Goldsmiths, University of London

Level Up: Live Performance and Collective Creativity in Grime Music

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Conventions

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Abstract

Grime music has been central to British youth culture since the beginning of the 21ˢᵗ century. It is an Afrodiasporic form that developed on street corners, on pirate radio and at raves. An emergent body of academic and popular literature has concentrated on the music's socio-political contexts. However, there has to date been no extended study of the form's performance techniques and values.

This thesis intends to enrich musical understandings of grime, and approaches to the study of (popular) music more broadly. It makes an original contribution to knowledge in three ways: 1) by providing the first exploration of the ways MCs and DJs perform in the live domain, and theorising the creative workings of improvisation and interaction in demanding performance environments; 2) through offering the first musicological ethnography of the form, allowing for rich documentation of practitioner perspectives and performance data; 3) by demonstrating how its very performance environments, principally pirate radio, inflect upon and influence creative practice. These advances are facilitated by my long-standing role as a DJ within the London grime scene

Entitled *Level Up,* this thesis constructs a framework for the performance of grime music. The resultant model offers new ways to conceptualise emergent improvisatory practice within ensembles, across the spectrum of creative arts. It opens with a critique of incipient histories of the form, before outlining grime's performance conventions. Three of the music's most fundamental interactional processes are explored—the reload, the rally and the through ball—with respect to their multidirectionality and collaborative character. A study of its radio network from 2016–18 follows, demonstrating how its interrelatedness stimulates creativity and incubates group practice. It concludes with a study of collective social learning in two grime crews: Shellyvnne and Over The Edge.

Acknowledgements

Finally, I would like to thank my parents, my brothers, sister, and my partner Ellie for their unwavering support and care during this long and arduous process. This thesis is dedicated to my dog Hector who is unknowingly the best therapist anyone could wish for.

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🎤 MC(s)

📻 Radio Broadcast

🎛 Live Show

Introduction

Grime music is a black British form of creative expression that emerged in the early 2000s. At its outset it was grassroots and entrepreneurial. Its predominantly male practitioner base of MCs, DJs and producers came from modest beginnings, where the form was developed on street corners, on pirate radio and at raves. Grime's influences span the African diaspora. US hip-hop and Jamaican sound system culture loom large, with its more immediate relatives (happy hardcore, jungle, drum 'n' bass and garage) similarly benefitting from the United Kingdom's fervent pirate radio and rave network.

These modest beginnings soon gave way to commercial acclaim and grime music's impact on British popular culture is substantial and enduring. In 2012, East London MC Dizzee Rascal performed at the London Olympics; in 2019, South London's Stormzy headlined Glastonbury. But despite grime's wider prevalence as a cultural phenomena, the performance of grime music remains under-theorised and misunderstood. Academic enquiry has been typically predisposed towards sociological readings of its lyrical content, its entrepreneurial approach and the lived experience of artists, while journalistic examinations of the genre have varied in their accuracy and intentions.[1]

Nowhere has this been more evident in (mis)understandings of grime's performance practice. In 2004, *The Guardian* was shocked at what it saw. A report from a grime show in Croydon referred to its 'alien' sound, foregrounding a hypermasculine representation of the MCs on stage. Rather than performing, these artists bared their teeth to air 'lyrical threats of extreme violence'.[2] Twelve years later in December 2016, a senior music writer from the *Evening Standard* mistook a key tenet of grime performance practice for a technical malfunction. John Aizlewood's review of North London MC Skepta's headline show

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[1] Richard Bramwell, *UK Hip-Hop, Grime and the City: The Aesthetics and Ethics of London's Rap Scenes* (London: Routledge, 2016); Joy White, *Urban Music and Entrepreneurship: Beats, Rhymes and Young People's Enterprise* (London: Routledge, 2017).

[2] Chris Campion, "Inside Grime | Guardian.co.uk Arts", May 23, 2004, https://www.theguardian.com/arts/features/story/0,,1223537,00.html.

reported that 'frustratingly not everything went to plan: songs were re-started'. This technical malfunction is in fact the 'reload' or 'pull-up', a cornerstone of grime performance where the DJ halts the song's progression and restarts it from the top.[3] This latter incident in particular was the source of substantial outrage from members of the grime community. And while the reporter's faux-pas is suggestive of a wider attentive lack towards grime's performance practice, the response also shows that a fervent community surrounds the genre, a community that understands its conventions and holds them dear.[4] This thesis will unpack these conventions, presenting the ways in which grime artists create and improvise in the live domain. In doing so, it will seek to answer the following questions.

Firstly, it investigates the extent to which grime's performance processes can offer insight into the inner workings of the form's musical identity and the wider sphere in which it is conducted. With prior literature tending to focus on the form's socio-historical impact, this thesis argues that a consideration of its performance processes can augment existing understanding. This will be achieved through demonstrating how grime's multi-performer improvisatory framework is both indebted to antecedent Afrodiasporic musical forms while possessing its own idiosyncrasies, many of which reflect its distinctive musical character and the freneticism of its inner-city performance landscape.

Secondly, it will question how the spaces in which it is performed have impacted the creative process itself. Grime's modest beginnings meant that its performance practice was incubated in demanding, group based scenarios. There was no school of grime and there were no practice rooms. Instead, radio stations, raves and, to an extent record shops, were its principal creative hubs. These spaces afforded artists an environment to experiment and refine their sound: new instrumentals were pressed to white label vinyl; DJs took up weekly residencies on the radio; and MCs would debut fresh lyrics on the airwaves to a community

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[3] John Aizlewood. "Skepta Music Review: Homecoming for King of Grime", *Evening Standard*, December 5, 2016, https://www.standard.co.uk/goingout/music/skepta-music-review-homecoming-for-king-of-grime-a3412321.html.

[4] Crack Staff, "The Evening Standard Reviews Skepta, Mistakes Reloads for Technical Difficulties | Music News", *Crack Magazine*, December 6, 2016, https://crackmagazine.net/2016/12/evening-standard-reviews-skepta-mistakes-reloads-technical-difficulties/.

of listeners. This interrelated, intense—and often fraught—sphere of production has arguably contributed to how the form functions.[5]

Thirdly, and most importantly, it asks how a model of grime performance practice can further understandings of group improvisation in artistic ensembles. Both collectivity and improvisation are central to grime performance. Through modelling the particularities of grime's emergent improvisatory framework, this thesis will unpack how performers fashion new ideas mid-performance in a number of ways, through intermusical referentiality, intricate group schema and other more aleatoric ways afforded by aspects of its performance protocol. The flexibility and emergent character of grime's performance conventions allows collaborative building towards periods of creativity that are unprecedented, densely interactive, and heightened in energy. While these protocol are multifaceted and extensive—and will be assessed in due course—they can be inscribed within a central framework, which will now be turned to.

Section 1 – Level Up

Kwam: 'This ain't entry level. You wanna spit? Best be levels. You're not levels, can't try meddle…'

As mentioned above, grime performance is complex, multidirectional and improvisatory. It possesses a particular liveness that makes it thrilling, unpredictable and ripe for academic enquiry. Writing on complexity and improvisation across artistic disciplines has helped to make sense of how humans interact and create, be it Keith Sawyer's work on theatre and jazz improvisation or Benjamin Brinner's writings on gamelan.[6] Yet, grime's combined complexity and unpredictability in performance—with artists' endeavours laid bare in front of an audience and over the airwaves—provides insight into how co-presence of

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[5] Will Pritchard, "White Label Goods: How Vinyl Culture Shaped Grime", April 2, 2019, https://open.spotify.com/episode/1qRfdFDLbEgtt91SKlb36O.

[6] Benjamin Brinner, *Knowing Music, Making Music: Javanese Gamelan and the Theory of Musical Competence and Interaction*, (London: University of Chicago Press, 1995); R. Keith Sawyer, *Group Creativity: Music, Theater, Collaboration* (New York: Routledge, 2003).

performers and public, and the palpable gains and pitfalls of improvisation, influence the creative output of the musicians involved. This 'maddening noise' as decreed by *The Guardian* above is far more complex than prior engagement suggests. The study of grime performance, in actuality, offers a new way to conceptualise live, improvisatory practice and the 'corollary epistemologies' of creative ensembles.[7] Principally, this thesis will attend to how performers collaboratively work towards moments of climactic energy, offering a tangible model for how artists—across all disciplines—engaged in improvisatory creative practice can *level up* and reach heightened states of interaction.

Grime performance offers space for collective social learning and the fashioning of musical ideas. This space is demanding, and the principal settings in which it is performed— on pirate radio and at raves—command a level of expectation. The very liveness and multidirectionality of these specific domains—notwithstanding the media ecology that stimulates the circuit as a whole—means that new performance suggestions and ideas are built iteratively. As such, the intensity of interaction sees energy levels continue to increase. These combinations and interactions often result in instances of becoming, where artists move beyond what is achievable in isolation, and *level up*. The resultant output is 'more than the sum of [the] constituent codified parts', as the collective combination brings forth novelty through improvisation and interaction.[8]

Level up is used throughout as an umbrella term for these often unquantifiable performance processes that are implicit and densely intertextual. This term has been chosen for a number of reasons. Firstly, it comes from within the tradition of grime music performance: MCs speak of 'levelling up' for radio performances; YouTube platform JDZ features a freestyle series called Level Up; and there are multiple allusions to being 'levels' across recorded output.[9] It is therefore used in a way that is faithful to the craft, rather than

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[7] Philip Clark, "Something In The Air", *The Wire*, 398 (April 2017): 36.

[8] Matthew Fuller, *Media Ecologies: Materialist Energies in Art and Technoculture* (London: The MIT Press), 2004: 24.

[9] JDZ Media, "Mez [Level UP] JDZmedia", June 27, 2014, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uJ8dibi58_g. Accessed February 5, 2020.

an academic theoretical imposition. Artists' ways of knowing are critical for modelling grime performance, and as such, the name of its overall framework must make sense to its community of practitioners, without sullying or simplifying the intricacies of the processes at hand. Furthermore—and most importantly—it captures the essence of grime performance as a system of learning and progression. Throughout the thesis, I attend to emergent practice within grime. While you have to learn and prepare *for* a performance, the performance sphere itself is undergirded by forward movement that is predicated on listening to others and fashioning new ideas to align with its onward trajectory.

Accordingly, levelling up is both an *individual* and *group* endeavour. To *level up* personally, means to acquire skills—or a 'living archive of techniques'—that enable you to reach your maximum, individualised, potential. Levelling up as a group means moving above and beyond what you are able to do in isolation. Tension between individuals and collectives is also a characteristic trait of grime music, and the unpredictability brought forth from *multidirectional* interaction (and sometimes confrontation) also stimulates the creative process.[10] Levelling up therefore incorporates, and allows for, feedback loops between the audience (live or through phone-ins), multiple MCs, DJs, equipment, and the wider performance network that sustains, and typifies grime practice. It is the interwoven nature of all these actors that enables new practice to take hold.

Section 2 – Thesis Overview and Critical Findings

This thesis is separated into eight chapters. Chapter 1 outlines the thesis' methodology, and the ethnographic lens with which this enquiry is conducted. My status as an active practitioner in the London grime scene is explored, and issues of reflexivity and positionality are interrogated. This methodological gaze is one of this thesis' key strengths, since it offers the first extended ethnographic engagement with grime performance practice.

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[10] Julian Henriques, *Sonic Bodies: Reggae Sound Systems, Performance Techniques and Ways of Knowing* (London: Continuum Press, 2011), 175.

Detailed insider's perspectives are offered throughout, alongside practitioner interviews and performance analysis.

Chapter 2 assesses existing literature. This review, entitled 'Set Pace', demarcates the critical terrain, both for the study of grime, and for existing models of performance that have shaped my framework for grime practice. It is split into five sections that will examine: the functionality of pirate radio and grime's wider media ecology; tensions in the representation of Afrodiasporic practice; the relationship between individual and collective in hip-hop and issues of practice as process; existing literature on emergent group creative practice; and the impact of hypermasculinity and artists' ways of knowing on performance.

Chapters 3 to 8 yield a number of critical findings, which aim to make substantial contributions to knowledge of performance practice in both grime, and across the spectrum of creative arts. Chapter 3 engages with incipient histories of grime, looking at dominant narratives surrounding the form—with respect to its geography (East London), its pioneering figures (Dizzee Rascal and Wiley, the 'godfather of grime')[11] and its canon— before offering a critique of these with reference to new empirical research. Historicising has had a profound impact on practice, foreclosing what is only just emerging as a bounded grime historiography. I argue that the scene is far more fractured and interactive than this history sets out. And yet, this history's prevalence has influenced the practice of new artists, encouraged nostalgia and affected creative possibilities.

Chapter 4 lays the groundwork for the thesis' model of grime performance. It sets out grime's musical conventions, its quasi-ethical rulebook and the ways in which artists speak about, adhere to, or break from an accepted understanding of how they should perform. This section draws extensively from artist interviews, analysis of performances and empirical research.[12] It builds on Julian Henriques' writing on Jamaican dancehall management, looking at how grime's MCs and DJs collaboratively build momentum as a performance unfolds. It also examines the monitoring processes that DJs and MCs

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[11] Dan Hancox, "The Long Read: The Godfather of Grime", *The Guardian*, January 24, 2017: 25.

[12] Joseph G Schloss, *Making Beats: The Art of Sample-Based Hip-Hop*, (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University, 2004).

undertake when engaging with each other and their audience. This approach signals a move beyond a dyadic understanding of a DJ and an audience—developed by Kai Fikentscher—towards a model of group improvisatory practice. Mark Butler has written on how electronic dance music DJs 'play with something that runs' but the added implications of multiple MCs performing over the top of the DJ's selections provides an altogether more difficult challenge.[13] A case study of West London DJ Eastwood's practice acts as the thesis' first contribution to an understanding of how artists collaboratively build energy with a view towards levelling up as part of their creative process.

Chapter 5 engages with two of grime's principal phases of play, the reload and the rally. Grime reloads and rallies are multidirectional and move beyond existing frameworks for antiphony within what Paul Gilroy has called 'black Atlantic' creative practice.[14] As such, it helps answer this thesis' first question regarding grime's musical identity its relationship to antecedent practice. The myriad ways in which the reload functions are then assessed, before presenting the rally as an example of emergent, multidirectional practice that results in instances of levelling up. Tensions between the individual and the collective are brokered in both sections, with assessments of South London MC Dot Rotten's divergent individualism and grime supergroup MTM's acute demonstration of group flow during the rally phase.

Chapter 6 unpacks the 'through ball'. Arguably grime's most complex, group-based improvisatory technique, it has gestated, developed and consequentially solidified over time. This chapter offers the most comprehensive argument for artists' ways of knowing as a legitimate form for conceptualising complex improvisatory group practice. It demonstrates how this technique arose through a synthesis of existing performance protocol and a predilection for multidirectional interplay. The through ball demands attuned improvisation, astute group dynamics and results in moments of climatic energy that are emblematic of artists successfully levelling up as part of their collective creative process.

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[13] Mark Butler, *Playing with Something That Runs: Technology, Improvisation, and Composition in DJ and Laptop Performance* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2014); Kai Fikentscher, '*You Better Work!' Underground Dance Music in New York City,* (Hanover: Wesleyan University Press, 2000).

[14] Paul Gilroy, *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness* (London: Verso, 1993).

Chapter 7 answers this thesis' second principal question. Through offering an extensive study of grime's radio and live network from 2016–2018, it demonstrates how his particular performance ecology demands a high level of competence, the ability to adjust trajectory mid-performance, and the sensibility to deal with uncertainty. It also shows how its very interrelatedness builds energy and can bring forth irruptive, new moments. Principally, this is realised in its incubation of group creative practice.

The importance of pirate radio for collective creativity is reinforced in this thesis' final chapter, which models grime practice in two crews from London: Shellyvnne and Over The Edge. This chapter looks at two fundamental ways in which grime crews *level up*: through dense intermusical referentiality and the development of respective 'corollary epistemologies' that underpin each crews' performance aesthetic.[15] This chapter therefore captures moments of becoming, and myriad examples of levelling up, demonstrating how each crew collectively negotiates the complexities and nuances of grime practice. As a consequence, it offers new ways to conceptualise emergent improvisatory practice within ensembles.

In order to engage fully with grime practice, it is now necessary to outline the form's musical influences. Grime has a diverse heritage, and the introduction's next section uses examples from grime practice to demonstrate how its heritage is articulated in performance. It also acts a brief introduction to the form itself for readers unfamiliar with grime music. The thesis proper places practice front and centre. As such, a wide contextualisation will help orient readers, enable them to locate commonalities with antecedent practice, and offer clear distinctions between this antecedent practice and grime's own idiosyncratic framework.

Section 3 – Introducing grime music: influences, identity and idiosyncrasies

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15 Clark, "Something In The Air", 36.

Grime is principally seen as a black British musical form. Although not exclusively produced by black artists, it is almost unanimously referred to as such. This is foregrounded in the work of grime scholars Richard Bramwell, Monique Charles and Joy White. It was also attended to in Mykaell Riley's *The Grime Report,* a large-scale study which looked at police and media discrimination targeted towards grime because of its status as a music of black origin.[16]

This status is of course partly attributed to grime's predominantly black (and male) practitioner base, but it is grime's performance style, and its indebtedness to other black musical forms, that cements this position. While there is a particularity to grime that sees it markedly differ from its predecessors—in tempo, interpersonal relations and its idiosyncratic improvisatory gait—there are commonalities that help frame grime within wider popular and Afrodiasporic musical practice.

This opening section will offer a contextualisation of this rich performative heritage. An examination of these influences will offer insight into the very foundations of grime's performance, demonstrating how its diverse palate is inspired by both global styles and a grounded performance network situated across the United Kingdom's major cities. This balance, of both locally immediate influences and wider black Atlantic practice, captures much of what is at play in cultural theorist Paul Gilroy's conception of diaspora with respect to music: 'a diaspora composed of communities that are both similar *and* different— between invocations of an African motherland and critical commentaries on the immediate local conditions in which a particular performance of a piece of music originates.'[17] For grime music, its very development on the streets of the United Kingdom's major cities is continually framed within reference to this wider whole.

Accordingly, this section will first look to the influence of US Hip-Hop and Jamaican Sound System Culture on grime, before attending to the UK dance music scene(s)

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[16] Bramwell, *Grime and the City*, 6; Monique Charles, "Hallowed be thy Grime?: A musicological and sociological genealogy of Grime music and its relation to black Atlantic religious discourse.", (PhD diss, University of Warwick, 2016); Mykaell Riley, "State of Play: Grime", *Ticketmaster,* October 2017, http://blog.ticketmaster.co.uk/stateofplay/grime.pdf.

[17] Gilroy, *Black Atlantic*, 87.

that incubated a number of critically important musical forms throughout the 1990s and early 2000s.

Musical Precedents: Jamaican Sound System culture and US Hip-Hop

Jamaican music has been a prevailing influence on artistry in the United Kingdom ever since the arrival of Empire Windrush into Tilbury Docks on June 22 1948.[18] Ska, rocksteady and reggae entered into British mainstream consciousness in the late-1950s and 1960s and by decade's end this music was hugely popular. This popularity saw Desmond Dekker achieve a UK Number One in April 1969 for his single 'Israelites', the first reggae song to earn this accolade.[19] Reggae and dancehall have since become further infused and identifiably associated with the British Isles. And while this relationship is complex and tainted by a history of systemic oppression towards British citizens of African Caribbean descent, Jamaican music's enduring impact is perhaps best evidenced by the Notting Hill Carnival attended annually by over one million people.[20]

For West London grime MC Swarvo, who grew up just a few miles from Notting Hill, reggae has always been an important part of his musical practice: 'When I was young I was obviously always listening to music. My parents are from Jamaica. I come from listening to reggae and all of that. [I was] just going along spitting (performing lyrics) with the Yardie people, making up my own stuff for a joke and what not.'[21] East London MC Riko Dan also recalled Jamaica's influence in interview: 'My parents used to go to a lot of shoobs, shabeen

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[18] "Newscript Reports on the Arrival of the Empire Windrush, 22 June 1948", *British Library*, accessed June 4, 2019, https://www.bl.uk/collection-items/bbc-newscript-reports-on-the-arrival-of-the-empire-windrush-22-june-1948.

[19] "Desmond Dekker | Full Official Chart History | Official Charts Company", *Official Charts*, accessed February 21, 2020, https://www.officialcharts.com/artist/14126/desmond-dekker/.

[20] Paul Gilroy, *There Ain't No Black in the Union Jack* (London: Routledge, 2002): 86; Sophie Linden, "Expert Advice on Notting Hill Carnival", *London City Hall*, December 20, 2016, https://www.london.gov.uk//what-we-do/mayors-office-policing-and-crime-mopac/governance-and-decision-making/mopac-decisions-342; Notting Hill Carnival celebrates a whole spectrum of Caribbean dance styles, although Jamaican music is particularly prevalent.

[21] Swarvo, Personal Interview. July 2017.

dances. It was also the music that was played at home. That was the first time I heard [Jamaican artists] Bounty Killer and Capleton.'[22] This familiarity was even more pronounced for a number of grime artists who had direct familial links to links to Sound System culture. Producer and DJ Sir Spyro's father is St Lucian singer Nereus Joseph, while Newham-based MC Footsie's father used to run the King Original Sound.[23] As a result, African Caribbean musical practice impacts substantially on grime music.

There are overt similarities. Sound Systems are presided over by a selector, who is responsible for song choice and often 'toasts' (performs lyrics) over the recorded tracks.[24] Sounds often have dedicated MCs (or deejays).[25] Further to this, the foregrounding of an MC allows for crowd interaction. For East London producer Terror Danjah, grime is MC-led and its 'instrumental' productions are often tailored to allow space for MC performance.[26] The rise of dub in the 1960s and 70s made this practice initially permissible in reggae. 'Dub serves that moment in the dancehall when excess ornamentation is stripped away to emphasise the elemental power of the rhythm pattern to…give the improviser [the MC] the free rein to excite the crowd'.[27]

In addition, grime musicians similarly cherish the 'dubplate', a test pressing or acetate of an unreleased track. According to West London's DJ Eastwood 'everybody wanted the instrumental in them days' and unreleased dubs strengthen both a Sound's claim

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22 Boiler Room, "Mumdance In Conversation With Riko Dan", June 15, 2016, https://soundcloud.com/platform/episode-03-mumdance-in-conversation-with-riko-dan, (2:04).

23 Fabric London, "In Conversation: Footsie Reflects on the Growth of Grime – Fabric Blog", *fabriclondon,* November 2018, https://www.fabriclondon.com/blog/view/in-conversation-footsie-reflects-growth-of-grime.

24 Henriques, *Sonic Bodies*, 196.

25 These terms are often used interchangeably, although both have a specific history. See William Anthony Henry, *What the Deejay Said: A Critique from the Street!* (Blackheath: Nu-Beyond, 2006).

26 "East is East", *BBC Radio 1,* London, UK: May 24 2004, 12:00; Grime tracks without vocals are typically called instrumentals.

27 Michael E. Veal, *Dub: Soundscapes and Shattered Songs in Jamaican Reggae* (Middletown: Wesleyan University Press, 2007), 63.

to supremacy and a grime DJ's position in the scene.[28] 'Dubplate specials', where a DJ or Sound's name is inserted into the track, are also commonplace in grime.[29]

There are two further aspects from Sound System culture that have carried over into grime and its performance. The first is the organisation into 'crews' and 'collectives'. Crews function in a similar way to Sounds, although the majority do not have their own physical Sound System. MCs in a crew will often record dubplate specials for their DJs, and the crew more generally offers space for growth. Joy White writes that 'a crew is a space that provides an opportunity to learn your craft and develop tacit knowledge about the scene and how it operates'. As a consequence crews often mentor new talent, forming 'Youngers' factions of MCs and DJs.[30]

These crew affiliations, while important for artist development, inevitably bring forth rivalry with other collectives. Clashing is an important part of both grime and Sound System Culture. Sounds collect and collate the finest dubplates in advance of a clash, often featuring lyrical content defaming the rival sound. According to Julian Henriques these 'competitions between rival Sounds are the most highly wrought, and indeed sometimes overwrought and occasionally violent, of dancehall sessions. The single night of a clash can literally make or break a Sound's entire career'.[31] Many grime artists cite Sting, a prestigious dancehall event held annually at Portmore, as formative for both their performance and their approach to clashing. For Swarvo, Wiley's Eskimo Dance rave was based on a similar premise. 'Eskimo [Dance]. That's a Soundman Jamaican thing. Everybody is just spitting bars and someone goes in and the crowd goes mad. I think it comes from the Jamaican Yardie stage show.'[32] This overlapping practice was made acutely apparent in 2014 when

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[28] DJ Eastwood, Personal Interview. May 2017.

[29] SB:TV: Music, "Spyro | DJ Mix [SBTV Beats]", March 14, 2014, https://youtu.be/5_rJpXkHtP8.

[30] White, *Urban Music and Entrepreneurship,* 4.

[31] Henriques, *Sonic Bodies*, 182.

[32] Swarvo, 2017.

Kingston's Stone Love Sound System clashed North London grime crew Boy Better Know at Earls Court in West London.[33]

Outside of DJ and Sound clashes, a considered emphasis is placed on the MCs' clashing capabilities within grime.[34] Producer and MC Jammer set up Lord of the Mics with filmmaker Ratty in 2004, pitting MCs against each other in lyrical battles.[35] And while this 'ritualised verbal form of combat' principally takes its influence from Jamaica, it also shares substantial affinity with US hip-hop (a form similarly engaged in musical exchange with the Caribbean island) and its tradition of battle rapping.[36]

Battle rapping's origins are generally located in 'the dozens', an African American homosocial game of name calling and provocation that shares a wider diasporic link with toasting, riddles and proverbial exchanges that feature frequently in informal black Atlantic rhetoric and conversation.[37] Battle rapping's impact on grime artists' approaches to clashing is telling. East London MC Trim, a former member of Roll Deep alongside Wiley and Riko Dan, spoke about its impact on his practice.

> I found that any rapper that was anybody had a stream of mixtapes. But they were all battle rappers before that. I felt like I needed to have that part if I wanted to be whole. You don't really need that to be an artist, but I felt that if I didn't train in battling then I wouldn't be a better rapper. There's always people trying to tell you about yourself and if you don't know how to defend yourself then people use it against you. All the best rappers are those that battle. Busta Rhymes, Eminem. They were all battling before. On the street and in the clash.[38]

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33 *Red Bull Culture Clash*, Earls Court, London, October 30, 2014.

34 Lord of the Mics (Official), *Lord of the Beats: Logan Sama Vs DJ Big Mikee [@djlogansama @djbigmikee]*, October 28, 2013, https://youtu.be/gdKsACbkOVs.

35 *Lord of the Mic Battle Arena Vol 1,* dir. Capo and Ratty, 2004.

36 Wayne Marshall, "Bling-Bling for Rastafari: How Jamaicans Deal with Hip-Hop", *Social and Economic Studies; Mona* 55, no. 1–2 (March 2006): 49–74.

37 Roger Abrahams, "Playing the Dozens" in Alan Dundes, *Mother Wit From The Laughing Barrel* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 1993): 295–309.

38 Trim, Personal Interview. June 2017.

One aspect is different though. The 'freestyling' of grime MCs in battles is rarely 'off the dome', or made up on the spot. Instead, pre-composed lyrics are chosen depending on the circumstance, creatively reworked to suit the occasion.

> Sets are kind of pre-meditated, you've got your lyrics ready. You need loads of lyrics so you can cover certain topics…If someone did try and clash you and you didn't have bars [lyrics] for them, you would probably set a date. Tell them it's on. Then come back to them with a diss track.[39]

Outside of battling, certain aspects of US hip-hop have impacted grime production. In interview with Hot 97's Peter Rosenberg, Dizzee Rascal spoke to the influence of Dirty South and Southern Hip-Hop on his own practice: 'When it came to making beats. Three 6 Mafia [a group from Memphis, Tennessee]. I used to love Project Pat [one of their MCs]. And the whole Crunk [Southern Hip-Hop] thing. Timbaland and Neptunes [too].' Timbaland's 'double time' style was particularly important for grime. Grime is a distinctively different tempo from most hip-hop, with grime tracks typically between 135 and 145 beats per minute, however this 'double time' style meant that a number of hip-hop productions— such as Timbaland's 'Bounce' and Ludacris' 'What's Your Fantasy'—operated at a similar tempo.[40] Dizzee Rascal later mentioned that the lyrics to his debut single, 'I Luv U' (2002), were written to Timbaland's 'Is That Your Chick'.[41]

These influences are heralded by music writer Simon Reynolds' in his Primer on grime from 2005. 'These Grimestrumentals were largely sourced in the electro diaspora – post-"Sleng Teng" ragga, Miami bass, New Orleans Bounce, Dirty South, Crunk'. Here Reynolds principally locates grime's hip-hop influences in the Southern states. It is perhaps unsurprising, then, that one of the United States' first regular grime events, 'Proper', took place on Miami's South Beach.[42]

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[39] ibid.

[40] Dan Hancox, *Inner City Pressure: The Story of Grime* (London: William Collins, 2018), 10.

[41] HOT 97, "Dizzee Rascal and Rosenberg Discuss the History of Grime, Skepta, and the Whole UK Scene", January 20, 2016, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-8dOAYpWass.

[42] Simon Reynolds, "The Primer: Grime", *Wire,* 254 (April 2005): 42–49; General Courts, "General Courts with American Grime", Flex FM, London: January 26, 2019.

Musical Precedents: Hardcore, Jungle, UK Garage

Both Sound System culture's familial ties and hip-hop's very pervasiveness in popular culture around grime's inception meant that the majority of artists listened to, and were influenced profoundly by, these forms. However, an appreciation of more locally immediate creative practice offers a strong understanding of the everyday environment in which grime was birthed. The emergence of hardcore, jungle and UK garage, while temporally distinct, is arguably linked to the same spatial dynamic. Reynolds famously located these forms (and grime) within a 'hardcore continuum', united by a socioeconomic infrastructure of 'pirate radio stations, independent record shops, white labels and dubplates, specific rave promoters and clubs'.[43]

Prior to the advent of grime, many of its practitioners were already actively working in this field that Reynolds describes. This is captured well by DJ Slimzee of East London radio station Rinse: 'When I first come into the scene, I've been DJing since 1992. So I was playing hardcore them times then. Then jungle. Into garage. Then grime.'[44] For Slimzee it was simply a natural progression. Riko Dan's first performances were also at hardcore parties.

> I was say about 12, 13 and the white boys on the ends used to play hardcore. And there was something in there. I wouldn't say reggae but there was something there. That's why it formed into jungle. It wasn't just a bag of noise. That was my first experience MCing over music. I wouldn't necessarily listen to hardcore, but in the house parties when it used to get played, I would get on mic and dun the dance.[45]

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[43] Simon Reynolds, "The Wire 300: Simon Reynolds on the Hardcore Continuum: Introduction – The Wire", *The Wire Magazine – Adventures In Modern Music*, February 2013, https://www.thewire.co.uk/in-writing/essays/the-wire-300_simon-reynolds-on-the-hardcore-continuum_introduction.

[44] Will Pritchard, "White Label Goods", 2:38.

[45] Boiler Room, "Mumdance In Conversation", 5:01.

Outside of hardcore, grime's most immediately relatable forms are jungle and UK garage. While Riko Dan and Slimzee were old enough to remember and partake in hardcore raves and parties in the early 1990s, it was jungle and UK garage that provided the initial platform for most artists' creative practice. For DJ Eastwood both these forms (and the scenes' wider infrastructure) were important during the early stages of his career.

> I started DJing first. A lot of my friends were MCs. So, out of our collective four of us were DJs and most of the guys were MCs. At first, it was literally playing jungle, drum 'n' bass in the youth club. When it progressed we took it a bit more seriously. Getting a few bookings. We got on radio and we called ourselves 2 Good 2 Be True. And pretty much from then I wanted something different than what the other DJs were playing…My first tune was called 'Uncle Harry'. I remember my friend Oddz played it in Cardiff and [garage] MC Viper stopped it and was like 'what's this? This is crazy'. I thought I might try and release it. So I got a loan to get the money, I pressed up 500 white labels and I took it around the shops.[46]

In terms of the musical influence specifically, grime takes much of its MCing style from jungle. Jungle's quickened pace, typically around 160bpm to 180bpm, is well suited to the 'fast chat' style pioneered by a number of UK dancehall artists in the 1980s, most notably Peter Kind, Smiley Culture and Tippa Irie.[47] Jungle MCs, such as Stevie Hyper D, MC Moose, Skibadee and DET, built strong partnerships with their respective DJs. They would typically perform lyrics that juxtaposed social commentary with provocation, often reacting in the moment to pirate radio callers and to situations and audience participation at raves, drawing substantial influence from the reggae toasters of their youth.[48]

Following his early experiences at hardcore raves, Riko Dan became a regular on jungle station Pressure FM in the late 1990s. Tape Crackers, a documentary on jungle's pirate radio scene, pointed to this station's importance for grime music.

> Riko gets very dark on this next track. Today people are used to grime MCs talking about guns, but that never used to really happen in jungle. Certainly not happy hardcore. But these

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[46] Eastwood, 2017.

[47] Dick Hebdige, *Cut 'n' Mix Culture, Identity and Caribbean Music,* (London: Routledge, 1987), 141.

[48] Brockie and MC DET, *Roast presents the '95 Showcase*, The Sanctuary, Milton Keynes: June 10 1995; Nicky Blackmarket and Stevie Hyper D, *Roast,* Island, Ilford: October 1995.

guys were doing it. They were the forefathers of that. At least on this sort of London scene…That's Riko Dan. Almost sounding a bit like [jungle MC] Moose there. Really lowering his voice and putting an edge on it. And it suits that bassline, really dark bassline. Kool FM [jungle's longest running London radio station] wouldn't play this sort of track… That's Pressure FM. Big station with big MCs, coming across much more aggressive than any other station.[49]

This urgency and space afforded to MCs by jungle's production, particularly the tracks being played on Pressure FM, is corroborated by East London MC D Double E. 'We had to create grime, because we needed it for our spirits, as spitters, because we're coming from drum 'n' bass, which is so open, like, "Spray your heart out G, spray your lungs out!"'.[50]

This move towards a more abrasive, MC-led style was not just happening in jungle but symptomatic of a wider trend. Its influence was particularly felt in UK garage, a popular dance music style from the late 1990s. UK garage initially featured the 'gospelly piano riffs' and 'soulful lead vocals' of its US counterpart, taking its name from Larry Levan's infamous New York City nightclub Paradise Garage. During this period its biggest UK exponents included MJ Cole, Craig David and DJ trio the Dreem Teem. However, an adjustment in sonority and lyrical content at the turn of the millennium signalled a turn away from this sound, towards darker, more crew-led garage tracks. These new tracks foregrounded the MC and their performance, acting as a distinct precursor to grime.[51] The most notable collectives during this period were So Solid Crew, who received a UK Number One with '21 Seconds' in 2001, North London's Heartless Crew and East London's Pay As U Go Cartel, which featured both Wiley and DJ Slimzee. Pay As U Go, in particular, were seen to be indicating a new direction.[52]

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[49] *Tape Crackers: An Oral History of Jungle Pirate Radio*, dir. Rollo Jackson, 2011, https://fourthree.boilerroom.tv/film/tape-crackers, 29:30.

[50] Dan Hancox, "D Double E, Grime's Nearly Man: 'I Haven't Been Able to Prove Myself'", *The Guardian*, September 10, 2018, https://www.theguardian.com/music/2018/sep/10/d-double-e-grimes-nearly-man-i-havent-been-able-to-prove-myself.

[51] Jeffrey Boakye, *Hold Tight: Black Masculinity, Millennials and the Meaning of Grime* (London: Influx Press, 2017): 50.

[52] "Official Singles Chart Top 100 | Official Charts Company", accessed May 4, 2019, https://www.officialcharts.com/charts/singles-chart/20010812/7501/.

> Lethal Bizzle: Pay As U Go made such a big impact. Their style was proper raw. Talking about what was going on on the roads. They kicked it off. They were like the big boys. The So Solid of East London.[53]

Their track 'Know We', also from 2001, perhaps best encapsulates the complex 'sonic geography' of grime music that has been outlined in this section so far.[54] Its hook is laced in battle rap provocation with a dancehall flavour, MC God's Gift asserting in patois (Jamaican slang) that 'dem fassyole dem nuh know we' (they do not know us).[55] Both MCs Major Ace and Wiley exhibit double-time fast chat flows for their verses, while MC Maxwell D references reggae deejay Sweetie Irie in his lyrics. Operating at 135bpm, it has a two-step skip (characterised by syncopated hi-hats and snare pattern), with synth stabs redolent of Todd Edwards' US Garage productions. Its cutting violin loop also offers an insight into the stripped-back instrumental style that grime production became prized for (see Chapter 3, Section 2).[56]

Grime music and the articulation of the local and global

In the years following, these elements held within 'Know We' began to spread and solidify. 2002 saw a proliferation of crew-led tracks such as More Fire Crew's 'Oi' and End Productions' 'Are You Really from the Ends?'. In 2003 Dizzee Rascal was awarded with the Mercury Prize for his debut album *Boy in Da Corner*.[57] By the mid 2000s these aspects had fully congealed and become recognised as grime music. This genre's rootedness in Britain's cities and their dynamic underground scenes, and its critical routes across the black Atlantic, are perhaps best captured by two releases from this period.

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[53] "East is East", 12:22.

[54] Dan Hancox, *Stand Up Tall: Dizzee Rascal and the birth of Grime* (London: Amazon EU, 2013), 173.

[55] Translations throughout are bracketed. Frequently used terms appear in Appendix A's glossary.

[56] See discography.

[57] Angelique Chrisafis, "Rapper Wins Mercury Prize", *The Guardian*, September 10, 2003, https://www.theguardian.com/uk/2003/sep/10/arts.mercuryprize2003.

East London MC Lethal Bizzle's breakthrough single 'Forward Riddim (Pow!)' is one of grime's most successful tracks, having reached No.11 in the UK charts in 2004.[58] The track features nine MCs across the track, each spitting eight bar verses. Of this diverse array of performers, three incorporate patois as part of their delivery, most notably Jamakabi and Flow Dan (both of Roll Deep). Jamakabi's contribution, in particular, reflects the lyrical aggression mentioned on Tape Crackers.

> Jamakabi: Rude boy fi jus sekkle (calm down),
>
> don't let Jamakabi nah draw for the mekkle (metal),
>
> not di gun me draw for the belt buckle,
>
> I make a bigga boy fi seem likkle…

Following the track's powerful and pugnacious refrain from Lethal Bizzle, diminutive white MC Fumin spits a lyric that is similarly pregnant with braggadocio, imploring his enemies to 'stop barking up the wrong tree' because the 'spotlight's on me'. Throughout the track there is continual code-switching, with phrases featuring cockney swagger, patois, and black British slang, representing the range of identities and affiliations associated with the form. The legacy of Jamaican dancehall and reggae clashing and hip-hop battling renders loud and clear, while the grounded-ness of the UK's underground scenes is manifest through jungle flows and the crew-led performance style.[59]

North London MC Wretch 32's single 'Ina Di Ghetto' offers a similarly full spectrum of influences. The single's video and Wretch 32's lyrical content offer a stark juxtaposition of London's streets and a slum district, likening Tottenham to an imagined ghetto (the location of the slum filmed for the video is not documented or made apparent). Meanwhile its chorus, performed by Birmingham MC Badness, is sung in patois, alluding heavily to the sung performance style of a number of dancehall MCs.[60]

> Badness: Life is more than rough, see

[58] "Lethal Bizzle | Full Official Chart History | Official Charts Company", *Official Charts,* accessed January 24, 2019, https://www.officialcharts.com/artist/16488/lethal-bizzle/.

[59] Lethal Bizzle, *Forward Riddim,* 2004.

[60] jakfrsh, "Wretch 32 Ft. Badness & Ghetto - INA DI GHETTO (Official Video)", *YouTube,* December 8, 2008, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oYgmsCBKmLM.

> you haffi be more than tough, yo
>
> you haffi can hold it up, woah
>
> ina di ghetto, ina di ghetto.

The instrumental, however, produced by East London's Maniac, is decidedly influenced by hip-hop. The sustained sub-bass line and sixteenth-note (semiquaver) hi-hat pattern have the hallmarks of the Southern sound mentioned by Dizzee Rascal above, with both Three 6 Mafia's 'Stay Fly' and Timbaland's 'Bounce' sharing a substantial number of characteristics.[61]

When grime music first entered into wider public consciousness, it was quickly positioned against anything that had come before it. Sentiments contained in *The Guardian*'s 2004 report that referred to grime's 'alien' nature were bolstered by the then manager of BBC Radio 1Xtra George Ergatoudis who called grime an 'exciting new sound', whereas Wiley referred to its unquantifiable 'raw energy'.[62] And while many aspects of grime's practice were fresh and exciting—and this 'raw energy' will be consequently framed within how grime artists *level up* as part of their practice—this section has demonstrated grime's substantial indebtedness to antecedent creative practice of black musical origin.

Moreover, it has presented how grime artists' practice is at once resolutely transatlantic in its horizons, yet reflective of the UK dance music scene from which it was birthed. It has also captured a level of inter-relation between all of these musical forms, evidenced principally in the overlap between Jamaican Sound System Culture and US hip-hop, but also in the fluidity with which MCs such as Riko Dan performed over hardcore, jungle and UK garage. Further to this, the shared ancestry also evokes a sense of the collective performance of values, that is more fully inscribed in Chapter 4 and its discussion of grime's performance conventions. The comfort with which Riko Dan is able to perform across multiple genres is indicative of a shared framing for collective practice.

For Paul Gilroy, whose writing on diaspora opened this section, his conception of the black Atlantic expresses much of this inter-relation. He writes of 'the stereophonic,

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[61] See discography.

[62] "East is East", 15:30.

bilingual or bifocal cultural forms originated by, but not longer the exclusive property of, blacks dispersed within the structures of feeling, producing, communicating and remembering that I have heuristically called the black Atlantic world'. Through presenting grime as both black British and an example of wider black Atlantic expression, this denotation adeptly encapsulates grime's local and global roots, and the multifaceted elements that inform its musical practice.[63]

Chapter One will now set out this thesis' methodology. Since this thesis is concerned with articulating the 'structures of producing and communicating' that underpin collective creativity in grime music, I have adopted a decidedly ethnographic approach. This chapter will therefore offer an outline of this angle, alongside an evocation of my positionality as both a researcher and practicing DJ.

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[63] Paul Gilroy, *Black Atlantic*, 3.

Chapter 1 – Methodology

Introduction

This chapter details the project's methodological focus. Throughout there is a concerted effort to synthesise analysis of performances with ethnographic findings. Since this project is concerned with unpacking how musicians know what they know, and how they can collectively build towards a performative ideal and *level up*, it is only through a combination of analysis and on-the ground engagement that this can be achieved. Benjamin Brinner, a theorist of gamelan and inter-performer relationships, has written that 'an interpretative, ethnographic approach based on observed conduct and musicians' concepts and concerns is far more likely to produce an understanding of musical competence that is rooted in human experience'. The thesis' introduction has already indicated a disjunct between the critical field and the field of performance itself in grime music. As such, in order to explore what is at play, we must be attentive to artists, their ways of knowing, and the 'internal systemicity' of grime's performance community.[1]

While Chapter 2 will deal explicitly with theoretical work that underpins this enquiry, this chapter engages with the practicalities of my methodology. Section 1 makes transparent my involvement with grime music, issues of access, and my role as DJ for London grime collective Over The Edge. Section 2 deals with issues that arise from autoethnography—something that I engage with in the latter stages of this thesis—and how to be analytically reflexive. It draws parallels with Anthony Kwame Harrison's work as a practicing hip-hop ethnographer in the San Francisco Bay Area, while also making distinctions about the particularities of my own situation.[2] Section 3 looks at ethical considerations. This thesis engages with a black British working-class form that is typically wary of outside interest. Issues of race and class are brokered, before a discussion of the academy and the

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[1] Brinner, *Knowing Music*, 33; Schloss, *Making Beats*, 56.

[2] Anthony Kwame Harrison, *Hip Hop Underground: The Integrity and Ethics of Racial Identification,* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2009).

relationships that arise conducting this sort of research. Finally, Section 4 will outline the specifics of my methodology, and the ways in which I collected data across the three-year research period from 2016 to 2019.

Section 1 – Issues of positionality in the study of grime music

Having addressed grime's deeply held indebtedness to antecedent forms of black musical practice in this thesis' introduction, it is important to examine my position as a researcher and practitioner. The lack of extended ethnographic reportage on grime music's performance practice is arguably due to it being principally enacted in contested and energetic spaces, such as pirate radio and raves. Access for academics (and outsiders in general) has been limited. Richard Bramwell's book *UK Hip Hop, Grime and the City* features some fine examination of grime raves from the position of an observer, while Monique Charles' PhD thesis offers an ethnography of a variety of individuals involved with grime music and its production (both are detailed in Chapter 2). In Patrick Turner's case, his assessment of creative practice was from afar, owing to boundaries set by the improvising groups he was observing.[3]

> Those surrounding the emcee form a sort of pulsing enchanted shield or perimeter, underscoring the sense of exclusivity, separation and group solidarity. The focussed energy and attention is directed toward the core of the cipher—a fixed point on the ground in the middle of the circle—serving to repel uninvited onlookers or at least ensure they maintain a respectful distance. This is exactly how I feel on this night when itching to go over and observe up close one of these mini bush fires.[4]

Being both a practitioner and academic poses questions with respect to the level of access afforded. Harrison writes of a moment in his research where he decides to 'put [him]self out there' and transition from a passive ethnographer to active MC at open mic events. This

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[3] Bramwell, *Grime and the City,* 72.

[4] Patrick Turner, "Hip Hop Versus Rap: An Ethnography of the Cultural Politics of New Hip Hop Practices" (PhD diss., Goldsmiths, University of London, 2010), 141.

decisive shift was a turning point for his study. Similarly to Harrison I encountered relatively few difficulties in accessing grime music during my research, and this was principally due to my existing role as a DJ within the community. And while my work as a practitioner is not the principal focus of this thesis, this position facilitated the large majority of my research and ethnography.[5]

Accordingly, this positionality needs to be made transparent. This section will firstly provide some background on my initial involvement with grime music, before attending to my more immediate involvement with London-based grime crew, Over The Edge. This will both make my role within grime music transparent, but also augment discussion in consequent sections that attend closely to how issues of race and class—and the particularity of being a DJ—facilitated my my entry into the scene.

(i) My entry into grime: 2004–2017

The first grime tune I heard was Lethal Bizzle's 'Forward Riddim' in 2004. It was shown to me on the bus to secondary school that I took every day from my housing estate in Ashford, Kent, a predominantly white-working class market town situated fifty miles south of London. Grime was a constant on these bus journeys, and tracks were shared via mobile phone.

Outside of sharing tracks with school friends my principal point of exposure was the radio. I would listen to Brentwood-based DJ Logan Sama's Kiss FM show every Monday night from 11pm till 1am. London's pirate stations did not broadcast into Kent, but mixes were accessible through Grime Forum. This meant I could listen back to Croydon's Plasticman (now Plastician), Newham Generals' DJ Tubby on Rinse, and East London crew Slew Dem on DejaVu FM. After a few years visuals became easier to access. Grime videographer Risky Roadz had his videos uploaded to MySpace and I picked up *Lord of the Mics 2* on DVD. And while this period was fanatical, it is important to stress that my first

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[5] Harrison, *Hip Hop Underground*, 3.

contact with the form was from a distance. For the first five years of engaging with grime, it was almost entirely mediated and sustained through listening to pirate radio sets, purchasing CDs and making weekend trips to the capital to watch live shows. Although Ashford had a small scene, it wasn't something that I engaged with on a regular basis.

This changed when I moved to London in 2009 to study music. I bought a set of Technics 1210s and learned to mix jungle in my university halls in Bethnal Green. I also went along to every event advertised, namely Butterz at Cable, FWD>> at Plastic People and a few nights at East Village in Shoreditch. I also reached out to the London pirates to try and get a foot in the door. Eventually DJ Supreme[6] from DejaVu FM picked up the phone and I went down to a meeting at the station. By this point, grime was in a bad way— commercially at least—so my entry was perhaps facilitated by this. Importantly, though, the team at Deja were fully committed to keeping the sound alive. It was a proper pirate station, broadcasting illegally on FM, and proud of its heritage. As a consequence its roster was highly localised and 'culture vultures'—those who jump on a scene when it's popping—were nowhere to be seen.[7] I was one of three white DJs in the meeting, with the remainder of its DJs of black African or African Caribbean heritage. At the time, the station was located on an industrial estate in East London. You weren't able to give out the details to anyone, and the block's entrance was manned by a security guard. This was serious business. Following a few months volunteering at their events series I started DJing the 'graveyard shift' from midnight until 2am on Tuesdays. During this time I got familiar with using the phone line, getting listeners to tweet into the show and began to have guests appearances. My first MC guest was Braceman, who still works with me now. After two years of involvement with the station I left to focus on finishing my undergraduate studies.

Despite leaving DejaVu FM, I had build up a substantial base of contacts and collaborators by the time I started to conduct research for this thesis. A period writing articles for *Pigeons and Planes* and *Complex* afforded me a journalistic position that meant I

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[6] Name anonymised.

[7] Richard Mook and Felicia Miyakawa, "Avoiding the "Culture Vulture: Paradigm: Constructing an Ethical Hip-Hop Curriculum", *Journal of Music History Pedagogy* 5, no. 1 (2014): 41–58.

could do something for artists as opposed to relying on them for guest appearances on my show. 2016 saw commissioned interviews with Novelist and Elf Kid, the former of whom received a Mercury nomination for his debut album *Novelist Guy* in 2018.

Within the first year of PhD study I had joined Don City Radio, a station based in Hackney Wick, with a fortnightly slot on Thursdays. I was recommended the station by Kraze from Slew Dem, who I had interviewed for the thesis in the summer of 2017. It had a proper community surrounding it and was easy to get to by car from Lewisham. While many of the elements were similar to DejaVu FM, such as the phone line and deck set up, Don City was purely online. When I joined Deja, Rinse was still broadcasting illegally and there was little hope of stations working any other way. Rinse's official transition to Rinse FM in February 2011 was a huge moment. Other stations began to move their endeavours online or register as community stations.[8]

As a result the dynamic and audience relationship also changed. Listeners were encouraged to use Twitter to communicate with stations, and radio flyers were posted online in advance of transmission. Its legal status also altered practice. When working for DejaVu FM I was made acutely aware of the risks we were undertaking. At any time the station could be raided by the DTI and my equipment could be seized. This move online made the situation more relaxed. In spite of this, though, Don City primarily functioned like a pirate. I paid my subs to keep the station running, and we relied on adverts for raves and dances around the area for income.[9]

Over the following few months I started to gain some real momentum and by October 2017 I was the official DJ for Over The Edge, a grime crew consisting of MCs Razor, Reaper (or Reaps), Kabz, J River and Geo. Later additions included IndexOnDecks

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[8] "Ofcom | Community Radio Stations", accessed January 15, 2019, http://static.ofcom.org.uk/static/radiolicensing/html/radio-stations/community/cr000225ba2rinsefm.htm.

[9] Sam Wolfson, "The New Pirate Radio Crackdown: 400 Stations Closed in the Past Two Years", *The Guardian*, July 26, 2015, sec. Television & radio, https://www.theguardian.com/tv-and-radio/shortcuts/2015/jul/26/outlaw-sound-pirate-radio-defined-british-popular-music.

as a DJ and Raheim as our in-house producer.[10] This affiliation would become critical with respect to my wider legitimacy in the scene. I was both a Don City DJ and the DJ for Over The Edge. The following subsection introduces Over The Edge, before outlining how I became involved with the collective, and what my position means for this research.

(ii) Over The Edge: formation and formative years

> Razor: At the time my school didn't really seem like a place where grime music would be made. The school choir made the soundtrack for Lord of the Rings, they've got a chamber orchestra and shit. You get taught Latin up to Year 9. At the time it was a very serious Catholic school: all-boys, chapel once a week, prayer every morning. 'We don't play football here, we play rugby' was the vibe. We were on a resistance flex like 'I don't wanna do this, you know. I don't wanna conform to this sort of thing'. And that's what it was. We had clashes on the playground and in the toilets, little alleyways around the school and stuff.[11]

Over the Edge (OTE) was formed in 2006 by classmates Razor, Reaps and Tempest at a school in West London. A Catholic school in Fulham isn't necessarily the first place that comes to mind when you think of grime, but neither is Ashford in Kent, where I am from. Chapter 3 will examine East London's position as the central loci for grime practice, but the range of artists involved in Over The Edge reflects a more diversified intake. The grime scene—and pretty much all musical movements—relies upon contributions from a wide variety of people, with some taking unconventional routes. Nonetheless, a Christian education is quite a common grounding for grime artists. Particularly for those with Jamaican and West African heritage, the predominant demographics for grime MCs (including Reaps and Razor). Joy White has written about the importance of St Bonaventure's Roman Catholic School for grime artists in Newham, its alumni including Ruff Sqwad's Tinchy Stryder, Red Hot's Gracious K and N.A.S.T.Y crew's Griminal, while

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[10] Raheim was formerly known as Krabs. Radio sets prior to 2019 refer to him as such in their descriptions.

[11] Razor, Personal Interview. February 2018.

Monique Charles' PhD thesis extensively explores Grime's spirituality and religious grounding with respect to the black Atlantic.[12]

What is clear from Razor's quote above, though, is a marked animosity towards the schooling he received. During this period, Razor and Reaps developed their craft in interstitial spaces, escaping the formalised expectations imposed upon them. This practice is coherent with grime theorist Richard Bramwell's writing on the importance of buses and corners for the formation and development of an MCs' craft, and speaks to the ways in which the spaces that grime is performed become central for an understanding of grime performance as a whole (see Chapter 7).[13]

Razor and Reaps left the school in Year 11, and Reaps met J River at college in Richmond, where their friendship and barring capabilities developed in tandem. The group of MCs would develop their style through exchanges and sparring sessions.

> I met Reaper in college. At that time I wasn't even spitting but had an admiration for the culture. I'd always been into poetry so I had an affinity for word play, but after I met Reaps it was actually his rapping that inspired me to start myself. I met Razor through him.
>
> I definitely felt a need to bring my lyricism up to the level of the people around me. When I started those guys were leagues ahead of me. I'd have bars (lyrics), I'd write them, but when we go to rally (see Chapter 5) I'd just get spun. Then we'd be on the bus and man would be looking at my notepad and be like 'yeah this bar's kind of sick' and start spitting my bars and they'd be spitting it better than me and it was a pisstake! It was just that really competitive element of sharpening steel against steel, rallying every single day, linking up every single day and just barring repeatedly until that level came up and I started to be able to bar at the same level as the people around me.[14]

This fervent quotidian collaboration was critical for developing the core of the crew. MC interactivity is highly prized and their sparring sessions fostered an affinity which could be

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[12] Joy White, "We Need to Talk about Newham", in *Regeneration Songs: Sounds of Investment and Loss from East London* eds. Alberto Duman, Dan Hancox, Malcolm James and Anna Minton (London: Repeater Books, 2018), 230; Charles, "Hallowed be thy Grime?", 46.

[13] Bramwell, *Grime and The City,* 18; Simon Wheatley, *Don't Call me Urban! The Time of Grime* (Newcastle: Northumbria Press, 2010), 40.

[14] J River, Personal Interview. February 2018.

brought out in performance, later resulting in moments where the collective surpassed individual expectation and levelled up (see Chapter 8).

Their first public appearance under the Over The Edge monicker was a radio set that took place in the latter half of 2016 at Mode FM in Enfield. This transition from playground practice hours to performing in the 'dojo' was a major concern for River.

> When we first went to radio obviously there's elements of spitting that are specific to radio. You're spitting in front of people. That gives you a different type of nervousness when you're performing if you're not used to it. So even though I was very confident in my levels and abilities—cause we've obviously been barring for ages—it was an experience that we had to adapt to. We did it as much as we could and we got good quickly. The first set that me and Razor were ever on, AJ Tracey, Big Zuu, PK [of MTM, see Chapter Five] were all there. We were thrown in at the deep end.[15]

Being thrown in at the deep end is a shrewd analogy for the situation Razor and River entered, and how they responded to it. You simply have to swim to keep yourself above water. Upon listening back to the set, though, it's audible that they acclimatised to the setting. Although flanked by artists who were well known in the scene at the time, dealing with the matter at hand was the primary objective.[16] Following on from this point the crew started to make more radio appearances, released individual EPs, and enlisted a producer called Doubtey from North West London.[17]

(iii) Over The Edge: implications of becoming a DJ for a grime crew

A crew born out of childhood friendships and developed over the best part of a decade holds within it strong bonds and relationships. Becoming involved with anything that far down the line will always result in a level of distance, missing out on experiences and

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[15] J River, 2018.

[16] It also acutely captures how the radio domain itself can inflect upon performance. This will be attended to more fully in Chapter 7.

[17] Shan, "Shan with Guests Debut Show", Mode FM. London, UK, September 5, 2016.

Figure 1.1 – Over The Edge outside Don City Radio. IndexOnDecks,
Raheim, Doubtey, Razor, Reaps (left to right). Photograph taken by
author in September 2017.

camaraderie developed over time. I was asked to join Over The Edge on a car journey from

Don City Radio to West London, just after a radio set. I was immediately tentative. While

concerned about how the affiliation to a crew might curtail some of the wider collaboration

I had been engaging with, I was excited at the opportunity to work with some promising

MCs over an extended period of time.

Initially surprised, there were signs that the offer was incoming. I first met Razor, J

River and Doubtey in August 2017 at my show on Don City. They came down since I had

got hold of Razor's track 'Act Like You Know' to play on, and they wanted to show their

support. Following this set, Doubtey asked to host my next two shows, which in itself was a

big deal. Hosts have to act as a communicator with the audience, informing them of track names and new releases. As such, hosts typically have an invested relationship with the DJ.

The following month I organised a guest mix from IndexOnDecks and Raheim. On the night Doubtey, Razor and Reaps all passed through for the set. In my years across radio, I had never really had guests repeatedly turn up for shows, particularly from the same crew. It seemed like Doubtey had a proposal.[18] Passing through Westminster at 2am with a VW Polo full of MCs and DJs who I had only known for less than a few weeks, I wasn't best placed to make a decision. I said to Doubtey that I would let him and Razor know, but I just needed to check my commitments. After dropping off Doubtey in Kensal Green, Raheim in West Acton and IndexOnDecks in Croydon, I finally got home at 5am and slept on it. The next morning I got in contact to say that I'd be up for joining. From the start of October 2017 I was officially Over The Edge's DJ.

This move was significant for a number of reasons. Principally, this move enabled me to work with a (relatively) stable group of MCs over an extended period of time. I could track their progression, development of ideas, and actively engage in the creative process. While the practice of the crew and my findings are examined fully in Chapter 8, this does not mean that my practice is only considered in the latter stages of the thesis. In actuality, these experiences are central to understanding my theorisation of levelling up, and permeate all consequent chapters. My unfettered access to, and active performance with, an improvising group has enabled me to document creative practice at ground level, and collect field notes along with retrospective analyses of performances (many of which appear in Chapters 7 and 8). However, while fundamental for answering this thesis' main questions, this decidedly autoethnographic approach is far from perfect. This chapter's next section details the issues that arise from such an approach, and begins with an extract from my field notes that reflects upon a performance event with Over The Edge from December 2017.

18 de Lacey, "Beats, Rhymes and Strife w Krabs, Index and Over The Edge", Don City Radio. London, UK, September 21, 2017.

Section 2 – Conducting autoethnography and critical analysis

It's 3am in late-December and I am waiting for a train from Seven Sisters, North London, in bitterly cold conditions. While many people are nestled up at home in post-Christmas slumber, I am making the trip back to South London having just performed as part of Over The Edge's official debut show. From my position on stage, Five Miles—a former fabric warehouse newly kitted out with a state-of-the-art soundsystem—was jumping. Eight MCs were going back-to-back, while myself and our two other DJs were pushing out instrumentals. Largely pleased with the performance, I left the booth and entered the outside courtyard to break down what had occurred with the team.

One of the MCs was in high spirits, gassed off of the performance, one of his first in public. Another MC, however, was angry. 'There are levels to this', he kept saying. Our subsequent discussion lasted nearly an hour going over how the transitions between tracks weren't fast enough, how certain MCs weren't projecting enough to the audience, and how the pacing was off. Standing on the platform at Seven Sisters I came to realise that each and every one of us held a different conception of how the night went.

Journal Entry. December 30, 2017.

This section looks to two concerns. Firstly, it will address the difficulties faced trying to report on something that I am deeply involved in and how these difficulties have been mitigated by a more participatory approach. Secondly it will look at how my practice has changed since becoming a researcher-performer, with reference to theoretical models that this thesis has incorporated, and issues of observation evoked by Pierre Bourdieu in his study *The Logic of Practice*.[19]

(i) Autoethnography, ways of knowing and analysis

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[19] Pierre Bourdieu, *The Logic of Practice* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1990).

The situation that arose in Five Miles spoke to how a singular perspective can never tell the full story. There is a question of representation that is affected both by the difficulties of writing reflexively about one's own work, and the need to incorporate collaborators' opinions to fashion a more rounded understanding of group practice.

Concerns surrounding analytic reflexivity are attended to in a number of studies. Atkinson et al's work on Qualitative Research examines how autoethnographers 'frame their accounts with personal reflexive views of the self'. For Harrison, his transition from 'passive ethnographer to active MC'—mentioned in this Section 1—was a prevailing consideration.[20] Being able to accurately convey what occurred, and analyse the processes at hand, requires a coming to terms with the fact that any interpretation—including my own—will never be completely disinterested.

Acknowledging this incorporation of the self, without falling into self-indulgence is a matter addressed by other scholars. Leon Anderson's work examines issues of 'evocative ethnography' that prioritise pathos over precision, while Norman Denzin is critical of autoethnographers who 'bypass the representational problem by invoking an epistemology of emotion'. While I have an emotional engagement with the artists who I work with—we have been collaborating since 2017 and have become friends as a result—the priority is to unpack group creative performance in grime, not espouse a singular and overly emotive viewpoint. Accordingly, there are ways in which I have tried to instil a sense of critical distance, alongside my more detailed field notes.[21]

Part of this distance has come through human necessity. While completely immersed in the scene throughout 2016 and 2017, over time I became physically and emotionally exhausted. Taking breaks from practice allowed me to collect my thoughts and reflect. My diary entries were also subject to several phases of engagement. Following the initial

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[20] Paul Atkinson, Sara Delamont, and Amanda Coffey, *Key Themes in Qualitative Research: Continuities and Changes* (Oxford: Rowman Altamira, 2004), 62; Harrison, *Hip Hop Underground*, 3, 46.

[21] Leon Anderson, "Analytic Autoethnography", Journal of Contemporary Ethnography, 35 no. 4 (2006): 373; Norman Denzin, *Interpretive Ethnography: Ethnographic Practices for the 21st Century*, (California: Sage, 1997), 228.

performance and preliminary report, I would revise and edit the journal entry on the following day. If the event was recorded (all of my radio shows were, but some performances were not) I would then re-listen to the performance, taking notes and looking closely at points of interest. Following this, I would speak with artists about their perceptions. Through a triangulation of artists' interpretations, my own ethnographic reportage, and an assessment of the material away from the field, I hoped to mitigate for some of the issues that result from this sort of research.

In particular, this co-collaborative approach with artists has proven beneficial. Throughout this thesis, the process of translating practical grime knowledge into academic knowledge will be both challenging and illuminating (shown principally in Chapter 6's engagement with the Through Ball). Difficulties breaching the impasse between artists' ways of knowing and a more formal understanding have been substantially helped by discussions and collaborations with a diverse array of artists (see Section 4). For Chapter 8, in particular, I worked extensively with Razor, one of Over The Edge's MCs. We would speak regularly about the minutiae of grime practice and the ways in which it could be made transparent. He also became directly involved in the research as it progressed.

In June 2018, Razor and I introduced grime music and performed a fifteen minute set to an audience of early career researchers in Greenwich. And in March 2019 we co-presented an undergraduate lecture at Goldsmiths, where Razor spoke on 'technical terms and their practical use', and how grime's rich lexicon of descriptive terminology helps unpack what's at play in live performance.[22] This level of thinking critically and collaboratively with a co-performer was bolstered by interviews with the rest of the crew. Interview questions about each artist's practice related to performances that we were all involved in. This approach helped both Chapter 8 move towards a more co-constructed model of Over The Edge's functionality, and strengthen the thesis' overall modelling of how crews can *level up*.

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[22] Razor and Alex de Lacey, "Performance 1: Ways of Knowing", Lecture. Goldsmiths University, March 5, 2019.

(ii) Performer-researcher: theory's impact on practice

A peculiar aspect that has impacted my research is the way in which my engagement with academic writing has affected my DJ practice. According to second order cybernetics, any involvement with a system—even observing—can elicit change upon it. My position as a DJ means that I have substantial scope to impact proceedings. I am able to choose what tracks to play and how to deliver them. And since I started grappling with theoretical material—particularly on interaction, improvisation, emergence and complexity (covered in Chapter 2)—my approach to DJing has changed. This has inflected on the functionality of the group as a whole. When I 'make the cut' I bring this understanding to the table, in addition to my skillset as a DJ. While I would like to think that I am fully in the moment, improvising with the group in a manner that seems immanent and intuitive, there is an underlying influence. This affects the way in which I am thinking about performance at the time of performing.[23]

For example, I noticed a developing trend in my ethnographic diary in 2017. Some of these notes detailed a sense of detachment from the performance at hand, my improvisation temporarily suspended. Following a set with London Crew Shellyvnne, featured in Chapter 8 (audiovisual example 8b), I wrote that 'I was not just performing, but actively listening to other performers during their unfolding performance process and working out how to react to their performance'. This statement essentially articulates the metapragmatic process that artists undertake while performing in grime music (see Chapter 5). However, I was being distracted by this thought during the process. Here, I was thinking about how I think and react while within a performance I was already working through.

Consequently, this impacted my practice and decision making. There were moments when I was acutely conscious of not trying to 'drive' the performance. This was especially the case whenever I performed in close proximity to reading the work of Keith Sawyer,

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[23] Katherine Hayles, "Making the Cut: The Interplay of the Narrative System, or What Systems Theory Can't See", in *Observing Complexity: Systems Theory and Postmodernity,* ed. William Rasch (London, University of Minnesota Press, 2000), 137.

whose work on emergence and group practice will prove central to this study. Similarly, ethnomusicologist David Borgo's assertion that 'the modeller is not seeking to control the complex system by quantifying it...[but by] increas[ing] their "intuitions" about how the system works so they can interact with it more harmoniously' led me towards a more passive performance style. Here, sitting back and prioritising MCs actually brought distaste from artists, berating me for not testing them and chopping the tracks.[24]

What is captured here is an alteration of process. Rather than responding in the moment to a variety of stimuli, I took singular suggestions and allowed these to override my practice. Despite both Saywer and Borgo being advocates for emergent creative process, I found myself aligning with singular salient points from their writing and consequently colouring the crew's creative output.

For Pierre Bourdieu, there are many issues in prescribing totalised understandings of how practice should be conducted. This is made apparent in *The Logic of Practice*, where he states that 'practice has a logic that is not of the logician'. While he is not advocating for a complete abandonment of the theorisation of practice—the book offers many ways in which we can begin to conceptualise creative practice (see Chapter 2, Section 3 and Chapter 5)—he acknowledges a mediation between the actuality of creative process and the difficulties faced in reflecting on what has occurred. Bourdieu goes on to indicate a fallacy of reflection as representative of practice itself, writing that 'there is every reason to think that as soon as he reflects on his practice, adopting a quasi theoretical posture, the agent loses any chance of expressing the truth of his practice'.[25]

In light of these concerns, and with respect to how my practice was influenced, I then tried to detach myself from the literature while performing, effectively unlearning what I had learned to explain what I was already doing. This was, of course, also a challenge. And while I have come to realise that any conceptualisation of practice will have an impact, regardless of intention, there are a number of ways in which I have tried to capture process,

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[24] David Borgo, *Sync or Swarm: Improvising Music in a Complex Age* (New York: Continuum, 2005), 73; Sawyer, *Group Creativity*, 9.

[25] Bourdieu, *Logic of Practice*, 80, 92.

without the fear of 'mere totalization' that Bourdieu warns against.[26] Firstly, the performances analysed that I featured in were all recorded (audio and audiovisual). This assuages the crisis of memory that has befallen Bourdieu's theorist who 'sits in his armchair' pontificating after an event has occurred. Secondly, my analyses are strengthened by extensive interviews with participants (see Section 4). Finally, my very awareness of these fallacies is present throughout the field notes undertaken. This means that for sections where analysis of my own practice is undertaken, particularly in Chapters Seven and Eight, diary entries are presented alongside analysis of performances, to ascertain what I was thinking through theoretically at the time of each performance episode.

There is a fundamental concern within this thesis to map the nuances of creative process. Despite the difficulties of autoethnography, the insight garnered acts as a critical supplement to theoretical modelling and analysis, while also providing the experiential bolstering that acknowledges performances' local instability, the importance of process, and the need to continually interrogate findings, both with co-collaborators and in reference to audiovisual documentation and field notes.

Section 3 – Ethnographic legitimacy and the academy

Having dealt with the issues surrounding autoethnography specifically, this section looks to wider structural issues (particularly race and class) that have made my engagement with grime music permissible, and the ethical concerns that I have considered while conducting my ethnography. I am a white man performing in a field that, although featuring an ethnically diverse array of practitioners, continues to foreground its position as a music of black origin. This carries significant implications with respect to structural biases within wider society.

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[26] ibid, 82.

It will then turn to issues surrounding the academy itself. Working within the academy affords a particular vantage, however this institutional association has impacted the way in which I am seen by other practitioners. A history of misrepresentation, as represented above, has unsurprisingly led to a palpable sense of distrust of outsiders. I spoke with a number of artists about these concerns.

(i) Race, class and the particularity of a DJ

Two factors that are pertinent to my position in the scene are the overt racial and implicit economic affordances that I possess. There are prevailing structural obstacles in society that —regardless of the ways in which grime's performer base is diversified—effect employability and the opinions of major organisations over who to hire. Harrison references this. Despite the so-called 'racial heterogeneity' of the Bay Area hip-hop scene, he writes that 'the idea that race should not matter and the false consciousness (for some) that race does not matter gets consistently confronted by the fact that it does.'[27]

In December 2018 I received a message in a group chat with some MCs that directly spoke to this issue.

> MC: Hear what I'm saying. Probably an unpopular opinion, however Logan Sama…He is whack fam. I was tryna take him in yeah. He's whack g. I've been watching these sets that he's doing. His selection is terrible, his mixing is terrible, he's worse than XXXX, but fam he's just whack bro. What's going on?
>
> MC 2: not gonna lie, it's white privilege still.[28]

Here my own position as a white DJ was laid bare. These artists attributed Logan Sama's reputation as one of grime's principal DJs to structural racism. And I really couldn't argue, because it is largely true. Logan Sama grew up in Brentwood, Essex and studied Maths and Physics at King's College London. He got his break in 2002 after becoming a well known

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[27] Harrison, *Hip Hop Underground,* 34.

[28] Personal Correspondence, 2018.

name on the Uptown Records Web Forum where he was invited to join Rinse FM, effectively jumping in at the highest level because of his ability to engage in an online literary sphere: 'I was invited by Dugs from Rinse FM to record a demo in 2002. Within weeks I had a show prime time on a Friday night 7pm before Roll Deep.'[29]

While Logan is one of grime's most highly regarded DJs, the way in which he rose through the ranks was arguably facilitated by his race, relative economic security and social nous to negotiate and reason with a managerial class that predominantly looked like him. His show on Kiss FM that I listened to as a teenager was the first grime show commissioned on that platform (Kiss was also home to David Rodigan throughout the 2000s). Sama was also first on the list for a dedicated grime programme that launched in 2017 on BBC Radio 1 Xtra. This was despite a four year radio hiatus. DJs Spooky, Sir Spyro and Grandmixxer (all black and very active in the scene at that moment in time) were not chosen. I am not saying that black artists can never get into these positions. Spyro was eventually given the role after Sama's offer was revoked.[30] However, questions have to be asked. Particularly when we consider that David Rodigan, Tim Westwood and Logan Sama—seen as the three titans of radio for Reggae, Hip-Hop and Grime respectively—are all white and come from middle class backgrounds.[31]

One other aspect to consider is the particularity of DJing and how this career path afforded access in a way that MCing could not offer. As a DJ I didn't have to speak aside from introducing tracks. Therefore, identity wasn't openly asserted. This is starkly different for MCs. Bruza, a black MC from Walthamstow who spat in a Cockney accent, regularly had to deal with issues surrounding his identity. Presumed by many listeners to be white because

[29] "Biography: Logan Sama – Fabric Blog", *fabriclondon*, February 10, 2015, https://www.fabriclondon.com/blog/view/biography-logan-sama.

[30] "Reggae Fever: David Rodigan", *BBC*, accessed January 15, 2019, https://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/b0brzpsb.; "Logan Sama Dropped from BBC Radio 1Xtra after "ignorant and Offensive Comments" on Twitter", *Resident Advisor*, accessed January 15, 2019, https://www.residentadvisor.net/news/40396.

[31] Tim Westwood's father was an Anglican Bishop. C I P Denyer, "DEPUTY LIEUTENANT COMMISSIONS", *The London Gazette*, no. 54456 (1996): 72.

of his performance style, he released a single in 2005 called 'Doin Me' that explicitly confronted these expectations.[32]

> Bruza: When people first heard of me,
>
> they used to wonder what colour Bruza is,
>
> before they saw Lord of the Mics,
>
> they used to think that I was white
>
> they used to think I lost my mind.
>
> Haters used to say I'm a coconut,
>
> but I'm far from it, I'll fold you up and
>
> then burst your head open like a coconut.
>
> All that's white in me,
>
> is me bones bruv, and I know my history…

Unlike Bruza, my DJing identity was instead built through my selection of tracks, my skill set—how I mixed the tracks, the rapidity with which I could cut between different instrumentals—and the MCs I worked with. I provided the beats and the MCs did the talking. Further to this, I had the socioeconomic means to purchase a set of decks and start mixing vinyl from an early age. For an artist like DJ Spooky this wasn't an option. He simply couldn't afford his own set of turntables. In brute economic terms, 'DJing isn't cheap. MCing is free'.[33] This consideration then, is three-fold. While I have worked hard to get where I am, as did Logan Sama, there are a number of elements (racial, socioeconomic, and DJ specific) that have made this journey more easily navigable.

(ii) The Academy meets the performance sphere

Perhaps the most marked concern with respect to my practice, though, is my position within the academy. Not only did this research impact my own practice as a DJ, I also felt set apart

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[32] "Bruza [Archive] – Dissensus", April 14, 2005, http://www.dissensus.com/archive/index.php/t-1263.html?s=2e5e0dc0ec02ff60c9615c51f731a9c8.

[33] Boiler Room, "Spooky - Boiler Room Collections - London", *YouTube*, September 7, 2015, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=X0JYShDyUU4, (25:00); Hancox, *Inner City Pressure,* 52.

from other artists by virtue of being attached to an institution. As mentioned above, grime artists are reticent to engage with outsiders for fear of misrepresentation, and I was anxious about how other artists might perceive me. I was concerned that university study of the form meant I was no longer just a DJ, but someone to be treated with suspicion. There are obvious benefits through being aligned with a university. Prior to starting my PhD (in 2016) I was juggling piano teaching with delivery driving and DJing. This meant that research was limited. PhD study, however, enabled me to spend a substantial amount of time interviewing and performing with artists. In many instances I met up with artists on multiple occasions to discuss things further, and I could track the development of their performance practice. This 'truly participatory participant-observation' really enabled me to work with ideas, consult with peers, and keep artists updated on how the research was progressing.[34]

However, I was also aware that this freedom to explore and document grime's performance practice was facilitated by a funding grant from the Arts and Humanities Research Council. This relative economic and occupational security was not shared with the majority of artists I worked with, many of whom lived in relative precarity. Accordingly, this disparity between the time afforded to me as a researcher and the lived experiences of these artists created a palpable power dynamic. A key consideration throughout my research was managing this. I had to be judicious with respect to who I interviewed. For example, not interviewing people simply because I already knew them. I also had to be clear and manage expectations.

Aside from the handful of academic studies mentioned above, the primary format with which grime artists are typically interviewed is journalistic. As such, there was initially an emphasis from artists to tell me about their new single that they thought might help them 'go clear' and get serious recognition and financial reward. My new role as a researcher meant that my intentions were very different. The scope for exposure through talking to me, as opposed to my time as a journalist, was comparatively non-existent. Accordingly I had to

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[34] Timothy Cooley, "Casting Shadows in the Field: An Introduction", in *Shadows in the Field: New Perspectives for Fieldwork in Ethnomusicology* ed. Gregory F. Barz and Timothy J Cooley, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), 4.

be honest and upfront. While I had time on my hands, this time was precious for artists. I did not want to mislead them or promise them something I couldn't fulfil.

I encountered this issue when I first met one of my interviewees. At the time I was working for youth culture publication *Complex*. We were in the smoking area at a grime night in West London and he was eager to tell me about his new EP. He offered me a premiere and sent a number of follow-up e-mails over the consequent fortnight. When I approached him to be interviewed for the thesis, however, I had to be clear of my intentions. I couldn't promise a review, nor could I get his video uploaded to a popular channel. As a result, it took some time to get the interview in place. There was far less urgency on his part to make it happen. However, once we met up there was a mutual understanding and this resulted in us talking extensively about performance and his wider pursuits. Through downplaying commercial imperative and foregrounding my interest in the art form, we entered into a far more meaningful working relationship. And as a result we later ended up performing together, both on the radio and at live shows.

I soon discovered that while being a researcher meant that it took longer to arrange interviews, my role as a practitioner helped qualify my position to artists that I approached. In the large majority of cases it assuaged concern about my involvement with an academic institution, which was something I wasn't necessarily expecting. Razor, South London MCs Jabz and Shannon Parkes, and photographer Ellie Ramsden all said that they felt reassured that someone they knew was doing this work and that they were asked for their opinion. A few even jokingly suggested they'd like to have lectures from me. And Jabz, although initially surprised that someone could actually write 80,000 words on grime, primarily thought it was sick and would continually check in to see how the project was going. The formality of the boundary only manifested itself in the recording of interviews, which wasn't an unusual imposition since performances were typically recorded anyway.[35] As time progressed interviews flowed, and recommendations kept coming through, meaning I could speak with more and more artists about their practice. It was apparent that while the notion of the

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[35] See Appendix B for details of my ethical approval.

project itself was a bit strange to some, I was committed and had time to hear about their craft, rather than trying to squeeze out a soundbite for a news article.

Most importantly, then, my position as a known quantity lessened concerns about my attachment to the academy. One artist in particular openly said to me in interview that he wouldn't have reached out if I wasn't active in the scene. For many others this was implicitly inferred. Of course I can't predict how this project may have turned out if I wasn't a practitioner, but it was principally a 'way in' and it made the reasons behind my research more tangible. In short, I am a DJ, I work with Over The Edge and I have a fortnightly show on Mode FM and I used to be on Deja and Don City. Therefore I was respected and legitimised because of this.

Section 4 – Data Collection and representation

While Section 3 began to explore aspects of my ethnographic practice in relation to my ethical responsibility as a researcher, this section outlines the ethnographic process more fully. There were three primary ways in which I collected and amassed material. Firstly through observation and reporting on events, secondly through interviewing practitioners, and finally through my own performances with my crew Over The Edge. The specifics of this data collection will now be addressed, before detailing how I have represented musical material throughout.

Observations

I attended and documented over a hundred and fifty events as part of the research phase, which ran up until February 2019. This included radio sets, live shows, cyphers and video shoots. While not necessarily Geertzian in descriptive richness—it was often difficult to report as events were unfolding, since a notepad would provide a barrier between myself

and other participants—each of these occasions was written up the following day. I took great care to include minor details owing to the potential of inconsequential happenings becoming prevailing themes.[36]

Live shows and radio sets typically took place inside the M25, ranging from intimate album launches in basement bars to large scale raves at Fabric in Central London, Fire in Vauxhall, and Bussey Building in Peckham. Radio sets were normally populated by one or two DJs and a roster of MCs. While my earlier observations were on the periphery, I began to get more involved at shows with a palpable blur between observation and performance becoming apparent. A number of radio sets that I attended resulted in me jumping on deck, while I typically had a vested interest at certain shows, particularly if one of Over the Edge's MCs was scheduled to perform.

Many of these observations appear throughout the thesis, but many more could not be included owing to the relative scope and length of the project. Nonetheless, attendance at events was critical in fashioning the final output. Without attending as many events as I did, I would not have been as embedded in the scene. Although I was an active DJ, I had to be seen out and about and 'putting in work' to be further authenticated.[37] Continued attendance bolstered friendships and helped me secure interviews (mentioned above). Fundamentally, this immersion helped me develop ideas and schema for mapping the ways in which grime artists perform and improvise.

Interviews

I began to conduct interviews with practitioners in January 2017, after amassing contacts in late 2016. The final interview took place in February 2019. In total, twenty-six formal interviews were undertaken alongside innumerable informal and semi-structured discussions

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[36] Clifford Geertz, *The Interpretation of Cultures: Selected Essays,* (New York: Basic Books, 1973).

[37] Dirtee TV, "Footsie - Work All Day (Official Video)", July 23, 2014, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=N37KX8ZJfSo. Accessed February 6, 2020.

from the events I attended. Formal interviewees were all living and working in London at the time of our engagement (aside from Japanese MC Pakin). All interviews took place in neutral spaces such as coffee shops, studio spaces and parks. Arrangements were primarily organised through Twitter or WhatsApp. As mentioned above, all interviews were recorded and I obtained verbal assent (predominantly on record) from artists since many were reticent to sign a form owing to its perceived legally binding nature. I typically found that demanding a signature can foster a sense of distrust, with verbal assent being far more practical and agreeable.[38]

Most of my interviewees were MCs and DJs, however I interviewed some photographers, journalists and event organisers in order to gain a fuller understanding of the scene as a whole. Interviewees for Chapters 4 and 5 were primarily involved with grime in the early 2000s, since the material examined in these chapters relates to foundational performance techniques, whereas artists interviewed for Chapters 6, 7 and 8 were actively involved in the London scene from 2016–2019.

Interviews were loosely structured, yet somewhat tailored towards the particular section I was writing about at that moment in time. I also made use of musical examples to direct our discussions. Ingrid Monson has written on the benefits and pitfalls of utilising music in her ethnographic interviews. While initially tentative I generally found the incorporation of musical examples to be positive. Consequently, I incorporated examples more and more as time went by. Often they invoked surprise and renewed interest from my participants, some of whom had forgotten the performance that I was talking about (particularly the case for interviewees for material in Chapters 4 and 5). DJ Eastwood, for example, was transported back to 2005 through hearing an extract from a mix CD that I played for him.[39]

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[38] Susan Tilley and Louise Gormley, "Canadian University Ethics Review: Cultural Complications Translating Principles Into Practice", *Qualitative Inquiry* 13, no. 3 (2007): 371.

[39] Ingrid Monson, *Saying Something: Jazz improvisation and interaction,* (London: University of Chicago Press, 1996), 19.

> I kind of like the rawness of this one. You don't get the same energy in a professionally recorded mix as you do when everything's live, with mistakes and everything. To be honest with you, I'd forgotten about that tune. It kinda hit me. Took me back a bit.[40]

My interview with West London MC Hitman Tiga was particularly in-depth. Near the beginning of the interview I played him an excerpt from a performance that featured himself alongside former MCing partner Naughty Gangsta. Tiga had not heard this in years, and spoke passionately about that time period and his performance partnership with Naughty Gangsta. The prospect of hearing these sets again, which I e-mailed to him later that evening, was a great icebreaker and started off a discussion that lasted for a number of hours. Similarly, my aforementioned understanding of the music—and my work as a DJ—helped conversations flow. If initial exchanges were slow at first, these were ameliorated by being able to speak on issues that were often esoteric and largely reserved for hardened purists or practitioners.

It is worth mentioning that this understanding of esoteric issues, while beneficial in interview, did make the writing process in general more challenging. Through being an insider, I was often unaware of how much a non-initiate might know about grime music and what references they might glean from the study. Furthermore, these interviews often drifted off on tangents so specialised that a wider applicability for the understanding of performance was completely absent. I also often lacked a curatorial gaze, afforded to outsiders that can help fashion a meaningful understanding of what is really important. These positional difficulties were attended to by Damian Marley, who mentioned that David Rodigan's relative position as an outsider in reggae music meant he had an ability to see something in the music that artists deeply involved in it might miss. Lez Henry, a British reggae toaster and ethnographer of Jamaican music, has spoken on his specialised knowledge of the Jamaican soundsystem scene amassed through avidly collecting tapes of dances that Jamaican artists themselves simply discarded.[41] There were moments in my

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[40] Eastwood, 2017.

[41] "Reggae Fever", 35:00; Lez Henry, Personal Conversation. September 2018.

research, too, where I obsessed over minutiae (such as the relationship between two MCs in the early 2000s mentioned above) rather than looking at the bigger picture.

While my reflexivity more generally is discussed above in Section 2, for the purpose of interviews and comprehensibility for wider readership I have tried to keep obscure references to a minimum. Those that are necessary for an understanding of the situation at hand are qualified by an explanation in brackets.

Performances

For the study of performance, however, my main objective was to become embedded as possible. While I entered my research phase as a working practitioner in the scene, I continued to perform and develop my skillset, building further performance relationships through working with everyone I could. Joseph Schloss, mentioned at this chapter's outset, wrote of an 'ethics [structure that possessed] an internal systemicity that exists independently of the observer' in his study of sampling practice in the Seattle hip-hop scene. My continued involvement in the grime scene has similarly helped contextualise my own practice and the work of others.[42]

In total, I DJ'd with sixty-six different MCs over the research period, hosted forty-two radio shows, or 'sets', on Don City Radio, guested on Radar Radio (Clerkenwell) and Subtle FM (Hackney Downs) and hosted eight further shows on Mode FM (Enfield), having joined the station towards the end of my research phase in November 2018. I also DJ'd for Razor at a number of venues across London and Brighton, hosted an Over The Edge set for streaming platform Keep Hush and performed with the crew at Five Miles in Tottenham.

I documented all of my radio shows and performances, writing detailed notes on my interactions with the MCs and my own practice. Through this I both amassed a working

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[42] Schloss, *Making Beats*, 105.

understanding of expected performance ethics—which acts an important addition to observations and interview data—and kept a substantial performance diary which documents Over The Edge's development as a crew over an eighteen month period. Its contents acted as invaluable data for mapping the crew's emergent practice in this thesis' final chapter, and the ways in which we were able to *level up* in the live domain.

Representation

Throughout the thesis musical events are situated in 'Episodes'. These episodes focus on a particular performance or technique. Each of these correlates to piece(s) of audiovisual documentation provided on the USB, placed in the thesis' inside sleeve.[43]

Within episodes the music is written about in a way that is hopefully accessible to all readers. Having said this, I often incorporate stave notation to convey or augment a point. Unlike studies of jazz, musical scores are not 'insider notation' for the large majority of grime artists. This was a tough decision, however there are moments of intricate interplay that are most efficiently represented using this form. MC performances are typically presented on single stave lines. MCs do not necessarily sing, and when they do this is clearly indicated. Cadences are shown through notation rising upwards above the line, or falling beneath it (see Figure 4.2 and Figure 4.3). The accompanying audiovisual material also represents what is at play.[44]

Of course, this does not negate interviewee contributions. On many occasions—such as when Swarvo speaks about the distinction between 'technical' and 'reload' bars in Figures 4.3 and 4.4—the notation is provided alongside an artist testimonial.

Further to this, each piece of analysis attends closely to the performance context. In hip hop studies, Justin Williams has written on the importance of the 'intertextual' relationship between the text, flow and music, while Oliver Kautny foregrounded the

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[43] See Table of Episodes and the Table of Audiovisual Examples for further information.

[44] Monson, *Saying Something*, 23.

'interplay of the MC and the track'. A rhythm alone does not tell us anything substantive. Accordingly, techniques are unpacked with reference to the situation at hand.[45]

This importance of interplay also means that DJ techniques—when notated—are presented alongside the MC(s)' performance. This is the case in Chapter 6 where the 'through ball' is mapped out. The notation is simple (such as in Figure 6.2) and exists only to elucidate the interaction taking place. More intricate techniques are attended to through interviewee contributions.

While Turntablature and its varying manifestations can be beneficial in certain circumstances, it would only seek to confuse in this context. There are two principal methods, both of which are insufficient for the task at hand. Hip-Hop DJ A-Trak's 'scratch notation' is intended for replication of performance, while John Carluccio's Turntable Transcription Method (TTM) is a highly complex notational system that does not illuminate what I am trying to convey with respect to grime's performance. My concern is principally with interplay, and the nuances of DJ scratching and flare technique are not the focus of this study.[46]

Conclusion

This chapter has offered an overview of this thesis' methodology, and the ways in which my ethnographic lens will be synthesised with analytical work. I have argued that an understanding of the nuances of group creativity necessitates on-the-ground ethnographic engagement, but have also made transparent its limitations. Ethical considerations of ethnographic research were then outlined, before my methods of data collection were

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[45] Justin A Williams, "Beats and Flows: A Response to Kyle Adams, 'Aspects of the Music/Text Relationship in Rap'", *Music Theory Online* 15, no. 2 (2009): 4; Oliver Kautny, "The Musical Analysis of Hip-Hop", in *The Cambridge Companion to Hip-Hop*, ed. Justin A. Williams, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), 101.

[46] Felicia Miyakawa, "Turntablature: Notation, Legitimization, and the Art of the Hip-Hop DJ", *American Music* 25, no. 1 (2007): 81–105.

detailed. Chapter 2 will now critically examine existing literature that will help to frame this study of collective creativity in grime music.

Chapter 2 – Set Pace: Literature Review

Introduction

While Chapter 1 has outlined this thesis' methodological concerns, and the decidedly ethnographic nature of this enquiry, it is important to note that this thesis is not just a collection of diary entries from performances and conversations with artists. This thesis is explicitly concerned with articulating the distinctive factors of grime performance—the presence of multiple MCs, tensions between the individual and collective, dense group intertextuality and improvisation—the specificity of the terrains in which it is performed—the live show and radio sets—and how these elements combine to foster fertile ground for new creative practice and enable artists to *level up*. In order to fully address these issues, though, we need to 'set pace' for the thesis through engaging with existing writing.[1]

It is impossible to demarcate grime music's distinctive character, without acknowledging prior musical forms that have impacted and influenced its performance structure, or addressing key theoretical work that has attended to group creative practice in correlate musical styles. As such, a number of key theorists' work has helped to frame the consequent enquiry. This work will now be addressed.

This chapter is split into five sections. Each section will put forward a key aspect of grime performance, and examine literature that will undergird and inform each of the later chapters. In many ways, the idiosyncrasy of grime music moves beyond conceptions of creative practice nestled in prior theorising, and these advances will be mentioned here, alongside the strengths of each text. While it is important to stress that this work will not usurp or mask the ethnographic material presented throughout, it will assist in framing analyses and situating ethnographic enquiry.

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[1] Radar Radio, "Set Pace w/ Razor", *YouTube*, January 21, 2018, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FyJbMzbYm5c.

Section 1 attends to the grounded network of grime performance. This socioeconomic infrastructure was looked at in the thesis' introduction, with reference to the 'hardcore continuum' and grime's locally immediate musical influences. However, this section looks to the functionality of pirate radio, the potentiality of an interrelated media ecology, and how artists have utilised this sphere for entrepreneurial gain.[2] Section 2 addresses a number of tensions in Afrodiasporic musical practice: between the voice, vocalising and technological manipulation; between audience and artist; and those manifest in literature that fetishises the embodied, at the expense of the cognitive and 'collective intellection'.[3] Section 3 addresses a further tension, between the individual and collective, and how this affects group creative practice. H. Samy Alim's conception of the Cipher and creative co-production in hip-hop will be explored, alongside Pierre Bourdieu's work on practice and process.[4] Section 4 attends to emergent group creative practice. It is split into three subsections. Firstly, it looks to work on jazz and improvisatory theatre and how this relates to the 'generative capacity' of performance groups.[5] Secondly, work on artistic competence and interaction is addressed. Finally, it looks at group epistemologies—how ensembles and crews develop a recognisable group aesthetic—and how novelty is stimulated by intertextuality and referentiality. The dense referentiality of grime crews is a key factor in bringing forth new ideas. Ingrid Monson and Timothy Rice's respective work on intermusicality in jazz and Bulgarian folk music will be examined, following an exploration

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[2] Reynolds, "The Wire 300: Introduction".

[3] Ashon T. Crawley, *Blackpentecostal Breath: The Aesthetics of Possibility*, First edition (New York: Fordham University Press, 2017): 25.

[4] H. Samy. Alim, *Roc the Mic Right: The Language of Hip Hop Culture,* (London: Routledge, 2006); H. Samy Alim, Jooyoung Lee, and Lauren Mason Carris, "Moving the Crowd, "Crowding" the Emcee: The Coproduction and Contestation of Black Normativity in Freestyle Rap Battles", *Discourse & Society* 22, no. 4 (2011): 422–439.

[5] Bourdieu, *Logic of Practice*, 55.

of Justin Williams and Catherine M. Appert's work on referentiality in hip-hop, and Seymour Wright's attentive study of collective social learning in improvisatory groups.[6]

Section 5 looks at latent tensions in grime practice born out of societal pressures, hypermasculinity and social subordination, covered in the work of Monique Charles, Jeffrey Boakye, Richard Bramwell and Joy White. It then reaffirms the importance of artists' ways of knowing for a comprehensive model of collective creativity in grime performance.[7]

This chapter aims to bring together theorising on interconnected media and performance ecologies, with the specificities of practice within improvisatory groups. It will therefore clearly demarcate the terrain for the thesis' study of grime practice, and its idiosyncratic form of collective creativity that is multidirectional, laced with tension and coloured by both its performance environment and the wider performative network.

Section 1 – Pirate Radio, Media Ecologies and Entrepreneurship

Dominant perspectives on performance have historically located creative practice within the confines of a concert hall, or theatre. At concerts, skilled performers recreate works by composers whose autonomy is often unquestioned, and sometimes at the expense of creativity.[8] The rise of performance studies, and theorising of performativity, however, has significantly altered perspectives on what performance is, where it takes place, and how it is constituted. Early work from sociologists such as Erving Goffman and Kenneth Burke—and expansive theatrical productions that emerged in the 1960s—envisioned everyday life

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[6] Catherine M. Appert, "Modernity, Remixed: Music as Memory in Rap Galsen", (PhD diss., UCLA, 2012); Catherine M. Appert, "On Hybridity in African Popular Music: The Case of Senegalese Hip Hop", *Ethnomusicology*, 60, no. 2 (2016): 279-299; Monson, *Saying Something*; Timothy Rice, "Reflections on Music and Meaning: Metaphor, Signification and Control in the Bulgarian Case", *British Journal of Ethnomusicology,* 10 no.1, (2001): 19-38; Justin A. Williams, *Rhymin' and Stealin': Musical Borrowing in Hip-Hop* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2013).

[7] Joy White, "We Need to Talk about Newham", 223-238.

[8] Vervliet, Stijn, and Bart Van Looy, "Bach's Chorus Revisited: Historically Informed Performance Practice as 'Bounded Creativity'", *Early Music* 38, no. 2 (2010): 206.

and social interaction as intrinsic to performance schema, and in the 1980s Howard Becker wrote on the interconnectivity of *Art Worlds*.[9] Philip Auslander's edited volume from 2003 entitled 'Performance' is particularly comprehensive, and looked at performance's centrality to politics, social behaviour, and the sciences as 'dramas of speculative thought'.[10]

A more holistic understanding has taken hold in the study of musical performance practice specifically, and is captured in Christopher Small's *Musicking*. This book takes the concert hall as its principal focus, but situates the performance event within an interconnected social fabric. Small problematises the 'spirit of the dead composer', explores relationships between instrumentalists, and dismantles the ideal that performers work in an 'isolated, self-contained society' of practitioners.[11] Small concludes by looking towards an—albeit crudely homogenised—African sense of practice where everyone within a society, regardless of specialisation, is involved in music making in some capacity.[12] Through dismantling the autonomy of the concert hall, Small signals a move towards focusing on the everyday nature of interaction, and the many actors that sustain and excite the performance environment.

This collaborative approach is exemplified in sound system practice. Simon Jones and Paul Pinnock's ethnography of Birmingham-based sound system Scientist notes a tripartite relationship between the studio—where tracks are cut—the sound system itself—and its crew of engineers, the selector and the MC—and the audience.[13] The audience are vital, and dancers—such as the prestigious 'Bashment Gal'—take part in dynamic exchange

9 Ann Branaman, "Reconsidering Kenneth Burke: His Contributions to the Identity Controversy", *The Sociological Quarterly* 35, no. 3 (1994): 443-55; Erving Goffman, *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life* (London: Penguin Books), 1990; Howard Becker, *Art Worlds*, 2Rev Ed edition (Berkeley, Calif.: University of California Press, 1998).

10 Gautam Dagupta, "From Science to Theatre: dramas of speculative thought", in *Performance: Critical Concepts in Literary and Cultural Studies: Vol 1-4*, ed. Philip Auslander, (New York: Routledge, 2003), 3-10.

11 Christopher Small, *Musicking: The Meanings of Performing and Listening*, (Hanover: Wesleyan University Press, 1998), 87, 158, 205.

12 ibid, 208.

13 Simon Jones and Paul Pinnock, *Scientists of Sound: Portraits of a UK Reggae Sound System,* (Poland: Bassline Books, 2018), 4.

that builds momentum. For Julian Henriques, who strongly advocates for an auditory understanding of the sound system session, these processes can be mapped as 'amplification, inflection and transduction'. The collaborative interchange between dancer and sound is adeptly captured in the latter, where transduction is seen as 'the patterning of signal, wave or disturbance in one medium [being] translated into another medium. The bashment gal hearing a rhythm in her ears and over her body and transforming this into a dance move would be a biomechanical example'.[14]

Julian Henriques' study of Jamaican sound system Stone Love highlights the importance of actors whose involvement transcends the immediacy of the performance itself, such as the maintenance crew, or 'boxmen'. For Henriques, this reaffirms a need for 'the widest possible definition of what constitutes performance' and an appreciation of 'every necessity required for the performance to take place rather than only those on stage in front of the audience'[15]. This acknowledgement of the wider performance ecology is reminiscent of Small's work, and speaks to concerns within grime musical practice, and its interconnected community of pirate radio engineers, DJs, MCs, rave promoters, and videographers, all of whom contribute to the field of performance.

Simon Reynolds' writing on the 'hardcore continuum' pays close attention to the interconnected elements that constitute these genres' performance network(s). Reynolds' piece on UK garage for *Wire* evoked the symbiotic relationship between club, pirate radio and the record shop. New tracks would be tested over the airwaves, before being debuted in the clubs. Records for sale were then found through 'hang[ing] out at a garage shop like Rhythm Division'. For Reynolds, this music was about 'vibe' and this vibe was built through

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[14] Julian Henriques, "Rhythmic Bodies: Amplification, Inflection and Transduction in the Dance Performance Techniques of the 'Bashment Gal'", *Body & Society* 20, no. 3–4 (2014), 79–112.

[15] Henriques, *Sonic Bodies*, 45.

engagement in this 'subcultural engine, an urban folkway with its own privileged sites and rites'.[16]

Grime music's shared ancestry with these forms meant that its performance environment is similarly bound to a multifaceted network of 'sites'. Grime scholar Richard Bramwell has written on how these spaces can be situated within a Black Public Sphere. For Bramwell, this liminality is reflective of the socioeconomic pressures faced by the predominantly working-class black youth who engaged in grime practice at its outset. However, these restrictions, for Bramwell, contributed to positive outbursts of creativity. Bramwell draws on Michael Dawson's writing on Black counterpublics, presenting an innovative, interconnected space in which budding practitioners would exchange ideas over bluetooth between mobile phones, and create beats on 'cracked' copies of digital audio workstations such as Fruity Loops.[17]

Engaging with Bramwell's work in this instance opens up two avenues of exploration, which both need to be attended to. Bramwell, Henriques, Pinnock, and Reynolds' work has started to tease out the accumulation of 'vibe' and momentum born out of these interconnected performance frameworks. This is particularly important for this thesis, and an understanding of grime performance, and will be attended to shortly. However, it also touches on how entrepreneurial endeavours within this network have impacted performance.

(i) Entrepreneurship and agency in grime music

Bramwell's discussion of artists using 'cracked' copies of digital software to produce grime instrumentals is complicit with well-worn ideas of creativity being born out of adversity.

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[16] Simon Reynolds, "The Wire 300: Simon Reynolds on the Hardcore Continuum Series #6: Two-Step Garage (1999) - The Wire", *The Wire Magazine - Adventures In Modern Music,* accessed December 6, 2019, https://www.thewire.co.uk/in-writing/essays/the-wire-300_simon-reynolds-on-the-hardcore-continuum-series_6_two-step-garage_1999_.

[17] Bramwell, *Grime and the City,* 18; Michael Dawson, "A Black Counterpublic?: Economic Earthquakes, Racial Agenda(s), and Black Politics", *Public Culture* 7, no. 1 (1994): 195–223.

This section, though, eschews a socioeconomically deterministic perspective. Instead, it looks towards artists' agency and how they repurpose materials at their disposal in new ways through fashioning creative channels, and spaces to create.

Keith Negus' enquiry into "The Business of Rap" refers to rap functioning as a 'self-conscious business activity' that capitalises upon corporate structures.[18] While grime's network is far more grounded than US hip-hop—according to Ro Ronin, Death Row Records were turning over 100 million US dollars at their peak[19]—grime artists have engaged with corporate entities, predominantly through clothing sponsorships, such as South London MC Stormzy's lucrative deal with Adidas[20] Nonetheless, it is within grime's distinctive performance network that most of these innovations occur. The informal economy of pirate radio, record shops and raves is crucial to this, in addition to visual media innovations during the mid 2000s.

S. Craig Watkins has written on how technology is seen to affect or sully oppositional practice through an alignment with dominant structures. However he also located a particular 'black youth agency' in hip-hop that has incorporated technology—such as video—to 'forge new creative frontiers'. This 'flexible accumulation'—as posited by George Lipsitz, is shared by grime artists, many of whom engage in artisan capitalist practice, through building their own platforms for visual distribution from the ground up.[21]

Three of grime's main visual platforms—GRM Daily, JDZ Media, and SB:TV— were started by young entrepreneurs, and their proliferation of content both aligns with mainstream entities while surpassing them with on-the-ground insight and lifestyle features.

[18] Keith Negus, "The Business of Rap: Between the Street and the Executive Suite", in *That's the Joint!: The Hip-Hop Studies Reader*, ed. Mark Anthony Neal and Murray Forman (New York: Routledge, 2004), 657, 669.

[19] Ro Ronin, *Have Gun Will Travel: The Spectacular Rise and Violent Fall of Death Row Records,* (New York: Doubleday, 1998).

[20] David Renshaw, "Stormzy Announces New Partnership with Adidas Originals", *The Fader*, November 23, 2018.

[21] George Lipsitz, Dangerous Crossroads: Popular Music, Postmodernism, and the Poetics of Place (London; New York: Verso, 1994), 6; S. Craig Watkins, "Black Youth and the Ironies of Capitalism", in *That's the Joint!: The Hip-Hop Studies Reader*, ed. Mark Anthony Neal and Murray Forman (New York: Routledge, 2004), 702, 706.

This is best evidenced by GRM Daily, set up by Posty in 2009. Through foregrounding the 'daily', Posty's channel not only increased revenue through content saturation, but evoked the everyday performance of this musical form.[22] Its slogan 'I Grime Daily' captured a continual graft—alluded to by the homonymic relation between 'grime' and 'grind'—and a complete immersion in the scene. This is reflected in the visual content produced. Each artist would be interviewed, asked to perform a freestyle, and then carry out a 'crep check', where they speak about the trainers that they are wearing.[23] This process both produces three separate videos that can be uploaded on consecutive days, and reaffirms the extramusical. The popularity of the 'crep check' segment contributed towards East London MC J2K founding his own company Crep Protect—who produce a spray to prevent shoes from wear and tear—that had a listed £3.5 million net worth in 2019.[24]

In addition to visual platforms that are both entrepreneurial in scope and performative of the everyday, there also exists a dedication to—and performance of—independence in grime music. North London grime crew Boy Better Know was founded by brothers Jme and Skepta, and it is entirely self-run. In 2008, Jme graduated from the University of Greenwich with a degree in digital design, with explicit means to 'develop technical and creative skills which form the foundation of [his] business enterprises, including producing [his] own music, videos and clothing ranges'.[25] In 2017, the crew sold out the O2 Arena in South East London for an immersive concert experience that featured tailored food stalls, 5-a-side football and a roller disco.[26] While Boy Better Know's ascension is an example of self-determinism, it also aligns with a wider performance of independence

22 Sonali Pahwa, "Making Revolution Everyday: Quotidian Performance and Utopian Imagination in Egypt's Streets and Squares", *Text and Performance Quarterly* 39, no. 1 (2019): 57–73.

23 Not for the Radio, "J2k - Crep Protect, Crazy Titch, Roll Deep and More [NFTR]", *NFTR,* accessed December 22, 2019, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WAmav7gJeoM.

24 "CREP PROTECT LIMITED", *Company Check,* accessed December 7, 2019, http://companycheck.co.uk/company/09223288/CREP-PROTECT-LIMITED/companies-house-data.

25 Dan Stevens, "Jme", *Alumni | University of Greenwich* (blog), accessed December 22, 2019, https://alumni.gre.ac.uk/greenwichportraits/jamie-adenuga/.

26 James Hanley, "Takeover Talks: Boy Better Know Get Set for Grime's Biggest Stage", *Music Week*, 2017, 4.

that has been historically co-opted in popular music by artists trying to attain legitimacy and retain a sense of authenticity.[27] Many grime artists are engaged in artists services contracts—West London MC AJ Tracey's management team have set up Supernature to help facilitate such deals[28]—but an outward projection of independence is marketable. This is located in hip-hop by both Negus and Watkins who point to street legitimacy and the 'ironies of capitalism' respectively.[29]

For Foord and Ginsburg, there exists 'hidden social capital in poor areas' of the inner city and this can be capitalised upon, in a way that music writer Dan Hancox sees as 'truly autonomous' and existing apart from 'white cultural institutions'. However, there is often mediation with such entities. For example, an early grime rave run by DJ Magic, entitled Dirty Canvas, took place in Whitechapel Art Gallery before moving to the Institute for Contemporary Arts.[30] And many grime artists have benefitted from the PRS for Music Momentum Fund, such as Snowy, Big Zuu, Bugzy Malone and C Cane.[31] What exists then, is a model wherein artists creatively utilise opportunities, while maintaining a grounded connection to their own locale. This contrasts with a generalised US hip-hop model where independent labels were regularly bought out by major labels to run only quasi-autonomously, with the executive suite's backing a mandatory prerequisite for their continued existence.[32] Grime artists may engage with 'white cultural institutions' but the

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[27] David Hesmondhalgh, "Post-Punk's Attempt to Democratise the Music Industry: The Success and Failure of Rough Trade", *Popular Music* 16, no. 3 (1997): 256.

[28] Andre Paine, "'It Gives Us a Legitimacy": Team AJ Tracey on Their New Services Company', accessed December 22, 2019, https://www.musicweek.com/labels/read/it-gives-us-a-legitimacy-team-aj-tracey-on-their-new-services-company/077595.

[29] Negus, "Business of Rap…"*,* 666; Watkins, "Black Youth…", 701.

[30] Joseph Patterson, "Introduce Yourself: DJ MAGIC - Fabric Blog", *fabric london*, August 10, 2009, https://www.fabriclondon.com/blog/view/introduce-yourself-dj-magic.

[31] PRS for Music Foundation, "Momentum Artists - Full List", accessed December 9, 2019, https://prsfoundation.com/funding-support/funding-music-creators/next-steps/momentum-music-fund/momentum-artists/momentum-artists-full-list/.

[32] Jo Foord and Norman Ginsburg, "Whose hidden assets? Inner-city potential for social cohesion and economic competitiveness", in *City Matters: Competitiveness, cohesion and urban governance*, eds Martin Boddy and Michael Parkinson, (Bristol: Policy Press, 2003), 287; Hancox, *Inner City Pressure*, 81.

importance of homegrown platforms—such as SB:TV, Link Up TV, GRM Daily and pirate radio—means there is a more complex intermeshing.

An understanding of grime artists' engagement with informal (and formal) economies is furthered by Joy White, who locates figures that creatively work with the means afforded to them. These 'artist entrepreneur[s]' are people 'who resides in "the ends" or poor neighbourhoods, with very few resources', and who—despite these limitations —'create work for themselves or others or both.'[33] With a lack of access to the 'public space' of the city, this reaffirms the importance of both the interstitial spaces Bramwell referred to, but also the agency of these artists to capitalise from avenues that are available to them.[34]

It is important to note that these relationships have changed over time, and early grime practice was more affected by the grounded network of pirate radio and raves, than later visual manifestations and corporate partnerships. The means by which artists worked within this network, and ascended through the ranks, are captured well in an interview between N.A.S.T.Y crew founding member Sharky Major and DJ Logan Sama: 'We used to go around peoples' yards and record a bedroom tape…I had my regular dons and I started linking [East London MC] D Double E and I was going to a few older guys' yards [to record tapes]. Double was driving, he had the old school golf…We used to do sets in a church club. Those were the days for us, what moulded it. Me and Double would go around to bare different houses and link [East London MC] Kano on that circuit…[then] more people started doing radio sets.'

This quote emphasises the trophic separation between avenues of expression, with artists working their way up from the bedroom set, to the community centre, and then onto radio. Once there, artists could promote new singles, dubplates and upcoming raves.

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[33] White, *Urban Music and Entrepreneurship*, 47.

[34] Tracey Reynolds, "Black Neighbourhoods as a Social Capital Resource", Urban Studies 50 no.3 (2013): 484-498.

Resilience and resolve were required to get to this point. 'It was any way', recalled Logan Sama. 'Any which way in which you could string up a a pair of decks and some speakers.'[35]

The interconnected nature of this performance form, its constituent elements, and the innovation required to get things off the ground, means that its performance should be understood as all-encompassing, with entrepreneurial endeavours resulting in new avenues for revenue accumulation and creative expression. While White, Hancox and Bramwell have articulated the innovative edge, we need to turn to the specificities of the key performance environments. One of this thesis' key innovations is its attentiveness to pirate radio as a site of collective creativity. As such, we need to explore its idiosyncrasies and how these afford certain modes of engagement, with both the wider performance network, and the community of artists and listeners.

(ii)   Pirate Radio as a site for creative practice

The majority of academic work principally concerned with pirate radio examines its role as 'alternative media' in times of political unrest.[36] Grime scholar Monique Charles, however, makes a number of important advances relating to pirate radio's functionality for performance in grime. Firstly, Charles foregrounds pirate radio's capacity to bypass the strictures of public space through aerial transmission, much like the alternative media landscape in Zimbabwe: 'the sense of community provided by pirate radio transcended the ethereal Black Public Sphere into the materiality of real London Colonial life'.[37] Pirate radio in grime offers space to coalesce, communicate and disseminate for those who are typically elided from dominant spaces and discourse.

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[35] Logan Sama, "009 – Sharky Major", *Keepin It Grimy Podcast*, May 20, 2019, https://open.spotify.com/episode/7xPSj8MnIlZm0zER8r0vgK?si=xsItH9ARRCeCkZB8gZm9Tg, 22:00.

[36] Last Moyo, "Participation, Citizenship, and Pirate Radio as Empowerment: The Case of Radio Dialogue in Zimbabwe", *International Journal Of Communication* 6 (2012): 484–500.

[37] Monique Charles, "Hallowed be Thy Grime…", 192.

Importantly, too, Charles captures pirate radio's centrality for 'skill acquisition' and 'skill development'.[38] While the specifics of this acquisition process are not attended to—something that is fully addressed in this thesis in its theorising of 'levelling up' and collective creativity (the latter of which is attended to in Section 4)—Charles interviewed a number of grime artists whose testimonials referenced how MCs who could 'hone their craft' and how DJ's learned how to mix while holding down a residency.[39] Finally, Charles resolutely locates radio within this aforementioned wider network that includes record shops, youth clubs and raves.[40] The 'community aspect' of listening to radio, and the ritualised practice of exchanging tape recordings of sets, adds further interconnectivity to this sphere of performance and creativity.

This section will close with an exploration of this interconnectivity that pirate radio affords. Henriques' writing on the soundsystem session locates a number of auditory transductions that excite and feedback into the performance process, be it the audience entering into dyadic interplay with the deejay, or the bashment gal's dance moves heightening in intensity as a result of the deejay's selections. For pirate radio, the scope for interactivity is similarly fertile: both at the level of interchange with the wider network, and at the human level between its participants and the wider listenership.

In Belgian philosopher Isabelle Stengers' work in the philosophy of science, arguments are put forward for reconsidering science as a 'constructive enterprise'.[41] The ways in which we see the world are shaped by process and interaction. Over reliance on how things have always been done denies the irruptive power of scientific enquiry. Her paper "An Ecology of Practices" is most relevant to this research, since it adeptly captures how groups of actors—in this case, physicists—might venture towards new frontiers outside of the domination of their own discipline. Stengers looks at how to 'actualise the power of the

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[38] ibid, 190.

[39] ibid, 191.

[40] ibid, 192.

[41] Isabelle Stengers, *Cosmopolitics I*, *Posthumanities*, (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2010).

situation' and depart from habit.[42] Each practice must 'unfold their own force' towards becoming an 'active, fostering milieu'.[43] Within this milieu there exists a social diplomacy that moves towards 'new propositions'. The interconnectivity of pirate radio, and sound system sessions is such that the accumulation of momentum and ideas from multiple actors can similarly bring forth irruptive, new moments: crews of MCs fashion new lyrical units out of collaborative interplay; DJs discover new combinations of instrumental; and the audience can provide an instrumental production with force through reacting in the moment to its selection, and calling through to the station's radio line.

The multiplicity of elements, and consequent scope for innovation, is captured in Matthew Fuller's book *Media Ecologies*. Its opening chapter focuses on the pirate radio environment and its functionality. Fuller examines jungle pirate radio practice during the late 1990s, and locates how different elements interact and coalesce during a radio performance. Using Deleuze and Guattari's 'machinic phylum' as a conceptual lens, Fuller tracks 'matter in movement', and the combinatorial potential of objects working together to ensure the performance's success.[44] He sees the performance as greater than the sum of its parts, leaning on the work of De Landa, who has written on how self-organisation of 'previously disconnected elements suddenly reaches a critical point at which they begin to cooperate to form a higher level entity'.[45]

There are many valuable elements within Fuller's piece. It inventively maps the ongoing iterative process of pirate radio performance, and looks at how the wider media ecology affects creative practice. Owing to the interconnected nature of pirate radio, feedback loops exist between components that build and heighten in intensity, both on an immediate level as part of a performance, but also within this wider performative field

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[42] Isabelle Stengers, "Introductory Notes on an Ecology of Practices", *Cultural Studies Review* 11, no. 1 (2013), 185.

[43] ibid, 195.

[44] Fuller, *Media Ecologies*, 17.

[45] Manuel De Landa, *War in the Age of Intelligent Machines*, Swerve Editions (New York: Zone Books, 1991).

located above. However, Fuller further expands the field. While raves and record shops are still central, 'peritextual apparatus' such as flyers and posters are also considered (see Chapter 7, Section 1).[46]

The vast and inventive means by which artists engage with pirate radio and fashion informal economies is also alluded to here, and acts as a counterpart to Joy White's account of *Urban Entrepreneurship*. Fuller offers a useful theorisation of hype. Specifically, how these 'exploratory systems of mutual excitation' provide drive and sustenance.[47] This is a particularly valuable intervention, and will prove useful for conceptualising the often unquantifiable 'energy' that artists speak of when engaging in pirate radio performance.[48]

Fuller also offers a tangible example of reception technologies and how they can impact a performance's onward trajectory. Within the radio domain, communication with an audience is imperative, and the principal way in which a dislocated audience can communicate with a DJ or MC is through their phone. While the proliferation of social media has altered the means by which this communication takes place—Twitter is now regularly utilised for shout-outs—the SMS message was the main avenue during jungle, garage and early grime. With the messages streaming in, this builds the 'hype' in the studio. It lets the performers know that the audience 'are out there, that the listening is being done collectively…and that there is a system of feedback and production to intensifying it'.[49] This demonstration of technological antiphony, between a collective audience and the studio team, etches out how multiple actors can intervene during an ongoing performance. This thesis, however, moves beyond dyadic interplay and attends to the intricacies of inter-MC and DJ practice. There are multiple 'crews' called out by the jungle MC—Fuller lists the 'ladies crew' and the 'HMP crew'—but there is also the grime crew itself and its own densely intertextual creative interplay that serves to build the hype and energy, with a view to

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[46] Fuller, *Media Ecologies,* 36.

[47] ibid, 37.

[48] See DJ Eastwood in Chapter 4, Section 2.

[49] Fuller, *Media Ecologies*, 50.

'levelling up' and surpassing what can be achieved in isolation. Multidirectional group interplay is critical for grime practice, and a greater appreciation of these interactions will augment existing work.[50]

It is perhaps Fuller's overt focus on the machinic that—while acknowledging a multiplicity of actors—sometimes leads to a decentering of both individual agency and human intersubjectivity within this model, factors which both Bramwell and Charles have cited as critical to grime practice. The complex array of radio transmitters, aerials, and deejay equipment, while important, at times undermines the deliberated input of the human participants. Instead, they are just another aspect within the phylum. Midway through Fuller's exploration, he writes of the turntable inventing the DJ 'in order to compute', and MCs are simply seen as 'convenors' who work mechanically and diligently, 'chat[ting] on the mike, giv[ing] the shouts, work[ing] the phones' before 'chatting on the mike some more'.[51] This monotony is redolent of a production line, and brute-level mechanistic utility of a computer program, confirmed shortly afterwards where he writes of MCs' language being 'composed of UNIX commands'.[52] There are moments wherein Fuller's engagement with technological influence is to be commended, and—as shown above, he offers creative interplay between human and non-human actors, using the phone as a conduit—however this piece intermittently errs into the technologically deterministic.[53] This thesis, then, while acknowledging the ways in which the technical structure of radio can afford interaction, also stresses radio's role for invoking community and acting as a space to foster new creative practice.

Section 2 – Voices, Voicing and other issues within Afrodiasporic Practice

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[50] ibid, 38.

[51] Henriques, *Sonic Bodies,* 188.

[52] Fuller, *Media Ecologies,* 33.

[53] ibid, 25.

It is within Fuller's theorising on the MC and the technological mediation of the voice that a further tension pertaining to grime practice is made apparent. The ways in which Afrodiasporic practice is written about often align with what Nina Sun Eidsheim calls 'unexamined truisms'.[54] Afrodiasporic practice is typically seen as overtly somatic, while the black voice is essentialised regardless of context. Eidsheim points to critical writing on African American classical singer Marian Anderson as a prime example. Fuller also engages with issues of voicing and liveness in pirate radio. However, he offers a cutting juxtaposition of the 'synthetic voice' and the orality of the 'open throat' in live rap.[55] It is of course prudent to explore the 'synthetic voice', and Fuller highlights technological re-workings of MC recordings that often appear as hauntological sonic signatures in dub and jungle productions. However, he presents a sharp distinction between these two types of MC performance. The 'synthetic' snippets of prior performances that function as a musical texture are contrasted with the interjections during a performance from live MCs that—according to Fuller—are 'cretinously predictable' and fundamentally of the body. This dialectic presented by Fuller, between the cyber and (black) human, is attended to in a number of important texts that have foregrounded a more complex intermeshing. An appreciation of this body of literature—that looks at the relationship between black music, black bodies, cybernetics and technology—will help position grime music within current debates on technology within black studies, and offer an insight into how reductive narratives on the somatic nature of black creative practice can be counterbalanced.

This section will then explore other 'truisms' such as Afrodiasporic practices' synonymity with antiphony and repetition, and how these factors, while important, are not all-defining. Attention to nuanced writing on the importance of bodily praxis, embodied cognition, and the wide ranging complexity and intersubjectivity that pervades Afrodiasporic

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54 Nina Sun Eidsheim, *The Race of Sound: Listening, Timbre, and Vocality in African American Music*, (Durham: Duke University Press, 2019), 24.

55 Fuller, *Media Ecologies*, 25.

practice, will act as a rebuttal to essentialist readings of grime music and black creative practice more widely.

(i) Race and Technology

The complex relationship between race and technology is tackled by Alexander G. Weheliye in his book *Phonographies,* which presents a wide ranging enquiry into the role of the phonograph, and the meeting of technological and the sonic.[56] Weheliye refers to an 'enmeshment' or coexistence of sound and technology, addresses the implications of white posthumanism—built upon, rather than against the enlightened subject—and highlights the ways in which technological practice has been historically considered as an a priori white enterprise. Blackness, however, is seen as anti-technology, with a 'pre-technological orality'.[57] This tension is also captured by Alondra Nelson in an essay from 2002—where she locates an 'ostensible oppositionality of race (primitive past) and technology (modern future)'—and Justin aDams Burton who addresses a posthumanity that 'at best critiques and redresses the more traditional constructions of human that have historically privileged whiteness, masculinity, capitalism, able-bodiedness'. For these authors this white post humanism follows in the wake of writing by Katherine N. Hayles and Donna Haraway.[58]

Weheliye's book ardently confronts Hayles et al's representation of black creative practice—problematised by Nelson and Burton—instead arguing for the sonic as a means 'open up possibilities for thinking, hearing, seeing apprehending the subject in a number of different arenas that do not insist on monocausality'.[59] The advent of the phonograph was a

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[56] Alexander Weheliye, *Phonographies: Grooves in Sonic Afro-Modernity,* (London: Duke University Press, 2005).

[57] ibid, 6.

[58] Alondra Nelson, "Introduction: Future Texts", *Social Text* 20, no. 2 (2002): 5-6; Justin aDams Burton, *Posthuman Rap,* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2017), 16.

[59] ibid, 68.

critical moment, since it worried the 'digital divide' and Weheliye shows this through presenting examples of black musicians' interactions with technology.[60]

One enquiry attends to the technological reworking of the voice in sound system culture (that Fuller touches on with reference to jungle). The voice appears in a number of guises during a sound system session. It can be upfront and live from an MC, the MC's voice can be manipulated by the engineer through the use of echo and reverb, or it can be presented as fully disembodied on record.[61] These 'ghost-like' impositions of a voice are temporally stretched and cascade around the sound system session, with their point of origin obscured. Live manipulation of deejay vocalisations is staged in Franco Rosso's *Babylon*, particularly in the sound clash between Jah Shaka and Blue's Ital Lion, and this processing resonates with Weheliye's writing.[62] There exists a doubleness that sees the voice (and body) as both present and absent, offering an 'echo and haunting' that serves to disjoint and 'mix-up' modernity.[63]

This mixing and manipulation is rooted in the very name 'dub'. Weheliye notes its etymological link to 'duppy', a word commonly used within Caribbean folklore for ghosts or spirits. Fittingly, dub music is able to convey the 'homonymic overtones of the ghost'.[64] For grime music, these vocal manipulations from dub are both audible and visible within wider cultural production. In keeping with the entrepreneurial spirit mentioned by White, GRM Daily set up a freestyle series called Daily Duppy in 2009, while prominent DJ Spooky evokes the phantasmic in both his own moniker, and his label Ghosthouse Records.[65] Audible experimentations were documented by Nabeel Zuberi in 2013, who noted a growing trend in instrumental grime that shared resonances with jungle and dub practice.

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[60] Louis Onuorah Chude-Sokei, The Sound of Culture: Diaspora and Black Technopoetics. (Middletown: Wesleyan University Press, 2015), 6; Weheliye, *Phonographies*, 102.

[61] Henriques, *Sonic Bodies*, 177.

[62] Franco Rosso and Martin Stellman, *Babylon* (Diversity, National Film Trustee, 1980).

[63] Weheliye, *Phonographies*, 54, 102, 105.

[64] ibid, 102.

[65] GRM Daily, "AJ Tracey - Daily Duppy S:05 EP:20 | GRM Daily", *YouTube*, accessed November 29, 2019, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Q9LVLrGu_Vw.

These producers used extracts from old recordings of grime MC performances as part of new tracks, employing sparse vocalisations as texture, through obscuring their original liveness. For Zuberi, these producers acted as 'rave mythologists', who brought back voices from the past through rendering them anew. The pervasiveness of this practice has carried into the 2010s, with producers such as Bengal Sound and Lington incorporating the voices of Wiley and D Double E respectively in their recorded output.[66]

These examples demonstrate how black Atlantic practice throughout history has problematised Eurocentric posthumanist perspectives on technological engagement. Black creative practice has been intertwined with technology for generations, and a denial of this disavows a large amount of creative work. For Chude-Sokei, both blackness and technology upset Eurocentric understandings of the enlightenment subject, owing to their dual-pronged 'threat [to] sovereign notions of the "man" or "human"'. As such, a critical denial of black technological practice is to be expected.[67]

However, these complex and interwoven collaborations demand attention since they offer new ways for conceptualising the voice in Afrodiasporic work. The variety of soundsystem and grime manipulations enable vocalisations that afford presence, absence and loose spectre in varying quantities. Distinguishing a voice as either 'synthetic' or gutteral undermines the complexity with which black artists have been engaging with technology throughout history, while recent developments in grime music demonstrate a continuation of technological exploration that started with the phonograph, and really took hold with dub's 'scientists of sound'.[68]

(ii) The Body, Repetition and Antiphonal Practice

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[66] Nabeel Zuberi, "Vocalizing: MC Culture in the UK", Dancecult 5, no. 2 (2013); see discography.

[67] Chude-Sokei, 3.

[68] Jones and Pinnock, *Scientists of Sound,* 3.

This conceptual move towards a more 'vernacular cybernetics' captures an ongoing negotiation that relates to this section's second concern: representations of the body in black Atlantic practice.[69] While we have covered the interrelation between technology and black creative practice above, there is still a tendency to inscribe black practice as de-facto rhythmic and solely embodied. Instead this thesis argues for a more nuanced grounding, that resists a tired dialectic between overly cognitive readings of (white) creative practice, and Neo-primitivist assertions that demand a militant foregrounding of the somatic in black performance: the 'old mind-body blues'.[70]

In this thesis' introduction, two misrepresentations of grime's performance were foregrounded: the *Evening Standard*'s mis-recognition of the reload, and *The Guardian*'s sensational reportage on live practice. Campion pointed to MCs 'spitting blood and fire', with East London MC D Double E in particular vocalising something in 'between a whoop and a grunt'.[71] For Simon Reynolds, Crazy Titch stood out for his hoarse holler.[72] Fuller's 'open throat' from pirate radio practice is arguably complicit with these assertions that align black musical practice with the visceral. Using dancehall artist Buju Banton as an example, Fuller continues to write of 'the throat and mouth' and how they 'become a chiliastic fuck muscle drawn in Marvel Comic ink'.[73] This ascription is later bolstered by numerous assertions to the rhythmic.

An article from 2015 by Tom Perchard captures the way in which rhythm is inscribed by some as the intrinsic and fundamental proponent of black musical practice. In particular, he addresses Jeff Pressing's 'Black Atlantic Rhythm'. Pressing's eagerness to 'explain why such rhythm has achieved such global popularity and presence, and to do so

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[69] Ron Eglash, "African Influences in Cybernetics", in *The Cyborg Handbook* eds. Chris Hables Gray, Heidi J. Figueroa-Sarriera, and Steven Mentor (New York: Routledge, 1995), 18.

[70] Tom Perchard, "New Riffs on the Old Mind-Body Blues: "Black Rhythm," "White Logic," and Music Theory in the Twenty-First Century." *Journal for the Society of American Music*, 9 no. 3 (2015): 322.

[71] Campion, "Inside Grime…".

[72] Reynolds, "The Primer: Grime", 47.

[73] Fuller, *Media Ecologies,* 32.

scientifically through the application of evolutionary psychology',[74] carries a latent implication that black music offers a return to nature. This is tied to similar narratives that Weheliye dismissed with respect to 'pre-technological orality'. For Paul Gilroy, whose writing is implicit in many of the studies discussed so far, he noted that writing on soul music would often 'forsake discussion of music and its attendant dramaturgy, performance, ritual and gesture in favour of an obsessive fascination with the bodies of the performers themselves…this opposition acting as an object to critical theorising'.[75]

While rhythm is of course an aspect of black Atlantic practice—as is orality—these are two of many, and a reductive foregrounding of these aspects draws resonance with Neo-primitivist writing that this thesis is profoundly distanced from. This thesis is concerned precisely with critical theorising upon creative practice, and as such the full spectrum of creative interplay will be examined.

More productive studies on the importance of the body and its movement will help in negotiating this terrain. In particular, Ashon T. Crawley's *Blackpentecostal Breath*. This powerful text foregrounds the importance of breath, following the death of Eric Garner, and focuses on the choreosonic encounter of movement and sound. Whereas the word, and linguistics, aligns with a theological thinking that enforces 'dematerialization', Crawley argues for value in the collective encounter, the need to breathe, and the importance of flesh as 'unbounded and liberative' in the face of the enlightenment subject.[76] This resonates with Eidsheim's work where she both acknowledges that 'vocal culture is performed and formed in the flesh', while offers distance from reductive readings.[77] For Crawley, this liberation is realised in a Blackpentecostal aesthetics, that offers otherwise possibilities and a recognition of 'collective modes of intellection'.[78]

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[74] Jeff Pressing, "Black Atlantic Rhythm: Its Computational and Transcultural Foundations," *Music Perception: An Interdisciplinary Journal* 19 no.3 (2002): 285– 310; Tom Perchard, "New Riffs…"*, 322.

[75] Gilroy, *Black Atlantic*, 101.

[76] Ashon T. Crawley, *Blackpentecostal Breath: The Aesthetics of Possibility*, (New York: Fordham University Press, 2017), 4, 16.

[77] Eidsheim, *The Race of Sound*, 23.

[78] ibid, 25.

The relevance of Crawley's text for this thesis is two-fold. Firstly, it offers further insight into the role of the 'intentioned' voice. Locating an 'enunciative displacement of air' in Harriet Tubman's freedom marches, Crawley moves through the work of Dorinda Clark-Cole, Billie Holiday and Nina Simone, seeing the voice as offering both 'abundant life', profound purpose, and an appeal to vitality.[79] These observations add nuance to prior discussion of the open throat's dialectical opposition to the voice as fully technologised. Secondly, Crawley addresses the 'performance of performativity' and aestheticised dance performance. Locating the ring shout—also encountered in Richard Bramwell's discussion of grime's 'profaned cultural inheritance'—within a wider field of collective dance traditions such as the Afro-Arabic *saut* and Sufi dervish movements, Crawley demonstrates how these choreosonic encounters agitate against the enforced split of theoria and aesthesis.[80] And it is precisely this recognition of 'collective intellection' that begins to tease out the intersubjective and creatively cognisant agents (MCs and DJs) that engage in grime performance.

The development of theories on embodied cognition by Francisco Varela, Vijay Iyer and others offers a further intersection between body and mind, theory and sensation, that resonates with Crawley's assertions.[81] And more recently, Newen et al's work on 4E Cognition—a cognition that is 'embodied, enacted, embedded and extended'—sees the mind in continual relation to the body and the world around it.[82] While thinking 'otherwise' possesses political character for Crawley in furthering a blackness that does not need to engage with racist epistemologies, the impetus to think beyond and collectively helps move past erstwhile juxtapositions of the enlightened white subject and the black body towards a potential for a creative becoming located in collective practice.

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[79] Crawley, *Blackpentecostal Breath*, 35, 44, 65, 170.

[80] ibid, 94; Bramwell, *UK Hip-Hop, Grime and the City*, 32.

[81] Vijay, Iyer, "Microstructures of Feel, Macrostructures of Sound: Embodied Cognition in West African and African-American Musics." PhD diss. University of California: Berkeley, 1998; Francisco J. Varela, *The Embodied Mind: Cognitive Science and Human Experience*, (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1991).

[82] Albert Newen, Leon de Bruin, and Shaun Gallagher, *The Oxford Handbook of 4E Cognition*, Oxford Handbooks Online (Oxford: University Press, 2018), 2.

Collective practice is also at the centre of narratives on two other prominent factors located within Afrodisaporic musical production: repetition and antiphony. These aspects present in grime music in the reload, a technique—fully examined in Chapter 5, and attended to at the thesis' outset—that involves the DJ pulling back a track and restarting it from the top. Typically seen as the result of an audience interjection, its causation is far more complex, with a combination of MC performance, instrumental choice and DJ technique all feeding into this negotiation. And while causation and agency within the reload is multifaceted, the outward projection of repetition and base-level antiphony is seen as elementary, or in Aizlewood's case, as a 'technical malfunction'.[83]

There are two issues that arise from existing literature on repetition and antiphony. Firstly, there exists an ascription of regressiveness to these techniques—tied into the legacy of Hegel's assertions that African practice is 'outside history'—but also there is an over-emphasis on their fundamentality to, and under appreciation of the varying ways in which they are utilised within, black creative practice. If we return to Perchard's critique of Pressing's Black Atlantic Rhythm, this acts as a useful point of departure, since Pressing's writing—while intended as a 'compliment'—foregrounded a centrality of rhythm that re-articulated Neo-primitivist assertions.[84]

Antiphonal practice is widely seen as a foundational component of Afrodiasporic practice. For Paul Gilroy, it is 'the principal formal feature of these musical traditions'.[85] It is also foregrounded in other texts by Samuel A. Floyd and Guthrie Ramsey.[86] The common understanding of antiphony as call and response, however, means that practice is framed as dyadic turn taking between an artist(s) and the audience. In Ganesh's study of the hip-hop cipher, for example, he uses an MC shouting 'hip' to the audience's response of 'hop!' as an

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[83] Aizlewood, "Skepta, music review…".

[84] Tom Perchard, "New Riffs…", 323.

[85] Gilroy, *Black Atlantic,* 78.

[86] Samuel A. Floyd, *The Power of Black Music Interpreting Its History from Africa to the United States*, ACLS Humanities E-Book (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995); Guthrie P. Ramsey, *Race Music: Black Cultures from Bebop to Hip-Hop*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004).

example of this 'communal event' that offers dialogue between the audience and performer.[87] This conception also appears in writing on contemporary dance music practice. Both Kai Fikentscher and Mark Butler have written on a DJ's relationship to a 'collective body' of an audience. And while these aspects are very important, it is often far more nuanced—and sometimes contested—than a simple back and forth.[88]

Firstly, there is a level of multidirectionality in these exchanges, with varying power dynamics that aren't captured in dyadic interplay. We have seen how the performance network in grime—and other Afrodiasporic forms—is interrelated, both in Fuller's writings and more acutely located in Henriques' application of 'musicking' to the reggae sound system. In addition, there is a multidirectionality between performers *on stage*, particularly in grime music, that departs from this understanding. There is a tendency to attend to the 'reload' as the most integral element of grime performance, and it is one of the few performance features attended to explicitly in Hancox and Charles' work.[89] However, many more complex negotiations take place, such as the 'rally' and 'through ball' (see Chapters 5 and 6). Furthermore, as mentioned above, the reload itself is a site of contestation. While the audible result is the 'wheel up' of an instrumental, the myriad factors at play are elided through a reduction to 'give-and-take'.[90] While Charles offers an important insight into how 'call and response is a crucial element in generating and maintaining energy in a live performance setting', I argue that grime moves beyond a 'dialogic relationship between the crowd and the performers' towards a more complex, improvisatory and iterative, emergent process articulated in collective acts of creativity.[91]

An important intervention from Henry Louis Gates Jr. is pertinent to consider. In *The Signifying Monkey*, Gates builds upon Zora Neale Hurston, Roger D. Abrahams, and other

[87] Bharath Ganesh, "The politics of the cipher: hip-hop, antiphony and multiculturalism", (PhD diss., University College London, 2017): 21.

[88] Butler, *Playing with Something That Runs*, 100; Fikentscher, '*You Better Work!*', 8.

[89] Hancox, *Inner City Pressure*, 2018: 64; Charles, "Hallowed be thy Grime…", 125, 185.

[90] Paul F. Berliner, *Thinking in Jazz: The Infinite Art of Improvisation*, Chicago Studies in Ethnomusicology (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994), 348.

[91] Butler, *Playing With Something That Runs,* 102; Charles, "Hallowed be Thy Grime…", 311.

work on signifying practice in African-American vernacular traditions.[92] His discussion of repetition and antiphony captures some of these tensions, but offers an important distinction. Through counteracting work by David Hume and Thomas Jefferson who decried all black music as 'imitative', Gates Jr. locates 'motivation' within repetition. Within lyrical content, this refers to dense neologisms, and intertextual allusions that have been passed down for generations. These are often overtly manifest in the dozens, and clashing. H. Samy Alim, for example, examines the 'verbal subversion' of hip-hop group Dead Prez in his book *Roc the Mic Right*. Outside of lyricism, Gates Jr. points to the formative potential of repetition.[93] Gates Jr. captures both the subversive nature of antiphonal praxis, with it functioning as a 'mode for of encoding for self-preservation', and a progression through repetition that counters the stasis and 'indocility' inscribed upon black vernacular practice, and reductive envisioning of antiphony as simply dialogic.[94]

This dialectic between European progress and African stasis, so readily affirmed by Hegel, is re-articulated in many ways through James A. Snead's 'On repetition in Black Culture'. While this text looks at how repetition is positioned against 'European' ideals of future, there are moments wherein Hegel's assertions reappear. Snead's juxtaposition of a 'reservoir of inexhaustible novelty' against repetition, for example, implies the latter to be regressive and unthinking.[95] And although this is perhaps not Snead's intention—since the paper presents different approaches to originality—he reaffirms a racialised outlook through presenting black culture as a 'conscious natural return' in opposition to the supposed decline of ritual in white European culture and the rise of independent thought.[96] Further still, he presents a contrast between 'European culture [where] repetition must be seen to be not just circulation and flow, but accumulation and growth' and black culture where 'the thing (the

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[92] Henry Louis Gates, *The Signifying Monkey: A Theory of African-American Literary Criticism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988).

[93] Alim, *Roc the Mic Right*, 74.

[94] Gates, *The Signifying Monkey*, 67; James A. Snead, "On Repetition in Black Culture", *Black American Literature Forum*, 1981, 148.

[95] Snead, "On Repetition…", 148.

[96] ibid, 149.

ritual, the dance, the beat) is "there for you to pick it up when you come back to get it". If there is a goal it is always deferred'.[97] Snead's theorising on the cut is of substantial use, and does help in examining how a return to a prior section or rhythmic refrain is not the same, but a new articulation of an existing element. However, it does not account for emergent practice. For Snead, black musical practice demands an 'assurance of repetition'.[98] And while Small's crude homogenisation of African practice, mentioned at this chapter's outset, helped to destabilise Western Art Music expectations and understandings of performance—through foregrounding the everyday in performance—this fixation upon repetition, reasserts an unhelpful and 'forced' separation between black creative practice and so-called European growth. Instead, this thesis looks towards complex interactive improvisatory processes that iteratively build momentum and progress: a 'changing same', rather than being 'always already there'.[99]

Section 3 – Ciphers, the logic of practice, and the tension between individual and collective

In accordance with this thesis' intentions, the following two sections look towards relevant literature on group creative practice and how this pertains to grime performance. This section is firstly concerned with the tension between individual and collective, and how this dynamic can stimulate and excite a performance scenario. It then looks to Pierre Bourdieu's conceptualisation of practice as 'process' and the potential for forward planning while already performing. Bourdieu's ideas begin to tease out aspects of emergent practice, and as such offer a considered segue into Section 4's explicit engagement with group creativity.

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[97] ibid, 149

[98] ibid, 150.

[99] Le Roi Jones, *Black Music* (New York: Da Capo Press, 1998), 180; Snead, "On Repetition…", 148.

Grime practice is a collective enterprise. However, it is not devoid of tensions and individual endeavour. Returning to work on dancehall and sound system culture, we can see that its collaborative character works alongside articulations of individual prowess. The sound clash, for example, is a vibrant performance scenario where two (or sometimes more) sounds enter into a musical battle, with lyrical provocations—Henriques writes of MC's 'championing' a sound and entering into 'ritualised forms of verbal combat'—and specially prepared dubplates that "send" for the rival sound.[100] Eskimo Dance's close ties to Sting, for example (mentioned in the thesis' introduction), demonstrates this shared ancestry and leanings towards competition.The hip-hop cipher is also an arena wherein collectivity is married with competition. MCs take turns to perform lyrics, and there is a calculated push towards trying to impress others present, while also acknowledging the collective nature of the activity. H. Samy Alim has investigated the cipher and its position within hip-hop, locating its origins in the dozens, while acknowledging the form as 'tradition linked not tradition bound'. The potential brought forth in the cipher includes a reconceptualisation of antiphony to incorporate 'multiple levels of response, occurring simultaneously and synergistically' as artists collectively negotiate this improvisational space.[101]

Rather than a 'collective body' of audience members, there exists an engaged response framework where artists assess and feed*back* into a performance, depending on others' contributions. Jooyoung Lee's examination of freestyle battling in Los Angeles also found similar results: 'even those who are not called on are interacting with the rhymers by providing critical feedback, approval or rejection'.[102]

Alim also explores the means by which this competitive space encourages skill acquisition, and ways in which artist can 'take it to "da next level"', thus strongly resonating

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[100] Henriques, *Sonic Bodies*, 175.

[101] Alim, *Roc the Mic Right*, 101.

[102] ibid, 100; Jooyoung Lee, "You wanna battle? Negotiating respect and local rules in the emcee cipher", paper presented at the Lehman Conference on Hip Hop: From Local to Global Practice, New York, 2005.

with this thesis's presentation of grime artistry and 'levelling up'.[103] This combination of the 'communal and competitive' renders the space with both a 'fierce intensity' and a pedagogical framing. This also aligns with grime artists who have reflected on the radio environment as a means to foster creativity and skill acquisition.[104]

> Krucial: When I'm hearing Royal [Krucial's crew member], it was so competitive I hear him say something sick, like nah I need something sick. That is just literally how it run, just evolving off each other to the point that when I met Royal we would just be slewing each other all the time. Back then if you're not warring, you're not heard. Or you're not sick, and cause we was just warring all the time, we was always ready on the sets. We was just like on form all the time cause we were just ready.[105]

For North London MC Krucial, the nature of radio sets meant that 'warring' became a normality and this competition elevated their practice. This pedagogic element is also manifest in grime through the creation of Youngers factions of crews, mentioned in the thesis introduction, who are trained up by the elders in the scene.

Despite these important considerations, which will affect and inform this thesis' examination of collaborative practice, Alim's approach is principally linguistic. His theorisation of 'Hip Hop Nation Language' has proven influential for a number of studies of correlate musical forms around the globe.[106] However the primacy of language means that other performance elements are not necessarily attended to in the fullest way. The cipher may be the 'height of linguistic creativity' but interactions in grime can often take place without linguistic cues. Keith Sawyer's critique of an overtly 'structuralist' approach within music writing locates issue with 'attempts to draw parallels between music and language [that] have analysed improvisational forms of music by using linguistic models

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[103] Alim, *Roc the Mic Right,* 101.

[104] Noah Karvelis, "Race, Class, Gender, and Rhymes: Hip-Hop as Critical Pedagogy", *Music Educators Journal* 105, no. 1 (2018): 46.

[105] Krucial, Personal Interview. June 2017.

[106] Nikki Lane, "Black Women Queering the Mic: Missy Elliott Disturbing the Boundaries of Racialized Sexuality and Gender", *Journal of Homosexuality* 58, no. 6–7 (2011).

originally developed for *langue*, non-improvised verbal behavior.'[107] While Alim's work is, of course, non-complicit with criticisms lodged at this wider trajectory in music criticism, there is space to move beyond language and its antiphonal basis towards a more interrelational, improvisatory performance schema that accommodates for musical cues, body language and other pertinent semiotic signifiers.

Pierre Bourdieu's research on practice and ritual is useful to consider here, since it offers a move towards a more dynamic theoretical schema for performance. Within ritual practice, 'customary rules' exist and these undergird interactions. Chapter 4 makes explicit grime's foundational performance conventions, and these key components offer a bedrock from which to innovate. And while Bourdieu sees rules and customs as restrictive to an extent, they are readily adapted and reworked in a variety of contexts.[108] *Logic of Practice* presents a theoretical perspective that does not lose sight of everyday practice. Predilection for linearity, for Bourdieu, is located in the sciences, with an 'antimony between the time of science and the time of action' often masking the realities of 'practical time' which is 'in process' and 'made up of islands of incommensurable dimension'.[109] Instead, then, Bourdieu rejects an imposed linearity, instead mediating between what he calls 'objectivist reduction' and 'gnostic enchantment'.[110] This stance is crucial, for Bourdieu, since it both allows the researcher to examine practice without losing sight of its quotidian character. It captures the grounded process of practice, without falling into hyperbole and 'exalted participation', the latter of which is often critiqued in literature on autoethnography (see Chapter 1).[111]

Central to Bourdieu's writing is the way in which being engaged in practice can help participants anticipate or build towards new happenings (without reducing it to a linear progression). Bourdieu often turns to sport to conceptualise this process, likening practice

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[107] Sawyer, *Group Creativity*, 98.

[108] Bourdieu, *Logic of Practice*, 37.

[109] ibid, 81, 83.

[110] ibid, 96.

[111] ibid, 96.

to a game: 'the feel (*sens*) for the game is the sense of the imminent future of the game, the sense of direction (*sens*) of the history of the game that gives it its sense'.[112] While not departing wholesale from the customs (or history, here) that underpin performance, there exists a futurity and expectation which begins to tease out how performers might negotiate ongoing interactions and predict other artists' future movements. This is captured in a short passage on football, where players who are currently engaged in the game make decisions on what they 'foresee' rather than what is directly in front of them.[113] This level of forward planning will prove critical for framing a performance technique within grime music—the through ball—which relies upon anticipation and adjustment to collaboratively build towards a climactic moment. It is striking, too, that grime artists have used a similar analogy from football to conceptualise their practice. The myriad sporting allusions used by grime artists—discussed in Section 5—add further weight to Bourdieu's assertions.

The Logic of Practice therefore offers ways to examine the specifics of practice in dialogue with theoretical conceptualisations. And its attention to forward movement offers a sense of potential that can be harnessed by performers who are adept with the rules of the game and can manoeuvre appropriately. The means for irruptive creativity and the emergent character of grime performance will now be attended to. Bourdieu urges an understanding of 'practice in process' and greater attention to musical process will strengthen this thesis' approach to grime performance.

Section 4 – Emergent Group Creative Practice

It is worth briefly attending to the improvisatory and emergent nature of grime performance, before looking at the specifics of theoretical work that will complement this thesis' findings. As mentioned at this thesis' outset, grime is a semi-improvisatory form. While performing, grime artists are continually engaged in a process of interaction,

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[112] ibid, 82.

[113] ibid, 81.

affordance and compromise. As a consequence no two grime performances are the same. Different permutations of MCs and DJs populate each performance with a particular feel, and while this is also true of much jazz and hip-hop performance, the fluidity with which grime artists collaborate is unique to the form. Artists are afforded a level of agency that they have to use productively and often presciently to successfully move through a performance.

MCs have pre-composed lyrics, referred to as 'writtens' within hip-hop. However, they are used differently in grime music. These lyrics are chosen in *ad hoc* fashion, depending on what instrumental is playing (and how that might suit their style), or depending on who they are following on from in a performance. They are constructed of smaller units that can be interchanged and melded together depending on circumstance. Certain MC pairings and groups compose lyrics together, and some are intended to follow on immediately from another's contribution.

> There's a lot of intricate things you have to think about cause a lot of people think it's "write, spit, go" but there's a lot to think about. You have to think about your delivery, you have to think about the flow, who has come before you on set. You also think about the change-up think about if you're guna slide in a metaphor, if you're going to end it on a metaphor, if you're going to play the metaphor round and extend it to the next 16. It's a whole load of things, but that's for the people who are more sort of mindful of the craft. That actually are interested in the actual craft and not just bap some bars together and just spray them over a riddim.[114]

Similarly, DJs have an open space within which they can articulate themselves. By and large, DJs will bring along a selection of instrumental tracks, but the order with which they play them and how they are introduced is up in the air. DJs and MCs have to be receptive to each other, attentive to an audience and successfully negotiate a performance without it reaching either critical mass or creative dearth. The very liveness provides uncertainty, while the ever-changing formulation of artists necessitates a synthesis of both 'working' and 'thinking' through the performance and its direction, while already performing. This synthesis of

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[114] Kraze, Personal Interview. June 2017.

working and thinking is complicit with Bourdieu's attention to practice as process (mentioned above), is resistant of overly somatic conceptions of Afrodiasporic musical performance mentioned in Section 2, and has been theorised with reference to other artistic forms, principally jazz, theatre and gamelan.[115]

There are three principal frameworks that will be worked with during this thesis that unpack creative practice in grime music and its emergent character. The first of these is found in the work of Keith Sawyer, whose development of 'group flow' and 'interactional semiotics' captures the resolutely group nature of grime music, and a need to address elements of performance that are not readily 'reduced to language', such as indeterminacy and improvisation. Ingrid Monson's theorising of sociality in performance and performers' 'perceptual agency' will strengthen Sawyer's work and Bourdieu's theorising of forward planning and anticipation.[116] Secondly, Benjamin Brinner's study of gamelan practice helps conceptualise the complex, multidirectional nature of grime interaction. Brinner's text teases out artists' ways of knowing and the refinement of artistic 'competence' required to negotiate improvisatory performance, while David Borgo's writing shows how artists manage uncertainty in improvisational fora.[117] Finally, there is a decided attention towards novelty born out of these interactions, addressed in Chapters 6 and 7. Novelty is stimulated in a number of unique ways in grime music, however important work by Timothy Rice, Catherine M. Appert, Ingrid Monson and Justin Williams offers insight into particular forms of innovation in music that are motivated by intermusical allusion, while Seymour Wright's dedicated study of British free improvisation group AMM's practice offers a framework for the 'corollary epistemology' of improvising groups. As such, this section is split into three parts that attend to each of these concerns.[118]

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[115] Henriques, *Sonic Bodies*, xxi.

[116] Sawyer, *Group Creativity*, 43; 74, 75; Monson, *Saying Something*, 14.

[117] Brinner, *Knowing Music*, 28; Borgo, *Sync or Swarm*, 61, 124.

[118] Seymour Wright, "The Group Learning of an Original Creative Practice: 1960s Emergent-AMM", (PhD diss, Open University, 2013), 113.

(i) Interaction and Emergence

The word emergence has been used a number of times so far, without explicit attention to its definition. Within this thesis, emergence is understood in relation to G.H. Mead's writing: 'the emergent when it appears always found to follow from the past, but before it appears, it does not, by definition, follow from the past'.[119] This attention to non-linearity, and the irreducibility of a process to its constituent elements, without negating its foundation in these aspects, is found above in Bourdieu's work, and is theorised in relation to group practice by Keith Sawyer, and a number of contemporaries.

Sawyer's work with improvisatory forms has predominantly focused on theatre and jazz groups. His model of 'group flow', developed in 2003, inscribes this concept as a fundamentally emergent property of the group. Within group flow, artists work with a heightened state of sensitivity to future happenings: 'in this state, each of the group members can even feel as if they are able to anticipate what their fellow performers will do before they do it'.[120] This not only aligns with forward planning required for the through ball, since it also resonates with Ingrid Monson's work on interactive jazz improvisation. Monson's work in this instance is valuable for two reasons. Firstly, it offers a nuanced way to bridge the gap between analysis and aesthetics, which Crawley located as an issue. Monson's view of sociality in jazz practice is informed by Anthony Giddens' social theory, a model that allows for 'unintended consequences' of actions from individual agents and outcomes that are resolutely *of* the group and 'extend[ing] beyond any individual'.[121]

Secondly, it captures the perceptual 'monitoring'—to borrow from Henriques—that is crucial for successful group practice.[122] In "Hearing Seeing and Perceptual Agency", Monson examines how performers simultaneously create, interpret and anticipate other

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[119] George Herbert Mead, *Philosophy of the Present* (Amherst, N.Y: Prometheus Books, 2002), 2.

[120] Sawyer, *Group Creativity*, 44.

[121] Anthony Giddens, *The Constitution of Society: Outline of the Theory of Structuration*, (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1984): 281-8.

[122] Henriques, *Sonic Bodies*, 188.

artists' gestures within a group setting. 'Perceptual agency' affords artists the space to make an informed choice on the basis of 'sensory inputs, the manifold cognitive processing possibilities of the brain and the sociocultural contexts in which they listen and perform'.[123] This approach not only helps to conceptualise the prescient nature of group performance, but it allows intersections between the embodied, social, linguistic and cognitive. Therefore, Monson moves beyond prior work on explicitly cognitive approaches to performance practice (see footnote) or the overtly embodied approaches critiqued in Section 2, instead moving towards a socially informed 'collective intellection'.[124] There is an appreciation of mutlidirectionality in the performance environment from both Monson and Sawyer that demands focus within these interactions. For Monson, it involves a 'liquidation of human relationships among participating players—not to mention audience members—[that] affects all levels within the interactive musical process'.[125] This assertion recalls Small's work on musicking, and the performance of the everyday. A full appreciation of these processes according to Sawyer, though, requires an examination of the 'interactional dynamics among members during performance', and there are a number of ways by which this can be conducted.[126]

Both Sawyer and Monson indicate a lack within work that principally attends to the linguistic, owing to the myriad ways in which performance can be manoeuvred through. Therefore, while Paul Berliner's *Thinking in Jazz* is a seminal text for the field of improvisation, with enduring value is located in the wealth of data collected over a period of many years studying jazz improvisation in New York, a full examination of creative process

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[123] Ingrid Monson, "Hearing Seeing and Perceptual Agency", *Critical Inquiry* 34 (S2 2008), 52.

[124] Gerald Edelman, *Wider Than the Sky: The Phenomenal Gift of Consciousness* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2004), 106-107; Jessica Phillips-Silver, Athena Aktipis and Gregory Bryant, "The Ecology of Entrainment: Foundations of Coordinated Rhythmic Movement," *Music Perception: An Interdisciplinary Journal* 28, no.1 (2010), 3-14; Petri Toiviainen, Geoff Luck and Marc Thompson, "Embodied Meter: Hierarchical Eigenmodes in Music-Induced Movement," *Music Perception: An Interdisciplinary Journal* 28 no.1 (2010), 59-70.

[125] Monson, *Saying Something*, 189.

[126] Sawyer, *Group Creativity,* 50.

needs to move past the jazz 'vocabulary' and the conversational ideal.[127] Sociality, mentioned above, is important, and the fundamentally interactional character of improvisatory performance (including grime) demands a particular angle.

Sawyer locates this within a framework termed 'interactional semiotics'.[128] This model builds upon the work of semiotician Charles S. Peirce on indexicality, and later interpretations put forward by R. Jakobson and M. Silverstein.[129] While these three theorists are traditional semioticians in the sense that they work primarily with language, Sawyer employs the ideals of indexicality—and how contextual association and implicit suggestion can colour interaction—within a performance setting. Sawyer separates musical communication into two categories: denotational and metapragmatic. Denotational is overt, referring directly to something or a concept, and is often language based. For example, a grime artist might call someone's name, and consequently usher them onto the mic. The metapragmatic, however, acts on multiple levels, requiring artists to perform and react to others simultaneously. A change in tempo, meter, or altered cadence—while non-linguistic— can contextually infer an impending change, and affect future interaction. Suggestions are collectively negotiated as a performance unfolds, and these are framed within a 'continuing process'. This process attends to the ways in which suggestions enter the performance arena and the performer(s)' field(s) of perception, before then being either successfully incorporated by other performers around them or filtered out. Suggestions themselves are often informed by prior interactions and their constraint on proceedings is more or less pejorative depending on circumstance. Sawyer's model helps to frame how new elements are suggested and, if successful, are reabsorbed back into the performance's emergent trajectory (see Figure 2.1).[130]

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[127] Berliner, *Thinking in Jazz*, 98.

[128] Sawyer, *Group Creativity*, 75.

[129] ibid, 75.

[130] ibid, 89.
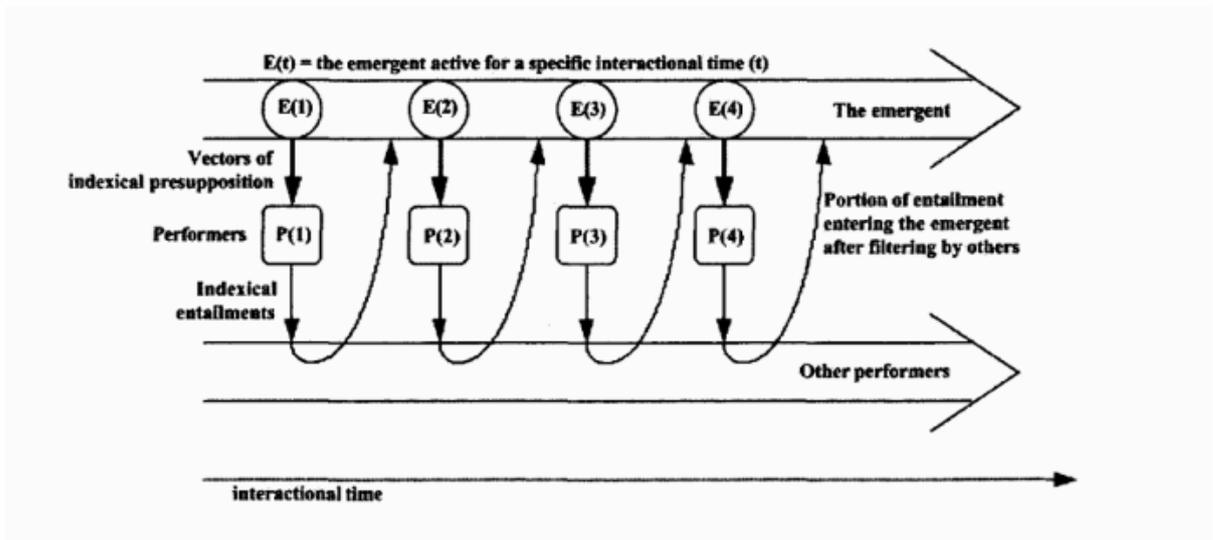
Figure 2.1 – The Continuing Process. From Keith
Sawyer's *Group Creativity*, 2003: 89.

The resolutely interactional nature of this process is referred to by Monson, who also looks at how metapragmatic indexicals—meaning indexical suggestions that are enacted while *already* performing—help to define the future nature of interaction in three ways: 'they simultaneously generate musical shapes, interpersonal bonds in the ensemble, and intermusical associations for a community of listeners'.[131] This model is far from dyadic exchange. Rather, an intricate group interaction—affected by all performers, and even audience members—takes place. This interaction is affected by contextual factors and social relations. And the extent to which performance suggestions are incorporated depends on their applicability to the particular circumstance, and how they are inferred to other performers. For example, a uncharacteristic cadential fall from an MC at the end of a four bar passage might suggest to another MC that they should take over. However, the second MC may wait for a re-occurrence to ascertain whether or not this cadential fall was an explicit performance suggestion or an unexpected variation. The collaborative building and negotiation inherent in this process is attended to fully in Chapter 5, in its discussion of reloads and rallies, where successful employment of metapragmatic suggestions helps build a performance towards points of climax (the reload), or exemplary group flow (the rally). What is crucial though, is the conception of a performance as continuous and emergent.

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[131] Monson, *Saying Something*, 188.

The acknowledgement of context is also a concern within this model. An understanding of the group dynamic, and the power relationships inherent within a performance scenario helps artists move through these negotiations. A performer's reluctance to absorb a fellow performer's suggestion, for example, could result from prior animosity between artists. This is shown in Chapter 4, where deliberate ignorance, or adherence to, suggestions is contingent on affiliation and environmental setting. And while it is far from groundbreaking to assert that rules help to frame performance, an adept appreciation of these tensions will help explain how artists move through these negotiations.

(ii) Competence and complexity

In 1990 Hungarian psychologist Mihalyi Csikszentmihalyi wrote of a 'domain' for creativity: a 'collective body of rules and conventions of a creative field'.[132] For Keith Sawyer, who builds on Csikszentmihalyi's work, certain 'meta-constraints of a genre' help to frame interaction, while Bourdieu addressed 'customary rules' that undergird practice. It is within Benjamin Brinner's work on gamelan, however, that the nuances of musical interaction and the social schema of these interactions is most explicitly addressed.[133] His ethnography of Javanese gamelan performance attended to 'how musicians know what they know' in gamelan practice, and more generally. A successful gamelan performance relies upon dense interlocking parts performed by a variety of practitioners who utilise a core melody and structure for a piece, which is elaborated upon depending on performance suggestions from key figures, prior renditions and customary expectations. Interaction requires an attentiveness to 'situated factors, the unspoken assumptions' and a need to make 'split-second judgments that are difficult to verbalise'.[134] Brinner, like Monson and Sawyer, urges a move past both the universality of 'linguistic competence', and the linearity of linguistic

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[132] Mihalyi Csikszentmihalyi, "The Domain of Creativity", in *Theories of Creativity*, ed. Mark A. Runco and Robert S. Albert, 1 edition (Newbury Park: SAGE Publications, Inc, 1990), 190.

[133] Bourdieu, *Logic of Practice,* 108; Sawyer, *Group Creativity*, 89.

[134] Brinner, *Knowing Music*, 1.

exchange, towards an understanding of specialised musical 'competence' that demands reaction to simultaneous utterances.[135]

Brinner's work on interaction and interplay is beneficial to consider, with respect to grime music performance. The dense interrelation of gamelan, where cues from a variety of performers infer change, or suggest an alteration in melody, rhythm or pace, provides potential—a 'microcosm of connections, activities and possibilities'—for performance.[136] This potentiality resonates with Fuller's understanding of the interwoven pirate radio environment, and also the fervent interactivity of grime performances themselves, both of which are addressed in Chapter 7's examination of the radio performance circuit. Brinner details a number of interactive procedures, which include 'ways of leading and following; cuing and responding; influencing and imitating'.[137] These indexical procedures are acted upon with respect to each musicians' musical 'competence', in an emergent manner, and vary depending on the *types of knowledge* they possess as part of the wider improvising unit.[138] Each performer has 'active knowledge' of their own practice, but 'passive knowledge' of others' process, which enables them to understand and respond to cues and interactive suggestions.[139] This is an important consideration for MCs and DJs who often have very different faculties and capabilities, but require an acute understanding of each others' craft to respond appropriately to indexical allusions.

The appropriateness of response is contingent on a variety of factors. Brinner locates 'subtle workings of an ensemble' and a need to appreciate power dynamics, performer capabilities, and others' knowledge of repertoire. An understanding of these elements is only fully achieved through 'an interpretative, ethnographic approach based on observed conduct and musicians' concepts and concerns'.[140] My approach strongly aligns

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[135] ibid, 3.

[136] ibid, 5.

[137] ibid, 56.

[138] ibid, 28; 169.

[139] ibid, 35.

[140] ibid, 33.

with Brinner, and as such its engagement with grime crews—notably in Chapters 7 and 8—is supported by quotidian insight into individual performers' abilities and affiliations, alongside the specifics of the performances themselves.

Most importantly, though, it is Brinner's close attention to the rapid interchange, and ongoing adjustments by musicians during a performance that resonates with grime practice. A form with an even more radically open and interpretative frameworks for musical production is free jazz. David Borgo's *Sync or Swarm* is a text that both documents free jazz practice, and assesses the potential for new ideas in improvising groups. Sharing commonalities with Brinner's work, Borgo's writing pays more attention to uncertainty, (owing to the form with which he is working). This is valuable for grime for a number of reasons. Grime's largest differentiation from gamelan (in terms of performer interaction) is the homogeneity of the voice, and the presence of multiple MCs. While 'instrumental deference', to both senior players and instrumental roles assigned with higher prestige or importance, in gamelan helps dispel tension and assuage conflict, a large group of MCs often has no clear system of order. This often chaotic nature—with grime performances teetering on the edge of collapse—requires resilience and a management of the overall 'session', particularly from the DJ.

David Borgo conceptualises this well: 'improvisations…tend to contain moments in which apparent order—stable states and limit cycles—can quickly dissolve into "chaos" and sections in which "chaotic" dynamics can produce surprising periods of emergent order and structure'.[141] This oscillation between locally unstable moments and more assured passages is characteristic of grime and its continual move through phases of play. Chapters 5 and 6 address the 'reload', 'rally' and 'through ball', of of which can be considered as phases of play. Arrival at certain phases can provide assuredness, such as a stable rally phase where MCs take eight bars each to spray lyrics. Or they can be chaotic, with MCs clamouring for the mic and performing over each other (see Episode 5.4). Phases also offer a chance to

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[141] Borgo, *Sync or Swarm,* 75.

continually build in energy towards a point of rupture, such as a through ball, wherein the collective's creative contribution demands a reset before the performance can continue.

Borgo conceptualises this well in his discussion of musical 'phase spaces', which are often 'decisive'. These phases are moved in and out of on a regular basis, and are collectively 'negotiated by the group with an awareness of what has occurred and a conception of what may follow'. While resonating with Sawyer's ideas on emergence, and the prescient abilities captured in Monson's 'perceptual agency', Borgo's mapping of ensemble behaviour in these settings is a particular step forward: 'the exact behaviour of the ensemble at transitional moments appears to be both locally unstable and, in intriguing ways, globally comprehensible'.[142] While negotiations are often up in the air, and uncertain, Borgo argues that a performance can still make sense to its audience and the performers themselves. This is precisely since the wider framework is predicated on 'micro-adjustments', quick interactions, and what Sawyer and collaborator Stacy de Zutter denote 'moment-to-moment contingency'.[143]

We can start now, then, to position grime practice, and the work of grime crews, within a similar model of uncertainty and complexity. This complexity is brought forth through continual negotiation within improvisatory structures, motivated both by the performances themselves—as mapped out in the work of Sawyer, Brinner, Monson—and the interconnectivity of its wider network and radio environment. Therefore, to fully understand grime performance, we must combine theoretical work on how pirate radio— and grime's wider performance ecology—engenders practice, with work on complex improvisatory groups, and then situate this material within the realities of grime's grounded performance network. This dual attentiveness is captured by Borgo, who notes that groups 'exhibit the possibility for adaptation and emergence by being open to energy influxes from outside the system and through their own highly interconnected nature.'[144] This section's

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[142] ibid, 61.

[143] Keith Sawyer and Stacy De Zutter, "Distributed Creativity: How Collective Creations Emerge From Collaboration", *Psychology of Aesthetics* 3, no.2 (2009): 82.

[144] Borgo, *Sync or Swarm,* 62.

final consideration, then, is how best to conceptualise practice of improvisatory groups, and the means by which novelty is engendered, principally through intermusical and intertextual allusions.

(iii) Group Epistemologies and Intertextuality

David Borgo rightly located substantial potential in free jazz and improvisatory performance for novel practice. For Seymour Wright, the practice of British free improvisation outfit AMM offered the ideal case study for mapping how creative ensembles fashion new work. AMM were a radical ensemble, intent on creating new forms and ways of performance. Their weekly rehearsals were, in many cases, attended by a dedicated audience who expressed great interest in the group's process, and these rehearsals offered space to innovate and bring forth new ideas.

AMM located an arbitrary divide between rehearsal and performance. This conflating of all activity as part of a wider agenda can both be likened to Small's reconceptualisation of performance—indeed, Wright notes the importance of the 'quotidian and the city' in AMM's learning—and grime music's opaque division between radio sets and live shows. But furthermore, this development was seen by Wright as an 'emergent ontology' for AMM, who developed a group 'epistemology' that was specific to AMM and irreducible to constituent performers.[145]

Wright's study is framed within work on communities of practice that foreground the importance of 'shared enterprise', 'situated learning', and is tied to emergence.[146] This study of AMM is valuable for understanding grime practice for four reasons. Firstly, in terms of methodology. The critical focus on the group's development enabled new patterns and ideas to be fully documented. Secondly, his consideration of 'practice and learning'

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[145] Wright, "Original Creative Practice", 110, 319.

[146] Jean Lave and Etienne Wenger, *Situated learning: legitimate peripheral participation,* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 45; Ray Bhaskar, *The possibility of naturalism: a philosophical critique of the contemporary human sciences* (London: Routledge, 1998), 97-101.

working in tandem. This thesis's main aim to explore collective creativity is predicated upon examining skill acquisition in situ, and how these skills are acquired as part of live process. AMM's practice offers a shrewd comparison, and Cornelius Cardew's approach with AMM evidences this commonality: 'performance is a performance, but it's also a rehearsal…you can find out things and use it, but what you do find out tonight, say, you don't put in your pocket and drag it out the next night. It won't fit there. It's adding to sound experience.'[147] Thirdly, Wright acknowledges the emergent multidirectionality of performance, and the 'complex simultaneity and iteration of multiple, on-going interaction[s] and reaction[s] involved'. Finally, he links performance—and how it is made sense of—'inexorably [to] its environment of production'.[148] AMM's 'hebdomadal' practice sessions are formative, and correlate to weekly radio sets—examined in Chapters 7 and 8—for the development of crew aesthetics.

It is therefore through Wright's attention to the emergent nature of 'intra-AMM activity'—or the new ideas fashioned within the group itself—that we can turn to a number of ways in which new activity comes to be, and how these ideas elevate the collective into new levels of performance.[149] While Chapter 6 focuses on the emergence of a new performance technique, the through ball, and its codification, it is within Chapters 7 and 8 that the creative practice of individual grime crews is examined. Much of this novelty is inculcated by the interconnected nature of performance and the environment itself. However, a large majority is developed in situ amongst members of the collective. And many of these innovations can be described as intermusical, or referential.

Intertextuality in hip-hop is familiar territory. For Justin Williams, one of the form's defining characteristics is the 'overt use of pre-existing material to new ends'.[150] Referencing of existing material can stimulate new practice, and offer contextual links with the past, or a

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[147] Polly Devlin, "Spotlight Music: AMM", *Vogue,* May 1966: 18.

[148] Wright, "Original Creative Practice", 202.

[149] ibid", 103.

[150] Williams, *Rhymin' and Stealin'*, 1.

particular place. For Catherine Appert, hip-hop in Senegal is a fertile ground for exploration of this practice. Rather than lie complicit with narratives that depict West African hip-hop as a hybrid cultural product, underground artists in Senegal engage in a 'strategic intertextuality' that favours 'diasporic cultural flows' and resists imposition from 'western cultural hegemony'.[151] Instead of being continually defined in relation to a Western other, underground hip-hop artists in Senegal use traditional instruments, such as *balafon* in their hip-hop productions, thus presenting a 'locally grounded' yet 'globally articulating' hip hop scene that is based in, and out of, Senegal.[152]

For Williams, intertextuality has a wide range of functions in hip-hop practice within the United States, that connote to different elements, epochs and people. 'Intrageneric' referencing reaffirms an artist's bond with the hip-hop nation, through alluding to a source from within hip-hop culture, while 'intergeneric' demonstrates ties to prior Afrodiasporic forms such as jazz and blues.[153] The intentionality of jazz sampling practice is also explored in a 2011 piece from Tom Perchard.[154] Knowledge of particular references, for example a classic flow pattern or lyrical adage to a 'canonized rapper' like Biggie or Tupac' infers prestige upon an artist making that link and strengthens a bond to hip-hop's wider 'interpretative community'.[155]

This thesis' examination of grime practice is at a far more local level, though, and looks to referencing within crews, rather than the entire genre. Nonetheless, we can envision grime crews as micro-interpretative communities, that function similarly to literary theorist Stanley Fish's initial conception, 'produc[ing] meanings and [as] responsible for the emergence of formal features'.[156] Recognisable group flow patterns, rhythmic structures and

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[151] Appert "Modernity, Remixed", 129 ; Appert, "On Hybridity in African Popular Music", 294.

[152] Appert, "On Hybridity in African Popular Music", 204.

[153] Williams, *Rhymin' and Stealin'*, 17.

[154] Tom Perchard, "Hip Hop Samples Jazz: Dynamics of Cultural Memory and Musical Tradition in the African American 1990s", *American Music*, Fall 2011: 277-300.

[155] Williams, *Rhymin' and Stealin'*, 18, 14.

[156] Stanley Fish, *Is There a Text in This Class? The Authority of Interpretive Communities* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1980), 14.

cadential formations, all help 'bind a community [or crew] together', and bring forth new interpretations.[157] This intertextual stimulation of group practice (rather than within a wider hip-hop nation) is attended to in the work of Timothy Rice and Ingrid Monson.

Rice's examination of Bulgarian folk music looks at how 'meaning'—a notoriously challenging phenomena to quantify—is assigned in musical practice, and pieces of music.[158] While meaning is often inferred from the initial author, its point of origin can be sullied through endless interpretation and signification. However, it is often the case that 'the community and its values, acted out in countless unremarkable, quotidian activities, tend to dominate individual interpretations'.[159] For Bulgarian folk musicians who work with a living repertoire, the scope for intertextual allusion is vast. Licks, motifs and forms are continually referenced and re-interpreted as part of this living tradition. But the choices made infer connection, either to locale or to a shared resistance of totalitarian regime and state-controlled artistic production. Intertextual relationships for Rice, therefore, are four-fold, with references to prior pieces and renditions, a wider 'ideational' system, individuals or groups, and 'formal musical contrasts' that offer referential meaning.[160]

Monson's explicitly musical take, where she consciously adopts 'intermusical' rather than intertextual, acknowledges this interwoven sociality and performance schema, and looks to much more immediate relationships. This therefore resonates with the ad hoc improvisatory intertextual practice that takes place in grime music. There exists an open sphere of 'musical allusions' that are 'interactionally produced'—this is important since it foregrounds the group—and these allusions span the full spectrum of interaction and communication.[161] These 'interactional texts [are] projected from any conceivable range of human behaviours, from bodily gestures to speech to music', and this model therefore offers the closest alignment with grime practice. While grime group process is of course stimulated

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[157] Williams, *Rhymin' and Stealin'*, 180.

[158] Rice, "Reflections on Music and Meaning…", 34.

[159] ibid, 34.

[160] ibid, 36.

[161] Monson, *Saying Something*, 188.

by lyrical allusions and flow patterns, it is also affected by body language, repetition, and a wide array of DJ gestures, such as chopping, cutting and punching (see Chapter 4).[162] Monson's widened interpretation of intermusical referentiality is welcomed in this thesis, since the primacy of the textual can often underplay gesture—and how gestures can be referentially linked to prior gesture and prior interaction—at the expense of solely lyrical readings. This appreciation also allows the group and its ontology to be taken as an organising element, which is vital for collective creativity in grime. Monson also begins to map groove and 'cultural sensibilities' as facets that can be endemically interred, which is similarly important for conceptualising how grime artists build energy, align and move towards levelling up. Through exhibiting considered focus on the nature of group practice, mapping innovations that are both intertextual and intermusical, and offering more meaningful dialogue between the social and the linguistic, this thesis will build upon Monson's work and offer an unparalleled insight into grime performance, its interactional basis, individual tensions, and potential for novelty born out of its complex formations and fraught live environment.

This chapter's final section, although short, is important. It attends briefly to how extra-musical tensions and antagonisms can affect this creative process, before offering a note on the primacy of artists' ways of knowing and perspectives, and how their ideas are co-constituted with, and often foregrounded in place of, theory throughout this thesis.

Section 5 – Hypermasculinity, language and artists' ways of knowing

(i) Authenticity, homosociality and gender

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162 ibid, 189.

Following from Small's widening of performance to include societal and everyday factors that impact musical practice, there are certain extra-musical aspects particular to performers engaged in grime practice that affect creativity. Section 1 touched on the entrepreneurial intent of various artists, and how this was in part impacted by societal conditions. For White, young grime artists were—and still are—'corralled into ever smaller spaces', and an intense desire to break these ties comes through as part of performance.[163]

Charles makes a more direct link between socioeconomic conditions and the form's sonority, stating that grime's 'tempo reflect[s the] fast pace of London', while the importance of liminal spaces in Bramwell's writing highlights the fragility of the Black Public Sphere. Pirate radio not only excites performance through its interconnections and feedback loops, but also through the very real threat of stations being raided by the police.[164] North London MC Skepta's track 'DTI' refers to the impermanence of radio, while Mykaell Riley's study of grime practice found Form 696—a document issued by the Metropolitan Police to assess the safety of events—to be used punitively against grime events, which were regularly cancelled.[165] A combination of 'social subordination' and the lack of safe spaces to perform has impacted and coloured performance practice.[166] While Chapter 3 looks to how an over-reliance on a Marxist causational framework in journalistic writing, that sees grime directly as a product of societal struggle, has resulted in a reductive understanding of its performance practice, it is important to acknowledge that performance does not take place in a vacuum and these extra-musical factors do inflect upon proceedings.[167]

As such, it is important to consider hypermasculinity, and how it affects the performance process. Jeffrey Boakye's book *Hold Tight* deals with masculinity and grime

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[163] White, "We Need to Talk about Newham", 224.

[164] Charles, "Hallowed be thy grime…", 133.

[165] Riley, "State of Play: Grime", 59.

[166] Bramwell, *Grime and the City,* 259.

[167] Michael Brocken, "Was it really like that?: 'Rock Island Line' and the instabilities of causational popular music histories", *Popular Music History* 1, no.2 (2006): 151.

music. This detailed and sensitive approach offers stark contrast with the racially essentialised reportage from Campion attended to in Section 2, but it does draw out important issues and concerns with a certain style of performance. While focusing predominantly on recordings, Boakye's book looks to certain tracks, such as Giggs' 'Talkin The Hardest' and East London MC Crazy Titch's 'I Can C U', and how they feature abrasive and often misogynistic lyrical content. Boakye argues that these overt assertions of masculinity are used to authenticate their positions as bona fide artists, while also reflecting their quotidian experiences.[168] This reading aligns with Kembrew McLeod's research on hip-hop authenticity, that locates an the outward projection of a 'hard' persona in hip-hop MCing.[169]

Hypermasculinity's impact on performance and performance spaces was evocatively documented by Monique Charles. During her doctoral research, she experienced aggrandised masculinity in a number of ways. She was sexualised by ethnographic participants, noted problematic gender dynamics at raves, and also referenced particular tracks that—like Boakye's choices—had uncomfortable and misogynistic lyrics.[170] The normalising of these themes, and aspects of conduct, unsurprisingly makes grime unwelcoming for a number of people. With respect to performance, this hypermasculine intensity has consequently impacted and inflected upon radio sets and live shows.

The most overt manifestation of this is the overall gender imbalance at events. The pirate radio station and rave are predominantly seen as a priori masculine, and this leaves women outnumbered and often disenfranchised. Harrison has mapped a similar field of creation and performance in Bay Area hip-hop, where 'informal apprenticeships, which in terms of underground hip hop typically involve the diffusion of particular skills and knowledge within home and bedroom settings, tend to be activities that discourage female

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[168] Jeffrey Boakye, *Hold Tight: Black Masculinity, Millennials and the Meaning of Grime* (London: Influx Press, 2017), 101, 152.

[169] Kembrew McLeod, "Authenticity within Hip-Hop and Other Cultures Threatened With Assimilation", in *That's the Joint!: The Hip-Hop Studies Reader*, ed. Mark Anthony Neal and Murray Forman (New York: Routledge, 2004), 169.

[170] Charles, "Hallowed be thy grime…", 78, 269.

involvement.'[171] While grime MCs often speak to feeling at home on radio, the primacy of male bonding in these spaces makes it difficult and uncomfortable for women to engage.

> There's only certain girls who do sets with guys. Whether that's because the guys don't really want them involved or if they don't want to be in those spaces I'm not sure…men get a bit thrown off when there's a girl there. You know when they go a bit crazy and everyone's grabbing each other and stuff. The guys don't do that with the girls in case they hurt them.[172]

Throughout the 2010s a shift towards greater participation and representation for women in the grime scene saw DJs Julie Adenuga, Sian Anderson, Rebecca Judd and Kaylee Kay host prominent shows on Beats One, BBC Radio 1Xtra, Westside and Pyro Radio respectively. MCs such as Lady Leshurr, C Cane, Lost Souljah, Madders Tiff and Taliifah also gained substantial notoriety for their craft during this period.[173] For DJ Kaylee Kay, these positive steps were seen as part of a gradual transition.

> What we want to do is integrate. It's not like having all female sets all the time. I think it should be a thing where when DJs are doing sets, they invite at least one female MC. At the moment [in 2019] it's not really the case…but it is a lot better than it was previously.[174]

But, despite this shift, the nature of these spaces has affected female artists' practice.

> I think a lot of the [female MCs] are strong minded people but put on an even harder front. Especially when they're out doing their shows. They have to be harder than the guys to show they're even better than the guys.[175]

This homosociality and its impact on practice will therefore be explored with reference to both grime's outset (where the field was overtly male-dominated), but also the legacy of this latent homosociality on the contemporary field that I investigated from 2016–2019. The prevalence of male practitioners, and aggressive content are compounded by the insecurity

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[171] Harrison, *Hip Hop Underground*, 33.

[172] Ellie Ramsden, Personal Interview. August 2018.

[173] Artists such as Lady Fury, Lady Sovereign, Lioness, No Lay and Shystie established themselves in the early 2000s.

[174] Kaylee Kay, Personal Interview. February 2019.

[175] Ramsden, 2018.

and challenges faced by black working-class artists performing within a field that is threatened by event closures, and racist stereotyping. As a result, there is a combined intensity, both within the complex improvisatory performance framework that artists engage with and the extramusical factors that they bring with them into the performance sphere, that results in high energy clashing, confrontation and elision or isolation of other performers and audience members.

(ii) Language and artists' ways of knowing

The discussion above located aspects of hypermasculinity being foregrounded through language use. The very naming of performance protocol within grime music also reflects this masculine bias. Key performance techniques, such as the 'reload' and 'through ball', refer to weapon usage and football respectively, both of which are historically viewed as homosocial. The normalisation of football as a means to conceptualise artists' practice, for example, demonstrates how a sport coloured by 'hegemonic masculinity' is used as a frame of reference for performance practice.[176]

Outside of an affirmation of homosociality, though, artists' use of descriptive terminology offers a valuable insight into the inner workings of the creative process. While this literature review has predominantly attended to the work of other scholars, most of whom have not engaged with grime performance, a considered attentiveness to artists' ways of knowing will critically supplement this theorising. This is particularly the case in descriptive sections where intricate exchanges and specialised techniques are being utilised by performers. Artists' use of sporting terminology, for example, often offers a striking visual correlate between practice and its metaphoric association. This terminology foregrounds performers' interaction in a dynamic manner. The 'rally' and 'through ball' are prime examples.

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[176] David Wood, "The Beautiful Game? Hegemonic Masculinity, Women and Football in Brazil and Argentina", *Bulletin of Latin American Research* 37, no. 5 (2018): 567.

The through ball in particular moves beyond dyadic turn-taking. Instead its use directly references a passing technique in football. This passing technique demands a Monsonian 'perceptual agency' and aligns closely with Bourdieu's conceptualisation of practice in process. Rallying meanwhile is elucidated with respect to interchange in tennis and squash. Outside of sporting associations, artists' reflections on vibe and energy impart knowledge on the collaborative process. West London DJ Eastwood, for example, regularly referred to energy in interview, and how performers *level up* and reach moments of climax or rupture through assiduous concentration and iteratively building through phases of play (see Chapter 4, Section 2).

Throughout his work on practice, Bourdieu raised issue with the 'theorization effect' and how future practice can be impacted by the reducing of 'highly interdependent aspects' to a neat, 'totalizing' theory of practice. Section 4's engagement with the emergent nature of grime performance, and its irreducibility to its constituent elements, has already shown that a reductive, totalizing gaze needs to be replaced with an appreciation of its ongoing, iterative, and group-based nature. But it is also important to continually juxtapose the theorising that does take place with artists' ways of knowing and testimonials.[177] For Bourdieu, 'practice has a logic which is not that of the logician', and a full appreciation demands the ethnographic gaze advocated for in Chapter 1. Artists' terminology and testimonials are able to both capture the nuance and intricacy of emergent creative practice and multidirectionality, while also making sense to a community of practitioners who actually conduct and carry out grime performance on a daily basis. As such, artist descriptions will be considered seriously as part of this thesis' meaning-making framework for collective creativity in grime music.

Conclusion

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[177] Bourdieu, *Logic of Practice*, 86.

This chapter has offered a comprehensive overview of existing literature, and how it will help to frame and conceptualise grime practice. It aimed to bring together ideas on the interconnected media ecologies that undergird and excite performance practice, with the specificities of improvising groups. It also paid attention to key issues surrounding Afrodiasporic practice, and the ways in which the voice and the body are inscribed in literature, and how this thesis will position grime practice as acts of collective creativity. Grime music is group based—with underlying tensions between individuals and crews—it is emergent, and its multidirectional framework offers continual scope for novelty, and the attainment of higher levels of interaction that produce moments of unquantifiable energy. These moments are attained through craft, diligence and assiduous concentration, and are often developed in situ as part of a group's 'corollary epistemology'.[178]

Since we have now 'set pace', the next chapter will offer an historiographic enquiry into the ways in which grime has been written about, and how certain narratives have impacted practice, and conceptions of its performance. Exemplary work by key theorists on grime is looked at in conversation with a more prevalent journalistic canon, the latter of which has had a greater impact on the grime community and public perceptions of the form. The strictures and limitations imposed upon journalistic writing—which is often expedited, excessively narrativised and reductive—pose tangible issues for wider conceptions of grime practice. As such, this chapter will address this writing and offer salient counter-narratives from both practitioners and empirical work that I have conducted, in order to redress the balance.

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[178] Philip Clark, "Something In The Air", *The Wire*, 398 (April 2017): 36.

Chapter 3 – Histories of Grime

Introduction

Grime's history has principally been constructed through journalistic reportage, oral history and writing by a small collection of reputable academics. This history locates the birthplace of grime to be Bow in East London. The form's emergence in the early 2000s, presented briefly in the thesis' introduction, is often framed within a wider socio-political narrative of disaffected urban youth responding to New Labour's domestic policy and the lived conditions of the capital. Grime was gritty, much darker than its predecessor UK garage, and musically documented a post-millennial struggle. This chapter presents (and critiques) grime's incipient histories, looking at how narratives have become solidified, the meaning making that takes place in their enactment, and how empirical research can challenge reductionist conceptions of the form.[1]

This is by no means a revisionist polemic against current writing. However, a critical engagement with the current literature alongside primary research and an examination of 'in-house' criticism from within the scene will help in demarcating the critical terrain. It will also demonstrate how the prioritisation of narrative expediency—particularly in oral history and journalism—has real scope to affect future practice. Musical histories palpably affect ideas of tradition and innovation amongst practitioners and theorists alike. Grime music has a bounded historical representation, an intense geographic affiliation (Bow E3), and a few key players (Dizzee Rascal and Wiley) whose importance is uncontested. This history is seen as definitive, constituting 'authentic' performance, and prescribing strict guidelines on how to innovate. This section, then, while historiographic in nature asks pertinent questions about how a streamlined understanding of grime practice can affect improvisatory process, and stifle instances of emergent creativity (documented in Chapters 4–8).

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[1] Simon Reynolds, *Bring the Noise: 20 Years of Writing about Hip Rock and Hip-Hop* (London: Faber and Faber, 2009), 382.

As grime continues to develop over time this becomes a more pressing consideration. Marianne Hirsch's notion of 'postmemory', where memory and its 'connection to its subject or source is mediated not through recollection but through an imaginative investment and creation' is important to consider. Hirsch argues that this 'postmemory…characterises the experience of those who grow up dominated by narratives that preceded their birth'. This is at hand in grime music, affecting new artists' conceptions of the form, not just in the United Kingdom but also internationally, with its scenes in Japan, the United States and Australia. It is therefore important to critically engage with the state of play before this history becomes monolithic and preserved for time immemorial.[2]

This chapter is split into three sections: firstly it presents extant histories of the form; secondly it looks at the ways in which these histories have solidified and the meaning making that takes place in their enactment (historical authenticity, canonisation, iconography, codification); finally it presents a critique of these extant histories, utilising ethnographic interviews, archival investigation and musical examples.

Section 1 – Grime's extant histories

As discussed in Chapter Two, there are three key academic texts on grime music, each attending to a critical concern. Richard Bramwell extensively covers the 'black public sphere' and the socioeconomic orientation of its participants. He locates grime within a 'postcolonial London', with a strong lineage informed by the 'transnational flow of Soundsystem Culture to Britain' post-1948. His shrewd interventions with respect to class solidarity act as a signifier across ethnic groups for a large proportion of its practitioner-base, and interviews with a wide range of ethnographic informants from both UK hip-hop and grime support his claims.[3] Monique Charles' PhD study of grime makes a number of

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[2] Marianne Hirsch, *Family Frames: Photography, Narrative and Postmemory* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1997), 242–243.

[3] Bramwell, *Grime and the City,* 32, 72.

advances, notably for this study through her discussions of pirate radio practice and subalternity, and through highlighting the importance of 'specialised language [within artists' creative lexicon] to counter Eurocentric narratives', while Joy White has written a number of texts on the form concerning its relationships to urban entrepreneurialism and the importance of Newham.[4] The work of these authors, to varying degrees, engages assiduously with issues of grime's history, and how it pertains to the subject at hand. However, the majority of this historical work has been conducted in the journalistic and commercial sphere.

There are two principal texts to consider, the first of which is Dan Hancox's *Inner City Pressure: The Story of Grime,* published in 2018. Its opening chapter 'The City and The City' acutely captures the socio-political context for the form's emergence. Hancox deftly recounts the history of East London and its docklands, their decline and the particular struggles faced by its residents in the early 2000s. The book includes interviews with a substantial number of grime artists, drawing from more than ten years experience documenting the form across varying media outlets.[5] Hancox has also written one of two biographies on Dizzee Rascal, the other by Alex Kitts.[6]

In 2016 Hattie Collins and Olivia Rose released an oral history of the genre, definitively titled *This is Grime.* This book had substantial commercial impact selling 3,000 copies UK-wide and features contributions from grime artists (DJs, MCs and producers) and their families. It resoundingly locates grime in East London, reaffirming Collins' claim in 2014 that grime was 'almost exclusively an East London sound'.[7] There are contributions from artists including East London's Stormin, Maxwell D, Riko Dan and South London's Doctor on the importance of sound system culture. Extended chapters focus on Dizzee

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[4] Charles, "Hallowed be thy grime…", 32; White, *Urban Music and Entrepreneurship*, 4; White, "We Need to Talk About Newham", 226.

[5] Hancox, *Inner City Pressure*, 9–30.

[6] Alex Kitts, *Tales From Da Corner: Dizzee Rascal* (London: Orion, 2011); Wiley, *Eskiboy* (London: Random House, 2017).

[7] Hattie Collins, "The Second Coming of Grime", *The Guardian*, March 27, 2014, https://www.theguardian.com/music/2014/mar/27/second-coming-of-grime-dizzee-rascal-wiley.

Rascal and Wiley. It is ambitious and well intentioned text, and the most comprehensive oral history of the form that exists.

Despite this, however, this book has encountered criticism from some artists who feel that Collins did not speak with a wide roster of practitioners, instead choosing to work with East London artists who were 'her friends'.[8] There is certainly a lot of deliberated meaning-making work in this text, and the chaotic nature of grime's formation is sometimes elided for a clear linear progression from Dizzee and Wiley living in Bow to Dizzee's work with Calvin Harris and international superstardom.[9] And while this book demonstrates unwavering commitment to presenting the voices of grime artists, oral histories—and journalistic reportage more generally—can involve a degree of discretionary framing for thematic cohesion.

This is spoken to in a variety of texts on journalistic narrative. Jørgen Jeppesen's study, for example, tracked how his own interview transcripts then get repurposed to fit a wider narrative arc as part of the writing process. After monitoring the process by which he refined six ethnographic interviews with palliative care patients, he noted a 'profound reorganization of narrative data takes place during the construction of a story based on the aesthetic of journalistic narrative'.[10] These concerns are longstanding. In 1991, Mishler wrote an article on the 'rhetoric of transcription', which examined how 'the relation between representation and reality in transcription of discourse is circumstantial', demonstrating how rhetorical affect can often exceed the importance of providing clarity.[11]

While this is of course true of all writing, there is a particularity and pressure to journalistic reportage, with hard deadlines, quick turnarounds and the need to convey a narrative for the general public. This was addressed in Gaye Tuchman's seminal study of

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[8] Contribution anonymised.

[9] Hattie Collins and Olivia Rose, *This is Grime* (London: Holder and Staughton, 2016), 72.

[10] Jørgen Jeppesen, "From Interview to Transcript to Story: Elucidating the Construction of Journalistic Narrative as Qualitative Research", *The Qualitative Report* 21, no. 9 (2016): 1637.

[11] ibid, 1638; E G Mishler, "Representing discourse: The rhetoric of transcription", *Journal of Narrative and Life History*, 1, no.4 (1991): 255-280.

journalistic practice, "Making News", which addressed how the 'typification of raw materials [often] arises out of the requirements of the organisational structure of news work'.[12] The necessity for an expedited deadline is evidenced in *The Evening Standard's* misrepresentation of grime practice that prioritised publication over prudence, while writing to fit an expected typecast can have more pressing implications. Writing in Chapter Two, Section Two, for example, from Chris Campion—for *The Guardian* in 2004—and Simon Reynolds—from his personal blog—readily articulates longstanding racialised representations of black voices and bodies, discussed in *Phonographies* by Weheliye with reference to 'pre-technological orality'.[13] While such narratives were challenged by Marybeth Hamilton's *In Search of the Blues,* where she stated that 'the realness of the Delta blues, its much-heralded purity, lies in those raw, archaic, supposedly uncompromised voices', primal fascination continues to pervade writing on black popular music practice.[14]

And while in this instance we are concerned with historicising, rather than immediate representations of performance practice (both Campion and Reynolds' pieces were reviews), it is often the case that texts align with received wisdom, rather than challenge existing understandings. In interview, a journalist spoke to this concern when reflecting on an unscrupulous deadline: 'in moments like that I feel like I'm reverting to my own sense of what the [grime] narrative is in an almost openly calcified and unthinking way'. Here, then, the charge afforded to Collins and Rose in this instance—while not unique to their book, and reflective of wider issues within journalistic practice as a whole—is the positioning of East London as grime's defacto point of origin, and then proceeding to interview artists who fit within this pre-existing mould.[15] For Jonathan Potter, descriptions become fact through 'be[ing] be treated as so unproblematic that they do not even need to be explicitly

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[12] Gaye Tuchman, "Making News by Doing Work: Routinizing the Unexpected", *American Journal of Sociology* 79, no. 1 (1973): 110.

[13] Campion, "Inside Grime"; Reynolds, "The Primer: Grime", 47; Weheliye, *Phonographies*, 6.

[14] Marybeth Hamilton, *In Search of the Blues: Black Voices, White Visions.* (London: Jonathan Cape, 2007), 10.

[15] Contribution anonymised.

formulated, they can be presupposed'. Therefore a book entitled *This Is Grime* featuring artists almost-exclusively from East London, implicitly infers that grime is unequivocally situated there, for posterity.[16]

The next section will look closely at the meaning making at work within these principal (academic and non-academic) texts on grime music, alongside other important interventions. Since place is the most contentious, as shown above, the discussion will start here. Following this, it will examine grime's 'pioneers'—and the way in which their centrality is imbued with a sense of historical authenticity—before looking at the origins of grime's name, and issues of codification. This assessment will both unpack how grime's history has solidified, and offer insight into the ways in which a particular place, set of individuals, and genre blueprint, have come to represent the form now known as grime. As such, an appreciation of this history will augment Chapter 4's engagement with grime's performance conventions, many of which are informed by—and born out of—this received history.

Section 2 – Space, Pioneers, Origins

(i) Locality and iconography in Grime

As stated above, perhaps the most pertinent signifier for grime is Bow in East London. Linking a musical genre to a place of origin is not a new phenomena, with the romanticised histories of place in jazz and hip-hop foregrounding Storyville and the South Bronx respectively. In fact, it is an exemplary demonstration of how certain places become associated with certain styles, with a perennial, Herderian fixation on *lokalgeist* that pervades popular music histories.[17]

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[16] Jonathan Potter, *Representing Reality: Discourse, Rhetoric and Social Construction*, (Sage Publications Ltd, 1996), 113.

[17] Martin Schütze, "The Fundamental Ideas in Herder's Thought. IV", *Modern Philology* 19, no.4 (1992): 367; White, *Urban Music and Entrepreneurship*, 4.

While the majority of this meaning making does take place in journalistic texts, there are moments within academic grime literature that have foreground East London's pre-eminence. For Joy White, grime is unequivocally located within an 'urban East London' placed in opposition to South London, which possesses its own bounded soundscape. White presents South London as the home of road rap, exemplified by its most prolific and prominent exponent Giggs.[18] This assertion carries a number of implications, but most pertinently has the potential to disavow the work of South London's grime artists (Nikki S, Nyke, South Soldiers, Essentials and Roadside Gs to name a few) through 'delimiting the population of those entitled to take part in the struggle'.[19] The legacy of East London's progeny is also manifest in Kamila Rymajdo's discussion of space and place with respect to Manchester grime MC Bugzy Malone from 2015. According to Rymajdo, this artist's substantial popularity opened up a new geographical avenue for the understanding of grime. Rymajdo lays out grime's London-centric history, in a more overt manner than White, in order to set up this opposition with Manchester. This makes for a compelling argument on the surface, however through negating to acknowledge Manchester's already-existing grime scene—Virus Syndicate released their first LP in 2005—and through downplaying the vibrant multi-locational landscape that existed at grime's outset (including Birmingham and Nottingham), Rymajdo arguably overstates this opposition and reaffirms the history she is seeking to problematise.[20]

Within the journalistic canon, however, there are far more explicit appeals to East London's centrality. These are cemented through the application of pathos and the alignment of grime and locationally specific social destitution. Grime is (said to be) from East London, sound like East London and embody its way of life. A prevailing metaphor

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[18] Joy White, *Urban Music and Entrepreneurship: Beats, rhymes and young people's enterprise.* (London: Routledge, 2017), 4.

[19] Pierre Bourdieu, *The Field of Cultural Production: Essays on Art and Literature* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1993), 43; White, *Urban Music and Entrepreneurship,* 5.

[20] DJ Total, "Midlandz Mafia", Silk City Radio, Birmingham: May 21 2006; Kamila Rymajdo, "Hashtag 0161: Did Bugzy Malone Put Manny on the Map?", *Popular Music History* 10, no. 1 (2017): 82–98.

Figure 3.1 – Album cover for *White Label Classics*.
Photograph taken by Simon Wheatley in 2005.

used by Dan Hancox in his long read on Wiley from 2017 places East London as grime's 'ground zero'. This highly evocative term likens grime's birth to nuclear fallout, or a phoenix rising from the flames. This sense of (re-)birth is similarly spoken to by Wiley's father, Richard Cowie: 'This all came from a bad place: people stabbing, robbing, guns, young people hustling drugs, bad parents. You name it. This whole thing, it came from these kids rising out of the ashes.'[21]

Grime is therefore depicted as a social consequence, regularly framed as the bastard child of New Labour policies, just as punk and post-punk were tied to Thatcher's Britain and deindustrialisation in the late 1970s and early 1980s. This is perhaps why Simon Reynolds initially coined the term 'rave-punk' to describe the genre. Michael Brocken has

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[21] Hancox, "The Long Read…", 26; Collins, *This Is Grime,* 11; Kitts, *Tales from Da Corner,* 7.

Figure 3.2 – Dizzee Rascal and Wiley at Three Flats.
Photograph taken by David Tonge in 2002.

argued that a 'dialectic process of history determined by struggle and alienation' has coloured popular music research and this can be seen in the writing on grime music.[22]

This equating of socioeconomic destitution to an outpouring of creative fervour is furthered through visual imagery that captures the alienation of the area. When I visited Bow in 2011, the first thing I noticed was the Canary Wharf financial district that occupies the entire skyline, especially if you look southwards from Mile End Park Stadium. The railway arches that run perpendicular to Burdett Road, just a few hundred yards from the Stadium, were the site for one of the most iconic photographs in grime. Taken by Simon Wheatley, it presents Ruff Sqwad, a crew consisting in 2005 of Slix, Dirty Danger, Shifty Rydos, Fuda Guy, Rapid, DJ Scholar, DJ Begg and Tinchy Stryder, close to the release of their mixtape *Guns N Roses Volume 1*. This image later used for the cover of their *White Label Classics* CD (see Figure 3.1) depicts the looming skyline, an 'oppressive financial paean'

[22] Michael Brocken, "Was it really like that?: 'Rock Island Line' and the instabilities of causational popular music histories", *Popular Music History* 1, no.2 (2006): 151; Reynolds, *Bring the Noise*, 347.
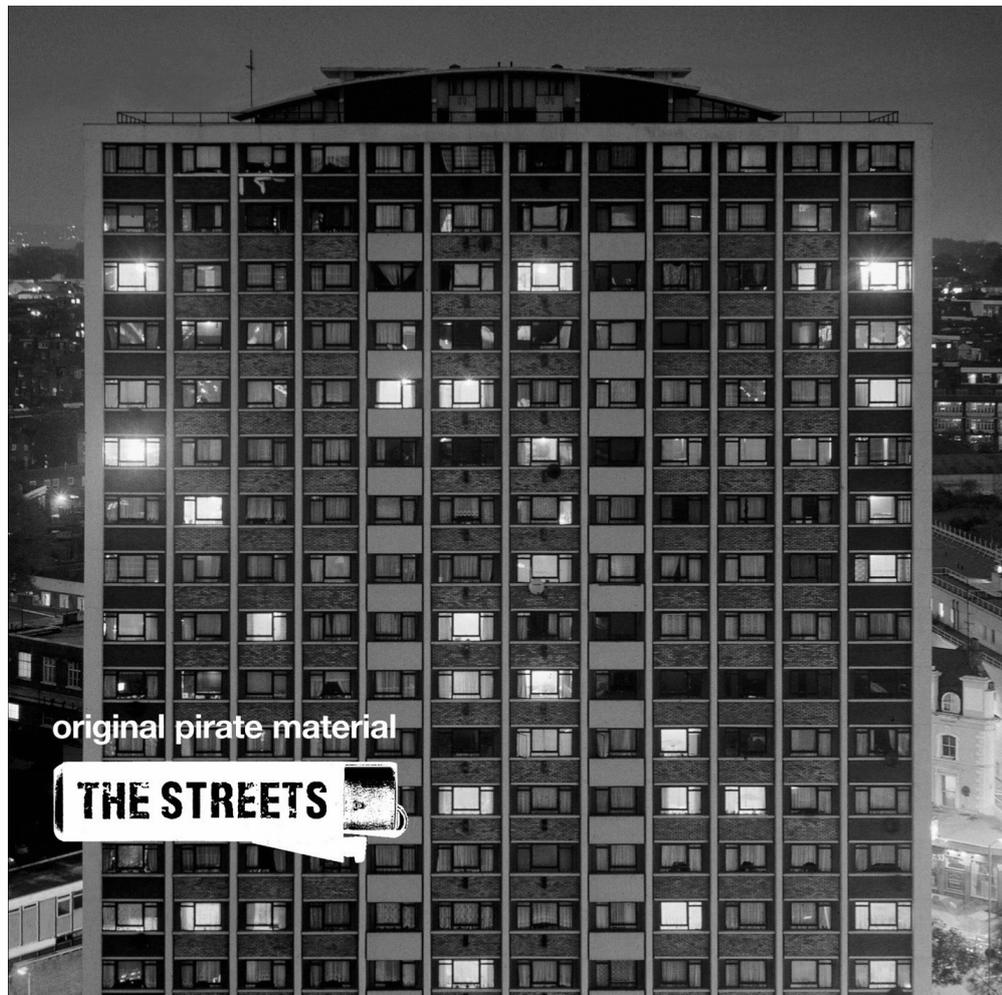
Figure 3.3 – Album cover for The Streets' *Original Pirate
Material*. Photograph taken by Rut Blees Luxemburg in 1995.

according to Collins, starkly juxtaposed with the crew who look staunchly towards
Wheatley's camera. Brocken's struggle and causation is captured in one shot. It's a powerful
image, and its continued use in articles on grime, and on the cover of *White Label Classics*
creates a lasting impression.[23]

A powerful image of Wiley and Dizzee Rascal sitting in Three Flats (Crossways
Estate in Bow) does similar work, presenting grime's key protagonists (more of which later)
within, and born out of, East London council flats. Taken in August 2002 by David Tonge it
is again deemed 'iconic' and featured in 2017 as part of Hancox's long read on Wiley. Unlike
Canary Wharf, though, the tower block also pertains to practice. Tower blocks (including
Three Flats) housed transmitters for pirate radio stations, while their brutalist form is

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[23] Collins, *This is Grime,* 1.

redolent of the way in which grime music's sonority is spoken about journalistically: brash, bleak, and abrasive with 'caustic acid bass' and 'death ray riffs'.[24]

This interwoven sense of practice, life and sound is reflected in The Streets' album artwork for their seminal record *Original Pirate Material.* Rut Blees Luxemburg's image 'Towering Inferno' of Kestrel House was chosen to both symbolise the output from pirate radio and complement the social commentary provided by Mike Skinner on record. This is despite Skinner being from Birmingham and Kestrel House being situated in North London. Luxemburg agreed for her photo to be used for the album since 'these places are hothouses of creativity. They hold within them real kernels of social change and expression' (see Chapter 7).[25]

The tower block is also a focal point of Melissa Bradshaw's long read with DJ Slimzee from 2015. Through using his anti-social behaviour order (ASBO) as a conceit for the piece, Bradshaw foregrounds the tower block and the East London skyline in a heavily romanticised and highly symbolic manner. These three images (and some of the reportage) present the tower block as a creative hub. For Tonge's image, it also presents these two pioneering figures in grayscale, a macabre effect that further highlights the bleakness of both the form's sonority and the place from which the artists came. Both Wheatley and Tonge's images locate grime powerfully and convincingly in a barren and poverty-stricken area. The music is seen to be created in light of the oppression from above (Canary Wharf) and made through and within tower blocks, resulting in musical content that reflects the artists' predicament. This creative framing speaks directly to, and is reflective of, the Marxist causational tendency that Brocken has highlighted as endemic of rhetoric surrounding popular music histories.[26]

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[24] Reynolds, *Bring The Noise,* 347.

[25] Simran Hans, "How the Iconic Artwork of *Original Pirate Material* made a Subtle Statement about London Life", *The FADER,* March 23, 2017, http://www.thefader.com/2017/03/23/original-pirate-material-cover-rut-blees-luxemburg-interview; Rut Blees Luxemburg, *London: A Modern Project* (London: Black Dog Publishing, 2007).

[26] Melissa Bradshaw, "Slimzee: ASBOs, Breakdowns and Dubplates", *Boiler Room,* July 6, 2015, http://boilerroom.tv/slimzee-asbos-breakdowns-and-dubplates/.

It is also important to consider the ubiquity of these images. There is no questioning that these images have become part of a 'collective memory', however the paucity of grime photographs taken at that time may have affected this outcome. Leonard Nevarez's study of Joy Division takes a close and considered look at how a band that were so sparsely documented during their period of activity came to symbolise an entire metropolis and were simultaneously typecast as 'miserable young men in raincoats'. Nevarez proposes an 'indexicality of Joy Division' where connotations that are initially ambiguous become established (and often monolithic) by 'interactively assigning referents and establishing contexts of relevance', according to the terms set out by Richard Garfinkel in his work on indexicality. For Joy Division specifically, a band who never performed outside of Europe, there is a case to be made for how the tropes were established, since the (visual) documentation was relatively sparse: 'their televised performances were so infrequent as to become key events in the posthumous collective memory of the band.' These few appearances just before the 'promo video age' meant that the history was created in retrospect, and these events garnered a heightened importance as a result.[27]

Similarly, grime is readily reduced to a few stock images and a singular place. In an interview with Dan Hancox, I spoke to him about why these particular images became so prominent. He attributed this to a general lack of interest from media outlets and a technological restriction that precluded large-scale documentation.

> In terms of visual iconography in the early days it's significant that the digital camera, let alone smartphone, didn't really reach mainstream adoption until a few years after grime's first wave…it was so far off from smartphone stuff that those images are so few and far between. That's why you see them over and over again.[28]

Although this may seem technologically deterministic, it is a salient point. Photographic documentation and evidence from 2002–2005 is relatively limited, and the lack of access to

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[27] Richard Garfinkel, *Studies in Ethnomethodology,* (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1967); Leonard Nevarez, "How Joy Division came to sound like Manchester: myth and ways of listening in the neoliberal city", *Journal of Popular Music Studies*, 25 No.1 (2013): 58, 61.

[28] Dan Hancox, Personal Interview. March 2017.

digital cameras was difficult. The fact that this iconography is complicit with the narrative that has been established makes them even more compelling and enduring as representations of a time that is otherwise largely undocumented in the visual sphere. These pictures act as a collective memory for grime at its inception.

In addition to the paucity of images of grime artists, there is also a lack of reportage on the full spectrum of figures involved in its production. Its two protagonists will now be looked at, demonstrating the ways in which Dizzee Rascal and Wiley have been uncritically revered and placed at the centre of discussions on the form.

(ii) Grime's 'pioneers': Wiley and Dizzee Rascal

Throughout the history of popular music, there has been a tendency to ascribe idol-like status to a few key figures who were seen as responsible for an entire movement, or at least a change in course. These narratives are mythologised and focus upon mercurial, maniacal geniuses whose raw passion helped create such trailblazing work. A prime example is alto saxophonist Charlie Parker, whose heroin addiction was written about as much as his music. An article from 2017 still perpetuates the notion that his addiction helped his musical writing, while the tales of his time spent at the rehabilitation clinic at the Camarillo are well documented.[29] This is accompanied by the paradigm shift induced by his work, articulating a marked break with what came before. According to Ted Gioia 'even the most genealogical tracing of Parker's sources fail to explain the *unique* sound of his alto saxophone [emphasis added]'.[30]

This framework makes a ready comparison with Manchester-born DJ Semtex's assessment of Dizzee and Wiley's emergence: 'the style was just crazy, like, totally

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[29] Larry Getlen, "Charlie Parker's Heroin Addiction helped make him a genius", *NY Post,* February 5, 2017, http://nypost.com/2017/02/05/charlie-parkers-heroin-addiction-helped-make-him-a-genius/; Ross Russell, *Bird Lives! The High Life and Hard Times of Charlie (Yardbird) Parker* (New York: Da Capo Press, 1996).

[30] Ted Gioia, *The History of Jazz,* (London: Oxford University Press, 1997), 208.

unorthodox, totally raw, totally abrasive…Diz and Wiley, they pioneered the sound. They turned nothing into something.'[31] Both Wiley and Dizzee Rascal are seen as visionaries who, like Charlie Parker and his role in re-energising jazz, moved a sound forward and away from a stagnant UK garage scene. This section briefly looks at the artists themselves, before turning to key moments and canonical events that have served to cement their roles as pioneers in the game.[32]

Wiley the Godfather

Richard Kylea Cowie is seen as a physical embodiment of both grime and East London. Initially known as Wiley Kat, the MC was born into a musical family. His father was a working musician, a factor which substantially influenced Wiley's practice and familiarity within a studio environment.[33] He started out MCing over jungle and drum 'n' bass in the late 1990s, later forming Ladies Hit Squad with DJ Target and Maxwell D, before joining Pay As U Go Cartel alongside DJ Slimzee. His first release on Wiley Kat records 'I Will Not Lose' came out in 2001. He later formed Roll Deep and the A-List. By 2019, Wiley had written a Number One single and released twelve studio albums. His track 'Bow E3' articulates Wiley's deep connection to his locality, but this—and his position as the 'godfather of grime'—is not simply unbridled bravado. He has been positioned as such by journalists, academics and artists alike.[34]

For example, fellow East London MC Kano said that 'he [Wiley] could mostly be credited for this *whole thing* that they call grime now. He's been a big influence in my career and probably anyone from *East London* and anyone into *grime* now [emphasis added]'. Fellow Roll Deep member Riko Dan echoes this assessment: 'there wouldn't be half the MCs out

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[31] Collins, *This is Grime,* 101.

[32] Alyn Shipton, *A New History of Jazz,* (London: Continuum, 2002).

[33] Wiley, *Eskiboy*, 9.

[34] DJ Trend, Riko and Wiley, "DJ Trend", Rinse FM, London: April 8, 1997.

of Bow that are superstars now. I think Wiley is the most important person in grime.' Both Riko Dan and Kano view Wiley as responsible for the genre. The syntactical proximity of East London and Grime in Kano's quote sees these two terms become synonymous, shepherded and crafted by its progenitor. Wiley is also presented as an otherworldly, near-mythical figure. Quotes from Chantelle Fiddy, 'his brain is not human', and broadcaster Sian Anderson, 'he's just an anomaly', serve to create a cult-like status around him.[35]

Wiley's position as a 'Godfather' of the scene has been parochially accepted for sometime, but was magnified in 2017: Wiley released his album *The Godfather,* performed his 'Godfather Show' at the Camden Roundhouse and was interviewed for *The Guardian*'s long-read by Dan Hancox. Wiley and his label Big Dada were consciously constructing a legacy with this project. His album *The Godfather* is positioned as a resounding musical statement,

Kembrew McLeod's Support Claims of Authenticity		
Semantic Dimensions	Real	Fake
Social-Psychological	Staying true to yourself	Following mass trends
Racial	Black	White
Political-economic	the underground	commercial
Gender-sexual	hard	soft
Social locational	the street	the suburbs
Cultural	the old school	the mainstream

Figure 3.4 – Table adapted from Kembrew McLeod's "Authenticity within Hip-Hop and Other Cultures Threatened With Assimilation", 2004: 169.

accompanied by a written testimony and live rendition.[36]

The album itself was well received critically and the content from a substantial number of the tracks speaks to Wiley's positioning as the pre-eminent Godfather of Grime. It appeals to a large range of 'authentic' signifiers and is complicit with many of the

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[35] Collins, *This is Grime*, 84–89.

[36] Hancox, "The Long Read: The Godfather of Grime", 25.

Figure 3.5 – Wiley. Photograph taken by Olivia Rose. From *This is Grime*, 2016: 94–95.

'support claims' outlined by Kembrew McLeod in his study of US hip-hop authenticity (see Figure 3.4).[37]

The hook of lead single 'Can't Go Wrong' is a clear example, appealing to authenticity and a clarity of vision: 'you can never control how man are doing it, it's authentic can't go wrong…still going strong because I've got the belief that I'm the wickedest grime MC on earth,' while second single 'Speakerbox' readily makes comparison to totemic figures in reggae (Peter Tosh and Bob Marley). This assertion from Wiley aligns with McLeod's 'authentic signifiers', while attending to something deeper. In Justin Williams' examination of *Musical Borrowing in Hip-Hop*, he writes of 'historical authenticity' and how the referencing of other artists' work can affirm membership of a particular community (see Chapter 2, Section 4). In this instance, Wiley both affirms his own authenticity but also

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[37] Kembrew McLeod, "Authenticity within Hip-Hop and Other Cultures Threatened With Assimilation", in *That's the Joint!: The Hip-Hop Studies Reader*, ed. Mark Anthony Neal and Murray Forman (New York: Routledge, 2004), 169.

constructs a calculated lineage, through an 'intergeneric allusion' to 'legends' of an antecedent musical form.[38]

His Godfather live show took place a month after the album's release and was similarly resounding. The very same week Noisey announced Wiley as their Number One 'Greatest UK MC of all time', and Julie Adenuga presented the award to Wiley mid-show. The Camden Roundhouse was sold-out and his performance featured over twenty guest MCs, including JME and Skepta (of Boy Better Know), Lethal Bizzle, and D Double E. It acted as a celebration of his work and a demonstration of the camaraderie within a scene that he is deemed largely responsible for. There were innumerable hugs and assertions of brotherhood on stage following collaborations, rare for a scene typically fraught with antagonism between MCs. This was a powerful statement that irrefutably placed Wiley as the godfather of grime.[39]

Boy in Da Corner

Although Wiley stands firm as the godfather, Dizzee Rascal was grime's poster boy. He was the first artist to breakthrough commercially, ascending from humble beginnings on Devons Road Estate to his landmark performance at the London Olympics in 2012. This rise to fame is mentioned extensively in both Kitts and Hancox's autobiographies, while grime's watershed moment is widely considered to be the 2003 Mercury award for his debut album *Boy in Da Corner*. *Boy In Da Corner*'s continued importance was evidenced through two complete live renditions of the album by Dizzee Rascal in New York and at East London's Copper Box Arena in 2016. The Copper Box show, which took place only a few yards from the now demolished DejaVu FM studio from the early 2000s, was referred to in Crack

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[38] Justin A. Williams, *Rhymin' and Stealin': Musical Borrowing in Hip-Hop,* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2014), 17.

[39] Ryan Bassill, "Greatest UK MCs of All Time", *Noisey,* February 10, 2017, https://noisey.vice.com/en_uk/article/greatest-uk-mcs-3-2-1-skepta-dizzee-rascal-wiley.

Magazine as 'one of grime's most important highlights in its history'. It also formed the focus of Dan Hancox's chapter "Pirates and Olympians" from *Regeneration Songs*.[40]

We can mark a clear distinction here between Wiley the Godfather and Dizzee Rascal the populariser, a likeness shared with the narrative surrounding hip-hop's 'founding fathers' Kool Herc—the shy yet dedicated grafter—and Grandmaster Flash with his dazzling techniques and showmanship.[41] Dizzee Rascal's outward looking intentions are mentioned by Hancox: 'he helped to invent and *popularise* grime…as his fame quickly expanded beyond the radius of the DejaVu aerial, so too did his horizons.' And this is also verified commercially. Dizzee Rascal had charted at Number One five times by 2012 while Wiley's first and sole Number One single 'Heatwave', a bashment-infused pop song, did not chart until later that year.[42]

Wiley had to mount a defence of this track for its commercial tendencies—'any major deal I get, I put the money back into grime, into other artists'—and is notably dismissive of all his pop forays. Wiley's subsequent studio album *Snakes and Ladders* on Big Dada demonstrated a return to his former sound, through choosing collaborators and producers best known for working within grime, eliding sung choruses, and favouring rapped hooks.[43]

In contrast, Dizzee Rascal left his label XL in 2007 to write an album geared towards a commercial market. *Tongue N' Cheek* was released independently through his own label Dirtee Stank. According to Kitts the turning point was hearing Snoop Dogg's *Doggystyle* at

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[40] Tom Watson, "The rhythm and spite of Boy in Da Corner rekindled", *Crack Magazine,* October 28, 2016, http://crackmagazine.net/article/music/dizzee-rascal-boy-da-corner-live-review/; Dan Hancox, "Pirates and Olympians: DejaVu FM and the Copper Box Arena", in *Regeneration Songs: Sounds of Investment and Loss from East London*, eds. Alberto Duman, Dan Hancox, Malcolm James and Anna Minton, (London: Repeater Books, 2018), 201.

[41] Nelson George, "Hip-Hop's Founding Fathers Speak the Truth", in *That's The Joint: The Hip-Hop Studies Reader,* ed. Murray Forman and Mark Anthony Neal, (Oxon: Routledge, 2012), 44.

[42] Hancox, *Stand Up Tall*, 44; Lauren Kriessler, "Dizzee Rascal honoured with five Number 1 Awards", *Official Charts,* June 21, 2012, http://www.officialcharts.com/chart-news/dizzee-rascal-honoured-with-five-number-1-awards__2200/.

[43] Alexi Duggins, "Wiley: 'You want to know the truth? I'm going to tell you the truth", June 9, 2016, https://www.timeout.com/london/music/wiley-you-want-to-know-the-truth-im-gonna-tell-you-the-truth.

Figure 3.6 – Still image from "Dizzee Rascal vs Crazy T".
Accessed April 4, 2017.

one of his own parties and hoping to emulate it on record. Tracks such as 'Dance Wiv Me' featuring Calvin Harris were unashamedly pop-oriented and Dizzee was quoted in Clash magazine saying 'I get pop music now. I get what a pop format is, to be up there with the greats and the best'. This formulaic approach is markedly different to Wiley's tortured relationship with commerciality. Thus demonstrating how these two artists have also positioned themselves in these differing roles, both musically and in their engagement with the press and wider public sphere.[44]

In short, Dizzee Rascal is seen as a pioneer *and* populariser within the scene as opposed to Wiley's more ambiguous role. Dizzee's position is articulated and reaffirmed through the youthful and visionary vigour of his debut release and his enduring success across four full-length album releases, the latter overtly commercial in its intentions. In the words of biographer Alex Kitts, Dizzee Rascal was a 'prophetic child of the New Labour years' who had 'the entire country in the palm of his hand'.[45]

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[44] Clash Magazine, "Dizzee Rascal Interview", *Clash,* November 3, 2009, http://www.clashmusic.com/features/dizzee-rascal-interview; Kitts, *Tales from Da Corner,* 203.

[45] Kitts, *Tales from Da Corner,* 13, 243.

Grime's Micro-Canon: Canonical Events and Classic Sets

Canonical moments also frame public understanding of a form and respective artists' significance. For Dizzee Rascal and Wiley, their legendary status is secured by virtue of their presence both at key events, and their musical contributions to so-called 'classic sets'. This section attends to grime's key canonical moment, before analysing their musical contributions in relation to antecedent and consequent practice.

One of the most infamous events from grime's history is a rooftop clash between Dizzee Rascal and Crazy Titch. Deemed grime's '100 Club Moment' by Dan Hancox in 2011, it also opened *Inner City Pressure*. The incident took place on the rooftop of Club EQ., and was captured on film by Troy 'A Plus' Miller.[46] This video documents a Monday night set hosted by DejaVu FM's Frisky rapidly spiralling out of control. A number of crews are there, and a situation emerges where Dizzee Rascal and Crazy Titch (of Boyz in Da Hood) begin going back and forth. There's a point where Titch spits a 16-bar passage before indicating that he is about to pass the microphone to Dizzee. However, he instead turns away and continues MCing. Dizzee erupts and the two MCs square up to each other. While Wiley and D Power (of East Connection) attempted to mediate and break up the situation, it soon escalated with Titch's stepbrother Durrty Goodz getting involved. Following this, the group all headed outside onto the rooftop adjacent to Deja's studio (See Figure 3.6). The grainy skyline with Big Ben a distant blur acts as a stunning piece of lo-fi visual iconography. The shiny promise of the metropolitan hub juxtaposed with the monochrome and destitute rooftop, compounded by the display of hypermasculinity on show. Dizzee Rascal's passion is in full view, with the retaliatory anger from Crazy Titch aptly pre-empting his ultimate fate. Titch was convicted of murder in 2005 and is currently serving a 30-year prison sentence.[47]

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[46] Dan Hancox, "Grime's 100 Club Moment", *The Guardian*, 12 June 2011, https://www.theguardian.com/music/2011/jun/13/dizzee-rascal-grime; Hancox, *Inner City Pressure*, 1.

[47] Collins, *This is Grime,* 101; Hugh Muir, "Rapper Who Killed Producer for "disrespect" Gets 30 Years", *The Guardian*, November 3, 2006, https://www.theguardian.com/uk/2006/nov/03/ukguns.musicnews.

The mythologising of this clash is substantial. There are suggestions that Titch called Dizzee a 'mook' in one of his bars, with some citing this lyrical affront as the catalyst. Others point to Titch's sleight with respect to microphone politics (covered in Chapter 4).[48] Ambiguity and romanticism are profoundly at work in myriad canonical moments in popular music history. For example, consider the legend of Grand Wizzard Theodore 'accidentally' inventing the scratch after his mother asked him to come downstairs for dinner. Regardless of direct refutations from Grandmaster Flash, the story is told ad infinitum, with no one entirely knowing the exact details. It is unsurprising, then, to see how this event has become a pivotal part of grime's history. It is exciting, visually striking, yet remains a mystery when it comes to the specifics. The crucial point to bear here is that Dizzee is a protagonist and Wiley is clearly present and involved. They were not only there for grime's '100 Club Moment', but had an important role to play.[49]

In addition to canonical moments of conflict on pirate radio, the medium also offers musical moments that are cited as formative for the genre. DJ Slimzee's return to radio broadcasting in 2014 with NTS Radio saw a renewed and augmented interest in his practice and his seminal sets from the 'classic era' that helped define the form. Hattie Collins wrote a piece on Wiley and Slimzee reuniting for a special Rinse FM show that offers continual comparison to the 'old days'. Collins' assertion that Wiley 'shelled like it was 2001' or the chosen Twitter reflection that it 'remind[ed] me of Roman Road back in the day' are nostalgic, offering up '2001 on Roman Road' as a yardstick from which to assess other performances. In effect, these classic sets defined the genre. This new collaboration between these two legends of the scene had to be assessed in relation to them.[50]

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[48] Lordie, "Frisky DJ discusses Dizzee Rascal vs Crazy Titch (Legendary Footage)", *Grime Report*, March 7, 2012, http://thegrimereport.blogspot.co.uk/2012/03/frisky-dj-discusses-dizzee-rascal-vs.html.

[49] Angus Batey, "Grand Wizard Theodore Accidentally Invents Scratching (or does he?)", *The Guardian*, June 13, 2011, https://www.theguardian.com/music/2011/jun/13/grand-wizard-invents-scratching; George, "Hip-Hop's Founding Fathers…", 448.

[50] DJ Slimzee, "Slimzos Sessions 001 – Slimzee b2b Logan Sama w/ Riko Dan and Flow Dan", NTS Radio, London: April 24 2014; Hattie Collins, "some things we learnt from slimzee and wiley's set last night", *i-D,* February 23, 2016, https://i-d.vice.com/en_uk/article/j5mwwd/some-things-we-learnt-from-slimzee-and-wileys-rinse-fm-set-last-night.

This idea of a 'micro-canon' was at work in 2015 when Fact magazine published an article that listed '24 classic Slimzee sets featuring Wiley, Dizzee Rascal and more'. Aside from the 'and more' relegating the seventeen other MCs featured, it also constructs a database of important radio sets, the majority of which were from 2002. This is significant, since 2002 is widely considered to be the year in which the sonorities, or darker sounding elements, that became to be known as grime started to push away from the principal form garage. This transition is therefore documented through archiving and venerating mixes and sets from this era.[51]

A particular set to consider is DJ Slimzee, Wiley and Dizzee Rascal's Sidewinder Promo Mix from 2002, recorded ahead of an appearance at Club Sidewinder, one of grime's largest raves (see Chapter 4, Section 1). Notwithstanding the technical abilities on show from Wiley and Dizzee Rascal, this mixtape's enduring appeal is its capture of this musical shift, as demonstrated through Slimzee's track selection. At 11:01 Slimzee brings in Outlaw Break's 'Nissi', which has a 2-step feel, syncopated snares and a rolling bassline, stylistic tropes common to UK garage (see Introduction for further discussion of garage and Pay As U Go). This is immediately followed by Dizzee Rascal's 'Ho' riddim, and the difference is apparent (see Figure 3.7).[52]

'Ho Riddim's use of semitone movement implies urgency, while its percussion is markedly stripped back. This allows the voice to be foregrounded, something that is particularly important for grime and the prominence of MCs. For West London producer and DJ Eastwood, simplicity was key: 'You don't even have to like all these strings and music in there it's like when you put too much music in there, it takes away the grime kind of element'.[53] Quite what this grime element is will be explored shortly in a discussion of its

[51] FACT, "Stream 24 classic sets featuring Wiley, Dizzee Rascal and more", *FACT Magazine*, July 9, 2015, http://www.factmag.com/2015/07/09/stream-24-classic-slimzee-sets-featuring-wiley-dizzee-rascal-and-more/.

[52] Get Darker, "Slimzee, Wiley and Dizzee Rascal - Sidewinder Promo Mix - 2002", *Soundcloud*, 2015, https://soundcloud.com/getdarker/slimzee-wiley-dizzee-rascal-sidewinder-promo-mix-2002?in=getdarker/sets/slimzee-mix-archive.

[53] Eastwood, 2017.

Figure 3.7 – Score-based visual comparison of excerpts from
'Nissi' and 'Ho Riddim', (audiovisual example 3a, 0:28; 2:52).

codification, but it can similarly be contrasted with the sonority of UK drill instrumentals, a form which came to prominence in the 2010s. Drill producer Carns Hill, from Brixton, employs both a half-time feel, ethereal vocal samples, 808 kick drums, and rapid 16th note hi-hats to allude both Chicago drill—performed by artists including Chief Keef and King Louie—while possessing an idiosyncratic edge. This is evidenced on 2017 single '#WAPS' with long-time collaborators 67. Hill even claims that his style was built out of adhering to '67 bpm' for 67 and 'developing a new sound around that'.[54]

An extensive discussion of grime's instrumental development warrants a separate but nonetheless necessary paper that critically unpacks the musical worlds at play. Its importance here, though, is to document both how the sound was changing, and the

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[54] Yemi Abiade, "Beatmaker's Corner: Carns Hill", October 11, 2017, https://trenchtrenchtrench.com/features/carns-hill-interview.

implications of these sets being inscribed as 'canonical'. While there were myriad different styles and idiosyncrasies within early grime practice (see below), Wiley, Slimzee and Dizzee Rascal's practice is seen to exemplify this transition.[55]

It is precisely this period of change that will now be turned to, since it captures a power shift, sonically and in terms of personnel. This is crucial for understanding the historicising of grime's origins. Often played out as a tension between cultural orthodoxy (UK garage) and heresy (grime), this period saw a much-mythologised UK garage action group set up to stifle this new sound. There were varying claims for legitimacy from new artists, and a multitude of names for the sound being posited by varying parties. Novelty can often problematise an entire field of production, and an examination of how these artists and their musical endeavours became subsumed under the name 'grime' is both critical for the dominant history attributed to the form, but also for the ways in which 'authentic' practice has been conceived of since its emergence as an autonomous performance genre.[56]

(iii) 'Wot Do U Call It?' The codification of 'grime'

While the sonic transition out of garage into grime was being played out on radio, the terminology surrounding it was markedly fractured. Wiley was making 'Eskibeat', South London producer Jon E Cash had his 'sublow' sound, and Slimzee was working with 8-bar, a term used to evoke certain instrumentals' 8-bar structure. Kamila Rymajdo claimed that grime 'began with tracks that were strictly 140 beats per minute and had low bassline frequencies, but as the genre evolved, so did its parameters', however this is a retrospective ascription.[57] Both Slimzee and Logan Sama have issued statements that would refute this

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[55] Other sets hosted by GetDarker, which are well-suited for further enquiry include DJ Slimzee's November 2002 set with Wiley, Dizzee Rascal, Dirty Doogz, God's Gift and Dogzilla, and Slimzee's set with Pay As U Go at Sidewinder in 2001. The latter is particularly interesting since the tempo oscillates from 145–160bpm with a selection of slowed-down drum 'n' bass tracks and sped up garage records.

[56] Bourdieu, *Field of Cultural Production*, 56; Collins, *This is Grime*, 40.

[57] Rymajdo, "Hashtag 0161", 84.

claim. This subsection, then, closes our discussion of the ways in which grime has been historicised with an attention to nomenclature and codification. It will also offer a bridge into the chapter's third and final section, through incorporating critique. Its presentation of empirical research alongside interview data will contest both Rymajdo's assertions and wider canonical chronicling of grime as a singular aesthetic, demonstrating a far more chaotic and geographically disparate inception for the form now known as grime music.[58]

In 2004, Wiley's single 'Wot Do U Call It' directly addressed issues of the form's codification.

> Wiley: Garage, I don't care about garage,
>
> listen to this, it don't sound like garage.
>
> Who told you that I made garage?
>
> Wiley Kat's got his own sound it's not garage,
>
> make it in a studio not in the garage,
>
> here in London there's a sound called garage,
>
> but this is my sound it sure ain't garage,
>
> I heard they don't like me in garage
>
> cos I used their scene to make my own sound the
>
> Eskimo sound is mine recognise it's mine…

Here Wiley claims Eskimo as his own autonomous style, distinct from garage yet nonetheless influenced by the form. According to music journalist Paul Gibbins 'this was the first time the divide had been addressed on a a musical track'.[59] Prior to this, these new sounds were mostly discussed in periodicals, particularly *RWD Magazine*, which opened in September 2001 with a grant from the Prince's Trust. Their editor up until 2006, Matt Mason, spoke with Collins about the term 'grime', and Wiley's assertions amongst other claims.

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58 Tomas Fraser, "Back in the Game - Slimzee Interview", *FACT Magazine: Music News, New Music,* April 30, 2015, https://www.factmag.com/2015/04/30/slimzee-interview-nts-grime-slimzos-geeneus-wiley-dizzee/; Kieran Yates, "Logan Sama on How to Be a Grime DJ", *Dazed*, November 5 2014, https://www.dazeddigital.com/music/article/22440/1/logan-sama-on-how-to-be-a-grime-dj.

59 Paul Gibbins, Personal Interview. February 2017.

The word came long after the sound. Finding the right name for this new thing was something we talked about non-stop at *RWD*. It took the scene a while to agree on a label. I wish people still took time to label things, *labelling a culture too early can hurt it*. Slimzee was the first person I spoke to who defined the sound by the 8-bar arrangements. We called it '8-bar' for a few issues of *RWD* at least. Some people started calling it UK filth. I think [DJ] EZ was the first person I heard say 'grimy' and later just 'grime'. There were other things happening that clouded all this too. 4/4, breakbeat garage, dubstep of course. There was so much fragmentation happening in the early 2000s. There was almost this *race to brand grime*. Jon E Cash was calling his stuff sublow, Wiley with the eski sound. There were at least twenty other names. It was exhausting. Everyone had their vision for what was next. At some point it just *all fell together as grime* [emphasis added].[60]

I visited *RWD Magazine*'s offices in 2016 to look through their magazine archive, and Mason's recollections largely corroborate these findings. *RWD* was certainly pre-occupied with nomenclature and most interviewees were asked about this. 2 Dark Crew, for example, said that 'garage is a bit dark right now…it's not what it used to be', while producer J Da Flex used the term breakbeat garage in February 2002, a term that aligns with a review of DJ EZ's Pure Garage CD that was released a month before: 'EZ's emphasis is very much on the breakbeat garage sound emerging from the underground.'[61] In April 2002, producer Jon E Cash succinctly described the formula of his sound, sublow: 'Jungle + Hip Hop + Underground UK Garage.' Meanwhile 8-bar, the term championed by Slimzee, first appeared in print in September 2002 alongside an interview with the DJ. Slimzee was described as 'the Pay-As-You-Go member responsible for sending the garage scene 8-bar crazy'.[62]

Simon Reynolds was one of the earliest journalistic contributors to this narrative, outside of *RWD Magazine*. His speculations on *Blissblog* from November 2002 include the

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[60] Collins, *This is Grime,* 78.

[61] Matt Mason, "Interview with 2Dark Crew", *RWD Mag*, Issue 2 (October 2001): 85; Matt Mason, "Review of DJ EZ's Pure Garage", *RWD Mag*, Issue 5 (January 2002): 74; Matt Mason, "Interview with J Da Flex", *RWD Mag*, Issue 6 (February 2002): 20.

[62] Matt Mason, "Interview with Black Op's", *RWD Mag*, Issue 8 (April 2002): 68; Matt Mason, "Interview with DJ Slimzee", *RWD Mag*, Issue 13 (September 2002): 28.

aforementioned 'rave-punk' and the unseemly 'gabba-gangsta-garage'. While not in close contact with practitioners, Reynolds' assertions were tied to the rising prominence of the MC: 'ever so slowly the MC shed this menial, accessory function and clawed his way back to the dominant position'.[63]

The term 'grime' didn't appear anywhere until December 2002. This was used as an adjective by Jon E Cash in interview who was 'quick to big up all the cats pushing the grimey sublow sound'.[64] Incidents specifically concerning 'grime' as a name for the music, however, were almost uniformly dismissed by practitioners, who saw it as a journalistic imposition. Tinchy Stryder was ardent in interview stating '*we* didn't call it grime', while West London MC Bashy saw it as a racial slur.[65] This was corroborated by Marco Grey, cofounder of *WotDoYouCallIt?,* in interview: 'journalists started putting it about. Grime, grime? What's that? Everybody was critical of it.'[66]

In short, the terrain was highly fractured and contested, particularly during 2002. Multiple terms were being used, with artists all vying for autonomy over characteristics. Wiley's sound was largely defined by 'eski-clicks' made on the Korg Triton synthesiser. He also had a predisposition for 'devil' mixes, instrumentals that didn't feature any percussion. Jon E Cash in contrast used 'sublow' to offer a double emphasis on the low-end sounds coming out of his label Black Ops. For Simon Reynolds, it took until August 2003 for this diversity of sounds to become cemented under one umbrella term. Interestingly, like the practitioners above, Reynolds was not completely enthused by the ascription. In an article entitled 'Grime it is, then?' for *Blissblog,* he dutifully pointed to Queens hip-hop group Onyx's 1993 single 'Slam', where they asserted 'everybody wanna sound grimey'. This, for

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[63] Simon Reynolds, "Fave Singles of 2002", *blissout,* December 18, 2002, http://blissout.blogspot.co.uk/2002/.

[64] Matt Mason, "Interview with Jon E Cash", *RWD Mag*, Issue 16 (December 2002): 48.

[65] Collins, *This is Grime,* 77–78; Dan Hancox, "What is #Grime? Learn more in Hashtags, Season II", *Red Bull Music Academy,* February 2017, http://daily.redbullmusicacademy.com/2017/02/grime-hashtags-feature.

[66] Marco Grey, Personal Interview. February 2017.

Reynolds, was a concession of ground to 'slanguage of American origin', rather than asserting grime's distinctive character.[67]

Through this variety of assertions, what we can see is that an implied rigidity—as alluded to by Rymajdo—was far from the case. Nobody really knew who named 'grime', but a decided antipathy across the spectrum (from practitioners and journalists) is perhaps reminiscent of the way in which a diverse array of cultural expression becomes compartmentalised and reduced to core constituent elements as part of a codification process. Accordingly, in line with the empirical nature of this enquiry, this chapter's final section will put forward the case for a more ambiguous understanding for the form as a whole, in its etymological origins, geographical specificity and narratives surrounding its pioneering figures.

In a similar fashion to Nevarez advocating for a more ambiguous understanding of Joy Division, this final section will explore counter-narratives and points of fracture in order to challenge a streamlined conception of grime music, a conception that both regulates new artists' understanding of what grime "is" and has had a profound impact on wider practice.[68]

Section 3 – Other Histories

The history constructed above has situated grime within Dizzee Rascal and Wiley's East London. This narrative has relied on a vibrant oral history, although this has been sourced from a limited pool of artists and published by an even smaller selection of writers. Collins and Rose's substantial work is entirely made up of personal contributions. While oral histories are incredibly valuable, both the predispositions of the editors and individual contributors can affect the nature of their reflections. For Tuchman, writers often have an

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[67] Simon Reynolds, "Grime It Is Then?", *Blissblog*, August 3, 2003, http://blissout.blogspot.com/2003/08/.

[68] Nevarez, "How Joy Division…", 65.

'axe to grind'. Therefore while Collins' book is an important text, the nature of oral histories, which present material without context and analysis, allow a certain history to gestate.[69]

These histories become totemic, and are furthered by a lack of adequate documentation from the time period, aside from out-of-print DVDs and mythical mix CDs that provide little to counter this positioning in a substantial manner. This issue (more widely within popular music studies) was attended to by Paul Oliver who stressed that 'the history of popular music is an ever-present challenge as the music of the present slips rapidly beyond our grasp…until it is too late to recover the necessary information through firsthand experience, oral history or the collection of ephemera'. Further still, the tendency to focus in on individuals has come at the expense of empirical work, according to Charles Hamm.[70] My preliminary findings from *RWD Magazine* demonstrate how valuable empirical work can be. In particular, these findings both challenged Rymajdo's assertion that grime was 'strictly 140 beats per minute' and demonstrated the wide array of artistic work that eventually became subsumed under the name 'grime'.[71]

This section looks at further contributions and source material that have been elided from current discussions of grime, owing to their ill fit with the popular narrative: firstly through an examination of formative grime practice outside of East London; secondly through the censorship of aggressive artists (Roadside Gs); and thirdly through attending to in-house criticism from practitioners seeking to redress a perceived imbalance (Unpopular Opinions, Authentic Grime). Michael Brocken stated that 'the unknown always remains of equal historical value' and this closing section will both argue this case, and unpack the ways in which these artists have sought to redress a perceived imbalance in the historicising of grime.[72]

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[69] Tuchman, "Making News…",

[70] Charles Hamm, "Popular Music and Historiography", *Popular Music History*, 1 no.1 (2004): 13; Paul Oliver, "History begins yesterday", *Popular Music History*, 1 no.1 (2004): 16.

[71] Rymajdo, "Hashtag 0161…", 84.

[72] Brocken, "Was it really like that?", 159.

(i) Native genius and the Southside Allstars

Grime's resolute ties to Bow E3 are not just endemic of journalistic reportage and the policing of boundaries by artists. It is complicit with a wider understanding of 'native genius' across artistic endeavours. 18th century philologist Johann Gottfried von Herder wrote evocatively on works of merit being imbued with a 'spirit of locality', or *lokalgeist*. This understanding of material being tied to a particular place remains pervasive, functioning as a critical component of popular music histories. The specificity of East London's association, though, is perhaps more reminiscent of the highly contested fight between New York boroughs over the ownership of hip-hop, captured on Boogie Down Productions' 1987 track 'South Bronx'.[73]

This subsection unpacks the ways in which originality claims have been addressed in grime music, and why a more wide reaching conception of geographical boundaries matters for grime's creative practice. Rather than disputing East London's pre-eminence, it will provide a salient counter-narrative that both demonstrates the ways in which originality claims are articulated outside of East London and foregrounds the wealth of creative practice across the United Kingdom. A reductive understanding of a musical form restricts what can be seen as legitimate practice (and where it should be made) and we have seen above how an academic assertion about the alleged fixity of grime's tempo and parameters was untrue yet enduring.

There are a number of tensions at play in this discussion. Firstly, there is a tension between a need to articulate locational idiosyncrasies and the temptation for copying artistic practice of predecessors. This of course has precedent in the UK hip-hop scene, with the London Posse's 1988 single 'Money Mad' widely seen as the first record to break through

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[73] Schütze, "The Fundamental Ideas in Herder's Thought. IV", 365; Murray Forman, "'Represent': Race, Space and Place in Rap Music", in *That's the Joint!: The Hip-Hop Studies Reader*, ed. Mark Anthony Neal and Murray Forman (New York: Routledge, 2004), 211.

with artists rapping in an English rather than American accent.[74] So too for grime. As early as 2004, Manchester artists Virus Syndicate (mentioned above) were criticising others for copying East London MCs rather than crafting their own style.

> Nika D: Stars in your eyes, who do you wanna be?
>
> Dizzee Rascal or Wiley?
>
> Well tonight Matthew I think I'll be Wiley, I
>
> practiced so hard that I might get it right G.
>
> MCs get your own stylie.[75]

This concern is similarly reflected in discussions surrounding grime production. The 'micro-canon' mentioned above has resulted in a plethora of remixes of a small pool of tracks. And while repurposing and remixing is an important facet of grime practice, it often becomes overbearing. Spooky remarked on the state of play in 2015: 'yet another Rhythm'n'Gash refix/remix/bootleg. When will it end? How many different variations are you going to put it through?'[76]

The second tension is between an acknowledgement of differences and locational variations, without compartmentalising practice. For Virus Syndicate, they felt the need to 'speak up for [their] own quarters. We had to show them it was a Manchester thing…we've got our own Virus style, the original Manchester flex'.[77] But often this is inferred to be something altogether different, rather than a variation. Other locales, especially in the Midlands, are tied to bassline music (a bass-heavy four-to-the-floor variation on UK garage that incorporated elements of gabba and hardstyle). This sort of ascription both aligns with Herder's notion of *lokalgeist*, and deeply affects how artists' practice is contextualised. For Birmingham artists, in particular, their craft is often presented with reference to bassline. It

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[74] V. F. Team, "The 10 Records That Helped British Hip Hop Find Its Own Voice", *The Vinyl Factory* (blog), September 17, 2015, https://thevinylfactory.com/features/the-10-records-that-helped-british-hip-hop-find-its-own-voice/.

[75] "East is East", 29:00.

[76] 'Rhythm'n'Gash' is a famous grime track released by Rebound X in 2006; Spooky Bizzle, @*SpartanSpooky*, June 22, 2015, https://twitter.com/SpartanSpooky/status/613076781046829057.

[77] "East is East", 28:40.

took until the late 2000s, with the rise of collectives such as Invasion (with MCs Sox, Jaykae, Vader and Depzman) and StayFresh, for Birmingham's contribution for grime to be acknowledged.

> It's so deep. We've been going since the 90s. I touched mic before I ever heard So Solid, Pay As U Go, Heartless [Crew]. Obviously I respect them all. But the way we got overlooked is deep. I respect you writing about the history.[78]

South London's case is particularly interesting and reflective of these wider tensions. Similarly to Birmingham's association with bassline, South London is seen principally as a space for UK rap artists rather than grime MCs. Joy White writes of UK rap replacing UK garage 'south of the river' in opposition to East London's grime scene. The commercial success of Peckham rapper Giggs, whose 2016 album *Landlord* reached Number Two in the UK charts, helps solidify this understanding.[79] Yet, a vibrant array of grime artists have been living and working in South London for many years.

In 2005, a calculated effort to assert South London's dominance was put forward by the Southside Allstars. Their track was called 'Southside Riddim'. The Allstars were a South London supergroup, featuring MCs from a number of crews including Milkymans (Nikki S, Nyke), Essentials (Remerdee, Kidman), Hype Squad (2za, Jiggalo) and So Solid Crew (Asher D). The track and its accompanying video are confrontational, taking aim at East London artists, and offering a provocative hook that claims superiority over all other areas.

> Nyke: Southside that's where it's coming from
>
> Southside, that's where we run it from.
>
> When I say South, you say run tings
>
> South, (run tings!)
>
> South, (run tings!)
>
> When I say run tings, you say South,
>
> run tings (South!)

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[78] Vader, Personal Interview. October 2018.

[79] White, *Urban Music and Entrepreneurship*, 5; "Landlord | Full Official Chart History | Official Charts Company", *Official Charts*, accessed June 4, 2019, https://www.officialcharts.com/search/albums/landlord/.

run tings (South!)

Nyke's opening verse directly follows the hook. This 24-bar passage listing sixty locations across South London is three times as long as all other contributions. It seems endless and this is precisely the intention. Through detailing these locations an argument contra-South London's role in grime music appears facile.

Asher D's opening couplet is also telling: 'look, here it's the star of the show, the Pecknarm ni**a who *started the flow* [emphasis added].' This is particularly interesting since (unlike Nyke) Asher overtly asserts a pioneering role in the genre's formation. So Solid Crew are from Battersea and while associated primarily with UK garage, their 2000 track 'Dilemma 2' is regularly referenced in discussions of grime's 'original document', owing to its sparse instrumentation and sustained single note bassline (similar to 'Ho Riddim' in Figure 3.7). Journalist Paul Gibbins mentioned that 'Wiley himself said it was a So Solid beat that signalled the transition', while producer J Sweet is a hardened advocate for the track and its pre-eminence.

> Real amazing people came out of the East London scene, but that wasn't everything...There was a lot out of South London. West London had crews, people making stuff…South London you've got Alias [producer of Southside Riddim], people like myself, what So Solid had done. 'Dilemma' for me is probably the first grime tune. [They're from] Battersea, South London.[80]

In addition to this claim for pre-eminence, further gusto is present in eight-bar passages from Remerdee and Three Phase. The former offers a hyper-aggressive provocation to East Londoners: 'if you come South, better bring your weapon.' Three Phase closes the track, 'sending' (lyrically provoking) for Wiley's crew: 'ni**as wanna try and come block round 'ere. You can Roll Deep but not round 'ere.'

This five-minute track laced in appeals to authenticity locates a sense of acrimony between South London and East London in the early 2000s. While this is representative of the locational claustrophobia also present in hip-hop or the 'neighbourhood nationalism' of

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[80] DJ BPM, "Grime for the Unconverted: Interview with J Sweet", Resonance FM, London: January 7, 2017.

London's working-class communities, it also evidences delimiting and protectionist practice from East London artists, through trying to claim the sound as entirely their own.[81] This dispute was brought into focus in 2017, when Nyke was interviewed by radio presenter Kenny Allstar.

> [now] you ain't gotta be on a straight pally thing with one clique. You can fuck with everyone. In our times it was beef. South didn't work with East. That's why it was Southside…look at Ska, look at Ska [Riddim]. Where was the MCs from on Ska? South and West. Cos we linked up cos East weren't fucking with anyone…them times the cake weren't there.[82]

Nyke references Milkyman's track 'Ska Riddim' as further evidence for South London's friction with East London (no one from East London featured on the track). He also indicates that East London was consciously closing itself off, perhaps for financial reasons —'the cake weren't there'—but perhaps to preserve and perpetuate their own pre-eminence. If East London artists weren't open to collaboration, then a bounded understanding of the form could gestate. In effect, re-articulating the gatekeeper tendencies of the UK garage committee.[83]

'Southside Riddim' clearly demonstrates enduring tension between a fervent South London grime circuit and their East London counterparts. It is partnered with multiple claims to authenticity, Three Phase and Remerdee are overly provocative in their assertions, while Asher D claims that he 'started the flow' later utilised by grime's pioneers. Its very existence challenges the idea of South London being associated purely with UK rap's 'slower style'. Rather, its quickened tempo, Alias's bass-heavy production and the MCs' rapid spitting share a great deal with East London's practice, while still articulating a sense of place and particularity.[84]

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[81] Les Back, *New Ethnicities and Urban Culture: Racisms and Multiculture in Young Lives, Race and Representation* (London: Routledge, 1996), 49; Murray Forman, *The 'hood Comes First: Race, Space, and Place in Rap and Hip-Hop* (Middletown: Wesleyan University Press, 2002).

[82] Kenny Allstar, "Voice of the Streets w/ Kenny Allstar, Nikki & Nyke", Radar Radio. London: February 17 2017.

[83] Nikki S & Nyke, *Milkymans Ska Project,* 2005.

[84] White, *Urban Music and Entrepreneurship*, 5.

(ii) Censorship and Roadside Gs

Hypermasculinity, when marketed correctly, can be seen as a real asset for grime music. This is evidenced by the way in which Crazy Titch is idolised. His firebrand braggadocio is seen as authentically grime yet catchy, while his life-sentence for murder has drawn out the mysticism surrounding him and his ephemeral presence at grime's outset. This dialectic that Titch embodies is captured well by Jeffery Boakye: 'Titch is the face of Grime's true griminess. His lyrics are swollen with threats of physical violence, grievous bodily harm and sexual aggression. But he's also an MC. He's fun, playful and energetic. He doesn't sound like a murderer.'[85]

This dichotomy is also evidenced in his recorded output, a sparse catalogue of a few singles and a mixtape, *Crazy Times Vol.1*. His 2004 single 'Singalong' juxtaposes hyper masculine assertions—'you're not a thug, you're a weakling'—alongside a hook-based chorus.

> Crazy Titch: Crazy's got a new sing a long,
>
> if you want you can't sing along,
>
> when I'm on a radio you can sing a long,
>
> when I'm on a stage show you can sing a long.

The sample is also of significance. Produced by Milton Keynes collective IMP Batch, it features cut up string ostinati and flute arpeggios. As mentioned in Chapter 2, Simon Reynolds offered an exoticist reading, describing it as 'a wonderfully incongruous setting for Crazy's hoarsely hollered anthem'.[86]

For other acts, however, their representation of life on the streets is seen as too much to bear for commentators, lacking the marketable realness that Crazy Titch's audience could voyeuristically enjoy. Birmingham's DJ Vibez pointed to its pirate radio scene being

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[85] Boakye, *Hold Tight*, 103.

[86] Reynolds, "The Primer: Grime", 47.

'too raw' for wider interest.[87] South London's Roadside Gs are a particularly interesting case, since their elision from histories of grime is also complicit with the dominant locational narrative. Roadside Gs (R.A, Dan Diggaz, Den Den, Smiley, Elmz, Alan B, DJ Finty) hail from Brixton, specifically Coldharbour Lane. In 2004 they released *Lesson 1: Curb on Smash*, and had a number of videos featured on Channel U, a satellite television channel that was highly important for the wider dissemination of grime music.[88] Their video for 'Come 2 Da Roadside', from their second tape *Lesson 2: Gangsta Grime,* was later banned from the channel following complaints from the Metropolitan Police. In 2017, MC Den Den addressed their street notoriety and lack of acceptance in the wider grime community.

> I'm guna tell em straight. Man's ting was violent, the music was violent. Our followers were violent. So our ting came with a lot of violence, you get what I'm saying. Street politics and at the end of the day it ended up in handcuffs, you get me.[89]

Paul Lynch, co-founder of the Boxed club night, wrote an article in 2012 on why the group were forgotten: 'they chose a harsh, abrasive beat selection that most MCs have shied away from that has often worked to their detriment…[the 'Come 2 Da Roadside' video censorship] sums up why it never really happened for them.' Whereas Crazy Titch is seen as ludic and playful despite being a convicted murderer, the work of Roadside Gs was seen as a step too far.[90]

Looking at both the work of Roadside Gs and Southside Allstars we can see assertions of authenticity that in many ways that are overbearing and unrelenting. Roadside

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87 Emma Finnamore, "BBC – Straight Outta Brum: How Birmingham Music Is Pushing Things Forward", *BBC*, September 7, 2018, https://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/articles/1m0wX87SxnTMCprrFrxlzcz/straight-outta-brum-how-birmingham-music-is-pushing-things-forward.

88 Yomi Adegoke, "RIP Channel U: The Urban Music Champion That Gave Power to the People", *The Guardian*, June 4, 2018, sec. Music, https://www.theguardian.com/music/2018/jun/04/rip-channel-u-urban-music-grime-dizzee-rascal-skepta.

89 Kenny Allstar, "Voice of the Streets w/ Kenny Allstar, F3Fibbz & Roadside Gs", Radar Radio, London: January 6, 2017.

90 Paul Lynch, "Slackk's Forgotten Grime MCs", *Red Bull Music Academy Daily,* 2012, http://daily.redbullmusicacademy.com/2012/07/slackks-forgotten-mcs; East London crew Slew Dem are also rarely spoken about owing to their violent content, aside from Tempa T. His 2009 single 'Next Hype' in many ways re-captured the 'fun' displays of violence that saw Crazy Titch lauded in 2004.

Gs are trying to represent what's real and happening around them, while Southside Allstars are resolute on capturing some sense of legitimacy, in spite of East London. Considering Bourdieu's work on hierarchisation with respect to the field of cultural production, the heteronomous principle of hierarchisation that is 'favourable to those who dominate the field politically and economically' bears relevance in this instance, and for practice outside of London. Political dominance is asserted through journalistic support (Hattie Collins, Simon Reynolds), with Nyke's assertion that 'the cake wasn't there' suggesting that the East London MCs had a monopoly on the marketplace. Similarly the *autonomous* principal of hierarchisation adheres to an 'art for art's sake' is prudent to consider. Where Den Den says that 'man weren't shook' to say what was actually happens on the roads, he was portraying life as it was for him and the collective through his music. Crazy Titch's playful performance of violence, however, was promoted and valorised.[91]

(iii) In-house revisionism

This chapter's final subsection looks to the ways in which artists have tried to reclaim the popular narrative surrounding grime music. Although principally London-based, retrospective attention to other cities' roles in grime music does exist. Birmingham MC Jaykae's extensive discussion with Logan Sama, for example, foregrounds the importance of DJ Big Mikee, radio station Silk City Radio, and fortnightly grime event Goonies.[92] This subsection, though, looks to two aspects from London's scene. Firstly, in-house criticism that flourished on radio from 2016–2018, and secondly an events series that sought to reposition older MCs as progenitors of the form.

Both Roadside Gs and Nyke aired their grievances on the radio as part of Kenny Allstar's Voice of the Streets show. This medium has proven popular as a vehicle for these

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[91] Bourdieu, *Field of Cultural Production*, 38, 40.

[92] Logan Sama, "008 Jaykae", *Keepin It Grimy Podcast*, May 2019, https://open.spotify.com/episode/11MFEz1lkWqcKnntg7Ol8p?si=MnzAcWE1Rb2NEh_FCPj7lA.
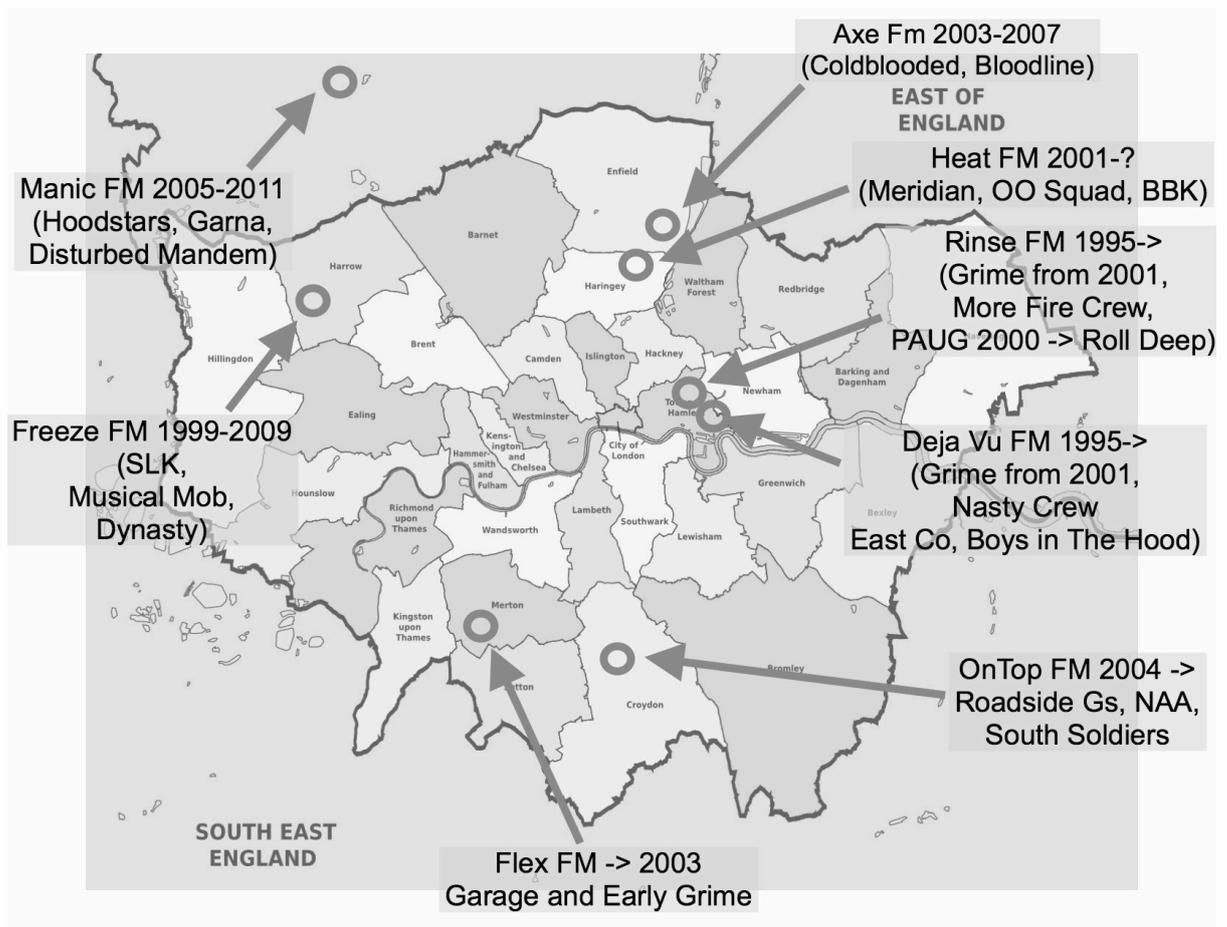
Figure 3.8 – Grime's Pirate Radio Network.

fervent discussions. Croydon DJ Argue's 'Grime History Lesson' was a monthly segment on his Radar Radio show, offering extended interviews with practitioners whose importance has been allegedly sidelined.[93] Critiques of the East London-centric narrative are a regular occurrence, with London-based MC Kwam's radio show 'Unpopular Opinions' also providing a space for discussion. In January 2017, he invited South London DJ Grandmixxer onto the show.

> The real history of grime is totally different to the actual narrative that is in the game now. It's focused on certain areas. That's all good cause that's where the people who write decided where they wanted the history to be. But *I come from* OnTopFM and South London, and I want to big up all the big boy MCs in the game that come from OnTopFM . They know who

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[93] Radar Radio, "Flirta D – Grime History Lesson | DJ Argue", *YouTube*, February 1, 2018, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2e4c9zIoCcc.

they are. But guess what? No history, because it was the *mandem*, it really was the *mandem* [emphasis in voice].[94]

The non-exhaustive radio diagram (see Figure 3.8) was compiled from archival recordings and indicates OnTop FM's position geographically within London. Its reputation was strongly championed by Grandmixxer, with this role reaffirmed when I interviewed Kwam.

It would be amiss, or remiss of me to not shout out OnTop FM. Really gets overlooked in the general history of kind of the grime scene and some of the greatest and best grime MCs have come out of it. The likes of Big Narstie, Doctor, Desperado, P Money, Blacks, Little Dee, most of the best MCs who live South of the river have MC'd there at one point or another. Big up OnTop FM.[95]

Looking again to Grandmixxer's contribution, the concerns put forward by Paul Oliver are manifest in this statement. Grandmixxer highlights an authorial advantage of writers at expense of the 'mandem', who are actually making the music, but aren't necessarily narratively framing it for a wider audience. Photographer Marco Grey also spoke to this point in interview: 'I don't need an article. I don't need anyone to write anything cause I understood it completely cause it's me.'[96]

Both Grandmixxer and Grey alluded to being within the culture to such an extent that their concern was composing and living, rather than documentation. As a result OnTop FM is rarely discussed. However, these contributions are indicative of a fervent in-house community concerned with redressing the state of play in spite of the chronic loss of ephemera that would substantiate their claims.[97]

The last example to consider is an event series called Authentic Grime.[98] While much of this section has attended to the importance of a UK-wide understanding of

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94 Kwam, "Unpopular Opinions (w/ Kwam and Grandmixxer)", Radar Radio: London, January 25, 2017.

95 Kwam, Personal Interview. February 2017.

96 Marco Grey, 2017.

97 On March 7, 2017 Kwam also interviewed North London MC Dimples who asserted that Heat FM is also under-represented (see Bibliography).

98 Events series' name and contributors are anonymised.

grime's creative practice, Authentic Grime's work is both locationally complicit, set up by an artist from East London, and concerned with legacy building for artists from within East London (at least initially) whose endeavours were allegedly under-appreciated. This series had clear intentions to 'bring that original Grime rave feel back', offering what Allan Moore calls 'second person authenticity' through presenting grime as it should be. Authentic Grime recaptures its point of conception, akin to taking a stroll through Storyville in 1916.[99]

Following its initial announcement, however, this event was met with consternation from a wide array of commentators. I interviewed two journalists the month following its announcement.

> Interviewee A: Them lot have had their time. The reality is from what I understand, it's getting the oldest guys and having them, the originators. I think there is room for that, but when you're overstating that you ask yourself, is this the end of this? Or what? Where's the new stuff? That's what I think the problem is. People want the trophy to say they were there, I was here at this time, and that's their goal.

> Interviewee B: They're just trying to claim it, and it's boring as fuck. It's the same with all these grime docs, it's just people trying to put their version of how grime was born, trying to put their version out with them in the centre of it.

Authentic Grime's first event took place in March 2017 at a small underground venue in East London. The room was populated by no more than fifty people, predominantly MCs and DJs, engaged in performances laced with claims to authenticity, 'keepin' it real' and being 'true to yourself' (see Figure 3.4).[100] The instrumental selection from the evenings' DJs was telling. All of the tracks chosen had either been produced before 2008, or were remixes of tracks from grime's 'golden-era', such as the 2017 remix of Roll Deep producer Danny Weed's 'Creeper'. Similarly to the canonising of classic sets highlighted in Section 2, and reaffirming Spooky's assertion above, a micro-canon of classic tracks exists within

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[99] Allan Moore, "Authenticity as Authentication", in *Critical Essays in Popular Musicology* ed. Allan F. Moore, (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2007), 137.

[100] *Authentic Grime,* East London, 2017.

grime. This demonstrates one of the ways in which creative practice is impacted by a reductive history of grime.

The MCs who performed similarly engaged with the notion of a canon and asserted their membership to an eternally verified 'true school'. One MC took the microphone and told the crowd: 'this ain't the old school, this ain't the new school, this is the true school… this is the truth. It's the truth. No bollocks.' Following the final set, the event's organiser was passed the microphone and offered an assertive closing statement.

> I want to big up everyone that's come out tonight. To support the ting. Authentic Grime, it's the first one you know, so you lot here are legends alone. You've made history by helping this thing start off. We're going to take it to big venues, we're going to go all over the country doing this ting here, Authentic Grime, so people know where grime came from, the real grime, do you get what I'm saying?

This statement shows intent for legacy building, with its organiser bestowing a duty upon himself to preach this version of the truth across the country. McLeod concludes his piece by writing that such 'invocations of authenticity' are often 'a direct and conscious reaction to the threat of assimilation and the colonisation of this resistive subculture'. It is certainly the case that Authentic Grime was organised at a time where grime had begun to grow in popularity again, following Stormzy's commercial success and Skepta's Mercury award win for *Konnichiwa* in 2016. But there is more at work here, albeit with the musical climate adding urgency to these claims. As the interviewees above have commented, artists will try to position themselves at the centre of discussions, and this event series, which grew substantially throughout 2018 and 2019, is a definite example of this, with claims to authenticity, originality and truth.[101]

Conclusion: History's effect on practice

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[101] McLeod, "Authenticity within Hip-Hop", 175.

This opening chapter presented academic and journalistic writing on grime, before looking at how meaning is constructed within this writing, with respect to space, pioneers and nomenclature, and the solidification of a grime 'micro-canon'. This was then followed by counter-narratives and assertions from artists whose work doesn't readily fit with the dominant understanding of grime, primarily because of locational affiliations but also—in the case of Roadside Gs—a hyper-aggressive output that lacked marketability. For Authentic Grime, these artists felt a need to reassert grime's core energy, to bring that 'original grime rave feel back'.

While popular music histories always earmark a birthplace, possess a foundational document, and highlight key figures, claims to authenticity within grime music are pregnant with tension and provocation. These frustrations are furthered through an academic and journalistic canon that serves to reinforce a locationally bounded, hagiographical narrative. My interviewees may have seen Authentic Grime as a pernicious and tired exercise, but it is interesting to consider why these discussions are so fervent within grime music. Grandmixxer's assertions about the 'mandem' not documenting their work are critical when we consider the ephemerality of this form, primarily played out on stage, on radio sets, and physically distributed through tape packs and dubplates. An authorial edge helps to legitimise a certain understanding, and Wiley's *Godfather* project provides a far more compelling claim to legitimacy than an artist who *knows* their history but can't provide evidence of it.

Regardless, a dominant narrative has prevailed, and this needs to be considered throughout as we consider grime's practice and how this solidified historical understanding informs the ways in which artists work and create. At this chapter's outset I referenced Marianne Hirsch's notion of 'postmemory'. It is important to return to this here. Grime music is at a critical juncture where its new practitioners were not alive at its outset. New artists' frame(s) of reference are manifest in a historicising of the form by others. When speaking with a new MC in 2016, for example it was acutely apparent that his understanding of the form is heavily mediated, with his point of reference being a Skepta track from 2014.

I'm not gunna lie, the first song that I listened to was Skepta's 'That's Not Me'…through

that I kept discovering different people and it kind of expanded. I started writing lyrics at

140bpm…D Double E was the first artist that I learned about, I heard D Double E's 'Bad

to the Bone' last year, and I heard him on *Rinse,* there was that set with P Money, and then I

heard Novelist. It's between him and D Double that's my favourite MC.[102]

For this MC, 140bpm signifies grime and Rinse is a key station for his understanding of the form. While his palate is not restricted to East London artists—South London MCs P Money and Novelist are key influences on him—he has entered the form as a practitioner who sees one radio station as authoritative and a particular tempo as indicative of practice.

Although I have shown how its point of origin, pioneering artists and the codification of 'grime' are far more contested grounds than appreciated in the dominant narrative, this narrative will still serve to act as a framing device for future performers, particularly young artists and those working in scenes abroad. North London MC Krucial, who was active in grime's early days with the Aftershock crew, remarked that 'grime is almost doing a loop. Anyone that's new, they're just remixing legendary bars or spitting on old-school beats. Because their influence comes from 2002 to 2005.' According to Krucial, then, new MCs practice is based off an (often reductive) understanding of what come before.[103] For Japanese grime MC Pakin, however, a lot of the Japanese scenes' MCs primarily work within hip-hop and 'jump on grime': 'I think they never really listened to grime music. Or only Skepta's [most recent album] *Konnichiwa.*'[104]

There exists a dynamic relationship with the past in popular music practice, working with what is seen to come before to create something new. Tom Perchard wrote of a 'tradition in progress' for hip-hop, defined by a 'dual embrace and rejection of what came before and the constructivist reading of the past in service of contemporary advancement'. As we now turn away from grime's history and look towards practice, this is vitally important to keep in mind. Chapter 4 begins the investigation into inter-performer

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[102] Contribution anonymised.

[103] Krucial, 2017.

[104] Pakin, Personal Interview. May 2018.

relationships in grime practice proper. It assesses grime's 'living archive of techniques', which are readily utilised in performances and were developed and solidified on radio sets from the 'classic era' by Wiley, Dizzee Rascal and their contemporaries.[105] It then looks at artists' management of performance scenarios, and begins to address how an accumulation of energy—built through multidirectional performer interactivity—can be successfully managed towards moments of levelling up. Through outlining grime's accepted tenets of practice and modelling this accumulation of energy that is characteristic of grime performance, we will then be well placed to examine emergent practice and novel techniques that have been both developed in light of grime's historical legacy, while similarly looking forward to achieve a dual embrace.[106]

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[105] Henriques, *Sonic Bodies*, 102.

[106] Tom Perchard, "Hip Hop Samples Jazz: Dynamics of Cultural Memory and Musical Tradition in the African American 1990s", *American Music* 29, no. 3 (2011): 294.

Chapter 4 – Foundational Performance Conventions

Introduction

It's 10pm on a Sunday evening and there's anticipation across the capital. Sir Spyro has been holding down his Rinse FM residency "The Grime Show" since 2005, and everyone knows that the MC section kicks off an hour in. Spyro takes the microphone.[1]

> It's the top of the hour so you know what time it is yeah. Shellyvynne [pronounced 'Shelly-anne'] in the place about now. If you don't know about Shellyvynne… number one you're an idiot, number two you're about to find out yeah. Oi this place is full up of MCs right now. Send out to Selecta Impact in the wings, yeah.
> Let's go.

The next sixty minutes see the eleven-strong crew, their DJ Selecta Impact and Sir Spyro perform a continuous set. The MCs exchange lyrics while the DJs introduce instrumentals at a remarkable rate. This rapid rate of interchange saw the performance receive an unprecedented social media response, with many listeners having heard the group for the first time.[2]

   The set would not have been a success without a shared understanding of a radio set's conventions. Sir Spyro had not performed with the MCs before so this was a new element. The order in which the MCs performed was not pre-planned. Neither was the order of the instrumental tracks. This level of improvisation requires a rubric to help guide the unfolding performance process.

   Having outlined the histories of grime—and how they serve to construct an understanding of the form—this chapter turns to these foundational conventions and

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[1] Sir Spyro, "Sir Spyro", Rinse FM, London: November 12, 2005; Sir Spyro, "The Grime Show w/ Sir Spyro & Shellyvynne", Rinse FM, London: July 9, 2017; Spyro's last ever edition of The Grime Show aired on December 3, 2017.

[2] Melvillous, @*Melvillous*, July 12, 2017, https://twitter.com/Melvillous/status/885222877313806336. Accessed April 27, 2020.

expectations. Specifically, it will look at the macro-level rules and regulations of the sound-system session and radio set: the large-scale structure of a performance; the management of the overall performance by MCs and DJs; and the etiquette or code of practice that MCs and DJs are expected to adhere to. Every musical environment has 'dos and don'ts' and unwritten rules. Through unpacking the 'shared values or prejudices of those present' and disentangling the relationships between artists we can move to closer to an understanding of both the functionality of the performance event and the meaning making that takes place.[3] Grime performances are predicated on dynamic exchange and as such there are things that performers have to know, and are expected to know, before they even think about novel practice. This chapter unpacks these foundational performance conventions.

It is split into two sections. Firstly, it will detail grime's two principal domains, the radio set and the live performance, before attending more broadly to MCs and DJs' performance etiquette and codes of practice. This section will begin to address a key tension in grime music, between individual and collective. Successful performance requires co-operation and mediation between individuals, with varying degrees of affiliation, but the need to demonstrate individual prowess can affect a performance's trajectory. This will be shown with reference to tactics such as 'snaking' and 'hogging the mic'.

Section Two looks to session management and the ways in which MCs and DJs oversee proceedings. Work from Julian Henriques on dancehall 'monitoring' tactics will be explored alongside specificities of grime practice. In order to iteratively build energy in the live domain, there are a number of macro-concerns that help facilitate this accumulation of momentum. A case study of DJ Eastwood's use of gesture and selection will pay close attention to how he builds with MCs towards a point at which they can *level up* as a collective unit. Techniques utilised by both MCs and DJs will then be collated in order to offer a preliminary model for managing a performance's 'energy'. This will therefore provide a

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[3] Henriques, *Sonic Bodies*, 217; Small, *Music of the Common Tongue*, 19.

platform for the exploration of more local, multidirectional interactional processes that takes place in Chapters 5 and 6.[4]

Section 1 – Grime's musical conventions

As mentioned above, there are two principal domains in which grime music is performed: the radio set and the live performance (or cypher). These arenas and their distinctive performance expectations will now be outlined, before attending to artists' performance etiquette.

Type 1 – The Radio set

The radio set is typically two hours long, as per Sir Spyro's "The Grime Show" above. This allows the DJ to play new vocal tracks, new productions and generally build momentum over the first sixty minutes. For DJs like Spyro who also produce, this gives them space to premiere new material that they have been working on. Exclusives and dubplates heighten a DJ's pedigree, and the opening hour provides this platform. As the second hour approaches, MCs start to filter in. Live bars begin around the hour mark. Contingencies are made for travel issues or MCs pulling out last minute. If five MCs are expected to show up and only two do, this will require greater effort for the two MCs. Starting the MC section later lessens the burden.

This by no means accounts for all shows. Some are entirely production focused, including Grandmixxer's Rinse shows throughout 2016, Boxed's shows on Rinse and Bristol-based Boofy and Hi5 Ghost's Bandulu programmes. However, the majority generally adhere to this structure. According to Krucial, 'it does seem to be the format. Where you have your vocals, your music, then you have the MCs to the end'.[5]

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[4] Berliner, *Thinking in Jazz,* 492; Monson, *Saying Something,* 177.

[5] Krucial, 2017.

Type 2 – The Live set (or cypher)

Live sets are far more fluid when it comes to length. Events such as Eskimo Dance and Sidewinder advertise a large number of crews and DJs to perform across the night (see Figure 4.1). With all these artists, it tends to be that the performance is more fast-paced than a radio set. The microphone is quickly passed between MCs all jostling for the chance to spray their lyrics.

> There's people that'll come on and spit a whole 16. When you're spitting live and you're in a show that's a lot sometimes. It's usually just 8s and pass it, 8s and pass it. But a lot of people come and spit a big 32 and get nothing. But, there's people who come and spit 8 and get *everything* [emphasis in voice].[6]

Kraze of Slew Dem stressed the importance of keeping the performance moving. A sixty-minute radio show allows MCs to try out new lyrics and ideas, however stage shows rely on big lyrics—famous bars that the audience are aware of, either through their appearance on successful songs or prior usage at raves and on radio sets—coming thick and fast. The expectations are different and MCs have to react accordingly. Swarvo spoke with me about this concern, mentioning how live shows demanded 'hype bars' (or big lyrics) rather than more complicated or intricate passages.

> Sometimes when you're technical it's too technical. Simple is always effective. If you listen to Dizzee back in the day, it wasn't hard, it was simple. What people can understand, people can work with. I'd say, I *would say* I was technical but people didn't know me like that. I didn't really *show* the technicality of what I could really do, like with the bars. If you knew me, if you was with me every day you would know that. But obviously when you go to raves it's just hype bars, innit? So it was just 'forearm dis, forearm dat'. Just the wheel-up bars, the hype bars. You would know I was technical if you listened to a radio show.[7]

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[6] Kraze, 2017.

[7] Swarvo, 2017.

Figure 4.1 – Eskimo Dance flyer. From April 9, 2009.

While Swarvo is a diverse performer, he is best known for his 'forearm' lyric. As such, he is expected to perform it at raves. Since MCs are often only afforded eight bars to show what they can do, they have to effectively utilise their limited time on the microphone. Because of

Swarvo: Fore-arm! straight to the back of the neck and Fore arm you will get floored and decked and

Swarvo: Fore arm straight to the back of the throat and Fore arm you will get knocked and choked and

Swarvo: Fore-arm-a-sau-rus, you could ne-ver han-dle Fore-arm-a-sau-rus, get waxed and can-dled

Swarvo: Fore-arm-a-sau rus, you will get tan gled Fore-arm-a-sau-rus till you get dis man-tled

Figure 4.2 – Transcription of an excerpt from 'Forearm' by Swarvo,
(audiovisual example 4a).

Swarvo: Yo! I'm from the North-West Ci-ty where tings are gri-tty but oh, what a pi-ty.

Swarvo: some thing that sticks peo ple this shi-tty and tings are not great and tings are not pre-tty.

Swarvo: Yo cer-tain man-ors are dir-ty cer-tain-man that live with their mum till they're thir-ty,

Swarvo: not wor thy sho-ttin dai-ly in and out-ta jail like they don't miss their ba-by.

Figure 4.3 – Transcription of an excerpt from 'DJ Masta Freestyle' by Swarvo,
(audiovisual example 4b).

this, MCs regularly tailor their performance when switching between radio and live sets. Figures 4.3 and 4.4 demonstrate the distinction between Swarvo's 'forearm' lyric, seen as a 'big bar' or 'hype lyric', and one of his more 'technical' flow patterns. Here, the technical refers to his use of multisyllabic patterns, with a shifting flow that spills across bar lines.

There is a similar expectation for DJs in the live rave environment. West London's DJ Eastwood reflected on this balance required when performing live, stressing the importance of quickly mixing between instrumentals to keep the audience interested.

When I used to DJ, I used to have a bag for my dubplates. I [also] used to have a normal record bag [as] I never had anything planned out. I might have two tunes that I liked to mix together. I used to do one with 'Hungry Tiger' [by Dom Perignon and Dynamite] and 'Eskimo' [by Wiley]. I used to mix the two together and it used to work so good. I put guaranteed hitters like 'Pulse X', 'Eskimo'—all them kind of tunes there—at the back of the bag. In the rest of the bag, and the other one [dubplate bag] I would just experiment and see how this one goes down. As soon as the vibe started I could draw for the back of the bag…sometimes I would draw three from the back and put them under the deck. I used to DJ quite quick so they were ready straight. Especially with MCs you need that element of surprise and you have got to maintain that level of energy when you're DJing as well. So I used to put them under the deck, and I could literally flip. It maintains the energy of the set.[8]

Being mindful that big hitters can help maintain the vibe is nothing new in terms of DJ performance. However, the lining up of tracks for the 'quick draw' is a technique that is really prized in grime performance. The changeover between tracks can be as little as twenty seconds, and this has been incorporated to keep up with the rapid switching between MCs in the live arena. Eastwood's contribution is also telling, with regards to the way in which he conceptualises live practice. Through paying close attention to the maintenance of energy, he demonstrates an awareness of the unfolding performance and the means by which he can augment proceedings. This will be returned to in Section 2.

(i) Performance etiquette

Having provided an overview of the primary performance arenas, it is useful to look at the ways in which artists are expected to approach these environments. While Kraze, Swarvo and DJ Eastwood outlined issues of pacing and technicality above—and how it varies between radio sets and live performances—grime's code of practice is wide-ranging and

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[8] Eastwood, 2017.

often extra-musical, thus reaffirming the performance event's position within a wider social framework.

Invitations to sets

Grime's code of practice took time to solidify. This transition to formalised protocol is clearly apparent in the practice of inviting MCs to radio sets. Figure 4.4 depicts the schedule from Delight FM in September 2002. This graphic demonstrates that MCs rarely hosted their own show. The vast majority are presided over by either a DJ or a crew. While common courtesy to ask in advance before attending another DJ or crew's show, in grime's formative years MCs and DJs used to arrive uninvited, a practice known as 'mobbing the set'.

> The only reason I had a name, or we [Slew Dem] even had a name is because we used to force our way into clubs to perform or force our way onto radio sets and just mob it. Just turn up. We used to just turn up to a radio set. If we like half knew the people or even if we just knew they were grime and they were about we'd turn up to the set. And we'll just spit. It was like that in those days, people were just mobbing your set.[9]

This penchant for mobbing sets resulted in Rinse FM's co-owner Geeneus instigating an MC ban on the station in 2003. This caused many MCs to migrate to fellow East London station DejaVu FM, the site of the Crazy Titch and Dizzee Rascal 'rooftop incident' from Chapter 3.[10] Turbulent events continued to take place. In 2006, Mucky Wolfpack rushed (attacked as a group) Wiley halfway through his Rinse FM show after Wiley 'sent' for God's Gift of Mucky Wolfpack live on air. God's Gift was outraged and brought his entourage to the radio station to set the record straight.[11]

> Hear what I am saying yeah. Don't call out my name on the fucking mic. I told you on your phone yeah. Don't play with man. Blud, you see what yeah. When

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9 Kraze, 2017.

10 Alex Macpherson, "Jungle, garage and grime: 20 Years of Rinse FM", *TheGuardian*, November 2014, https://www.theguardian.com/music/2014/nov/27/jungle-garage-and-grime-20-years-of-rinse-fm.

11 DJ Maximum, "Wiley", Rinse FM, London: December 12, 2006.

Figure 4.4 – Delight FM Schedule, October 2002. From *RWD Magazine,* 14: 41.

man come outside and we'll show you the difference yeah. The levels are very

high [drops mic].

These incidents were far from uncommon, but importantly show the fervour with which MCs were intent on demonstrating their worth and ability. Here, God's Gift refers to the 'levels being very high' as a reference to both his own crew's pedigree and his individual prowess. Further to this, Gift's real-time response to Wiley's provocation demonstrates how both radio sets and live shows are part of an ongoing communicative field of performance that is open to interjections and outside influence. Grime performances are not stand-alone entities, but possess musical and extramusical material that document the situation at hand, and refer to inter-crew rivalries.

(ii) MCs' code of practice

Once within the performance arena, though, there exists expected etiquette that are generally upheld. While extramusical confrontations can arise, MCs primarily have to negotiate performances and work together. Accordingly, there are three primary rules that are (normally) adhered to and ameliorate these extramusical tensions: respecting home turf, not hogging the microphone, and being open with your body language.

Rule 1 – Home Turf

There is a pride attributed to place within grime. The prevalence of postcodes in grime lyrics, such as Wiley's 'Bow E3' and BMD's 'North Weezie', indicates a wider concern with repping your ends, outside of the locational friction documented in Chapter 3. In terms of this factor's translation to the live environment, the main expectation is to be respectful if you are performing in someone else's area.[12]

I spoke with Krucial (of Aftershock) about an incident at his youth club, the White Lion in Islington. Here he felt the need to assert himself and represent his centre. A number of MCs turned up to perform, including an artist affiliated with Younger SLK (an offshoot of Swarvo's crew SLK), but they were not demonstrating the required level of respect.

> It weren't a direct fusion between me and them. There was no befores, no afters. It was literally on the spot. Every MC came through White Lion, but that's *my* centre. The *way* they were hogging the mic and stuff, I had to bully it.
>
> So when I took the mic I just flared and they thought 'alright cool' but to be honest I don't think they knew what they got themselves into. Cause that was my youth club. So it's like, that's why I could go back and forth [with them]. Just do my ting cause it was *my time*. They couldn't do anything really, *those people* that spat [emphasis in voice].[13]

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12 Dan Hancox, "Big up Tooting Bec! How Southside Allstars became grime's social network", *The Guardian*, September 26, 2017, https://www.theguardian.com/music/2017/sep/26/how-southside-allstars-became-grime-social-network-ska-2-nikki-s-nyke.

13 Krucial, 2017.

This incident was caught on camera and was uploaded to YouTube as 'Krucial v Yunga SLK'. According to Krucial the videographer mis-represented the situation, since it only featured one artist affiliated with Younger SLK. However, it caused tension with SLK for a period of time.

> They must have thought I was promoting it as that. Obviously imagine they're thinking 'how's he saying that? He slewed us when we weren't there'. But as I said there was only one of them that were there. It wasn't aimed at no crews, it wasn't aimed at no crews or nothing. It was literally just on the spot, just like that.[14]

Krucial's highlights the need to set the record straight. This bears relevance to Chapter 3's discussion of practitioners rarely having the opportunity to control the narrative surrounding them. More importantly, it shows how the situation emerged in the moment. The visiting MCs did not show due deference and as a consequence Krucial felt compelled to contest them. Krucial's cry of 'I'm Aftershock, who are you?' was met warmly by the audience and this contributed towards him holding his own against an entire group of MCs (audiovisual example 4c, 0:53). If they had shown due respect—since many MCs did pass through the White Lion to spray—the situation would not have arisen, evidencing the need to be considerate if venturing into someone else's territory.[15]

Rule 2 – Hogging the Mic

Krucial's main point of contention was 'the *way* they were hogging the mic'. He took care to emphasise this, his tone heightening as he described the situation. Microphone rotation is the second critical consideration for grime MCs. While Krucial's discontent was magnified by the MCs performing on his turf, it was their lack of awareness that principally caused frustration. I spoke with former Roll Deep MC Trim about this issue. He expressed a general concern for other MCs' needs, seeing this as internalised and embodied.

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[14] ibid.

[15] "Krucial v Yunga SLK Video", *YouTube*, accessed September, 2017, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8iZy1AQBeSg.

> We have been doing it for years so you just know. There's an amount of bars that you should be spraying. So 16 bars or 32 bars. You should have that and then let the next MC in. Yeah man, it's like a chemistry in the room.[16]

Julian Henriques wrote that reggae artists possess a 'living archive of techniques' that they utilise during performance. This resonates with Trim's assertion that he just 'knows' what to do. Affording time for other artists is a natural consideration for Trim while performing. Deviance with respect to this rule, however, is met with distaste. This is shown in the following episode.[17]

Episode 4.1
🎤 **P Money, Little Dee, Blacks, Jendor, Desperado, J2K, Manga, Trim, Obese, Skepta, Jammer, Fangol**
📻 **Logan Sama, "Money over Everyone Launch", Kiss FM, London: September 7, 2009.**
💿 **Audiovisual example 4d**

On September 7 2009 Logan Sama hosted a launch for South London MC P Money's new mixtape *Money Over Everyone* as part of his Kiss FM residency. A substantial number of MCs were in attendance (see above), including P Money's fellow crew members Little Dee, Blacks, Jendor and Desperado. Owing to the large number of MCs and the focus on P Money's new project, the expectation was that MCs outside of his crew—the Lewisham-based collective OGz—would occupy a peripheral role. However a minor disagreement among two other MCs fifty minutes into the set speaks to the issue at hand (audiovisual example 4d).

Following a 32-bar section from Skepta, during which Boy Better Know's Jammer asks for the headphones from P Money for the studio microphone, Jammer takes over as indicated, beckoned with a hand gesture from Skepta. Jammer spits a 32-bar then the track gets reloaded by Logan. There is a bit of unrest in the studio. Jammer acknowledges this, stating 'sorry still there's nuff goons.' He then points to another MC, J2K, to indicate that he

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[16] Trim, Personal Interview. June 2017.

[17] Henriques, *Sonic Bodies*, 175.

is up next. Both then start to spit at the same time. J2K has to sit back. J2K's exclamation 'okay' is followed by a swift and bemused look around the room, demonstrating his disbelief at the situation. The laughter from other MCs causes Logan Sama to pull the beat back after eight bars (audiovisual example 4d, 1:16).

> Jammer: Aite, 16 J yeah
>
> J2K: What you saying, cos I'm guna…
>
> Jammer: Hold tight J2, cos he's guna squeeze off an 84 on me, so I'm just guna spit
>
> my little ting and move off, you get me? Listen.

Jammer, true to his word, follows up with a 16-bar before J2K then takes over and performs forty bars worth of material (rather than eighty-four) and the set continues. This minor dispute, fairly well tempered owing to J2K and Jammer's long running professional relationship, shows how a disruption of expectations can both cause tension and upset the momentum of the performance. Jammer tried to make light of the situation, through referring to an alleged tendency of J2K to perform for longer than he's meant to. However, through bringing explicit attention to the structure of the set, it caused laughter amongst other MCs. As a consequence this alerted the listener to underlying structural issues rather than collaborative practice thus distracting from the primary focus. Although well tempered, the lack of communication between the two artists ultimately upset the flow of the performance.

Rule 3 – Body language

The dispute in Episode 4.1 occurred following a misread physical gesture from Jammer, resulting in a clash of voices. It is particularly important when there are a number of active microphones and multiple MCs to indicate who is up next, otherwise it can rapidly degenerate. This can be indicated vocally through a rising cadence or a looping of a particular lyric refrain. The complexity of cues usually correlates to the shared familiarity between the MCs present (see Chapter 8), but it is often indicated physically. Being open and

aware of others helps the flow of an unfolding performance. In the live domain and some pirate radio stations it is likely that there will be fewer microphones. As such, artists rely on being passed the microphone to perform.[18]

While open body language is generally seen as good practice, a closed demeanour can destabilise or unnerve fellow performers. 'Blocking' or 'being snaked' is where an MC or group of MCs turn(s) away from another MC who is trying to get the mic. This typically happens when rival crews are on the same set and the mood can quickly turn sour. Hitman Tiga spoke about this issue and the varying factors that may contribute to an MC blocking the entry of another.

> Hitman Tiga: I think the most snaky thing on a set that you'll find is body language. I mean you could tell, because not everybody likes each other.
>
> Alex: You mean like, people sort of turning away with the mic? Shielding?
>
> Tiga: Yeah, you're like, it's mad. I mean. A lot of people say I got snaked on the Channel 4 set, "When Pirates Made Grime".
>
> Alex: Ah, yeah I did see that.
>
> Tiga: People said I got snaked on the set. I was waiting for the mic and the mic got swung to somebody else. When people do that to me they're protecting their neck cause I'm about to splash (show them up). So, basically they don't want me to come after them. Also, in those situations you never know what's really behind it, do you get what I'm saying? So you don't really pay mind to them things. But there are snaky things that are going on during sets. There are people that secretly want to test themselves against you.[19]

This statement from Tiga alludes to the fear MCs often have through being shown up by an artist who immediately precedes or follows on from them. While Tiga may simply be asserting a perceived sense of supremacy, this is a wide reaching concern. Jazz musicians, for example, assiduously order soloists in their sets: 'because of the influence that improvisers exert on those who follow, some bandleaders deliberately vary the soloists from piece to

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[18] This differs from jazz musicians taking solos who have their own instrument and can simply rely on cues rather than needing amplification.

[19] Hitman Tiga, Personal Interview. June 2017; "Pirate Mentality: When Pirates Made Grime", Channel 4, February 17, 2017, http://www.channel4.com/programmes/pirate-mentality/on-demand/64569-001.

piece'.[20] Although the order isn't pre-planned in grime, there is most probably a consideration by the MC on the microphone of how the consequent or previous performer's input may affect assessments of their contribution. This is of course the case in a hip-hop cipher where it is incumbent upon the next up to outdo their immediate rivals: 'you want to evaluate the other rhymer while maintaining a cool, calm and confident exterior that lets the present rhymer know "you got competition!"'.[21]

Typically within grime, though, there is usually some history between MCs and crews. This can contribute to artists getting snaked physically, in addition to being shown up on the microphone. Aggressive body language acts as a direct provocation and often precedes a clash, as seen in Episode 4.2 below.

Episode 4.2
🎤 **Reece West, Saint P**
📻 **Rude Kid, 'The Kiss Grime Special', Kiss FM, London: December 8 2016.**
💿 **Audiovisual example 4e**

This incident on East London producer and DJ Rude Kid's Xmas show from 2016 features explicit use of blocking tactics. Similarly to P Money's set above, there were a lot of MCs in attendance with in excess of thirty artists from a variety of crews. An impromptu clash took place seventy minutes into the set between North London MC Reece West and Saint P (of grime collective YGG). Allegedly stemming from a dispute over ownership of the term 'bounce' as a lyrical punctuation marker, the back-and-forth between the two artists featured aggressive gestures, which grew in intensity over time. A brief look at the lyrical content shows the alleged similarity between the two phrases lies with 'bounce' being on beat 1 at the start of a bar. Outside of this, though, the rhyme schemes are markedly different. Saint P incorporates multisyllabic rhymes throughout his refrain while West rhymes the first beat and finishes most phrases with the word 'again'.

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[20] Berliner, *Thinking in Jazz,* 369.

[21] Alim, *Roc the Mic Right,* 100.

Following 48 bars from West, opened with his 'bounce' lyric, Saint P enters. Saint announces himself with his own 'bounce' lyric (a four bar refrain), looping it four times. Each time, he gestures towards West with an up-hand shoo, beckoning him towards the room's exit on 'bounce' (see Figure 4.6). Saint P segues out of the refrain, using the phrase 'body's all mangled' before spitting another 16-bar. He then ignores West's request for the microphone, before pushing it towards West's chest at the end of the sixteen. West's riposte 'cor blimey, I heard Saint P don't like me' lyrically announces the clash to the MCs present. The following few minutes feature faux-passes of the microphone and physical posturing with the MCs in close proximity throughout (audiovisual example 4e).

The clash reaches its climax when West reaches out a hand for the microphone and Saint P does a 360-degree pirouette before passing the microphone to fellow YGG MC Lyrical Strally (audiovisual example 4e, 5:32). This deliberate shun was met with criticism from some and hilarity from the audience, both in the room, and online once uploaded to YouTube.[22] From the video footage it initially seems that Saint P was the victor, however a closer look would reveal that the other MCs in the room were more aligned with Saint P. As

Figure 4.5 – Transcription of Reece West 'bounce' bars, (audiovisual example 4e, 0:15).

22 KISS FM UK, "The KISS Grime Xmas Special with Rude Kid Feat. Novelist, Discarda, YGG, Prez T and Many More", December 18, 2016, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Fb7vU5GivhU.

Figure 4.6 – Transcription of Saint P's 'bounce' bars (audiovisual example 4e, 1:13).

such the audible response weighed heavily in Saint P's favour, while many online viewers favoured Reece West.

This incident between Reece West and Saint P captures all three of the key issues surrounding MC etiquette and relations. Firstly, the flagrant ways in which MCs can use body language to provoke other performers. Secondly, the need to pass the mic and the issues that arise from not complying, and finally the role of home turf. Although the Kiss

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FM studio in Soho, Central London is a largely neutral space with Rude Kid at the helm, it acts as a shifting turf, a meeting ground with tensions that are made manifest by the affiliates and crew members present. Furthermore, these incidents show that while grime is a collective endeavour, individual prerogatives and inter-crew rivalries continually permeate its performance sphere. As such, there exists a need to manage performances accordingly.

Section 2 – Session Management

The variety of affiliations on show at Rude Kid's Xmas special posed a number of problems, with a few moments having the potential to completely derail the performance. This scenario poses the wider question of who actually presides over the performance process in grime music, or who is principally responsible for its progression. There are three groups of human actors involved in a grime performance: the DJ(s), MC(s) and audience members. At some events the audience is not clearly distinguishable from MCs and DJs who aren't performing, such as in the clash between Reece West and Saint P where the room was filled with practitioners. Here, other MCs became mediating voices from the crowd.

> MC A: Shall we move them back?
>
> MC B: There's no need, no need.

Audience members can play a crucial role, particularly for reloads (addressed in Chapter 5). However for *overall* session management, the responsibility lies with MCs and DJs. The DJ is seen as the ultimate arbiter since they have control over many factors, including track selection, who is allowed to attend their set and whether or not to reload a tune. Even if the crowd demands a reload, a DJ can refuse. This section unpacks the power relationships between DJs and MCs specifically. It begins by looking at the MC's role in managing the session, and the means MCs possess in order to be able to respond to performance direction from DJs, before attending to the DJ's toolkit, with a case study of DJ Eastwood harnessing a performance's 'energy'.

(i) MCs and momentum

Macro-decisions and indications of a performance's wider trajectory are primarily proposed by the DJ. The DJ (for the most part) is fixed while MCs move in and out of the foreground as the microphone is passed around whoever is in attendance. As a consequence MCs' and DJs' responsibilities are broadly analogous to soloists and the rhythm section in jazz. MCs are 'temporary leaders of the group journey', who rely on the DJ 'to provide sign posts for the performance direction'. Because of this, MCs have to pay close attention to each other and the DJ, listening out for aural cues or physical indications, and making musical decisions on the basis of the state of play at that moment in time.[23]

To help frame MCs and DJs' session management, it is useful to look to Keith Sawyer's conception of group flow. This model prioritises interaction as a fundamental element of group improvisatory practice. Group flow is an 'emergent property of the group' manifest through participants working together and listening to each other. Assiduous concentration is demanded from grime artists in these scenarios, and MCs have a number of tools that they can utilise when reacting to each other in this unpredictable and emergent performance environment. Firstly they can provide space and balance, sitting back when appropriate. Secondly they can adapt and incorporate different lyrical schema, depending on the DJ's instrumental selection. Thirdly, they can be used in combination, with MCs utilising 'transition lyrics' (see below) to build over a highly gestural section from a DJ, or a change in instrumental.[24]

These session management techniques were prevailing concerns for a number of MCs I spoke with. Balance was a key consideration, helping to 'preserve a continuity of

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[23] Berliner, *Thinking in Jazz*, 358.

[24] Mihalyi Csikzentmihalyi, *Flow: The Psychology of Optimal Experience* (New York, Harper Collins, 1990); Robert K. Sawyer, "Group Creativity: Musical Performance and Collaboration", *Psychology of Music*, 34(2), 2006: 157.

mood'. This was facilitated by intensive listening and augmented by prior experiences, using these experiences to situate yourself within a new performance environment.[25]

> Kwam: There's obviously a time and a place for things. If you've gone to enough sets you understand when there's a peak approaching, or when there's time to take it down and back off a bit. You learn these things along the way.
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> It's just like sport. You're not going to go a million miles an hour right away. You want to build up the play, rather than shooting as soon as you get the ball. Same thing in tennis, squash, rugby. Any sport I can think of. Experience leads you to it. And also sometimes it's just natural understanding. Sometimes an MC turns up and they just *know there's a certain time and a place for something* [emphasis added]. They can build up a vibe off that, and that's why you see these young MCs coming through, whether through listening—you know at times when people didn't know they were listening—or just having a natural sense of rhythm. They have that ability to engage with the crowd like that, so it's cool.
>
> Alex: Do you think about young MCs now who are doing bits (doing well)?
>
> Kwam: So the likes of [Lewisham MC] Novelist of course. I have seen him develop his craft from radio sets towards now doing much bigger sets. It's clear that he's been able to develop that understanding that I've talked about. When I was first on sets with him he used to just go for it as much as he could on every single lyric rather than go back a bit, regenerate himself and then go again.[26]

Kwam speaks directly to pacing and providing space for the DJ to work. He also earmarked Novelist, whose development is of particular interest. The Lewisham MC signed to XL at the age of 17 and saw a sharp and unprecedented rise to prominence. His engagement with pirate radio enabled him to refine his craft and become balanced. In 2016, I spoke with Novelist about his development. Notwithstanding the space that he affords to the DJ and other MCs, he is also able to listen to the DJ's instrumental selection and alter his lyrical pattern accordingly, mid-performance.

> I'll listen for when the kick is and for where the snare is and figure out a groove. A rhythm between the kick and the snare…I like to pattern things to the music. I've learned a format

25 Berliner, *Thinking in Jazz,* 368.

26 Kwam, 2017.

so that I can write bars without any instrumental but the way that I've written it when I hear certain beats on a set I know automatically to drop this lyric or to drop that lyric. It's like science.[27]

Further to the correct choice of lyrics, the pace with which they are introduced remains an important consideration. Kwam's aversion to arriving at a 'million miles an hour' is critical, since grime sets (at least on radio) last in excess of sixty minutes. The tendency for young MCs to grab the microphone and put everything into their first lyric, while understandable, can really upset the flow. Of course, if there are thirty MCs on the set there is only a small window to stake your claim. You have to take that chance. However, when there are fewer MCs on the set, the role of session management and careful listening to the DJ's selections is key. Krucial spoke to both these issues.

> Krucial: If I'm on a set with millions of people, I'm gonna be selfish and spit what I want. But, if I'm on a set by myself and I've got the mic in my hand I'm ready. If I don't like it I'll pose, talk, say a little four bar repeat and prepare. And when the beat comes in, spray. You just manage it.
>
> Alex: Yeah yeah time management.
>
> Krucial: You just manage it.
>
> Alex: I noticed that a lot as well, people re-fixing a bar anticipating something that's going to happen, which is sick.
>
> Krucial: That's just building, building the energy, building the vibe. Also if you don't like that song you're not going to spray on it.

Krucial's 'four bar repeat' is an example of a 'transition lyric' (my terminology). This approach is widespread in grime music. These lyrical units allow space for the DJ, and are typically used in three ways. Firstly, as mentioned by Krucial, MCs use transitions to paper over tracks that they don't want to spit on. Secondly, they are also employed in anticipation for the drop of a track. Finally, they are used to rebuild energy following a peak in a set.

This final tactic was used by Saint P in Episode 4.2. The repetition of his 'bounce' lyric acts as a transition, building momentum before he moves on to a new lyrical scheme.

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[27] Novelist, Personal Interview. October 2016.

Figure 4.7 – Transcription of Krucial's 'transition lyric' (audiovisual example 4f, 0:22).

Figure 4.8 – Transcription of Krucial's lyrical development (audiovisual example 4f, 0:42).

Krucial also employed a number of transitions on a radio set from August 2017, in celebration of Essex DJ Kirby T's birthday. Following a back-to-back section between Krucial and Fire Camp MC Face, the second MC broke out into one of his most famous hype lyrics: 'you don't wanna war or, your boys will get bore-ored [stabbed]' (audiovisual example 4f, 0:01).[28]

This performance combined with the instrumental—a 2-step refix of classic grime track 'Gash By Da Hour'—garnered a reload from Kirby T, and the track was cued from the top. The track has a long introduction, taking sixteen bars to build up before the bassline comes in. Accordingly, Krucial used a transition lyric to rebuild following the point of

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[28] Kirby T, "Grime Sessions – Kirby T Birthday Set", Westside Radio, London: August 22, 2017.

rupture (Figure 4.7; audiovisual example 4f, 0:22). This transition lyric also acted a precursor to the more elaborate passage that Krucial opened up into when the beat drops (Figure 4.8; audiovisual example 4f, 0:42). Through using this transition lyric Krucial gained momentum and indicated to the DJ—and an informed audience—about his projected arrival point. Rather than immediately arrive, he took time, demonstrated balance and patience, and enabled the performance to continue. This is precisely what Kwam was referring to when he mentioned peaks and troughs. For a musical form that operates at both a high intensity (and tempo) it is not viable to maintain the same energy level across an entire performance.

For MCs, then, session management relies on a combination of close listening, careful monitoring of participants' body language and the successful employment of an existing skillset. Ingrid Monson has written of jazz artists 'continually [being] called upon to respond to and participate in an on-going flow of musical action that can change or surprise them at any moment'. For grime MCs, this collection of techniques enables them to monitor, manage and set the pace of a performance as it progresses.[29]

(ii) DJ gesture and its effect on performance

For DJs in reggae sound system culture, their role is likened to a 'conductor, manager or producer'. It is their job to monitor and oversee proceedings. The myriad techniques developed within hip-hop turntablism, drum 'n' bass DJing, garage mixing and performance tropes further refined by grime DJs themselves demands a re-mapping of the DJ's role. While grime DJs generally preside over and support the performance of MCs, there is scope for more active and combative performance.[30]

Mediating between being supportive and combative is something that Berliner considered in his discussion of the rhythm section's role in jazz, stressing for a 'particular balance [that] the rhythm section maintains between responsive performance on the one

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[29] Monson, "Hearing Seeing and Perceptual Agency", 43.

[30] Henriques, *Sonic Bodies*, 158.

hand, and assertive, aggressive performance on the other'.[31] There are three main ways in which grime DJs can shift between these two poles while working on set with MCs: selection (and speed of selection); a general responsiveness (reloads and reaction to an MCs' expectations); and technique and punctuation (chopping, cutting, punching).

Selection: DJ's track choice

A DJ's track selection can have a substantial impact on a performance, offering a sliding scale from hostility to comfort for MCs performing with them. While MCs like Novelist profess to have a lyric for every type of beat, MCs tend to prefer a certain style. An awareness of the MC's flow and an appreciation of the style of instrumental that would complement their vocal delivery is an important consideration. The following example offers two highly contrasting performances from the same two artists—West London MC AJ Tracey (of MTP) and his DJ General Courts—that took place within a six month period.

Episode 4.3
🎤**AJ Tracey**
💿**General Courts, "Boiler Room BBC AZN Network Presents", Rye Wax, London: May, 2016.**
📻**Wigpower (General Courts and Travis-T), 'General Courts' Wigmas Special on Radar Radio', Radar Radio, London: December 22 2015.**
💿 **Audiovisual examples 4g, 4h**

In May 2016, AJ Tracey and General Courts performed a live set for Boiler Room at Rye Wax, a small, dimly lit basement venue in Peckham. This set was part of the BBC AZN Network takeover. The duo were booked to perform an R'n'G set, a sub-branch of grime music that heavily features cut-up vocal lines. Source material for the instrumentals is typically sourced from contemporary R'n'B songs (Timbaland, Destiny's Child, Aaliyah).

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[31] Berliner, *Thinking in Jazz,* 403.

While the pair have an enduring working relationship, this stipulation—BBC AZN Network encouraged all artists that evening to leave their comfort zone—caused a number of issues. Courts was evidently uncomfortable playing this material. The prominence of vocal lines meant that AJ Tracey struggled to assert himself, particularly for the first ten minutes. One of Courts's blends was out of time (the new instrumental wasn't beat matched to the instrumental already playing) and later he introduced a pitched-up version of one of AJ Tracey's songs to accommodate for the faster tempo. This made AJ's voice sound comically high (audiovisual example 4g, 2:22). While AJ Tracey cleverly performed over the track underneath before opening up into live lyrics to coincide with a new instrumental, this momentum was short-lived. Immediately afterwards, Courts abruptly brought in an abrasive instrumental that was nearly twice as loud as the previous track (audiovisual example 4g, 4:38).[32] As a consequence, the set was an uncomfortable listen. Since the large majority of Courts' energy was focused on mixing the tracks, this thwarted interplay and upset the trajectory of AJ Tracey, who was trying to pull together the eclectic, and eclectically mixed, selections into a cohesive whole.

A performance on Radar Radio six months prior, however, offered a radical contrast, with AJ Tracey and General Courts working close to full flow. Despite the set being particularly busy, with ten MCs in attendance, the duo built substantial momentum over a three-minute period of interaction. AJ entered over a blend of a sub-heavy Alias production and producer Treble Clef's melody-driven 'Trumpet Boom'. AJ's opening eight-bar lyric reached a high-point at the same time as Courts removed the Alias track from the mix, resulting in a point of clarity that was met with approval from MCs present (audiovisual example 4h, 0:18). He continued for a further twenty-four bars with crystal clear delivery before faltering on a new lyric, which he acknowledged verbally by saying 'freshers'. Courts was attentive, pulled back the track and allowed AJ to restart (audiovisual example 4h, 0:50).

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[32] This practice of spitting over a vocal is largely inherited from dancehall MCing, where artists 'voice over the already voiced record'; Henriques, *Sonic Bodies*, 188.

AJ began again and quickly regained momentum. Four bars in Courts teased in a snippet of Sir Spyro's 'Tekkerz' in anticipation. This also let AJ know that a new track was impending. After AJ's completion of his sixteen-bar pattern, Courts teased in 'Tekkerz' more explicitly, cutting it into the mix for the final three beats of each even bar for a period of sixteen bars, before bringing it in completely alongside 'Trumpet Boom' for eight bars. Courts then cut 'Trumpet Boom', allowing 'Tekkerz' to open up at the same time as AJ started a new rhyme pattern (audiovisual example 4h, 1:32).

Not only does this passage demonstrate rapid decision making on Courts' part, it importantly demonstrates a creative synergy between Courts and AJ owing to the *style* of the new instrumental. AJ's plosive yet skippy flow pattern aligned with 'Tekkerz" minimal percussion and drawn out sub-bass line, allowing AJ's voice to come to the forefront.

Unlike the example from Boiler Room, Courts was able to draw for familiar selections. Using his understanding of AJ's particular performance style, he could quickly mix in instrumentals that would augment, rather than detract from, AJ's vocal delivery. Selection, therefore, is critical for cohesive group performance.[33]

MC perspectives on DJ selections

Considering the effect instrumental selection can have on performance, it is important to consider MCs' opinions on how this affects their performative trajectory. While Krucial (above) was happy to spit transition bars and wait for a new selection, others—such as Trim —highlight the importance of DJ sensitivity when working with MCs.

> I don't think DJs are that considerate anymore. They used to be in the days of Mak 10 and
>
> Maximum [DJs for Nasty Crew and Roll Deep respectively]. These days I think DJs just play
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> what they like and as an MC you have to adjust. But people like [Croydon-based DJ] Argue,

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[33] Henriques, *Sonic Bodies*, 188.

DJ Easy B [Trim's DJ], these people, I've been working with them for a while so they kind of know how to deal with me when it comes to sets.[34]

Looking back to P Money's launch show with Logan Sama (Episode 4.1), there is a moment where Logan brings in an instrumental that is mismatched to Trim's style.[35] Following on from J2K—a markedly skippy MC, with a fast-paced garage style flow—Trim's languid, metaphorical and often quite dense passages were at odds with its effervescent and busy instrumentation (audiovisual example 4i, 0:08). Trim persisted for the first twenty-four bars, however Logan then brought through an even more animated instrumental, which completely threw Trim off-kilter.

Logan done that to me of all people. I'm greeze. I'm not J2. I can't play with that

one there. But yeah. Yeah that one there wasn't me. I wanted something greeze

Log. Please. Yeah, something like that. That threw me way off.

Logan Sama quickly realised his faux-pas, pulled back the track and introduced a half-time beat that was far less congested, allowing Trim the required space to work with (audiovisual example 4i, 0:43; 1:18).

There are many other examples of this, but Dot Rotten's appearance on Logan Sama's show from 2008 stands out. The show, scheduled in support of the South London MC's new project *R.I.P Young Dot*, lasted only five minutes before Dot stormed out of the studio, after expressing discontent over Logan's mixing and placement of instrumentals. All of the instrumentals used had long introductions, and this had an adverse effect on the forward momentum Dot was attempting to build lyrically. His arrival at a prominent sixteen-bar lyric, for example, was met with a new track's introduction, as opposed to the joint arrival of a lyrical apex and an instrumental drop (audiovisual example 4j, 2:28).

Logan Sama later clarified in interview that issues arose since Dot Rotten provided him with the instrumentals immediately prior to the performance. As such, Logan was

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[34] Trim, 2017.

[35] Logan Sama, "Money over Everyone Launch", Kiss FM, London: September 7, 2009.

unaware of their non-conventional structures.[36] Nonetheless, the breakdown in communication on the night saw icy words exchanged. This was being broadcast live on Kiss 100, and I can vividly remember the event as it happened (audiovisual example 4j, 5:46–6:35).[37]

> Dot Rotten: Logan deal with me proper. Deal with me like I'm Wiley or JME. I'm guna start getting mad, I swear on my life. I'm guna get mad bruv, please, just deal with me like I'm one of them guys bruv. Please, please. Deal with me like I'm one of them guys. You know what. Kiss 100, everyone who's listening, Logan has to deal with me like I'm one of *them guys*. Come on.
>
> Logan Sama: What do you mean?
>
> Dot Rotten: Come on man. Come on.
>
> Logan Sama: What do you mean?
>
> Dot Rotten: Like dodgy mixes and all that stuff. Come on Logan, you *know me* bruv. You know me please, G. Like deal with me proper [emphasis in voice throughout].

This particular situation was fraught with complications and the precise culpability is largely a moot point and unable to exactly ascertain. The accusations from both Trim and Dot Rotten, though, suggest that DJs have an obligation to choose the right selections and deal with them properly when it comes to mixing. Krucial and Hitman Tiga, however, suggested that the MC has to take some responsibility for the situation at hand, rather than blaming the DJ entirely for the selection.

> Krucial: If you don't like it, pass the mic. DJs are in charge, powerful. Obviously the DJ is playing it because he likes it.[38]
>
> Hitman Tiga: I think all beats should be rideable. We come from a time where you ride anything.[39]

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[36] DJ Argue, "w/ Special Guests Logan Sama Mode FM Founders & JP", London: September 4, 2017.

[37] Logan Sama, "Dot Rotten", Kiss 100, London: July 14, 2008.

[38] Krucial, 2017.

[39] Hitman Tiga, 2017.

This was also true for DJ Kaylee Kay, who mentioned that MCs could sit back and wait for their favourite instrumental: 'why not just jump in [when a beat they like comes on]. A lot of MCs do that. If they have their favourite beat that they know inside out, they might wait and jump in.'[40]

Rather than clouding the issue, these differing perspectives are in fact evidential of the importance ascribed to instrumental selection. While Hitman Tiga and Novelist are confident that they can ride any riddim, it is a concern worthy of discussion. In general, MC and DJ working relationships are strengthened through a mutual understanding. A greater awareness of an MCs style from a DJ is both endearing and good for working relationships, while an MC's willingness to work with what the DJ presents to them can ensure the continuation of the performance event, rather than encountering partial collapse (with Trim's disgruntled utterances) or complete rupture, with Dot Rotten's dramatic exit from the radio studio. Selection is returned to in Chapter 8, with reference to intra-crew practice.

DJ responsiveness

Tempers also become frayed when MCs feel that their efforts haven't been recognised by the DJ. Accordingly, a DJ's general responsiveness to MCs is important and this manifests itself in what is broadly termed 'reload politics'.[41]

The full workings of a 'reload' will be elaborated on shortly so it makes sense to keep this consideration brief. Ostensibly, DJs must monitor the performance environment listening carefully to MCs to determine whether their efforts deserves a reload or not. DJs can be overly favourable, particularly for fellow crew members, and pull back the track quite freely during a set, but some DJs are reticent to do so as it can upset their own progression. Coyote Records' Last Japan was quoted saying it would take 'hell to freeze over' before

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[40] Kaylee Kay, 2019.

[41] The terms 'reload', 'wheel' and 'edge' are broadly interchangeable.

reloading a track.[42] While this statement is most likely a jocular provocation, MCs can get upset if the DJ is unresponsive, particularly if they feel they have earned the reload and are not receiving the required recognition.

> Kraze: There are a lot of people that [try to] force a wheel. But there are a few DJs that are straight savage and won't care and keep mixing. But there are some who will hear you're forcing the wheel, and know that you're around a lot of people and they don't want you to look stupid and they wheel you.[43]

> Hitman Tiga: They [MCs] will spray their reload bar and not get it. And when they don't get it, it destroys their whole being.[44]

Jendor from OGz, for example, was visibly frustrated when he did not receive a reload from Logan Sama at P Money's Money Over Everyone launch. Listening carefully, however, you can hear that Logan was mid mix and eventually reloaded the instrumental once the new track was established (audiovisual example 4k, 0:27). Kaylee Kay spoke to the difficulties of acknowledging an artists' endeavours mid mix.

> I find wheeling quite hard actually. When I'm DJing I'm not always listening to you. So I'm relying on the reaction of the crowd and what the other MCs are doing. So I try and listen but it's not always easy to do so.[45]

In my personal experience, I have both been berated by MCs for not reloading the instrumental frequently enough, and for being overzealous with pulling back the beat. One MC, for example showed substantial frustration on PK Brako's birthday set when I didn't reload the tune straight away for one of his more famous lyrics, preferring to wait until the new beat came in.

> MC: Trust man, you're making me *work* for these. You're making me *work* for these wheels.

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[42] "Last Japan Boiler Room London DJ Set", *YouTube*, October 22, 2015, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3wO3u87T4mE.

[43] Kraze, 2017.

[44] Hitman Tiga, 2017.

[45] Kaylee Kay, 2019.

These concerns, while challenging, should arguably come down to artistic merit, but a consideration of balance and flow is again important. Reloads are a significant point of rupture and can signify a new phase of play. They are valued and cherished, however too many can both upset the flow of the set and lead to a devaluing of their usage.[46]

> It can get easily over-saturated. We have all heard sets where it's like a million reloads and there's no flow to the thing whatsoever. You have to have the peak and the trough of the thing and that's the beauty of it.[47]

DJ gesture: Chopping and punching

The final techniques to consider are arguably the most complex, and substantially impact performances. Chopping, quick cuts and punch rhythms are all gestural acts that both add a level of intensity to the set, while also demonstrating a DJ's authority over proceedings. Their usage is stimulating but enactment must be considered. These terms will be defined, before an assessment of the issues (and benefits) that arise from their usage, using examples from Kraze, DJ Kaylee Kay and DJ Eastwood.

'Chopping' involves swiftly cutting between two channels on the mixer, each playing an instrumental, so that the tracks instantaneously fade in and out of prominence through the speakers. This can be done either with the cross-fader, or by riding the channel faders (the latter is more common in grime).

While Krucial mentioned that he tends to sit back while the DJ is chopping, acknowledging that it's a 'mutual thing', Hitman Tiga particularly favours DJs who chop.[48] For example, on a Sidewinder Bonus CD with DJ Eastwood, you can hear Tiga attacking the chops, riding over Eastwood's quick changes. Through maintaining his place he is able to provide forward momentum for when the new instrumental is allowed to come through on its own (audiovisual example 4l, 0:05–0:18). Kaylee Kay also acknowledged the give and take

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[46] Beats, Rhymes and Strife, "PK Brako BDay Set", Wired, London: March 7, 2017.

[47] Kwam, 2017.

[48] Krucial, 2017.

between MCs and DJs. She tends to sit back when there is a large number of MCs on the set, but will regularly incorporate chopping: 'I tend to play tracks for longer, because there might be a certain MC who wants to spit on that. I'm quite mindful. But I still chop where I can. If there's another MC gearing for the mic, I want to do a nice transition.'[49]

'Punching' is a chop variation where the DJ repeatedly brings in a track on the same beat each bar, creating a new rhythmic layer. Typically this is done on the first beat while an MC spits a capella, punctuating their performance. It then culminates with a full release of the track that had previously only been exposed in snippets. In DJ Eastwood's set with West London crew Renegade Boys you can hear Eastwood punching in a new track, a variation in production (VIP) of 'Champion' by DJ Oddz, on the first beat with Renegade Boys' Purple on the microphone (audiovisual example 4m, 0:05–0:19).[50]

A certain variation of the punch rhythm is particularly effective and requires a strong working relationship between the DJ and the MC. This 'punching in' takes place after a reload with the MC still spitting in time. The DJ punches in the new instrumental, cueing it up so it drops again at the same point in which the MC initially received the reload. Kraze describes this well.

> You know when they're spitting and they get a wheel and they continue spitting. They're on beat still and the DJ comes back in with it. Cause you count bars. Cause I got the wheel on the eighth bar, I'll continue that lyric even after the wheel. By the time I've got to that eight, I'm gonna start the next eight and the DJs put the riddim in again…That's the dopest thing I ain't guna lie. I love that. I love that.[51]

When this particular routine is pulled off successfully it usually results in another reload, both recapitulating the prior climax and demonstrating exemplary interplay between the MC and DJ.

However, these gestural acts, while highly stimulating, encounter complications. These tensions, concerns and power dynamics were all captured in an extended discussion

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[49] Kaylee Kay, 2019.

[50] DJ Eastwood, *Sidewinder Collection Vol 10,* 2005.

[51] Kraze, 2017.

with DJ Eastwood, an artist renowned for his chopping and quick selections. This discussion demonstrates how Eastwood balances the need to articulate his own idiosyncratic style, while also affording space for MCs as part of a collaborative process. It was motivated by listening to a recording of his performance at Sidewinder with West London crew Dynasty from 2005.

The first factor Eastwood acknowledged was how a certain *level* of MC aptitude affords him space to be more creative with his performative gestures (audiovisual example 4n).

> The MCs [Dynasty's Hypa Fen and Marcie Phonix] were really good on this set, because they didn't get thrown off. There's been times where you do that [chop in a track] and the MC gets confused and loses his rhythm. He starts stuttering, forgets his lyrics, then blames it on the DJ.
>
> When you're around good *good* MCs…they're so on point they can catch any beat. Skepta, [East London MCs] Ghetts and Kano were showing off on 'Pulse X' once, starting their lyrics on the first beat, second beat and third beat, performing seamlessly [over bar lines]. It helps when you've got good MCs around you when you're DJing [so you're able to] express yourself [without] them getting thrown off.[52]

New MCs, however, can provide a particular challenge, especially on the live stage when the risks are far greater. Here, Eastwood offered another performance at Sidewinder as a contrasting example. In this case, collaborative performance proved very difficult owing to the sheer power and unpredictability of the MCs on the set.

> When I went Sidewinder another time, I'm not gonna lie I was fucking shitting bricks, especially since I didn't know the MCs. I remember Tempa T [from Slew Dem] was there. I'd never seen anything like it. I was like 'oh god this is crazy, let me just play the tune. I'm not even going to get into the creative stuff, these lot are fucking nutcases'. So I didn't really express myself too much on those ones.[53]

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[52] Eastwood, 2017.

[53] ibid.

Power dynamics can rapidly shift depending on the environment, though, and DJs can challenge MCs to see if they are able to match his energy and *level up*. The following statement from Eastwood offers a counterbalance to his encounter with Tempa T. Eastwood is forthright, and evokes practice redolent of seasoned instrumentalists in jazz testing out newcomers in 'cutting' sessions on the bandstand.

> I was quite known in West London as I was on so many radio stations. I remember being on React FM [a West London station that broadcast on 99.7 FM]. I used to get lots of MCs coming and it got messy. One day I said 'look this is what we're going to do. Everyone can go back-to-back. Whoever don't merk (perform well) has gotta go home'.[54] I never sent anyone home, but it's a thing where *I was known* and *I was confident* [emphasis in voice]. I was the big man. I wasn't worried if I fucked up or fucked someone up [with my chopping and cutting]. If it happened I'd be like 'deal with it. I didn't ask you to come on my show'.[55]

From this passage it is evident that certain scenarios impact the creative possibilities for a DJ. Sidewinder is high pressure—with thousands of fans in attendance—while radio sets can be less frenetic. It also reinforces the notion of home turf. In this instance it was Eastwood's show. As such he was afforded the terrain to experiment.

Central to the discussion, though, was the tension between wanting to demonstrate virtuosity through chopping and creative interplay, and the need to be sympathetic to the needs of MCs. The sonic impact of chopping can be quite dramatic and overbearing, and with potential gains comes substantial risk.

> When you get more comfortable and when you're around MCs you know, you know the tunes they like to spit to, you know the ones that get them excited. You have to test the water, with new MCs, spending the whole time thinking 'ahh is he guna like this one, is this guna work? I don't know if I should chop it in and out, if there, I don't know if they've got that in their locker'. I can see how it can be really difficult.
>
> But at the same time, you want it to be special. You wanna put your own imprint, You wanna do something original. You wanna kinda hear people be like 'yo Eastwood!

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[54] 'Merk' has a number of connotations, see glossary.

[55] ibid.

> Gwan, Eastwood!' You wanna have your little bit of time to shine. So see when you chop
>
> the tune, you chop the tune back in, chop the tune back out, [roll in] a little bit of the bass
>
> from here, flick it back…that's how people can appreciate you.[56]

This, Eastwood's final contribution, captures the full spectrum of concerns for the DJ's management of performance: the worry and consideration over selections; sensitivity with respect to extended techniques and new MCs; and the burning desire to put your own stamp on the performance while still ensuring it is a success.

(iii) The accumulation of energy

This section has attended to ways in which MCs and DJs manage the session. For MCs, the principal concerns were both pacing and 'preserv[ing] a continuity of mood'.[57] When Kwam mentioned the need for not going at a 'million miles an hour' he allows for a co-constructed build of energy, that while naturally oscillating through 'peaks and troughs', can also reach moments of rupture, such as a reload (see Chapter 5).

For Julian Henriques, collaborative interchange is endemic of a sound system session and its wide array of participants (both human and technological). This continual accumulation of energy through 'amplification, inflection and transduction', helps to 'build the vibe', and there are multiple ways in which this can take place, such as the transduction of musical signal through the body of the 'bashment gal' whose consequent dynamism is then fed back into the emergent trajectory.[58] This interrelation is best captured by DJ Eastwood, who not only feeds off MC practice (see Subsection iv), but readily locates a quasi-symbiosis between human and technology while he is working at full capacity:

> Everything is like a mechanism. You're programmed to do actions like boom, even when
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> you see them [DJs] take the record off the deck, they do it, put it in the sleeve boom, or put

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[56] ibid.

[57] Berliner, *Thinking in Jazz,* 368.

[58] Henriques, "Rhythmic Bodies…", 82.

it back in the bag. Everything's almost in one movement, it's tuned into your brain sort of thing, in to your nervous system almost. You just do it in a certain way.

While this internalised understanding of both practice and instrument is a clear indication of what Weheliye has determined an 'enmeshment' of sound, technology and black cultural practice, for Eastwood this importantly *affords* instantaneous reaction and the maintenance of energy—such as through his 'quick draw' approach from Section 1. [59]

When we are considering how grime artists *level up* as part of a performance, we have to consider all of these elements as part of the conversation. Session management is contingent on circumstance, the elements nestled within its network of enactment (technology, audience), the performers themselves (MCs, DJs), and the emergent character of each performance. For example, in a similar fashion to a hip-hop cipher—where energy is built through each MC trying to outdo their predecessor—a DJ can challenge the MCs to *level up* through excessive chopping and punching. However, a more tempered response that allows the MCs to be foregrounded is sometimes necessary (such as Eastwood's engagement with Tempa T). Grime artists are active, sometimes combative, agents within live performance. As such, a comprehensive understanding of its performance protocol, acute awareness of your own technical cachet, and the ability to mediate between your personal prerogative and the wider emergent trajectory, allows the accumulation of energy to be harnessed in an appropriate manner.

Conclusion

When Sir Spyro took to the microphone before his set with Shellyvnne, anything could have happened. Eleven MCs were primed and ready to give it their all, with both DJs eagerly anticipating what was to come. The thin line between success and failure, magnified by no fewer than thirteen artists about to enter into improvisatory performance, was ever present.

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[59] Weheliye, *Phonographies*, 4.

Nonetheless, a demonstrable understanding of grime's code of ethics and the expectations for performing on a radio set ensured a coherent and successful performance.

For grime music, a general appreciation of performance etiquette is needed, but this is tempered with both musical and extra-musical tension that pervades its performance sphere. Friction and animosity can add to the accumulation of energy and stimulate a performance's onward trajectory, but flagrant ignorance of the MC code of practice—through mobbing someone else's turf, hogging the microphone, or snaking—can have an adverse effect. In these instances, DJs can exert substantial power over proceedings. They can mediate between MCs, build creative energy with MCs through shrewd instrumental selections, and provide and moderate intensity through gesture (chopping, cutting and reloads).

While these conventions and artists' technical cachets are typically tacit and learned respectively, the contributions from Kraze, Trim, Kwam, Novelist, Krucial, DJ Eastwood, DJ Kaylee Kay and Hitman Tiga demonstrate an understanding of—if not an adherence to—these conventions, and a toolkit that affords attenuated responses to creative stimuli. This foundational grounding allows artists to branch out and create, facilitating 'dynamic exchange': DJ Eastwood referenced a certain freedom he was afforded working with Marcie Phonix and Hypa Fen owing to their understanding of the form, while Sir Spyro and Shellyvnne entered into moments of group flow.

This chapter, therefore has presented an analysis of both convention and craft, resulting in an elucidation of the broad terrain and techniques with which artists manage, harness and propagate energy during a grime performance. Having established these foundational conventions, we can now engage explicitly with the issues that arise out of multidirectional improvisatory practice, which occurs at a more local level. While the examination of DJ Eastwood's use of gesture offered a preliminary insight into his local processes and the ways in which chopping and cutting can stimulate practice, this next chapter's attention to two of grime's principal phases of play is concerned principally with

the *interrelation* between multiple MCs, DJs (and often audience members), rather than an individual's negotiation—and management of—the session as a whole.

Chapter 5 – Phases of Play 1: Reloads, Rallying and metapragmatic improvisation

Introduction

Within grime music, there are a number of densely interactional processes that artists engage in during a performance. Chapter 4 showed how artists can demonstrate an understanding of the macro-concerns of the performance field, its expected etiquette, and how to channel improvisatory energy over an extended period of time. However, some of these processes take place at a far more local level. This chapter looks at two of grime's *phases of play,* the reload and the rally, attending to the ways in which artists creatively improvise, negotiate these interactions, and manage power dynamics born out of these processes. These phases of play are denoted as such, since they are regularly moved in and out of during a performance. They also vary in length. The reload is a quick point of rupture, whereas a rally tends to be more long form. This means that each phase of play commands slightly different expectations from artists. Whereas Chapter 4's modelling of creative energy across a session was iterative and gradual, these transitions can be sudden. This therefore presents further demands for modelling creative process. While we can clearly see how a 'bashment gal' might receive a 'haptic sensory impression [and respond with] kinetic motor expression', or how an audience at an underground dance event can 'cultivate and sustain liveness' through dancing, within grime there exists multidirectional, musically meaningful performance suggestions that are assessed and incorporated continually during intense negotiations.[1]

Within jazz practice, Ingrid Monson works with 'intensification' to collate myriad musical events that 'contribute towards a musical climax', and 'intermusical aspects that refer

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[1] Henriques, "Rhythmic Bodies", 100; Butler, *Playing With Something That Runs*, 102.

to wider 'African American sensibilities', such as grooving and 'taking it to another level'.[2] Her denotation is 'deliberately amorphous' and these musical events—which this chapter will focus on—include 'changes in dynamics, rhythmic density, timbre, melody' among others. Small alterations from MCs and DJs can elicit huge change, if incorporated, and attenuated sensitivity to these multiple signals and inputs from the ensemble at large (MCs, DJs, audience, performance network), all contribute towards a building of energy that— while still iterative—is sometimes non-linear and often exponential.[3]

Central to these phases of play, therefore, is an ability to perform and react simultaneously. This could be in response to a heightened MC voice, repetition of a lyrical pattern, a falling cadence, or an abrasive passage of chopping from the DJ (as mentioned in Chapter 4). In order to conceptualise this process, it is helpful to consider Keith Sawyer's work, both on 'group flow'—mentioned in Chapter 4, Section 2—and on emergent creative practice more generally. Sawyer's model of 'interactional semiotics', in particular, maps how indexical allusions from performers are either incorporated or discarded as part of a 'continuing process' (see Figure 2.2). This process is metapragmatic in nature, meaning that suggestions seek to entail upon a performer's ongoing response(s) to a performance that they are already currently engaged in. Within 'group flow', each performance is an 'irreducible property of the group', yet cannot be traced to its origins.[4] As such, successful suggestions as part of the 'continuing process'—which could all come at once, or build gradually—directly fold into the performance's emergent trajectory. This is useful for modelling both the reload and the rally, since the moving into, negotiation of, and exit out of, each phase involves multiple negotiations between its participants.

The decision to incorporate someone's suggestion, or not, also captures the power dynamics inherent in grime performance. Reluctance could be shrewd, or it could simply be

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[2] See Chapter 8 for a full engagement with intermusical allusion.

[3] Monson, *Saying Something*, 139.

[4] Sawyer, *Group Creativity,* 44.

brazen and begrudging. These factors will be addressed with respect to 'reload tactics' and acts of divergent individuality in Section 1 (Episodes 5.2 and 5.3).

Aside from these divergences, though, a communal sense of performance's trajectory exists. Often, suggestions are indicative of an impending change that fellow performers have to be aware of. As stated above, improvising groups have to transition into, and out of, phases of play. As such, ignoring a cue can result in a mismatch of both energy, and musical production. This sort of concentration is central to a wide variety of improvisatory forms. Gamelan and free improvisation, in particular, share a number of commonalities with grime performance.

Similarly to grime artists, gamelan musicians occupy roles within a group, have a skeletal understanding of pieces, but are required to react in real time to other performers. Each artist is expected to know the central melody, *balungan*, and be aware of the colotomic framework. But within this, they have to attend to changes in speed, often indicated by the *kendhang* (double-headed drum), melody elaborations from the *gendèr barung*, and changes in trajectory from the overall leader, the *pamurba*. These affordances and relations can be seen in a technically demanding performance of 'Jaya Semara' from Lila Cita in 2012. Performed on balinese gamelan, this *kebyar style* piece features rapid switches in tempo. Tenzer writes that an 'essential aspect of *kebyar*'s sound is in its variability', and while this thesis draws principally upon Javanese practice—*kebyar* lacks cyclic meter, unlike the majority of Javanese performance—it captures musicians engaging in 'ongoing micro adjustments' throughout, which are achieved through 'active listening'.[5]

Free jazz similarly thrives on improvisation, and successful performances are contingent on percipient attendance to the unfolding landscape. British free improvisation outfit AMM, discussed in Chapter 2, utilise an even more open format than both grime and gamelan, and as such they must negotiate 'multiple, on-going interaction[s]' that are gestural, timbral, dynamic, or otherwise. A performance from 1968 at The Crypt in Notting Hill

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[5] Brinner, *Knowing Music*, 169, 213; Michael Tenzer, *Gamelan Gong Kebyar: The Art of Twentieth-Century Balinese Music*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 60–61; SEA Arts, "Jaya Semara by Lila Cita 31.03.2012", April 11, 2012, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FP3KXTcEXZ4.

captures the group performing with a variety of found objects and instruments. For Wright, the 'dense practical homogeneity'—with extended techniques employed on bowed discs, saxophone and drums making each individual instrument sonically indistinguishable—necessitates an attentiveness to the evolving sound worlds that signpost its trajectory.[6] According to David Borgo, performance 'hinges on one's ability to synchronise intention and action and to maintain a keen awareness of, and sensitivity to, and connection, with the evolving group dynamics and experience', and this is similarly a consideration in grime (despite its parameters being more clearly defined).[7]

What practice in both these forms captures, too, is multidirectionality. The 'complex simultaneity and iteration' of exchanges and interactions in free jazz is compounded by grime's homogenous tool, the voice, where multiple MCs (along with the DJ) have to deal with stimuli from all angles. Therefore, a consideration of these two phases of play will continue to build the model of levelling up within grime music, through attending to locally complex and simultaneous interactions that, when harnessed correctly, can build energy towards either climactic moments (the reload), or passages of fully-realised group flow (the rally).[8]

This chapter, then, issues a turn towards the intricacy and improvisatory nuance of grime music performance, achieved through a consideration of Keith Sawyer's modelling of metapragmatic process, scenarios from correlate musical forms, and a critical ethnographic engagement with two of grime's most important phases of play, the reload and the rally. Each section will explore the respective phase of play's workings: its rules of enactment; how it emerges; how artists respond and negotiate to performative suggestions; and how tensions between the individual and group are manifest in decision making. It will consequently offer insight into improvisatory group practice in grime music, demonstrating how competence, active listening and metapragmatic ability help these artists negotiate and

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[6] Wright, "Original Creative Practice", 280.

[7] Borgo, *Sync or Swarm*, 9.

[8] ibid, 202.

proceed through fraught and intensive performance environments towards moments of levelling up.

Section 1 – Reloads

'Jump on a set and can't get no wheel, I don't even know how that feels', Merky Ace.[9]

Reloads are a critical element of grime performance. This thesis' opening referred to the *Evening Standard's* misreading of the reload as a technical malfunction. Consequent castigation was evidence of its importance to grime's fanbase. Furthermore, the lyric above from South London MC and producer Merky Ace compellingly evokes the high regard with which the reload is held by performers. Its ubiquity is shown by the sheer number of terms used to describe the technique: wheel, edge, forward, pull-up, reload, jackum, to name a few. This supports the Sapir-Whorfian notion that the variety of terms in a lexicon that refer to a concept are proportional to its importance, much like Inuit indigenous groups' fifty words for snow.[10]

Figure 5.1 offers a basic overview of the reload, to provide some initial understanding of the technique. It is a densely interactional process, involving MCs, DJs and often audience members. It is essentially enacted at a point of climax in a performance, where the instrumental track has to be pulled back, or reloaded, before being restarted from the top. The audience's role varies depending on the situation. For radio sets, the audience in the room acts as the principal yardstick. Listeners do still contribute. They can interact with performers as the set unfolds, through ringing or texting the phone line.[11] The live environment provides the audience with far more agency. Their presence is resoundingly

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[9] Merky Ace, *All or Nothing,* 2013, UK: No Hats No Hoods.

[10] David Robson, "There Really Are 50 Eskimo Words for 'Snow'", *Washington Post*, January 14, 2013, https://www.washingtonpost.com/national/health-science/there-really-are-50-eskimo-words-for-snow/2013/01/14/e0e3f4e0-59a0-11e2-beee-6e38f5215402_story.html.

[11] See Dread D and Jammz, *10 Missed Calls,* 2016, UK: Local Action.

1. MC is performing and is about to drop a big lyric.

2. DJ hears the MC is about to drop a big lyric

DJ

MC

3. DJ drops the new track and audience hears and reacts to new track.

3. MC delivers the big lyric / Audience hears and reacts to famous lyric.

Audience

4. If energy level and reaction is sufficient, the DJ reloads the tune and takes it from the top.
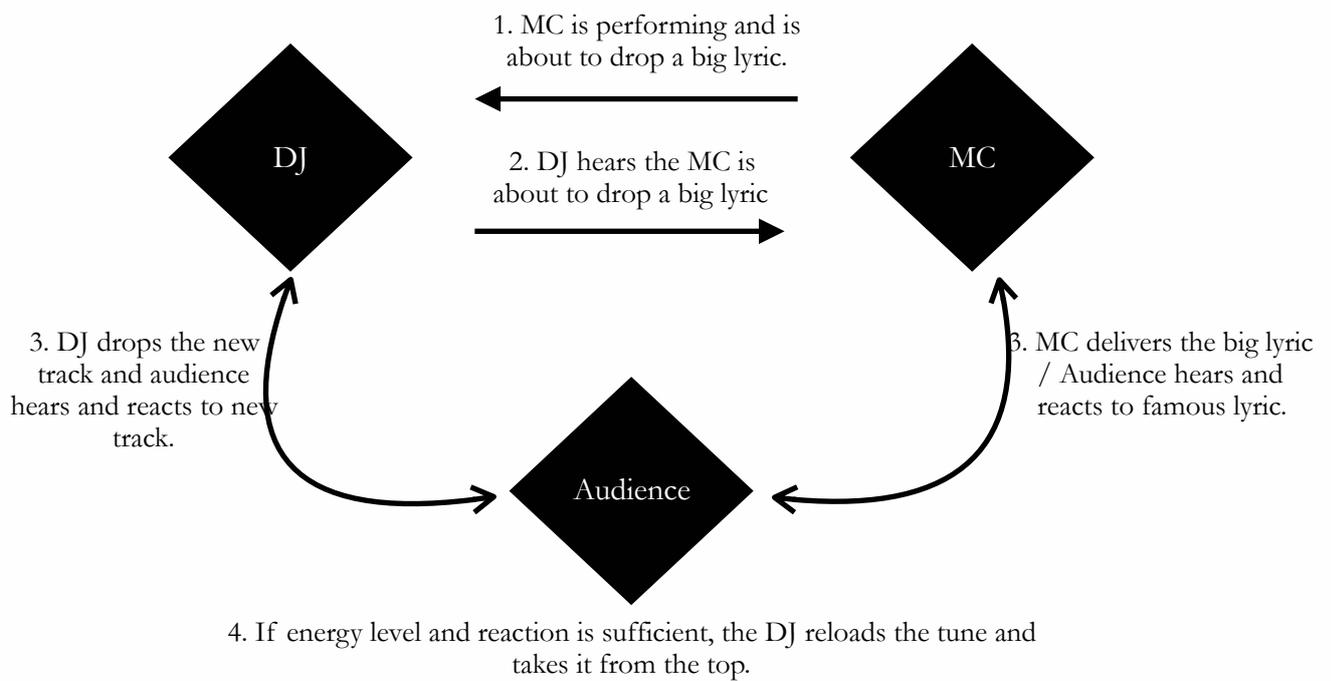
Figure 5.1 – The Reload in the Live Domain.

felt, both sonically and physically, and the level of interaction has precedent in sound system culture and other antecedent styles. From reggae DJ David Rodigan's cry of 'give me some signal!', to the whistles at UK hip-hop raves, and the airhorns distributed at Sidewinder and Eskimo Dance, audience members at raves have historically been urged to call out in response. This interaction is succinctly summed up by Heartless Crew's Mighty Moe: 'if you want the re-load, you better ex-plode.'[12]

This section, however, principally focuses on the radio environment, and signals a departure from received understanding. While the antiphonal praxis of call-and-response between the audience and the DJ in the live environment is theorised by Fikentscher, who conceptualises this as an interaction between the DJ and the audience's 'collective body', this model needs to be refined for the specificities of radio practice. And while antiphony is seen by many to be central—and intrinsic to—black Atlantic cultural practice, it is one of many aspects of grime performance and reload practice. Chapter Two, Section 2 attended to Eidsheim's 'unexamined truisms', and as such we need to be careful ascribing an existing model to the reload process owing to antecedent commonalities. Figure 5.1 presents the

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[12] Heartless Crew, "Sidewinder Live @ Brunel Rooms", Swindon: May 20, 2005.

multidirectionality of interchange within the reload, and its usage at a more local level on radio is even more resounding. Therefore, while its enactment in the live domain can be simply antiphonal—such as with the example of Mighty Moe—its use at a local level is often more complex. Rather than a communal back-and-forth—as correlate to Ganesh's MC shouting 'hip' and the audience responding with 'hop!'—the reload in grime demands a closer look at the MC and DJ relationships. This will bring out the tensions at play *between* performers—mediation between 'intersubjective and creatively cognisant agents' and articulations of individual fervour being a key characteristic of grime—unpack the metapragmatic improvisatory skill required to pull it off the technique, and map the communal exchange that can result in both climax and instances of levelling up.[13]

Accordingly, it will examine three types of reload: the drop wheel, the MC's wheel and the DJ's wheel. Each example is accompanied by a relevant episode from grime practice. Following this, it will attend to reload tactics. These tactics are used by artists to subvert and influence the performance. Finally, it will analyse reload etiquette, before summarising the importance of improvisation and collaboration. Both are key assets required for successful negotiation of this phase of play*,* and are characteristic to grime's model of collective creativity.

(i) Types of Reload

Type 1 – The Drop Wheel

The 'drop wheel' is the most common type of reload in grime music. It typically occurs following the combined efforts of an MC spitting a hype lyric and the arrival of a new instrumental's 'drop'. The 'drop' is the point at which an instrumental enters its main

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[13] Fikentscher, '*You Better Work!*', 8; Bharath Ganesh, "The politics of the cipher: hip-hop, antiphony and multiculturalism", (PhD diss., University College London, 2017): 21; Eidsheim, *The Race of Sound*, 24; Crawley, *Blackpentecostal Breath*, 94.

passage, and is typically built towards rhythmically and through heightened synth lines. Varying factors affect the energy—such as the MC's technical ability and the nature of the DJ's selection (if the track is poor, the MC's lyric may struggle)—but the primary factor is this unified entrance of the new track and the MC's reload lyric.

The term 'drop wheel' was taken from my discussions with Kraze of Slew Dem as it succinctly summarises the process. Accordingly, to demonstrate the drop wheel in action, I have chosen an example from Kraze's practice.

Episode 5.1
🎤 **Kraze, Shorty Smalls, Lightning, Chronik**
📻 **DJ Spooky, "Youngers Clash", Raw Blaze, London: December 29, 2004.**
💿 **Audiovisual example 5a**

In Chapter 4, Kraze spoke about the importance of having a strong relationship with a DJ. This set from 2004 on East London's Raw Blaze was helmed by Spooky, the principal DJ for Younger Slew Dem during that period. Younger Slew Dem's members included Kraze and his good friend Shorty Smalls. This set was laced with tension. Lightning from Younger Nasty, a rival crew, had turned up to clash.

> So the wickedest ting with that set is that we didn't know he [Lightning] was coming. He just turned up. I kind of rate him for that because we were absolutely terrorising him…So hats off to him that he came to defend himself and we just took it from there and we started clashing.[14]

This rivalry, born out of a tension between their 'olders' Slew Dem and N.A.S.T.Y, inflected on the performance (see Chapter 4, Section 1). This meant that Kraze could use his relationship with Spooky to his advantage.

This 'drop wheel' took place eleven minutes into the set and was cleverly worked towards by Spooky and Shorty Smalls, allowing Kraze to arrive on the drop. Following a 16-bar passage from Chronik (of Slew Dem), Shorty Smalls entered over Wiley's 'Outburst'

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[14] Kraze, 2017.

remix (audiovisual example 5a, 0:25). 'Outburst''s string ostinati and dancehall kick pattern combined well with Smalls' delivery. His voice verged on shouting rather than spitting, punctuating his contribution with a cry of 'I'll put an end to your days!' Following this 16-bar passage, Smalls made way for Kraze's entrance over the drop (audiovisual example 5a, 0:52–1:14).

> Kraze: And it's Kraze Kraze, jump on a riddim gonna blaze
>
> blaze!
>
> If you stay more than a phase phase, merked when my bars get
>
> sprayed, sprayed!
>
> And it's Kraze Kraze, jump on a riddim gonna blaze, blaze!
>
> If you stay more than a… [reload] merk when my bars get
>
> sprayed sprayed.
>
> ['Outburst' gets reloaded]

The powerful arrival of Kraze with his hype lyric over the drop of 'Outburst' intensifies the energy in the room. Kraze finishes each bar on a heightened cadential figure, 'Kraze, kraze', 'blaze, blaze'. His repetition of the four-bar hype lyric gets the reload from Spooky seven bars in. The sound here is redolent of a car crash or violent screen-wipe, as the needle cuts back into the groove, the forward momentum swiftly curtailed by Spooky's hand spinning back the record.

This incident, while an exemplary demonstration of the drop wheel, demonstrates how an awareness of others around you helps in augmenting energy levels. This complex process may appear to be natural on the surface, much as a collaborative performance between a jazz quartet on the bandstand may seem. However, this episode presents constant communication between the artists at both a denotational and metapragmatic level, in addition to acute levels of listening. The joint arrival of Kraze with his signature bar and the drop of 'Outburst' instrumental created an energy level that meant Spooky simply *had* to pull the track back, and the timing was facilitated by Smalls' shrewd step to the side. Its success was also furthered through Spooky's attentiveness to the unfolding situation at hand. His awareness that Kraze was about to touch mic, and his reactions to Kraze's entry—

including intense chopping of 'Outburst'—added to the latent energy. Spooky harnessed this, building towards a point of climax.

> It's not just what you see on the surface. People say 'oh he spat and got a wheel. Done.' People won't ever understand behind it that there are a lot of things that you have to know and do…if you're new and just come to it, you're not going to understand that. Unless you have it explained to you by people who are seasoned in it.[15]

Type 2 – The MC's Wheel

The MC's wheel is enacted purely on the basis of an MC's craft or performance. It both celebrates an MC's individual artistry and relies on attentive performance from the DJ to accommodate for the MC's indexical presuppositions. Throughout the performance a DJ may be working with FX and equalisation, or cueing up new instrumentals, essentially otherwise occupied. Therefore, they must be aware of the MC's performance in order to pull back the track. Especially if their contribution alone warrants a reload. This allows the MC's suggestion to have a substantial impact on the unfolding performance.

The MC's wheel also foregrounds another element at play within grime performance, the ongoing tension between group flow and burning individuality. This individual thrust is possessed by many MCs who want to put their own stamp on proceedings. This tension—which Brinner sees as forming 'between individual motivations and the broad structures and preferences of the group'—is a critical consideration for understanding the dynamics of interaction in grime. DJs may be reticent to give the wheel, since it might cause a negative effect on momentum (as mentioned in Chapter 4), while MCs can force the issue, providing substantial constraint on the emergent performance.[16]

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[15] Kraze, 2017.

[16] Brinner, *Knowing Music,* 201.

The following episode examines the multifaceted nature of the MC's wheel, showing both how it is enacted, and how an MC's individual fervour can be simultaneously enlivening yet problematic for the overall group trajectory.

Episode 5.2
🎤 Dot Rotten, Firmer D
📻 Sir Spyro, "The Grime Show with Firmer D and friends", Rinse FM, London: June 4, 2017.
💿 Audiovisual example 5b

Returning to Sir Spyro's "The Grime Show" residency, this particular set saw South London MC Firmer Dee (also known as Funky Dee) assemble a roster of MCs to perform. Dot Rotten's contribution, in particular, stood out.

Dot Rotten is an elusive character and this was the first time he had appeared on a radio set for a number of years. Before his entrance the set was largely unremarkable. Thirty two minutes in, though, the mood changed. Following a twenty-four bar passage from Firmer D, Dot Rotten entered powerfully arriving with the drop of Sir Spyro's own instrumental '10 out of 10'. Dot's passage featured his trademark multisyllabic flow and dense enjambement across bar lines. This was compounded by lyrical sends and violent threats towards members of his old crew, OGz (see Episode 4.1), fronted by P Money and Little Dee (audiovisual example 5b, 0:20–0:38).

> Dot Rotten: Motivated I'm after a mil I don't need a big plate with food for a fat kid,
>
> I've been out of the game, but who's still established? I'm introducing a madness.
>
> Fuck those crews that I used to collab with, someone take a pic of my middle fin-
>
> ger, and @ those dons without using a caption, cah there's no future attachments,
>
> I'mma send shot after shot like I'm shooting a gatlin, dress yourself in a suit don't
>
> try to pursue beef with me I will do you with clashing… [reload]

It is important to note that Sir Spyro could have 'drop wheeled' Dot Rotten on entry. The arrival of the instrumental and a new MC could easily have merited this move. However, Spyro allowed Dot Rotten room to perform, anticipating something special. As Dot Rotten

opened up, Spyro started to chop the track in and out to add excitement to Dot's delivery. He eventually wheeled the track eleven bars in for an 'MC wheel'. In other words, the point at which Dot's contribution to the flow of performance simply had to be acknowledged on its own terms. Sir Spyro then took the tune from the top.

Dot Rotten's divergent individuality then comes into play in remarkable fashion. Rather than stop to take a breather, Dot continues to spray having taken little to no account of Spyro's decision to reload the track. Through continuing to spit for a further ten bars, he takes centre stage while the group performance as a whole becomes secondary to this display of technical prowess (audiovisual example 5b, 0:38–0:51).

This decision from Dot Rotten captures the enduring tension between group flow and individual assertions of supremacy. In terms of Sawyer's denotation, Dot Rotten is 'driving' proceedings.[17] He provides little to no outlet for other performers, particularly Spyro, to grasp a hold or influence the future nature of the performance. But while driving a performance can be seen as derisory, particularly by Sawyer with respect to improvisatory theatre, Dot Rotten's divergence is exhilarating. Initiating a complete rupture with the emergent and unfolding collaborative process, this move set up a consequent three minute passage wherein Dot and Sir Spyro dovetailed off each other with aplomb, with Spyro bringing in a classic Dot Rotten instrumental 'Real Talk 3' following '10 out of 10' (audiovisual example 5b, 1:02–4:54).

The combined novelty of Dot Rotten's entrance, the MC's wheel and Dot's determination to continue in spite of the wheel, resulted in a tense phase of play. Despite temporarily derailing the performance, Dot's actions provided propulsion and energy. This energy was then iteratively built back into the performance. Furthermore, this manoeuvre's success was also contingent on the way in which Spyro reacted to the change. Dot's 'intensification' was fully harnessed by Spyro, who attentively listened and adeptly interpreted Dot's markedly forceful performance suggestions.[18] This instance, while an

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[17] Sawyer, *Group Creativity*, 9.

[18] Monson, *Saying Something*, 139.

exemplary demonstration of the MC wheel, also shows how levelling up can be paradoxically contingent on both individual fervour and sensitive group work from others present.

Type 3 – The DJ's Wheel

'Them man think that *they* got the wheel up, but the reload was a wheel up for the riddim', Rhimez.

In a similar vein to MC's getting the wheel on the basis of their performance, tracks can be reloaded for the 'riddim' alone. This reload variant is deeply indebted to sound system culture. However, its role in grime music differs slightly. In grime the ownership of the reload is more hotly contested. Grime's fervent and hyperactive involvement of MCs—as opposed to the (generalised)[19] reggae deejay's facilitating of proceedings—can lead audience members (and artists) into believing that the reload was for the MC, rather than for the DJ's selection. Similarly to the MC's wheel, then, power dynamics are once again pertinent. The following two examples help frame these power dynamics: firstly through MCs unduly taking credit for a wheel; secondly through demonstrating MCs' frustration at their agency being overshadowed by the DJ's usage of a 'big instrumental'.

I spoke with Trim about how MCs tend to claim ownership over a wheel that should belong to the DJ.

> Sometimes when the track gets wheeled, it's for the track itself. A lot of the time some people hear they get a wheel up and act as if it was theirs. But it's really a case of the track has come in at the right time and everyone was feeling it. You have to be able to differentiate. Some people are not fooled by it. You can act as much as you want that it was your wheel but the crowd will be like 'nah, nah, nah, but that tune!'

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[19] This is not to disavow the dense lyrical arsenal of reggae deejays. Events such as Sting heavily feature lyrical provocations. In these scenarios it is harder to ascertain the ownership of the wheel. Similarly social commentary, live improvisation, and to an extent slackness, are all present in a sound system performance.

> You should be able to tell [as an MC]. If you're spitting on set and you're going
>
> crazy thinking 'yeah this is the ting', and everyone's looking at you like 'nah it's not the ting',
>
> but then the tune comes in and everyone is like 'oooh, yeah it is the ting', you should know.
>
> And people know that wasn't you bruv, that was the tune.[20]

These tensions often appear on set, as evidenced by Rhimez's bar above. Hitman Tiga also

spoke to this issue.

> You know Rhimez? Rhimez has a bar about the reload for the tune. He makes a lot of MCs
>
> seem stupid. That's why a lot of MCs don't like 'Rhythm 'n' Gash' now.[21]

Tiga's reference to 'Rhythm 'n' Gash' attends directly to our second concern. This track has

taken on a status that is prized and maligned in equal measure (see Spooky in Chapter 3). Its

appearance in sets is guaranteed a reload, and it has become a ritualised expectation.

However, many MCs become frustrated at its appearance, since it removes their agency. It is

also often mocked by other artists, see Canadian MC Tre Mission's tweet (Figure 5.2).[22]

There is a level of complexity here. While its usage is often defamed, its

combination with the entry of a new MC can be scintillating. An example from DJ Kaylee

Kay, alongside the Girls of Grime collective, saw the instrumental combine strongly with

the arrival of North London MC C Cane. Following on from an MC whose delivery was

off-beat, C Cane powerfully arrived with clarity and precision. Her performance, in this case,

merited the reload as much as the track selection.[23] Its general usage though, sees it act as a

'specific pejorative term' within group improvisatory performance. Much like Dot Rotten's

commandeering of Firmer Dee's set, its appearance provides other actors with a restricted

set of options moving forwards.[24]

Primarily though, a DJ wheel should be a sign of appreciation for the DJ's selection.

This could be owing to the track being a rarity, an out-of-print release, a specifically made

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[20] Trim, 2017.

[21] Hitman Tiga, 2017.

[22] Joseph Patterson, "The Rise of 'Rhythm & Gash' (according to Social Media)", *Complex UK*, July 20, 2015.

[23] DJ Kaylee Kay, "Grime Originals: The Female Takeover", Rinse FM, London: May 22, 2018.

[24] Sawyer, *Group Creativity*, 9.

Figure 5.2 – Tweet from Tre Mission, July 8, 2015.

dubplate, or simply an exemplary choice of tune to fit in with the performance. The fact that resultant power dynamics become the principal focus of discussion with practitioners is perhaps endemic of the way in which this phase of play—while oftentimes demonstrating shrewd attentive improvisatory group practice, such as in Episode 5.1—is continually coloured by the tension between individual and group.

(ii) Reload Tactics

As we have seen above, the three principal types of reload are rife with power relationship issues. In order to manage proceedings, DJs and MCs alike must listen closely, react accordingly and collaboratively contribute towards an unfolding performance. While Dot Rotten's contribution was lauded for individual brilliance, there are moments wherein artists can seek to subvert, or drive, proceedings in a way that is not appreciated by the rest of the roster. The reload is an incredibly volatile technique. Its sonic rupture initiated by the DJ pulling the tune back can open up a number of possibilities for forward movement. Attentive responses allow for continued 'intensification' towards new moments of climax, or periods of group flow (see Section 2). These maintain an emergent trajectory, that while

encountering periods of repetition—through the restarting of an instrumental—is part of a 'changing same' that progresses and develops in new ways.[25]

This section looks at three tactics utilised by MCs and DJs to try and secure a reload that upset this trajectory and the accumulation of energy. Debate over these tactics' legitimacy is incredibly heated. As such, contributions from interviewees will be juxtaposed with examples, offering multiple perspectives on the conditions required for certain tactics to be permissible.

Type 1 – Forcing the Reload

'Leave your forced reloads in double-oh-five', Bliss.

During performances, instances occur wherein MCs explicitly try to earn a reload from the DJ. This tactic of 'forcing the reload' takes place when an MC switches up their lyrical pattern to quickly perform a 'hype lyric', upon hearing an impending drop from the DJ (see Chapter 4, Section 1). Here, the intention is to earn a 'drop wheel' from marrying their big lyric with the novelty and sonic punch of the new instrumental's drop. Often highly contentious, evidenced by the lyric above from Hertfordshire MC Bliss, it can be seen as a legitimate tactic.

> Kraze: You can't just be spitting some mediocre bar and then you turn to the hype thing straight away, shout and try to get the wheel.[26]
>
> Hitman Tiga: That is a real tactic. That definitely happens. I may have actually been guilty of that myself. You might be spraying something that's a bit technical for the riddim so you might just draw the pattern back and take something else.[27]

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[25] Le Roi Jones, *Black Music* (New York: Da Capo Press, 1998), 180; Monson, *Saying Something*, 139.

[26] Kraze, 2017.

[27] Hitman Tiga, 2017.

While these contributions are contrasting, there is scope to find nuance in their words. Whereas Kraze distinguishes steadfastly between 'mediocre' lyrics and 'hype' lyrics to get a reload, Tiga presents a situation wherein he alters his pattern to fit the instrumental, arguably a shrewd, musical (and metapragmatic) decision. What is clearly apparent, though, is that artists consider their lyrics in tiers and they are chosen according to circumstance.

Kraze's contribution is evidenced in a performance from East London MC Discarda in 2012. Here, Discarda switched up and drew for his 'hype lyrics' to rescue a situation where he was encountering difficulties.

Episode 5.3
🎤 **Discarda, MIK, Flow Dan, Merky Ace, Ego, Obese, J Deep**
📻 **Logan Sama, "After Hours ft. MIK, Discarda and friends", Kiss FM, London: February 4, 2012.**
💿 **Audiovisual example 5c**

This "After Hours" set took place on Logan Sama's Kiss FM show in 2012. It was organised in support of East London MC Discarda's new release 'Rhyme On' and his collaborative single with Lewisham MC MIK entitled 'Lord of the Hypes'. MIK's crew Family Tree were in attendance (Merky Ace, Ego), alongside artists who came to support Discarda (fellow East London MC Flow Dan, Obese and J Deep).

The set initially starts well, however Discarda's re-entry posed a number of challenges. His opening sixteen bar offers new lyrical content, which he hadn't performed on radio before. These 'freshers' (see AJ Tracey's denotation in Episode 4.3) were successfully delivered. Following this characteristically violent and abrasive passage he loses his place. This is the first point at which Discarda tries to save face. Rather than continue with his new lyric, he instead rebuilds momentum using his trademark two-bar transition lyric: 'L double-E, L double-O, S, E C A Double-N O N' (audiovisual example 3c, 0:36).

After eight bars of this, however, he misses the drop. To compensate, he repeatedly utters 'b-b-b-b bare mixer!', in reference to Logan Sama's mixing. This punctuated and plosive passage is considerably augmented by Obese, who joins in with Discarda. Through

this they develop the mistake into a seemingly legitimate performative decision. Brinner has written on spontaneous imitation in gamelan that 'momentarily link musicians in relationships that are not sustained'.[28] Similarly to imitation in gamelan, this section soon fell apart. Neither artist was sure on how to progress from their moment of convergence. Instead, the instrumental is left to run on its own before Discarda speaks up to qualify the situation at hand: 'Getting the new ones out. Off my chest. Let's do the old ones maybe.' Following this, Logan Sama drops in a new instrumental by Teddy Music. Discarda then re-enters with his most famous hype lyric, known colloquially as 'Waterboy'. This earns a coveted drop wheel from Logan Sama and appreciation from the other MCs in the studio (audiovisual example 5c, 1:08–1:30).

This passage is of substantial interest for a number of reasons. Firstly, it demonstrates how other performers (such as Obese) help to collaboratively fashion forward momentum in an improvisatory manner. Secondly, it demonstrates Discarda utilising a number of performance techniques to rescue his trajectory (transition lyrics and hype lyrics). This allowed him to rebuild his reputation following a challenging phase of play.

Despite falling off and allowing the instrumental to run for eight bars without intervention, Discarda knew that his 'top tier' lyric would garner a reload. This was perhaps further facilitated by his close friendship with Logan Sama (see Type 3 below). While seen by many as a divisive tactic, the performance's context—Logan had a huge listenership at the time on Kiss FM, and the video upload received in excess of 50,000 views—makes Discarda's decision seem more understandable. To the untrained ear, Discarda got a reload and the performance continued, thus reaffirming Discarda's pedigree. His decision to use 'Waterboy', however, resolutely forces the reload as a quasi-ritualised expectation.

Type 2 – Begging the Reload

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28 Brinner, *Knowing Music,* 225.

In Episode 5.3, Discarda utilised a number of performance techniques to shrewdly rescue the performance and ensure forward movement. Other reload tactics, however, are overt and direct. 'Begging the wheel' is particularly divisive. Although similar in intent from the MC—since they are trying to get the DJ to wheel the tune—'begging the wheel' provides the DJ with little or no scope to continue.

Within this there are two principal variants. The first variant involves MCs heightening their tone, shouting so loud that the DJ simply has to reload the track. The combined sonority of the MC's performance and the instrumental become so cacophonous that it would be embarrassing if the DJ did not succumb to the MC's wishes. DJ's are often resentful of this practice. On many occasions I have deliberately ignored this driving tactic. However, it often has its desired effect. North London MC Capo Lee also wrote a lyric that speaks to this issue: 'Man wanna scream and hype on a drop, but it's bare awkward if you don't get a wheel.'

The second variant is even more explicit, with the MC verbally requesting the reload, such as Jendor on Logan Sama's set in audiovisual example 4k. While Jendor's example was ironically cheered, other instances can be far less amicable. Some MCs develop a reputation for begging the wheel. In March 2016, East London MC Stanley[29] overtly criticised DJ Jack Dat while they were performing together on a set for BBC 1Xtra's Sian Anderson. This was seen as very disrespectful, particularly since it was being broadcast live on air to a large audience. Stanley, however, felt that it was actually Jack Dat being disrespectful, through not wheeling up the tune: 'Oi, Jack Dat. What you saying? Jack Dat don't jack [reload] nobody you know.'[30] Stanley was subsequently embarrassed when Merky Ace received a reload from Jack Dat just a minute after he voiced his grievances. In this situation, the DJ was able to assert his role as ultimate arbiter, and the tactic from Stanley was not incorporated into the performance's emergent trajectory. Rather, its continuation explicitly negated his interjection, with the other artists continuing to collaboratively build.

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[29] Name anonymised.

[30] "DJ Jack Dat with Sian Anderson", *YouTube*, March 9, 2016, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=I1dmzDUZhi8.

Type 3 – Reload for 'your boy'

This role as ultimate arbiter can also be used by DJs for their own gain or to assert their crew affiliation. In Episode 4.1 I mentioned briefly how Kraze used his relationship with Spooky to his advantage. However, this manifest itself in a considered and attentive build towards a climactic moment where they both levelled up. In other instances, DJs can deliberately reload their own MCs with a view to garnering artificial 'hype' in a difficult situation. Similarly, they may be unwilling to wheel an MC from a rival crew, even if their performance merits a reload.

> Reloads should be on the energy. Loads of people are getting reloads, for me, for no reason. You got a reload cause your boys are here and they know your bars. But what you just did, if you did that in a club, or in a place that doesn't know grime? It's just going to be like 'ok, right. What's going on here?' Rather than a reload for a genuine burst of energy.[31]

Krucial's words here are interesting to consider. The notion of 'genuine burst of energy' is critical, since it attends to an exponential combination of elements working together, rather than the enforcement of a ritualised expectation.

Despite alluding to the importance of 'genuine' energy, instances such as those described by Krucial are fairly commonplace in grime. Recall the 'shifting turf' that afforded Saint P the upper hand in his clash with Reece West in Episode 4.2. In October 2018, Saint P also benefitted from a home advantage, on a set organised for fellow crew member PK's birthday on East London station NTS. This particular show featured in excess of 30 MCs. However, towards its end a clash emerged between Saint P and Faultsz, allegedly owing to Faultsz jumping in front of Saint P and 'snaking' his contribution. The five minute clash featured both artists creatively reworking their lyrics on the spot, inserting the rival artist's name in to their lyrics and openly defaming them.

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[31] Krucial, 2017.

At one point, Saint P received three wheel ups in a row (audiovisual example 5d, 2:08–3:01). This is known as a 'hat-trick', taking its name from scoring three goals in football (see Chapter 6 for further attention to footballing terminology). Saint received this hat-trick for the successful execution of one of his trademark bars: 'S-d-d-d-daint-d-daint-d-daint, and I've got pattern'. Faultsz immediately called out claiming that it was 'bias' and his protestations were arguably well-founded. One of the wheels, in particular, was initiated by an audience member, who reached over the DJ to pull back the track themselves.[32]

(iii) Collaborative building and climactic moments

Following on from the examples above, it is apparent that forcing and begging the reload carries a substantial risk. Overt reliance on the reload could result in the artists having nothing to say if the track isn't wheeled. Reticence, or even complete rejection, from the DJ to adhere to these driving performative suggestions can result in ridicule. Whereas Discarda was ultimately successful, Stanley's attempts damaged rather than helped his cause. Similarly, if a DJ is seen to be providing other MCs with preferential treatment, this can again disrupt the unfolding performance.

In light of these ulterior tactics and power relationships born out of reloads, it is important to recall the ways in which MCs can collaboratively work with DJs towards moments of climax and levelling up. We have already established that artists can assemble tiers of lyrics, utilising them at appropriate moments. Bliss (above) has called for MCs to 'pattern their bars' and this is telling. A key element of grime MC craft is organising and structuring your lyrics so they can ebb and flow.

Within hip-hop studies, both Justin Williams and Kyle Adams have written about this phenomena of 'patterning'. For Adams, avoiding a 'predictable pattern of rhymed syllables' can both create 'rhythmic variety and articulat[e] form'. While he uses an example

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[32] General Courts, "PK Birthday Set", NTS Radio, London: October 18, 2018.

of MC Gift of the Gab's (Blackalicious) recorded oeuvre, this articulation of form is a key consideration for grime artists in the live domain.[33] In Chapter 4, for example, there were multiple demonstrations of artists using 'transition lyrics' to ameliorate and smoothen out movement between sections. 16-bar units are often arranged so that they have moments of calm balanced with rhythmic intensity.

The principal difference here, though, is the use of pre-composed lyrics in an appropriate manner to align with the demands of the particular performance scenario. This is accounted for by Williams, who expressed difference with Adams over a number of issues, most notably Adams' necessity for 'narrative unity' in lyrics, and the linearity of process. Adams' text presents hip-hop lyric writing as a task conducted *after* the production of the beat. For Williams, however, there is a 'nuance and complexity of process'.[34]

In line with Williams' assertions about recorded hip-hop, there exists a co-construction of lyrics and instrumentals in grime. This is the case for recorded output—as attested to in interview by Wiley, and evidenced through numerous MCs also being producers (Skepta, Dizzee Rascal, Crafty 893)—but especially during performance.[35] Recall Novelist in Chapter 4: 'I like to pattern things to the music. I've learned a format so that I can write bars without any instrumental but the way that I've written it when I hear certain beats on a set I know automatically to drop this lyric or to drop that lyric'.[36] MCs both compose and 'pattern' lyrics in advance, but their live enactment is predicated upon direct engagement with the unfolding rhythmic and musical structure put forward by the DJ.

In turn, we also need to consider DJs' contributions to the reload, its acquisition of energy, and subsequent moments of climax. This section has shown how DJs can yield substantial results through being receptive to the situation at hand, such as with Sir Spyro's

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[33] Kyle Adams, "On the Metrical Techniques of Flow in Rap Music", *Music Theory Online* 15, no.5 (2009).

[34] Williams, "Beats and Flows…".

[35] Martin Clark, "Hyperdub Archive: Eski Beat: An Interview with Wiley – Part 1 (October 2003) - Fabric Blog", *fabric london*, accessed February 15, 2020, https://www.fabriclondon.com/blog/view/hyperdub-archive-eski-beat-an-interview-with-wiley-part-1-october-2003.

[36] Novelist, 2016.

due deference towards Dot Rotten in a moment of individual brilliance. Or, through being creatively engaged, cutting and chopping, or dropping in an instrumental at the correct moment.

Myriad factors and actors can influence this. Power relationships are constantly at play. However, the reload is enacted primarily off of a shared acknowledgement that the energy levels are high. This is either iterative, from a succession of interactions that progressively build 'hype', or it can be exponential resulting from a 'genuine burst of energy'. And while often antiphonal, interactions frequently take place between multiple MCs and DJs, and this negotiation can be complex (as evidenced in Episode 5.2 and 5.3). Fundamentally, though, its enactment is born out of successful interactions that subsequently cause the emergent performance to reach an energy level wherein the track simply has to be pulled back.

> When the energy hits a certain level, you've just gotta say fuck it and spin back the deck. Or if someone spits that bar that just goes crazy or if they're in beef with someone at that time and they slew him? Wheel it up again. There's so many different…it's literally just a point of the vibe's just gone crazy, you've gotta pull it up now, you can't leave it going no more.[37]

The reload, then, is a principal example of grime's collective creativity, and the paradoxical contingency of individual brilliance and emergent process. Its enactment is secured through intense listening, improvisatory ability and metapragmatic decision making, resulting in both frenetic and measured 'intensification' towards a climactic moment.

Section 2 – Rallies

'Rally on a tune like Novak and Andy. Rally on a tune Like Roger and Raf. Rally on a tune like say a man's Berdych. Rally on a tune just like Stanislas', Kwam.[38]

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[37] Eastwood, 2017.

[38] Kwam X Trends, *Rally EP,* 2016, UK: Mean Streets.

This chapter's next section examines our second phase of play, the rally. Unlike the reload, this process is almost universally long-form in its actualisation. As such it demands considered instances of 'group flow' in order to *level up*. Rallies are transitional, and an examination of rallies can unpack movement *between* phases of play. These transitions are vital for grime performance as there are no stoppages between tracks (aside from the temporary rupture caused by a reload). As such, they require a heightened level of (musical) dialogue between participants. David Borgo wrote about interstitial passages in improvisatory performance, stating that 'many of the most effective collective improvisations involve decisive musical "phase spaces" and transitions between phases are all negotiated by the group with an awareness of what has occurred and a conception of what may follow'. Through attending to the rally, we can unpack how grime artists negotiate these interstitial "phase spaces": how they collectively work together to negotiate a 'way in' to a rally phase; how the artists subsequently improvise during this phase; and how they negotiate a 'way out'.[39]

The rally itself is best summarised with reference to its namesake from racquet sports tennis and badminton. It is a quick fire, but lengthy exchange between MCs. One MC will spit a lyric of a certain length, then another MC will spit a lyric of the same length, before firing it back across to the other MC. Kwam's lyric above demonstrates this metaphoric link. Its rapid rate of change requires acute awareness between the performers present. As such, it typically works best with crews who have been working together over a sustained period. Once the microphone is passed back to an MC, they have to automatically pick up up the mantle and spray their passage without losing their place.

There are two principal ways in which a rally is approached. The first is artificial, either resulting from time constraint or an explicit announcement. The second is emergent, building naturally out of the performance. Through an examination of both variations (Episode 5.4 and Episode 5.5), this section will distinguish between enforced group practice, and genuine creative initiative, (moving us closer towards quantifying Krucial's 'genuine

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[39] David Borgo, *Sync or Swarm*, 61.

burst of energy'). An enforced rally phase demands immediate fixity and can often result in substantial issues. The phase's natural emergence however—born out of a collective response to MCs' non-linguistic cues and performative suggestions—offers fluidity and natural sense of progression.[40] According to Kwam:

> There's no set structure to it [radio sets]. We just meet on the radio. When you go to sets again and again with people and bounce ideas off each other, it's natural. You're going to learn their bars, just naturally because you've heard them over again so it's a reflex thing. It's not something that people have spoken about. So, me personally, I haven't spoken about 'oh when I do this bit everyone has to do this'. It just kind of happens. I think those are the most organic moments in a grime set for sure.[41]

(i) The Rally's explicit announcement

Episode 5.4
🎤**Master Peace, Squintz, Boss Renz, Mic of Course, JP, JoSoSick, Lusionist, Jabz, Logan, Mr Myki, Luciferian.**
📻**DJ Argue, "DJ Argue w Jammz, Black Ops, Renz, M3", Radar Radio, London: June 17th, 2017.**
💿 **Audiovisual example 5e**

When expediency forces a rally phase into play, the results are often chaotic. This is well evidenced in an example from Croydon-based DJ Argue's residency on Radar Radio.[42] During his time on Radar, Argue championed up-and-coming MCs. This particular show featured a clash between two of these artists: Renz of Mob Set, and M3 of the Collective. This clash was highly charged and nearly thirty young people were in the room, many of whom had rival affiliations. Following the clash, there were five minutes remaining of his show. Rather than gradually close proceedings, Argue saw an opportunity: 'Oi, listen we've got five minutes left. Do you lot want to have a quick squeeze off? Quick. 8 bars, 8 bars.

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[40] Brinner, *Knowing Music*, 197.

[41] Kwam, 2017.

[42] Radar Radio was based in Central London. It ceased broadcasting in 2018.

Quickly. Quickly, quickly, quickly. Yeah.' Immediately, all of the MCs in the room tried to get hold of the microphone, however Mob Set's Master Peace grabbed it first and announced himself with repeated iterations of two two-bar refrains (audiovisual example 5e, 0:30).

> Master P-E-A-C-E, Master P-E-A-C what?
>
> Master P-E-A-C-E, Master P-E-A-C what?
>
> Chatting and bragging about Ea-zy- E, Chatting and bragging about Ea-zy- what?
>
> Chatting and bragging about Ea-zy- E, Chatting and bragging about Ea-zy- what?

Following Peace's 8-bar section, another MC tried to grapple the microphone out of Peace's hands. Instead Peace held tight, resolute, and began to re-spit the same 8-bar passage. Just one bar into this recapitulation, Argue pulled back the track amidst audible discontent from other MCs in attendance. Cries of '8 bars!' and '8 bars, fam!' are strikingly clear (audiovisual example 5e, 0:49). The microphone was then passed to fellow Mob Set member Squintz, who similarly flaunted convention. Making a mistake upon entry, Squintz decided to hold the mic and compose himself for re-entry over the instrumental's drop (audiovisual example 3e, 1:04–1:43).

The rally then regained some momentum. Consequent MCs Renz, Mic of Course, and JoSoSick all spat for eight bars, passing the microphone smoothly. Argue, however, then made a mistake of his own, dropping a new instrumental in out of time, clanging the mix, and completely throwing off West London MC Lusionist.

From this example, it is clearly apparent that explicit calls for an '8-bar rally' can be rife with complications. Argue's announcement to an unprepared room filled with MCs from different crews saw power relationships come to the fore. Mob Set asserted authority over proceedings and flagrantly ignored the 8-bar call, and there was palpable confusion over the order of MCs. Consequently, there was no common thread to the performance. The tacit understanding and close listening needed to negotiate this passage of complex interplay was absent. As a result, the artificiality of the phase was audibly foregrounded.

Rather than fostering an exciting passage of interplay, Argue's announcement resulted in a situation where the 'speed of interaction' required overwhelmed the participants.[43]

(ii) The Rally's emergence in group creative practice

Episode 5.5
🎤**Lyrical Strally, Ets, Big Zuu, Dee 7, AJ Tracey, PK, Saint P**
📻**Sir Spyro, "Grime Show: AJ Tracey, Big Zuu, PK, Lyrical Strally, Saint P, Ets & Dee 7 (MTM)", Rinse FM, London: June 16, 2017.**
💿 **Audiovisual example 5f**

'MTM see the crew got shellers', Big Zuu.

In contrast, the rally's emergence within an already-unfolding performance is often more successful. This is particularly the case if negotiated by MCs who have close, collective affiliations (as opposed to the amalgam of 30 MCs in Episode 5.4). This particular set took place just 24 hours before Argue's show. Organised in support of AJ Tracey's *Lil Tracey EP,* it featured MCs from West London crews MTP (AJ Tracey, Big Zuu, Ets, Dee 7) and YGG (Lyrical Strally, Saint P, PK) working under the wider moniker 'MTM'. Sir Spyro was at the helm for the duration, and the strong relationships between the MCs present—they had all been attending radio sets together for at least a year prior to this event—enabled the crew to move through multiple phases during the performance, and *level up* into considered periods of group flow. An attention to this movement between phase spaces speaks to the importance of 'active listening' in a crew and the ability to make 'micro-adjustments' through the collective improvisation. Accordingly, the following analysis will work through this particular rally's five key stages.[44]

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[43] Borgo, *Sync or Swarm,* 81.

[44] Borgo, *Sync or Swarm*, 124.

Stage 1 – Entry and Solidification
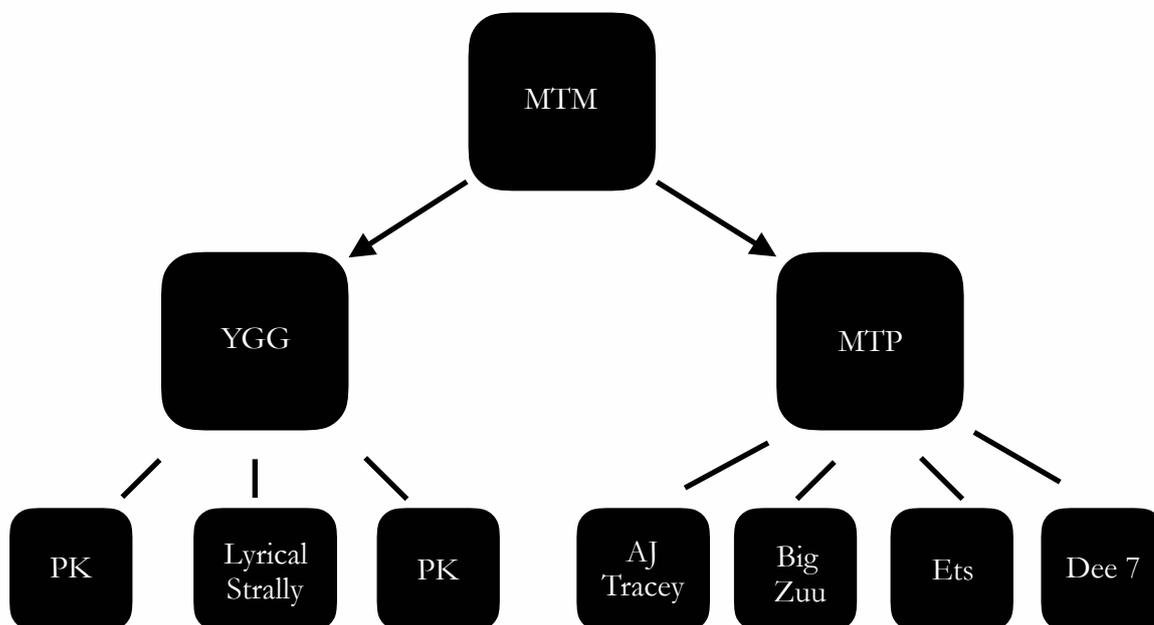
Figure 5.3 – MTM's MC line-up, June 2017.

A rally phase's emergence is contingent on a number of factors, while its length depends on consequent MCs' decision(s) whether or not to incorporate prior suggestions into their performance. An artist may implicitly suggest a rally through only spitting eight bars, but the following MC may continue on their own path For this set, the rally emerges around eighteen minutes into the performance. It lasts for a period of seven minutes, and its entry was facilitated by Lyrical Strally and Ets.

Just prior to the rally's point of entry, Lyrical Strally spits an uncharacteristically long 96-bar passage (roughly three minutes in length). During this time Spyro brings in two new tracks and the vibe builds (audiovisual example 5f, 0:00–2:40). Deftly moving through a number of transition lyrics, Strally skips across an abrasive and highly percussive track produced by J Beatz, before Spyro gradually brings in his track 'Tekkerz'. Its half-time sub bass feel provides space for the performers. Strally's ferocity reneges, allowing room to open up with the entry of Ets.

Ets' entry is of principal interest. Considering Strally had just performed a 96-bar passage, it was entirely feasible for Ets to follow on with a similarly lengthy passage. However, he immediately draws for a four-bar 'hype lyric'.

> Man-a lock off the dance, drop one whoosh make gyal wanna glance,
>
> E-T-S manna lock off the rave, drop one whoosh make gyal watch face,
>
> E-T-S man-a lock off the dance, drop one whoosh make gyal wanna glance,
>
> E-T-S manna lock off the rave, drop one whoosh make gyal watch face.

Through choosing to loop a repeated four-bar passage, Ets indicates a transition, quickening of momentum and heightening of intensity. Through hearing this, the other MCs and Sir Spyro acknowledge that the pace has changed. In addition, while performing his seventh bar, Ets looks around to see who he can pass his headphones to. This does not affect an immediate change, since Big Zuu is already stationed at the other microphone. Nonetheless this action alludes to impending movement, through Ets indicating that he was happy for someone to take over after his short contribution.

The phase's solidification, however, is ultimately contingent on Big Zuu. After Zuu seamlessly takes over from Ets (there is no apparent visual cue between the artists) he has a number of choices to make. Referencing Sawyer's 'continuing process', Ets' indexical presupposition is up in the air.[45] Having heard Ets spit eight bars, Zuu could either carry on regardless or incorporate Ets' suggestion into the ongoing performance and restrict himself to eight bars. At this moment of time, then, the 8-bar rally is not quite secure. However, both Zuu's decision to adopt the 8-bar closely followed by his overt indication for Dee 7 to take over—gesturing with both hands towards him—fully announces the rally phase. Ets' performance suggestion is successfully absorbed back into the emergent, unfolding performance, as the energy iteratively builds (audiovisual example 5f, 2:56–3:07).

Stage 2 – The Rally Phase

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[45] Sawyer, *Group Creativity*, 89.

Once within the rally proper a number of further negotiations have to take place. Whereas some rallies are dyadic, this example featured six MCs who had to work out an order amongst themselves with minimal time, while the performance was ongoing (thus reaffirming the multidirectionality of grime exchanges). This period could be seen as 'locally unstable' since the parameters were not yet assured.[46] However, on the surface the performance itself does not suffer. This period is negotiated well, and the order becomes stabilised by the time AJ Tracey enters (audiovisual example 5f, 3:22). This stability is exemplified by the calmness with which PK takes the headphones from Dee 7 while walking towards the microphone. Here, he readily supports AJ's performance through joining in unison at the end of every bar (audiovisual example 5f, 3:22–3:38).

The 8-bar rally then lasts for seven minutes, with contributions for all six MCs present. Figure 5.4 provides an overview of the running order, and an array of supplementary details including DJ gesture and points of unison. Jones and Pinnock employ a similar system for documenting of a Scientist sound system performance in Sheffield from 1983.[47]

Time	Stage	MC(s)	Instrumental	Comments
00:00		Lyrical Strally	Neon Beats – 'Quantum (J Beatz Remix)' Sir Spyro - 'Tekkerz'	96-bar Passage.
02:43	1 – Entry and Solidification	Ets		8-bars passage. 4-bar hype lyric repeated.
02:56		Big Zuu		8-bar passage.
03:09	2 – Rally Phase	Dee 7		8-bar passage.
03:22		AJ Tracey		8-bar passage with accompaniment from PK.

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[46] Borgo, *Sync Or Swarm*, 81.

[47] Jones and Pinnock, *Scientists of Sound*, 99-101.

Time	Stage	MC(s)	Instrumental	Comments
03:36		PK		8-bar passage. Spyro starts to chop-in 'Spirit Bomb'
03:50		Lyrical Strally	Ezro – 'Spirit Bomb'	8-bar passage.
04:03		Ets		8-bar passage.
04:18		Big Zuu		8-bar passage.
04:32				
04:46		AJ Tracey		8-bar passage. Spyro cuts out low-end of instrumental.
05:00		PK	New Instrumental.	8-bar passage. Arrives with drop of new instrumental.
05:09		Lyrical Strally		8-bar passage. Four bar hype lyric repeated.
05:22		Ets		8-bar passage. 'Wraydar' gradually brought through by Spyro.
05:38		Big Zuu		8-bar passage. Spyro blending two instrumentals.
05:51		Dee 7	Splurt Diablo – 'Wraydar'	8-bar passage. Arrives with drop of 'Wraydar'. Towards the end Spyro starts to bring in a new beat.
06:02		AJ Tracey		8-bar passage. Heightened cadences. Spyro chopping.
06:17		PK		2-bar loop repeated four times. Spyro brings in new instrumental.

Time	Stage	MC(s)	Instrumental	Comments
06:31	3 – Back to back	Lyrical Strally & Ets	Kid D – 'Phantom Creeper' Dullah Beatz – 'Gun Smoke'	42-bar passage. 2-bar variational back-to-back. Mutually supporting each other. After 8 bars, Spyro drops in new instrumental. Track reloaded by Spyro after two bars. Ets and Strally restart and continue for 32 bars. Spyro ferociously chops in a new instrumental.
07:45		Ets		8-bar passage. With backing from Big Zuu. Punch rhythms from Spyro.
08:00	4 – Rally Refrain	Big Zuu		Enters and immediately gets a wheel from Spyro. 8-bar passage follows with backing from PK.
08:32		PK		8-bar passage. 4-bar hype lyric looped with chops.
08:48		AJ Tracey		8-bar passage. Its repeat gets a wheel from Spyro. 8-bar repeat with punch rhythm.
09:35		Saint P		2-bars on entry. Reload from Spyro.
09:58	5 – Exit and Transition	Saint P	Sir Spyro – 'Ya Dun Kno Already'	Saint P spits for 56 bars. After 32-bars Spyro brings in new instrumental. Moves out of phase.

It should be apparent from Figure 5.4 that Spyro's role is critical for the rally phase's success (and for outward negotiation). Earlier in the set Spyro was predisposed to more abrasive chopping, something which substantially builds hype but can be off-putting to some MCs (see Chapter 4). At Stage 2, though, he takes a considered step back. This allows the MCs to develop and move through the early stages of the rally. There are multiple points, too, where he could reload the track, notably five minutes in when the drop of the new instrumental arrives with PK's entry. However, Spyro allows the rally to flourish. His adjustment, therefore, temporarily suspends acknowledgement of individual fervour through a reload in favour of acute awareness of the emergent group trajectory, towards a point where the crew were beginning to 'take it to another level'.[48]

Stage 3 – Back to backs: Negotiating a way out

'Dem man can't rally on a riddim like we. Dem man can't rally on a riddim like us', Manga Saint Hilaire and GHSTLY XXVII.[49]

After a period of time resolutely within the rally phase space, the crew subsequently had to collectively move towards a 'way out'. These points of departure can prove challenging. In this situation the initial exit point is fashioned by a back-to-back between Ets and Lyrical Strally. Their exchange is further compounded by a drop-in from Sir Spyro eight bars in that forces the issue and merits a reload (audiovisual example 5f, 6:50).

The exchange between Ets and Lyrical Strally is remarkable, considering that its emergence also relies on the way in which the rally was organically established. Had Ets not initially followed on from Lyrical Strally—in the transition from Stage 1 to Stage 2—they

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[48] Monson, *Saying Something*, 139.

[49] Manga Saint Hilaire and GHSTLY XXVII, 'Back to Back', 2017, UK: None.

would not have been able to negotiate this way out. Owing to this order, though, Ets and Strally could craft an exit point through entering into a pre-composed lyrical exchange (further exemplifying the dynamism with which lyrical patterns are used in grime performance, see Section 1). This exchange quickens the pace from an eight-bar rally to a two bar back-to-back (unison lines are emboldened).

> Lyrical Strally: Ets and Strally know we're going on irate, tints get knocked if a man try violate
>
> Ets: Ets and strally, **moving bammy** (paranoid), washed MC's can't **violate**,
>
> Strally: Washed MCs get left like the dishes, guarantee no-one's touching my plates,
>
> [Spyro pulls the track back, Kid D's 'Phantom Creeper' enters with two bars of pre-drop build up]
>
> Ets: Washed MC's get left like the fishes, guarantee **man can't splash round** my way,
>
> ['Phantom Creeper' drops]
>
> Strally: Get a new Xan cause my man sank, Magikarp all you can do is splash,
>
> Ets: Get a new 16 **my man's whack, Vardy chat shit manna get banged!**

This point of convergence and interplay is an exemplary example of how MCs can incorporate a pre-composed passage into an improvisatory structure, its addition bringing palpable energy to the unfolding performance. It culminates with the drop of 'Phantom Creeper' combining with a topical lyric from Ets referring to Leicester City striker Jamie Vardy. The subsequent reload offers the first break in the rally phase, and a chance to move forward. The discipline with which Spyro holds back from wheeling the tune throughout Stage 2 adds gravitas to this eventual point of rupture. This back-to-back exchange, born out of a long-term association, both quickened the pace, brought forth substantial

excitement from their densely interactional display, and ultimately resulted in a climax after a period of 'intensification' and iterative building of energy.[50]

Stage 4 – The Rally Refrain

'What we saying? Still 8 bars?', Big Zuu.

Following the reload from Spyro, this sonic point of rupture offered scope to open up into a new phase. Instead of this continuation, however, the performance briefly moved back into a rally. This resulted from Big Zuu's entry after the back-to-back with one of his 'reload bars' or 'hype lyrics', consequently earning a reload (audiovisual example 5f, 7:50). This point possesses substantial energy and is of significance for the rally's direction. Big Zuu's decision to follow on from Lyrical Strally and Ets with a reload bar meant that the energy level was maintained, rather than segueing out into a new more long-form section. Following the wheel, Big Zuu asks 'What we saying? Still 8 bars?' This question is also of importance for the ongoing direction of the performance, since it (briefly) re-establishes an eight-bar exchange.

It is also the first explicit verbal acknowledgement of the rally. Up until this point, metapragmatic decision making coupled with body language governed the rally. Sawyer's observation that 'the language of music does not allow reflexive commentary on how the performance is proceeding' is useful to reflect on here. It took nearly six minutes before a temporary pause in performance afforded Zuu the terrain to comment on the situation at hand.[51]

Stage 5 – Exit and Transition

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[50] Brinner, *Knowing Music,* 179.

[51] Sawyer, *Group Creativity,* 10.

The rally's eventual end is signalled through the arrival of Saint P, who was late to the booking. Following a wheel on entry, he is then allowed to fully establish himself with an uninterrupted fifty-six bar passage (audiovisual example 5f, 9:34–11:29). This is demonstrated by the refusal Saint P is met with after offering up the mic to Ets once he had sprayed for 16 bars. Instead, Ets points back at Saint P and urges him onwards. This longer exposition signifies a new phase and infers to other MCs present that longer passages are acceptable again. (Ets spits 24 bars, followed by 40 from Big Zuu, 56 from AJ Tracey, 48 from PK and 96 from Saint P to finish).

Aside from Big Zuu's question at the start of Stage 4, this entire rally phase is negotiated through gesture and inference while already performing. Here, MCs have to divide their senses, listen to each other's contributions and react accordingly. Sir Spyro also had to be continually attentive, making shrewd choices about when to interject, through selection, cutting, drop-ins, punch rhythms and reloads.

An extensive engagement with this episode demonstrates the metapragmatic nature of grime performance, while also highlighting myriad possibilities and directions afforded to artists during collective improvisation. Rallies are present in other forms of music, most notably the 'trade-offs' in jazz, exemplified by Dexter Gordon and Wardell Gray's 'The Chase'. However, grime rallies are open to substantial interpretation and are multidirectional in nature. Indeed, 'The Chase' is arguably more formulaic, working from 32-bar exchange down to 4-bar trade offs. The sheer number of MCs on a grime set provides a vast array of possibilities and orderings. Some aspects have been solidified. 8-bars is widely seen as the standard length of a rally turn. However entry, exit and artist orderings are worked out in situ. It is important to remember we are still working with a form that has yet to fully formalise its parameters. As such this balance of technique and innovation is consequentially quite fragile, or fluid. The rally, however, is a strong example of improvisatory practice in grime music that while locally unstable, can provide global comprehension to its audience when enacted successfully.[52]

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[52] Sawyer, *Group Creativity,* 10; Borgo, *Sync or Swarm*, 61.

Conclusion

Through paying close attention to two of grime's principal phases of play, the reload and the rally, this chapter has shown how artists creatively improvise at a local level. Within grime, the reload is typically achieved through a series of successful interactions between an MC (or MCs), a DJ and often an audience. These interactions are sometimes gradual and iterative, but often explosive and immediate. Either way, they cause the emergent performance to reach an energy level wherein the track has to be reloaded. There exists mediation between divergent individuality and collective impetus, yet this dynamic often underpins and can heighten the energy to a point of rupture. In jazz performance, Berliner has written on the 'vehemence with which a player makes musical suggestions [having] bearing on the mutuality of musical exchange'. These dynamics are profoundly at play during the reload phase.[53]

Mutual attentiveness is critical for the rally. Its successful enactment relies on multiple agents negotiating an entry, the phase of play itself, and its subsequent exit. The rally's explicit announcement results in difficulties, while the best examples typically emerge through interplay as part of an unfolding performance. Rallies are distinctive, owing to their multidirectionality and long-form accumulation of energy. Arrival at a fully-fledged rally phase is a prime example of levelling up since an array of artists initially immersed in an ongoing negotiation that has innumerable permutations, results in an implicit move towards aligned 'group flow', where everyone is on the same page.

We have also started to see distinctions here between acts of collective creativity, and forced through manoeuvres. This thesis is concerned with the irruptive potentialities of improvising groups. The reload's succession of metapragmatic suggestions towards a point of climax, and MTM's exemplary manoeuvres through the rally phase have demarcated

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[53] Berliner, *Thinking in Jazz*, 367.

terrain for the ways in which these local processes are actuated. The next chapter, however, looks at how a new technique has emerged and solidified over time. Rather than inducing a ritualised expectation (through 'begging the reload', or otherwise), the 'through ball' is a direct result of collective instances of creativity—or 'genuine bursts of energy', according to Krucial—as part of grime's 'active, fostering milieu'.[54] A variant of the reload, it gained substantial currency during the mid 2000s, with its gradual codification now readily incorporated into grime practice at large. An understanding of the 'through ball' will achieve three things: it will demonstrate how new ideas can solidify within artistic practice in grime; offer robust argumentation for artists' ways of knowing as part of this thesis' performance framework, and provide analysis of grime's most complex improvisatory technique.

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[54] Stengers, "Ecology of Practices", 195.

Chapter 6 – Phases of Play 2: The Through Ball

Introduction

'Mic grip tight, loose grip on the glass. El Shaarawy, man skip then blast', AJ Tracey.[1]

This chapter attends to grime's third phase of play, the through ball. Similarly to the reload and rally discussed in Chapter 5, it is a highly localised, interactional technique. Unlike the reload and the rally, however, the through ball (and its parameters) have evolved substantially, particularly from its early usage in 2004 to the mid 2010s. Built upon attuned partnerships between MCs and DJs, its enactment is contingent upon individuals converging upon a collective trajectory, and subsequently eliciting a synchronic, communal arrival at a climactic moment.

This chapter will examine both the through ball's functionality, specifically how this alignment occurs, *and* its codification, through representing how its usage has developed over time and the impact of artists' denotations upon its parameters. This technique's emergence is a key consideration, since it shows how a synthesis of performance protocol and improvisatory group creativity can bring forth irruptive, new ideas. For Pierre Bourdieu, 'ritual prescriptions…[can] orient practice without reproducing it'. Rather than enforcing a ritualised expectation, the through ball has naturally emerged from artists working with performance conventions (Chapter 4), but creating anew through multidirectional interplay (Chapter 5).

This chapter it is split into two sections, offering comparison between foundational and established practice, from 2004 and 2015 respectively. Section 1 delineates the fundamentals of the technique, looking at two examples from 2004. Section 2 will assess the state of play in 2015, focusing on a radio set that featured multiple instances of the through

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[1] BBC Radio 1Xtra, "Fire in the Booth – AJ Tracey", *YouTube*, February 27, 2016, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EU3ylQOWw_Y.

ball. The chapter will also foreground artists' ways of knowing. It will demonstrate how grime artists' perceptual understanding of this technique is made tangible through usage of footballing terminology and analogies. It will also assess the applicability of these sporting ascriptions. Specifically, it will look at how effective they are in framing this complex (and often ineffable) interplay between artists. While sporting terminology is non-musical it is still highly specialised. Because of this, its usage not only enables artists to frame their own practice, but allows them to utilise language that makes sense to a large majority of its participants and listeners.

By chapter's end, this attention to the development and solidification of the through ball as a phase of play will show how a synthesis of performance protocol and multidirectional interplay can both fashion new ideas and provide scope for levelling up as a collective, consequently offering a bridge between established performance techniques—primarily addressed in Chapters 4 and 5—and the novel, emergent practice covered in Chapters 7 and 8.

Section 1 – The Through Ball and its usage in 2004

'A player who is involved and caught up in the game adjusts not to what he sees but what he *fore-sees*, sees in advance of the directly perceived present; he passes the ball not to the spot where his team-mate is, but to the spot he will reach', Pierre Bourdieu.[2]

In football, the through ball is a style of passing with a delivery that arrives at the projected position of another player. It may be threaded between the lines, or lofted over an opponent's head. Its distinctive nature relies on the presence of mind from one player to predict or anticipate the trajectory of a fellow teammate. The through ball in grime ostensibly functions in a similar way. Rather than a footballer lining up a pass for a fellow player, an MC or DJ will prepare a fellow performer, typically for the drop of an

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[2] Bourdieu, *Logic of Practice*, 81.

instrumental track.[3] It is metapragmatic in nature, much like the reload and rally. Performer(s) have to make necessary adjustments while already performing, to ensure the joint arrival of their fellow artist(s) over the drop of the instrumental.

> The through ball is when you drop man in on the drop. Say for instance I'm spraying my 32 and I know that the DJ is going to let it drop and I let you take it, that's the through ball. Or the DJ can give you the through ball by giving you the drop.[4]

This definition from Hitman Tiga foregrounds his awareness of other performers' future performance decisions. Sawyer wrote of 'shared knowledge' development in group practice where 'group members can feel as if they are able to anticipate what their fellow performers will do before they do it'. Tiga similarly 'knows' that the 'DJ is going to let it drop'. Elsewhere, jazz pianist Kenny Barron has reflected on his second guessing of drummers: 'it sounds like you actually rehearsed it all, and it makes a rhythm section sound cohesive. I might anticipate the "and" of a phrase together with the drummer, for example.'[5] This arrival a point of high energy is critical for understanding performance relationships in grime. Having both an implicit understanding of what is about to happen before it happens, and being able to align with a fellow artist, means the energy of each individual's trajectory is combined, and magnified exponentially. For Bourdieu, there is a 'sens' of the 'imminent future of the game' and it is through a combination of 'shared knowledge' and individual skill that a through ball can be successfully enacted. This section looks firstly to the importance of strong group relationships, before demonstrating how both DJs and MCs can set up the through ball (referred to above by Hitman Tiga).[6]

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[3] This is also present in gamelan performance, where the *kenong* and *kempul* players in *palaran* form attempt to predict the length of a singer's vocal phrase; Brinner, *Knowing Music*, 237.

[4] Hitman Tiga, 2017.

[5] Sawyer, *Group Creativity*, 44; Berliner, *Thinking in Jazz*, 356.

[6] Bourdieu, *Logic of Practice*, 82.

Episode 6.1

🎤**Kraze, Shorty Smalls, Lightning, Chronik**

📻**DJ Spooky, "Youngers Clash", Raw Blaze, London: December 29, 2004.**

💿 **Audiovisual example 6a**

While an MC may be familiar with the structure of an instrumental, knowing when a DJ might drop the tune is less clear cut. Similarly to a winger being aware of a striker's tendency to run a certain channel in football, MCs also need to have an idea of what the DJ might do next. Kraze, Shorty Smalls and DJ Spooky worked together extensively in the early 2000s as part of Younger Slew Dem. This period of practice enabled them to anticipate and predict each other's prospective performance decisions.

> Spooky's a sick DJ, man. I've always rated Spooky from school cause we used to go to my bredren's house and just practice all the time. He used to do the right chopping, play the right beats. That's when you're in touch with your DJ and he knows you and it's that.
>
> With Shorty Smalls, it's cause we worked with each other and we always used to write together. It became kind of natural [to us].[7]

The Raw Blaze clash (first mentioned in Episode 5.1) features a number of moments where these three artists creatively anticipate each other. One particular example demonstrates the interactive attentiveness required from all participants for the successful enactment of a through ball. It takes place shortly after the reload that Kraze received in Episode 5.1, and follows on from a passage from Chronik, where he struggles for clarity with a muffled multisyllabic pattern over 'Outburst (Remix)''s string pattern.

Shorty Smalls instead provides precision (audiovisual example 6a, 0:52–1:17). His high pitched delivery occupies space above the string agitations (whereas Chronik's gruffer tone was obscured). Eight bars into Shorty Smalls' contribution Spooky subtly starts to bring in a new instrumental—an unreleased dub of Sunship's 'Almighty Father'—that sonically challenges 'Outburst (Remix)' for dominance with a warped gliding square pattern. This moment sees Smalls enter a critical juncture. Either he can continue MCing regardless

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[7] Kraze, 2017.

DJ Spooky, "Youngers Clash feat. Shorty Smalls, Chronik, Kraze and Lightning", Raw Blaze FM, London: December 29, 2004

♩=140

(00:55) *Wiley's 'Outburst (Remix)' instrumental is playing on the deck.*

Figure 6.1 – Transcription of Shorty Smalls' usage of Rhythmic Units, audiovisual example 6a 0:55–1:20.

or he can prepare to pass the microphone. He also has to anticipate *when* Spooky might drop the new instrumental. After a further eight bars, Smalls passes the microphone to Kraze just at the point where the new instrumental drops and Spooky pulls back 'Outburst (Remix)'. The effect is remarkable. The impact of the new beat dropping into a sub-heavy kick groove with minimal percussion provides substantial space for Kraze's forceful entry.

This success is contingent on Shorty Smalls' usage of transition lyrics. Figure 6.1 presents a transcription of Smalls' performance. Here, he uses one rhythmic unit—'don't get it twisted'—as a central fulcrum for his performance across the sixteen bar passage. The first eight bars are expansive, with the phrase shifting beat positions throughout (slashed through on noteheads). From bar 9 Spooky starts to tease in the new track. Here, 'don't get it twisted' acts as a punctuating marker for each odd bar, demarcating clear two-bar sections. These sections open with a strong rhythmic identification on the opening two beats and are similarly closed off with a quaver-quaver-crotchet pattern in bars 10 and 12. The final four bars, from bar 13 to 16, are more elaborate and effusive, closing with a final call of 'don't get it twisted' directly preceding Kraze's entry.

I played this example for Kraze in interview. He summed up what took place that evening, using the through ball's footballing correlate to break down interplay between the three artists. To evoke the complexity of these relationships is challenging and can often isolate practitioners (many are not familiar with stave notation). Instead Kraze opted for a suitably fitting analogy to break down the relationships at play.

> It's like football. When the DJs got a tune on the decks and he's got the mix coming in you gotta be like, 'now alright I need a through ball. Set up this volley for me'.[8]

This passage from Smalls therefore demonstrates how MCs can react and switch up their pattern to both suit the unfolding performance, and prepare for the entry of a new MC. He is afforded great flexibility. This is due to a large arsenal of lyrical units that work with, and improvise around, the phrase 'don't get it twisted'. After his exclamation of 'look!' in bar 9, he was then able select and tailor his next lyrical passage, such that his performance

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[8] Kraze, 2017.

creatively built towards the climactic moment when Kraze was passed the microphone.[9] This is an example of the MC's through ball, and it is defined below.

(i) Types of Through Ball

Type 1 – The MC's through ball

Similarly to the reload, the through ball can be principally enacted by, or attributed to, one member of the creative group engaged in the performance. While the example above relied on attentive listening and metapragmatic reaction from Kraze, Shorty Smalls and Spooky— their communal 'sens' of the immediate future meaning that they could position themselves appropriately for the convergence of a new MC's entry and an instrumental drop—it was Shorty Smalls' deft use of transition lyrics and his timely step to the side that put Kraze through on goal. The MC's through ball, then, relies on an awareness that the DJ might be switching up, and the sensitivity to make way for a fellow performer's entry.

Type 2 – The DJ's through ball

The DJ's through ball is similarly self-explanatory, since its principal facilitator is the DJ. In these instances, the DJ has to possess a prescient understanding of where the MC's performance might be headed, and prepare a new instrumental drop for this projected position. DJs can 'tease' or 'chop-in' the new instrumental to give an MC forewarning. This also helps in preparation for the moment of convergence. Abrupt cutting in of a new instrumental can often throw an MC off balance, particularly if it has a markedly different

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[9] This usage of small units, which are then expanded on, is an important tenet for many grime MCs. Two examples from Wiley's practice demonstrate this well. 'Bow E3' bases its entire rhyme scheme around its title. Similarly, Wiley's verse on 'Destruction VIP' works around the unit 'don't know you'.

feel, consequentially mismatching with the MC's flow pattern. Therefore, a sensitive approach from a DJ is critical for its success.

The two following examples, also from 2004, demonstrate this technique in action. Both feature DJ Eastwood, who contributed substantially to Chapter 4. Unlike his work with Dynasty and Renegade Boys, however, this set featured MCs he had barely worked with in the past. As such, Eastwood's performance suggestions required great care. Similarly to his remarks in Chapter 4—with respect to his use of chopping and how it varied depending on how good the MCs were—Eastwood had to be careful and attentive. He could not rely on prior interaction and expectations to help facilitate improvisation. As such, his performance suggestions were met with two different outcomes.

Episode 6.2
🎤 **Scorcher, Wretch 32, C.A.P.S, Calibar, Jonson Terrorist, Cookie, Cel 22**
📻 **DJ Eastwood and Rema D, "DJ Eastwood B2B DJ Rema D with Cold Blooded and Combination Camp", Heat FM, London: April 30, 2004.**
💿 **Audiovisual examples 6b, 6c**

This set, overseen by DJ Eastwood, featured an amalgamated roster of MCs from North London crews Cold Blooded and Combination Camp, who had a close relationship at this point in time. Their members in later years joined the Movement[10] (Scorcher, Wretch 32) and collaborated with Boy Better Know (Cookie).

Example 1 – Scorcher and Eastwood

Once the MCs had warmed up and become familiar with Eastwood, the intensity began to build. Following two reloads for Cel 22, Cookie enters combatively over DJ Bossman's

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[10] Jesse Bernard, "The Lasting Impact Of The Movement", July 30, 2019, https://trenchtrenchtrench.com/features/the-lasting-impact-of-grime-outfit-the-movement.

DJ Eastwood, "DJ Eastwood B2B DJ Rema D with Cold Blooded and Combination Camp", Heat FM, London: April 30, 2004.

——————— 'Bongo Eyes'

— — — — 'Buzz Lightyear'

Reload

♩ = *140*

(00:40) *'Bongo Eyes' carries over from Cookie's 16-bar.*

Scorcher

yep — and we down out Lon don — yes — my ma-nor where we come from

1

Eastwood — 0

3

Scorcher

yes — dem boy we nah run from — yes — man let the stain-less dig in your

1

Eastwood — 0

5

Scorcher

yeah — and we down out Lon don — yes — my ma-nor-where we come from

1

Eastwood — 0

7

Scorcher

yes — dem boy we nah run from — yes i let the stain-less lis-ten list- en!

1

Eastwood — 0

(00:53) *Davinche 'Buzz Lightyear' drops.*

9
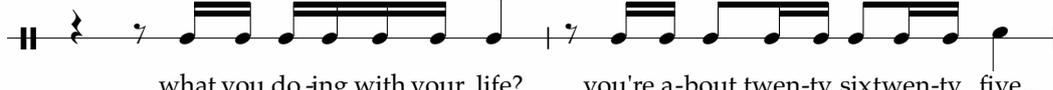
Scorcher

what you do -ing with your life? — you're a-bout twen-ty six twen-ty five...

1

Eastwood — 0

Figure 6.2 – The DJ's Through Ball: Scorcher and DJ Eastwood (audiovisual example 6b, 0:40-0:57).

'Bongo Eyes', delivering a 16-bar affront: 'who don't hear will feel, look at my right hand stainless steel'. He then passes the microphone to Scorcher (audiovisual example 6b, 0:00–0:42). Scorcher enters at a similarly energetic level, adopting a semi-patois lyrical style. His punchy flow leads towards, and accents on, beat one of each bar (see Figure 6.2). This provides an assured trajectory and complementation to the frenetic instrumentation from DJ Bossman's instrumental. Four bars into this percussive and aggressive passage from Scorcher, Eastwood starts to 'tease in' a new instrumental— Davinche's 'Buzz Lightyear'— signalling an impending change. Having heard Scorcher's high energy delivery, Eastwood capitalises on this and lines up a new track to arrive with Scorcher's next 8-bar assertion. As shown in Figure 6.2, Eastwood cuts in 'Buzz Lightyear' for beats three and four of Bars 5, 6 and 7 before wheeling 'Bongo Eyes' and allowing 'Buzz Lightyear' to come through will full force at bar 9.

In most circumstances, Eastwood's auditory cues would suggest an incoming change to the MC. His chopping explicitly projects towards a future moment where the new instrumental will converge with Scorcher's punchy lyrical recitations. However, in bar 8—the point at which Eastwood pulls back 'Bongo Eyes'—Scorcher loses his place. Attempting a recovery he quickly repeats the phrase 'listen, listen!'. After this, he enters into a new passage with the arrival of 'Buzz Lightyear'. This decision, however, is arguably at odds with the emergent performance.

Rather than adopting a similarly energetic bar for the drop set up by DJ Eastwood, Scorcher opens up into an elaborate lyrical passage. This passage does not necessarily match the vivacity of Eastwood's cutting and chopping, nor the instrumental chosen. Further to this, just prior to the drop, Scorcher was professing to 'let the stainless (knife) dig in your chest'. This contrasts markedly with his subsequent passage where he asks the existential question 'what are you doing with your life?'

Rather than communal convergence, the resultant feel, here, is of disjuncture. Eastwood's climactic moment is met with a measured lyrical pattern, the effect akin to passing the ball back into the defence rather than a volley on goal. Eastwood's suggestions,

therefore, were largely in vain and not incorporated into the emergent performance. As a consequence the momentum and energy had to be rebuilt from the ground up.

Example 2 – C.A.P.S and Eastwood

A more attuned example of the DJ's through ball took place twenty minutes later, with C.A.P.S and Eastwood combining well. Following a 16-bar passage from Cookie, C.A.P.S takes the microphone while DJ Eastwood instantly works a punch rhythm, cutting in the instrumental at beat one of every bar (see Figure 6.3). This tactic builds energy substantially, through the sonic power of Eastwood's punches and the technical ability shown by C.A.P.S to stay in time with minimal rhythmic accompaniment. In addition to C.A.P.S's skilful adherence, he also has a number of decisions to make mid-performance. Specifically, how to arrive at Eastwood's projected position and with what lyrical pattern. He also has to second guess when Eastwood might choose to exit out of the punch rhythm allowing him to flow fully over the instrumental.

This piece of frenetic interplay lasts for around eight bars. While C.A.P.S's initial choice of his alphabetised pattern works well, accenting on 'Caps', it is his consequent decision that matters most. A pre-emptive 'never dat, never dat!' in bar 8 affords C.A.P.S the time to open up into an abrasive and spirited lyric in bar 9, coinciding with the full reveal of DJ Oddz' 'Tha Trouble'. C.A.P.S's shout of 'you got a Gat (pistol), never dat!' is matched by the instrumental's full sonic presence. This combination causes the room to call for the instrumental to be reloaded (audiovisual example 6c, 0:30).

Offering contrast to Scorcher's reaction above, C.A.P.S's attentive listening while performing allowed him to sense the impending change and tee himself up for the through ball from Eastwood. Eastwood compounded the impact through his consistent punch rhythm, which is further magnified by crotchet punches across bar 9. While demonstrating both Eastwood and C.A.P.S's capabilities, this example also states further claims for the metapragmatic nature of reloads, and for through balls in particular, since this interaction

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Figure 6.3 – The DJ's Through Ball: C.A.P.S and DJ Eastwood (audiovisual example 6c, 0:11–0:30).

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and negotiation took place mid-performance. It also reaffirms the importance of DJ gesture for both iterative and exponential accumulation of energy. This successful negotiation resulted in an apex for the set. Galvanised, C.A.P.S continued for a 16-bar passage before passing the microphone to Jonson Terrorist. The latent energy from this through ball therefore enabled the collective to *level up,* with the consequent reload being absorbed into the emergent, unfolding performance process.

(ii) The codification of a performance technique

'I'm not up-to-date with all the lingo', DJ Eastwood.

Having attended to both variations of the through ball, this section's final consideration is the way in which artists, particularly DJ Eastwood, conceptualise their craft. Unlike Kraze and Hitman Tiga (who are still active practitioners), Eastwood had mostly retired from playing grime by 2010. When we spoke in 2017, he was unfamiliar with the term 'through ball'. When I showed him these examples, he could not reconcile the term and his enactment of it. While his performance in Episode 6.2 fits closely with the definition prescribed by Hitman Tiga, he instead reflected on a similar technique that he utilised when DJing UK garage.

> That's not even an MC thing. As a DJ growing up—especially a garage DJ—when you're DJing in front of a crowd, you give them a bit of a teaser. Through ball in today's terms, well, I'm not up-to-date with all the lingo. You look at the crowd and see who recognises it, see who knows the little bit you've just teased.[11]

This assertion speaks directly to issues of codification. While obviously indebted to UK garage, the through ball itself has a complex array of parameters and rules of enactment that supersede simply 'teasing in' a new instrumental. When we discussed further, Eastwood

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[11] Eastwood, 2017.

acknowledged that the more active, interactional role of MCs in grime sets had an impact on how he was performing at this time.

> Obviously with grime, MCs are fans of the music. So you're playing with the sounds to see what MC's are going to pick up. They get that little rush of energy because they can sense when it's going to drop. If they catch it right, you do a little wheel up: their energy, their excitement comes out. It all adds up to a mad energy from that scenario.[12]

Part of the through ball's development and codification, then, could be attributed to this change in dynamic. This 'mad energy' is audible in the example with C.A.P.S from Episode 6.2, while the collaborative building towards moments of climax relies on both the DJ and MC attentively working together, reaffirming the improvisational relationship between self and collective inherent to grime performance. Both the improvisatory practice of Eastwood and Cold Blooded, offers a proto-example of what has now become formalised practice in grime music, even though he did not conceptualise his practice in this way. Although the terminology had not yet been codified, the technique was starting to take shape.

This chapter's next section will not just look at contemporary practice, but also question whether the codification of the term—and its subsequent proliferation—has led towards a more formulaic understanding of the technique, sullying the potential for acts of irruptive creativity. In 2004, Eastwood and C.A.P.S were engaging in a metapragmatic manner, demonstrating active listening and creatively reacting to each other, without necessarily quantifying what they were doing. The through ball for Eastwood is something that he just 'did' rather than necessarily thought about at length. As with the discussion in Chapter 3 over who named grime, the point of interest is not the term's provenance. Rather, the concern is how the very *process* of naming the through ball has both contextualised and framed the phase of play.

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[12] ibid.

Section Two – The Through Ball and established grime practice

There are marked differences between the way in which Eastwood 'teased in' instrumentals and the established through ball in grime's practice during the mid-2010s. The following two examples are taken from a Radar Radio set, three days prior to Christmas Day in 2015. Presented by the DJ partnership Wigpower (General Courts and Travis-T), the set featured a number of MCs primarily from YGG and MTP (or MTM).[13] A volatile atmosphere pervaded the performance, however multiple examples of close knit and fervent group interactivity from MTM and Wigpower took place. Two through balls, in particular, demonstrate this interplay, effectively conveying how this phase of play has developed since its embryonic usage in 2004.

Episode 6.3
🎤 **Row D, PK, Spitz, AJ Tracey, Big Zuu, Jay Amo, Ets, Saint P, Fusion, Jammz**
📻 **Wigpower (Travis-T and General Courts), "General Courts' Wigmas Special on Radar Radio", Radar Radio, London: December 22, 2015.**
💿 **Audiovisual examples 6d, 6e**

Example 1 – Saint P and Travis-T over 'Ice Pole'

Twenty minutes into the set, Saint P takes the microphone from Ets and immediately enters into a multisyllabic passage over an instrumental entitled 'Pengaleng'. Saint P readily uses varying rhythms and stutters in his practice. Accordingly, his responsiveness to suggestions from DJs is attenuated owing to the relative familiarity with which he can alter his pattern

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[13] See Figure 5.4.

Wigpower, "General Courts' Wigmas Special on Radar Radio", Radar Radio, London: December 22, 2015.

♩ = **140**

(00:15)

(A) *Streema - 'Pengaleng' 8-Bar Build Up*

Saint P

I was like old friends try – na – jump out of the grave I

Saint P

Tell em stay in their lane we ain't on the same page But

Saint P

Oh who's say – ing that we Ain't Mates But Oh seems like we're not the same see

Saint P

Old friends try – na jump out of the grave I tell em Stay in their Lane We Ain't On The Same Page Like

Saint P

Oh You See Me Now We Ain't Mates Like Oh Seems Like It's Not The Same Like

(B) *Streema - 'Pengaleng' drops.*

Saint P

old friends try – na jump out of the grave I Tell em stay in their lane we ain't on the same page A – ny

Saint P

More Used To Be Cool We Ain't Mates A – ny More Seems Like We're Not The Same A – ny

Saint P

Old Friends Try – Na Jump Out Of The Grave I Tell Em Stay In Their Lane We Ain't On The Same Page A – ny

Saint P

More Used To Be Cool We Ain't Mates A – ny More Seems Like We're Not The Same A – ny

(C) *Beat Switches Up*

Saint P
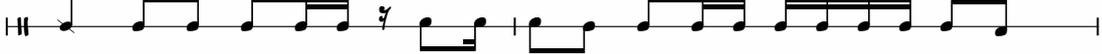
More Man Star Man Said His Ol – Der Bro Does Road And His Da – ddy Is A Gang – Ster

Saint P

man That Chat Al – Ways Giv – Ing Me Ban – Ter Must – ve Thought You Was In A 3 6 Maf – ia

Figure 6.4 – Transcription of Saint P's flow (audiovisual example 6d, 0:15–1:30).

mid-flow. This came to the fore in this passage of interplay between Saint P and Travis-T, YGG's official DJ, on the decks.

Saint P proceeds to spit an opening 32-bar passage, featuring elements of tension and release, with a careful use of cadential figures that help to etch out a coherent structure, rising upwards towards beat one for the first eight bars, before falling downwards towards beat one across Bars 9–16 (see Figure 6.4).[14] This is a further demonstration of how grime artists articulate form through their 'patterning' of bars (see Chapter 5, Section 1).[15] The through ball in question takes place over a ten-bar period of negotiation (audiovisual example 6c, 1:09–1:25); (Rehearsal Mark E on Figure 6.4). Its successful enactment was in part due to chance, but predominantly owing to the enduring working relationship between Travis-T and Saint P and their 'shared knowledge' of each others' predilections.[16]

As Saint P approaches his next 32-bar section, he switches up into a 'transition lyric'. This sees the joint arrival of Saint P with Travis-T's chopping in of the a instrumental. Here, Saint P's usage of a 'transition lyric' affords him terrain to refix and rework his lyrical units as Travis-T is getting ready to deliver the through ball. While Travis-T is preparing, Saint P has to react and move to the projected position Travis-T thinks he will arrive at for the drop. This passage signals the point at which interplay supersedes aleatoric elements. Their interaction is documented fully in Figure 6.5. As Travis-T begins to chop in the new instrumental—Wiley's 'Ice Pole'—on beats one and two of each bar, Saint P has a decision to make. Bar 37 is crucial. Having performed a 4-bar transition lyric, Saint P chooses to re-perform this passage, effectively teeing himself up for the through ball, arriving fully at bar 41.

A slight err from Saint P nearly derails the progression, but he quickly regains momentum opening up into an elaborate forward moving passage, with greater enjambement across bar lines, and skippy syncopated semiquaver units. This passage

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[14] The cadential rise is indicated by a slashed notehead, the cadential fall indicated by a backslashed notehead.

[15] Adams, "On the Metrical Techniques of Flow".

[16] Sawyer, *Group Creativity*, 44.
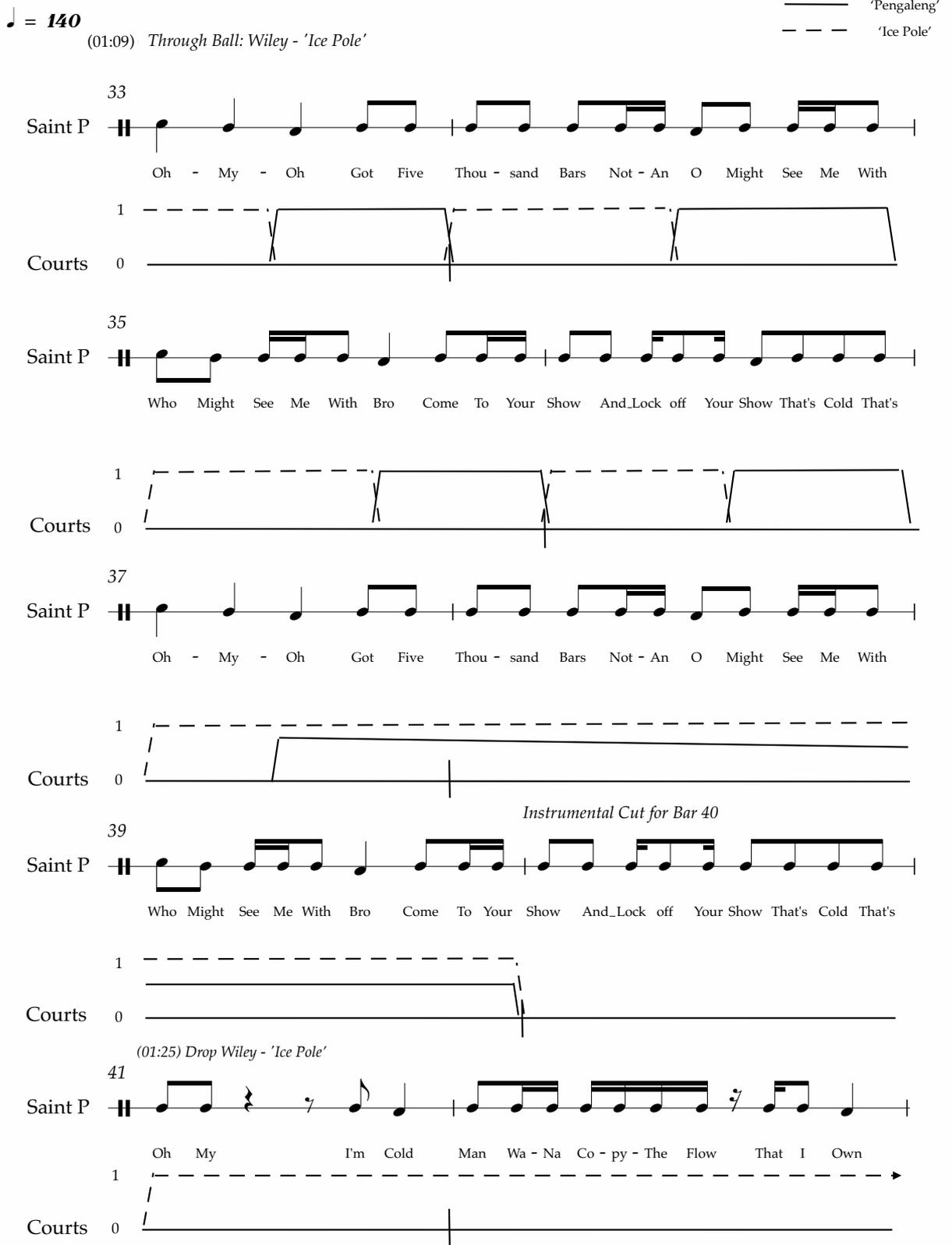
Figure 6.5 – Through Ball Interaction Chart: Saint P and Travis-T
(audiovisual example 6d, 1:09–1:30.

markedly differs from his 'transition lyric' that he creatively used to work towards and punctuate the through ball (this can be seen at Rehearsal Mark F on Figure 6.4).

This iteration of the through ball is dense and interactional, and offers far more negotiation than Eastwood's 'teasing in' with both Scorcher and C.A.P.S' contributions. Similarly to Shorty Smalls, Saint P uses a transition lyric to build through the through ball passage, and this is matched by Travis-T's chopping and cutting. However, through setting himself up for the drop, Saint P employs different lyrical patterns to both build towards— and release on—the drop in a way that is more developed than Smalls' quick handover of the microphone to Kraze, with multiple phases of interaction building towards its climactic moment. Similarly to the rally, this through ball demanded a long-form collaborative negotiation. And through this, both Travis-T and Saint P collectively arrived at a point of novelty and forward movement for both parties. As such, their energy combined and strengthened the performance's emergent trajectory.

Example 2 – Big Zuu and Travis-T over 'What Comes Around (Dub)'

The second example occurs ten minutes later. It features close interplay between Big Zuu of MTP and Travis-T. Following on from a passage from Jay Amo, Big Zuu takes the microphone (audiovisual example 6e, 0:24). Almost immediately Travis-T beings to slowly rake in a new instrumental, building towards the projected position of Big Zuu. Zuu's 16-bar passage is direct and assertive, and the entry of the new instrumental adds impetus to the unfolding performance. The immediacy of this decision is addressed by Bourdieu in his mapping of the *Logic of Practice*, where performance decisions can be made 'in the twinkling of an eye', while immersed in the process.[17] And this decision from Travis-T, while instantaneous, was critical. As the new track builds, General Courts places a reassuring hand on Travis-T's shoulder while vigorously nodding his head, as if to say 'you've got this, I *know* where this is heading'. On the track's arrival, Zuu moves into a highly animated passage: 'you

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[17] Bourdieu, *Logic of Practice*, 81.

Figure 6.6 – YouTube comments on YGG's The Grime Show appearance, November 2015.

are no baller, you are not Totti, you are not savage fam, you are not Robbie' (audiovisual example 6e, 00:51).[18]

This climactic moment is met with a huge reaction from all present and is arguably the most substantial of the entire performance. As a consequence, the track is reloaded by Travis-T. Through both Travis-T's quick cueing up of the next instrumental and Big Zuu rising to the task, the two artists were able to creatively work towards this powerful point of convergence and unquantifiable energy.

Conclusion

These two examples demonstrate both the regularity with which the through ball is now incorporated into grime performance, and the ease with which artists utilise this technique successfully. Further to this, artists—particularly in 2015 and 2016—began to vocally acknowledge the through ball when it occurred on set. For example, in June 2015 Big Zuu was on set with Oxford DJ Trends. He responded 'are you nuts? Them through balls there'

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[18] This lyric offers a footballing pun. Firstly referring to Italian footballer Francesco Totti, Big Zuu then makes reference to former Liverpool striker Robbie Savage.

following a passage of interplay.[19] Furthermore, these discussions are not restricted to practitioners. In fact, the through ball is regularly spoken about at length by grime's listenership. This is evidenced by comments taken from YGG's debut appearance on The Grime Show (See Figure 6.6).

One of my discussions DJ Aidan of Cream Collective (see Chapter 7), bears particular relevance to the ways in which the through ball has become a cornerstone of grime's improvisatory performance practice:

> I feel like with through balls, there are a lot of times where the DJ gets the MC the wheel. I love it when MCs acknowledge it, and are like 'safe for that'. Real MCs clock what's occurring and they *know* what's coming. They know it's coming, they know how to prep for it. They literally anticipate that the drop is going to be here, prepare a particular bar, say it at a particular time, and get that wheel.
>
> Certain MCs are quick to shout you out, too. Some guys try and pretend that it was all theirs, though. But I'm like 'mmmm I gave you that one'. I set you up.[20]

This explicit acknowledgement from Aidan differs from Eastwood's comments. It also demonstrates that a system of etiquette has also developed around the through ball. Its recognition, and the ownership by either the DJ or MC, is seen to be important, much in the same way as the reload.

Further to this, its development has coincided with a heightening of references to football in general within grime lyricism, demonstrating far more than a cursory influence on the performative field. Big Zuu's through ball actually converges on a footballing reference, and this is far from an isolated incident. AJ Tracey makes allusions to Italian winger Stephan El Shaarawy on the same set, while Big Narstie threatened to 'kick your head off the crossbar like Tony Yeboah' on 2011's 'Gas Leak'.[21] And while care should be

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[19] Trends, "Trends w/ Special Guests: Spooky, Mez, Mic Ty, Big Zuu", Radar Radio, London: June 15, 2015.

[20] Aidan, Personal Interview. June 2018.

[21] This lyrical reference is indicative of the avid attentiveness to football from grime practitioners. Here, Big Narstie is referring to a goal from 1995 by then-Leeds striker Tony Yeboah against Liverpool that thundered into the net off the top of the crossbar.

taken conflating wordplay and lyrical accolades with applicability for analysis, the prevalence of lyrics and the strong footballing associations of artists—many are former players, or even current professionals—foregrounds football as a perennial concern. It is therefore unsurprising that a principle phase of play within grime performance has been mapped onto a footballing counterpart.[22]

This examination of the through ball has unpacked three important considerations for grime's creative practice. Firstly, it presented the through ball as a localised phase of play that is both iteratively built towards, while relying on instantaneous reactions. Consequently, its outcomes are variable. Highly energetic convergences can result in a reload, while more considered development—such as between Travis-T and Saint P—can see the collective *level up* and enter into a period of flow, much like the rally. Grime's unique synthesis of individual prerogative and collective trajectory is therefore most effectively realised within this process, with collaborative convergence towards points of climactic energy indicating a deep and implicit understanding of grime's performance protocol on the part of practitioners and a 'sens' of the immediate future, while the flexibility of outcome affords consonance with the emergent and ongoing accumulation of energy during a performance.

Secondly, it has shown how a highly complex process can be made sense of through appropriate sporting analogies. These analogies break down dense interaction into a metaphorical association that is (almost) universally recognisable. Thirdly, it has presented examples of its elementary use alongside established practice from the mid 2010s. This comparison has shown how the technique has advanced over time. Eastwood's 'teasing in' has grown into a fully fledged phase of play, with varying levels of agency. Its functionality is recognised by artists and audience members alike, while its enactment is governed by an expected etiquette.

It is this transition from an almost nonchalant extension of a UK garage trick to a fully codified aspect of grime practice that demonstrates how both the naming of a

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22 Wiley claims to have been by far the best football player in his school, Terminator had a professional contract with Queens Park Rangers, Kamakaze plays for Dagenham & Redbridge and Crystal Palace midfielder Yannick Bolasie clashed with New York Red Bulls' Bradley Wright Phillips on Lord of the Mics VI. Wiley, *Eskiboy*, 16; *Lord of the Mics 6*, dir. Jammer and Ratty, 2014

technique—through its similarities to football practice—and its extended usage has helped to quantify and set the 'domain' for its usage. With these guidelines, artists can creatively work towards each others' projected positions in new and exciting ways towards moments of climactic energy, or periods of levelling up as a collective.[23] Fashioning new creative practice is a principal concern for the next two chapters. Having assessed how multiple MCs and DJs can foster a new technique through improvisatory interplay, Chapter 7 turns directly to the field of performance itself—specifically its interrelated performance ecology of radio stations and raves—and how this can inflect upon creativity. Following this Chapter 8 will attend to emergent creative practice in two crews, Over The Edge and Shellyvnne. Having established grime's foundational performance conventions and three key phases of play, we are now well positioned to examine its current performance network, and the ways in which crews develop new ideas as part of their creative endeavours.

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[23] Sawyer, *Group Creativity*, 60.

Chapter 7 – Competence in spite of chaos: the role of live radio for grime performance

Introduction

In Chapter 4's discussion of grime's overarching conventions, a quasi-system of ethics was outlined. This system of ethics underpins grime practice, with principals and etiquette to uphold. Unlike Schloss' ethics of sampling in hip-hop, however, the very liveness of grime means that its conventions are open to constant negotiation.[1] Much of this negotiation results from both the multidirectional nature of grime performance, and the tension between individual and collective—explored in Chapters 5 and 6 with respect to its constituent phases of play—but it is also affected by the spaces in which grime is performed. One of the key spaces for grime performance, as outlined in the thesis' introduction, is pirate radio. And while this thesis has demonstrated how the reload, for example, is a highly interactive and dense metapragmatic negotiation, it has not yet fully attended to the interrelatedness of the pirate radio network which sustains and offers space for this practice to take place. This consideration is arguably just as complex.

Further to this, another key aspect of grime's practice must be addressed. While artists have a tendency to formulate crews and orient under a moniker, these are never clear cut and always subject to change. It was nigh-on impossible to tie down who actually was in Roll Deep during their prime period of activity, while Milkymans' opaque affiliation with So Solid Crew is further testament to this. This combination, of both a highly fraught pirate radio sphere and its amorphous conglomeration of MCs and DJs, has brought forth vociferous collaboration, an undulant current of chaos that is never far from the surface, and scope for irruptive and vital practice born out of these acts of collective creativity.

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[1] Schloss, *Making Beats*, 14.

This chapter unpacks how artists situate themselves within grime's performance network, how they consequently react and create in both the radio and live environment, and how the environment itself colours these interactions. It is split into three sections.

Section 1 presents a case study of grime's radio environment, undertaken from May 2017 to November 2017. This mapping of MC and DJ activity will outline relationships between artists, and attend to the radio network's intensive nature. This section builds upon Monique Charles' examination of pirate radio as a sphere for 'skill acquisition', and responds to Matthew Fuller's work on media ecologies, reframing his model of pirate radio practice with an augmented sense of agency for performers adapted from Benjamin Brinner and David Borgo's work on competence and complexity respectively.[2]

Section 2 examines DJ practice. Specifically, it looks to how DJs manage uncertainty in the radio domain, owing to the vast roster of MCs who might pass through their show on any given week (see Section 1's case study). Two DJs' practice are focused on, with a view to providing salient examples of 'complementation'—where 'musicians' parts combine to foster an integrated aesthetic'—that are achieved through proto-taxonomising of MCs that requires shrewd assignment of both instrumental selections and appropriate gesture (chopping, cutting) to ensure a coherent marrying of styles demanded from collaborative performance in grime music.[3]

Section 3 looks at MC practice within this circuit, and focuses on a performance from South London MC Jabz and DJ Slimzee. Prior to this encounter they had never performed together. It maps the ways in which Jabz managed the power dynamics that are often inherent when performing with an artist of assumed status and prestige.

The most successful creative practice occurs when artists have an acute understanding of each other and can presciently anticipate what other group members do, particularly during periods of dense interplay such as the local pragmatic processes worked with in Chapters 5 and 6. This is achieved through an acquisition of competence, and an

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[2] Charles,"Hallowed Be Thy Grime?…", 190; Fuller, *Media Ecologies*, 17.

[3] Brinner, *Knowing Music,* 193.

ability to situate yourself both within the interactive network of performers, and the conventions and dynamics of interaction that underpin the form. Without complexity grime would stagnate, but this level of chaos afforded by both the pirate radio domain and its multidirectionality requires an acute set of techniques, expectations and attenuated sensibilities to successfully negotiate its unfolding performance and *level up*.

Section 1 – Pirate Mentality: Grime's radio performance network

> Hitman Tiga: I think being on a set for all MCs, it's like it's levels innit. Anyone can go to a studio and make a tune but what have you got on the radio?

Every musical form requires a network that can enable its varying artists to develop and thrive. In his biography of Jimi Hendrix, Greg Tate foregrounds the importance of the 'musical proclivities of Seattle's post-war black community' for Hendrix's development. Tate also sees the role of the chitlin circuit and Hendrix's obsessive touring with a variety of RnB outfits as paramount to his progression. During this period he met Billy Cox, who later joined Band of Gypsys.[4]

Historically within jazz, close-knit networks, much like Seattle and chitlin for Hendrix, have offered opportunities for performance and exchange. Gleiser and Danon's study of the United States' network of jazz performers between 1912 and 1940 saw 2.79 steps of separation between the players. Corey Mwamba's study of UK-based jazz demonstrates the enduring relevance and importance of networks. His rhizome project maps out the UK scene and the collaborative links between artists.[5]

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[4] Greg Tate, *Flyboy 2* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2016), 26, 27.

[5] Pablo Gleiser and Leon Danon, "Community Structure in Jazz", *Advanced Complex Systems* 6, no.4 (2003): 567; Corey Mwamba, 'THE RHIZOME', accessed March 22, 2019, https://www.coreymwamba.co.uk/resources/rhizome/.

While it is not enlightening to reaffirm the base level assertion that close knit communities foster collaboration, scope for creative exchange is nonetheless highly important. Furthermore, for grime music, three elements unique to its performance network make enquiry altogether more pressing. Grime's primary network is the radio domain, an arena that poses different questions to the live stage. This arena is itself transitory with crews disbanding and radio stations being forcibly closed by authorities.[6] Finally, despite its constant evolution, this network's acute locational specificity breeds fervent interchange.

The particularities of both grime pirate radio and pirate radio at large have been examined by Monique Charles and Matthew Fuller respectively. For Charles pirate radio was critical for listeners and practitioners alike. It was also vital for a sense of community, which for Charles acted as a space for the articulation of 'real London colonial life'.[7]

Matthew Fuller's work offers two points to consider, both relating to his understanding of 'hype'. Firstly, he is concerned with the interwoven media ecology that pirate radio is part of. Recalling Reynolds' hardcore continuum, radio is nestled within a wider socioeconomic infrastructure. For Fuller, there exists a particular dynamism within this network, that includes raves, radio, even peritextual apparatus (flyers, posters). This dynamism helps build energy and 'hype' through 'mutual excitation', much like the iterative building examined in Chapters 4 and 5.[8]

Secondly, he not only acknowledges the importance attributed to both listeners and practitioners by Charles, but affirms the medium's very reliance on their interaction. Listeners build into a sense of technological antiphony, through leaving notes of approval: 'voice [calls], texts and rings' (also see Chapter Five, Section 1). These notes reaffirm collectivity but also indicate 'hype about a certain track, and [build into] a system of feedback and production towards intensifying it'.[9]

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[6] Dan Hancox, "Pirate Radio Rave Tapes: You Can't Google This Stuff", *The Guardian*, September 8, 2011, https://www.theguardian.com/music/2011/sep/08/pirate-radio-rave-tapes.

[7] Charles, "Hallowed be Thy Grime…", 192.

[8] Reynolds, "The Primer: Grime", 47; Fuller, *Media Ecologies*, 35, 37.

[9] ibid, 50.

What these texts don't cover, however, are the actual performative innovations born out of these encounters. While Fuller details the system itself, there is a decided antipathy towards the potentialities of MCs, who are nestled within a wider network, often as another combinatoric. The antiphonal relationship between MC and listener may build hype, but for Fuller the MCs' responses are 'cretinously predictable'. Both this chapter and Chapter 8, however, are occupied with examining how new practice is fertilised in the radio domain. This section specifically aims to synthesise the particularities of the radio domain, and its wider network, with the craft of grime MCs and DJs.[10]

Grime performance is distinctive, since it not only takes place within this wider media ecology, but the performances *themselves* are pregnant with multidirectional interplay and improvisatory negotiation, as detailed in Chapter's 5 and 6. Furthermore, the economically and socially precarious nature of grime offers its own intensity (see Hitman Tiga's quote above). This section's evocation of grime's pirate radio network will therefore show how its own particularities both build hype through mutual excitation, and how the agency afforded to artists results in an accumulation of momentum and ideas from a variety of actors that results in novel practice, (the latter of which is explicitly assessed in Chapter 8).

(i) Radio Case Study – May to November 2017

To demonstrate these particularities, I documented grime's performance circuit throughout 2017. Through listening to and logging every grime show that aired on radio, and attending every event advertised, this intensive period showed a swathe of variety across live events and radio sets. Although DJs largely remained consistent on the radio, the MC roster was highly changeable. MC combinations were similarly vast. Another aspect I noticed was that although the roster was interchangeable, the total number of MCs and DJs *actively*

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[10] ibid, 28.

performing—having appeared more than once—did not exceed 100. The overview from this five-month period has provided a strong picture of this interactivity that both confounds and complicates, but also excites its performance circuit. This study that follows demonstrates how artists work within this network, making sense of its seemingly chaotic field of interaction.

The radio stations included in this study were BBC Radio 1Xtra, Radar Radio, Westside Radio, Mode FM, NTS, Rinse FM, DejaVu FM, Reprezent and Don City Radio. All broadcast via the internet, with Radio 1Xtra and Reprezent also available on digital radio. Shows that were included required a live element, which meant either live MCing and/or live mixing from a DJ and they had to primarily be playing music broadly defined as grime music. Live shows that featured grime artists, and were within the M25, were included and examined separately. The data collected infers that grime's key hubs are radio stations. In the period covered I documented 108 radio shows as opposed to 23 live shows, with live shows accounting for 18% of overall output. .

To try and offer an overview of this network, I took the same week of each month over a five month period and documented all the radio output that matched the above criteria. In theory by choosing the same week I would capture the same monthly residencies and begin to etch out some level of consistency. In reality, this was far from the case. Over the five week-long period 180 MCs (Radio and Live) and 122 DJs performed overall, while twenty five crews—notwithstanding fifteen affiliations to defunct crews—were represented across the radio shows.

Figure 7.1 demonstrates this variability, with MC appearances month-to-month ranging from 33 to 61, averaging at 44. DJ appearances were less markedly spread in terms of numbers but more pronounced in terms of percentage, offering a range of 21 to 42 with an average of 30. This level of variability can be unsettling for artists. As a result they have to adapt and be ready for all circumstances. I spoke to Over The Edge's J River about his first experience going to radio.
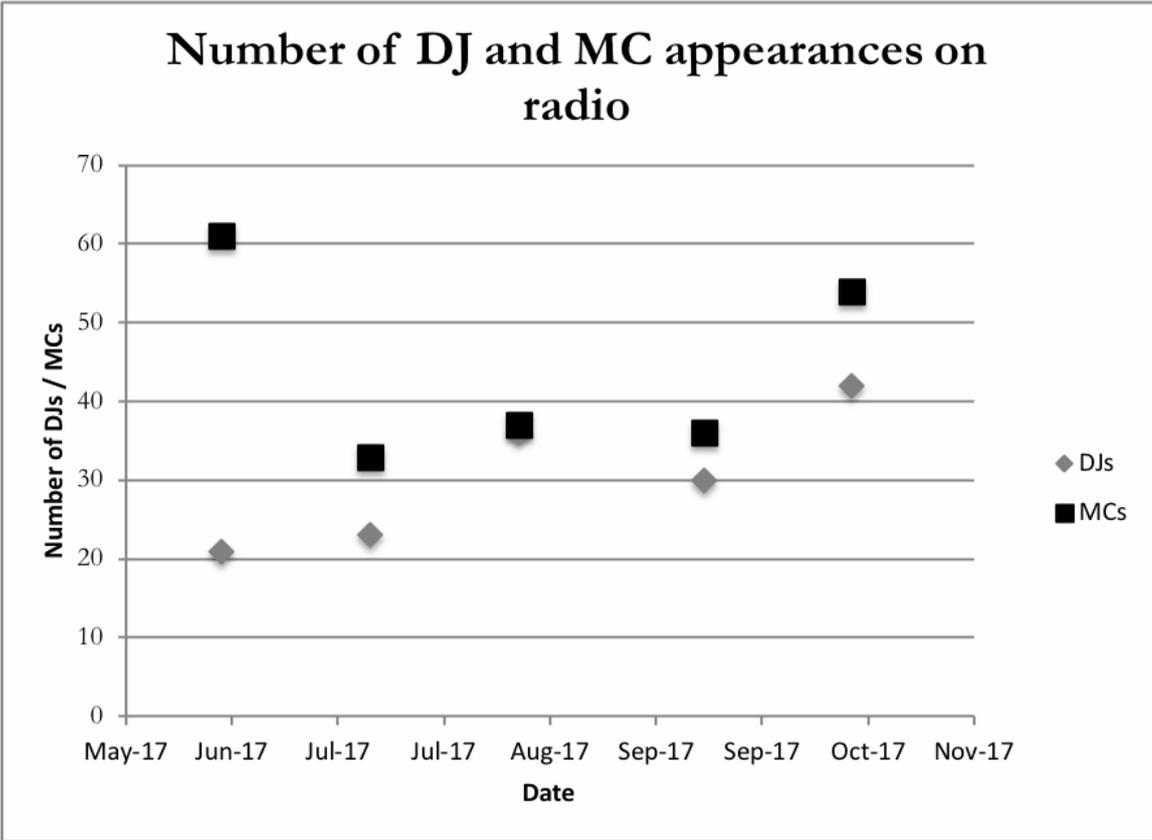
Figure 7.1 – Radio Case Study: Chart of DJ and MC appearances.
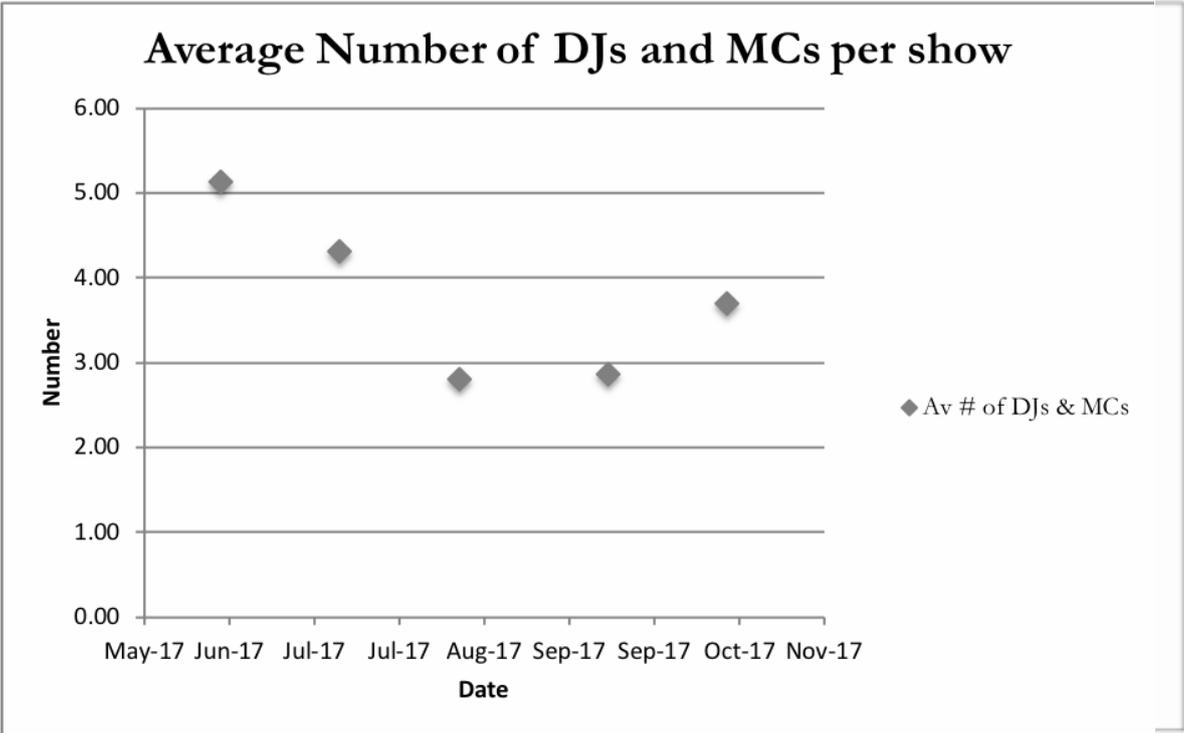
Figure 7.2 – Radio Case Study: Chart of expected appearances.

When we first went to radio, there's elements of spitting that are specific to radio. You're spitting in front of people that you might not know, and it gives you a level of nervousness when you're performing if you're not used to it. Even though I was confident in my own levels and abilities—since we'd be barring for ages—it was an experience that we had to adapt to. But we did it as much as we could and we got good quickly.[11]

This level of disparity seems unmanageable on the surface, but artists like J River look to adapting quickly and being comfortable with uncertainty. Further to this, patterns do develop. Figure 7.2 presents a DJ and MC per show ratio. This chart, in contrast, is more stable, ranging between 2.81 and 5 artists per show. This means artists have a rough level of expectation for the amount of guests before attending a radio set. There are other factors that help determine this, such as the nature of the performance (birthday sets, for example, typically feature a significant number of MCs, see Episode 7.2).

This data therefore demonstrates that substantial roster of artists are active on the radio circuit and their attendance at sets is variegated. While there is an expectation of how many artists might be on set, the complete roster of artists who end up performing is never really secured. This uncertainty is both ripe for innovation, and offers real scope for levelling up as a collective, but requires astute coping mechanisms from the artists involved. One way to conceptualise artists' management of this uncertainty is to move beyond raw data and look towards the specifics of the radio performance network and the MCs and DJs involved in it. The next subsection firstly looks at how the very liveness and multidirectionality of the radio domain provides scope for conflict and confrontation, before outlining how different crews interrelate, and fashion enduring performance relationships.

(ii) The Performance Network

The radio performance environment is a special space. Once you arrive at a radio station everyone is immediately aware of your presence. There is no hiding at the back of the room.

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[11] J River, Personal Interview. February 2018.

As soon as you enter it is claustrophobic, loud and you're in the thick of it: 'there's no takes here. On radio sets you can't hide. Definitely. There's no hiding.'[12] Radio is often the first place where artists can get their voices heard on a public stage. DJ Argue and Kirby Ts residencies on Radar Radio—particularly in 2017—were critical spaces to 'touch down' and show your worth. The radio set often operates similarly to a jazz cutting session, since artists are vying for pride of place with competition coming from all angles. Failure to perform convincingly may result in an artist not being invited back, or publicly shunned. Tom Perchard wrote about the 'very public nature' of correlate cutting competitions in jazz: 'victories could be won or face lost in front of a city's worth of jazz set peers.' This is a palpable fear and motivation that grips grime artists in this environment. But radio's dominance means that it is a sphere you cannot ignore. And while artists may not be asked to play Cherokee in B at a blistering tempo, there are multiple tactics that DJs and MCs can utilise to both challenge newcomers and heighten a performance's intensity.[13]

As a consequence, radio stations are a bustling, vehemently creative, yet potentially hostile ground. This 'public nature' of these performances results in a variety of outcomes. Consider Episode 5.4. Here, DJ Argue provided the artists with '8 bars' to make a mark. The ensuing disarray demonstrated both the difficulty of putting this prescription into action and the eagerness of artists to perform. Impromptu clashes can also arise. This is well evidenced on a radio set from May 2017, where Kirby T hosted 26 MCs across a thirty minute segment (audiovisual example 7a). The need to perform, combined with latent antagonisms saw a ferocious clash between Big John of Heat Gang and Blaydes of 3ird Degree take centre stage, consequently eclipsing many of the other artists' contributions.[14]

While competition and rivalry is the most immediately apparent factor in radio performance, there are other elements at play. The performance itself can be fraught, but developing relationships with other artists is key. Such is the chaotic and interchangeable

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[12] Hitman Tiga, 2017.

[13] Tom Perchard, *Lee Morgan: His Life, Music and Culture*, (London: Equinox, 2006), 31, 38.

[14] Kirby T, "Kirby T with Guest MCs", Radar Radio, London: May 8, 2017.

Radar Radio Case Study - June to October 2017
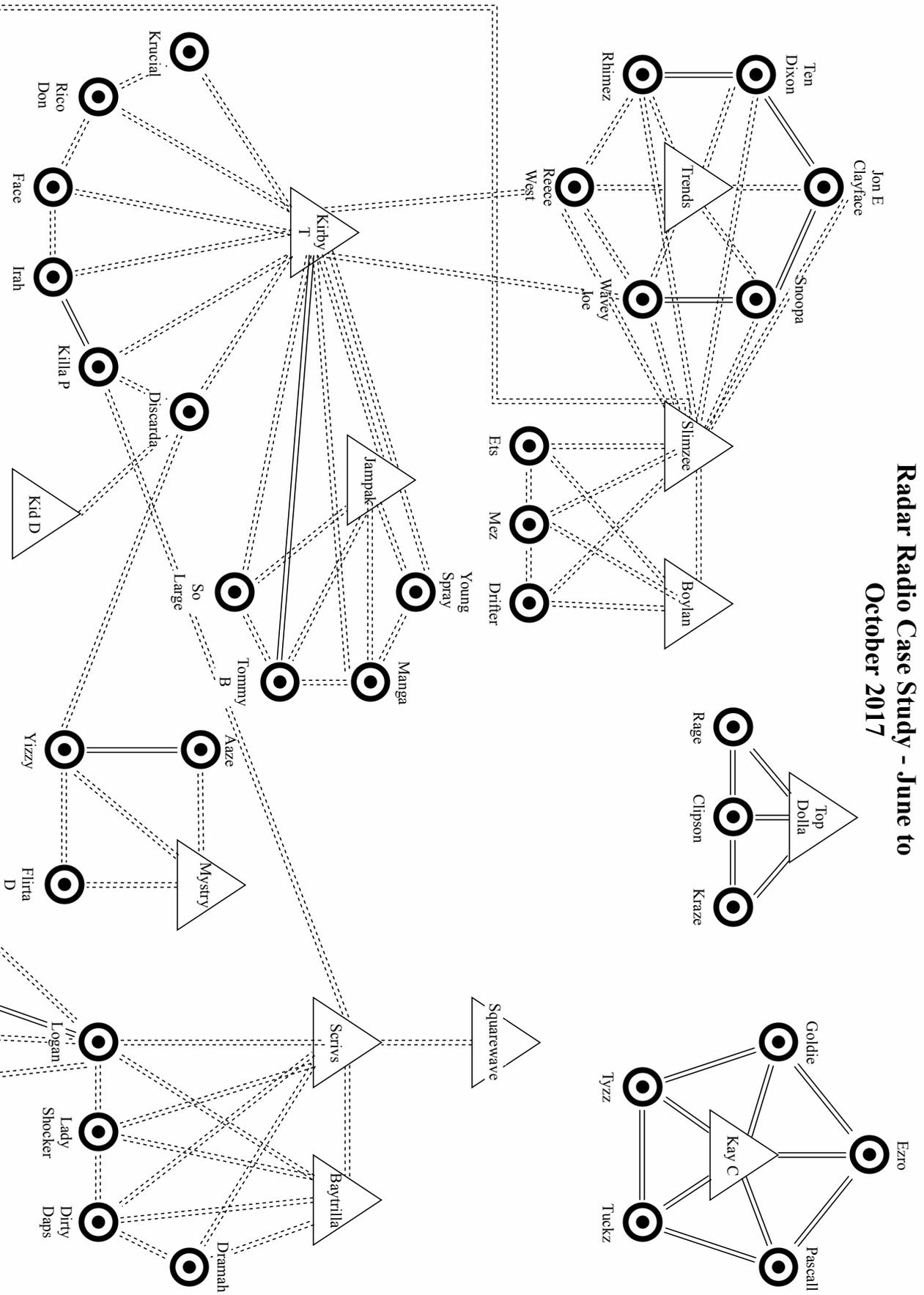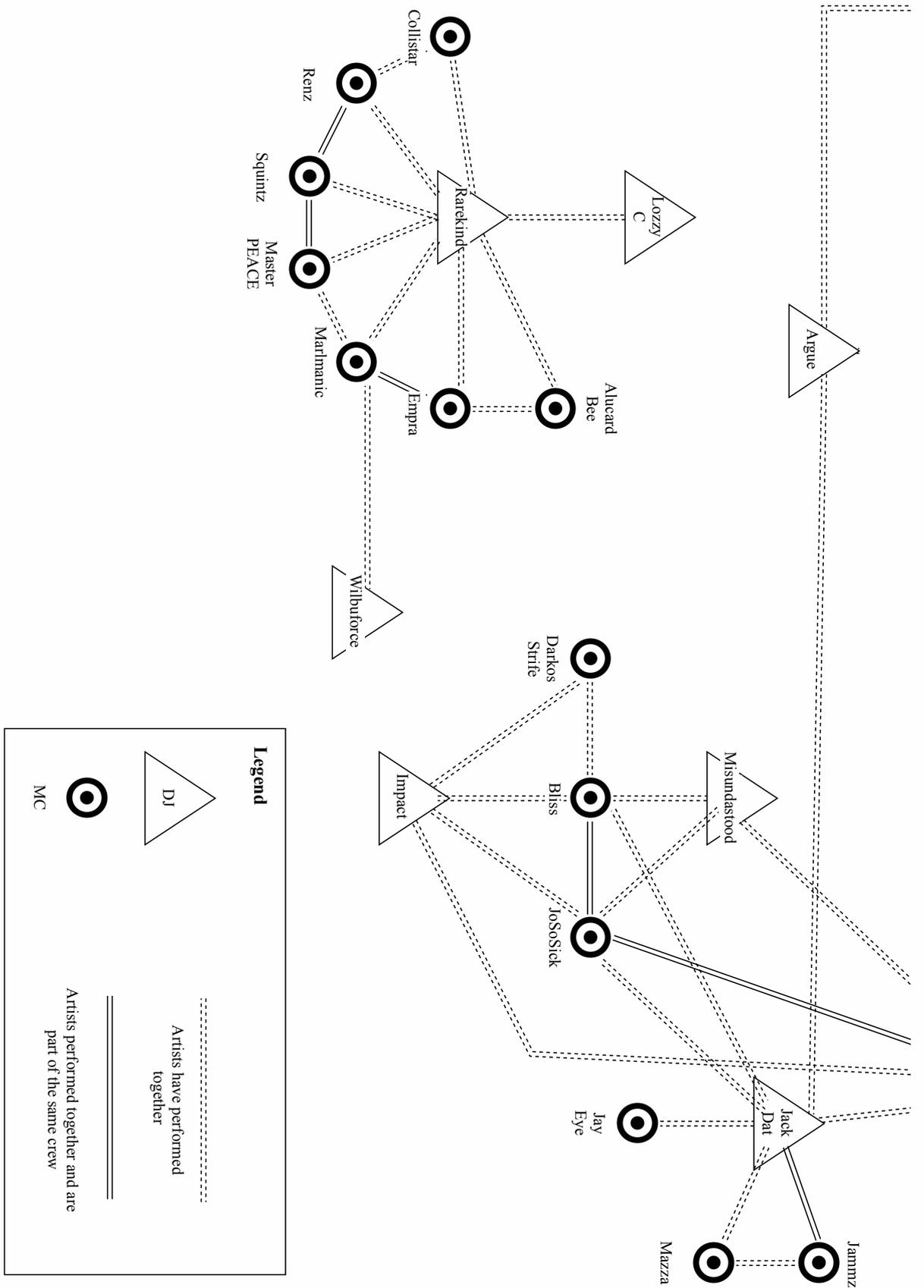
Figure 7.3 – Artistic relations at Radar Radio, June to October 2017.

nature of the form, there is every likelihood that you could bump into any number of MCs or DJs at a particular radio set. An awareness of other artists, their style, and their expectations of you as an artist, is necessary for cohesive practice.

Figure 7.3 maps (part of) the extensive interconnectivity of the scene, paying close attention to the artists engaged in creative practice at Radar Radio (where Kirby T and Argue were based) during the five month period documented in the radio case study above. Dashed edges denote having performed together on one of these shows, while solid edges —or hyper-edges— indicate a shared performance *and* group membership. For example, the line between Boss Renz and Squintz demonstrates that they performed together in this period, and that they were both members of a crew, Mob Set, at this time. Lady Shocker and Scrivs, however, simply performed together on a radio show. Unlike Gleiser and Danon's model it is far from exhaustive. It does not present all exchange for time immemorial, nor does it express ties that weren't articulated in the radio sphere. The fact that it is still so entwined is a testament to the interconnectivity, and consequent potentialities for new practice.[15]

One calculation that can be deduced is the vertex degree, or the number of connections to any one artist. Of the 47 MCs and 19 DJs, it is Logan from the Otherside who stands apart with 20 connections. This means he performed with 20 different artists in this period, including five DJs and fifteen MCs. Kirby T was the most connected DJ, having performed with thirteen MCs. Kirby T has since gone on to develop the Westside Sessions platform—along with DJ Olos and Rebecca Judd—while Logan became a regular on a number of radio shows, including Tiatsim's House of Grime residency on Mode FM.

And although MCs may not prefer to engage with the radio sphere, the connections and match fitness accrued from working within this domain make it easier for artists to transition into the live arena. I spoke with South London MC Jabz about the radio sphere,

[15] MEJ Newman, "The Structure and Function of Complex Networks", *SIAM Review* 45, no.2 (2003): 172; Stengers, "Ecology of Practices", 185.

its benefits, both musically and socially, and the distinction between going to sets with just your own crew members as opposed to branching out.

> I feel like when you're around MCs that you're always around it's just practice. It's the same as fighters when they're in the boxing ring. When you're in the dojo with your guys fighting, that's your guy so you're practicing. When you're around other MCs, though, you've got to show that you know what you're doing. It's a challenge, but it's a good way to meet new people as well.[16]

MCing or DJing regularly on radio allows artists to refine their craft, accrue knowledge of the performance sphere as a whole and make connections with the artists within it. A working knowledge of this interconnectivity within the network, then, is a critical part of a grime artists' performance practice.

(iii) Acquiring competence as part of a group

The multitude of performers engaged in pirate radio practice means that they are more than simply another combinatorial element in a wider network of creative production. Radio features performers with agency who have to negotiate uncertainty and collaborate with a wide variety of artists. The 'working knowledge' that grime artists must therefore possess can be framed within Benjamin Brinner's concept of a musician's 'competence' (first referenced in Chapter 5, Section 1). Although a generalised term, it carries substantial weight and relevance for grime performance. Brinner describes competence as:

> the 'individualised mastery of the array of interrelated skills and knowledge that is *required of* musicians within a particular tradition or community and is *acquired* and developed in response to and in accordance with the demands and possibilities of general and specific cultural, social and musical traditions [emphasis in original]'.[17]

The first clause within Brinner's definition could refer to grime's performance techniques that were analysed in Chapters 4 and 5. Session management, etiquette and the skills to

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16 Jabz, Personal Interview. July 2018.

17 Brinner, *Knowing Music,* 28.

negotiate a performance—moving through phases of play such as the reload, through ball and rally—are necessary to ensure forward motion. Artists need knowledge of these techniques so they can react to artists' performance suggestions, and move towards heighten states of creativity wherein they can *level up*. This is etched out in Sawyer's model of the continuing process, and is expanded on in multiple episodes that elucidated the 'moment-to-moment contingency' of grime artists during these phases of play.[18]

The latter part of this statement is also important. Grime artists must develop with reference to the form's demands and possibilities. Owing to its huge scope, there are myriad possibilities including changes in personnel, mobbing of sets, amongst other factors. This, again, is unique to grime performance. As such this definition of competence needs to be refined for grime practice. To acquire competence, you have to work frequently within this environment for an extended period of time to become accustomed to this. This, in fact, is one of the primary reasons that Stormzy—a grime artist with international acclaim—was shunned by some members of the grassroots grime community. Historic unwillingness to attend radio sets is seen as a lack in his competence as a grime MC.[19] Knowledge of the environment and its expectations can be just as important as individual skill.

Within grime there are specific demands for an individual to develop requisite skills with reference to the performance network as a whole and its varying environments. These arenas for performance lie outside simple discussions of familiarity, friendship or dyadic relationship development. As such, grime's semi-improvisatory performance style and chaotic make up of performances necessitates acquisition of a particular type of competence, specific to the form.

It is the resolutely collaborative nature of grime performance that shapes this competence. The more one works within these groups the easier it becomes to orient oneself within them and *manage* uncertainty through being adaptable. It is not a case of becoming more predictable—since there are always elements that cannot be pre-accounted

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[18] Sawyer and De Zutter, "Distributed Creativity…", 82.

[19] Stormzy addressed this directly on 2017's 'Mr Skeng': 'They said Stormzy can't be the king of grime. Cah he can't do radio sets. Let's be real, rudeboy, I would light up a radio set.'

for—but being able to locate certain behaviours becoming stable, while also recognising the scope for change and being ready to reposition oneself with reference to this novelty.

Section 2 will present these patterns of behaviour within grime's performance network, demonstrating how artists, DJs in particular, deal with change. For David Borgo, there is always a 'localised unpredictability of improvised group performances' but there are nonetheless 'dynamics…that can reveal more stable behaviours over time'.[20] This stability is afforded by grime artists' distinct ability to adapt, react and create in this complex and continually changing performance environment.

Section 2 – Degrees of control and issues of power in live radio

Section 1 established that engagement with grime's performance sphere is unpredictable. But there are ways in which these issues can be managed. An awareness of the network enables artists to anticipate who might be performing alongside them, and what the conditions may be. For DJs in particular, this anticipation can even stretch to the very material nature of the equipment at each radio station or performance venue. Mode FM, for example, is famed for its 'bruk-up' mixer, with all its channel faders missing their knob cap (see Figure 7.4) while Radar Radio's practice rooms had CDJs with semi-functionality. According to one artist I worked with, 'we always had to cue it up loads and just press play'.[21] And while the material degradation of equipment is a constant issue that has to be negotiated by DJs—cue buttons, in particular wear over time—engaging with other artists is often more variable and unpredictable.

This is evidenced by a shift towards DJ—rather than crew—residencies on radio stations. The Rinse FM schedule from 2002 clearly demonstrates a substantial amount of residencies for crews, with Dagenham's OT Crew, Pay As U Go, Crazy Titch's Boyz in Da Hood and More Fire Crew all featuring (see Figure 7.5). Figure 7.6's roster from 2017,

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[20] Borgo, *Sync or Swarm*, 74.

[21] Contribution anonymised.

Figure 7.4 – Tweet from Spooky Bizzle, August 7, 2017.

however, only lists one show hosted by a crew, The Otherside. All others listed are DJ residencies with a rotating MC roster. This variability is acutely felt by DJs, as evidenced on Kirby T's 26 MC set (audiovisual example 7a). This section therefore shows how DJs manage this uncertainty, and move towards levelling up as part of a *temporary group affiliation* realised through interactive performance. Episode 7.1 highlights the importance of competence and improvisatory ability through presenting two contrasting moments of interaction (one successful, the other less so) between two DJs and a roster of MCs. A case study of Cream Collective DJ Aidan follows, foregrounding *complementation* as a key characteristic of grime practice.
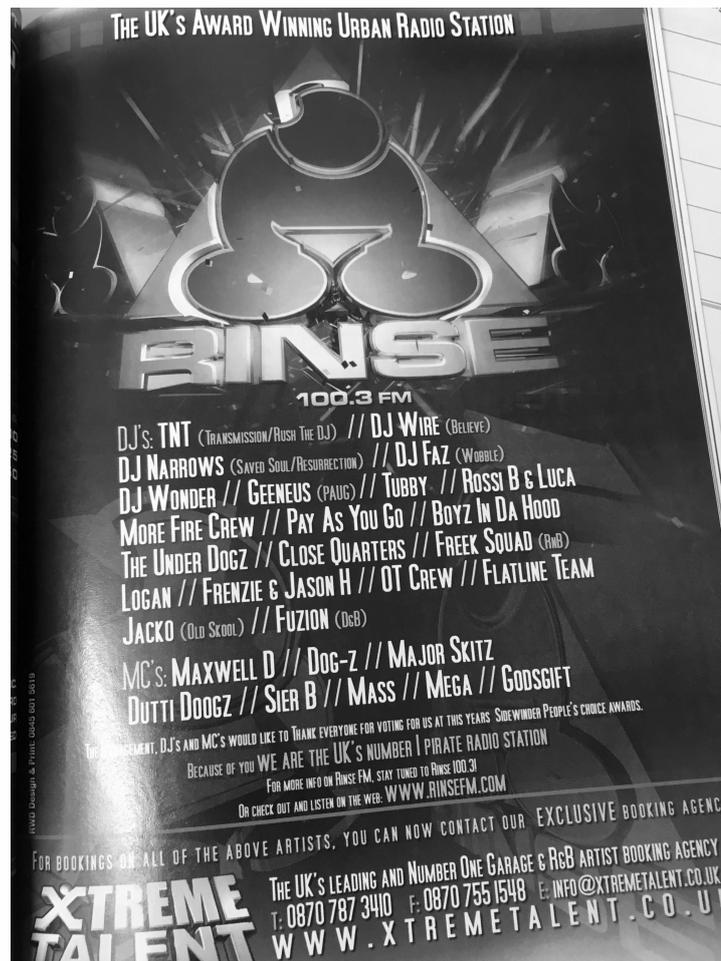
Figure 7.5 – Rinse FM schedule, October 2002. From *RWD Mag*, 14: 37.

Date	Show	DJs	MCs
10/07/17	Jack Dat	Jack Dat	Mazza, Jammz, Wize
10/07/17	Cream on Deja	Prod. By Aidan	Crafty893, Blaydes, Ramzey
11/07/17	Plastician	Plastician	Discarda, Young Yizzy, Scratchy, D Double E, Footsie, Jammz, Mic Ty, Mez,
11/07/17	Grime Sessions	Kirby T, Olos, DJ Cable, DJ Kingpin	Saskilla, Reepa M, Jinx Touchwood, Vital, Heckz, Firing
11/07/17	Heavytrackerz	Heavytrackerz	None
12/07/17	Marcus Nasty Birthday Special	Marcus Nasty, Croustibass, Vapour	Dizzle Kid, MC Shantie, MC Creed, PSG
12/07/17	Boofy & Hi5 Ghost	Boofy & Hi5 Ghost	

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12/07/17	Nike X GRM	Logan Sama, A.G the DJ, J Cush, Grandmixxer	President T, AJ Tracey, Not3s
12/07/17	The Otherside	Selecta Impact	Jo So Sick, Bliss, Darkos Strife, Logan OLM
13/07/17	Grandmixxer	Grandmixxer	None
14/07/17	Stella Beats: PK Brako	Pk Brako Grandmixxer	None
16/07/17	Boxed	Slackk	None
16/07/17	Charisma		Info not online
16/07/17	The Grime Show	Sir Spyro	Mez, PK

Figure 7.6 – London radio schedule, July 2017. Adapted from Radio Case Study database.

(i) Adaptation to uncertainty

Episode 7.1
🎤 **Sheller, Challenger**
📻 **DJ David and DJ Finesse, "DJ David Show", London: 2017.**
💿 **Audiovisual examples 7b–d**

One of the most common variables DJs deal with is MC attendance. Artists often don't turn up, or arrive late. This has the potential to disrupt proceedings if the DJ is unable to react appropriately. This particular set took place about three months into DJ David's weekly residency on Mode FM.[22] David was a relative newcomer to the scene, and throughout this period he had been building momentum with guest MCs and guest mixes each week. For this show he had invited seven MCs. He promoted the show in the week prior specifically focusing upon these MCs and their expected attendance. I arrived about twenty minutes into the show, while another DJ was running their guest mix. DJ David seemed apprehensive.

As mentioned in Chapter 4, shows with a two-hour format typically feature guest mixes and new tracks for the first hour, with MCs arriving at the top of the second hour.

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[22] Names and dates anonymised throughout.

However, as the second hour approached there were still no MCs at the station. Five minutes later Challenger arrived. He took a place in the corner nodding his head to the beats. Fifteen minutes later Sheller arrived. By this time there were only forty minutes until the end of the show. DJ David was notably frustrated, was running around and ringing MCs. Myself and the other DJ present (Finesse) said he should remain calm and start the set, which he eventually did 20 minutes later.

DJ David and Challenger

Both the time constraint and MC composition offered an interesting dynamic. Apprehension pervaded the radio performance. While it started well, there were some errors on DJ David's part that inhibited Challenger's ability to flow. Similarly to Saint P and Dot Rotten, Challenger works with multisyllabic rhyme schemes that often carry across through bar lines. This technicality is demanding, and DJs consequently have to be acutely attentive and receptive.

During the set, Challenger performed a 32-bar passage that was markedly dense and multisyllabic before opening out into a new section that, although complex, was clearly tied to the end word of each line. Seven bars into this new section however, DJ David dropped in an instrumental that derailed the performance. David offered no prior indication of the instrumental's impending drop (unlike a DJ who might build anticipation through a through ball). Further to this, its arrival mid-way through a passage distorted both Challenger's trajectory and the cadential shape of his 16-bar pattern. To compensate, Challenger repeatedly looped a singular bar to regain traction. This failed, and the instrumental was eventually pulled back by DJ David so they could start again (audiovisual example 7b, 0:55–1:15).

> Challenger: I'mma drop this one here,
>
> drop it in the hood with a restricted here,
>
> show you powers of the mystic brer,

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challenge me then you will witness fear…

Ten minutes later, DJ David repeated his error, through dropping in Platinum 45's 'Oi' beat in the 23rd bar of a pattern (audiovisual example 7c, 0:25). Again, this was two bars prior to the 8-bar switch up. These errors are contrasted with DJ Finesse, who by this point was going back-to-back with David, alternating after every two tracks.

DJ Finesse and Sheller

Unlike DJ David, DJ Finesse had been DJing on the scene for approximately three years. The following example from the set demonstrates both Finesse's competence and adaptability. This is facilitated by his acute 'knowledge of cues and appropriate responses [that possess] declarative and procedural aspects' (see below).[23]

Following a wheel up of a Mr Virgo track, entitled 'Next Tune', the track picks up again and Sheller begins to build, repeating the passage that earned him the wheel. Almost immediately, Finesse starts to tease in a new instrumental, cutting it in on the last semiquaver of each bar. In bar 9, Finesse cuts more intensely with chops on the 2+ and the 4+ of the bar. Just as the new instrumental is about to drop something unexpected happens. Instead of moving into the next 16—which is one of his well-known reload lyrics—Sheller starts to loop bar 7, 'dem boy a violate me well', through into bar 8 (audiovisual example 7d, 0:17– 1:04).

> Sheller: There ain't no witches, just ni**az with figures,
>
> bruddas with snubbers, tell man already make a man see
>
> colours, I've got man that wear their winter
>
> jacket in the summer, big shotgun hidden under
>
> the puffa. Locked and loaded,
>
> *chk* boom, now you're another,
>
> dem boy a violate me well,

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[23] Brinner, *Knowing Music,* 40.

dem boy a violate me well…

Finesse instantaneously drops out the new instrumental and brings the existing Mr Virgo track back in. He then sets a loop on the new instrumental. This enables him to wait and anticipate Sheller's movement into the reload bar. During the 8-bar build, Finesse chops in the new instrumental again. On the eighth bar he uses a high-pass filter to roll off the Mr Virgo track, allowing Sheller to announce the impending bar—'nun nuh go suh' (nothing happens how you expect it to)—and arrive at the drop: 'Man are from yard, might run up in your yard, your bredren's yard, your sister's yard.'

The energy and almost symbiotic interaction here between Finesse and Sheller lead to an instant wheel up of the tune, with Sheller immediately acknowledging Finesse's contribution: 'Oi we're inside. Finesse. Going on very shelly around deckle.' This momentum managed to pull the set through, and it was largely successful. Afterwards I left with Challenger to get the train home. On the train he took a phone call and explained the situation: 'Quick set and that, yeah. You know them ones where you expect certain people to turn up at a certain time and then they didn't. So I *knew* something wasn't quite right [emphasis added].' Challenger's comments indicate that he was aware of things not going entirely to plan, with five MCs failing to show up. The issue here, though, is how the artists subsequently created with this in mind. While DJ David struggled with the situation as a whole, leading him towards making errors that he wouldn't usually make, Finesse both handled the situation *and* was able to attentively work with Sheller and Challenger, listening to their contributions and reacting while performing.

Finesse achieved this for a number of reasons. Firstly he possessed the technical cachet to implement alterations almost instantaneously. He knew what to do (declarative) and he knew how to execute it (procedural). Secondly, he was familiar with both artists. This meant that he could second guess or pre-empt some of their actions, since he was aware of the 'functional and contextual associations' of their material.[24] Thirdly, and finally he was more accustomed to this environment so he could manage uncertainty in a more disciplined

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24 ibid, 41.

manner. This demonstration of both competence and improvisation is often a mandatory expectation for grime DJs, particularly on the radio circuit. Rather than falter, the combination of Finesse and Sheller reached an apex wherein their collective contribution exceeded individual capabilities, to a point at which they levelled up.

(ii) Complementation: Aidan and Cream Collective

To further probe into DJs' preparation, technical skill and adaptability in performance, we can turn to the practice of Aidan. Aidan was the DJ for Cream Collective's DejaVu FM show for nearly two years from 2015 to late 2017. In this period he worked with over 80 MCs. This experience allowed him to develop tactics to deal with the variability faced in the pirate radio environment. These tactics align with Benjamin Brinner's concept 'complementation'. Rather than be intimidated by uncertainty, Aidan saw potential in variability that offered a 'sustaining drive' to his weekly residency.[25]

Aidan mitigated against too much uncertainty over who might turn up to perform through having an understanding of MCs' existing relationships. This meant he could predict who might show, based on their affiliations. He also had an appreciation of MCs' individual styles, and categorised MCs in a particular way. Through this he was able to adapt his instrumental selection accordingly. In discussion he spoke of 'multi' MCs, broadly denoting artists like Challenger, Saint P and Dot Rotten who regularly utilise multisyllabic phrases and an expansive, storytelling style.

> For them guys I would be going for the choppy beats. I would go for the Spooky [productions], the proper sampled bass ones. Skippy and skippy works together, that's what I've seen. It's either the proper choppy beats or the mellow ones where they get to say everything. Because on the loud wobbly grime beats they get lost. There's too much going on with the music and the vocals, there's no in between.[26]

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[25] Brinner, *Knowing Music,* 316; Fuller, *Media Ecologies*, 37.

[26] Aidan, 2018.

This adaptability of selection resonates with Brinner's notion of 'complementation' since Aidan indicates a move towards an 'integrated aesthetic'. An awareness of artists' respective styles enables DJs to harness their emergent relationship, work collaboratively and even reach moments of climactic energy.[27]

The following two examples demonstrate how Aidan's knowledge of artists' strengths and weaknesses, which form part of a *proto-taxonomisation*—-that is continually evolving and contingent—affords him adaptability when working with both MCs who are familiar to him, and new artists that he assesses in real-time during performance.[28]

Episode 7.2
🎤 **Charlie Trees, Blessed**
📻**Aidan, DJ Umpah, "Cream on Deja – Charlie Trees Birthday Set", DejaVu FM, London: November 23, 2016.**
💿 **Audiovisual example 7e**

As part of Aidan's weekly residency a large roster of artists passed through, varying from week to week. The following set happened to be with MCs who Aidan was largely familiar with. It was arranged for the birthday of South-East London MC, Charlie Trees. During the set an extended passage developed where Charlie Trees and fellow crew member Blessed were exchanging lyrics. Both artists are widely considered to be multi MCs.

This passage emerges fifteen minutes into the set, with Charlie building momentum over the remnants of a Spooky production. Blessed takes over with the drop of the new instrumental by Swimful—a remix of Wiley's 'Shanghai'—adjusting his delivery to compensate for the change in style, with Aidan seemingly confident that this selection would complement the two performers. Its half-time sub bass and pentatonic string pattern offered a marked change in sonority but also space with which the artists could work.

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[27] Brinner, *Knowing Music,* 193.

[28] ibid*,* 316.

Consequently the switch up allows their lyricism to come to the fore, particularly at the point in which the instrumental breaks down, with Charlie and Blessed's voices fully foregrounded (audiovisual example 7e, 1:18–1:42).

> Charlie Trees: I'll slaughter a guy on set and I
>
> know myself so I'll walk in the night no
>
> Stress, can't talk to my guys on set no
>
> Blessed: You must have thought my guys are all wet wait,
>
> when WAVE gang come on a hype it's all stressed
>
> Charlie Trees: little man get back on your bike it's all dead
>
> Blessed: Don't try living a life that's not blessed
>
> Charlie: Can't look me in the eye that's not them…

This back-to-back required great focus, and unfortunately twelve bars in Blessed lost his place. Although this convergence was temporary, it possessed great potential, capturing a transitory point in which all three artists are working in unison. Aidan reflected on this set during our interview.

> There was a set where I remember Charlie [Trees] and Blessed were there and I knew who was going to be on the mic next and I thought if I put something by Audioslugs [or similar] on they will do it right. Some people get lost. Let's say you put on a gassed (excitable) beat, obviously whoever's on it would start doing one liners or trying to get the wheel, but certain man that you know are not looking for that, you put on a certain beat and it's just magic.[29]

This sensibility extends to scenarios where MCs may appear uninvited. These situations can be enlivening but also stressful or even frustrating. However, Aidan adopts similar tactics to assuage concern, choosing appropriate instrumentals for the new MC(s).

> If I haven't heard of them before, obviously whatever's going to come next comes next. I remember there was this one guy named Figure-O or something. He only came to one set but straight away when he got on mic he was very clear, very slow. He wasn't about doing a lot of syllable stuff. It was more just being clear and getting his shit out. So I knew straight away that when he was next to come to just put something on that wasn't so complex. I

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[29] Aidan, 2018.

> wanted it to be something that would make him fit in pocket. Have the gaps. Maybe
>
> something choppy. Because then it would make him sound sick, and it did because I
>
> remember he got like two wheels straight away.[30]

Aidan's contribution here offers a further example of being adept to novelty. He also touches on ways to make an artist sound better, especially if they are lacking the technical ability to project over an energetic beat. Figure-O's clear and deliberated delivery was matched with a instrumental that benefitted this style. A perceived lack in competence is repurposed as a strength, offering another example of complementation.

> I feel like certain people see the DJ as just putting in tracks and the MC spitting over them .
>
> When really you're trying to adapt your sound and style to them. So that you can make it
>
> sound better than what it is, cause even when they're not the greatest MC(s) they might have
>
> good one line flows or something like that. If you take out the music, make it choppy for it
>
> it, will sound sick. It will sound like they're doing it on purpose, it's like a collaboration type
>
> thing.[31]

In both situations Aidan elicits a contextual association between a certain type of delivery and a catalogue of beats that would be suitable for the artists. Furthermore, he was able to put this to practice during performance. Similarly to Finesse, he possesses the skillset to both understand the nature of the interaction, how to enact a change, and be sensitive to other performers around him.

In order for DJs to succeed in the highly fraught radio environment, then, there is an awareness of what to play combined with possessing the skillset to successfully enact change. They also need to have a strong selection of instrumentals that cover a multitude of MC styles. A mastery of these techniques then allows this process to be secondary to the act of listening and reacting in the moment. A DJ's competence within grime's radio network therefore relies upon core skills (addressed in Chapters 4, 5 and 6) and the flexibility to react as a performance unfolds. Assiduous complementation and proto-taxonomisation affords DJs with full agency to respond instantaneously—through 'moment-to-moment

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[30] ibid.

[31] ibid.

contingency', or otherwise—and combine with MCs to *level up* and produce moments of substantial energy.

Section 3 – Persistence and composure: Jabz and Slimzee

The variability brought forth from pirate radio's dense network of practitioners similarly poses problems for MCs. There exists a sliding scale between relatively stable encounters to moments of chaos and confusion (see audiovisual example 7a). For Brinner, there are 'degrees of control' that pervade gamelan performance. For grime music, the scope for uncertainty is arguably greater. This is partly owing to the variety of performers essentially occupying the same role. Whereas gamelan ensembles have instrumental positions and expectations, the homogeneity of grime's principal performance tool—the voice—means any performer can take control of proceedings (see Chapter 2, Section 4). Further to this, the variety of domains offers a number of options and circumstances. Grime performances can be rigid but this is rare and only really occurs at large scale headline shows.[32]

Skepta's July 2018 performance at Lovebox, for example, was meticulously planned and choreographed. A monochrome silhouette of Skepta lit up behind a 10ft industrial fan, while the undulant bass of the opening track boomed across the field. He burst out onto stage in a bulletproof vest and tinted shades, performing four tracks in a row without deviating one iota from how they sounded on record. Forty-five minutes into the performance, there was a 'grime set', where Skepta promised to 'bring it right back to the origins'. In reality the set was predetermined. DJ Maximum metronomically brought in a new instrumental every 16 bars and each MC had eight bars to spray a reload lyric in a rally-styled format. This premeditated performance removed all scope for improvisation, with each performer prescribed a particular role, especially DJ Maximum who only played the most overt and well known grime tracks: 'Rhythm'n' Gash', 'Oi!', 'Pulse X' amongst others.

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32 Brinner, *Knowing Music,* 173.

In this instance, they fulfilled a 'ritualised expectation', at the expense of collaborative creativity.[33]

New combinations, however provide very different opportunities. They can be both rewarding and disastrous. While problematic occurrences have already been addressed through attending to the divergent individuality of Dot Rotten in Episode 5.2 and the chaotic results of DJ Argue calling for an '8-bar rally' in Episode 5.4, this final section looks at the ways in which artists can work successfully within new domains. This chapter has attended extensively to the 'interactive network' that grime artists are engaged within. Nonetheless, the sheer number of MCs and DJs involved at ground level, as evidenced in Section 1, does not necessarily result in an even playing field. Latent tensions and antagonisms are also accompanied by distinct power dynamics. As mentioned in Episode 5.1, an apprenticeship system exists where 'Youngers' typically defer to 'Olders', while there exists invisible, yet highly pronounced, trophic levels that permeate encounters. Certain DJs and MCs are higher up the food chain. This following episode focuses on a performance from South London MC Jabz with DJ Slimzee from August 2017. Prior to this encounter they had never performed together. It maps the ways in which Jabz adapted to the occasion, and managed the power dynamics that are often inherent when performing with an artist of assumed status and prestige.

> Alex: Do you think about what MC's are going to turn up or who might be there?
>
> Jabz: Nah. I assume that I'd probably go more in if there were massive MCs there as I want to show how hype I can be. More time I just don't really give a shit, I just come, especially since I've come to do my thing and gas it up with hype on the set.
>
> Alex: What about when you went on Rinse with Slimzee?
>
> Jabz: Yeah, well if I'm on Rinse FM people can listen in their cars. I have to go in.[34]

While I have spoken about an understanding of the network and its benefits, a level of persistence and self-confidence is required to enter a domain where anything can happen. Jabz had to 'go in', and do his best. This Rinse FM set with Slimzee was consequently a

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[33] Skepta, Live at Lovebox, Gunnersbury Park, July 13, 2018.

[34] Jabz, 2018.

Figure 7.7 – Slimzee consults his book at a live performance.
Screenshot from "DJ Argue B2B Slimzee w/ U19s", August 27,
2017.

landmark in Jabz's career: firstly for the opportunity to appear on radio with one of grime's most well-respected DJs; secondly, for the way in which he worked with and accommodated for Slimzee's mixing style.

Episode 7.3
🎤 **Jabz, Jon E Clayface, Popzzy English**
📻**Slimzee, Trends "Slimzee w/ JLSXND7RS", Rinse FM, London: August 15, 2017.**
💿 **Audiovisual example 7f**

During this period, Slimzee's Rinse FM residency showcased new material coming out on his two label imprints: Slimzos Recordings and Rotpot Records. Consequently, these shows attended primarily to new instrumentals, rather than interplay with MCs. Aidan attested to this in interview. He spoke of Slimzee's use of a book during sets that features a tracklist detailing upcoming releases (see Figure 7.7). As a consequence, MCing on a Slimzee set in this period was particularly challenging.

> One time when WAVE had their Rinse FM set with Boylan, Trends and Slimzee, it was interesting to see how they were DJing. They had a book and obviously it listed the exclusives that were coming up. It didn't look passionate, it was more like 'ah I've played that one, don't play that one, we've ticked it off the list'. And then they'd say to each other 'oh yeah I'm playing this one next, it's off our next release'.[35]

Jabz's arrival on the set coincided with a deeply abrasive instrumental. Its stripped-back square wave rumbles, snare drum hit with infinite decay and high pitched triangle hits were not typically suited for MCing over. However, Jabz rose to the occasion, with his sixteen bar possessing similar venom.

Following Jabz's entry, Slimzee teases in a new instrumental. During this time Jabz pursues a multisyllabic pattern. Anticipating an impending drop, Jabz takes a measured approach, calming down his delivery and lowering his tone. Jabz then arrives at the drop with a signature reload lyric, his passage combining with the irascible bassline of a new production from Boylan to great effect (audiovisual example 7f, 0:58). In most circumstances this would garner a wheel—or 'drop-wheel'—however it doesn't arrive. Rather than faltering, however, Jabz persists and continues spitting his lyrical passage with real purpose. Eventually, after ten bars Slimzee acknowledges Jabz's contribution and reloads the tune.

> Obviously I didn't really know their style of mixing well. I had to work bare hard for that wheel. It's mad. There were certain bars that weren't getting a wheel up and I thought 'errrr'. But it wasn't really that deep. They mix differently to Charisma and anyone else and to be honest. I wasn't sure if I was going to get that wheel…but they're not DJs that wheel it on a regular basis. You've got to transform your energy over a long period. It was a late wheel, too, so I really wasn't expecting it at that point.[36]

Here, Jabz speaks about transforming his energy. There is a need to maintain the level of delivery, even when a vast amount has been expended spitting over the drop. His 'late wheel'

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[35] Aidan, 2018.

[36] Jabz, 2018.

had greater effect and he felt that he'd earned the wheel saying it was 'more deserved' when it came through.

> It's all to do with practice. Sometimes you don't know, but you might subconsciously know you're going to get it. Working with different DJs also helps. We did a set once with [Manchester-based DJ] PK Brako and he basically doesn't wheel it.[37]

While Jabz opened with confidence, his awareness of different mixing styles allayed initial fears about not getting the wheel. Instead, he continued performing and maintained his composure. Slimzee's lessened attentiveness to the MCs—while frustrating to some and very different to Aidan's mixing style—did not affect Jabz. Further to this, he was respectful to his fellow performer. One aspect of competence that is required for successful performance is the understanding of your position in relation to others. While Jabz was confident enough to spar with anyone, he applied due deference to both Slimzee—who was an 'older' and more respected—and the station where he was performing (Rinse FM). Rather than complain about 'working hard for the wheel'—such as MC Stanley in Chapter 5—he persevered and secured a reload for his contribution. A combined understanding of his position relative to Slimzee, an attenuated appreciation of Slimzee's preferences, and assured self confidence, resulted in an encounter that—although initially challenging—resulted in a collectively assured improvisational exchange.

Conclusion

Engaging with grime's performance sphere is a complex and arduous endeavour. Personnel are in flux, radio stations are fervent yet hostile, and competition can see performances crumble. This fractured and chaotic sphere is therefore open to highly creative and combative approaches in equal measure. New environments create novelty but require both insight and resilience to thrive. This is owing to the double bind of both an interrelated

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[37] ibid.

performance circuit and the complexity of the improvisational process itself with a multitudinous array of performers.

Successful negotiation of these environments requires a high level of competence. An awareness of performance context, knowledge of the interactional framework, and an understanding of the macro-network and micro-ensemble set up is critical. This, combined with an adaptability to unfolding events in a semi-improvisatory form—be it through complementation or otherwise—allows for new ideas to develop. DJs, such as Aidan and Finesse, possess both an understanding of the network and its participants, and the skillset to enact change and react to other artists in a metapragmatic manner. They assess performance context, ensemble structure and are aware of the dynamics of interaction, demonstrating a multifaceted competence for the form and its semi-improvisatory performance structure. While David's use of gesture unnerved Challenger, Finesse's attentiveness to Sheller resulted in a temporary group affiliation bringing forth a moment of irruptive energy. Aidan's considered employment of complementation allowed the practice of disparate individuals to mould together, resulting in an integrated aesthetic.

Grime is a form that sees continual tension between group creativity and individual fervour. Some individual pursuits are scintillating, but for everyday involvement and for constructing new ideas, the ensemble set up provides many more possibilities. Chapter 8 will now turn to the specifics of crew practice in the radio domain. Weekly sessions offer crews the stability to both improvise and develop inter-ensemble techniques. These cases often foreground the most advanced examples of collective creativity in grime music, with each crew intent on both developing its own sound and pushing the envelope through new innovations. Through assessing the practice of two groups, including my own collective Over The Edge, it will articulate two principal ways in which grime crews *level up*: through intermusical referentiality and the development of a 'corollary epistemology' for group creative practice.

Chapter 8 – Levelling Up: Collective creativity in two grime crews, 2017-2019

Introduction

For crews to develop, they need an acute understanding of the ensemble they work within. Within this MCs and DJs develop interactional routines. Chapter 5 offered examples of how group tropes like back-to-backs and rallies can develop (see Episode 5.5, with Ets and Lyrical Strally). Working together enables new ideas to collaboratively emerge, and this is attached to a 'collective sensibility' that is built over time.[1] While Chapter 7 detailed the somewhat chaotic nature of the pirate radio circuit, residencies for crews offer a level of stability. This chapter explores what this stability can offer to improvising crews, and how both new practice and points of climactic energy can emerge.

This examination focuses on two grime crews, Over The Edge and Shellyvnne, and it principally attends to two concerns. Firstly, how group's collaboratively build performance schema that offer opportunity for metapragmatic improvisation that is triggered through intermusical allusion and referentiality. Secondly, how the pursuit of a recognisable crew aesthetic leads towards ways of knowing that are unique to each improvising collective.

While in these instances there is not necessarily scope for outside interference—such as through mobbing of sets, and inter-crew rivalries—this does not result in stagnation. Rather, and this is captured by David Borgo, improvising groups 'exhibit the possibility for adaptation and emergence by being open to energy influxes from outside the system [as shown in Chapter 7, but also] through their own highly interconnected nature.'[2] Further to this, variation in personnel does occur as the crew itself is continually evolving, with respect to both membership and creative thrust.

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[1] Brinner, *Knowing Music,* 41, 171; Sawyer and De Zutter, "Distributed Creativity", 84.

[2] Borgo, *Sync or Swarm,* 62.

This chapter's analyses are underpinned by work on intertextuality and intermusicality, and improvising ensembles' 'epistemologies', or ways of knowing. It is accordingly split into two sections. The first focuses on intermusicality in both Shellyvnne and Over The Edge, while Section 2 looks more closely at Over The Edge's emergent practice.

This thesis maps grime crews as micro-'interpretative communities' that possess a vast array of 'formal features' common only to the crews themselves. While there are many extensive pieces of work that focus on hip-hop intertextuality, this is often at a macro level, with 'intergeneric' allusions to antecedent musical forms or 'canonized' figures like Tupac and Biggie Smalls.[3] Grime's intertextuality is incredibly local. The use of particular lyrics or phrases can intertextually refer to another member of the collective, while a particular flow pattern can engender a response from the DJ. However, this is just one way in which artists interpret and create anew. In this chapter, this referentiality is inscribed as *intermusical* since—like Ingrid Monson—I locate a wide variety of contextual allusions at play, many of which are not textual. DJ gesture, body language and cadential figures are critical to a crew's interactional structure. While intertextuality in-and-of-itself does not negate non-textual referentiality, intermusicality more closely aligns with the full spectrum of interactive strategies employed.[4] These strategies in combination build into each crews' 'emergent ontology'. Seymour Wright locates a synthesis of 'practice and learning' as part of improvisatory performance. This is fitting for grime. Both pirate radio's specificity and the nature of grime crews' interactive structures, result in creative practice as a continuing, emergent exercise that offers skill acquisition, moments of heightened energy, and irruptive novelty; all of which are critical for levelling up.[5]

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[3] Stanley Fish, *The Authority of Interpretive Communities*, 14; Williams, *Rhymin' and Stealin'*, 14, 18, 180.

[4] Monson, *Saying Something*, 139.

[5] Wright, "Original Creative Practice", 18.

Section 1 – Shellyvnne: Group Cohesion, Flows and Referentiality

Working within a crew for an extended period of time affords artists with space to attune to each others' proclivities. Period of intensive activity often result in scenarios where artists effectively predict what their fellow performers are going to do before they do it. This was noted in Chapter 6, with the through ball, and is referenced widely by artists across disciplines. For free improvisation outfit AMM the centrality of shared enterprise meant that ideas would naturally coalesce, with improvisations lasting in excess of sixty minutes resulting from emergent interplay that naturally unfurled and was rarely explicitly acknowledged in words (much like MTM's transition into the rally phase, see Chapter 5, Section 2).[6] This section offers a close look at Shellyvnne's dense intermusical practice, and how six of its MCs fashioned flow patterns, cadential figures and modular lyrical units that can interweave and follow on from each other in an open model that allows for variation in personnel and improvisational setting. This framework moves beyond the dyadic pre-composed back-to-backs analysed in Episode 5.5 (between Lyrical Strally and Ets), towards a multidirectional phase of play.

(i) Modular lyrical units

Despite its advances on dyadic back-to-back practice, Shellyvnne's multidirectional approach was initially more modest in intentions. An embryonic example of this process can be heard on Sir Spyro's Rinse FM showcase, which opened Chapter 4. Four minutes into the performance MCs Shiesty and Glorz enter into a back-to-back out of a 64-bar passage from Shiesty that gradually began to incorporate Glorz. In this instance, both artists utilised modular lyrical units—fashioned around their names 'D-A-T-G-U-Y' and 'G-L-O-R-Y'

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[6] AMM, *The Crypt*, June 12, 1968.

respectively—to dovetail and exchange lyrics. No physical cues or gestures were utilised. Rather, the choice of lyrical content and performance made Glorz aware of the incoming switch up (audiovisual example 8a). Each artists' employment of this abrupt lyrical unit therefore functions as an intertextual reference to both prior enactments of this interplay and to their fellow MCs' own version of the lyrical unit. The onset of Shiesty's usage contextually infers to Glorz that he should enter with his own repurposing, and the back-to-back consequently ensues.

This early indication of close, intra-ensemble interplay was further developed over the coming months during Selecta Impact's weekly shows on Don City. Since my residency followed on from Impact's show, I was able to map its refinement firsthand from August 2017 to February 2018. On the basis of the Rinse FM showcase, I initially presumed that these back-to-backs were restricted to Glorz and Shiesty. However, I quickly realised that Shellyvnne were fashioning an extensive framework, testing out new interchanges weekly, with successful ideas becoming integrated into future performances.

On October 26 2017, four members of Shellyvnne stayed on after Selecta Impact's show to spit on my set. J Smart, Esskay, Shiesty and Voltage all exchanged lyrics, taking over from each other at various points. One tactic in particular stood out. While many artists use transition lyrics to permit flexibility, Shellyvnne used even smaller blocks to enable interchange. The following took place an hour into the set over a Dubzta production (audiovisual example 8b, 0:15–0:57).

> Shiesty: S-H mind on a
>
> S-H, run gums get one in your
>
> chest plate man might go to your estate to
>
> dirt dem man on an S A I'm telling em
>
> Voltage: It's V-O, do man on the
>
> d-low, no dilly no dally and…

Through using the first two letters of their MC name, Shiesty and Voltage worked with modular blocks that can be repurposed, reused, and—most importantly—easily and coherently moved between on set.[7]

Episode 8.1
🎤 **Shiesty, Melvillous, J Smart, Voltage, Esskay, Eklipse, Glorz**
📻 **Selecta Impact, DJ Argue "DJ ARGUE with SHELLYVNNE", Radar Radio, London: February 5, 2018.**
💿 **Audiovisual example 8c**

This technique reached its apex on a set with DJ Argue in February 2018. While the back-to-backs were still in an elementary stage on Sir Spyro's Rinse FM show, here the group were weaving and interlocking comfortably. The following passage sees Shiesty, Glorz and Eklipse using a variant of the above style to move between each other mid bar (audiovisual example 8c, 0:02–1:20).

> Shiesty: Look it's S dot H, U-S-
>
> H, run gums and get boxed in the
>
> face Glorz: It's G dot L beat off
>
> shells, barking road with a what I roll
>
> look, S: it's S dot H, U-S-
>
> H, run gums and a get boxed in the
>
> face, Eklipse: It's E-dot-Klipse, E dot
>
> 6, Barking road with a juice and a
>
> spliff G: It's G L, do mine on the
>
> d-l no dilly no dally I…

These densely inter-related passages emerge at points throughout the majority of Shellynne's performances and are an example of a 'phase of play' that is indeterminate in length, flexible and fundamentally tied to the ensemble.

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[7] de Lacey, "Aesthetic Kid, Esskay, Voltage, J Smart, Shiesty, Doubtey and Daze The Kid", Don City Radio, London: October 26, 2017.

This process and the make-up of the lyrics utilised therefore allows for multiple ordering of artists on set. Melvillous, J Smart, Shiesty, Glorz, Eklipse and Voltage all have versions of this pattern, theoretically allowing for 720 different orderings if all six were present on a set. This means the group can continually create novel combinations, reacting to subtle suggestions from other MCs and gestures from their DJ. Critically this group technique is composed and developed *during* performance, with its refinement occurring in a live environment, principally their weekly show on Don City. This active curation is a salient example of how grime artists collaboratively *level up* through multidirectional interchange and how it is afforded both by the terrain (weekly radio session), and creation of flexible units that can be repurposed ad infinitum, much like musical motifs that are reworked and cascade around a jazz quintet.

(ii) Intermusicality: intra-crew flows and creative borrowing

Another way in which grime artists can negotiate proceedings is through the use of flow patterns that are shared within the ensemble. An enactment of a particular flow pattern functions as a referent that both reaffirms a communal bind, but also engenders a creative response. Episode 8.1 demonstrates how stock phrases were starting to become owned by Shellyvnne with Glorz and Voltage using 'no dilly no dally' as part of their multi structures, and through Eklipse repurposing Shiesty's 'run gums' bar through replacing 'chestplate' with 'cheekface', but the use of flow patterns is more subtle, since it signals a creative reaction through its rhythmic character.

Ingrid Monson's work on intermusicality both resonates strongly with grime music's ad-hoc improvisatory intertextual practice, and its relatively open schema. Rather than attending to overt lyrical allusion, Monson locates allusions within a full spectrum of 'human behaviours, from bodily gestures to speech to music'.[8] In the case of Shellynne, while this referencing is of course lyrical at points (see above), it also extends to flow

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[8] Monson, *Saying Something*, 188.

Figure 8.1 – Transcription of Rudie Rudez's flow. Westside Radio, October 2017
(audiovisual example 8d, 0:14–0:21).

Figure 8.2 – Transcription of J Smart's flow. Westside Radio, October 2017
(audiovisual example 8e, 0:15–0:22).

patterns and cadential figures. The utilisation of another artists' flow style is a way of paying homage to a fellow performer. While there is a fervent discussion over stealing or 'catting' other artists' deliveries, within a group setting performers often reference fellow crew members using a variation of their flow. This both creates hype through the reference itself but actually impacts and engenders consequent practice, with other MCs' present often deciding to incorporate their own version of the flow upon hearing its utterance.

This is demonstrated in an ppearance on Westside Radio from October 2017, which presents intermusical flow referencing between Shellyvnne's J Smart and Rudie Rudez (see Figures 8.1 and 8.2).[9] Rudez's initial repurposing of a flow pattern (devised by J Smart)

9 Kirby T, "Grime Sessions – Melvillous, Shiesty, Jsmart, Esskay, Rudie, Ninja – Kirby T B2B Selecta Impact", October 17, 2017, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rVHfJ8CL4kE.

immediately garners a response from his fellow performer, who looks up from his phone and visibly reacts to its utterance (audiovisual example 8d, 0:14). J Smart then performs his lyric ten minutes later (audiovisual example 8e, 0:15). And although these passages are not entirely correspondent they share substantial similarities. Rudez' interpretation generally follows a similar rhythmic pattern to Smart, particularly at the ends of bars, while the cadential arc of each passage is almost identical.

The warmth with which Smart received Rudez's contribution and his consequent performance of his own version also demonstrates the way in which this intermusical referencing in Shellyvnne can actively reinforce relationships and elicit change in the unfolding performance. For Timothy Rice, who worked extensively with Bulgarian folk musicians, these sort of allusions are central for articulating a communal bind. While often located at a macro-level, through intertextual references to a shared folk canon—something that is also explored in Justin Williams' examination of hip-hop intertextuality, with respect to 'intrageneric borrowing…from hip-hop culture'—these folk musicians' repurposing and creative use of this canon asserted resistance to state controlled artistic production as part of a wider 'ideational' system.[10]

This is particularly the case for the MCs in Over The Edge, who continually develop lyrics and patterns as part of their creative practice. A sense of group identity is strengthened through the tailoring of fresh bars and styles. These referential techniques are deeply encoded, and the crew have created recognisable 'Over The Edge Flows'. MCs Razor and J River have a number of flows that they utilise on a regular basis. This allows them to enter into temporary passages of unison, offering moments of divergence and convergence (see audiovisual example 8g below). This was referenced by J River in interview and is apparent in multiple recordings (see Episode 8.3).

> That literally comes from I write a flow and he'd be like 'nah that's fucked' and he'd write his
> own version of that flow. Then next time when we rally he'll spit it after mine and then we
> just developed the rapport. And it's like vice versa, like he'll write a flow and he'll be like

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[10] Rice, "Reflections on Music and Meaning…", 34, 36; Williams, *Rhymin' and Stealin'*, 17.

yeah I've gotta remix that. We've got about five to ten different Over the Edge Flows, I call them—not only me and Razor, but Reaper and Geo and stuff, have their own versions of it. People know mine and Razor's more because we spit them on set more or whatever. It's an organic thing we don't sit down. We've got one or two tunes where we sat down and written it together but in general it comes down to just bouncing ideas back and forth between rallying sessions.[11]

Here, J River captures both this communal bind and creative consequence. The overtly indexical capacity of these associations provides meaning and structure to the collective's creative practice, while ongoing iterations and repurposing of flows in situ can result in an acquisition of momentum, typically towards a reload. This chapter's final section turns explicitly to Over The Edge's practice, and how their fashioning of idiosyncratic flow patterns and development of ensemble ways of knowing both reaffirms their membership of the collective, and enables them to *level up* and produce irruptive, new practice.

Section 2 – Over The Edge: Ensemble ways of knowing

> Reaps: It's not about coming into it and being a godlike musician from day one. It's about having your own little niche and the goal is coming together as a collective thing but to grow everyone's individual talents as well.[12]

This section focuses on practice within Over The Edge, the London-based crew that I joined as a DJ in October 2017, (introduced in Chapter 1, Section 1). It documents the process of trying to create something new, the need to articulate an idiosyncratic edge, and difficulties in finding coherence in a chaotic landscape (pirate radio performance). Through this, it will critically examine the way in which performance environments have impacted practice, offer an insight into the lived experience and everyday workings of a grime crew,

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[11] J River, 2018.

[12] Reaps, Personal Interview. February 2018.

and—most importantly—map the crew's development of a 'corollary epistemology' that is both unique to the ensemble, and foundational for its collective process. It therefore attends to the thesis' three central questions, and its findings offer a concrete example of collective creativity within a grime crew, and how its multidirectional, improvisatory set-up affords moments of climactic energy and levelling up.[13]

(i) Over The Edge: negotiating the complexities of inter-performer relationships.

For free improvisation collective AMM, there was no palpable divide between performance and rehearsal. They placed great emphasis on developing an improvisational model that was specific to the group through continual learning. This both resonates with Christopher Small's work on 'musicking'—and the importance of the quotidian for creative practice—and grime music's synthesis of 'practice and learning', which is realised within its interrelated performative realm. To understand how new ideas emerge in these settings, it is therefore necessary to document practice closely over an extended period.[14]

Seymour Wright tracked AMM's practice over a number of years—through analysing performances, examining documentation, and conducting interviews—and the centrality of their 'hebdomadal' practice sessions resonates with the importance of weekly radio sets for grime crews and their development of a group aesthetic.[15] This section presents examples of Over The Edge's practice from December 2017 to March 2018, that saw the crew properly solidify. While it began as a group of three friends spitting among themselves, by 2018 the crew had developed its core unit, while each performer had refined their techniques and developed strong interactional and musical bonds.

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[13] Wright, "Original Creative Practice", 113.

[14] Small, *Musicking*, 205; Wright, "Original Creative Practice", 202.

[15] ibid, 24.

Episode 8.2

🎤**J River, Razor, Reaps.**

📻**de Lacey, "de Lacey with Over the Edge", Don City Radio, London: December 7, 2017.**

💿 **Audiovisual examples 8f, 8g**

Figure 8.3 – J River, Razor and Reaps (left to right).
Photograph taken by author in December 2017.

The central space for the development of Over The Edge's creative practice during this period was my radio show on Don City, which aired every Thursday. During the early stages of being in Over The Edge, I studied our sets intently. I wanted enough diversity in the instrumentals to reflect the MCs' preferences, without losing a common thread. We were also starting to develop our interactive structures, with the MCs—who were much more familiar with each other than I was with them—engaging in back-to-backs and intertextual

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interplay. On December 7 2018, I hosted a set on Don City with MCs J River, Razor and Reaps that spoke to both of these concerns, captured in the journal entry below that detailed my use of complementation and an appreciation of each individual's skills and techniques.

> After an hour on my own running vocals and dubs they all arrived. J River started and spat for a good while. He worked a sick back-to-back with Razor. I loved the crew's dynamic tonight. Razor with presence and flow, definitely acting as leader. Reaps with the really intricate introspective bars. There's always one of these MCs in a crew: Esskay, Luciferian [of The Collective]. Then you've got the hype bars from Doubtey and then J River who I guess is more like Charlie Trees but has a different flavour to Reaps. 'I was rolling with Charlie and Stanley' stood out. I guess that edge doesn't come through in Reaps' bars which are more about manga, mythology and sci fi.

> Journal Entry. December 9, 2017.

Despite this awareness, however, we often entered into challenging periods of interplay. While my shows were critical for Reaps' refinement of his intricate rhyming style, and the development of his radio confidence, it took time for us to align. This was evidenced fifteen minutes into the set, where I drove the performance into uncomfortable territory for Reaps. Entering over 'Arouse' by Huffy—a half-time track with a strong synth line and intermittent bass stabs—Reaps was initially afforded space to spray a complex pattern over the top of the instrumental (audiovisual example 8f, 0:02).

> Reaps: Exceptional wordsmith, I do my
>
> best out here get sent where the dirt is,
>
> defending is urgent, take the path with them
>
> all out, you were sent by the Trojans…

Rich with internal rhyme, this passage alluded to aspects of Greek mythology, while foregrounding his technical expertise. However, the instrumental I brought in, Crafty 893's 'Oni', drowned out Reaps' performance. It was far too busy and abrasive. As a consequence, Reaps could not perform to his full potential.

In light of these difficulties, I sought for a compromise and drew for a punch rhythm on beat one. This meant that the sonic power of 'Oni' could both punctuate each bar and foreground Reaps for the remaining three beats. This decision, while desperate, worked well. Its re-arrival after eight bars of the punch rhythm combined with Reaps switching up his flow into a pattern that better fit the instrumental. He was more direct, plosive, and aggressive. He consequently received a huge response from Razor and River, and earned a reload (audiovisual example 8f, 0:28–0:50). While still a work in progress, this moment offered hope and momentum. The negotiation was metapragmatic, and my awareness of the mismatch of Reaps' performance and the instrumental was resolved by a quick alteration. For Reaps, his switch-up of a pattern from his multisyllabic rhyme scheme to a more forceful provocation elicited an important change. And although initially fractious, we collectively managed to rectify the emergent trajectory of the performance.

J River and Razor also demonstrated a strong level of interplay, which peaked fifteen minutes prior to the end. Following on from a strong 64-bar from Razor over Eva 808's 'Duality', both MCs entered into an interlocking passage that coincided with the introduction of a new instrumental, Sir Hiss's 'Velociraptor' (audiovisual example 8g, 1:46).

> Razor: like bruddas don't know like dat, how's
>
> my man tryna bite flows like that?
>
> J River: l-l-lem ting manna get smoked like dat,
>
> Razor: bout skeng ting manna don't roll like dat,
>
> man can't chat to my J: bros like dat,
>
> Unison: Bare elbows to the nose like that,
>
> Unison: Me and Rivs shell down shows like dat…

Following this passage, J River moved into an eight bar that utilised a similar rhyme scheme to Razor. Here, I started chopping back in Eva 808's instrumental. This consequently set up a transition, emboldened by the instrumental's stripped back instrumentation, its wind line and sparse hi-hat pattern affording River substantial space to spray. The full introduction of 'Velociraptor' at the drop then combines with River's movement into yet another new

section (audiovisual example 8g, 2:24). This resulted in a reload. After the interaction took place, River attempted to reflect on what had happened: 'you know them mad back to backs. You don't know where is one stops and my one starts.' This statement from River is telling. This interaction saw the group move through something that he didn't necessarily know and wasn't able to convey entirely in retrospect. Importantly, though, he could perform it in that precise moment. I was also able to facilitate this, having overcome my initial issues.

Both these negotiations were afforded by a stability of personnel and our relative familiarity. By this point the Don City residency was both a place of experimentation but also a site for the crew to enter into passages of flow. Razor and River's interplay offered scope for multiple outcomes. A cacophonous mismanagement could have arisen between the two MCs. Or I could have undone their creative work through poor selection and mixing. Instead, this moment offered an example of us being 'able to anticipate what fellow performers do before they do it'. We were able to react mid-performance and *level up* to places we wouldn't have otherwise reached in a less stable environment.[16] This set therefore provides an early example of the close knit group work that took place in Over The Edge, presenting emergent practice that was facilitated by collective social learning in a resolutely group setting.[17]

During the following three months the crew engaged in a variety of activities and continued to strengthen these bonds. An Over The Edge set in January 2017 saw Reaps performing with renewed confidence and presence. Initially spitting a 32-bar over a meditative instrumental (with a prevalent harp sample) he then worked over an eight-bar through ball into a Defiant-produced instrumental. Defiant's instrumentals are notoriously punchy, and this track was abrasive, with square wave synths and sampled choral stabs on a Phrygian mode. Riding this transition is challenging, yet he retained composure and earned a wheel, following commendation from the other MCs present (audiovisual example 8h, 1:06).

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[16] Sawyer, *Group Creativity,* 44.

[17] Clark, "Something in the Air", 36.

He then re-spat the sixteen and passed the microphone. Later on in the set he also earned a wheel over an energetic instrumental.[18]

> Reaps really rode one nutty beat that I dropped in on his entry about ten minutes before the end. Basically, he was fully on form tonight and because of this I thought he could take it [my instrumental choice]. Got an MC wheel twelve bars into his section, properly killed it as well. Then he passed the mic to Razor, without re-spitting his lyrics. Razor clocked the significance of this straight away.

> Journal Entry. January 12, 2018.

The comfort with which Reaps performed over these challenging tracks demonstrates a calmness and composure that was perhaps not present in Episode 8.2. This moment was indicative of the three months of experimentation that followed on from our performance at Five Miles, (detailed in Chapter 1, Section 2). For Wright, his interest lies in 'music existing before its creators have fully got the measure of its parameters', and this transitional period for Over The Edge resulted in new ideas and a renewed intensity in our practice.[19] Similar to AMM who developed their own epistemology, the core of our crew was concerned with fashioning techniques, tracks and tropes that could be identifiably Over The Edge, and come to signify us as a group.[20] This chapter's final subsection takes a single set as its focus, unpacking the ways in which we were developing and articulating a group aesthetic or 'sound' in the radio domain.

(ii) The Over the Edge 'sound': developing a group aesthetic

At the end of March, Over The Edge were invited to perform a showcase on Subtle FM in Hackney Downs, East London. The show was going to be video streamed live across social media, and it offered us a chance to demonstrate what Over The Edge was about. I presided

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[18] de Lacey, "Over the Edge, Braceman & Mr Sols", Don City Radio, London: January 11, 2018.

[19] Seymour Wright, "Original Creative Practice", PhD diss, Open University, 2013, 113.

[20] Clark, "Something In The Air", 34.

over the first hour, playing tracks from Razor, J River and Kabz, who joined the collective in December 2017. Reaps had yet to release any material. Following this, I interviewed crew members about their work and their influences. This provided an insight into their craft for Subtle FM's audience.

This subsection examines the set that took place in the second hour. While studio recordings offer a snapshot of individual crew members' work, this live set was a realised manifestation of the Over The Edge 'sound' that we had been developing over the preceding few months. While nothing was pre-determined, there were ways in which we had been affirming a sense of group identity across our radio sets leading up to the Subtle FM show. These are present in this performance. The section focuses on three aspects of our practice. Firstly it examines my relationship with Razor. Secondly, it looks at how certain instrumentals became fundamental to the group's overall aesthetic and sound through acting as an intermusical referent and creative stimulant. Finally it examines MC techniques, and the ways in which 'Over The Edge Flows' (see Section 1) helped solidify Kabz's status within the collective, thus affirming the way in which intermusical practice is both communally binding and musically generative. A close examination of these factors will make transparent our often implicit performance schema, thus revealing both the 'internal systemicity' and emergent multidirectional improvisatory that characterises collective creativity in grime music.[21]

Episode 8.3
🎤**J River, Razor, Reaps, Kabz.**
📻**Over the Edge, "Over The Edge Showcase", Subtle FM, London: March 20 2018.**
💿 **Audiovisual examples 8i-p**

Razor and de Lacey

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[21] Schloss, *Making Beats*, 105.

Working with Razor has been sick, but it took time to get used to being the DJ for someone I was initially a fan of. I remember hearing his track 'Sao Feng', and clocking that his cultural points of reference were sick, in addition to his voice timbre and delivery. For the first few sets I was trying to keep a low profile and just support what he was doing. Once it became regular, I began to develop more of a back and forth with him. I guess my birthday set in November 2017 was the first point where we had an extended chat. We were both fully on pushing the group forward and he came to all my sets, and we started to work out what each other liked. I became more conscious of working in 16s, and as my knowledge of his lyrics developed I knew when to drop things in. We became super competent with through balls. I knew to start teasing in an eight before his big bar would come, and he knew that I'd drop it at the right point. We'd maybe exchange a knowing glance but by this point it was tacit and learned. I was confident that if we ran set it would be OK. I guess it's also happened with Reaps, whose development has been great, but Razor's established status and existing body of work meant I could study his tracks and lyrics more, where Reaps' material was basically only available on my sets. Either way I was hyped for this Subtle set to show what we could do.

<div align="right">Journal Entry. March 23, 2018</div>

This extract from my diary captures my shifting relationship with Razor, from a point of fandom to symbiotic performance. While this entry is raw it offers a reflective look at the months leading up to the show. Having a quasi-encyclopaedic knowledge of each MCs' bars meant I could ascertain when would be good to bring in new instrumentals, and also appropriate occasions to chop. This understanding was reflected in an incident early into the show on Subtle FM. Ten minutes into the set the microphone was passed to Razor. Here we entered into a passage of interplay over a typically caustic instrumental from Defiant. Razor was spitting new bars off his phone—artists often write new lyrics in their mobile phone's 'Notes' section—that I hadn't heard. I held back, allowing him space to perform. As soon as he switched up into something familiar, however, I cued up the next track. Although it only

had an eight bar build up, I knew what was coming in on the ninth bar (audiovisual example 8i, 0:47).

> Razor: For the campaign, manna got a manifesto,
>
> gas ting, when I spray shelling Es-so,
>
> wasn't really for the money from the get go but,
>
> now I've gotta get paid gotta make dough, gotta
>
> work for the dough like a baker does,
>
> we're crazy you know, don't play with us
>
> man already said that we're dangerous.
>
> We've got the sauce you stay flavourless, I'm like
>
> we've got the we've got the sauce,
>
> manna man a came with the condiments,
>
> I'm out here collecting the compliments…

The drop coincided with his arrival at a hype lyric, and the combined efforts of the instrumental's sonic punch and Razor's flow caused the track to be pulled back. This incident's principal point of interest is my response. As soon as I heard Razor's lyrical pattern I looked forward instantly and made appropriate alterations. At this point in time I was starting to see his lyrics in a modular way. Second guessing Razor's trajectory enabled me to both react correctly and quickly, resulting in a moment of substantial energy.

Moments later, however, an error took place while I was struggling with a mix on the decks. I typically mix fast, with the intention of bringing through a new instrumental every 32 bars. Here, though, I simply could not get the new track in time. Razor and I were working together and I started to tease in a new instrumental by Bristol producer MJK, entitled 'D-T-OP'. Chopping on beats 3 and 4, this alerted Razor to an impending change. He spat a sixteen over this period of chopping. Following this, I started to bring it in on beat 1, inferring more strongly that a change was due. Razor responded, put his hand up in the air and raised his voice in anticipation. Rather than arriving with the drop, however, Razor's vigour was instead met with stasis. While attacking the microphone with punch and power,

his assertions were not matched by my expected trajectory. This resulted in him falling off beat, leading him to reflect on what had just occurred (audiovisual example 8j, 0:30–1:14).

> Razor: Sword on my back, strike first can't wait to attack…sssss.
>
> Ohhh. See I got gassed in between what was here and what was coming. Nah, nah, you gassed me too hard, it's not your fault bruv. I'm gonna do one more though.

Razor tried to argue that it wasn't my fault, but I knew that this was not the case. My suggestion, an overt through ball with 'D-T-OI', strongly suggested to Razor that a change was immanent. Through not following through, his expectation was mismatched with my inability to mix in the instrumental. As a consequence this improvisatory negotiation fell flat, and both energy and momentum were lost. Looking back to the journal entry above, this negotiation relied upon our 'tacit and learned' relationship. For Razor, through being 'gassed in between what was here and what was coming' he acknowledged that he was thinking through the performance, and anticipating my movements, while already spitting. Through failing to align with expectations in this instance, I caused this passage to be uncertain.

Both incidents, however, demonstrate a flourishing working relationship: micro-management and interaction afforded a successful through ball in the first instance; and the closeness with which we were working allowed us to rebuild from the mistake without it affecting the overall performance's trajectory. Managing uncertainty is a critical facet of improvisatory performance in grime music—as explored in Chapter 7—as is an ability to both partake in successful and unsuccessful passages of negotiation. The 'emergent ontology' of a group must be fashioned through live interaction. This example resonates strongly with Reaps' statement that opened this section, capturing the importance of both individual skill acquisition and collective growth.[22]

Intermusicality: Riddims upon riddims, the DJ's perspective

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[22] Sawyer and De Zutter, "Distributed Creativity…", 82; Wright, "Original Creative Practice", 305.
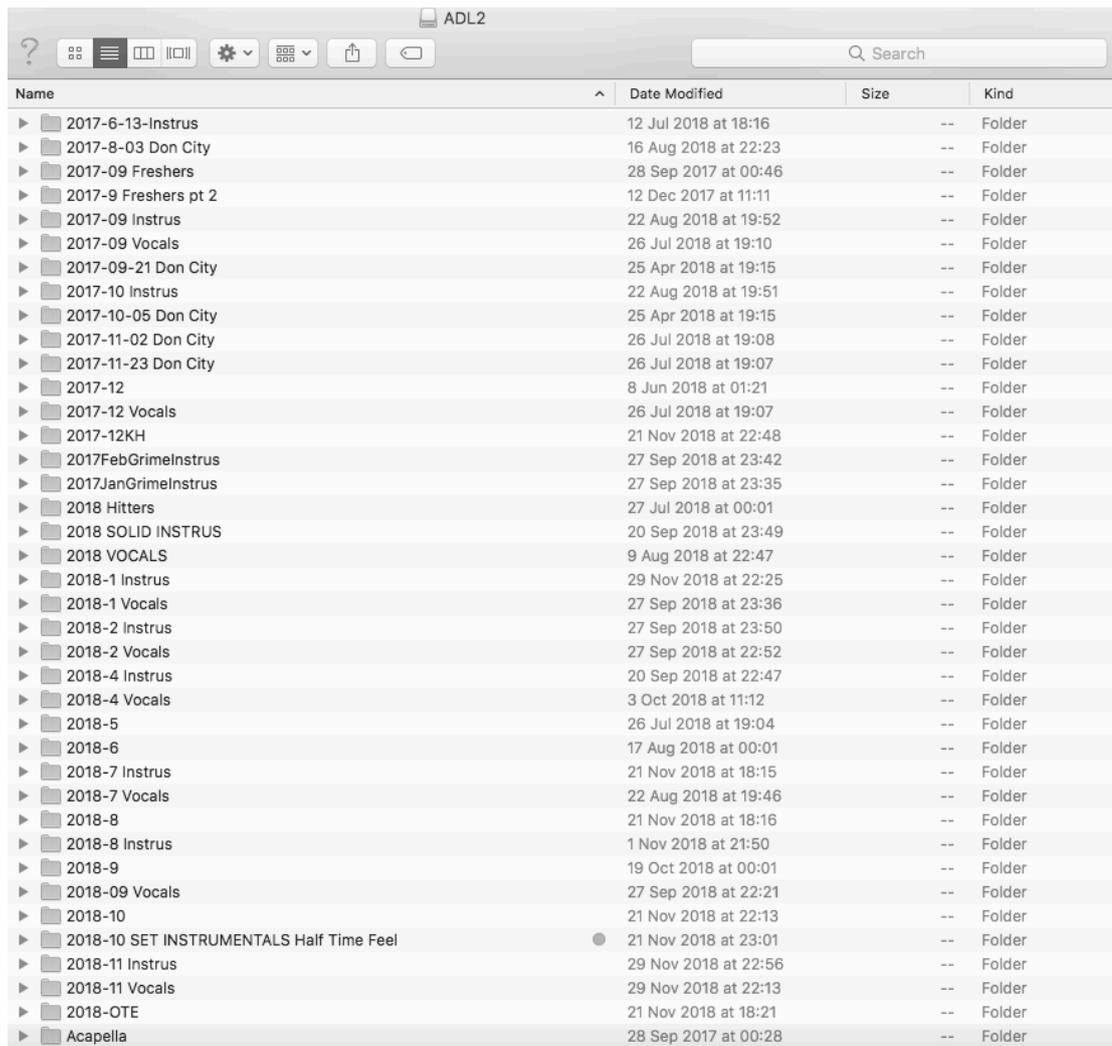
Figure 8.4 – USB Overview in Finder, December 2018.

'Do you know know what yeah? Over The. Yo. Do you know how many years manna been
waiting for Over The Edge to touch its full potential cuz, are you mad?'

Shortly after Razor received the wheel in audiovisual example 8i, he said the above
statement. This declaration is telling. For years the crew had been MCing together in a close
and creative way, but this set signified a move towards an identifiable 'sound' for the crew.
One important aspect of crew's sound is the relationship developed with their DJ. Guesting
on other DJs' sets allowed the crew to refine their MCing ability, but a level of familiarity
with a regular DJ meant that combinations could be explored further. While Aidan's use of
complementation was explored in Chapter 7, this subsection looks at how weekly sessions

with the same crew—rather than as a rotating residency—afford the development of a group sound, facilitated through instrumental selections and the employment of DJ gesture.

Mark Butler's study of DJ performance presents concerns that DJs face while performing: 'DJs are continuously evaluating the current configuration of sounds; when, how it should change; what sort of sound or record should follow next.' This moderation of travel is compounded by the addition of MCs. In Chapter 4 DJ Eastwood spoke about 'surprising [the] MCs' and maintaining a high level of energy, whereas Aidan's proto-taxonomy distinguished between certain styles of artist.[23]

Localised, crew-based practice signals an advance on this approach. I had already assigned a rough 'style' to each of Over The Edge's MCs, but I was also part of a collective push to fashion an overall crew sound, born out of instrumental selections and multidirectional interplay. Instrumentals possessed intertextual power, and their usage both meant something to the collective, and engendered a musical response.

As such, the organisation of instrumentals was an arduous process. During this period, there were 2,847 instrumentals on each of my USBs.[24] Only thirty of these were in regular rotation. Each month I would curate a new folder (see Figure 8.4). Instrumentals would then be trialled. Those that survived the month would then be moved into the '2018 SOLID INSTRUS folder'. This vetting process produced a core selection of instrumentals. I knew which tracks would work with certain MCs, when to bring them in and how to use them. A level of familiarity for the MCs also brought forth patterns that MCs had either written specifically for the beat, or knew would work over it.

Eliciting contextual associations became a useful intermusical tactic. I would often drop instrumentals that an MC had previously vocalled. This offered an opportunity for the MC to change tack and spit bars that they had initially written for the instrumental in question. This happened a number of times on the Subtle FM show, including a point where

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[23] Butler, *Playing With Something That Runs*, 106.

[24] During the late 2010s, DJs would load up USB memory sticks with tracks. These would then be inserted into CDJs, from which tracks could be selected during a performance. Vinyl was less popular, but still utilised.

I dropped in an instrumental by Doncaster-based producer Mistakay that Razor had recently vocalled for Jabz's tune 'G's Out Here'. Outside of this, I would consciously choose selections that certain MCs had been enjoying in recent weeks. For example, Reaps was a big fan of BLVCK COVVBOYS' productions, notably the track 'T.L.C.O'. I made sure it was ready for this set, since he had been writing lyrics to it for a future release.

> Here I quickly mixed in 'T.L.C.O' by BLVCK COVVBOYS cause I knew Reaps wanted to have it on the set and I saw him take the mic from Razor. Even though I'd just thrown in another new instrumental eight bars beforehand I wanted to line it up. Within sixteen bars I had the track in and he reacted instantly with a more forceful tone but hadn't had time to switch up his pattern. When he did about eight bars in it was fully sick, with the multi-flow and mad imagery.

> Journal Entry. March 22, 2018.

> Reaps: I cause and effect shit,
>
> point over all is war and deceptive,
>
> Accept it, shell in a lyrical
>
> war, this sword is super effective…

Through listening back to the recording, it is evident that this instrumental's arrival is met with a substantial rise in volume from Reaps. His heightened presence then combines with a switch up of flow for his ninth bar. While initially tentative on entry, Reaps repurposes his performance with power and direction. After the drop-in, he proceeded to spit for thirty-two bars, before audaciously quoting one of Razor's reload bars to get a wheel (audiovisual example 8k, 0:27–1:33). The choice of instrumental and its 'quick draw'—DJ Eastwood's terminology—coincides with Reaps' entry and brings forth a desired outcome. The novelty of the instrumental, its significant impact on Reaps owing to his prior interactions with it, and the after effect of his revitalised contribution all fed into the emergent performance, providing momentum and forward movement that resulted in a reload.

Further to individual associations, there were also instrumentals that became associated with the group as a whole, 'bind[ing the] community [or crew] together', and

eliciting a shared response within its micro-interpretative community.[25] A track entitled 'Mandolin Man', produced by Sorrow and released in 2016, was an example of this. Its refined low-end and clarion call horn line made it a staple of my sets, and it typically heralded a positive response from the MCs upon its inclusion. Accordingly, I dropped 'Mandolin Man' just under eight minutes into the set. At this point River was moving through an intricate sixteen bar. The way he rode the instrumental warranted a reload. Just as it began to build up again, the following exchange took place (audiovisual example 8l, 0:36).

> J River: Kabz, I know you wanna spit. Let me just squeeze one out.
>
> Kabz: I want this riddim, I can't lie, I can't lie.
>
> J River: Let me just squeeze one out quickly.

True to his word, River spat a sixteen and swung the mic. More importantly, though, this exchange demonstrates the effect certain instrumentals can have on performance. For 'Mandolin Man', it was compounded by prior interaction with the track on previous sets. In this instance Kabz took over with one of his signature bars, and consequently added to the momentum of the overall performance. After the set, I reflected on how these instrumentals can help structure a set.

> Drew for Sorrow's 'Mandolin Man'. Proper signature beat for the crew now. Worked really well with River's bars. Spent a lot of time on it too so everyone could get a go. I could see Kabz was proper wanting to jump on it. Kind of vindicates me when this happens. [I] remember a set on Don City a few weeks back when Kabz was like 'hold that riddim' but I only had 30 seconds left on the instrumental, so I had to load it up on the other deck and mix it into itself to keep the flow running.
>
> Journal Entry. March 24, 2018.

This reflection demonstrates how instrumental selection can be critical for affirming a sense of group identity, and for iteratively building energy during a performance. Within a collective, it is the DJ's my responsibility to line up tracks that both complement the MCs and at times challenge them to *level up* and exceed expectation. Knowing their lyrics, knowing

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[25] Williams, *Rhymin' and Stealin'*, 180.

their patterns and knowing how to get the best out of them is a skill that develops over time. It is only through performance—and the pressure of the live radio domain—that this can really be tested. In interview, contemporary classical composer Cornelius Cardew spoke of performance as process of accumulation. This particularly resonates with Over The Edge's practice. Constant refinement and alignment with other performers—through selections and their contextual associations—helped me develop a DJing style that reflects and embodies Over The Edge, and forms part of its wider 'ideational structure' of meaning.[26]

Intermusicality: Over The Edge Flows as communal bind

While Section 1 attended to the referential employment of crew flows—for both Shellyvnne and Over The Edge—this subsection focuses on a short example of Kabz's practice from the Subtle FM showcase, and how Razor's employment of Kabz's suggestion is both an example of intermusical practice, but—more importantly—affirms Kabz's membership within the crew during his embryonic involvement with the collective.

Kabz's first performance with Over The Edge took place on December 14 2017, at a live showcase in Peckham (see Figure 8.5). His arrival had a huge effect, and the performance was remembered for Kabz's employment of a lightning fast semiquaver pattern that combined exponentially with my instrumental choice: a track by Sir Hiss with sparse and hard synth stabs and military-like snare rolls. Two people—Doubtey and an audience member—threw their hands up towards me, spinning their hand back to indicate a reload (audiovisual example 8m). His consequent involvement added novelty to the collective, and resonates with complexity theorists Davis and Sumara, who wrote on the way in which new elements can 'expand the space of the possible rather than perpetuating

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[26] Polly Devlin, "Spotlight Music: AMM", *Vogue*, May 1966: 18; Rice, "Reflections on Music and Meaning", 36.

Figure 8.5 – Flyer for Keep Hush, Peckham, December 2017.

entrenched habits'.[27] This introduction of novelty, however, could have affected group cohesion and Over The Edge's ontological basis. According to Burnes, in business the best run companies—that function in a similarly chaotic environment to grime's live circuit —'operate at the edge of chaos by relentlessly pushing a path of continuous innovation'. This push, however is dangerous. Burnes also noted that this 'inject[ion] of so much novelty and change into their normal operations [causes them to] constantly risk falling over the edge'.[28]

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[27] Brent Davis and Dennis Sumara, *Complexity and Education: Inquiries into Learning, Teaching and Research,* (Oxon: Routledge, 2006), 135.

[28] Bernhard Burnes, 'Complexity Theories and Organizational Change', *International Journal of Management Reviews, 7* (no. 2), 2005: 80–81, William C Frederick, 'Creatures, Corporations, Communities, Chaos, Complexity', *Business and Society*, 37 (no. 4), 1998: 358–389.

Kabz

mix and match I hit a-ttack I get the back I flip the pack I fill the crack I've

3

Kabz

got my akh, I ne-ver lack I kill the track i'm gassed and fat, cause you know that i've

5

Kabz

had bars from be fore year 10, got big bars from a way back when...

Figure 8.6 – Transcription of Kabz's syncopated flow at
Subtle FM, March 22, 2018 (audiovisual example 8n, 0:15–
0:30).

Razor

fresh out the pa-cket the li-ckl-est tri-ckle of blood leaking out of the

3

Razor

fresh out the pa-cket the li-ckl-est tri-ckle of blood leaking out of the

Figure 8.7 – Transcription of Razor's triplet flow at Subtle
FM, March 22, 2018 (audiovisual example 8n, 1:37–1:44).

For Over The Edge, the transition from a period of innovation motivated by Kabz's membership towards an understanding of 'shared enterprise' is evidenced in the crews' use of 'Over The Edge flows' on the Subtle FM showcase. Early on, Razor and Kabz's fledgling relationship is immediately apparent, with both artists delivering syncopated flow styles that offer a flavour of each others' delivery while possessing their own idiosyncrasies (see Figures 8.6 and 8.7; audiovisual example 8n).

Later in the set, Kabz employs a novel tactic in two stages. Whereas referencing within the collective has been documented, here Kabz repurposes a lyrical pattern from *outside* the crew, while providing a distinctly Over The Edge flavour. This adaptation of West London MC AJ Tracey's hype lyric 'thought that I missed the drop but I never', creates both an 'intrageneric' reference to another artist within the scene, and a wider reference to a *style* of vocal delivery where the MC's entry is delayed slightly for dramatic effect (see Figures

Figure 8.8 – Transcription of AJ Tracey's signature
flow, from 'Swerve n Skid'.

Figure 8.9 – Transcription of Kabz's adaptation
of AJ Tracey's signature flow at Subtle FM, March
22, 2018 (audiovisual example 80, 0:15–0:23).

8.8 and 8.9).[29] Kabz's variation takes six semiquavers' rest—rather than four—before entry, while possessing a number of commonalities, including a falling semiquaver to dotted quaver on the forth beat on 'cheddar' and 'whenever'. This usage affirms connection to, and understanding of, the wider grime performance community, through demonstrating 'insider knowledge' of its canon of performance tropes, while also offering an idiosyncratic edge.[30]

This tactics's development into a quasi-group flow took place over a number of sessions. While Kabz debuted the lyric in early January, he subsequently developed a variation. This variation was therefore a refix of his own initial intrageneric allusion. Its solidification as a group trope, however, only became realised when Razor subsequently developed his own take on Kabz's version. Importantly, Razor's version was debuted on the Subtle FM showcase. This offers a critical jump, from an individual intrageneric allusion to an ensemble tactic that is communally meaningful with creative implications.

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[29] Williams, *Rhymin' and Stealin'*, 17.

[30] ibid, 46.

Figure 8.10 – Transcription of Kabz's refix of his AJ Tracey Flow.
Subtle FM, March 22, 2018 (audiovisual example 8p, 0:14–0:22).

Figure 8.11 – Transcription of Razor's refix of Kabz's flow. Subtle
FM, March 22, 2018 (audiovisual example 8p, 0:38–0:45).

Razor's debut of his flow had a remarkable effect. As soon as Razor started to perform the lyric, Kabz visibly jumped up and indicated towards me to reload the track. On the recording you can hear River say 'had to pull it' immediately afterwards. These reactions were strengthened by the similarity between Razor's refix and Kabz's version, the former paraphrasing Kabz's pattern, while flipping the lyric order of his opening line. The passage still cadences at the same point (on the eighth semiquaver of bar 2), but the rhyme of 'catch that'—as opposed to 'missed it'—resolves upwards (see Figures 8.10 and 8.11).

This innovation is crucial for a number of reasons. Firstly, it is demonstrative of how external creative work can become internally meaningful for a collective. Secondly, through Razor's consequent innovation, it captures the ways in which intermusical allusions can strengthen creative partnerships. Kabz had joined the crew three months prior. Through

Kabz developing a pattern subsequently incorporated by Razor, it shows an acknowledgment of both Kabz's affiliation with the crew and a level of creative impetus to influence other MCs' contributions. The overtly indexical capacity of this association therefore acts as a communal bind for the crew, evidenced by Razor's closing phrase: 'war Over The Edge, man will back that'.

This incident, then, is a prime example of how micro-interpretative communities, such as grime crews, can *level up* through innovative use of both internal and external stimuli. Razor's employment of Kabz's flow offers both a strong intermusical moment that strengthened the 'interpersonal bonds of the ensemble', while also presenting an expansion of the improvisatory ensemble's creative palate that resulted in a moment of climactic energy.[31]

Conclusion

> J River: The level of barring, the proficiency of skill in the squad is high. You have to understand it's so organic in OTE. Most people have just been spitting in their fucking bedrooms for years and that's how they've learned to bar. We learned together. OTE now is a learning tool, we like to cultivate talent where we see it and give people the opportunity to grow into the MCs they can be. [32]

This chapter explored the practice of two grime crews, and their collaborative construction of performance schema. It showed how new practice can emerge through hyper-local innovation and intermusical allusion. This included the development of idiosyncratic phases of play—as opposed to the more established structures explored in Chapters 4 and 5—that are open form, flexible, and fundamentally tied to the ensemble. This was principally evidenced through Shellyvnne's modular lyric structures, and Over The Edge's flow patterns. While the homogeneity of the voice as performance tool can cause friction in the radio domain—through a variety of MCs with different affiliations clamouring for the

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[31] Monson, *Saying Something*, 189.

[32] River, 2018.

microphone—it is a key strength for collectives, who can collaboratively fashion intricate lyrical and rhythmic structures that combine in a variety of permutations.

Its second section's attention to Over The Edge's practice examined the ways instrumental tracks can become emblematic of a crew, and how the crew itself developed a recognisable group aesthetic. J River's quote above captures the way in which Over The Edge has been able to cultivate these individual artists' talent. Prior to joining the crew, all of Over The Edge's members were deeply passionate about their craft. However, it was within the crew itself that they could really develop.

This chapter has also shown how elements can emerge out of performance with artists not quite being able to quantify this aspect of their practice. This was evidenced in J River's back-to-back with Razor, which River struggled to verbalise after its occurrence (see audiovisual example 8g). However, the emergence is predicated on a continued and committed dedication to improvisatory practice as part of a group. This commitment to a group aesthetic, or 'sound', reached its apex with Over The Edge's showcase show on Subtle FM. The selection of instrumentals was chosen to suit both an overarching theme and the particularities of each MC. MC relationships were demonstrated through Over The Edge flows, and intermusical associations, while Kabz's membership of the crew was affirmed through Razor's creative incorporation of his performance suggestions as part of a wider group trope. This performance, although a standalone piece of footage, was part of a wider period of development, with each radio set on Don City offering a space for the 'self-reflexive group study' for new ideas to take shape and flourish.[33]

This chapter has therefore demonstrated three things. Firstly, how creative process in grime is afforded by the particularities of its environment—with scope for innovation, learning and practice on weekly radio sets—these environments' importance for developing a group aesthetic, and how the employment of intermusical allusions can stimulate emergent practice and act as a communal bind, consequently offering scope for levelling up through iteratively building momentum as a collective improvisatory unit.

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[33] Wright, "Original Creative Practice", 115.

Conclusion

This thesis is the first of its kind to focus explicitly on grime performance. Initially motivated by a palpable disjunct between media representations of the form—which deemed grime as a visceral yet voyeuristically enthralling—and practice itself, it has sought to offer a holistic understanding of group creative process. This was achieved through a long-term ethnographic engagement with grime's field of performance, resulting in findings that challenge erstwhile readings. Grime is not 'alien' or impenetrable.[34] Rather, it is highly complex. Successful performances depend on the adherence to an intricate set of performance conventions, an understanding and appreciation of varying local pragmatic processes, and a distinct capacity to innovate within uncertain territory.

This study's close contact with, and analysis of, a number of grime crews and artists —principally DJ Eastwood, MTM, Shellyvnne, and Over The Edge—has resulted in a comprehensive model of grime performance that offers new ways to conceptualise group interaction in the live domain. Its model of levelling up accounts for the multitudinous array of performers invested in grime performance, antagonisms born out of tensions between individuals and the wider emergent trajectory, and its improvisatory nature that demands metapragmatic negotiation. Within this, it has mapped an array of processes that vary in intensity: from the interrelated accumulation of hype towards moments of climactic and irruptive energy, to the more deliberated ways in which crews engage in collective social learning to bring forth new practice and idiosyncratic group epistemologies.

This conclusion will summarise the thesis' key insights, detailing the extent to which it has answered its principal research questions. It will then close with possibilities for future research.

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34 Campion, "Inside Grime", 2004.

Section 1 – Key Findings

This thesis' modelling of grime practice sought to address a number of concerns relating to the wider field of performance. It questioned the ways in which grime's performance processes can offer insight into its musical identity as a genre, how an understanding of these processes can provide a model for group improvisation more widely, and how the very spaces in which it is performed—principally pirate radio—have impacted upon the creative process itself. This section will attend to these concerns, before addressing the benefits born out of an extended ethnographic enquiry of popular music practice.

(i) Grime's musical identity

This thesis opened with an overview of grime that situated its performance practice within wider historical understandings of Afrodiasporic practice. It is indebted to a variety of forms, such as reggae, hip-hop, jungle and garage. As such it possesses many characteristics common to Afrodiasporic performance: antiphony, improvisation, repetition. However, it also harnesses a number of important idiosyncrasies. These distinctive features are crucial for understanding grime, and the wider spaces in which it is performed.

Multidirectionality, Metapragmatic Process and DJ Gesture

The first of these is its multidirectionality. Within grime performance, multiple MCs are engaged in improvisatory collaboration with the DJ. These artists engage in fervent interactional procedures, all of which necessitate assiduous concentration. The success of the reload, rally and through ball, all dense and fundamentally group-based phases of play, is contingent on the metapragmatic ability of DJs and MCs to listen to others' performance suggestions and adjust their trajectory while already performing themselves. The capacity to

make 'ongoing micro adjustments', a technique similarly prized in gamelan performance, enables grime artists to quickly react to alterations and indications, and shift in-and-out of these phases of play. [35]

Despite an understanding and employment of these practices, the number of artists performing at a grime show—and the extent to which their performance directions are pejorative—is continually in flux. The necessity incumbent upon a dancehall deejay to 'conduct choir' and enter into an antiphonal relationship with the audience differs sharply from a grime DJ negotiating a set with twelve MCs clamouring for the microphone.[36] As such, this thesis' mapping of group practice and improvisation within a club and DJ driven environment both captures the intensity with which grime is often performed, and builds upon existing representations of DJ performance as antiphonal practice in dialogue with an audience's 'collective body'.[37]

This can be seen through comparison to the work of Mark Butler and Kai Fikentscher on DJ practice more broadly. For Butler, the DJ is concerned with 'what sort of sound or record should follow next', whereas a grime DJ is preoccupied with a substantial array of options: what sort of instrumental might align with the next MC to take the microphone (known as 'complementation'); how to quickly transition into a different style of instrumental; how the change might affect the MC currently spitting; what specific intermusical relevance the instrumental may have for any of the MCs present, and so on.[38] Similarly Fikentscher highlights 'the capacity to engender commmunitas through the ritual of dance' during UDM[39] performance. While this is a consideration, it contrasts with a grime DJ's technical cachet. Punching, for example adds a new percussive layer that is urgent

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[35] Brinner, *Knowing Music*, 169.

[36] Henriques, *Sonic Bodies*, 158.

[37] Fikentscher, '*You Better Work!*', 6.

[38] Butler, *Playing With Something That Runs*, 106.

[39] 'UDM' is an acronym for Underground Dance Music.

and unrelenting, while the 'quick draw' affords an exponential rise in energy through a sudden change in sonic character.[40]

Tensions between Individual and Collective

The sheer number of MCs in this ever-changing negotiation provides scope for creativity but also articulates latent tensions surrounding its performance circuit as a whole. While unrest and confrontation features extensively in sound system culture, it is typically between rival sounds. For the most part, dancehall deejays are very skilled curators who 'monitor' proceedings and act as a mediator with a live audience, and iteratively build the vibe with its array of participants.

Grime is also distinct from gamelan in this regard, since it is both more fluid in personnel and the roles that these artists can undertake. Antagonisms arrive in gamelan performance, but these are between clearly defined roles. The *kendhang* (double-headed drum) is normally in charge of setting the *irama* (temporal relationships between parts), while many musicians follow the *pamurba* (overall leader). The *gambang* (xylophone) player(s), however, typically defer(s) to the *rebab*'s (bowed spiked fiddle) lead.[41] In grime, however, the homogeneity of the voice means tension on sets is often omnidirectional. This continued threat of combative MCing or uninvited guests adds to the challenge, and as a result antagonisms can arise, resulting in both extramusical and on-air confrontation.[42]

The most overt stimulant of creative practice, though, is the tension between individual and collective. The paradoxical mapping of divergent individuality and collective fervour was evocatively manifest in Episode 5.2 with Dot Rotten's driving performance on Sir Spyro's Rinse FM Show. Similarly to the hip-hop cipher, grime performance encourages skill acquisition through its 'communal and competitive' nature. Unlike the cipher, though,

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[40] Fikentscher, *'You Better Work!'*, 41, 61.

[41] Brinner, *Knowing Music*, 219.

[42] Henriques, *Sonic Bodies*, 158.

where artists take turns to spray their best 32-bar, individuals are afforded opportunity to converge and combine, either with a fellow MC or the DJ, often resulting in moments of climactic energy. This occurred when Sir Spyro both accommodated for Dot Rotten's trajectory, before selecting an instrumental by Dot Rotten, 'Real Talk 3', as a means to proceed. This instance, therefore, also captured the way in which intermusical allusions can be utilised to manoeuvre through such fraught negotiations.[43]

The Specificity of the Radio Domain

Thirdly, this exchange and interplay was principally realised within the radio domain. Without it, grime's landscape would be very different. The radio network, however, is rarely attended to in academic work on performance. Instead, the practice room and consequent live performances take precedent, with the majority of work on pirate radio concerned with its political potential as a site of 'alternative media'.[44] Documentation of creative endeavours, however, is limited. Aside from the work of Charles and Fuller referenced throughout, and Rollo Jackson's *Tape Crackers*—which clearly shows the potential for study of jungle and grime tapes from the late 1990s and early 2000s, see below—decades of performance history, especially from the United Kingdom, remained untapped.[45]

This thesis' focus on radio therefore offers substantial advances in the understanding of this medium as a performance arena, and its position within grime's interrelated network that includes raves and various entrepreneurial ventures, such as the visual platforms and independent labels detailed in Chapter 2. These elements are a critical part of grime's wider field of cultural production, but it is within the radio sphere that most performative innovation takes place. This was demonstrated through documentation of London's pirate

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[43] Alim, *Roc the Mic Right,* 101.

[44] John Nathan Anderson, "Illicit Transmissions: Engaging with the Study and Preservation of Pirate Radio", *Journal of Radio & Audio Media* 23, no. 2 (2016): 235; Hayes Mawindi Mabweazara, "'Pirate' Radio, Convergence and Reception in Zimbabwe", *Telematics and Informatics* 30, no. 3 (2013): 240; Moyo, "Pirate Radio as Empowerment", 484–500.

[45] Jackson, "Tape Crackers…".

radio scene. Over a hundred practitioners regularly engaged with the sphere every week during my period of enquiry. This vast web of stations, artists and listeners builds into an 'exploratory system of mutual excitation' that iteratively accrues hype and consequently results in irruptive, new practice.[46]

This creative thrust is afforded by both the domain itself, and the multidirectional interplay of its participants. As such, the agency of these individuals differs from Fuller's principal focus on the media ecology at large. Active improvisatory interplay between MCs, and DJs breeds fervent interchange, be it within temporary group affiliations, or more stable units: from Kraze, Krucial and Hitman Tiga in Chapter 4; through the work of YGG and MTP across Chapters 5 and 6; to the recent practice of Shellyvnne and Over The Edge, radio's very liveness provided both an edge, and a space to convene. Both the 'public nature' of cutting sessions for jazz musicians, yet the consistency offered by DJ's regular sessions—such as Selecta Impact's shows for Shellyvnne, and my residency with Over The Edge—allowed for groups to develop and refine their sound and overall aesthetic.'[47]

(ii) Levelling Up

This thesis' central development builds upon these distinctive features, resulting in a model of grime's creative practice. This modelling of grime's wide-ranging performance processes —such as the reload, rally and through ball—has demonstrated how artists collaboratively work towards points of climactic energy, wherein they can *level up*. Levelling up involves furthering one's individual abilities and group affiliations as part of a wider system of learning and progression.

It has four distinctive features. Firstly, resultant moments of climactic energy are resolutely group-based and gestalt in actuation, through exceeding the sum of its parts. Secondly, these moments are either built towards iteratively as part of an interrelated

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[46] Fuller, *Media Ecologies*, 50.

[47] Perchard, *Lee Morgan*, 31, 38.

improvisatory process, or they can emerge suddenly, 'in the blink of an eye', through remarkable points of convergence.[48] The rally is an example of communal convergence over time, the reload is often quicker to arrive, while the through ball is flexible. The through ball's defining feature is the prescient ability of improvisatory performers to anticipate the future nature of group interaction and make appropriate amendments. These amendments build into *Level Up*'s third distinctive feature. Levelling up requires astute metapragmatic negotiation, and it is an emergent characteristic of an improvisatory group. It is both an irreducible property of the collective, and is ensured through ongoing adjustments.[49] Finally, its enactment typically results in instances of new practice, fashioned out of complex improvisatory interplay.

The process is coloured and augmented by a number of contributing factors. Firstly, the very multidirectionality explored above, and the improvisatory contributions from multiple MCs and DJs. Secondly, the performance setting itself. Radio brings chaos and coherence in equal measure, while its interrelated network engenders group process. Thirdly, the enduring tension between individual and collective that necessitates the 'sharpening of steel against steel', as attested to by J River. Finally, there are two features distinctive to stable groups that enable them to *level up*: intermusical referentiality, refined over an extended period, and each crew's respective epistemology.

Intertextuality is incredibly local in grime, and a full array of musical allusions can be utilised to infer impending change. These are strengthened as part of an improvising group. Modular lyrical units offer innumerable permutations and prospective pathways, DJ complementation is often imbued with intertextual power owing to prior outings, while intra-crew flows act as a creative invitation and communal bind. Acute understanding between participants consequently fashions a recognisable aesthetic. While radical openness is assuaged, this does not sully improvisatory potential. Instead, each group's idiosyncratic phases of play, and dense intertextual schema, are malleable and can subsequently adjust to

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[48] Bourdieu, *The Logic of Practice*, 81.

[49] Sawyer and De Zutter, "Distributed Creativity…", 82

the constraints of the emergent performance at hand. As such, they offer substantial potential for levelling up over extended periods of time, or from 'genuine bursts of energy'[50].

Levelling up is fundamental to grime practice, and its enactment is ultimately contingent upon collective acts of creativity. And while this model of grime practice has built upon, and with, existing work on a variety of Afrodiasporic practices, it could equally be employed to map—or disentangle—the complexities of other improvisatory performance forms. Most notably, those that endure a rotating roster of collaborators, are multidirectional in scope, and have implicit performance schema, such as improvised theatre, free jazz, *shangaan electro*—where dancers on stage, the DJ, and audience all interact—and other DJ-based performance forms including—but not limited to—jungle and footwork.

(iii) Popular Music Ethnography

It has been mentioned throughout this thesis that *level up* is a term taken from within the tradition of grime music performance. This reflects both this thesis' in-depth documentation of creative practice in popular music ensembles, and its commitment to artists' ways of knowing. I have strongly advocated for the legitimacy of in-house terminology as ways of knowing, both for the artists and for wider (academic and critical) understanding. Using a metaphor borrowed from sport, such as the through ball, for example, breaks down an otherwise highly dense, interactional process into something tangible for the musicians involved, while at the same time conveying the presence of mind needed to ensure its successful enactment. Levelling up is similarly comprehensible, evoking both learning and acquisition, while the rally offers a striking visual correlate, with tennis players hitting the ball back and forth readily mapping onto MCs' fervent interchange.[51]

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[50] Krucial, 2017.

[51] Jabz, 2018.

While theorising is an important endeavour, with much taking place within this thesis, it is important to recall Bourdieu's assertion that 'practice has a logic that is not of the logician'.[52] This thesis has therefore incorporated artists' ways of knowing to complement its theoretical framework, since they both readily evoke the complexity of the processes of hand, while also framing the practice itself for its cohort of MCs and DJs.

Further to this, my position as a performer within the field has also offered insight otherwise unattainable in either a purely theoretical study or a social ethnography. Acting as a critical supplement to other accomplished research on grime—conducted by Richard Bramwell, Monique Charles, Dan Hancox and Joy White, respectively from a sociological, Foucauldian genealogical, urban entrepreneurial and socio-historical standpoint—it has explicitly focused on grime performance. It presents a diverse array of voices and this is strengthened by the long-term engagement undertaken. As an insider, while encountering issues of positionality, I accessed a variety of performance and social domains, from which a wealth of material could be collated, and captured the quotidian and all-encompassing nature of its performative realm. Audiovisual recordings from these domains present grime practice in situ and were used throughout.[53]

Urban ethnography of popular music forms has been a sparing endeavour, perhaps owing to the difficulty with which academics are afforded access to these communities. This was referred to by Patrick Turner in his study of hip-hop and grime (mentioned in the thesis' introduction), where he felt separated from the cyphers he was observing.[54] This thesis, though, has employed my position as a practitioner to foreground artists' practices and experiences, in conjunction with the construction of a comprehensive model that is

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[52] Bourdieu, *Logic of Practice*, 86.

[53] I am aware of concerns arising from Auslander's writing on the 'performativity of performance documentation'. However, the recordings utilised throughout are consistent with the genre's standard documentation practices. As mentioned in Chapter 1 all shows were 'recorded anyway'. Therefore, my presence as a DJ—and the recording—should not have had a discernible effect. See Philip Auslander, "The Performativity of Performance Documentation", *PAJ: A Journal of Performance and Art*, no. 84 (2006): 3.

[54] Turner, "Hip Hop Versus Rap…", 141.

faithful to the craft, while still elucidating the intricacies and complexities of its performance processes.

Section 2 – Directions for Future Research

Following on from this study, there are multiple avenues for future research. This section outlines the potential for exploring radio practice within different forms, the sociocultural importance of pirate radio, the study of drill music and its contrasting performance network, and issues of gender in grime.

Detailed understanding of radio's role for musical ensembles provides substantial scope for further research, both within grime music and other forms reliant on this domain for creative output. Studies of the effect of pirate radio on antecedent forms, such as jungle and UK garage, could produce fascinating results. Seminal garage collective So Solid Crew fashioned much of their early work on Delight FM, while Kool FM acted a critical ground for jungle artists—such as Brockie, DET, Flinty Badman and Mampi Swift—to 'develop new skills'.[55]

Considered study of the pirate radio domain could also bring forth new sociocultural insight. Similarly to the radio stations SW Radio Africa and Studio 7 in Zimbabwe, many of these grime transmissions (alongside their presentation of creative practice) featured acute social commentary and reflections on inner city London at the turn of the millennium.[56] Stark juxtapositions of creative fervour and lived experience are manifest on a number of recordings. A radio set from North London's Meridian Crew in late-2002, sees MC JME shouting out his fellow performer Big H for his 'birthday the other day'. Moments later Big H launches into an unflinching lyrical tirade: 'manna pop off with murder, 9 millimetre murder.' This fine balance between engaging in musical practice and

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[55] PDS, "So Solid Crew", Delight FM, London: December 25, 2002; Rollo Jackson, "Tape Crackers", 56:00.

[56] Hancox, "Pirates and Olympians…", 197.

contending with life on the Meridian Estate in Tottenham imparts a great deal about the precarity of many young people living on London's council estates.

Further to this, the locational claustrophobia captured in Chapter 3 is audibly manifest in a 2004 recording of Brixton crew NAA on Croydon's OnTopFM. The tension from straying into a rival area simply to get their message across caused the crew to adopt a 'merk and go' policy as a consequence. Both these sets indicate substantial possible scope for a project that attends to radio sets as both musical documents and sociocultural (and historical) artefacts.[57]

And while radio was the principal domain for many of the United Kingdom's Afrodiasporic forms—at least for the past two decades—a distinctive change in recent times would also benefit from further enquiry. Drill music is a phenomenon in London, but unlike grime and UK Garage its principal mode of dissemination is through YouTube videos. The impact of overbearing mediatisation upon quotidian cultural practices is of course well-documented, but the concern here is how the use of the medium affects performance. Whereas grime artists were afforded space to test out new ideas in the 'dojo', these drill videos are a restricted format that has potentially impacted the propensity of artists to improvise, interact and create.[58]

Heightened censorship of drill music, in a manner arguably more belligerent than erstwhile discrimination against grime music, has resulted in the removal of videos, arrests and even court injunctions relating to the performance of specific songs. In December 2018, Skengdo and AM 'breached' a court ruling simply by performing their song 'Attempted 1.0' at North London's Koko. The double bind of mass censorship and mediatisation poses interesting questions with respect to the performance of this form, how

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[57] DJ Skepta, "Meridian Crew", Heat FM, London: 2002; Unknown DJ, "NAA", On Top FM, London: 2004.

[58] Craig Pinkney and Shona Robinson-Edwards, "Gangs, Music and the Mediatisation of Crime: Expressions, Violations and Validations", *Safer Communities* 17, no. 2 (2018): 104.

crews and groups assert communality, and how individual artists develop performance techniques—such as projection and crowd interaction—without tangible arenas to do so.[59]

Another important area of research is into the role of women in grime music. I mentioned the male-dominated nature of grime music at the thesis' outset. And while I interviewed a number of female practitioners and included examples that featured female creative practice, the large majority of the thesis deals with masculine spaces and male artists' work. This thesis has shown how the very homosociality of grime music colours much of its performance and performative interactions, and is manifest in much of the analogies surrounding its production (fighting in the dojo and playing football). Harrison similarly located a sense of 'laddism' in hip hop practice in San Francisco's Bay Area.[60] However, events such as Girls of Grime and the Grime Originals Female Takeover have demonstrated grime practice from all-female ensembles in similarly intense scenarios.[61] This readily confounds the notion that grime practice is principally a male preserve, and opens up interesting questions regarding the nature of its performance. Further enquiry into female, and LGBTIQ+ artists' practice—such as Karnage Kills and FFSYTHO—is a necessary and important endeavour.

Finally, and looking further afield, there is palpable scope for the examination of grime practice outside of London and around the world.

Closing Remarks

This thesis' fundamental aim was to document grime music and its performance in London. While starting as a modest venture, it has resulted in the formulation of a complex model for group improvisatory practice, based upon the idiosyncrasies of grime's performance

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[59] Kenan Malik, "Since When Was It a Police Job to Impose Sanctions on Drill Musicians? | Kenan Malik", *The Guardian*, February 9, 2019, https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2019/feb/09/since-when-was-it-police-job-to-impose-sanctions-on-drill-musicians.

[60] ibid, 171.

[61] DJ Kaylee Kay, "Grime Originals: The Female Takeover", Rinse FM, London: May 22, 2018.

community. Throughout three years of investigation, it attended to grime's core components, the principal phases of play (the reload, rally, through ball), and its performance network. Ethnographic enquiry has also offered the first extended examination of a grime crew and its creative practice.

As the form continues to develop its performance practice will also evolve. Scope for innovation is indicated by the emergence of the 'through ball', and the multidirectional interactivity that characterises grime practice and stimulates its performance process. This study should act as the benchmark for future endeavours that seek to determine the ways in which grime artists pursue innovation within this highly contested, yet creatively fertile sphere of performance.

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Keep Hush: Slimzee, Kwam, Jammz, Riz La Teef. Rye Wax, London. January 16, 2017.

Keep Hush: Slimzee, Garna, Asif Kid, Sir Pixalot. Rye Wax, London. February 8, 2017.

Keep Hush: Gundam, Killa P, Sukh Night, P Money. Soho House, London. May 11, 2017.

Knucks. *Knucks Headline Show.* Sticky Mike's Frog Bar, Brighton. March 5, 2018.

Newham Generals and Logan Sama. *Boiler Room: ICA x Eskimo Dance.* ICA, London. July 2015.

Nicky Blackmarket and Stevie Hyper D. *Roast.* Island, Ilford. October 1995.

P Money. *Live and Direct.* G Shock, London. December 1, 2016.

Razor and de Lacey. *Knucks Headline Show.* Sticky Mike's Frog Bar, Brighton. March 5, 2018.

Red Bull Culture Clash. Earls Court, London. October 30, 2014.

Sir Spyro and YGG. *Acrylic London.* Camden Assembly, London. February 3, 2017.

Skepta. *Live at Lovebox Festival.* Lovebox, London. July 13, 2018.

Slimzee and Big John, "Keep Hush". Rye Wax, London. January 16, 2017.

Trim. Battersea Arts Centre, London. May 18, 2017.

The Square. *Elf Kid Private Launch Party.* Edition Hotel, London. December 14, 2016.

Wiley. *The Godfather Tour.* Camden Roundhouse, London. February 9, 2017.

Yizzy and PK. *Grime Originals.* Fire, London. December 9, 2017.

Appendix A – Glossary of Terms

This glossary is by no means an exhaustive list, nor is it necessarily indicative of the way in which all artists speak about their practice. However, it contains terms that are used regularly throughout this thesis. Accordingly, their usage throughout should be understood with respect to these definitions.

Back-to-back: Where two MCs engage in a rally (see below) that features rapid interchange between the artists, often in the middle of bars. These are usually pre-composed and moved into as part of a performance.

Clanging: When a DJ brings in an instrumental that is out of time with the existing instrumental. DJs can 'clang' a mix or a blend, for example.

Chopping and Cutting: These are DJ techniques, where the DJ quickly pulls the channel faders up and down, bringing instrumentals in and out of the mix. They can choose to chop a new track in, or cut between two instrumentals.

Cypher (or cipher): A live improvisatory performance between a collection of MCs. In grime music—and unlike hip-hop—lyrics are typically pre-composed but chosen to fit either the instrumental or the situation at hand.

Drop: The point at which an instrumental enters into its main passage. Typically it is built towards through rhythmic tension and heightened synth lines.

Drop-in: Drop-ins take place when a DJ brings in a new instrumental at the point where the track enters into its main passage.

Dubplate: Historically understood as a test pressing or acetate of an unreleased track. In Grime, dubplates don't necessarily have to be on record: as long as they are exclusive or unreleased they are considered to be a dub.

Dubplate Special: A dubplate, typically re-recorded to feature the name of the sound, MC or DJ who is playing out the record.

Flow: An MCs idiosyncratic performance of musical material. Unlike Adam Krims' definition that pinpoints 'an MC's rhythmic delivery', a flow can also incorporate cadential figures, and be stylised with reference to the content. There are grime artists, for example, with a recognisable 'yardie flow' or 'cockney flow' that is influenced by the artists' lexicon and projection of the specific sonorities of that lexicon.[1]

Freshers: New bars that an MC often debuts and tries out on a radio show. MCs tend to acknowledge that they are 'freshers' or 'new ones', particularly if they made a mistake while delivering them.

Hype Bars/Lyrics: Typically an MC's most famous set of lyrics. They are punchy, direct and are rarely syncopated or skippy. Examples include Tinchy Stryder's 'We've got tings in boots, under the seat nah tings in boots' or Skepta's 'I'm doing it again, they tried to stop me I'm doing it again. Skepta, yeah, I'm doing it again. Boy better know I'm doing it again, I'm…' These terms are used interchangeably throughout the text, although 'hype lyric' is favoured since discussions often include musical bar numbers and the use of 'hype bar' can result in slight confusion.

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[1] Adam Krims, *Rap Music and the Poetics of Identity*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 67.

Instrumental: The principal term used for a grime track that doesn't feature vocals. DJs use instrumentals on sets that MCs spit over.

Merk: To get one up on someone, or kill them lyrically. Truncated form of 'mercenary'. Alternatively it can mean to perform well. Often MCs are described as 'merking' a set.

Multi MC: An MC whose delivery is characterised by using multisyllabic patterns with internal rhyme as a prevailing characteristic. For example Darkos Strife's lyrics 'real time strategy command and conquer, this scene enemies wanna try harm this monster', or 'me boy fi try sekkle like Jamakabi's old bar, straight if you panic it's over'.

Punch Rhythms: These are similar to a cut or chop, but they occur with regularity on the same beat in the bar. Typically a DJ will punch in a track on Beat 1 of the bar. This technique can be utilised to bring in a new track, or to foreground the performance of an MC by providing them with greater room and space to deliver their bars. As seen in Chapter 4, Section 2.

Rallies: Rallies consist of fixed length exchanges between MCs. They are typically eight bars long and can either be explicitly announced or entered into as part of an unfolding performance.

Reload, Wheel, Jackum, Pull Up, Edge, Forward: Enacted by the DJ, this is a technique where the instrumental is pulled back on the deck and restarted from the top. This can be enacted owing to the beat selection, an MCs performance or a mixture of the two and is typically instigated owing to a substantial audience response, although there are a multitude of power dynamics that can affect this (see Chapter 4, Section 1).

Rushed: To be attacked, often by a group of people.

Sending: Lyrically provoking another artist or crew. Artists regularly send for each other on recordings or on radio sets.

Set: A term that is interchangeable with performance. MCs and DJs regularly perform at radio 'sets' or live 'sets' at venues.

Shell, Spit, Spray: Alternative terms for performing lyrics. All three capture the attack and presence of an MC's delivery.

Sixteen: A sixteen-bar length lyrical passage. MCs often write lyrics in blocks of sixteen. This allows for a rise and fall across the passage, and scope for microphone rotation as part of a radio or live performance.

Snakey: Typically refers to unsporting conduct of MCs. Being 'snaked' occurs when an MC jumps the queue and spits before another MC, who was meant to be up next. Artists can also 'snake' through pretending to pass the microphone, then 'blocking' the other artist by turning away from them.

Tekkie/Tekkers: Truncated terms for something being technical. Typically utilised in football but widely incorporated in grime music. Sir Spyro released a track called 'Tekkerz' in 2014.

Through Ball: The through ball is a technique where a performer indicates an impending change to another performer, allowing them to arrive at the drop. Its etymology lies in the footballing term for a pass that arrives at the projected position of a fellow teammate. They can be enacted by DJs who tease or chop in a track—informing an MC of the impending

change—or by a fellow MC who can tee the MC up for the drop. It is a dense metapragmatic process and is fully detailed in Chapter 6.

Transition Lyrics: A small unit—typically four bars—that an MC can use to their advantage whilst a DJ is moving between tracks, or alternatively, to provide them with breathing room before entering into a new passage. These transition lyrics can be looped and reworked until the MC is ready to proceed with their performance.

VIP: This acronym stands for 'variation in production'. DJs often produce multiple versions of their own track. Alternatively, a producer can be given the stems of a track to make their own VIP.

WIP: This acronym stands for a 'work in progress'. These tend to be tested out on radio sets or teased out through 30-second teasers on Soundcloud or Instagram.

Appendix B – Ethical Approval

Ethical approval for this thesis was applied for and obtained in December 2016 from the Departmental Postgraduate Research Committee.

Twenty-six participants were formally interviewed for the research. All participants verbally assented to their inclusion and this was recorded. This was preferable to written assent, since participants are often reticent to sign a form owing to its perceived legally binding nature. I typically found that demanding a signature can foster a sense of distrust, with verbal assent being far more practical and agreeable.[2] Participants were also informed that they could withdraw from the project at any time, and have their contributions anonymised if they so wished.

All participants were over the age of 18, and no children or vulnerable parties were interviewed. Each participant was provided with a participant consent form (see overleaf) that outlined my research. My phone number and e-mail address were included so they could contact me at any time.

For much of the research process I was observing and engaging with grime performances. Any observations undertaken (which were subsequently analysed in this thesis) had consent obtained from the parties in question.

For further details or a copy of my ethical approval form, please contact Goldsmiths' Music Department.

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[2] Susan Tilley and Louise Gormley, "Canadian University Ethics Review: Cultural Complications Translating Principles Into Practice', *Qualitative Inquiry* 13, no. 3 (2007): 371.

Participant Consent Form - Alex de Lacey, PhD Candidate, Goldsmiths University: Interviews for Doctoral Thesis - Grime Music: Live Performance and the Creative Process

This project is looking at performance in Grime and I'm interviewing artists as part of the research process. The interview will be recorded, however your participation is completely voluntary, and you can let me know at any time if you'd like to withdraw, or have your contribution anonymised.

If you'd like to contact me at any point, or would like to know a bit more about the study, feel free to contact me via e-mail - XXXXXX - or by phone: XXXXXX.

Thanks,

Alex