



## Research Article

Monique Charles\*

# Grime and Spirit: On a Hype!

<https://doi.org/10.1515/culture-2019-0010>

Received May 17, 2018; accepted December 7, 2018

**Abstract:** Grime is a genre of Black British music originating from London at the turn of the twenty-first century. In this article, I explore responses to moments of Grime music making and engagement in live performance settings. I make connections between Grime, Black music streams (Lena), Black Atlantic (Gilroy) practices, the Black Public Sphere (Baker) AND how engagements at these intersections are connected to spiritual practice in the context of live performance. The *power* in Grime live performance settings; where the spiritual is found, connects to the sonic characteristics deployed, embodied and emotive responses and cultural practice. Spirituality, through cultural practice, is an Africanised religious/spiritual outlook that remains with the African diaspora over time and space (Mbiti). Smith's work shows how African derived religious and spiritual practice continues in diasporic religious practice contemporarily. Through live performance (raving/club culture), I explore and theorise how *power* is a) generated, b) operates, and outline the roles people play in the cultural-spiritual practice. Building on the work of Smith, Kennett, Sylvan, Mbiti and Baker, I introduce theories: 1) Liminal Energy Power Spirals (LEPS) and 2) AmunRave Theory, to show how the spirit enters live performance space.

**Keywords:** club culture, Grime music, spirit

## Introduction

Grime and spirituality... There is no clear link between the two; or is there? In this article, I explore responses to moments of Grime music making and engagement in live performance settings. I make a connection between Grime, Black “music streams” (Lena 8), Black Atlantic (Gilroy) practices, the Black Public Sphere (Baker) AND how engagements at these intersections are connected to African spiritual practice (Mbiti).

## Grime

Grime is a Black British, DIY, male-dominated genre of music originating from London's subaltern inner cities (Campion) at the turn of the Twenty-first century. Sonically, at its earliest stages, it was characterised as typically 4/4 (four crotchet beats to a bar), comprising of repeated 8 or 16 bar cycles and dominated by low frequencies—basslines and dub (Sullivan, Henriques, Bradley). The average tempo ranges between 136-140 beats per minute (Grime Bow and How UK Hip Hop Finds its Voice). There can be the sonic effect of vast space in a Grime track (often filled by MCs). MCs “spit” in British accents, regional slang and Jamaican infused accents and patois with relentless velocity. The DIY nature of early Grime contributes to its lo-fi, gritty, raw, grimy and unrefined sound.

---

\*Corresponding author: Monique Charles, School of Law & Criminology, University of West London, London, W5 5RF, United Kingdom, E-mail: Neake81@gmail.com

For the purpose of this article, I rely on Lena's definitions of Avant-garde and Scene based stages of musical genre to draw attention to the earliest stages of Grime teleological development.

- Avant-garde (Ag), is considered new and sonically distinct from other musical forms and shared/ followed by a core group of people.
- Scene-based (S), is where niche knowledge, practice, culture and sensibilities develop normative values and meaning. In the case of Grime, this solidified as an understandable genre with an official name around 2004.

Early Grime, for the purpose of this article, refers to Grime circa 2000-2008. Interrogation of early Grime is significant as it gives insight into wider sociological issues. At its earliest stages, Grime was made, shared and followed by a core group of marginalised youth who resided in London's inner cities. They were exposed to (yet excluded from) fast social change, i.e. gentrification, in the areas they lived. The main music makers and participants of the scene were predominantly third and fourth generation Black British youth (whose parents and grandparents came from The Caribbean or West Africa), with some White and Multi-Ethnic working-class youth. Like other scenes, it developed norms, practices, sensibilities, ideological outlooks and aesthetics; some of which were informed by musical influences and cultural practices of their heritage.

## ...and Spirit

This article opens the debate around the spiritual elements found in everyday British life for Black and working-class youth engaged in Grime. This will be interrogated by examining how knowledge and practice in the Grime scene and Black music streams are intertwined with the African diaspora, the local, the past and present, and how it is genealogically linked to Africanised religious/spiritual understandings of the world, universe and the sublime. In this way, the everyday practices, perspectives and moments of music engagement become spiritual praxis. It is important to ensure the topic is approached decolonially and in accordance with Africanised sensibilities considering the subcultural practices of the group largely engaged in early Grime were largely of African descent (including via the Caribbean). The context of interrogation here will be live performance events.

It is worth noting here that whilst studies have been conducted by academics such as St. John's *Global Tribe* and Till's *Pop Cult*, the primary focus of this paper is to make genealogical links to Africanised spiritual practice and outlooks. Grime is largely influenced by descendants of Africans who have had religious practice and spiritual systems compromised through oppression (slavery and colonialism). The article explores how spirituality and power are accessed from this marginalised locus through live performance events. Whilst there may be similarities with other studies such as being in the moment (St. John) and *communitas* (Turner, a concept applied in this article), it is important to note:

- Firstly, those studied in Goa Trance and subsequent movement, for example, are able to travel to a far-away land on a spiritual quest.
- Secondly, using non-religious music at such festivals has a spiritual intention.

In these contexts, the spiritual is still set apart from every day, meaning the Eurocentric dichotomy, i.e. sacred/profane (Reed) still remains. In the British context, those marginalised and oppressed are likely to have less capital to go on spiritual voyages for purposeful and intentional spiritual engagement. Being in the moment with music, you or your peers make, may serve a different purpose.

Music and sound were important to traditional African religious and spiritual understandings (Mbiti) and to the lives of enslaved Africans in the Black Atlantic (Gilroy). African religions celebrate life and its milestones. Music and dance are included in celebrations, worship and traditional life. It forms part of everyday life and provides practical solutions and apparatus for navigating one's life. It is for the people; all can engage, and this religious and spiritual outlook travels wherever the people go. Mbiti's finds the dichotomy in Africanised religion, and their spiritual practices straddle the visible/invisible or material/immaterial world, not the (European dichotomy of) sacred and profane (Reed). He finds this approach

can operate flexibly inside differing social structures. It can take multiple generations for outlooks and practices to disappear completely, if at all. Mbiti gives the Caribbean and the presence of African religiosity in their contemporary practices as an example. Creolised religious or spiritual practices in the Caribbean have been well documented (Sylvan). This understanding, i.e. that it has changed over time, will be applied here. It differs from the position that music and fandoms form a ‘new’ religion.

Sylvan argues that:

...even though the West African [musico] religious complex has gone through a myriad of major transformations on its journey into American culture and is now tied into a white youth audience and a corporate economic structure, its transformed expressions still thrive and have the capacity to profoundly affect people’s lives in powerful ways. (75)

I argue, oppressive forces as severe as slavery and colonialism impacted spiritual practice and meaning; diverting surviving elements into cultural or folk practice. Everyday practices, perspectives and moments of music engagement, whilst spiritual praxis, are understood or shared in new ways and contexts. I argue that these new ways of understanding become knowledge located in the Black Public Sphere (Baker). Baker’s Black Public Sphere is an intangible space of collective knowledge and practice, integral to the understanding of social and cultural capital, and how to use it to express identity. Importantly the Black Public Sphere is not a sanitised or romanticised version of knowledge accredited for mainstream narrative interests. It is unfiltered and reflective of the Black majority, and he argues that the Black majority are always constructing modernity through “creative agency” (16). Approached in this way, this framework navigates an understanding of cultural production in the Black British context and simultaneously explores, articulates and displays its Africanised spiritual practice.

The practices influencing early Grime and the context of live performance occurred in continuous and sustained oppression and marginalisation, e.g. internal colonies (Hall), racism, poverty etc. Whilst literature such as Lynch’s work explores popular music and religion or spirituality as something new; this approach is the result of Eurocentric understandings of religion and spirituality. It has limited connection to, understandings of, how spirituality continues to thrive, fragment or transcend oppressive frameworks designed to stifle or remove it.

I explore whether Grime illustrates, that in contemporary times, cultural and folk practices can be equated to spiritual practice in live performance settings. Does engagement in live performance help attendees make sense of their lives, world and existence (as Mbiti proposes) within oppressive systems?

## Research Methods

**Interviews**—I approached forty-two people for in-depth semi-structured interviews in total. The response rate was approximately 74% (thirty-one). However, only 40% (seventeen) of those approached resulted in an interview. The seventeen respondents had ranging involvement and capacity in the Grime scene, but can be categorised within the scene in clusters I have named:

- cultural producers (producers, musicians, MCs/rappers, entertainers), (CP)
- consumers (fans),
- cultural transmitters (DJs, pirate radio, presenters, raves), (CT)
- cultural commentators (journalists, bloggers),
- creative managers (editors, marketers) and
- creative administrators (legal, business owners, label owners).

Each category has a specific role in the circuit of meaning (Johnson) that constitutes cultural signification. Grime MCs and cultural producers (CP), occupy a distinctive place within Grime subculture—both as music makers/performers/entrepreneurs and also as fans. They are key arbiters, definers, consumers and disseminators of Grime culture. As such, they occupy multiple places on the circuit of meaning, or, their role in the circuit changes over time.

Those interviewed were predominantly male, (only three female respondents) and the age range varied, in my estimation, from approximately the early 20s to 50s, with the majority falling within the estimated 22-38 age range. Respondents' self-reported ethnic backgrounds were White (European descended, i.e. White British, British and White American), Mixed-Race (Biracial, i.e. Black and White, British) or Black (African descended, i.e. Black British, British, Caribbean, Dutch (Surinamese), Mauritian, West African, African). Two-thirds of those interviewed were Black.

This article focuses primarily on live music. As such, I focus on cultural producers (CP) and transmitters (CT—mainly DJs in this context) (CP&T) who are *core* members of the scene or *performers* in live performance contexts. I refer to consumers as *the crowd* in live performance settings or *Tweeters* when they discuss live performances online.

**Observation**—Participant observation involved immersion in Grime live performance settings. I attended events and observed fan engagement and embodiment. Concurrently, I embedded myself in web-based fan communities speaking about the same live performance events. I used Twitter owing to the self-categorising function of the hashtag (#). I used hashtags that coincided with live performance events I attended. I searched # the day after the event and searched through the hashtags backwards to the day before the event took place. I also looked @artists' Twitter pages over the same time period. Using physical and online observation methods together, I documented my observations at events with Tweeters' comments about their experiences.

I focussed the # searches on seven live performance events attended (March 2013-December 2014). Events attended were a combination of those I chose myself and others that were respondent led. The majority of the music played at these events were Grime and Grimy Garage, with occasional Jungle, Ragga/Bashment/Dancehall and Hip Hop.

**Table 1.** Events attended and online searches

Event Name	Event Type	No. Attended
So Solid	Concert	2
Pulse	Rave/Club	1
Mix 'n' Blend	Pub/Rave	1
Inside Music	Bar/Rave	1
Eskimo Dance	Rave	1
LOTM6	Launch Party	1

I have included a playlist<sup>1</sup> with this article (Chapter 7 Observations Playlist.). It includes footage of the live events attended. Each video link is embedded into the text for ease of access if reading electronically. However, a short synopsis of each video clip (and link) is included alongside the embedded footage if direct electronic access is not possible.

**MDA**—The last research method uses a combination of analytical methods which form a musical analytical framework I invented called Musicological Discourse Analysis (MDA) (*Hallowed be thy Grime, MDA as a Research Method of Generic Musical Analysis for the Social Sciences*), where songs are text and context. Music is rhizomatic, comprising of sonic characteristics such as frequency (bass/treble), beats per minute/tempo, pitch, rhythm, layering, volume, aural manipulations, stylistics and constructions (such as “the drop,” “the break,” accelerando, crescendo and syncopation) are some of the identifiable and quantifiable characteristics syncretise to form genre. Across genre, those characteristics connect music into “streams” or “musical families” (Lena 8). Understood in this way, Garage, Ragga, Bashment, Dancehall, Hip Hop and

<sup>1</sup> Chapter 7 Observations playlist [www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PL1sdDFLh\\_rXcE7FTtJASPgUkWiC6T-ZOD](http://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PL1sdDFLh_rXcE7FTtJASPgUkWiC6T-ZOD).

Jungle that were played at events attended form part of Grime's musical family tree as they include similar sonic (and sociocultural characteristics).

The components of the MDA framework are musicological (sonics, auralities, lyricism), subcultural (modes of identity work, intersubjective practices, spectacular-ritual elements), technological and historical-political-sociological narratives (personal narratives and official narratives), principally of the African Diaspora, in the postindustrial British context. MDA considers respondent experience (through analysis of interviews, observation and immersive listening/song as object), their on-the-ground debates, perspectives and conversations about the genre location of their art. Significantly, the MDA framework examines subcultural experience and what it does for/means to respondents. It analyses social, cultural, political, ideological, technological and historical contexts from which the music emerged to establish social, political and musical norms & sensibilities.

The triangulation of these research methods produced a field of theoretically rich data, that serves multiple but interconnected modalities of analysis. The measurable outputs (data) of Grime as the site of analysis were triangulated through i) observation; how people react to it in live performance settings (physical), talk about it and share their experience (online), ii) interviews exploring feelings and attachments to music (music elicitation) subcultural practices, making music, etc. and iii) song as text or song/sonic/sound analysis. For live events, I applied thematic analysis to detect whether there were any collectively shared experiences with music engagement.

## Power! Musical Impact

Sylvan (42-3) states that music operates in 7 realms:

1. Physiologically, affecting the body and its subsystems,
2. Psychologically, affecting the structure of the psyche and state of consciousness,
3. Socioculturally, affecting and reflecting social order and cultural paradigms,
4. Semiologically, providing symbolic structures which create affective meaning systems,
5. Virtually, creating temporal and spatial worlds,
6. Ritualistically, forming part of spiritual practices (with their own purpose and functions),
7. Spiritually, connecting to spiritual worlds and the contours of that world.

It is this ability to access these realms simultaneously that makes the sum greater than its parts. Additionally, there is something specific to music engagement in live settings such as concerts, clubs and raves/parties (which is the focus of the article). Kennett's study on listening experiences and affect highlights the significance context plays in meaning-making. Live music produces a specific set of expectations (i.e., fan engagement in person and online). (In addition, respondents' recollections of listening to Grime, and/or making Grime, will also contribute to this article.) It should be noted, the specific context of communal music engagement bears similarities for gatherings for spiritual or religious purposes. As outlined by St. John, Spencer and Till, the purpose of musical use in spiritual settings is to achieve *communitas* (Turner). *Communitas* is collective feelings of community and joy that music ushers into space.

For respondents, Tweeters and the crowd, Grime is *more than just music* being exchanged and consumed. Grime is both music and subcultural practice, intimately linked to lived inner-city experience and Black cultural capital, sensibilities and knowledge (i.e. the Black Public Sphere (Baker)). Understood in this way, it is the product of a material and immaterial *ecosystem* and bears similarities to traditional African approaches to spirituality.

To understand how *power* is harnessed, created and deployed through Grime, I explored the data to ascertain how:

- a) Grime music affects the individual,
- b) Core members work together to make music in home/studio settings, and whilst performing (cultural producers/cultural transmitters CP&T)
- c) Core members prepare for a performance (CP&T) and

- d) Music is responded to and spoken about by the crowd in live performance settings (via case studies).  
(CP&T and Tweeters)

## Individual Listening in the Moment and Reflections

For most respondents interviewed, early Grime (circa 2000-2008) music was unlike anything they had heard before. The sonic extremity/unusualness, notably the experimental approach to music making and pushing the boundaries of European musical convention, in comparison to other genres at the time, caused strong attraction or repulsion. Respondent comments suggest that Grime opened up a new space/portal (Eshun) so unfamiliar to the listener upon first hearing it, that it challenged them on several realms (Sylvan) simultaneously; primarily due to not understanding or being able to easily organise the Grime sound into pre-existing knowledge, cultural capital or experience around it.

Once exposed to the new sound, respondents spoke of their introduction almost like an awakening. One respondent spoke of being “burst open” and another spoke of “never returning to how things were before” hearing the music. This suggests something intangible and immaterial (possibly spiritual) happened. For most interviewed, first exposure created immense excitement, attraction and generated affective investment. Dependent on the listeners’ own journey, this portal was closer or further away from their current realm of knowledge (including social and musical knowledge). Figure 1 illustrates the distance a person travels when first listening to early Grime that falls outside their realm of knowledge, is far away from (mainstream) British social and cultural norms, but is bordering the outer edges of the Black Public Sphere (Baker).

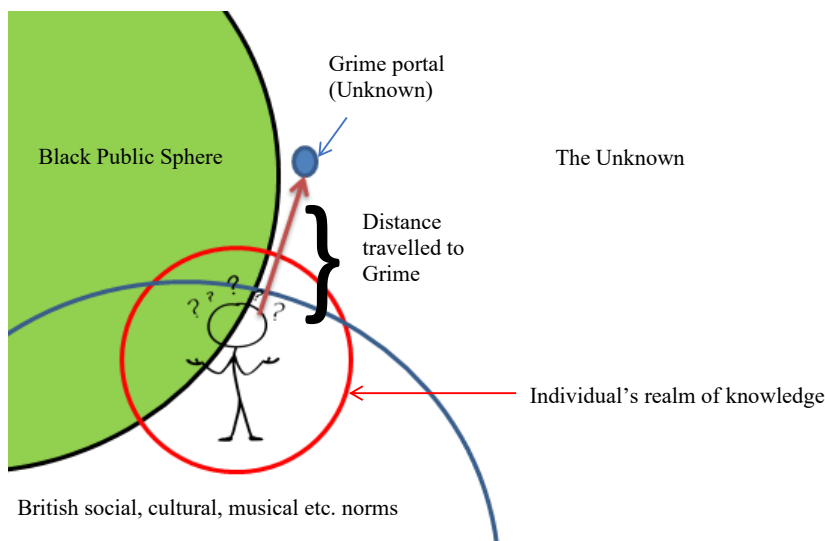


Figure 1. Individual Listening (early Grime circa 2000-2008)

## Making Music, Collaboration and Immaterial Navigation

Core respondents involved in early Grime placed great importance on the connections they had with other performers. Musical collaborations were voyages, journeys or experiences into unknown spaces and engaging with unknown portals. Contributors relied on one another to experience and understand the space they are creating and exploring together. Making music or performing together required mutual trust, respect and understanding, almost intuitively, to produce something that was accurately reflective of their collective vision. Words such as “chemistry,” “connection,” “intuition,” “knowing” and “instinct” repeatedly arose from respondent data. One respondent considered making music a “spiritual” practice.

When creating music, musicians go into the unknown to locate, create the dimensions of, and open an

immaterial portal, (using their experiential knowledge (material) and cultural capital (immaterial)). The music making process is a creative stream, alchemy, connecting to energies and a constellation of emotions and aspirations they perceive will be accessible by core members (CP&T). It is close enough to the edge of the Black Public Sphere (Baker) for music makers to know that scene members will understand. Cultural practice is spiritual practice. Respondent data suggests that if music making or performative collaboration cannot happen organically, the music or performance made collaboratively will never be able to effectively create, locate or define the dimensions of a portal (or the resulting liminal space in live performance settings).

Taking Kennett's work on listening contexts into account here, core members (CP&T) already competent with locating, creating and defining immaterial music portals, now focus their attention on maximising *affect* on the crowd (for music tailored to a live setting). Mutual understanding and anticipation of desired crowd reaction were considerations in collaborative music making. These considerations draw the unknown into their fans' consciousness and thus, expand fans' realms of knowledge, affect and meaning-making upon interaction.

Figure 2 shows the knowledge factors of consideration for collaborative working. Both draw on Black Public Sphere (Baker) knowledge/capital, but must navigate their own realms, understanding how they intersect and assist each other to reach the portal now inside the Black Public Sphere, but still outside of (mainstream) British social and cultural norms.

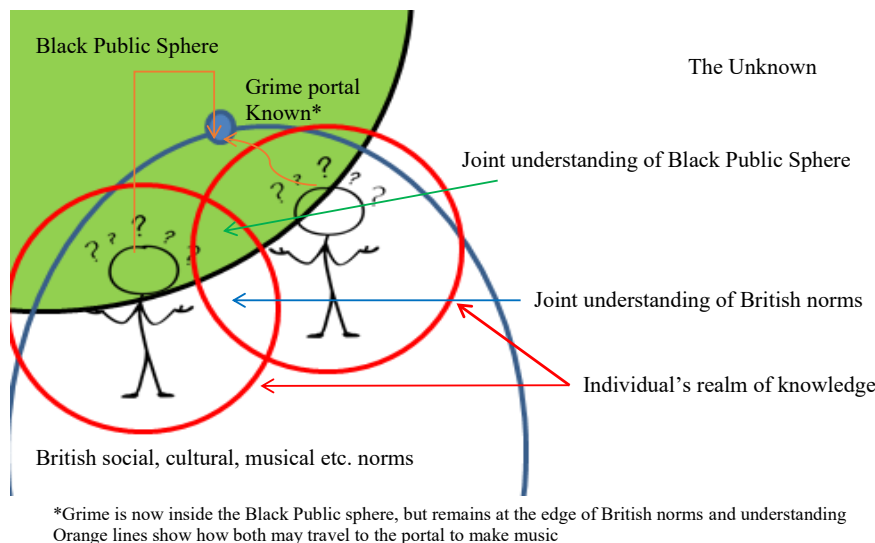


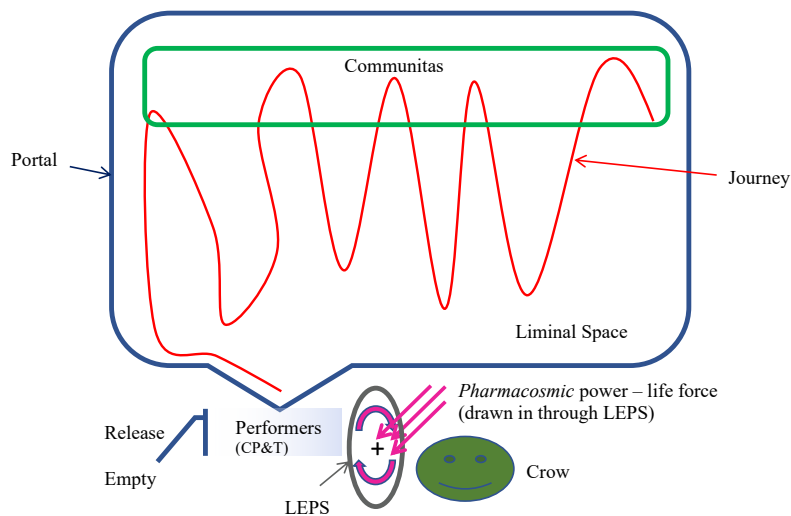
Figure 2. Scene Based, Making Music and Collaboration

## Preparation for Performance

Before live performances, some respondents (CP&T) had set processes or *rituals* that they would perform to prepare themselves. Releasing tension in the body was a common factor amongst respondents; whether going to the toilet, finding quiet, drinking or smoking to clear their mind. It is almost as if performers (CP&T) are emptying themselves. Based on the data, I propose that performers (CP&T) are the vessel (i.e. key to the portal) that needs to be empty and receptive in order to open the portal and navigate the crowd into the liminal (live performance) space inside and along a journey. When understanding performance preparation in this way, there is a degree of comparability with West African musicoreligious practices outlined by Sylvan; where performers' bodies become receptive to deities that are present during traditional ceremonies. However, in the cases here, rather than opening up oneself to deities that take over and possess a person, I propose, upon consideration of the data, one opens oneself to engage the crowd through energy exchange and then lead the crowd on an immaterial journey safely through the

portal wall into liminal space and ultimately towards moments of *communitas* (located inside) and back (outside the portal) again. Relaxation, receptivity and responsiveness are key performance skills to do this effectively.

Leading up to and during performances, core respondents (CP&T) had, or developed, an ability to improvise on the spot, read the crowd, feed on, and respond effectively to the *energy* that was exchanged between themselves and the crowd. A DJ respondent believed that DJs have a lot of power in live performance settings because music choice could lead to fights or romance amongst attendees (for example). This suggests performers (CP&T) have to understand and set the limits to the dimensions of the portal they have created for live performance. One respondent said he read the energy levels of the crowd to assess what type of crowd they were, responding accordingly. Another respondent said he fed off the crowd's energy and, as he responded to them, they, in turn, would respond to him and it would continue in a cyclical fashion.



**Figure 3.** Live Performance Journey (AmunRave Theory)

Cyclical energy exchange between performers (CP&T) and the crowd was a key theme coming from the data. This finding is also corroborated in the work of Ferreira. However, his work underplayed the significance of DJs (CT). Music creation and transmission, particularly by oppressed groups for themselves, change the dynamic when compared to the EDM that Ferreira explored. Music has a transformative effect on the body and the environment where it is played (Goodman, Perkinson). In a live music setting, loud Grime music, made by peers, triggers multisensory responses through the use of the fast tempo of 140 bpm<sup>2</sup>, eight bar cyclical rhythms, low frequency and vast space, causing the body(ies) to voluntarily and involuntarily react and rhythmically comply in particular ways (not discussed in the paper). These are the signs and signals performers (CP&T) look for in live performance settings to assist in maintaining the cyclical exchange of energy.

Performers (CP&T) make themselves the vessel through which they open up portals and navigate attendees through liminal space. Performers (CP&T working together) are the key to the portal for their own and crowd enjoyment. Going inside the portal, into liminal space (immaterial), overrides the existing societal oppressive structures (material). Liminal space is where the carnivalesque and antistructure (Turner) can be found. It is a space of alternative ontology and epistemology. This space is sanctuary and relieve from oppressive forces and marginalisation in wider society.

<sup>2</sup> Beats per minute.



## Conjuring Culture and *Pharmacosmic Power*

Using Smith's *Conjuring Culture*, I unpack how performers (CP&T) work together to open and draw in moments of *communitas* into the liminal space they navigate the crowd through. His work outlines that traditional West and Central African religious and spiritual practices that are still present in Afrodiasporic religious/spiritual practices. He speaks of:

- Mimetic conjuration (Mc)—i.e. the spirit is brought in by the use of the voice, choice of words and the movement of the performer.

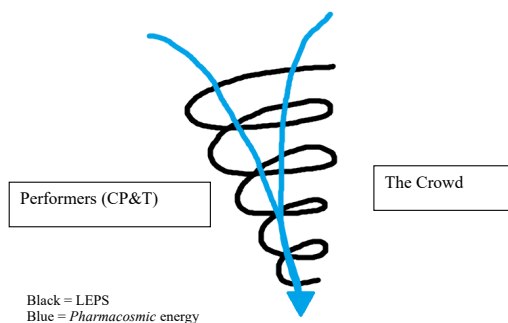
I propose Grime MCs use their voice, lyric/bars, stage presence and movement to bring energy in live performance space. In doing so, they open the portal into liminal space for the crowd and performers (CP&T) to enter together.

- Theopoetics (Th)—i.e., using materials to conjure spirits for a specific purpose. The materials have been traditionally herbs and roots, animal products or human body effects, to harm or heal intended recipient(s).

I propose this applies to producers who combine sounds to make songs. However, in the context of live performance, it applies to DJs, who compile performance playlists. DJ's music selections open the portal and direct the journey.

- Pharmacosm—i.e., using action and things/materials to conjure spirits for the purposes of good or harm.

Performers' (CP&T) application of both Mimetic Conjuration (Mc) and Theopoetics (Th) open a portal into liminal space, enabling themselves and the crowd to enter. In tandem (i.e. Mc +Th) and in an exchange with the crowd's energy, I propose a cyclical relationship of energy exchange is a series of spirals. When the spiral is at its tightest, i.e., the performer (CP&T) and the crowd know they have reached a destination along the journey together; *communitas* occurs, destination reached. Then performers (CP&T) continue moving the crowd along the journey and begin to work on a new spiral to build to another moment of *communitas*. Figure 4 illustrates how this theoretical process, that I call *Liminal Energy Power Spirals (LEPS)* works. LEPS creates a vacuum that draws in/channels/conjures *Pharmacosmic power* into liminal space along the journey and into moments of *communitas*.



**Figure 4.** *Pharmacosmic* power (life force) drawn into liminal space via LEPS

To summate, the *communitas* creation happens through a theoretical process I call the AmunRave<sup>3</sup> theory (outlined in Figure 3):

1. Performer emptying/release
2. Performers are key/vessel
3. Team working performers = (Mc+Th) = create, locate and open portal

<sup>3</sup> Pronounced Armun Rahv.

4. Portal has liminal space inside
5. (Team working performers + crowd) = Liminal Energy Power Spirals (LEPS)
6. LEPS + Journey inside liminal space = drawing in *Pharmacomic power* and creating moments of *communitas*

Moments of *communitas* are the ultimate goal. It is a space/moment where everybody is unified in the moment. All structures dissolve. *Communitas* signals the arrival of a new/final destination along the journey inside liminal space. It is where the crowd experience moments of ecstasy, euphoria and transformation. Figures 5 and 6 (below) illustrate the factors of consideration discussed so far, for the crowd, in the moment of *communitas* that feed into AmunRave theory (Figure 3).

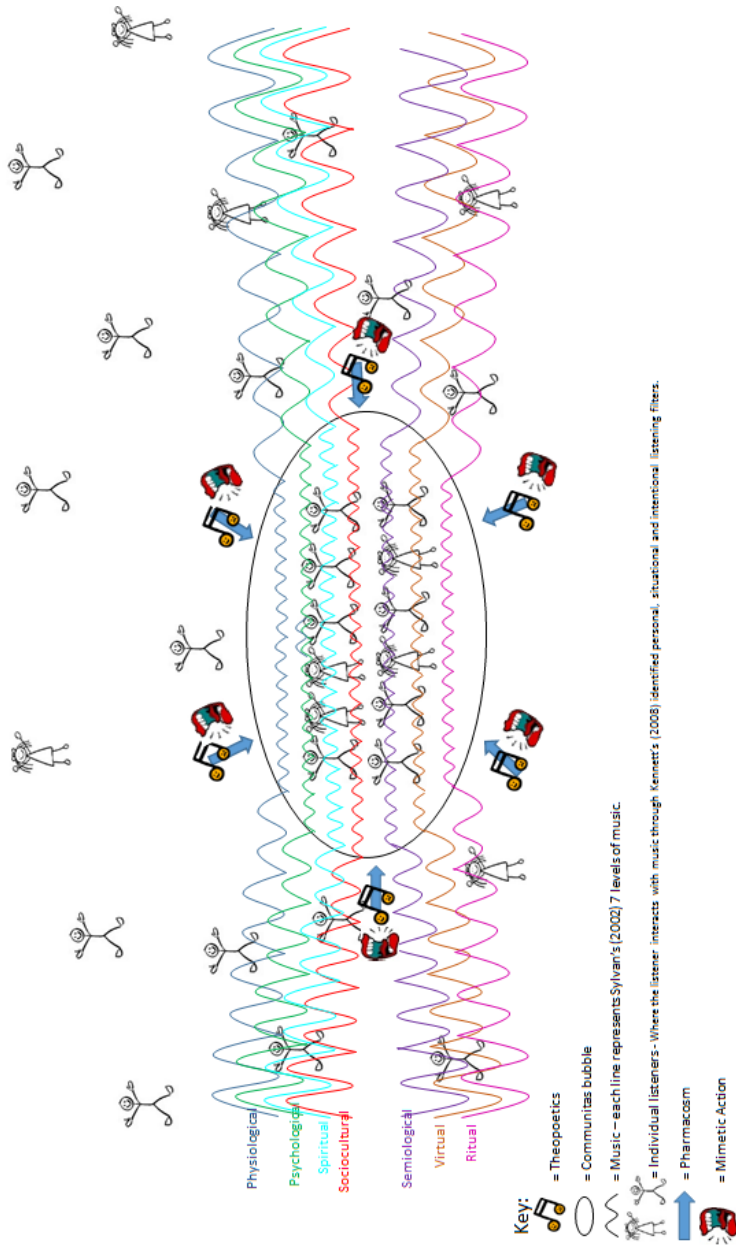


Figure 5. Factors contributing to communitas in a live music setting.<sup>4</sup>

<sup>4</sup> I designed this diagram from a combination of theories. These include Kennett's situational listening context, Sylvan's seven realms of musical experience, Smiths conjuring culture, but also data indicating that people are simultaneously engaged in the performance, in crowd response and online responses.

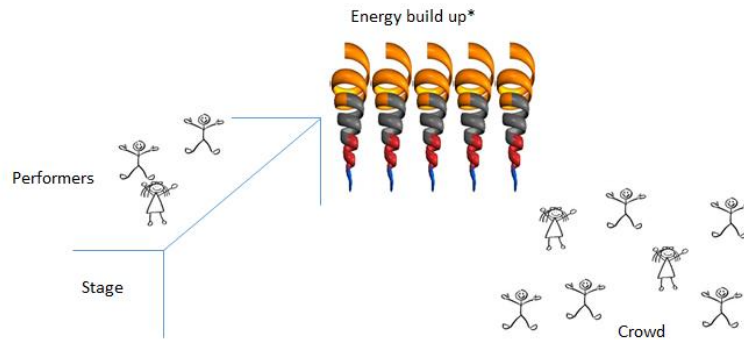


Figure 6. Building up communitas.<sup>5</sup>

Building on respondent data, conceptual frameworks and theories developed in this article, I now examine live settings (listed in Table 1) through physical and online observation. I will focus on LEPS (used to increase an intensify *Pharmacosmic power*). Initial analysis of Tweets and respondents' experiences of events revealed that there is a common language or *speech community* used amongst scene members. These fell into two overarching themes, A and B that I term:

A. Energy and Movement (EM)

This connects physical responses to the music with the way energy moves in liminal space, i.e. kinesics, embodiment and dance, but also how Tweeters and respondents speak about the movement of energy.

B. Emotion and Biology (EB)

This connects to how the energy makes crowd members feel with how they (Tweeters and respondents) speak about it connecting to the body and mind.

Both A (EM) and B (EB), straddle the material and immaterial Africanised religious/spiritual dichotomy (Mbiti). Whilst Tweeters reported online that these were enjoyable events, it is not possible from the data to discern, whether these events were considered overtly spiritual. This may result from the normalisation of Eurocentric understandings of the sacred and profane dichotomy (Reed) by a largely oppressed and marginalised group; British Black, Multi-Ethnic and White working-class youth. Conditioned misrecognition, for example, could lead to one viewing the sacred or spiritual as a) something completely separate from what was happening at these events, or, b) belonging primarily as cultural capital in the Black Public Sphere (Baker) in a non-spiritual way.

Within each overarching theme, three subthemes were found:

A) Energy and Movement subdivided into:

- i. Explosion and Release, (ER)
- ii. Implosion and Collapse, (IC)
- iii. Defiant and Unyielding, (DU)

Tweets and respondents' comments give reference to an immaterial motion, transfer of energy/forces during live performances. References to forces outwards (explosion), inwards (implosion) or inertia were consistently referred to. For Tweeters, performers/performances (CP&T) "went off," moments were "poppin" (ER). Paradoxically, performers/performances (CP&T) "demolished" or "shut it down" (IC). If described as inert (DU), performers/performances were "Heavy," "Hard," "Big," to suggest immovability.

<sup>5</sup> This diagram comes from Smith's conjuring culture, Turner's Liminal Space and Communitas, and the data showing energy exchange articulated from interviews and the observation data.

B) Emotion and Biology subdivided into:

- |      |                              |       |
|------|------------------------------|-------|
| i.   | Living (conscious/rational), | (LCR) |
| ii.  | Dying and                    | (DY)  |
| iii. | Liminal (unaware/irrational) | (LUI) |

Tweeters expressed how performers/performances (CP&T) were “awesome,” “amazing” (otherworldly) at one end of the spectrum, to “slaying” or “killing it” (death) at the other. Tweeters “lost it” or went “mad” or “mental” (betwixt/between). Performers/performances (CP&T) were, “lively,” “sexy” (life), “sick” or “healthy” (health). These statements give an indication of the affect that the moving energy (that draws in Pharmacosmic power, i.e. to heal or harm) in live performance, has on the body, mind and health, ultimately life. In live performance settings, people are talking about states of health, life and forces. *LIFE FORCE*.

Focussing predominantly on the energy aspect in the overarching theme “A” above, I will triangulate all data and theoretical propositions, i.e. journey, LEPS, *Pharmacosmic power* etc. to analyse observation footage of Grime live performance (listed in Table 1).

## A) Energy and Movement (EM)

Performers (CP&T) open portals into liminal space in live settings. Inside this space, they read the crowd and navigate the direction they want the crowd to go in (in negotiation with the crowd). There is a repetition of cyclical energy exchange that spirals between the source of the focus (CP&T, the music, performer, stage etc.) and the crowd (Figures 4 and 6) tightening each time, drawing in *Pharmacosmic power*, understood collectively as life force (by the crowd/Tweeters) until *communitas* is reached. Owing to the sonic characteristics found commonly in Grime (heavy bass, fast tempo, space etc.), it has the ability to dominate temporally and spatially, seizing control quickly—particularly in live performance space. At high volume, it radically changes the soundscape through rhythmising the environment (Perkinson) and sonic dominance (Goodman). The team working of performers (CP&T) frees bodies that are usually marginalised in wider social structures enabling them to engage with *LIFE FORCE* safely.

## Case Studies

### Call and Response (and Case Studies)

Despite not being named explicitly as such, the data suggests call and response is a crucial element in generating, circulating and intensifying LEPS and drawing in *Pharmacosmic power*. Importantly, call and response takes a variety of forms. Performers (CP&T) engage the crowd and give them opportunities to express themselves. In observations, performers (CP&T) at larger events engaged the crowd by asking questions that most people could take part in: “Who’s from London?” “What part of London are you from?” “Cheer if you are from W, N, E, S London,” “Cheer if you are over 20, 30, 40” or “70s, 80s, 90s babies” etc. These examples illustrate the dialogic relationship between the crowd and the performers integral to building LEPS.

The crowd plays a crucial role. Their role functions to *hype it up* or increase energy and tighten LEPS and draw in *Pharmacosmic power* (life force) that culminates in moments of *communitas* (along the journey). It reaffirms the embedded and participatory nature of the scene (i.e. the importance, being there and taking part in the moment inside and outside of live performance settings), but also connects genealogically to the participatory nature of Afrodiasporic approaches to music engagement as cultural, folk and spiritual practice.

Call and response is connected to wider African diasporic practice. It is traceable through chants by enslaved African singers and/or Chantwells (Leu) in the Caribbean to the Griots (Ancient African storytellers). Their role involves preserving history, but also relaying topical subjects to listeners or competing against

one another. In the Caribbean context, Chantwells<sup>6</sup> often led or opened for a carnival related ceremony (which has religious and spiritual roots) or celebration. In contemporary times, Chantwells are known as Calypsonians. The function of the performer (CP&T) in live performance settings bares similarities to Chantwells and Calypsonians and exemplifies a connectedness to Afrodiasporic folk practice arriving in Britain through the migration of Caribbean peoples. The crowd and their engagement in all these contexts are integral to the performance.

The data shows the dialogic relationship between the crowd and performer(s) (CP&T) is always interdependent and interactive. However, at the events attended, not all call and response was verbal. Some were physical and also achieved through the use of technology, such as turntables, CDs or lighting. All forms of call and response contribute to LEPS. Observation footage captured performers using vocal and physical methods of call and response that I will now examine as a series of case studies.

Video 1 VEskimoDNov2013h.MP4 Eskimo drop<sup>7</sup>  
[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7pt5R8\\_zhZg](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7pt5R8_zhZg)

The MC is spittin', and there is call and response between the crowd and the MC. The crowd response is shouted as the MC's arm raise for emphasis along with other MCs on the stage. This gesture signals the crowd to respond on the last word of each line. The crowd responds by jumping, or head nodding with arms up. Here, the exchange of energy and induction of *Pharmacosmic power* comes through the use of gesture to intensify the energy circulation (LEPS).

Paradoxically however, at other times the performers' (CP&T) silence induces call and response. Silence from the performers (CP&T) requests energy from the crowd. If energy is given, the crowd are rewarded with increased energy from performers (CP&T).

Video 2 VSoSolidMar2013a.MP4 Smoke da Reefer<sup>8</sup>  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=royoRjF4JCY>

Here, the DJ removes the music for the crowd to sing along and fill the gap. He then turns the music down to interact with the crowd. Turning the music down requests energy and input from the crowd. It gets the crowd more hyped up, sending more energy forth into the liminal space and tightening LEPS (drawing in *Pharmacosmic power*). With this energy, the DJ plays another song which encourages the crowd to dance more vigorously. Expression of cultural capital associated with age and era is solicited from the crowd by the MC verbally. As a method of energy generation and intensification, the MC gives a rhetorical and playful challenge to the crowd, "If you don't know this track I'm going back to Southwest (London)!" The MC clearly knows that the (vast majority) of the crowd know the track. The crowd dance more vigorously to emphasise that they know the track and have the cultural capital he challenged them on (tightening LEPS).

---

<sup>6</sup> Singers/orators to Calypso music

<sup>7</sup> The stage is full with MCs, some interact privately on stage. Lead MC begins performing to the crowd. All on stage in shot join in with the lead MC performing, shouting the last word of each sentence, vocally or through gesture. Crowd responds. There is call and response between the crowd and the performer. Fans raise their hands; jump and/or body bounce as they watch the stage. Videographers are on stage; they do not obstruct the fans' view. Base is rumbling.  
[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7pt5R8\\_zhZg](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7pt5R8_zhZg)

<sup>8</sup> Three DJs are the only people on the stage behind the decks. The crowd (in the upper circle) are partially engaged. Some are standing and others are seated. Nobody in this clip is recording the happenings on electronic devices. One DJ begins to engage the crowd by asking questions to which the crowd responds. The crowd are more engaged, raising their arms and cheering in response to the DJs request to make noise. The crowd begin dancing more. The song played in Bass heavy.  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=royoRjF4JCY>

## The Drop (and Case Study)

In addition to call and response, and its role in LEPS, key sonic manipulations are necessary to transition the crowd into moments of *communitas*. Heavy basslines that engulf the spatial and temporal; loudness, increased tempo (*accelerando*) and heightened pitch, are features foregrounded in Grime and are effective in dominating spaces. However, the swiftest audio manipulation to induce *communitas* is via a sonic construct identified as *The Drop*. Orchestration of *The Drop* requires performer (CP&T) skill (particularly the DJ) and, in some cases, teamwork between performers, e.g. MC and DJ (CP&T) is reliant on “instinct” and “chemistry” to achieve this (as outlined by the respondents earlier).

### What is The Drop?

*The Drop* is an organisation of sounds, usually orchestrated by a DJ or a live music band to usher momentary *communitas* into liminal space. *Communitas* is *the ultimate destination* to be reached in live performance. Sylvan’s research highlights DJ techniques used to achieve this:

If you want to build a peak, you bring in a sixteenth note snare roll and you change the pitch of the snare roll as it quickens and that just all of a sudden gets everyone’s attention and everyone’s waiting for the payoff. Then you drop out the pounding kick drum and just have one long bass note, and it’s like ‘boom’... (qtd. in Sylvan 139).

The sensation of tempo acceleration and pitch heightening suddenly stops for a moment before a lower pitch and slower tempo enters (Figure 7), usually a heavy bass line (rhythmic pattern), and this is what signifies the arrival into the new moment of *communitas*. The crowd usually celebrate in the moment of *communitas*, the tightest point in the spiral, with more rigorous movements, shouting, singing or dancing. Everyone is engaged, and focussed in the moment of enjoyment and euphoria. *The Drop* is repeated at various points throughout the journey (in negotiation with the crowd).

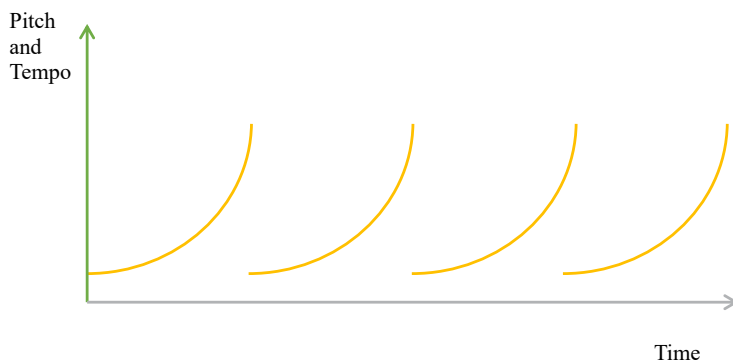


Figure 7. Visual Representation of “The Drop”

Below are sections of observation footage to exemplify how a *Drop* is executed:

Video 3 VIMAug2013b.MP4 Logan Sama building a drop.<sup>9</sup>  
[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OLO\\_YOJIFOI](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OLO_YOJIFOI)

<sup>9</sup> DJ (Logan Sama) mixes music and builds *The Drop*. This footage shows how he is working to achieve this on CDs. The venue had just started the event, so the place was relatively empty. [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OLO\\_YOJIFOI](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OLO_YOJIFOI)

Here we can see Grime DJ Logan Sama building a *Drop*. In this process, we can hear he starts with a slower, more the mellow Hip Hop/R'n'B track. He inserts sound effects (samples) commonly used in Reggae Dub to increase the tempo and heighten the pitch of the music. He uses the stuttering voice effect and increases the tempo by using drum beats that progressively get faster (*accelerando*) in conjunction with a siren to give a sense of urgency, before seamlessly introducing a Grime track. It is important to reiterate, all music played in this clip form part of a musical stream or family (Lena) foregrounding Black musical styles influential to Grimes development. This technique (i.e. the drop), intensifies energy and pace and pulls the crowd forward to a new destination, *communitas*. The impact of this *Drop* was not profound however, primarily because the event had only just started and not many people were present. As a result, there was no significant exchange of energy between the performer and the crowd which is essential for LEPS, *Pharmacosmic power* and *communitas*. Nonetheless, it is a clear example of how to build a *Drop*.

## Wheel Up (and Case Study)

A method to heighten anticipation and or extend *communitas* moments in a live performance setting includes a practice respondents and Tweeters called a “Wheel Up,” “Rewind,” “Reload” or “Bun back.” This cultural practice is found in Reggae Dancehall and Hip Hop cultures where a track is started (by a Selector or DJ respectively) and is either stopped or the record/CDJ is pulled backwards (reversing the sounds) almost immediately. It is then restarted again from the beginning moments later. Performers (CP&T) work together to allow the crowd to *peek* at a new aspect of the journey that they did not know was there. Performers (CP&T) do this through building a *Drop* or inserting a song the crowd was not expecting. This new aspect previews the direction and a destination along the journey (the crowd are travelling along). After short exposure, performers (CP&T) immediately pull the crowd back (pull up/rewind/reload/bun back) to a pre-existing and familiar, earlier part of the journey. When the performers (CP&T) restart this particular part of the journey again, in the familiar area, the crowd now have new knowledge of the journey and destination, that they are expectantly waiting to reach. This new knowledge creates a heightened sense of excitement and anticipation from the crowd and intensifies the energy, drawing more *Pharmacosmic power* into liminal space. This is a process that is repeated several times throughout the course of a live performance event. Below is an example of a *wheel up* in practice.

Video 4 VEskimoDNov2013c.MP4 Crowd reaction to the Drop of Eskimo dance.<sup>10</sup>  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=c0-8ThdN6Ls>

The crowd is dancing to a mellow instrumental track in a swaying motion. The DJ plays sound effects (sample sounds commonly used in Dub style Reggae, such as foghorn), before introducing a popular Grime (Eski) instrumental—*Eskimo*, on the *Drop*. Not knowing that this new song was coming, the crowd respond becoming visibly more excited by dancing more vigorously. With the entrance of the new, unexpected song, the crowd were shown a new direction of the journey inside liminal space and respond to this with movement; by jumping in time to the music (pogoing), raising their arms and moving with more gusto/emphasis. This musical change generates and intensifies energy from the crowd, intensifies LEPS and draws in *Pharmacosmic power*. At this time, the DJ shouts over the mic, alongside the crowd. This moment of high energy is extended by the DJ playing sound effects, pulling the track back— “bun back,” “rewind,” “wheel up,” (to a familiar part of the journey, an area the crowd had already heard/travelled) and then playing the track from the very beginning and adding sound effects. The crowd are primed and ready for The *Drop* they are now anticipating and continue to dance as they now know the direction the journey is taking.

<sup>10</sup> Crowds’ reaction to music change. The DJ mixing using his laptop. Fans are engaged facing the stage, a few people are recording. The MC paces the stage and says very little enabling the DJs music to entertain the crowd. The mellow vibe created by the DJ is heightened by the introduction of the popular Grime/Eskibeat instrumental. The crowd are excited; the MC verbalises more to heighten the moment and lead into a reload. Rumbling bass throughout. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=c0-8ThdN6Ls>



## Communitas (and Case Study)

Performers (CP&T) manage the energy levels at events by navigating the crowd on a journey through liminal space. They work together and to open the portal. They interact with the crowd to circulate energies along a journey and draw in *Pharmacosmic power* into liminal space via LEPS. The journey is punctuated Drops and with moments of communitas, *the ultimate destination*. Performers (CP&T) end on a high so that attendees leave the event feeling elated and wanting more, returning to normality (i.e. exiting liminal space) transformed.

Video 5 VSoSolidNov2013d.MP4 21 Seconds Finale<sup>11</sup>  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=42rSVxHlbuQ>

This is the last song at a concert where the crowd will end the evening on a high. The collective, So Solid Crew, left their most commercially successful song until the end “21 Seconds”. All performers (CP&T) including guest artists showcasing that night, were on the stage for the finale. The vast majority of the crowd in the seated areas were already upstanding and engaged with the performers (CP&T) at this point (i.e. they were dancing and/or reciting the lyrics). Popular phrases of this song were recited with action and added gestural emphasis (such as G-Man’s segment). With Romeo’s (MC) slower lyrical flow and the entrance of the bassline, the crowd began to dance more. The crowds’ effort in reciting Romeo’s lyrics increases verbally and gesturally. A significant moment of communitas that closed the event on a high is where everyone, performers and the crowd, supersede call and response at the tightest part of the spiral to chant Romeo’s last phrase in unison.

## Conclusion

In this article, I explored the *power* of Grime. I applied the seven musical realms identified by Sylvan to listening context (Kennett). I argue traditional African spirituality and practice (Mbiti), under oppressive forces, becomes folk or cultural knowledge in the Black Public Sphere (Baker). From its new location, it is still used as a resource to navigate ones’ life. I explored affect in relation to individual listening—how respondents made sense of Grime when first hearing it. I explored how core respondents made music both individually and collaboratively, uncovering their skillset and the alchemy taking place in immaterial spaces.

I considered the performers (CP&T) role in understanding listening contexts, portal spaces, collaboration, lived experience, cultural capital and articulating intention to maximise *affect* on crowd members. I explored liminality and communitas (Turner) and more recent Black religious and spiritual practice (Smith), to position Grime in live performance spaces as spiritual practice. In live performance settings, I identified the movement of energy—LEPS and its ability to draw *Pharmacosmic power* into liminal space.

I theorised and depicted what happened on a journey through Grime live performance. Performers (CP&T) emptied themselves, (e.g. going to the toilet, releasing nervous energy) to be effective vessels/keys to open the portal and navigate the crowd along a journey inside (in negotiation with the crowd). Data revealed the energy moves bodies and generates emotions. LEPS draws in *Pharmacosmic power* and *speech community* data suggest the crowd, Tweeters’ and respondents’ speak of exposure to LEPS induced

<sup>11</sup> The end of the So Solid Crew concert. All performers are on stage. Guests in the upper circle are upstanding, and some are filming the event on their electronic devices. The lights flash rhythmically in time to the music and the lyrics being said. Some artists on the stage are interacting with each other and others are interacting with the crowd. Those behind the decks at the back of the stage are standing and observing the performers and crowd in front of them. Fans in the circle raise their arms, some doing “Gun Fingers” and raising their arms rhythmically to the beat. Those with electronic devices remain still to capture the footage. As the lights flash rhythmically, the performers and crowd participate in the song—21 seconds, t-t-t, before chanting in unison “Romeo Dunn.” <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=42rSVxHlbuQ>

*Pharmacosmic power* and *communitas* in terms of body, mind and health. LIFE FORCE. This process is AmunRave theory.

Live performance<sup>12</sup> is an example of how the spiritual presents, in what appears cultural. Grime marks out the sonic priorities, soundscapes, ideologies, fantasies, social norms and emotions for a collective of people in a particular era of time. It is a Sonic Footprint Timestamp—SFT (Hallowed be thy Grime, Grime Central! MDA as a Research Method of Generic Musical Analysis). Significantly, for the marginalised communities involved in music making and consumption in early Grime, it validates them. It helps scene members make sense of their lives, world and existence.

## Works Cited

- Baker, Houston. "Critical Memory and the Black Public Sphere." *The Black Public Sphere (Series): A Public Culture Book (Black Literature and Culture)*, edited by The Black Public Sphere Collective 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., University of Chicago Press, 1996, pp. 7-37.
- Bradley, Lloyd. *Sounds like London: 100 Years of Black Music in the Capital*. Serpent's Tail, 2012.
- Campion, Chris. "Inside Grime." *Guardian Online*. 23 May 2004, www.guardian.co.uk/music/2004/may/23/urban1?INTCMP=SRCH.
- Charles, Monique. "Hallowed be thy Grime?: A Musicological and Sociological Genealogy of Grime Music and Its Relation to Black Atlantic Religious Discourse." PhD Thesis. Warwick University, 2016.
- . "Chapter 7 Observations Playlist." *YouTube*, uploaded by Dr. Monique Charles, 18 Aug 2016. www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PL1sdDFLh\_rXcE7FTtJASPgUKWIC6T-ZOD.
- . "Grime Central! Subterranean Ground-In Grit Engulfing Manicured Mainstream Spaces." *Blackness in Britain*, edited by Kehinde Andrews and Lisa Palmer, Routledge, 2016, pp. 89-100.
- . "MDA as a Research Method of Generic Musical Analysis for the Social Sciences; Sifting through Grime (Music) as an SFT Case Study." *International Journal of Qualitative Methods*. vol. 17, no. 1, 2018, doi.org/10.1177%2F1609406918797021.
- Eshun, Kodwo. *More Brilliant than the Sun: Adventures in Sonic Fiction*. Quartet Books, 1998.
- Gilroy, Paul. *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double-Consciousness*. Verso, 1993.
- Goodman, Steve. *Sonic Warfare: Sound, Affect, and the Ecology of Fear*. Massachusetts Institute of Technology Press, 2010.
- Grime, Bow and How UK Hip-hop Found Its Voice*. Directed by Powell, A. The South Bank Show. Sky Arts. 18 May 2012.
- Hall, Stuart. *Policing the Crisis: Mugging, the State, and Law and Order (Critical Social Studies)*. McMillan, 1978.
- Henriques, Julian. *Sonic Bodies: Reggae Sound Systems, Performance Techniques and Ways of Knowing*. Continuum, 2011.
- Johnson, Richard. "What Is Cultural Studies Anyway?" *Social Text*, no. 16 (winter), 1986, pp. 38-80. JSTOR, www.jstor.org/stable/466285.
- Kennett, Chris. "A Tribe Called Chris: Pop Music Analysis as Idioethnomusicology." *Open Space*, vol. 10, no. 1, 2008, pp. 8-19.
- Lena, Jennifer. *Banding Together: How Communities Create Genres in Popular Music*. Princeton University Press, 2012.
- Leu, Lorraine. "'Raise Yuh Hand and Get on Bad!': New Traditions in Soca Music in Trinidad." *Latin American Music Review / Revista de Musica Latinoamericana*, vol. 21, no. 1 (Spring-Summer), 2000, pp. 45-58. JSTOR, https://www.jstor.org/stable/780413.
- Lynch, Gordon. *Between Sacred and Profane: Researching Popular Culture*. I B Tauris and Co Ltd, 2007.
- . *The Sacred in the Modern World: A Cultural Sociological Approach*. Oxford University Press, 2012.
- Mbiti, John. *Introduction to African Religion*. 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., Heinemann, 1991.
- McClure, John. *Mashup Religion: Pop Music and Theological Invention*. Baylor University Press, 2011.
- Perkinson, James. *Shamanism, Racism, and Hip Hop Culture: Essays of White Supremacy and Black Subversion (Black Religion/Womanist Thought/ Social Justice)*. Palgrave Macmillan, 2005.
- Ferreira, Pedro. "When Sound Meets Movement: Performance in Electronic Dance Music." *Leonardo Music Journal*, Vol. 18, 2008, pp. 17-20.
- Reed, Teresa. *The Holy Profane: Religion in Black Popular Music*. University Press of Kentucky, 2003.
- Rose, Tricia. *Black Noise: Rap Music and Black Culture in Contemporary America*. Wesleyan University Press, 1994.
- Smith, Theophus. *Conjuring Culture: Biblical Formations of Black America*. Oxford University Press, 1994.
- So Solid Crew. "21 Seconds." *They Don't Know*. Relentless Records. 2001, 17.
- . music video www.youtube.com/watch?v=g7VhfofoV3qs.
- Spencer, Jon. *Protest and Praise: Sacred Music of Black Religion*. Fortress Press, 1990.
- St. John, Graham. *Global Tribe: Technology, Spirituality and Psytrance (Studies in Popular Music)*. Equinox, 2012.

<sup>12</sup> (the portal, its liminal space, journey and energy exchange (LEPS), ability to draw in *Pharmacosmic power* and momentary *communitas*)

- Sullivan, Paul. *Remixology: Tracing the Dub Diaspora*. Reaktion Books, 2013.
- Sylvan, Robin. *Traces of the Spirit: The Religious Dimensions of Popular Music*. New York University Press, 2002.
- Till, Rupert. *Pop Cult: Religion and Popular Music*. Continuum, 2010.
- Turner, Victor. "Liminality and Communitas" in *The Ritual Process; Structure and Anti-Structure*, Transaction Publishers, 1995, pp. 94-130.