“You crossed my mind ... before?”: An intertextual analysis of songs from 'To Pimp A Butterfly'

Colin Outhwaite

*Edith Cowan University*

Follow this and additional works at: [https://ro.ecu.edu.au/theses_hons](https://ro.ecu.edu.au/theses_hons)

Part of the Ethnomusicology Commons, and the Music Performance Commons

**Recommended Citation**


This Thesis is posted at Research Online. [https://ro.ecu.edu.au/theses_hons/1547](https://ro.ecu.edu.au/theses_hons/1547)
You may print or download ONE copy of this document for the purpose of your own research or study.

The University does not authorize you to copy, communicate or otherwise make available electronically to any other person any copyright material contained on this site.

You are reminded of the following:

- Copyright owners are entitled to take legal action against persons who infringe their copyright.

- A reproduction of material that is protected by copyright may be a copyright infringement. Where the reproduction of such material is done without attribution of authorship, with false attribution of authorship or the authorship is treated in a derogatory manner, this may be a breach of the author’s moral rights contained in Part IX of the Copyright Act 1968 (Cth).

- Courts have the power to impose a wide range of civil and criminal sanctions for infringement of copyright, infringement of moral rights and other offences under the Copyright Act 1968 (Cth). Higher penalties may apply, and higher damages may be awarded, for offences and infringements involving the conversion of material into digital or electronic form.
“You Crossed My Mind… Before?”:
An Intertextual Analysis of songs from

To Pimp A Butterfly

This thesis is presented in partial fulfilment of the

Bachelor of Music (Honours)

Colin Outhwaite

Western Academy of Performing Arts (WAAPA)
Edith Cowan University
2020
# Table of Contents

- **Declaration** .................................................................................................................. i
- **Abstract** ......................................................................................................................... ii
- **Acknowledgments** .......................................................................................................... iii
- **List of Figures** ................................................................................................................ iv

**Chapter 1: Introduction** .................................................................................................... 1  
1.1 Purpose of this Study ....................................................................................................... 2  
1.2 Background .................................................................................................................... 3  
  1.2.1 Intertextuality .......................................................................................................... 4  
  1.2.2 Nostalgia ................................................................................................................ 6  
  1.2.3 Authenticity .............................................................................................................. 7  
1.3 Rationale ......................................................................................................................... 8  
1.4 Methodology ................................................................................................................... 9

**Chapter 2: Wesley’s Theory** .......................................................................................... 11
  2.1 Introduction ................................................................................................................... 11  
  2.2 ‘Every N*gger Is A Star’ Sample ................................................................................. 11  
  2.3 Hit Me! .......................................................................................................................... 13  
  2.4 ‘Every N*gger Is A Star/Wesley’s Theory Musical Analysis .................................. 14  
  2.5 Chapter Summary ....................................................................................................... 16

**Chapter 3: For Free? - Interlude** .................................................................................. 17
  3.1 Introduction ................................................................................................................... 17  
  3.2 Jazz Genre Conventions ............................................................................................. 17  
  3.3 Aligning Contexts ......................................................................................................... 18  
  3.4 Jazz Harmony and Harmonic Tension ........................................................................ 18  
  3.5 Rhythm and Tempo ..................................................................................................... 19  
  3.6 Vocal Delivery ............................................................................................................. 19  
  3.7 Chapter Summary ....................................................................................................... 20

**Chapter 4: King Kunta** .................................................................................................. 22
  4.1 Introduction ................................................................................................................... 22  
  4.2 Sample Manipulation ................................................................................................. 24  
  4.3 Stylistic Borrowings ................................................................................................. 23  
  4.4 Structural Elements ................................................................................................. 25
4.5 Funk Throwback ........................................................................................................... 26 
4.6 Chapter Summary ....................................................................................................... 28 

Chapter 5. Conclusion ........................................................................................................ 29 
5.1 Conceptualising Lamar’s Practice ............................................................................. 29 
5.2 Contribution to Ethnomusicology ............................................................................. 29 
5.3 Shortcomings and Future Research .......................................................................... 30 

References ......................................................................................................................... 31 
6.1 References Cited ......................................................................................................... 31 
6.2 Music Cited .................................................................................................................. 37 

Appendices ......................................................................................................................... 39 
A.1 Music Analysis Charts ............................................................................................... 39
Copyright Declaration

I certify that this thesis does not, to the best of my knowledge and belief:

(i) incorporate without acknowledgment any material previously submitted for a degree or diploma in any institution of higher degree or diploma in any institution of higher education;

(ii) contain any material previously published or written by another person except where due reference is made in the text of this thesis;

(iii) contain any defamatory material;

(iv) contain any data that has not been collected in a manner consistent with ethics approval.

Signed: ________________________________ Date: 08/11/19
Abstract

Popular music often refers to, evokes and includes elements of other music from the past. This kind of intertextuality in popular music provides artists and audiences with short-cuts to making and interpreting meaning. It draws on nostalgia, past listening experiences and idealised perceptions of the past. Artists engaging in this practice risk criticism for being too derivative. Conversely, artists who are too innovative and forward-looking run the risk of not connecting to listeners. Kendrick Lamar’s hip-hop album of 2015 *To Pimp A Butterfly* is lauded as being simultaneously innovative and steeped in the recent history of African American music. Lamar accesses a broad range of styles and creative approaches to pay tribute to African American culture, borrowing and transforming references from past musical predecessors and recontextualising them to make meaningful statements for contemporary audiences. Through the identification and analysis of the network of intertextual references embedded within the first three tracks of *To Pimp A Butterfly*, this study aims to understand the significance of Lamar’s use and manipulation of intertextuality. In doing so, it will discuss the effectiveness of intertextuality as an increasingly prevalent creative practice in popular music.
Acknowledgements:

I would first of all like to thank my supervisor Clint Bracknell for his energy and ideas and helping me produce work beyond what I thought I was capable of at the start of the year.

Thanks also to Matt Styles for his guidance throughout the year, and for always being available to give advice and support when I needed it.

I would also like to thank my family and my girlfriend Aísling for their patience and encouragement.

And finally, I would like to acknowledge Kendrick Lamar and the collaborative musicians involved in To Pimp A Butterfly for helping me broaden my understanding of music and culture.
List of Figures

Musical Examples

Audio 3.1: Lamar’s use of rhythmic and lyrical repetition in ‘For Free? Interlude’ in the style of Gil Scott-Heron (Lamar, 2015, track 2, 01:39-02:06) ......................................................................................................................20

Audio 3.2: Scott-Heron’s use of rhythmic and lyrical repetition in ‘The Revolution Will Not Be Televised’ (Scott-Heron, 1970, track 1, 01:28-01:52) ......................................................................................................................20

Audio 4.1: Drum break in Curtis Mayfield’s ‘Kung Fu’ (Mayfield, 1974, track 5, 05:00-05:13) ........22

Audio 4.2: King Kunta’ guitar wah effect in the style of ‘Wah Wah’ Watson (Lamar, 2015, track 3, 03:15-03:26) ......................................................................................................................27

Audio 4.3: ‘Wah Wah’ Watson wah pedal use in ‘Papa Was A Rollin’ Stone’ (Whitfield & Strong, 1972, track 3, 04:01-04:10) ......................................................................................................................27

Music Transcriptions

Figure 2.1: Transcription of Boris Gardiner’s, ‘Every N*gger Is A Star’ sample in ‘Wesley’s Theory’ (Lamar, 2015, track 1, 00:26) displaying the use of extended harmony ........................................................................15

Figure 2.2: Wesley’s Theory’ (Lamar, 2015, track 1, 00:45) opening melody showing harmonic construction from Phrygian dominant scale and form 1 of the Japanese ‘In’ mode ........................................................................15

Figure 2.3: Form 1, Japanese ‘In’ mode (Blanchard, 2008) in F# .............................................................................16

Figure 3: Guitar/Saxophone unison line in ‘For Free? – Interlude’ (Lamar, 2015, track 2, 00:12) showing the use of tri-tone interval and G7 altered content ...............................................................................18

Figure 4.1: Transcription of bass line from Mausberg’s, ‘Get Nekkid’ (Burns, 2000, track 4, 00:01) to show rhythmic and harmonic contrast in Thundercat’s interpolated sample in Figure 4.2 .............................................................................22

Figure 4.2: Transcription of bass line from ‘King Kunta’(Lamar, 2015, track 2, 00:01) to show rhythmic and harmonic contrast from original bass line of ‘Get Nekkid’ in Figure 4.1 .............................................................................22

Figure 4.3: Chord chart to the verse of Mausberg’s ‘Get Nekkid (Burns, 2000, track 4, 00:21), showing place of key modulation ..................................................................................................................24

Figure 4.4: Chord chart to the verse of ‘King Kunta’ (Lamar, 2015, track 3, 00:37), showing place of key modulation ..................................................................................................................24

Figure 4.5: Vocal line during outro of ‘Get Nekkid’ (Burns, 2000, track 4, 03:04) showing harmonic similarities to ‘King Kunta’ guitar solo in Figure 4.6 .............................................................................25

Figure 4.6: Guitar solo during outro of ‘King Kunta’ (Lamar, 2015, track 3, 03:05), showing harmonic similarities to ‘Get Nekkid’ vocal harmony line in Figure 4.5 .............................................................................25
Chapter 1: Introduction

“Words alone do not generate a song’s meaning.” Theodore Gracyk (2001, p. 228)

“Having spent so much time working with him, it’s clear that everything he does is on purpose.” Thundercat on Kendrick Lamar (Weiss, 2015, para. 3)

In an era where music is increasingly created via pastiche and the fusion of genres, popular music is imbued with deep layers of cultural and historical meaning (Sloan, Harding & Harris, 2019; Sloan, Harding & Felder, 2019). Due to the rise of digital streaming, listeners have become more demanding of content and variety, influencing artists to alter their creative approaches (Lefsetz, 2013). Popular music genres have also cross-pollinated to the point where some music could be considered genre-less (Harding, Sloan & Harris, 2019). Thanks to the internet and increased access to information, looking backwards to inspire musical innovation has become the principal method for creating new music (Sloan, Harding & Harris 2019). The process of incorporating or quoting musical elements from the past in new work is known as intertextuality. Musicologist Gary Burns lists intertextuality as a category in his typology of hooks in popular music (1987). However, intertextuality in popular music does more than simply hook the listener in and make a song more memorable, it presents audiences with multiple layers of meaning to engage with.

Kendrick Lamar’s album, To Pimp A Butterfly (Lamar, 2015), is an important album in contemporary popular culture that extensively utilises intertextuality as a creative method to convey meaning. The album not only draws heavily on the history of African American musical culture and innovation, but also serves as a medium for potent messages in regards to the exploitation of African American musical artists, racial politics, and the Black Lives Matter movement (King, 2016; Fulton, 2015). Through the synthesis and manipulation of intertextual references, Lamar manages to straddle the border between engaging in history and nostalgia, while remaining culturally relevant and successful, both critically and commercially. To Pimp A Butterfly not only won best rap album at the 58th Grammy awards, but also earned 10 more nominations (Grammy, n.d.). It also received a 96% score on Metacritic (n.d.), a website that provides a weighted average of published reviews from accredited critics and publications.
1.1 Purpose of this Study

Intertextuality is the presence of a text within another text. Defined as the view of literature in terms of its relationship to previous texts, the concept of intertextuality has also been applied to studies of music (Shuker, 2017). If we consider music as a text, we are able to draw conclusions about meaning based on the analysis of particular musical and lyrical elements within a piece and how they relate to past works. During an era of music making in which artists regularly draw on and combine musical genres, Lamar’s extensive use of intertextuality in *To Pimp A Butterfly* could be considered state of the art. The album cohesively incorporates a slew of cultural and musical references from the past to address topical themes.

This study plans to identify and analyse the use of intertextuality in the first three tracks from *To Pimp A Butterfly*:

1. ‘Wesley’s Theory’ (Lamar, 2015, track 1), which fuses an optimistic 1970s soul sample with minor-key hip-hop and features lyrical references to the funk genre;
2. ‘For Free? Interlude’ (Lamar, 2015, track 2), which heavily references jazz and spoken word beat poetry;
3. ‘King Kunta’ (Lamar, 2015, track 3), the lead single from the album which is based around an interpolated sample, and heavily references the funk roots of hip-hop.

These three tracks offer contrasting stylistic and conceptual approaches while exemplifying the sheer density of intertextual references across the whole sixteen-track album. Genealogy is a process of unearthing historical knowledge that has been adapted to music studies in order to interpret meaning in the way popular music incorporates musical ideas from the past (Burns et al., 2015). Focusing on the opening tracks of *To Pimp a Butterfly* (2015), and adapting methods of genealogical analysis, this study will explore the cultural and historical significance of intertextuality as a creative method. It takes place within a broader context of African American music studies, and works on nostalgia, intertextuality and authenticity in popular music.
1.2 Background

Musical genres with roots in African American communities such as blues, jazz, gospel, R&B, soul, funk and hip-hop are linked to the recirculation of cultural history and the push for civil rights (Fulton, 2015; Solis, 2019; Weiner, 2015). Whether socio-politically or creatively inclined, hip-hop in particular has served as a rejuvenator of African American music and cultural identity through the use of sampling (Minestrelli, 2016). Sampling is defined as the reuse of musical content or recorded audio within another recording (Demers, 2006). It is a creative method that is both extensively used in, and sonically defining to, the hip-hop genre (Perchard, 2015; Ullman, 2016; Williams, 2014). Due to the cultural baggage that each musical reference carries within its place in time, the act of sampling enables artists to recontextualise cultural and socio-political themes to address concerns of the present (Perchard, 2015).

Samples are a way of connecting to and reviving culture and music (Perchard 2015). However, it is disingenuous to assume that artists use samples in their music solely out of a desire to rejuvenate culture (Perchard 2015; Schloss 2004). Sample-based music production is a key part of the hip-hop aesthetic, to the point where some of its aficionados and exponents may deride the use of live instrumentation as being inauthentic to the genre (Ullman, 2016). This study will investigate how To Pimp A Butterfly leverages sample-based production, live instrumentation and lyricism to present multiple layers of intertextual meaning, with foundations in a hip-hop aesthetic.

Much of the scholarly consideration of Kendrick Lamar’s To Pimp A Butterfly is concerned with the current relationship between hip-hop and jazz (Early & Monson, 2019; Solis, 2019; Weiner, 2015). Solis (2019) and Weiner (2015) draw attention to the fertile Los Angeles jazz scene that fuses the boundary-pushing jazz aesthetics with racial politics to create music that is nostalgic, innovative, culturally relevant, optimistic and inspiring. This displays how some innovative current music scenes are built upon a melting pot of genres and cultural backgrounds. However, the collaboration of jazz musicians and hip-hop artists is not a new phenomenon. Adler (2005) describes how jazz musicians such as Kurt Rosenwinkel and Robert Glasper have been collaborating with hip-hop artists since the early 2000s and draw on hip-hop and other popular music conventions in their own jazz releases. This collaborative link can be traced back to further significance, with jazz piano legend, Herbie Hancock, inadvertently bringing hip-hop to global recognition with his Grammy award winning hit, ‘Rockit’ (Hancock, 1983) (Fernando Jr., 2015). Due to Lamar’s referencing of the jazz genre and aesthetic approach within To Pimp A Butterfly, it is
important for me to consider hip-hop’s history and current connection with jazz.

Lamar’s potent message in regard to racial politics – along with his role within the Black Lives Matter movement – has dominated scholarly discussion of To Pimp A Butterfly (Fulton, 2015; King, 2016; Lawrie, 2019; Sillman, 2017). King (2016) demonstrates how public critique of Lamar on social media did little to dissuade Lamar from engaging politically through his music. Lawrie (2019) discusses the album’s significance as protest art, and Sillman (2017) investigates how Lamar’s musical, lyrical and sonic choices display his internal conflict due to the fallibility of his role within black politics as a result of his fame and fortune. Fulton (2015) provides a brief lyrical and musical summary of To Pimp A Butterfly, contrasting it with D’Angelo’s Black Messiah (Archer, 2014) to show how both albums are examples of ‘black music’ as a concept due to the collage of many African American genres and their revitalisation of political and cultural themes. Intertextuality is a key feature of memorable popular music (Burns, 1987), and is effectively leveraged by African American artists.

1.2.1 Intertextuality

Intertextuality originated in literary studies but has since been applied to music studies, with the majority of the music based scholarly research stemming from Genette’s theory of intertextuality (1997). Genette proposed a compartmentalised approach to identifying and categorising intertextual references based on the strength of their connections, enabling a more authoritative interpretation that some poststructuralist approaches lacked due to their ambiguity (Nichols, 2006). Genette’s theory thus provides focus and identification strategies in order to acknowledge the varying methods of intertextuality. Lacasse (2000) worked to apply the transferability of Genette’s theory into the study of popular music using popular songs as examples to the main headings of Genette’s theory.

One of Lacasse’s suppositions is that there is not only feasibility in analysing the elements of intertextuality embedded in song (2000), but in studying a song’s surrounding paratextual and the metatextual texts. Burns et al. (2015) offer a clear definition of these two terms:

Lacasse’s formulation thus allows for a comprehensive consideration of the popular song text and its references to other texts, not only in the materials and expressive elements that are embedded in the text (intertext), but also in the potential links and
connections that are evident in the surrounding materials. These related materials include the images, design, and formatting of the text (paratext) in addition to critical commentaries, reviews, analyses, and interviews with the artist (metatext). (Burns et al., 2015, p. 7).

Burns et. al (2015) draw upon Lacasse’s framework to factor in this paratextual and metatextual content in order to more fully understand the significance and cultural relevance of Lady Gaga’s intertextual references in the album The Fame Monster (Germanotta, 2009). They conclude how Lady Gaga’s creative application and recontextualisation of intertextual references are innovative and culturally relevant. Due to the sheer volume of intertextual references within To Pimp A Butterfly, investigating the paratextual elements falls outside the scope of this study. Instead, it will focus on using metatextual material to provide further context for developing a fuller understanding of Lamar’s extensive use of intertextuality.

Hypertextuality is another concept of Genette’s intertextual theory that distinguishes how far away the creation (hypertext) deviates from the initial text (hypotext). Russo (2015) employs Lacasse’s interpretation of hypertextuality in order to analyse the compositional, sonic and aesthetic approaches of bands from the Australian hard rock revival scene. A hypertextual analysis is thus used to determine where bands lie on the “spectrum of derivativeness” (2015, p. 122). This spectrum is based on Auslander’s (2003) study of rock bands in the late 1960s reviving 1950s rock and roll. Auslander uses this to gauge authenticity to a musical paradigm while Russo utilises it to also determine the level of innovation involved in music revival bands. Russo’s theoretical framework enables me to identify and reflect upon the usage of hypertextuality throughout To Pimp A Butterfly.

Hatten (1985) also draws on Genette’s (1997) branch of theory but combines it with a range of other theoretical approaches to recontextualise classical compositions such as Mozart’s ‘Requiem’ and Beethoven’s ‘Missa Solemnis’. Spicer (2009) then carries Hatten’s (1985) intertextual framework into the popular music sphere by analysing three of John Lennon’s recordings. He distinguishes between stylistic intertextuality and strategic intertextuality, allowing for his analysis to consider formal quotations and allusions, plus stylistic references such as genre, instrumentation, harmony, and timbre. This more refined approach to categorisation allows further interpretational scope for my analysis. Lamar not only displays the use of strategic intertextuality through sampling and lyrical quotation, but he also engages in stylistic intertextuality through the reference and manipulation of the
structural and sonic elements. Both of these techniques thus contribute to imbuing a song with meaning (Hatten, 1985; Spicer, 2009).

1.2.2 Nostalgia

Due to its link to the past, intertextuality has a direct link to the evocation of nostalgia. In popular music, intertextuality functions as a ‘hook’, which can bolster a song’s popular appeal due to nostalgic resonance (Burns, 1987). Burns uses specific musical examples in popular music to show how hooks can use melodic, rhythmic, harmonic and lyrical references or quotes to engage the listener through their familiarity with a past song or text, thus showing the impact and benefit of the use of intertextuality in music. In fact, it is partly due to this accessing of musical predecessors that music is said to be one of the most powerful initiators of nostalgia (Juslin et al., 2008; Zentner et al., 2008). Hence, through the effective use of intertextuality and subsequent evocation of nostalgia, popular music is able to instantly convey a sense of meaning to many listeners (Garrido & Davidson, 2019). The ability for music to induce feelings of nostalgia is dependent on each listener’s personal context and lived experience. However, due to the ability of individuals to generate idealised perceptions of past time periods based on their social and cultural experiences, music can also prompt “second hand” nostalgia (Garrido & Davidson, 2019, p. 37; Holbrook, 1993; Marchegiani & Phau, 2013).

Due to the popular desire to connect with a past time period, historical nostalgia has been targeted as a marketing strategy (Holbrook, 1993; Holbrook & Schindler, 2003). Holbrook and Schindler (2003) seek to understand how prone individuals may be to nostalgia-focussed marketing, stating individual contexts play a role in not just recognising nostalgic cues, but registering them with a sense of nostalgia. He concludes that nostalgia influences consumer tastes, a conclusion shared by many other studies in the field (Brown, 2001; Havlena et al., 1991; Loveland et al., 2010; Marchegiani & Phau, 2001; and Smith & Clurman, 1997). While Bennett’s and Rogers’s (2016) study of nostalgia does not focus on marketing, their analysis of the correlation between the shifting of music’s physical extensions to a society of digitalised immateriality occupies a similar sociological vantage point. They infer that due to the affiliation between nostalgia and objects, people are still prone to valuing a connection with material aspects of popular music. This is particularly significant to this study in relation to the opening sample of ‘Wesley’s Theory’ in To Pimp A Butterfly, where the use of a record player sound effect induces nostalgia and a longing for the past due to its material connection. Bower (2009) shows how there has been a ‘vinyl
revival’ in the past decade despite the global rise of digital streaming (Seppala, 2019), due to a desire to reap a more fulfilling listening experience that music streaming does not provide (Bower, 2009).

The use of nostalgia in the arts has also garnered a significant number of negative connotations. Jameson (1991) describes concerns within the consumerist realm, stating how the reinterpretation of the past sacrifices historicity after being tainted by the cultural baggage of the present. Pickering and Keightley (2006) also back up this suggestion stating that nostalgia compromises historical accuracy in the media industry. Reynolds (2011) takes this cynicism a step further by suggesting that the reason we look back as a society is due to the lack of forward propulsion. In relation to music, he considers nostalgia is a crutch on creativity and constantly looking backwards impedes progress and innovation (2011). Conversely, some researchers suggest nostalgia is an integral aspect to new music due to its influence on the creative process (Chilton, 2019). Chilton (2019) moves chronologically through the most relevant styles of popular music from the 1920s through to the present day, highlighting the key figures of each movement and the music artists that influenced them, and in return, the effect they had on changing the face of popular music. Tamara Livingston adds to this by explaining how unsuccessful music revival projects may serve as a catalyst to generate new sounds and timbres (1999). Different values associated with nostalgia in various popular music genres help inform aesthetic and critical boundaries for audiences and critics to make judgments about an artist’s degree of innovation, originality and authenticity.

1.2.3 Authenticity
Nostalgia is a currency in popular music that influences the endurance of genre and the success of revival and reformation tours (Livingston, 1999; Driessen, 2017). Upon reflection of the uses and effects surrounding the accessing of nostalgia, it would appear that an artist walks a fine line between authenticity, historical accuracy, cultural relevance and artistic innovation, whilst also striving for commercial success. Hard rock revival band Greta Van Fleet’s debut album, *Anthem of the Peaceful Army* (Kiszka et al., 2018) was notably derided by Jeremy D. Larson (2018) in his Pitchfork review claiming that the band, “make music that sounds exactly like Led Zeppelin and demand very little other than for getting how good Led Zeppelin often were” (2018, para. 3). This demonstrates how drawing too heavily on music from the past in popular music can lead to criticism due to a perceived lack of artistic authenticity (Livingston, 1999), although this practice can still be commercially successful (Sloan, Harding & Larson, 2018). Nevertheless, genre revivalism is an important part of the
musical landscape that gives artists the ability to align themselves with an idealised interpretation of the past while offering a cultural alternative to the present (Livingston, 1999).

Though music revival scenes prioritise notions of authenticity in musical production and presentation, these ideas of what constitutes authenticity is often decided in relation to contemporary cultural circumstance. Authenticity can also be connected to how an artist may respect or challenge the boundaries of established musical genres or traditions of practice. Lizzo’s 2019 album, *Cuz I Love You* (Jefferson, 2019) was also criticised for its use of intertextual referencing despite the very culturally relevant message aligning with body image, female empowerment and racial inequality (Kameir, 2019; Sloan, Harding & Harris, 2019). Lizzo draws heavily on a variety of established musical genres, paying tribute to influential artists from the past including Prince, Missy Elliot and Aretha Franklin. She abruptly switches genres with every new track on the album, her choice of genre emphasising the message of each song (Sloan, Harding & Harris, 2019). This approach drew criticism, the album considered by some “a means to a greater end” (Kameir, 2019), too sprawling to authentically resonate with listeners despite the liberal use of nostalgic hooks.

The way in which these artists have been critiqued suggests the underlying approach to the use of intertextuality can impact an album’s critical and commercial success. It is not necessarily what nostalgia-inducing cues you reference, but how you go about it. Lamar’s *To Pimp A Butterfly* manages to boldly and excessively utilise references from musical predecessors, yet avoids criticism of plagiarism or genre-hopping. Upon being questioned for his referencing of multiple African American music genres, R&B artist D’Angelo stated, “I make black music” (Fulton, 2015, para. 1). Faced with similar questions, Lizzo suggested, “I am the genre. My voice is the genre.” (Kameir, 2019, para. 5). These three artists share a common goal in displaying defiance against a society that tries to pigeonhole African American artists and undermine their political statements by focusing on discussions of genre. Their voice and culture are the threads that bind the wide variety of creative processes and musical conventions they draw on.

### 1.3 Rationale

*To Pimp A Butterfly* is a concept album that traverses a broad range of socially complex themes and thus uses intertextuality to convey or emphasise them. These themes include African American creativity and cultural history, socio-political concerns, the striving for
authenticity as an artist, and the exploitation of African American music artists. To allude to these diverse, yet culturally fused concepts, Lamar aligns his political inclinations with that of his musical ancestors through the medium of intertextuality. *To Pimp A Butterfly* is a strong indication of Lamar’s response to the modern state of music creation and consumption. Not only does his music represent the pinnacle of intertextuality as a creative method, but it is both a reflection of and a statement against the current musical climate. While there has been research into the lyrical themes and the musical referencing of African American culture within *To Pimp A Butterfly*, there is yet to be scholarly analysis specifically on Lamar’s use of intertextuality as a creative method. The present investigation into the intertextual methods utilised by Lamar engages with the broader fields of popular music and popular culture.

1.4 Methodology

My approach to identifying and analysing intertextual references will be based on that of Burns et al. (2015), which distinguishes between the use of strategic intertextuality and stylistic intertextuality. This approach allows me to not only consider formal content and structural references, such as direct musical and lyrical quotations, but also consider more general stylistic allusions such as the use of timbre, harmony, genre conventions and instrumentation. The intertextual analysis will be supported by a review of the metatexts, which include information that surrounds the text such as interview material and critical review. I will also be applying genealogy as an interpretive method within my study, again adapted from Burns et al. (2015).

Genealogy is a widely discussed approach to historicisation that has also been used in the music domain (2015). It is the archaeological process of unearthing knowledge that has been suppressed by mainstream or dominant forms of knowledge. Genealogy’s roots stem from Nietzsche (Foucault, 1978) but was brought to further attention by Foucault. Foucault’s (1972) writings were later applied to popular music studies by Burns et al. (2015). While they do not offer a comprehensive evaluation of the transferability of Foucault’s theories into music studies, they highlight how they take inspiration from the key concepts of genealogy such as the unearthing of underlying knowledge (2015).

Charles (2006) also draws on this process in her contextualisation and cultural definition of the electronic dance genre known as grime. Each intertextual reference within music carries its own cultural baggage that affects and is in turn impacted by the materials that occupy its new contextual setting. Charles’ (2006) and Burns et al.’s (2015) applications of
Foucault’s theories show how the key principles of genealogy can be utilised within popular music studies to examine the use of intertextuality and understand its cultural significance.

In order to provide a critical interpretation of the use of intertextuality within *To Pimp A Butterfly*, my analytical and conceptual framework proposes to:

1. Identify the lyrical and musical elements of each song that are a strategic or stylistic reference of a past musical work;
2. Reflect upon the cultural context of the references and the artists at the source of the borrowed materials;
3. Analyse Lamar’s use, placement and transformation of the intertextual references, and their subsequent recontextualisation;
4. Determine how the individual intertexts are structured and interwoven within a song to facilitate the projection of an overarching cultural message.

This exploration of Lamar’s intertextual referencing of African American culture will include a reflection on how Lamar impactfully mobilises and manipulates music, lyrics and themes from a broad range of sources. It will also highlight the use of intertextuality as a prevalent creative method in modern popular music. Tracing Lamar’s intertextual references to their sources and discussing their original and new contexts – both culturally and musically – will present a genealogy of each song and reveal something of the intentionality in Lamar’s use of intertextuality.
Chapter 2: ‘Wesley’s Theory’

2.1 Introduction
‘Wesley’s Theory’ is the opening track of the album that introduces the main thematic elements that will be discussed and reoccurring throughout the album, such as African American culture, politics and creativity (Cuchna, 2016; Fraden, 2015). The track revolves around a metaphor of his relationship with music being a first girlfriend (Cuchna, 2016a). Through this centralised theme we are introduced to the protagonist, a young Lamar with an idealised perception of fame and the music industry, and the villain, Uncle Sam, who symbolises both institutional racism subjected by capitalist America, and the exploitative nature of the music industry (Cuchna, 2016a; Markman, 2015). ‘Wesley’s Theory’ also foreshadows the internal conflict that will be inflicted upon Lamar, due to his vulnerability as an African American artist, and his struggle to hold onto his principles in an environment aimed at capitalising on African American creativity for financial gain (Cuchna, 2016a). The song features a variety of strategic and stylistic intertexts that traverse five decades of African American musical genres including soul, funk and hip-hop. These intertexts are layered with contrasting duality due to the manipulation and enmeshing of individual contexts that provide further depth of meaning to the narrative (Cuchna, 2016a). Through these intertextual references, he not only pays homage to musical predecessors, influencers and influences, he also brings to light the political interests he shares with them and the potential risks he faces by walking in their footsteps.

2.2 ‘Every N*gger is a Star’ sample
‘Wesley’s Theory’ opens to the crackling white noise of a record player needle queuing up a sample of the track ‘Every N*gger is a Star’ (Gardiner, 1973, track 1) by Boris Gardiner. ‘Every N*gger is a Star’ is the title track of the soundtrack that accompanied the film of the same name, which was produced in Jamaica by blaxploitation film star Calvin Lockhart and released in 1974. Though the film had little success in achieving its purpose as a celebration of black creativity, it has since been heralded as an important part of the blaxploitation genre (James, 2016). The title to the song and film was significant in the post-civil rights movement era as it was part of a trend in the 1970s where African American artists were intentionally using the derogatory term “n*gger” in order to “acknowledge its troubling history and defuse its dehumanising power” (2016, p. 56). In using this sample, Lamar revives the optimism of
the 1970s in *To Pimp A Butterfly*, thus recontextualising past ideologies into a modern-day context.

The use of the record needle sound effect also plays a role in highlighting the nostalgia of this sample. The operating sounds of a record player are universally synonymous with the past. Record players provided the most common way to listen to music in family homes across the USA and Australia until popularisation of the cassette player in the mid-1980s (Bower, 2009). Upon hearing the sound effect of a vinyl player, we are instantly transported to a previous time. By utilising the sound of the record needle, Lamar situates the ideologies associated with ‘Every N*gger is a Star’ in the past, drawing attention to the social, cultural and attitudinal distance between the past and present.

This divide between then and now is further exemplified by the abrupt transition into the Flying Lotus produced minor funk groove that takes place at 00:45. The opening sample of ‘Every N*gger is a Star’ represents notions of African American togetherness and optimism associated with the 1970s, and the rest of the song lyrically explores a more nihilistic present (Cuchna, 2016a). The timbral differences between the vinyl sample and the crisper digital audio of the rest of ‘Wesley’s Theory’ accentuate this contrast (Barron, 2015). ‘Wesley’s Theory’ also features particularly dense multitrack production, the song featuring around 216 tracks (Elliott, 2015). This is effectively juxtaposed with the minimalistic production typical of 1970s soul music on ‘Every N*gger is a Star’. This contrast in timbre and production emphasises the differences between African American attitudes and ideologies in the 1970s and today.

This opening use and manipulation of intertextuality sets the tone of the rest of the album before we are introduced to any composed lyrics from Lamar. In analysing these intertexts we can understand the multi-faceted nature of their use and also the way in which Lamar is able to address many complicated issues with symbolism and understatement. By using a sample affiliated with a 1970s blaxploitation genre film, Lamar instils a sense of optimism and black togetherness within his music. He then highlights the issues black communities are facing regarding a lack of togetherness by emphasising the nostalgic value of this reference and juxtaposing it starkly against the metaphorical symbolisation of modern society. The next section will further explain how this transition between past and present ideologies is enforced through the James Brown quote, “Hit me!” that separates the sample from the rest of the song.
2.3 Hit Me!

Around the 00:44 mark of ‘Wesley’s Theory’, the analogue sounds of ‘Every N*gger is a Star’ is abruptly cut to the interpolated sample of James Brown’s famous exclamation, “Hit me!”. This is an example of the technique of interpolated sampling due to the lyrical quotation being performed rather than extracted from an earlier piece of music. Interpolation is the method of recreating a sample using live instruments or newly recorded voices. This process originated as a workaround for artists wishing to use an old sample in their music but simultaneously desiring the higher audio fidelity provided by modern recording equipment (Ullman, 2016). However, since the late 1980s it has become a more widely used practice to allow for further creative manipulation (2016, p8). “Hit Me!” was a widely used phrase by Brown and heard on studio recordings of tracks such as ‘Get on the Good Foot’ (Brown, 1972, track 1). The skin-deep function of bringing Brown’s context into play is an obvious hint at his influence. Brown was an extremely influential artist, both through being a forebearer of funk and a torchbearer of soul and gospel, but also through his political inclinations (Harris, 2014). Brown’s involvement in racial politics make him not only one of the most influential African American artists of all time, but also one of the most politically active.

The phrase “hit me!” is also synonymous with the political hip-hop act Public Enemy, who also referenced Brown’s “hit me!” at the start of their popular track ‘911 is a Joke’ (Flav, 1990, track 3). The late 1980s and early 90s was a fertile period for the hip-hop genre (Williams, 2018), particularly in regard to the use of sampling as a means of continuing African American musical culture (Perchard, 2011; Williams, 2018). In reference to their anti-authoritarian stance and audacity, New Musical Express hailed Public Enemy as “The greatest rock ‘n’ roll band in the world” in 1988 (Lynskey, 2015). By referencing Brown and Public Enemy, Lamar straddles the mid-point between the initiators of creative political action and modern day hip-hop, honoring his influences as well as highlighting his own political bent as an artist, interconnecting five decades of African American music and activism.

However, Brown’s career was not free of controversy, which adds a further layer to the intertextual context. Multiple arrests and jail time in relation to theft, drug use, domestic violence and sexual assault unfortunately contaminate Brown’s obituary (Latson, 2014). Here we are reminded of the vulnerability of African American artists, societal pressures and systematic racism (Cuchna, 2016a; Fraden, 2015). Adding another layer, hip-hop artist
Mystikal also sampled Brown’s “hit me!” on his 2012 single ‘Hit Me’ (Tyler, 2012, track 1). Another influential African American artist alluded to in ‘Wesley’s Theory’ who publicly fell from grace, Mystikal was sentenced to six years imprisonment for sexual battery in 2004. The sample “Hit me!” embodies not just African American music and activism, but the metaphorical tightrope Lamar walks as an African American artist who understands the transitory nature of fame and public adoration. More artists are lyrically referenced throughout ‘Wesley’s Theory’ to further enforce Lamar’s message of African American innovation, fame and falls from grace, including Sly Stone, Wesley Snipes, Dave Chappelle, Trinidad James and – somewhat perplexingly – the caucasian ex-president Bill Clinton (Cucnha, 2016; Fraden, 2015). The “hit me!” intertext serves as a transitional device that ornaments the political divide between the past and present.

2.4 Every N*gger is a Star/Wesley’s Theory musical analysis

A transition in harmony compliments the juxtaposition of timbre and era in the opening moments of ‘Wesley’s Theory’. The chords in ‘Every N*gger is a Star’ are diatonic (Eb major) and are more complex than standard pop triads, in keeping with the genre conventions of R&B as understood since the 1960s and still relevant today (Sloan, Harding & Felder, 2019). Whilst the simple vocal melody is completely based on notes from the Eb major pentatonic scale, the chord movement underneath affects their intervallic value due to their relation to the chord being played. For example, the second and fourth vocal note of bar three of Figure 2.1, is Bb, which is the 5th of Eb major. However, constructed on top of an Fmi7 chord (the II chord of Eb major), it becomes the perfect fourth of F, creating an F minor 11 chord. The use of extended harmony voicings, rather than simple triads, brings an overall feeling of lightness to what would otherwise be a more sombre sounding piece. The suspended 11 chord – deployed here in bar 2 and 4 of Figure 2.1 – creates what Chase (2006, table. 52) describes as “optimistic tension”, leading to its frequent use in uplifting R&B and disco tracks such as, Chic’s ‘Good Times’ (Edwards & Rodgers, 1979, track 1), Michael Jackson’s ‘Rock With You’ (Temperton, 1979, track 2), and Earth, Wind & Fire’s ‘September’ (McKay et al., 1978, track 7).
During the transition from the sample to the main body of Wesley’s Theory, the familiar harmonic conventions of uplifting R&B are starkly contrasted with a mysterious and exotic harmonic minor tonality that takes over at the 00:45 mark. Transcribed in Figure 2.2, the suggested chord progression utilises chords built from the B harmonic minor scale, starting from the 5th chord, F#sus4b9, implying that the melody’s tonal centre is in fact the fifth mode of B harmonic minor, F# Phrygian Dominant. This is a commonly utilised harmonic approach in heavy metal music due to it having a “foreboding, evil sound” (Chlasciak, 2013). The phrygian dominant scale is also used in jazz as a way of highlighting an altered tonality on a V7 chord and assists in building musical tension (Warnock, 2019).

Figure 2.1. Transcription of Boris Gardiner’s, ‘Every N*gger Is A Star’ sample in ‘Wesley’s Theory’ (Lamar, 2015, track 1, 00:26) displaying the use of extended harmony.

Figure 2.2. Wesley’s Theory’ (Lamar, 2015, track 1, 00:45) opening melody, showing harmonic construction from Phrygian dominant scale and form 1 of the Japanese ‘In’ mode.
Through further analysis of the harmonic minor tonality, we can see a harmonic link to the Japanese ‘In’ Mode. Figure 2.3 displays how all of the notes except E are contained in form 1 of the F# ‘In’ mode pentatonic of Figure 2.3. It is the presence of half-steps that give the scale such a distinct sound that is associated with Japanese traditional folk music and rarely heard in popular music (Blanchard, 2008). The use of this relatively unfamiliar scale creates a sense of unease due to its juxtaposition with the harmonically rich and familiar Boris Gardiner sample. After becoming familiar with the warm and nostalgic sounds of 1970s R&B and soul music, we are abruptly transported into a different musical world, with the crisp timbre of modern digital production. It momentarily disorientates and then forces the listener to re-calibrate to the present.

![Figure 2.3](image-url) Form 1, Japanese ‘In’ mode (Blanchard, 2008) in F#.

This feeling of disorientation is enhanced by simultaneous changes to tempo and key. The song begins at a loping pace of 85bpm with a slightly swung and natural sounding lilt, before snapping into a mechanically straight 115bpm. After lulling the listener with a dream-like slow tempo, the track jarringly introduces modern funk drums at a steady walking pace. The transition also features a key change, moving down a semi-tone from Eb major to the relative major key of D. This minor second modulation, or major third to the relative minor of B, helps reinforce the transition from optimism to apprehension, from the ideological past to the pessimistic present.

2.5 Chapter Summary

Within the first minute of ‘Wesley’s Theory’, we gain insight on the depth of intertextuality throughout To Pimp a Butterfly. This is evident from the choice, manipulation and placement of Boris Gardiner’s, ‘Every N*gger is a Star’ sample and the interpolated sample of the iconic funk phrase “hit me!”. Both intertextual references are layered with meaning. Stylistic intertextuality is also present, as evidenced by the juxtaposition of harmony, timbre and tempo with semantic intent. Further use of stylistic referencing is even more apparent in the second track of To Pimp a Butterfly, ‘For Free? Interlude’.
Chapter 3: ‘For Free? Interlude’

3.1 Introduction
The majority of ‘For Free? Interlude’ displays genre conventions that are synonymous with the jazz genre such as instrumentation, syncopation, swing, harmony, improvisation and band interaction (Cuchna, 2016b; Sutro, 2011). Lamar’s vocal delivery also bears echoes of slam poetry and spoken word, the early predecessors of rap (Cuchna, 2016b). In the grand scheme of the album, this track is an anomaly. It takes the listener to a new sonic sphere and in the process of doing so, introduces new concepts, themes and attitudes. Whereas ‘Wesley’s Theory’ responds to the criticism and victimisation of African American celebrities, ‘For Free? Interlude’ projects self-confidence and arrogance, signifying the first level of rebellion against the system (Cuchna, 2016b). However, due to the multi-functional nature of intertextuality and Lamar’s use of contrasting duality, these attitudes prove to be a façade, concealing the assiduous shackles of systemic racism. These messages are transported by the stylistic intertextual referencing of the jazz genre due to its aligning context and history that signifies both the fight for liberation and the exploitation of African American musical creativity.

3.2 Jazz Genre Conventions
Beginning with a barrage of sound and gospel harmony, ‘For Free? Interlude’ instantly instils a sense of empowerment, providing a sharp change in direction from the cynical, digitalised sounds of ‘Wesley’s Theory’. ‘For Free? Interlude’ is based around a free-jazz jam, featuring the use of live instrumentation, such as walking bass, swinging drums and syncopated piano ‘comping’. Whereas the use of live, jazz-based acoustic instrumentation is enough to suggest the songs association with jazz, genre conventions such as improvisation and band interaction add to the aesthetic. Seasoned jazz piano player Robert Glasper, who played piano on the track and has collaborated with a number of hip-hop artists, said producer and jazz saxophonist Terrace Martin instructed him to embrace the straight-ahead jazz feel and “really dig in” (Deshpande, 2015, para. 6). The task of a comping (short for ‘accompanying’) instrument in jazz is to provide and add to the rhythmic momentum of the song by complementing and reacting to the lead instrument (Cozza, 2018). Glasper described reacting to Lamar’s vocals as if they were a saxophone, which enabled him to latch onto Lamar’s rhythmic delivery and provide appropriate musical support.
3.3 Aligning Contexts

Early and Monson (2019) suggest that striving for freedom is the thread that joins musical aesthetics and socio-political motivations within jazz music, “[Jazz]… has been associated first and foremost with freedom. Freedom of expression, human freedom, freedom of thought, and the freedom that results from an ongoing pursuit of racial justice” (2019. p9).

Like hip-hop, jazz started out as an underground genre that relished in an ‘outsider status’, embodying African American solidarity and cultivating an important creative art-form in the process (Perchard, 2011). On the surface, Lamar’s intention of employing jazz conventions is consistent with his referencing of African American cultural touchstones. Considering jazz ideologies associated with musical freedom and experimental creativity, evoking jazz on a hip-hop album may also link to themes of rebellion.

3.4 Jazz Harmony and Harmonic Tension

This act of rebellion and lack of regard for popular appeal is signified by the tonal harmony of the song. Predominantly based around a static C7 altered chord, Glasper’s chordal comping uses ‘fourth voicings’ to highlight the altered chord tones (ie. #9, b9, #5 and b5) of C7, creating a feeling of tension with little release. This eight-bar section of freneticism is contrasted heavily against the abrupt stop and transition into the legato feel of the guitar/saxophone unison riff [Figure 3], further reinforcing a feeling of unease. The riff utilises notes from the C dominant 8-note, or half-whole scale, which is a commonly approached tonality in jazz music used to create tension due to its intervallic and symmetrical nature (Wernick, 2018). This symmetry is caused by the alternating half and whole step intervals that the scale is built upon, resulting in a distinguishably angular sound.

Figure 3. Guitar/Saxophone unison line in ‘For Free? Interlude’(Lamar, 2015, track 2, 00:12) showing the use of tri-tone interval and G7 altered content.

The riff revels further in dissonance by targeting the tritone intervals within the dominant 8 note scale. The excessive targeting of the tri-tone interval, or historically dubbed “Devil’s Interval” (Longdon, 2018, para. 1), is rarely approached so brazenly in popular
music due to its dissonant sound that is caused by the complex frequency ratio of the interval (Longdon, 2018). In bars 1-3 of Figure 3 we can see that every second note of the unison line is preceded by a tri-tone either above or below, targeting the 13, #9, 3, b7, b9, 5 of C7, epitomising altered tonality. The most prominent piece of popular music to exploit the tri-tone is Jimi Hendrix’s ‘Purple Haze’ (Hendrix, 1967, track 1). Employing the tritone in the introduction of his first original single quickly established Hendrix as an extremely influential and innovative African American artist (Fulton, 2015).

Adding to the jazz-based application of extended harmony, the riff then outlines a G7 altered chord to hint at a V-I resolution back to the tonic of C. In bar 4 of Figure 3 the melody ascends the first four notes of the F minor scale, analysed more commonly in jazz as the b7, 1, b9 and #9 of the G altered scale. In musical harmony, a V7 chord emits a naturally compelling need for resolution to the I chord (Goldman, 1965). Altered chord tones on a V7 chord create an even stronger feeling of resolution back to the tonic (Baerman, 1998). This use of resolving an altered V7 chord (G7alt) into another altered V7 chord (C7alt) is also an effective way of maintaining harmonic tension and adds to the freneticism of the song.

3.5 Rhythm and Tempo

The tempo and time feel of ‘For Free? Interlude’ are also distinctly related to the jazz genre. Sitting around 250bpm in a medium-up swing feel, the song has a frantic energy and is a huge contrast to the rest of the album’s moderate tempo, with most of the songs sitting around 90bpm. Considering the timbre and feel of funk drum grooves are, “the most unifying sonic thread in hip-hop” (Williams, 2014, p. 190), Lamar’s intentions for neglecting this essential ingredient hint at a lack of regard for conformity. This symbolises a return to and connection with jazz music’s counter-cultural origins, correlating with Lamar’s theme of defiance. Due to its institutionalisation and canonisation, jazz has lost something of its anti-establishment ethos (Early & Monson, 2019). However, through ‘For Free? Interlude’, Lamar actively embraces the expressive qualities that define the liberating origins of the genre.

3.6 Vocal Delivery

Lamar’s vocal delivery and use of live instrumentation evokes another predecessor of hip-hop, particularly the pre-rap era spoken-word stylings of Gil Scott-Heron. ‘For Free? Interlude’ has been likened to Scott-Heron’s ‘The Revolution Will Not Be Televised’ (Scott-Heron, 1970, track 1) due to its stylistic approach and socio-political statement (Cuchna,
Evidence of this is Lamar’s heavy use of lyrical and rhythmic repetition of the words, “This dick ain’t free” (Lamar, 2015, track 2), to start each vocal vent, which is strongly akin to Heron’s repetition of his song’s title phrase, “The revolution will not be televised” (Scott-Heron, 1970, track 1). Another stylistic similarity can be found at 01:40 of ‘For Free? Interlude’ [Audio file 3.1], where Lamar builds intensity with shorter sentence bursts, accentuated by rhythmic repetition and the lyrical repetition of, “Matter of fact…” (Lamar, 2015, track 2). This bears striking resemblance to ‘The Revolution Will Not Be Televised’, where at 01:30, Heron builds similar tension with relatively shorter, rhythmically similar phrases started by a repeated phrase: “There will be no…” (Scott-Heron, 1970, track 1) [Audio file 3.2]. In acknowledging Scott-Heron’s influence on rap and hip-hop through stylistic interpretation, Lamar also aligns himself with Scott-Heron’s cultural context and involvement in activism.

3.7 Chapter Summary
Lamar’s stylistic intertextual referencing of the jazz genre also serves a darker function. A repeated theme throughout To Pimp A Butterfly is the exploitation of African American creativity in the music industry. Jazz pioneer Louis Armstrong was not only exploited for his talents, but also became ostracised from his community for being regarded as an ‘Uncle Tom’, with journalists such as Andrew Kopkind referring to him as a “racial cop-out” (Schwartz, 2014, para. 2). In referencing jazz, Lamar sheds light on the exploitation and corruption of African American artists in the early development of the jazz genre.

Stylistic conventions associated with the jazz genre are also utilised within ‘For Free? Interlude’ to convey desires for freedom and assertions of defiance. In this instance, Lamar’s lack of regard for popular appeal is evident in his abandonment of common R&B and hip-hop harmonic progressions. The targeting of dissonance through harmonic devices further embellishes a sense of rebellion. This is compounded by the fast tempo and use of
syncopation in ‘For Free? Interlude’ that replaces the funk groove that forms the foundation of most hip-hop songs. However, Lamar’s repeated theme of African American exploitation is nurtured by the use of the jazz genre due to its social and historical significance. The next track on the album is ‘King Kunta’ and provides another juxtaposing yet genre-consistent approach to intertextual referencing.
Chapter 4: King Kunta

4.1 Introduction

‘King Kunta’ is the third track from the album and was the third single to be released. Lyrically, the title and theme of the track is an intertextual reference to the rebellious slave Kunta Kinte, an 18th century fictional character from Alex Haley’s, *Roots: The Saga of an American Family* (Haley, 2014). Lamar aligns his own act of societal rebellion with Kinte’s, and in doing so, insinuates that he is still enslaved by his Compton roots, systematic racism and his faltering conscience (Cuchna, 2016c). ‘King Kunta’ incorporates bold stylistic and strategic intertextual referencing of the funk genre, including the lyrical quoting of seminal funk band, Parliament, and the collaboration with the band’s singer and leader, George Clinton. It is also heavily based on ‘Get Nekkid’ by Mausberg (Burns, 2000, track 4), one of Lamar’s musical idols (Cuchna, 2016c). Mausberg’s context as a Compton based rising hip-hop talent in the late 1990s, who was shot to death at the age of 21, links to Lamar’s commitment to African American social rights. Through the creative methods of interpolated sampling and stylistic and strategic intertextuality, Lamar manipulates and recontextualises ‘Get Nekkid’ in order to further align with his lyrical intentions.

4.2 Sample Manipulation

The most prominent example of interpolation within ‘King Kunta’ is the drum groove and bass line. Renowned bassist, Thundercat, harmonically replicates the original bassline, making subtle rhythmic adjustments in order to synchronise with the interpolated sample of the drum break within Mayfield’s, ‘Kung Fu’ (Mayfield, 1974, track 5, 02:48) [Audio file 4.1]. Figure 4.1 and 4.2 shows how both basslines share a similar harmonic progression that ascends an E minor tonality. However, the basslines have a contrasting groove and feel. The most notable adjustment is Thundercat’s emphasis of the down beats by targeting the important notes of the progression, E, G, B and A. This is different to the original track where the target notes are emphasised on the off-beats. For example, in bar one of the ‘Get Nekkid’ transcription [Figure 4.1], the target note, G, is accented on beat ‘3+’ and ‘1+’ of the following bar, both times played off the passing F# note. Conversely, Thundercat’s bassline lands the G on beat ‘3’ and then beat ‘1’ [Figure 4.2]. This adds to the drive of the song, giving ‘King Kunta’ a strutting quality.
Adding to this rhythmic dissimilarity is how the sixteenth notes in the original are slightly swung compared to Thundercat’s straight feel. This again provides drive as opposed to the bouncier, lighter feel of the original. Thundercat said in order to evoke that feeling of drive and momentum, he imitated an approach previously applied to a hardcore, thrash metal, Suicidal Tendencies song.

I actually played it all on one string. I remember learning the Suicidal Tendencies bassline ‘Possessed to Skate’, and how imperative it was to get it right, it's fast and it's rolling... The King ‘Kunta’ bassline has the same feel. (McQuaid, 2015, para. 18).
Despite ‘King Kunta’ and Suicidal Tendencies’ ‘Possessed to Skate’ (Mayorga & Muir, 1987, track 9) heavily contrasting in genre and context, this channeling of an attitudinal approach in order to provide intensity is a further layer of stylistic intertextuality that aids the function of the song.

The motivations behind the manipulation of the interpolated sample support the lyrical contrast between ‘Get Nekkid’ and ‘King Kunta’. Despite its minor tonality, Mausberg’s track has a playful and youthful feel due to its lyrical content. For example, Mausberg boasts throughout the first verse about his confidence, authenticity, reputation, generosity and his status within his community.

Platinum Visa buyin’ out the whole damn bar-a
Limelight hoes wonderin’ who we are-a
Got a flock a bad b*ches that be callin’ me honey
Y’all n*ggas still mad ‘cause I’m shakin’ my tummy
But fuck it, I’m a real n*gga, got a keep a thrill wit’ it
Order five more bottles of Moet and y’all kill it. (Burns, 2000, track 4, 00:30)

The second breakdown verse continues in the same vein but leans more towards asserting his sexual abilities, “Put my belly on your butt-cheeks, hold your hips, and I’ll be f*ckin’ till the bus about six” (Burns, 2000, track 4, 01:25). These themes of youthful priorities, freedom, naivety and reckless abandon, fit in with the playful, slightly swung lilt of the original funk bassline. Conversely, while Lamar harnesses the positive, self-confidence of ‘Get Nekkid’, the manipulation of the intertext provides further alignment with his darker lyrical theme.

4.3 Stylistic Borrowings
Another strategic intertextual reference borrowed from ‘Get Nekkid’ is the half-step modulation that occurs before and into each chorus. The first obvious difference between the shared use of this device is the direction of the key change. The more obscure deviation is the placement and significance of it. For example, Mausberg’s track uses the last quarter of the verse to venture down a semi-tone to the key centre of Ebm in order to provide lift back into the chorus four bars later [Figure 4.3]. In this regard, the key change functions as a turnaround back into the start of the form, or a point of difference to make a clear statement of
the chorus. Lamar’s use of the key-change however is opposite in that he modulates up a semi-tone to Fm. The placement is significant, as the first time Lamar modulates keys is half-way through the first verse [Figure 4.4]. In this instance, the use of the modulation acts as a medium and signpost for another layer of lyrical meaning, a way of signifying the separation of lyrical themes with shared content (Cuchna, 2016c).

Figure 4.3. Chord chart to the verse of Mausberg’s ‘Get Nekkid’ (burns, 2000, track 4, 00:21), showing place of key modulation.

Figure 4.4. Chord chart to the verse of ‘King Kunta’ (Lamar, 2015, track 3, 00:37), showing place of key modulation

4.4 Structural Elements
‘King Kunta’ is also heavily inspired by ‘Get Nekkid’ in terms of its structural approach, with Lamar borrowing and reinterpreting sectional approaches as well as using the same tempo, key centre and track duration. At the 01:16 mark of ‘Get Nekkid’, Mausberg uses a breakdown section with heavy quarter note E minor chordal stabs to build tension into the sparser feel of the second verse. ‘King Kunta’ also features a breakdown section [02:06] with a similar yet subtler focus on the quarter note, using only a hi-hat to indicate the pulse. Lamar’s rap delivery during this section is also a stylistic channelling of Mausberg’s.
Lamar’s rapid-fire flow of sixteenth notes within this breakdown section is comparatively denser than his approach to the rest of the song and much more akin to Mausberg’s flow on ‘Get Nekkid’. This juxtaposition of rhythmic and harmonic scarcity against the dense rap flow builds tension before being resolved by the return of the original groove, displaying a shared structural intent.

Another example of stylistic intertextuality is the guitar solo in ‘King Kunta’ which is based on the vocal harmony line of ‘Get Nekkid’. They not only share harmonic content but also a similar creative approach, with a duel, harmonising guitar line paying homage to the vocal harmonies of the original track. A key indicator to the influence of the vocal line is in Bar 2 [Figure 4.5] and Bar 6 and 8 [Figure 4.6], where the guitar solo and vocal line both make use of the natural 6th of E minor, C#, to evoke an E Dorian tonality. This is significant as both songs up to this point have been heavily suggesting an E Aeolian tonality which features the flat 6, C, and has an altogether darker sound. Hence, the use of this Dorian tonality creates a lighter yet contextually unfamiliar sound, clearly highlighting the shared use of harmony.

![Figure 4.5. Vocal line during outro of ‘Get Nekkid’ (burn, 2000, track 4, 03:04) showing harmonic similarities to ‘King Kunta’ guitar solo in Figure 4.6.](image1)

![Figure 4.6. Guitar solo during outro of ‘King Kunta’ (Lamar, 2015, track 3, 03:05), showing harmonic similarities to ‘Get Nekkid’ vocal harmony line in Figure 4.5.](image2)

4.5 Funk Throwback

The outro section to ‘King Kunta’ is perhaps the most blatant homage to the funk genre within To Pimp A Butterfly. One of the most obvious throwbacks is the lyrical quotation of “we want the funk”, taken from Parliament’s ‘Give Up The Funk (Tear The Roof Off The Sucker)’ (Brailey et al., 1975, track 6), and using the stylistic appropriation of the female vocal delivery of ‘Get Nekkid’. Parliament and its more experimental sister-group Funkadelic, known collectively as P-Funk, are seminal exponents of 1970s funk. The band
further developed the funk genre in the 1970s by drawing on elements of psychedelic rock and cosmic themes, thereby inspiring the development of Afrofuturism (Solis, 2019). As summarised by Solis, “Afrofuturism describes Afrocentric work in the arts and philosophy that investigates African diasporic engagements with a vanguardist orientation, technoculture, and/or the fantastical” (2019, p. 30). By intertextually engaging with P-Funk, Lamar resurrects the optimistic pursuit of liberation that is synonymous with Afrofuturism.

This significance of accessing P-Funk is further emphasised by P-Funk leader George Clinton appearing on ‘King Kunta’. Not only is Lamar intertextually accessing the sounds of P-Funk, but he collaborates with its founder in the process. Clinton’s unique voice and delivery can be heard throughout the track, particularly at the 02:45 mark when he states, “by the time you hear the next pop, the funk shall be within you” (Lamar, 2015, track 3). The lyrical quotation of “we want the funk” is also associated with Ahmad’s song, ‘We Want The Funk’ (Lewis, 1994, track 7). Ahmad is another significant figure contextually due to his influence as a rapper and also his social status. After his initial stint as a hip-hop star, Ahmad continued his studies as a mature age student to receive a doctorate in sociology and African American studies. This again invigorates optimism within ‘King Kunta’, juxtaposed with the context of Mausberg’s unfortunate fate.

A more subtle strategic intertextual reference with a direct link to the funk and soul genre is the use of the frequency filter guitar effect at 03:20 of ‘King Kunta’ [Audio file 4.2]. This use of a filter or ‘wah’ fluctuating on a static minor chord is almost identical to the approach used by soul session guitarist, Melvin Ragin, AKA ‘Wah Wah’ Watson, at the 04:03 mark of ‘Papa Was A Rolling Stone’ by The Temptations (Whitfield & Strong, 1972, track 3) [Audio file 4.3]. Ragin’s use of the wah pedal became his trademark. This signature sound appeared on countless soul and funk tracks including, Isaac Hayes’ ‘Theme From Shaft’ (Hayes, 1971, track 1), Marvin Gaye’s ‘Let’s Get It On’ (Gaye, 1973, track 1), and work by many other artists including, Michael Jackson, Smokey Robinson and Gloria Gaynor (Leight, 2018). The wah guitar sound is a timbre synonymous with the funk genre.

Audio file 4.2: ‘King Kunta’ guitar wah effect in the style of ‘Wah Wah’ Watson (Lamar, 2015, track 3, 03:15-03:26)  
4.6 Chapter Summary

‘King Kunta’ offers a strong example of hypertextuality (Lacasse, 2000). We can clearly see a deviation from the hypotext of ‘Get Nekkid’ to the hypertext of ‘King Kunta’. This can be seen in the manipulation of the interpolated bass sample played by Thundercat and even the lyrical adjustments. Referencing ‘Get Nekkid’ pays homage and brings light to Mausberg’s status in the rap canon (Cuchna, 2016c). Its use prompts us of Mausberg’s context which fits in with the central themes of the album, particularly African American fame and activism. The sense of inevitable disaster foreboded by Lamar in these opening tracks is further enforced by this musical reference. Lamar also contrasts this with the sporadic injection of optimism through referencing uplifting funk and soul icons such as Curtis Mayfield, George Clinton and ‘Wah Wah’ Watson. The intertextual referencing of the funk genre thus forms a link from the origins of funk, through funk influenced hip-hop of the 80s and 90s, and finally to Lamar, who reminds us of the influence and socio-political struggles of almost six decades worth of African American creativity, optimism and political action over the course of three tracks.
Chapter 5: Conclusion

5.1 Conceptualising Lamar’s Practice

This study sought to gain an insight into the use of intertextuality as a creative method in modern popular music. Intertextuality in music is the act of borrowing from musical predecessors through either direct quotation or stylistic allusion. It is an increasingly key feature of popular music. Hence, the art to creating critically and commercially viable music, lies in the choice, placement, and transformation of intertextual references. These musical borrowings must therefore intertwine to create a network of intertexts that adhere to an overarching theme. The extensive use of intertextuality within *To Pimp a Butterfly* exemplifies this practice in modern music. Lamar accesses a broad range of music styles and genres in order to historicise African American culture and creativity. The original contexts of the sources of the intertexts are applied by Lamar to align with current social concerns. This enables Lamar to highlight contemporary issues whilst also acknowledging their longstanding presence in African American communities.

In addition to this, Lamar’s approach of extensively referencing African American musical icons and styles, avoids criticism of plagiarism and inauthentic genre-hopping. Although positioned firmly within the hip-hop genre by virtue of Lamar’s vocal delivery, within the first three tracks *To Pimp a Butterfly* moves rapidly and abruptly through multiple genres, directly quoting a variety of diverse sources. Through intertextual analysis, we can see consistency in both the root of the intertextual sources, and also the narrative development that threads through the songs. Due to its global success, *To Pimp a Butterfly* serves as a large-scale community service announcement on America’s dark history and the residual effect of systemic racism. Lamar connects with African American artists and activists in order to rejuvenate past political motivations in the contemporary context. This not only exposes a contemporary audience to music and cultural contexts of the past, but also prompts an engagement with past and present concerns of African American people.

5.2 Contribution to Ethnomusicology

While the rejuvenation and recirculation of African American cultural themes in the hip-hop genre has been heavily discussed (Minestrelli, 2016; Perchard, 2015; Ullman, 2016; Williams, 2014), the continued rise in the use of intertextuality in modern popular music has opened up more opportunities for analysis. There have been a number of studies into identifying and
interpreting the use of intertextuality in popular music, and this thesis is based on one such study, borrowing and adapting its conceptual framework (Burns et al., 2015). However, this study provides a different vantage point for intertextuality by not only striving to understand the significance of its use in popular music, but also its cultural significance as a creative method in modern music making. By combining lyrical and musical analysis, this study draws conclusions about how intertextuality is effectively leveraged in popular music today as not just a hook (Burns, 1987) but a means to convey layered meanings.

5.3 Shortcomings and Future Research

Intertextuality is largely dependent upon, and effected by, personal context. Each person carries their own contextual baggage comprising of their unique life and musical experiences, which can have a significant influence on the use and perception of intertextuality within music. Due to the sheer volume of analytical material available within To Pimp A Butterfly, this study did not have the scope to research the consequences of personal contexts on audience reception. This kind of expanded focus would provide a deeper understanding of the use and effectiveness of intertextuality in popular music.

If To Pimp A Butterfly represents the current peak of the use of intertextuality as a creative method for creating new and innovative music, this study brings to light questions of the future of intertextuality in popular music. For example, how will artists be using intertextuality ten years from now? Will Lamar’s artistry be a source for stylistic and strategic intertextuality in years to come? Has technological advancements, such as the internet and instant connectivity to all forms of historical knowledge, made the application of intertextuality a more viable artistic process? These questions display how To Pimp A Butterfly has ultimately opened up the field of intertextuality in popular music, both as a creative process, a medium for conveying and interpreting meaning, and also a mechanism for gaining an insight into relationships between music, consumerism and popular culture.
References

6.1 References Cited


Longdon, V. (2018). What is a tritone and why was it nicknamed the devil’s interval?. Retrieved from https://www.classicfm.com/discover-music/music-theory/what-is-a-tritone/


6.2 Music Cited


Appendices

A.1 Wesley’s Theory Intro Transition Transcription

'Wesley's Theory' Intro

(Lamar, 2015, track 1)

Transcribed by Colin Outhwaite

\[\text{\(\frac{1}{b_3}\)}\]

\(Cm7\)

\(Bb11\)

\(Ev \text{ - } ry \text{ N*gger is a star}\)

\(\text{\(\frac{1}{b_3}\)}\]

\(Fm11\)

\(Gm11\)

\(A\text{maj7} Gm7 Fm9 Bb11\)

\(\text{Who will den-y that you and i that ev \text{ - } ry n* - gger is a star}\)

\(\text{\(\frac{1}{b_3}\)}\]

\(Eb\text{maj7}\)

\(Eb\text{maj7}\)

\(Eb\text{maj7}\)

\(\text{\(\frac{1}{b_3}\)}\]

\(\text{Star Star Star Hit me!}\)

\(\text{\(\frac{1}{b_3}\)}\]

\(F\text{\#sus4\#9}\)

\(G\text{maj7\#11}\)

\(A\#11\)

\(Bm11\)

\(\text{\(\frac{1}{b_3}\)}\]

\(F\text{\#sus4\#9}\)

\(G\text{maj/F#}\)

\(A\#11\)

\(Bm\#6\)