

Hip-Hop in THE GREAT GATSBY
Musical Narration and African American Representation

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1. INTRODUCTION

The Great Gatsby, as a novel, has received ample attention and praise with regards to its accuracy of setting and zeitgeist. Set in 1922 New York it tells the tale of Nick Carraway and his reconstruction of the life and death of Jay Gatsby. Fitzgerald's evocation of New York in that summer in a period of great modern and cultural change was said to be in tune with the times and above all a description of an essentially American experience. Yet its omission of black characters, the New Negro Movement and the Harlem Renaissance as noted by Lois Tyson in her African American critique of the novel, proves to be problematic for this alleged accuracy.¹ Tyson sums up Fitzgerald's detailed descriptive powers extensively, which includes the fashions, literature, ambiance, historical context, technologies and locations of the time in order to explain the appeal and the praise the novel has been bequeathed over the decades. However Tyson's critique exposes the significance of omitting Harlem in *The Great Gatsby*. For Harlem is more than a mere geographical location, Harlem also represented one of the historical sites where the black American cultural production was at a height.² Moreover the location harboured the modern urban social reality, which gave rise to these cultural expressions.

The 2013 film version is directed by Baz Luhrmann and the plot of the film follows the plot of the novel fairly accurately. However as the film version reconstructs Jay Gatsby's life it also omits some of the personal events pertaining to Nick, such as the romantic plot between Jordan and Nick. Additionally the film changes Nick's indeterminate present situation of the novel by placing him in a sanatorium. The therapist's implicit suggestion that writing down Jay's tragic ending might be therapeutic for Nick forms the frame story. Most importantly in this context the adaptation from literature to film adds a narrational device unknown to literature, namely music. The omission of jazz as an African American cultural artefact has been duly noted in critical scholarly writings directed at the novel.³ The medium of film provided Baz Luhrmann and consequently Sean Carter (Jay Z) the opportunity to recover via the means of music that which lacked representation in the written word. However this is not to say that the mere presence of African American music necessarily leads to a

¹ Lois Tyson, *Critical Theory Today: A User Friendly Guide*, 2nd ed. (Routledge: Abingdon, 2006), 396.

² Ibid, 396.

³ See for instance, Lois Tyson, *Critical Theory*, and Meredith Goldsmith, "White Mask: Passing, Posing, and Performing in *The Great Gatsby*," *Modern Fiction Studies* 49, no.3 (2003): 443-468.

straightforward representation of African Americans or their culture, as the use ‘white’ forms of jazz in the film attests to.

The general focus of analysis regarding the relationship of mimesis/realism and racism/difference in film texts has, according to Robert Stam and Louise Spence, “been marred by a certain methodological naiveté.”⁴ By this the authors mean that these analyses were predominantly concerned with “social portrayal, plot and character” and that little attention was paid to the actual narration through which these elements are constructed.⁵ As narration in film consists of different elements than narration in a novel, one does not end up with an identical narrative, regardless of the seeming similarities on the level of the story. Furthermore, although with different narratological consequences, even *if* the film would have featured traditional African American jazz music, as realism would probably have it, one cannot simply conclude that African Americans and their culture are unambiguously represented for this would entail a closer look at what the music *narrates* in the film and how.

The presence of African American music on the soundtrack of *THE GREAT GATSBY* cannot hide the fact that the story ultimately revolves around a white man’s own construction of identity and how he ultimately fails to achieve his goal. Yet the music significantly contributes to the film’s narration of its events and characters. From the above I would like to dilute the following research question for this thesis: **What does the narratological function of African American music reveal about the representation of African Americans in *THE GREAT GATSBY*?**

In order to answer this question this thesis first of all aims to explore the following sub-questions. Firstly why is music relevant in the analysis of film’s narration? As part of the total narration of film it is pertinent to ask how music contributes to the overall narration. Secondly how does musical narration relate to issues of ethnicity and difference? These questions will be explored in the theoretical section of this thesis. For the analysis the focus shifts from the general to the specific. The analysis departs from these theoretical insights in order to answer the question how African American hip-hop fits within the rest of the cinematic discourse. And how the use of hip-hop in *THE GREAT GATSBY* narrates specific sequences. There will be a strong focus on the opening of the film, since, as I will show, openings can be read as a manual of sorts. To conclude the thesis will circle back in order to

⁴ Robert Stam, and Louise Spence, “Colonialism, Racism and Representation: An Introduction,” *Screen* 24, no. 2 (1983): 2-3. doi: 10.1093/screen/24.2.2

⁵ *Ibid*, 3.

understand how the manner in which hip-hop narrates is related to representations of African Americans.

As an afterthought yet very important to make explicit is that the author, me, speaks from the position of a Dutch born white middle-class man who does not hope to speak for African Americans. However the film captured my interest by the way it, at first sight, blatantly showcased African American music. Music that I felt was awkwardly out of place in the film, not because of its anachronistic nature, but rather because of its disjointed cultural context. In other words the film conveyed a narrative, which seemed to deal with American identities, but the African American presence was only explicitly present on the soundtrack. I also realise that treating hip-hop as *the* music of all African Americans is overly generalising. However the point is the analysis tries to expose that the film's narratological structure constructs hip-hop with a function that may be considered stereotypical within its own narratological framework.

2. THEORETICAL POSITIONING

One of the aims this study is trying to pursue is that of continuing the attempt to uncover the analytical potential of film music. Although musical narration has received an increasing amount of attention many authors feel that it is still lacking in comparison to the overall body of work concerned with film analysis and theory. Moreover it remains a subject open for further examination, because scholars they tend to disagree on the function of music in a film.⁶ As such these disagreements produce theoretical writings and debates on film music that are riddled with difficulties with regards to the ontological status of sound, music's semiotics, the problematic relationship between music and image, music's relationship with other elements on the soundtrack (effects and dialogue) and most importantly the ideological ramifications of deciding on these issues.

⁶ For example, Anahid Kassabian, *Hearing Film: Tracking Identifications in Contemporary Hollywood Film Music* (London: Routledge, 2001), Caryl Flinn, *Strains of Utopia: Gender, Nostalgia, and Hollywood Film Music* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992), Claudia Gorbman, *Unheard Melodies: Narrative Film Music* (London: BFI, 1987) and Daniel Goldmark, Lawrence Kramer and Leppert, *Beyond the Soundtrack: Representing Music in Cinema* (London: University of California Press, 2007).

The following will highlight some of these discussions with the ultimate purpose of explicating their at times intricate connection to debates of difference and ethnicity. In extension I argue that, therefore, music in particular shows itself to be a valuable means for analysing the ideology of narration in film allowing one to move beyond an analysis that records the absence and presence of African American characters. As Stam and Spence explain, ignoring the medium specific dimensions of narration could result in analyses and subsequent conclusions that seem monolithic and are equally applicable to film *and* novel.⁷ In that sense there would be no relevance in analyzing *THE GREAT GATSBY*, the movie, when there is a plethora of studies on *The Great Gatsby* the novel. What is at stake here is the fact that a narrative comes into fruition through narration, through construction, which in itself can be studied for ideological meaning. Therefore Stam and Spence posit that both the study of and the call for positive images of minorities “obscures the fact that ‘nice’ images might at times be as pernicious as overtly degrading ones, providing a bourgeois façade for paternalism, a more pervasive racism.”⁸

2.1. MUSICAL NARRATION

Precisely because music is often said to have no ideological function, one should be suspicious, since it invites one to disregard the music in an ideological analysis. For it is significant that the origins of the transcendent essence of music lie in the tradition of Western symphonic music.⁹ An essence that in that regard may not be applied to non-Western traditions. Music supposedly “depends on a self-contained system of formal and mathematical relations (...) it is not believed to derive any influence from the social world nor to exert any upon,” but this notion is problematic since classical composing was not developed in a vacuum and neither did the development of classical composing ever since.¹⁰ Even if one has difficulty undermining this notion with regards to music in isolation (so-called pure music), music in film (as do other musics) gains meaning simply because conventions are imposed on them. Thus filmic genres tend to normalize and naturalise the use of particular parts and motifs, musical genres, composers, notes, melodies etcetera through the simple concept of

⁷ Stam and Spence, “Colonialism,” 3.

⁸ Stam and Spence, “Colonialism,” 2-3.

⁹ Flinn, *Strains of Utopia*, 5.

¹⁰ *Ibid*, 7.

repetition and variation. Just as the conventions of editing, narrative and framing in classical Hollywood were established through repetition and experimentation and as such were invested with meaning over time.

Even the ideas about music as an object of study are shaped and formed within a particular context. While we may recall the contextual autonomy of Western art music in the previous paragraph it is particularly relevant when it concerns jazz. In this context the prevailing ideas about African Americans in the 1920s were extended to black cultural production such as jazz. African Americans' supposed biological primitivism lent jazz its, allegedly, uncivilized and sexual character. Only much later jazz was considered an art form worthy of studying, but this time it was perceived as an autonomous art form.¹¹ As such jazz was studied outside its socio-historical context and thus removing precisely *the* element which framed jazz as primitive. So only by disassociating jazz from the African American context jazz was elevated to an art form. In spite of all the apparent issues in this regard, the idea of music's independence of a social reality remains a persistent one. I believe that these ideas do affect the interpretation of music in film; they lend a certain universalizing transcendence to the themes of films that accompany these classical scores. This can be seen in James Buhler's discussion of the court scene in *AMISTAD*. He argues that as the court scene evolves the verbal arguments for and against slavery are juxtaposed, each with their own musical accompaniment. The clear distinction between the two scores in terms of recognisability and affective quality narrates the identification of the spectator with the argument against slavery. However Buhler feels that this moral clarity is wholly explained by the musical identification, as if the music somehow knows absolute truth and the actual arguments made in the court are of no importance.¹² Thus Buhler shows that the film equates the truth with the beautiful and the false with the dissonant (some may say ugly) and that theory of musical clarity indeed supports this argument. However when closely examined it shows that the easy comprehension of the scene, is based on a binary in musical narration. The binary elides the fact that the argument for slavery "might have once been convincing."¹³ It is as if all our problems regarding racism, the ideology that buttressed the need for slavery, were behind us.

Analysing *THE GREAT GATSBY* in order to evaluate its historical authenticity located in the surface of the text may prove to be a redundant exercise, in particular due to the

¹¹ Krin Gabbard, *Jammin' at the Margins; Jazz and the American Cinema* (London, University of Chicago Press, 1996).

¹² James Buhler, "Analytical and Interpretive Approaches (II)," in *Film Music: Critical Approaches*, ed. K. J. Donnelly (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2001). 49-50.

¹³ *Ibid*, 50.

postmodern form of the film. It would be more productive to focus on the issue of cinema's 'reality effect,' which is but one form of realism and a form that functions by the way of erasing its own construction.¹⁴ It is a form realism that "erases the idea of illusion" and therefore presents a fully formed diegesis without the intervention of mediation.¹⁵ This effect is achieved by rendering the mechanisms of filmmaking "invisible," disallowing the editing, music and camera techniques to draw attention to the act of narration. It is an effect of ideology for it "presents as natural" the production of meaning when in fact it is a cinematic discourse.¹⁶ Due to the highly stylised visuals and specific use and mix of popular music and traditional scoring, *THE GREAT GATSBY* does indeed not lend itself for a discussion that deals with historical correctness and realism in any direct way. This is not to say that this study shouldn't pay attention to the narration by cinematic codes thus revealing the tendency to produce such reality effects. Despite the film's postmodern and post-classical form, *THE GREAT GATSBY*, for the greater part, still relies on conventional storytelling, which will be explained later when the opening is analysed. Thus *THE GREAT GATSBY* too relies on both the reality effect of cinema and the invisible narration of classical Hollywood to create a believable diegetic world and to create a narrative based on causal, temporal and spatial logic.

When considering music within a cinematic framework there is need to examine some concepts that are instrumental in the analysis that follows. Claudia Gorbman has addressed most of these concepts (cinematic musical codes), while others have expanded upon them and complicated their analytic potential. According to Gorbman the presence of music within a film often escapes us, because it is deemed nonrepresentational and nonnarrative and most films "relegate music to the viewer's sensory background."¹⁷ The term nonrepresentational should be understood as nonreferential and considers music as a sign system that does not denote of its own accord. Yet this background quality is in many instances used for its affective manipulation constituting the reality effect more fully. In other instance music functions by way of creating a reality effect which is otherwise barely tenable or non-existent (smoothing over a discontinuous montage sequence providing it with continuity via continuous music). However when music is noticed it is often because it draws attention to itself rather than to the story it supposedly narrates. In other words it draws attention to the act of narration or discourse and consequently reveals its constructed nature.

¹⁴ Stam and Spence, "Colonialism," 8-9.

¹⁵ Susan Hayward, *Cinema Studies: The Key Concepts*, 2nd ed. (London: Routledge, 2002), 15.

¹⁶ *Ibid*, 15.

¹⁷ Gorbman, *Unheard Melodies*, 12.

Whether the music in a film is diegetic or nondiegetic is one of the most fundamental narratological distinctions where it concerns film music and its relation to the narrative. Music was often considered diegetic when the source could be accounted for in the image. However as James Buhler explains, the distinction between diegetic and nondiegetic music is defined “in relation to the narrative rather than the image,” thus the source of the music does not necessarily need be shown visually, but rather it is judged on the plausibility of its presence within the diegetic world.¹⁸ While this distinction may seem self-explanatory its use in film is often complicated by border crossings or transitions. A score that was at one moment fully diegetic becomes wholly nondiegetic the next moment. Other moments occur when the diegetic song is rendered partly nondiegetic the next moment with particular consequences. In his analysis of the 1951 film *Showboat* Buhler discusses the audio dissolve (transition from diegetic to nondiegetic music) and the suggestion that this represents crossing the boundary from the real to the ideal in musicals.

Every time a musical transition occurs in a film, such as the audio dissolve, it changes the narratological status of the music, because the crossing from the diegetic to the nondiegetic is in itself meaningful. As Robynn J. Stilwell explains “it call attention to the act of crossing and therefore reinforces difference,” this refers both to the difference between the function and status of the diegetic and the nondiegetic music and the content that constitutes the crossing, the music. The music consequently takes on a different meaning produced by the transition. When noticed, and I believe the repetition of crossings calls attention to itself, it makes itself known as a device of narration. In that sense the music finds itself on the outside or the edge of the diegesis and is less confined to the narrated story, and takes on an identity of its own rather than that one is imposed on it.

2.2. WHITENESS AND RELATIONALITY

Ethnicity and race are largely thought of as pertaining to the Other (from a white perspective), yet the ethnic white, or whiteness, is often perceived as a non-ethnicity, racially undefined, a neutral norm against which all other ethnicities and races are measured. In the words of Richard Dyer, “other people are raced, we are just people.”¹⁹ In films where the white is

¹⁸ Buhler, “Analytical and Interpretive Approaches to Film Music (II)”, 40.

¹⁹ Richard Dyer, *White, Essays on Race and Culture* (Abingdon: Routledge, 1997), 19. (2006 Digital edition)

pitted against or alongside a different ethnic character (racial buddy films come to mind) the construction of whiteness becomes more explicit and is often detrimental to the construction of say blackness. In films where comparison and contrast is less explicit, a close reading can still reveal the more sub-textual constructions of ethnicity, race and difference. For difference is always present in representations as can be seen in Stuart Hall's explanation of the constructionist approach to language as a representational system: "what signifies, is not each colour in itself, it is the difference between the colours which signifies."²⁰ Hall thus concludes that representation is relational, black is black, because it isn't white. This may lead to binary oppositions, because it is "the simplest way of marking difference," such as the aforementioned black/white.²¹ However the colour black within a semiotic structure is as much not white as it is not orange. Just as African Americans are not, per definition, the opposite of WASP Americans (White Anglo-Saxon Protestants), although they are often constructed as such.

At first sight it seems that the object of study, *THE GREAT GATSBY*, is concerned with the telling of a story from the perspective of a WASP man about another white man who elaborately constructs his own identity according to the ideals of the American Dream and the ideals of the hegemonic majority. However as Richard Dyer shows it is problematic to disregard such films on the basis of the absence of ethnicity on the thematic and visual surface of the film. In *White: Essays on Race and Culture* he felt that if whiteness only revealed itself in opposition or relation to non-white people or in texts that deal with ethnic and racial difference, the concept only seemed to matter when the presence of the non-white subject functioned by way of defining the white subject.²² Yet the white subject's historical power over self-definition and representation implicitly reveals its reliance on the historical other.²³ This reliance is revealed in the images of Others. More importantly this reliance can be exposed by the way a film is structured, which narratological devices, such as music, are put to what use.

In this context Ella Shohat's work on ethnic and racial representation in American film musicals is of particular importance. In her analyses of various musicals she argues first of all that questions of race permeate all films even if they do not "appear on the "epidermic"

²⁰ Stuart Hall "The Work of Representation," in *Representation: Cultural Representations and Signifying Practices*, ed. Stuart Hall (London: Sage Publications Ltd., 1997), 27.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 31.

²² Dyer, *White*, 33.

²³ *Ibid.*, 15.

surface of the text.”²⁴ By the aforementioned “epidermic” surface” of a film text, Ella Shohat argues that the concept of difference is not immediately apparent, in terms of thematic content such as films dealing with interracial relationships or with themes of oppression. In the context of this analysis the word epidermic is telling, as *THE GREAT GATSBY* is thematically focused on white *skinned* characters. The term epidermic refers to both the surface of the text as well as the skin of its narrated characters, since the literal meaning of the word is taken as the outer-surface of the skin. It is a question of identifying something or someone and hence categorizing on the basis of the outer appearance. Secondly the musical and in extension its music and dance have historically been a site where minority expressions have found their way on the screen, despite the appropriation of these expressions by the hegemonic processes.

In “White face, Black Noise; Miles Davis and the Soundtrack,” for example, Krin Kabbard argues that Miles Davis and his music have stopped carrying associations with actual African American culture in particular when it is used in films.²⁵ In similar vein the music industry has systematically toned down hip-hop’s political potency in order reach a greater and often white audience. Of course this is also a balancing act, the representation of African American cultures in the media, both the alternative subculture and the appropriation of the alternative by the dominant culture are simultaneously present. The task is to lay bare what Gina Marchetti calls the defusion of the “ideological challenge the groups may pose to the dominant culture.”²⁶

Ethnicity, according to Shohat, “is culturally ubiquitous and textually submerged,” which is something that the notion that meaning and representation is constructed through difference may help one to expose.²⁷ Both the assumption that only certain films are “ethnic” or that ethnicity is somehow only applicable to specific groups is informed by the idea that the dominant group in America is the norm and not considered as an ethnicity.²⁸ These assumptions have led scholars to analyse ethnic films and their representation as separated from the American mainstream context, which Shohat calls the “ghettoizing discourse.”²⁹ Yet

²⁴ Ella Shohat, “Ethnicities-in-Relation: Toward a Multicultural Reading of American Cinema,” in *Unspeakable Images: Ethnicity and the American Cinema*, ed, Lester D. Friedman (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1991), 215.

²⁵ Krin Gabbard, “White Face, Black Noise: Miles Davis and the Soundtrack,” in *Beyond the Soundtrack: Representing Music in Cinema*, ed. Daniel Goldmark, Lawrence Kramer and Richard Leppert (London: University of California Press, 2007).

²⁶ Gina Marchetti, “Ethnicity and Cultural Studies,” in *Unspeakable Images: Ethnicity and the American Cinema*, ed, Lester D. Friedman (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1991), 282-283.

²⁷ *Ibid*, 215.

²⁸ *Ibid*, 215-216.

²⁹ *Ibid*, 216.

America has been a multiethnic society for a long time and is thus defined by it as well. It is therefore, I argue, very much possible to read the construction of Nick's whiteness as well as Gatsby's whiteness in such a way that it conveys to us something meaningful about the position in the margins, i.e. African Americans.

3. ANALYSIS

3.1. METHOD

Luhrmann is known for rewriting classics from literature and stage and layering these classics with pop music and highly stylized visual and he does so in his adaptation of *The Great Gatsby*. This way the film elides the discussion about whether portrayals and sonic representations of African Americans are in any way authentic with regards to the historical context of the novel. In particular the film's music self-reflexively reveals the film's constructedness, specifically through the use of anachronistic genres and the recognisability of the compiled score. In an interview Anton Monsted, the musical supervisor of the film *THE GREAT GATSBY*, explained the idea of using modern pop music in combination with then contemporary jazz.³⁰ They wanted to create a "sliding doors" construction that explicitly linked the music of today with the music of then. At the same the use of pop music helped marketing the film for a 21st century audience and as such a hybrid soundtrack was created. The creators of the film view jazz and contemporary music as having the same pop sensibilities of their respective time periods. As such we are not only seeing a "stylized past" through the visuals, but also hearing a reconstructed past in the sound of "modern beats."³¹

The proposed method is to look for the transitions in which African American music is foregrounded, in other words to identify Monsted's "sliding doors." This has led me to examine the sequences where the music is most prominent and explicitly present. The mere presence and at times explicit foregrounding of hip-hop is dubious in itself. The identity of the music seems to have no relation to the visuals and the narrative so you cannot help to ask why

³⁰ Roy Trakin, "From Flappers to Rappers: 'The Great Gatsby' Music Supervisor Breaks Down the Film's Soundtrack," *The Hollywood Reporter*, November 5, 2013, <http://www.hollywoodreporter.com/news/great-gatsby-soundtrack-track-by-track-521092>.

³¹ Ibidem.

and what is that it does for the narrative. The focus lies on the use of Jay-Z's music, because the musical identity of hip-hop is arguably the farthest removed from the principle characters in the film and Jay-Z's recognisability as an African American man and representative of hip-hop undoubtedly renders the music in racial terms. Music is in that sense oppositional to the narrative and the visual construction and this opposition transforms the understanding of the film. In other words the racial identity of the music impedes on the narrative and vice-versa the narrative transforms the music to a certain extent. The four Jay-Z songs that are featured in the film are all in one way or another connected to Nick's voice-over narration and thereby connected to Nick, as will be explained later. Baring in mind the limited scope I will focus on only two songs.

The transitions come in different forms. The transition that is most discussed in academic literature is the transition from diegetic music to non-diegetic music and vice-versa. Working with this concept also means considering the moments where the transition and its signification in the diegesis remain unsolved and open to gaps, as it is the case with metadiegetic music. To large extent the presence of the transition determines the narrative status of the music and the way the music is restricted in its functioning and meaning.

On this note I would like to explain the focus of the analysis on the opening of the film for it establishes a tension between self-reflexive narration and classically effaced narration in which music plays a part. Openings are always contested spaces in narrative film, because even though it's a constitutive element it is often understood as both separate from as well as part of the narrative even when modern opening titles are interweaved with the diegetic narrative world. Since it is both inside and outside it offers a gap in which one can understand the film's constructed nature. Thomas Elsaesser and Warren Buckland argue that the opening is a "special case of meta-text," which is "separate from and yet part of the narrative."³² They find that the meta-textual status of the opening allows it to show how the film "needs to be understood."³³ Furthermore this self-referential aspect of openings can be thickened with the regards to the analysis of *THE GREAT GATSBY*. Peter Verstraten argues that an excessive style, something Luhrmann is known for, can "indicate *a style that functions as an in-built guide that serves to create a distance to the content or plot.*"³⁴ In this case the music's slippery narrative status in the film can be thought of as the excessive style that

³² Thomas Elsaesser, and Warren Buckland, *Studying Contemporary American Film; A Guide to Movie Analysis* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002): 47.

³³ *Ibid*, 47.

³⁴ Peter Verstraten, *Film Narratology*, trans. Stefan van der Lecq (London: University of Toronto Press Inc., 2009), 197. (Italics in the original)

constructs the relations between different levels of narration using dissolves, hybrids and alternating source scoring and underscoring, but at the same time the music sutures the spectator in the spectator in the story world. In other words the music may be thought of as narrating both excessively (noticeably) and classically (effaced). Jay-Z's music in *THE GREAT GATSBY* functions differently according to the extent it is functionally compensated by the content of the story.³⁵ Arguably the more the music is motivated and contained by the narrative the less it

3.2. ANALYSIS - OPENINGS: INTO THE DIEGESIS

Like most films, although this is becoming less conventional, *THE GREAT GATSBY* begins with a title sequence featuring the various logos of the participating production companies.³⁶ The film's credits are shot in black and white film, or something that is made to look like a dated film. In conjunction the music seems to be recorded on and/or played from an outdated recording device, such as a phonograph. The cracks and clicks you hear are the auditory equivalent of the black and white film with its specks of dust and other visual "noise". These visual and auditory elements all signify a past or pasts. After the credits both image and music change. The image gains colour and mobility along the camera axis and the music becomes fuller, the bass notes more pronounced and the stereo image (a misnomer) expands. Although the music seems to change its tune it is in fact the same score, but differently orchestrated and reproduced (using the modern musical reproduction technology available).

It is possible to argue that in musical terms the slow melancholic horn and the tonal progression of the end phrase (the music seems to work its way towards the end) conveys an already tragic ending.³⁷ Evoking tragedy also implies a history, a story that even when one is unfamiliar with *THE GREAT GATSBY* is musically constructed as ill fated. Even this isolated piece of the music can function as a means to suture the audience into the diegesis. However the manner in which it is reproduced (its aged form) has already rendered it meaningful in a different way. As the story is set in the 1920s the aged visual and musical components are in

³⁵ Verstraten, *Film Narratology*, 190.

³⁶ Georg Stanitzek, "Reading the Title Sequence (Vorspann, Generique)," *Cinema Journal* 48, no 4 (Summer 2009): 48.

³⁷ This is later confirmed when the full rendition of the song, *Can't Repeat the Past* is played at the end of the film.

keeping with the historical context of the literary source.³⁸ As such the sequence strongly references cinema's materiality, both the visual and the auditory machinery of cinema in the twenties are acknowledged only to be effaced by modern practices of suture. In this view the start of the film has a double function. Firstly the visuals and the music simultaneously transport the audience into the diegesis. This is a conventional function of the title sequence, as it has "to deal with the systematic hiatus between titling and diegesis in the form of a lead-in into the film." The process of suture is achieved by the use of every modern cinematic technique available: 3D imagery, digital animation and conventional yet effective use of music. Secondly, and contrastingly, due to the unique status of the credits within a film text, it explicitly alludes to the construction of the film. In that sense the film's opening represents the tension between classical and post-classical cinematic narration and a tension between a closed structure and a more open structure.

The openness of the structure that starts the opening sequence and the subsequent closure that completes the sequence can also be found with regards to the scenes that feature Jay-Z's music. Thus it introduces the possibility of a more free-floating meaning with regards to music, but simultaneously functions as a suture into the diegesis. The four scenes that feature Jay-Z can be thought of being on a sliding scale with regards to the relative freedom the music holds within the narratological framework. The first flashback introduces a similar structure in which it acknowledges the music's presence as meaning in itself, but ultimately restricting it as a musical lead-in to the diegesis.

3.2. ANALYSIS - OPENINGS: FIRST FLASHBACK

Jay-Z' first auditory entrance occurs when Nick's first flashback to New York is triggered. The narrative shifts because of this from the 'present' frame story to the narrated past. Musically the transition is marked by dissolve from a jazz rendition of Jay-Z's "*No Church in the Wild*" to the original recording by Jay-Z. While the music necessarily interacts with the images it also interacts with the other elements on the soundtrack, the effects and the monologue in particular. Buhler argues that the three elements of the soundtrack are

³⁸ The cinematic apparatus and the phonograph are historically strongly connected. In the development of a sound cinema the phonograph and the projector were in different stages of the development combined. Furthermore both the invention of the phonograph and cinema are understood as representative of the modernization of the early twentieth century.

structured by an internal dialectic and the film as whole is structured by the dialectical tension between the sound track and the visual track.³⁹ Thus the first element that needs analysing is the internal structure of the soundtrack in other words the interaction between Nick's voice-over and Jay-Z's song.

As was argued earlier, a transition such as the crossing from the diegetic to the nondiegetic is meaningful of itself. The narrative and its diegesis are rendered less rigidly closed for the crossing calls attention to the borders that provide this closure. In the case of voice-over introduced flashbacks, music may accompany the lead-in suggesting that the music is part of the narrator's thoughts.⁴⁰ In this scene the importance of the musical voice is also marked. Nick's voice-over narration halts in order for Jay-Z to rap his first verse momentarily transferring the authoritative space of the voice-over to Jay-Z. While the voice implies a different reproductive tool, namely the body, the bodies of the narrators are significantly absent as are those of any identifiable characters. The God's eye view of New York that introduces the flashback attests to this and so do the disjointed images that follow. The sequence is remarkable, because the shots consist of archive footage and original footage of the film that is processed in order to rhyme with the visual appearance of the archive footage, reinforcing the feel of a documentary style voice-over and the authoritative power that comes with it. Since the sequence is only loosely narrative the music of the black Jay-Z finds a less narratological-restricted space to claim its presence.

In a way this seems to be a progressive narratological intervention for Gorbman suggests that when the metadiegetic music is part of the narrator's thoughts it simultaneously takes over "part of the film's narration."⁴¹ The music is partly allowed to narrate in its own right, but as Stilwell argues the nondiegetic music (the nondiegetic as metadiegetic) transports us within the character's subjectivity, thus it remains associated with Nick's point of narration and subjectivity so to speak.⁴² There is an analogy to be found here. Meredith Goldsmith places Fitzgerald's *The Great Gatsby* alongside some of the passing and Americanization genres of the early 20th century.⁴³ She puts forward the idea that Fitzgerald's novel is in constant dialogue with (or appropriation of) these genres of African American and immigrant

³⁹ Buhler, *Analytical and Interpretive Approaches to Film Music (II)*, 39-40.

⁴⁰ Gorbman, *Unheard Melodies*, 22-23.

⁴¹ *Ibid*, 23.

⁴² Robynn J. Stilwell, "The Fantastical Gap between Diegetic and Nondiegetic," in *Beyond the Soundtrack: Representing Music in Cinema*, ed. Daniel Goldmark, Lawrence Kramer and Richard Leppert (London: University of California Press, 2007), 194.

⁴³ Literature of African Americans and ethnic immigrants in which imitation and assimilation offers opportunity for social mobility in American society.

integration.⁴⁴ Fitzgerald's apparent recognition of other peoples' cultural expressions and experiences did not find explicit references in the novel, but were nevertheless central to American 1920s context. As an adaptation the film is necessarily in dialogue with its source and therefore the source's literary context. However the film's extensive use of hip-hop offers a dialogue with the musical context of the novel as well as that of the film. Hip-hop as a typical genre of black American urban realities is inevitably given discursive space in the film's narration. As Goldmark, Kramer and Leppert explain this is inevitable because the "generic identity that music always carries [...] has a signifying power that carries over into film, a carryover that also implicates musical identity with social identity."⁴⁵ Yet this musical identity is embedded in a subjective narration from a white man's perspective and is therefore in tension with the function that is imposed on it. As a self-reflexive instance of musical narration, two voices unrelated yet part of the same diegetic subject, it belongs to Nick, who is white and middle-class, and yet it cannot shake Jay-Z's star identity, which is in part his blackness. Since the music and the voice-over are coded differently with regards to the diegesis, in other words Nick's narration is dislocated only temporally, while Jay-Z's musical voice-over is "separated from the fiction by an absolute partition," Jay-Z's identity cannot be wholly subsumed by Nick's subjective narration.⁴⁶

It allows Jay-Z, and as far as he represents African Americans, an ambiguous and confined space for self-representation. Ambiguous because he is constructed as an authoritative voice within the narration, but his voice, on the level of the narrative, is at all times embedded in Nick's narration. Nick's status as a visitor is important in this regard, where his voice-over conveys the wonder of witnessing New York in the twenties, Jay-Z a real-life New Yorker already speaks of the decay Nick will only realise at the closure. Nick's sense of tragedy, however, is intimately related to the demise of Jay Gatsby, his ideals and his dreams of class mobility. . The manner in which Jay-Z's space of narration is constructed, however, leaves room for Jay-Z to speak of present struggles and tragedies; the corruption of capitalism and the position African Americans occupy within capitalism through their production of hip-hop. At the same time his voice-over functions as a commentary on the

⁴⁴ Meredith Goldsmith, "White Skin, White Mask: Passing, Posing, and Performing in The Great Gatsby," *Modern Fiction Studies* 49, no. 3 (Fall 2003): 444-445, doi: 10.1353/mfs.2003.0050.

⁴⁵ Daniel Goldmark, Lawrence Kramer, and Richard Leppert, "Introduction," in *Beyond the Soundtrack: Representing Music in Cinema*, ed. Daniel Goldmark, Lawrence Kramer and Richard Leppert (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2007), 8.

⁴⁶ Kaja Silverman, *The Acoustic Mirror: The Female Voice in Psychoanalysis and Cinema* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1988), 48.

archival footage and implicitly links the themes of his songs with the struggles of then. It is a confined space, because the transition that marks this space (the musical and narrative transition that introduces the flashback and the subjective narration) and opens it is also mirrored at the end of the sequence and thus confining it. The music is marked by another dissolve from “*No Church in the Wild*” to a contemporary jazz composition and the shot freeze frames on Nick’s face mirroring the shot the sequence started thereby marking it as an isolated space. Also the God’s eye view of New York is repeated and reversed in stead of drawing us to the city the shot draws us away towards the suburbs. This is a space, which, throughout the film, is marked as an especially white space and thus a space where Jay-Z’s voice has no authority. In this sense Jay-Z’s music is allowed to narrate, but due to the structure of the film it is only allowed to narrate certain sequences.

I would like to draw on another scene to explain the restricted space that is reserved for hip-hop to narrate. As stated earlier Jay-Z’s music is represented in four scenes. Each scene represents the music differently. The first as discussed in the above, is marked by a musical transition. This metadiegetic transition both frames the sequence as a subjective narration and as somewhat removed from the diegesis proper. However each subsequent appearance of Jay-Z the music becomes more diegetic and more closely associated with the spectacle of the diegesis and the African American bodies that occupy the diegesis.

As Nick and Gatsby cross the Queensboro Bridge into Manhattan Jay-Z’s *H.O.V.A* becomes increasingly audible. Unlike the “*No Church in the Wild*” sequence the music is unmistakably diegetic. The spatial cues of the music coincide with the visual cue and the music clearly emanates from the passing car. The diegetic status of the music is important, as the music’s narrative status is different from that of the flashback scene. As part of the diegetic track Rick Altman argues that the music functions according to “cinema’s referential nature” and “reflects reality.”⁴⁷ The film represents the music and African Americans dancing to and the way they present themselves to this music as a natural and realistic match. In other words when we see African Americans in the diegesis we hear music and when we hear hip-hop we see African Americans. The dislocated function of hip-hop in the flashback scene and the ambiguity that comes with it disappears as the film wears on and the narrative focuses more narrowly on the romantic plotline. As such either the music functions increasingly as an excuse for the visual spectacle of black bodies or spectacle of black bodies diegetizes the anachronistic hip-hop.

⁴⁷ Rick Altman, *The American Film Musical* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1987), 62-63.

4. CONCLUSION

The inclusion of African American music in *THE GREAT GATSBY* the film is in some sense a corrective to the novel with regards to the novel's exclusion of African Americans. It also implicitly acknowledges the contribution of African American culture and music specifically to the era of the Jazz Age by drawing connections between hip-hop and jazz. However the addition of music has narratological consequences, this being that it both changes the narrative as a narratological device and as part of the narrative structure the meaning of the music itself is transformed. The construction of Nick as narrator and thus the film's narrative point-of-view complicates the presence of hip-hop, since it limits the way music generates meaning. Interestingly when hip-hop is employed to construct a subjective scene such as the one analysed in the above, musical meaning is found to be less restricted despite its association with a white subject. It is arguably the film's overt narration that allows the music to come into play more freely, while the more classically narrated scenes anchor musical meaning more rigidly. In the end when the film's narration becomes more classically closed and the story nears its closure both hip-hop and the African American bodies are there for little more than spectacle. Even more so the hip-hop seems to justify the presence of the spectacle by rendering it as naturally there.

This thesis nevertheless leaves gap that needs researching. Within a cultural studies framework one may be able to question the effect of using hip-hop in the film on the relationship between African American spectators and the film text. A study that could explore the question of the representation of the American Dream in *THE GREAT GATSBY* and whether African Americans feel the narrative's discourse relays an African American perspective on the American Dream. Or a little differently put, we could ask whether the narrative at all strikes a chord with African Americans and where these points of identification and recognitions can be found?

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