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Chapter 7

Urban Breakbeat Culture

Repercussions of Hip-Hop in the United Kingdom

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African American cultural commentators have rightly taken pride in the influence hip-hop has exerted on popular culture across the globe. But the direct impact of hip-hop on non-U.S. musical cultures is often exaggerated. In this chapter, we want to argue that the most significant passages of hip-hop from the United States to the United Kingdom should not be understood as localization, whereby a U.S. musical mode is adapted, with minor modifications, to British themes and accents. The most important developments in recent British popular music indeed have many of their origins in hip-hop, but we aim to show that they represent such a transformation of these origins that the term localization, with its connotations of local adjustment to a still-intact form, hardly seems valid.

There have been, it is true, attempts to develop U.K. versions of rap and hip-hop that are strongly influenced by U.S. versions, but that make reference, verbally and musically, to distinctive situations faced by black and white Britons. We trace some of these rich creolizations in the first part of this chapter, including appropriations of hip-hop by British South Asian musicians. In cases such as these, the term "localization" seems apt. But a more significant legacy of hip-hop, in our view, is to be found in the experiments of various musicians, from the late 1980s onward, with key elements of hip-hop music, most notably breakbeats and sampling. These practices have been adapted for use in very different performative and institutional circumstances from those to be found in the USA and have led to a profusion of new genres (often uncomfortably bracketed under the category "dance

music"). They mark a further stage in the creative appropriation of consumer and semiprofessional playback technology initiated by disco and hip-hop.

Analyzing the complex legacies of hip-hop in the United Kingdom raises important issues about the journeys and lineages of sounds in the global era, and about disruption and continuity in black musical traditions. At what points do sounds, technologies, and performances become detached from their origins in particular places (as "U.S." or "Jamaican" or "Indian")? How do they become reconfigured as different kinds of cultural interventions, based on, in the U.K. case, new relationships between diasporic ethnicities, city and suburbs, center and periphery?

Our investigation of these issues begins with an outline of the economic, political, and cultural conditions specific to Britain that are most relevant, in our view, for understanding the way in which hip-hop elements became adapted and, eventually, transformed in the U.K. context. We then discuss the impact of U.S. hip-hop culture in the United Kingdom in the 1980s. As it has elsewhere, U.S.-produced rap has been popular in Britain, and hip-hop culture has resonated with black and white British youth. In terms of musical production, however, the impact of U.S. hip-hop on British music making has been complex and diffuse. In spite of the undoubted talent of many British hip-hop musicians, British rap has been marginalized and to some extent impoverished by an overreverential attitude toward U.S. rap, by the attempt to reproduce styles and languages developed in very different contexts. Rather than seeing U.S. hip-hop as a point of origin—an approach likely to make British versions appear implicitly parasitical—we argue for a view that sees black cultures in Britain, the Caribbean, and the United States as linked in a complex network of cultural flows. The productive syncretism of diasporic cultures is further demonstrated by the creative use British Asian musicians have made of hip-hop as the basis of musical-cultural statements about how they are negotiating new ethnic identities. Here again, hip-hop is only one node in a complex web of postcolonial cultural elements.

Finally, we (artificially) divide our discussion of the new musical genres produced in this post-hip-hop and dance culture into two overall categories: jungle/drum 'n' bass; and trip-hop. These terms are journalistic tags that do little justice to the complexity of the cultures concerned. But the categories provide a means of organizing an account of how hip-hop became one of a number of key elements in a highly distinctive set of musical practices that we want to call, following the Metalheadz label, "urban breakbeat culture."

BLACK BRITISHNESS, SOUND SYSTEMS, AND CLUB CULTURE

Urban breakbeat culture draws inspiration from U.S. hip-hop culture but is ultimately the product of national conditions specific to the United Kingdom. This diasporic music emerges from the particular confluence of a number of diasporic cultural flows in 1980s and 1990s Britain. It is, ultimately, black music; but as black British cultural studies have shown (e.g., Gilroy 1993b; Mercer 1994), there are particular ways in which blackness is inflected in Britain, and these have a crucial bearing on understanding the new musical cultures. Black people have been present in Britain for many centuries (Fryer 1984), but most of the nonwhite population of the United Kingdom is the result of postwar migration from Britain's former colonies. One in every twenty Britons defines himself or herself as nonwhite. Nearly 1.5 million people have their family origins in India, Pakistan, and Bangladesh. Half a million are African Caribbean. There are also very large groups of migrants from Africa (including African Asian people) and China.

Postwar migration to Britain was the result of labor shortages. Black immigrants were welcomed and given full citizenship rights as subjects of the British Commonwealth. Gradually, though, immigration policies became increasingly restrictive and racist. Immigration figures declined significantly after the early 1970s. The vast majority of young black British people were born in Britain.¹ As a result, a whole generation of migrants' children are dealing with the experience of being British and black. They have roots in former colonies such as Jamaica and India, but have been exposed to a myriad of other media and cultural influences. In Britain, hip-hop provides only one set of ways in which identity is constituted and negotiated musically. Its practices, technologies, and aesthetics have been merged and recombined with those of two other crucially important musical-cultural phenomena: sound system culture and club culture.

SOUND SYSTEM CULTURE

Les Back (1996) has argued that the rejection of black migrant workers by white working-class leisure institutions during the postwar period fostered the creation of autonomous black cultural spaces. Amongst the Caribbean community, the gambling house and the sound system were particularly significant. The latter, originating in Jamaica, is a massive hi-fi, operated as a small business and taken from venue to venue by its operators to play music for dancing at youth clubs, "blues parties," and all manner of Caribbean community events from weddings and christenings to "sound clashes" (where two or more systems would compete in front of a crowd on the grounds of

volume and originality of record selection). The emphasis in sound system aesthetics has been strongly on the production of booming, powerful, syncopated bass runs, which is significant in understanding later developments, in particular jungle.

CLUB CULTURE

Sound systems represent a distinctive British Caribbean black practice. The importance of club culture to British musical life cuts across classes and races, but it is still vital for understanding the urban breakbeat cultures we describe. This importance in turn derives from particular social, economic, spatial, and political conditions. In her study of British club culture, Sarah Thornton has suggested that "the widespread significance of dance clubs to growing up may be unique to Britain" (1995: 16) and that the importance of "going out dancing crosses boundaries of class, race, ethnicity, and sexuality" (1995: 15). The centrality of club culture to British life derives, as Thornton points out, from the drive to escape from the "tyranny of the home" (1995: 18, citing Mary Douglas). Many British homes are very small, and domestic culture is heavily television oriented. Pubs, clubs, and "the street" have been important alternative venues. Dance clubs are often based in town centers, which remain relatively well served by public transport. But even as young people have gained increasing access to cars, the importance of the dance club has not declined. Trips to other boroughs, towns, and cities and to out-of-town venues have become more important, which has only added to the importance of the dance club in British life.

For many years, many young British people viewed dance clubs with suspicion, as "cattle markets" (i.e., places devoted mainly to sexual pairing off), sites of an artificial glamour, or white dominated (Asian youth often attended "daytimers" rather than nighttime events). The 1980s saw the popularity and importance of clubs spread into new constituencies, including those in higher education and just out of it, and to sections of the working class previously disinclined. By the late 1980s, the club had for a number of reasons become the locus of a new popular cultural politics. This was to have complex repercussions for ethnic relations in cultural spaces, and it had the most profound effects on British music making. We explore these changes in more detail below.

The importance of sound systems and club culture does not, however, negate the great importance for British youth of U.S.-produced hip-hop. We begin, then, by tracing the particular ways in which that culture was received in Britain before going on to discuss how it was transformed.

THE EARLY IMPACT OF U.S. HIP-HOP IN THE UNITED KINGDOM

Almost as soon as it moved from the street corner to the recording studio, hip-hop, along with rap, found a sympathetic audience in the United Kingdom. And right from the start, hip-hop in Britain was a cross-racial scene. It is important to remember that the various ethnic groups in Britain tend not to live in segregated areas. Even in the areas with the highest proportions of ethnic minorities, such as the northwest London borough of Brent, white people still form a majority. There are a number of places in Britain where white, Caribbean, and Asian youth share much cultural interchange: Bristol, Birmingham, and southeast London, to name but three. These are spaces where, in spite of institutional racism and the persistence of poverty amongst ethnic minority populations, a "rigorously syncretic youth culture" (Back 1996: 123) is being created.

Hip-hop in the United Kingdom was largely pioneered by DJs on the racially mixed "rare groove" scene, a loose network of DJs and clubs with origins in the soul and R&B scenes of the mid-1970s whose musical milieu combined rare U.S. soul and jazz dance with slicker soul, disco, and funk. And hip-hop practices, such as breaking, graffiti, and the various DJing techniques, were adopted by not only Caribbean youth, but also by whites and Asians.

It is significant that hip-hop was only one of a number of styles being played in British dance clubs in the 1980s. Clubs devoted exclusively to hip-hop were rare. Black British culture already had a musical, stylistic, and social structure—the reggae sound system culture described earlier—that to a certain extent obviated the need for wholesale conversion to hip-hop. By the early 1980s, according to Back (1996: 187), sound systems operated in all the major regions of London where black young people lived, and he provides a list of twenty-two sound systems functioning in southeast London alone in 1981 (1996: 286). So the United Kingdom already had its own version of an emancipatory black practice, a Caribbean-derived cultural formation with music at its epicenter that fostered black expressivity and organized and channeled critiques of institutional racism and neocolonialism. In other words, sound system culture did for black British urban populations what hip-hop did for African Americans. Many black British clubbers and consumers picked up U.S. hip-hop but incorporated it into their preexisting diet of reggae.

This process is best understood via Paul Gilroy's now-familiar but still enormously productive concept of the black Atlantic (1993a) as the site of complex cultural flows among the African diaspora in Europe, the Caribbean, and North America. U.S. hip-hop is itself the product of the physical

and cultural traffic between Jamaica and New York (Toop 1991), an influence embodied in the figure of Clive "Kool DJ Herc" Campbell from Kingston, one of hip-hop's founding fathers. The very sound system culture that was exported from the Caribbean to Britain in the 1950s was the basis of much of U.S. hip-hop. Rapping, while clearly based to some degree in African American oral tradition, borrows heavily from the development of the Caribbean's myriad creolized languages.²

Reggae, meanwhile, was heavily informed by U.S. R&B (Hebdige 1987). Twenty years later hip-hop had a profound effect on Jamaican music, influencing the development of a harder style of reggae rapping known as ragga (or dancehall), which became popular amongst Caribbean audiences in the United Kingdom. According to one prominent U.K.-Jamaican toaster, Leslie Lyrix, Jamaican and British dancehall tapes circulated widely amongst U.S. hip-hop producers, and the fact that many prominent U.S. rappers were explicit about their Caribbean parentage (e.g., Grand Puba) or consciously fused hip-hop with reggae and Jamaican vernacular forms (e.g., Shinehead, and Boogie Down Production's *Criminal Minded*) should serve to guard against a model that insists on the national integrity of genre or on one-way patterns of musical influence.

This does not negate the possibility that musical forms can be innovative, nor that they might be associated with particular groups. Hip-hop is clearly music of mainly black origin(ality). But the black Atlantic histories outlined above make it impossible to speak of the effect of hip-hop on U.K. music in terms of a direct, one-on-one influence. That influence is mediated, distorted, amplified, and fractured because of the complexity of the international flows of musical culture.

It is for this reason, perhaps, that British hip-hop can be considered to have failed where it has overenthusiastically imported African American attitudes to hip-hop, along with the music and style. There have been numerous attempts to forge a British version of rap drawing directly upon U.S. models. A number of acts emerged from pockets of U.K. hip-hop activity, concentrated primarily in multiracial areas of south London such as Brixton and Peckham: the London Posse, Sindecut, Dodge City, Big Ted, the She-Rockers, the Cookie Crew and Monie Love, and Ty and Shortee Blitz. In commercial terms the most significant outlet for the music was the independent label Music for Life, run by hip-hop fan Simon Harris. From the beginning there was a lively debate within U.K. hip-hop regarding the extent to which U.S. rap should serve as a model. The issue was twofold: a question of accent (style) and one of content. Should a British rapper adopt the U.S. drawl of the Brooklyn badboys (an enterprise doomed to failure) or stick to

an English accent that might sound strange? Should a U.K. rapper adopt the Uzi-packing, carjacking, bitch-smacking lexicon of U.S. rap or develop a “vocab” more in step with the British context, where guns are rare, few youths can afford cars, misogyny is perhaps slightly less acceptable, and the prevailing British diffidence renders public boasting (or “bigging yourself up”) relatively uncommon and frowned upon?

While many rappers could not help but begin by imitating the styles and accents of their U.S. heroes, there were many who realized that to merely transpose U.S. forms would rob U.K. hip-hop of the ability to speak for a disenfranchised British constituency in the way that U.S. hip-hop so successfully spoke to, and for, its audience. As the frankly derivative early efforts of many of these rappers failed to ignite the imaginations of the record-buying public and were met with derision by a U.K. rap market that tended to value authenticity above all else, many U.K. rappers began to subscribe to the sentiments expressed by the rapper Dizzi Heights: “I’m sick of English rap kids saying fresh and def and hard. Those words come from America. We’ve got— ‘it’s well ’ard’ and ‘it’s cool’ lots of slang words. . . . You can make much better raps using words you know and that’s where we could really come in” (quoted in Back 1996: 208). Attempts were made by U.K. rappers to develop styles more obviously rooted in British linguistic practices—Rodney P of the London Posse deliberately chose a London accent—although many succeeded only in adopting a slurred hybrid that located the rap somewhere in the middle of the Atlantic Ocean.

British rap throughout the 1980s tended to eschew the cartoon braggadocio and gunplay of U.S. rap in favor of more recognizable U.K. themes. One obvious way this was achieved was to (re)import into the U.S. rap framework styles and terms from Caribbean culture. Many U.K. rappers such as Blak Twang and Rodney P drop frequent references to, and echoes of, British Caribbean style into their rapping styles and have arguably, therefore, cast a more authentic version of U.K. rap by acknowledging that allegiance to an Afro-American form need not supersede or replace black British links to the Caribbean. Classic British hip-hop tracks like the London Posse’s “How’s Life in London?” (London 12-inch, 1990) explicitly incorporate “cockney lyrics” and references to familiar London situations, such as riding the number 37 bus and collecting unemployment benefits. Blak Twang’s “Red Letter” (Jammin’ 12-inch, 1997) features a chorus sung in a reggae-toasting style, all about receiving final-demand (red) bills through the post. Both are attempts to refit hip-hop to a specific black British situation.

British hip-hop has, in our view, been less successful where it has taken a



Rodney P. Photo by Ken Passley.

purist attitude toward U.S. models. In their determination to remain "true to the game," "keep it real," and ally themselves with the kind of Afrocentric politics represented by, for example, the Native Tongues wing of U.S. hip-hop, British hip-hop has floundered in the face of the complex transnational processes that birthed it, and this has disallowed its participation in the creative flux of the U.K. music scene in general. While many participants in U.K. hip-hop culture have taken their skills into other genres (examples include the scratch DJ Pogo, who DJs with the jazz saxophonist Courtney Pine's band, and the producer DJ Krust, who emerged as a significant figure on the jungle scene), purists tended to be left on the sidelines complaining about a lack of respect. By adhering too closely to a set of precepts, a sense of correctness, that emerged in very different circumstances, under different racial and social conditions, British hip-hoppers have, it seems, largely succeeded in marginalizing themselves. Hip-hop continued to thrive in Britain in the late 1980s with the emergence of the "second wave" of New York rap (Eric B and Rakim, Public Enemy, Gang Starr, etc.). But in terms of British production, rap was one of a number of styles that could be fused eclectically to make new genres, rather than constituting a goal in itself.³

Hip-hop, however, exerted a huge influence on U.K. music making primarily in relation to DJing (scratching and mixing) and production techniques. The sale of samplers rose exponentially during the late 1980s. In particular, that period saw the rise of the breakbeat phenomenon: the development of a subculture based around searching for rare breaks on soul and funk records and sampling and reconstructing beats using Atari computers with sequencing programs and Roland 808 drum machines. This began to lay roots that would come to fruition in the early 1990s.

BRITISH ASIAN HIP-HOP

The major exception to the developments noted above, whereby the attempt to develop distinctive U.K. versions of hip-hop had largely been abandoned by the early 1990s (and British artists proved unable to adapt rapping as a form), was the continued adoption by British Asian musicians of hip-hop forms. Again, this has important implications for the issues of ethnicity and cultural legitimation we raised at the beginning of this chapter. British African Caribbean musicians struggled to gain the respect accorded to their African American counterparts. This applied to British Asian musicians working in the field of hip-hop too. But the very novelty of young Asians, traditionally portrayed in racist lore as relatively passive and subservient, adapting the urban musical languages of hip-hop served to provide a (limited)

space in which such musicians could gain a certain (limited) access to the musical public sphere.

Many young British Asians were involved in breakdancing and graffiti from the early 1980s on, but very few were rapping and scratching. It was only in the early 1990s that a number of hip-hop-influenced acts emerged from within the various constituencies of the Asian diaspora in Britain to a greater national prominence, in the form of television coverage and deals with major and large independent record companies. Kaliphz, for example, formed in the early 1980s in Rochdale, were signed to London Records in 1992 and achieved some success (including an appearance on the BBC show *Top of the Pops* with the boxer Prince Naseem Hanif). The label Nation Records, based in West London, has served as a hub for a number of British Asian acts, influenced by hip-hop in a variety of ways. Perhaps the best known of these is Fun-Da-Mental, consisting of Nation's co-owner and manager, Aki Nawaz, and his partner, Dave Watts (who is Caribbean in origin). Fun-Da-Mental demonstrated an explicit allegiance to African American Islamic radicalism and to the black separatist politics of groups such as the Black Panthers, which led to their being labeled "the Asian Public Enemy"—a label Nation adopted for its own publicity. Their third single, "Wrath of the Black Man" (Nation 1993), for example, is built around a sample of a speech by Malcolm X. While African American radicalism provided political inspiration, the themes of the raps and spoken samples were concerned with Asian and British Asian issues. The band's name reflects this—a controversial invocation of Islamic fundamentalism, even while the hyphens in the name indicate another purpose, that of combining pleasure ("fun") with thought ("mental"). The band's symbol is a crescent, to evoke not only Islam, but also the Pakistani flag (Aki Nawaz's mother was a leading British activist for Benazir Bhutto's Pakistan People's Party).

Hustlers HC and Asian Dub Foundation, both of whom released records on Nation, demonstrate other affiliations. Whereas Fun-Da-Mental's Aki Nawaz discovered rap late and found "its politics more sorted than its music,"⁴ Hustlers HC had a long-standing allegiance to hip-hop culture that preceded its pedagogical turn in the mid- to late 1980s. Like many other hip-hop fans, they were drawn to aesthetic and cultural features of the form as much as to the direct expressions of political anger contained within certain versions of it. Given the greater allegiance of Fun-Da-Mental to black nationalism, it is ironic that while Fun-Da-Mental found greater recognition amongst white audiences and institutions, Hustlers HC have gained much more positive reactions from British Caribbean hip-hop crowds. Such crowds



Hustlers HC. Courtesy of Nation Records.

tend to have a strong sense of hierarchy about who can best perform and play rap: African Americans tend to be most favored, followed by British African Caribbeans. So for a Sikh band to gain the respect of an African Caribbean hip-hop crowd is no mean feat.

Just like U.S. rap acts that were more obviously engaged politically, such as the Disposable Heroes of Hiphoprisy or Consolidated, Fun-Da-Mental's appeal was more to white student populations than to the less-educated urban poor addressed by hardcore rap. Perhaps for this reason the political messages of Fun-Da-Mental have been granted considerably more coverage in the student-oriented British music press (such as *New Musical Express*) than any other British rap act. Other South Asian acts influenced by hip-hop have struggled to receive airplay and media attention. Hustlers HC adopted a different approach to music and black identity from Fun-Da-Mental. Their raps were rarely political, in the direct sense. Their aim was to show that Sikhs are as influenced by hip-hop culture as by the temple, and that they are as capable of producing high-quality rap as are British Caribbean bands. For many, this is a sufficiently strong political aim in itself, because it resists stereotypes of Asian life as composed only of traditional elements.

Indeed, it could be said that what unites British Asian acts influenced by rap is precisely such a desire to assert a more complex sense of identity than that assumed by many media representations of the South Asian diaspora in Britain. (See Sharma et al. 1996) But there are important differences in how

various acts go about asserting this complexity. Fun-Da-Mental borrowed extensive samples from Indian film music, particularly from the string sections. Through their juxtaposition with hip-hop rhythm tracks and angry raps, such samples are reconfigured, and a new hybrid Asian identity is emphasized. Hustlers HC, however, made extensive use of Indian instrumentation on only one track: "Let the Hustlers Play," which was the B side of their "Big Trouble in Little Asia" single. Hustlers HC (Nation 12-inch, 1993) did use samples from Asian records, but they tended to listen mainly for sounds that can be perceived as distinctly un-Asian. As one of their associates at Nation, Simon Underwood, put it, Hustlers HC were "not a fusion band."

Like Fun-Da-Mental, Anirhudda Das, of the former Nation act Asian Dub Foundation, similarly sees his band's use of "Indian sounds" as symbolic of certain experiences for second-generation British Asians: "When we use Indian sounds or stuff out of Hindi films, it's reflecting our upbringing, that we heard these sounds, always, in the background, on the telly, on the video." But the band merges such sounds with appropriations of the electronic dance music that exploded in the United Kingdom from the late 1980s onward, partly under the influence of hip-hop, but also because of separate developments (which we treat in the next section). There is a further level of defiance too: they incorporate the kind of rock instrumentation that, at least until the "big beat" phenomenon in dance music in the mid-1990s, was shunned by many dance musicians: "We're expected to be sitting there playing tablas or sitting there playing sitar and all of that, and we're saying, 'nah, nah, that's for hippies.' I'm playing bass guitar, Steve's playing distortion guitar, and we're more Asian than you are in what we're playing."

The range of uses of hip-hop by British Asian musicians, then, suggests once again that the most fruitful way of telling the story of hip-hop is not as a musical form that has spread across the world from U.S. origins, but rather as one of a number of elements that can be recombined to make important statements about cultural identity. This is not to disrespect the astonishing creativity of U.S. rap musicians and those who have attempted to stay close to their example. Rather, it is to pay proper attention to the creativity of those who have transformed that resource in new and adventurous ways.

ACID HOUSE AND AFTER: THE BREAKBEAT ERA

We now turn to what we consider to be the most fruitful and exciting adaptations by British musicians of hip-hop musical components. These new genres, we believe, can be understood only by reference to changes in British club culture in the 1980s and early 1990s.

It is difficult to convey to outsiders the profound effects on British popular

music of the rise of dance music culture in the late 1980s and early 1990s. As we have seen, the dance club already had an unusual importance in British youth culture. For many people increasingly drawn to electronic dance music in the wake of hip-hop, rave culture confirmed the subversive populism of dance.⁵ Its dangerous reputation was sealed by a kind of moral panic in the national press about the drugs associated with the scene, especially ecstasy. Accompanying this panic, though, was an especially strong utopian discourse of collectivism and equality within club culture, that stressed the breaking down of ethnic, class, and gender differences. Dance events had long been viewed as rituals of togetherness and inclusion, but the new dance culture went further, and the rhetoric, at least, was genuinely democratizing: "No performers, no VIPs, we are all special" was one typical slogan from a club flyer.

The music comprised, at first, rhythmic offshoots of disco, imported mainly from Chicago, Detroit, and New York City. House, techno, and garage were the principal forms. Pop producers, increasingly dance oriented since the early 1980s, picked up on these black U.S. subcultural styles, and dance music's centrality to the most popular songs intensified. Ironically, the "acid house" moment meant that hip-hop production techniques hit the pop charts in the form of a postmodern, cut-and-paste technique of sampling and mixing—for example, in the huge 1987 hit by MARRS, "Pump Up the Volume" (4AD 12-inch, 1987; see Manuel 1995 for an analysis). The emphasis was much less on the sampling of breaks than on melodic samples, but the hip-hop influence was reinforced by the fact that many key phrases were being sampled from U.S. hip-hop tracks. (MARRS's "Pump Up the Volume," for example, drew on Eric B and Rakim's "I Know You Got Soul.")

But in spite of the basis of the music in hip-hop and in black U.S. offshoots of disco, and even though there was a widespread rhetoric of racial unity on the scene as a whole, many black Britons perceived rave as a white thing, especially as the music of black Chicago and Detroit became supplanted or supplemented by Euro-house from Italy and the "colder" strains of German and Belgian techno. While a few club nights retained their traditional soul and R&B formats, some "blacker" house and rave clubs (such as Confusion in central London) retained an emphasis on traditional "black" practices by injecting breakbeats into the mix and featuring toasting (the practice, originating in Jamaica, of rapping, often at remarkable speed, over a track played on a sound system). A post-rave subgenre of techno called hardcore (or 'ardkore) simmered underground. This musical synthesis of techno and hip-hop, with the addition of reggae and ragga influences, transmuted into jungle.⁶ It is here that breakbeat experiments continued in musical production.

JUNGLE AND DRUM 'N' BASS

There are important influences, connections and continuities between U.S. hip-hop and jungle. Jungle is a musical genre dominated by DJs and producers (rather than live performers), whose formal techniques—the use of samplers and sequencers and the high value placed on drum patterns and volume—borrow heavily from models established by U.S. hip-hop practitioners. Also, jungle, rather than using the repetitive kick drum that characterizes house music, borrows hip-hop's reliance on *breakbeats*, the jerky, interrupted rhythmic pattern that underpins hip-hop. Jungle also shares a number of themes and attitudes with hip-hop, particularly with gangsta rap and the crazed and blunted productions of Cypress Hill and the Grave-diggaz. Jungle introduced dark, scary chords frequently derived from horror movie soundtracks, gangsta references (gunshots, police sirens, and vocal samples like "who's the badbwoy"), and the kind of nihilistic attitudes to violence that are associated with U.S. gangsta rap acts such as N.W.A.

The explosion in popularity for this new musical form (around 1993–94), particularly among British Caribbean youth in London, was also the occasion for the emergence in the press of the kind of moral panics and racialized narratives that gangsta rap provoked in the United States. Familiar positions were that jungle glorified violence and drugs, that it was too "dark" and downbeat, that it was not musical, and that it had spoiled the utopian possibilities of rave. Clearly, these anxieties about the "darkness" of jungle were racist responses to a music that was defiantly "black," whose core market was very obviously black, and whose structure reintroduced elements of black musical forms and practice—the figure of the MC-rapper is a ubiquitous presence at jungle clubs—that had been noticeable by their absence from the previous five years of rave music.⁷

The influence of hip-hop is discernible at every level of jungle: lexicological, technological, and textual. In addition to jungle's elevation of the producer-DJ and MC-rapper, junglists (as they became known) clearly drew on U.S. models for their nomenclature—for instance, DJ Hype, DJ Die, Spinback, Shy FX, and Reprazent. This was often inflected with British and West Indian slang (reflected in names such as Ed Rush, A Guy Called Gerald, and Ganga Kru). Jungle also shared with hip-hop a thematic emphasis on "inner-city pressure" (the title of a Goldie track from 1995) and a fascination with technology, weaponry, and science fiction and horror movies.

On the textual level, in terms of the music itself, the links are even more obvious. Take, for example, the track "Danger" by Special K, released as a 12-inch single in 1996 on the small south London independent Trouble on Vinyl. The cut begins as out-and-out hip-hop, with a thick ("phat") slow

breakbeat and chugging bass line and with subtle echoes of reggae in the sung chorus and a stabbing keyboard riff. There is no lead rap, just some repeated vocal hooks. This basic form loops for over two minutes until, suddenly, the tune stops and a vocal warns, "You've heard the tune now hear the remix." The track suddenly shifts up in speed: a huge subbass line wobbles on to the soundscape riding an uptempo reggae-inspired repeated figure, and the breakbeat quickens to almost double the original speed. The texture of the bass line particularly is rough and distorted, pushing the reproduction technology (and your speakers) to the limit, a practice Tricia Rose (1994: 74) has defined within hip-hop as "working within the red." Hip-hop thus is transformed, by a change of tempo and the (re)introduction of reggae, into jungle.

Trouble on Vinyl tend to specialize in jungle and drum 'n' bass in the "jump up" and "tech step" subgenres (drawing heavily on reggae in the first instance and techno and hardcore in the second). This is quite different from the more jazz- and funk-tinged jungle and drum 'n' bass of acts such as Roni Size and 4 Hero. Yet here too hip-hop provides an important reference point. Roni Size's "Brown Paper Bag" (Talking Loud 12-inch, 1997), for example, employs a live double bass in place of the electronic "Hoover" sub-bass of Special K's "Danger." This is an explicit reference to jazz as well as to the jazzy hip-hop of A Tribe Called Quest and the Roots. But both tunes employ meticulously crafted breakbeats that, when slowed down, reveal themselves as hip-hop beats.⁸

One of the biggest jungle club tunes at the time of writing is Shy FX's "Bambaata" (Ebony 12-inch, 1998), a tribute to the hip-hop DJ Afrika Bambaata employing a pitched-up Latin percussion-influenced beat that once again ups the ante amongst jungle producers and introduces another source from which to draw rhythmic inspiration. Changes of tempo, pitch, and style, as well as importations from hip-hop and reggae and house, coexist in jungle in an unstable and continually evolving mix. So, although jungle has an enormous range of subgenres, from those drawing on reggae and ragga (General Levy and DJ Red) to more techno- and rave-inspired hardcore (Grooverider and Ed Rush) to styles influenced by jazz and funk (Roni Size and Squarepusher), all jungle shares common ground with hip-hop. Even where the overt influence is minimal, the basic materials and production practices (breakbeats and bass lines, samplers, drum machines, microphones, and sequencing program) are the same. Tricia Rose's detailing of the fundamental elements of hip-hop production applies equally well to jungle: "Rhythmic complexity, repetition with subtle variations, the significance of the drum, melodic interest in bass frequencies and breaks in pitch and time"

(1994: 67). But if jungle is the "first truly *British* black music" (Collin 1997: 260; original emphasis), and if it shares so much with U.S. hip-hop, then is it not useful to label it, as Benjamin Noys (1995) and others have done, British hip-hop? The problem is that this move reproduces the parochial categories of U.S. histories and ultimately undermines the view that jungle is truly both an integration and something new. To be fair to Noys, his characterization of jungle as British hip-hop can be read as a strategic rhetorical move: in aligning jungle with hip-hop, Noys is implicitly making the case that what might be considered peripheral or ephemeral should instead be treated as an important object of study. Certainly his conclusions—that jungle has "drawn together the subcultures of hip hop, techno and rave," which leaves the future open and "complicates questions of racism and sexism in its integration of a series of unstable cultural and musical hybrids" (Noys 1995: 331)—mitigate against any easy incorporation of jungle into a simplistic model of hip-hop.

In crucial ways, jungle is not hip-hop at all. Musically, it would be wrong to think of breakbeats as a unique product of hip-hop. While hip-hop places much emphasis on breaks and achieves levels of volume, distortion, and juxtaposition that were not available before some of the recent innovations in studio technology, the actual form of breakbeats has been around in black Atlantic music for a very long time. Hip-hop breakbeats are sampled reconstructions of the same kind of interrupted rhythms found most obviously in James Brown's music, in jazz recordings from previous generations, and in Brazilian and Afro-Caribbean rhythms. Breakbeats, then, cannot be taken as the defining characteristic of hip-hop, as *belonging* to hip-hop in some way, nor as evidence that jungle is U.K. hip-hop.

Most significantly of all, perhaps, jungle has purposefully avoided an ethnocentric account of its own origins. In place of declarations of black particularity (be it "The Blues Matrix" [Houston Baker] or "The Signifyin' Monkey" [Henry Louis Gates]) or the kind of black nationalism espoused by Ice Cube or Poor Righteous Teachers, junglists have tended to emphasize the racial openness of their scene. Again, the distinctive social conditions of the United Kingdom need to be foregrounded here. In Britain, interracial alliances within musical subcultures, such as those that prevailed on the "rare groove" scene, offer perhaps more hope for cross-racial collaboration than the fiercely polarized racial dynamics and segregated patterns of leisure of the United States. Black junglists including Goldie, Roni Size, and Jumping Jack Frost have claimed that jungle transcends race. As MC Conrad says frequently while MCing, "It's not a black thing, it's not a white thing, it's a multi-culture, interracial dance thing" (Wiser 1993). So, both in terms of its musical raw mate-

rials (hip-hop, techno, and ragga) and its political narratives, jungle must be read not as U.S. hip-hop adapted, but as hip-hop transformed, a musical expression of new black (and other) British identities, or perhaps a frame within which these identities are produced.

Recently there has been much cross-pollination between hip-hop and jungle. The U.S. producer and remixer Timbaland, for example, one of the hottest properties in hip-hop at the time of this writing (1998), has developed a style that, although with a slower character of its own, draws heavily on jungle's redistribution of labor between the drum and the bass. This kind of cross-pollination and syncretism should alert us to the material reality of Paul Gilroy's model of the black Atlantic. Jungle is an Afro-diasporic soundtrack that narrates the continual flow among the United States, the Caribbean, and the United Kingdom. Syncretism, rather than the expression of some form of racial essence, is at the center of black musical practice. The restless musical development that is one signal feature of British club culture and musical production, which folds black musical genres, wherever they are from, into new and imaginative fusions, shows no signs of abating. New genres have sprung up incorporating elements of hip-hop aesthetics and culture, but fused with musics that are not defined by "blackness," in particular with indie and alternative rock and pop. One such genre is ambient jungle, or its near kin, intelligent drum 'n' bass, which represents a fusion of jungle breakbeats with the mood and tenor of ambient music. For many this is an adventurous step forward; for others it constitutes a gentrification of an earthy street sound.⁹

The form that has made the most impact in the British musical public sphere, though, is a style that has been labeled "trip-hop." There is space only for a brief survey here, but trip-hop helps to demonstrate further the distinctive ways in which hip-hop was adapted in the United Kingdom. If jungle shows the results of the unexpected collision of post-house club culture with hip-hop, trip-hop demonstrates other odd fusions. Here, the key influence is sound system culture.

TRIP-HOP

Trip-hop is a flimsy journalistic tag punning, badly, on the fusion of hip-hop with "trippy" psychedelic styles. As with most journalistic tags, "trip-hop" was strenuously resisted as a descriptive term by those engaged in producing the music itself. However, the term does serve to illustrate the fact that this subgenre modeled itself as a version of hip-hop. Conventional journalistic surveys of trip-hop center on the music, which emerged from Bristol, a port city in the southwest of England.¹⁰ While any implication that Bristol

was the only place where such innovation was occurring would be false, and with due wariness of the projection of location as an apparently stable and unified guarantor of authenticity that Will Straw (1991) has warned persuasively against, it is useful to revisit the Bristol music scene in the early 1990s to draw out some of the key themes of trip-hop. This will also serve to illustrate how studies of popular music must remain aware of the processes— aesthetic and social—that bring particular musical forms and techniques together in surprising ways and unlikely places.

In common with cities such as Liverpool with long-standing black communities such as London and Birmingham, where waves of migration created new British Caribbean communities, Bristol has a deeply rooted sound system culture. An important center of the eighteenth-century slave trade, Bristol has a black population that has been defining what it means to be black British for several centuries, as well as a large mixed-race population, and, alongside greater racial tensions, a well-integrated youth culture based around St. Paul's and schools where black and white children shared classes and befriended each other. Reggae culture and rastafarianism provided anti-imperialist narratives and a vocabulary with which to resist institutional racism. The cafés and youth clubs of St. Paul's and West Knowle were a gathering point for Bristol's black and progressive communities, and they provided cheap entertainment for unemployed youth. Bristol never had a highly developed club scene comparable to London's, so the musical culture was dominated by the sound systems and the blues parties, where reggae and soul provided the soundtrack throughout the 1980s.

Under the influence of the first wave of U.S. hip-hop in the early 1980s, many of Bristol's youth, black and white alike, became converts to hip-hop culture, adopting its style and outlook as well as names such as the Fresh Four and the Wild Bunch. Hip-hop was immediately fused with elements of black music that already had roots in the United Kingdom: dub, dancehall, and soul. The peculiar socioracial characteristics of Bristol, however, also meant that "white" forms, particularly punk, had a strong influence too (early 1980s Bristol bands such as Pop Group and Rip Rig and Panic found fruitful correspondences between punk, funk, and jazz). In the early 1990s, a succession of Bristol bands—some brand new, others merely reconfigurations of crews who had been around for years—began to release material that clearly relied heavily on the influence of hip-hop production techniques, while seemingly uninhibited by the potential for comparison with U.S. acts.

Among the bands to emerge from the Bristol scene—and virtually all interviews with supposed representatives of this scene have denied its existence—are Massive Attack, Tricky, Portishead, Smith and Mighty, Cool



Tricky

Breeze, Earthling, and Roni Size/Reprazent. The music, though disparate, in general is laid back, downbeat, even "miserabilist." In the mid-1990s it provided a very different soundtrack to the brash optimism of Britpop guitar bands. But even as its sounds encoded a cool detachment, trip-hop unmistakably displayed a new confidence in its black Britishness. Tricky's debut album *Maxinquaye* (Island, 1994) is perhaps the most remarkable (and therefore, admittedly, atypical) example of this. Tricky was inspired by hip-hop, but he whispers and squeaks where U.S. rappers aim at a loud-and-clear, articulate flow. Against the assertion of an overcoherent biopolitics of individualized sexuality (analyzed so powerfully in Gilroy 1994) in recent U.S. R&B, Tricky offers a polysexual angst, dressing as a woman on the sleeve of his record, confessing that he comes too quickly. It is his female singing partner, Martina Topley Bird, who sings a version of Public Enemy's "Black Steel in the Hour of Chaos," rather than Tricky. Male rebellion is deflected, made uncertain, and yet is more defiant through this very deflection. The beats are equally confident in their portrayal of confusion and fucked-upness: they slide in tantalizingly, disappear unexpectedly. Grooves are found, only to be abandoned.

But the sexual dimensions of the album should not distract the listener from the racial dynamics of the music. There is an interest in memory and continuity (for example, in the track "Aftermath") that many commentators have noted in Afrodiasporic music. Tricky shows his debt to hip-hop aesthet-

ics by recontextualizing samples and slices of both the most respected black music (Public Enemy) and the tackiest pop (quoting David Cassidy's "How Can I Be Sure?"). Tricky is exceptional in that he has become a recognized "artist" whose albums are now awaited as statements of a continuing music development (and whether this ultimately detracts from the power of his music is a moot point).

Trip-hop as a whole, however, can be divided into two basic types. The first might just as well be called instrumental hip-hop: dense constructions of breakbeats, samples, drum patterns, and incidental squiggling that draw heavily on the production styles of Premier, Muggs, and Pete Rock. In its earliest "dark" manifestation, this first type favored a cinematic mode that imported the sweeping strings and horror chords of movie soundtracks along with snatches of dialogue from "gangsta" movies such as *Scarface*, *Goodfellas*, and *The Warriors*. The mood was "blunted," heavy with the smoky ambience of dub as well as the more horrific hip-hop of Cypress Hill, Onyx, Geto Boys, and Lords of the Underground. Much attention was given by the producers to the cutting and splicing of found sounds, the phatness of the beats (which usually quavered at fewer than 100 beats per minute, much slower than most hip-hop). It is this form of instrumental hip-hop that inspired a whole generation of U.K. producers and labels, such as Mo' Wax, Wall of Sound, Hard Hands, Sabres of Paradise, and Pressure Drop.

The second strain of trip-hop can be understood as a synthesis of hip-hop sensibilities with the format of conventional (including "alternative") rock. *Dummy*, Portishead's debut album (Go! Beat, 1994), is perhaps still the prime exemplar of this form. Over the heavy drumbeats meticulously assembled by the producer, Geoff Barrow, and the subtle scratching of the DJ, Andy Smith—both hip-hop fanatics and archivists—is laid the querulous, chain-smoking, exquisitely fragile vocals of Beth Gibbons. Portishead thus bridges the gulf between the cultural milieus of (implicitly black, U.S.) hip-hop and (implicitly white, English) "student" rock. In the wake of the huge commercial and critical success of *Dummy*, a rash of trip-hop "bands" were signed, each to some degree indebted to the Portishead format: Moloko, Lamb, Sneaker Pimps, Morcheeba, and Olive. As with other white appropriations of musics of black origin, this can be seen as exploitation rather than tribute. It is important to remember that Barrow worked as an engineer with the multiracial Massive Attack and that the music emerges from a scene where white and black musics and musicians were in a constant process of exchange and cross-fertilization. This is not to deny the continued existence of power dynamics in the British music industry. But trip-hop represents something a little more complicated than the mere transposition of hip-hop techniques

to student and young middle-class audiences. And, like jungle, it represents an important and distinctive strand of British music making that cannot be understood simply as the descendant of hip-hop.

REPERCUSSIONS

However much it has been taken up by whites, hip-hop can be seen as primarily a form of black cultural expression. But as the work of Paul Gilroy and others has shown, to be black and British is very different from the model of black experience often assumed by African American commentators. Nearly all discussions of U.S. hip-hop begin by locating its origins in the South Bronx. An overemphasis on such origins can lead to difficulties in accounting for other variants of hip-hop culture, not only on the U.S. West Coast, but in Houston, in Jamaica, in Britain, and elsewhere. The very different economic, political, and cultural dynamics that obtain in Britain produce different sounds, encoding different worldviews. Urban breakbeat culture does not constitute the adoption of an imported language. It builds on the technologies and attitudes of hip-hop but transforms them according to particular national diasporic conditions. As should be obvious now, discussing the racial dynamics of these diasporic conditions of British musical production is fraught with difficulty. Jungle and drum 'n' bass are both multicultural, in terms of the ethnicity of producers and consumers, and black, in the sense that black styles and traditions clearly play a more important role within jungle than they did in rave.

Trip-hop, too, represents the outcome of interactions between the syncretic youth cultures that Back (1996) so effectively draws attention to. One of the most interesting aspects of urban breakbeat culture is the way that it challenges assumptions about origins and confuses notions of cultural boundaries between one style and another, between one group of people and the next. Ironically, while some U.S. commentators, unaware of or uninterested in these developments, have overplayed the direct influence of rap music in Britain, British commentators have downplayed the importance of hip-hop and other distinctive forms of Afrodiasporic musical expression in the development of the new genres discussed here. The U.K. music press tends instead to overemphasize the influence of rave culture on genres such as jungle (and on more recent emergent genres such as speed garage) to the point where the influence of black cultural practices on dance-music culture is hardly considered at all (except as a mere precursor, in the form of black gay clubs in U.S. cities). To celebrate the global spread of hip-hop is an understandable assertion of pride in the continued vitality of African American cultural expression. And to point out the vitality of post-1980s dance-

music culture is to resist a mainstream conception of youth culture as trivial, insignificant, and uncreative. Both of these positions represent partial viewpoints and particular interests and are inadequate to understanding the complex weave of influences and origins that make up these new cultural forms.

None of the above should be read as a claim that the transformations and recombinations we have been examining are superior to those of U.S. hip-hop itself, or that Britain has a monopoly on distinctive forms of intertextuality. Our aim has been to provide a case study of the particular way in which flows of culture have merged in new, unexpected, and often exciting ways in the 1990s. Within cultural studies, this kind of approach is hardly innovative: an emphasis on the complexity of flows as a resistance to ethnic and national particularism has become something of an orthodoxy. However, studies of such flows are often asociological and ahistorical, finding evidence of them in analysis of the ambivalence of cultural texts. We have tried instead to show how a particular nexus of cultural institutions—club culture and sound-system culture—serve to create situations where new ways of making meaning through music and dance are tried out and experimented with, and from which new sounds are eventually produced. We would want to distance ourselves too from a position lurking beneath some recent cultural studies that might implicitly see cultural hybridity as an easy answer to or adequate compensation for long histories of racial and class division.¹¹ It is these conflicts that ultimately lie behind the particular ways in which a new generation of musicians have sought to create pleasure and meaning. This does not mean celebrating all forms of music equally. But we have tried to suggest that the creativity of black British musicians, comparatively marginalized in the global public sphere (see Gilroy 1993b: 61), merits the kind of respect and consideration previously granted only to black U.S. music.

NOTES

1. The 1991 census reported that 75 percent of the working-age ethnic-minority population in the United Kingdom was born abroad, but that the figure for the under-sixteen group was only 14 percent (Central Office of Information 1997).

2. This is not even to mention the unique contributions made by Hispanic Caribbeans to hip-hop culture, especially in breakdancing and graffiti.

3. An important attempt to craft a version of U.K. rap emerged from the "acid jazz" scene when some of the more self-consciously radical, intellectual British rappers hooked up with jazz musicians to create a jazz-rap fusion. Of this wave, which included MC Mello and Urban Species, U.S.3 was the most successful, hitting the charts in both the United Kingdom and the USA with "Cantaloop" (Blue

Note 12-inch, 1993). With the demise of jazz-rap, the hopes of developing a truly British hip-hop virtually withered away.

4. All quotations in this section, where not attributed in the main text, are taken from interviews conducted by David Hesmondhalgh as part of his fieldwork at Nation Records in 1994 and 1995. See also Hesmondhalgh (2000).

5. "Rave" was a term used for big, often unlicensed dance events, usually held out of town. In the early 1980s, parties in abandoned warehouses had been the subject of extensive and glamorous coverage in the U.K. "style press" (i.e., magazines such as *Face* and *i-D*). Raves extended this movement away from the restrictions of licensed city-center premises, out into the unregulated outer-city and rural areas of Britain.

6. There was a brief controversy over the notion that "jungle"—also thought to originate from "junglist," a reference to the inhabitants of Kingston, Jamaica—was thought to have primitivist racial connotations (cf. Thompson 1998: 99), and for a while the term "drum 'n' bass" was used as an alternative by some. In general, though, the two terms tend to be used interchangeably.

7. Many of the major figures within jungle are black British: the MCs Det, Navigator, GQ, and 5-0; and the DJs LTJ Bukem, Brockie, Fabio, Roni Size, Goldie, Grooverider, Bryan Gee, and Krust; as well as many of the label owners and staff at prominent labels such as Reinforced, V Recordings, Trouble on Vinyl and Good Looking/Looking Good.

8. It is common practice for U.K. hip-hop and breakbeat DJs to play jungle 12-inch singles at 33 rpm, (re)presenting them as instrumental hip-hop.

9. See, e.g., the debates in the pages of the avant-garde music magazine *The Wire*, following Simon Reynolds's critique in the June 1995 issue of the search for "depth" and "maturity" amongst some drum 'n' bass musicians.

10. The best journalistic survey is a book-length treatment by Johnston (1997); it provides good background on Bristol and intelligent analysis of key figures. See also Reynolds 1998: 313–34.

11. Hybridity has been a key concept in recent cultural theory, and no doubt many readers will be tempted to label the cultural formations we have described as hybrids. We want to resist using the term here, because its overuse has come to flatten out the differences between very diverse forms of recombination and intertextuality.

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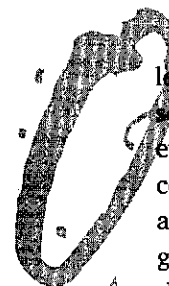
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Chapter 4

Rap in Germany

The Birth of a Genre

MARK PENNAY



One point that should be made abundantly clear by this collection of essays is that genres of popular music can transcend linguistic and cultural barriers. This is not to say, however, that such barriers are fully transparent; indeed, it is contended here that musical transmission is better modeled as a selective osmosis. Through a consideration of the emergence and development of German-language rap, I attempt in this essay to illustrate the importance of both language and cultural differences for the fortunes of a musical genre outside of the monolithic English-speaking market for recorded music.

Beginning with a brief résumé of the significance of heterogeneity within a musical style, I sketch the history of rap and hip-hop culture in Germany since 1983, seeking an explanation for the watershed in the popularity of the former that occurred a full decade later in the specific cultural context of post-reunification Germany. Subsequent developments are then considered in the light of the proposed explanatory factors.

Although there is now a healthy mainstream strand to German-language rap, with most major labels having two or three German rap groups under contract by the late 1990s (K.M.S. 1997), a significant proportion of the music remains closely tied to a hip-hop subculture that is less accessible to an outsider. In this study I have attempted to compensate for a necessary bias toward the readily accessible by consulting hip-hop fanzines such as *MZEE* (in 1993) and Internet sites dedicated to the subculture (in 1997), and through the use of citations from interviews with practitioners from within the "underground" hip-hop scene.