

The Break

In our introduction, it was stated that our framework for understanding hip hop would be the intertextual practices it involves. We have already seen, in the preceding chapters, that intertextuality must be understood as an important element within hip hop. Whether in the form of a DJ cutting between records, a producer using samples in a track's construction or an MC quoting other artists' works, practices involving citation are central to the genre. In order to simplify our discussion, the term 'Break' will be used to refer to all instances of intertextuality within hip hop, encompassing each of the above examples along with any others. This terminology was chosen since it reflects the importance of breaks (i.e. instrumental breaks, as used by early DJs) within hip hop – as was noted in chapter two, the genre was known as 'break music' for a while. The capitalisation is simply to distinguish the term in the specific sense described above from other uses. Since the term 'Break' will be important within this thesis, a fuller definition should be offered at this point.

A Break can be defined as *any sound-element within a recording which is a re-presentation of a sound-element from a pre-existing source, either by direct or indirect methods; which is understood as such irrespective of any potential recognition of said source by an implied listener*. The following paragraphs clarify this definition.

'sound-element'

This term refers to the actual 'physical' material present – the 'sonic stuff' which the listener hears. Frequently, this can be analogous to Philip Tagg's 'museme', which refers to a 'minimal unit of expression'.³ However, a single sound-element can be comprised of more than one museme, or can already contain repetition. For example, a four-bar drum break consisting of an ABAC pattern could be

considered to be comprised of three musemes, with repetition of the first. The same break, sampled in its entirety, should be understood as a single sound-element, albeit one which allows for greater interpretation of its internal structure than would a sample consisting of one of the four bars.

Theoretically, there is no limit with regard to the contents of a single sound-element; in practice, the ‘sonic stuff’ tends towards the musematic. Often, this ‘sonic stuff’ is musical in nature: a fragment of melody, a horn riff, a drum pattern, a bass line (or, indeed, a combination of discrete sounds: a sound-element can be either monophonic or polyphonic)– the list could go on. However, this is not necessarily the case. Plenty of extra-musical examples spring to mind: spoken vocal material, police sirens, an atonal James Brown grunt, cartoon sound effects – again there are many other possibilities here. The term sound-element, then, is used as it covers both musical and extra-musical material.

‘within a recording’

This phrase refers to the context of the Break. Although our discussion of Breaks necessarily treats them as discrete objects, it is important to remember that they are heard as part of a larger whole – the recording.

‘re-presentation’/‘pre-existing source’

These two phrases combine to give a sense of the appropriative nature of the Break. We must, however, be aware that this notion is more complex than is accounted for here. As we will shortly see, pre-existing sources are not necessarily re-presented in such a way as to be immediately recognisable.

‘direct or indirect methods’

There are three ways in which sound-elements are re-presented within hip hop. Two of these – the digital sample and the analogue cut (i.e. the manipulation of a record by a DJ) we can consider direct methods, in that what is being re-presented is material ‘physically’ present in the original. The third method, that of using musicians to provide a facsimile of a sound-element can be understood as an indirect method, since the sound of the source is not present, with the re-presentation being, primarily, one of musical ideas. Additionally, the MCing practice of quoting – which can involve the re-presentation of lyrics from an earlier recording, but which can also involve a vocal ‘approximation’ of a melody (as, for example in KRS One’s use of Billy Joel’s ‘It’s Still Rock ‘N’ Roll To Me’ in Boogie Down Production’s ‘The Bridge Is Over’⁴) – should also be understood as a form of indirect re-presentation.

‘understood as such’

This term is included in the definition in order to make apparent the vital role played by the listener in the process of Break-construction. Since the aim of this section is to justify our usage of reception theory by showing the importance of process within hip hop, this will be discussed at length later in this chapter.

‘irrespective of any potential recognition of said source’

This phrase of the definition is included so as to encompass two types of Break, which we can term ‘autonomous’ and ‘dependent’ Breaks. While these two types will be discussed further below, we can introduce them briefly at this stage as being differentiated by the listener’s recognition of the source in the case of dependent Breaks, and non-recognition of the source in the case of autonomous

Breaks. The phrase ‘potential recognition’ is included since recognition of the Break is possible in either of these cases.

‘by an implied listener.’

This closing phrase simply serves to underline the text/reception approach we will be taking with regard to Breaks, namely that of investigating hip hop, and in particular the genre’s intertextual practices, through an application of Iser’s version of reception theory.

It can fairly readily be established that some Breaks develop an autonomous fame: ‘the UFO’, ‘the Champ’, ‘the Funky Drummer’, ‘the Impeach The President’, ‘the Apache’ – these and many other snippets of music have, through their re-presentation by hip hop DJs, become familiar in and of themselves. Hip hop’s constant recontextualisation of sounds means that the sounds themselves eventually gain a patina of recognisability independent of both their source and their recontextualised uses. This is best explained by means of an example: on hearing the familiar horn sound of part of ‘the Apache’ being scratched in, the listener’s pleasure of recognition comes not from an acknowledgement of the source of the sound (‘Oh, that’s the bit out of the Incredible Bongo Band tune’), nor even from acknowledgement of a secondary, hip hop, source (‘Aha, the bit from ‘Adventures on the Wheels of Steel’), but simply from a recognition of the Break *per se*. Essentially, this could be phrased as knowing the music, without necessarily knowing what the music is.

Of course, it could be argued that this is not a phenomenon exclusive to hip hop. Frequent exposure can serve to make any music familiar: for instance, the melody of Beethoven’s ‘Ode To Joy’ can be presumed to be familiar to many people through the varied uses to which it has been put – as the European anthem, as music in television adverts or programmes, even as a heavy metal instrumental performed by Rainbow in the 1980s – but its familiarity is not dependent on the listener’s knowing either the name of the piece or that of its composer. However, while the ‘Ode To Joy’ can be seen to have acquired a similar patina of recognisability to that gained by autonomous Breaks, there is a difference between the two types of recognition, and it is this difference that will be investigated below.

Two important factors here are concerned with hip hop’s production. Firstly, there is the common practice of using Breaks taken from the more marginal areas of the original: introductions, little bridging phrases, the break itself. This effectively distances the listener from the original, since these marginal elements are simply less likely to be recognised as belonging to a primary source. This is further enhanced by the commonplace practice of using Breaks taken from relatively obscure originals*, which is rooted in the competitiveness amongst early hip hop DJs to find breaks that no other DJ was using. In itself, this is a production-side version of the equivalence between scarcity and status commonly found amongst consumers of recorded music, as evidenced in publications such as *Record Collector* which list the financial values placed on records based on both their perceived quality and their rarity. Additionally, the use of unfamiliar source material allows hip hop DJs and producers to use Breaks as a kind of instructive tool, forcing their listeners to confront their own preconceptions about music, as the following quotation from Afrika Bambaataa shows: ‘I’d throw on The Monkees, ‘Mary Mary’ – just the beat part where they’d go ‘Mary, Mary, where are you going? – and they

* Evidence of this practice will appear in the following chapter.

[Bambaataa's audience]'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.'⁵

Secondly, there is the fact that a Break's *sound* is often as important as its musical content.

Discussing drum samples, Tricia Rose notes:

Rap's heavy use of sampled live soul and funk drummers adds a desired textural dimension uncommon in other genres and that programmed drum machines cannot duplicate. These soul and funk drummers, recorded under very different circumstances, carry performative resonances that cannot be easily recreated.⁶

Or, as DJ Premier more succinctly phrases it: 'They ain't making that sound no more.'⁷ While it should be remembered from chapter one that this focus on sound quality is, as Portia Maultsby has argued, a wider African-American musical trait, what it means in practical terms is that hip hop producers will often prioritise the sound-content of the source over any musical-contextual sense.

An example of both this prioritisation and the practice of sampling from marginal areas can be found in Public Enemy's 'Get The F--- Outta Dodge'.⁸ One of the sound-elements heard in this song is a looped rising triad in D minor played on an organ, accompanied by a drum pattern (only the organ part is shown in figure 1, below):



Figure 1. Public Enemy 'Get The F--- Outta Dodge'

In this case, the sound-element is taken from a relatively well known source: Sly & The Family Stone's 'Sing A Simple Song'.⁹ This track had been the b-side of a US number one single, had been included on the album *Stand!*, which had reached number thirteen in the US charts, and had also been issued on the group's *Greatest Hits* compilation, which had been a US number two album in itself. However, the sound-element appears only briefly within 'Sing A Simple Song' during the instrumental break, is only heard in the right-hand stereo channel, and the organ part is largely masked by the accompanying instrumentation, only being clearly audible when the right-hand channel is heard in isolation. The original context is shown in figure 2, below:

Figure 2. Sly & The Family Stone 'Sing A Simple Song'

From this, we can see how the musical sense of the sound-element has been altered. In its original context, the rising triad underpins the (more strident) horn and guitar parts, and forms part of a two-bar rising and falling pattern. Within the Public Enemy track, the horns and guitar are absent (originally appearing in the unsampled left-hand stereo channel), and the second, descending, part of the pattern is also removed. The effect of this is that the sound-element can be seen to be sonically redolent of ‘Sing A Simple Song’, whilst apparently musically dissimilar.

With this example, however, we have moved a little way from our discussion of autonomous Breaks. As noted above, ‘Sing A Simple Song’ is relatively well-known, and so in order to further discuss the importance of process and the listener with regard to autonomous Breaks, we will employ another example, selected for the perceived obscurity of the source: ‘the UFO’.

In order to discuss ‘the UFO’ in terms of its source, we must, of course, know what that source is: a track of the same name by a group called ESG.¹⁰ However, it must be understood that we are, in having this information, placing ourselves in a privileged position. In order to discuss ‘the UFO’ in terms of its status as an autonomous Break, we must posit a listener who is unfamiliar with the source, based on the relative obscurity of that source (the ESG album containing the track did not chart). Of course, since this listener is a virtual presence, grounded in a particular textual aspect, we are here dealing with an implied listener (our correlate of Iser’s implied reader).

The actual sonic content of ‘the UFO’ is a mewling, siren-like guitar sound, probably created with controlled feedback, and is largely pitch-indeterminate, consisting principally of overtones. Although it is heard throughout much of the original, it is only heard unaccompanied briefly at the very start of the track. It is one bar of this brief appearance that has been utilised by hip hop producers. In itself, this is a further demonstration of the tendency to utilise sound-elements found in the more marginal areas of sources.

We will consider four uses of ‘the UFO’ here: ‘It’s My Turn’ by Stezo; ‘Ain’t No Half Steppin’ by Big Daddy Kane; ‘Murdergram’ by LL Cool J; and ‘Night Of The Living Baseheads’ by Public Enemy.¹¹ Our implied listener hears each of these tracks at differing times. For clarity, we have assumed a sequence in which the tracks are heard, but this should be understood as arbitrary: the sequence could be altered without affecting the outcome. Additionally, the bracketed times in the following paragraph refer to the time at which ‘the UFO’ is first heard within each track.

In ‘It’s My Turn’, the sound-element is instantly noticeable: it appears, looped, at the beginning of the track (0:05) and again in between verses. On hearing ‘Ain’t No Half Steppin’’, the implied listener recognises the sound-element again (0:02), perhaps also noticing the fact that it is pitched slightly slower. When ‘Murdergram’ is heard, the same sound-element is distinguishable again (0:04), despite the fact that this time it is pitched much higher and is somewhat buried in the mix. Finally, in ‘Night Of The Living Baseheads’, the Break appears for one bar only, almost two and a quarter minutes into the track (2:10), but our implied listener, having already experienced it in several different contexts, recognises the sound-element.

It is this moment of recognition that is different from, say, recognising the ‘Ode To Joy’ (to continue the example from above). In recognising the ‘Ode To Joy’, the listener recognises the unchanged musical ideas (principally, in this case, the melody along with the prominent I-V harmonic

pattern), even through the radically different instrumentation of the Rainbow version. In Break recognition, the listener recognises a concrete collection of sounds as well as musical ideas. As we will see, this type of recognition can take place despite quite radical alteration of the original material. However, what is important here is that the series of recontextualisations, by different producers, of what was relatively obscure material to begin with, leads to the Break signifying, in the first instance, itself as a Break. That is, our listener recognises the commonality of certain sounds within the various recontextualisations, understands that this is likely to mean that the same source material has been used for each, and goes on to reconstruct the Break as a *potential* original – a ‘sound-idea’, rather than a sound-element.

On first hearing, there is no way of knowing whether a particular collection of sounds constitutes a Break or not. Only when the same sounds appear in other musical contexts (that is, in other tracks) does it become possible to recognise them as a Break. Furthermore, in order to construct the potential original, the listener also has to recognise which sounds belong to their ‘sound-idea’ and which do not. Using the above example again, ‘It’s My Turn’ begins with two bars of drums before ‘the UFO’ is heard, alongside the drums, for another two bars. On hearing only this instance of the Break, the listener would have no way of knowing whether this was one four-bar Break or two separate Breaks combined. Only when ‘the UFO’ is heard in the other contexts, with no sign of the drums from the Stezo track being present, can the listener be relatively sure of the sound of the original. In this sense, it can be said that a Break is at least partially defined by the sounds that surround it, and autonomous Break recognition is as much a recognition of absence as well as of presence.

But while the listener plays a vital role in the creation of Breaks, it must be remembered that the raw material from which the Break is created exists in the form of sound-elements within hip hop productions, and that before this, the sound-element exists as part of a source recording. This larger idea of Break creation is represented diagrammatically in figure 3, below. While this diagram represents the example of ‘The UFO’ discussed above, it omits LL Cool J’s ‘Murdergram’. Principally, this is for reasons of pictorial clarity, but the omission will itself have relevance in the discussion that follows.

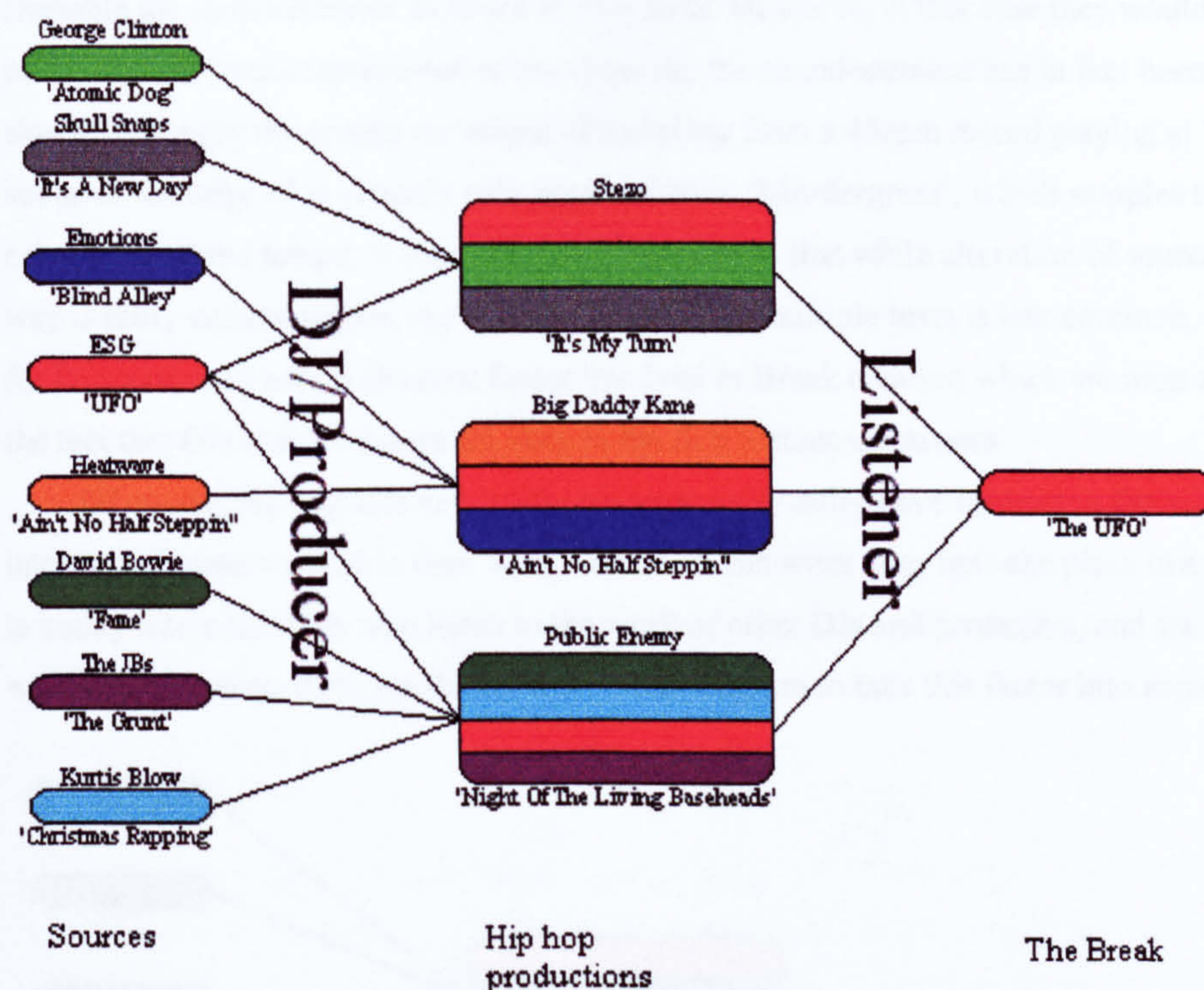


Figure 3. Autonomous Break creation

The different coloured blocks in this diagram represent individual sound-elements, with the surrounding text showing the context in which they are heard. On the left hand side of the diagram, we see the sound-elements as heard in their sources; in the centre, we see the same sound-elements within their hip hop recontextualisations; and on the right hand side, we see the 'sound-idea' as reconstructed by the listener. Again, for the sake of clarity, not all of the sound-elements heard in the hip hop productions are included: the aim here is not full analysis of these tracks, but rather a representation of the process of Break creation. The lines which link the blocks represent the processes involved in the production and reception sides. On the production side, this involves the isolation of the sound-element within the source and its subsequent combination with other sound-elements to form the hip hop track. As we have seen above, the process involved in the reception side is the implied listener's reconstruction of 'the UFO' as a potential original. Of course, since we are dealing with multiple texts here, we must also allow for multiple implied listeners. That is, we should not assume an individual implied listener who has heard all of the uses of the sound-element within hip hop productions, but rather a set of implied listeners who will have heard some. This is important because it underlines the fact that the Break as a sound-idea is not necessarily the same as the sound-element upon which it is based.

For example, if we take the listener shown in the diagram above (between the 'hip hop productions column' and 'the Break') to be an individual implied listener who has not heard 'Murdergram', then it could be claimed that that listener would have developed a fairly consistent concept of 'the UFO'. While there are slight differences in pitch in the sound-element as heard in 'It's My Turn', 'Ain't No Half Steppin'' and 'Night Of The Living Baseheads', there is enough similarity between the three uses for the listener to consider that their sound-idea of the Break is likely to

resemble the sound-element as heard in its source. However, in this case they would be wrong. In each of the hip hop tracks represented in our diagram, the sound-element has in fact been considerably slowed down (by the simple technique of sampling from a 45rpm record playing at 33&1/3rpm). The sound of the original is actually only approached in 'Murdergram', which samples the source at its original pitch and tempo. It should be noted, however, that while alteration of source material in some way is fairly commonplace, regularised alteration in multiple texts is less common. The likely reason for its occurrence here is the next factor involved in Break creation which we must take into account: the fact that DJs and producers are also, in the first instance, listeners.

Of course, hip hop DJs and producers must necessarily have listened to the sources of the intertextual material used in their work, but since this work does not take place in a cultural vacuum, it is highly likely that they also listen to the work of other DJs and producers, and are influenced by this work. At this point, then, we should update our diagram to take this factor into account.

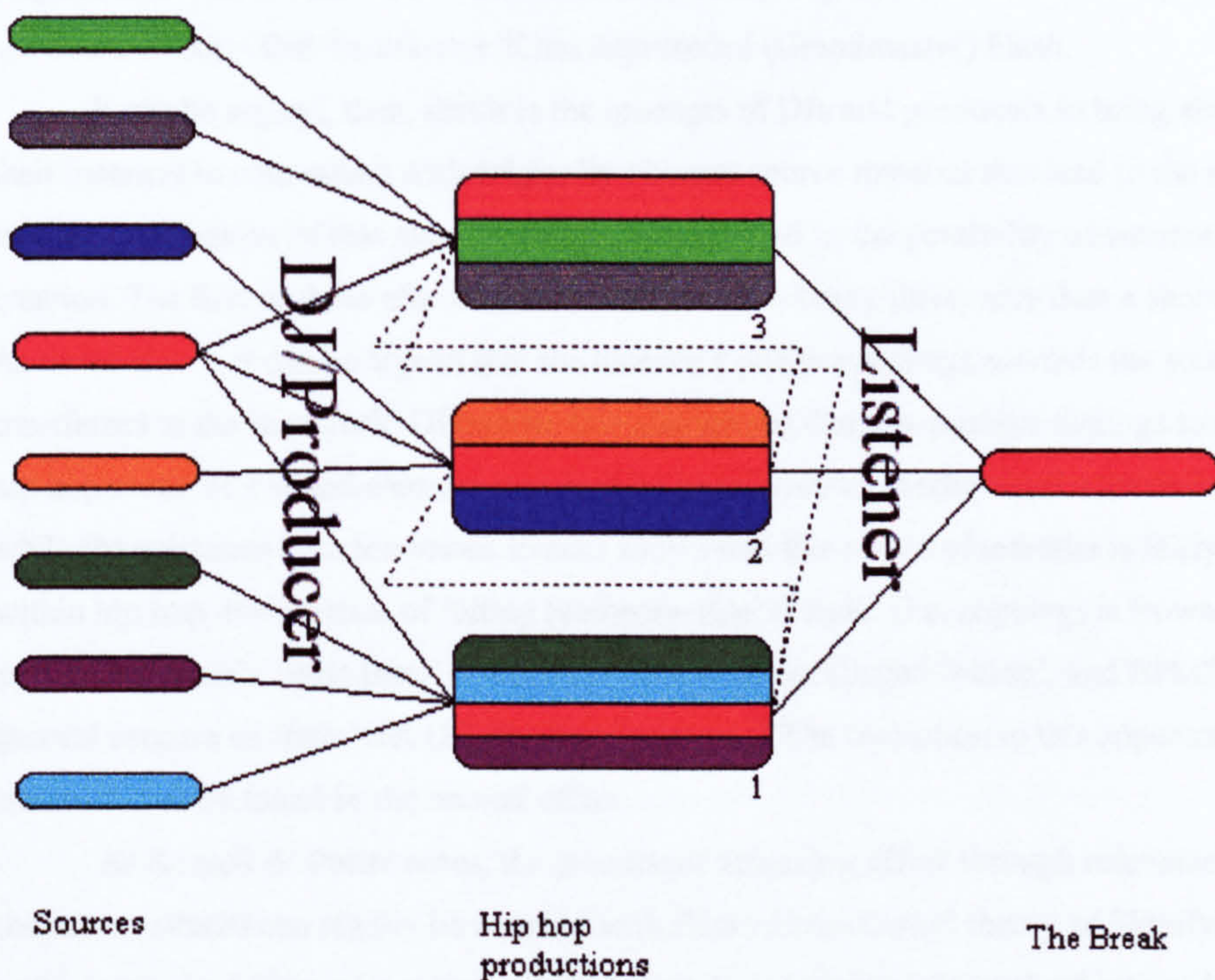


Figure 4. Autonomous Break creation

In Figure 4, above, while the basic diagram remains largely unaltered, the specific sources, names of hip hop productions and Break have been removed in order that the diagram be understood as being more representative of the general process of Break creation. In addition, we should now consider the three hip hop productions as being in chronological order, with the earliest at the bottom (this is shown by the numbers which now appear at the bottom right hand corner of each). The broken lines added to the diagram represent the influence of earlier hip hop productions on DJs and producers. These lines are broken so as to show that the sound-elements as heard in earlier hip hop productions are not 'physically' present in the subsequent tracks (although this can occur), but rather influence the manner in which the source material is heard and used. However, while this cross-influencing is readily understandable, it seems to run against the grain of our earlier claim that DJs and producers place value

on obscure source material. In order to explain this, we need to turn our attention to another way in which intertextual material is used within hip hop, the above-mentioned dependent Break.

The dependent Break is simply the opposite of the autonomous Break. Where the autonomous Break is constructed as a sound-idea by a listener unfamiliar with the source, the dependent Break is interpreted by the listener by reference to the source. There are two main effects which listeners may perceive in connection with a dependent Break. The first of these is musical: the familiarity of the music places the listener within a comfortable frame of reference – this can work to bring a listener ‘onside’ (any positive feelings the listener has for the original may be transferred to the new track) and to draw listeners in to the track (having recognised the source, the listener may become interested in seeing how the DJ or producer has used the sonic material). The second effect is extra-musical: for example, Public Enemy’s ‘Terminator X To The Edge Of Panic’ uses ‘Flash’s Theme’ by Queen, but with the words ‘Terminator X’ cut in over the ‘Flash’ vocal.¹² Here, the listener who recognises the original, and who is conversant with the history of hip hop can understand an implied meaning in the use of the Break – that Terminator X has superseded (Grandmaster) Flash.

It can be argued, then, that it is the attempts of DJs and producers to bring about these effects in their listeners in connection with originally obscure source material that lead to the multiple recontextualisations of that material which, in turn, lead to the possibility of autonomous Break creation. The first of these effects can be interpreted as being little more than a shortcut to popularity. As noted above, it can be argued that the listener’s positive feelings towards the source may be transferred to the new track. Of course, this also means that any positive feelings towards a previous hip hop usage of a sound-element may also be transferred to another track containing it. Interestingly, while the existence of autonomous Breaks shows that this re-use of material is fairly commonplace within hip hop, the practice of ‘biting [someone else’s] style’ (i.e. copying) is frowned upon by hip hop artists. MC Shan’s ‘Beat Biter’ attacks LL Cool J for his alleged ‘biting’, and EPMD offer a more general censure on their ‘Get Off The Bandwagon’.¹³ The resolution to this apparently paradoxical situation is to be found in the second effect.

As Russell A. Potter notes, the practice of achieving effect through reference to previous uses of the same material can readily be equated with Henry Louis Gates’ theory of Signifyin(g), and it is nothing new in African-American music: ‘when New Orleans jazz evolved into swing, or the hard boppers broke from swing, or the “cool” jazz school drifted away from hard bop, these new forms were Signifyin(g) on their precursors.’¹⁴ While Signifyin(g) must be understood as a deeply complex rhetorical device (as Gates’ work makes clear), at its heart lies the ‘double-voiced utterance’ which (as noted in the first chapter of this thesis) operates through ‘tropological revision or repetition and difference’.¹⁵

For this process to work, the listener must have some previous point of reference – ‘repetition and difference’ can only be understood through comparison. In the example of a dependent Break noted above, the effect is achieved through the listener’s recognition of the source. However, as we have noted above, the very definition of the autonomous Break is that it operates without the listener knowing the source. Thus, in order for Signifyin(g) to occur, multiple recontextualisations are

necessary: unfamiliar with the source, the listener can only understand autonomous Breaks which Signify on their other uses within hip hop.

Once again, a look at a specific example should prove helpful here. S.H. Fernando depicts Afrika Bambaataa at work in the early days of hip hop: 'Bam might start off with the theme from "The Munsters," taped off his TV, switch into some James Brown, and rock just the beat of the Rolling Stones's "Honky Tonk Woman" (*sic*) for a while, before bringing in the Herman Kelly Band's "Dance to the Drummer's Beat" or something even more obscure.'¹⁶ The 'obscure' 'Dance to the Drummer's Beat' (from Herman Kelly & Life's *Percussion Explosion!* album, which originally peaked at #92 in the R&B chart in 1978) was also being used by other DJs: 'Hollywood, Eddie Cheeba, Starski, and Flash made it popular in the late '70s.'¹⁷ So we can imagine a listener noticing a particular funky beat in, say, DJ Hollywood's set, hearing it again from Grandmaster Flash, then again from Bambaataa. Gradually (and at a differing rate from listener to listener), the Break becomes familiar – a small portion, a sound-element, of 'Dance To The Drummer's Beat' becomes recognisable as a Break, and this familiarity allows DJs to use the Break to Signify on its other uses.

We now have to imagine our listener several years later, having bought *He's The DJ, I'm The Rapper*, by DJ Jazzy Jeff & The Fresh Prince. Track 10, 'Live At Union Square (November 1986)' is reached, and halfway through our listener hears Jazzy Jeff performing a series of transformer scratches on the 'Dance To The Drummer's Beat' Break. Utilising a technique discussed in chapter three, Jeff lets the Break play in full before and between the transformer scratches. The effect on the listener is the simultaneous recognition of the Break – in this case, aided by Fresh Prince's pointing the Break out to the audience (not by name, but by a lyrical phrase cut in by Jazzy Jeff): 'Let's Dance. How many of y'all remember that?' and an acknowledgement of the changes wrought upon it. The Break is being used to Signify upon the earlier uses within hip hop (and in this case, to make the same point that Public Enemy did in 'Terminator X To The Edge Of Panic' – a DJ 'boast'), without the listener ever having even heard of Herman Kelly & Life.

It can be seen, then, that simultaneously with its creation, the autonomous Break gains more and more potential for extra-musical signification (and, indeed Signification as in Gates' usage). The Break is in a constant state of being recreated, refigured. Each new use can add further signification, until the autonomous Break reaches a level of fame such that it can operate on the same terms as Breaks taken from familiar source material. The difference, of course, is that the autonomous Break refers only to its other hip hop incarnations and not to its original source.

So it can be claimed that the autonomous Break is forever in a state of being recreated. There is a constant creative tension between DJs/producers and listeners, and it is this – the very *process* of hip hop creativity – that is the force behind autonomous Break creation.

Process, then, is the factor which provides the link between hip hop and reception theory. With this established, we can, from this point on, turn to a more rigorous examination of hip hop in terms of Iser's work. Iser's definition of the implied reader, noted towards the start of this chapter, places importance on both the textual prestructuring of potential meaning and the reader's actualising of this potential through interaction with the text. With regard to hip hop's intertextual practices, this means that we must investigate both how the music establishes itself as intertextual and how the listener can

interpret this intertextuality. That is, rather than simply discussing texts through an implied listener (we have seen the potential pitfalls of this approach above), we must construct a model of the implied listener as a set of potential text/listener positions. In order to do this, we will propose two groups of possibilities: those concerned with ‘degrees of intertextuality’ on the textual side; and those concerned with ‘degrees of recognition of intertextuality’ on the reception side. The required set of potential text/listener positions can then be created simply by ‘plotting’ the possibilities against one another, as with the axes of a graph.

The implied listener model (1): text

Turning first to the textual side, we must first note the overriding importance that has been placed on the idea of appropriation in discussions of hip hop as music (this one included). Hip hop’s detractors claim that appropriation replaces composition, and the resulting music is consequentially viewed as being somehow less artistically ‘worthy’, and even immoral (the perceived theft of intellectual property). ‘Memorex music’¹⁸, noted jazz musician Mtume called it. On the other hand, supporters of hip hop freely admit that it is appropriative, while often mounting a kind of ‘hypertextual defence’. Bronx based hip hop artist Diamond D exemplifies this when he says:

[H]ip hop was based on the idea of taking somebody else’s music, and everybody who knows hip hop will know that...I would defend it because it’s a form of – even though, yes, we are taking a piece of somebody else’s work – we are altering it, chopping it, making new sounds out of it. This is the whole thing with hip hop.¹⁹

Indeed, so strong is the association between hip hop and appropriation that under-informed commentators often assume that hip hop consists *solely* of appropriation. One late night talk show host, for example, earnestly asked pop hip hopper Wyclef Jean if he was the first rap artist to use live musicians in the studio (the questioner presumably being unfamiliar with The Sugarhill Gang, A Tribe Called Quest, Dr Dre, The Roots, etc.)²⁰ In order to avoid this kind of mistake, then, we must construct the text side of our model along the lines of *degrees of intertextuality*. Essentially, there are three possibilities for any individual sound-element in a hip hop track:

Original Material. That is, material which does not refer explicitly to a single pre-existing source. Most raps belong to this category, as well as drum machine patterns* and newly-created instrumental parts. Of course, these elements can still possess wider connotations – for example, A Tribe Called Quest’s ‘Verses From The Abstract’ features a bass line played by Ron Carter. This bass line carries stylistic connotations (it is ‘jazzy’), but is not recognisable as any particular jazz bass line already in existence.^{†21} While we are proposing the term ‘original material’ here, it should be borne in mind that, as Jason Toynbee notes, ‘the musical text is an amalgam of possibilities – possible voices, that it is (*sic*), from the field of musical works.’²² That is, all musical texts are essentially intertextual to some

* Bearing in mind, of course, the note made in chapter three concerning drum machine programming (see page 37).

† At least, to the author’s knowledge.

degree, since they rely on combinations of the ‘endemically dialogic’²³ voice. The category of ‘original material’ used here, then, should be understood as incorporating that material which, within hip hop, operates at this base level of intertextuality common to all music.

Interpretive Material. This category covers those sound-elements which involve the re-creation of material from a pre-existing source, through indirect methods. As noted above, this most often involves a session musician (or musicians) recreating a part from an earlier recording; as, for instance, is the case in many records on the Sugar Hill label. There are two types of material which can be termed interpretive, although in reality they differ only in degree. The first type of interpretive material is that which, although non-identical with a single source, shares enough similarities to be considered a ‘version’ thereof. An example of this can be seen in Crash Crew’s ‘Breaking Bells (Take Me To The Mardi Gras)’, the main riff of which is a version of the introduction to Bob James’ ‘Take Me to the Mardi Gras’, as shown below:²⁴



Figure 5. Bob James ‘Take Me To The Mardi Gras’



Figure 6. Crash Crew ‘Breaking Bells (Take Me To The Mardi Gras)’

Of course, the title of the Bob James tune is included within that of the Crash Crew record. However, while this fact should be noted here, further discussion will be deferred until we turn to the reception side, since any effect of the shared title is on the listener, rather than the text. The second type of interpretive material involves those sound-elements which are near-identical recreations of material from a single source. These often differ only from their source in relatively abstract ways – slightly different timbre, for example, or a different ‘quality’ of recording (cleaner/dirtier). The most famous instance of this is The Sugarhill Gang’s ‘Rapper’s Delight’, in which the Sugar Hill house band recreate Chic’s ‘Good Times’.²⁵

Appropriative Material. The final category includes all that which, as we have seen above, is widely held to be at the heart of hip hop – sound-elements that are directly appropriated from a single source, either by means of a digital sampler or a DJ’s manipulation of vinyl. An example here (if one is needed) is Grandmaster Flash’s ‘The Adventures Of Grandmaster Flash On The Wheels Of Steel’, a track comprised entirely of previously recorded material replayed by performative DJing techniques. The idea of direct appropriation is an important one here, since it is this that forms the distinction between appropriative material and that type of interpretive material which is almost sonically identical with its source: appropriative

material is physically present within the hip hop track which uses it; interpretive material is always mediated in some way.

Importantly, we can see that our distinction between interpretive and appropriative material is equivalent to the dichotomy Serge Lacasse draws between autosonicity and allosonicity. The autosonic is that wherein 'what is common to both recordings is of a physical nature'²⁶ – Lacasse singles out sampling as an autosonic practice. The allosonic, on the other hand, is that where 'what is shared...consists of an abstract structure.'²⁷ The example given is that of a jazz musician 'quoting' another tune in a solo.

In his work, Lacasse uses an adaptation of Gérard Genette's work on literary textual relationships - in particular Genette's concepts of intertextuality ('practices that aim at including some elements of a previous text within the present text'²⁸) and hypertextuality ('practices which aim at producing a new text out of a previous one'²⁹) - to produce a typology of musical textual relationships. While allowing that others may be possible, Lacasse outlines eleven 'transtextual practices': autosonic quotation, autosonic parody, cento, instrumental remix, remix, allosonic quotation, allusion, allosonic parody, transtylation (with its three subcategories of copy, cover and travesty), translation and pastiche.

While it is not the intention here to describe each of these in detail, we can readily see these practices at work in hip hop recordings. MC Shan's 'Kill That Noise', for example, can be understood as an autosonic parody of Boogie Down Productions' 'South Bronx', in that a sound-element from the latter (the chanted title) is incorporated in the former, but by following it with 'kill that, kill that noise,' the celebratory tone of the BDP original is reversed.³⁰ In Slick Rick's 'Mona Lisa' we can find two examples of allosonic quotation: towards the end of the recording, a female voice sings a verse and chorus from the Hal David/Burt Bacharach composition 'Walk On By'; earlier, Slick Rick approximates the melodic hook of Nat King Cole's 'Mona Lisa' (in fact, Slick Rick's delivery is so different from Nat King Cole's that it might be more accurate to class this as allusion rather than allosonic quotation).³¹ A paratextual relationship can be seen in the example used in our discussion of interpretive material, in the Crash Crew's use of the title of their source material as a bracketed subtitle for their track.

The equivalence between our categories of appropriative and interpretive material and Lacasse's central distinction between autosonicity and allosonicity means that we can reduce Lacasse's categories as follows: Autosonic quotations, autosonic parodies and cento all involve appropriative material; allosonic quotations, allosonic parodies, transtylations and allusions involve interpretive material. Only pastiche necessarily involves original material. The two types of remix, while commonplace in hip hop, involve the recasting of an entire track, and so are not concerned with the production of Breaks. Translation (of lyrics) is of negligible importance in U.S. hip hop. This reduction is made possible by a removal of subjectivity from the textual side of hip hop – without active elucidation of 'meaning', there is no difference between, say, a quotation and a parody. Of course, there *is* a difference between a quotation and a parody: what is at stake here is the site of this difference. As Lacasse notes, 'Genette pays more attention to the author's intentions than to the work's reception'³²; that is, Genette sites the difference with the author. Lacasse, on the other hand, sites the difference within the text: his model is one of textual events. The distinction between autosonicity and allosonicity is described in terms of

'practices which *aim*' (emphasis added) to do something (shifting from Genette's authorial intent to textual intent). However, as we saw in our discussion of autonomous Breaks, it is the process of constant refiguration of sound-elements through the interaction of texts and listeners (and, indeed, producers-as-listeners) that is responsible for the creation of the autonomous Break. In our model, then, the site of the difference between quotation and parody (to continue our example) lies within the realm of the text/listener interaction which is the implied listener. While Lacasse conflates textual intent and the meaning created therefrom, we are, by reducing his categories into the tripartite division discussed above, removing meaning-creation from the textual side of our model.

Finally, with regard to the textual side of our model, it must be pointed out that the boundary between original material and interpretive material must be understood as being subject to differential interpretation. A particular sound-element may be considered as original material by one listener and as interpretive material by another. Different listeners obviously come equipped with different musical histories. It seems reasonable to posit a correlation between the amount of musical capital a listener brings and the likelihood of a sound-element being understood as interpretive, rather than original, material. Even the concept of authorial intent fails to bring the fuzzy dividing line between the two into focus, as can be seen in the famous example of the copyright action taken over the perceived similarity between the central three-note riff of both George Harrison's 'My Sweet Lord' and the Chiffons' 'He's So Fine':³³

On August 31, 1976, Judge Owen ruled against Harrison, finding "My Sweet Lord" and "He's So Fine" "virtually identical," but adding that Harrison had unknowingly lifted the riff, owing to an "unconscious" familiarity with the chord pattern in question.³⁴

While Harrison considered his song as original material, others (unfortunately for Harrison, including Judge Owen) considered it as interpretive material.

This example highlights the problematic nature of drawing a distinction between original and interpretive material, and what this means for us here is that any application of our text/reception model will ultimately involve interpretations of sound-elements to a degree. However, while this should be borne in mind, it does not invalidate our approach. Essentially, we are once again dealing with Stanley Fish's argument here: all textual interpretations are ultimately subjective. The wider problems of this approach have been noted above, and, moving to a personal level for a moment, while I am aware that my own understanding of which material is interpretive or original can only ever be subjective, part of the duties of research are to minimise that subjectivity. The details of how this attempt was made form part of the following chapter.

The implied listener model (2): reception

Turning now to the reception side of our model, we will continue to build on the discussion of the listener's familiarity, or otherwise, with the source material which began with our description of autonomous and dependent Breaks. As we have seen, hip hop is frequently understood as being a strongly appropriative genre, and from this it follows that the appropriated sources must be obvious to a large number of listeners, at least some of the time. Turning once again to 'Rapper's Delight', it is

apparent that most listeners would recognise 'Good Times' as the source of the music they were hearing; the Chic track having been a huge hit in the summer of 1979, dropping out of the top 40 in the same month that 'Rapper's Delight' was released.³⁵ Of course, it is also the case that at other times an appropriated source can be fairly obscure, and will go unrecognised by the majority of listeners. Few, for example, are likely to recognise Eastside Connection's 'Frisco Disco' in Slick Rick's 'Mona Lisa'.³⁶ This is not, however, a simple division between dependent and autonomous Breaks. 'Frisco Disco' remains obscure, with 'Mona Lisa' being the only hip hop track to use it as source material. Since, as we have seen, autonomous Breaks depend upon multiple recontextualisations, this example must be something else: a Break from which intertextual extra-musical connotations are unlikely to be drawn.

Of course, it is not possible to construct anything other than an approximate scale of recognisability for Breaks. For each individual sound-element, however, there are two basic possibilities – the listener either recognises it or doesn't. If the sound-element is recognised, another two possibilities follow. The source can be known (i.e. the listener can name the source) or unknown (the sound element is sonically familiar, but the source cannot be named). These possibilities for reception can be summarised as follows:

Non-recognition. The listener does not associate the sound-element with an individual source.

As with original material in the production side, this still allows for stylistic connotations etc. to be drawn.

Familiarity. The listener recognises the sound-element as having been heard elsewhere but cannot go on to name a source.

Knowledge. The listener recognises the sound-element, associates it with an individual source and knows what that source is.

Before we come to study the combinative effects of text and reception below, several other points concerning reception need to be made. Firstly, it should be noted that the listener's memory plays no small part in all of this, and human memory is notably fallible. It is possible for a listener to be aware that they know a sound-element's source yet not be able to recall what it is. This response belongs in the category of familiarity, but it is a conditioned familiarity. With some mental effort, the name of the source can sometimes be recalled, changing the response from one of familiarity to one of knowledge. We will deal with this phenomenon later.

Secondly, a note should be made here concerning knowledge. It should be borne in mind that while there are many ways of knowing music – a musician, for example, could be said to know a piece of music when they have memorised the particular sequence of movements necessary to produce it on a chosen instrument – the term is being used in this thesis in a quite specific fashion. Here, it means simply that the listener knows the name of the source and that of the artist who recorded it.

Thirdly, a note should also be included with reference to spoken vocal cuts here. As we have seen, these can be used to allow the DJ/producer to communicate on a linguistic level, and this can mean that the semantic sense created overrides any potential effect of a familiarity or knowledge response, although this is not always the case. For example, during 'Rhythm Trax – House Party Style' by DJ Jazzy Jeff & The Fresh Prince, vocal cuts are used to reply to questions from The Fresh Prince:

'[Fresh Prince] Are you ready to really get stupid or what? [Jazzy Jeff, scratched in] Yes.'³⁷ Here, the obvious semantic sense – Jeff is answering the question – is complete in itself, without any recognition of the source of the 'yes'. Earlier in the same track, Jeff scratches on the word 'fresh'. In this case, while a semantic sense can still be discerned – 'fresh' is a slang term for good, and Jeff's scratching can be interpreted as a comment on the track as a whole – familiarity with the sound-element can allow for interpretation through its other uses within hip hop.*

Fourthly, we must, as promised, make mention of the potential effect on paratextual elements on reception. Using the 'Breaking Bells' example again, we can see that as long as a listener to the Crash Crew track is aware that there is already a song in existence called 'Take Me To The Mardi Gras', they may presume knowledge of the source without ever actually having heard it. However, as we have seen, the Crash Crew Break is interpretive material, rather than appropriative, and belongs more to the 'version' type than the 're-creation': thus the listener can be misled by such paratextuality. Additionally, in this instance, the listener could be further misled by the fact that the Bob James track used as a source for 'Breaking Bells' is a substantially altered cover version of a Paul Simon track. A listener unaware of the Bob James version may presume that the 'Breaking Bells' sound-element is from the Paul Simon original. Of course, paratextual elements can also point towards less ambiguous sources. We have already seen an example of this in Big Daddy Kane's 'Ain't No Half Steppin'', which shares its title with the source of the vocal cut used as the track's hook.³⁸

Finally, as with the text side of our model, we should note that our various reception categories must allow for some overlap. A fictional example will help clarify this point.

Imagine the following series of events: a guitarist strums a chord sequence: B, Abm, G, F#; the guitarist plays the same chords, but arpeggiates the first three; a couple of extra notes are added to the second arpeggio; the whole thing is swung. Now, at what point did the guitarist start playing Stevie Wonder's 'Sir Duke'?³⁹ Obviously, there is no definitive answer to this question, and it is this that introduces the indistinct boundaries to our reception categories. A little work has, in fact, been undertaken in an attempt to quantify musical recognition. In a 1960 study by a psychologist named B. White, familiar tunes and versions thereof, were presented to listeners, in an attempt to quantify long-term auditory memory in the musical field. The rate of recognition dropped from 90% in the case of the tune played 'straight' to around 50% when 'the [melodic] contour was maintained in the sense of direction of change, but the degree of change was varied nonlinearly'⁴⁰. However, while this information is interesting, it is only of limited value here. Only melodic changes are under consideration, and then only in the context of a whole tune. Hip hop's reworking of pre-existing music tends not to alter melody, but rather to extract small pieces of music (which may or may not have melodic content) and change their relative importance within the larger work. We have already seen this process at work in the example of 'Sing A Simple Song' and 'Get The F--- Outta Dodge' earlier. What we can take from White's experiment is a definite sense of decreasing recognition with increased alteration of source material. Therefore, returning to our fictional guitarist, we can say that for some listeners the chord sequence alone would signify 'Sir Duke', while for others the addition of the arpeggios would enable recognition. Further listeners would hear 'Sir Duke' when the melody was a

* For further discussion of this Break, see page 71, below.

replica of the original (presumably about 90%, according to White's study), with a few more being added with the original rhythm. Thus we have a sliding scale of recognition within which our previously described categories are more specific regions.

The implied listener model (3): combinative possibilities

Having outlined our various categories for both text and reception, we can begin to construct our model of the implied listener. In order to represent this graphically, we can imagine our text and reception categories as the vertical and horizontal axes of a graph, with the area encompassed representing the possible positions of the implied listener, as shown in Fig. 7 below.

The combinative possibilities are here represented by the cloud-like shape – cloud-like because although there are essentially nine combinations, they overlap each other due to the lack of rigid distinctions between the various textual and receptive possibilities.

Additionally, arrowheaded markers have been included on the axes of the diagram between most of the categories. These represent the above mentioned lack of distinctions. There is no marker between interpretive and appropriative material because, as noted above, appropriative material is distinct through its physical presence in the hip hop track. However, the cloud-like shape is nonetheless continuous since, as we have seen, interpretive material can be almost sonically identical with appropriative material.

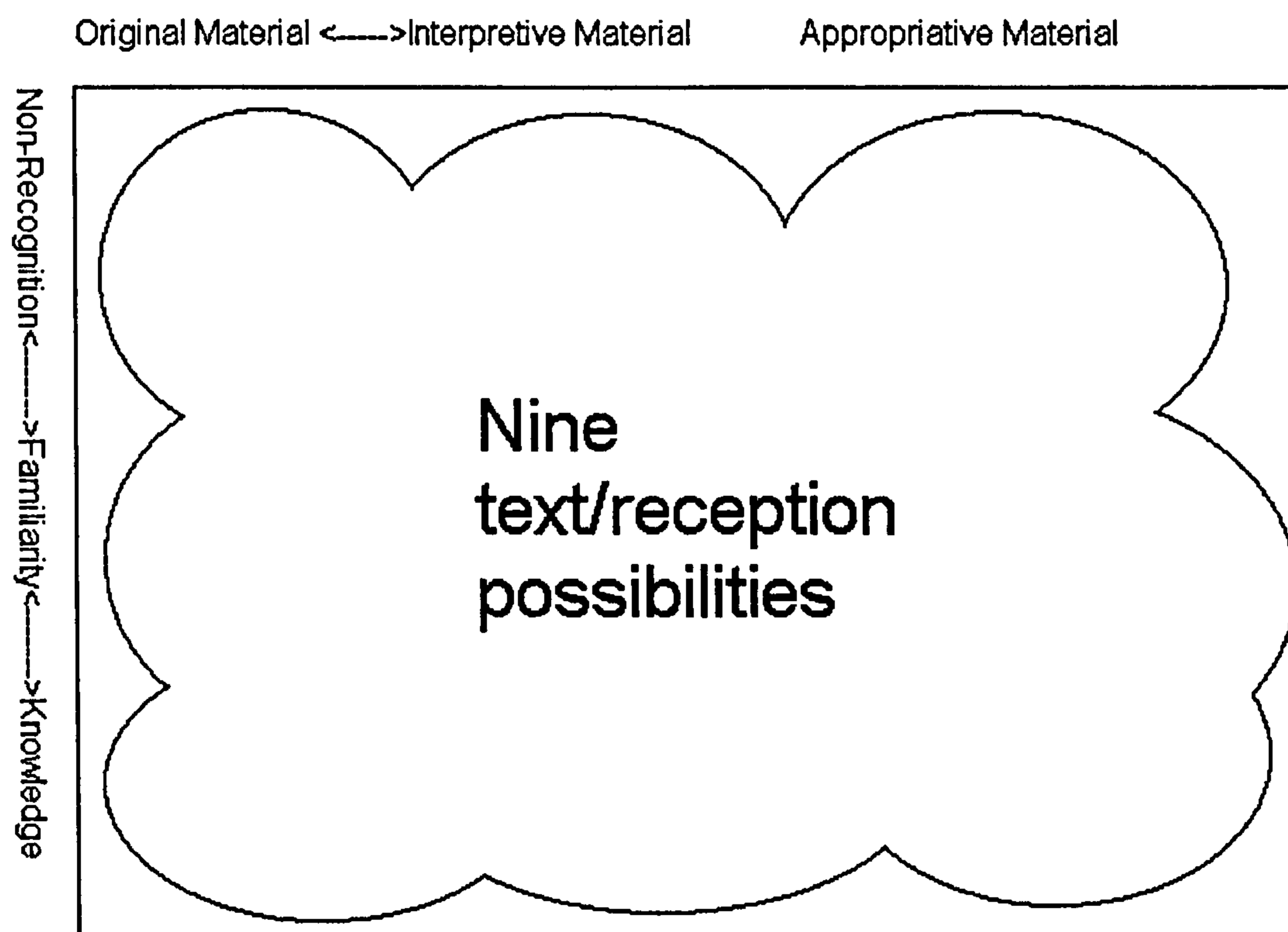


Figure 7. *The Implied Listener (i)*

At this stage we can begin to consider the various combinative possibilities of text and reception in more detail. Beginning in the top left hand corner of our diagram, we will initially discuss the five

possibilities which lie nearest the axes of our diagram, and which cover those implied listener positions involving original material, non-recognition, or both. Subsequently, we will discuss the remaining four possibilities. The reason for this order will become apparent in the course of our discussion.

i. Original Material/Non-Recognition

At first glance, non-recognition would seem to be the only possible response to original material (a more detailed second glance will be taken at a later point). The problems of where original material ends have been discussed above, but essentially for a sound-element to be considered original material, the listener must not experience any kind of intertextual recognition. This possibility can be seen as a kind of maximum degree of correspondence between our textual and receptive categories, with the former being defined by the latter. In fact, it can be claimed that non-recognition is a particularly powerful reception possibility, since the listener experiencing it is unlikely to consider original material as non-intertextual: intertextuality simply does not enter the equation. At the same time, this combinative possibility can be understood as being a type of 'control condition' within our model. Since the framework of our discussion is intertextuality within hip hop, this combinative possibility, which minimises any potential for intertextuality, is effectively a null position. In fact, as we shall see, both of these categories have a tendency towards this null position, brought about by their overriding of effect of the category with which they are being cross-referenced. For instance:

ii. Interpretive Material/Non-Recognition

In this case, the reception category nullifies the effect of the textual one. In other words, as far as the listener is concerned, the sound-element is not comprised of interpretive material at all, but original material. Again, here, intertextuality is not at stake for the listener.

iii. Appropriative Material/Non-Recognition

Again here, the non-recognition on the part of the listener prevents any further connotations being drawn from the appropriative material. Once again, the listener does not engage with any potential intertextual effect, and the sound-element is treated as if it were original material.

The same sort of effect can be seen within the other combinative possibilities involving original material

iv. Original Material/Familiarity

Strictly speaking it is impossible for the listener to be familiar (in the sense as stated in the preceding section) with original material. Of course, repeated exposure to the sound-element (either within the track or in repeated listenings) will bring about increasing recognition, but since the listener can only associate the sound-element with the track in question, this must be considered intratextual recognition rather than intertextual familiarity. It can be said, then, that in this case the textual side is overriding the reception side.

v. Original Material/Knowledge

This is the last of the one-sided possibilities. Once again, the source of original material cannot be known, simply because none exists. As in the previous possibility, text overrides reception. Original material denies the possibility of anything other than non-recognition, and the effect is similar to that seen in the case of the non-recognising listener: any possibility of an understanding in terms of intertextuality is minimised.

As far as Breaks are concerned, then, there is no likelihood (at this stage) of any Break production taking place near either of the axes of our model. Both original material and the non-recognising listener nullify any possibility of intertextuality. The four remaining combinative possibilities, then, are the sites where Break production can occur, and we will begin our investigation of these in the bottom right corner of the diagram.

vi. Appropriative Material/Knowledge

This combination occurs most commonly in the case of tracks which use famous samples. A good example here is X Clan's 'Heed The Word Of The Brother'. This track is based around a loop of Parliament's 'Flashlight', a song which had been a #16 hit as a single and which was taken from a #13 hit album.⁴¹ For many listeners to the X Clan track, then, the sample would have been easily recognisable as being from 'Flashlight'.

As noted above, the presence of well-known source material enhances the likelihood of a knowledge response on the part of the listener, and this allows for extra-musical connotations, such as those involved in Signifyin(g) (in Gates' sense), to be drawn. There are two methods by which these connotations can be elucidated. Firstly, there is a process of metonymic immanence, in which the listener understands the sound-element as a *pars pro toto* signifier of the source. In this case, the listener's knowledge response involves understanding of both the content and connotations of the source, and so the recontextualised sound-element can comment upon those connotations without referring to them explicitly. An example of this is the 'Kill That Noise'/'South Bronx' example noted earlier. Here, the sampled phrase 'South Bronx' does not, in itself, carry the celebratory connotations of the source, and its effect in 'Kill That Noise' is only achieved through the listener's understanding of those connotations.

Secondly, there is a process of textual alteration, wherein the connotations of the source are not necessarily involved in the creation of effect. This relies only on the listener's understanding the content of the source, and thus being able to recognise the difference in the re-presented sound-element from that source. Frequently, this recognition of textual alteration simply allows for an appreciation of the technical skills of the DJ or producer, as in Jazzy Jeff's rhythmical cutting up of Slick Rick's phrase 'as we go a little something like this' from Doug E. Fresh & the Get Fresh Crew's 'La Di Da Di' on 'As We Go'.⁴² However, extra-musical connotations can be introduced through textual alteration, by means of a deliberate misreading of the source (in itself, a strongly Signifyin(g) practice). Again, we have already seen an example of this in 'Terminator X To The Edge Of Panic', in which the word 'Flash', (referring to Flash Gordon in the source) can be reinterpreted, through its omission, as referring to Grandmaster Flash. It can be seen, then, that a knowledge response to appropriative material leads to the construction of a dependent Break.

vii. Interpretive Material/Knowledge

This possibility is essentially a more complex version of the preceding one. In the case of interpretive material which approaches appropriative material (i.e. that which is almost identical in sound to the original) the resulting effect is the same as described in the above subsection. However, as the actual sound of the sound-element moves further away from the original – a melody played on a different instrument, for example, or a vocal snippet sung in a very different manner (as in the example

of Slick Rick's re-presentation of Nat 'King' Cole's 'Mona Lisa' mentioned above) – we find an increasing likelihood of a kind of double recognition in the listener. The listener knows the source of the sound-element and as a result will also recognise the difference between what is being heard now and what has been heard before. As we saw in our earlier discussion of autonomous Breaks, this double recognition must be regarded as different from the textual alteration noted in connection with appropriative material above. As with Rainbow's version of the 'Ode To Joy', we are here dealing with a different re-presentation of a musical idea, rather than the alteration of existing sonic material. Again, as with appropriative material, in this case the listener's knowledge response leads to the creation of a dependent Break. As might be expected, this combinative possibility allows for the same kind of connotative effects as the previous one. Using the example of Slick Rick's 'Mona Lisa' again, it can be seen how the listener experiencing a knowledge response to the re-presentation of Nat King Cole's 'Mona Lisa' can understand a Signifyin(g) effect. Slick Rick is applying the connotations of the figure of Cole to himself – in particular the notion of 'coolness' often associated with the 'crooners' of the 1950s – whilst simultaneously commenting on these connotations, pointing out that the 1950s idea of 'cool' has become a stultified cultural convention: Slick Rick is 'cool' like Cole *and then some*.

viii. Appropriative Material/Familiarity

This is one of the more complex combinative possibilities. Above, it was stated that there are two different types of familiarity – the sense of recognition with no sense of knowing the source and the sense of recognition with an accompanying feeling of knowing the source but being unable to pin it down. Before going any further, it will be useful to look at the distinction between these two types of recognition.

Essentially, we are in the realm of what psychologists term 'metacognition' here. Metacognition consists of those processes by which we 'monitor and control ongoing cognition, so that it is efficient...and discriminating.'⁴³ In the first instance, then, metacognition is involved in affirming that while the sound-element is recognised its source is unknown, and the listener does not attempt to recall it. This is primarily an unconscious process, and is an example of metacognition as efficiency regulator. The second instance is closer to a particular metacognitive effect known as the tip-of-the-tongue state.

The tip-of-the-tongue state has primarily been researched in connection with lexical metacognition⁴⁴, but it is readily apparent that the feeling of knowing something but being unable to retrieve it can be triggered by a variety of stimuli. A scent, a visual image or a sound can all instigate the state. Music, as an organised form of sound, can also bring about the tip-of-the-tongue state. It is possible, for instance, to recognise a quotation within jazz or classical music and be aware that, while you know what it is, you can't quite place it at the moment. However, the tip-of-the-tongue state is a relatively uncommon occurrence, so why is it important here? Two reasons present themselves.

Firstly, hip hop's appropriative nature comes into play once again. A music that consists largely of re-presented sound-elements taken from pre-existing sources is simply more likely to trigger recognition within the listener than a music which is comprised principally of original material. This effect is increased further by the discourse surrounding hip hop which, as we have seen, concentrates on the appropriative element of hip hop production. If the listener is led to understand hip hop in terms

of its appropriation, there will be an overall higher level of awareness of that appropriation – hip hop is listened to, it could be said, in terms of that which it appropriates.

An example of the whole process: at the time of writing I am listening to a compilation of early hip hop recordings.⁴⁵ It is the first time I have listened to this particular compilation, and while a few of the tracks are familiar to me, most are not. Dr Jeckyll & Mr Hyde's 'Doing The Do' is playing. The bass line is familiar, and prompted by having read the sleeve notes before listening to the album, I recognise it as a recreation of Bob James' 'Nautilus'.⁴⁶ The track finishes and the next one begins. Immediately I recognise the organ riff within the groove. Having just heard a track based around a sound-element to which my response was that of 'knowledge', hip hop's appropriative techniques are prominent in my mind (if only semi- or even sub-consciously), and my response is a feeling of knowing the source of the organ riff but not being able to name it. On checking the track listing, I find that in fact it is not the source with which I am familiar, but the individual usage – the track is Bambaataa Zulu Nation Soul Sonic Force's 'Zulu Nation Throwdown (Part II)', a record I have heard before, but not for some time. My immediate question – 'where have I heard this before?' – has been answered, and, in this case, I am satisfied with my answer. My thinking in terms of appropriation led me to mistake simple recognition for 'failed' knowledge. To summarise: the listener expects hip hop to contain appropriative material, and is therefore 'primed' for familiarity.

At this point the second reason comes into play. Above, it has been noted that hip hop production tends to change the relative importance of individual sound-elements within the larger work. That is, a 'marginal' sound element in the source – a small instrumental break, a bar from an introduction, even a single drum hit – can play a more central role in the hip hop track which uses it. As previously noted, this process stems from early hip hop's use of instrumental breaks from records, rather than verses or choruses, and from the competitive nature of the genre. 'There's an art to finding a break that somebody else doesn't know about, you know,' says Diamond D. 'It makes people go, 'Oh, shit, where'd he get that beat from?' That's part of the mystique.'⁴⁷ Marginal sound-elements are less likely to be recognised by the listener, so are more likely to be used by producers attempting to create the 'mystique'.

Of course, the reaction described by Diamond D is that of non-recognition, and we are dealing here with familiarity. The familiar listener, then, recognises the sound-element, but because it is taken from the margins of the source, is less likely to be able to name it immediately. This is precisely what defines the tip-of-the-tongue state – the feeling of knowing something without being able to recall it at the time.

Furthermore, any mental attempt the listener may make at identifying the source is stymied by the continuing track. A common method of attempting to recall the source of a familiar sound-element is to 'run through' the original in the mind, with the aim of eventually coming across either a more familiar section of the tune or (perhaps) a hook containing the title, either of which will prompt recall (a process psychologists term the 'double-take' effect⁴⁸). However, this process is made more difficult by the continuing presence of other music in the form of the track being heard.

For example, the introduction and hook of Roxanne Shante's 'Have A Nice Day' uses a bass and rhythm guitar figure taken from The J.B.'s 'Hot Pants Road'.⁴⁹ This sound-element is repeated for

eight bars at the beginning of the track, and four in the hook parts. In the source, the sound-element is part of the four bar introduction which precedes the main horn riff. The listener who experiences familiarity may attempt to play through the original in their mind, trying to reach this horn riff, but each time the point at where the horns are due to come in is reached, the sound-element either returns to its beginning or disappears from the track's soundscape.

Further complications can be brought about in the case of sound-elements that have been altered in some way. A minor alteration can, as it were, throw the listener off the trail of the source by adding an extra stage to the process: the listener first has to recreate the original in their head before relating it to another part of the source. The 'Hot Pants Road' sound-element also appears in Public Enemy's 'Fight The Power', but the bass is doubled with a synthesised bass which also adds notes to the original.⁵⁰ Thus the listener has to strip these extra notes away before going any further.

In addition, sound-elements can in some cases be radically altered, yet still retain a core of recognisability. This can make even the most familiar of sound-elements elusive. One of the most popular sound-elements amongst scratch DJs is the introduction of Fab Five Freddy's 'Change The Beat' which consists of a heavily treated voice saying, 'aah, this stuff is really fresh.'⁵¹ A typical example of its use can be found in Gang Starr's '2 Steps Ahead', wherein DJ Premier scratches vigorously on just the first 'aah' of the sound-element.⁵² This scratching treats the sound-element in a rhythmic fashion and also alters its pitch to varying degrees. However, despite the radical alteration, the sound-element retains a quality which makes it recognisable – the 'consistency of timbre' mentioned in chapter three. Here, the listener must associate this quality of sound with the source in order to attempt to name it.

To summarise this section: there are two types of familiarity reaction possible to appropriative material, and both can occur to the listener. However, hip hop's production techniques work to prioritise the tip-of-the-tongue like reaction, while at the same time stymieing any attempt the listener might make to resolve the recognition into knowledge. Furthermore, it has also been seen that the listener's extra-musical knowledge of hip hop can bring about an erroneous feeling of knowing (mistaking a previously heard use of a sound-element for having heard the original), wherein resolution is, ultimately, impossible.

I am not suggesting that all this mental activity is always foregrounded in the listener's attention. While this may be the case occasionally, for most of the time these mental processes take place almost, if not entirely, unnoticed. However, since psychologists have shown that even surreptitious repetition of information leads to stronger memory traces⁵³, it can be stated that this background processing will have the same effect on the listener: namely that the likelihood of recognition is increased when the sound-element is next encountered.

If this is the case, then relatively common sound-elements will become more and more recognisable to the listener, resulting in their becoming 'familiar' (in the specific sense we are using here) without the listener's ever having heard the original source. The familiarity response, then, is that which allows the production of autonomous Breaks.

ix. Interpretive Material/Familiarity

As with vii. and vi. above, this final possibility is similar to the preceding one, but with extra complications arising from the fact that the sound-element is further removed from its source. However, where the knowledge response to interpretive material allows for a kind of double recognition in the listener, the familiarity response is likely to be less certain here. Of course, the degree of familiarity will depend on both how sonically close to the source the interpretive material is (exact copies being more likely to produce a familiarity response than material that has been altered in some way) and the underlying familiarity with the sound-element that the listener brings with them. As with the previous combination, then, it can be seen that autonomous Breaks can be created here, but to a degree that depends on the two variables mentioned above.

Having discussed the nine combinative possibilities, we can now see three regions of 'intertextual possibility' within our model: the minimised intertextuality of those combinations involving original material or non-recognition; the autonomous intertextuality associated with a familiarity response; and the dependent intertextuality associated with a knowledge response. These can be shown on our diagrammatic representation of the implied listener as shown in Fig. 8, below.

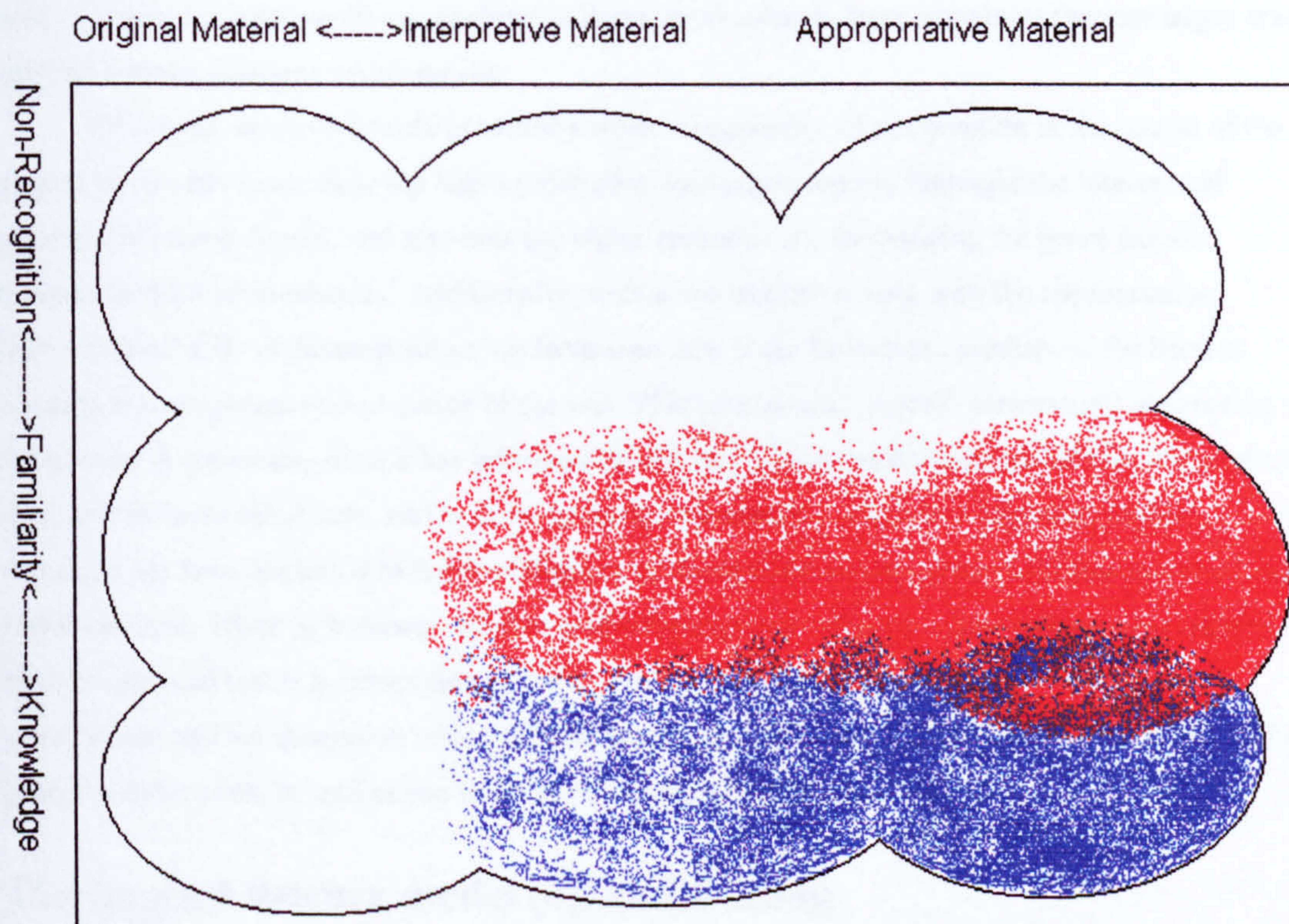


Figure 8. The Implied Listener (ii)

Here, while the unshaded area represents those combinative possibilities which result in minimised intertextual potential, the shaded areas of the diagram represent those combinative possibilities which allow for Break production. The area shaded red represents autonomous Break production, which results from a listener response of familiarity. Dependent Break production is represented by the blue area. The shaded areas overlap: as we have seen, it is impossible to strictly delineate both text and reception categories, so it follows that we cannot fully demarcate the results of

their combination. An attempt has been made to give a rough idea of the increasing likelihood of Break production by the depth of shading (it should be noted that this is an indication only and is not scaled in any way). Thus as interpretive material approaches original material, the likelihood of Break production fades. A similar decrease can be seen as familiarity weakens into non-recognition.

At this point, then, we have outlined nine text/reception possibilities which we can understand as being nine potential implied listener positions. This is the set of implied listener positions referred to on page 14, above. Within this set of positions, we have seen that five do not lead to Break production, and that of the remaining four, two (those connected with a familiarity response) bring about autonomous Breaks, and two (those connected with a knowledge response) lead to dependent Breaks. However, this leaves us with a problem. Throughout, we have argued that hip hop needs to be understood by means of its intertextual practices: our concept of the Break is founded on this critical position. But our diagram shows that only four of the nine potential implied listener positions are Break-productive. With the majority of our combinative possibilities not resulting in Break production, we must take care to ensure that we are not embodying one of the problems noted with Iser's approach, that of projecting our assumptions onto the implied listener. That is, we must explain why the smaller area of implied listener positions resulting in Break production is more important than the larger area of implied listener positions which do not.

Of course, we have already provided evidence supportive of our position in the course of the argument. We have seen how hip hop's production techniques tend to highlight the intertextual practices involved therein, and also how the wider critical work surrounding the genre has also concentrated on intertextuality. Additionally, within the section dealing with the appropriative material/familiarity response position we have seen how these factors can predispose the listener towards an intertextual interpretation of the text. This textual (and, indeed, paratextual) positioning of the listener is important, since it has informed the entirety of our model. Because of this, we need to discuss it in more detail here, and in order to do this we need to change our approach slightly. Thus far, reception has been discussed in terms of degrees of recognition in connection with the source of the sound-element. There is, however, another type of recognition which is a key aspect of the implied listener role, and that is a recognition of the fact of intertextuality, *per se*. This we will term codification, and the discussion which follows will begin with a narrow definition of that term, before going on to broaden its application to all of our implied listener positions.

The implied listener model (4): codification

Codification can be defined as *the listener's recognition of the presence of appropriative material within a text, irrespective of any potential recognition of a source*. That is, it is the *de facto* recognition of intertextuality. The term 'codification' is used because this recognition involves the listener's acknowledgement of the wider cultural encoding of hip hop as being a genre strongly associated with appropriative intertextuality. In this, codification can be seen to be closely tied to the closing phrase of our definition of the Break. In restricting the definition of codification to appropriative material only, we are upholding the distinction drawn earlier (see page 52) between the different forms of recognition involved in connection with interpretive and appropriative material.

With regard to interpretive material, the recognition of intertextuality relies on recognition of the source, and it is a musical idea which forms the intertextual material. Using the 'Breaking Bells' example again, if a listener has never heard of 'Take Me To The Mardi Gras' in either its Bob James or Paul Simon versions then the synth melody of the Crash Crew track is just that – a melody played on a synth: its similarity to the Bob James source can only be perceived through a familiarity or knowledge response or presumed through paratextual recognition. (This is, essentially, the non-recognition response to interpretive material as described above).

With regard to appropriative material, the recognition of intertextuality does not rely on recognition of the source, and the shared material is a sound (or collection of sounds) as well as an idea. We have already discussed the concept of consistency of timbre as aiding the listener's recognition of the Break, and we saw in chapter three how transformative DJing techniques are often used in conjunction with at least a fragment of the unaltered source, once again highlighting the presence of appropriative material.

Thus, while it will ultimately need to be shown that codification can have an effect on all of our implied listener positions, we will initially limit our discussion to codification in relation to appropriative material.

Process/content codification.

At this point, we need to introduce the first of three paired concepts involved with codification, drawing a distinction between what we will term process and content codification. This distinction can be clarified by looking at codification with regard to two of our implied listener positions: those of appropriative material/non-recognition and appropriative material/knowledge. In the case of the former, we can see that hip hop's production techniques allow for codification to take place without any recognition in terms of the source. Two such techniques (consistency of timbre, the inclusion of unaltered source material) are noted above. To these, we can add several other factors which also indicate the presence of appropriative material. Some of these factors are physical: if a sound-element is introduced by being scratched in, the existence of a source is implied – you need a record to scratch. Similarly, the presence of vinyl crackle within a sound element implies the presence of a record. Additionally, looped sound-elements can be cut in such a way that the transition from end back to beginning is itself audible: the listener can, on occasion, hear the edit. Other factors are less concrete. In some cases, appropriation can be signified by the prolonged repetition of a sound-element, or by the same sound-element appearing at different times within a track. Of course, these techniques are not exclusive to hip hop, but where appropriative material is treated in this way, a sort of unnaturalness can creep in, revealing the technique. An example will clarify this.

'The Grunt' by the J.B.'s begins with a long rising horn shriek. In traditional descriptive terms, it could be said to be passionate – angry, even. Certainly, it sounds like some concerted physical effort has gone into producing the sound. So when the same sound appears, looped, in Public Enemy's 'Rebel Without A Pause', it becomes unnatural.⁵⁴ It is highly unlikely that a human player could produce that sound repeatedly, and so, even if a listener has never heard it before, the fact that it has been sampled is still apparent.

This, then, is process codification: the recognition of the presence of appropriative material by means of the comprehension of textual 'clues', with no recognition of a source. The term 'process' is used to show that this type of codification primarily involves a recognition of the process by which the appropriative material has been incorporated into the text.

By extension, content codification is that type in which the listener codifies the sound-element through recognition of the source. The term 'content' is used for this type of codification to show that the listener primarily recognises the actual sound of the sound-element, with the appropriative process being inferred through that recognition. As noted above, while process codification can be associated with a non-recognition response to appropriative material, content codification can be seen in connection with the appropriative material/knowledge position. Using the above example again, it can be seen that in recognising 'The Grunt' Break in 'Rebel Without A Pause' in terms of its source, the listener must also recognise the fact of the Break, per se. The listener's having previously heard the sound-element in another context implies the act of appropriation and re-presentation. Additionally, it can be seen that content codification is not limited solely to the knowledge response: a strong familiarity response can also provide enough recognition of the source (albeit not in the sense of knowledge) to allow content codification to take place.

Of course, process and content codification do not operate entirely independently. The textual factors which enable process codification can, of course, be present in appropriative material which is known to the listener. This means that content codification can enhance the listener's understanding of those textual factors, through reference to the source, and thus increase their future capacity for process codification. For example, on hearing a known sound-element re-presented as a looped sample, the loop itself is apparent to the listener: it is the audible difference between the sound-element as heard in its source and as heard in the hip hop text. Thus, on hearing an unfamiliar sound-element used in the same way, the listener is better able to recognise the presence of a loop, and so (primarily) codify the sound-element.

Text-driven/reception-driven codification.

The second of the three paired concepts involved in codification is the distinction between text-driven codification and reception-driven codification. Whereas the distinction between process and content codification is concerned with the different ways in which the listener can codify the textual material, the distinction being drawn here concerns the degree to which either the text or the reception side of our model brings about codification. It could be said that the process/content distinction is concerned with the 'how' of codification, and the text-/reception-driven distinction with the 'why'. That is, while the former distinction is between the recognition of the intertextual status of a sound-element through textual 'clues' (process) or through knowledge of the source (content), the latter distinction is between whether such recognition is prompted by what is heard within the text (text-driven) or by resources brought to the text by the listener (reception-driven). Of course, since the implied listener is defined at the point at which text and listener interact, there can be no purely text-driven codification (there must be a listener) and, similarly, no purely reception-driven codification (there must be a text). This paired concept, then, should be regarded as one of theoretical extremes which are being used to highlight differing tendencies within a continuum.

Text-driven codification, then, is that type in which the listener codifies a sound-element in response to specific textual events. Bearing in mind that we are here dealing with theoretical extremes, this can be exemplified if we imagine a listener with no prior knowledge of hip hop hearing 'Rebel Without A Pause' and recognising the intertextual nature of 'The Grunt' Break by means of process or content codification.

In order to understand reception-driven codification, we need to reintroduce a term from reception theory mentioned only briefly so far – Jauss' 'horizon of expectations'. This, as we have seen, involves that which the reader brings to the text, and is based on 'a pre-understanding of the genre...[and] the form and themes of already familiar works'.⁵⁵ With regard to hip hop (and as we have already seen in the section concerning the combination of appropriative material and a familiarity response, above), this horizon of expectations can be seen to involve an awareness in the listener that intertextual, appropriative practices are likely to be at work. Described above as the listener's being 'primed for familiarity', this horizon of expectations is developed through both the listener's acceptance of the generally-held conception of hip hop as being a strongly intertextual, appropriative genre and the experiential evidence accumulated through the process and content codification of sound-elements in other hip hop tracks. Continuing with our example of 'The Grunt' we can imagine a listener who is well-versed in hip hop hearing 'Rebel Without A Pause' and assuming that the rising horn squeal they can hear is appropriated intertextual material without any codification in terms of process or content taking place. We must again post the reminder that we are dealing with a theoretical extreme here: in reality, reception-driven codification is likely to be confirmed by either process or content codification.

Reception-driven codification, then, is that type in which the listener codifies a sound-element based on their expectations of intertextuality. Additional importance is added to this type of codification by the fact that producers are (as we have seen) listeners too. As was noted in chapter three, one of the central points concerning production techniques was the tendency for producers to hark back to the DJing techniques instigated by the pioneers of the genre. What this means is that original or interpretive material can often be treated by producers as if it were appropriative material. The most obvious example of this is, once again, 'Rapper's Delight', in which the Sugar Hill house band re-present 'Good Times' not as a cover version, but in a form suggestive of the DJing practice of repetition through extension.

True/false codification.

This leads to the last of our three paired concepts involved in codification: the distinction between true and false codification. The distinction here is simply that between the listener's correctly codifying appropriative material and their incorrectly codifying original or interpretive material as appropriative. It should be stressed here that this true/false dichotomy is being drawn strictly in terms of our definition of codification as being the recognition of the presence of appropriative material: the terms 'true', 'false', 'correct' and 'incorrect' should not be read as implying the existence of 'right' and 'wrong' readings of hip hop (although for some listeners – for instance, those who are also producers – it can be important to fully distinguish between the three textual possibilities of original, interpretive

and appropriative material). True codification needs no further clarification – it is that which we have been discussing above. False codification, on the other hand, merits further discussion.

We have already seen several examples of the potential for false codification. In connection with ‘Breaking Bells’, we saw how unfamiliarity with the source could lead to the interpretive material present therein being falsely codified. Similarly, we saw in the section dealing with appropriative material and familiarity an example of my own falsely codifying a sound-element from ‘Zulu Nation Throwdown (Part II)’. Furthermore, we can see how the listener to ‘Rapper’s Delight’ might also falsely codify the interpretive ‘Good Times’ sound-element as appropriative.

Usually, false codification stems from a misinterpretation of textual factors prompted by reception-driven codification. However, text-driven false codification is also possible. For example, scratches or background vinyl crackle which sound as if they are part of a sound-element can be added separately, and a synthesised sound can approximate a sampled one (while there will generally be differences in the quality of this sound, these may be masked by the surrounding sounds present). An example of this kind of duplicity of production can be found in Run DMC’s ‘Beats To The Rhyme’. As well as various vocal breaks being scratched in by DJ Jam Master Jay throughout the track, the main vocal is preceded by scratching on the first word.⁵⁶ This effect was achieved by the vocal track being pressed a capella onto a test vinyl, which was then scratched in before the final mix was produced. While it is, admittedly, unlikely that in this case the listener would mistake the lead vocal for a pre-existing vocal track, it can still be seen how production techniques can deliberately blur the lines between original, interpretive and appropriative material, and so encourage false codification. Once again, this can be understood as a Signifyin(g) (in Gates’ sense) practice. Here, rather than Signifyin(g) on the previous uses of a sound-element, hip hop producers are Signifyin(g) on the techniques of hip hop production themselves.

The true/false pairing means that codification, initially constrained to those implied listener positions associated with appropriative material, can now be expanded to also include those involving original or interpretive material. Where earlier we dismissed the possibility of anything other than a non-recognition response to original material, we can now see that it is possible for that material to be falsely codified, and thus the listener can experience a familiarity response.

Above, in the section dealing with appropriative material and a familiarity response, it was shown that hip hop works to prioritise a ‘tip-of-the-tongue’ type of reaction in the listener, and that this increases the future likelihood of a (stronger) familiarity response. We can now also see that codification both enables and enhances this process, not just for appropriative material, but across the width of our diagram. The listener can hear a sound-element to which their response is that of non-recognition, yet still codify it (either truly or falsely) by means of process codification, facilitated by some combination of text-driven and reception-driven codification. This act of codification – the recognition of intertextuality – enables familiarity in that it opens up the possibility of the listener’s having heard the sound-element before. It enhances familiarity in that codification is, in itself, an additional layer of semantic meaning attached to a sound-element. Since the nineteenth century, and William James’ statement that: ‘All improvement of the memory lies in the line of ELABORATING THE ASSOCIATES’⁵⁷ (original emphasis), psychologists have been aware that associating events with

ideas increases the likelihood of their subsequent recall. Throughout the 1970s, a series of experiments (most notably that of F.I.M. Craik and R.S. Lockhart (1972)⁵⁸) led to the more specific understanding that ‘semantic processing will typically produce richer and more discriminable memory traces... [which in turn] will enhance subsequent recall and recognition.’⁵⁹ What this means for us here is that because the codifying listener processes the incoming information both acoustically (in the sense of its sound) and semantically (in the sense of its intertextuality), subsequent recognition of the codified sound-element is more likely.

Thus, like the tip-of-the-tongue state discussed above (and with which it is intrinsically connected), codification enhances the likelihood of a familiarity response. Of course, it cannot, on its own, produce a knowledge response, but it can alert the listener to those paratextual elements (either of the hip hop track or of the source) which can. For example, a listener to Big Daddy Kane’s ‘Ain’t No Half Steppin’ can codify the eponymous vocal cut, and by means of paratextual referencing, presume knowledge of the sound-element in terms of its (unheard) source, Heatwave’s ‘Ain’t No Half Steppin’’. As we saw in connection with the ‘Breaking Bells’ example, this can also take place in the case of false codification. Here, however, we must be aware that the erroneous knowledge response is subject to subsequent revision, either through the listener’s hearing the ‘Take Me To The Mardi Gras’ Break used as appropriative material in other hip hop tracks, or through exposure to the source. In either case, the resulting effect is that the listener revises their understanding of the sound-element heard in ‘Breaking Bells’ from appropriative to interpretive material, and will subsequently be better equipped to distinguish between the two.

Codification, then, is a receptive practice, involving the listener’s interpretation of textual events. However, as we have seen, it is of a different order to the three receptive categories of non-recognition, familiarity and knowledge. Codification, in effect, operates in parallel with these other reception possibilities, and can affect both the listener’s interpretation of the sound-element currently being heard and their future interpretation of sound-elements. At this point, then, we can introduce codification to our diagrammatic representation of the implied listener, as shown in figure 9, below. Here, the downwards-pointing arrows represent codification as enhancing the familiarity response, with the solid arrows showing true codification, and the broken ones false codification. Below these are arrow-tailed ‘P’s, which represent the necessary input of paratextual elements in forming a knowledge response. The thinner, upwards-pointing arrows represent the ability of content codification to enhance process codification. While these begin in the region of the knowledge response, we should remember that content codification can also occur in connection with a familiarity response: these arrows do not represent a start and end point for the effect of content codification, but rather show the direction of this effect. As can be seen, content codification can even have an effect in the case of the erroneous implied listener position of ‘knowledge’ of original material. While this position is likely to be largely the result of reception-led codification, we have noted how misleading textual factors can be incorporated into a track, and so even false content codification can have an effect on the listener’s ability for process codification. We should, however, note that false codification and reception-led codification are only made possible through the listener’s experience of true codification and text-led codification, and so we

should be aware that the 'upwards effect' of content codification weakens as we move from right to left on the diagram.

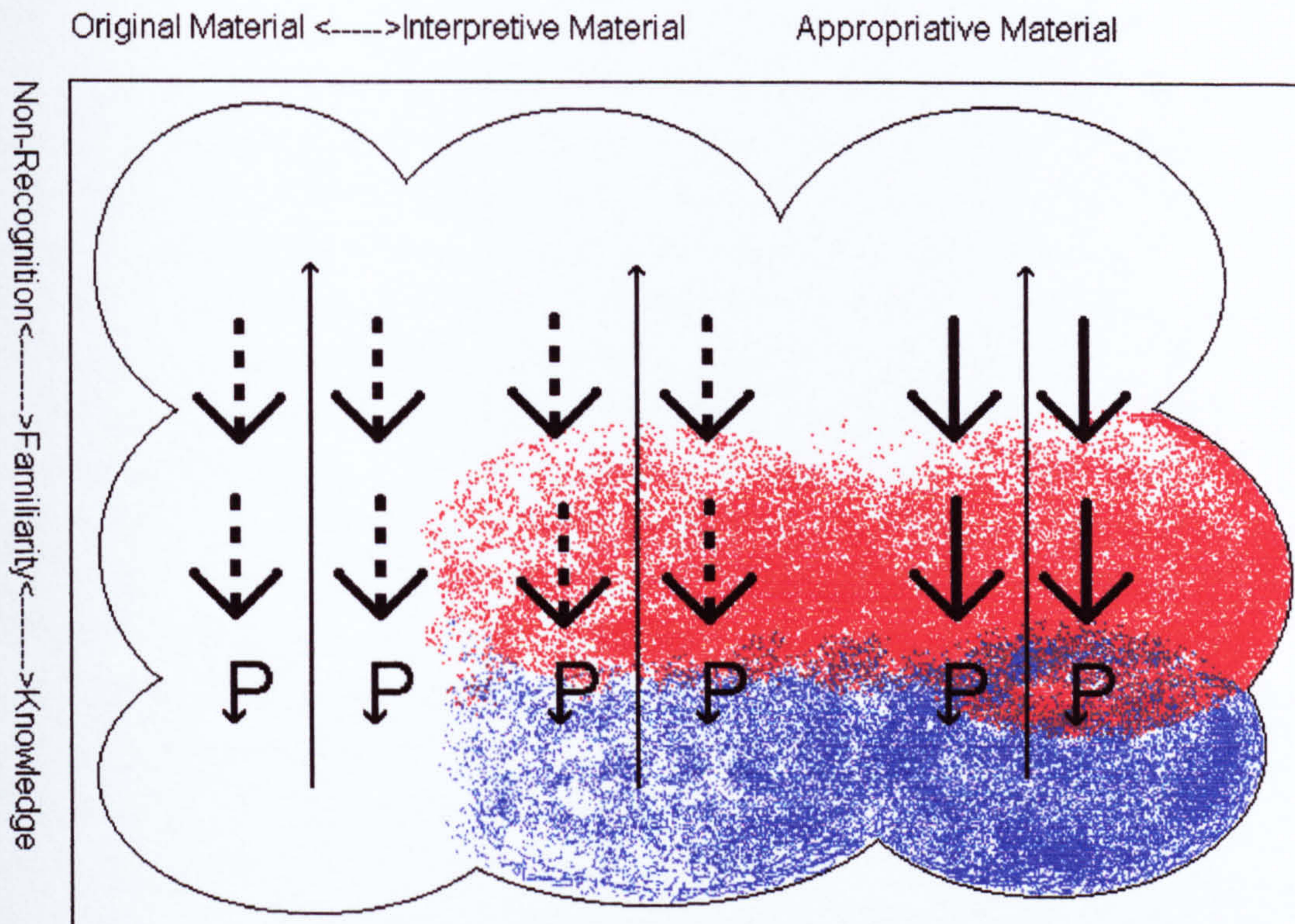


Figure 9. *The Implied Listener (iii)*

Chapter summary

Within this chapter, we have argued for an understanding of hip hop based on an adaptation of Wolfgang Iser's reception theory. The suitability of this approach was demonstrated in our initial discussion of the Break, wherein we saw that the vital role of the listener cannot be ignored if we are to understand how hip hop works. Subsequently, a model was developed which avoids the potential pitfalls of Iser's approach by allowing for a set of implied listener positions. These were created through the juxtaposition of textual factors – those connected with the degree of intertextuality within any one sound-element – and receptive factors – those connected with the listener's recognition of the sound-element in terms of its source. Following this, it was argued that a different type of recognition – codification – is responsible for driving the whole process, since it can both instigate and catalyse source-related recognition.

We have, then, a model which allows us to see the various implied listener positions associated with hip hop's intertextuality and also how codification both enables these positions and enhances movement between them, in particular the shift from non-recognition to familiarity. Essentially, this model must be understood as being *meta-hermeneutic*. That is, it does not, in itself, offer interpretations of what hip hop tracks might mean, but rather provides a series of implied listener positions through which meaning can be drawn. In the chapter that follows, it will be demonstrated

how this model can go some way towards fulfilling one of Jauss' stated aims for reception theory: the bridging of the gap between structural and hermeneutic interpretive approaches.

Case-study of *Walden*

The aim of this chapter is to bring together the structural and hermeneutic approaches to reception theory with the critical work done by the field, by means of a case-study of a literary text. The first stage of the process involved the selection of a text for analysis. The text chosen was Henry David Thoreau's *Walden*, a work which has been the subject of a vast amount of critical work. In order to bring a more manageable sample, and to avoid the problem of what was termed a 'very early edition', I decided to use the edition of *Walden* published by a variety of authors in the 1960s. This edition of *Walden* was chosen for a number of reasons. It is a relatively recent edition, following both critical theory in the 1960s and those which represent a reaction to the 'structuralist' approach to literary studies, and a more recent critical and literary text. It is also a relatively recent edition, following both critical theory in the 1960s and those which represent a reaction to the 'structuralist' approach to literary studies. It is also a relatively recent edition, following both critical theory in the 1960s and those which represent a reaction to the 'structuralist' approach to literary studies. It is also a relatively recent edition, following both critical theory in the 1960s and those which represent a reaction to the 'structuralist' approach to literary studies.

Of course, it might be argued that in choosing this text we are not in either way choosing a text which is either 'new' or 'old', or 'early' or 'late'. This is not true. In fact, the text chosen is a relatively recent edition, following both critical theory in the 1960s and those which represent a reaction to the 'structuralist' approach to literary studies. It is also a relatively recent edition, following both critical theory in the 1960s and those which represent a reaction to the 'structuralist' approach to literary studies.

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5. 'Breaking Atoms': Analyses

Case-study selection

The aim of this chapter is to bring together the historical and technical information included in earlier chapters with the theoretical work undertaken in the third, by means of the analysis of a series of 'case-study' hip hop tracks. The first stage in this process involved the narrowing down of the thousands of potential tracks for analysis into a more manageable sample, and this was achieved by means of what was termed a 'survey of surveys'. Essentially, this involved the collation of information from a variety of sources: the 'discography' sections of both academic and non-academic works (covering both works entirely on hip hop and those which contain a section on the genre); journalistic selections of 'greatest' singles and albums; and a magazine-conducted listener poll. For a full list of these sources, see appendix 1, on page 159. Each appearance of an individual single or album was noted, and this resulted in the narrowing down of our potential field of study to some 618 singles and 1536 albums. These lists were then further condensed by the removal of any entries which had been mentioned by only one source, along with any released outside of the time-scale of this thesis. The remaining entries (176 singles and 150 albums) were then separated by their year of release, giving rise to a series of smaller lists, from which the final selection of tracks for analysis could be made.

Of course, it could be argued that in compiling these lists we are in some way offering a canonical view of the 'most important' tracks to hip hop's history. This is an important point, since as Frank Kermode has noted: 'canons are complicit with power; and canons are useful in that they enable us to handle otherwise unmanageable historical deposits.'¹ If, then, our year-by-year lists can be considered as canonical, we should address both of Kermode's points.

The first point – that canons are complicit with power – involves several factors: a prioritising of canonical texts, a presumption of authority on the part of those responsible for creating the canon, and a sense of finality concerning which texts are to be regarded as canonical. Whilst we are, here, undoubtedly prioritising texts within our 'canon', we can go some way towards countering the other two factors. Firstly, no personal authority is being claimed over the selection of tracks. Tracks were included on the lists on the grounds of their having been found worthy of mention by at least two sources. It must also be borne in mind that these sources themselves had differing agendas with regard to which tracks they included: academic discographies tend to include those tracks relevant to the work of the academic; journalistic selections are based on perceived 'quality' or 'importance', validated by the contributor's knowledge of the genre; entries in the listener poll are based on a more consensual idea of 'quality' (although perceived 'importance' may also play a part here). In collating information from sources with differing agendas, the attempt has been made to render the power of authority of selection more diffuse. Additionally, because each of these sources is a culturally and historically positioned document, no claim is being made for finality with regard to the lists of tracks selected. Had different sources been consulted, a different 'canon' would have resulted. So if our lists of tracks are to be considered canonical, it must be in the sense of a 'loose canon', freely open to revision and subject to debate.

Kermode's second point, regarding the usefulness of canons, is, of course, the reason for our having to establish a 'canon' at all. The principal aim, it should be remembered, was to limit the choice of tracks to be considered for analysis. If canons, as Kermode argues, are essentially a necessary evil, then we will accept our selection as being canonical, placing stress on the necessity whilst simultaneously attempting to diminish those factors involved in establishing structures of power.

Finally, there are grounds for asserting that the lists of tracks which were compiled represent, to some extent at least, the taste and values of a notional hip hop community. To the extent that we are posing an implied listener, then those responsible for compiling the source lists might be said to constitute collectively such a listener.*

In addition to providing a 'loose canon' from which our case-studies can be selected, the chronological arrangement of the collated information allows us to view a snapshot of the relative importance of singles and albums to hip hop over time. This is represented graphically below, with analysis following the diagram.

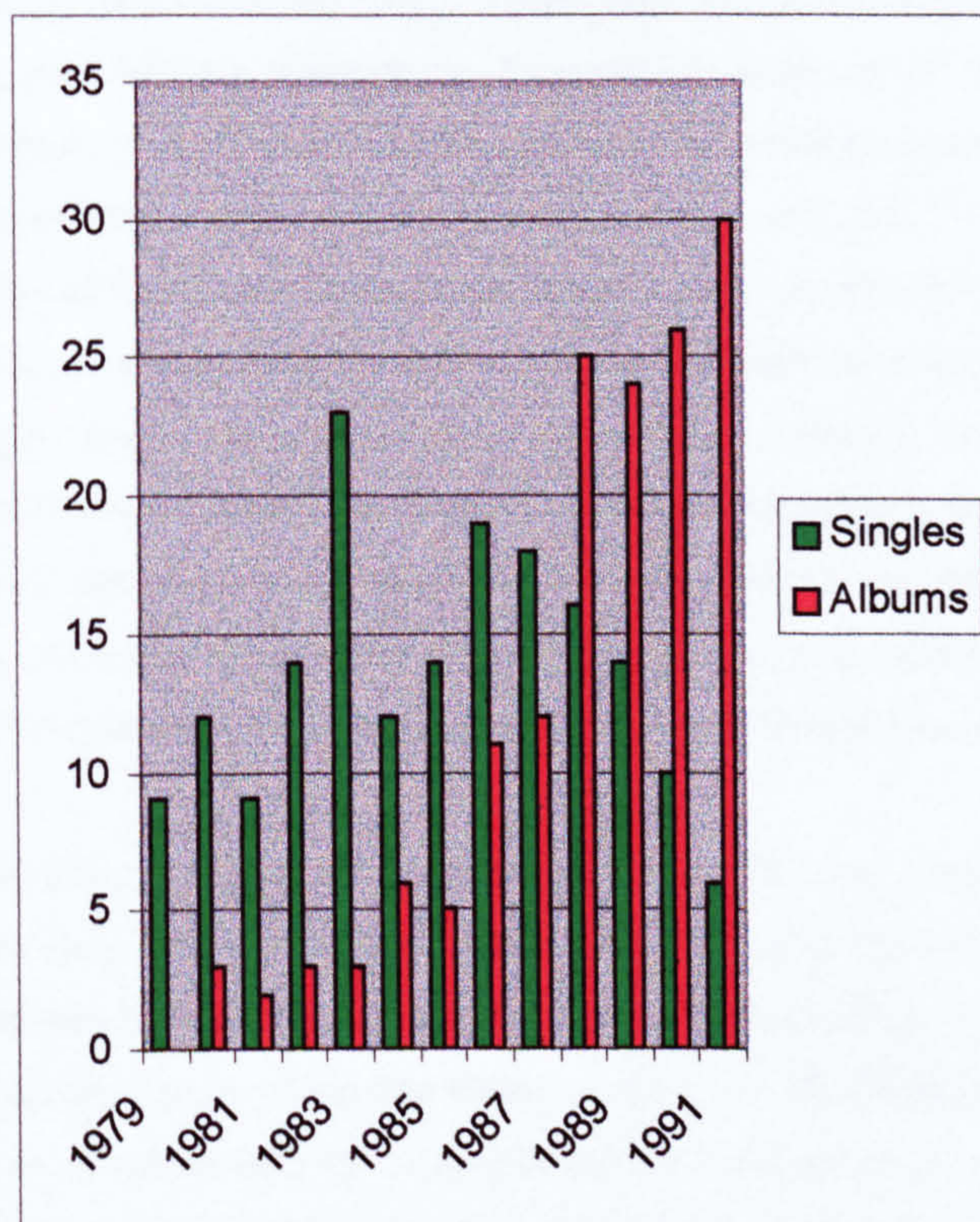


Figure 1. Singles/albums included in 'year-by-year' lists.

Turning first to singles, it can be seen that the general pattern is an increase in the number of qualifying records from 1979 to 1983, with a subsequent decrease until the end of the survey. The anomalous dip at 1981 can be understood as reflecting a decreased amount of innovation within hip hop at the time ('innovation' being potentially conflated with 'importance' by at least some of our sources). While there were some innovative records released in that year, the general trend was to reproduce the formulaic sound which had given recorded hip hop its initial impetus. More simply put,

* Thanks to Jason Toyne for this paragraph.

hip hop's early novelty value was wearing off. The 1983 peak is a result of the changes taking place in hip hop at the time. This year saw hip hop's second era of production (the electro sound) at the height of its success, along with the last few notable releases from the first production era, and the beginnings of the third. The same fact accounts for the dip of 1984-1985. By this time, electro had gone into rapid decline and the first wave of hip hop acts had all but vanished, and so these years represent the increasing commercial viability and musical innovations of the third era of production. There is then a second peak in 1986, again representing a combination of production eras, with the first singles being released by artists associated with the fourth era adding to the continuing relevance of the third. Finally, the gradual decrease in qualifying singles through the years 1987-1991 is indicative of the shift in hip hop from being a singles-based to an album-based genre.

This latter fact is underlined by the leap in the number of albums which qualify for inclusion in 1988, with the number of qualifying albums exceeding singles for the first time. This transition is interesting, since albums, at least in comparison with singles, have traditionally carried connotations of maturity and seriousness. As Paul Willis has noted: 'Often there will be tracks on an LP which have never been very popular, but which are of interest to the expert or the devotee or the technician. LPs tend to serve the interest more of the "serious" listener, who is concerned to appreciate all the aspects of a particular field, and not simply those to which he (*sic*) is already attracted.'² Although, Willis was writing in 1978, before the advent of recorded hip hop, his comments are still relevant to the genre. For example, although it was common practice to release instrumental versions of tracks on the B-side of singles, it is hard to imagine standalone instrumentals such as Public Enemy's 'Contract On The World Love Jam' or De La Soul's 'Transmitting Live From Mars' being released as singles.³ Tracks such as these embody Willis' ideas: not particularly popular in their own right and appealing to the more serious listener. The rise of the hip hop album over the single, then, implies both a desire amongst hip hop artists to further the boundaries of the genre and a willingness amongst the audience to listen to these experiments.

Of course, hip hop albums had existed since as far back as 1980, but, as can be seen from the graph above, few of these early albums have been understood as being of any historical importance. Indeed, those albums meriting inclusion in the survey which were released between 1980 and 1983 generally do so because of the scarcity of hip hop albums at the time. The increase in noteworthy albums in 1984 once again coincides with the coming of the third production era of hip hop. Albums released during this era were, compared to those which followed, fairly simple as a rule, consisting of eight to ten tracks, of which three or four would be released as singles. However, the same increasing commercial viability that was seen in the singles market at this time is also present in albums, with more albums being released, and greater sales being achieved. Finally, as noted above, there was the shift to more fully realised, 'mature' albums coinciding with both the coming of the fourth production era and hip hop's transition to being an album-centred genre.*

* This is not without precedent. Parallels can be seen with 1960s rock music, which became more album-centred with the growing 'maturity' of the music, particularly post-'Pet Sounds' by the Beach Boys and the Beatles' 'Sgt. Peppers Lonely Hearts Club Band'.

A database of Breaks

In addition of the selection of tracks for analysis, another strand of preparatory work was necessary. Within the analyses, we will be discussing tracks with reference to their intertextuality, and in particular in terms of our implied listener positions. In order to discuss any implied listener positions involving a knowledge response, we must first have access to that response ourselves. What this means is that it became necessary to compile a database of Breaks. While this database could never be entirely comprehensive, it eventually ran to over 6700 entries, covering as much ground as was possible. Included in it were both appropriative and interpretive material. Drum machine interpretations of breaks were excluded on the grounds that their usual inaccuracy (see chapter three) casts doubts on the degree to which the listener will understand them as being intertextual: the slight differences in rhythm combined with the difference in sound can make it very hard to recognise the original through the interpretation, without recourse to information external to the music itself.

Compilation of the database was undertaken in three main ways: through personal recognition; by means of liner notes on albums crediting sources for Breaks; and by internet-based research involving the collation of information from websites detailing sources, such as <http://www.the-breaks.com>. Each method was verified, wherever possible, by cross-referencing the re-presentations with their originals, or other uses of them within hip hop. This cross-referencing, initially carried out to ensure accuracy within the database, proved to be exceptionally useful, since the act of 'actively listening' highlighted the processes involved in listening to hip hop. Awareness of these processes, normally carried out in a more passive, subconscious fashion, proved to be important in formulating the ideas discussed in the previous chapter.

A principal purpose of the finished database was to allow track analysis to proceed without interruptions for 'source-hunting'. In addition to serving this purpose, it also allowed for analysis of the database itself to be undertaken. This resulted in the production of two lists, of the artists and songs most frequently employed as source material within hip hop. These are reproduced, with commentary, below.

20 most sourced artists:

1. James Brown (10.91%)
2. Parliament (3.23%)
3. Kool & The Gang (3.04%)
4. Sly & The Family Stone (2.98%)
5. The J.B.'s (2.38%)
6. Funkadelic (2.19%)
7. Lynn Collins (1.59%)
8. The Honey Drippers (1.39%)
- 9=. Lou Donaldson (1.33%)
- 9=. The Meters (1.33%)
- 11=. Isaac Hayes (1.28%)
- 11=. The Ohio Players (1.28%)
13. Bob James (1.27%)
14. Zapp (1.25%)
15. Bobby Byrd (1.03%)
16. George Clinton (1.00%)
17. Average White Band (0.96%)
18. Melvin Bliss (0.94%)

19. Prince (0.92%)
20. Grover Washington Jr. (0.81%)

The bracketed percentages given above represent the number of times an artist has been sourced as a percentage of the whole database. These are included so as to give a sense of scale, and run to two decimal places in order to distinguish between individual entries. A repercussion of this is that the numbers take on an air of mathematical accuracy; however, care needs to be taken not to over-interpret the percentages in this light, and we must restrict our interpretations to a more general level. There are two reasons for this. Firstly, as noted above, the database, despite its depth, does not cover every instance of intertextuality within hip hop, and so should not be subjected to overly rigorous mathematical interpretation. Secondly, no account was taken either of the fact that many hip hop tracks use more than one sound-element in their construction or of the differing degrees to which sound-elements are used (some are major parts of the track in which they are used, while others may make only a fleeting appearance). Therefore, while it can be said that (for example) George Clinton's solo work is less frequently sourced than that of his groups, Parliament and Funkadelic, it should not be inferred that Clinton's solo work can be heard on one in every hundred hip hop tracks.

The first claim that can be made with certainty about this list is that all the artists included within it are most strongly associated with soul, funk or jazz music. This should come as no surprise, of course: these types of music provided the material with which the original hip hop DJs worked, and, as such, they are an integral part of the genre. Furthermore, the continued appearance of soul, funk and jazz in hip hop provides a physical link which works together with the techniques discussed in the previous chapter to place hip hop firmly within the larger continuum of African-American music. While hip hop's eclecticism of source material should not be forgotten (in fact, it is reflected in the much wider variety of artists whose material has been sourced only once or twice), it should be understood that this eclecticism is tempered by hip hop's frequent referencing of the soul, funk and jazz music mentioned above. Indeed, it could be argued that without this central 'canon' of musical styles, that eclecticism would become less important: sound-elements taken from genres of music outside of this canon are rendered more noticeable by their very difference from it.

It is also readily apparent from the above list that some artists are more important within that canon than others, with the single most important figure being James Brown. Not only does Brown head the list by some margin, but there are also places within the top twenty for The J.B.'s, Lynn Collins and Bobby Byrd, all of whom were closely associated with him.

This dominance of the James Brown sound in hip hop is a reflection of the years 1986 to 1989, when, as noted in the second chapter, it was almost *de rigueur* to include a James Brown sample on a hip hop track. There are several reasons why this was the case. Chief amongst these was Brown's music itself. As Rickey Vincent notes, by the mid 1960s, 'Brown had figured out how to...make everything in the band work around a groove, rather than a melody.'⁴ The sound that resulted had a rhythmic primacy that ideally suited the needs of hip hop producers. Additionally, many tracks featured the kind of breaks that had been extended by early hip hop DJs, wherein the drums would be heard either unaccompanied or with a bass guitar pattern. Once again, these were ideal for the hip hop producer – one relatively easy way of providing the basic rhythm track for a song was simply to sample

and loop one or two bars of the break. On top of this, Brown's non-verbal vocal utterances – the grunts and groans which he delivered during his performances – could be isolated by sampling and used as an extra percussive device.⁵

Beyond the strictly musical, Brown himself enjoyed almost iconic status amongst African-Americans, and African-American musicians in particular. During the late 1960s, his ownership of radio stations and promotion of African-American DJs had helped to push both his own and others' music beyond the perceived limitations of the time. By sampling Brown's music, hip hop producers could hope to tap into this iconic power themselves. Furthermore, Brown had been releasing records since 1956, which meant that by the time hip hop producers began sampling his work in the mid-1980s there was a thirty-year catalogue of records available to them. While Brown's earlier works were less frequently sourced, this depth of catalogue meant that there were plenty of 'new' tracks available to producers. Finally, there was also something of a commercial 'bandwagon' effect: once a few hip hop records which utilised James Brown samples had achieved success, others followed in their wake, with producers hoping to emulate that success. In connection with this, it should also be noted that Brown had himself returned to the spotlight with his 1985 hit 'Living In America', and the success of this record had also perhaps reminded hip hop producers of the potency of the James Brown sound.⁶

But while James Brown is the most important figure in the list of most-sampled artists, he is not the only person worthy of individual mention: a second noteworthy individual is George Clinton. As with James Brown, Clinton's solo entry in the list is augmented by his involvement in other groups: Parliament, Funkadelic and (to a lesser extent) Zapp. Clinton's sound, known as P-Funk (an abbreviation derived from the names of his two main groups Parliament and Funkadelic, who shared many members) became popular with hip hop producers towards the end of the 1980s, a fact noted by Rickey Vincent: 'For rap producers, the music of James Brown was the sample of the day back in 1988, but as rap music became more thematic, conceptual and serious... the Clinton/P-funk loop surpassed James Brown as the jingle of choice (just as P-Funk surpassed the JBs funk as the groove of choice in the 1970s).'⁷ Vincent's statement is interesting for two reasons.

Firstly, the parenthetical comment at the end suggests that hip hop, as well as employing the techniques and material of earlier African-American music, was also developing in a similar manner. Secondly, Vincent makes a connection between the use of P-Funk samples in hip hop and its broadening semantic content. Within the geographic and chronographic boundaries of this thesis this indeed seems to be the case.^{*} In particular, P-Funk samples were popular with those artists categorised at the time as Afrocentric hip hop (the various Native Tongues acts, and groups such as X Clan). One characteristic of the work of these artists was a reinvigoration of what Vincent terms the 'P-Funk aesthetic': 'The convergence of historical consciousness, political consciousness, and a humorous spin on creativity.'⁸ As with the use of James Brown material, the connection is clearly being drawn here between the re-presentation of sound-elements and the 'reinvigoration' of the connotations which accompany them.

The final point to be made about this first list concerns the inclusion of two relatively little-known acts: the Honey Drippers and Melvin Bliss. Despite their comparative obscurity, both of these artists

^{*} The most famous use of P-Funk within hip hop is probably that of later, West Coast-based groups.

achieve a place amongst the top twenty most-sourced through multiple uses of one song from their repertoire. This is important, since it illustrates hip hop's ability to increase the relative familiarity of a piece of music without necessarily increasing the fame of the original artist – the autonomous Break, as discussed in the previous chapter.

21 most sourced songs:

1. James Brown – 'Funky Drummer' (2.29%)
2. Sly & The Family Stone – 'Sing A Simple Song' (1.52%)
3. The Honey Drippers – 'Impeach The President' (1.39%)
4. Lynn Collins – 'Think (About It)' (1.24%)
5. James Brown – 'Funky President' (1.15%)
6. Melvin Bliss – 'Synthetic Substitution' (0.94%)
- 6=. George Clinton – 'Atomic Dog' (0.94%)
8. Kool & The Gang – 'N.T.' (0.89%)
9. James Brown – 'The Payback' (0.86%)
10. James Brown – 'Get Up, Get Into It, Get Involved' (0.69%)
11. Bobby Byrd – 'Hot Pants...I'm Coming, I'm Coming, I'm Coming' (0.63%)
12. Parliament – 'Flashlight' (0.62%)
13. Skull Snaps – 'It's A New Day' (0.56%)
14. Zapp – 'More Bounce To The Ounce' (0.55%)
15. The Ohio Players – 'Funky Worm' (0.53%)
- 16=. Lou Donaldson – 'Ode To Billy Joe' (0.46%)
- 16=. Bob James – 'Nautilus' (0.46%)
- 16=. Joe Tex – 'Papa Was Too' (0.46%)
19. The Emotions – 'Blind Alley' (0.43%)
- 20=. Kool & The Gang – 'Jungle Boogie' (0.41%)
- 20=. Sly & The Family Stone – 'You Can Make It If You Try' (0.41%)

Once again, before beginning any analysis of this second list, the note of caution given above concerning the percentage figures for each entry should be reiterated: these numbers are included to provide a sense of scale and to distinguish between entries, and should not, for the reasons stated earlier, be used for detailed mathematical analysis.

The most obvious fact about this second list is its similarity to the first. Of course, this is no surprise: the reason artists appear on the first list is because some of their songs have been used many times in hip hop productions. The three artists who appear on the second list but not the first (Skull Snaps, Joe Tex and The Emotions) do so because the rest of their catalogue is infrequently sourced. However, it should be noted that all three once again fall within the soul/funk/jazz canon.

The reason why these particular songs are the most sourced is, once again, because they include a break section of the type used by hip hop DJs, featuring drums with little or no added instrumentation. It is these sections that are principally employed by hip hop producers. Taking the top three entries as examples should make this apparent. In the case of 'Funky Drummer', the section used is the drum break towards the end of the track. With 'Sing A Simple Song', the sampled section is a drums and horns break occurring in the middle of the track^{*}. Finally, it is the drum introduction to 'Impeach The President' which is most commonly used in hip hop productions, although the section immediately following, featuring drums, bass and a little guitar is also frequently sampled.⁹ It can readily be seen

^{*} Described here as a 'drums and horns break', but reference should be made to the preceding chapter.

that drum breaks of this kind, when sampled and looped, provide the ‘blank intensionality’ mentioned in chapter three.

The second list also presents us with an opportunity to investigate whether any particular era is more frequently sourced than others. The songs featured in it were all originally released between 1966 and 1982, with the details being as follows:

<i>Year</i>	<i>Number of entries</i>
1966	1
1967	1
1968	0
1969	2
1970	1
1971	4
1972	2
1973	3
1974	2
1975	1
1976	0
1977	2
1978	0
1979	0
1980	1
1981	0
1982	1

Although this sample is too small to undergo any rigorous statistical analysis, it is immediately apparent that there is a concentration of frequently-sourced songs originally released around the early 1970s. Since these were the years immediately prior to the beginnings of hip hop, it is likely that these records were amongst those popular with early hip hop DJs. Evidence for this can be found in the fact that seven of the listed records also appear in a list of important breakbeat records published by Afrika Bambaataa in 1988. Once again, we can see here how hip hop production is directly influenced by the practices of hip hop DJs.

Finally in connection with the second list, the appearance of relatively obscure material should once again be noted. This can either be through the inclusion of little-known artists (The Honey Drippers and Melvin Bliss again, with the addition of Skull Snaps), or through little-known tracks by well-known artists (‘Funky Drummer’ was a relatively unsuccessful single by James Brown, and was not included on any album until 1986). As we might now expect, this relatively-obscure source material is that which appears within hip hop in the form of the autonomous Break.

Analytical approaches

The final preparatory stage with which we must concern ourselves before moving on to the analyses proper involves the selection of analytical ‘tools’. Essentially, four analytical approaches will be combined in our analyses, as detailed below. These are: the sign typology of Philip Tagg; a more traditional musicological approach; the structural analysis of hip hop tracks; and the implied listener model developed in the preceding chapter.

The sign typology of Philip Tagg.

The first of our approaches is the sign typology of Philip Tagg.¹⁰ This approach was chosen because, as will be seen in the discussion that follows, Tagg's typology – based on a semiotic approach to popular music – is particularly salient for the understanding of hip hop. Within his work, Tagg outlines four connotative possibilities, described below:

Anaphones are those musemes which have a 'perceived similarity to paramusical [elements]'. These Tagg subdivides into sonic, kinetic and tactile anaphones, being musemes which resemble, respectively, sound, movement and touch.

Genre synecdoches are musemes which represent a '*pars pro toto* reference to 'foreign' musical style, thence to complete cultural context of that style'.

Episodic markers are 'short, one-way process[es] highlighting the order or relative importance of musical events'.

Style indicators are those 'unvaried aspects of musical structuration for the style in question'.

Before employing this typology in the analysis of individual tracks, it will prove useful at this stage to provide a more general outline of how these meaning-producing devices can operate in conjunction with our various implied listener positions.

Of course, as we have seen, five of these implied listener positions (those involving original material and non-recognition) do not result in Break production. In these cases, then, it can be understood that Tagg's connotative types will operate in the same manner as they would in music in which the issue of intertextuality plays a minor role. Further discussion here would, therefore, simply be reiterating Tagg's original work in this area, and is unnecessary. Instead, we will concentrate on those four textual and receptive categories which, in combination, do result in Break production, and how Tagg's typology can be applied to them.

Turning first to anaphones, it can be seen that there are two ways in which Breaks can employ anaphonic sounds. Either the appropriated sound-element being used can contain an anaphone in the first place (as, for example, in the police sirens heard in Rhythm Heritage's 'Theme From S.W.A.T.', itself heard in LL Cool J's 'I'm Bad')¹¹, or a non-anaphonic sound can be made to act in an anaphonic fashion, as in the rhythmic scratching of a single note: the addition of rhythm to a sound implies movement, and can therefore be understood as a kinetic anaphone. Despite the suitability of the technology employed in creating hip hop (the sampler, in particular) for incorporating non-musical sounds within the soundscape of a particular track as appropriative material, the first of these is relatively uncommon. This is probably because anaphones are dependent (as Tagg notes) on cultural conventions. These cultural conventions include the generic conventions of the source of the sound-element containing the anaphone. Isolated from their original surroundings, anaphones frequently lose their original meaning. Of course, in the case of a listener-response of knowledge, meaning can be reconstructed through reference to the source. For example, Babe Ruth's 'The Mexican' can be understood to be replete with the same kind of kinetic anaphones to the figure of the gunman riding through the open spaces of the old West as are found in the spaghetti western soundtracks of Ennio Morricone.¹² In Organized Konfusion's 'Prisoners Of War', a sound-element from this track is used, but the anaphonic sense of the source is lost.¹³ However, if the listener's response to this sound-element

is one of knowledge, the western imagery can be recalled, adding a further nuance of meaning to the MCs' extended metaphor of lyrics as weapons.

Another way in which anaphones can be made to 'work' within hip hop is by their being referred to either in the title or the lyrics of the track. For example, De La Soul's 'Pease Porridge' contains a regular clicking noise which, taken on its own, connotes little.¹⁴ However, in conjunction with a lyrical reference to tap-dancing, the listener understands the clicking to represent the sound of tap shoes on a hard floor. In fact, since this technique of discursive reinforcement can also be used in a source, these two methods of creating meaning can work together. If the title of the source contains a word or phrase which makes sense of an anaphone contained within it, then a listener-response of knowledge brings with it an understanding of the connotations of the anaphone, even if the sound has been altered substantially in its incorporation into the hip hop track.

Compared to their use in appropriative material, anaphones contained within interpretive material are even less likely to retain their original connotations, although this varies depending on the degree of difference from the original. Again, a listener-response of knowledge can reinstate these connotations, but it may be found that they no longer have any relevance in the new context of the sound-element. For example, Afrika Bambaataa + Soul Sonic Force's 'Planet Rock' famously contains interpretive material based on Kraftwerk's 'Trans-Europe Express'.¹⁵ Part of this is a shuffling rhythm which, in the Kraftwerk original, is clearly an anaphone of the sound of a train moving: the sound is phased, suggesting movement, and there is, of course, the paramusical 'clue' in the title of the track (and, indeed, in the picture of a train on the inner sleeve of the record). In 'Planet Rock', the sound is faster and not phased, and so is sonically less redolent of a train. For the listener with knowledge of the original, the sound may still be understood as 'the train sound' from the Kraftwerk track, but where this makes sense in the context of 'Trans-Europe Express' – the theme of the song is (unsurprisingly) a rail journey across Europe – in 'Planet Rock' the train reference is out of place.

The second possibility for anaphone use in hip hop is, as noted above, the creation of anaphones out of originally non-anaphonic material. This can be done with no change to the original, but more commonly some alteration will be performed on the sound-element, with this change working in combination with the context of the new track to create new connotative possibilities. A good example here is the rising horn sound in Public Enemy's 'Fight The Power', as discussed in the previous chapter. In the source ('The Grunt' by the J.B.'s), this appears once, at the very beginning of the track. Here it is acting as an episodic marker, a brief introduction signalling the start of the track and readying the listener for the main riff, which follows it immediately. In the Public Enemy track, as noted in our earlier discussion, the sound is looped, and this alteration combined with the context of 'fighting the power' renders the sound anaphonic: it begins to resemble a police siren, leading to connotations of the police force and, by extension, the government and authority in general, leaving the listener in little doubt as to which particular form of power Public Enemy are opposing.

With regard to genre synecdoches, hip hop is in an interesting position. Since intertextuality plays such a large part in the genre, with many tracks being largely comprised of sound-elements taken from other genres of music, it initially appears that hip hop is principally composed of genre synecdoches. However, this is problematic, since it would leave hip hop with little in the way of a

'home style' into which to place the genre synecdoches. In order to understand how genre synecdoches work within hip hop, then, we must look at style indicators at the same time. In other words: what is it that signifies 'hip hop', and when is a Break a genre synecdoche?

As we saw in chapters two and three, the sound of hip hop changed several times during the time span covered by this thesis, which means that the genre's style indicators must have also changed. However, there are some style indicators which have remained constant throughout. These are a basic 4/4 pulse, the presence of MCs and the above mentioned prevalence of intertextual practices. Additionally, there are some style indicators which, although not present throughout, have been in place for most of the time span of this thesis. These include the use of drum machines and the inclusion of DJing techniques such as scratching in the production of tracks. These style indicators, or combinations thereof, signify a track as being hip hop.

This, then, is hip hop's 'home style', and Breaks, as intertextual practices, are important within it. However, as we have seen above, the most common sources for sound-elements are the genres of soul, funk and jazz music. What this means in terms of genre synecdoches is that Breaks taken from these genres are more closely aligned with hip hop's home style than others, and so tend to carry fewer connotations of their original genres. The hip hop listener expects to hear soul, funk and jazz-based Breaks, and so does not necessarily consider their wider cultural connotations as relevant. Whilst knowledge responses to particular Breaks taken from these genres may give rise to connotations associated with the particular source of the sound-element, familiarity responses will tend more to the listener having an understanding of the particular Break as being part of hip hop's home style.

Of course, the fact that soul, funk and jazz Breaks are closely associated with hip hop's home style is of importance in itself. Effectively, in its constant citing of these genres, hip hop is both pointedly affirming the tradition of African-American music and positioning itself within this tradition. That is, hip hop revisits the linked, but separate, genres of soul, funk and jazz and unites them (and itself), powerfully reinscribing the history of African-American music. As Russell A. Potter points out, 'hip-hop brings back the musical past that many white and middle-class listeners have conveniently forgotten.'¹⁶

With regard to a knowledge response to a Break constructed using sound-elements taken from other genres, the same kind of effect as described above can be seen – particular connotations associated with the source can be drawn. However, in the case of familiarity responses to this type of Break, more general generic connotations are likely to be drawn, and it is in this way that genre synecdoches operate within hip hop. The heavy metal guitar sounds popular during the second era of production, for instance, began as genre synecdoches, although over time, with their continued appearance, they became less unexpected, and therefore started to drift from being genre synecdoches towards being style indicators. Essentially, the less frequently a particular genre is used to provide sound-elements within hip hop, then the stronger the genre synecdochal character of the Break. For example, the Beastie Boys' '5-Piece Chicken Dinner' consists of twenty-three seconds of frantic bluegrass banjo picking and fiddle scraping.¹⁷ With this type of music being extremely rare within hip hop, this acts strongly as a genre synecdoche. Given the widespread belief that bluegrass, as 'rural/white' music, is diametrically opposed to hip hop, as 'urban/black' music, several possible

connotations can be drawn: i) the track is mocking bluegrass in a derogatory fashion; ii) the Beastie Boys are ridiculing themselves as white artists making hip hop, from which; iii) the track is pointing out the dangers of stereotyping music along racial lines.

Finally, it can be seen that episodic markers, like anaphones, can either be contained in the source or created anew during the process of production. In the first instance, episodic markers may be simply lifted from the original and used for the same purpose in the hip hop track, but it is not uncommon for them to be used by DJs to inform the listener as to which Break they are subsequently going to perform transformative scratching upon. We have already noted on several occasions that DJs frequently let part of a Break play in order to make it recognisable during otherwise transformative sections, and episodic markers are often used for this purpose. Once again, the Transformer scratching in DJ Jazzy Jeff & The Fresh Prince's 'Live At Union Square (November 1986)' provides a good example of this.¹⁸ Here, a short sequence of descending notes which act as an episodic marker in the original is played to signal the beginning of the Break, which is then subjected to the transformative scratching.

In the second case, episodic markers can be created from other material in the original, principally through rhythmic scratching. The simplest example here is that of a single note or drum beat from the original scratched in on each beat of a bar to act as an episodic marker.

Traditional musicological analysis.

The second of the four approaches to be used in the analyses that follow is that of traditional musicology. Of course, musicology was developed as a means of analysing tonal-European music, so its usefulness when applied to hip hop is limited. However, having previously argued (in chapter three) that hip hop can and does incorporate some tonal-European ideas, musicological analysis will still prove useful in analysing some of the sound-elements contained within our selected tracks. That is, since concepts such as harmonic development and melody are not entirely absent from hip hop, in order to understand how these work within those tracks in which they can be discerned, we will be employing traditional musicological tools, particularly Western notation and scales, when relevant.

Structural analysis.

Thirdly, and as stated at the end of the previous chapter, our reception theory-based model must be used in conjunction with structural analysis. That is, as well as looking at sound-elements in terms of their potential effect on an implied listener, we must consider their interrelationship in terms of their arrangement within the unfolding structure of a track through time. For any researcher into non-notated music, comparative structural analysis is problematic in that it is impossible to compare two pieces of music by listening to them simultaneously. While pieces under analysis can be listened to sequentially, this can become very time consuming, particularly if several pieces are under consideration, with the researcher having to move back and forth between them to verify findings. In order to facilitate analysis, then, some kind of visual representation of the music has to be produced.

It was immediately apparent that a traditional score was inappropriate for the analysis of hip hop music. The relative unimportance of melody, frequent use of extended ostinatos and incorporation of non-traditional musical sounds (such as scratching and samples of non-musical sounds) meant that a

score would contain the wrong information and would be unnecessarily complicated through annotation. Although traditional musical notation could still be useful for the representation of individual elements within tracks – a particular bass line, for example – the idea of representing an entire track with a score was discarded. This meant that an alternative had to be found, and the first step towards creating this was deciding what information was to be included in the representation, and how it was to be organised.

Since one of the principal aims was the comparative structural analysis of tracks, it was important that any representation would have to make this structure immediately apparent. With musical structure being dependent on events unfolding over time, a time-scale would have to be included. Initial attempts at basing representations on musical time proved cumbersome (largely due to the length of some early hip hop tracks), and so a scale based on clock time was decided upon. However, the work based on musical time was not entirely wasted.

The process of noting what happened in the music on a bar-by-bar basis made one fact readily apparent. Frequently, individual elements of the music would be treated as if they were a looped sample, or the result of a DJ cutting between two copies of the same break. That is, they would begin, repeat for a time without changing, then end. This form of binary progression – i.e., a sound-element is either ‘on’ (present) or ‘off’ (absent) – suggested a form of representation in which the presence or absence of the individual element could be visually reproduced by the presence or absence of a simple block of colour on a diagram. In order to ascertain which sounds comprised each element, a simple rule was applied: when a group of sounds first appeared during a track, they were treated as one element until a change occurred. At this point, a new element was created, in one of three ways:

Addition. In this case, a new sound (or sounds) is heard alongside the existing ones. This new sound is considered as a separate element, and is represented by its own block of colour, at a different height from the existing element, and beginning at the point where the change occurred.

Subtraction. Here, a sound that has thus far been heard as part of an element stops while the rest of the element continues. The sound that has dropped out is considered as a separate element and is once again given its own block and height on the diagram, this time ending where the change occurred.

Alteration. This involves a change in sound without any change in the source of that sound. A clear example would be a bass line which alternates between two distinct, repeated riffs. In this case, although the two riffs are considered different elements, they would be represented by two blocks of colour at the same height on the diagram. The exception to this was when the alteration was of an intensional nature, in which case the variation would be noted in the key of the diagram. For example, a bass line consisting of minor variations on a single riff would be shown as a single block.

Some examples will probably help to make things clearer:

*Example 1**

A drum machine plays a repeated two-bar pattern. At the third repetition, it is joined by a sampled bass and guitar loop (see Fig. 2, next page).

* N.B. Examples not to scale.



Figure 2. Analysis diagram, example 1.

Example 2

A sampled bass and drum loop is heard in combination with a drum machine pattern. On the eighth bar, the drum machine drops out before returning with the addition of some piano chords.

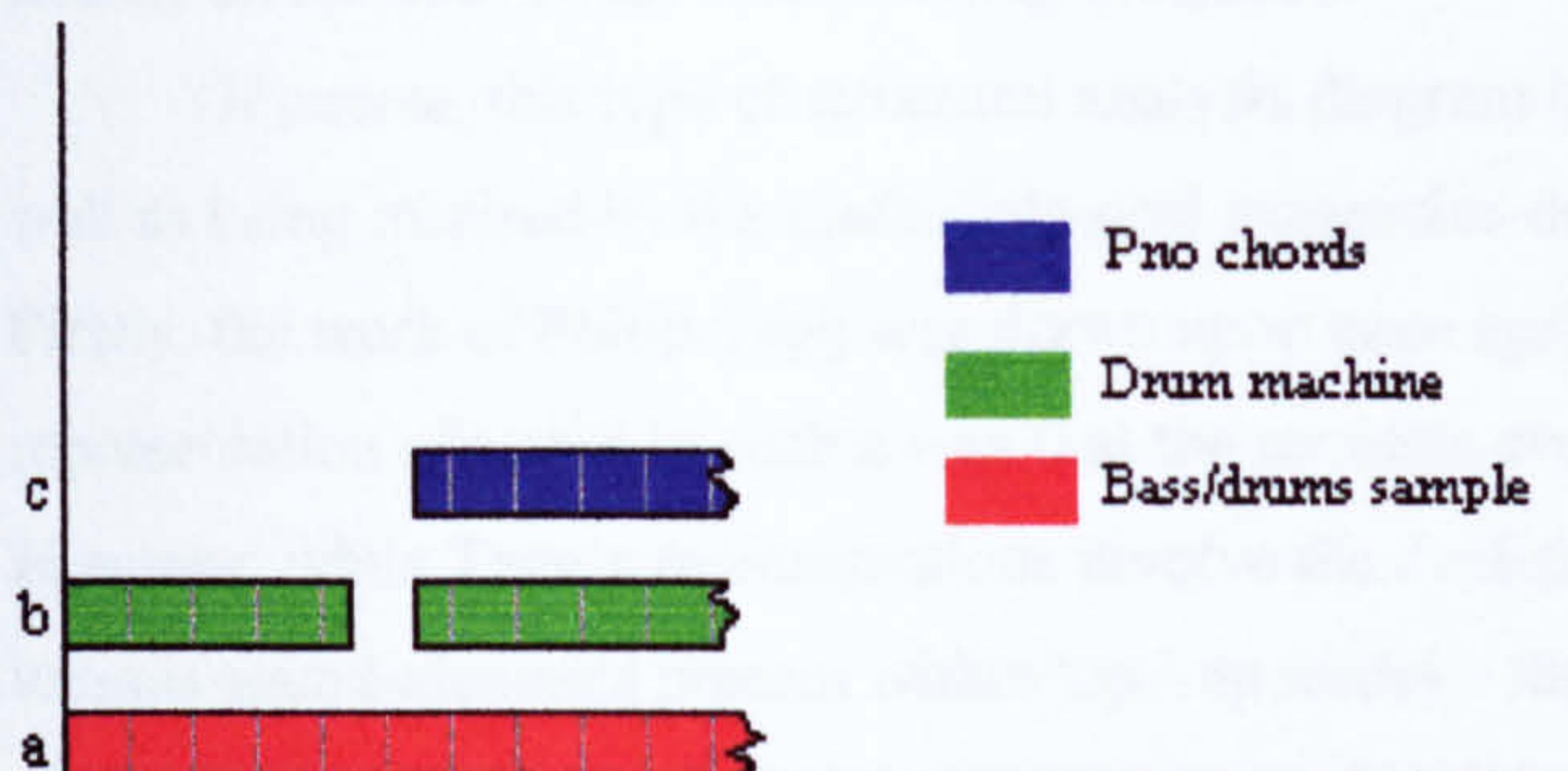


Figure 3. Analysis diagram, example 2.

Example 3

A looped drum sample is heard along with a bass which plays a repeated riff for eight bars before switching to a second riff for four, then returning to the original.



Figure 4. Analysis diagram, example 3.

At this point, a note should be made concerning the grey lines which can be seen within the blocks of colour on the analysis diagrams. Essentially, these are the remaining traces of the original grid upon which all the analysis diagrams were constructed. However, they were purposefully left in the finished diagrams as an aid to the reader, providing a means by which the subdivisions of the larger time-scale of the track (shown along the horizontal axis of the diagram at the bottom, in minutes, although not on our examples) can be discerned. Additionally, it should be pointed out at this point that the lower case letters which appear along the vertical axis of the diagrams are simply another aid to the reader; a means by which individual lines within the diagrams can be referred to within the analytical text. These references will appear within square brackets ([a], [b], etc.) for the sake of clarity.

As noted above, any intensional variation present is noted in the key of the diagram, but where further detail of that variation is relevant, this was provided separately within the analysis. Similarly,

the vocals (principally MCing) were represented by a block of colour simply showing the start and end points of individual sequences on the main diagram, with any detail of the lyrical content relevant to the analysis being mentioned within the text. Separate MCs would (usually) each have their own block of colour and line.

Finally, although the majority of tracks analysed could be adequately represented using these rules, there were some that could not. The ultimate rule of diagram construction, therefore, became 'bend the rules if necessary'. For example, any scratching present would usually be represented on its own line (or lines). However, in 'The Adventures Of Grandmaster Flash On The Wheels Of Steel' it was felt that the scratching was more integral to the structure of the track, and so it was represented by slashes on the lines of the records being scratched.¹⁹

Of course, this type of structural analysis diagram is not without precedent. Its development, as well as being inspired by the methodological exigencies described above, drew upon two influences. Firstly, the work of Philip Tagg was drawn upon once again. Part of his approach involves the graphic representation of tracks in such a way that the semiotic processes described above are rendered visible. However, while Tagg's representations involve the depiction of individual musemes, ours depict the various sound-elements present within hip hop tracks – the difference, as we saw in the previous chapter (page 50) being that a sound-element can involve more than one museme, or can already involve repetition. Secondly, our structural representations were partially inspired by my own experience of PC-based sequencers. In these programs, individual sound-elements are virtually positioned in such a way that those which align vertically are heard together, while those that align horizontally are heard sequentially.

The role of the implied listener model.

Finally, as stated at the close of the previous chapter, the theoretical approach discussed therein will be used within our analyses. However, as was noted at the time, our model of implied listener positions is meta-hermeneutic: it does not itself offer interpretations of texts, but maps out those possibilities of text/listener interaction which give rise to interpretation. Within our analyses, then, the model will be used to acknowledge the particular implied listener position(s) upon which the interpretation is based. For example, if an appropriative sound-element is discussed in terms of the connotative meanings associated with its source, the implied listener model will remind us that we are dealing with the appropriative material/knowledge position. Of course, it is theoretically possible to discuss every sound-element of every track from all the various potential implied listener positions. However, this would prove unnecessarily reduplicative: for example, while it is always possible for a sound-element consisting of appropriative material to meet with a non-recognition response in some listeners, the potential effects of this (i.e. the impossibility of any source-related connotations being drawn and the possibility of process codification with its attendant effects on future listener responses) are much the same in every case. Additionally, and importantly, it must be remembered that our implied listener model, through codification, tends to posit a 'typical' listener: our analyses will frequently, although not exclusively, reflect this position.

In addition to the verbal association of sound-elements with implied listener positions, a graphical representation will also be included at the end of each analysis. This diagram will show the sound-

elements of the track under analysis mapped onto our implied listener model of the previous chapter. As well as providing an easily accessible visual representation of the assumptions lying behind our analyses, these diagrams will allow us to see something of the changing nature of hip hop across our four production eras in terms of the varying amounts of original, interpretive and appropriative material employed in each track. It should be noted here that the positioning of sound-elements within each individual implied listener position is non-representative. That is, no attempt has been made to distinguish between, say, interpretive material that tends towards original material and that which tends towards appropriative material: the blocks of colour are simply shown within the region corresponding to the implied listener position(s) assumed in the text. Additionally, it should be pointed out that vocal performances (principally those of MCs) will not be shown in these diagrams. This is because it is impossible to categorise a vocal performance as belonging wholly to any one of the textual categories involved in our implied listener model. For instance, an MC's performance may be largely original material, but contain quotes from other lyrics (or, as we saw on page 51, a melodic 'approximation' of a phrase from an earlier song) which we would have to understand as being interpretive material. In order to fully understand vocal performances, we would need to analyse lyrics, rhyme schemes, vocal style, etc. with the same amount of detail as that of our musical analyses, and as was pointed out in the introduction (see page 3), this has been excluded from our remit.

At this point, then, we are ready to begin our case-study analyses. These number sixteen in total, and can be subdivided as follows. The first six analyses are more detailed than the ten which follow. Four of these are of tracks which can be understood as typical of their respective production eras, while the other two – 'The Adventures Of Grandmaster Flash On The Wheels Of Steel' and 'The Show' – represent untypical tracks which demonstrate the wider possibilities within hip hop. The subsequent ten shorter analyses are intended to flesh out our understanding of the four production eras, giving a clearer picture of hip hop's development through time.

Six analyses

'Rapper's Delight'²⁰

The main Break used in 'Rapper's Delight' is the familiar bass line from Chic's 'Good Times', shown below:



Figure 5. 'Good Times' bass line.

This four-bar pattern, along with the accompanying drum line (not shown), forms the basic musical unit which is repeated in the song, and is shown on line [b] of Fig. 5. As Fig. 6 shows, it can be understood as comprising two two-bar phrases. In each of these there is a repeated note, establishing a harmonic base, followed by a melodic fill that leads to the next phrase. Thus, within the repeated pattern, there is a harmonic binary oscillation between Em (I) and A (IV).

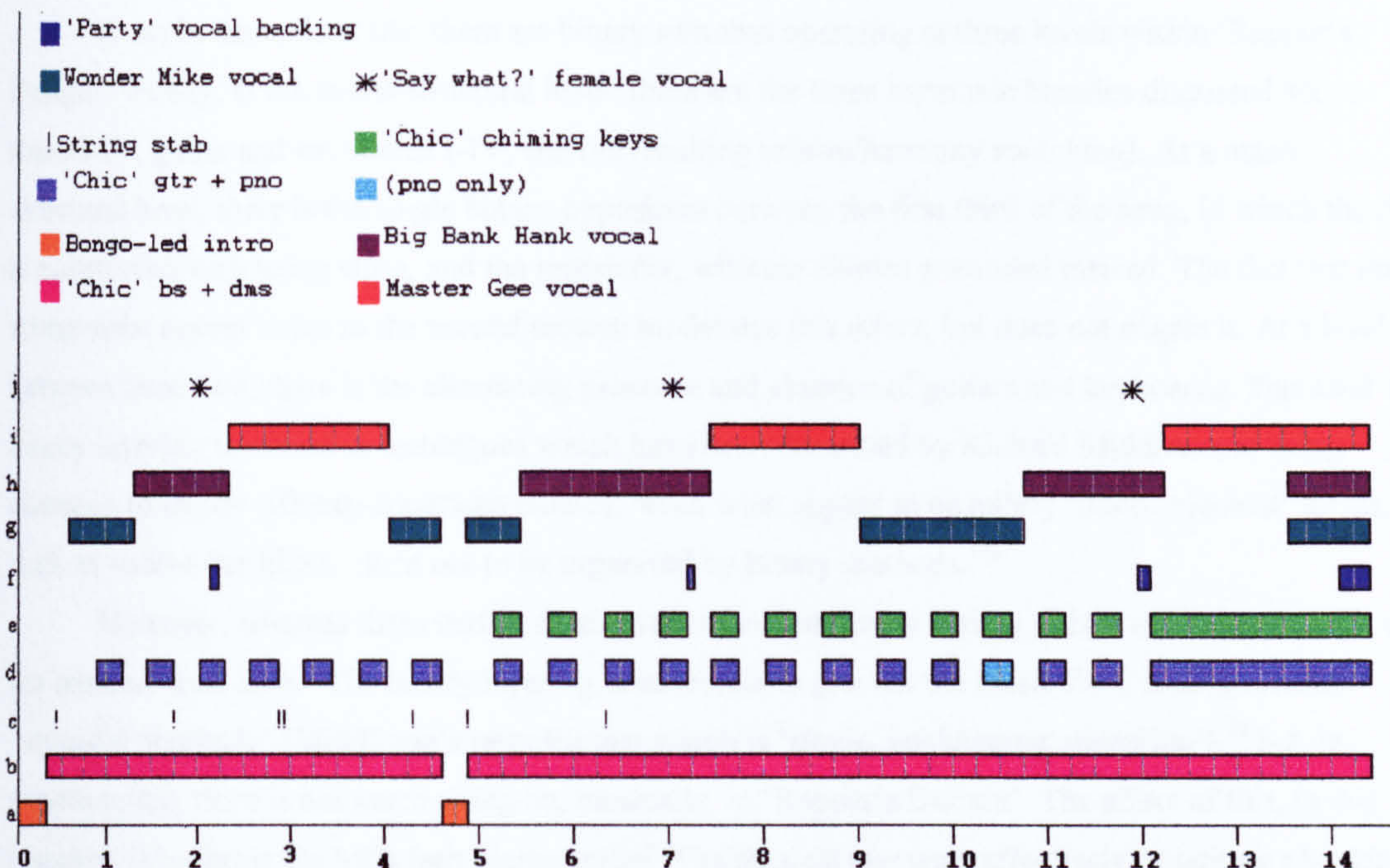


Figure 6. Sugarhill Gang *'Rapper's Delight'* 1979 Sugar Hill Records.

At regular intervals, guitar and piano, and later, chimes, are overlaid (lines [d] and [e]). These, too, repeat a four-bar progression, which consists of the chords Em, A9, Em, A (each lasting one bar) with a few regular grace notes. Again, we have the I-IV binary switch, but here the change occurs at twice the rate of the bass part. When the two parts combine, the effect is one of alternating unison and harmony between the bass and the other instruments, viz.: I/I (u), IV/I (h), I/IV (h), IV/IV (u).

The only other musical element in the main body of the song is a string 'stab' (line [c]), which is heard at fairly regular, if infrequent, intervals during the first third.

During the few bars in which the main break is not heard, the following pattern is heard, doubled by bass and piano. In Fig. 1, this break appears on line [a], and is referred to as 'Bongo-led intro', a name which testifies to its percussive qualities.



Figure 7. *'Bongo-led intro'*.

This break appears twice. In this case, this sound-element is interpretive material, being based on a track called 'Here Comes That Sound' by a group called Sun, and we can propose an implied listener response of non-recognition since this source is exceptionally obscure (substantial research has failed to uncover any further details).²¹ This means that our discussion of this sound-element needs to concentrate on its effect within 'Rapper's Delight'. As the introduction, it serves to establish the harmonic base for the whole song (Em), and it appears again approximately one-third of the way through the track, where it acts as a bridge: but only a bridge between two virtually identical parts. The longer second part of the song differs from the first only in the addition of keyboard 'chimes', with the string stabs all but disappearing, only being heard on two further occasions.

It can be seen, then, that there are binary switches operating at three levels within 'Rapper's Delight'. Firstly, at the micro-structural level, there are the three harmonic binaries discussed above (bass I-IV, guitar and keyboards I-IV, and the resulting unison/harmony switching). At a macro-structural level, there is the single binary opposition between the first third of the song, in which the riff is punctuated with string stabs, and the remainder, wherein chimes are added instead. The fact that the string stabs appear twice in the second section moderates this effect, but does not negate it. At a level between these two, there is the alternating presence and absence of guitars and keyboards. This kind of binary layering is related to techniques which have been described by Richard Middleton as being common to earlier African-American musics: 'even what appear to be mildly 'developmental' forms, such as twelve-bar blues...turn out to be organised by binary methods.'²²

However, whereas these earlier musics relied on intensional variety, this is effectively absent at the musical level here.^{*} The binary layering is sufficient to prevent the music from sliding towards 'monadic plenitude' (Middleton's term for that which is 'single, unchanging, unending'),²³ but, in simple terms, there is not much going on, musically, in 'Rapper's Delight'. The effect of this, in this instance, is to throw the MCs into sharper relief. The musical elements effectively constitute a backing track for the lyrical elements.

In this, 'Rapper's Delight' was reflecting contemporary hip hop practice. As S. H. Fernando has noted: 'By 1978, MCs had stolen the spotlight from the DJs, because they spoke directly to the crowd, making the experience...more exciting and live.'²⁴ This shift in emphasis has been noted in previous chapters, and no doubt the centrality of the MC at the time was partially responsible for both Sylvia Robinson's decision to use a house band rather than a DJ, and the above-noted focus on the MCs in the finished record.

In terms of the implied listener positions discussed in the previous chapter, it can be seen that the principal Break used in 'Rapper's Delight' comprises interpretive material and, being taken from a highly popular track of the time, was likely (and, indeed, still is) to meet with a knowledge response. As we have seen, this allows for connotations to be drawn by the listener through reference to the original. However, these connotations are subject to change with the passing of time, as new audiences hear the track. 'Rapper's Delight' was, of course, one of the very earliest hip hop singles, and the majority of its contemporary audience would be unfamiliar with the idea of hip hop. The likelihood is that for most people (that is, excepting hip hop artists and fans of the nascent genre), the knowledge response would lead to an understanding of 'Rapper's Delight' as being a new type of cover version. Thus, at this point in time, the Break can be seen to be widely acting as a style indicator, not of hip hop, but of disco: indeed, the first mention of hip hop in the *New Musical Express* was in a short news article entitled 'Toasted Disco'.²⁵

For the modern listener, on the other hand, the same knowledge response can lead to an understanding of the Break as a style indicator of hip hop and a genre synecdoche of disco. The difference is, of course, codification. The modern listener is more likely to have some understanding of

^{*} 'Effectively' because the music on 'Rapper's Delight' was provided by a live band. However, Wood, Brass & Steel (as the Sugar Hill house band was known) were *tight*. We can assume our implied listener hearing the same on each repetition .

hip hop and can therefore codify the Break, aided by the presence of one of hip hop's key style indicators, MCs rapping.

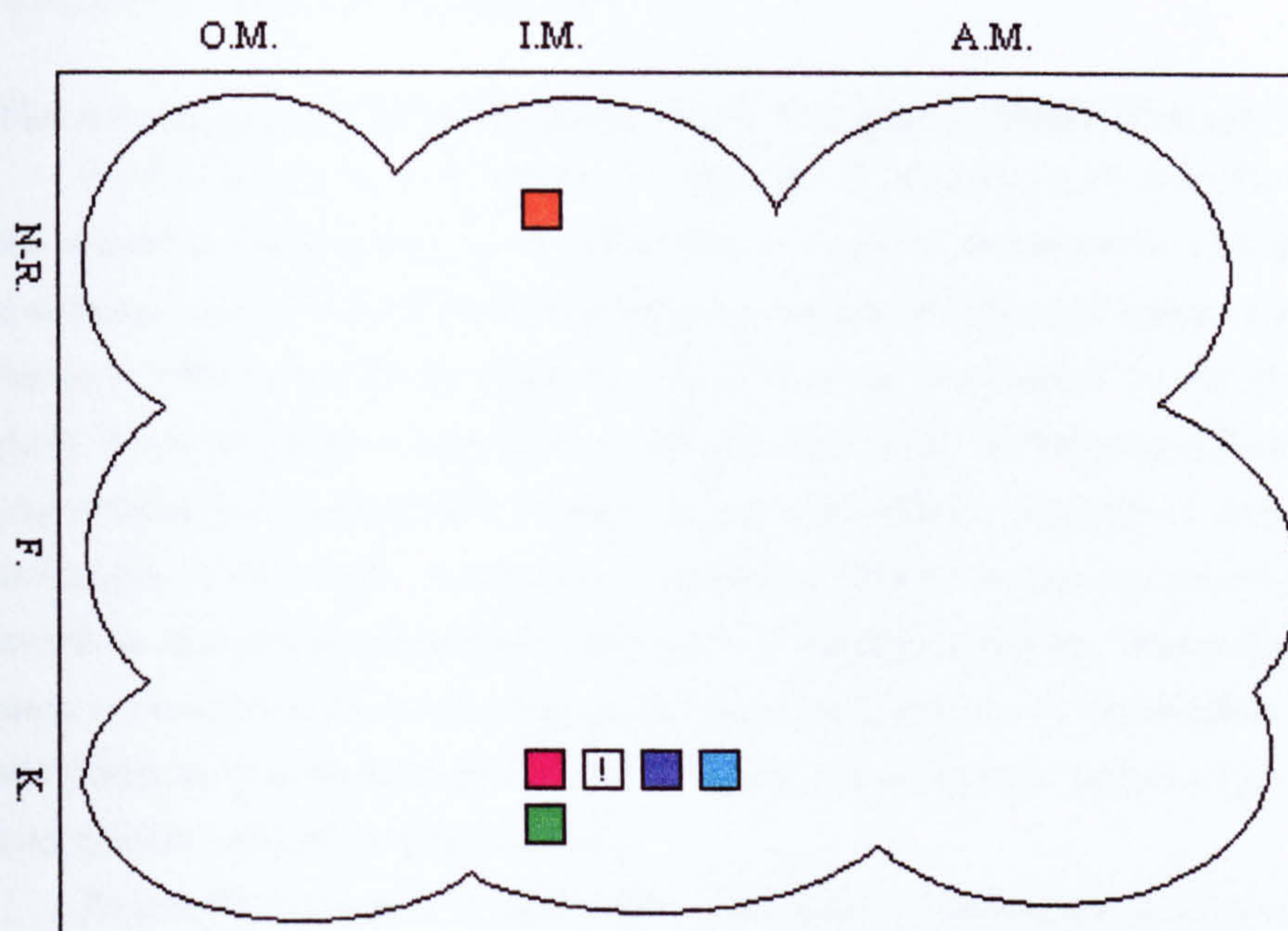


Figure 8. *Implied listener positions as discussed in connection with 'Rapper's Delight'.*

As noted earlier, each of our analyses will close with a diagram of the type shown in Fig. 8, above. While it is not the intention to offer an explanation of these diagrams in every case, one will be provided in this first instance. The aim here is to provide an example of how the text relates to the diagram, thus enabling the reader to better understand the relevance of the implied listener position diagrams in the analyses that follow. Firstly, then, we can see that the only sound-element shown in the area corresponding to an implied listener position of interpretive material/non-recognition is the 'bongo-led intro'. In the above text, it was noted that this comprises the Sugar Hill house band replaying a section from 'Here Comes That Sound' by Sun. This means that the sound-element is interpretive material, while our perception of the obscurity of this sound-element led to our understanding of the likely response of non-recognition. The remaining sound-elements heard within 'Rapper's Delight' (with the exception, for the reasons noted earlier, of the vocal performances) are all shown as being within the area corresponding to an implied listener position of interpretive material/knowledge. This is because all five of these sound-elements comprise the various parts of 'Good Times' as recreated by the studio musicians. As noted in the text, the fact that 'Good Times' had been a sizeable hit in the weeks preceding the release of 'Rapper's Delight' meant that we could assume a listener response of knowledge in the contemporary audience. The fact that 'Good Times' has since gone on to become an oft-heard 'disco classic' meant that we could assume the same response in later listeners.

At this point, a reminder should be posted with regard to the selectivity of our analyses. For reasons stated earlier (see page 95), it is not the intention to discuss every possible implied listener position in connection with each sound-element. However, this does not mean that these other possibilities do not exist. While a knowledge response to the 'Good Times' sound-elements heard

within 'Rapper's Delight' is the most likely, familiarity or non-recognition responses are still possible. The above diagram, then, serves as a reminder of this. The reader is, of course, free to consider other implied listener positions for themselves.

'The Adventures Of Grandmaster Flash On The Wheels Of Steel'²⁶

The first point to note concerning 'The Adventures Of Grandmaster Flash On The Wheels Of Steel' (hereafter referred to simply as 'Adventures...') is that it demonstrates considerable development when compared to the other early hip hop records discussed above. 'Adventures...' was released in 1981, two years after 'Rapper's Delight' and two years before 'Sucker MCs' (discussed below). Where both of these records are notable for their largely unchanging repetition of a single sound-element, here multiple sound-elements are at work, either in sequence or simultaneously. Furthermore, as we will see, 'Adventures...' displays a much more regulated developmental structure than will be seen in our representative track of the second production era, 'Planet Rock'. For this reason, our analysis of this track, along with the one that follows, will be undertaken on a chronological basis (horizontally along the diagram – Fig. 9, below), rather than the vertical, sound-element by sound-element, style of the preceding four.

Despite the differences outlined above, 'Adventures...' can be seen to have much in common with 'Rapper's Delight', at least on the level of musical content. Line [a] of the analysis diagram represents a series of sound-elements taken from Chic's 'Good Times' – the source, it will be remembered, for the music on the Sugarhill Gang record. Since these sound-elements are the only ones to appear with any consistency throughout the track, they can be understood as the basis around which the rest of 'Adventures...' is built. As with 'Rapper's Delight', the variations in the Chic sound-element are created through the inclusion (or otherwise) of additional instrumentation around the basic bass and drums riff. Again, as with 'Rapper's Delight', the fuller variations do not appear until some way into the track. The same binaries seen operating in 'Rapper's Delight' are, then, present here, although the more irregular switching between the variations lessens this effect somewhat. This lessened effect is, however, more than compensated for by the increased development in the larger structure. In 'Rapper's Delight', the binaries created in and around the 'Good Times' riff were virtually the sole source of musical 'interest' in the track. In 'Adventures...', much greater activity takes place around these basic sound-elements.

In fact, two other sound-elements are heard before the 'Good Times' riff is introduced to the track. The second line (line [b]) of the diagram represents a vocal cut of MC Spoonie Gee's introduction from a track called 'Monster Jam'.²⁷ Grandmaster Flash begins by punch phasing in the two words 'they say' six times, before letting the Break play in full: 'They say one for the trouble, two for the time, come on girls let's rock that [whistle]'. By altering the opening, Flash is both referencing the source and immediately demonstrating difference from that source. Repetition with a difference is, of course, a strong Signifyin(g) (in Henry Louis Gates' sense) practice, and Flash is Signifyin(g) on Spoonie Gee's intro through the repetition of the phrase 'they say'. This emphasises the subject of the introduction as other than the concerns of this record: more simply 'they' are MCs, and 'Adventures...' is 'about' DJing.



Figure 9. Grandmaster Flash 'The Adventures Of Grandmaster Flash On The Wheels Of Steel' 1981 Sugar Hill Records.

Immediately following the Spoonie Gee vocal, four bars of Blondie's 'Rapture' are heard, although repetition of the vocal phrase 'Flash is fast' extends this to five bars – this is represented on line [c] of the diagram.²⁸ Here, the listener is confronted with a hip hop record making use of a record made by a new wave band, itself inspired by hip hop, which references live performances by the DJ responsible for the current record. Additionally, Flash can be seen to be exemplifying the lyrical claim with his quick cutting of the source. In this instance, the meaning is clear even in the case of a non-recognition response to the Break by the listener. However, given the popularity of Blondie at the time, we could expect a knowledge response in many listeners. Depending on the individual listener's point of view, this could be interpreted as either an endorsement of Blondie's version of hip hop or the reclamation of hip hop's musical and lyrical stylings from the wider world of popular music.

Following the Blondie Break, the Spoonie Gee vocal is heard again, leading this time to the introduction of the 'Good Times' Break. This is heard once only at this stage, and serves to establish the Break in the listener's mind in preparation for what is to come. Over the last bar, rhythmic scratching is heard, which leads into a brief section using the 'Apache' Break, shown on the line [d] of the diagram.

As a classic autonomous Break, the 'Apache' could be expected to bring about a familiarity response in many listeners, giving rise to connotations concerning its use within a live hip hop environment. Thus, within the first thirty-five seconds of 'Adventures...', it is possible to discern references to hip hop as live event, as recorded music, and as a broader style to be interpreted by non hip hop performers.

At the end of the 'Apache' segment the listener apparently hears the return of the 'Good Times' Break, as Flash cuts in the first three notes of the bass line several times. However, when the Break is allowed to play in full, it turns out to be Queen's 'Another One Bites The Dust'.²⁹ This Break is represented on line [e] of the diagram. While this 'trick' relies largely on the similarity between the Queen and Chic bass lines, it can be seen that the listener has been elegantly and subtly 'set up'. At the beginning of 'Adventures...', Flash employs an A-B-A pattern with the Spoonie Gee and Blondie Breaks, followed by the introduction of the 'Good Times' Break. After the 'Apache' intermission, the listener might expect a similar pattern (C-D-C) to be followed again, and this expectation is seemingly confirmed, only to be subsequently and rapidly denied. So, in addition to the several layers of potential meaning already present, the whole opening section of 'Adventures...' can be understood as leading up to this moment.

As the Queen Break plays, rhythmic scratching is heard, which acts as an episodic marker leading up to the introduction of the next major section of 'Adventures...'. This section is underpinned by the 'Good Times' Break, and features Flash cutting back and forth between this and the phrase 'Grandmaster cuts faster', from the earlier Grandmaster Flash & The Furious Five release, 'Freedom' (line [f] of the diagram).³⁰ As with the use of the Blondie Break earlier, knowledge of the source is not necessary for the listener to understand the meaning of this section. The lyrics state Flash's prowess as a DJ, and he is underlining this with a demonstration of his skills. Following this, the 'Good Times' Break is heard again, with more scratching as episodic marker leading into a Break taken from another earlier Grandmaster Flash & The Furious Five record, 'Birthday Party' (shown on line [g]).³¹

Here, Flash reverses the technique used in the preceding section to achieve a similar effect. Using the 'Birthday Party' Break as the basis for this section, Flash cuts in the word 'good' from 'Good Times' in response to the Furious Five's (recorded) exhortations of 'Flash, one time', 'Flash, two times', et cetera.

Culminating in a brief rising horn line, this section leads back into the 'Good Times' Break, and another reversal as Flash once again cuts in more excerpts from 'Freedom' over the top. These consist of the Furious Five reciting their names and star signs, with the intervening phrases removed by the DJ. There are two noteworthy points concerning this section. Firstly, the cuts begin with another brief horn line, this time falling in tone, and so underlining the second reversal. This is illustrated in figure 10, below, which shows both the rising and falling horn parts.



Figure 10. Rising and falling horn parts heard in 'Adventures... '.

Secondly, the practice of reciting star signs was a popular technique amongst live MCs, and so this can be understood (at least by a listener cognisant of the practice) as another reference to pre-recorded hip hop, in much the same way as the 'Apache' Break, heard earlier, was.³²

Next, 'Adventures...' returns to the 'Good Times' Break, which is allowed to play through several times beneath a narrative segment taken from a children's record by The Hellers called 'Singers, Talkers, Players, Swingers, and Doers', shown on line [h] of the diagram.³³ This spoken sound-element cannot be considered a Break, since its source is extremely obscure, and thus is likely to bring about a non-recognition response; but it does create meaning by working in conjunction with the 'Good Times' Break. The Hellers sound-element consists of two children's voices asking an avuncular male voice to tell them a story. The connotations of this involve children's bedtimes and, by extension, comfort and cosiness. This atmosphere is enhanced by the addition of chiming keyboard sounds within the 'Good Times' Break. All of this means that this section operates as a kind of respite from the busier preceding sections, with their frequent use of atonal scratching.

However, this respite is only temporary, and is brought to a sudden (and sonically violent) end by a series of coarse, heavy scratches. Once again, this is an example of 'Adventures...' confounding the expectations of the listener. Unlike the previous example, however, there is no 'trick' involved here, but rather a simple unexpected shattering of the previously established soothing atmosphere. This sudden dynamic shift is another example of an effect that does not rely on Break-recognition to work.

However, there is, as usual, the opportunity for the listener to gain the satisfaction of Break-recognition, when the source of the heavy scratches is allowed to play on, and is revealed to be The Sugarhill Gang's '8th Wonder' (represented on line [i] of the diagram).³⁴ In fact, this Break allows the possibility of a kind of double recognition for the listener, since '8th Wonder' is itself based on a sound-element taken from a track called 'Daisy Lady', by a group named 7th Wonder.³⁵ While uncommon for its time, this is an early example of hip hop's using Breaks from pre-existing hip hop records which are themselves created from Breaks from earlier records, so forming a kind of audible 'living history', giving rise to ever greater rewards for the listener who experiences a knowledge response.

Towards the end of this section, there is more scratching which again acts as an episodic marker leading into the return of the (original, non-chimes) 'Good Times' Break. This is then used as a soundbed over which Flash performs a 'scratch solo', again demonstrating his skills as a DJ. This ends with a vocal cut of 'the official adventures of Flash', taken from either a radio or cinema Flash Gordon soundtrack, which acts as an episodic marker, effectively being Flash's 'sign-off' for 'Adventures...'. The remainder of the record consists of Flash's cutting between various versions of the 'Good Times' Break accompanied by some MCing, designated 'party' style on the diagram (line [k]), since it is

³²In fact, astrological signs had been used in African-American recorded music from around the time when hip hop was developing, with The Floaters' 'Float On' being the most famous example.

reminiscent of the looser style of MCing associated with block party MCs. This section acts as an elongated coda to 'Adventures...', which finally fades out at around seven minutes.

Overall, then, it can be seen that 'Adventures...' contains a remarkable degree of developmental structure for an early hip hop track. Within the seven minutes of the record, Breaks are employed both simultaneously and sequentially; listeners' expectations are raised and confounded; there are elements that rely on Break-recognition to create meaning as well as those that do not; and musical ideas are introduced, recapitulated and reversed to create a whole that is, as the title suggests, truly adventurous.

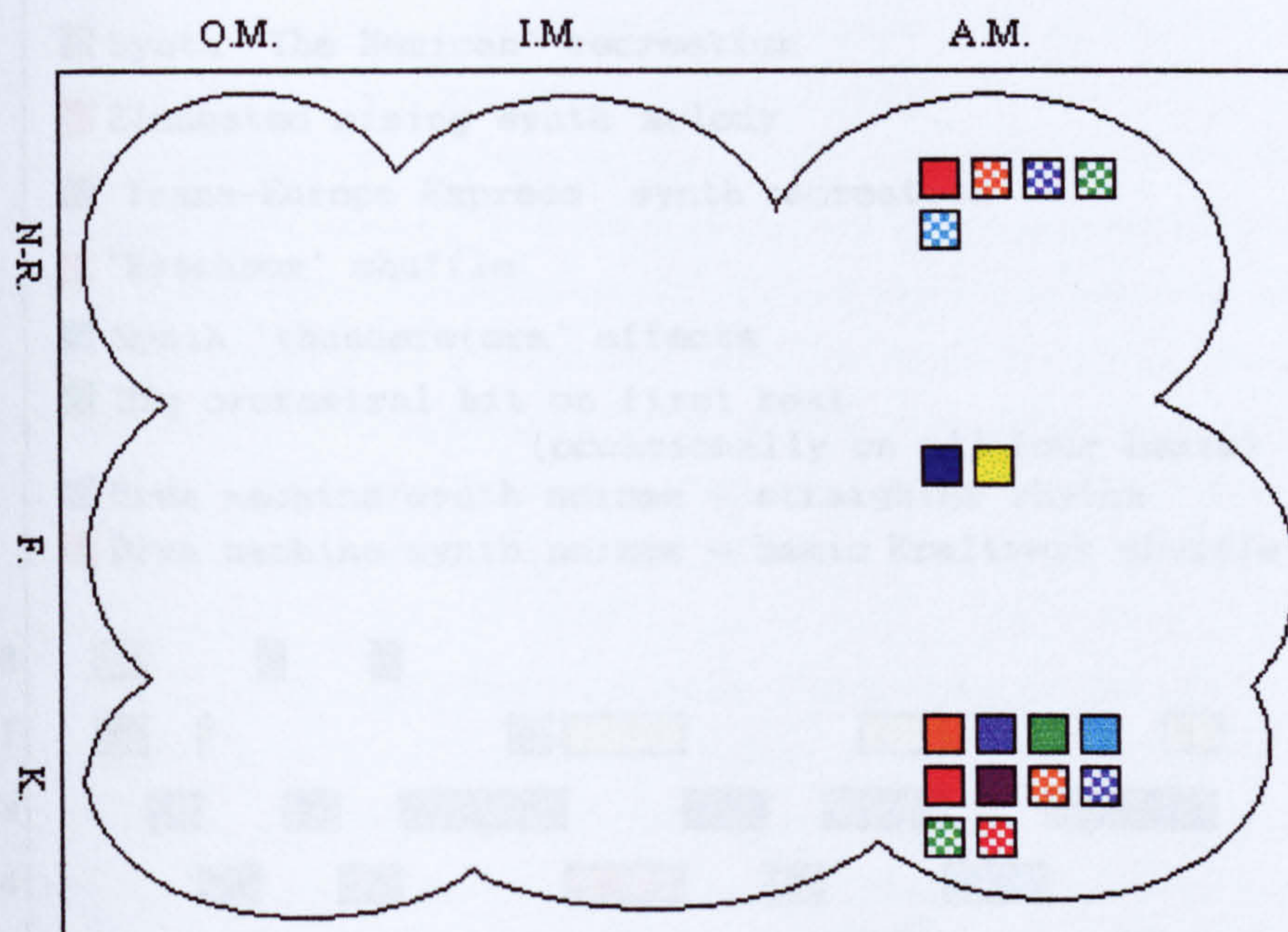


Figure 11. Implied listener positions as discussed in connection with 'Adventures... '.

'Planet Rock'³⁶

Even at a glance, it is readily apparent from the analysis diagram presented below (Fig. 12) that there is substantially more musical 'activity' in 'Planet Rock' than was encountered in 'Rapper's Delight'. While the earlier track was principally composed of a single Break repeated (with minor variation), here several different Breaks and other sound-elements appear at various times. However, on closer examination it becomes apparent that there is not much in the way of developmental structure within 'Planet Rock'. Concentrating initially on the 'soundbed' of the track, represented here by line [a] on the diagram, it can be seen that the basic structure of the track is much the same as that of 'Rapper's Delight': a prolonged repetitive riff followed by a different section, before a return to the initial riff. In this case, there is a slight difference in that the period between approximately 4:04 and 4:31 can be seen to be another separate section of the track. However, in this section the soundbed line does not change entirely, but instead drops out momentarily before gradually returning in an elongated

* It should be noted that different versions of this track exist, involving differing arrangements of the sound-elements. The version under analysis is that as described in the endnotes.

crescendo. Such a musical device is rare within hip hop, but would become more commonplace in electronic musics – such as techno – that were at least partially influenced by hip hop's second era.

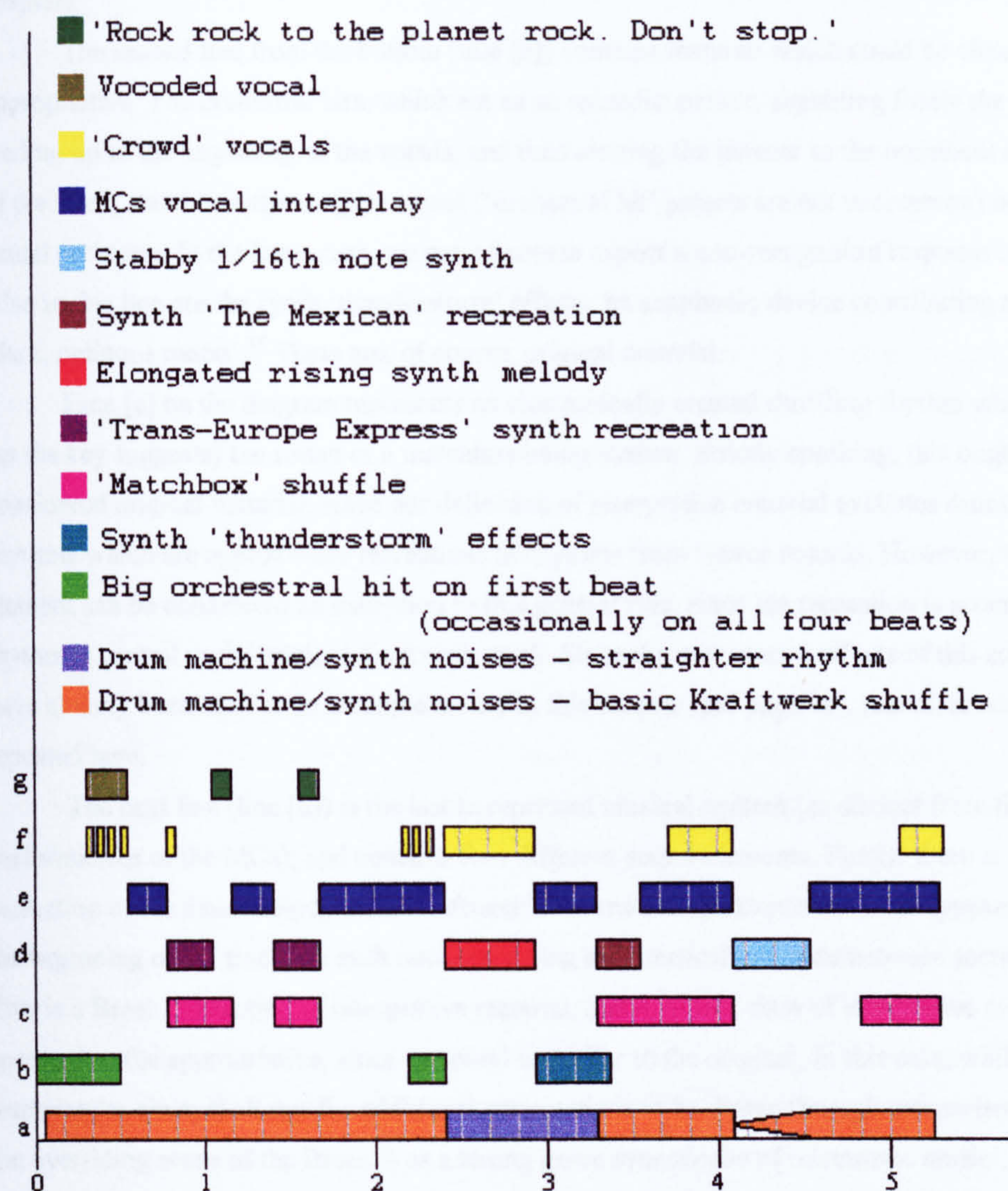


Figure 12. Afrika Bambaataa + Soul Sonic Force 'Planet Rock' 1982 Tommy Boy.

This line represents the drum machine and percussive synth sounds central to the track, and is essentially original material. However, as is apparent from the key of the diagram, the main riff can be considered as a genre synecdoche to the type of electronic music being produced by groups such as Kraftwerk. Of course, part of the reason this genre synecdoche is particularly redolent of Kraftwerk is the separate inclusion of a Break from a Kraftwerk track within 'Planet Rock', and the potential implied listener response of knowledge to this latter Break. As we saw in the previous chapter, this type of original material may also give rise to a 'false' familiarity response within the listener. That is, it is possible that the listener may mistake the genre-synecdochal original material for interpretive or appropriative material (either through textual 'clues' – the synth sounds heard here are very similar to the type heard in Kraftwerk tracks – or through their own expectancy of hip hop's interpretive practices). If the listener understands the sound-element as comprising interpretive or appropriative material, it then becomes possible that they may experience a familiarity response, perhaps by

assuming that the sound-element is taken from a Kraftwerk track which they cannot recall at the moment (this response, of course, prioritises the 'tip-of-the-tongue state' as discussed in the previous chapter).

The second line from the bottom (line [b]) contains material which could be either original or appropriative. The orchestral hits, which act as an episodic marker, signalling firstly the introduction, leading up to the beginning of the vocals, and then alerting the listener to the imminent central section of the track, could be either a synth sound ('orchestral hit' presets are not uncommon) or a sample of an actual orchestra. In the latter case, we can of course expect a non-recognition response in the listener. Also in this line are the synth 'thunderstorm' effects, an anaphoric device contributing to the track's 'dark, ominous mood'.³⁷ These are, of course, original material.

Line [c] on the diagram represents an electronically created shuffling rhythm which resembles (as the key suggests) the sound of a matchbox being shaken. Strictly speaking, this ought to be considered original material, since our definition of interpretive material excludes drum machine rhythms which are approximate recreations of rhythms from source records. However, this sound-element can be considered an exception to this general rule, since the recreation is accurate and the rhythm is central to the original Kraftwerk track. Since the connotative effects of this sound-element have already been used as an example earlier in this chapter (see page 90), that discussion will not be repeated here.

The next line (line [d]) is the last to represent musical content (as distinct from the vocal performances of the MCs), and contains four different sound-elements. Firstly, there is a synthesiser recreation of the main melody from Kraftwerk's 'Trans-Europe Express' which appears twice towards the beginning of the track, on each occasion acting as a musical interlude between sections of MCing. This is a Break, consisting of interpretive material, and is of that class of interpretive material which approaches the appropriative, since its sound is similar to the original. In this case, while a knowledge response (as always) allows for additional connotations to be drawn through comparison to the original, the overriding sense of the Break is as a strong genre synecdoche of 'electronic music', and this is effective even with a non-recognition response. Of course, for some listeners, the Break may also be a style indicator of hip hop. 'Trans-Europe Express' was a staple part of Afrika Bambaataa's live DJing, and if the listener is aware of this (either through direct experience or through research), then the use of the Break can also be understood as a reference to this fact. By extension, this can be seen to carry connotations of the live DJing practices at the heart of hip hop – this type of self-referentiality being relatively commonplace within the genre. Of course, self-referencing is dependent upon either a familiarity or a knowledge response in the listener, and so its frequency of occurrence serves to remind us of the genre's tendency to encourage these responses within the listener.

The next sound-element represented on this line is a rising synth melody which, although it bears a passing melodic resemblance to another part of 'Trans-Europe Express', is sufficiently different that it can be considered original material (bearing in mind the somewhat vague border between original and interpretive material, as discussed in the previous chapter). Again, however, it acts as a genre synecdoche, further allying 'Planet Rock' with electronic music. As with the drum

machine/synth noises line discussed above, there is once again the potential for a listener to experience a 'false' familiarity, or even knowledge, response to this sound-element.

The penultimate block on this line represents another Break consisting of interpretive material, this time based on 'The Mexican' by 1970s rock band Babe Ruth. Since this Break is replayed on a synthesiser, its sound is dissimilar from that of the original, and it is therefore of that type of interpretive material which can be considered a version of an original. This, combined with the relative obscurity of the source means that we can expect a non-recognition response in many listeners. However, 'the Mexican' was again a Break used by Bambaataa in his live DJing, and so for some listeners, we can see a different response is possible. Furthermore, since 'The Mexican' is one of those Breaks used by early hip hop DJs precisely for its obscurity, it is likely that in contemporary listeners to 'Planet Rock' this response would be likely to be one of familiarity, rather than one of knowledge. As we have seen, interpretive material coupled with a familiarity response can lead to autonomous Breaks, and 'The Mexican' can be seen as such. As has been noted, autonomous Breaks tend to lose their autonomy through time as the fame of the original increases as a result of their repeated use, and so this increases the likelihood of a knowledge response on the part of the modern listener.

In the case of 'The Mexican', a familiarity or knowledge response may enable the listener to draw additional connotations if they know that the Break is a particular favourite with B-Boys. The use of 'The Mexican' in 'Planet Rock' is once again a self-referential nod to live hip hop practices, and as with the 'Trans-Europe Express' Break, can only be comprehended by those listeners with experience or genre-knowledge of hip hop.

Finally on the line [d] there appears a block representing a 'stabby 1/16th note synth'. Like the earlier rising synth melody, this is original material, although once again it bears a slight resemblance to a Kraftwerk track, 'Numbers'. Once again, this sound-element can be understood to be acting as a genre synecdoche for electronic music, and the same note concerning potential 'false' recognition made in connection with the 'elongated rising synth melody' sound-element must also be made here.

As noted above, the overall structure of 'Planet Rock' is akin to that of 'Rapper's Delight': two prolonged sections interrupted by a briefer 'middle eight'. In the latter track, we saw how musical elements operated in binary pairs within that larger structure, and the same can be seen here, albeit on a different level. Here, there is a binary operating between vocal and musical-melodic elements separately from the central repeated rhythm pattern. Following the introduction, there are two pairs of vocal/'Trans-Europe Express' sections. These differ in length due to an extension of the 'matchbox shuffle' on the first occurrence which allows time for the treated vocal hook of the song ('Rock, rock to the planet rock. Don't stop') to be heard. This appears between the main vocal line on both occasions, but on the second is heard alongside, rather than after, the 'Trans-Europe Express' Break. This can be explained if we consider the first appearance of the hook as an establishing event and the second as a reiteration. That is, the hook's first appearance is in a relatively uncluttered sonic environment, allowing the listener to register it, and so its second appearance needs only to prompt the listener, and this can happen despite the continued presence of the 'Trans-Europe Express' Break.

Additionally, in connection with the hook, the effect of the vocal treatment should be considered. The voice here is 'mechanised', and parallels can be seen with the practice of beatboxing.

While the words ally the hook with the human (vocal) elements of the track, the sound of the mechanised voice associates it with the 'machine-made' (musical) elements. Therefore, as with beatboxing, this sound-element is occupying territory somewhere between the two, and so acts as a link, holding the track together.

Following the hook's second appearance, there is a longer section of vocals leading up to the middle eight, which itself consists of an instrumental section followed by a vocal section. The return of the main rhythm is accompanied by a switch to another instrumental section ('The Mexican'), before another vocal section. Although there is another instrumental section towards the end of the track, the binary between vocal and melodic-musical elements effectively ends here, since the final instrumental section, as noted above, is centred on a change in dynamics, rather than in melody. The end of the binary switching is, in fact, subtly acknowledged within the track by the continued presence of the 'matchbox shuffle' alongside the track's penultimate vocal section. Finally, another vocal section (again accompanied in part by the 'matchbox shuffle') brings the track to a close. It could, of course, be claimed that the switches between vocal and musical elements give the track a more developmental structure than was claimed earlier. However, it should be noted that the differing sections of the track vary in length with no regular pattern of change being discernible, and that, aside from the 'Trans-Europe Express' Break which is heard twice towards the beginning of the track, there is no restatement of melodic ideas which would be expected of more developmental music.

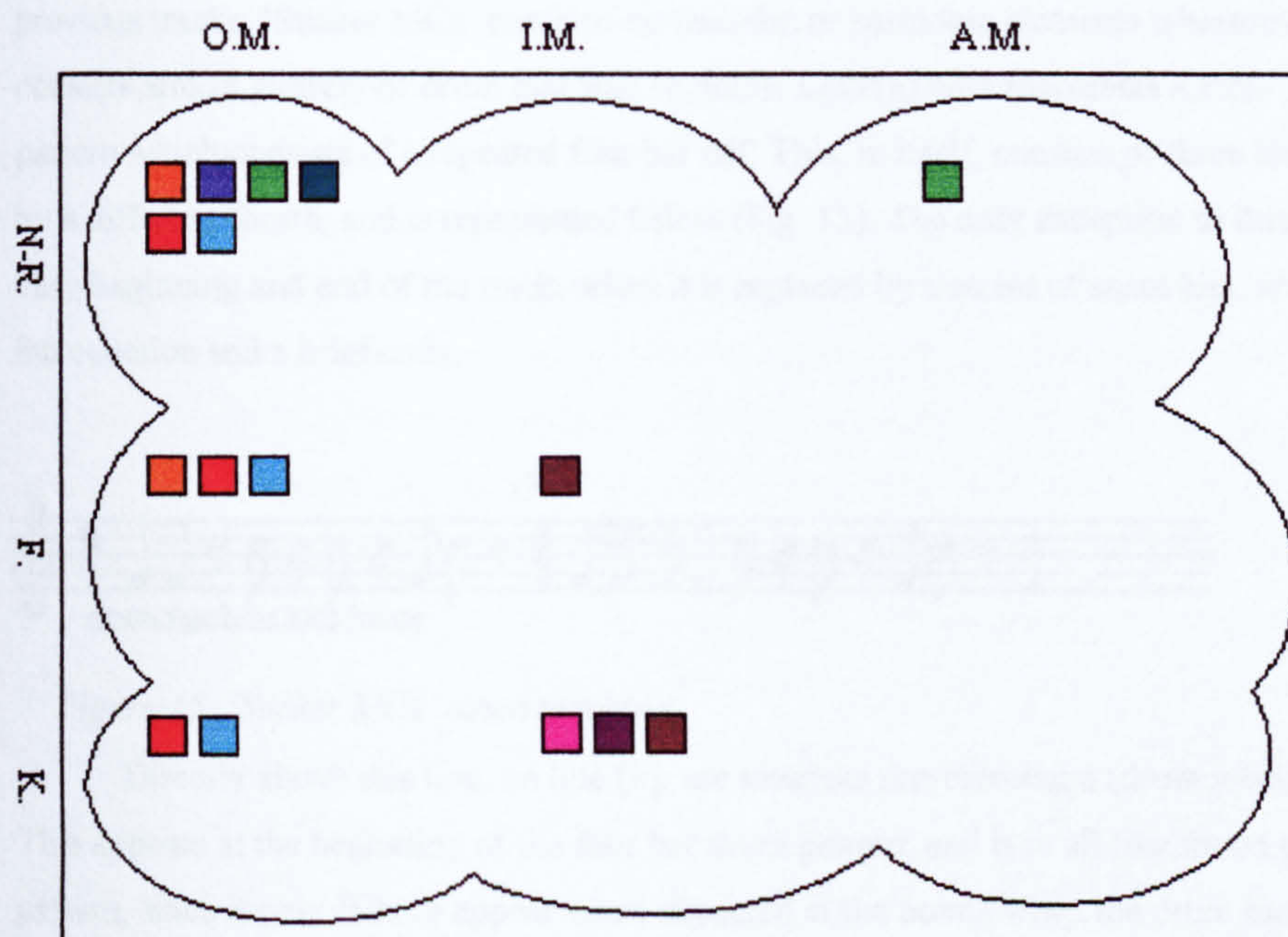


Figure 13. Implied listener positions as discussed in connection with 'Planet Rock'.

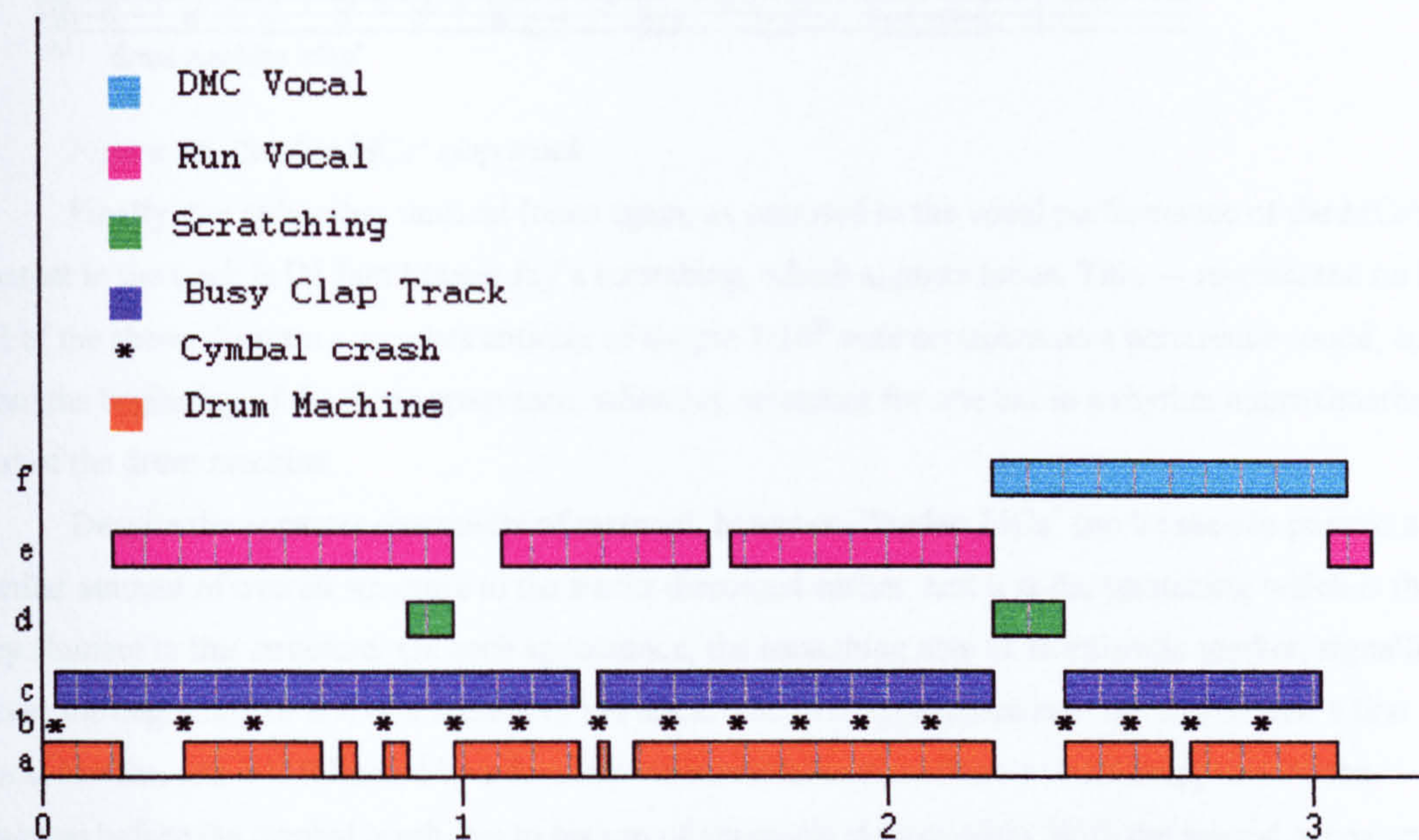
'Sucker MCs'³⁸

Figure 14. Run DMC 'Sucker MCs (Krush-Groove #1) 1983 Profile.

The most immediately noticeable fact about this analysis diagram is that there is substantially less sonic activity than was encountered in either 'Rapper's Delight' or 'Planet Rock'. Unlike these previous tracks, 'Sucker MCs' contains no melodic or harmonic elements whatsoever, and musically consists almost entirely of drum machine rhythms. Line [a] here represents a kick- and snare-drum pattern which consists of a repeated four bar riff. This, in itself, consists of three identical bars followed by a differing fourth, and is represented below (Fig. 15). The only exception to this pattern is at the very beginning and end of the track, when it is replaced by a series of snare hits, acting as an introduction and a brief coda.



Figure 15. 'Sucker MCs' drum machine

Directly above this line, on line [b], are asterisks representing a (drum machine) cymbal crash. This appears at the beginning of the four bar drum pattern, and is in all likelihood part of the same pattern, since it only fails to appear when expected at the points when the drum machine drops out temporarily.

Above this, line [c] represents a 'busy clap track' (again, here, this is a drum machine 'clap' rather than the sound of human hands clapping), which once again follows a repeating four bar pattern with three identical bars followed by a different fourth. This is represented below:



Figure 16. 'Sucker MCs' clap track

Finally, the only other musical (once again, as opposed to the vocal performance of the MCs) content in the track is DJ Jam Master Jay's scratching, which appears twice. This -- represented on line [d] of the above diagram -- consists entirely of simple 1/16th note scratches on a percussive sound, apart from the beginning of the first appearance, when Jay scratches for one bar in a rhythm approximating that of the drum machine.

Despite the apparent sparseness of material, however, 'Sucker MCs' can be seen to possess a similar amount of overall structure to the tracks discussed earlier, and it is the scratching which is the key element in this structure. On each appearance, the scratching acts as an episodic marker, signalling either the beginning or end of a section of the track. The first appearance is at the end of Run's first vocal section, and it is followed by a four bar instrumental section (Run's vocal reappears on the diagram before the cymbal crash due to his use of anacrusis at this point). With the second appearance of scratching signalling the start of DMC's rhyme, it can be seen that the track has three distinct sections -- similar, but not identical, in length -- and as with 'Rapper's Delight', these sections are virtually the same, musically.

However, 'Sucker MCs' differs from 'Rapper's Delight' in that where the latter used binary switching, the former tends towards intensional variation. As can be seen in the bottom line, the drum machine pattern drops out at irregular intervals and for varying amounts of time. On occasion, these drum machine dropouts serve to highlight a particular lyric, as for instance at 0:45, where Run's densely rhymed couplet, 'So take that and move back catch a heart attack/ Because there's nothing in the world that Run'll ever lack' is thrown into sharp relief by the absence of the beat. At other times, however, the drum machine dropouts are not connected to the lyrics, with the beat disappearing for part of a line, or the first half of a couplet. These dropouts, then, can be understood to be adding musical variation to the track within both the repeated four bar pattern and the larger tripartite division. As we saw in chapter three, this type of irregular variation within a relatively simple larger structure serves to place 'Sucker MCs' firmly within an African-American musical tradition. Finally, in connection with intensional variation, it should be noted that there is an unexpected extra bar at approximately 1:17, at the point where both the drum machine and the clap track drop out simultaneously. The effect of this is that Run's couplets finish on the first and third bars of the four bar pattern, instead of the second and fourth, as would usually be expected. Normality is restored by the one bar pause in the rhymes which occurs at approximately 1:40.

Naturally, one result of the relatively minimalist style of 'Sucker MCs' is a distinct lack of Breaks. There is, of course, appropriative material present in the form of Jam Master Jay's scratching, but it is presented in such a way that the only possible response is one of non-recognition. However, at the time of the record's release, the sound of scratching in itself would have had much the same effect as the use of Breaks in earlier hip hop. Prior to this, as we have seen, DJing techniques were replicated in the studio by other means. Here, however, the contemporary listener was presented with the sound of

a DJ at work, and so, despite the lack of Breaks, a connection could still be made to earlier hip hop practices. For the modern listener, used to hearing the sound of scratching on hip hop records, this connotative effect is naturally tempered, and we could instead expect the relatively simplistic style of scratching to combine with the overall stripped-down sound of the track, giving rise to connotations concerning the specific era to which the track belongs.

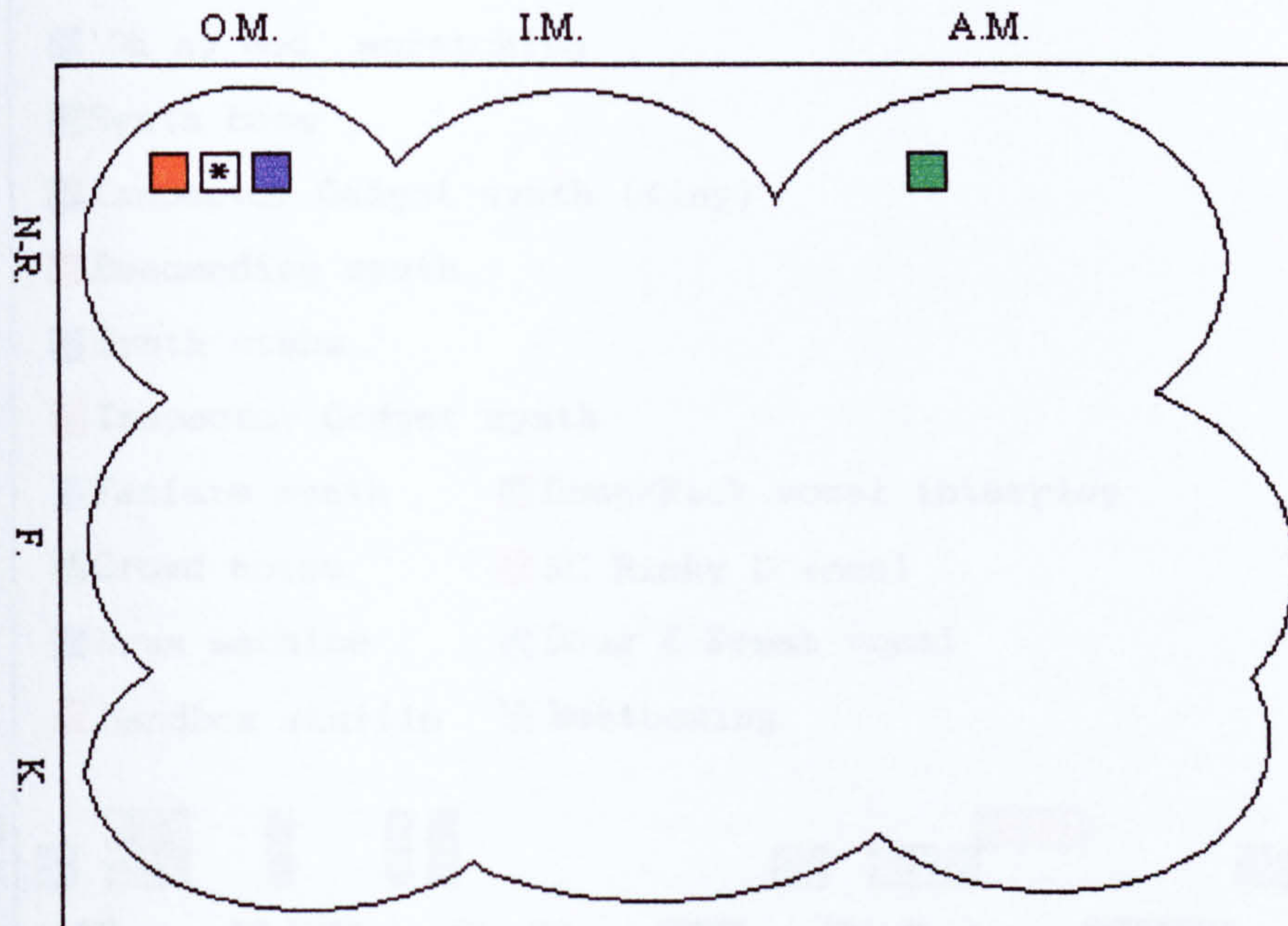


Figure 17. Implied listener positions as discussed in connection with 'Sucker MCs'.

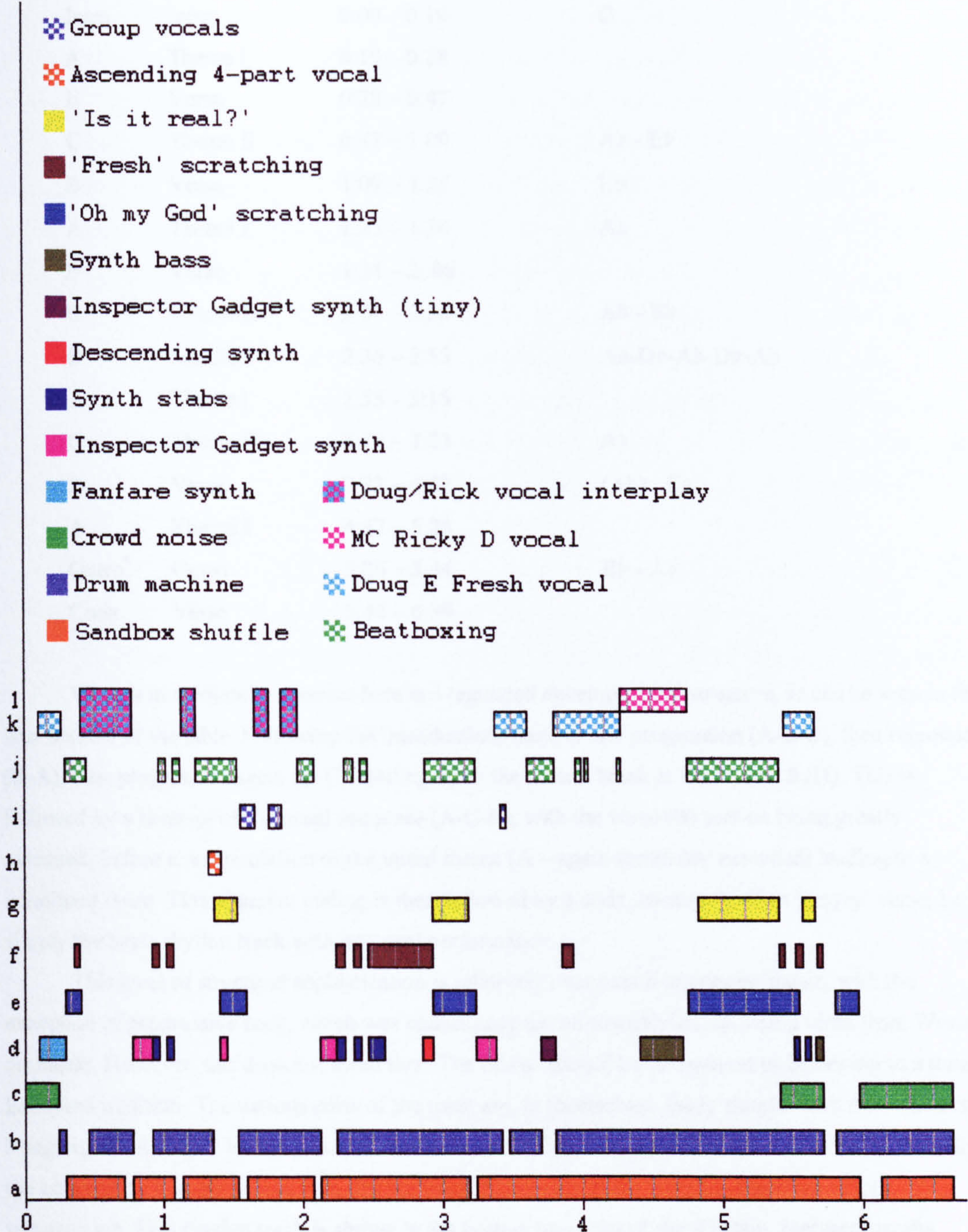
'The Show'³⁹

Figure 18. Doug E. Fresh & The Get Fresh Crew 'The Show' 1985 Reality Records.

As with 'Adventures...', 'The Show' is another track which displays greater structural development than many of its contemporaries. However, where 'Adventures' developed principally in a linear fashion, here there is greater variety. This variety can clearly be seen in the table below, which summarises the larger structural details of 'The Show':

<u>Section</u>	<u>Type</u>	<u>Approximate Time</u>	<u>Harmonic Presence (if any)</u>
Intro	Intro	0:00 – 0:19	C
A	Theme I	0:19 – 0:28	
B	Verse	0:28 – 0:47	
C	Theme II	0:47 – 1:09	A \flat - E \flat
B	Verse	1:09 – 1:25	E \flat
A	Theme I	1:25 – 1:34	A \flat
B	Verse	1:34 – 2:08	
C	Theme II	2:08 – 2:36	A \flat - E \flat
D	Middle 8	2:36 – 2:55	A \flat -D \flat -A \flat -D \flat -A \flat
A	Theme I	2:55 – 3:15	
C	Theme II	3:15 – 3:23	A \flat
B	Verse	3:23 – 4:47	(A \flat) E \flat
A	Theme I	4:47 – 5:26	
Outro*	Outro	5:26 – 5:44	E \flat - A \flat
Coda	Verse	5:44 – 6:39	

What is immediately apparent here is a regulated developmental structure, as can be seen in the first column of the table. Following the introduction, there is first progression (A-B-C), then regression (B-A), then progression again (B-C), leading up to the central break at the middle 8 (D). This is followed by a reversal of the usual sequence (A-C-B), with the verse (B) section being greatly extended, before a recapitulation of the initial theme (A – again somewhat extended) leading to a culminant outro. This apparent ending is then followed by a coda, consisting of an ‘empty’ verse; i.e. simply the basic rhythm track with no vocal performance.

This level of structural sophistication is relatively uncommon in popular music, with the exception of progressive rock, which was consciously aimed towards incorporating ideas from Western art music. However, this does not mean that ‘The Show’ should be understood as belonging to a tonal-European tradition. The various parts of the track are, in themselves, fairly simple, with their difference being signalled simply by the presence or absence of different sound-elements. Additionally, virtually the entire track is underpinned by a rhythm track that is very much African-American in its construction. This rhythm track is shown in the bottom two lines of the diagram, representing the ‘sandbox shuffle’ and ‘drum machine’ sound-elements. Parallels can be drawn here with ‘Sucker MCs’, with irregularly placed dropouts in these basic rhythm tracks adding intensional variation to an otherwise unchanging rhythm part. By the time of the track’s release, this technique was a strong style indicator of hip hop.

Further distance is placed between ‘The Show’ and the tonal-European tradition by the lack of harmonic development. For much of its duration, the track relies solely on rhythmic material, with only

* ‘Outro’: a term developed by opposition to the abbreviated word ‘intro’, meaning (usually) the closing section of a track.

brief appearances of any harmonic material. When it does appear, this harmonic material is all (with the exception of the introduction) based around the I-IV-V chords in the key of $A\flat$. The first appearance of harmonic material in the main body of the song is during the 'Theme II' segment. This consists of a synthesised recreation of the theme tune to the television cartoon series 'Inspector Gadget', which establishes the harmonic base as $A\flat$, followed by a series of synth stabs on $E\flat$. The expected resolution back to $A\flat$ is then held in abeyance until the end of the verse section which follows. As this verse finishes, a four-part rising vocal arpeggio is heard on $E\flat$, before the first five notes of the 'Inspector Gadget' Break bring this particular harmonic idea to a close, back on $A\flat$.

After another verse, the 'Theme II' section is heard again, with the same movement from $A\flat$ to $E\flat$. This time, however, the $E\flat$ part is extended, highlighting the immediate lack of harmonic resolution and so stressing the difference of the middle 8 which follows. This difference is reinforced at the end of the middle 8 by a descending synth melody which incorporates the only use of the IV chord, $D\flat$, during the track. Again, this resolves back to $A\flat$, re-establishing the harmonic base for the second half of 'The Show'.

The next appearance of harmonic material is during a reiteration of the 'Theme II' section, this time without the shift to $E\flat$, and this is then echoed in the 'tiny' (i.e. quieter and in a higher register) appearance of the 'Inspector Gadget' Break during the elongated verse which dominates the second half of the track. Towards the end of this verse the most prolonged harmonic material found in 'The Show' is heard, in the form of a synthesised bass line in $E\flat$. Here, the shift to the V chord is used to emphasise the difference in the vocal performance – the bass line accompanies the only extended solo MCing by Slick Rick.

Finally, during the outro, more synth stabs on $E\flat$ are heard, increasing the tension as the track moves towards its climax, before a single low $E\flat$ synth note is heard beneath the scribbly scratching which builds up to the final 'fresh'. This is accompanied, at the point of release, by the synth note dropping down to $A\flat$, giving harmonic resolution to the point of closure for the main body of the track.

Having discussed the larger structural elements of 'The Show', we can now look at the individual sections in more detail. The track's introduction, as can be seen from the analysis diagram, consists of crowd noise (line [c]), the 'fanfare synth' (line [d]) and a spoken vocal introduction ('Ladies and gentlemen – the most exciting stage show you've ever seen...' – line [h]). These sound-elements work together to place the listener within the frame of reference of a live performance. This type of device can be seen to have antecedents in the work of James Brown. Concerning Brown's 'Superbad', David Brackett has noted that Brown's work 'emphasises the recording as a *performance*... The crowd noise positions the listener at a live performance; the words 'watch me, watch me' invite the audience to scrutinise the performer...' ⁴⁰ However, while James Brown uses these performative techniques to engender the impression that his track is recorded as live, here their use is more stylised. 'The Show' is not a track which represents a studio-based recreation of a show, but rather one which uses the concept of a live show as a narrative framework. This can be seen in the lyrics of the track, during which the listener is apparently made privy to Doug and Rick's backstage, pre-show, conversation:

R: A-yo, Doug.
D: What?

R: Put your Ballys on.

D: Yo, Rick, I was about to but I need a shoehorn.

R: Why?

D: Because these shoes always hurt my corns.

R: Six minutes...six minutes...six minutes, Doug E Fresh, you're on...

Following the introduction, the main rhythmic elements of the track are introduced. These are shown on lines [a] and [b], and principally operate independently in the fashion discussed above, but it should also be noted that there are specific points of interaction between the rhythmic elements and the overlaid sound-elements.

The first section heard in the main body of 'The Show' is the 'Theme I' section. Initially, this consists of Doug E Fresh's rhythmic beatboxing (line [j]) along with scratching on a vocal cut of the phrase 'Oh my God' (line [e]). In subsequent appearances, another sound-element – either a vocal performance (original material) or a vocal cut (appropriative material) – consisting of the phrase 'Is it real?' is added (line [g]). These latter two sound-elements can be understood to be operating in a metatextual fashion: they offer comment, within the track, on the simultaneous beatboxing performance, creating the impression of both astonishment at Doug E Fresh's prowess ('Oh my God') and a registering of his accuracy of reproduction ('Is it real?'). Additionally, since the 'Oh my God' sound-element is a Break, taken from an earlier hip hop record, 'Punk Rock Rap' by the Cold Crush Brothers, there is the possibility of a familiarity or knowledge response in the listener, with the usual connotation of tying 'The Show' in with earlier hip hop as a whole.⁴¹ However, the relative obscurity of the Cold Crush Brothers' track means that this possibility should be regarded as unlikely. Towards the end of the track, during the final 'Theme I' section, another Break is found, in Doug E. Fresh's beatboxed impression of part of Ralph MacDonald's 'Jam On The Groove'.⁴² Although relatively obscure, this Break was popular amongst live hip hop DJs, and since Slick Rick calls for the impression using the name of the source ('A-yo Doug, do that record 'Jam On The Groove)'), this can be seen as an example of hip hop's ability to develop a potential listener response of familiarity to one of knowledge.

This section is followed by the first verse of the track. As might be expected, the verses of 'The Show' are marked by an increase in vocal activity. Alongside this, and typically for the era of production, there is a decrease in musical activity. For the most part, the musical content of the verse sections of 'The Show' consists of nothing but the basic rhythm track discussed above. Exceptions to this are found in the second and fourth verses. The second verse contains the rising four-part vocal arpeggio mentioned above (line [h]), which serves as an episodic marker leading into the following section. This vocal arpeggio is of interest in itself, since it represents a type of conditioned interpretive material. This sound-element can be seen to be similar to the famous rising vocal arpeggio in The Beatles' 'Twist And Shout' (albeit without the screamed conclusion): however, since the use of this device is relatively widespread amongst many forms of popular music, the listener may experience either a specific familiarity response or a more generalised recognition of the device.⁴³ It could be claimed that this sound-element is Signifyin(g) (in Gates' sense) on popular music's largely unspoken tendency towards intertextuality.

The fourth verse contains three separate additional musical elements. Firstly, there is the ‘tiny’ ‘Inspector Gadget’ Break (shown on line [d], at approximately 3:42), which accompanies Doug E. Fresh’s impression of a telephone ring. As noted above, this reiterates the ‘Theme II’ section, while also adding a little musical ‘colour’ to an otherwise relatively empty few seconds of the track. Secondly, there are three vocal stabs of the word ‘fresh’ (line [f], from approximately 3:53). Although these should be considered as a musical element in that they are part of the DJing performance on the track, they are effectively incorporated into the vocal part, since they complete the phrases in Doug E. Fresh’s phrase, ‘Now you gotta be [fresh] to rock with [fresh] and I’m D.O.U.G.I.E. [fresh]’. Finally, there is the bass line heard towards the end of the verse (line [d], from approximately 4:26) which, as noted above, underlines the change in MC from Doug E. Fresh to Slick Rick.

Returning to earlier in the track, the next section heard after the first verse is the ‘Theme II’ part. The principal sound-element heard in this section is the synthesised ‘Inspector Gadget’ recreation (shown on line [d]). This is the first Break used in ‘The Show’ for which a knowledge response might be anticipated (in contemporary listeners, at least). As the theme music to a popular cartoon series, this Break can be understood to carry connotations which place ‘The Show’ in the field of light, escapist entertainment. In the first two appearances of this section, the ‘Inspector Gadget’ Break is followed by two sets of unison synth stabs and ‘fresh’ scratches (lines [d] and [f]), separated and followed by rhythmic beatboxing. Principally, this allows room within the track for Doug E. Fresh to further display his skills, but, as noted above, the synth stabs also create a harmonic shift from I to V that is left unresolved until the end of the following section. In the third appearance of the ‘Theme II’ section, the synth stabs do not appear. The resulting lack of harmonic shift differentiates the long fourth verse which dominates the second half of the track from the shorter ones heard in the first half. This can be understood to be reinforcing the lyrical difference in the verses, with the start of the fourth verse being the point at which the show in ‘The Show’ actually begins.

Around the chronological midpoint of the main body of ‘The Show’* the middle 8 is heard. Consisting solely of ‘fresh’ scratching along with the rhythm track, this section acts as a bridge between the two halves of the track, while allowing for a demonstration of DJing skills. Furthermore, the sound of the scratching is highlighted by its isolated use. Since, as we have seen in the previous chapter, the Break being scratched (‘aah, this stuff is really fresh’) is a widely used autonomous Break, this can also be understood to be another example of hip hop’s frequent self-referentiality, understood by the listener through a familiarity response.

The last section of the main body of ‘The Show’ is the outro. Here, elements of both the ‘Theme I’ and ‘Theme II’ sections are combined with a return of the crowd noise heard at the beginning of the track and a synth bass to act as a strong episodic marker signalling the end of ‘The Show’.

Finally, for almost a minute following the close of the main body of the song, there is an extended coda. This consists, for the most part, of the main rhythm track of ‘The Show’ accompanied by the crowd noise which frames the main body of the song. The only other sound-element present is a continuation of the ‘oh my God’ scratching, at the beginning of the coda. The coda section is perhaps best understood as an example of hip hop’s promoting the idea of its own re-use. It had been fairly

* That is, discounting the introduction and the coda.

common practice for the B sides of hip hop singles to carry an instrumental version of the A side since the genre's early recorded days* – offering a version of the track for MCs to rhyme over, or for DJs to work with. Here, with 'The Show' forming half of a double A sided single with 'La Di Da Di', the instrumental version is foreshortened and added to the end of the track itself.

Overall, then, it can be seen that 'The Show' demonstrates a complex arrangement, incorporating both intensional and (relatively) extensional structural development; framing devices; a simple, but effective, blues-based harmonic development; musical/lyrical interaction; and use of Breaks. Additionally, although this thesis is not primarily concerned with lyrical analysis, 'The Show's lyrics are noteworthy in that they ably realise a sophisticated, multi-layered narrative (Slick Rick's narrative verse forms a part of the show which itself forms a part of 'The Show'). The full lyrics to this track are included in appendix 2.

One final point concerning 'The Show' should be noted here. Those readers who have already read the appended lyrics in full will have noticed several lines from The Beatles' 'Michelle' which are not mentioned in the analysis. This example of Break use was not included for the simple reason that it did not appear in the version of the track under analysis. This, in turn, is for the following reason: While early copies of 'The Show' include the lyrical quotation, later copies do not. The Beatles' recorded works, were (and, indeed, still are) amongst the most highly guarded musical properties, with tracks rarely being licensed for uses such as compilation albums or television adverts. In this light, it is likely that the removal of the sound-element is an example of hip hop's creativity having to work within the bounds of the wider financial and/or legal constraints implicit in the re-use of pre-existing recorded material.

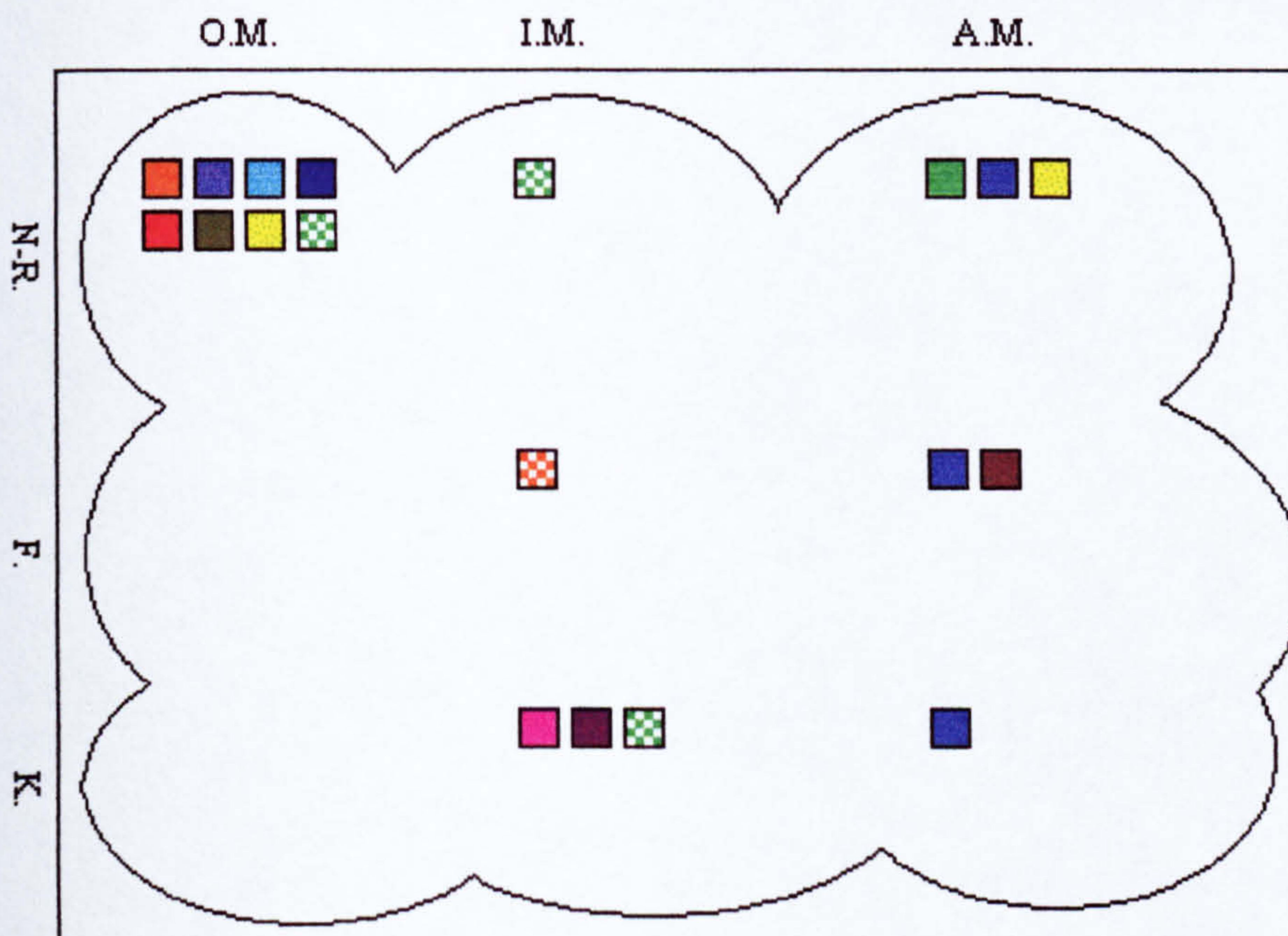


Figure 19. Implied listener positions as discussed in connection with 'The Show'.

* Indeed, in the years following those covered here, the practice would be extended by the additional inclusion of a vocal *a cappella* on B sides.

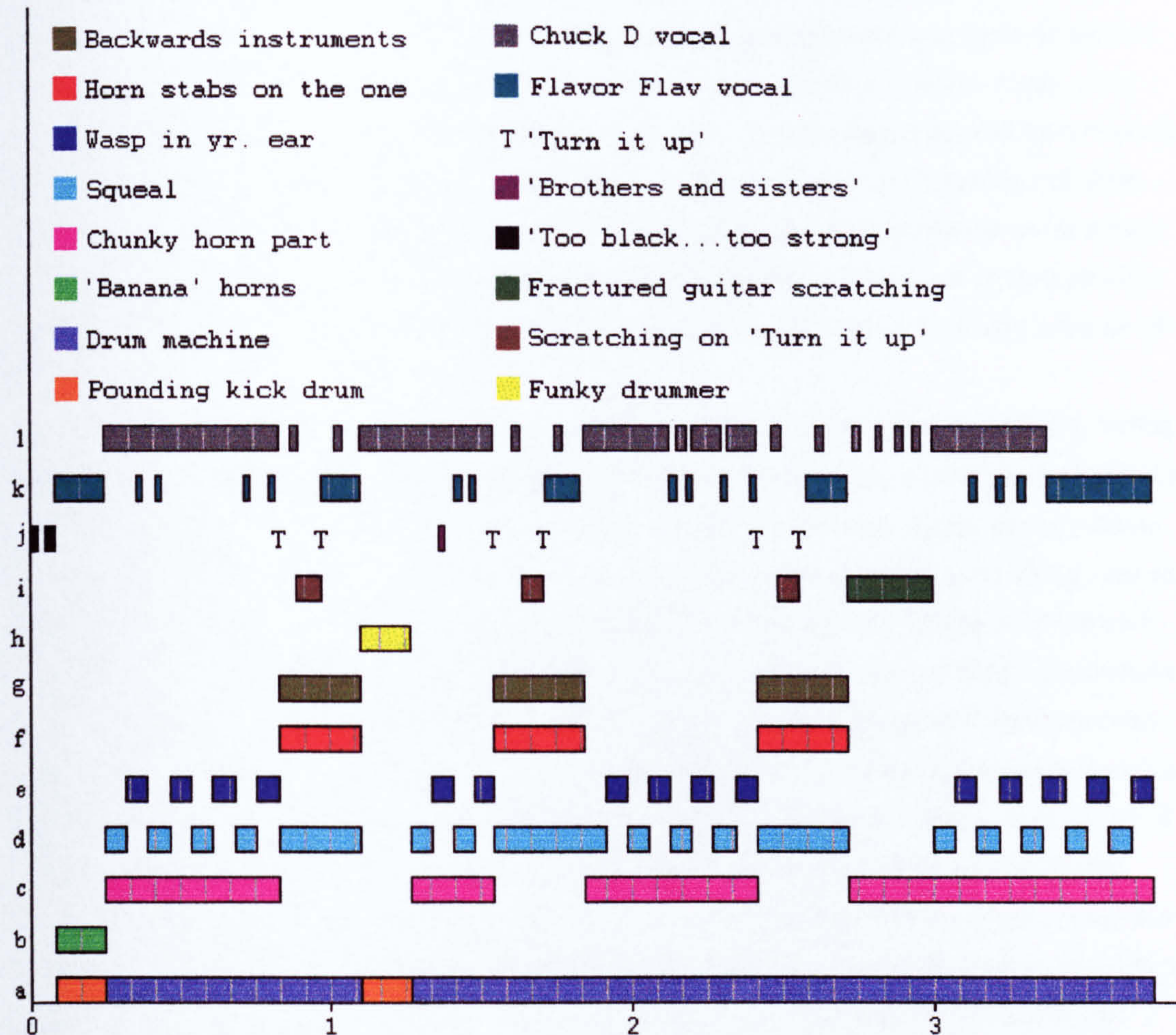
'Bring The Noise'⁴⁴

Figure 20. Public Enemy 'Bring The Noise' 1987 Def Jam.

The first point to be noted regarding 'Bring The Noise' is concerned with musical activity. As with 'Planet Rock' in comparison to 'Rapper's Delight', it is immediately obvious that there are more sound-elements involved here than there were in the previous era of production. However, of more interest, in this case, is the way in which the sound-elements are arranged. Compared to our previous examples, 'Bring The Noise' can be seen to have much more regular structural detail about it. Whereas previously we have encountered long repetitive sections with only brief interludes ('Rapper's Delight'; 'Sucker MCs') or a variety of sound-elements being used in an irregular fashion ('Planet Rock'), it is readily apparent that 'Bring The Noise' displays a structure much more akin to that of the 'traditional' pop song. In essence, the structure of 'Bring The Noise' is as follows: introduction, verse, chorus, alternate verse, chorus, verse, chorus, instrumental break, verse (to fade). Importantly, it should be noted that this structure is created through the positioning of several different sound-elements, rather than being centred around the presence (or absence) of a single sound-element – in terms of the analysis diagram, the structure here depends on several lines, rather than just one. This should become more apparent through the more detailed analysis that follows.

The bottom line of the diagram (line [a]) represents the drum machine patterns that can be heard within the track. The first of these is labelled 'pounding kick drum', since its overriding feature is a

kick drum heard on every 1/16th note of a bar. In fact, this sound-element also contains regular snare hits as well, and a brief snare appoggiatura towards the end. This appears first in the introduction of the track, where it establishes the tempo and acts (due to the snare appoggiatura) as an episodic marker, signalling the coming verse. On its second appearance, its primary function is to add 'depth' to an otherwise relatively sparse section of the track. Here, the snare sound is largely masked by surrounding sound-elements, and so it is less of an episodic marker – as might be expected, since the end of the second appearance is midway through a verse. The second sound-element represented on the bottom line is the main drum machine pattern, which is fairly 'busy'. In this, it can be seen to have parallels with the drum machine patterns in 'Sucker MCs', and so can be understood to be a style indicator of hip hop.

Line [b] contains a single sound-element, labelled 'Banana' horns'. This appears only during the introduction, and consists of appropriative material in the form of a horn section playing I-bIII-I in such a way that the sound is reminiscent of the word 'banana' with the stress on the second syllable (hence the name). This Break is the first of two taken from Marva Whitney's 'It's My Thing', and can be understood in several different ways. Firstly, the Break establishes a harmonic base for the track, and it also combines with the pounding kick drum to provide a sense of urgency. These connotations can be made by the listener regardless of any intertextual response. In the case of a listener response of non-recognition, stylistic connotations may still be drawn to the effect that the Break can be understood to be taken from a soul or funk track and, as we have seen, this can act as both genre synecdoche (of soul/funk) and style indicator (of hip hop). However, in the case of a familiarity or a knowledge response, additional connotations can, as always, be made. In either case, here, we might expect that the listener's response would lead to an understanding of the Break in terms of James Brown – Marva Whitney was the female vocalist in Brown's live show, and 'It's My Thing' was co-written and produced by him. The connotations associated with Brown have already been discussed earlier in this chapter, but of particular interest here are those concerned with his strong pro-black stance of the late 1960s and early 1970s. Public Enemy are themselves associated with a militant pro-black position, and it can be seen that this is reinforced by the use of a Break from a Brown-produced track.

In fact, as noted above, there are two separate Breaks from 'It's My Thing' in 'Bring The Noise'. The second of these is found in the next line (line [c]), in the 'chunky horn part'. Of course, the same connotative possibilities are associated with this second Break, but it should be noted that it also plays an important structural role within 'Bring The Noise'. It was stated above that the track's structure is dependent on several different sound-elements, and it can clearly be seen from the analysis diagram that this Break forms the primary musical activity within the verse sections. With the drum machine line remaining relatively constant throughout, it is the presence of this sound-element (along with Chuck D's rhymes) that principally defines the section as being a verse.

The next two lines on the diagram ([d] and [e]) need to be considered together, since once again they are from the same source. In this case, both the 'squeal' and the 'wasp in yr. ear' are from Funkadelic's 'Get Off Your Ass And Jam'. In fact, it is likely that the two sound-elements are actually part of a single sample, since the second immediately follows the first in the original. However, they are treated separately in the analysis diagram because of the continued presence of the 'squeal' in the

chorus sections of the song where the 'wasp in yr. ear' is absent. This effect could be achieved quite simply by retriggering the sample twice as often during these sections, thus cutting the second half off. As we have seen, the music of Funkadelic is another frequently used source of Breaks, and so we might expect the same kind of stylistic connotations here as with the Marva Whitney Break above. However, while the individual sound-elements are in many ways typical of Funkadelic – the 'squeal' is in fact a heavily treated section of Eddie Hazel's guitar histrionics and the 'wasp in yr. ear' seems to be a residual noise created by the effects – they lack much of what might normally be expected of a Funkadelic Break; i.e. strong rhythm and bass content. Therefore, in this case, it can be claimed that the sound-elements do not carry much of a sense of being genre synecdoches for funk. Of course, a listener with knowledge of the original may interpret them as such, but it should be borne in mind that these sound-elements are examples of the practice of taking Breaks from the marginal areas of a source – in this case, the brief introduction to 'Get Off Your Ass And Jam' which bears no sonic similarity to the main body of the track – and so, while the source is relatively well-known, the likelihood of a knowledge response is diminished here.

Additionally, it should be noted that there is once again binary switching between the two sound-elements within the verse sections of the track, with the same connotations as discussed above, in relation to 'Rapper's Delight'. Finally, in connection with these Breaks, it can be seen that their incorporation within the track is a type of musical interpretation of the track's title. Since they possess neither a tonal centre nor any particular rhythmic impetus they can be understood as representing the 'noise' – albeit regulated and used in a structured fashion – that Public Enemy are bringing.

The next two lines on the diagram ([f] and [g]), representing respectively a series of punched in horn stabs on the first beat of each bar and some reversed (and unidentifiable) music have a principally structural role within the track. Both consist of appropriative material, but can only meet with a non-recognition response. Since no Break-based connotations can be drawn, it can be seen that their function is largely to define the chorus sections of the track as such. While the horn stabs, in conjunction with the drum machine, maintain the rhythmic impetus of the track, the reversed music combined with the 'squeal' keeps the concept of 'noise' running through the chorus. In fact, with the absence of the second Marva Whitney Break, it can be seen that the chorus is principally composed of 'noise', which could be understood, within the context of the track, to carry connotations of a dangerous loss of control.

The only sound-element represented on line [h] of the diagram is the 'Funky Drummer' Break. While 'Bring The Noise' was important in establishing this as an autonomous Break, its use was already becoming commonplace within hip hop at the time of the track's release, and so we could expect a familiarity response in contemporary listeners, and the same or a knowledge response in modern ones. Therefore, it can be understood that this Break is acting largely as a style indicator of hip hop. Additionally, since it appears virtually in isolation, a similar process can be seen to be taking place as was seen in 'Sucker MCs', where the decrease in musical activity serves to highlight a particular section of the MCs performance. In this case, this is Chuck D's concentrated internal vowel rhyming during the phrases 'never badder than bad 'cause the brother is madder than mad/ At the fact that's

corrupt like a senator/ Soul on roll, but you treat it like soap on a rope/ 'Cause the beats in the lines are so dope'.

The sound-elements represented on the next line (line [i]) are those produced by the scratching of Public Enemy's DJ, Terminator X. During each of the three choruses, the phrase 'turn it up' is heard (this is represented separately on the next line, for clarity), followed by Chuck D's exhortation to 'bring the noise'. Terminator X then duly obliges by performing a series of rapid scratches on 'turn it up' before letting it play again. This scratching further adds to the general feel of chaos and noise within the chorus. Following the third chorus, there is a section of 'fractured guitar scratching' which acts as an instrumental interlude within the track. While all the scratching present in the track is, of course, controlled, the presence of a repeated melodic element to this scratching means that it sounds more controlled, and so can be understood in much the same way as a traditional solo within a track, wherein the performer is demonstrating their skills. Additionally, the increased amount of scratching in comparison with earlier tracks analysed should be noted, since this represents the increasing importance of the DJ within recorded hip hop by this time.

Finally, line [j] is the last line of the analysis diagram which is not representative of the MCs performances, and it contains several vocal cuts which are incorporated into the track. Firstly, a voice is heard repeating the phrase, 'too black, too strong', and it can readily be seen how this helps to create the idea of militant pro-black politics which is subsequently enhanced by the use of James Brown material. The use of 'turn it up' during the choruses has been noted above, which leaves only the seemingly minor incorporation of the phrase 'brothers and sisters' during the second verse, which is heard simultaneously with Chuck D's use of the phrase within his rhyme. Of course, this once again carries general connotations concerning the African-American experience, but once again there is room for additional connotations to be made by the listener experiencing a knowledge response. This same sound-element had been used by Public Enemy to introduce the single released immediately prior to 'Bring The Noise, 'Rebel Without A Pause', and so it can be seen to be contributing to an overall unity in approach within the work of Public Enemy. Furthermore, as Chuck D has explained, the voice heard 'is Jesse Jackson as he was about to introduce the Soul Children on the Stax record "Save The Children"'.⁴⁵ Thus, this tiniest of sound-elements contains, for the listener with knowledge of the source, connotations of the wider Public Enemy catalogue, earlier African-American music, the Stax label (which was important in the development of African-American music during the 1960s) and the person of Jesse Jackson, who represents both an outspoken pro-black political stance and the possibility of self empowerment.

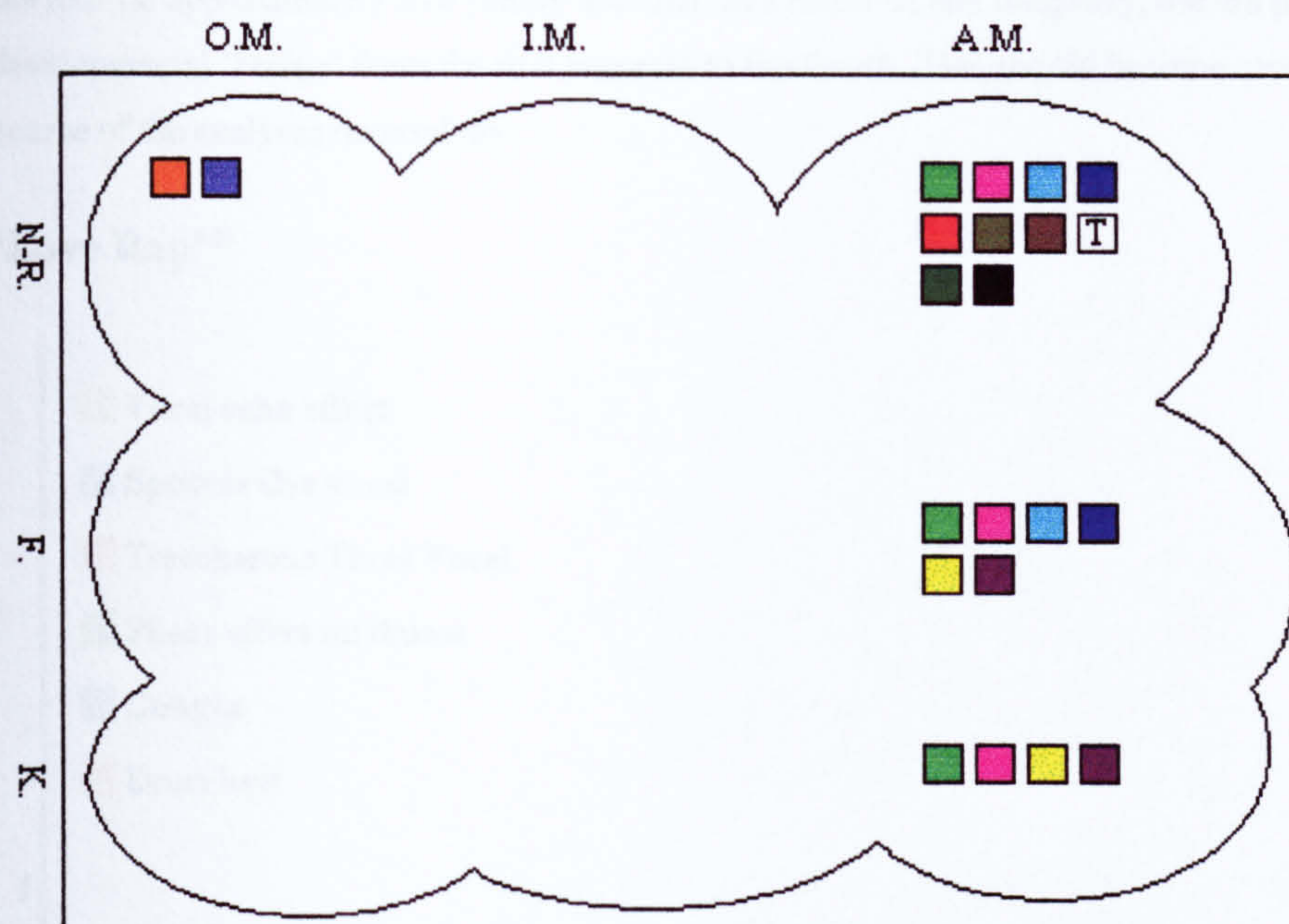


Figure 21. Implied listener positions as discussed in connection with 'Bring The Noise'.

Ten further analyses

From the first four of the above analyses, we can already see evidence of the differences between the four production eras as outlined in the chapters two and three. By comparing the diagrams representing the implied listener positions as discussed in each analysis, we can see, for example, that interpretive material is much more prevalent in the first two eras, with appropriative material coming to the fore in the third and fourth eras. As noted in chapters two and three, this shift is due to hip hop's growing status as a recorded genre, meaning that artists were under less pressure to create a 'compromised' form of their music, formed through a negotiation between the aims of the artist and the working practices of the record labels on which their work appeared; combined with changes in the capability and availability of new recording technology (principally the sampler).

As noted earlier, the preceding analyses only offer a series of 'snapshots' of the four production eras of hip hop, and so in order to widen our understanding of both the differences between eras and the manner in which hip hop developed within them, we will now undertake ten further, supporting (and, as noted earlier, briefer) analyses. Once again, the tracks under analysis here were selected from the short lists described at the beginning of this chapter, and they comprise two from the first era – Spoonie Gee's 'Love Rap' and the Funky Four + One's 'That's The Joint' – one from the second era – Grandmaster Flash & The Furious Five's 'The Message' – five from the third era – T La Rock & Jazzy Jay's 'It's Yours'; Schoolly D's 'PSK "What Does It Mean"?'; MC Shan & Marley Marl's 'Beat Biter'; the Beastie Boys' 'Hold It Now, Hit It'; and Big Daddy Kane's 'Raw' – and two from the fourth era – Eric B. & Rakim's 'In The Ghetto' and A Tribe Called Quest's 'Bonita Applebum'. While this sample appears biased towards the third era, it should be remembered that this era was the longest-lasting of

the four (at approximately five years), and that, as a result of this longevity, the era provides a crucial developmental 'bridge' from the first two eras to the fourth. This should become more apparent in the course of the analyses themselves.

'Love Rap'⁴⁶

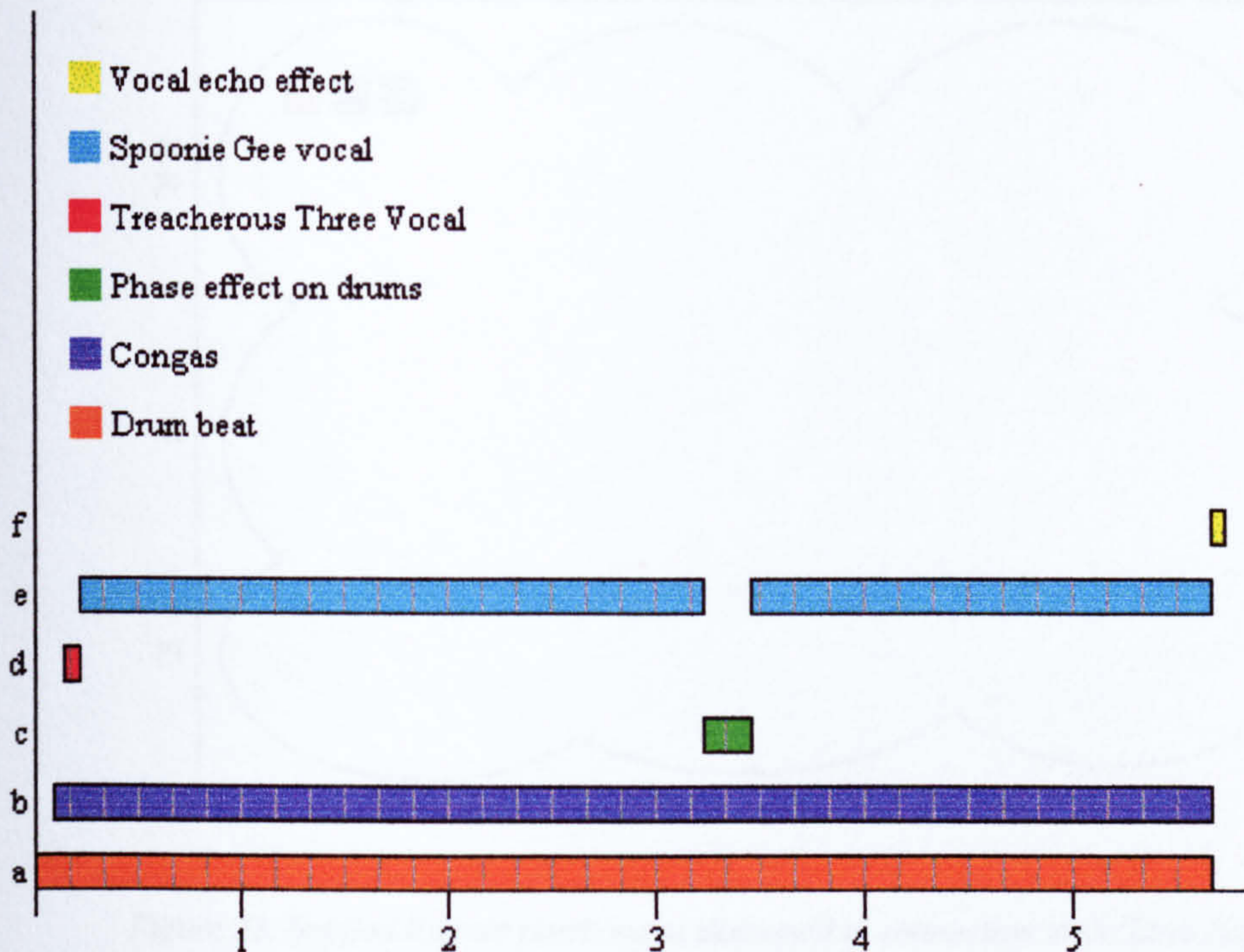


Figure 22. Spoonie Gee 'Love Rap' 1980 Enjoy Records.

The simplest of all the tracks under analysis, 'Love Rap' (Fig. 22, above) represents one extreme of first-era hip hop production. It consists of very little other than Spoonie Gee reciting rhymes (represented on line [e]), virtually uninterrupted, for nearly six minutes with nothing but drums and congas (lines [a] and [b]) as accompaniment. In terms of our implied listener model, this places every sound-element heard here within the original material/non-recognition combination. This is unusual for a hip hop track, and is probably attributable to the fact that in 1980, the recorded form of the genre was still very much the result of a negotiation between the newer musical practices of live hip hop and the more traditional working practices expected by record labels.

The only macro-structural variety within the track is the brief section wherein a phased effect is added to the drum line, represented on line [c] of the diagram. This acts as a bridge between Spoonie's two elongated verses. As with 'Rapper's Delight', this bridge again links two virtually identical sections. However, on the micro-structural level, it is apparent that this track is an example of intensional repetition at work. Since both the drums and congas are (as we might expect in a track from 1980) played live, there is intensional repetition of the 'traditional' type (rather than the 'blank' intensionality created by a looped sample, for example).

Thus 'Love Rap' sites itself firmly within an African-American musical tradition, with its most direct antecedents being, perhaps, artists such as the Last Poets and early Gil Scott-Heron. Of course, Spoonie Gee's style of rhyming also sites 'Love Rap' as being hip hop (it displays many of the

techniques described as belonging to first-era MCing in chapter three), and we have already seen how melodic and harmonic minimalism combined with rhythmic intensional variation would continue to appear within hip hop, in our analysis of 'Sucker MCs'.

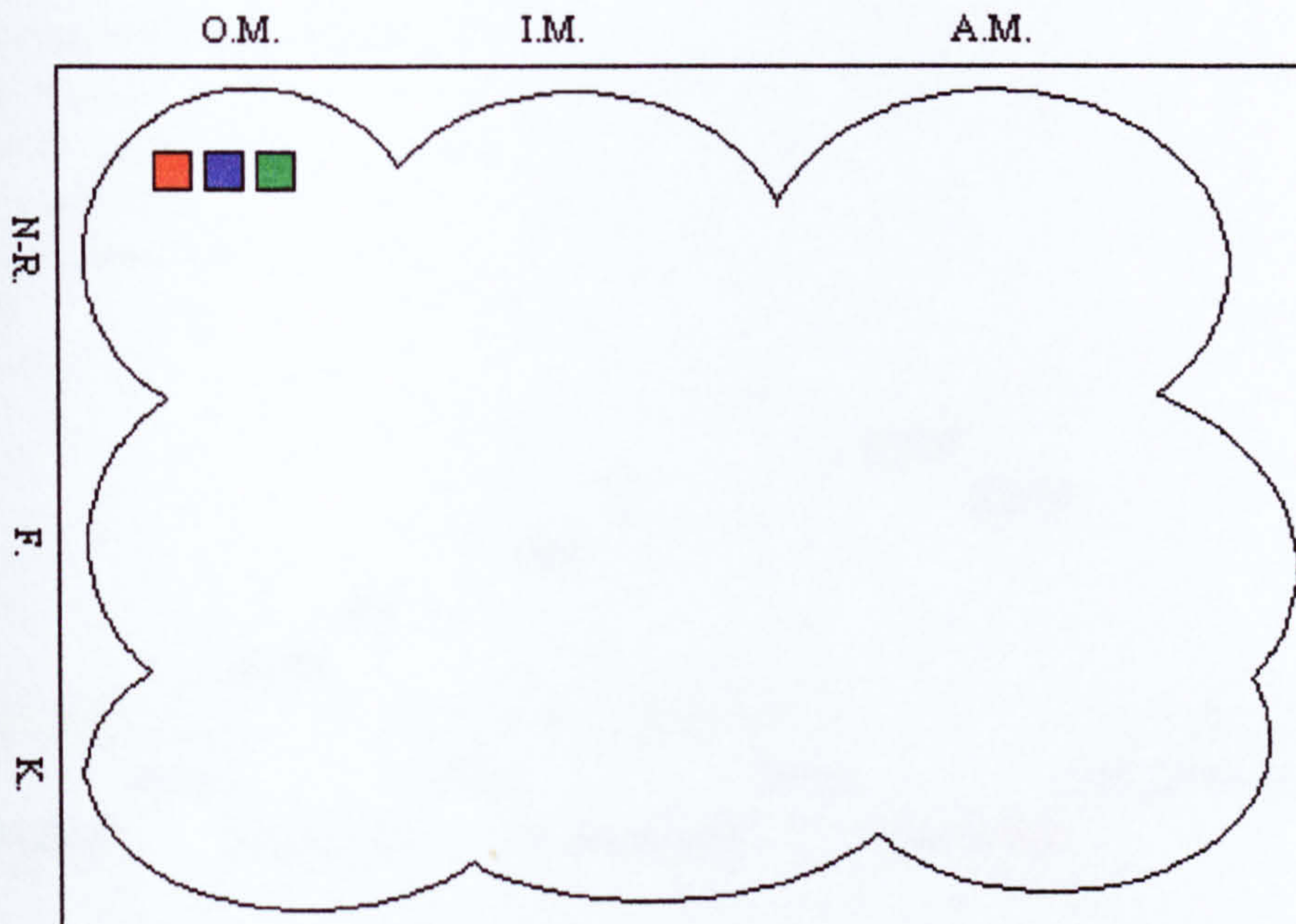


Figure 23. Implied listener positions as discussed in connection with 'Love Rap'.

'That's The Joint'⁴⁷

In comparison to the other first-era tracks under discussion, 'That's The Joint' initially appears to be relatively structurally complex. However, at the heart of the track is a simple binary opposition between the 'horn + gtr led break' (line [c]) and the 'bass-led break' (line [d]). It should be noted that these are breaks in the sense of 'instrumental break', and not Breaks as defined in the previous chapter. Despite the continued presence of the MCs throughout, these work to divide the track into verses and near-instrumental breaks: the rhyming is 'looser' in the 'bass-led break' sections, and there is a greater degree of intensional variety amongst the percussive instruments. Further variation is provided by the irregular appearance of the 'hanging drum break' (line [b]) within the verse sections, which acts as the song's hook, usually (but not always) underpinning the MCs' reciting of the phrase 'that's the joint', or variations thereof. The only other point of variation is provided by the non-appearance of the horns during Kevie Kev Rockwell's solo verse (shown at 6:30 on line [c]); but while this is of interest in that comparisons can be drawn with the moment in 'Rapper's Delight' at which the guitar is similarly absent (from around 10:15), it has no effect on the overall simplicity of the track's construction. Again, then, the focus here is on intensionally-styled repetition, with the macro-structure of the track consisting of simple binary oppositions. Of course, this combination of simplicity of approach and use of original material (as usual for a Sugar Hill recording, the music for this track was provided by the house band Wood, Brass & Steel) means that 'That's The Joint', like 'Love Rap', offers us little within

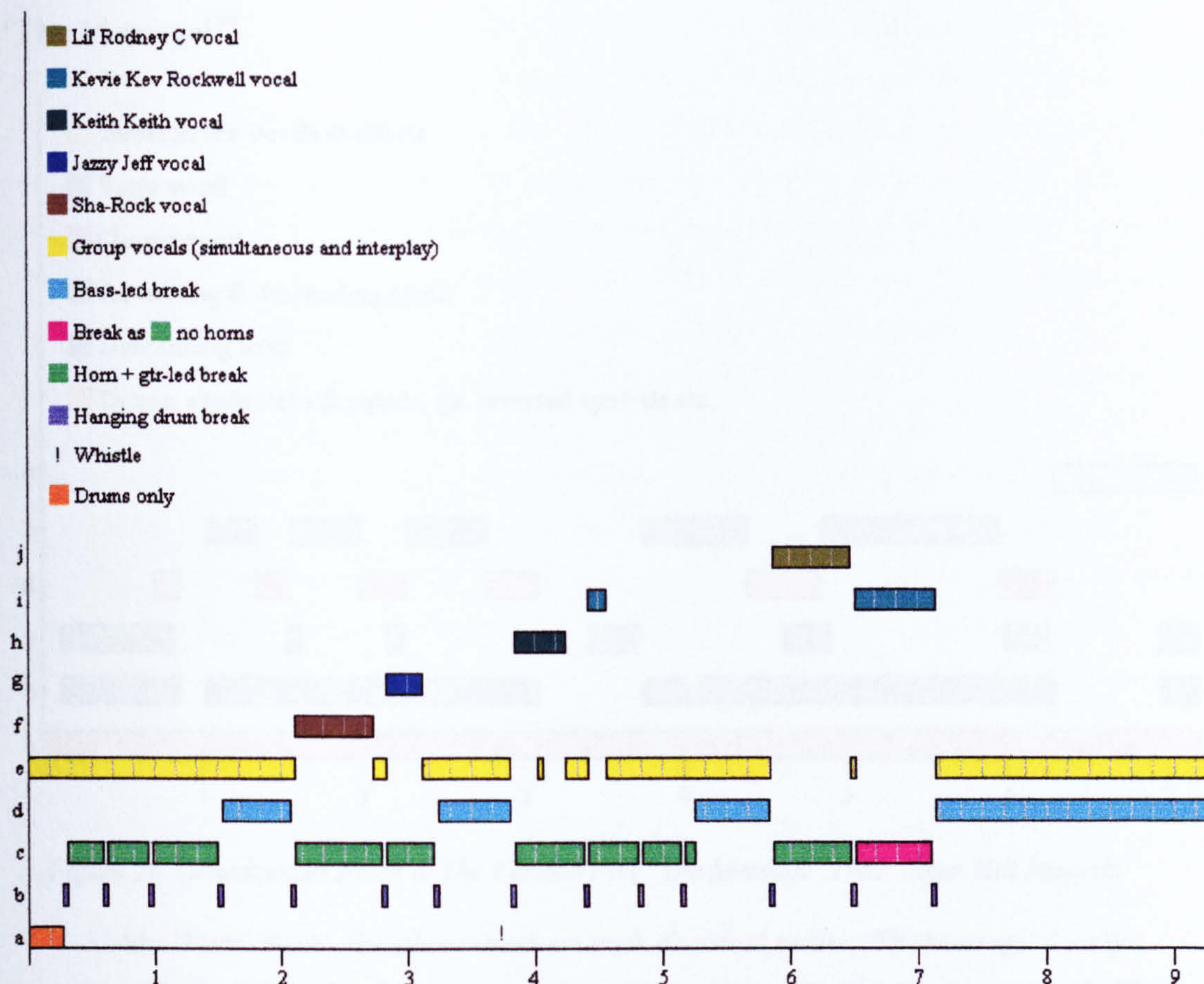


Figure 24. Funky Four + One 'That's The Joint' 1981 Sugar Hill Records.

the analytical frame of this thesis. However, it should be remembered that at the time of these tracks' production, hip hop was very much a nascent genre, and its focus was very much on the MC. So if the music of hip hop's first production era is simple, it is because it was essentially functional. All that was required of the music at this stage in hip hop's history was that it provided a rhythmic backdrop over which MCs could perform.

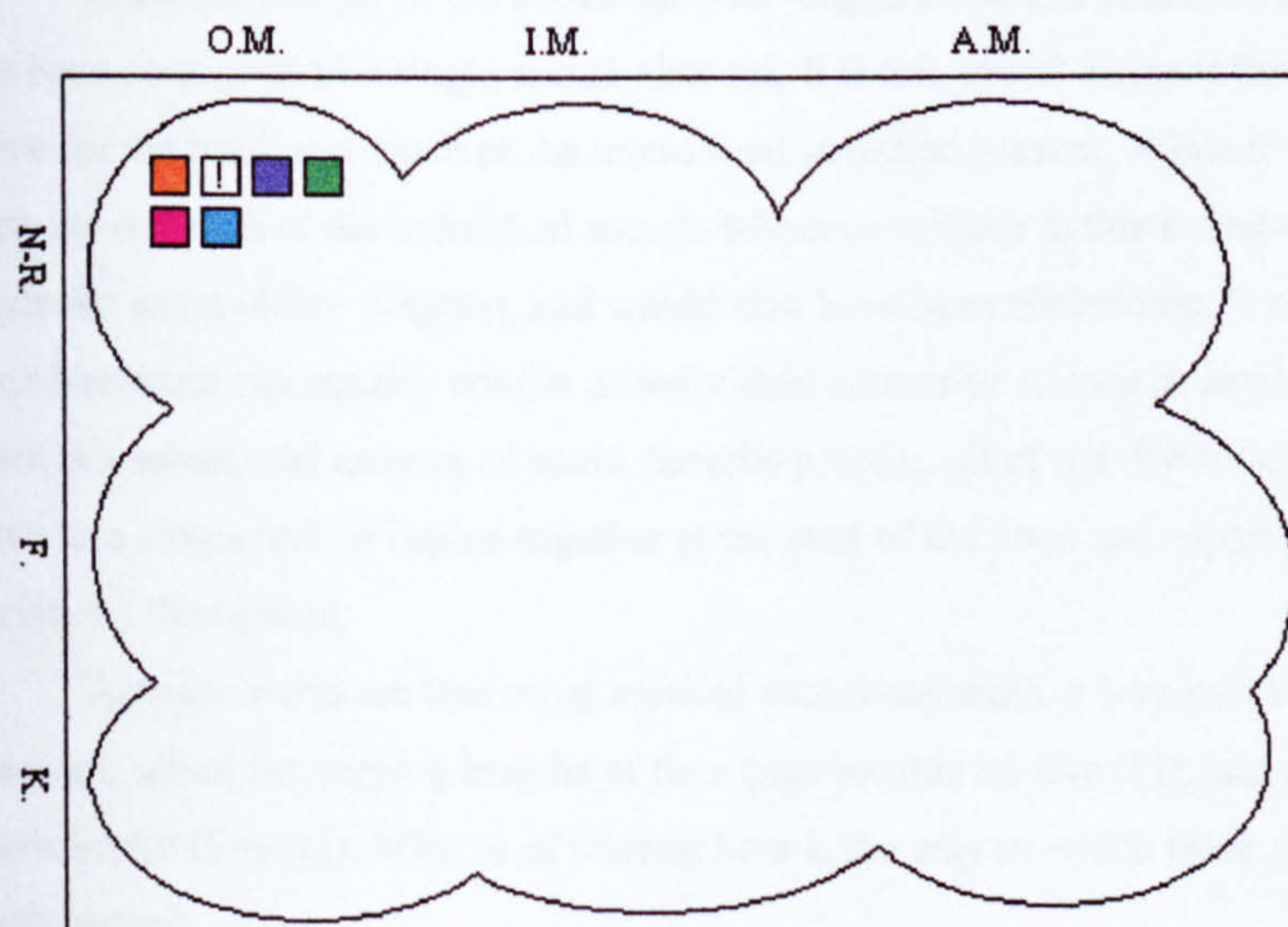


Figure 25. Implied listener positions as discussed in connection with 'That's The Joint'.

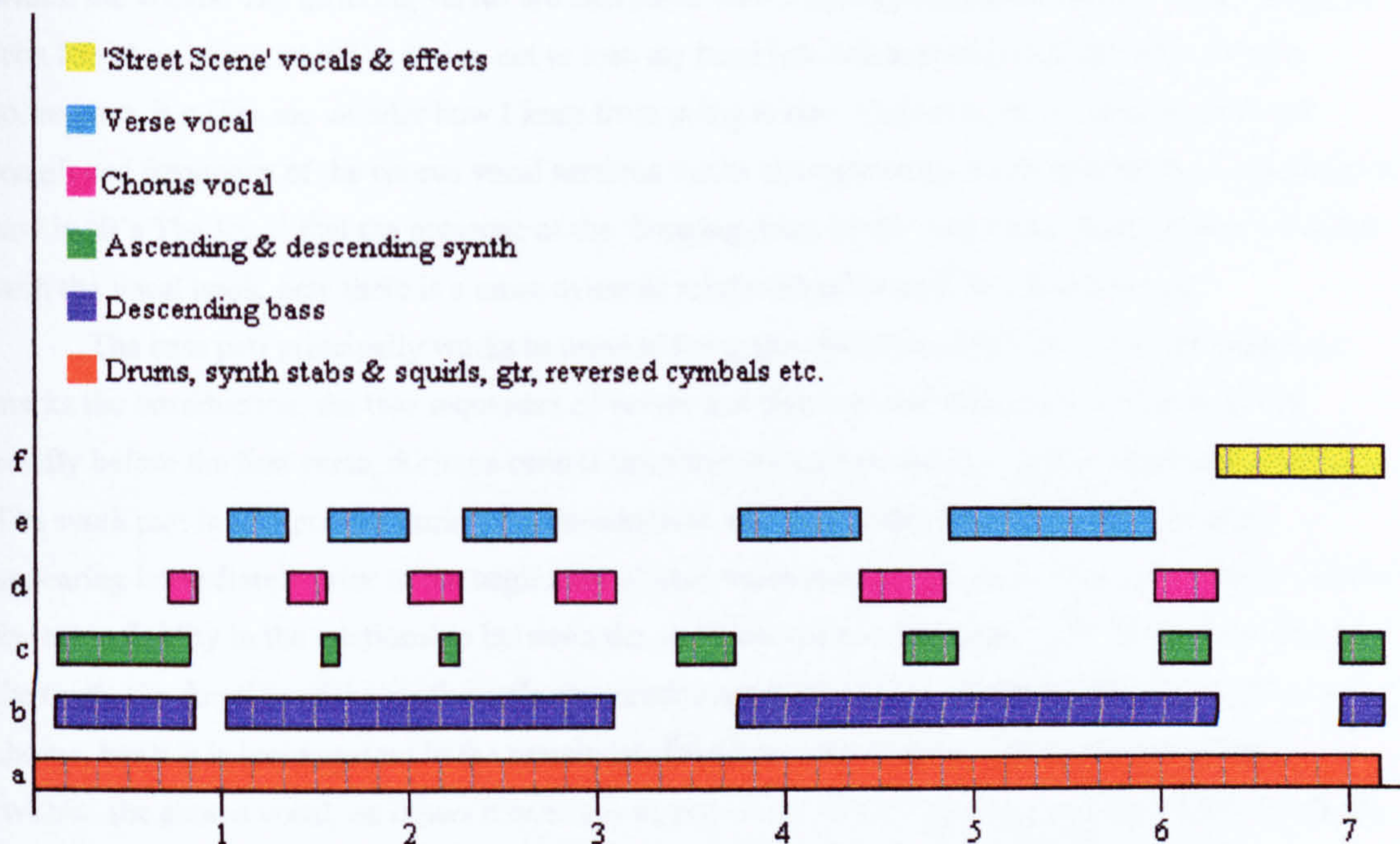
'The Message'⁴⁸

Figure 26. Grandmaster Flash & The Furious Five 'The Message' 1982 Sugar Hill Records.

Unlike 'Planet Rock', the other second-era track discussed earlier, 'The Message' does not contain any Breaks. While this shows a connection with the first production era, it is – as with 'Planet Rock' – immediately apparent that there is here a lot less regularity in the macro-structural organisation of 'The Message' when compared to the preceding tracks. The simple intensional repetition of the first production era, based on either unchanging repetition or binary switching, is replaced with a style of production in which sound-elements are more likely to operate simultaneously, as opposed to sequentially. Of course, this does not mean that intensional repetition vanishes from hip hop with the passing of the first production era. Instead, those sound-elements which operate in this manner begin to be used as a basis around which other sound-elements are placed.

Consider line [a] of the above analysis diagram. Here, a considerable amount of musical activity has been consigned to a single sound-element. It is this sound-element that provides both the rhythmic drive for the track and much of the intensional variation present. While it would have been possible to separate out each of the individual sounds which contribute to this sound-element, this would have made for an unwieldy diagram, and would also have been misleading. It must be remembered that a sound-element can equally consist of individual sounds or sounds in combination. In this case, while there is a substantial amount of sonic material present, all of the rhythmic material is treated within the track as a single unit: it begins together at the start of the track and repeats (with internal, intensional variation) throughout.

Alongside this are two other musical sound-elements: a bass part which is present for much of the track, albeit for varying lengths of time (represented on line [b]); and a synth line which appears sporadically (line [c]). What is of interest here is the way in which these parts interact with the vocal performance.

As can be seen from the diagram, 'The Message' has a definite sense of verse and chorus within the vocals. The differing verses are alternated with a (fairly) consistent chorus: 'Don't push me 'cos I'm close to the edge/I'm trying not to lose my head (uh-huh-huh-huh-huh)/It's like a jungle sometimes, it makes me wonder how I keep from going under'. However, as can also be seen, the length and frequency of the chorus vocal sections varies throughout the track. Furthermore, whereas we saw in 'It's The Joint' that the presence of the 'hanging drum break' hook was regularly accompanied with the vocal hook, here there is a more dynamic relationship between music and vocal.

The bass part principally works to provide the major divisions within the track: its presence marks the introduction, the two sequences of verses and choruses and the conclusion; it is absent briefly before the first verse, during a central instrumental section and during the 'street scene' coda. The synth part is also present during the introduction, and principally acts as a hook thereafter, appearing immediately prior to the beginning of each verse section of vocals. However, this also allows for some fluidity in the relationship between the vocal chorus and the synth hook. In the first third of the track, the duration of the synth part's appearance seems to vary in relation to the length of the vocal chorus, but this is less apparent in the remainder. On some occasions the synth part is contained 'within' the chorus vocal, on others it overlaps it; and on the fourth appearance of the chorus vocal the synth part is entirely absent, appearing instead towards the end of the central instrumental section. It is this variation that gives rise to the sense of structural irregularity in 'The Message', and this irregularity, in turn, underlines the edginess of Melle Mel's lyrics.

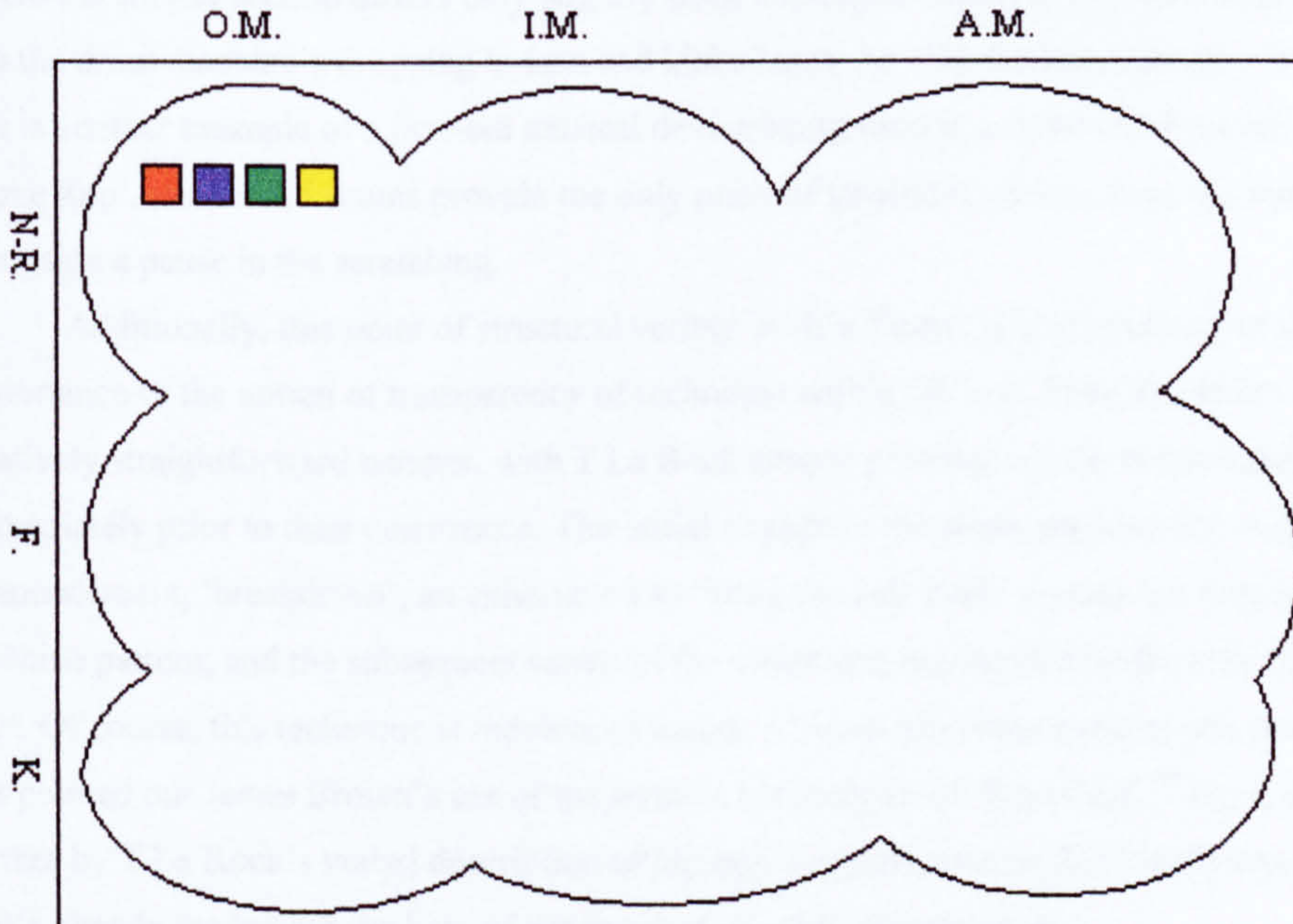


Figure 27. Implied listener positions as discussed in connection with 'The Message'.

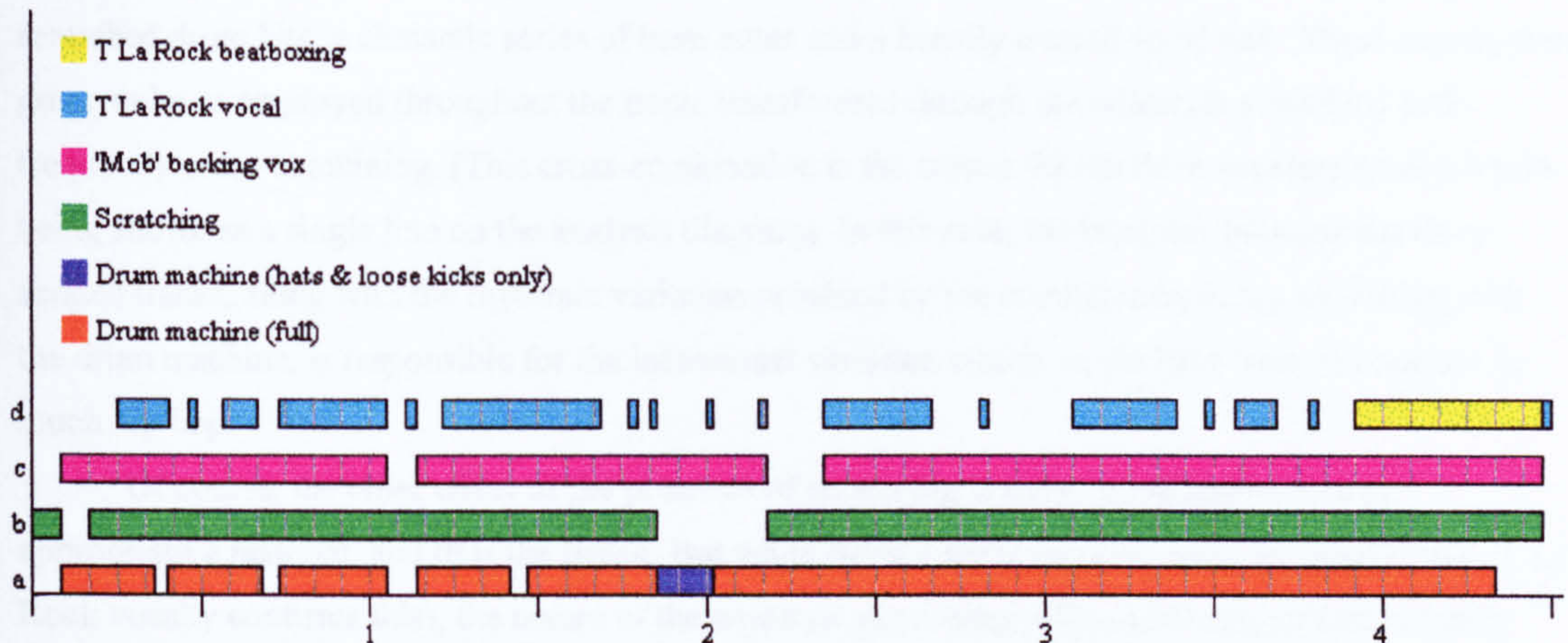
'It's Yours'⁴⁹

Figure 28. T La Rock & Jazzy Jay 'It's Yours' 1984 Partytime/Def Jam.

Several key signifying factors of the third era of production are readily discernible within 'It's Yours'. As with 'Sucker MCs', melodic and harmonic interest are minimised, there is a strong reliance on the drum machine line (line [a]) and the sound of scratching is very much present (represented on line [b] of the diagram). However, as we also saw in 'Sucker MCs', the influence of earlier production eras can still be made out. For example, a parallel can be seen between the drum machine line here and the structure of 'Love Rap', with two prolonged sections being interrupted by a much shorter section, where the shorter section differs only slightly from the longer ones (the phased drums in 'Love Rap' and the drum machine's dropping to hats and kicks here). As with the intensionality in 'The Message', this is another example of a first-era musical device being used in a more combinative fashion. In 'Love Rap', the phased drums provide the only point of structural variety; here the same device is used alongside a pause in the scratching.

Additionally, this point of structural variety in 'It's Yours' is also evidence of the growing importance of the notion of transparency of technique within hip hop. Here, the effect is achieved in a relatively straightforward manner, with T La Rock simply pointing out the structural changes immediately prior to their occurrence. The initial change in the drum machine line is heralded by the announcement, 'breakdown'; an exhortation to 'bring the beat back' signals the return of the full drum machine pattern; and the subsequent return of the scratching is preceded by the reminder, 'DJ Jazzy Jay'. Of course, this technique is redolent of earlier African-American musical practice: David Brackett has pointed out James Brown's use of the same in his analysis of 'Superbad'.⁵⁰ Here, the idea is taken further by T La Rock's verbal description of hip hop's construction within his rhymes: 'taking a record that's already made/with the help of the mix-board, using the crossfade.'

However, this is not the only way in which 'It's Yours' makes the techniques involved in its construction apparent to the listener. As we have already seen, it was during the third production era that DJing techniques began to appear prominently within recorded hip hop, and the heavy use of scratching here is evidence of that fact. Of course, the sound of scratching *per se* can be understood to carry connotations of the technique, but as we noted in our discussion of scratching in chapter three, traces of the original can frequently be discerned in or around the radically transformative wildstyle

scratching used here. In the case of 'It's Yours', this occurs at the very beginning of the track. Before the introduction of the drum machine and 'mob' backing vocals, a series of sounds are heard: some scratched drum hits, a climactic series of horn notes and a heavily treated vocal stab. These sounds then go on to be re-employed throughout the track, transformed through the wildstyle scratching and frequently cross-combining. (This cross-combination is the reason for the three separate scratch tracks being shown as a single line on the analysis diagram). In this case, the interplay between the three scratch tracks, along with the rhythmic variation provided by the combination of the scratching with the drum machine, is responsible for the intensional variation which, as we have seen, is common to much hip hop.

Of course, the other effect of the presence of scratching is the implied appearance of appropriative material, and thus the Break. But while Breaks are in use here (and, as noted above, T La Rock vocally confirms this), the nature of the wildstyle scratching makes their recognition virtually impossible (despite the introduction), and so we can expect at most a vague familiarity response from the listener, with no connotative meanings associated with the source being drawn.

Finally, it should be noted that unlike 'The Show', the human beatboxing in this track can be understood as being original material. In fact, where much beatboxing (as we have seen) blurs the boundary between vocal and musical performance, T La Rock's approximation towards words to represent drum sounds here ('ba-boom, ba-bap, ba-boom-bap') means that this beatboxing can be seen as forming part of the vocal performance, effectively operating as a vocal coda to the track.

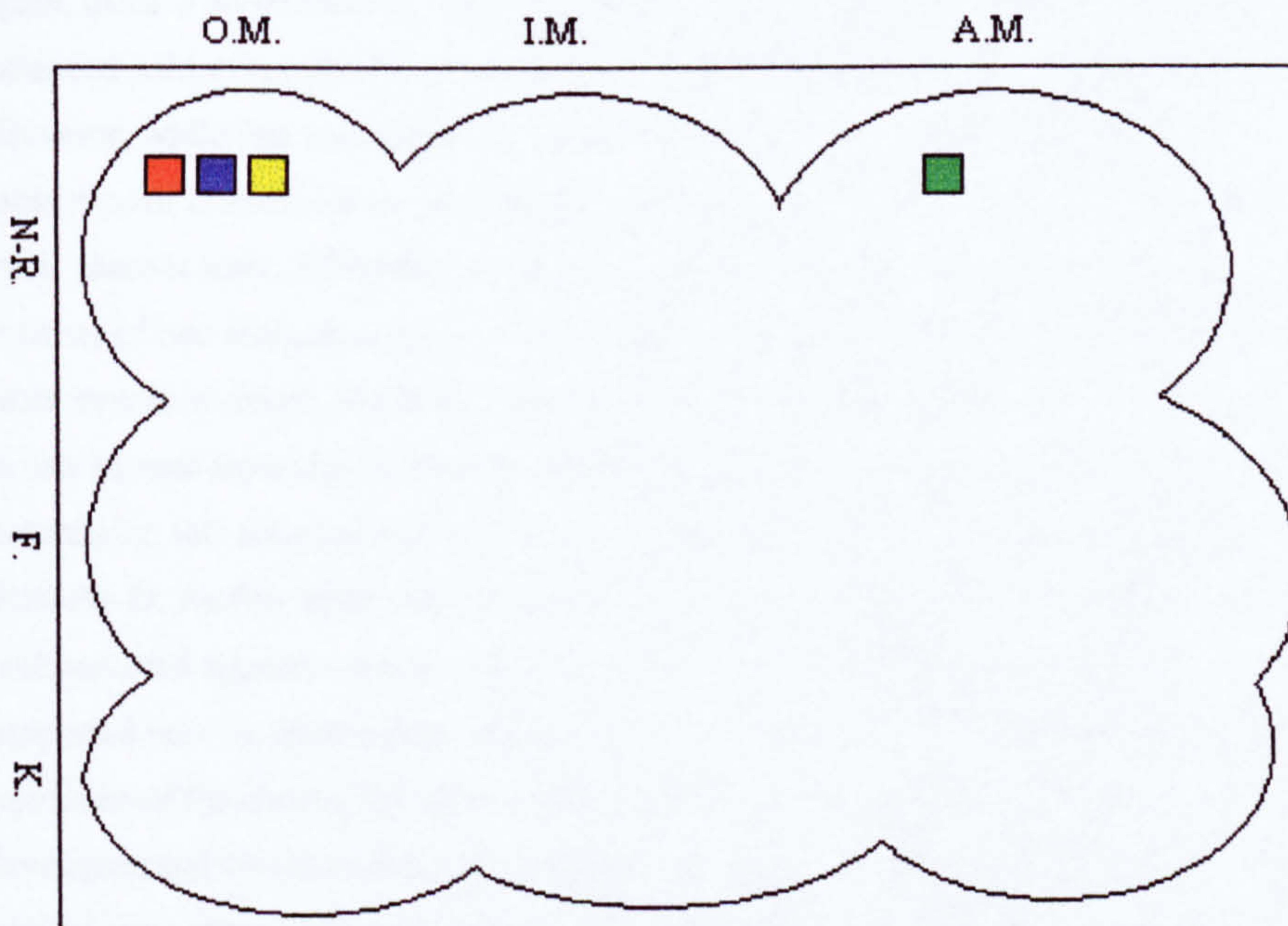


Figure 29. Implied listener positions as discussed in connection with 'It's Yours'.

'PSK "What Does It Mean"?'⁵¹

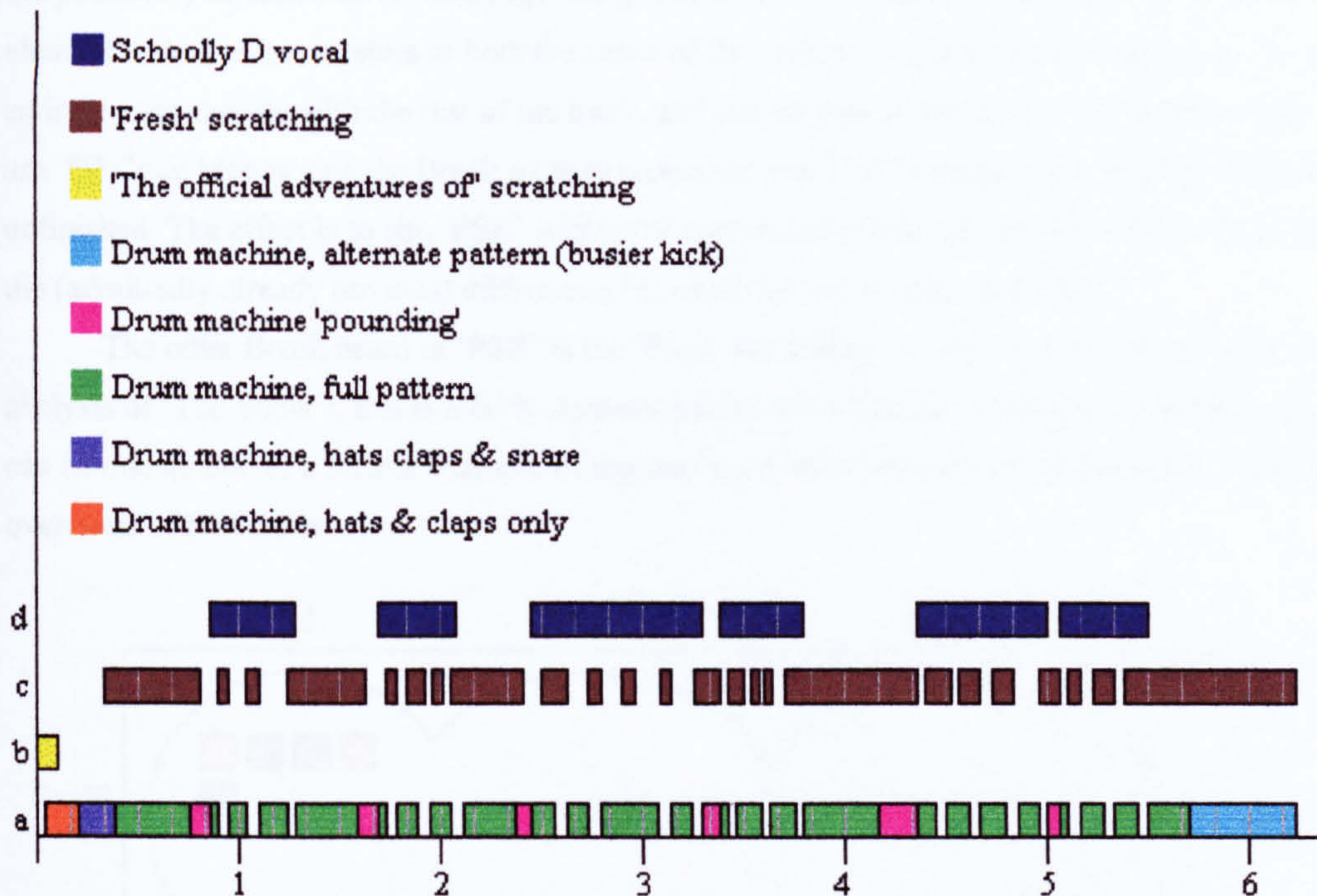


Figure 30. Schoolly D 'PSK "What Does It Mean"?' 1985 Schoolly D Records.

As with 'It's Yours', 'PSK' bears many of the hallmarks of third-era hip hop production. Once again, there is no melodic or harmonic interest, with the track relying solely on the combination of extended wildstyle scratching (represented on line [c]) and a repeated drum machine pattern (line [a]). However, while this means that, on the micro-structural level, the two tracks are very similar, with the same type of intensional variation being created by the rhythmic interplay of drum machine and scratch track, there is some difference at the macro-structural level. As we saw, 'It's Yours' principally consists of two elongated sections with a central bridge. 'PSK', on the other hand, displays slightly more structural detail. The key to this is the 'drum machine 'pounding'' sound-element, which appears, as can be seen from the analysis diagram, at regularly occurring intervals throughout the track. Essentially, this sound-element acts as an episodic marker, signalling the imminent appearance of Schoolly D. Further structural variety is then added in a similar way to that seen in 'The Message', with repeated appearances of a vocal chorus. Unlike 'The Message', however, the vocal chorus is supported here by consistency within the music: the drum machine drops out at the same points in each repetition of the chorus. Of course, this does not mean that 'PSK' displays the same kind of developmental structure that we have previously seen in 'Bring The Noise'. In the Public Enemy track, we saw a regular and distinct musical difference between verse and chorus sections. Here, while there is regularity within the chorus, there is no musical distinction between verse and chorus: drum machine dropouts are present throughout the track, in both chorus and verse sections.

But if 'PSK' is only mildly developmental in terms of its structure, it is much more fully realised in terms of its intertextual practices. The track begins with scratching on the phrase 'the official adventures of...' (represented on line [b]), and of course, we have encountered this sound-element before, in Grandmaster Flash's 'Adventures...'. Given the popularity of Flash's track, we can

assume that many listeners to 'PSK' would react with a strong familiarity response, thus giving rise to the possibility of connotative meanings being drawn. In the context of 'Adventures...', this sound-element makes sense: it refers to both the name of the performer and the title of the track. Here, it is entirely unconnected with the rest of the track, and can only be understood as a reference to its earlier use. DJ Code Money cuts the Break so as to repeat the word 'of' several times, leaving the phrase unfinished. The effect is to site 'PSK' within the continuum of hip hop, and then immediately underline the (admittedly already obvious) differences between hip hop's 'now' and 'then'.

The other Break heard in 'PSK' is the 'fresh' scratching. As we have already seen (in our analysis of 'The Show'), this is a fairly commonplace use of a classic autonomous Break, and as such can be understood as a further example of hip hop's tendency towards self-referentiality, with its overtones of DJ battles.

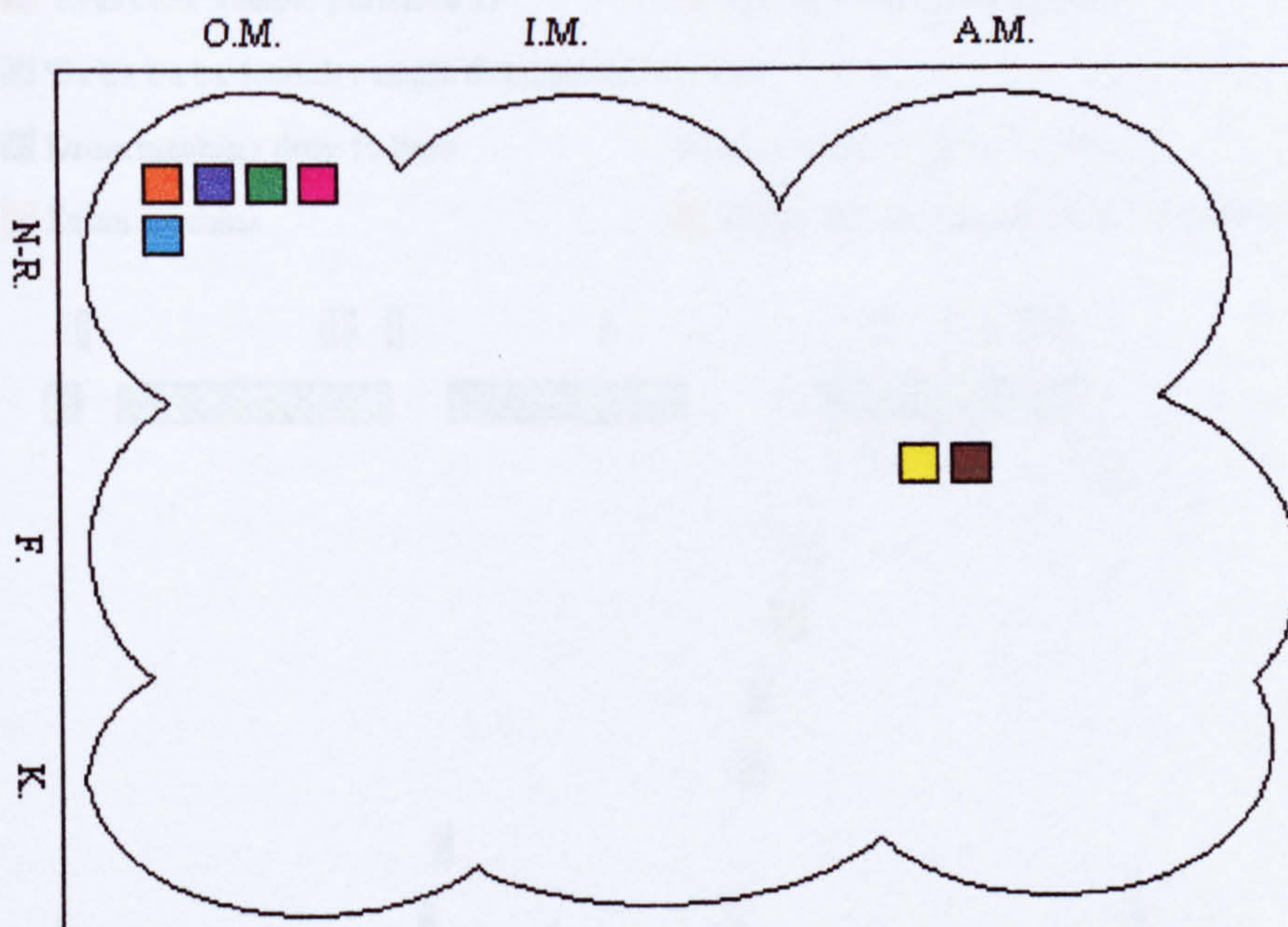


Figure 31. Implied listener positions as discussed in connection with 'PSK "What Does It Mean"?'

'Beat Biter'⁵²

While the two previous tracks under analysis belong to the relatively simplistic early phase of hip hop's third production era, 'Beat Biter' (Fig. 32, below) displays some of the developments which would ultimately lead to the rise of the fourth. Firstly, there is the larger macro-structural organisation of the track. As we have seen, both 'It's Yours' and 'PSK' have essentially simple structures, with the differing sections being vocally signalled (T La Rock announces 'breakdown' at the relevant point in the former; Schoolly D's vocal is the only differential between verse and chorus sections in the latter). In 'Beat Biter', the overall structure is only slightly more coherent, consisting of an introduction, three verses of approximately equal length separated by short breaks and a coda. However, the important structural difference here is in the concentration of 'musical' (as opposed to vocal) material within the breaks between verses. Where the wildstyle scratching of 'It's Yours' and 'PSK' was allowed virtually

free reign throughout the tracks, MC Shan's verses in 'Beat Biter' are accompanied only by the drum machine line, with other sound-elements making less frequent appearances.

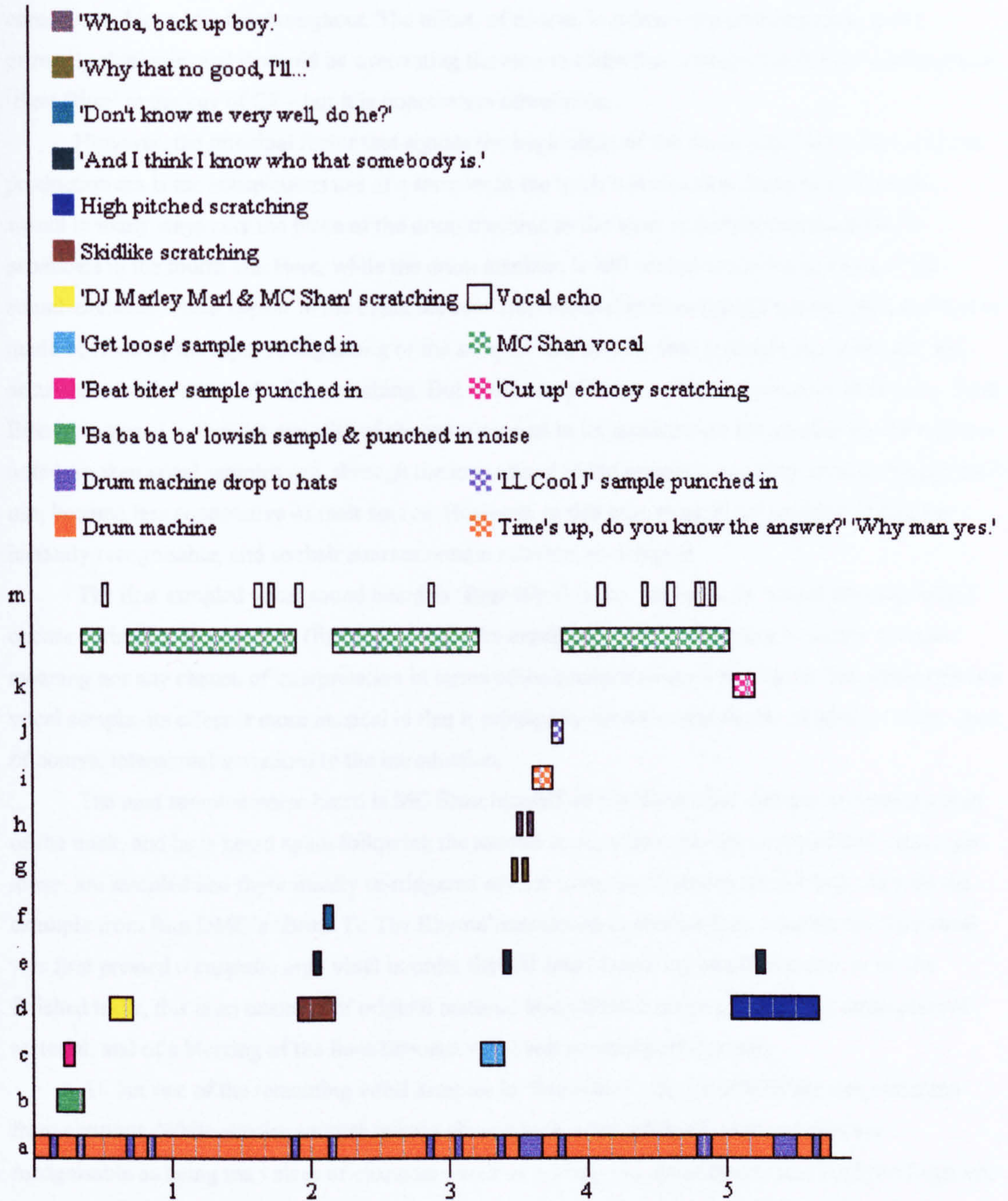


Figure 32. MC Shan & Marley Marl 'Beat Biter' 1986 Bridge.

Of course, intentionally-styled repetition is still present within 'Beat Biter', but where the two previous tracks under analysis relied on the interplay of drum machine with wildstyle scratching to create this, here it is principally confined to variation within the drum machine pattern (shown in line [a] of the diagram), in the form of the irregularly placed 'drop to hats', which appear in both verse and break sections.

The centrality of the drum machine is, of course, a style indicator of hip hop's third production era, but once again a difference can be discerned between 'Beat Biter' and the previous tracks under

analysis. While there is still no melodic interest within this track, a sense of a harmonic base is present. Drum machines, like acoustic drums, can be tuned, and in this case the drum machine ‘kick’ consistently hits a low C# throughout. The effect, of course, is subtle – the drum machine is still primarily rhythmic, and it would be overstating the case to claim that a single tuned drum sound places ‘Beat Biter’ in the key of C# – but it is nonetheless discernible.

However, the principal factor that signals the beginnings of the move towards hip hop’s fourth production era is the conspicuous use of a sampler in the track’s production. Samplers, of course, would in many ways take the place of the drum machine as the most important tool available to producers in the fourth era. Here, while the drum machine is still central to the track, many of the sound-elements which appear in the break sections (represented in lines [d]-[j]) are sampled, and this is made obvious by the rapid re-triggering of the samples in a manner that is simply too quick and too accurate to be the result of a DJ scratching. But while sample-use implies the presence of Breaks, ‘Beat Biter’ is unusual in that the majority of the samples used in its construction are vocal ones. As we have noted, spoken vocal samples can, through the immediacy of the semantic meaning created through their use, become less connotative of their source. However, in this case most of the sampled voices are instantly recognisable, and so their sources remain relevant, to a degree.

The first sampled vocal sound heard in ‘Beat Biter’ is the ‘ba ba ba ba’ sound-element which occurs during the introduction (line [b]). This is the exception here, in that there is neither semantic meaning nor any chance of interpretation in terms of the sound-element’s source. In fact, while this is a vocal sample, its effect is more musical in that it principally serves to add further rhythmic ‘drive’ (and, of course, intensional variation) to the introduction.

The next sampled voice heard is MC Shan himself, in the ‘Beat biter’ sample towards the start of the track, and he is heard again following the second verse, where the last words of that verse, ‘get loose’ are sampled and rhythmically re-triggered several times (both shown on line [c]). As with the example from Run DMC’s ‘Beats To The Rhyme’ mentioned in chapter four, wherein the lead vocal was first pressed *a cappella* onto vinyl in order that DJ Jam Master Jay could scratch it in on the finished track, this is an example of original material being treated in the same way as appropriative material, and of a blurring of the lines between vocal and musical performance.

All but one of the remaining vocal samples in ‘Beat Biter’ consist of brief phrases extracted from cartoons. While precise sources remain elusive here, some of these vocal samples are recognisable as being the voices of characters such as Tweety Pie, Bugs Bunny and Foghorn Leghorn, with the others presumably belonging to less well-known characters from the Warner Brothers ‘Looney Tunes’ series. Semantically, these vocal samples allow producer Marley Marl to add to the message contained in MC Shan’s lyrics – an attack on LL Cool J for his ‘biting’ (i.e. stealing) of a beat for use in one of his own tracks – and they can be split into two categories. Some suggest that the identity of the biter is known to Marley Marl: ‘And I think I know who that somebody is’ and ‘Time’s up, do you know the answer?’ ‘Why man yes’. Others contain threats, either veiled or direct: ‘Don’t know me very well, do he’ and ‘Why that no good, I’ll...’ (the latter accompanied by a suggestion that it is only the intervention of a third party that is holding the producer back, in ‘Whoa, back up boy’). However, the obvious nature of the source of these vocal cuts works to undermine the seriousness of the threat: actual

physical violence is not at stake here: the track itself is reprimand enough. Again, this is echoed in MC Shan's lyrics: 'It just so happened that we met some place/I confronted this beat biter face to face/I asked did he do it and of course he denied/So I had to say, homeboy, I let that slide.'

The final vocal sample used in the track puts the biter firmly in his place. Here (on line [j] of the diagram), Marley Marl samples LL Cool J's own voice stating his name, responding to the phrase 'do you know the answer?', and so turning the MC against himself. This, of course, can be understood as an example of hip hop Signifyin(g) (in Henry Louis Gates' sense).

Of course, this is also another example of hip hop's intertextual practices being used in a self-referential manner, and this occurs further in the scratched in vocal cuts included in the track. During the introduction, Marley Marl scratches on the phrase 'DJ Marley Marl and MC Shan' (represented on line [d]), which, since it does not occur in this track, must be taken from another, and towards the end there is scratching on the phrase 'cut up' (line [k]), a reference to LL Cool J's DJ, Cut Creator (once again, this is made explicit within the lyrics of the track). In terms of reception, we can see that the first of these may be met with a familiarity response, in this case driven by content codification – the listener recognises the words 'DJ Marley Marl and MC Shan' and can understand that they are taken from a track by the said artists without necessarily knowing which one – while the second is likely to meet with a non-recognition response, with the semantic sense of the vocal cut providing the sound-element's meaning.

In addition to all this, there is also atonal rhythmic scratching during the first break and the coda, which can be seen to be further defining the difference between the verse and break sections, as well as adding intensional variation.

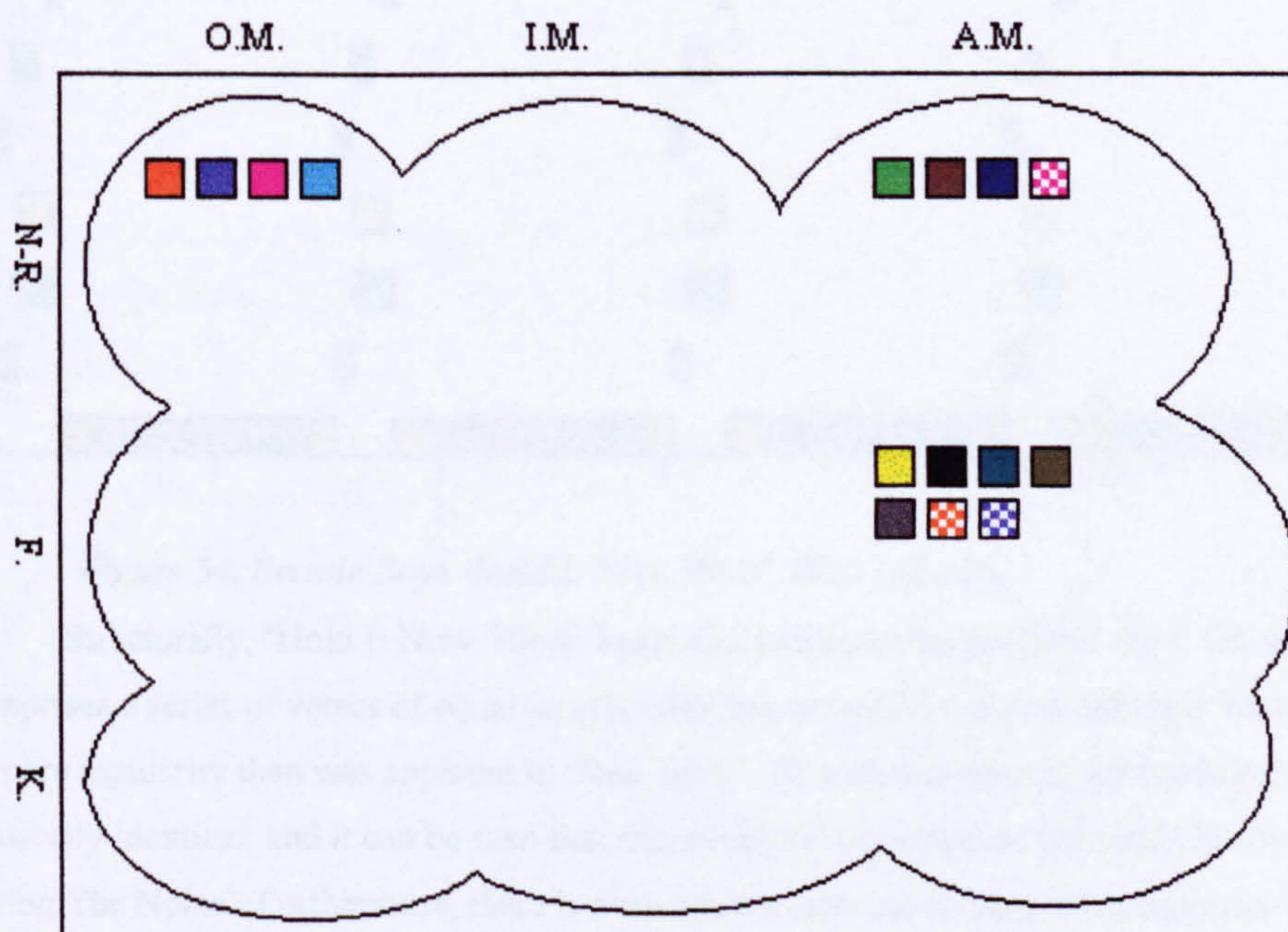


Figure 33. Implied listener positions as discussed in connection with 'Beat Biter'.

'Hold It Now, Hit It'⁵³

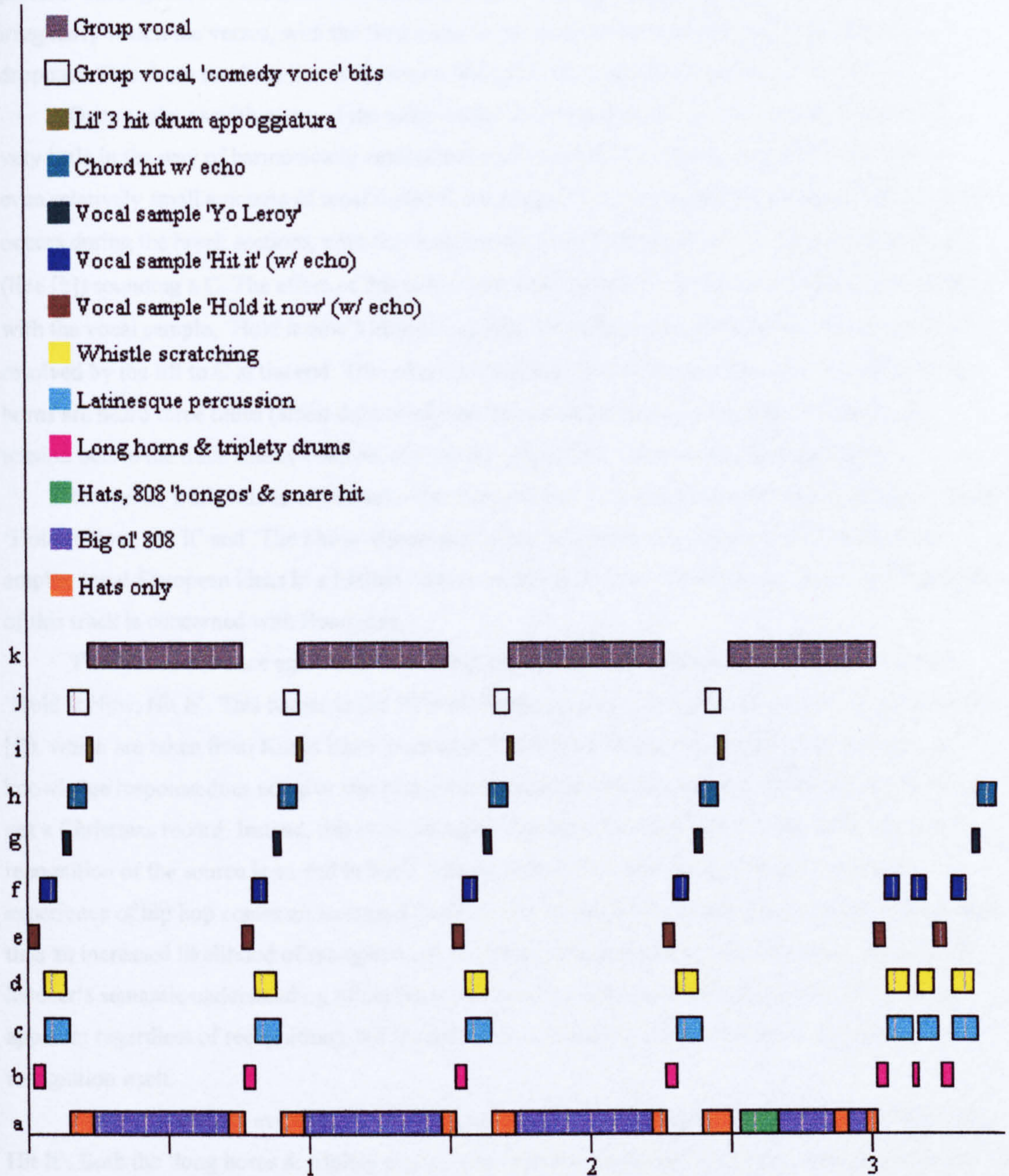


Figure 34. Beastie Boys 'Hold It Now, Hit It' 1986 Def Jam.

Structurally, 'Hold It Now, Hit It' bears similarities to the previous track. Once again, the track comprises a series of verses of equal length, with instrumental breaks in-between. Here, however, there is more regularity than was apparent in 'Beat Biter'. At each occurrence, the break sections are musically identical, and it can be seen that this structural organisation has much in common with 'Bring The Noise'. Furthermore, there is once again much use of sampled appropriative material. However, while we are moving further towards the fourth production era, 'Hold It Now, Hit It' is still distinctly of the third era. While samples are used, they are once again confined to the break sections, with a drum machine (unmistakably a Roland TR-808, itself a key signifier of hip hop's third production era) being the sole musical accompaniment to the verse sections. While the type of

intensional variation seen in the drum machine line in previous tracks is not so apparent here, it is still present. Throughout the track, several different single-bar drum machine patterns are deployed irregularly within the verses, with the final verse displaying the more 'traditional' drum machine dropouts. This drum machine line is shown on line [a] of the analysis diagram (fig. 34, above).

Once again, as with many of the other tracks under analysis, there is no melodic interest and very little in the way of harmonically centred material present. However, as we saw in 'The Show', even relatively small amounts of tonal material can suggest a type of harmonic development. Here, this occurs during the break sections, with the 'long horns' (line [b]) sounding an $A\flat$, and the 'chord hit' (line [h]) sounding a C. The effect of this is to create a rising major third, with the $A\flat$ (in combination with the vocal sample, 'Hold it now') introducing into the break sections a harmonic tension which is resolved by the lift to C at the end. This effect is underlined during the track's coda, wherein the $A\flat$ horns are heard three times (albeit only briefly on the second of these), prolonging the harmonic tension before the track finally resolves to C on the 'chord hit', which is the last sound heard.

However, while this is of interest – the incorporation of harmonic tension and resolution in both 'Hold It Now, Hit It' and 'The Show' demonstrates hip hop producers' ability and willingness to employ tonal-European ideas in a limited manner within their work – perhaps the most important facet of this track is concerned with Break-use.

Firstly, there is once again evidence of hip hop's tendency towards self-referentiality within 'Hold It Now, Hit It'. This comes in the form of the eponymous vocal samples (shown on lines [e] and [f]), which are taken from Kurtis Blow's seasonal first-era hit 'Christmas Rapping'. In this case, a knowledge response does not give rise to any further thematic connotations – 'Hold It Now, Hit It' is not a Christmas record. Instead, this is an example of genre self-referentiality wherein the potential recognition of the source is an end in itself. That is, with an increase in the listener's previous experience of hip hop comes an increased likelihood of having heard 'Christmas Rapping' before, and thus an increased likelihood of recognition of the Break. The knowledge response does not add to the listener's semantic understanding of the track (the meaning of the phrase 'hold it now, hit it' being apparent regardless of recognition), but instead offers a reward in the form of the very pleasure of recognition itself.

Secondly, there is evidence of the appearance of the soul/funk/jazz canon within 'Hold It Now, Hit It'. Both the 'long horns & triplet drums' and 'whistle scratching' (line [d]) sound-elements can be seen to have the same source: Kool & The Gang's 'Funky Stuff'.⁵⁴ As with 'Bring The Noise', this is once again an instance of marginal material in the original being re-sited more centrally within a hip hop track. Both the whistle and horns appear briefly in the introduction to 'Funky Stuff', but reappear regularly throughout 'Hold It Now, Hit It'. As we saw in the case of 'Bring The Noise', this use of marginal material lessens the likelihood of a knowledge response, but does not negate it completely. Thus while it is unlikely that the listener will instantly recognise these Breaks, it remains a possibility: in any case the reference to the canon can still be understood through a familiarity or non-recognition response, through recognition of the sound-element's sonic qualities. On a personal note (and it must be remembered that any Break-centred analysis is always personal in that it is limited by the listener's musical experience), I was surprised while researching for this analysis to find that the 'triplet drums'

were not present in the Kool & The Gang original. While this means that either a different version of 'Funky Stuff' from the album version I referred to in my research is being used or the drums come from a different source, the fact is noteworthy since it demonstrates the process described in chapter four. The listener 'creates' the Break by mentally isolating the sound-element, and this understanding can then be modified through further experiencing of the sound-element in different contexts (or, as in this case, the source).

Further referencing of the soul/funk/jazz canon can be found in the 'Yo Leroy' Break (line [g]), taken from the Jimmy Castor Bunch's 'The Return Of Leroy'.⁵⁵ While this again provides evidence of hip hop's physically connecting itself with the wider tradition of African-American music, it also points towards the growing legal complexity of sampling at the time – the use of this Break giving rise to accusations of copyright infringement in a suit that was settled out of court.

Finally, 'Hold It Now, Hit It' also contains an example of the use of a classic autonomous Break. The 'lil' 3 hit drum appoggiatura' sound-element (line [i]) employed as an episodic marker here is taken from Bob James' 'Take Me To The Mardi Gras'.⁵⁶ As we saw in chapter four, while autonomous Breaks can refer to their sources, their tendency is to give rise to a familiarity response which is understood through reference to other uses within hip hop – a tendency which is further increased here by the very briefness of the sound-element (three individual drum hits lasting a fraction of a second in total). As with all uses of autonomous Breaks, the effect is to form a connection between 'Hold It Now, Hit It' and earlier uses of the sound-element within hip hop, adding to the genre self-referentiality mentioned above, but without necessarily involving any reference to a source.

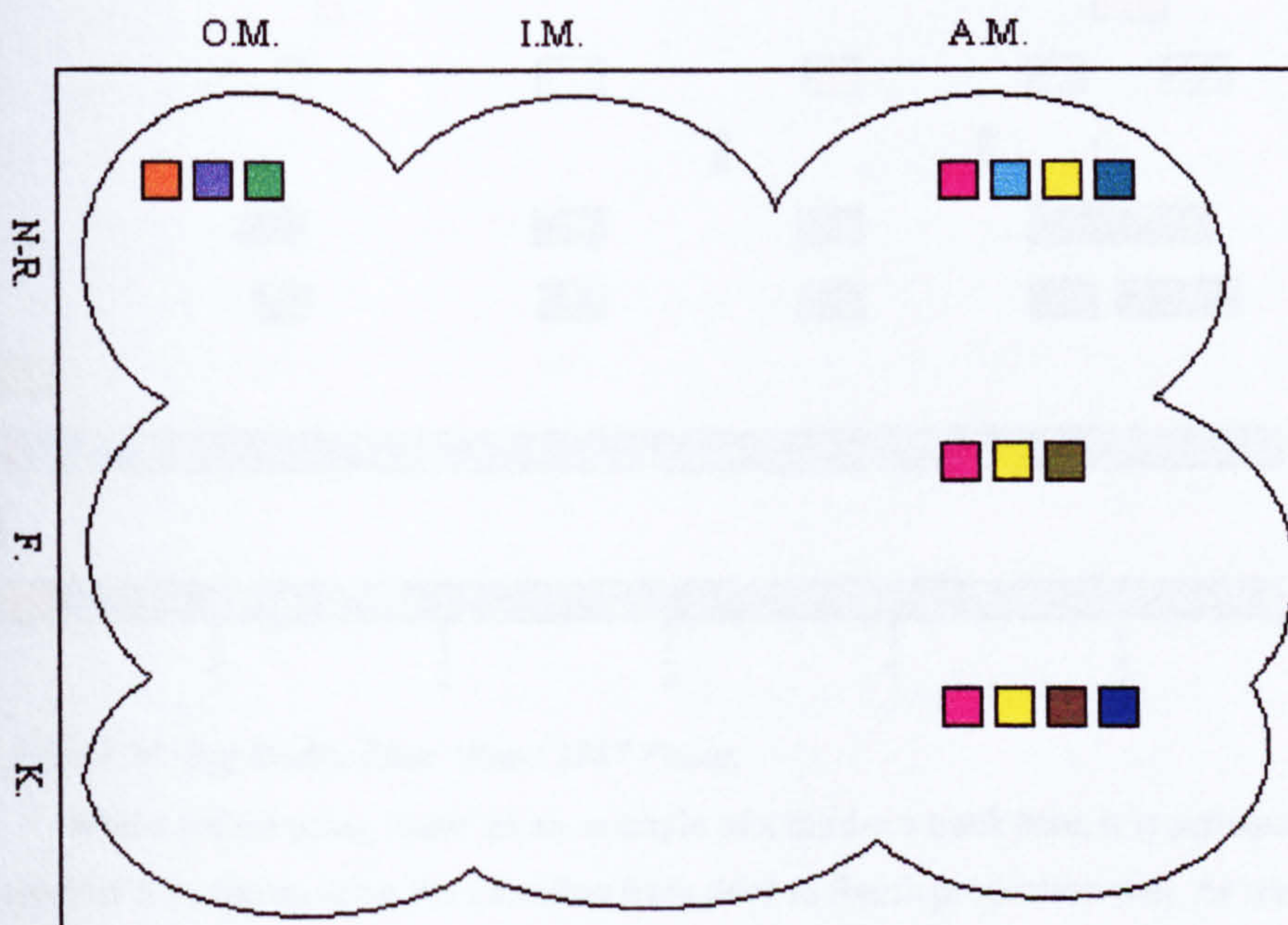


Figure 35. Implied listener positions as discussed in connection with 'Hold It Now, Hit It'.

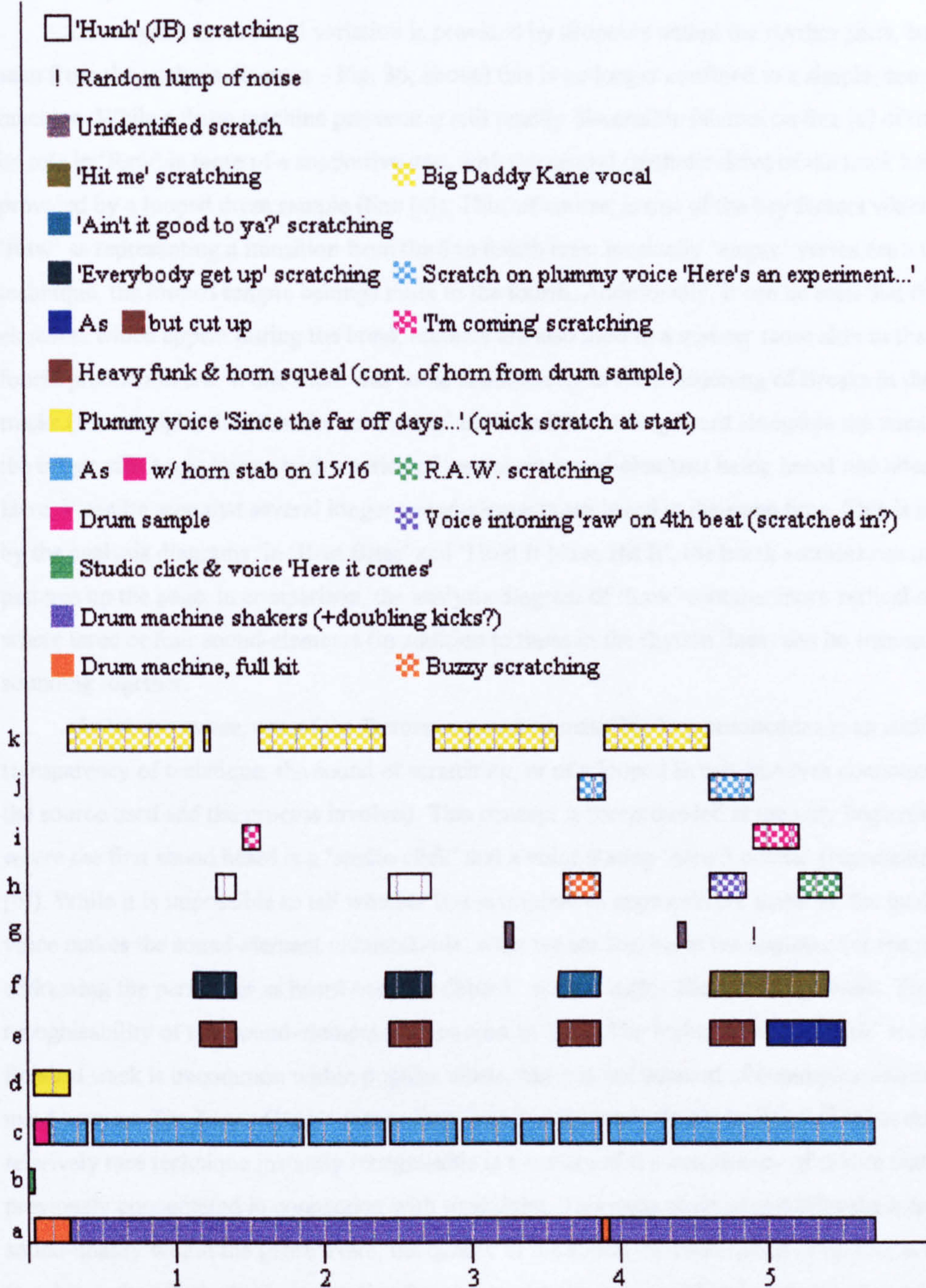
'Raw'⁵⁷

Figure 36. Big Daddy Kane 'Raw' 1987 Prism.

Whilst we are using 'Raw' as an example of a third-era track here, it is perhaps nearer the truth to consider it as representing the transition from third to fourth production eras. As we will see, the track contains similarities to those discussed immediately above, while also demonstrating the beginnings of the ideas which would be central in the fourth era.

Structurally, parallels can readily be drawn with both 'Beat Biter' and 'Hold It Now, Hit It'. As in these tracks, the larger structure of 'Raw' comprises a series of vocal verses of similar length with a

minimal amount of musical activity, interrupted by instrumental breaks wherein several sound-elements operate together.

Once again, intensional variation is provided by dropouts within the rhythm parts, but (as can be seen from the analysis diagram – Fig. 36, above) this is no longer confined to a simple, central drum machine. While a drum machine presence is still readily discernible (shown on line [a] of the diagram), its role in ‘Raw’ is more of a supportive one, with the central rhythmic drive of the track being provided by a looped drum sample (line [c]). This, of course, is one of the key factors which positions ‘Raw’ as representing a transition from third to fourth eras: musically ‘empty’ verses are a third-era technique, the looped sample belongs more to the fourth. Additionally, it can be seen that the sound-elements which appear during the break sections are also used in a manner more akin to that of the fourth production era. While there was some simultaneity in the positioning of Breaks in the previous tracks (for example, the ‘skidlike scratching’ in ‘Beat Biter’ being heard alongside the vocal samples), the larger effect was linear, with a series of very short sound-elements being heard one after another. Here, it can be seen that several longer sound-elements are heard at the same time. This is made clear by the analysis diagrams: in ‘Beat Biter’ and ‘Hold It Now, Hit It’, the break sections run in diagonal patterns up the page; in comparison, the analysis diagram of ‘Raw’ contains more vertical stacking, where three or four sound-elements (in addition to those in the rhythm lines) can be seen to be sounding together.

As we are aware, one of the factors common to many hip hop productions is an audible transparency of technique: the sound of scratching, or of a looped Break, involves connotations of both the source used and the process involved. This concept is foregrounded at the very beginning of ‘Raw’, where the first sound heard is a ‘studio click’ and a voice stating ‘here it comes’ (represented on line [b]). While it is impossible to tell whether this is original or appropriative material, the quality of the voice makes the sound-element unmistakable: what we are hearing is the engineer (or the producer) addressing the performer as heard over a ‘talkback’ system within the recording studio. The recognisability of this sound-element is of interest in itself. The inclusion of ‘talkback’ sound within a finished track is uncommon within popular music, but it is not unheard of (examples which spring to mind here are The James Gang’s ‘Stone Rap’ and Syd Barrett’s ‘If It’s In You’).⁵⁸ What makes this relatively rare technique instantly recognisable is a variety of the consistency of timbre that we have previously encountered in connection with scratching. This once again exemplifies the importance of sound-quality within the genre. Here, the quality of the sound, its consistence of timbre, is relied upon to achieve the effect: that being to simultaneously cite the studio within the track and site the track within the studio, emphasising the process of production.

With regard to the use of Breaks in ‘Raw’, the single most important fact is the strong presence of James Brown. Both the central drum sample and the ‘heavy funk & horn squeal’ (line [e]) sound-elements are taken from tracks produced by Brown: Bobby Byrd’s ‘Hot Pants...I’m Coming, I’m Coming, I’m Coming’ and Lynn Collins’ ‘Mama Feelgood’, respectively.⁵⁹ These sound-elements are combined in ‘Raw’ are combined in a subtle and effective manner. This involves the isolation of the first note of the Lynn Collins Break and its subsequent incorporation within the Bobby Byrd one. This (the ‘horn stab on 15/16’) is treated throughout the track as if it were from the same source as the drum

sample – when the sample drops out, so does the horn. However, when the break sections are heard, the difference in source becomes apparent, at least for the listener interpreting the track within the bounds of a knowledge response. As we have seen in other examples, the musical effect of this combination of Breaks is accessible to all listeners, regardless of their response to the intertextual practices at work: the insistent horn stab creates drive and tension which is resolved in the break sections. However, once again a knowledge response allows for further appreciation of the track, with the niceties of the production only accessible through an understanding of the differing sources of the two Breaks.

On top of this, more James Brown sound-elements are heard in the various vocal scratches present (line [f]). While we can anticipate a listener response of familiarity to these sound-elements, the connotations of Brown *per se* have been discussed elsewhere, so they need not be reiterated here. What is of note, however, is the fact that these vocal cuts are used in the same manner as in their sources. David Brackett has noted Brown's use of small vocal 'cells' within his music. These ostensibly marginal phrases and non-verbal sounds involve 'the repetition of fragments with discrete variations'.⁶⁰ This, of course, creates intensional variation within Brown's tracks, and the same effect is achieved here through DJing techniques. Where Brown might use several variations on a 'hunh' or a 'hit me' in the course of a track, here single instances of these vocalisations are isolated, and the intensional variation is then reinserted through the rhythmic variety of the scratching.

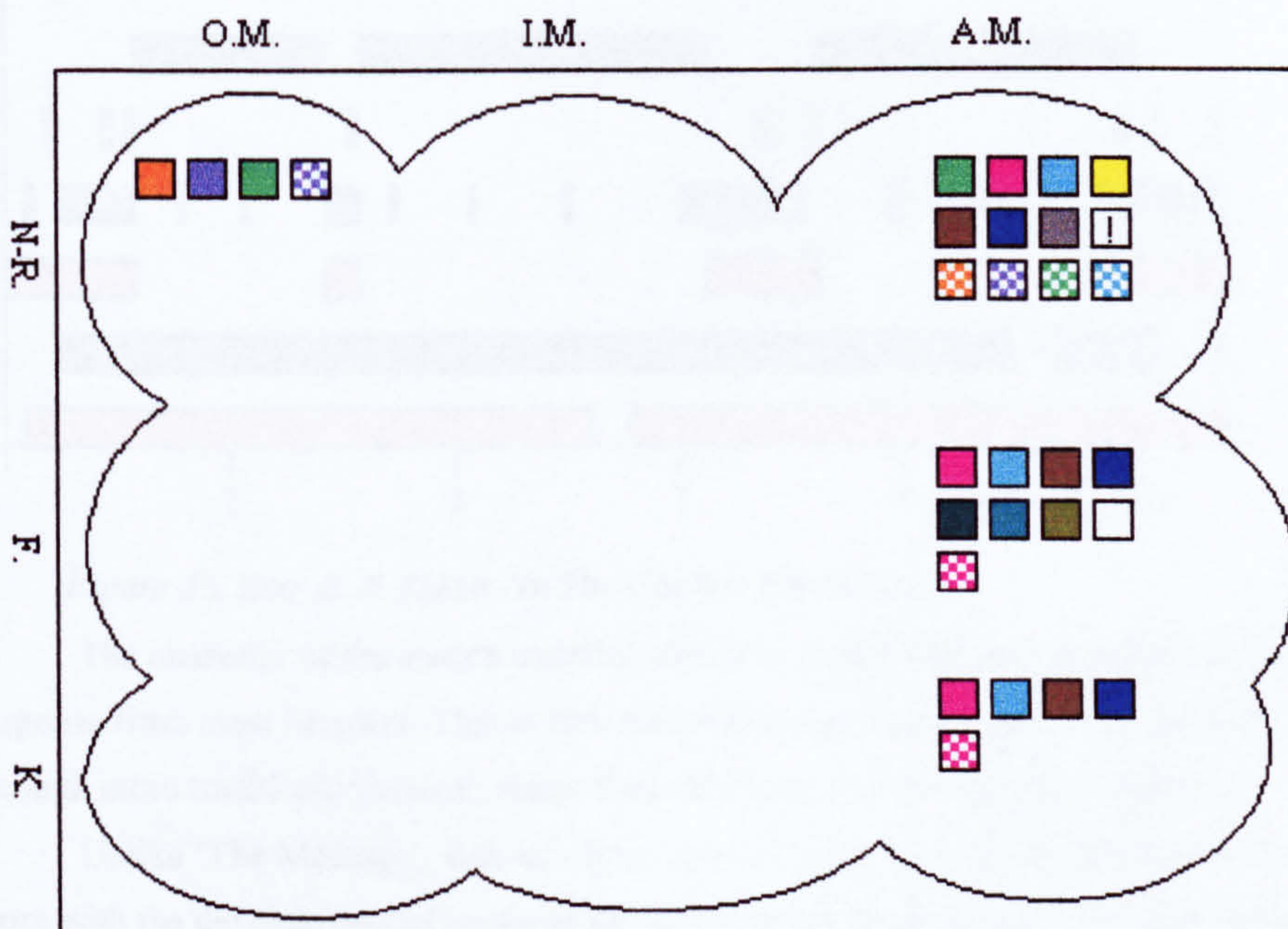


Figure 37. Implied listener positions as discussed in connection with 'Raw'.

'In The Ghetto'⁶¹

As noted in chapter three, the principal defining factor of hip hop's fourth production era is the centrality of the sampler, and this is clear within 'In The Ghetto'. Here, while the overall structure of the track can be seen to be similar to that of the previous tracks analysed – a series of vocal verses with breaks in-between – there is a difference in that the verses are underpinned by both a drum machine pattern (line [a]) and a sampled, harmonically centred, sound-element (line [b]). This latter consists of

two bars taken from a track called 'Ghetto: Misfortune's Wealth' by The 24-Carat Black, with the sample being retriggered so that the first bar is heard three times before the second.⁶² The resulting four-bar pattern repeats virtually unchanged throughout the track, accompanied by two intensionally varying sound-elements taken from the same source, viz. the sung vocal samples 'Ghetto...the ghetto' and 'Y'ain't gonna get rice in hell' (lines [d] and [e]).* Further intensional variation is added through the scratching on Rakim's voice stating 'nobody's smiling' (line [c]). As with 'Beat Biter', this phrase does not appear in the main vocal of this track, and so can be considered as appropriative material to which the listener's response is likely to be one of familiarity, at least in the sense of recognising Rakim's voice.

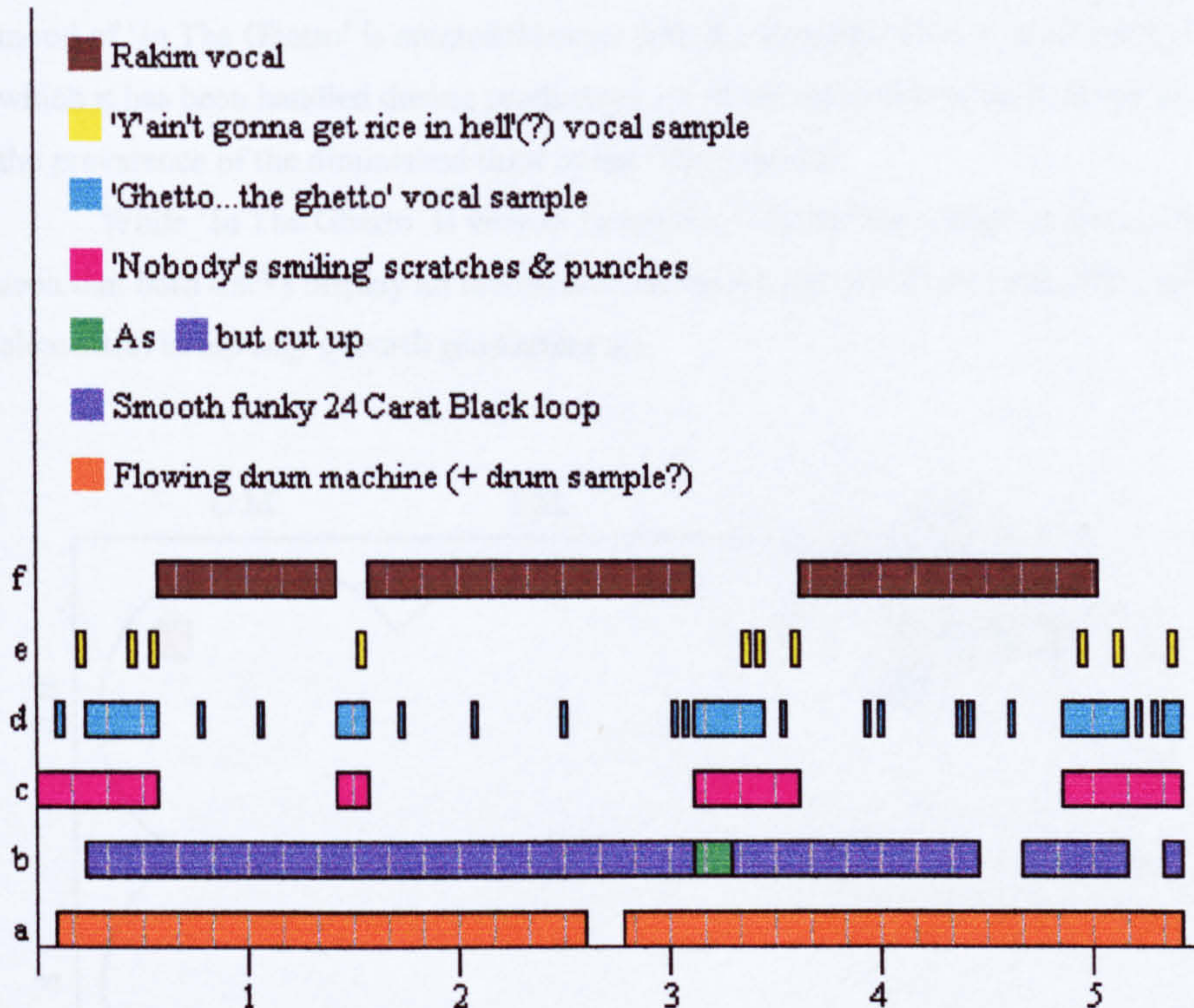


Figure 38. Eric B. & Rakim 'In The Ghetto' 1990 MCA.

The obscurity of the source material used here means that we can expect a non-recognition response from most listeners. This in turn means that we should try to understand 'In The Ghetto' through more traditional musical, rather than simply intertextual analytic methods.

Unlike 'The Message', Rakim's lyric is less concerned with the realities of life in the ghetto and more with the development of personal strength through introspection ('So now is the time for us to react/Take a trip through the mind and when you get back/Understand your third eye seen all of that/It ain't where you're from, it's where you're at...'), and this is echoed in the track's music. The introspective mood of the music is created through the central 24 Carat Black sound-element, which employs harmonic variation within a single chord. During the first three bars of each repetition, a bass is heard playing a pattern in B \flat m, accompanied by an electric piano sounding a pendent B \flat m (diminished third). In the fourth bar, the piano is absent, and the bass resolves the phrase, finishing on a C# (the 'correct', non diminished third). This prevalence of the diminished third could be said to be

* The latter is indistinct. 'Rice' could be 'fries'.

opening an internal space within the repeated Bbm, and it is this internal space which lends the introspective feel to the track.

Of course, even a non-recognising listener is still capable of codifying this sound-element as a Break, and while this does not make the source any more apparent, it does enable an understanding of the production process. As usual, there are sonic 'clues' to this in the finished track. On the first bar of each four-bar repetition, the electric piano chord is sounded through a brief arpeggio, preceding the first beat. On the second and third bars, this is absent, and the chord (effectively already sounding in the source) simply 'cuts' in, lacking the attack associated with live keyboard playing. While this effect is subtle, it is nonetheless discernible, and thus the codifying listener can understand that the musical mood of 'In The Ghetto' is created through both the sonority of the source material and the way in which it has been handled during production – it is the repetition of the first bar that is responsible for the prevalence of the diminished third in the finished track.

While 'In The Ghetto' is very different from 'Bring The Noise' in terms of its sound, it can be seen that both tracks display an increased concern for the overall musical effect of the choice of sound-element(s) in hip hop's fourth production era.

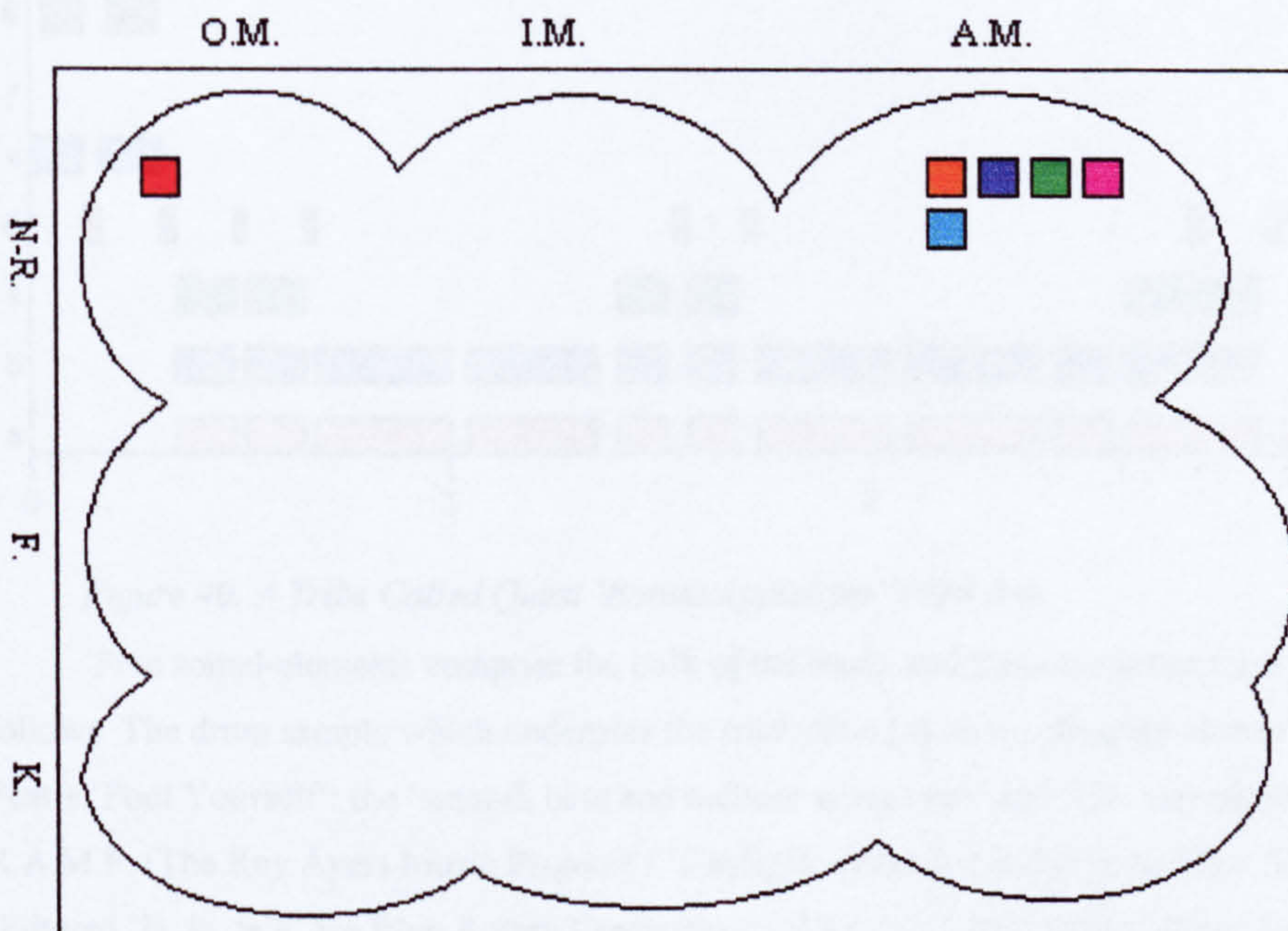


Figure 39. Implied listener positions as discussed in connection with 'In The Ghetto'.

'Bonita Applebum'⁶³

In 'Bonita Applebum' (Fig. 40, below) we find an example of the techniques involved in the fourth era of hip hop production being used to create a regularly-structured and harmonically-coherent pop song. Macro-structurally, the track follows an intro/chorus/verse/chorus/verse/chorus/outro pattern, with the only irregularity within this design being the differing lengths of the two verses. On the micro-structural level, the track is based on intensionally-styled unchanging repetition, but with little in the

way of variation within this. Indeed, the only point at which there is variation in the micro-structural repetition is during the third chorus, where the main looped sound-elements (the drum sample, the bass and keyboards sample and the guitar ascend/descend) fail to drop out when the 'sitar sample' sound-element is heard.

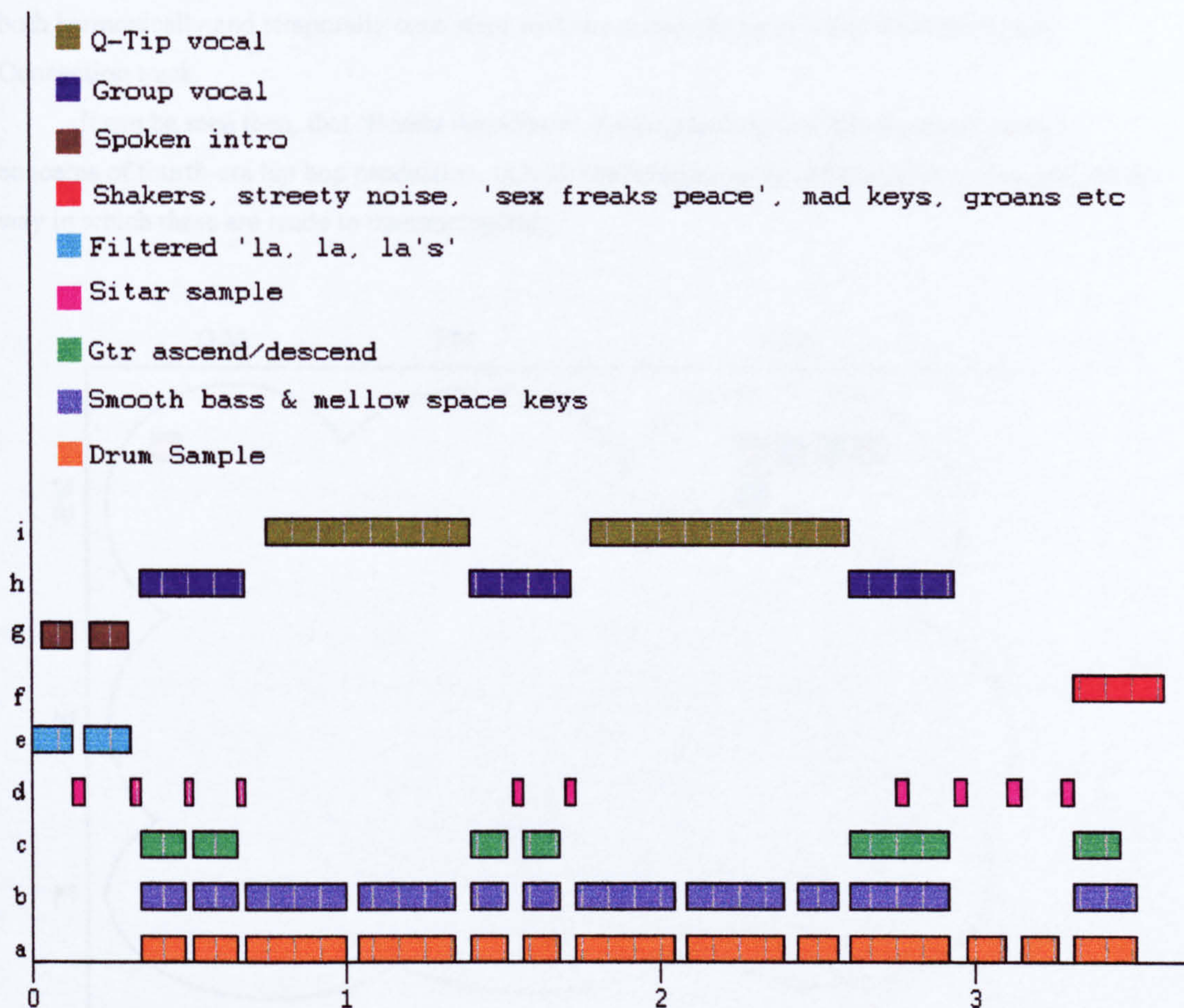


Figure 40. A Tribe Called Quest 'Bonita Applebum' 1990 Jive.

Five sound-elements comprise the bulk of the track, and these are taken from three sources, as follows. The drum sample which underpins the track (line [a] on the diagram above) is from Little Feat's 'Fool Yourself'; the 'smooth bass and mellow space keys' and 'Gtr ascend/descend' are from R.A.M.P. (The Roy Ayers Music Project)'s 'Daylight' (lines [b] and [c]); and the 'Sitar sample' and 'Filtered 'la, la, la's' are from Rotary Connection's 'Memory Band' (lines [d] and [e]).⁶⁴ As with 'In The Ghetto', we can expect non-recognition responses towards these sound-elements in most listeners – none of the sources ever troubled any chart compilers.

Again, then, the key to 'Bonita Applebum' is in the musical mood it creates. Here, the relaxed pace, warm keyboards and unchanging repetition work to create a mood which is perhaps best described as that of a 'warm summer evening'. While the harmonic base of the track is Am, any potential dolefulness associated with a minor key is minimised by the scarcity of the minor third within the track – this note, a C natural, only appears briefly during the descending part of the guitar phrase, and even then is offset by the warm, 'open' nature of the preceding ascent (a three note octave rise on V-I-V).

While this musical mood is largely created through the material used in the track's creation, there is, as with the extension of the central Break within 'In The Ghetto', a subtle use of production techniques intrinsic to making the track 'work'. Here, this involves a simple speeding up of the sound-elements taken from the R.A.M.P. track, moving them from their original key of Gm, and making them both harmonically and temporally consistent with the sound-elements taken from the Rotary Connection track.

It can be seen then, that 'Bonita Applebum' once again displays the increased 'musical' concerns of fourth-era hip hop production, in both the selection of sound-elements to be used and the way in which these are made to operate together.

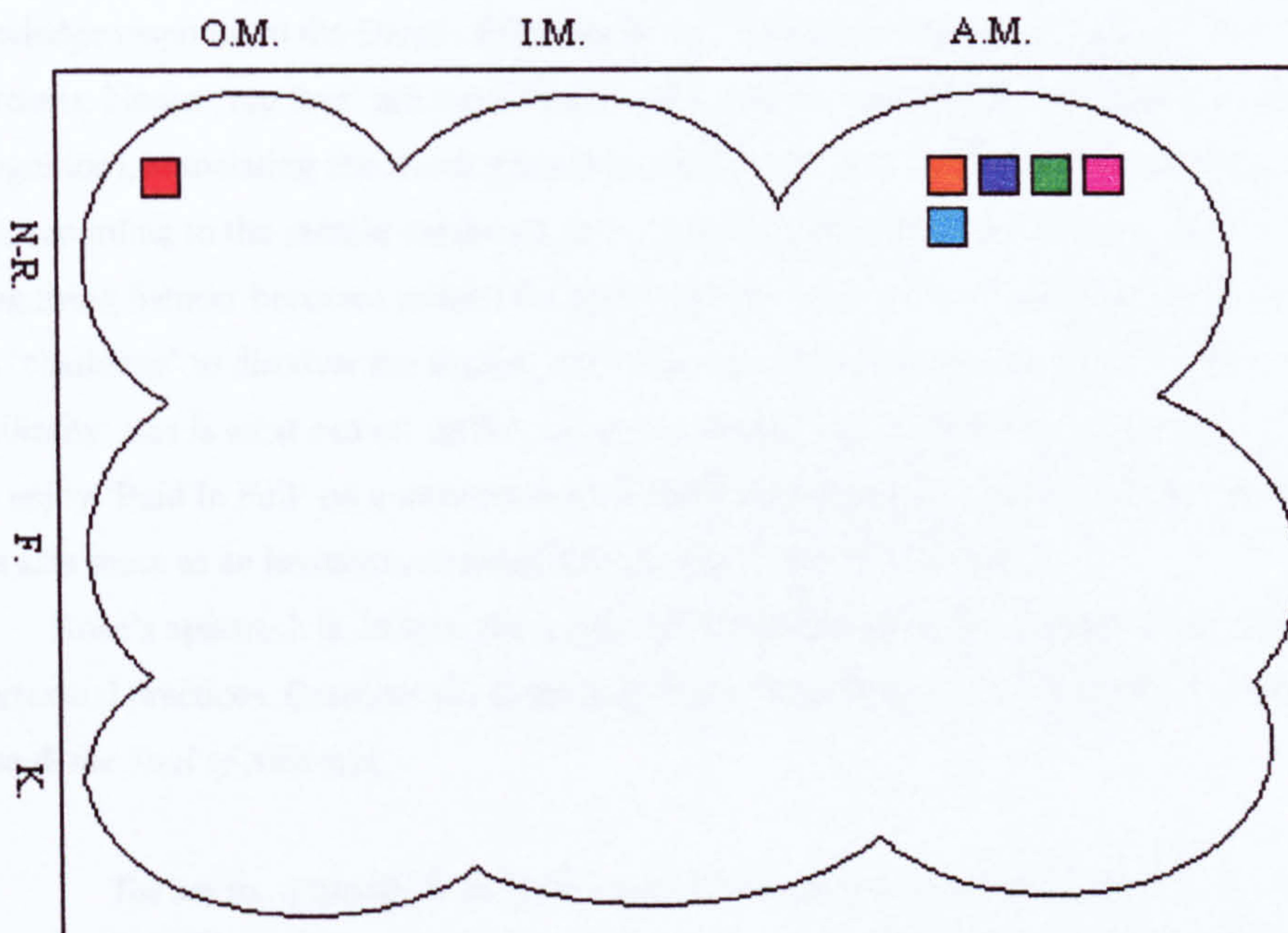


Figure 41. Implied listener positions as discussed in connection with 'Bonita Applebum'.

The implied listener model as a meta-critical tool

To bring this analytical chapter to a close we will, at this point, broaden our scope to include some examples of existing critical writing on hip hop. In this way we will be able to better understand the usefulness of our implied listener model as a meta-critical tool. In the preceding analyses, we have seen how the implied listener model can highlight the way in which texts can position their own 'typical listener', and how varying interpretations are still possible due to the difference in musical capital brought to the text by each listener. We will again see the effects of these processes in the examples that follow. By discussing each extract in reference to the implied listener model, we will be able to see which implied listener positions the authors are reflecting. This, in turn, will enable us to see how, in some cases, the text prioritises a particular interpretation, while in others alternative interpretations are equally possible. We will begin with an example from Tricia Rose's *Black Noise*.

Rap fans can recognize that Eric B. & Rakim took the bass line for their cut “Paid In Full” from Dennis Edwards “Don’t Look Any Further” a popular R&B song that topped the charts only a year earlier. In addition to the musical layering and engineering strategies involved in these soul resurrections, these samples are highlighted, functioning as a challenge to know these sounds, to make connections between the lyrical and musical texts. It affirms black musical history and locates these “past” sounds in the “present”.⁶⁵

Here, we can see that Rose is interpreting ‘Paid In Full’ in terms of a knowledge response to appropriative material. Additionally, she refers to the transparency of technique, in the phrase ‘these samples are highlighted’. But while not wishing to disagree with Rose, we can see that there is more to be said. It is indeed the case that contemporary listeners to ‘Paid In Full’ were likely to experience a knowledge response to the Dennis Edwards Break. However, with the passing of time, this likelihood decreases. Newer ‘rap fans’ are more likely to experience a familiarity response (or even non-recognition), associating the Break primarily with Eric B. & Rakim’s track (or with one of nine other uses, according to the sample database). Of course, codification is still possible, and so even the non-recognising listener becomes primed for familiarity on re-encountering the Break. Rose interprets this as a ‘challenge’ to discover the source, and of course this is the case for those listeners experiencing familiarity: this is what can set up the ‘tip-of-the-tongue’ state. However, non-recognising listeners can still enjoy ‘Paid In Full’ on a musical level without reference to a source, and the codification in this case acts more as an invitation to familiarity, a lure to the ‘challenge’.

Rose’s approach is, in fact, the ‘standard’ academic method for interpreting hip hop’s intertextual practices. Consider the following, from Craig Werner’s *A Change is Gonna Come: Music, Race & the Soul of America*:

The key to... [‘Strictly Business’]... was EPMD’s sampling of Bob Marley’s “I Shot the Sheriff”. Aware that members of oppressed groups are frequently hired to do the dirty work – black deputies frequently handle arrests in black areas – Marley presented himself as a politically conscious outlaw striking out against the true source of oppression: “I shot the sheriff, but I did not shoot the deputy.” It’s anyone’s guess what the song meant to Eric Clapton, whose record company encouraged him to record it as an implicit apology to black fans after he unwittingly lent support to a right-wing political candidate. Clapton’s version went to number one. Sampling Clapton rather than Marley, EPMD commented on both the minstrel exploitation of black music and the decay of political awareness among blacks since Marley’s time.⁶⁶

Werner’s interpretation is both incisive and astute, and once again relies on a knowledge response to the Break used. Like Rose, he also implies that this knowledge response is widespread (‘Clapton’s version went to number one’). However, not every listener to ‘Strictly Business’ will be familiar with this source. For many listeners, Marley’s original is as well-known, if not better-known, than Clapton’s. For these listeners, we can expect knowledge in terms of the song, but not necessarily in terms of the artist, with codification once again being made possible by the rapid retriggering of the vocal sample (‘I-I-I shot the sheriff’). In this case, the connotations of the use of Clapton’s version of

the source are less likely to be understood, with meaning more likely to be drawn from the combination of the vocal sample with the scratched in phrase, 'Don't get too close because you might get shot' (EPMD further distance their track from any potential political interpretation by excluding the phrase 'but I did not shoot the deputy' from their track).

But if the approach taken by Rose and Werner is the most commonly used one in academic writing on hip hop, it is not the only one. Consider the following extract from Dick Hebdige's *Cut 'N' Mix*, which discusses 'The Adventures Of Grandmaster Flash On The Wheels Of Steel':

The record is a startling mix of different sounds: the bass line from the rock group Queen's 1980 hit *Another One Bites The Dust* is mixed with a riff from *Good Times*, Chic's disco hit from 1979. These are then mixed with snatches from four or five other rap records. Finally, towards the end of the record, a man and a young child read out extracts from an incomprehensible fairy story. All this is jumbled up and scratched together... Flash keeps holding the needle back, tearing great empty holes in the web of sound. But however long he waits, he always comes back to hit the mix with the right sound at the right time... At one point he mixes in a snatch of Latin salsa. The screaming horns and the eight-bar beat jar against the steady 4/4 time of the Queen bass... The record is about taking sound to the very edge of chaos and pulling it back from the brink at the very last millisecond.⁶⁷

Here, Hebdige begins in 'standard' academic mode, using a knowledge response to the Queen and Chic Breaks in 'Adventures...'. However, this is rapidly abandoned for a codified non-recognition based interpretation of the remainder of the record. Of course, codified non-recognition still allows for the pleasure of technical admiration, and it is in these terms that Hebdige couches his discussion. Of course, this does not necessarily imply that Hebdige is himself unaware of the sources of most of the Breaks in 'Adventures...' – it may well be that such detail was considered irrelevant, given that the main subject of *Cut 'N' Mix* is reggae, with the chapter on hip hop only being added in the book's third edition. What is important here is that Hebdige's analysis shows that a non-recognition response, whilst preventing a connotation based interpretation, does not debar the listener from gaining some understanding of what a record is 'about'. Once again, the crucial factor in this is codification. It is, of course, possible to write about hip hop in traditional, musical-affective terms – indeed, in the case of tracks comprised principally of original material, this approach is inevitable (as Hebdige shows in his discussion of Grandmaster Flash and the Furious Five's 'The Message') – but where Breaks are involved, to do so would suggest a basic failure to understand the music. Hip hop, in short, insists on codification.

Of further interest here is the fact that Hebdige does use a knowledge response to the Chic and Queen Breaks in 'Adventures...'. With regard to the Chic Break, this is understandable: the sound-element is central to the track, and so not to mention it would undermine any analysis. However, the Queen Break only makes a brief appearance, so why is it named in Hebdige's analysis? Once again, the work of this thesis can help us understand this. As we saw in our own analysis of 'Adventures...', the inclusion of the Queen Break is the culmination of an elaborately constructed sonic 'trick' which, although comprehensible without reference to the source, is much more forceful when understood

through a knowledge response. Thus, Hebdige uses his knowledge response to ensure that his readers understand that he has understood. (It should be noted, though, that this is somewhat undermined by his claim that the '[l]atin salsa' (presumably the 'Eighth Wonder' Break) 'jar[s] against the... Queen bass', given that the two occur some three minutes apart within 'Adventures...'.)

Of course, Hebdige's interpretation of 'Adventures...' is not the only one available to us. Interesting comparisons can be drawn with Russell A. Potter's discussion of the track, from his *Spectacular Vernaculars*:

Dropping the needle down on Chic's "Good Times" or the Sugar Hill Gang's "8th Wonder," he immediately lifted, dropped, and lifted again without missing a beat. Namechecks were provided by cuts from his own earlier records (the Furious Five's "Birthday Party"), Blondie's "Rapture," and an old radio sign-on for "The Official Adventures of Flash" [Gordon]. Cowboy provided his signature "Say ho, ho!" call-and-response, and in an inspired moment, Flash cut in a snippet from what sounds like a fairy tale record: "Why don't you tell me a story?" pleads a child's voice; "Well, it went pretty much like this," answers a male voice in a condescending tone; in an instant Flash breaks in with a blast of nine heavy percussive scratches that tear up the audio fabric and kick into yet another perfectly timed backbeat. "Adventures" was more than a sonic bricolage, it was a tactical neural implant, a short circuit in the inner wiring of the music industry, a tone-poem to chaos that brought the street back into the studio.⁶⁸

Here, while Potter does not name all the sources involved in 'Adventures...', he adopts a more knowledge response-based approach than Hebdige. However, the connotations drawn from this are limited to those which have an immediate effect within the track (specifically, those which incorporate Flash's name). Ultimately, his interpretation is the same as Hebdige's: what is important about 'Adventures...' is its sense of controlled chaos and its demonstration of Flash's technical ability. Of course, to a large extent, this is what 'Adventures...' is 'about', but as our own analysis showed, there are subtle musical ideas operating within the track which can only be accessed through the combined structural/musicological/Break-centred taken there. For instance, neither Hebdige nor Potter mention the appearance of the 'Apache' Break towards the start of the track which, as we saw, plays both a vital structural role in the early part of 'Adventures...' and forms a tangible reference to hip hop's earlier performative practices.

Additionally, Break-centred analysis also contains a degree of self-limitation, through its acceptance of the fact that not all Breaks are understandable in terms of their source, and so are necessarily only understandable in primarily affective terms. For example, both Hebdige and Potter mention the 'fairy tale' section of 'Adventures...', with neither referring to its source. While our analysis does note this source, it allowed for the extreme obscurity of the sound-element: even the normally encyclopaedic *Rap Attack* by David Toop concedes that this is one source 'which Flash is keeping a firm secret'⁶⁹ (subsequently, of course, the information was disclosed at some point). In allowing for this obscurity, Break-centred analysis accepts that most listeners will be unable to make any interpretations based on a knowledge response: thus we see that an affective interpretation of the 'fairy tale' section is not only valid, but it is the *only* feasible interpretation.

Chapter summary

The analyses of this chapter have provided us with a series of ‘snapshots’ of hip hop in development. As such, before moving on, in the following chapter, to a discussion of the wider implications of these analyses, a note of caution needs to be introduced. Although the first four analyses can be understood to be largely typical of their respective production eras, this should not be taken to mean that all tracks belonging to the same era demonstrate the same type of structural development. The remaining analyses go some way towards clarifying this, but other examples of atypically structured tracks can readily be found: Brother D’s ‘How We Gonna Make The Black Nation Rise’, a first-era track from 1980, demonstrates a fairly regular alternating verse-chorus structure; Main Source’s ‘Live At The Barbeque’, dating from the other end of our time-scale (1991), utilises a looped Break from Bob James’ ‘Nautilus’ which plays unchanged and with little accompaniment for virtually the entire length of the track.⁷⁰ Effectively, this means that structural considerations, while still valid, should be considered as secondary to actual sound content and production techniques in delineating the various eras.

Notwithstanding this, our analyses have thrown sharper focus on five key factors: a tendency towards intensionally-styled repetition; an importance attached to the ‘vertical’ and ‘horizontal’ arrangement of sound-elements; a transparency of technique; the use of Breaks; and the important role of self-referentiality within hip hop. All of these five factors have arisen earlier in this thesis, but they will be restated in the following, conclusory, chapter, in order that their wider implications can be discussed. This does not mean that all five factors will be found in every hip hop track, but rather that all hip hop tracks will display some of the factors, and some will display all.

In this chapter, then, we have shown, through the analysis of selected hip hop tracks, how the theoretical model developed in chapter four can be applied. In addition to this, detail has been added – in particular through the latter ten analyses – to the era-based historical narrative which was begun in chapters two and three. At this point, then, we are ready to return to the single question at the heart of this thesis: how does hip hop work?

6. 'Rap Summary': Conclusions

As noted at the end of the preceding chapter, much of this conclusory chapter will be concerned with the restatement, and further discussion, of the five key factors which our analytical work has isolated as enabling us to answer the question, 'how does hip hop work?' However, before beginning this we should, at this stage, remind ourselves of the ground we have covered so far.

At the outset, we stated two central aims for this thesis. Firstly, we set out to try to answer the above question – how does hip hop work? – in terms of its music; and secondly, we were to attempt to compile a history of the musical changes and developments which took place over our time-scale. It was towards this second aim that we first turned our attention. In chapter two, a general historical overview of the genre was narrated, within which we began to describe the musical changes taking place, siting these alongside contemporaneous changes such as technological developments and the shifting pattern of record labels which can be considered important to the genre.

Chapter three further developed this musical history, consolidating the changes described in the second chapter within a model of four production eras. This was achieved through a broader discussion of the techniques involved in creating hip hop, and this also served as groundwork towards the approach which was to be taken in the remainder of the thesis.

In chapter four, our focus shifted towards gaining an understanding of how hip hop works. To this end, a model was constructed around the idea of an implied listener, based on Wolfgang Iser's work on literary reception theory. This model enabled us to see various possibilities of text/listener interaction with regard to degrees of intertextuality within the text and source-recognition by the listener. Additionally, we discussed a different type of recognition – codification – wherein the listener recognises the fact of intertextuality irrespective of any potential source-recognition. This, it was claimed, is important since it both enables and enhances recognition in terms of sources, and thus prioritises some implied listener positions over others.

Finally, in chapter five, a series of analyses of individual hip hop tracks was provided, serving two purposes. Firstly, our analyses made it possible for us to see how the largely theoretical work of the preceding chapter could be applied to actual examples. Secondly, our historical model of production eras was given greater dimension through the analyses, as changes in both macro-structural arrangement and the amount and type of intertextual material present could readily be identified.

Which brings us back to the end of the preceding chapter, where we promised further elucidation of five key factors central to hip hop. This follows below.

The tendency towards intensionally-styled repetition

Evidence for this tendency can readily be found within our selected analyses: the elongated repetition of the 'Good Times' bass line in 'Rapper's Delight'; the variation within simple repetition found in the interplay between drum machine and clap track in 'Sucker MCs'; the similar effect achieved in 'The Show', with the 'sandbox shuffle' replacing the clap track. Furthermore, it has been seen that repetition of this type can be used both in isolation – forming virtually the entire musical soundbed of a track – or in combination with other ideas.

As we saw in chapter three (through the work of Dick Bradley and Richard Middleton), intensional repetition is primarily associated with African-American music, and so it is no surprise that hip hop, being essentially an African-American form of music, should make frequent use of the technique. However, hip hop's use of intensionally-styled repetition, while undoubtedly informed by musical-cultural associations, developed as a specific response to a need within its earliest audience. Here, of course, I am referring to Kool Herc's 'merry-go-round', and the extension of breakbeats through repetition.

The concept of need-fulfilment brings us, as Middleton explains at some length, within 'the whole problematic of desire and enjoyment'¹ – that is, repetition within popular music is intrinsically bound up with pleasure. Roland Barthes' famous *plaisir/jouissance* dichotomy will be useful to our investigation here, and our understanding will be further enhanced by the introduction of some musical-historical perspective. This comes from Andrew Chester's groundwork on intensional/extensional development: 'If jazz aimed to transform intensional into extensional, musical structures, rock sought a reverse path.'²

While Middleton is rightly wary of an oversimplified application of the *plaisir/jouissance* dichotomy to the two types of musical repetition, there is a sense in which the two concepts can be linked. Extensional repetition, it could be argued, tends towards *plaisir*, with its affirmation of the syntactical codes of harmonic development, theme and variation, melody and counterpoint. Intensional repetition, on the other hand, tends towards *jouissance*: its concerns are asemantic, rapturous. These relationships are not exclusive – to claim this would deny the ability of extensional Western classical music to 'send' the listener (again, I am borrowing this term from Middleton).³ However, one has only to observe the crowd at a hip hop DJ's performance, heads nodding to the pulse of the record, to witness a kind of collective *jouissance*. Hip hop slang provides further evidence here, in the term used to describe the listener's positive reaction to a track: *feeling it*.

Structurally, then, and in terms of genre relations, hip hop is less allied with jazz (although, again, it would be wrong to deny the jazz listener access to *jouissance*), and more with rock music. At the risk of over-generalisation, we can think of 'rock music', here, as a metonymic phrase which also refers to funk and soul. The primacy of the affective in these genres can readily be seen: think of a J.B.'s ostinato; or Otis Redding at Monterey, exhorting his band to repeat a series of climactic musical punches during 'I've Been Loving You Too Long'.⁴

But while this fact is of some interest in itself – if only in the siting of hip hop in a wider musical framework – the real relevance of hip hop's relationship to *jouissance*, and to other genres which prioritise it for the listener, will become apparent below, following our discussion of the five key factors involved in the genre.

The 'vertical' and 'horizontal' arrangement of sound-elements

One advantage of the type of analysis diagram introduced in this thesis is the clear depiction of both the 'vertical' (i.e. synchronic) and 'horizontal' (i.e. diachronic) arrangement of sound-elements. Obviously, all music consists of sounds operating in combination in this way, but what is particularly noticeable about hip hop is the overriding importance of digital, binary selection in the arrangement of

sound. Due, in a large part, to the technology employed in the construction of hip hop tracks, along with the generic conventions developed from DJing practices, sound-elements within hip hop tend to simply either be 'on' or 'off' – present or absent. The only exception to this found in our analyses was the crescendo within the drum machine pattern found towards the end of 'Planet Rock'.

What this tendency towards binary selection of sound-elements means is that their arrangement is of more importance within hip hop than in other genres. The tendency towards intensionally styled repetition coupled with a comparatively small amount of intensional variation within the repetition (the 'blank intensionality' mentioned in chapter three) means that the musical interest of hip hop is principally formed through the varying methods of arrangement.

As we have seen in our analyses, hip hop allows for considerable variety in this area. Some tracks gain their impetus through a principally synchronic structure – 'The Adventures Of Grandmaster Flash On The Wheels Of Steel', (again, referred to as 'Adventures...' hereafter) for example; others work in a more diachronic fashion – the combined appearance of the 'Oh my God' scratching and the 'Is it real?' in 'The Show'; others again combine the two, and in various ways – 'Rapper's Delight' employs both synchronic 'stacking' of sound-elements in the overlaying of guitar and keyboards on the central bass riff, and diachronic positioning at two levels, with the simple binary on/off of the layered sounds and the (slightly) more developmental introduction of the keyboards following the bridge section. Similarly, 'Bring The Noise' exhibits both synchronic and diachronic arrangement of sound-elements, here creating a sense of a verse/chorus structure by the alternate (diachronic) use of synchronic sets of sound-elements.

Furthermore, it can be seen that it is very often the case that this variety in musical structure is underpinned by a central, largely unchanging, rhythm track. This may consist of a repeated drum machine pattern, another rhythmic sound-element, such as 'The Show's 'sandbox shuffle', or a looped section of appropriate or interpretive material – or, indeed, any combination of the three.

What this means is that the *jouissance*-producing, intensionally styled repetition is often focused within the more rhythmic elements of a track, leaving a 'sonic space' in which producers can incorporate the various arrangements of sound-elements discussed above. This does not mean that this always happens, of course: 'Sucker MCs', for example, largely leaves this space blank. This can be understood if we turn once again to the history of the genre as a whole, in which the third production era was seen as a fresh start, beginning with Run DMC, bringing back to hip hop a simplicity which had been lost through the second era, and which would be gradually built on, leading to the fourth.

Transparency of technique

Another of the key factors involved in hip hop tracks is a transparency of technique. That is, rather than any attempt being made to hide the fact that hip hop is largely constructed from Breaks, various methods are used to promote that fact to the listener. Several examples can be found within our analyses. Firstly, there is the use of a widely-known source with minimal alteration, as with the 'Good Times' sound-elements in 'Rapper's Delight'. Secondly there is the revelation of a source despite alteration through scratching, either by inclusion of an unaltered playing of the source adjacent to the scratching, as with the 'Another One Bites The Dust' Break in 'Adventures...', or by the consistency

of timbre described in chapters three and four, as can be heard in the 'Fresh' scratching in 'The Show'. Finally, we can see the inclusion of paramusical events which refer to sources, either directly – such as Slick Rick's exhortation, 'Ayo Doug, do that record 'Jam On The Groove'' in 'The Show' – or indirectly – the title 'The Adventures Of Grandmaster Flash On The Wheels Of Steel' implies a DJing performance, therefore the playing of records, therefore the use of Breaks.

Thus hip hop is partially productive of, and partially reflective of, the widely held cultural assumption that the genre is created solely through Break use. Furthermore, where original material is used, it is often treated as if it were a Break – the drum machine pattern of 'Sucker MCs' repeats a regular, unchanging four-bar pattern, as if it were a looped sample; the descending synth line in 'The Show' appears only once, disallowing any potential variation on it that would demonstrate its originality.

What this means is that hip hop creates its own frame of reference for the listener. In semiotic terms, the signifier is the actual sound-element as heard, and its primary signified is that sound-element's musical sense within a track, but the transparency of technique encourages the listener to go on to draw connotations of intertextuality. Or, to paraphrase again, hip hop encourages codification, and as we have seen, codification is the enabling conduit of an understanding of hip hop in intertextual terms.

There is a danger, here, that this argument might be seen as circular: we have discussed hip hop in terms of its use of Breaks, only to discover that in its use of Breaks, hip hop encourages codification, and therefore an understanding in these terms. But if the argument is circular, it is because the process is. The key, of course, is that, as we saw in chapter four, producers are listeners too. Hip hop encourages listeners to codify Breaks, and so when the listener is a producer, this prioritisation of codification feeds back into their work, and is reproduced afresh.

But what is important here is not so much the circularity of the process – after all, all musicians are listeners, and will incorporate ideas from what they hear into their own performances – but rather the fact that it is a metatextual concept that is being reproduced, instead of an intratextual musical idea. Hip hop's constant reiteration of the idea of Breaks being used so familiarises the concept that any novelty value in the use of a Break *per se* is nullified, freeing both listener and producer to concentrate on how the particular Break is being used, and what its effects are.

Turning once again to the types of pleasure available to the hip hop listener, it can be seen that one potential effect of the codification made possible by transparency of technique is what can be termed the 'pleasure of admiration'. That is, having codified the Break, even the non-recognising listener can gain an understanding of the sound of the original (as we saw in chapter four within our discussion of autonomous Breaks). With this understanding in place, the listener can then go on to appreciate the technical ability in the DJ or producer's transformative techniques. The pleasure of witnessing technical virtuosity is well-established in music: we can imagine this same pleasure being experienced by listeners to Nicolo Paganini in the early nineteenth century or by progressive rock fans of the 1970s.*

* It was, perhaps, an over-assumption of the listener's capacity for this pleasure that led to the self-indulgence for which progressive rock is often criticised.

The use of Breaks

The removal of conceptual novelty in Break use by prioritised codification means that a discussion of the use of Breaks in our analytical examples needs to focus on what effects are achieved, and how those effects are produced. Three types of effects can be isolated, which can be seen to be roughly equivalent to the three main reception categories in our implied listener model.

The first effect of the majority of Breaks is musical. That is, the sound-element contains material which interacts with other surrounding sound-elements to create the impression that what we are hearing is music. Of course, the type of musical content varies from Break to Break – some may be principally rhythmic (as with the ‘Apache’ segment in ‘Adventures...’ or the ‘Funky Drummer’ in ‘Bring The Noise’); others may be mainly harmonic (as with the guitar and keyboard sound-elements in ‘Rapper’s Delight’); others again are melodic in their nature (the ‘Inspector Gadget’ Break in ‘The Show’, for instance). This musical sense is always the first signified of the Break, regardless of whether any further signification can be drawn from it. Thus, while all three of our reception categories allow for this musical sense to be apparent to the listener, we can see an equivalence with the category of non-recognition, since this debar any further signification.

The second effect is that which is connected with our reception category of familiarity. As we saw in chapter four, there are several factors within hip hop which promote the likelihood of this response: the use of marginal elements from originals, alteration of the actual sound of the source material, and the surrounding presence of other, different, sound-elements frustrating the listener’s attempts to locate the source. The result of this is an increased likelihood of the listener being left in a ‘tip-of-the-tongue’ state.

Again, while – as in chapter four – stressing that this may be largely an unconscious process, the listener is left in a state of being aware that they may be able to pin down the original, and knowing that hip hop often uses Breaks to impart extra-musical connotations, that they would gain a better understanding of the track were they able to locate the source, but they are stymied in their attempts to do so. Thus the listener is left in a somewhat pendent, unresolved state – a state that, as we saw earlier, leaves memory ‘traces’ which enhance future recognition of the Break. Additionally (if somewhat contentiously), it could be claimed that there is once again a pleasurable element involved in this state. Initially, this may seem unlikely – pleasure is not something readily associated with irresolution. However, it can be argued that the tension created by the lack of resolution can lead to a type of pleasure best described through analogy. This pleasurable tension can be seen to be akin to that of the nervous excitement felt on being strapped into a roller-coaster, or that of watching a movie where *you* know the killer is lurking behind the door, but the ever-nearing protagonist is unaware.

Finally, allied with the knowledge response in the listener, is the capability of Breaks to bring forth wider, extramusical, connotations. Once again, examples are readily available in our analyses. We saw how the ‘Brothers and sisters’ sound-element in ‘Bring The Noise’ could lead to multiple layers of meaning, and with the Queen/Chic ‘trick’ in ‘Adventures...’, Grandmaster Flash not only creates extratextual meaning, but does so by playing with the conventions of hip hop itself.

In order to understand the effect this type of Break use has on the listener, we must once again turn to Barthes’ *plaisir/jouissance* dichotomy. Whereas earlier, we saw that intensionally styled

repetition leads more towards *jouissance* in the listener, here the effect is more akin to *plaisir*. That is, *plaisir* is concerned with the affirmation of syntactical codes, with an intellectual satisfaction of knowing one has understood something. Thus, when the listener experiences a knowledge response, and feels themselves to have ‘got the meaning’ connected with a particular use of a Break, they experience *plaisir*: they have confirmed to themselves that they have sufficient understanding of both the manner in which intertextuality works within hip hop and the wider cultural environment referred to.

Self-referentiality

The last of our five key factors is the tendency towards self-referentiality within hip hop. Tricia Rose has noted that, as far as lyrical content is concerned, ‘[r]eferences to the rapper and his or her DJ are extremely common.’⁵ However, the type of self-referentiality with which we are concerned here is not so much the individual naming of an artist within their track, but a more general referencing of hip hop – its history and techniques – as a whole. Again, this has happened lyrically (indeed, this thesis begins with such an instance), but our concerns here are principally musical.

Examples from our analyses are readily available: we saw how both the ‘Trans-Europe Express’ and ‘The Mexican’ Breaks in ‘Planet Rock’ could be understood as referencing earlier live hip hop performances. A similar effect was seen in connection with the appearance of the ‘Apache’ Break in ‘Adventures...’; and in the same track we saw a referencing of ‘Rapper’s Delight’ in the use of the ‘Good Times’ Break. Additionally, we saw how one of the many connotations that could be drawn from the ‘Brothers and sisters’ Break in ‘Bring The Noise’ was a reference to an earlier Public Enemy track containing the same Break.

Of course, the roots of this self-referentiality lie partially in the desire for commercial success: knowing that both ‘Trans-Europe Express’ and ‘The Mexican’ were popular tracks in his live sets, it seems obvious that Bambaataa would include them in ‘Planet Rock’ as a means of aiming towards popularity for the record. However, it can readily be seen that this is not the whole reason behind self-referentiality. For example, while the ‘Funky Drummer’ Break was already popular by the time of ‘Bring The Noise’, it can hardly be claimed that its brief appearance therein is an attempt to make the record more popular: it is difficult to imagine somebody buying the record for four bars of ‘Funky Drummer’, when there were plenty of other records which featured it more prominently. Again, although Grandmaster Flash uses several earlier Sugar Hill records in ‘Adventures...’, the cross-cutting between them and linking of musical ideas discussed in our analysis means that the overall effect is that of a purposeful citing of hip hop history, rather than a simple, abridged, ‘Sugar Hill greatest hits’. (This is the difference between hip hop and medley records, such as the ‘Stars on 45’ series popular in the 1980s.)

Furthermore, it should be remembered that one of the important concepts at the heart of live hip hop was the search for originality in material being used. With this being the case, then the re-use of material which has already appeared in hip hop tracks must be interpreted as a deliberate self-referential tactic. Of course, as we have seen, this intrageneric self-referentiality can have a variety of uses. References may be simply historical, pointing towards hip hop’s own past (a kind of ‘era-

synecdoche', to paraphrase Philip Tagg); but they may also be used in a Signifyin(g) way, as was seen in the 'LL Cool J' sound-element in 'Beat Biter'.

This self-referentiality can once again be understood within the interpretive framework of Barthes' typology of pleasure. The effect of self-referentiality is similar to that described above in connection with Break use in general: the listener experiences *plaisir*; there is an intellectual satisfaction in having both recognised the source of the Break and understood the 'meaning' of its recontextualised inclusion. However, because in this case the sources being referred to are not the originals, but secondary ones explicitly connected with hip hop, the effect is that the listener has an increased likelihood of experiencing this *plaisir* with increased exposure to the genre. Essentially, hip hop becomes more rewarding the more one hears it.

How hip hop works

Finally, then, we are in a position in which we can answer the question that was posed at the very beginning of this thesis: how does hip hop work? The answer involves the interaction of the five key factors discussed above, and is as follows.

Through its transparency of technique, hip hop promotes codification. Thus the listener understands hip hop in these terms and is able to recognise Breaks within the music, irrespective of their knowledge, or otherwise, of the source. A second effect of codification is to enhance familiarity within the listener when the Break is encountered again. This cycle of codification and familiarity is capable of making originally obscure sound-elements well-known to the listener within the context of hip hop, and in this manner, autonomous Breaks are formed. Whilst all Breaks can be used in a self-referential fashion, autonomous Breaks, being the most likely to produce the kind of tip-of-the-tongue state discussed earlier, provide the best example of the effect of self-referentiality. The listener is left with an unresolved question about which further listening to hip hop will provide more information whilst rarely giving an answer. Thus, with increased listening to hip hop comes increasing *plaisir*: the listener becomes more adept at understanding the intrageneric references present. The more one listens to hip hop, the more rewarding it becomes, and the autonomous Break, while still provoking a 'feeling of knowing', becomes less problematic. (Of course, the basic question is still unanswered, and so if and when a listener does discover the source of a Break, there is always a moment of satisfaction).

Furthermore, while the listener is increasingly rewarded with increased exposure, hip hop also provides both *plaisir* and *jouissance* through its use of non-autonomous Breaks and its intensionally styled repetition. This double-edged pleasure is accessible to even the casual listener to hip hop, so it can be seen that the genre provides both instant gratification (which does not lessen with increased exposure) and ever greater rewards over time.

But while it is increasingly rewarding, hip hop remains increasingly problematic. It must be remembered that we have seen that hip hop is constantly in process, endlessly refusing finality. Every 'answer' is, or has the potential to be another 'question'. Each use of a Break can comment on an earlier one, while remaining open to the possibility of subsequent uses commenting further again.

A history in eras

As we are aware, besides answering the question of how hip hop works, the second principle aim of this thesis was to outline a musical history of the genre. Through much of this thesis we have used the concept of four production eras within our discussion of hip hop's musical development. A recap of these four eras at this point will serve to recapitulate the musical-historical narrative we have developed.

Hip hop's first production era ran from 1979 to around 1984, although its predominance began to decline after 1981, with the coming of the second-production era. As we saw in chapters two and three, the central figure within hip hop at this time was the MC, and this, combined with the nascent genre's having to negotiate with the traditional working practices of record labels such as Sugar Hill, Winley and Enjoy, led to a predominance of original and interpretive, rather than appropriative, material. Samplers, at this time, were little used, and DJs frequently had little, if any, input into recordings, despite their names appearing on the resulting discs. Structurally, we have seen that first-era tracks tended towards macro-structural simplicity, with intensionally-styled repetition of sound-elements being heard in combination with simple binary changes.

The second production era within our history of hip hop existed around the years 1982 and 1983. During this time, the sound of hip hop was predominantly electronic, with synthesisers and drum machines largely taking the place of the studio-based musicians heard on first-era recordings. While traditional live hip hop DJing techniques were still absent from second-era recordings, some DJs began to make their mark by applying the performative ideas associated with DJing to record production. In particular, we have seen this with 'Planet Rock', where Breaks used by Afrika Bambaataa in his live DJing work were recreated on synthesisers and used in the construction of the track. Of course, we have also seen that in other second-era tracks, the tendency is towards original, rather than interpretive material, with studio musicians using synthesisers to create 'new' material. Structurally, the second production era was similar to the first, with simple macro-structures once again dominant, and little in the way of internal divisions within a track.

Our third production era ran from 1983 to approximately 1987. As we have seen through our analyses of the preceding chapter, this era encompassed considerable development within hip hop, beginning with Run DMC's 'back-to-basics' approach and leading to the richer, more complex fourth era. As we saw in chapter two, the third era arrived packaged as a reaction against the increasing showbiz kitsch associated with the second, yet it was, at the musical level, a development of, rather than a change from, the earlier sound. Despite early third-era records doing away with much (if not all) of the melodic or harmonic material heard on second-era records, the drum machine programming carried strong resonances of the type of patterns heard on earlier tracks.

However, this is not to say that the third production era did not differ greatly from those that had preceded it. It was during this time that DJs began to be regularly heard on records – we have seen many examples in our analyses of both rhythmic and wildstyle scratching on second-era tracks – and this was also the era during which the practice of human beatboxing was at its height. Of course, with DJs beginning to make their mark on recorded hip hop, there was a shift away from interpretive material and towards appropriative material, as can be seen in the implied listener position diagrams

associated with our analyses. Structurally, hip hop's third production era showed greater variety than those which had preceded it. While some tracks adhered to the relatively simplistic structures of earlier hip hop records, others (such as 'The Show') demonstrated much greater macro-structural variety, and there was a more generalised shift towards tracks structured around vocal verses (each of approximately the same length), with fairly regular instrumental breaks in between (see, for example, 'Beat Biter' or 'Raw').

Additionally, during the third era (and again as we saw in the second chapter), hip hop began to become more of a marketable commodity, with new record labels such as Def Jam and Cold Chillin' springing up to replace the older ones noted above. Importantly, these new labels entered into commercial partnerships with major corporations, allowing hip hop to gain an ever wider audience. Of course, with a wider audience comes an increased likelihood of appropriative material being noticed by copyright holders, and so it can be seen that hip hop's increasing success during the third era was simultaneously sowing the seeds of litigation which would bring the ensuing production era to a close.

Finally, the fourth production era held sway from around 1988 to 1991, with samplers replacing drum machines at the heart of the hip hop sound. In particular, the fourth era saw an increase in the use of looped samples, with loops of melodic and harmonic material appearing more frequently. Additionally, the verse/break macro-structural tendency was developed further, with many fourth-era tracks displaying a macro-structure closer to that of the 'traditional' pop song, with regular verses and choruses. The dominance of the sampler in hip hop's fourth production era meant that appropriative material came strongly to the fore at this time, firmly establishing the widely-held assumption regarding hip hop as a primarily appropriative genre. The other effect of the centrality of the sampler to the fourth production era was a broadening of hip hop's sonic palette. While, as we have seen, the central 'canon' of soul, funk and jazz sources remained important to hip hop, a wider variety of material within this canon began to be used. If the beginning of the fourth production era was marked by the frequent use of looped drum samples from James Brown tracks, its end saw the sound of hip hop being influenced by a much broader range of soul, funk and jazz sources, as well as a wider eclecticism as evidenced by Prince Paul's production on De La Soul's *3 Feet High And Rising*.

It was, of course, this eclecticism with regard to source material, coupled with hip hop's increasing visibility, that ultimately led to the end of the fourth production era. As more and more copyright holders became aware that their material was being re-presented within hip hop tracks, so the pressure grew on producers to work around the potential for litigation, either by legally 'clearing' samples before incorporating them in tracks, or by using smaller and smaller samples in less recognisable ways.

Closing comments

It is, perhaps, the very open-endedness, the cyclical nature of the genre mentioned earlier (see page 155), that has led to hip hop's becoming an enduring musical force. However, it must be remembered that this thesis has dealt with a particular historical period in the genre's development. Post-1991, extramusical factors have become increasingly important for hip hop. The growing popularity of the genre has meant that the relative freedom of Break use crucial to our understanding

has become impossible, with copyright owners growing cognisant of the fact that they can charge for the use of 'their' sounds. More importantly, perhaps, any consideration of hip hop's musical value has become overshadowed by the ongoing debate over the genre's glorification of antisocial behaviour, the constant eulogising of drugs-and-guns culture ('Fears over lure of rap's violence and obscenity' – headline in *The Daily Telegraph*, August 21, 2000).

However, this debate is concerned with hip hop's lyrical content (often reinforced visually through media such as record covers and videos), and as was pointed out in the introduction, that is quite specifically not what this thesis was aimed at addressing. Of course, this debate is important (and, for the record, it is my belief that there is some validity to the claims of both those who state that hip hop promotes violent behaviour and those who state that it simply reflects the violence already present in society, with both views being oversimplistic visions of a complex truth involving a combination of the two) – but it is necessarily preceded by an understanding of how hip hop works as music.

This thesis has presented this understanding. Through the analyses of the preceding chapter – informed by the historical periodisation of chapters two and three and the theoretical work of chapter four – we have formulated an understanding of the pleasures associated with listening to hip hop, along with the ways in which the genre encourages further listening.

Of course, the approach taken within this thesis does have its limits. For example, while the decision to focus on the musical (instrumental) side of the genre, rather than the lyrical has been beneficial to this work in many ways, it has meant that our discussion has been limited: the example of the analysis of 'The Show' demonstrates this well. Here, some discussion of lyrical content was present, and the result was a more rounded analysis than some of the others. While this limitation was predictable, the second way in which this thesis finds its limits came about during the development of the theoretical model of the implied listener.

While this model was originally intended to show how intertextuality within hip hop might create meaning, it developed into a model of how intertextuality is, itself, understood by/operates on the listener. What this has meant is that while the implied listener model works well in the ways it has been applied within this thesis – as a means of illustrating the shift in content towards appropriative material during our timescale and as a meta-critical tool – it can be seen that it has limitations in that it does not engage directly with connotative meaning. While this effect has been somewhat offset in the analyses by employing Tagg's semiotics of music and Gates' theory of Signifyin(g), further work remains to be done. While space limitations mean that it could not take place here, it would, for example, be a worthwhile project for hip hop – or, indeed music from another genre – to be subjected to a combination of analyses involving the implied listener model from this thesis, along with detailed semiotic work on both music and lyrics.

Finally, it is hoped that this thesis has gone some way to explaining the lure of hip hop as music, demonstrating why so many people get pleasure from listening to it, as well as outlining the musical developments that have taken place within the genre itself. It is also hoped that others will apply the analytical models used herein to later hip hop, extending the ideas to show how producers negotiated the increasing legal and financial implications of their intertextual approach through the 1990s and beyond.

Appendices

Appendix 1: Sources for the 'survey of surveys'.

Singles:

'100 Best Singles', *The Source*, #100 January 1998, selected by contributors.

'Charts' section in *Ego Trip's Book Of Rap Lists*, selected by the authors.

'Lightning Swords of Death' and 'Lightning Swords of Death 2' sections in Toop, David, *Rap Attack*, selected by the author.

'Recommended Listening' sections in Fernando, S.H. Jr., *The New Beats*, selected by the author.

'Essential Funk Recordings' section in Vincent, Rickey, *Funk*, selected by the author (only hip hop recordings taken into consideration).

'Discography' sections in *The Vibe History of Hip Hop*, selected by the authors.

'Playlist' section in Werner, Craig, *A Change Is Gonna Come*, selected by the author (only hip hop recordings taken into consideration).

Albums:

'100 Best Albums', *The Source*, #100 January 1998, selected by contributors.

'Charts' section in *Ego Trip's Book Of Rap Lists*, selected by the authors.

'Lightning Swords of Death 3' section in Toop, David, *Rap Attack*, selected by the author.

'Recommended Listening' sections in Fernando, S.H. Jr., *The New Beats*, selected by the author.

'Essential Funk Recordings' section in Vincent, Rickey, *Funk*, selected by the author (only hip hop recordings taken into consideration).

'Discography' sections in *The Vibe History of Hip Hop*, selected by the authors.

'Partial Discography' section in Rose, Tricia, *Black Noise*, selected by the author.

'100 Best Albums Ever' in *Hip Hop Connection*, #135, March 2000, selected by readership.

Appendix 2: Lyrics to 'The Show'

D = Doug E Fresh

R = MC Ricky D (aka Slick Rick)

B = Both

G = Get Fresh Crew

Intro

Ladies and Gentleman...the most exciting stage show you've ever witnessed...appearing live...Doug E Fresh and the Get Fresh Crew.

Verse 1

R: Excuse me Doug E Fresh...

D: Yes!

R: Have you ever seen a show with fellas on the mic
with one minute rhymes that don't come out right
They bite

D: They never write
 R: That's not polite. Am I lyin'?
 D: No, you're quite right
 R: Well tonight on this very mic you're about to hear
 B: We swear, the best darn rappers of the year
 R: So!
 D: So!
 R: Cheerio!
 D: Yell...
 R: Scream...
 B: Bravo! Also, if you didn't know this is called The Show

Verse 2

R: A-yo, Doug
 D: What?
 R: Put ya Ballys on
 D: Yo, Rick, I was about to but I need a shoehorn
 R: Why?
 D: Because these shoes always hurt my corns
 R: Six minutes...six minutes...six minutes Doug E Fresh, you're on
 Uh uh on, Uh uh on, Uh uh-uh uh-uh uh uh on
 Uh uh on, Uh uh on, Uh uh-uh uh-uh uh uh on
 Ooh ooh ooh, uh uh on

D: Here we go...
 G: Here we go...
 D: Come on...
 G: Come on...
 D: A-here we go...
 G: Here we go...
 D: Come on...
 G: Come on...

D: Yo! Where's Will and Barr?
 R: Well I don't know, they're late
 Told em them the time...oh, I forgot the date
 D: Man you did it again, oh no!
 G: No, here we go, come on
 Here we go, come on
 Here we go, did we miss the show?
 D: Nuh, nuh na nana no we didn't
 R: Word
 D: Nuh nana nana nana, no we didn't
 R: W-w-w-Word
 D: No we didn't
 R: Well don't get us wrong
 'Scuse me Doug E, 'Scuse me Doug E,
 'Scuse me Doug E Fresh, you're on
 Uh uh on...

Verse 3

D: Well it started up on 8th Avenue
 When I made up the name called the...
 G: Get Fresh Crew!
 D: It was me, my two DJ's Chill Will and Barry B
 and my right hand man Ricky D
 I used to rap and sing, makes sounds and things
 And for example, here's a telephone ring...

R: Hello? Is Doug E Fresh in?

D: No, he's not in right now

D: But anyway, no more delay

Just check out the new style I display

Now ya gotta be (fresh)

To rock with (fresh)

And I'm D.O.U.G.I.E (fresh)

And I'm known for the... [fx: Doug E style beatbox]

Not for the... [fx: Fat Boys style beatbox]

The human beatbox or the entertainer

No other title could fit me plainer

In a passing generation I am a remainer

And I'm also known as the beatbox trainer

Cashin' checks, make sound FX

And after I finish rockin' Slick Rick is on next

R: Ya know it

D: Slick Rick...

R: Well, here's a little somethin' that needs to be heard

Doug, I was goin' Downtown

D: Word Rick?

R: Word

D: Sure

R: All alone, no-one to be with

Stepped on the D-train at 205th

I saw a pretty girl

D: So?

R: So I sat beside her

Then she went [fx: roar] like she was Tony the Tiger

I said, oh no, there's been a mistake

Honey, my name's Slick Rick not Frostie Flakes

D: Oh, golly wally

R: She was raisin' hell

She said, oh my name is Maggie but call me Michelle

Michelle, ma belle

Sont les mots qui vont, tres bien ensemble

Tres bien ensemble

Bust a move, we show and prove

A-yo Doug, do that record Jam on the Groove

Outro

D: As you can see, most definitely

We are (fresh)

Chill Will (fresh)

Barry B is (fresh)

Ricky D is (fresh)

And I am, the Original Human Beatbox

The Entertainer, Doug E.... (Fresh)

Lyrics taken from <http://www.ohhla.com>, the online hip hop lyrics archive, where lyrics to all tracks under analysis (along with many others) can be found.

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Endnotes

Introduction

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- ² Rose (1994a); Fernando (1995); Potter (1995).
- ³ Barber (1995), p. 82.
- ⁴ Walser, (1995), p. 291.

⁵ These quotes are from the introduction to the articles: Cosgrove (1987).

⁶ Ice Cube (1990).

⁷ McClary & Walser (1988), p. 278.

⁸ McClary & Walser (1988), p. 280.

Chapter One

¹ Rose (1994a), p. 95.

² Rose (1994a), p. 78.

³ Rose (1994a), p. 89.

⁴ Potter (1995), p. 42.

⁵ Krims (2000), p. 3.

⁶ Gates (1988), p. 88

⁷ Maultsby (1991), p. 191.

⁸ Bradley (1992), p. 32.

⁹ Bradley (1992), p. 33.

¹⁰ Fryer (n.d.).

¹¹ Bradley (1992), p. 44.

¹² Jones (1963), p. 62.

¹³ Chester (1970), *passim*.

¹⁴ Bradley, (1992), p. 34.

¹⁵ Bradley, (1992), p. 44.

¹⁶ Middleton (1983), pp. 238-9.

¹⁷ Middleton (1983), p. 238.

¹⁸ Kristeva (1980), p. 36.

¹⁹ Orr (2003), p. 1.

²⁰ Barthes (1977), p. 147.

²¹ Riffaterre (1980), p. 12.

²² Iser (1974), p. 274.

²³ Iser (1974), p. 275.

²⁴ Holub (1984), p. 83.

²⁵ Iser (1974), p. xii.

²⁶ Fish (1976), p. 56.

²⁷ Fish (1981), p. 7, quoted in Holub (1984), p. 103.

²⁸ Iser (1974), p. 233.

Chapter Two

¹ Much of the historical detail in this opening section is from Fricke & Ahearn (2002), *passim*.

² Boogie Down Productions (1987).

³ MC Shan (2001); Various Artists (n.d.b).

⁴ Grandmaster Flash, quoted in Bent (2002), p. 83.

⁵ Various Artists (1997); Grand Funk Railroad (1991); Beatles, *The* (1967); Bob James (2001).

⁶ Quoted in Toop (2000), p. 65.

⁷ Quoted in Toop (2000), p. 62.

⁸ Grandmaster Flash, quoted in Bent (2002), p. 83.

⁹ Quoted in Rosario (1998).

¹⁰ Various Artists (1992).

¹¹ Various Artists (1997).

¹² Chic (1990).

¹³ Quoted in Toop (2000), p. 76.

¹⁴ Kurtis Blow (1994).

¹⁵ Various Artists (1992).

¹⁶ Various Artists (1992).

¹⁷ Various Artists (1992).

¹⁸ Various Artists (1992).

¹⁹ Kraftwerk (1977); Various Artists (1999); Various Artists (1998c).

²⁰ Various Artists (1998b); Grandmixer D.ST & The Infinity Rappers (1982); Various Artists (n.d.a).

²¹ Dimples D (1983).

²² Run DMC (1984).

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- ²³ Frere-Jones (1999), p. 62.
- ²⁴ T La Rock & Jazzy Jay (1984); Schoolly D (n.d.).
- ²⁵ Various Artists (1994b).
- ²⁶ Silhouettes, The (2001); Various Artists (2000); Beatles, The (2000); Bootles, The (1964); Beatlettes, The (1964).
- ²⁷ Roxanne Shante (1995); UTFO (2001).
- ²⁸ Doug E. Fresh & The Get Fresh Crew (1985).
- ²⁹ Adler (1995), p. 3.
- ³⁰ LL Cool J (1985).
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- ³² Eric B. & Rakim (1987a).
- ³³ KRS One Vs. MC Shan (1996).
- ³⁴ See Garcia (1999), p. 72.
- ³⁵ Word Of Mouth featuring DJ Cheese (1985); Spectrum City (1984).
- ³⁶ LL Cool J (1987).
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- ⁴⁰ AC/DC (1980); Beastie Boys (1985); Boogie Down Productions (1987); Run DMC (1995).
- ⁴¹ Public Enemy (1987).
- ⁴² J.B.'s, The (2000).
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- ⁴⁴ Slick Rick (1988); Big Daddy Kane (1988); EPMD (1988); Ultramagnetic MC's (1988).
- ⁴⁵ Marley Marl (1988).
- ⁴⁶ Lakim Shabazz (1988); Queen Latifah (1989).
- ⁴⁷ LL Cool J (1989).
- ⁴⁸ Stetsasonic (1986); Stetsasonic (1988).
- ⁴⁹ De La Soul (1989).
- ⁵⁰ Jungle Brothers (1989); A Tribe Called Quest (1990).
- ⁵¹ Greg Tate, *Village Voice* review of *People's Instinctive Travels And The Paths Of Rhythm*, quoted in Wood (1999), p. 194.
- ⁵² Gang Starr (1999); Main Source (1991).
- ⁵³ Quoted in McElfresh (1999), pp. 170-171.
- ⁵⁴ De La Soul (1991); A Tribe Called Quest (1991).
- ⁵⁵ Biz Markie (1991).
- ⁵⁶ Gilbert O'Sullivan (1994).
- ⁵⁷ The details of this paragraph are taken from Fernando (1995), pp. 243-244.

Chapter Three

- ¹ Poschardt (1998), p. 163.
- ² Examples of inner sleeve advice were commonplace, especially during the 1960s. These particular examples are from Beatles, The (1966).
- ³ Quoted in Ogg (1999), p. 28.
- ⁴ Various Artists (1992).
- ⁵ LL Cool J (1985).
- ⁶ DJ Jazzy Jeff & The Fresh Prince (1988).
- ⁷ DJ Jazzy Jeff & The Fresh Prince (1988).
- ⁸ T La Rock & Jazzy Jay (1984).
- ⁹ Fernando (1995), p. 226.
- ¹⁰ Quoted in Grabel (1981), p. 32.
- ¹¹ Various Artists (1998b).
- ¹² Quoted in Toop (2000), p. 130. Kraftwerk (1977).
- ¹³ Various Artists (1992); Various Artists (1998b).
- ¹⁴ Various Artists (1994a); George Clinton (1982).
- ¹⁵ Audio Two (1987); Various Artists (1998a).
- ¹⁶ Doug E. Fresh & The Get Fresh Crew (1985); LL Cool J (1985).
- ¹⁷ Quoted in Poschardt (1998), p. 233.
- ¹⁸ Quoted in Rose (1994a), p. 80.
- ¹⁹ Toop (2000), p. 19.

- ²⁰ Gates (1984), p. 287.
- ²¹ Rose (1994a), pp. 87-88.
- ²² Fryer (n.d.)
- ²³ Barthes (1977a), p. 297.
- ²⁴ Stephens (1991), *passim*.
- ²⁵ Stephens (1991), p. 31.
- ²⁶ From, respectively: Spoonie Gee 'Spoonin' Rap' (1980), Grandmaster Flash & The Furious Five 'The Message' (1982), The Sugarhill Gang 'Rapper's Delight' (1979), all available on Various Artists (1992); Newcleus 'Jam On It', Newcleus (1984).
- ²⁷ From, respectively: Grandmaster Flash & The Furious Five 'The Message' (1982), Spoonie Gee 'Spoonin' Rap' (1980), both available on Various Artists (1992); Brother D 'How We Gonna Make the Black Nation Rise' (1980), on Various Artists (1990).
- ²⁸ Examples of 'The Signifying Monkey' and playing the dozens, both quoted in Toop (2000), pp. 29, 32-33.
- ²⁹ See chapters 3 and 4 of Toop (2000).
- ³⁰ LL Cool J 'Rock The Bells' on LL Cool J (1985).
- ³¹ MC Shan 'Beat Biter' (1985) on MC Shan (1991).
- ³² From, respectively: Doug E. Fresh & The Get Fresh Crew 'La-Di-Da-Di', Doug E. Fresh & The Get Fresh Crew (1985); Run DMC 'King Of Rock' (1985) on Run DMC (1995).
- ³³ Stephens (1991), pp. 35, 36.
- ³⁴ Various Artists (1987); Hank Ballard & The Midnighters (1955?); Etta James (1955).
- ³⁵ From respectively, EPMD 'Strictly Business' on EPMD (1988); Boogie Down Productions 'My Philosophy' on Boogie Down Productions (1988).
- ³⁶ From, respectively: Big Daddy Kane 'Raw (Remix)' on Big Daddy Kane (1988); LL Cool J 'Jingling Baby (Remixed But Still Jingling)' on LL Cool J (1990).
- ³⁷ From, respectively: Main Source 'Live At The Barbeque' on Main Source (1991); Big Daddy Kane 'Raw (Remix)' on Big Daddy Kane (1988).
- ³⁸ LL Cool J (1990); A Tribe Called Quest (1990); De La Soul (1989); Gang Starr (1989).
- ³⁹ Public Enemy 'Cold Lampin' With Flavor' on Public Enemy (1988). Lyric as transcribed from liner notes.
- ⁴⁰ *Disorderlies* (Michael Schultz), 1987, Warner Bros. (USA).
- ⁴¹ Disco Three (1984).
- ⁴² Jones (1963), p. 67.
- ⁴³ Jones (1963), p. 68.
- ⁴⁴ Crystal (1987), p. 400.
- ⁴⁵ Whistle (1985); Biz Markie (1993); Doug E. Fresh & The Get Fresh Crew (1985).

Chapter Four

- ¹ McClary and Walser (1988), p. 279.
- ² Holub (1984), pp. 83-84.
- ³ Tagg (1982), p. 42.
- ⁴ Billy Joel (1980); Boogie Down Productions (1987).
- ⁵ Quoted in Toop (2000), p. 66.
- ⁶ Rose (1994a), p. 78.
- ⁷ Interviewed in *Battle Sounds* (John Carluccio) 1997 USA.
- ⁸ Public Enemy (1991).
- ⁹ Sly & The Family Stone (1990).
- ¹⁰ ESG (1980).
- ¹¹ Stezo (1989); Big Daddy Kane (1988); LL Cool J (1990); Public Enemy (1988).
- ¹² Public Enemy (1988); Queen (1980a).
- ¹³ MC Shan (2001); EPMD (1988).
- ¹⁴ Potter (1995), pp. 27-28.
- ¹⁵ Gates (1988), p. 88.
- ¹⁶ Fernando (1995), p. 6.
- ¹⁷ Kurtis Blow (1997), p. 7.
- ¹⁸ Quoted in George (1998), p. 89.
- ¹⁹ Quoted in Fernando (1995), p. 225.
- ²⁰ *Late Night With Letterman*, Channel 5, UK, 14 July 2001.
- ²¹ A Tribe Called Quest (1991).

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- ²² Toynbee (2000), p. 46.
²³ Toynbee (2000), p. 45.
²⁴ Various Artists (1992); Bob James (2001).
²⁵ Various Artists (1992); Chic (1990).
²⁶ Lacasse (2000), pp. 38-39.
²⁷ Lacasse (2000), p. 38.
²⁸ Lacasse (2000), p. 37.
²⁹ Lacasse (2000), p. 37.
³⁰ KRS-One Vs. MC Shan (1996).
³¹ Slick Rick (1988); Dionne Warwick (2002); Nat 'King' Cole (1999).
³² Lacasse (2000), p. 43.
³³ George Harrison (1970); Chiffons, The (1963).
³⁴ Quote taken from US sleeve of George Harrison (1976).
³⁵ See Greenberg (1999), pp. 24-25.
³⁶ Eastside Connection (1978).
³⁷ DJ Jazzy Jeff And The Fresh Prince (1988).
³⁸ Heatwave (1976).
³⁹ Stevie Wonder (1976).
⁴⁰ Baddeley (1990), p. 34. (Original work: White (1960)).
⁴¹ X Clan (1990); Parliament (1995).
⁴² Doug E. Fresh & the Get Fresh Crew (1985); DJ Jazzy Jeff & The Fresh Prince (1988).
⁴³ Perfect (n.d.).
⁴⁴ See Brown (1999) for an overview on tip-of-the-tongue research.
⁴⁵ Various Artists (2001).
⁴⁶ Bob James (2001).
⁴⁷ Quoted in Fernando (1995), p. 223.
⁴⁸ Baddeley (1990), p. 30.
⁴⁹ Roxanne Shante (1995); J.B.'s, The (1995).
⁵⁰ Public Enemy (1990).
⁵¹ Fab Five Freddy (1982).
⁵² Gang Starr (1989).
⁵³ See Eysenck and Keane (1995, 1997), p. 127.
⁵⁴ J.B.'s, The (1995); Public Enemy (1988).
⁵⁵ Jauss (1982), p. 22.
⁵⁶ Run DMC (1995).
⁵⁷ James (1890), p. 662, quoted in Baddeley (1990), p. 166.
⁵⁸ Craik & Lockhart (1972), discussed in Baddeley (1990), pp. 160-173.
⁵⁹ Baddeley (1990), p. 173.

Chapter Five

- ¹ Kermode (1988), p. 18.
² Willis (1978), p. 49.
³ Public Enemy (1990); De La Soul (1989).
⁴ Vincent (1996), p. 73.
⁵ For a discussion of the importance of these non-verbal utterances within Brown's work, see Brackett (1992), *passim*.
⁶ James Brown (2002).
⁷ Vincent (1996), p. 251.
⁸ Vincent (1996), p. 311.
⁹ James Brown (1986); Sly & The Family Stone (1990); Various Artists (1998a).
¹⁰ Quotations in this section are taken from the overview of Tagg's typology which can be found in Tagg (1992).
¹¹ Various Artists (1997); Various Artists (1995).
¹² Various Artists (1999).
¹³ Organized Konfusion (1991).
¹⁴ De La Soul (1991).
¹⁵ Various Artists (1998c); Kraftwerk (1977).
¹⁶ Potter (1995), p. 118.
¹⁷ Beastie Boys (1989).

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- ¹⁸ DJ Jazzy Jeff & The Fresh Prince (1988).
¹⁹ Various Artists (1992).
²⁰ Various Artists (1992).
²¹ Sun (n.d.).
²² Middleton (1983), pp. 241-2, 248. Here, Middleton is referencing earlier work done by Paul Oliver.
²³ Middleton (1983), p. 235.
²⁴ Fernando (1999), p. 19.
²⁵ U Roy (1979), p. 12.
²⁶ Various Artists (1992).
²⁷ Various Artists (1992).
²⁸ Blondie (1980).
²⁹ Queen (1980b).
³⁰ Various Artists (1992).
³¹ Grandmaster Flash & The Furious Five (1994).
³² Floaters, The (1998).
³³ Hellers, The (n.d.).
³⁴ Various Artists (1992).
³⁵ 7th Wonder (1979).
³⁶ Various Artists (1998c).
³⁷ Fernando (1995), p. 47.
³⁸ Run DMC (1995).
³⁹ Doug E. Fresh & The Get Fresh Crew (1985).
⁴⁰ Brackett (1992), pp. 312-313.
⁴¹ Cold Crush Brothers (1983).
⁴² Ralph MacDonald (1976).
⁴³ Beatles, The (1963).
⁴⁴ Public Enemy (1988).
⁴⁵ Chuck D (1997), p. 91.
⁴⁶ Various Artists (1998b).
⁴⁷ Various Artists (1992).
⁴⁸ Various Artists (1992).
⁴⁹ T La Rock & Jazzy Jay (1984).
⁵⁰ Brackett (1992), p. 313.
⁵¹ Schoolly D (n.d.).
⁵² MC Shan (2001).
⁵³ Beastie Boys (1986).
⁵⁴ Kool & The Gang (1973).
⁵⁵ Jimmy Castor Bunch, The (1977).
⁵⁶ Bob James (2001).
⁵⁷ Big Daddy Kane (1988).
⁵⁸ James Gang, The (1969); Syd Barrett (1970).
⁵⁹ Various Artists (1988b); Various Artists (1988a).
⁶⁰ Brackett (1992), p. 318.
⁶¹ Eric B. & Rakim (1990).
⁶² 24-Carat Black, The (1973).
⁶³ A Tribe Called Quest (1990).
⁶⁴ Little Feat (1973); R.A.M.P. (1977); Rotary Connection (1967).
⁶⁵ Rose (1994a), p. 89.
⁶⁶ Werner (1998), p. 286.
⁶⁷ Hebdige (1987), p. 142.
⁶⁸ Potter (1995), p. 47.
⁶⁹ Toop (2000), p. 106.
⁷⁰ Various Artists (1990); Main Source (1991); Bob James (2001).

Chapter Six

- ¹ Middleton (1983), p. 262.
² Chester (1970), p. 316.
³ Middleton (1983), p. 261.

⁴ *Shake! Otis At Monterey*. (D.A Pennebaker, Chris Hegedus & David Dawkins). 1986. Pennebaker Hegedus Films. (USA).

⁵ Rose (1994a), p. 86.