Keepin' It Reel:
Hip Hop, Remediation, and the Performance of the New Black Realist Soundscape

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For my parents, Gerry and Kay.

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Abstract

James Millea

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> Subcultures represent 'noise' … [as an] interference in the orderly sequence which leads from real events and phenomena to their representation in the media.
>
> Hebdige, 1979, 91

Public Enemy's "Bring the Noise" (1988); Tricia Rose's *Black Noise* (1994); Tony Mitchell's *Global Noise* (2002); and the Beastie Boys' "Make Some Noise" (2011) - while just a snapshot of the titles on offer from hip hop's practitioners and researchers, it is clear from this list that throughout the almost fifty-year history of the culture and its music, noise, in whatever form, has been one of hip hop's constant companions. As a composite binding of contemporary postmodern technologies and orally based ideologies, hip hop is noise because it disrupts the traditional characteristics of mainstream media and culture in order to create a space for subcultural revolt and resistance. Nowhere is this more fascinating than in the soundscapes of New Black Realism, a collection of African-American commercial independent films released throughout the 1990s in which the aesthetics of hip hop culture stand as guiding principles.

This study explores such moments of noise in the sound and music of New Black Realism. It contends that these films create meaning in their disruption of the traditional structures of the cinematic soundscape. Maintaining characteristics of orally based expressions while at the same time incorporating and destabilising elements of the literate and technologically sophisticated society in which its practitioners live (Rose, 1994, 85 - 86), these soundscapes are charged with a culturally-specific understanding of author, text, and audience. As a post-literate orality, New Black Realism blurs the boundaries between each in a performance of the celluloid. At the heart of that cinematic performance is the double-consciousness of remediation, the balance between the immediacy of the sonic material presented throughout these films and the hypermediacy of the frames of that presentation. As those two elements clash, the soundscapes of these films utter of contemporary Black America, both on and offscreen. More than just the use of canonic hip hop songs in these films, on the soundtrack, this thesis is concerned with the way hip hop influences the construction of the cinematic soundscape, of each of film's three sonic layers of music, sound effects, and the voice. This study argues that, as hip hop (re)uses sound generally rather than just music and melodic material in its compositions, in New Black Realism all levels of the film soundscape contribute to the narrative world onscreen and our perception of it.

To this end, this thesis draws on the work of a collection of young Black American, and largely male, directors who made New Black Realist films at the end of the twentieth-century. Stretching from Spike Lee's *Do The Right Thing* in 1989 to Hype Williams' 1998 film, *Belly*, and from Los Angeles to New York City, the research explores the performance of the New Black Realist soundscape across a small collection of coming-of-age dramas that deal with a problem-riddled Black urban culture in conflict with a white mainstream.

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Introduction

Hip Hop, Remediation, and the Performance of the New Black Realist Soundscape

> Subcultures represent 'noise' ... interference in the orderly sequence which leads from real events and phenomena to their representation in the media.
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On the 14th of July 1991, the *New York Times* published a piece by Karen Grigsby Bates. Bates opens her article, titled "They Gotta Have Us", from a home in the Baldwin Hills in southern Los Angeles. The property belongs to John Singleton, a 23 year old African-American director. Bates is meeting Singleton just as his first feature film, *Boyz 'N' the Hood*, is released in cinema theatres across the US. From Singleton's LA home, the article considers the "latest bold-relief example of Hollywood's sudden open-door policy toward black film makers, particularly those telling black stories" (Bates, 1991). In her article, Bates explores the histories and context of this new wave of Black cinema, considering some of the social, racial, political, financial, and cinematic influences on these films and their directors. While she moves rapidly through the relevant figures, mentioning Ernest R. Dickerson, Spike Lee, Mario Van Peebles, Joseph B. Vasquez, Matty Rich, and Warrington and Reginald Hudlin, her focus on John Singleton is both warranted and revealing (Ibid), and certainly so within the frame of this doctoral study. Although the birth of a new Black cinema was due in large part to the success of Spike Lee, and specifically the success of his films *She's Gotta Have It* (1986) and *Do The Right Thing* (1989), Bates contends that this movement became known as "The Singleton Thing" in Hollywood (Ibid). Just a year out of the "Filmic Writing Programme" at the University of Southern California (USC), Singleton pitched "a coming-of-age story set in the

tough Los Angeles neighbourhood where he grew up" to Columbia Pictures. With no previous professional credits, John Singleton was given a budget of $6 million to direct his own script (Ibid). By the end of the same year, 19 similar films were released. In conversation with Columbia chairman Frank Price, Singleton argued that, as he lived it, *Boyz 'N' the Hood* was his story to tell. What sense would it have made, therefore, "to have some white boy impose his interpretation on my experience?" With the success of hip hop music in such "largely white environments as MTV", and a developing understanding of the financial power of the growing Black youth market, mainstream cinema agreed and began to chase down and green-light directors like Singleton and films like *Boyz 'N' the Hood* (Ibid).

In April of 2019, almost thirty years later, John Singleton passed away after suffering a stroke. A flurry of pieces were written about the 51 year old, with many marking out the importance of his film legacy (Scott, 2019). In the *New York Times* both A. O. Scott and Touré discussed Singleton through *Boyz 'N' the Hood*, with Scott arguing that the film "rests in American movie history like a boulder in a riverbed, altering the direction of the stream. After its release in the summer of 1991, everything looked different, including its precursors" (Ibid). Touré points out that Singleton's film was cinema's answer to the politically conscious music of artists like N.W.A or Ice Cube, and the news surrounding the continuing story of the beating of Rodney King at the hands of Los Angeles police offers (Touré, 2019). Touré suggests that Singleton approached the film "as an artistic activist" (Ibid). He argues that Singleton understood the power of the image in shaping opinion and thought and so used his film to change the way that Black people were seen onscreen, a big ask considering that the film appeared at a time when it felt that "South Central was the center of American culture then, with its overt racial tension, frightening gang wars and notorious police department" echoing through hip hop

music and mainstream news reports (Ibid). Singleton's activism is most obvious in the film's content, its story. *Boyz 'N' the Hood* showed 'the hood' in all of its complexity and gave us the humanity of people so often shown in demeaning ways (Ibid). Singleton presented the world in which he grew up as both "quintessentially American" and a "virtual jungle that has been all but left for dead by America" (Ibid). Where Singleton's activism is less obvious but far more pertinent is in the film's form, or, how he tells the story of contemporary Black America. Singleton was a child of mainstream neo-classical cinema, of George Lucas's *Star Wars* (1977) and Steven Spielberg's *Raiders of the Lost Ark* (1981) and *E.T.* (1981). He had absorbed the films of Orson Welles, François Truffaut, Martin Scorsese, and Francis Ford Coppola (Ibid). While this new wave of Black cinema unabashedly depicted onscreen "a problem-riddled urban culture in conflict with a white mainstream" in its storylines (Bates, 1991), it did so similarly in the frames and structures of the cinematic form itself. Just as hip hop had carved a space for Black expression in the largely white environment of MTV by taking on and reshaping the forms and structures of dominant media, so too did directors like John Singleton and films like *Boyz 'N' the Hood* echo a space for Black American culture in the film theatre by challenging and disrupting the forms and structures that had built cinema in servitude to and as a reflection of mainstream culture.

Today a new wave of Black directors, people like Jordan Peele, Ava DuVernay, and Ryan Coogler, are again making films that focus specifically on the African-American community onscreen, films like *Selma* (2014), *Get Out* (2017), and *Black Panther* (2018). At the same time, as Touré intimates, the messages that Singleton, his films, and his peers were trying to get across in the early 1990s have relevance again in recent years, both in the context of Black cinema itself, with online movements like #OscarsSoWhite in 2015, and in regards to civil rights and

social change with Black Lives Matter (BLM). Rather than Rodney King and the LA riots of 1992, this current batch of directors and films exist in the world of Michael Brown and the riots that occurred in Ferguson, Missouri in 2014, following the acquittal of the police officer that fatally shot the 18 year old. Now, in the wake of John Singleton's passing, as history begins to rhyme both on and offscreen, it is important to reconsider what Singleton and many of his peers created. More specifically, it is imperative to explore the sound and music of the Black cinema that appeared in the early 1990s, as it is in the cinematic soundscape that many of these films have been most disruptive, most 'noisy'. While there are similarities in the cinema and context of both now and then, the African-American films that were released in the 1990s were an idiosyncratic cinematic moment. As Guthrie P. Ramsey Jr. points out, with many of its performers, artists, and thinkers being "in vogue" at the end of the 1980s and throughout the following decade, the 1990s was "the age of hip hop" (2002, 164). Much of the cinema that this batch of young Black American filmmakers was creating at this time focused on the hip hop generation in their storylines, which Bakari Kitwana has defined as "those young African Americans born between 1965 and 1984 who came of age in the eighties and nineties and who share a specific set of values and attitudes" (Ramsey, 2002, 164; Kitwana, 2002, 4). As a highly mediated utterance centred in music and musical expression, those values and attitudes also migrated to the cinematic soundscape. Where mainstream cinema is concerned with linear, rigid texts that are received by a passive audience and crafted by authorial filmmakers, hip hop culture and music promote aspects of communal authorship, performative texts, and the active participation of its audience, as well as a blurring of the boundaries of each of these elements. Just as Singleton director's chair was placed between Black America and the cinematic expressions of Lucas, Spielberg, and Coppola, these film

soundscapes walk the line between the expectations of the mainstream narrative soundscape, and the sonic expressions of hip hop culture. In their open disruption of the narrative film soundscape that films like Singleton's *Boyz 'N' the Hood* create meaning onscreen, as well carving out a space for a culturally-specific utterance. As Dick Hebdige has argued, "subcultures represent 'noise' ... [as an] interference in the orderly sequence which leads from real events and phenomena to their representation in the media" (Hebdige, 1979, 91).

This research focuses on those moments of noise, of disruption in the cinematic soundscape. It explores the role of sound and music in New Black Realism, a collection of African-American commercial independent films released throughout the 1990s in which the aesthetics of hip hop culture stand as guiding principles (Diawara, 1993, 23 - 25; Watkins, 1998, 98). These films create meaning in their disruption of the traditional structures of the cinematic soundscape. Maintaining characteristics of orally based expressions while at the same time incorporating and destabilising elements of the literate and technologically sophisticated society in which its practitioners live (Rose, 1994, 85 - 86), these soundscapes are charged with a culturally-specific understanding of author, text, and audience. As a post-literate orality, New Black Realism blurs the boundaries between each in a performance of the celluloid. At the heart of that cinematic performance is the double-consciousness of remediation, the balance between the immediacy of the sonic material presented throughout these films and the hypermediacy of the frames of that presentation. As those two spaces clash, the soundscapes of these films utter of contemporary Black America, both on and offscreen.

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construction of the cinematic soundscape, of each of film's three sonic layers of music, sound effects, and the voice. It contends that as hip hop (re)uses sound generally rather than just music and melodic material in its compositions, in New Black Realism all levels of the film soundscape contribute to the narrative world onscreen and our perception of it. To this end, this thesis draws on the work of a collection of young Black American and largely male directors who released films throughout the 1990s. Stretching from Spike Lee's *Do The Right Thing* in 1989 to Hype Williams' 1998 film, *Belly*, and from Los Angeles to New York City, this thesis explores the performance of the New Black Realist soundscape across a small collection of coming-of-age dramas that deal with a problem-riddled Black urban culture in conflict with a white mainstream.

Before getting to the analysis of these film soundscapes, it is important to both define the cinema at the heart of this research and outline the core studies that influenced the conception of this thesis. The first section deals with a definition of New Black Realism. While there have been a number of small and larger studies of the genre, the characteristics, timeline, and even terminology surrounding these films has been muddied. The purpose of this section is not to undermine or detract from those studies. Instead, with the added clarity of twenty or so years, this section amalgamates that research into a coherent determination of this particular wave of Black cinema. The second section offers an academic roll call of sorts. While chapters two and three explore the relevant literature in great detail, there are a number of studies that gave rise to the ideas for this research. Those ideas are central tenets that run throughout this study and pointing them out early is useful in understanding the approach that this study takes in its investigation of New Black Realism and the narrative film soundscape.

What's So New About New Black Realism?

> What [these directors and filmmakers] have come to realise is that power comes from control, and you have to be in control of your art. You know, we don't want any more of this Morris Levy shit, you make a million dollars for somebody else and you end up broke. Them days gotta be over.
>
> Lee quoted in Watkins, 1998, 99 - 100

In his 1989 article in *Callaloo*, novelist and playwright Trey Ellis talks about what he calls the "the new black aesthetic", a collection of black artists and thinkers who were getting back into jazz and the blues, going to punk concerts, in bookstores wearing glasses and "short, neat dreads", and willing to "admit [to] liking both Jim and Toni Morrison" (1989, 234). Diverse as they were in their individual pursuits, what they had in common was a commitment to "what Columbia University philosopher Arthur Danto calls 'Disturbatory Art' - art that shakes you up" (referenced in Ellis, 1989, 234). African-American culture was inherently diverse at the end of the twentieth-century and the cinema that the new wave of Black directors were making at time was no different. In 1990, Spike Lee directed *Mo' Better Blues*, a musical drama that followed the ups and downs of jazz trumpeter Bleek Gilliam (Denzel Washington); in 1991 Julie Dash directed a period drama, *Daughters of the Dust*, that explored the lives of three generations of African-American women in 1902; and, in 1994, Darnell Martin directed *I Like it Like That*, a comedy-drama about a young Puerto Rican couple in New York City. At the centre of this commitment to disturbatory art was a collection of film that, as Singleton highlights above, explored a "problem-riddled urban culture in conflict with a white mainstream".

This thesis defines this cinema as "New Black Realism", a term that comes from Manthia Diawara's 1993 work, *Black American Cinema*. In this research, Diawara suggests that films such as Singleton's *Boyz 'N' the Hood* (1991), Matty

Rich's *Straight Out of Brooklyn* (1991), and Ernest R. Dickerson's *Juice* (1992) explore "the existent reality of urban life in America," arguing that, "just as in real life," these films are set "in neighbourhoods that are pulled between gang members, rappers, and education-prone kids" (1993, 24 – 25). He qualifies this definition in the assessment of his students, who contend that these films "use hip hop culture" as the new black youth culture in modern America and so "the characters look real because they dress in the style of hip hop, talk the lingo of hip hop [and] practice its world view toward the police and women" (Ibid).

The term "New Black Realism" has not been widely adopted by other scholarship investigating the same subject matter. In fact, there seems to be as many definitions of these films as there is academic studies. For example, Dan Flory has talked about "black noir films" (2008, 153); Guthrie P. Ramsey and Henry Louis Gates Jr. have mentioned "rapsploitation" and "guiltsploitation", respectively (2003, 168; 1992, 12); Bakari Kitwana has used the term "black gangster films" (2002); S. Craig Watkins has mentioned "hood films" or "ghetto(theme) action films" (1998, 170); Kenneth Chan has gone with the simple "black action films" (1998, 35); Mark A. Reid has alluded to "trendy 'gangsta rap' films" (1995, 457); Steven Kendall has drawn on the term "New Jack Cinema" (1994); and Ed Guerrero has been a little more specific with his "male-focused, 'ghettocentric,' action-crime-adventure films" (1993, 182). This study adopts Diawara's "New Black Realism" because these films are positioned at the generic crossroads between fact and fiction (Smith, 1992, 57). Although there are certainly aspects of other film genres that come to the forefront of each of these films, as the mix of terms above suggests, at the heart of each work is a reflection, if projected, of the "New Black Youth Culture" of the late twentieth century (Kitwana, 2002, 123). This term also connects these films, importantly, to their direct ancestor: the hip hop musicals of the 1980s. Featuring

“recognizable urban locations, sympathetic portraits of inner city communities, and politicized communal performance strategies” the hip hop musicals of the 1980s “emphasize dynamic breakdance choreography, outlandish costuming, and the aesthetic rather than political aspects of hip hop culture” (Monteyne, 2013, 5). It is by building on those characteristics, of films like *Wild Style* (1983), *Breakin’* (1984), and *Krush Groove* (1985), that New Black Realism gets its “new” (Monteyne, 2013, 4).

The focus on the hip hop generation in this cinema has meant the promotion of hip hop music in New Black Realism, both in the film’s imagery and its soundscape. Onscreen, hip hop artists and emcees take up roles not dissimilar to those celebrity personas that they cultivate in their music. As pointed out in the research of Ed Guerrero (1993), Melvin Donalson (2007), and Kimberley Fain (2015), the physical presence of stars like Ice Cube, Ice-T, Nas, Queen Latifah, or Tupac Shakur have offered a sense of authenticity in New Black Realism’s attempts to reflect the reality of hip hop culture (Fain, 2015, 132), albeit mediated. While Spike Lee has used the originally composed scores of his father, Bill Lee, and saxophonist Terence Blanchard, and other films have featured African-American musics more generally, such as jazz, soul, reggae, funk, and R&B, hip hop music is also heavily present in the soundtracks of New Black Realism. For example, Ernest R. Dickerson’s *Juice* (1993) features the work of Big Daddy Kane, Salt ‘N’ Pepa, and Cypress Hill, while Mario Van Peebles’s *New Jack City* (1991) featured 2 Live Crew and Ice-T.

Such is the foregrounding of hip hop music and its musical stars in New Black Realism that a majority of scholarly discussion on the films has tended towards two points. First is the suggestion that hip hop merchandising prevails across the New Black Realist soundtrack (Donalson, 2007, 38), as the music

emerged at “an opportune time for Hollywood” (Donalson, 2007, 125). In this way, it is argued, “Black filmmakers . . . [were] not so much actors producing change but rather actors who [were reacting] to and [exploiting] a rapidly changing social world” (Watkins, 1998, 103). Second, is the focus on the intertextual weight of using hip hop music on these film soundtracks. Research in this area contends that the music acts as a cultural artefact that passes into a film’s aural composition and offers audiences a predefined understanding of key points in the film narrative. In this vein Melvin Donalson has argued the “codes of masculinity, language, clothing and use of guns emanates from gangsta rap” in films like John Singleton’s *Boyz ‘N’ The Hood* (2007, 38), while Houston A. Baker Jr. has pointed to the fact that these same cultural codes made their way into Spike Lee’s *Do The Right Thing* through the soundtrack’s use of Public Enemy (1991). This thesis, as will be detailed later, goes further, arguing that the aesthetics of hip hop has shaped the sound and music of these films, shaped the cinematic soundscape. In his discussion of digital sampling in hip hop, Jeff Rice argues the music is built on a “whatever process” - the idea that you take whatever you find and use it to construct the music (2003, 454). Hip hop, then - or at least the hip hop comparable to the timeframe of these films - is not just a collection of canonic songs or sonic artefacts but rather a language of compositional techniques and aesthetics that can encompass any and all forms of sound or music. Rather than focusing simply on the use of particular songs on these soundtracks that fit into the genre of hip hop, it is pertinent to read the dialogue, sound effects, and music of New Black Realist cinema through the aesthetics of hip hop.

While onscreen these films echoed the stories and soundworlds of the hip hop generation, offscreen New Black Realism took shape within the context of profound social, economic, and technological transformations that reorganised the

possibilities for collective and symbolic action (Watkins, 1998, 7). During the 1980s and 1990s, ”social and political conservatism was becoming more deliberate in its attack against a changing racial order created in part by black political struggle” (Watkins, 1998, 4). Following on from the Civil Rights movement of the 1970s, S. Craig Watkins contends that historically situated cultural politics began to pivot around race in “inventive ways” and so enlarged the “scope and terrain of racial politics” (Ibid). In a cyclical fashion, because of this, the visibility of Black culture became even more important during this period, acting as a counterweight to the political entrenchment of conservatism (Ibid).

Like fashion, graffiti, dance, and music, hip hop cinema offered the chance to control spaces most often occupied by mainstream culture in both a literal and figurative sense. This was supported by the “emergence of young, black, college-educated and middle-class directors” who had a more direct access to the film industry in a way that had been “more policed and much less easy at an earlier stage” (Ramsey, 2003, 168; Hall quoted in Watkins, 1998, 5 - 6). This cohort of directors was of course larger than just Spike Lee and John Singleton. As this research understands, it also included the work of Mario Van Peebles, Matty Rich, Hype Williams, Ernest R. Dickerson, and Allen and Albert Hughes. A male dominated field, the list could also include Leslie Harris and her 1992 film *Just Another Girl on the I.R.T.*, although as it marries the aesthetics of New Black Realism and the hip hop musicals of the 1980s, the director’s work features in this research as a minor aside. It is important to point out the fluidity of this mix of names. There are obvious disparities with Karen Grigsby-Bates’ list of names, for instance. Also, although each filmmaker mentioned here directed a number of films throughout their career, taking into account Diawara’s definition of the genre, not all of this work can be counted as New Black Realist film.

The genre of New Black Realism was a phase that many of these directors left behind in the earliest part of their careers. The Hughes Brothers are the most salient example in this case as, by just their second film in 1995, *Dead Presidents*, the pair were telling stories not of the hip hop generation, but of that generations' parents as they fought in and returned home from the Vietnam war. This study, therefore, focuses on a specific list of films. This list includes Spike Lee's *Do The Right Thing* (1989), *Clockers* (1995), and *He Got Game* (1998); John Singleton's *Boyz 'N' the Hood* (1991) and *Poetic Justice* (1993); Mario Van Peebles's *New Jack City* (1991); Matty Rich's *Straight Out of Brooklyn* (1991); Ernest R. Dickerson's *Juice* (1992); Allen and Albert Hughes's *Menace II Society* (1993); and Hype Williams's *Belly* (1998). While the majority of New Black Realist cinema was certainly produced within the first five years of the 1990s, key elements of its expression were still felt across some films towards the end of the twentieth-century. It is for this reason that the scope of this study stretches from Lee's *Do The Right Thing* in 1989 to Williams's *Belly* in 1998.

"We Love [The Academic] Roll Call Y'all"

> We love roll call y'all: Boogie Down Productions, Rob Base, Dana Dane, Marley Marl, Olatunji, Chuck D, Ray Charles, EPMD, EU, Alberta Hunter, Run–D.M.C., Stetsasonic, Sugar Bear, John Coltrane, Big Daddy Kane, Salt-N-Pepa, Luther Vandross, McCoy Tyner, Biz Markie, New Edition, Otis Redding, Anita Baker, Thelonious Monk, Marcus Miller, Branford Marsalis, James Brown, Wayne Shorter, Tracy Chapman, Miles Davis, Force MDs, Oliver Nelson, Fred Wesley, Maceo, Janet Jackson, Louis Armstrong, Duke Ellington, Jimmy Jam, Terry Lewis, George Clinton, Count Basie, Mtume, Stevie Wonder, Bobby McFerrin, Dexter Gordon, Sam Cooke, Parliament-Funkadelic, Al Jarreau, Teddy Pendergrass, Joe Williams, Wynton Marsalis, Phyllis Hyman, Sade, Sarah Vaughn, Roland Kirk, Keith Sweat, Kool Moe Dee, Prince, Ella Fitzgerald, Dianne Reeves, Aretha Franklin, Bob Marley, Bessie Smith, Whitney Houston, Dionne Warwick, Steel Pulse, Little Richard, Mahalia Jackson, Jackie Wilson, Cannonball and Nat Adderley, Quincy Jones, Marvin Gaye, Charles Mingus, and Marion Williams. We want to thank y'all ….

In Spike Lee's *Do The Right Thing* (1989), over a montage of characters dealing with the heat of the day, Mister Señor Love Daddy runs through a roll call. Played by Samuel L. Jackson, the local neighbourhood deejay recites a huge list of influential Black American artists over the original music of Bill Lee, the film's composer. Amongst this list of jazz, funk, soul, and R&B greats, the radio announcer also slots in a number of then contemporary hip hop artists, people like Marley Marl, Chuck D, EPMD, Big Daddy Kane, and Salt-N-Pepa. In doing so, Jackson's character not only pay his dues to all these acts but grounds those newer performers in the histories of the musicians he surrounds them with. Echoing the purpose of this moment in *Do the Right Thing*, the roll call for this study includes four pieces of academic research: Tricia Rose's *Black Noise* (1994), Russell A. Potter's *Spectacular Vernaculars* (1995), Annette Davison's *Hollywood Theory, Non-Hollywood Practice* (2004), and Wayne Marshall's article "Giving up Hip-Hop's Firstborn" (2006). Although these pieces, their theories, and analyses pop up at key junctures throughout the work, and they are of course key aspects of the literature review and theoretical framework, it was important to mention them here as their ideas not only flow throughout the rest of the study but have shaped its very conception. Of the four pieces of research, three are concerned specifically with hip hop culture and music while the other focuses on the soundtracks of films created at the edges of mainstream cinema.

As for many studies of hip hop arts and media, Tricia Rose's *Black Noise* is the principal reference point for this study. In her research, Rose has argued that hip hop is a post-literate orality, a complex fusion of orality and postmodern technology. Hip hop, she contends, maintains the characteristics of orally based expressions while at the same time incorporating and destabilising elements of the literate and technologically sophisticated society in which its practitioners live (Rose, 1994, 85 -

86). Rose argues in her work that the hybridity between black music, black oral forms, and technology has meant that hip hop music blurred the “distinction between literate and oral modes of communication” (1994, 85). A fascinating take on the music in its own right, this understanding of hip hop is even more intriguing when considering the role of the culture and music in the traditionally literate format of narrative cinema. Rose’s research helped to germinate the idea that a major cultural and structural clash shaped New Black Realist cinema and its soundtrack.

At the centre of Rose’s definition was the concept of sampling. In a 2006 article, Wayne Marshall explores the change in hip hop sampling after “a number of high profile copyright lawsuits in the late ‘80s and early ‘90s sent a chill through the hip-hop world and a buzz through the business world” (2006, 868). Marshall considered what this watershed moment meant to the compositional aesthetics of hip hop group The Roots and their bandleader Ahmir ‘?uestlove’ Thompson, who argued that for artists like himself and his band who play their instruments live, “sampling is not worth the trouble when ‘original’ material, performed with certain stylistic bounds, and properly recorded, can be just as authentic” (2006, 869). ? uestlove does still acknowledge “sampling as central to hip-hop and reaffirms this conviction in his music and writings”, however (Marshall, 2006, 869). Particularly early in their career, through the use of “loop-based structures and ‘dirty’ timbres”, The Roots produced “non-sample-based [and] yet ‘real’ hip-hop”, something which crafted an authentic space within the the culture and community for ?uestlove “himself, his colleagues, and his audience” (Marshall, 2006, 869, 870). The idea that sampling was not necessarily resigned to the re-use of previously composed musical material freed this research from a one-dimensional focus on canonical songs in the film soundtrack. It made possible the proposal that the post-literate

nature of hip hop influenced the composition of non-musical aspects of cinema, such as the voice and sound effects.

The centrality of sampling and its aesthetics in hip hop music highlight a particular consideration of postmodernism and postmodern expression. This thesis understands hip hop as “radical postmodernism”, as defined by Russell A. Potter. Potter suggests that hip hop is one of “multiple postmodernisms”, as each iteration of postmodernism claims a different textual genealogy “made up of the books, texts, or cultural happenings that it prefers to regard as characteristically postmodern” (1995, 1 - 2). Hip hop’s particular version is one form of radical postmodernism, a postmodernism that makes future out of fragments from the archive of the past, turning consumption into production (1995, 4, 9 - 10, 18). In his writing, Potter contends that hip hop is a postmodern form whose representation strategies, “while complex and contradictory, do not for that reason lose their libertarian potential” (1995, 9). It is “play” that acts as a “mask for a potent model of subversion” (Potter, 1995, 2). This specifically means that, Potter argues, the postmodernism of hip hop does not create “monuments to some romanticised ‘human spirit’” as much as it does create “fundamentally anti-monumental arts” (Potter, 1995, 8). Although, at times, the New Black Realist soundscapes may seem similar to the postmodern work of directors like Quentin Tarantino, Potter’s research supports the idea that as a culturally-defined cinema, the nihilism, hyper-textuality, or hyper-referentiality of New Black Realism is not just about pastiche expressions that speak only of chaos as they fail to live up to the sum of their parts. Potter’s research helps to establish the point that while there may be similarities in the way the final product of each of these cinemas look or sound, the postmodernist utterance of New Black Realism and its soundscape is saying something decidedly different.

Annette Davison's 2004 book, *Hollywood Theory, Non-Hollywood Practice*, is concerned with the soundtracks of "films made after 1980, outside of, and in relation to Hollywood" (2004, 1). Davison's approach to her analysis of these non-Hollywood soundtracks is structured by their relationship to the "re-emergence of classical scoring in the mid-to-late 1970s in the Hollywood blockbusters" (2004, 1 - 2). She argues that this is important because, although there are certainly problems with "conceiving cinemas and their soundtracks primarily in relation to Hollywood", the "classical Hollywood score has functioned as a form of dominant ideology in relation to which alternative scoring and soundtrack practices may assert themselves" (2004, 6). Although Davison is interested in the relationship between European and mainstream American aesthetics, her proposed dichotomy is even more relevant when considering New Black Realist cinema.

The return to classical scoring practices in the early 1970s, with the music of John Williams for disaster film titles like *The Poseidon Adventure* (192) or *The Towering Inferno* (1974), can be interpreted as operating in tandem with these same films' reference to the narrative techniques of 1930s and 1940s classical Hollywood, as the narrative format for the blockbuster was seen to match with the B-movie adventure films popular at that time (Davison, 2004, 2, 3). Although John Williams has since scored a plethora of cinematic styles and genres, this study will use him as an exemplar of these classical scoring practices and the mainstream culture and ideology that these sounds come attached with. Classical cinema and its soundtracks were not just a "historical moment or set of conventions" but a "nexus of style, ideology, technology, and economics which coalesced during a particular time and particular place" (Kalinak cited in Davison, 2004, 2 - 3). The return to those aesthetics in the cinema of the 1970s, as Anahid Kassabian points out (2001), functioned as a regeneration of conservative, Western-centric, bourgeois,

heterosexual, and largely masculine values (Davison, 2004, 3). As those values have continued to reflect projections of mainstream culture, so too has the neo-classical Hollywood film score, championed by Williams, functioned as a form of dominant ideology for the cinema theatre (Davison, 2004, 6). If subcultures are an "interference in the orderly sequence", and so Black American culture has been shaped in some part by its contrast with the dominant mainstream in the narrative of New Black Realism, so too is it important to consider this balance in the New Black Realist soundscape. Davison's work provides the grounding for the approach taken to the sound and music of New Black Realist cinema in this thesis.

Conclusion

Led by those theories and definitions mentioned above, the rest of this thesis is split into two sections. The first, explores the key studies and literature relevant to this research. Consisting of a literature review and theoretical framework, this section of the thesis sets out the groundwork for the analysis that follows. The literature review focuses on fundamental research in hip hop music more generally, and hip hop music and cinema specifically. It maps some of the most important research in the field within the context of the New Black Realist soundscape. The theoretical framework outlines the creative principles at the centre of hip hop music and matches them against the established norms of narrative cinema. Exploring issues of authorship, text, and audience reception, this chapter both frames the driving forces behind hip hop music and proffers new ways of understanding those same elements in relation to the narrative film soundscape. This chapter supports the rest of the doctoral thesis as a reference point for a mix of varying case studies in sound and music from across the genre of New Black Realism.

The main body of the work is split into three chapters. Each, simply, focuses on a separate level of the film soundscape: music, sound effects, and the voice. The chapter on music explores these films through three interconnected aspects: remediation, repetition, and hapticity. In New Black Realism, music, this chapter argues, is prevalent to the shaping of the film's narrative meaning, particularly for those who know where to look and what to look out for. Constantly breaking the barriers between various levels of narratological diegesis as well as the barrier of the fourth wall, music in New Black Realism is not an agent through which directors create moments of disingenuous overloaded meaning but a space in which the narrative of these films is performed. The chapter on sound effects explores the use of this aspect of the soundscape to echo the contemporary Black city and as a coded language in the structuring of a sonic panopticon in New Black Realist cinema. While sounds like gunshots, whirring helicopter blades, and sirens have been traditionally relegated to the supplementary channels of film, and considered to offer little to the narrative world onscreen, they are vital in shaping the mediated Black city in these films. Imbued with meaning and importance through hip hop music and music videos, this section will show that these sounds provide a greater sense of realism on film not by just helping to present a cinematic space but by echoing a particular cinematic reality. The final chapter of this section analyses the voice in New Black Realism along two tracks: the hip hop voice as it disrupts the film text and the disrupted voice as it speaks in hip hop cinema. One half of this chapter explores the ways in which hip hop's post-literate understanding of orality has reshaped the possibilities of the voice in New Black Realist cinema, and with it, the cinematic text itself. Through aspects of cypher-like dialogue, linguistic variation, and a challenge to cinematic diegesis, this chapter inspects those possibilities. Although the voice in mainstream narrative cinema is read as the

foremost component of the cinematic text, this thesis listens to the voice as the loudest sound in the performance of film, a performance that blurs the boundaries between spectator and cinematic text. In compliment, the other half of the chapter contests that while in mainstream narrative cinema the sounds of police sirens and gunshots usually occupy the peripheral levels of the film soundscape, in New Black Realism these sounds have at times leaked into the central vocal track. In that movement, they have became consequential to the cinematic narrative, announcing and verifying the exchange between the bodies of those that utter them and the environment in which those same bodies exist onscreen. Therefore, this section will argue, the vocalisation of these sounds highlights the invasive role that their original sources play in the mediated expression of hip hop culture.

The conclusion, as well as tying all this together, will look to the answers that the theories in the first half and analysis in the second may offer to questions asked in research on the sound and music of contemporary postmodern cinema moving forward.

Chapter One

Literature Review

Hip Hop Culture, Music, and Academic Research

> There is even an argument to be made for hip-hop writings adoption as a sixth element of the culture - behind deejaying, emceeing, dancing, graffiti, and fashion - due to its critical role in archiving and reporting the history, present and undoubtedly the future of hip hop.
>
> Cepeda, 2004, xvi

In the introduction to her 2004 edited collection, *And it Don't Stop*, Raquel Cepeda points out the intrinsic relationship between hip hop and the literature that surrounds it. She suggests that such is the innate connection between these two that writing arguably constitutes another of the culture's "elements", a fundamental aspect of the movement through which the utterances of the hip hop community are expressed. Although her assertion of the importance of writing to hip hop refers specifically to the journalism that accompanied its linear growth and subsequent diversions, such a point is equally relevant in the discussion of academic scholarship on the culture and its music. In looking to document the various expressions of the hip hop community, academic writing has had to make critical choices, focusing on what it sees to be the most prevalent or unique aspects of this Black youth movement with the analytical tools available to hand. What is interesting about those choices is that this body of writing has had to attempt a very difficult task and, in so doing, has left an indelible mark on hip hop. It has become a part of the narrative that it intends to define.

As we write about hip hop, we look to coerce onto the page in the written word a culture and music that exists almost exclusively through performance and improvisation. We attempt to put the roundest of pegs into the squarest of holes. This is not to suggest that such a task is impossible; nor it is to suggest that such a task should not be undertaken at all - far from it. Research that has explored folk

and popular musics over the last number of decades has always dealt with the issue of transcribing music that exists purposefully without the constraints of Westernised approaches to 'traditional' notation, authorship, or text. The swung rhythms and 'bent' notes of jazz are, for instance, now well-worn elements of any published sheet music. Instead, to start this chapter from here is to highlight that the academia that surrounds hip hop comes with various expectations, and correlating pitfalls, that need simply to be recognised and appreciated. This literature review therefore not only identifies important individual pieces of research in the focus of this doctoral study but it acknowledges the importance and lasting affect of scholarship more generally on our understanding of hip hop culture, its arts, and its media. That acknowledgment must begin, first, with an appreciation of the major changes taking place in the field of music scholarship at the end of the twentieth-century, changes defined through the rise of popular music studies and the coming of "New Musicology".

While hip hop music came into existence as a nameless force around the early 1970s, with the block parties of DJ Kool Herc at Sedgwick Avenue, it was not until the release of the Sugarhill Gang's "Rapper's Delight" in 1979 that it reached the American popular consciousness.[1] By 1982, and Grandmaster Flash and the Furious Fives' "The Message", the music had become an emissary for a young urban generation, a part of a tightly-knitted movement identified with contemporary street culture. By this stage in that movement characters both inside and outside of the culture understood it as hip hop (Donalson, 2007, 16). In that time, between 1979 and 1982, as hip hop transitioned from underground movement to a recognisable genre, two major changes had begun to take effect in the field of

[1] Both graffiti and breakdancing existed as independent forms before the supposed conception of hip hop music. It wasn't until the block parties at Sedgwick Avenue that all composite elements of the music began to mesh together. By the time of these parts in the early 1970s, it is generally understood that hip hop comprised on four elements: graffiti, breakdancing, deejaying, and emceeing.

music scholarship: a focus on popular music studies and the emergence of New Musicology. These changes altered the academic platform that received hip hop and therefore altered the way that we came to understand the culture and its various iterations, an important point within the context of this thesis.

In the case of the latter change, the emergence of New Musicology, the term and concept developed from the wave of “criticism” that arose within the field of musicology from the 1960s onwards. This initial change saw writers like Edward T. Cone, Charles Rosen, Leo Treitler, and Carolyn Abbate contend that “musicology should be interpretive, in some sense, rather that purely ‘positivist’” (Maus, 2011). They believed that technical analysis alone was insufficient as a complete reading. These scholars argued that the experience of a “cultivated, contemplative listener” must be added to garner a fuller understanding of any musical object (Ibid). While, as with the analytical studies they looked to counteract, criticism continued to focus on art-music traditions, it did so by drawing from humanistic fields such as philosophical aesthetics, or literary theory (Ibid). With Joseph Kerman’s article, “How We Got Into Analysis and How to Get Out”, at the beginning of the decade, the 1980s saw this criticism become what we now know as New Musicology (Agawu, 1996, 5). Buoyed by anti-formalism, New Musicology stretched further in the disparate approaches it took to its musical research, drawing on “postmodernist strategies of understanding” music, through such new fields of thought as feminist theory and queer studies, and, through the influences of ethnomusicology and anthropology, emphasising historical and cultural context (Kramer, 1992, 5; Maus, 2011).

In the case of the former change, during this same period of time, popular music studies was already flourishing across various international academic institutions, particularly in the United States and Europe. Popular music studies

came into existence due to the work of a dedicated and varied community of scholars, people like Charles Hamm, Simon Frith, and Philip Tagg, that existed in force by the late 1970s and early 1980s. These scholars coalesced their work into a number of institutions during this time. The journal, *Popular Music and Society*, was established in the US in the early 1970s. In 1981, the International Association for the Study of Popular Music and the academic journal, *Popular Music*, were established. Seven years later, in 1988, the Institute of Popular Music at the University of Liverpool and the *Journal of Popular Music Studies* both came into existence (Cloonan, 2005, 81). By the end of the 1980s then, the field had been around for almost thirty years, with popular music studies growing in direct correlation with Rock 'n' Roll and its appearance in the American consciousness in the middle of the 1950s (Cloonan, 2005, 78). The rise of the Beatles across the Atlantic a decade later brought that interest to the UK, as intellectuals focused on the band and their music in ways previously unseen through similar forms. In fact, the 1967 release of the Beatles' landmark *Sgt. Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band* album saw pop – or more specifically rock – "being increasingly characterised as an art form" (Cloonan, 2005, 80). The early 1960s also saw the creation of the Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies (CCCS) in Birmingham, an institute that helped to "legitimise" the study of the culture of modern life, and with it the study of popular music as a composite element of that life (Cloonan, 2005, 78).

By the 1970s, key scholarship like that of Paul M. Hirsch (1970), Richard A. Peterson and David G. Berger (1975), Steve Chapple and Reebee Garofalo (1977), and Simon Frith (1978) sought to solidify popular music more generally as worthy of intellectual enquiry (Cloonan, 2005, 78, 80). Much of this early research, like the work Dave Laing (1985, 1996), Philip Tagg (1982, 1987), and Lawrence Grossberg (1989, 1992) was semiotic or interpretive in its focus. Other early research pursued

theories of social or cultural homology, such as Dick Hebdige (1987) and John Shepherd (1991) (Middleton, 1993, 177). Positively, this scholarship aimed to "highlight how cultural identity, historical change, geographical location and political processes [had] a significant influence on how music is produced, distributed and consumed" (Negus, 1996, 2 - 4). Like New Musicology's intent to move past the "internal connection[s]" that analysts found in its musical notation, popular music scholars began to explore musical expression with the knowledge that it was "created, circulated, recognised and responded to ... in quite particular social relationships, political processes and cultural activities" (Ibid). This research pointed to the extra-musical structures and influences that surrounded these expressions and their reception as equally pertinent to the music as the sounds that each of these iterations produced. These early studies also leaned towards the importance of lyrics in popular music. Such an approach was charged in particular by the "literary form of folk music" of Bob Dylan, which had found its way into English departments where it was discussed amongst work like that of John Keats, such as in Betsy Bowden's research (1982) (Cloonan, 2005, 79). Poetry and linguistic analysis, it seems, offered popular music another a channel through which to be considered as material for serious debate (Ibid). As Martin Cloonan points out, these two approaches - the textual and extra-textual - then became the two paths down which popular music studies have subsequently walked (Ibid).[2]

Bursting into the American popular consciousness during the 1980s, hip hop arrived as part of a perfect storm. For the new strains of musicological analysis that were in motion, hip hop music offered an intricate linguistic structure coupled with complex external influences. While this undoubtedly crafted some insightful

[2] As Martin Cloonan (2005) has pointed out, the development of popular music studies has been traced in Griffiths (1999), Green (2002), and Hesmondhalgh and Negus (2002). Its results are still highly contested, such as in Grossberg (2002) and Frith (2004).

discussions of a vibrant contemporary expression, as any 'orthodox' scholarship often does,[3] this body of research coloured in a very particular picture of hip hop culture and music. As Richard Middleton points out, in attempting to counteract the formalist musicology that had dominated previous research, this scholarship often gave insufficient attention to the actual sound of the music, or what Middleton refers to as the intra-musical structures of the "primary" level of signification (Middleton 1993, 177; Middleton, 1990, 220). And, when it did attempt to discuss these intra-musical structures, it often did so from a historical position in which musical notation was based on a westernised understanding of authorship and text, structured and unmoving, an understanding that could not adjust for musics that existed through space, performance, and improvisation (Cloonan, 2005, 79).

Acknowledging the need, therefore, to account not just for the research in and around hip hop culture and music but the way that that research has shaped and shapes our understanding of the material at hand, this chapter will be split into two distinct sections: research in hip hop music and research in hip hop music and cinema. The first of these explores the body of research on hip hop music under three headings: hip hop music and culture, hip hop music and the voice and, finally, hip hop music. It will profile the diverse range of scholarship that has explored hip hop under the characteristics highlighted above over the last four decades. The second section focuses on scholarship that has explored the connection between film and hip hop music, a relationship that manifests not just in the use of hip hop on the cinematic soundtrack but in the migration of the music's stars and icons to

[3] In historiography, "the study of the writing of history and of written histories", there is understood to be three phases of research: Orthodox, Revisionist, Post-Revisionist. Each constitutes a particular understanding of that at the core of the research. While orthodox research is an immediate reaction, revisionism tends to offer a polarised approach in an attempt to adjust for earlier leanings. A post-revisionist reading offers a more level balance between the two, supported by a distance from the subject matter and its specific historical time. Murray Forman highlights this point in his chapter, "'Hip-Hop Ya Don't Stop': Hip-Hop History and Historiography" in the edited collection, *That's the Joint!* (2012).

the film screen. While this section of the literature review accounts specifically for academic research around New Black Realist cinema, it will also include discussions on hip hop music and film more generally.

1.1 Research in Hip Hop: Music and the Performance of Culture

Foundational Texts & Primary Approaches

The mapping of the cultural and societal influences that surrounded the Black American youth community at the end of the twentieth-century dictate much of the early, fundamental writing on hip hop. This primary engagement with hip hop through its extra-musical components shaped work like Tricia Rose's *Black Noise* (1994) and *Hip Hop Wars* (2008), Eric M. Dyson's *Bearing Witness to Black Culture* (1997) and *Know What I Mean* (2007), Nelson George's *Hip Hop America* (1998), Bakari Kitwana's *The Hip Hop Generation* (2002) and *Why White Kids Love Hip Hop* (2006), and Jeff Chang's *Can't Stop, Won't Stop* (2005). This body of research often took a first-person, documentary-style approach to its exploration of hip hop's extra-musical elements. By writing as if at the frontline of this cultural movement, the analyses and definitions that these scholars put forward carried an authorial weight, a fact apparent in Dyson's *Know What I Mean* (2007), in which the book's introduction and conclusion are written by hip hop artists Jay-Z and Nas, respectively. Both are huge hip hop stars; both are seen to be excellent performers with ample street credentials; and both were involved in an ongoing feud. Dyson reaffirms his own authority, and the authenticity of the arguments and ideas that he puts forward, by borrowing from the credibility of both of these characters.

Collectively, this research has promoted the importance of the extra-musical components that surround hip hop music. As, Rose points out in the field's foundational text, *Black Noise*, "life on the margins of postindustrial urban America

is inscribed in hip hop style, sound, lyrics, and thematics. Situated at the crossroads of lack and desire, hip hop emerge[d] from the deindustrialisation meltdown where social alienation, prophetic imagination, and yearning intersect" (1994, 21). By focusing on hip hop's sonic components as one element that reverberates within a wider culture or community, these early scholars uncover important aspects of hip hop music as they exist in a particular time and place, and under particular parameters and influences. Here, hip hop is not defined through its lyrics on a page or simply by the sounds that it creates. In the work of this early cohort of scholars, hip hop is, and must be, defined both by the vibrancy of its history and its contemporary existence. For Rose that means being able to account for the wider impact of hip hop culture in the shaping of the music. She points both to the influence of technological processes on the music's oral articulations, "not only in the way that such oral traditions are formulated, composed, and disseminated, but also in the way that orally based approaches to narrative are embedded in the use of technology itself"; as well as highlighting that those producing the music work "within and among distinctly black practices, articulating stylistic and compositional priorities found in black cultures in the diaspora" (1994, 64; 95). This also allows scholars like Jeff Chang to track the conception and growth of specific musical features in the music, such as the "break", deejaying techniques like the "merry-go-round", and hip hop's obsession with repetition (2007, 79, 263). This scholarship reads hip hop as a "music-driven lifestyle being lived by an entire generation of young people" (Chang, 2007, 423).

Although this approach to hip hop does fall into some of the pitfalls set out by older, more conservative musicological research, it does offer a comprehensive understanding of a music that cannot be understood through an older, more conservative approach. Hip hop music is a "contemporary stage for the theatre of

the powerless" (Rose, 1994, 101), and to understand it is to explore it through the elements that have built that stage.

Edited Collections & "Hip Hop Studies"

Published in 1996, William Perkins's *Droppin' Science* highlights another in the crucial characteristics of early, foundational hip hop scholarship. An edited collection, Perkins's book featured chapters from scholars who approached various corners of hip hop culture from dispersed viewpoints. In compiling this work, Perkins argued that, notwithstanding the writing of David Toop (1984), Tricia Rose (1994), and Houston A. Baker Jr. (1995), by this point in hip hop's academic life the culture and its music had not been receiving "the kind of scholarly attention it merited" (Perkins, 1996, viii). He argued that no one had "analysed the complex interior of hip hop culture, surveyed its many genres and personalities, examined its effect on the larger white market, or acknowledged hip hop internationalisation" (Ibid). However the contributors to *Droppin' Science* would, Perkins's contested, "address these deficiencies and together put rap and hip hop culture into a wider framework of media and culture" (Ibid). His confidence in his book's ability to rectify such concerns lay in the varied platforms of those writing in *Droppin' Science*, that they would explore hip hop culture and media through a "uniquely wide frame and [with a] variety of voices" (Ibid). From Mandalit del Barco's uncovering of the influence of Latin culture on early hip hop to Robin D. G. Kelley's analysis of gangsta rap's emergence from the deindustrialisation of 1980s Southern California, *Droppin' Science* covers hip hop's history, evolution, and expanding audience. It also maps many of the political and economic environments in which the music's major genres took root (Ibid). Perkins's work marks out a "broad-based historical accent" that much research took up in the preceding years of hip hop

scholarship (Perkins, 1996, 2). This research stepped into the space carved out for it through the major waves of New Musicology and popular music studies (Ibid).

Since the early 1990s, hip hop has seen a huge wave of edited collections that focus on hip hop from across diverse vantage points, including Adam Sexton's *Straight Up Talk on Hip Hop Culture* (1995), Murray Forman and Mark Anthony Neal's *That's the Joint!* (2004), Dipannita Basu and Sidney J. Lemelle's *Hip Hop and the Globalisation of Black Popular Culture* (2006), Tim Strode and Tim Wood's *Hip Hop Reader* (2007), Justin Williams's *Cambridge Companion to Hip-Hop* (2015), Travis L. Gosa and Eric Nielson's *The Hip Hop and Obama Reade*r (2015), and Justin D. Burton and Jason Oakes's *Oxford Handbook of Hip Hop Music* (Forthcoming). Research in hip hop scholarship is, then, inherently multifaceted. Hip hop both offers, and requires, a myriad of viewpoints through from which to view it, not because it is any more or less complex than other musics, but rather that its complexity is ever-present in the music's performance. This is, of course, a double-edged sword. In a positive sense, this means that the the wide spread of approaches taken towards the culture, apparent through the edited collections mentioned previously, allow us to map the various inter-locking components of hip hop. After all, "the inherent cultural attributes that inform rap are deep and multifaceted and hip-hop should not, therefore, be reduced to any single object or medium" (Forman, 2012, 2).

The methodological framework of research on hip hop can, however, often appear as a blurred outline. As Murray Forman and Mark Anthony Neal have noted, hip hop has been important to many courses across the disciplines and its themes have been regularly explored amongst academic conferences and seminar proceedings, but there did not seem to be anything "resembling a consensus on what hip-hop studies might be and how it could progress" since the early 1990s

and Perkins's collection (Ibid). In fact it was not until the first print of their edited collection in 2004, *That's the Joint!*, that the term "Hip Hop Studies" was defined. For Forman and Neal, rather than being a provocation, the title came about after a search for a term that could encompass "the array of theoretical and analytical approaches characterising research on hip-hop's vast and unwieldy practices" (2012, 2).

Culture, Community, and Hip Hop as Multifaceted Performance

While we now think of the main focus of contemporary hip hop scholarship to be the sound and music that emanated from Black American youth culture at the turn of the twenty-first century, much of the initial research spoke about the music simply as one aspect of a "lifestyle which came to be known as hip hop" (Toop, 1984, 12). Hip hop comprised of a number of interlocking and integrated practices, including graffiti writing and breakdancing. As Dick Hebdige pointed out, these practices were imbued with the same "rough and abrupt 'cut n mix' aesthetic" that we saw in the music but through the frames of visual art and physical movement (Hebdige, 1987, 136 - 148).

For the earliest of studies in the field, understanding hip hop as a "performance" of interrelated forms was an organic process. Released in 1984, both Steven Hager's *Illustrated History of Break Dancing, Rap Music and Graffiti* and David Toop's *Rap Attack* talk about hip hop as a cultural movement. Their anthropological research, which grew naturally from early journalistic discussions of the culture, map all aspects of the form as they move together collectively. While music exists largely at the forefront of this space, like the dialogue of a film, that existence is rarely shaped without fashion, graffiti, and dancing. This research understood the music as a fulcrum around which these other cultural elements turned, a fact that contributes to the illustrated nature of both Toop and Hager's

work. Five years after their research, in 1989, Trey Ellis talked about hip hop as one part of the wider Black Arts movement that was stirring in the US from the mid-1980s onwards. Although Ellis mentioned the music as it had progressed into spaces where it was created by “middle class Black kids”, it still came coupled with other arts and physical expression (1989, 241). For instance, he argues that for breakdancers “style is often as important as one's music” and that even brand names can sometimes become “more important than one's rap” (Ellis, 1989, 240).

This idealised state, of hip hop as multifaceted performance, is a fascinating aspect of this contemporary popular culture and early hip hop scholarship’s focus on it has left an impression on the rest of the field. In the first sense, this cultural construction has marked out an already established space to explore hip hop’s influence on other arts and media outside its “initial forms” (Chang, 2006, ix). As Jeff Chang points out in his edited collection *Total Chaos*, “hip-hop has become one of the most far-reaching and transformative arts movements of the past two decades” (Ibid). The “hip hop arts movement” takes in “theatre, poetry, literature, journalism, criticism, performance art, dance, visual arts, photography, graphic design, film and video” (Ibid). While Chang’s book incorporates chapters from scholars who explore some of these various iterations of the hip hop arts movement, we have also seen research that investigates hip hop spirituality (Johnson, 2013), hip hop theatre (Banks, 2011), and hip hop pedagogy (Hill, 2009), as well as the “performance” of other cultures and communities around the globe, including Cuba (Saunders, 2015), France (McCarren, 2012), and Australia (Maxwell, 2003).

In the second sense, acknowledging this inceptive structure is fundamental to understanding the way in which hip hop offers contemporary arts and media, particularly film and the narrative soundscape, a unique partner. In his article, “Hip

Hop: From Live Performance to Mediated Narrative", Greg Dimitriadis defines hip hop, pre-1979 and the release of "Rapper's Delight", as an "integrated series of live community based practices", arguing that the culture was an "event" of face-to-face social interactions constructed through "dance, dress, art and music" (1996, 179). This integrated series puts the body, space, and the performance of both at the core of the hip hop experience. This is something which sets hip hop out in direct contrast with many of the literate-based Western cultural forms and structures that it bumps in to, particularly in the context of this thesis. In the third sense, however, Dimitriadis suggests that that is how hop hop was and not how it necessarily is. In his article, he points to the success of Run-DMC and the release of "It's Like That/Sucker MCs" in 1983 as a moment in which the culture went through a "basic redefinition" (1996, 185). With the release of that record, Dimitriadis argues that Run-DMC "consolidated and commodified" hip hop as an aural form, effectively diminishing the importance of hip hop's other dimensions (Ibid). Dimitriadis's work contends that hip hop's attention shifted to "rap's verbal discourse" during the early 1980s (Ibid). Consequently, a majority of hip hop studies, work like Nelson George (1998), Guthrie P. Ramsey Jr. (2003), and Joseph Schloss (2009), has concerned themselves with hip hop as aural form. It is this long entrenched understanding of hip hop that shapes the next section of this literature review.

1.2 Research in Hip Hop Music: As Voice, As Sampling, As Postmodern Expression

The Hip Hop Voice, Poetry, and Orality

Rap and hip hop are often read as interchangeable terms in scholarly and popular discussions of the culture and its music (Donalson, 2007, 25). While such a terminological exchange is arguably innocuous, it presents a shorthand for the

primary position that sound and music, and the voice in particular, have taken up in projections of the hip hop community and the research that explores those projections. What is interesting, however, is that while hip hop has come to the American popular consciousness in the early 1980s as a vococentric music, the voice in hip hop has not necessarily been given a comparable amount of attention in academic scholarship.

Of the work that has explored the voice in hip hop, there has been some significant and far-reaching scholarship over the last four or so decades, of which a notable percentage looks to explore hip hop as text, as poetry. In his 2009 book, *The Poetics of Hip Hop,* Adam Bradley points this out, arguing that “every rap song is a poem waiting to be performed. Written or freestyled, rap has a poetic structure that can be reproduced, a deliberate form an MC creates for each rhyme that differentiates it, if only in small ways, from every other rhyme ever conceived. Like all poetry, rap is defined by the art of the line” (Bradley, 2009, xi). As suggested in a later work with Andrew DuBois, this approach has meant treating hip hop as "a body of lyrics that responds to transcription, explication, and analysis as poetry” (Bradley and DuBois, 2011, xxx). Beyond the poetry of the lyrics, research has also been concerned with the “language” or linguistic structures of hip hop (Alim, 2006), and its key features and formal structures, such rhyme, metre, and “flow” (Caplan, 2014).

Echoing the New Musicological approach mentioned earlier, some studies have also been concerned with the social, cultural, and political factors that have influenced that language (Ross and Rivers, 2017), as well as how hip hop lyrics have fed back into contemporary popular culture, classrooms, and pedagogy (Low, 2011). Some have explored the dialogic nature of the language (Wheeler, 1991), or its place in the lineages of African and African-American vernacular or AAV

(Smitherman, 2000; Rickford and Rickford, 2000). Others still have explored the language of hip hop outside of its own 'expected' lineage (Hoffman, 2011). Imani Perry's 2004 book *Prophets of the Hood* is an interesting mix of the approaches taken by some of these studies. Perry's work uses hip hop lyrics to understand "what philosophies and assumptions one finds in the spaces between the poetry of the lyrics and the music of the beats", the philosophies at play between "the artists and an audience that receives the music as one deriving from its own community and experience", and the role that record companies and commerciality play in mediating such relationships (2004, 4 - 5). Her research also points towards the inherent difficulty in discussing the voice and language in hip hop.

Hip hop is an oral literature or, rather, it is a post-literate orality, an idea that returns later in this thesis as a key mechanism in understanding the role of hip hop in the sound and music of New Black Realist cinema. Through this definition, hip hop fuses "literate concepts of authorship with orally based constructions of thought, expression and performance" (Rose, 1994, 87). Simply, the poetry of hip hop does not exist on the page but in its performance and the space in which that performance takes place. While it is undoubtedly important to read hip hop's lyrics and language, to do so alone is to miss out on the innate importance that the rhythms and sampled sounds of the music play in the narrative and meaning of hip hop (Rose, 1994, 88). It is for that reason that Robert Walser's "Rhythm, Rhyme, and Rhetoric in the Music of Public Enemy" stands out as a touchstone in the analysis of the voice in hip hop (1995). Walser argues that in contrast to the music of predecessors like Gil-Scott Heron and The Last Poets, sounds and music do not exist as "accompaniment to textual delivery; rather, voice and instrumental tracks are paced in a more dynamic relationship in hip hop, as the rapper interacts with the rest of the music" (Walser, 1995, 204). Using traditional forms of notation and

musical analysis, Walser maps the voice, its lyrics, and rhythms over the rhythms and sounds of the music. On the one hand, this dissection of the voice in hip hop brings the music further into the halls of academic institutions and so, in part, legitimises the debate around hip hop's status as music (Walser, 1995, 195). Yet, on the other hand, it also allows us to pick apart the inner workings of hip hop's orality, a concept proposed in the writing of Walter Ong (1982) (referenced in Walser, 1995, 196). Here, Walser offers hip hop scholarship the chance to consider the non-linguistic elements of the music in their importance to the voice, or rather to consider that the voice is a part of hip hop's utterance. This means discussing the music's polyrhythms as part of culturally significant statements, as "rhythmic structures [that] are linked to social values and tensions" (Chernoff quoted in Walser, 1995, 208). To understand hip hop is to read, therefore, what is being said in the lyrics, the music, and the interactions between the two. Walser was certainly not the first to transcribe the voice in hip hop - both Cheryl Keyes (1991) and David F. Wallace and Mark Costello (1990) had done so previously - but his approach has, in an immediate sense, influenced writing like that of Kyle Adams (2008, 2009) or Martin E. Connor (2017). On a broader scale, Walser's work has helped to forward our understanding of the way in which the voice in hip hop constructs narrative. By moving beyond the text of the lyrics, Walser accounts for the performance of the music in a cultural and social space.

Hip Hop Music, Samples, and Sampling

If the voice has been relatively under-explored in hip hop studies, hip hop music has certainly not struggled with representation in this field more generally. As the fulcrum around which most of hip hop arts and culture turn, music has been at the centre of the majority of studies on hip hop. And, as many studies as there are that focus on the music specifically, so too are there differing aspects and elements

focused on in that research - from hip hop's musical lineage and place in African-American musical history (Ramsey Jr., 2003) to its role in the post-Civil Rights Movement (Walcott, 2005), through issues of orientalism (McLeod, 2013), nationalism (Decker, 1993), masculinity (Shabazz, 2014), feminism (Clay, 2008), politics (Binfield, 2009; Ciccariello-Maher, 2005), metaphors (Crossley, 2005), realism (Danielsen, 2008), and money and mortality (Peterson, 2006). Studies like these differ from that scholarship mentioned in previous sections because of the way in which they focus on the music created by the hip hop generation. Rather than anthropologic or ethnomusicological studies in which music features as the core element, this body of research approaches the music first. Aspects of culture, politics, or economics are still pertinent here; research like Clay (2008) or Peterson (2006) does not extract these sounds from reality and explore them in isolation.

The pivot of this research is, though, very much the finalised music product. That approach to hip hop is driven by Adam Krims's major work, *Rap Music and the Poetics of Identity* (2000). Krims declares that his work "deals with rap music as it has been transformed, commodified, and globalised by the music industry; in other words, it addresses rap music as media content" (2000, 2). In that shift, Krims is intent on discussing what he feels is "a relatively neglected but crucial aspect of rap music's cultural force: namely the particularity of its sounds" (2000, 3). He acknowledges the impact of the music's origin as an African-American vernacular practice", and that that "origin survives in transformed resonances, gestures, and counter-gestures, and in newly relocalised cultural inflections" (2000, 2 - 3). He contends that his emphasis on what he calls hip hop's "musical poetics" is meant as a "corrective to the vast majority of rap and hip-hop scholarship which takes the music seriously but gives little, if any, attention to its musical organisation" (Ibid). Krims's shift in concentration marks out the change from the previous section to this

one, a change that gives academic scholarship the space to explore the sounds and music of hip hop further than before. Most interestingly, in respect to this present project, this new priority has created space for some fascinating work that explores samples and sampling in hip hop music.

In the first sense, a number of studies have focused on the practical aspects of sampling and samples in hip hop, stretching from crate digging and the ethics that surround sampled material (Demers, 2003; Lena, 2004; Schloss, 2004; Perchard, 2011; Tillet, 2014) to deejays and turntablism (Katz, 2012; Smith, 2013), issues of copyright (McLeod and DiCola, 2011; Williams, 2015b; Said, 2015), and even approaches to the notation and transcription of sounds and samples in the music (Miyakawa, 2007; Boone, 2013). One of the most challenging aspects of this research has been the definitions of samples and their role in hip hop music. Studies like Serge Lacasse's (2000), David Metzer's (2003), and Joseph Schloss's (2004) have, for instance, each proffered possible terminology for this issue. However, it was not really until Amanda Sewell's 2014 article on the Beastie Boys and Public Enemy that we finally saw a discernible and translatable typology that allowed us to discuss samples and their role in the narrative and meaning of the music consistently (Sewell, 2014, 29). Sewell is interested, for instance, in where samples exist in the track, how often they return, and their importance to the musical drive of the piece. This typology becomes important to our focus on samples later in this research.

In the second sense, there is also the very useful body of research that has explored not just its practical elements but the idea that sampling is a guiding philosophy in hip hop, a culturally-particular understanding of sound and music. As mentioned, Wayne Marshall points towards such an idea in his research on sampling, copyright, and The Roots (2006). The article deals with the innate

dichotomy of the hip hop band, suggesting that while they "reject monolithic, marginalising ideas about authentic hip hop musicianship and ... construct a compelling and coherent counterargument in performance and discourse", through the use of live instruments and originally composed cells of music, they also engage with "many of hip hop's distinctive sonic features" to evoke "the characteristic sound and style of 1970s-era breakouts" (2006, 871). ?uestlove and the Roots create authentic hip hop through the aesthetics of sampling, without depending on actual re-used sonic material. Justin Williams has written extensively on this subject matter (2010, 2013, 2014, 2015b). In his 2014 article "Theoretical Approaches to Quotations in Hip-Hop Recordings", for example, Williams looks to provide "a toolkit that sets a context for more nuanced discussions of borrowing practices and offers broader implications for intertextuality within and outside of hip hop culture" (2014, 188). Emblematic of his contribution to the field, Williams considers the very term sampling, and what it means in the context of hip hop culture. He determines that it a form of cultural "borrowing", settling on the term not because it is value free - quite the opposite. To borrow something implies that it should be returned intact, or that it can be - but "because it sidesteps the ethical arguments and negative connotations in favour of more detailed analysis, and places these hip-hop practices within a well-established lineage of musical borrowing in both African- and European-based musics" (2014, 190 - 191). Williams's focus on sampling at this level becomes a signification consideration later in the discussion of the composition of the New Black Realist soundscape.

Hip Hop Music and/as Postmodern Expression

Contemporary scholarship has reached out in search of existent frameworks in its attempts to explore both the voice and music in hip hop, and for most authors, that has meant bumping into the aesthetics and philosophies of postmodernism. At

the most basic level of this connection, major studies in the field have at least referenced hip hop culture and music's passing similarity to the characteristic traits of postmodern art and expression. In his 1991 article, "The Fine Art of Rap", Richard Shusterman is clear about hip hop as postmodern culture and utterance, suggesting that it is a "postmodern art which challenges some of our most deeply entrenched aesthetic conventions" (1991, 614). Shusterman contends that postmodern art and hip hop music share a number of key characteristics, including that both creatively deploy and thematise "appropriation to show that borrowing and creation are not at all incompatible", show a fascination and overwhelming "absorption of contemporary technology, particularly that of the mass media", and thematise "the eclectic pastiche and cannibalisation of past style[s]" (1991, 617, 620, 624). Gregory Stephens affirms this logic in his article from the same year (1991). Again, Stephens suggests that because hip hop and postmodernism share fundamental characteristics, such as indeterminacy or a focus on performativity, then hip hop is "clearly a postmodern artform" (1991, 67). In his assertion, Michael Eric Dyson is a little more specific, determining that sampling in hip hop is a postmodernist activity because it allows musicians to "interrupt the narrative flow and musical stability of other musical texts, producing a new and often radically different creation" (2004, 67).[4]

James Peterson suggests that hip hop has, in part, shaped our contemporary postmodern existence. He suggests that "even as it might also be seen as one of the postmodernist movement's most glorious and ostensibly recognisable products", it can nevertheless be considered a "contributing factor to the postmodernist artistic movement" (2016, 383). This connection has not always been

[4] Dyson's article comes from M. Forman and M.A. Neal's 2004 edited collection *That's the Joint.* This book features other articles that include material on hip hop and postmodernism. Other works on the connection between hip hop and postmodernism include Walser (1995), Saddik (2003), Alim (2006), Bailey (2014), Broome (2015), and Molokov and Zueva (2017).

a simple and clear one in hip hop scholarship, however. While Adam Krims suggests that hip hop has not become “one of the more canonical objects for discussions of postmodern culture” because of deep-seated moral panics around the music (2000, 8), Tricia Rose highlights the fact that although some do view hip hop as a “quintessentially postmodern practice”, others see it as a present day example of premodern oral traditions (1994, 21). As noted, Rose settles on a definition of hip hop as a “post-literate orality”, a fusion of “literate concepts of authorship with orally based construction of thought, expression and performance”, as she contends that neither postmodernism nor premodern frameworks do the culture and its expressions total justice on their own (1994, 86 - 87, 22).

At the centre of this research is Russell Potter’s *Spectacular Vernaculars* (1995) and his exploration of hip hop and postmodernism, a work that arguably addresses those concerns raised by writings like that of Rose. In his research, Potter is specific in his arrangement of hip hop’s postmodern-ness. He asserts that Black cultures have inhabited the contradictory space of what Paul Gilroy calls the “slave sublime” (1993) and so “glimpsed the fundamental rottenness of European modernism from its very intestines long before Europe noticed any trace of indigestion” (Potter, 1995, 6). In other words, hip hop is a “black postmodernist” utterance that can be read independently of the movement of postmodernism itself (Ibid). It is not just a “simple object which a postmodernist project could ‘bring to light’ or offer as exemplary” (Potter, 1995, 13). It is itself an active, ongoing, and highly sophisticated postmodernism (Ibid). Although Potter suggests that “it could be said that all black artistic movements are postmodern”, he contends that the postmodernism of hip hop is unique in its ability to take on and reshape other forms of expression. Hip hop is “one form of radical postmodernism” that, through the turntable as its central chronotope, “signifies on its ability to ‘turn the tables’ on

previous black traditions, making a future out of fragments from the archive of the past, turning consumption into production" (1995, 4, 9 - 10, 18). It is in this sense that hip hop redefines the very "structures of resistance" and it is those new definitions that this research is interested in exploring in the New Black Realist soundscape (1995, 15).

1.3 Research in Hip Hop Music/Film: Genre, Soundtrack, and Soundscape

Hip Hop, Genre, and Cinema

As we have seen in other research, hip hop music has been accompanied by varied visual means from its earliest iteration. In many ways hip hop is as visual a culture as it is a musical one. For both practitioners and scholars, this has most obviously translated into a focus on music videos and their role in representing, establishing, and challenging visual tropes amongst members of the hip hop community and those that peek in on it, as in the work of Balaji (2010), Railton and Watson (2011), and Rubin (2016). Still, hip hop's presence in mass-mediated forms has stretched far beyond music videos.

Hip Hop culture and music has driven two distinct film genres: the Hip Hop Musicals of the 1980s and the New Black Realism of the 1990s. Although the latter has garnered some notable attention in academic circles, that work has at times been disjointed in places where we needs it to be most secure. Like any artistic movement, the boundaries of New Black Realism are of course blurred. There are various discussions over the characteristics, start and end dates, directors, and films that constitute this genre. While such discussions are expected and important debates, what is unusual is the disparate way in which some studies seem to attempt to define these films on their own terms and often at the disregard of others. Those definitions have been outlined fully in the introduction, but stretch

from Ed Guerrero's "male-focused, 'ghettocentric', action-crime-adventure films" (1993, 182) through Bakari Kitwana's "black gangster films" (2002) to Dan Flory's "black noir films" (2008, 153). Each of these studies helps us to point out the importance of various elements of their composition, as in their focus on male characters or their echoing of other film genres. Equally, though, they muddy a clear definition of the new Black youth films of the 1990s. It is impossible for this cinema to satisfy all of the terms used here and in the introduction.

Guerrero's definition, of these films as male-focused, 'ghettocentric', action-crime-adventure films, is particularly interesting though (1993, 182). It details three separate characteristics of this cinema. And yet, it is still rather vague. A majority of American films produced at this time were some form of action or adventure films that focused on lead male characters. The other definitions outlined in the introduction can also be seen to carry negative connotations. For instance, by playing on the term blaxploitation, both Guthrie P. Ramsey Jr. and Henry Louis Gates Jr.'s "rapsploitation" (2003) and "guiltsploitation" (1992) evade the influence that the Hip Hop Musicals of the 1980s have had on New Black Realism, by tagging them in such a way as to skip a decade. Dan Flory's use of the term "noir" sets these films in an entirely different film lineage, something which the term gangsta/gangster also does. Steven Kendall's "New Jack Cinema" (1994) narrows the musical framework of these films, tying the genre to a specific film, Mario Van Peebles's *New Jack City* (1991). While there are of course components of "action", "gangstas", and "ghettos" across these films, they are constituent parts of each film's attempt to reflect, as much as any mediated presentation can, the immediate reality of its creators and its intended audience and the already mediated sounds and images that surround that culture. It is for that reason that this research settled on "New Black Realism".

The term, New Black Realism, stems from Manthia Diawara's 1993 work, *Black American Cinema*. Diawara suggests that films such as *Boyz 'N' the Hood* (1991), *Juice* (1992) and *Straight Out of Brooklyn* (1991) explore "the existent reality of urban life in America," arguing that "just as in real life" these films are set "in neighbourhoods that are pulled between gang members, rappers and education-prone kids" (1993, 24 - 25). He qualifies his determination in the assessment of his students who contend that these films "use hip hop culture" as the new Black youth culture in modern America, and so, "the characters look real because they dress in the style of hip hop, talk the lingo of hip hop [and] practice its world view toward the police and women" (Ibid). In positioning these films at the generic crossroads between fact and fiction (Smith, 1992, 57), Kitwana suggests that New Black Realism is defined by, and helps us to define, the creation of the "New Black Youth Culture" of the late twentieth century (Kitwana, 2002, 123).

Hip Hop Culture and Music on Film

The foremost concern of scholarship on hip hop and film, other than a discussion of the work of Spike Lee,[5] is the presence of the culture on the screen - both how it got there and the way it looks and sounds once it arrives. In the case of the former, S. Craig Watkins's *Hip Hop Culture and the Production of Black Cinema* is a stand-out example. Watkins's 1998 work is comprehensive in its exploration of the ingredients that led to the growth of Black American film genres. He contends that "it is difficult to write about black filmmaking without also considering the specific social and historical processes that forged the space for its production and the spirit for its imagination and vigor" (1998, 5). Watkins argues, specifically in reference to New Black Realist film, that this particular formation of Black youth cultural production took "shape within the context of profound social, economic,

[5] Some of this work includes Snipe (1990), Lubiano (1991), Baker Jr. (1991), Christensen (1991), Pinsker (1991), Fuchs (2002), Flory (2006), Massood (2008), and McGowan (2014).

and technological transformations that reorganised the possibilities for collective and symbolic action, especially from the social margins of society" (1998, 7). His research outlines extensively a number of those transformations, including cultural and technologic aspects, political factors, racial issues, and, of course, monetary and economic restrictions and concerns.

Other research has echoed and developed these discussions. This has been both in the specificity of New Black Realism, as in Audrey McCluskey's interview with Spike Lee in which the director mentions the influence of money and mainstream institutions on his films and directing style (2004); and more generally in Black filmmaking, as in the work of Matthew Hughey (2009) who discusses the cultural importance of representation and visibility of Black bodies onscreen or Earl Sheridan (2006) who explores the influence that racism has had on the composition and reception of Black American films. In the case of the latter, research has been interested in the presence of the symbols and cultural products of hip hop music on the film screen, particularly as they contribute to a strong sense of authenticity in these cinematic statements. As a highly mediated form, the authentic construction of New Black Realism tends to exist, for both its creators and its audience, in the translation of the music's visual signifiers to the screen in a quite literal sense. This is apparent in the work of Ed Guerrero (1993) and Melvin Donalson (2007), or Kimberley Fain (2015) who asserts that, among other things, the physical presence of stars like Ice Cube, Ice-T, Nas, Queen Latifah and Tupac have offered the most salient of ways to ratify the "realistic" nature of this cinema (Fain, 2015, 132). These figures create a shorthand for those inside and outside the culture, suggesting to those watching that this is authentically hip hop. This point is reinforced in writing like that of Geoff Harkness (2015) or Jesse Stewart's, whose blurry categories of hip hop culture on film, pseudo-biographical films, 'hood films, and hip hop

documentaries, are all built on the supposedly realistic projection of figures normally present in the songs and music videos of hip hop (2009, 49).

This projection also occurred with culturally-specific artefacts, images, or 'things', apparent in the way in which the actual sounds and music of hip hop have been understood to feature in these films. Echoed in the Hip Hop Musicals of the previous decade, and the scholarship of Casey Hayman (2013) and Kimberley Monteyne (2013), this scholarship has leaned towards discussions of specific musical tracks, both in the investigation of diegetic performances of hip hop within the film narrative and the use of specific pieces of hip hop as musical cues on the cinematic soundtrack. Some scholars, like Watkins, have argued that this use of music "was typically employed as a promotional tie-in, thus appealing to an already established youth market with some measure of precision" (1998, 188). Furthermore, this use of hip hop music is understood to engage already established identifications, taken from the cinema theatre audience's relationship with hip hop music and music videos more generally. Michael Eric Dyson points out that the music of groups like Run-DMC, Public Enemy, Boogie Down Productions, Kool Moe Dee, Ice Cube, and Ice-T affords young Black men "a medium in which to visualise and verbalise their perspectives on a range of social, personal, and cultural issues, to tell their stories about themselves and each other while the rest of America consumes and eavesdrops" (Dyson, 1993, 93). To use this music in New Black Realism is to borrow and promote that same sonic space. This perspective settles alongside the already established approach taken towards popular music on film. Work like that of Steven Lanin and Matthew Caley (2005), Phil Powrie and Robyn Stilwell (2005), Ian Conrich and Estella Tincknell (2006), and K. J. Donnelly (2015) are concerned with the "song" in cinema, either in its diegetic or non-diegetic performance. This means viewing hip hop music on film in the same way that we

view the presence of hip hop artists like Ice-T or Queen Latifah playing characters onscreen, something Adam Haupt suggests in his writing on these films (2015). For hip hop, that means we can go little further than assessing that the music, as one sizeable cultural object, represents questionable characters traits or menacing aspects of male nihilistic culture and dangerous spaces (Ramsey, 2002, 317; Ramsey, 2003, 183 - 184). In its unique construction hip hop sound and music on film can offer that and much more, if we look to read the music not as a collection of canonic songs or artists but as a musical process.

Hip Hop Music as Cinematic Soundscape

To focus on hip hop simply as a genre of music, a sonic cultural product, centred in its performance on or in the film soundscape, is to miss out on its very nature as a musical process. The argument here, as noted in the previous and upcoming chapters, is that hip hop is not defined by a specific set of chords, instruments, themes, or keys. It is, rather, a collection of techniques and aesthetics that allow us to construct sound and music through a culturally-charged format. Hip hop is as much an understanding of sound and music, an aesthetic, sonic framework, as it is a collection of canonic artists, albums and songs. To view hip hop in this light, I argue, is to uncover the unique way in which the culture constructs its sonic expressions and to argue that it is that unique framework through which hip hop offers its most valuable contribution to the film soundscape. To read hip hop as a sonic process is to open up to the way in which it shapes not just music, but also other elements of the film soundscape such as the voice and sound effects. It is this outlook that helps to dictate the next chapter, the theoretical framework.

Although little research has approached hip hop music and the cinematic soundscape in this fashion; there is, however, some scholarship which has leaned in

a similar direction to the one taken in this thesis. Of the three mentioned here, each study has done so across the three sonic components of cinema. So, while Margaret Thomas's article explores language and linguistic variation in Spike Lee's *School Daze* (1994); Danjiela Kulezic-Wilson's discussion of Darren Aronofsky's 'π' explores, in part, hip hop music and the cinematic sound effect (2008), and Krin Gabbard focuses on Spike Lee's *He Got Game* (1998), mapping the music of Aaron Copland against the images of young Black bodies onscreen (2000).

Thomas' article deals with the concept of linguistic variation and African-American vernacular (AAV) in one of Lee's earliest films. In her article she contends that "every language includes resources allowing for variation along many dimensions" (Thomas, 1994, 911). For Thomas, this means that how any particular message is encrypted in an utterance is "potentially influenced by the speaker's age, gender, ethnicity, etc, and location in time and space, as well as by many aspects of the particular social context of the utterance, among them the relationship between the speaker and the hearer, the setting the mood, and the topic and the purpose of the conversation" (Ibid). Thomas's research does not specifically acknowledge hip hop culture and music, but her article highlights the importance of reading the sounds of contemporary African-American culture in all its forms on film, and not just its specific musical utterances. The construction of the voice in hip hop culture is a very particular utterance loaded with specific signifiers and signifieds, and its purpose and possibilities on the New Black Realist soundscape can be better understood by realising its role in hip hop music. The language and voices of hip hop are also important aspects of its musical process, and there is an innate connection between hip hop music and the structuring of the voice in hip hop, as we have seen.

In Kulezic-Wilson's article, the author looks to examine how director Darren Aronofsky, inspired by hip-hop and techno music, "applied various musical techniques and models of structuring" in his film 'π', something which resulted in "an innovative approach to editing and an inherently musical audiovisual style" (2008, 19). By exploring the idea of "hip-hop editing" or "the hip-hop montage", Kulezic-Wilson investigates Aronofsky's composition of visual scenes and cuts, as well as his use of sound effects in the film soundscape through aesthetics normally tied to sampling and hip hop music. In 'π', Kulezic-Wilson contends, "the numerous narrative, visual, and sonic patterns create different layers of 'loops' on the macro level; the hip-hop editing breaks are inserted as cuts or ruptures into the flow, yet the repetition of those ruptures itself constitutes a pattern and thus balances out the effect of those ruptures on the film's macro level" (2008, 26 - 27). Reflecting Marshall's article on The Roots (2006), Kulezic-Wilson's work outlines that hip hop and sampling, and the cut 'n' mix aesthetics that drive them, can be applied to both sounds other than music and expressions other than sound. Other work has also talked about sound effects in New Black Realist films more specifically, such as Dyson (1993), Watkins (1998), and Haupt (2015), while not in the context of the cultural aesthetics that have informed their composition.

In his article published in 2000, Gabbard discusses the (re)use of some of American concert-hall composer Aaron Copland's music in Spike Lee's 1998 basketball film, *He Got Game*. What is most interesting in his writing is Gabbard's exploration of the complicated relationship between the music of Aaron Copland, seen by many to reflect the "sound" of America, and the images of young Black male bodies at play (2000, 373 - 374). Gabbard explains that this difficult connection allows Lee to question issues of race in the normalisation of what is, and is not, "American". Lee reverses the "familiar Hollywood practice of using the

invisible and ‘inaudible’ sounds of black music to accompany the actions of white people” onscreen, by bringing what is typically “background music” to the fore and creating a cinematic dissonance, one that calls on the attention of the theatre audience (2000, 372). Gabbard argues that while a film will may “make a menancing group of youths seem even more menacing by playing rap music on the soundtrack”, Lee’s “unusual juxtaposition” signals to viewers a “new set of associations” between the quintessential sound of America and the sight of young Black males on screen (2000, 371 - 373). This thesis builds directly on, or rather in contrast to, Gabbard’s writing later in the analysis of music in New Black Realist cinema.

Conclusion

“theorising” on Hip Hop and the Soundscapes of New Black Realism

Hip Hop has risen to be one of the most wide-reaching and pervasive cultural movements of the last half-century. It has infiltrated, disturbed, or reset a number of contemporary art forms and media in countries and communities that spread right across the world. Musically, hip hop has evolved beyond itself, spanning or inspiring various new genres and musical fusions that build on many of the aesthetics and ideas that helped to create the music in the early 1970s. It is now a mainstream language as commonly spoken or understood as rock ’n’ roll, jazz, classical or pop music. In almost 45 years, hip hop has gone from the sounds and images of a couple of street corners around 1520 Sedgwick Avenue in the Bronx, New York to the sounds and images of a global movement that can be found as easily in clothes and apparel, language, sports and marketing, as it can in any record store. Throughout that same period hip hop has been accompanied by articles, research,

and journalism that has looked to detail and explore the culture and its various iterations with, as ever, a pinpoint focus on the sounds and music of the community.

Over its relatively short life then, hip hop music has been in the somewhat unique position of being mapped and researched in parallel motion to its growth. For a culture and music shaped by time from before and beyond its own existence, through aspects like the sampling of past musics or Afrofuturism, hip hop academia and research has always existed in the culture and music's immediate reality. This is a double-edged sword. It has allowed us to be at the forefront of this movement, examining its fundamental factors first-hand, chatting to its key figures in their revolutionary guises, and charting the economic, political, and cultural concerns as they occur in that moment. It has offered us a proximity that few other major musical cultures have enjoyed and in that, has given academia the chance to analysis the fossils of hip hop before the amber crystallises. This proximity, in both a temporal and social sense, has however raised specific concerns, outlined throughout this literature review. At times the analysis of hip hop culture and its many expressions has been shaped by the immediacy in which we have made those assessments. Hip hop studies have taken anthropological or ethnomusicological positions that raise certain set discourses around hip hop. This research is concerned with space or performance at the cost of the recorded medium, worried by the social or economic aspects that shape the music as much as the sounds themselves, or focused on the translation of hip hop's biggest musical stars to the screen rather than the aesthetics and frameworks of these films. This is not to say that such discussions create negative assessments - far from it - but rather it is to note simply that distance can be a useful attribute in academic debate.

Now, as we approach hip hop's 50th anniversary, and many of the films that we are focusing on reach their own quarter-century milestones, that distance becomes a vital perspective through which to create a unique and important study. Robynn Stilwell and Phil Powrie point to a similar idea in the introduction to their edited collection on the reuse of music on film, *Changing Tunes* (2005). In it, the editors talk about the fact that their contributors are refining the already "tentatively mapped out" concepts and debate around the ways in which pre-existing music relates to visual and narrative aspects of film (2005, xiii - xiv). Stilwell and Powrie reference the work of Noël Carroll as he maps the movement from "Theory", "a top-down model in which the general Theory determines how something is read", towards theorising, "in which understanding proceeds from a close reading of individual texts from a variety of angles" (Ibid). While Stilwell and Powrie contest elements of Carroll's model, they suggest that *Changing Tunes* corresponds to his aim of "small-scale" analysis, in which the hope is that "out of detailed and patient work there may emerge pragmatic solutions to local issues, and that such solutions may inform wider questions" (2005, xiv). This doctoral research is firmly in that category of "theorising".

The "Theory" outlined throughout this literature review, the general approaches taken towards hip hop and its mediated expressions, are certainly important to this study but they are not where it begins. While the literature review outlines fundamental aspects of hip hop music Theory, as it pertains to this study, this research will work its way back towards this scholarship from the specificity of the New Black Realist soundscape. This thesis will analyse these films and the particularities of their sounds and music in the unique dichotomy that these exist: somewhere between the subcultural intent of hip hop and the mainstream framework of narrative cinema. Such an approach allows this research to both avoid

being defined by the expectations of hip hop as a musical expression, or falter at or repeat the same points as those studies that precede it, but also pull from fields of research not normally thought of in discussions of either hip hop music or the mainstream narrative soundscape. In the ‘small-scale analysis’ of exploring how particular sounds, song samples, or vocal exclamations are structured and interact with the film narrative and images, this research will explore the ‘local issue’ of hip hop creating unique audio-visual iterations that express contemporary Black youth culture onscreen and inform wider questions of the construction of culturally-driven meaning through sound and music in the postmodern narrative film soundscape.

Chapter Two

Theoretical Framework

Make Some Noise: Hip Hop as the Cinematic Soundscape

> When we came into the game, musicians said we're not making music, we're making noise. So I said, 'Noise? You wanna hear noise?'
>
> Shocklee in Light, 1992

In Spike Lee's 1989 film *Do the Right Thing,* tensions boil over on the "hottest day of the summer". Arriving just before closing, Buggin' Out (Giancarlo Esposito) and Radio Raheem (Bill Nunn) call for a change in the faces of the celebrities on the wall of the local pizzeria, arguing for the profiles of important Black cultural figures to hang alongside the Italian-American faces already present on the "Wall of Fame". As customers of a pizza parlour that sits in a mainly African-American neighbourhood, Bedford-Stuyvesant in Brooklyn, NY, Buggin' Out and Radio Raheem argue that their community is as important to that establishment as the heritage of its owner, Sal (Danny Aiello). Blaring the music of Public Enemy, Radio Raheem and Buggin' Out assert their cause through the speakers of Raheem's boombox. It is these sounds that seem to cause most upset both to Sal and the film's narrative. "What I tell you 'bout that noise?", exclaims Sal as the pair appear. As Lee's film tumbles towards its close it is this noise, the sounds of "Fight the Power", of Public Enemy, of hip hop, that orchestrates the impending onscreen clash. Sal's shriek marks an interesting point in hip hop music's role as the cinematic soundscape. While Sal uses the term "noise" in a derisory sense, a view which has often been repeated by critics or academics who intend to question the validity of hip hop as a musical force, noise is a particularly useful frame through which to explore the powers and possibilities of the culture and its music in New Black Realism. In fact, from Public Enemy's "Bring the Noise" (1988) through to the Beastie Boys' "Make Some

Noise" (2011), and from Tricia Rose's *Black Noise* (1994) to Tony Mitchell's *Global Noise* (2002), the idea of hip hop as noise runs true in both the work of its practitioners and its researchers. Throughout its now almost fifty year history, noise, in whatever form, has been one of hip hop music's constant companions.[6] But, while "noisy textures" have always played a pivotal role in African-American musics generally, from the grainy voice of Blind Willie Johnson through to the muted horn of Miles Davis, hip hop, as a post-literate orality (Walser, 1995, 197), is unique in the way that it not only produces 'noise' but is itself inherently 'noisy'.

In the *Political Economy of Music* (1977), Jacques Attali argues that music is more than "an object of study: it is a way of perceiving the world. A tool of understanding" (2014, 4). He contends, for instance, that while the work of Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart and Johann Sebastian Bach reflected "the bourgeoisie's dream of harmony better than and prior to the whole of nineteenth-century political theory", the music of Janis Joplin, Bob Dylan, and Jimi Hendrix have said more about "the liberatory dream of the 1960s than any theory of crisis" (2014, 5 - 6). Music both presents and critiques with an unfiltered immediacy not available to theoretical frameworks looking to do the same thing. Reflecting the work of Karl Marx and Frederic Nietzsche who, respectively, refer to music as a "mirror of reality" and the "expression of truth" (quoted in 2014, 6), Attali argues that all music is a tool for "the creation or consolidation of a community, of a totality" (Ibid). But, with music and its ability to reflect and explore the world, comes its opposite, subversion - noise (Ibid). As Paul Hegarty points out, noise occurs not in isolation, it has history. It occurs in differential relation to music, to sound, to society (Hegarty, 2007, 5). It marks outs the edges of the frame and makes itself heard within that frame. It is

[6] This is not the first research in film sound and music to speak about hip hop as noise. For example, Anahid Kassabian does so in her article on diegesis and the film soundtrack, if only in passing (2003, 92).

equivalent to “the articulation of a space” as it calls for support for difference and marginality. It demands cultural autonomy (Attali, 2014, 6 - 7). Noise then, as Attali defines it, is the source of the “mutations in the structuring codes”, a source that “despite the death it contains” also carries with it information as it promotes a new “order” (Attali, 2014, 33). In this way, Attali suggests that noise proffers the creation of new meaning both in the interruption of the original message, which signifies censorship, rarity, and the interdiction of the transmitted meaning, as well as through its un-channeling of auditory sensation, because the supposed absence of meaning in “pure noise frees the listener’s imagination” (Ibid). Noise is not simply a determination of non-musicality. It is the unwavering challenge to the traditional and established that can stretch from deteriorative sounds or textures through to the use of seemingly unconventional elements to disturb the musical framework, as in the use of popular music in the concert hall compositions of Charles Ives or Erik Satie for instance (Hegarty, 2007, 15). Noise, as this study reads it, is the reflection of the subcultural as it creates interference in the orderly sequence, "from real events and phenomena to [its] representation in the media” (Hebdige, 1979, 91).

Hip hop’s noisiness exists in the fact of its double-consciousness. A term first put forward by W. E. Du Bois in his 1903 work, *The Souls of Black Folk*, Henry Louis Gates Jr. draws on the concept in his discussion of black literary traditions, arguing that texts in this cannon are “double-voiced in the sense that their literary antecedents are both white and black novels”. Although Gates is focused only on the term as a literary device, he acknowledges Du Bois’s two-ness as a metaphor for the “peculiar psychology” of African-American citizenship (referenced in Reed Jr., 1992, 101 - 102). Elizabeth A. Wheeler makes the same assertion in regards to hip hop, arguing that “you cannot hear rap music unless you acknowledge the split between two Americas: one getting rich, the other getting evicted. … our culture

rips out loud as it splits in two" (Wheeler, 1991, 195). That same two-ness, therefore, operates in and reflects the culture of hip hop's artistic expressions, particularly its music and that music's role in New Black Realist cinema.

In these Black independent films, in which the aesthetics of hip hop culture stand as guiding principles (Watkins, 1998, 98), the intent and drive of hip hop's post-literate nature bumps into and disrupts the inherently literate frame of narrative cinema. In this intricate balance, hip hop uses more than just deteriorative textures to challenge the composition of the film soundscape. It certainly does use those elements, the sounds of static and record scratching are obvious examples heard throughout New Black Realism, but its innate structure means that it upsets film on a much deeper level. Hip hop is not just noise in the instantaneous nature of difficult sounds. It is noisy by its very definition, on a macro level as it exists in the alteration of the forms and media that surround it. Hip hop is not just disrupted, it is disrupting. Hip hop is noisy, it noises. Its focus on aspects such as performance, repetition, and communal authorship disrupt narrative cinema's understanding of set texts, linear narratives, and two-dimensional sonic spaces. So, in Sal's pizzeria the Public Enemy track that plays from Raheem's boombox is noise not just because it is loud or sonically abrasive but because it looks to alter the very complexion of Sal's establishment. It aims to disrupt the Wall of Fame and reassemble it to echo its own cultural existence. It calls for support for difference and marginality. In an exchange that lasts less that three minutes, this clip encapsulates the idea at the centre of this study in a real and immediate sense. As this thesis will outline, the soundscapes of New Black Realism, imbued with the aesthetics of hip hop music as a post-literate orality, demand cultural autonomy through their compositions. Across all three aspects of the film soundscape, the voice, sound effects, and music, New Black Realism challenges the traditions of

narrative cinema, and the social order that it reflects, in order to create a space for subcultural revolt and resistance.

This chapter explores the sonic principles at the centre of hip hop music, matching them against the established norms of narrative cinema, and outlining the clashes that these mutations in the structuring codes create. Moving beyond a simple concern with the lyrics or beats sampled, the chapter will set out the deeper concerns at the heart of hip hop's musical expressions. Exploring issues of authorship, text, and audience reception, this theoretical frame marks the driving forces behind hip hop music and proffers new ways of understanding those same elements. This chapter will underline the rest of the doctoral thesis, acting as a theoretical bed for the analyses that take place in the three core chapters. Although each of the core chapters explore differing aspects of the film soundscape, the voice and dialogue, sound effects, and music, the theories established in this chapter guide those varied discussions, allowing seemingly separate parts of the soundscape to echo as one filmic performance. By setting out this chapter at the start of the thesis, we also strengthen our grasp of the rebellious nature of the New Black Realist soundscape. It is through that grasp that we garner a better understanding of those moments of noise and their importance in the cinema of New Black Realism, even when these films seem to be at their quietest.

2.1 Hip Hop Music, Post-Literate Orality, and Narrative Composition

Hip Hop is a Post-Literate Orality (But, What Does that Mean?)

To define hip hop as a post-literate orality is to unveil the inner-workings of the culture's artistic expressions, particularly its music. In Tricia Rose's definition, we move beyond the core elements of the culture to a space in which we come to comprehend hip hop's "primary properties of flow, layering, and rupture" at a much

deeper level, as well as the ways in which those properties “reflect and contest the social rules open to inner city youths at the end of the twentieth century” (1994, 22). This approach grants an understanding of not just what the music does but why it chooses to do it that way.

Building on the 1982 work of Walter Ong, *Orality and Literacy*, and as already mentioned, Rose argues that hip hop is complex fusion of orality and postmodern technology that maintains characteristics of orally based expressions while at the same time incorporating and destabilising elements of the literate and technologically sophisticated society in which its practitioners live. Hip hop is a post-literate orality (Rose, 1994, 85 - 86). Rose contends that the critical frame for this development of hip hop was shaped by the “tension between cultural fractures produced by postindustrial oppression” and the “binding ties of black cultural expressivity” (1994, 21). As hip hop’s “black sonic forces” were “an outgrowth of black cultural traditions, the postindustrial transformation of urban life and the contemporary technological terrain” (1994, 63), no one single theoretical structure would be enough to decipher its musical expressions. The hybridity between black music, black oral forms, and technology meant that hip hop was not just a linear extension of older African-American oral traditions with “beat boxes and cool European electronics added on” (1994, 85). It is an architectural blueprint for the “redirection of seemingly intractable social ideas and technologies and ways of organising sounds along a course that affirms the histories and communal narratives of Afro-Diaporic people” (Rose, 1994, 64). The music blurred the “distinction between literate and oral modes of communication by altering and yet sustaining important aspects of African American folk orality” (1994, 85). For Rose, the complexity of hip hop’s post-literate orality is reflected in the mechanics of sampling.

As the musical concept at the centre of hip hop, sampling has married the premodern and postmodern currents that move within the music. Sampling outlines the inherent duality of hip hop. While, in one sense, the formation, composition, and dissemination of hip hop's "oral articulations are heavily informed" by the technology and technological processes of sampling, in another, those same technologies have not been straight-forwardly adopted by the culture and its music (Rose, 1994, 64, 63) Instead they have been "significantly revised in ways that are keeping with long standing black cultural priorities, particularly regarding approaches to sound organisation" (Ibid). Rose points out that while hip hop has "dramatically changed the intended use of sampling technology" it has also remained linked, critically, to "black poetic traditions" and to the "oral forms" that underwrite them (1994, 64). To describe hip hop as a post-literate orality is to point to the fact that it revises and presents oral traditions in a technological sophisticated context as well as to explain the way that literate-based technologies articulate sounds, images, and practices associated with orally based based forms. In short, as a post-literate orality, hip hop "makes technology oral and technologies orality" (Rose, 1994, 86).

Hip Hop, Orality, and Text as Performance

As post-literate orality, hip hop's idiosyncratic logic highlights atypical constructions of narrative. Through its approach to aspects of authorship, text, and reception, hip hop music is a unique artistic utterance that directs the composition of the narrative film soundscape in an equally idiosyncratic fashion. Working within distinctly "stylistic and compositional priorities found in black cultures in the diaspora", hip hop music preserves "much of the mind-set of primary orality", a style of oral culture almost totally untouched by any knowledge of writing or print (Rose, 1994, 95; Ong, 2002, 10 - 11). This is not to say that hip hop has not been

touched by literate forms and cultures - such a statement would be entirely incorrect - but rather that elements of the music are driven, in part, by the aesthetics of orality. In this sense, the music is an art-form that challenges our deeply entrenched aesthetic conventions, such as originality and novelty, artistic unity and transcendence, monumentality, and an understanding of artist as divine creator, conventions which are common in particular to modernism as an artistic style, ideology, and philosophical doctrine (Shusterman, 1991, 617 - 620, 614). It is those challenges that make hip hop music a unique bed-partner to narrative cinema in the soundscapes of New Black Realism.

Firstly, and most obviously, hip hop changes what we understand to constitute as "text".[7] As Ong points out, "'text', from a root meaning 'to weave', is in absolute terms, more compatible etymologically with oral utterance than is 'literature', which refers to letters etymologically'" (2002, 13). For the musical work in hip hop, there is no more appropriate a term than the verb "to weave". Roland Barthes, in his 1971 essay "From Work to Text" delineates between the terms "work" and "text". Barthes contends that while "a work can be held in the hand and seen on the shelves of libraries and bookshops, the text only exists when it is produced by a new reader" (Allen, 2003, 83). From a literary stand-point, the work is a static, unmoving, and clearly delineated memorial. Wheeler argues that since the Hellenist revival of the Renaissance, Western culture and critics have privileged the "well-wrought urn", the closed-off 'work' that erases signs of its predecessors (1991, 199). Richard Shusterman claims that this view of the work of art as an "organic whole so perfectly unified that any tampering with its parts would damage"

[7] Walter Ong argues that the "text" is a loaded term that should be avoided when discussing elements of orality. In *Orality and Literacy* (1982), Ong suggests that by focuses on "texts", scholars often assume that "oral verbalization was essentially the same as the written verbalization they normally dealt with, and that oral art forms were to all intents and purposes simply texts, except for the fact that they were not written down". Wrongly, in this case, the impression grew that, apart from oration, oral art forms were "essentially unskillful and not worth serious study" (1982, 10).

it, stretches even further back to the time and traditions of Aristotle (1991, 618). So stringent is this understanding of the artistic work, contends Wheeler, that classical artists will even avoid using two patterns at once, “for fear that they will clash” and begin to crack the urn (1991, 199). In literate, modernist art, the work is an obelisk. Musical pieces, styles, and genres stand independent of each other. Mikhail Bakhtin suggests that in the classical Western musical tradition each new canon projects “merely one body …. It is self-sufficient and speaks in its name alone” (referenced in Wheeler, 1991, 199). In contrast, hip hop challenges traditional notions of the monumentality, universality, and permanence of the work by defying the fetishised integrity of the artwork (Shusterman, 1991, 619). It aligns itself with different traditions, those of “the interlocking, analogous patterns of African dashikis, Islamic tile, Gothic manuscripts - and … subway car graffiti murals” (Wheeler, 1991, 199).

In hip hop, there are no ultimate and untouchable works. There is no divine work that cannot be changed or re-made (Shusterman, 1991, 617). In fact, as Wheeler points out, it is fragmentation and reassembly that describe both Black history and the music that it creates (1991, 199). As a music born of communal gatherings and dances, hip hop is an expression of purpose. It was crafted specifically for movement and engagement, not just for listening. Echoing through schools, homes, parks, and community centres then, the work in hip hop cannot be static or ethereal (Shusterman, 1991, 616). In hip hop, the “text” exists in performance. It is not shackled to the sheet nor is it etched in stone. In creating pieces by selecting and combining parts of previously recorded music and integrating new vocal and sonic elements over those parts, hip hop’s narrative is fluid and mobile. It resides in the spaces between its musical nodes and over various narratological levels. As Shusterman outlines, in contrast to the aesthetic of organic unity, hip hop, driven by orality and facilitated through the technology of

sampling, reflects “schizophrenic fragmentation” and "collage effect” characteristics that imply that an “artwork’s integrity as object should never outweigh the possibilities for continuing creation through use of that object” (Shusterman, 1991, 618). The samples, the rhymes, the voices - they do not just contribute to the central, linear narrative of hip hop but are a part of it innately. As summed up succinctly by Rose, to simply recite or read “lyrics to a rap song is not to understand them; they are also inflected with the syncopated rhythms and sampled sounds of the music (Rose, 1994, 88). In hip hop, the text is more “essentially process than finished product” (Shusterman, 1991, 618-619). The defining qualities of “flow, layering, and ruptures in line” create a text that exists as a multi-layered, three-dimensional performance (Kulezic-Wilson, 2008, 22).

Authorship and Audience in Hip Hop Music

Secondly, by reshaping text as performance, hip hop also drastically alters the parameters and roles of those bodies that engage with these performances. Hip hop blurs the lines between author and audience, composition and reception. In fact in hip hop there is, at times, little difference between the author, their text, and those that engage with that work. Authorship, in oral culture, is a non-essential element to the performance of folk tales. Or, to consider it in reverse, the singular and divinely-guided author is certainly not central to hip hop (Rose, 1994, 86). This is not to suggest that there are not authorial figures in hip hop, nor that particular authors do not preside over musical material, genres, or styles. Rather, this is to contest that the role and purpose of the author is an inherently malleable form in hip hop. The hip hop deejay, for instance, as a counter-part to the Bakhtinian author, creates a dialogue with “preceding utterance”, both their own and others, with which their given utterance “enters into one kind of relation or another” (Bakhtin quoted in Wheeler, 1991, 198). Similar can be said of hip hop music’s other lead

figures, as emcees and rappers make “claims of originality while stealing from other artists” (Wheeler, 1991, 198). As narrative originality in oral culture depends not so much on the making up of new stories but instead on the reshuffling of formula and material within that formula (Rose, 1994, 88), then authors in hip hop are not so much the creators as they are conduits: bodies in which old and new material coalesce.

In hip hop, authors are spaces in which hip hop's musical texts are in-part performed. Whether they occupy the role of deejay or emcee, in hip hop the author is a facilitator rather than a divinely-guided and untouchable dictator. Sampling helps to drive the change in the role of the author in hip hop. While deejaying or emceeing is certainly an aspect of composition - what Rose calls a means of post-literate production (1994, 88) - it is at the same time an act of consumption. Writing in the age of electronic reproduction is a process in which endless sounds, rhythms, and melodies are available and immediately accessible to would-be authors (Ibid). Sampling can boil down pieces, artists, or whole genres to small pockets of material that become musical building blocks for particular compositions or performances. Sampling, something we will explore later in the chapter, offers hip hop’s authors a complex position in which they both digest and direct the music. Shaped by the aesthetics of orality and freed by the possibilities of sampling, the author in hip hop both consumes and is consumed by the performative text.

Thirdly, as a music birthed at communal gatherings and dances to the sets of DJ Kool Herc on the block corners of the Bronx, the role of the audience in hip hop has also been shaped in a particular fashion. Herc’s deejaying style was very much led by the crowds he performed for; when he noticed that people were “waiting for certain parts of the record” that he was playing, he began to focus his deejay sets around those parts (Chang, 2007, 79). These “breaks”, the part in the song where

the lyrics and musical interests of the track would dissipate to reveal the simple and usually percussive heart of the piece, became moments in which local breakdancers would take to the dance floor to show off their moves. Even as emcees and lyrics became the foremost proponent quickly after this initial period in hip hop, a characteristic context for the performance was still that the audience were engaged or aroused, this time by the the group's rapper(s) (Keyes, 1984, 145). Scholars like Greg Dimitriadis have suggested, however, that as hip hop became "consolidated and commodified" as an "easily duplicatable aural form" with the success of Run-DMC in the early 1980s, a "basic redefinition of hip hop culture" occurred that shifted attention to hip hop's verbal discourse and away from the "the importance of dance, live congregation, and those who could create a live scene" (1996, 185). But, while the immediacy of the audience, through their physical presence, may have changed in the music's new form, the significance of their reception is still central to the music, its narrative, and meaning.

Like its authors, who create intertextually rich tapestries that exist across a number of narratological levels, the hip hop audience are "miners, they are the cultivators of communal artefacts" (Rose, 1994, 185). In his discussion of sampling, Justin Williams points out that while hip hop's listeners may or may not get some or all references to varying degrees, the music proffers "multiple imagined 'sources', based on the previous knowledge of specific songs, artists, or genres" (2014, 202). I would go a little further. Although each individual receiver of the text may not always pick up on the specificity of each and every sample or narrative thread, there is (to draw on the ideologies of one of hip hop's holy trinity, Afrika Bambaataa) a 'knowledge' or understanding of the hip hop text from the point of view of the hip hop audience. This audience understands that hip hop is an interwoven text that calls for further participation, investigation. This performative text sets up

possibilities for its audience, and while they may not always get those possibilities, there is a 'knowledge' of the probability of those possibilities. So, as the hip hop text blurs the lines between creation and appropriation, so too does it challenge the deep divide between "creative artist and appropriative audience" (Shusterman, 1991, 618). In hip hop music the audience is intentionally active, driving towards and chasing the music's various narratives as they pass across linear narrative levels, and back and forth between the samples, non-samples, and sample-esque material. The hip hop audience, particularly of the 1980s and early 1990s, is an intellectually active force that both receive and create the narrative(s) of hip hop music. While in hip hop the influence of orality and the platform of post-literate technologies create dynamic relationships between the author, text, and audience, in the soundscapes of narrative cinema those parts have been, historically at least, connected at a distinct distance.

2.2 Reading the Soundtracks of Narrative Cinema

Music and Narrative in the Classic and Neo-Classical Film Score

In Annette Davison's 2004 book, *Hollywood Theory, Non-Hollywood Practice*, the author explores the soundtracks of post-1980 films that were made "outside of, and in relation to Hollywood" (2004, 1). Davison's exploration of these soundtracks is shaped, in part, by their relationship to "the re-emergence of classical scoring in the mid-to-late 1970s in the Hollywood blockbusters" (2004, 1 - 2). She contends that the return to those aesthetics in the cinema of the 1970s, and their continued dominance throughout the 1980s and 1990s, functioned as a regeneration of conservative, Western-centric, bourgeois, heterosexual, and largely masculine values (Davison, 2004, 3). Davison takes this approach to her research, therefore, because the classical Hollywood score has "functioned as a form of dominant

ideology in relation to which alternative scoring and soundtrack practices may assert themselves" (2004, 6). As noted previously, with the soundscapes of New Black Realism both sitting at the edge mainstream Hollywood and disrupting the traditions of that same form purposefully, this thesis takes after Davison's lead. Consequently, the following section pinpoints some of the most prevalent aspects of the mainstream cinematic soundtrack in relation to New Black Realist cinema, outlining them in preparation for the analyses later in this work.

Historically, film music composition and scholarship has explored the film soundscape as part of a literate entity, an approach influenced both by what is seen to be film's towering artistic ancestor, opera, and through academia reaching out for ways to discuss the role of sound and music in film, and finding it in the novel. In the case of the latter, Claudia Gorbman has investigated the film soundscape through diegesis, which refers to "the world of the narrative, the screen world or world of the film" (Buhler and Neumeyer, 2016, 57). Gorbman's work has become a defining feature for film music scholarship, a field that is itself really only as old as the author's work of the 1980s. Gorbman's thesis is largely based on Gérard Genette's system of narratology, in which "different narrative voices are characterised as operating at various levels of literary diegesis", a system developed in order to explain the narrative devices encountered in the novel (Winters, 2010, 225). In its simplest terms, diegesis defines music as inside or outside the film world. So, while "diegetic sound refers to everything that can be heard by characters in the film", "nondiegetic sound cannot be heard by the characters" at all (Buhler and Neumeyer, 2016, 57). Although we have since come to

develop this model, through terms such as the meta-diegetic or ambi-diegetic, the narratological levels of film sound are still implicit within these new terms.[8]

From a traditional standpoint, the cinematic work is very much a static construct. First, it exists, primarily, in the images and dialogue of the film. Music on the soundtrack is, then, additional or supplementary to that narrative. Although sound is itself a “particularly event-orientated” utterance that is both “narrative and spatial in nature”, traditional scholarship is interested purely in how it reads as part of a two-dimensional work (Altman, 1992, 15, 24). It either occurs as within the story, and characters discuss or engage with it, or it occurs outside of that world as an "intrusive layer of narration” (Winters, 2010, 227). Second, in a literate framework, the abstract nature of sound and music fails to translate into the same, decipherable language as film’s dialogue and images. While this means that music does have the potential to disrupt that language, it also has been seen to tap into the subconscious of the audience, creating a sense of regression or a safety state in which those watching can willingly engage with the fantasies onscreen (Gorbman, 1987, 31 - 32).

This means that for many scholars and practitioners sound and music on film needs to be “inaudible”. This is not so much that music should not be a part of film, that it needs to be silent, but rather that it should not challenge or draw from the central work. It should, and has the capability of, evading “the conscious awareness of the audience to appeal directly to their sensory backgrounds” (Rogers, 2013,

[8] The meta-digetic refers to sound and music on film that acts as a "kind of represented subjectivity”. It is sound that is clearly situated in a character who forms a particularly strong point of identification/location for the audience. Through framing dialogue, acting, lighting, sound design, or cinematic processes, the character becomes the bridging mechanism between the audience and the diegesis as we enter into his or her subjectivity (Stilwell, 2007, 196). Meta-diegetic sound and music often rise up into the foreground and express the particular point of view of a character onscreen (Stilwell, 2007, 196). The ambi-diegetic refers to film sound and music that is produced within the visualised zone lying inside the film’s imagined action, but that plays an important role in the external aspects of the film’s dramatic development (Holbrook, 2005, 48 - 49).

154). As Leonid Sabaneev has posited, music on film, particularly the non-diegetic, should be understood as the “left hand” of the melody on the screen, and it should seek to remain that way (quoted in Gorbman, 1987, 77). From a psychoanalytical perspective, Caryl Flinn, another of the field’s earliest and most prominent film scholars, highlighted the position of traditional scholarship and composition contention that “bad cinema music is noticed; [while] good scores are not” (1992, 37).

Finally, Étienne Souriau, whom Gorbman references, also uses the term diegesis to describe one level of “filmic reality” through which the spectator interacts with film (Winters, 2010, 226). While, in a sense, that reality is a unique cinematic universe, in which music can underscore characters’ actions or erupt from nowhere spontaneously, long-established film music research has suggested that that “reality” is tied innately to the rules of our own (Winters, 2010, 227). This is in part driven by Hans Eisler and Theodor Adorno’s 1947 book, *Composing for the Films*, in which the authors argue that film “seeks to depict reality” (Winters, 2010, 228). This novelistic approach to the film soundscape is quantified then in our own reality, in the idea that music either exists as part of our world or it does not. There is no supporting layer of sonic commentary in our own lives and so the existence of one in cinema is seen to be potentially disruptive.

Further to this point of the cinematic work, film music scholarship, including that of Gorbman, Flinn, and Kathryn Kalinak (1992), has equally drawn on the aesthetics of opera in their discussions of the narrative soundscape. While opera is an artform that includes music, lyrics, and movement, it perpetuates literary structures that have shaped our reading of the narrative film soundscape, particularly in terms of the author and their audience. Opera’s influence on the sound and music of film is most obviously reflected in the overshadowing figure of

Richard Wagner. For some of film's earliest composers right through to contemporary heavyweights like John Williams, Wagner and his musical philosophies offer a platform that has defined the mainstream narrative film score (Schroeder, 2002, 80). As his compositional techniques and ideas became guiding principles of the narrative film score, in aspects like the leitmotif, Wagner himself became as important to film's musical practitioners as an authorial figure. Through his approach to operatic composition, which was driven by the concept of Gesamtkunstwerk, in which the "forms and elements of a text should all be mutually reinforcing (Flinn, 1992, 34), Wagner exerted unending control over his art. His authorial stamp was always obsessively clear in the control of his compositions. While some scholars have suggested that there is no real room for creativity or personality in the film score - Irwin Bazelon remarked for instance that "film music is almost composing but not quite" (1975, 113) - those that looked to Wagner, like Max Steiner, Alfred Newman, and Erich Korngold, found a singular, distinct, and imposing image of the author. Steiner even argued, for instance, that Wagner would have been "the number one film composer" if he had lived in the twentieth-century (Thomas, 1973, 122). In the image of Wagner, the film score composer could be a divinely-guided and distinct, if quiet, actor whose style and place on the soundtrack were clearly defined.

When the classical scoring practices of Steiner, Newman, and Korngold resurfaced in the soundtracks of the early 1970s, as the narrative techniques of the films of 1930s and 1940s Hollywood was thought to suit the narrative format for the blockbuster (Davison, 2004, 3), so too returned the figure of the composer and the distinctive sounds that had so often outlined their authorial hand, the nineteenth-century European and twentieth-century American Romantic orchestra (Brownrigg, 2007, 307). Although high-culture and concert hall composers had already moved

beyond this musical discourse, film composers continued to use the sounds of strings, brass, woodwind, and percussion in their scores (Brownrigg, 2007, 307, 309). The use of these sounds, the privileging of dialogue, and the synchronising of music and film image, as in the scores of composers like John Williams, Danny Elfman, or Anne Dudley, worked to "encourage the audience to surrender to the film and fully engage with the emotional worlds and action depicted on screen" (Davison, 2004, 2, 3). While the Romantic orchestra can of course draw the attention of the audience to various aspects of the cinematic medium, their role in the mainstream narrative soundscape is to generate a space for a passive audience. They are set out to occupy the subconsciousness of the film viewer, allowing the film work, its dialogue and image, to entertain the audiences' consciousness. The sounds of the orchestra allowed these films to "control narrative connotation", how the text may be read, from the sidelines (Kalinak referenced in Davison, 2004, 2). They aim to place the viewer in a position of submission; to put them in the control of the author and their work. Traditionally, then, in the literate frame of the narrative cinematic soundscape, it is the author that dictates, the work that speaks, and the audience that receives.

New Approaches to New Auteurs and Musical Mélomanes

Still, over the last four or so decades, the film author, audience, and work, and how we understand them, have developed. As the arena in which film existed changed, and the tools that were available to both its authors and its audience altered as well, so too did the purpose and possibilities of each evolve. While these changes have often still read narrative cinema and its soundscape through a literary framework, they have in places moved mainstream definitions of the author, their work, and audience closer to those definitions outlined in hip hop. It is the sound and music of cinema that offers film authorship the space for that most recent

growth. The turn of the twenty-first century brought significant changes in post-studio Hollywood, such as a shift in the industry's economics and a new generation of composers schooled in television and pop culture rather than in Vienna, as well as a digital revolution in the recording and storage of music that made it "possible for directors to exert much greater control over the selection and placement of music in their films" (Gorbman, 2007, 151). These changes resulted in "an influx of new musical idioms" and "vastly more flexible range of ideas concerning the nature, placement, and effects of music" in film, both of which meant that music became ever more "accessible and malleable as an increasingly personal means of expression" in cinema (Gorbman, 2007, 151, 150).

The changes of the last 30 years have led to the conception of the auteur mélomane, filmmakers for whom sound and music is more than just something added to the final cut. Music, instead, participates forcefully in the director's worldview (Gorbman, 2007, 151, 150). These filmmakers were those that saw music liberated from the control of rarified specialists, to take a "more active control of music" in cinema (Ibid). Beginning really with Jean Luc Godard and the French New Wave, Gorbman's list of mélomanes includes Stanley Kubrick, Martin Scorsese, Spike Lee, and Quentin Tarantino, amongst others (Ibid). For this contemporary style of film authorship, music is not thought of in its relation to the central diegesis, but the authorial signature of the film's director. Music here disrupts the "structures and underlying aesthetic of the classical rules of film music" (Ibid). Arved Ashby pushes the control of these new auteurs further away from a literary framework.

In the introduction to his edited work on more recent film auteurs, directors like Sofia Coppola, David Lynch, and Wes Anderson, Ashby argues that as "auteurism resurges in our age of looking", it is the aesthetics of the music video and not literature that we should consider in our discussions of cinema (2013, 23).

Ashby contends that the music video has changed the cinematic experience in fundamental ways by widening the “creative vocabulary of filmmakers, starting with MTV in 1981” (2013, 2). As these mélomanes gave popular musics the kind of centrality in their films once reserved for the script, they shifted how and where film authorship took place, moving it from pen-and-paper to the process of cinematic direction (Ibid). For the scholars in Ashby’s book, the music video has offered film a platform upon which to increase and decrease the speeds of event, deflect from “Aristotelian patterns of narrative, characterisation, and storytelling toward a concentration on situation, feeling, mood”, proffer “new approaches to time and the passage of it”, as well as, most interestingly with regards to our current discussion, introducing the ideas of “performance and different performative sensibilities” to the two-dimensional construct of cinema (Ashby, 2013, 2 - 3).

The music video has encouraged two contrasting styles of auteurism. The first is a “synergistic approach”, a style that echoes the “elusive music-filmic Gesamtkunstwerk presaged by the Eisenstein-Prokofiev collaborations and those 1940s Hollywood musicals where music was given an integral rather than incidental role in the narrative” (Ashby, 2013, 4). The second “facilitated Brechtian layerings of character, narrative, and music - a new dissimulation, a splitting of the cinematic seams”, an approach in which the relationships between “musical style and narration, characterisation, and individual subjectivity on the screen” have been renegotiated (Ibid). In both cases, as Gorbman posits in her definition of the mélomane, this auteurism is almost a kind of musicianship in which filmmakers seem to pit “the musical-stylistic expression of individual songs against their expected functions as set pieces with the film” (Ashby 2013, 18, 13). For John Mundy, this approach to music echoes the “cinematic traditions of the spectacular”, or, more specifically, the “cinema of attractions”, an exhibitionist form of filmmaking

that chooses to show things rather than narrate stories (Ashby, 2013, 17). This, Tom Gunning writes, is a cinema that displaces its visibility so as to "rupture a self-enclosed fictional world for a chance to solicit the attention of the spectator" (Ibid). As Ashby explores this form of cinematic auteur, Gorbman's mélomane, he finds an author that teases out the differences between narrative and performance, between page and process, between literate and oral (Ibid).

Rethinking the Film Text: Space, Performance, and the Filmind

This reshaping of the role of the film author as cinematic mélomane is accompanied by a rethinking of both the film text and its audience. All three changes, as we have seen, have been driven by the use of popular and previously-composed pieces of music on the cinematic soundtrack. This re-use of sonic material on film is almost as old as the medium itself is, however. Through cue sheets, music catalogues with suggested pieces for various onscreen scenarios, previously-composed music accompanied much of silent cinema. In the US, as early as 1909, Edison Pictures began publishing cue sheets to encourage the selection of appropriate musical numbers from both "classical and popular sources" to accompany screenings of its films (Cooke, 2008, 15). Cue sheets also often made reference to more substantial published anthologies of film music that were organised by mood or dramatic type. One of the first anthologies to appear in the States, Gregg A. Frelinger's *Motion Picture Piano Music*, was also published in 1909 (Ibid). Silent film's accompanists found the popular song useful material, both in the sense that the melodies might serve as musical puns, "playing on the relevance of the song's title to the film's subject-matter" and the more general purpose of tapping in to the "spectator's presumed enthusiasm for recent hits" (Sinn referenced in Cooke, 2008, 396). Popular music has returned to cinema as a major musical multiple times since. In the 1950s it came back as a way to entertain the new youth

culture. It returned in the 1980s as a way to pander to the 'Baby Boomer generation' and then again for 'Generation X'. By accompanying these swings in culture the use of popular musics on film have often been seen to entice audiences in to the theatre and so must be devoid of artistic drive and creativity (Cooke, 2008, 398; Kassabian, 2001, 4). In addition to serving as non-diegetic score, popular musics existed in these films by way of musical performance, source radios, or record players on screen. In these films, "people sing, sing-along, lip-synch, dance, and play to popular music" and so while music can draw the audience into the theatre, they can also leave with it as they attempt to buy into the lives of those characters onscreen (Robertson-Wojcik and Knight, 2001, 4).

Stanley Kubrick's *2001: A Space Odyssey*, originally released in 1968, marks one of the earliest points in a parallel history of popular and re-used music on film. Kubrick's soundtrack established, in the mainstream Hollywood tradition at least, "a new postclassical film music aesthetic" (Powrie and Stilwell, 2006, xiv). For Phil Powrie and Robyn Stilwell, that aesthetic involved the deploying of music from a pre-existent concert repertoire on the film soundtrack in a "seemingly arbitrary manner" that echoed what Michel Chion called "anempathetic music" (Ibid). Kubrick, they contend, was opting for divergence and distance (Ibid). The contrapuntal soundtrack of 2001 challenged the classical, and then neo-classical, understanding of the cinematic form (Kracaeur in Kalinak 1992, 25 - 26). The distance created by Kubrick's popular and re-used soundtrack stretched the parameters of the text here, suggesting that cinema has, or at least had begun to, move beyond the linear, textual narrative defined so simply through diegesis. Film music scholarship has continued to question and challenge that approach in recent years.

On the issues of textual strata in film, Robyn Stilwell proposes the concept of the “fantastical gap”, a “liminal space” of transformation, superimposition, and transition (Stilwell, 2007, 187). Stilwell proffers this term so as to define those moments in film in which sound and music seem to cross back and forth between the diegetic and non-diegetic (Stilwell, 2007, 200). She argues not for the invalidation of these terms because they are so regularly blurred, but simply an acknowledgement that their blurring is an important aspect of the medium (Stilwell, 2007, 184). Ben Winters, building on the work of Anahid Kassabian (2003) and others, goes further. Winters argues that, rather than “a troubling element that needs to be assigned to a separate level of narrative”, the presence of music in the narrative space of the film is a sign of the “fictional state of the world created on screen”, an “indicator that the universe in which the events we are watching take place is not real” (Winters, 2010, 229). In accepting that, Winters contends, music becomes entirely natural to the medium of film (Ibid). Proposing slightly newer, and more specific definitions, Winters’s distinction is that sound and music on film concerns "narrative space rather than narrative levels” (2010, 236).[9] Here, Winters’ “space” projects a three-dimensional text in which the music can be considered as important to the narrative as the film’s dialogue and images. As in adverts, multi-media, and contemporary art practices, popular and previously-composed music has altered the film text, creating a “triangle of inter-relation” where each element was thought to “merge, overlap, [and] leak into each other” (Caley, 2005, 31).

[9] Winters proposes a new outline: First, the extradiegetic might be understood as music or sound whose logic is not dictated by events within the narrative space, and therefore does not seem to be part of the film’s fabula. Second, intradiegetic music or sound exists in the film’s everyday narrative space and time, and is thus properly thought of as part of the film’s fabula: it may be considered to be produced by the characters themselves (either as a result of their physical movements, as with mickey-mousing, as an expression of their emotional state, or as a musical calling-card), or by the geographical space of the film…. This category accounts for the majority of music heard in Classical Hollywood film usually labelled “non-diegetic”, and represents the largest change to existing models. Finally, music which is heard by the characters ‘as music’ in the diegesis (much like phenomenal song in opera), along with sounds that the characters seem to hear, retains its label of “diegetic” for continuity’s sake (2010).

Contemporary film then, through the reuse of popular musics, is, what Daniel Frampton has defined as, a “filmind” - a text that steers its own discourse and has its own intentions and creativities (Frampton, 2006, 7, 5). It does not “merely present objects, but reveals a way of seeing them” (Frampton, 2006, 49). And, in presenting that way of seeing, the filmind passes control into the hands of theatregoers, as the audience experience cinema, “directly, as a thinking thing” (Frampton, 2006, 8).

The Film Perceiver and Multimedia Mentalities

Scholarship on sound and music in film was relatively slow to account for the role of the audience in cinema. In fact, it was not really until Anahid Kassabian’s 2001 work, *Hearing Film*, that a full-length study explored the engagement between “filmgoers and film scores”, acknowledging that those engagements were “conditioned by filmgoers’ relationships to a wide range of musics both within and outside of their filmgoing practices” (2001, 2). Kassabian’s work is particularly interesting because she accounts for the autonomy of the filmgoer within the process of film, defining them as “perceivers” rather than as spectators or audience. She does so because not only does the term not “privilege one sense over others” but it hints towards “some degree of agency” (2001, Prologue Footnote 1). Agency is a distinct aspect of perceivers’ interaction with compiled scores, a “range of complete songs” use in a film that most of the movie theatre will have heard before, whether they are “oldies or new releases” (Kassabian, 2001, 2 - 3). Kassabian argues that compiled scores “bring the immediate threat of history” (2001, 3). Perceivers, she contends, bring external associations with them as they interact with soundtracks with popular or previously-composed musics (Ibid). By opening up the “psychic field”, these “affiliating identifications” depend on threads found outside of the film screen to create a “fair bit of mobility within it” (Ibid).

Soundtrack scholarship has also explored the conditionality of reused material in creating space for active perceivers. Historically, it has been understood that the purpose and possibilities of pre-existing music on film hangs on the perceivers' shifting recognition of those pieces (Powrie and Stilwell, 2006, xvi). More recent research has challenged this account, however. As outlined above, because the film soundtrack can no longer just be read as an "invisible, interpretative, and thus manipulative force", Winters suggests that the contemporary film audience must be "far more aware of a film's music than Gorbman suggests in 1987" (Winters, 2010, 235). In that sense, while each thread may not be picked up by each and every audience member, the possibility of film's perceiver engaging with threads and using them to add to the film's narrative rather than distracting from it, has certainly increased over time. If, as Frampton argues, the perceiver experiences film intuitively, as a "thinking thing" (2006, 8), then the compiled score and its stretching of the film text, creates space in which the thinking thing entices the audience in to being thinking things themselves.

Nicholas Cook has explored similar discussions outside of cinema, through the frame of multimedia. Cook proffers the idea of a multimedia mentality, an engagement with media in which meaning "emerges at the point of reception" (2013, 66). At the core of Cook's writing is the work of Lawrence Lessig. In his book *Remix* (2008), Lessig talks about "Read/Only" and "Read/Write" cultures. The former map on to modernist autonomy culture, "in which art forms such as music are professionalised, generating commodities (works) designed for appreciation by passive, paying audiences". The latter are produced through participation in which art and music is "conceived not as a collection of fixed works, but rather as a signifying practice in which materials are circulated and reworked in much the same way that ideas are in other domains of culture" (Cook, 2013, 54 -

55). Therefore, while an autonomy mentality is based on the understanding of art or music as a thing, multimedia mentality is driven by an understanding of these expressions as experience (Cook, 2013, 65).

In what Cook calls “performative media” then, meaning is negotiated. It “emerges from both media and social interactions and is constituted in the experience of hearing and seeing” (Cook, 2013, 56). In this sense, it is not so much that cultural artefacts have meaning but rather that that they afford “constructions of meaning in response to them” and so meaning it relocated from “production to reception” (Ibid). Cook explores film within this context. He submits that while, in technological terms, classic Hollywood cinema was “the first major manifestation of multimedia” it was, in cultural terms, a “continuation by other means of an existing tradition of authored narrative, just as music was a continuation by other means of an existing European symphonic tradition” (2013, 55). There are cinematic exceptions to this rule, it seems. Those exceptions fall firmly to mélomanes and their compiled soundtracks. Cook mentions Quentin Tarantino in particular, arguing that while he may be a product of Hollywood, his work embodies many of the attributes that contribute to a multimedia mentality, precisely in the film soundtrack (Cook, 2013, 59). As the “Tarantino Mixtape” piles inter-text on top of inter-text, each of the musical artefacts on the film soundtrack not only reference themselves but “repurpose preexisting film music” (Cook, 2013, 62). In other words, the musicalisation of film materials in Tarantino’s work extends the non-linear time of the film and its references, creating “moment-to-movement continuity”, or a cinema of experience (Cook, 2013, 60). And, in that experience, something that this thesis refers to as the performance of film, arrives in the laps of its perceivers to craft and define.

2.3 The (Black) Postmodern Narrative Soundscape

Postmodernism and the Compiled Soundtrack

Postmodernism is both the point at which hip hop music and culture is closest to the films and soundscapes of the previous section and the point in which the sound and music of New Black Realist cinema is most revolutionary. Postmodernism is, as so often argued, a difficult term to clearly delineate. Such resistance to definition is arguably its defining feature. Generally, postmodern art and culture is understood to celebrate "pluralism, fragmentation, and multiple points of view" (Efland, Freedman, and Stuhr referenced in Broome, 2015, 34). Aside from disrupting "the linear teleological path of modernism", as its name suggests it might, postmodern theory questions the "truth" of the meta-narratives of modern culture and society, such as "science, positivism, and history" (Clark referenced in Broome, 2015, 35). To do so, postmodern expressions uncover "hidden inequities in established narratives" and instead attempt to embrace alternative and most often nihilistic perspectives which manifest in arts and media, and particularly in the case of music, through aspects of appropriation, re-contextualisation, and layering (Efland, Freedman, and Stuhr referenced in Broome, 2015, 35; Clark referenced in Broome, 2015, 35).

As Stephen Graves points out, hip hop has been widely and historically labelled, in work like that of Shusterman (1991), as the first "postmodern music" (referenced in Graves, 2009, 246). More recently, Kirill Molokov and Ekaterina Zueva declare that hip hop music is a "product of postmodernism, and perhaps, one of the best products in general, because it embodies all the postmodern traits and synthesizes them within the syntheses of music and literature and high art and pop culture" (2017, 1363). Graves suggests that sampling is the standout feature of hip hop postmodern-nesss. Hip hop uses sampling, which "parallels almost perfectly the techniques used by postmodern architects who slap

together disparate styles into a coherent whole", so as to incorporate snippets of other musics into a new pastiche without regard to genre or stylistic convention; makes "ample use of irony" (Graves, 2009, 246). Graves contends that hip hop artists draw on the music of other composers "in a fashion at odds with the original composer's intent and to audiences far removed from the original" (Ibid). This helps hip hop to appeal to contemporary culture and art through "street authenticity", as the music constructs a mediated representation of black inner city life, at times even at odds with the reality of life in Black America (Ibid). The postmodern film soundtrack seems to echo these same aesthetics, particularly in its use of previously composed music.

The Complex Relationship between Hip Hop and Postmodernism

M. Keith Booker argues that the compiled soundtrack, of previously-composed material, is a crucial component in the nostalgia that permeates throughout the postmodern cinema of contemporary directors like Quentin Tarantino or Sally Potter (2007, 48). Booker has argued that this postmodern nostalgia is particular in that it explores the "representations of remembered representations" (2007, 51), a style disengaged from the "memories of any specific historical past" (Ibid). These highly referential film soundtracks set up a plurality of lines where it is not the meaning or narratives of each line that necessarily matter but rather the "overload of meaning" that they form (D'haen, 1986, 225). Booker highlights this in his mention of the Jack Rabbit Slim's restaurant scene in Tarantino's *Pulp Fiction* (1994), where music and images from the 1950s, 1970s, and 1990s create the "perfect postmodern setting," drawing from history in a purely "ahistorical way, showing little real sense of the pastness of the past or of past history as the antecedent of the present" (Booker, 2007, 47). Estella Tincknell contends that while the choice of music in this scene complicates the simplicity of

such an argument, it has little power to alter the overall nihilistic nostalgia of the soundtrack. Tincknell argues that the use of Chuck Berry's music in the restaurant "briefly disrupts the deployment of the compilation score as a part of the film's randomised stylisation of history in the most powerful way", due to Berry's authenticity rather than "authenticity" (2006, 140 - 141). Berry promotes realism rather than a projection of realism. But, she concedes that, as *Pulp Fiction* is strongly marked by a "discourse of emotional detachment", the affective power that Berry's music may offer is unsustainable beyond the moment of its immediate performance (Tincknell, 2006, 140 - 141). The combination of the "mono-tracked, beat-heavy style of early 1960s US 'underground pop'" and "'classic' ballads such as Dusty Springfield's 'Son of a Preacher Man'", Tincknell admits, is central to the film's "postmodern knowingness" and part of its attempt to solicit a "younger, cinematically knowledgeable spectator" (2006, 139).

Tarantino's reuse of popular musics on the postmodern soundtrack manipulates both time and genre in film, with the indeterminacy of scenes such as the Jack Rabbit Slim's contest not only subverting the possibility of linear meaning but in fact amplifying the text's concern with the surface of history (Tincknell, 2006, 141). For much postmodern cinema then, aside from fleeting and often smothered moments of affect, the (re)use of previously composed material is not about clear determinations of fixed temporal statements, ideas, or issues. It is about the chaotic (re)structuring of cinematic moments, through both the film's visual and aural tracks, in which the production of narrative threads is such that no one particular thread matters any more or less than other and thus chaos ensues.

Numerous scholars have attempted to offset the relationship between hip hop and postmodern theory or, at the very least, challenge the simplicity of that connection. The title alone of James Braxton Peterson's chapter, "Hip Hop is (Not)

Postmodern", in Brian McHale and Len Platt's *The Cambridge History of Postmodern Literature* (2016) is itself enough to point to the complexity of this relationship. Rose, in her criticism of Andre Craddock Willis's attempt to frame hip hop as a postmodern form suggests that Willis wrongly "perceives rap's contradictory positions to be postmodern contradictions, rather than an expression of long-standing social and political inequalities and beliefs" (1994, 24). To explore hip hop through this frame, Rose proclaims, is to undermine "the historical specificity of hip hop's emergence and the points of continuity between hip hop and . . . Afrodiasporic forms, traditions, and practices" (quoted in Hayman, 2003, 119). For Casey Hayman, postmodernism is still a suitable structure through which to explore hip hop, once we are careful about how we define it. Hayman's thoughts on hip hop and postmodernism follow on from the work of postmodern scholars Steven Best and Douglas Kellner, who themselves base their work on the writing of philosopher and cultural theorist Jean Baudrillard. Like Best and Kellner, Hayman treats Baudrillard's concepts of "hyperreality, simulation, and the implosion of binary systems of meaning" as key characteristics of the late twentieth-century urban reality in which hip hop was created rather than as totalising states of being, recognising that Baudrillard's concepts must be supplemented with a focus on the material forces that shape lived reality (2003, 120).

While hip hop culture did develop in a world that exhibited aspects of what Baudrillard called a "hyperreality", where mass-mediated images have effectively replaced the reality that they purport to represent (Hayman, 2003, 119), the "very real conditions of poverty" shaped that culture and the lives of those urban African-American communities living in the South Bronx in the late 1970s (Hayman, 2003, 120). These conditions were shaped by a shift in the economic logic of production to more abstracted forms of capital accumulation, a shift characterised as a

“postmodern moment” (Hayman, 2003, 120). So, although the conversion of cities from “centers of manufacturing to hubs of finance, services, and upscale consumption ... caused the massive residential dislocation of lower-income African-Americans and deepened their isolation within segregated areas of concentrated poverty”, to locate twentieth-century African-American culture in “‘pockets of sheer alterity within or outside contemporary conditions” is to primitivise the culture and “fetishize [African-Americans] as the guarantors of everything that is felt to be at risk in the postmodern era” (Hayman, 2003, 120). While Baudrillard often denies that “reality exists any longer in an era of simulations and hyperreality”, however unevenly urban African-American populations felt the structural inequalities framed by the shift to postmodernity, they did not live separately from the postmodern city’s hyperreal “zone of signs” (Best and Kellner referenced in Hayman, 2003, 120). Hip hop’s postmodernism exists somewhere between the real and the “real”. Arising within the context of postmodern capitalism, Hayman suggests that the genre attempted to use the “symbolic discourse of capitalism itself to open up new spaces for African-American artistry and identity” (2003, 130).

Through “playful intertextuality and hyperreferentiality” in its commercial manifestations, hip hop participates in a sort of “‘deplorable’ levelling of history into mere stereotype or text” (Hayman, 2003, 121). It does so, however, not as a way to create increasing distance from a discrete or real aesthetic based in the “somehow more authentic material lives of the urban poor”, but so as to create unique symbolic negotiations with the consumer culture in which they developed (Ibid). These negotiations within the “commerce of culture” do not nullify hip hop’s resistant energy. Instead, in denying the “exclusivity of authentic blackness and commercial stardom, through a playful breakdown of the binary of authenticity and co-option” (Ibid). Hip hop uses the apparatuses of postmodern commercial culture

subversively to “open up a popular sphere long content with stereotyped portrayals of African Americans to increasingly nuanced expressions of black identity” (Hayman, 2003, 128).

Hip Hop as Radical Postmodernism Expression

As noted in the previous chapter, Russell A. Potter’s *Spectacular Vernaculars* (1995) is one of the more fundamental explorations of the complex relationship between hip hop culture and postmodernism, especially in the context of this thesis. In this work, Potter contends that hip hop culture and music is one of “multiple postmodernisms” that claims a different textual genealogy “made up of the books, texts, or cultural happenings that it prefers to regard as characteristically postmodern” (Potter, 1995, 1 - 2). For Potter, hip hop is a “radical postmodernism”, a postmodern form whose representation strategies, “while complex and contradictory, do not for that reason lose their libertarian potential” (Potter, 1995, 9). Potter’s radical postmodernism is “play” that acts as a “mask for a potent model of subversion” (Potter, 1995, 2). This version of postmodernism sits, in a loose sense, in the space between Theresa L. Ebert’s “ludic” and “resistance” postmodernisms (Ibid). The first side of these is the postmodernism “of play, of freefalll, of delight in irresolution”. The second is a model of critique which, “while aware of the complex interdeterminations of social and textual subjectivities, draws deeply on Marxism’s insistence on the correlatives of material conditions, and seeks quite explicitly to ‘resist’ what it sees as humanistic pluralism” (Ibid). The resistance of this form, however, is not just the theorisation of a more political postmodern stance. Potter contends that the material and social forms of this postmodernism takes in a specific cultural context that may exceed or be indifferent to “some of the academic formulations of postmodernism”. In the case of black cultural histories, Potter continues, that conflict lies not “solely or even primarily in what is too readily

construed as a reactive hearkening towards a pre-modernist worldview, but in a deeply historical and resonantly informed vernacular articulation of anti-modernism (Potter, 1995, 5 - 6). For Potter, “all of this comes down to almost a single proposition: the historical experience of slavery” (Potter, 1995, 6).

Black culture generally, and African-American culture specifically, “glimpsed the fundamental rottenness of European modernism from its very intestines long before Europe noticed any trace of indigestion” (Potter, 1995, 6). That glimpse means that Black American culture conceived of the postmodern “long before its ‘time’ as construed by writers who had to wait and take their cue from Derrida, Foucault, or Lyotard” (Ibid). Talking, making music, writing, even living had to be constructed in the subjectivity of resistance against “the economic and philosophical bulwarks of slavery and colonialism” (Ibid). It is for that reason that while postmodernism in the most general sense, and particularly in the case of reused material on the contemporary film soundtrack, is read as the idea that “nothing is at stake, a signpost on the way to relativistic chaos”; in the postmodernism of hip hop at least, a great deal is at stake (Potter 1995, 2). This is not about suggesting that Black postmodernism is in someway someway superior because it is “earlier or more visceral” (Potter, 1995, 6). It is also not to suggest that it is any less cerebral because it it “lived or felt” (Ibid). This is to contend that the radical postmodernism of hip hop is equally salient and of a discernibly different importance (Ibid). While Potter concedes that black modernisms “have never been hermetically sealed off from European or Euro-American modernisms”, the sense of time so fundamental to postmodernism arrived “considerably earlier within black diaspora cultures” and therefore brought with it antecedents and results related to but distinct from those of European postmodernisms (Potter, 1995, 7).

If, Potter argues, postmodernism and its expressions are haunted by a feeling of belatedness, “a sense of living in the ruins of the abandoned structures of modernism”, then hip hop as a Black postmodernism is about a curious “split in time” in which a “bitter awareness of the presence of ‘past’ oppressions” is coupled with an “unyielding hunger and thirst for the promise of the future”, what bell hooks calls “Yearning” (Potter, 1995, 18, 3). With potent connections to W.E.B. DuBois’s “double-consciousness”, Potter suggests that African-American artists wrench “new time out of old” (Potter, 1995, 3,4). Based on and shaped by unaccounted histories and as-yet unfulfilled futures, this process crafts a “radical now”, a gap in postmodernism’s progressive time (Potter ,1995, 5). Hip hop’s various expressions are “post-apocalyptic arts”. They are “scratches on the decaying surfaces of post-industrial urban America”. They are not so much “monuments to some romanticised ‘human spirit’” as they are “fundamentally anti-monumental arts” (Potter, 1995, 8). From this vantage point, it is therefore clear that for a movement like hip hop to “appropriate its indigenous knowledges and practices merely in order to annex them to academic modes of knowledge” would be an “act of violence” (Potter, 1995, 22). Hip hop constitutes itself as a “knowledge”, something that Afrika Bambaataa has proposed as a fundamental element of hip hop (Chang, 2007, 90), and this “knowledge” comes complete with unique discursive forms that both cite and sit among its own traditions (Potter, 1995, 22). In many ways, the radical postmodernism of hip hop, from a distance, seems to echo aspects of the postmodernism of mainstream culture, but, crucially, through its specific cultural context, the postmodernism of hip hop sees, hears, and feels time through a curious but tethered split. The postmodernism of hip hop calls its own, time-shaping tune.

2.4 Sampling, Soundscapes, and Remediation in New Black Realist Cinema

Musical Tool, Cultural Language

Funk is the DNA of hip-hop. And sampling is the essence.

Clinton quoted in Craig, 2013, 21

In *Spectacular Vernaculars,* Potter argues that if "Blues is the 'classical' music of African-American culture, and Jazz is its 'modernism', then hip hop has a powerful claim to be regarded as their postmodern successor" (1995, 18). Rather than defining hip hop by its lineage, however, Potter contends that this determination is "not so much on account of chronology as on account of what [Mikhail] Bakhtin calls 'chronotopes' - the linked prismatic synecdoches of cultural history" (Ibid). For Potter, hip hop's fundamental chronotope is the turntable, a musical object that, through its ability to literally "'turn the tables' on previous black traditions", creates a future out of fragments from the archive of the past, turning consumption into production (Ibid). Through its "mode of turning and re-turning", hip hop becomes the backdrop for an "insistent vernacular poetics" that invokes and alters the history of African-American and Black music on a global scale (Ibid). In the context of this thesis, that mode exists through the concept of sampling. While sampling is technically an ambiguous term that has its origins in the "first digital recording and reproduction of sounds in the 1930s" and really translates to a "short digital recording" (Boone, 2013, 2), in hip hop, sampling is most commonly seen as a compositional, musical technique through which sound artefacts from previous recordings are captured and reorganised to create new music (Petchauer, 2012, 138). Sampling in hip hop grew out of the practice of early deejay's looping "breaks until they formed a musical cycle of their own" (Schloss, 2004, 36). Although the technologies surrounding sampling have changed over the last four decades, due in no small part to the plethora of copyright court cases that were filed in the US in the

early to mid 1990s and subsequent swelling costs of using copyrighted material (Schloss, 2004; Williams, 2009a; Sewell, 2014), sampling has continued as a foundational aspect at the core of the music (Schloss, 2004, 79). This is because sampling in hip hop is not simply a mechanical technique by which older or previously-composed sounds are restructured. Sampling, in the view of this thesis, is a culturally-specific understanding of music and musical composition, one that blurs the boundaries between the bodies and texts involved.

First, as Todd Craig contends, sampling in hip hop "lends itself to a transactional practice", in which a dialogue takes place between the sampled material (and the various histories that it brings with it) and those figures that mix, write, or construct new sounds with that material (Craig, 2013, 23). In moving from consumption to production, the frames of the author, text, and its audience become apparent and the interactions between those three become pivotal to the meaning of the performance. Arguably the text resides only in that interaction. Second, sampling is a "process of cultural literacy and intertextual reference" (Rose, 1994, 89). It is a specific framework by which hip hop culture creates, reads, and understands arts and media. As noted, Wayne Marshall leans towards such a point in his writing on the music of Ahmir "?uestlove" Thompson and his band The Roots (2006). Marshall explores the fact that The Roots draw on the aesthetics of sampling, its timbres and sonic qualities, without actually reconstituting older musical material. The Roots do so so as to tap in to what is perceived to be the authentic sound of hip hop. Sampling, and the interpretation of music that it projects, is important to hip hop beyond the elementary rearranging of sonic matter.

Both points outline what Williams calls the "imagined community of hip-hop". As sampling permeates throughout hip hop, the genre "presupposes an unconcealed intertextuality" (Williams, 2014, 193). This is not so much that every

sonic element in hip hop is drawn from somewhere else, and therefore carries with it previous histories; nor that all histories carried will be immediately obvious to the audience, for instance Public Enemy and the Bomb Squad often worked against "the very intelligibility of quotation" in their music (Boone, 2013, 3). Rather, the potential for possible histories to be present is understood to be an innate part of the music specifically, and the culture's creative expressions more generally. Williams suggests that the imagined community of hip hop is an interpretive one, that it is made up of those "who share interpretive strategies for not reading but for writing texts, for constituting their properties" (2014, 202). In other words "these strategies exist prior to the act of reading and therefore determine the shape of what is read rather than, as is usually assumed, the other way around" (Ibid). Joseph Schloss argues similarly, suggesting that the culture's participants invest "a great deal of intellectual energy in the development of elaborate theoretical frameworks" to guide the interpretation of the music (2004, 6). In line with Schloss's point, Mickey Hess argues that the reason why the listener takes such responsibility is because sampling deals in popular culture and media rather than something like philosophy (2006, 288). As a transactional process, sampling is more of a language than it is a simple tool, and as the soundscapes of New Black Realism speak through that language they create unique interactions between the performance of the cinematic text, its creators, and their audience. Sampling offers a platform by which we can explore the way these film soundscapes alter the parameters of film and the bodies that interact with it.

Borrow, Steal, Plagiarise, Sample

Admittedly, much scholarship has tried to push beyond the basic definition of sampling in the music, with many scholars having bumped into the same concerns as those raised above. In his writing, Craig outlines some of academia's grappling

with these definitions (2013). This includes Shusterman's (1991) assessment that hip hop music derives from the selection and combining of parts of prerecorded songs to produce a new soundscape; Houston A. Baker, Jr.'s (1993) argument that sampling in hip hop is not simply a process of selective extension and modification but also the process of archiving a "reservoir of threads" that deejays weave into intriguing "tapestries of anxiety and influence"; and Andrew Bartlett's (1994) suggestion that sampling is "a new form of digital collaboration that entails a dialogue between various pieces of musical soundbites and representations that become overlayed to create a sole 'text'" (referenced in Craig, 2013, 22 - 23). Craig points to the work of Jeff Rice (2003) as the more "contemporary definition". Rice argues that sampling is a process of saving "snippets of prerecorded music and sound into a computer memory" that are cut from their "original source and pasted into a new composition" (Craig, 2013, 22 - 23). Schloss contends that, for him, only three "widely published academic works" - Walser (1995), Kyra D. Gaunt (1995), and Krims (2000) - have focused specifically on "sample based musical gestures" (2004, 20). Of those studies in which sampling constitutes a part of the discussion, Schloss suggests that there are two tracks. One focuses on the meaning of particular samples in the music, as in the work of Gaunt (1995) or Wheeler (1995), while the other explores the significance of sampling as a concept "within a given theoretical framework", such as in the work of Mark Costello and David Foster Wallace (1990), George Lipsitz (1994), Rose (1994), Walser (1995), and Potter (1995) (Schloss, 2004, 51). Schloss proposes that these musicologists tend to explore sampling as a text more that a process. For Hess that is the right approach (2004, 20).

As he explores it in terms of academic writing, through the phenomenon of text speaking to texts, Hess connects sampling to a "deeper history within African-American discourse and the tradition of Signifying" (referenced in Hess, 2006, 286).

In his 1988 work, *The Signifyin(g) Monkey*, Henry Louis Gates, Jr. defines signifying as "'a metaphor for textual revision' through repetition and recontextualization" (referenced in Hess, 2006, 286). Paul Gilroy (1993) extends this tradition to the music of hip hop, positing that "the aesthetic rules which govern [sampling] are premised on a dialectic of rescuing appropriation and recombination" (referenced in Hess, 2006, 286). Gates himself seems to agree, as in later editions of *The Signifyin(g) Monkey* he goes as far as to say that hip hop is "signifying on steroids" (2014, xxix).

The difficulty with these definitions is that each can lead to the equating of sampling with artistic value systems that can mislabel its purpose. As Mark Derry points out, sampling has been seen as a maligned practice, described as "the musical equivalent of shoplifting", and often equated with theft rather than creativity (referenced in Walser, 1995, 196; Hess, 2006, 292). Although this determination fits in with Rose's (1994) description of hip-hop's "sociology-based crime discourse" (referenced n Hess, 2006, 289), the stigma of theft "overshadows the role of sampling as a citation system where sources are transformed for new use" (Hess, 2006, 282). Hess points to plagiarism as another synonym that falls short here. He argues that it does not do sampling justice because, in hip hop, to sample is to transform, critique, and respond to the source material (Hess, 2006, 282).

For many, as Craig points out (2013), borrowing is the most appropriate synonym for hip hop sampling and this is certainly true of the principal scholarship on the matter, that of Justin Williams. As mentioned, Williams suggests, for instance, that while one could choose to use terms like 'appropriation', 'borrowing' helps to sidestep the ethical issues and negative connotations that come with other terminology (Williams, 2014, 190). At the same time, this puts the practice in an

established lineage of “musical borrowing in both African- and European-based musics” (Williams, 2014, 190, 191), not just in the sense of using material from these older genres (Demers, 2003, 41), but actually equating the practices of hip hop with established musical forms and genres now canonised in popular culture. However, whatever terms that are used to explore sampling in hip hop - whether that is stealing, plagiarising, or borrowing - each definition suggests that hip hop culture and music is taking something that does not belong to it and placing it somewhere that it should not be. While the former two terms proffer the idea that hip hop takes these elements by force, and may never return that which has been taken, the latter concedes that they will return that material at some point. It is simply on loan for now, by the permission of its original keeper.

The difficulty is that this understanding not only suggests a mono-directional power structure, one in which hip hop culture is always the submissive, secondary force within the pairing, but that it is structured on a Westernised frame that does not entirely suit the parameters of hip hop’s expressions. As we have seen, hip hop’s arts and media do not read the author, their text, or the audience in this same way and so to define sampling by terminology which proffers a similar value system is to lose out on an important aspect of the utterance. Hip hop is certainly a rebellious force in mainstream culture and the meaning and narratives behind its expressions depend on our acknowledgement of that position. Nonetheless, these terms give the music and its culture no space in which to disrupt or challenge the dominant power on hip hop’s own terms.

Computer Frames and Sampling as Remediation

The alternative option, I argue, is to explore sampling in hip hop as a language of “remediation”, as determined by Jay David Bolter and Richard Grusin in their book of the same name. Bolter and Grusin define remediation as the double-

logic of immediacy and hypermediacy (2000, 5), where immediacy suggests a unified space and hypermediacy offers a heterogenous one in which “representation is conceived of not as a window on to the world, but rather as ‘windowed’ itself - with windows that open on to other representations or other media” (2000, 5, 34). Philosophically speaking, immediacy is about transparency, it is about “the absence of mediation or representation”, as much as that is possible within the confines of any artistic expression. It is, Bolter and Grusin claim, “the notion that a medium could erase itself and leave the viewer in the presence of the objects represented”, so that they could know the objects directly (2000, 70, 71). In the same vein, hypermediacy is about opacity, the fact that viewers acknowledge that the “world comes to us through media” and that, in the presence of media, the audience “learns through acts of mediation or indeed learns about mediation itself” (Ibid). Psychologically, immediacy is the projection of an authentic experience, as the medium seems to disappear, while hypermediacy is the sense that the experience of the medium itself is an experience of the real (Ibid). While the “logic” of immediacy has been most dominant in Western representation, from the Renaissance right through to the coming of modernism, hypermediacy is certainly more prominent in contemporary, postmodern and technologically-advanced expressions (Bolter and Grusin, 2000, 34).

The double logic of remediation then, Bolter and Grusin argue, functions in a number of ways. First, it acts as the “mediation of mediation”, that this medium can continually comment on, reproduce, or replace other mediated forms or expressions. Second, it proffers the inseparability of mediation and reality, that this mediation is itself a real, if not autonomous, artefact within mediated culture and, in a sense therefore, can be understood as a process of reforming reality. Third, it functions as reform, as it refashions or rehabilitates other media (2000, 55 - 56). This

thesis contends that sampling in hip hop is a remediative force. And, far more interestingly, it contend that in its shaping of New Black Realist cinema, hip hop has brought that remediation to the narrative film soundscape. If we are to accept that hip hop arts and culture understand key aspects of authorship, audience, and textual performance in alternative ways to mainstream culture, arts, and media, and that those approaches are pivotal to figuring out the possibilities of the New Black Realist soundscape, then it is imperative that we set out a new determination for its central tenet. Rather than defining this process through an unfavourable system in which terms like borrowing or stealing seem to proffer that hip hop draws on static material that belongs to someone or somewhere else, remediation lets us view sampling as a new media through which the interaction and movement of material is pivotal to the form. Like windows on a computer screen, the balance of frame and content are innately connected to each other, and to the very purpose of that medium. It is not about moving sonic objects that belong elsewhere as it is viewing and reviewing material from particular viewpoints. This can be both positive and negative. It can both undermine and/or exonerate that which it presents. It can challenge or reaffirm the narratives or ideas behind that which is sampled. At the same time, sampling presents a space not just to explore sonic matter, but a platform to examine the reality of the mediatisation of African-American culture generally, and hip hop culture specifically. Through remediation, both the content and the form by which that content arrives to us is up for scrutiny.

To talk about sampling as a language of remediation is to acknowledge that it is more than just a compositional tool, a form of musical borrowing, or “signifying on steroids”. To suggest that sampling remediates is to argue that it is a complex dialogic of transparency and opacity, an expression that strikes a balance between the material that it is showing us and the way that it is showing us that material.

Both are innately important to each other and to the meaning that we are to draw from their connection. As a remediative force, sampling is a windowed expression that calls forward the audience, requesting their influence on the narrative or meaning of the music, and blurring the distance between that body and the body of the text and its 'traditional' author. In New Black Realism, those traditional structures are challenged by the influence of hip hop culture and music, as a subcultural expression. Remediation offers a chance to fully unpack that influence. This theory moves past the assertion that the chaotic soundscapes of contemporary postmodern cinema are nihilistic expressions devoid of true meaning. To acknowledge sampling as a remediative force is to unveil the language of hip hop as it utters far beyond the reuse of specific pockets of sound, and to read that utterance as it speaks from and across all three elements of the New Black Realist soundscape.

Conclusion

It's like that, and that's the way it is.

McDaniels, Simmons, and Smith, 1983

At the core of this chapter has ben the concept of duality. Hip hop culture is a radical postmodernism that sits between Ebert's ludic and resistance postmodernisms. It is a 'split in time' in which the awareness of past oppressions are coupled with a Yearning for the promise of the future. The music is a post-literate orality, an utterance that revises and presents oral traditions in a technological sophisticated context. Neither totally post- or premodern, the hybridity between black music, black oral forms, and technology means that hip hop is a complex fusion of orality and postmodern technology. Hip Hop music is built on the dichotomy of sampling, a remediative process that moves between the

immediacy of the musical content and the hypermediacy of its musical structures. The relationship between hip hop music and narrative cinema is itself built on a binary, something that is particularly obvious in the sound and music of these films. The duality of the New Black Realist soundscape is an interesting space in which the hip hop community can explore its bond with mainstream culture. While the majority of the narrative and film visuals across New Black Realism are based in and amongst the Black community, the sound and music of these films are structural lines in which hip hop culture fights to be free and be heard. As these soundscapes present hip hop culture's understanding of sound and music in channels dictated by mainstream narrative cinema's expectations, they reflect the innate double-consciousness that the hip hop community experiences in real life.

The call being made throughout this chapter, and the thesis more generally, is therefore a call for awareness. It is a call to explore the soundscapes of New Black Realism with the express acknowledgement that hip hop comes with unique characteristics and values. New Black Realism is the synthesis of subcultural intent and mainstream media. Reflecting a regeneration of conservative, Western-centric, bourgeois, heterosexual, and largely masculine values (Davison, 2004, 3), the platform of narrative cinema is one that hip hop culture and music disrupts with a direct purpose. It is hip hop's mutation in the structuring codes of the narrative cinematic soundscape in which hip hop culture echoes loudly. The chapters that follow in this thesis will pinpoint moments of filmic noise through which, both in the sense of the immediacy of the message being offered and the interruption to the original message, the soundscapes of New Black Realism create meaning. At times, the soundtracks of many of these films can be easily filed away as examples of exploitation cinema, or African-American specific samples in the influx of pop music soundtracks that rose to prominence at the end of the twentieth-century. And, there

are certainly elements of New Black Realism that align with the sound and music of many contemporary postmodern films. However, to not read the culturally-specific nature of these films and their soundscapes is to lose out on an understanding of a fundamental space for one of twentieth-century culture's most important movements.

The rest of the thesis explores these dualities across each of cinema's sonic channels: music, sound effects, and the voice. Although each of these chapters draws on differing academic threads in their analyses, all three return to the ideas in this chapter, either explicitly or implicitly, in making their points. By exploring the overarching or underlying issues at the heart of hip hop music and the narrative film soundscape here in one place, the intent is that this chapter anchors those discussions together while also streamlining the arguments that they put forward. If the previous chapter is the foundation of this work, then this chapter is the frame by which the principal investigations of this thesis are supported.

Chapter Three

Music and New Black Realist Cinema

Digging, Cuts, and the Performance of the New Black Realist Soundscape

The subplot to Ernest R. Dickerson's *Juice* revolves around the hopes of Quincy "Q" Powell (Omar Epps) as he dreams of making it as a hip hop deejay. As Q and his three friends, Roland Bishop (Tupac Shakur), Raheem Porter (Khalil Kain), and Eric "Steel" Thurman (Jermaine Hopkins) walk the streets of Harlem, playing truant and attempting to make money through their exploits at the local arcade, Q spots a poster: "Ruffhouse Presents 'Mix Master Massacre'". While none of Q's crew care too much about the event, a deejaying competition, he sees this as his chance to elevate his status as a deejay beyond the derisory tag of "local", an insult tossed at him by those same friends. Not only is the prize "custom gold 1200s", a set of Technics turntables, but also a six month contract to deejay at Ruffhouse. His friends undermine his chances of winning, arguing that much better deejays will be performing at the event. They eventually concede to his requests and agree to back him when he asks to go to the local record store, the Record Rack, to pick up some "party tapes" for his own "audition tape".

When the group arrives at the record store, Q distracts the shop clerk while Bishop, Raheem, and Steel steal some records for him. Even as they stand in the eye-line of the clerk, and so are under pressure to steal the records and get out as quickly as possible, opinions on the music bounce back and forward between the three. Bishop and Raheem carefully sift through the records, picking specific cuts, and hand them off to Steel to hide in a folded newspaper under his arm. As he takes the records from the others, Steel offers a number of disapproving faces; he is not pleased with the choices that Bishop and Raheem are making. As the shop clerk writes down her number for Q, and the conversation seems to be coming to its end,

Steel makes his own choice, *Roy Ayers Presents Ubiquity: Starbooty*. As he smiles and nods to the others, Bishop forces an angry whisper, “put that shit back”. Steel does not listen and takes the record anyway. Q ends the conversation and, just as the clerk finally figures out the ruse, the group make their escape from the store. This is not a smash and grab robbery. The group are not just taking these records for the sake of it. This is a detailed dissection. Although Raheem, Bishop, and Steel all make choices that the others openly disapprove of, the point is that even in the context of a robbery the three young men take the time to make considered choices. The music, and the material that makes up that music, are important to the group. The cuts matter. Their choices matter. The music matters.

This scene is emblematic of the understanding of music at the centre of this chapter, and of the assessment of the New Black Realist soundscape that permeates throughout this thesis more generally. During the 1990s, mélomanes like Martin Scorsese, Quentin Tarantino, and Wes Anderson brought the use of popular music and popular musical styles on film, something that had flourished in early cinema and returned again with the advent of 'youth culture’ in the 1960s and 1970s, back to the forefront of mainstream cinema. They did so under the guise of postmodernism, where their use of popular musics steered, artistically speaking, a sense of ironic or distanced nostalgia. In creating a “postmodern collage”, where the various elements assembled from any era, genre, style, or discipline, are left unchanged and untransformed, these soundtracks use music “in a totally detached and self-conscious way” so as to de-naturalise some of the most dominant features of our life (D’haen, 1986, 220, 222; Hutcheon, 1995, 2). Postmodernist soundtracks creatively deconstruct our reliance on the unifying potential of rudimentary meta-narratives and replace that unilinear functionalism with discontinuity and eclecticism (D’haen, 1986, 219). As with most postmodern art and media, the soundtracks of

these films are pastiche, aesthetic imitations that 'fail' to achieve what their originals have and so can often be incompatible with affect (Dyer, 2007, 1, 2, 4). Even though they create moments of overloaded meaning in cinema, where the histories of the music and the images they play over exist at arms length, these pastiche soundtracks depend on audiences "getting" the elements referenced (D'haen, 1986, 225; Dyer, 2007, 3). Without that, it is suggested, the presence and purpose of this sonic material is potentially pointless. Their importance is conditional, and even when they become important, their purpose is to structure a plurality of lines so that no one particular thread matters anymore than another. This creates a sonic landscape too crowded to unpack. These soundtracks reinforce the traditional, literate understanding of film in which music is a secondary and submissive component. In these films, the referentiality of the music speaks through and of disengagement.

For the Black commercial independent cinema and soundscapes at the centre of this thesis, as utterances of a radical postmodernism, this cannot be the case. Just as for Q, in hip hop at the turn of the twenty-first century, music was pivotal to the identity of Black American youth culture. For those inside and outside hip hop, the community at large and its music become interchangeable synonyms. It is, the clearest reflection through which the culture can be viewed, or more appropriately, heard. Music is at the forefront of what Afrika Bambaataa calls "knowledge", the culture's grasp and shaping of the world around it. Hip hop is a subcultural movement and music is the rhythm to which that movement occurs. At the same time, hip hop's understanding of music, particularly at this point in history, is driven by and for a community of create diggers, individuals like Bishop, Raheem, and Steel, who actively choose and listen to their music with great care and obsessive attention. They may not be the deejay, but their role in understanding the

music through the cut is clear. As Justin Williams contends, despite the inevitable variations that any individual understandings or interpretations may proffer, there exists an "audience expectation that hip-hop is a vast intertextual network that helps to form and inform the generic contract between audiences and hip-hop groups and artists (2009, 33). Hip hop music is, therefore, performative. It exists in the relationships between the text, the deejay, and their audience, where the role of each are continually blurred. It is this hip hop mentality, a dependence on a highly woven intertext between multiple bodies, that challenges the rendering of hip hop and New Black Realism as simply another case study in postmodern cinema and the (re)use of popular music on film.

Against the traditional literary reading of sound and image in narrative cinema, purported by some of film's definitive texts (Gorbman, 1987; Prendergast, 1992; Flinn, 1992), New Black Realism challenges entrenched issues of diegesis, inaudibility, and reception. Echoing Rose's definition of hip hop, these films are iterations of a post-literate orality, in which narrative meaning exists not just in the images or dialogue but across the various nodes of the expression (1994, 85 - 86). These films are celluloid performances. This chapter will explore music in New Black Realism through selected examples from Spike Lee's *Do The Right Thing* (1989) and *He Got Game* (1998), Mario Van Peebles's *New Jack City* (1992), the Hughes Brothers's *Menace II Society* (1993), Hype Williams's *Belly* (1998) and Ernest R. Dickerson's aforementioned *Juice* (1992). The chapter explores these films through three interconnected aspects: remediation, repetition, and hapticity.

At the core of each of these points is the blurred relationships between text, author, and audience. Each contends that because of the way hip hop structures sound, and subsequently because of the way that it expects that sound to be read, these films and their soundscapes establish a unique role for music in narrative

cinema. Constantly breaking the barriers between Gorbman's various levels of narratology as well as the barrier of the fourth wall, music in New Black Realism is not an agent through which directors create moments of disingenuous overloaded meaning, but a space in which the narrative of these films is performed. Tapping into and drawing on the 'knowledge', the audience understands that, shaped by hip hop aesthetics, these soundscapes are interwoven texts that call for further participation. As hip hop music blurs the distinction between "creative artist and appropriative audience" so does the New Black Realist soundscape blur the distinction between author, text, and audience (Shusterman, 1991, 618). As with Q, Steel, Bishop, and Raheem in the Record Rack, the music here is specific, detailed, and of prominent concern. This is not simply the soundscape of postmodernism but the soundscape of a Black, radical postmodernism.

In exploring these performances, this section of the research discusses both the use of archetypal hip hop songs on the soundscape, as in Van Peebles's *New Jack City* or Dickerson's *Juice*, as well as considering the influence of hip hop aesthetics on other musics throughout these films. It will explore, for instance, the use of Aaron Copland's work to score young Black male bodies in Lee's *He Got Game*. As an artistic language, hip hop is as much about the structuring of material as it is about a canon of specific artists or songs. It is that unique framework that returns in the following two chapters as this research examines hip hop's shaping of the voice and sound effects in this Black commercial independent cinema.

3.1 Sampled Soundscapes

Remediation on the Title Track

Released in 1991, Mario Van Peebles's *New Jack City* is a film based on the story of screenwriter Thomas Lee Wright. The film focuses on the eventual fall of the drug

gang The Cash Money Brothers (CMB), their leader Nino Brown (Wesley Snipes), and his lead henchman the Duh Duh Duh Man (Bill Nunn). While Brown and CMB successfully sidestep the challenges to their empire from the rival drug lord Don Armeteo (John Aprea), the group falter under the pressure of the New York City police department tasked with their capture, led by Det. Stone (Mario Van Peebles), Scotty Appleton (Ice-T), and his partner Nick Peretti (Jude Nelson). Although Scotty's infiltration of the gang sees the demise of their empire, the loss of their drug production base, and the sentencing of Nino Brown, it is the gun in the hands of a distressed local resident, the Old Man (Bill Cobbs), on the steps of the courthouse that Nino finally meets his gruesome end.

The film's soundtrack consists mainly of New Jack Swing, a fusion genre pioneered by Teddy Riley, whose music Barry Michael Cooper defined as New Jack Swing in an 1987 *Village Voice* article (referenced in Josephs, 2012). Also known as swingbeat, the music "eschewed the fashion for sampling", instead relying on electronic drum machines as it crafted insistent beats under "light melody lines and clearly enunciated vocals" (Silverton, 2001). Nonetheless, of the genres of which New Jack Swing is an amalgamation, the sounds and timbres of hip hop are key features. Van Peebles' *New Jack City* and its official album release do, however, feature a number musical tracks that, if not completely determinable as one genre or another, certainly include enough to be considered hip hop-esque, at the very least. One such track is found in the film's opening credits, where the sounds of 1970s soul, 1980s hip hop, and television and radio news reports mix to score a pan of the streets, buildings, and skyline of New York City. The song, Troop and LeVert's "For the Love of Money/Living for the City", is a song that was specifically composed for this film. The track's two main components are samples of The O'Jays' "For the Love of Money", a single from the group's 1973 album *Ship Ahoy*,

and Stevie Wonder's "Living for the City" from his album *Innervisions* (1973). "For the Love of Money" constitutes what Amanda Sewell has defined as a "non-percussive structural sample", as in it uses the musical elements of the original, without percussion, to create the track's groove (2014, 32). While the main musical element of the guitar is an autosonic sample of the original, a digital copy, the famous chorus line is reproduced allosonically, re-performed by one of the vocal groups that feature in the song (Lacasse referenced in Sewell, 2014, 29). Although Wonder's "Living for the City" features more prominently in the almost 6 minute soundtrack album, in this moment in the film the chorus of the music is again played allosonically at the beginning of the track, a sample type Sewell might define as "lyric singular", in that it is a spoken, sung, or rapped element that we hear just once (2014, 32).

This opening performance also features a sample of Dr. Dre's introductory statement from N.W.A.'s 1988 single "Straight Outta Compton" (the group's lead release from their album of the same name), as well as the sounds of police sirens and helicopters and news reports of unemployment, poverty, tax, income disparity, drug turf wars, national US debt, the murders of young Black men, and the deaths of innocent children. The distinct voice of Queen Latifah is the track's final component. While on the album release we hear her rap throughout, the film's opening titles instead includes only her introductory hype or build-up. Her voice is, nevertheless, still very much apparent in this cinematic moment as she identifies herself in the locale, "bringing a song to you about a place you might live".

The sounds and music that feature in the film's opening sequence are prominent sonic nodes that encourage audience recognition and engagement. As the core musical force behind the film's title sequence, through both its guitar and vocal lines, the presence of "For the Love of Money" is obvious. It plays out

untroubled by other sonic aspects and, without any alterations, it is clearly present as we pan across New York. Although Wonder's "Living for the City" features only as an a cappella opening to the film, with the lyrics changed to "for the New Jack City", it plays out over the Warner Brothers logo. Unchallenged visually, this music is again obviously present as we are dropped in to the world onscreen.

Aside from their marked placement, both are also staple tracks within the hip hop community specifically. While "For the Love of Money" was used as the base track for both Grandmaster Melle Mel and the Furious Five's "Step Off" (1985) and The Funky Four +1's "King Heroin" (1983), Public Enemy opened their 1988 track "Black Steel in the Hour of Chaos" with the dialogue breakdown of Wonder's "Living for the City", with the same section also featuring through small snippets in Eazy-E's "Nobody Move" (1988) (WhoSampled.Com, 2019). It is along this line that both fit Williams's definition of "unconcealed intertextuality". The presence of these samples are signalled to overtly in these moments (2014, 193). They are pronounced in the performance of the film's opening titles and in that pronouncement they contribute to our understanding of the film's narrative meaning.

"For the Love of Money" decries the pitfalls of capitalist culture. Echoing a passage from the New Testament, 1 Timothy 6:10, in which "the love of money is the root of all evil", the song argues that "the almighty dollar" is dangerous. Like "stealing from their brother", the obsession with and glorification of money ruins people and so the song begs its listener to not "let money change you" (Gamble, Jackson, and Huff, 1973). As numerous scholars have pointed out, capitalism has always been an uncomfortable bedfellow for African-American communities (Watkins, 1998; Murray, 2004; Donalson, 2007). While capitalist culture had driven the Black community to cities scattered across America in search of opportunities and a better life, a "combination of social, economic, and political crises converged

to compromise postwar economic growth" from the 1970s onwards (Watkins, 1998, 21). A "period of rapid economic restructuring" and "accelerated deindustrialisation" followed and "ushered in the steady erosion of the industrial base economy in favour of a flourishing service, administrative and information driven economy" (Ibid). These huge swaths of economic transformation at the end of the twentieth-century "devastated the infrastructure of cities that were once robust centres of production and economic growth" (Ibid). S. Craig Watkins points out that, as a result of "systematic neglect and institutional racism", these changes led to the "erasure of well-paying jobs, income, and tax base", all of which charged acute fiscal and educational problems in many inner-city communities (Ibid). Growing up in the 1970s and 1980s, it was the hip hop generation that felt the full weight of the seismic changes of postindustrial capitalism. As we have seen Elizabeth Wheeler mention already, those feelings were at the centre of hip hop music as you cannot hear "rap music unless you acknowledge the split between two Americas: one getting rich, the other getting evicted" (1991, 195).

Although Stevie Wonder's "Living for the City" is not a hip hop song, it is a song about the hip hop generation. It encapsulates the very story of Black America's move to and life in the postindustrial city. The use and placement of Wonder's "Living for the City" in the opening sequence of this film is therefore a fascinating choice to make. While we only get the final chorus line in these credits, the song is famously about a young Black man and his family who move to the city is search of a better life but end up living "just enough for the city" (Wonder, 1973). Through every verse, Wonder's lyrics highlight the same systematic neglect and institutional racism that Watkins' research outlines. His song is a retelling of this well-known cultural migration.

While each song individually proffers narrative threads that we can pick out throughout the film, it is through the remediation of these musics over the panned images of New York by which the narrative meaning of *New Jack City* is most clearly stated. Through placement and prominence, the unconcealed intertextuality of these musics mean that the edges of the audio and visuals rub up against each other. The film does not so much borrow from the O'Jays and Stevie Wonder as it reframes those songs in the context of 1990s New York City. It exposes the material at the centre of each of these filmic nodes, the stories of the dangers of capitalism and Black American culture's search for a better life in the inner-city, and lays them out over the streets of New York. The balance of the immediacy of the material and the hypermediacy of their framing calls each into question for the audience who are more than aware of the context of the sounds they are hearing. Beyond specific narratives, the use of this material also establishes a clash between genres and the societal moments they represent. In her assessment of the artform, Joanna Demers argues that hip hop culture often samples from 1970s African-American life as a period in which Black American "identity coalesced, and a new political consciousness was born" (2003, 41). That new consciousness, which succeeded the civil rights era, produced creative forces in music and film, such as Blaxploitation, that spoke freely of contemporaneous struggles and a new hope for the future. Stevie Wonder, in particular, was at the forefront of that movement; emblematic of this was his lead to establish Martin Luther King Jr. Day as a national holiday across the US. To re-present the singer here, and those musics so clearly steeped in such an important time in African-American culture, is to reframe the Civil Rights Movement in the context of 1990s Black life. It is also to view contemporary Black life amongst the aims and hopes of the Civil Rights Movement.

The other samples that feature intermittently in *New Jack City*'s title sequence further these narrative threads by blurring the boundaries between 1970s and 1990s Black America. The news reports that bombard the audience through the second half of the performance create meaning through the mediation of realism. These reports are the musical leitmotif of the city, it seems. They echo out from the streets as we move between them and the buildings and so their role in the performance is imperative to the correlation of these narrative nodes. While it is almost impossible to tell if these reports - of poverty, tax evasion, drug wars, and murders - are in fact 'real', they are projected in such a fashion as to seem real and that is far more important. That 'realism' announces the presence of this sonic component, causing it to brush up against the frames of the city pan, Stevie Wonder, and The O'Jays. The 'reality' of the news reports seem at odds with the 'fictional' nature of the music playing in the same space. In that clash, these news reports draw the narrative out of those songs and bring them forward, cultivating their connection to New York even further. This mix messes with the timeline of the music and the news reports, moving between 1970s and 1990s Black America all at once.

The final elements, the vocals of Dr. Dre and Queen Latifah, are interesting in their disruption of the fourth wall, as both voices localise the remediated narrative in the lives of the cinema audience. Dre's line, taken from the opening of N.W.A.'s "Straight Outta Compton", argues that "you are now about to witness the strength of street knowledge", and therefore preemptively outlines the importance of the remediation within the piece. Conversely, Queen Latifah's rap suggests that she is bringing a "song to you about a place you might live", qualifying herself further by saying that incase "you don't understand, it is called new jack city." Dre and Latifah direct their statements at "you". Both utterances place the film stories on screen in

the laps of the audience offscreen, particularly for those audiences who see themselves reflected in the film's images. By speaking directly to their viewers, both utterances drag the film audience in to the world onscreen, or, pull the film closer to the auditorium. In either case, Dre and Latifah strengthen the correlation between the reality and mediation of the hip hop community. And, in helping to reveal this clear reflection of contemporary Black American life, both lines further frame the other, loaded narrative threads. It is the voices and Dr. Dre and Queen Latifah that call for the kind of narrative explorations outlined above.

Versioning, Aaron Copland, and American-ness

In *He Got Game*, Spike Lee localises American identity in young Black bodies playing basketball through the music of Aaron Copland. In the age of electronic reproduction, in which endless sounds, rhythms, and melodies are available and immediately accessible to would-be authors (Rose, 1994, 88), hip hop is more "essentially process than finished product" (Shusterman, 1991, 618 - 619). It is as much about the collection and crafting of material as it is the final artefact. In that sense, the aesthetics of hip hop sampling are present not just in the reuse of music that can be defined as hip hop or as part of the hip hop orbit, like the voices of Dr. Dre and Queen Latifah or the sounds of the O'Jays and Stevie Wonder, but in the reuse of sounds and musics normally thought to be outside hip hop culture more generally.

Lee's 1998 film *He Got Game* follows Jesus Shuttlesworth (Ray Allen), the top-ranked basketball prospect in the US as he navigates both his burgeoning sports career and his complex relationship with his father, Jake Shuttlesworth (Denzel Washington). Jake has been released from prison on parole to convince his son to play for the governor's alma mater. Along with songs by Public Enemy, the music of twentieth-century American concert hall composer Aaron Copland is used

across *He Got Game*'s soundscape. In contrast to the sounds of the previous case study, Copland's music standout in the *He Got Game* soundscape because of its perceived dissonance with the film's images. The film's Copland cues are drawn from a number of more famous moments in the composer's back catalogue, cues that include "Billy the Kid" (1938), "Fanfare for the Common Man" (1942) and "Appalachian Spring" (1944). Viewed by many as "Mr. Musical Americana", Copland's work holds a definitive role in the reception of dominant American culture at the end of the twentieth-century (Tommasini referenced in Gabbard, 2000, 374).

For much of the US, the sounds of Copland echoing in the concert hall were, and are still seen to be, the sounds of the United States of America. Copland rejected elements of American classical music that had been deemed too Eurocentric and instead concentrated special attention on American folk melodies, quoting them in his compositions without irony or patronising gestures. He also explored melodies that gave his music a spacious, uplifting quality which then became linked to the open plains of the American West (Gabbard, 2000, 374). Copland's presence on the film soundtrack is, in itself, nothing unusual. Aside from scoring a number of films with original compositions, including *Of Mice and Men* (1939), *The Red Pony* (1949), and *The North Star* (1943), Copland's work has featured in Martin Scorsese's *Raging Bull* (1980) and Michael Patrick Jann's *Drop Dead Gorgeous* (1999). What is unusual, however, is in the relationship between the images in Lee's film and Copland's music, where *He Got Game* speaks of Black America.

Spike Lee equally heard Copland's music as the sounds of America. But, he has also argued that as American as Copland was, so too was the game of basketball and those that play it, particularly in the case of the contemporary African-American community (Gabbard, 2000, 372). As noted earlier, Krin Gabbard

has suggested that by mixing the film's images with Copland's sounds, Lee signals to viewers a "new set of associations" between the quintessential sound of America and the sight of young Black males on screen (2000, 371). In a "move that would please Ralph Ellison", Gabbard contends, "Lee may be asserting that these African-American youths are as uniquely and thoroughly American as anything that Copland's Ballet music may signify" (2000, 372). Gabbard also contends that the interesting balance of Copland's left-leaning political views and sexual orientation, and the counterweight that those factors offer to his music's centrality in American life, may loosely mirror the complex relationship that the African-American community shares with dominant mainstream culture (2000, 374, 375). However, in approaching the discord of sound and image in this fashion, Gabbard determines it as just that: discord. He mentions both the "unusual juxtaposition" of the music and images and the film soundscape's role as "background music", where its purpose is to supplement the action onscreen (2000, 370, 372). Here, Gabbard depends on the same normative, Westernised understandings of the (re)use of previously composed music on the film soundscape that sidelines similar relationships as a postmodern nostalgic disengagement built on a stylistic statement with little correlation to any specific historical past. Meaning, in that sense, is assembled in spite of ironic distance. Through the hip hop culture that drives New Black Realist films like this one, that correlation is not sufficient. These are sampled sounds that become innate aspects of the film's narrative meaning. In their remediation, Spike Lee reshapes American-ness in *He Got Game* by "versioning" the music of Aaron Copland on his soundscape.

Stemming from hip hop's relationship with reggae music, versioning is the obvious and overt mix of old and new materials (Rose, 1994, 90). It involves the reworking of a piece of music with some new elements that do not detract or

completely rupture the original but add to it so that, as Dick Hebdige puts it, “the original version takes on a new life and a new meaning in a fresh context” (quoted in Rose, 1994, 90). And, it is through the versioned soundscape that *He Got Game* makes a fascinating statement on Black culture in contemporary American society. The connection between Copland’s music and Lee’s images is made from the film’s outset, with Copland’s “John Henry”, a programmatic piece for radio, scoring the opening scenes of players from all walks of life on various basketball courts and half-courts across the US.

Although the collaboration between Copland and Lee continues throughout the film, it is in one specific scene where the remediation of the versioned soundscape is most intriguing. As Jesus and some of his friends play a late-night local pick-up game, “Hoedown”, from Copland’s 1942 ballet *Rodeo,* is heard alongside the images. Appearing within the first fifteen minutes of the film, this scene is a guiding factor in the audience’s understanding of the film narrative. The music plays out over the images, largely uncut and sonically prominent. It is clearly present in the film scene. As Copland’s cue is heard, it is punctuated both by the dance-like movements of the young Black bodies onscreen as they play basketball and the voices emanating from those same figures. This is not about one element playing over, under, or against the others but both sound and image coming together as a singular performance. They exist in comparable, parallel lines where neither one leads the other. In her 1992 work, *Settling the Score*, Kathryn Kalinak explores Siegfried Kracauer’s ideas on music in mainstream cinema that either parallel or counterpoint the film image. In the case of the former, Kracauer argues, music restates “in a language of its own, certain moods, tendencies, or meanings of the picture it accompanies”, while in the case of the latter, the music composer or supervisor is at “liberty to assign to [the music] all possible functions and

tasks" (Kracauer referenced in Kalinak, 1992, 26). From a traditional viewpoint, Copland's "Hoedown" would normally fit into this second category, then. Inside and outside New Black Realism, young Black male bodies at play tend to be scored with musical genres generally associated with African-American culture and hip hop music specifically, something which pops up throughout this study. The music in this scene would appear to not match the images. It seems not to restate in its own language what is happening on film. However, bearing in mind his thoughts as mentioned above, Lee may contend that this is an example of the former, that the music and images do in fact connect in this moment because basketball is as American as Copland's work. In either case, music is a subsidiary aspect of the expression and that hierarchical frame draws from the statement that is being made.

The versioned nature of this moment, and why that matters so much, is tied innately to the unconcealed nature of Copland's "Hoedown". As with Rose's discussion of hip hop lyrics and music as a post-literate orality, here all aspects of the film are part of its statement, all part of its multilayered performance. Just like the software updates that appear across phones, tablets, and laptops every couple of weeks, this moment of versioned soundscape is an update of American-ness, or at the very least our perception of it. It is a projection of America 2.0, if read as one complete film performance. As the bodies and voices of the young Black men onscreen echo through Copland's "Hoedown", they upgrade the definition of what it sounds and looks like to be American. But, this is not the adding in or supplementing of American-ness so much as it is the refurbishing of American-ness to include something that should have been there all along, something that was mislaid or misplaced the first time around. It is not about borrowing from Copland's American-ness to lend it to these young men; rather, the scene reaches back into

history and carves out a cultural space not afforded to this community through the mediation of America in cinema and music historically. This is a remediation of Copland and the Black bodies and voices on screen. It is the immediacy of the images and music in contrast with the hypermediacy of expectation, of the way these sounds and music should match up. This is a re-presentation of the music of Aaron Copland and of the images of Black men playing basketball. By aligning the mediation of Copland and African-American culture, this scene updates our perception of American-ness with the social and cultural 'history' tied to these young men onscreen. This is an important power shift to acknowledge in this cinematic moment. To read this scene through the aesthetics of hip hop as subcultural movement, rather than simply as an ironic statement of contemporary postmodern cinema, is to create space to unpack a much more powerful cultural statement at the heart of Lee's use of Copland in *He Got Game*.

Gangsta Rap, G-Funk, and the Music Video in Film

Where the unconcealed nature of Copland's music in *He Got Game* is apparent because of the supposedly unusual relationship between sound and image, it is the control given to the soundscape of *Menace II Society* that calls for our attention. *Menace II Society* is the directorial debut of brothers Allen and Albert Hughes. Released in 1993, the film follows Kaydee "Caine" Lawson (Tyrin Tuner) and his friend Kevin "O-Dog" Odum (Larenz Tate) as they navigate the various obstacles of contemporary African-American life in the neighbourhood of Watts, in southern Los Angeles CA. While we see both characters fall at many of these hurdles, including with school, drink and drugs, family separation, incarceration, and murder, Caine eventually decides to weather a new path. Encouraged by the positive decisions that a small number of his friends are making around their lives, and in particular by the move that Sharif Butler (Vonte Sweet) is looking to make, the

film eventually sees Caine decide to follow his love interest, Ronnie (Jada Pinkett Smith), and her young son to Atlanta GA, in search of a brighter future. On the day that they are getting ready to leave Caine's criminal lifestyle begins to close in on him. As the group pack up Ronnie's car with their stuff, a rival gang seeking retribution fires shots at the group from a moving car. Caine and Sharif both get shot. Sharif passes away immediately. As the final credits close out it is clear that Caine is going to die.

As with both *Juice* and *New Jack City*, *Menace II Society*'s film soundtrack is not entirely comprised of hip hop. Across this film we hear the sounds of Al Green, Zapp, Marvin Gaye, and George Clinton. When hip hop does appear in the soundtrack, it is gangsta rap, a much harsher sounding sub-genre of the music. The presence of gangsta rap throughout *Menace II Society* is important to the remediation that takes place on screen. Gangsta rap features lyrics and sounds that emphasise the violence of street life. Artists in this genre also depend on a projection of violent personas and imagery to establish their authenticity and perpetuate their relevancy in the music. In *Menace II Society*, gangsta rap can be heard in the music and voices of artists like MC Eight, Ice Cube, N.W.A., and DJ Quik. It is also present in the work of Boogie Down Productions, a musical precursor to the genre that pioneered some of the sounds and approaches to exploring the reality of everyday life that many of these gangsta rappers took forward in their music.

Of all the instances in which gangsta rap punctuates this film, one example in particular stands out as a moment in which the remediated frames on display contribute to the narrative meaning onscreen. Before he chats to Sharif and Sharif's father, Mr. Butler (Charles S. Dutton), about leaving criminality behind and following Ronnie out of Watts, we see Caine continue to participate in dangerous, criminal

acts. One of these acts is the buying and cooking of drugs at a local drug house. This scene stands out not only because of the various musical threads that are apparent, but because that, in its construction, it also seems to remediate other media within film. Specifically, it presents characteristics normally associated with music videos, a form of expression innately tied to both cultural constructions of gangsta rap and the film's directors, Allen and Albert Hughes, who were famous for their directing of music videos by this point. After we see Caine rob a young man in line at a drive-thru, the film cuts to him in his bedroom speaking on a landline to a friend. Caine, it appears, is calling to see about getting some drugs, drugs that he can sell on to make money. "Yeah, I need you to hook me up with some shit", we hear Caine say. As we cut to the next scene, we see Caine get "some shit". As he sits at a kitchen table, he is asked how much he wants. The drugs are delivered, the services of that particular kitchen are offered up, and a small montage of the process ensues. A relatively short collection of images, the clips in question take no more than two minutes to play out. In this small snapshot, as at other points across *Menace II Society*, the Hughes Brothers disrupt normative constructions of the mainstream narrative film and its soundscape in such a way as to call attention not only to the musical samples on display, but point towards the sampled aesthetics of hip hop music video and the possible narrative nodes that that offers.

The scene features a cut of "Dopeman", a b-side to N.W.A.'s 1987 debut single "Panic Zone" that featured on the group's first album, *Straight Outta Compton* (1988). In its complete form, "Dopeman" is made up of a myriad of samples, including elements of Herman Kelly and Life's "Dance to the Drummer's Beat" (1978), 7th Wonder's "Daisy Lady" (1979), C.I.A.'s "My Posse" (1987), and Roxanne Shanté's "Freestyle Live" featuring Biz Markie (1987) (WhoSampled.Com, 2019). The full track also features the voices of Ice-Cube and Easy-E, two resident

members of N.W.A. In the film, however, two main musical elements stand out: the voice of Ice-Cube and the ARP synthesiser of The Ohio Players's "Funky Worm", a single from their 1972 album *Pleasures* (WhoSampled.Com, 2019).

First, Ice-Cube's voice is distinctive and draws our attention to the music's role both in the sense of his aggressive tone and through the song's lyrics, which seem to correlate to the images onscreen. In the song, Cube talks about the role of the Dopeman, or drug dealer, in local communities. He warns of the dangers of drug use to those who buy from the Dopeman, and to the Dopeman himself: "To be a dope man boy you must qualify, Don't get high off your own supply". In using music that speaks directly about the images and actions onscreen, the Hughes Brothers push music to the forefront of this scene. Traditionally, sound and music in narrative cinema is thought to act best as an inaudible force, an unobtrusive presence in film that should not draw attention to itself and away from the film image. For many scholars and practitioners in the classical and neo-classical film music model, music is, as Leonid Sabaneev has suggested, the "left hand" to the right hand of the melody onscreen. With rare exception, it should not draw attention to itself but simply offer support to the film's right hand, its narrative images (referenced in Davison, 2004, 21). For Caryl Flinn, this understanding of sound and music in film boils down simply to the idea that "bad cinema music is noticed; [while] good scores are not" (1992, 37). The timbre of Cube's voice and the lyrics of the song are clearly tangible here and in that, they offer a node against which the scene's narrative is constructed.

Second, musically, the sample of the Ohio Players is important here. "Funky Worm" is a staple of the hip hop oeuvre, particularly in the sub-genre of G-Funk, or Gangsta-Funk, itself an extension of gangsta rap. G-Funk was shaped by Dr. Dre's 1992 debut solo album, *The Chronic*. Inspired by the P-Funk of George Clinton, and

"borrowing from Leon Haywood, Isaac Hayes, Curtis Mayfield, and Donny Hathaway", the music echoed the talk box and vocoder-esque sound effects of electro-funk groups like Zapp and Cameo (Williams, 2010, 167). The result was a music that dealt with the same harsh realities of gangsta rap, but that did so over highly layered soundscapes that mixed high-pitched synthesised sounds with live instrumentals and low-end frequencies (Ibid). The Ohio Player's "Funky Worm" was, however, the sound of G-Funk as it formed. First used by Dre in his production of the track "Dopeman", the sample featured in a myriad of songs that echoed these same aesthetics before appearing in the Hughes Brothers's film six years later. Through its role in N.W.A.'s "Gangsta Gangsta" (1988), the Ministers of Black's "Step Into My Office" (1989), Above the Law's "B.M.L." (1991), AMG's "The Vertical Joyride" (1991), MC Breed and DFC's "Ain't No Future in Yo' Frontin'" (1991), Ice Cube's "Wicked" (1992), 2-Pac and The Notorious B.I.G.'s "House of Pain" (1993), Masta Ace Incorporated's "Born to Roll" (1993), Snoop Dogg's "Serial Killa" (1993), and Ice Cube's "Ghetto Bird" (1993), the song and sampled became a synecdoche for this sound world (WhoSampled.Com, 2019; Weshtoff, 2016). Its prominent place in The Hughes's *Menace II Society* is a moment of remediation as its unconcealed intertextuality calls in to focus the cultural baggage of the violent and hyper-masculine G-Funk. The other point of remediation in this scene resides in the music video-like structuring of the film's music and images, as we will see in the next paragraph.

As mentioned, sound and music in mainstream narrative cinema is traditionally a subservient force in the film's narrative propulsion, occupying both a space behind the film's dialogue and images as well as a space in the audience's subconscious. It steps out to the forefront of the film's performance really only in moments of "spectacle", as in, for instance, the battle on the ice planet Hoth in *Star*

Wars: A New Hope (Kalinak, 1992, 197). In *Menace II Society*, however, as Caine cooks his latest batch of drugs and "Dopeman" plays out over this event, the sound and images of the film echo not the aesthetics of cinema, but those of the music video, and specifically the aesthetics of gangsta rap and G-Funk music videos. Amongst other similar moments across the film, this scene marries the sounds and images present in a music video-esque fashion. Leading with the soundscape playing very loudly, intercutting it with small sections of dialogue, and focusing on mundane images in which our attention is undoubtedly drawn to the sounds present, this scene is as much about the film's music as it is the film image. As Diane Railton and Paul Watson contend, "music video's raison d'étre as a promotional device" means that a music video is "first and foremost a commercial for an associated but distinct consumer product" (2012, 1 - 2). The music video is a "secondary product, an advertisement for another cultural form" (Railton and Watson, 2012, 1 - 2). Music, the song, is that other form. It is the driving force behind the music video and its images.

To echo the aesthetics of the music video is to point towards the sound or music of this cinematic moment as the primary space of concern for the film audience. In a similar fashion to the previous case study, in this instance it is in the relationship between the film image and its music that the sounds of the cinematic moment step to the forefront. This is not surprising though, considering the careers of the film's creative leads. Allen and Albert Hughes had directed around thirty music videos before *Menace II Society* was released in 1993, including for Digital Underground, Tone-Loc, Tupac Shakur, KRS-One, Too $hort, and Yo-Yo (African American Directors: Albert And Allen Hughes, no date). The Hughes Brothers's music videos were notable for their unapologetic visuals that mirrored the difficult issues at the heart of the lives and artistic personas of the artists that they worked

with. The video for Tupac Shakur's 1991 release "Brenda's Got a Baby", from the album *2Pacalypse Now,* is a clear example of this. Carol Vernallis points out that the influence of music videos and their directors in film has created a new set of "intensified audiovisual aesthetics [that] can override traditional Hollywood film structure" and have, in part, led to the creation of a post-classical cinema (2013, 5). Those intensified audiovisual aesthetics are on show here and further our understanding of this filmic performance.

In this moment, the remediation of the aesthetics of the music video in *Menace II Society* further entrench in the film's audience the cultural threads put forward both by the sounds of Ice-Cube and N.W.A. and the Ohio Player's "Funky Worm". All three tap into not just the immediacy of the realism presented by gangsta rap and G-funk, and tie that to the images on screen, but also present the hypermediacy of the 'presentation' of Black youth culture through that musical construction, its 'reality'. This balance uncovers the frames of this expression, questioning both the actions of Caine onscreen, and our understanding of those same actions. This use of the aesthetics of other media is also present in the opening sequence of Spike Lee's *Do The Right Thing*, in which we watch Rosie Perez emulate her role on the musical television show *Soul Train*, and throughout Hype Williams's *Belly*, where the music video director's structuring of the relationship between sound and image is akin to that of the Hughes Brothers here. In both cases, the remediation of other forms of expression is again used to foreground the film soundscape. Perez's dance in *Do the Right Thing*'s opening is, for instance, to the film's main musical motif, Public Enemy's "Fight the Power" (1989).

3.2 Repetition and Remediation on the Film Reel

Non-Teleological Patterns and Narrative Disruptions in New Black Realism

> In any case, whenever we encounter repetition in cultural forms, we are indeed not viewing 'the same thing', but its transformation, not just a formal ploy, but often the willed grafting onto culture of an essentially philosophical insight about the shape of time and history.
>
> Snead, 2017, 648.

From gunshots and sirens to baselines and vocal exclamations, hip hop includes a varied collection of sounds that, at times, can have little correlation in terms of their aural makeup. Their connections exist, often solely, in the way that they are structured through the 'process' of hip hop and while some samples feature in isolation, appearing just once in a track, repetition is one of the foremost correlating characteristics of this musical expression. As James A. Snead points out, repetitive words, rhythms, and musical phrases have long been recognised as a focal constituent of African musics and their contemporary American descendants (1984, 68). In fact, repetition, and hip hop culture's willingness to engage with it openly, is one distinct way in which we determine it separately to other Western expressions, expressions with often look to cover up or hide such traits (Snead, 2017, 648). For Snead, Black culture's focus on repetition as a "principle of organisation … shows the desire to rely upon 'the thing that is there to pick up'", to engage with, reshape, and rework the reality of the world (Ibid). Creating space for aspects now so pivotal to the expressions of Black musics, such as improvisation or "call and response", repetition in these cultural expression replaces memory and "normal" access to the past (Ibid). Rather than just a dialogue about a history that has already happened, repetition is in this case a chance at restating the past, of changing it to move forward (Snead, 1984, 67). As Snead points out, in these cultures and expressions repetition is seen not so much as the viewing of the same thing, but as a transformation, a philosophical insight on the shaping of time and history (2017,

648). That philosophical insight is, for hip hop, grounded in the actuality of its conception.

Hip hop's early years on the block corners of New York City were as the soundtrack to dancing at neighbourhood parties. In trying to keep young dancers out and moving, DJ Kool Here noted that the people who came to his performance were waiting for certain parts of each record to play. They were focusing on the breaks, when the lyrics and musical interests of the track would dissipate to reveal the simple, usually percussive heart of each song. Realising this Herc developed a technique known as the "merry-go-round." Here two copies of the same record were played on two record players and back-cued against each other so that Herc could turn five or ten second breakdowns into five minute loops (Chang, 2006, 79). Repetition has always been at the very core of the music then. And, even as hip hop as moved from analogue to digital, from turntables to samplers and drum machines, repetition remained integral to the music's performance. What is interesting about repetition, particularly when we consider its role in hip hop's conception as a cultural movement, is its affective influence on the music's audience. As noted, in defining hip hop as a post-literate orality, Tricia Rose notes that the music blurs the "distinction between literate and oral modes of communication by altering and yet sustaining important aspects of African American folk orality" (1994, 64, 85). Repetitive rhythms and cuts are among the more prominent of these aspects, as they "illustrate a heightened attention to rhythmic patterns and movement between such patterns via breaks and points of musical rupture" (Rose, 1994, 67). As in the unconcealed intertextuality of hip hop sampling, this heightened attention calls the listener to interact, to participate in the creation of the art;, to move from audience to author. The cutting and mixing in hip hop music, Rose argues, "keeps the listener in a perpetual state of anticipation" (1994, 93). Repetition in hip hop, and

consequently in the soundscapes of New Black Realist cinema, thereby create a non-passive, more intellectually aggressive cinematic perceiver, one that looks to ask rather than be told, one that aims to listen rather than simply hear.

It is the idea of repetition and its structuring of the break that orchestrates the first case study of this section. Spike Lee's *Do The Right Thing* (1989) is a standout moment in Black cinema. In many ways it is the success of this film, both critically and commercially, that led to the outbreak of New Black Realist cinema and the rise of a small group of Black filmmakers in the early 1990s. As with other examples in this chapter, the soundscape for Lee's film is not made up exclusively of hip hop. It features groups like Steel Pulse, Al Jarreau, Perri, and Teddy Riley. It also features a specifically-composed score, written by the Jazz bassist and composer Bill Lee, Spike's father. *Do The Right Thing* marked the pair's third outing on a full-length feature. Still, hip hop music is pivotal to this film. Although there are a number of artists and songs that feature throughout, it is the hip hop group Public Enemy and their song "Fight the Power" that is the musical centrepiece to *Do the Right Thing*. Specifically composed for the film, the song features the voices of rappers Chuck D and Flavor Flav over the production of Hank Shocklee and the Bomb Squad, the group's in house production team. The track is made up of a myriad of different samples, and although this includes Syl Johnson's 'Different Strokes' (1967), The JB's 'Hot Pants Road' (1970), Bobby Byrd's 'I Know You Got Soul' (1971) and Bob Marley and the Wailers's 'I Shot the Sheriff' (1973), it is the drumming of Clyde Stubblefield on James Brown's "Funky Drummer" (1970) that serves as the backbone of the track, a sample that is itself referenced in Chuck D's lyrics (WhoSampled.Com, 2019). The song also includes a performance by saxophonist Brandford Marsalis.

While it features as the non-diegetic soundscape over the film's opening credits, to the Otis Sallid choreographed dance moves of Rosie Perez, "Fight the Power" also, more interestingly, appears as a diegetic motif throughout the film story. Emanating from his portable boombox onscreen, the song is tied innately to Radio Raheem (Bill Nunn), a character whose death marks the film's closing. In this onscreen connection "Fight the Power" appears at junctures of potential communal or cultural conflict: from Raheem's first appearance, where he professes "peace" to his friends, to his "Love and Hate" speech with Mookie (Spike Lee); and from the scene preceding his heated discussions with the Korean store clerks over batteries, to his boombox "volume" battle with a group of young Latino men. At each of these points in the narrative the balance of peace and violence seems to be in question and as a sense of tranquility and calmness descends, that balance eventually tips towards peace.

This changes when Radio Raheem and Buggin' Out (Giancarlo Esposito) confront Pizza Parlour owner Sal (Danny Aiello) over the lack of African-American figures on the "Wall of Fame" in his pizzeria. Raheem and Buggin' Out argue that as his paying customers their culture is as important to Sal's establishment as his own Italian heritage. As the scene climaxes Sal smashes what he calls the "noise" of Raheem's boombox, which once again plays "Fight the Power". Traditionally, as we have seen, sound and music in narrative cinema supports the film image. It parallels the film image by restating "in a language of its own, certain moods, tendencies, or meanings of the pictures it accompanies" (Kracaeur referenced in Kalinak, 1992, 25 - 26). Conventionally, in Sal's Pizzeria, we would expect that a portion of the non-diegetic soundscape would underpin the theatrical build up of this scene, making the eventual clash between Sal, Radio Raheem and Buggin' Out seem natural within the progression of the film. The sound and music of this scene should parallel the

narrative as it progresses visually. It should guide the audience, confirming for them in aural terms what is occurring through the film's images (Copland referenced in Prendergast, 1992, 222). As the tension rises in the film's narrative and imagery, so too should tension rise in the film's sound and music. This could be done through the addition of instruments or a rising scale. It should also offer a window into the deeper psychological issues at hand. As music can speak a language of emotions and feelings that dialogue does not have the capacity to utter, the film soundscape should help to underline the psychological refinements of the characters onscreen and scenario at hand (Prendergast, 1992, 216). It should therefore parallel not just the actions on screen but the deeper sentiments or feelings that the characters may be experiencing as each scenario unfolds.

As the characters scream at each other, rather than paralleling the visuals, the music heads in the opposite direction. In this scene, Lee's soundscape pares back the music to leave us with just the beat. Instead of echoing the psychological aspects of the cinema screen, by mirroring the anger, fear, or frustration we see in the characters, it reduces to a backing track that seems to offer little more than a repetitive beat. It is not so much that the music acts in counterpoint to the film's images, however. It is far more dissonant than it is contrapuntal, not offering a unique "melodic" line so much as sounds that do not match their correlating images. As the scene unfolds, "Fight the Power" continues to play diegetically on Raheem's boombox. As we inch towards the impending clash the music, line by line, drops its components of musical interest. Eventually, we are left with just the sounds of Clyde Stubblefield's drum break, the bassline of The JB's "Hot Pants Road", and the vocal exclamations of Bob Marley and the Wailers's "I Shot the Sheriff". As the bare bones of the music repeats, Sal smashes the music player. The repetition at the heart of this upset stops only as Sal breaks the boombox with a

baseball bat, and, as the staff and customers of Sal's Famous stand in shock at his actions, he exclaims: "I just killed your fucking radio".

Public Enemy and Spike Lee bring the film soundscape to the break, just like those bloc parties that Kool Herc threw in the early 1970s. By locating Sal's violence against Radio Raheem's boombox in the break of "Fight the Power," *Do The Right Thing* disrupts the traditional sounds of the climactic moment and locks its viewers into a state of anticipation. Without the guidance of the film soundscape, the audience are left searching for narrative support. The film soundscape provides no narrative progression in connection with the film image, instead offering, in the context of narrative cinema, a sort of silence. The music is 'silent' in regards to its traditional purpose. As Lisa Coulthard argues, silence can demand "a kind of resonant listening, one aimed not at full understanding, but rather unsettling openness" (2012, 17). Referencing the work of Jean-Luc Nancy (2007), Coulthard further suggests that to "listen" is to strain toward meaning "that is not immediately accessible", "to be on the edge of meaning", and to open oneself up to "the resonance of being, or to being as resonance" (Nancy referenced in Coulthard, 2012, 16). This 'silence' brings our attention to the presence, or lack thereof, of the cinematic soundscape. That search troubles the "untroublesome" space that music usually offers to the film theatre audience in narrative cinema (Kulezic-Wilson, 2009). It takes away the safety and support of that space, the finality of the scene's climax, instead leaving the audience in a loop that remains open, unresolved. In the non-teleological structure of hip hop's repetitive samples, the film soundscape - theorised by traditional film literature as inaudible (Flinn, 1992) - becomes all too audible. As the music consciously returns to its point of origin again and again, the audience remains aware of its presence in a way that undercuts the scene's linear progression. As the film builds towards the climax, and the audience listen out for

the support they are traditionally afforded, sonic guidance on how to read or feel what is happening on the screen, Lee and Public Enemy offer them only the breakbeat. This exposes the audience, as they are asked to engage with what is occurring onscreen to a much greater degree.

This cinematic moment may also echo a deeper concern around the rise of hip hop music and culture at the end of the twentieth-century. If “Funky Worm” is a sonic synecdoche for G-Funk then Clyde Stubblefield’s drum break on Brown’s “Funky Drummer” is at the foundation of hip hop music on a grander scale, featuring across a plethora of hip hop songs throughout the 1990s, including some of the music’s biggest hits, such as “Fight the Power”, Run-D.M.C.’s “Run’s House” (1987), N.W.A.’s “Fuck tha Police” (1998), LL Cool J’s “Mama Said Knock You Out” (1990) and De La Soul’s “The Magic Number” (1990). It then went on to become a ubiquitous sound in popular music more generally, featuring in George Michael’s “Freedom! ’90” (1990), Sinead O’Connor’s “I am Stretched on Your Grave” (1990), Prince’s “Gangster Glam” (1991), and Madonna’s “Justify My Love” (2006), amongst others. Stubblefield’s drum break was emblematic of the rise in power of hip hop as a cultural movement in Western, English-speaking society at the very least. Sal’s reaction to Raheem’s boombox, therefore, is not just because it is loud but because it is repetitive. As Snead points out, we can readily classify cultural forms based on “whether they tend to admit or cover up these repeating constituents within them” (2017, 648). As the repetition of “Funky Drummer” establishes itself, filling the space so culturally tied to Sal, his family, and their Italian heritage, so too does Black youth culture attempt to establish itself directly on his wall. “Funky Drummer” is a musical snapshot, an earworm, that challenges the establishment by exploring something which it tries to avoid. In this scene, Public Enemy’s “Fight the Power”, is “noisy” not just because it offers no narrative support,

but because of the way it chooses in which to challenge the structure of dominant cinema: through repetition.

"The Cut" and "Materiality" in Ernest R. Dickerson's Juice

Repetition is again at the heart of the soundscape in Dickerson's *Juice*, but this time the remediation of the film soundscape exists in the literal disruption of repetition, through "the cut". After the film's opening credits, as we meet each of the four main characters, Q, Bishop, Raheem, and Steel, for the first time, we hear Big Daddy Kane's "Nuff Respect" play from Q's boombox. Moving between the homes of each character the song ties together ambi-diegetically a montage of the varied morning routines,[10] from Steel's brother pulling him out of bed to Bishop checking in on the forlorn figure of his father as he watches television. As the song starts, we hear Kane's voice rap the first verse of "Nuff Respect", but, as we bounce back and forth between the characters, and aside from some intermittent, recurring lyrical exclamations in the chorus,[11] his voice eventually disappears. We are left with just the baseline of The Soul Searcher's "Ashley's Roachclip" (1974), the drums of Bobby Byrd's "Hot Pants" (1987), and the brass stabs of James Brown's "Soul Power" (1971) (WhoSampled.Com, 2019). We are once again left with the track's break. What is fascinating about the sound and music of this film is the interference of that repetition. In the hands of deejays on and offscreen, we hear the sound of the scratch of vinyl, a sound that brings to the fore the "materiality" of the film

[10] Morris B. Holbrook defines the ambi-diegetic as a "cross-classification of the two key distinctions normally conflated in discussions of music in motion pictures - namely, diegetic versus non-diegetic music and the functions of realistic depiction versus dramatic development". So, ambi-diegetic music is sound that appears on camera (within the image) that performs a non-diegetic purpose, it is music that "adds depth to that character by forming persona-related associations, that elaborates on thematic aspects of the plot, or that advances relevant symbolic identifications so as to enrich the meaning of the scene (dramatic development)" (2005, 48). In this particular scene Big Daddy Kane's "Nuff Respect" plays diegetically on screen, but also ties together various scenes and locations in a cinematic montage.

[11] Amanda Sewell defines recurring lyric samples as vocal samples that appear "repeatedly during a track, usually in the choruses" (2014, 32).

soundscape through “the cut”, “an abrupt, seemingly unmotivated break (an accidental da capo) with a series already in progress and a willed return to a prior series” (Snead, 1984, 67). From various songs across the film’s non-diegetic soundscape, as in the opening title sequence in which we hear the dexterous cuts of Eric B. on “Juice (Know the Ledge)”, through the onscreen narrative journey of Q as a young deejay, and finally in various cues throughout the film composed by Hank Shocklee and the Bomb Squad, the cut is present, obvious. It is, again, remediative, calling attention both to itself and to the material that it disrupts.

It is, nonetheless, a curious choice with regards to the narrative cinematic soundscape. As we have seen through the concepts of inaudibility or parallelism, the soundscape in narrative cinema, particularly in the mainstream narrative cinema so prominent at the end of the twentieth-century, is to be an occupier of the subconscious. It should support the film’s image, but never challenge it. Caryl Flinn, drawing on psychoanalytical theory, stresses that by appealing to the “unconscious mind, music is able to encompass the spectator, causing the boundaries between active and passive, body and environment, self and other to dissolve” (Flinn referened in Rogers, 2013, 154). As Mary Ann Doane outlines, in the case of inaudible film music, cinema and sound are a “fantasmatic” body, held together “by the illusion of organic unity, a perceptual cohesion within the film text” (Doane referened in Rogers, 2013, 154). The neo-classical film scores of John Williams are perfect case studies in such an approach.

In the years directly preceding and following Dickerson’s *Juice*, Williams scored Chris Columbus’s *Home Alone* (1990), Steven Spielberg’s *Hook* (1991), *Jurassic Park* (1993) and *Schindler’s List* (1993), Oilver Stone’s *JFK* (1991), and Ron Howard’s Far *and Away* (1992). Echoing the classical model of composers like Max Steiner, Erich Korngold, and Alfred Newman, who themselves were inspired by the

operatic greats such as Richard Wagner and Giacomo Puccini, Williams' music obeyed the same rules as these old masters, rules that determined the film score inaudible. Those rules included, but were not limited to, the privileging of music in moments of spectacle, a dependence on expressive melody and the use of leitmotif, the very careful placement of music in relation to dialogue, and most interestingly in this case, using music to sustain cinematic unity (Kalinak, 1992, 198). To sustain that unity, a unity that echoes the Wagnerian concept of Gesamtkunstwerk (Flinn, 1992, 34), the sound and music of mainstream cinema smoothes over its edges so as not to expose its frame. While the music creeps in under the cover of diegetic sounds and never challenges dialogue, it also draws on timbres and sound worlds that do not call attention to the self-imposed separation of the film's sounds and images. To expose the edges of that music, to allow its unpolished structures to be heard would be to move away from the unity that drives mainstream cinema. In hip hop culture and music, these edges are important aspects of expression. In dominant media these breaks tend to be hidden, smoothed over so as not to expose their frame; in hip hop the prominent use of "the cut" is an attempt to control the uncontrollable by looking to make room for accidents and rupture inside the system of expression itself (Snead, 1984, 67), creating noise that can bring to the fore a repressed "truth-content" (Thompson and Biddle, 2013, 4 - 5).

As mentioned, these cuts occur throughout *Juice*, both inside and outside the film's narrative world. We first hear them in the opening title sequence of the film, scored with the specially-composed song "Juice (Know the Ledge)", and at the fingertips of the now already renowned deejay Eric B. whose cuts are interspersed with the lyrical musings of Rakim. A film's opening number is an important indicator to the audience of the direction that the film will take; it is an early signpost as for

what to expect throughout the film's narrative action. As David Schroeder has pointed out, that purposing of the film's opening credits is a carry-over from the influence that Opera has had on film. For Schroeder, a film's title sequence acts like a kind of cinematic overture, preparing "the audience for what will follow" (Schroeder, 2016, 85). Schroder outlines this point in Wolfgang A. Mozart's *Marriage of Figaro*, in which the "light, rapid, pulsating opening invokes the comedy and intrigues of the libretto" (Schroeder, 2016, 86). It is an audiovisual amuse-bouche.

The role of "the cut" in the opening title sequence of *Juice*, then, is important to our understanding of the narrative that later unfolds onscreen because of the space in which it occurs. To promote such a sound so obviously in a moment of the film in which the music can take centre-stage, as it it only challenged by the film's credits, is to point to that sound and what it may possibly represent. We see and hear these sounds also in *Juice*'s central protagonist, Q. In the film's subplot, Q spends his time driving towards his dream of being a professional deejay. We watch him take to the turntables to practice his skills and/or create mixtapes of his work at points throughout the film's narrative, specifically at home in his bedroom and then at a local and prestigious deejaying battle. As we have seen Snead already point out, through the cut, Black culture attempts to build "accidents" into its coverage. It attempts to control their unpredictability by making room for them inside the system. In Q's case, that system is literally the turntable and vinyl records at hand. His actual, physical attempt to control these cuts must be understood as an echo of the deeper, metaphorical attempt by Q to engage, challenge, and reshape the difficulties that exist throughout his life in New York City. The specific cutting that we see him practice at home and do so well in the club echoes the filmic narrative more generally in which Q attempts to adjust for and command the troubles that surround

him as a young Black man in the post-industrial American city at the turn of the twenty-first century.

As Q's control of those literal cuts disintegrate during the second round of the deejay battle, as we see him grapple with the aftermath of the murders committed at the hands of Bishop and his understanding of what that means to him and his hopes for the future, so too the world around him crumbles as police officers come to pick him, Bishop, and Steel up to be questioned about the night's events. All three sit in individual interrogation rooms, speaking to detectives about the details of their night. One officer says to Q: "Why do you seem so nervous? What have you got to be nervous about?", to which Q replies, "It doesn't matter what happened, if y'all want us to be guilty, we'll be guilty". Q and his compatriots are certainly the right men to be questioned, but his sentiment relays to a much larger point that shapes all films with the New Black Realist canon. Q may have done his best to control the ruptures that surround him, practised regularly to achieve such a mastery of these elements as to be able to not only adjust for them but use them to move forward, but, it appears, no matter how much he comes to manage these accidents, they are, inevitably, stacked against him. It is impossible for him to evade the troubles that pervades every aspect of his life, no matter how much he tries to control it.

Where the cut is most affective in *Juice*, however, in regards to the film's narrative in the immediate sense, and the construction of New Black Realist cinema overall, is in the materiality of the intradiegetic score, composed by Hank Shocklee and the Bomb Squad. Ben Winters has defined the intradiegetic as sound or music that "exists in the film's everyday narrative space and time, and is thus properly thought of as part of the film's *fabula*: it may be considered to be produced by the characters themselves … or by the geographical space of the film" (Winters, 2010,

28). As intradiegetic music the cuts in Shocklee's originally-composed score have "the power to impact on the course of the story" as well as the way that the story is read by the film audience (Winters, 2010, 29). The inaudibility of the film soundscape is shattered through Shocklee and the Bomb Squad's use of scratching in their music cues.

While that materiality appears at a couple of points throughout the film, it stands out in two particular scenes at either end of the film's running time. The first is when the group, who have decided to not attend school, run from the local arcade as the police arrive to catch them and others in the act of skipping school. While Steel gets caught and Raheem heads in another direction, the camera follows Q and Bishop as they together try to escape the cops. As we see them run down back streets, jump chainlink fences, climb stairs, and finally jump from roof to roof to escape the police, the score features the Bomb Squad cutting over an otherwise simple, repetitive beat. Then, in the film's final act, as Bishop chases Q and fires a gun at him as Bishop attempts to frame him for the now numerous murders, the Bomb Squad's cuts are once again a prominent feature of the film's intradiegetic soundscape. In these moments, Q does not have control of the cuts in the film but they still have a power to impact on the course of the story. The unconcealed-ness of their role in that space is important. In promoting the cut, Shocklee and the Bomb Squad highlight the materiality of the film soundscape. More than just calling attention to the presence of music on film, this materiality outlines the very medium of film itself. If the "cut" is a noise that outlines the difficult reality of contemporary Black culture, an auditory microscope, then to foreground it in these moments in this film is to further emphasise the issues that it accompanies, issues like education, criminality, the role of the criminal justice system in Black youth culture, and gun violence. As he struggles to evade the omnipotent presence of these

sounds in the film's intradiegetic score, so too does Q apparently fail to evade what the sounds represent.

The cut does offer a moment of redemption for Q, again when it appears to move back in to his control. As the film's closing credits roll, Kool DJ Red Alert, one of the founding figures of hip hop, announces: "But check this out! Got this new tape just came in. First time I ever heard. You check it out because I'll like it, you'll like it: DJ GQ!" Following Red Alert's declaration, we hear DJ GQ, a name Q gave himself earlier in the film, cut and scratch over the top of Naughty By Nature's specially-composed song, "Uptown Anthem" (1992). While we are given no indication of this piece's role in the film narrative, the song appears after Q is unable to save Bishop and has had to watch him fall to his death from an apartment rooftop. As he leaves, passing through some of the party who had followed the pair to the rooftop, one of the group suggests that it is Q who now has the "juice", a term for street credibility. Although he says nothing, Q's demeanour and expression suggest that he does not want nor need such a thing. At the film's close he now shows the same dexterous control of the cut that we heard Eric B. highlight in the film's opening. In that, Q has taken control of those real life accidents and ruptures that surrounded him through the narrative of Dickerson's *Juice*.

Listening as Violence: New Black Realism and Haptic Aurality

As in the last two case studies, violence is a pervasive trope in the mediated expressions of hip hop culture. As Geoff Harkness suggests, in New Black Realist cinema, directors and producers adhered to various genre conventions that included "plenty of action, violence and sex" (2015, 168). Violence was what drove the Hughes Brothers to direct *Menace II Society*. Outraged by the "Hollywood-style" sentimentality of John Singleton's *Boyz 'N' the Hood* (1991), the brothers convinced "New Line Cinema to give them $2.5 million to report what really goes on in the

ghetto - the self-destructive cycle of black on black violence", and the "pathological internalisation of the values of a racist society so that black men grow up believing their lives are worth nothing" (Hillier, 2001, 39). The film's narrative was, as Ed Guerrero points out, saturated with "so many intensely violent scenes" that violence became the "main structuring, captivating - and thus cumulatively entertaining - device in the film" (2001, 217).

The point of such imagery and cinematic narratives has been heavily contested. Guerrero contends that as *Menace II Society* closes out its final scene, in which Caine is shot by a rival gang, through "close-frame slow motion" the film fetishised violence (Ibid). For Patricia Hill, there existed an innate irony in the role that themes like violence played in these films. She argued that the actual "ghettoisation of poor and working-class African Americans" rendered them virtually invisible "in suburban malls, on soccer fields and in good public schools" while at the same time mass media, and film in particular, created "a seemingly authentic Black American culture that glamorised poverty, drugs, violence and hyper sexuality" (Hill referenced Haupt, 2015, 238). Tracy Snipe points out that some critics, like David Denby, charged Spike Lee with a "gleeful, almost manic, 'celebration of violence'" (1990, 6). The conversation around violence in New Black Realism is, however, not that simple.

First, violence had become a composite aspect of mainstream film more generally by this point in the late twentieth-century anyway. Directors like Quentin Tarantino, Abel Ferrara, and Oliver Stone had ushered in a cinematic movement that came to be described as "new violence". That moniker, J. David Slocum argues, was then subsequently adopted "by popular critics and cultural commentators to characterise a range of films and other media productions, including rap music and popular fiction" (2001, 1). Mainstream cinema had in fact been heading in this

direction for a quite a while. With few exceptions, the stylistic range of Black violence onscreen followed the overall "configuration of mainstream white cinematic violence, which escalated in 1966 with the collapse of the Production Code and the advent of such technology-driven, stunningly violent successes as *Bonnie and Clyde* (1967), *Bullitt* (1968) and the *Wild Bunch* (1969)" (Guerrero, 2001, 212). The arrival of Quentin Tarantino, or the Hughes Brothers, is certainly not surprising when understood in this light.

Second, for the Hughes', the violence of their films was neither an aspect of essentialist representation nor was it simply part of a filmic zeitgeist. They contend that their depiction of violence in film, and particularly in *Menace II Society*, was a means to promote anti-violence throughout Black American communities, telling the New York Times that they wanted to "show the realities of violence", to "make a movie with a strong anti-violent theme and not like one of those Hollywood movies where hundreds of people die and everybody laughs and cheers" (Guerrero, 2001, 217). The idea that these images and narratives are more than merely a celebration of violence rings out when we consider that one of New Black Realism's most prevalent influences is Blaxploitation cinema, a film genre which consists of "sixty-something cheaply made black-focused action-adventure flicks released between 1969 and 1974" (Guerrero, 2001, 213). Aside from the practical influences and similarity in cultural and political factors that led to their conception, these films also focused on young Black men living in the inner city who often ended up being involved in "deviant behaviour" (Bausch, 2013, 267). Their lives were portrayed as "chaotic and nihilistic, ripe with violence and drugs. They were represented as having little to no political affiliations or solutions to their problems, and had no real identifiable leaders" (Boyd referenced in Bausch, 2013, 267). Still, although the imagery throughout Blaxploitation cinema could be read as merely another version

of “mainstream media’s depiction of young black men in America - as ‘dump, deprived, dangerous, deviant, and disturbed’ - these film-makers made an active attempt to imbue these young men with humanity” (Gibbs referenced in Bausch, 2013, 267). These films were about creating space for the young Black body on scene.

Violence in the blaxploitation genre then, no matter how crude or formulaic, transcoded the Black liberation impulse of the 1960s (Guerrero, 2001, 215 - 216). It was not about violence for violence’s sake, it was about violence as tool for nihilistic rebellion. New Black Realism approached violence in the same way. In these films, violence transcodes the collapse of those hopes of the Civil Rights Movement under the socio-cultural assault of Ronald Reagan and George H. W. Bush and their rollback on “policies on affirmative action, black social progress, multiculturalism, and the welfare state in general” (Guerrero, 2001, 216). The violence of New Black Realism is equally not just about violence for the sake of it. These films are vehicles “through which society’s racial contradictions, injustices, and failed policies are mediated” and it is, in part, through violence that those mediations take place (Watkins 1998, 196).

While Blaxploitation cinema uses violent imagery to show its audience a space for the Black liberation impulses of the 1960s and, visually, New Black Realism highlights the collapse of that impulse through society’s racial contradictions, injustices, and failed policies, the New Black Realist soundscape is constructed so that the film audience “feel” the affect of those failures. Through their musical cues, and the choices that the film’s perceiver are asked to make around those cues, these films create moments of haptic aurality, moments in which New Black Realist cinema does not just show violence but places it’s audience in the firing line. In her 2012 article on silence in the films of Michael Haneke, films like

Benny's Video (1992), *Funny Games* (1997, 2007), and *La Pianiste* (2001), Lisa Coulthard analyses the pairing of acoustic minimalism with essential narrative ambiguities in the presentation of violence on film and with that, the creation of a haptic aurality. Coulthard's argument stems from haptic visuality, borrowed from Gilles Deleuze's work on Francis Bacon, a concept which has gained a position of popularity and prosperity in contemporary film studies. A sensually inclusive approach to visuality, the haptic gaze is understood to "interrogate the role of all sense, touch, smell, and hearing, in the visual" (2012, 18). In this, it is suggested, haptic visuality reorients "theoretical discussion and spectatorial experience away from narrative logic and character identification towards the phenomenological, experiential, sensual and corporeal" (Ibid).

Coulthard contends, however, that it is sound and music on film that offer a far more pertinent space for the haptic experience. Sound is, above all else, tactile and corporeal in its very nature because it "not only communicate[s] physical presence, sensuousness or feeling, but actually travel[s] outwards and literally move[s] the body of the spectator or listener" (Ibid). In Haneke's films, hapticity is achieved through silence. For Coulthard, silence is a call to interrogate, to contemplate, to resonate and to listen (2012, 18 - 19). It is through silence that we "can begin to approach the self, for it is in the absence of noises, music or voices that the subject's self can be heard" (Nancy referenced in Coulthard, 2012, 19). Silence, particularly in cinema, can therefore be a moment in which the audience is exposed. Rather than simply hearing the film, in these instances they are asked to listen. Jean-Luc Nancy (2007) points out that to listen is to strain toward meaning "that is not immediately accessible", "to be on the edge of meaning", and to open oneself up to "the resonance of being, or to being as resonance" (Nancy quoted in Coulthard, 2012, 16). Listening is an active process in time and space, that moves,

resounds, and reverberates and the subject it constitutes is likewise in movement and agitation (2012, 18 - 19). Coulthard builds on this point, arguing that listening always implies an approach to the self, as the resonant subject is one who is philosophically, epistemologically, and sensorially active, who is persistently approaching meaning but not complacently arriving at it (2012, 16).

In New Black Realism, the call to listen is charged not by silence but by noisiness. Like silence, the overload of meaning through intertextually rich musical threads or the focus on repetitive cells that highlight the edge of the cinematic medium and offer little narrative support, create spaces in which the film audience are asked to listen. Traditionally, through the soundtrack, mainstream cinema has assigned a position of passivity to its audience. Director Martin Scorsese has suggested that music in cinema not only relays the narrative to the audience but tells them how they should feel about what is occurring onscreen, that the film soundscape effectively takes the "audience emotionally off the hook" (Kulezic-Wilson, 2009). Music helps the audience to cope with uncomfortable situations, reminds them that it is only a fantasy, and points them in the right direction when it comes to how they should receive the film's image and dialogue. The Romantic orchestra, melodic, supporting, and inaudible, is the best tool to box the film audience off in an "untroublesome" space (Ibid). Through choice, New Black Realist cinema troubles that untroublesome space. The noise of the film soundscape asks the audience to listen to a part of the cinematic medium that normally dictates their passivity, to open oneself up to the resonance of being, or to being as resonance. The text exists on in its relationship with the audience, a performance that puts them in line with the violence onscreen. In pairing those instances in the soundscapes across these films with moments of visual violence, these films disintegrate the distance normally afforded to the cinematic audience.

Throughout the case studies in this chapter, New Black Realism co-opts the body of its viewer as a chamber through which the film text echoes. The noisiness of these soundscapes, whether in the cuts of *Juice* or the samples of *He Got Game*, like Haneke's silence, insist on an active engagement for its audience. Hip hop is, I have argued, a remediative force. The interplay of immediacy and hypermediacy, of content and form, is innate to the very structure of the music and its expressions, as is the acknowledgement of this fact. To listen is at the core of hip hop's sonic expression and, therefore, at the core of these soundscapes. In both Blaxploitation cinema and New Black Realism the use of violence onscreen is part of a drive towards restoring "the possibility of having an effect, creating a shock, provoking a response - aspirations that arose in the first place only in response to the absence of immediate presence that cinema has continued to reaffirm" (Charney, 2001, 49). It is in the soundscapes of New Black Realism that such violence is truly affective.

Conclusion

> We're just three emcees and one deejay,
> And we be getting down with no delay,
> So Mix Master Mike, what'cha got to say?
>
> Diamond, Yauch, and Horowitz, 1999.

Both Jim Smith and D.K. Holm have individually described Quentin Tarantino as a "director as DJ" (Smith; Holm referenced in Rennett, 2012, 391 - 392). They have argued that his cut-and-paste, mix-and-match directorial style is similar to that of a music deejay who borrows "sounds from older songs and combines them to create a new song" through the process of sampling (Ibid). Nicolas Rombes argues that this kind of director "samples, rearranges, and makes something new … recogniz[ing] that it is in the arrangement of preexisting texts that new texts are created" (Rombes referenced in Rennett 2012, 391 - 392). As noted in the last

chapter, the idea of a singular, authorial figure at the helm of a film has flourished in the hands of contemporary directors where, for many, music has come to play an ever growing role in film auteurism (Rennett, 2012, 392 - 393). The end of the twentieth-century brought with it changes that led to the auteur mélomane, a term that Claudia Gorbman posits for filmmakers for whom sound and music is more than just something added to the final cut. It instead participates forcefully in the director's worldview (Gorbman, 2007, 151, 150). Through their dictatorial command, mélomanes like Stanley Kubrick and Sally Potter took more control of the soundtrack in their films, liberating music from the powers of rarified specialists (Gorbman, 2007, 151, 150).

Arved Ashby has noted that for an even more recent range of film directors, people like Sofia Coppola, David Lynch, and Wes Anderson, auteurism has been driven by the influence of other media, specifically the music video (2013, 23). He argues that because of their widening of the creative vocabulary on offer to filmmakers, music videos have helped to shift film authorship from pen-and-paper to the process of cinematic direction because it has allowed these directors to give popular musics the kind of centrality once reserved for the script (Ashby, 2013, 2). Ashby suggests that this has created two contrasting styles of authorship in film: the first, a synergistic approach that echoes the elusive music-filmic Gesamtkunstwerk, where music was given an integral rather than incidental role in the narrative; and second, a Brechtian dissimulation, a splitting of the cinematic seams of character, narrative, and music (2013, 4). Almost a kind of musicianship, these filmmakers pit the musical stylistic expressions of individual songs against their expected functions as set pieces within the film (Ashby, 2013, 18, 13).

To describe Tarantino as a deejay then, along these lines, makes sense. It equally makes sense to highlight the change that New Black Realist cinema and its

soundscape brought to the understanding of shape of this authorial figure. Rennett notes that, particularly in terms of the music's early history, the deejay is the most important figure in hip hop. Deejays were the ones who created and mixed the music and in many of the culture's foundational groups, like Grandmaster Flash and the Furious Five, Afrika Bambaataa and the Soul Sonic Force, and Eric B. and Rakim the deejay's name not only featured in lights alongside the emcees but they were often seen as the group's leader (Rennett, 2012, 392 - 393). Interestingly, Rennett argues, that "within the narrative filmmaking format, the director as DJ has become the moviemaking representative of hip hop society" (2012, 391 - 392). He contends that the significance of the director as deejay, a deviation from the traditional formation of the role, is due to its close relationship to "contemporary remix culture" (Ibid). Rennett further argues that this "hip hop attitude" "will affect how fictional films are studied and made", as this understanding of authorship is a different one to that which Truffaut proffered over fifty years early (Ibid). There are two artistic positions found within the history of the hip hop deejay, neither of which constitute a single, divinely-inspired dictator: "one is a record presenter, providing music for an audience; the other is a record producer, creating new music from older songs" (Rennett 2012, 394).

If we can consider Taratino as director/deejay, as well as considering that such a status should affect how we read film and its soundscape, then it is only because New Black Realist cinema brought that understanding of film authorship to the fore at the beginning of the 1990s. Imbued with the aesthetics and cultural values of hip hop culture and music, these films shaped their soundscape with figures that were as much "performer and promoter" as they were dictator (Rennett 2012, 394). As we have seen through the work of Spike Lee, Ernest R. Dickerson, Hype Williams, The Hughes Brothers, and Mario Van Peebles, these directors are

diggers, collectors who organised music and musical timbres and used them on the soundscapes of their films in order to create new meaning from other texts. Like a cinematic curator, this assemblage of musical sounds not only influence the film narrative but are genuinely important aspects of it. They play an imperative role in a full understanding of what is occurring onscreen. And, although that collection of sounds is certainly shaped by the film director, to construct cinema in such a way is to define the director as one of many performers in this piece, and to hand off the full realisation of that narrative to the relationship between the director, audience, and text itself.

Chapter Four

The Sound Effects of New Black Realism

Sounding the City, Sounding the Alarm: Sound Effects and the New Black Realist Soundscape

> There remains one thorny issue, namely the understanding of sound effects as an expression of the crude, the mechanical/repetitive, the unsophisticated, that is, as an expression of vulgarity.
>
> Sergi, 2006

On a 2010 DVD boxset of Spike Lee films, a portion of Stevie Wonder's "Living for the City" scores the title menu. After a small break, the excerpt repeats. It does so over and over. It plays incessantly as the viewer prepares to watch Lee's work and, consequently, Wonder's "Living for the City" rings in the ears of the viewer as the films finally begin. African-American culture is not only linked by the city but specifically identified through it. For Black America generally, and the hip hop generation in particular, the city is a framework that foregrounds "histories and asks concurrent questions of mobility, progress and stasis" (Massood, 2003, 204). It was migration that brought the hip hop generation to the city and it was the city that placed economic and social limits on its many Black residents (Ibid). Split primarily between New York and Los Angeles, in each and every iteration of New Black Realism, the city plays a part in shaping all aspects of the film narrative.

As outlined in her 2003 book, *Black City Cinema*, for Paula Massood the city not only defines New Black Realism but structures its filmic history, its mediated existence. The roles that the city, migration, and urban life plays in the history of African-American culture means that they are "essential to our understanding of films by black directors or films featuring African American people in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries" (Massood, 2003, 8). Arguably, the importance of understanding the mediated city goes further than that. While it was certainly Robert

Moses and the Cross-Bronx Expressway that brought the contemporary African-American community to the city (Chang, 2007, 10 - 13), it was the Blaxploitation cinema of the 1970s that defined the culture in and by that space. This generation was keen to move beyond the representation of Black culture onscreen it saw in figures like Sidney Poitier, who they believed to be "emasculated and isolated characters" that represented "'the cultural presence, the aspirations, and the social psychology of the largest minority in the United States' for white" rather than Black America (Massood, 2003, 82). Through hyperrealism, Blaxploitation cinema looked to rhyme with the reality of its city-centred audiences. This interdependency meant both that the self-fed popularity of the films shaped the contours of the "Black city" for the theatre audience, as well as the fact that the disappearance of this city came with the waning popularity of Blaxploitation cinema towards the end of the 1970s (Massood, 2003, 118). In that time, and through films like Gordon Banks Jr.'s *Superfly* (1972) in which Curtis Mayfield's "Pusherman" plays over images of the the film's opening titles, sound and music became imperative to the construction of the "Black city" (Massood, 2003, 103). Most striking in its shaping of this world through sound and music was Haile Gerima's 1979 *Bush Mama*. Through a mix of LAPD helicopters, sirens, social workers, exploding guns, babies wailing, bus belches, radio sermons, and the music of Gil Scott-Heron, Gerima's film layered a "multiplicity of noises on top of each other on a near-deafening urban heteroglossia" (Massood, 2003, 111, 114 - 115).

Reemerging in the New Black Realism of the 1990s, this "new" Black city was an extension of that found in Blaxploitation cinema. In the intervening decades the back-to-back presidencies of Ronald Reagan and George H. W. Bush forced major industrial, political, and economic changes in inner city America (Massood, 2003, 147). Those changes effectively redefined the borders of the Black city "from

the ghetto to the hood" (Massood, 2003, 148). What was therefore at the centre of the New Black Realist city was not only an understanding of the Black city historically and the effects of "successive displacement, migrations, movements, and journeys (forced and otherwise) on its definition", but also an understanding of newer tropes of the "inner city as shaped by a different set of sociological and optical discourses" (Massood, 2003 147). Those discourses included rising rates of unemployment amongst African-American men, an increasing association of criminality with Black youths, escalated feelings of helplessness, a lack of societal agency, as well as the growing influence of hip hop, specifically gangsta rap, its attendant signifiers and cultural referents (Massood, 2003, 143).

Influenced by the cinéma vérité of its direct predecessor, the Hip Hop Musicals of the 1980s, New Black Realism attempted to "define the hood as it really 'is'" (Massood, 2003, 143). These films looked to achieve that through techniques like synchronised-sound, location shooting, hand-held cameras, and grainy film stock, techniques that offered films like *Juice* and *Menace II Society* a documentary-style realism to explore "an overcrowded world of deteriorating tenement apartments, of tiny cellblock, prison-like 'projects', streets filthy from the lack of city services, liquor stores, and billboards selling malt liquor and cigarettes" (Massood, 2003, 146, 152). Coursing throughout these films and their presentation of the Black city was a unique focus on the film sound effect. Sound effects were certainly pivotal in both Blaxploitation cinema and in Hip Hop Musicals in different ways, but, with a new financial stability and the histories of the mediated Black city already ringing in their ear, New Black Realism used the cinematic sound effect in a far more creative fashion. As "black commercial independent" films, these audio-visual social documents were created through culturally-charged

independent aesthetics but benefitted from “access to commercial film industry resources” (Watkins, 1998, 98).

In the traditions of sound and music in mainstream cinema, the dominant belief is that sound effects provide, simply, “a greater sense of realism” on film, helping to breathe life into the “flat nature” of the two-dimensional image (Sergi, 2006). That has meant that sound effects in film have most often come to represent “space” onscreen. They are used to flesh out the perceived world around the characters and the film story. They give a sense of depth to the world onscreen and help to direct the audiences’ attention towards the film’s dialogue. Traditionally, however, it seems that while sound effects qualify the presence of the cinematic space onscreen they tend to offer little by way of its distinct features. Gianluca Sergi has argued that sound effects in cinema “are understood as customarily providing ambience, mood, scope and size, but not information, characterisation [or] plot development” (Ibid). He contends that this particular understanding is based on the “language” of these sounds, arguing that, for instance, while dialogue employs verbal communication immediately accessible to the theatre audience, sound effects appear “to be a purely non-verbal form of communication” (Ibid). He asserts that this shortcoming in the non-verbal language of the sound effect is due to its lack of a “recognised structure”, a collection of decipherable elements (Ibid). They tell us that there is a space here, one in which the story is taking place, but do not detail much about that specific space. And, even if it could, it appears that mainstream cinema audiences could not understand it anyway. Even though sound designers like Walter Murch and Ben Burtt had been pushing the boundaries and importance of the sound effect in narrative cinema since the 1970s, the idea that

sound effects have little to say has persisted (Hanson, 2007, 30).[12] Scholars like Tony Grajeda and Jay Beck have highlighted as much, arguing that the field of sound studies was in the "process of formation" as recently as 2008 (Grajeda and Beck, 2008, 110). At that point, the academic focus on sound effects and sound design was "a work in progress subject to ongoing transformations as it coalesces into its own distinctive field" (Ibid).

Such a position on the film sound effect is, of course, culturally-motivated. While sounds of helicopter blades and police sirens do not contain any language-like material, their lack of a recognisable structure is down to the fact they do not come charged with one. These sounds do not feature prominently in the expressions of mainstream culture on film because they do not feature prominently in the reality (mediated or otherwise) of mainstream culture. They arrive at the film screen representing nothing more than the object they emanate from and can therefore pick up no deeper meanings onscreen either. In mainstream cinema, these sound effects exist simply as sound effects, filling out a space, any space, around the film's central narrative. They give life to the film image, but do not give it a specific life. In contrast, across New Black Realism, sounds of sirens, police radios, and helicopters exist as part of a "spatial signature", providing information not just about the sound's source but also about the very particular space in which the sound is propagating (Altman referenced in Jordan, 2012, 250). The city is central to the hip hop generation and and its mediated existence, particularly in relation to hip hop music, and in that fact the sound effect arrives to New Black Realism loaded with culturally-tied possibilities. By exploring the cinematic city not just visually but through the film sound effect, New Black Realism has created a discourse

[12] As some of the most famous names in sound design, Walter Murch worked on films like *THX 1138* (1971), *The Conversation* (1974), and *Apocalypse Now* (1979), while Ben Burtt was the sound designer for *Star Wars* (1977), *Radiers of the Lost Ark* (1981), and *Return of the Jedi* (1983).

concerned with power structures. As the rest of this chapter will highlight, the film sound effect offers New Black Realism a platform upon which the relationship between hip hop and mainstream culture, through issues of crime, migration, and the criminal justice system in modern America, can be tested. In film, the sound effect has occupied a particular role: it provides a greater sense of realism. In New Black Realist film it still occupies that same role but it is now imbued with a coded language that speaks of a very particular reality. It is in this duality that the New Black Realist sound effect is a remediative force, at once walking the line between subcultural intent and mainstream media. As Murch points out in his foreword to Michel Chion's 1994 edition of *Audio-Vision*, in French the word for sound effect is "bruit", which translates directly as "noise", "with all of the same pejorative overtones that the word has in English" (Murch, 1994, xiii). Just as with the music of the last chapter, the sound effect in New Black Realist cinema is a channel for cultural rebellion, a chamber for cinematic disruption.

With this in mind, this chapter will explore the sound effect in New Black Realist cinema in two parts. First, it will focus on the way in which New Black Realism uses sound effects to echo the contemporary Black city. Through films like John Singleton's *Boyz 'N' the Hood* (1991), Matty Rich's *Straight Out of Brooklyn* (1991), and the Hughes Brothers' *Menace II Society* (1993), this chapter argues that these sound effects become important to the story onscreen as they disrupt the placement and purpose of the sound effect in film. At the intersection of mainstream cinema and hip hop music, New Black Realism sets up a cinematic duality in which meaning is generated in the push-and-pull between what is traditionally expected of these sounds in film and the new possibilities bestowed upon them from within hip hop. This part will argue that it is in this challenge that these sounds become a remediative force as their disruption of mainstream approaches to the cinematic

soundscape push forward their presence in these films sonically, and subsequently bring the city to the foreground of contemporary Black culture onscreen. This first section will show that New Black Realism has elevated Sergi's contention that sound effects provide a greater sense of realism on film not so much by presenting a cinematic space but by echoing a very particularly cinematic reality. Sounds like gunshots, whirring helicopter blades, and sirens, in New Black Realism, talk loudly about the Black city on and offscreen.

Second, this chapter will explore the use of sound effects as a coded language in the structuring of a sonic panopticon in New Black Realist cinema. Becoming a vehicle for political discourse, these films looked to explore the blatant racial inequalities in the world that surrounded their creators and audience through work that focused on the charged and violent relationship between, in particular, the young Black male body and the American criminal justice system. While this manifested obviously in storylines and images that dealt with these surveillant and scrutinising forces, the most fascinating construction of this relationship is to be found in the use of the film sound effect. Through the same three films as above, this latter section of the chapter will show that in the very particular promotion of otherwise neglected, acousmatic film sounds, New Black Realist cinema has created prison-like structures that echo Michel Foucault's theories on panopticism (1975). Foucault's theories are themselves built on Jeremy Bentham's eighteenth-century "panopticon", a circular prison building in which inmates are supposedly under constant scrutiny. As these sound effects attempt to sonically surveil and control the characters onscreen they mirror a deeper psychological relationship that seems to exist, in a mediated sense at the very least, between the Black American youth community at the turn of the twenty-first century and the American criminal justice system. This half of the chapter contends that more than just echoing the

Black city, sounds like sirens, police radios, and whirring helicopter blades are often the sounds of sonic supervision and scrutiny, the sounds of the panoptic machine.

4.1 Sounding the City

Sounds of the City as Cinematic Overture

John Singleton's film *Boyz 'N' the Hood* (1991) begins in 1984 with a young Tre Styles (Desi Arnez Hines II) living with his mother, Reva Styles (Angela Bassett), in Inglewood, south west Los Angeles. After Tre continues to get in trouble at school, Reva takes the decision to move her son in with his father, Jason "Furious" Styles (Laurence Fishburne). Dropping him off at his new home in Crenshaw, south central Los Angeles, Reva tells Furious that it appears he was right, she cannot "teach [Tre] how to be a man". Singleton's *Boyz 'N' The Hood* is, then, a Black coming-of-age film, one that explores what it is like to grow up as a young Black man in modern America. The film cuts forward seven years to 1991 - the same year as the film's release. Tre (Cuba Gooding Jr.) is now a diligent young man with a part-time job and aspirations of attending college with his long-time girlfriend, Brandi (Nia Long). While his friends, half-brothers Ricky (Morris Chestnut) and Darrin "Doughboy" Baker (Ice Cube), have also grown up, each has followed a very different path. Ricky is a star running back at his highschool who is hoping to land a scholarship to the University of Southern California (USC). Doughboy, on the other hand, has become a gang member, a Crip. As the film drops in to the present day, Doughboy has just been released from jail and the film's characters are all at Ricky and Doughboy's home, where the boy's mother, Brenda Baker (Tyra Ferrell), is throwing a party for her newly-released son. Although the main body of the film is set in the early 1990s, the film's exposition, set in the middle of the 1980s, offers a unique film moment that resonates throughout the rest of this work.

Singleton's *Boyz 'N' the Hood* bursts open to a cacophony of noise. Sounds and voices ring forward before we have moved off the *Columbia Pictures* title slide. They continue to echo across the blank, black screen which is interspersed with slides of "Columbia Pictures Presents", the film's title, and two connected statements. The first phrase states that "one out of every twenty-one Black American males will be murdered in their lifetime" while the second points out that "most will die at the hands of another Black male". As we eventually get in to the film world the noises dissipate, just as the camera closes in on a traffic stop sign with an aeroplane flying over it in the distance. Across these images Singleton's film sets out a cinematic overture composed mainly of sound effects. In a little over fifty seconds, a myriad of sounds are heard and a small narrative unfolds. Over police sirens we hear at least two young men planning what sounds like a retaliative attack. We hear them get in to a car, pinpoint their targets, and perpetrate that attack with a semi-automatic weapon. The results, sonically, are numerous screams and shrieks, possibly from passers-by and witnesses to the attack, as well as screeching car tyres, probably of the perpetrators as they make their escape. As police and ambulance sirens and a police radio report are heard, detailing aspects of the crime and calling for support for the officers already on scene, a young boy exclaims: "they shot my brother, they shot my brother". It is police sirens and whirring helicopter blades which close out the film's opening gambit, as *Boyz 'N' the Hood* finally cuts to image and zooms in on the red stop sign.

The opening to Singleton's inaugural film dramatises a drive-by shooting and promotes the tropes of nihilistic violence and the policing of the contemporary Black community not in the film's image but rather through the cinematic soundscape. These are the sounds of the world onscreen, the sounds, Singleton seems to suggest, of Black life and by extension the Black city in contemporary America.

Walter Murch has argued that sound make us see the image differently, it triggers a "kind of *conceptual resonance* between image and sound" (Murch, 1994, xxii). Therefore, as we come out of this opening piece and in to the images of Singleton's film, we do so with these sounds still ringing in our ears. They shape our perception of what is to follow onscreen. As some scholars suggest that it is this film that "jump-started" the genre (Kitwana, 2002, 123), Singleton's focus on sound design at this moment categories a pivotal motif that has resurfaced throughout New Black Realist cinema, one in which the non-narrative sound effect plays an integral role in the narrative of Black cinema. Yet such an approach to cinematic sound is rare, particularly with the linear history of mainstream cinema.

As mentioned in the previous chapter, the opening title sequence is an important moment in any film. Musically, this importance can manifest in a number of ways: it can announce the beginning of the dramatic presentation; it can relay the film's genre, as particular types of music have been traditionally tied to particular film styles; it can highlight key musical themes that reflect the film's characters; or it can outline narrative arcs or twists. And, while the nature of title music has expanded in recent years, with filmmakers and studios seeing a film's opening sequence as a chance both to market soundtrack albums and aim for major awards through the insertion or popular songs or popular artists (Schroeder, 2016, 85), title music in cinema has continued to serve the same purpose: to prepare "the audience for what will follow" (Schroeder, 2016, 89, 85). John Ford's film *The Informer* (1935) foretells the story of Dublin in the early 1920s, after the Irish War of Independence, through Max Steiner's "gloomy - almost morbid - titles music", which leaves the viewers with no question of the film's inevitably unhappy ending (Schroeder, 2016, 90). Five years later, in his work for Michael Curtiz's *The Sea Hawk*, Erich Korngold develops the filmic overture even further (Ibid). In the piece's

'A' section we are given a lively brass fanfare theme for the Sea Hawk. This is answered with a bittersweet string theme for the film's lead protagonists, Geoffrey Thorpe (Errol Flynn) and Doña María (Brenda Marshall), in section 'B'. We eventually return to the fanfare of section 'A', an indication to the film's audience that despite the stories ups and downs, the film will, eventually, end well. In this case, both the opening piece's musical material and formal structure reflect the story that will unfold in the film (Schroeder 2016, 92 - 93). We have continued to see such detail in contemporary narrative cinema with, again, the soundtracks of John Williams, particularly those within the *Star Wars*, *Jurassic Park*, *Harry Potter*, and *Indiana Jones* series, providing appropriate case studies. A film's title sequence is, therefore, a space of narrative importance. It offers the film's audience sonic melodies, relationships, or themes that can both foretell the film's narrative and be used to help explain that same narrative as it unfolds in real time. It is an indicator, a signpost that audience take note of as they consume the rest of the film's sounds and images.

So, to place sound effects and untethered voices at the centre of the title soundscape is a very deliberate decision. The promotion of these sounds outlines for the audience their importance. It suggests to the theatregoer that what they represent is paramount to the ensuing drama. Literally, *Boyz 'N' the Hood*'s title points out a collection of sounds that return throughout the film, sounds like gunshots, sirens, helicopters, and police radios, defining them in this moment as somehow thematic to the film's narrative. Symbolically, this opening positions the sounds of a very particular version of the post-industrial American city at the forefront of Singleton's film world. In the aforementioned films, it is characters, relationships, and narrative arcs that are silhouetted in each piece's overture. Because of their tie over from the world of opera, in these expressions, overtures

highlight the things that can exist at the centre of the stage, or in this case, at the centre of the film screen. In the cinematic overture of John Singleton's *Boyz 'N' the Hood* it is the city, the world that surrounds the characters, that is prioritised. As Rick Altman contends, "sound has a fundamental enigmatic quality which confers on the image the quality of a response" (Altman referenced in Hanson, 2007, 42). Sound has the basic nature of a question in film. It can ask its audience to contemplate where the source of the sound is (Ibid). It can ask them to contemplate what it is that is speaking from the screen. And, while traditionally, the question of sound is answered by the image immediately, in this moment, as it is accompanied by a black screen, the overture of *Boyz 'N' the Hood* leaves that question ringing out across the film's opening, making it all the more pivotal to the audience's perception of the film as it unfolds.

The remediation of the Black city in this cinematic space is important. As outlined, remediation is about an innate balance between immediacy and hypermediacy. Although immediacy is about the projection of an authentic experience, in which the medium seems to disappear, hypermediacy is the sense that the experience of the medium itself is an experience of the real (Bolter and Grusin, 2000, 70, 71). The immediacy of these sound effects exists in their foregrounding at the opening of *Boyz 'N' the Hood*. They are presented at the start of the film, over a mostly blank screen, and are largely unchallenged visually. The audience consumes them in as close an unfiltered fashion as arguably possible in cinema. There is little else to take attention away from them. In this case, the cinematic overture to *Boyz 'N' the Hood* prioritises otherwise additional sounds and with that promotes that which these sounds represent: the city.

Initially, we hear these sounds without seeing their originating source. Their acousmatic nature means that Singleton elevates their importance, as the audience

are intrigued by their eventual de-acousmatization when the film's images are finally revealed. This reflects the significance of these sounds in the lives of the then contemporary Black American youth community. From a black screen the sounds envelop the audience in the same way that they have enveloped the hip hop generation. These sounds are the sounds of the inescapable and imposing city and their position here in *Boyz 'N' the Hood* reflects that for the film's audience. By shaping the film's opening in this fashion, Singleton offers the audience a chance to listen to the "real" contemporary Black city.

And yet, the hypermediacy of that moment exists in those same cinematic choices. The film sets out the aesthetics of hip hop culture and music against the framework of narrative cinema. As already mentioned, Gianluca Sergi contends that the "language" of sound effects, or more appropriately the lack-thereof, means that they offer little more than the suggestion of a place, rather than the designation of a specific space. Equally, it also means that narrative cinema has depended on them less, as they do not carry with them a language that cinematic audiences tend to be able to speak. To place these supposedly non-narrative sounds in an arena traditionally designated for narrative guidance and support is to create a disruption. This unusual shaping of the cinematic overture calls into question the traditions of film sound. It asks the viewers to pay attention to the structures of the medium. It coerces them into listening to the sound effect, an element of cinema that has not historically called for their focus. As Singleton foregrounds the sounds of the Black city, trying to get his audience closer to that 'reality', he pulls their attention towards the mediated frames of that presentation. In saying all that, the balance between frame and content, this moment of remediation, is in fact the most appropriate construction of the Black city. Putting the sounds of gunshots, sirens, and whirring helicopters blades in this position is to impose on the audience to the same degree

that the post-industrial city has imposed upon and shaped the hip hop generation offscreen. As these sounds echo through the theatre unchallenged in the opening of the film, their presence is felt as much by those that fill the theatre as the characters onscreen. To do this over a platform that calls attention to cinema's framework is to point to the importance of the mediation of the Black city in shaping our understanding of what actually constitutes that space. The Black city of New Black Realism owes as much to its construction in media as it does reality. As we have seen, the sounds and images of that world have been carved from the sounds and images of Blaxploitation cinema and the Hip Hop Musicals of the 1980s, as well as through hip hop music and its correlating music videos. The remediation of this moment in Singleton's film expresses the significance of the city to hip hop culture on and offscreen while at the same time highlighting the importance of the screen to the shaping of the Black city.

Sonic Architecture and Sound Effect as Leitmotif

New Black Realism's control of the cinematic overture exists in that space that we saw Annette Davison mark out in her research earlier. As it is defined by the "dominant ideology" of mainstream cinema, through its operatic influences, the cinematic overture offers John Singleton a space by which his "alternative scoring and soundtrack practices may assert themselves" (2004, 6). Singleton both uses and misuses the cinematic overture in *Boyz 'N' the Hood* as a way to echo the reality of contemporary Black America onscreen. Singleton in *Boyz 'N' the Hood* and the Hughes Brothers in *Menace II Society* take a similar approach to the filmic leitmotif.

The leitmotif is, as David Schroeder contends, "perhaps the most striking appropriation of an operatic device into cinema" (2016, 75). A musical "procedure" applied by Richard Wagner in his operas, and defined by his distinctive use of it, the

leitmotif, or “leading motif”, is a musical theme that represents “a person, an object, an event, a personal quality, or perhaps even an emotion” (Ibid). The music itself rarely has any distinct qualities or associations that would pinpoint such a connection. The relationship between musical idea and that represented is, more often, based on the correlation of the two in the opera in the sense that the leitmotif plays out over the arrival of a character, whenever the story focuses on a specific object, or when a particular emotion is the prevalent feeling onstage. Once an association has been established, operatic composers like Wagner then can bring back the musical idea in various ways, including when the object or person does not appear onstage, as a “type of psychological reminder” of the person, object, or emotion (Ibid).

The Wagnerian treatment of the leitmotif is certainly distinctive, with a “highly complex musical language”, “intricate sense of structure”, and a “forward-pressing development of chromaticism” (Schroeder, 2016, 75 - 76). Nevertheless, at its core, the leitmotif in both opera and cinema is about the identification of “characters, objects, or ideas”, and across the classical and neo-classical scoring models of mainstream cinema, the leitmotif has certainly been used in this way (Schroeder, 2016, 79). The scores of John Williams again provide ample case studies of the leitmotif, as in the two-note leitmotif to represent the shark in Steven Spielberg’s 1975 film *Jaws*, or the leitmotif Williams composed for the *Harry Potter* film series, “Hedwig’s Theme”, which has come to represent both the lead character’s pet owl specifically and the presence of magic more generally. It would be fair to suggest that the leitmotif is not as important a feature in recent cinema. This is partly related to the influx of popular music styles and partly manifested in scores that focus on atmosphere more than on specific musical ideas, such as Mica Levi’s work for *Under the Skin* (2014) and *Jackie* (2016). And yet the leitmotif was prevalent in the

mainstream cinema that surrounded New Black Realism. In Roland Joffé's 1986 film *The Mission*, for instance, a film that explore stories of Jesuit missionaries in South America in the eighteenth-century, composer Ennio Morricone "used a number of motifs to represent different forces in the conflict or alliances among" European and non-European characters and worlds onscreen (Schroeder, 2016, 82). *The Mission* also outlines that by invoking some "previously known association". For Morricone that means that the use of the "Ave Maria" motet in his compositions in this film echo the ties that this would have with "well-known Christian-liturgical" traditions (Schroeder, 2016, 83).

Across the genre of New Black Realism, there are few musical leitmotifs as traditionally defined by the works of either Morricone or Williams. Largely avoiding the styles and instrumentation of the nineteenth-century Romanticism so prevalent in such scores has meant that these soundscapes have also moved away from the malleability of these musical systems, a malleability that Alan Williams suggests is key to the establishment of the leitmotif as a compositional aspect of the film score (Brownrigg, 2007, 307; Williams referenced in Smith, 1998, 164). But, through the cinematic sound effect, these films have found sonic utterances that "can slip in and out of the musical background", serving "as a punctuating device" and "musical characterisation" that are not long enough to "interrupt a chain of actions visually or linguistically depicted" but simply rise up "briefly to fill a gap" (Williams referenced in Smith, 1998, 164). Interestingly, like Morricone's work in *The Mission*, the leitmotivic sounds of the city in films like Singleton's *Boyz 'N' the Hood* or The Hughes Brothers' *Menace II Society* are built on previously known associations defined by hip hop music and its music videos, particularly as it relates to the genre of gangsta rap and the city of Los Angeles. It is through that space that these non-narrative sounds pick up strong, culturally-specific narrative connotations.

As Rose points out in *Black Noise*, hip hop music has always been engaged in a struggle for public space and the music has often been defined by those locales in which it struggles (referenced in Nielson, 2010, 1256). For gangsta rap that determination is structured by the city of Los Angeles. Gangsta rap is considered a product of the gang culture and street wars of south central Los Angeles, Compton, and Long Beach, and the resurgence of the “retromack culture of East Oakland”, which reflect a “pimp” attitude and style (Kubrin, 2005, 360 - 361). The music marked a sizeable change in hip hop music, geographically and sonically. Throughout its earliest years, New York City acted as a prism for hip hop. It marked the site of the culture’s conception, the hub of the majority of its early creative flourishes, and it “checked the flow” of the hip hop coming from “struggling African-American neighbourhoods in cities such as Philadelphia, Boston and Houston” (Grant, 2002, 7). Although Los Angeles issued its first major challenge to New York’s domination in 1986 when Ice T released his single “6 in Tha Morning”, it was through N.W.A., and in particular their debut album *Straight Outta Compton* (1988), that that disruption was primarily driven (Grant, 2002, 7, 8). By the 1990s, Los Angeles had become the indisputable “capital” of “the hip hop nation”, a “dislocation” that was accompanied by a “shift in rap’s basic tonal and narrative style” (Grant, 2002, 7). Like New York, LA’s hip hop scene grew out of “politically and economically neglected, predominantly African-American, Latino, and Chicano neighbourhoods” (Ibid).

While it is acknowledged that hip hop music is generally understood to chronicle the contemporary Black experience, with Chuck D suggesting that "Rap is Black America’s TV station” (Leland, 2019), gangsta rap is understood to be “specifically interested in the black underclass in the ghetto” (Keyes, 2002; Kubrin, 2005, 361). Gangsta rap tended to glorify street gang culture, enthralling American

audiences with “tales of territorial rivalry, drug dealing, and brutalising sexual relations in the south central boroughs of Los Angeles” (Grant, 2002, 7 - 8). Murray Forman suggests that those that were telling these tales were not only “serving notice” to their neighbouring communities that they were in charge, but they are also serving notice to “New York and the entire hip hop nation that the new sound had arrived and the balance of power … had tipped to the west” (Forman referenced in Grant, 2002, 8). In that sense, violence, gang-culture, drug culture, the corruption of Black youth communities, and the policing of the same are innately tied to the mediated construction of Los Angeles at this moment in history (Grant, 2002, 12). Unsurprisingly, this has manifested in the lyrics of gangsta rap, with artists talking about the codes of the street in their music, implicating their own role in the violence of that reality, and equating the prowess of their lyrical abilities on the microphone with their gang-connected activities and “street knowledge”, something which Dr. Dre outlines in the opening of N.W.A.’s “Straight Outta Compton”, as we have seen earlier (Kubrin, 2005, 367; Grant, 2002, 9). The music videos for this and two other of the group’s earliest songs, “Express Yourself” (1988) and “Alwayz into Somethin’” (1991), also echoed the role of LA across their images, with sweeping, panoramic views and street location based shots of south central Los Angeles perforating the music video narratives (Grant, 2002, 9).

Beyond the music’s lyrics, where members of the group make constant reference to “the neighbourhood” generally and “Compton” specifically, and the images of their accompanying videos, the soundscapes of N.W.A.’s work feature sound effects that reflect the correlation between violence, gangs, and LA. In songs like, “Fuck tha Police”, “Express Yourself”, “Dope Man”, “Gangsta Gangsta”, and “Straight Outta Compton”, sounds of gunshots, screeching tyres, police sirens, drive-by shootings, drug deals, and the executing of police warrants are heard

throughout. Tying these sounds with lyrics and images of Los Angeles and the 'reality' of contemporary Black youth culture means that they are coded with that language. Then, as they appear over similar images and storylines in films like *Boyz 'N' the Hood* or *Menace II Society*, they speak with that same code. And, even when those images or storylines tend to detour from the exact aspects of Los Angeles and gang culture so prevalent in the work of artists like N.W.A., these sounds struggle to escape the codes of gangsta rap and its accompanying lifestyle. This stands out in the simplest sense in Matty Rich's *Straight Out of Brooklyn* (1991), a film set in New York City rather than LA. On one particular night, the film's lead character, Dennis Brown (Larry Gilliard Jr.), has stayed late at his girlfriend Shirley's (Reana E. Drummond) apartment. The rest of the Browns are at home and asleep when Dennis's mother, Frankie (Ann D. Sanders), hears gunshots and screeching tyres outside of their apartment. She rushes to see if Dennis is in bed. Finding only his sister Carolyn (Barbara Sanon) in their room, Frankie breaks down in tears. As her husband, Ray (George T. Odom), tries to console her, she weeps, certain that those sounds and what they symbolise represent the demise of her young son on the streets of New York City. We have seen Sergi argue that non-verbal sound effects in cinema lack a "recognised structure" and that, subsequently, they suggest space in cinema insofar as they help to flesh out the film image. In New Black Realism, having picked up a recognised structure in gangsta rap and music videos, the film sound effect rings out across the film screen as a sonic leitmotif that represents the contemporary Black city.

The sound of the city echoes at key junctures throughout the soundscapes of both *Boyz 'N' the Hood* and *Menace II Society.* In the first sense, that means that we hear them at times when the city of Los Angeles is either the central focus on the film image or its narrative. So, for instance, we hear whirring helicopter blades

and police radio reports in *Menace II Society* as the camera pans over the city of Los Angeles. One of the more prominent examples here is when, in *Boyz 'N' the Hood*, Furious takes Tre and Ricky to a neighbourhood in Compton in south Los Angeles. The trio pull up to a neighbourhood corner. Furious gets out and brings the two young men to stand under a billboard, a billboard that offers cash for people to sell their homes. As he talks about how gentrification is shaping the Black neighbourhoods of America, and how that is connected to the problems of violence and drug use that pervade Black communities locally, an older gentleman and a group of young men and women gather round to listen to him speak and debate his ideas. As the scene unfolds, and Compton's Most Wanted's "Growin' Up in The Hood" (1991) aptly plays from a nearby speaker, the sounds of screeching tyres, police sirens, and helicopters circulate throughout the film soundscape. As Furious preaches about the pitfalls and struggles of the Black community living in the city of Los Angeles at the turn of the twenty-first century, these sounds abound across the screen. In the second sense, these sounds are strewn throughout the soundscapes of both these films ringing out not just at key moments but intermittently across the film's narrative and images. Seemingly irregular, and at times playing in positions that are not always important in terms of narrative or character development, these leitmotivic sound effects echo throughout the film space. That reverberation not only qualifies the space onscreen, as Sergi might contend that it would, but, loaded with the codes of gangsta rap, it denotes a very particular space, the contemporary Black city. Ringing continuously across the images of these films, like sonic architecture, these sounds establish the impending nature of the Black city and all that it represents in the lives of the characters onscreen.

Exploring the leitmotif in the work of George Lucas and John Williams's *Star Wars*, Kathryn Kalinak suggests that in his score for *The Return of the Jedi* (1983)

Williams's leitmotif for antagonist Darth Vader (James Earl Jones) is so prevalent that it even competes with the main theme of these films for "dominance of the soundtrack", much like the character of Vader in the film's story (1992, 197 - 198). Similarly then, as the varied leitmotifs of the contemporary Black city return throughout films like Singleton's *Boyz 'N' the Hood*, they reflect the brutal dominance of that very particular space in the lives of the hip hop community, on and off screen. The prominence of these sounds and what they represent in New Black Realism is furthered by their challenge to cinema's other, more prominent sonic channels, and in particular, in their confrontation of the voice in cinema. The sounds of gunshots, sirens, and whirring helicopter blades are certainly not leitmotifs in the traditional sense but across the genre, as they continually represent Black life in the post-industrial American city, these sounds are leitmotif-life echoes that punctuate the film soundscapes of New Black Realism.

Challenging Film's Vococentrism

Film listening, Michel Chion has argued, is typically vococentric. The voice is the most important part of the filmic medium as it provides us with the most vital information, whether anchored to an image or heard as voice-over. It is the loudest of the film's sonic channels, both in the sense of its primacy in cinema's sound design mix and in the context of the audience's receptiveness to the voice. For that reason, across Chion's "aural triage", of voice, sound effects, and music, the voice is "naturally privileged" (referenced in Rogers, 2006). Although music does not speak as clearly as the voice itself, it does, through verbal and non-verbal communication, come with a "recognised grammar" of its own (Sergi, 2006). In this sense, Sergi contends, audiences are engaged at an intellectual level "mostly by dialogue", with music occupying a "potentially similar position" with added "emotional engagement". Sound effects, as we have seen, are traditionally thought

to lack grammar, at least relative to narrative cinema. Consequently, they offer neither an intellectual nor an emotional engagement. Instead they are an expression of the "crude, the mechanical/repetitive, the unsophisticated, that is, as an expression of vulgarity" (Sergi, 2006). With that, in traditional constructions of narrative cinema, the film sound effect occupies the tertiary position in Chion's hierarchical structure, rarely acting as the prominent line of engagement for the film audience. The leitmotivic treatment throughout and prominence in the introductory material of films like *Boyz 'N' the Hood* means that this is not as simple a separation in New Black Realist cinema.

Through the culturally loaded codes of the sound effect in hip hop, these sounds speak a language that allows directors like Singleton to treat them in a similar fashion to dialogue and music in his films. These sounds are not restricted solely to a tertiary space. They creep in and out of premiered positions in the film soundscape and, with that, they question and confront cinema's primary line of communication, the voice. Never fully distorting the central vocal track of these films, these sounds nonetheless move alongside the voice at a comparable level, becoming undeniable aspects of the cinematic utterance. As we have seen Rose mention elsewhere, hip hop is a post-literate orality. It "fuses literate concepts of authorship with orally based construction of thought, expression and performance" (Rose, 1994, 87). Rappers and their rhymes are a "far cry from traditional oral poetic forms and performers" in the sense that narrative and meaning in hip hop exists not simply in the lyrics of a rap song, but are inflected with "the syncopated rhythms and sampled sounds of the music" (Rose, 1994, 88). Here, then, meaning exists in the interactions of various sonic channels, in the space in-between the lyrics and those sounds that reverberate around them. Amanda Sewell has furthered such an understanding of hip hop music.

In her writing on sampling in the music of Public Enemy and the Beastie Boys, Sewell establishes a framework for the classification of sample sounds. One of these categories she determines as “surface samples”, sounds which “decorate or punctuate a track’s groove without necessarily participating in the track’s primary loop” (2014, 37). These sounds, Sewell contends, may not contribute directly towards the “rhythmic or harmonic propulsion of the track”, but they do provide material for “rhetorical emphasis, historical context, and formal articulation” (Ibid). Sewell specifically mentions what she calls “momentary surface samples”, sounds that appear once in a track, pointing out that in their dominant role in Public Enemy’s *Fear of a Black Planet* (1990) they enhance the meaning of particular tracks and contextualize the rapped lyrics within a political and chronological framework (Sewell, 2014, 37, 39). Although cinema separates out its sonic channels, often keeping each at arms distance from each other, the hip hop text is performative. Rather than each sonic element coming to occupy the central channel in various moments, all of the music’s components move together, collectively. That collective drive is at play in the performance of the New Black Realist soundscape where the film sound effect challenges the frames of narrative cinema to create meaning through both form and content, something we see as Ricky Baker is scouted to attend USC in *Boyz ’N’ the Hood*.

“Anybody know where Ricky Baker lives?” shouts a voice from the mysterious car stopped outside the Baker’s home. “That’s my brother, he live here”, replies Doughboy, calling in to Ricky to let him know that the recruiter from USC has arrived. As a coming-of-age film, one of the subplots of Singleton’s *Boyz ’N’ the Hood* focuses on the abilities of Ricky on the football pitch and the possibility that those skills will earn him a scholarship to the University of Southern California. This, it is made abundantly clear throughout the film, is a chance for Ricky, his partner,

and their child to establish a better life for themselves, one beyond the constraints of the life that may lie ahead for them in Crenshaw. As we cut to Ricky's girlfriend, Shanice (Alysia Rogers) helping to tie his tie, a leitmotivic helicopter sounds across the screen. It accompanies Lewis Crump (John Cothran Jr.), the USC recruiter, as he walks up to the front door of the house and begins chatting with Doughboy's friends and fellow gang-members. Mr. Crump is the only character onscreen that seems to acknowledge the sounds above, looking skywards as the lights from the helicopter spotlight the Bakers' home. Doughboy lets Mr. Crump inside. After he introduces himself to everyone, Mr. Crump sits with Ricky and begins to talk about the possibility of him going to USC. As the room clears, police sirens echo in the background; and as the two sit, the sounds of whirring helicopter blades ring out above. Mr. Crump again looks up, acknowledging the consistent presence of the sounds. Ricky, putting on his showreel, ignores them. He is, it seems, oblivious to them, so accustomed to those sounds that they do not register for him in the same way that they do for the USC recruiter. Both men, it appears, are accustomed to very different soundscapes as they sit in their living rooms. The two continue to talk about life at USC, and how to get there. Mr. Crump asks Ricky what he would like to major in, pointing out that, like many others on football scholarships, it is a strong possibility that he will not make it in to the National Football League (NFL) and play professional football. As they chat about this, helicopters swirl above once again. This time, as Ricky considers the pathways of his future, he seems to become aware of these sounds. As he looks forward, these leitmotifs remind him of the present, of the city and all that city means for him as a young Black man in America.

As Mr. Crump leaves, and is asked by one of Doughboy's crew for a second time to 'hook them up' with a scholarship, the sounds of helicopters swirl above once more. Throughout this interaction, the sound effects move in and out of the

film foreground. As these sounds move to the cinematic foreground they, and the post-industrial Black city that they represent, seem not only to close in sonically but metaphorically. Although the sounds of the helicopter or police sirens do not completely obscure the dialogue between the characters onscreen, they certainly feel as if they are near to doing so. Already privileged in their leitmotivic treatment and role in the overture of these films, the increased volume of these background elements means that they challenge the primacy of the voice in Singleton's *Boyz 'N' the Hood* on two levels, something that is again decipherable through the immediacy and hypermediacy of Bolter and Grusin's remediation (2000).

In the sense of immediacy, these sounds encroach upon the voice, a vitally important aspect in the expression of character identity onscreen. As Steven Connor has outlined, the voice comes from "the inside of a body and radiates through a space which is exterior to and extends beyond that body" (Connor, 2000, 6). He suggests that "in moving from an interior to an exterior, and therefore marking out the relations of interior and exterior, a voice also announces and verifies the co-operation of bodies and the environments in which they have their being" (Ibid). The voice is the space in which the self can be heard, both in the sense that it reverberates through the body and allows that body to echo in a particular space. As will be explored further in the next chapter, the voice has long been a channel through which hip hop culture has found room to utter, a space in which to rap on grievances and call for change. These sound effects encroaching upon that expression of identity mirrors the role that the city plays in the lives of the hip hop community offscreen. As Ricky looks forward and tries to shape his future, the post-industrial city reminds him that it will have something to say about that.

In the sense hypermediacy, these moments line out the intent of a subcultural expression, hip hop, against the frame of a mainstream medium, film. In hip hop,

these sounds are important narrative nodes, taken in to account by the listener as they digest the meaning on offer. In film, these sounds are relegated to the edges of the film screen as dialogue and the voice is privileged (Kalinak, 1992, 79). To challenge that privilege sonically is to highlight cultural differences between the community that structures the subcultural intent and that that has shaped this mainstream medium. In narrative cinema, traditionally, the sounds of the city are background noise because the city does not have the same role in mainstream culture as it does in the hip hop community, on or offscreen. The Black city has been a prevalent aspect of African-American expressions over the last fifty years because it has been a prevalent factor in the shaping of contemporary hip hop culture. To position the sounds of the city in contrast to the primary and untouched component of mainstream narrative cinema, as in the voice, is to outline that significance through this mediation of the hip hop community.

4.2 Sounding the Alarm

Surveillance and Panopticism through the New Black Realist Soundscape

[Hip Hop] is what it is because of surveillance.

Nielson, 2010, 1255

Allen and Albert Hughes's 1993 directorial debut, *Menace II Society*, is a film consumed by violence, violence perpetrated against and by the Black youth community of Watts, central Los Angeles at the turn of the twenty-first century. As is common in New Black Realist cinema, the film drives towards a cinéma vérité style as it looks to examine the world around it through its own reflection (Diawara, 1993, 24 - 25). This, for the Hughes Brothers, meant an uncompromising focus on the violence of contemporary Black life, a look at the "self-destructive cycle of black on black violence", a cycle driven by the "pathological internalisation of the values of a

racist society" that teaches young Black men to "grow up believing their lives are worth nothing" (Taubin in Hillier, 2001, 39). As mentioned already, for Ed Guerrero, *Menace II Society* was so intensely violent that "violence itself became the main structuring, captivating, and cumulatively entertaining device in the film" (Guerrero, 2001, 217). Visually, *Menace II Society* seems to focus on the violence bestowed upon young Black men by their peers, but sonically, like *Boyz 'N' the Hood*, the film is concerned with the role that the American criminal justice system plays in the sustaining of that violent existence. And, like B*oyz 'N' the Hood*, it also expresses the role of the criminal justice system sonically through the structuring of the film sound effect. In using this space to explore the coercive powers of these institutions, these films define that violence to be psychological. They frame these forces as surveillant powers that attempt not to support or safeguard the Black community, but rather to control it.

With the release of *It Takes a Nation of Millions to Hold Us Back* and *Straight Outta Compton* in 1988, Public Enemy and N.W.A. marked a sizeable shift in hip hop music, one by which "rap became a vehicle for political discourse" (Nielson, 2010, 1257). Both albums, Erik Nielson explains, fearlessly attacked American law enforcement, whether that was the FBI and CIA in the case of Public Enemy's "Louder than a Bomb" or the Los Angeles Police Department (LAPD) in N.W.A.'s "Fuck tha Police" (Ibid). These albums and artists marked a watershed moment in the music and inspired generations of hip hop artists, performers like Gang Starr, EPMD, Snoop Dogg, and Tupac, to question and challenge the role of the police force specifically and the criminal justice system generally in the shaping of the contemporary African-American experience. As with this change in hip hop music at the end of the 1980s, the focus on the immediate reality of its audience and the

influence of hip hop arts and media meant that New Black Realist cinema was also a vehicle for political discourse.

Directors like the Hughes Brothers challenged racially-centered inequalities in the world around them through narratives that focused regularly on the charged relationship between the young Black male body and the American criminal justice system. While Van Peeble's *New Jack City* (1991) and Lee's *Clockers* (1995) position police in their films' primary plot line, their presence is felt as a constant undercurrent throughout each iteration of the genre. In that, these films lay out a unique space to dissect such a construct. After the success of Spike Lee's *She's Gotta Have It* in 1986, "a small class of black independent filmmakers began to experience greater access to the vast resources of the first- and second-tier film distributors", allowing them to craft what was essentially Black commercial independent film (Watkins, 1998, 98). This creative freedom meant that many of the directors with which this thesis is concerned - Singleton, Van Peebles, Lee - charted representation of the hip hop community that would not normally feature in film theatres. And yet, like the gangsta rap that influenced their soundscapes, across these cinematic utterances the characters of each of these films struggled under the control of the American criminal justice system (Watkins, 1998, 100).

Even when the Black youth community told the stories that they wanted to about the contemporary Black American experience, they still could not escape the scrutiny and supervision of these omnipotent institutions. While, over the last two decades, hip hop music and music videos have continued to grapple with American Black youth culture's relationship with the criminal justice system, cinema has created a unique and potent space through which to explore this culturally-specific trope. Since its birth, but most explicitly since the 1950s, film has focused on and been focused by issues of voyeurism and the power of the gaze, with films like

Alfred Hitchcock's *Vertigo* (1958) and Francis Ford Coppola's *The Conversation* (1974) being obvious case studies (Albrechtslund, 2008, 132). In Norman Denzin's 1995 book, *The Cinematic Society*, the author uses the terms voyeurism and surveillance as interchangeable synonyms throughout (referenced in Zimmer, 2015, 16). The equating of surveillance and the power of the cinematic medium speaks to the rest of this chapter, where it is argued that New Black Realism has disrupted the traditions of mainstream cinema through the film sound effect to echo the coercion and control felt at the hands of the American justice system. Although the sounds of sirens, police radios, gunshots, and whirring helicopter blades are sounds of sonic architecture that echo the city throughout New Black Realist cinema, at specific moments in films like *Menace II Society* and *Boyz 'N' the Hood* these sounds are the sounds of sonic supervision and scrutiny, inspecting and monitoring the films' characters, their existence, and the decisions that they choose to make. In New Black Realist cinema, in specific instances, these are the sounds of the panoptic machine.

Although the sound effect's coded language of the city arrives at New Black Realism through gangsta rap, it is from a smaller subsection of that music that the language of surveillance and panopticism has arisen (Nielson, 2011). As is now well documented in this thesis, hip hop started its life as block corner music, as sounds for local youths in the neighbourhoods of New York City in the early 1970s. Although largely apolitical lyrically in these early years, the "very act of public performance" within a "complex web of institutional policing" in the context of large public spaces was itself rebellious (Nielson, 2011, 349). And yet, while that rebellious nature grew lyrically and sonically in the work of groups like Public Enemy and N.W.A. in the final decade of the twentieth-century, the late 1980s and early 1990s saw a rise in what Erik Nielson has called "surveillance tracks", hip hop songs in which, despite their

intent and artistic freedom, the presence and power of the criminal justice system seems almost impossible to evade (2011, 351). While songs like LL Cool J's "Illegal Search" (1990), KRS-One's "Sound of Da Police" (1993) and Brand Nubian's "Claimin' I'm a Criminal" (1994) talked of the intrusions of the American criminal justice system in their lives, and the attempt of those performing to resist such intrusions, surveillance tracks were songs that tacitly acknowledged the futility of their resistance, particularly when facing a "foe that is far more organised, powerful and technologically advanced" (2011, 351). Through lyrics, sounds, and visuals, the result is a mediated world in which the hostile gaze of law enforcement is ubiquitous. These characters exist in a "state of conscious and permanent visibility" (Ibid).

As well as in the lyrics of Goodie Mob's debut single, "Cell Therapy" (1995), Nielson explores this through a focus on the sound of the helicopter in Ice Cube's "Ghetto Bird", from his 1993 album, *Lethal Injection*. From the song's opening, the police helicopter occupies not just Cube's thoughts and lyrics, "ghetto bird" being what he calls this element of the police force, but the sound of the helicopter's whirring blades literally permeates throughout the track's soundscape. This, Nielson contends, turns the songs locale into a "militarised zone", echoing Mike Davis's assessment of Los Angeles as a "carceral city" (1990). Even in taking to his car, a symbol of autonomy and mobility in hip hop, Cube is unable to escape this surveillance as the sound of the helicopter circumscribes his freedom, reminding the audience that Cube's liberty is an illusion beneath of "the gaze of the 'incognito ghetto eagle". Any trace of an autonomous space is eradicated through the unwavering sound of the police helicopter above (Nielson, 2011, 251 - 353). For Nielson, who echoes the work of Robin D.G. Kelley (1997), hip hop music "is what it is because of surveillance" (Nielson, 2010, 1255), as the music evolved as a direct, if

at times subconscious, response to the supervision and scrutiny of the surrounding dominant infrastructure. These sounds echo the idea that for the mediation of the young African-American community at this point in history the criminal justice system functions not as something that works to keep them safe but rather something that works to keep them in line. The reverberation of this noise across Ice Cube's soundworld points both to the reality of omnipotent and inescapable surveillance and also highlights the fact that these non-narrative sounds are an integral part of hip hop's grappling with those same elements.

Here, the sounds of the city are as much a part of the language of sonic scrutiny and control as the words of the music are. While the sounds themselves may be non-verbal, for those listening to the "surveillance tracks" of late 1980s and early 1990s hip hop, and recognising some semblance of the reality of these soundscapes, these sounds are prominent statements in the music's vocabulary on policing and its relationship with the American criminal justice system. Although this thesis contends that the sounds of the city and those of surveillance are the same because, in the context of contemporary Black life, those two things are innately linked both on and offscreen, these sounds specifically echo coercive forces through the positions and contexts in which they arise across New Black Realist cinema. It is in those instances that these sounds structure the sonic panopticon, a prison built on psychological control, through the film soundscape. Coincidentally, it is the song at the centre of Nielson's study, Ice Cube's "Ghetto Bird", that scores the following scene in the Hughes Brothers' *Menace II Society*.

After its opening prologue and flashback, recounted by the film's central protagonist, Kaydee "Caine" Lawson (Tyrin Turner), *Menace II Society* returns to 1990s Watts, Los Angeles from a police helicopter as it pans across the largely Black neighbourhood. With the additional, augmented sounds of a police radio and

whirring helicopter blades, the scene is scored with the instrumental introduction of "Ghetto Bird", a musical choice that opens it immediately to intertextual connections of surveillance. As the camera scans across the neighbourhood, a scene in which little out of the ordinary is happening, the female voice on the police radio begins to detail the events of a reported crime. Like the overture to Singleton's *Boyz 'N' the Hood*, this cinematic moment establishes the trope of surveillance in the film through narrative and sonic means. From our position in the sky, this mix of sounds and images does two particular things. First, they suggest that while a single crime with two suspects is committed, the whole neighbourhood of Watts is under scrutiny. The helicopter and its accompanying sounds do not pinpoint one particular house or street but instead suspect the entirety of the south Los Angeles community. Secondly, this mix of sound and image becomes the frame by which we are taken into the film's main narrative. While the rest of *Menace II Society* features moments of violence and policing within a relatively traditional film structure, our introduction to this world is tinted by this clip. That tint reflects the very particular type of surveillance that we see and hear in this scene. As we drop into the world of Watts, Los Angeles, we survey the community below. Flying across the whole neighbourhood, the helicopter echoes its omnipotent presence above, demarcating a controlled space below as it surveils an entire group of people. This, it seems, is not so much reactionary surveillance to catch those that committed the crime, but instead a show of complete and unmistakable supervision.

The use of the helicopter in particular is important in constructing this psychological prison. As it circles above, this sound outlines the limits of the space available to the people below in a literal sense. It clearly marks out a restricted territory above those that hear it. The old metaphors for success and betterment are no longer applicable: you cannot reach for the stars; the sky is not the limit. The

helicopter, from its position in the film soundscape, frames the world below as a purposefully regulated space. Never appearing on screen in these films, the added acousmatic nature further empowers it to control the lives of that hip hop community below. While onscreen characters may have control over small spaces, block corners, cars, or recreational halls, the helicopter above reminds them that that liberty is limited. It tells them with each utterance that their freedom is distorted, controlled by those institutions that surround and surveil them. And even when the helicopter does not utter, as we have seen with Ricky's tacit acceptance, the community below is always aware of its potential presence, albeit psychologically. It is a part of everyday life for the characters onscreen, and it is one that they do not question. This is the panoptic machine at work.

The concept of panopticism rose from the shift in punishment practice that was established in modern European prisons between 1760 and 1840. At this time the approach to discipline shifted from the monarchical, public spectacles of torture and execution to the techniques of "soul training", a focus on controlling the very purpose of someone. To do so, prison systems developed a form of spatial and temporal control through the hierarchy of surveillance (Coleman and McCahill, 2011, 16). Conceived by Jeremy Bentham, the panopticon is a circular building in which the cells that line the prison walls can be viewed at will by the control tower that occupies the centre of the room. Unable to interact with those cellmates around them, the prisoners are tasked with completing their daily manual labour. While any inmate can be observed at any particular moment, each is totally unaware if and for how long the observation is occurring, unless explicitly communicated to through what Bentham called "conversation tubes" (Ruth, 2015, 2). Bentham believed that if the prisoners knew they were under scrutiny, but were unsure of its exact parameters, then they would complete their daily tasks from the fear of punishment

if they were to be discovered to be doing wrong. He argued that the panopticon's omnipotent, ambiguous surveillance would see the production of obedient and docile individuals who would eventually begin to restrict and discipline themselves (Lyon, 1994, 62 - 63), transforming the prison system from a process of punishment to one of reform (Ruth, 2015). This new structure, driven by self-discipline, would allow a small collection of guards to monitor a larger group of prisoners, creating a much more efficient and powerful structure of authority and command (Foucault quoted in Coleman and McCahill, 2011, 17).

While he would not see the construction of a panoptic prison in his lifetime, Bentham's ideas would become central, in particular, to twentieth-century society (Lyon, 1994, 62). In his 1975 book, *Discipline and Punish*, Michel Foucault drew on the concept, arguing that panoptic power, and the unverifiable surveillance that it gave rise to, had moved beyond the immediate physical structure that Bentham had initially proffered. This form of surveillance, Foucault suggested, had become operative as a new instrument of social control, pervading institutions such as schools, hospitals, and workplaces (Foucault quoted in Coleman and McCahill, 2011, 17). While Bentham's prison was about the reform of those that had slipped up or misbehaved, in pervading social spaces like these, the panoptic machine of the twentieth-century was about the control of communities and populations at the core of their existence. This panoptic surveillance was still about "whether an individual was behaving as he [or she] should, in accordance with the rule or not", but in its transition, the panoptic machine looked to "normalise" individual bodies, gestures, behaviours, and attitudes through a generation of cultural knowledge outside the prison walls (Foucault quoted in Coleman and McCahill, 2011, 17). Where "old" surveillance involved the "close observation" of an individual, "especially of a suspected person", panopticism, the "new surveillance" of the

modern and postmodern age, targeted whole groups, communities, and populations, looking to instil in them an implicit sense of restriction and control that seemed indisputably organic (Marx referenced in Coleman and McCahill, 2011, 113).

In the US, that process of cultural identification and control has always run along racially specific lines (Foucault quoted in Coleman and McCahill, 2011, 18). In Christian Parenti's research on the history of surveillance in America, he has highlighted the projection of identification as a "definitely and violently" racial structure (referenced in Zimmer, 2015, 12). Referencing slave patrols, the slave pass, and wanted posters, Parenti demonstrates that the lineage of police enforcement and the manufacture of bodies as informationally and visually identifiable is directly traceable to the production and maintenance of a slave economy in North America. The control of groups and communities through surveillance is designed to produce identity along racial lines while at the same time disavowing identity in order to maintain the radicalised subject as object (referenced in Zimmer, 2015, 13). This duality places the surveilled body in a peculiar place, one in which its defining feature is something that it does not control. It is determined by and for its "other", those that surveil and scrutinise it.

The panoptic surveillance of contemporary US society is therefore about controlling groups and communities based on race. It is about the "soul training' of the radicalised subject/object through the all-seeing control of the criminal justice system. In their omnipotent and ambiguous surveillance, these dominant forces intend to shape the hip hop community, to construct it in such a manner that the actions and thoughts of these bodies are docile, obedient, disciplined, "normalised". And when those bodies stray from that self-discipline, this panoptic machine is to have instilled in them a deep-rooted understanding of the futility of

their resistance. To achieve that level of social control outside of a physical structure like Bentham's prison, this system has had to engineer an illusory framework around the community that it intends to surveil, one which they are aware of but unsure of its set parameters. This becomes about the command of tangible space through what is essentially non-physical means, about constructing barriers and walls without actually building them with bricks and mortar. As with Bentham's prison, panopticism is more about the perception of control than it is an actual lack of freedom.

As David Lyon has noted, it is in the recognition of freedom, albeit fictitious, that panopticism achieves self-discipline (1994, 62 - 63). While that can manifest most obviously through visual means, such as the spaces controlled by closed-circuit television (CCTV), something which runs through *Menace II Society* as a subplot, as we have seen in Nielson's research above, it is in the sounds of the criminal justice system that these panoptic barriers are most imposing. While the noise of sirens, police radios, and helicopter blades represent, instantly, the presence of the criminal justice system in the lives of the contemporary African-American youth community on and offscreen, they also create a circumscribed space. As the sounds of helicopters circle above and sirens pass alongside, they offer a chance to mark out the three-dimensional nature of the panoptic machine. These sounds are akin to Bentham's "conversation tubes", reminding those within their "walls" not only of their presence, but of their omnipotent and impenetrable control. The challenge that they sounds put to the traditions of the film soundscape reinforce that three-dimensional space.

As we have seen in the first half of this chapter, the audience depends on dialogue and music for aspects of narrative and character developments, while the film's sound effects breathe life into the space onscreen and little more. Based on

the perceived “language” of these sounds, narrative cinema has traditionally relegated them to the tertiary position within Chion’s “aural triage”. Therefore, in mainstream narrative cinema, sound effects exist at the periphery of the film soundscape. In occupying such a position, these sounds are used to fill out the onscreen world, to mark out an indeterminate space around the voice and images so central to the medium. As the tertiary component in film’s “aural triage”, the film sound effect in mainstream cinema is resigned to the spaces outside of our central focus, and serves to fill out those gaps onscreen, not necessarily nailing down the boundaries of an exact frame but echoing its vague presence. They suggest undefined depth to the film world by reverberating from its margins. While mainstream cinema’s positioning of the sound effect at its outer realms can be reasoned from its supposed lack of a decipherable structure, it can also hint towards the position that these sounds, and the boundaries that they represent, occupy in dominant culture. As the sounds of surveillance reverberate from the margins of the film image, they trace the intangible walls around those young Black bodies onscreen, echoing like “conversation tubes” that remind their “prisoners” of their invasive and omnipotent power.

The change in New Black Realist cinema is subtle but significant and can be read, once again, through remedation. In the sense of immediacy, these sounds of helicopters, sirens, and radios speak precisely of surveillance. We hear the dialogue and machinery of societal control echoing across the film screen. In the sense of hypermediacy, the structuring of these sounds spells out the frame of the media and in that shapes a world onscreen more real than reality itself. While music and dialogue continue to act as the primary lines of communication in these films, the sound effect takes on a more pre-eminent role, not so much evading the shackles of its position as it is rather bringing that position forward. Not only do these sounds

speak a culturally-coded language of surveillance, but, as in hip hop music, they act as important nodes in the film's narrative. By speaking from and of the margins, in a decipherable and prominent language, these sounds encroach upon the film's characters with force and autocratic control. They restrict the space onscreen, pulling those intangible walls ever closer to the film's characters and creating a sense or aura of sonic scrutiny.

The turning point in the life of *Menace II Society*'s Caine comes from a rather solemn scene towards the film's end. Caine catches up with his pal, Sharif (Vonte Sweet), in the classroom of Sharif's father, Mr. Butler (Charles S. Dutton), a teacher chatting to his son after school hours. Up to this point in the film Caine has willingly given into, as he sees it, the nihilistic flow of life on the streets of Los Angeles, engaging in gun-crime, drugs, drinking, robbery, and murder. He is, as he mentions to his own grandfather, unsure if he truly cares if he lives or dies. As he takes a seat in the classroom, Mr. Butler tries to convince Caine that he needs to change his approach to life, arguing that he should follow Sharif out of Los Angeles. To do so would give him the chance at a better existence, one which he shapes for himself. Mr. Butler pulls no punches in making his point. As the conversation rolls on, and Caine seems to struggle with the notion of escaping LA, Mr. Butler booms, "being a black man in America isn't easy. The hunt is on and you're the prey". A catalyst for his decision to leave Watts, Mr. Butler's warning sees Caine finally settle on following his love interest, Ronnie (Jada Pinkett), to Atlanta in the hope of that better future. Caine never makes it that far though, instead losing his life in a drive-by shooting as he and his friends pack Ronnie's car for her journey in the film's final scene. Caine's death comes, however, as no surprise to the film's audience.

As Mr. Butler's message echoes through the almost empty classroom, so too does the siren of a solitary police car in the otherwise empty film soundscape.

Menace II Society leaves no room for any uncertainty here. Although the slogan of the LA police department is "To Serve and Protect", the film soundscape here seems to suggest that the hunt that Mr. Butler speaks of is one perpetrated by that very system. The siren sound crowds the film's narrative epiphany and, more specifically, hangs over Caine's choice to move beyond his current life. As Mr. Butler warns Caine of what lies before him if he chooses to stay, the police siren echoes over their discussion, reminding the characters both of the presence of these dominant infrastructures and also of their place in the ascendency of this structural control. This sound, and the force that it represents, inspects, and monitors these characters, their existence and the decisions that they choose to make. The promotion of this sound, through the space it is given in the film soundscape, sees, or rather hears, the imaginary walls of the panoptic machine close in. At even the thought of escaping his immediate reality, Caine and the film audience are reminded of the control that the American criminal justice system has on him. It shapes the world around him and leaves him and the city of Los Angeles to fend for itself.

In *Boyz 'N' the Hood*, while the crafting of the panoptic machine occurs across a great crescendo, it is once again most apparent in the life of the film's central character, Tre. As Tre and Ricky drive from a local gathering, in which a group of gang members stamp their authority and disperse the crowd by shooting an automatic weapon into the air, the topic of freedom and escaping the nihilistic violence of Los Angeles comes up. Tre tells Ricky that he wants to get away from his current environment, one in which he cannot be safe and has no control: "I'm getting the fuck out of L.A. Fuck this shit. Fuck it. Can't go nowhere without it getting all shot up and shit." As he utters this line the imposing sound and lights of a helicopter pan across the scene, finishing in the solitary flash of a police siren as the two young Black man are profiled, pulled over, and intimidated, with one cop

sticking a gun to Tre's chin and threatening to "blow his head" off. At the exact moment that Tre thinks about his escape, his progression to a better life, the weak structures of his hopes are toppled. He realises that not only are his chances of escape in someone else's hands but even his thoughts of freedom are observed and scrutinised. In this moment the omnipotent surveillance of the panoptic machine speaks out and closes in. Through circumscribing the space around him, the panoptic machine undermines his independence. It is training his soul. After the police leave the two boys go, Tre eventually arrives back to his girlfriend's house. As Brandi opens the door to let him in the sounds of the helicopter echo across the screen again, like a filmic leitmotif. As Brandi slumps to the couch, Tre breaks down. He air-boxes into the empty space around him, claiming that he is "tired of this shit". As he does, an orchestra of helicopters circles above. While, for Tre, this moment is built on a crescendo of emotions, the sounds of the helicopters are unchanged from their utterances previously in the film. They are definitively unemotional in contrast to Tre's outburst.

As Tre swings into the vacant space it is these sounds, and what they represent, that he is fighting. He is attempting to resist the impending and imposing scrutiny and control of the panoptic machine that surrounds him. He tries to use violence to revolt but this dominant structure cannot be dismantled in that way. As he swings wildly the sounds and structures of surveillance show no alteration, no stress. They watch from a distant as Tre struggles with life and the futility with which he attempts to alter that life. Tre is unable to evade or resist these sounds of surveillance, and in that, these sounds restrict his freedom. As the "gaze of the 'incognito ghetto eagle'" follows Tre into his girlfriend's home, closing the cinematic space around him, it reflects the invasive power of the panoptic machine. Here, in this scene, that structure creeps in to the space that is meant to be the safest, most

intimate and private of places. As the characters sit with tears in their eyes, exacerbated at their own lack of authority and command, there seems to be a tacit acknowledgement that no matter what they do, what marks they get in school, or how hard they work at their jobs, they may never escape the unfiltered rule of the panoptic machine.

In the final scene of B*oyz 'N' The Hood*, Tre and Doughboy sit on the front porch of Furious's home. It is the morning after Doughboy has gotten his revenge on those who murdered his brother, Ricky. As the boys sit on the porch, still in shock from the events of yesterday, they contemplate the immense difficulties of the lives behind and ahead of them. Doughboy tells Tre that he has been watching the news as they report of atrocities and issues from across the globe. He struggles with the fact that mainstream media evades speaking about the problems in the world in which he lives, of the lives of those young Black men and women who reside in the city of Los Angeles. He is lost, unsure of what is truly going on. But, that, it seems, is the point. Staring in to the distance Doughboy says that "either they don't know, don't show, or don't care about what's going on in the hood". Although the "they" that Doughboy refers to is ambiguous, it arguably reflects anyone and everyone outside of those Black neighbourhoods across Los Angeles that have featured in these films. It is here, in this context, the filmic other: those that the American criminal justice system serves and protects rather than surveils and scrutinises.

While helicopters and police cars appear visually at intermittent points throughout the narratives of films like *Menace II Society* or *Boyz 'N' the Hood*, their sounds are always present in the lives of the young Black community onscreen. They 'don't show' because they choose not to show. These forces command the mediated space and identities of the film's protagonists through their evasive,

omnipotent presence. Here, the film soundscape, or more specifically the sound effect on film, offers New Black Realist cinema the greatest tool for exploring the panoptic machine. As Aaron Copland has suggested, sound in cinema allows us to represent “the unseen implication of a situation” (quoted in Prendergast, 1992, 216). It gives us the space to represent the subconscious, the element of a scene that the film’s dialogue or image cannot truly depict. In their promotion of the language of surveillance, sirens, police radios, gunshots and whirring helicopter blades, the New Black Realist film soundscape creates a platform in which sound controls the bodies of those characters onscreen by controlling their subconscious, their soul, through its crafting of the panoptic machine. In that sense, while the violence that is perpetrated throughout these films is not always actioned by these forces it is, the films and soundscapes seem to suggest, dictated by their shaping of the world onscreen. As Furious points out as he preaches to Tre, Ricky, and a group of locals on the block corner under a Compton billboard, “they want us to kill ourselves”.

Conclusion

As outlined throughout this thesis, opera is one of the standout influences in the composition and scholarly discussions of the narrative film soundscape. The other major guiding force, as noted in the theoretical framework, has been the novel, literature, and literary studies. In her field-defining work (1989), Claudia Gorbman uses literary models to explore the cinematic soundscape. Largely based on Gérard Genette’s system of narratology, in which “different narrative voices are characterised as operating at various levels of literary diegesis”, a system developed in order to explain the narrative devices encountered in the novel, Gorbman defines music as inside or outside the film’s text, its dialogue and images (Winters, 2010, 225). And, although opera is an artform that includes music and

movement and is performed live onstage, it also largely perpetuates literary structures. While Richard Wagner's central thesis of Gesamtkunstwerk is about the assertion that the "forms and elements of a text should all be mutually reinforcing" (Flinn 1992, 34), the opera that influenced the shaping of the film soundscape itself obsesses over the divinely-inspired central figure of the author and text as monument, as "work". Likewise, those scholars that have mapped the history of the soundtrack in narrative cinema and shaped the field of film music research, Gorbman (1989), Caryl Flinn (1992), and Kathryn Kalinak (1992), have done so through the aesthetics of opera.

In his chapter, "The Material Heterogeneity of Recorded Sound", from his 1992 edited collection on sound in cinema, Rick Altman notes this textual approach to the cinematic soundscape and urges his reader to move beyond it. He argues that in approaching cinema "as text", "we borrowed terminology and methodology from previously established textual domains" (Altman 1992, 15, 16). This has meant drawing systematically on a musical model to discuss cinematic sound, one that is concerned with properties such as "loudness, pitch, and timbre" (Ibid). This definition is based on the idea that "all film sounds have the nature of musical notes, that they are single phenomena, produced instantaneously, emitted from a point source, and perceived in an immediate and direct fashion" (Ibid). Although Altman admits that such an approach "explains many aspects of film sound, such as contrasts or confluences in volume, frequency, and tone", he stresses that this approach works only if it is possible to notate all film sounds according to musical criteria, something which is, of course, not possible at all (Ibid). Musical terminology, he contends, "pays little attention to the details of any particular performance, concentrating instead on common factors joining all performances of the same score" (Ibid). Altman proffers an alternative though, an approach to the soundscape

not as text, but as event. He argues that “every sound initiates an event” and “every hearing concretises the story of that event”, or rather “it concretises a particular story among the many that could be told about the event” (Altman, 1992, 23). A recording of a sound contains not so much the sound event as a “record of a particular hearing, a specific version of the story of the sound event” (Altman, 1992, 24). He also suggests that in offering itself up to be heard, “every sound event loses its autonomy, surrendering the power and meaning of its own structure to the various contexts in which it might be heard, to the varying narratives that it might construct” (Altman, 1992, 19).

This switch, from audiovisual media as text to audiovisual media as event, is a necessary move in the focus on New Black Realism, particularly in regards to the role of the sound effect in these films, for two reasons. The first is, as Altman contends, that these sounds and our understanding of them are not served by talking about them in a solely “textual” manner. They do not exist nor can they be mapped along musical criteria. They do not project characteristics of loudness, pitch, or timbre in the same way that the scores of John Williams or even the music of Public Enemy do. Not to acknowledge this is to undermine the importance of these sounds in the construction of identity through space in New Black Realist cinema. These sounds condition their audience in a process of “assimilating identifications” where, by speaking through the culturally-coded language of gangsta rap, they “track perceivers toward a rigid, tightly controlled position” (Kassabian, 2001, 141, 138). In the same way that the neo-classical film score uses flourishing strings to allow the audience to experience love and heartbreak onscreen, high brass to denote identities of heroic lead characters, rumbling percussion to suggest terror, or woodwind to outline feelings of idyllic peace or loneliness, these films use sound effects to explore the world from the

point of view of the hip hop community onscreen. This position is one in which the post-industrial city encroaches upon the lives of the youth community in Black America while dominant infrastructures literally shape that city around them, as the American criminal justice system scrutinises their every move as a measure of societal surveillance and cultural control.

The second reason is that in thinking about the New Black Realist film as event rather than text, we adjust for the role of the film viewer in this expression. While the intertextual nature of the previously composed music in these films is an obvious challenge to the traditionally passive cinematic audience, the otherwise non-narrative sound effects of gunshots, sirens, whirring helicopter blades, and police radios equally call for moments of sonic interrogation because of their role in cinema. These sounds abound across the cinematic soundscape of New Black Realism, sounding out in the cinematic overture, as filmic leitmotif, and even in challenge to film's central audio track, the voice. In foregrounding the sounds that are supposedly an "expression of the crude, the mechanical/repetitive, the unsophisticated", these films ask their audience to ask question, therefore troubling the untroublesome space of the cinema theatre (Sergi, 2006; Kulezic-Wilson, 2009). In asking those questions, the New Black Realist audience finds that these sounds speak of a New Black Realist identity. The identity that these sounds utter emerges, therefore, "at the point of reception" (Cook, 2013, 66). It is constituted by a hip hop mentality, a New Black Realist mentality, an understanding of cinema not as text but as event. Through the balance of immediacy and hypermediacy, these sounds call in to recognition the frame of the cinematic soundscape and, in that, these sounds create meaning not so much in themselves as "cultural artefacts" but rather in that they afford "constructions of meaning in response to them" (Ibid). It is, again,

through the process of remediation that these soundscapes utter from and of hip hop.

Chapter Five

New Black Realism and the Cinematic Voice

Poetic Justice: The Hip Hop Voice Disrupts the Film Soundscape, The Disrupted Voice in Cinema

> The screen is becoming the mask of the voice that speaks from its center, with a clear and strong timbre, as if amplified by the screen.
>
> Chion, 1999, 167

Radio Raheem's (Bill Nunn) Love/Hate speech from *Do The Right Thing* is one of the standout moments of contemporary Black cinema. As Mookie (Spike Lee) is on his way to deliver pizzas across the neighbourhood for Sal's Famous, he bumps into his friend Radio Raheem in the street. Turning down his boombox, Raheem stops to greet to Mookie. Agreeing to catch up later at the pizzeria, Mookie notices Raheem's new jewellery: a set of knuckle duster-like rings covering the entirety of both hands. Across his right hand, the word "Love"; across his left hand, the word "Hate". "That's the hype", exclaims Mookie, holding out both of his friend's hands. "Newest, latest", replies Raheem. As Raheem begins to the tell the "story of Right Hand, Left Hand", Mookie steps out of shot. The camera swivels to a medium close-up. Against a Brownstone backdrop Radio Raheem "raps" straight down camera, scored by the diegetic sounds of Public Enemy's "Fight the Power" ringing from his boombox. Through his fists, Raheem tells the "story of life", stopping only as the left hand, Hate, is "KO'd by 'Love'". As the story finishes, the camera peels back to the left and Mookie returns into shot. "There it is, Love and Hate", Mookie says. The two shake hands, give their regards, and part ways. Things do not turn out so positively in their later meeting at Sal's Famous. There, as we have seen, Raheem, his boombox, and Public Enemy return to challenge the hegemony of the pizzeria's hall of fame. In this story of "Right Hand, Left Hand", Spike Lee creates a

moment of film in which the relationship between cinema and hip hop seems most consonant. In Raheem's speech, as any director of narrative film may, Lee foregrounds the voice. He prioritises it over all other aspects of the cinematic medium. And yet, across these films, the New Black Realist soundscape uses the voice, dialogue, and language as a space of distortion to echo aspects of contemporary Black American life onscreen.

The voice has, since the coming of sound cinema, always been a space for self-expression in narrative film. In 1927 Warner Brothers released *The Jazz Singer*. The film was enormously successful not just commercially but in its permanent reshaping of the cinematic text. Although its soundscape consisted mainly of continuous, recorded silent-film musical accompaniment, like Warner Brothers's release from the previous year, *Don Juan* (1926), it also broke out into synchronised sound in the manner of the Vitaphone and Movietone shorts or "varieties". Across four separate sequences, audiences could hear the main character, Jack Robin (Al Jolson), speaking and performing musical numbers (Gorbman, 1987, 46). The *Jazz Singer* marked a brand new relationship between "spectator and film", as, through its contribution towards "the constitution of a diegetic space", narrative cinema used the voice to project reality for the first time (Ibid). The voice had been burdened with reality well before it poured from Jolson's mouth in 1927. Because of the "sound shorts" of the early 1920s, where the majority of these films introduced the voice in recitations, songs, non-narrative performances, and interviews, the voice came to narrative film as a "supplement of reality", offering a "documentary value" (Ibid). Early cinema's focus on the voice in this way echoed the reality of human listening, something that theorist Michel Chion contends is "naturally vococentrist", suggesting that if the voice is part of a soundscape, the "ear is

inevitably carried toward it, picking it out, and structuring the perception of the whole around it" (1999, 5, 6).

The voice hierarchises those sounds that surround it. For Chion, and for the cinema audience, it is not a case of "all the sounds including the human voice", but rather, "there are voices, and then everything else" (Chion, 1999, 5). Chion, paraphrasing Christiane Sacco, argues that in this sense, the presence of the "human voice structures the sonic space that contains it" (Ibid). Film viewers search for meaning in film and tend to find it, or at the very least think that they will most likely find it, in this channel. Cinema offers the voice to the "spectator on a silver platter" and in that, everything is mobilised implicitly to favour the voice and the text that it carries (Ibid). The same can be said of hip hop culture and music. Although the release of "Rapper's Delight" in 1979 marked the initial tear in hip hop's form as an "integrated series of live community based practices," practices which included breakdancing, graffiti, deejaying and emceeing, it was Run-DMC that "consolidated and commodified" hip hop as aural form, one specifically centred on the voices of the group's rappers: Run (Joseph Simmons) and DMC (Daryl McDaniels) (Dimitriadis, 1996, 179, 185). Hip hop's tumble into late twentieth-century culture as a technologically mediated object brought with it an understanding of the music as a cultural expression focused on the voice. Just as in film, the voice in hip hop is also a symbol of reality, but that reality is culturally-specific. It is not just about giving *life* to the film image, but giving *a life* to it. For artists such as Eric B. & Rakim, Big Daddy Kane, and Boogie Down Productions, the voice symbolised a sonic space for individual utterance and agency, a chance to articulate the realities of their contemporary world and to have those articulations heard (Dimitriadis, 1996, 185).

Greg Dimitriadis argues that in its reification of "vocal content alone" hip hop as recorded musical object excised the body and physical space from its

expression and with that, it would seem, the ability for true rebellion (Dimitriadis, 1996, 191). He uses the work of Susan McClary to make this point, specifically focusing on her argument that “the musical power of the disenfranchised youth [and] the underclass ethnic minorities ... more often reside in their ability to articulate different ways of constructing the body” (1994, 34). In contrast, in "The Grain of the Voice”, Roland Barthes defines the vocal “grain” as the “body in the voice as it sings, the hand as it writes, the limb as it performs”. He contends that this relationship determines the hearing of the alliance between the voice and “the body of the man or woman singing or playing” (Barthes, 1977, 188). Barthes proffers that the very production of the voice brings with it that which created it, the physical body. He suggests an inherent connection between the two that means to engage with the voice we must also engage with the materiality of the body. For Barthes, the voice has the audible presence of the physical form in which it was constructed contained within its very utterance (Ibid).

As a post-literate orality, that materiality is even more pertinent to the voice in hip hop. As Tricia Rose points out, hip hop music “simultaneously makes technology oral and technologises orality”. It revises oral traditions and presents them in a technologically sophisticated context (Rose, 1994, 86). Rather than being ‘organic’, ‘pure', or ‘untouched’, the voice in hip hop echoes in and through the technological structures that surround it, a point especially true because of the prevalence of sampling in the music. The materiality of this voice is innately tied to its mediality. It presents the grain of the voice loudest by celebrating its frames. As in the intertextually rich music in *New Jack City*, the cut in *Juice*, or the prominent use of sound effects in *Boyz ’N’ the Hood*, the voice in hip hop cinema is disruptive and disrupted. It is composed so as to present the immediacy of its reality through the hypermediacy of its frame. Both are innately important to the voice in hip hop,

and subsequently in New Black Realist cinema. It does not use technology to amplify its point, nor is technology a barrier for it to get over. It is an innate part of the expression of hip hop and that has shaped the way the voice in hip hop utters. From rough vocal textures through to samples of non-organic materials in the vocal channel, the voice in New Black Realism is noisy both in the message it presents and the way that that message is presented.

From this vantage point, this chapter will explore the voice in New Black Realism in two ways: the hip hop voice as it disrupts the film text and the disrupted voice as it speaks in cinema. The first half of this chapter explores the ways in which hip hop's post-literate understanding of orality has reshaped the possibilities of the voice in New Black Realist cinema, and with it, the cinematic text itself. Through aspects of cypher-like dialogue, linguistic variation, and a challenge to the cinematic diegesis, this section analyses the shaping of language and delivery of the voice in these films as much as the actual words spoken. It contends that the voice in New Black Realist cinema is a remediative force, just like the sounds or music of the previous chapters. Much like in the *Jazz Singer* at the other end of the twentieth-century, the duality of the hip hop voice in New Black Realism marks a change in the film text, one in which the projection of reality exists in the highlighting of the film form, not its erasure. While the voice in mainstream narrative cinema is read as the foremost component of the cinematic text, standing upon an unshakeable pedestal, this thesis listens to the voice as the loudest sound in the performance of cinema, a performance that blurs the boundaries between spectator and film. Drawing on Chion, as quoted above, it is in this performance that the screen becomes the mask of the voice as it speaks from its centre, with its own clear and unshakeable timbre. To explore this shift in cinematic text, this chapter focuses on case studies drawn from Lee's *Do The Right Thing* (1989), Leslie Harris's *Just*

Another Girl on the I.R.T. (1992), John Singleton's *Poetic Justice* (1993), and, to begin, the Hughes Brothers's *Menace II Society* (1993).

In compliment, the second half of this chapter builds on arguments established in the previous chapter on the role of sound effects in hip hop and cinema. It contests that while in mainstream narrative cinema the sounds of police sirens and gunshots usually occupy the peripheral levels of the film soundtrack, where they help simply to qualify the presence of the onscreen cinematic space, in New Black Realism these sounds have at times leaked into the central vocal track (Sergi, 2006). In their transition, these sound effects have became consequential to the cinematic narrative, announcing and verifying the exchange between the bodies of those that utter them and the environment in which those same bodies exist onscreen (Connor, 2000, 6). The vocalisation of these sound effects highlights the invasive role that they play in the mediated expression of hip hop culture. Although in the previous chapter, the literal use of sounds of sirens, gunshots, and whirring helicopter blades shapes the post-industrial city, a space that looks to surveil and control the hip hop community, the vocalising of these otherwise fringe elements of the cinematic soundtrack reflects attempts to engage and resist crime and the contemporary American criminal justice system in New Black Realist cinema. This latter section analyses how and why such "vulgar" sound effects have become fundamental to the vocal expressions of hip hop culture onscreen and map some of the developed narratives that these sounds have contributed to in this cinema. It will explore the space for resistance that, as it defines it, "the vulgar voice" has crafted on the New Black Realist soundscape, focusing specifically on Spike Lee's 1995 crime drama *Clockers,* as the supposed final iteration in this collection of cinema (Massood, 2003, 189).

5.1 The Hip Hop Voice Disrupts the Film Soundscape

Menace II Diegesis

"I seen lots of people killed before, but I ain't never done it myself. I mean, I never had a reason to; but when they killed my cousin, I knew I was gonna kill them". In *Menace II Society*, Kaydee 'Caine' Lawson's (Tyrin Turner) intradiegetic voiceover opens the scene in which he, A-Wax (MC Eiht), and Kevin 'O-Dog' Anderson (Larenz Tate) peruse the city streets in A-Wax's car as they search for those that carjacked and murdered Caine's cousin, Harold. As they do, Al Green's "Love and Happiness", a song from his 1972 album, *I'm Still in Love with You*, plays over the car radio. A relatively straight-forward verse-chorus structure, the song features bass guitar, brass, electric guitar, and keyboard, along with the vocals of Al Green and a trio of female backing singers. As the title may betray, the song is about how someone can be driven to do things for the people they love and how that can shape both of their lives in various ways. Although the main body is a simple and rhythmically determined performance, the opening to the piece is a free, laid-back introduction of the core material of the work.

In this section, the music features just the vocal musings of Green, riffing on the song's central theme, and the electric guitar, which outlines the song's main chords through loose and gentle strumming. Playing from the car's speakers, this section of the piece scores both Caine's voiceover and O-Dog's bragging to A-Wax about the CCTV footage he has been showing around to his friends of him murdering some local shopkeepers, an act that Caine was present for but did not take part in. In this exchange between the two characters in the front seat, although he suggests that he likes what O-Dog has done, almost as if the tape is some sort of artistic work itself, A-Wax tells O-Dog that he should have come to him first. He suggests that if he did, he could have helped O-Dog to do "it" much better, while

gesturing to his own handgun. Both revel in this murderous violence, with O-Dog even claiming that he will soon surpass Steven Seagel in becoming a “big-ass movie star”. Caine eventually pipes up from the back seat. Not only has he not taken part in this celebration of the macabre but he does not feel his compatriot should be doing so either.

As Caine chips in, telling O-Dog “to stop showing the fucking tape”, Green’s “Love and Happiness” begins to play. Through a count in and guitar pick-up, the song drops in to its rhythmically structured core section, where the bass guitar, keyboard, brass, and additional vocals are added. It is in this moment that the hyperreality of film is challenged by the hypermediality of hip hop. The voice in cinema is prioritised and projected so as to arrive at the theatre in the clearest and cleanest of terms. In the voyeurism of mainstream cinema, for the audience to engage with the story onscreen, it is imperative that they meet with the media without needing to acknowledge the presence of that frame. Just as with the inaudible film music of John Williams, the voice, the story, and its audience are thought to be a “fantasmatic” body, held together “by the illusion of organic unity, a perceptual cohesion within the film text” (Doane referened in Rogers, 2013, 154). As a remediative force, hip hop basks in mediality, depending on it to make a truly “real” statement. Hip hop cinema wants its audience to acknowledge the frame as part of the expression. This causes a problem with traditional approaches to cinematic diegesis.

As outlined in the theoretical framework of this thesis, the role of sound inside and outside a film’s diegesis has been one of the most prevalent conversations in the field of film music scholarship. Diegesis, in this sense, refers to “the world of the narrative, the screen world or world of the film” (Buhler and Neumeyer, 2016, 57). Gorbman’s (1987) diegesis is based on a narratology of the

novel, in which “different narrative voices are characterised as operating at various levels of literary diegesis” (Winters, 2010, 225). A simple binary has been developed from this. In that, “diegetic sound refers to everything that can be heard by characters in the film” while “nondiegetic sound cannot be heard by the characters” at all (Buhler and Neumeyer, 2016, 57). As Ben Winters explains, music in this system can either occur within the story, in the space in which the characters onscreen can discuss or engage with it, or it exists outside the film world as an "intrusive layer of narration” (Winters, 2010, 227). While that binary has been extended with, amongst other terms, the meta-diegetic and ambi-diegetic (Stilwell, 2007; Holbrook, 2005), and challenged through the likes of Winters’s intradiegetic and extradiegetic in recent years (2010), the idea of sound and music inside and outside the film world has still largely persisted.

This dissection of the sounds of the cinematic world is driven, in part, by the proposition of realism, the idea that sound and music in film must act in the same way that sound and music do in the real world. We do not tend to have, for instance, a nineteenth-century, eighty-piece romantic orchestra or full swing band accompanying the most dramatic or emotive elements of our lives, a fact exploited for comic effect in Mel Brooks’ 1974 satirical Western, *Blazing Saddles*, where the character of Sheriff Bart (Cleavon Little) is scored diegetically in the desert by jazz pianist Count Basie and his orchestra. Gorbman outlines this in her reference of Étienne Souriau, who also uses the term diegesis to describe one level of “filmic reality” through which the spectator interacts with film (Winters, 2010, 226). It is Hans Eisler and Theodor Adorno’s *Composing for the Films*, a book published forty years before Gorbman’s work, in 1947, that sets out this comprehension of sound and music in film. In this work it is suggested that narrative cinema “seeks to depict reality” (Winters, 2010, 228). Eisler and Adorno’s use of “seek” is noteworthy here

because, reality is of course a relative term. Robyn Stilwell has suggested that the realism of narrative cinema is putative, not so much reality as lived experience but a projection of a reality that we can recognise as our own, a reality as based more on theatre (2007, 188). Film, in this sense, is a hyperreality, more real than real itself (Baudrillard, 1994, 81). Early sound cinema looked to adjust for this hyperrealism through plots that focused on backstage musicals and nightclub-centred gangster films that allowed the "quasi-realistic insertion of music", like *Showboat* (1951), *Singin' in The Rain* (1952), and *Guys and Dolls* (1955) (Stilwell, 2007, 188). In these films, musical performances onscreen are often qualified by the presence of some musical body ready to perform, whether that is the piano accompaniment to Julie LaVerne's (Ava Gardner) "Bill" in *Showboat* or the use of the pit orchestra in the "reveal" scene of *Singin' in the Rain*.

Although some of these hang-ups have dissipated in mainstream narrative cinema in recent decades, a point apparent again in the neo-classical soundtracks of the *Star Wars* series in which John Williams's full-orchestral scores echo across the cavernous void of space, the idea of qualifying the role of diegetic music, particularly with regards to musical performances, has remained largely the same. In narrative cinema, as a character looks to actively engage with music as a moment for expression onscreen, a delineated space is handed over to that diegetic performance. Just as in the *Jazz Singer,* in which we hear Al Jolson's voice reach out from the screen, when music and the voice connect diegetically in narrative cinema they do so in a prominent and qualified fashion. As a hyperreality, when the voice performs inside the diegesis of narrative cinema, it attempts to do so while evading the shackles of the cinematic frame so as to draw the viewer into the film world.

In Caine's rebuke of O-Dog's celebration of violence in *Menace II Society*, and in the conversation that continues between the three passengers in the car, a speech-effusive style echoes across the screen, helping to lock the dialogue of the characters in with the music and lyrics of Al Green's "Love and Happiness" and, with that, disrupting the film's diegesis. In *Rap Music and the Poetics of Identity*, Adam Krims explores, amongst other things, what he calls a "speech-effusive" style of hip hop music, a rhythmic style of emceeing or "flow" that hears the rapper perform in a speech-like fashion in which the music spills over "the rhythmic boundaries of the meter, the couplet, and, for that mater, of duple and quadruple groupings in general" (2000, 50). Through many of those that helped to pioneer such an approach, like Chuck D, KRS-One, and Ice Cube, this vocal style is connected heavily to what Krims terms "reality rap", a genre of hip hop that "undertakes the project of realism, in the classical sense, which in this content would amount to an epistemological/ontological project to map the realities of (usually black) inner-city life", echoing topics in, what Robin D.G. Kelley calls, "ghettocentricity" (referenced in Krims 2000, 75, 70, 78). Krims points out that this reality is very much a "reality", a stress on the "mediation and (above all) the historicity of reality rap's particular means of representation" (2000, 70). At the core of reality rap, and particularly in the case of its loudest subgenre, 'gangsta rap', is the "hip hop sublime" - in which "massive, virtually immobile and incompatible layers of sound are selectively and dramatically brought into conflict with each other" - a component that Krims claims adds to the music's "hardness" (2000, 54, 73). Using mainly one and two syllable words, A-Wax, Caine, and O-Dog, trade, in the loosest sense, 'bars'. They talk in short bursts and through rhythmically punctuated phrases. Although no specific time signature is initially on offer, when

the main section of “Love and Happiness” kicks in, this dialogue pushes and pulls across a relatively strict four beat bar, rarely keeping to the frame of the music.

In the first sense, the dialogue in this scene echoes the reality rap, and specifically gangsta rap, that Krims mentions in his work. Furthered by the centrality of the car and the city streets of Los Angeles (Krims, 2000, 78), this discussion reflects, intertextually, a genre of music innately tied to violence, criminality, and the difficulties of life in modern America as young Black men. By speaking in this way, those characters evoke predetermined understandings of gangsta rap, driven by the music and accompanying music videos, in the same way as any use of music or musical artists may do across the New Black Realist genre.[13] Even without the dialogue of violence, the phrasing of the voices onscreen here connect to a mediated reality of violence.

In the second sense, this speech-effusive style establishes a space for remediation, one that furthers meaning within this scene. As noted, A-Wax, Caine, and O-Dog speak in a rhythmically distinctive fashion, one that echoes a form of rapping heard in reality rap. In shaping the language of the scene in this fashion, the Hughes’ set out a fascinating relationship between the diegetic music and diegetic voices, one that pulls at the hyperrealism so central to narrative cinema. Through the aesthetics of hip hop, these rhythmic voices establish a closer connection with Al Green’s “Love and Happiness”. There is always a hierarchical structure between the various sounds in a film, one in which the voice normally takes centre-stage. That hierarchical frame is still relevant here. However, the speech-effusive voices echo as if almost rapping, an approach to dialogue in which the ear hears, inevitably, the music in the scene not as a competing or supportive sound but as an aspect of the expression. Just as Green’s track is settling into the song’s core

[13] A-Wax is played by *Compton’s Most Wanted* member and gangsta rapper, MC Eiht (Aaron Tyler), a musical and visually intertextual option for the audience to connect with.

rhythmic section, Caine reminds O-Dog that he has already warned him to stop passing around the CCTV footage of their last murder. This reminder is highly punctuated. Caine does not simply inform O-Dog, he tells him, emphatically. He leans on certain words. He emphasises his reminder. "*Stop show*ing the *fuck*ing *tape*". He accents "stop", "show", "fuck", and "tape". The first three words act as a three beat vocal pick up, a count in that matches the crescendo felt in Green's track. They set out the rap-like nature of the statement, connecting the dialogue to the diegetic music. They drag the listener with them towards the word "tape". The final beat of Caine's statement lands on the first beat of the bar in Green's rhythmically structured section and with that the film audience find themselves in a filmic performance. This performance is, again, unconcealed, not in the sense of the highly referenced music in other case studies but in the fact that the voice brings this music to the fore of the film by way of its utterance. Through the speech-effusive voices of the characters, as part of a post-literate orality, the sounds from the car radio act both as a qualifier of onscreen space, as other supplemental diegetic music so often does, and as a part of the meaning of the narrative onscreen.

The highlighting of that mediation is furthered by the distance between the content of the young men's discussion and that of Green's music. In "Love and Happiness", the sultry tones of Green's voice, the laid-back sounds of his early 1970s soul song, and the lyrics of this piece, concerned with the positive nature of feelings of love and happiness, offer conflicting sonic layers to the discussion of violence between the three characters in the car. Mirroring Krims's hip hop sublime, this ironic distance deepens the shocking nature of that conversation. While Caine's willingness to seek murderous revenge is in itself a difficult line to accept, O-Dog's unhinged hyper-masculine, nihilistic rage is even further from the sounds of Green's

music. This is amplified by the line in the chorus, “love will make you do right, make you do wrong”. For Green, this is about those little decisions we make around love, like coming home early or staying out too late; in the context of this scene, those decisions revolve around taking brutal revenge. This elicits a connection to similar scenes in Singleton’s *Boyz ’N’ the Hood* where Tre and Doughboy search the streets of Los Angeles for retribution from those who murdered Ricky. In that film, unlike in *Menace II Society*, Tre gets out of the car and chooses a different path before the act of revenge is carried out.

The disruption of film realism is crucial to conveying meaning here. Rather than the diegetic performances of mainstream narrative cinema, in which film characters express themselves through spaces of staged reality, this is a performance of film itself. The immediacy of the elements onscreen, the car radio and conversation between the three characters, establishes an authentic scenario, one where the film audience seems to listen in, voyeuristically, on what is happening onscreen, creating a sense that this is a natural and everyday scenario. That in itself adds to the shocking nature of this argument between the characters. At the same time, and in recognising the role of the speech-effusive style of dialogue, this moment of authenticity is also a moment of hypermediacy. The correlation of the music and voice highlights the frame of cinema’s form and, with that, the un-real nature of the authentic conversation taking place. The natural-ness of this conversation is shaped by the mediality of Black youth culture. This is as much about the “reality” of hip hop culture, and all that that means, as it is the reality of Black life in contemporary America.

In other words, the natural-ness of this conversation is questioned. Is it authentic because it projects a reflection of real life, or does it seem authentic because this is how the hip hop generation has been presented in music, television,

and film. As Krims suggests of reality rap, and as with those case studies throughout this thesis, this scene undertakes the projection of realism, as an epistemological/ontological project to map the realities of ghettocentricity, and "realism", as the mediation and historicity of hip hop culture's representation. Where the Hughes Brothers disrupt cinema's hyperrealism by challenging cinematic diegesis, Lee's *Do The Right Thing* does it by in breaking the fourth wall and addressing the theatre audience directly through a round of "the dozens".

Stepping in to the Cypher in Do the Right Thing

"The Dozens", Elijah Wald posits, can be "tricky, aggressive, offensive, clever, brutal, funny, inventive, stupid, violent, misogynistic, psychologically intricate, deliberately misleading - or all of that at once, wrapped in a single rhyming couplet" (2012, 4). Turning up in the context of African-American entertainment as early as 1910, the dozens is a traditional type of performance poetry, a part of the linguistic code of Black America (Wald, 2012, 21, 11, 4). Although the dozens was played by African-American communities across the US, it has become associated in recent years with street culture (Wald, 2012, 4). "Street language", as Wald contends, is "slippery, shifting in subtle and complicated ways". It expresses its most important sentiments "not in the words but in the intonation, style, or context, and its taxonomy can change from week to week" (2012, 6). It is in this context that the dozens can be understand as a major influence on the vocal utterances of hip hop music (Ramsey Jr., 2003, 165). The term itself, and accompanying concept, are also slippery, both in the sense of the complexity of the form and its changes over time, meaning clear definitions have been difficult to tie down (Wald, 2012, 15). Numerous scholars and research has attempted to do so, but, as Wald has pointed out, each and every authoritative statement on the form has "tended to provoke equally authoritative and contradictory critiques" (2012, 5). This is in no small part

due to the fact that the dozens have attracted less scholarly attention than other forms of African-American arts because it has been seen, historically, as a “violent nastiness” that can lead to physical altercations. And yet, like blues, jazz, and African-American preaching, the dozens is a technically sophisticated performance art that mixes “immediacy and inspiration with a deep affection for tradition” (Wald, 2012, 10, 9).

In the simplest sense, the dozens is a competitive and recreational exchange of verbal insults that takes place in a “cypher”, a circle of participants and onlookers that close around those performing (Chang, 2007, 60). It is “an elusive blend of verses, jibs, and banter that floats like a butterfly and stings like a bee” (Wald, 2012, 4). For Wald, there are clear distinctions between “playing the dozens” and “performing the dozens” - the first being a “duel between two combatants” and “the latter a performance by one person, two people, or a group, entertaining each other by repeating funny lines" (2012, 103). Wald also points out that while the equally complicated “signifying” applies to “insults which are hurled directly at the person”, the dozens applies when the insults are “hurled at your opponent’s family, especially the mother” (Wald, 2012, 6). In Lee’s *Do the Right Thing*, the director uses the dozens as a space to question and challenge the racial differences that contribute to “the hottest day of the summer”. He does so by forcing the audience to become a part of a mediated cypher. As various racially diverse characters throw insults at specific onscreen communities, they do so facing down the lens, a camera angle that brings the audience into the “circle of participants and onlookers” of these vocal utterances and, subsequently, racial tensions.

Spike Lee has always been bold with camera angles in his films and those angels have always contributed to his film’s performances. Mekado Murphy points out that nearly every Spike Lee film includes heightened visual flourishes that make

the audience “take notice while moving the narrative forward”, flourishes that the director himself calls “Spikeisms”. Whether it is the double-dolly shot of *Malcolm X* (1992), or the pan of young Black faces in *BlacKkKlansman* (2018), Lee’s directorial style has always depended upon standout camera angles and shots that foreground characters, locations, or objects in unique ways (Murphy, 2018). His idiosyncratic framing of the worlds onscreen was already apparent in *Do the Right Thing*. From the dutch camera angles littered throughout, in which a camera is positioned lower than the object or person it focuses on and tilted to one side, to the already mentioned close up of Radio Raheem, Lee has never been overtly concerned with the hyperrealism of the narrative cinematic form, particularly in his filmic representations of Black American culture. This is true of both sound and image in the insults montage in *Do the Right Thing*.

The scene is triggered by a discussion between Mookie (Spike Lee) and Pino (John Turturro). In Sal’s Famous, Mookie calls Pino, Sal’s eldest son, aside to try talk to him about his racist language. He asks who are Pino's favourite basketball, movie, and film stars, positing the answers for him: Magic Johnson, Eddie Murphy, and Prince. While Pino fights back about his favourite rockstar, arguing that it is in fact Bruce Springsteen, Mookie feels that his argument is validated. “Pino, deep down inside think you wish you were Black?”, Mookie asks Pino, nodding as if to allow the young Italian pizzeria worker to admit his affinity for Black culture. It is at this point that the tone of the conversation seems to change. Pino begins to undermine the Black Civil Rights Movement and the stature of those leading it, figures like Reverend Al Sharpton, Jesse Jackson, and Minister Louis Farrakhan. Just as he has pushed Pino buttons, Pino’s belittling of key Black figures of the time upsets Mookie. He retaliates. “Pino, fuck you, fuck your fucking pizza, and fuck Frank Sinatra”, to which Pino replies, “Yeah? Well fuck you too and fuck Michael

Jackson". Rather than finish or continue this particular exchange, Lee's film transitions to the montage of separate characters tossing insults down the camera lens. In this, the camera zooms in to individual close-ups on five racially diverse characters. The camera frames the head and shoulders of each character from a low angle as each speaks directly down the lens.

Across the montage, Mookie rattles off racist stereotypes of Italian Americans; Pino talks of Black Americans; Stevie (Louis Antonio Ramos), Asian Americans; Officer Long (Rick Aiello), Latino Americans; and Sonny (Steve Park), Jewish Americans. Each of the characters utter their insults in the same fashion. Drawing on generalised, and often mediated, racist stereotypes, the perpetrator pinpoints the insults through the first-person. In each "verse", the characters speaking refers to "you", boiling down massive, prejudiced historical determinations of race to a singular point, the figure at the other end of the camera. The flow of racist hatred is interrupted only by Mister Señor Love Daddy (Samuel L. Jackson), the local radio deejay whose booth looks out onto the streets of Bedford-Stuyvesant and who purveys the happenings of the film almost like an omnipotent voiceover. Interestingly, in this montage, the characters seem to be speaking beyond their own diegesis. Not restricted by the camera frame, they break beyond the fourth wall and talk directly into the film theatre. The camera angle and use of "you" first establishes this. Both direct the scene towards those watching, rather than those within the film world. It feels in this moment not like we are voyeuristically peering in on Lee's Brooklyn neighbourhood, but that that world is reaching out to us, speaking directly to those that are watching the film. It is the vocal gymnastics of each character, echoing the dozens, that is the other indicator of this.

Mookie is first of the five characters to speak. Attacking Italian Americans, his verse is emblematic of those that follow: “you dago, wop, guinea, garlic breath, pizza slinging, spaghetti bending, Vic Damone, Perry Como, Luciano Pavarotti, Sole Mio, non-singing motherfucker”. His insults are a mix of colloquial stereotypes and mediated constructions of race. Arms folded, Mookie’s rhythmic language echoes the dozens, and specifically the playing of the dozens. His vocal demeanour is combative, as if in a duel. Although his language is more than banter, and his tone seems far from recreational, his utterance is a mixture of those terms that Wald uses to define the dozens (2012). Mookie’s verse is aggressive, offensive, brutal, inventive, psychologically intricate, and deliberately misleading. It is hurled not just at an opponent’s mother or family, but their entire culture and community. The insults of the five characters onscreen feel like they are leading to a physical altercation, the “violent nastiness” that Wald references, and it feels that it is only in the call of Mister Señor Love Daddy for everyone to “cool that shit out” that the characters do not go further than just words. After all, the insults thrown around in this montage are an incendiary dilution of race and culture. The intonation and phrasing of these insults is violent too. In Mookie’s verse, the short, rhythmic bursts have rough edges and feel like forceful jabs to those listening. As this utterance echoes out into the theatre, with the characters looking straight down the camera and addressing “you”, the untroublesome space of the narrative theatre audience is once again troubled as the film viewers are drawn into Lee’s mediated cypher (Kulezic-Wilson, 2009).

The direct address is important to this, but it is the dozens-like structuring of the dialogue in which the audience are challenged. This draws us in to the “circle of participants and onlookers that close around those performing”. It is not just a case of Mookie, Pino, or any of the others addressing the audience and the race or

community of that audience. Through these vocal stylings those at the other end of the camera become a part of the performance of the film. It is almost as if the theatre lights have been brought up in some Brechtian performance and those in the auditorium are being called on to engage with those onstage. The scene's visual speak to the audience, but its dialogue encourages the audience to speak back, to participate in playing the dozens. It is a multi-directional fourth wall break driven by the film's sounds and images that asks the audience to become involved, albeit psychologically. Just before this montage, Mookie questions Pino's determination of Black-ness. Pino stumbles through an answer heavily dependent upon the mediatisation of Black culture. In the montage, Lee asks the same thing of his audience. Baiting them to react by using equally stereotypical definitions, Lee asks his audience to participate and in that participation to consider their own determinations of American-ness as they are rattled through onscreen. Mister Señor Love Daddy's eventual interruption is therefore a jolt not to characters onscreen but to the audience leaning in. The dozens-like language of this scene establishes a participatory space and with that the theatre audience become active members of the same "violent nastiness" that Wald references. Through the immediacy of the dialogue, the actual words spoken, and hypermediacy of the disruption of the film frame through the intonation and phrasing of this montage, Lee once again shifts the definition of the film audience and cinematic reception.

Leslie Harris's *Just Another Girl on the I.R.T.* (1992), a film which seems to sit, aesthetically, somewhere between New Black Realism and the Hip Hop Musicals of the 1980s, also regularly breaks the fourth wall. The film's lead character is Chantel Mitchell (Ariyan A. Johnson), a seventeen year old Black American girl growing up in Brooklyn, New York. Harris's film follows Chantel as she goes to school, works a part-time job, and helps to look after her family. Chantel's main aim is to get to

college so that she can become a doctor and move out of her poor neighbourhood in search of a happier life. Although the direct address by the characters of Lee's *Do The Right Thing* can be read as an engagement of the cinematic audience, Chantel's breaking of the fourth wall in Harris's *Just Another Girl on the I.R.T.* is about self-control and empowerment. Throughout the film Chantel turns to the camera, directly addressing what is going on onscreen. In her first fourth wall break she explains that she is a "Brooklyn girl. Lots of folks think Brooklyn girl's are tough. I guess that's true. I let nobody mess with me, and I do what I want, when I want". This sets the tone for her character for the rest of Harris's film. Chantel's ability to almost stop the film's linear movement so as to address the camera within the diegesis reflects the sort of control that she spends the entirety of the film trying to replicate in the narrative itself. While Chantel attempts to control the film soundscape, and consequently her fate, through a direct-address in Harris's *Just Another Girl on the I.R.T.*, in John Singleton's *Poetic Justice* (1993), we see a much more successful expression of female freedom and control in the hyper-masculine New Black Realist cinema, through the filmic voiceover.

Narration, Gender, and the Poetics of Identity

In his native French, Michel Chion explains, the word for voiceover is "voix-off", a term that designates any acousmatic or bodiless voice in a film that tells stories, provides commentary, or evokes the past. In this sense, he contends, bodily can mean "placed outside a body temporarily, detached from a body that is no longer seen, [or] set into orbit in the peripheral acousmatic field" (1999, 49). Simply, the voiceover is understood as a person we cannot see who talks directly to us and the image track shows the story that they are telling (Buhler and Neumeyer, 2016, 13). It has featured most prominently in documentary film, where, from serving to provide both context for the images and filling the audience in on pertinent

information that is either not present or not obvious to the image, it has gathered a documentary-like quality (Buhler and Neumeyer, 2016, 67). This is not meant necessarily as a projection of realism, but rather that the voiceover is a special kind of acousmêtre, characterised by "a sense of complete, omniscient knowledge" (Coulthard, 2012, 91). It is this idea of hearing a person that we cannot see that gives the cinematic voiceover, scholars suggest, a considerable power and importance in film. Pascal Bonitzer explores onscreen and offscreen sound, arguing that while synchronised sound seems to "fix the meaning of every voice, belittle it by placing a check on the voice's power", asynchronised sound retains "a certain power over the image" so that "instead of looking, it is necessary to think". The "power of the voiceover", Bonitzer contends, exists in its "twinning its 'absolute other'", that is its "transcendent position, where it 'is presumed to know', with an address to someone 'who will not speak", namely the spectator (referenced in Neumeyer, 2014, 401). It is a voice that knows all and remembers all (Chion, 1999, 49). The power of the voiceover is an even more important aspect of narrative cinema when we consider that, along with serving to direct viewer attention and letting the audience know how they are supposed to understand the film's image, it can act as a plot device and establish character (Buhler and Neumeyer, 2016, 67, 68).

Amongst the films in this research, a number of them feature a narrative voiceover, including the Hughes's *Menace II Society* (1993), John Singleton's *Poetic Justice* (1993), and Hype Williams's *Belly* (1998). Each of these voices are of onscreen characters, figures from the film's diegetic world. By giving these onscreen figures the control of the cinematic voiceover, New Black Realism has created spaces in which film characters question and determine the identity of the world onscreen from the inside. In two of these films, *Menace II Society* and *Belly,* the

voiceover comes from the film's lead male characters, Kaydee 'Caine' Lawson (Tyrin Turner) and Sincere (Nas). Although both ponder and attempt to move on from the chaotic violence that dictates their lives, both are firmly rooted in the nihilistic hyper-masculine violence that rings throughout the genre of New Black Realism. Singleton's film centres a female characters in this world and give her control of the cinematic voiceover. In his film, it is his female lead, Justice (Janet Jackson), who, through her poetry, uses the space of the voiceover to critique the hypermasculine violence onscreen.

While there is a list of performers throughout the history of hip hop that have given voice to women and female identities in hip hop culture, performers that range from MC Lyte and Roxanne Shanté to Missy Elliot, Lauryn Hill, Nicky Minaj, and Noname, hip hop music has continually struggled with representations of gender and sexuality. Not only is this apparent in the limited space afforded to female artists in hip hop but in the way that many male artists have talked about women and female characters in their songs, often relegating these figures in their music to positions of checked passivity. This is particularly true of the music's most prominent genres, such as gangsta rap and G-funk. This lack of female voices and spaces has carried over to New Black Realist cinema. Female characters in these films act simply as stand-ins, backgrounds figures defined by their relationship to the film's main male protagonist. They are grandmothers, mothers, and sisters or they are sexual conquests. In each case they are supplementary pawns in the film's primary narrative. This is not the case in Singleton's *Poetic Justice.*

Set in south central Los Angeles, *Poetic Justice* focuses on the life of Justice, a young hairdresser, and her burgeoning relationship with Lucky (Tupac Shakur), a postal worker and aspiring emcee. Initially meeting each other on Lucky's postal route, and then later on a postal delivery road trip through mutual friends, the pair

establish a connection throughout the film and, eventually, a relationship by the film's close. As the film's title betrays, Justice is the lead character onscreen. She is also the leading aspect of the cinematic soundtrack, acting as a voiceover on several separate occasions throughout the film. As well as a hairdresser, Justice is a poet. Throughout the film we see and hear her writing and reciting her poetry, material originally penned by famed American civil rights activist, writer, and poet, Maya Angelou. Although Justice spends the entire film resisting others as they seek to define her female identity, both in the case of her male suitors and other female characters who question her feminine-ness, it is in these moments of voiceover that her resistance and control of those definitions are, literally and figuratively, loudest.

Each of Justice's voiceovers occurs at points across the film in which female identities are outlined or shaped. Of these instances, the majority are connected to Justice specifically, while the others reverberate from events surrounding two other female characters that Justice has an impact on. We hear Justice's voice in this latter case when Lucky takes his daughter, Keisha (Shannon Johnson), from the dangers of her mother's home, where drugs and prostitution seem to be rampant, and when Justice consoles her friend Iesha (Regina King) after Iesha's boyfriend, Chicago (Joe Terry), is physically violent with her. Of the other moments of voiceover, each of these utterances seem to occur in the space in-between the diegetic and non-diegetic, in the meta-diegetic. This, according to Robyn Stilwell, is sound and music in film that acts as a "kind of represented subjectivity". It is sound that is clearly situated in a character who forms a particularly strong point of identification for the audience (Stilwell, 2007, 196). From those first cinematic moments after the violent murder of her partner, Markell (Q-Tip), to the post 'bitch' argument of her car journey with Lucky and from her beach consideration of Lucky as a potential suitor to the scene just moments after her first kiss with him, each of

these voiceover scenes come in support of her growth as a lead female character onscreen. In the ‘bitch' argument for instance, a scene in which Lucky attempts to demean her female identity by calling her names such as “bitch”, “hoe”, and even “feminist”, Justice fights back. She argues that Lucky has no idea what he is talking about, that she is a “Black woman” that “deserves respect”. After the group resolves the aftermath of the fight, and fills up the tank at a petrol station, Justice and Lucky are back in the postal van’s front carriage. In this environment Justice not only writes her poetry, unmoved by Lucky’s presence, but she writes and recites poetry about love meta-diegetically. She ponders it for herself. “Love is a juice with many tastes”, she contends. She is unmoved by Lucky’s belittling of her identity. She thinks for herself. She is not defined by the male character onscreen or by love itself. She defines love or, at the very least, attempts to define it as she understands it.

Where her freedom is most powerful is in the film’s final voiceover. In this scene Justice recites ‘Phenomenal Woman”, a piece from Maya Angelou’s third collection of poetry, originally released in 1978. By this point in the film, Justice and Lucky have warmed to each other, shared a kiss, gone their separate ways after an outburst from Lucky, and returned back to the lives they had before this ill-fated trip. As we watch Justice in her bedroom, lying on her bed, we see Lucky struggling to set up the music equipment passed on to him after the murder of his cousin. Justice speaks out over the images, again in the meta-diegetic. Angelou’s poem is not a musing on love or identity as we have heard throughout the rest of the film; it is an assured understanding of the self in resistance to the femininity and female identity pushed on to Justice throughout the rest of the film. She rebukes the definition of femininity that flows from other characters onscreen in the first verse, “Pretty women wonder where my secret lies. I’m not cute or built to suit a fashion model’s

size, But when I start to tell them, They think I'm telling lies"; she talks about her engagements with men on her own terms and the fact that she is not defined by them in paragraphs two and three, "They try so much, But they can't touch, My inner mystery"; finally, she closes out the poem by explaining that her identity is self-assured, determined by no other, and complete in and of itself, "Now you understand, Just why my head's not bowed. I don't shout or jump about, Or have to talk real loud". Although what Justice says here is important, how she delivers these lines is as disruptive to the traditional female identities that exist in this film. Within the diegesis of the film, Justice often uses the abusive and violent language directed at her and her friends, throwing it back at those who wield it. As Imani Perry explains, this is a common technique for female hip hop artists to eke out their own spaces in the culture and music. Hip hop is, after all, a "masculinist form with masculinist aesthetics" (Perry, 2004, 156, 159). Those women that use these hyper-masculine ideals do not simply occupy male spaces, they use their presence to "call into question the masculine designation of those spaces and offer a feminist critique by using the power vested in these spaces" (Ibid). By occupying "styles of presentation and archetypal roles coded as male in the world of hip hop or in the larger world of black popular culture", female hip hop artists are able to "receive respect as artists" (Perry, 2004, 156).

It is this approach that Harris takes in the shaping of Chantel's voiceover, and therefore the shaping of her own female identity in *Just Another Girl on the I.R.T.*. In her meta-diegetic voiceovers in Singleton's film, however, Justice completely avoids this language. She disrupts those rooted determinations of women in the Black contemporary space by relying on language not shaped in hip hop culture. While Lucky practices his lyrics and listens to hip hop throughout the film, and is therefore bound by its hyper-masculinity, in the meta-diegetic voiceover Justice carves out a

contrary space by her use of contrary language. While some have used 'masculine language' to challenge for 'female spaces', others have introduced "certain elements of black female culture that traditionally lend evidence to toughness, [and] in particular, the attitude" (Perry, 2004, 167). In her poetry, Justice exudes attitude. Although she does not use "double Dutch rhymes, clap songs, [or] cheers", Justice uses language that is assertive and independent. She legitimises her existence in this world by controlling that space as a female character defined in opposition to the masculine figures of hip hop culture (Ibid). She shapes her own construction of "badness" by not coopting hip hop's hyper-masculine "badman", but by echoing her own (Perry, 2004, 156, 167). Doing so through the cinematic voiceover amplifies that voice and its power. As a special kind of acousmêtre, the voiceover has a certain power over the image. In giving Justice the control of that space through the film soundscape, as Harris does for Chantel in *Just Another Girl on the I.R.T.*, Singleton gives Justice the opportunity to create a space for her identity in an onscreen world shaped by hip hop, a mediated existence in which female voices are given restricted freedoms. Her control and power is therefore not just through what she says, the immediacy of her expressions, but the way that that is shaped and shapes the narrative world in which she exists, the hypermediacy of her utterance, as she determines the film through its soundscape.

5.2 The Disrupted Voice in Hip Hop Cinema

New Black Realism and The Vulgar Voice

> Woop Woop,
> That's the sound of da police.
> Woop Woop,
> That's the sound of the beast.
>
> Parker, 1993

KRS-One's single "Sound of Da Police" is an interesting case study in hip hop. Having already had commercial and critical success with his group, Boogie Down Productions, the song was the second release from the emcee's first solo album, *Return of the Boom Bap*, an album that reached number 37 on the Billboard 200 chart. Released in 1993, "Sound of Da Police" arrived after the watershed of Public Enemy's *It Takes a Nation of Millions to Hold Us Back* and N.W.A.'s *Straight Outta Compton*, albums that, as we have already seen, marked a change in hip hop in which the music became a conduit for political discourse. Commercially successful hip hop music was given the space to question the racial injustices of contemporary American life, focusing specifically on the American criminal justice system (Nielson, 2010, 1257 - 1258). From here on, hip hop's biggest acts, like Ice-T, LL Cool J, Tupac, Main Source, and Brand Nubian, dealt openly with issues of surveillance, police brutality, and racial profiling in their music and accompanying videos. These tropes were explored both in the lyrics and in the musical soundscapes over which these artists rapped, where sounds of helicopters, police radios, sirens, and gunshots accompanied the music's central vocal line.

In "Sound of Da Police" those sounds exist as part of the voice in the music, as part of KRS-One's vocal utterance. Throughout the song's verses, KRS-One, like those emcee's mentioned above, decries the actions of the police and the criminal justice system towards contemporary Black youth culture and connects them to the larger historical trajectory of racism and the experiences of the Black community in American. At one point in the song he morphs the word "overseer", a term associated with the "supervision" of slaves on cotton plantations, into the word officer, as in police officer:

Overseer
Overseer
Overseer
Overseer

Officer, Officer, Officer, Officer!
Yeah, officer from overseer
You need a little clarity?
Check the similarity!

In the song's chorus, KRS-One's lyrics are less linguistically flamboyant. Here, through his exclamations of "woop woop," KRS-One vocalises the sound effect of police sirens, bringing them to the fore of the music's narrative. Echoing what Adam Krims has defined as a "percussion-effusive" voice, in which an emcee uses their mouth as a percussion instrument (2000, 50), KRS-One consumes and regurgitates these sounds. For KRS-One, this vocalisation is a way to not just experience the "sounds of the police" as a passive subject but a process in which he can confront and control what they represent. As he raps at the end of the first verse, "this has got to cease, cos we be getting hyped to the sound of da police".

Those same voices, and their attempts to control determining features of the post-industrial city on Black America, ring throughout New Black Realist cinema. In these films, through the voice, the sound effects that have traditionally occupied the edges of the film screen, where they help simply to qualify the presence of the onscreen cinematic space (Sergi, 2006), have leaked into the central vocal track. In this transition, these sounds have become consequential to the characters and cinematic narrative, announcing and verifying the exchange between the bodies of those that utter them and the environment in which those same bodies exist onscreen (Connor, 2000, 6). The vocalisation of these sound effects highlights the invasive role that they play in the mediated expression of hip hop culture and the struggle of those on and offscreen to deal with what they represent. In the immediacy of the sounds sampled by the voice, as in the police siren in KRS-One's track, and the hypermediacy of the clash between the non-organic, non-musical sound and the frame of the human voice, this is a remediative utterance. This

section of the chapter explores the role and purpose of this disrupted voice through the narrative cinematic soundscape of Spike Lee's 1995 crime drama, *Clockers*.

The last chapter explored the role of sound effects in New Black Realist cinema. As black commercial independent films, with "access to commercial film industry resources and, most notably, production and marketing budgets, distribution, and theatrical exhibition", New Black Realism looked to explore "the existent reality of urban life in America" (Watkins, 1998, 98; Diawara, 1993, 24 - 25). In looking to explore such subject matter, these films focused on the postindustrial American city in terms of both the film's sound and image. This meant that the soundscapes of New Black Realist cinema needed to be composed with rich, seemingly diegetic, and prominent (even if heard off-screen) sound effects so as to echo the sonic reality of these spaces. For New Black Realism, the function of the film sound effect was to echo and explore the culturally-centered existence that the film presented onscreen, and sonic constructions like those that open *Boyz 'N' The Hood* allowed them to do so. As noted, the sound effect in mainstream narrative cinema is understood to provide "ambience, mood, scope and size". In other words, it helps to breathe life into the two-dimensional nature of film, allowing it to create a greater sense of realism without speaking about a specific reality. It does not offer, however, "information, characterisation and plot development" (Sergi, 2006). We can gather no specifics from the sound effect in narrative cinema because it cannot offer the theatre audience any specifics. While vital in the overall composition of the film and its soundscape, the film sound effect is relegated to the tertiary position in Michel Chion's hierarchical understanding of the narrative film soundtrack, after dialogue and music (Rogers, 2006).

As noted, Sergi contends that the comprehension of music, dialogue, and sound effects on the film soundtrack is built on the "language" that each

component uses, and that language's ability to communicate alongside the filmic image (Sergi, 2006). In film, while dialogue employs "verbal communication" and music uses "both verbal and non-verbal", but "crucially has a recognised 'grammar' of its own in terms of structure and phrasing", sound effects would appear to be a purely "non-verbal form of communication" (Ibid). He argues that in its lack of a recognised structure the film sound effect must "be content with the kind of sensual activities traditionally linked to non-verbal forms of communication", activities that include giving a sense of "location, scope, and detail" (Ibid). It is its unclear language that means that the film audience cannot gather anything more from these sounds than the immediacy of their presence on the film screen (Ibid). This supposed inability to engage the viewer on a intellectual level results in Sergi's somewhat damning determination of the film sound effect, that it is an "expression of the crude, the mechanical/repetitive, the unsophisticated, that is, as an expression of vulgarity" (Ibid).

And yet, hip hop has promoted such sounds in its expressions, giving them a language that is often fundamental to the narrative drive of the utterance, in whatever medium it exists. Again, as already outlined, Amanda Sewell's typology of sampling makes room for "surface samples", sounds that "decorate or punctuate a track's groove without necessarily participating in the track's primary loop". These sounds, Sewell proffers, may not "contribute to the rhythmic or harmonic propulsion of the track, but they are valuable samples for rhetorical emphasis, historical context, and formal articulation" (2014, 37). Sewell's work determines the innate connection and value of these surface samples to the construction of narrative meaning in hip hop music. While these sounds do not reside in the music's central vocal track or constitute sonically integral elements in the music's beat *per se*, they are intrinsic to the creation of the music and its meaning, and the hip hop

generation not only engage with these components but look to them in aesthetic, narrational, and connotational terms. Therefore, in the consumption and promotion of these sounds through the voice, film's central communicative channel, hip hop contradicts the intellectual with the sensual, the verbal with the non-verbal, and the sophisticated with the vulgar. In those moments, the voice in New Black Realism is a vulgar utterance, a "vulgar voice". And, it this vulgar voice in New Black Realist cinema that announces and verifies the exchange between the young Black male body and the environment in which that body exists, the postindustrial American city.

As the supposed final iteration in New Black Realism (as Paula Massood would have it), Spike Lee's *Clockers* offers one of the "loudest" examples of the experiential, vulgar voice (2003, 189). An adaption of Richard Price's 1992 novel of the same name, the film follows Ronald "Strike" Dunham (Mekhi Phifer) in his attempts to progress as a low-level drug dealer in charge of a small crew of "clockers", those who sell drugs "around the clock" (Taubin in Hillier, 2001, 52). Strike is a street marshal for Rodney Little (Delroy Lindo) and his right-hand, Errol Barnes (Thomas Jefferson Byrd). While the local drug trade is Rodney's, he is never close enough to be pinned to any particular crimes or convictions. After the murder of another of Rodney's more prominent dealers, Strike's brother, Victor Dunham (Isaiah Washington), turns himself into the local authorities claiming to have shot the man in self-defence. While Detective Larry Mazilli (John Turturro) thinks that this is an open-and-shut case, Detective Rocco Klein (Harvey Keitel) thinks otherwise, suggesting that Victor's impeccably clean record means that something else is surely going on. Like both Rodney and the neighbourhood police officer, André the Giant (Keith David), Det. Klein suspects and pursues Victor's drug dealing brother. Strike, everyone agrees, is the reason for the murder of his fellow clocker and the

fall of Rodney Little. As the film closes out, so too does Strike's time as a clocker; he must make a decision, flee his current existence and lifestyle, or fight and die on the streets. Although those who have discussed the film tend to focus on its "film noir" connotations (Massood, 2003; Flory, 2008), *Clockers* presents an expert construction in the genre of New Black Realism.

Like most of these ghetto-centric films, the soundtrack of *Clockers* is an eclectic mix of hip hop music, African-American popular musics (soul and R&B), and scored cues, composed in this instance by Terence Blanchard (Guerrero, 2012, 182). Alongside the music, there is also a developed construction of linguistic variations, again reflecting a recurring trope from the soundscapes of New Black Realism (Thomas, 1994). Through the diverse, culturally informed structuring of language, the film shows the interactions of social groups both within themselves and with each other. Throughout *Clockers* the vocal expression of the vulgar sound effect litters almost all voices in the film's soundscape, from the White and Italian-American police investigating the murder and connected drug dealers to the drug dealers themselves, all young African-Americans members of the hip hop generation. These vocal utterances can even be heard in the *Clockers* soundtrack, in the chorus of "Blast of the Iron" where members of the group the Rebelz of Authority vocalise gunshots as "Blup". In this film, the vocalising of these "noises", even in those bodies that are not young, Black, and male, relates to the violent reality of New York City at the end of the twentieth-century for the community onscreen. These sound effects - which specifically echo gunshots, car noises, explosions, and trains - can be heard in the human voice as "pop", "boom", "beep", "bam", "gat", and "choo choo". The concurrent existence of these biological expressions of non-organic sounds in all channels of the voice on film alters the

position, and therefore function and purpose, of the mainstream film sound effect, crashing it into and rupturing the voice in film and structuring the “vulgar voice”.

The cinematic sound effect is a traditionally unseen, offscreen sound that helps to determine the presence of a three-dimensional cinematic space. As sounds that are largely diegetic, unspecified, and offscreen, the acousmatic nature of the sound effect is innate. Unlike the voice or music, we cannot pinpoint these sounds and can never truly determine their origin, only gather an inference from their unattached relationship with the images and narrative that we are following onscreen. As in the work of John Singleton and the Hughes Brothers in the last chapter, it is in the encroachment of those sounds on the film’s voice where they begin to gain more power over the film’s images and characters. It is in their de-acousmatisation, their journey towards the foreground of cinema, that the film sound effect gains, potentially, more importance.

During their investigation of the film’s murder, Detective Rocco Klein interviews Victor Dunham, the man who claims to have committed the crime. Interspersed with images that follow Strike, the pair walk through the events of the night in question as Klein searches for the details and motive of Victor’s actions. During a heated moment in the conversation, in which Victor seems to be losing patience with Klein’s line of questioning, the pair both vocalise gunshots. “Why do we keep going through this man, look I told you already”, Victor asks, eventually defining the act in one simple statement: “Bam, then I ran”. “You mean bam, bam, bam, bam”, replies Klein, highlighting that it was four bullets that were fired at the now deceased Darryl Adams (Steve White). In scenes like this, *Clockers* (re)situates the sound effects in the voice and those voices echo them repeatedly throughout their sound world. When Det. Rocco Klein questions Victor Dunham, and both men articulate varying numbers of the word “bam” to highlight the gunshots that Victor

supposedly fired at the deceased drug dealer, they do not just allow the characters to talk about the narrative but remind each of the immediacy of those elements within their existence. This is particularly true for Victor who, although he utters the term just once, has Det. Klein repeat “Bam” four times in the interrogation room with him. The move from offscreen to onscreen, in a specified existence, changes the influence of the film sound effect both physically and metaphorically. More than just shrink the world onscreen, as they did in *Boyz ’N’ the Hood* for instance, the vocalising of these sounds stands them in the face of the characters onscreen and subsequently in the faces of the film’s audience.

As the space for the primary line of communication for a film’s audience, a character’s mouth and face are often a point of focus. To put these sounds in that space is to solidify them as part of the literal language of the mediation of Black culture onscreen, a new, powerful role for the film sound effect. They, and what they represent, are unavoidable through the vulgar voice, a point apparent in the narrative arc of Darryl Adams who utters the sounds of a gunshot vocally and eventually becomes a murder victim. The vocalised sound effect reminds Victor of the proximity and inescapable nature of the world in which he lives, as even when he is inside the police station those sounds and that actuality follows him in. The police do not protect him from that life - they can’t; they simply perpetuate that existence for Victor. These sounds are a part of his filmic reality. The vocalising of the film sound effect not only constructs the cinematic world of New Black Realism but reminds its characters and the viewing audience of the hip hop generation’s restricted opportunities and movement. Victor, exasperated, explains to Det. Klein that he does not see his kids. He works two jobs just so that he can try and get his family out of the ghetto and now, as he has engaged with the nihilistic violence of the world he so desperately wants to escape, those factors have taken control.

Both characters sample the sound effects tied to the post-industrial American city that surrounds them. They take the sounds of gunshots from a previous source and reorganise that material so as to create new sounds and meaning. In that sampling those noises vocally, these characters promote their importance in this film, making them constituent elements of the film's onscreen narrative.

As mentioned, Tricia Rose contends that technology has not been straightforwardly adopted by hip hop culture and its music. It has instead been "significantly revised in ways that are keeping with long standing black cultural priorities, particularly regarding approaches to sound organisation", the formation, composition, and dissemination of hip hop's "oral articulations are heavily informed" by the technology and technological processes of sampling (1994, 64, 63). In slightly simpler terms, as a post-literate orality, hip hop "makes technology oral and technologies orality" (Rose 1994, 86). This assessment of hip hop manifests most obviously in the vulgar voice of Lee's *Clockers*.

Throughout the film, that voice samples from the sound world around it. Whether it is police talking to Strike about his hobbies, the soon-to-be deceased clocker Daryl Adams trying to intimidate Strike, or Det. Klein's interrogations of Victor or Tyrone, vocalised as "Choo Choo", "Boom", or "Bam", these (re)structured voices take a sound from a previous source and remix it. In the context of cinema this sampling is a disruptive process, creating a disrupted voice. As Holly Rogers reminds us, Chion has "famously argued that film listing is vococentric" (2006). It is the primary form of communication in film and has been afforded the relevant to account for this. These films are no different. Throughout each case study in this chapter, and equally in Lee's *Clockers*, the voice is privileged. But, in narrative cinema, that privilege is a separated and distanced structure. In Chion's aural triage, the hierarchical system of voice, music, and sound effect is interchangeable as, at

different times different features of a film soundtrack take the lead, but their game of musical chairs is a refined and polite affair with individual aspects taking the lead at separate points. For instance, the music in the neo-classical film score tends to be prioritised only in moments of "spectacle", where onscreen images are best served by music rather than the voice or sound effects (Kalinak, 1992, 197). In those instances, music asks the voice to move aside politely or takes over when the voice hands off to it. And yet the voice in *Clockers* is the uncompromising mix of two of the cinematic soundscape's most divergent components. The voice and film sound effect speak in and through each other. The sound effect echoes in the voice, and the voice echoes through the sound effect and all that that represents. This voice is vulgar here because it is framed through the filmic sound effect and, unlike conventional sound design, these vocalised sound effects qualify not just the reality of the onscreen action and image but explicitly tie together the young Black male body and the post-industrial city onscreen.

In these films, the biological uttering of the non-organic and mechanical constructs of the hip hop generation's existence in the post-industrial city qualifies the presence of the physical body in that space and the culturally-specific place in which that body exists. To acknowledge the sample-like nature of this voice is not enough to fully pick apart what is being said here. The powerful experientiality of this utterance depends on its remediation. It is through the immediacy of the sounds vocalised and the hypermediacy of the frames disrupted that the vulgar voice echoes reality through its mediation. In mainstream cinema, as it reflects the values and concerns of dominant culture, the voice is uncompromised, free from those sounds or those imperfections that suggest societal difficulties or issues. Cinema is vococentric and the sound effect is the film soundtrack's tertiary component. If the voice is the primary mode of communication, explaining who and what we are, then

the voice's ability to utter free from such defects is an echo of the freedom of self. The vulgar voice is not that. In *Clockers*, the vulgar voice ruptures that frame, pushing and pulling between the inner and most outer edges of the film soundtrack simultaneously. This is an artistic vibration that foregrounds the vocalised sounds and, consequently, what they represent - tropes of modernity, crime, the criminal justice system, migration, economic difficulty, or social limits. Just like those cuts in Dickerson's *Juice*, the vulgar voice utilises these vocalisations as an attempt to control the uncontrollable by looking to make room for accidents and rupture inside the system of expression itself (Snead, 1984, 67), creating a voice that can bring to the fore a repressed "truth-content" (quoted in Thompson and Biddle, 2013, 4 - 5). Sampled as it is, the vulgar voice speaks clearly of the young Black male body in the postindustrial city through its noisy disruption.

While those Black male characters that voice these sounds get trapped in the cycle of hyper-masculine violence that has permeated throughout the genre of New Black Realism, those that escape this language seem to be able to avoid the impending nature of the postindustrial American city. This is true of the film's lead character, Strike, and of the young boy that looks to follow in his footsteps, Tyrone "Shorty" Jeeter (Peewee Love). As the narrative of *Clockers* unfolds, the forces surrounding Strike begin to close in on him. Not happy with the culpability of Victor, Klein begins to put pressure on Strike, believing that it is he who committed this murder. To do so, Klein targets Rodney (Strike's boss) and Strike's credentials amongst his fellow clockers. Klein and Mizelli arrest Rodney and infer that Strike has set him up because of the pressure he is under. Klein suggests the same directly to Strike in front of his crew. While in lockup, Rodney bribes a guard and gets a call to his support, Errol Barnes. He tells Barnes of what has happened and

who he believes is to blame. Rodney asks, “you know what you got to do, right?”, to which Barnes replies “It’s done”.

As Barnes waits on the curbside outside Strike’s apartment to retaliate for Rodney, Strike sees him and hides. He is met instead by Tyrone, wearing headphones and riding his bike, who is carrying the gun he has been trying to return to Strike. Having already been accosted by Barnes once, and warned away from him by Strike, Tyrone stops in front of Barnes and shoots him twice into the chest. Barnes hits the ground and Tyrone rides off. When we cut to the police station, we find the local beat cop André begging Klein to go easy on Tyrone, arguing that it is all a mistake from an otherwise well-behaved and high-achieving young man. Klein decides to help. In the interview room, with André and Tyrone’s mother Iris Jeeter (Regina Taylor) present, Klein explains to Tyrone how to retell the story once the tape recorder is on, suggesting that it was all done in panic and self-defence. As Det. Klein talks to Tyrone, we see an illusionary version of the scene in which the young boy kills Barnes, created from both the images of the events that actually occurred and the story that Klein offers to Tyrone to save him from jail.

In this scene the vulgar voice occurs on two levels: in the centered vocal and image of Klein as he “(re)tells” the story for Tyrone, and in the imagined peripheral discussions of Strike’s crew of clockers. In the latter, we hear the vulgar voice as a moment of meta-diegesis in which the young African-American drug dealers point guns at each other, pretending to shoot and reload as they voice the sound effects as “pwooch,” “blup blup”, and “ch-ch.” This is coupled with Klein’s dialogue, which speaks of the threat and menace that this world brings to Tyrone and his mother. Initially, this allows us to hear the way in which Tyrone subconsciously constructs the sonic boundaries of his own reality. When he imagines this world, he places these vocalised sound effects in the film’s soundscape and in so doing allows them,

like Sewell's surface samples, to sonically punctuate and augment the sentiments and ideas of the film's central dialogue at that moment. In understanding that the vulgar voice is a biological manifestation of non-organic sounds and components specific to a cultural existence, the subconscious sounding of Tyrone's world through these surface samples offers developed identification processes for the film's characters. When we hear these sounds, and can specifically tie them to Tyrone through the meta-diegesis, we can elevate our understanding of him as a character through a sound world that is culturally and socially specific. The physical space echoes within these vulgar voices and ties the character of Tyrone specifically to the world in which he lives and hears these sounds. More than this, this moment of meta-diegesis allows us to see Tyrone's shaping of the young Black male identity that he so desperately wanted to be a part of. In their vocalisation, the sound effects not only close around those bodies and Tyrone, but echo through them, again suggesting their inescapability. For Tyrone, the sound of gunshots defined his world and the bodies of the young Black men that surround him. And yet, through Klein's sounding of the same voice, there is a chance that Tyrone escapes this fate.

When Det. Klein finishes the sequence by vocalising the two gunshots fired, he voices them as "boom boom." The difference here is that Tyrone is not creating or imagining these sounds, but rather Det. Klein is actually speaking them. The situating of the vulgar voice in the central expression of film dialogue is a move of considerable note. Now, the fundamental identifying track of the film expressly vocalises the culturally-specific sound effect of the post-industrial city, and with it, draws the audience's attention towards that element of the film's soundscape. What's interesting in this case study is that if the vocalising of these sounds is how Tyrone imagines those young gang members speaking, then Klein's use of the

vulgar voice is an attempt to speak the language that Klein feels Tyrone will engage with.

In her article on dialogue in Lee's 1988 film *School Daze*, Margaret Thomas contends that linguistic variation is a simple but important aspect of some of these films. She argues that every language includes "resources allowing for variation along many dimensions", meaning that how a particular message is encoded in any expression is "potentially influenced by the speakers' age, gender, ethnicity, etc, and location in time and space, as well as by many of the particular social contexts of the utterance", among them the relationship between the speaker and the hearer, the setting, the mood, the topic, and the purpose of the conversation (1994, 911). Det. Klein's vocalising of these sounds, in the context of both the interviews mentioned here, is an attempt at what Howard Giles & Peter F. Powesland may call an "accommodation model". Klein, converging towards the supposed speech style of the interlocutor opposite him, appears to try and speak to these characters through a language that he feels they will understand (Giles and Powesland referenced in Thomas, 1994, 921). Through a form loaded with the cultural connections and socially constructed sonic tropes that speak on both a conscious and subconscious level, Klein's vulgar voice is an utterance of a hyper-masculine, nihilistic reality. It echoes the forceful, unrelenting, and uncompromising nature of the postindustrial city. In both of his uses of this voice, Klein turns to this language as a tool to warn off those on the edge of speaking it as freely as those in Tyrone's imagination. To engage in that language, it appears, is to become a part of that world.

At parts in *Clockers*, both Tyrone and Strike vocalise the sound effects of gunshots and, throughout the majority of the film story, both engage with, or attempt to engage with in Tyrone's case, the hyper-masculine, gangsta lifestyle.

Their vulgar voices are, however, limited. While Tyrone's vocalisation is as he is playing a "gansta" videogame, in which we hear him mouth an automatic weapon as "Durrrr", Strike's vocalisations tend to be innocuous and solitary utterances. He is, for instance, startled into vocalising a gunshot in one of his conversations with Det. Klein. The lack or purposeful avoidance of the use of this vulgar voice contributes to their own narrative arcs in Lee's *Clockers*. While Strike, as the film closes, flees the reality of New York City by train, forced out by his fear of Rodney and a beating from André, Tyrone skirts the repercussions of murdering a man and his future, it seems, exists outside the world he currently occupies. The vulgar voice dictates the life of these characters throughout *Clockers* and it is omnipresent in the reality of their onscreen existence.

Conclusion

Initially, in *Clockers*, Strike is keen to take Tyrone under his wing. Calling him Shorty, Strike gets Tyrone a haircut, buys him a bicycle, shows him his apartment and beloved train set, and eventually teaches him to cut and sell drugs. It appears that, as Rodney did with him, Strike would like Shorty to become a member of his crew of clockers. In his grooming of Tyrone for this life of drugs and crime, Strike buys him a video game. Sitting in the passenger seat of Strike's car, we see Tyrone with a headset and handheld controller playing a game called "Gangsta". Foreshadowing the film's climactic shooting of Errol Barnes, we watch Tyrone play as a character similar to himself. He rides around outside apartment blocks on his bike, watches police hold and question other characters, and eventually shoots a gun, prompting the game to congratulate him with a title screen that flashes, "Gat 'Cha", a play on a slang term for handgun. He becomes so occupied with his video game that he initially ignores Strike, who eventually pulls the headset off Tyrone to get his

attention. So enthralled is Tyrone by the game, so immersed in the mediated world, that he ignores the person whose car he is sitting in.

Immersion is one of the key characteristics of video games across any platform and has, particularly in terms of ludomusicology, become a central focus for scholars investigating this material. Music, argues Rob Munday, is central to that immersion. For immersion to occur, the activity or stimulus has to be sufficiently engaging as to block out the normal sense of one's surroundings. This implies, Munday continues, that immersion has a privative as well as a stimulating side, and "in the context of immersive media, it means that the real world must be dimmed in order for the mediated one to be illuminated" (2007, 56). Immersion is driven partly by interactivity, the idea that the player participates in the construction of the media in some way. Interactivity has been, historically, a key factor in many forms of mediated expression. As Lev Manovich points out, all classical, and particularly modern, art is "interactive" in various ways, from "ellipses in literary narration" to "missing details of objects in visual art" and "other representational 'shortcuts' [that] require the user to fill in missing information" (Manovich referenced in Collins, 2008, 3). Karen Collins argues that the interactive nature of video games is, however, a specific form. She contends that although interactivity does indeed take place on many levels, with regards to video games, she uses the term as defined by Andy Cameron (1995) "to refer to not being able to read or interpret media in one's own way, but to physically act, with agency, with that media" (referenced in Collins, 2008, 3). She suggests that in this way, interactivity distinguishes video games from many other artforms because in those other expressions, the "physical body is transcended in order to be immersed in the narrative space" (Ibid). This is apparent, for instance, in the neo-classical film scores that stand in opposition to New Black Realism, where music is composed with the express intent of seeming inaudible so

as to evade “the conscious awareness of the audience [and therefore] to appeal directly to their sensory backgrounds” (Rogers, 2013, 154). The physical body cannot be removed from the experience of video game play and so, Collins argues, the audience is more than just a passive receiver as they participate in the triggering of sounds, like dialogue, musical events, and sound effects, in the narrative world (Collins, 2008, 3).

While the theatre audience of New Black Realism do not “trigger” events *per se* - no physical act takes place so that particular sounds emanate from the film screen - there is a perception of these films that resembles the non-passive receiver that Collins mentions. Just like video games, New Black Realism involves both diegetic and extradiegetic activity. It is extradiegetic in the corporeal response of the audience to the film environment and experience and diegetic in the sense that the viewer has a conscious interaction with the interface, the frame of the medium of film (Shinkle referenced in Collins, 2008, 3). Whether we are directly addressed by the characters onscreen, or the hierarchical structures of the soundscape are challenged as cinema’s primary channel of communication is disrupted by the crude, unsophisticated, and vulgar sound effect, the voice in New Black Realism speaks through and of its content and form. It relays information about the hip hop generation not just in what it says but in how that material is delivered to its audience. In that, the theatre audience are active constituents in this filmic performance. Narrative meaning exists in and through them as they participate in this expression. The boundaries between author, text, and audience are purposefully and continually blurred.

As an expression of “Read/Write” culture, this is to be expected. Lawrence Lessig notes, while “Read/Only” cultures create art that is “designed for appreciation by passive, paying audiences”, “Read/Write” cultures produce work

through participation where art is “conceived not as a collection of fixed works, but rather as a signifying practice in which materials are circulated and reworked in much the same way that ideas are in other domains of culture” (Lessig referenced in Cook, 2013, 54 - 55). In the case of the latter - what Nicholas Cook calls “performative media” - meaning is negotiated as it “emerges at the point of reception” (2013, 56, 66). In juxtaposing immediacy and hypermediacy in various ways throughout these films, the voice, as music and sound effects, calls on the theatre audience to participate, relocating meaning from “production to reception” (Cook, 2013, 56).

Just as Justin Williams points out with hip hop music, hip hop cinema proffers “multiple imagined ‘sources’, based on the previous knowledge of specific songs, artists, or genres” and it is in the correlation of those materials that the meaning of the film is realised, even if that meaning is ever-changing (Williams, 2014, 202). This performative text sets up possibilities for its audience, and while they may not always get those possibilities, there is an “knowledge” of the probability of those possibilities. So, as the hip hop text blurs the lines between creation and appropriation, so too does it challenge the deep divide between “creative artist and appropriative audience” (Shusterman, 1991, 618). While it is solely the multi-layered music of contemporary cinema that scholars like Cook suggest extends the non-linear time of film and its references, creating “moment-to-movement continuity”, or a cinema of experience, in New Black Realism, each of cinema’s three sonic channels, music, sound effects, and the voice, establish spaces of filmic performance (Cook, 2013, 60). Across each of these lines, New Black Realism speaks to, with, and through the film audience and it is in that conversation, charged by hip hop’s remediation, its “double-consciousness”, that

New Black Realism creates a celluloid performance (Cook, 2013, 60; Potter, 1995, 3,4).

Conclusions

The Death of New Black Realism?

And that's that.

Dumile, 2009

In 1993, Allen and Albert Hughes directed M*enace II Society*. Following the hyper-violent and nihilistic lives of Kaydee "Caine" Lawson (Tyrin Tuner) and his friends as they grow up in Watts in southern Los Angeles, the film was a definitive entry in New Black Realist cinema. Two years later, in 1995, the Hughes Brothers made *Dead Presidents*.

A crime-thriller, *Dead Presidents* follows the story of Anthony Curtis (Larenz Tate), a young man from a middle-class Black family growing up in New York City. As we meet Anthony in 1969, he is engaging in minor crime under the tutelage of Kirby (Keith David), sparking up a relationship with Juanita Benson (Rose Jackson), and getting ready to graduate from highschool. Rather than following in the footsteps of his older brother, Andrew (Isaiah Washington), and heading to college, Anthony has decided to enter the army, against the wishes of his mother. Joining the marines, the film follows Anthony and two of his friends, Skip (Chris Tucker) and Jose (Freddy Rodriguez), as they add to the American war effort in Vietnam. While Jose becomes a part of the army's demolitions branch, Anthony and Skip join a special reconnaissance unit. Working covertly and heading behind enemy lines, Anthony and his platoon witness and commit a number of jarring atrocities. After four years of service, we eventually see Anthony return home to New York in 1973. He struggles to acclimatise to 'normal life'. The world he has returned to has changed. Skip and Jose both live with the affects of their time in Vietnam and both now depend on drugs to get by. Kirby can no longer offer Anthony any work, legal

or otherwise. Although he still runs the same dive-bar, the police have put a stop to his extra-curricular activities. Anthony finds out that Juanita had been sleeping with Cutty (Clifton Powell) while he was away, so as to provide for their daughter. Despite Cutty's unwillingness to leave Juanita alone, she and Anthony eventually rekindle their relationship. After he loses his job at a local butchers, Anthony, Juanita's sister Delilah (N'Bushe Wright), and their group of friends plan to rob an armoured car as it makes a deposit at the Federal Reserve in Brooklyn. The robbery goes awry but Anthony and some of the crew get away with some of the money. In the end, the police track Kirby and Anthony to Kirby's bar. As the film closes out, Anthony is sentenced to life in jail for the robbery and murder of those guards who protected the armoured vehicle.

The film soundtrack is littered with soul, funk, and R&B. The original music soundtrack was written by Danny Elfman who, through his relationship with director Tim Burton, had provided music for *Beetlejuice* (1988), *Batman* (1989), *Edward Scissorhands* (1990), and *The Nightmare Before Christmas* (1992) in the years preceding the Hughes's *Dead Presidents*. In the space of two years and just one film, Allen and Albert Hughes went from making New Black Realist cinema to telling stories of the hip hop generation's parents and grandparents.

In the same year as the Hughes Brothers' *Dead Presidents* made it to cinema theatres, Spike Lee released *Clockers* (1995). As we have seen, Lee's film focuses on the story of Ronald "Strike" Dunham (Mekhi Phifer), a member of the hip hop generation, growing up in New York City in the 1990s. Strike's life is perforated with the same instances of drugs, violence, and hyper-masculinity that shape *Menace II Society*. An adaption of Richard Price's 1992 book of the same name, the film ends with Strike boarding a train and supposedly leaving the life of drugs and criminality behind him. The film's story and conclusion appears to be an attempt to close out

New Black Realist cinema. Paula Massood has suggested that, for Lee, *Clockers* was to be “the final nail in the coffin”, as he hoped to force other African-American filmmakers’ hands in beginning to tell “new stories” (2003, 189). As noted by Manthia Diawara and his students, New Black Realism was defined by hip hop culture, as it explored “the existent reality of urban life in America” through characters that looked real because they dressed in the style and talked the lingo of hip hop (1993, 24 – 25). Sitting on the train, Strike escapes that “reality of urban life” in the film’s closing. Once those stories onscreen were no longer about the hip hop generation, then that cinema stopped being New Black Realism. And that was inevitable. By the release of *Clockers*, the culture and its music had become a composite part of American mainstream media and, as it did, the space for hip hop films waned. This was, in the end, as Guthrie P. Ramsey and Henry Louis Gates Jr. have determined, “rapsploitation” or “guiltsploitation” cinema (2003, 168; 1992, 12). It was a culturally-specific filmic expression that was never meant to last for long.

However, it is not really until 1998, and Hype Williams only directorial feature film *Belly*, that the final bell tolled for the genre. Although supposedly released three years after the death of the genre, *Belly* still traded in visual and sonic signifiers of hip hop culture generally and New Black Realism specifically. It told a story of young Black men caught up in hyper-violent criminality; the soundtrack consisted of numerous hip hop artists; and the cast included a number of high profile rappers, with Nas as Sincere, Method Man as Father Sha, and DMX as Tommy “Buns” Brown. It was a somewhat fitting end to the genre of New Black Realism.

Stylistically, because of Williams' directorial instincts, the film seems to be the moment in which the mediatisation of hip hop folds in on the “realism” of the world onscreen. The film itself is highly stylised. A music-video director by trade, Williams’s structuring of the sound and images in *Belly* leans as much towards

short, set-pieces of sound and image, loosely held together by narrative, as it does a film story punctuated with sound and music. At times he trades away entirely the projection of filmic reality, openly engaging in the mediation of the world onscreen. While any film presents a cinematic version of realism, and the genre is keen to bask in that aspect of hip hop culture, Williams goes so far with highlighting the "un-real" nature of the film that it feels as that only the media itself is actually present at points throughout the film. Belly's narrative trajectory also makes it a suitable end to this cinematic movement. At the centre of the film is the relationship between Nas's Sincere and DMX's Buns. Growing up as childhood friends, the pair had become partners in crime. Now, with a small family, Sincere is beginning to separate himself from his old life and friend. By the film's close, he has moved out of the US, to Africa, to begin a new life. Throughout the film, Buns continues to engage with criminality, particularly in the transporting and selling of drugs. Buns becomes more and more isolated, losing touch with Sincere and his old crew. Through a number of unfortunate events Buns is coerced into attempting to murder Rev. Saviour (Benjamin Chavis), a Black Muslim leader, as the Rev. is preparing to give a sermon to a large group of his followers on New Year's Eve, 1999. As the Rev. and Buns come face to face, the Rev. begins to preach to him, talking about the coming of a new millennium and the chances and freedoms that that can bring with it, both for Buns specifically and the African-American community at large. As the rest of the world counts down the final moments of the twentieth-century, the Rev. convinces Buns to drop the weapon and repent his sins. The close of the decade had to mark the end of New Black Realism.

Guthrie P. Ramsey Jr. argues that "if the 1920s were dubbed the 'Jazz Age' and the 1960s marked as the ascendancy of rock, then a strong case can be made for calling the last decades of the twentieth century the 'Age of Hip-Hop'" (2003,

164). With many of its performers, artists, and thinkers being “in vogue”, hip hop culture was “virtually everywhere: television, radio, film, magazines, art galleries, and in ‘underground’ culture” (2003, 164). A point apparent in the chorus of pop boyband Hanson’s 1997 single “MMMBop”, from their debut album *Middle of Nowhere*, released in the same year. A group consisting of three young white teenagers making contemporary surfer-pop, the song’s chorus not only features the sound of record scratching but the non-sensical lyrics of the song’s chorus echo the vocal sampling seen in Lee’s *Clockers*, as mentioned in the previous chapter, if devoid of the same cultural weight. When hip hop was not found in a particular expression, art, or media during this time, Ramsey Jr. continues, its absence “may also be understood as a reaction against it” (Ibid).

Although hip hop culture and music, particularly of the 1980s and 1990s, has continued to be fodder for films produced into the 2000s, like *8 Mile* (2002) and *Straight Outta Compton* (2015), those social, racial, political, and financial factors, as well as the cinematic influences (Bates, 1991), that shaped New Black Realism as a specific cultural moment, no longer apply. Ramsey Jr. has said that, since D. W. Griffith’s *Birth of A Nation* appeared in 1915, “film has communicated, shaped, reproduced and challenged various notions of black subjectivity in twentieth-century America” (Ramsey Jr., 2002, 309). New Black Realism was a unique space for the hip hop generation at a specific moment in American history, both on and offscreen. Just as they counted down the final seconds of the twentieth-century on New Year’s Eve 1999, the characters of Williams’ *Belly* also marked the close of this filmic utterance. And yet, although hip hop cinema closed out at the end of the 1990s, the influence of New Black Realism on the structures and frames of cinema and the narrative film soundtrack, have run much further than that.

In Paul Gormley's 2005 book, *The New-Brutality Film: Race and Affect in Contemporary Hollywood Cinema*, the author focuses on the rise of violence in the film theatre since the early 1990s. Specifically, Gormley explores what he terms "New-Brutality Film". He argues that this cinema, which includes titles like Quentin Tarantino's *Reservoir Dogs* (1992) and *Pulp Fiction* (1994), Joel Schumacher's *Falling Down* (1992), Kathryn Bigelow's *Strange Days* (1995), and David Fincher's *Se7en* (1995), attempts to "renegotiate and reanimate the immediacy and affective qualities of the cinematic experience within commercial Hollywood" (Gormley, 2005, 8). New-brutality film attempts to "assault the body of the viewer and make the body act involuntarily" (Ibid). It makes "the viewer's body act in such a way that it imitates and mimics the actions of the cinematic body, or the bodies that the viewer experiences on the screen" through images which "cause a reaction based on immediacy and bodily affect which subordinates critical consciousness and awareness of the world or knowledge outside the image to its initial impact" (Ibid). Although the idea of "the tortured viewer", one who is moved violently by cinema, is not a new one, as the understanding of "a moving-image which can alter conscious thought through a bodily shock was an immanent factor at the birth of cinema" (Gormley, 2005, 14, 15), recent postmodern film has very much furthered this idea. One of the defining features of postmodern cinema, Gormley contends, is a "lack which creates a desire for something past and missing. This lack is the loss of the material, physical connection imagined to exist between the ideal spectator, and the screen, where the viewer would lose herself in the images of the Classical Hollywood film" (Gormley, 2005, 21).

Postmodern cinema does two things to recreate the "physical potential and pleasure of the cinema". It both emphasises "'the spectacular' in the *mise en scène*" and leans on an "in-built need for preconceived knowledge of other

film" (Gormley, 2005, 22, 21). Gormley points specifically to this second part in his definition of the genre, arguing that it is the tensions between affect and cultural knowledge that makes this subset of contemporary cinema distinguishable from other action films because of "its mimetic engagement with 1990s' African-American culture and film" (Gormley, 2005, 13). Judith Butler suggests that "images of the masculine black body in contemporary America activate a kind of immediate and affective response from audiences" (referenced in Gormley, 2005, 28). The "Rodney King episode" is a key example of this, wherein which the "images of black male bodies tend to provoke a response which is couched in an immediate fear, anxiety and paranoia around the imagined primitivism, violence and authenticity of the masculine black body" (Gormley, 2005, 28). New-brutality films attempt to "produce an affective shock by imitating the immediate and bodily response provoked in white viewers by images of black bodies" (Gormley, 2005, 13). The perceived result is "immediate and bodily, but actually caused by racially organised systems of visual perception" (Gormley, 2005, 13).

Gormley explores his arguments in, amongst others, two New Black Realist films from those mentioned throughout this thesis: John Singleton's *Boyz 'N' the Hood* (1991) and Allen and Albert Hughes *Menace II Society* (1993). As already mentioned, *Boyz 'N' the Hood* features a "pumping rap soundtrack and almost exclusively African-American street vernacular which makes up the dialogue" (Gormely, 2005, 87). Hip hop, Gormley contends, is a medium which is concerned with invading white public space in an affective fashion. As Robin D. G. Kelley points out, for the hip hop generation "music and expressive styles have literally become weapons in a battle over the right to occupy public space" (referenced in Gormley, 2005, 87). Frequently employing "high decibel car stereos and boom boxes", hip hop music represents not only a chance to "'pump

up the volume'" for one's own listening pleasure but is also a fundamental part of an "ad hoc war of position" (Ibid).

Mark Winokur argues that the affective power of hip hop music in cinema exists in its disruption of the cultural familiarity and smooth flow of the linear Hollywood narrative, a traditionally white space, in three ways. First, is that it is "difficult for the uninitiated to understand", meaning that the music is often experienced as a "bodily (aural) assault rather than as explicit meaning or signification". Second is that, once that initial assault has passed, the stories and lyrics at the centre of the music are themselves "often violent and obscene" anyway. Third, is that through the music and its relationship to gangsta rap and G-funk of the time, hip hop leads to the violent interpretation of "sequences not always immediately meant as violent, suggesting that violence is always immanent and imminent" (referenced in Gormley, 2005, 87). Hip hop culture and music affords postmodern cinema, it seems, a chance to both emphasise "'the spectacular' in the *mise en scène*" and lean on an in-built need for preconceived knowledge of other film, music, and media (Gormley, 2005, 22, 21). Gormley argues that the aesthetics of hip hop, and particularly those correlating to gangsta rap, have been a massive influence on the violence that has defined new-brutality film and, subsequently perforated contemporary postmodern narrative cinema. Therefore, while the genre itself was short-lived, the cinematic importance of New Black Realism has lasted well beyond the countdown to New Year's in Hype Williams' *Belly.*

Based on a change in the relationship between the body of the film viewer and the film text, Gormley mainly contends that it is the violent imagery of mediated Black bodies and New Black Realist cinema that has influenced his new-brutality film, itself an important node in the shaping of contemporary Hollywood. If Tarantino and his peers are interested in trying to renegotiate and reanimate the immediacy

and affective qualities of the cinematic experience within commercial Hollywood, and have looked to hip hop and New Black Realism as guidance, then their greatest ally surely has been this cinema's sound and music. As Lisa Coulthard argues "sound is above all else, tactile and corporeal" (2012, 18). It not only "communicates physical presence, sensuousness or feeling, but actually moves outward to quite literally move the body of the spectator, sometimes in aggressive and assaultive ways" (Ibid).

Maintaining characteristics of orally based expressions while at the same time incorporating and destabilising elements of the literate and technologically sophisticated society in which its practitioners live (Rose, 1994, 85 - 86), the soundscapes of New Black Realism are charged with a culturally-specific understanding of author, text, and audience. As a post-literate orality, New Black Realism blurs the boundaries between each in a performance of the celluloid. This has meant dismantling the traditionally safe-space offered to the theatre audience as they are asked to engage actively with the film world onscreen. As the sounds and music of this cinema move out toward the listener, they are forced to lean forward, becoming a part of the cinematic experience as it unfolds. In those moments across all three levels of the cinematic soundscape in which the boundaries are blurred, New Black Realism is at its nosiest, its most sonically violent, because it is in those moments, in the interference of the orderly sequence, that this cinema utters specifically of contemporary Black America, both on and offscreen. Although far beyond the parameters of this study, as new-brutality film and contemporary postmodern cinema looks to recharge the affective powers of narrative film, directors like Tarantino have, and will continue, to find support and inspiration for this not just in the images of mediated Black American culture, but in the soundscapes of New Black Realism.

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The Towering Inferno (1974) Directed by J. Guillermin. [Feature Film]. Los Angeles, CA: Twentieth Century Fox.

THX 1138 (1971) Directed by G. Lucas. [Feature Film]. Burbank, CA: Warner Brothers.

Under the Skin (2013) Directed by J. Glazer. [Feature Film]. Paris, France: Studio Canal.

Vertigo (1958) Directed by A. Hitchcock. [Feature Film]. Hollywood, CA: Paramount Pictures.

Wild Bunch (1969) Directed by S. Peckinpah. [Feature Film]. Burbank, CA: Warner Brothers.

Wild Style (1983) Directed by C. Ahearn. [Feature Film]. New York, NY: Submarine Entertainment.