



Rumble In The Jungle: The Invisible History of Drum'n'Bass

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Abstract: Drum'n'bass is a musical form that expresses the antagonisms of British identity in the 1990s and it also situates itself outside of the dominant terms of African-American expressions of black identity. It speaks of a more productive possibility in the traditional relationship between national and global polarities or public and private histories. Being at once an expression of the crucial significance of place in any characterisation of identity, it also recognises the influence of circumstances that exist outside of the narrow terms of national affiliation. Drum'n'bass represents a metonymic formulation of the long history of race and migration and its (often invisible) effects on the nature of British cultural identity in particular and popular music in general.

Key terms: Drum'n'Bass, British cultural identity, Black cultural identity, electronic dance music, rave, Harry Beck, London Underground Map

Sound Effects

Roots don't stay in one place. They change shape. They change colour. And they grow. There is no such thing as a pure point of origin, least of all in something as slippery as music, but that doesn't mean there isn't history.¹

Dick Hebdige

Some time in the future you open an encyclopedia, as there is a specific style of music that you want to learn more about. You flick to the section labelled 'D' and move through the pages until you find the entry you are looking for. You fix your glasses on your nose and you begin to read . . .

From its emergence in the English hardcore rave scene of 1991-2, the music that came to be known as drum'n'bass evolved at such a pace that by the late 1990s it stood as one of the most energetic and influential of the post-house musics. Characterised by ferociously complex digitised drum patterns and synthetically-treated booming basslines, it bore the traces of UK hip hop, combined with the electronic assault-tactics of European and US techno. It rapidly expanded in its range of styles to encompass the ragga-tinged bad bwoy of jungle, the amphetamine-attack darkcore of Ed Rush, Optical and Fierce, and the more ghostly jazz-inflected strains of artcore and ambient represented by Omni Trio and LTJ Bukem. Long

¹ Dick Hebdige, *Cut'n'Mix: Culture, Identity and Caribbean Music*, Comedia, London, 1987, p. 10.

ignored because of its roots in rave, for most of the early 1990s a widely disparaged and supposedly illiterate musical form, it had evolved without any media coverage or appraisal. It also already had its own established history, one that centred on a trio of major personalities – Goldie, Grooverider and Fabio.

It was the release of Goldie's "Timeless" album in 1995 that initially signalled the transition of drum'n'bass from underground to mainstream. It established the former B-boy and graffiti artist as the first recognisable star of drum'n'bass. Yet, Goldie was not alone in first pioneering this sound. DJs Grooverider and Fabio, after starting out on pirate radio and the illegal rave circuit, had been hosting their Rage nights at the Heaven nightclub during the period 1989-93. In that time, their sound had shifted from early house and techno to harder breakbeat styles. Goldie had previously been in the US and had not experienced the acid house breakthrough in the UK. Upon his return to England in 1991, friends Kemistry and Storm had taken him to Rage and his previous love of hip hop was discarded. In 1996, Goldie toured sellout shows with his Metalheadz crew, the superclubs (previously handbag havens) began booking drum'n'bass DJs and Grooverider and Fabio were lionised as founding fathers. When, in 1997, Roni Size and Reprazents won the Mercury Prize for their *New Forms* recording, it appeared the transition was complete.

This narrative history is problematic. Unfortunately, it has already attained the status of myth. Aside from a few well-placed names and dates, it does not reveal much about the music. The supposed mythic centrality of the club Rage, for instance, was criticised by music journalist Simon Reynolds as a case of historical revisionism.

You go back to issues of *Mixmag* at the time – as I did when researching the book – and you find that Rage isn't even listed in the clubs section during that 91-93 period!²

The early development of drum'n'bass had occurred in a seeming journalistic vacuum due to its perceived affiliation with the critically-dismissed sounds of rave. Once it had achieved the traditional markers of success, its emergence was rewritten into the pages of musical history. This genealogical malleability revealed the limitations of traditional conceptions regarding the function and construction of history and memory. In prioritising a particular chronological movement, other locations and experiences were consigned to the periphery.

Drum'n'bass is a musical form that expresses the antagonisms of British identity in the 1990s and it also situates itself outside of the dominant terms of African-American expressions of black identity. It speaks of a more productive possibility in the traditional relationship between national and global polarities or public and private histories. Being at once an expression of the crucial significance of place in any characterisation of identity, it also recognises the influence of circumstances that exist outside of the narrow terms of national affiliation. Drum'n'bass represents a metonymic formulation of the long history of race and migration and its (often invisible) effects on the nature of British cultural identity in particular and popular music in general.

Although occurring within a definable geographical space – the clubs, radio stations and bedrooms of the English capital – the focus in this paper is not restricted to a purely national analysis. Instead, the history of drum'n'bass reveals the shifting pathways through the metropolitan and the regional and the intersecting planes of

² Simon Reynolds, *Interview with Olga Teer* at The Simon Reynolds and Joy Press Home Page at <http://www.members.aol.com/blissout>, p. 8. Accessed 11/01/99.

visual and aural memory. It reveals the capacity of the margins to challenge and weaken the dominance of the centre, through the performance of pluralities often neglected in dominant renderings of history and memory. Drum'n'bass confounds easy historicism, by maintaining a shifting position between the polarities of the local and the global, the past and the present, the linear and the elliptical.

Tracing the Bass

The real dub of the '90s is what people call drum'n'bass, or jungle. When dub came in the '70s, it was innovative, it was new, it was fresh . . . All the people who do the drum'n'bass stuff - the Bukems, the Grooveriders and Fabios. Those guys are King Tubby's true inheritors.³

Steve Barrow

The initial development of the jungle sound was framed as a response to the dominance in the UK of American hip hop styles. According to Chambers in 1987,

today, being black and living in Britain also involves being British, this has been accompanied by younger blacks abandoning the imaginary solution of Rastafarianism and voicing the fact that they have no intention of going anywhere, whether back to Jamaica or on to Ethiopia.⁴

From such a perspective, it became necessary to assert a black musical identity that recognised the different cultural specificity of living in the UK. As Gilroy has written,

during the eighties black British cultures ceased to simply mimic or reproduce wholesale forms, styles and genres which had been lovingly borrowed, respectfully stolen, or brazenly highjacked from blacks elsewhere.⁵

The mobilisation of UK blackness that these urban sounds rapidly achieved, undermined the centrality and hegemonic dominance of American expressions of African heritage or identity. Subsequently, while some early jungle records echoed the social concerns of American gangsta rap with drugs and guns, musically there was a merging of the hardcore rave sound with influences derived from the Caribbean and African migrations to England that had boomed from the 1950s onwards.

The heavier bass sounds of dub reggae, combined with the toasting and patois-driven style of the vocals, created a different statement of 'blackness' one constructed from a vocabulary of sonic collision and bricolage. Although hip hop bears a fundamental indebtedness to the same heritage, this legacy has often been elided in order to reinforce hip hop's status as the specific cultural property of African-Americans. Within the different social, cultural and political environment of the UK, however, these sonic influences continue to bear the traces of their own origin, as the English and British foundations of racism function in a markedly different fashion to that of the US. Any political appeal to blackness within the UK must recognise that "if these populations are united at all, it is more by the experience of migration than by the memory of slavery and the residues of

³ DJ Magazine, July 1997, p. 44.

⁴ Iain Chambers, "Maps For The Metropolis: A Possible Guide To The Present" in *Cultural Studies*, Vol. 1, No. 1, 1987, p.17.

⁵ Paul Gilroy, *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge, Massachusetts, 1993, p. 86.

plantation society".⁶ What is crucial in any English or British expression of black identity and culture is the centrality of passage and transition.

A crucial historical trace lies in the indebtedness to Caribbean music that can be heard most clearly in the dominant presence assigned to the bassline. While the density and ferocity of the drum programming is often at odds with the more minimal use of melodic textures, it is the rumbling basslines that connect these two poles and provide the principal rhythm for dancing. For Hebdige, the bassline has long provided "the basic background throb - reggae's heartbeat".⁷ This heartbeat, however, is more than just a musical foundation. Within the history of reggae's opposition to institutional and colonial authority, the bass sound evolved into the signifier of that opposition. Descriptions of it as the 'rebel bass' or the 'dread bass' served to contextualise the menacing, rumbling nature of its sonority. The bass line can also be read as a description of the passage of migration, the line that connects different cultural locations. This understanding can be seen in Chambers' citing of Linton Kwesi Johnson: "bass history is a moving/ is a hurting black story".⁸

There is an urgency within the sound of drum'n'bass that conveys a sense of social and cultural dislocation. While the influences of jazz can be most clearly heard in its melodic and textural arrangements, the ferocious drum patterns echoes the hard bop styles of Art Blakey and Max Roach. For Tricia Rose, these aural memory traces represent a crucial component of hip hop's sound: as a reprisal of the sonic past.

Rap's sample-heavy sound is digitally reproduced but cannot be digitally created. In other words, the sound of a James Brown or Parliament drum kick or bass line and the technology that processed it then, as well as now, are all central to the way a rap record feels.⁹

Alternately, drum'n'bass exemplifies the difference between digital *preservation* and digital *construction*. Where hip hop's sound was critically formulated as an indebtedness to the past, through the quotational format of sampling, drum'n'bass extended hip hop's manipulation of sound and propelled it instead into the technological future. For Eshun, perspectives such as that of Rose, ignore the very character of digital sonic creation.

The drum machine has *never* sounded like drums because it *isn't* percussion: it's electronic current, synthetic percussion, syncussion . . . Electro ignores this hope of emulating drums, and instead programs rhythms from electricity, rhythmic intensities which are unrecognizable as drums. There are no snares - just waveforms being altered. There are no bass drums - just attack velocities.¹⁰

The complexity of drum'n'bass programming meant that these sounds were far removed from the hands-on style of previous drummers as they were patterns no hands could physically play. Yet, this is not to deny drum'n'bass' maintenance of the sonic past. Rather, the lineage represented was not a simple question of sonic

⁶ Ibid., p. 81.

⁷ Hebdige, *Cut'n'Mix: Culture, Identity and Caribbean Music*, p. 82.

⁸ Iain Chambers, *Urban Rhythms: Pop Music and Popular Culture*, MacMillan, London, 1985, p. 161.

⁹ Tricia Rose, *Black Noise: Rap Music and Black Culture in Contemporary America*, University Press of New England, Hanover, 1994, p. 78.

¹⁰ Kodwo Eshun, *More Brilliant Than The Sun: Adventures In Sonic Fiction*, Quartet, London, 1998, p. 078.

archiving through the maintenance of certain pre-recorded sounds. Instead it displayed an attitude to sonic manipulation and to drumming itself as an expression of a particular socio-historical experience.

Drum'n'bass, while not emerging from any unified 'black' subjectivity, is able to signify that history through its sonic materials. As Chambers describes it, "the secret codes and subterranean forces of its music".¹¹ In order to address the process through which these sounds can signify without any loss of a social or cultural heritage it is necessary, as Shepherd demands, to develop "theoretical protocols suitable to analysing social meanings as manifest within the sonic materials of music themselves".¹² Drum'n'bass, as with other electronic dance music forms, is largely non-linguistic, but this does not efface its intertwining of history and memory on the aural plane.

Drum'n'bass in the early and middle 1990s was the music that came to represent an urban youth population whose existence was denied in the traditional mapping of the city of London. Dominant cartographic icons, such as the London Underground map, framed the capital as a well-organised and easily-navigable modernist city. What did not lie on the map geographically, did not exist socially or culturally. In a familiar reprise of the rhetoric of Empire, the London of the

Underground was depicted as a changeless city with clearly marked stations and points of interest. The uncomfortable traces of colonialism, represented by those areas and their populations that were not visible on the map, disappeared into a white-washed background. It is from those unmarked spaces that the sounds of drum'n'bass could be heard in the mid 1990s, asserting a newer understanding of British identity, one that could only be read between the lines.

Going Underground

She would always reply with a straight face, 'Harry Beck' when asked which artists she liked. Harry Beck was the man who had designed the map of the London Underground; the map under which she slept, wept and crossed the days off the calendars.¹³

Julie Burchill

Since its initial design in 1933, Harry Beck's map of the London Underground system has come to be one of the most highly visible icons of London. For Burchill's 'narrator', Susan Street, the names of the stations have a fantastical power and the map itself serves as a talismanic allegory of the city she will one day inhabit. With its modernist organisation and graphical arrangement into 45° and 90° angles, the London presented is an orderly and efficient city, one where actual time and distance have been eradicated in favour of a relativistic design. The intersecting grids, formed by colour-coded lines on a white background, offer the illusion of a total transport network promising easy access to all points of the city. The strength of Beck's design lies precisely in the simplicity of its composition. Despite the changes in name and ownership, and the development of new lines and stations in the postwar years, the basic form has remained unchanged. As a map of what lies *beneath* the city, its

¹¹ Chambers, *Urban Rhythms*, p. 167.

¹² John Shepherd, *Music As Social Text*, Polity Press, Cambridge, 1991, p. 207.

¹³ Julie Burchill, *Ambition*, Bodley Head, London, 1989, p. 4.

reductive presentation overrides the historical traces of London's above ground development.¹⁴

Despite its subterranean orientation, the discrepancy between the cartographic and the geographic is not entirely resolved in Beck's design. The names of the stations, as incursions into the overground, still refer to specific geographical sites. For Jacobs, "place plays an important role in the way in which memories of empire remain active".¹⁵ In spite of the historical evolution of London, a three-dimensional radial city is made to conform to a two-dimensional rectangular grid. The importance of the river Thames in the development of the city cannot be underestimated, operating as the geographical median for the city and providing its principal mercantile axis. It is the divisive capacity of this water-course that Terence Conran refers to when he claims, "the extraordinary thing about London is it divides in two, north and south, and the people of one want nothing to do with the other".¹⁶ In Beck's depiction, however, the Thames is reduced to a 'thin blue line' positioned in the bottom third of the map area. With 80% of the Underground system situated north of the river, the area south of the Thames is rendered almost absent from the cartographic conception of London.

The crucial point here is not that Beck's design is faulty in regards to any geographical 'truth', but that it is active in the imagineering of a city of London. The Underground map, far from operating on a representational plane, grants an existential status to some locations (those marked in colour) while effacing others (those sites that are situated in the white spaces). For instance, Reynolds claims that,

Camden is supposed to have brought back the idea of Swinging London, but for five years now pirate radio has been making a clandestine cartography of the metropolis, bringing the scent of enchantment to forsaken places like Peckham and Dalston.¹⁷

Here, both another form of mapping and another London are referred to. Sites such as Peckham, Dalston, Hackney, and Lewisham, are in many ways "forsaken" because they exist in the blank spaces of the background. It is from areas such as these that drum'n'bass initially emerged, the invisible ghettos of the marginalised. Similarly, the "clandestine cartography" that Reynolds refers to presents us with a different conception of the 'underground' as that depicted in Beck's design.

If the map is viewed in its more contemporary form, with the overlaying of the various regional and suburban British rail networks, a different image of London begins to form. Still adhering to the design principles of the basic format, in this mapping, our 'forsaken' places are introduced to the visual conception of London. So too, the Thames is restored to its central axis on the map grid; a radial perspective

¹⁴ Jane Jacobs addresses the difficulties in such above ground development in her analysis of the No. 1 Poultry Scheme in London, "the efforts to preserve the historic built environment in the present are often also efforts to preserve buildings and city scenes which memorialise the might of empire". *Edge of Empire: Postcolonialism and the City*, Routledge, New York and London, 1996, p. 40.

¹⁵ *ibid.* p.40.

¹⁶ Terence Conran, quoted in David Kamp, "London Swings! Again!", *Vanity Fair*, March 1997, p. 105.

¹⁷ Reynolds, Britpop, at members.aol.com/blissout/britpop.htm (first published in Frieze, late 1995) 15/10/97.

of the city reappears and the areas south of the Thames are depicted as more populous than was initially indicated. Despite this, however, the appearance of equivalence is far from sincere. Those previously 'unmarked' sites are still positioned on an hierarchical scale of urban/suburban, as white lines emerging faintly from an equally white background. Instead of being rendered entirely absent from the cartographic conception, they are now presented as bearing only a secondary significance.

The difficulties that emerge with the Underground map have much in common with the ideology of Britpop as it related to 1990s Britain. The Britpop moment had polarised the English capital in articulating the rigid separation between the north and south regions of the city. Being centred so firmly within the preserve of north London, particularly the zones of Camden and Soho, Britpop dispensed with the river Thames and rendered London devoid of its southern half. Its overtly cartographic historicism fetishised a particular conception of both Englishness and its musical corollary. The re-stamping of an indisputably white face onto a 1990s British identity, excluded those whose heritage stemmed from migration from the former colonial outposts of the British Empire. It was these same groups who had come to inhabit the hinterland zones of the English metropolis, particularly the neglected areas south of the Thames.

While both Britpop and the Underground map existed as textualised representations of their subject, their active mapping of cultural space positioned them as templates that sat atop both the city and the nation. Where Beck's design originated in the 1930s and Britpop's ideological focus remained anchored to the 1960s, any conception of a British identity or iconography that was derived from the present day was entirely absent. In effectively bracketing the decades of war and austerity so crucial to the formation of the Home Counties mentality, British history was seemingly frozen in time. As Bracewell claimed of Britpop,

by invoking both the sound and sensibility of earlier pop culture, the ultimate destiny of Britpop was a kind of 'virtual' pop, in which the stars and the fans appeared like holograms of their distant and mutated originals.¹⁸

So too, the map of the London Underground renders the city itself virtual: no longer, as for Susan Street, a rendering of London, but now a substitute for it. In existing in a hologrammatic state, the mythography of the London Underground set the stage for the performance of nation as offered by Britpop, but denied the possibility of any alternative to its narrowly-formulated directions.

Many critics chided Britpop for its nostalgic reminiscence towards the Britain of the 1960s, a time when the effects of migration were still being masked by the dominance of English social organisation. By the 1990s, any belief in the stabilising force of the class system not only seemed blithely naïve, but rampantly xenophobic. Reynolds, for instance, claimed that Britpop was "an evasion of the multi-racial, technology-mediated nature of UK pop culture in the '90s".¹⁹ Since the end of the Second World War, English society had been transformed, albeit unwillingly, by the effects of the migration of those from the outlying regions of the disintegrating Empire. Towards the end of the century, a new generation of Britons had emerged to stake their own claim for citizenship. This was a generation that bore their own

¹⁸ Bracewell, "Britpop's coming home, it's coming home", *New Statesman*, 21 February, 1997, p. 37.

¹⁹ Reynolds, *Britpop*.

history and memories, a group to whom the pastoral rhetoric of a green and pleasant land had little meaning.

Sounds of Blackness

It would not be honest for me to make a drum'n'bass record. It's not where I come from. You have to go through being a half-caste immigrant living in England for 20 years before you understand that.²⁰

Bjork

The importance of issues of national identity and authenticity in respect to drum'n'bass cannot be denied. Significantly, these concerns are stamped with a conception of race that positions drum'n'bass within a specifically lived experience, prompting Toop to ask, "is drum'n'bass reducible to the repressed black youth theme, then?"²¹ The question here is one of cultural property and the extent to which sound is limited by social conditions.

What was important for jungle and drum'n'bass was the formulation of a music that could represent a 'black' population and counter its experience of marginality. Thus when Goldie remarked, "we've said all we can say and nobody listens anyway so fuck 'em, we just give 'em bass",²² it was clear whose experience was being represented. The invoking of a notion of 'half-casteness', however, undermines the mobilisation of a unified and racially-determined collectivity. As Julien and Mercer argue, during the 1980s there was, "a rearticulation of the category 'black' as a political term of identification among diverse minority communities of Asian, African and Caribbean origin, rather than as a biological or racial category".²³ In this regard, the conception of a representational 'blackness' seems untenable in requiring the unification of a diversity of minority communities whose only common characteristic is the absence of a particular somatic characteristic (namely, 'whiteness'). As Genet asks, "what exactly is a black? First of all, what's his colour?"²⁴

The culture surrounding drum'n'bass is composed of as similarly diverse mix of British youth as that seen in the ska revival of the late 1970s. Since the 1950s, the West Midlands region has had the most concentrated multi-racial population in England. This mix meant that the full spectrum of British youth was not as fiercely segregated as in other parts of the country. As Hebdige claimed in the late 1970s,

Birmingham must be one of the only places left in Britain where it's still possible for a white man to get into a shebeen without wearing a blue uniform and kicking the door down.²⁵

Consequently, musical styles were also not as ghettoised; rock, punk and reggae could be heard in the same clubs. It was out of this environment that ska, and

²⁰ *Mixmag*, November 1996, p. 84.

²¹ David Toop, "Metal Guru" in *The Face*, July 1995, p. 92.

²² *ibid.*, p. 92.

²³ Isaac Julien and Kobena Mercer, "De Margin and De Center" in H. Baker, M. Diawara and R. Lindeborg (eds.), *Black British Cultural Studies*, University of Chicago Press, Chicago, 1996, p. 196-7.

²⁴ Jean Genet, *The Blacks*, Faber, London, 1960, p. 6.

²⁵ Hebdige, *Cut'n'Mix: Culture, Identity and Caribbean Music*, p. 112.

particularly the Two Tone label, emerged. Bands like the Specials, the Selecter and The Beat had all grown up in this geographical area where they were exposed to a diversity of musics including Caribbean styles like bluebeat and rocksteady.²⁶ In harking back to the 'Jamaican style' and sound of the mid 1960s and combining it with more contemporary social issues, ska went a long way towards merging the concerns of a range of British youth. The notion of marginalisation in this region was not characterised in explicitly politicised terms; social concerns about unemployment, violence and crime crossed over racially-determined boundaries.

A principal difficulty lies in the exact denomination of minority communities in the UK, where the synonymy of racial origin and national identity initiates a first order of exclusion. Gilroy has already made clear the difficulty of such a conflation where the term 'black' is conceived for those who are not 'British' in terms of any 'native settlement'.²⁷ This intertwining of racial differentiation and national origin perpetuates an ideology of otherness on the basis of an opposition between settlement and migration. This binary maintains the assumption that minority communities are always determined by the traces of their own national or racial origin. Certainly any easy homology of 'blackness' needs to be rejected, however this cannot be achieved simply through replacing it with an alternate homology of 'Britishness'.

A central component of contemporary discussions of black cultural identity and tradition revolves around the polarised formation of essentialism and pluralism, which can also be articulated as a shifting movement between unity and difference. The importance of Africa as a shared point of departure is crucial in establishing a common experience and lineage for black populations surrounding the Atlantic fringe but also for other groups across the globe. While such a strategy is necessary in order to effect political and social change, it operates through a stabilisation and negation of differences. The particular problem with this conception of a shared sense of African origin, due in part to its forceful presence within African-American studies, is that it masks the diversity and complexity of local and regional articulations. Ethnic differences are subsumed in favour of a discrete and racialised political same. The tendency towards absolutism that this trajectory can embody, results from the forced cohabitation of an array of divergent subjective positions in the name of cultural, racial and political unity.

The pluralistic position has been discredited because of its tendency towards political evacuation and racial assimilation, where the history and effects of racism can become masked or negated in the name of cultural hybridity. As Gilroy writes, this form of pluralism "is clearly itching to abandon the ground of the black vernacular entirely".²⁸ The opposition of the two poles of essentialism and pluralism, has complexified the category of race and the denomination of blackness in demanding resolution to a deceptive paradigm. Neither position can fully express the diversity of black subjectivities or overturn the homogenising structures of racism. It is for this

²⁶ Interestingly, the term 'shebeen' extends the notion of cultural flow and discursive overlap. While it is used extensively in England to describe dance halls frequently found in black urban areas and is also used in many African countries, its lineage descends from the Gaelic term for drinking den. Whether this is due to the influence of missionaries, many of whom came from Ireland, is uncertain but it does suggest an intriguing fluidity for seemingly culturally specific terms.

²⁷ Paul Gilroy, *There Ain't No Black in the Union Jack*, University of Chicago Press, Chicago, 1991, p. 50.

²⁸ Gilroy, *The Black Atlantic*, p. 100-101.

reason that Gilroy adopts the framework of the changing same, where music functions as the representative of both unity and diversity, neither static in its binding continuity nor evacuated in its dynamic and fluid negotiation with different spatio-temporal conjunctures. Where, in the US, hip hop and techno have been rendered as the bearers of these two divergent trajectories, it is drum'n'bass that expresses the more emancipatory possibilities of music as a changing same.

Paul Gilroy's *The Black Atlantic* is particularly pertinent in establishing a discursive and narrational frame through which to understand the sonic construction and historical legacy of drum'n'bass. Gilroy's strategy is to critique the existence of any singular post-African nation in an attempt to locate an interconnected structure which is transnational. This is the Atlantic as criss-crossed by the lines of slavery and migration. The same trade routes that furnished the resources for the political and economic domination of Western modernity have also been the carriers of a subterranean black modernity that has furnished popular culture, and particularly popular music, with many of its pleasures and operating assumptions. This has necessitated the development of new models,

that might fit with a theory that was less intimidated by and respectful of nation states than either English or African-American studies have so far been. I have settled on the image of ships in motion across the spaces between Europe, America, Africa and the Caribbean.²⁹

This sense of culture as passage, of contemporary blackness as less a product of specifically nationalist articulations than as a diasporic movement, is crucial to understanding contemporary forms such as drum'n'bass. Less overtly representational than its predecessors, drum'n'bass is a form that signals the very real effects of cultural dislocation and regional specificity in the development of cultural practices.

Historical models which emphasise linearity and continuity in the transmission of cultural codes, are unable to recognise the centrality of migration and discursive collision in the articulation of newer musical and social forms. The manner in which musical forms move across the more traditional boundaries of race, nation and authenticity attests to a more complex intersection between private and public histories. Any analysis of contemporary popular musical forms must begin by recognising the manner in which electronic dance music forms have developed their modes of transmission and reception across existing national borders and racial structures.

Drum'n'bass is a clear manifestation of the way in which music can be a crucial form of expression for those populations whose histories and experiences have been denied visibility in the more traditional forms of visual and textual history. The politics of memory resides in the capacity to challenge dominant structures and give voice to the invisible. Sonic histories do not efface the presence of other narratives or structures, but work within and through their forms, insinuating the traces of the forgotten into the fabric of the dominant. Indeed, the entire history of popular musical forms can be seen as being underwritten by this desire to maintain a sense of the past, one that can be frequently overlooked as its inhabitants disappear back into the margins.

The significance of drum'n'bass resides in its sonic maintenance of the legacy of those whose heritage and experience of being British has not been widely recognised

²⁹ *ibid.*, p. 4.

within the more traditional and dominant characterisations of British culture and identity. Moreover, it also attests to the existence of an emerging British identity, one that is still to be marked upon the maps of its own present. The intertwining of memories evoked on the visual or the aural plane reveals a background teeming with colour and no longer blankly white as in the London Underground map. What, perhaps, is most significant is drum'n'bass' performance of a certain form of history: as a memory tonic for the amnesiac it continues to guide our attention towards those gaps in the story, those tears in the page, that may no longer be visible, but are far from being forgotten.

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