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# Boxing Obsession and Realness in London Rap: *Racism, Temporality, Narcissism*

Emilio G. Berrocal

**Abstract:**

London Rap belongs to the transnational public of hip-hop. As a result of the birth of the genre of the music-video (in the 1980s) and the diffusion of music TV channels like MTV (from the 1990s), hip-hop has become a worldwide public first and foremost because of its visual power. The internet revolution has further expanded the audio-visuality of hip-hop, particularly via the current roles of YouTube and social media. The cognitive change this passage entails, for the younger generations of hip-hoppers, is that the technology of the video has become more commonly used than that of the book to captivate an audience. Yet, as suggested in this thesis, the screen brings to completion the search for visual analogues for words that alphabetic writing, since the birth of philosophy in ancient Greece, developed. If digital audio-visual capitalism declares the crisis of modern nationalism based on print, what I call here the "boxing obsession" – the obsession whereby words need to mean things – is still far from being dead. We observe through interviews, lyrics, speech and music-video analysis how London Conscious Rappers ambiguously relate to the boxing obsession with regards to what concerns the imagination of ethnicities. In viewing the "political correctness" of the dominant discourse as the hypocrisy to unmask, the rappers rebel against the effects the boxing obsession produces, such as police brutality, the crypto-racism of media talk, and everyday racist attacks; but in reifying views of "blackness", "whiteness" and "Islam", and in attaching them to specific bodies on the basis of their physical appearance, they struggle to identify the causes. The fieldwork methodology here presented (an "exit from the text") offers a way for informants and anthropologists to definitively get to grips with the boxing obsession and move forward.

# Boxing Obsession and Realness in London Rap:

## *Racism, Temporality, Narcissism*

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2013

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# Introduction

**The Corporeality of the Athens School**

This is an ethnography about London hip-hop culture and the practice of rapping. It is based on fieldwork research that lasted altogether fifteen months, from October 2010 to Christmas 2011. The first three months were devoted to a preliminary exploration of the city, and the following twelve to intensive research. However, this dissertation is also about something else: a mechanism which precedes and exceeds the local particularities that this text will describe, and without which these particularities would not acquire the *disturbing mask* they wear today. Hip-hop, which is and has been for three decades now a *global culture*, is based, along with many other youth cultures in the West, on this mechanism that keeps returning. Paul Gilroy (1993), sociologist and cultural critic, has called it "sameness that changes", arguing that expressive black cultures on both sides of the Atlantic, among which he includes hip-hop, bring with them the inescapable ontological legacy of the pain and redemption of slavery. This is not what returns, rather, the controversy of this reading is. What specifically does return is the Nietzschian "eternal recurrence" with its problematic baggage, but also with the emancipatory force of the human, all too human, "will to power". This is both the *roots of racism and its perfect form in the multicultural society*, alongside the *possibility of overcoming it*. But this possibility, although unfading on the horizon, is unfortunately not in good shape today. And the reason for this is the *victory of narcissism*.

Perhaps if Christianity had not had the "stroke of genius", as Nietzsche (2006: 63) termed it, of inventing the afterlife, so-called Western civilisation would not have experienced the separation of the body and the soul, the present and the future; and maybe today we would accept death as Socrates (470/469-399 BC) did when drinking the fatal hemlock instead of being tormented by fear of death and trying to live longer. If ancient Greece really was the basis of Western thought, with its cyclical conception of time and understanding of corporeality, we would probably be able to cope with what always returns, in terms of the physiological and metaphysical needs of our species, differently than how we have been trained to do since Christianity adapted Plato's metaphysics to its purposes, a process in which St Augustine (354-430) was key. This is not to mythologise ancient Greece, which, according to modern ethics, had bad aspects too. The point is that what we call "modernity", as Galimberti (2005, 2012) rightly argues, is primarily Christianity. Science is not really opposed to the Christian faith, as both of them share the view of the future as progress. This progress will come either on earth, with the cures medicine provides the body as organism; on another planet, with the technologies physicists, engineers and geneticists are working on in order

to allow the transfer of humans to another planet were life on earth at risk[1]; or in the afterlife, where, if you live respecting certain moral codes, your body (because Christianity is about the resurrection of the body) will be rewarded. Marxism, like scientism, shares the same linear view of temporality, with its belief that a classless society will be imposed at the end of capitalism. Freud does the same, with the view that trauma occurs in infancy while recovery is placed in the future after the psychoanalytic treatment of the present[2].

In some sense therefore, this ethnography, while setting its sights on London rap as *corporeality* and *temporality*, is also an anthropology of Western modernity that deals with the *phenomenology of racism* in multicultural London. This work argues that the connection between modernity and racism is precisely the *eternal recurrence of narcissism* as a bio-cultural problem and, more importantly, that there is a way for the ethnographer to use fieldwork practice and ethnographic writing to overcome the recurence of racism.

The following is the problem that was raised by my ethnographic observations and around which this dissertation is based: London hip-hop, in the form of the "conscious rap" analysed here, articulates a "soft black nationalism", whereby, although hip-hoppers collectively engage in the practices of hip-hop (rapping, deejaying, breakdancing, graffiti) regardless of colour, ethnicity, gender and religion, they all feel obliged, in a Maussian kind of "obligation", to pay their respects to the narrative of the origins of hip-hop, according to which the culture was born in the South Bronx in the early 1970s out of the emancipatory struggle of African-Americans and blacks in general. Londoners are not alone in paying tribute to this narrative, as a voluminous literature on "hip-hop studies" outside of the US tells us (see Roth-Gordon 2009; Lin 2009; Urla 2001, and more generally Mitchell 2001). But the problem is that the same institutionalisation of hip-hop studies, as a sub-branch of cultural studies in American universities, embraces the view that hip-hop is rooted in the oral culture of African-Americans. *Black Noise* by Tricia Rose, first published in 1994, marks a watershed for the institutionalisation of hip-hop studies. Her thesis that hip-hop is a "post-literate orality" based on the African-American dozen was well received by departments of African-American studies and authoritative African-American intellectuals. Hip-hop had already been classified as "black music" by music journalists, critics, and TV commentators since it was transformed into a worldwide culture and transnational public in the 1980s and 1990s.

The explanation this thesis offers with regards to the problem of black nationalism is as follows: hip-hoppers around the world are not paying tribute to the narrative of hip-hop as "black

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[1] See the scenarios depicted by British physicist Stephen Hawking in the third episode of his documentary series *Into the Universe with Stephen Hawking: The Story of Everything*.

[2] This is the main criticism of Western modernity that Umberto Galimberti, a Jungian philosopher, raises in his work. I agree with his ideas and will use them as a basis later when considering the concepts of "anti-modernity" and "alter-modernity" in the understanding of Hardt and Negri 2009.

struggle" in itself; they are actually worshipping the technological medium that allowed hip-hop to become a global culture: the audio-visuality of TV, and subsequently the internet. But these are just the latest technological changes in the method of communication which need to be blamed for the essentialisation of hip-hop. Our discussion needs to start at the "invention of the alphabet", and Plato's (428/427-348/347 BC) words on the threat towards memory that writing represents. Writing establishes the *memory of the word as body*, in the same way that the Gospel of John does when referring to the temporal situation of "the beginning": "In the beginning was the Word and the Word was God" (John 1:1). For John "word" equals "God", and it is the memory of the word "God" that becomes a body. But a word is *materially* another thing: the movement of a human's larynx which allows the vibration of the vocal chords and results in the emission of sound via the oral apparatus, or a movement of the hands. Certainly a word is more than this. It is also a semantic attribution of a signified through a signifier. But first, whereby this "first" acquires a phylogenetic perspective, a word is a gesture and vocalisation. The first word our species ever produced, and any baby produces as I argue in Chapter 1 with the proponents of the gestural theory of the origin of language (see Arbib and Rizzolatti 1998), is a vocal sound attached to a movement of the hands. And it is the absence of this vocal sound and gestuality that is the reason why Plato didn't like "written" words. With the audio-visual technology of hip-hop, vocality and gestuality are once again in real-time. Yet millennia of the internalisation of writing and ideologies based on this technology have produced the situation whereby the black nationalism of hip-hop is soft exactly because "hard" is what I call here the *boxing obsession*.

By boxing obsession I mean, principally but not exclusively[3], the reductionist anxiety through which social actors manage to find an "ethnic seat" for themselves and others in response to an external pressure to box oneself ethnically, as displayed in censuses, all sorts of application forms (covering almost every aspect of everyday life such as the gym, the workplace, the hospital, the university etc.), as suggested by the audio-visual language of media, in political practices, and in public rhetoric. This is a reductionist anxiety rooted in the internalisation of the ideology of nationalism which, as Benedict Anderson (1991) argues, can exploit the imagination of a "homogeneous and empty time" thanks to the technology of "print capitalism". But its present legacy is heightened anxiety exactly because "audio-visual capitalism" has given back to the corporeality of the body that centrality which the book and the newspaper have masked. This is why the ideologies based on writing are in crisis; the fact that a nationalism *can be* soft testifies to

[3] The point I want to make is on racism. But, as will be made clear in the Conclusion, I see the boxing obsession as today's ideology of technological scientism which, according to Heidegger (1977), concludes the experience of philosophy from Ancient Greece to cybernetics. Therefore, the problem of racism needs to be seen within this bigger scenario.

precisely this. Yet those ideologies based on audio-visuality, such as hip-hop, are still weak (in Vattimo's sense of "weak thought", see Vattimo 1991; Rovati and Vattimo 2010) because the *immediacy* they offer is conquered by the "old" before the "new" manages to organise itself.

The immediacy invoked when watching a hip-hop video – the immediacy whereby the viewer interacts with performing bodies on the screen – is the immediacy the Gospel of John refers to when pointing to the event of the *word that becomes body*. If the memory of this event is the reason why the *anxiety is obsessive*, the event in itself is why the *boxing is recursive*, it keeps repeating itself. The immediacy of the relationship between the bodies on screen and the viewer is the positionality that Aristotle (384-322 BC) raised against Plato's idealism, rejecting his proposal of the hyperuranium world being responsible for the substance of the sensible world. Aristotle was an empiricist, and one might see in his criticism of Plato the announcement of the conflict between the transcendentalism of the Church and the empiricism of modern science. But Aristotle was not a rupture, he was rather a synthesis of what philosophy had thought in the two centuries before him. The difference between humans and animals, he observed in the *Politics*, is that the first are linguistic in addition to being social animals. This capacity is what makes them, along with other gregarious animals, *zoon politikon*, political animals. But this does not put them in any privileged position whatsoever; on the contrary, like any other animated and mortal entity in the sensible world (the ancient Greeks called humans "mortals"), they are exposed to the recursivity of the laws of nature over which they do not have any power at all.

It is with reference to the idea of corporeality of the Athens School, and in particular to Socrates' acceptance of the destiny of his partiality; to Plato's rejection of writing in the name of the temporality of such partiality; and to the centrality of this partiality to Aristotle's formulation of the zoon politikon, that I want to call the immediacy of the body-to-body interaction both in real-time and via a screen, "realness". Realness is both what makes the mechanism of the boxing obsession work and/or not work, in the sense that it creates the conditions to overcome it as well as to make it work tirelessly. This mechanism is the always-shifting balance between biology and culture, the *recursive simultaneity* of our being social and linguistic animals. I will tackle this point below and argue that this thesis embraces realness in order to "exit from the text"[4].

[4] In vindicating the legacy of the Athens School I am distancing myself from Nietzsche, who privileged the pre-Socratic world, particularly Eraclitus, and accused Socrates and the tradition that stems from him of imprisoning the dyonisiac moment of Greek culture. I believe that if Nietzsche had taken to extreme consequences the figure of the "OverMan", he would have probably reconciled himself with Socrates, and not allowed provocative negative readers to misinterpret his ideas. In another sense, Nietzsche himself allowed this misinterpretation. In reconciling him with Socrates, and not with Plato, I interpret him in a way whereby he would have possibly abandoned his anti-abolitionist beliefs, see Losurdo 2004.

**The Immanency and Transcendency of Realness**

Realness is an *immanent* corporeal relationship, whereby immanency here needs to be seen as unseparated from *transcendency*. To see them as separate would be to forget that the linguistic animal is first of all a *functionary of the species*.

One consistent way of describing this is to adopt the ethnographer John L. Jackson Jr.'s perspective. In *Racial Sincerity*, Jackson (2005) delves into how blackness is perceived in Harlem by black people, giving an ethnographic account of the sincerity/authenticity dichotomy, originally coined by Lionel Trilling in the field of literature. In his lectures delivered at Harvard in 1970, Trilling argues that the advent of modern literature brings with it a "stay-true-to-oneself" ideal, *authenticity*, which contrasts with the more intersubjective value of being a morally sincere person, *sincerity*. Sincerity is an older ideal, characteristic of Pre-Enlightenment literature, particularly observable in the works of popular playwrites like William Shakespeare. Jackson uses this framework to interpret his ethnographic context: he understands authenticity and sincerity as two interconnected but different categories of social solidarity and regimens of truth; the former representing a subject-object relationship, the latter a subject-subject one. With this continual deferment to the other subject, Jackson asserts, the truth of sincerity is always uncertain and never fully penetrable. In contrast the truth of authenticity, in happening outside of the corporeal relationship between bodies, that is to say in the "object", is an irrevocable truth.

Sincerity, I want to suggest, happens in the immanency of the carnal relationship actually taking place; authenticity in the "special" temporal relationship of transcendence. I call it "special" because this is when the *present is split* by the emergence of the reflexive, *transcendent ethos* of our species, the fact that *we can speak about the fact of speaking*. In one sense we are always immersed in the condition of sociality; in another, we are taken away from it when thinking in the loneliness of our minds. This splitting of the present is the *temporal battleground* where the *possibility* of the production of a word or linguistic option *and its negation* compete with one another. The physical ground where this fight actually takes place is on the level of sincerity of the interacting bodies. But the contending words and linguistic options can establish themselves at the expense of one another only if the battle is won in the special temporality of transcendence. In this sense sincerity, which is sensory and immediate, happens in the "here and now"; authenticity by contrast projects itself "after" such immediacy. And this is why the temporal ambit is so special: it is impossible to be after, in the future of, the here and now, the present, if you are rooted in the here and now. You are in the present of the relationship when projecting yourself after the present. Nonetheless, you create "mental space" for the future. What I am suggesting here is looking at the ambivalent temporality – the split present – in which the transcendent ethos of our species is expressed with the idea of *being*

*a space* and *having a space*. Being a space and having a space is what keeps occurring in the immanency of the realness: this is the recursive simultaneity we produce and are – being at the same time a linguistic and social animal[5].

Realness is the context in which the "truth" is made. This truth *has* to be "real" for the subjects involved in it, and straightforward as it is the information their nervous systems carry; but this *is* also a mysterious and ineffable thing for them, because they cannot really be in the body of the other, *in interiore homine* of the other subject, so as to be 100% sure of what is real for them in the contingency of the given interaction. Realness is, in this sense, both pre-linguistic, that is, inexpressible via syntax, and linguistic. It is both because it allows the linguistic reductionism to happen and at the same time provides a scapegoat for it, the material possibility of a different future. Realness is temporarily this *and*, in the ontological meaning given to it by Eduardo Viveiros De Castro (2003). It is "multiple" because it creates multiplicities: realness is and indeed has a *quasi-object*.

**First definition of transcendent ethos: *real-isation***

Allow me to read the recursive simultaneity of realness within the methodological framework that Amiria Henare, Martin Holbraad and Sari Wastell have defined as the "ontological turn" in anthropology, because their use of the notion of "things as heuristics" facilitates the doubleness (being/having) of realness (Henare et al. 2007). This notion, they argue, employs the "quiet revolution" which the works of anthropologists like Strathern, Gell, Wagner, Viveiros De Castro and Latour have progressively contributed towards bringing about. According to them, this revolution consists of a much more methodological focus on the ontology of the informants and puts less emphasis on answering the epistemological questions of the constructivist approaches. In discussing their proposal, I will consider the work of Viveiros De Castro and Latour, while Gell will be encountered later in the dissertation[6]. The definition of realness as a quasi-object requires an encounter with Latour first.

The quasi-object for Latour is the "hybrid", the intersection and interconnection between nature and culture, humans and non-humans, which modernism has tried to purify, establishing a "parliament of things". Such a purification is, however, destined to failure, because what is excluded from the "thing", like a sleeper virus, will always remain within it: that is why he argues that "we have never been modern", despite our rhetorical and political claims from the

[5] In offering this, I am employing Heidegger's concept of Being as a "thrown project" as expressed in *Time and Being* (Heidegger 1996), whereby Being is being-in-the world as a "thrown project" from which projects oneself.

[6] I do not engage with Strathern or Wagner, but with the Maussian tradition, see Chapter 3. In general, I integrate (or oppose) these mainly "Anglo-Saxon" sources with the Italian ethnologist Ernesto De Martino, see Chapter 1.

Enlightenment onwards (Latour 1993). It is not, to return to Trilling's opposition, that the advent of authenticity has killed sincerity, because the two have always existed together. And sincerity continued to exist in the bodily context of realness even after the Enlightenment. In this sense, the hybrid has happened in the past, disproving our previous statements; it is happening in the present and it will happen again in the future, mortgaging the validity of our future statements, unless we change them. It is here, at the point at which Latour attempts a reformist theory to box the hybrid in a different way than how modernity has done, for instance by establishing a "network of hybrids", that Henare, Holbraad and Wastell turn their back on him. They do so with a methodological caveat which differentiates between "things as heuristics" and "things as analytics". When Latour stresses that modernity, in unsuccessfully trying to purify and box the hybrid, has contributed to its proliferation (to the extent that science is today aware of it and of the illusion it itself created and believed in the past), and when this proliferation and awareness is opposed to the lacking qualities of the traditional and non-modern societies, which in never having tried to purify the hybrid have basically contained it, his use of the category of hybrid already presupposes a classification. Hybrid here becomes an analytical thing. The core objective of the editors of *Thinking Through Things*, by contrast, is to praise the methodological heuristic use of "things". Their proposal is designed for fieldwork research. As such, it doesn't refute anthropological theory, the elaboration of analytic categories. But this can happen only after fieldwork: it is necessary to gather "data" in order to elaborate theory and only data can drive the theory, not the other way round. In this sense, they argue, it might even be that the data we gather suggests that the "network of hybrids" is not a consequential general theory (Henare et al. 2007: 7).

Although this criticism is not as straightforward as it seems[7], Henare, Holbdraad and Wastell share with the founding perspective of this research the understanding that anthropology is very much an inquest *about* and *into* the realness of the human. It is "into" as it is an inquest carried out through the body-to-body interaction of the fieldwork research. But it is also "about" because it reflects on the experience of the "into". In their diversion from Latour there is a vindication of the temporal primacy of the fieldwork project over the anthropological theory. Things as heuristics first, then their analytical collocation in a classificatory system: that is to say, realness first, boxing second. It is here that their temporal primacy of fieldwork enables the seeing of the having and

[7] The authors say: "It may be the case that not everything works like a network of hybrids" (Henare et al. 2007: 7). I find this line and the previous one "We want to propose a methodology where the 'things' themselves may dictate a plurality of ontologies" quite obscure and counterproductive. It is clearly the intent of the editors to reconcile their proposal with Viveiros De Castro's multinaturalism. But this is not a fieldwork methodology: it is already a theory. Despite the fact that quantum physics may tell us, giving basis to Asian spiritualities, that everything is a "network of hybrids", in making the case that it might not be like this the editors would oppose Latour's theory with another theory, not with a methodology. In so doing they seem to miss the point that Latour's network of hybrids is not necessarily a general theory but a general political proposal which requires action. It is with reference to the action such a proposal implies that the methodology here discussed makes the step that Henare et al. do not risk taking.

being of realness.

To take difference seriously, the authors argue, anthropologists should abandon discussions about epistemology and address directly the status of ontology. This means that when informants share with an anthropologist the knowledge that "powder is power", as in the ethnographic case presented by Holbdraad (2007), rather than the anthropologist assuming that the informants are wrong because, according to the anthropologist's own classificatory system, powder is just powder and not power, they should take that information as local ontology, not as local culture (see the debate on "ontology just another word for culture", Carrithers et al. 2010). The difference is methodological because at stake is the anthropologist's capability for giving an account of that human capacity that the authors call "thinking through things":

> anthropological analysis has little to do with trying to determine how other people think about the world. It has to do with how we *must* think in order to conceive a world the way they do. In this sense the method of thinking through things, geared towards creating new analytical concepts, is a recursive one. […] it is because our informants […] think through things […] that we might think of doing the same. (Henare et al.: 15)

Anthropologists, in sharing the same human condition as their informants, think through things as well, simply because not only "our experience of things can be conceptual", whereby a thing like powder can be a concept like power, but also because you need to think of it to create it.

> Think of it. You the reader, 'see' the point we are striving to 'make' here by making it for yourself, perhaps lifting your eyes from the text occasionally, to 'think the point through' (much as we have had to do when writing it). So too anthropologists may see 'different worlds' by creating them. Creating thing-concepts like 'powder is power', not so much in our mind's eye, as in our eye's mind (ibid.).

Here is demonstrated the space of the "real". In stressing the materiality ("lifting your eyes from the text occasionally") of the heuristic mental procedure, Henare et al. end up "seeing" in what I want to call the *activity of real-isation* the recursivity of the linguistic animal. What keeps happening on our side is the continuous creation, through the eye's mind – that is to say both mental and physical – of things as realities. Things are made up, they acquire a space and while being spatialised they become being, ontology, reality. This drives me to give a first definition of the transcendent ethos of our species: it is the *continuous realisation of things that live (ontologically) in the present, by making space (the possibility) for other future's realities*. But this definition also allows us to enter into the situation of the boxing obsession as *conflict*, experienced in the corporeal relationship of realness, *between the thing as analytics and the thing as heuristics*.

Dimitri Theodossopoulos has recently adopted and adapted to the general context of how the

Greeks imagine the Turks the notion of "hollow identity", originally formulated by Ardner and Chapman "to account for the image of an ethnic group as this is forged or reinvented by its neighbours, who impose upon it from outside their own meanings and categorical distinctions" (Theodossopolous 2006: 4). These impositions from the external can vary among a possible range of taxonomic options. The "Turks" could be this way, that way, or another way for the Greek national, depending on the socio-historical and personal circumstances in which the one who represents the Other is embedded. This is why, Theodossopoulos suggests, hollow identities are never completed, always becoming and subject to internal change.

I want to suggest that the incompleteness of identity is due to the level of realness involved in the carnal relationship between bodies in any circumstance. Their incompleteness is given by the unpredictability of the activity of real-isation that the bodies of the relationship will be involved in. Here is the problem: the ethnographic case suggested by Theodossopoulos is one where *realness is complicit in the boxing obsession*. The fact that a Greek can each time mobilise a representation of the Turks, regardless of it being different, tells us that they have in mind a *bodily representation* of what being a Turk means upon which to continuously apply different propositions. This bodily representation is the carnality of the hollow identity, the immutable nucleus which gives meaning to the generalising attempt of the category of "Turks" (as well as "Greeks"). Yes, the sincerity of the relationship might push the Greek to realise how untruthful their previous representation of the "Turks" was. But the regimen of truth of the experience will be put aside when such a different representation is going to be applied to the same third "fictional" body that the "real" body of the relationship has proved to be wrong. This third body, at once dethroned and then rethroned, is the body as object (authenticity) and it is the body of the "Turks". A body which was dethroned to create the present, to then be re-throned, as happened in the past, to occupy the future. It is in this generalising attempt, towards the future going backward, that the boxing obsession tries to replace sincerity with authenticity. The replacement puts the preordering of the classificatory system (things as analytics) as a precondition of the "here and now" (things as heuristics), making up the "body as analytics". It follows that if we agree to see racism as a belief in ethnic boxes, without necessarily involving an idea of hierarchical relation between them (as in the interpretation of Stolke 1995), we cannot escape the conclusion that the *boxing obsession is racist* (more in Chapter 1).

Nevertheless, the "body as heuristics" has happened in the sincerity of the relationship. It has left a space, not defined as that which will be established by the fictional space of the things as analytics, because sincerity is uncertain and in-the-making, but defined enough to be a potentiality. Realness is and has a "quasi-object", I said, but we should probably now call it a *beyond-object* in the sense that it expresses an excess that the successive classification and fixation in literal boxes

will be very likely unable to capture. It is in considering the "potentiality" and "excess" of the realness that we can now encounter Viveiros De Castro's notion of "multi-naturalism". In reality, the connection with Viveiros De Castro will take place indirectly because my real objective is to position the notion of realness within the field of possibilities that Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri (2000, 2004, 2009), borrowing from Baruch Spinoza and Gilles Deleuze[8], call "multitude".

Ghassan Hage (2012) notices how in *Commonwealth*, the final component of Hardt and Negri's "Empire" trilogy (which concerns the order of globalisation, *Empire*, and its counter-power, *Multitudo*), they quote Viveiros De Castro's work to illustrate the notion of multitude (or "common" as they have recently called it) as "alter-modernity" in opposition to "anti-modernity". What is "alter", for Hardt and Negri, is a "becoming", becoming the rupture with modernity that anti-modernity, for being dichotomically opposed to it, is unable to produce. Viveiros De Castro's study of Arawete cosmology is presented, in this framework, as an alternative "biopolitical rationality" to modern epistemology:

> […] Amerindians conceive animals and other nonhumans as "persons", as kinds of humans, such that human interactions with what would normally be called "nature" take a form of something like "social relations". As a result, whereas modern philosophy (from Kant to Heisenberg) posits that the point of view creates the object, here the point of view creates the subject; and whereas modern philosophy conceives of one nature and many cultures, here there is one culture (all are in some sense human) but many natures (occupying different worlds). (Hardt & Negri 2009: 123)

In contrast to the multiculturalism of modern philosophy, Amerindian multinaturalism, Hardt and Negri continue, is a universe where

> Becoming is prior to Being and where the relation to alterity is not just a means of establishing identity but a constant process: becoming jaguar, becoming other. Our aim here – and Viveiros de Castro's too – is not to advocate an un-modern Amerindian ontology but rather to use that perspective to critique modern epistemology and push it toward an altermodern rationality. (Hardt & Negri: 124)

Hage is not surprised by this appropriation of an anthropological argument by theorists of radical politics. This is in line, he argues, with the recent change of agenda of radical movements around the world. From Egypt's Tahrir Square, to Spain's "Indignados" and Occupy Wall Street, this movement has materially occupied a space rather than "passing" through a space. The difference, according to Hage, is all in the move from a sociological (anti-modernity) radical politics to an anthropological (alter-modernity) one. What is occupied, Hage seems to be saying, is the very

[8] Deleuze is a key reference also for Viveiros De Castro and, as seen in Chapter 5, also for this thesis.

possibility that "another world is possible", as the slogan of the alter-globalisation movement, inaugurated in Seattle in 1999, has claimed globally. It is the possibility of other realities, other ontologies, other perspectives, which are occupying space in the here and now of the present, fighting against the occlusive attitude of the "parliament of things" (as per Latour), or modern epistemology (as per Hardt and Negri). What the occupiers seem to be doing therefore, to paraphrase Hage, is the job of the anthropologist, at least in the sense of carrying out their ethico-political function. Which is to say: explaining that we *can* embrace the possibility, the alter, because the alter is not different to us. Moreover, what is anthropology actually about? Henare et al. already made the point: "[anthropology] has to do with how we *must* think in order to conceive the world the way [our informants] do". This thesis fully embraces the space of the possibility of the realness and it defends it, in an ethico-political sense, like the people in Tahrir Square, Madrid, New York, London and many other places around the world have done. That is why the methodology followed is one which promotes the act of *exiting the text*. But this requires the anthropologist to embrace a second and more demanding definition of the transcendent ethos of our species.

**Second definition of transcendent ethos: *denial of coevalness***

A *jump* is necessary to exit the text, an ethico-political push. I do not promote a "turn", but a "push". This is the push that says the *job of the anthropologist is not only to write*. The push is therefore in opposition to the "Geertzian model", so-called only because Geertz asked "what does the ethnographer do? – he writes" (Geertz 1973: 19). Anthropologists have actually always been writing. And they have been writing even more since Geertz formulated and answered such a question.

The movement of reflexivity in anthropology has encouraged not only writing but also reflecting upon writing, the pioneers of which were also motivated by an ethico-political push. The 1984 Santa Fe seminar, which produced the volume of essays *Writing Culture* (Clifford and Marcus 1986), took place at a historical moment in which anthropology was still shaken up by the scandal of having been an instrument of colonialism. Geertz's interpretativism represented in that conjuncture an interesting hermeneutic attempt, able to give back to the discipline its scientific credibility, although he proposed seeing anthropology as a science "sui generis", one that proceeds in a "zig-zag" between "science and fiction" (Geertz 1973). Apart from the power of the perspective itself, intepretativism also gained popularity through the fact that the attempt was made outside the European academia which was seen as being organically embedded in the imperial past of the old continent. There were, however, already disturbing episodes of American anthropology's involvement in the expansionist foreign policies of the now globally powerful United States when

Geertz published *The Interpretation of Cultures* in 1973[9]. Maybe it is also for this reason that the convenors of the Santa Fe seminar did not feel that interpretativism had satisfied the ethico-political push of the 60s and 70s. Inspired by Geertz's formula nevertheless, they started to write about the act of writing the Other, reflecting upon the literary strategies of writing ethnography. Geertz's attack on the epistemological status of anthropology as a science allowed them to analyse traditional anthropology's writings from the point of view of the assertiveness of language, seeing in the reification of essentialist stances on the Other the real assistance anthropology gave the colonial logic of power. *The Nuer*, Evans Pritchard's classic ethnography of colonial Sudan, appeared to be an epistemological and political problem in the eyes of those that soon acquired the label of "post-modern" (see Rosaldo's contribution in particular, Clifford & Marcus 1986: 77-97).

Lila Abu-Lughod took this argument further, criticising the editors' decision not to include feminist ethnographic work, deemed not innovative (Clifford & Marcus 1986: 20-21), or that of the "halfies" – "people whose national or cultural identity is mixed by virtue of migration, overseas education or parentage" (Abu-Lughod 1991: 137). According to Abu-Lughod, this exclusion reflects a general attitude of Western anthropology: that of writing *just* for Western anthropologists. Feminists and native anthropologists also write for a feminist and native audience, and in so doing, she notices, they are much more careful in the usage of the term "culture". Rather than writing culture, Abu-Lughod suggested ethnographers "write against culture", noting how the term "culture" embodies a generalising imprint with which it cannot be used in anti-essential ways (ibid.: 143-154).

The methodological argument of this thesis radicalises Abu-Lughod's point by considering that you cannot escape essentialism when boxing in a text, when establishing things as analytics. This project therefore addresses *the impossibility of not essentialising the Other in ethnographic writing*. Even if the term culture is not used, there will be other terms, such as the pronoun "They", to mean the people the ethnographer is required to be accountable for in writing, with the primary goal of producing an understanding of a particular situation in a given time and space. This is what the reader will expect to find and will eventually find when reading an anthropological work. They will find it in the same recursive way that Henare et al. suggest when asking for the complicity of the reader to "see" the point they are making – that is to say, to make points through the "eye's mind" ("lifting up your eyes from the text occasionally"). This will happen no matter what, no

[9] The classic example of this is Project Camelot, a social science research project of the US Army started in 1964 and which involved the active participation of anthropologists in the analysis of conflict in foreign countries. Anthropologists' information on local populations was already being used by the US Army in the Korean War and would be used in the Vietnam War. For a historical account of this and its relationship with the present, see McFate 2005.

matter what self-attributed anti-essentialist strategy the writer puts in place to "see" them and to make you "see" the point differently. This essentialism is indeed linguistic reification. But it is not necessarily the reification that a certain materialist literature has seen as smoke to the eyes.

This is no different, I argue, to the activity of realisation presented above involving the advocates of the methodology of thinking through things: making up the thing as heuristics. But here is the problem: the things as heuristics made while reading ethnography are things that can only simulate the immanency of the fieldwork realness. They have not been made by the reader there, "into" the realness of the body-to-body interaction between the ethnographer and their informants, but whilst reading the account of an ethnographer writing "about" the realness. They are made *without* that realness, not within it. They are of course made within another realness, which is the *strange realness* established between a subject, the reader, and an object, the text. Subject-object is the relationship of authenticity; but this is also subject-subject since the reader recognises that another subject has written the text. The call for complicity with the reader from Henare et al. is an example of how the reader can recognise a level of familiarity with the author. There is a commonality involved in that, which is both expressible, as I am doing, and inexpressible, as I cannot do. There is a corporeality in that call, one that precedes the writer and the reader, but which the writer can intentionally evoke, although not fully control. In this sense, reading is also a subject-subject relationship, as is the case with sincerity. But here there's no bi-directionality: the directionality is only object-subject, whereby the subject can go back to reading the text as many times as needed to clear their doubts ("what does the author *really* want to say here?"). This is a possibility that the subjects involved in the immanency of sincerity do not have. They cannot go back in time to be there "again" when the thing as heuristics happens. When reading a text, these things as heuristics, in being fixed in a classificatory system (the text), cease to be such and become things as analytics. The strangeness of the realness allows this passage from the thing as heuristics to its analytic fixation. But this realness is "strange" because it is its temporal status in being so. It is an *immanency applied post-hoc*, namely, an immanency taken out from the level of simultaneity in which the fieldwork thing as heuristics happens.

It is for this reason that my proposal also radicalises Johannes Fabian's deconstructionism in *Time and the Other*. Inspired by the same ethico-political push discussed above, Fabian (1983: 31) argued, one year before the Santa Fe seminar, that the real scandal of the encounter between anthropology and Imperialism – to paraphrase the title of Talal Asad's *The Colonial Encounter* – is evident in what he calls the "denial of coevalness". By this he means the "Intersubjective Time" that the ethnographer and informants share in the experience of fieldwork. This is a time the same ethnographer will deny, "circumventing or pre-empting coevalness", when theoretically writing

about the Other and putting the Other in generic statements meant to dissipate doubts about "them". When this takes place, the Other will be incarcerated in Their Time as opposed to Our Time ("Typological Time"), the individual time of the writer and reader, denying therefore the "Interpersonal Time" that took place in fieldwork (ibid.: 33). Fabian calls this strategy the "allochronic discourse" and sees it as a strategy of writing that characterizes the discipline since its birth. French structuralism and American relativism, the two major schools of thought of the discipline when his book was written, perpetuated this allochronic tradition, born within the paradigm of British evolutionism, although they were both committed to facing the scandal of the imperial domination of the Other (see Chapter 2: 37-69). The study of man, he powerfully concludes, was and continued to be the "science of other men in another Time" (ibid.: 143).

My radicalisation of Fabian involves declaring any attempt put in place by the ethnographer to not "circumvent or preempt coevalness" when writing a text a failure. This is indeed a problem that cannot be solved by a mere process of writing. If it were so, then one might conclude that coevalness can somehow be secured when the ethnographer gives narrative accounts, that is to say when the narration is vivid, sensory. But that's exactly when the simulation of the fieldwork realness is triggered – that strange realness that although providing a relationship of immanency (subject-subject) is a posteriori immanency (object-subject), namely an inevitable rupture of the simultaneity of fieldwork realness. In this sense, we can easily assume that with the postmodern urge to write, anthropology has continued to be the science of other men in another time even after Fabian's work.

This strange realness is not a characteristic exclusive to the text. Hip-hop became a worldwide culture thanks to the strangeness of this realness. You can indeed have the same simulation taking place with other types of media technology and other types of object, such as when watching a video, listening to a record, speaking on the phone or chatting via a keyboard on the net. Such a strange realness can be understood with the notion of "secondary orality", by which Ong, in employing McLuhan's metaphor of the "global village", means the renewed technological and cultural interest in the spontaneity of communication (Ong 1982: 133). A spontaneity that, in his view, strives to go back to the level of immanency where communication before the invention of writing took place. It strives unsuccessfully because it is a communication that has internalised writing. Therefore simulation – that's why "secondary" – is the only thing left.

Ong's propositions, however, are only partially helpful in acknowledging the cognitive problem this thesis discusses. In contrast, his neat distinction between oral and literate societies reflects precisely what Jacques Derrida would call the "phono-logocentism" of Western modernity. It is here that the boxing obsession needs to be placed. And it is in accordance with Derrida's view

of writing as *leaving a trace* that we need to understand the status of the strange realness. It seems pacific to say that the "explosion of writing" he predicted in 1967's *Of Grammatology* really happened with the internet revolution when blogs, iPhones and other interactive technologies maximised our possibility to leave a trace. The great problem with Derrida's formulation is that the "ideology of the book", a product of Western logocentrism, that he saw as dying, is still far from being dead[10] (Derrida 1997: 6-27). This is not a problem of how audio-visual and digital capitalism manages to exploit such a strange realness, rather it concerns its *role in what produced capitalism*.

What I suggest is twofold: on the one hand, I claim that what the strange realness really simulates is *the experience of touching the body of another* through which our ancestors probably began to mutually make sense of the world; that is by developing a *gestural language* among themselves upon which sound has been attached. This is the suggestion raised in Chapter 1, building on the mid-1990s discovery of "mirror neurons": a pre-linguistic audio-visual mechanism of "embodied simulation" which, according to some in the neuroscience debate, played a decisive role in the evolution of the species (see Gallese 2005). On the other hand, audio-visual and digital capitalism exploits this pre-linguistic level of communication because it *feeds its biological need for self-referentiality* whereby one, through watching a music-video on YouTube, can *watch one's own past*, and by listening to a rap record on an iPod one can *listen to one's own past*, in the same way our species can and could *touch one's own body and hear the sound of one's own voice* when developing language. What this implies is that the explosion of writing in the electronic era has been an *explosion of narcissism* in the sense of narcissism being inscribed in the biological possibility that humans, as linguistic animals, have to make sense of the world. The *strangeness* of the realness, in other words, is all due to the *speciality* of the temporality in which the transcendent ethos of our species happens. It is here that the "denial of coevalness" begins and it is inescapable. That is the second definition of transcendency[11].

It may be argued that my use of Derrida contradicts my attempt to present the progression Socrates→Plato→Aristotle with regards to what Western modernity did not develop. Derrida (1981: 67-186) places the beginning of logo-centrism precisely at Plato's refusal of writing. While this refusal is made in writing and after writing has been internalised, if it is the beginning of something – even though it is misleading to think in this way – it is the beginning of *narcissism as a principle of social organisation expressed through the control of words*. There is narcissism in Plato's speech-

[10] Derrida proposes viewing Hegel as the last philosopher of the book and the first of writing.

[11] In defining narcissism as an inescapable condition of the transcendent ethos of our species, I am not taking into consideration Freud's understanding of narcissism as expressed in 1914's *On Narcissism: An Introduction*. This is not to refute his interpretation, but rather to push it forward by taking advantage of what neuroscience can tell us today that Freud did not know. In general, what I am doing here, as will be clear in Chapter 1, is reworking, under a theory of language framework, the centrality of touch in Freud's reading of the "sexual" and Husserl's phenomenology, through a confrontation with neuroscientific evidence.

centrism as interiorisation of the principle that whoever controls the word has social power. His refusal of writing, I will argue in Chapter 5 with Foucault (2010), is made in the name of "ascendancy", the real-time relationship between an orator and the audience at the agora, in which the orator is appreciated by the audience. Although Plato, in his dialogues, spoke against bad orators, he had a rather self-referential view, if an enlightened one, of who should run the city-state and did not think democracy was practically possible[12]. Aristotle's empirical methodology, in this sense, was an important cultural antidote to Plato's "will to power". When referring to *narcissism of the presence* as a point of junction and separation between biology and culture I am talking about Nietzsche's will to power. It follows that when I say "exit from the text" I really mean "control of narcissism". But what does this mean for an ethnographer?

**The Gramscian Fieldworker**

Tim Ingold comes very close to what I propose when he calls for an ethnography free of the "tyranny of the method", challenging what he sees as the institutionalisation of ethnography as a "servant" to anthropology (see Ingold 2011: 229-243). This is the "very scandal" of anthropology, according to Ingold, one that has severe consequences for the way anthropology is taught at university. Here the student is constructed, like the informant, to be a "receiver of knowledge" from the teacher, instead of the two engaging in a participatory practice. Anthropology is thus presented as what anthropologists do and not what happens in a classroom (ibid.: 242-243). My point continues his. By "tyranny of the method", I mean the fieldwork project in which the ethnographer is only concerned with writing ethnography and sees only a "book", not people, providing each month a possible table of contents for their ethnographic book, placing the book before any possible unexpected development their relations with the informants might bring about.

However valid Ingold's point, I do not agree with him when he separates anthropology from ethnography by re-working Radcliffe Brown's dichotomy of nomothetic vs idiographic, whereby anthropology as nomothetic is engaged with theoretical comparisons, while ethnography is an idiographic description. While Ingold's "dwelling perspective", built around Gibson's ecological psychology and Heidegger's existentialism, is in keeping with the idea of anthropology here presented, and particularly his suggestion that *anthropology is an attitude*, I argue that in confining ethnography to description he is doing anything but freeing it, he is instead aborting its potential.

Freeing ethnography would mean anthropologists interpreting fieldwork as a *participatory dialogue* and not a description. Books are about describing, while attitudes are about living. But this doesn't mean that we refuse to write a text. This thesis is accompanied by other forms of text, such

[12] To be possible, as expressed in the *Republic*, it is necessary to remove sophists and rhetoricians who, like poets, use the motion of affects over that of reason to impress the audience.

as a music album and a music-video[13], the texts of digital capitalism. Yet this is done to *come back to fieldwork*, to keep dialoguing. We go back to the text to jump out of it again and again, never giving in to the boxing, in the same relentless way the things as heuristics do in relation to the things as analytics. By "exiting the text", therefore, I want to affirm a *possibility-driven methodology* in which the realness of the fieldwork relationship can develop all its unpredictable potentiality. The lesson of Nietzsche, the father of the deconstructionism of the past century, is precisely that the centrality of realness is twofold: on the one hand, one cannot do anything against its recursivity, on the other, we have the greatest power, the power to control the point where biology and culture separate themselves. Antonio Gramsci (1891-1937) seems to support this claim when he proposes the model of the "organic intellectual", a figure which would definitively accommodate the pedagogical requests advanced by Ingold regarding teaching anthropology.

It is not an audacious parallel to draw, that of reading Gramsci's famous metaphor of "hegemony" alongside my understanding of the boxing obsession. As the American folklorist Stephen Obrys Gencarella remembers, Gramsci developed his political use of the notion of hegemony by adapting it from the linguistic studies he was carrying out at the University of Turin, where Professor Matteo Bartoli, a pioneer in linguistic geography, was teaching his theories of "irradiation" (see Gencarella 2010: 229). But it is not Gramsci's notion of hegemony that is of particular relevance here. Or at least, it is only relevant when compared to his understanding of the role of the intellectual.

In his *Prison Notebook*, Gramsci (1964) differentiates between two types of intellectual: the "traditional" and "organic" intellectuals. The first type of intellectual is an executor of the dominant ideology, the hegemony, while the second fights against the current hegemony. The organic intellectual fights the hegemony by carrying out the role of the "culture organiser". When the intellectual does so, they are playing the "war of position", which is the war of ideas. Gramsci opposes this to the "war of movement", the war fought with guns and bombs. The organic intellectuals are organic to something: a class, a community, a party, a country, and so on. They are organic as long as they are "sentimentally attached" to the group they belong. It is in the context of the groups to which they organically belong that the intellectuals play the leading role of the culture organisers.

I want to replace the adverb "sentimentally" with "sensorially" to say that fieldwork researchers are organic to their "object" of study at the precise moment they "go native". "Going

[13] Both the music-video and the album are available online. The music-video here: www.youtube.com/watch?v=H7sweWV0N6Y, or alternatively search "Rebuild Remake Remaking Europe" on YouTube. The album: remakingeurope.bandcamp.com, or alternatively search "Remaking Europe Bandcamp" on Google.

native" is a key trope of the anthropological literature on fieldwork: in a practical sense it means capturing the "native point of view", to quote Geertz (1983: 70), and this "capturing" is what differentiates a successful ethnographic endeavour from an unsuccessful one. I have suggested that capturing the informants' point of view is when the thing as heuristics happens in the body-to-body interaction of fieldwork. I argue that it is then, when an understanding has been produced, that the fieldworker can become an organic intellectual. But what does this mean? And in what sense can the fieldworker start to exercise the role of the culture organiser?

Here the jump out of the text becomes a practical response to the ideas of Dell Hymes, himself also motivated by the same ethico-political push mentioned above, who suggested "reinventing anthropology" and making it a "possession of the people of the world" (Hymes 1974: 54). As we have seen, anthropology has been largely reinvented as anti-essentialist and ontologically possibilist: the possibilities of the *alter*, of the Other in the Self and the Self in the Other. And that's exactly, I suggest, what to communicate to the informants. But this means more than letting the informants read the ethnography. It means collectively creating ways to *inhabit the anthropological attitude*. This is much more complicated than "lecturing the informants"; it implies instilling in them the attitude of thinking "about" the realness "within" the realness, embodying in them the methodology of pointing at the disconnections between the things as heuristics and as analytics. In other words, anthropology can become a possession of the people of the world only if the *informants become anthropologists of themselves*.

This is why Gramsci's take on intellectuals is so relevant. The possibility that informants can become intellectuals is all in their relationship with the fieldworker. It is not appropriate to keep referring to them as "informants", as in this project the informants are more than this: they are all potential allies – the anthropologist can play the game of the war of position with them. The horizontal term "ally" conveys the meaning of the mentor-pupil relationship Gramsci had in mind when differentiating between the organic and the traditional intellectual. The latter do not see themselves as a mentor, but as one who has to teach and instruct the pupil. In contrast, the former interprets this relationship in a mutually empowering way, whereby it will not be clear who is who as both poles of the relationship learn from each other and teach each other. It is Gramsci's conviction that "any man is a philosopher", that is to say, has the intellectual capacity to produce abstract thought – what I have called here the "transcendent ethos" – letting us understand that the job of the intellectual is precisely to promote this in order that the pupils, masses, subalterns and so on, can eventually become mentors of themselves.

I must specify that the model of the Gramscian fieldworker I propose needs to depart from Gramsci himself. Gramsci in fact did not have an empowering concept of the popular masses, the

folk. Although he was very critical of Italian elitist literature, like that represented in *I Promessi Sposi* by Alessandro Manzoni, because it looked down on the popular world, the same hegemonic discontent operated in Gramsci's views on the need to eradicate folklore and educate the masses. In this sense, the criticism expressed by Gencarella according to which Gramsci would "bear the hallmarks of a-turn-of-the century elitism that decreed folk thought primitive or antithetical to rational understanding" (Gencarella 2010: 227) is certainly an inescapable one. But traditional anthropology might even be charged with the same original sin. Gramsci nevertheless provides a model of political intervention which can go beyond his own bias, and it is here that the model of the organic intellectual inadvertently becomes compatible with the unpredictability of the fieldwork realness.

**Place and Questions**

What has been outlined above does not in any way call for the abolition of the object of study. The turning of the fieldworker into a Gramscian Intellectual is something that can only take place *in medias res*, only during fieldwork, "once there" for the ethnographer. Obviously, this model of doing ethnography implies that what happens during fieldwork will inevitably influence the life and trajectory of the researcher after fieldwork has ended. But this is probably true for any fieldworker. In this case, however, there is an indefinite continuation of the exercise of the role of the organic intellectual for the ethnographer that would challenge the same idea of "detachment". This is the Bergsonian "duration" I will refer to in Chapter 5 and in the Conclusion. For the moment it is enough to say that before fieldwork encounters take place, nothing changes with regards to traditional anthropology in terms of identification of an object of research for the would-be fieldworker. In this stage the researcher has to formulate a research question the answer to which could contribute to expanding the understanding of one or more particular areas of study, or even create a new area of study on the basis of the understanding produced. This all leads me to express what my research question was, what it ended up being, and how this thesis is structured.

Originally my research question was: What is the role of hip-hop in the ethno-genesis process of "Black, Asian and White" youths in London? The reason behind it was the following. In 2008 I graduated in *Demo-Ethno-Anthropological Disciplines* from the University of Rome "La Sapienza", with an ethnographic dissertation on multiculturalism and hip-hop in Rome in which I encountered the rap music of some Black Italians and so-called "second generation migrants", a sociological category that at that time was starting to have a place and recognition in the Italian public (Queirolo Palmas 2005; Berrocal 2010, 2012). Building on my previous work in Rome in which I identified the role of hip-hop as a tool of resistance and a source of identity for my

informants, I wanted to have a better understanding of the link between "hip-hop-descendants of migrants" in some other European cities with an older experience of inward migrations. My idea was to produce a European portrait of the sons and daughters of migrants engaged in hip-hop. In this sense, the rap of the *banlieue* riots in France in autumn 2005 and the rap of the 7/7 terror attack in London, carried out by home-grown terrorists[14], made Paris and London two important candidates for my fieldwork: "multi-sited" (Marcus 1995) ethnographic research between Rome, Paris and London was in fact my original proposal. I soon realised, though, that this was too ambitious a plan for a PhD, where only one year could be spent on fieldwork. While the idea of depicting the European situation of the Other Within via hip-hop still informs the programmatic vision of this dissertation, I later opted for fieldwork in just one location, London, where I spent the whole of 2011 doing fieldwork.

I preferred London to Paris because of a chance encounter I had in the city with a fascinating East London Muslim singer-songwriter, Babar Luck, in September 2009, during a two week visit before the start of my PhD programme in Durham in October. This singer-songwriter was not necessarily a rapper, rather a reggae and world-music artist, but rap and hip-hop obviously played an important role in his music and attitude. The fact that I befriended him when I had the opportunity to see him again in Durham[15] made me realise that some factors were in place to make my research in London successful. Paris by contrast was a place where no such factors were in place by the time of writing a proposal.

Once immersed in the fieldwork reality from my East London base, I could experience other kinds of pressing questions. The foremost and more personally loaded ones were: why was it that some Muslim men on the street greeted me with *assailamalekum*, and why was it that some other people racially abused me because of their assumption that I am a Muslim? Why had I started, after the initial embarrassment, not only to reply *alaikum salaam* to the Muslim passers-by, but also to greet them myself with *assailamalekum*? And why had I started to take more care of my beard than I did before, in particular making it look more like the beards of the young Muslims I saw on the street? Why did I do this not only to fit more smoothly into the Asian Muslim East London areas in which I was based, but also to "externally" be more visually provocative to those who wanted to

[14] There were two episodes connecting rap to terrorism in Britain in which I was interested. The first was the release in 2004 on the internet of a rap video emblematically titled *Dirty Kuffar* – the Arabic word for infidel – in which two rappers with British accents spread messages of hate about people like Tony Blair and George Bush, and praised the jihad. The second episode related to my previous research in Rome. The failed terror attack on 21/7 featured a young Ethiopian man, Hamdi Isaac, who before moving to London and converting to Islam was part of a group of friends, black hip-hoppers, who used to hang out in Piazzale Flaminio, the birthplace of hip-hop in Rome in the early 90s and where I conducted my previous research. My informants in Rome knew him and were shocked when they realised that he was one of the four responsible for the second terror attack in London. Hamdi Isaac was arrested in Italy where two of his brothers still live whilst attempting to escape British police.

[15] Babar Luck came to Durham to perform twice in 2010: in February and April.

racially abuse me?

These questions were followed by others as soon as I started interviewing London hip-hoppers: why was it that Rashid, a mid-40s "black" London hip-hopper, told me that "hip-hop ain't no white people's culture", while he himself claimed to have spent time with "white" boys in Covent Garden in the early 1980s when hip-hop took root in London and considers them, even today, to be "family"? Why was it that Staez, a mid-30s "white" hip-hop and drum and bass DJ, considered hip-hop to be "black music", but at the same time he found it a bit confusing when "jungle"[16] records he was fond of perusing in record shops were labelled "black music" in the early 90s? Why did he tell me "black people can't be racist", when he himself was beaten up by black boys in the past just because his girlfriend was "black"? Why was it that Rashid and other London black hip-hoppers converted to Islam through rap because they saw in Islam the "truth" for black people; and why was it that Ed, an early-20s "white" rapper friend of Staez, did the same by engaging in the anti-war and Palestine solidarity movement in London, and claimed that Islam is opposed to "Western corruption"?

These questions might suggest that this research is about the phenomenon of conversion to Islam among London hip-hoppers. It is not. This research is about the *ethnic boxing game* that takes place in Conscious London Rap, where conversion to Islam holds an important place. By "conscious" I mean an *emic* term, a hip-hop classificatory label used by hip-hoppers themselves to designate a tradition of rap which originated with the late 1980s legendary New York group Public Enemy, and which today has become as worldwide as hip-hop, even spreading to the Arab Spring. This is a tradition that stresses the importance of the social message of the lyrics and interprets rap as an emancipatory tool. However, its most influential London exponent at the time my fieldwork was carried out, Lowkey, would reject being boxed as "conscious", arguing that this is rather an *etic* term, a label thrown at things from those external to the "rap game" – or, as we will call it in Chapter 3 and 4, "scene" – as it presupposes that there exists an "unconscious rap"[17]. But Lowkey would end up playing the same ethnic boxing game himself when presenting himself as the "son of an Iraqi woman", so as to allow Muslim and non-Muslim hip-hoppers to classify him as a Muslim, even though he never labelled himself as such.

This is the ethnic boxing game the two set of questions have highlighted. In it, Islam plays a very decisive and divisive role. This has much to do with the London and British particularities in which the hip-hop game is territorialised: it has to do with elements such as the growing percentage of young Muslims, the perception of Islam as the enemy by those outside it and as under attack by

[16] Jungle is a London based electronic genre which evolved from hip-hop and reggae.

[17] This is what Lowkey said in a Channel4 documentary on London rap, "Life of Rhyme", broadcast on August 14th 2011.

some inside it, and the materialisation of this inescapable dualism for a third observer engaged in this situation. This all therefore concerns the issues the first branch of questions have raised. But all these London and British particularities cannot on their own explain the reasons behind the second set of questions. To understand the phenomenon of conversion to Islam as a form of "black nationalism" or "white activism" it is necessary to talk in some way or another about "hip-hop as lifestyle". Which is to say, about hip-hop as an object-subject relationship that can create as many subjects as possible so long as these subjects all have in common a bodily entity, the "style", as corporeal as the possibility, the "life", they can potentially explore. With this I want to suggest that the continuous dialectic of de-territorialisation and re-territorialisation that, according to Appadurai (1996), globalisation or late-capitalism produces, is one whereby the lifestyle of hip-hop is locally embodied (what Appadurai calls "production of locality") as long as it can be embodied differently (another possible location produced).

In this sense, when historian David Starkey, in a controversial BBC *Newsnight* appearance, blamed rap and hip-hop for the London and UK riots of August 2011, at stake was the possibility that the type of hip-hop he was referring to, "gangsta rap", generally blamed for glorifying violence and nihilism, was no different from the rap this research is about. True, some of the London conscious rappers who feature in this thesis spoke unequivocally about the riots (and against the rioters) in non-glorificatory terms in the immediate aftermath of the events, supplying the public with a different angle of understanding on the whole situation. (According to them, the looters were just doing what the British ruling class has been doing for centuries: looting other countries, in the imperial past as well in the neo-imperial present.) But it is the "attitude of the rebel" as a hip-hop potential that we need to take into consideration here. Rebelling with words, as some conscious rappers do when speaking out against the *status quo*, might come from the same hip-hop source of rebellion as smashing things and looting shops, as some rioters have done. This research therefore is all about producing the unexplored possibility in which it would not look detrimental for "conscious rap" to be associated with "gangsta rap", but which would also trigger a different way of seeing than gangsta rap's once its connection with conscious rap is established. Which is to say: what would have happened if the rioters, instead of looting and destroying their local areas, had directed their anger at the monuments of British Imperialism, not to destroy them but to affirm their willingness to break with the systematic domination of the Other (the alter-possibility) that Britain has put in place since slavery and colonial times? What would David Starkey have said? This is ultimately the research question upon which this project is based.

**Structure of the Thesis**

This dissertation is composed of five chapters which can be divided into three parts. Chapter 1 and 2 set the scene of the London boxing obsession and chronicle the ethnographic attempt to overcome it; Chapter 3 and 4 identify the phenomenon of the consumption of hip-hop; Chapter 5 stands alone as it focuses on the logic of the production of a hip-hop music-video and hip-hop live-show.

Chapter 1 argues that the ideology of *political correctness* lies at the heart of the current hegemony of the boxing obsession. In tracing the post-war history of such an ideology within the ambit of the "special relationship" between the United States and Great Britain, I view the social and musical backgrounds of the protest movement of the 60s and 70s as what preceded and called into being the rooting of hip-hop in London. The chapter's objective is to show the *habitus* of the boxing obsession as a rhetorical process and how anthropology can tactically establish a relationship with neuroscience to accurately identify it. The chapter is built around the notion of "mental sensation" proposed by neurologist Robert Burton, providing a theoretical framework with which to understand the specific vocabulary of hip-hop. Chapter 2 builds on the aforementioned tactical alliance with neuroscience by considering what rappers mean by "flow". It takes into account Tim Ingold's dwelling perspective while discussing the musical and political collaboration which took place between Babar Luck and the ethnographer, myself. The particularity of Babar Luck's embracing of hip-hop and rhetorical production within the ecological niche of East London is discussed in detail. I chronicle and comment on how the collaboration with Babar Luck happened and what it has produced, in terms of music and politics, by introducing the categories of "counter-hegemony" and "other-hegemony", as further articulated in the following chapters.

Chapters 3 and 4 discuss the concept of the "real" in rap. Both chapters use Alfred Gell's model of "abduction by agency" to explain the consumption of music-videos, public speeches, and listening to music. I suggest that rather than being an anthropological theory of art, Gell's model, informed by Peirce's semiology, is inadvertently a performative explanation of how the boxing obsession works. In adopting the notion of "index", Chapter 3 deals with the interconnectedness of the London Conscious scene and Islamic rap, arguing that the positioning of the Born Again Christian scene as distinct and distant from the Conscious and Islamic scenes strengthens the "West vs Islam" opposition upon which the theory of secularisation is articulated. Chapter 4 deepens the insight into such a positioning by explaining the role of black nationalism within the decisions of some black hip-hoppers to convert to Islam, and the behaviour of white conscious acts in relation to racism and the index of the "West". In both cases, though, how the immediacy of the consumption of hip-hop involves a temporality whereby the index has no role whatsoever is presented and discussed.

A further discussion on the temporality of the index is offered in Chapter 5, which establishes the meaning and importance of "hype" in hip-hop vocabulary. It considers Gilles Deleuze's work on cinematographic language to analyse the format of a London music-video. Through the Deleuzian concept of the "crystal-image" this chapter shows the relationship between the format of a hip-hop music-video, live-show and song, offering an investigation into the affectivity of the performing rapper. The objective of the chapter is to show how rappers perform the role of the Gramscian intellectual. By reworking Nietzsche's classification of the two types of nihilism as existential possibilities, I argue that an organic intellectual is such only in the temporal dimension of "duration" in a Bergsonian sense. In contrast, audio-visual capitalism points at ephemerality to feed one's own narcissism as passive nihilism. In the short Conclusion I praise duration as anthropological detachment, arguing that here lies the possibility for ethnographers to keep coming back to fieldwork and to continue dialoguing. This, I stress, is the only way for anthropology to reinvent itself before the scenario of the "post-human" which Heidegger had already observed in 1964: the end of philosophy (and anthropology) and the domination of technological knowledge – the completion of the Western boxing obsession.

One last point. Due to the role that audio-visual media plays in this dissertation and due to the analysis of TV talk-shows and TV interviews that I produce in the pages that follow, it is appropriate to say that TV hosts and guests feature as my informants in the same way that rappers, hip-hoppers and people I have interviewed or interacted with do.

# Chapter 1: The Mental Sensation of the Boxing Obsession

**Introduction**

Recent research in the field of neuroscience has introduced the problem of the boxing obsession. It suggests that "it may be possible to predict differences in implicit race bias at the individual level using brain data" (Brosch et al. 2013: 164). Brosch, Bar-David and Phelps selected a number of people and studied their brain activity while showing them pictures of *black* and *white* faces. They then assessed, through a set of questions, whether or not the participants had an implicit race bias. Focusing primarily on the brain activity of "White Caucasian Americans" with a "strong" and "minor" implicit race bias, the results of fMRI (Functional Magnetic Resonance Imaging) suggested that the ways in which black and white faces affect the fusiform area (FFA), an area of the brain involved in facial perception, differ: this area is more active in people with a stronger implicit race bias, so by focusing on the activity of this area the researchers could predict whether the person was looking at a white or black face. This implies, as a review of the article states, that "people with stronger negative implicit attitudes may actually perceive Black and White faces to look more different" (Kutoba et al. 2012: 945).

Decisive information valuable to the job of the anthropologist is missing in this article. It is not established, for instance, how the researchers assessed the rate of "implicit race bias" in the participants: which questions were asked and how the participants replied. It is only implied that those who confessed to having a race bias *were correct* (in that they actually had a bias). Also, this "subtle" racism is present in all the participants, but it is not specified if the authors mean within the totality of "White Caucasian Americans", or also within the small number of other "ethnicities". In the absence of any additional information, and due to the absolute novelty of neurological research on racism, it is wise not to comment. But one thing needs to be addressed, and it is a neuroscientist who makes the point. The fMRI did not prove that those who said they were racist were actually correct. The major brain activity in the fusiform area might actually be a result of the illusionary effect of "mental sensation". Robert Burton (2008; 2013) suggests that a "mental sensation" is the *feeling of knowing* and of *being certain*, the sensation of being cognitively the author of a thought, yet this thought has already been "prepared" by the pre-cognitive networks of the brain. This feeling of being certain is the limit of the neuroscientific investigation. It can depict it but it cannot say anything about it even if the technology for studying the brain becomes more sophisticated in the years to come. The mental sensation lies in the relationship between brain and Mind. Neuroscience only studies the activity of the brain, not the Mind.

Greg Downey and Daniel Lende (2012), first with a blog (http://neuroanthropology.net/) and

then by editing a collection of essays (*The Encultured Brain*), have argued in favour of a more specific engagement of anthropology in the study of the brain, so that sociocultural anthropologists can get acquainted with what, for the mistrust with which the discipline has looked at biology since Nazism, they ignore. I suggest that they are right. The emergence of a "new biology", with epigenetics (see Carey 2011) and the neuroscientists' acceptance of "neuroplasticity" – the malleability of neural pathways and synapses in relation to behaviour – constitutes an opportunity for anthropology to play a role in the re-opening of the "nature vs nurture" debate[18]. But I equally stress that this engagement can only be done by putting this notion of Mind as encompassing the brain at the centre, and by treating the neurological evidence as counter to the framework of neuro-Cartesianism in which much neuroscience literature moves. The Cogito Ergo Sum of the mental sensation is an illusion, Burton would say, the illusion of being the owner and author of one's own thoughts. This begins before one realises it. There is a temporal disjuncture that perhaps Nietzsche captures well when, in *The Gay Science*, he says "I must still be alive because I still have to think" (Nietzsche 2001: 276), in contrast to the Cartesian formula. We can correct this with: "I live because I have *yet* to think cognitively". If one will not think, in the immediate future, one is already dead, in the actual present. The challenge this chapter takes on is to show how *one must live to think the boxing obsession*. In the next chapter I deal with how one must live to think *the possibility of its negation*. Everything happens in the *illusion of the mental sensation*, but the former is the illusion of the established ideology, the latter the ideology in-the-making.

In this sense, the neuroscientific paper discussed above presents the problem of the ideology of the boxing obsession insofar as it is possible to individuate an implicit race bias in those who want to detect other people's race bias. Why is it that "White Caucasian Americans" are asked whether they are racially biased and it is argued that somehow all are?

Consider the behaviour of another "White Caucasian American", Quentin Tarantino, and his

[18] After the disappointing results of the Human Genome Project, this debate has reopened in the field of biology. Many believed, as then US President Bill Clinton did when announcing the project, that by sequencing the entire human genome the defeat of cancer and of many other diseases was only a question of time. Although scientists are still assembling and evaluating data, the major result of the Human Genome Project is that the conviction according to which by selecting a specific gene it is possible to repair the altered gene in human organisms has hardly been re-dimensioned. It emerged that genes do not "run the show", do not regulate by themselves the dynamics of the cell; rather the epigenome does. Epigenome literally means "above the genome", and epigenetics is the discipline that studies how the membrane of the cell, not the nucleus, instructs the DNA by turning on and off genes and allowing them to express or not express themselves. A computer metaphor is often used to make sense of the mechanism: the genome is the hardware of the cell, but just like any other computer hardware, this can work only if the software activates it; this is the epigenome. The interesting point here is that the epigenome changes in relation to environmental factors, that is to say according to the signals it receives from outside the cell and the way it reacts to them. Recent data has shown that the epigenome can be hereditary: what can be inherited by children is the specific environmental information responsible for activating certain genes instead of others. This is not a new hypothesis in biology. Lamarck and his theory on the heredity of acquired characteristics argued exactly this. The problem is that the discipline then assumed that this was wrong, believing that the law of heredity was to be discovered in the genome and not in phenotypical factors.

*first reaction* to his own script for the movie *Django*, set in Alabama during the time of slavery. Although the script certainly cannot be defined as pro-slavery, Tarantino confessed in a radio-interview[19] that after writing it and realising that he had to get around 100 black people to be chained and work in a field, he felt "trepidation". "Being a white dude didn't help any matter", he admitted, pressed by the black radio host. He felt the symbolic pressure of that particular request: asking African-American actors to play slaves in America. At first he tried to overcome the problem of the "trepidation" by shooting the film somewhere else; not in Alabama, so dramatically loaded with the American past of slavery, but outside of the US, such as in the West Indies or Brazil, where, he confessed, although these were countries that had a strong relationship with slavery, it was not necessarily an American story and the actors would not be Americans. But then, after a lunch with the black actor Sidney Poitier, he realised that the strategy of the geographical change was an escape. Sidney Poitier, whom Tarantino said he always saw as a "father figure", told him to "man up" and that he should not be afraid. And so Tarantino did. But how should we read the "trepidation" he felt after writing the script? And how should we analyse the fact that he felt reassured after a black man told him that he should do it?

My suggestion is that this, possibly like the framework of the scientific paper discussed, is an "unintended consequence of Political Correctness". This is the subtitle of Jackson's (2008) *Racial Paranoia*, an anthropological consideration of the debate on racism in the USA following the Civil Rights Era, where he introduces the problem. However, Jackson seems to be concerned solely with how "Black Americans" would cope with it, relegating to a corner the majority of "White Caucasians". After the "de jure racism" which characterised the period of racist legislation against blacks since Independence to Jim Crow, and after the "de facto racism" which was the remaining cultural racism (notwithstanding the civil rights movement's legislative victories), America, according to Jackson, is now confronting "de cardio racism", which is the obligated need to spot a racist behind the apparently non-racist language the person is using, given that in the age of political correctness racist language is banned from the public sphere. Those who make charges of racism in this way behave in the same way, so to speak, as the Azande (as described by Evans-Pritchard) when resorting to the magical explanation: they evoke racism whenever any other rational explanation for a particular occurence is not given (ibid.: 208-209). The "evidence" in this case is just a look, an intonation of voice, and other impalpable things directed or projected at a person: enough nonetheless to make them feel that people they interact with are racist.

The boisterous laugh of a white person among an audience was enough, in the episode Jackson starts the book with, for African-American TV comedian Dave Chapelle to leave his show

[19] *Sway in the Morning*, aired 17/12/2012, accessed here: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=R_Du_wF9wUw

(and its contract of 50 million dollars), go abruptly to an African country without informing his wife and family, and reflect upon his inner self. The media speculated that Dave Chapelle was "going crazy", but the more he started explaining his reasons, the more, Jackson argues, it was clear that a profile of "racial paranoia" was rising to the surface. The same, I would suggest, applies to Spike Lee's refusal to watch Tarantino's slavery western. In this case it is even "preventive", as Spike Lee did not find himself in the actual situation, the cinema, were he could have concluded that the laughter of white people, especially during the more satirical scenes of the movie, was racist. It was more the idea in itself, doing a "Sergio Leone Spaghetti Western" with slavery, which did not find Spike Lee's approval, as he wrote in a tweet where he announced that he would not go to watch the movie as this would disrespect his ancestors[20].

But the point is that Tarantino felt trepidation exactly because he knew he was going to break, visually more than linguistically, the code of political correctness by making this film. This also tells us that Tarantino would probably not have felt the same had he been black: had he been so, he might have felt trepidation for other reasons, such as the fear that black people might see him as a "betrayer", an "Uncle Tom", a "house-nigga", had they thought he was misrepresenting the experience of slavery. Tarantino's trepidation is the other half of the coin to Spike Lee's fear that the movie is disrespectful to his ancestors. Tarantino is conceivably thinking of his white ancestors, potentially slavemasters to the potential slave ancestors of Spike Lee, when acknowledging that his whiteness adds controversy to the whole situation. And it was probably the approval of Sidney Poitier, a man whose ancestors may have been slaves, which somehow gives him the moral green light to proceed. But what does this finger pointing at an alleged hereditary line mean? Who really are Spike Lee's and Tarantino's ancestors? Can we not say, without exaggerating, that their ancestors are the same?[21]

***a) In the Situation***

Let us look at Tarantino's trepidation and Spike Lee's indignation in the bodies of London actors. Here it becomes a *situation* with a dynamic of resolution which will be the object of this chapter.

At the beginning of my fieldwork, I participated in the student demonstrations over the

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20 Spike Lee's tweet was on 22/12/2012, 2:18 PM. In 1997 he protested against the language of Tarantino's *Jackie Brown*, arguing that if he used racist language about white people in his movies, as Tarantino had done about blacks by using the word "nigger" 38 times, he would be accused of racism by the media whereas Tarantino was not. In *Django*, the "N-word" is used almost three times more (109), and here, unlike in *Jackie Brown*, black people are depicted chained and as the objects of unsettling violence (such as when one slave is bitten to death by the slavemaster's dogs; and when, in an organised slave fight, the "mandingo fight", the loser is killed by the winner for the amusement of the same slavemaster, played by Leonardo Di Caprio).

21 According to late 1980s genetic research, the hypothesis of which, although challenged, has since been assumed by geneticists, all Homo Sapiens on earth today are descended from one African woman, the "Mitochondrial Eve", who lived around 200,000 years ago in Eastern Africa before our species spread to Europe and Asia.

tripling of University fees and cuts to the EMA (Education Maintenance Allowance). On December 9th 2010, the day of a massive demonstration, I ended up being trapped in the "kettle" of the Police in Parliament Square, and then Westminster Bridge, for many hours with an outside temperature of below zero. During that demonstration there were confrontations between some protesters and the police. The media gave a lot of attention to the gratuitous violence of some protesters towards the police, and particularly to an incident involving Prince Charles and Camilla Parker Bowles[22]. On the Sunday following the demonstration, I attended the student assembly at the University of London Union in Malet Street. The assembly was well-attended and participation was intense. The protesters refused to be labelled as "violent" by the media and also refused to be divided into "good", those who protest peacefully, and "bad", those who use violence. This was according to them a distinction which had racist overtones since the "bad" were mostly black young people: those whom the media narrative labelled as "hoodies".

Towards mid-January, however, the regular Sunday assembly began to lose its appeal, to the point that on the 16th, given that less than ten people turned up, the assembly was cancelled. Invited by an international postgraduate student, I joined some of the student activists at a pub for a drink. I took advantage of the situation to share my opinion on the student movement with the student who invited me and another British postgraduate student. Both of them were SOAS students and members of a recently formed socialist organisation, "CounterFire", instrumental in the organisation of the student movement.

"It's seems to me," I said, "that the ones who will be really affected by these cuts and fee increases are not part of this movement. I mean, everyone is gonna be affected but I would like to see those who live where I do here. I live in East Ham and I see *these* guys hanging around the streets while I think it would be great to have them involved in this..."

"Who are *these* guys, sorry? What you mean by that?" the British student replied quite brusquely, while the other student shared an ironic smile of complicity with him. I felt I had inadvertently ended up in a trap: the *these* here was understood as a racist slur.

"No-no-no-no-no-no! There's a misunderstanding here, I am *these* guys!" – I strongly reacted to the implicit charge of being racist – "I too have been the object of racism for growing up in Italy and being the son of an immigrant". While saying so, I made a gesture with my right hand to indicate my face, and the British student, a white British student, apologised at this point, adding

[22] From the back seat of their car, in a royal convoy heading to a theatre in central London, they experienced the rage of some protesters who targeted the car. As the car window was down, Prince Charles and Camilla Parker Bowles had a face-to-face interaction with the protesters for a few scary seconds. A security service man was going to use a gun had the danger not been prevented.

that our misunderstanding was just a problem of "language".

It was not only a problem of language, but also of the *mental sensation of the boxing obsession*. Its logical form establishes the Body of the Other as Truth. But this logic has to be supported by the mental sensation, the logic of which is self-referential: it is what One Feels as Truth. This is why both Tarantino and I have to look for confirmation that we have not been racist in an *external object*. In his case it was the skin colour of Sidney Poitier; in my case, the skin colour of the person with whom I was speaking. "If Sidney Poitier tells me that I have not been racist, then I am not", Tarantino thought. "If you are white and I am black, you simply cannot tell me that I am racist", I must have thought. Spike Lee's indignation is present firstly in the student's mental sensation that I was being racist by using "these" instead of "youth from an underprivileged background" as he may have wanted to hear in order to think that I was not racist; and secondly in my reaction whereby I could not be racist by using "these" simply because my skin colour does not allow me to be so, whereas his *does*. Like Tarantino, he is now in trepidation because he agrees that I am right, precisely like Spike Lee is in raising that if a black man says "nigger" it is one thing, but if a white man says it it is another thing altogether. This is why Eminem, a famous white rapper from Detroit, never says "nigga" in his rap while the term is used by his black peers[23].

***b) The "theory fragment" situation***

In his "theory fragment", Michael Carrithers makes interesting use of the *idea* of a situation in human relations, building on Turner's liminality (Carrithers 2008). First: a situation can both happen to people – "patients" in Carrithers' vocabulary – and be produced by their own agency. Second: it implies a movement. Third: it has a timed-life, its own "historicity". A brief outlook of what the author means by historicity is needed before tackling the other two features.

Historicity is understood here as the "eventfulness of things, the fact that things keep going on, relentlessly, whatever the plans we lay or the devices we invent to forestall events" (ibid.: 162). The historicity of the situation is that from which humans develop their rhetoricity, their becoming rhetorical animals. As Carrithers points out, the eventfulness of things creates situations to which humans respond by dispelling the ignorance of the situation through rhetoric, via the act of speaking, or as he says elsewhere (see the "rhetorical edge of culture" in Carrithers 2012: 6), even by a

[23] My argument here relates to the perceived stability of notions such as race, class, community (or even gender). Despite all attempts to deconstruct such notions and to treat "belonging" as provisional, everyday practice proves that the very structures employed to challenge stereotypical identity categories reify them. In some ways, activists – including the anthropologist as an activist – are inadvertently caught in this trap. In order to "protect", "support", or "fight for" a particular group of people, they need to clearly delineate it, substantiate it, define it and ultimately infuse it with material and social life.

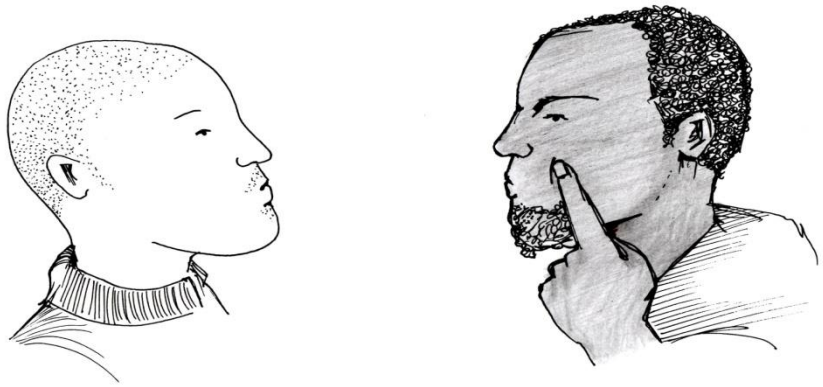
gesture. But this act, the act of putting into discourse the *things* of the situation – and among them *persons* – is a movement in itself. Building on James Fernandez's take on rhetoric and social performance, Carrithers means by movement the movement "from inchoate pronouns to proper nouns", the movement from uncertainty and indefiniteness (of the inchoate pronouns) to clarity and precision (of the proper nouns), as he illustrates in his diagram of pronominality (Carrithers 2008: 164). This movement, which is a movement of rhetorical understanding and rhetorical performance, requires a "rhetorical will", as Carrithers calls it in another article, borrowing from Aristotle's *energeia* (see Carrithers 2005b): the will to speech, the "prise de la parole", to use the rhetorical instruments to dispel the uncertainty of a situation to make it clear.

Such a moment of "prise de la parole" is the conscious intervention of the human in the historicity of the situations, the relentless flux of things that happen. Carrithers explains that his own rhetorical attempt to build a theory upon such a moment "begins at the very point at which anthropology and history come together – *or sometimes fail to come together*" (Carrithers 2008: 162, my italic). It is not entirely clear what he means by "anthropology" and "history", given that for Carrithers to have a culture is to have a history (see Carrithers 1992). I would change that phrase by saying that the meeting, or the failed meeting, is between *biology* and *culture*. The inserted clause here, the possibility of the failure of that encounter, is of fundamental importance. Carrithers points out that an "inexpressibility" is left out of the rhetorical movement of the prise of parole; an inexpressibility laying in the domain of intimacy that resists rhetorical articulation. This is why there is always a situation that *does* you even when you do the situation: the "agency-cum-patients" relationship (see Carrithers 2005b).

I want to call what is left out of the rethorical articulation an "extra-textuality". The phrase would apparently be in contrast to Jaques Derrida's assertion that "there is nothing outside the text" (Derrida 1997: 158). While Derrida really meant that there is nothing outside the context in which the language operates, that is to say that the "extra-textuality" is the context of grammar, with such a phrase I want rather to stress the temporality in which the extra-textual, from the realm of inexpressibility, becomes encompassed by the rhetorical action. This is when the mental sensation comes into play, when the *extra-textual gets textualised*.

The situation of the misunderstanding at the pub between the student and and myself aptly demonstrates the moment of such a textualisation, as the misunderstanding is produced by the fact that the skin colour of my face is not *that* black, and as such it can create potential confusion over my ethnicity, while it is black *enough* to leave doubt when the difference is emphasised against whiteness. A simple gesture is enough to restore persuasion, as Figure 1 shows.

[Figure 1][24]



Now, Carrithers explains that the "agency-cum-patients" relationship means that who persuades is also being persuaded. To have a culture is to have a history, he says, meaning that the schemata of responding to a situation are "learned" exactly because they have already happened in the past. What connects the Tarantino/Spike Lee situation to that in Figure 1 is the past of the "special relationship" between the UK and America, a past that does not begin with Winston Churchill's 1946 statement, but with the American historical transition from slavery to the present and the British journey from the Empire to multiculturalism; that is, the history of the ways through which the Nation has dealt with the Other Within. This past is that which precedes the rooting of hip-hop in London, revealing that the "American" object of our research, the lifestyle of hip-hop, is not only hip-hop but also the *mental sensation of political correctness* it implicitly comes with.

In the first part of this chapter, called "Political Correctness", I will trace this movement by providing a socio-historical background to the introduction of American-inspired legislation on race relations in Britain and the heated debate it produced from the 1960s onwards. But this is not enough to explain the "agency-cum-patients" relationship of Figure 1. There is also another past at work here, a "past that is always with us", and that is the history of historicity, that is to say, the *habitus* of what Carrithers has called the "rhetoric will", and I define as mental sensation. The discourse of hip-hop, so much centred on the question the rapper keeps asking the audience, "You Feel Me?", is the perfect propagator of "racial paranoia", as Jackson notices[25], but also its worst

[24] This and all the illustrations that feature in this dissertation are by Sarina Mantle.

[25] Jackson argues that this is how American rap conveys racial paranoia, so much so that even the case of John Walker Lindh, a young white American "captured in Afghanistan in 2001 while fighting for the Taliban" (Jackson 2008:

enemy – a point missed by Jackson. The "truth" the rappers, and particularly the "conscious rappers", ask the listener to feel is not explained, as it *has to be felt*. And this can be felt regardless even of the intention of the rapper, as we will show in the next chapters. In order to set the stage here for understanding what London rappers really mean when using certain hip-hop words, like "flow", "real" and "hype", which all have a global as well as local reference, we need to trace the configuration of the mental sensation of what "One Feels as Truth". This is the object of the second part of the chapter, called "Minimal Theory of the Linguistic Act", where I consider the implications of a neuroscientific discovery, "mirror neurons". This allows, in the third part called "Habitus of the Body of the Other as Truth", an exposure of the *habitus* of the boxing obsession. This happens, I argue, when narcissism, from being an inescapable condition of the mental sensation, becomes justification of the idea of the ethnic border subsumed by an ideology. Anthropology and ethnographic description is particularly necessary here, but this means going to the heart of the problem of racism for the discipline.

## 1) Political Correctness

**From America...**

Drawing on Jackson, we can say that the moral principle of political correctness has its roots in the moment at which the "de-facto racism" starts to be confronted by a cultural anti-racism. The decade of the 1960s in the USA can be highlighted as the time at which this change took place. The 1963 "March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom", organised by the leaders of the civil rights movement, was an event that signalled the magnitude of the change. Not only because America had never before experienced a demonstration of such proportions in front of the Lincoln memorial to promote civic and economic rights for African-Americans; but also because not all of the organisers, protesters, sympathisers and supporters were blacks. The Democrat John Fitzgerald Kennedy was the head of the American nation, and a bill was already being proposed by his administration to grant civil rights to African-Americans while the march was happening. Martin Luther King, president of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference, gave his famous *I Have a Dream* speech, in which, in the most famous passage, he hoped that even in racist Alabama, one day, "little black boys and black girls will be able to join hands with little white boys and white girls as sisters

153), can be explained by this. While being a big hip-hop fan, Lindh tried to pass himself off as a black militant speaking up against the conspiracy of the white world, as seen in some online conversations prior to his conversion. It is this paranoia that, according to Jackson, he further articulated in the jihadist way.

and brothers" (King 1968: 17). With similar, although differently delivered, evocative solemnity, Lindon Johnson, who succeeded Kennedy (killed in Dallas in November 1963), two years later addressed the American Congress and the Voting Rights Act was passed. This law ended "de jure racism" as it ensured that the nine southern states that had used discriminatory devices and practices to deprive African-Americans of their right to vote could no longer introduce changes to election law without the approval of the Federal Department of Justice. One year before this, in 1964, Johnson had signed the Civil Rights Act to end discrimination of minorities and women in the workplace, schools, when voting, and in the use of public facilities. These two laws completed a process of legislative integration in support of minorities, which began with the Executive Order 10925, signed by Kennedy in 1961, and which inaugurated the measures known as "affirmative action".

Racism was not defeated by the introduction of such legislation. But black people fighting racism could rely on the active and genuine support of a growing white anti-racist America. Some of the black leaders of the 60s did not like the fact that this intermixing between black and white anti-racists was taking place, feeling that it was not worth trusting the good intentions of white people. These public challengers of de-cardio racism, before political correctness was formally widely accepted, were in particular Malcolm X, who lamented that the organisers of the March on Washington (which he called, with contempt, a "picnic") had welcomed white organisations; and Stokely Carmichael, the leader of the NAACP (National Association for the Advancement of Coloured People), who coined the expression "Black Power" and later, in 1969, as a Member of the Black Panther Party, strongly disagreed with the decision of the party to allow white people to join the organisation and ended up being ejected by the Panthers themselves. White Anti-Racist America has, though, resisted these and other types of pressures, such as the those coming from white conservatives, and one of the cultural products they came up with, by working shoulder to shoulder with black people and other minorities, was, in the decades to come, and particularly the 1990s, the acceptance of the code of political correctness.

**...to Britain**

That the cultural climate of political correctness was already in place long before the 1990s was demonstrated in Britain by the reaction of the British political system to Enoch Powell's "Rivers of Blood" speech, delivered in Birmingham on 20th April 1968. This speech was considered inflammatory, and Powell was sacked from the Shadow Cabinet, led by the Conservative Edward Heath, as a consequence of the words he chose to use. By quoting a conversation he had with a white Englishman in his constituency of Wolverhampton – a man who was disappointed with the

continuous incoming of immigrants and was thinking of leaving the country – Powell said that, in the near future, the "black man will have the whip hand over the white man". He also used the word "picanninnies" to refer to the children of black families who had moved to Wolverhampton and which had made a white elderly widow the only white resident on her street. Even in this case Powell was quoting somebody else: a letter he said he received from a woman telling the story of the old widow who found herself suffering from the arrival of new neighbours.

Four years before the Birmingham speech, the electoral poster for Peter Griffiths, the Tory candidate for Smethwick, stated, "If you want a nigger for neighbour, vote Labour". But on this occasion, although anti-racists protested, no official measures were taken against Griffiths by his own party. On the contrary, this slogan allowed him to win in a constituency traditionally associated with Labour, anticipating the working class sympathy for Powell's speech. But within the next four years a change in the public sensibility towards matters of "race" had taken place, because Powell himself was very aware that his words could potentially create controversy. After saying the infamous phrase about the black man having the whip hand over the white man, he said: "I can already hear the chorus of execration. How dare I say such a horrible thing? How dare I stir up trouble and inflame feelings by repeating such a conversation?"

In the intervening four years, legislation against racial discrimination following the example of American affirmative actions was being introduced to Britain. In 1965 the Labour Government led by Harold Wilson passed the Race Relations Act which made racial discrimination in public places a civil offence – this was meant to counter the practices constituting the "colour bar", whereby services were denied or prices inflated at pubs and shops for people in relation to their ethnicity and nationality. When Powell gave his speech, the Labour Government was debating a bill (which then became the 1968 Race Relations Act) which extended the civil offence to housing refusal. It is in referring to this eventuality that he quotes the letter he claimed to have received. This letter tells the story of the elderly widow who refused to rent rooms of her house to the new immigrant foreigners in her street and who, as a result of the backlash of the neighbours, felt in fear of her life and worried that if the bill is passed, she would go to jail:

> She is becoming afraid to go out. Windows are broken. She finds excreta pushed through her letter box. When she goes to the shops, she is followed by children, charming, wide-grinning piccaninnies. They cannot speak English, but one word they know. 'Racialist', they chant. When the new Race Relations Bill is passed, this woman is convinced she will go to prison. And is she so wrong? I begin to wonder. (Powell 1968)

In *Enoch Powell Odd Man Out*, a 1995 BBC2 documentary featuring an old Enoch Powell, the

view is put forward, which others have supported[26], that the letter he is said to have received was never sent by anyone, but was probably invented by Powell himself. It is appropriate to believe that at the time his speech was given, Powell must have been influenced by the televised images of the US ghetto uprisings following the killing of Martin Luther King – which happened just two weeks before (April 4th) he gave his speech – and the memory of his recent tour of the USA in which he experienced first-hand the social context where that violence, between black people and the police, was being fuelled. The violence that he wanted to prevent by expressing his opposition to the Race Relations Act was not the violence of black people, but the violence of the white British people against the State that had turned them into a minority in their own country. These, in his view, were the people who were starting to be discriminated against; not the immigrants, who by contrast were elected to a first class citizenship status by having instituted a legal tool through which they could persecute the white majority ("They cannot speak English but one word they know. 'Racialist', they chant"). This is why:

> Nothing is more misleading than comparison between the Commonwealth immigrant in Britain and the American Negro. The Negro population of the United States, which was already in existence before the United States became a nation, started literally as slaves and were later given the franchise and other rights of citizenship, to the exercise of which they have only gradually and still incompletely come. The Commonwealth immigrant came to Britain as a full citizen, to a country which knew no discrimination between one citizen and another, and he entered instantly into the possession of the rights of every citizen, from the vote to free treatment under the National Health Service. (ibid.)

To do that, according to Powell, to compare the "Commonwealth immigrant" to the "American Negro" without understanding that the Race Relations Act is turning the British into the "American Negro", is "mad":

> We must be mad, literally mad, as a nation to be permitting the annual inflow of some 50,000 dependants, who are for the most part the material of the future growth of the immigrant-descended population. It is like watching a nation busily engaged in heaping up its own funeral pyre. (ibid.)

The image of the pyre betrays some of Enoch Powell's romantic fascination with India: the fascination of a colonialist who sees in the practice of the sati, the widow set on fire with the pyre, a "mad" practice to abolish, as the British did under Lord William Bentink's administration of Bengal (1828-1835), so as to re-establish the rational rule of civilisation. But here it is the civilisation, not the barbarism of the Indians, which is on fire: it is Rome on the pyre and nothing is left for a

[26] With the exception of the *Daily Mail*'s 2007 investigation.

virtuous Roman citizen but foreseeing "the River Tiber foaming with much blood".

It goes without saying that the tradition of thought Enoch Powell subscribes to, as well exemplified by the classical reference to the relationship between *land* and *blood*, is European romanticism (see Holmes 2000). In this sense, the correct and non-mentioned comparison with the American scenario in which we should probably place Powell's use of the British "difference" is not with the "American Negro", but rather with the "Native American", the only group "born" to the land and attached to it by a secular relationship of "blood". Let us have a look at how Powell's romanticism gets lost in the subsequent Tory acceptance of the Other Within and how the anti-racists faced it.

**Supporters**

For many, Powell's "political incorrectness" was a breakthrough for the "truth". Three days later, when the Race Relations Bill was debated in the House of Commons, almost two thousand London dockers marched to Westminster in support of Powell. This and other manifestations of solidarity with Powell against his removal from the Shadow Cabinet were taking place across the country. These supporters of Powell need to be recognised in those social groups, especially among the working classes, that never looked positively on the presence of "Commonwealth subjects" in the country, especially after the British Nationality Act of 1948 granted indefinite right to abode in Britain for the subjects of the British Empire. This was the time when, after the Second World War, the United Kingdom discovered itself in need of skilled and unskilled workers. And it began bringing people into the country via passenger ships: from the name of one of the first, "Empire Windrush", stems the label "the Windrush Generation" to indicate the people from the West Indies who settled in Britain.

The arrival of the "coloured" people, as they were referred to, created many tensions within the local populations: tensions that soon resulted in riots, such as when a group of so-called "teddy boys", a post-war working class youth subculture (see Hedbidge 2002; 2005), did not appreciate that a white woman was hand-in-hand with a black man on the street, sparking what became known as the 1956 "Notting Hill riot". These social tensions led the legislators to promulgate the 1962 Act which introduced entry restrictions, such as that newcomers needed to have a job before arrival or to have skills that would fit in with the needs of the national economy. This passed under a Conservative government. But the following Wilson-led Labour government took more decisive steps in this direction.

When Powell gave his Birmingham speech, Parliament had already passed a law, the 1968 Commonwealth Immigrants Act, which further reduced the possibility of new entries. Nationality

was granted to those who had “substantial connection with the United Kingdom” in the form of birth or ancestry. It was still possible for some to become nationals if they did not meet these requirements, but that was at the discretion of the national institutions. One month after the law passed, Powell explained his measures to solve the problem: the drastic ceasing of immigration and the adoption of repatriation policies, such as supporting voluntary repatriation.

These were the proposals that many at the time supported. The mainstream Conservative Party did not, which Powell eventually opposed by endorsing a Labour candidate in the 1974 election and by becoming an MP for the Ulster Unionist Party soon after. Margaret Thatcher, from 1975 leader of the Tories, held Powell in high esteem, like others of her generation in the party. One of her statements during a TV interview leading up to the 1979 electoral campaign seemed to evoke Powell’s speech, as many in the anti-racist camp indicated. She said she understood the fear that British people exhibited of being “swamped” by immigration. The choice of the verb “swamp” revealed a thoughtful and precise strategy from Thatcher: to steal votes from the National Front, which had taken on Powell's proposal of dealing with migration. Since 1976, the neo-fascist organisation had become an open political party with official representatives in local institutions. Thatcher’s strategy to regain their electorate was extremely successful, as the National Front remained a minor political force throughout the 80s. Yet Thatcher did not implement the radical policies Powell suggested, especially in terms of repatriation. On the contrary, although her governments, particularly with the 1981 British Nationality Act, worked to drastically tackle the problem of new immigration so that it progressively faded away from the social perception of some classes, under Thatcher’s leadership the Tories began working on the “British-isation” of the Other Within. The difference between the above-mentioned 1964 Conservative electoral poster in Smethwick and a 1983 one recalled by Paul Gilroy could not be greater. Here, a black man with a suit and arms crossed is pictured standing over the slogan: “Labour says he's Black. Tories say he's British”. He is no longer a “nigger”, but “British”. The price to pay for such a transformation, though, is very high, as Gilroy highlights:

> Blacks are being invited to forsake all that marks them out as culturally distinct before real Britishness can be guaranteed. National culture is present in the young man's clothing. Isolated and shorn of the mugger's key icons – a tea-cosy hat and the dreadlocks of Rastafari – he is redeemed by his suit, the signifier of British civilization. The image of black youth as a problem is thus contained and rendered assimilable. The wolf is transformed by his sheep's clothing. The solitary maleness of the figure is also highly significant. It avoids the hidden threat of excessive fertility which is a constant presence in the representation of black women […]. This lone young man is incapable of swamping 'us'. He is alone because the logics of racist discourse militate against the possibility of making British blackness visible in a family or an inter-generational group. The black family is presented as incomplete, deviant and ruptured. (Gilroy 1987: 59)

Although this process of British-isation is matched by what we could term, building on Gilroy's graphic reading, a process of "orientalisation" (from Edward Said's *Orientalism*) of the Black Other Within, the Tories paved the way here for what would be their passive acceptance of multiculturalism. The Tories didn't enthusiastically endorse such a model as Tony Blair's New Labour did after almost two decades of Tory Government. But they did not resist it nevertheless, as Enoch Powell and his followers might have wanted.

Prime Minister David Cameron's speech, which was given in Munich while I was doing fieldwork on February 5th 2011, is a telling example. He strongly condemned what he called the doctrine of "State multiculturalism" for vilifying the national tradition of the host country, incentivising the communitarism of the immigrant communities, and passively allowing endogenous terrorism such as that responsible for 7/7 to grow. But he never rejected multiculturalism in itself. To fight the peril of an internal terrorism, he offered, by contrast, the solution of more "integration" of the immigrant communities into the national culture, so that immigrants and their descendants can also define themselves as locally British[27].

Cameron's model of "muscular liberalism", as he called it, differs from the neo-fascists' proposal which originated with Enoch Powell. It is closer to the patriotism of the emerging UKIP, the UK Independence Party. This party takes up the anti-EU arguments of Powell and proposes the exit of the UK from the EU, alongside the closure of borders for migrants, including European ones. Unlike when Thatcher stopped the rise of the National Front by stealing their electorate, here UKIP is rapidly gaining support from the Tory electorate, to which the Tories respond with increased rhetoric against foreigners.

**Anti-Racists**

BBC's *Enoch Powell Odd Man Out* visually documents part of the backlash Powell received after his speech. It shows the "welcome" that was given to him when going to university campuses to give speeches: the students who opposed his views made so much noise that he was unable to talk.

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27 "We must build stronger societies and stronger identities at home. Frankly we need a lot less of the passive tolerance of the recent years and a much more active muscular liberalism. A passive tolerant society says to its citizens: "as long as you abide by the law we'll just leave you alone", it stands neutral between different values. But I believe a genuine liberal country does much more, it believes in certain values and actively promotes them: freedom of speech, freedom of worship, democracy, the rule of law, equal rights regardless of race, sex or sexuality. It says to its citizens: "this is what defines us as a society, to belong here is to believe in these things". […] There are practical things we can do [to promote this] as well. That includes making sure that immigrants speak the language of their new home and ensuring that people are educated on the elements of a common culture and curricula. Back home we are introducing National Citizen Service, a two-month programme for 16 years-old from different backgrounds to live and work together. […] That way common purpose can be formed and people come together and work together in their neighbourhoods. It will help build stronger pride in local identity so that people feel free to say "yes, I am a Muslim", "I am a Hindu", "I am a Christian" but "I am also a Londoner" or a "Berliner too". It's that identity, that feeling of belonging to our country, that I believe is key to achieving thorough cohesion." (David Cameron, Speech delivered at the Security Conference in Munich, Germany, 5/2/2011)

Even before his speech, a white anti-racist Britain had provided proof of its existence, as protests were organised following the 1962 Commonwealth Act and the 1968 one. These were protests in which blacks and whites marched together. But it was after his speech, and particularly in the decade of the 70s with the rise of the National Front, that the cooperation between black and white young people was consolidated. If we want to search for a British equivalent to the American civil rights movement, it is to this decade that we need to look. The equivalent of the 1963 "March on Washington" would perhaps be the 1978 "Rock Against Racism" concert in Victoria Park, London. A British version of the civil rights movement can possibly be found for in the rise of punk music, and the rise of one punk band in particular, The Clash.

Following some controversial statements from Eric Clapton during a concert in August of 1976 concerning Britain being "overcrowded" and the need to "Keep Britain White" (as a National Front slogan would have it), and after a David Bowie interview in which he said that there was nothing wrong with fascism and that an Adolf Hitler was exactly what the UK needed, some individuals created an organisation called "Rock Against Racism". Alongside a socialist organisation, the "Anti-Nazi League", these people tried to fight the spread of racist sentiments through a series of concerts, the most successful of which was in 1978. 100,000 people attended the concert in Victoria Park, Hackney, after marching from Trafalgar Square to the East End of London, symbolically passing near the "battleground" (Cable Street) where, in 1936, the then London anti-fascists opposed Oswald Mosley and his attempt to promote anti-Semitism in Britain. The strategy of Rock Against Racism to stop the National Front recruiting young people was to spread the message "Nazis are No Fun", as their banners and magazine said, by organising "carnivals" like those of the West Indian communities. The criticism of Eric Clapton was that while he was doing covers of Bob Marley he was also voicing racist messages without acknowledging how "black music" was redefining his own attitude. The 1970s youth, whether West-Indian or white British, were adopting reggae roots and ska music coming from Jamaica as Britain had become the biggest market for reggae by the middle of the decade. Bob Marley himself had made London and the UK an important place to record, promote, perform, and spend time.

The punk rock band The Clash were a perfect and courageous reflection of this change. Their 1976 *Police and Thieves*, a punk cover of Jamaican reggae artist Junior Marvin's song, merged Jamaican roots with British subculture, announcing the "new" which would influence the younger generations of musicians and European subcultures. Lee "Scratch" Perry, the legendary Jamaican producer of the original version (and pioneer of dub), after hearing the tune – although he said that the Clash had ruined it – collaborated with them in the production of *Complete Control*. In response, Bob Marley composed and released *Punky Reggae Party* in 1977, repeating several times

that a “new wave” was coming and mentioning The Clash, among others, in the list of invited guests to the ideal punky reggae party. One year later, The Clash released *White Man in Hammersmith Palais*, an original punk-reggae tune with ironic lyrics on the socio-economic situation in the UK (“white youth, black youth better find another solution/why not phone up Robin Hood and ask for wealth distribution”), and on the rise of new punk bands (“The new bands are not concerned with what there is to be learned/ They got Burton suits, ha, you think it's funny turning rebellion into money”). The final section of the lyrics of the song, interpretable as an attack on the infiltration of some racists within the punk movement, gives us the possibility of looking more profoundly at the anti-racist imagination of these new subcultures: “All over people changing their coats along with their overcoats/ if Adolf Hitler flew in today, they would send a limousine anyway”.

According to Gilroy, the cultural movement started by Rock Against Racism – building anti-racism on the basis of the new mixed subcultures – was overshadowed by the differing framework provided by their ally, the Anti-Nazi League, which saw anti-racism as a continuation of the noble national socialist tradition of opposing Mosley. This second framework ended up prevailing, according to Girloy, leaving no space for a critical comprehension of racism. Reading the British punk rock lyrics as proof of this, we can say, for instance, that The Sex Pistols, in their provocative *God Save the Queen*, released during the Queen’s Silver Jubilee in 1977, compared the monarchy to a “fascist regime”, not to a racist one, nor to an imperialist one. John “Johnny Rotten” Lydon, the frontman of the band, may have intended that the terms were equivalent while writing the lyrics for the song. But the lack of urgency to disentangle racism from fascism has impeded the younger generations of anti-racists from looking at racism as an autonomous problem. Instead of melting black and white together, this undermining of the racist problem has allowed essentialist tendencies to be reinforced, even within the anti-racist field. The Clash again provide the perfect example of this. The lyrics of one of their most famous and celebrated songs, *White Riot*, were written by Joe Strummer after he and the bass player, Paul Simonon, were involved in the 1976 Nothing Hill Carnival riot. He sings in the chorus: “White Riot, I Wanna Riot/ White Riot, a Riot of My Own”, and the opening verse is as follows:

> Black people gotta a lot of problems
> but they don't mind throwing bricks
> white people go to school
> where they teach how to be thick

Strummer is inviting his “own” white community to riot with the same courage black people show

when “they don't mind throwing bricks”. The motivation for writing this song, Strummer states in the documentary *The Clash: Westway to the World*, was that, in finding himself in the midst of the riot against the police, he had the perception that it was a “black riot”.

It is perhaps an over-simplification to see in the New Labour leadership of the country a sort of political legacy of the “Rock Against Racism” movement. This is because even if Tony Blair impressed a radical change on the general approach of Labour, Labour's Government was criticised during the anti-racist campaigns of the 70s, and still is today by anti-racists. However, seeing Blair's rhetoric on migration – informed by Anthony Giddens' enthusiastic view of globalisation – as a result of the cultural change that Rock Against Racism introduced, allows us to understand where that anti-racism has proved to be inconsistent.

With Labour back in power after eighteen years of Conservative government (Thatcher from 1979 to 1990, Major from 1990 to 1997), Blair undertook policies which opened Britain to economic and skilled migration, in particular granting visas to students, with the idea that migration, and particularly the migration of ideas in the age of globalisation, could only do good for the country. It is estimated that one third of the current foreign population entered the country during Blair's decade as Prime Minister. But, as journalistic investigations have shown, some of those who were granted a student visa were anything but students, enrolling with institutions that did not exist or were not actually educational institutes. Migration, especially after the 2004 expansion of the EU into Eastern Europe which allowed a new wave of legal migration, again came to be perceived as a huge problem by the time Blair left office; and his successor, Gordon Brown, failed to convince the public that the measures he introduced as Prime Minister from 2007 to 2010 (the points system), and the ones he promised if re-elected, had contributed towards reducing the foreign presence in the country. Promising to revise Labour’s flexibility on migration issues, the Conservatives found themselves back in power in 2010, even if without an absolute majority and by being joined in government by the Liberal Democrats. What went wrong?

**“Enoch Was Right”**

Enoch Powell again can answer. In the above-mentioned BBC documentary about Powell, he is shown a TV interview of a young black Labour MP in 1988, Paul Boateng. Boateng says that the day after Powell gave his “River of Blood Speech”, he was “spat at and abused on the streets” for the first time in the country he was born in and loves. Powell responded with: “What's wrong with racism? Racism is the basis of nationality.” In this straightforward answer, given by an old but lucid Powell, albeit diagnosed with Parkinson’s disease, is indicated what the anti-racists have not done: address directly the racism of the nation. They have seemed to promote, by continuing to oppose

whiteness to blackness, even if differently to the fascists, a sort of "weak nationalism". This is the political model that Blair embraced. Cameron replied with a "strong nationalism" in continuity with Thatcherism. But both models, the first by promoting multiculturalism, the second by passively accepting it, do not fight and promote essentialist tendencies: these tendencies grow within society, and the answers they receive from the policies of the governments in power, since the Second World War onwards, cannot but be contradictory. Conversely, there is no internal contradiction in Powell's argument. And the non-contradictoriness of his argument is evident in the official statistics provided by the State. It is because of these numbers, according to Powell, that we must be "mad":

> In 15 or 20 years, on present trends, there will be in this country three and a half million Commonwealth immigrants and their descendants. That is not my figure. That is the official figure given to parliament by the spokesman of the Registrar General's Office.

Gilroy notices how the same use of official statistics spurred a neo-fascist "March Against Mugging" in September 1975. The banner was: "Stop The Muggers. 80% of muggers are black. 85% of victims are white"[28].

> This was significant not simply for its open defiance of the laws on incitement to racial hatred and the new tactic of provocative marches through black areas but for the convergence it represented between the official, respectable politics of race signalled by the authoritative official crime statistics and the street level appeal of the neo-fascist groups who had seized the issue of black crime and begun to refine it into a populist weapon which could prove the wisdom of their distinctive solution to Britain's race problems – repatriation. (Gilroy 1987: 120)

The rise of political correctness as a public morality must have had a role in the successive use of official statistics on ethnicity by the anti-racists: on the basis of "numbers" anti-racists would begin to claim that too many blacks and Asians were being stopped by the police, that ethnic minorities were not properly represented on TV, in Parliament, and at Universities. Numbers are here used to argue that racism exists. But unlike its opposite, which uses numbers to argue that racism is needed, this usage should rather question the logic behind the official ethnic classifications, as this is in contradiction to the professed anti-racism.

In his essay concerning the genocidal violence of the 1990s (India, Rwanda, Yugoslavia) and its relationship with the structure of Western liberal societies, Arjun Appadurai (2006) calls such a logic "fear of small numbers". By this he means the terrible suspicion that the majority may have of ethnic minorities: fear that they could be minorities only momentarily and

[28] Under the same banner, in August 1977, a National Front demonstration in Lewisham turned into a riot.

that could threaten, in the long run, the status of the majority. Measures have to be taken to prevent this; measures that Appadurai calls "predatory", drawing on Taguieff's work on Yugoslavia and on Freud's reading of narcissism. This is indeed a "predatory narcissism", Appadurai argues, the predatory attitude of the majority towards minorities as a consequence of the ethnic absolutism latent in any idea of Nation. Ethnic absolutism is what European romanticism wished for. Enoch Powell, in this sense, is a coherent representative of that tradition. That's why contemporary right-wing extremist groups often say that "Enoch was right" in his prediction that white people would become outnumbered: the 2011 census shows that for the first time since records began, "White British" Londoners are less than half of the London population. But Powell, of course, was right only in defending the logical consequentiality of his mental sensation. For the rest, he was just another victim of the boxing obsession at the time in which political correctness was preparing itself to become public morality.

The socio-historical background offered here is just the last step in the modern struggle for the "proper" way to deal with "difference" for Anglo-Saxons. We can indeed say that the anti-racists of the 70s are the descendents of the 18th century slavery abolitionists; while Queen Elizabeth I's 1596 letter to the Mayor of London ordering the ejection of "blackamoores"[29] from the country (see Fryer 2010: 10) is already a formulation of the political proposal Enoch Powell voiced in the late 60s to deal with mass migration. I have just focused on the debate of the last sixty years to get as close as possible to the temporal threshold of my fieldwork experience; but now we need to go back to that "time that is always with us" to understand the recursivity of this situation: the recursivity of the body-to-body interaction and of the mental sensation of the interacting subjects. To investigate such a level we need to leave the socio-historical register and begin to undertake some incursions into the field of biology. This is what I aim to do while building a "minimal theory of the linguistic act".

## 2) Minimal Theory of the Linguistic Act

### Pre-Linguistic Empathy

St Augustine's notorious statement on Time, quoted at the very beginning of Fabian's *Time and the Other*, may also work if we replace the word "time" with "empathy": "What is *empathy*? If no one asks me about it, I know; if I want to explain it to the one who asks, I don't know". Empathy is that

[29] As were called those people who were brought in as servant slaves and those who worked on the docks of the Empire.

“special” temporal relationship between two or more events happening at the same time. It differs from other events of simultaneity because the ones involved here are feelings, emotions, movements of the soul: the simultaneity is between mental sensations.

Anthropologists and fieldworkers in particular often avail themselves of the type of knowledge stirred up by empathy. Let us take into consideration this famous Clifford Geertz quote, taken from the “Native Point of View”:

> Understanding the form and pressure of natives' inner lives is more like grasping a proverb, catching an illusion, seeing a joke – or, as I suggested, reading a poem – than it is like achieving communion (Geertz 1983: 70).

Geertz is invoking here a dimension of performative simultaneity: the fieldwork face-to-face interaction in which the performance of the proverb, the illusion, the joke by the natives produces the internal performance of the “grasping”, “catching”, understanding of it by the anthropologist. The second is produced by the first, in the sense that the “grasping” is of the “proverb”, but one is a condition of the other as the proverb would be nonsense without one grasping it. The job of the anthropologist is to grasp, to understand the difference between a “twitch” and a “wink”, to quote Geertz, at the exact moment one or the other is produced. Time and a process of observation and participation in the life of the natives are necessary before the anthropologist can cognitively grasp their point of view; but the objective of any fieldworker is to establish, to the fullest possible extent, a relationship of simultaneity between, so to say, the events of the informants' culture and the understanding of them in the fieldworker's mind.

To use a concept, “entrainment”, originating with the physicist Christian Huygen in 1666 when he observed that two pendulum clocks with different oscillatory movements synchronise when placed on a common surface – we could infer that the success or failure of a fieldwork research project is based on the fieldworker's ability to *entrain* with the locals, to be able to walk as if the shoes on their feet were locals' shoes. Clayton, Sager and Will (2004), in their proposal to sensitivise the study of ethnomusicology to the concept of entrainment, stress that entrainment takes place not only between human bodies and between the human body and the environment, but also within the human body itself; such as for instance the entrainment between the movement of the legs and arms when walking. The authors argue that a bio-cultural approach to the phenomenon of entrainment would contribute to the study of musical performance, music learning, and a comprehensive understanding of music itself. The point underpinning their project is that the human body is “made” to entrain, and learning to make music – “musicking” to quote Cristopher Small (1998), who considers musicking the relationship between performers and the audience – involves

cognitive and non-cognitive components, requiring a holistic and inter-disciplinary approach. In this sense, to return to our question of the ability of the fieldworker to entrain with the locals, it is impossible for the researcher embedded in face-to-face and daily interaction with the locals not to entrain with them and for them not to entrain with him/her: this is at least impossible at the pre-cognitive level of tuning in with the external environment.

A discovery in the field of neuroscience prepared the ground for the proposal Clayton et al. are advancing for ethnomusicology. In the mid-1990s, a team of neuroscientists from the University of Parma, led by Giacomo Rizzolatti, was struck by a casual discovery while carrying out research on the nervous system of macaque monkeys. The same area of the monkey's brain, the premotor cortex F5, was activated both when the monkey performed an action – to grasp a peanut in order to eat it – and when the same action was seen executed by the researcher carrying out the experiment. This was as a revolutionary finding for the study of the brain as it contradicted the previous understanding that the perception and motor systems were parts of two different networks. Rizzolatti, Gallese, Fadiga and Fogassi, however, showed that in monkeys and presumably in the human brain as well, there exist important and special neurons able to carry out both sensory and motor functions. They called them "mirror neurons", precisely because of their characteristic of mirroring what they sensorily perceive in the external environment. The researchers hypothesise a decisive role for these neurons in the evolutionary step from monkey to human, especially in the evolution of language. Further research carried out with fMRI and cutting-edge technology of the human brain's activity allowed identification of the regions of the human brain more commonly featuring mirror neurons (premotor cortex, supplementary motor areas, primary somatosensory cortex and the inferior parietal cortex), singling out a special class of mirror neurons, the "audio-visual" ones, which would fire not only when seeing an action, but also when hearing the sound with which an action is associated[30].

This finding brings to the fore the functioning of a pre-linguistic mechanism of communication governing the human capacity of empathy with others and the capacity to mimic another's actions. Vittorio Gallese, one of the four discoverers of mirror neurons, has called such an ancient mechanism "embodied simulation" (Gallese 2005), highlighting the role of the peri-personal space, the space within reach, for its functioning.

> Vision, sound and action are parts of an integrated system; the sight of an object at a given location, or the

[30] The presence of mirror neurons in the human brain has been a matter of debate for neuroscience ever since the work of the Parma researchers was published. Some have argued that there is not enough evidence for their existence, expressing perplexity about their alleged role in reading the intention of another, and challenging the view that autism is due to a lack of mirror neurons, which a therapy based on motor activity could treat. The research conducted by Mukamel et al. 2010 seems to resolve the argument in favour of the Parma researchers.

> sound it produces, automatically triggers a “plan” for a specific action directed toward that location. What is a “plan” to act? It is a simulated potential action. (Gallese 2005: 27)

In analysing the mirror mechanism, Gallese has embarked upon an interesting line of research in which the empirical evidence of neuroscience is excitingly juxtaposed with the philosophical and psychological tradition of study around the themes of empathy, intersubjectivity and social cognition. This has led Gallese to see in the work of the French phenomenologist Maurice Merleau-Ponty the best description of the mechanism that mirror neurons indicate, precisely because Merleau-Ponty emphasised

> the specific motor intentional nature of the space of the body, when he wrote that bodily awareness is 'neither the mere copy nor even the global awareness of the existing parts of the body', but the 'active integration of these latter only in proportion of their value to the organism's project. In other words, this means that my body appears to me as an attitude directed towards a certain existing or possible task. And indeed, its spatiality is not like that of external objects or like that of spatial sensations, a “spatiality of position”, but a spatiality of situation' (Gallese & Sinigaglia 2010: 132).

Alongside the philosopher Corrado Sinigaglia, Gallese has used Merleau-Ponty's notion of “spatiality of position” and American psychologist James Gibson's notion of “affordance” to challenge those views which attribute a basic role for the awareness of self only to proprioception, the sensory perception of one’s own body. Rather, it is “proprioception of the Other”, we could paraphrase, that Gallese and Sinigaglia see as a primary awareness of the self. Unlike the view of the proprioceptive awareness which founds the self independently of otherness, Gallese and Sinigaglia argue that the self can recognise itself only when recognising otherness as power to act, and realising that it has the same power to act. Primary awareness of the self must therefore be in what they call a “manifold of action possibilities”.

> Bodily self awareness as a manifold of action possibilities provides the common ground for and the distinguishing criterium between self and another at least at a basic level. The discovery of the mirror mechanism for action indicates that the very same action possibilities that shape our bodily self also make us aware of other bodily selves inasmuch as their action possibilities can be mapped onto our own ones. (ibid.)

The view of the basic self as manifold of action possibilities is in keeping with the hypothesis of the gestural origin of language. Giacomo Rizzolatti and Michael A. Arbib (1998) argue that the existence of a mirror system for gesture recognition in Broca's area of the brain, the area of speech in humans, suggests that the origin of language lies in communication via hands, upon which

vocalisation has then been attached. “Then” being here more of an evolutionary jump to Homo than an adverb.

> Imprints in fossil cranial cavities indicate that 'speech areas' were already present in early hominids such as Homo habilis, but there is debate over whether or not such areas were already present or not in austrapolithecines. A plausible hypothesis is that the transition from the australopithecines to the first forms of Homo coincided with the transition from a mirror system, enlarged but used only for action recognition, to a human-like mirror system used for intentional communication. Our view on the subsequent scenario is close to that of Corballis. The 'proto-speech' areas of early hominids mediated oro-facial and brachio-manual communication, but not speech. The long period from the appearance of these areas to the appearance of speech coincided with an increased capacity to communicate with gesture and the progressive association of gesture with vocalization. (Arbib & Rizzolatti 1998: 193)

In the capacity of the fieldworker to simply entrain with the Other at the beginning of the fieldwork enterprise, that is to say when the fieldworker is not yet fully aware of all the local particularities which shape the local language of the body, way of communicating, in essence: local culture; there is presumably at work an ancient mechanism allowing the stranger to recognise the actions and intentions of the observed and to react consequently. This is a non-propositional recognition. But what happens when the proposition takes place, when one wants to cognitively interact with another?

**The Violence and Potentiality of the Linguistic Act**

Consider now the incidents that many Arab and Muslim women experienced in Australia during the 1991 Gulf War, and on which Ghassan Hage develops an interesting understanding of the form racism takes within the nation: “I just saw her hand, she pulled my hair and my scarf violently, pushed me and started shouting abuse...” (quoted in Hage 1998: 27). The hand that tears the scarf off the Muslim woman's head executes a nationalist practice, according to Hage. The person involved in such an activity might be employing racist terminology while doing so, but, he contends, the pulling off of a Muslim woman’s scarf by somebody who considers themselves to be Australian, and to possess certain rights concerning the nation and privileges over those perceived as non-Australians living in the nation, involves a relationship between self and territoriality for which nationalism, more than racism, captures the meaning of the mentioned practice. For Hage, statements like “they are too many”, arming the hands of the violent nationals over those who are classified as “too many” and hence unwelcome, are primarily “categories of spatial management” (ibid.: 38).

Hage's reading of the relationship between nationalism and racism is not new. The French philosopher Etienne Balibar previously described racism as the “supplement internal to

nationalism" in his reflections on class, nation and race, alongside the historian of the world system Immanuel Wallerstein (Balibar & Wallerstein 1991: 54). Michael Herzfeld, on the other (anthropological) hand, prepared the ground for seeing the relationship which nationalism establishes with the intimacy of individuals by ethnographically attempting to answer the question: "Why do people continually reify the State?" (Herzfeld 2005: 5). Before this, and with different premises, Ernest Gellner had already produced an original reading of nationalism, arguing that it is nothing less than an inescapable consequence of modernity (Gellner 1983). The innovation in Hage's interpretation, however, lies entirely in viewing *nationalism as the logic that orders the space surrounding the individual.*

This interpretation indicates a significant relationship with the description of the primary self that Gallese and Sinigaglia articulate, in that it shows what can happen when the cognitive level of communication intervenes. As argued, the primary self, for Gallese and Sinigaglia, experiences its own bodily awareness in the peri-personal space where one experiments with the possibility of movement. Hage's view of the function of the hand, in the scarf incident described above, is that the logic of nationalism *colonises*, so to speak, the space within (peri-personal) and without (extero-personal) the reach of the individual, so that, we can conclude, the manifold of action possibilities ends up being limited by the imposition of such a logic. The function of the hand is not only to aggressively violate the peri-personal space of the Muslim woman, but also to reconfirm the legitimacy, deriving from the nationalist logic, of the aspirations of the one who wants to feel at "home" in the space surrounding his or her body.

Here we start to delineate the perimeter of the situation of the Body of the Other as Truth under a narcissistic logic. The Italian philosopher of language Paolo Virno argues, in a dialogue with the discoverers of mirror neurons, that the effect of the invention of language in humans, and the imposition of linguistic categories on the human mind, is to *partially put out of order* the mirror mechanism. This happens, Virno argues, with a certain use of the word "not", such as in the phrase "this is not a Man", in order to deny the recognition of sameness that mirror neurons perform. "This is not a Man" could be seen as the logic underlining any de-humanising attempt undertaken in history. Virno's point, however, is not that before language there existed a sort of "altruistic man", who then became violent when language was introduced. He rather sees the relationship between what he calls the "common" – the biological pre-linguistic which characterises us as Homo Sapiens – and the linguistic performance as a tension between potential and act, in which the act defuses the potential and the potential is triggered by the act. In this sense the word "not" could also be used to deny the logic of de-humanisation, the denial of denial. This is why language, in its combinatory possibilities, can only "partially" prevent the mirror mechanism from influencing the direction of

the cognitive proposition. Let us expand on this by broadening our perspective of Virno's philosophical anthropology.

**Externalising the Linguistic Medium to Chase Away the Crisis**

Virno's work, especially his *Quando il Verbo si fa Carne* (Virno 2003) and *E cosi' via all'Infinito*, (Virno 2010), to which I will refer in this section, is the victim of a prejudice that has a long philosophical tradition: that of considering the human as the only linguistic animal present in nature. According to this anthropocentric understanding of language, other animals are, yes, able to communicate, but they lack of the capacity for abstraction through which humans not only talk, but also uniquely "talk about the fact of talking". This reflective aspect of human language is commonly seen as both the result and cause of the invention of the alphabet. The authors who voice such a view are not always able to be consistent with the assertion of the duplicity of reflexivity as both cause and consequence of the invention of alphabetic writing. One example of this is given by Walter J. Ong's *Orality and Literacy*, a classic and praise-worthy text of cognitive anthropology which I will examine here as opposition to and completion of Virno's philosophy.

Ong produces a creative contrast when he argues that "orality needs to produce and is destined to produce writing" (Ong 1982: 14). But he is not able to recognise this when affirming that the introduction of writing drastically revolutionises the organisation and structure of human thought as previously known in the societies of "primary orality" – as Ong calls illiterate societies. Orality and literacy are here no longer complementing one another but are placed at opposite poles, given that primary orality cannot be but annihilated by the victory of writing. On the one hand, building on the work of Milman Parry concerning the formulaic oral sources of the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* – which Homer, if he ever existed, presumably just weaved together rather than wrote – and on the further insights of Eric Havelock on the internalisation of writing which took place with Plato, Ong establishes that the scriptural externalisation of the linguistic medium managed to free the mind from the obligation to remember, allowing the development of the analytic criterion of objectification over the affective, situational, participatory and mnemonic discourse of illiterate societies. On the other hand however, such a shift is presented as promoted by the will of persons "rooted in primary orality, who want literacy passionately but who also know very well that moving into the exciting world of literacy means leaving behind much that is exciting and deeply loved in the earlier oral world. We have to die to continue living" (ibid.). Such a will to externalise the linguistic medium so as to promote intellectual operations of objectification is not captured in its own deep implications. Take this passage as an example:

> It is of course possible to count as 'writing' any semiotic mark, that is, any visible or sensible mark which an individual makes and assigns a meaning to. Thus a simple scratch on a rock or a notch on a stick interpretable only by the one who makes it would be 'writing'. If this is what is meant by writing, the antiquity of writing is perhaps comparable to the antiquity of speech. However, investigations of writing which take 'writing' to mean any visible or sensible mark with an assigned meaning merge writing with purely *biological* behaviour. When does a footprint or a deposit of faeces or urine (used by many species of animals for communication – Wilson 1975, pp. 228–9) become 'writing'? Using the term 'writing' in this extended sense to include any semiotic marking trivializes its meaning. The critical and unique breakthrough into new worlds of knowledge was achieved within human consciousness not when simple semiotic marking was devised but when a coded system of visible marks was invented whereby a writer could determine the exact words that the reader would generate from the text. This is what we usually mean today by writing in its sharply focused sense. (ibid.: 94, my italics)

Ong's canonical and alphabetical definition of writing, while certainly correct, does not allow him to grasp the point where writing becomes a "biological behaviour" in itself. It is here that Virno's materialistic project of the philosophy of language becomes extremely interesting.

Virno sees the will to externalise the linguistic medium as the point where biology and culture diverge and meet at the same time. It is a biological need as long as its act founds the culture, and cultural as long as it is influenced by biological factors. These factors are: super-reflexivity, transcendency and duplicity of form (Virno 2010: 57). Without going deeply into this, it is enough to say that these three are the passions that, according to Virno, shape the performance of what he calls the "logic base of metaphysics". This is not metaphysics but what contributes to articulating it: the mental sensation, I want to say. Here, according to him, there are three forms of logic at its base. They are the form of negation, revealed by the use of the word "not", the modality of the possible, revealed in the use of the word "possible", and the regression to the infinite, revealed in the use of the phrase "and so on".

> Everything makes us believe that metaphysics, with its characteristic repertory of non empirical problems, is a natural tendency of our species. A tendency which can be explained via some decisive biological requirements. But metaphysics, on its own, says nothing about such requirements. Things are different for its logic base. Such a base coincides, indeed, with the distinctive traits of *Homo sapiens*. The negation, the modality of the possible, the regression to the infinite, if, on one hand, creating the texture of a *primary philosophy* (allowing questions such as: "why is there something instead of nothing?"), on the other represent the syntactic correlation to important phylogenetic evidence (for instance, of the persistence of infantile characters even in mature age and a related lack of congenital inhibitions). The logic base of metaphysics, unlike what has from time to time been built around it, amounts to a totality of adaptive functions, balancing the modes through which the animal gifted with language executes those cognitive and operative tasks on which depend their survival, making evident the texture of emotions and affections characterising their existence. (ibid.: 10, my

translation)

Virno narrows his focus to try and pinpoint the original intention of the human will to emit sound, and therefore to externalise the linguistic medium via sound. This sound, he argues, is both cultural, because it produces the "here and now", humans' necessity to distance themselves from the present to operate in it; and biological, in that it responds to the physiological mechanism that produces the "here and now", through the apparatus of speech.

I would rather see the "double sensation of touch" (upon which Husserl and Merleau-Ponty have pondered), that is to say the event of touching and being touched that one can experience at the same time (being object and subject), as the biological fact underpinning the logic base of metaphysics. In fact, to explain the forms of logic at the base of metaphysics through words (the words "not", "possible", and "and so on") could be misleading. It is a product of the analytical discourse that the internalisation of writing promotes to think of these three forms of logic (negation, the modality of the possible and regression to the infinite) as three distinct empirical realities. They are reduced to three different things only through a process of objectification. But they are given, or better still, their possibility of being is given, all at the same time, and that is the *temporality of the mental sensation*. The will moving the sound, through the vibration of the vocal chords, the movement of the larynx and the tongue's muscles, or the will moving the hands, I add, enables the possibility of Virno's three forms of logic all at once. Maybe Virno does not dwell long enough upon such misconceptions produced by the scriptual prejudice, as if this was not an important point to make. This is the reason why, if, at the beginning of this section, I said that Virno is victim of an *anthropocentric* conception of language, I really meant "alphabetical".

However, Virno is consistent with the anthropo-genetic account here provided, particularly in an earlier work (Virno 2003). Here, building on Austin's theory of linguistic acts, he comments on the notion of the "absolute performative". This is the linguistic act which privileges the "fact-that-one-speaks" over "what-is-said", the event of speaking over the semantic meaning of the proposition. The absolute performative, Virno explains, starts with the baby producing articulated sounds and experimenting with its own vocal capabilities; but it does not go away in the life of the adult speaker. It represents itself every time "the exhibition of the 'fact-that-one-speaks' is the real objective of the enunciation" (ibid.: 43). The absolute performative is captured by the logic of the one who says: "I speak".

> The absolute performative ritually represents and reiterates crucial episodes of anthropo-genesis. During any banal quotidian conversation, it allows the speaker to go back in time on the genetic terrain, to the exact moment when they became... a speaker. On the ground of personal biography, the discourse which has the

> logical form of “to say 'I say'” is an incursion into infancy. Moreover: it delineates a brusque reversal of direction in the journey made by ontogenesis. (ibid: 48, my translation)

The following is key to Virno's interpretation. This “I say” is redundant, but such redundancy is redemptive when the silence is overwhelming and the one who is able to speak finds themselves anxiously and dramatically unable to execute the act of speaking. They are overwhelmed by an excess of potential and an absence of execution of the act. Through the coupling of his linguistic theory framework, potential and act, Virno employs to the fullest the work of Italian anthropologist Ernesto De Martino regarding the philosophical debate on self-consciousness.

Writing in Italy's post war period, De Martino, scholar and ethnographer of popular religious forms in the pre-modern and 1950s/60s Italian rural folk sphere, challenged the common assumptions on consciousness stemming from Kant's idealism. From 1948’s *Il Mondo Magico* (The Magical World) onwards, he used Martin Heidegger's existentialist language to argue that the “cogito ergo sum” acquisition of the consciousness (*dasein*) is not given definitively, but always with the risk of not being (Martino 2003). That's why it needs to be re-conquered every time it ends up being lost. Westerners should not be to confident about the cogito ergo sum condition of their civilisation, De Martino argues, because this is continually under attack from the precariousness of social and individual life. They should rather look at the societies of the past, from which their present is shaped, to see how those people faced the problem of cultural apocalypses, the end of the world, and managed to chase away the crisis: in doing so they will understand how the past survives in the present. Benedetto Croce, De Martino's mentor and an energetic representative of idealist philosophy in Italy, destroyed De Martino's innovative views in *Il Mondo Magico*, contemptuously and ironically charging De Martino of “venerating the wizard” of pre-modern society (see Berrocal 2009). De Martino was indeed fascinated by the techniques the wizard had devised to transcend the present world and go back to exorcise the crisis and maintain social and political order. He singled out in the wizard’s behaviour an important asset, the dynamic crisis-redemption, with which, in his view, modernity still had to confront itself.

In several pages of *Quando Il Verbo si fa Carne*, Virno lets us see the explosive connection his anthropo-genetic approach to philosophy of language can establish with the ontological condition of crisis-redemption De Martino suggests. De Martino, Virno argues, is occasionally not consistent with the powerful premises of his framework, to the point of running the risk of seriously affecting it. This happens when defining the “transcendent ethos” of the wizard – the energy to make the present by distancing from it – as a categorical imperative (Virno 2003: 85). Such a “transcendent ethos” is for Virno rather a passion driving the linguistic animal to experience the logic base of metaphysics. But how does the linguistic animal first experience it?

Let us put Virno/De Martino with Gallese and Sinigaglia. As the latter two point out, the baby can recognise what the facial expression of the mother is telling it as long as it is able to map out the movement as something it can potentially do. And time is needed, the time of the experience and experiment of that movement, before the baby can learn what the movement means and give feedback with a smile and laugh to the funny face and vocal expression of the mother, who aimed to provoke such a reaction. This means that when the mother first displays that body movement, the baby finds itself in crisis, which it can solve only by an act: the act it can experiment with in its peri-personal space. This act, which helps the baby know what its limitations are, executes the function of exorcising the state of immobilisation represented by the excess and absence of limitation. But is this not the condition in which the baby is born? And what does a baby do just after it is born and starts interacting with the world? It cries, after its peri-personal space is invaded by the hands of the midwife that holds it. It cries in desperation, emitting sounds as desperation. After a while it quietens down. This is when the crisis is resolved. And it has been resolved by experimenting with the body movements that emit sounds. Until the next crisis presents itself, and "so on" and "so on"...

To quote one of the two "founders" of neuro-anthropology, Greg Downey, we could say that the crying of the newborn baby is how our "embodied learning" – that is to say the process through which the "organic entity of our body is modified by behaviour, training and experience, deeply encultured" – begins.

> Skill learning is not the internalisation of a shared "sense" of transmission of a reified cultural structure. Rather enskillment is the patient transformation of the novice, the change of his or her muscles, attention patterns, motor control, neurological systems, emotional reaction/interaction patterns and top-down self management techniques (Downey 2005: S36).

But this enskillment probably begins even before the experience of the emission of sound. It begins in the movement of the limbs of the fetus in the maternal uterus. The power to act, which Gallese and Sinigaglia refer to as a minimal condition for the self, perhaps begins in that experience of touching the surrounding space. This is a hypothesis which would allow us to explore a route that Derrida's deconstructionism did not develop to the fullest extent, even though it is the debt which he acknowledged to Leroi-Gourhan's *Speech and Gesture* that drives us to embrace this path. Which is to say, emphasising the role of *touch as a linguistic act*.[31] This is essential when

[31] While this is key to his critique of Western logocentrism, Derrida touched upon this topic only tangentially. He does so, for instance, in a seminar entitled "Heidegger's Hand" (see Derrida 1987). The situation is the same with the problem of narcissism. For example, in an interview he says that "there is no one narcissism", and that "what is called non-narcissism is in general but the economy of a much more welcoming, hospitable narcissism, one that is much more

distinguishing the *habitus* of the mental sensation from the *habitus* of the boxing obsession.

## 3) Habitus of the Body of the Other as Truth

### The Colonisation of the Common through the Public

The theory of the emittance of sound can only provide a provisional understanding of why the boxing obsession is first and foremost a matter of words: a situation created and solved by words. It does not explain yet why those words have one and only one meaning, so that the Body of the Other is the Truth. A complementary reading of Ong and Virno is of further help here.

As pointed out earlier, Ong builds on Havelock's interpretation to argue that the Athens in which Plato was philosophising was a society that had internalised writing more than previous generations had. Havelock suggests that Plato did not include the traditional poets as law-makers in his *Republic* precisely because in Plato's society a cognitive revolution had finally, some time after the invention of writing, taken root[32]. A change in the experience of the word, Ong argues, did happen: from being an "evanescent sound" (Homer, Ong remembers, talked of "flying words"), the word now occupied a visual space and had become a thing. In the realm of writing, it is possible to see the word; the word is confined to a chirographic space, and such a space liberates the word from the evanescence of primary orality. This has a countereffect, though: if the chirographic technology can liberate the mind and support its capacity for abstraction, at the same time it limits the word to a strict correspondence between graphic codification and sound, so as to discourage variation in the performance of it. This is the change, according to Ong, that writing put in place and that print, and more recently electronics, supported, increasing its rate of diffusion and establishing it in the minds of the popular classes.

But what is the *habitus* that the spatial quality of the word introduced? Ong answers this question while commenting on Derrida's *Of Grammatology*:

> Jacques Derrida has made the point that 'there is no linguistic sign before writing' (1976, p. 14). But neither is there a linguistic 'sign' after writing if the oral reference of the written text is adverted to. Though it releases unheard-of potentials of the word, a textual, visual representation of a word is not a real word, but a 'secondary

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open to the experience of the other as other. I believe that without a movement of narcissistic reappropriation, the relation to the other would be absolutely destroyed, it would be destroyed in advance" (Derrida 1995: 199). What I do here is put Derrida's thoughts regarding hands and narcissism into perspective by building an anthropological theory of language.

[32] It is generally agreed that the invention of writing, in the sense of a written language, can be traced back to the Mesopotamiam civilisation of Ancient Sumer around 3,200 BC. However, what is considered to be the first "true alphabet", including letters for vowels (which the Phoenicians did not have), was the Greek alphabet around the 8th century BC. Plato was living in the 5th and 4th centuries BC.

> modelling system' (cf. Lotman 1977). Thought is nested in speech, not in texts, all of which have their meanings through reference of the visible symbol to the world of sound. What the reader is seeing on this page are not real words but coded symbols whereby a properly informed human being can evoke in his or her consciousness real words, in actual or imagined sound. It is impossible for script to be more than marks on a surface unless it is used by a conscious human being as a cue to sounded words, real or imagined, directly or indirectly. (Ong 1983: 84)

The major effect of the introduction and internalisation of writing lies in the solidification of a difficult to deconstruct, "far more difficult, it would seem, than the 'deconstruction of literature'" (ibid.: 86), deceitful mode of thinking of words as "visual analogues". Ong admits that such a visual reductionism is "perhaps incipient in oral cultures but clearly marked in chirographic cultures and far more marked in typographic and electronic cultures" (ibid.: 85). I would suggest that the mirror system and gestural theory of the origin of language, proposed by Arbib and Rizzolatti, leads us to suppose that the "first word" was invented by triggering a visual mechanism, and that therefore providing visual analogues for words was not something writing invented, but was something engrained in the human language.

The model of the "crystal image" developed by Gilles Deleuze (1989) from Charles Peirce's semiology – which I will discuss in Chapter 5 – is perhaps of help in understanding the enigma of the creation of the first word. Crystal images are cinematographic representations which reveal themselves to be so internalised by the subjective viewer that the experience of watching them in the past comes back to influence the viewer's choices in the present: they come back in the present crystallised from the past, like Proust's madeleine[33]. Removing the element of the cinematographic mediation, we could similarly imagine that the crystallisation of an important event in the memory of those that experienced it in the immediacy of the situation created the need to provide a linguistic act of correspondence. Recalling these sensory experiences of the past while performing the linguistic act of the "here and now" is a process of reification. But there is nothing wrong, Virno strongly suggests, with reification. This is the mechanism through which human language works. The problem is rather with alienation and fetishism.

> Fetishism consists of attributing to anything whatsoever requirements which belong exclusively to the mind; reification of highlighting aspects of the activity *of the* mind. Fetishism makes abstract, numinous and inscrutable, a sensible object; reification shows the space-time reality in which abstraction comes about, that is to say it proves the existence of *real abstractions*. Fetishism masks the empirical as transcendental, reification ends with the empirical revelation of the transcendental. If I attribute to the phenomenon that I am representing

[33] Taste and smell receptors, we know today, preserve the oldest traces of memory in the hippocampus, but they are also the slowest senses in processing information. In the conclusion to this chapter I reflect on the hierarchy of senses that the boxing obsession strengthens to establish linguistic values.

> to myself the prerogatives due uniquely to the categories of the *a priori* on which depends the representation, I am transforming that phenomenon into a fetish. If, though, I am dealing with phenomena that mirror the logical structure of the categories of the *a priori*, I am standing before a genuine reification of the representational activity. (Virno 2003: 114, my translation)

On the basis of this differentiation between reification and fetishism we could say that the very difficulty in deconstructing the mode of thinking of the word that writing introduced is a fetishist *habitus* that forgets the sensorial and experiential limitations of the word as a pre-condition. The problem of alienation and fetishism, as Virno paraphrases the Gospel of John, is when the "word does not become body" (ibid.), when the precondition does not become objective of the crisis-redemption dynamic. To put it another way, the problem is that, in the societies that have internalised the alphabet, it is not the sensory mechanism of the immediacy of the oral communication which shapes the word, but that the word is evoked from a third context which precedes the actions produced in the oral communication. This third context is the alphabet, but I would like to suggest that such a third-ness that allows the oral communication between strangers, people that do not know each other, is exactly what Michael Warner (2002) means by "public". The public is not thinkable without an internalised idea of borders: a public has indeed a "counter-public" as well. The borders come first, then the relationship. Virno's "common" and Gallese's and Sinigaglia's "manifold of action possibilities" is what can make the public: they are not the public already made. The product of the common, the public, is the arena where the crisis emerges; the common is greatly implicated when trying to solve this. The difficulty Ong refers to is the emergence of a *habitus* which tries to solve the crisis by inverting the common-public relationship through which our ancestors began to create a coded language (iconic images) among themselves; that is to say, not the common making the public but the public imposing itself on the common. But how does it *materially* do this? In the same way our ancestors did when creating a public among themselves: by *capturing the body of a con-specific by touching*.

This might be self-evident with the example of the hand that tears the veil off a Muslim woman in Australia. But I argue that it is evident even when, in Figure 1, my finger points to my own face. The function of my finger is not to point at my face. It is rather to point at the physical qualities of the body of the person with whom I am speaking. The difference when our ancestors made the gesture of touching another is that at that time they were opening up a public. Now the public is being *closed*. Both in the Australian case and in Figure 1 the Body of the Other is a Word – not the possibility of a word – and this word is the Truth. This changes our understanding of racism.

**Inverted Temporality: Pre Defined by the Post**

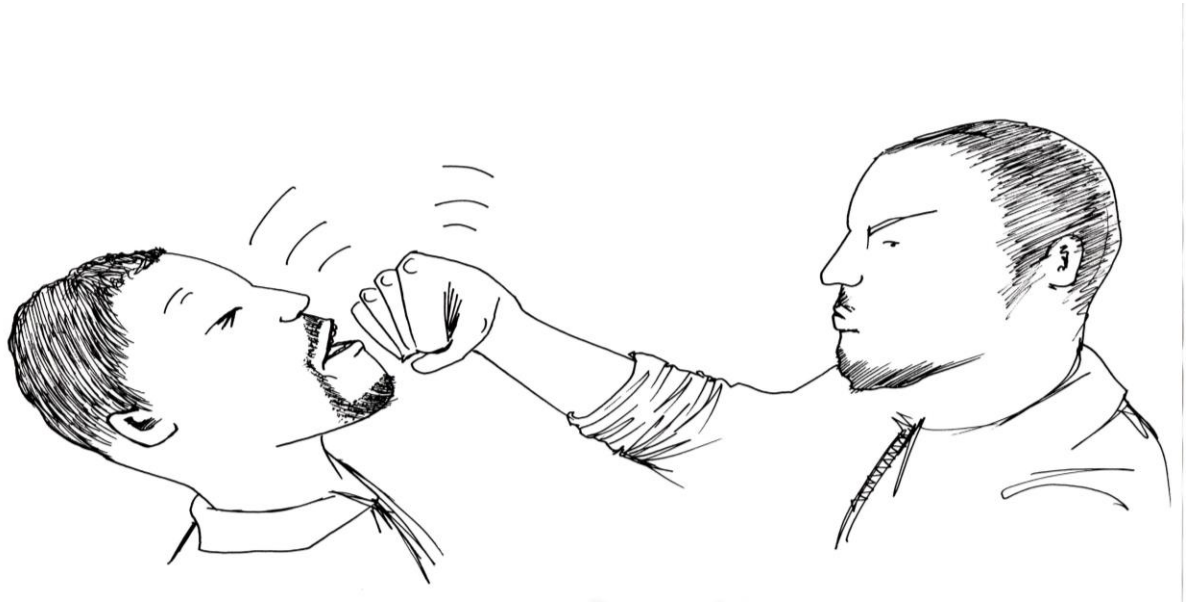
Gassan Hage (1998), although offering a very decisive approach to the understanding of nationalism, does not do the same with regards to defining racism. He opposes propositions like "everybody is racist", on the grounds that if everybody is, then racism does not exist. However, in so doing he ends up privileging the inadequate view according to which one is clearly racist only when using racist vocabulary, frustrating here the potential of his proposal. This unexplored territory of racism is what I suggest the boxing obsession requires us to examine. Anthropology does not seem to have reached an autonomous position on the topic of racism. The theoretical contributions offered in the field of sociology or philosophy are often borrowed or commented on by anthropologists when facing the topic directly. Even when anthropologists seem to come up with an original understanding, like in the case of Verena Stolke, who in 1995 observed the emergence of a new form of racism based on the absolutisation of cultures, these understandings do not appear so original within other fields; Stolke's observation, for instance, was made some time earlier by the British philosopher Martin Baker (1981) who, in analysing the practices and rhetoric of the new xenophobic parties and organisations, noticed how it was not a belief in a hierarchy of races upon which this racism was being articulated, but upon a horizontal concept of difference.

Read with the sensibilities of today, Levi Strauss' *Race and Culture* would stir up criticisms of cultural racism for his emphasis that cultures are inherently inimical to one another. Criticisms that would not do justice to the fecundity of the observation made: it is actually argued that it is not the race that determines the culture, but the opposite (see Levi-Strauss 1988, and also the Conclusion of this dissertation). The culture that determines the race is the situation of the history (or culture) that influences the historicity (or biology), which we need to understand in order to understand racism.

An understanding which approaches the point I want to make can be found in the theoretical framework provided by Bauman and Gingrich (2002) in *Grammars of Identity/Alterity: A Structural Approach*. The suggestion of the authors, and particularly Bauman in his own essay, is that in order to understand the moment at which violence explodes it is necessary to look at the grammar through which identity/alterity is articulated. The diary of Victor Klemperer, a German philologist of Jewish ancestry, is offered as a case in point. In his diary, Klemperer notes a change happening in the use of certain words in the German public just after Hitler took power. He was alarmed when he heard the phrase "punitive expedition" used nonchalantly by his student and adoptive son to describe the activity they were involved in: a punitive expedition against the communists. He sensed that a change in the language was taking place before the final solution of the concentration camps was even inaugurated, demonstrating how a focus on language can help understand violence. Studying

the semantics of words can help understand when violence occurs but no words are spoken, as in Figure 2:

[Figure 2]



Bauman grasps that grammars of identity/alterity are all ternary, involving a third element, but does not acknowledge the temporal scenario in which this third-ness comes into play. He rather sees it, building on Roland Barthes' staggering, as an ideological passage. Which is true, but it is also true that the ideology comes "after" the situation depicted in Figure 3.

[Figure 3]

The balloon represents that the person is thinking, experiencing their mental sensation, and feeling that what they are going to say or do is certain, it is how they feel, even in the case of punching somebody or simply saying something. The person here is alone to represent the "loneliness" of thinking: you are alone when you think. To become rhetorical one needs to be taken away from the

condition of sociality.

Carrithers' theory fragment does not acknowledge this temporality either. Yes, it opposes the Gospel of John's assumption that "In the beginning was the Word" by arguing that the situation comes first, and then the words to understand the situation. But it does not address the temporal dimension of the production of words. It is not clear, for example, what the characteristics of the "fragment" in the theory are: is it a substitute for smallness, meaning that the quantity of theory involved here is a fragment compared to other more ambitious projects, such as the Kantian philosophical enterprise which Carrithers mentions? Or is it rather a connotation of time, because the point at which "anthropology and history converge" is a matter of fragmentation in terms of temporality?

Homi Bhabha (2008) might provide an answer, in asserting that the temporality of Figure 3, the temporality of the prise de la parole, is indeed a problematic one. In a presentation given at Berkley in 2008, Bhabha argued that the present of enunciation is split between the present of the "recognition of the now" and the future anterior of the "what has been". By building on the notorious statement of Walter Benjamin: "there is no document of civilization which is not at the same time a document of barbarism", via a discussion of the messianic tone in James Elliot's literature, Bhabha faces the problem of "cultural transmission" in history in terms of the temporality of the enunciation site. For Bhabha, like Carrithers, there is a movement building up to a speech. This movement is called a "translational move", and opens up the space for performing the "now". The problem with the "now" is that "the insistence of the unconscious of trauma and the institution of a narrative of historical consciousness" passes through it. The what has been, in Bhabha's reading of Benjamin, will happen again, even though it will not be identical to how it was but "new", and the way it will be "new" will depend on the recognition of the now, the "institution of a narrative of historical consciousness".

The temporality of Figure 3, the enunciation site, is split between the present of the recognition of the now and its future anterior, which will depend on the now, but which will repeat the "barbarism of the past". I take this barbarism to be a re-affirmation of the biologicity of the human, as the inescapable "inexpressibility" that for Carrithers will happen again when the "rhetoric will" of the present makes the now. To put it more simply, we can state that the man in Figure 3 will surely find himself in the same situation when thinking words in the future.

In fact, if we say that the temporality of the boxing obsession is the temporality in which the "now" is made by the "past" via a mechanism in which the pre-linguistic (the inexpressibility) is subsumed by the "post" (future) through the thing-ification of the word, we discover that the mechanism of "inverted temporality" is no different to the one triggered when one thinks and

speaks, without necessarily thinking violence. This is the temporality of the mental sensation, whereby one feels certain about one's own thought when this has already been prepared by the networks of our brain. As Gallese (2010: 457) points out, "key aspects of human social cognition are produced by neural exploitation, that is, by exaptation of neural mechanisms originally evolved for sensory-motor integration, later on also employed to contribute to the neurofunctional architecture of thought and language". Exaptation is possibly the mechanism to "blame" for the mental sensation which does not allow us to recognise that the pre-linguistic has been activated before the linguistic categories realised it. The "post" which tries to explain the "pre" is an inescapable narcissism: the *narcissism of the mental sensation*. But the narcissism of racism is another thing. And here an anthropological understanding is particularly helpful.

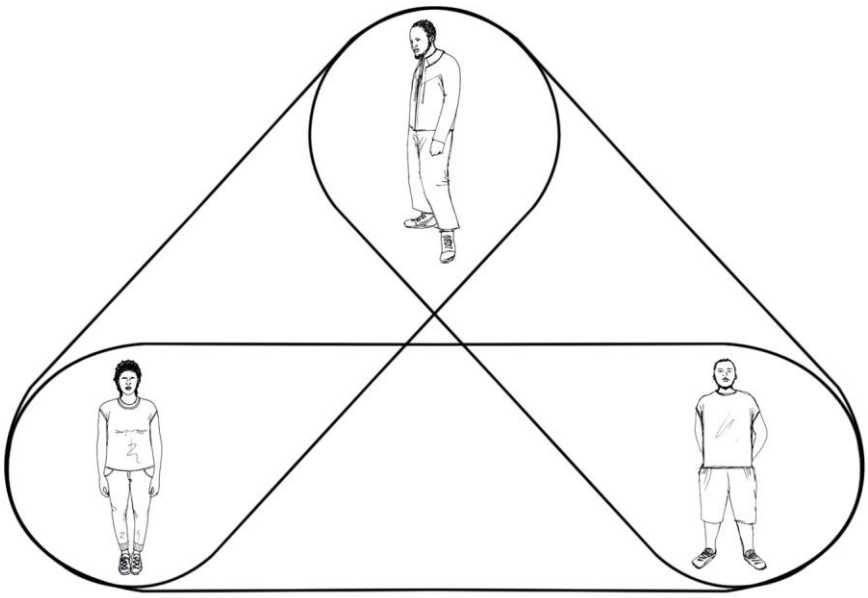
**Sensory Racism**

Frederick Barth's "Introduction" to his 1969 *Ethnic Groups and Boundaries*, widely seen as a groundbreaking text on the anthropology of ethnicity, provides the analytic space to observe this dynamic (Barth 1969). His view of ethnic identity as an instrument of social organisation contradicted the tradition of seeing ethnicity as a self-perpetuated biology of social unity – a tribe – whose boundaries with the external world were established once and one time only. Barth affirmed, by contrast, that the boundary changes in relation to the organisational structure between the "groups" and within the group itself.

Figure 4 tries to give a visual representation of the model of ethnicity imagined by Barth. We need here three people to represent the continual negotiation of identity imagined by Barth. The ethnicity in this model is represented by the circuit which always unite two of the people. This model breaks with the old tradition of seeing ethnicity as something that one single person (in the sense of ethnic identity) "has", by affirming the social-ness and social changeability of ethnicity. The break is also in the idea of culture: by disjointing ethnicity from culture, Barth also provided the space for articulating culture with flexibility and change[34].

[Figure 4]

[34] Barth, in commenting on his paper twenty-five years later, argued that such an understanding would have required a postmodern interpretation of culture (Barth 1994).



Jenkins (1997) calls such a model of ethnicity "situationism", and puts it in a tradition stemming from Barth and Goffman. Such a tradition is opposed to "primordialism", the tradition which Barth interrupted. However, even personalities like Geertz, Jenkins notices, have been associated with the tradition of primordialism. This comes from an observation that Geertz made in *The Interpretation of Cultures*, in which he pondered the possible conflict of loyalty that would arise in the the post-colonial State when "civil sentiments" would have to find their way through the "primordial", those bonds "variously called tribalism, parochialism, communalism and so on" (quoted in Jenkins 1997: 45). To put Geertz in this tradition is to caricature his anthropology, Jenkins points out, given that Geertz never meant that those primordial bonds are to be seen as such, but that they are rather constructed as "natural" by the people themselves. Equally, putting Barth in the situational tradition should not impede us from remembering that for Barth the boundary, even when reframed, is "maintained" in any situation. The following passage is key:

> In showing the connection between ethnic labels and the maintenance of cultural diversity, I am therefore concerned primarily to show how, under varying circumstances, certain constellations of categorization and value orientation have a *self-fulfilling* character, how others will tend to be falsified by experience, while others again are incapable of consummation in interaction. Ethnic boundaries can emerge and persist only in the former situation, whereas they should dissolve or be absent in the latter situations. (Barth 1969: 30)

The final remark should not be misunderstood: Barth is talking about situations in which the previous boundaries could dissolve. This doesn't mean that they will not represent themselves in new forms in different situations. The difference with the so-called primordialist tradition is exactly in this disposition of not negating the historicity of the situations; in the fact that new situations will emerge which will require a reformulation of the boundaries. Recursivity is embraced in situationism, while it is denied in primordialism. In denying it, primordialism also denies the human capacity for making history and culture, which is a response to historicity. But both history and historicity, culture and recursivity, are also biology in Barth's understanding. He points to how the boundaries will be re-established: they will be "self-fulfilling". They will appear as "truth". It is here that Barth and Geertz become complementary.

Figure 5 intends to represent what is implied in Barth's model of imagining ethnicity. There is only one man in the image, and the circuit that in Figure 4 represented the shifting ethnicity is here open. For it to be closed, another person is needed, as ethnicity is not something one has, but is a relation. Such open-ness is to highlight the relational identity of the human as a social animal, or if you like, the "group-ness" of the human. The loneliness of the man in the figure reflects the loneliness of the man who speaks or imagines words in Figure 3.

[Figure 5]

As the reader can see for themselves, the more I have been trying to show the *habitus* of the boxing obsession, the more I have ended up drawing figures with individual people, visually suggesting that their individuality represents the *habitus* of the mental sensation: the fact that it is experienced *in interiore homine*. But here we are at a decisive point, whereby the mental sensation as inevitable narcissism, in which one thinks to be certain about what one feels, can become justification of the reason why the ethnic boundary, the possibility of establishing what a group is, is closed. My finger in Figure 1 captures the exact moment at which the colour of the skin of the Other, therefore a visual experiencing of light, becomes the "self-fulfilling" character Barth is talking about. If we

imagine that Figure 1 occured in Northern Ireland, and that the two subjects did not differ much in the colour of their skin, but did so in their religious backgrounds, we would have no visual means to represent the moment at which the ethnic boundary was to be established. This moment would indeed involve the "diacritic" – the self-fulfilling element for Barth – of the experience of sound, as they could recognise whether they were speaking to a Protestant or Catholic by the accent used.

The situation of the boxing obsession is one in which the sensual experience of the "seen" and "heard", more than the "smelled", "touched" and "tasted", become diacritica for the ethnic labelling of the Self and the Other. This doesn't mean that the unity of the sensorial experience of the subject is broken, as this is impossible. One will keep on smelling, touching and tasting while seeing and hearing. It means that there is a *hierarchy* in the establishment of linguistic values. The boxing obsession is the situation whereby the audio-visuality of mirror neurons is *audio-visualised* by the audio-visual regimen of representation of the media, much more so than the other way round; and where one's own mental sensation is stirred up by the "regimens of immediacy" that media culture provides. These are *regimens of illusions* that the mental sensation performs in itself. But the point is that they could always be performed differently. The boxing obsession is a limitation of this possibility. It is both inevitable, when one is moved by a rhetorical will, and artificial, such as in the fact that the centrality of audio-visuality conceals that mechanical senses like "touch" and "hearing" are the fastest at processing information through the central nervous system, while "vision", more of a synthetic sense like "taste" and "smell", is definitively slower[35]. The precedence of the connection between "touch and sound" over "sound and vision" could tell us a lot about how we, beginning in the uterus, began and begin experiencing our own mental sensations by touch and by reacting to the sound stimuli of the external world, and how racism emerged and emerges definitively later in the intersection between brain and Mind. This is how we should really interpret Austin's suggestion of *doing things with hands*.

**Conclusion**

I have set the stage for understanding the object-subject (Body of the Other as Truth) and subject-subject relationship (what One Feels as Truth) in which rap as a rhetorical act operates in London. Let us pause for a moment, sum up the argument, and prepare the ground for the next chapter.

I have argued that the origin of the boxing obsession I witnessed and, as per Carrithers'

[35] According to Horowitz 2012, "sound" is the fastest sense, able to process sound stimuli 10 times, and sometimes 200 times, faster than "vision" does with light. Vision processes information slightly quicker than the time needed for "our conscious recognition of what we see". The pressure-sensing signals of "touch" work quickly, "as in light touch", while those of pain more slowly. Smell and taste take seconds to process information (ibid: 4). Sound and touch are definitively the fastest senses.

concept of “agency-cum-patients”, I contributed towards shaping during my fieldwork (see Figure 1), must be located in the ideology of political correctness. I have examined the introduction of such a public morality into Britain by recalling the cause and consequences of Enoch Powell's “Rivers of Blood” speech, which was meant to oppose such a move. A wider socio-historical background might be introduced to trace the origin of this ideology: for instance it can be traced back to the 18th century transnational movement for the abolition of slavery, as well as to the movement which explicitly opposed this, as evident in European romanticism. While it is the tragic methods of European modern history in dealing with “difference” (the wars of religion, involvement in the slave trade, anti-semitism) which are conflated as a caveat to not repeat in the political correctness ideology, so as to not to hurt anyone starting with language itself (the Sapir-Whorf hypothesis is seen as the hidden principle of political correctness); I have argued that both the promoters and challengers of this public morality share the same *habitus* of perceiving ethnicities as closed boxes. The reason behind this lies in why we have not fully left modernity or perhaps entered it, even if we perceive it as in crisis. Building on the view of “new racism” or “cultural fundamentalism”, I have indeed called such a *habitus* racist; but I have clarified that what makes it racist is the Nation, the lasting legacy of the “no longer” (modernity) which impedes the possibility of the “not yet”. The way the Nation imposes its legacy on the present, through political correctness, is by placing its essentialism before any possible result of the body-to-body interaction (realness) of the subjects. It places, that is to say, the “public” before the “common”, when it is the public which is a result of the common. This is the situation of the “post” that precedes the “pre”-linguistic, which I have called “inverted temporality”. It inverts what comes “first” and “after”, starting with the senses of the subject: it places the connection “vision and sound” above “sound and touch” in the battle to define one’s own mental sensation.

One pressing question is left to be asked: how can this *habitus* be changed? Nothing could be simpler. It is changing at any given second, precisely like an RNA modification. The next chapter demonstrates how this is done “spontaneously” in London rap, but also, in the remaining chapters, we see how it becomes difficult to doubt that what one feels is right, and to practice Socrates’ example from the *Apology* of “I know that I know nothing”.

# Chapter 2: Spitting 'We Are All Mixed' To Exit The Text

**Introduction**

This chapter explains how the boxing obsession can be fought. It does so by covering, as if it were streaming it in *real-time*, the moment at which such a battle can be won. Any ethnographic experience is an immersion in this real-time. However, not many ethnographic projects build a political strategy within it. This chapter documents the political efforts the ethnographer and some of his informants made in order to take advantage of what this real-time experience offered them. But what does this mean? The point is critical, because if we were to see the real-time experience as an independent reality which we could capture only in a mediated fashion with our apparatus of perception, then we would not be far from the reductionism of the boxing obsession, according to which the ethnic difference of the Other is just out there waiting to be caught.

Tim Ingold (2000b) reserves such a kind of criticism for the "anthropology of the senses", and especially the work of Dennis Howes who, starting in the early 1990s, authoritatively argued that anthropology should take the study of the senses seriously. This was posed as necessary for anthropology to escape the Cartesian tradition within which, as a product of Enlightenment, it was born. But this is exactly what the new literature had not escaped, according to Ingold, even though it stated the contrary and dressed up its proposals as a critique of Western modernity's ocular-centrism. Ingold's critique is twofold: firstly, that the approach offered does not sufficiently clarify how "vision" as an activity of the perception of light works, and secondly, that as a consequence of this misrecognition, the ethnographic detail of non-Western societies is mistakenly taken as an account of the hegemony of aurality, or one of the other senses, that European Enlightenment has presumably put aside in favour of sight. This move, Ingold continues, instead of dethroning Descartes' dichotomy, reconfirms it, by substituting "mind" and "body" with "Western" and "non-Western", and attributing to a super-dimensional entity like "society" or culture" the explanation of the alleged difference of perception that the members of these societies apparently display just to belong to that particular society or culture. In other words, cultural relativism is, for Ingold, yet another doctrine that masks the universalistic pretensions of Western modernity when affirming that other forms of life are possible. The pretension here relates not only to the claim that we have comprehended the Other – in a particular way rather than another – but that we have also understood how the Self carries out the perceptive task in the first place. Vision, Ingold implores, was never the problem of Western modernity, as hearing is not what makes some non-Western societies different. As he clarifies, this is not equal to saying that differences in how one and the other perform certain skills are not related to how they perceive the world. But these skills, Ingold

stresses, are always "sensory multitask", and therefore cannot be attributed to any specific sense, as if these senses were independent organs, but always to the totality of how the perceptive inputs affect the "human sensorium".

There is one important restrictive clause that Ingold is keen on pointing out: those who can see, who perform the experiencing of light, become vigilant spectators only when they also *watch with their ears*; just as those who can hear, who perform the experiencing of sound, turn themselves into attentive listeners when they also *listen with their eyes* (ibid.: 277); highlighting the deep interplay relating the auditory and visual apparatus. It is not true, Ingold says, that blind and deaf people are somehow compensated with an above-average development of some other sense (ibid.: 269-276). Those who cannot see, he says – reformulating a Cartesian example – can perform "vision as cognition", even though they are deprived of "vision as sensation", when walking, by touching the ground along their path so as to be able to *see touching* (ibid.: 254-255); but to process the information of what is in front of them takes an amount of time far greater than that needed by those of us who can see light. Furthermore, they cannot read the lips of a speaker and properly listen to, not just hear, what is being said; deaf people have the opposite problem as they cannot discriminate between acoustic signals using the visual apparatus with the immediacy of one who hears sound.

As discussed in the previous chapter, the visual and auditory apparatus are essential to activating a motor-action programme. I have suggested that the boxing obsession exploits this programme by exploiting the experience of "watching skin colours" and "listening to accents". This is already the result of a mental operation whereby the light that one sees is classified as "skin colours" and the sound one listens to as "accents". I now want to emphasise that this operation is *delayed* in relation to the actual experience of seeing light and hearing sound: it "comes after". In this chapter, we need to immerse ourselves in what "happens before", to argue that this is exactly what makes the reductionism of the boxing obsession always at risk of being *impossible* in the mental sensation of those who are engaged in such a temporality. I suggest looking at these conflicting temporalities with what rappers call "flow" and "flowing", activities by which they intend "rapping" or "spitting", to use emic terminology.

By critically confronting Ingold's "dwelling perspective", this chapter argues that when one is rapping, a positionality is inhabited with an awareness of inhabiting it. This awareness, as per Nadia Seremetakis (1994), is sensory-driven and allows for a meta-commentary on the positionality inhabited – the "ecological niche" (Hacking 1998) – to be enunciated. I stress that this enunciation, instead of simply confirming Gramsci's statement that "any man is a philosopher", indicates that any person is rather an *anthropologist of themselves*, at least in a performative sense. I point to the

political nature of such a meta-commentary, and argue that when a fieldwork experience is a "jump" into such a site of enunciation, then the concrete possibility for the ethnographer to participate in the "political improvisation" of the locals, and contribute towards giving it a specific direction rather than another, is within reach.

This chapter is therefore the ethnography of such a jump. The ethnographic contents are organised into three sub-parts, called "Situation", "Location" and "Solution", in which I will show the flowing of the locals' flow and the ethnographer's *jump into* the rappers' awareness of flowing. This is in order to *spit*, alongside them, "We Are All Mixed"; intended as a "constitutive rhetoric" (Charland 1987) to *jump out of* the text of the boxing obsession. As this double move of jumping into and out of the flow is a complicated, but at the same time very natural, manoeuvre when one is taken in the movement of the flow, I want to start, in the next sub-chapter, called "Knowing One Flows", by clarifying what flow and flowing mean for rappers and how we should see this as a skill concerning "placing". In this sense, I will conclude by saying that the fieldwork behaviour discussed here is about *other-placing*.

## 1) Knowing One Flows

### Flow as Dwelling

Flow is one of the most central concepts for rappers worldwide. "You got a sick flow", "This guy's flow sucks". Even though these expressions might be spoken within a local vernacular, the English word "flow" is used *ipso facto* by all hip-hoppers around the globe. My English, for instance, was very limited when I approached hip-hop in late 90s Italy; but as I got more into it, by attending Italian hip-hop gigs, reading Italian hip-hop magazines, and starting to rap in Italian, I realised that "flow" meant the rhyming skill of the rapper over the musical beat, and if you wanted to be acknowledged as a great rapper and not a "sucker" – another English word that hip-hoppers around the world use – you have to master flow. I therefore began to train myself, spending hours and hours in my room rapping over a hip-hop beat that I would play from a tape-recorder or a vinyl record. My family home in my hometown still contains the piles of vinyl that I bought precisely to practice my rapping skills. I bought those that had instrumentals on the B-side so that, by playing them, I could practice my *freestyle*, the art of improvising rhymes on the spot. As soon as I felt that I "got a flow", I was ready to join other rappers onstage during freestyle sessions at hip-hop gigs.

In *How To Rap* (Edwards 2009), numerous acclaimed American rappers give specific advice to the reader on how a rapper can improve his/her flow. Here are some: running and working out is

highly recommended, as this helps you keep your breath during a particularly fast delivery; writing down lists of words with last or middle syllables which sound the same is thought to help train the mind to think of rhymes, so that the task of throwing them on a musical beat during freestyle becomes easier; working, through dictation exercises, on the clarity of enunciation is presented as another good thing to do, in order to prevent the listener from not understanding what a word means because it has been muffled or wrongly pronounced; and the list continues. From the above accounts, both personal and from a guidebook, we can understand that flow is skill acquired through training.

Psychologist Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi (1990), who introduced the term "flow" to the psychological academic debate, argues in a similar vein with one important addition. In his account, flow is an intense state of concentration in which the person is totally absorbed in the activity that is being carried out, so much so that they can lose all sense of time, the need to eat, to sleep and to satisfy other basic necessities. Flow is deemed to be beneficial for the psyche and body of the person flowing. He calls it an "optimal experience" for the achievement of happiness. Happiness, though, does not come out of the blue, but can be pursued by "finding flow", which basically means setting some goals and working intensely to achieve them. People, Csikszentmihalyi (1998) argues, usually get bored in their free time, not when they work and enjoy their work, which suggests that to find flow is to engage in a goal-oriented activity. Although relevant to the implication of happiness as a temporary psychic harmony one reaches as a result of flow, this account depicts flowing as a rather individual experience, and it does not help us understand what a rapper seeks when training to have a certain level of confidence that s/he "got a flow". The harmony Csikszentminihalyi refers to is rather a *relationship*: a skilled relationship of tuning in with the musical beat, so as to understand where a "bar" begins and ends, in order to throw syllables over them.

Steven Feld (1988), in his account of Kaluli music, describes this relationship as being "in synch but out of phase"; with Charles Keil (Keil & Feld 1994) he refers to it as finding "groove"; while Christopher Small (1998) calls it "musicking". They all variously refer to the moment at which musicians have, by playing their instruments or singing, a musical conversation during a live performance or improvisation, synchronising their musical acts in anticipation of and response to those of the other musicians, the audience, or, as in the case of the Kaluli, the sounds of the forest. Generally during a hip-hop live event, the audience screams and raises its hands when the rapper on stage performs or improvises some impressive rhyming, thereby demonstrating that they can master flow. But since the audience recognises it, this skill is now shared, and it would be better to say that they are all, both performers and spectators, *in* flow. Flowing therefore means to know that you are

in flow.

Hip-hop, as a musical genre, has some specific features which make flowing a specific skill within it: the drumming pattern is essential to a hip-hop beat, as the rapper is rhythmically attuned to it, rather than to the melody; a hip-hop musical producer deploys synthesisers and electronic technologies with samples to support the rhythm and delivery of the rapper. The skill of flowing accompanies hip-hop in its various formats; irrespectively of the specifics of local music technologies and narratives, flowing is embodied in such a way that I, for instance, having become a rapper in Italy, could recognise when a rapper in London had flow.

Neuroscientific evidence possibly shows that the skill of rapping to a beat has similar neurological features among the skilled rappers in London and those in Italy. But the point is that, even if this was the case, it does not satisfy what flowing, as a relationship, means. However, a very recent and early stage fMRI investigation into the brains of twelve American rappers while free-styling helps to make my point here. The research shows that "lyrical improvisation appears to be characterised by altered relationships between regions coupling intention and action in which conventional executive control may be bypassed and motor control directed by cingulated motor mechanism" (Liu et al. 2010: 1). The researchers comment, intending to investigate the topic further, that "these functional reorganizations may facilitate the initial improvisatory phase of creative behaviour" (ibid.). This may suggest viewing creativity as a spark, a burst that happens in a fragment of time: in a word, a *jump*. The mental sensation is a jump.

This is how I will read "creativity" here, contradicting Tim Ingold's view, where I nonetheless position my understanding of flow. Even though Ingold (2000, 2007, 2011) may sometimes favour other terms, flow, as an open relationship, is key to his anthropology. Flowing is for Ingold what humans, like any other organism in the environment, do to inhabit the world. Ingold attacks the "building perspective" (as he calls it) that views the world as being furnished with "objects". In contrast, the world, according to his perspective, is constituted by processes in which "things" emerge and "meanings" are discovered, not invented. Humans, who, like any other organism in the environment, would not be alive without the phenomenon of photosynthesis, flow, fluctuate, in order to *dwell* in the world. It follows that to account for the "process of life" it is necessary for scientists and social scientists to recognise that they also dwell in the world, and therefore to embrace a "dwelling perspective". The error that the building perspective would make is precisely to lose grip on this dynamic, "with the pre-objective, pre-ethical" (Ingold 2000: 25) through which people inhabit the world – thus generating a contradictory logic: while the pre-cognitive is treated as *sense-less*, dead, not living, the difference that supposedly arises from it and inhabits the world is *sense-full*. We therefore have, so to speak, death as the origin of life.

The "functional reorganisations" of rappers' brains when beginning to flow, in the sense of improvising rhymes, are in my view an attunement to the constant flow of life, to the pre-cognitive through which the world is inhabited. Ingold may provocatively ask us 'where were they before?', rightfully highlighting that this level of attunement is never abandoned by living organisms, simply because they would otherwise live somewhere else. I agree with Ingold's ecological perspective that challenges us to see the "forwardness" of processes. I notice, however, that he is not very concerned with the problem of power. It is not his priority to explain how power exploits the "process of life", simply because this is an impossible mission: we would live in a world made of robots if this was the case. On the contrary, it is for him socially useful to understand what power cannot do. And power cannot interfere with the movement of life, as a person cannot stop the flow of a river. But can a person have the *illusion* of doing so? The objectualist scientists, for Ingold, in carrying forward the pre-conceptions of the Enlightenment, may share this illusion, but what about ordinary people? Is there not a connection between the misconceptions of the former and the latter? The problem that the Gramscian notion of hegemony gives rise to is that it relies, first and foremost, on the "spontaneous consensus" of those over whom hegemony is going to be exercised; in his framework the subalterns. How are they going to spontaneously agree to the hegemony? Does he mean that they flow to the hegemony? And if this is so, is it because of a skilled-practice? As the objective of this work is also to read Gramsci anthropologically, I want to differentiate between two distinct flows: the flow of power, which I call the "flow of hegemony"; and the flow of the movement of life, which, building on Ingold's idea of sociality, I will call the "flow of sociality". The first tries unsuccessfully to arrest the second.

The reason why I introduce this differentiation into Ingold's perspective is that, on the basis of the previous chapter's analysis on how the boxing obsession works, we have found that no matter how wrong the reductionism of objectivism can be, it nonetheless appears to be *very easy and logical*; at least as easy and logical as the contrary realisation that, according to Ingold, people somehow make or express when doing art or engaging in artistic activities; painting, composing music, writing poetry, but also doing crafts and so on. On these occasions, such as when a lyricist says that it was the moonlight, or the waves of the sea, that suggested they write those specific words[36], people would be able to perceive that they are "joining in" with a thing, they are enmeshed in it, participating in the task the landscape makes available (what Ingold calls "taskscape", see Ingold 2000: 194). But the realisation that one is flowing, I want to add, will appear through their sensory apparatus as clearly and naturally as it would for other people, or probably the same people on other occasions using a pen or seeing a man like an "object", and not participating in a "thing"

[36] This is why Heidegger focused so much on poetry and poets' abilities to sense, without explaining it, another rationality. This is also what put them at risk of going insane, according to Heidegger.

with it. For Ingold, "bonding" is what happens in the flow, "bordering" is by contrast what the building perspective thinks people do when making objects. But why is it, I ask here, that bonding and bordering can coexist, that the same organism-in-the-environment (let us not forget that this is, as Ingold says, what people always are in a landscape) can potentially have two opposite temporalities, one (impossible) sense-less, and one (permanent as life) sense-full?

**Placing Through Ritual**

The move I propose here is to look at this conflict, the conflict of flow – Ingold uses the term "tension" – through the figure of the ritual. Anthropology has indeed shown us that ritual is both a sense-full experience, as it dramatises a social relationship, and a sense-less one for putting on stage pre-defined roles. According to Appadurai (1996: 179-182), the long tradition of the study of ritual has rarely stressed that what the ritual achieved was a home-making process; it produced natives as natives of a locality and localities as embodied by natives. Now, if the ritual is a process of subjectivisation, we can say that the same lack of emphasis on the aspect of home-making, or placing, that Appadurai detects in the literature on ritual, can also be found in the theoretical model par excellence of subjectivisation: Althusser's theory of interpellation. To apply to him the "symptomatic reading" (what a text does not say) that he deployed in reading Karl Marx's *Capital*, for instance, we can say that prior to being a model on how ideology works, Althusser's vignette of the policeman calling "Hey you there" to a passerby, is a ritual of placing the subject in the State. Althusser himself presents his *Ideology and the Apparatus of the State* in this light, as a theory of subjectivisation that creates, so to speak, ideologised subjects, placed, via the skills learned at school and other institutions, within the logical form of the State. But putting emphasis on the process of placing that ideology triggers is a rather important way to remember, as Ingold points out, "what is a discourse if not a narrative of interweaving of experience born of practical, perceptual activity?" (Ingold 2001: 286). This renders the conflict between sense-less and sense-full a conflict between ideology and placing, performed within the temporal boundaries of the ritual.

It follows that if we are to see the boxing obsession as an ideology, this produces localities embodied by subjects on the basis of an original impossible sense-less situation, which pre-forms what the subjects have to become; but since this happens in the temporality of the ritual – that is to say, when meeting with the sense-fullness of the subjects who inhabit the world – one might realise that their "home" is much bigger and more open than the "object" the ideology wants to inculcate in them. "Londoners", in this sense, would be made both in a way which makes the ritual of creating "London" work and work not. When it works, an object has been built – and the building perspective is thus led to believe that its point is true – when it does not, a relationship of dwelling

in the world has just been discovered. Here comes the decisive question for the researcher: While caught in the midst of this realisation – when local actors know they are flowing – what can the fieldworker do? If they have the ambition, as this ethnographic project has, to fight the boxing obsession (and the building perspective) in real-time, during fieldwork, so that it no longer has a role in the production of Londoners, what can they do to join the local "conscience" of dwelling in the world?

**Hip-Hop as Interpellation**

Let us answer this question by reading Althusser's interpellation with Ingold's dwelling perspective. With one caveat: we must imagine that the policeman calling the pedestrian is the hip-hop narrative, the hip-hop lifestyle. Take into consideration what hip-hop scholar Tricia Rose reveals in the last chapter of her book, *The Hip-Hop Wars*, in an attempt to give a series of reccommendations to lovers of hip-hop on how they should relate to hip-hop. In a section called "Beware the Manipulation of the Funk", she says:

> On countless occasions over the past decades or so, I have found myself listening, driving or dancing to a song, yet only later really heard the lyrics. One such song was Dr. Dre and Snoop Dogg's 1992 classic and unbelievably funky "Gin and Juice"; another was 50 Cent's 2003 hit, "In da Club". In some cases I was unaware of the words because I couldn't actually make out the lyrics or translate the slang; but then there were times, I was mostly listening to the music or merely letting the music, the style, and the swagger move so completely that only the most-oft repeated phrase really sunk in. Once I really listened to the words and thought about the story being told, it was hard to know what to do: Respond to the funk and ignore the words, or reject the story and give up the funk that goes with it. The moment I realised that I was being asked to give myself over to the power of the funk – which in turn was being used as a soundtrack for a story that was really against me – was very sad for me. (Rose 2008: 262)

Once she became aware of the misogynistic content of the lyrics, she found herself in a dilemma; what to do? Keep flowing to the funk of the beat or jump out? To encapsulate the conflict Rose experienced I would use Judith Butler's criticism of Althusser's theory of interpellation.

Butler (1997) makes evident the mechanism of "inversion" working in interpellation, the same inversion that in the previous chapter I defined as the *habitus* of the boxing obsession. Butler highlights the temporal dysfunction of the "post" (public) defining the "pre" (common) in the policeman calling "Hey you there" to a passerby. For Althusser, the responsive turning around of the passerby is what makes one a subject. That is, it is their submission to the terms of interpellation that subjectivises them. But if subjectivisation goes hand in hand with subordination, there is also a "readiness", Butler points out, a pre-existent psychic life of the pedestrian, on behalf of which they

promptly respond to the input of a voice heard from behind (ibid.: 107). Their turning around is a need to know if it is the voice of the Law, but in their willingness to turn around, Butler continues, it is already anticipated that they know it is. Butler here reverses Althusser's association between religion and ideology, according to which religion is an ideology. She concludes that the ideology of the State, by which the State materialises and subordinates its subjects via the State apparatus, is actually religious. The voice which impels the passerby to turn around has a "religious force"; and the passers-by who recognise themselves as potentially guilty of what that voice would blame them for, are subjects already theologised in the first place.

Althusser himself is aware that his model requires an anticipation of the Law by the subject to make it work: he explains that even if they need to go through the ritual of submission to become subjects, they are "always-already" to do so. Althusser refers here to the Lacanian theory of the Name of the Father, wherein, before being born, individuals are already placed in society by their family's social role. But Althusser's use of Lacan's tripartite psychoanalatic framework, Real-Imaginary-Symbolic – Butler contends by drawing on Slovenian philosopher Dolar – is rather elusive. For Lacan, the Real always resists the impossible colonisation of the Symbolic, there is always a "residue" that the Symbolic cannot dispose of. In Althusser's interpellation, by contrast, the subjects are there to make the ideology materialise. This residue, what is left out of the process of subjectivisation, can then turn itself against the process of subjectivisation. It can express a "willingness not to be – a critical desubjectivation – in order to expose the law as less powerful than it seems" (ibid.: 130). Following this, and remembering that this topic was of central concern to Spinoza, Nietzsche, and currently Agamben, Butler concludes her reading of Althusser's interpellation with two decisive questions:

> How are we to understand the desire to be as a constitutive desire? […] How is such a desire exploited not only by a law in the singular but by laws of various kinds such that we yield to subordination in order to maintain some sense of social being? (ibid.)

There are two points that arise from Butler's reading of Althusser. The first is as follows: What is the driving force of the residue? Is it not the willingness not to be, the critical desubjectivisation, also linked to a pre-established narrative? Is it not Rose's feeling that she is, just because she is a woman, offended by the lyrics due to a narrative of feminism that invites her to be militant and detect sexism in all aspects of life? Is it not also in this case impossible to escape the teleology of the "post" as what defines the grammar of the "pre"? At some point, it is implied in Butler's last question, we will "yield to subordination", meaning that we will subordinate ourselves to a pre-established narrative, frustrating our own efforts to refuse the terms by which we have been

previously interpellated and express our critical desubjectivisation. We do this, Butler continues in the above passage, to "maintain some sense of social being", and this allows a second type of observation incorporating Ingold.

Butler's shift from the singular to the plural of laws to which one inevitably submits, making the "constitutive desire" exploited by a constituted ideology, depicts a situation of multiple identifications. One can identify with as many narratives and subordinate oneself to as many laws as needed to maintain a sense of social being, so that others can call out to us and we can call out to them. But is this sense of social being expressed even when no one is vocally calling us and when we are also not calling to them? If we were to see these pre-established narratives and the participation of the subject in them with what Ingold means by a "thing", then the ideological problem of the move would not exist. There would not be a submission to the voice of the Law, but just a discovery of the fact that the subject participates in it. By "sociality", Ingold means more than a relationship between con-specifics, including the relationships with other organisms and the environment itself. I would suggest that this is rather the sensory awareness Rose manifests when realising that while "listening, driving and dancing", she enjoys funk. She realises she is flowing when listening to music. The ideological problem comes in a second stage, when getting out, that is, when expressing the critical desubjectivation and letting the policeman, or the narration of hip-hop, know that their ideology is refused or accepted. In both cases, this requires a step out of the flow, to not be part of that dynamic and to run in the other direction, which is different even in the case that the previous direction is accepted.

Now I can better situate my difference to Ingold. Alongside Elisabeth Hallam (Hallam & Ingold 2007), he differentiates between "creativity as innovation" and "creativity as improvisation". The first is read as such in terms of its result, the second is in the making. To read the first, it is necessary to be taken out of the movement of creativity; the second goes along with it. The first is "creativity backwards", as per the model of "abductive reasoning" of Alfred Gell (1999) – which I will comment on in the next chapter – the second is "creativity forwards": "because improvisation is generative, it is not conditional upon judgements of the novelty or otherwise of the forms it yields" (Hallam & Ingold 2007: 3). This reading views improvisation as a continuum rather than breaking points, as, they argue, modernity has privileged creativity. I agree with the forwardness with which this view solicits reading creativity, but only if we recognise the decisive role of the "meta-commentary" in it, so that instead of simply saying that there is no difference without repetition, because the difference is in the repetition, we state that the *difference is continuously being repeated*. My formulation makes evident an accentuated practice that does not find a proper place of recognition in Ingold's framework. If, as he argues, a "thing" should be seen as a

"parliament of lines" rather than a connection of points (see Ingold 2007), intended as "lines of becoming" in Deleuze's and Guattari's language; these lines are lines of direction firstly, the direction of which one can "sense" while immersed in them. With this, I want to acknowledge certain key improvisational political capabilities of the individual who recognises they are kept in a flow, in a line or a coming together of lines; and who, as a consequence, develops skilled-practices to jump out of it and join another one; and so on and so on, in a continuum. This happens too in real-time, as prescribed by the model of creativity as improvisation. The skill we are talking about is a jump from one running train to another. Ingold and Hallam might respond that it is impossible to acknowledge with absolute precision when and where a skill begins, when and where a jump is made, or when and where a line has been forced. But is this so for the improvisers? By jumping out of the flow, I want to emphasise the recognition, which the improvisers are having in real-time, of using capabilities that set a "before" and "after". What I want to suggest is that the question Rose (and the pedestrian in Althusser's vignette) is left with after having danced to the funk, is something along the lines of "how can we, not only I, be, simultaneously, the policeman that effects an ideology, and still allow ourselves and those we address to recognise that the flow we discover ourselves in is pre-ideological? How can we build a pre-ideological ideology?". As you can see, I am definitively applying a reading backwards when putting these questions in the head of Tricia Rose; but is she not also engaged in a reading backwards when she realises that she is taken in a flow? Moreover, Deleuze and Guattari, from whose figure of the "rhizome" Ingold borrows and develops the concept of line, casually make the suggestion that "the rhizome is a short time memory" (Deleuze and Guattari 1987: 21). Let me consider this short-time memory with a visual case below.

**Jumping Out Of The Flow of Hegemony**

Consider the following example. In the Channel4 documentary *Life of Rhyme*, presented by London rapper Akala, the host is seen closing his eyes, stiffening his facial muscles, and engaging his body in the typical head-nodding movement of a hip-hopper listening to rap. He is indeed listening to an MC (Master of Ceremonies) "spitting" rhymes over a microphone live. Ghetts, a London grime MC and underground rapper acclaimed for his fast flow – whom Akala was interviewing for the documentary – is recording some rap in his home studio and, from the window of the recording booth, can see that Akala is flowing to his rap. After a take, he opens the door of the recording booth and asks Akala to keep standing where he is, so that Ghetts can still see him and be energised by his dancing. It is now that Akala, in replying to Ghetts, exits the flow:

> Cos you could see (he says to Ghetts before addressing the sound engineer in the room) I know what he is feeling, and I know how he is feeling as an MC, knowing that he is going in…(he then suddenly addresses the cameraman and hence the audience) We can't quite explain to you this feeling. Sometimes we can only sum it up like this (here he reproduces the head-nodding movement with closed eyes), for some people it may seem that we are crazy, going mad, but it's like my bredrin's mum explained to me. She went to see Jimi Hendrix perform and the whole audience were just standing there, transfixed, and just looking at him. I would compare great MCing and being in the pocket of the beat and the flow and the rhythm, the drums and the lyrics and all of that. For those of us that love this art, that means a lot to us. Some people would say its blasphemy, to compare it to Jimi. Obviously Jimi is Jimi and I have tremendous respect for him. But there's just something in here (he indicates his chest and belly) that is rewiring your whole body, that is causing me to do that very, very, silly face…

By jumping out of the flow I mean precisely the clarity of understanding of what was going on a few moments before. He uses the expression "being in the pocket of the beat and the flow and the rhythm, the drums and the lyrics and all of that", which is both a vivid description of what just took place and also a learned-skill in being able to explain it to somebody else. He does so by operating a metonymy: he says "that means a lot to us". He is speaking from somewhere, a position, which he recognises as belonging to him, but not only him. Yet he does not know who this "us" is, he "can't explain to you" – but he feels he can show it – "we can only sum it up like this…". We have here the opening up of a "site of enunciation", and the simultaneous transformation of this into a sensory meta-commentary on the "echological niche" inhabited. All this happens in real-time.

In *Senses Still*, Nadia Seremetakis makes the same point. She indicates stillness as the "resting point" in which a sensory memory comes back from the "dust" of history and generates a meta-commentary.

> There are substances, spaces and times that can trigger stillness. I think of the old Greek who halted from his daily activity in the heat of the mid-day to slowly sip his coffee, each sip followed by a sigh of release. This was a "resting point", a moment of contemplation, the moment he began to re-taste his day. Introduced by aroma and taste, this was a moment of stillness. Each sip and sigh signalling a deepening in thought, returning "logismos (thought) to distant times". Coffee is sintrofia (friendly companion), as the saying goes. Sintrofia generates a moment of meta-commentary in which the entire scenography of present and past social landscapes are arrayed before his consciousness: the contemporary political situation, familial events, village circumstances, the weather, the crops, international news all mixed together. There is a perceptual compression of space and time that is encapsulated in the small coffee cup, from which he takes a sip every other minute, and while feeling the sediments on his tongue, he makes his passage through this diversity. (Seremetakis 1994: 13)

Iain Hacking formulated the notion of "ecological niche" to understand the irregularities of certain

madness, preferring it to the perspective of social constructivism which did not grasp the irreducibility and uniqueness of madness due to its stress on the linguistic production of behaviour (Hacking 1998). Seremetakis' beautiful description of the the old Greek's sensory moment of stillness is a breakthrough into these unique singularities and a commentary on the moment in which they are "re-tasted" by the elderly while sipping coffee. Yet this happens from an "absence" of the actual unique sensory time being remembered: it is "nostalgia" that the re-tasting now contributes to narrativising. Is this meta-commentary not therefore a reading backwards happening in the forwardness of real-time?

Seremetakis inadvertently raises here the point that what sensorily comes back during the resting point is the "historical unconscious". Although this is not the meaning Seremetakis intends[37], I think that the expression could be misleading, particularly if we were to view the irreducibility of this moment with the objectualist perspective, instead of remaining in the dwelling. To remain in the dwelling would mean treating that memory always as "short-time", as what just happened and is still happening. To go back to objectualism, in the case of Akala, would mean reading that memory with the agenda of the black nationalism of hip-hop; to say for instance that what returned with his flowing was the African tradition of making music and dancing to the drums, a tradition embedded in hip-hop and in him as a black man, which reveals the real roots of culture. This might be a conclusion Akala comes to at a second stage: when he realises he has either to accept or refuse ideology. But at that moment he is not touched by this problem. His problem is rather that he cannot explain with words what he understands with his senses. The awareness of the people caught in flow is that even if they jump out of it, they cannot jump out of the "bigger house" in which they flow. I want to enrich this "bigger house" with Ingold's concept of sociality so that we can conclude that the awareness of flowing is the awareness of one's own sociality. And this awareness is a *jump out of the flow of hegemony*[38].

**Recognition of Flowing Into the Flow of Sociality**

Let us go back to Rose's realisation that she is dancing to the flow of hegemony. What does she do? Post-Colonial and Queer Theory literature, which have in different areas expanded the notion of the historical unconscious in relation to the positionality of marginal identitites, would say, by adopting Gregory Bateson's notion, that she is caught in a "double-bind". By this Bateson and his team meant, in a 1950s paper, the circumstance which occurs when a "victim" is put before contrasting

[37] Seremetakis refers rather to the difference between poiesis and history as put forward by Aristotle, where poiesis survives history.

[38] The philosophical point of reference is of course Hegel's view of the Spirit of History, in itself developed from Aristotle's poiesis. My theoretical manoeuvre here consists of substituting Hegel's "for us" with "for me".

messages which do not allow an easy discrimination between them, and in which, "no matter what a person does, he can't win" (Bateson 1987: 205). Bateson hypothesised that the situation of the double-bind in the mother-child, parents-children, and more general family relationships, was one of the causes of the emergence of schizophrenia in adult individuals. The children would have found it difficult to relate to contrasting emotional messages from their parents, such as being told "I love you" while receiving a slap, and would develop schizophrenia as a result of the reiteration of the double-bind. This would indeed have made chronic their inability to develop meta-communicative skills. Bateson and his colleagues argued that while the double-bind was a common circumstance in everyday life, occurring whenever the victim responds literally to a metaphorical question (showing inability to master what Russell called "logical types"), this is a pathology particularly prevalent in schizophrenics.

Although Bateson is not always necessarily and unanimously referred to by these authors, but mentioned enough nonetheless (see Spivak 2012) alongside the French philosophers of post-structuralism, the metaphor of the double-bind has served for them to depict the situation in which colonised and sexualised identities find themselves when confronting the hegemony; a situation whereby, as Bateson pointed out, the victim is not allowed to escape the field of the double-bind. Building on this, post-colonialism and queer theory have developed interpretative efforts to decode the anti-dialectic instance of enunciation of the victim, caught between the promise of the "new" and the repetition of the "old". Bhabha (2004) has, for instance, observed the phenomenon of hybridisation in the colony, arguing that the natives' encounter with the culture of the colonists has given birth to interstitial cultures, to a "third space", wherein the natives can both express, consciously and unconsciously, their admiration of their dominators – so to mimic them – and their willingness to challenge them, to end the relationship of imperial subordination. Butler (1990, 1993) has stressed that the homosexual "drag" practice is the "repetition with difference" of a norm: "norm" as constitutive of the heterosexual economy of modernity – "man vs woman as culture vs nature" – and "difference" as the power to subvert the norm[39]. But both Bhabha's "mimicry" and Butler's "parody"[40] are only half subverting the dominant order of discourse. The other half reifies the assumptions under which their role as subalterns is strengthened. These two are fused together with no solution of continuity. Yet they move.

Drawing on this framework, I would introduce one additional distinction within the

[39] Separating the biology of sex (man, woman) from gender roles (feminine, masculine), this difference, instead of fixing homosexuality as deviance from the norm of heterosexuality, would pose the two in the same continuum, questioning the idea of normality as a pre-established narration and showing, in contrast, that the norm lives in the "performativity" of the actors, in the dimension of doing, repeating and differentiating.

[40] Theatrical behaviours in which colonised and sexualised identities engage in roles that the norm hegemony repeats would otherwise forbid them from.

movement of the flow of hegemony. This is the contrasting of two interconnected forces: one is reactionary, which I call "counter-hegemony", and the second is revolutionary, which I call "other-hegemony". The first is a "missed jump" from the field of hegemony; the second is a "potential jump". These two are in dialogue with no solution of continuity, as the literature mentioned describes. I differ from the framework in that the actual jump, as a result of the shifting balance between these two forces, can eventuate rather than just be potential, and it precipitates the constitution of "new hegemony".

Although post-colonial and queer theory literature correctly show that the balance between new and old in the instance of the subaltern is always shifting, they do not seem to me to have clarified the direction of this move. This is as a result of forcing Bateson into a psychoanalytic (Lacanian) reading of the double-bind, from where his ecology of mind was in contrast stepping out of, as he might have stepped out of the view that there is no escape for the victim from the field of the double-bind. Ingold considers Bateson's steps and manages to put them into perspective. Building on a Bateson statement (1970) that "the mental world – the mind – the world of information processing – is not limited by the skin" (in Ingold 2011: 86), he argues, in dialogue with Andy Clark, that not only "the skull is leaky, whereas the mind is what leaks", but that "the organism is not limited by the skin" (ibid.). He means precisely the penetrable borders of the notion of sociality ("zones of entanglement", a term he borrows from quantum physics), the rhyzomatic "meshwork" we end up wrapped in when participating in a "thing", following the forces and materials of the environment, and, I add, contributing towards being part of Mind, which is not just what is inside our brains but the same process of life. I take the recognition of the difficulty of enunciation for the victims of the double-bind to be the realisation of flowing within the flow of sociality. To jump out of the flow of hegemony is therefore a *recognition of flowing within the flow of sociality*.

This recognition takes the form of a refusal: the refusal to join the flow of hegemony. Rose stops dancing when she recognises in this way. Consider also the refusal of the women of the Greek lesbian community of the "parea", as described ethnographically by Elisabeth Kirtsoglou (2004). The girls and women of the parea engage in lesbian relationships but refuse to label themselves as "lesbian". They do so tactically, so as to escape the conventional conceptualisation of the term in Greek society, which would expose them to the morbid attention of the provincial town in which they practice the parea. But there might be another rationality at stake here, given that, as Kirtsoglou points out, some of them have apparently "ordinary" lives when they do not associate with other members of the parea; husbands and children at home, boyfriends, parents, friends and colleagues who do not suspect that they engage in sexual relationships with other women. Perhaps

we have here the recognition that their "home" is far greater than that provided by their classification as lesbians. The balance between counter-hegemony and other-hegemony is therefore shifted significantly towards the latter if this is the case.

What can an ethnographer do when they *sense* that this tactical refusal is a jump out of the flow of hegemony and a recognition of flowing into the flow of sociality? Below I show the two-step procedure my fieldwork practice followed in order to ally with the local other-hegemony and establish "new hegemony". This happens, I suggest, only by *politically embracing the double-bind*.

***a) Constitutive Rhetoric***

Maurice Charland (1987) described the introduction of the term "Québécois" by a nationalist organisation into the Quebec political discourse as "constitutive rhetoric", adopting the categorisation from James Boyd White. This rhetoric, according to Charland, is constitutive because it "calls into being a people" and predisposes them towards an action. Charland draws here on Kenneth Burke's methodology, according to which "identification" and not "persuasion" is key to a rhetorical process. If, as Althusser makes plain, subjects are always already so, then, Burke observes, they do not need to be persuaded to become what they already are. They do not need to exit, so to speak, the pre-given narrative that is put before them. In this sense, according to Charland, the "ideological effect" that the identification with a speaker's rhetoric creates in the audience is that the term "Québécois", positioned in the Canadian public discourse, already legitimises them to aspire for independence.

To translate this example into Kirtsoglou's ethnographic case would mean for the women of the parea to "come out" with public statements and a political strategy in which they could properly vocalise and vindicate their refusal to call themselves lesbians, and present their double life as just another way of practising and imagining sexuality. The step here would be for them to "textualise their difference", instead of leaving this job to the ethnographer.

This chapter documents the effort put in place by the ethnographer to work alongside his informants towards the textual production of a constitutive rhetoric. A rhetoric, created to fight the boxing obsession's imagination of ethnicities, which goes here under the slogan: "We Are All Mixed". In Nietzschian terms, it is equivalent to his maxim: "Become who you are".

***b) Deconstruction of the Constitutive Rhetoric***

This is, however, only the first step. Unlike the methodology Charland uses to analyse political movements within a formal rhetorical approach, textualisation here is not an end in itself, but only an instrument to get to the extra-rhetorical which allows identification. If Burke is right in noticing

that whoever is identified does not need to be persuaded, here it is persuasion that is sought. The first step indeed seeks the production of a text. The second seeks to exit from it, as it wants to come to terms with the ambivalence of the subject-audience relationship, that it to say, with their performative repetition of being both the text and the extra-text, the flow of hegemony and flow of sociality. By this, I mean the adoption of a tactical alliance between the ethnographer and informants while engaging in a sensory meta-commentary, with the objective of perfecting the skill the audience already possesses of questioning interpellation. This is a skill that actors already have, they are already anthropologists of themselves, if you like. The job of the ethnographer is here to join with these local skills, offering a methodology to refine them. If it is true that the *habitus* is something that we cannot completely and fully grasp, as it exploits a pre-linguistic level of communication made of our "sociality" with the environment (as per Ingold), we can nonetheless still be able to modify it by exercising our own innate predisposition (the mental sensation) of being aware of its functioning. We can therefore work on this skill, exercising a conscious drive. We will not be able to be the pilot of the flow we are following. But we can refine our ability to "watch" the direction we are taking – this is what we do when we know we are flowing – and therefore do something about it. The "something" we offer here as a direction has a lot to do with the achievement of general political goals, such as the affirmation of equality and social justice. Even in this case, therefore, the "pre" of the subjectivation process will be exploited by a "post", but the difference here is methodological, resting in the always greater awareness of the subjects towards the contents of the "post", so that they can embody the skilled-practice to question it. In so doing, the process of subjectivisation is always retuned to new instances arising from the unspeakable awareness of knowing one flows ("We can't quite explain to you", Akala said once he realised he could not explain it with words, but felt he could with gestures and by simulating the flow he was in). The difference ultimately lies in the subjectivisation process offered as this becomes the *flow of the new hegemony.*

**Placing as Strategic Reflexivism**

I want to call the first step of the production of a constitutive rhetoric "strategic essentialism"; the second as "strategic reflexivism". Both steps are drawn from Gayatry Chakravorty Spivak's contribution to both post-colonialism and contemporary feminist critique, as contained in a provocative essay first published in the late 1980s. I would like to briefly discuss Spivak in order to expand on the ethico-political need to take the second step seriously, especially in projects, such as this one, dealing with marginal and oppressed subjectivisation processes and in which the fieldworker, in flowing with the informants, presents themself as a Gramscian "organic intellectual".

Spivak (1988a, 1999) considers the case of an Indian woman named Bhubaneswari, a member of an Independentist group, whose suicide in 1926 ended up being misread by generations of aware middle-class women in post-colonial India. Having found herself unable to carry out a political assassination she was assigned to, Spivak explains, Bhubaneswari took her own life. But she waited until her menstruations came because she did not want her suicide to be interpreted by the local people as the desperate act of a woman following an abortion, as she made clear in a letter written to her sister before her death[41]. Paraphrasing the title of her paper, *Can the Subaltern Speak?*, Spivak asks the reader the following: between the traditional patriarchal system of the local societies which pressured widows to burn themselves alive (the practice of the sati), and the mission of the colonialists who paternalistically wanted to save the women and "civilise" Indian society (they abolished the sati in 1829), where did Bhubaneswari's attempt to reinvent the suicide as an interventionist practice end? Apparently, she provocatively implies, in the misrecognition of the young and Western-educated feminists of a new and rising India.

In mentioning this case, Spivak intends to shed light on the problematic job of the politically committed intellectual. Such intellectuals include the group of Indian historiographers engaging in "Subaltern Studies", who, starting in the early 1980s, began to offer a contrasting image of India under British rule by focusing on the semiology and acts of insurrection among local people. Spivak (1988b) questions the possibility of doing this job without committing what she calls a "double epistemic violence"; which is the violence of the intellectual who tries to give a voice to the subalterns in order to let them express their agency, but without realising that what the intellectuals believe to be the subalterns' agency is another aspect of the same hegemony against which the intellectuals want to act. In her understanding, as Mellino points out, a subaltern who speaks is no longer a subaltern, as they would eventually find an access to mainstream society that the example of subalternity, as Bhubaneswari's case may teach, does not find. Therefore it is nonsense to search for the historical traces of something which is untraceable (Mellino 2005: 81).

One could object that since Spivak has talked about Bhubaneswari, then Bhubaneswari is no longer the subaltern who cannot speak, as Spivak herself implied in the original 1988 article, later revising this conclusion in the 1999 version[42]. But it is not my intention to test the validity of Spivak's specific accusations or to report critiques of Spivak's conclusion (see Parry 2004 and Suleri 1992), or, ultimately, to expose her contradictions in her reply to these criticisms (see Mellino 2005). I just want to see in what she perceives as a conflict between "subalternity" being an instance of positionality and the job of the committed intellectual as an institutionalised subject, the

[41] The letter was discovered ten years after her death.

[42] Spivak added that Bhubaneswari was not a subaltern as her background was middle class. Subalterns are those who are deprived of any access to mainstream society.

generative tension between the constitutive desire of jumping out of the flow of hegemony and the constituted ideology of not being aware of being in a flow of sociality. Seen in this light, Spivak's critique is an invitation to the committed intellectual to not lie down on an unreflexive *habitus* that leads to defining the constitutive desire on the basis of the constituted ideology (Marx's "subsumption"). On the contrary, a "surplus" of reflexivity is required to look at oneself from a point external to the positionality embodied, be it a university campus, the office of a political party, an NGO, or even the comfortable room where an anarchist PhD student, fed up with racism in the UK, writes his dissertation. This is why my "strategic reflexivism" takes on board Spivak's tension, not to immobilise the political activity of the committed intellectual, but to make reflexivity the propelling push of the objective to change the *habitus*. In addition, the intellectual here is only committed to the "flow as sociality" because the new hegemony they want to build is a recognition of that interpellation.

First, I call into being a "We" – strategic essentialism – then I deconstruct the way it has been called into being – strategic reflexivism. This second step coincides with the objective of spreading the methodology of anthropology among the informants. But this is an objective that will never be achieved definitively. Self-anthropology (Chang 2008, Ellis 2004) is a never-ending job, always flowing. It is a methodology that lives only in the "performativity" (Butler 1993) of the actors, in the dimension of doing. And as such, all the anthropologist-fieldworker can do is make sure that this performativity is placed in a line that runs, as per Kant, increasingly closer to an idea of social equality and justice, "persuading" everyone that it is only to them that it is worth submitting and letting the flow go. "Placing" along this line, recognising this as home, is the political challenge that the Enlightenment did not practically take on.

**Ethnographic Content**

I can now show how this challenge has been tackled in the limited context of fieldwork. The ethnographic content of this chapter is divided in three sub-parts called: Situation, Location, Solution. The decision to opt for this tri-partition mirrors the understanding of the boxing obsession as a situation created by the media (at the top), reproduced locally (on the ground), and which can be solved by inverting the direction of this movement: instead of starting from the media and going towards locality, to start from the locality and proceed to the media. Top-down-top is therefore the movement in which interpellation (top) can never arrest the flow (down), but this can always stir up new processes of interpellation (top). I depict this movement by starting with an analysis of a media talk-show, continuing with an immersion into East-London, and then offering a solution that is based on a music-video and a music album. Rap is the thread which unites the three parts, the first

being an analysis of the public imagination of rap, the second a look at the vernacular articulated by rappers, and the third a conceptualisation of rap as a political project.

In the first part, I show the "regime of the interpellation of ethnicities" which unfolded during the fieldwork experience. I do this by taking into consideration a very heated discussion on a BBC talk-show which took place immediately after the London and UK 2011 riots. These riots followed the murder of a black South Londoner, Marc Duggan, who was shot by the Metropolitan Police during an attempt to arrest him. The riots erupted for three consecutive days in many parts of London (6th, 7th, and 8th of August) and other cities of the UK (9th and 10th of August). To show the rhetorical climate this situation created, I focus on the indignation with which the host and two guests responded to the statements of a third guest, historian David Starkey, who said that one of the causes of the riots was that "whites have become blacks". Drawing on Carrithers (2000), I call the multicultural imagination which informed the TV show "syncretic"; and I contrast it with the anti-essentialist cosmopolitanism of an East London singer-songwriter, Babar Luck, with whom I happened to establish a relationship of friendship and alliance. Building on Bhabha (2004b), I refer to Babar Luck's lyrics and musical practices as "vernacular cosmopolitanism", embracing and articulating a "cultural and geographical ambivalence". In comparing Babar Luck's cosmopolitanism to the guests' reaction to David Starkey's comments, I refer to the former as "other-hegemony", the latter as "counter-hegemony"; but I argue that both flow together in the London vernacular. The difference is just in how they are balanced.

The second part of the chapter offers an ethnographic account into the "ecological niche", Newham in East London, in which "other-hegemony" and "counter-hegemony" flow. I document the conflicts which have accompanied the demographic transformations of Newham over the last thirty years: conflicts whereby a "discourse of regret" articulated by whites, former East-Enders who left the area as soon as waves of Asians arrived, is diametrically opposed to the strengthening, for the Asian-Muslims, of their markers of identity. Babar Luck, himself an Asian-Muslim, exposed to both the racism of the former and solidarity of the latter, transcends being caught within these two poles of interpellation. But the difference he provides, the celebration and embracing of otherness, rather than being treated as unique, is demonstrated by sensorily engaging with the cosmopolitanism of accents, fragrances, skin colours and religious styles of Newham.

The third part of the chapter provides the political coordinates from which to overcome the conflictory scenario of London, by operating an alliance with the locals' awareness of flow (other-hegemony). As mentioned, this has resulted in the production of a constitutive rhetoric leading to the slogan "We Are All Mixed". This has been articulated through the self-release of a music-video, produced and directed by the ethnographer with the cameraman and editor, London resident Adrian

Pablo Trinidad; and the self-release of an album by a hip-hop-reggae and punk rock band called "Remaking Europe" featuring Babar Luck and the ethnographer. The exit from the text has been interpreted here as following the flow that the researcher and informants discovered themselves to be joining. A video and album are just two of many possible places in which to land having exited the ethnographic text. But however safe the landing has been, they too, in inhabiting other pre-established grammars, need to be exited in the second step. The chapter ends on the threshold of this second exit.

## 2) Situation

### Syncretism in London Multiculturalism

A few days after riots had again erupted on the streets of London, spreading exactly from those same places (Tottenham, Brixton) that were at the heart of social turbulence in the 1980s (1981: Brixton riots; 1985: Tottenham riots), historian David Starkey said on BBC2's *Newsnight*:

> [T]here has been a profound cultural change. I've just been re-reading Enoch Powell, the rivers of blood speech. His prophecy was absolutely right in one sense. The Tiber didn't foam with blood, but flames lampant wrapped round Tottenham and wrapped round Clapham. But it wasn't inter-communal violence, this is where he was completely wrong. What's happened is that […] the whites have become blacks; a particular sort of violent, destructive and nihilistic gangster culture has become the fashion, and black and white, boy and girl, operate in this language together. This language which is wholly false, which is a Jamaican patois that has been intruded in England. And this is why so many of us have this sense of literally a foreign country. (BBC2 *Newsnight*, 14/8/2011)

The black man has not got the whip-hand over the white man, as Enoch Powell predicted, but the whites have become blacks: this is how Starkey interpreted the involvement of white youths, alongside black, in the riots. I want to read this by emphasising three elements: first, how the reductionist logic of the boxing obsession is expressed in it; second, the anxiety that his words produced in the television studio, anxiety for which the host and the other two guests felt the compelling need to box themselves in opposition to his viewpoint by legitimising his reductionism nonetheless; third, the hegemonic model of "syncretism" working in this particular case. This incident and the rhetorical reactions it produced offer a glimpse into the dominant regime of the interpellation of ethnicities working in the London multicultural imagination and the role rap and hip-hop have in it.

Drawing on the two uses of the term "culture" that Gerd Bauman (1999) identifies in

multicultural discourse ("essentialist" and "procedural"), we can say that Starkey's intervention is premised on a "procedural" interpretation of culture which in itself would not necessarily be challenged by social scientists working in the field of ethnicity in the UK. We may recall Stuart Hall's (1988) understanding of how a new conception of blackness, fluid and pervasive, was circulating in the British public in the 80s via artistic productions, especially in the field of cinema, and the use Les Back (1996) made of this to ethnographically test the emergence of "new ethnicities" in multicultural London. In two South London districts, Riverview Estate and Southgate, where he located his ethnography in the early 90s, Les Back found that white youths of the neighbourhoods were not generally reproducing the racism of their fathers, who, particularly in the case of Riverview, saw the arrival of black and Asian people as an invasion. This is because their favourite music was already "black", as were their friends[43]. Some pages of that ethnography – especially where Back focuses on what I would call the "desire to be black" among some white youths in Southgate, stemming from the exoticisation of reggae music and the perception of blackness as being synonymous with coolness – as well as the work of Claire Alexander (2000) among young British-Bengalis in South-East London, and even some passages in Bauman's ethnography of Southall (Bauman 1996), would provide some empirical backing for Starkey's observation that a certain interpretation of blackness, mediated through a particular type of hip-hop and cinema, has become "the fashion" among young people.

Starkey made this point clear when responding to one of the guests, Owen Jones, the young author of *Chavs*, who had stated that Starkey was downplaying the beneficial role black music had in the culture of the UK. Starkey interrupted him in polemic fashion: "You glorify rap?" and then suggested that rap glorifies riots and violence. Apart from this moralistic statement on rap, the literature mentioned above both proves and expands on Jones' point to show that the cultural change has also involved Asian youths and young people in general. This literature though, particularly in the case of Bauman, also stubbornly affirms that the change has not been uni-directional, but bi and multi-directional[44]. This is what Starkey is not willing to concede. It is crystallised in the moment when the procedural interpretation of culture which Starkey shares up to this point of his argument is abruptly abandoned and culture surreptitiously replaced by race. This takes place not only surreptitiously but also *dishonestly*; while declaring that race has nothing to do with the problem as the problem is a cultural one, and then turning race into the key to understand the problem: the culture to be blamed is defined as "black", and the one to be praised is referred as

[43] Even so, this did not extinguish the problem of racism because, as Back notes, the same white youths might be racist towards blacks outside their neighbourhood or Asians in it.

[44] Here I am referring to all the passages in Bauman's ethnography which show the Asian youths of Southall being familiar with with the music, way of walking, and behaviour of Afro-Caribbean people.

“white”. The way he mentions David Lammy, Black Labour MP for Tottenham, is significant; he is described as “an archetypical successful black man, if you turned the screen off, if you listen to him on radio, you would think he was white”. Whiteness and whitening of blacks is here a synonym for a restored Englishness that a supposed “blackening” of the white youth has put at risk.

The conventions of “political correctness” can partially explain the switch from the use of culture in Starkey's language: on the one hand, he is blaming people with black skin for having negatively influenced white youths; on the other hand, the term “race”, articulated with the intention of blaming someone, is a contravention of political correctness: this is why “culture” was used in the beginning instead. The reactions of the host and other guests came, in contrast, from a feeling that the glaze of political correctness had been broken. Each of them tried to solve the situation by re-establishing the broken conventions. The host, as master of ceremonies, wants to ensure that no racist comment is left unaknowledged during the broadcasting of a programme on national television, as probably stated in an ethical code she is required to submit to. It is therefore very “opportune” when, at the end of Starkey's quoted passage, she reads a controversial extract from the “Rivers of Blood” speech – a text that, as we have seen, has an indelible and controversial place in the social memory of the British public – waiting for Starkey to interrupt her and say: “That's not true!” whereby he means that Powell's racial prophecy (“the black man having the whip-hand over the white man”) was incorrect as the problem is cultural. She asks a second question: “When you say that white culture has adopted black culture, are you saying that that has been at the heart of the rioting? Is it black culture that has caused rioting?”. And then, later on, very firmly, she asks Starkey to clarify his reasons for blaming rap: “Wait a second... do you equate rap with rioting on the streets? Is that what you think?”.

Rap here is already equated with “black culture”, as her question to Starkey comes after Owen Jones has said:

> What’s utterly outrageous, obviously what you are saying, what you're doing is you are equating black culture with criminality. You are... let me finish (aborting an attempt from Starkey to interrupt him) you said David Lammy, when you heard him, sounded white. What you meant by that was white people equals being respectable and that white people by adopting black culture... look (he moves his shoulders energetically and changes his facial expression) black culture in this country had a huge contribution, in music, in a whole range of cultural ways.

Here Starkey interrupts with the above-mentioned polemic question: “By rap? You glorify rap?”. Up until this moment Jones had shown, in his response to Starkey, that he grasped the interchangeability between culture and race taking place in Starkey’s attack, understanding that

Starkey's goal is to blame the culture of the people and youths with black skin. However, he is also complicit in such interchangeability when, obeying a moral impulse, he feels he has to say something "positive" about the people Starkey is disparaging. He feels interpellated as a "white man" who has to speak up against the racist words that another white man is saying. But he does it only up to a certain point. He keeps using "black culture" in the same way Starkey does, and lets us understand that he means "black music" when affirming the enormous contribution that the people Starkey is talking about have brought to the country.

There is anxiety in the host's and Jones' reactions to Starkey's controversial statements. With an exercise in "mind reading" (of the Wittgensteinian private language, which for Wittgenstein 1958 was not at all private), I want to describe it in this way: upon hearing Starkey make his point, Jones must have said to himself: "He is talking against black people. I need to say something positive about black people"; upon hearing Jones mentioning music as one of the fields in which black culture has contributed to Britain, and upon hearing Starkey disparaging rap, the host must have thought: "Rap is black music. I want to know if he is really saying that rap music, the music of blacks, caused the riots". When she formulates her question, she has already directly asked Starkey if he is blaming black culture. In both cases anxiety is created by Starkey's ethnically loaded words or implications and the situation is solved by strengthening, although with the intention of resisting them, the same assumptions: that there is a black culture, that rap is black music.

Such an inability to resist the assumptions of Starkey at the moment of speaking against him is evident when the other guest in the studio, Dreda Say Mitchell, author and broadcaster, the only black person in the room, has her say. She speaks first, following Starkey, as if another logic at work for the host would be: "He has been talking against black culture. We have here a representative of that culture. It is fair that she should speak first". It is not possible to say from the BBC footage of the situation, which does not allow us to see the eye contact and body language between the people in the studio, whether the fact that she spoke first was negotiated with the host on the spot or was previously established. What is possible to understand though, is that while Starkey is making his point about David Lammy an ironic laugh is audible. It is not clear from whom it came: whether Jones, who is sat in front of Starkey, or Mitchell, who is to Starkey's left. But the fact is that immediately after the laugh, Starkey, who was looking at Jones, turns to his left as Mitchell begins to speak. She says:

> David, absolutely... absolutely not at all! Of all the theories we have heard this week, this whole notion that this is down to the way some young people may choose to speak... David (responding to Starkey who says something incomprehensible as she makes her point), people like myself who maybe talk in a particular way... (here Starkey interrupts again with "You don't talk like them!") It's a them. This is the problem. It's a them and

> us culture. We can't keep thinking of this as a them and us argument. We keep talking about different communities. You keep talking, David, about black culture. Black communities are not homogeneous groups; there are black cultures, lots of different black cultures. What we need to be doing is, we need to be thinking about ourselves not as individual communities, as one community. We need to stop talking about them and us. We need to be talking about our children. We need to be using word like we and stop putting the blame on different people. The blame culture has got to stop.

To return to the category of "diacritica", discussed in the previous chapter in relation to Barth's dynamic understanding of ethnicities, and to employ it here with Burke's suggestion that identification does not require persuasion because the extra-rhetorical is already given, we can say that Starkey's words make Mitchell feel involved at the precise moment the experience of "seeing different skin colour" and "hearing different accents" Starkey recalls to establish what is "white" and what is "black" becomes an undisputed fact for Mitchell as well. It is here that her need to position herself ("people like myself") within Starkey's mental map, and demand that Starkey clarify it, originates. As it stands right now, Mitchell argues, the multiplicities of black cultures, one of which she feels she embodies, are not captured by Starkey's representation of blackness. There are no "homogeneous" black communities, she says, but many "black cultures", and "people like myself", she makes clear, do not inhabit the specific black culture that Starkey is talking about.

I would like to paraphrase the dynamic of recognition animating Mitchell's demand for specification as: "Is he talking about me?". This is a pressing question from Mitchell regarding Starkey throughout the twenty minutes of the show, prevailing even after Starkey claims that he was not talking about her ("You don't talk like them!"). Take into consideration, for instance, the way she reacts to the host's question to Starkey immediately after she finishes talking. The host asks: "Is it black culture that has caused rioting?" to which Starkey replies with the straightforwardness the answer requested ("Remember what we are dealing with. Listen to these boys..."). Mitchell intervenes again with: "I think you should answer the question David?" – which could be paraphrased as: "Are you *really* saying that I am part of the problem just because I'm Black?", strengthening the assumption that there is "black people" and "black culture". It is this internal dynamic of recognising Starkey's rhetoric which impedes her from fully embracing the perspective of "we as one community" expressed at the end of her statement. The logic of "we as one community" could have significantly disrupted Starkey's assumptions, but this disruptive power is resisted by her feeling that she has been addressed by Starkey – a feeling with which she is not part of "we as one community", but is instead part of the black community Starkey is disparaging.

These particular reactions to Starkey's intervention – trying to move against his reductionism but strengthening it nonetheless – highlight what Paul Gilroy has called the crisis of anti-racism in

the UK. As anticipated in the previous chapter, Gilroy argues that the anti-racist rhetoric of the 70s and 80s ended up countering the calls for a racially homogeneous country by "racialising cultures" (Gilroy 1987, 1990). I want to insert the host's and guests' reactions to Starkey within this tradition, and I want call it "counter-hegemony", meaning by this a praxis and theory that although intended to fight the structures of power, is incapable of going beyond the representations and practices suggested by the hegemony. This is a missed jump from the flow of hegemony. It is admittedly an opposition to the hegemony, but only for a fragment of time: when it realises that it has to jump out, it is already too late because the terms by which one has been interpellated have already been accepted. In so doing, it does not get to question the extra-rhetorical, the out of the text, that the text presents as an always true fact, and by inhabiting a subaltern, militant and transformative intentionality, it supports the dominant representations of the boxing obsession. But how can we define more clearly, with a phrase, the hegemony that such a move does not oppose? And how can we likewise define the potentiality of the moment before, that is, the "other-hegemonic" jump?

Carrithers coins the term "polytropy" to "capture the sense in which people turn toward many sources for their spiritual sustenance, hope, relief or defence" (Carrithers 2000: 834). Presented as the norm rather than the exception of religious life in South-Asia, polytropy is defined as a "cosmopolitanism in social and spiritual relations" (ibid.), whereby people of different religious background find themselves sharing the same holy plethora of persons to worship and practices to follow. This doesn't mean, Carrithers points out, that a sense of belonging to a specific religious tradition rather than another is not present; instead it highlights a non-exclusivist attitude among the users of this plethora to make sense of their religious life. This is why polytropy, according to Carrithers, does justice to the South-Asian religious form more than does the term "syncretism", which hints at a pure original past that syncretism has somehow corrupted:

> On that model the pure form comes first, logically or chronologically, and the syncretic form comes second. But if we take polytropy as the norm – if, in other words, we treat all situations as ones which are always already polytropic, already presenting an array of holy persons and worshippers moving between them, already fecund with interpretations – then we can see straight away that any notionally pure form exists in an already crowded social world of alternatives. (ibid: 836)

Building on Carrithers' differentiation between syncretism (for a similar critique of "creolisation" see Steward 2007) and cosmopolitanism, I want to suggest that the logic working in the London boxing obsession is the logic of syncretism in which a hierarchical order of mental boxes is always reconfirmed: "whiteness" comes first when defining "Englishness", and "blackness" comes first when defining "hip-hop". Contrary to host and guests of the TV show, South-Asians would resist

such a hierarchy even when it is imposed by external conditions: this is evident in what Paul Dundas describes as the "unwillingness" of Jains and Sikhs to be "classed separately from Hindu" in the Census Report of 1921, as reported by Carrithers (2000: 834); and in the example of Sri Lankans who, whilst they "were happy enough to attend a Christian service or even to be baptised by the newly arrived missionaries […], showed little understanding or patience for the missionary's insistence that they observe exclusively Christian customs and attend only Christian service" (ibid.), thereby casting aside all Hindu and Buddhist elements of their religious life. Such a space of resistance to the uni-local identification and openness to the "simultaneous multiplicity" is the space and time that is very reluctantly opened up in the television debate: compelled to take a position by the regime of interpellation imposed by Starkey, all of the protagonists ultimately identify themselves as being "white" or "black", rejecting the possibility of being both at the same time. The multiple positionality and simultaneous time of the We as One Community, which, following Carrithers, we can call polytropic and cosmopolitan, is where we are next going to turn our attention by commenting on the political poetics of the ally for this ethnographic project.

**"World Citizenship"**

Let me introduce visually the musician Babar Luck: it is an image about which I will now talk. I do this by recalling the concept of resistance "just by its presence", as proposed by Italian anthropologist Lombardi-Satriani (1974) in a 1970s article on the problem of "progressive folklore" (see also Limon 2010, Gencarella 2010b). By this, Lombardi-Satriani meant the resistance that folk culture could represent, "just by its presence", to the subjugation process initiated by the hegemony. Consider this picture:

The man pictured is Babar Luck, a singer songwriter from East London. The context is a *Ted-x* event which took place in Istanbul in 2010, where he was invited to perform. The picture is sourced from the Facebook page for the event. Babar Luck is here depicted holding his guitar and pointing to the sticker saying “One Love” on it, as a form of greeting to the audience, or possibly after his performance. The image on its own does not necessarily do justice to Lombardi Satriani's powerful suggestion. But if we could add some changes, congruent with the pictured subject's everyday life, then we might perhaps capture the meaning of “just by its presence”. We could, for instance, put on Babar Luck's head his regularly worn West Ham United Football Club hat, the hat of a football team located in East London (Upton Park) and traditionally supported by the working class people in that part of the city; we could perhaps better see the the nosering which characterises his left profile; and we might replace the background with a scenario iconic of East London, such as the docks, the old factories, or, post-summer 2012, the Olympic Stadium at Stratford: then we would be grounding the beard and *salwaz kameez* of the subject in the *habitat* where his presence is everyday challenging a discourse of Britishness and affirming a space of awareness.

Before tackling these two points, let me first provide a short biography of the artist. Born in Pakistan in 1970, Babar lived in London from the age of eight, when he moved to England with his mother and elder brother. He lived and went to school in the borough of Newham, in the area of Canning Town. Here, influenced by his brother, he started playing the guitar and the bass. In his

early twenties he joined a band called “King Prawn”, which soon became popular in the British underground ska-punk and alternative scene. Over ten years, King Prawn released four albums and seven EPs, and had numerous gigs at European festivals and in some other regions of the Commonwealth, becoming an important reality in the “conscious music” networks of Britain and Europe. I say “conscious” as King Prawn’s lyrics were very much political, taking on board the messages coming from British punk, Jamaican reggae and American hip-hop. Babar played the bass, wrote lyrics and occasionally sang. After King Prawn disbanded, he began a solo artist career which continues to this day. Following his debut album in 2006, “Care in the Community”, Babar has been on an artistic journey which, alongside the reggae, rock and soul of his musical repertory, has featured experimentation with the genres of folk, hip-hop and metal music. Now in his early forties, Babar is an underground musician with tremendous stage presence, performing solo acoustic acts or with a band, with lyrics on the subject of love and street-life. It was this “latest incarnation” of Babar that I met on my first day in London in September 2009 before my fieldwork even started, during a music event at which he performed in Mile End park in East London.

When I first saw him captivating the audience at that event with his music and short speeches before and after each song – given in an accent which at that time I identified as cockney, typical of East London, with a slight Jamaican pronunciation – it was like I was interpellated by Babar. Something told me that he embodied an essential aspect of contemporary multicultural London dynamics, and that it was worth investigating this. As my fieldwork progressed in 2011, I understood that this multicultural dynamic he embodied, as claimed by him, opposed, “just by its presence”, the public discourse in the East End of London: a discourse whereby, similarly to that articulated by Starkey, he could not fit into the supposed ethnic identity of what is considered to be a real “Eastender”, a real “Cockney”.

In her ethnography on race-relations in East London, Georgie Wemyss (2009: 5) labels “white” and “liberal” such a discourse, meaning by this the mobilisation of hegemonic representations of Britishness in the local debate. In East London, Wemyss argues, this discourse employs the narrative of the “Invisible Empire”: one wherein the Imperial Past of Britain is not mentioned, distanced from the current multi-ethnic situation, or reduced to a “discourse of merchants and the spread of civilisation” (ibid.: 3), in order to suppress alternative memories which would challenge the “hierarchy of belonging” (ibid.: 20) this narrative supports. The presence of South-Asian Muslim communities in the “docklands”, and of Blacks throughout the East End, dates back to the employment of Asian seamen in the East India Company and the enslavement of Africans. These alternative memories, though, do not find an official space of recognition, or one which challenges the narrative of the Invisible Empire, when it comes to launching a new

development project in the areas concerning them historically; This is the case with Canary Wharf, built on the site of the old West India Dock, and can be seen in how the two-hundredth anniversary of the abolition of slavery in Britain is being remembered. Such a discourse, Wemyss continues, ends up sustaining a hierarchy of belonging where the "whites" are opposed to the "ethnic minorities", and where only to the whites is accorded the stamp of real East-Enders, while the latter will be "eternalised" in their status of minorities.

It is here that an ethnographic insight into how Babar responded to a situation created by the hierarchy of such a reductionism shows how his body is managed to fiercely affirm a space. I am going to ethnographise now an episode of racial abuse Babar and I experienced in a pub in Rochester, a small town in Kent, some miles outside London.

For reasons that will become clearer later, I found myself recording some music with Babar in a studio in Rochester. After the session and before taking the train back to London I invited Babar to have a pint in a local pub. Jokingly, he replied: "Ok, but I don't wanna fight. You will fight for me!" as if he sensed what was about to happen. Once there, both Babar and I were a little bit annoyed by the behaviour of the young barmaid who was taking our orders. Her facial expressions, body language, and words were everything but welcoming, as one might usually expect a waitress to be. While we were standing at the bar waiting to place our orders, I must have whispered something to Babar about the girl. "Well, you wanted to come here..." he said, highlighting the fact that I proposed it, chose the place, and that now should not complain too much. A robust woman standing next to me must have heard what Babar said. She was holding a glass of white wine in her hand and talking to a man. They were both white, as was probably everyone else in the pub. As she realised what Babar had said, she cried out loudly, apparently addressing the waitress serving us: "What are these two doing here? They come here with their hats and beards, don't they know that Bin Laden is dead?". Osama Bin Laden was in the news at the time this episode took place, May 2011, a few days after he was killed in Abbottabad, Pakistan. As the woman said this, I could feel the eyes of everyone at the bar on us. Babar did not reply immediately. He waited for a few seconds before saying loudly: "I have nothing to do with Bin Laden mate! But I can fight, and if you wanna fight, I'll fight you right now. I'm a Canning Town boy!". As Babar later told me, he did not have any intention of fighting, but could not tolerate the woman getting away with offending him without an aggressive reaction from him, "just because she was a woman". The woman replied with "And I am from Poplar", an area of East London in the borough of Tower Hamlets, which has the highest percentage of Muslim residents in the whole of the UK (34.5%) – Newham is second with (32%). Babar used her admission to dissolve the tension. He said: "And I am a West Ham fan, terrible team", to which the woman replied by commenting on the risk West Ham were running at the time

(and which later became a reality) of being relegated to the Football League Championship. After a few other remarks from each of them on the topic of West Ham, the confrontation-turned-into-a-conversation ended, and Babar followed me with the drinks to a table where we stayed for about twenty minutes before heading to the train station.

Leaving aside now all the implications that this episode might raise – such as the fact that I passed for Muslim just because I had a beard and was with another bearded man wearing a *kameez* (see next chapter for this) – what I want to take note of here is Babar's response to the woman, as this demonstrates the "rhetorical edge of the culture" (see Carrithers 2009) he aspires to build. His tactical use of the word "mate" instead of "sister", which is how Babar would have possibly addressed the woman on other occasions; and his final phrase: "I am a Canning Town boy"; suggest that he was really saying to the woman: "Look, I am an Eastender and working class like you, mate. I support West Ham like you do, and I know this might shock you because you assume that people who dress like me and live in the East End don't support West Ham, but I do. So you better watch yourself, because I know how to deal with these pub confrontations. I've been in these situations before, growing up in Canning Town. You don't wanna test me out, do you?". It might be excessive to see all this in a simple statement, but at the same time this is what "just" his presence in a pub in England is loaded with. In the reductionist logic supporting the hierarchy of belonging, "beard" and "Muslim" is simply at odds with "pub", "drinking", and therefore "Englishness". It is this logic that his presence in a pub challenges and recombines. This recombination opens up a space of enunciation where his body turns into the practice of an unconventional way of being Muslim (an unconventionality not covered by the media, while Jihadism and strict Islam are) and his words deny the narrative in which he should not be an Eastender while articulating another one.

It is this body-speech relationship which requires an additional understanding. All those ostensive and contrasting signs, such as the nosering, *kameez*, stickers on his guitar; this last one, a real extension of his body, stands for the building of an inter-communal space. Uprooting Carrithers' polytropy term from its South-Asian context, I would like to see as a "polytropic practice" the practice according to which Babar simultaneously *picks and chooses* different cultural signs to make up his public identity. The term polytropy is used here to mean an anti-exclusivist attitude opposing the logic of syncretism, a logic which would impose choosing only one sign instead of many to represent oneself publicly. The woman in the bar would have wanted Babar to choose between the beard-*kameez* and the pub. You cannot have both at the same time. One could argue that Babar managed to solve the situation by making a choice between two options: the real East End – supporting West Ham and drinking at the pub – and Bin Laden. Babar unequivocally chooses the former ("I have nothing to do with Bin Laden, mate!") and one can even see in the

expression of territoriality in the statement ("But I can fight and if you wanna fight, I'll fight you right now. I'm a Canning Town boy!") the imposition of a model whereby "real East End-ness" has to be absolutely expressed by embodying the stereotype of the white working class man who fights in the pub. According to this line of interpretation, Babar would definitively submit to such a model to avoid the risk of being involved in a fight with the other men in the pub, he has to express his passion for West Ham ("And I am a West Ham fan, terrible team..."), as if one cannot be a Canning Town boy without passionately suffering for West Ham. This line of interpretation, however, would fail to understand the audio-visual space of enunciation that his body-speech opens up, if it separated itself too much from the actual experience of seeing and hearing him speaking in that pub with his beard and *kameez*. By this I want to say that although Babar was repeating an alleged model of authenticity for East Londoners, the difference he produced is in the woman's eyes and ears. She saw a Bin Laden supporting West Ham, or listened to an Eastender dressed like Bin Laden. Either way, there's a recombination of the terms proposed by the order and hierarchy of discourse. In her possible reaction then lies the "third space", which Babar inhabits – the interstitial space of being caught between two cultures (Bhabha 2004a).

I want to show this more clearly by commenting on the use of "culture" in Babar's political poetics. Take into consideration the following lyrics from a single called *One Love* from his "Care in The Community" album.

> Pass me the pipe don't miss my shot
> Mohammed peace be upon him watch me rot
> Allah will set me free He cares a lot
> Pass me the pipe don't miss my shot
> All the White Culture taught me a lot
> All the Black Culture taught me a lot
> And my own people taught me a lot
> Only the real people showed me Love
> We're badmash the wildest ones
> We're badmash the baddest ones
> We believe in truth
> We believe in love
> One Love

The first four lines show the space Babar inhabits to articulate his being Muslim and a "man of faith", as he describes himself. This space is made possible by the Sufi Islam to which Babar sees himself linked, in opposition to strict Islam – he often calls himself a "liberal Muslim", and provocatively says that "Allah and Anarchy begin both with A". But this is a Sufi space only as a

result of the fact of being from London in the first place. During his speeches while performing, Babar refers to himself with the ironic definition of "Muslim Monster created in the Wonderful West", hinting at the apparent contradiction of being Muslim ("Mohammed, Peace be Upon Him…") and a Western man who has experienced drugs ("…watch me rot! Pass me the pipe, don't miss my shot").

In the following four lines he sheds this apparent contradiction with a clear delimitation of the space he inhabits. To recall now Bauman's dichotomy of the "procedural" and "essentialist", the term "culture" is used here in an essentialist sense when it is preceded by the nouns "white", "black", and "brown" or "Asian" (the latter two implied by his "own people"); but then the same conception is turned into a procedural one when the culture he wants to articulate, where all the teachings of all the cultures he has been exposed to have brought him, is the culture of One Love (this is contrary to Starkey's use of "culture"). One Love is, according to his poetics, a culture of unity between human beings, "compassion and forgiveness" and "love for all the children", as stated in the literature of his CD booklets. One Love is seen here as the Truth which "We" – in which Babar puts himself – are called to believe. This "We" is represented as "badmash", which is a London vernacular slang term taken from Asian-English. It is a translation from Hindi meaning "nasty". This meaning is preserved in Babar's use of the word, as he defines this "we" as "the wildest" and "baddest ones". But such a wildness and badness seems to stem from the will to challenge boxes, stereotypes and borders rather than from behaving badly, as the term "badmash" might conceivably stand for. Here is the "difference" in the repetition of that term: it is a wildness and badness which allows you to approach the space of One Love.

Let us consider the outro of the most recent version of the same song, from "The Babar Luck World Citizen Folk Band" debut album:

> Every Nation celebration
> no matter if you're Jewish Muslim or Christian
> no matter if you're Sikh Buddhist Agnostic
> no matter if you're Hindu riding on the rhythm
> no matter if you're black or white no matter what your nation
> no matter what continent or resolution
> no matter if you're earning or you're poor
> no matter if there's darkness and you're left out in the cold
> Human Problem Human Solution
> Human Problem Human Solution
> Only Love Will Save Us

Such an idea of One Love is, of course, not a recent one. We are all in some way familiar with Bob Marley's song which made those words popular, and, as we recalled in the previous chapter, which was very high profile in the 70s and 80s in the UK. What is completely new in Babar's case, in relation to the British anti-racists Bob Marley inspired, is the *self-awareness* of the move, expressed from the conscious making up of his own body, and through which he explains his identity-making process as a kid growing up in the East End of London. On the one hand, the One Love space configures itself as the vindication of what Bauman (1996) calls "cross-cutting cleavages": the cleavages people produce in an urban context to overcome their own ethnic or religious communities in the make-up of their own cultural choices. On the other hand, though, such a One Love space does not only take place in the "convergence" of two or more communities which, after the convergence, carry on their separate individual paths (see also Bauman 1995a, 1995b); but it is possible to germinate radical changes whereby the very borders of the community itself may be dismantled if the community denies the space of One Love. The "convergence", in other words, is expressed in Babar's lyrics as a "no way back experience" from where a consciousness of the unity of humankind can only develop. It is a consciousness that sees particularisms as the problem rather than "home", as the home here becomes the same space of convergence. The use of "badmash" is key: this term might be used by some in the Asian community to disparage the phenomenon of white hooliganism and deviancies of the white working class in England – badmash applies here to hooligans. Babar, in contrast, uses it by depriving it of any specific ethnic connotation and by giving it a positive meaning: the meaning of One Love. He articulates this aspiration for communitarianism and unity in another manifesto song of his political poetics, *World Citizen*:

> For No Nation we don't take no stand
> For No Politician we don't kill no man
> For no Religion we don't take no life
> For no Civilisation we don't pay the price

Homi Bhabha (2004b) calls "vernacular cosmopolitanism" the vernacular which articulates the local sense of territoriality with the idea that in the same time but in another space a similar vernacularism might be articulated. I would like to read Babar's articulation of the "world citizenship belief" from the East End of London with this category. What Babar articulates is the embracing of a "cultural and geographical ambivalence" where many religions, culture and localities are One, and One is stirred up by the tension to overcome the given, intended as the flow of hegemony. This is particularly apparent in the phrase he uses to present himself in his social network communications and live shows: the one who "loves all the people all the time". This

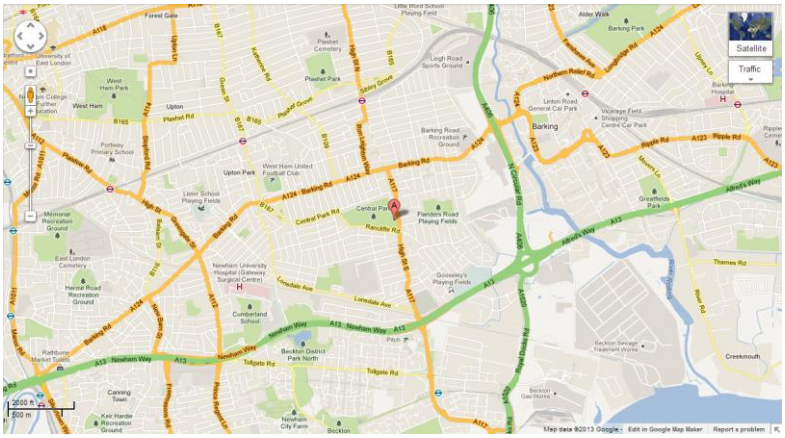
makes him able to make the jump that the challengers of Starkey missed.

If we want to look at it historically, we can find that Babar's "love for all the people all the time" contradicts a local British tradition of anti-racism which saw slavery firstly as a "home problem" and only secondly as a problem of the world. The phrase attributed to Lord Mansfield that "the air of England is too pure for any slave to breathe", spoken as he gave judgement on the case of the runaway slave James Somersett, is indicative in this sense (see Fryer 2010: 120-126). This tradition, which obtained the abolition of slavery in Britain in 1807, did not look at slavery as something odious in itself, but rather as something that was particularly odious within the national borders. Slavery in the colonies of the British Empire was formally abolished only in 1833. Such a temporal gap does not find a space of articulation in Babar's anti-racism: the world citizenship belief acknowledges from the start the possibility of sameness beyond the given territorial boundaries in which one experiences the five senses. This is why I want to call it "other-hegemonic". But we need to go deeper into this belief to show why other-hegemony is articulated more powerfully than counter-hegemony with Babar, by offering an immersion into his ecological niche.

## 3) Location

**The site of East London**

The fascination I felt towards Babar from the first time I saw him perform in 2009 motivated me to go and live in the area of London where he grew up. Although he left there a few years ago and now lives in a little village on the outskirts of London, I spent my pre-fieldwork time (October-Christmas 2010) and my entire year of fieldwork (the whole of 2011) in the borough of London with which Babar is so intimately familiar: up until early November I shared a flat near East Ham's Central Park, while from November to Christmas I stayed at a house in Plaistow, halfway between my previous accommodation in East Ham and Canning Town's ("I am a Canning Town boy!") bus station, tube station, and the DLR (Docklands Light Railway) station.




Newham as a borough was created in 1965 when London became Greater London. Two existing boroughs were combined to form Newham, the Essex borough of East Ham and the borough of West Ham. The stadium of West Ham United Football Club is positioned on the exact street which before 1965 marked the watershed between East Ham and West Ham: Green Street in Upton Park. The tactical use of "West Ham" by Babar in the above mentioned pub confrontation must be understood in the sensorial context of that street when West Ham are playing at home. On those days the spicy smells of Indian takeaways, the elegant fragrances of the shops selling *kameez*, saris, perfumes and jewelry, mix with the smell of beer and fried chicken consumed by the West Ham fans approaching the stadium. Waves of white supporters, equipped with the scarves, hats, and flags of West Ham, and with beers in their hands, crowd Upton Park tube station off Green Street and walk up to the stadium in the midst of a myriad of Asian shops, bearded men, and veiled women. None of the Asian residents in the area seem to be very interested in what is happening in the stadium: none of them can be seen in there, none of them can be seen wearing West Ham merchandise. It is in the midst of such an ethnographic atmosphere that Babar challenges the legitimacy of this ethnic assumption.

The "colour line" which the event of a West Ham game highlights tells us something about the transformation the area has been through in the last few decades, and the conflict that still lives on today. I want to convey this by giving an ethnographic account of the "internal movements" that getting off at East Ham tube station produced in me, so as to compare it with a historical event which took place outside that tube station in 1980. We are going to move a few tens of metres east of Green Street, even though the scenario, charged with smells and sensuality, is not going to change very much. Running parallel to Green Street, High Street North presents several similarities with the situation of Upton Park, although it lacks a stadium. On the morning of Saturday October 2nd 2010, I ended up on High Street North having got off the tube at East Ham tube station. I was on the tube returning from Dagenham, in the borough of Dagenham and Barking, where I had gone to

view my first potential accommodation in London: a shared house with one room available. I did not like the house and the area. While travelling Westbound from Barking on the District Line, I decided to get off at the next stop to have a look at the area, East Ham. As soon as I made my way onto High Street North, I realised I wanted to settle in the area. What I immediately liked was the feeling of walking into a village: a town within a town, with a public centre and a public sphere.

At both ends of High Street North there are two large arched signs, dominating the whole street, with "EAST HAM TOWN CENTRE" written on them. These arches signal an area full of shops: from the branded supermarkets and electronics and clothing chain stores, to the small shops selling sweets and traditional foods and clothes; from the fast food shops to the Indian restaurants and cafes; from the banks to the off-licenses; from pubs to slot-machine venues. In the middle of this area, exactly where the street becomes pedestrian and only buses are allowed, a short lane of fifteen to twenty metres takes you to a fairly large indoor market where vegetables, fish, meat, clothes and many other items are sold: East Ham Market. Around this market, in the lane and High Street, it is possible to find a few benches which cannot be found elsewhere. On Saturday mornings and early afternoons you can see people gathering at the crossroads of the High Street and the lane, by the entrance to the indoor market. This is particularly evident when one or more people go there to "speak" to the passers-by, who, especially at the weekend but also on working days, are quite numerous. These speakers are religious, mainly Christian and Muslim. The Christians are predominantly older Black Africans and South Asians while the Muslims are young South Asians (although they could be British-Asians, or even Arabs or British-Arabs) and, in lesser numbers, young Black (perhaps Black-British) and White people (who could be, and most generally are, English and British people). The Muslims are generally quieter than the Christians, although they look more organised. In groups of six or seven men, they usually stand around a table handing out leaflets to passers-by. All of them are bearded and wear the *djellaba* or *kameez*. The Christians on the contrary do not wear any ostensive dress but are definitively more "noisy". They speak loudly to get the attention of the passers-by. With Bibles in their hands, these Christians invite people to "love Jesus" and submit to God. Jehovah's Witness and Born Again Christian are the religious identities most of these speakers subscribe to. Occasionally, they have a microphone and a little amplifier. On these occasions the speaker comes with a group of people handing out leaflets. On many occasions though, the person speaks without any sort of amplification and no one seems to be accompanying them in the effort to spread the word of God. The speaker is alone and usually none of the passers-by seem to take any notice of their shouting. I have seen the same scenario in front of the big indoor market in Upton Park on Green Street. The noise of these "street preachers of God" contibutes to that of the market, where vendors of fruit, vegetables, fish and meat invite you to check out their

goods. Another voice is added to this vignette of sound. Around the little phonecard shops, next to larger Asian off-licenses, there are young Asians who repeatedly shout: “calling ca-a-a-rd, calling ca-a-a-rd”, emphasising and prolonging the “ah” of card. This sort of “cockadoodledoo” exhorts the passerby to buy from the sellers the cheapest phone cards with which to call family “back home”. In the mind of a PhD anthropology researcher willing to study London's ethnicities through hip-hop, such a kaleidoscope of sounds was pleasing: I had found a very interesting cosmopolitan working class village to live in!

If I had got off at East Ham tube station thirty years earlier, a different scenario would have been before my eyes, and my sense of personal gratification would probably have been replaced by tears. In that year a local teenager, Akhtar Ali Baig, was attacked and killed by a group of skinheads just outside the tube station. This murder, the last of several episodes of racial harassment committed by Neo-Nazi groups against Asian people, led some Asian residents to organise themselves in order to protect their children from being attacked by violent groups. Groups of Asian men started to escort children to and from school. On one occasion, in 1983, outside the Little Ilford School where episodes of racial abuse had previously happened, eight Asian men had a confrontation with a group of white people who they later found out were undercover police officers. The eight men were arrested and accused of conspiring to commit crime. One year later, in April 1984, another seven Asian men were arrested after a fight with some white men outside the Duke of Edinburgh pub on Green Street. The white men involved in the fight had already been the protagonists in episodes of verbal and physical abuse towards Asian residents. The seven Asians, on the other hand, suspected that the pub in Green Street was a base for the men, and other similar groups in the area, to plan and carry out attacks against Asians. These two cases, known as the “Newham 8” and “Newham 7”, were followed closely by the local Asian community, anti-racist organisations, and trade unions. Among these was the Newham Monitoring Project, an organisation created at that time which today still provides a service for residents by monitoring the police regarding racial crime and offering support for the victims of these kinds of offences.

Thirty years later, during the time of my fieldwork, I neither witnessed nor experienced any such episodes in the area. I did experience racial abuse of my own person, due to the logic according to which my beard made me a “Bin Laden” for some, but never in Newham. Another episode of racial abuse involving Babar and me, as well as the one already mentioned, can help us understand what had happened in the intervening thirty years.

Babar lives on the outskirts of London, in a little village in Essex where, alongside “White English” people, there are some Africans and black people, a few Asians, and where, from what I could gather from the times I went there, it was not possible to see anyone bearded and wearing the

*kameez* besides Babar. This resulted in occasional incidents of racist attention towards Babar. One day I was walking with Babar, his older brother and his cousin from their house to the train station to catch a train to London. During the journey, on a sunny afternoon in late May, we met a group of young kids riding their bicycles. As one of them cycled past Babar, he shouted: "Bin Laden! Bin Laden!". We smiled at the young boy. But I did not smile when something less tolerable happened on the train. At the stop before ours, a young man spat at us from the platform. He was on our train. He got off at the stop and spat towards us through an open window whilst walking past. Luckily, the window through which he spat was on the other side of the train from us and it did not reach us. The man did not say anything and was walking in the opposite direction to that of the moving train, so we did not manage to see him properly. As we realised what had happened, Babar could see that the episode had really upset me. To cheer me up, he said "Don't worry. You'll soon be in the East End!" Where, as was his point, these things do not happen.

Two things have happened in the last thirty years in East London, and particularly in Newham. The first is that "White English" people have moved out as soon as non-white people (apart from the recent migration of Eastern Europeans), and especially Asians, have massively moved in. The anti-Islamic attitude of the woman from Poplar living in Rochester, the crowd of West Ham fans who have to take the tube, train and car to reach Green Street, the 2011 census saying Newham has one of the lowest "White British" populations in the country (16.7%): all this data shows that white nationals have left the area in the last few decades. My interviews demonstrate this as well. Babar, who went to school in Canning Town in the late 70s and 80s, said that, apart from a black schoolmate, he was the only "brown" boy in his school; Sarina, a "Black British" girl at whose family home I stayed from November to Christmas, went to school in the 80s and 90s in Plaistow and said that the schools were already more mixed by then. She also noted though, while growing up in the same house, that many of her white neighbours had moved out over the years. Badmir and Tom, my two flatmates in East Ham's Central Park area, both shared the same observation with me: that "White English" people had moved out. Badmir, a thirty year-old man from Albania, had lived for more than ten years in East Ham; Tom, an Irish man in his late forties, had spent more than thirty years in East London, mainly in Newham. They both occasionally in private conversations expressed their frustration about the situation, taking the position of the local people who had seen their neighbourhoods "inundated" with immigrants. They manifested a certain feeling of sympathy towards the decisions of whites to leave the area, saying that they could understand why they left, and blaming the Government for allowing foreign people to come into the country too easily. While it is striking that these viewpoints and feelings are shared by two people who are themselves migrants (an Albanian and an Irishman), their complaints

introduce the second event which has occurred since 1980: the establishment of a discourse of regret regarding the presence of the Other in the land of the Self.

In the East End of London this discourse is highly visible in the rhetoric of "Londonistan". This is a derogatory way of referring to East London using the suffix "istan", from the Persian for "land", emphasising the religion of the people in the East End rather than their country of origin. As with Pakistan, Afghanistan and so on, the suffix "istan" is meant to indicate the Islamic aspects of such places. "Londonistan" is used by conservative writers who warn of connections between the East End and Jihadist Terrorism (see Phillips 2006), and it is also used by xenophobic and anti-Islamic movements and parties such as the British National Party and the English Defensive League. This is a rhetoric placed upon East London from outside, rather than from within, and this simultaneous movement of people out and rhetoric "moving in" conveys the position of regret from where such a discourse is articulated. The white backlash, from being an organised violence, has turned into a rhetorical violence, which does not seem to manifest in material violence within the boundary of the contested East End, but just outside of it. Within the East End the backlash occasionally turns into a "ballot-box white backlash", as other areas encounter incoming non-white or foreign people. In the borough of Barking and Dagenham, further East, where I was originally looking for a room, the BNP came second in the 2006 council elections, gaining twelve seats at the expense of other parties. In the 2010 election, the BNP lost all of its seats, confirming a trend seen in the 1993 election of a BNP candidate in the Millwall by-election on the Isle of Dogs. The BNP lost its seat in the following election, showing that, before moving out, the "ballot-box backlash" seems to be the last hope for halting a process that actually appears to be irreversible, leaving no other option than to "regret", articulated from without.

The discourse of Londonistan emphasises the Islamic distinctiveness of places like High Street North or Green Street. Islam is visible in the beards, *kameez* and hats ("they come here with their hats and beards", the woman in the pub said) of the men as well as in the veils and burqas of the girls and women. But this is just a component, although a key one (32% Muslim and 43.5% Asian – almost equally Indian, Pakistani and Bangladeshi), of Newham. Afro-Caribbean (4.9%) and African people (12.3%) are another component, as are Eastern Europeans, and to a lesser extent Chinese and Latin-Americans. In his political poetics, Babar calls each one of them a "Londonstani", challenging the derogatory use of the suffix "stan". Everyone is a "stani" for Babar, regardless of whether they live in Newham or in London: the Africans are "Africanstani", the Jamaicans "Jamaicanstani", the Italians "Italianstani" and so forth. The suffix "stani" here becomes the immutable particle to celebrate the diversity of the people, contrary to the suffix "istan" which stands in opposition to this.

This different rhetorical use of "stani" shows how Babar *bonds* with East London, an environment enclosed by "semiological bordering", whereby outside East London my beard makes me look like Bin Laden, whilst inside East London I look like a Muslim "brother" to the Muslim passers-by, old and young, men more than females. The following is an episode which illustrates the perfect symmetry of all the subjects involved in the logic of the boxing obsession. Next to the flat I was sharing in East Ham's Central Park area there is a fastfood shop run by Asians. A few days after Osama Bin Laden was killed, I found myself in there getting some samosas. The waiter was a young man whom I had never seen before. He had never seen me either, as he told me when we began a conversation.

"I'm sad these days because my uncle died" he said to me.

"I'm very sorry to hear that. How did he die?" I asked.

"He was killed back home! You know who I am talking about?" then he said it was Bin Laden.

He told me that he had met Bin Laden twice in the past few years in Pakistan, and that he was very sorry that the Americans had killed him. I pretended to take him seriously, but in my heart I deemed this very unlikely to be true. That Bin Laden is seen as a symbol of identity by some of the young British-Asian Muslims who live in areas like East Ham could be interpreted as a reaction to the white backlash with which they and their parents had to deal when living in Britain. Which makes Babar's refusal to be interpellated as a Bin Laden even more politically relevant.

This relevance lies in the status of being a meta-commentary on East London multicultural dynamics. In this light, Babar's music and lyrics are themselves a social biography of London's last thirty years, which is, more or less, the amount of time since he first moved to London. This was also the time when rap and hip-hop moved to London: the first generations of London hip-hoppers met up in Covent Garden (Central London) in the early 1980s, experimenting with breakdancing and rap. Babar did not join these gatherings at the time but, as he says,"I had friends from the African and Jamaican community who had family in the States […] I could listen to the tapes that were sent over to them, so I listened to hip-hop before the pirate radio here in London did" (Interview conducted on 8/1/2010). It is now to the vernacular which hip-hop introduced to which we turn our attention in order to complete the picture of Babar's ecological niche and prepare the ground for the "solution" offered in the final sub-chapter.

**London Patois**

Let me go back to my first meeting with Babar. This happened by chance when I had just arrived in London. Having left my bags at a friend's place in Victoria Park, around 2 or 3 o'clock on a Saturday afternoon, I was travelling alone to Mile End Tube Station. Whilst walking I heard some

music, playing live, and a voice amplified by a PA coming from my right. The sounds were familiar to me, as if somebody was rapping. But I could also sense that this was not hip-hop music, at least not in the classic sense of a deejay and an MC on stage. So I followed the voice, and after a few minutes I saw Babar on stage. What made me think of rap was the improvised talking, with rhymes and occasional tunes, with which Babar burst out over the melodic riff of the guitar he was playing as an intro and outro to the songs. Although Babar was reworking it, this was a stylistic tradition better know as *toasting*. And this is where London rap comes from.

Akala, in the aforementioned documentary, stresses the role of the generation of "sound system toasters" as facilitators of British Rap. Jamaican music's influence on the origin of American hip-hop is a very well established narrative, which often mythologises the emigration of DJ Kool Herc to the South Bronx, where he adapted the tradition of sound systems and, during a bloc-party for his sister, invented the "break" by stopping, with his hand on the turntable, James Brown's *Give It Up or Turnit a Loose* (Toop 1984, Gilroy 1993). London was the other possible destination for Herc's family when leaving Jamaica. And London was the place where many Jamaican and Caribbean sound system deejays migrated to. Among them was Linton Kwesi Johnson, a legendary figure of the Jamaican-British Reggae Dub-Poetry scene of the 70s. The toaster who is considered to be the father of British Rap was himself born in London: Smiley Culture. Akala, alongside many of the London rappers interviewed in the documentary, recall the commercial success of one specific song by Smiley Culture which not only paved the way for the development of rap in Britain, but also made it "British", articulated with a British accent.

In *Cockey Translation*, Smiley Culture, born in in the early 60s in Stockwell, South London, to a Jamaican father and Guyanese mother, aims to teach the slang spoken in East London to the Jamaican "yards":

> It's I Smiley Culture with the mike in a me hand
> Me come to teach you right and not the wrong
> In a de Cockney Translation
> Cockney's not a Language it is only a slang
> And was originated yah so inna England
> The first place it was used was over East London
> It was respect for the different style pronunciation
> But it wasn't really used by any and any man
> Me say strictly con-man also the villain
> But through me full up of lyrics and education
> Right here now you a go get a little translation
> Cockney have name like Treey, Arthur and del-boy
> We have name like Winston, Lloyd and Leroy

We bawl out YOW! While cockneys say OI!
What cockney call a Jack's we call a Blue Bwoy
Say cockney have mates while we have spar
Cockney live in a brum while we live in a yard
Say we nyam while cockney got capture
Cockney say guv'nor. We say Big Bout ya

However, Smiley does not want to translate only for those from the Caribbean, but also for English people who are not familiar with cockney slang but share the same metropolitan place with the people who speak it ("you never know when them might buack up a cockney").

The translation of cockney to understand is easy
So long as you don't deaf and you listen me keenly
You should pick it up like a youth who find some money
Go tell it to your friends also your family
No matter if a English or a Yardy
Ca' you never when them might buack up a cockney

Having an understanding of cockney is necessary especially if you go to East London:

But sometimes me shake out and leave me home town
And that's when me travel a East London
Where I have to speak as a different man
So that the cockney can understand
So black man and white man hear dem fashion

Consider now what Starkey calls "Jamaican patois", being the the language that both white and black share:

> This is the text sent by the girl who would be the Olympic Ambassador who then engages in shocking acts of looting: "Pigs shouldn't of killed that guy last night innit? Den they wouldn't get blown up. Girls going to steal we is. But stealing do we. The shop keeper ain't fuck there. Mugs"

If we could dilute the accusatory nature of Starkey's finger-pointing with a serene recognition that Jamaican-English has strongly influenced the English spoken in London, we would find that he is not so wrong. Seen with the eyes of today, we could indeed say that as people have moved out of the East End of London in the last thirty years, the need for Smiley Culture's translation has also vanished – "Cockney say this, We say that" – in the sense that the terms used by the youth,

regardless of colour or territoriality, are somehow the same. This does not mean, though, that they have been "Jamaicanised". Smiley Culture sounded "more cockney" than the generation of his parents, and this shows that for those sharing the same ecological niche, linguistic influences are never a unidirectional phenomenon: the working class people of the Windrush generation, as well as the other linguistic communities who came afterwards, have also been "picking up" the vernacular of Londoners as they progressively settle in. Let me briefly describe some linguistic examples of such multi-directionality in the current London vernacular.

We have seen how Babar uses "badmash", the Hindi word for "nasty". Other terms such as "blood" and "fam", so frequently used in hip-hop lyrics, seem to have another origin: "blood" seems to be an abbreviation for "bloodclaat" and "fam" for "family yard", both used in Jamaican-English to mean different things – bloodclaat is a swearword, or is an expression meaning the menstrual period of the woman; "family yard" is the land or garden of one's house. "Blood" and "fam" have become terms which substitute for "brother" in London, especially for the younger generations who listen to hip-hop and grime. Babar's generation might use "bruv" to express the same social solidarity. The use of "blood" and "fam", however, resembles that of "nigga" in African-American hip-hop, filmography, and communities. But one term unites all the speakers of London vernacular: the term "innit", as used in the text message recited by Starkey. "Innit" is an abbreviation and incorporation of "isn't it", and is entirely an original product of the London vernacular – a term, impossible to find anywhere other than London, used by the younger (and less young) generations, equally shared by working class, middle class, and to a lesser extent, upper class youth.

In terms of how this vernacular is spoken, I could hear a slight difference between Babar's accent and the younger versions of East London accents, such as the vernacular of the young man in the shop mentioned at the end of the previous section. This difference is generational. Other differences might be territorial. But to treat any of these differences, as Starkey does, in a static way, as if they do not change with time, means not recognising the logic by which the London vernacular is so internally differentiated. My suggestion is that, in the contemporary multicultural conjuncture, internal variations are due to a lack of precise translation when introducing words from other languages or social groups, and also uncertain pronunciation: a lack of precision and an uncertainty which the generations foillowing the introduction will experience as precise and certain, introducing other imprecisions and uncertainties as new terms and sounds are introduced, re-initiating the process for the generations to come. TV, music, and cinema offer a faster process of crystallisation. Some innovations might be recognised as "morally appropriate" in the use that other people will make of them when making sense of the surrounding space. They might "keep it real",

to use a hip-hop expression. They might be closed to the everyday experience of other possible users; therefore it requires an intentional cognitive act to internalise the innovation. But some other innovations will remain uncontrollable because, as Ingold (2011: 139) suggests, "listening is to follow sound", to wander along with it with no resistance offered to the process of becoming. Hence it can be that, while David Lammy sounded "white" to David Starkey, Dj Steaz, born in the mid-70s in Hackney, East London, sounded "black" to a black person:

> The other day I was speaking to someone at the uni and there was a black girl who was listening but couldn't see me. At some point she saw me and she asked where I grew up and I said Hackney. "Oh, that explains – she said – because if I hadn't seen you, I'd have thought you were a black man". But you see, the way I talk is the way I've been influenced because I grew up in Hackney. (Interview conducted on October 29th 2011)

Even in this case, like in Starkey's, what is recognised as "black" would be better called "London" or "London patois", rather than Jamaican or "black Hackney", to acknowledge the cosmopolitanism of the vernaculars spoken in the London districts. The transformations of the words, accents and slang expressions which occur in those areas make it impossible to distinguish the Black from the Cockney, the Asian, the South, West, or North Londoner. It would be easier to say "We Are All Mixed", reflecting such a cosmopolitanism of places, sounds and accents. Both Starkey and the "black girl" are ready to concede this while first acknowledging, through an experience of sound, that a white man sounds "black" and a black man "white". I want now to intervene before the boxing obsession does.

## 4) Solution

### Producing Folklore

Stephen Olbrys Gencarella (2010a) recently asked his fellow folklorists to adopt a "Gramscian perspective" and to turn the discipline into "critical folklore studies". By this he meant, by building on Gramsci's *Observations on Folklore,* replacing folklore as an object of analysis with "good sense", that is to say a nucleus of the common sense of the people able to overcome hegemony; what I have called "other-hegemony". To those who, like Jose' E. Limon (2010), a prominent figure in American folklore studies, objected that this would mean the end of the discipline since Gramsci wanted to eradicate folklore from people's minds and habits, Gencarella promptly replied that "a critical folklore studies might indeed call for the eradication of folklore" (Gencarella 2010b: 259), especially where folklore promotes hatred, discrimination and superstition. Gencarella does not go

any further than this and does not offer a precise example of what he means by eradicating folklore whilst creating critical folklore studies. In a previous contribution (Gencarella 2009), he had suggested researchers of folklore reconsider their role in "producing folklore", intended as the production of a "lore" (rhetoric) able to affect a "folk".

The fieldwork behaviour advocated in this thesis is situated precisely at the jump into the local "good sense", into the local awareness of flowing – the moment at which even Starkey sensorily recognises that his "home" changes – with the objective of stimulating the "meta-communicative" skills of the informants. This is done to prevent the reductionism of the boxing obsession from colonising Londoners' ways of inhabiting London, and to offer the concrete possibility of an "other-placing". The first step taken to make this happen consisted of producing a "constituted rhetoric" through rap. Rap was not only the local tradition I was investigating and which my informant Babar Luck inhabited (along with reggae and post-punk mixed with some influences from South Asian acoustic music), but was also the "regime of interpellation" around which we discovered ourselves as friends and articulators of the same idea of rap. This happened smoothly, and the first time I interviewed him was key to the transition from interviewer-interviewed to friends. This took place in January 2010 in London, when I was staying there for a week. Prior to that day I had seen him only twice: first at the gig in Mile End Park and then at another gig a few days later in a little park off Shoreditch High Street. After the second gig I briefly introduced myself and exchanged a few words with Babar, who nevertheless left the venue immediately after his performance. I spent the rest of the day – it was a Saturday afternoon – with a friend of Babar's, Dino: a curious and funny American man who at that time was living with Babar. Babar mentioned Dino when I met him at Stratford Station on the afternoon of Friday January 8th 2010, saying "I am here just because he (Dino) said that you flow well, otherwise I wouldn't". I went to a nearby street party in Brick Lane with Dino on the Saturday – a yearly event organised by the restaurants on the street – and as the street was full of bands playing music, I improvised some rhymes for Dino while dancing. I did not expect this episode to be referred to by Babar, and more importantly I did not expect the fact that I "flowed well" to be the reason he agreed to an interview – a second-hand opinion furthermore, as he was not there when I rapped. "I trust Dino, he was in Boston when hip-hop came out" he said to justify the claim that I *must* flow well if Dino said it.

This episode highlights a certain reluctance I have experienced in most of my interviews, and the same reluctance even partially explains why I was not able to conduct other interviews. "Dino said it" is here a sort of green light to enter the intimate space of the interviewed, knowing that the information given will not be rendered inaccurate or exploited, because "Dino said" that you are *one of us*. In other interviews, especially with younger rappers, I did not necessarily have to

be seen as one of them to get an interview, while the fact that my status as a PhD researcher did not share the certification of sameness established by other sameness (the equivalent "Dino said" from one of their crew) prevented me from interviewing some popular conscious rappers. With Babar, in contrast, the "Dino said" developed a relationship of alliance where music and anthropology became the axes of our common project of the "production of folklore". In the end we really ended up *flowing together*.

Babar and I formed a band with several other London musicians[45]. We self-released an album of 10 tracks ("Digital vs Analog") and a music-video in January 2012. The song of the video is called *Rebuild, Remake* and is the manifesto-track of our musical and political collaboration, which goes under the name of "Remaking Europe". The song and video propose replacing the monuments and names of streets and squares dedicated to people who were involved in the Imperial Occupation of other lands, as part of a campaign to stop celebrating the Imperial Past of the Nation in contemporary European cities. I want to briefly discuss the script of the video in order to expand on the "solution" offered.

The beginning of the video is a spoken word part in which the audience is asked whether they know who the men represented by the two statues beside Nelson's Column in Trafalgar Square are. They are Sir Henry Havelock (1795-1857), a general of the British Empire who was key to suppressing the Indian revolt of 1857, and Sir James Napier (1782-1853), another general serving in India, whose name is linked to the abolition of the sati.

[45] On the Remaking Europe mixtape "Digital vs Analog", Tom Murrow played the drums, Captain Hotknives played the bass, Len Hovis played the saxophone, Junior Enyioko played the keyboard, and Tom the Lost World Citizen did the beatboxing.

"The list could continue with many other examples, perhaps next to your house or in your local park" the spoken-word section continues, suggesting that it is not only a problem of Trafalgar Square. This call for the audience to be acquainted with what such monuments celebrate is strengthened when the song begins, and among Babar's lines is this one: "If these icons from before were to come to life, would they take my life?" which highlights once again the brilliant political use he makes of "his presence".

The rhetoric of decolonising the national imaginary does not develop into a discourse which sustains the logic of reparations or the granting of particular privileges to specific groups of people affected by the Imperial Past of Britain: it rather tries to deny the legitimacy of the Imperial practice of "Divide et Impera", in order to raise consciousness of the fact that "We Are All Mixed". The words make this point clear as they continue:

> My point is that we should be aware of the past that links us all to understand our present.
> Do we want to still celebrate Imperialism or do we want instead, ultimately, to stand up for freedom and the undeniable right of everyone to be happy?
> At stake is the language that your and my children are gonna speak.
> I say that the year 2011 made us glimpse the global possibility of such a new language.
> But it is time now for each one of us to contribute on that.
> How? You need to remake yourself.
> Why? One Love, One World, One People.
> This means that even if you believe you're English, Irish, Spanish or whatever,
> the Truth is We Are All Mixed. (video-clip uploaded on youtube on 6/1/2012:
> http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=H7sweWV0N6Y.)

When "the year 2011" is mentioned, the scene changes from Trafalgar Square to what was then the Occupy St Paul's Cathedral Movement. This part was intended as a suggestion for the Occupy Movements around the world, and particularly in London, to align themselves not only in the criticism of the financial system but also in support of the unity of the people of the world as "One Tribe" – the name of an independent record label, now defunct, which released Babar Luck's "Journey" album in 2008 – instead of numerous tribes divided along ethnic, national and religious lines[46]. The phrase We Are All Mixed was purposely chosen to oppose the rhetoric, which was

[46] This is a point I had been trying to raise, although unsuccessfully, in the Occupy London Camp. When the camp was debating its "initial statements", a document formulated and discussed by the members of the camp, I proposed getting rid of the term "ethnicities". This was used in statement no.2 to define the people in the camp, the phrase "[we are people] of all ethnicities" being used alongside social and gender indicators. Some accepted my proposal while others, particularly among the lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender movement, strongly rejected it. One white lesbian activist from the USA said at a meeting, in opposition to my argument, that according to her experience of activism in the US with black communities, "they" would require that category so as to show that the movement was not just white. The point she made was a strategic one: given few black people attended the camp, the

already having a space of official recognition as seen in the BBC2 program *Mixed Britannia* (first episode broadcast on 6/10/2011), according to which the 2011 UK census enabled the prediction that "mixed-race" was going to be the largest "ethnic minority" in a few year time, and London their world capital. The fact that this was presented as a "good thing" by the anti-racists, as a vital element of British multiculturalism given that so many people from different races and communities have children together, shows to the fullest extent how the logic of syncretism in multiculturalism is hegemonic. Stating "We Are all Mixed" while fighting the logic of the Invisible Empire may be a good way to give political force to the good sense of the London vernacular cosmopolitanism articulated in the idea of One Love. The challenge here was to have the phrase "We Are All Mixed", maybe in its abbreviation "waam", enter the London vernacular, as "badmash", "blood", "fam", "innit" and many more have done, and so be claimed by Londoners themselves to make sense of their everyday space. The project in fact asks Londoners to question the "non-said" around which their surrounding place is articulated by *placing it differently*.

We can now go back to the point, raised at the beginning of the chapter, of the ritual as producing embodied localities, and we can ask ourselves the following hypothetical questions: What would have happened if the London rioters had taken to the streets to ask for the removal of the Imperial statues of Trafalgar Square, instead of looting local shops as many of them did[47]? What would have happened if they had done so not to express an anti-British anger but the constructive proposition of the slogan "We Are All Mixed"? What still could happen if they were to do so?

Moving from the hypothetical past to the present, the question shifts from Alain Badiou's interpretation of an "event" to Michel Foucault's one. According to Hardt and Negri (2009: 60), an event for Badiou appears as the locus of an irremediably multiple truth only after it takes place; for Foucault an event is, by contrast, always investigated from the conditions of its productivity. Badiou looks at the event with a backward gaze, Foucault implies a forward one. The move of positionality I have proposed here, from "counter-hegemony" to "other-hegemony", is equally a journey from the past to a possible present: a movement through time. The project Remaking Europe offers an "alternative mental map" through which to re-articulate concepts like "multiculturalism", "Englishness", "blackness" and "otherness". But to be truly alternative a mental map of this kind has to live in the performativity of the actors. In this sense, the solution here suggested, that of transferring the know-how of anthropology to the informants so that they can perfect their already existant skills in being anthropologists of themselves, cannot be offered as a "fait accompli" within

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best way to attract non-white people was, according to her, to accord them a space of recognition, starting with the statements. That's why, she concluded, it was better to keep "of all ethnicities". I still disagree.

[47] Many others, as shown by research from the *Guardian* and LSE which interviewed 270 people involved in the riots, just wanted to attack the police in revenge for the everyday police brutality they were subject to, and to avenge the death of Marc Duggan, who was shot dead by the police.

the text. This can only take place when an effective change of "weltanschauung" among the articulators of London vernacular is sanctioned. Only then will Londoners meet the conditions to continuously perform the eradication of the reductionism of the boxing obsession from their own way of inhabiting London. Only then will a new hegemony emerge.

**Conclusion**

Let me conclude by making an unconventional, but rhetorically productive, comparison. This comparison brings us back to Althusser's scenario of the policeman's interpellation, as it shows what can happen when a subject stops submitting to the pre-established narrative.

Agnese Piraino Leto, widow of the Italian prosecutor Paolo Borsellino who was killed alongside five security agents[48] by a bomb blast on July 19th 1992 in Palermo, said to a prosecutor of the Italian Republic during a recent deposition (before dying herself) that her husband told her eight days before the tragic attack that he was seeing the "mafia in real-time". This was a reference to the inquiry he was carrying out into the reasons behind the dramatic death, almost two months before (May 23rd), of his friend and colleague Giovanni Falcone, killed alongside his wife and three security agents[49] by a bomb placed on the motorway near the Sicilian town of Capaci, triggered at distance when the convoy of the anti-mafia prosecutor reached the designated spot. Borsellino was seeing the "mafia in real time", the widow said, as a result of a very unsettling realisation: that the head of the Carabinieri of Palermo, a man he trusted, was affiliated to the mafia. Borsellino knew he was next on the mafia's kill list after Falcone, his widow said, but he also told her that his death was not going to be a solely mafia operation. The mafia were going to be materially helped and allowed to commit the murder by sectors of the State, by some of his colleagues.

The deposition, given in 2010, allows the depiction of a version of events different to that of the official version given to explain the murder. Although Agnese felt her confession put her family at risk, she gave it because the son of a dead Palermo politician, called Ciancimino, and former mayor who was affiliated to the mafia, alongside other mafia men turned informants, had begun to make shocking revelations. Ciancimino's son, with first-hand knowledge and original documents, had revealed that high-ranking figures in the Armed Forces and Secret Services had approached him just after Falcone's death with the intention of establishing a secret deal between the Cosa Nostra – the Sicilian mafia – and the State. Ciancimino's son was approached in order to inform his father of the State's intention, with the knowledge that the Ciancimino family was a viable channel for reaching Bernardo Provenzano, the head the criminal organisation alongside Toto' Riina, and who had benefited for many years from the protection of the State – he was only arrested in 2006 after

[48] Agostino Catalano, Emanuela Loi, Vincenzo Li Muli, Walter Eddie Cosina, Claudio Traina.

[49] Vito Schifani, Rocco Dicillo, Antonio Montinaro. Falcone's wife was Francesca Morvillo.

forty years in hiding. Was this the unspeakable secret that Borsellino discovered? That the State was negotiating with the anti-State? Was this what had caused his brutal death?

This is now a matter for the Italian Courts. However, the deposition of Borsellino's widow is very much in keeping with our attempt to see the "extra-rhetorical" in real-time. This is apparently what her husband saw and what ultimately caused his death via his attempt to transform the situation. Let us think about his transformative instance. We can change the "mafia" to the "State" in his statement, as this is the nature of the realisation he made: that a member of the State, a policeman, is affiliated to the mafia. His statement would now be that he, as another member of the State, is seeing the State in real-time, he is looking at himself and the place he inhabits from the external: when replying to the yell of the policeman, he is watching his own dynamic of identification. This positionality helps him to come to grips with the ambivalence (double-bind) of the whole situation, the ambivalence of a member of the State who identifies with the State, because the State is "good" and as such fights the mafia which is "evil", but who eventually realises that the same policeman who is yelling at him to do good is evil. He is shaken by this[50]. He is shocked at seeing his "home" being destroyed, but he is not immobilised by it, he has not become schizophrenic, he is running toward the exit. He sees things clearly now, he knows who his enemies are. The policeman who is calling out to him is an enemy, that is why he no longer turns around (the "no-way-back experience"); good and evil can no longer be placed unreflexively like they were before such an ambivalence was detected. The "non-said" of the identification process has to be agreed upon again in order to allow him to turn around. Borsellino is now able to stir up new identification processes, ones which are able to persuade even the policemen to accept their ambivalence in the same way Borsellino did. He is ready to utter words and share this knowledge with an audience, to tell them what to do. We can see him reaching for the microphone during a public event. The crowd hears a bang… He is shot, killed before he gets to the stage. But he might have already persuaded an audience that what he wanted to say is possible. Indeed, they discover they were already inhabiting the world in that way.

I have tried to stir up this same realisation in Londoners in this chapter. I have attempted to do it with a rhetorical strategy that, through a music-video and album, has shed light on one of the "non-saids" which make Londoners so. In terms of the material production of a text, this objective has been satisfied, especially if the video's viewers, the album's listeners, and this chapter's readers have felt caught in the same flow. The question this chapter does not ask is: how is this realisation possible? What is the new "non-said" that this identification has produced? Why is it that, for instance, Borsellino's audience is energised by watching him reaching the stage and inspired by his

[50] Two of his close associates revealed that on one occasion Borsellino, almost in tears, cried out that he did not expect a friend to betray him, referring to the Carabinieri head.

presence? Is this what we mean by charisma? And what is charisma? If we were to apply this to the case of those watching the YouTube video, can we talk of a charisma of sounds and images? Chapters 3, 4 and 5 all contribute to answering this question. They do this while analysing the role of the visual, aural and audio-visual in London Conscious Rap, and how each of these individually and collectively contribute towards keeping the non-said of a process of identification "non-said"; but also how, conversely, they suggest that it has to be said. Chapter 3 will look at the hip-hop narrative of "Islam"; Chapter 4 will look at the hip-hop narrative of "blackness"; and Chapter 5 will look at the rapper's narrative of "rappers as leaders".

# Chapter 3: Realness *for and against* Theory of Secularisation

**Introduction**

London-Iranian rapper Reveal said to me, during an interview, that Lowkey, a peer who is widely known in the London and UK Conscious hip-hop scene, is *real* with regards to his political commitment to the Palestinian cause.

> There are many people who just talk about Palestine. They wear the kefia and say Free Palestine. That's fashion! Lowkey is real. He went there, he tried to help. He's doing something! (Interview conducted on 10/11/2011)

While in the previous chapter I introduced the concept of exiting the text through the rappers' understanding of flow and flowing, in this and the following chapter I want to show how one can be *textualised*, or enter a text, by exploring what rappers mean by "real". More precisely, whilst flow and flowing were treated mainly as features of rapping, here by real I mean a feature of hip-hop consumption, and more specifically, listening to a tune or watching a video or a public performance. Real as an adjective becomes key, I suggest, to understanding the "hip-hop realness" as a form of *enchantment*. In this sense, if it is possible to say that in the previous chapter I described the real-time experience of knowing one flows as the beginning of disenchantment, I now ask: when does enchantment begin?

As should be clear by now, by disenchantment and enchantment I mean only the entry to and exit from the "flow of hegemony", as it is impossible to run away from the "flow of sociality". This is probably what those who talked about the disenchantment of European modernity underestimated. As Charles Hirshkind (2011) has said in a dispute with Talal Asad and William Connolly, social science approaches which follow Weber's take on disenchantment and rationalisation have not been able to explain yet, not what secular or secularism is, but what "secular body" means. What is the difference, in other words, between a secular body as a disenchanted person and a non-secular body as enchanted? It is impossible to answer this question without being trapped by the false dichotomy upon which it is articulated. Take the example of Immanuel Kant in *What is Enlightenment?* If disenchantment is having the courage to stand up and speak one's mind freely without fear of tradition or superstition (see Foucault 2010: 1-24), then one could claim that the person Kant has in mind is not disenchanted, but *enlightened*. And as Adorno and Horkeimer (2002) have pointed out, this enlightened subject only has the illusion of having tackled its dark side, its "mythic roots",

while believing that rational calculation is the answer[51].

With the metaphor of enchantment, we can analyse the difficulty between feeling and explaining as a temporal problem in the relationship between an audience and a performer. If Reveal feels that Lowkey is real, while listening to his music and witnessing his political commitment, then when he has to explain it to the interviewer he positions Lowkey's characteristic of being real against a background where realness acquires a value that was possibly not what he first felt when realising that Lowkey was real. Lowkey was real not because others were not, such as those who scream "Free Palestine for fashion". He was just real. Period.

In the previous chapter I suggested splitting the concept of hegemony into two halves, "counter-hegemony" and "other-hegemony", in order to account for the conflict of temporality between the anti-dialectic instance of enunciation and the instance enunciated. I now suggest doing the same with the relationship of realness. The realness of hip-hop in this sense consists of the "memory of the index" and "immediacy". In the same way as counter-hegemony is a missed jump following the emergence of a potential opportunity (that other-hegemony is ready to take advantage of by jumping), so the "memory of the index" comes temporally after the moment at which one is taken by the immediacy of the enchantment. The memory of the index is a rationalisation of the enchantment; immediacy is the enchantment when it happens. The latter is a feeling, the former an explanation.

I borrow the term "index" from Alfred Gell's (1998) model of the "abduction of agency". I suggest that while Gell does not succeed in his attempt to build an anthropological theory of art able to explain the relationship between an artwork and the viewer, his model is inadvertently a very useful demonstration of how the boxing obsession works. Gell argues that a work of art produces "enchantment" in the beholder as long as they can reconstruct the technical procedure through which the artist made the actual object. When he, as a little boy, was taken to visit Salisbury Cathedral, he was not impressed by the cathedral itself but by a work of art which used materials, matchsticks and glue, with which he, as an eleven year-old, was very familiar. Because of his familiarity with the materials, he was left with a true appreciation of the genius with which that the object was made (Gell 1992: 47). When this happens, he argues in re-reading the relationship between art and magic in classic anthropological literature, the "enchantment of technology" (the enchantment produced by the artwork) coincides with the "technology of enchantment" (the mental

[51] To rescue Max Weber from his followers, we need to say that Weber (1992) had sensed the trap into which the theory of secularisation was heading. His sociology was focused on the conflict of the interiority of the individual: a conflict between *feeling* and *explaining*. This was both the driving force of capitalism, as the Calvinists, in order to understand what they could not – that is, whether or not they were going to be saved in the afterlife – were led to produce more and try to be successful, and also a risky place for modernity, as secularisation and bureaucratisation would box humans in the "iron cage" of anomy.

reconstruction of the techniques used to produce the enchantment). He calls such a cognitive mechanism "abduction of agency" (Gell 1998: 13), meaning the viewer's attributing of intentionality to the artist.

Contrary to deduction and induction, abduction in Charles Peirce's philosophy, from which Gell borrows the term, is a logical inference whereby if a) is true, then b) also might be true but a) is not sufficient in itself for b) to be true. Peirce also referred to it as "guessing". For Gell, abduction is not only what explains the relationship between a work of art and the viewer, in the sense that the viewer guesses by abduction what the artist wanted to convey; abduction is also the relationship between the artist, when making the work of art, and the material used to make it. This is, according to Gell, all mediated by the index: what the work of art stands for, the ideal that gives it a meaning and to which the artist commits when making the artwork.

It has been argued that this model is too mentalist to be a truthful account of enchantment (see Hallam & Ingold 2007). I suggest that it is inaccurate in relation to when the enchantment begins. Art historian David Freedberg and neurophysiologist Vittorio Gallese have recently joined together to build a theory of the aesthetic experience of art which, contrary to traditional mainstream studies, draws on the pre-cognitive response to an artwork (Freedberg & Gallese 2007). Neurological evidence shows that the mental reconstruction Gell refers to when contemplating an artwork is a mechanism which the mirror neuron system already performs. As Gallese points out, when observing an object, especially if this object is familiar to us in the sense that it belongs to our repertory of actions (the actions we make it with), the understanding of which actions the maker of the object has carried out to make it is a mechanism which does not require any cognitive procedure. This means that if we were to see abduction as the operation of "reconstruction a posteriori" in which the mirror system is involved, then we could easily conclude that the index has no role whatsoever in the immediate viewer's reaction to the object.

The index comes into play later, perhaps when, by exaptation, the same neural pathways affected by the activation of the mirror neurons are involved in the "neurofunctional architecture of thought and language" (Gallese 2010: 457). The "embodied simulation" performed by the mirror system suggests, however, that enchantment begins with *impersonation*, not "indexing". It can later become indexing and this is when, I suggest, the boxing obsession plays a role.

One could object by saying that I am using the concept of memory in a rather contradictory way: in the previous chapter, memory was generating the sensory meta-commentary key to getting one out of the flow of hegemony; here, by contrast, it is determinant to getting one textualised in the hegemony. The difference, once again, is temporal. When getting out of the flow, the memory is short-term and fully concentrated on what has *just* happened. Precisely because of this temporal

vicinity to the happening being remembered, one is not yet out of what has just happened, even though it has just happened: the short-term memory witnesses in itself the "*longue durée*", according to Braudel (see Seremetakis 1994b: 20), or "duration", according to Bergson (see Chapter 5), of what has just happened. But this *longue durée* is rather short: it leads to enunciation, it is the driving force of verbal-cognitive articulation that then drastically ends when one is enunciating and realising that what has just happened has *gone*. It is now, as if it were an exchange of baton in a relay race, that the memory of the index is activated. This is functional to framing what has just happened as an *event*, while before was just a happening. What is being remembered here is not the continuity of the *longue durée*, which in itself can only be felt, but a discontinuity. Memory is now selected, fractured, made (as per Anderson) homogeneous and flat, but nonetheless the result of a patchwork. And this patchwork is mediated by the index.

When Reveal says that Lowkey is real because others are not really committing themselves to Palestine, one is left with the question of whether it is because *he is Muslim*. One can infer that Lowkey is Muslim by indexing his past statements, songs and performances, by remembering what he said on certain occasions and how one felt about it, how he reacted to a question and how one reacted to his reaction, and so on. On the other hand, one is simply not interested in this conclusion when first experiencing the performer's realness. What counts here is another truth: the certainty one feels about the inner state of the performer. This is not a reflection of the message being sent out, but of a sensation of being empathetically connected to the inner state of the sender. This is, I suggest, the primary meaning of what a hip-hop listener intends when saying that the creator of a tune, video or performance is *real*: impersonation.

Inferring that Lowkey is a Muslim anticipates the topic of the first part of the chapter, called "Memory of the Index". This is an opportunity to expand upon one important crux of the London boxing obsession, the significance of which during fieldwork I have only touched upon in the previous chapter: the crux whereby *looking like a Muslim* makes somebody either an enemy or a friend. Unlike my descriptions of racism and solidarity in the East End and its outskirts, where appearing Muslim through beard, dress and skin colour was a rather passive provocation of the pedestrian, resulting in greetings from some and racial abuse from others; here we will look at it as an *effective political strategy*, that is, as the deliberate attempt to design one's own communication to the audience with the objective of indexing Islam. I will argue, by focusing on the lyrical, visual and political output of Lowkey, that this strategy, intended or unintended, is successful insofar as it produces ambiguity and doubts in the audience, and stirs up the mechanism of cognitive abduction according to which one can infer that if the speaker says so (and says so with a certain degree of dramaticism and bodily gestures) then s/he must be Muslim.

But this is not the level of immediacy through which an audience first experiences the performer's realness. In the second part of the chapter, called "Language of the Heart", I show that on this level, Lowkey's rap is neither Islamic nor Political. I will question the mechanism of abduction by reflecting on the possible immediate understanding one is exposed to while listening to the rap of those who accept the label of "Religious Rap". If in listening to Lowkey's album "Soundtrack to the Struggle" one is left with the firm impression that the rapper is engaged in political rap, in the same way one would conclude that Poetic Pilgrimage's "StarWomen" is made by Muslim rappers, and SO's "So It Begins" by a Born Again Christian. Yet it would be hard for the listener who has no previous knowledge of the rappers' religious identities to infer that they are Muslims or Christians just by listening to some of their songs where no ostensive reference to their religious identity is made. One would just be exposed to the immediacy of their being real. This implies for the listener an *inward look at oneself* rather than an external inference through indexes. The first modality of listening precedes the second and I call it, building on SO's words on the clarity of heart of the Christian believer, *language of the heart*.

Differences between Islamic, Conscious and Born Again Christian Rap emerge, however, *when the language of the indexes is reestablished*. Here the Conscious and Islamic Rap become allied while the Christian scene stands alone. The third part of the chapter, called "Theory of Secularisation", shows how this positioning both strengthens and defuses the *West vs Islam* division upon which the theory of secularisation is articulated. This form of analysis on how the hip-hop realness both challenges and collaborates with the boxing obsession will continue in the next chapter, where our ethnographic insight into the West vs Islam division will lead us to examine the role of "black nationalism" in London hip-hop.

## 1) Memory of the Index

### Appearing as Muslim per Abduction

To understand what I mean by appearing as Muslim as a political strategy, consider the following picture, taken from the *Independent* on 30th March 2012. A jubilant George Galloway, founder of the *Respect* party, is making the victory sign with his right hand: he has ample cause to celebrate as he has just become an MP in Westminster for the constituency of Bradford West.

Keep in mind the element of his short beard and take a step back in time. During the electoral campaign, this is the letter that Galloway wrote "to voters of the Muslim faith and Pakistani heritage in Bradford West" – a decisive slice of Bradford's electorate[52] – to protest against what he saw as the strategy put in place by Labour of suggesting to voters that they should favour Imran Hussein, his opponent, because, unlike Galloway "he is Muslim […] and of Pakistani background".

> God KNOWS who is a Muslim. And he KNOWS who is not. Instinctively, so do you. Let me point out to all the Muslim brothers and sisters what I stand for:
>
> I, George Galloway, do not drink alcohol and never have. Ask yourself if you believe the other candidate in this election can say this truthfully.
>
> I, George Galloway, have fought for the Muslims home and abroad, all my life. And paid a price for it. I believe the other candidate in this election cannot say that truthfully.
>
> I, George Galloway, tell the truth, stand up for the truth, in parliament, on radio, on television, in the face of its enemies, without fear, however powerful they are. Even in the US Senate, by the Grace of God. The truth and Mr Blair's New Labour are passing strangers.
>
> I, George Galloway, hold Pakistan's highest civil awards. The Hilal-i-Quaid-i-Azzam for services to the restoration of democracy in Pakistan 30 years ago and the Hilal-i-Pakistan for my work for the freedom of Kashmir. What has the Labour candidate ever done for Bradford let alone Pakistan and Kashmir?
>
> I, George Galloway, came to the side of the people of Palestine in their agony, tried to save the people of Iraq, now demand the immediate end of the war begun by NEW LABOUR upon the people of Afghanistan and I am leading the fight against a new war, this time with Iran.
>
> And, with your support, and if God wills it, I want to give my remaining days in the service of all the people – Muslims, Pakistani and everyone in Bradford West. I await your sincere judgment on this matter.
>
> Wa'Salaam o Aleukum

Let us imagine that this letter is the text of an actual political speech Galloway gave during the electoral campaign, addressing an audience. I want to treat both the picture and Galloway's fictional

[52] According to the 2011 census Bradford had the fourth highest proportion of Muslims in the country (24.7%) and the largest proportion of people of Pakistani ethnic origin (20.4%).

oratory political performance as if they were objects of art in Gell's sense. This will help us to see the complicity of realness with the boxing obsession.

What is the index in Galloway's electoral campaign? Gell suggests that we examine the abduction of those who voted for him. Media narrations, in this sense, have highlighted a sociological problem: the mutiny of young people against the elders of the Asian Muslim community in Bradford. That a non-Pakistani, (apparently) non-Muslim and non-Bradford resident managed to beat the candidate of the Labour Party, a man of the Bradford Pakistani community, chosen and appointed by representatives of the same community after negotiations with the Labour Party, was perceived by the media as a crisis of the *biradari* – the extended family which works as a unit of government in Pakistani families and communities, which was portrayed as losing its grip on the British-Pakistani young people's social behaviour. (In reality, Galloway received the support of some Bradford mosques, but even so the young vote was still a determinant factor in his victory.) Anthropological literature on British-Asian communities has been showing signs of this change in the last two decades (see Alexander 2000; Dench et al. 2006; Lewis 2007). However, the same literature has also provided a more detailed account of how, despite divisions, the community reconstitutes itself. As the media covering the election pointed out, the fact that some Asian young people voted for him because they thought he was Muslim shows how their idea of Islam is the basis on which young people experience the unity of the community.

Pnina Werbner's ethnography of British-Pakistanis in Manchester explicates the northern England background and contextualises the reason why, even in voting for Galloway, Bradford's British-Pakistani young people did not necessarily break with the community. In diaspora, Werbner (2002: 12) points out, "Pakistanis have rediscovered their connection to Palestine, Bosnia, Chechnya, Kashmir", identifying more with the international community of Muslims, the "ummah", than they would if in Pakistan. Bradford, in this sense, is an important centre of this rediscovery in the UK, especially so for radical Islam: Bradford was the original sparking point for both the anti-Rushdie demonstrations in the late 80s and the riots in Northern England in August 2001, involving young Muslims, BNP sympathisers and the police.

But why is it that after attending a Galloway rally a young person is persuaded not only that Galloway is Muslim, which is a claim Galloway never made, but also that Galloway is "more Muslim" than his Muslim opponent, as implied in the letter[53]? I propose taking into consideration

[53] Galloway was not new to playing the card of Radical Islam. He played it in the 2005 parliamentary elections when he ran with his new *Respect* party for the constituency of Bethnal Green and Bow in the East London borough of Tower Hamlets. Back then his opposition to the Afghan and Iraqi War and his involvement in the "Stop the War Coalition", a network of pacifist and socialist groups which includes the active involvement of Muslims and Muslim groups disappointed with Labour foreign policy, allowed Galloway to be seen as a national politician appealing to the Muslim cause.

the combined roles of the auditory and visual apparatus. As John Bowen (2012: 18) notices, "Qur'an" shares the common Arabic root q-r-' with "qira'a", meaning the words given to Mohammed by Allah that Muslims have to mnemonically learn in Arabic in order to value "the precise act of aural revelation", and repeat "the act of oral transmission" necessary to establishing the Islamic ontology of the non-mediated presence of Allah in the believer's life. In keeping with this tradition based on aurality and orality, to be a Muslim one has only to make the *shahada*, the declaration of submission to God and acceptance of Mohammed as His prophet before two Muslim witnesses. Which is what some of the young Muslim Bradfordians who voted for Galloway were led to believe he had done, via his proclaimed willingness to help Muslims and his claim to never drink alcohol. On the other hand, however, this tradition becomes more "liquid", to borrow from Bauman's (2000) "liquid modernity", when reworked in a conjuncture wherein the visual can confirm what the ear suggests. In this sense, Galloway's short beard can prove that he really is a convert to Islam when, Muslim or non-Muslim, the social actor is accustomed to viewing the beard, mainly through media representations, as a distinctive Muslim trait.

The irruption of the body's features into the stylistic practice of appearing to be Muslim, as a kind of final confirmation of what one feels, serves to introduce the human sensorium that is at stake in the abduction by which rapper Lowkey is both the victim and beneficiary. Like Galloway, Lowkey also makes enigmatic use of his being or not being a Muslim. Like Galloway, he is thought of as a Muslim due to the way he looks in addition to what he says, but this assumption might apply to him more easily than it does to Galloway, who has to somehow physically style himself as a convert: although Lowkey is not bearded and does not wear traditional dress, his mother is originally from Iraq while his father is English, which helps to stir up such abductions. However, exactly like Galloway, Muslims and non-Muslims assume Lowkey is Muslim because of his words of political commitment to Palestine, opposition to US Imperialism, and the defence of Muslims "home and abroad". Like Galloway, as we will see in the next two sections, Lowkey articulates his political commitment from a socialist rather than Islamic perspective, and this is why he is given here as a paradigmatic case of the confusion between the Political and Religious in the London scene.

Although indirectly, Lowkey's extraordinary success and popularity among young British-Muslims can help explain Galloway's victory in Bradford. It does so in respect of the diaspora, as highlighted by Werbner, which Galloway's letter purposely targeted. Diasporas, for Werbner, are "transnational communities of co-responsibility", which does not imply a return to the land of the parents but a continual trigger for mechanisms of sentimental identification (Werbner 2002: 3). When Lowkey articulates at this level in his lyrics and political speeches, he seems to be saying

“I'm Muslim”, although he never verbalises it. What he does verbalise is another discourse which can sometimes be at odds with that of diaspora: when he verbally presents himself as “mixed-race” and consequently a “human being” rather than a Muslim. This an an acknowledgement which, as I will show below, not every “mixed-race” person who has a Muslim parent can make easily in an environment so polarised by the “Muslims vs West” division.

**Unprecedented Political Realness**

The Convey Hall theatre was crowded to capacity. From the balcony, covered with Egyptian, Tunisian and Libyan flags, a voice rhythmically shouted as the rally was about to begin: “Down down with Mubarak”, and was immediately joined by the rest of the audience in a “call and response” that lasted for several minutes. On the evening of Wednesday February 2nd 2011, the Stop the War Coalition had organised a rally for Egypt. One of the two coordinators of the organisation, John Rees, had just returned from Tahrir Square in Cairo where, since early January following protests in Tunisia, people gathered to demand the resignation of the president Hosni Mubarak. The eyes of the international media networks were all on Tahrir Square in those tumultuous weeks, especially the cameras and journalists of Al Jazeera English International which, according to many of the English-speaking people gathered at the event, gave a more truthful commentary on the protest than mainstream Western media outlets such as CNN and the BBC. These two in particular were accused by socialist militants and student activists of all ages, who were crowding the theatre, of having formerly been too sympathetic towards the personal authoritarianism of the Rais, in the same way that Western countries, now looking with interest at Tahrir Square, had been. Both of the two student activists involved in the “Situation” of Chapter 1 were at the rally, along with Claire Solomon, then President of ULU (University of London Union) and an instrumental figure in the student demonstrations of Autumn 2010. All of them, as well as other student-activists, particularly from SOAS, were members of “Counterfire”, the socialist organisation Rees founded after leaving the Socialist Workers Party in 2009. Around 250 people attended the event. A big part of the audience was Egyptian and Arab people who, since the start of the gatherings in Tahrir Square, had been protesting in front of the Egyptian embassy. Other Arabs and British-Arabs in London also protested in front of the embassies of their countries of origin as the wave of the so-called “Arab Spring” spread. It was these people who started the chant “Down down with Mubarak” from the balcony of the theatre.

Rees opened the event by giving his first-hand account of what was happening in Tahrir Square. The other coordinator of the Stop the War Coalition, George Galloway, spoke at the end. Galloway began his speech with “assalamailekum”, to which a large part of the audience responded

with “alaikum salaam”. Neither Rees, nor the other speakers, including Egyptians, addressed the crowd in such a way. Galloway also made a controversial statement which met with vocal agreement and clapping from some and the obvious disagreement of others. When he stated that the Egyptian revolution was a “Muslim revolution”, one young British-Egyptian woman who had spoken before him and was still sitting on the stage, moved her head from side to side to indicate her disagreement. Rees, who was sitting next to the young woman, changed his facial expression, betraying his embarrassment. In the audience, by contrast, someone exclaimed “yes” as Galloway made his point. The qualification of the movement as Muslim seemed to be at odds with the pictures coming from Tahrir Square, where Muslims and Copts could be seen taking turns to keep lookout and allow one another to pray without being attacked by Mubarak's loyalists. At some point in his speech Galloway mentioned Lowkey, who was sitting to his left while Galloway was at the podium: “as Lowkey so brilliantly put it”. He was referring to a passage from Lowkey's speech, given earlier, in which Lowkey said that if Egypt became democratic, the Americans would not be unconditionally supported as happened under Mubarak:

> It's very foolish for the American President to think that democracy in the Middle-East will favour them (people laughing). This arrogant concept... this ridiculous concept that democracy in Arab countries, in Middle-Eastern countries, with the history that they have, will create pro-American and pro-Israeli government. I tell you this (raising his voice): I have so much belief in the people of Egypt that if there is democracy, if there was democracy, there wouldn't be an American or Israeli government left-standing in the Middle-East! (Many people clapping vigorously while Lowkey points his finger).

According to the official schedule Lowkey was not expected to speak. He had just returned from Australia where he was touring. He was either offered the chance to speak by the organisers when they realised he was there, or he asked to be allowed to speak. He was dressed in a smart black jacket with a jumper underneath and a pair of jeans. His face was serious but he smiled whenever young students recognised and greeted him.

In another part of his speech, received with much applause, he mentioned the hypocrisy of the BBC’s and SkyNews’ coverage of the fall of the regime. The BBC and Sky were emphasising, according to him, the scenes of men on horseback charging into the crowds of people in Tahrir Square in order to clear it.

> Sky and BBC News were horrified by that. Men on horseback running into people, protesters, demonstrators. That sound familiar to the people of London? BBC and SkyNews attach these ridiculous double standards as if it is any less civilised or any more civilised when the men on those horses are Metropolitan Police.

The reference was to the incidents which happened during the student demonstrations of winter 2010, particularly that of December 9th where Lowkey himself was involved in an incident with the police who on that occasion were equipped with horses[54]. The greatest applause came at the end of his speech when Lowkey said, powerfully:

> The path to the liberation of Jerusalem runs through Cairo. This is why they are nervous and we must keep them nervous. We must keep them awake at night, always!

"They" is here referring to Israelis and whoever opposes Palestinian emancipation. To understand the tactical meaning of this final remark on Palestine, we need to enter into the relationship between a speaker and an audience. Key to the success a public address may have at a political event so loaded with emotion and passion is not only the argument proposed by the speaker, but also the body language through which such arguments are articulated. The passion, drama, seriousness of face, intonation and intensity of voice, are here all elements and strategies that can make the difference between the clapping and booing of the audience: they help the audience understand (or misunderstand) how committed to the cause the speaker is, how "real" s/he is.

In this sense, the final reference to Palestine in Lowkey's speech comes as certification of Lowkey's realness for the audience. It is the confirmation that in Lowkey's heart Palestine still has a prominent place, the same place they realised it had when they got to know Lowkey. In fact, ever since Palestine entered the realm of his lyrical output, Lowkey began to occupy an unprecedented place in the UK and London scene. No one among the generations of rappers that preceded him had been able to turn themselves into such an influential voice on national and international political issues, to the extent that the socialist movement involved in the organisation of demonstrations and rallies has reserved an important place for him and for rap performances generally. Following the Israeli assault on Gaza from December 2008 to January 2009, Lowkey progressively became a very vocal figure in the London pro-Palestine movement. Before then, he was just a brilliant young MC who, with his three mixtapes, "Key to the Game" (Vol.1; Vol.2; Vol.3), became acknowledged as one of the most talented rising rappers around. After the Israeli operation in Gaza, Lowkey, who was not yet twenty-three, composed a song called *Palestine Will Never Die*, officially released in March 2009, which he began performing at demonstrations of the Stop the War Coalition and pro-Palestinian organisations in order to show solidarity with the Palestinian people. It was then that the socialist audience gathered at the Convey Hall theatre in February 2011 came to know Lowkey.

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[54] A few days after the demonstration, the Metropolitan Police released some pictures of people filmed attacking or throwing blunt objects at the police. Among them was a picture of Lowkey. That demonstration, as we will see in Chapter 5, also featured an incident involving Lowkey's good friend, Jody McIntyre. Some footage shows the police dragging McIntyre out of his wheelchair. McIntyre is a young journalist and activist with cerebral palsy.

The lyrics of one of Lowkey's songs and the images of its video ably demonstrate the role that the memory of the index may have in the applause, rather than booing, of a socialist audience listening to his speech. As I write these words, the video for *Terrorist* has been viewed almost three million times on YouTube. The video was directed and uploaded to YouTube by Globalfaction, a collective of London hip-hop visual artists who since collaborating with Lowkey have become the name behind almost all music-videos released by London's (but not only London's) conscious rappers, especially those of Lowkey's crew, "People's Army". Their first collaboration was for the music-video *Obamanation* (two million views), uploaded on March 2010. Uploaded six months later in September 2010, *Terrorist* is in at least one sense the continuation of *Obamanation*. It has the same criticism of US foreign policy, which the new President Obama has not changed. As said in the second verse: "One nation in the world has over a thousand military bases". This nation, along with all the countries that support America's foreign policies, Lowkey says, should be called terrorists if we want to adhere to the definition of terror. He says in the spoken introduction:

> So we must ask ourselves: What is the dictionary definition of Terrorism?
> "The systematic use of terror especially as a mean of coercion". But what is terror?
> According to the dictionary I hold in my hand:
> "terror" is violent or destructive acts such as bombing committed by groups in order to intimidate a population or government into granting their demands.
> But what is terror?

And he explains in the first verse:

> It seems like the Ragheads and Pakis are worrying your dad
> but your dad's favourite food is curry and kebab
> It's funny but it's sad how they make your mummy hurry with her bags
> rather read The Sun than study all the facts
> Tell me what's the bigger threat to human society
> BAE Systems or home made IEDs?
> Remote controlled drones killing off human lives
> or a man with home made bomb committing suicide?
> I know you were terrified when you saw the towers fall
> It's all terror but some forms are more powerful
> It seems nuts! How could there be such agony
> when more Israelis die from peanut allergies
> It's like the definition didn't ever exist

The companies which make bombs and drones, like BAE Systems, are more effective in their

power to kill human lives than Improvised Explosive Devices. That's why it seems ridiculous ("It seems nuts") to keep sympathysing with the Israelis due to the constant peril of rocket attacks from Palestinian groups, given that "more Israelis die from peanuts allergies"; on the contrary, Palestinians die in large numbers each time the Israel army begins an operation in the West Bank or Gaza. Besides, Israel was already defined as a "Terrorist State" in *Palestine Will Never Die*.

The music-video suggests the scenario of a suspected terrorist being interrogated. Two men, both played by Lowkey, face each other, one with glasses and a suit, the other with an orange T-shirt, deliberately referencing the orange uniform worn by prisoners in the USA.

This is a uniform which can be associated with the situation of Guantanamo Bay in the memories of viewers of TV news, as TV and newspaper images have lingered upon Al-Quaeda suspects held as prisoners by the US Army wearing orange uniforms. The reference to Muslims as those who are perceived as terrorists – "the Ragheads and Pakis are worrying your dad" and "they make your mummy hurry with her bags" – is directly addressed in the second verse:

> They say it's religion when clearly it isn't
> It's not just Muslims that oppose your Imperialism
> Is Hugo Chavez a Muslim? Nah... I didn't think so
> Is Castro a Muslim? Nah... I didn't think so

The two Latin American leaders are named here to counter the Muslims vs West division that up to this point has imbued the lyrics. Not only Muslims, Lowkey says, fight against US Imperialism. However, the repetitive rhetorical questions and the pauses in Lowkey's answers risk reinforcing such a divide: "Imperialism" is used just once in opposition to "Muslims", "Muslims" being repeated three times in just four lines. For those listening and watching on YouTube, this passage is more clearly remembered than the finale of the song, where Lowkey lists what terrorism is. It is striking that Lowkey includes here, alongside Contras and Fallujah's phosphorous, figures like Nelson Mandela and Gerry Adams, who may be seen as "heroes" of anti-imperialism by some of his socialist fans within the Stop the War Coalition:

Was Building 7 Terrorism?
Was nanothermite terrorism?
Diego Garcia was terrorism
I am conscious the Contras was terrorism
Phosphorous that burns hands – that is terrorism
Irgun and Stern Gang that was terrorism
What they did in Hiroshima was terrorism
What they did in Fallujah was terrorism
Mandela ANC – that was terrorism
Gerry Adams IRA – that was terrorism
Eric Prince Blackwater – that was terrorism
Oklahoma McVeigh – that was terrorism
Everyday US – that is terrorism
Everyday UK – that is terrorism

The inclusion of Mandela and Adams as terrorists is, however, made offhandedly and the passage does not have the same drama as that referencing Chavez and Castro. In this sense, the attempt, begun when mentioning the two Latin American leaders, to deconstruct the mainstream assumption "Muslim equals Terrorist", does not achieve much. It is here that the lyrics of the chorus generate a misunderstanding which Lowkey's realness does not help to solve:

They're calling me a terrorist
Like they don't know who the terror is
When they put it on me I tell them this
I'm all about peace and love
They're calling me a terrorist
Like they don't know who the terror is
Insulting my intelligence
Oh how these people judge

It is not clear whether Lowkey is saying that he is called a terrorist because of how he looks, that is to say looking like a Muslim as the son of an Iraqi woman, or because of what he says, that is to say, accusing the USA, the UK, Israel and so forth of being terrorists. It is an ambiguity that the entire song does not clarify. However, precisely because of the expectation of realness Lowkey excites in his audience, the ambiguity of the song allows the listener to assume that both are valid, that he is on the one hand a victim of the mainstream assumption "Muslim equals Terrorist", whereby "Muslim" here is just appearance, and on the other hand that he is verbally accused of being so by the supporters of American, British and Israeli Imperialism as a result of his will to stick to the

vocabulary definition and say "who the terror is"[55]. A socialist activist, committed, like Lowkey is, to fighting imperialist injustices would not necessarily be called a "terrorist", especially if they have no beard and do not wear a headscarf, or lack other distinctive Islamic traits. Lowkey, on the contrary, might sound like a socialist, but for many of his detractors and supporters, as we show below, he is a Muslim, standing up against injustices, and particularly those affecting Muslims around the world.

**The Space of the "Mixed" Denied and Embraced**

On the afternoon of Wednesday December 12th 2011, I went to Northwest London to interview Muneera and Sukina, the members of a rap duo called "Poetic Pilgrimage". Originally from Bristol, Muneera and Sukina are two Black British women in their early thirties who converted to Islam in 2005. Alongside "Mecca-to-Medina" and other London hip-hop acts about which I will speak more extensively in the next chapter, I want to define Poetic Pilgrimage's Rap as "Islamic hip-hop". This is an emic category, first used in London by Mecca-to-Medina, a group featuring two black rappers who converted to Islam and a British-Asian Muslim who were formed about ten years before Poetic Pilgrimage. Mecca-to-Medina started to articulate rap with Islamic-oriented lyrics in the late 90s, and were soon followed by other rappers, particularly blacks converted to Islam, who began to use rap as a form of *dawah*, spreading the message of the Quran and inviting other people to join Islam. I will question the category of Islamic Rap later. For now I will tactically refer to Poetic Pilgrimage as such in order to highlight a difference with Lowkey in terms of "coming out".

Sukina, at whose house the interview took place, told me that regardless of Lowkey's Iraqi background, Muslims, including herself, would assume that he is Muslim because of his actions during the Israeli attack on Gaza. It was then that they, as Poetic Pilgrimage, started to share the stage with him during fundraising events for Gaza organised by Muslim organisations, Islamic university societies or Muslim people. It was then that Poetic Pilgrimage began to have more of a connection with the People's Army crew and DJ Snuff, a key figure in the London conscious scene (as we will see below) and organiser of the *Speakers' Corner* event in Brixton.

> The first time we went to the Speakers' Corner event was when my husband (Mohammed Yayha, see next chapter) performed. We were coming from a Muslim hip-hop tour, which was very spiritual, religious, we were hosted by very lovely Muslim hosts, Asian people and when we went to the Speakers Corners we saw guys with their dogs outside, it was a grimy pub, everyone was drunk, people was sleeping on the floor, and we felt the difference between heaven and hell (laughing). I got to know Snuff on that occasion but it's through more political events, like the ones organised in universities, that we started to get to know each other and

[55] The boxing obsession begins precisely with the cognitive impulse to look up a definition in the dictionary – this is proof that the "ideology of the book" is not dead at all.

> collaborate. We still have to perform at the Speakers Corner but in the coming months it might happen, Snuff wants us to do a set.

Some comments made on a thread on a Muslim website forum (http://www.ummah.com) titled "What do you think of Lowkey", confirm the view that Lowkey got a lot attention during the campaign for Gaza. Hamza05 wrote on 28/4/2011:

> his ok a bit over hyped it would be better if he kept a low stance. Get it lowkey stance […]. his ok but lots of his followers are muslim girls and dey like omg omg lowkey is coming and they drooool upon him, wearing palestine tops, drinking coca cola, also muslim guys who act as gangstars are his big followers. His lyrics are good tho

To which BeautyWithin seven minutes later replied:

> That's what I wanted to hear, for me it's all about the lyrics, his words inspire me a lot, and I can relate. And I also know what you mean, tha hype during the GAZA thing was MADD and really ticked me off, and he was the centre of it, not his fault, plus he is a talented speaker mashaAllah, but there was a Lowkey waaaaaaay before that, people should realise.

Other comments, such those in which Lowkey is asked to release his material acapella (as music is considered forbidden – *haram*), show the expectations a certain Muslim audience has in relation to Lowkey. Muneera voices these expectations when, replying to my query about whether or not Lowkey is Muslim, she says:

> I know one particular friend around him who when they speak to me is like "I'm trying to give him dawah" which indicates that he doesn't practice it.

Muneera and Sukina are on the contrary very much practising. With their colourful veils, they took turns to pray in a separate room while talking with me in the living room during the interview, which lasted more than two hours.

The definition of what it means to practice the religion of Islam is, however, not undisputed among those Muslims who are into hip-hop and assume Lowkey is Muslim. Mo-Mafia, a young Iranian-English rapper and b-boy from London, for instance, was smoking a marijuana joint in the atrium of St Paul's Cathedral on a late October night – when St Paul's was still occupied by the Occupy movement – when he freely discussed the topic:[56]

[56] The courtyard of the Cathedral was still occupied by the Occupy London LSX movement, following the original attempt to occupy the London Stock Exchange Centre made on October 15th as a form of protest against the

Mo-Mafia: You see I am smoking my weed now, hopefully I will quit one day. But when I smoke one million ideas are processing through my head, no lies. I am chilling and relaxing and I am meditating and solving so many problems in my life. I am already planning which games my kids will be playing, which ones they will not be playing because they are no good. I know you are not Muslim but for instance someone like Lowkey he has many many ideas but why has he got to big up socialism and Marxism?

Me: So you disagree with him?

Mo-Mafia: Brother, I went to college with that guy, he is a decent guy. I also tried to chat with him about it but he didn't have time. He says he is Muslim so I don't understand why he has to big up socialism. Does he not know what Socialism did to Muslims?

Me: So he says he is Muslim?

Mo-Mafia: Yes, he is!

By responding with "Yes he is", rather than "Yes he does", Mo-Mafia is not contravening the grammar of my question. He is actually explaining the logic according to which to "practice" for a Muslim in London means not to associate with "socialism". He knew I was not Muslim because I answered that specific question in his presence earlier. So for me it would not be a problem to "big up" Marxist ideology, while in his view it was a problem if Lowkey was doing it. But the reality was that both of us were mingling with socialists of the St Paul's occupation. Admittedly, Mo-Mafia was more than likely just camping there because his friends, other young Muslim rappers of the London scene, were there and they were having fun together[57]; it was not a place he would have gone to alone. In his view, Lowkey might have done so (which he did not[58]), and this is seen as an error, the error of a Muslim mingling with socialists. Yet in assuming such, Mo-Mafia is denying Lowkey the possibility of inhabiting the space of being a Muslim and a socialist, or neither. This is a space that he is firstly denying himself.

Me: Sorry I just wanna record what you are saying. You say that your culture is the Iranian culture, but you were born here right?

Mo-Mafia: Yes, but I was raised by my mum not by the culture. Unlike other people I wasn't raised by my friends or television or music, they did have an effect on me obviously but I was raised by my mum. My mum's culture made sure... obviously my mum had to be a mum and a dad at the same time, a mixture of love and not hate but tough love, you know what I mean.

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world financial system, and to respond to the global day of mobilisation inspired by the Occupy Wall Street movement. The Police had, though, prevented the occupation of the LSX, so the protesters opted for the adjacent St Paul's Cathedral.

[57] I was particularly interested in interviewing two of his friends, two Palestinian brothers, Kraze Haze and Lyricist Jyin, with whom I freestyled a few nights before on the steps of St Paul's.

[58] Lowkey went to Occupy St Paul's on only one occasion, on December 28th 2011. He was invited to rap in the music sessions that the movement organised in front of the Church. Among the organisers of the sessions was Ed Green, rapper of the People's Army and occupier of the square since October 15th. I will talk about him in the next chapter.

Mo-Mafia's alignment with the "culture" and country of his mother, that of Iran – to where he was sent by his mother from 2002 to 2004 ("I wasn't doing good here. I ended up fighting everyday at school. So when I was twelve, my mom sent me to Iran, to my family there, my cousins, to fix me up") – was strengthened by the abscence of his father, an English man from Manchester who converted to Islam to date his mother: ("My dad saw my mom and said 'Oh I love you' and my mom 'No, I'm Muslim bla bla bla' so he converted to Islam. He could start talking to her and then they got married"). This became explicit in the story behind his hip-hop name.

> Me: Why Mo Mafia? I understand Mo is from Mohammed, but why Mafia?
> Mo-Mafia: Honestly when I was younger... you know I have English genes, if you look at my brother he is darker, no blue eyes, he is also taller because he has the Iranian genes. So I was called Mo White at school. I didn't like that. Because I was an angry kid I beat up all the people that called me Mo White Boy and then they started calling me Mo Mafia. That was around 2006 time.
> Me: Was it an insult for you, calling you Mo White?
> Mo-Mafia: Not an insult because my skin colour is white. But because I have a different history. You know if you wanna be technical, I am Mixed-Race. So I used to say to them "Fuck you, I am Mixed-Race". If it was a guy that is mixed black and white but looks white, they would say "no, he is not white, he is mixed race", how the fuck am I white then?

The feeling of having a "different history" to the stereotypical white English citizen is shared in Lowkey's public pronouncements. In a speech, given at a conference organised by the Stop the War Coalition in June 2009 called "Defend the Muslim Community", available on YouTube, Lowkey says very firmly, almost shouting:

> I just wanna start by saying one thing: nobody should expect Muslim people in this country to feel no affinity towards their brothers and sisters dying every single day in Iraq, to feel no form of kinship towards the 1.4 million people who have been made refugees in Pakistan by Obama's bombs. You cannot expect Muslim people to feel no kinship towards their brothers and sisters in occupied Palestine and you cannot expect Muslim people to feel no affinity towards their brothers and sisters in Afghanistan[59].

The "you cannot expect" line, emphatically repeated four times, and the sense of pride and desire for revenge with which he says it, sound as if he is claiming for himself here membership within the "Muslim people" rather than within Britain. This strategy of identifying himself with only one side of his mixed background is apparent not only in his political speeches, but also in his music. In a song, called *Cradle of Civilization*, Lowkey says in the spoken introduction:

[59] http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Uautyn7JQfE&feature=related, uploaded July 20th 2010

If my mother got angry or frustrated with me she would say
”Oy shked helwa el horiya”
and the basic translation for that is “Oh how beautiful is freedom”
but where is freedom?

A female singer, Mai Khalil, sings the Arabic words spoken by Lowkey. Then he raps the first verse:

This is for Baghdad, the place of my mother's birth
The cradle of civilization for what it's worth
The land I've never seen, culture I've never known
Iraq is in my heart, my blood, my flesh and bones
The air I've never breathed, fragrance I've never smelled
The pride I never had, the nationality that I never felt
Saddam was bad, are the Americans even more so?
They made me grow like I was missing part of my torso
But I never picked up a grenade in my garden
I never saw people I love die starving
I never saw my family die through many years of sanctions
while the ruler's family lived in palaces and mansions
Never had a family member kidnapped for a ransom
Never lost a friend to a violence that was random
Bombings, occupation, torture, intimidation
a million dead people doesn't equal liberation

The topic of chemical weapons features here as a way for Lowkey to claim to be Iraqi:

Babies being born with deformities from uranium
those babies aren't just Iraqi, they're Mesopotamian
What I view on the news is making me shiver
cause I look at the victims and see the same face in the mirror

And again in the third verse:

It rains white phosphorous in Fallujah
This is for those that won't live to see the future
Sorry that I wasn't there, sorry that I couldn't help
I'm sorry for every tear, sorry you've been put through hell

The reference to chemical weapons highlights the sense of physicality with which Lowkey sees himself as one of them: Iraqi, Arab, Muslim, Mesopotamian – the physicality of seeing himself in

the mirror and recognising that he looks like the Iraqi victims shown on the news, and regret for not being there physically when white phosphorous was raining on Fallujah. This sense of physicality makes the song a lament of the Iraqi diaspora all over the world. After this physical sense (the presence) is established, though, Lowkey feels the need to let the Iraqi diaspora know that he is *not only* one of them, but also:

> Still I feel like an immigrant, Englishman amongst Arabs and Arab amongst Englishmen
> Like I said they never gave me the culture but they did give me Kubda Haleb, Hakaka Dolma[60]
> Ana isme Kareem Wa ohmre thalatha wa-'ishrun,
> Umi min Baghdad, wa abuya min Dover[61]
> And that's the combination that I carry on my shoulders

The attempt at bilingualism (English and Arabic) here lends an aural quality to the combination he says he is carrying "on his shoulders". In an interview with a Newcastle radio, CVFM (104.5), in July 2011, he articulates it more clearly:

> I have the lyrics of one of my songs that say "I feel like an Englishman amongst Arabs and Arab amongst Englishmen" and I feel that really articulates the way a person of mixed heritage is forced to situate themselves. You feel you are both but neither and first and foremost you are a human being. In terms of looking at the world, you can't look at the world as an Iraqi or as an Englishman, you look at the world as a human being first and foremost... Both of my dad's grandparents were in the British Army in the First World War and this affected the other side of my family. People who are born in this situation really have to think deeply, probably more deeply than people who are maybe born in a more simple situation, about the world and about the reasons for the present being the way it is.

A few weeks later (14th August), in the aforementioned Channel4 programme on rap hosted by Akala, Lowkey stated that he raps "to understand the historical reason of why I even exist", premising that: "One side of my family is from here, another one is from Iraq". The acknowledgement of his mixed background, the recognition or rejection of being English, seems be taking place more serenely than with Mo-Mafia, who makes use of the "technical" definition of mixed-race only to deny his belonging to the category "White", despite his white skin making him look white and English. Lowkey, by contrast, seems more at ease with his English father and recognises that whoever is born "in this situation", in the situation of a mixed background, should research "the reason for the present being the way it is". It is an internal research before being an investigation of the world and coincides with embracing the category of the human being to express

60 Lowkey is here talking about food.
61 Literally transates as "My name is Kareem, I am 23. My mother comes from Baghdad, my father from Dover"

the condition of being both and neither. It is a discovery that Lowkey seems to defend with the same passion with which he would defend the Muslim community and the Palestinian people, and fight American imperialism.

For example, Lowkey was interviewed on the Russia Today news channel in March 2011. The same journalist had interviewed Lowkey on several other occasions in the past. Russia Today selected him, alongside other conscious rappers from the USA, as a spokesperson on issues such as Obama's presidency, the Palestinian issue, and the Arab Spring. The interview took place when European countries and the USA were about to bomb Libya under Muammar Gaddafi. The journalist asks Lowkey to speak as a representative of his "generation":

> I want for a moment you speaking about your generation, people like you, second and third generation Muslims. You seem and you have seemed for many months angry at what's going on. Do you think that this is a sentiment shared by your peers, by people like you?

Lowkey, speaking from London to the journalist in Washington, is seen listening to the question with a slightly ironic smile on his face. He then says:

> I think it's important to also (emphasising the "also") understand that one side of my family is English. I had a great aunt on one side of my family who was married to a man in the military that lived on a British military base in Libya. As a human being (strongly emphasising the "human being") I don't believe it is right for Britain or any other country in the world to have any other type of military base in Libya[62].

He did not reject the category of "second generation Muslim" for himself but added that of "human being". The non-refusal of being Muslim and the embracing of humanity is the way Lowkey combines his mother's and father's backgrounds. A combination whereby his mother gives him the territorial connection to Iraq, Islam and Mesopotamia[63], while his father gives him the cosmopolitan abstraction of the human being – the status that, in the previous chapter, we saw Babar Luck articulating in the discourse of the World Citizen. It is a combination which, however, does not find a perfect equilibrium and shows traces of the territorial essentialism of the "We as Iraqis, Muslims and Mesopotamians" that his lyrics and political speeches abundantly articulate. This sort of essentialism is evident even when he articulates the discourse of the human being: it is present when, in the radio interview, Lowkey makes a distinction between mixed-race and those who are born in a "more simple situation", a distinction that becomes a qualitative one in that it is more

[62] Interview can be accessed here: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-AKstx6o2UU&feature=relmfu

[63] In the song *Something Wonderful*, dedicated to his mother and the women of his family, Lowkey says, in a very rare example, "I Pray". This could probably only happen in a song dedicated to his mother to reassert his Muslim background.

important for mixed-race people to research the world than others[64]. This frustrates the acquisition of the humanistic argument and leads to his realness rekindling the enigma of whether or not he took his *shahada*, instead of it being used for a cosmopolitan purpose calibrated on the condition of the "mixed".

## 2) Language of the Heart

### Immediacy as Total Prestation

Does this ambiguity make Lowkey's music "Islamic Rap"? I want to emphasise the role that ambiguity has in stirring up such kinds of abduction. It is because Lowkey never says that he is Muslim that Muslims and non-Muslims can infer that he is, indexing his public statements and background. Their abduction would die the moment at which Lowkey dispelled once and for all the aura of ambiguity around him. But until this occurs, who or what tells them that their abduction is correct?

In my view, Gell's theory of the enchantment of art makes here an underestimation of the role of the "pure gift" in the Maussian framework, where Gell himself places his theory. A solid anthropological tradition, as represented for instance in Mary Douglas' (2002) foreword to a Routledge republication of the *Essay Sur Le Done*, argues that for Mauss it simply does not make sense to have a gift without the production of solidarity. It is the *hau* of the gift that obliges the receiver to give a countergift in Mauss' theory of exchange. Just as Levi Strauss replaced "kinship" with Mauss' "prestations", Gell has done the same with "objects of art" (Gell 1998: 9), intended as extensions of persona. The reason for this is to present the index the work of art raises as what causes the admiration of the spectator and "initiate causal events in vicinity" of the artwork (ibid.: 19). But the point Gell never clarifies in his theory is whether or not we should treat these causal events that the artwork produces as reciprocity.

The political strategy of looking like a Muslim implemented by Galloway in the recent Bradford election is certainly directed at a particular part of the electorate in order to have their vote

[64] I did not have a chance to discuss Lowkey's lyrics and politics with him. I repeatedly asked him for an interview during my fieldwork but Lowkey never replied to my emails or verbally agreed to an interview. This is why I am using his lyrics and public statements to give him a voice. I have also tried to make my voice heard by Lowkey and his political movement, the Equality Movement, with regards to my proposal on the Imperial Statues of London, hoping for them to become "allies". The Equality Movement is a collective founded by the People's Army rappers, Lowkey and Logic, and young journalist Jody McIntyre in 2011. Several public meetings were organised at ULU in the first half of 2011. They took place in the hall where the student movement's assemblies took place, and discussed Imperialism, the Arab Spring and police brutality. The meetings were always very crowded, particularly with young people, students, activists and people who like hip-hop. My attempts to involve them and the student movement in my project were not successful.

as a counter-gift. The same could be said of the rapper who targets a certain audience so that this audience can buy his/her music. But if this causal relationship is triggered by ambiguity, and therefore by abduction, I would more decisively talk of the production and consumption of art as "total prestations": the *total prestation of the immediacy*, separated from the obligation of reciprocity.

David Graeber (2001) proposes just such a separation in his attempt to build an anthropological theory of value which combines and integrates Mauss with Karl Marx, putting forward, from an anthropological standpoint (building on the work of Sahlins), the framework of the *Mouvement Anti-Utilitariste dans les Sciences Sociales* ("Anti Utilitarian Movement in the Social Sciences"), the MAUSS. According to Graeber, Mauss was close to taking the step of separating the prestation from reciprocity:

> The conclusion would have been impossible to avoid had Mauss made a serious effort to explore his own notion of "total prestation" (which he also referred to as "total reciprocity"), instead of moving directly to "the potlatch". Because in the former, gifts do not have to be repaid. This is because unlike competitive gift exchanges, "total prestations" created permanent relationships between individuals and groups, relations that were permanent precisely because there was no way to cancel them out by a repayment. The demands one side could make on the other were open ended because they were permanent; nothing would be more absurd than for the member of an Iroquois society to keep count of how many of the other's side dead each had recently buried, to see which was ahead. This is why Mauss considered them "communistic": they corresponded to Louis Blanc's famous phrase "From each according to his abilities, to each according to his needs." Most of us treat our closest friends this way. No accounts need to be kept because the relation is not treated as if it will ever end. Whatever one might conclude about the realities of the situation (and these can vary considerably), communism is built on an image of eternity. Since there is supposed to be no history, each moment is effectively the same as any other. (Graeber 2001: 217-218)

The open-endedness I want to refer to, while applying the category of total prestation to Lowkey's lyrical ambiguity, is one whereby his listeners do not interrogate themselves on which indexes have armed the pen of the rapper; ambiguity remains ambiguity if it is viewed within the same register that creates ambiguity. Conversely, the listener can ascribe to his lyrics any meaning they want precisely as they feel it. They are enchanted firstly by the clarity of the signal that the *heart* sends out.

This is well illustrated by the most popular expression in hip-hop songs and language, as suggested by Jackson: "You feel me?" (see Jackson 2008: 139-164). This is a question which can be heard during a hip-hop performance, asked by the rapper/performer via the microphone of the audience; or while listening to a hip-hop record, asked by the voice on the record of the listeners. But more than an actual question, "you feel me?" refers to a mode of relationship which is based on

corporeality. When asking the audience or listeners "you feel me?", the rapper is actually making sure that they have accurately listened to their body and received the "vibrations" that his body has just sent out while the rapper is engaged in something he feels is "real". "You feel me?" should really be read as: *you felt me?*. To receive someone's vibrations means to be able to listen to one's own body, as the body is the sender and receiver of such vibrations. And it is not an obligation of the audience/listener to send them back, not least because counting the number of vibrations sent and received is even more absurd than keeping count of buried bodies for the Iroquois society, simply because this is actually *impossible*. Nor have the vibrations been sent out with the intention of being reciprocated. They just happened to be sent out and received.

The register of communication of vibrations precedes and exceeds the index. I will attempt to demonstarate this below, by describing listening to the music of Poetic Pilgrimage. The experience of listening, upon which I will reflect, is the condition of listening to music on an iPod. One needs to imagine an individual experience with headphones or speakers, consumed in the *absence* of the actual presence of the rapper; the listener cannot see them, they can just listen to their voice and music.

**Inward vs Outward: *Dawah* by Example**

We can now question the category of "Islamic Rap". Poetic Pilgrimage's rap, as expressed in their last release, "StarWomen", is not only and not necessarily practicing *dawah* as Mecca-to-Medina interpreted it in their first recordings. Alongside prayers to Allah in Arabic, there are also songs and topics, such as in the tracks *StarWomen* and *Beautiful*, where no reference to religion is made and one would infer more of a feminist stance than an Islamic one coming from the authors of the lyrics. Yes, *Beautiful* begins with "In the name of the Almighty", but observe how the intro to the song continues:

> You see, there's thing called Beauty
> And sometimes we as women, we believe don't posses it
> We don't see the real beauty that's within
> I just wanna say keep shining because you're beautiful

In the verses the rappers tell the story of women forced, either through an arranged marriage or violence, to lose touch with their "inner" beauty. But it is only by listening to other songs on the album that the listener can realise the "Almighty" praised at the beginning of this song is "Islamic" and that the situations described in its verses apply, but not exclusively, to Muslim women. To account for the fact that even when Poetic Pilgrimage do not explicitly adopt the status of *dawah*

their realness helps the listeners remember that they are Muslim, as is also the case with Lowkey, I propose reading their rap within the category of "*dawah* by example". This is of course a reading of the realness mediated by the index, but I want to use it to show how their rap can be interpreted in a different way were the listeners unaware that they are Muslim. For those who know they are Muslim and those who are Muslim themselves, their rap can continue to give *dawah* even when it does not do so explicitly: it can provide "*dawah* by example". By this I mean the listener's knowledge that the rappers always want to please God with their lyrics. The presence of such an intention is actually what, according to some ulama[65], should always direct the actions of those who practice dawah. The invitation for somebody to embrace Islam should never be "forceful" but always in line with the human virtues – piousness, humility – which are pleasing to God. Moving within this Islamic ontological framework, it follows that even without displaying and showing off distinctive traits, such as Arabic words or references to God or Islam, a song can provide *dawah*. The *dawah* the tune gives is in the same act of making it available to an audience, without expecting this to revert to Islam, even though the eventuality that this may happen will inevitably be a source of joy for the givers. Yet this was not the reason why it was given nonetheless.

If we look closely at this concept, we could conclude that even Lowkey's tunes are *dawah*. The difference for Poetic Pilgrimage's listeners is that they would know for sure, and not by implication, that the rappers are Muslim. I have shown what the implications are that would make Lowkey look like a Muslim to Poetic Pilgrimage's Muslim audience. But what other implications could arise just by listening to their *Beautiful* for a different audience? Let us take the case of some men and women of the conscious hip-hop scene who discovered Poetic Pilgrimage following the Gaza operation, which caused the Conscious and Islamic scenes to become intermingled. Upon first listening to *Beautiful*, they could abduct that Poetic Pilgrimage are feminists. This non-Muslim and feminist audience, sympathetic to feminism in hip-hop, would at first be encouraged by finally finding a female hip-hop group that challenges sexism in hip-hop. But then, in expanding their knowledge of Poetic Pilgrimage's biography, rap and activities as practising Muslims, they might feel betrayed in ascertaining that the rappers are not the feminists they thought they were: in the same way, some Muslims might feel betrayed by Lowkey.

On the morning of the day on which I interviewed Poetic Pilgrimage, I inadvertently found the answer to this problem in the ontology of a Born Again Christian rapper, SO, interviewed in a cafe at Victoria Station. His testimony is relevant as it shows the reason why there could not be someone like Lowkey in the London Born Again hip-hop scene. There could not be a political rapper who is seen as Christian by the rappers who preach the word of (a Christian) God in their

[65] Islamic experts of holy scripture.

music, in the same way that rappers of the Islamic scene, such as Poetic Pilgrimage, assume Lowkey is a Muslim. It does not matter if your background or tradition belongs to a religion to be acknowledged as a man of faith for SO: you need to always practice it. But how do you do this?

The Born Again interpretation given by SO affirms the dynamism of "practising" against the immobility of "being", shared by all those Muslims who assume Lowkey is Muslim just because of his background and physical appearance.

> Me: I want to ask you this. I lived with a man, my flatmate was an Irish man, a tough man, a working class man. He used to say to me that he was born Catholic but his life... I mean he doesn't practice but he still believes in God.
>
> SO: Nobody is born Catholic or Christian. You have to become. The Bible says that we are born sinners, we are born enemies of God. That is the issue I had before. I was Christian, I went to Church, I've been baptised but no. Faith is to genuinely repent and turn to God and live a life that is worthy of his calling. There are many people in the world who think themselves Christians. Jesus says in Matthew 7 "On the last day many people will come to me and will say Lord", He will say "depart from me, your words are of inequity, of loneliness, I never knew you". Christianity is not thinking to be something, Christianity is Him knowing you and if He doesn't know you, you will get that response.

Born in Nigeria in the late 1980s, SO moved at the age of eight with his family to South London. He obtained an undergraduate degree in Theology at Durham University. I met SO at Dwayne Tryumf's concert at ULU on Malet Street on Friday November 18th 2011. Dwayne Tryumf and Jahaziel were the two rappers most representative of the London Christian scene at the time of my fieldwork. SO performed at the event. Like "StarWomen", his album "S.O. It Begins" is not only about religion. It also contains love songs. But it does not contain social commentary and politically involved lyrics as seen in the song *No More War*, a protest against recent wars on Poetic Pilgrimage's album.

> Me: I would say that this is a feature of all the Christian rappers that I've listened to. It seems that they don't deal with political and social issues. While, for instance, what I am seeing in my research is that there's like an interconnectedness between the Political and Muslim scene. We are talking about the same people.
>
> SO: Yeah, I see. I think that for us...when Jesus came to earth he said my kingdom is not of this world. He said if I want to I can lead legions of angels to come and destroy you now. In this sense, Christians are other worldly. We worship a God who tells us to live in peace and he fights our battle. He tells us to turn the other cheek, tells us that we are blessed if we are persecuted. He says that not only it is given to you to believe in Jesus but also to suffer for his sake. Let's say that right now they write a law against Christians and we cannot read our Bible, which is happening in some countries across the world: it is not my prerogative to write a rap song to say this is wrong, it is my prerogative to encourage those who are going through with that. What would you expect? They hated Jesus, you think they love you? Our prerogative is other worldly. Our prerogative is to

> make people realise they are sinners and they need forgiveness from God. That is the first issue, the gospel issue of repentance and faith, all other issues come secondary to that. Even the political and social issues if they are not integrated within the gospel then there's no point. We can talk all day about political and social issues and all that might do is shape our perspective, but this doesn't mean they are the right standards of God. It all means that the perspective can change but they still go to hell. We have a bigger issue, it's heaven or hell. Maybe that's why we don't talk about it, that's why I don't talk about it.

Compared to the expectations Muslims have of Lowkey, SO's words highlight another type of expectation that Muslims only partially share with him. Lowkey is supposed to pray and fast, but Muneera infers in passing that he does not, and he is supposed to rap acapella for some web users, but he does not. He is also supposed to have Muslims in his heart, and his music, political speeches and job as an activist, show that he does. And that is enough to be seen as Muslim, when beard, dress and background do not reveal it at first glance. For SO, a cleanliness of the heart is the only thing that matters. The only expectation he has for his fellow Christians is to genuinely embrace the "gospel of repentance and faith", to truthfully serve and please God for the afterlife. This implies an act of mundane passivity projected towards the final submission to God. For this reason, SO cannot share with Muslims the "solely" physical expectation of having a beard or veil to be seen as Muslim. This is evident in his criticism of the church he grew up with and was first baptised by. He was eleven or twelve when baptised but the ministers did not do a "good job" with him:

> It's not that baptism changes you but it's meant to be an outward expression of your inward transformation. The ministers didn't make sure that baptism was symbolic of my transformation. They just assumed I had changed because I was in their church and I was singing.

SO does not judge this to be a real baptism. His real baptism took place later when he was sixteen and in another church, The Ministry of Defense in South Dulwich, whose pastors were among the first Born Again Christian rappers in London and are now in their forties. It was then that he became Christian in his view ("I wasn't Christian before"), the moment at which he transformed internally and was ready to accept Christ as his saviour. Baptism is just meant to symbolise such a passage in one's spiritual life: a passage that is inward and cannot be made by simply going to church or being baptised. It is for this reason that he warned me during the interview: "Not all that's Christian is good!" This warning indicates that the space of refusal Born Again rap predisposes for Lowkey is configured on the grounds that the level of appearance, the level of the outward over the inward, is morally insincere. But is this not the level also evident in "*dawah* by example"? This is an invitation to embrace a faith that tries to reach another's heart by showing one's own clean heart. And is it not a dialogue between hearts that an audience sympathetic to feminism in hip-hop

establishes first when listening to Poetic Pilgrimage's rap? And could it not be the case that a listener to some of SO's songs interprets them according to different criteria than those intended by the lyricist, precisely as a result of being enchanted by the immediacy of listening?

This immediacy of listening would make Islamic, Born Again and Socialist Rap not look the same, but *be* the same. They would look different at a second stage, when the index is reestablished, let us say when the absence of the iPod experience is replaced with the *presence* of the live-show. It is to this presence that we now turn our attention, in order to compare the concert at which I met SO with one an informant described as an "Islamic event", even though I thought it was "Political".

## 3) Theory of Secularisation

**Islamic or Conscious?**

The following picture gives a visual example of the mixing of the Political and Muslim hip-hop scenes taking place in London over the last few years. It resonates both with Sukina's claim that she started meeting Lowkey on a more frequent basis at events organised by university Islamic societies in support of Palestine, and with the comment above from the internet user who lamented that Lowkey's crowd contained Muslim girls who were "crazy about him". The picture shows a crowd at a hip-hop event which took place on Saturday November 26th 2011: the crowd is young, mostly Asian, with many females, some of them wearing head-scarves.

The comment from Hamza05 also stated that the Muslim girls who attend Lowkey's shows wear "Palestine tops and drink Coca-Cola". Regarding Coca-Cola, evidently seen here as an imperialist drink which is in contradiction to the anti-imperialism Lowkey's supporters claim, my ethnographic

presence cannot say much: maybe some of them were drinking Coca-Cola during the event without seeing it as necessarily at odds with their faith and political convictions. But Palestine items were clearly present: evident not only in the clothes of some of the participants but also in a *kefiah* unfolded behind the deejay table on the stage. The deejay for the night was the above-mentioned DJ Snuff, the organiser of the *Speakers' Corner* event at the Brixton Jamm since early 2000. Originally from Belfast, DJ Snuff is also the musical director of live events at Hootananny, a very crowded pub with free live music in Brixton, South London. He has launched another hip-hop event in East London called *End of the Weak*[66], which since 2006 takes place every last Friday of the month at Passing Clouds in Dalston Kingsland.

DJ Snuff was not, however, the organiser of the event. The crowd in the picture is a different crowd from those at Brixton Jamm, Hootananny or Passing Clouds. Those are not predominantly Asian but more mixed: Black, White, Asian, and to a lesser extent Chinese. It is hard to find head-scarfed girls with the same frequency one can in the picture. This also explains the sense of uneasiness Sukina had the first time she went to *Speakers' Corner*. The crowd in the picture mirrors the organisers themselves: the non-profit organisation "RestlessBeings", represented by the beard of Mabrur and the colourful scarf of Rahima, the founders and codirectors of the organisation. They acted as hosts for the event, introducing the performers and giving speeches from the stage.

Let us pause for a moment and go back in time, a few days earlier, to a different venue and stage. On Friday November 18th in the hall where I used to attend the Sunday assemblies of the student movement (ULU), the stage was prepared for a concert by Dwayne Tryumf. Unlike the many other times I left my shared flat in East Ham to go to that hall, I knew that I would not take part in a political event, but a Born Again Rap show. Addressing a crowd of black and white young and middle-aged people, the night began with a pastor on the stage inviting the audience to pray before the music started.

The event seen in the picture, in contrast, began with Rahima and Mabrur inviting people to donate and join Restless Being's human rights projects. As they state on their website (from where I have sourced the images in this section), the organisation, officially set up in October 2007, was created with the intention of raising awareness of and funds for "human rights projects" run by collaborating NGOs which work in poorer countries. Hip-hop is the tool chosen to bring their campaigns to the public: a particular idea of hip-hop, as seen in the statement on the *Human Writes* poster below, "Explosive lyrics come together to ignite your conscience. Hip Hop turns up the volume on Human Rights!".

66 The *End of the Weak* is an event originating in the USA that has in recent years taken place in other countries.

"Explosions", "lyrics" and "consciousness" appear on the poster for an earlier event, seen below: "The UK's most explosive conscious lyricists come together to promote new talent"[67]. The two posters present a continuity in graphic language: the 2010 poster uses the image of some steps with a colourful ghettoblaster; in the later poster a cassette tape is depicted on a colourful background. The ghettoblaster and tape are two "old-school" hip-hop icons, with which it is clearly intended to present hip-hop as the origin of a conscious movement.

[67] The reference to the "new talent" is due to the open-mic competition in which unknown young artists were selected and voted for by the audience and performers.

Lowkey is not included in the list of performers at both events. But YouTube videos show that Lowkey performed at the 2010 event, probably as a last-minute guest[68]. However, both at the 2010 and 2011 events, many rappers from his crew, the People's Army, performed: his friend and the cofounder of People's Army, Logic, performed in 2010; and Black the Ripper, Jimmy Jitsu, Caxton Press and others, alongside DJ Snuff, performed in 2011. Poetic Pilgrimage performed at both events, and other openly Muslim rappers, such as Mohammed Yahya, Quest Rah and Muslim Belal, have performed at the *Human Writes* events.

Yet this did not impede me from perceiving the events as the promoters had intended, that is to say, as a "Conscious" event. This is why an exchange I had with a person who was standing next to me in the audience towards the back of the room, as seen in the picture, surprised me. We were both enjoying the acts on the stage when we exchanged glances and smiles. This person was a man, possibly in his late thirties or early forties. He had a short beard and his appearance made me think he was South-Asian or British-Asian, which made me also think he was Muslim. He came towards me and we chatted for a while. As we talked, I had the perception that he did not consider me to be Muslim. I realised he was not into hip-hop and it must have been one of his first hip-hop gigs. He knew Immortal Technique, a Latino rapper from Harlem, New York, who had become very popular in the last few years in the conscious rap scene in the US and worldwide. I told him that a London rapper had made a song with Immortal Technique. When I said his name, Lowkey, and said that he had made songs about Palestine and the post-9/11 Islamophobic rhetoric on terrorism, he realised

68 This is what the organisers themselves wrote in their report of the event.

that he had already heard of him. As the conversation continued, I told him about my fieldwork research topic. It was then that he asked me: "Is this your first Islamic event?" and he offered to introduce me to "Rahima and Mabrur" as he called them, showing a certain degree of familiarity with the directors of Restless Beings.

Asked about this episode during a skype interview, Nadia of Restless Beings showed her astonishment as to why somebody might have said something like that. Although she acknowledged that the organisation is largely composed of Asians ("nearly 75%") and practicing Muslims ("70%"), Restless Beings, she stated firmly, is "open to anyone". The intention of the organisers was to put on an event which was only about "human rights": "we did not even play Islamic music", she said to reassert her point. Islamic music, if it exists, was not performed or played by DJ Snuff. However, at the 2010 event, one of the performers probably wanted to do Islamic music by choosing to rap acapella without a backing beat. This was a decision taken by Muslim Belal, a black rapper from South London who converted to Islam and who follows the Salafi interpretation, according to which music is *haram*; this is why he raps without music. Belal does what some of the website users mentioned earlier would like Lowkey, who was sharing the stage with Belal at the first *Human Writes*, to do: rap without music[69].

There are two more indexes that substantiate the depiction of the event as an Islamic one. The first is that Restless Beings' human rights projects are aimed, although not exclusively, at Muslim people or countries. For instance, their first project was aimed at street children in Dhaka, Bangladesh. Subsequently, they have been involved in helping and supporting the persecuted Rohingya Muslim ethnic group in Burma, helping women subjected to a form of bride-kidnapping known as Ala Kachuu in Kyrgyzstan, and doing local work in schools countering stereotypes of Gypsies.

But there is also a more direct index that would work towards the "Islamic" rather than the "Conscious": the fact that alcohol was not served. Alcohol was not served at Dwayne Truymf's concert either. Asked about this, Nadia's response is interesting. Alcohol was not served, not necessarily for religious reasons, but foremost for practical ones, such as to avoid discouraging practicing Muslims or under-eighteens from coming, and to allow the audience to be entirely focused on what was being said on the stage, as very important messages were delivered and these deserved the full attention of the audience.

> We did it because we wanted the event to be open for everyone and not prevent some from coming, some practising Muslims from coming. We did it also because we allowed under-18s to come as long as they were

[69] Asked for an interview through Facebook, Belal replied by saying that he was in an Arab country studying Islam so was not able to meet me for an interview in London.

> supervised by someone else. So it was to keep it friendly for them. It's also because these hip-hop gigs are renowned for being awful environments so removing alcohol helps anyone feel welcomed. We did it also because we noticed from our last event that removing alcohol keeps people more focused and you can engage with them a lot more. If we did serve alcohol, people would get too drunk and they would miss the meaning and the message behind the music, which is essential. (Interview conducted on 22/12/2012)

Although reasonable, these words reveal a certain degree of bias against alcohol and drinking culture: any amount of alcohol, even a little, is seen as compromising your cognitive faculties. Conversely, the words on the posters strengthen an idea of rap whereby "explosive lyrics ignite your conscience". Rap is seen here as an enlightenment tool, able to trigger mechanisms of understanding in the audience, and as such it demands a great level of attention and focus. The photograph of the event shows the level of attention from the audience towards the stage. An audience which barely attempted to dance: moving their heads to the beat or raising their arms to the roof, as requested by the performers, was the extent of this audience's movement. They put themselves in the condition of listening and not simply hearing.

Lowkey was without doubt seen by this audience as best embodying the role of the rapper who "ignites your conscience" when rapping. This view is particularly evident in the vehemence with which Lowkey's fans defend him in internet conversations, praising him for his commitment to speaking the truth and opposing the mainstream rap industry. Thanks to this support, Lowkey's album, "Soundtrack to the Struggle", released independently on October 16th 2011, debuted at number one in the UK iTunes chart, number three in Canada, number four in Australia, and number eight in the USA. The album launch took place at the Garage in Highbury and Islington (North-London) and was sold out: more than 600 people attended. The crowd was young, apart from a few older militant socialists, and mixed. The Muslim crowd was, though, an important slice of that audience and when Logic – a black rapper among the supporting acts who claims in his lyrics to believe in God but does not specify whether he is a Muslim – changed the chorus of a popular tune of his to "Assailamalekum, Assailamalekum", the audience went crazy!

**Flexibility vs Before and After**

"Looking-like a Muslim", we can now conclude, refers to flexibility in regards to practicing the faith. Sakina says: "My friends were not surprised when I converted to Islam because I was already seeking God in whatever shape or form". Both Sukina and Muneera came to Islam after a search for God which brought them to African spirituality and Rastafarianism. Such a continuity does not seem to appear in the Born Again acts where, by contrast, the meeting with God configures as a before and after. Dwayne Tryumf, for instance, in a YouTube video called "My encounter with

God", says:

> I was in the music industry. I was pursuing major contracts, was in a lot of industry meetings, had a lot of contracts on the table, had a lot of work that I was about to do […] I was set to work with pretty big names […] when the Lord called me. What happened was that back in August 1999 I had a dream and I had a vision of a cloud which formed into a man and then pointed at me, a lightning bolt hit me […] I started speaking in another language and in my mind I was like "what language am I speaking?" A voice within me said "you are just speaking wisdom" and then I woke up, and when I woke up I knew that I knew that God was calling me. I had not even thought to seek after God before that time but when I had that dream I knew that I knew that had to seek God. […] I knew God was calling me but I didn't know what to do so I just carried on with my life […] That same week a friend of mine called me out of the blue, never spoke to me about God before but calls me up and says "yo, I am going to church this Sunday. Would like to come with me?" and so I said "yeah, definitely! God is calling me!" […] That Sunday I went and I heard the good news. But I only understood it as good news when I heard the bad news. When I started hearing what Christ has done for me […] all my sins, I realised that he died for me, had died for my sins. I felt convicted of my sins […] The good news is that although we were born in sin, we can be born again, we can be renewed and saved, that's what He did, He put a new nature in my heart. From that Sunday when I went to church I didn't want to do the things that I did before, clubbing every night and getting drunk, chatting up different girls, I think I was going out with three girls at one time when God called me, I had to drop all of that. God took me out of that lifestyle, pursuing the fame, the success, being a player. It was foolishness, it was not pleasing to God. […] When I received Christ I had an awareness I did not have before. I was bothered by sin whereas before I wasn't. […] I gave up music altogether but the Lord gave it back to me and opened doors. I just walked through them. I never tried to push any door open. (http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NK85uNQNPm4: uploaded on February 16th 2011)

The chorus of his song *Never Be the Same* goes:

> I can feel ya spirit running through my veins
> came into my life I'll never be the same again
> it's a feeling that's so strange
> now I'll never be the same again
> now I'm ready
> now I'm ready
> I'm living for the glory of Your name

The before and after in Tryumf's testimony and lyrics correspond to the passage that anthropologist James S. Bielo, researching Christian notions of personhood in the USA, has termed the "change from the Mind of the World to the Mind of Christ": a psychological change from sins and confusion to "Christ-like mind" and spiritual benefit (Bielo 2007: 333). In Bielo's ethnographical cases, however, adopting a "Christ-like mind" also becomes a way to get financial success, as the speaker

of a Christian class he followed explains: "The reason I'm successful, the reason these other guys are successful, is because we have a powerful partner" (ibid.: 326). This is a recent incarnation of the American Born Again movement, called "Gospel of Prosperity", which has not yet established a definite base in the UK and is seen with suspicion, especially by Christian rap acts. In Tryumf's view, money is something which had a value in the life of before, when he was about to sign big contracts with major labels of the secular rap scene; but not any more. He gave up music, he said, once God called him: "the Lord [then] gave it back" to him, but he "never tried to push any door open", he never again tried ("I'll never be the same again") to use rap to get richer. These remarks on the fact that he never tried to push any doors open can indeed be read as an indirect criticism of those expressions of Christianity, such as the Gospel of Prosperity, which risk privileging money and the material world over the spirit.

In the Muslim context, manifestations of repentance which can look similar to the Born Again example seem to abound only in the experience of some converts to Islam who join extremist groups, such as the banned "Muslims Against Crusades" organisation. In a YouTube video, a white London convert and former MC, with a beard, hat and long robe, confesses that before embracing Islam and after 9/11 he hated Islam and Muslims, as a result of the media discrimination Muslims are subject to[70]. This is, however, an individual testimony which contradicts the rapper converts to Islam who feature in the next chapter. Such a drastic change simply does not happen in the self-representation of their experience: They rather confirm the account given by Sukina, according to which her conversion to Islam happened in the midst of a natural search for God whereby it would not be appropriate to talk about a before and an after.

We are therefore standing before a fruitful contradiction. On the one hand, the interconnectedness between the "Political" and the "Islamic", articulated in this chapter by the moral obligation to defend Muslims home and abroad, tells us of the specific practices of Islam which, according to a certain Western interpretation of Islam and modernity, do not allow provision for the space of the secular in Islamic countries and societies. On the other hand, exactly where one would expect to find rigidity in keeping with this framework, in terms of what it means to behave as a "good Muslim", flexibility and multivocality appear. Defending Palestine and Muslims home and abroad even without practising the established obligations, does not necessarily prevent one from behaving as a good Muslim in the perception of young British Muslims, so that even Lowkey's rap can be interpreted as *dawah*. The same flexibility does not appear, by contrast, in the Christian field, although this comes from a historical background, the history of European modernity, that, despite

[70] http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8AkJl11KdSU&feature=related, video uploaded on October 4th 2010

conflicts, religious wars and the resistance of the Church, ended up with Christianity accepting the space of the secular and the doctrine of secularism. One could see, as those who claim the amodernity of Islam do (Kilpatrick 2010), in the duality of Christianity, indexed in Jesus's words: "give to Caesar what belongs to Caesar and to God what belongs to God", the predisposition among Christians towards the acceptance of the space of the secular in the kingdom of Caesar for a seat in heaven in the kingdom of God. But the representation of Islam as opposed to this secular space does not fit with the phenomenon of conversion as a progression and the multiple and internally flexible ways to live the faith as expressed in the London rap acts.

There is also an inversion of roles regarding the place the image has in Christianity and Islam. The phenomenon of appearing as a Muslim as a vehicle for establishing belonging among modern British Muslims contrasts with the Islamic denial of figurative art and portrayals of the Prophet. Christianity, in the sense of the Church of Rome, has in contrast developed a sophisticated religious visual art. The opposition of Born Again Rappers to the language of appearance is a continuation, in one sense at least, of the Protestant criticism of the Church of Rome.

In the next chapter, I will focus on these manifestations of Muslim multi-vocality within rap in order to try and understand whether there is a specific role of the hip-hop narrative in this flexibility and politics of the image. In the concluding remarks below I want to recapitulate how the ethnographical material here examined legitimises, while also potentially countering, the theory of secularisation.

**Conclusion**

In a thought-provoking essay, Fenella Cannell (2006) argues that anthropology has betrayed the "spirit" of Durkheim's, Mauss's and Weber's research into Christianity, while carrying forward the "letter". The three of them saw Christianity as a watershed in human history, but their research, Cannell argues, nonetheless undertook a study of Christian theology and complexities which might have taken them far away from such a standard interpretation. In contrast, Cannell argues, if Talal Asad's 1993 *Genealogies of the Religion*

> persuasively understands the category of religion as a product of Christian thinking that has entered anthropological theory […], might it not also be the case that the use of the term modernity itself has become superstitious in the social sciences? Insofar as it implies an irreversible break with the past, after which the world is utterly transformed in mysterious ways, it is itself modeled on the Christian idea of conversion" (ibid.: 39).

This "strong" interpretation of conversion echoes the Born Again Rappers' understanding of

baptism, while a "weaker" version of it can be seen in the young Muslims' abduction that just by appearing Muslim one has taken *shahada*. Both elements would reify the opposition of Christianity vs Islam as modernity vs pre-modernity; but in reality their shared articulation of the "language of the heart", which we see both in SO's view of "real" baptism as solely inward and in the "*dawah* by example", would shelve such an opposition. This proves that the hypothesis that modernity as rationalisation and bureaucratisation, whereby the dry "language of reason" inevitably prevails over the dominion of affections and superstitions, simply cannot reach the perfection at which it aimed. But it would also expose the equilibrium of power upon which the theory of secularisation has assumed that the Church would take care of the soul and modernity of the body. The language of the heart, the immediacy of realness, is there to remind us that such a separation of power is also a misleading illusion. It is misleading in the same way that "not all that is [classified as] Christian is good", and in the confusion of no longer knowing what is "Political" and what is "Religious". Both seem to share the need for a different positioning from that which the "letter", the index, suggests. In this search for another classification system, they meet with Babar Luck's cosmopolitan and anarchist spirituality, when he stresses, against the dictates of established religions, that "God doesn't need a house or a representative" (Interview conducted on 8/1/2010).

However, such a "house" does not remain after the repositioning requirement is expressed; this is when the Islamic and the Born Again remain as two distinct and physically distant hip-hop scenes. Unlike the rappers of the Islamic scene, Born Again rappers perform only in churches or at events organised by churches or, as with Dwayne Tryumf's concert at ULU[71], organised by Christian organisations. Conversely, Islamic and conscious rappers cooperate together only in order to "diss" Western corruption, imperialism and racism; when affirming the "anti", not the alternative. The next chapter on the view of modernity as slavery, given by both black and white hip-hoppers, will document precisely this.

[71] That concert was a special event because the performance was recorded to make a live album.

# Chapter 4: Realness *for and against* Black Nationalism

**Introduction**

To pursue the investigation into the relationship between Islam and hip-hop in London, let me continue to examine the reason why abduction is precipitated by analysing the following situation.

On Saturday April 15th 2011, I participated in a demonstration that moved from South London, specifically from Smiley Culture's family home, to Scotland Yard in central London. The demonstration was organised by relatives of Smiley Culture, and in particular a nephew of his called Merlin Emmanuel, alongside historical black London activist Lee Jasper. The reason for the protest was to demand an explanation from the Metropolitan Police regarding the death of Smiley Culture, which occurred on March 15th. In the midst of a police raid on his house, Smiley Culture, whose real name was David Emmanuel, died. According to the police's version of events, later confirmed by the Independent Police Complaints Commission, he stabbed himself in the chest with a kitchen knife when the police were about to arrest him on suspicion of drug smuggling. The accusations against him were dismissed in 2012.

I participated in this demonstration not only because it was relevant to my research interests. The death of the legendary British reggae artist, unanimously seen as the father of British Rap in the 1980s, was an occasion where one could see together as one the generation that produced hip-hop in London and the generations currently taking it forward, particularly with regards to the articulation of conscious rap. Sociologist and Black British intellectual Paul Gilroy (whose work on hip-hop I will consider in this chapter) attended the demonstration, as did those of his generation who were teens or in their twenties when Smiley Culture became recognised in the British reggae scene. Also present were the generations of younger siblings or children, currently teenagers or in their twenties, and who articulate hip-hop with a political message. Members of the People's Army were also there.

However, the primary reason why I participated in the march was because I did not believe the official version given by the police, and thought this was a case of police brutality in the UK. I was definitely not alone in this assumption. When the demonstration reached Scotland Yard, where Lee Jasper, Merlin Immanuel and the relatives of other people who have died in police custody in the last few years were to address the crowd from a stage, the chorus of a reggae tune playing over the PA system became an opportunity for some demonstrators to express their anger towards the police. The tune was *Murderer* by Barrington Levy, and when the chorus repeated the title word, many pointed towards the building of Scotland Yard.

Was this not another form of abduction? None of those who pointed knew for sure that

Smiley Culture was killed by the police. But this did not prevent them, and myself, from assuming that Smiley Culture was another victim of the police, as reflected by the disturbing statistic that more than 1,400 people have died in police custody or following contact with police since 1990[72], as given by those speaking on the stage.

There is also the record of a public inquiry which demonstrates this. Following the murder of a black youth in South East London in 1993 (Stephen Lawrence), Home Secretary Jack Straw ordered a public inquiry into the matter in 1998 headed by Sir William Macpherson. The Macpherson inquiry concluded, with great attention from the media, that the ineffectiveness of the work of the Metropolitan Police, incapable of bringing to justice those responsible for the murder, was due to "institutional racism".

Almost all of the informants interviewed in this chapter participated in the April demonstration. While the question of whether or not they believed that Smiley Culture was killed by the police was never asked of them, their testimonies are interpreted here as very significant in explaining why that abduction is possible. One episode, taken from the interview of an informant of a previous chapter, ably introduces this.

The main reason why SO, unlike some of his peers in the Born Again scene, promptly replied to my email requesting an interview was because he was glad to meet somebody from Durham University. He had just finished his undergraduate degree there. And Durham was the starting point of our discussion. At some point, after listening to my account of an incident of racial abuse I was subject to from a Durham undergraduate student, who while drunk called me a "paki bastard" on the street, SO said:

> Nobody ever called me the "n" word. But I stopped going to church at some point. I felt they didn't get me. Probably it's part of their snobbish culture, that has been integrated in them, that when someone from a different background comes to their fellowship, they find it hard to relate to you. I struggled and stopped going to church. But this was a sin on my part because I am not going to Church for them. I am going to Church for God. (Interview conducted on 14/12/2011)

SO refers here to the "white affluent background" of the Christian undergraduate students, and to the "culture" in general of the Evangelical Church he attended while in Durham. SO is in no way comparable to the acts I will talk about now. If the interviewed of this chapter, exponents of the Conscious and Islamic scene, view the London riots *also and principally* as a rebellion against the police by those brutalised by the police, SO classifies police brutality as an "excuse", dismissing the idea that there is even such a problem, and raising the view that the events of summer 2011, the

[72] In 2011 there were 23 deaths linked to the police with two shootings, one being Marc Duggan's.

looting and burning of shops, happen "when you depart from God".

However, where the informants of this chapter agree with SO is in the potential understanding of why the church situation dedcribed above occurred. If SO felt that the reason why he was perceived in a certain way by some Christians in Durham was because he is black, in the same way the informants of this chapter would share the underlying assumption that if some are stopped and searched, beat up and eventually killed by the police instead of others, it is because they are black or of an ethnic minority. This understanding is definitively mediated by an index. And while, in the previous chapter, the index that sanctioned the interconnectedness between the Islamic and Conscious scene in London was "West vs Islam", with the Born Again scene aligning with "West" (and contributing towards justifying the framework of the theory of secularisation), now the index at work in SO's detection of a situation of potential racism – but not yet verbally expressed – breaks off the positioning previously established. What counts here is the index "Black vs White", and therefore the problem for SO is now whether he, as a black person, remains aligned to "West" or is opposed to it.

This chapter argues that the interconnectedness between Islamic and Conscious hip-hop on the basis of the "West vs Islam" opposition happens first and foremost by exploiting another opposition, that of "Black vs White". This produces something that the Born Again scene is not capable of doing, although not the case with the problematic and, according to him, sinful reaction of SO's withdrawl from the Durham Church. This is the embracing of *black nationalism* through hip-hop.

I will propose six case studies in order to examine this dynamic: three black and three white acts. In the case of the black acts, it happens through embracing Islam, that is, through disjointing themselves from the "West". But this is not necessarily a step that all those who articulate black nationalism through hip-hop feel compelled to make. The mainstream narrative of hip-hop as a "black music" and a product of slavery already provides the opposition "Hip-Hop as Black vs West as White". By critically engaging with the politics of representation of an old-school African-American rap group, Public Enemy (very influential among the acts discussed here), and the framework provided by Paul Gilroy in *Black Atlantic*, I will show the consequentiality of this level of reading. I will also show how this reading produces a problematic positioning, arising from the conflicting relationship between the ideology of black nationalism and Western technologies of the diffusion of hip-hop.

This conflict is well highlighted by the way in which white hip-hoppers cope with the index of the "West". In one of the white cases here documented, we will see that this conflict leads to conversion to Islam. With the other two cases, it results in a difficult understanding of the self: that

of a white person engaging in an art form invented by blacks to fight the racism of whites. While occasionally this critical positioning leads to self-censure and self-limitation, the white hip-hoppers also show pride in belonging to hip-hop culture and connecting with black people.

Although the relationship between "Hip-hop" and the "West" will be the object of the next chapter, I prepare the ground for this here by beginning this chapter with a diachronic look at "how" the informants converted to Islam. In the first part, "Technologies of Conversion", I show how the mode of consumption of hip-hop in London has changed with generational differences since Smiley Culture's time to today's generation. I build on the informants' testimonies of how they embraced Islam and met hip-hop, as these testimonies well represent the technological changes of the last thirty years in London hip-hop.

To account for "how" someone has converted to Islam, the "why" is also inevitably introduced. This is investigated in the second and third parts of the chapter. In the second part, called "Malcolm's Legacy", I argue that black hip-hoppers convert to Islam in the name of Malcolm X as a "black Muslim". I will show that the use of his legacy is suggested in the successful efforts of those acts who present rap as black rhetorical power, inherited from enslaved Africans during slave rebellions.

Moving from the idea of Islam to the idea of blackness, the third part of the chapter, called "Sartre's Legacy", focuses on the white informants' relationships with hip-hop and racism. I argue that these relationships can easily be framed by recalling Jean Paul Sartre's "Introduction" to Frantz Fanon's *Wretched of the Earth*. I will conclude by analysing the relationship between Fanon and Western modernity in order to introduce the theme of the last chapter.

## 1) Technologies of Conversion

### The Tape-Generation

Born in London in the late 1960s to a Barbadian woman who later moved to the US, Rashid is a web radio presenter and film director. He directed and self-released a 2010 documentary called *Why Black People Don't Vote*, set in London and featuring important figures in the local black movement, such as Lee Jasper. He arrived for my interview outside Brixton tube station on Friday April 8th 2011 by bike and sporting dreadlocks. We moved to a fast food shop in Brixton market which was en route to the Brixton mosque where Rashid was going after the interview.

> I was in the United States, in New York, in 1982. I was sixteen. I was hearing things on the radio that I just liked. I didn't know it was hip-hop. The big track for '82 was Planet Rock. There was also ET Boogie, The Message,

Grandmaster Flash and the Furious Five, that was a big track. On Saturday night, on the radio, you knew that there was something a little bit different from what was happening during the day time. I remember my mother, who lives in New York, she said: "You know how this is called? They call it rap music." I didn't know it. I knew there was this tune out in '79, Rappers Delight by the Sugarhill Gang. I knew it was this thing happening but I didn't know it was part of a culture. When I came back to England, there was other guys out there who listened to this music and they liked it and I heard that the place were everyone used to hang out was Covent Garden. A hundred and fifty brothers were down there, from all parts of London, just hanging out. With the body popping at first...then things slowly developed. Some guys started to get older tapes from America. That was '84. But these weren't made in '84. They were made probably in '76. And there were some names of the DJs, like Africa Islam. The name didn't mean anything to me really but I just liked the way the man used to cut James Brown. That really took us into the late 1960s, '67, '68. We found that the music of the era had a certain energy about it and we started to research what was going on in that era. We've been introduced to the politics through the music. When you hear a tune like "I'm Black and I'm Proud" by James Brown and the DJ doing the breaks with that tune, it's powerful. It talked about brothers rather "dying on our feet than keep living on our knees" and you hear all of this militant politics coming through. We wanted to know what made this music so energetic. The more we started to study politics to appreciate the music, then it was a natural progression.

The "natural progression" Rashid refers to here, during his process of research into the political and social conditions of African-Americans in the 60s and 70s, is embracing Islam:

Through the music that was sampling the 1960s, we studied the politics of the 1960s, and if you do that you can't not come across somebody like Malcolm X. And he was a Muslim. So we got to know Islam. We were led in that direction.

His journey towards Islam was, however, influenced by a rapper: Rakim.

Around '86 there was a tune by Run DMC called "King of Rock" and it sold a lot of copies but all the guys who were into hip-hop, we never liked it because "this is rock music!". We wanted to hear some James Brown, some funk. And then Eric B and Rakim came out: Eric B for President. And that put everything back on track. They were sampling James Brown, and Rakim, I don't know what he was talking about...

Suddenly he starts rapping from memory Rakim's lyrics:

*I said it before, I came in the door/ never let the mike magnetise me no more/he is biting me, fighting me inviting me to rhyme/ can't hold it back, looking for the rhyme taking off my coat, clear my throat.*

This guy was smooth but we didn't know what Rakim really signified. We did not know what Rakim meant. We just knew that there was a smooth tune with a fat bassline and there was this guy who had a rapping style that was not like Run DMC. Run DMC was like "I'm-the-king of rock". Rakim sounded new, fresh. We didn't know that Rakim was part of this thing called the Five Percent Nation. We didn't know anything about that but we just knew that he sounded intelligent.

Rakim, for Rashid, did not just articulate the black pride that the soul and funk of James Brown had left as a legacy to the new musical genre of hip-hop: a legacy that, in Rakim's opinion, NWA (Niggaz With Attitude) on the West Coast with their gangsta-rap and the introduction of the word "nigga", and Run DMC with the adoption of rock (seen as white music), were disowning. Not only did Erik B and Rakim "put everything back on track", but they succeeded in showing him the link between the black man and Islam. More precisely, Rakim led Rashid to his particular Islamic congregation: The Five Percent Nation.

Founded in 1964 by Clarence 13X, a former member of the Nation of Islam and minister of the Mosque N.7 in Harlem under the tutelage of Malcolm X, The Five Percent Nation shares the same controversial ideas as the early Nation of Islam: black men are seen as the "original man" and whites, called "blue eyed devils", are seen as a genetic scientific creation, responsible for anything bad happening to blacks. The name "Five Percent" comes from another teaching of the early Nation: according to which 85% of the world population is manipulated by 10%. Only 5%, the "poor righteous teachers", are willing to enlighten the 85% about the truth of existence. The Five Percent Nation radicalised and systematised the esoteric belief in numbers of the Nation by providing what they call a "Supreme Mathematics", which teaches that each number from 0 to 9 has a specific meaning (1 is Knowledge, 2 is Wisdom, etc). Some East Coast rappers, and particularly early New York rappers, were influenced by the Five Percent Nation and make ample reference to this coded language in their lyrics.[73] This was why the first time Rashid came across Rakim's rap he could not understand what Rakim was talking about.

Leaving aside the message of black emancipation Rashid decoded while listening to this type of rap, I want to stress a connection between the delay through which he eventually managed to understand the meaning of Rakim's rap and the practice of listening to a tape. This practice does not seem to be an individual one, as Rashid always referred to a "we", meaning the young people of Covent Garden, when alluding to the tapes from America which they managed to listen to several years after they were produced. This brings us to a reconstruction of the situation in which this collective listening took place: imagine a ghettoblaster played in an open space with someone doing "body-popping" – the form of dance that later evolved into breakdancing, others watching their moves, others listening to the lyrics, others socialising. This first wave of London hip-hoppers were not just repeating a ritual when they got a tape from America. It actually had a very "indigenous" input:

> It was very easy for us guys who listened to the sound systems over here to then get into hip-hop. We listened to

[73] For an insight into the Nation of Islam and Five Percent "paranoiac" epistemology as articulated through rap, see Jackson 2008.

> the Saxon sound system, they were known for having the best deejays. We used to listen to tapes taken from the dance where Saxon was playing. You imagine a guy with the little walkman recording live. This is how we got to hear the dance, we could hear the screams of the audience. The Saxon deejays originated what was called the "fast-style", rapping at double pace, very fast, and the people in the audience went crazy. Saxon lifted the bar in terms of lyrical stuff. And the thing is, that reggae crowd they listen to the deejay. They came to the dance to listen to the deejay. The hip-hop crowd at the time was not cultured in blackness as the reggae crowd was. The reggae crowd was conscious. They knew about stuff, they knew about Marcus Garvey, they knew this stuff. The hip-hop crowd, they wanted to party. What were they rapping about? The party and the girls. Hip-hop got really conscious when guys like Public Enemy came out years later. That's when they got that element of consciousness back into it.

In a BBC4 documentary on the introduction of reggae to Britain, *Reggae Britannia*, Jamaican-British artist Big Youth, who was famous in the early 70s, suggested that in the period when radio and television were not playing reggae music, the sound system parties were the "BBC, ITV, CNN and everything" for the West Indian youth in Britain. This definition intentionally echoes that of African-American Chuck D from Public Enemy – the group mentioned by Rashid – who in the late 80s defined rap as the "Black CNN". Rashid's account positions the emergence of early hip-hop in London as coming immediately after the realisation that the reggae sound system dance was an important place to be and *record*. When Rashid visited his mother in New York in 1982, Bob Marley, who had died one year earlier, had already introduced to the world stage the spirituality and aims of Rastafarianism. The sound system parties had, however, done so earlier in Britain. The early-80s "fast-style" deejays – MCs with a microphone on a stage – were bringing Rastafarianism to a different music format than that expressed by Bob Marley. The offbeat of ska and reggae tunes was progressively losing ground to an electronic way of making music which, unlike dub productions which emphasised the suspension syncopation of reggae with effects and reverbs, focused on the rhythmic delivery of the MC as toaster. This was a stylistically transitional time which was also accompanied by a transition in the practices of listening. From being a collective participatory aural experience, the same audiences were coming to realise that ghettoblasters and walkmans made listening decontextualised and more individual. Rashid's generation found themselves inbetween: while the former was on the way out, the latter had not yet emerged. I would suggest reading the years of delay after which Rashid embraced Islam (1998) after first listening to Rakim's rap (1986), as a time of reassessment following the disorder of getting to know something new: a reassessment that the technologies of aural reproducibility can help understand. The path to his embracing of Islam seems like a "natural progression" only after listening repetitively to the tapes. In Rashid's mnemonic verbal reproduction of the act of transmission of knowledge, Rakim's verses, there is a lot of listening, questioning and answering.

**The TV-Generation**

On the evening of Wednesday September 21st 2011, in front of Café Rio in central London's Soho, where he would perform later with his group "Native Sun" alongside singer and fashion-designer Sarina Leah, I interviewed Mohammed Yayha. He is married to Sukina from Poetic Pilgrimage, whom he met in London. But Mohammed was born in Mozambique:

> I left Mozambique with my family when I was two, due to a civil war that left more than two million people dead and more than five million people displaced. In order for my family to survive we had to run away and flee to Lisbon, the capital of Portugal. I lived there for ten years and then my father, due to financial difficulties and a lot of racism, decided to migrate to London in order to have a better life. And I came here with him.

Racism was also experienced in London but it was more subtle, "smart", he calls it; while in Portugal

> It was me and another boy as black people in my school... now you see a lot more people but in the early 80s you didn't see that. I was mistreated by the teachers a lot. I remember being beaten by the teachers with rulers. I remember having to fight because someone called my sister a nigger or called me a nigger.

It was then that something he saw on TV, alongside the music his parents would play at home, made him want to rap.

> Music played a big role in my family. My father used to be a singer... Running away from my country and knowing nothing really about Africa, I ended up staying in a country that colonised my country. They did not wanna empower me or tell me about my country. They only wanted to tell me that I was a slave as if our history, the history of African Black People started with slavery and I knew it wasn't the case. So my mum was playing music at home which was very revolutionary. It's because of the influence of my parents that I started to rap. But also because when hip-hop came into Portugal I started seeing Black People on TV wearing African pendants, putting their fists up in the air and they seemed very proud of it and they were. It was the first time I saw African people or African-American people in positive light, so I liked that. I wanted to attach myself to that.

Born in 1980, Mohammed Yayha approached hip-hop in the same way I did: through television, in the domestic situation of the family home. In also being exposed to some episodes of racism as a teenager, I can relate to what Mohammed refers to when saying that the image of "Black people on TV with African pendants and fists up in the air" empowered him. And both of us did not understand what these African-American rappers on screen were saying[74].

[74] When I told a black old-school London rapper that I was called a "nigger" when I was young and this was why I approached hip-hop, he replied with "you're still white".

For Mohammed, however, the rediscovery of his African heritage through rap eventually led to him embracing Islam. It is probably no coincidence that this happened in Africa. Growing up in a Christian family, his spiritual journey began at thirteen when he became a Born Again Christian; then, as a result of not feeling comfortable with some answers the pastor gave him in relation to some theological issues[75], at sixteen he left Christianity and started investigating Rastafarianism and Buddhism. Then he went on a journey to Gambia, West Africa, which led him to converting to Islam in 2005.

> I saw Muslims in Gambia but they were a different sect of Muslim. There were Sufi, very very spiritual. I was very drawn to that. I went there as a Rasta but by the time I went back to the UK, in my heart, I felt I wanted to become a Muslim, so I went back and I researched, cut my dreads off and I converted to Islam. […] A lot of times we hear of theories of governing systems that might sound good in theory but the practice is something different. And I saw how the poor people were looked after by rich people. For instance there was a restaurant that was making money from selling food to tourists. At the end of the day the poor people gathered there and they were having their food for free instead of the restaurant saving it for the next day. I said "why are you doing that?" – "Because we made our money, now it's time to help those that don't have it, the community". My friend who was a taxi driver would make his money from driving tourists around, but in the evening he would give all pregnant women lifts for free. I said "why are you doing this?" –"This is Islam". The way the rich look at the poor... this drew me to Islam. This is a very balanced lifestyle and it's practical.

This raises the question of whether Mohammed would have interpreted those lived examples of "the rich looking after the poor" in a different way had he experienced them in any place other than Africa. This is not to diminish the appeal that Islam itself as a spiritual source had for him. But it does highlight how his idea of Africa, mediated via family and audio-visual hip-hop, has influenced his conversion to Islam.

As is the case with his wife's group Poetic Pilgrimage, when listening to Mohammed's rap an "old" listener, familiar with his music, can interpret the lyrics as "*dawah* by example", when they do not explicitly state the faith of the rapper. But when first seeing his visual productions, such as the music-video for *Legacy* by Native Sun, one might have a different interpretation of his music. Instead of Islamic hip-hop, it might look like "Afro-Centric hip-hop". Take into consideration this image taken from a music-video:

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[75] Mohammed: "For example the death of Judas. Within the New Testament, one of the stories says that Judas hanged himself and that was his death. He hanged himself because he felt guilty. Another story is that he gave the money back and threw himself off this place. So in one he threw himself, in another one he hanged himself. The same thing with the Old Testament: there are some differences as to why a war was caused and I said myself why is this?... Also in Leviticus 11.7 it speaks about not eating pork and in the New Testament you read a story about Jesus casting out demons into the pigs. So there were things like this, and I would say: if Jesus prays like this and he says he put his head to the floor and Moses says he put his head to the floor, why is it that as Christians we don't do these things? Do you understand? There were a lot of questions and I thought we are not following the tradition."

And also this flyer:

Are the "African" outfits Mohammed and Sarina Leah wear not unlike the "pendants" Mohammed saw in an African-American music-video? And do they not look proud to wear them, as Mohammed felt the black people on the screen were?

In a 1994 paper which I will comment on later, Paul Gilroy argued that the centrality of the image suggests that hip-hop, as a form of communication, serves to "reinforce the priority of saying over the said" (Gilroy 1994: 71). This is the period of "mirroring" – intended in aesthetic terms – through which hip-hop became a worldwide phenomenon. Rashid's generation was prior to the emergence of TV as a means for the diffusion of hip-hop. Mohammed's came during this emergence. The role of the image becomes key for the next generation, as the case below shows.

**The iPod-Generation**

Born in London in 1990, Ed Green embraced Islam in July 2011. An occupier of St Paul's Cathedral since day one – October 15th 2011 – Ed came to Islam via involvement in the pro-Palestinian movement. Key to his conversion to Islam was a trip he made to Egypt with a pro-Palestinian association which planned to march on Gaza on the anniversary of the 2008/2009 Israeli military offensive. He already knew the People's Army crew at the time, and with them he had organised a fund-raising event for the trip to Egypt. In Egypt, Ed went to Friday prayers for the first time:

> I wasn't practising and I didn't really consciously take my *shahada*. I actually repeated the words and said it

> but I didn't consciously do it. Obviously in my heart I was like feeling that Islam was the truth for me. Along with that there were people around me that were Muslims but weren't practising as such and they were like "Oh you don't have to convert to Islam, you are nice as you are".

More than a year passed after he got back from the journey and again took his *shahada*, this time more consciously. However, in "his heart", he had known for a much longer time that Islam was the "truth" for him.

> I always saw the lies within my own culture, the bullshit of the Western culture, and I also saw this terrorism thing, why the West sees Islam as such a threat, and obviously anything that I did look into about Islam I always agreed with it ...it wasn't "ok I agree with Islam" but I would look at things and say "ok that's fair". And even within the conspiracy theory world, in quotation marks, there's so many coincidences that I don't believe in coincidences. I always did believe in God and I always believed in One God. Even in Catholicism there are many things that don't make sense to me. I researched Catholicism and there are so many things in it that if you look into that you realise that they are not even worshipping God but something else. If you are not worshipping God, you are working for the Devil.

It is possible to see here the mechanism which I want to highlight as being evident in the white English youth context, that is to say the identification with Islam as what opposes the decadence and corruption of the western world. Conspiracy theories, which also highlight the corruption of the western world, are not a sufficient alternative to the western project. They do not satisfy the spiritual needs of somebody like Ed, who always believed in One God. Here Islam appears as the correct alternative:

> I look at the Bible as a magazine from God that comes out every thousand years and I look at the Quran as the latest edition, as the latest thing that God put out, so why am I going to be studying the first and the second when I already know what they say because it's included in the latest edition? It's logical, you know what I mean, it's like why wouldn't you? With this I don't want to say there's no truth and energy in the Bible and the Torah, but the Quran is more connected to the reality now and is the latest edition of what God said without being manipulated.

The phrase "latest magazine from God" in reference to the Quran might be read alongside the then Born Again Mohammed Yayha's realisation that Christianity had ceased to "follow the tradition" of Christianity. However, although Ed wants to explain his conversion as a progression of his religious sentiment, the linearity of this would only appear clear to his eyes after having interpreted a sign which led him to Islam. Interviewed on Wednesday October 12th 2011 in a bar in Angel, Ed did not remember if the episode mentioned below happened before or after his trip to Egypt. Either way,

the revelation led him to embrace Islam:

> I was on the bus [...] near where Central Mosque in Regent's Park is, and I was on the top deck of the bus. I was thinking about many political things and stuff like this and this song came on my iPod. It was a rapper that I didn't recognise even though at the time I was really into my hip-hop and if a rapper came on, especially on my own iPod, I recognised the voice straight away. This rapper was talking about political things, the war, really the things I was thinking about. Then as the song ended, there was like a "dong-dong-dong", like a bell yeah, a really ominous bell, and as I turned to my left, just at the point where there was this "dong-dong-dong", I looked to my left and you had to be on the top deck of the bus to see what I was seeing, otherwise there would have been a wall in the way. I was looking above the wall and I could see the BT Tower and around that time, you know, it's like I saw Western Capitalism stuff, Babylon and all that kind of ideology because at the time I was aware of Rastafarianism... so I was looking at what I saw as the Tower of Babylon, the BT Tower, and at the exact second of the dong-dong-dong, it was right next to, although they are not next to each other geographically, right next to the minaret of Regent's Park Mosque, so I kind of saw it as the Tower of Babylon against the Tower of God. It was quite a profound moment...

Borrowed from the Bible, "Babylon" in Rastafarian terminology means "confusion", and often stands for western culture: Rastas stand firmly in opposition to its materialism and greed. In his interpretation of the sign which led him to Islam, Ed employs Rastafarian terminology with hip-hop conscious music, demonstrating the red line of Rastafarian-related associations that links the three cases of conversion to Islam so far discussed. The episode of the sound of the bell from his iPod shows how here, as in Rashid's case, hip-hop plays the role of introducer to Islam. On this occasion, rap introduces Islam not through powerful or mysterious lyrics that can only be grasped by the listener at a second stage, when conversion to Islam is considered. Here it is what is "seen" after listening to some conscious rap lyrics ("This rapper was talking about political things, the war, really the things I was thinking about") which triggers the mechanism of interpretation. There is nothing which Ed did not already know coming from the rapper's mouth – he didn't have to research the lyrical content as Rashid had to. This does not mean that his listening was not as accurate as Rashid's. We can assume that he was sitting on the upper deck of the bus and looking in front of him or out of the window. He was looking out of the bus without being able to hear the acoustic signals the environment around him was producing. His ears were "plugged in" to his headphones. He was focused on what was coming through his ears but enjoying looking outside the window. It was like watching a hip-hop music-video, with the window as the screen and the images of the outside world "cut and edited" by the speed of the bus, rather than by a music-video director. It was then, "at the exact second of the dong-dong-dong" coming from his headphones, that the view he had suggested that he had to embrace Islam. The combination of the speed of the bus, the height and perspective of Ed's position on the upper deck seat, and the sequence of the tracks on his iPod

contributed towards making him "see the truth".

In Ed's conversion to Islam it is possible to see the effects of a generational change which has led to the fast-style of the sound system toasters increasing in rapidity. This is the change that has given birth to "grime", a relatively recently electronic music arising from dub and rap, in which the BPM (Beats Per Minute) of classic hip-hop is almost doubled[76]. As a member of his respective hip-hop generation, Ed grew up with grime, learning, studying and practising as a rapper the technical complexities of a grime flow. This increased rapidity has literally killed the suspension effect of its reggae roots, and also the delay through which Rashid embraced Islam. Immediacy now comes into play. But I do not mean that it is just a matter of a few seconds for Ed to make the decision to embrace Islam. Ed was already in the process of becoming Muslim, or was already converted when the episode happened, as by his own admission he did not remember whether he had already embraced Islam at the time. Either way, the process was hastened, or the decision was vigorously reinforced, by a vision he had while on the bus with his iPod. This vision was the result of a technological change which has configured the practice of listening to rap to privilege the saying over the said.

I would suggest that this is probably where London hip-hop, as an urban music, reconnects with its punk roots. Reggae came from an island of the Empire. It was not countryside music because reggae was urban Jamaican, but to some London punk rockers like the Clash, it was perceived as a contemplative type of music which contrasted with the emphasis on speed and disorder of the punk acts. This opposition was a productive one. It produced London hip-hop. The problem these cases suggest is not whether London hip-hoppers know that the history that precedes them consists of encounters, mixing and borrowing. It is whether they are prepared to defend this history. Deepening our insight into the reasons *why* a hip-hopper decides to convert to Islam can help us find an answer.

## 2) Malcolm's Legacy

### Malcolm X's door to Islam

Rakinnias belongs to the same generation as Rashid: that of the first wave of hip-hop in Britain. Like Rashid, Rakinniass also used to spend time in Covent Garden in the early 80s. He used to do body popping. Eventually, he started rapping and joined a group called "The Cash Crew", including another rapper and a deejay. Interviewed on Monday September 26th 2011 in a cafe in North West

[76] Generally Grime averages around 140 BPM, while Hip-Hop varies from 80 to 115.

London, Rakinniass pointed out that The Cash Crew was a "conscious" group:

> The Cash Crew has always been conscious or political, even in those early days we wrote lyrics with sense. Even in those early days we were talking about the ghetto circumstances, the problem of the ghetto, why young people in the ghetto cannot get out, why cabs don't stop for black people, we were talking about slavery. We've always been political. We have always used rap as a "Black CNN", as Chuck D said.

It is from this political stance of the band that Rakinniass explains his and the other two members of the group's conversions to Islam. They converted to Islam when they were twenty.

> Because Cash Crew was a political group, what we used to do every Sunday was go to Speakers Corner in Hyde Park. We used to get a little stand and stand up and speak to the people, used to rap, used to rap our lyrics to them. They used to like it. When we finished we used to go around different speakers and listen to them and this is how we got introduced to Islam, to Sunni Islam. We knew about Sunni Islam because we used to read a lot, we read a lot of imam, we read Malcolm X's *Autobiography:* that was very interesting and inspiring and when you read the *Autobiography* you discover that Malcolm X was a Sunni Muslim at the end. He went through the Nation of Islam and then became a Sunni Muslim, that was very important for us. Then there's our history as Africans. My parents are from Nigeria. We found out about great African scholars and great African institutions like Timbuktu University and we said: this is what we are, this is what we should be. […] What happened was that we changed our music, from social-political to Islamic music. We had a song called "The Provider" in which we sing "Allahu Akbar Allahu Akbar" and this song did very well. At the time there was a deejay called Richie Rich, used to be on Kiss FM. This song was number one for seven weeks! That was the first Islamic song made by Sunni Muslims because you always had the Five Percent, or the Nation of Islam. They have been around for long time with rap but people as Sunni Muslims rapping, that was the first time.

In Rakinniass' words we find both a similarity to and a difference with Rashid's. The similarity is in the common identification with Malcolm X as a Muslim ("Malcolm X was a Muslim", Rashid said) and "one of us", in the sense of black people. The difference is in Rakinniass' pride in saying that the "Provider" was the first Sunni Muslim rap song. It is a pride which betrays some indifference towards the Nation of Islam and Five Percent rap, as if to reproduce towards them the same kind of resistance which official Islam had towards that black American form of Islam[77]. This use of Malcom X's legacy is twofold. On the one hand, it did not result in Rakinniass feeling a contradiction between Islam and his being "black": it was indeed the discovery that Malcolm X was a Sunni in the last two years of his life – after leaving the Nation of Islam and doing the pilgrimage

[77] In 1998 the Board of Ulema of the Italian Muslim Association (AMI) delivered a fatwa against the Nation of Islam. The organisation led by the Reverend Farrakhan came closer to Sunni Islam at least in the US. However, incongruity still remains. The divine status of the founder of the Nation, Fard Muhammed, cannot be accepted by Muslims. For the Nation of Islam, Fard is the Mahdi, who taught the last messenger of God, Elijha Muhammad.

to Mecca – which made Sunni Islam fit for a black man like Rakinniass ("this is what we are, this is what we should be"). On the other hand, however, the fact that real Islam has to be researched for a black man and not simply joined, put him in a position of dependence on the mainstream Islamic world in England. This resulted in some internal conflict. He stopped rapping for one year when he was confronted with the accusation of doing something *haram*.

> There were some Muslims who were excited by what we were doing but there were others who said to us that what we were doing was *haram*. We got to a stage where Cash Crew broke up. I left Cash Crew to study more about Islam because I was kind of thinking that music was *haram*. But then I met a Sudanese teacher, a Sheik, and after one year of stopping he said to me: "You should start a new group, and concentrate your music 100% about Islam." And I created Mecca to Medina.

In the late 90s, along with Ismael, Rakinniass created "Mecca-to-Medina", the group which chose the category of "Islamic Hip-Hop" to describe their rap. They soon gathered around them a small but solid number of rappers willing to go further in spreading the message of Islam through rap: rappers such as Mohammed Yayha, Poetic Pilgrimage, Quest Rah and Muslim Belal; but they also work with University Islamic Societies and associations willing to collaborate with them in the organisation of workshops, conferences and summits; activities which Mecca-to-Medina, at a later stage, developed hand-in-hand with rap and through which Ismael developed professional competence as a social worker. Ismael organised and chaired the 2011 "Muslim Hip-Hop Summit", at which I met both Rakinniass and Rashid who featured as panellists[78]. This took place at SOAS on Friday February 16th 2011, and it is with regards to what they said on that occasion that I want to situate their similarities and differences.

In explaining his experiences before a panel composed of Rakinniass, Poetic Pilgrimage, an Egyptian female journalist and an African scholar of Islam, Rashid said: "I came to Islam not through the back door but through the black door of Islam". This was his way of contributing to the discussion the panellists and audience were having on whether or not hip-hop was *haram*. During the interview, he expanded on this as follows:

> The reason why Islamic rappers in the States can get on is because it is far more diverse there. Over here Islam is coming from Arabs and Asians from Pakistan. So they have their culture whereas in the States it's coming from Black Americans. I remember being in the majeed [mosque] in Harlem and there was a brother who was reciting in Arabic and the way he was reciting I never listened to in my life. I don't know what he was saying but the way he said it was so powerful. I said: "you sound like Otis Redding in Arabic. If you give me some tapes I will take them back to London and we will have thousands of converts because this is incredible". He said: "Brother, you

[78] He also organised and chaired the previous three events.

> have to understand that what you hear is 400 years of slavery, you're hearing people that have been ripped from mother Africa and from their culture and you hear the lash of the slavemaster and you hearing the cotton field, the pain, the suffering and that's what you hear." That's why there is no one who is gonna take Islam to the level that the black man who has been through slavery will take it. And that's why the rappers who have been influenced by Islam are so powerful, because only they can do that journey. You feel me?

The difference to Rashid's position needs to be read against the background of the locations of men and women in the audience. In order to reach a seat in the audience, the participants had to pass Ismael and other female organisers who stood at the entrance to the Khalil theatre. Their job was to divide the audience into men and women so that they were not sat next to each other. Asked about this a few days after the Summit, Ismael gave me an answer similar to the reason why alcohol was banned at the *Human Writes* event. He told me that the gender division was done so as not to exclude anyone, specifically followers of radical Islam, from coming to the event. The same strategy, according to him, also motivated the decision of Mecca-to-Medina to not use hip-hop beats, only drums, so as not to offend the sensibilities of a certain Muslim audience: "At one stage we, as Mecca to Medina, were doing it just on drums. The reason for this was that we wanted to reach a wider spectrum of the Muslim community even if we didn't agree"[79]. The main difference between Rakinniass' (Mecca to Medina's) and Rashid's views on Islam has to be seen precisely in the fact that the former accepts the mainstream Islamic communities of Britain, while Rashid rejects them at least in part. Such a different approach to the established Muslim communities should not, though, prevent us from seeing where the two articulations meet. During the Summit, Rakinniass was very vocal in raising the issue of racism within the Muslim community, accusing Arabs and Asians of looking down on black people. I asked him to clarify this during the interview:

> When I came to Islam I faced racism which is based on ignorance and culturalism. You have Arabs that think they are better than you and look down on you because they think you are Abs which means slave...You also have many Arabs who idealise the white man: anyone other than a white man, they despise them; Asians, Bengalis, they all suffer racism from Arabs and even some Asians, Bengalis they look down on us because they wanna be white. So you have this kind of racism where everyone wants to be white but then you have the white women that like the black man.

The point about the white woman liking the black man is made reference to in Malcolm X's *Autobiography*: the author talks about his life before turning to Islam and gives a psychological description of the white woman (Sophia) he used to date (Malcolm X 1965: 140-154). It is Rakinniass' and Rashid's identification with Malcolm X which explains their conversion to Islam.

[79] Interview conducted on 24/2/2011.

But as this happened after they embraced hip-hop, the question raised by these two cases is rather: what is the legacy of Malcolm X in hip-hop?

If, as we have argued, impersonation is the primary logic of the consumption of hip-hop, the point here is not whether they feel that a Conscious Black person has to be a Muslim, but why is it that the rapper they just listened to or watched *looked like a Malcolm X to them*, meaning by this an index representing the figures of the past who fought and died for black emancipation? Were these figures alive today, would they be rapping?

**The Black Nationalism of Public Enemy**

This question serves to test the alliance established between the hip-hop narrative given by hip-hoppers and hip-hop scholars. Let us begin with hip-hoppers.

The New York hip-hop collective Public Enemy has been mentioned several times in the interview extracts above. Rakinniass used the label "Black CNN" of rap, while Rashid argued that when Public Enemy emerged in the late 80s, they returned to hip-hop the element of consciousness which characterised reggae and funk acts. In reality, there were other acts contemporary with Public Enemy, like KRS-One's Boogie Down Productions, proposing a black militant attitude for hip-hop. But no one prior to Public Enemy had delivered the message of rap as a continuation of the tradition of black struggle from Martin Luther King to Malcolm X, from the civil rights era to the Black Panthers, all around the world. This happened when hip-hop's TV generation, the generation of "saying over the said", was already beginning to become well established. Public Enemy contributed to establishing it, from the start, articulating a black militant message.

Take the imagery of their classic 1989 music-video, *Fight the Power*, directed by Spike Lee, and which was also the soundtrack to Lee's film "Do the Right Thing". In the second version of the video[80], Public Enemy's rap is presented as critically engaging with the civil rights era. After recalling through documentary archive footage the 1963 Washington March, the video continues with Chuck D, Public Enemy's frontman, addressing the crowd at a rally with a microphone:

> Check this Out. We rollin' this. That march in 1963 was a bit of nonsense. We ain't rollin' like that no more. Matter of fact that young Black Americans, we rollin' with seminars, press conferences and straight up rallies. Am I right? (the audience screams). We gonna get what we gotta get coming to us, word up. We ain't going out like that '63 nonsense!

After this introduction, all the members of Public Enemy address a screaming crowd from a stage. Then the tune starts to play. In the backboard of the set can be seen, next to Public Enemy's logo

[80] The first was made by Spike Lee using images from "Do The Right Thing".

(the profile of a man in a gunsight, evoking the danger represented by a public enemy), the picture of Malcolm X. Men dressed up as if they were Black Panthers, with black clothes, hats and sunglasses, also feature on the stage from which Chuck D and Flavour Flav entertain the crowd and scream f-i-g-h-t t-h-e p-o-w-e-r. The Black Panther members are seen marching, while the crowd is seen carrying images of black leaders.

All these elements "convey the idea of rap and hip-hop culture as an instrument to fight the power and transform the ghetto" (Berrocal 2012: 167). But since the crowd is black, the entertainers are black, the leaders whose portraits are carried are black, one is left asking whether the power they fight is "White". It is also the use of Malcolm X, who opposed the 1963 Washington March, which contributes to creating this ideological effect. At that event Martin Luther King made his famous "I Have a Dream" speech, while Malcolm X, then spokesperson for the Nation of Islam, criticised the event for being organised alongside white anti-racist organisations. On other occasions, he called the black leaders who featured in the march "house niggas", blacks who in the time of slavery lived in the house with the master and helped maintain the regime of the oppression of slaves, as this was essential for them to retain their position above the other blacks owned by the master.

Gilroy, commenting in 1994 on the visual material coming from African-American hip-hop, argued that the model of biopolitical disciplining this material offers can be defined as "revolutionary conservatism":

> There is something explicitly revolutionary in the presentation of violence as the key principle of social and political interaction and perhaps also in the hatred of democracy, academism, decadence, tepidity, weakness, and softness in general that have been regularly rehearsed. Conservatism is signalled loud and clear in the joyless rigidity of the gender roles that are specified in absolutist approach to both ethics and racial particularity and, above all, in a gloomy presentation of black humanity composed of limited creatures who require tradition, pedagogy, and organization. (Gilroy 2000: 206)

Gilroy's conclusion comes following an analysis of the African-American public in which hip-hop music-videos and animated movies featuring African-American NBA star Michael Jordan are seen in the light of the animality they evoke – such as the figure of a "dog" for rapper Snoop Doggy Dog and a "monster" for basketballer Michael Jordan – and also the idea of sexuality and gender roles they support. For Gilroy, such a "visual representation of racialized bodies – engaged in characteristic activities, usually sexual or sporting […] if they do not induce immediate solidarity, certainly ground and solicit identification" (ibid.: 185). He fails, however, to address what is involved when the bodies on screen engage themselves in *political activity*, such as in the *Fight the Power* video.

I suggest reading the "conservative revolution" of Public Enemy within what Gilroy leaves implied in the framework of his *Black Atlantic*. Here Gilroy (1993) draws on the work and transatlantic journeys of black writers of the early 20th century panafrican movement, in order to explain what the "black diaspora" is. For Gilroy, the descendants of slaves today share the same condition of "doubleness" which for W. E. B. Du Bois was the situation of the deported Africans in the Atlantic, both within and outside the law of the countries to which they were taken, conceptually projected to somewhere else which did not correspond to their country of residence. The recognition of this condition of doubleness, the fractured Self, is for Gilroy the moment at which the enslaved Africans entered modernity. Music and the creative forms of the black communities on either side of the Atlantic are for him the sites in which what he calls "sameness that changes", the sameness of the memory of the painful past which is each time articulated differently, is visible in its sublimated form (Gilroy identifies it with the Lacanian term "jouissance"). According to him, the step he proposes – reading the black diaspora within the ontology of the sameness that changes – would oppose both the Afrocentric interpretations that idealise Africa and neglect slavery, and also the anti-essentialist approaches which make it impossible to think of a black community.

My reading is that his "anti-anti-essentialism", as he calls it, is unpracticable, and the explicit adoption of the legacy of Malcolm X vs Martin Luther King by Public Enemy is precisely a case in point. To read conscious rappers' rhetorical power as resembling the oral abilities of those slaves who addressed their companions in the several slave revolts of the Caribbean and American

continent in the late 18th and 19th centuries is as fascinating as it is risky. The slaveowners, C. L. R. James (1989) reminds us in his *Black Jacobins*, feared such gatherings to the point that they prohibited them because of their potential to cause uprisings. Back then, it was clear against whom these slaves were fighting. But in the *Fight the Power* music-video, who are the people against whom the blacks are rising up?

In answer to my question of whether there were white youths alongside blacks in Covent Garden in the 80s, Rashid responded that "yes" there were some, even though it was largely a black gathering. Then he added: "They had to be very respectful because they knew it ain't their culture". Some of them, he continued, had a "hard time" because they were white. Yet he admitted to being very happy when he happens to see some of them today, those he spent time with, as they are "family". But one is left wondering whether, for the black nationalists in hip-hop, they are *full* "brothers", or a surrogated form of the enemy.

In Jacqueline Urla's account of a Public Enemy concert in Bilbao in the early 90s, one can sense that the answer is probably much more straightforward that it looks, and does not require any anti-anti-type of sophistication. Public Enemy, Urla (2001: 188) writes, "greeted the enthusiastic audience with a big Hello Spain", disappointing the Basque militant punk-rap band Negu Gorriak, who were looking forward to having their "heroes" perform in Bilbao.

> Negu was even more disappointed when Public Enemy expressed their dissatisfaction at playing to what they perceived to be a white audience and announced to the press that they preferred to play at the U.S. Army base outside Madrid, where they would have more of a black audience. The gulf between the two groups revealed by this incident seemed unbreakable. For Public Enemy, race solidarity proved to be the stronger of the bonds. For Negu Gorriak, it was hard to understand or sympathise with the race and class politics that drive many African-Americans into the enlisted ranks of the army. It was even harder to accept that these militant rappers did not perceive a U.S. Army base in Spain to be a symbol of U.S. imperialism. And it was a disappointment that Public Enemy's black nationalist politics did not lead the group to embrace the white Basque nationalists as their allies. (ibid.)

This episode highlights the problem of double-consciousness for black people. Are they against the "West", intended here as American imperialism, or in favour of the "West"? My criticism of Gilroy's framework is meant to stress that the boxing obsession materialises when the double-consciousness is not acknowledged. The sound system fast-style toasters in London knew they were not English, but equally they knew that they were not Jamaicans or West Indians, being born and raised in England. In fact their fast-style, of which Smiley Culture was an articulator, was born out of the need to put London on the world map of reggae and reggae influenced music so as to be acknowledged by their relatives and colleagues in Jamaica and the West Indies. It was not that an

idea of sameness did not link them; this can be seen in the concept of blackness mediated by the liberationist ideology of Rastafarianism, whereby the then Ethiopian Emperor, Haile Selaisse, is seen as the "Black Jesus" precisely because he is African. But my point is that with the birth of an African-American visual and militant hip-hop that appropriates the legacy of Malcolm X, a more strict interpretation of how to carry out the struggle for black emancipation is offered; an interpretation that does not find a place for the "One Love" proposal of Bob Marley[81], nor for the "I Have a Dream" of Martin Luther King[82]. Gilroy (2010: 87-119) suggests elsewhere that Marley referred to King's speech (and the anti-colonial rhetoric of Haile Selaisse) to articulate his "One Love" and that this shows how Marley moved within and beyond Rastafarianism. The legacy of Malcolm X is used precisely to not move forward. That's when the revolution becomes conservative. "This is not their culture" means that if the rapper is white, his rap is not as powerful as a black rapper's. In times of slavery, the blacks were the slaves while the whites were the slavesmasters. The revolutionary slaves who, as Malcolm X said, wanted to burn down the house of the master and convince the other slaves to do the same were the courageous "field niggas".

The problem of the "conservative revolution" as biopolitics – that is, what I call "mirroring" – lies in the reaction of Negu Gorriak. At first they personified *Fight the Power*'s video when they watched it: they imagined themselves to be on the stage and addressing a Basque nationalist audience. But then they realised that Public Enemy did not want them to impersonate the message. Their reaction was to reject Public Enemy. But what happens when the refusal becomes more difficult, and is not helped by the fact that black nationalist hip-hoppers are not far from the place where one embodies hip-hop?

Rakim, Rashid's Charon to Islam, said in a 2010 interview that if Eminem, the famous white Detroit rapper of the 2000s, was black, he would have been "the next Mohammed Ali"[83]. By this he means that he would have become a popular icon for black people precisely because he is an extraordinary rapper, just as Ali was an extraordinary boxer. But Eminem is white, and he discovered very quickly that for him certain things were taboo if he wanted to be acknowledged by black hip-hoppers and have "street credibility" (see Berrocal 2012: 164-168). It did not matter if he

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[81] Perhaps, as Gilroy 2010 suggests, Marley's song and proposal were a reflection on how to overcome the racism he endured while in Jamaica as "mixed-race". His father was a white Englishman who was already an old man when his mother, who was then a 16 year old girl, got pregnant.

[82] Public Enemy defended the legacy of Martin Luther King with the video for the song *By The Time I Get To Arizona*, attacking the Arizona Governor who refused to celebrate Martin Luther King Day. But rather than the Reverend of unity and non-violence, Public Enemy were defending the "black icon". The video is indeed about violence: Public Enemy lead an armed attack on some politicians responsible for the abolition of King's national holiday. This video also shows the difficult positioning of subalterns who fight against the State in order to claim what the state already concedes them: Martin Luther King Day. The same applies to a London music-video I comment on later about Black History Month.

[83] The interview can be seen here: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=153vWm8dJGk Uploaded 23/11/2010. Accessed 20/6/2013. Min. 1:00

was a great rapper. He was a much greater rapper if he did not cross a line. What is the price that some white conscious hip-hoppers feel they have to pay for cooperating with London black militant acts?

## 3) Sartre's Legacy

In commenting on the remaining two white conscious hip-hop acts of this chapter, I will refer to "Sartre's Legacy". But unlike with Malcolm's legacy, I do not mean that the interviewed necessarily support such a legacy. I refer rather to two similarities between the way they explain their collaboration with black conscious hip-hoppers and Jean Paul Sartre's "Introduction" to Frantz Fanon's *Wretched of the Earth*. These two similarities are intertwined and impossible to separate. On the one hand, there is *pride* in collaborating with the oppressed who are striving for their emancipation. On the other hand, there is the *self-awareness of not being oppressed*, and of being somebody who historically speaking belongs to the people who caused the suffering and violence of the oppressed. Sartre is talking to a European audience in his "Introduction", but makes it plain that Fanon is not writing the book for them. He is instead targeting the wretched of the earth, the colonised, the brutalised. He is telling them to rebel, to use violence against the white man, and "yes" Sartre seems to conclude, "he is damn right!" The only possibility left for the white man before this historical redemption fully unfolds is to help them do the job – Sartre's text is somehow presented as an action of this kind by the author himself: "As a European, I steal the enemy's book, and out of it, I fashion a remedy for Europe. Make the most of it." (Sartre [1961] 1963: 14). Let us see how these two elements, pride and self-awareness of not being the victim, present themselves in these two case studies.

### Reverse Racism is Impossible

Born in Hackney in 1976, DJ Staez, like Ed Green, is a fervent activist. It is possible to find him at almost any demonstration in London: from the workers unions to the student unions, from international issues involving migrant communities to national and local affairs. As a steward, banner-holder, or just a simple protester, he never misses a demonstration with an agenda he supports. He explains his commitment to social causes as being due to the figure of his father, who used to be a saxophonist in street bands during socialist and union marches.

As with Ed Green, the Israeli operation in Gaza in 2008 had a huge impact on his political views. But unlike Ed, Dj Staez is not a Muslim. "Maybe", he says, he does believe in God. What is definite, though, is that he has got to know more about Islam in the last three or four years, and he

adds “even when I didn't know anything about it, I always had this feeling that it was right to me”.

> Me: Why?
> Staez: I don't know, it's just something in my life that goes by feelings.
> Me: Nothing to do with the fact that is against the West or that it is perceived as such?
> Staez: Maybe subliminally but I never thought about it. Consciously I never made that connection. You know what I felt it was? Probably the community vibe I felt in it, that's probably what it was. I learned about Islam. I learned how to pray. Sometimes I pray, occasionally, in the morning but not 5 times a day but I don't really call myself a Muslim because I haven't embraced it fully. Let's put it this way: if you ask a Muslim what happens when we die, he would say bla bla. If someone asks me, I would be like I don't know, it's for you to find your way, it's your personal journey.

Like Ed Green, Staez had some experiences which he has interpreted as a message for him to embrace Islam. For the moment though he has not made that step yet:

> When I started thinking more deeply about Islam it was because I saw profound things, like one time was really weird, I was chatting to some sister online and I was in LSE in a room where some brother had just got back from Cuba, they were with Fight Racism Fight Imperialism and they were talking about their experiences. I was by the window because there was no seat and there was a painting on the wall. I can't remember the picture, it was an abstract thing and I read what was written underneath. It said “you should be praying”. Then the talk finished and I was going out the room. The sister I was speaking to online came in. I didn't think she was gonna come. She came late and the talk was finished. She said: “I brought you something” and she gave me a book on how to pray. That's quite a deep thing but now I don't feel so connected as I was at the time. Also I don't come from a very religious family, apart from my grandmother and grandpa who were methodists. They never drunk alcohol, which is interesting because you think it’s a Muslim thing but it’s a Christian thing as well. This is from my mum's side, but my mum and dad are not religious. My dad is totally anti-religion.

When the interview took place, on the evening of Saturday October 29th 2011, on a bench just outside the Occupy St Paul’s camp, DJ Staez was a full-time student in Sociology and International Development at the London Metropolitan University. A few days before, on Tuesday 25th, he and his French flatmate (and hip-hop researcher) and others organised a public talk called “Hip-Hop Spirituals” in a room at the London School of Economics. The talk featured among the panellists a Muslim rapper from New Jersey called Hassan Salaam. His contribution, very eloquent and well articulated, struck a chord with me. One of the reasons I wanted to contact DJ Staez was also to comment on some of Salaam's statements.

> Me: I want to share with you my feelings about that conference and would like to know your opinions about it. I really liked it. I particularly enjoyed Hassan Salaam's presentation and I could sense that he has already done

it before because his presentation was very structured and well-given. But there was something in what he said throughout the whole thing that made me uncomfortable. That was his attitude of saying: "I am going to tell you the history of my people, of the music of my people, of my culture". He was linking hip-hop with the history of black people which is of course a truthful connection but I think that the way he talked about it doesn't take into consideration the current state of hip-hop and the fact that hip-hop has spread to countries like Albania, Poland, Serbia, these type of white countries. You know what I mean? I know that this is a common way of seeing hip-hop for black people but I also believe this is too narrow a view of hip-hop and furthermore a very dangerous one. Take for instance the video that the London rappers did for Black History Month. I didn't like the fact that only black rappers were on it as if really Black History Month was a Black Thing only. You know what I mean?

S: My view's slightly changed in the last few years. Even when jungle was around, in the music shops, they had a section with jungle records and they called this section "black music". I was a bit confused at the time because you know I played jungle. Why are they calling it black? It was not a big question in my head but I used to question it. And I see what you are saying, I agree with it to the extent that hip-hop means a lot for different people. On the flipside what I would say is that for some people and maybe for myself, the necessity or the reason to focus on the history of the music as being rooted to black music or black struggle is because you know how this history is neglected, you see that racism is directed at black people more than anyone else. So it's complicated because you want to move forward and see the fact that hip-hop is being embraced by different people all over the world but at the same time you know that black people are discriminated against more than anyone else. So what has changed my view in these years is the fact that I took some time to think about it, to study that, and I saw how racism works more deeply than I did before. And it's weird because I have black brothers, Asian brothers who don't see it as I do and I am a white brother. And I don't like dividing people or whatever because to me it's all the same, I love everybody, I don't care where you're from or whatever but I see this shit, this racism shit that we created hundreds of years ago and this underlines everything for me, the way we perceive things, the language we talk. We don't acknowledge it, one: that racism exists, two: the influence it has on us, where it comes from, we don't recognise the things we build our life upon, where they come from, because if we did, we would discover that we are influenced by black people. And black history month, it's funny, it's like this month for black history while black history is our history and it should be all year long. But it's not, that's the problem. Unless we keep pushing these aspects of history till it becomes equal to all the other histories and it will not be an issue of black history month any more.

Directed by GlobalFaction, the *This is Black History* music-video was uploaded to YouTube on October 2nd to inaugurate the 2011 "Black History Month". A smiling DJ Staez, the producer of the beats, Last Resort, and Jody McIntyre (see next section), are the only non-black persons who feature in the video. Fronted by rapper Logic, who sings the chorus and raps the opening eight bars of the tune, *This is Black History* features the most important black rappers of the People's Army crew and other black conscious rappers from London, and also features two old-school figures in MC D and former London Posse member Rodney P. They are all united in attempting to provide, within the format of a rap song, a real version of black history contrary to the mystification of the "school system", as the chorus states:

> This is Black History
> The school system made it a mystery
> but it laid the foundation for you and me
> so we put it in our music for you to see

DJ Staez does not deal directly with my criticism of the decision to have only black rappers in such a project. However, his answer and his defence of Hassan Salaam's strategy of presenting hip-hop as a black music and struggle allow us to assume that even if he had the opportunity to intervene and change that situation, he would not have felt he had the authority, as a white man, to do so. He would not feel able to interfere in such an intimate space for black people who are empowering themselves. This feeling is evident in the following passage of the interview:

> Me: What I would like to ask you is: don't you think that black people can be racist too?
> Staez: Against who? Against themselves? […] I don't think a black man can be racist to a white person. Years ago I thought that yeah if you picked on a man just for the colour of their skin, you would be a racist. But now, after reading a lot and talking to people, especially an Iraqi lecturer who is a very good lecturer, I would say no, that is not being racist, that is a prejudice based on the colour of the skin but that is not racism because racism is like a profound structure that runs throughout society where something is seen as inferior. When I grew up I got beaten up on the streets by black people just because my girlfriend was black. If I think about it, obviously this stems from anger and something related to that situation but when prejudice is directed at a white person it is not necessarily an inferiority thing, it's an anger thing. I don't know, it's different though from what I would consider as racism, because in racism there is also a language attached to it that you don't necessarily see in the white case. But again, my friend in graffiti thinks like I used to think and I don't have a problem with that: if you pick on someone for the colour of their skin and you say something then you would be a racist which is how I used to think and for me both are true because it's what is real to you.

In growing up Staez confessed that he had some problems with his whiteness: "not that I had a problem with being white but that I had some issues with whiteness, I saw that black people suffered from whiteness. This gave me not a complex but an inside thing that I would associate more with black people". The "inside thing", as he calls it, is something whereby he would support and help the oppressed but would never allow him to see himself, when compared to them, as also oppressed. It would never allow him to forget that he is white and that because of whiteness there is racism and oppression. He can associate with the rappers of *This is Black History*, but because of the fact that he is white he will never be one of them until racism – which in his understanding means whiteness – is completely defeated.

**The Right to Write Their Own History**

The music-video of *This is Black History* starts with black-and-white images of some old aboriginal men, followed by that of a Native American man with feathers on his head. They are accompanied by a voice which recites the following poem:

> Australia is a black country. So is America.
> So the superpower….
> It's not theft if it's yours and you take it back.
> Just the correction of an inaccurate fact.
> So I am not afraid of the thoughts of immigrants.
> More ashamed of my quarter of Englishness.
> The Scots and the Irish don't wanna take this.
> Occupied by a State that is racist.
> Black history is a story of revolution and resistance.
> A salute to all our brothers from now to more...

The author of the poem is Jody McIntyre, who in the video recites the poem while seated in his wheelchair. Affected by cerebral palsy, Jody McIntyre was born in South-London in 1990 and, although still young, is already a prominent figure in the London conscious hip-hop scene. His friendship and alliance with Lowkey contribute towards making him an important point of reference for young people of the scene. However, all this would not be possible if he was not a charismatic character with a strong civic passion, having already made long journeys around the world, such as the year he spent in South America after secondary school, and the nine months he spent in Palestine.

> I met Lowkey before I went to Palestine and while I was there I was emailing him my articles and interviews I was writing. And then, when I got back we met up in Lebanon. I went to Lebanon on my way back from Palestine because I have family in Lebanon. Lowkey was there so we met up and we chatted about things. Then when I got back to London, we met up a few times and we became friends. I also became friends with other people like Logic. And then we went to America for a talking tour and I met Dead Prez.

I interviewed Jody on the morning of Monday November 7th 2011 in a cafe' in Peckham, South London. I wanted to know his opinion on the *This is Black History* video, and was also struck by the fact that he called Australia a black country – "Australia is a black country. So is America".

> What I was trying to say in that poem is that these countries that you are portraying as the icons of democracy, like the United States, Australia and United Kingdom, particularly the United States and Australia are black

> countries, countries of black people that you have colonised and turned into something else.

Jody's understanding of black people here clearly stands for "other than white European". As the song starts, though, it is also clear that for all the seventeen rappers of the song black means Africans and enslaved Africans. It is suggested that black people invented the clock, that pyramids were things black people made, that we should research how African civilisations have influenced Europe. Figures such as Marcus Garvey, Malcolm X, Huey Newton, Nelson Mandela and Bob Marley are mentioned and praised. The editing choices of the video mirror such lyrics. After the first few pictures of (presumably) indigenous people of Australia and America shown at the beginning of Jody's poem, the focus of archive visual and audio-visual material shown is on the colonisation of Africa, the Black Power movement in the US, and historical leaders of the African decolonisation movement. Black nationalism is lyrically and visually established from the first very seconds of the video, and no room is left for Jody's suggestion of including "other than white European people" within the box of "black people". Jody does not, however, in any way feel that an opportunity has been missed with the music-video. He is, on the contrary, very pleased to have been given the opportunity to join a project where black people can finally talk "in such a strong and assertive manner" about their own history:

> The reason why I like that video is because for once black people are being portrayed in a positive intelligent light. I watched *Top Boy*, for instance, on Channel 4 and as usual black people are the drug dealers and gangsters. There's nothing wrong with that. It's one aspect of society. But someone needs to make a program with a different light. And people are very uncomfortable with black people talking about their own history, their own culture, in such a strong and assertive manner. Why can't black people talk about that?

By "black people" Jody here seems to mean exactly what the rappers in the video mean by it. Less obviously than with DJ Staez, who is two generations older, with Jody McIntyre is the sense of discomfort regarding being white, and therefore being privileged, in relation to black people. For Jody it is his "quarter of Englishness" which he says makes him feel ashamed. He is, in contrast, proud of his quarters of Irishness and Scottishness, both seen as opposing English Imperialism ("The Scots and the Irish don't wanna take this/Occupied by a State that is racist"). The missing quarter is Middle-Eastern: someone in his family is Lebanese, as he mentioned in the first excerpt above. Although one could say that Arabs had a role in the beginning of the slave trade, it is the white connection that causes discomfort when looking at the "history of black people".

This is an uneasiness that can lead some to help and support black people willing to free themselves in an unconditional way. Not posing any conditions whatsoever, this help can even

assist black people to articulate discourses by which whites are excluded. But in the case of Jody and DJ Staez this does not happen, in the sense that even though there are no white rappers in the video – but white rappers do feature in the People's Army crew – their presence can be interpreted as a sort of *reward* for their genuine commitment to the black cause. This shows how the strict black nationalism of early Public Enemy has taken a *softer* form when taking root in London, attenuated by the pre-existent local history of reggae mingling with punk in musical and political terms. Soft Black Nationalism was, however, also the manifesto of Public Enemy, who while affirming a strong black iconography refused to be called "black racists" and collaborated with white musicians and artists.

**Conclusion**

On this journey in which we have seen generations embracing Islam through hip-hop, we discover that if Malcolm X had written *Wretched of the Earth*, the 1961 edition of it with the foreword by Jean Paul Sartre, it would have been enough to explain the dialectic between "immediacy" and the "memory of the index" that arises from the ethnographic material here discussed. Frantz Fanon was not Muslim. But he was black and it is to blackness that we have come to while following the reasons why some have converted to Islam. He was also in a difficult relationship, a love/hate one, with the West. I believe that all the acts discussed here are in such a dilemma. This is why a concluding analysis of Fanon's work and life becomes important for introducing the topic of next chapter.

I agree with Ghassan Hage (2010) who argues that Fanon does not solve the problem of the passage from "anti-modernity" to "alter-modernity" as Hardt and Negri suggest (Hardt and Negri 2009: 103-104). Fanon, to use my categories, does not put the "other-hegemony" ahead of the "counter-hegemony" whatsoever. Hardt and Negri are not able to see this, Hage argues, because they do not distinguish the "intellectual" from the "affective" rupture. Fanon might be able reach a third option of "new humanism", which Hardt and Negri praise, rejecting both euro-centrism and oppressed people's particolarism, such as Senghor's proposal of "negritude"; but Fanon is never capable of resolving his internal conflict. Hage indexes the famous passage from *Black Skin White Mask* to explain this: the reaction Fanon had when a child said "Look a nigger" to his mother upon seeing Fanon in France (see "Chapter Five" in Fanon 2008: 82-108). He argues that this episode shows Fanon's relationship with European modernity as being one of an expectation betrayed: the expectation of coming to the motherland from the colony of Martinique, and thinking that he could be identified as one of them. When realising that such an expectation has been betrayed (the "mis-interpellation"), European modernity becomes the enemy he will fight in Algeria. Yet there remains

an unresolved internal conflict: to be like them.

In my view, this is well illustrated by Fanon's twofold use of the category of the Nation in *Wretched of the Earth*. On the one hand, he calls for the colonised to embrace the Nation in order to send the colonisers back to Europe, although warning them that, once independence is gained, it will be necessary to save the Nation from the autochthon bourgeoisie who will try to restore their privileges with the help of the colonisers (see Fanon 1963: 148-205). On the other hand, he argues that the wretched of the earth and their intellectuals should place the values of progress and freedom of the Europeanised classes above the cosmologies of the old African institutions (ibid.: 206-248). This is seen as trash to get rid of for Fanon, superstitions, whose institutions have worked hand in hand with the colonial administrators and allowed the Europeans to spread a representation of Africa suitable to their civilisation propaganda. The wretched of the earth are in this way kept in a difficult situation, caught between those who are already betraying them, and those who will do so. Fanon suggests that they ally with those who will betray them, maintaining that their betrayal will happen and they will need to be ready to face that.

I believe this is the worst political advice he could give them. History tells us that his prophecy was probably right, but the path he discarded might have given African decolonisation an opportunity it missed as it systematically happened. It is by critically engaging with the "pre-modern" Africa that Africa could have shown the world an "African way to modernity", rather than the African fallacious embracing of European modernity. This has eventually led to the corrupt and unsuccessful experience of the Nation State; corrupt and unsuccessful precisely because the Nation State, to fill the void of authority left by the rejection of the legal and political roles of the traditional institutions, has used traditional institutions and thinking in the same way as the colonialists did. To complete Hage's criticism, I would therefore see in Fanon's idea of Nation the proof of his never-solved affective conflict between his desire to be "one of them" and the Europeans' refusal.

The reference to Frantz Fanon's *Black Skin White Mask* as complementary to Malcolm X's *Autobiography* came from one of my informants. Apex is a Masters student in Philosophy and Contemporary Critical Theory at Kingston University, and also a rapper with dreadlocks. He said to me that he, like the oppressed Fanon talks about, wanted to be "one of them" as a black kid growing up in a white London neighbourhood. But then, through music, he got into Rastafarianism and African spirituality, and became more comfortable with himself as a black man in a white country. This move is not "anti" in itself. Fanon was not "anti" when he wanted to go to the motherland, to escape from the world he knew and challenge borders. He was not "alter", however, but rather "in" the logic of colonisation, when contrasting the "West" with "African traditions" in terms of "right"

and “wrong”. In the same way, the Black and White hip-hoppers of this chapter are “alter” when they feel that the hip-hop they embrace reflects their double consciousness, their being both and not English, both and not Londoners. It is when they feel that their double consciousness requires an explanation in relation to the history of slavery that they are “in” the logic of black nationalism. When this happens they are either Black or White, not the articulators of a local culture of unity that is more closely related to the the reggae and punk of the 60s and 70s.

I have shown, through recounting three generations of technologies involved in the informants’ embracing of Islam through rap (tape-TV-iPod), how the hip-hop realness has acted, along this timeline, as an element of illusion and suggestion towards the absence and presence of such a local story of rap. It is illusion when Rashid says that rap is not white people’s culture. It is suggestion when he adds that the white boys of Covent Garden he befriended are his family. We have also argued that the role of audio and visual technology presents an important passage in the consumption of hip-hop. It makes it more individual, in the sense of domestic, and more absent from real-life engagement, in the sense of the iPod listener on the upper deck of the bus who is taken away from the acoustic engagement of their surroundings. This individual consumption is a decisive dynamic in explaining the ambivalence of the relationship between hip-hop and Western modernity. This is what I aim to do in the final chapter, where I will look at this via the role of rappers as “truth-tellers” and their emotions as such.

# Chapter 5: Organic to the Worn Language

**Introduction**

This chapter is about what it means to be a Gramscian "organic intellectual" in London rap. It is about the two human qualities which typify this figure: "pessimism of intelligence" and "optimism of the will" (see Gramsci 2011 and the letter from prison of December 19th 1929). What is the role they have to play and how do they fit in with the technologies of rap?

This discussion is proposed at the end of the dissertation because it can address the most pressing problem of conscious hip-hop and consequently of the sense of my ethnographic and political intervention: the *relationship between the mental sensation and democracy*. This is the mother of all the ethnographic situations previously discussed as it goes straight to a matter of *form* rather than content. This form is the *face of hip-hop in the era of the internet*, wherein it becomes increasingly faster and easier than before for a rapper/hip-hop group to record a song, upload it to the web and get oneself recognised, without being signed to a major label company or having a music-video on TV. This might still be a decisive factor for high sectors of the music business. But the impact that the 2000s have had is creating unexpected opportunities for the middle and low sectors, in which the conscious acts are generally situated.

The advent in 2005-2006 of www.youtube.com, alongside social networks such as "facebook" and "myspace", have allowed hip-hop artists – and artists and people in general – to use the internet as a means for promoting their art. At the same time, advances in digital technology have made producing art more feasible. YouTube contributed towards proliferating self-made productions: the audio-visual project Remaking Europe and the video *Rebuild Remake*, completely self-funded and self-produced, would not have been possible without such technology. YouTube has indeed provided a space for virtual action, previously unknown, and for alternative projects.

But this has not necessarily produced the invention of a new language. In preceding the web, TV provided a model of communication that the web, although innovating and modifying in a participatory way, has essentially adopted and adapted. Yet TV is not the beginning of the story of what concerns audio-visual media communication. A self-taught music-video director, while editing their own music-video with *Final Cut* or other software on their own laptop, is seeking a "cinematographic effect" in the same way that they are consuming such things when watching other audio-visual material. This consumption and production, the simultaneity of being both the director and spectator, is not only visual but also *lyrical*. Words get attached to images as these are framed by the screen, conferring to the screen the status of *vocabulary*.

This chapter faces the passions that go with the embodiment of such a vocabulary. Its object

is the phenomenon of "consumption as production"; its gaze is on the rappers' passions while they are on stage and on screen. The chapter suggests that these passions are attached to a form which I will call the *worn language*. This is the situation where the screen *dictates* real life. When the stage leads one's own passion, the language is not worn but *wearing*. In the first case, the pathos is "sad", of a nihilistic narcissism; in the second it is an investigative mood. I suggest seeing this difference as being between *past* and *continuity*. It is here that we return to Nietzsche's powerful philosophy and criticism of post-Socratic Greece.

By reading the relationship between an orator and the audience in the agora in ancient Athens alongside the performer-audience interaction at a hip-hop show, I suggest that the cinematographic effect is not an external technology but an *exploited inward mechanism*, based on the *worship of the Ego*. I will do this by developing a Deleuzian approach to the "hip-hop image", and by offering another key of reading than the one Michel Foucault (2010) offers when dealing with Plato's refusal of writing. If Plato refused writing in the name of "ascendency", I argue, the Gramscian organic intellectual would rather fear ascendency. The "optimism of the will", as a mental sensation, is perceived by Gramsci as dangerous if it is alone. It has to be followed or preceded by the "pessimism of the reason". I stress the different temporality in which the two operate: the first in the immediacy, the second in the continuity of life.

In the first part of the chapter, called "The Worn Language", I frame the conflict between immediacy and continuity in terms of "worn" and "wearing". Building on Nietzsche's distinction between two types of nihilism, I propose reading the first as "narcissim as nihilism" and the second as "narcissism as scepticism".

In the second part of the chapter, called "Rappers as Organic to Audio-Visuality", I frame the *difficulty* for rappers of privileging the temporality of the wearing over that of the worn. This is well demonstrated by the fact that if a rapper can on stage, through performing techniques, blur the distance with the audience, so as to satisfy the first requisite for a rapper being called an organic intellectual – that is, to be *sentimentally connected* to their community; the rapper-on-screen can perform the second and more decisive requisite, the *function of direction*, more powerfully. A rapper on screen is potentially more powerful than one on stage, because this enters the aesthetic code of the past of someone else's present ("mirroring"). This is where we take one step further than Deleuze's analysis, written when YouTube was not yet invented: what is worn is not only in the "crystal-image" of someone else's interiority, it is *out there*, in the archive of the screen, on YouTube, and can be accessed and reproduced as many times as one wishes, until saturation.

The third part of the chapter, called "Bad Parrhesia of the Punchline", is an investigation into the passion of saturation in London conscious hip-hop. By continuing the comparison with

Foucault's lectures at the College de France on the relationship between *parrhesia*, the act of truth-telling, and democracy in ancient Greece, I will suggest that "narcissism as nihilism" manifests itself with the phrase "I'm a revolutionary" in the conscious scene. I will show what it means to perform under such a statement. In making a point on the distinction between the figure of the "rapper as lyricist" and that of the "producer as beat-maker", I will use a lively paper by Theodor Adorno on opera writer Arturo Toscanini to define the act of saying "I'm a revolutionary" as "Toscanini syndrome".

In the fourth and last part of the chapter, called "Wearing", I will argue that if hip-hop as a cultural industry provides a worn language, wearing it precedes and exceeds the temporality of the past that the format of hip-hop provides. To capture the phenomenon of consumption as production from the point of view of the rappers' activity on stage and on screen means to recognise that the worn language copes only with the fetishistic side of production. As Appadurai (1996: 83) notices, consumption is also a "work of imagination" that can free the body from the "techniques of the body". This is where wearing comes into play: "narcissism as scepticism". Wearing, I conclude, is duration in a Bergsonian sense, and it is there that a rapper is a Gramscian intellectual.

This chapter is therefore the final journey into the dynamic of territorialisation and de-territorialisation of hip-hop to give a consistency of pathos to what I have defined as the "lifestyle of hip-hop". This is done by providing a commentary on music-videos, songs, and interviews throughout the chapter.

## 1) The Worn Language

### The Paradox of the Hype

Like "flow" and "real", "hype" is also a very loaded hip-hop term. Unlike the first term, it is not used in non-English speaking countries, and unlike the first two, hype can mean one thing when used as noun and possibly the opposite when used as a verb. In the first case, it means publicity, advertisers, someting that is repeated over and over again in the media world. This, particularly for conscious acts, is a synonym for falsity and lies. In the second case, hype is a verb used next to a performing rapper, the "hype man", to indicate the rapper's role in stimulating the audience's excitement, such as in the typical call-and-response where the performer asks the audience to make some noise, repeat a word, clap, and so on. Hype here denotes something positive, and a show becomes "hyped-up".

I suggest that we look at this opposition by framing it within the famous essay of Walter

Benjamin (2007) on the "aura" and the technological reproduction of art. The problem of aura takes us back to ancient Greece.

In accordance with the lectures of Foucault (2010) at the College de France from 1982 to 1983, we can indeed say that conscious rappers' suspicions about hype being not truthful can be compared to Plato's perplexity about the technology of writing; and equally we can say that the positive view among hip-hoppers of the hyped-up performance matches the ancient Greeks' trust in the oratory performances of the *parrhesia*, the act of "truth-telling". According to Foucault, Plato in *Letter VII* rejects writing to affirm that philosophy is a particular type of knowledge, a fifth knowledge, that differs from the other four (even though the fourth is different from the first three) in that it does not try to understand reality by means which are external to the reality itself, like names, definitions, matheme, and so on. Philosophy confronts reality from within: this is why, Plato concludes, philosophy is not "serious" if it is written; it has to be listened to in real-time and not, I contend, "de-territorialised" from its context.

Foucault argues that Plato's rejection of writing should not be read, as Derrida did, as "the advent of logocentrism in Western philosophy":

> On the contrary, what this letter (Letter VII) takes up is precisely the theme of the insufficiency of logos. And the refusal of writing is set out as a refusal of a knowledge arrived at through onoma (the word), logos (the definition, the interplay of substantives and verbs, etcetera). It is all of this, writing and logos together, which is well and truly rejected in this letter. Writing is not rejected because it is opposed to logos. On the contrary, it is because they are on the same side, and because writing is, in its way, like a derivative and secondary form of logos. And on the other hand, this refusal of writing, of writing and of the logos associated with it, or of the logos to which writing is subordinated, is not made in the name of logos itself (rejected like writing and even before writing), but in the name of something positive, in the name of tribe, of exercise, effort, work, in the name of a certain painstaking mode of relationship of self to self. What we should decipher in this refusal of writing is not at all the advent of logocentrism, but the advent of something else entirely. It is the advent of philosophy, of a philosophy whose very reality would be the practice of self on self. It is in fact something like the Western subject which is at stake in this simultaneous and conjoint refusal of writing and of logos. (Foucault 2010: 254)

It is an act of bravery to exhibit *parrhesia*. The same courage, Foucault lets us understand, which for Kant represented the spirit of Enlightenment: Sapere Aude! The *parrhesiast*, the one who tells the truth, does not observe any pact when telling the truth: they are not concerned by the reaction, whether positive or negative, they might induce in the listener. A *parrhesiast* could potentially offend a powerful person who might react violently to such brave words. But their bravery might also be positively rewarded. The courage to stand up and speak the truth in public can captivate the soul of the listener. Foucault calls this "ascendancy".

Plato therefore rejects writing in the name of ascendancy. But what is this ascendancy? It is the "here and how" of the truth-telling, the territorial aura: it is therefore audio-visual, as the audience can listen to the parrhesiast as well as watching them address the agora. But this is an *audio-visual memory* as well, because for Plato writing was dangerous exactly because of memory. Our comparison with Plato needs to stop here, because if for him writing is counter to the memory of the aura as the reader cannot see the author of a text giving *parrhesia* in real-time, it is possible in the audio-visual hype in which rappers operate. Benjamin would argue that this, submitted to the reign of technological reproducibility, is no longer aura. But he would not take on the role of a contemporary Plato by rejecting the audio-visual stage of writing as Plato did with the written – although Plato did not really do this if we are commenting on his texts. Benjamin knew that aura disappeared a long time ago with technologies of the reproduction of art.

Benjamin's take on the technology of film is what I want to expand and problematise in this chapter. Contrary to many of his Frankfurt School colleagues, particularly Theodor Adorno, he thought that mass consumption presented emancipatory potentialities alongside oppressive ones. He argued, for instance, that the viewers of a movie can still be critical even if *distracted*, like how one is normally distracted when consuming architecture. He suggests that perception changes after the interiorisation of the movie, and that Dadaism prepared the ground for the "cinematographic effect" and that Futurism is the immediate consequence.

I suggest also that the Greek "ascendancy" presented a mechanism of perception that film later exploited. Are we sure, for instance, that the "distracted attention" was not already present in the agora and was not already a form of consumption of public speech, if not of production, which gave ascendency to a *parrhesiast*? The ancient Greeks, Foucault shows us, had a name for this: they called it "bad *parrhesia*", which is when an orator does not deserve to capture the soul of the listeners, although it happens, as this was possibly the cause for Athens as a democracy to perish and turn into a tyranny. But the point is that if there is a difference between bad and good *parrhesia*, it is because one is superimposed over the other, therefore the two are indiscernible. There is, in other words, a recursivity of the memory as audio-visual communication due to which the distracted attention can be read even in pre-capitalist terms.

I therefore suggest that when veteran London rapper Ty said to me that a rapper on stage has to make sure people "have fun to get your political message"[84], he is expressing the problem that ancient Athenians experienced with the "bad *parrhesia*", but which certainly also involves the good *parrhesia*. In fact, his is a positive comment on the wisdom with which Public Enemy managed to overcome the "hype". Essential for them was having Flavour Flav (the fun) on stage next to Chuck

[84] Interview conducted in a cafe in Vauxhall, South London, on December 7th 2011.

D (the political message). Flavour Flav was – and still is, as Public Enemy are still active in their fifties – the "hype man" of Public Enemy's live shows. Very rarely does Flavour Flav rap: most of the time he speaks without rhyming, alternating his falsetto voice with the baritone verses of Chuck D, or repeating Chuck D's rhymes. But what he does most is entertain the audience with comical sketches, dances, and showing off his extravagant way of dressing, such as the big clock he wears around his neck in every Public Enemy public appearance:

Public Enemy often also had an alter ego of Flavour Flav on stage: Professor Griff. Dressed in a military suit, he is the "Minister of Information" for Public Enemy, and in charge of the security service. This security, represented by three big black men, stand on stage as well. They are the "S1W", the Black Panther-like figures we saw in *Fight the Power*'s music-video. When Public Enemy became well known in the late 80s, the audience used to scream whilst watching them marching on the stage. They also contributed towards "hyping up" the venue. But was this their intention? They were not as charming as Flavour Flav; they were instead as serious as soldiers while performing their march.

According to Ty, Public Enemy created the formula for all the conscious acts that came after them. But might it be the case that the "Flavour Flav-Chuck D relationship" is actually not an interruption of the (negative) hype, but a *co-opting* of the the counter-hype (the "Black CNN", as they called it)[85] by the hype? That is to say, that Flavour Fav is needed not because you can then be exposed to Chuck D's lyrics, but because it does not matter if you are? And might it not be the case

85 Public Enemy's hit 1988 album "It Takes a Nation of Millions to Hold us Back" (released one year before the single *Fight the Power*), contains a song called *Don't Believe The Hype*, in which Chuck D speaks out against the media misrepresentation of his music and message, asking the listener not to believe the hype in order to really understand him: "Turn up the radio/They claim that I'm a criminal". But it is a paradox that while Public Enemy rapped against the hype, their worldwide commercial success happened precisely because of their orthodox relationship with the industry of the hype.

that the insufficiency of the *logos* Foucault refers to is precisely that whereby the presence is needed not to realise the limit of the *logos*, but precisely to not do this? It is ironic that while Foucault is trying to re-evaluate the illumination of subjectivity with the latter, it is with the former, the absence of authorship, that we need to re-read Plato's refusal of writing. In so doing we can catch the meaning of the distracted attention as a model of audio-visual consumption both for the *parrhesiasts* in the agora and for rappers on stage. Benjamin noticed in 1935 that "any man today can lay claim to being filmed" (Benjamin 2007: 231), prophesising what is clear to us today. But the point is that this proposition needs to be read alongside the Gramscian one whereby "any man is a philosopher".

**Hyped Up by One's Own Past**

Consider my own case of hip-hop re-territorialisation. When I began my ethnographic journey into hip-hop in Italy a few years ago, I encountered a spontaneous embodiment of what I had always thought hip-hop was ever since I embraced it. The person I was talking to, while explaining to me that he wanted to build a hip-hop studio in the hall of the squatted building we were in, mimicked grabbing with his right hand an imaginary microphone hanging from the ceiling, assuming the raised-head posture of someone who is rapping.

The scene recalled for me the situation of the boxing ring when the host introduces the boxers, as immortalised in Hollywood movies about famous boxers, such as Jake LaMotta in *Raging Bull*. But I associated it with a song. When I went back home the same day I searched in my collection for a

tape of Italian hip-hop. I wanted to listen to a song which I had listened to countless times in my teens, and which the body posture of the person brought to mind. The tune was *Head Up* (A Testa Alta), and this was precisely the reason why I wanted to rap: to hold my head up.

Gilles Deleuze, the creator along with Felix Guattari of the metaphors of territorialisation and deterritorialisation, has provided, in his two books on cinema (*Cinema1* and *Cinema2*), the category that can explain the paradox of the hype as a passage of *re*-territorialisation: the category of the "crystal-image".

Deleuze's approach and classification of images as "movement-image" and "time-image" has been criticised in Film Studies for not providing a congruent framework of analysis for non-European cinema (see Martin-Jones 2011). But it is the attempt at combining the semiotics of Peirce with the philosophy of time of Henri Bergson that makes his work particularly valuable in terms of the boxing obsession. Deleuze (1986: 200) argues that Alfred Hitchcock introduced a new type of image, the "mental-image", which incorporates the viewer's response in the actual shot, instead of focusing on the characters on screen. It is an image which purposely plays with the interpretation of the viewer; that is, for Deleuze, with what Peirce calls "thirdness". But as Gallese and Guerra (2012) have recently made clear, this directorial strategy builds primarily on the pre-linguistic mechanism of the mirror neuron system of the viewer.

The "mental-image" is a "time-image" in a Bergsonian sense. Therefore, as for Bergson time is interiority, this is an interior image, optical as well as auditory, for the watcher. It is always actual or in the process of being actualised from what Bergson calls "recollection". It is never past as it is not related to space, like how, in contrast, the "movement-image" is, according to Deleuze. But when this image is actualised, it becomes present as chronologically distinct from the past. This is the "crystal-image". It splits the present in two: one half is a "crystal of pure time" that hangs in the recollection, one other half is actualisation in the present so as to create separation from the past. Yet these two halves are indiscernible (Deleuze 1989: 98-125).

Now, to put it in terms of our perspective grounded in the mirror neuron system, it follows that when my interlocutor displayed that body posture, I recollected, with the help of my mirrorring system, the "pure crystal of time" of the emotional experience I had when my interiority first formed that optical and aural image; but this is put chronologically at the beginning of my relationship with hip-hop only when the recollection becomes cognitive. This chronological order is Peirce's index to which we referred in the last two chapters, when adopting the model of Gell's model of "agency by abduction".

We can take another step now as Deleuze links Nietzsche's concept of "will to power" with the "power of the false" of the crystal-image (ibid.: 126-155). This gives us the possibility of

viewing the ethical qualities that accompany the dynamic of re-territorialisation as creation (and falsification) of the past. The way this past has been created suggests that we face a different ideological transition from the one Benedict Anderson saw as determining the birth and development of modern nationalism. In reworking Kenneth Burke's take on rhetoric, we can indeed say that if, in the modern conjuncture, imagining oneself attached to an abstract community such as the Nation was possible thanks to the technology of "print capitalism" which allowed readers to see their community of reference through the signs and grammar of a written language, the contemporary audio-visual passage we find ourselves in seems to be one whereby watchers can see these signs and grammar as "worn" by the body on-the-screen. That is to say, exactly as the introduction of a "word", viewed as written, can create the ideological effect of legitimisation, here it is a simple "illocutory act", as Austin would have it, captured by the camera and framed by a screen that can have ideological consequences. The screen, like the book before it, offers an aesthetic of the past. The big difference being that on the screen is offered the *past of one's own body*, the past of impersonation. Regardless of whether or not my interlocutor took that body posture on purpose, so as to stir up one reaction rather than another in me, what matters is that I was seeing *my past* in his body: a past that I tried to relive, by re-listening to that song, as if I didn't want to let it die, re-energising the *myth* of my encounter with hip-hop.

**Nihilism vs Scepticism**

Nietzsche distinguished between two types of nihilism: passive and active nihilism, seen respectively as a decline and an increase in the power of the spirit (see "European Nihilism" in Nietszche 1968: 9-82). What he calls nihilism is for me narcissism. Nihilism means for Nietzsche that there is no goal, no objective; that the old values have died, and new ones will have to rise up. Narcissism, as a will to power, is what will shape the new values and make the old ones decay. Narcissism and nihilism, in my proposal, are indeed the same will to power, part of the same bio-cultural dynamic in which to *kill God* and worship another becomes an ontologically inescapable condition for humanity. This is why I propose calling Nietzsche's first category of nihilism "narcissism as nihilism", and the second "narcissism as scepticism". These two properties characterise the contrasting forces contained in the figure of the "OverMan" in *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*: a figure that on the one hand accepts the destiny of one's own tragedy – that there is no way to escape pain; but on the other hand, through this acceptance, he is capable of an emancipatory act in order to govern the eternal return of the same.

We are indeed back to the problem of how to solve the reiteration of the crisis, as argued in Chapter 1, where I traced the *habitus* of the minimal linguistic act. With Paolo Virno and Ernesto

De Martino I said that the logical form of "I speak" helped humanity overcome the crisis of the "end of the world" – the title of De Martino's posthumous book. With "narcissism as nihilism" I now want to point out when this no longer works. "I speak" in this form of narcissism is not "I speak"; it is rather "I spoke". I want to highlight the limit of saturation that the redundancy of "I speak" overcomes. A saturation fed by the audio-visual technologies of reproduction of the aura and which leads to "heaviness" and immobilisation. With "scepticism", by contrast, I want to praise the ethical qualities of the silence, the transformational properties that the "lightness" of such a practice brings about. A sceptic would be affected, as any other person, by the body posture of my interlocutor, because any other person has an emotional past. But a sceptic would not re-view and re-listen to themselves as an act in itself. They would meditate in silence. This subtle yet decisive difference is what distinguishes "wearing" from "worn", as argued in the next sections.

Appadurai suggests that modern consumption "seeks to replace the aesthetics of duration with the aesthetics of ephemerality" (Appadurai 2001: 85). I suggest that the battle is rather between the *aesthetics of the worn*, that is the past, and *the duration of wearing*; the aesthetics of the territorialised against the suspension of recollection. This does not solve the problem, actually it complicates it. How indeed can a rapper be silent when performing? This is a battle that cannot be won on stage[86]. This is the reason why Zarathustra would tell us today that "Democracy is Dead and we killed it". What remains for conscious rappers, and all of us, is what Heidegger (1958) suggested in his *The Question of Being*, that is to look at nihilism, which in the meantime has made itself at home in your house, "right in the face".

## 2) Rappers as Organic to Audio-Visuality

### Gramsci vs Ascendancy

Paul Gilroy calls the articulators of the aesthetic forms of communication between slaves and former slaves in *Black Atlantic* a "new type of intellectual", new in a Gramscian sense, in that they do not exercise the coercive role that Gramsci attributed to the traditional intellectuals:

> These people have often been intellectuals in the Gramscian sense, operating without the benefits that flow either from a relationship to the modern state or from secure institutional locations within the cultural industries. They have often pursued roles that escape categorisation as the practice of either legislators or interpreters and have advanced instead as temporary custodians of a distinct and embattled cultural sensibility

[86] In the Conclusion of the dissertation, I very briefly connect this silence to the famous concluding proposition of Wittgenstein in his *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*: "What we cannot speak about we must pass over in silence".

> which has also operated as a political and philosophical resource. The irrepressible rhythms of the once forbidden drum are often still audible in their work. Its characteristic syncopations still animate the basic desires – to be free and to be oneself – that are revealed in this counterculture's unique conjunction of body and music. Music, the grudging gift that supposedly compensated slaves not only for their exile from the ambiguous legacies of practical reason but for their complete exclusion from modern political society, has been refined and developed so that it provides an enhanced mode of communication beyond the petty power of words – spoken or written. (Gilroy 1993: 76)

In the Gramscian model, organic intellectuals are first of all "one of us", sentimentally connected to the existential condition of their audience. Only as a result of this can they exercise a moral suasion, what Gramsci called the "function of direction". But this direction, to compare the Gramscian intellectual to Plato's *parrhesiast*, cannot be performed by ascendancy. In the Gramscian model where the new intellectual is opposed to the traditional, we can say that ascendancy is rather feared and needs to be balanced.

Like the *parrhesiast*, the organic intellectual is also involved in speaking the truth, and like *parrhesia*, this is a truth which needs to be spoken regardless of the pact the speaker has with the listener. In speaking the truth, the organic intellectual can even go against their own political position or be rejected by it. But the one difference between Gramsci and Plato is that the former does not divide society into leaders and followers. Every person is a philosopher for the Sardinian intellectual, meaning that everyone has the intellectual ability to be one. The organic intellectuals are those who carry out the function of empowering people to use their own brains, if you will, so that they will no longer need to be guided by someone who is not themselves. For Plato in the *Republic*, by contrast, "philosopher-kings" are enlightened governors but aristocratic, not unlike what Gramsci would call traditional intellectuals. There is, therefore, in the model of the organic intellectual, a sort of repulsion towards authority founded on the mechanism of ascendancy, as if Gramsci could sense in this the principle of authoritarianism and would therefore need a counter-power – that of the empowered former-followers – to placate the eventual desire for power of the intellectual. However, as we will see later with the notion of "bad *parrhesia*", Plato and the Ancient Greeks presented a clear difference between the moment of truth and that of the search for power, even though for them it remained a fact that giving *parrhesia* was a privilege of some, while Gramsci wanted to make this, through the work of the intellectuals, potentially a possession of everyone.

The difference between Gramsci and Plato acquires here a twist that would make Gramsci engage with Hanna Arendt's *Origin of Totalitarianism* with an emphasis on the effects of the charisma of the speaker on the audience as something to prevent and fight. The point is even more insightful if we were to say that the role of rappers as organic intellectuals in the audio-visual

technological conjuncture is strongly limited by the power of the image. The image has taken responsibility for providing a moral direction, while the role of invoking a sentimental connection with the community of the audience remains for the rappers.

In the four ethnographic cases that follow, I commit to such a reading, suggesting that while onstage rappers manage to remove the distance between themselves and the audience, the moral direction is provided by the reproducibility of the narrative power of their music-videos.

**Sentimental Connection**

***a) "I am just like you"***

On Friday September 30th 2011, Akala performed at Passing Clouds for the "End of the Weak" event – organised by Speakers Corner and DJ Snuff. His set, followed and preceded by other hip-hop acts, lasted for about half an hour. He was alone on stage rapping. DJ Snuff was behind the deejay table, playing and stopping the beats over which Akala was rapping. The set began with Akala proposing that the audience – a full room of about 150 people – have a competition: those to his left had to compete against those to his right. From the stage he drew an imaginary line that divided the audience into two halves, asking those who fell along the line to move either to the right or to the left. Then he asked the left side to "bounce" with their bodies by bending their knees to the beat. He demonstrated from the stage how to do this. After the left side of the audience had bounced, he said: "You infront are ok, you in the back are rubbish...", causing the audience to laugh. Then he asked the right side to do the same. This was the introduction to the song he was about to perform, whereby with each chorus he asked one side of the audience to bounce, shouting out "left" and "right". Towards the end of his set came the song *Find No Enemy*. Here Akala raps:

> I've got a heart like yours that pumps blood and oxygen
> and insecurities, a whole lot of them
> I'm scared like you deep down.
> I really do care that the world is not fair like you
> but I don't even believe my own prayers like you
> chasing career going nowhere like you

When rapping these lines at the Passing Clouds, each time Akala repeated the word "you" – which features four times in the passage quoted – he pointed and looked at a different part of the audience.

***b) "I am a hip-hop member!"***

Ten years older than Akala, who is approaching thirty, Ty has a solid hip-hop career behind him,

having collaborated with famous African-American acts like De La Soul, and having been nominated for the prestigious British Mercury Prize. Wearing glasses, Ty is a big black man who looks very serious. When onstage he transforms, becoming funny, dancing and partying. I saw this transformation with my own eyes at the *Human Writes* event described in Chapter 3. He was the last act. As soon as he grabbed the microphone after being introduced by Restless Being's directors he said:

> I wanna thank you so much for being here till the end. I came at the beginning and will stay till the end because we are in this together. I am a hip-hop member. Other people will say something else (like a hip-hop artist) but I am a hip-hop member, so let's have fun now!

The event began around 6pm with the first performances. His act took place at around 9 pm, towards the end of the event. Some people were already leaving the place or thinking of doing so. Ty convinced them to stay by bringing to the stage a "party atmosphere" which no one, none of the younger rappers who preceded him, had managed to bring. His DJ, Big Teddy Ted, an old-school DJ who supported other old-school London rap acts like Black Twang and MC Mellow, had a microphone on a stand over his turntables and used it to "double" the rhymes of Ty and incite the audience. Ty's performance acquired a boost from the vocal support that the DJ was giving. However, the party atmosphere was not just due to the energetic role and vocal support the DJ was giving, or the funny dances and exaggerated lip movements Ty urged the audience to do. It was because at one point Ty jumped off the stage and began dancing with the people in the audience. He was in this way showing that he really was a hip-hop member, like those in the audience, and that they really were *all in this together*.

**Movement in the Mind**

In these two performances, the objective of the rappers was to produce fun and enjoyment in the audience while encouraging their participation. Their objective was also to present themselves as "one of you". The techniques of pointing at individuals in the audience and jumping off the stage to dance blur the performer/audience seperation in such a way that the performer wants to recognise the individuality of the audience and at the same time be included in their generic mass. This is a planned effect that is proved successful by the enjoyment of the audience. In this sense, the performers also provide a moral direction. This is particularly the case with Ty, whose show and participatory attitude seemed so different to those of the younger rappers who preceded him: the moral direction he provided is in the contextual difference he brought to the stage. But if his jumping off the stage had been filmed, along with his performance, and then edited and assembled

into the format of a music-video, the effect of moral direction provided by his realness would probably have been amplified, like an amplifier does with the sound of a guitar, and would have gained "added-value". The contextual difference of his performance might get lost but a de-contextualised meaning can accompany the passage of his performance from the stage to the screen.

This all rests in the format of a hip-hop music-video. They mainly exhibit two stylistic features which *Rebuild Remake* has also embraced. One is a montage of images cut and edited to the beat. The second is the filming of the rapper rapping over the music of the video. These features are what Deleuze would call "affection-image" and "action-image" – two of the three subcategories of the "movement-image" – that is POV (point of view), close-up shots, and contextual shots. The cinematographic effect here is to synchronise the lip movements of the rapper with the words of the lyrics so as to leave the impression that the rapper is performing the song in real-time.

Deleuze argues that cinema introduces a "section of duration" (Deleuze 1986: 11) on the screen precisely because it puts "movement in the mind" of the watcher. But it does so, to expand on this, by exploiting the mechanism of "embodied simulation" performed by the mirror neurons. In the following, I show two ways in which Ty could have used the images of his performance in a music-video. In so doing I also show what type of moral direction these stylistic choices could lead to.

**Moral Direction**

***c) Will He think I'm ugly when He sees my clothes or sees my hair?***

Dwayne Tryumf's music-video for *Thy Kingdom Come* uses visual material taken from his concert at ULU on November 18th 2011. As advertised before the event, the concert was to be recorded for an album, "Live in Concert". The video for *Thy Kingdom Come*, uploaded to YouTube in August 2012, promotes the release of the album. My suggestion is that this music-video presents elements of moral direction in at least two ways. Let me first describe the setting and scenario, and then approach the performance of the moral direction.

The video begins and ends with an animated three dimensional image of an English Gothic Church rising up after a close up of snowy mountains and bare rocks. Thunder and lighting flash over a starry sky in the background. At first, the credits of the music-video are positioned, in capital letters, along the route that the shot takes: from the bare rocks to the background and the church, to then go back again to the bare rocks. After the credits, the shot passes through the ground until, as if we had gone into the basement of a building, we find a stage with many people on it and a huge crowd. From the Kingdom of God, up in the sky, we have now reached the earth. Before the song begins, Dwayne Tryumf is seen talking, walking up and down the stage with a microphone in his

hand, and with the first few rows of the audience shown at the bottom of the screen: “One more time. This is spontaneous, trust me. But let's go one more time”. When Tryumf is about to finish speaking and the song begins, images of people queuing outside the venue are shown, along with images of backstage and on stage. The chorus of the song begins at low volume (“Thy Kingdom Come/Thy Will be Done/ On earth as it is in Heaven”). Tryumf finally begins to rap from the stage. He is seen rapping in real-time, with several insertions of images of other performers, such as the band on stage, and some digital visual effects like this one:

The song, as the title already suggests, is about Judgement Day. References to passages (“Revelation 22:14”) and episodes from the Bible (“no more golden calves in our hearts/ now we've been delivered from the Beast and the Mark/ now we've been invited to the feast of the marriage of the lamb”) are made not only by Tryumf, but also by A Star and Tru2DaName, two of the three other performers in the video – Mattew Allen sings the chorus. A Star mentions another passage from the Bible, while Tru2DaName mentions the astonishment of the Romans at the resurrection of Christ. This first-hand knowledge of the Holy Scriptures is one way for the rappers to exercise moral authority over the listeners: it sounds like an invitation for the followers to become acquainted like the rappers with the word of God: “read the Bible and you will know yourself”.

One could say that it is not necessary to watch the music-video to get this message: listening to the song would be enough. One could even argue that if this was the intention of the director, s/he could have used superimposed words from the lyrics to better capture the attention of the viewers, or other expedients. This is all true. But what I want to stress here is that the image, the visual of the rappers on stage so passionately rapping about God, has the effect of powerfully corroborating the oral content of their verses, particularly so in a music-video that does not present a sophisticated storyline and does not have stylistic editing of the images. The video’s gaze remains statically on a stage during a performance. The performance of the rappers is the main focus of the video; their *body language*. When the last rapper, Tru2DaName, grabs the microphone, something different happens. There is a “surplus” of drama. All the other rappers on stage, around seven or

eight individuals, almost all black, raise their hands, smiling or increasing their nodding as Tru2DaName drops the first lines of his rap. His style, sustained by the tireless rhythm of the bass and drums, appears more animated than those of the previous rappers. This is accompanied by Tru2DaName's body language while rapping: he is wilder, with arms and head moving disorderly but nonetheless in sync. His beanie also contributes to giving him a "street look". The audio-visuals of his performance presents a message for all the street boys and girls out there: "Be yourself! God loves you, no matter how you carry yourself".

The African-American rapper Ambassador, from Cross Movement, has released a song in which he raises a similar point. He thought God would not like his way of being, dressing and talking, so soaked in street hip-hop culture, before realising that God is "rock, latin etc...". To express these doubts, in the chorus of the song he says: "Will He think I am ugly when He sees my clothes or sees my hair?". Tru2DaName seems to be implicitly shouting in this video-clip: "Not at all!"

***d) Who do you think has got us filling out the censuses?***

A Different approach is evident in the director's choices for *Hand On Your Gun* by Lowkey. Set at a rally organised by the "Stop the War Coalition" in Trafalgar Square, the song is an attack on the arms industry. As Lowkey says in the introduction: "This one is dedicated to the suit-wearing arms-dealers, to the champagne-sipping depleted uranium droppers". But instead of being seen saying these things and rapping from the podium of the rally in Trafalgar Square, where the music-video nonetheless shows he is being invited to address the crowd, Lowkey is seen rapping alone, standing in winter clothes in different central London locations. The video alternates images of the rally with images of Lowkey rapping alone, alongside images of informative and illustrative material.

Directed by GlobalFaction, the video begins with images of the crowd in Trafalgar Square holding banners such as "Cut War Not Welfare", and with Lowkey approaching the stage to give a speech. The image of Lowkey stepping on stage, back to the camera, while the rally's host is coming towards the camera, applauding and smiling, is the image chosen by GlobalFaction for the initial

credits of the video. Inside a CGI gun target is written:

> Name: Lowkey
> SoundTrack to The Struggle
> Hand on Your Gun
> Target: Arms Industry
> BAE Systems Lockheed MA

While this takes place and other images of the crowd in the square are shown, such as a participant masked as Tony Blair holding a banner with "Take Me to the Hague" on it and a smiling Julian Assange, a voice, sampled from other sources, is heard saying:

> And everyone got excited about the technology. And I guess it was pretty incredible watching a missile fly down an airvent, pretty unbelievable. But couldn't we feasibly use that same technology to shoot food at hungry people?

Then, after the dedication to the "suit-wearing arms-dealers", the song begins with the chorus, which, like the opening voice, is sampled from another source: "Keep your hand on your gun/Don't you trust anyone".

It is worth recalling other images from the rally featured in the video: there are protesters wearing Obama masks; banners with the faces of George W. Bush and Tony Blair beneath the word "Wanted"; famous figures like Julian Assange and John Pilger giving speeches from the stage, and Tony Bennet being shown greeting someone; journalists with microphones and cameras covering the demonstration. These, as said previously, are interspersed with images of Lowkey rapping in different central London locations. But at the beginning of each verse, and after Lowkey says "First in my scope is BAE Systems" and "Next in my scope is Lockheed Martin", a different type of image is introduced. These are diagrams from arms industry literature, showing and describing the properties of rockets, tanks and rifles. On a few occasions the CGI target of the initial credits returns with information like: "Barclays, the largest investor in global arms, has £7.3 billion in shares and is amongst the Top 10 largest investors in US arms companies", and "HSBC holds shares in the global arms industry worth £450 million and has loaned £27 billion to the industry".

This information is added to that which Lowkey provides in his lyrics, full of various references and the names of companies: we have A&R (Artists and Repertoire), a division of a record label responsible for talent scouting; names such BAE Systems, Lockheed Martin, BBC, Rolls-Royce; historical figures, like the inventor of the nuclear bomb Oppenheimer, and contemporary mercenaries like Erik Prince; stories like that of the nine anti-war activists who

damaged the Raytheon military factory in Derry, Northern Ireland; shocking revelations such as that Lockheed Martin is behind the management of Guantanamo Bay and the UK census. The result is a visual and aural bombardment of information. But this bombardment has two objectives.

The first is to "visually wake up" the audience regarding the arms trade and the pervasiveness of the industry of death, up to and including the management of things considered "civilian", like the census and production of cars. If most of the video still has not obtained such an objective, the viewer cannot remain impassive when presented with the final scene of a newborn baby, deformed by the effects of the war industry, being assisted by some doctors. The screaming baby has three legs. After this disturbing image has been shown, the target comes back with a provocative message in it: "Sleep Well".

The second objective of the video is to establish the authority of Lowkey as a prominent representative of those who try to wake up the people. The video shows Lowkey addressing the crowd at the anti-war gathering from the same stage where other authoritative figures like Julian Assange and John Pilger have spoken. The video shows Lowkey at the same rally as an iconic figure of the British Radical Left, Tony Benn. Lowkey is shown being interviewed by a journalist with a camera.

This all suggests that the viewer sees in Lowkey someone who is worth following, in order to expand on the message given in the music-video.

**The Crystal Body of the Punchline**

It can be seen that my reading of these two music-videos is an interpretation of the images they display in order to "index" the moral direction they offer. This index, I have said, is the crystal-image, composed of optical as well as aural material. Felix Guattari, Deleuze reminds us in passing, calls this *ritornello* (Deleuze 1989: 93), a form that repeats continuously like the chorus of a song, and this analogy is apt for the point I want to address in the next sections. In rap, a *ritornello* is

lyrically composed of “punchlines”, the units which, like newspaper headlines, capture the attention of the listener. “I’m a hip-hop member like you”, as Ty said at the Restless Beings’ event, is a punchline. Had he decided to make a song with this punchline in the chorus, and a music-video based on footage his show, the added-value the process of de-territorialisation would have conferred to his performance would all be in the director’s strategies. Had the director opted to emphasise the body language of the rapper, as the majority of hip-hop music-videos do, the viewer might experience the *punchline attached to a body*. This is the “crystal body”, I suggest. In Dwayne Tryumf’s video, what the watcher can see is the “spontaneous body”, to employ a word used by the rapper himself; in Lowkey’s video, in contrast, is the “anti-war body”. This is particularly the case if the viewer enjoys watching. There has to be an emotional attachment for this process of fixing words to images to be successful. This is why artists normally decide to shoot a video for a song that is already deemed to be strong in itself. A video can give added-value to it. But the problem with the video strategies that give centrality to the body is the following: what happens when the body on screen belongs to the person who is watching it?

## 3) Bad Parrhesia of the Punchline

**The Revolution Has Been Televised**

This is the “power of the false” of the punchline. Consider the following situation.

After the August riots of 2011, some London rappers who were somehow seen as being responsible for the riots by some in the media spoke out against the episodes of looting and the burning of shops and houses that took place in the three days of riots. Among them, rapper AC decided to film his intervention and uploaded it to YouTube. Speaking from the inside of a car, AC begins by condemning the looters, for whom he reserves the appellative of “dickheads”, which he shouts repeatedly. The looters are “dickheads” in his view because instead of burning down police stations, as the police should be righteously blamed for the killing of Mark Duggan, they burnt down people's shops, ruining their businesses. “What's the point of doing this?”, AC asks himself, adding that looting is not justified as the people in London cannot be called poor: the real poor people are somewhere else, certainly not in Britain where the State can even pay your rent. “Dickheads” is also used for David Cameron, the government and the police who allowed this to happen, not just by standing by passively, but also – and here he sees the responsibility as lying with politicians from the early 80s onwards, from Margaret Thatcher to Tony Blair – for having brainwashed younger generations with the culture of materialism, feeding their need to always have

new branded goods. If the younger generations really want to rebel against those who are in power, AC argues, they should reject such materialistic culture and start educating themselves in the manner of, say, Huey Newton of the Black Panthers: self-education and empowerment through personal research and knowledge. A step which AC declares to have undertaken himself. In his view, this is mainly what differentiates him from the looters:

> I look up to real revolutionaries, to people like Che Guevara. He never did no looting. When they fucked up Cuba and took over Cuba, if you watch the movie, yeah, them people they nicked a car, they nicked a Cadillac and were all like "ah, look at this Che Guevara, look at the car we got". He said: "Take the fucking car back, you prick! What the fuck you are doing? We're not thieves. Take the fucking car back. It's not your car. Later, you know what I am saying, we'll redistribute all the wealth, later, yeah. But now if they see you as a fucking thief and all you wanna do is just have bullshit trainers and bullshit fucking TVs, you don't even need them, they are gonna programme your brain with fucking shit […] What's the fucking point of this? (http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0bTDlsxjZ8l, uploaded on 10/8/2011)

The movie that AC mentions the final scene of is *Che: The Argentine* by American director Steven Soderbergh. The reference is used here not to highlight the movie but to illustrate one aspect of the revolutionary life of Ernesto Che Guevara. "If you watch the movie" corresponds here to a reference to the real life of Che, not to the representation of this life in a movie. In other words, in accusing the looters of not being revolutionaries, AC is presenting a scene of *Che: The Argentine* as if it really happened, as if it really took place in Che Guevara's life, conflating a fictional movie with reality.

It is interesting to notice how AC, without realising it, is contravening here one important dogma in conscious rap: the relationship between "truth" and screen. Gil Scott-Heron, considered the godfather of African-American rap, sang *The Revolution Will Not Be Televised* in the 1970s. One of the most quoted statements from Malcolm X used by rappers to explain their relationship with State Media goes as follows: "If you're not careful, the newspapers will have you hating the people who are being oppressed, and loving the people who are doing the oppressing". AC, by contrast, is placing his confidence in an image taken from a movie and believing it really occured in Che Guevara's life when explaning what "revolution" and being a "revolutionary" mean.

Reveal, during a conversation we had in a cafe on the Edgware Road on November 10th 2011, said that in hip-hop "people want to have a *leader* more than be inspired to do their own research". This explains why it is sufficient for AC to watch *Che: The Argentine* in order to establish that Che Guevara is one of his personal "heroes", without even researching whether the movie is congruent with Che Guevara's life. But it does not explain why AC is using such a movie to claim for himself the category of the leader, in respect to the looter "followers", who in his

opinion are brainwashed by the materialism of TV and the dominant discourse.

Reveal is, however, useful in getting to grips with this situation. Consider what he says about what he discovered when he started a module at SOAS on religion:

> I was interested in religion, and Wu Tang, Killah Priest and Tupac are rappers that talk about Illuminati, Freemasons and the Templars. I went to SOAS, I've done a course called Study of Religion. I've done the classroom, I read books and I studied for three years and I realised that everything I've heard in hip-hop, 90% was bullshit. It was a part of the truth that they haven't researched properly.

This is his opinion on Immortal Technique, a popular Latino rapper from Harlem, known worldwide:

> I'm not a big fan of Immortal Technique. What I don't like is that he reads something and he put it in his music, so I can show you this song that he made, he read this article and there's no more thought than that in it. He's a false prophet.

So here is described the condition of the rapper who styles himself as a leader without doing the necessary research to claim this role. The result is being a "false prophet". Notice how Reveal's analysis fits well with the "power of the false" of the crystal image and Nietzsche's "will to power" as the power of domination. But what is the relationship between the consumption of images and standing up to speak the truth as a rapper?

**Prisoner of One's Own Image-on-the-Screen**

Foucault, in his lectures at the College de France, eloquently stresses that in ancient Greece, democracy and *parrhesia* were energetically linked to one another. The more human virtues, such as courage and explicative neatness, a *parrhesiast* displays in telling the truth, the more efficient the democratic system ends up being. Such a mechanism is, however, always threatened by some other factors, like the nasty consequences for the *parrhesiast* in telling the truth. This is what happened following the Peloponnesian War and the death of Pericles (495-429 BC), regarded by Thucydides, whose work Foucault comments on, as the last great interpreter of the intimate connection between *parrhesia* and democracy. After Pericles comes the decadence of Athens as a democracy and the emergence of *parrhesia* as "bad *parrhesia*", not truth-telling but demagogy delivered by flatterers. Here, Foucault notices, *parrhesia* is no longer an activity that only those who demonstrate exceptional certain human qualities can do, it has become something anybody can do:

> […] instead of ascendency being exercised through the specific difference of true discourse, the bad ascendency of anybody is achieved through conformity to what anybody may say and think. […] the true

> armature of this false true discourse is not the singular courage of the person who, like Pericles, is able to turn against the people and reproach them in turn. Instead of this courage, we find individuals who seek only one thing: to ensure their own safety and their own success by pleasing their listeners, by flattering their feelings and opinions. The bad *parresia* which drives out the good is then, if you like, "everybody", "anybody", saying anything, provided it is well received by anybody, that is to say, everybody. Such is the mechanism of the bad parresia, which is basically the elimination of the distinctive difference of truth-telling in the game of democracy. (Foucault 2010: 183)

Like the intellectuals of ancient Athens who could detect when a rhetorical performance was "bad *parrhesia*", rappers can do the same with rap, as we have seen with Reveal. At the "Hip-Hop Spirituals" conference in London, for instance, panellist and rapper Apex spoke against a certain thoughtlessness with which many rappers talk of "revolution". A point which I asked him to clarify during the interview he gave, in a Shepherd's Bush cafe, on December 11th 2011.

> The point I was making was that, not only in hip-hop but also in literature or art or anything, you have people who put on themselves this tag of revolutionary. I mean, that's all good if this is actually contributing to revolution. But let's say you have someone in the Palestinian liberation army calling himself revolutionary but not doing anything revolutionary: he will never get away with that. Here, instead, in artistic media, you have the system that has been able to sort of capture your revolutionary spirit and keep it prisoner. Some would say: "you know there's something wrong with the world, I wanna change it so what I do is sit down and write a song about it" and that's it, that's enough. But that's not enough!

Apex's image of the "media able to capture your revolutionary spirit and make it prisoner" is worth exploring. The prison he is talking about is that of the rapper saying "I'm a revolutionary". There is a song in London rap that has a similar punchline in the chorus: "I'm an activist". The music-video is of some interest. The song is by Jaja Soze featuring Logic and other rappers from the People's Army. The sequence of images for the chorus is repeated continuously, they are literally the same imagess, the same shots and perspective angles that are shown each time. There is a black singer seen singing "I'm an activist. My colour is black. My shade is light. I'm back in this". But behind him, in the background, four people are always shown. Two of them are Logic and another rapper featured in the song. The other two appear as cameos: they are Lowkey and Jody McIntyre. Individual close-up shots of them are then provided in the outro of the song, when the camera also dwells upon Jody McIntyre's wheelchair. Both Lowkey and Jody do not have a role in the actual song, but they do in the video. They are standing there as if to give their approval to a song about what everybody in the London conscious scene knows them to be: activists.

As both Lowkey and Jody were probably asked to be in the video, and it was not them who edited the sequences of images which keep returning with the chorus, this video shows how they

are classified by their peers in the hip-hop scene. How do they cope with their peers' estimation that they are London's ultimate activists and revolutionaries? In the following two examples, I suggest looking at the passions that go with becoming a prisoner of one's own image on the screen.

***a) Paranoia of the Heroic Death***

Lowkey's much acclaimed album, "Soundtrack to the Struggle", begins with this statement in its very first track: "It's been a long time coming, too long, too long. It's been in the making a quarter of century, but is here now, is here now." And then: "If by the time you hear this album, I am not here, you know why", leaving the listener with the disturbing thought that he could be killed for what he says in the album.

The last track of Immortal Technique's "Martyr" mixtape, *Ultimas Palabras*, evokes a similar but more fanciful situation. Immortal Technique is the President of the United States addressing the Nation in a speech more than seven minutes long. He talks about controversial issues such as slavery, imperialism, renewable energy, immigration and corporate oligarchy in America. The speech ends with the firing of a gun which presumably kills the orator at the exact moment at which he is about to say the names of "those who truly control this country, those that control the political parties, those that control the oil industry, the energy, those that stand behind the companies, faceless, whose names have never been revealed, until to...". Here Technique is killed. He is killed as a martyr, as a revolutionary hero, as a Malcolm X; killed for his act of telling the truth.

Although less striking than Immortal Technique's, Lowkey's strategy of implying to the listeners that he could "not be here" because of the revolutionary content of his "Soundtrack to the Struggle", needs to be positioned within the same attempt to present the rapper as a heroic truth-teller. In being detached from any fictional setting, such as Technique's simulation of a public speech with background sounds and applauses, Lowkey's seriousness in delivering his message makes it even more dramatic, conveying the idea to the listener that Lowkey really believes he could be killed for rapping. There is no signal for the listener whatsoever that this is a dramatic ploy, a deliberate exaggeration. This gives the cliché of the heroic death an air of anguish and paranoia.

***b) Pleasure in Being Called Revolutionary***

On Monday December 13th 2010, anchorman Ben Brown of the BBC News24 channel introduced Jody McIntyre in the BBC Westminster studio to discuss an incident involving McIntyre during the student demonstrations over tuition fees on Thursday 9th. Video footage, viral on the internet in the days preceding the interview, showed McIntyre being pulled out of his wheelchair and dragged

across the road by a Metropolitan Police Officer. After explaining the situation and showing the footage, Brown asks McIntyre why he had not yet made an official complaint. After McIntyre's reply that he will soon do so, Brown begins to reveal his prejudices. On the basis of a limited concept of "revolution", he repeatedly suggests that McIntyre had somehow provoked the police's reaction. I focus here on how McIntyre reacts to the insinuations of the BBC journalist.

At least five questions from Brown support the idea that someone who classifies themself as a "revolutionary" necessarily attacks the Police[87]. To these, McIntyre answers ambiguously. On the one hand, he manages on several occasions to effectively break down the line of interpretation of the anchorman by letting other critical arguments enter the dialogue. This happens when he questions the real role of the police during demonstrations, revealed, according to him, by the case of Alfie Meadows, a student struck in the head by the police and hospitalised. This also happens when, very opportunely, he manages to connect what he feels to be the prejudice of the journalist towards him with the attitude of the company for which he works (the BBC) towards the Palestinian conflict, which shows, in his view, how the media often blame the ones who are subjected to violence instead of the perpetrators. On the other hand, however, McIntyre doesn't necessarily question Brown's idea of revolution. He doesn't directly confront his presumption that being a revolutionary means fighting the police. Brown has every reason for using against McIntyre's his own interpretation of revolution as quoted in *The Observer*. And McIntyre is here not able to break down Brown's argument when asked if he classifies himself as a "revolutionary", or when he is referred to in such a way ("But you do say you are a revolutionary") by the journalist. In the first case, McIntyre answers: "I don't classify myself as anything"; in the second, he limits himself to saying: "that's a word, not a physical action I've taken against the police". But in both cases the idea that a real revolutionary is somebody involved in direct action on the streets against the representatives of the institutions is not challenged but strengthened. When asked by me about why he did not reject the idea being imposed by Brown that a revolutionary has to be a violent man, Jody answered with:

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87 1) "In the Observer newspaper you were described as a cyber radical and you were quoted as saying that you want to build a "revolutionary movement" and that can only happen "through direct action on the streets". Do you classify yourself as a revolutionary?" 2) "I need to say I was in Parliament Square covering the demonstration and I saw protesters throwing rocks, missiles, very missiles at the police. Were you throwing anything at all at the police during that day?" 3) "Were you harmed in any way in that incident with the police?" 4) "Why then do you think the police picked on you twice? Why do you think they did?" 5) "And you didn't shout anything provocative or throw anything that would have induced the police to do that to you?" The journalist concludes with "But you do say you are a revolutionary!" after a negative answer from McIntyre. Some viewers complained to the BBC about the presenter's behaviour during the interview, stressing that there was some prejudice in the journalist's repetitions of the same question to the interviewed without taking into consideration the fact that he had already answered negatively. The BBC stated in the following weeks that an internal commission conducted to deal with the complaint, concluding however that nothing unprofessional on the part of Brown was detected.

> Well, the thing is that I didn't really dignify that question with an answer because it's a ridiculous question and it's not worth an answer. His understanding is so little that is not worth an answer. But my analysis is this: the BBC, the British Broadcasting Corporation, are the State media in this country. We often talk about the Venezuelan State Media, or Libyan State Media or the Iranian State Media as some kind of propaganda machine but why don't we look at the State Media in this country? The BBC represents the vision of the government, the vision of the State. That is their job. So they have no interest at all in interviewing me in a proper manner. (Interview conducted on 7/11/2011)

I still see his interview as a missed opportunity to tactically challenge the State Media interpretation of revolution and a revolutionary. But the problem this interview raises is that the official way of seeing (and disparaging) the revolution may coincide with that of the young protesters in the streets, particularly those who chanted "One Solution, Revolution" and then attacked the police without being attacked first. There might be a subliminal pleasure working here: the self-satisfaction of being called revolutionary. This pleasure may impair judgment and prevent the pleased individual from realising that this fits with the intentions of those who want to disparage protesters and what they stand for.

**Toscanini Syndrome**

I want to label the passion that accompanies these two episodes, and also the vocal way in which AC says that he is a revolutionary, as "Toscanini syndrome". The reference is to *The Mastery of the Maestro*, an essay in which Theodor Adorno (1999) reads critically a much-awaited performance by opera conductor Artuno Toscanini in Berlin. Adorno does not have kind words for the performance, although he judges the event to have been a success. What made it a success was the "barbarism of perfection" that Toscanini displayed, especially with the Italian operas: "a precision that went far beyond anything seen in the German-speaking world" (Adorno 1999: 40). This extraordinary precision had, though, a counter-effect, that of being "hostile to the spirit" of variations within the same opera, its pathos. Adorno criticises Toscanini for not being able to step out of the score, the pre-established, so as not to give full sensuousness to the opera. This is a criticism, he argues, that only an expert audience can detect, not a non-expert one who, by contrast, would be naively impressed by Toscanini's precision. In *Fetish Character* this point becomes a polemic against Benjamin's concept of "distracted attention", arguing that distraction does not make listeners to a music industry-produced record progress in any way, arguing rather that the opposite is true (see Adorno 1985). The difference between them is in the position they take when looking at the same phenomenon: Adorno from the point of view of production, Benjamin consumption. And while I suggest that Adorno's emphasis on the fullness of attention applies to what Appadurai calls the "fetishism of production", this is still a "distracted production". By this I mean that while Toscanini

is focused on following the score, he also deals distractingly with the variations. That is why he goes back to the score. Distraction is here *desperation* that the stubbornness in following the score masks. We can now apply this reading to the passions mentioned above.

London-based rapper and poet Ruby Kid suggested, during an interview in a bar in Holborn on December 19th 2011, that the way punchlines are produced in London rap has lost a certain creativity.

> The current formulation today would be: "I move a lot of snow, an avalanche". It's so distilled, it's like a set of, set of, punches. There's no time taken, being creative. I have a line that goes "I don't know what would have to happen to get rappers to rap about other than how good they are at rapping".

My suggestion is that Lowkey, McIntyre and AC, are, like Toscanini, only focused on following the score; that is, they *have to* give punchlines. But these punchlines, as they are not prepared with suspension and resolution, do not punch as they would if the score was not followed literally. The "I'm a revolutionary" punchline is a sign of the difficulty the rapper has in conforming to a format that wants them to give punchlines. Like Toscanini, they revert to what is taken for granted, but this move hides what they do not master: the beat. A rapper's flow might even be *too good*, like Toscanini's precision, but they have not made the music over which they are rapping.

In his most recent book, Paul Gilroy (2010: 120-177) suggests that since its early days, hip-hop has progressively moved towards the digital sophistication of its technological equipment: a sophistication requiring less and less skill. But a producer still needs to know how to use this equipment. The point is that one who is trained as a rapper might never become a producer. This is the case with many of the rappers I have interviewed. The exceptions are either senior rappers, such as Ty, or rappers who are also musically trained and can play one or more instrument, like Sensei, Ruby Kid's friend who I interviewed on the same occasion. The contrasting rule is that one who starts rapping will stay focussed only on rap, collaborating with producers who will provide them with beats to rap over. This joint venture reduces significantly the time needed for, say, a student of the guitar to learn to play with skill a song with three or four chord changes from beginning to end. A rapper learns quicker how to throw rhymes over a beat only because he is not concerned with *making* music.

There are plenty of examples of rappers who make their own music. But this is normally a second stage. The punchline celebrates the temporality of the fastness. Its emotional image keeps returning. Yet not the same thing, the aura, felt when first consuming it: it is actually the same thing distorted by the sad passions of the obstinate person who wants to dress in the same outfit, even though in some places the stitching is unravelling and it needs some repairing. The repair eventually

takes place but this involves a different temporality. The alter ego of the fetishism of production, Appadurai also stresses, is consumption as a "form of work": a work of imagination that poses the conditions for the liberation of the body from the "techniques of the body".

> This labour is not principally targeted at the production of commodities but is directed at producing the conditions of consciousness in which *buying* can occur. Every housewife knows that housekeeping is work as real as any other. We are all housekeepers now, labouring daily to practice the disciplines of purchase in a landscape whose temporal structures have become radically polyrhytmic. Learning these multiple rhythms (of bodies, products, fashions, interest rates, gifts, and styles) and how to integrate them is not just work – it is the hardest sort of work, the work of the imagination. We are back then to Durkheim and Mauss and the nature of collective consciousness, but now with a twist. The work of consumption is as fully social as it is symbolic, no less work for involving the discipline of the imagination. But increasingly freed from the techniques of the body, the work of consumption is all the more open-ended, situated in histories and genealogies whose conjuncture has to be examined, alas, case by case. (Appadurai 1996: 83)

This open-endedness implies another aesthetic of temporality in which the punchline can be thought. In the final section below I suggest that this is duration.

## 4) Wearing

**Arrogance vs Confidence**

Some of my informants (Ty, Sarina Leah) told me that hip-hop allowed them to overcome shyness. It has given them a secure model of a relationship between themselves and others. Hip-hop came into their adolescent lives as a form of empowerment. My experience, as shown at the beginning of this chapter with an illustration, is similar. I want to show a picture below – taken from the blog of Anna-Lina Balke – which embodies a similar form of empowerment. This is the "b-boy stance", a posture associated with the art-form of breakdance and which accompanies the breakdancer's acknowledgment of the audience and adversaries at the beginning and end of the breakdance routine. The b-boy stance captures the moment of pride in which the dancer seems to be saying to the world: "Here I am". This picture is relevant because it shows a young boy doing the stance, as if proof of the fact that one first encounters hip-hop when very young.

Other informants, such as Muneera from Poetic Pilgrimage, have also stressed that when they first embraced hip-hop, it fed their arrogance. Ty has a particular view on the relationship between arrogance and humility in hip-hop:

> When you see arrogance, really what you see is insecurity. It's not really a brutal arrogance. It's rather trying to get noticed, your attention, your respect. You must respect me, you must listen to me. It often comes from youths who do not yet know how to be men and don't necessarily know how to get attention. They used to be ignored and they're trying to get attention.

The arrogance is depicted as a sort of initiation ritual that can be replaced with confidence only when the bigger picture of where hip-hop comes from is clear in the hip-hopper's mind:

> I play the humble but my thing is not really humbleness. It's being secure. I'm secure. I've been around for a long time and I understand the rules of the game, where it comes from and what it's about.

Security comes after embracing an investigative mood, while arrogance is more or less an instantaneous aesthetic which is destined to not last long, until one has reached an internal state of maturity. For Sensei as well, a Birmingham rapper based in London, security is accompanied with reaching an internal state of maturity, which is the perfect antidote to arrogance.

> It's like this, I have this opinion, this might offend a few people here but I think that it's a point to be made and I'll make it, but then within yourself you need to have the humbleness that it might be wrong and you need to be able to listen to other people's opinions. I would say that that is absolutely essential in hip-hop, you need to have fire, to make a record that smashes it, but also to respect the other warriors. (Interview conducted on 19/12/2011)

As we can see, in these two testimonies hip-hop is not rejected even when addressing the problematic aspect of arrogance within hip-hop. The same attitude is shown by Reveal and Ruby Kid, who spoke critically about about false prophets in hip-hop and the mainstream "punchline"

style, but who never thought about stopping rapping because of this. Conversely, it was through this internal criticism that hip-hop was fully embraced: notice how Ty invokes the "rules of the game" to say that he knows what hip-hop is, and how Sensei says that it is "essential in hip-hop to respect the other warriors". One would say that it is precisely here that the apparel of hip-hop, as a language with its own grammar and vocabulary, is worn. But wearing is a full-time experience, it is to inhabit what Sensei calls "humbleness within yourself", and Ty "security" arising from an investigative mood. It is not to adopt a tactical posture of the body in itself: it is not about the "worn". Wearing is duration in a Bergsonian sense.

**Wearing doesn't need Saying**

Here we find ourselves at the final conflict within the body of the worn language: that between wearing and saying. This is the conflict that Lowkey has recently been engaged in. On April 18th 2012 he shocked his fans by leaving this message on his facebook page:

> After many months of contemplation I have decided to step away from music and concentrate on my studies. Maybe at some point I will get back into it again but at this stage I feel I should direct my energy in different, more helpful directions. The ego is a destructive thing and I feel this business and these social networks in particular have a tendency to feed it in an unhealthy way. I will be deactivating this page. Thank you for all those who have supported me over the years. See you on the other side people.

If we read this message with Malcolm X's statement in mind about the need to be careful when dealing with media, we can say that here Lowkey seems to have understood, perhaps more incisively than Malcolm X, why distraction is the key to oppression: it is all about repetition. An interruption is needed to disrupt the repetitions he finds himself in the midst of. His announcement of silence is configured primarily as an *act of love* towards himself, as his speaking activity made him realise that he was destructively feeding his ego. The sad passion of narcissism is the ultimate reason why one needs to be careful when dealing with media and new media. Lowkey, who became famous through the new media, was not able to immunise himself to the ephemeral pleasure of being tagged, commented, liked, interviewed, and filmed on Facebook where his page had more than 100,000 fans. He eventually manages to do so and this shows that he always could, that wearing does not need the repetition of the saying. Lowkey might get back to rapping after a pause for study and research, or he might not if he so decides. But he will not cease to inhabit the hip-hop attitude with which he rapped all these years, with intensity and authority. In either case, it is now, with this message to his fans and the silence that follows, that he is showing how a rapper can be, off-stage and off-screen, a Gramscian intellectual.

We are now ready to answer the question we raised at the beginning of the chapter, which is whether the Flavor Flav-to-Chuck D relationship is a fake relationship in the format of a hip-hop show because the lyrical seriousness of Chuck D is never going to be interpellated, while everything lives and dies with the fun provided by Flavour Flav. Building on Lowkey's withdrawal from the rap game, I want to suggest that to get to Chuck D it is necessary to exit the hyped-up temporality and submit to duration. Duration keeps flowing for the time necessary for finding a meaning and to justify an act. When this happens, the deterritorialisation/re-territorialisation dynamic is rebalanced according to the wearing rather than the worn. Wearing, in other words, is like flowing. But just as flowing needs a flow to be flowing, so does wearing: it is always connected to the clothing worn by a body. This is why it is important to put words, bodies, images in circulation. This is why Remaking Europe uploaded a music-video to the internet.

**Conclusion**

In an Italian National TV program, *Terza B: Facciamo L'Appello*, broadcast in 1975, writer, poet and film-maker Pier Paolo Pasolini (1922-1975) argued that television as a medium of mass communication is "terrifyingly anti-democratic", because "when somebody listens to you speaking on screen, he is immediately experiencing you as superior and him as inferior". He continues: "speaking on screen is like speaking *ex-cathedra*, even if this is masked with democracy". The host, journalist Enzo Biagi, responds by arguing that the same thing might happen with a book and a newspaper, re-dimensioning Pasolini's suggestion that the experience of the screen presents some peculiarity.

This chapter has defended Pasolini's position on this debate and taken it further. Pasolini had already actually done so himself. He suggested, for instance, that the mass introduction of TV in post-war Italy had produced an "anthropological fracture", and the introduction of a semiology that made traditions perish while favouring the homogenisation and bourgeoisation of society along with an explosion of narcissism. These are themes that the Frankfurt School had addressed before him. Pasolini voiced a certain strain of nostalgia that seeps into the work of the Frankfurt School. He did not have any hope for the future. He was the "last poet of the Italian decadentism", as his friend and writer Alberto Moravia described him following his violent, and still mysterious, death. Yet he kept working, making films, writing, giving speeches, never giving in to the decadence. It was probably because he knew that "Democracy is Dead" that he worked so hard and eventually died.

Benjamin differed from Adorno precisely in attributing a role of potential emancipation to mass consumption. I have developed his suggestion of the "distracted attention" of the film viewer

by adopting Gilles Deleuze's approach to cinema. Both authors took their own lives. But their work is still alive today, and in Deleuze's concept of nomadism the two would have met. As Deleuze says in the *Abecedaire* television programme, one can experience a "rupture" while remaining seated at one's own chair. While seated, one can have a mental journey with important consequences for one's own surroundings, for the "re-territorialisation". While seated, you can "remake yourself", as the metaphysical narrative voice of *Rebuild Remake* suggests the viewers to do in order to stop celebrating the Imperial past of their neighbourhoods. But a music-video cannot in itself defeat the boxing obsession. Conversely, precisely in crystallising scripted bodies onto a screen, a music-video, as a powerful narrative, is instrumental in naturalising the boxing obsession. What a video can do, though, like any other form of communication, is produce "sections of duration" in one's head, in which the boxing obsession will never win. The instant, the ephemeral, is simply run over by the endurance of duration. This is when the mental sensation is questioned. Here lies the possibility for an act of rupture.

# Conclusion

In a 1964 short paper, *The End of Philosophy and the Task of Thinking*, Martin Heidegger poses the problem of what I have called the boxing obsession in the Western philosophical tradition, and the domination of "cybernetics" in the society of mass consumption. Philosophy has ended, Heidegger argues – it has reached its full maturation: "the completion of metaphysics" (Heidegger 1977: 374). From that time onwards, science took the lead, becoming an independent field which no longer needs philosophy, even though it was from the space that Greek philosophy opened up that science developed. Science is the completion of the search for the causes and principles of things, the Being of being, that all Greeks, not just Plato but also the Pre-Socratics and even Homer, looked for[88]. Science, with the efficaciousness the *techne* provides, has simply taken to extreme consequences Aristotle's empirical search for cause and principle, offering a more solid *episteme* – which means a knowledge that stands on its own feet – than the one philosophy gives. Here is the end of philosophy.

Forty-six years later, British physicist Stephen Hawking wrote in *Grand Design* that "philosophy is dead. Philosophy has not kept up with modern developments in science, particularly physics. Scientists have become the bearers of the torch of discovery in our quest for knowledge" (Hawking 2010: 4). Physicists and scientists are for Hawking the new philosophers, since their discoveries are enabling humanity to get closer to knowing the origins of life than any philosopher has. Allow me to say with bitterness that thinking has really ended if we assume that technological thought can really explain the "Mystery of Being", the title of the first chapter of Hawking's book. On the one hand, it is true that philosophy, especially the continental tradition, has not kept up with modern science – this is an error. But on the other hand, that tradition from Plato to Derrida, the last great philosopher, is unavoidable if a physicist wants to be a philosopher.

Along with philosophy, anthropology and all the Humanities have also ended or are in the process of ending. This is why I have discussed in this thesis the work of Tim Ingold, who presents one of the most interesting proposals for reinventing anthropology that the contemporary Western debate is offering. But to go beyond the tradition of Western anthropology an actual jump out of the academic institutions is necessary. This is the jump that Claude Levi-Strauss, possibly the last great anthropologist of that tradition, was unable to make. Some may read, and certainly his Unesco audience did, the climax of "cultural racism" in 1971's *Race and Culture*, in which he argued that cultures are constantly at war with one another. But this was the recognition of a failure: personal

[88] Heidegger says the reduction of the Being to the presence, reworking some of his previous conclusions, may already begin with Parmenides' *aletheia*, intended as the revealing, opening up of thinking. This is not what the natural sciences intended as "truth". But it is what presents the conditions for it to be so. (Heidegger 1977: 387-392)

and professional as well as that of a civilisation – racism was yet to be defeated and did not look like it ever would be[89]. The population explosion, medicine and industrialisation were for Levi-Strauss at the heart of the problem. This view shocked the same Unesco audience that was happy to hear, nineteen years earlier in *Race and History*, that cultures grow with coalition and exchange. Ironically, "cultural racism" would be the strategy that, since 1972 with the "World Heritage List" and especially in the 90s[90] when "political correctness" became a public morality in the West, Unesco adopted to protect and defend cultural diversity. But defend it from what? Homogenisation of cultures was the risk that Levi-Strauss, who had built a career on the preservation of differences, felt unprepared to face in 1971, sensing that this could establish in the near future a "regime of exacerbated intolerance […] without even having to use ethnic difference as a pretext" (Levi-Strauss 1992: 24). Technology and science, we can say today forty years after his warning, have been and are the primary vectors of the Westernisation of the world. With the result that Man is no longer the subject of history – Western technology is. This is the extreme stage that the Western world has reached by embarking upon the reductionist path ushered in by the boxing obsession. A path which has reduced the human first to a letter and number, then to statistics on ethnicity, gender, race and ultimately genetic and neural chemical components[91].

But the game is not over yet. There is still one determining thing that Heidegger has to say in his paper. What is left as the last task for philosophy, when philosophy is finished, is also the "first possibility for thinking […] a possibility from which the thinking of philosophy would have to start, but which as philosophy it could nevertheless not experience and adopt" (Heidegger 1977: 377). Philosophy, as we know it today, has to die to re-start thinking. The same applies to anthropology, I argue. They both need to escape the boxing obsession by embracing that time and space which precedes the institutionalisation of the discipline in Plato's Academy. Socrates! He was neither the first philosopher, nor the first anthropologist: we should rather see him now as the first fieldworker. His field was the Athens' streets, and he was doing at the beginning what the anthropologists have done at the end. This is the return home of anthropology.

I have taken this approach here, employing Ingold's suggestion that anthropology can be a

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89 "Nothing idicates that racial prejudices are declining; and after brief periods of local calm, everything points to their resurfacing elsewhere with a greater intensity. Hence the need felt by UNESCO periodically to resume a struggle whose outcome appears uncertain at best. Furthermore, are we so sure that the racist form of intolerance results chiefly from the wrong ideas of this or that group of people about the dependence of cultural evolution on organic evolution? Might not these ideas be simply ideological camouflage for more concrete oppositions based on a desire to subjugate other groups and maintain a position of power? Such was certainly the case in the past. But, even granting that these relationships of force are diminishing, might not racial difference continue to serve as a pretext for the increasing difficulty of living together, as unconsciously felt by humanity in the grips of the population explosion?" (Levi Strauss 1992: 20-21).

90 In 1992 the List was enlarged with the "Memory List", and in 1997 the concept of "oral and immaterial memory of humanity" was defined.

91 This is the scenario some have begun depicting with the expression *post-human*.

better philosophy than the one provided by armchair philosophers (Ingold 2011: 243). But I have also done something more. I have reconciled Nietzsche's "OverMan" and maxim "Become Who You Are" with Socrates' example and Delphic maxim "Know Yourself". I have done this by taking to its extreme consequence the figure ignored by the defeated historical political Left in Europe and the '68 Parisian intellectuals: the Gramscian Organic Intellectual. It is hypocritical to keep saying that the fieldworker is neutral. Even more hypocritical is saying that the fieldworker is not neutral but then acting as if they were by following, rather superstitiously, preestablished fieldwork methodologies. This is masking the fieldworker's will to power – fieldworkers build a career out of their fieldwork endeavours. By contrast, the scenario in which the researcher plays the game of fieldwork by putting all their cards on the table is politically fruitful. Socrates created something new when he began doing this, asking pressing questions of his fellow citizens, with the result of founding a public morality. Something which eventually cost him his life. My aim is precisely to reconnect with this courage – the bravery of *parrhesia* – while "exiting the text". I do so to keep asking the last question an ethnographer, at the end of fieldwork, can ask, which is also the first: how can we defeat racism? – which doesn't mean how my informants can or cannot, nor the anthropologist, but the two together. How can we? Why did we not do it – in the sense that racism still has to be eliminated? And why can we always do it?

Narcissism, I argued in Chapter 1, is the bio-cultural dynamic responsible for the production of the Western boxing obsession and consequently contemporary racism. Narcissism, I concluded in Chapter 5, is also the syndrome which audio-visual technologies have favoured precisely by exploiting such an embodied dynamic – the mirror system – offering the reproducibility of an aesthetics and acoustics to the personal past of the subject. But the temporality referred to in Chapter 2, while chronicling the attempt put in place by the ethnographer alongside Babar Luck – to make Londoners inhabit London in a different way than the boxing obsession suggests they do – is the jump out from within the flow of Western civilisation that Westerners have always been capable of making. In Chapter 3 I called this the "Language of the Heart", arguing that in this Born Again, Islamic and Conscious Rap are indistinguishable. In the same temporality, I suggested in Chapter 4, Black and White hip-hoppers engage without positioning themselves in relation to the history of slavery. In both cases, though, I have also shown how the potential that such a temporality brings with it dies the moment at which the word acquires one and only one meaning, which is the meaning suggested by the morality of political correctness.

Wittgenstein in the *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus* demonstrated that this temporality cannot be explained. In the *Philosophical Investigations* he corrected this by adding that this temporality can be shown. But he did not change his views on the fact that this temporality just

happens. What he called the "mystic" just happens[92]. And it is extremely important that it does – like Socrates, one knows that one knows nothing when it happens. It calls into being the limit of one's own language and as such it opens up the path to the possibility of another word and world[93]. Such a possibility, like Lowkey's silence[94], lies in the Bergsonian dimension of "duration". There anything can happen, old values can die and new ones be born. The new values will allow us to create a "new hegemony", and to really leave modernity, as long as the values are founded on the awareness that whatever one thinks is right (mental sensation) is not the "truth". There is no final truth, no solution to the Mystery of Being, and never will be, regardless of discoveries and technologies scientists or artificial intelligence will produce. This is an extremely difficult challenge for fieldworkers, too difficult. But it is also the easiest if we only attempted to exit the technology we base our knowledge upon: the text. Should we leave the keyboard and make ethnographic videos in the same way Plato used papyrus even though he preferred orality? Not necessarily. Like Socrates, we need to go back to the streets and work with as many "anthropologists of themselves" as possible.

[92] Proposition 6.522: "There are, indeed, things that cannot be put into words. They make themselves manifest. They are what is mystical" (Wittgenstein 2012: 6.5222).

[93] Proposition 5.6: "The limit of my language means the limit of my world". (Wittgenstein 2012: 5.6).

[94] Proposition 7: "What we cannot speak about we must pass over in silence" (Wittgenstein 2012: 7).

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**Interview**

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