UNSPITTABLE: LONG-FORM ETHNOGRAPHIC MUSIC VIDEO AS CINE-ETHNOMUSICOLOGY RESEARCH-CREATION

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ABSTRACT

Cine-ethnomusicology, the cinematic study of music culture, is an emerging practice/methodology in ethnomusicology. Benjamin Harbert, a leading figure in this movement, has called for a critical cinema of music to blend ethnomusicology and film studies. In response to this call, I forward the long-form ethnographic music video as a research-creation model that combines ethnographic filmmaking with music video production. This article introduces a three-assemblage ethnographic production model and uses the making of Unspittable (2019) as a case study.

KEYWORDS

music video, ethnographic film, ethnofiction, three-assemblages, research-creation, phenomenological ethnomusicology, Alberta, Canada, DIY musicians

BIO

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Prologue

This article was initially drafted and reviewed before the killing of George Floyd in Minneapolis, Minnesota, by five police officers, including Derek Chauvin which energized the subsequent Black Lives Matter protests around the world. Here in Edmonton, Alberta, 15,000 people gathered to powerfully acknowledge that Black and Indigenous Lives Matter in Canada and that the long history of oppression perpetrated by colonial and racist governmental practices must end. On my final morning of editing, I received word that William Gladue, a member of the local Indigenous Hip Hop group Collective Conscience discussed in this article, had died overnight. While in this article, I write for professional ethnographers and filmmakers about the technical work of making ethnographic music video, I do not want to lose sight of the practical work of solidarity that motivated this project and others like it. Unspittable was a joint project in ethnofiction, an attempt to share the lived realities of inner-city youth in Edmonton, the forced demand of capitalism to "hustle" and the joy and solidarity that rhythm brings. The moments of joy are fleeting. The struggle, while fictionalized, is real. I believe that white academics must find ways to amplify the voices of Black and Indigenous people. The long-form ethnographic music video is, therefore, a creative political project. I hope that the reader will understand that working through the technicalities and theories in this paper is a kind of ethico-aesthetic labour required to create new ways of knowing and feeling each other—a new way of breathing together.

> "Only an act of language escaping the technical automatism of financial capitalism will enable the emergence of a new life form. Only the reactivation of the body of the general intellect—the organic, existential, historical finitude that harbors the potency of the general intellect—will enable the imagination of new infinities."
> (Berardi 2018: 31)

Introduction

The long-form ethnographic music video is an experimental method to mix ethnographic film and music video production. It builds on a growing area of music video research (Arnold et al. 2017, Beebe et al. 2007, Burns and Hawking 2019, Frith et al. 1993, Keazor and Wübbena 2010) that focuses on productive modes of analysis. Still, there is little written about production and research-creation (Richardson 2019). Books on the creation of music videos have been written by artists who have, understandably, little interest in contributing to cultural studies (Esrich 2009: 147). The emerging area of cine-ethnomusicology has much to offer in this regard as it develops what Benjamin Harbert has called a "critical cinema of music" (Harbert 2018, 246). Cine-ethnomusicology, as conceived by ethnomusicological filmmakers, may forward research-oriented production methods that resonate with the aspirations of research-creation (Cumming 2012; Kerrigan 2016; Stévance 2018) while also providing a critical engagement with digital cinema. Music video research-creation reorients ethnomusicological fieldwork, a move that transforms the traditional anthropological idea of "the field" as an identifiable geographical location, to a posthuman field.

There are multiple ways that this new field might be understood. My approach is a tryptic of assemblages: territorial, production, and screen. In the most common sense of the term assemblage is a collection. Expanded philosophically by Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari in "A Thousand Plateaus" (1987), an assemblage is a self-creating unit; it is autopoietic. Manual DeLanda in "A New Philosophy of Society" (2006) and "Assemblage Theory" (2016) suggests the study of units of social bodies as a technique to understand collective and constant becomings. The assemblage is a way to dissolve the structure: agency binary and has a great deal in common with Abu-Laghod's (1991) "ethnography of the particular" and Gullion's (2018) "diffractive ethnography." I use assemblage to recognizes complex posthuman becomings at each step or stage of the production process, especially as in my case, where there is a single body (my body) doing the research, co-writing, filming, editing, sound mixing, colouring, and publicity and then also conducting research on the entire process and writing articles.

In my model, the territorial assemblage is constituted by traditional fieldwork practices that move and evolve with the discipline, in my case, ethnomusicology (Stone and Berger 2019). The production assemblage draws together screen production research methods (Batty 2018) to engage with the technical and technological issues in music video creation. It is not strictly technical, however, as there is an existential urge to create that motivates the becoming of the production assemblage. There is a leap

between the territorial and production assemblage, where the researcher becomes an artist.[1] The screen assemblage draws on film studies and expands the older shared anthropology in ethnographic film theory, where the film is shared with the featured community. There are rich possibilities here to study both the reception of the film from insider and outsider positions, but also to engage in a cultural study of the circulation of screen objects as they traverse digital networks and find audiences at film festivals, through YouTube distribution, blogs, arthouse cinemas, and other digital streaming platforms.

Despite the re-orientation of "fieldwork" music video production is not divorced from the main concerns of ethnomusicology or primarily phenomenological ethnomusicology, and its commitment to the study of musical meaning in its broadest sense.[2] And this is especially true of the long-form ethnographic music video, where the intent is to blend ethnographic film with the music video. The three assemblages model provides a holistic approach to the study of music videos where findings from the work of each assemblage shed light on the other two. In this essay, I use the making of *Unspittable* as a case study.

Part One: *Unspittable* as a music video and the new questions it poses for cine-ethnomusicology

Link to the trailer: https://vimeo.com/376051031

Unspittable (2019) is a 32-minute ethnographic music video comprising ten scenes and five pre-recorded songs and three live musical performances.[3] Covering a vast range of Unspittable's music (the film's title is taken from the name of the hip-hop group), the film is a series of music videos held together by sections of short dialogue. The film does not follow a conventional storyline, nor does it linearly move through time (to be discussed in section two).

The film

The film opens in black with Unspittable's music. Andrew Cardinal (Amplify) is silhouetted in the snow, smoking a cigarette outside a club. Amplify enters the club, drinks a few beers, and socializes with group members, friends, and fans, he sits alone deep in thought. After a short cut to black, we see Andrew waking up on a sofa. He explains to his cousin, who had just woken up on a nearby sofa, that he needs to meet up with Charles (Repression) to share a new beat. The scene ends with Amplify explaining to his family that he will be back later in the day and asks his dad, "should I chug this beer before I go out of the yard," his father responds that he should because he does not want to get arrested. Amplify retorts "eventually, I will...but not today right", his mother responds, "not today." Music begins, and the scene ends with Amplify lighting a cigarette, ignoring his parents' warning leaves the backyard beer in hand. A city montage is interrupted by Amplify walking down the stairs into a basement where he is greeted by Repression and introduced to Niko.

Scene Three is a live performance to the new beat Amplify has sent to Repression. Amplify makes fun of Repression as he struggles to find and open the music file on his broken laptop. Concluding with a commitment to creating the new group Unspittable, we return in Scene Four to Andrew sitting thoughtfully at the club. Several friends join him, and we learn that the reason Amplify was sitting alone is that he almost got in a fight with a young white man at the club. Supported by friends, they make up.

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[1] In a forthcoming article, I have written about "the leap" between the assemblage where the body metaphorically leaps between social science language of concepts to the affects and percepts that constitute the regime of art production. I think of it as the hyphen between researcher-artist or artist-research. The hyphen both joins these words while it also hides the existential work of a single body moving back and forth between two worlds, trying in vain to bridge the often-contradictory demands while struggling against the self-criticism, and sometimes professional criticism, that one is not entirely either.

[2] "musical meaning includes the affective or stylistic valence that listeners or performers may find in music; processes of coordination and communication among participants in a performance event; the positioning of performances or works in terms of formal or generic systems; the negotiation of identity through music; and, in its widest sense, any ascription or discovery of significance in music or music-making" (Berger 2015) accessed online: https://www.oxfordhandbooks.com/view/10.1093/oxfordhb/9780199935321.001.0001/oxfordhb-9780199935321-e-30

[3] *Unspittable* (2019) will be soon available to stream at www.michaelbmacdonaldfilms.ca.

The young white man says "I'm sorry now that I know your face you wouldn't get that look from me, like I'm going to beat you up" while a female friend retorts to the young white man "He wouldn't beat you up, you're too white."

Andrew is alone again, this time backstage at the club. Music starts, and he and the rest of Unspittable engage in play fighting. After a short cut to black, we follow Amplify in Scene Five, making his long journey to the Edmonton Inner City High School, before returning to Scene 06, where we rejoin Amplify alone backstage. After a couple of short shots, we find Amplify deep in thought.

Scene Seven opens with Niko driving an old pickup truck into the city in winter. He meets up with Amplify and Repression, and they drive around the city, trying to find the promoter that owes them money. They stop and buy some charity hot dogs where Niko comments about them being "a bunch of brown people at a tool store eating dogs" to the hushing of Amplify and Repression. After spitting to a track in the truck and learning from David that he has not seen the promoter, there is a quick cut to Scene Eight where the group drives around looking at houses imagining the house that they would like to have someday when they "make it."

We rejoin Amplify alone backstage dancing to music performed off-screen, and presumably onstage. There is a kind of mania to his dancing that is suggestive. The film closes with Unspittable performing live.

A music video?

Initially, it may strike the reader as unusual that I call *Unspittable*—a thirty-two-minute short film—a music video, but there are plenty of examples of long-form music videos. I position *Unspittable* in a history of music video films that would include the early experimental music works of Dudley Murphy, the rock and roll music films of the late 1950s, and the "documentary" work of Les Blank among others. I use the scare quotes around documentary because when Les Blank was asked about his documentary music films, he hesitated and said his music films were "more like a little opera of some sort...operetta" (Blank 2013). Of course, Blank's music films pre-date the development of MTV by decades so it is understandable that he would not have access to the idea of the music video. Even today I feel I have to justify my thirty-two-minute film as a music video. Though widely accepted that the music video has moved from its 'original' commercial function into a "more dynamic circulation of the music video" (Manghani 2017: 23), it is emerging as an art-form supported by a network of film festivals around the world. Blank's insistence that "my films are more pieces of music than film documents" (Blank 2013) poses fascinating historical reconsideration and ontological questions for music video studies. Do we, for instance, submit to the hegemony of MTV or re-historicize music videos going back to the early experiments in music and the moving image?

Even in this expanded model, Blank would stand apart because his music films are ethnographic in origin and creative works of discovery that echo Andre Bazin's (2011) claim for neorealism and the successive generations of new wave cinema that deal with music.[4] Blank's distance from documentary has to do with his engagement with music. It seems to me that Blank is more concerned with the experience of his operettas than the 'say-able' so valued in the documentary form.[5] Laura Marks (2000) points out, through Deleuze, that what the "optical image does is 'finally see' what has not been encoded in discourse—and finally hear it as well" (200). Blank's ethnographic operettas let us *seehear* a musical world, a potentially rich model for cine-ethnomusicology. But what does it mean to *seehear*?

The vertical montage

In an interview with Les Blank, Benjamin Harbert asked, "Is there something about making a film that reveals music in a unique way?" Blank's response is worth analyzing in some detail as it will lead us into what makes music video production a unique form of music filmmaking.

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[4] Here I am thinking about Jean Luc Godard's "Sympathy for the Devil," a work of ethnographic observation of the Rolling Stone's recording session that Godard sets against a series of dramatic vignettes.

[5] One might hear in this Foucault's observations about discourse (1972; 1977; 1980; 1994) or Ranciere's politics of aesthetics (2000; 2005; 2007; 2010).

It brings out of the music elements you wouldn't hear if you just listened to straight music. As soon as you play a visual against a piece of music, everything changes. The music changes. The visual changes. *A third entity comes into being*: a fusion of the music and the visual. I like it when that happens. The result is a different kind of notes or chords . . . I don't know what you'd call them even. But they are a fusion of music and visual shown in a new, fresh way. (Les Blank 2013, emphasis added)

Blank's comparison to opera and his notion of "a different kind of notes or chords" is suggestive in two senses. First, because it is tempting to recall Wagner's idea of *Gesamtkunstwerk*, that is the aesthetic drive to bring together all art forms. This notion that undoubtedly influenced early filmmakers (Birdsall 2012: 141-72, Warshaw 2018). Blank, though, never suggested such lofty goals for his films. It is far more likely that what he is reaching for is something else, a way to make sense of the complicated feelings associated with the experience of aligning moving images and music, an experience that is more and different from both the visual images and the musical score. Eisenstein, the great Russian filmmaker and theorist, called this vertical montage (Afra 2015; Eisenstein 1949; MacLean 2012, Warshaw 2018). While Eisenstein's theory of horizontal montage is quite well known, his idea of vertical montage is much less developed (often unmentioned), it is perhaps an editing theory that was waiting for the music video.

In his essay "The Fourth Dimension" he wrote:

And yet we cannot reduce aural and visual perceptions to a common denominator. They are values of different dimensions. But the visual overtone and the sound overtone are values of a singly measured substance. Because, if the frame is a visual perception, and the tone is an aural perception, visual as well as aural overtones are a totally physiological sensation. And, consequently, they are of one and the same kind, outside the sound or aural categories that serve as guides, conductors to its achievement. For the musical overtone (a throb) it is not strictly fitting to say: "I hear." Nor for the visual overtone: "I see." For both, a new uniform formula must enter our vocabulary: "I feel." (Eisenstein 1949: 70-1)

New Questions

Eisenstein's "I feel" centrally resonates with phenomenology, of course, but the notion of editing for the "overtone" is more suggestive than instructive.[6] Even though the overtonal montage has never really become part of music video technical language, reference to the experience that Blank and Eisenstein identify none-the-less appear in other books. In her 2009 book "Making Music Videos," Laura Shwartz suggested that aligning music and moving image brings out a "third dimension" (151). Whether we call it a new kind of "chord," an "overtone," a "third dimension," or "fourth dimension" matters little at this moment. What is essential is that there is an emergence of some kind of Gestalt, or an affective experience of meaning (Zwicky 2019) that emerges from the filmic environment.[7] I want to highlight two things from this discussion that will be used in the autoethnography. One, that vertical montage—the aligning of moving images with music—is a technical procedure I utilized in the production assemblage to realize, two, an affective experience of life in the city.[8] While the former can be transcribed (Haverkamp 2012: 2), the latter is an experience that requires further phenomenological ethnomusicological research. I believe that these are some of the new questions posed by the music video's posthuman field and that artist-researchers have the skills and experience to lead this work. In the case study below, I use autoethnography to begin to deal with these new questions.

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[6] There is a suggestion here that the vertical and horizontal montage work together to produce tonal and over tonal montage, and while we might not know what to do with these ideas immediately, I cannot help but feel the resonance with Blank's "chords" which surely suggests vertical and horizontal montage techniques.

[7] As Turino (2014) has noted, the Peircean ontology of firstness, secondness, and thirdness offers phenomenological ethnomusicology a firm basis for non-representational analysis. Deleuze has similarly noted the value of Peircean semiotics to film studies (cinema 1) and Bergson (cinema 2) for the study of the experience of time, which Eisenstein hints at in the title of the work (The Fourth Dimension).

[8] Two things that will have to await a further project are worth emphasizing because they establish a kind of background for my work. The first, Blank's use of musical language to understand his own creative practice invites an ethnomusicological exploration in the musicality of Blank's editing practice. The second, Blank's metaphor of "a different kind of notes or chords" is remarkable in this sense that both he and Eisenstein, filmmakers separated by time and geography, use this idea of stacked tones (chordal or overtones) to try to explain the experience that occurs in the editing room when music and moving images are put together in a particular way.

Part Two: autoethnography of the three-assemblages

Territorial Assemblage: Edmonton Hip Hop Culture

I began my extended fieldwork with the Edmonton hip hop scene in 2011 (MacDonald 2016). It began quite accidentally. I was preparing a postdoc project on gentrification and the impact on artistic scenes. I was attending a series of community meetings as part of a planned 'revitalization'. I was following the discussions with some interest because the proposed area had become well known as a community where local artists could still afford to buy homes. There was concern amongst my artist friends that this 'revitalization' was a code word for city-supported gentrification that would result in artists getting pushed out. This was of considerable concern because many artists had recently relocated due to a string of other gentrification projects. While at the meeting, I began a conversation with a local hip hop artist and community activist who suggested that covering these meetings would not lead me to the real story and that there was a considerable hip hop community in the neighbourhood through which I might view real impacts of gentrification. I began to be introduced to members of the local hip hop community, and through these conversations, a new focus emerged, a community engagement project on hip hop pedagogy.

Over the next six or so years, as documented in my book *Remix and Lifehack in HipHop* (MacDonald 2016), I was a partner in an inner-city drop in program called Cipher5.

IMAGE 1: Cipher5

Cipher5 was a weekly meeting that brought several generations of hiphoppas together to share skills, develop kinship, and provide existential support (Pearson and Yazdanmehr 2014). In time Cipher5 became networked with the American Temple of Hip Hop.

IMAGE 2: Cipher5 becomes recognized as the first Temple of Hiphop Canada.

This led to three conferences on hip hop as critical pedagogy and brought together international hiphop scholars and activists to discuss pressing issues of racism, crime, educational opportunities, and activism.

IMAGE 3: Presenters at the first international Hip-hop Kulture conference at MacEwan University (left to right): Jianda Payza, Hodari Davis, Andre Hamilton (Dre Pharoh), Thomas Alvarez III, Michael B MacDonald, prof. Awad Ibrahim.

The conferences helped some members of the local community get connected internationally. They seemed to provide Cipher5 with a broader perspective culminating in two short films, *Megamorphesis* (2015) and *Letters to Attawapiskat* (2016), which kicked off a letter-writing campaign intended to support youth in the remote community of Attawapiskat First Nation in Northern Ontario, Canada.

IMAGE 4: The film premiere of *Megamorphesis* and *Letters to Attawapiskat*

Cipher5 led to some success with the inner-city youth and certainly built up a vibrant social network, but I was consistently unhappy with what I was reporting in my articles. I was writing for academics and, as such, used a language and a means of knowledge mobilization that was not meant for the youth I was working with, nor could be accessed by them because it was hidden from public view through library paywalls. Second, the narratives that were being reported, while valid testimonials, often felt like scripts used in hip hop, a form of urban discourse. Hip hop culture was consistently described as emancipatory and transformational but over the years, I saw little evidence that much was changing in the lives of the youth (self-sufficiency/economic stability). From my perspective, many youth were spending the majority of their time moving from youth activities to youth drop-in centres making beats and spitting rhymes. While these are important activities, it was like watching a rigged game where their circuits of movement around the city became mazes, making it difficult to leave. And the weight of that time, the years that began to pass by, the existential experience of time itself started to become an important aspect of my research, but I could not find a way to represent it in print.

Further, the narrative of emancipation seemed to come with a commitment to industrialization, perhaps the neoliberal dream of hip hop culture, that if one could become 'good enough' they would 'break' and would achieve economic success. But having come from the music industry before attending graduate school, it appeared that inner city youth were not in the music business from the perspective of what little music industry there is in Alberta, Canada. I did not see ways that they could access the professionalization they dreamed for. The ideology of emancipation through popular economic success would continue to elude these youth, through no fault of their own, and year after year youth were 'aging out'[9] of the inner-city youth programs that were providing music production space. After aging out they were now 'adults' without much in the way of employable skills, and no closer to music industry success. Alcoholism, drug use, violence, prison, homelessness, and gang membership was taking away whatever gains we thought we were making with Cipher5. But still, even in the face of mounting evidence to the contrary, the discourse did not change; those who were unsuccessful were so because they were not 'good

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[9] Youth programs are able to provide services to a particular age group defined by the operating charter of the organization. Aging out means that you are now too old to access the services. There is no graduation process, and often these drop-in centres are emergency front line crisis centres that are not designed to provide certifications for the youth that use them.

enough'. Never was the discourse of hip hop success challenged. Though it felt to me that the game was rigged against them, they did not see it, or at least did not publicly admit it.

I wanted to make an educational product that would help members of the hip hop community self-reflect on their struggles and their distance from the music industry, despite their efforts and their desires. It was the realization that the discourse of hip hop in the context of colonization and neoliberalism further entrenched problematic social relations that were 'un-seeable'. These Hiphoppas proved themselves to be very articulate about historical and social forces (MacDonald 2020b) especially aware of some forms of colonization and saw, as I do as well, the power of hiphop as a form of decolonization (MacDonald 2020a). It seemed likely that if I made a film focused on the struggles of keeping a hip-hop group together, it would work as a form of critical pedagogy of popular music (MacDonald 2020b). At the time of this observation (2016) I was working with an Indigenous hip hop collective called RAW (Rebels at War) Nation and we began to embark on a documentary project that had great potential.

IMAGE 5: RAW Nation

Andre Hamilton (aka Dre Pharoh) and I began meeting with members of RAW Nation on a documentary project that was to be called *Hip Hop: A New Civilization*. It was going to be a documentary of the founding of RAW Nation voiced over by Hamilton. The idea behind the film was to document the way Indigenous youth use hip hop as a kind of neo-traditional cultural practice, what Hamilton called new tribalism (MacDonald 2020b). RAW Nation was comprised of three Indigenous hip hop groups: Collective Conscience, RAW by Design, and Knights of Valor.

IMAGE 6: Andre Hamilton (aka Dre Pharoh) reading the City of Edmonton Declaration of Hip Hop Week at Hip Hop in the Park.

I first heard Collective Conscience (CC) around 2014 when members began attending Cipher5. When I first saw them perform, it was the most exciting moment I have yet had in hip hop. It was as if I was seeing the Wu-Tang Clan in the early 1990s. I followed them as much as I could and began trying to figure out how I could support what they were doing.

CC came together at iHuman, an inner-city arts-based youth drop-in centre, and were central to a group of urban Indigenous youth who came from different reserves all over Treaty 6 & 8.[10]

IMAGE 7: The 'old' iHuman Youth Society

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[10] Treaty 6 was signed between the Crown and Cree, Assiniboin, Salteaux, and Chipewyan people in 1876 and covers parts of present day Alberta and Saskatchewan. Treaty 8 "encompassing a landmass of approximately 840,000 kilometers, is home to 39 First Nations communities, including 23 Alberta First Nations, 3 Saskatchewan First Nations, 6 Northwestern Territories First Nations, and 8 British Columbia First Nations" http://treaty8.bc.ca/ (accessed Nov 1, 2019)

They were well-liked and often included in shows hosted by local leading hiphoppas Kaz Mega and iD.
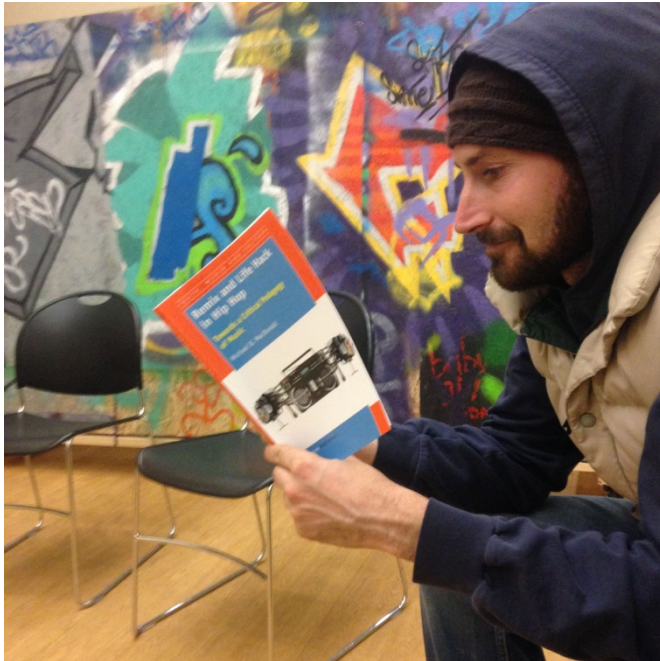

IMAGE 8: iD reading *Remix and Life Hack in Hip Hop.*

But interestingly, shows that members of CC put on were usually not attended by many non-Indigenous heads, with a few notable exceptions like DJ Dice, who is a go-to DJ for much of the community, a mentor for CreeAzn (Pearson and Robinson 2018)—now a dancer for the world famous A Tribe Called Red—and a colleague of Rex Smallboy, the founder of renowned Indigenous hip hop group War Party.

IMAGE 9: DJ Dice (left) and CreeAzn (center).

In 2014 I first came up with the idea to shoot a documentary about RAW Nation. They had just formed as a unit and I had been talking with local Indigenous music promoter and emcee Curtis Red

Rock about it – he was interested and we set up a meeting in the spring of 2015. By the fall of 2015 however RAW Nation had broken up and its members were dispersed.

In March of 2016 I began meeting with Deejay (from Knights of Valor) and Amplify (from CC) about making a documentary about urban Indigenous youth and hip hop. Since my 2014 experience at the Canadian Truth and Reconciliation public event in Edmonton I had been thinking about Hiphop through the frame of truth and reconciliation, but I was having a hard time imagining what it would look like.[11] It reminded me of the opening track of the War Party album *The Resistance*, an album that features Public Enemy's Chuck D who connects Indigenous hip hop to the origins of hip hop's African American struggle for liberation. But this connection is largely 'un-sayable' illustrated in its absence from most hip hop narrative.

Later that month Curtis, DeeJay and Andrew let me know that RAW Nation was going to re-form and that they were going to have a meeting and would float the idea of making a documentary. I was very pleased and began to think more deeply about hip hop as creativity, truth and reconciliation. By this time however, Hamilton had fallen back into drug use and was no longer involved in the research. A week later I sent a Facebook message asking Curtis about how the meeting went, in response he invited me to a BBQ at Dawson Park, 5:30pm on Saturday April 2nd, 2016. I picked up hotdogs, a bottle of root beer, mustard and two bags of chips and headed out to the park.

I did not know where Dawson Park was and tried to use my iPhone GPS. I was not successful. I ended up parking at a set of stairs that seemed to go to where I thought the park should be. I jumped out of my vehicle and headed down to the stairs remarking as I went at how lovely the view was from this set of wooden stairs but also how much garbage there was along the side of the stairs. It was curious how many police officers I see around this part of town but how much garbage there is everywhere. Why does the city let such a mess pile up? Certainly, there must be a branch of city workers who do this sort of work so why does it seem that every time I am in this part of town, just north of a really fashionable neighborhood, there seems to be so much squalor.

I descended the stairs and took a right up the hill thinking that I saw what might be the park, but I also saw a few youth, one of which I recognized as Andrew Cardinal. I greeted him and he introduced me to his friend and his girlfriend Dakota and his new baby. I admitted that I had no idea where the park was and he said it was down the hill. We walked together and chatted. A car honked their horn as we walked toward the park and a group of Indigenous youths were hanging out of a window waving, all headed towards the BBQ.

On our approach, there were three obvious groups around the parking lot of the park. A biker club with matching leather vests and back-patches were standing in a circle. Next to them was another circle of very joyful Caribbean people enjoying the lovely evening and cooking and dancing in the park. We headed towards the covered BBQ area and saw RAW Nation and friends, totaling about 30 Indigenous youth, some with babies and strollers, others with skateboards. I saw Curtis' pregnant partner putting wood into the BBQ pit. The smoke was heavy, but it was really nice to smell burning wood. It had been so long since it felt like summer.

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[11] https://globalnews.ca/news/1232599/national-truth-and-reconciliation-event-comes-to-edmonton/ accessed October 29th, 2019.

IMAGE 10: Gary Moostoos (left).

Gary Moostoos, a Cree elder that does a lot of work with inner city organizations asked everyone to get together in a circle. Gary asked for a lighter and lit up some sage. He asked if anyone had not smudged before. A few of the youth put up their hands. Gary began explaining why we smudge:

> When we wake up in the morning we wash. And this washes our outer body. Smudge is the way to wash your inner body. It is about cleansing and cleansing is about health and clarity. This is how we look after ourselves, and treat ourselves as we walk our journey.

> The longest trip that we will take in our lives is from our head to our heart or our heart to our head. We can walk through life feeling the world with our heart but not having an open mind. Or we could also walk through life engaging with the world only through our minds but not with our hearts open. Either way is only half.

> When we hear the world we need to do it twice – that's why the creator gave us two ears. When we see the world we need to look twice – that's why we have two eyes. When we speak we need to do it consciously because we only have one mouth and we do not get a second chance. Our words can hurt – and we need to speak without hurting people. To do this we need to be clear about what we understand of the world.

> We also need to recognize that the world we live in has many parts, some that we can't see. We are just passing through this world, just passing through this territory. It's necessary that we recognize that we are here, in a place that many generations have lived and that these energies are still here and we need to recognize them. They have an impact on us.

> When we go to the mall for instance – and we have an entire day planned – but we are exhausted in 20 minutes. It's not because we exerted a full day's energy but because we observed other people's anxieties. We need to guard against this. I put sage in my shoes to keep the negativity out.

He explained that we smudge our heads to clear our minds, our eyes to see clearly, our ears to hear clearly, our mouth to speak clearly, our hands to work with purity, our hearts to feel, and our feet to walk with intention and direction.

When the smudge went around we began introducing ourselves. Given name, emcee name, and who we are and why we're coming to the circle. Each emcee said their piece. The circle started in the west. I

was in the east standing next to Donovan. It's only looking back at the photos that I realized that I had actually met all of the members of *Unspittable* at this circle. Although they officially did not yet exist as a collective they had already begun to spend increasing amounts of time together and collectively participated in the Indigenous cultural events together. I should say that two members of *Unspittable* are indigenous (Andrew and Colton).

IMAGE 11: Charles (Repression) and Colton (Niko) (right side of the photo).

The smudge now came to me and I introduced myself. To my unpleasant surprise, youth in the circle started clapping. I was instantly uncomfortable because it was clear to me that I was being applauded because I was the white professor and, besides the elder, the only participant over thirty in the circle. I read this as an expression of a power inequality. I really wanted to dissolve it so I made a quick and awkward joke: "Why are you clapping? Are you surprised that the white guy remembered his own name?" And then I softly asked them not to clap because we are trying to undo the power differences of colonization.

I explained that I came from Cape Breton and that I worked in the music industry for many years and that I left the music industry to go to grad school because I felt that I had lost the heart-head connection that music once allowed. That I decided to study what music does for community and that for the last 10 years I've been doing that. For the last five years with Cipher5 and the publication of a book on Hiphop in Edmonton. And that with the support of MacEwan University, I want to make an album and a documentary about RAW Nation and that I ask for the community support in this project. Finally, that it seems to me that hip hop is a form of truth and reconciliation and that what RAW Nation is doing is historically important. Over the course of the BBQ I had conversations with many of the youth and elders and received enthusiastic support to move ahead with the project.

Unfortunately, RAW Nation once again collapsed in the fall of 2016. But by that time, I had already developed a closer relationship with Andrew Cardinal (Amplify) and he agreed to continue the work with me and that we would make a film about his new project, *Unspittable*. We began getting together regularly to work through ideas in a process we called "the Relationship Map" and then began writing scenes for the film.

IMAGE 12: Michael B MacDonald (left) and Andrew Cardinal aka Amplify (right).

Production Assemblage

The relationship between ethnography and screen production is not yet well understood (Berry 2018), and my introduction of the three assemblages is an attempt to move this discussion forward. Ethnographic methods are an accepted form of research, even if they are undergoing transformation (Guillion 2018). Creative practice research and its relationship to ethnography however, while accepted in Canada as research-creation (Stévance 2018), still requires a significant amount of explanatory work before it is widely accepted. It is my feeling that a long-standing divide between those who have theorized ethnographic writing and those who have theorized ethnographic film may be at the root of this issue. While there are some excellent examples of ethnographic film theory (Barbash 1997; Crawford 1992; Grimshaw 2008, 2009; Jenssen 2009; MacDougall 1998, 2006; Rouch 2003; Ruby 2000; Russell 1999; Stoller 1992; Walley 2015), these authors have rarely endeavored to theorize the translation of ethnographic field work into creative practice, and nowhere is there an engagement with the music video. This understanding must emerge from creative practice, from the use of a camera, recorder, and editing suite. This kind of research of discovery through creative practice locates this phase of the study firmly in screen production research, where theory emerges from the practice of making film documents, in this case ethnographic music video. As I will explain later, the screen assemblage becomes a way of testing the work that occurs in the Territorial and Production assemblage. Flanked on one side by ethnography and the other by audience reception, the production assemblage is an incredibly creative space that opens on either side to two very well studied areas. But I believe screen production has the potential to disrupt current ideas in both ethnographic practice and film studies.

Screen production in cine-ethnomusicology introduces both philosophical and methodological questions. For instance, the ethnographic observation above includes both textual and photographic components that were all used as tools to help me entangle myself (and you, the reader) with the ethnographic field. Moving this first phase of observation into the field of ethnofiction is a leap that continues or extends the ethnographic encounter. A leap that is made collectively as both Andrew and I begin to turn reality into a story. Ethnofiction methods were developed in the 1950s by French anthropologist Jean Rouch, who used filmmaking "as a visionary form of political engagement" (Jones 2005: 118). I should say at the outset that this move will pose more questions than provide answers because ethnofiction "was never conceived as a genre, a theory or method" (Sjöberg 2008: 230). In fact, Rouch himself dismissed theory making about his ethnofiction films: "If you start making theory about my films you are losing. You should just follow the movement. If there is a theory, there is no longer improvisation and creativity" (Yakir 1978: 10). Instead of theorizing ethnofiction, I seek to explain through autoethnography what I am doing for myself and to the communities with whom I am working because I believe it is scholarly, ethically, and politically essential.

In this production assemblage phase, the ethnography does not stop, but creates further entanglements in different modes but must also leap from one regime to another. Each leap helps identify a new working space and a way to generate layers of recursion. As I leap from the ethnographic fieldwork to the process of co-writing the screenplay we are together generating new kinds of analysis. I have used leap instead of continuation, because continuation suggests an unproblematic ongoing-ness. When the activity moves from participant observation to screen production it is not so much a continuation of the same kind of activity but a shifting of position. And at the same time, unlike my screen writing partner (Andrew), I remain an ethnographer keeping notes about the screen production process, even as I begin to think and act as a filmmaker. If I was to sketch this out in a graph it could appear this way:

[Ethnographic assemblage] * [production assemblage]
[concepts]   * [affects and percepts]

Perhaps the hyphen in artist-research hides the gap between two regimes of discourse that must be traversed? This is a provocative question that I will return to in a latter essay.

The Relationship Map

The first step in this translation was to work with the members of *Unspittable* to sketch out possible directions for the ethnofiction. In the beginning, Unspittable wanted to make an Edmonton-based *8 Mile* that followed the trajectory of their group's creation and culminated in their ultimate success at a big concert. They were very enthusiastic about this idea and had lots of great scene ideas. But I reminded them that the film we agreed to make would be based on their real experiences, not on ones that we imported from fiction film. To begin the process, they agreed to make a storyline of their friendship and music relationships leading up to the forming of Unspittable. We met again after a few weeks and went over their storylines. We agreed that the film should start with their first meeting and we set up a plan for a day of shooting.

The Relationship Map also allowed us to sketch out the parts of the city that were important for the group, the locations of high schools, training facilities, recording facilities, coffee shops where they would meet as well as bars and performance locations. We talked about the role transportation plays in their lives and the location of recording equipment. The map grew from the three individual timelines into a framework that I was able to utilize in conceptualizing the story. I was further able to lay out their narratives over the ethnographic work that I had completed. I began to see that the narratives that were developing for the film looked nothing at all like the narratives which were included in *Remix and Life Hack in Hip Hop* (MacDonald 2016). For example, a chapter in the book was an oral history of Edmonton hiphop compiled from interviews with local hiphoppas. This compilation suggests a collection of data that legitimates a coherent history of Edmonton hiphop. However, upon working with the members of Unspittable on the production assemblage, it becomes evident that although they may be operating within the Edmonton hiphop scene, their experiences look very different from the official narrative of Edmonton Hiphoppas.

Improvisational Filming

A few days before the first filming day, Andrew called me and asked to change the original plan, that he wanted to start the shooting at his place because he wanted me to see the sofa he uses as a bed. He thought that dramatizing a home life that was typical of many of the youth in hiphop would help people understand more about where they were coming from and what they were rapping about. He also explained that what had happened originally, is that he called Charles and told him about a new beat he had just finished and that he wanted to drop by his place so they could listen together. When he arrived at Charles' place, Colton was there and they got to know each other while spitting to the new beat.

So, I picked up David Chung, a member of Cipher5 who had interest in learning how to do audio recording and we made our way to Andrew's house. He invited us in and I met his family and we discussed what we wanted to do. One of the former members of RAW Nation was also there to see what we were doing and agreed to be in the opening scene. I had Andrew explain to me what he wanted to

do with the scene and I worked out the blocking with David. Blocking is the theatre word for the intended movements in the scene. In cinema, there is the blocking of the actors but also the movement and focus of the camera. And because we were working in an improvisational form it was important for David and I to figure out how to move around the rooms of the house without getting in each other's way, or in the way of the onscreen action. During this period, I was also giving David lessons on how to hold the microphone and boom, what he should be listening for, and how to read the screen on the audio recorder.

After all of this preparatory work was accomplished we ran the scene three times, recording each take. We reviewed them together and talked about what was good and what could use improvement. We ran the scene a fourth time and this time Andrew came up with a completely different performance that included his family members sitting around the kitchen table. I suspect that the spontaneity came from his increasing comfort with the camera and also his recognition that he had control over the development of the story. The outcome was terrific.

We moved onto the second scene where Andrew enters Charles' home. Once again we worked out the blocking and shot his descent down the stairs a few times before settling into the main part of the scene when Charles downloads the new beat and starts playing it. As you can see in the film, Charles' computer was in terrible shape. The screen was busted and he had to guess where most of the desktop files were because so much of the screen was unusable. Andrew began making fun of it, and him, for having such a busted computer.

In these examples I began to see a major difference between the work that emerges from ethnographic writing and ethnographic filming. In writing it is much easier to ignore movement and non-human elements where in cinema they are just simply there, part of the onscreen world and are not separate from the humans that move through the space. The computer became a central figure in the opening part of the scene and as the scene progressed it was a four-part ensemble that came into view, the three Hiphoppas and the computer.

I went home after shooting and spent the weekend working on a first draft. I sent a long version of the draft to the group so they could see what I was trying to do. They responding very quickly and enthusiastically. It seemed to me that they understood what I was wanting to do. Over the next year, we shot a variety of scenes as their lives were changing. Charles moved into a new apartment, Colton moved out of town, Andrew changed schools. All the while we kept shooting small scenes and coming up with more and more scenes. But a story was eluding us. In one writing session we decided to put a story together. I wrote an introductory blurb for myself in my notes before my meeting with the group. Below is the scene breakdown we decided to try.

Unspittable: a HipHop ethnofiction, February 2017

Modernity, semiocapitalism, and urban music are nestled into each other like Russian dolls. For young Hiphoppas like Unspittable, making music is a quest through frozen and sometimes dangerous streets, constantly trying to get oriented in a world that feels directionless and futureless.

Fade In

Scene 1
The snowy sidewalk is lit up by the light of The Forge. Andrew walks into the shot and we follow him into the show. The boys connect and hang out in a booth. The show is followed by a cipher.

Scene 2
While working with Kaz, Andrew calls Charles to find out how much money they made at the show this weekend.

Scene 3
Charles goes about a lonely day at school until Andrew's phone call adds more anxiety.

Scene 4
Colton tries to stay out of trouble in the country until an alarming message from Charles requires the long drive into the city.

Scene 5
The boys meet downtown and start looking around for the promoter. They run into another hiphoppa who heard that the promoter lives on the west side. They drive out and try to find his house. With no luck, they visit David who agrees to keep a look out for them. But David thinks the promoter now lives on the south side.

Scene 6
The boys take a break in a rich neighborhood where they smoke pot and talk about the houses they'd like to live in after they make it.

Scene 7
Finally arriving at the south end they meet up outside a Tim Horton's with Aiden, only to find out that no one seems to know where the promoter is. He tells them about a party on the north side.

Scene 8
Party on the north side. Guys spit freestyles at the party.

Scene 9
The party winds down and amid beer bottles and booze, the guys start to plan for tomorrow, but the conversation soon moves to why they are even bothering to be hiphoppas. Colton gets a text from a girl, Andrew and Charles watch him drive off.

Fade to Black

A series of events made it impossible to shoot this entire story. Before we gave up on it, we had filmed a series of scenes that showed a great deal about how youth live in Edmonton's hip-hop scene. As I was working through the shots something about the opening blurb kept nagging at me, it felt like there was something there that was pointing to an important observation that had yet to emerge in my thinking. I would now call it, following Eisenstein, an overtone.

When I wrote "trying to get oriented in a world that feels directionless and futureless" I was making a claim about relational and temporal experiences of life in the city. When I began to look back through the footage I realized that the scenes are happening in a chaotic relationship, always in the city, approaching the city, but from where and in which direction we are traveling is never clear. The frame is often very tight and at times challenges the limits of focus, giving a sense of being closed in. The temporal aspect of the scenes was quite informative. There was always so much time passing without resolution. Even when there was movement in a vehicle there was stillness, and a sense that the scenes were not moving anywhere necessarily, there was little forward momentum, at least to some conclusion. I had a difficult time bringing these two experiences together until I learned about Deleuze's idea of the time-image.

The Time-Image

Deleuze's cinema books are organized by two types of images: the movement-image and the time-image. Time-image films are dependent on what Deleuze calls a 'direct image of time'. A time-image film does not move towards conclusion through a series of resolution (Situation-Action-Situation) like a movement-image film, it is instead an experience of duration. Deleuze remarks that the time-image liberates thought from the mechanization of the movement-image films (from the necessities of linearity and resolution). It would have been interesting for Deleuze to grapple with the music video.

Memory is an important aspect of time-image films, what Bergson called 'pure sensation'. Time-image films "chart the various journeys of their characters in terms of their insertions into sheets of past, their attempts to plunge into and relive the past" (Rushton 2012: 146). Making *Unspittable* a time-image film allowed me to go back to the live performance footage that I filmed as Scene One of the above script and then work all of the other scenes into the film as memories, or perhaps folds. I looked through the ample footage I filmed at the live performance and found a number of moments when Andrew seems to

be in his own head. I used these moments to cut away to older scenes. The intention was to curate an experience that was open to the viewer where they can decide if these are Andrew's memories, fantasies, or projections into the past. As Rushton has remarked, summarizing Deleuze:

> in the time-image, there is no longer merely confusion between the real and the imaginary 'in someone's head'; instead, the indiscernibility between the real and the imaginary, the present and the past, the actual and the virtual, becomes an objective 'fact'…when this occurs, what was virtual now becomes actual while what was actual correlatively becomes virtual: the actual and virtual become entwined to the point where we can no longer tell which is which. (Rushton 2012: 89)

Vertical Montage

The entire film is held together by Unspittable's music which converts the ethnofiction into an extended music video, which I may call, following Deleuze, the music-image. Like Blank's films, the film's subjects appear twice, once in the visual component and once in the film music. This produces a kind of doubling, perhaps a holographic presence, or as Deleuze calls a crystal image. Throughout the film we see members of the group involved in making music or moving through the city to a soundtrack of their own making. The music adds a further level to the time-image, the vertical montage, where the relationship between the filmic action and the music blurs the virtual-actual in the same way that the time-image elements do. Therefore, the musical time-image film is a form of music video that may shed light on Eisenstein's ideas of vertical and horizontal montage and the experience of these montage techniques may be experienced as tones and overtones.

Screen Assemblage

In the production assemblage, the experience of duration became more important than anything that had previously occupied my thinking. Communicating the experience of duration, movement without direction, story without climax or conclusion, and the overtones of Edmonton life for young Hiphoppas communicated my experience of the ethnographic work more powerfully than the experiences I wrote about in *Remix and Life Hack in Hip Hop* (MacDonald 2016). The film turns time and the city into percepts and affects. The percepts of the urban form over time release bodily intensities (affects). The opening thick kick drum as the opening titles begin, the sounds of voices against the blackness of the screen, the muted colours of a dirty winter city, all affected me when I was setting them to Unspittable's music. The non-representational parts of my ethnographic work began to appear onscreen, not in the form of explanation but in an actualization of the affects of duration (Del Rio 2008) that I tried to make notes about. In the form of an ethnographic music video, duration becomes a substance that is both experienced and coded by the viewer (Turino 2014).

I have screened *Unspittable* four times for different audiences. Two of the screenings were in conference environments and did not provide an opportunity to engage the audience in discussion. However, two screenings at my home university provided an opportunity for me to get feedback from students studying ethnomusicology. While I have some early remarks on the screen assemblage, I am in the process of a full-scale study on the screen assemblage, so please read these closing remarks as tentative.

At the conclusion of both screenings the student audience was quite silent. They were expecting to see an ethnographic work that was much closer to documentary than to music video. I believe they were expecting a work of representative ethnography, not one in which the non-representative plays a central role. Instead of asking about film details, the post-screening conversations were focused on my intentions. Students were interested in who the film was made for, and when I replied that it was made for music students, they wondered why. I explained that I wanted to make a film that music students could watch in order to appreciate the musical practice of youth who are clearly exceptional musicians but for whom music school was not a possibility. The conversation moved from the details of the film process to the political consequence of the film, the ways that colonization and capitalism reduce the possibilities of young people to engage meaningfully in economic circulation. Students were 'unsettled' by the feelings they had watching the film. While nothing bad or shocking happens in the film they felt an overwhelming 'dread' and 'darkness', some students described their experience as 'hopeless' while others 'enjoyed'

seeing a film that showed the reality of a city in winter, with dirty snowbanks and dirt-covered vehicles, the coldness that caused people to huddle in small spaces during the darkness of winter.

But a discussion led by one Latino student stood out to me. This is a student who had been very quiet in the class up until this point. He rarely participated in class conversations until after the screening of the film. He explained to the class that the world of the film was very familiar to him. A great number of aspects of the housing, neighborhoods, clothes, modes of address were all common and he felt that it shed light on a part of Edmonton life that is unknown to most people, including all of his student colleagues. He felt that watching the film together with his fellow students, who had come from very different backgrounds from him, was an opportunity to explain his experience of the city and he helped his fellow students understand the kinds of limitations that are lived by the community featured in the film. He opened the conversation onto new vistas, drawing connections between colonization, and economic exclusion together with hip hop, and how he has to navigate these exclusions at the university as well. The feelings of being stuck, or running around in circles in the city were aligned with his experience. The conversation became a vehicle by which students from different backgrounds could relate, or in the case of most of the student viewers in this instance, not relate to what was depicted onscreen.

Conclusion

In previous articles, I have written about the role of ethnographic music film as critical pedagogy (MacDonald 2020) and the conversation following this screening further supports this view. In the article titled *Thanks for Being Local: CineMusicking as a Critical Pedagogy of Popular Music* (MacDonald 2020) I explain 'CineMusicking' is an approach to ethnographic film production as a form of critical pedagogy by illustrating the ways that an ethnographic starting point provides a new way of studying the role of music in youth culture. Using cinema to show the way systems operate within more systems allows the filmmaking team (ethnographer and youth) to document the mediation, the individual instances of the entanglements that constitute individual lives in their existential, social, and environmental registers. Macro-sociological discussion of youth culture risks obscuring real lives as they are lived. Cine-ethnomusicology provides an opportunity to reorient the study of popular music from a historical and critical theory orientation to an existential one. When this shift is done with a camera, the outcomes of the ethnographic research become content for a critical pedagogy of popular music. The long-form music video may become a powerful teaching and research tool as cine-ethnomusicology develops.

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