

Rap and Feng Shui: On Ass Politics, Cultural Studies, and the Timbaland Sound

Jason King

? (body and soul – a beginning . . .

Buttocks date from remotest antiquity . . . They appeared when men conceived the idea of standing up on their hind legs and remaining there – a crucial moment in our evolution since the buttock muscles then underwent considerable development . . . At the same time their hands were freed and the engagement of the skull on the spinal column was modified, which allowed the brain to develop. Let us remember this interesting idea: man's buttocks were possibly, in some way, responsible for the early emergence of his brain.

Jean-Luc Hennig

the starting point for this essay is the black ass. (buttocks, behind, rump, arse, derriere – what you will)

like my mother would tell me – *get your black ass in here!*

The vulgar ass, the sanctified ass. The black ass – whipped, chained, beaten, punished, set free. territorialized, stolen, sexualized, exercised. the ass – a marker of racial identity, a stereotype, property, possession. pleasure/terror. liberation/entrapment.¹

the ass – entrance, exit. revolving door. hottentot venus. abner louima. jiggly, scrawny. protrusion/orifice.² penetrable/impenetrable. masculine/feminine. waste, shit, excess. the sublime, beautiful. round, circular, (w)hole. The ass (w)hole – wholeness, hol(e)y-ness. the seat of the soul. the funky black ass.³ the black ass (is a) (as a) drum.

The ass is a highly contested and deeply ambivalent site/sight . . . It may be a nexus, even, for the unfolding of contemporary culture and politics. It becomes useful to think about the ass in terms of metaphor – the ass, and the asshole, as the “dirty” (open) secret, the entrance and the exit, the back door of cultural and sexual politics. The ass as a site (sight) of accrued ambivalence offers us the

chance to dance out of the constrictions of binaries like ugly–beauty and static–kinetic toward a politics of hybridity and (w)holeness⁴ . . .

If we attend to the (w)hole message, a discourse on the ass provides a means for monitoring the flow of spirit in the space–time of late modernity. The ass is an integral phenomenon to contemporary black dance-oriented music, especially at that crossroads where, at any given moment, funk, disco, boogie, jazz, classical, R&B, and various forms of electronica might be enveloped under the banner of rap. We might refer to this hybrid sound in terms of its corporeal effect: “ass music.”⁵

This chapter zeroes in on the compositional practice of one of the hottest contemporary rap producers, Timbaland. His bold percussive ventures in popularizing “ass music” on the landscape of contemporary urban radio have set new standards for artistic achievement in black popular culture as a (w)hole. When considered in tandem with his videos and celebrity discourse, Timbaland’s synthesized and excessively groovy songs provide a forum in which we might imagine how the pursuit of metaphysical freedom has evolved in the age of techno-modernity.

Timbaland’s adventures in the programing of ass music invite discussions of *breath*, *space*, and *flow*, and, as such, find companionship in Feng Shui, the Chinese cultural practice of siting, placement, and architectural composition. Perhaps the only form of spiritual architectural practice that has become popularized in Western cosmopolitan circles, contemporary Feng Shui provides a model for (re) thinking the relation between the spatial–physical environment and the body/soul. Unlike other forms of popular urban design, Feng Shui is chiefly interested in the spiritual valence of how place and space *feels*.

Rap music and contemporary Westernized Feng Shui may be complementary diasporized cultural practices. In rap, the reconstructed and phenomenal hip hop is cultivated through the drum machine: it jumps up to hit the body at the level of the ass in order to impact the soul. In Feng Shui, manipulation of the built environment which surrounds and envelops the body brings good ch’i.

In both rap and Feng Shui, the soul – the life source – maintains a direct and immediate relationship to the external environment and its physical culture. Rap and Feng Shui might therefore be considered *technologies of soul*: through these practices, the soul might come to be cultivated and holistically treated by way of the vibrational lightwaves of the chakras.

Rap and Feng Shui come together at the charged representational form of the music video. Here the performance of the black “good life” – that modern lifestyle in which bodily “flow” is imagined to be optimized – is announced. In these texts, the power of ass music to cultivate ch’i is homologized with the beautiful design of the physical spaces in which the black celebrity’s cultivation of spirit is made possible. The style in motion of these videos cross-references the musical architecture, composed around the fantastic beat, which in turn wants to jump up and hit the body at the level of the ass in order to inspire the soul.

With respect to the experimental suggestions for sonic-funky revolution put forth by Timbaland, the ass becomes not only a way to think more deeply about the place of soul in cultural studies, but it becomes the way we might imagine the body itself to think . . .

The Timbaland Sound

What the fuck was [Timbaland's] "Are You That Somebody?" doing in the [pop] top 10? It was the most aggressively experimental hit single since, I don't know, "I Am the Walrus." The only way Timbaland could top it would be to cover John Cage's "433" on a drum machine.

David Krasnow, in a letter to *The Village Voice*

This entire country is completely full of shit and always has been – from the Declaration of Independence to the Constitution and the Star Spangled Banner, it's still nothing more than one steaming pile of red, white and blue All American bullshit. Because think of how we started. Think of that. This country was founded by a group of slave owners who told us all men are created equal. Oh yeah, all men – except for Indians, niggers and women, right?

George Carlin

Born Tim Mosley, Timbaland appeared in the latter half of the 1990s as a rap and R&B producer on his label Blackground Enterprises (Atlantic Records). The visionary twentysomething-year-old songwriter and engineer has served behind a stable of successful artists from Aaliyah ("One in a Million"); SWV ("Can We"); Ginuwine ("Pony," "What's So Different"); to his co-writing partner Missy "Misdemeanor" Elliot ("The Rain (Supa Dupa Fly)" and "She's a Bitch").

In early 1997, Timbaland emerged from behind the producer's velvet curtain to launch his own project as a rapper. "Welcome to Our World" features Timbaland alongside his other partner-in-rhyme Magoo, while the 1998 release "Tim's Bio: Life From 'Da Basement" features the producer/rapper in his first solo effort, supported by artists from Kelly Price to Jay-Z to Nas. Voted by *Rolling Stone* as 1998's Producer of the Year, Timbaland also produced and performed on the soundtrack to the film *Dr. Doolittle* starring Eddie Murphy, and he has remixed songs for a number of successful groups including the UK's All Saints.

What's most striking about Timbaland's work is the dense, polyrhythmic layering of his drum track.⁶ Since the drum has always been the central feature of African and Afro-Diasporic music and dance (Chernoff 1979), part of Timbaland's contribution has been to test the relationship of this traditional

form of communication to modern musical technologies. Urban music producers have been playing with the sonic valence of percussion with an increased fervor since the industrialization of synthesizer equipment and drum machines in the 1970s. How the beat might not only bang against the eardrum, but seductively take hold of the body through sonic inspiration in various spaces of/for listening – the club, the jeep, the home – has become a major issue in black popular compositional practices.

Since his debut on the popular music scene in 1997, Timbaland's peculiar flair for percussive deep pocket funk has reconstructed and monopolized the sound of black urban radio.⁷ The sound he introduced to radio has cut and augmented black popular music in such a way that the bridge back is no longer traversable. Because lesser producers have rushed to copycat the magic of his sound, Timbaland has, for some, become the latest scapegoat for the supposed death of soul in funk music.

Urban music (which is a marketing term to describe a hybrid sound that incorporates rap and R&B among other styles) has flattened itself out horizontally since the early 1990s. Simple, lock-pattern grooves have taken precedence over dramatic chord changes. Except for the mainstream alternative R&B scene, live instrumentation has been somewhat devalued in urban music. These changes have been mobilized as evidence for the shrinking or reduction of the musicality if not the soul of the urban sound. The reason for these changes has something to do with the lack of traditional musical training available to many of the hot contemporary young urban music producers.⁸

At the same time, this new horizontalism has placed a greater emphasis on formal qualities of texture and density, the feeling of the music. In a different context, Steven Feld has referred to processing multidimensionality in sound as “textural denisification” (1988: 82). The rich acoustic guitar work on Usher's “You Make Me Wanna,” Blaque's “808,” and TLC's “No Scrubs” – all songs which borrow heavily from the trademark Timbaland sound – is but one demonstration of this tactile, expanding dimensionality of sound. This is a vertical, layered sound you can really *feel*.

Indeed, Timbaland has played with the spatiotemporal properties of urban music in unique ways that deserve close scrutiny. Unlike many peer producers, Timbaland doesn't just use machinery to approximate live instrumentation. Rather, he's equally prone to using computerized instrumentation that sounds deliberately robotic, machinistic. As a consequence, his body of work is often described in terms of space-time metaphors, like “space age funk” and “futuristic funk.” In a recent article, a journalist calls the Timbaland sound “back to the future” music (Rogers 1997: 23), while Sasha Frere-Jones deems his sound “ancient modernism.” Both these descriptions become useful for thinking about Timbaland's contribution as a warped and possibly radical reconception-reconstruction of linear time and frontier space logic.

Echoing some of the work of Mantronix and C&C Music Factory's David Cole and their respective adventures in percussion, the Timbaland sound offers

up a spare, arid landscape highlighted by the drum track, a dark, funky thumping bass and electronic keyboards. Because keyboards are traditionally a form of percussion, his music is very much focused around the power of the beat (always in relation to groove). His collection of beats and grooves is staccato, hypertense, and caffeinated.

Music critic Barry Walters has previously described Timbaland's drum orchestrations in the following manner: "brittle, nervous, simultaneously small and loud, as if someone had held a mike to a ticking clock prone to sudden spasms of syncopation. His emphatically mechanical drum programming recalls the rattle of Miami bass, but downplays the jeep-bumping boom, and often suggests an American cousin of English drum 'n' bass" (1997). The particularly attentive might also notice flavors of jungle, East Coast hip hop, disco, reggae, soca, calypso, alternative rock, and electronica as also overt influences in the Timbaland sound.

Alongside this vista of global influences, Southern-bred Timbaland produces a sound that necessarily emerges in the localized setting of the American South. Along with his peer performers and producers in rap from Jermaine Dupri to OutKast and Goodie Mob (all from Atlanta), to New Orleans' Master P and his No Limit crew, Timbaland has ushered in the so-called "Dirty South" beat to late 1990s black urban radio. Dupri has previously defined this Dirty South beat in relation to (auto)mobility: it is essentially "music for the broken cars . . . like an Impala that ain't really hooked up. Real heavy on the bass. A lot of live keyboards. And we ain't scared of the 808 [drum machine] down here. Niggas get in that car and pound somethin' all the way to the strip club." The writer of the article in which Dupri's quote appears follows suit in his description: "when those twanged out rappers of the South Coast get goin', you feel that laid-back bass in your *rump*" (Conroy et al., my italics).

The 1990s emergence of the Dirty South beat, this funky beat that engages and animates the rump, is reflective of the institutionalization of the South as a discrete production center for urban music. What is precisely "dirty" about the beat is that it's sullied with the turbulent racial-political history of American South.⁹ The beat contains that violent and bloody history, it *illuminates* it – even if it cannot signify or determine it as such.

If, as George Carlin muses, the founding American narrative of exclusion turns the nation into a steaming pile of shit, then the beat, produced in the American South, can only be shitty. The dirty ass, really at the center of bodily geography but often imagined to be at the bottom or south slope, naturally produces a dirty, smelly beat.¹⁰

Dirt is nothing more than loose matter, substance which is always already out of place, matter which must be *moved* (out of sight!). Dirt becomes an illuminating metaphor not only for the historical content of this Southern beat that is spun into motion, but for the kinetic-corporeal impulse at the heart of this new, reconstructed beat. This beat wants to move the body, and the body must learn to (re)move to the beat.

Thinking the Body

How can the Negro Past be used?

James Baldwin

The kinetic, tactile body is more than a problem for cultural studies. This body is (like) the question-mark that punctuates and marks the limit of cultural studies. And, in its ambivalence, its refusal to close, and its desire to mark a continual beginning, the sensate body in motion performs the very accretion and mobilization of the cultural studies project that it questions.

In general, cultural scholars have tended to skirt rather than confront the “phenomenal” difficulty of reading and writing the tactile body in performance.¹¹ Perhaps with the exception of progressive dance scholars and some cultural geographers, few connections have been made between the body in motion and forms of sociopolitical mobilization. Even fewer connections are made between the tactile body and its phenomenal faculties in cognition. The question becomes not only whether we could (re) think the body, but whether we could think *through* the body¹² . . .

Cultural studies must first be credited with the strides it continues to make in opening up space to consider the political agency of the body. Two of the more important texts of British (sub) cultural studies from the 1970s, the edited volume *Resistance Through Rituals* (Hall and Jefferson) and Dick Hebdige’s *Subculture: The Meaning of Style*, claim this micropolitics of the body that is reflected ambivalently through style. Cultural studies must also be recognized for its power to envision the body as a social construct, to address the mapping of the social and political onto the contours of the body over time. In this way, cultural studies continues to derail the physical sciences’ monopoly of the *truth* of the body and the way the sciences render the body (as if) knowable in its totality through the rationality of *proof*.

But the epistemological anchor of cultural studies – in spite/despise/perhaps because of its internal differentiation as a discipline – remains rooted in semiotic theory. In its exclusive emphasis on the determinability of acts and interpretations and the causality of referential chains, semiotic theory has traditionally made it difficult to claim the representational abstractions engendered by the body in motion, labor, and performance.¹³ The motion of body, its tactile life in performance and labor, is frequently rendered inconsequential in the writing of culture.

Feeling, emotion, and sensate experience refer to the phenomenality of the living body. Related metaphysical terms like soul, spirit, and aura exceed both the (il) logic of determination and critical reading/writing practices based in self-referential linguistic systems (see Jackson 1998; Moten 1994). The kinetic body reconstructs the very grammar of legibility (if not the logic of grammar itself).

The body in motion/performance/labor is the question-mark for cultural studies since it cannot be determinative except that it might determine its own indeterminability. It also calls into question the tendency to theorize the “flow” of history in disregard for the agential bodies which mobilize that same history (Martin 1998).

In its attention to “liveness,” the newer interdisciplinary field of performance studies might amend these problems of the cultural studies approach to the body. Yet institutionally, performance studies becomes disempowered in its longing to focus exclusively on speech acts. This focus, in its own desire to reduce the phonic substance, functions to demobilize and desensualize the body before it can be thought, read, or written (Jackson 1998). Especially where musical performance is concerned, the Saussurean reduction of the phonic substance is also an immobilization if we remember that sound moves not only in time but in space.

This cryogenically frozen body, whose truth in abstraction is obscured in favor of its potential to signify, also freezes the productive study of culture and performance. In any system that prizes determinate meaning in the effort to eclipse the abstracted content of the illumination, it becomes difficult to assess the sensual impact of (industrial) modernization on corporeity, and near impossible to claim the sensual agency of the body on the forward momentum of modernization itself. In such a closed system, the sensual body is always rendered primitive and agentially weak.¹⁴

If the body is the question-mark of cultural studies, perhaps blackness is the question-mark of scholarship on the body.¹⁵ Soul is institutionalized as black vernacular practice. The phenomenon of soul, that substance which gives life to the body, punctuates and simultaneously mobilizes the cultural studies project.¹⁶ As that which always already bears a relation to the corporeal, soul is irreducible to the market, even though it can quite easily be accommodated within the marketplace and travel as a fetish within its circuitous routes. In part because of traditional African cosmologies that predate slavery, as well as the brutal conditions of the middle passage, and the long, arduous, and religiously inflected relationship of unfree blacks to property and material, the metaphysical remains the accursed blessing of black performance traditions.

So the question-mark for cultural studies that is *body and soul* must in some way go through blackness, not around, above, below, or on top of it, but *through* it. It must particularly go through black music, a massive global resource where soul is more actively cultivated than anywhere else and where the spirit is most frequently called down. Cultural studies must also recognize, rather than annul, the marriage between diasporized black musical forms and co-constitutive vernacular dance moves. Screams, shouts, jerks, and twists are coded illuminations, willfully indeterminate, rich in content, the very hallmarks of a sensual avant-garde black modernity, erotic specters of a critical, *counter* public culture.

Black bodies in motion further trouble the cultural studies distinction between labor and leisure (work and pleasure) toward a more generative notion of

bodywork (see Joseph 2000). Bodywork disrupts the related distinction between labor and rationality, where the white body comes to symbolize rationality while the black body exists to perform the physical labor which that abstracted rationality produces and requires manifest. This racialized divide, which is also a conflation of the human laborer with property, is tragically transconstituted in terms of gender. It is a divide that can only be enacted through terror and spectacle, in the space where these terms come to pass (Hartman 1997).

What remains to be learned from the black body, treated as primitive and dangerous, eliminated, exiled, bloodied, brutalized, exoticized; and yet in its motion/labor/performance offers us not only new claims to history but new ways to produce history, and to imagine – above and beyond and through representation and identification – the vision of a social totality emancipated from mental slavery? To respond to James Baldwin's query, the Negro past, which is always and only embodied, can not only be used, it can be performed and thus mobilized.¹⁷ The black body thus remains a question-mark in and of itself, a threat to the foundations of Western philosophy because it has already witnessed and puts into performative motion a practice of freedom that it has not yet been officially granted and from which it has been historically excluded . . .

Black Ass Politics

Sasha Frere-Jones' review of Timbaland's "Welcome to Our World" album brings us to the heart of these questions of metaphysics and the body. Describing the hit first single, "Up Jumps da Boogie," she says,

Ask my downstairs neighbor about this song. Every hour I get a *limbic urge* to play it very loud and do the Cabbage Patch or Elastic Cornflake (write for details) . . . when the chorus drop in, it sounds like Labelle, a Masai drum circle, and a Survival Research Laboratories contraption all jamming together. *This orgasmic moment typifies the beauty of a very movement-oriented party album*, which is not a song cycle, threat, or deeply felt impression of America: *it's high powered ass music*. And if you're asking for anything more from today's pop music, you're going to get lonely. (my italics, 1997)

Frere-Jones's hourly desire to hear Timbaland's song played at a loud volume is limbic, or corporealized. As captivating as a drug habit or masturbatory addiction, the dangerous and infectious rhythm has seduced her. It comes to her hourly: Timbaland's scientific-erotic funk is on time and in time and out of time and past time.¹⁸

All at once, the music allows Frere-Jones to recall transtemporalized sounds: Labelle (a black female R&B vocal trio who by 1975 found themselves clothed in futuristic styles); traditional African ritual (Masai drum circle), and American pseudo-scientific performance art (Survival Research Laboratories). The orgasmic coming together of these elements toward the (w)hole produces, at last, a

“very movement-oriented party album” which is also beautiful, a word not often applied to rap aesthetics. Frere-Jones has no problem reconciling the fact that she has described the music in relation to the “ass” – so often conceived as the site of shameful vulgarity which cannot be spoken about in public places – and also as a work of beauty. I would argue that the music itself provides an impetus for amending this traditional ugly–beauty binary toward a vision of (w)holeness.

Although the Timbaland sound can be enjoyed individually or communally, in private space or in public space or both, the thread between the public and private is the kinetic impetus. The Timbaland sound is movement oriented, it “inspires” you to move.¹⁹ In this sense his trademark sound is holistic (especially in relation to the relationship of the sum and parts to which holism – or (w)holism, if you will – refers) and something like a cure.²⁰ As George Clinton has proclaimed, “funk can not only move, it can re-move, you dig?”

The danger of the beat is wrapped up not only in its ability to pollute, to contaminate, and seduce others into its ensemble, but to heal through its insistence on rhythm as a cure for various ills (see Browning 1998). You don’t play the beat so much as the beat plays you. Timbaland’s rapid takeover of the sound of urban popular radio, virus-like in speed and effect, might be related to the power of his trademark sound to offer its listeners (w)holistic bodywork, an aural (rather than hands on) manipulation of the physical body that inspires the soul.

I want to break, however, with Frere-Jones’ dismissal of the threatening and impressionistic elements contained in Timbaland’s work. I would challenge her argument that Timbaland’s dissident sound is not a “deeply felt impression of America” since it does lay out an unequivocal politics of (w)holeness in motion that emerges locally from the dirty American South (but exceeds that locale in its ability to circulate globally). Her refusal to feel the danger of the music must suppress her own erotic identificatory relation to the sound, the conscious trance of distracted contemplation her body succumbs to every hour in its desire to consume the song.

Cribbed from the well-known hook of the first mainstream rap hit “Rappers’ Delight,” the title of “Up Jumps da Boogie” viscerally describes the kinetic power of the beat in its groove. (The orgasmic chant in the song fully describes the motion of the beat: “up jumps da boogie, boogie jumps me, up jumps da boogie, boogie jumps me.”) The sound spontaneously compels Frere-Jones to rehearse perennial black vernacular dance styles like the Elastic Cornflake and the Cabbage Patch. The erotic boogie beat jumps up and hits her body at the level of the ass. Hence she calls the Timbaland sound “high powered ass music.”

If, as Baraka reminds us, the word “fuck” is loosely translated as “hit,” then the power of the beat to jump up and hit the body at the level of the ass could be envisioned as a kind of sonic sodomy. If we can also imagine the body to think, then we could imagine the power of the beat as a kind of *mindfuck* – a kind of erotic cognitive anarchy.

Timbaland's compositional impulses help bring together the ass with the sound which is always already corporeally designed to get the ass in motion. He's prone to using unusual tempos and time signatures that seductively inspire the body into rethinking how it must move (or re-move) to stay on time. "One in a Million," the single Timbaland co-wrote and produced for Aaliyah, crawls along at a snail's pace only to turbo boost into double-time during the bridge. Unlike traditional dance-oriented music that plays around 120 beats per minute or more, Timbaland's most successful tunes flow at about 60 beats per minute. To count them in double time would be to falsely accentuate their tempos. At the same time, he's prone to doubling the speed of his hi-hats and related background percussion. His music, as a result, feels extremely fast and achingly slow at the same time.

This sound requires and produces new listening and movement skills, new ways to think through feeling. The alligator pace of the beat instructs the body to slow down, maybe it even arrests the feet. Instead, the beat animates various other parts of the body and it becomes easy, if not pleasurable, to loosen the hips, pelvis, and shake the ass. The influence of Timbaland's sound, and the urban sounds it has spawned, has contributed (along with Caribbean music styles) to the ubiquity of "bounce music" in black vernacular dance. Bounce music is closely related to "ass music," and the term itself might partially describe the effect of the music on the movement of the (jiggly) ass and breasts – they bounce.²¹

I have always found Timbaland's irregular beats extremely difficult to dance to at first: one cannot very easily apply to the music the kind of expansive or extended motility that was more prevalent in vernacular dance styles prior to the introduction of the Timbaland sound (think of the movements of Michael Jackson in the early 1980s or John Travolta in *Saturday Night Fever*).²² To maximize pleasure from the Timbaland sound in bounce movement, the feet should remain more contained spatially. This containment of movement might be related to what Paul Gilroy's addresses as the "shrinking orbits of freedom" around the black body in postmodern cultural practice (1998). But there is still freedom to be found despite/in spite/because of this containment of the feet because it only opens up a different stylistic form of corporeal mobility that focuses on the hips and groin, and finally on the controversial and contested ass. The Timbaland sound inspires the body to recognize what it does not already know of itself. In place, the body must relearn its own relation to the process of self-mobilization. Newly gravitationally centered around the ass, the body becomes its own intimate dance floor, an ever more knowledgeable site where new "steps" are rehearsed and practiced. This beat wants to move the body, and the body must learn to re-move to the beat.

The rise of ass music, this pursuit of percussive tactility, might be a continuation of the subaltern longing for corporeal freedom from and against the "shitty" history (and therefore the "shitty" present and future) of Western imperial civilization. Here is how the Negro past might be used. Invert George

Clinton/Dr. Funkenstein's classic principle "free your mind and your ass will follow." Instead, the new dance styles implore "free your ass and your mind will follow" (or, hopefully, they begin to amend the (culturally specific) binary that separates "ass" and "mind" into a discourse of waste versus use-value). The architecture of the Timbaland beat implores us to free our asses – lest we not only look but *feel* unfunky and obsolete.

At once, this inversion returns us to an ass politics in which the most controversial body part next to the gendered genitals and breasts becomes the locus point for the pursuit of enlightenment. Freeing up the ass is a movement toward a sensual new rationality. The ass thinks. Amiri Baraka may provide some direction here: "We seek Wholeness. Atonement. Not Nietzsche saying feeling made it hard for him to think. For us what cannot feel cannot think. They say Dr. J, Magic, Michael Air are 'instinctive.' Boston Larry B, etc., intelligent. The highest intelligence is dancing, not the Arthur Murray footsteps advertising! The highest thought is a doing, a being, not an abstraction" (p. 107). Baraka's revisionist epistemology is complemented by a recent trend in urban slang, which is the substitution of "You understanding me?" for "You feelin' me?" The implied tactility in the latter expression demonstrates the need for revised corporeal epistemologies in Afro-diasporic cultures.

If we are attuned to its power to mobilize the cognitive faculties of the body at the level of the ass, the Timbaland sound may indeed be a dissident threat. Colored folk have traditionally been imagined as the cultural bottom, the Southern "ass" of the world (Africa, Asia, Caribbean) in relation to the rational "mind" of the Euro-Northwest (Europe, America), according to the economic (re)enactment of the Cartesian mind-body dialectic on geographical space. Then we might imagine that Euro-Western freedom and humanity depends in a big way on containing the corporeal freedom of the black ass, both metaphorically and literally. The historic white repression (and periodic engagement with and hybridization of) black vernacular dance (and music that inspires and/or is inspired by such dance) has to be linked, therefore, to the historic subjugation of the black body, and by extension, its fugitive claims to rationality.

The body in motion may also pose a threat to the social order because the freedom of cognitive corporeality organizationally corresponds to forms of political activity that value the social and communal over practiced individualism. Ntozake Shange has written that

i mean / in habana / everybody knows fidel can mambo a revolutionary rhumba / if fidel can do it / it cant be so hard to love yr people n keep in step/ at the same time/everybody in the ford assembly line cd do it / the folks in soweto cd do it / *i mean think n dance at the same time* / but i've never heard tell of the ny times takin notice of that moment when "CASTRO LEADS HABANA IN NATIONAL RHUMBA" just like they make no mention of the fact that jimmy carter cant dance to any rhythm known to man. (p. 124, my italics)

Here, Shange locates a revolutionary communist politics in the rhythmic aesthetics of the vernacular dances of Cuba and South Africa. (These are in turn transnationally linked to the proletarian rhythms of industrial labor at Ford.) In the process she illuminates new discourses on subaltern corporeal rationality that fundamentally engage rather than displace the erotic power of the body in motion toward an improvisational practice of freedom.²³

The Motion of Wind and Water

When there is dancing the buttocks are no longer depressed, bored or seeing no future in life. For dancing creates something miraculous within the buttocks: they shake. This shaking is a sudden movement which makes the buttocks jerk, twitch, even register seismic shocks. Shaking in a way is a storm within the buttocks.

Jean-Luc Hennig

Feng Shui provides a referential model for thinking about the Timbaland sound in and its relation to the space-time of the built environment. A traditional Chinese art of placement, siting, and architecture, Feng Shui can be more or less summarized as the “feel” of a place, good or bad (Walters 1998: 9). A rigorously interdisciplinary practice, it straddles site planning, dealings in the built and natural environment, as well as the redistribution of material objects within the interiors of a building, among many other traditions.

Feng Shui meets formal properties of composition (lighting, ventilation, color, shade) with practices of science and religion: some of its concerns include ch’i (energy) and the magnetism of the earth, and the symbolism of shapes with reference to the Five Elements. We might say that the ultimate aims for practitioners are harmony, happiness, tranquillity, peaceful co-existence with nature (Walters 1998).

Emerging out of the intense religio-mathematics of geomancy, Feng Shui has become increasingly popular in Western bourgeois urban culture at least since the late 1960s. Brought to international visibility by traveling writers like Derek Walters and Sarah Rossbach, Feng Shui’s new cosmopolitan identity in and outside of Asian Diasporic cultural practice has naturally altered the traditions of the form. I have often grimaced in dismay as my friends claim to practice Feng Shui as they do nothing more than reposition Pottery Barn tables and nail mirrors purchased at Ikea to the wall of a room to make the reconstructed space more “happy.”

Contemporary Feng Shui was ushered into modernity through its circulation in a transcontinental marketplace of asymmetrical exchange. It has thus had to respond to pressures of technological modernization and improvisational routines of diasporization. In fact, as both black music and Chinese spiritual architecture have been circulated to ever larger audiences, the flow of these

exoticized practices is tested against the appeal of hard machine technologies and the monotonous rhythms of (post)Fordist industry . . .

I would say the popularity of Feng Shui has only gained in relation to certain bourgeois crises over the death of the spirit in late global capitalism.²⁴ The cultural practice in its popular diasporized format carries only the trace elements of traditional geomancy. For instance, the book *Feng Shui Tips for the Home* limits its discussion to an anorexic 100 pages, providing hand tips for *instant* Feng Shui in the home. A recent article in *House Beautiful* magazine similarly reduces the practice to its lowest common denominator: “With references to ‘the 24 Terms of the Solar Calendar,’ the eight trigrams, and the five energies, some of the new books add up to a lot of confusion. Still, you don’t have to be a China scholar to understand the basics of Feng Shui” (Picker 1996).

Always shadowed by the ancient interrelations between Ifa divination systems and Chinese cosmology, popular African-and Asian-diasporic composition practices bear a deep relationship. Especially since the cultural studies movement has tended to neglect metaphysics, the powerful resonance between I-Ching and Yoruba ache is worthy of a longer discussion than is possible here. But it is useful to note that these terms have no interpretative equivalents in Western contexts. Although they are two culturally specific practices, at some basic level rap and Feng Shui share concerns with flow. Derek Walters notes that: “There can be no exact translation of Feng Shui . . . since it has not true equivalent in Western terms. The words themselves mean ‘wind’ and ‘water’: both wind and water ‘flow,’ and this gives some clue to the nature of Feng Shui.”

Flow is a term that illuminates motion in space and time, the phantasmal style of trace and ephemera, wind rustling the leaves on the branch of a tree, or water brilliantly illuminated by the light which seems to dance on its surface.²⁵ Flow (energy in motion) is also a key element in black oral vernacular practices and is interrelated to both the “breath” of the performance, its inspiration, as well as to the drumbeat, whose simplest rhythm might be said to mirror the beat of the heart.²⁶ Walters also notes that *ch’i* translates directly as “breath” or “blowing into” while *yun* (as in *chi-yun*) might be said to translate as the resonance of the spirit.

Like Feng Shui, Timbaland’s music bears a relation to the (w)holistic in that it works to energize the body, to organize the flow between the concentrated vibrations of the chakras. The music wants to optimize soul, to augment the freedom of embodied spirit. So if current popular Feng Shui is at times reduced to a pseudo-contemplative practice of reorganizing beds, tables, and adding mirrors to a room, it is still about the organization of hard materials in the external environment toward the progressive flow of internal energies. In the same way, we can look at Timbaland’s practice of reconstructing that which bears a relation to the hard materiality of the built environment (not only his use of the synthesizer but its ability to generate robotic sounds that mimic factory and machinery rhythms) in its relation to (w)holistic bodywork that links flow to the politics of the ass.

In Aaliyah's "Are You That Somebody," written and co-performed by Timbaland, the infectious melody is tied to the stress of the drumbeat. It starts and stops in a regular rhythmic pattern, leaving open gaps and (w)holes of space. I liken these gaps to gasps of air that regulate the flow of the track itself. Timbaland also received accolades for sampling a baby's joyous gurgle that becomes the recurring motif of the song. A baby's laugh is nothing if not an exercise of the lungs, an effect of respiration.

This "inspired" sample of spirited breath, a uniquely "live" found object that is always already inspiration in and of itself, is the source of the song's flow. Its inclusion in the track begins to counteract the possibility that the sound might become hopelessly dehumanized by its use of "hard" synthesizers and computer musical technology.²⁷ The aesthetic binary between hardness and the liquidity of flow is being effortlessly reconstructed or warped toward the (w)hole by Timbaland's compositional choices.

Beside the drum, the central ingredient in the Timbaland sound is its groove, which aims to lock and seduce you into its steady flow. Steven Feld defines the groove in relation to the drumbeat in kinetic terms: "one's intuitive feelingful sense of a 'groove' or 'beat' is a recognition of *style in motion*" (my italics, 1988: 76). This style in motion is orchestrated into the flow of the music itself. What really anchors the quirky rim shots and the dancing hi-hats of the Timbaland sound is a rhythmic groove that illuminates the conditions of labor in the techno-industrial age. In the tight, interlocking funk groove of his hit single "Luv 2 Luv Ya," the repetitive clanging, steely instrumentation recalls, for me, the intense and monotonous rhythms of the assembly line, of mechanized industrial labor and proletarian work practices . . .

In "Clock Strikes," Timbaland samples the theme from the 1980s television show "Knight Rider," referencing that show's main gimmick, a high-tech sleek black sports car named Kit, which travels at intense speeds, speaks in a robotic tone, and has a mind of its own. The echo of the Kit car in "Clock Strikes," style in (auto)motion, brings to mind a phallic image of technologized black speed as flow.²⁸ Timbaland's conjoining of diasporized African drumming practices with techno-machinery works to amend the traditional binary of technology as acceleration-speed (modern) with the sensuality of ritual (the "primitive" African drumming).

This is not only an acoustic reconstruction of the traditional spatial-geographic configuration of these discourses (North and West as technologized-rational, the South and East as sensual-primitive) but also a temporal reconstruction that syncretizes categories of past, present, future toward a nonlinear, newly cyclical model of human existence. The meaning of life is/as the circle, and the opposite of being funky is what? Square.

Groove by its nature is cyclical, and so it becomes useful to address the motif of circularity that characterizes the Timbaland sound. This circularity is not only literalized by the repetitiveness of the groove but it's never less than guaranteed by the politics of (w)holeness that Timbaland's brand of ass music makes

possible.²⁹ Ultimately, the circularity of the Timbaland sound has much to do with the way it formats a postmodern drum circle (again, see the quote by Frere-Jones) which bridges the song and spectator(s) at the level of sensual bodywork.

I have already referred to how the Timbaland sound might work to syncretize socially constructed binaries like local/global and ugly/beauty toward the (w)hole. The Timbaland sound also reimagines the presence of the kinetic within the static toward the (w)hole in ways that might reinvigorate the possibilities for mobilization within the sociopolitical. Although it might be possible to make this argument exclusively considering Timbaland's musical output, video – in its relation to his trademark sound – provides the clearest example of the relationship between politics and flow.

The hip hop video has become a privileged site in which the cultivation of soul is explicitly visualized and therefore managed. In the late 1990s, the trend in hip hop music videos was to depict rap stars living the “good life,” partying, socializing, and residing in expensively decorated and lavish homes.³⁰ Stars are called stars in part because they are imagined to be filled with intense forms of vibrational light that suggests their internal flow of energies is optimized or unblocked. Stars' homes are imagined to illuminate the energetic faculties of the people who reside in them. Where beautiful homes are not displayed in music videos, exceptional leisure spaces are often substituted, such as the millennial streamlined silver rooms that appear in TLC's “No Scrubs” video, directed by Hype Williams.

While critics have celebrated the avant-garde aesthetics of these videos, others have criticized their depiction of materialism gone rampant, conspicuous consumption, and bourgeois upward mobility.³¹ Are these spectacular videos nothing more than what Manthia Diawara envisions as a black “metropolitan modernity” which promises the realization of a new Aquarian age in which “black people do not divorce ethics from the material conditions that reproduce the good life” (1992; 1995 [1994]: 52)?

To rescue these videos from both their uncritical celebration of class and privilege and from the academic critique and/or lack of critique of that original lack of critique, we must begin to question how these videos look and what that tells us about how they feel. Beautiful million-dollar homes and futuristic architectural design may signify ostentatious wealth, celebrity privilege, the accumulation of individual profit, the lifestyles of the rich and famous. But the representational spaces may also be attempting to illuminate the abstracted power of funk to (re)move the body from material pursuits and to optimize inner flow. To move beyond the materialist critique of the videos, we must claim the synergy of at least three elements in these videos: 1. the beat that inspires the ass to elevate the soul; 2. the illuminated body of the celebrity which makes the video possible; and 3. the expansive, avant-garde design and direction of these productions.

The financial expense of some of these videos has much to do with their attempt to capture in visual form the warped spatio-temporality within the aural

itself. Color saturation as well as state-of-the art lighting is especially important in their artistic design. Special care has been taken to highlight properties of symmetry and balance in the built environments of the sets in these videos. The visual design attempts to approximate not only the mood of the music and its emphasis on textural densification, but its *feeling*. So many of the spaces and places in these hip hop videos not only look beautiful but they feel good: these videos have texture. They could only have been produced at the turn of the century and the turn of the Millennium, as they “flow futuristic” (to coin Jay-Z) not unlike the music itself.

From this temporal lens of style in motion, Feng Shui provides an analogy for (re)thinking the relationships between the body and soul, flow and the built environment. The video for Timbaland and Jay-Z’s “Lobster and Scrimp,” with its jittery staccato screen, canted frames, midnight imagery, and neon-lighted green floor captures the manic, robotic quirkiness of the trademark Timbaland percussive sound.³² Busta Rhymes and Janet Jackson’s video for “What’s It Gonna Be,” which borrows heavily from the Timbaland sound but is not written by Timbaland himself, imagines the two celebrities in an environment of silver, mercurial walls, illuminating through special effects Busta’s rap skills, his ability to flow, the stylistic motion of his performance self and his inner essence.

Malik Hassan Sayeed’s video for Timbaland, Jay-Z, and Amil’s “Nigga Wha, Nigga Who” features several scenes in which the performers walk toward the camera in graceful slow-mo, battered from behind with bursts of light in motion jutting out like electricity in sharp angles against the dark backgrounds. (Sayeed repeats this same affect of the flow of light, only bathed in deep blue, for the video for Lauryn Hill’s melancholy “X-Factor.”) The sloth-like attitude of the video for “Nigga Wha, Nigga Who” works (as if) in counterpoint to the pungent percussive track of the song, which sounds to me like a jar of jellybeans or coins shaken intermittently, rhythmically, and hard. The breaks and pauses in the percussion echo (for me) the rhythms of hard breathing, like the way the body sounds and sluggishly heaves, up and down, as it recovers from exercise.

As the illuminated bodies of Jay-Z and Amil approach the television screen in the video, moving so magically slow that time seems to nearly freeze, we become aware of the motion of silence, how silence looks and feels, the ghosted evidence of style in motion, or groove. The divided temporalities of the song (fast) and the video (slow) are not divided at all – they’re actually synchronous and asynchronous at the same time. It is on time in time out of time and past time. Sayeed brilliantly captures in visual form the *molasses frenzy* of the Timbaland sound, the slowsugarsweet coming together of staticitykinesthesia which is already being worked out in the sonic architecture, so dirty it’s funky, and in the effect of his brand of Southern fried liveness on the stylized ass in motion . . .

body and soul (more . . .

What is funky is history, what comes goes.

Amiri Baraka

This is just a beginning . . .

The gendered and slick video for Aaliyah's funkfest "Are You That Somebody" (written by Timbaland for the *Doctor Doolittle* soundtrack³³) presents a group of black men on motorcycles magically bursting through the outer (vaginal) "walls" of a cave in which Aaliyah and her female dancers await. Once inside the cave with its streamlined, silver walls, the men and women perform a quixotic urban courtship dance that is not only choreographed to the triplet stress beat of the music but also to the lyric itself that features syllables which largely rest on the beat as well. The video performs how the dirty South sound, its emphasis on loosening up the motion of the ass, should look and feel as it hits the body. It is nothing if not an instructional text on how to dance to the new dirty South beat.

In 1999 the choreographer of the video, Fatima, released her own video in stores, entitled *Go Fatima!* During the course of the one-hour instructional video she breaks down step by step some of the best moments from the popular videos she helped design, and the first video on the tape is "Are You that Somebody." Fatima informs us that to start preparing for this choreography, one must begin with the bounce. I would consider this instructional video as a kind of notation or transcription. But it is almost akin to "thrice behaved behavior" – it not only transcribes the choreography from Aaliyah's video, but the original choreography in video could be seen *by itself* as a transcription of the movement already contained and inspired by the music but not yet corporealized.

When the song was released into New York clubs in the summer of 1998, I remember watching awestruck as couples would reenact moves from the video itself on the dancefloor. This kind of mimetic bodywork, which requires skill, practice, and desire, declares the power of funk to call the body into mobilization, to maximize flow and mix the interpersonal vibrations of the chakras. Aaliyah's video is an added feature in the relationship between music and the body, something like a bridge between the individual and the social.

Whether by watching it on TV or by watching Fatima's instructional tape, the practitioner-listener rearranges and mimetically reconstructs Aalyiah's video and/in its choreography to move his body to inspire his soul. A non-essential but useful item, the video brings us that much closer to the reconstructive corporeal impulses that are always already housed within the Timbaland sound from the get go.

The labor spent by the video in reconstructing the feel of the Timbaland sound is matched by the bodywork returned by the audiences whose souls do much better once their asses shake to the music.³⁴ Although enacted in a public club, this revisionist primal scene is not entirely different than Frere-Jones' "limbic urge" to move in time on time out of time and past time to the Timbaland sound in her private space . . .

So the mindfuck of the Timbaland sound is that it forces you or me not only to rethink our body³⁵ in terms of the rhythmic motion of our hips and ass, but to think through our dancing body in order to be funky – to stay in time and on time and ultimately to move through time, to avoid *feeling* square, to avoid stepping outside of the percussive circle.

The Timbaland sound formats this new circular politics of freedom that supports dirty beautiful cognitive feeling. It becomes ever more necessary to think through the agency of the funky ass in motion to consider how the sensate, kinetic body always already mobilizes and produces history rather than remains oppressed by its *flow*.

We always knew "Dancin' in the Streets" had a progressive subtext, but who knew "Shake Your Groove Thing" was prophecy?

Notes

- 1 See James Earl Hardy's B-Boy Blues on this point: "The next 'characteristic' that caught my eye was what Gene calls their 'tail waggin'.' As mentioned before, B-boys wear their pants hanging off their asses. Most of them have juicy behinds to begin with, so when they bebop down the street, it just jingles and jangles – and *that* is a sight to see. I am convinced that most B-boys, whatever their orientation, really enjoy the attention that their asses attract; I mean, why advertise like that if you don't want it to be seen and salivated over? When you think about it, this is very homoerotic. Homosexuals are often accused of 'flaunting' their sexuality (a tired charge, since straight folks bombard us every day with images that glorify their sexuality), but B-boys, who are supposedly a heterosexual lot, seem to do it more, especially in this area" (p. 29).
- 2 I am not attempting here to conflate the buttocks and the anus, merely to open up a more sophisticated conversation about the interrelationship between the part and the (w)hole.
- 3 For more on the "ass" as a subject of critical inquiry, see Hennig (1995), Madonna (1992), Hardy (1994), Bersani (1995), Sadownick (1996, esp. 101–3). This writing will surely be criticized for attempting to locate a sacred politics of transcendence in the metaphor of the ass. But like the old spiritual song says "my soul's so hot I can't sit down." Here is a traditional phrase that already posits a direct relationship between the soul, spiritual frenzy (the motion of anarchy), and the ass.
- 4 My influence here is Geeta Patel's meaningful complication of hybridity (1997), as well as the work of Amiri Baraka (1991).
- 5 I borrow this term from Sasha Frere-Jones (1997). More on this later.

- 6 I have chosen not to focus on lyrics for two reasons. One: the logistics of space. I would not want to focus on his lyrics unless I could also be guaranteed enough room to focus on the sound of his lyrics in performance. Two: despite Timbaland's immense contributions to new black popular music aesthetics, the producer has not attained the level of success or visibility of his peer rapping producers in part because of what many perceive as his weak skills as both a lyricist and performer. Word on the street is, he can't write lyrics and he can't rap. The banality of many of his lyrics, taken in tandem with his tendency toward "unsophisticated" rhyme scheme, has alienated any number of rap purists, who instead look toward 'visionary' and more hardcore artists like Jay-Z and Nas for inspiration. Yet I would argue that the tendency to label Timbaland's musical contributions as 'nonsense' is a useful gesture. Nonsense is meaninglessness, rubbish, trash, waste, excess – and already this takes us back to a discourse on (black) ass politics. As George Clinton states, "nonsense is a positive force." Thinking of Timbaland's work as nonsense also allows us to think more deeply about the politics of abstraction and content. If much (but not all) the power of Timbaland's funk is located in the nonrepresentational possibilities of his music and its performative effects on the body, then we might move away from a discourse on what his music is saying, or even how it sounds, and towards a revolutionary discourse on how his music *feels*.
- 7 Of the 1999 Grammy-nominated TLC release *Fan Mail*, Ann Powers notes that "the sound is sharper, more aggressive; clearly, Austin and his musical partners, L. A. Reid and Babyface, have been feeling the heat generated by their Virginia neighbor" (1999).
- 8 Or whether they would want such training at all if it were hypothetically offered to them. I'm not convinced by this line of argumentation in the first place, since anyone who believes composing music on computer programs like ProTools or CuBase requires reduced (or no) skills has probably never actually spent time using such complicated programs. In some ways, it is more difficult, not only musically, but in the sense that one must have a developed skill for mathematics to perform cut and mix programing. Timbaland nonetheless displays an extra-special musical sensitivity: "Timbaland says he builds his mixes around the harmonics of the speaking voices of his male and female rappers. He notices the 'key' a rapper performs in, then places all his melodic and percussive effects in complementary keys. The technique proves that working up the musicality in rap does not have to result in transforming it into R&B" (Cooper 1998: 134).
- 9 My use of "dirty" here is influenced by Douglas (1966).
- 10 We can therefore imagine that the beat only gets dirty when man stands up to walk, when he starts using his brain (Hennig). Cleaning up, laundering or containing this black beat, its messiness and its smell – while pleasurably engaging its magic – has been a perpetual project in the Western ethical pursuit of freedom. But as George Clinton, my funk guru, has said: "Because funk by any other name would still be funky – still make a motherfucker say shit, it damn near smell. 'Cause it's that primal thing, and that funny kind of nasty humor. Cats can't be cool when they hear that music. And you either love it 'cause it will make you twitch, or you hate it. But if you stay with it, you will dance" (quoted in an interview with Chip Stern 1979 [1994]: 15).

- 11 There are of course many within and outside cultural studies who have made excellent strides toward this goal. Among them see Foster (1996), Polhemus (1978), Nast and Pile (1998), Eshun (1998), Jackson (1998).
- 12 Randy Martin is useful here (1998). To think about thinking through the body would necessarily involve the continued study-practice of corporeal epistemologies, such as muscle memory and gut feeling, that might exceed the limits of the foundational Cartesian logic of Western thought. On a different tip, Kodwo Eshun (1998) has made great strides in rethinking the digital sensorium.
- 13 Motion, performance, and labor are three terms each with their own weight and history. I do believe that in relation to corporeality they can be productively theorized in concert. We might think of the motion of labor in relation to the labor of motion in relation to the performance of labor in relation to the labor of performance, and so on.
- 14 The frozen body of cultural studies and performance studies can only, therefore, signal the foreclosure of the postcolonial movement.
- 15 Blackness in this context has a relation to but always exceeds epidermal proof (melanin), proof of hair and voice, as well as the genes or any other aspect related to the physical. It could be thought of more generatively as a subordinate class positioning (in relation to the dominant class) within the social (Hall 1990: 226). If I am in danger of reconstituting racist logic by linking blackness not only to the body, but to emotion, sensuality, essence, and spirit, let it be recalled that blacks in the Diaspora do not monopolize nor own soul. See Green and Guillory (1998).
- 16 We could distinguish soul from spirit here in that the spirit may enter and leave the body, and as such is not bound by the corporeal. Soul, however, must be embodied although it is not reducible to the body. The soul that leaves the physical body causes it to die. Therefore, we cannot talk about the health of the body outside of its relation to the soul. The soul of the body cannot be exclusively conflated with the term "soul" that is used to market records, books, hair products, and so on. At the same time, the interrelations of the terms are crucially important.
- 17 For Baldwin, the use-value of black history is complicated by the truth that everyone is "carrying one's history on one's brow, whether one likes it or not" (1971: 167). The body cites the history from which it is produced; the body can, as such, never be free of its own history. This "burden" of history is thus embodied. History is then complicated by the admission that subordinated peoples under oppressive regimes do not necessarily "own" their bodies: skin, hair, lips, genitals, and ass are contested properties along asymmetries of race and gender. If oppressive history is corporealized, Baldwin remains utopic in his belief that bodies do not only move through history – bodies move history itself (1971). Despite the oppressive faculty of history, the agency rests with people to imagine a better future. And if the body can never be outside of history it can certainly be emancipated from its totalizing power. Then we could also think about the body in performance as an articulation or mobilization of the terms of that history.
- 18 George Clinton sizes up the link between funk, temporality, and utopia in "Unfunky UFO" when he claims: "We're unfunky and we're obsolete (and out of time)."
- 19 I use the term "inspire" here rather than "discipline" or "force" for the sake of the breath which inspire implies, which is in turn related to flow. I use it to break from

- the concept of the beat as an exclusively disciplinary force (Hughes 1994). There seems to be some way in which Frere-Jones' ascetic practice of moving to the Timbaland sound has to do with inspiration in the context of flow that would contest any easy notion of the recalcitrance of the master-slave relationship in beat culture. If the beat enslaves the body, turns us into slaves to the rhythm, we also imply that the body, like the subaltern slave, has no life in consciousness, no cognitive scream or voice of/or rationality that would contest the brutality.
- 20 A useful analogy here for thinking about (w)holism is the tossed salad. A food item which literalizes what Dick Hebdige has defined as the "cut 'n' mix" practices of Caribbean Diasporic cultures (1987), the tossed salad holds particular value in its tactile apprehension (in this case, eating, but we might also use the term consumption) as a whole, not in individual elements of the preparation (tomatoes, lettuce, carrots). Tossed salad is also a useful metaphor here because it is used in US slang for oral-anal contact, and its equivalent, "rimming," is the active verb, the kinetic manifestation, of the noun "rim" which is the term used to describe the outer perimeters of the circular drum.
 - 21 The dance style inspired by the Timbaland sound is related to, but probably exceeds, the Black Bottom, an "underground" but hugely popular dance style – popular among whites as well – of the earlier half of the twentieth century.
 - 22 I am immensely grateful to Kobena Mercer for pointing this out to me.
 - 23 Also see Randy Martin (1998) for his work on nationhood and hip hop dance aesthetics.
 - 24 I am particularly thinking of the mantra of television's *The Oprah Winfrey Show* at the turn of this century and Millennium: "remember your spirit." This mantra is for me a bourgeois proposition in that it assumes that to remember the spirit one must have already temporally moved past it in linear terms or lost it altogether. I would argue that to lose the spirit in order to (re-)remember it is itself a luxury. Do the dispossessed and disenfranchised have the luxury to *not* remember their spirit?
 - 25 With much reservation, I would suggest here Csikszentmihalyi (1990).
 - 26 Baraka writes that "Spirit is literally breath as in in/spire or ex. Where you aspire is where you (go be at) headed, like the church spire. No breath. No life. But the drum replicating the first human instrument keeps life, the sun replicating itself inside us. Its beat. Night and Day. In and out, the breath. Coming and going, the everything. The Pulse, the flow, the rhythm carrier" (p. 104).
 - 27 We might now contest R&B legend Charles Wright's statement: "I've dealt with the electric drum, for five years now I've tried. There's absolutely no spirit in it. You can't put spirit into a machine" (quoted from an interview with Charles Wright at [www. RandB.com](http://www.RandB.com)). It is not necessarily that one must look for spirit in the machine (although there it may well be) but that one must reconsider one's relationship to the machine itself in order to play it with spirit. Feng Shui again provides a referential model: it is not necessarily the built environment that contains ch'i but the way in which the built environment can be arranged and reconstructed that cultivates ch'i in the practitioner of Feng Shui. This same line of reasoning might apply to Gilroy's public mourning for the dormancy or death of soul in contemporary rap. "I'm always wary about this argument because I feel it has a kind of generational specificity to it, and I would not want to turn around and be seen to be

- saying, well, this particular quality has completely disappeared from the musical culture. It may still be there, but I know that *I can't hear it*" (p. 254, my italics).
- In the 1970s, R&B singer and instrumentalist Billy Preston adapts his gospel-trained keyboard skills to the synthesizer (an instrument which he first makes use of in his song "Space Race"). Here he describes performing on the synthesizer: "It's the spirit of it, the feeling of it, the heart of it, and the love that's put into it, the touch and the sensitivity of it, that's what makes the difference, cause everybody [plays] the same notes . . . There's only so many notes you can play . . . It's how it's played, how it's touched and the emphasis and the approach, you know, the attack, the release, the sustain . . . I never play the song the same way twice" (quoted from an interview with Billy Preston at www.RandB.com).
- 28 In his song "Here We Come," the producer samples the sing-song theme from the Saturday morning cartoon show *Spiderman*, echoing the title superhero's ability to defy gravity, to scale buildings with grace and speed in defiance of the grammar of space-time.
 - 29 Dyer calls the repetitive groove and long format structure of disco music "whole body eroticism," a phrase which again brings us back to this notion of (w)holeness in relation to the rhythmic flow in dance music (1990 [1979]).
 - 30 R. Kelly's 1999 video for the urban pop song "Home Alone" is perhaps the most explicit example (next to the Notorious B.I.G.'s "One More Chance"). The plot is as follows: R. Kelly is relaxing in his dazzling, stylishly decorated mansion when his doorbell rings. He walks in a stylized motion to the door, grumbling to himself since the doorbell has distracted him from his activities. Meanwhile, the camera shoots him from below and behind, focusing and bringing attention to the motion of his ass in his gym pants. Kelly opens the door and is bum-rushed by crowds of people who have come to have nothing but a good time in his home. The video wants to say; one should never be "home alone" in such a beautiful space, and by extension, R. Kelly, the star, should never be "home alone" when he has so many fans. I would argue the shot of his ass in the beginning of the video, before his friends enter the house, frames what we will see for the rest of the video, which is the performance of the social, of the collective, of the pleasure principle, the orgy which is always already sexual even when no clothes are removed. No matter that the video is crass in its depiction of materialism. From the beginning of the video, with the ass shot, we know that this clean spacious house has to get funky and dirty. With the ass shot, we know that something has to shake.
 - 31 I, for one, have previously argued that the avant-garde aesthetics of the contemporary black music video are inseparable from the performance of celebrity privilege (1999).
 - 32 It also prominently features the celebrities cruising in a car, suggesting the automobility that is at the heart of the Dirty South beat.
 - 33 The 1998 film remake starring Eddie Murphy had more bathroom humor ass jokes per scene than any I can remember in recent history. Coincidence?
 - 34 George Clinton: "Funk is a non-profit organization." That which funk spends it returns in equal measure. Organizationally, funk is probably anticapitalist.
 - 35 I purposefully use body here, rather than its plural equivalent.

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