

***Representing the Inner City in London's
Urban Music Videos (1994-2021)***

Austin George Cooper

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Abstract

In this thesis I analyse a sample of music videos associated with the music genres of jungle, UK garage, grime, UK rap, and UK drill, referred to as urban music genres. Music videos from these genres have rarely been analysed together, if at all, in academic scholarship. This thesis addresses this shortcoming, with a particular focus on how these videos contribute to the production and development of London's inner-city between 1994 and 2021. The analyses are multidisciplinary, drawing on methods from urban sociology, film and television, cultural studies, critical race studies, and urban geography. I also draw on interviews I conducted with music video producers, directors, and videographers. The way in which urban music videos engage multiple scales and modes of representation tell histories of London's inner city, and how this space has been experienced and imagined by artists living in inner-city areas, particularly in relation to the eradication of social housing and to changing notions of national identity. This study informs theoretical understandings of how urban space is produced, accessed, and controlled, and how these dynamics are represented in urban music and music video over time, within the confines of a single city.

List of Contents

Abstract	p.2
List of Contents	p.3
List of Tables	p.6
List of Figures	p.7
Acknowledgements	p.11
Declaration	p.12
Chapter 1: Routes of Arrival and Departure: Introducing Foundations	p.13
Research Questions	p.16
Guiding Concepts	p.26
Methodology	p.28
Complete Table of Videos	p.30
Thesis Structure	p.36
Conclusion	p.38
Chapter 2: Finding Space for Urban Music Videos: A Tour of the Literature	p.40
Section 1. The Sociology of Space and the Right to the City	p.41
Section 2. Race Formation and Conviviality	p.46
Section 3. Spatial Scales	p.53
Section 4. The Inner City	p.56
Section 5. Representing Urban Space	p.61
Section 6. Modes of Representation	p.66
Section 7. Genre	p.74

Section 8. Music Video	p.76
Conclusion	p.81
Chapter 3: Methodological Routes through London's Inner City	p.83
Section 1. Ontology	p.85
Section 2. Epistemology	p.86
Section 3. Video Sample	p.90
Section 4. Interviews: Sample, Analysis, and Ethics	p.92
Section 5. Video Analysis Methods	p.94
Section 6. Using Concepts	p.96
Section 7. Concepts and Methods in Action: Postcards from London	p.101
Conclusion	p.107
Chapter 4: Sliding Spatial Scales: Jungle and UK Garage in a Global City	p.109
Chapter 4 Table of Videos	p.114
Section 1: Jungle	p.115
<i>Incredible</i>	p.116
<i>Original Nuttah</i>	p.125
<i>Inner City Life</i>	p.131
Section 2: UK Garage	p.144
<i>Neighbourhood</i>	p.145
<i>Bound 4 Da Reload (Casualty)</i>	p.153
<i>Oh No (Sentimental Things)</i>	p.158
<i>21 Seconds</i>	p.167
Conclusion	p.175

Chapter 5: New Spatial Scales: Grime, UK Rap, UK Drill, and the Hyperlocal	p.178
Chapter 5 Table of Videos	p.181
Section 1: Grime	p.182
<i>When I'm Ere</i>	p.183
<i>Jus A Rascal</i>	p.194
<i>Aim High Volume 2</i>	p.203
Section 2: UK Rap	p.211
<i>Look Out</i>	p.216
Section 3: UK drill	p.227
<i>Live Corn</i>	p.232
<i>Ambush</i>	p.239
Conclusion	p.247
Chapter 6: Contesting Spatial Access and Use through Urban Music Videos	p.250
Chapter 6 Table of Videos	p.259
Section 1: Connecting Contextual Locations	p.260
Section 2: Expressions of Agency	p.273
Conclusion	p.295
Chapter 7: Concluding the Tour: Representing Routes through London's Inner City	p.298
Section 1: Key Findings	p.299
Section 2: Implications and Limitations	p.310
Section 3: Final Reflections	p.313
References	p.316

List of Tables

Complete Table of Videos	p.30
Chapter 4 Table of Videos	p.114
Chapter 5 Table of Videos	p.181
Chapter 6 Table of Videos	p.259

List of Figures

Figure 1: Still from <i>Pass The Dutchie</i>	p.103
Figure 2: Still from <i>Incredible</i> , showing Levy (front-centre).	p.117
Figure 3: Still from <i>Incredible</i>	p.118
Figure 4: Still from <i>Incredible</i>	p.119
Figure 5: Still from <i>Incredible</i>	p.120
Figure 6: Still from <i>Incredible</i>	p.121
Figure 7: Still from <i>Incredible</i>	p.122
Figure 8: Still from <i>Original Nuttah</i> . UK Apache (left) and Shy FX (right).	p.126
Figure 9: Still from <i>Original Nuttah</i>	p.126
Figure 10: Still from <i>Original Nuttah</i>	p.129
Figure 11: Still from <i>Original Nuttah</i>	p.129
Figure 12: 1983 photograph of the tower blocks of Wyndam Estate, from the University of Edinburgh's Tower Block UK project archive.	p.133
Figure 13: Still from <i>Inner City Life</i>	p.134
Figure 14: Still from <i>Inner City Life</i> , showing Diane Charlemagne.	p.135
Figure 15: Stills from <i>Inner City Life</i>	p.136
Figure 16: Still from <i>Inner City Life</i> , showing pioneering jungle DJ and producer Randall McNeil (aka DJ Randall), with the Paradise sign in the background.	p.140
Figure 17: Still from <i>Neighbourhood</i>	p.146
Figure 18: Still from <i>Neighbourhood</i>	p.147
Figure 19: Still from <i>Neighbourhood</i>	p.147

Figure 20: Still from <i>Get Up And Move</i>	p.151
Figure 21: Still from <i>Neighbourhood</i>	p.152
Figure 22: Still from <i>Bound 4 Da Reload (Casualty)</i>	p.154
Figure 23: Still from <i>Bound 4 Da Reload (Casualty)</i> , Neutrino (front-right) and Oxide (back-left).	p.157
Figure 24: Stills from <i>Oh No</i>	p.159
Figure 25: Stills from <i>Oh No</i>	p.159
Figure 26: Stills from <i>Oh No</i>	p.160
Figure 27: Still from <i>Oh No</i>	p.163
Figure 28: Stills from <i>Oh No</i>	p.164
Figure 29: Stills from <i>Oh No</i>	p.166
Figure 30: Still from <i>Haters</i>	p.168
Figure 31: Still from <i>21 Seconds</i>	p.169
Figure 32: Still from <i>21 Seconds</i>	p.171
Figure 33: Stills from <i>21 Seconds</i>	p.172
Figure 34: Still from <i>When I'm Ere</i>	p.184
Figure 35: Still from <i>When I'm Ere</i>	p.185
Figure 36: Still from <i>When I'm Ere</i>	p.185
Figure 37: Still from <i>When I'm Ere</i>	p.187
Figure 38: Still from <i>When I'm Ere</i>	p.189
Figure 39: Still from <i>When I'm Ere</i>	p.193
Figure 40: Still from <i>Jus' a Rascal</i>	p.195
Figure 41: Still from <i>Jus A Rascal</i>	p.196
Figure 42: Still from <i>Jus A Rascal</i>	p.197

Figure 43: Still from <i>Jus A Rascal</i>	p.198
Figure 44: Still from <i>Jammer's Birthday Bash</i>	p.202
Figure 45: Still from <i>Aim High</i>	p.205
Figure 46: Still from <i>Aim High</i>	p.206
Figure 47: Still from <i>Risky Roadz 2</i>	p.207
Figure 48: Still from <i>Aim High</i>	p.208
Figure 49: Still from <i>CR (Grills Shutdown)</i>	p.212
Figure 50: Screenshot of a YouTube comment on the CR music video.	p.213
Figure 51: Still from <i>TALKING DA HARDEST</i>	p.214
Figure 52: Screenshot from XL Records upload of <i>TALKIN DA HARDEST</i> , showing the two of the video's most 'liked' comments.	p.215
Figure 53: Still from <i>Look Out</i>	p.218
Figure 54: Still from <i>Look Out</i>	p.219
Figure 55: Still from <i>Look Out</i>	p.220
Figure 56: Still from <i>Look Out</i>	p.223
Figure 57: Still from <i>Look Out</i> , showing Skepta (left) and Mark Duggan (right).	p.226
Figure 58: Still from <i>Kennington Where It Started</i>	p.228
Figure 59: Still from <i>Kennington Where It Started</i>	p.229
Figure 60: Still from <i>Next Up? [S2.14]</i>	p.230
Figure 61: Still from <i>Next Up? [S1.E13]</i>	p.230
Figure 62: Still from <i>Live Corn</i>	p.233
Figure 63: Still from <i>Live Corn</i> showing LD (left).	p.234
Figure 64: Still from <i>Live Corn</i>	p.235
Figure 65: Still from <i>Live Corn</i>	p.235

Figure 66: Still from <i>Live Corn</i>	p.236
Figure 67: Still from <i>Live Corn</i>	p.237
Figure 68: Still from <i>Ambush</i>	p.241
Figure 69: Still from <i>Ambush</i>	p.245
Figure 70: Still from <i>Ambush</i>	p.246
Figure 71: Composite image of LD in <i>LD: The Godfather of UK Drill Returns</i>	p.261
Figure 72: Composite image of Digga in <i>Defending Digga D</i>	p.263
Figure 73: Still from <i>A London Thing</i>	p.266
Figure 74: Photo of set installation for <i>little BIG Man</i> , from David Hamilton's website. ..	p.267
Figure 75: Photo of set installation for <i>little BIG Man</i> , from David Hamilton's website. ..	p.267
Figure 76: 3D render of <i>little BIG Man</i> set from David Hamilton website, designed by David Hamilton.	p.268
Figure 77: Screenshot of a YouTube comment from <i>Unorthodox Daughter</i>	p.270
Figure 78: Still from <i>A London Thing</i>	p.276
Figure 79: Still from <i>First Day Out</i>	p.279
Figure 80: Still of Anna May Wong as Shosho in <i>Piccadilly</i> , from Cornell University Cinema website.	p.280
Figure 81: Still from <i>No Diet</i>	p.282
Figure 82: Still from <i>No Diet</i>	p.285
Figure 83: Still of Anna May Wong as Shosho in <i>Piccadilly</i> , from Spurlock Museum of World Cultures website.	p.286
Figure 84: Still from <i>Unorthodox Daughter</i>	p.287
Figure 85: Still from <i>Unorthodox Daughter</i>	p.288

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Declaration

I declare that this thesis is a presentation of original work and I am the sole author. This work has not previously been presented for a degree or other qualification at this University or elsewhere. All sources are acknowledged as references.

Chapter 1

Routes of Arrival and Departure: Introducing Foundations

This project is about London, a city that in many ways needs no introduction. Its historic role as the political, administrative, and symbolic centre of the British Empire means that its name is known across the globe. In this sense, it is a place with many reputations, in financial, geopolitical, and cultural terms, for instance. London is an ancient Roman city, a Shakespearean city, an imperial metropolis, an industrial city, a Dickensian city, a Blitzed city, a post-colonial and post-industrial city, and a global city, to name a few of these reputations. There is a vast wealth of representations in literature, painting, theatre, photography, film, television, music, and music video, produced both in and about the city, that attracts global attention. But precisely because there is a sense that these reputations precede it – reputations that can be reductive and exclusionary – studies of how such representations are part of the city are all the more important. London is a constantly and rapidly changing place, and it is many different things to many different people, both those who live within its boundaries and those for whom it lives within their imaginations. It is also the city in which I was born, and where I have lived for most of my life, specifically in New Cross in the borough of Lewisham, south-east London. I have lived within it, and it has lived within me, in many different ways and at many different moments. One of the ways it has lived within me is through the representations I have experienced. I took on this project, in part, because of this personal relationship: of having ‘come from’ London, and of wanting to explore what it can mean to have these ‘roots’ in a place.

To be more precise, this project is about specific areas of London designated as ‘inner-city’ spaces, and how these spaces relate to the rest of the city. As will be explored in more detail below, the Anglophone notion of the inner city, particularly in the twentieth- and early twenty-first century, has been used to designate areas with high proportions of minoritised ethnic and racialised populations, living in working-class accommodation, such as overcrowded Victoria ‘slums’ in pre-war London (Brunsdon, 2019/2007; Millington, 2016a). In the post-war era, this has predominantly referred to London’s state-funded council housing estates, which have become stereotypically linked to the problems of the inner city. From the 1950s to the early 1980s, New Cross was an archetypal inner-city area, with much of the area’s working-class population struggling in the aftermath of dock closures and de-industrialisation, and where many post-war Caribbean migrants made their homes (Back, 2017). Many music genres, such as calypso, reggae, dub, and ska, were brought to London by such migrants, who often settled in inner-city areas such as New Cross, Brixton, and Notting Hill. Inner-city spaces have been melting-pots of creative sharing, and so these genres blended with many others from other places and transformed into new genres, such as those that this project focusses on: jungle, UK garage, grime, UK rap, and UK drill. Music events and sharing practices also blossomed around these genres, from Blues Parties to Notting Hill Carnival, to warehouse raves, to pirate radio stations, and eventually to YouTube accounts. Music videos became ever more present elements of these music scenes as audio-visual recording equipment and the Internet became more and more accessible. Since the mid-1980s, however, compounding forces of regeneration, gentrification, and displacement have dramatically fragmented working-class communities, from areas such as New Cross, that could once be straightforwardly designated as inner city (Rhodes and Brown, 2018).

My personal relationship to these spaces is complicated by how the designation ‘inner city’ has been used, and who and what it has referred to. My upbringing in a privately-owned terraced house, and in a middle-class, white-British family, produces socio-economic, racialised, cultural, and spatialised distances from these spaces, despite a close geographical proximity. I have never inhabited stereotypical and stigmatised inner-city spaces (‘come from’ them, had roots in them), but I have travelled to and through some of them (‘come to’ them via different routes of travel and communication). These inner-city spaces have also travelled

to me in different forms and via different routes: conversations, news sources, film and television, music, and music videos, for instance. These routes played a significant role in bringing me to and shaping this project. I have been audience to many sonic and audio-visual productions coming out of London's inner-city spaces for many years now, mainly for my own enjoyment but sometimes also for academic purposes. In 2018 I became aware of, and wrote an essay about, a practice emerging in London by which the Metropolitan Police were requesting the removal of UK drill music videos from YouTube on the grounds that they were inciting violence. The news articles I read introduced me to this burgeoning music genre that began to emerge in London's inner-city council estates in the early 2010s. The essay I wrote allowed me to explore relationships between music, audio-visual production, space, and policing in contemporary London. I wanted to develop these themes further, finding an opportunity to do so in a PhD studentship as part of the *Archiving the Inner City* project,¹ the results of which you are reading now.

The central focus of this project is the representation of London's inner city in what I call 'urban music videos', an expression I will outline in more detail below. This refers to music videos produced for tracks from music genres that have been closely associated with the notion of the 'inner city' since the 1990s: jungle, UK garage, grime, UK rap, and UK drill. I will refer to these genres as 'urban music genres'. These genres were all pioneered by black British artists, predominantly young men, though each scene has involved convivial interaction (Gilroy, 2004) across lines of racialised and gendered difference. This project focusses on urban music videos produced by musicians from or operating in London during this period, as it was in London that each of these genres emerged into mainstream attention. More specifically, the thesis is about the relationship between the spaces of inner-city London, the music genres that have been associated with these spaces, the music videos that have emerged from and helped shape these genres, and the representations of the city in these videos. Furthermore, the project explores how all of these elements have changed over time, particularly in the period between 1994, when jungle music first gained widespread public attention and music videos started to appear, and 2021, which was the cut-off point I

¹ <https://archiving-inner-city.org/>

established to keep the research manageable. It was with these routes of exploration in mind that the project's research questions were formed.

Research Questions

The primary research question I pose in this thesis is:

How has London's inner city been represented in urban music videos, in the period from 1994 to 2021?

My aim throughout this project has been to draw together many different audio-visual texts and lines of argument in order to explore this primary question. Groups of secondary questions emerged through this process:

How do these representations relate to the spaces of London's inner city, and to the changes that have occurred in these spaces over time? How are routes through the city represented? How do these representations partake in the production of London's inner-city spaces?

How have different technologies – both audio-visual recording devices, and modes of distribution such as the internet and social media platforms – interacted with urban music videos, and how has this changed over time? What routes of distribution and reception have these videos taken?

What modes and spatial scales of representation are used in urban music videos?
How do these modes and scales relate to other audio-visual traditions? How do these videos play with different modes and scales?

How is access to and uses of urban space represented and policed? Who has access to which spaces under what conditions? How can urban music videos partake in struggles for the right to the city?

The ways in which each chapter explores these questions will be outlined below, particularly the notions of the production of space, spatial scales of representation, and the right to the city. First, I will provide a broader introduction to the ideas of inner-city London and urban music genres and music videos, followed by a discussion of the guiding concepts and methodologies that the thesis engages with.

Inner-City London

What are now designated London's inner-city spaces began to form during the nineteenth century, as unprecedented numbers of workers – both internal and external migrants – began to settle in the city and become self-consciously bound together by the spaces in which they lived and worked (Millington, 2011). Following the Second World War a similarly unprecedented influx of workers travelled to London, this time predominantly British citizens from the Caribbean and Indian subcontinent (Rhodes and Brown, 2018). The River Thames was an important entry point to inner-city London in the twentieth century, with many migrants arriving by boats, such as the HMT Empire Windrush at Tilbury Docks in 1948, before travelling into the city.

It was during this period – the 1950s to the 1980s – that political and media discourses began to connect the notion of inner-city London to particular racialised, predominantly black and Asian, communities (Millington, 2011, 2012; Rhodes and Brown, 2018; Archer and Yamashita, 2003; Reay, 2004; Gilroy, 1999; Shabazz, 2015). Due to what can only be described as racist housing policies and practices, new arrivals often became concentrated in segregated areas of poor-quality housing, such as Brixton and Notting Hill. These communities were then blamed for the poverty and crime that emerged in these areas and were heavily policed accordingly. This produced animosity between working-class, particularly racial- and ethnic-minority inhabitants and the Metropolitan Police. This animosity played a crucial role in conflicts between inner-city communities and police that erupted during the 1980s in London and across the UK, such as the Brixton Uprisings of 1981 and the Broadwater Farm riots of 1985.

One of the radical changes that took place in London, and across the UK, from the 1980s onwards was in the field of housing, particularly state-funded social housing. In the inter- and post-war period, successive British governments had funded the building of working-class housing, much of which belonged to large council housing estates characterised by modernist architecture and design, and especially tall tower blocks, to replace Victorian ‘slums’ (Boughton, 2018). These structures became icons of working-class urban space and key symbols for inner-city life featured in many film, television, and music video representations. The 1980s was a pivotal decade for London, when the city was beginning to undergo the “radical economic, social and political restructuring” that led to it becoming a ‘global city’ (Millington, 2012, p.7; also see Sassen, 2004). The production of this new form of city has gradually eroded London’s council housing over the past few decades, a theme that will be explored in more detail in the following chapters. Despite this erosion, many inner-city communities and spaces remain connected to each other via many different routes of travel, communication, and representation, including the production of music and music videos.

Focusing on London allows for an understanding of how the concept of the inner city has developed over time within the confines of a single city. London changed dramatically

throughout the twentieth century, during which time the inner city was produced as a spatial designation. The city has continued to change in the twenty-first century, particularly in the way many of the areas formerly designated as ‘inner city’ have been rebranded as ‘up-and-coming’, and some of the most ‘desirable’ locations for the middle classes to live in. These processes of regeneration and removal are a key part of the fragmentation and displacement of communities from their homes and local areas (Rhodes and Brown, 2018; Mavrommatis, 2010; Jones H., 2013; Millington, 2012; Watt, 2021). However, London’s working-class inner-city communities have continued to make innovative cultural developments. This thesis suggests that the many individuals and communities who partake in the production of urban music and music videos are inner-city storytellers who can help build a rich picture of the profound changes to London’s social and spatial environments that have taken place since the early 1990s.

Urban Music Genres and Videos

I have proposed the category of the ‘urban music video’ to organize and focus my analyses of how urban change is documented and critically apprehended. As noted above, this idea refers to music videos produced for tracks from music genres that have been closely associated with the notion of London’s inner city: jungle, UK garage, grime, UK rap, and UK drill. It is important to note from the outset that the use of the term ‘urban’ as a way to describe types of music, especially music associated with black artists, has been contested (see Ilan, 2012). For example, in his 2004 track *Wot Do U Call It?*, grime MC Wiley (Richard Kylea Cowie Jr.) mocks the description of his music as ‘urban’ (Wiley in gowaru, 2014). On a similar note, the title of photographer Simon Wheatley’s book documenting the grime scene, *Don’t Call Me Urban: The Time of Grime* (Wheatley, 2010), “was inspired by the rejection many black youths continue to feel at the ‘urban’ label imposed on them by commerce and the media.” The book thus explores “the significant discrepancy between perceptions of black culture as ‘cool’ and the often harsh reality of being born black on a London council estate” (The Photographers Gallery, 2025).

While these are valid concerns that must be taken into consideration, I have opted to use the term because it offers a useful way of producing a systematic analysis of videos based around a central referent: the inner city. Following Joy White (2018), I suggest the term is a useful and flexible tool for analyses that are open to discussion, as a source of connection, rather than an essential and fixed category to enclose and separate representations. I use 'urban music' instead of 'inner-city music' for several reasons. First, in order to avoid confusing repetitions in the writing process. Secondly, to situate the inner city in a wider sense of urban space. Thirdly, the term 'urban' has useful precedents in lots of the academic literature that this project has drawn on (see for example White, 2016, 2018; Massood, 1998; Lefebvre, 1968, 1991/1987; Saumarez Smith, 2016; Gilroy, 2013/1987), as will be outlined in more detail in Chapter 2. Each of these genres can be situated within the wider genre of electronic dance music, as each involve the use of electronic instruments and an integral influence of the practices of DJing and MCing. All but jungle could also be situated within the wider genre of rap music, though some jungle tracks use rap conventions and UK garage only ventured towards this situation in its latter stages of development. All were heavily involved in the pirate radio scenes, except drill which emerged when the Internet had become the primary distribution platform for urban music. I will now provide a brief outline of each urban music genre, which will be explored in more detail as the thesis proceeds.

The first of these genres to emerge was jungle in the early 1990s. This fast-tempo music, often around 170bpm (beats-per-minute), incorporates syncopated rhythms, sampled breakbeats, and an emphasis on drum, bass, and vocals. Intertwined with the development of drum and bass, a genre which it is often categorised alongside (Toppin, 2021), jungle grew out of the vibrant sound system and warehouse party scenes in Hackney and Tottenham (Bennett, 2011). As pirate radio stations began to replace the declining sound system scene, jungle music quickly spread across London (Melville, 2019; Hyder, 2014; James, 2020). The relationship between the producer of the track, the DJ (Disc Jockey) on the deck, and the MC (Master of Ceremonies) on the microphone, speaking to an audience, is resonant of the sound system culture from which jungle emerged. Jungle has often been interpreted as the first in a line of musical genres to fold in the history of London's colonial and migratory past, but to exceed

this past in a new form that was intimately tied to contemporary life in London (Melville, 2019; Hyder, 2014). Jungle emerged before affordable video-making technology and software became available, so there aren't many music videos from the early period of the genre's emergence. Those that were made during this early period were funded by the record label, with the video budget corresponding to the size of the label. During the height of its popularity in 1994, when the three videos I look at in Chapter 4 were released, these videos were shown and watched in the UK on satellite/cable TV channels such as MTV and MTV Base. While jungle musicians M-Beat and General Levy played on Top of the Pops, this was generally considered too mainstream by many members of the jungle scene of the time.

UK garage (hereafter referred to as 'UKG') emerged in London in the mid- to late-1990s, and was closely linked to jungle, both temporally and spatially. Like jungle, UKG was widely broadcast on pirate radios during its emergence (O'Hagan, 2004; Wiltsher, 2016). Strongly influenced by garage records coming out of the New York club scene, UKG also incorporated the sounds and the DJ/MC dynamic of jungle (McCubbin, 2016; O'Hagan, 2004), though at a slower pace, generally between 120-140bpm (Reynolds, 2013). While jungle music was closely tied to warehouse raves, UKG engendered a different aesthetic that was closely linked with the development of London's more glamorous super-club scene, involving clubs such as Gass in Leicester Square (McCubbin, 2016). This emphasis on glamour and excess, often a visual feature of the genre's music videos, disillusioned many communities who couldn't afford this lifestyle. In response, a darker sound began to emerge in UKG, particularly in the 2-step subgenre, with tracks leaving more space for the MC to rap about their lives and the everyday difficulties encountered by inner-city inhabitants, with the MC's lyrical performance taking a more prominent place in music videos. This trend was pioneered by groups such as Heartless Crew, Pay As U Go Cartel, and, most famously, So Solid Crew. These videos would also be watched predominantly on MTV, and several UKG musicians, including So Solid, also performed on Top of the Pops. So Solid's darker, MC-focussed brand of UKG was hugely successful within the cultural mainstream, with their track *21 Seconds* reaching number 1 in the UK Singles Chart in 2001. This success was matched by big-budget, label-funded music videos, which often featured special effects and multiple locations. The video for *21 Seconds*, which I explore in Chapter 4, is a prime example of these big-budget elements. But this

mainstream success was short-lived as a moral panic about a spike in gun crime in London was tied to the UKG scene, particularly to members of So Solid, who were often characterised as criminals by politicians and mainstream news media. This led to a crackdown on UKG shows and tours, while radio stations stopped playing tracks from the genre.

As the UKG scene's popularity began to dissipate during the early 2000s, the influence that groups like So Solid had made, with an emphasis on the MC as inner-city storyteller, continued to grow. This new sound came to be known as grime, which emerged in London in the early-2000s, often regarded as an offshoot of, and direct response to, UKG's glamorous aesthetic and lyrical content (Fatsis, 2019a, Adams, 2019). Grime MCs lyrically represented life in the council estates and streets of London, most notably Bow, Newham, Tottenham, and Hackney (Fatsis, 2019a; Hancox, 2013, 2018). This lyricism was reflected in the genre's music videos, which were often low-budget and shot on location in the areas that the artists were from. The grime scene developed in tandem with a growing DIY music video practice as audio-visual recording equipment became more affordable. Though MCs are a prominent feature, grime instrumentals have a unique sound: conventionally around 140bpm, with heavily syncopated beats, and heavy electronic basslines. DJs and MCs often performed on pirate radios, and their sessions began to be recorded audio-visually in collections such as *Risky Roadz* and *Lord of the Mics*, initially distributed on DVD and eventually shown on YouTube (Perera, 2018; Swain, 2018; Fatsis; 2019a; Bramwell, 2015; de Lacey, 2022). The growing popularity of grime also led to the founding of Channel U in 2003, a digital satellite music-focussed television channel that platformed the growing number of DIY music videos coming out of London and other UK cities, particularly music videos for grime tracks (Collins and Rose, 2016; also see Link Up TV, 2023). Videos such as NoLay's *Unorthodox Daughter*, which I explore in Chapter 6, would have been seen by many for the first time on Channel U.

Like jungle and UKG before it (Scott, 2020), grime faced intense police scrutiny from its foundation, particularly through continued crackdowns on pirate radio stations, increased use of 'stop and search' powers, Operation Trident, and shutting down live events. These practices disproportionately affected black artists trying to perform in the city and were a profound

barrier to the growth of grime, as well as to the development of the UK rap and UK drill scenes that followed. UK rap emerged around the same time as grime and used similar visual conventions with low-budget DIY music videos shot in an artist's local area, performing lyrics directly to camera surrounded by a predominantly male entourage. However, the two genres differed sonically. While grime tended to utilise instrumentals that were produced directly on digital software with few samples at around 140bpm, UK rap often drew on US hip hop, rap, and trap beats and samples at a slower tempo, often around 100bpm. Giggs and Skepta's *Look Out*, which I explore in Chapter 5, typifies this US influence and tempo. The video is also a good example of the low-budget DIY aesthetics that are also typical of music videos stemming from the genre. UK rap videos would also often be shown on Channel U, and later shared on Internet platforms such as YouTube.

UK drill originated and flourished in London in the early- to mid-2010s. Audio-visual recordings were widely distributed and viewed on YouTube and social media platforms from its inception (Fatsis, 2019b). Inspired by the South Side Chicago drill scene of the mid 2000s, UK drill crews began rapping over "distorted, makeshift beats," producing tracks that "fiercely express the harsh reality of life in deprived South London social housing estates, and the artists' loyalties to their immediate locale" (Fatsis, 2019b, p.1304). The UK drill scene began in the Brixton and Kennington areas of south London, with crews such as 67 and the Harlem Spartans, before quickly spreading across the city (Muk, 2022), notably through the Broadwater Farm estate in Tottenham. In contrast to Chicago drill, in the drill music of London "the soundsystem culture of the UK started coming into it", while "the bass drum was pushed right to the front", producing "really melodic basslines" (Tim Barry, in Muk, 2022). These basslines, distinctively sliding between notes, were frequently paired with dark and melancholy piano melodies, and drums at around 140bpm, much faster than the Chicago counterpart, demonstrating a connection with grime's sonic conventions. Music videos have been a core feature of the genre from its beginnings, with visuals often shot on the estates that the artists had grown up in (Herlock, 2020). These were often DIY videos, which would be shared immediately on YouTube rather than television channels.

These five genres of music are particularly notable because they were closely associated with the notion of the inner city, and pioneered by working-class, predominantly black artists while also being described as distinctively British genres (Fatsis, 2019a, 2019b; Charles, 2019; Bramwell, 2015; Toynbee, Tackley and Doffman, 2016; Karvelis, 2018; Melville, 2019; Banerjee in Rave Channel, 2012). The music tracks and videos offer an insightful archive to explore how artists inhabit and represent space in the city, and how this relates to questions of national identity. These urban music genres are often conceived as having emerged from outside of 'mainstream' music-industry production, or at least to have had a complex and often strained relationship with the cultural mainstream. In a sense, the music's generic situation within the British music-industry landscape can be seen as reflected in the artists' spatial situation within Britain's cityscapes – 'inner' but excluded, often referred to as 'underground'.

While this music comes from outside of the mainstream, the release of an 'Official Music Video' has often been a marker of a track 'breaking through', and thereby being preserved for longer (Cave, 2017). The 'Official Music Video' is only one form of the music video, however, and these genres, particularly grime, UK rap, and UK drill, also push the boundaries of the 'official' video through DIY production practices, which I explore in more detail in the chapters that follow. Also important is the relationship between the music video format and the platforms on and through which they have been presented and displayed. The relationship between the spaces of inner-city London, the music that has been produced in and from it, and its representation in music video, then, must also take into consideration the way in which the music video is distributed and platformed, and how this has changed over time. There have been dramatic developments in this area, from the dominance of labels in the production of music videos for terrestrial TV distribution and reception on channels such as MTV, to the emergence of smaller, DIY practices, distributed by hand or in record shops on VHS and then DVD, to the emergence of the Internet as the dominant mode of distribution, and the ability for audiences to leave comments directly underneath videos on platforms such as YouTube. Looking at each of these genres chronologically, as I do in Chapters 4 and 5, allows for a consideration of how these developments emerged, and how they relate to changes in the urban environment of London.

To reiterate, this project focusses primarily on the period between 1994 and 2021, during which these urban music genres emerged and flourished in London. All of the videos that I analyse in the following chapters were released in this period, and I provide details of each of the videos in the table below. I have chosen a few videos from each genre, with a reasonable sample in terms of chronology within the selected time frame. Each selected video played an important role in the emergence and development of each genre, and each represents an important moment in the development of urban space during the period of its release. A range of inner-city spaces are represented in the selected videos, while different types of video have also been included, such as performance, narrative, and freestyle genres, and both big-budget and DIY productions. These types will be outlined in more detail in Chapter 2 and as the chapters progress.

In the chapters below, I draw attention to the connections between different formats, opting for an open and inclusive conception of what music videos are and what they can be. While other scholars and commentators have critically analyzed films and television programs made about the experience of living in inner-city areas, and the music produced by those who have lived in and been shaped by these areas, the same critical attention has not been paid to the music videos blossoming from these music genres. This is in part due to a lack of critical attention to music videos in general, but even when academics have studied music videos (for example: Railton, 2017; Railton and Watson, 2005, 2011; Korsgaard, 2013, 2017; Vernallis, 1998, 2013; Frith, Goodwin and Grossberg, 2005), it is rarely to those within the genres of urban music videos that they look, nor are they generally examined with an eye to how they represent space.

The selected time frame is an important period in the history of London's inner city, labelled by Rhodes and Brown (2018) as a period that saw the fragmentation of historic inner-city London. This fragmentation has been mirrored by the diminishing usage of the notion of the inner city in policy discourse and the rise of 'regeneration' and 'renaissance' discourses, which have been used to justify the changes that have taken place (Rhodes and Brown, 2018). In the chapters that follow, I build an understanding of how this fragmentation has interacted with,

and been represented by, inhabitants of London's inner-city areas who have been affected by this process. Furthermore, it explores how, in spite of this fragmentation, cultural production acts as a way for artists to remain connected and to produce new connections with people and spaces in the city, particularly through urban music scenes and the production of urban music videos that create and show connections between people and the spaces in which they live.

Guiding Concepts

There are a number of core concepts that have guided my selection and analysis of music videos and other forms of data for this project. These concepts stem from and traverse multiple disciplines at once, thereby contributing to the way the analysis of each video is approached in a multidisciplinary manner. Here I will provide a brief outline of five central guiding concepts – 'representation', 'the production of space', 'the right to the city', 'routes', and 'play' – which will be developed in more detail in Chapters 2 and 3.

Representation

The core data that this project analyses is music videos, which by their very nature provide audio-visual representations. I use the concept of representation in this project in a multidisciplinary way, stemming from the project's roots in both sociology and screen studies, and drawing on an multidisciplinary field of literature (Williams, 1977; Higson, 1984; Hall, 1993; Gilroy, 1993; Cheng, 2011; Millington, 2016a; Lefebvre, 1974/1991). To operationalise this multidisciplinaryity, I consider how the textual elements of each music video intertwine the social forces and practices that interrelate in its contexts of production, distribution, and reception.

The Production of Space

Central to my thesis is the argument that audio-visual texts, such as music videos, don't just represent spaces and social practices in space, they also contribute to the production of space. This way of understanding music videos in particular and representation in general draws on the writings of Henri Lefebvre, particularly his work on the production of space (1974/1991). Fundamental to his theory is the assertion that space is not a stable or passive phenomenon, rather it is unstable and actively produced in particular ways depending on the power structures and economic systems that form society.

The Right to the City

The production of space links to another concept pioneered by Lefebvre (1968) and developed by David Harvey (2012): the right to the city. This concept was formulated to highlight the ways in which the spaces of the city are unevenly accessed, controlled, and used, and to galvanise social and political struggles to access, control, use, and transform space by urban inhabitants. I argue that one labour force to consider in the production of the city is the producers of urban music and music videos, whose work often involves the appropriation of space both to lay claim to those spaces and to transform them, thereby participating in struggles for a right to the city.

Routes

Another core theorist for this thesis is Paul Gilroy, whose work on race, class, nation, spatial relations, and cultural production have helped structure and guide my analyses. His notion of 'routes' (Gilroy, 1993), which emphasises the role of diasporic travel and movement across

and through space and time in the production of cultural and inter-personal connection, has proved particularly significant for this thesis. This concept has enabled me to highlight the journeys that artists and artworks have taken, through physical, digital, and imaginative spaces, and the dynamics that control access to and use of certain routes.

Convivial Playfulness

The concept of convivial playfulness emphasises the way artists use space in playful ways to produce meaning through sound and image. Focussing on play emphasises the use of space by artists, rather than valuing space according to what it can be exchanged for on the property market (Lipsitz, 2007). The different ways in which space is played with are expressions of claims to a right to the city, by which artists reimagine the ways urban space can be made and used differently (Lefebvre, 1968; Harvey, 2012). Play is closely related to Gilroy's (2004) concept of 'conviviality', which highlights the everyday interactions that occur in Britain's multicultural urban spaces, across intersecting lines of difference. This playfulness often involves blending and transgressing spatial and generic boundaries. As will be seen, the conventions of realism are often played with and combined with other representational conventions to explore different experiences of urban space. This project is based on a convivial aspiration for social change (Cory, 2020), highlighting the playfulness of the music videos I analyse, and challenging instances of social injustice that these videos explore or that have influenced them.

Methodology

I have used a number of methodological approaches in this project, which I will introduce briefly here and outline in more detail in Chapter 3. The core data that I have analysed is a

selection of urban music videos, the details of which are collated in the table of videos below. The column 'Video Name' refers to the name by which I refer to the video in my analysis. Sometimes the name given to a video on YouTube is different to the name given to the track for which the video was made. The column 'YouTube Video Name' refers to the name of the respective video on YouTube that I have used in my analysis. The column 'Video Release Date' refers to the date the video was originally released. This may be different to when it was uploaded to YouTube, which is indicated in the column entitled 'YouTube Upload Date'. Sometimes a video has been uploaded by multiple accounts at multiple times. This column refers to the particular video upload that I have selected to include and analyse in this thesis, with the link to this video included in the column 'YouTube Video Link'. The column 'Musician/s' refers to the main musicians credited as having made the track, i.e., the musicians whose names are included in the title of the respective YouTube video, and/or that are seen to perform in the music video. The column 'Video Director' refers to the director of the music video. The column 'Music Genre' refers to the music genre/s with which the music video is related. The column 'Video Genre' refers to the genre of video with which the video is related, a notion I will explore in more detail in the chapters that follow. The column 'Location/s of Shooting' refers to the place where the respective video was shot. Finally, the column 'Chapter' refers to the chapter/s in which the respective video is featured. If a cell contains '?' this means I was unable to find the respective information.

Complete Table of Videos

Video Name	YouTube Video Name	Video Release Date	YouTube Upload Date	YouTube Video Link	Musician/s	Video Director	Music Genre/s	Video Genre/s	Location/s of Shooting	Chapter
Pass The Dutchie	<i>Musical Youth - Pass The Dutchie</i>	September 1982	17 June 2022	https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EsyUa63NM1E	Musical Youth	Don Letts	Reggae	Performance, Narrative, Big-Budget	Bank of the River Thames, Central London	Ch.3
Inner City Life	<i>Goldie - Inner City Life (Official Remastered HD Video)</i>	1994	31 July 2020	https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6vHkOI-Z7IY	Goldie Diane Charlemagne	Mike Lipscombe	Jungle Drum and Bass	Narrative, Big-Budget	Wyndham Estate, Camberwell, South London	Ch.4
Original Nuttah	<i>UK APACHI With SHY FX - Original Nuttah</i>	1994	10 October 2009	https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PkAYv0MuVTE	Shy FX UK Apache	?	Jungle	Performance	Kings Cross, Central London	Ch.4
Incredible	<i>M Beat feat General Levy Incredible</i>	1994	6 March 2009	https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mL2Bgi-za5k	M-Beat General Levy	?	Jungle	Performance	Big Ben	Ch.4
A London Thing	<i>UK Garage Scott Garcia Feat MC Styles It's A London Thing</i>	1997	16 September 2015	https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4ADcWWUM-ZmY	Scott Garcia MC Styles	James Hyman	UKG	Performance	Notting Hill Carnival River Thames Central London Battersea Power Station	Ch.6

Video Name	YouTube Video Name	Video Release Date	YouTube Upload Date	YouTube Video Link	Musician/s	Video Director	Music Genre/s	Video Genre/s	Location/s of Shooting	Chapter
Neighbourhood	<i>Neighbourhood - Zed Bias featuring Nicky Prince & MC Rumpus</i>	2000	7 November 2006	https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ijz9XYbXsUg	Zed Bias Nicky Prince MC Rumpus	Andy Hylton	UKG	Performance, Big-Budget	Brixton Centre Brixton Market	Ch.4
Bound 4 Da Reload (Casualty)	<i>Oxide & Neutrino Bound 4 Da Reload</i>	2001	21 Jul 2006	https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AZ-27rdwJPg	Oxide & Neutrino	?	UKG	Performance, Narrative, Big-Budget	?	Ch.4
Oh No (Sentimental Things)	<i>So Solid Crew - Oh No (Sentimental Things) (Official Video)</i>	2001	21 March 2013	https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=guJ0NyQVs9I	So Solid Crew	?	UKG	Performance, Narrative, Big-Budget	?	Ch.4
21 Seconds	<i>So Solid Crew - 21 Seconds (Official HD Video)</i>	2001	21 March 2013	https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gZVhofoV3qE	So Solid Crew	Max Giwa and Dania Pasquini	UKG	Performance, Narrative, Big-Budget	?	Ch.4

Video Name	YouTube Video Name	Video Release Date	YouTube Upload Date	YouTube Video Link	Musician/s	Video Director	Music Genre/s	Video Genre/s	Location/s of Shooting	Chapter
<i>Jus A Rascal</i>	<i>Dizze Rascal - Jus A Rascal</i>	2003	17 June 2008	https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0pnJPX60vXA	Dizze Rascal	?	Grime	Performance, Big-Budget	River Thames Tower Bridge Canary Wharf London Eye	Ch.5
<i>Lord of the Mics 1</i>	<i>Wiley vs. Kano – Lord of the Mics 1</i>	2004	9 May 2016	https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nTF_T47CDnI	Wiley Kano	Jammer	Grime	Performance, DIY	Jammer's family basement, Leytonstone, East London	Ch.5
<i>When I'm Ere</i>	<i>Roll Deep "When I'm Ere" music video</i>	2005	5 Mar 2007	https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HK1SpAy_cR4	Roll Deep (Wiley, Flowdan, Scratchy, Roachee, Trim, Manga, Breeze, Jet Li)	Simon Poon Tip (Indica, Poon Tip Entertainment)	Grime	Performance,	Kildare Walk, Limehouse, east London	Ch.5
<i>Aim High Volume 2</i>	<i>Aim High dvd Volume 2</i>	2005	13 February 2014	https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZrXPz7J7JqE&t=2163s		DJ Target	Grime	Performance, DIY	Rhythm Vision Jammer's basement	Ch.5

Video Name	YouTube Video Name	Video Release Date	YouTube Upload Date	YouTube Video Link	Musician/s	Video Director	Music Genre/s	Video Genre/s	Location/s of Shooting	Chapter
<i>Unorthodox Daughter</i>	<i>No Lay 'Unorthod ox Daughter'</i>	2005	01 May 2008	https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=C3Pp3V0N0hk	NoLay	Manny Bonett	Grime	Performance, Narrative?	White City Estate	Ch.6
<i>Talking Da Hardest</i>	<i>GIGGS - TALKING DA HARDEST</i>	2007/2008	11 August 2014	https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=914OHMH5zgE	Giggs	?	UK rap	Performance, DIY	Surrey Canal path, Peckham, South-East London	Ch.5
<i>Look Out</i>	<i>Giggs & Skeptak / Look Out [Music Video]: SBTV</i>	6 May 2009	6 May 2009	https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5y2vMPUA2IQ	Giggs Skeptak	Jemal Edwards (SBTV)	UK rap Grime	Performance, DIY	Peckham Islington Tottenham	Ch.5
<i>CR (Grills Shutdown)</i>	<i>Nines / CR (Grills Shutdown) [Music Video]: SBTV</i>	28 Nov 2012	28 Nov 2012	https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=e5e1f0S7hYc	Nines	Morgan Keyz	UK rap	Performance, Narrative	Hatton Garden, Camden Church Road Estate, Brent	Ch.5
<i>Live Corn</i>	<i>67 LD - Live Corn Video by @Pacman TV</i>	8 October 2014	8 October 2014	https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XtKdPYnHEtC	LD (67)	PacmanTV	UK drill	Performance, DIY	Brixton Hill	Ch.5

Video Name	YouTube Video Name	Video Release Date	YouTube Upload Date	YouTube Video Link	Musician/s	Video Director	Music Genre/s	Video Genre/s	Location/s of Shooting	Chapter
<i>No Diet</i>	<i>Digga D - No Diet</i>  <i>(Music Video) @Mixtap eMadness</i>	18 Apr 2019	18 Apr 2019	https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dEc2ZWlJKxc	Digga D	Digga D Teeeezy C	UK drill	Performance	?	Ch.6
<i>Ambush</i>	<i>#OFB SJ X Bandokay X DoubleLz Ambush (Prod. Sykes beats) [Official Music Video]: OFB</i>	31 May 2019	31 May 2019	https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-QezMBY0Ndk	SJ (OFB) Bandokay (OFB) DoubleLz (OFB)	Yukki	UK drill	Performance	Broadwater Farm Estate, Tottenham, North London	Ch.5
<i>little BIG Man</i>	<i>Wretch 32 - little BIG Man (Short Film)</i>	28 May 2021	28 May 2021	https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_7MXM1wzRYU	Wretch 32	Edem Wornoo	UK rap Grime UK drill	Performance, Narrative, Big-Budget?	Woolwich, South- East London	Ch.6
<i>First Day Out</i>	<i>LD (67) - First Day Out [Music Video] GRM Daily</i>	18 November 2021	18 November 2021	https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XDMjvALsp ho	LD (67)	Tyrus Gugzay	UK drill	Performance, DIY, Narrative	Lancaster West Estate, North London HMP Isis, South- East London	Ch.6

As noted above, each of these videos played important roles in the emergence and development of the selected music genres, but I have not aimed to provide an exhaustive survey of urban music videos. Rather, I have employed a purposeful sampling method (Patton, 2014; Palinkas et. al, 2015) in order to select a number of indicative videos across a range of music genres, inner-city spaces, and moments in time. This method allowed for the selection of videos that offered rich insights into the questions and themes the project looks to explore.

I also conducted five ('primary') semi-structured interviews with music video directors and producers, again selecting the five interviewees according to a purposeful sampling method. In the sampling, conducting, and usage of these interviews, I drew on methods of social research which supplemented the methods of representational analysis that form the bulk of the video analyses. In addition, I drew on a range of other texts, including published ('secondary') interviews, documentaries, films, photographs, and two YouTube comments. My analyses of the music videos took an inductive and iterative approach, looking to generate new understandings and meanings of the relationship between space and cultural production in London's inner-city between 1994 and 2021. I used the primary and secondary interviews, documentaries, films, photographs, and YouTube comments to inform my analyses of the videos, intertwining these texts with academic scholarship. I will provide more detail on the video and interview sampling methodology, and how these different forms of data are used in a multidisciplinary approach, in Chapter 3.

The project employs an interpretivist epistemology, engaging with the idea that the research produced through this project is grounded in my subjective experiences (Hiller, 2016). The analyses, understandings, and meanings produced in this thesis are necessarily partial and situated (Haraway, 1988), in recognition of the fact that I am not an isolated observer but an active participant in the production of space, as are the artists whose work I analyse. The ontological foundations of the thesis stem from its guiding concepts. Thus, I look to explore a reality that is both material and imaginative (Lefebvre, 1991/1987; Pierce & Martin, 2015), specifically that of London between 1994 and 2021. I will explore how this reality has been

produced and developed both materially and imaginatively, focussing primarily on the role of representation in this production process.

I chose the geographical parameter of London for several reasons. London has often been seen as a reference point for class and race relations for the rest of the UK and its relationship with countries formerly of the British Empire. Paul Gilroy indicates this dynamic at various points in his work, arguing that London often acts as a ‘stage’ for racialized and nationalist confrontations that are felt in different cities across England and the UK (Gilroy, 2003, p.7). This is particularly the case when music is ‘foregrounded’, as this “allows us to see England, or more accurately London, as an important junction point or crossroads on the webbed pathways of black Atlantic political culture” (Gilroy, 1993, p.95). In this thesis I suggest that these racial and spatial dynamics can also be explored in important and enlightening ways through the foregrounding of music videos. There are dynamics that are particular to London as the former metropolis of the British Empire, its role as the capital city of England and the UK, the seat of the Houses of Parliament, and its size and geographic setting. This thesis does not aim to generalize across the UK, or even across London. But London has a strong and vast field of influence, so to focus on the boundaries of the city can suggest further explorations – routes of inquiry – in other places in the UK and beyond.

Thesis Structure

The structure of the thesis is as follows. Chapter 2, ***Finding Space for Urban Music Videos: A Tour of the Literature***, provides an overview of the relevant academic literature within which I situate this thesis and on which I build. This includes literature on the sociology of space, spatial scales, the inner city, and the right to the city; on racial ontology and conviviality; on the representation of urban space; on modes of representation; on genre; and on music video. In Chapter 3, ***Methodological Routes through London’s Inner City***, I explain the methodology

for operationalising the various theories introduced in Chapters 1 and 2 into a framework for the analysis of the music videos in Chapters 4, 5, and 6. Thus, Chapter 3 will explain the methods I used to analyse the videos as audio-visual representations. The chapter will also provide further details about the selection methodologies for the music videos I analyse, the various other forms of data that are drawn on in the analyses of the music videos, and the people with whom I conducted interviews during the project. I will also explain in more detail the methodology I used for conducting the interviews and how they were drawn on during the analysis chapters. Finally, I outline the importance of secondary sources such as published interviews and documentaries.

Having established the foundations of my research and my approach in these initial chapters, I engage in analyses of a range of urban music videos in Chapters 4, 5, and 6, as indicated in the table of videos above. The focus in these chapters is on the different ways that these videos represent, engage with, and produce the spaces of inner-city London; how they are inhabited and how they are used; the modes used to represent the city; and how these videos claim a right to the city. In Chapter 4, ***Sliding Spatial Scales: Jungle and UK Garage in a Global City***, I look at the emergence of jungle and UKG through the music videos *Incredible*, *Original Nuttah*, *Inner City Life*, *Neighbourhood*, *Bound 4 Da Reload*, *Oh No*, and *21 Seconds*. Through the analyses of these videos' representations of the inner city, alongside other related sources of data, multiple themes emerge. The first is a theme of 'celebration', in the emergence of new music genres that forged new senses of national belonging through videos that slide between different scales of representation: global, national, and local. Celebration is often represented through playful and convivial activities such as dancing and musical performance, and the playful use of space involved in clubbing. However, this theme conflicts with representations of the difficulties of everyday life, as the inhabitants of inner-city spaces also have to navigate the development of London as a 'global city'. This tension generates a second theme of 'alienation', by which people are disconnected from one another and the spaces around them. Again, playfulness is often used to expose and challenge forms of alienation. There are also suggestions in these videos of the themes of 'showing/hiding' and contestations over the right to the city that become more prominent as the thesis develops.

In Chapter 5, ***New Spatial Scales: Grime, UK Rap, UK Drill, and the Hyperlocal***, I look at the emergence of grime, UK rap, and UK drill through the music videos *When I'm Ere*, *Jus A Rascal*, *Aim High Volume 2*, *Talking Da Hardest*, *Look Out*, *Live Corn*, and *Ambush*. This chapter explores the way different videos show people and music sliding between different scales of representation, with technological and economic developments producing a new 'hyperlocal' scale shown in some of the music videos. But as well as sliding between scales the theme of 'hiding' becomes more analytically significant. I explore why this concealment might occur, drawing on the history of contemporary policing practices which produce urban space as somewhere to move through cautiously for particular racialised members of society. The theme of hiding is related to the idea that representation can be used as a means of contesting control over access to, use of, and movement through space. The theme of contestation is at the heart of Chapter 6, ***Contesting Spatial Access and Use Through Urban Music Videos***. This chapter analyses five music videos from a range of urban music genres: *A London Thing*, *Unorthodox Daughter*, *No Diet*, *little BIG Man*, and *First Day Out*. Through these analyses the chapter focusses particularly on access to and uses of space as ways of engaging in struggles for the right to the city. The chapter builds on the concepts and themes introduced earlier in the thesis, exploring how different modes and spatial scales are employed, and connecting these textual elements with contextual details of production, distribution, and reception. Finally, in Chapter 7, ***Concluding the Tour: Representing Routes through London's Inner City***, I draw out some conclusions to my project, noting that urban music videos use a range of modes and spatial scales of representation; that YouTube is an under-acknowledged informal archive of representations of London's inner city; that there is a great diversity in the way London's inner city has been lived in and represented, and that these spaces are by no means homogenous, as many reductive descriptions have previously made out. I also discuss possible directions for further research, before concluding the thesis with some final reflections.

Conclusion

These then are the foundations for this thesis, and the substantive topics and research questions I will explore in what follows. While I have outlined the methodologies and concepts that have guided my analyses of the selected urban music videos, I will explore these in more detail below. The key point to take away at this point, though, is that I will be exploring these videos as expressions that both represent and produce the material and imaginary spaces of inner-city London; that these spaces are produced in part through representational processes and texts; and that this process of production must be kept in mind throughout the following chapters.

Chapter 2

Finding Space for Urban Music Videos: A Tour of the Literature

An analogy: academic literature is like a city. Different academic disciplines are like different districts of this city: over there is the Sociology district; over there is the Screen Studies district; and so on. In fact, influential movements in academia are often named after the cities in which the movement emerged: the Chicago School, a group who introduced the idea of ‘urban sociology’ in the inter-war period, and the Birmingham School, a group who pioneered the field of Cultural Studies in the 1960s, are two pertinent examples for this project whose work will be outlined in more detail below. Continuing this analogy, some PhD theses are situated firmly within one district, and could be said to construct a building that aligns with the architectural character of the area. The writer has looked around the area and felt the absence of a building that they feel should be there, which they then construct. In this thesis, though, I move between a number of different districts, producing something more akin to a transport network with stations in different areas. I draw on and respond to a field of different disciplinary literatures, different architectures, and thereby produce a multidisciplinary means of understanding the relationship between academic literature, cultural output, and spatial production (Dalton et al., 2021).

Below is a tour of the literature that I have found most instructive to my research questions: those research questions suggested a route through this city of literature, and the literatures included here are, in a sense, landmarks with which to navigate. I begin in Section 1 by outlining literature on the ‘Sociology of Space’, with a particular focus on the work of Henri

Lefebvre and his theories of the 'Production of Space' and the 'Right to the City', which shifted the focus of sociology towards the importance of space and its production. This shift in focus is also a prominent theme in Section 2, 'Race Formation and Conviviality', particularly through the work of Stuart Hall and Paul Gilroy. Section 3, 'Spatial Scales', reviews literature that explores different scales of space, from the global to the hyperlocal, and the relationship between those different scales. Section 4 offers a more detailed review of literature on one of these scales, the 'Inner City', and how this space has been produced over time, as a concept and as a material space, particularly in the British context. Sections 5, 6, and 7 will focus on literature that explores different dynamics of representation: 'Representing Urban Space', 'Modes of Representation', and 'Genre', respectively. Finally, Section 8 provides a review of literature on 'Music Videos', again with particular reference to British urban music scenes.

Section 1. The Sociology of Space and the Right to the City

During the twentieth century sociology experienced what scholars have called a 'spatial turn' (Shiel, 2001). John Urry (2004) provides a useful genealogy of the concept of space in the field of sociology. He argues that for much of the discipline's history theories were constructed as 'a-spatial', with "little recognition of the processes of internal differentiation across space" (Urry, 2004, p.3). Though space is present in the work of Marx and Durkheim, Georg Simmel is the most important classical contributor to the sociology of space, particularly the modern city, exploring "those social interactions that turn an empty space into something meaningful" (Urry, 2004, p.5). Simmel (1962/1903) argued that the space of the city structures social interaction and individual particularity through the importance of motion, diverse stimuli, and concentrated capitalist economics. He further argued that the form of space in which one lives, whether rural or urban, has a direct relation with the development of one's psychology in that one's psychology reflects the structure of space.

A particularly influential wave in the sociology of space was the 'urban sociology' established at the University of Chicago during the interwar period. In contrast to Simmel, the 'Chicago School' developed 'ecological' approaches to study the space of the city. Louis Wirth (1938) and Robert Redfield (1947) argued that urban and rural life differ as a result of differences in the size, density, and heterogeneity of urban and rural areas. Chicago School scholars argued that cities developed from the centre outwards in concentric rings, arguing that the business area formed the centre, which was immediately surrounded by a 'slum' or 'ghetto' area (Wirth, 1927; Zorbaugh, 1983/1929; Suttles, 1968). The Chicago School tended to call this area the 'zone in transition', though it subsequently came to be known as the 'inner city'.

The late-1960s to the 1980s generated Marxist and post-Marxist critiques of established sociologies of space such as those of the Chicago School. Manuel Castells (1977/1972) argued that the Chicago School had produced a universalising, a-historical 'urban ideology', which failed to understand that capitalism produces urban space in historically specific ways. Castells argued that the 'theoretical object' of urban sociology should be 'collective consumption', the provision of services by the state for the reproduction of the labour force, and that the study of this object can explain how politics vary across space. Other important contributions during this period came from two scholars from the discipline of geography. First, Doreen Massey (1995/1984), whose focus on space as active in capitalist production helped to challenge the conception of social class as structured by the boundaries of the nation-state. Secondly, David Harvey, whose concept of 'time-space compression' explored how capitalist technological production increasingly condenses time and space (1989), and whose seminal work on city planning (2010/1973) directly challenged many of the spatial theories of the Chicago School. During this period Henri Lefebvre also published his highly influential theory of the production of space (1991/1987), in which he shifted the academic focus from space as a stable object to the processes by which space is socially produced. According to this argument, space is a social construction rather than a natural, passive object. This is not to say that we bring space itself into being, in some form of subjective idealism. Rather, it is to say that social beings produce spaces, such as cities, in different ways depending on the organisation of social relations. To put it simply, where there are deeply unequal social relations, space will be produced in deeply unequal ways, protecting and benefiting some while endangering and marginalising others.

Lefebvre (1991/1987) proposed a three-dimensional, 'triadic' conception of interrelating forces for understanding the production of space: 'spatial practices'; 'representations of space'; and 'representational space'. Within each force occur physical, mental, and social processes that combine to produce space. Lefebvre argues that this triadic model of spatial production cannot be conceptualised abstractly, but it can be utilised to explore concrete, historical material, so I will outline the theory using London as this material. 'Spatial practices' highlight the everyday activities and routines of inhabitants, the way they move through the city and interact with the spaces around them. For example, a daily commute to work walking through streets or on the Underground. But it also highlights actions and movements that are less quotidian, more exceptional, that might only happen once a year or more infrequently still. Here one might think of Notting Hill Carnival, or, a more extreme and less frequent example, manifestations of social unrest such as the 2011 London Riots. All practices are spatial, in that everything we do is always in space, and all practices leave a mark in space. The re-working of spatial practices, or the creation of new spatial practices, create spaces anew.

But the ability to perform new spatial practices is limited by the physical landscape and the way this landscape is controlled. 'Representations of space' highlight how those with capital dominate the potential to conceive of space – that is, to determine how space appears in representations that are used to construct new buildings, roads, parks, transport links, and so on. In a capitalist society, space is thus constantly reconceived in ways that support the accumulation of capital. One might think here of the redevelopment of the London docks into the London Docklands and Canary Wharf in the 1980s, or more recently, the redevelopment of large parts of east London to construct the Queen Elizabeth Olympic Park, or the demolition of the Heygate Estate as part of the redevelopment of Elephant and Castle in south London. Each of these cases involved producing plans to conceive of these spaces anew. And in each case large numbers of working-class inhabitants were displaced as a result (Hall & Ogden, 1992; Foster, 1992; Bender, 2008; Watt, 2013; Lees & Ferreri, 2016; Wall, 2021; Jelali, 2025), demonstrating the material and social impact of what might otherwise appear to be innocuous architectural designs.

Finally, 'representational space' highlights how space is lived and experienced by inhabitants. This is the space of dreams and utopia, and "is accessed through symbolic, artistic and aesthetic works" (Millington, 2016a, p.7). It highlights how representations of space are experienced, resisted, and opposed, often through forms of representation that aren't produced by those who dominate spatial planning. In this thesis I explore London's urban music videos as representational spaces, which highlight how inhabitants of inner-city areas live and experience these spaces, how they dream of these spaces, and how these spaces can be imagined and represented differently, for alternate purposes.

Lefebvre argues that the process of valuing and exchanging spaces inherently results in inequality, with some spaces being valued more highly than others. This produces a fundamental alienating contradiction within the capitalist system, in that it must be homogenous – exchangeable within a single system of value – and fragmented – divisible into different individual portions (Lefebvre, 1991/1987; Wilson, 2013). But these portions will necessarily be different from one another, through different uses, exposing the fundamental heterogeneity of space and spatial practices. Gareth Millington (2016a, p.8), building on Lefebvre's work, argues that in order to maintain the balance of power the state strongly controls "forms of sociality" in low valued spaces, predominantly through policing, schooling, and housing. This work is particularly instructive in understanding how urban spaces, music genres, and videos have been policed, and how this policing relates to youth cultures and the provision of housing, all of which are central concerns for this thesis.

Lefebvre's work on the production of space is particularly important for this project in understanding the way representations relate to the production of space, and to access to and use of spaces in the city. However, the double use of the term 'representation' for two opposing forces is confusing to write and to read, so for the purposes of this thesis I will reword one element of the triad. 'Representations of space' will be referred to as 'dominant representations of space', which are produced by those who dominate the design, maintenance, control, and redevelopment of urban space. Dominant representations of space

are produced by government policies, urban planners, corporations, banks, large media institutions, the police, etc, who rarely live in the spaces effected by these representations, and who stand to benefit from this spatial domination, financially or simply by having power over a spatial domain. Representational spaces are produced by artists who inhabit the spaces that are under threat from dominant representations of space, and that contest and challenge dominant representations, in this case the spaces of inner-city London.

Following Lefebvre, academic literature, such as the work reviewed in this chapter, and audio-visual representations, such as the music videos explored in this thesis, are not just windows through which to see the city, but building-blocks of the city. Academic literature, then, is an active component in the production of urban space, which means that the analogy with which I began this chapter is more than just an analogy. Urban music videos are also building blocks, analyses of which provide concrete examples of how different approaches to representation play different roles in the production of space; or, to put it another way, how different representational approaches produce different types of space.

Another guiding concept pioneered by Lefebvre (1968), and developed by David Harvey (2012), is the 'right to the city'. Harvey (2012, pp.129-130) defines the struggle for the right to the city as "a struggle of that proletariat which produced the city to claim back the right to have and control that which they had produced." This work highlights the role of working-class communities in the production of space. These communities do not possess the capital that would give them power within a capitalist system, but they are fundamental to the production of space and the manifestation of dominant representations of space in service of the accumulation of capital for those that do. The struggle for the right to the city, argue Lefebvre and Harvey, is a struggle over access to, and use of, space, and highlights the ways in which the spaces of the city are currently unevenly accessed and used. It is, then, a powerful response to the inequality produced by the valuing of space based on exchange. It is at the same time a demand not only for these relations to be made even, but also for the city itself to be produced differently. The way the city can be made differently is often articulated through representational spaces. Representational spaces, such as urban music videos, are

thus part of the struggle for the right to the city, as they can be produced through new or re-worked spatial practices, and can represent new or reworked spatial practices. As will be seen in later chapters, though, sometimes urban music videos can challenge some dominant representations of space whilst reproducing others.

As noted in Chapter 1, both the Anglophone inner city and the urban music genres I am focussing on have been associated with urban inhabitants who are racialised as black. A number of scholars have noted that Lefebvre does not consider the role of race in his work on the production of space (McCann, 1999; Kipfer et al., 2008; LaFleur, 2021). So, to augment Lefebvre's work I will now turn to a review of literature on race formation and the concept of conviviality.

Section 2. Race Formation and Conviviality

The urban music genres that this project focusses on were all pioneered by black British artists. As will be seen, the production of these genres has also transcended racial and national boundaries, often in ways that could be described as 'convivial'. In order to add depth to these ideas, I will now outline literature on the formation of race, particularly in a British context, and on the concept of conviviality as it relates to the production of multicultural urban social practices.

One key theorist of the relationships between race, class, and representation is Stuart Hall (2021a/1978, 2021b/1997; Hall et al., 2017/1979). Hall was one of the ground-breaking figures of the Birmingham School of Cultural Studies from the 1960s onwards. He argued (2021a/1978, p.58) that racism has been an endemic part of British society and politics since at least the sixteenth century. Taking this long view into account, Hall pioneered ways of understanding how discourses on race were used in postwar British media and politics.

Particularly influential were his studies of how racial discourse was used to create ‘moral panics’ around ‘crises’ such as ‘muggings’ in Britain in the 1970s, thereby justifying increased policing, particularly of black communities (Hall, 2021a/1978; Hall et al., 2017/1979). His insights on this subject are particularly pertinent to the moral panics that have been produced around all five urban music genres on which this project focusses.

Hall also argued (2021b/1997) that, in opposition to biological definitions, ‘race’ is a ‘floating signifier’, and, like a language, it is constructed through discourse. The meanings of the language of race, argues Hall (2021b/1997, p.362), cannot be fixed; rather they are “made to mean something different in different cultures, in different historical formations at different moments in time”. Importantly, argues Hall, this is not to say that there are no differences other than those which are produced through language. Differences, such as skin colour, do exist in the world, but it’s only when they’ve been organized within language that these differences “acquire meaning and become a factor in human culture and regulate conduct” (Hall, 2021b/1997, p.364). Hall focusses on the way this language is practiced, and the meanings that it produces in relation to other discursively produced classifications such as gender, through representation. The signifier of race, he argues, functions to make nature and culture equivalent, “So that once you know where the person fits in the classification of natural human races, you can infer from that what they’re likely to think, what they’re likely to feel, what they’re likely to produce, the aesthetic quality of their productions, and so on” (Hall, 2021b/1997, p.367). Hall’s work has been highly influential in the expressive arts as well as in academic scholarship, particularly for the ‘Black Workshop Movement’ of the 1980s, whose film and video work will be explored in more detail below.

Another important theorist for this project is a former PhD student of Stuart Hall’s: Paul Gilroy (2013/1987, 1993a, 1993b, 2004, 2005, 2010, 2017). Gilroy’s work is particularly instructive in thinking about questions of race, class, nationality, and cultural production. In *There Ain’t No Black in the Union Jack* (2013/1987), Gilroy situates the study of ‘race’ in relation to class and culture, arguing that it cannot be reduced to the former, and that the latter is an integral medium through which the formation of race, class, and nation can be understood. He notes

dramatic changes in the demographic of Britain's workforce, away from white male producers of surplus value towards multi-gendered and multi-racial producers of many different types of value and a large unemployed 'surplus population' whose struggles must be taken into account. These changes require class analysis to be "opened up so that it can be supplemented by additional categories which reflect different histories of subordination" (Gilroy, 2013/1987, p.7), not just workplace exploitation. He embarks on this 'opening up' by shifting the object of analysis from class to how classes are formed, a process "in which racialization plays a key part"; in the same vein, he shifts the object of analysis from 'race' to 'race formation', which highlights the processes through which a person's observable characteristics are given racial significance and transformed into "concrete systems of differentiation" (Gilroy, 2013/1987, p.23, p.35). It is important to recognise, he argues, that these two processes of class and race formation are not identical, though they may sometimes become mutually entangled.

Alongside the work of Stuart Hall, Gilroy's notion of race formation is directly inspired by the work of Michael Omi and Howard Winant (2014/1983). In Britain, Hall had pioneered a move away from notions of racial fixity, in terms of both biology and culture, emphasising the role of discourse in the construction of race and its resulting fluidity. In the USA, Omi and Winant pioneered this shift from the study of race as an essential human characteristic towards the study of how race is formed by social, economic, and political forces. Gilroy's theoretical advancements in the UK discouraged an overemphasis on social construction that Hall's focus on discourse had sometimes inspired by emphasising how race is bound to physical, not just discursive, processes of production and movement through space and time.

However, Gilroy's work also contrasted with strictly materialist understandings of race, such as the Marxist theories of Robert Miles (1980, 1982, 1984, 1987; also, Miles & Phizacklea, 1977), which proposed that the 'idea of race' could not function as an 'analytical concept' and should, therefore, be subsumed within class analysis in order to combat racism (Miles in Ashe & McGeever, 2011). There are similarities between Miles and Gilroy, in that both argue for the renunciation of race as a way of categorising people. However, Gilroy characterised Miles' work as erroneously rendering all political mobilisations around the concept of race as

“formally equivalent” (Gilroy 1998, p.842). Gilroy argues that the process of race formation means that race is a political category, but that black political organisation is often more than just anti-racism, as it is frequently concerned with utopian critiques of society that aren’t directly focussed on anti-racist action. He argued that, in late-1980s Britain, race “provides a more potent means to organize and to focus the grievances of certain inner-city populations than the languages of class politics” (Gilroy, 2013/1987, p.20). Gilroy emphasises that class formation must be understood as contingent on the struggles faced by particular groups of people in particular places, with the forms of racism faced by black Britons his primary focus.

Gilroy also demonstrates that race plays as important a role in the politics of consumption as it does in the politics of production, particularly in audio-visual youth cultures. Given that the urban music genres that I am concerned with in this project can all be characterised in this way, Gilroy’s work on this topic is particularly insightful. He has written extensively on music in the formation of racial, ethnic, national, and cultural identities (Gilroy, 1991, 1993a, 1993b, 2010). In *Sounds Authentic* (1991) he begins to outline one of his most lasting ideas: that there can be a way of understanding diasporic black identity and cultural expression as unified without relying on racial essentialism. He argues here that analyses of black musical expressions offer a profound way of understanding this unity. Where racial essentialism conservatively identifies music with tradition and culture, characterizing any differentiation within black culture as “*only* apparent rather than real,” Gilroy approaches music as a ‘changing same’ (Gilroy, 1991, p.125, p.126). By this he means that the vast array of different black musical expressions is evidence of the way race is neither a fixed essence nor a fundamentally contingent construction, but is lived day-to-day as an often unstable, though nonetheless coherent, sense of self.

In *The Black Atlantic* (1993a), Gilroy continues his radical critique of racial essentialism and his exploration of cultural production. He distinguishes between three different “dimensions of racial ontology” (Gilroy, 1993a, p.19), by which he means the ways in which race is seen to relate to a person’s being as a subject: how a person exists in the world and forms identities. He conceptualises the distinction between ‘roots’, ‘pseudo-pluralism’, and ‘routes’ as three

distinct racial ontologies. Rooted racial ontologies produce problematic essentialist logics and rigid nationalism, structuring a nationalist imaginary in which the citizen-subject neatly fits into fixed national and cultural borders. This ontology produces essential relations between 'Britishness' and 'whiteness', for example. Opposed to this ontology is a pseudo-pluralist position that sees nothing unitary about race as such; race is instead what the individual makes of it. This second ontology is equally problematic, he argues, as it overlooks forms of power and subordination that are specifically racialised. Instead of a rooted or pseudo-pluralist approach, Gilroy suggests a 'routed' racial ontology. A routed understanding of race emphasises how people are connected and often unified by racial categories, which are produced through the various movements and interactions of people across the world. But it also emphasises that these categories are not essential and can be transformed if understood as such.

In *The Black Atlantic*, Gilroy uses the metaphor of the Atlantic Ocean to explore how the voluntary and involuntary movements of people between Africa, the Caribbean, Britain, and the United States and the routes they took led to the production of what he calls 'black Atlantic culture'. This refers to the many forms of expression that build on these histories of movement and interaction, highlighting the central importance of these histories in the production of modernity, colonialism, post-colonialism, and multicultural society. Exploring this culture allows for an understanding of how race and nationality are not essential features of modern subjects. Rather, they are historically contingent ways of fixing essentially unstable subjects: "The history of the black Atlantic yields a course of lessons as to the instability and mutability of identities which are always unfinished, always being remade" (Gilroy, 1993a, p.xi). The kinds of routes involved in black Atlantic cultural production are those that stem from the diasporic movements of black people between Africa, Europe, the USA, and the Caribbean. As Gilroy states, "diaspora identifies a relational network, characteristically produced by forced dispersal and reluctant scattering," noting that the term opens up debates "around ethnicity culture and identity at an intermediate level somewhere between the local and the global" (Gilroy, 1994, p.207; Gilroy, 1996, p.105). Gilroy (1996), following St. Clair Drake, notes that there have been several African diasporas, and he refers to the latest one, instigated by though not reducible to the trans-Atlantic slave trade, as the black Atlantic. This work on routes and

diaspora was particularly useful in this project for thinking about the representation of different scales of space in urban music videos, and how these relate to changing notions of Britishness. The urban music videos that I analyse in this thesis are a continuation of this black Atlantic cultural production: they have emerged from cultures produced by the movement and settling of people and texts between Africa, the Caribbean, the USA, and the UK. Therefore, they are instructive in thinking about how contemporary British identity is constantly being remade through audio-visual representations and their routes through different spaces.

It is worth noting that Gilroy's notion of racial non-essentialism has been widely accepted in the context of the UK but has been more controversial in the US. While leading American scholars of race such as Saidya Hartman have celebrated Gilroy's work, others such as Fred Moten have challenged his analyses, arguing that he has overstepped in criticising African-American politics, which he would not understand as an outsider (Koshy, 2021). It is worth noting too that Moten's critique in some ways proves Gilroy's point, in that it reveals how national dynamics play an integral role in the formation of race and racial politics, and that different forms of black politics can and do emerge.

A final concept of Gilroy's to consider here is 'conviviality', which he introduced "to refer to the processes of cohabitation and interaction that have made multiculturalism an ordinary feature of social life in Britain's urban areas" (2004, p.xi). For Gilroy, conviviality was most obviously present in urban spaces in which many different groups live in close proximity to one another, but where their differences, whether racial, linguistic, or otherwise, do not inhibit communication and understanding, as the logic of racial essentialism suggests (Gilroy, 2006, p.40). Gilroy argued that conviviality "does not describe the absence of racism or the triumph of tolerance", rather it "suggests a different setting" for the "interpersonal rituals" that seem to establish race (Gilroy, 2004, p.xi). This has proved an influential argument, and much of the subsequent literature on conviviality emphasises the messiness, instability, and resilience that characterises everyday life in multicultural urban spaces (Neal et al., 2019; Amin, 2013; Gilroy, 2006; Karner & Parker, 2011; Nowicka & Vertovec, 2014; Wise & Noble, 2016). Central to

Gilroy's conceptualisation of conviviality, and to the many uses of the concept that it has inspired, is the idea of a radical openness to difference (Gilroy, 2006; Hemer et al., 2020; Nowicka, 2020, p.16).

Conviviality is not simply different people getting along happily, and there are many moments of disagreement and tension in convivial interaction. Furthermore, convivial interaction does not mean that systems of power disappear, or even that they are directly challenged. As Achille Mbembe (1992) argues in the case of post-colonial power relations in Cameroon, convivial interactions can actually reproduce and reaffirm state power. It is wrong, Mbembe argues (1992, p.5), to interpret postcolonial relationships as a binary opposition between "resistance or absolute domination". The power of post-colonial states "involves not just control but conviviality," so "the analyst must watch out for the myriad ways in which ordinary people guide, deceive and actually toy with power instead of confronting it directly" (Mbembe, 1992, pp.24-25). There are significant differences between power relations in formerly-colonised states, such as Cameroon, and formerly-colonising states, such as the UK. Nonetheless, Mbembe's insight can also be applied to the case of London, a city deeply entangled in the history of European colonisation and the way this history structures the contemporary world.

These concepts of race, class, and conviviality are particularly instructive in thinking about the contexts in which the videos I analyse were produced, and how these videos produce meanings. These concepts link to many others that are also important for understanding of contemporary inner-city cultures, such as gender and sexuality. It is beyond the scope of this thesis to cover all of these intersecting concepts, so my main focus will be on race and class. However, at times I will bring gender and sexuality into my analyses, particularly by drawing on the work of Anne Anlin Cheng's (2011) concept of representational 'surrogacy', which is instructive in thinking about the relationship between racialisation, gender, sexuality, capitalism, and representation. I will outline this concept in more detail in Section 6, on Modes of Representation.

This literature, taken together, builds a picture of race, class, gender, and sexuality as categories that are constantly being formed and reformed in relation to one another and through many different interrelating processes and media. A significant feature of the literature discussed above is the shift in focus from essential stable subjectivity to the ways in which subjectivities are unstable and formed through various processes and in relation to one another. As Hall, Gilroy, Cheng, and other scholars propose, representation is one such process, which is undertaken through various forms of media including film, television, news, and music video. This work thus reflects the shift from space to how space is produced in the work of Lefebvre, a productive process in which representation plays a central role. By combining these works on the production of space and racial formation, this project explores how representations in urban music videos relate to spatialised and racialised dynamics in contemporary inner-city London. A key part of these representational dynamics is the notion of scale, which I will now turn to.

Section 3. Spatial Scales

In my analyses of urban music videos, I draw on the notion of spatial scales and their representation in audio-visual texts. I draw on several different concepts in relation to each scale and to the relationship between scales. The ‘transnational’, ‘trans-Atlantic’, ‘diasporic’, and ‘national’ scales have been touched on in the work above. Below I will outline literature on the notion of scale, and the ‘global’, ‘global city’, ‘local’, ‘hyperlocal’, and ‘inner city’ scales.

Lefebvre (1991/1987) argued that scales of space, like space itself, are produced within hierarchies in capitalist economic systems. Lefebvre argued that the national scale was at the top of this hierarchy, by which the spatial and temporal ideals that allow for a capitalist nation state to function are purported as the only ways of producing space. Lefebvre argued that spatial hierarchies cannot eradicate scales:

No space disappears in the course of growth and development: the worldwide does not abolish the local [. . .] the local [. . .] is never absorbed by the regional or even worldwide level. [. . .] All these spaces, meanwhile, are traversed by myriad currents (Lefebvre, 1991/1987, pp.86-88).

This notion of ‘myriad currents’ traversing spaces and scales of space is particularly evocative of Gilroy’s (1993) notion of transnational routes across the black Atlantic. This suggests seeing race formation and the production of representational spaces outside of the strict prism of the national scale. It also suggests seeing representational production as a means of traversing different spatial scales.

As Neil Brenner (2000, p.361, p.369) suggests, through a reading of Lefebvre’s work, the relations between spatial scales are “continuously rearranged and reterritorialized” and that these scales “constitute deeply intertwined moments and levels of a single worldwide sociospatial totality.” Brenner (2000, p.374) also argues that “the urban scale has become a major socioinstitutional forcefield in which the geography of global capitalism is being forged.” So, the urban scale is a field in which the global scale can be understood. as a question of scale and as a struggle against the production of spatial hierarchies. Brenner also notes that the dominating force of the national scale seems to have waned in the current era of globalisation, with transnational corporations playing an ever-greater role in the production of space, so, if Lefebvre were writing today, he would likely articulate the hierarchy differently. Nonetheless, Lefebvre’s insights are still pertinent to understanding the role of scale in the production and representation of space.

Drawing on the work of Manuel Castells (2002), Sassen (1994, 1995, 1996, 2004) has influentially explored the concept of the ‘global city’, specifically how London has developed as a global city since the 1990s (2013). Sassen argues the global city is the product of increased transnational flows in the global economy which do not eradicate the importance of cities but

rather heighten the importance of cities as 'command and control' hubs for the flow of capital and information. The music videos I analyse in this thesis are a product of this globalised context, particularly in the use of buildings associated with London's shift towards global finance city, specifically the towers of Canary Wharf. But these videos also challenge Sassen's sometimes narrow conception of what kind of globalisation is evoked, by highlighting the role of flows, or routes, of diaspora and culture.

Following Lefebvre, Gilroy, Brenner, and Sassen, I will explore various scales of urban space in this thesis. The 'local', and variants thereof, will be of particular importance. The 'local' scale will be explored using a collection of concepts that invoke particular urban spaces within the city, as opposed to the city as a whole. One of these concepts is 'vernacular landscapes', which Jerome Krase and Timothy Shortell (2011, p.371) define as spaces inhabited and made meaningful by "ordinary people living ordinary lives" in globalized urban environments. Vernacular landscapes, they argue, are the spatial setting in and through which a sense of identity and community is produced. These spaces are used and shaped by people in their immediate locale, spaces that show how people live their everyday lives, spaces such as city streets and homes that demonstrate the local heterogeneity of spatial practice. They specifically contrast with more homogenous and globalised forms of spatial production, which build extraordinary and iconic buildings that cannot be accessed, used, or shaped by local communities, such as the towers of Canary Wharf.

A final scale invoked by several videos explored in this project is the 'hyperlocal'. Much of the literature on the notion of 'hyperlocal' has predominantly focussed on news media (Hochman et al., 2014; Jati, 2021; Van Kerkhoven & Bakker, 2017), discussing how new media technologies produce a more spatially focussed form of reporting than that of local and global news. The association of certain music genres – particularly grime, UK rap, and UK drill – with hyperlocal representation has been explored in several academic studies, in which urban music genres are considered to provide a form of hyperlocal representation akin to a news source, a form of ethnography, shedding light on the everyday lives of inner-city residents that are otherwise ignored or suppressed (Dodds, 2023, O'Reilly, 2023; Evans, 2020; White, 2018,

2023). The scale of the inner city is, of course, central to my thesis, and in the next section I will explore literature about the inner city, and how it has been produced as a concept and as a material space.

Section 4. The Inner City

Lefebvre's triad draws attention to how different social practices and forms of representation combine to produce particular spaces and spatial scales. This section will review literature on one such space – the 'inner city' – both as a concept and as a material, physical space. This body of literature is instructive in thinking about how the British inner city, particular that of London, is both a conceptually and physically manifested space, produced through representations of space and spatial practices. This literature also suggests how this space has been understood in academic, popular, and political imaginations. Indeed, it helps to understand the concept has been applied to different issues and places at different times. It is also instructive in thinking about how the history of this space is related to the ways in which it is represented in the urban music videos I analyse in this thesis.

A number of academics have noted that the concept of the inner city first emerged in the US in the 1960s, where it was predominantly applied to inner areas of US cities with large black populations, and was then appropriated by British urban policy makers and sociologists in the 1970s, who noted similarities between British and North American cities (Saumarez Smith, 2016, 2020; Kefford, 2017; Andrews, 2018; Waters, 2023). Otto Saumarez Smith (2016) argues that 'urban modernism' had been the go-to for government and urban planners in the post-war period, which he defines both in terms of planning concepts, such as slum clearance and automobile-centred transport, and architectural concepts, such as the high-rise tower block and industrialised building systems. These planning and architectural concepts are prime examples of Lefebvrian representations of space. It was during this period that large council estates, particularly tower blocks, became material archetypes of inner-city architecture. He

argues that in the 1970s, the landscape of the inner city “gathered a tremendous symbolic resonance,” a mixture of urban decay and soulless renewal (Saumarez Smith, 2016, p.582). During this decade, he argues, a sense of crisis at the state of British society was tied to the disavowal of urban modernism, which was considered to have failed by the conservationists and residents of re-developed areas, and by political and planning elites. In contrast to other researchers of the British inner city, Saumarez Smith only notes race in passing. His core argument is that political and planning elites rejected urban modernism in the 1970s because they conceived it to have played a key role in creating an inner-city crisis, alongside an array of other issues including race relations. This is important literature for this project because modernist social housing estates are the setting of many of the videos I analyse later.

Kefford (2017) also notes the preoccupation of policy-makers with inner-city problems during the 1970s, emphasising the prevalence of assumed connections between race and criminality in national understandings of the inner city. Again, this shows how government policy is implicated in the production of space through dominating representations of space, in this case producing reductive racialised synonymity between black urban populations and criminality. In contrast to these scholars, Waters (2023) explores how the inner city functioned in the popular imagination in literature set in 1960s London. He explores this function through literary descriptions of the movement by train from the suburb to the inner city. Waters makes two main arguments. First, that the inner-city imaginary can only be understood as a place in constant relation to the imaginary of the suburb and the dynamic of escape. His second argument is that the waves of post-war post-colonial migration from the Caribbean to London renewed an emphasis on race as a distinction between respectability and derision, and that this distinction played out in spatial terms in the distinction between the suburb and the inner city. The novels Waters explores, such as V.S. Naipaul’s *The Mimic Men* (1967), are prime examples of representational spaces that represented how London’s inner-city was experienced during this period. Naipaul was a Trinidadian-British writer of Indian descent, so this novel in particular relates to experiences of the inner city for inhabitants who were part of the Caribbean and South Asian diaspora. I argue that urban music videos produced between 1994 and 2021 can be seen in the same way, particularly those that represent inner-city spaces in contrast to spaces such as the suburb, such as Digga D’s *No Diet*.

In a later paper (2020), Saumarez Smith positions the concept of the inner city as central to understanding the transformation of Britain which occurred during the government of Margaret Thatcher. It is important to note that it was during this period that the Right to Buy policy was introduced, which allowed tenants of social housing estates to buy their homes, and which has since led to drastic loss of social housing stock (see Foster, 2015). Saumarez Smith argues that the concept of the inner city was able to touch upon so many issues because of its indeterminacy, meaning that it became shorthand for many different issues, such as race relations, poverty, law and order, and de-industrialization, in different urban spaces across the country. In a similar vein, James Rhodes and Laurence Brown (2018) argue that the inner city is a 'polymorphic' concept that has always drawn together a range of issues, and has evolved over time. In contrast to Saumarez Smith, however, they argue that the concept of 'race' has become "*the* defining feature of the inner city" (p.3243, original emphasis).

While most of the scholars cited above focussed on the emergence of the inner city as a concept or discursive construct, a number of scholars have looked instead at the development of the inner city as a material space. Millington (2011) marks the beginnings of the British inner city as a material space in the nineteenth century. During this period of rapid economic growth an unprecedented influx of workers and immigrants began to settle in cities to live and work. In contrast, Rhodes and Brown (2018) begin their 'archaeology' of the British inner city much later, with the period immediately following the Second World War. They argue that the settlement of immigrants from the New Commonwealth sparked anxieties in the pre-war settled population: "Although those arriving were British citizens, racialised imaginaries of 'black immigrants' structured perceptions of their arrival" (Rhodes & Brown, 2018, p.3245). Settlers from the Caribbean and the Indian subcontinent were forced into poor quality housing, concentrated in areas segregated from the rest of the city, quickly identified by politicians and the news media as "sites of poverty, decay, poor health, crime and vice" (Rhodes & Brown, 2018, p.3245). Rhodes and Brown mark this period from 1945-1970 as one that sees the 'minoritisation' of space, referring to how these immigrant populations were soon considered unassimilable to the 'indigenous' population and in need of constraint within specific areas.

Following this period, argue Rhodes and Brown, came the 'territorialisation' of the inner city, referring to a movement in discourse and policy away from immigration control and a perceived external threat, towards the inner city as a space that facilitated the production of an internal enemy, implicitly and explicitly defined as the black communities that inhabited it. The territorialised period of the inner city allowed for the racialisation of issues of employment, housing, education, and, importantly, law and order: 'blackness', 'crime', and the inner city became discursively aligned, and the inner city became the site of authoritarian policing techniques. The inner city 'riots' or 'uprisings' in the 1980s, and the dominant political discourses that emerged from them, "can be seen as an outcome of the increasingly intense and spatially concentrated policing of the inner city" (Rhodes & Brown, 2018, p.3250). This period of unrest became part of the justification for urban policies that diverted funding from inner-city local authorities to private interests who were granted ever greater control.

Rhodes and Brown argue that, from the 1990s onwards, the inner city has diminished in policy debates, as successive governments have restructured these areas as attractive sites for consumption, accommodation, and capital accumulation. They argue that "Investment, property speculation, welfare cuts, [. . .] large-scale gentrification, and newer migrations, have all reconfigured the racial demography of 'inner cities'" (2018, p.3252, p.3253). They posit that the commodified and fetishised racial and ethnic 'diversity' of inner-city space has been a fundamental feature of this reconfiguration, marking this period as one that sees the 'fragmentation' of the inner city, as more peripheral areas have been regarded as more important concerns for the attention of policy-makers (Rhodes & Brown, 2018, p.3256).

A number of academics have outlined how London has been dramatically transformed since the 1990s, As noted above, Sassen (2013) argues that London became a global city during this period. becoming what has been called a 'global city' (also see Fainstein & Harloe, 2000). Vertovec (2006) argues that during this period London was becoming 'super-diversified', a process through which the number of ethnicities and living situations rapidly variegated. Millington (2011) has outlined how areas once designated as inner city began to be

appropriated by developers for new housing and shopping projects through processes of dispersal, gentrification, and securitisation. Furthermore, he outlines how 'outer-inner cities', areas on the periphery of London like Southend-on-Sea, have become significant entry points for new migrants (Millington, 2012). This correlates with Rhodes and Browns' notion of the inner city's fragmentation, and suggests how the fragmentary forces of capitalist space noted by Lefebvre reached a critical point during this period.

Much academic research has argued that the inner city has historically been associated with specific racialised groups who have historically been subjected to moral panics, criminalisation, and physically and psychological containment (Rhodes and Brown, 2018; Archer and Yamashita, 2003; Gilroy, 1999; Shabazz, 2015; Millington, 2011). Furthermore, there has been extensive research into the relationship between the inner city and policing (Jones et al., 1986; Foster, 1989; Sanders, 2004), much of which has directly focussed on race (Brunson & Gau, 2014; Perera, 2019). Jessica Perera (2019), for example, argues that urban austerity policies and 'estate regenerations' have combined with policing focussed on 'gangs' and 'ghettos' to target and displace black, Asian, and other ethnic and racial minority residents of the inner city.

The ways in which inner-city London is represented in urban music videos from 1994 to 2021 are related to the history of this space. This body of literature is useful in understanding how the space of the British inner city came to be produced and understood, both in political and popular imaginations. Key is the rise of the council estate tower block as the archetypal material manifestation of the inner city. Considering shifts in policy are important for understanding the role of government in the development of the inner city. Considering artistic representations of the inner city produces insights into different imaginaries of this space, and especially how dominant representations of space are challenged and opposed by representational spaces. Considering urban music videos as representational spaces also offers important insights into the relationship between race and space in recent British history: whether given primacy or mentioned in passing, race is always a factor of academic

literature and political discourse on the inner city, thereby producing inner-city London as a racialised space.

Section 5. Representing Urban Space

Lefebvre's triad highlights the role of representations in the production of space and suggests how different kinds of representation, and the power relations between them, produce space differently. My interpretation of his triad proposes that representational spaces often oppose or engage playfully with dominant representations of space, but that the particular manifestation of the triad always differs across time and space. The music videos selected for discussion in this thesis provide a range of images of London's inner city between 1994 and 2021. As such, they highlight the role of representational spaces in the production of this space during this period. It is important, then, to consider particular elements of these representational spaces in more detail. What modes of representation are used in urban music videos? How do these modes relate to other audio-visual traditions? This section will review selected Screen Studies literature to suggest answers to these questions, as this discipline has predominantly concerned itself with what Lefebvre calls representational spaces.

One way in which these themes have been approached is through discussions of '*mise en scène*', foregrounding the space of the 'frame', and what appears within this space. In Bordwell and Thompson's *Film Art*, *mise en scène* refers to "setting, lighting, costume and makeup, and staging and performance" (1979/2016, p.113). Gibbs (2002) and Martin (2014) argue that the concept, in its use in film studies, is fundamentally related to discussions of 'style'. Gibbs provides a slightly more detailed breakdown of elements to be included in a *mise en scène* analysis than Bordwell and Thompson, but also asserts the importance of the frame's 'contents' and the way it is organised. Martin rightly discourages over-emphasising the *mise en scène* to a degree that it is removed from a film's elements of production, or from its

narrative. As this project looks to analyse the role of representation in the production of space, setting will be fundamental in the analysis of all of the selected videos. It is also important to consider how *mise en scène* relates to modes of production and circulation, to cinematography, and to the narrative setting and broader work of storytelling in each music video.

There is a number of important works that explore the relationship between film and the city (see Clarke, 1997; Fitzmaurice & Shiel, 2003; Hallam, 2010, 2012; Donald, 1995; Mennel, 2008). Mark Shiel's (2001) work is particularly instructive in thinking about the relationship between audio-visual productions (in his case cinema) and the city, as a multidisciplinary project marrying the disciplines of Sociology and Film Studies. Nezar AlSayyad (2006) suggests the concept of 'cinematic urbanism', how the modern city is produced in large part through cinematic representation, an assertion echoed by Richard Koeck and Les Roberts (2010). Millington (2016b) develops this concept in his analysis of urbanization and the figure of the migrant in British cinema, suggesting that a cycle of films about migration (made in the late 1990s and 2000s) explores the city as a 'spectre' that 'haunts' spaces beyond or outside the city itself. This work is particularly informative in thinking about the profound changes to British urban space that occurred during the early stages of this project's time-frame, "processes such as gentrification, securitization, widening inequality, the rise and fall of financial markets, and global migration" (Millington, 2016b, p.2). It also informs readings of texts that invoke space outside of the inner city, but that is a surrogate for the inner city, or in which the inner city is eerily present (more on this below).

Paula Massood's *The Urban Chronotope* (1998) and *Black City Cinema* (2003) are instructive in analysing the specific racial dynamics of urban representation. Massood (1998) develops explores how racialised space is constructed cinematically, particularly through the figure of the train, which she sees as materialising the history of African American migration. Massood's works are instructive for my analysis of how histories are materialised in representations of the city, particularly in the use and representation of vehicles, buildings such as tower-block estates, and other objects. Her focus is on American cinema, but there is also useful work on

audio-visual representations of the city that is London specific. In *London in Cinema* (2019/2007, p.5), Charlotte Brunsdon explores the “many different Londons” found in cinema, tracing “the cinematic geography of post-war London, to investigate how the spaces that are, in the cinema, created through *mise en scène*, cinematography and editing, invoke and stage this city.” Brunsdon’s work is instructive in navigating the relationship between the ‘diegetic location’, that which is ‘in’ the music videos, and the ‘real’, or ‘extra-diegetic’ location that is invoked. These insights lead to questions of the relationship between space and ‘place’, and the ways in which ‘real places’ are inserted into the *mise en scène* of music videos, and in some cases are narrativized through the action and the performance of the music.

Anna Viola Sborgi (2023) argues that since 2008 there has been increased international representation of stories about working-class girlhood, particularly in public housing estates, with Andrea Arnold’s *Fish Tank* (2009) paving the way. She outlines a genre of what she calls ‘transnational precarious home films’ within broader representations of girlhood, which “develops in relation to transnational housing spaces and tightly intersects with the stories of the working-class, gendered and racialized people who inhabit them” (Sborgi, 2023, p.125). Sborgi’s chapter is instructive in thinking about the ways gender, race, class, and space interact with one another, and the ways in which these interactions can be explored through audio-visual texts, as representational spaces. Her chapter is particularly useful in thinking about how London’s urban music videos, though local to the city, operate within an international context, helping to relate both audio-visual representations and academic literatures to those from other national contexts, such as Massood’s work on American films.

Clive Nwonka (2017, 2023, also Malik & Nwonka, 2017) has written extensively about the relationship between representations of urban space, particularly London, and representations of race. Nwonka (2017) notes that the genre of British social realism (which will be explored in more detail below) has been closely associated with post-war estates, and more recently with “inner-city and suburban tower blocks” (Nwonka, 2017, p.65). In *Black Boys* (2023), in which he explores what he calls the ‘Black Urban Text’. He describes this as “a generic approach to the representations of Black identities within the inner city,” in which

black working-class male characters are associated with dominant racialised myths of criminality and violence (Nwonka, 2023, p.1).² This genre had its heyday in the early- to mid-2000s, with films such as *Bullet Boy* (2004) and *Storm Damage* (2000). Nwonka argues that the housing estate is a key spatial location of these myths, which came to be known within policing logics as a 'symbolic location': areas "where black communities, often the young, come to view a particular location with something of a proprietorial attachment, resenting intrusion especially by the police, to enforce the law" (Kenneth Newman in Davis, 1989). These locations, Broadwater Farm in north London being the archetypal example, would become the site of disproportionate policing practices targeting black communities. In *Black Urban Texts*, argues Nwonka, the estate often functions as a socio-politically decontextualised space in which habitual violence is performed by black residents, thereby further entrenching racial and class prejudices.

There are parallels between the Black Urban Text and many urban music videos, particularly the presence of black male protagonists, inner-city setting, and themes of criminality and violence. However, there are also differences between the terms, particularly their specific contexts of production. Nwonka defines the Black Urban Text genre as constituted by films and television produced by Public Service Broadcasters (PSB) such as the BBC and Channel 4. Because they are produced in line with the ostensive function of providing a 'public service', alongside other PSB programmes such as BBC News, such representations are involved in a feedback loop of political, police, and media representations that combine to produce racial myths. It is in the context of state or corporate funding that the relationship between representational spaces and dominant representations of space is closest, and in this work Nwonka is particularly focussed on showing how this relationship can reproduce racialised myths about black criminality and violence.

² In *Black Boys*, Nwonka explains that he chooses to use a capital B for Black in acknowledgement of his own racial and cultural identity. I have chosen to use the lower-case b, both in an acknowledgement of the fact that I am not black, and in line with the majority of work I have drawn on, including that of Paul Gilroy.

It is important to note, however, that there are many PSB programmes that do provide radical commentary that challenges these myths, so a nuanced perspective on PSB production is necessary. For example, in a 1994 BBC 2 documentary on jungle music, then-Goldsmiths College-lecturer Koushik Banerjee argues that it is deeply subversive for black artists, such as Shy FX, to make money by playing with the racialised myths that are used to systemically criminalise them and maintain uneven class positions along racial lines (Rave Channel, 2012, 8:40-9:18). Many programmes made by the Black Workshop Movement, whose work will be explored below, were also PSB funded. As will be seen in the following chapters, these myths are often played with in urban music videos.

It is also important to note that Nwonka is nuanced in his critique of Black Urban Texts, suggesting that they are still important representational spaces even if they do sometimes also reinforce reductive racialised myths. Indeed, in May 2025 he wrote about *Bullet Boy* as an “important intervention” in the context of routine erasure and exclusion faced by black British films and filmmakers in the 1990s and early 2000s, and as a “unique visual archive of the past” as it captured a pre-gentrified Hackney (Nwonka, 2025). No representational space is beyond critique, and all offer a way of understanding the particular conjuncture in which they were produced. This is as true of urban music videos as it is of Black Urban Texts or any other form of representational space. It is worth noting, too, how a scholar’s critique of representational spaces can develop over time, and how representation is never static but always embedded in the socio-spatial productions in which we experience everyday life.

Brought together, the work of Gibbs, Martin, Shiel, AlSayyad, Millington, Gilroy, Massood, Sborgi, and Nwonka helps to add nuance to the role of representation in the production of urban space. They emphasise the importance of representations of relations between characters and space, and the dynamics and histories that structure the representations of these characters. This work adds detail to understandings of how representational spaces partake in the production of space through their form, content, and production context. Finally, this work provides insights into how these textual and contextual elements partake in struggles for a right to the city, where contests over access and use of space are conducted

through the medium of representation. As suggested by Nwonka, these dynamics have often been representationally explored through theories of realism. I will now turn to this and several other modes of representation.

Section 6. Modes of Representation

The concept of 'realism' is important in thinking about the relationship between representation and that which is being represented. For over a century scholars have discussed realism as a mode of representation that utilises particular conventions to show reality 'how it really is', in an array of different mediums from painting to cinema to music video. Raymond Williams (1959, 1977) has been particularly influential in theorising audio-visual realism, outlining the notion of a 'realist intention' towards 'social extension', meaning the constant expansion of representation to include more and more untold and marginalised stories (Williams, 1977). He argues that each new wave of realist representation extends the social boundaries of who is represented and how. The realist intention, he argues, involves situating action in the present, with an emphasis on the contemporary, and this action must have a secular metaphysical frame, with the action played out in "exclusively human terms" (Williams, 1977, p.108). Williams outlines these three realist intentions – social extension, contemporaneity, and secularism – as elements of classic realism that predates the advent of film, going back to the bourgeois dramatic theatre of the eighteenth century. Williams adds a final intentional characteristic, only present in some realist texts: the intention 'to be interpreted', as opposed to, for example, merely empathised with. Williams uses the example of Ken Loach's social realist BBC television play *The Big Flame* (1969) to explore this interpretive intention. He argues that, through the film's use of characters playing themselves in the actual locations that the film is set, a dramatic and political hypothesis is developed: "What would happen if we went beyond the terms of this particular struggle against existing conditions and existing attempts to define and alter them?" (Williams, 1977, p.111). In other words, what if the lessons learnt from the realism of the film were taken into the reality

outside of the film? In this sense, the hypothesis of a realist text might instruct an audience in their struggle for the right to the city. To put it in Lefebvrian terminology, representational spaces can suggest new spatial practices that destabilise existing power relations, such as *The Big Flame*'s representation of dockworkers occupying the Liverpool docks, or a music video such as *Pass The Dutchie* representing the occupation of the banks of the River Thames.

As hinted at several times above, the genre of 'social realism' employs the realist mode. Social realism in British film and television realism' is the most important form of representational realism for my thesis, as it has traditionally focussed on marginalised urban communities, often inner-city inhabitants. Therefore, I will now turn to an outline of literature that explores this concept and its various conventions. Many scholars in this field have focussed on different 'movements' or 'cycles' in British social realism (Higson, 1984; Millington, 2016a, 2016b; Rüffert, 2019; Forrest, 2013, 2020; Malik & Nwonka, 2017; Hill, J. 2019, 2022; Wielgus, 2020; Lee, 2022; Nwonka, 2017, 2023). Following Raymond Williams, John Hill (2022) succinctly argues that, in cinema and television, the genre has traditionally aimed at "making visible [. . .] social groups hitherto under-represented within the prevailing representational regimes", characteristically depicting working-class communities and the spaces in which they live and work (Hill, J. 2022, p.325). The running theme in these studies that is most pertinent to this thesis is the exploration of how the genre has represented particular communities in different ways over time, and how the representation of these communities relates to representations of the spaces they inhabit. This thesis will continue this line of inquiry, though shifting the focus to the often-overlooked expressions of urban music videos.

One key movement in British social realist cinema that has received much scholarly attention was the so-called 'kitchen sink' movement of the late 1950s and early 1960s (Higson, 1984; Hill, J. 2019; Gómez Reverte, 2021; Gardner, 2019; Mello, 2024; Murphy, 2019; Cooke, 2014; Lee, 2022). Hill (2019) argues that these films utilised social realist conventions to focus on the social lives of individual male working-class characters and the spaces where they lived, played, and sometimes worked – and from which they often sought to escape. Andrew Higson (1984) argues that, in these 'kitchen sink' films, location shots of the landscape and townscape

were often used as part of the narration of events, whereby space became “a signifier of character, a metaphor for the state of mind of the protagonists,” what he calls ‘poetic realism’ (Higson, 1984, p.3). Problematically, he argues, this created a tension between a moral commitment – to explore the socio-economic conditions of the working-class protagonist and the spaces they inhabit – and an aesthetic commitment – to make this exploration attractive for a predominantly bourgeois audience to look at. Simon Lee (2022) is more forgiving of the use of space in the kitchen sink films, arguing that they represented space not as mere backdrop but as an active participant in storytelling and the formation of alternative working-class identities. He argues that the monolithic, un-spatialised notion of the ‘proletariat’ was given nuance by a focus on the specificities of where working-class people lived, and the different spaces different members of this community frequented.

Focussing on a later period, David Forrest (2013, 2020) argues that, from the 1990s onwards, a movement of ‘new realists’ emerged in British cinema and television, including Andrea Arnold amongst others. Forrest describes the new realist approach to representation as “lyrical” (Forrest, 2013, 127), reminiscent of the ‘poeticism’ noted by Higson of the kitchen sink movement. Central to new realism, argues Forrest, is the use of images of space as a means to suggest a multitude of possible meanings as an active part of the narrative, rather than to augment a specific sociopolitical narrative message produced primarily through dialogue and subject matter. The discussion of space in British social realist cinema and television is pertinent for this thesis, as it is instructive in thinking about how images of space are involved in the delivery of particular meanings in the music videos that I analyse. I found this work insightful when thinking about the representation of space in urban music videos, how space is represented ‘poetically’ or ‘lyrically’, and the tension between aestheticism and socio-economic critique.

The work of Hill, Higson, Forrest, and others often overlook, or only note in passing, the question of how realism and space relate to representations of race. One theorist whose work on social realism and representations of race is particularly instructive in thinking about these questions is Nwonka. In *Black Boys* (2023), Nwonka categorises the Black Urban Text as a sub-

genre of social realism. He argues that, though many Black Urban Texts attempt to actively challenge racialised myths, their core reliance on both traditional social realist conventions and representations of black urban youth conflict actually reinforces these myths (Nwonka, 2023, p.231). Through these generic conventions, Nwonka says, representations of the lives and, importantly, bodies of black people “become camouflaged within the abject phenomenology of Black death as an inferential media spectacle” (Nwonka, 2023, p.6). The representation of violence committed by black people, particularly towards other black people, thus deflects attention from critical socio-economic or political explorations in the discourses of the mainstream media, the police, and the political elite.

This is a marked difference, Nwonka (2023) argues, to the way space is represented in the Black Workshop Movement of the 1980s. This movement included Sankofa, Black Audio Film Collective (BAFC), Ceddo Film and Video Workshop, and Retake Film and Video Collective, who received financial support from Channel 4, the Greater London Council, and some other local authorities for the development of collectives of black and Asian artists. Nwonka argues that these collectives “saw screen media as a counter-hegemonic tool against the dominant narratives of race”, and produced films and television programmes that deviated from traditional social realist conventions in order to expose how these conventions were used to reify racialised myths (Nwonka, 2023, p.17).

A particularly notable film from this period is BAFC’s *Handsworth Songs* (1986; for an in-depth study of BAFC’s oeuvre, see Eshun & Sagar, 2007). Eshun (2004) argues that *Handsworth Songs* poetically contextualised the violent conflicts between local communities and police that erupted in Handsworth, Birmingham, and Broadwater Farm, London, in 1985 within wider contexts of racism, racist policing, and the way Britain’s historic colonial power continued to shape the present. Nwonka (2023) argues that the films and programmes of the Black Workshop Movement, such as *Handsworth Songs*, employed a number of different representational methods and images, including using archival footage, interviews, and soundscapes. Similarly, Alison Wielgus (2020) notes that BAFC’s films developed a new visual language by employing “hybrid documentary and fictional forms, recycling news footage to

comment on the limitations of national archives” (Wielgus, 2020, p.107), while Mark Fisher described *Handsworth Songs* as a “complex palimpsest” of sound and imagery (Fisher, 2011). Importantly, Nwonka argues, the Black Workshop Movement did more than simply counter racist stereotypes of black identities by presenting positive black imagery. Rather, there was a dual representational goal of, on the one hand, showing more truthful and positive scenes of black and Asian British lives, and, on the other, using novel narrational and aesthetic conventions to expose the mechanisms through which these lives were systematically maligned by mainstream film and television.

Wielgus (2020) notes that BAFC’s primary directors – John Akomfrah and Reece Auguiste – were critical of realist cinematic conventions and archives, both of which support the notion of a hegemonic ‘official memory’ of events. Auguiste argued that texts from Britain’s national and historical archives confronted the audience with “fragmented residues of histories of migration,” which serve this hegemonic narrative while omitting a multitude of others (Auguiste, 1988, p.5). The collective extended this critique to television newsreels in *Handsworth Songs*, of which Auguiste stated that “we had to poeticise that which was captured through the lenses of the BBC and other newsreel units – by poeticising every image we were able to succeed in recasting binary oppositions between myth and history” (Auguiste, 1988, p.7). Auguiste concludes by arguing that “Poetry in combination with a set of multi-layered images forges a lyrical space into which British post-war sensibilities around race could be conceived anew” (Auguiste, 1988, p.7).

This literature on the poetic and lyrical use of imagery and sound in the kitchen sink, new realist, and Black Workshop Movements is instructive in thinking about the ways spaces are seen and heard in urban music videos, as representational spaces, and how these representations relate to official discourses, dominant representations of inner-city space and the people who inhabit it. As a number of these works outline, social realism is often considered as a genre with particular, though frequently changing, representational conventions. Urban music genres have often been associated with the conventions of realism, as expressions of what life is really like in inner-city London. But, like the ‘complex palimpsests’

of the Black Workshop Movement, many of the videos included in this thesis use alternative representational modes to those associated with realist genres or conventions, such as representational surrogacy, the carnivalesque, the weird, and the eerie. I will now outline each of these in turn.

Cheng (2011) defines her concept of representational 'surrogacy' as a form of expression found in performances that seem suspended between "being an object on display and a subject hiding in plain sight" (Cheng, 2011, p.1029). A representational surrogate requires the agency of a person to make themselves thing-like. However, argues Cheng, it is a "peculiar form of agency" that is limited by compounding power dynamics that lace through space in London: dynamics of class, race, gender, sexuality, and nationality (2011, p.1032). The surrogacy through which this agency is expressed hinges on the way in which bodies inhabit space and are spaces in themselves: it is a mode of representation that "compels us to confront the inherent, taut intimacy between being a thing and being a person" (Cheng, 2011, p.1038). Whether this be the space of clothes, homes, prison cells, cars, streets, or otherwise, the ways in which we see (or don't see) bodies is highly political. Through performance, artists represent alienating restrictions to human subjectivity, while simultaneously highlighting its inherent and fundamental possibilities.

What has come to be known as the 'carnavalesque mode' was first developed by Mikhail Bakhtin (1984/1965), who explored the 'carnivalization' of literature through the works of François Rabelais and Fyodor Dostoevsky. The 'carnavalesque' is a literary mode that uses humour and chaos to undermine and upend the official power structures that control everyday life. Importantly, he built this concept through an analysis of the social practice of medieval carnival, which he saw as a form of 'folk culture' that was distinctly separated from and directly opposed to the hegemonic official culture. He argued that the carnival, and therefore the carnivalesque, should be understood as exposing a 'two-world condition'. On the one hand there is the official everyday world of official social hierarchies, controlled by the church and the monarchy and their associated rituals in the medieval period. On the other hand, there is a "second" world, "outside officialdom", produced by carnival practices of

humour and subversion (Bakhtin, 1984/1965, p.6). The carnivalesque, argues Bakhtin, allows for a temporary escape from the everyday world.

Several scholars have taken issue with Bakhtin's conceptualisation of carnival as producing a 'second world'. For example, Esther Peeren (2007) argues that London's Notting Hill Carnival, which is particularly important in this thesis, does not take place in a Bakhtinian 'second world', but very much in the space and time of Notting Hill, west London. Her focus is on the period up until the 1990s, during which "Carnival remained a site of conflict, annually enacting a literal battle over the streets of Notting Hill," arguing that this "openly conflictual character distinguishes it from the Bakhtinian carnival," which emphasises a separation between worlds (Peeren, 2007, p.71). In this thesis I am focussing on the period after this intense conflict. In line with Peeren, though, Alleyne-Dettmers (1998) argues that "at Notting Hill, we are not looking at a generic Carnival. We are looking at a historically and culturally specific model, which has its origins not only in the African traditions that were transported to the Caribbean, but also in the European traditions brought by the various colonizers" (Alleyne-Dettmers, 1998). The characterisation of the second world creates a problematic distancing of the practice of carnival, and therefore the carnivalesque, from its temporal and spatial situation. However, the notion of the carnivalesque as a mode of representation that temporarily turns the social order on its head through humour is a useful idea to work with. It is also an idea that need not be related to the actual practice of Notting Hill Carnival.

Other modes of representation that I draw on in this thesis are the 'weird' and the 'eerie'. Mark Fisher (2016) explores these modes through analyses of literature, film, and television. He argues that these two modes are related to the Freudian notion of the '*unheimlich*', which is usually translated as 'uncanny' but is more accurately translated as 'unhomely'. Fisher defines the weird as representing things that don't belong, things that are there but shouldn't be, and an accompanying sense that something is 'wrong'. This is often produced through the use of a threshold through which one accesses a world that undermines the concepts and frameworks we have previously considered to govern our reality. This threshold might be a door in a building, or it might be a national border. The latter highlights the link between

feelings of national identity and the nationalist assertion that those from elsewhere don't belong and are in some way (racial, linguistic, religious) weird. For a text to be weird in Fisher's sense, contact must occur between our everyday world and an 'outside' world that is beyond our everyday conceptions of space and time. The everyday world is that which is represented using the conventions of realism. These conventions are incommensurable with and undermined by the conventions of weird representation. Weirdness produces a sense of unreality, but also a sense that what we take to be the everyday real world is actually less real than the weird world we have encountered and that encroaches upon us.

In contrast to the preoccupation with thresholds in weird texts, Fisher says, the eerie is more connected to landscapes partially or totally emptied of human presence. Eeriness encourages a set of questions concerning these landscapes: what happened to produce this emptiness? What kind of agent was involved? Was there an agent at all? Fisher notes that these questions can be posed in a 'Marxian' register: how have the forces governing capitalist society produced these eerie spaces? As suggested by these questions, the eerie is particularly involved in questions of agency, but not necessarily just the agency of humans. The forces of capital lead us to question the agency of objects and the immaterial. An eerie feeling is produced when there is a sense that something should be there (a building, a city, a subject, an agent) but it isn't, or when there is a sense that there is something (an agent, a force, a building, a landscape) controlling one's agency. The "eerie power of landscape," Fisher argues (2016, p.97), reminds us "of the ways in which physical spaces condition perception."

Fisher (2016, p.15) argues that many natural phenomena are more weird or eerie than supernatural phenomena, because of the "generic recognisability" of many supernatural beings. The weird and the eerie is more concerned with the opposition between everyday perceptions, conceptions, and experiences of reality, on the one hand, and those of unreality, on the other. This point about the recognisability of generic conventions, and their impact on the modes of representation that a genre might use, highlights the need to explore the notion of genre in more detail, how it has been theorised in relation to screen and music studies, and how it can be related to the production of space and the formation of subjectivities.

Section 7. Genre

The concept of genre is an important point of departure for this project as it helped to direct the selection of the videos I analysed. Genre plays a role in both the audio and visual elements of music videos, in that the music is often categorised generically, while the visual elements can be seen to relate to generic conventions from film, television, advertising, and theatre, as well as to specific conventions of music videos. Music videos, then, often operate in line with various genres from different artistic disciplines at the same time. In light of this multiplicity, it is pertinent here to review literature on genre in music video studies alongside literature from music and screen studies.

First, I will outline how genre has been explored in music studies. Despite disagreements over the concept's utility and ethics, genre is the foremost classifier in contemporary popular music (Holt, 2019/2007; Nowak & Whelan, 2018). Much of the literature on music genre sees the concept as a useful tool for categorising, comparing, and understanding artworks (Aucouturier and Pachet, 2003; Atton, 2010; Frow, 2014). Holt (2019/2007, p.42) argues that the concept of genre can help to refer to particular kinds of music that exist in a "distinctive web of production, circulation, and signification." There has also been much scholarly exploration of the tension between genre as a tool for developing musical communities around particular expressive conventions, and genre as a constraining set of rules that oversimplify the output of specific artists or forms of identity, often in relation to the notion of 'authenticity' (Aujla-Sidhu, 2021; Gilroy, 1991; Huq, 2003; Wiltsher, 2016; Back, 2000).

As noted in Chapter 1, the notion of 'urban music genres' relies on a contested term but one that can still be used usefully, as long as it is recognised as contested and not suggested as a fixed and fundamental category. The contestations around the term 'urban' include the

argument that it is a reductive way of describing the expressions and cultural productions of marginalised, particularly black, artists, as noted by Jonathan Ilan (2012). I am following the work of Joy White (2018) in particular by using the term in this way. As White says of her term 'urban music economy': "I am aware that 'urban' is a contested category, nevertheless it serves as a useful shorthand to denote UK black musical expression" (White, 2018, p.3). I would add to White's explanation to suggest that it also serves as useful shorthand for UK black musical expression that is tied to the notion of the inner city. I follow White in accepting that my term is open to critique and should not be taken as an essential or fixed category; rather it is a useful way of organising particular genres and texts. In the case of this project, these are videos associated with the genres of jungle, UK garage, grime, UK rap, and UK drill. An important field of research has also looked into the criminalizing of particular music genres in the city (Scott, 2020; Ilan, 2012; Silverstone, 2016; Quin et al., 2022), with Lambros Fatsis's (2019, 2021) work particularly useful for this project in its analysis of the policing of grime and drill music in relation to a long history of the policing of black British creative expression. I will provide a more detailed account of each of these genres as I look at them chronologically in Chapters 4 and 5.

The concept of genre has been discussed in much the same way in screen studies as it has in music studies (Cornea, 2017; Bignell & Woods, 2022; Calvert et al., 2007; Creeber, 2023; Schatz, 1977; Williams, 1984; Nair, 2021; Berry-Flint, 2003; Neale, 1990, 2004). Berry-Flint (2003) notes that film critics have often derided genre as antithetical to modernist aesthetics' emphasis on individual formative vision. She argues that this view began to change in the latter half of the twentieth century, shifting away from individualist priorities towards a focus on 'cycles' of films and an emphasis on intertextuality. Ritzer (2021) outlines how genre has shaped every area of contemporary media culture, including film, television, and computer games. The concept, he argues, enables various forms of media criticism, including the kind of cultural-historical criticism I embark on in this thesis, which uses the concept of genre to organise analyses of how artistic expression relates to urban history.

Diane Raiton and Paul Watson (2011) look specifically at music videos in relation to genre. They argue that genre is primarily a way of purposefully categorising cultural products into discrete groups based on common properties, but that it is messy, arbitrary, and always open to negotiation. They note that genre functions differently depending on each medium and cannot be straightforwardly transposed from music or film onto music video. Despite this messiness, they argue, it is often useful to draw on the concept of genre in explorations of the politics of representation, as it can help to analyse whether representations of raced, gendered, or sexualised identity in a given text are unusual or if they are prevalent features of a movement. This is an instructive course of inquiry, though I would add that it is useful for the analysis of representations of not just identity but also of space and the relationship between the two. Finally, they note that discussions of genre and music video often conflate the music track's genre with that of the music video, so that a music video for a hip hop track is necessarily a hip hop music video. In opposition to this tendency, they outline four generic categories of music video representation, which might appear in any number of music genres. First is the 'pseudo-documentary video', which uses a realist mode of representation akin to documentary films or television. Second is the 'art music video', which uses more experimental modes, emphasising these aesthetic qualities over narrative. Third is the 'narrative video', which tell a story in a similar way to a short film. Finally, there is the 'staged performance video', which features the music artist/s performing the track in a staged setting. Raiton and Watson's genres can be instructive in thinking about the way music videos can be categorised through their visual conventions. I will draw on these categories while exploring each video, as they are useful typologies for exploring and comparing how each video represents inner-city space. I will now turn to a broader review of literature on music videos, before narrowing the tour towards urban music videos.

Section 8. Music Video

As noted by many academics working on the subject, there has been a lack of critical scholarly attention to music videos (Caston, 2019; Railton & Watson, 2005, 2011; Korsgaard, 2017; Vernallis, 1994). Simon Frith, Andrew Goodwin, and Lawrence Grossberg (2005/1993) provided an early intervention in their book of collected essays *Sound and Vision: The Music Video Reader*. This book emphasised a balanced approach to both image and music in the analysis of music videos, in opposition to prevailing analyses that had hitherto privileged the former. As would be expected of its time of publication, *Sound and Vision* focusses primarily on the relationship between music video and television. Railton and Watson (2011) and Carol Vernallis (2013) have since both critiqued academic discussions of 1990s music videos that did little to differentiate between music videos and the platforms on which they were displayed, arguing that the same mistake must be avoided in discussions of music videos that are distributed on Internet platforms. These platforms were non-existent when *Sound and Vision* was first published, with YouTube only released in the same year as the re-publication of the book in 2005.

Tomáš Jirsa and Mathia Bonde Korsgaard (2019) offer a useful outline of the dramatic developments in the production, distribution, and reception of music videos over the past few decades, particularly the increased relevance of the Internet. They argue that YouTube's online popularity – and its functions of uploading, liking, commenting, and sharing – mean that the platform has become more than just a two-way distribution and reception channel. Rather, YouTube “enables, conditions, solicits, and informs music video practices and aesthetics,” as well as “archiving, stocking, curating, and allowing this audiovisual content to circulate” (Jirsa & Korsgaard, 2019, p.116). In light of these changes in production, distribution, and reception, Jirsa and Korsgaard suggest thinking about contemporary music videos as ‘intertextual’, “involving the multitude, co-presence, and overlapping of mutually clashing voices” (Jirsa & Korsgaard, 2019, p.117). This work is useful for thinking about how the internet has impacted the way music videos are made, distributed, and received. They note that internet platforms such as YouTube have made it much easier for people outside the mainstream music industry to share music videos and made it possible to watch videos in far more spaces, whereas the television era of MTV's heyday was mainly restricted to the home.

As well as their typology of music video genres, Railton and Watson (2011) offer an interesting critique of music video from the standpoint of feminist and critical race theories. Their methodological approach of applying theories of race, gender, and sexuality to music videos is instructive to this project in its attempt to answer questions on the formation of subjectivity in inner-city London's music videos. However, space plays a minor role in their approach, and their focus is predominantly on the US. Emily Caston has written extensively on music video production in Britain (2014, 2017, 2018, 2019, 2020), and collaborated with Dylan Cave (2017) to create the 'British Landmark Music Videos' collection, as part of the 'Fifty Years of British Music Video' project and the '100 British Landmark Music Videos' collection for the BFI National Archives. Caston outlines that London was the centre of the UK's music video production industry, concentrated in and around Soho (2019, p.486). Since its beginnings, however, the music video industry has become far less geographically concentrated, while technological advancements have led to a blooming video production industry, as Stan Hawkins and Lorio Burns outline (2019).

These advancements have also led to more accessible equipment and the growth of a more informal, low-budget, DIY music video production industry in conjunction with the established, major label-funded industry that Caston and Cave focus on. The work of Joy White (2016, 2017, 2018, 2020) and Orson Nava (2021) are particularly important in understanding how grime music and music video production has developed in the British music video context, and for understanding this more informal video industry. White's 2016 book *Urban Music and Entrepreneurship: Beats, Rhymes and Young People's Enterprise* was the first academic work to "foreground the socio-economic significance of the UK urban music economy, with particular reference to Grime music" (White, 2018, p.2), and she has continued to write about the way grime has been an immensely successful business within the UK and as a cultural export (White, 2018). As indicated, she defines grime as part of the 'urban music economy', a term she uses to describe:

a grassroots and informal economic community of interacting music-making individuals, organisations and consumers. Solidly underpinned by a DIY ethic, these individuals and organisations provide goods and services that are allied to black

musical practice. Collaborative working is a prominent feature in this economy. It is a complex fabric containing a multiplicity of roles and practitioners operating within and across the sector as artists and as entrepreneurs (White, 2018, p.3).

White's work, then, also helps to bring a number of important factors into the picture, particularly the importance of race and grassroots collaboration outside of the mainstream music and music video industries, emphasising the importance of community.

Orson Nava builds on White's work, arguing that the production of grime music videos acts both as "a creative industries sector that contests dominant systems of ownership and control, and as an instrument of radical ethno-cartography through which racialised subjects can lay claim to urban space" (Nava, 2021). Nava notes the importance of increased availability and affordability of low-cost high definition (HD) digital video cameras and editing software, which "facilitated the formation of a DIY independent music video production sector," and which augmented subcultural music production (Nava, 2021). His work is helpful not just in understanding technological developments but also how these related to an industry that was being destabilised as music labels and terrestrial television broadcasters were bypassed by DIY video producers and online platforms. Furthermore, he argues that grime videos produce maps of the city and the artists' place in it. This is for both political and practical reasons: "As well as acting to anchor their producers in particular urban spaces this approach is also highly pragmatic given the prohibitive costs of studio or special effects-based productions" (Nava, 2021).

Nava's work on grime music videos is especially informative because he has first-hand experience as a music video director both in the commercial industry and in DIY grime video production. Given this experience, he has specified grime as particularly important in terms of the relationship between audio-visual production and spatial contestation. The spatial anchoring found in grime music videos is a way to "symbolically claim physical urban space, and contest existing racialised hierarchies, institutional structures and urban power relations" (Nava, 2021). The symbolic claiming and contesting of urban space through music video

production offers an important way of exploring the notion of the right to the city. This element of grime music videos, he argues, is different to how space was used in the more commercial music videos of UKG, for example. They had a different relationship to the use of space because the production agencies mediated location choices, rather than the artist shooting a video in their local area. Nava's work, then, helps to consider the ways in which different approaches to and uses of space are central to the developments of particular genres and generic conventions. Nava's work is particularly useful in thinking about how access to and control over particular spaces relates to the production of urban music videos. While Nava focusses primarily on grime music video production, and its difference from UKG music production, I will look to draw on his work in thinking about the role of music videos in the jungle, UK rap, and UK drill scenes, and how these videos represent and produce inner-city London.

There has been growing academic attention to the genres I focus on in this thesis, which are increasingly written about in books and journals, as shown by the work of White, Nava, Fatsis, and others. However, it is also important to look to other sources of information to provide context, as people with knowledge of these scenes often operate outside of academic settings. One such source is YouTube, which contains many informative documentaries that I will draw on throughout the thesis. YouTube channel Link Up TV made a documentary about Channel U called *Home Invasion: The Story of Channel U (Documentary) | Link Up TV Originals*, featuring a number of artists who were platformed or inspired by the channel talking about its history and cultural significance (Link Up TV, 2023).

In this documentary, grime MC Scorcher (Tayó Grant Jarrett) describes how Channel U influenced artists to move from performing 'sets' – MCs going back-to-back on pirate radio or for DVDs such as *Risky Roadz* – to producing tracks that could be shown on the channel (Scorcher in Link Up TV, 2023, 1:04:17-1:04:43). An MCs set would often draw on lyrics from many different tracks, or lyrics that weren't part of a stand-alone track at all, in the course of a freestyle session, sometimes hours long. A freestyle is the delivery of lyrics by an MC, with or without a beat or backing track: it's a way for an MC to show off their lyrical prowess,

jumping on different beats at different times, on radio sessions, live shows, or videos. Freestyling stems from 'toasting', a style of talking over beats which originated in Jamaica, and is a feature of a number of rap subgenres, particularly those associated with pirate radio such as jungle, UKG, and grime. Lyrics could be performed over any number of backing tracks, and part of the enjoyment was to hear the same lyrics over different backing tracks. Official tracks, on the other hand, would be an individual piece of music, often part of an album, which would have official lyrics for a specific backing music track. This suggests that different music video platforms require different production methods and even lyrical conventions, and that there is a reciprocal relationship between music videos and the platforms through which they are distributed.

Conclusion

Taken together, this literature (used broadly to include documentaries such as *Home Invasion*) produces a cityscape within and through which I situate this thesis. There are several disciplinary 'districts' that this tour has moved through and connected. This, then, is one cornerstone of the project's multidisciplinary: that literature from several disciplines has been used to inform the design of the project and the analyses that I undertake in the following chapters. My analyses in the following chapters strive to pay critical attention to the fact that representation and the inner city are not distinct entities, and that the literature reviewed here is not merely a source of information. Following Lefebvre, it is important to consider how the space of the inner-city is in part produced in and by this literature, and by this thesis itself: how this literature acts in some respects as dominant representations of space, and in other respects as representational spaces. Furthermore, it is important to consider how the urban music videos I analyse tell stories of the history of this space, while they also partake in its production as representational spaces. Lefebvre's notion of representational spaces implies what he imagines visual art, music, poetry, and other forms of artistic expression to do: representations express and produce how space is lived, and show

how there is always space for difference. It is with this literature in mind that the project's methodology was formed, which I will present in the next chapter.

Chapter 3

Methodological Routes through London's Inner City

Aimless wanderings through space can be an enjoyable and profound experience, particularly in dense urban environments full of crossroads and chance encounters. This is the experience of the 'flâneur', a literary figure popularised by Charles Baudelaire and developed by many other writers including Walter Benjamin (see Baudelaire, 2018/1863; Benjamin, 1999/1982). The name 'flâneur' comes from the French '*flaner*', meaning 'to stroll', and this captures the way this figure moves through space, particular the urban spaces of Paris in the nineteenth and twentieth century, by deliberately strolling through the city and experiencing it in a leisured manner. This leisureliness has led to critiques of the flâneur as someone, almost always a man, of wealth and privilege who can wander through and experience the city at their ease, without a definite aim (Brunsdon, 2019/2007). This project does have an aim, though, which is to explore the research questions set out in Chapter 1.

A methodological route has been developed and implemented in order to carry out this objective. Following Brunsdon (2019/2007, p.13), this involves thinking of London as a 'biographical city'. This idea:

permits an understanding of the imagined London of a film as a city in which individual characters understand their lives partly topographically, through journeys that they make, or can't make, or aspire to make. The biographical city has destinations of habit, impossible destination and destinations of desire and memory.

The biographical city encompasses the city of the flâneur, as this is one way in which an individual can experience urban space. But the biographical city also includes far more banal experiences and journeys, such as the commute to work, and also journeys that are imagined, remembered, or dreamed of. The biographical city, then, is a wider scale for understanding representations of urban space than the narrow scale offered by the flâneur. It is more appropriate for understanding representations of working-class and diasporic stories, such as those represented in London's urban music videos.

While Chapters 1 and 2 outlined the landscape in which this project is situated, this chapter will explain the methods by which this project proceeds in its explorations of London's urban music videos from 1994 to 2021. The chapter is divided into 7 sections. Section 1 will discuss how the central organising concepts outlined in the Introduction and the Literature Review are used for the analysis of the various forms of data. Section 2 will discuss the ontological foundations of the thesis, drawing on the work of Lefebvre and Gilroy. Section 3 will discuss the epistemological foundations, outlining the ways in which knowledge of this world is produced, drawing particularly on the work of Donna Haraway. Section 4 will discuss the methodology by which the videos have been selected as part of a data sample. In this section I also outline the importance of secondary sources such as published interviews and documentaries. Section 5 will discuss the interview sampling methods, both for the first-hand interviews that I conducted and second-hand interviews that I found online. It also discusses interview analysis methods and the procedures I adopted to ensure my research was ethically sound. Section 6 outlines how I analysed the music videos, drawing on the project's guiding concepts and the ontological and epistemological foundations. Section 7 will look at the 1982 music video of Musical Youth's *Pass The Dutchie* in order to illustrate how I employ the methodologies laid out below, and to set the scene for the following chapters. I have selected this video as an example of how I analyse music videos in the following chapters. It is also an insightful case study for the way it provides a historical context for the time-frame I focus on in this thesis.

Section 1. Ontology

The core concepts that guide this project involve important ontological assumptions about the world this project looks to explore. As noted previously, one central organising concept is Lefebvre's theory of the production of space. Lefebvre (1991) employs an explicitly materialist ontology in his theory of spatial production, but an ontology that also acknowledges material space as produced co-constitutionally, 'trialectically' and non-hierarchically, by physical, social, and mental processes (Pierce & Martin, 2015). In this project I will take this ontology forward, by proposing that the music videos that make up the primary data are constitutive elements of the spaces of London, particularly inner-city spaces. In other words, the world this project looks to explore is material and produced through the triad of spatial practices, dominant representations of space, and representational spaces. The ontology I am proposing, in line with Lefebvre is that urban space consists of representations, subjective experience, practical activity and the material, built environment. Urban music videos allow you to 'access' this reality in a partial, but nonetheless useful manner.

A second central ontological foundation for this project comes from the work of Gilroy (1993). His idea of a routed ontology in relation to the production of race will be used to supplement Lefebvre's spatial triad. In the ontology of the world that this project looks to explore, people are ontologically 'routed' subjects who have been formed by the many routes by which they and those who have come before them have journeyed through the world, and the many spaces through which these routes have passed.

The material world this project looks to explore is an unstable reality. This ontological foundation – commitment to a material reality, in part produced by representations – generates interesting questions about representational conventions, particularly those thought of as 'realist'. It is worth noting that within the ontological foundations and limits of this project all representations, whether 'realist', 'weird', or otherwise, are part of this material

reality, even the most surreal or fantastical. This is not to say that the videos are reducible to the material circumstances of their production, distribution, or reception. Likewise, these material circumstances are not reducible to the textual elements of the videos. Rather, it is to say that there is no stable boundary between the textual and contextual elements of the videos I analyse in the thesis. Following from this ontological foundation, I will explore how each video relates to the shared material reality of inner-city London, in part through representation and in part through the spatial practices that allow for these representations to be produced.

I assert that there is a shared reality in which we live, that it is produced by a combination of processes, and that we live in it differently depending on our situation in relation to intersecting power structures. This is a culturally informed materialist position, such as that which Lefebvre (2015/1968) developed. Following Lefebvre, these power structures are spatial and trialectical, and they exist in the unstable material world. But this world is not a passive or neutral space waiting to be encountered and known, but an active entity in the production of knowledge. This ontology, therefore, has epistemological ramifications, which I will explore in the next section.

Section 2. Epistemology

This project proposes that knowledge, spaces, and subjectivities are never produced in separation from one another. In light of this proposal, I consider this project to play a role in the production of space, not just to describe or interpret how space is produced. As noted by Pierce and Martin (2015), Lefebvre (1991) argues that epistemology is part of the mental field, and therefore an element through which space is produced, not simply a way of producing knowledge about space. Lefebvre's (1991) intervention was essentially ontological not epistemological, and actually 'hostile' to epistemology: "[Lefebvre's] goal . . . is not to define

how to “know” and examine (social) space but to posit just what, ontologically, (social) space is” (Pierce and Martin, 2015, p.1283). While engaging with Lefebvre’s ontology, I incorporate an epistemic approach that is not inhibited by the demand to ‘know’ space as a unitary whole. I employ an interpretivist epistemology to produce knowledge that is ‘intersubjective’ and necessarily incomplete (Hiller, 2016). This epistemological foundation emphasises that a researcher is not an isolated, objective observer but an active participant in the production of space. In line with this epistemological stance, I have chosen to employ a first-person mode of address, as a reminder that these views are grounded in my inter-subjective engagement with the data.

Following from the notion that we are all situated within a shared reality is the notion that we can have knowledge about this reality by exploring the dynamics of this situation. Donna Haraway (1988) called this ‘situated knowledges’, which she opposed to hierarchical objectivist and radical social constructivist knowledge systems. The former performs a ‘god trick’ by constructing a “view from above, from nowhere” that hides the specific situation of those who are constructing this view, often those at the top of a socio-political hierarchy (Haraway, 1988, p.589). From this point of view, all knowledge is universal and can, therefore, be reduced to one language that can explain everything, what Haraway calls ‘reductionism’: “What money does in the exchange orders of capitalism, reductionism does in the powerful mental orders of global sciences. There is, finally, only one equation” (Haraway, 1988, p.580). This relates, I argue, to Lefebvre’s account of the capitalist production of space on the basis of exchange value, by which all space is reducible to its monetary value. Hierarchical objectivism seeks to dominate all other forms of knowledge just as capitalist space seeks to dominate all other forms of space.

The extreme opposite of this position, argues Haraway, are radical social constructivist accounts of knowledge (Knorr-Cetina & Mulkay, 1983; Bijker, 1987; Pinch and Bijker, 1984; Latour, 1987) which argue that all knowledge claims are essentially attempts to establish power relations and cannot, therefore, tell us anything ‘true’ about the real world. This opposition between objectivism and radical constructivism, I argue, correlates with Gilroy’s

exploration of racial ontology, which outlines the dichotomy between rooted essentialists and pseudo-pluralists.

Haraway posits situated knowledges as a challenge to hierarchical objectivism and radical constructivism. Challenging hierarchical objectivity is not to abandon objectivity, as the radical constructivist or pseudo-pluralist does. Indeed, Haraway (1988, p.584) argues that attacks on reductionism should not be based on relativism but 'location': "The alternative to relativism is partial, locatable, critical knowledges sustaining the possibility of webs of connections called solidarity in politics and shared conversations in epistemology." There can be true, objective knowledge produced about the real shared material world, and there are people who know more about a subject than others. Haraway also refers to situated knowledges as 'Feminist objectivity', different forms of knowledge of the real world that stem from an awareness of the embodied nature of knowledge, the location of embodiment, the spatial and mental dynamics that have produced it, and a politics of solidarity and connection. I suggest that Haraway's notion of 'situated knowledges' can be seen as knowledge stemming from the routed ontology suggested by Gilroy: it is, in other words, 'routed knowledge'. Importantly, it is knowledge that is produced through a recognition of space, and through explorations of the ways in which it is produced.

This notion of situated knowledges relates directly to the ontological foundations of this project and its guiding concepts:

Accounts of a "real" world do not, then, depend on a logic of "discovery" but on a power-charged social relation of "conversation." The world neither speaks itself nor disappears in favor of a master decoder. The codes of the world are not still, waiting only to be read [. . .] the world encountered in knowledge projects is an active entity (Haraway, 1988, p.593).

I understand this notion of the world as an 'active entity' in line with Lefebvre's theories of spatial production, of the world as a space that is constantly being produced. I also want to argue that the notion of situated knowledges is directly opposed to the kinds of logics that

are increasingly being used to ‘decode’ urban music and music videos by police forces across the UK. The notion of a ‘master decoder’ is profoundly illustrated by the ‘expert witnesses’ of the Metropolitan Police, who produce readings of urban music and music videos as part of policing practices and criminal prosecutions (Fatsis, 2019), as will be explored in more detail in Chapters 5 and 6. These prosecutions are profound examples of hierarchical objectivity in action. I explicitly support an anti-carceral approach to the treatment of artistic expression, and to the fixity and finality of a criminal sentence.

To return to the analogy of the tour, if the tour guide does not know the area, then the tour group will get lost. There are people who have studied an area and who can lead a tour that is informative and directed, and where no-one gets lost. Those who take this tour will learn about the area through which they have travelled. A radical relativist might criticise any route as a way for the tour guide to assert their power over the group, thereby overlooking the lessons one might learn by following the chosen route. “This inner-city walking tour in London is embroiled in exactly the same power dynamics as this other one I went on in Paris,” they might say. Well, I would agree that there are issues with walking tours through inner-city spaces, particularly when the tour guide isn’t from those spaces and when they aren’t carried out with care and appreciation for those that do live there. As noted in Chapter 1, the way I relate to the inner-city area of New Cross is complicated by the ways I am classed, racialised, and gendered as a middle-class white man. These are important considerations for understanding the kinds of knowledge I can and should try to produce in a project such as this: it is necessary to understand the limits of my situation.

I would also argue that many related power dynamics similarly structure the spaces of inner-city London and Paris, as I have learned through engaging with the *Archiving the Inner City* project. But there are many specific differences, too, and there can be situated knowledges of these differences that actually challenge power dynamics, expressing solidarity in a way that a radical relativist standpoint, through its abandonment of objective knowledge, cannot. Furthermore, there are different forms of knowledge that can inform others, so while I do not have knowledge of being racialised and gendered differently, I can develop knowledge of

racialisation and gendering through reading, listening, watching, and talking with others: through shared conversation. In this sense, the research I have produced in this project has allowed me to lead an informative tour through which the reader will develop an understanding of representations of the inner city in London's urban music videos from 1994 to 2021. This project is a 'situated inquiry' into this substantive topic. In the next section, I will outline how these considerations enabled me to select videos for analysis on a systematic basis.

Section 3. Video Sample

The primary source of data that I analyse in this thesis is what I am calling urban music videos. These videos are representational spaces, in Lefebvre's terms, and there is a wide range of representational approaches taken in music videos that are included within this organising concept. These videos were selected using purposeful sampling methods in order to identify and select information-rich cases, and enable a greater depth of understanding (Patton, 2014; Palinkas et. al, 2015).

My selection of videos was guided by the combination of themes and concepts that the project explores and uses, with some videos speaking to and showing these themes and concepts more loudly and strikingly than others, at least to my ears and eyes. It is not the aim of the project to argue for typicality, comprehensiveness, or generalisability, between different music genres, time periods, spaces, or otherwise. Many other videos could have been selected and, given more space and time, I would like to have included more videos. Further research could draw on other videos or look at the videos I have selected in many different ways, as is the nature of a situated inquiry such as this. This segment of Gilroy's preface to *The Black Atlantic* could equally well describe how I have conceived this thesis and methodically selected the videos for analysis:

It is essential to emphasise that there is nothing definitive here. Black Atlantic culture is so massive and its history so little known that I have done scarcely more than put down some preliminary markers for more detailed future investigations. My concerns are heuristic and my conclusions are strictly provisional. There are also many obvious omissions (Gilroy, 1993, p.xi).

There are many omissions in this thesis too, as the amount of urban music videos is far too large to consider comprehensively here. Future research can supplement and develop this work.

Nonetheless, I have systematised the selection process to ensure a reasonable range of videos from each music genre throughout the selected time period, which represent a range of spaces that relate to themes of inner-city London. There are significantly more videos released in the 2000s than in the mid- to late-1990s and 2010s. This is because most of the significant music videos in the emergence of UKG, grime, and UK rap were released in the 2000s. This is also because there are far fewer music videos from the emergence and early development of jungle than for the other music genres this thesis focusses on. There are far more black artists featured in these videos than artists from other racialised groups, reflecting the pioneering role of black artists in the developments of these genres. This speaks to the categorisation of these music genres as examples of black British music cultures. There is an important sense of these genres also being examples of black Atlantic culture (Gilroy, 1993), produced across national boundaries through diasporic movement, as I will explore in more detail later. Within the sample there are also far fewer female than male artists included in the selected videos. This reflects the fact that, though female artists have been instrumental in the emergence and development of each of these genres, there have been more men than women involved in these scenes, particularly grime, UK rap, and UK drill. An analysis of why this is the case is beyond the scope of this project, though there has been important research into these dynamics in relation to urban music genres, (see Toppin, 2021; Charles, 2019; Stirling, 2016; Bramwell, 2011). Future research into representations of the inner-city in urban music videos could focus more directly on the role of gender than I have been able to here.

Section 4. Interviews: Sample, Analysis, and Ethics

In the first year of this project (2022), I conducted five semi-structured interviews with music video directors and producers who have worked in London over the past few decades and have first-hand experience of directing and producing music videos in the city. These interviews were: Dr Orson Nava, Associate Professor at Ravensbourne University London and documentary, television, and music video director; Andy Hylton, who directed the music video *Neighbourhood*, which I analyse below; Yukki, who directed the music video *Ambush*, which I also analyse below; Isabella Culver, a writer, director, and producer who has made many music videos in London both in studios and on location; and DIR_01, a photographer and director who photographs musicians predominantly on location and has made several studio-based music videos, and who preferred to remain anonymous.

The aim of these interviews was to enhance my understanding of the ways in which music videos are made, how spaces are used in the production of music videos, how this has changed over the past few decades, and how artists approach or think about music genre in relation to music videos. I wrote a participant information form providing information about the project, a consent form for each interviewee to sign, and received ethics approval from the University of York to conduct the interviews. The consent form outlined what the project was looking to explore and why I had invited the recipient to take part in an interview. It also made clear that they did not have to take part, and, if they did, how their data would be processed, used, and kept secure, and their rights to withdrawal under the General Data Protection Regulation. Finally, it stated their right to complain should they be unhappy with how their data has been handled, and they were provided an option to be identified by name in the project if they so wished, otherwise an anonymous code would be assigned to them.

The literature review, research into music video production processes, and research into music videos from the selected genres, helped to formulate a list of potential interviewees. I then contacted potential interviewees over email or via Instagram. The selection of interviewees also utilised purposeful sampling methods (Patton, 2014; Palinkas et. al, 2015), searching for people who had an understanding and experience of music video production and direction that could provide rich insights pertinent to the aims of this project. As with the music video sampling, I tried to include a reasonable range of artists working in different genres at different times. The interviews were not designed to be comprehensive and generalisable. Rather, like the videos, they were designed to provide a rich insight into how particular people had experienced and engaged with the production and direction of urban music videos in London over the past few decades. I initially aimed to include interviews with musicians from the music scenes this project focusses on. However, direct access to musicians proved difficult and I received no responses to the emails and messages I sent. To navigate these access issues, I also collected interview data with artists and video directors from secondary sources, for example articles published on online media platforms and documentaries on YouTube. This process provided many rich sources that I draw on throughout, alongside the data from the first-hand interviews I conducted.

For the interviews I conducted, a semi-structured approach served the purpose of asking in-depth, open-ended questions that provided space for each individual participant to explore the meanings they made of the questions I asked them (Adams, 2015; Ortiz and Beach, 2013). As noted above, when I had found a potential interview candidate, I contacted them online with the project outline and a request to interview them. Once they had replied with an agreement to be interviewed, we worked together to find the best time and place to conduct the interview. The interview with Yukki was conducted on Zoom, and Andy Hylton's on the phone, otherwise they were conducted in person. The preference was always to conduct the interview in person, but due to the busy schedules of some of the interviewees this was not always possible. I told each interviewee what topics I wanted to ask them about before the interview and I tried not to stray too far from these topics, though the nature of semi-structured interviews meant that there was an element of unplanned direction. I asked each interviewee how they got in to music video direction/production; how they found working in

the city; how they found working on location, if they did so; what the music video industry was like to be a part of; if/how it had changed over the time they had been involved in it; whether they worked with particular genres, and if/how music genre related to the way they approached a music video. In these interviews I tried to remain aware of the power dynamics at play in my situation as a researcher. I tried to create a comfortable interview environment, and to avoid any questioning that might lead to the interviewee feeling uncomfortable or upset. I am deeply grateful for the time and insight provided by each interviewee.

I contacted many more music video directors and producers than I was ultimately able to interview, because most didn't get back to me at all. Sometimes I would receive an initial response of interest, but on further contact I wasn't able to secure an interview. I think this is due to the nature of the work of music video directors and producers, which is predominantly freelance and can frequently operate on a short-notice schedule, so it can be difficult to commit to interviews of this sort. I would have liked to have conducted more interviews, as this could only have added to the insights this project could produce. Nonetheless, the interviews I was able to conduct were fundamental to the way the project unfolded and the insights I was able to produce. As mentioned, the interviews were all carried out in the first year of the project, during which time I was exploring the substantive topic and thinking about how to plot the course the project would take. I was lucky to be able to talk to music video practitioners who had been working across a wide time-span, who were able to provide insights into how the industry had changed, and how the city had changed. These discussions played an important role in the decision to have the first two analysis chapters proceed chronologically, so that these changes could be explored on a timeline. It became clear through the interviews that particular changes were a fundamental part of the story, specifically the shift from big-budget label funded videos to DIY videos shot on digital cameras, and also the shift from TV-based distribution to Internet distribution. It was particularly insightful to hear about these shifts from practitioners who had experienced them first hand. These insights into the contexts of music video production then set the direction for exploring how these shifts manifested in the texts themselves.

Rather than using the interviews as primary data for analysis, I opted to use the insights from the interviews as a way to navigate the substantive topic, of representations of the inner city in London's urban music videos. So, the videos remained the primary data that I analyse in the following chapters, but the primary interviews that I conducted, alongside other secondary forms of data such as published interviews and YouTube comments, formed analytical tools akin to the academic literature I draw on throughout. The people I interviewed are experts in their fields, and I treated their insights as such.

Section 5. Video Analysis Methods

My analyses of urban music videos take an inductive and iterative approach, looking to generate new understandings of how inner-city London has been represented from 1994 to 2021. Each video is outlined separately, focussing on textual and contextual details and the guiding concepts where appropriate. Through the analysis of each video particular themes emerge and are used to draw the discussions of each video together. Extracts from first-hand and second-hand interviews are drawn on at various points throughout where they can provide insight into a particular representation or representational dynamic. The concept of conversation is used by allowing these different forms of data to talk to, listen to, and see one another, and to be seen together.

This project is multidisciplinary (Dalton et al., 2021), drawing on methods from several disciplines in the analyses I conduct. I am not attempting to produce a new research field, as an interdisciplinary study might. Rather, I am drawing on multiple disciplines, through both academic literature and methods, with the effect of producing richer answers to my research questions than would be possible were I to situate the project in one discipline alone. This approach allows concepts from different disciplines to speak to and enrich one another. My analysis of the videos as 'texts' utilises methods from screen studies, music studies, and

ethnomusicology. Within screen studies, I use methods of textual analysis developed for analysing music videos, films, and television (Railton & Watson, 2011; Brunsdon, 2019/2007; Higson, 1984; Williams, 1977; Nwonka, 207, 2023; Cheng, 2011; Gibbs, 2002; Martin, 2014; Shiel, 2001). These include narrative analysis, analysis of editing and shot choices, and mise-en-scene analysis. As mentioned, the selected videos exhibit a wide range of representational approaches, and these methods allow me to analyse what is seen in the frame, focusing particularly on setting, composition, costumes, and props. I also look at whether, and if so, how the video produces a narrative, and what story this might tell, and at how the video is edited and the meanings these choices produce. Thematic analysis is also employed to develop an understanding of how themes emerge and develop within videos and across the selected time-frame.

I also use methods from music studies and ethnomusicology when analysing the sonic elements of the videos, including analysis of the structure of the track, beats per minute (bpm), analysis of lyrics, attention to the way in which a music genre's sonic conventions operate in the video, and how the music operates within its cultural context (Holt, 2008, 2009, 2019; Nowak & Whelan, 2018; Wiltsher, 2016; Dodds, 2023; Caston, 2017, 2020; Bramwell, 2011, 2015; Aujla-Sidhu, 2021; Aucouturier & Pachet, 2003; Atton, 2010). These combined methods allow for comparisons between the videos to explore how inner-city London has been represented in different ways over time. They help to explore, in particular, my research questions about modes of representation, on inner-city storytelling, and representations of access and control over space.

The contextual analysis of videos gains insights from urban history, which I use to draw attention to the role of space in each video, the histories of particular areas and buildings, and how these have changed over time (Saumarez Smith, 2016, 2020; Kefford, 2017; Andrews, 2018; Waters, 2023; Rhodes & Brown, 2018; Millington, 2011; Sassen, 2013; Vertovec, 2006; Perera, 2019). These methods together help to explore my research questions concerning the role of urban music videos in the production of London's inner-city spaces, and how these videos are embroiled, explicitly or implicitly, in a struggle for the right to the city. Urban music

videos provide a complementary history of inner-city London that relates to policy histories, migration histories, the history of individual roads and estates and events, the history and development of policing practices, and so on. I draw on a range of sources and issues in my analyses of the videos. This again stems from the acknowledgment that there is no singular history of the city, of the lives of those who inhabit it, or of the artworks inhabitants make there. Once this is acknowledged it becomes clear that, by drawing together issues and sources that have not yet been combined, new histories can be produced that provide new insights.

I draw on two YouTube comments as part of my analyses. One comment offered insight into the location where one video was shot. The other offered insight into the way another video relates to notions national pride and identity. The use of these comments is included in the broader formalisation of secondary data collection employed in this project, by which secondary data sources are drawn on where appropriate for the analyses of the primary source of data, i.e., the music videos. In this case, they provided important insights for the analysis of specific videos, as well as an insight into the changing nature of video distribution and reception, with the rise in user-generated content. This process of drawing on different forms of secondary sources aligns with the work of Anna Lowenhaupt Tsing (2015) and Björn Ekström and Jutta Haider (2026). Ekström and Haider (2026) draw on the work of Tsing (2015, p.37), who uses a method of listening to and telling a “rush of stories” to explore an indeterminate yet empirically specific research object. Tsing uses this method to explore the globalised commodity chains of matsutake mushrooms. Ekström and Haider focus this method on the research object of obstructions to climate change mitigation and adaptation. In this thesis, I apply the method to the research object of representations of the inner city in London’s urban music videos, between 1994 and 2021. A key element of this method is that a conclusive and exhaustive account of the research object is impossible, as there is a “data deluge” (Ekström & Haider, 2026, p.151). So, to explore the research object requires noticing and connecting scattered yet entangled data fragments. In the case of this research project, these fragments include primary and secondary interviews with artists and music video makers, as well as YouTube comments and photographs. These fragments are then woven together to produce analyses of the research object.

There are many ways of telling the history of inner-city London, and this project, with its focus on music videos emerging from London's urban music genres, is one medium for articulating these histories. I am not suggesting that the videos are intentionally or merely responding to this history. Rather, the videos are not separate from these histories: the videos tell history at the same time as they actively produce history. These videos are intertwined with and narrate particular versions of events: in this case, how representations of the inner-city have changed over time, as the inner-city has changed over this same period. Furthermore, they tell a history of how some residents of these areas have perceived and experienced these changes, and how creative spatial practices have produced and been produced by urban developments.

Section 6. Using Concepts

In this section I explain how I have 'operationalised' the guiding concepts introduced in Chapter 1. By 'operationalise' I mean how I have put these concepts to use when watching, listening to, and interpreting the music videos that form the main source of data I analyse in this project, as well as the interviews and other forms of media, such as documentaries, that constitute a more secondary part of the data I analyse. These concepts have been used as tools for analysis that encourage particular readings of the videos. I will explain here how I know when I see, hear, or feel each of these concepts when I am analysing a video.

The Production of Space and the Right to the City

As outlined in Chapters 1 and 2, I have found Lefebvre's work on the production of space and the right to the city key to the way I have produced this project. Lefebvre proposed a three-

dimensional framework for understanding how space is produced. 'Spatial practices' refers to the everyday routines of inhabitants. 'Dominant representations of space' refer to how space is conceived by those who hold power in society. Finally, 'representational spaces' refers to how space is experienced, imagined, and dreamed of by inhabitants. Lefebvre argues that this triadic model of spatial production cannot be conceptualised abstractly, but it can be utilised to explore concrete, historical material.

Using this model as part of my analysis means conceptualising urban music videos as Lefebvrian representational spaces. I interpret each video as an expression of how inner-city inhabitants experience, imagine, and dream of space in the city. Furthermore, it means selecting videos that highlight particular themes in the production of the inner city, such as histories of the construction of modernist housing estates and the development of policing practices, as outlined by the literature reviewed in the previous chapter. It also means conceptualising certain housing policies, such as estate regeneration programmes, and police practices, such as stop-and-search, as dominant representations of space which are imposed on inner-city inhabitants. When a video represents figures of authority, such as police officers, or markers of estate regeneration, such as scaffolding, I use the concept of dominant representations of space to interpret how policing practices and housing policies encroach on the everyday lives of inner-city inhabitants, and on the representational spaces that these inhabitants produce. Finally, it means conceptualising the production of music videos, and the manifestation of representations of space, as spatial practices. People go to work and make music videos on a routine basis in the city. People also go to work and partake in estate regeneration and policing practices. I analyse how videos represent spatial practices as part of the narrative, mise-en-scene, and soundscape, whether in the foreground or background. In a similar vein, I use the concept of the right to the city by exploring how videos represent access to different types of urban space, how it is used, what it is used for, and how uses of space might be restricted. I also note how videos represent different uses of space. I use these ways of conceiving videos, interviews, and policies as a method for analysing images of spatial access, use, policing, and contestation.

Routes

The literature on race formation reviewed in Chapter 2, particularly Gilroy's (1993) notions of routed ontologies and the black Atlantic, are used in my analyses as a way of understanding the significance of race for and in each video. It is important to acknowledge that race is not an essential and stable way of categorising people. It is also important to acknowledge that race plays a significant role in how inner-city London is produced and how it is experienced differently depending on how one is racialised. In my analyses, I will acknowledge the race of the artists, directors, and characters in each video, where this information is available and appropriate. This is not to claim that the forms of representation they have produced are tied to a racial essence. Rather, it is to acknowledge racialisation as a significant process in the production and experience of the spaces of inner-city London, and how these spaces are represented in urban music videos. In my analyses I will highlight the representation of particular racialised dynamics, for example particular policing practices that have been shown to disproportionately impact racially minoritised people. I will also highlight representations of convivial interactions across lines of difference.

Conviviality

Maintaining what Gilroy called the 'unruly' nature of convivial relations (2004, p.x), the texts that I analyse in this thesis always remain open to different interpretations. Convivial culture is messy and unstable, and my interpretations aim to acknowledge this. The concept has also been utilised when considering how different platforms foster convivial environments, from the space of Notting Hill Carnival, which allowed communities to appropriate the streets of inner-city London, to the television space of Channel U, which allowed many people to access urban music videos in their home for the first time, to the online space of YouTube, which continued this expansion of access and allowed audiences to comment on and communicate publicly about videos. Some of these YouTube comments will be included in my analyses as

instances of an audience's response to the videos. It is also important to explore different forms of conviviality and how these are represented in the different types of data I analyse. In my analyses, I look at how videos represent these multiple relationships to power, and how playful toying with some relations of power in the videos might actually reify others.

The concept of conviviality, then, is particularly important to the theoretical considerations of this thesis and to the analytical methods of the videos. But I have also aimed to incorporate the concept within the project's epistemology. Following Erin Cory (2020), I base this research in a convivial aspiration for social change, to build on the cultures and literature that have inspired and guided the project in highlighting the structures that are fragmenting inner-city London, and the ways in which community persists and challenges this fragmentation.

Conversation

The concept of conviviality guides the methodology of this project in acknowledging that it has been co-produced through convivial interactions with the many people I have communicated and conversed with throughout the course of this project. Following these considerations, a concept of 'conversation' has been an integral theoretical and methodological principle that relates to many different elements of this project. This concept encourages a mindset of allowing videos to speak to each other, and to speak to other texts, concepts, and ideas. In my analyses I place music videos 'in conversation with' other videos and texts to generate new ways of understanding these videos and the wider contexts of their production. It is also how I think of the multidisciplinary nature of the project to function, as a conversation between disciplines (Dalton et al. 2021), and between different data fragments (Ekström & Haider, 2026). Thus, the different disciplines that drive the explorations this project contains – sociology, screen studies, literary analysis, philosophy, musicology, art history – speak to each other. The details that I have been able to find are fragments of contexts that connect the videos with each other and with the city more broadly. The fragmentary nature

of these details means that they won't be analysed systematically but drawn on where appropriate to illustrate specific points about urban spatial access, use, and contestation.

Furthermore, this conversation extends the role of the concept of conviviality in this project's methodology. The way disciplines, texts, concepts, spaces, and times are placed together is with convivial conversation in mind. This kind of conversation, in line with Gilroy's (2004) and Mbembe's work on conviviality (1992), is not without conflict. It is a core element of convivial culture that there is difference, but this difference is never insurmountable. The way convivial culture develops in urban spaces is through the kinds of communication difference produces, and I have tried to reflect this notion in the methodology and analyses of this project, noting when videos represent different forms of conviviality, and when the spatial practices that produced each video involved different forms of conviviality.

Genre

The concept of genre is another important point of departure for this project, and a useful way of organising the various forms of data that I analyse along lines of production, circulation, and signification. The notion of the 'urban music video' uses genre as an organising concept. It is useful in part as a way of spatialising genre and exploring the spatial dynamics of particular music genres. It is also useful in exploring how space is generic: how the inner city can be seen as a genre of space, which is produced through particular representations in an analogous way to the way in which genres of music and music videos are produced. In my analyses, I see genre as produced in conjunction with space and subjectivity, all of which are unstable, unfixed, and in conversation with one another.

I note how each video relates to particular genres. But I do not consider the videos to produce meanings that can be generalised for videos that are also included within the same generic boundaries. Again, the notion of routes is useful in thinking about how genres are formed,

particularly in relation to the formation of subjectivities and spaces, as part of a process of production. A genre does not have a fixed essence, neither does it have limitless boundaries. Like subjectivity, genres are formed historically in time and space, through movement and conversation. Conceptualising music genres as routed, as opposed to rooted, does not overlook the importance of particular spaces in the emergence and development of these genres. Rather, it emphasises the relationship between genre and space as historical and non-essential. In practice, this means analysing how space is shown in the mise-en-scene and narrative of each video and how this might be related to generic conventions. Furthermore, it means finding contextual information about how and where each video was made, and relates these details to the wider context of the city during that period. In the next section I will outline the ontology of this city and the world in which it exists.

Section 7. Concepts and Methods in Action: Postcards from London

I now want to turn to an analysis of the 1982 music video of Musical Youth's *Pass The Dutchie* to demonstrate how I use the concepts and methods I've outlined above in practice. Musical Youth were a reggae band initially consisting of Frederick Waite Sr., Freddie "Junior" Waite, Patrick Waite, Dennis Seaton, Michael Grant, and Kelvin Grant. Waite Sr. (father of Freddie and Patrick) had been a member of the Jamaican band The Techniques, before he moved to the UK. Musical Youth formed in 1979, while all but Waite Sr. were attending Duddeston Manor School in Nechells, inner-city Birmingham. In 1982, after some early minor successes, they released *Pass The Dutchie*, which reached number one in the charts in eighteen different countries, including the UK, and became the first video featuring a black artist to be played on MTV (Tannenbaum & Marks, 2011). Analysing this video is a way of demonstrating the methods I used in this project as well as a fruitful historical document for and introduction into the period and topic that I focus on in the following analysis chapters.

Pass The Dutchie was released the year after tensions between black communities and the police erupted in violence across the country in 1981. Brixton played a central role in the conflicts of 1981, which became known as the Brixton Uprisings by members of the local community and their supporters, or the Brixton Riots by the Metropolitan Police and the mainstream news media (Van Dijk, 1989). The local community and many activists considered the police to have caused the unrest through the controversial Operation Swamp 81, which radically increased the number of police on the streets of Brixton (Peplow, 2019). The dominant representation of space of Swamp 81 changed the spatial practices of both the police, who were brought into the area in increased numbers, and of local residents, who were suddenly confronted by this huge increase of police officers. The music video for *Pass the Dutchie*, as a representational space, offers a history of this period, as the heyday of inner-city discourse in the 1970s began to wane and the term fell out of popular usage (Saumarez Smith, 2016). It also helps to set the scene for the development of the urban music genres this project focusses on, all of which can be traced back through the sound-system cultures that had come to England via routes across the Atlantic Ocean from the Caribbean, and which *Pass The Dutchie* emerged from and directly references.

The video opens with a boy ‘toasting’ directly into camera, a style of talking over a music track which originated in Jamaica. His head is framed underneath a decorative Victorian lamppost dated 1870. His voice, laden with echo, announces: “*This generation/Rules the nation/With version.*” He then looks away from the camera, out of frame, left and right. The next shots show what he is looking at: the rest of the band setting up large speaker boxes next to a drum kit on the bank of the River Thames, with the Houses of Parliament and Big Ben looming in the background, as seen in Figure 1. The music track is a combination of reggae influences: the initial toasting is a slightly altered version of Jamaican vocalist U Roy’s *Rule the Nation*, while the track itself is an altered and extended cover of Jamaican reggae band the Mighty Diamonds’ *Pass the Kouchie*. Musical Youth’s version sanitised the Diamonds’ original track, swapping the word ‘kouchie’, meaning a cannabis pipe, for ‘dutchie’, meaning a Dutch oven, a type of cooking pot widely used in the Caribbean. These influences and alterations show several points that are key themes of this project. They show that *Pass The Dutchie* is part of

a wider black Atlantic cultural sphere of influence (Gilroy, 1993). They suggest a process of censorship, as potential negativities around representations of illegal drug use were sidestepped for a more acceptable content, which produces a completely different message within the narrative, as the object of discussion changes from cannabis to food. They also suggest the notion of a 'version' as a way of interpreting representations of inner-city London (Millington & Armstrong, 2024). *Pass The Dutchie* is both a new version of pre-existing music tracks, and a way of imagining a new version of spatial relations: London as a space in which working-class black artists have a right not just to the city but to the nation as a whole.



Figure 1: Still from *Pass The Dutchie*.

Using Railton and Watson's (2011) typology of music video genres, *Pass The Dutchie* is part performance piece, with the band performing the track by the River Thames, and part narrative video. This narrative tells the story of a school inspector who finds the band while they play and injures himself trying to disrupt their performance. We see courtroom scenes of the band on trial – presumably for truancy, assault, or both – and the band finally being given a verdict of 'not guilty' by the jury, after they've listened to the band's music on a boom-

box in the courtroom. The video ends with the band dancing in celebration in the middle of the courtroom, though the final image is of a loan speaker-stack back on the bank of the River Thames, with the shot using perspective to position the speakers towering over Big Ben.

The music video was directed by Don Letts, the child of Jamaican parents who arrived as part of the Windrush generation in England in 1955. Letts was born in London in 1956 and raised in Brixton. His father ran a sound system called 'Duke Letts Superstonic' on which he played Jamaican records in the local church on Sundays (Hunter-Tilney, 2023). In 1976, Don Letts began DJing at the Roxy club in Chelsea, west London, playing predominantly dub and reggae music. During this time, he introduced many members of London's burgeoning punk scene to reggae and dub music, including the Sex Pistols and members of the yet-to-be-formed the Clash (see Crossley, 2015; Reddington, 2020). A key moment for Letts came in 1978, with the release of *Five Nights of Bleeding* by Poet and The Roots, a group comprised of dub-poet Linton Kwesi Johnson and a dub-reggae band led by Dennis Bovell. Letts credits this record with contributing to his drive to become a filmmaker, "so vivid and visual was its rendition of the culture and climate in which it was made" (Letts in BBC.com, 2015). He has also noted that the record made him "start to think visually" (Letts in Otter Bickerdike, 2021), suggesting a conversation between the senses of sight and hearing in the reception and production of representational spaces.

Letts explains the appeal of reggae music to the punk scene as follows: "It was a culture that spoke in a currency with which the punks could identify. It was the soundbite-type lyrics, the anti-fashion fashion, the rebel stance and, importantly, the fact that reggae was a kind of musical reportage, talking about things that mattered" (Letts, 2001). This statement from Letts, especially its invocation of 'reportage', suggests that both reggae and punk music are examples of audio-visual social realist representation. This notion is also recognisable in the way the urban music genres this project focusses on have been described. It is notable that *Pass The Dutchie* uses some social realist conventions, such as shooting on location and a focus on marginalised communities, but also combines these with other conventions, such as the comedic representation of the foolish inspector, the central rather than marginalised setting,

and vibrant rather than gritty social-realist shot colouration. The type of reportage this video produces, then, is complex in its representation of a 'real' inner-city story. It is a hopeful representation of how music can resolve contemporary tensions between white representatives of the state and black artists and communities, evocative of Raymond Williams's (1977) argument that social realist texts pose the question: what if the representations were reproduced outside of the text, in the real world?

This hopefulness is most significant in the representations of the courtroom. The presence of the courtroom and the role of the inspector introduce state power structures which disrupt the performance of the music visually but never audibly: the music keeps playing throughout, despite the best attempts of the school inspector. It is notable that the primary authority figure is explicitly not a police officer, and thus not one of those figures who had been at the forefront of tensions that erupted in the Brixton Uprisings. But he is still involved in the criminal-justice system as he brings the band to trial. The fact that he is a school inspector is perhaps to draw attention to how young the members of the band were. But this detail also suggests how the judicial, police, and education systems intertwine, and how they variably impact different demographics in the city in particular and the country in general. These intersecting issues were explored in Steve McQueen's 2020-2021 BBC anthology *Small Axe*, particularly in *Mangrove*, which tells the story of the 1971 trial of nine black activists charged with inciting a riot in response to racist policing, and *Education*, which explores racial bias in the education system in 1970s Britain through the story of Kingsley, a 12-year-old black boy who is labelled as 'educationally subnormal' due to his 'disruptive behaviour' (see Millington & Armstrong, 2024). These intertextual themes show how conversations between urban music videos and audio-visual representations can generate new understandings of these texts, telling stories of the inner city across spaces and times.

The musical performance in *Pass The Dutchie*, which represents the kind of irreverent behaviour that Gilroy (2004) noted as a marker of conviviality, produces a tension with the portrayals of state power. That the video visually depicts young black boys being chased by a police-like figure, and that the power of their music results in them being found not guilty at

trial, contrasts with how many black British youths were being treated by the state during this period, as highlighted by the unrest in 1981. But this dynamic also highlights the agency of artists to choose what they want to foreground and how. The court scenes resolve with no fundamental challenge to the power of the criminal-justice system, an example of the kind of conviviality that Mbembe (1992) describes, as outlined in Chapter 2, poking fun rather than directly confronting. The music and the visual depictions throughout strike a positive tone, and the closing images can be seen as attesting to the power of the music and of its creators to produce a new city around them.

On his website, Letts said of his choice of location for the Musical Youth video: “I shot the band’s performance complete with red, gold and green speakers outside the Houses of Parliament to create a new kind of postcard from London – a new image of what London was about” (Letts, 2015). This notion of the music video as a ‘postcard’ – one that creates a ‘new image’ of what London is ‘about’ – is an important reference point for this thesis as a whole. It is suggestive of the many things that a music video can be, the many ways music videos can relate to the spaces in which they were made and which they represent, the many ways that they can be ‘about’ something, and the many things that they can be about. It is also suggestive of the ways in which these texts mark particular moments in time, but also traverse and produce different notions of time. As will be explored in the following chapters, urban music videos represent time in different ways: as linear, cyclical, fragmented, legal, stamped, hyped, real, and so on.

Letts’s and Musical Youth’s *Pass The Dutchie* evokes many of the questions that this thesis explores. It is notable that working-class inner-city housing and domestic life is absent from *Pass The Dutchie*, as is the city of Birmingham, home to the band. The video suggests the centrality of London and its landmarks for the rest of the UK, as Letts chose to bring the Birmingham-based band to the capital city to shoot. The video represents a form of displacement, of ‘surrogacy’ (Cheng, 2011), by which a location is occupied in order to highlight dynamics of access and control. In this case the group from marginal inner-city spaces in Birmingham occupy a ‘hegemonic’ space (Barras, 2023) in central London. In other

videos analysed in this thesis the dynamic of displacement also connects the inner-city with central London, but also with other spaces, such as the suburb, the financial district, the prison, and the psychiatric hospital. The courtroom narrative is also eerily prescient of the use of UK rap and drill music and music videos as part of criminal prosecutions, highlighting the themes of criminalisation and policing that will be explored in more detail in the following chapters.

As Millington and Armstrong (2024, p.661) argue, *Small Axe* “constitutes a ‘versioning’ of “London’s post-WWII black urban history,” utilising and activating archives, and thereby “preventing obscuration and/or erasure and making new interpretations and imaginaries of the urban past possible.” Letts does a similar thing with *Pass*, drawing on the ‘archive’ of traditional postcard-versions of London – the River Thames, red busses, and the Houses of Parliament – and producing a new ‘version’ that highlights the presence and expression of black British artists from inner-city areas that had otherwise been obscured. These relations highlight different ways that space and time can be produced through representation. They suggest how music videos, as representational spaces, partake in the production of space. They also suggest how music videos tell stories of the inner-city, how the video directors and musicians are inner-city storytellers, telling and producing versions of history.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I have outlined the ontological and epistemological scope of this project, the methods I used to select and analyse interviews and videos, and how I used the guiding concepts in my analyses. The methods for video analysis were put to work through an analysis of *Pass The Dutchie*. The analysis demonstrated how representational spaces are in conversation with one another; how different this music video speaks to *Rule the Nation*, *Pass The Kouchie*, and *Small Axe*. This conversation can be seen and heard across and between

different spaces: the banks of the River Thames; the Houses of Parliament; the British courtroom; the school; central and inner-city London; London and Birmingham; London, Birmingham, and the UK; and the UK and Jamaica. These spaces invoke the different spatial scales that are explored in the following chapters: the local, inner city, urban, national, international, trans-Atlantic, and global. The analysis also explored how these scales are traversed through hybrid modes of representation, in this case drawing on social realist and comedic conviviality to draw attention to themes of spatial contestation in struggles for a right to the city.

The nature of the ontology, epistemology, and methods I use emphasise connection and difference. Music scenes are often produced along lines of difference and similarity, for example, the particular circumstances of production, distribution, and reception that are used, which distinguish them from other music scenes. They are also produced around different spaces, whether physical, such as record shops, or digital, such as YouTube. Understandings of difference, and therefore the communities that are built around them, are often produced and separated by structures of power. So, intersecting with genre are class, race, gender, nationality, and, fundamentally, space, all of which are important considerations for this project. The ways in which these structures are represented is a key concern, as is the notion that music scenes are produced through conversation, and that boundaries between scenes can be, and are continuously, traversed through convivial interaction. In the subsequent chapters, I will explore how these themes are represented in jungle, UK Garage, grime, UK rap, and UK drill music videos as London was developing as a global city and undergoing significant changes.

Chapter 4

Sliding Spatial Scales: Jungle and UK Garage in a Global City

This chapter will explore the development of London's inner-city in the late twentieth and early twenty-first century by engaging with a selection of urban music videos from the jungle and UKG scenes. This will involve a particular focus on the history and representation of social housing estates, and how these relate to representations of other spaces in the city, particularly the club. I will discuss how the videos tell stories of inner-city London, how they represent inner-city space and how these representations relate to the city at the time of their production. The chapter also draws on a selection of interviews with artists and directors, two of which I conducted, that help shed light on the music videos and the contexts in which they were made. These elements are taken into account in order to better understand how inner-city cultural production, particularly in its audio-visual manifestations, developed and how it relates to racialised, socio-economic, and spatial changes in the city.

A key theme in this chapter is London's development as a global city, and how this was impacting the field of housing in particular (Sassen, 1994, 1996, 2013). Margaret Thatcher's Conservative government introduced the Right to Buy policy in 1980, which allowed council estate residents to buy their homes from the council, instigating a radical shift in the UK's approach to public and private housing (Millington, 2020; Foster, 2015; Elliott-Cooper et al., 2020). Between 1980 and 1989, the UK's social housing stock declined by 529,878 (Hill, S. 2022). This dramatic decline in social housing stock fragmented inner-city communities, with many working-class Londoners increasingly unable to afford to live in the city as social housing

has become progressively oversubscribed. The videos explored in this chapter are in part shaped by and reflect on these profound changes.

When jungle music emerged in London at the end of the twentieth century, it was quickly described as a home-grown cultural creation, pioneered by black British artists. This was something of a first in that up until this point, popular music genres pioneered by black people in Britain were widely considered to be cultural imports: calypso from Trinidad; cabaret from France; mento, ska, dub, and reggae from Jamaica; jazz, swing, and hip hop from the US. To be clear, I am not arguing that jungle was the first genre to be pioneered by black British artists that was in fact a true homegrown cultural creation. There were other scenes, such as 2 Tone and lovers rock, which emerged in British culture years before jungle. However, it is important to note that jungle was seen and spoken of at the time of its emergence as creating something new that had ramifications for senses of national identity. A fundamental element of the emergence of jungle into Britain's cultural mainstream was the assertion that it was renegotiating the notion of Britishness itself, and the people that could call Britain their home. Pioneering jungle and drum and bass DJ Fabio (Fitzroy Heslop) said of the genre: "it's the first British music probably since punk really, because it is just totally British, and it's the first thing that we've had and created for a long time" (DJ Fabio in Channel 4, 2014, 3:22-3:37). *All Black: Jungle Fever*, a documentary that originally aired in 1994 on BBC2, charted the rise of jungle in London, following some of the artists at the forefront of the scene including General Levy, Shy FX, and UK Apache, all of whom will be discussed in more detail below. In the documentary, Koushik Banerjee, then a lecturer in Cultural Studies at Goldsmith's College, says of the jungle scene that it engages with:

the re-definition of Britishness, a sense of Britishness, the British nation, and British culture: for the first time you're probably seeing all of those things being redefined on black terms. That in itself is a radical departure from what you've witnessed before (Rave Channel, 2012, 12:10–12:31).

This feeling about jungle suggests how notions of Britishness had changed dramatically throughout the twentieth century. Jungle's Britishness was distinctly multicultural and multi-

racial, opposing the racial exclusivity at the height of the British Empire. It presented a new sense of Britishness, with a new sonic, visual, and written language, originating from working-class inner-city locations. Indeed, an integral part of the newness that jungle represented for many was that its emergence was intertwined with a growing body of audio-visual creations. Also part of jungle's redefinitions was through engagement with global, national, and local scales of space, both sonically and visually. Central to this chapter is how urban music videos represent the tension between London as a global city and the local spaces of everyday life in which people made and played music and music videos. As will be seen, this tension plays out in the themes of 'Celebration' and 'Alienation'.

London as a global city is often represented through the use of icons or landmarks, recognisable or spectacular locations or figures. As Charlotte Brunsdon argues in her book on London-set British films *London in Cinema* (2019/2007, p.21), the use of iconic locations is both a reference to and a staging of a specific 'urban imaginary' of London, "contributing to the many images, characters and tales that constitute that urban imaginary." This is a London of 'hegemonic buildings' that symbolise the power structures of a particular era, from Big Ben to the towers of Canary Wharf (Barras, 2023). But an urban imaginary of London is not only produced through the use of iconic locations or landmarks:

In contrast to landmark London, there is another, less spectacular cinematic London, a local London. This is the setting for small narratives and everyday life, a London of terraced houses, blocks of flats, high streets, corner shops, pubs, bus stops, launderettes, cafes and recreation grounds" (Brunsdon, 2019/2007, p.57).

The videos explored in this chapter often represent this local scale. One place that Brunsdon omits in this list of local London settings is the night club. There may be good reason behind this omission: Brunsdon's focus is on London-set British films, not music videos, and the night club doesn't feature heavily in the films she discusses. But there is also a tension between the club and the spaces of the everyday in many urban music videos, a tension that Brunsdon explores through cinematic representations of trips from local London areas up to the West End. To take this trip is "to go from the everyday world to the world of leisure, from banal time

to special time, from work to play” (Brunsdon, 2019/2007, p.92). While the West End itself is not the central destination of the trips away from ‘local London’ in urban music videos, trips to the night club in these videos often reflect this movement between worlds and times, and from spaces of work to those of play.

The local scale can also be described through the concept of ‘vernacular landscapes’ of the inner city, spaces which show how everyday life in the inner city is experienced and used by local residents (Krase & Shortell, 2011; Krase, 2002; Jackson, 2022/1986). These are spaces that show how ordinary people live in and use the spaces of the inner city, rather than spaces, and uses thereof, that have been planned by professionals, police, policy makers, and other producers of dominant representations of space (Lefebvre, 1991/1987). Inner-city vernacular landscapes, then, are produced through the everyday spatial practices of inhabitants. These practices might display forms of alienation or conviviality, and they might oppose, play with, or reify dominant representations of space. Here they are captured in the representational spaces of urban music videos, in spaces such as housing estates, car parks, and local markets.

Another core theme of this chapter, which intertwines with sliding scales of space, is the different modes of representation that urban music videos use in their representations of space and everyday life. In Brunsdon’s study of London-set films, she argues for an equivalence between representations of local space and the genre of realism:

Generically, local London is a realist London, although this realist impulse is realised in different ways in different periods and by different film-makers. The realism of local London is partly its point, its defining feature - this is London as it is lived (Brunsdon, 2019/2007, p.57).

Representations of the local, Brunsdon argues, are driven by a realist impulse to show London ‘as it is lived’ by ordinary people, often in south London. These vernacular local spaces are frequently in tension with London’s West End, where the ordinary urban inhabitant goes to escape their everyday life. She continues:

Within realist fictions, the very details that guarantee authenticity also carry meanings and traces from an extra-cinematic world. The transformations of the iconography of the ordinary in south London, from terrace to estate [. . .] from a mainly white working class to an ethnically mixed population, are the very material of the local, but are also the result of complex, extra-cinematic factors both national and international (Brunsdon, 2019/2007, p.83).

These complex multi-scalar developments are a particularly fruitful way of understanding urban music videos during the period between 1994 and 2021, as London developed as a global city and new forms of technologies, such as affordable digital cameras and the Internet, emerged. But, as will be seen in the analyses that follow, these extra-cinematic factors, what I am referring to as the context of the video, are also key to understanding the weird and eerie elements of these texts (Fisher, 2016). These videos show that the realist mode is not the only, or even the preferred, way to explore and express everyday life in the inner city and its tension with London's globalisation.

The chapter is split into two sections. Section 1 explores the emergence of jungle, focussing on three music videos from jungle artists: *Inner City Life*, *Incredible*, and *Original Nuttah*. Particularly important in this section is the tension between London's development as a global city and local representations of the inner city as these spaces were beginning to fragment. Section 2 explores the emergence of UK garage, focussing on the videos *Neighbourhood*, *Bound 4 Da Reload (Casualty)*, *Oh No (Sentimental Things)*, and *21 Seconds*. This section explores how the optimism surrounding New Labour's election is reflected in some videos, before dissipating with the continuation of the sale of social housing and managed decline, and of policing practices that strategically target black working-class communities. Further details about each video are provided in the table below.

Chapter 4 Table of Videos

Video Name	YouTube Video Name	Video Release Date	YouTube Upload Date	YouTube Video Link	Musician/s	Video Director	Music Genre/s	Video Genre/s	Location/s of Shooting
<i>Inner City Life</i>	<i>Goldie - Inner City Life (Official Remastered HD Video)</i>	1994	31 July 2020	https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6vHkOI-z7IY	Goldie Diane Charlemagne	Mike Lipscombe	Jungle Drum and Bass	Narrative, Big-Budget	Wyndham Estate, Camberwell, south London; Paradise Club, Islington, north London
<i>Original Nuttah</i>	<i>UK APACHI With SHY FX - Original Nuttah</i>	1994	10 October 2009	https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PkAYv0MuVTE	Shy FX UK Apache	?	Jungle	Performance	Kings Cross, Central London
<i>Incredible</i>	<i>M Beat feat General Levy Incredible</i>	1994	6 March 2009	https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mL2Bgj-za5k	M-Beat General Levy	?	Jungle	Performance	Big Ben
<i>Neighbourhood</i>	<i>Neighbourhood - Zed Bias featuring Nicky Prince & MC Rumpus</i>	2000	7 November 2006	https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ljz9XYbXsUs	Zed Bias Nicky Prince MC Rumpus	Andy Hylton	UKG	Performance, Big-Budget	Brixton Centre Brixton Market
<i>Bound 4 Da Reload (Casualty)</i>	<i>Oxide & Neutrino Bound 4 Da Reload</i>	2001	21 Jul 2006	https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AZ-27rdwJP	Oxide & Neutrino	?	UKG	Performance, Narrative, Big-Budget	?
<i>Oh No (Sentimental Things)</i>	<i>So Solid Crew - Oh No (Sentimental Things) (Official Video)</i>	2001	21 March 2013	https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=guJONyQVs9I	So Solid Crew	?	UKG	Performance, Narrative, Big-Budget	?
<i>21 Seconds</i>	<i>So Solid Crew - 21 Seconds (Official HD Video)</i>	2001	21 March 2013	https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=g7VhofoV3qs	So Solid Crew	Max Giwa and Dania Pasquini	UKG	Performance, Narrative, Big-Budget	?

Section 1: Jungle

Jungle is directly intertwined with the waves of migration from former British colonies in the Caribbean that led to the development of a rich sound system culture in British cities in the post-Windrush era (1948 onwards), particularly in London. Jungle MCs' style of lyrical delivery is particularly reminiscent of the 'fast chat' style of 'toasting', a way of talking or rapping over music that originated in Jamaica (Baird, 2013). Fast chat was pioneered in London by sound system MCs such as Peter King, Smiley Culture, and Tippa Irie of the Lewisham-originated sound system Saxon Sound. But jungle presented a marked difference to the reggae and dub music of the sound system scene partly because it sounded so different, and partly because it undoubtedly originated in the UK. Its pioneers' lives have been intimately structured by Britain's spatial landscapes, particularly the architectural landscape of the city (Melville, 2019).

There was a wave of jungle hits from London-based artists in the first half of the 1990s that caused a cultural stir in the capital. Three hugely successful jungle tracks released in 1994 marked this entrance into Britain's cultural mainstream: Goldie's *Inner City Life*, M-Beat and General Levy's *Incredible*, and Shy FX and UK Apache's *Original Nuttah*. These artists illustrate the many different migratory and diasporic routes, in Gilroy's sense (1993, 1994, 1996), that produced London's inner-city communities during this period, with lineages including Trinidad, Jamaica, South Africa, Iraq, Scotland, and the West Midlands of England, besides London itself. Both *Incredible* and *Original Nuttah* involved crossovers between reggae singers/MCs and jungle producers, and both entered the Top 10 in the UK charts, while in 1996 Goldie won Best Jungle Act at the first ever MOBO Awards (an awards ceremony for Music of Black Origin). All three of these tracks were accompanied by music videos that I will analyse below.

These are very much music videos rather than documentaries about the inner city. The fast tempo of the music tracks and the sampling of a range of different sounds is visually echoed in the videos, which feature fast-cut collages of images of people producing, performing, and dancing. *Incredible* and *Original Nuttah* are full of raw energy, while the music video for Goldie's track offers an ambiguous story about life in the inner city, the precarity of social housing estates, and the escapism of club culture.

*Incredible*³

The video for *Incredible* focusses predominantly on General Levy (Paul Scott Levy) performing to camera surrounded by a crowd of men and women in a few different places, one of which is the seat of a convertible car, shown in *Figure 2*. General Levy grew up in the London Borough of Brent, north-west London, where he began collecting dancehall tapes, writing lyrics, and performing with sound systems from the age of fourteen. Before *Incredible*, Levy was predominantly a reggae vocalist. The production of *Incredible* was his first venture into jungle music and the first time he worked with M-Beat (Marlon Hart), a producer who grew up in east London, and the nephew of renowned reggae drummer Lowell 'Sly' Dunbar.

³ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mL2Bgj-za5k>



Figure 2: Still from Incredible, showing Levy (front-centre).

Incredible features brief shots of M-Beat in a studio, suggesting the space in which he produced the track, shown in *Figure 3*. There are outdoor shots of dancers behind caged fencing, a housing estate in the background, shown in *Figure 4*, and in front of a wall covered in graffiti, shown in *Figure 5*. There are also brief shots from inside a club with DJs spinning records and women dancing, lights flashing around them, shown in *Figure 6*.



Figure 3: Still from *Incredible*.

The different locations in *Incredible* combine to construct a version of inner-city space: the local, semi-public outdoor spaces where members of the community of all ages can meet, and which interact with the more private spaces of the club and the studio. The video hints at how these local spaces foster an environment for social interaction and musical production, highlighting the role of spatial practices in the production of urban space. These practices “structure daily life and a broader urban reality and, in so doing, ensure societal cohesion” (Merrifield, 1993, p. 524). *Incredible* represents forms of cohesion by connecting different activities and areas of the city. The activity of music production that takes place in the studio is linked to vocal and dance performance in the local spaces of clubs and estates.



Figure 4: Still from *Incredible*.

The video cuts rapidly between different shots of these sites, with the colouration also jumping between sepia, blue, and green toned shots. The rapid cutting between images aligns with the pace of the instrumental and Levy's lyrical delivery. While none of the spaces are lingered on, they are not represented as decaying or as encouraging anti-social behaviours. This is significant given government discourses on the inner city throughout the latter half of the twentieth century, which depicted the inner city as the focal point of urban decline (Saumarez Smith, 2016). The Conservative government discourse on social housing estates focussed on their design as directly responsible for crime and social deviance, a view academically supported most famously in Alice Coleman's book *Utopia on Trial* (1985). In this 'architectural determinist' account, litter and graffiti were indicators of the failings of modernist social housing estates in particular and state interference in free market housing production in general (Bevan, 2023). Against this view, *Incredible* extends the sociability of the club and the creativity of the studio into the inner-city and the vernacular landscapes of housing estates. The cage, for example, could be seen as constrictive, but is shown as a medium through which to watch the spatial practice of dance. Similarly, while to some viewers

the shots of graffiti might suggest a manifestation of urban decay, the fact that it is shown as the background to dance implies a far more positive evaluation.



Figure 5: Still from *Incredible*.

The video suggests that these forms of interaction with the physical environment are a way of producing social meanings, by which “architectural details, commercial signs, and graffiti, among other things, signify the flows of people and culture” (Krase & Shortell, 2011, p.371). As Zieleniec argues, graffiti “can be understood as an expression or embodiment of Lefebvre’s cry and demand for the ‘right to the city’, the right to appropriate, appreciate, know and use its spaces and places” (Zieleniec, 2016). This understanding can be extended to representations of the inner city in music videos such as *Incredible*, which extend and develop this demand through audio-visual means.



Figure 6: Still from *Incredible*.

In amongst *Incredible*'s collage of local inner-city scenes and spaces is a brief glimpse of Big Ben at night, shown in *Figure 7*. This suggests a connection between local inner-city spaces and iconic central London spaces. As Brunsdon argues (2019/2007, p.21): "When a film shows Big Ben and the Houses of Parliament [. . .] you know you are in London." The inclusion of this landmark links the local spaces that make up most of the video's *mise en scène* to London as a globally recognisable brand. Richard Barras (2023, p.29) argues that each era of London's history involves the "the formation of a dominant ideology by the ruling class, the application of that ideology in the exercise of hegemonic power, and the expression of that power through monumental building." The rebuilt Palace of Westminster, which includes Big Ben as the informal name for its clocktower, is the central monument of one wave of 'hegemonic building' during the Victorian era, when the British Empire was at the height of its power.



Figure 7: Still from *Incredible*.

Big Ben's presence in *Incredible*, though, represents very different global power relations. *Incredible* nods to the changing representations of Britishness that the jungle scene was both producing and responding to and, in this context, Big Ben's iconicity is recontextualised and imbued with new meanings. As Merrifield (1993, p.525) argues,

The images, symbols and perceptions of local people [. . .] all embrace different spatial practices. This imagery, too, may centre around symbolic representations of landscape (monuments, landmarks) which, while put in place through dominant spatial practices, become imbued with meaning in daily life.

In a similar way to *Pass The Dutchie*, Big Ben becomes a landmark for a post-colonial, multicultural London, one that was being produced through music genres such as jungle and videos such as *Incredible*.

In contrast to the iconicity of Big Ben, there are no street signs or estate names shown for the local areas, so these spaces take on a symbolic resonance for the inner city in general. As Brunsdon argues:

Local London is partly defined in the negative: it is not landmark London. Instead of the exceptional, local London offers the ordinary and the quotidian (Brunsdon, 2019/2007, p.57).

The local areas of the video represent ‘vernacular landscapes’, spaces inhabited and made meaningful by “ordinary people living ordinary lives” in globalized urban environments (Krase & Shortell, 2011, p.371). Ordinary here refers to the non-elite majority, i.e. not those people associated with spaces like Big Ben, but those such as Levy and M-Beat and the entourage that join them in *Incredible*. As Krase and Shortell argue (2011, p.371), “through their activities and by their presence, ordinary people not only change the appearance of spaces and places but also their meaning.” Activities such as spraying graffiti on walls, or dancing outside, or making music videos produce and alter social and spatial meanings. Graffiti “can add meaning, value, beauty, distraction and amusement to cities increasingly dominated by the homogenising effects of global capital” (Zieleniec, 2016), and the same is true of urban music videos. *Incredible*, then, produces a level of heterogenous locality that opposes the homogenising forces of the global city in which it was being produced (Sassen, 2004, 2013). There is a sense in the video of uninhibited movement through urban space and connection between local inner-city space and iconic global space. This could be read as enacting a claim to a right to the city (Harvey, 2012), by which inner-city inhabitants claim various spaces in the city as their own through movement and representation.

These representational claims to space are also linked to the particular dynamics involved in the contemporary music industry. Junior Hart, father of M-Beat, ran the Renk Records label that released *Incredible* (Jenkins, 2022). In a 2021 interview, he recalls:

I marketed the track through Renk. I had to borrow money and almost lost my house trying to finance the track with the costs of making a video and pressing the vinyl (Junior Hart in Terzulli & Otchere, 2021).

This comment speaks to the cost of making music videos in the 1990s, a time when film and video technology was expensive and concentrated in the hands of production companies. Steve B, Renk's A&R manager and a producer at the label, said of *Incredible*:

I remember early on, Junior saying to me that we needed to get the power away from the DJs because if they didn't play a record, we were fucked. He wanted to do videos, and get on TV, and was talking about the internet (Steve B in Terzulli & Otchere, 2021).

Both of these comments suggest the growing importance of audio-*visual* production, as a music video could help wrestle control of a track's marketisation away from radio DJs. They also suggest the ability of relatively small labels to finance their own videos, if precariously, drawing attention to the beginnings of a more accessible and affordable music video landscape that could exist alongside the outputs of major record labels. Furthermore, that Hart staked his house on the marketing of *Incredible* shows the way domestic space could be used in the production of audio-visual texts even if these spaces remain absent from the *mise en scène* of the video itself. The representational space of the video is thus structured in part by the spatial practices enabled by Junior Hart's relation to his home and his ability to stake it in the production of the music video.

M-Beat and Levy's video, then, highlights the particular dynamics of the audio-visual and how music videos produce new meanings for music and for the spaces of inner-city London. In *Incredible*, space is shared amongst Londoners, either in the club or in semi-public outdoor spaces of cages, estates, or car parks. Private, interior domestic spaces, however, are absent from the *mise en scène*. The viewer is only shown glimpses of estate exteriors behind which these private spaces are suggested but not seen. However, the contextual details of the video's production highlight how domestic space is always part of the dynamic of these representations, whether they appear in the videos or not. The combination of different

spaces, both local and iconic, emphasises the way in which music videos invoked a sense of local inner-city space in a global city. This combination of and movement through different spaces in the city contrasts with Shy FX and UK Apache's *Original Nuttah*, to which I will now turn.

*Original Nuttah*⁴

The video for *Original Nuttah* centres around the performance of UK Apache (Abdul Wahab) and Shy FX (Andre Williams) and a number of dancers in an outdoor location, as shown in *Figures 7* and *8*. The space is difficult to make out but it looks like a square surrounded on all sides by buildings. It evokes a sense of being in amongst the structures of the city, but very much outside, underneath the sky. The square is made into a kind of club, but also evokes a sense of Carnival through clothing, dance, and musical performance in a semi-public outdoor space. As shown in *Figures 8* and *9*, some of the background buildings may be housing, though this is unclear in the video due to both the quality of the available images and to the lack of focus on these background structures. The video focusses far more on the various characters performing to camera than on the spaces around them.

⁴ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3QMicBJ7yRM>



Figure 8: Still from Original Nuttah, showing UK Apache (left) and Shy FX (right).



Figure 9: Still from Original Nuttah.

Shy FX is a DJ and producer from Edmonton, north London. In 2018 he was interviewed by DJ Target on BBC Radio 1Xtra, who cites him as a strong influence on himself and other early grime pioneers (BBC Radio 1Xtra, 2018). In the interview, Shy talks about how he got into making music, recalling the influence of pirate radio station Kool FM, and of his grandfather, Count Shelly, operator of the Count Shelly sound system and owner of a record shop called Third World in Tottenham, where his mum worked. Shelly was one of the first people to import reggae music into the UK (BBC.com, 2018). Shy was surrounded by music from a young age, with Blues Parties taking place in his family home. These were parties held by black communities, often in order to raise money for rent, akin to the “‘rent parties’ in the Harlem of the 1920s and ‘30s” (Gates, 1976, p.305; see also Millington & Armstrong, 2024; Kew, 2020; Gillett, 2023). They provided a space – often people’s houses, or vacant houses appropriated for the event – for black Londoners, who were ostracised from the city’s clubs and venues, to listen and dance to music played by local sound systems. Shy had been part of a sound system as a teenager, which is where he got into jungle. It was at Notting Hill Carnival where he could experience his music being played to audiences for the first time at the age of seventeen, because, unlike night clubs, Carnival had no age limit. This was around the time that *Original Nuttah* was gaining widespread attention.

Shy’s collaborator on the track, UK Apache, had been raised in Tooting, south London, by his Indian-South African mother and Iraqi father. He recalls being inspired by the reggae scene in London as a teenager, going to sound system dances at the Doddington Estate in Battersea, and being drawn to jungle because he felt it to be distinctly British (Verma, 2016). In *Who Say Reload: the Stories Behind the Classic Drum & Bass Records of the '90s* (Terzulli & Otchere, 2021), Wahab says:

“Original Nuttah” was a very British term; you can’t get more British than that really. Jungle music was British music, even though it took samples from other styles it originated here. I was so happy to be connected to it. It was a multi-cultural thing, and when you went to the raves, you would see people of all colors from different nations jumping up and down together.

This was a marked development from the relative racial homogeneity of the Blues Party that Shy may have experienced growing up: as Henry Louis Gates recalls of a party in a vacant house on Bravington Road in north-west London, “A white face is as rare and as out of place here as are black ones at the Court of St. James; the only foreign accent, mahn, is the English accent” (Gates, 1976, p.302). Gates argues that reggae had helped Caribbean migrants in London to feel connected to one another and to the islands from which they had travelled. Conversely, a distinctive element of jungle was that it was pioneered in large part by people who had been born and raised in the UK, which helped to establish the feeling of homegrown expression.

Of the track and video, Wahab has said:

When I first performed it at Carnival in 1994, we had to stop a few times because people were fighting in the middle. A nuttah wasn’t just someone who goes around beating up people though; a nuttah was someone who achieves their goals, that’s why there are clips of Nelson Mandela and Martin Luther King in the video (Terzulli & Otchere, 2021).

Figure 10 shows a young boy holding a picture of Malcolm X to camera in the video. There are other clips of children holding large pictures, which are presumably of Mandela and King, though the video quality makes it impossible to tell, as shown in *Figure 11*. This imagery was also a nod to Wahab’s family’s past, as his grandmother was Nelson Mandela’s first secretary, “so from an early age I was around revolutionary people that were involved with the ANC and the anti-apartheid movement, and that influenced me in listening to certain types of music” (Terzulli & Otchere, 2021).

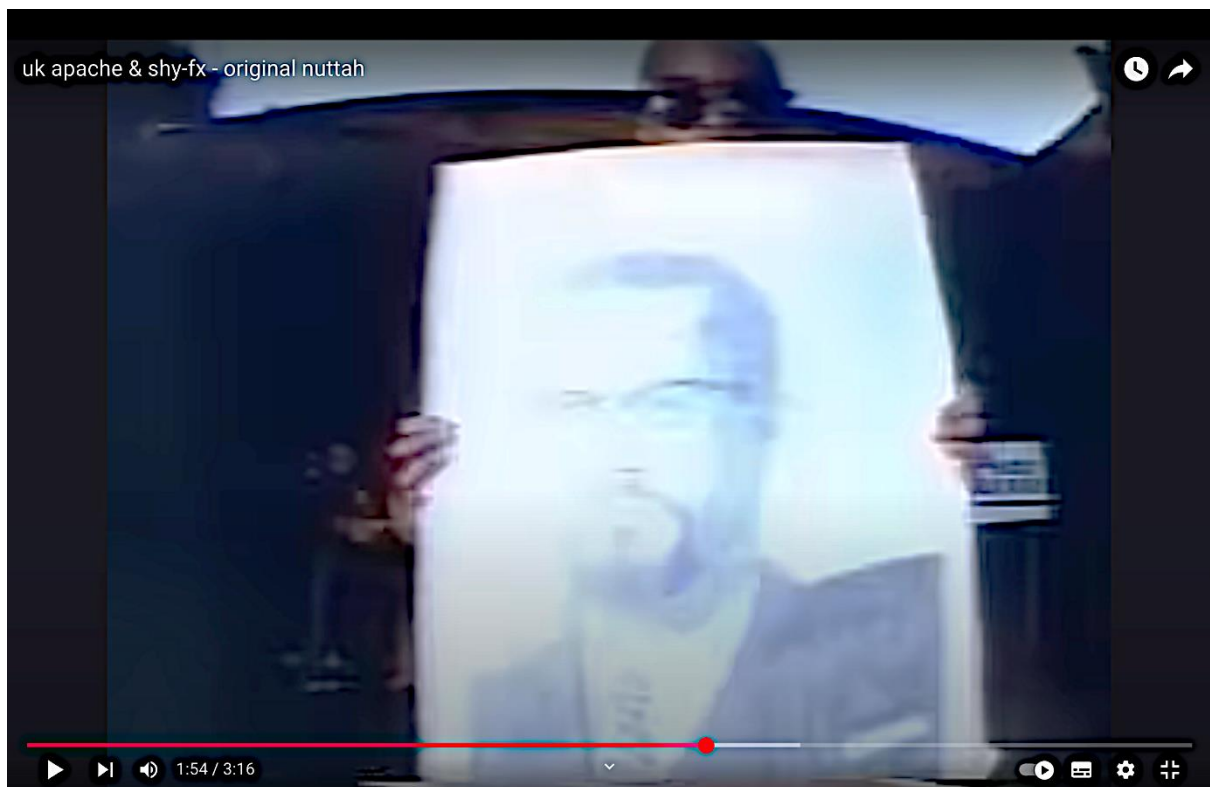


Figure 10: Still from Original Nuttah.



Figure 11: Still from Original Nuttah.

So, the *mise en scène* of *Original Nuttah* directly references a global, transnational movement of civil rights activists, while also drawing on Wahab's personal diasporic familial relationships. These transnational allusions, within a video that stays in one place, represent a criss-crossing of different routes in the video, different stories and practices that have all come together in this place and moment in time. Indeed, as Gilroy states, foregrounding music allows us to see London as "an important junction point or crossroads on the webbed pathways of black Atlantic political culture" (Gilroy, 1993, p.95). He also suggests the notion of the 'crossroads' to better understand that "the circulation and mutation of music across the black Atlantic explodes the dualistic structure which puts Africa, authenticity, purity, and origin in crude opposition to the Americas, hybridity, creolisation, and rootlessness" (Gilroy, 1993, p.199). *Original Nuttah*, then, is a prime example of black Atlantic culture. The video represents a crossroads between Britain, the US and South Africa in the production of race and nationality, and the struggle for civil and spatial rights. The video's allusions to political movements from other national contexts – political movements that were transnational in scope – highlights the fact that the "politics of representation and the narratives through which the nation imagines itself and presents itself to others are shifting as a result of globalizing pressures" (Fraile-Marcos, 2014, p.2). This transnationality is suggestive of how London was becoming a global city not just through the influx of corporate capital but also through the self-awareness and cultural productions of artists whose family migrated to the UK during the twentieth century. *Original Nuttah* represents how collective identities were being navigated both globally and locally in the new vernacular of jungle music and music video production.

Echoing Junior Hart's comments about making the video for *Incredible*, the growing importance of the music video format for distributing a music track is also recalled by Wahab. Of the *Original Nuttah* video, Wahab recalls:

We filmed the video in Kings Cross in one day, and Kiss FM put a call out on the radio for people to come down to the shoot. It should've been better really, but they made it quickly just so they had something to put out there. One TV show wouldn't play it because we had rain on the lens (Wahab in Terzulli & Otchere, 2021).

The fact that Kiss FM – formerly a pirate radio station, which then became the UK’s first black and dance music specialist radio station in 1990 – put out a call suggests that many of the video’s characters were contemporary fans of the jungle scene, local to London. The video creates a sense of playfully taking the club into public spaces of the city, similar to the representations of public and club spaces alongside one another in *Incredible*. But the details of the space itself are not made clear, and it could be anywhere in London to a viewer who doesn’t recognise the surrounding buildings. In fact, without this contextual detail it might not be clear the video was filmed or set in London. The video represents a fragment of inner-city space, whose inhabitants claim a right to it through convivial play.

The video is therefore different to *Incredible* in its lack of movement through the city and its lack of iconic landmarks such as Big Ben, and of the studio space in which the track was produced. *Incredible* shows the city being travelled through, with this movement through the urban landscape covering different locations, both local and iconic. *Original Nuttah’s mise en scène*, on the other hand, is distinctly static. There is no leaving the space where the performance takes place, but the video’s reference to transnational civil rights movements does hint at the global scale. Both videos generate a sense of the tension between the local and the global in a fragmenting inner-city London, emphasising the role of music and dance as a means for community cohesion. As such, *Incredible* and *Original Nuttah* both resonate with and differ in a number of ways to the music video for *Inner City Life*, to which I will now turn.

*Inner City Life*⁵

⁵ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6vHkOI-Z7IY>

The video for *Inner City Life*, directed by Mark Lipscombe, moves rapidly between interior and exterior shots of an estate, a club in which a DJ plays to a dancing crowd, and a car park. In the interior estate shots, a mother is shown in a kitchen struggling to balance childcare with financial difficulties, while another woman fantasises about the club from the bedroom, at times alongside a child, at others a man. The exterior estate shots of the estate, by contrast, are absent of any women, instead occupied by older men and children playing ballgames.

The vocalist in *Inner City Life* is the Manchester-born jazz, soul, funk, and electronic dance music singer and songwriter Diane Charlemagne. The track was produced by Goldie (Clifford Joseph Price MBE), a music producer, DJ, visual artist, and pioneer of UK jungle, breakbeat, hardcore, and drum and bass music. In a 1995 episode of Channel 4's show *Passengers*, Goldie is credited with having "taken jungle from its underground inner-city roots [. . .] into the bigtime" (Channel 4, 2014, 2:12-2:17). In the show, DJ Fabio, who played a major role in London's jungle and drum and bass scenes alongside Grooverider (Raymond Bingham), and whose father features in *Inner City Life*, said of Goldie's place in the jungle scene that he "just came along and shifted everything, he's the godfather really" (DJ Fabio in Channel 4, 2014, 3:26-3:37). Goldie was born in Walsall and raised on the Heath Town housing estate in inner-city Wolverhampton, making his name as a dancer and graffiti artist across the Midlands, before a period living in New York and Miami.

It was only after his time in the US that Goldie moved to London and got involved in music production, working with jungle and drum and bass pioneers such as Kemistry & Storm (Valerie Olukemi "Kemi" Olusanya and Jayne Conneely), Fabio and Grooverider, and DJ Randall (Randall McNeil), who features in *Inner City Life* as the man in the bedroom of the flat. This flat was on the Wyndam Estate, shown in *Figure 12*, a large housing estate in Camberwell, an inner-city area in the borough of Southwark, south-east London. As can be seen, there is a resemblance between the modernist tower blocks of the Wyndam and those of Heath Town, suggesting that the video's location reflects the local area where Goldie grew up.



Figure 12: 1983 photograph of the tower blocks of Wyndam Estate, from the University of Edinburgh's Tower Block UK project archive.

The Wyndam Estate, shown in the music video in *Figure 13*, consists of five twenty-one storey tower blocks and three low rise blocks. Completed in 1965, the estate was built on bomb-damaged land formerly occupied by high-density terraced housing in Camberwell. The tower blocks are situated in the centre of the estate, built from concrete and brick in the modernist architectural style. As such, the Wyndam resembles many of the estates that were central to critiques of the inner city in the 1970s (Saumarez Smith, 2016), and that were increasingly described as ‘sink estates’ from 1997 onwards (Slater, 2018; Perera, 2019).



Figure 13: Still from Inner City Life.

Post-WWII, Camberwell was one of the major destinations for Windrush migrants, becoming an area with one of London’s highest concentrations of black inhabitants (Jensen & Gidley, 2016, p.20). The London Borough of Southwark, in which Camberwell is situated, “remained unusually working-class until the end of the twentieth century, and had one of the most extensive social housing programmes in England” (Carter, 2008, p.156). Since the 1980s, however, the area has seen a massive reduction in social housing stock, rising private rents, and an influx of middle-class, predominantly white, residents (Jensen & Gidley, 2016). The

kinds of precarity that these changes in housing impose on inner city areas are hinted at in the video for *Inner City Life*.

Inner, in contrast to *Incredible* and *Original Nuttah*, directly represents the inner city in the title and lyrics of the music track, and space plays a far more prominent role in the *mise en scène* of the video. The form of the video is different too. *Incredible* and *Original Nuttah* are both what Railton and Watson (2011) call ‘staged performance’ music videos, which focus on the artist’s performance of the track. While there is an element of performance in *Inner City Life*, with images of Diane Charlemagne singing from a black void, shown in *Figure 14*, these are interspersed with a loose narrative of life on the housing estate and in the club. The video is, therefore, much more hybrid in form than the other two jungle videos explored here, blending elements of performance, art, narrative, and even pseudo-documentary genre conventions of music video (Railton & Watson, 2011). This hybridity has an effect on the kind of story that the video tells. Of the three videos explored in this section, *Inner City Life* thus stands out as the most intricate representation of life in 1990s inner-city London.

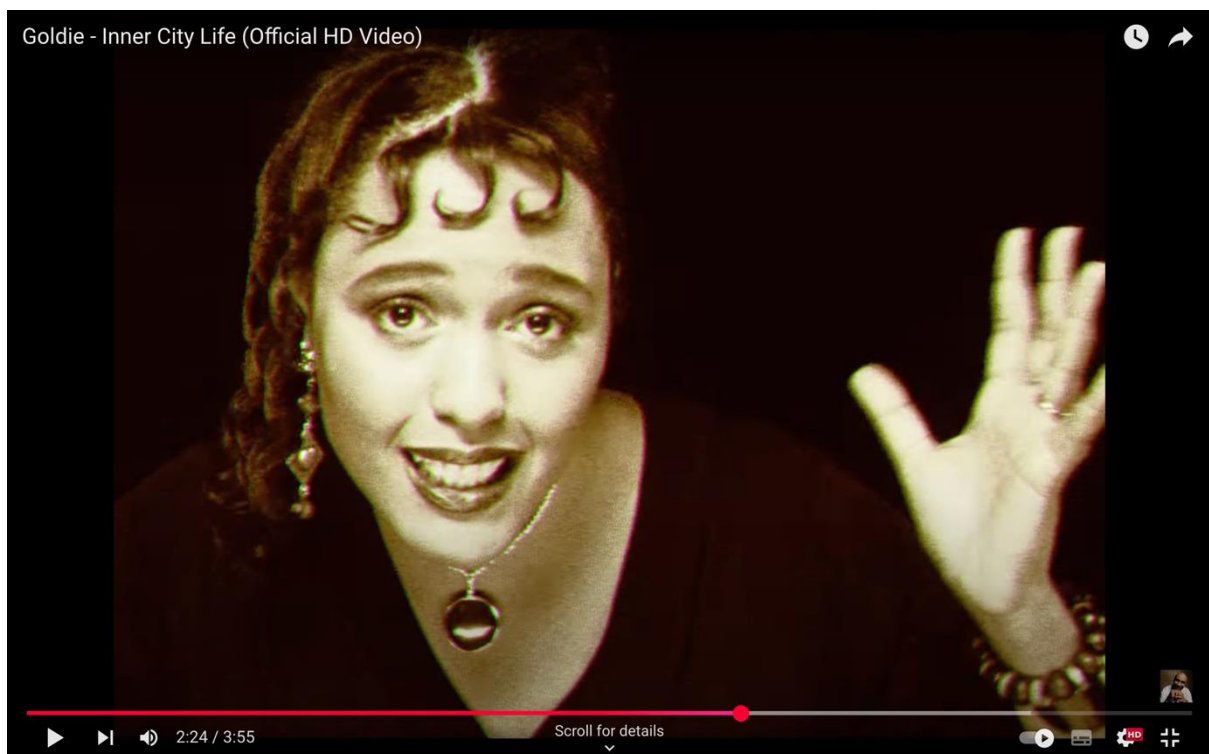


Figure 14: Still from *Inner City Life*, showing Diane Charlemagne.

The narrative structure of *Inner City Life*, despite its looseness, represents the interior domestic space of the estate as a playground for children and a convivial space for men, but a kind of prison for women, mothers in particular. The persistent difficulties of everyday life in the inner city are brought to the fore. Philip Wander, interpreting Lefebvre's notion of everyday life, argues that it refers to:

dull routine, the ongoing go-to-work, pay-the-bills, homeward trudge of daily existence. It indicates a sense of being in the world . . . that we know simply as the grey reality enveloping all we do. In this sphere of nonwork relations we live out our lives with our acquisitions, compulsions, and fears (Wander in Lefebvre, 2017, pp.vii-viii).

The repeated imagery of a gas meter and bills to pay, shown in *Figure 15*, is suggestive of these routines and fears. The mother's anguish arises from the struggle to maintain the basic necessities of life. The interior domestic space of the kitchen is distressing to the extent that the mother curtails the playfulness of her children: on the roof of the tower block, she burns the picture her children had painted in the kitchen. These themes are reminiscent of the notion of 'multiple deprivation' that was particularly linked to the inner-city during the 1970s (Andrews, 2018), but that also extended into the 1990s (Deas et al., 2003).

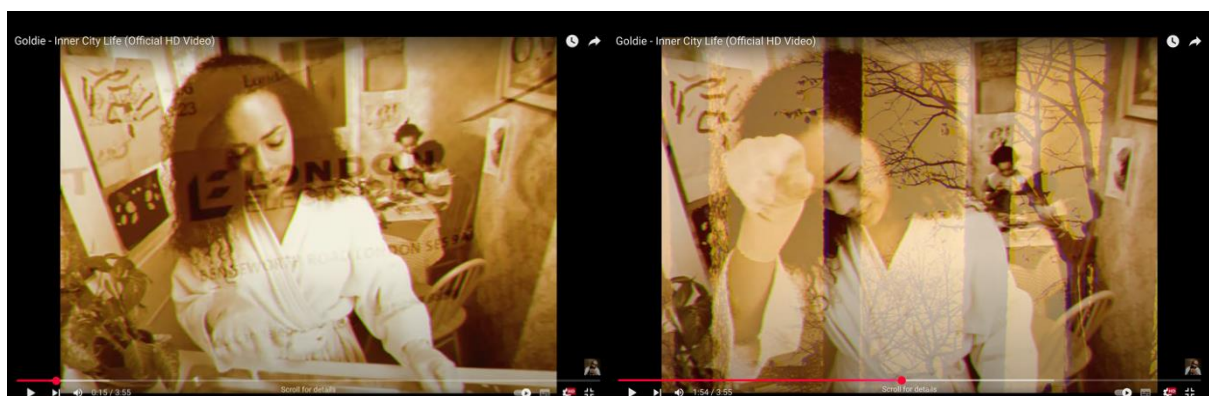


Figure 15: Stills from *Inner City Life*.

But there is play, nonetheless: the children paint and play ball games; the adults dance and play music. These are the elements of everyday life that cannot be wholly repressed by capitalist society: “The awakening of sexual desire and love; the undeniable delights of play; and the allure of the festival, the bursting of work-time and prefabricated leisure experienced in celebration” (Wander in his introduction to Lefebvre, 2017, p.ix). Diane Charlemagne’s lyrics play on this tension between the pressures of life in the inner-city ‘taking over’, on the one hand, and the desires of love and intimate affection, of not ‘letting go of love’, on the other. This tension is visually explored through the contrast between the spaces of the club, the estate, and the black void from which she sings. The club is a place of escape and festivity, where work-time is burst; the estate is a place of female domestic labour, where work-time weighs on the mother; and the void is a space without place or time, but which tries to connect the domestic space with the space of festivity through music.

Another element of play in the video relates to modes of representation: *Inner* draws on, plays with, and diverts from themes and representational conventions traditionally associated with social realism in British film and television. Like the so-called ‘kitchen sink’ films of the late 1950s and early 1960s, *Inner* utilises realist conventions to focus on the social lives of working-class characters, showing the spaces where they lived, played, and sometimes worked – and from which they often sought to escape (Lee, 2023; Hill, J. 2019). The way in which the video lays images of space over images of characters, as in *Figure 15*, suggests that space is in part being represented ‘poetically’ to signify states of mind, in this case a state of imprisonment, which was also a convention of the kitchen sink films (Higson, 1984). The video’s setting on a post-war inner-city council estate is also redolent of social realist films of the late twentieth and early twenty-first century (Nwonka, 2017). Particular elements of the video thus combine to tell a story of the difficulties faced by inner-city Londoners during this time through social realist conventions.

In the 1995 episode of *Passengers*, Goldie reflects on these ‘dark’ themes in jungle music:

The vibe of jungle is dark because there's dark goings on right now out there, and when an environment gets taken so far, where they're being oppressed by a system, and by bad policing and by bad community health and bad housing, which is the main force that's caused the problem, they made a nest, they made a lair, you know, and they're now paying the price for that, and then blaming it on the youth culture of today (Goldie in Channel 4, 2014, 3:00-3:21).

The estate in *Inner*, then, could be seen to represent this 'nest', one that was produced by bad housing policy, poor healthcare, and aggressive policing. These issues were frequently associated with the notion of the inner city in the latter half of the twentieth century, particularly on modernist housing estates (Waters, 2023; Saumarez Smith, 2016). The insinuated escape at the end of the video, as the car drives down the motorway, lends support to Waters' (2023) argument that the 'inner-city imaginary' of the late twentieth century can only be understood as a place in constant relation to the dynamic of escape. Here though it is not the escape of middle-class white people to the suburbs, but that of the working-class artist. Goldie's description of the 'nest' is reminiscent of Lefebvre's denigration of social housing estates, which he argued forced inhabitants to accept "the lowest possible threshold of sociability" (Lefebvre, 1991/1987, p.316). Lefebvre argued that the everyday life of a tenant in a "a government-subsidized high-rise housing project" provides a prime example of spatial practice: how people move around in and interact with physical space in their day to day lives (Lefebvre, 1991/1987, p.38). *Inner's* setting in the Wyndam, then, is instructive in thinking about how spatial practices are shown in representational spaces: how the daily activities of estate residents relate both to the way architects conceived of the high-rise block and how residents perceive and experience the space imaginatively.

Inner is also an example of the social realist convention of on-location shooting, in the club as well as the estate. Of the *Inner* music video, Goldie recalls:

It was kinda special because it was shot inside Paradise Club [a once iconic club in Islington, north London, now a shopping centre].⁶

⁶ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-CkRvpZijaw>

The viewer is shown this real location being used by members of the scene at the time. The video is, therefore, a visual record of an iconic space in the history of the development of jungle and drum and bass. This was a place of escapism and playfulness away from banality and work. The fact that Paradise is now a shopping centre is a concrete example of the temporary and precarious nature of spaces such as clubs and housing estates in inner-city London. It suggests the ontologically routed nature of these spaces, to work with Paul Gilroy's (1993) concept: such spaces are in a constant state of flux. There is nothing fixed about space, though particular meanings attached to space often linger and resonate long after a space has changed or been erased altogether. By shooting in the Paradise Club, *Inner* suggests how these meanings can be maintained through a music video.

However, the fragmentary nature of the video, jumping between different locations, most of which are unnamed, has the effect of fragmenting and disconnecting the Paradise Club from its actual local surroundings in Islington and collaging it with the scenes on the Wyndam Estate on the other side of the city, making it seem as though the club could be somewhere on the estate. The pace of the video also makes this detail hard to catch: the sign for the club is shown behind the decks at a couple of moments, as seen in *Figure 16*, but these instances are fleeting. Furthermore, there are hints at alienated celebration in the club scenes, as a CD, presumably of the *Inner* track, is covertly passed from hand to hand, seemingly avoiding detection from an unseen authority figure, alongside shots of club-goers glaring into the camera lens.

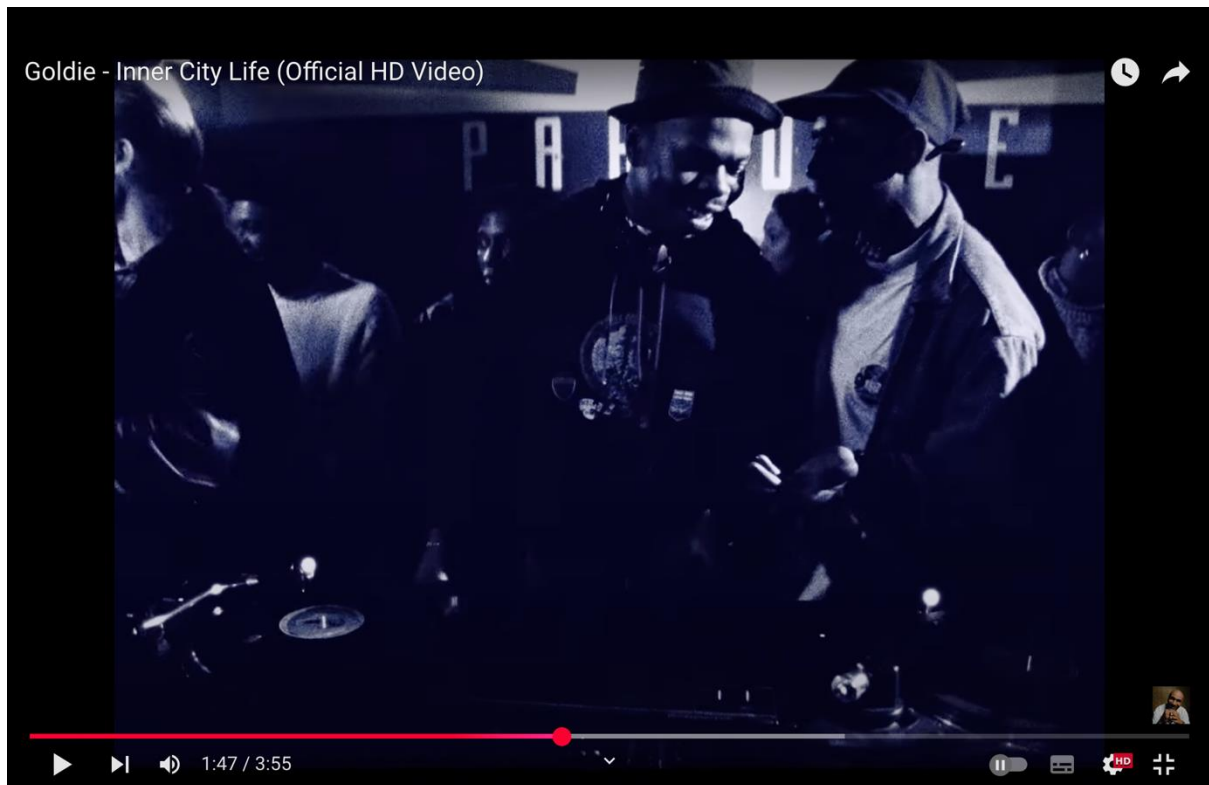


Figure 16: Still from *Inner City Life*, showing pioneering jungle DJ and producer Randall McNeil (aka DJ Randall), with the *Paradise* sign in the background.

These senses of disconnectedness and tainted celebration resonate with the video's deviations from realist conventions: the collage effects, which bring together different spaces, times, and 'realities'; Goldie's blackened eyes; the reversed time sequences; and Charlemagne's black void. There is, in Mark Fisher's (2016) terms, a weirdness to these representations of the inner city, and of space, time, and the people who inhabit them. As opposed to the conventions of social realist representation, in which action is played out in "exclusively human terms" (Williams, 1977, p.108), *Inner* arguably partakes in the conventions of the weird, which "de-naturalises all worlds, by exposing their instability, their openness to the outside" (Fisher, 2016, p.29). In *Inner*, the inner city is exposed as a 'polymorphic' concept, always drawing together a range of issues (Rhodes and Brown, 2018), but also as a fundamentally unstable space, constantly open to the sinister encroachment of capital. The history of the Paradise Club, and of the many housing estate tower blocks that have been demolished over the past few decades, speaks to this instability. Weirdness is produced through a tension between incommensurable worlds, between the world we see as 'everyday'

and a strange outside world that is incompatible with our everyday notions of space and time (Fisher, 2016). The incommensurability of these worlds exposes the ways in which our everyday notions of our world are actively produced rather than passively encountered. *Inner* implies that the inner city and its pressures, largely financial, is incommensurable with, and therefore alienates, the world of love that Charlemagne poignantly sings of from the abstract void of her performance. The void functions as a kind of anti-place in conversation with the representations of specific places such as the Paradise and the Wyndam.

In an interview about *Inner* (DJ Mg, 2024), Goldie says of the video that it was ‘a moment in time’, emphasising the importance of capturing spaces such as the Paradise at the height of their significance for the jungle scene. This notion of a ‘moment in time’ occurs in relation to a number of urban music videos explored in this thesis, and is linked to the way in which particular places are experienced, as structures with a particular coherence. The notion of ‘structured coherence’ was introduced by David Harvey (1985) to explain how habits, political practices, and cultural forms interrelate to allow highly dynamic and fundamentally unstable capitalist societies to be experienced as coherent and stable, at least for periods of, or moments in, time. Looking at *Inner City Life*, then, is a way of exploring inner-city London in the 1990s through a cultural form that sheds light on how the coherence of contemporary space was being navigated and renegotiated. The experience of certain places, such as Paradise and the Wyndam, “is more than just lived everyday life. It is the 'moment' when the conceived, the perceived and the lived attain a certain 'structured coherence'” (Merrifield, 1993, p.525). There is a recognition, in Goldie’s description of the uses of Paradise and the Wyndam, that their ability to be used in this way was special because of the dynamism of urban space during this period. Places as significant as this, in which people developed a sense of their situation in relation to the wider city, the nation, and the world, might not last long.

Orlando Alves dos Santos Junior, following David Harvey, argues that “the capitalist dynamic is marked by tension between preservation and continuity of the constitutive elements of the structured coherence existing in a certain space at a particular time (power relations, social reproduction, values, culture, etc), and the destruction of this same coherence to make room

for a new space to accumulate capital” (Santos Junior, 2014, p.151). Hence there is the emergence of Paradise, so central to the development of the hardcore, jungle, and drum and bass scenes of the 1990s; its use as a setting for *Inner City Life*; and its subsequent destruction to make way for a shopping centre. *Inner City Life* is a record of this place: it captures moments in time in specific locations and suggests a history of the social lives that were being created and shared there. It provides a record of the tension between structured coherence and its necessary destruction by producing and telling a history of the interrelation between social housing estates and clubs towards the end of twentieth-century inner-city London, just as these spaces were fragmenting (Rhodes & Brown, 2018).

While the ‘darkness’ of the pressures of life in the social housing estates of inner-city London is explicitly referred to in *Inner*, it is balanced by representations of spaces such as the club scenes, outdoor spaces on the estate, and interior spaces of the flat in which children play. These scenes evoke a sense of community ownership of these spaces and claims to a right to the city in which this music and music video was being produced. *Inner* suggests that though there were issues within these spaces in the 1990s, play and connection between inhabitants persists. The spatial practices of residents, the way they move around and interact with physical space in their everyday lives, is generative of a culture that had profound effects on the way London in particular, and Britain more generally, was imagined and experienced at the end of the twentieth century. The emergence of jungle and subsequent urban music genres from London’s social housing estates demonstrate, in contrast to Lefebvre’s damning critique of housing projects (see Millington, 2020), that the threshold of sociability these spaces can foster are far higher than Lefebvre recognised.

The three videos explored in this section tell stories of 1990s inner-city London, highlighting the tension between the global city, its fragmentary forces, and the local, vernacular landscapes of everyday life. *Incredible* utilises semi-public outdoor spaces for the performance of music and dance, invoking the city through its imagery of central London in conversation with the more local spaces of the club, the car park, the cage, and graffitied walls. Similarly, *Original Nuttah* represents the global city through its invocations of transnational political

movements in conversation with a changing Britishness, shaped through the semi-public local space of the inner-city, turning this space into a club for the purpose of the video. Both videos emphasise the playfulness and conviviality of this inner-city culture, representing a desire to be outside, sharing in and celebrating the burgeoning genre of jungle. This theme of celebration is somewhat reflected in *Inner City Life*, in its outdoor and club scenes, but there are also important departures in this video's representations of the inner city. *Inner City Life* suggests a reason why the other two more celebratory videos stay outside: the interior, domestic pressures of everyday working-class life in 1990s inner-city London have an effect on the tone of the video, producing a sense of alienation.

Inner City Life blends and plays with representational modes in its representations of the urban landscape. The increasing precarity for social housing estate residents in the city – growing financial pressures as the global city steadily prices out its working-class inhabitants – is alluded to in the video's *mise en scène*, and more obliquely in Charlemagne's lyrics. A sense of social realism is produced in its representation of everyday working-class space, particularly the kitchen sink scenes. This realism suggests the engagement of urban music videos with the telling of stories about the inner-city spaces in which the music genres have developed, though the video's realism is unsettled by weird elements that hint at the limitations of realist representation. The use of interior domestic space produces a narrative of inner-city pressure that is developed in contrast to the relative conviviality of the semi-public outdoor spaces and the club. But even in the space of the Paradise Club there is a sense of caution that alienates a full sense of celebration: the covert sharing of the CD and the glaring direct address to the camera. These moments hint at the way jungle in particular and black cultural production in general were being treated by the British authorities.

In *All Black: Jungle Fever*, Banerjea talks about accusations that certain jungle tracks were glamourising violence and criminality. He argues that "if it's a reflection on the reality which an individual seeks to portray through his or her music, then I cannot see how it can be a negative thing" (08:41–08:51). The accusation that black British music glamourises and even incites violence can also be traced back to those genres that were seen as cultural imports

from former colonies. As will be explored in more detail below, the implied synonymity between inner-city music genres and criminality has been levelled towards all the genres that I am referring to as urban music. In the next section, I will explore this dynamic of sliding between local and global representations of space and the policing of urban music in the UKG scene that blossomed a few years after jungle.

Section 2: UK Garage

UKG emerged in London in the mid- to late-1990s. In its early days UKG had a particularly important 'Sunday scene', 'after hours' parties held in various south London pubs around Elephant and Castle, London Bridge, and Vauxhall (O'Hagan, 2004). So, the escapism of the genre's origins was not directed towards the West End but time spent in local vernacular landscapes. A defining track from this era of UKG, as it began to break into mainstream UK charts, was Scott Garcia and MC Styles' 1997 *A London Thing*, the music video for which will feature in Chapter 6. This track is evocative of a socio-political optimism encouraged by the newly elected New Labour government in 1997. This optimism was accompanied by celebratory representations of music, dance, and inner-city space in the burgeoning UKG scene, as seen in the 1999 video for Zed Bias's *Neighbourhood*, which is the first video I explore in this section. I will then discuss the video for *Bound 4 Da Reload (Casualty)* as a means of exploring the developments that were occurring in the UKG scene and the puncturing of the sense of optimism and celebration of the early New Labour period. I will then move on to two So Solid Crew music videos, *Oh No (Sentimental Things)* and *21 Seconds*, which further emphasise the tensions between the housing estate and the club, and mark a critical juncture in the relationship between urban music production, racialised policing practices, and the pressures of inner-city life at the turn of the century.

*Neighbourhood*⁷

The video for Zed Bias' *Neighbourhood*, featuring MC Rumpus and singer Nicky Prince, takes place in the centre of Brixton, south London. Shots in a car park of a DJ spinning records Zed Bias (Dave Jones) spinning the record, with Rumpus and Prince performing to camera alongside people dancing, together or individually, are the centrepiece of the video, shown in *Figure 17*. Bias was based in Milton Keynes when he made the original version of *Neighbourhood*, producing the track and recording Rumpus' vocals in the spare room of his home, which he'd turned into a studio. He describes the video as being composed of two parts. The first part was the car park scenes, which he attended. In *Zed Bias 'Neighbourhood' | The Making Of An UKG Anthem*,⁸ Bias says that he wanted to retain a level of anonymity at the time *Neighbourhood* was released, so he attended the music video shoot, but only features his hands and eyes feature for brief moments. The DJ spinning records is Glen Woods, a DJ and friend of Bias' also based in Milton Keynes. Bias also says that lots of people from the UKG scene attended the shoot, despite not being featured on the track, so there was a strong feeling of authenticity. This is another semi-public space, like the cage in *Incredible* or the car park in *Inner City Life*, appropriated by the makers of and performers in the video.

⁷ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VZSclt7DvCo>

⁸ https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=s1YumahR_k



Figure 17: Still from Neighbourhood.

The second part of the video takes place outside the carpark, following two twins around the streets. The twins cycle around Brixton centre and the outdoor Brixton Market delivering newspapers that advertise the track and the car park party, shown in *Figures 18* and *19*. These scenes draw the surrounding area into the video alongside the dance scenes which take place in the car park. The twins' movement by bicycle suggests the proximity of his route – they don't leave the local area to advertise the dance, implying that the dancers are part of the neighbourhood that the vocal track is invoking. Of course, many people featured in the car park scenes, including Bias himself, had travelled there from places as far from Brixton as Milton Keynes, but the video suggests they are connected to this space through the UKG scene. While the spaces of the video are all local to Brixton, the use of the market, with its long history of Caribbean settlement and commerce, alludes to black Atlantic migration to London. The urban space is seen to foster a conviviality amongst local residents, similar to that shown in the exterior spaces in *Incredible* and *Original Nuttah*, taking club activities into the semi-public spaces of the local area.



Figure 18: Still from Neighbourhood.



Figure 19: Still from Neighbourhood.

Neighbourhood was released just two years after the landslide election of Tony Blair and New Labour in 1997, and the introduction of a new discourse on and approach to the urban and to social housing. At the beginning of their tenure in parliament, New Labour's policymakers declared "an unprecedented policy investment in programmes of urban renewal and regeneration, child poverty alleviation initiatives and social welfare reforms," cultivating a sense of a new period in British society after the despondency that had grown during the Conservatives' rule (Nwonka, 2023, p.77). New Labour promised to solve issues of inequality and social exclusion, particularly in social housing estates (Imrie & Raco, 2003; Lees, 2014). This sense of optimism towards the future of cities and urban space is reflected in *Neighbourhood*, which was directed by Andy Hylton, who I interviewed for this thesis.

I asked Hylton about *Neighbourhood* in the interview I conducted with him for this thesis. Of the video, he said:

I'm very much excited about life and energy of living in London, the buildings, the streets, the diversity, has always been something that I wanna capture and I think that was the perfect track because it was talking about the neighbourhood, so we just built in a very rough story.

This nods to the sense of conviviality that the video's loose narrative produces, with the members of the local community, of different races, sexes, and ages, coming together in urban space (Gilroy, 2004). As in *Incredible*, *Original Nuttah*, and *Inner City Life*, the video represents the role of communally shared music and dance as "interpersonal rituals" that mark convivial cultures in urban environments (Gilroy, 2004, p.xi). This also relates to the energy of London that Hylton wanted to capture, which is an amalgamation of people coming from different places in the built environment of the city. The video's imaginative use of space invokes these senses of 'everyday life' in inner-city London (Lefebvre, 2017), interacting with the built environment and the practices of those who live in it and move through it.

In the interview I conducted with him, Hylton also discussed the conventions he wanted to bring into the video:

So, I just thought I wanna get people together, make a little rave in a car park, and set it in an environment where we can shoot in a car park for part of the day, and the earlier part of the day we can go outside and shoot on the streets, and be very handheld and documentary style, and just shooting characters really, finding characters to inhabit that world and give it that edge of reality, so the environment just feels honest. It's not forced or anything, it could feel like this could be a documentary.

This suggests that, like Brunsdon's argument about representations of local London, there is a feeling that realist conventions are appropriate for representations of urban music genres. In this sense it is reminiscent of *Inner City Life*, particularly in the way certain social realist conventions are drawn on, such as shooting on location, casting local non-professional performers, and depicting working-class space. Like *Inner, Neighbourhood* is also a hybrid of music video genres: part performance video, and part pseudo-documentary, recording everyday scenes from the local area (Railton & Watson, 2011). These elements create a sense of connection to the local area: in contrast to the dance scenes which explicitly address the camera, there are also glimpses of people going about their everyday lives, enacting spatial practices, and unwittingly partaking in the production of the video.

In our interview, Hylton spoke about choices of location and international influences on the style of the video:

We were based in a car park, and it seems a bit cliché now but at the time I don't know if there was much going on like that, that kind of video, very much like into the camera with a wide-angle thing. I was ripping that probably straight out of the US, Hype Williams and all this stuff that was coming out of the States.

Though Hylton highlights the influences travelling from the US and directors such as Harold "Hype" Williams, an American music video and film director, producer, and screenwriter, this

description of the *Neighbourhood* also calls to mind the videos for *Incredible* and *Original Nuttah*. These multiple influences suggest UKG as another manifestation of black Atlantic culture (Gilroy, 1993). Rather than the influence of American directors undermining the Britishness of urban music videos, it highlights how movement and sharing is an integral part of black Atlantic cultural production, and how this culture overlaps with national cultural production. In this case, the local space of Brixton centre is in sonic and visual conversation with UKG's routes through Britain's jungle scene, Jamaican sound system culture, and American hip hop video culture.

The influence of different representational styles from different international contexts was also alluded to in the interview I conducted with Orson Nava. I asked Nava if there was "a sense that what was going on in the garage scene was something that was very British, in terms of the music and in terms of the videos," to which Nava responded:

I think it [UKG] was obviously very influenced by hip hop, but it was also influenced [. . .] in some ways by the reggae sound system culture and I guess by some of the jungle stuff that came before it as well, so it always had a pretty British flavour to me and the music videos I think were a bit different as well, especially because if you look at that moment I think a lot of the American hip hop videos were not particularly engaging with fantasy very much or special effects stuff, but there was a sub-strand of British garage music [videos] including one I made for [So Solid member] Harvey which were kind of quite influenced by manga really, and science fiction, and had quite a lot of special effects, it was a form of afro-futurism in a way, [. . .] so I think that visually there was a certain kind of aesthetic there that was quite interesting and quite British.

An interesting point to pick up on here is that, for Nava, much of what made UK garage audio-visual production distinctively British was the way it mixed together cultures from a variety of national contexts, in some cases those associated with black Atlantic culture, such as US hip hop and Jamaican-British reggae sound systems, but in other cases associated with other national contexts, such as Japanese manga. The sub-strand to which Nava refers relates to the afro-futurism that was a marker of the jungle scene's renegotiation of Britishness, but also the growing sense of London as a multi-cultural city, in which many different nationalities partook in the production of vernacular landscapes. Images such as the one in *Figure 20*, which shows

Harvey performing to camera in Nava's sci-fi martial arts music video for *Get Up And Move*,⁹ are playfully divergent from the spaces of inner-city London, even if the sonic element is still connected. This divergence suggests the nature of London as a global city, and the many different representational influences that were flowing through it at the time. It is also suggestive of a desire on the part of a number of artists to move away not just from conventional representations of the inner city, but from representations of local, vernacular inner-city space altogether, and from the conventions of social realism that are often tied to these spaces. By combining different sonic and visual genres, videos such as *Get Up And Move* challenge the notion that music genres which emphasise the importance of local space must rely on conventions of realism, and that realism is where they conventionally 'belong'. These combinations produce a sense of weirdness that exposes notions of belonging, and what and who belongs where.



Figure 20: Still from *Get Up And Move*.

⁹ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sWNXvvgJH30n>

There is nothing particularly weird about *Neighbourhood*, though. Instead, there is a faint sense of eeriness in the absence of representations of space in a music video that so directly references the experience of people living in the same area as one another. The representation of the neighbourhood in the video's *mise en scène* only includes housing in a brief shot of someone's letterbox, shown in *Figure 21*. Otherwise, the focus is on people in the local public spaces of the street, the market, and the car park. This is far more similar to *Incredible* and *Original Nuttah* than to *Inner City Life* in its minimal representation of inner-city London's social housing.



Figure 21: Still from *Neighbourhood*.

In *Neighbourhood*, the domestic doors are kept closed. As in all of the videos discussed so far, the celebration of neighbourhood does not take place within the home. On one hand, this makes sense for tracks that were designed to be listened and danced to in clubs and at parties, that capture a sense of optimism and celebration. Furthermore, there is power in these images of claiming public spaces in the city, particularly considering that black British music

has often been marginalised from more formal public spaces and often restricted to domestic spaces such as Blues Parties.

On the other hand, there is a sense that these interior domestic spaces are absent because they were places from which residents wanted to escape. This sense of the estate as somewhere to escape from through social mobility can be understood in more depth by noting how New Labour continued the previous Conservative government's legacy of demonising and privatising social housing estates through 'urban regeneration' policies (Imrie & Raco, 2003; Lees, 2003), particularly in their discourse around 'sink estates' (Watt, 2020; Slater, 2018; Lees & White, 2020). In combination with the continued attack on social housing, New Labour embraced "the continuation of racially specific crime control policies as a means to overpolice working-class Black people," particularly through Operation Trident (Nwonka, 2023, p.77). The relationship between regeneration discourse, racialised policing practices, and urban music videos will be explored in more detail below, first through the video for *Bound 4 Da Reload (Casualty)*.

*Bound 4 Da Reload (Casualty)*¹⁰

Bound 4 Da Reload takes place on the threshold and in the interior space of a club in which Oxide and Neutrino (Alex Rivers and Mark Osei-tutu) perform. The video opens with the sound of blaring police sirens and a kick drum that sounds like a beating heart, as a door opens towards camera and a man is escorted through it onto the street by a bouncer. The club itself is not a glamorous West End super club, but a local vernacular space more redolent of the Sunday Scene of early UKG. Suddenly a police car pulls up to the curb with a double of the ejected man sat in the back seat, as seen in *Figure 22*. The double smiles at the ejected man before 'shooting' him with 'gun fingers' as the music track kicks in. We see the man lying on the floor, with Oxide and Neutrino standing over him. The video then follows the man as he

¹⁰ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AZ-27rdwJPs>

re-enters the club, walking around like a zombie in the dark light, the crowd around him sometimes statuesque, time seemingly frozen, as he takes in the UKG duo's performance.



Figure 22: Still from Bound 4 Da Reload (Casualty).

The symbolic shooting of the protagonist ties in with the track's use of a sample from the BBC television programme *Casualty*, hence the track's name. The theme of shooting also evokes police and media narratives around urban music genres, nightclubs, council estates, and violence, particularly with the logic of Operation Trident (Nwonka, 2023, 2025). Operation Trident (1998-2013) was a Metropolitan Police policing unit set up to tackle so-called 'black-on-black' gun crime, initially established in the London boroughs of Lambeth and Brent before expanding to cover the entire city. The unit installed a 'transnational policing variant' in its "construction of gun violence as a Jamaican diasporic criminal activity," but also "expressed a concern over Black gun crime's rapid development as a 'home grown' affliction within the UK's inner-cities" (Nwonka, 2023, p.79; Nwonka, 2025, pp.3-4). This dynamic between Caribbean influence and home-grown development is recognisable from the urban music genres that

this project focusses on, and, as noted in Chapter 1, these genres' have faced unprecedented policing practices of the Metropolitan Police.

Housing estates and clubs have been central locations of this policing. Trident often focussed on council estates with high proportions of black residents, such as the Stonebridge Estate in Brent, which were characterised as 'symbolic locations' in need of extra police focus (Nwonka, 2025). Trident's policing also had a clear focus on clubs, as they argued that many instances of 'black-on-black' gun crime took place in these spaces (Silverstone, 2016). The video plays with and diverges from the logic and discourse of Trident in the representation of a white man as the victim and perpetrator of a shooting. The video is in some senses a representation of 'white-on-white' violence, as the protagonist 'shoots' another version of himself from the back of the police car, and from outside the club. But the video is primarily based around the idea of a 'reload', a convention by which a track is 'reloaded' (started from the beginning) because the audience want to hear it again, often signified by 'gun fingers' to show support. Again, hence the track's name.

The track's sampled dialogue – "Ah shit! I've been shot/I don't fucking believe this, could everyone stop getting shot?" – is from Guy Ritchie's London-set crime-comedy film *Lock, Stock and Two Smoking Barrels* (1998). When this sample first plays, the protagonist has just walked between two black men; he then turns to face them and they double over clutching their stomachs when the sound of the gunshot plays. The two men then start smiling, looking up towards the protagonist as the shooting is revealed to be a pretence. This joke links with the joviality of the sampled dialogue, but also the sense that there is no 'social realist impulse' at work here. Ritchie is not generally perceived as a social realist director and *Lock, Stock* is not a social realist text. Neither is *Bound*, which instead produces many moments of weirdness and eeriness: the two versions of the protagonist; the horror-style lighting and *mise en scène* as the protagonist wanders around the club like a zombie; and the slowing and stopping of time.

Brunsdon (2019/2007, p.83) says of films that produce a sense of local London space:

One of the textual strategies which is used to guarantee authenticity is a soundtrack in which London vernacular speech, particularly of male characters, is dominated by obscenity. The sound of everyday London life is 'fucking this and fucking that'.

What is interesting here is that the obscenity of *Bound* comes from the sample, whereas Neutrino's Mcing doesn't use any profanities, emphasising instead his lyrical prowess. The sample is an 'acousmatic' sound, a sound without a visible diegetic source. Fisher (2016) argues that acousmatic sound produces an eerie feeling as the agent that produced the sound isn't present, so there is a question over the type of agent that has produced it. So, alongside the comedic element of the request to 'stop getting shot', the use of the sample from *Lock, Stock* also produces a sense of eeriness, as the dialogue narrates a shooting that doesn't actually take place on screen in *Bound*. This eeriness plays on the criminalisation of UKG in particular and urban music genres in general by emphasising the space of the club as somewhere where something can be born again, where representational spaces will continue to be produced.

Bound is another hybrid genre video, combining conventions from performance and narrative music videos with samples from TV and film. The lyrics also involve the practice of 'antiphony', or 'call and response', as Neutrino repeats to the audience: "I say/ you say/ make some noise," shown in *Figure 23*. Gilroy notes antiphony as a key convention in black Atlantic culture, arguing that:

there is a democratic, communitarian moment enshrined in the practice of antiphony which symbolises and anticipates (but does not guarantee) new, non-dominating social relationships. Lines between self and other are blurred and special forms of pleasure are created as a result of the meetings and conversations that are established between one fractured, incomplete, and unfinished racial self and others. Antiphony is the structure that hosts these essential encounters (Gilroy, 1993, p.79)

The track, then, calls for a communitarian and convivial moment through its lyrics, asking for the audience to partake in its performance. The blurring of lines between self and other is sonically represented through the convention of antiphony, and visually represented through the weird doubling of the protagonist. The vernacular landscape of the club, then, as the structure that hosts antiphonic performance, convivial meetings, and conversation, also symbolises and represents the potential for new social relations.

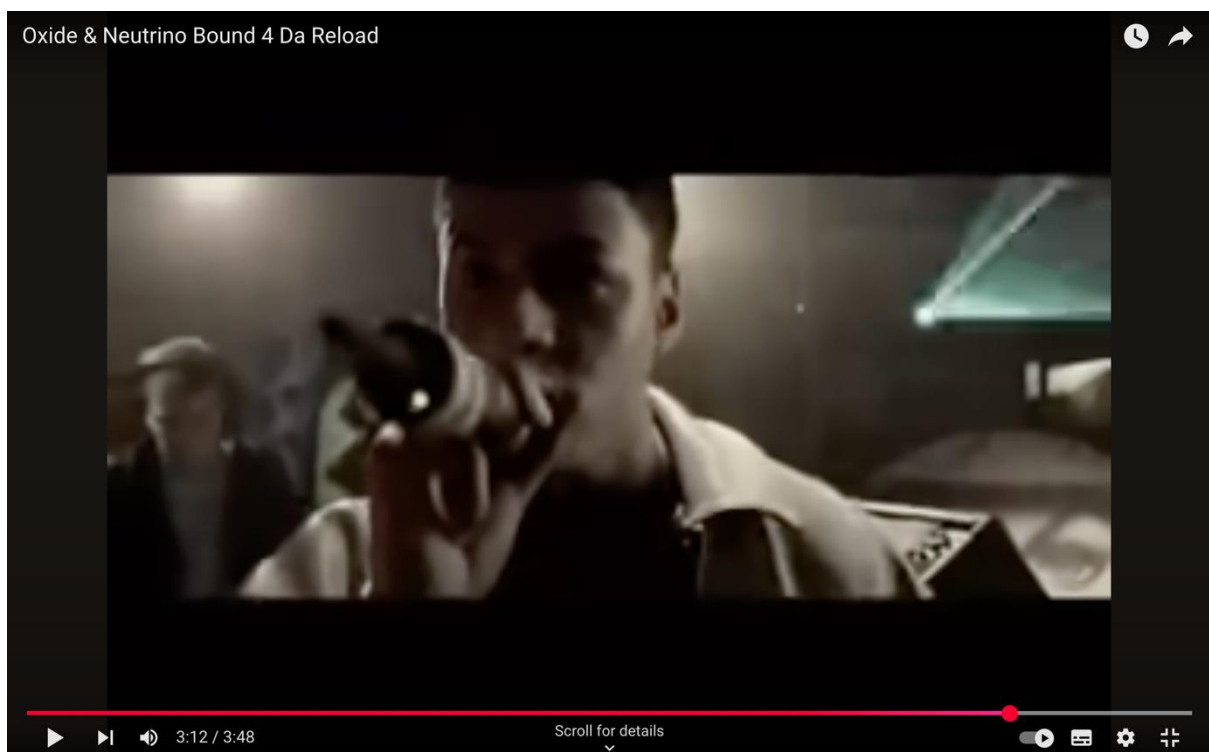


Figure 23: Still from *Bound 4 Da Reload* (Casualty), showing Neutrino (front-right) and Oxide (back-left).

Bound is an important marker of the tensions between inner-city celebration and alienation, and a hint at how the UKG scene was to develop in the next couple of years. In 2013, a documentary, *Link Up TV presents The So Solid Legacy* (Link Up TV, 2013),¹¹ was made for promotional platform and YouTube channel Link Up TV. In an interview in the documentary,

¹¹ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3qZQGvcifT4>

former So Solid member Swiss recalls how the group formed an idea of their potential trajectory when attending the shoot for *Bound*:

The [*Bound 4 Da Reload*] *Casualty* video is such a milestone in terms of what was about to take place after that, [. . .] everyone that was on [pirate radio station] Delight FM at that time and most people that became So Solid members were at that video shoot [. . .] and I just think that was the click and the turning point for 'OK, we need to take this to a next level, we've actually seen what we can do with this from seeing Oxide and Neutrino making this video, and this is what we want now, this is the next level, from going from a radio station to taking it to the big screen (Swiss in Link Up TV, 2013, 13:40-14:59).

This insight speaks to the potential importance of a music video shoot for specific artists working in a scene and for the scene itself. A shoot can bring various artists together in one place and foster an energy of excitement and possibility, creating a moment in time, a 'milestone'. What was 'about to take place' was a distinctive shift in the UKG scene, most famously through the work of So Solid Crew, to which I will now turn.

*Oh No (Sentimental Things)*¹²

The 2001 video of So Solid Crew's *Oh No (Sentimental Things)* focusses on and connects three different vernacular landscapes. Scenes from a club, in which So Solid-members Romeo (Marvin Darkins), Megaman (Dwayne Vincent), and Lisa Maffia perform to camera, are juxtaposed with interior and exterior scenes from a council estate, in which men and women pose in amongst the modernist structures. Between these spaces is the connecting space of the record store, in which a man buys a record (presumably *Oh No*) that he plays both by himself in his flat and at the club to a full and energetic room. The club imagery, shown in *Figure 24*, hints at the glamour and hedonism of the UKG scene. The characters and

¹² <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=guJ0NyQVs9I>

performers in these scenes wear suits and dresses, smiling and dancing as they sip champagne, the tone celebratory.

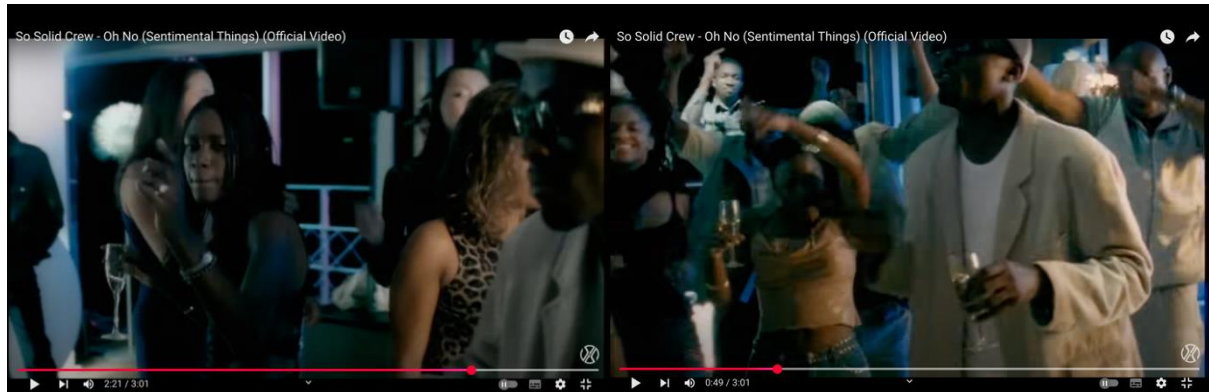


Figure 24: Stills from Oh No.

The difference between the spaces and lifestyles of the club and the estate is emphasised through character and artist performance, clothing, lighting, and tone. In contrast to the energised dancing and glamorous clothing of the club, the estate residents are far more static in their performance and movement, dressed in more casual outfits, as shown in *Figure 25*. Shots of Maffia on the estate balcony in a crisp white outfit are the one exception. Here, though, is an example of how the tones and performances of the two spaces are juxtaposed. On the balcony she looks directly at the camera and out across the estate with a serious expression, as shown in *Figure 26*.



Figure 25: Stills from Oh No.



Figure 26: Stills from *Oh No*, showing Maffia.

The connections and contrasts between these spaces in *Oh No* suggests how far So Solid had come in just a few years. So Solid Crew were a collective of musicians (30 at its peak), many of whom grew up in and around the Winstanley and York Road Estate and the Surrey Lane Estate in the Borough of Wandsworth, south-west London. Megaman and Romeo first began performing as part of Megaman's uncle's Ragga Sound System at Notting Hill Carnival before turning towards UKG (Ekpoudom, 2023). Lisa Maffia was born in Brixton to a Jamaican father and an Anglo-Italian mother. As Aniefiok Ekpoudom argues, the group represented a shift in London's demographic, as many of the Crew "were among the first generation of Black Caribbean kids who had parents born and raised in Britain [. . .] a reflection of a Caribbean presence now entrenched in the city" (Ekpoudom, 2023, pp.36-37). Like the jungle scene, then, UKG bears traces of the black Atlantic sound system culture that Caribbean migrants had brought to the UK (Gilroy, 1993).

But So Solid were also at the forefront of a significant development in UKG conventions. Tracks such as Scott Garcia & MC Styles' *A London Thing* (1997), DJ Luck & MC Neat's *A Little Bit of Luck* (1999), and *Neighbourhood* all featured MCs in what DJ Target (Darren Joseph) describes as the "classic hosting style" (DJ Target, 2019, p.28). This style struck a balance between the instrumental and MC (and sometimes singer, as in the case of *Neighbourhood's* Nicky Prince), whereby lyricism was present but was often structured by repetition. But a shift began to occur in the genre in the early 2000s, with instrumental tracks being designed to allow more space for MCs to deliver full verses. This shift was accompanied by the emergence of crews

and collectives of DJs and MCs, most famously So Solid, but also others such as Heartless Crew and Pay As U Go Cartel.

Scott Garcia related this development to the sense that the first waves of successful UKG artists, who worked with the classic hosting style, had lost touch with the experiences of those at the sharp end of Conservative and New Labour policies: the working-class residents of council estates, like those who made up the new crews and collectives. In the 2013 documentary *Rewind 4Ever: The History of UK Garage*,¹³ Garcia said of the development:

The So Solid, Heartless Crew [. . .] era of UK garage was a very important one [. . .] not just musically but socially. I think that [. . .] it gave the youth a mouthpiece and that was why it was so popular, and [. . .] that was why some of the old guard were so against it, because they instantly realised that they couldn't keep up with that, because they were out of touch with that, [. . .] it'd been a long time since a lot of those guys had even been on a council estate, let alone to know what was going on on a council estate, [. . .] because they'd spent the last four years driving round in big BMWs and living the life – great, but these kids needed to say what was on their mind, [. . .] and it was an opportunity for kids from whatever background to express themselves musically (Garcia in *ukg bible*, 2017, 1:03:15-1:04:04).

The classic hosting style didn't 163ouncih space for a new generation of working-class artists who wanted to use garage instrumentals as a 'mouthpiece' through which they could talk about their social lives. But it's also important to note, alongside Garcia's attention to the musical and the social importance of the music tracks, the importance of So Solid's music video output. The music tracks were sonically representing stories that weren't being told in the early days of UKG, while the music videos allowed for visual storytelling of inner-city London during this period. This is an example of the kind of social extension that is a key convention of social realist film and television (Williams, 1977), and *Oh No*, like *Inner City Life* before it, draws on social realist conventions in its representations of the council estate.

¹³ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JAvqjkg5SA4>

The 164 council estate scenes and their relationship with the club scenes are particularly reminiscent of *Inner*. In *Oh No*, however, the estate is less of a prison for the female characters, who are shown in the exterior spaces of the estate as well as the interiors. Like Charlemagne in *Inner*, Lisa Maffia predominantly performs in an abstract, rather than social, space. But in *Oh No* it is not a black void but a neon-blue abstract backdrop, shown in *Figure 27*, in front of which Maffia sings of the prowess of So Solid rather than the pressures of life in inner-city London. She is not the only performer in this space either, as Romeo opens the track alone in front of the neon lights, while Maffia also performs in the space of the club. The overall tone is far more celebratory than that of *Inner*, though the estate scenes are shot in comparatively dull lighting and the characters express themselves with more reserved body language. The estate scenes express a sense of the everyday, while the club is a special occasion, a celebratory place to escape to. In the exterior shots, women are either shown alone or with children, whereas the men are always shown in groups, with muted expressions when addressing the camera. The most energetic movement on the estate is the aggressive leaping of the dogs held by men in the exterior areas and in the playfulness of a child in the kitchen. That the child's mother reprimands them is again reminiscent of *Inner*, and while there is a father present in the kitchen, he looks away from this situation with a disinterested expression.



Figure 27: Still from Oh No.

While there is less restriction for the female characters in *Oh No* than in *Inner City Life*, the men still have a domineering presence, as shown in the control of the DJ decks, the manspreading in the club and the kitchen, and the large groups of men with dogs. This contrasts with the representations of women in images such as those shown in Figure 28, and the association of women with the kitchen, motherhood, and service through the shop assistant. And, though Maffia plays a central role in both the track and the music video, this contrast also plays out in the So Solid performances. There is a weird disjointedness between Maffia's chorus and Romeo's verses, both in the shifting sonics of the instrumental and the tone of lyrics. As Dan Hancox argues, "When Romeo's verses give way to Lisa Maffia's chorus, it's essentially a different track, like some omniscient unseen selector has flipped the crossfader back and forth, mid-song."¹⁴ Romeo's verses are confrontational and reference his lyrical as well as sexual prowess. One of his lines references the London Lovers Rock-group Black Harmony's 1979 version of Jean Carn's 1978 R&B-soul track *Don't Let it Go to Your Head*,

¹⁴ <https://daily.redbullmusicacademy.com/2019/09/so-solid-crew-they-dont-know-tribute>

suggesting a need to temper his ego, and again demonstrating a black Atlantic lineage. However, his assertions of superiority, both his own and So Solid's, are the resounding sentiment. In contrast, Maffia's chorus is humbler, referencing "little", "sentimental things". She still asserts that So Solid "rock the mic", but through a love of life and a good beat, ending with an antiphonic question to the audience: "tell me do you like?"

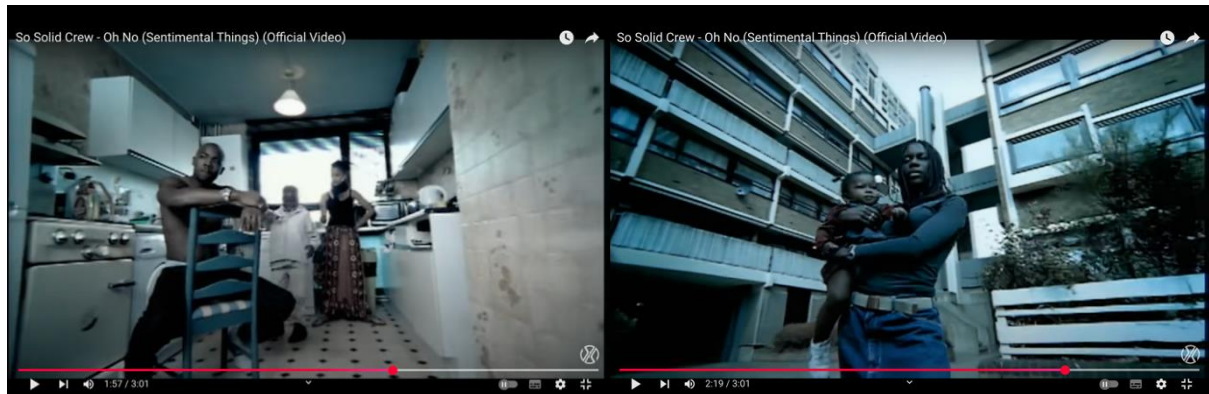


Figure 28: Stills from *Oh No*.

Despite the humble celebrations of Maffia's lyrics, there is still a visual sense that women carry the weight of domestic labour, and are more isolated than men, who assert more control over the public and private spaces of the inner city. *Oh No* emphasises the relationship and tension between the club and the estate that the artists themselves were experiencing. Maffia was a mother living on a council estate when this video was shot. "We were out at raves with champagne, then going home to council flats," said Maffia of this time (Maffia in Beaumont-Thomas, 2017). This was during a period when large council estates, like the one shown in *Oh No* and like those on which many So Solid members had grown up, were being vilified by the government and the media. In contrast to the Conservative vilification of the design of social housing estates producing criminality and social deviance through architectural determinism, which depicted estates as inherently bad places, New Labour focussed instead on the issue of estates as exclusively working-class spaces, arguing that this reproduced crime and 'anti-social behaviour'. Within New Labour's 'moral geography', "the council estate comes to play a major role as a symbolic marker of social disorganisation and disorder" (Atkinson & Helms, 2007,

p.129). In his first public speech as Prime Minister in 1997, at the Aylesbury Estate in south London, Tony Blair spoke of “rejecting a rootless morality” by regenerating council estates (Blair in Atkinson & Helms, 2007, p.129). To tackle this, New Labour’s urban regeneration policies sought to create a ‘classless society’ by creating ‘mixed income’ urban communities, which meant encouraging an influx of middle-class young professionals to council estates (Atkinson & Helms, 2007). As cities like London transitioned away from industrialisation towards global-city infrastructure, the market value of inner-city areas had greatly increased (Sassen, 2004). The land on which inner-city council estates had been built offered developers the potential for massive profits through ‘regeneration’ schemes that could provide mixed-tenure accommodation, which continued to reduce the social housing stock and the dissolving of traditional working-class communities (Watt, 2009, 2021; Boughton, 2018; Imrie & Raco, 2003; Lees, 2014).

Oh No is a playful testament to the importance of working-class space. The video opts for a realist representation of the estate, which shows everyday life in this vernacular landscape. It doesn’t use heightened colouration, special effects, or other editing techniques that could be considered to hide or idealise the space. But it shows how the estate, and the spatial practices that can be developed there, can generate extra-ordinary moments such as that represented in the club scenes. To do so, it represents the space of the record store, and the scene of the DJ playing and practicing in his living room, shown in *Figure 29*. The store is both an intermediary space between the home and the club, and a vernacular landscape in and of itself, where the DJ meets and greets friends and fellow artists. It is part of the art world (Becker, 2023/1982) of *Oh No*, alongside the club and the estate. The video actively contradicts the representation of council estates that were being espoused by New Labour, that these spaces produced a rootless morality. Instead, it celebrates the spaces in which the artists grew up, even if they often feel mundane or even unpleasant.



Figure 29: Stills from *Oh No*.

The club scenes suggest a dynamic of escape within the video, particularly through the contrasts in mood, tone, performance, and lighting discussed above. But, unlike in *Inner*, which represents a more alienated relationship to the estate in particular and the inner city in general, there is no representation of escape at the end of *Oh No*. The car is not shown speeding away down the motorway. Rather, the artists presumably head back to the estate once the track ends and the celebrations are over. In *Oh No*, the journeys between the estate, the record shop, and the club are not shown, but there is a suggestion that these routes are deeply meaningful in the story of So Solid, their emergence from inner-city London, and their impact on British music culture.

The tension between the vernacular, everyday inner city and the extra-ordinary global city is also explored in the final video I look at in this chapter: *21 Seconds*. It was with this track, off the same album as *Oh No* and also released in 2001, that So Solid topped the UK Singles Chart. *Oh No* connects a local estate with the glamour of the club and the convivial spaces of record stores. As will be explored below, *21 Seconds* contrasts in terms of the modes of representation, the dynamics between the club and the estate, and the suggestion of the impact of twenty-first century globalisation on the inner city and its vernacular landscapes.

21 Seconds¹⁵

So Solid released their first album *They Don't Know* in 2001, which featured a number of successful singles for which music videos were produced, including *Oh No*. Special effects were a feature of a few videos off this album, an expensive process attesting to the relatively large budgets the group were being supplied with for their audio-visual content, and suggesting the global scope of its distribution. The music video for one of these singles, *Haters* (2001),¹⁶ was again directed by Andy Hylton, who recalled shooting it in Shepherd's Bush, west London. The video combines shots from various outdoor locations with special effects like bolts of lightning, as shown in *Figure 30*. Both the title *Haters* and the album title evoke the split that was occurring in the UKG scene, insinuating that So Solid knew something that needed saying, which the older generation were out of touch with.

¹⁵ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=g7VhofoV3qs>

¹⁶ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1XhJ0xV0gmc>



Figure 30: Still from Haters.

The biggest hit off the album was *21 Seconds*, which became the first UKG track to reach number 1 in the UK Singles Chart, and which helped launch the group to national fame:

It took hold in South London and the inner cities. Stand on the kerb in any area across Lambeth and Lewisham and Southwark and Battersea in 2001, and you would hear its melody and pulse moving from car speakers and from radio sets (Ekpoudom, 2023, pp.38-39).

The track's music video, which won Best Video at the 2002 BRIT Awards, is set in a desolate, post-apocalyptic wasteland, shown in *Figure 31*, as members of the Crew deliver verses, each 21 seconds long.



Figure 31: Still from 21 Seconds.

The video opens with a shot of the wasteland, a city skyline featuring seemingly abandoned tower blocks in the background, and a swirling, clouded sky above. The shot is particularly reminiscent of the ‘desert of the real’ from the post-apocalyptic sci-fi film *The Matrix*, released just two years earlier in 1999, which also featured derelict buildings and a ‘torched’ sky. Alongside *The Matrix*, *21 Seconds* also bears resemblances to the sci-fi vampire film *Blade* (1998): one Crew member is dressed as a vampire while others fly into the club in long black leather coats reminiscent of the film’s protagonist. As in *The Matrix*, *Blade* also suggests a hidden ‘real’ world operating behind the scenes of the one that is taken to be reality, in this case controlled by vampires, with an underlying sense of the black action hero challenging the hegemony of whiteness (Bakke, 2010; Koh & Gwyne, 2017). Like *Blade* and *The Matrix*, *21 Seconds* relies heavily on special effects to produce a sense of space and action. This music video is the first included in this chapter to seemingly be shot completely in a studio, eschewing any local representations of vernacular space and further emphasising the fragmentation of the inner city lurking in the background. Following Railton and Watson’s (2011) typology of music video genres, *21 Seconds* is predominantly a performance video,

though it also has features of the art and narrative video. It certainly doesn't produce a sense of documentary in its representation of the city or the club. However, another similarity with *The Matrix* and *Blade* is an insinuation that this highly constructed 'desert of the real' offers new ways of understanding what is generally thought of as an unconstructed, everyday reality. In these film references, *21 Seconds* produces a sense of weirdness (Fisher, 2016), that these extravagant images are hinting at an element of reality – the tension between a globalising London and the spaces of the inner city – that can't be expressed using the conventions of social realism.

With barren land separating the tower blocks in the background from the club in the foreground, the video could be said to take place in the outer-inner city, as opposed to a conventional inner-city landscape (Millington, 2012). But there is also a sense that the setting is what the inner city might become. Fisher (2016) suggests that abandoned structures and barren landscapes produce a sense of eeriness, a feeling that there should be something there that is not. The landscape of *21 Seconds* produces this sense, of a city that has partially disappeared. The reason for this emptiness is unknown, but there is a sense that it might be beyond our everyday understanding of the nature of the world and reality. After the initial situating shot, there is a scene of two children crouched in the wasteland either side of a fiery purple potion, shown in *Figure 32*, which causes the boy to transform into Megaman, whose verse kicks off the track. This scene, then, is a sort of 'origin story', insinuating that Megaman comes from this wasteland.

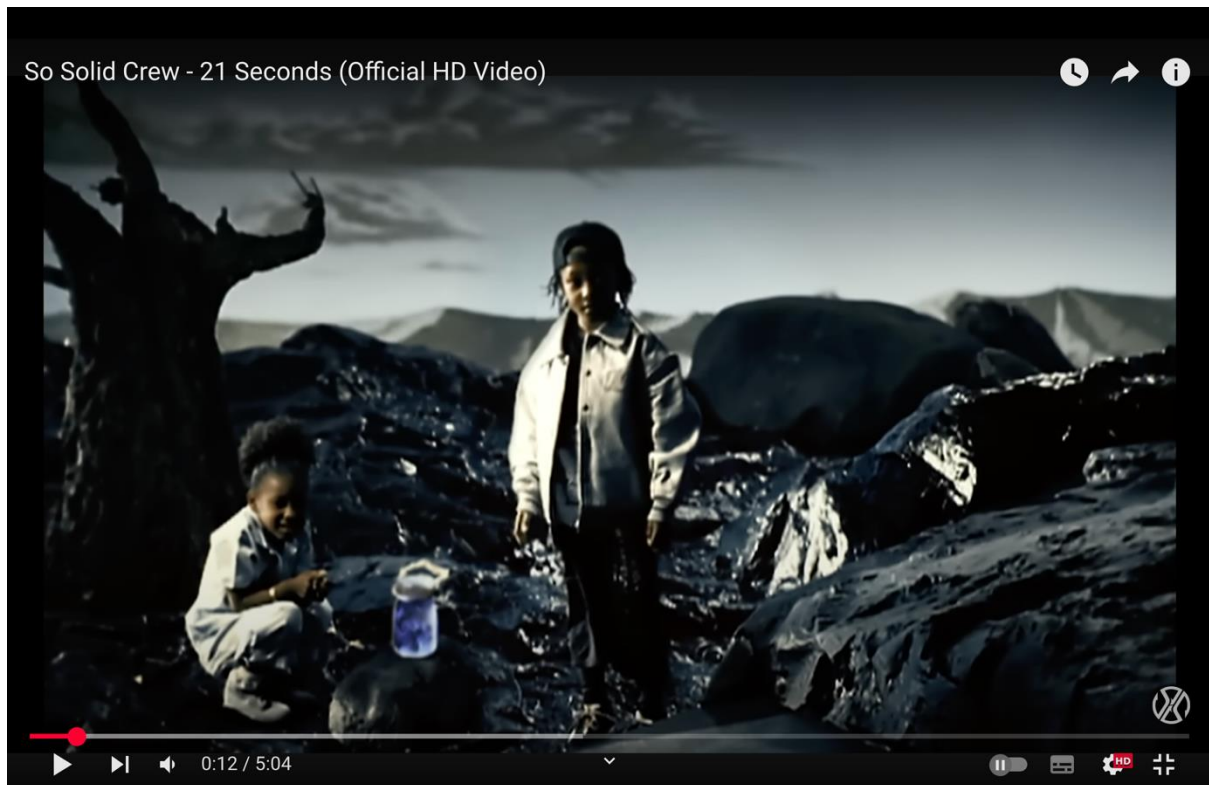


Figure 32: Still from 21 Seconds.

The rest of the video takes place in an outdoor club-like space, a cage within which the So Solid artists perform their verses, and outside of which crowds dance and clamour at the fence. It is reminiscent of the club scenes of *Inner*, and the outdoor dance scenes of *Neighbourhood*, *Original Nuttah*, and *Incredible*. But *21's* setting is also reminiscent of Charlamagne's eerie void in *Inner*, emptied of inner-city space. The video's setting is suggestive of the 'brownfield' land upon which developers were being encouraged to build during New Labour's urban renaissance (Lees, 2003). As noted above, the architects of 'estate regeneration' conceived of and recategorized council estates as 'sink estates', or 'brownfield land', "a term used 'to describe former commercial or industrial land that has become contaminated by chemical and industrial waste' and requires 'cleaning up' before being redeveloped" (Perera, 2019, p.17). In *21 Seconds*, the swirling sky and the purple potion speak to the notion of contamination, while the precipice is evocative of demolished land and the physical sensation of sinking.

The barren landscape produces a sense that the artists and dancers are alienated from a city that has become abstract, which recalls Lefebvre's (1991/1987) concept of alienation. As Japhy Wilson explains, Lefebvre's concept of alienation refers not only to "economic alienation in the sphere of production and property relations but also political alienation in relation to the state, and [. . .] a *human* or *spiritual* alienation within everyday life—the evisceration of symbolic significance and creative autonomy from the realm of lived experience" (Wilson, 2013, p. 366, italics in the original). The club sits on a literal precipice, struck at times by lightning bolts from the turbulent sky, shown in *Figure 33*. These bolts appeared in *Haters* to signify the exceptional creativity and glamour of the artists as they moved through the local spaces of London. This sense persists in *21*, but they also take on another layer of meaning here, signifying a tension between this exceptionality and the precarity of the spaces in which they were operating as artists.

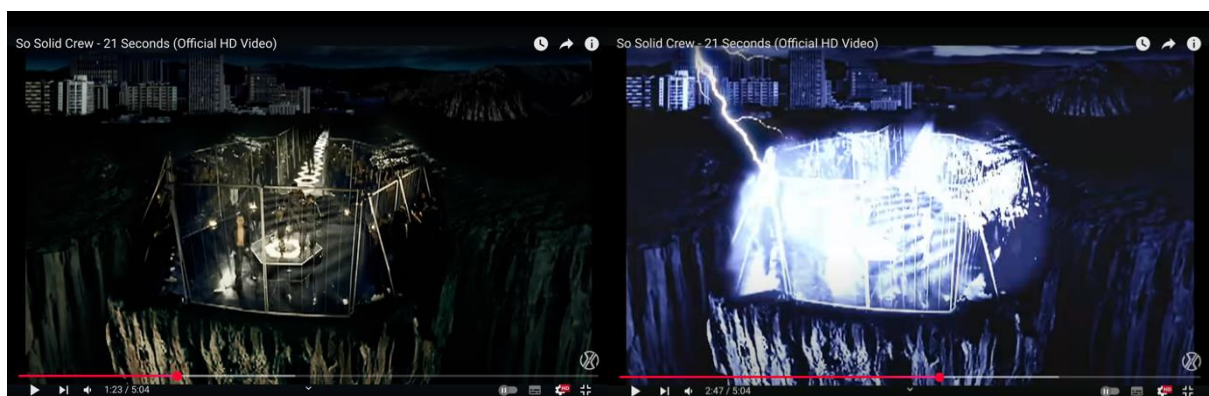


Figure 33: Stills from *21 Seconds*.

In my interview with Orson Nava, he described the music video for *21 Seconds* as 'sci-fi' and 'apocalyptic', and it is in keeping with his description of the audio-visual experimentation of the UKG scene he describes above, which "was evolving in quite an interesting healthy way, until the whole scene kind of imploded." The implosion to which Nava referred to in our interview came at the height of So Solid's fame, as the Crew were embroiled in a moral panic around increased gun violence in the UK's inner cities. In November 2001 there was a shooting at Romeo's birthday party in a central London nightclub, and in 2002 Asher D (Ashley Walters) was sentenced to 18 months in prison after being convicted for possession of a firearm. In

2003, then-minister for culture Kim Howells called So Solid “boasting macho idiot rappers” who were “glorifying gun culture and violence” (NME, 2003).

This negative treatment of the genre had a dramatic effect on UKG, and So Solid in particular, as tours got cancelled, radio stations avoided playing UKG tracks, and visuals had to change. In the interview I conducted with Orson Nava, he recalled:

I did a music video [. . .] which had a big martial arts fight sequence in it, and I remember being told or thinking at the time that if I had tried to get that commissioned even a month later, I don't think it would've happened. Because this big moral panic emerged around garage artists and violence.

Andy Hylton recounted similar experiences in the interview I conducted with him:

So Solid were always in the papers [. . .] and I think Westminster council used to shut down or stop videos being made that were for UK garage, so it started getting harder to shoot in certain places in London. There was definitely some kind of restriction on certain genres of music that they weren't happy about shooting.

This situation is particularly reminiscent of the moral panic around the ‘crisis’ of ‘muggings’ that Hall et al. (2017/1978) famously studied in the 1970s, arguing that the discourse of crises was used to justify increased policing, particularly of black working-class communities. This ‘forced synonymity’ between black musical expression and violence would continue to hamper the genres that developed after the implosion of the UKG scene (Bramwell, 2015; Nwonka, 2025; Fatsis, 2019), as will be explored in the next chapter.

Before concluding this chapter, though, it is important to note another development that was occurring during this period. Alongside the shift in sonic emphasis towards crews of MCs came changes in audio-visual technology. Though the use of film for big-budget videos persisted,

the growing availability of affordable high-definition digital video cameras led to profound developments in the production of music videos. In our interview Hylton recalled:

I used to encourage people to crowd the camera and do their words into camera and use the lens and the closeness to the lens or the environment or the way the camera moves through an environment was always really important to me, so the cameras would be low, they'd track, they'd move left and right, things like that, so that was very specific to that kind of video for me, when there was a lot of people in it, because I did a lot of the crew videos it wasn't necessarily one single person.

These descriptions are particularly reminiscent of *Neighbourhood* and *Haters*, directed by Hylton, and of the performance sections of *21 Seconds*, *Oh No*, *Incredible*, and *Original Nuttah*. But he recalled in our interview that during the early 2000s a change was taking place:

I used to notice when I was shooting videos, I would often see one of the guys going off into a corner and doing their own videos into these little Hi8 video cameras. People were beginning to make their own little videos behind the scenes of my videos, and obviously they were some of the videos that were making it onto the screen.

This is a particularly interesting insight, as it suggests that these big-budget video shoots were not just spaces in which artists could connect and imagine future work, but that they also sometimes functioned as a space for alternate video production for those with the appropriate technology. These DIY, unofficial videos were being produced in tandem with the growing use of home studios, utilising affordable production software.

Hylton's recollection in our interview evidences a significant change in the course of creative activity. The space of the music video shoot, through which representational spaces were being produced, also fostered new spatial practices by which DIY videos could be made in the background. These DIY videos could foster the production of new representational spaces, as the technology was more mobile and could be accessed by more people, making producers of people who might otherwise have been excluded from the production of art in general and

music videos in particular. These producers could now take this technology home with them and continue recording, producing the kinds of hyperlocal representations that will be explored in the following chapter.

Conclusion

Seven years passed between the release of *Incredible* and *21 Seconds*, the first and last videos discussed in this chapter. The urban music videos explored here tell a history of the growth of London as a global city and the way this was impacting local areas of inner-city London. London's growing status as a global city was both emphasised and juxtaposed with the scale of local space in *Incredible*, *Original Nuttah*, and *Neighbourhood*, all of which represented appropriating public spaces and turning them into clubs. These videos celebrate burgeoning urban music cultures by sliding between representations of local, vernacular landscapes and wider scales of reference, forging new senses of Britishness through convivial, transnational, black Atlantic connections. They employ some pseudo-documentary elements, but are predominantly performance videos that eschew representations of interior domestic space. But the pressures of the inner city during this period, the aftermath of the Thatcher years and the radical changes to social housing that her government had installed, haunt the celebration of these videos, while *Inner City Life* represents them explicitly.

Another significant change was New Labour's approach to council estates, their encouragement of the middle-classes to move into them and buy parts of them, and the demolition of sink estates deemed beyond saving. These dominant representations of space first produced a sense of optimism and then of alienation. The emergence of UKG into the cultural mainstream happened during this important conjuncture. *Neighbourhood* is evocative of the optimism of the period during which New Labour made many promises to better the standard of living in inner-city London. The video represents a desire for inner-city residents to occupy public space together, to make vernacular landscapes into clubs, in a way

that is reminiscent of *Incredible* and *Original Nuttah*. The representations are local in their use and representation of the city. But while they are shot on location, they do not directly represent those locations as the real-life everyday spaces that the artists actually live in.

The final significant change that this chapter focusses on was in the field of policing. At the same time that New Labour was pushing out working-class residents from so-called sink estates, the Metropolitan Police installed new policing practices through Operation Trident that continued to target working-class communities, particularly those racialised as black, further alienating inner-city residents. *Bound 4 Da Reload*, like *Neighbourhood*, produces local representations of inner-city space which emphasise the importance of music and dance, while the video's production context fostered a sense of possibility for younger members of the UKG scene. *Bound* plays on the notion of the reload while also highlighting the issue of gun violence and the tension between the police and the club, deviating from the pseudo-documentary form by opting for a weird cyclical structure.

While *Bound* emphasised the space of the club, the videos of So Solid reintroduced the housing estate as a central location. These videos touch on themes recognisable from *Inner City Life*, depicting the mutual importance of the club and the estate, and at times their mutual decline. While *Oh No* establishes a continuity between the club and the estates from which the music was emerging, *21 Seconds* takes this relationship into an apocalyptic setting, playing with the conventions of sci-fi films of the era whilst also suggesting the way New Labour's 'renaissance' policies were being experienced by estate residents at the time. The social realism of *Oh No*, produced in part by the representation of working-class space and characters shot on location, is combined with stylised imagery, glamorous clothing, and heightened colouration. *21 Seconds* elides conventional social realism and representations of vernacular landscapes altogether, opting for a studio production heavily reliant on special effects, though this does produce a sense of critical realism in its weird and eerie depictions of the inner-city in the background and the club on a precipice in the foreground. These images represent the fragmenting inner city at the beginning of the twenty-first century, while also hinting at the theme of 'hiding' scales of space, in this case the local vernacular

landscapes shown in *Oh No*. This theme of hiding will be explored in more detail in the next chapter.

Chapter 5

New Spatial Scales:

Grime, UK Rap, UK Drill, and the Hyperlocal

This chapter will continue to explore the relationship between representations of the inner city in urban music videos and particular developments that were occurring in London at the time of their production. The earliest music video included in this chapter, Dizzee Rascal's *Jus A Rascal*, was released in 2003, while the latest, OFB's *Ambush*, was released in 2019. So, the chapter explores important moments in the development of London's urban music genres and London's inner city during this sixteen-year period, and how artists have told stories of this period of space and time through music videos associated with the genres of grime, UK rap, and UK drill. This includes attention to changes in technology, and how this relates to different modes and spatial scales of representation.

An important consideration for this chapter is how new technologies and generic developments produced scales of representation that are smaller, or more detailed, than the local, sometimes called the 'post-code' scale (Dodds, 2023), though more commonly referred to as 'hyperlocal' (James, 2020; White, 2019, 2020, 2023). This hyperlocal scale has frequently been associated with the grime scene, though also with the other two genres explored in this chapter: UK rap and UK drill. In what follows I will look at particular videos that provide hyperlocal representations of inner-city spaces. As in the last chapter, though, I will also explore how each of these urban music genres produced music videos that slide between different spatial scales of representation, and how this sliding highlights the dynamics at work in the production of twenty-first century inner-city London.

These different scales of representation produced correspondingly different claims to space. They partake differently in representational struggles for a 'right to the city' (Lefebvre, 1968; Butler, 2012; Harvey, 2012). The hyperlocal is a small scale, with a correspondingly small claim to space. Hyperlocal representation, then, suggests a desire to claim a very specific area of space in the city, whereas representations of the global city suggest a wider claim to urban space. The representation of inhabitants in these different scales also suggests different dynamics of spatial struggle. This relates to another theme that was introduced in Chapter 4 and which becomes more prominent in this chapter, namely the dominance of men and masculinity in these representations of inner-city space. I could have chosen videos by or that feature female artists from each of the core music genres this chapter focusses on, such as Abigail & Ivorian Doll's *Spare Me*, Nadia Rose's *Skwod*, Ms. Dynamite & Sticky's *Booo!*, or NoLay's *Unorthodox Daughter*. This latter video will be explored in Chapter 6, and, as will be explored in more detail then, a theme of the track is that NoLay's prowess is unorthodox in such a male-dominated scene as grime. This male-domination is true of each of the genres explored in this chapter, and the selection of videos reflects this trend.

As in Chapter 4, different spatial scales of representation relate to different modes of representation and how urban music videos often combine and slide between them, particularly between realism, weirdness, and eeriness. The realism produced in these representations is sometimes in line with social realist conventions, telling stories of working-class lives in working-class spaces such as social housing estates (Nwonka, 2017; Lee, 2022), sometimes combining representations of everyday spaces with hegemonic spaces of the global city. Sometimes these videos don't use social realist conventions, or combine social realist conventions with other modes, blurring generic boundaries. The weird and eerie modes are produced through representations that suggest questions of the presence or absence of human and non-human agency, of situations that suggest the agency of non-human entities, such as the spread of capital through space and culture, and through the presence or absence of things we might or might not expect to be there (Fisher, 2016). Sometimes what is weird or eerie is the presence or absence of a route through space or through spatial scales.

Another theme that I will explore in this chapter is the policing of twenty-first century inner-city London (Atkinson & Helms, 2007; Brown, 2017; Fatsis, 2019a, 2019b, 2021; Kennelly & Watt, 2013). Like jungle and UKG before it, grime and UK rap faced intense police scrutiny from their emergence, particularly through continued crackdowns on pirate radio stations, increased use of the 'stop and search' practice, Operation Trident, and the use of Metropolitan Police's Promotion Event Risk Assessment Form 696 (Charles, 2019; Fatsis, 2018; Swain, 2018). This latter practice was a 'voluntary' risk assessment form used by the Metropolitan Police from 2008 to 2017. It requested that promoters and licensees of events, such as the performance of live music, submit information about the musicians and styles of music involved 14 days in advance. If the form was not submitted the Metropolitan Police could oppose licences for the event being granted. But they would also put pressure on events that platformed genres with an emphasis on DJs or MCs 'performing to a recorded backing track', such as grime and UKG (Fatsis, 2019a). Form 696 disproportionately affected black artists trying to perform in the city and was a profound barrier to the growth of grime and UK rap. Despite the Metropolitan Police's withdrawal of Form 696 in 2017, the underlying practice of crackdowns on events platforming urban music genres continued under different, often digital, guises, which also severely impacted the development of UK drill through the removal of videos from YouTube, the shutting down of live shows, and the use of lyrics and videos in court prosecutions.

So, in this chapter I look to explore in particular the research questions pertaining to representations of space, developments in technology, and struggles over use of and access to inner-city space in grime, UK rap, and UK drill music videos. The chapter is split into three sections. Section 1 looks at the emergence of grime and how the separation of this genre from UKG was related to the growing availability of affordable audio-visual technologies, which in turn led to the development of new forms of music video and scales of representation. In this section I will explore Roll Deep's *When I'm Ere*, Dizzee Rascal's *Jus' A Rascal*, and Aim High *Volume 2*. Section 2 begins with a brief outline of UK rap. This involves looking quickly at Nines' *CR* and Giggs' *Talking Da Hardest*. I then provide a deeper analysis of Giggs and Skepta's *Look Out*. This section helps to establish the context for the emergence of UK drill, which is the

subject of Section 3. Videos featured here include 67's *Live Corn* and OFB's *Ambush*. The table below provides more details of each of these videos.

Chapter 5 Table of Videos

Video Name	YouTube Video Name	Video Release Date	YouTube Upload Date	YouTube Video Link	Musician/s	Video Director	Music Genre/s	Video Genre/s	Location/s of Shooting
<i>When I'm Ere</i>	Roll Deep "When I'm Ere" music video	2005	5 Mar 2007	https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HK1SpAy_cR4	Roll Deep	Simon Poon Tip (Indica, Poon Tip Entertainment)	Grime	Performance,	Kildare Walk, Limehouse, east London
<i>Jus A Rascal</i>	Dizzee Rascal - Jus A Rascal	2003	17 June 2008	https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0pnJpX60vXA	Dizzee Rascal	?	Grime	Performance	River Thames; Tower Bridge; Canary Wharf; London Eye
<i>Aim High Volume 2</i>	Aim High dvd Volume 2	2005	13 February 2014	https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZrXPz7I7JqE&t=2163s	Various artists including Roll Deep, D Double E	DJ Target	Grime	Performance, Documentary, Pseudo-documentary, Freestyle	Rhythm Division; Rinse FM studio; Jammer's basement, Leytonstone; Limehouse basketball court
<i>Talking Da Hardest</i>	GIGGS - TALKING DA HARDEST	2007/2008	11 August 2014	https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=914OHMH5zqE	Giggs	?	UK rap	Performance,	Surrey Canal path, Peckham, South-East London
<i>Look Out</i>	Giggs & Skepta Look Out [Music Video]: SBTv	6 May 2009	6 May 2009	https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5y2vMPUA2IQ	Giggs Skepta	Jemal Edwards (SBTV)	UK rap Grime	Performance, Pseudo-documentary	Peckham; Islington; Tottenham
<i>CR (Grills Shutdown)</i>	Nines CR (Grills Shutdown) [Music Video]: SBTv	28 Nov 2012	28 Nov 2012	https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=e5e1f0S7hYc	Nines	Morgan Keyz	UK rap	Performance, Narrative	Hatton Garden, Camden; Church Road Estate, Brent
<i>Live Corn</i>	67 LD - Live Corn Video by @PacmanTV	8 October 2014	8 October 2014	https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XtKdPYnHEtc	67	PacmanTV	UK drill	Performance,	Brixton Hill
<i>Ambush</i>	#OFB SJ X Bandokay X DoubleLz Ambush (Prod. Sykes beats) [Official Music Video]: OFB	31 May 2019	31 May 2019	https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-QezMBY0Ndk	OFB	Yukki	UK drill	Performance	Broadwater Farm Estate, Tottenham, North London

Section 1: Grime

During its emergence in the early 2000s, grime was renowned for its DIY approach, intentionally moving away from the commercialisation that had begun to dominate UKG, both sonically and visually. Big budget UKG videos could provide elaborate camera work and were still often shot on film. In our interview, Andy Hylton recalled that his video for So Solid's *Haters* was shot on anamorphic 35mm film, "so you could've shown [it] in the cinema." But the growing availability and affordability of new technologies such as hand-held digital cameras provided a new mode for audio-visual production that didn't need to rely on label funding. Pirate radio stations such as Rinse FM were central to the development of grime, with MCs performing over beats live on air. These sessions began to be recorded on video in DIY DVD collections such as *Aim High*, *Risky Roadz* and *Lord of the Mics* (Swain, 2018; Fatsis, 2019a; Bramwell, 2015; Bramwell & Butterworth, 2019; de Lacey, 2022). These videos produced new audio-visual conventions such as 'freestyle' and 'clash' videos in everyday spaces across the city. Like freestyling, a 'clash' is also part of the lineage of Caribbean sound system culture, a practice in which two or more artists compete against each other, showing off their DJing or MCing skill (Cooper, 2004). Both of these forms of performance became important parts of the audio-visual language of the grime scene, blending elements of documentary and music video. The use of everyday spaces generated another element of renown for the scene: hyperlocal representation, the sonic and visual representation of spaces in which artists lived and produced music. Alongside these hyperlocal dissemination networks was the importance of Channel U, a satellite television channel that was established in 2003 (Link Up TV, 2023). This channel would feature a number of genres, but became renowned for platforming the growing number of DIY grime videos in the 2000s. These videos were still often low budget, but were more standard examples of the music video format, in contrast to the documentary styles of the freestyle and clash videos captured on the DIY DVDs. In this section, I will first explore the production of hyperlocal representation in Roll Deep's *When I'm Ere*. I will then turn to Dizzee Rascal's *Jus A Rascal* to explore how hyperlocal representation

was left behind by some grime artists who opted for a global city setting. I will then turn to a DIY DVD, DJ Target's *Aim High Volume 2*.

*When I'm Ere*¹⁷

The grime crew Roll Deep was formed in 2002 by several artists who had been instrumental in the latter stages of the UKG scene, in crews such as Ladies Hit Squad and Pay As U Go Cartel, before the scene's implosion outlined in Chapter 4. Roll Deep founding member Wiley had previously founded Ladies Hit Squad and had also been a member of Pay As U Go. In a 2013 interview for The Guardian, Wiley chose Musical Youth's *Pass the Dutchie* as 'the track that made me want to produce music', stating:

When I watched Musical Youth singing this on TV I just wanted to do what they were doing. [. . .] I used to listen to them religiously. I could play along to them but I was still learning. I was really trying to write my own little reggae sounds and then stick them over my own beat on Atari at my dad's workspace. [. . .] I guess I learnt to do that sort of stuff from Musical Youth (Wiley in Jones C., 2013).

The musical lineage of grime, then, can be traced back through UKG to the influence of 1980s British reggae, and further across the Atlantic to the Caribbean where it emerged. It is notable that watching the artists on TV, not just listening to the track, was integral to Wiley's inspiration.

Like the Letts music video for *Pass*, the video for *When I'm Ere* also produced a new postcard for London. Alongside Wiley, other Roll Deep founding members who feature in the music video for *When I'm Ere* include Scratchy (Ryan Robert Williams), Flowdan (Marc Veira), Breeze (Ibrahim Ali), Manga (Matthew Reid), Riko Dan (Zane Benson Williams), Trim (Javan St. Prix),

¹⁷ https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HK1SpAy_cR4

Roachee (Richard Roach), and Jet Le (can't find his real name). This track featured on their debut album *In At The Deep End* (2005), which won Best Album at the 2005 Urban Music Awards. The *When I'm Ere* video opens with Scratchy entering a dark room, as the introductory synth melody plays. He sits on a bed and sends a text message on his mobile phone: "B there in 5 mins", shown in *Figure 34*.

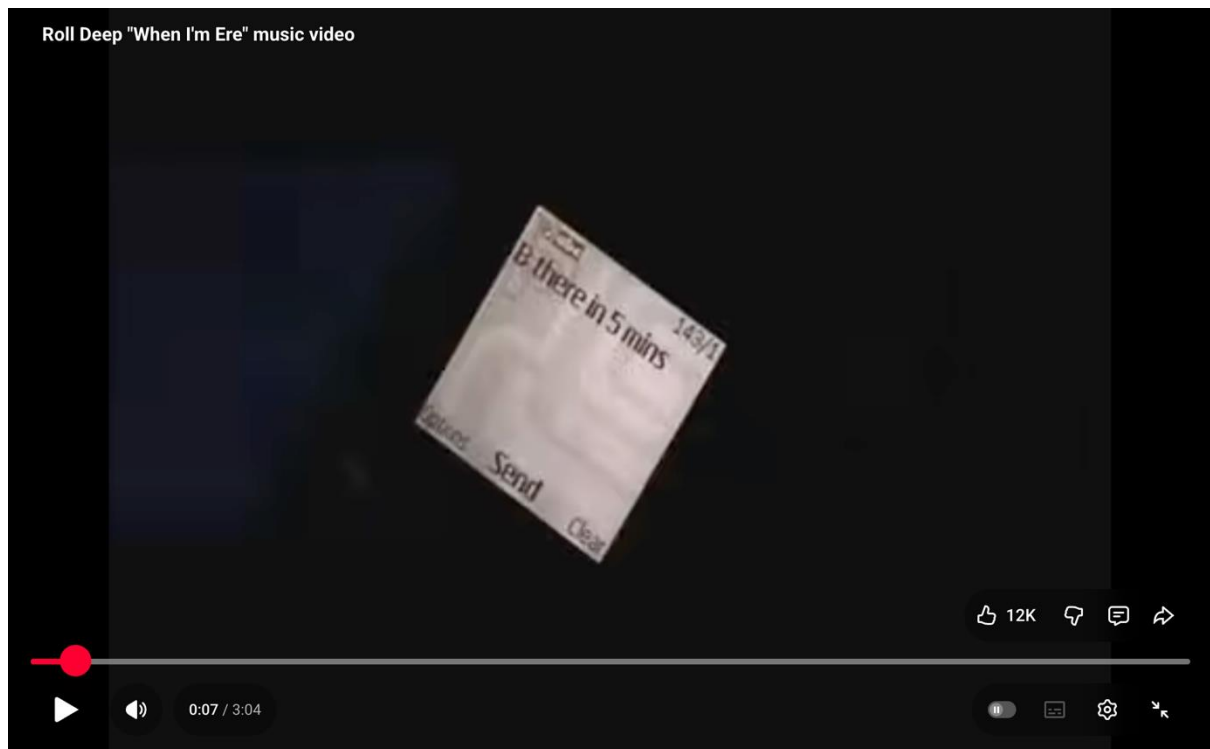


Figure 34: Still from When I'm Ere.

He then gets up and the video cuts to an exterior shot of a council estate flat at night, Scratchy closing the door behind him. After putting up his hood and looking at the camera, he simultaneously begins his performance of the track's chorus and his journey through the estate, walking past the road sign for 'Kildare Walk', shown in *Figure 35*. The structure of the video is that each featured member of Roll Deep performs their verse as they walk through the vernacular landscape of the estate. The track and the video end when Scratchy reaches and enters another flat on the estate, lit in an eerie red light shown in *Figure 36*, presumably the meeting place that he references in his opening text message.

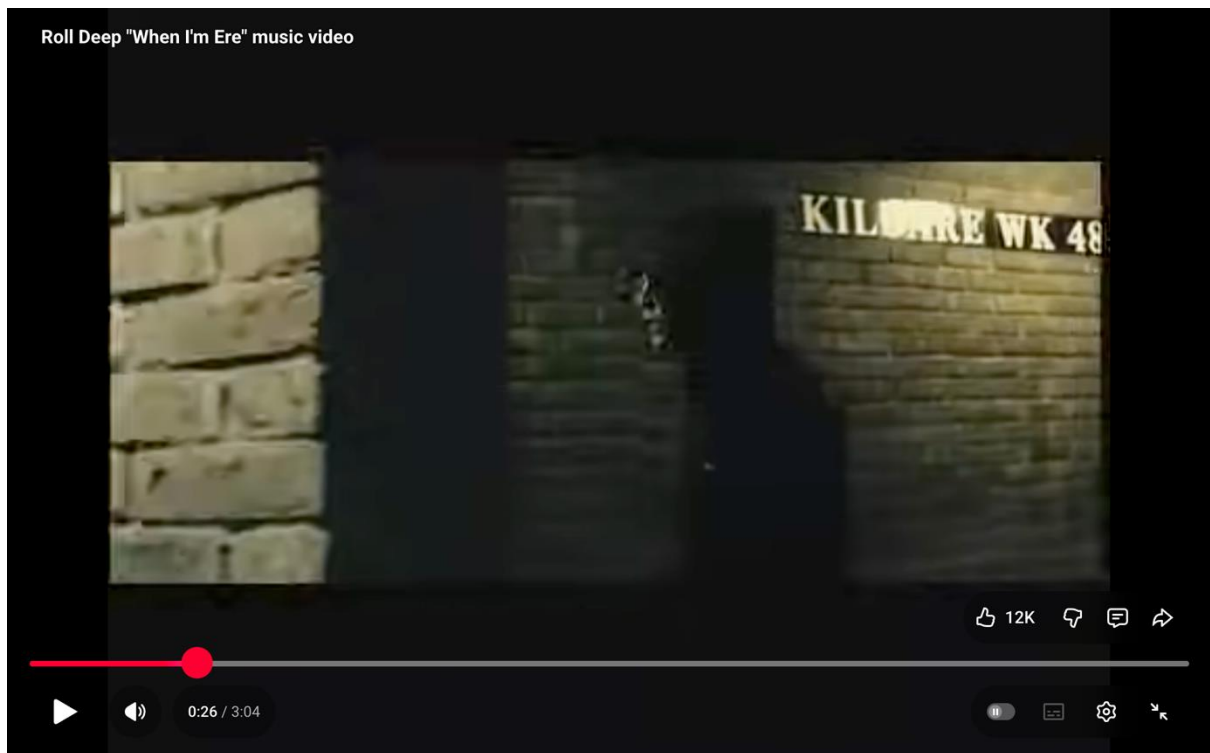


Figure 35: Still from When I'm Ere.

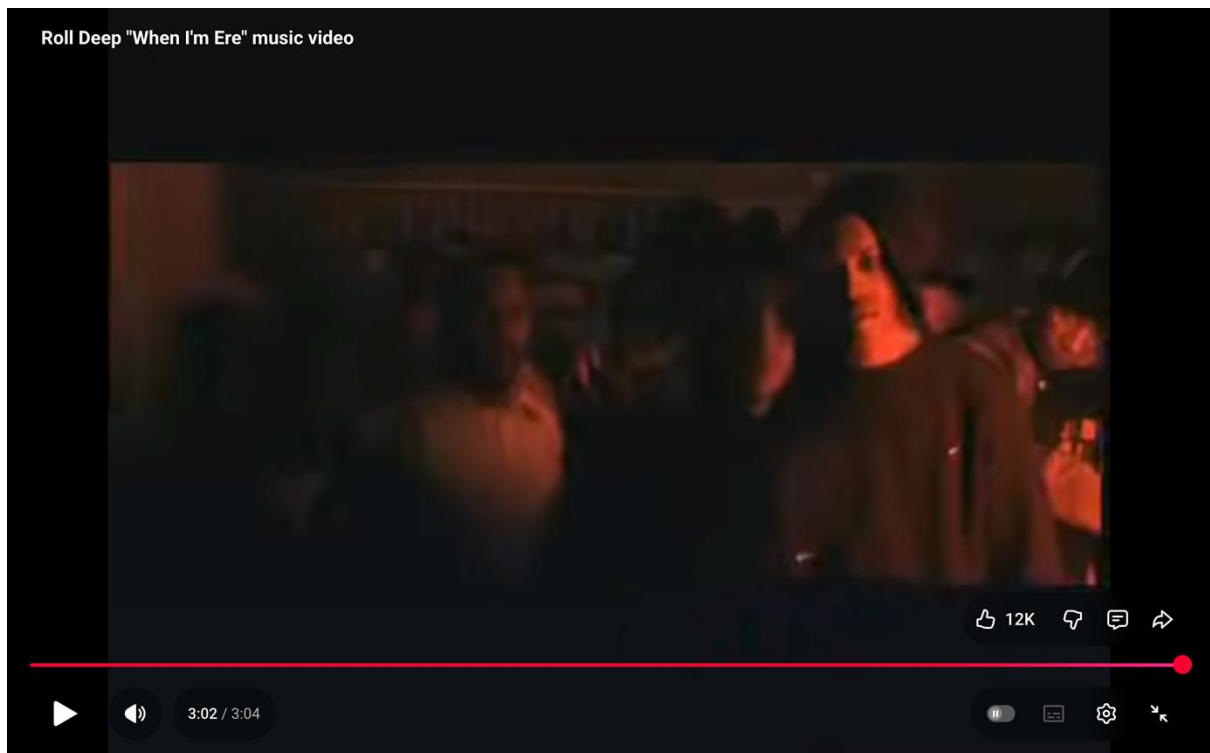


Figure 36: Still from When I'm Ere.

The track accompanies each MC on their hyperlocal journey. They are never together as they walk, though sometimes they walk past other people on the estate, who contrast in wearing clothing of various colours and standing still as the all-black clad MCs move past them. Each MC morphs into the next as they walk behind some part of the physical infrastructure of the estate, or as their face is concealed by the identical black hoodie that each artist wears, or as the camera is blocked by another estate inhabitant. A distinctive feature of the *mise en scène* is the inclusion of estate signage and road names as backgrounds to the MCs' journeys, shown in *Figures 35, 37, and 38*. Signs for Kildare Walk, Pigott Street, and Gough Walk E14 give names to the spaces, to make this journey specific. This is the Lansbury Estate, a sprawling modernist social housing estate, spanning the borders of Poplar and Bromley-by-Bow in the London Borough of Tower Hamlets, east London. The estate was built on land that was badly bomb-damaged during WWII. Construction began in 1950 and finished in 1982, the final phase being the westward construction ending with Pigott Street. The estate rehoused many working-class families from Poplar, Stepney, Bethnal Green, and Shoreditch, who had been living in overcrowded and run-down housing, so that Lansbury had an "overwhelmingly local and working-class population" (Boughton, 2013). This working-class localism is signified in *When I'm Ere* through the visual references to an estate that is never left behind, and through the artists' and residents' clothing and vernacular language, asserting an everydayness to their presence. The overall lyrical sentiment of the track, as suggested by the title, is what it means for Roll Deep as a collective, and each MC individually, to be in this place at this time: E14, east London, 2005. In Breeze's verse he states: "Put Roll Deep on the map when I'm 'ere". The music video thus functions to map both the estate and the collective of artists, and the relation between the two. The stillness of the estate inhabitants that the MCs pass suggests that they are part of the estate infrastructure, part of this specific place. The way the MCs appear out of the dark shadows of the estate and their dynamic movement through it also suggests that they are part of this space but that they also have the ability to control the means by which the estate is seen, a right to this part of the city, to take an audience on a journey through it that they narrate through inner-city storytelling.

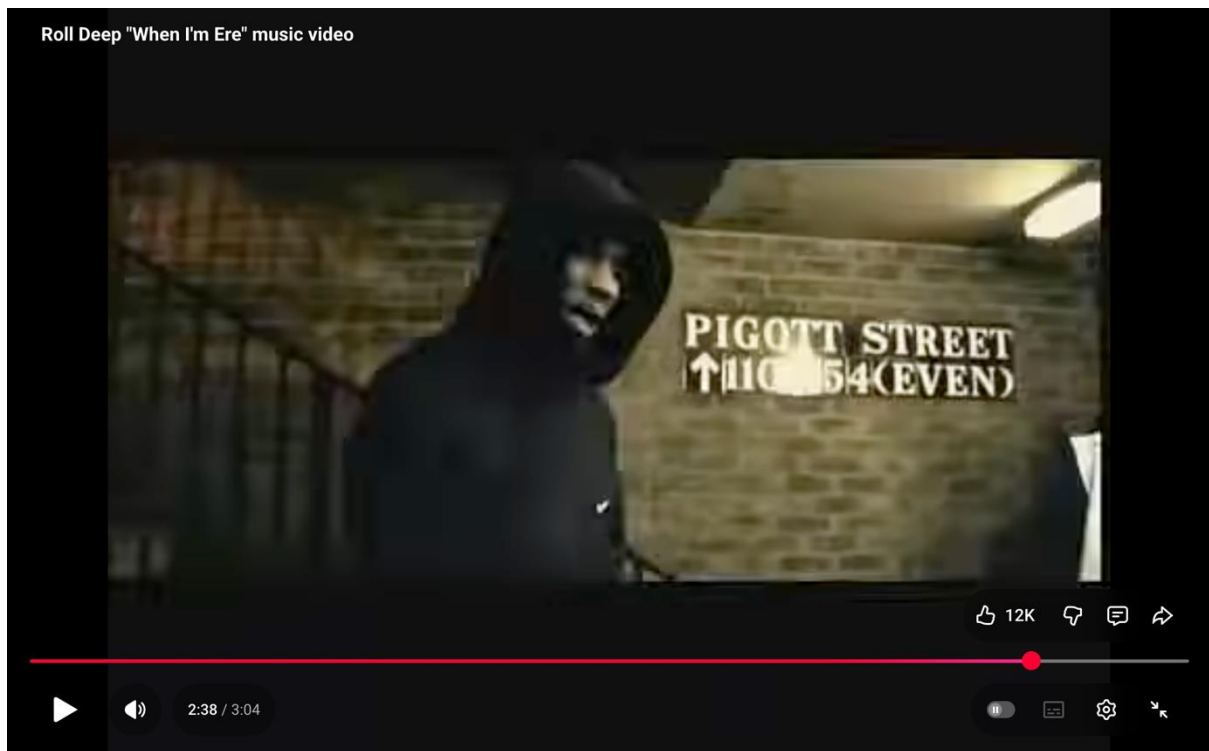


Figure 37: Still from When I'm Ere.

While many of the artists involved in Roll Deep had been involved in UKG collectives, and though estates that look like the Lansbury were featured in UKG videos, this level of reference, the naming of specific spaces from the artists' local area, was something that hadn't been seen in UKG music videos. The interview I conducted with Orson Nava offered insights into the transition from UKG to grime:

That whole [UKG] scene collapsed and record labels disinvested in black music in the UK really [. . .] And then all those artists went underground, or the next generation of artists went underground and it percolated up as grime.

Here, Nava's comments suggest that grime developed in part because of a vacuum of label attention towards black British urban music production. He went on to expand on his personal move from UKG to grime video direction, and the different roles a music video could play:

Prior to making grime music videos or working with grime artists I worked in more commercial, better resourced, better funded music video sectors and for those major record labels music videos have a certain function, they're kind of marketing tools effectively, they're like adverts for the artist. So, they have a rather specific function.

In the mainstream commercial sector, like that which produced most UKG videos, music videos were a way of visually selling the artist to an audience. This contrasts with the way Nava, in our interview, described the different dynamics of the grime scene:

What I found interesting about working in the grime sector is that function was slightly different. [The music video] still arguably had an economic function, but I thought it was much less interpolated into a straightforward economic process. It was also about people using the videos as a tool to promote themselves on a hyperlocal level.

Rather than a label having a say over the kinds of representation that could be produced, the availability of production technology firmly in the hands of the artists working in the scene meant that the marketing and direction strategy was also theirs to decide. These videos were a way for working-class artists to audio-visually capture their presence in, and their connections to, their local area. As Nava suggested in our interview, those connections are often 'hyperlocal', as artists "claim physical urban space and insert themselves in their videos in a way that linked themselves to certain kinds of areas: estates, postcodes." Indeed, Dodds (2023) argues that grime should be understood as intentionally working on a 'postcode scale', represented by the frequent references to postcodes in the music, such as Wiley's 2007 track *E3*, referencing the postcode in which he grew up. Alongside lyricism and crew names that referenced specific locations, such as Newham Generals from the borough of Newham and Meridian Crew from the Meridian Estate in Tottenham, this hyperlocal scale became visually accessible through the growing affordability of video cameras in the early 2000s. With the introduction of affordable video technology, big labels and their money could be bypassed completely, allowing for greater creative control for the artists in the production of representational spaces, and a new hyperlocal scale of audio-visual reference.

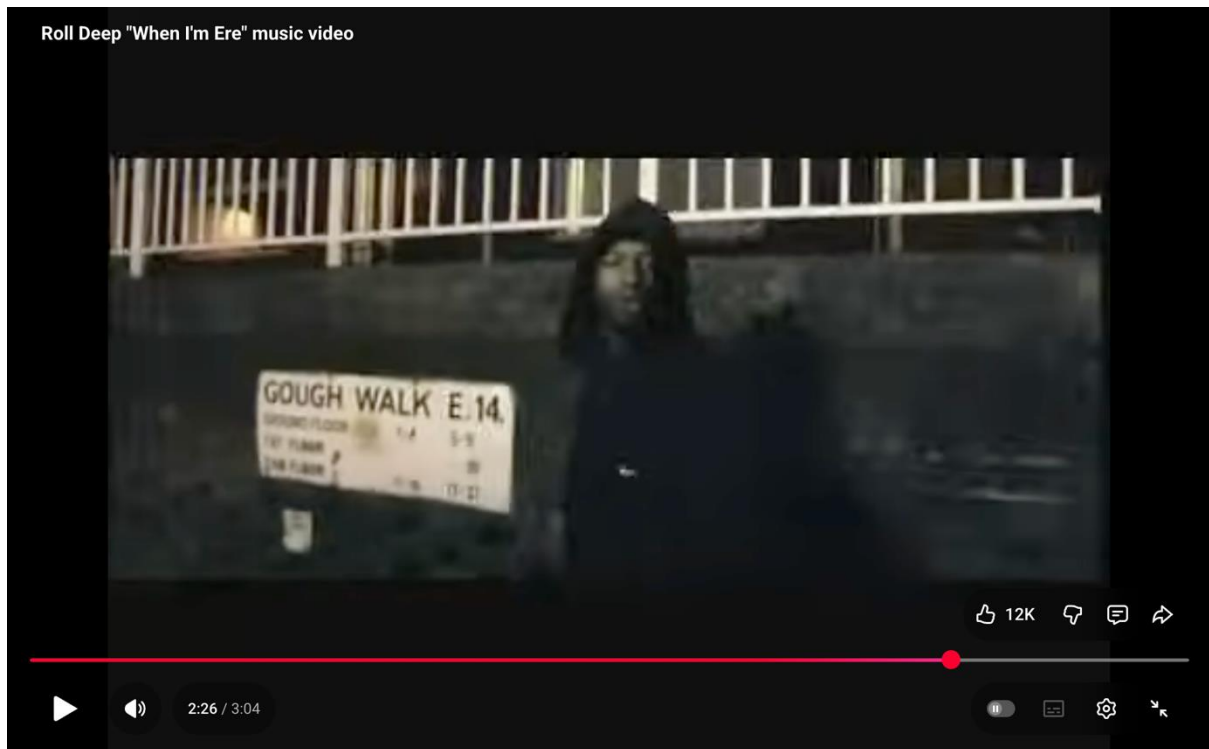


Figure 38: Still from When I'm Ere.

In the interview I conducted with Orson Nava, he explained how these videos, and the artists that made them, used and invoked urban space:

It wasn't a form of positioning that was imposed on them by anyone else. They had the power to do it for themselves through the use of video technology and low-cost editing suites and cameras. And so, I found it very different to the more mainstream commercial video sector. It was definitely much more associated with a particular local community of young people in east London. And I think for them it was much more than just about making money, though that was part of the incentive. It was about stamping their imprint on the areas they lived in, in kind of an equivalent way to graffiti art, which is about tagging certain physical spaces, this was about using multimedia technology to visually tag certain areas as well.

Here, Nava's comments recall Letts' notion of the music video as a 'postcard', stamping an imprint on a space through representation. Here, though, it refers to the specific visual nature of grime music videos and their ability to 'tag' the areas in which these artists lived and frequented. This notion of 'tagging', a term stemming from the graffiti practice of artists

'signing' walls and other public places (Zieleniec, 2016; Anderson, 2012; Russell, 2008; Snyder, 2011), is particularly interesting given the history of urban music videos. Modern graffiti is a classic example of late twentieth-century black Atlantic culture, originating in New York and then spreading across the US and the UK (Snyder, 2011; Schacter, 2019). Goldie first began to be recognised as a graffiti artist before focussing more on music when he returned to London from New York. The hip hop scene had originally been a balance of a number of expressive forms including music but also dance, fashion, and graffiti (Aldridge and Stewart, 2005). In a similar way, music videos could also be said to be an integral part of the development and popularity of grime, allowing artists to autograph the local spaces around them and share their connection with others.

Hyperlocal tagging also relates to modes of representation. In our interview, Nava described the generic conventions of grime music videos as follows:

It felt quite realist in the sense that it did, as Lee Barron talks about, have this form of urban ethnography and I think there was a documentary aspect to it, like you're just going around capturing people living their lives, sometimes a bit more, in the areas they live.

Here, Nava refers to Lee Barron's (2013) article, in which he argues that, in its concern for the everyday inner-city experiences of the 'artists themselves', "*grime is effectively ethnographic in nature: it is derived from participant observation in the most immediate, lived sense,*" and that grime lyrics "*represent a documentary legacy of urban commentary*" (Barron, 2013, p. 532, p.544, italics in original). Nava implies that there is a relation between the documentation of both the lyrics and the visuals, which thus also take on a documentary aspect. In our interview, Nava continued:

Unlike the garage videos in which we had the budget to create fantastical worlds, science fiction worlds or medieval worlds, jet skis and yachts and mansions, that was very different [to grime music videos which were] much more rooted in a form of documentary realism. Not entirely as there were elements of fantasy in some, but in a

lot of cases we or a lot of the artists didn't really have the budgets to produce any level of fantasy so we were kind of stuck with realism in a way, whether you liked it or not.

In contrast to the big budgets for UKG videos such as Nava's *Get Up and Move* or So Solid's *21 Seconds*, both of which created new worlds in a studio, most videos associated with grime music were produced on much smaller budgets. The kind of world that could be represented, then, was in some ways limited to the world in which the artists were actually situated. This particular relationship between budgets, modes of representation, and the spaces in which a video is shot was touched on by all of my interviewees. For instance, in the interview I conducted with Isabella Culver, she explained:

I love doing studio stuff, because you have so much more control over the space. But it just depends what the look and feel is. If you have endless budget, you can recreate any location in a studio [. . .] you can recreate landscapes, or create your own landscapes and create these really otherworldly landscapes.

An important point to pick up on here is the limitations on the different kinds of worlds that can be produced. On small budgets, videos are in some ways limited in the extent to which they can diverge from realist imagery.

But in the grime scene, argued Nava in our interview, this relation between location-shooting, world-making, and realist aesthetics was not simply a choice forced by financial limitations: "it was partly there to capture a certain kind of reality, to expand a very rooted local perspective." This 'very rooted local perspective' is an interesting point to pick up on. It relates to the argument that grime has often intentionally invoked a hyperlocal scale, and that this scale is able to tell stories of real everyday life in urban space in a way that a wider scale can't. Scale here refers not just to size but also to the 'level of detail':

When something is 'small-scale' this usually entails finer-grained, high-resolution detail, alongside different selection criteria for the features included or excluded. For grime, greater granularity is a political strategy: its high level of resolution ensures a

set of social realities come to the fore that may be absent from other music, even other popular music with an urban focus and scale. Grime's scale enables closer attention to the city's unevenness: to the stuff that falls in-between and to the detail that might otherwise be missed (Dodds, 2023, p.37).

This reflects Nava's assertion that hyperlocal detail allows for the foregrounding of everyday reality in the city that happens 'in-between' the flashier moments of escape and excess. Part of what emphasises this urban unevenness was through blending different scales of representation. As White (2019, 2020), Adams (2019), and Dodds (2023) argue, rather than being limited to a local or hyperlocal scale, grime operates across different scales of reference, identity, and distribution, including the individual, the crew, the hyperlocal, the local, the national, the transnational, and the global. So, the 'very rooted local perspective' that Nava described in our interview is also at the same time the result of complex, intersecting routes. In *When I'm Ere*, amongst the scenes of hyperlocal space on the estate is a brief glimpse of the towers of Canary Wharf, shown in *Figure 39*, hinting at the global city of the wider London around the estate. The towers, recognisable without needing to be named, loom in the background over the largely low-rise Lansbury. Its entrance into the video is reminiscent of Big Ben's into *Incredible*, another hegemonic building that signifies the global city. The video slides between scales of representation to draw attention to the estate's location in inner-city London, and to contrast the estate with the hegemonic symbol of twenty-first century finance capital. These are dramatically contrasting figures, the estate an almost fluid space of bricks and shadows that the artists melt in and out of, while the tower stands tall and still, lights beaming out of its glass façade.

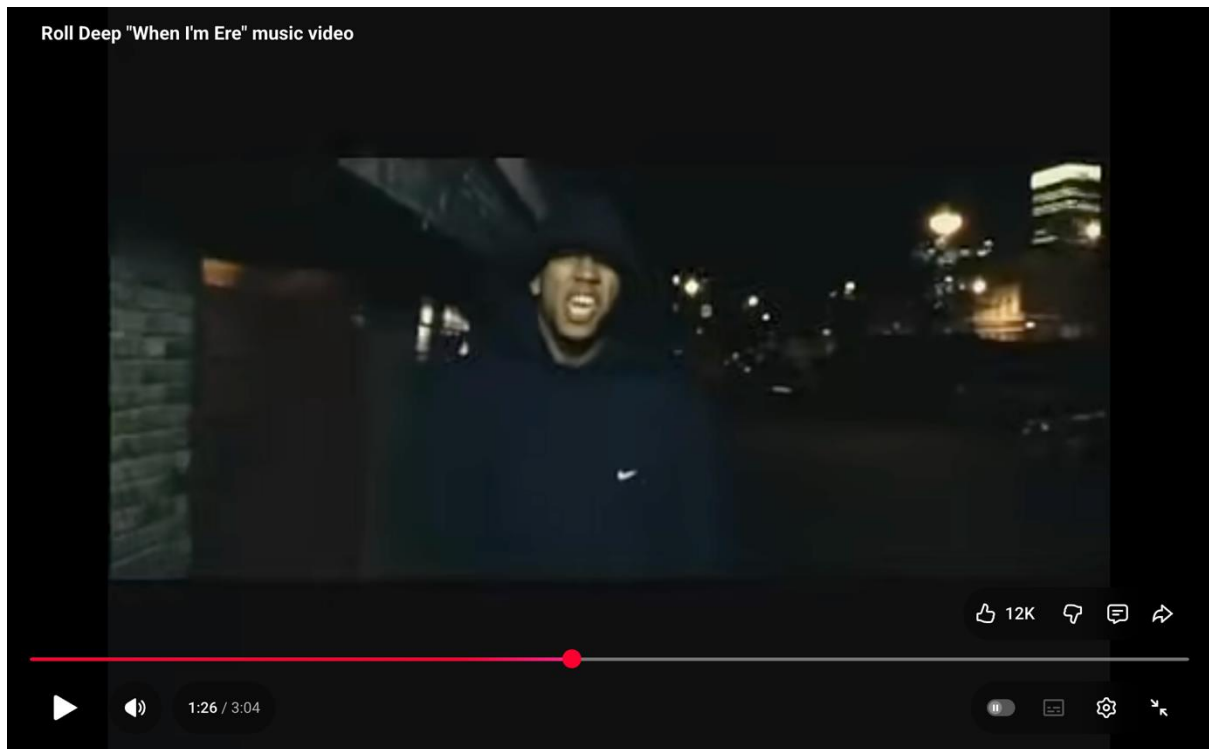


Figure 39: Still from *When I'm Ere*.

The video slides not just between scales but also modes of representation. The hyperlocal details of the road names and postcode in the estate produce a sense of social realism, focussing on characters from the local area, moving through working-class space, making themselves, their environment, and their stories visible and audible (Hill, J. 2022). But there is also a sense of weirdness produced by the way the artists move through the estate and by the way the estate is shown. In his exploration of representations that produce a sense of weirdness, Fisher (2016) highlights the role of thresholds between everyday reality and a world that destabilises our understandings of this reality. In *When I'm Ere*, weird thresholds are built into the estate where they don't exist materially, using camera and editing tricks. The artists morph into one another as the verses switch, and suddenly disappear behind a wall or appear out of the shadows. And the estate itself morphs from one place to another. The trajectory is not a linear walking tour but a weird jumping between spaces, through unclear thresholds, unsettling the sense that this is an everyday space.

In *Inner City Life*, edits were used to make the estate morph into the club. Here, though, the estate morphs into other parts of the estate, there is no leaving it, and seemingly no desire to. It's a self-sustaining urban lifeworld all of its own. The proximity of the estate to Canary Wharf is reminiscent of that between the precipice-club and the tower-blocks in *21 Seconds*. The lyrical structure of the track, and therefore the music video performances, are also reminiscent of *21 Seconds*, in that each artist has a set time to perform their verse. In this case, rather than 21 seconds per-artist, each MC in *When* gets 8 'bars', a four-beat segment. Instead of a dystopian landscape produced through special effects, the artists in Roll Deep move through a real estate. But alongside the weird thresholds mentioned above, the estate is also made to seem eerie. A sense of eeriness is produced, argues Fisher (2016), when a landscape is partially or totally emptied of human presence. While the estate in *When* is populated, the people the artists move past are statuesque and there is no dancing or sense of a club atmosphere, unlike in *21 Seconds*. This lack of dancing in some ways signifies an everydayness to the estate, but the inhabitants aren't going about their daily routines. The 'when' and the 'here' that the track repeats is a liminal space and time, in between the everyday and the exceptional.

When I'm Ere thus produces hyperlocal representations of inner-city London, but much more besides this. The hyperlocal is in conversation with the global city, and the contrast between the two is explored through the realism of everyday life on an estate, but an estate that is eerily occupied, and weirdly moved through. These dynamics contrast with the next video I will explore, though there are some overlaps in the use of Canary Wharf as a symbol of landmark London in the music of a former Roll Deep member, Dizze Rascal (Dylan Kwabena Mills MBE). As I'll go on to explore, through his success Dizze left Roll Deep and hyperlocal representation behind him.

*Jus A Rascal*¹⁸

¹⁸ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0pnJPX60vXA>

Jus A Rascal was the third single from Dizze's debut album *Boy in da Corner* (2003). The video is set on a boat moving along the River Thames. The video opens with a view of Tower Bridge lit up at night, a boat floating underneath it along the River Thames. The video then cuts to inside the boat, panning across close-ups of men's and women's faces, directly addressing the camera, nodding their heads to the track. The roof of the boat opens and Dizze Rascal is revealed standing on the roof, as shown in *Figure 40*.



Figure 40: Still from Jus' a Rascal.

Dizze performs to camera throughout the video in front of various iconic London landmarks. Another of those landmarks is the Millenium Wheel (aka the London Eye, shown in *Figure 41*). As Richard Barras writes (2023, p.376), "The start of the new millennium was inevitably celebrated through spectacle as well as culture, and a new theatre of spectacle was built in London to celebrate the auspicious date." The Wheel is one manifestation of this spectacle of the twenty-first century, and Dizze performs in this new theatre, drawing together culture

and spectacle through the medium of the music video. This is a theatre that contrasts dramatically with the setting of *When I'm Ere*. *Jus A Rascal* represents a desire to be seen moving through the main artery of the city. Dizzee takes the place of the captain, while the downstairs interior functions as a club. Close-up images of predominantly female dancers, as seen in *Figure 42*, are reminiscent of the club-like scenes in *Original Nuttah*, *Incredible*, *Inner City Life*, *Neighbourhood*, and *Oh No*.



Figure 41: Still from Jus A Rascal.



Figure 42: Still from Jus A Rascal.

While landmark London was briefly included in *Incredible*, with its glimpse of Big Ben, iconic London locations play a far more prominent role in *Jus*. Like Big Ben, when a video uses shots of Tower Bridge or the Millenium Wheel, the viewer knows that the video is set in London (Brunsdon, 2019/2007, p.36). The same can be said of Canary Wharf, which appears towards the end of the video: Dizzee is seen in silhouette against the towers, his body blocking out its lights, imposing himself on the building, shown in *Figure 43*. As Brunsdon argues, “While all cities have their landmarks, those of capital cities also carry complex and sometimes contested national and international meanings” (Brunsdon, 2019/2007). It is worth briefly outlining the history of Canary Wharf and the surrounding area to explore its relevance in the visual language of *Jus A Rascal*, and the relation of this video to others included in this chapter. Canary Wharf was developed on the former site of the West India Docks, which were used to import and export goods and sometimes passengers across the Atlantic, to and from the Caribbean. Construction of Canary Wharf began in the 1980s, transforming the industrial London Docks into the upmarket, residential London Docklands. The changes in this area symbolise the shifting economics of London, from imperial industrialism to the era of global finance (Brunsdon, 2019/2007). It is, in Brunsdon’s (2019/2007) terminology, part of

'landmark London'. The most recognisable of Canary Wharf's towers is One Canada Square, which was the first tower to be completed, in 1991. The tower was conceived of as "a landmark designed to announce the birth of a new American-style office district in the heart of London," the 'quintessential hegemonic building' that signifies "London's landscape of financial power" (Barras, 2023, pp.381-382). The use of landmarks in this video invokes these complex meanings through scales of representation: the national scale through London as England's capital city, and the global scale through London as the metropole of the British Empire and a global financial hub. This use of iconic London landmarks also brings to mind *Pass The Dutchie* as a new 'postcard' for London. *Jus A Rascal* can be seen as updating this postcard for the twenty-first century, taking the grime scene, and contemporary national identity along with it, down a new route of spatial and cultural production.



Figure 43: Still from Jus A Rascal.

In the early 2000s, the tension between extreme wealth and poverty in the global city was particularly pronounced between Canary Wharf, headquarters of numerous multinational banks and corporations, and the nearby area of Bow, both in the London borough of Tower

Hamlets. Canary Wharf captures “the essence of our age: the global reach of finance capital [. . .] and the coexistence of extreme wealth and poverty within a great city” (Barras, 2023, p.5). Only two miles separate One Canada Square and the tower blocks of Bow’s Crossways Estate, where Dizze and fellow grime pioneer Tinchy Strider (Kwasi Esono Danquah III) grew up (Kilpatrick & Patel, 2020):

A lot of grime’s key protagonists grew up in high density high-rise blocks in Tower Hamlets in East London. All the reminiscences of people like Tinchy Stryder and Dizze Rascal who grew up in the Crossways estate are of very cramped spaces. For example, Tinchy Stryder talks about how supportive his mum was, about having him and his friends making music in their tiny flat in his bedroom (Kafka, 2018).

This description resonates with other use of space in family homes in the development of urban music genres, recalling Shy FX’s parents’ house and the blues parties they would host, and the bedroom where he produced *Original Nuttah*. However, through its imagery of hegemonic buildings, *Jus A Rascal* invokes the scale of the global city, rather than the hyperlocal scale of Dizze’s estate.

One Canada Square, its walls of glass shining outward, contrasts dramatically with the Crossways Estate. Completed in the 1970s, and comprising three 25-storey tower blocks and a low-rise block linked by concrete elevated walkways, Crossways is another archetypal post-war modernist social housing estate. In a trajectory familiar for so many of these estates, the lack of proper management led to Crossways’ gradual decline: “By the late 1990s it had deteriorated to the point where total demolition and replacement with low density terraced housing was being considered” (Kilpatrick & Patel, 2020). In the early 2000s, ‘regeneration’ was suggested as the solution to the issues facing the estate, a process of social mixing between historic working-class residents and newly arriving middle-classes, like those populating the towers of Canary Wharf (Kilpatrick & Patel, 2020).

Canary Wharf became a symbol of aspiration for some musicians in the grime scene who had grown up with the hegemonic towers as part of their everyday local landscape (Hancox, 2013). In a 2010 interview, Dizzee said of Canary Wharf:

It means the most to me, I could see it from all angles as a kid. That was the highest building I could see from my bedroom [. . .] it always gets me excited, especially at night. It feels special [. . .] it's ours (Dizzee in Hancox, 2013).

The way in which the building could be experienced as 'ours' by Dizzee and his peers had limitations. Though he felt a sense of pride and ownership by virtue of living in local proximity to Canary Wharf, this space was not technically his. There is a sense in which his feeling of ownership over this part of the city was a fantasy, but also a suggestion that there are different ways for city inhabitants to 'own' the urban landscape in which they live, different ways for a city to be 'ours'. These comments speak to the right of inhabitants to assert claims of belonging over the city, a right captured in the sense of irreverent celebration and movement produced in *Jus A Rascal*. This is the overriding sense produced by the video – the young rascal imposing himself on and claiming space in the heart of his city. The production of this sense is in part due to it being shot at night. The nighttime setting adds to the visibility of the boat as it is lit up and stands out against the darkness of the sky and the water. In most scenes the video places Dizzee on a visual par with the iconic buildings in front of which he performs. It emphasises his prowess in the music scene, his emergence as an iconic figure in his own right.

However, the modes of representation in *Jus* suggest a tension between everyday life and exceptional moments in the city, reminiscent of that found in So Solid's *21 Seconds*. In that earlier video, the apocalyptic inner city loomed in the background as the artists performed in an open-air club on a precipice. In this later video, the hegemonic icons of London as a global city loom in the background as the artist performs on a club-like boat, surrounded by water. In both videos the overriding sense is of celebration, the foregrounding of the artists, and the exceptionalism of their performance away from mundane everyday life. But while *21 Seconds* used modes of sci-fi and eeriness, *Jus* produces a greater sense of realism than this earlier

video, eliding any CGI effects. Dizzee really was on a boat on the Thames, whereas *So Solid* were not in an apocalyptic wasteland. While the background of *21* was seemingly-abandoned tower block estates, creating eerie questions as to what has happened to these structures, in *Jus* these spaces have disappeared altogether. The spaces of everyday life are hidden behind the hegemonic buildings of global finance and national iconicity. The video produces a sense of eeriness through this tension between visibility and invisibility. The visual effect of the night-time setting means that the buildings behind the hegemonic icons aren't visible. There is an eerie sense in the absence of the rest of the city.

In the 2010 interview, Dizzee goes on to recall more of his childhood responses to One Canada Square:

I remember when we were little, we had a conspiracy – we thought that thing on the top of it was like aliens, and they were about to fly off – loads of little theories like that. (Dizzee in Hancox, 2013).

Again, this suggests the distance between Dizzee as a child and the fantasy surrounding this hegemonic building. This is also interesting as it implies that, because Canary Wharf is the quintessential hegemonic building, it takes on an almost alien quality. As Joy White (2020, p.267) argues, grime emerged in an urban environment of “rich and poor communities that exist side by side but barely touching. In these alien spaces, with bounded territories that are border patrolled by private security, young people are living in proximity to these heavily guarded structures of wealth and privilege—in plain sight, but almost always out of reach.” The towers of Canary Wharf are one such alien space and alienating, physically displaying the Lefebvrian (1991/1987) notion that the drive to accumulate capital dominates all other concerns in the production of space.

Despite these alienating dynamics, however, the ability for artworks such as *Jus A Rascal* to inspire, celebrate, and lay claim to the changing spaces of the city persists. Dizzee was the breakout star of the early 2000s grime scene, with *Boy in da Corner* winning the prestigious

Mercury Prize in 2003 when he was just nineteen years old. This achievement marked the growing possibility of grime MCs to achieve commercial success. However, most artists associated with the scene were still operating in the more covert spaces to which Nava referred to in our interview, and in which Dizze had started performing, such as the pirate radio scene. In the same year that *Jus A Rascal* was released, Dizze was still performing on pirate radio station DejaVu FM, as shown in *Figure 44*, a still from *Jammer's Birthday Bash FULL DVD* (2003), alongside other pioneering grime MCs including Wiley. *Figure 44* shows Dizze on the mic in the background, alongside grime MCs Tinchy Stryder (bottom left), Crazy Titch (Carl Dobson, front right), and Jammer (Jahmek Levi Selassie Power, middle right).



Figure 44: Still from Jammer's Birthday Bash.

Dizze's lyrical content and delivery in *Jus A Rascal* are recognisable from his pirate radio freestyles, fast-paced and intricate. But the instrumental is much slower than grime's conventional 140 bpm, at just 83 bpm. Furthermore, the overriding instrument is the distorted electric guitar, contrasting with the synth-heavy sound of tracks such as *When I'm Ere*, and other tracks on *Boy In Da Corner*, such as *Stop Dat* and *I Luv U*. The visual setting, in its absence

of hyperlocal, working-class, social realist space and emphasis on global, iconic, hegemonic London, thus reflects the track's sonic divergence from grime's pirate radio conventions. DIY video recordings of these radio sessions would become a key part of the visual language of the grime scene, constructed through hyperlocal representations of radio sets, clashes, and freestyles. I will now explore this visual language in more detail.

*Aim High Volume 2*¹⁹

Aim High Volume 2 was originally released as a DVD in 2005, and has been uploaded onto YouTube as *Aim High dvd Volume 2*, the version I look at here. It is a prime example of the filming and distribution of DIY or 'street' DVDs, which played an integral role in the emergence of grime in London in the mid- to late-2000s:

At a time when young boys began to pull scattered street memoirs into verse, friends became cameramen and DVDs were created for a community to bear witness. In East London, [. . .] DVDs like *Risky Roadz* and *Lord of the Mics* ran parallel to the birth of the genre [. . .] DVDs travelled along the same lines as the music, filtering across the city and the wider country via record shops and market stalls [. . .] In the era when Grime and UK Rap bloomed across South London, street DVDs began to appear, documenting their own early iteration of the culture, bringing faces to names, visuals to estates and areas repped for on songs (Ekpoudom, 2024, p.90).

These comments emphasise the way in which audio-visual recordings functioned to connect names of artists with images of them, and then also with the areas that they were from and that they named in their music. They also emphasise the gendered dynamic of the scene. Grime was by no means exclusively male, but it was male dominated, both in terms of music and music video production, as demonstrated by *Aim High Volume 2*.

¹⁹ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZrXPz7J7JqE&t=2163s>

The full DVD is an hour and a half long. It contains freestyles, interviews, studio tours, international tours, and various areas around London. The spatial breadth of this DVD, which consists of lots of shorter videos, is part of the collective mapping of the city (Dodds, 2023) but also of wider national and international scales]. Many of the spaces included in the DVD are not street spaces, but all of the videography produces a DIY mode of representation – shaky hand-held cameras, low quality image and sound, and live sound recordings – so I will use the term DIY DVD, rather than Ekpoudom's (2024) 'street DVD'. The length of the video makes it too long to explore here in full detail. So, in this sub-section I will explore the emergence of the DIY DVD through *Aim High*, and the way particular videos on the DVD produce hyperlocal representations of space through DIY aesthetics and a focus on the everyday, with some spaces becoming 'hyperlocal landmarks' of inner-city London.

The DVD begins with introductory snippets to the instrumental version of *When I'm Ere*. These snippets hint at the different scales of representation that the video engages in. The international scale is shown through footage from a tour to Miami with Dizzee Rascal and a Roll Deep tour to Belgium. These segments show how the grime scene was growing in popularity, with audiences in Europe and America. This international, trans-Atlantic scale is contrasted with local and hyperlocal scales, which are shown through filming in and references to the Rhythm Division record store on Roman Road in Bow and a basketball court in Limehouse. In his introduction segment from the basketball cage, Breeze says: "representing Roll Deep, every time, in the hood, Limehouse," shown in *Figure 45*. 'Limehouse', also known as 'Wilehouse' in reference to the influence of Wiley, signified "one specific estate where Roll Deep hung out and grew up. Especially the basketball court there, another small space of great critical importance to the emergence of grime. That's where numerous music videos, including their first *When I'm Ere* were [sic] shot" (Hancox in Kafka, 2018). This is then a representation of an inner-city space that was also used for other music videos, a 'behind the scenes' moment, shedding light on a member of Roll Deep through hyperlocal representation of their neighbourhood and everyday life. This basketball court was a hyperlocal space for Roll Deep, many of whom lived in the area, but also a place where many musicians from across London would come to meet them. It is a prime example of urban sports cages that are "most commonly found within inner city areas, often on social housing estates, usually highly public,

frequently unlockable and unsupervised” (Billingham et al., 2024, p.2022). These spaces have been noted for their “hyper-local, youth-dominated character” which can “provide a sense of security, identification, and ownership” (Billingham et al., 2024, p.2030). In *Aim High*, this space is represented in a realist mode, the DIY aesthetics signifying that this is a space where the artists spend time in their everyday lives. There are no weird movements between thresholds, or eerie statuesque figures in the background.



Figure 45: Still from *Aim High*.

One freestyle included in *Aim High* that is notable for the space in which it was shot is performed by D Double E (Darren Jason Dixon), a grime MC from Forest Gate in the borough of Newham. D Double became one half of the MC duo Newham Generals, named after the London Borough of their origin. The stairs that D Double sits on lead down to the basement studio of grime MC and producer in Leytonstone, east London. An earlier segment provides an extensive tour of the studio, but here D Double doesn't use any equipment, just his voice and performance directly to camera. *Aim High* captures D Double representing his local area, delivering his lyrics directly to camera in one take, shown in *Figure 46*. The closed door behind

him, the steeply slanting banister, and the graffitied walls all produce a sense of an underground social and cultural practice, private and hidden from view. It is local space, recognisable to those who have seen it before, but unnamed and unrecognisable for those who haven't. The video production is distinctly DIY: the camera is handheld and the sound of D Double's voice is recorded by the microphone of the camera, rather than being mediated through a speaker or prerecorded and laid over the images during the editing process.



Figure 46: Still from Aim High.

In 2019, Jammer's family home became part of the local heritage of Waltham Forest when it was recognised with a blue plaque commemorating the house where Jammer grew up, and where he co-founded the DVD series 'Lord of the M.I.C.S' in the basement in 2003. Behind D Double on the door of the basement in his *Aim High* freestyle is a poster for *Lord of the Mic Vol. 1*, a 2004 DVD collection recording 'clashes' between MCs. As noted previously, a clash involves two or more artists taking turns performing freestyles, each trying to outshine the other. The stairs of Jammer's basement also appear in the video *Risky Roadz 2* (2005), as

shown in *Figure 47*.²⁰ Like *Aim High*, *Risky Roadz* was a DVD series and then record label that began recording grime freestyles and interviews, then signing artists and releasing music. The name evokes the spaces and routes that these artists take to travel between different areas, and the spaces in which many of the freestyles and interviews take place. The scenes in both *Risky Roadz 2* and *Lord of the Mics 1*, like in *Aim High*, are represented in a realist, DIY mode. Though there is the unopened threshold of the basement door in the background, there is no sense of weirdness to it.



Figure 47: Still from Risky Roadz 2.

Roony Keefe founded *Risky Roadz* in 2004 with the manager of Rhythm Division, a record store on Roman Road in Bow where Keefe also worked, when they realised that “there were still certain MCs that – visually – remained a mystery.”²¹ These videos, then, were inspired by a

²⁰ https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oG2_ZZ9k2tE

²¹ <https://www.riskyroadz.com/roony-keefe>

desire to see and show the faces of the performers whose voices were being heard by many Londoners on pirate radio stations and on CDs, and the spaces in which they were operating. And this desire to 'solve the mystery' speaks to the use of realist aesthetics in representing these artists. Rhythm Division played a prominent role in grime's development, both sonically and visually, but is now a coffee shop, indicating the gentrification of east London in the years since grime's emergence (White, 2023). Initially *Risky Roadz* was shot and sold in the store, but as more Grime MCs emerged across London Keefe would go out to film them in their local areas, and the DVD series also spread across the city to spaces such as Jammer's basement. Rhythm Division features in *Aim High* during a BBC Radio 1XTRA Live session featuring several grime crews including Roll Deep. *Figure 48* shows Roll Deep member Flowdan performing in the store. This is another moment of hyperlocal representation in the DVD, as the performance inside the store is interspersed with footage from the road outside, where artists name the store.

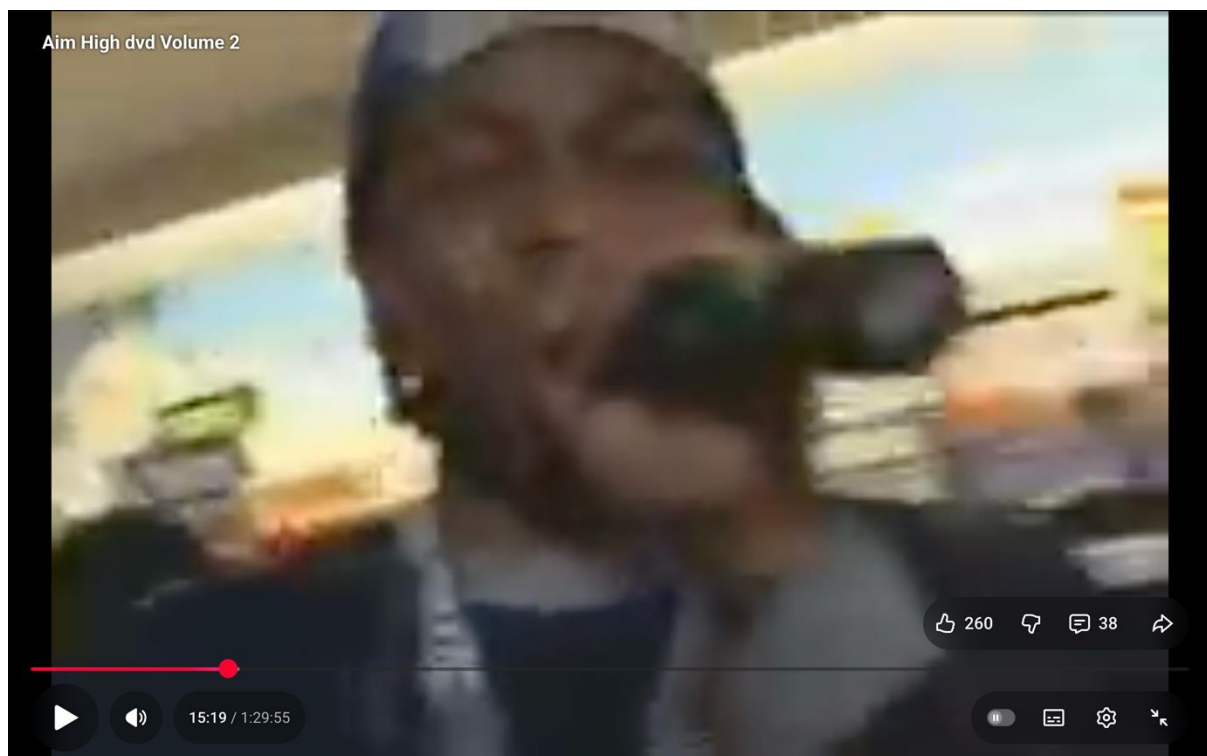


Figure 48: Still from Aim High.

The Limehouse basketball court and Rhythm Division show how particularly important hyperlocal spaces can become landmarks, and even become official parts of 'landmark London' in the case of the blue plaque on the façade of Jammers family home. These hyperlocal landmarks differ from the landmarks of London that Brunsdon (2019/2007) explores, such as Tower Bridge. They aren't hegemonic spaces on a global scale, but they are iconic and hegemonic within a particular sub-culture and locality, in these cases the grime scene of east London. Each of these hyperlocal landmarks is represented in *Aim High* through a realist, DIY mode. Again, there is a sense that the mystery of other videos, such as the weirdness and eeriness of *When I'm Ere's* representations of Limehouse, is avoided in the DIY DVD.

An important element in the development of grime was the emergence of new types of videos that could be categorised under the general type of 'music video'. There is what I would call the 'standard' music video, that which Diane Railton and Paul Watson (2011) are concerned with, characterised by all of the videos explored in the previous chapter, and by *Jus A Rascal* and *When I'm Ere*. Then there are the 'freestyle' video, and the 'clash' video, which are often contained within another new category of music video, which could be referred to alternately as the 'compilation DVD', 'street DVD', or 'DIY DVD', such as *Aim High*, *Risky Roadz*, and *Lord of the Mic*. D Double's freestyle or the BBC Radio 1XTRA Live session in *Aim High* are in a sense freestyle music videos, which could be categorised as both a pseudo-documentary and performance video, in Railton and Watson's (2011) terms. But they are different to the pseudo-documentary video for *Neighbourhood*, for example. The DIY quality of these freestyles is markedly different to the more standard music videos discussed previously: the sound quality and mise-en-scene are very raw and rough, and the videography is as much a freestyle as the lyrical performance. The way the music is captured is different to the format of more standard music videos, and shares some aspects with the avant-garde music video, given its resistance to standardised form and structure. *Aim High*, and other DIY DVDs such as *Risky Roadz* and *Lord of the Mics*, created a new sense of connection between spaces and representations, by which audiences were given a new level of representational access to urban music genres and the everyday spaces from which they were emerging. Rhythm Division, Jammer's basement, and the Limehouse basketball court show that the emergence

and continuation of grime was tied to a number of different types of space: housing, commercial, and community spaces. Furthermore, they showed the importance of different types of housing: terraced housing, like Jammer's, alongside low-rise and tower-block council housing.

As this section has explored, videos associated with the grime scene slide between different scales and modes of representation. While *When I'm Ere* is firmly situated in the hyperlocal space of Limehouse, there is a tension between this sense of everyday space and the senses of weirdness and eeriness produced by the way the artists move in and out of the physical infrastructure and past statuesque residents. Canary Wharf looming in the background also hints at the scale of the global city in which Limehouse is situated, a scale that is at the forefront of *Jus A Rascal*. In this video, the hyperlocal spaces of Dizzee's everyday life don't feature. Rather, Dizzee situates himself in the heart of the city, drawing on iconic and global landmarks, and thereby invoking national and global scales of representation. And while the video's overriding sense is of celebration, in part produced by the realist representation of Dizzee actually on the boat rather than in a studio, there is an undercurrent of eeriness in the way the hegemonic icons conceal the wider city. Dizzee's aspirations towards fame and financial gain are part of the way he claims his right to the city.

Both *When* and *Jus* are examples of a standard music video type, whereas the final sub-section explored a type that emerged through the growing availability of cheap video cameras. *Aim High* was able to capture spaces that were particularly important for the grime scene, producing hyperlocal landmarks through DIY, realist aesthetics. DIY DVDs show routes between different artists, spaces, and types of music video. Parts of the production process that would previously have been unseen were now recorded and shared alongside the music. To use Becker's (2023/1982) terms, recording the art world around the art object ensures that it becomes part of the art object. There is an everydayness to the scenes captured in the videos – the ordinary clothes, the ordinary spaces of parks, street corners, flats, basements, bedrooms, and kitchens. And these scenes combine with the DIY aesthetics to produce representations of the inner city that foreground the everyday lives and spatial practices of

working-class residents. These videos also highlight the different modes of showing and seeing at tension in the development of the grime scene. As will be explored in more detail below, this tension is also present in UK rap and drill music videos.

Section 2: UK Rap

UK rap has developed an audio-visual language that has also represented, told stories about, and laid claim to London's inner-city spaces. These representations speak to the questions of the changing landscape of London over the past few decades, to the policing of space, and to contests over access and use of space, all of which are central concerns of this thesis. This section explores how UK rap artists have engaged with the hyperlocal, but also slid between different scales of representation, as well as demonstrated the dynamics of hiding/showing. I will only look at one video at length, Giggs and Skepta's *Look Out*. First, however, I will introduce the two most notable UK rap artists, Giggs and Nines, and briefly explore one video each of theirs to demonstrate the multiple scales at play in UK rap music videos.

Nines (Courtney Leon Freckleton) is from the borough of Brent, north-west London. He grew up in the Church End Estate in Harlesden, where he started making music as a teenager. In 2012, he released his debut album *From Church Road to Hollywood*, the title referencing the estate in which he grew up and hinting at his aspirations to make not just music but Hollywood-style movies too. The music video for *CR (Grills Shutdown)*, as track off the album, is shot on the Church End Estate and in the surrounding area, providing hyperlocal representations of Nines, his friends and neighbours, as they travel around their neighbourhood selling 'grills'. These are a form of tooth jewellery that was first popularised in the UK by Goldie on his return from the US. Nines picks up the grills in Camden before taking them back to Church End, connecting his estate with the wider city and the international jewellery trade. The video incorporates a shot of a map of the council estate, shown in *Figure 49*, with an arrow pointing to a spot on the map accompanied by the text 'YOU ARE HERE'.

This shot shows and names exactly where the camera is, and the exact spot that the audience is looking at, producing a sense of hyperlocal representation of space, reminiscent of *When I'm Ere*. The camerawork is handheld and produces a similar DIY aesthetic.



Figure 49: Still from CR (Grills Shutdown).

Nines has been extremely popular and garnered millions of views on YouTube for his music, music videos, and short films. As attested to by a YouTube comment from the *CR* video, shown in *Figure 50*, his audio-visual work has put his home on the map through hyperlocal representations. Again, this is reminiscent of *When* in the 'mapping' of an estate through an urban music video. Nines's video thus represents an artist who has deep roots in a specific inner-city space, but who also incorporates black Atlantic routes through sonic and visual influences.

@mrurban6007 4 years ago

He put the whole of Church Road on the map with this one



126



Reply

Figure 50: Screenshot of a YouTube comment on the CR music video.

Giggs (Nathaniel Thompson), grew up on the other side of London to Nines in the borough of Southwark, south London, on the Gloucester Grove Estate in Peckham. He is generally regarded as the foremost pioneer of UK rap. Giggs began DJing reggae music, then MCing over garage, before turning to what would come to be known as UK rap. One of the prime examples of UK rap sampling US beats was Giggs' *Talkin the Hardest*, first released independently in 2007. The beat was originally produced by US musician and hip-hop pioneer Dr. Dre, though Giggs lays his distinctive London accent on top. The track helped to get him signed to XL Records, who released his second album in 2010, featuring *Talkin* as a bonus track. In 2014 XL uploaded the music video onto their YouTube channel under the name *TALKING DA HARDEST* (which I will hereafter refer to as *Talking*).²² The video was shot in the local area around the Gloucester Grove Estate, specifically the Surrey Canal path connecting Peckham High Street to Burgess Park. Giggs performs to camera surrounded by a large entourage who dance and perform the lyrics with him, shown in *Figure 51*. The aesthetic is particularly DIY, shot on a hand-held low-cost camera with minimal editing.

²² <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=914OHMH5zqE>



Figure 51: Still from TALKING DA HARDEST.

This location is far from the hegemonic London iconicity of Tower Bridge or Canary Wharf, and yet the track and the music video resonated to such an extent that it has become anthemic – iconic in its own way – as seen in many of the video’s most ‘liked’ YouTube comments, shown in *Figure 52*. As Aniefiok Ekpoudom writes:

The video saw Giggs in the fur jacket, surrounded by a large coalition of his boys from in and around Peckham, gun fingers waving, reciting the lyrics with him, giving face to an area and a crew that had rung bells in the city for over a decade. In the years to come the video would resemble a mural, with many of the faces glinting on the screen lost to jail or early burials. The song spread throughout South [London] and then the wider city and country, swapped and exchanged on school buses, blazing out of car speakers and barbershops, at BBQs and birthdays, sung like a national anthem at house parties (Ekpoudom, 2024, p.99).

Ekpoudom’s notion of the video as a ‘mural’ that ‘gives face’ to an area once again recalls Nava’s statement in our interview about grime videos functioning as graffiti tags of local areas by local artists. This local scale is in tension with the US sample that the track used, and idea

that the song had 'national' resonations as an anthem. These different scales are in constant relation to one another, continuing the local, national, and black Atlantic elements of urban music genres.

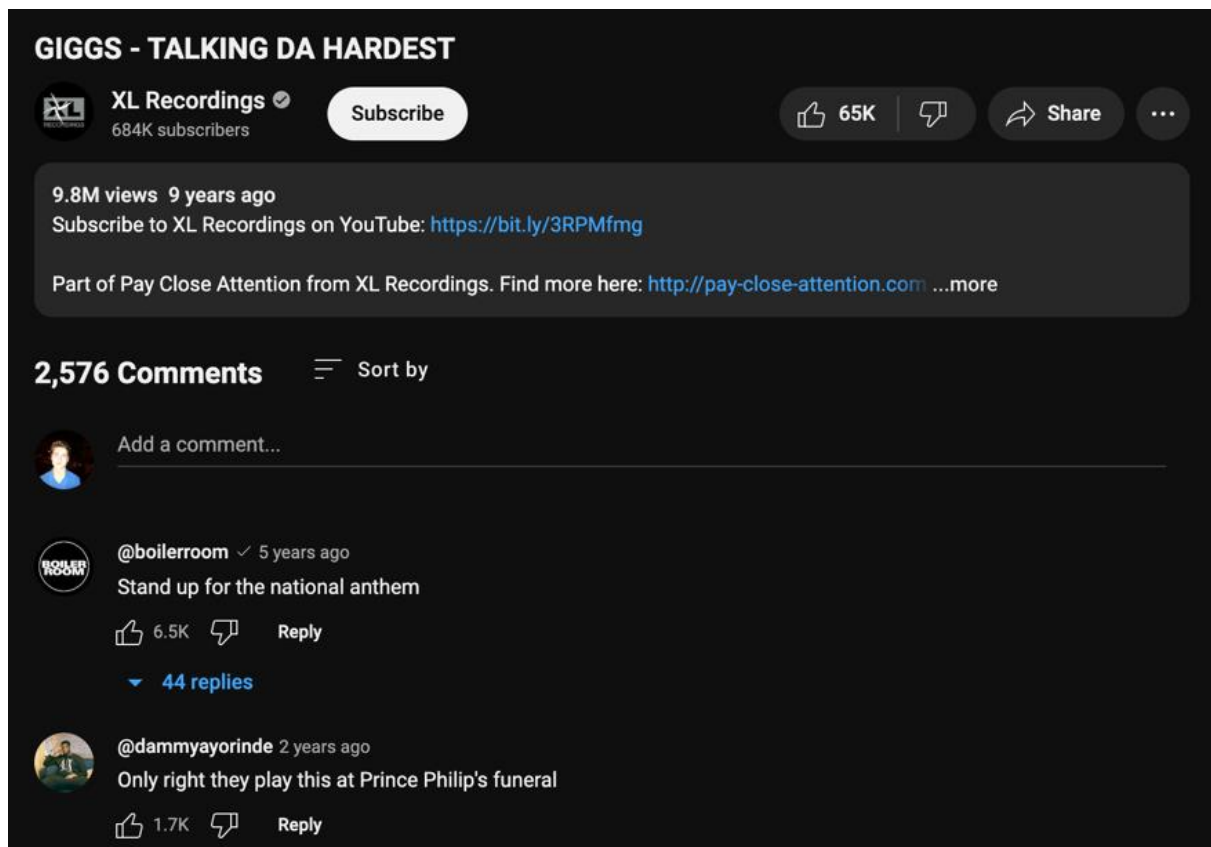


Figure 52: Screenshot from XL Records upload of Giggs' TALKIN DA HARDEST, showing the two of the video's most 'liked' comments.

In this video the black Atlantic scale is primarily represented sonically, the US-sampled backing track blending with Giggs' London accent and dialect signifying trans-Atlantic routes. The visual representations of space are all local, hardly moving from the bridge under which Giggs performs. At one point he sits in the front seat of a car under the bridge but the car doesn't move. This shot is reminiscent of General Levy's lyrical performance from the front seat of a car in *Incredible*, though here there is little movement from the place where the car is parked. There are no flashes of iconic or hegemonic London. The video represents a space in which young black men control the outdoor urban environment, irreverently blocking the path and

claiming attention as they claim space. Giggs and his entourage ‘give face’ to this local area: the video provides a means by which to recognise these spaces and the music emerging from it. And while the occupation of space in the video, the ownership it performatively and symbolically asserts, is small-scale, the track resonated far beyond the local area in which the video was filmed. The assertion of a right to a small portion of the city, then, can partake in much larger struggles for the city and even the nation. In UK rap, as in grime, working-class artists were thus using newly available technologies to tag, make murals, and give face to their local areas, to ‘put them on the map’. In doing so, they engaged with multiple scales of representation, from the hyperlocal, through the local, national, and black Atlantic. In the case of *Talking*, this was considered to renegotiate what the national scale could look and sound like. The video was another new post-card for the nation. But it achieved this by staying, visually, in one place. The next video I will look at takes the viewer through different spaces of London, and hints at the risks of such a journey.

*Look Out*²³

Look Out is something of a genre-crossover track between Giggs, the UK rap star, and Skepta (Joseph Olaitan Adenuga Jr.), a British-Nigerian MC, DJ, producer, designer, and film director from Tottenham, north London, who made his name in the grime scene. Skepta began his musical career as a DJ with the grime collective Meridian Crew, playing on pirate radio stations such as Heat FM. When Meridian disbanded in 2005, Skepta briefly joined Roll Deep before co-founding the grime crew and music label Boy Better Know (BBK). In 2009, Skepta released his second album *Microphone Champion*, on which *Look Out*, featuring Giggs, would be released.

The music video for *Look Out* was filmed and directed by Jamal Edwards MBE for his channel SB.TV on the then nascent online platform YouTube. SB.TV demonstrated the growing

²³ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5y2vMPUA2lQ>

dominance of the internet for the distribution and reception of music and music videos, quickly replacing the role of pirate radio. Edwards created SB.TV in 2006 when he began filming his friends performing their music on his estate in Acton, west London. The Black Curriculum (2022), a social enterprise founded in 2019 to address Eurocentricity in local and national school curriculums in England, described Edwards' work as "a source of archival history, documenting and preserving the histories of the contemporary music scene." Across sixteen years, before his death in 2022, Edwards provided a platform for many emerging and established artists in London, across the country, and internationally through SB.TV. His channel also laid the foundations for other YouTube channels that platformed urban music genres, many of which were important for the development of UK drill, as will be explored in more detail below.

The *Look Out* video begins with introductory images of Giggs and Skepta, with the instrumental for *Talkin the Hardest* playing, before cutting to a spoken introduction by Skepta advertising his forthcoming album *Microphone Champion*. This introduction takes place at night on a road next to an estate, Skepta talking to the camera as he walks to his car to drive to meet Giggs at the video shoot, and observing that it's an exceptional moment to be bringing together these two artists and their areas of Tottenham and Peckham, north and south London. The video-proper then begins with Giggs' verse, showing various shots of him performing alongside an entourage in daylight and at night on an estate, Skepta not yet present. There are shots in front of a named part of the estate, shown in *Figure 53*, but the shakiness and picture quality of the handheld camera makes it difficult to read. Nonetheless, this is another example of hyper-local visual reference. As the day turns to dusk, there are shots in a moving car, Giggs in the back performing to camera, presumably on the journey from Peckham to meet Skepta.



Figure 53: Still from Look Out.

At 2:43 the music video-proper is interjected by a scene of Skepta driving his car, stating to the cameraman in the backseat that he's on his way to meet Giggs. The track now seems to be playing out of the car's speaker. The volume is turned down so Skepta's voice can be heard clearly as he continues to promote his album. He refrains from stating the exact location where he will be meeting Giggs, but it appears to be a car park, where Skepta waits for Giggs to arrive. The video then cuts to a black background with white text proclaiming 'one minute later', as the *Talkin The Hardest* instrumental kicks back in at full volume to signal Giggs' arrival to the car park, where he greets Skepta. *Look Out* track kicks back in and the music video-proper resumes with Giggs performing the hook. The space in which the MCs perform together is difficult to make out, but as Skepta waits and as Giggs arrives there are brief glimpses of pub signage in the background, as shown in *Figure 54*, which suggest that this part of the video was shot in Islington.²⁴ Islington was presumably considered common ground for

²⁴ See: <https://www.layersoflondon.org/map/records/edvi> and <https://islington.humap.site/map/records/the-edward-iv>

the two artists to meet, relatively equidistant from Peckham and Tottenham. The scenes of Giggs on the estate during daylight present this space as somewhere he feels comfortable and at home, a space over which he has a degree of control. But he appears less comfortable in the scenes in which the two are together, as if leaving the space of the estate and his local area has unsettled him slightly. There is a similar dynamic with Skepta's performances. He also seems more at ease in the Tottenham performances and slightly uncomfortable as he is waiting for Giggs' arrival. However, the atmosphere is still convivial as they greet each other and perform together to camera.



Figure 54: Still from Look Out.

Following this is Skepta's verse, most of which is performed in the car park of the Selby Centre, a multi-purpose community centre in Tottenham, as shown in *Figure 55*, where Giggs isn't present. Again, the video anchors performance in a specific location, a hyperlocal representation linking the lyrical performance to the artist's area. The *Look Out* video, then, works by showing the two MCs in their local areas of north and south London, then tracking their movement towards each other, their routes towards the more central location where

they meet. There is a sense of a 'realist intention towards social extension' (Williams, 1977), by which the hyperlocal scale is expanded across the city.

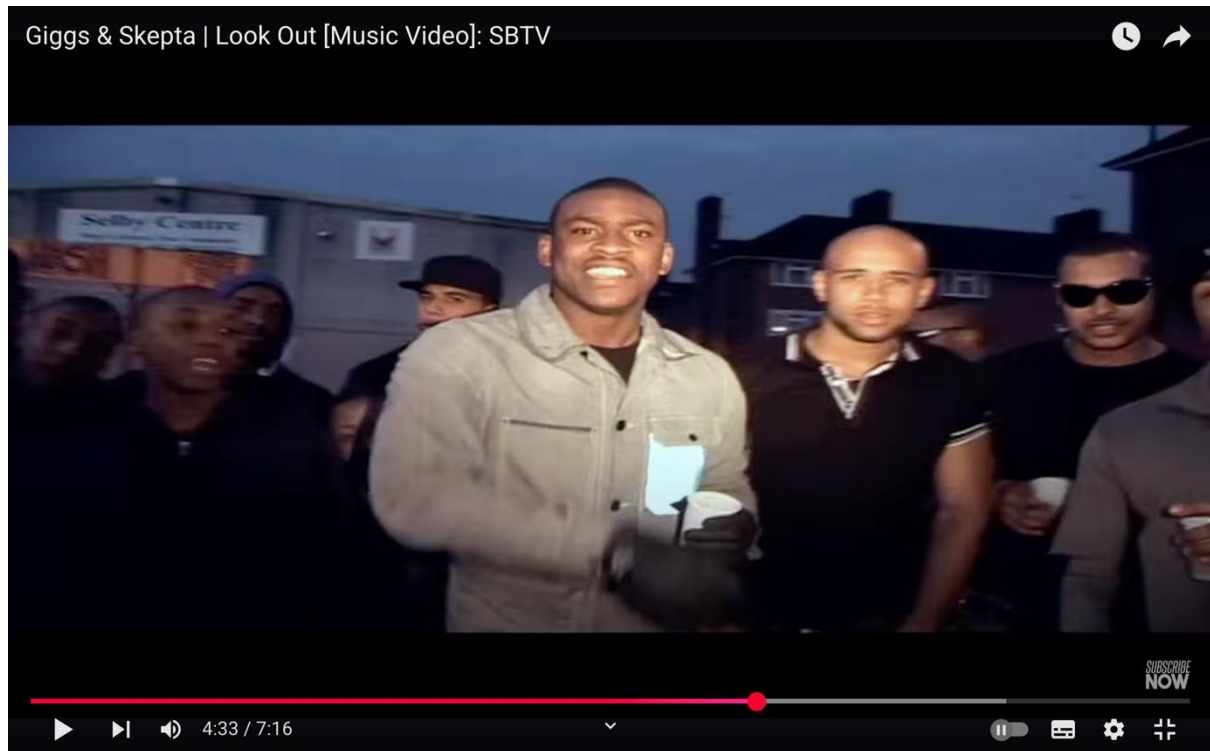


Figure 55: Still from Look Out.

Several different elements are combined in this music video. There is the album promotion, in documentary sections with the sound recorded by the handheld camera. There are the sections that use *Talkin the Hardest* as the backing track. Then there are the standard music video sections, with the *Look Out* track laid over the top. As in *Talkin The Hardest*, *Look Out*'s instrumental is slower than conventional grime, and is reminiscent of (potentially sampling) American rapper 50 Cent's *Candy Shop*, again showing UK rap's sonic influence from the US. *Look Out* is, then, another complex palimpsest (Fisher, 2011), with convergent sonic influences from across the black Atlantic.

It is worth noting that the routes the artists take across London don't lead to a performance in a club. This absence of a performance venue alludes to the policing practices of the time,

particularly the 2008 launch of the Metropolitan Police's Promotion Event Risk Assessment Form 696. This new practice "was set against a backdrop of heightened anxiety about postcode wars and gang violence in the early years of this millennium. This was reflected in the media outcry [. . .] and the renewed impetus that was given to anti-gang initiatives such as Operation Trident" (Fatsis, 2019b, p.1306). Many musicians, lawyers, and civil rights groups protested the use of the form, including Giggs who was almost unable to play shows in London because they were considered too risky (Ellis-Peterson, 2017).

These representations of space and movement through it explore the track's title and hook, the directive to 'look out'. This relates to the theme of hiding, in this case avoiding detection. The primary meaning of the directive in the hook is a warning to the MCs' respective rivals, recalling the convention of 'clashing'. But there are other meanings that are generated for the directive through the representations of space in the video. It also speaks of the locations from which the artists are looking out, the hyper-local spaces of their respective areas, and the spaces that they are looking out towards, the city at large as somewhere for them to move through and claim, even if at times uneasily. Unlike in *Talking*, in which Giggs sits in a stationary car, he is driven through the city in *Look Out*. This recalls the dynamics of *Jus A Rascal*, in which Dizze looks out over the city as a means to lay claim to it. Here, though, the city that Giggs and Skepta move through is composed of local vernacular spaces, rather than hegemonic London spaces (Brunsdon, 2019/2007; Barras, 2023). The space that they lay claim to, then, is that of their everyday urban experience, captured in a realist, DIY mode of representation.

There is also another undercurrent of meaning that these representations produce, the sense of being watched, and looking out for an unseen other. This is where an undercurrent sense of eeriness is produced, through the sense that some agent is present but unseen (Fisher, 2016). There is a moment showing Giggs in the car where he looks over his shoulder out of the back window as his lyrics describe being chased by police, shown in *Figure 56*. This brief moment produces a sense that the artists' performance is encouraging attention while simultaneously avoiding detection. It is revealing to note that this moment in *Look Out* takes

place in a car as it moves through London. Alongside large modernist social housing estates, Lefebvre also criticised cars for the role they played in everyday life and the production of alienating space in modern cities. He argued that the need to produce roads and parking spaces for cars meant that space in the city becomes “sliced up, degraded, and eventually destroyed” (Lefebvre, 1991/1987, p.359). Furthermore, he argues:

When an urban square serving as a meeting place isolated from traffic is transformed into an intersection or abandoned as a place to meet, city life is subtly but profoundly changed, sacrificed to that abstract space where cars circulate like so many atomic particles (Lefebvre, 1991/1987, p.312).

There is certainly a sense in *Look Out* that the cars provide a space to shut out the rest of the city. But, in *Look Out* as in *Neighbourhood* and *Incredible* before it, the car park is itself an urban meeting place. In contrast to Lefebvre’s critique, the representations in *Look Out* imply the ways in which cars can connect spaces and artists in the city, and how cars and parking spaces can be appropriated for multiple uses. In this video, the car itself becomes a space of performance, a studio that moves through the city.

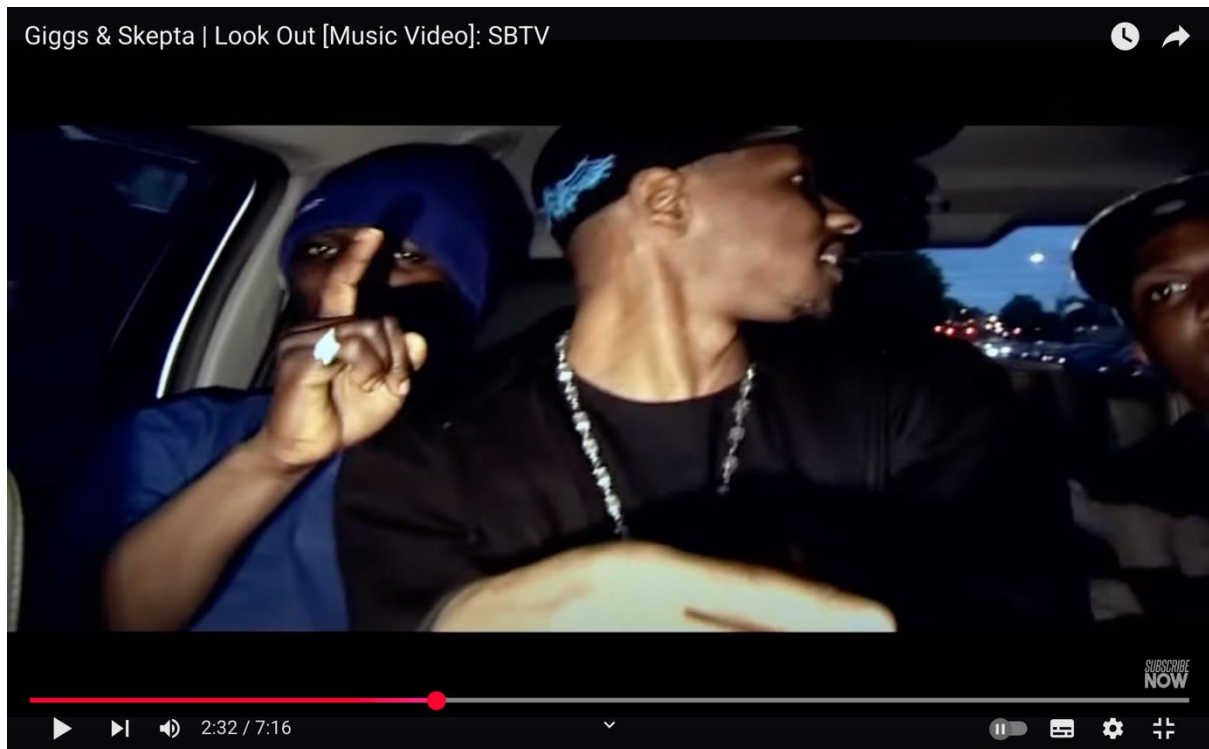


Figure 56: Still from Look Out.

In contrast to Lefebvre's critique, Tim Edensor (2003, p.153) argues that driving a car can produce "irruptions of fantasy and reverie," forming "connections between immediate surroundings and a host of intertextual and interpractical spaces, places, eras, and occasions" through which "individuals enfold elsewheres, pasts, and futures during their journeys; concoct and rehearse narratives; and sensually apprehend the world in ways additional to the visual." The notion of combining and enfolding times, narratives, and senses, is particularly appropriate for analysing *Look Out's* audio-visual representations. The video enfolds two music tracks – *Talkin the Hardest* and *Look Out* – within the same audio-visual text, plus the album that Skepta is promoting, *Microphone Champion*. Furthermore, the text enfolds sounds captured on Edwards' camera directly from the spaces in which he was filming, both in and outside of the car, where the MCs concoct and rehearse the narratives contained in their lyrics. These sounds interact with the images, producing a multi-sensorial representation of inner-city London, and a blending of documentary-realist and performance-video conventions.

It is worth reiterating that modernist council estates and cars, two forms of space that Lefebvre particularly reviles, both play prominent roles in the visual language of urban music genres. As explored in this thesis thus far, the spaces of modernist council estates were environments which often contradicted Lefebvre's assessment of the lives these spaces could foster, and the same can be said of his assessment of cars. Urban music videos, then, highlight the agency of contemporary city inhabitants and their ability to undermine the production of space as alienating in the very spaces that Lefebvre thought were most sharply affected by capitalist spatial production. Representational space "captures the dynamic and artful reconfiguration of conceived and perceived space by inhabitants, revealing that capital and central planning fail to fully comprehend space as a lived experience" (Scott, 2013, p.401). *Look Out*, then, like so many of the other videos I discuss, highlights the role of representational space in the production of social space, in that it artfully reconfigures the conceptions of space proposed by urban planners, such as car parks. It does so irreverently, producing convivial connections between different inner-city locations of London (Gilroy, 2004). And while the political ramifications of the claims to a right to the city asserted in these videos may not be revolutionary, they still challenge hegemonic structures that control access and use of space in the city, as will be explored in more detail in Chapter 6.

Nick Scott (2013, p.402) qualifies Lefebvre's critique of cars, arguing that he doesn't disqualify the possibility that the space of the car can foster creative and sensual possibilities. Rather, Scott argues, Lefebvre criticises the central role cars play in the "fragmentation of cities through the proliferation of private neighbourhoods serviced by automobility." This automobility disrupts an understanding of space as a unitary whole, and "habitualizes the relations of systemic domination and violence" (Scott, 2013, p.402). Scott's argument provides a forceful way of analysing the dynamics at play in *Look Out*, particularly Giggs looking over his shoulder. The video represents connections between spaces, but there is a sense that these are spaces that are being connected in spite of their fragmentation. And Giggs' look suggests that there is a danger to travelling through the city in this way, that there is a danger to not sticking to one's hyperlocal space by staying at home.

The danger of violence is prescient in this video given particular instances that have occurred since its release. As well as capturing spaces that have since been lost, the video also features a brief glimpse of Mark Duggan, shown in *Figure 57*. On August 4th 2011, just over two years after *Look Out* was uploaded to YouTube, Mark Duggan (shown in *Figure 29*) was followed by the Metropolitan Police as he was driven through London in a minicab, then shot and killed in Tottenham, sparking what came to be known as the London Riots. Duggan's son, Kemani, would go on to be a successful UK drill artist, while Giggs would go on to work with the drill collective 67. On September 5th 2022, Chris Kaba, a member of 67, was followed and then shot and killed by the Metropolitan Police in the front seat of a car in Streatham, south London. *Look Out*, then, is inadvertently connected with two high-profile police shootings, both of which involved the victim travelling through the city by car, both of whom are related to London's urban music scene. The fact that this connection exists reveals the way movement through space in the contemporary city is experienced profoundly differently by urban inhabitants, depending on intersecting lines of race, class, and gender. As with Ekpoudom's (2024) description of *Talking*, then, *Look Out* would also come to resemble a mural, with some faces lost to early burials. Giggs' look out of the car suggests anxieties and frustrations towards the police and the way movement through the city was monitored and impeded for particular racialised members of society. The *Look Out* video is significant for a number of reasons, then. It gave the crossover between grime and UK rap an audio-visual manifestation. It also signalled the growing popularity of SB.TV, and internet-sharing of music videos more generally, with SB.TV bringing together two of London's most popular MCs of the time from either side of the River Thames. But it also suggests some of the anxieties and experiences of police violence when moving through the city as a person who is deemed threatening.



Figure 57: Still from *Look Out*, showing Skepta (left) and Mark Duggan (right).

It is worth noting how references to nationalism and national identity, visually in the case of the nationally iconic locations of *Jus A Rascal* such as Tower Bridge, or reputationally in the case of audience reactions to *Talking*, were present in and through audio-visual texts that were on the threshold between underground and mainstream recognition. Dodds (2023, p.36) argues that the locations from which grime artists emerged are “*overlooked spaces and contested edges*”. These spaces are relatively central, densely populated, close to some of London’s most iconic leisure, tourism and global capital sites, and yet not seen, not included in an urban overview, not part of the city’s or the nation’s story” (italics in original). Dizzee is one obvious example of the artist described here, as he grew up in such close proximity to Canary Wharf. Giggs is another, as he grew up in the same London Borough as Tower Bridge and the Tate Modern. The movement of Giggs in *Look Out* shows both the spaces that are often overlooked in notions of London as an iconic capital and global city, and the contested nature of movement through the city for racialised and criminalised groups, particularly young black men.

These artists and the texts they produced suggest the many ways in which national iconicity, the global city, and inner-city audio-visual production intertwine, with the latter often marking the production and navigation of the former. This also suggests the inter-relation between the national, the global, the local, and the hyperlocal, whereby a hyperlocal video can become so popular as to produce additional senses of national identity, despite borrowing heavily from American music cultures. These new senses interact with and challenge, though do not replace, existing, historically established senses of nationality. While *Look Out* hasn't achieved the same anthemic status as *Talking*, it is another example of urban music videos sliding between different scales of reference and representation, and the parallel sense of unease this journey brings. Again, the modes of representation are distinctly DIY, producing a realist aesthetic, though there is a sense of unease in *Look Out* that hints at the eeriness of police surveillance and the threat of police violence. These dynamics are also present in the videos I will look at in the next section.

Section 3: UK Drill

The UK Drill scene began to emerge in Brixton and Kennington, in the south-London borough of Lambeth, around 2013, before spreading across the city. Like the genres of UK rap and grime before it, UK drill continued the convention of referencing the local areas in which the artists had grown up, both lyrically and visually, and creating collectives of artists who had grown up together in those areas. Key UK drill groups included 67 from Brixton Hill; OFB (Original Farm Boys) from Broadwater Farm, Tottenham; Harlem Spartans, who used 'Harlem' as a nickname for their local area of Kennington; and 1011 from Ladbroke Grove, whose name references the W10 and W11 postcodes of west London. These names represent a continuation of the hyper-local, postcode scale recognisable from the grime and UK rap scenes, but also allusions to other scales, such as the black Atlantic connection to Harlem in New York City.

Sonically, UK drill was characterised by stark lyrical depictions of drug dealing, violence, and the harshness of life on social housing estates, delivered over syncopated drum beats, sombre and melancholic piano melodies, and heavy basslines (Fatsis, 2019a, 2019b).

UK drill's hyperlocal lyrical themes are often visually represented through music videos shot on location in the artists' local areas, on council estates, streets, and parks. For example, the video for Harlem Spartan's *Kennington Where It Started* (2019) features imagery of the Kennington Underground station and a shot outside a local supermarket, shown in *Figures 58* and *59*. These scenes combine to situate the track's theme of emergence within very rooted local areas, hyperlocal representations expressing particularly realities of life in London's inner city.



Figure 58: Still from *Kennington Where It Started*.

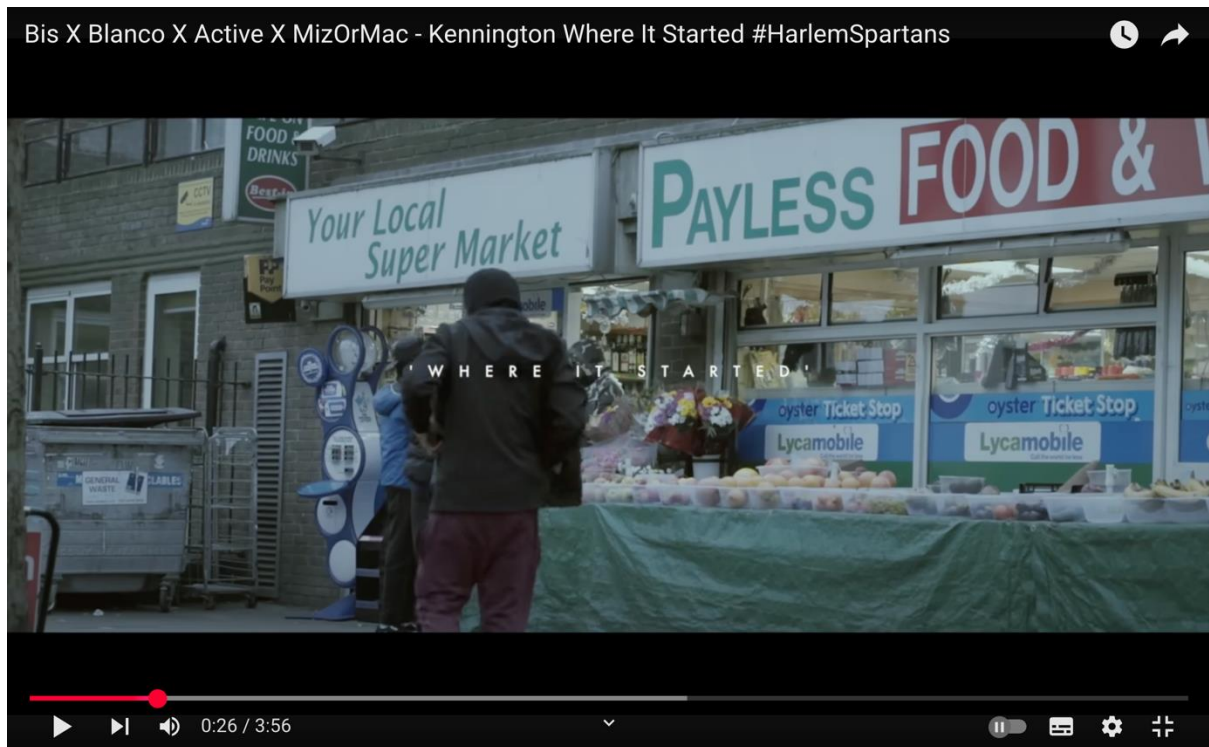


Figure 59: Still from Kennington Where It Started.

At the same time, the use of Canary Wharf as a backdrop for urban music videos persists in the UK drill scene, as can be seen in Mixtape Madness's *Next Up?* series, which has been a platform for many up-and-coming UK drill artists. Some of these artists will be explored in more detail in this chapter and the next, such as OFB, shown in *Figure 60*, and Digga D, shown in *Figure 61*. This use of Canary Wharf in the background echoes the themes of landmark London (Brunsdon, 2019/2007) and hegemonic buildings (Barras, 2023) explored earlier in this chapter.



Figure 60: Still from Next Up? [S2.14], showing OFB in front of Canary Wharf.



Figure 61: Still from Next Up? [S1.E13], showing Digga D (middle) in front of Canary Wharf.

The role of the internet in the distribution and reception of drill was touched on by another of my interviewees, DIR_01. In our interview together, DIR_01 stated:

A lot of what created the sort of person I am was always what we [DIR_01 and their friends] were learning and what we were doing and the environment that we created for each other. And part of that was also sitting down, just watching drill videos and having serious conversations about it, what lyrics they're talking about, what locations they're in. Googling our locations and seeing what drill videos pop up and things like that. But at the same time, also just watching like, you know, Spike Jonze's videos or Hype Williams' videos.

This is a fascinating insight into the relationship between drill, location, and technology. Using internet searches, DIR_01 and their friends were able to find where drill videos were being made, and to see if videos being made in their area. The comments also touch on the multitude of influences that contemporary creatives have at their disposal, particularly through the internet, in this case from US music videos and the continued relevance of Hype Williams. There is a continuation, then, of black Atlantic routes of dynamic interconnection across international borders. As in jungle, UKG, grime, and UK rap, then, there are sliding scales at play in UK drill music videos, as will be explored in more detail below.

Alongside these positive aspects of the Internet, though, are causes for concern. As UK drill developed through the 2010s it became implicated in a moral panic as a spate of violent crimes across London were linked to musicians making their name in the drill scene, with many drill collectives characterised as criminal gangs (Fatsis, 2019a, 2019b). The Metropolitan Police launched their Gangs Violence Matrix database in 2012, as part of the Coalition Government's 'war on gangs' (Densley & Pyrooz, 2020). The database was a risk management tool used to monitor and respond to problems associated with gangs in London. An investigation by Amnesty International (2018, p.43) found a significant overrepresentation of black people on the database, and argued that the Metropolitan Police were associating "elements of urban youth culture and identity that have nothing to do with serious offending", in a highly racialized manner. Many people included on the database weren't aware of their inclusion. The police considered even the sharing of particular UK drill videos as "a possible

indicator of gang affiliation”, with evidence of sharing regarded as “potential criteria for inclusion in the [Gangs Violence] Matrix”, which could impact access to housing, employment, and education (Fatsis, 2019b, p.1305). So, like the physical movement of Giggs through the city, there is also an eerie sense in the need for people interacting with UK drill videos online to ‘look out’.

I will now turn to an analysis of two videos. First, *Live Corn*, which produces hyperlocal representations of an estate in Brixton Hill, but also utilises signs of estate regeneration to produce a sense of eeriness in this everyday space. Then I will look at *Ambush*, which mixes hyperlocal representations of Broadwater Farm Estate with scenes of London as a global city, and the financial and sexual fantasies that come with it.

*Live Corn*²⁵

The opening shot of 67’s *Live Corn* shows a bottle of Cîroc Pineapple vodka liqueur and a plastic cup on the bonnet of a Range Rover, shown in *Figure 62*. The video, directed by PacmanTV, proceeds in a montage of shots from around an estate, with the track’s MC, LD (Cassiel Nii Akwei Wuta-Ofei), performing to camera with friends during the day and night as they smoke and drink. LD used to release music under the name Scribz until the police issued him a Criminal Behaviour Order (CBO) in 2014, banning him from making and performing music for two years, at which point he took on the name LD full time and started wearing a mask to conceal his identity in music videos. He wears his now iconic mask in the video for *First Day Out*, which I will explore in the next chapter. In *Live Corn*, though, his face is at times momentarily visible, while at others he obscures it. The sole female in the video, comparatively underdressed in a colourful skirt and vest-top, also performs LD’s lyrics to the camera alongside the MC, sat on the boot of a BMW as seen in *Figure 63*. The spaces of the estate include a playground, football cage, car park, and stairwell. In contrast to *Look Out*, in

²⁵ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XtKdPYnHEtc>

which cars are used to drive through the city, and even to *Talking*, and *Incredible*, the cars in *Live Corn* are never entered or driven. They are static props on an estate that is never left by the performers.



Figure 62: Still from Live Corn.



Figure 63: Still from Live Corn showing LD (left).

In *Live Corn* much of the estate is shown covered by repair work, as seen in Figures 64, 65, and 66. These shots of an estate in need of repair contrast with the luxury car, the wads of cash, and the bottles of Cîroc and Courvoisier that are shown throughout the video. The cash speaks to the lyrical themes of drug-dealing and the ability of the group to generate an income through their control of the local area. The title *Live Corn* refers to live rounds in a gun, again attesting to the group's control over the area. These themes of control of the area and the assertion of a right to the city, or at least a right to their estate and the local area of Brixton, are visually and symbolically represented using the maintenance signage that covers much of the estate infrastructure, proclaiming the need for caution and the danger of death. The use of these signs suggests that there are multiple authorships at play in these videos. There is the lyricism of the MCs, there is the direction of PacmanTV, and there are the writers and producers of these signs, which act as a sort of visual gloss for the lyrics.



Figure 64: Still from Live Corn.



Figure 65: Still from Live Corn.



Figure 66: Still from Live Corn.

However, there is another sense produced by the use of maintenance signs in *Live Corn*, which speaks to the contests over, and senses of belonging in, urban space. One shot in particular, shown in *Figure 67*, produces a sense of animosity felt by the group towards the repair works on their estate and the signage that comes with it. The reason for this animosity at what might be considered a sign of improvement can be found by a look at the way council estates were being treated at the time. In this videos, the estate is in danger of falling apart. It is simultaneously shrouded in extra material, exposed to the elements through deterioration, and exposing of the dynamics by which council estates have been allowed to deteriorate.



Figure 67: Still from Live Corn.

The emergence of UK Drill, and its trajectory into the mainstream, occurred concurrently with the implementation of severe austerity measures by the Conservative-Liberal Democrat Coalition government that won the 2010 general election, what Gillespie et al. (2021) refer to as ‘austerity urbanism’. The Coalition government continued in the policy direction of New Labour and the Conservatives before them in making the social housing sector increasingly precarious for residents (Hodkinson & Robbins, 2013, p.71). Housing benefits were cut severely during this period, and home ownership was further favoured by extending the Right to Buy to housing association tenants (Stephen & Stephenson, 2016). In 2012, the Coalition government abolished the Tenant Services Authority (TSA), which was set up in 2008 to “regulate ‘consumer’ standards in social housing,” making it increasingly difficult for council tenants to take action against unsafe housing conditions (Hodkinson, 2020, p.47). So, while the Coalition government was systematically removing protections for the poorest of London’s inhabitants, an audio-visual genre was emerging in which the assertion of control of specific social housing estates through hyperlocal representation was a central convention.

While ‘regeneration’ of social housing estates might seem positive, they have frequently been opposed by residents, who see them as part of a process of removal (Watt, 2021). So, the use of signs in this video also refers to this process and the connotations that came with it. It suggests an awareness of, and anger towards, the mismanagement that the signs are a result of and the potential displacement that the signs could precede. The way in which the sign in *Figure 66* tells people on one side of the wall to ‘Keep Out’ is evocative of the government discourse towards social housing estates during this period, The Coalition government frequently demonised estate residents as an immoral ‘underclass’, particularly young black residents who were frequently conflated with the notion of ‘gangs’ (see Hodkinson & Robbins, 2013; also Laub, 2021). The Coalition government’s housing policy enacted a return to the neoliberal ‘Thatcherite agenda’ of ‘class war conservatism’ (Hodkinson and Robbins, 2013). The maintenance shots, then, represent the way this war was being waged by the government, using scaffolding and signs to reorganise the spatial landscape of the city. These are physical manifestations of the work of policy makers and urban planners, whose regeneration plans are forms of Lefebvrian representations of space (Schmid, 2008). After the shot of the walled off section of the estate with the sign saying ‘Danger/Keep Out’, shown in *Figure 66*, the video jumps to scenes inside this walled off area where 67 perform, and where LD’s lyrics speak of what life is like for him and his peers in these demonised areas. These maintenance signs all contain directives reminiscent of *Look Out*. There is an interesting comparison to be made between the directives to ‘Look Out’ and to ‘Keep Out’. The visual language of the video suggests that this latter statement is directed at people who don’t live on the estate, not for the residents who are looking out from the other side of the wall. The representations of the scaffolding and signage in this music video speak of the way these representations of space intertwine with representational spaces and spatial practices. Like the use of empty flats for pirate radio stations, the use of maintenance signage in these videos shows the way inner-city artists use the physical infrastructure around them to produce and share artworks.

The infrastructure of regeneration in *Live Corn* is another example of the production of a sense of eeriness, in the conversation between what we see and hear in the video and the context of social housing regeneration, privatisation and financialisation. As Fisher argues:

Since the eerie turns crucially on the problem of agency, it is about the forces that govern our lives and the world. It should be especially clear to those of us in a globally tele-connected capitalist world that those forces are not fully available to our sensory apprehension. (2016, p.10).

In *Live Corn*, the maintenance work signifies the eerie spread of capital and governance working together through council housing policy, an infection camouflaged as a cure for the physical degradation of people's homes on the estate. The artists repurpose and subvert these signs through an act of agency that contests the effects of capital, as local residents proclaiming their ownership of and belonging to this space. This is not to say that all regeneration programmes are unwelcome or that they don't often improve the physical infrastructure of council housing estates (see Boughton, 2018). But these are instances within the broader trend of council housing sell-offs and a lack of resupply that has marked the post-financial crash years of austerity (Watt, 2021). This context is why some estate residents might want escape routes away from these spaces, perhaps through a career in music, as is suggested by the setting of the video I turn to next.

*Ambush*²⁶

OFB's *Ambush* opens with sunlight shining over a modernist building, a large colourful mural running vertically down towards the street, shown in *Figure 67*. This is Tangmere Block on the Broadwater Farm Estate in Tottenham, which OFB are named after. The video cuts quickly between shots of the estate, and briefly lingers on a 'Justice for Mark Duggan' poster in a shop window. OFB is a collective of artists, one of whom is Bandokay, the stage-name of Kemani Duggan, son of Mark Duggan. Bandokay grew up in Tangmere, and was ten years old when his father was killed. The commemorative poster, then, is an acutely poignant detail in the spatial representations of *Ambush*.

²⁶ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-QezMBY0Ndk>



Figure 67: Still from Ambush.

After the establishing shots of the outdoor spaces around Tangmere, there is a shot of the three featured OFB MCs, SJ (Jayden O'Neill-Crichlow), Bandokay, and DoubleLz (Andre Deer), surrounded by an entourage of other young men in front of Tangmere, the block's name clearly visible, as seen in *Figure 68*. The video proceeds as a montage of shots, with each MC performing their verses and the hook. The spaces shown include the roads that cut through the estate, where an older man dances and SJ and DoubleLz ride around on motorbikes. There are signs of disrepair and regeneration programmes in the background as they move through the estate. There are interior scenes in which the three MCs perform together and DoubleLz performs with a female dancer, who is overtly sexualised compared to the representations of the men. There are also scenes on a balcony at night with hotel signage lit up in the background. The video rapidly jumps between all of the spaces, reflecting the structure of the track. At the same time, the range of images gives the viewer a sense of the layout of the estate.

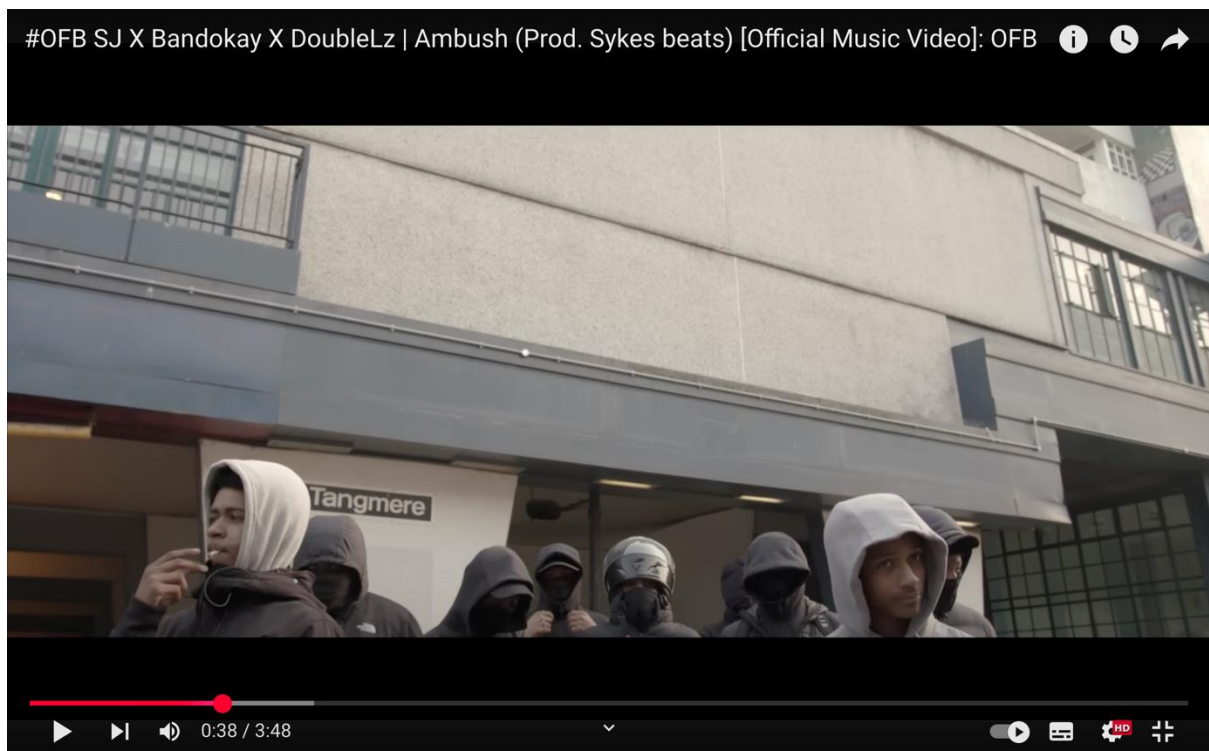


Figure 68: Still from *Ambush*.

Broadwater Farm has a particularly complex history that is worth outlining briefly here. Construction began in 1967, with Tangmere imagined as the estate's focal point. As well as Tangmere, Broadwater Farm consists of eight other six-storey blocks, which are connected to four-storey maisonette blocks, two nineteen-storey towers, and a small section of terraced housing (Boughton, 2017a). The estate was immediately a multicultural working-class place to live (Boughton, 2017a). The mural on Tangmere which is seen in the opening of *Ambush* represents a significant moment in Broadwater Farm's history. On October 5th, 1985, Cynthia Jarrett died of heart failure during an unlawful Metropolitan Police raid on her home near the Estate (Nwonka, 2023; Boughton, 2017b). The following day, outraged by Jarret's death, the local community held a demonstration outside Tottenham Police Station. Though the demonstration was initially peaceful, it escalated to violent confrontations when the demonstrators found their way blocked and all exits barred by police in riot gear. During the ensuing violent confrontations on Broadwater Farm, PC Keith Blakelock was killed. Four-hundred police officers occupied the Estate over the following weeks, with 270 police raids taking place over the next six months and 159 arrests made (Boughton, 2017b). A regeneration plan followed, creating local jobs for residents and painting murals on three

blocks including Tangmere. The *mise en scène* of *Ambush*, then, references three people who have died through altercations between the local communities of Tottenham and the Metropolitan police: Jarrett, Blakelock, and Duggan.

As noted above, the killing of Duggan sparked the 2011 London Riots. In 2016, David Cameron revived the term ‘sink estate’ when he proposed to “blitz” poverty by demolishing the “worst 100 sink estates” in England (Cameron in Slater, 2018), particularly those associated with the 2011 London Riots (Perera, 2019). Cameron stated in *The Times*: “The riots of 2011 didn’t emerge from within terraced streets or low-rise apartment buildings. The rioters came overwhelmingly from these postwar estates” (Cameron quoted in Perera, 2019). Despite the fact it included both terraced housing and low-rise blocks, off-the-record briefings suggested that one such estate to be demolished was Broadwater Farm, though this plan evaporated with the exit of Cameron from office following the Brexit referendum (Boughton, 2017b). Tangmere, though, has since been demolished as part of a 2022 improvement plan. So, as with the Paradise Club in *Inner City Life*, and Rhythm Division in *Aim High*, *Ambush* captures a space that has since disappeared. But in UK drill videos, this capturing is most frequently of housing rather than clubs. This is in large part due to the fact that the drill scene developed predominantly in estates and online, outside of the space of the club. Indeed, the scene developed during a period of increasing disappearance of clubs and youth centres (White, 2020; Laub, 2021). This absence of spatial options for convivial social events and activities placed an ever-greater importance on the estates in which these artists lived. But these estates themselves have also become increasingly precarious spaces for their residents.

In 2022 I interviewed Yukki, a director from north London who first started making music videos when he was a teenager. Since then, he has directed many music videos, short films, commercials, and documentaries. These include a number of videos for UK drill artists, including OFB’s *Ambush*. In the interview I conducted with Yukki, he said that *Ambush* was a significant moment in his career:

I got in contact with Jamal Edwards [. . .] from there I met Isaac [Densu], who was Jamal Edwards' right-hand man, and he took me to Broadwater Farm a week or two weeks later, and said 'look we've got a shoot for these young boys', and it was SJ, Bandokay, and DoubleLz. I think they were young at the time, like 17 or 16, and I was quite young myself, and we just shot something on the block.

This recollection provides an insight into the lineage between urban music video productions, as Edwards, the director and videographer of *Look Out*, provided a platform for the development of Yukki's career and the shooting of *Ambush*. There is a DIY element to this lineage, with artists generating networks through their work and connections with older more established artists, and this carries into the production of the video itself. In our interview, Yukki described *Ambush* as follows:

There was no actual budget with it, [. . .] it was just me, so I directed the shoot when I was there, I shot the video, I edited the video myself, and I graded the video myself, so I did everything basically [. . .] It was natural, [. . .] everything that was there is there, no extras, no stunt doubles, it was just pure, natural, so that's what got the attention of everyone.

Yukki's comments from our interview suggest the way in which music videos develop as documents of spaces and lives within them. There are very candid moments in the video, particularly a scene in which a bus driver brandishes the 'O' sign, referring to OFB, to the camera as SJ and Abra Cadabra (Aaron Philips, another OFB member featured in the video) join him and laugh. The laughter seems to be produced by the spontaneity of the scene, and the conviviality between the bus driver on his everyday route and the performers in the video. Yukki's description of the shoot also suggests an intention to show what life was like for these artists on the estate, and that this showing was perceived as an important part of the audience's enjoyment of the video.

The candid bus scene contrast with performances that appear far more obviously constructed, particularly the overtly sexualised scenes featuring a female dancer, the only female character in the entire video. In the scenes of the woman dancing, there are echoes here of *Inner City*

Life, with women's movement limited to interior space, while convivial scenes between men take place outside. There are also echoes of the dancing women in *Jus A Rascal*, *Incredible*, and *Original Nuttah*. But, in *Ambush*, the woman is completely separated from any kind of club scene or celebration amongst other dancers. She is represented as serving the needs of DoubleLz, bringing him drinks and weed and providing sexual attention. There are passing sexualised references to women in the track, but the lyrical content is far more focussed on descriptions of patrolling the local area, carrying weapons, and attacking rival groups, and DoubleLz doesn't reference women in his verse or his section of the hook. The sense is that she is also something to be consumed by the artist and, vicariously, the viewer of the video. The lighting in the interior scenes, in which she dances and the MCs perform to camera as seen in *Figure 69*, differs in comparison to the overcast daylight of the exterior shots around the estate. It is much closer to the night-time balcony shots, perhaps implying that these scenes happen in a different location, away from the everyday spaces of the estate. It is interesting that in our interview Yukki used the word 'natural' and not 'real' to describe the video, suggesting the conventions of naturalism rather than realism (Williams, 1977). The video doesn't produce the social critique of traditional social realist texts. But alongside the naturalistic reproduction of everyday reality, *Ambush* also involves elements of sexual fantasy. This dynamic is reminiscent of the So Solid videos that appear to bring the nightclub to the estate, but in this case female presence is reduced to a sexualised status symbol.

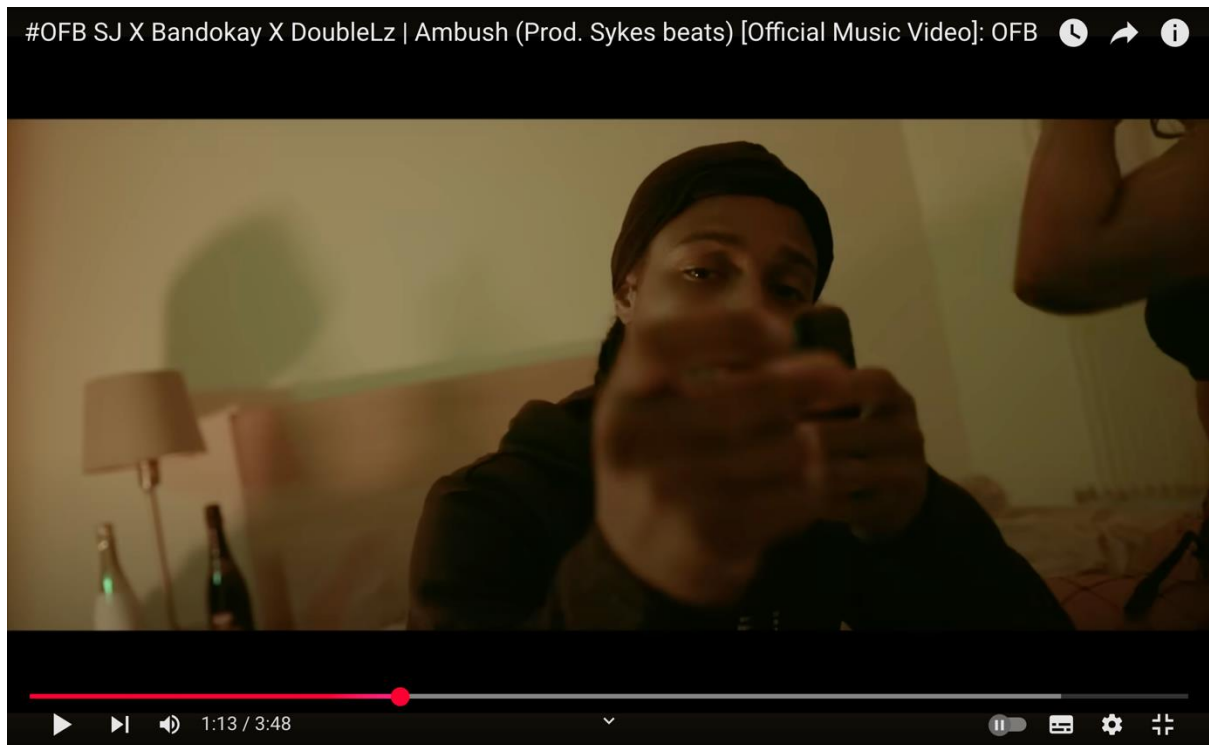


Figure 69: Still from Ambush.

SJ and DoubleLz are shown riding out of the estate, the sign for Broadwater Farm left behind in the background making way for the balcony night shots with hotel signage in the background. There isn't a Novotel or an ibis hotel near Broadwater Farm so the artists must have moved to a different location to shoot these parts of the video. The hotels appear to be part of the Excel London, in London Docklands, near Canary Wharf. This provides some context for Yukki's statement in our interview, that the parts of the video shot on the estate in the day were more naturalistic than the parts in the hotel at night, where fantasy and escapism are the overriding conventional features. Interestingly, though, this route through the city, from Broadwater Farm to Excel London, is not represented in the video. Instead, the two spaces are collaged together in another blend of everyday and exceptional spaces. But rather than the space of the club, here the estate is blended with spaces of global London, the 'abstract space' (Lefebvre, 1991/1987; Wilson, 2013) of the franchise hotel connected with the precarious space of Broadwater Farm.

Figure 70 shows SJ brandishing his middle finger towards camera, the signs of the ibis and Novotel hotels lit up behind him. This image is reminiscent of the shots of Dizzee in front of Canary Wharf in *Jus A Rascal*, artists irreverently claiming space in front of hegemonic buildings in a global city. It is also reminiscent of the shot in *Live Corn* in which a 67 member swears at a maintenance sign. In *Ambush*, the hotels become another sign of the continued and growing gulf between the rich and poor in London, and the discontentment of estate inhabitants at the way the city has been managed.



Figure 70: Still from *Ambush*.

Again, the title of the track references a dynamic between hiding and being seen, in this case staying hidden until the opportune moment to strike. The primary meaning, as in *Look Out*, refers to the group's ability to ambush their competitors, both musical and those from the local areas of north London. But, again, there are other meanings produced by the policing practices that were being used at the time, as outlined above. For many members of London's working-class, particularly racial and ethnic minorities, self-representing on council estates meant risking police monitoring, ambush, and incarceration. The Metropolitan Police's Project

Alpha unit, established in the same period as the release of *Ambush*, refers rap videos for removal from YouTube and has been shown to conduct “large-scale profiling of children online” (Pritchard, 2023). So, like in the grime and UK rap scenes before it, the UK drill scene has produced videos that have foregrounded hyperlocal space and the use of DIY, realist modes of representation, combined with other scales and modes to highlight tensions between everyday space and contemporary inner-city pressures.

Conclusion

This chapter has explored how the development of new technologies allowed for the production of a hyperlocal scale of representation in urban music videos. Part of what defines a video as hyperlocal is its use of realist conventions, primarily produced by shooting on locations where working-class artists are from, and DIY aesthetics of hand-held cameras and minimal post-production editing. The production of space is often represented through a combination of different scales and modes of representation. *Live Corn* is an example of hyperlocal representation of an estate that the artists don’t leave, particularly reminiscent of *When I’m Ere*. These two videos differ, however, in the way estate is shown, the emphasis on the maintenance signs in *Live Corn* replacing the emphasis on the road names in *When*. The emphasis on road names and place signs reappears in *Ambush*, though here is also an example of how particular videos slide between scales, in this case between the hyperlocal estate and the global space of the chain hotel. When this sliding between scales is taken into account, we can better understand how inner-city artists have used hybrid audio-visual conventions in order to represent the city that they live in, and that that they struggle for a right to.

Struggles for a right to the city are shown using hybrid modes of representation. These different videos work with the conventions of realism, but also the weird, the eerie, and fantasy to represent the city as a place that does exist and as a place that could exist differently.

The hybridity of these modes, with videos drawing on conventions of realism, weirdness, eeriness, and fantasy, speak to the hybridity of the music video format. Different videos are designed to do multiple things at once. Some videos, the standard music videos such as *When, Jus, Talking, Look Out, Live Corn, and Ambush*, are designed to advertise the artist and the music track. They show what the artist looks like, giving face to a name. Often, they show where the artists are from, also giving face to an area, though in the case of *Jus A Rascal, Look Out*, and *Ambush*, it shows where they want to go. *Jus A Rascal* and *Ambush* there are elements of fantasy in these desires, both financial and sexual. It is in *Aim High*, the most overtly realist of all these videos, that the hyperlocal landmark is most clearly captured, emphasised by the documentary elements of interviews and studio tours. There is little sense of weirdness or eeriness in the videos included on this DVD, but, in a similar vein to *Jus A Rascal* and *Ambush*, there are hints at the fantasy of celebrity and the special access that come with this exalted status. These themes of celebrity and access are core to the analyses in the next chapter. In the case of *Look Out*, there is a sense of eeriness in the allusion to, but absence of, police surveillance. The desire here is to move through the city without the danger of police interaction. *Look Out* asserts control over the means by which one's performance can be watched. This dynamic is also referenced in *Ambush*, which bears similarities to several of the videos discussed above in its hyperlocal representations of everyday life on the estate, allusions to policing and police violence, and a more glamorous lifestyle away from the estate. Here, London as a global city is referenced through the hegemonic buildings of lit-up hotels, imagery particularly reminiscent of Dizzee and Canary Wharf in *Jus A Rascal*. While Dizzee moves past the hegemonic building by boat, OFB reach the hotel by bike on an unseen route, and enter inside it. The hotel scenes hint at themes of escapism and sexual fantasy, away from estate regeneration, policing, and the spatial and everyday precarity that comes with them. They also suggest a theme that runs through this chapter, that of domineering men and sexualised women. This relates to the way claims to space are produced, to the struggle for urban space, and to who has a right to particular spaces of the inner city.

Increasingly invasive forms of policing continued through this period, in the guise of Form 696, the Gangs Matrix, and the sustained presence of Operation Trident. Such practices provide an

important context for understanding the dynamics of showing and hiding in these videos. The representations of space in these videos speak to the relationship between policing practices, routes through the city, and the dynamics of seeing that have been core themes of this chapter. *Look Out* represented the movement of two MCs from their local areas towards a more central space, though this movement involved an eerie dynamic of avoiding surveillance. *Live Corn*, on the other hand, represented movement around the estate on which it was filmed but not outside it. These routes were visually narrated by the infrastructure of regeneration, which was used to represent both 67's control over the area and their lack of it. Regeneration programmes are shown as eerie encroachments on the everyday lives of estate inhabitants.

This chapter concludes the chronological and genre-focussed part of this thesis' analysis chapters. These chapters have investigated several themes that have allowed for the exploration of the key research questions of the thesis. Changes in inner-city London's physical infrastructure, in government policies and discourse, in policing practices, and in technologies of representation have been brought together to explore how artists have told inner-city stories through urban music videos. Different modes and scales of representation help to understand the processes at work in the production of London's inner-city spaces, and to the city more widely. Chapter 6 will take a slightly different approach, leaving behind the emphasis on chronology and genre, but continuing to explore the themes of Chapters 4 and 5, focussing particularly on contests over inner-city space as represented in and by urban music videos.

Chapter 6

Contesting Spatial Access and Use through Urban Music Videos

This chapter explores how inner-city music videos represent and contest access to and use of space in the inner city. It analyses five music videos, the release dates of which range from 1997 to 2021, across the music genres of UKG, grime, UK rap, and UK drill. Each video was selected for both its textual representations and available contextual details of its production, reception, and/or distribution. Three of the videos were released in or after 2019, and this provides a movement towards a more contemporary understanding of inner-city representation to end the analysis chapters in this thesis. I will outline each video in this introductory section. Further details about each video are included in the table below.

The first of these videos to be released was Scott Garcia and MC Styles' *A London Thing* (1997), the success of which was a key marker of the growing mainstream interest in UKG in the late 1990s, as explored in Chapter 4. Garcia was a young Londoner involved in the burgeoning UKG scene at the time of *A London Thing's* release (I can't find any information on Styles). The video begins with shots from the UKG duo's set at Notting Hill Carnival before expanding outwards, with the pair walking and driving through various other locations around central London, including shots of red London buses, the River Thames, tower-block council estates, car parks, and Battersea Power Station. The next video released is NoLay's *Unorthodox Daughter* (2005). NoLay (Natalie Athanasiou) is from Croydon, south London, and made her name in the grime scene in the mid-2000s. The entirety of this video takes place in a single council estate, in a way that is reminiscent of other grime videos of this time, such as *When I'm Ere*, explored in

Chapter 5. The video shows NoLay in the interior and exterior spaces of the estate, predominantly performing her lyrics, though also performing parental activities with a teenager and child. There is a fourteen-year gap between *Unorthodox* and the next video to be released, Digga D's *No Diet* (2019). Digga D (Rhys Angelo Emile Herbert) is from Shepherd's Bush, west London, and rose to fame in the drill scene in the mid- to late-2010s. Though *No Diet* sounds like a conventional UK drill track, the video diverges from those hyperlocal videos such as *Live Corn* and *Ambush* explored in Chapter 5. This video is set entirely in and around a luxury suburban house in which Digga performs his lyrics and parties with friends and female dancers, while they also play with packages of Coca Cola cans as symbols for cocaine dealing. This choice of symbolism was partly inspired by the conditions of Digga's Criminal Behaviour Order (CBO), which placed restrictions on the lyrical content of any music he released, though, while the track aims to playfully avoid these restrictions, Digga was still recalled to prison following *No Diet's* release for breaching the conditions of his CBO (Mohamed, 2020).

The final two videos discussed in this chapter were both released in 2021. The first is a more unusual format of video than the other videos explored in this chapter, and most of the videos explored in this thesis. Rather than for a single track, Wretch 32's *little BIG Man* is described in its YouTube title as a 'short film', and runs for almost 12 minutes. Wretch (Jermaine Sinclair Scott) is from Tottenham, and, like NoLay, made his name in the grime scene in the mid-2000s. Edem Wornoo, the video's director, and David Hamilton, the video's production designer, also describe it as a short film on their respective websites (Wornoo, 2021; Hamilton, 2021), but Wornoo also makes clear that the film was always conceived as a vehicle for the music and the themes of Wretch's album (Wornoo in Wenham-Kenyon, 2021). The video was released alongside Wretch's album of the same name, which draws on the sonic conventions of grime, UK rap, and UK drill to explore themes of re-offending and inner-city housing precarity. The video is split into a Prologue and three Acts, following a fictional protagonist on his first day out of prison as he returns home to the council estate flat in which he lives with his father, mother, and sister. The flat is an open-top replica set, built for the purposes of the video, and erected in a car park surrounded by a business estate in Woolwich, south-east London. Hamilton (2021) describes the surrounding estate as an 'amphitheatre' in which the narrative takes place. The prologue sets up the narrative as a recurring dream, in which the

protagonist imagines from his cell that he has been released from prison and has returned home. Throughout the following three Acts, the protagonist rejects an offer of a legitimate job from his father, instead becoming reluctantly involved again in the drug trade that had originally led to his incarceration, and finds himself in a violent altercation. At the end of the video, Act 1 is repeated, in which the protagonist returns home to the flat. Wretch is shown around the set, performing sections of tracks from the album. So, the setting is similar to those found in music videos related to the grime, UK rap, and UK drill scenes, such as *Look Out* and *CR*, explored in Chapter 5. But the format and storytelling are more experimental than those other videos.

These themes of incarceration and release are central to the final video explored in this chapter, LD's *First Day Out*. LD (Cassiel Nii Akwei Wuta-Ofei) is a member of the drill-pioneering group 67 from Brixton, whose video *Live Corn* (2014) was explored in Chapter 5. As outlined in Chapter 5, LD wears a mask to conceal his identity, following a 2014 CBO that banned him from making music. *First Day Out* follows LD seven years after the release of *Live Corn*, on his release from prison where he had just served two years of a four-and-a-half-year sentence for drug trafficking at HMP/YOI Isis (His Majesty's Prison/Young Offenders Institution Isis) in Thamesmead, south-east London. The video opens with a conversation between LD and his mother, before a montage of shots from outside the prison where LD is greeted by friends, and a council estate and football cage, where LD is shown performing his lyrics. Outside the prison his mask is returned to him. The council estate is Lancaster West Estate in Ladbroke Grove, west London, far from the estates of Brixton Hill where LD and other 67 members grew up. So, again, while there are sonic and locational similarities with other videos associated with the UK drill scene, there are important divergences from the hyperlocal representations found in early 67 videos such as *Live Corn*, explored in Chapter 5, which were filmed in the artists' local area.

I reiterate in this chapter the importance of exploring the textual elements of the videos, their modes and techniques of representation, alongside their respective contexts. To focus on textual elements at the expense of contextual elements would be to limit understandings of

how these texts interact with and contest power dynamics in contemporary London. For example, to discuss images of Coca Cola in *No Diet* without considering the context of the police restrictions that Digga D faced when directing the video, and the social and economic dynamics of illegal drug distribution in contemporary London, would severely restrict a nuanced analysis of the representational and socio-economic dynamics at play. The intertextual analyses that I embark on below will therefore focus on both textual and contextual details.

This chapter takes a different approach to chapters 4 and 5. Instead of proceeding chronologically, discussing each genre one by one, this chapter is structured around two interrelating themes: 'Connecting Contextual Locations' and 'Expressions of Agency'. Each theme is explored looking at all five videos, across different moments in time and spaces in and outside of the inner city, and across different genres. I have opted for this approach in the final chapter because, by distancing the analyses of videos from the stricter boundaries of space and chronology that the previous chapters adhered to, the thesis can build towards conclusions that can be explored further in different cities, at different times, and through different mediums of expression.

The themes of 'Connecting Contextual Locations' and 'Expressions of Agency' are ways of exploring the wider themes of celebration and alienation that have laced through the previous two analysis chapters. As will be explored below, choices of location for urban music videos often expose alienating dynamics of disconnection, a lack of access to certain spaces and therefore an inability to use them, and a desire to access spaces that are restricted to marginalised members of society. Alternatively, they also often highlight moments of celebration, by which a location is chosen to celebrate connections between people and the spaces around them. Within each text, expressions of agency are also ways of exposing alienating social and spatial restrictions and disconnections, or of celebrating the inhabitation of space and the connection between inhabitants in and with the city. In the following analyses, each of these themes are related to several concepts that I will outline here.

As in previous chapters, central to the following discussions is the concept of the ‘right to the city’ (Lefebvre, 1968; Harvey, 2012; Butler, 2012). This concept highlights struggles over access to, and uses of, urban space. This struggle is often in response to alienating urban dynamics, through which inhabitants are disconnected from the spaces around them, the ability to use these spaces, and from other urban inhabitants. Alienation refers to the ways in which society disconnects the producer from the means of production, but also persons from one another, from their environment, from their own bodies, from nature, and from what it means to be human (Lefebvre, 1991/1987; Wilson, 2013; Cheng, 2011). Alienation is exposed, challenged, and overcome by convivial, playful activity, and an acknowledgment of connection between people and spaces (Gilroy, 2004). These connections are often cause for celebration, such as release from prison, and moments of celebration are also mediums for connection, such as Notting Hill Carnival.

Another concept through which I explore the relationship between alienation and celebration in the following analyses is through Anne Anlin Cheng’s (2011) concept of representational ‘surrogacy’. Surrogacy here refers to the way something stands in for something else, particularly in a way that exposes a “crisis of personhood” (Cheng, 2011, p.1032). This crisis refers to representations of people who desire for their personhood to be obscured as a form of resistance to alienation. Instead of being clearly present as a person, one might hide behind an object, and one’s personhood thereby becomes objectified. Cheng employs a decidedly feminist approach to the development of this concept, focussing her analyses on female performers of colour such as Josephine Baker (see Cheng, 2023/2000, 2006, 2008) and Anna May Wong (see Cheng, 2018, 2011). Cheng (2011) developed her concept through an analysis of the 1929 film *Piccadilly*, starring Wong, and both the film and Cheng’s analyses thereof offer interesting comparisons to the videos explored in this chapter and this thesis more broadly. The film’s central location is a nightclub in Piccadilly, in London’s West End. Wong plays a young Chinese woman called Shosho, who starts the film working as a scullery maid before being discovered dancing in the basement kitchen by the owner of the club. After first firing her for shirking her work, he hires her as his principal performer. Her performances, in which she dances dressed in shining metal ornaments, are a huge success with the club’s customers, and Shosho is able to move into a new, more glamorous home. Cheng argues that, in this

movement, the film traces Wong's own rise to fame and, more broadly, the birth of modern celebrity. However, diverting from Wong's own life, the film ends tragically for Shosho, as she is shot and killed in her new home by a jealous lover.

Representational surrogacy "is inherently political and maybe even strangely liberating for a woman and a minority [. . .] in the sense of temporary relief from the burdens of personhood and visibility" (Cheng, 2011, p.1032). Wong's performance in *Piccadilly* challenges the way Chinese women were racialised, sexualised, and minoritised in 1920s British society by employing the surrogacy of shining ornamental surfaces, which allowed her to withhold her personhood from the gaze of the audience. However, the agency involved in representational surrogacy is 'peculiar', a "form of nonsubjective agency that celebrity itself enacts: one always is and is not the star that one signifies" (Cheng, 2011, p.1033). It is this notion of peculiar agency that links surrogacy to the sense of eeriness (Fisher, 2016) that I have explored in previous chapters. This peculiarity poses questions of the form of agency that is being represented in these artists' performances, and a sense of eeriness is produced in representations of ambiguous agents. The ways people are shown and show themselves in the videos selected for this chapter, and the way they are seen by audiences, including myself, are bound up with the peculiar, eerie agency of celebrity. Celebrity, like playfulness, is a bridge between alienation and celebration. Becoming a celebrity is often celebrated as a trajectory of social mobility for working class artists who are able to make money from their talents and move into more comfortable surroundings, away from the pressures of inner-city life. But celebrity also highlights the people and spaces that are left behind, producing alienating disconnections in the process. Playing with celebrity is a way of exploring and challenging alienation, as will be explored in my analyses of these five videos.

Key to Cheng's analysis is how the context of Wong's own celebrity-making leaks into the text of the film itself. Her analysis thus offers a useful blueprint for exploring how contexts leak into texts, and vice versa. Cheng focusses on the early nineteenth century, a period of modernity when there were profound changes in the way representation was produced, specifically through the new medium of the cinema. I am also looking at a period during which

there were profound representational changes happening, in this case the ability for artists to represent the spaces of their everyday lives through hyperlocal representations of inner-city areas, as explored in Chapter 5. However, this ability is sometimes limited. Representational surrogacy offers an important way of understanding how artists have navigated these limitations, some in regards to gender performance, others in regards to the policing of expression and movement by the Metropolitan Police. As will be explored below, the burdens of personhood are often related to the way access and use of space is policed in contemporary inner-city London. In the following analyses I expand the notion of representational surrogacy to emphasise and explore the way subjectivities, objects, and, crucially, spaces are produced in relation to one another and can, therefore, be used as surrogates for one another. This plays out through representations of artists disguising themselves with and relating themselves to objects. But it also plays out in the use of spaces as surrogates for other spaces, by which one space is hidden or disguised as another, and by which spaces are shown as many things at once. The surrogacy through which this agency is enacted hinges on the way in which bodies inhabit space. Whether this be the space of clothes, homes, prison cells, cars, streets, or otherwise, the ways in which we see (or don't see) bodies is inherently political. Surrogacy offers an evocative way of understanding the images of dancers, masked performers, open-top sets, closed doors, luxurious houses, and Notting Hill Carnival performance that appear in the videos explored below, as well as the contextual details that formed and were formed by these images.

The history of Notting Hill Carnival is particularly important to this chapter, in which I analyse *A London Thing*, which was shot in and around the Carnival. As noted in Chapter 2, Patricia Alleyne-Dettmers (see 1998; 2002) traces Notting Hill Carnival back to its origins in the Caribbean, specifically in the practices of Trinidadian carnival, which was a way for the socially marginalised to express their agency and challenge the existing social order through dance, music, and costume. In a similar vein, the carnivalesque mode turns the official social order of everyday life on its head, thereby drawing attention to this order and the way it marginalises particular members of society (Bakhtin's, 1984/1965). This mode allows for a momentary escape from the pressures of everyday life, into a 'second world' of chaos and humour, by which the established social order is mocked. While the carnivalesque operates through

humour, surrogacy is less to do with mocking the established order and escape into a chaotic world, than with navigating objectification during the rise to the exceptional and exalted status of celebrity. Following Alleyne-Dettmers (2002), in my analyses I will explore Notting Hill Carnival as a social practice that does not produce a Bakhtinian second world, but an in-between space:

Through the medium of forms of resistance against the established order [. . .], disguise, and by consequence anonymity facilitated through playing *mas* (donning a costume to participate in Carnival) and its embodiment through dance (what Western eyes have interpreted as lascivious dance), a *social site* or another power space is created. In this interstitial space, subordinate, marginalized groups *can* and *do* make marginalization privileged and public (Alleyne-Dettmers, 2002, p.245).

Alleyne-Dettmers' notion of this in-between, 'interstitial space' resonates with the space between the celebrity and the person explored through representational surrogacy (Cheng, 2011): between the surrogate and that which the surrogate replaces, between the subject and the object, and between the mask and the person underneath it. It also resonates with the call to make space differently in the struggle for the right to the city, but to make this call for new forms of spatial relations through the means of playfulness, disguise, and dance. An interstitial space is where prevailing power structures are undermined; a place that is accessible to and used by the socially and culturally marginalised; a place which its inhabitants and other users feel belongs to them, within which they experience a sense of agency, and over which they experience a degree of control; a place of conviviality and playfulness; a place that allows for and acknowledges the connections between people and spaces; a place therefore that resists the social fragmentation and alienation.

The rest of the chapter is split into two sections, both of which discuss all five videos intertextually. Considering these videos intertextually produces connections between different not just different texts but also different spaces. Furthermore, considering the locations where the videos are shot, shown, and seen also produces connections that can expose and challenge the disconnections and fragmentations that produce senses of urban

alienation. Some of these are iconic inner-city London locations, such as council estates and Notting Hill Carnival. Others are spaces that are less acknowledged within the conventional inner city, such as prisons and psychiatric hospitals. Some are even antithetical to conventionally imagined inner-city London spaces: the luxury suburban house and the luxury car. This intertextual approach is part of the collective mapping of the inner city (Dodds, 2023), including both its archetypal locations, such as council estates, and its 'elsewheres', such as prisons, hospitals, and suburbs. These connections are part of a process of connection. Alienation occurs through spatial fragmentation, a sense of disconnection in urban environments by which inhabitants become alienated from each other and the spaces in which they live. This approach connects the fragmented dots, highlighting that these separations are not necessary, but contingent and enforced.

This intertextual analysis will explore not just the textual dynamics of the video, such as *mise en scène*, camera work, editing, narrative etc., but also important contextual details of each video. Section 1 focusses on these contextual details, specifically those that structured choices and uses of locations for producing and watching these videos, and how different spaces are connected through these contextual details. These details expose various struggles over a right to the city, and the use of surrogate locations as part of this struggle. Section 2 focusses on the textual dynamics of each video, particularly how each of these videos represent expressions of agency. Here I focus on how each of these videos represents different forms of agency through the access and use of spaces within the texts of the videos, and how these forms relate to struggles for a right to the city through surrogacy and the carnivalesque.

Chapter 6 Table of Videos

Video Name	YouTube Video Name	Video Release Date	YouTube Upload Date	YouTube Video Link	Musician/s	Video Director	Music Genre/s	Video Genre/s	Location/s of Shooting
<i>A London Thing</i>	UK Garage Scott Garcia Feat MC Styles It's A London Thing	1997	16 September 2015	https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4ADcWWM-ZmY	Scott Garcia MC Styles	James Hyman	UKG	Performance	Notting Hill Carnival River Thames Central London Battersea Power Station
<i>Unorthodox Daughter</i>	No Lay 'Unorthodox Daughter'	2005	01 May 2008	https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=C3Pp3V0N0hk	NoLay	Manny Bonett	Grime	Performance, Narrative?	White City Estate
<i>No Diet</i>	Digga D - No Diet  (Music Video) @Mixtape eMadness	18 April 2019	18 April 2019	https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dEc2ZWlJKxc	Digga D	Teeeezy C (now known as TARAN) Digga D	UK Drill	Performance	?
<i>Little BIG Man</i>	Wretch 32 - little BIG Man (Short Film)	28 May 2021	28 May 2021	https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7MXM1wzRYU	Wretch 32	Edem Wornoo	UK rap Grime UK drill	Performance, Narrative, Big-Budget?	Woolwich, South- East London
<i>First Day Out</i>	LD (67) - First Day Out [Music Video] GRM Daily	18 November 2021	18 November 2021	https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XDMjvALsp_ho	LD (67)	Tyrus Gugzay	UK drill	Performance, DIY, Narrative	Lancaster West Estate, North London HMP Isis, South- East London

Section 1: Connecting Contextual Locations

In this section, I will look at contextual details pertaining to the locations where each video was made, and in one case where it was seen, and how these details relate to struggles over the right to the city. The location details that I have been able to find are fragments of contexts that connect the videos with each other and with the city more broadly. The fragmentary nature of these details means that they won't be analysed systematically but drawn on where appropriate to illustrate specific points about contests over access to and use of urban space. The emerging conversations provide insights into how the contextual elements of audio-visual texts interact with, construct, and challenge relations of access to, and expressions of agency within inner-city space.

The circumstances that influenced the choice of location for LD's *First Day Out* provide one such example. An important text to draw on here is a short documentary produced by Noisey – *LD: The Godfather of UK Drill Returns | Noisey Raps* – which documents the production of the *First Day Out* video (Noisey, 2022). In this documentary, LD says that he had wanted the video to be shot on location in Lambeth, where he grew up, but that he wasn't allowed to due to the conditions of his release from prison (see *Figure 71*). Instead, the video was shot on Lancaster West Estate. These circumstances show how access to space, in this case the space that LD called home, is controlled; even after his release from prison, LD's agency to move around the city is restricted by the criminal justice arm of the state. LD is alienated from the estate in which he grew up through this disconnection (Lefebvre, 1991/1987; Wilson, 2013). This is an example of representational surrogacy (Cheng, 2011), in this case it is a spatial surrogacy, one space having to stand in for another when a person's agency is restricted. This surrogacy and restriction of agency means that there is an eeriness (Fisher, 2016) to LD's presence on the Landcaster West Estate. This contextual detail creates a missing space that LD inhabits vicariously.



Figure 71: Composite image of LD in LD: The Godfather of UK Drill Returns.

However, LD's use of this other estate is also a form of resistance to these controls. The 'estate' as an interchangeable setting becomes part of a generic visual language of authenticity, even if the estate used as the location for the video isn't the estate where LD lived. There is a sense of defiance here: while the police may be able to restrict him from one area, LD can find others to facilitate the message he wants to assert. He can still lay claim to a right to the city by filming elsewhere (Lefebvre, 1991/1987; Butler, 2012), while making connections and creating routes between spaces (Gilroy, 1993). Rather than thinking about this choice of setting only in terms of exchangeability – in terms of the estate as a commodity that LD has exchanged for an equally useful estate – the location choice also suggests how these estates are connected.

They are part of a network of working-class spaces that are linked by virtue of their material features: Lancaster West Estate looks similar to the estates of Brixton Hill on which LD grew up. Because of these spatial similarities, these estates are also connected by their depictions by police and the state, by media, and by artists (Nwonka, 2017). This other way of thinking suggests that the estate can be played with because of this connectivity. These spaces are not entirely fragmented; they are connected by material feature and routes of movement through the city.

Placing *First Day Out* in conversation with other videos deepens these connections between inner-city spaces. The council estate is connected to other spaces, in and outside the inner city. In *No Diet*, the luxury suburban house – a space that is antithetical to conventional, hyperlocal inner-city spaces central to UK drill as a genre – is shown to be connected to working-class spaces that are archetypically associated with the inner-city. The video is set in a large, modern suburban house fitted with a swimming pool, pool table, and balcony. Multi-packs of Coca Cola are cut open in the large open-plan kitchen and poured into blenders, humorously toying with expectations of white powder, while Digga brandishes golf clubs like guns and glides around the house on a Segway. This video, co-directed by Digga, can be seen as a direct response to his Criminal Behaviour Order (CBO), which restricted the areas he could travel to and the people he could interact with, as well as the content of his lyrics (Mohamed, 2020).

In the 2020 BBC documentary *Defending Digga D*, Digga describes how he decided to use Coca Cola as a symbol for talking about selling cocaine, without explicitly mentioning it (Digga D in Mohamed, 2020). This explanation is shown in *Figure 72*. This is another example of surrogacy (Cheng, 2011), the hiding of meaning in response to limitations imposed on an artist's agency. Digga's choice of a suburban house to deliver this lyrical content highlights the hypocritical and disproportionate policing of working-class space. The money that fuels the cocaine industry flows through middle-class spaces like *No Diet's* setting; yet these spaces are protected, rather than targeted, by police discourse and practice. The council estate and the suburban house not only have different material features, but they are also depicted and

treated differently by the police. It is partly the differences between these spaces that open up the suburban house as a space to be played not just in but with. But there are also important similarities between these two spaces – they are both spaces in which people live, they are designed by architects, they have walls and doors and ceilings and windows. These similarities, and the connection between the activities that are practiced in these distinct spaces – illegal production and distribution – also opens up dynamics of play. Drawing attention to these double standards, and the spaces that connect them, is a powerful way of contesting the right to the city for certain artists along compounding lines of class, race, and criminal justice.

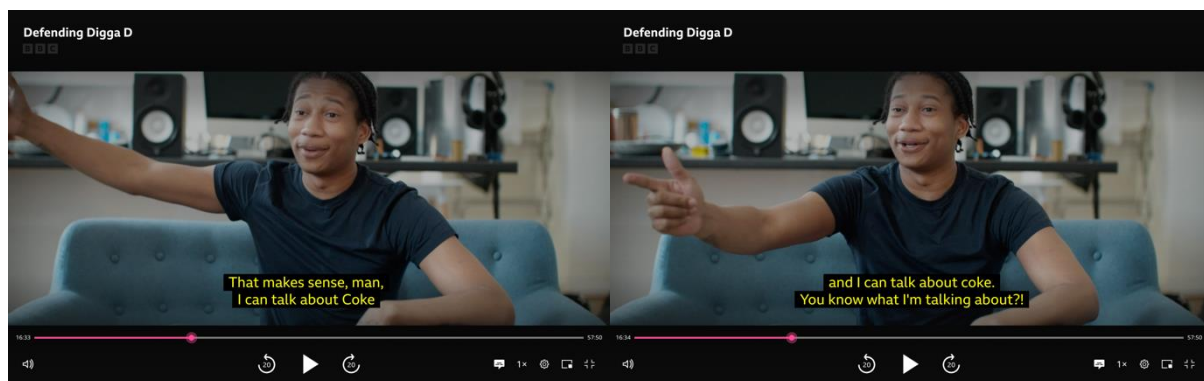


Figure 72: Composite image of Digga in Defending Digga D.

Contestations over inner-city space also play a central role in the locations used in Scott Garcia's *A London Thing*. The video is primarily set in Notting Hill Carnival, where Scott Garcia and MC Styles are performing. This location is particularly pertinent to the history of contested inner-city space in London. From its inception by newly emancipated Trinidadians, "attempts were made [by the British establishment] to outlaw their Carnival practices on the grounds of the worthlessness of the indigenous culture. The British press claimed that the blacks responded by producing characters from hell in their attempts to topple the white superstructure" (Alleyne-Dettmers, 2002, p.250). Continuing this trend, in 1975, after only a few years of its existence in London, "Local white residents in Notting Hill Gate, the local borough council, and the police of North Kensington, sought to have the Carnival removed from the streets of Notting Hill and imprisoned in the White City Stadium" (Pryce, 1985, p.36).

In 1976, when this planned 'imprisonment' failed to materialise, there was a major police crackdown of Carnival. Furthermore, in 1983 the Carnival was designated by then-Metropolitan Police Commissioner Sir Kenneth Newman as a symbolic location. Given this tense history, it is interesting that the police only make a very brief appearance in *A London Thing*, and do little to puncture the overriding sense of celebration.

The central location of Notting Hill Carnival in *A London Thing* suggests different ways in which space is accessed and used, as the streets are transformed from their everyday usage by local people into a space for exceptional celebration, dance, and music performance. The streets of Notting Hill are "transformed into a kind of mobile theatre" (Alleyne-Dettmers, 1998). The material architecture of the area is masked by the parade, the musicians, and the dancers, many of whom wear masks themselves. This adornment is a recognisable trait of surrogacy (Cheng, 2011), a renegotiation of the ways in which people and space can be seen by renegotiating access and use. But the streets outside this area are also brought into this conversation, with the montage shots of roads and carparks, the tower-block council estate, and Battersea Power Station. The video alternately places these different spaces in the centre of the video, as a collection of 'London things' that connect to build a picture of the city at this moment in time. The spaces that are used as locations are also surrogates for all the spaces that make up London that could not be included in the video. Playing with what is placed centre stage is a key element in the history of Afro-Caribbean Carnival, from Notting Hill back to the emergence of Trinidadian Carnival in the nineteenth century. As outlined by Patricia Alleyne-Dettmers (2002): "Carnival is used as a highly politicized device to decenter oppressive colonial structures, to move toward the (re)construction of destroyed communities through aesthetic creativity" (Alleyne-Dettmers, 2002, p.256). Thus, Carnival's origins exist in the process of bringing what was background in the hegemonic narrative to the foreground through play and festivity.

Notting Hill Carnival, and the costumes and dance it involves, is shown in *A London Thing*, and then interspersed with shots from elsewhere. The beginning foregrounds the centre of the festivities and the carnival costumes of those taking part in the traditional parade, as shown

in *Figure 73*. In moving around different spaces across the city, outside of the parade-proper, attention is drawn to the more everyday elements of urban life and the way these shape understandings of national identity (see Edensor, 2020). This movement emphasises the difference between the festivity and exceptionalism of Carnival, on the one hand, and everyday life on the other. As Peeren (2007, p.71) argues, Notting Hill Carnival:

appears as a direct confrontation between the festive and the everyday construction of Notting Hill. It clashes in temporal terms with the established English August Bank Holiday and in spatial terms with everyday life as it continues outside the Carnival area. In the racially charged environment of post-war Britain, different communities constructed the same space at the same time into rival worlds. Worlds that did not periodically replace each other in a neat, predictable, authorized pattern, but continually infected and inflected each other, engaged in a struggle for territorial control.

The exceptional space and occasion of the Carnival clashes with and permeates the space and time of everyday life, and encourages new ways of thinking about everyday life, why we might dress, move, or use space in particular ways. This is the way Lefebvre theorised festivity and play as alternate forms of resistance, by highlighting how festivals are grounded in everyday life and practice, and can, therefore, highlight how everyday life can be lived differently (Lefebvre, 1991/1987; Butler, 2012).



Figure 73: Still from *A London Thing*.

In *A London Thing*, different uses of public space are placed in conversation with each other by moving through the city while producing the video. This occurs both in and outside of Carnival, where the musical performance is taking place. This is comparable to the tension between the set and the surrounding estate in *little BIG Man*: the blurred boundary between outside and inside; between privacy and the public gaze; between housing and non-housing. The video, like *First Day Out*, follows a young black man on release from prison back to the estate where his family live. The video's director, Edem Wornoo, works with a theatrical set of a council-estate flat positioned in the outdoor space of a business estate. David Hamilton's website provides photos of the set installation, shown in *Figures 74 and 75* (Hamilton, 2021).



Figure 74: Photo of set installation for little BIG Man, from David Hamilton's website.

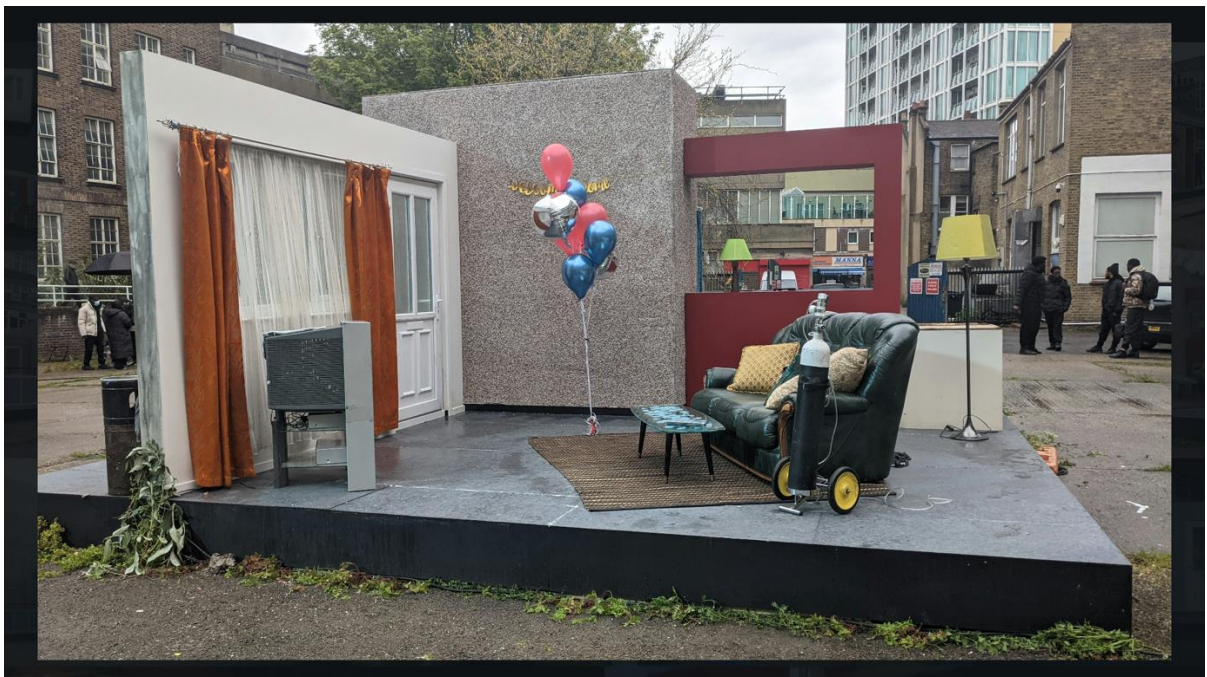


Figure 75: Photo of set installation for little BIG Man, from David Hamilton's website.

The website also shows an interactive 3D render of the flat, shown in *Figure 76* (Hamilton, 2021). This render suggests the alienation of the flat in *little BIG Man* (Lefebvre, 1991/1987; Wilson, 2013), fragmented as it is from the surrounding city (Rhodes & Brown, 2018). It is a

particularly eerie image (Fisher, 2016), the total absence of the world around the flat, which is itself a grey mass. It suggests that this set could be placed in any number of locations, copied and pasted in or outside the urban environment. This image is a stark reminder of Diane Charlemagne's black void in *Inner City Life*, a depiction of the pressures of everyday life in London's inner city, and the disconnections these pressures can produce.

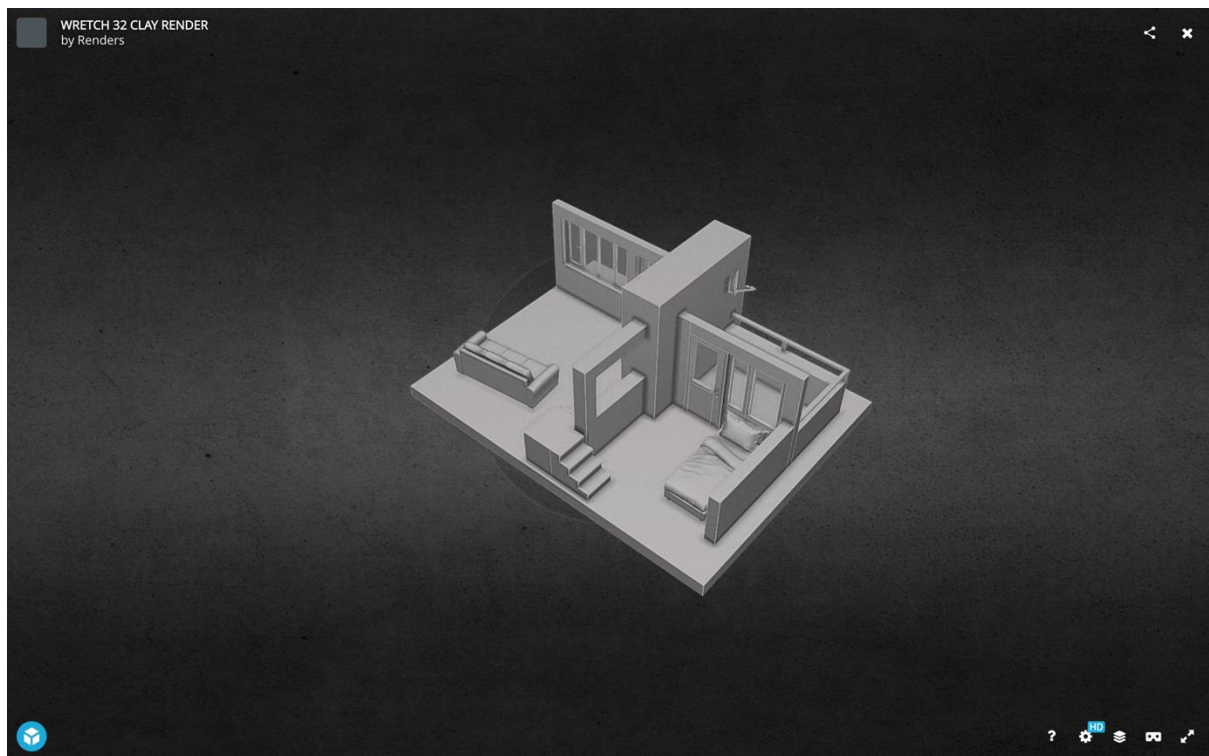


Figure 76: 3D render of little BIG Man set from David Hamilton website, designed by David Hamilton.

In a 2021 interview (Wenham-Kenyon, 2021), Wornoo said:

Finding the location was *not* easy. Especially with actual estates, there are a lot of vulnerable people . . . There was a point where it got so tough that we thought about doing it in an actual theatre as it would have been so much easier. But the magic of it is bringing the theatre to an estate. That was the core concept.

Presumably this concern about the vulnerability of residents on an actual housing estate is the reason why Wornoo chose to shoot in a business estate instead, but the façade of the Island Business Centre looks a lot like the modernist estates so key to the stereotypical inner-city (Saumarez Smith, 2016), so the effect is still impactful. The producers of *little BIG Man* placed a ‘produced’ set within a ‘real’ location, creating a conversation between the space of the temporary set and the space of the more permanent material city, the different and similar ways that they are produced. But the real location, the business estate, is actually itself a surrogate for a ‘real’ housing estate (Cheng, 2011). Like in *First Day Out*, here is another example of a location being chosen because of difficulty of access to an originally desired location. In this case, rather than policing restricting access to a location, it was the increased vulnerability of council estate residents, particularly during mass health crises such as the COVID-19 pandemic during which the video was shot. But in using the business estate as the amphitheatre in which to film *little BIG Man*, this site of commerce is temporarily made into a site of artistic performance and, representationally, a site of domesticity. This is a powerful expression of agency constantly contextualised by the historical and contemporary reality of the city. To make spaces many things at once, to emphasise the different potential uses of space, is a core part of the struggle for a right to the city, the struggle not just for access but for the spaces of the city to be made different (Lefebvre, 1968; Harvey, 2012; Butler, 2012).

The way that inner-city spaces act simultaneously as set, stage, auditorium and reality is also a prominent theme of *Unorthodox Daughter*, not just within the text but also in its production, distribution, and reception. The video begins with NoLay inside a flat with a teenager and a child, watching *No Help Or Handouts* (an earlier music video by Unorthodox, a grime collective that NoLay was a member of) on a TV. A YouTube comment (found in the comment section of the music video, shown in *Figure 77*) left by a person called Simon reveals the location of *Unorthodox Daughter* as his mum’s flat on the White City Estate in Shepherd’s Bush, North-West London. This flat, he says, was where the track was also recorded: specifically, the bedroom studio featured in the music video. He implies that Manny Bonett, who directed the video, wanted to keep the set as true to life as possible, suggesting that there was a realist intention to the video (Williams, 1977).

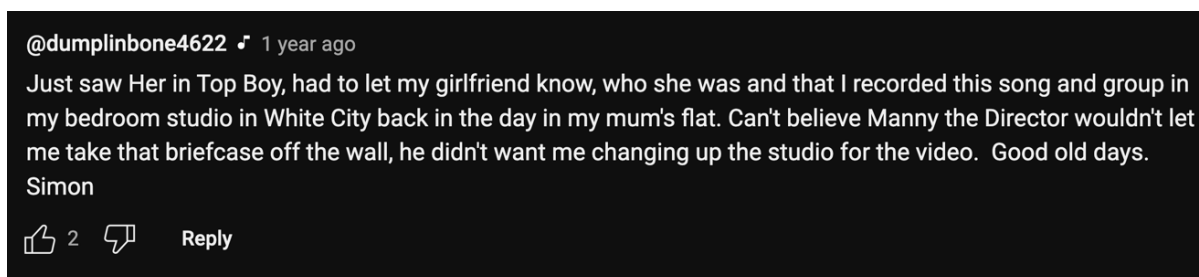


Figure 77: Screenshot of a YouTube comment from Unorthodox Daughter.

The title of *Unorthodox Daughter* suggests that NoLay's status as a daughter is unconventional, given the male-dominated music scene she is operating in. The lyrical content of the track hinges on the sentiment that NoLay could outshine any other MC, regardless of gender. There is also the pun that she is a 'daughter' of the Unorthodox collective that made *No Help*. But there is also an emphasis on NoLay as a mother figure throughout the video, as she looks after the teenager and child in the flat, that these are also daughter figures and that their relationship is somehow unconventional.

Thinking about NoLay as an 'unorthodox daughter' encourages an exploration of parenthood and who she is the daughter of. In a 2016 documentary *Demons: A Short Film About Finding Solace in Music* (Noisey, 2016), NoLay describes her relationship towards music, her family, mental health, and London. She describes how she used to hate being at home when she was growing up (in Croydon, south London), and how music helped her cope with domestic tension. She describes becoming homeless at the age of fifteen, when her mum kicked her out, and feeling more at home in recording studios than in her own house. The locating of *Unorthodox Daughter* on the White City Estate was, therefore, influenced in part because NoLay had been denied access to her own home by her mother. Again, this video can be seen through the lens of surrogacy (Cheng, 2011), as one space is used as a surrogate for another. In this instance, NoLay became alienated from her home through her relationship with her mother, and the White City flat becomes a surrogate for the flat she once shared with her mother. In contrast to the restrictions experienced by NoLay, Simon was allowed to use his bedroom as a studio, and to invite a director into his mum's flat to film a music video, to use this space as a set. This draws attention to the fact that access and use of space in London is

not only controlled by the state, as in the police-enforced restrictions that impacted LD and Digga's respective choices of location for *First Day Out* and *No Diet*, and in police monitoring and control of Notting Hill Carnival. Variable access to, and use of, space is also produced through music scenes and through families that both constitute and transcend city and state boundaries.

In *Demons*, NoLay also talks about her father, who inspired her to make music, but who also had schizophrenia, developed drug addictions, and was eventually placed in a psychiatric hospital (Bethlem Royal Hospital in Bromley, south London) where he died. In a particularly poignant moment in the documentary, NoLay recalls that the last time she saw her father was in the TV room of Bethlem. As they watched together, the music video for *Unorthodox Daughter* played on the TV, at which point her father jumped up in celebration of his daughter's achievement, though the staff thought that he was having a psychotic 'episode'. This moment draws attention to the relationship between bodies, spaces, and uses thereof: because her father was an inhabitant of a psychiatric hospital, the way he used his body was monitored and controlled. The way he celebrated his daughter's celebrity-making was interpreted as an expression of alienation rather than convivial agency. This interpretation was due in large part because of the space he was inhabiting at this moment in time: were they watching TV together in the living room of a home, this interpretation would have been different.

There are important contextual details to consider for each of these videos. For *A London Thing*, there is the history and practice of Notting Hill Carnival, and the way it allows for the production of interstitial spaces in inner-city London. For *Unorthodox Daughter*, there is her familial relations with her parents, the separations of relationships between familial bonds and between bodies and spaces, either side of the video's production. The use of an artistic collaborator's flat for the shooting of the video produces an interstitial space in which these themes of parenthood, childhood, family, celebrity, and performance are explored. For *No Diet*, there is the conditions of Digga's CBO, in navigation of which he appropriates the middle-class spatial ideal of the suburban house. For *little BIG Man*, there is the need to navigate the

potential health precarity of council estate residents, opting instead to use the safer location of the business estate as an interstitial space. And, finally, for *First Day Out*, there is another instance of CBO restrictions, this time spatial, and the bodily appropriation of a different though connected space to explore themes of release.

Following the contextual details of each of these videos, it is important to see bodies as spaces, inter-connected to non-bodily spaces. Bodies and spaces are unstable and fluid, 'leaky' from inside out and outside in (Shildrick & Dowrick, 1997; Longhurst, 2004). This is an important element of contests over inner-city space, though one that I will only be able to explore briefly here, is the way bodies and built spaces respond to, connect with, and leak into each other. This ties into issues raised around Notting Hill Carnival, of "deafening noise" and public urination (Burr, 2006, p.85), with some Police Liaison Teams describing "urine and spit being used as 'weapons' by members of the public" (Kilgallon, 2023, p.35). As inappropriate as it might be for members of the police force to describe these bodily fluids as 'weapons', considering they are part of a police force that actually carry weapons that have a lethal potential by design, this is an interesting example of how members of the public can use their bodies and the technologies available to them as forms of resistance and contestation. It is also important to explore how the spatial practices of state power literally and symbolically enter into bodies: through stop and search practices (Perera, 2019), invasive strip searches (Ibrahim, 2025), tear gas (Romy, 2019), plastic bullets and water cannons (Foster, 1989), and live ammunition such as that which killed Mark Duggan (Rhodes & Brown, 2018). This is an important point of analysis for the exploration of spatial production and contestation, of personal agency, and the limits of the personal and personal space. This line of inquiry also acts as a transition between Section 1 and Section 2, as the contexts of these videos leak into the textual elements, and vice versa, as will be explored in more detail below.

The five music videos examined here offer insights into how artists choose locations for urban music videos and how these contextual choices relate intertextually. Disconnecting urban inhabitants from the spaces and people around them is a form of alienation, and these disconnections can be produced in various ways. The location choices of artists highlight

different ways in which urban inhabitants challenge and overcome these forms of alienation. Police interference can influence choices of location, as seen in *First Day Out* and *No Diet*, but artists can contest this interference by connecting through surrogacy with other spaces in and outside the city. The prison and the psychiatric hospital are drawn into this connectivity, with *First Day Out* shot outside HMP/YOI Isis, and NoLay's recollection of watching *Unorthodox Daughter* with her father in Bethlem Royal Hospital. These locations contrast to the production and use of a set in *little BIG Man*, through which attention is drawn to spatial production as an underlying force of everyday life in the city. But it also highlights the vulnerability of social housing estate residents. These choices can be seen as using surrogacy to navigate and challenge the way the production of urban space marginalises and objectifies certain members of the population. By connecting with the material city, these videos produce convivial connections between people and urban space. The playfulness of these videos' choices of location, through the connections that they make, is indicative of representational struggles for a right to the city, to be able to access urban space and to be able to make it differently. In the next section I will explore how each of these videos textually construct the city, and specifically how they represent expressions of agency within and outside of the urban landscape.

Section 2: Expressions of Agency

In this section, I will explore how the selected videos represent expressions of agency within or in relation to inner-city space. The way people can access and use space in the city depends on their ability to claim space through appropriation, to express their attachment to it and agency within, and to exercise their right to the city. This in turn often depends on where a person lives, and the extent to which this space imprisons or empowers them. The ways in which people imagine themselves to belong to a city, and for the city to belong to them, depends in part on the representations that they encounter, and how these representations produce urban space (Lefebvre, 1991/1987). Representations can make space feel like home

or can produce alienating feelings of un-homeliness. But more than just feelings, dominant representations of space, such as regeneration projects, play a concrete role in the homing or un-homing of city inhabitants (Wilson, 2013), and to the ability of inhabitants to exercise their right to the city (Lefebvre, 1968; Harvey, 2012; Butler, 2012).

As noted above, the presence of housing in *A London Thing* is momentary, with only fleeting glimpses of a tower-block council estate. The local representations of Notting Hill Carnival are blended with a more city-encompassing outlook through the depiction of spaces outside the boundaries of Carnival. This ties in with the sentiment of the track – that it's about London as a whole, not just the Carnival. It also suggests that Carnival's use of space leaks out of its designated area. Through celebratory music and dance, new relations to space can be produced in the city, through representational spaces and through new spatial practices (Lefebvre, 1991/1987). Even though it is fleeting, the shot of the tower block is a reminder of the centrality of these domestic spaces to the development of inner-city music genres, as explored in more detail in Chapters 4 and 5. UKG is a prime example, as pirate radio stations utilised the height of tower blocks to sonically diffuse the surrounding area with tracks like *A London Thing*. Pirate radio stations were hugely popular across London around the time of *A London Thing*'s production and release, and Garcia himself ran a pirate radio station called Flight FM. By including shots of the tower block the video asserts that the track belongs in important symbolic ways to the residents and history of these spaces. But also, that the city in which they are situated, and which the video evokes, belongs to them too. It represents an expression of agency based on a shared love of music produced and transmitted through the transformation of everyday domestic spaces into spaces of cultural production and convivial interaction (Gilroy, 2004). The music and the video thus assert a right to the city, through the connections between each space in the video, and through the connection to other spatial practices that enact struggles over space.

There are many scenes in the video that foreground Garcia and Styles: they are shown spinning records and performing to the camera and to the crowds at Carnival. These scenes emphasise the importance of artists in creating urban connectivity, and that they can lay claim

to this sense of connection and to the spaces that it brings together. It is their creative practices, and their freedom to carry these out, that makes this connectivity possible. But there are also many shots that don't feature the musicians, emphasising the role of the audience in this process, particularly during events like Carnival where artist and audience share space. The sharing of space in the video ties in with the sense of optimism in videos such as *Neighbourhood*, explored in Chapter 4. It suggests that the sharing of space in this way, through music and dance, is part of a process of disalienation and an expansive expression of a right to the city (Lefebvre, 1991/1987; Wilson, 2013; Butler, 2012), far more expansive than that in *Neighbourhood* and many other videos explored in this thesis.

The vibrancy of the Carnival scenes contrasts with the greyer structures of the tower-block estate, the car park, the River Thames, and Battersea Power Station, but they are all offered to the audience as examples of 'London things'. The overriding feeling throughout the video is of celebration; the presence of the police and of homeless people are fleeting and do little to reduce this sensation, though the presence of these themes of state authority and urban precarity are there to tell a more realistic or truthful story about the Carnival and about London more generally. Though the tower block, shown in *Figure 78*, may look dull in comparison to the brightness of the Carnival, by connecting these spaces the video suggests that these much-maligned domestic structures can give birth to the celebratory and joyful Carnival scenes, and suggest that there is a lot more going on within these domestic spaces than meets the eye.

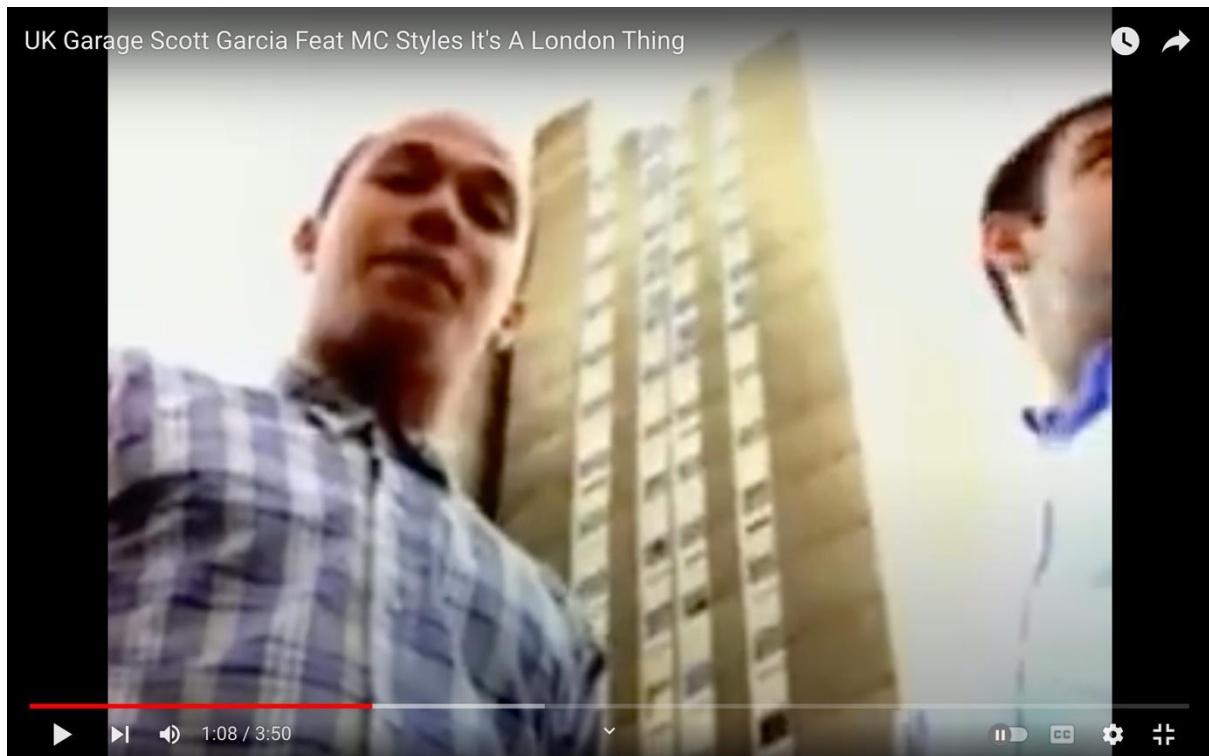


Figure 78: Still from A London Thing.

As in *A London Thing*, in *First Day Out* the viewer also encounters a looming tower block in the background. In the scenes shot on Lancaster West Estate, there are brief glimpses of Grenfell Tower looming in the background, the fire-damaged exterior hidden behind a protective wrap. This wrapping both hides and exposes the neglect of the estate by the Royal Borough of Kensington and Chelsea council, which led to the death of 72 people, unprotected by the cheap cladding that was formerly used on this and many other high-rise council estates across England (Dimka, 2023). The Grenfell fire is an extreme example of what can happen when the agency of urban inhabitants is restricted in the spaces in which they live, when decisions are made about spaces without concern for those who inhabit them. Nobody is able to access or use Grenfell Tower now, due to the decisions made by the council to allow the building to fall into a dangerous state over a number of years.

The remains of the tower are a vivid and tragic expression of urban alienation (Lefebvre, 1991/1987; Wilson, 2013), by which buildings low on the hierarchy of value are disconnected from their surrounding areas, and those inhabiting the buildings are disconnected from those

outside it. Grenfell is a background to the Lancaster West Estate, which is itself a kind of background as LD and his entourage only ever inhabit the outside spaces of the estate. Even here he is somewhat alienated from the function of the estate as a place to live (Wilson, 2013). The video for *First Day Out* opens in black and white, with LD wearing his iconic mask, which he started wearing to hide his identity from police when he had been told he couldn't release music earlier in his career. He is on the phone to his mother, expressing his love for her and telling her that he's been reading the bible. The location of the conversation is unclear, as the shot is a close-up of LD, with little background detail to go by, and his mother is not shown. The video then jumps to a new scene: colour footage of LD outside prison immediately after his release, with the words of Psalm 91 overlaid. As the conversation ends, opening credits overlay more footage of LD outside prison, though this is now in black and white, with *First Day Out* beginning to play. The video then shows footage of his release – being embraced by friends, popping bottles of champagne, smoking spliffs, unboxing new trainers, and driving luxury cars. The footage also jumps between different locations: outside the prison, in and around Lancaster West Estate, in an inner-city football cage, and in a studio. This cage is reminiscent of the Limehouse cage that was so significant to Roll Deep and the grime scene, discussed in Chapter 5. It is, then, another example of inner-city social infrastructure (Billingham et al., 2024), a place in which struggles for the right to the city often take place (Mayer, 2012).

First Day Out is a good example of how the production and presentation of music videos has changed over time. In contrast to *A London Thing* and *Unorthodox Daughter*, LD's video features credits at the beginning and end, with both the production house and the full production team identified. The lyrical content of *First Day Out* hinges on LD's claim to have established UK drill as a genre, and that he is authentic in both living the lifestyle and expressing it within the conventions of a genre he pioneered with his group, 67. The hook and the track's title reference that he has just been released from prison – where he was sentenced to 4 years for conspiracy to supply Class A drugs in 2019. In many ways the lyrics and visuals share much with earlier music videos produced and released by 67 before LD's incarceration, such as *Live Corn*, and some 67 members are seen in *First Day Out*. Like this earlier video, the camerawork is all hand-held, with almost constant dynamic movement, which ties in with the

fast pace of the backing track and LD's lyrical delivery. Fancy cars and expensive bottles of alcohol are also features of their early videos, that stand in stark contrast to the council estates that formed the architectural setting. The sparkling wine, the Rolls-Royce, and the jewellery are expressions of the ability to make money, and the agency to use that money for luxury rather than necessity. The video makes connections between luxury goods and working-class space that creates a sense of the carnivalesque (Bakhtin, 1984/1965), an undermining of the expected location for the use and consumption of these luxury goods.

But the sharp definition of the images, suggesting that the video was shot in HD, and the slick editing are marked differences from 67's earliest videos. There are post-production transitions cutting out LD from one piece of footage and pasting him into another in a different space. Another edit super-imposes devil horns on his head when he references grime pioneer Dizze Rascal's *Boy In Da Corner*, the cover art of which is an image of Dizze making devil horns with his fingers, and on which *Jus A Rascal* was released. The choice of black and white, providing moody and brooding visuals to accompany the lyrics, also diverges from 67's earlier videos. On the one hand, these features suggest a higher budget, on the other hand, there is still a sense of things being DIY, handheld, home-made, shot on the streets, featuring family and friends. The contrast between luxury goods, on the one hand, and inhabiting the socially and politically stigmatised space of a council estate, on the other, also highlights this tension between different senses of value. The luxury good suggest LD's financial aspirations now that he has been released, but also the success that he had before his incarceration, the financial rewards of his celebrity. Inhabiting the estate signifies LD's claim to authenticity, of being from and fundamentally tied to working-class inner-city space. But it also suggests limitations of his expression of agency: in a way, he is back to square one after his time in prison and must re-establish his right to the city (Lefebvre, 1968; Harvey, 2012; Butler, 2012).

The use of surrogacy in *First Day Out* goes further than just the video's spatial setting. LD's mask, shown in *Figure 79*, is evocative of the representational conventions found in Carnival in both its Trinidadian and London contexts, which use masks as a way of playing with disguise in the production of interstitial space by publicising social marginalisation (Alleyne-Dettmers,

2002). However, in contrast to Carnival disguise, LD's mask both provides anonymity and a distinctive recognisability. His mask is part of the making of his celebrity, a surrogate object through which he becomes an exalted figure.



Figure 79: Still from *First Day Out*.

The way light shines off LD's mask is reminiscent of the shining ornamentation of Shosho's performances, shown in *Figure 80*. As Cheng (2011, p.1027) argues:

Shosho's costume gleams preternaturally. The glare bounces coolly, brilliantly, and erratically off her breasts and hips, at times making it literally impossible to look at her. The star draws our gaze only to reflect it back with violence and indifference.

Cheng's analysis of this scene in *Piccadilly* offers an insightful way of interpreting the role of LD's mask in *First Day Out*. Like Shosho, LD took on a gleaming object as part of his trajectory towards celebrity. His mask draws and reflects the audience's gaze with the irreverence of

urban conviviality (Gilroy, 2004). But, unlike Shosho, the mask obscures his face, while he wears everyday clothing over his body, whereas Shosho's ornamentation frames her face. Key to this difference is the role of policing: LD's choice to wear a mask to hide his identity was influenced by the restrictions placed on him the criminal justice system. The audience doesn't see LD's face or his mother's, who he speaks to at the beginning of the video. Nor do they get to see where they live. From prison, LD's agency over when he could see his family, and when his family could see him, would have been severely limited. In this video he expresses his agency over access to his and his mother's bodies, and to the spaces that they share together. However, LD's bodily agency is in part restricted by the restrictions on his movement through the city, and by the restrictions on his ability to show his face in musical performances.



Figure 80: Still of Anna May Wong as Shosho in *Piccadilly*, from Cornell University Cinema website.

The lack of interior domestic space in both *A London Thing* and *First Day Out* can be read in multiple ways. On the one hand, the characters see these council estates as spaces they are connected to, but do not have the agency to access for the sake of the video. On the other

hand, the videos retain a level of privacy for these spaces and their inhabitants, that there is power in keeping the doors closed to the viewer. They suggest a 'right to opacity', for marginalised communities to remain hidden from view (Glissant, 2024/1990; see also Davis, 2019). This suggests that part of the struggle for a right to the city is waged through representation, and the modes through which things are seen or not seen.

In both *A London Thing* and *First Day Out*, domestic doors are kept closed, with a focus on shared public space and musical production. These two videos are primarily concerned with exteriority, with being outside, and how being outside relates to everyday life in the city. In contrast to these closed doors, *No Diet* moves through the multiple interior spaces of a large suburban house. There are close-ups of toys and Coca Cola cans in various locations, giving the sense of a children's party. *No Diet's* setting is very obviously not a traditional inner-city space, as the suburb has historically been constructed in opposition to the inner city (Waters, 2023). Nonetheless, it is the location for the performance of music that is fundamentally tied to inner-city London: it draws a connection between luxury suburbia and inner-city London, through which these supposedly fragmented, alienating spaces are reconnected with one another (Lefebvre, 1991/1987; Wilson, 2013), in this case via the music video format. In *No Diet*, the fixing of UK drill artists to the inner city is destabilised by what Digga is seen doing: playing in a big suburban house.

The way that Digga occupies this space expresses his agency to challenge practices and discourses that deny him access to a house like this. The video begins with Digga's phone ringing to alert him of two men approaching the house that he is inhabiting. Digga allows these two men, and by extension the video's audience, access to the space and the music performance. This scene suggests that Digga has a right to this space, and a level of control over how it is accessed and used. This usage is emphasised as humorously unusual and non-common-sensical in the close-ups of Digga pouring cans of Coca Cola into a blender, as shown in *Figure 81*. Everyday 'common-sense' notions of the 'proper' use for an object, and the 'proper' place for a person, an activity, or an object are related to socio-political expectations and ideologies (Cresswell, 1992). Furthermore, as Tim Cresswell (1992) explores through the

example of the crackdown on graffiti in New York City, transgressions of the ‘proper place’ for a person or activity are often used by the state to reinforce ideologies of who and what belongs where. This disruption of common-sense expectations of properness is a core element of the carnivalesque (Bakhtin, 1984/1965), and *No Diet* is the most carnivalesque of the five videos explored in this chapter, primarily through this occupation of the luxury house and the symbolic activities that occur inside it. In *No Diet*, Digga challenges ideologies that restrict him to his ‘proper’ place by playfully exposing expectations of ‘properness’ using humour and subversion.



Figure 81: Still from *No Diet*.

No Diet's setting is represented as multiple things at once: it is both a symbolic surrogate for working-class spaces in which cocaine is packaged and a non-symbolic, lavish suburban house in which leisure activities are performed. The symbol cannot simply be exchanged for the symbolised. The characters in the video are both non-symbolically partying – drinking Coca Cola, riding around on a Segway, and playing with golf-clubs – and symbolically working – readying cocaine for sale, driving through the city, and threatening competitors with weapons.

While the house symbolises the spaces in which the packaging of cocaine stereotypically takes place in White imaginaries – working-class spaces such as council estates (Koch et al., 2024) – it also non-symbolically represents spaces in which many people involved in the cocaine industry actually reside and work (Siddique, 2018). Drug dealing is generally representationally erased from middle-class spaces like the house in Digga’s video, despite the fact that the stereotypical inhabitants of these spaces are the primary consumers, and often suppliers, of the trade that Digga symbolically plays with. This conflict exposes the hypocritical and disproportionate policing of working-class space: the money that fuels the cocaine industry flows through middle-class spaces like *No Diet*’s setting. Yet these spaces are protected, rather than targeted, by police discourse and practice. The visual absence of the police in *No Diet* is not complete, as they are eerily present (Fisher, 2016) through the restrictions placed on Digga’s expressions. His agency is limited by the fact that the video hinges on symbols that are used because of police surveillance and restrictions.

In *No Diet*, Digga expresses his agency by accessing spaces often denied to working-class and minoritised artists, by suggesting the possibility of new social and spatial orders in which his presence in these spaces is not an expression of surrogacy. Success in the music industry offers a way for Digga to escape his socio-economic origins through the route of social mobility, a route much-exalted by successive governments over the past four decades at least. Like Shosho’s narrative trajectory, Digga moves from working-class to more glamorous housing through the power of his performance. The video hinges on a playful escapism, but the extent of this escape was rendered disturbingly momentary, as Digga returned to prison after the video’s production for breaching the conditions of his CBO (Mohamed, 2020).

This highlights the entrenched limitations of social mobility and the agency that it can generate. With exalted celebrities such as Digga or Wong as Shosho, “In the very symbolic act of exaltation that reifies them, their iconic stature veils the intricate systemic realities that repress myriad communities of people who resemble them” (Wolukau-Wanambwa, 2021, p.299). The promise of social mobility through the making of celebrity is part of the process of alienation, as it suggests that people can separate themselves from their backgrounds

through capital accumulation and the exaltation of iconicity. But this separation alienates people from their environments, further entrenching class dynamics produced through the capitalist production of space. Any escape is limited if the conditions from which the escape is made continue after the escapist has left.

It is important to note that expressions of agency and claims to a right to the city might also reproduce alienating power dynamics. This point is highlighted by the gendered dynamics of these videos. In *No Diet*, Digga uses drug dealing as a symbol for his creative expression: he asserts that the product he sells is superior to that of his competitors. This may be another example of representational surrogacy, as Digga makes himself think-like by aligning himself with the drugs he is symbolically selling. This self-objectification constitutes “a mode of escape into illegible and inaccessible interiority,” through which the self-objectified expresses their agency by building their own walls and controlling access into their interior space (Wolukau-Wanambwa, 2021, p.235). While Digga may be expressing a resistant agency through surrogacy, playing with illegibility through symbolism and inaccessibility through representations of space, the depictions of women in his video demonstrate that resistance can also partake in objectifications of others. In both the visuals and the lyrics, women are depicted as sexual objects. They don’t partake in the packaging of the ‘product’ in the kitchen, rather they appear to be at the house for the entertainment of Digga and his male entourage, sexualised by their clothing, dancing up against and draping themselves around the male characters, shown in *Figure 82*. Their dancing may call to mind the reductive Western interpretation of Carnival dance as lascivious when it could be interpreted instead as a powerful expression of agency in its own right, the production of what Alleyne-Dettmers (2002) refers to as an ‘interstitial space’ through dance. However, they do not wear Carnavalesque disguises. The video doesn’t explore these women as celebrities in the making. The video doesn’t disrupt or undermine the representation of women as sexual objects through the carnivalesque mode, there is no inversion of rank, rather it supports this alienating element of contemporary society. The female characters appear to be stripped, both in terms of their clothing and in terms of their agency. Even though women occupy the luxury house alongside men, they do not seem to control this space in the same way: they don’t choose who gets to enter. They appear as something for Digga to hide behind. This

restricts the transgressive extent of these Digga's appropriation of space and expression of agency: the video still supports the exclusivity of space based to some extent on capital, gender, and sexuality.



Figure 82: Still from No Diet.

In contrast, *Unorthodox Daughter* brings women to the foreground. Not only does the video highlight NoLay as MC and protagonist of the music and video, but we also see her with female friends and family figures. Furthermore, the video highlights not only female characters but also spaces that have frequently been depicted as feminine: the domestic spaces of the home, particularly the kitchen. While the kitchen scene in *No Diet* is a disguise for an illegal workplace, the kitchen scene in *Unorthodox Daughter* is in one sense a stripping away of disguise: a revealing of the tender familial moments and spaces that are frequently left in the background of hyper-masculine inner-city representation. In another sense, however, these scenes are tender moments that visualise a frequently unrecognised workplace: the domestic labour of a mother figure and homemaker. Despite watching her own celebrity-making on the TV at the beginning of the video, NoLay does not leave the estate in the course of *Unorthodox*

Daughter. Unlike Shosho's kitchen performance, shown in *Figure 83*, NoLay's performances in the kitchen, shown in *Figure 84*, do not elevate her above or separate her from her fellow inhabitants.



Figure 83: Still of Anna May Wong as Shosho in Piccadilly, from Spurlock Museum of World Cultures website.

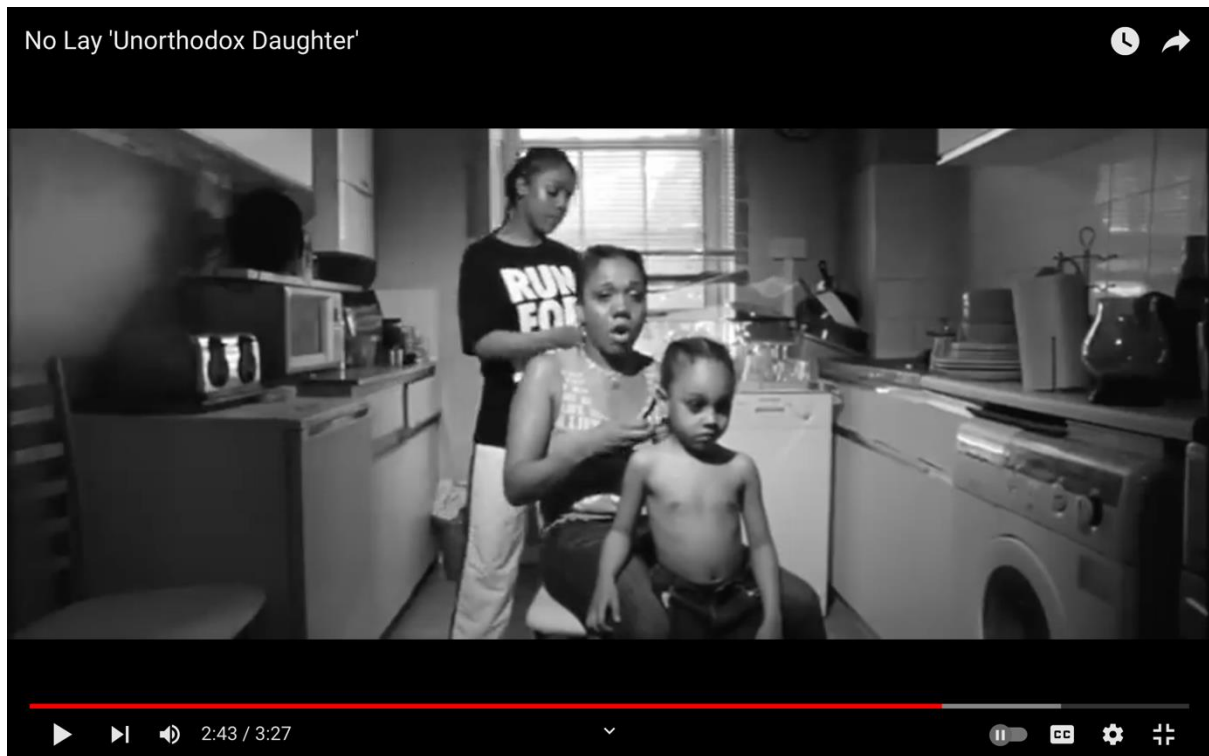


Figure 84: Still from *Unorthodox Daughter*.

In contrast to the private space of *No Diet's* luxury location, and to the exterior spaces of *A London Thing* and *First Day Out*, *Unorthodox Daughter* and *little BIG Man* depict interior domestic moments in council estates. The entirety of *Unorthodox Daughter* takes place in the interior and exterior spaces of the White City Estate. There are three interior spaces shown inside a flat: the living room, where NoLay, a teenager, and a child watch tv; the kitchen, in which they braid each other's hair; and the bedroom, which doubles up as a studio. The bedroom is the only interior space inhabited by both male and female characters, whereas the kitchen and the living room are only inhabited by the female characters and the only spaces where we see the teenager and the child. Despite the male presence in the bedroom studio, NoLay is the main focus as she performs into the microphone, shown in *Figure 85*. Indeed, NoLay and her music are the main focus and binding force throughout the video, with snippets of focus on other characters: the teenager in the kitchen directly addressing the camera; the child in the living room dancing to the video of *No Help Or Handouts*.



Figure 85: Still from *Unorthodox Daughter*.

The interior scenes in the living room and the kitchen present a more serious NoLay in comparison to the bedroom-studio performance and the outdoor scenes. These tender moments of female domestic inhabitation allow for a more vulnerable side of NoLay. It is important to note that in the domestic scenes, NoLay is doing domestic work, caring for the teenager and the child, which could explain the subdued energy in these spaces even when she is performing the lyrics, in comparison to the scenes where she is with other adults. In the kitchen, NoLay also performs the lyrics, though not constantly: sometimes to camera, at other moments looking at the child's hair as she braids. This scene is reminiscent of the kitchen scenes in Goldie's *Inner City Life*: shot in black and white, with mother and children figures, and set in a council estate flat. Like Camberwell, White City had a high degree of deprivation: in 2009, just four years after the release of *Unorthodox Daughter*, White City Estate was "among the most deprived areas of the whole country" in terms of household income (Boughton, 2017c). But in contrast to *Inner City Life*, the mood in the kitchen of *Unorthodox Daughter* is tender, despite the often-aggressive lyrics, far from the feeling of distress and gendered incarceration presented in Goldie's video. There is little suggestion of deprivation in

the video itself. This suggests that, despite the social and political stigmatisation of council estates as 'sinks', and the financial difficulties local residents may have been facing, these spaces fostered beautiful familial moments. Unlike in *Inner City Life*, NoLay is not confined to the interior spaces of the flat: she walks around the outside areas of the estate, and expresses her right to this part of the city (Lefebvre, 1968; Harvey, 2012; Butler, 2012). These scenes depict NoLay expressing her agency through movement and convivial interaction, connecting with the spaces and people around her (Gilroy, 2004). Furthermore, NoLay always performs the lyrics from the estate: there is no black void like that from which Diane Charlamagne performs in *Inner City Life*. And the camera is always at ground level: there are no aerial shots that situate the estate more widely within the city, or that take the viewer away from the characters and spaces of the estate. Within the video, these characters are in one place, and they are there to stay. The outdoor spaces are inhabited by other estate residents, shown from outside on the threshold of their flats, and by NoLay, accompanied by her entourage of male and female characters, as she performs to camera. Sometimes NoLay is moving with the camera, sometimes they are stationary. Sometimes the entourage dances, sometimes they just look into camera. The entire video is shot in black and white, a choice that has the connotation of authenticity and realism in film and television (Street, 2018). The sense is that this is a space and a collection of people that NoLay is interacting with authentically, people that she knows in her everyday life, outside of the representational space of the video.

The sense authenticity produced through the realism of *Unorthodox Daughter* contrasts dramatically with the theatricality of *little BIG Man*, which also represents interior domestic space on a council estate. In contrast to *Unorthodox Daughter*, the interiority of the home in *little* is undermined by the open-topped set through which domestic scenes are shown. The set, which is the only domestic space shown in *little*, is inhabited by the protagonist and his mother, sister, and father, and is the only space in the video that is inhabited by female characters. It is made up of two interior rooms – living room and bedroom – and an exterior space, the balcony. It is not a full replica flat as there is no toilet or kitchen, and only one bedroom. Wretch, the performer of the tracks that, with the narrative, bind these spaces together, only inhabits the actual estate. At one point Wretch sits against the wall of the set, but he never enters the set itself. The way the set is limited to these spaces suggests a desire

to deliver the narrative as efficiently as possible: there are no spaces that are not inhabited in the set.

The video represents a particularly limited expression of agency within urban space. While the partial representations of domestic space in the other videos are due to the fact that the camera doesn't cover the entire spaces in the videos, the set in *little BIG Man* is frequently shown in its entirety, and shown to be lacking in fundamental domestic amenities, such as a kitchen or a toilet, or indeed a roof. The video is reminiscent of Sborgi's (2023) notion of the 'precarious home film'. This precarity is constructed through conversations between the characters: in a conversation with his father, the protagonist notes how the flat has degraded since he's been away. Moreover, the flat has no direct neighbours: it is disconnected – fragmented – from the connections of community that are shown in, for example, *Unorthodox Daughter*. Here, the residents are alienated from the surrounding city (Lefebvre, 1991/1987; Butler, 2012). Even the video's performing musician, Wretch, can only look into the flat, and does not cross its threshold. The video also contrasts to the depiction of the city as a shared, public space of community as seen in *A London Thing*. In *little BIG Man*, London is violent, fragmented, lonely, cold, and unsettling. The flat is a place of alienation for the protagonist, where he is separated from the community around him, by the way the set is positioned, and from his family in the interior domestic space itself, as the forces of capital accumulation obstruct his ability to reconnect with them on his return. This domestic space is rendered a disconnected unit rather than a home to live and thrive in (Lefebvre, 1968; Wilson, 2013), a unit that is literally emptied of its inhabitants through the course of the narrative.

The material openness of the set in *little BIG Man* – the lack of a roof – acts as a profound symbol of the precarity of social housing: that the roof over one's head might be stripped away at any moment (Watt, 2021, 2022). The set can be voyeuristically peered into, diminishing the residents' claim to privacy in their home. Again, the choice of location was integral for this element, as Wornoo describes:

It was really important that we could shoot in 360° at the location and the set . . . Shooting from above was really important too, the “God’s Eye View.” You’re able to look down on the characters like a deity and decide whether to judge them, exhibit sympathy or laugh at them.

The rooflessness of the set, shown in *Figure 86*, thus serves the dual function of allowing the audience different angles from which to look at the characters and the space, and of accentuating how socio-economic forces leave certain domestic spaces unprotected. This flat is open to surveillance, drawing a subtle parallel with the ways in which artists working in urban music scenes have historically and contemporarily been monitored by police (Fatsis, 2019), such as in the monitoring of the expressions of Digga and LD.



Figure 86: Still from little BIG Man showing the 'God's Eye View' of the protagonist being confronted by his sister.

In a similar way to how the luxury suburban house can be read as a surrogate for a council estate in *No Diet*, the spaces of *little BIG Man* are surrogates for the unseen but ever-present prison. Like *First Day Out*, *little BIG Man* follows a ‘first day out’ narrative, and also begins with

a phone conversation. The way this conversation relates to the construction of space, particularly urban domestic space, in the video is one example of how *little BIG Man* plays with the 'first day out' narrative. Unlike LD's video, the prison is never shown in *little BIG Man*, but it is implied that this is where the caller is speaking from. This phone conversation sets up the entire narrative as a recurring dream, so there is in one sense never an actual release from the cycle of reoffending and re-incarceration, or from the space of the prison. This is noted by Wornoo in the *Crack Magazine* interview:

The phone calls are a metaphor [. . .] he's imagining himself back outside with his friends in the ends [the local area] and he sees a curtain fall. His day starts again, he's in prison again. But *because* his day starts again, he has another opportunity to do things differently.

The prison is, in a sense, actually shown constantly: it is all that is shown, because the release that the protagonist experiences is a profoundly limited release. This is because of the situation that he is being released back into: the alienating space of inner-city London, dominated by capital accumulation and its cycles of domestic and employment precarity, policing, and violence.

Within the walls of institutions like Bethlem or HMP/YOI Isis, the monitoring and control of bodies and spaces is perhaps most pronounced. But this dynamic is not limited to the space of the psychiatric ward or the prison: it permeates the city more widely, particularly in the way working-class spaces are policed, disproportionately so for racial and ethnic minority members of this population. London's inner-city spaces have become increasingly penalized and pathologized, destabilising the boundaries between prisons and psychiatric institutions, on the one hand, and 'everyday' spaces like council estates, on the other. This symbiosis is a central theme of *little BIG Man*, as the protagonist is both inside and outside the prison throughout the video, just as he is perpetually between dream and reality, actual estate and set. This surrogacy (Cheng, 2011) – by which the prison is the hidden background to the inner-city – is part of the textual construction of space in *little BIG Man*, requiring a divergence from literal representation, and from the 'exclusively human terms of traditional social realist

representation (Williams, 1977). But it is not a Bakhtinian (1984/1965) carnivalesque representation either, like the subversive use of space in *No Diet*. Rather, it explores these limitations of agency through eerie representations of space (Fisher, 2016), the absence of elements of the urban landscape that should be there but aren't.

Expressions of agency in the city are intertwined with representations of space in each of the videos analysed in this chapter, but also in the way these videos invoke sense of time. In a 2023 interview, Garcia stated of *A London Thing*:

This record means more to people than I ever thought it would . . . I know it's London, and we love London. I'm proud of being a Londoner. But it actually really means something. It's a timestamp for [the city]. A reference point. For that moment of time, it made people feel a part of something. And it made them realise that this is our fucking thing. I like to think for that one moment, it put everything in one place. And from that we were able to grow. That record put its arms around the scene, and said, 'I'm your record' (Garcia in DJ Mag, 2023).

This statement, though focussed on the record rather than the music video, speaks to multiple themes focussed on throughout this thesis, and to the representational construction of urban space in particular. Garcia's description of *A London Thing* as a 'timestamp' can be seen to indicate how music and music films and videos can be points through which urban space is not just produced, but also contested and claimed through production. These texts were tools through which people irreverently asserted control over the spaces of inner-city London that they inhabited: the 'our-fucking-thing'-ness of music films and videos as a marker of presence, as a landmark, as a stamp on a passport indicating space and time.

Garcia's statement suggests that the city of London itself is a shared space, a broad home in which many people can live and connect. This connection often occurs through music, particularly through the reception of iconic records 'putting everything in one place', bringing things together in conversation. The record itself augments and constructs the city as a home, putting arms around and embracing its inhabitants, connecting people and thereby

challenging spatial alienation (Lefebvre, 1991/1987; Wilson, 2013). This embracing can be seen in the video itself, in the way it draws people and spaces together, putting them all in one place. The video attempts to capture the vibrancy and diversity of Carnival, how it is tied to the city of London, and how it brings people together within the space of the city. The narrative and chronology are limited, reflecting the lack of narrative in the track itself. The dancers and characters featured throughout the video are from many different races, ages, and sexes, dressed in a variety of different ways. The scenes in the video are fragmented, but the music track brings these fragments together and connects them as a coherent urban space.

In a similar vein to *A London Thing*, the looming tower blocks in *First Day Out* draw attention to the everyday lives of those who co-produce the music genres and cultural celebrations that are sonically represented in the videos, while keeping the doors closed to visual representations of these intimate domestic spaces. This suggests a resistance to voyeurism, while also connecting these spaces to other areas of the city, and emphasising the importance of occupying outdoor space as a way of claiming a right to the city. In *Unorthodox Daughter* and *little BIG Man*, the protagonists inhabit domestic spaces on council estates, though with contrasting senses of agency. Whether in joyous convivial outdoor scenes, indoor scenes of studio performance, or intimate familial domestic scenes of parenting, NoLay does not appear to have her agency restricted. The video asserts a right to inner-city spaces for female inhabitants. And though it is constantly emphasised that NoLay's particular form of agency is unorthodox, she is setting an example for the young girls around her, so that her agency can be replicated in future.

Conversely, the protagonist of Wretch and Wornoo's video is constantly out of control, trapped in a cycle of poverty, violence, and incarceration, the spaces of the inner-city represented as a continuation of the space of the prison that he leaves in his dream. He enters into an alienating space on his arrival home, immediately struggling to connect with his family and his environment, the conviviality and reconnection of his return short lived as his mother is taken to hospital and he argues with his sister and father. The cyclical nature of the narrative

emphasises that the conditions of his release are intertwined with and produced by the conditions of his incarceration. But the repetition at the end of the video suggests that there is still scope to produce this space differently, to make different choices this time round. *No Diet* allows the viewer access into a luxurious house which doubles as a place of work, presenting a dynamic of spatial control hinging on a dialectical relationship between work and play. The space, like the set of *little BIG Man*, suggests elements of abstraction and precarity, with the house a temporary commodity of sorts. And though Digga controls who enters and the modes by which his labour is represented, his expressive agency is somewhat undermined by the conditions of his CBO and the way the video represents gendered dynamics of spatial access and use.

Conclusion

Through these videos, and through the conversations that arise when they are seen and heard together, situated knowledges (Haraway, 1988) are produced of the richness and complexity of spatial representation and production in London's urban music videos over the past few decades. The way each of these videos use locations, and connect with other locations, is an example of how artists contest spatial usage and access in the city and claim a right to the city that they help to produce. Exploring the locational contexts of these five videos highlights the ways in which artistic expressions often encounter power structures that may be restrictive, particularly for London's working-class inner-city residents, but that can also be circumnavigated and contested by these same inhabitants. These contextual locational details intertwine with the textual content of the videos. Surrogacy, as a mode of representation and method for analysis, draws attention to tensions between background and foreground, and to the use of disguise, seen in these videos in the form of clothing, symbolism, dance, vernacular, and location choices, to name a few examples. It generates questions of how, why, and with what something is covered up. Also, when, and for how long, and where this covering is taking place. Though London has continued to be subjected to the alienating forces of spatial

fragmentation and disconnection, artists continue to produce work that represents the inner city, how it is changing, and how convivial connections between people and spaces persist. They explore how it is policed and how access and use of space in the city is experienced differently by different urban inhabitants. And, finally, they show how urban music videos can both represent and partake in struggles for a right to the city through different modes of representation – such as the eerie, the carnivalesque, and surrogacy – and through the different forms of agency these modes represent and explore.

The analyses in this chapter suggest that contesting space inside the city may involve spaces generally considered outside, particularly for those represented as ‘outsiders’ by established power structures. These structures influence the expected and the unexpected, where we expect to see people, objects, and activities, and what we expect spaces to be accessed and used for. But the playfulness of artists indicates that people are not determined by these structures. Rather, representations and socio-economic and political conditions are mutually productive and fundamentally intertwined: they leak into and out of one another. Space is fundamental to the structuring of expectations, though there are particular kinds of space that encourage playfulness while others curtail this possibility. Artists are, in some ways, capitalising on the spaces that they have access to. Indeed, another means by which these videos are held together as productions is through the workings of the music industry, and the way the makings of celebrity figures implicates people and the spaces around them in processes of objectification. But celebrity making also offers a way of understanding the power dynamics that structure access to and use of space in inner-city London, and how representational spaces can be used to navigate and challenge these structures.

London, the spaces the city contains, and the representational significance of these spaces have changed dramatically between 1997 (the release date of *A London Thing*, the earliest considered in this chapter) and 2021 (the release date of *little BIG Man* and *First Day Out*, the most recent considered here). However, just as these videos suggest connections between spaces, they also suggest connections between different times, intertwined with the spatial, by which these different moments in time speak to one another. In the 2021 *Crack Magazine*

interview, Wornoo describes *little BIG Man*, and the way theatre plays a role both in the way it was produced and the internal themes of the text. He says that the video is an example of texts that take on different meanings each time one interacts with them: “time capsules that might not be appreciated now but might be later on.” This speaks to the notion of archiving: the will to preserve something – a space and a moment in time – that otherwise would be lost, and which gains new meanings over time. As archival time capsules, each of the videos explored in this chapter, and in the thesis, can speak to each other, creating a dialogue between the London of the late 1990s, represented in *A London Thing*, through to the London of the early 2020s, represented in *First Day Out* and *little BIG Man*. The contrast in mood is stark, as the optimistic and celebratory feeling of Garcia’s video has been completely eviscerated by the weight of urban precarity in housing and employment. Wornoo’s notion of his video as a ‘time capsule’ is also reminiscent of Scott Garcia’s description of *A London Thing* as a ‘timestamp’, and Don Letts’ description of his 1982 video for *Pass the Dutchie* as a ‘postcard’ and Goldie’s description of *Inner City Life* as a ‘moment in time’. All four notions suggest a similar process of drawing together time and space through the use of music, visuals, and urban space. Letts, Goldie, Garcia, and Wornoo each present space and time differently, but they all disrupt the alienation that severs connections between people and their environment. Letts’ postcard carries a stamp of a new London that welcomes people previously denied access to and use of the city. Wornoo’s notion of the time capsule, but also his evocation of time as cyclical in the text of *little BIG Man*, invokes the different weights of certain moments, but also that moments in time are non-chronological. Certain moments in particular, those with particular weights, stay with people through time, as celebratory timestamps, or as haunting reminders of trauma. Like *little BIG Man*’s set, Carnival is a momentary production happening once a year, radically transforming the space on and in which it takes place. It involves a kind of acting, with sets, props, and costumes, while music is diffused throughout. Every year it is the same ‘Carnival’, but every year it is different. The event also moves through ‘real’ space: the more permanent space (Notting Hill) provides the structure – the amphitheatre – for the more momentary event. This tension between permanence and transience is also an element of how spaces are connected in the city: central to the power structures that govern space in the city are decisions on what is and isn’t – what can and can’t be – temporary, let alone permanent.

Chapter 7

Concluding the Tour:

Representing Routes through London's Inner City

This thesis has taken the form of a tour of selected music videos from five of London's urban music genres – jungle, UK garage, grime, UK rap, and UK drill – exploring how they have represented and produced inner-city London between 1994 and 2021. These videos are an extraordinary repository of stories about the city, about how artists have lived and worked in it, and about how it has changed over the past few decades. By drawing on a multidisciplinary field of literature and methodologies, my analyses of the selected videos enabled me to answer the research questions I posed at the start of the thesis. The fact that the literature and methodologies came from and connected different disciplines allowed for explorations of the research questions that considered the representational dynamics alongside (in conversation with) social dynamics in contemporary urban space.³ The concepts of representation, the production of space, the right to the city, routes, and play have guided my analyses of the selected videos. These analyses have provided a way of understanding how the spaces of London's inner city have been imagined and experienced; how they have been variably accessed and used; how they have been policed; how these spaces, experiences, imaginaries, and policing practices have been represented; and how this has changed over time. Now I will conclude the tour by taking stock of the routes I have travelled in undertaking these explorations, the findings and conclusions I have found along the way, and suggesting other routes to take in future. I will begin by reviewing the key findings from the thesis, specifically on the different scales, modes, and themes that the selected videos represented and explored, and how these relate to the questions I posed in Chapter 1. Next, I will discuss

the implications of these findings, how this project has advanced several fields of study, the limitations to the approach I took in exploring my research questions, and potential areas for future research. I will close with some final reflections.

Section 1: Key Findings

In this thesis, the primary research question I intended to answer was: How has London's inner city been represented in urban music videos, in the period from 1994 to 2021? I developed several secondary questions which helped in answering this primary question. One question concerned the spatial scales of representation used in urban music videos, and how these videos played with different spatial scales. A key finding from my analyses is that urban music videos represent several different spatial scales of inner-city London. London's development as a global city with an imperial past is often explored and contrasted with smaller local scales of everyday life (Castells, 2002; Sassen, 1994, 1995, 2004; Brunsdon, 2019/2007). These different spatial scales are primarily represented by particular buildings and the ways they are used, but particular buildings can at the same time represent multiple spatial scales. Thus, in *Pass the Dutchie*, the Houses of Parliament and Big Ben played a hegemonic role, representing both imperial and national space. Against this backdrop Musical Youth and Don Letts made their mark on the urban landscape, insisting on their own right to space in the city. This video thus encouraged new ways of understanding access to and use of space in the former imperial capital. Big Ben is also an example of the potency of towers in the visual language of urban representation. Towers are often used as looming background figures against and with which artists can impose, compare, and connect themselves. Alongside these towering hegemonic buildings (Barras, 2023) are the towering figures of the pioneers of each of these urban music genres: General Levy and M-Beat, Shy FX and UK Apache, Goldie and Diane Charlemagne in the jungle scene; Scott Garcia and MC Styles, Zed Bias, Nicky Prince, and MC Rumpus, and So Solid Crew in the UK garage scene; Roll Deep, Dizze Rascal, NoLay, and Skepta in the grime scene; Giggs and Nines in the UK rap scene; and 67, Digga D, and OFB in the UK drill scene.

These artists also invoke different spatial scales, their music and visuals establishing routes of connection between local, national, transnational, and global significance, and between everyday and extraordinary spaces. The videos these artists made represent convivial and playful ways of inhabiting these different spaces, moving between these different spatial scales, and asserting a right to occupy different parts of the city.

My analyses explored how urban music videos represent routes through the city, and this again touches on the representations of celebration and alienation. In some videos, such as *Look Out* and *little BIG Man*, movement through the city is represented as being potentially dangerous, either through the possibility of being stopped by police or by a rival in the drug trade. These alienating dynamics of urban movement suggest the ways in which the contemporary inner-city is experienced by some inhabitants, particularly those for whom involvement in the drug trade is hard to avoid. Other videos, however, emphasise celebratory and uninhibited movement through the city, as in *A London Thing* and *Neighbourhood*. These videos represent the city as a playground through which musical performance and dance can connect people with one another and the city around them, and challenge the alienating forces suggested by other videos. Sometimes, though, there is still a suggestion of the route of social mobility as the answer to urban alienation, such as in *Jus A Rascal*, *Ambush*, and *No Diet*. This is a limitation to the claims to rights to the city, as the exclusivity of this route necessarily leaves people behind. But it does suggest a way through which movement between scales can be represented.

Different spatial scales are related to different socio-economic and racialised situations within the urban landscape, with access and use of different scales experienced and policed in different ways depending on these situations. Urban music videos represent these differences, and the distance and proximity between spatial scales. This proximity is most tragically captured in *First Day Out*, with the looming figure of Grenfell Tower in the Royal Borough of Kensington and Chelsea, one of the wealthiest boroughs of London, but also one with some of the widest wealth disparities in the city (Williams, 2024). This is a general marker of London, that extreme wealth and poverty exist side by side, and the architectural markers of these

socio-economic situations surround and loom over the inhabitants of the city. As its name suggests, this Borough is home to the British royal residence of Kensington Palace, as well as foreign embassies. It is also home to the annual Notting Hill Carnival, which represents the hyperlocal, local, urban, and transnational scales at once. Grenfell Tower was both a large-scale, towering architectural figure of post-war social housing estate production, and a relatively local-scale building in comparison to other globally recognisable buildings it shared proximity with, such as Kensington Palace. However, after the tragedy of the fire, representations of the Tower slid between different spatial scales, as this local became a symbol for governmental neglect across the country. The ability to slide between spatial scales of representation, then, is produced not just by the way locations and *mise en scène* are used in audio-visual texts (Gibbs, 2002; Dodds, 2023), but also by the material spaces and changes in the city, such as the demolition of social housing estates, the transformation of streets into locations for festivals and carnivals, or the development of new policing practices.

Another important example of the way locations can represent multiple scales at once is Canary Wharf, an icon of London's global city status that is represented as a marker of aspiration in *Jus A Rascal* and *Aim High*. The towers of Canary Wharf are exclusive spaces, inaccessible to most inhabitants of the city, used by the urban elites. But they are also very local buildings in the area of east London where Dizzee and other grime pioneers grew up, as represented in *When I'm Ere*. This video marks a profound change in the representation of spatial scale in London's urban music videos, through the development of the hyperlocal scale. The hyperlocal was made possible by affordable audio-visual technology, and is most present in grime, UK rap, and UK drill videos. But even in hyperlocal videos there are multiple scales at play, as represented in videos such as *When I'm Ere*, *Look Out*, and *Ambush*. The towers of Canary Wharf in *When I'm Ere* are connected to the social housing estates of Limehouse, spaces that most obviously invoke the scale of the hyperlocal and the experiences of everyday life. The hyperlocal scale is in conversation with the globally recognisable buildings around them. The representation of spatial scale, then, is comparative and relational. This is shown in the rapid montages of *Incredible*, a video that jumps between Big Ben, social housing estates, clubs, and studios, building a picture of the city, the connections between the different spaces that constitute it, and the spatial practices of urban inhabitants that produce it.

The finding that urban music videos represent different spatial scales is significant because it shows how space is often experienced and lived through several scales at once. This also means that the representational spaces produced by artists in turn produce space as multi-scalar: these representations situate different spaces and scales of space in relation to one another, so that an estate is not a fragmented abstract unit but a space that is connected with other spaces in the city, with the wider nation, and with spaces beyond national borders. Another implication of this finding is that the rights to space that these representational spaces lay claim to are claims to multiple scales of space at once: not just the space of an estate or a street, but the space of the city, the nation, and the transnational.

A further key finding that emerges from these discussions of scale is the notion of the 'hyperlocal landmark', what this means for understanding what Brunson (2019/2007) called 'Landmark London', and how this relates to what she calls 'Local London'. The hyperlocal form of landmark is one that is recognisable and deeply meaningful to people operating within or following a scene that is embedded in a particular area at a particular time, but that would not be recognisable or meaningful to someone outside of this scene, even if they live in the same area as the landmark. Take, for instance, the Rhythm Division record store in Bow, which was so central to the development of the grime scene in the 2000s. While some people living locally may not have been aware of the pivotal role this space was playing in the development of this music scene, or even aware of the scene at all, for others in the local area this was a landmark of a blossoming and deeply meaningful artistic movement. And not just for those from the local area – this was a landmark for many people from across the city, who would make their way via various routes to get there, buy records and DVDs, find information about events, and speak to people involved in or fans of the grime scene.

Another key finding from these discussions is that spatial scales are actively produced, not just the hyperlocal but all scales of spatial representation, and that scales are produced in part through the production and representation of landmarks. London has been produced as a global city through particular practices and forces, of financialisation of housing, the

fragmentation and displacement of inner-city communities, the gentrification of inner-city spaces by the influx of the middle-classes, and the construction of hegemonic buildings such as the towers of Canary Wharf or the London Eye. Rhythm Division or Jammer's basement have been produced as hyperlocal landmarks through different but equally productive forces and spatial practices, of convivial local communication and the production and sharing of music. But, while landmarks and scales are produced, they can also change and morph. Particular buildings can move from landmarks of one scale to another. Grenfell Tower, which was once a local landmark to people from the area, is now a national landmark, signifying tragic mismanagement and neglect. Similarly, Broadwater Farm morphed from a local landmark into a national landmark of inner-city tensions after the riots of 1985. Landmarks and scales can also disappear. As mentioned previously, Rhythm Division is now a coffee shop. Tangmere, shown in *Ambush*, was once a hyperlocal landmark in Broadwater Farm, where Kemani Duggan grew up, but has since been demolished. It seems a hyperlocal landmark is far more likely to disappear than a global landmark, and is likely to disappear in part because of the forces involved in London's development as a global city.

This is not to say that global landmarks can't also disappear, as demonstrated when the City of London sold the exterior masonry of London Bridge to the American entrepreneur Robert McCulloch, who moved it to the US when he founded Lake Havasu City in 1968 (see Munro & Cooper, 2024). However, the use of this of London Bridge, both as a means to cross the River Thames and as a global landmark for the city, continue despite the sale. Furthermore, not only is this an instance far outweighed by the many local and hyperlocal landmarks which disappear on a yearly basis, the London Bridge purchase also shows the way capital and monetary exchange value can and does infiltrate even the highest landmarks on the spatial hierarchy. In exploring questions of scale through these selected music videos, I have charted connections between the material landscape of the city, its buildings, roads, and parks; the lives of city inhabitants, how they use and access space, and what for; the policing of these spaces; and the audio-visual representation of these spaces. I have found that the appearance and disappearance of global and local landmarks shows the way different scales face the changes occurring in the city, and that the spaces that working-class inhabitants can access and use every day are far more likely to disappear as the city becomes more and more

unaffordable for them. As Lefebvre (1991/1987) argued, spatial scales cannot be eradicated by spatial hierarchies of value. But the disappearance of local landmarks means that the local scale must be redefined, and new means and practices produced through this process of redefinition.

Another question concerned the modes of representation used in urban music videos, and how these videos play with different modes and traditions of representation. A key finding of this thesis is that, like spatial scales, urban music videos draw on the conventions of multiple modes and traditions of representation. Each of these urban music genres has frequently been considered as expressing what life is like in inner-city London, thereby providing a realist representation of everyday life in this specific form of space. As seen in many of the videos discussed in this thesis, realist representation does indeed play a prominent role, particularly in representations of housing and the space of the everyday. Realist representations of housing were explored in videos such as *Inner City Life*, *A London Thing*, *Aim High*, *When I'm Ere*, *Unorthodox Daughter*, *Look Out*, *Live Corn*, and *Ambush*. Representations of clubs are often less realist, such as the clubs in *Bound 4 Da Reload*, *Oh No (Sentimental Things)*, and *Jus A Rascal*. Instead, these clubs suggest elements of weirdness and eeriness (Fisher, 2016), or the glamorous shine associated with celebrity (Cheng, 2011). But the lines between these modes of representation are not clearcut. As with the representation of multiple scales at once, these videos often draw on conventions from multiple modes in their representation of different parts of the city.

The representation of the estate in *Inner City Life* is a combination of realist, weird, and eerie conventions, a hybrid representation of the local spatial scale. In a similar vein, the ways in which the housing estates in *Live Corn* and *little BIG Man* are represented draw on both realist and eerie conventions. This combination is an effective way of representing inner-city fragmentation and the experiences of residents in precarious housing estates. The representation of the club in *Inner City Life* also draws on realist representations in its use of a real location and real members of the jungle scene, conventions that were also present in the carpark club of *Neighbourhood*. The key finding here is that these videos should not be

bracketed within a single representational mode, but recognised as speaking to and through hybrid modes. The videos are concerned with life in the inner city, representing urban space in different versions, as a space that can feel mundane at times, and weird and eerie at others. But these videos also represent how life and the city could be if things were different. Sexual and economic fantasy are sometimes at play here, in videos such as *No Diet*, *Ambush*, and *Jus A Rascal*. But videos also represent imagined realities through carnivalesque and surrogate performances, through which the city is momentarily made into something else, an interstitial space through which new social relations can be produced.

Another question concerned how urban music videos produce the spaces of London's inner-city. Following Lefebvre's framework of spatial production, I considered urban music videos as representational spaces that partake in the production of space. These videos produce space by showing the way objects, spaces, and people are perceived and used by urban inhabitants. They represent the lived realities of inhabitants of spaces that are often overlooked and actively ignored: the way estate regeneration is felt by inhabitants of these spaces, such as in *Live Corn*, or the way policing measures are experienced by those under restriction, such as in *First Day Out* or *No Diet*. But these videos also play with, and thereby change, the way objects, spaces, and people are perceived and used: the way streets and shared public spaces can be transformed, such as in *Incredible*, *Original Nuttah*, *A London Thing*, *Neighbourhood*, or *little BIG Man*. They emphasise the inhabitation of space by people with agency to produce spaces rich with meaning, and that these people live in and use these spaces in ways that cannot be reduced to exchange value or any other merely economic quantifier.

These findings are related to access to different spaces and to different uses of these spaces. The social housing estate and the club are particularly important. Estates are represented as spaces in which convivial and playful connection takes place, such as in the outdoor scenes in *Incredible*, *Inner City Life*, *Unorthodox Daughter*, *Look Out*, *CR*, *Live Corn*, and *Ambush*. There are representations of convivial and playful interior scenes, such as the tender familial moments of *Unorthodox Daughter* and the joyous moment of return for the protagonist of *little BIG Man*. However, the representations of social housing estates are rarely simplistic

celebrations of these spaces. They are rarely glorified and often show a harshness to the everyday life of working-class inhabitants, such as the exasperation of the mother in *Inner City Life*, the unsmiling faces in *Oh No*, the statuesque inhabitants in *When I'm Ere*, the maintenance signs in *Live Corn*, and the ailing mother in *little BIG Man*. But these representations do show the depth of feeling towards these spaces and the relationships and practices they foster. They also show the importance of these spaces for the music scenes that have emerged in inner-city London over the past few decades, which have brought exceptional moments to the everyday lives of countless people from the city and further afield.

The everyday and the exceptional were often connected by the themes of escape and escapism, and this was discussed in relation to struggles over rights to the city (Edensor, 2020, 2003; Butler, 2012; Lefebvre, 1968). There were representations of escapism to the club in *Inner City Life*, *Incredible*, *Bound 2 Da Reload (Casualty)*, *Oh No (Sentimental Things)*, and *21 Seconds*, to dance practices in *Original Nuttah*, *A London Thing*, *Neighbourhood*, and *Jus A Rascal*, and to more glamorous surroundings through social mobility in *Oh No*, *Jus A Rascal*, *Aim High*, *No Diet*, and *Ambush*. This escapism suggests the different feelings both towards the spaces that are being escaped from, such as alienation in the form of boredom or economic pressure, and towards the spaces that are being escaped to, invoking feelings of celebration, excitement, and pleasure. There is a very literal narrative of escape from prison in *little BIG Man* and *First Day Out*, videos that suggest an extreme point of difference between the freedom of the city and the potential to have this freedom taken away. Some videos, though, had no dynamic of escape or escapism from the estate or the local area, such as *Unorthodox Daughter*, *When I'm Ere*, *Talking Da Hardest*, *CR (Grills Shutdown)*, and *Live Corn*.

I also asked questions of how access to and uses of urban space are represented and policed? Who has access to which spaces under what conditions? How can urban music videos partake in struggles for the right to the city? All of these representations suggest different relationships to the city, and different claims over the spaces of the city, such as the right to share outside space, as in *Look Out* or *A London Thing*; the right to inhabit central locations, as in *Pass The Dutchie*, *Incredible*, or *Jus A Rascal*; or the right to inhabit more glamorous surroundings, as

in *No Diet* and *Ambush*. The policing of access to and use of space – and therefore claims to a right to the city – is found both in representations of or influenced by police restrictions, such as in *Look Out*, *No Diet*, *First Day Out*, or *little BIG Man*, and in representations of gendered difference, such as in *Unorthodox Daughter*, *Ambush*, or *Inner City Life*. Each video represents how access and use of space is experienced differently by urban inhabitants, particularly along classed, racialised, and gendered lines. For example, *Jus A Rascal* represents Dizze claiming his right to the hegemonic locations of the city, and to the city as a global space, not just those hyperlocal areas that had been overshadowed by the towers of Canary Wharf where he grew up. Alternatively, *Unorthodox Daughter* represents NoLay's claims to the interior and exterior spaces of the estate as unusual and unruly, but that the right to these spaces she is laying claim to can be replicated by younger generations of working-class women in the city.

In answering the secondary questions concerning the modes and spatial scales of representation used in urban music videos, I produced key findings that answer the primary research question of how London's inner city has been represented in these music videos. I found that urban music videos use these different modes and spatial scales to represent inner city spaces as the location of both 'celebration' and 'alienation', themes which are represented in several ways. Celebration is variously represented by dance and performance, by convivial connections between urban inhabitants and the spaces around them, and by uninhibited movement and travel. Meanwhile, alienation is represented as a process of hiding, of surrogacy, of fragmentation and disconnection, and of covert movement and escape. Both themes are often represented in the same video, and sometimes the representation of one theme is also the representation of the other. Forms of performance, for example Digga's dancing and playfulness in the house in *No Diet*, can simultaneously express celebration and alienation, a blurring of the boundaries between playtime and worktime.

These videos represent both different ways of experiencing the spaces of London at different moments in time, and the many different lives of and in the inner city. These points of difference are an often-unacknowledged aspect of the inner city. The inner city is frequently homogenised as a space through negative stigma (Saumarez Smith, 2016; Waters, 2023).

Points of difference within this space are often erased in favour of simplified and reductive narratives about the lives of inhabitants, in claims such as David Cameron's following the 2011 London Riots, when he aligned the unrest with social housing estates – the contemporary archetypal inner-city housing type – not the now gentrified terraced houses (Cameron in Perera, 2019). Lefebvre (1991/1987) called this process of erasing distinctions the production of 'abstract' space. The videos explored in this thesis challenge these reductive and alienating abstractions, emphasising points of difference and moments of joy, celebration, and conviviality in the urban landscape.

In her conclusion to *London in Cinema*, Brunsdon (2019/2007, p.296) reflects on the "inadvertent archive quality of cinema," through which films capture and record spaces and moments that aren't around anymore. In this thesis I have argued that urban music videos perform a very similar function, capturing spaces, moments in time, and fragments of lives. Brunsdon also reflects on how this quality of cinema generates a form of melancholy towards the loss of places captured on film, particularly, for her, the redevelopment of King's Cross. This was once an archetypal inner-city area, with a strong "working-class extended family", but has now been redeveloped "in favour of an architecture of spectacle" through the "elimination of the local places in between the landmarks, which make up so much of everyday life" (Brunsdon, 2019/2007, p.297, p.301). This thesis has also traced many of these developments, noting many local and hyperlocal landmarks, but also the passing of particular places, and sometimes people, captured in videos. This passing has also produced a feeling of melancholy in this thesis, combining with a sense of eeriness which laces through my analyses, as spaces disappear in reality but remain as ghosts in representation. In this sense, this thesis produces a similar archive quality, a record of places and people to add to those it has explored and drawn on. The archive I have drawn on exists on YouTube, though this is an 'informal' archive with a high level of uncertainty as to what is there, how easily it can be accessed, what can stay there, and how long for (Auerbach, 2018; Aasman, 2019; see also Hai-Jew, 2026). This thesis has therefore drawn attention to and made critical sense of an archive of inner-city London that is yet to be widely recognised or legitimised as such.

My findings also offer answers to the question of how urban music videos relate to the spaces of inner-city London, how they have represented changes taking place in the city, and how technological developments have interacted with and impacted on the city. These answers could only have been produced by drawing on analytical methods from multiple disciplines, particularly those of screen studies alongside those of urban history and sociology. These videos represent, tell stories of, document, and produce urban change in London over a quarter of a century. Over this period, London has become an increasingly difficult place for working-class people to continue living in, and for working-class artists to continue working in (Gillespie et al., 2021; Kennelly and Watt, 2013; Watt, 2009, 2013, 2020, 2022). Social housing estates have been demolished and not properly replaced (Watt, 2021). Finance has increasingly seeped into more and more spaces of the city, both in this eradication of social housing but also in new forms of policing (Laub, 2021). Changes in technology have allowed artists to represent more and more of the city, for instance producing hyperlocal representations on high-definition cameras. At the same time, digital media platforms such as YouTube have become the foremost space for the distribution and reception of music videos (James, 2020; Vernallis, 2013). Alongside this growing online availability is the increasing presence of online policing (Perera, 2019; Quinn et al., 2022; Scott, 2020; Fatsis, 2019a, 2019b, 2021, 2023; Metropolitan Police 2020). Clubs have increasingly had to shut down, as financial and political pressures have made the survival of these spaces increasingly precarious (Gillett, 2023). Social housing estates have become a more ubiquitous space in the representational landscape of urban music videos, suggesting the eradication of the club as a space to escape to, even if this escape is just representational. In this thesis, I directly challenge claims, such as those proposed by Alice Coleman's 'architectural determinism' and reenforced by David Cameron's blaming of social housing estates for the London Riots, that these estates are spaces of social degradation or 'sinks', which should be demolished to make space for housing types that can 'elevate' society (Bevan, 2023; Perera, 2019). Instead, I support work that shows how diverse these spaces are, not just in terms of the many transnational routes that make up the racial and ethnic heritage of inhabitants, but also in terms of the way inhabitants from these spaces choose to show them (Lees & Hubbard, 2020; Lees & Ferreri, 2016; Perera, 2019; Nwonka, 2017, 2023).

I have thought at times my emphasis on the eerie in certain videos, particularly *Jus A Rascal*, may have been overstated. If so, this is surely in part because of this feeling of things passing, and the connections I have been focussing on across a time-span of almost thirty years. And yet, in addition to these feelings of eeriness and melancholy, I hope there is also a recognisable thread of joy and celebration of the artworks I have explored in this thesis, and the spaces they depict. I grew up with many of these videos and the music that binds them, and they have soundtracked many formative and joyous moments of my life, not least the last four years. It has been a great privilege to have been able to spend this time with them. Nonetheless, I'm sure my analyses of these videos represent inner-city spaces and inhabitants will sometimes jar with the ways other people feel about them. In the next section I will look at the implications and limitations of this project in more detail.

Section 2: Implications and Limitations

This project has added to a number of fields of study. In the field of urban sociology, it has explored concrete examples of Lefebvre's (1991/1987) triad of spatial production looking at contemporary spatial practices, the production of representational spaces by urban music artists, and the challenges to the representational spaces produced by contemporary society's elites. It has also challenged Lefebvre's negative assessments of particular elements of capitalist spatial production, specifically the social housing estate and the car. It has also explored the role of artistic representation in struggles for a right to the city (Lefebvre, 1968; Harvey, 2012, Brenner, 2000), how these struggles often clash along lines of race, class, and gender, and how these struggles are represented in urban music videos. It has continued the exploration of black Atlantic cultural production, a set out by Gilroy (1993), and of the many ways in which London has been represented on screen. It has expanded on the field of cinematic urbanism (AlSayyad, 2006; Fitzmaurice & Shiel, 2003; Shiel, 2001; Koeck & Roberts, 2010) to include music videos in explorations of the relationship between the city and representations thereof. It has added to understandings of spatial scales (Brenner, 2000), how

different scales are represented, and how these scales can be represented using different and hybrid modes. As noted, there have been many findings to add to Brunsdon's (2019/2007) exploration of London, the way the local is invoked, the way landmarks are used, and the different scales of landmark that can be produced through audio-visual representation. It advances an understanding of music videos, adding the clash and freestyle video to Railton and Watson's (2011) typology, and exploring how music video analysis relates to the analysis of other audio-visual disciplines within the field of screen studies. It has added to an understanding of how modes of representation invoke and explore different scales. My analyses of the videos in this project have shown that these spaces play important roles in the connection of people to one another and to the city around them, and that they cannot be written off as fundamentally alienating entities.

Most of the artists involved in making these videos are or were from working-class backgrounds, and many of the spaces represented or used in these videos are associated with working-class inhabitation or use. These videos tell important stories about these spaces, what they have meant to working-class artists and urban residents, and how they have changed over time. These videos are also a continuation of the black Atlantic culture that Gilroy (1993) famously explored in the early 1990s. Most of the musicians whose videos are included in this thesis are black or mixed-race, and all of these five urban music genres were pioneered by black artists. The potency of Gilroy's work on the black Atlantic is that it encourages the foregrounding of race in London's contemporary social and cultural landscape. But importantly, this is an understanding of race, nationality, and culture not as fixed markers of people and spaces with immutable boundaries and essential cores, but as actively produced and fluid categorisations, existing in reality but always subject to change.

Understanding the representational complexity of these 22 videos is increasingly important in the current climate of policing in inner cities, not just in London but increasingly in other cities such as Manchester, in which urban music videos and lyrics, particularly those associated with UK rap and drill, are being used in criminal prosecutions. Indeed, the University of Manchester's Prosecuting Rap project organises expert witnesses to challenge the use of

videos and lyrics as evidence. The research presented in this thesis, which highlights the multiple spatial scales and modes of representation that these videos draw on and produce, suggests that public policy around the usage of artworks in court needs to take into careful consideration the complexity of urban music videos both lyrically and visually. I hope this work can lead to the reform of these current policing practices, through engagement with projects such as Prosecuting Rap and the campaign group Art Not Evidence to challenge the use of creative expression in court. This hope stems from the convivial aspiration for social change (Cory, 2020) on which I based this project, to highlight and challenge the forces and processes that are fragmenting London's inner city, and what is being fragmented by these forces and processes. I hope this project provides a foundation for me to continue in following this aspiration, hopefully through work as an expert witness with Prosecuting Rap, while also campaigning to stop the use of creative expression as part of criminal prosecutions.

As with any research project, there are some limitations to my thesis, and these limitations have affected my analyses in several ways. Finding artists to interview was difficult. There were many cases where I had an initial response which never materialised as a conducted interview because the artist was too busy, and many cases where I had no reply at all. I think this had a lot to do with the nature of freelance work, as artists working in a highly competitive field need to be careful and selective with how they use their time. It was also difficult finding people to interview who were involved in the production of urban music videos in the early-to mid-1990s, and to find information on the directors and producers of these videos, showing a lack of publicly available information at times. That being said, I am incredibly grateful for the five artists I was able to interview in the first year of the project: Dr Orson Nava, Andy Hylton, Yukki, Isabella Culver, and DIR_01. Each was extremely generous with their time, and their insights were invaluable for my understanding of the processes involved in the production of music videos, and how these have changed over time in the context of London.

My sample of videos also had to be limited, so there have been countless omissions that I could have included and that would have affected the way I analysed the videos that were included. The same is true of the genres I selected, the artists involved in these genres, those

that I interviewed for the project, and the time period I selected to begin and end my sampling period. This is both a limitation to the work I have presented here and a necessary foundation for what I have produced. Though I have by no means started many of the conversations I have explored in the course of this thesis, I have added to these conversations, and directed the conversation down routes and towards texts that might not have been explored had I not written this thesis. As with Gilroy's explorations in *The Black Atlantic* and Brunsdon's in *London in Cinema*, these analyses have produced a discourse which, like the city, can always be added to.

Finally, the multidisciplinary of the project meant that the analyses were not as systematic as they might have been had I opted for a single disciplinary approach. I could have just focussed on conducting and analysing interviews with artists, or I could have just focussed on the representational dynamics of the videos, without attempting to explore how these dynamics interact with social and spatial dynamics in the contemporary urban environment. As with all of the project's limitations, these are also strengths, as my approach produced answers to the research questions, and explorations of the research object, that would not have been possible otherwise. But, in future research, a single disciplinary approach, or a more systematic multidisciplinary approach, could advance on the explorations I have made in this thesis.

Section 3: Final Reflections

I began this thesis by reflecting on the many reputations of London, and my personal relationship to the city in which I was born and raised, specifically the area of New Cross. My feelings towards and understandings of this area, and to the city in which it is situated, have changed dramatically throughout the course of this project as I've learnt more about its history and the forces that have shaped it. I hope that, through this thesis, the reader will also have a new understanding of London, how it has been represented, and how these

representations have produced the city. Not just the areas designated as inner city, but also those that are connected to inner-city areas but often thought to be worlds apart.

On another personal note, this work has also encouraged me to think of all the spaces I have been to and lived in as actively produced rather than passively encountered, and that I am part of this process of spatial and social production. For the last two years of this project I have been living in Glasgow, making frequent trips back to London to visit family and friends, and to go to exhibitions and gigs, but experiencing the city as something of an outsider looking back in. This distance has impacted how I have thought about the spaces that I have been writing about, in granting this perspective of 'looking in' that I would not have had were I living in the city throughout. This distance has intersected with themes I discussed in the chapters above, of race, class, and space. But the writing has also impacted the way I have experienced and thought about the spaces I have been living in, not least Glasgow. At this point it is pertinent to explore where I might go next.

An obvious direction for future research would be to look at videos that fall within what I have called London's urban music videos that I wasn't able to include in this thesis. Including more videos can only add to the understandings produced by my analyses in the previous chapters, and add to the conversation, challenging some analyses, and producing more routes of exploration. I found the interviews that I conducted in the first years of the project incredibly interesting and helpful for understanding how music videos are produced, and the music video industry itself, how it has changed over the past few decades, and what state it's in now. Again, any future work could only benefit from the insight of more interviews with artists involved in the production of urban music videos and genres.

Another direction for future research would be to explore other cities around the world, the music genres that have emerged there, how the city is represented in the music videos associated with these genres, and how these genres and videos relate to our understanding of the cities and the nations in which they have emerged. Global cities in the black Atlantic

network, such as Birmingham, Manchester, Paris, New York, Philadelphia, or Los Angeles would be particularly interesting places to explore. These cities have been in close conversation with London over the past few centuries, and the music genres that have developed in these cities have shared lineages and points of reference. Glasgow itself has a history of trans-Atlantic slave trade involvement, inner-city development, waves of migration from increasingly diverse points across the globe and concurrent changing relationships of national representation and understanding. With its rich audio-visual scenes, it would also be a particularly interesting place to explore.

All of this potential future research would build on the work I've presented here. These music videos are situated within the various forces and processes that have produced and continue to produce London over the past few decades. These videos therefore reproduce particular alienating dynamics that are experienced in the everyday lives of the city's inhabitants: capital accumulation; classed, racialised, and gendered inequality; social mobility; and objectification, to name those most central to the discussions in this thesis. But these videos also play with these dynamics, exposing how they are produced, and showing how they are spatialised by invoking them through the performance of music and the process of visual representation. These videos represent differences between people, spaces, objects, social classes, times, performances, words, imaginations, and lives. They also represent connections between all of these things. They represent the inner city as a combination of spaces that can and do provide the setting, means, and reason for celebration, but also where alienating forces are produced and experienced, such as those of economic and housing precarity or racialised policing practices.

In these final reflections it is important to reiterate Lefebvre's emphasis on everyday life. It is this emphasis that is so important in the social realist tradition of representation, and the realm that is so effectively exposed and played with by weird and eerie representation. Everyday life is both "a realm of alienation" and the realm of connection (Wilson, 2013, p.371). It is the social space, frequently represented in urban music videos, in which the alienating forces of power are most diffuse, but also where the potential to disrupt these forces is most

potent. The representational focus on everyday life, and representational comparisons between everyday life and weird, eerie, and exceptional moments, highlights the possibilities that are constantly produced in contemporary London. All of the videos discussed in this thesis, and countless more that have not been included, represent the power dynamics that structure life in inner-city London, how these dynamics influence access to and use of space in the city, and how to contest these dynamics through representational means. They represent the fragmentation of inner-city communities, and how this fragmentation has been experienced by artists from these communities. They also represent how, in spite of this fragmentation, the convivial connections between urban inhabitants and urban spaces that playful cultural production can foster.

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