Title:

The Zero-Hour City: Writing London in the End Times

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Abstract:

The zero-hour arguably marks much more than a form of precarious employment. Making liquid the injustice of the here and now, it also postpones any reckoning with the temporal, spatial and, more often, racial dispossessions of a city like London in this, its contemporary neoliberal progress. In this article, I offer up a reading of the zero-hour as it emerges within the city's much longer end time imagination. But I also attempt to trace an immanent critique of this tradition. Turning to the black British poet D.S. Marriott and his latest collection, *Duppies* (2018), which is best characterised as an elegy for the end of Grime, this article theorises the possibility for a melancholy writing of London that might resist its many end time dispossessions.

Key Words:

London, Grime, Melancholy, David Marriott, Zero-hour

Main Article:

> Grime is late shift, zero-hour, it makes a beeline for bare life, but what
> it lays bare leaves everyone cold.
>
> —D.S. Marriott, *Duppies*

When it comes to the trumpets of doom, London has tended to pipe a consistent tune. Almost always to someone, somewhere, it has seemed like a city at the edge of defeat. If it were a genre, it would likely be a grief memoir or, to follow Iain Sinclair's (2017a) more provocative idiolect, a "suicide-note". As the writer attests in *The Last London*, there are signs of this *felo-de-se* everywhere visible across the city, from the "terminal architecture"—pun intended, I assume—of Here East in Stratford's Olympic Park, to the obscene, Bacchanalian celebrations that accompanied the inauguration of Renzo Piano's The Shard in 2012 (Sinclair 2017b, 293). Indeed, for Sinclair, this latest glorification of glass marked "the end of time" (157). It was, he continues, in typically paratactic style:

> A public execution. The last London as a Vauxhall Pleasure Gardens grope sponsored by oligarchs and arms dealers. A flash mob, texting and tweeting [….] Last London of a stillborn millennium. (156-7)

No doubt, Sinclair's vitriol here for the digitally dependent, twitching insomniacs of the pop-up city is of a variety all his own. But the end times his screed heralds are also so well-worn as to be the stuff of fable. For in its tropological life, at least, London has been forever marching towards its zero-hour. "London was, but is no more", declared the diarist John Evelyn barely a day into the 1666 blaze that charred its medieval streets. A couple of hundred years later, in the opening chapters of *After London* (1885), the Victorian naturalist, Richard Jefferies, envisioned a creeping but no less decisive demise for the city. Returned to wild as part of his speculative fiction, its streets appear overgrown here by a new, faintly tropical order. It is as if the monsoon climate of one of London's colonial peripheries has swept over the place, returning the city, in Jeffries's view, to "barbarism". His fantasy not only washes enough of London away, as custom has it, for William Morris to imagine a bucolic, anti-urban future in *News From Nowhere* (1890), but he also arguably anticipates elements of J.G. Ballard's alternately dystopic view of the city, a space reduced in his urban disaster trilogy to archipelagos of

waste, island micro-cultures forced to survive and adapt amidst a web of logistical concrete. Against this chronic dirge, then, spanning numerous false chiliasms, such accounts of the city at "the point of obliteration," to return to Sinclair (2017b, 6), might better be thought as not just apocalyptic but also constitutive. By this, I mean to suggest that the mournful is perhaps the mood through which London demands apprehension, the cataclysmic the condition under which its imaginary more often plays out.

But, self-evidently, it is not the city itself that expires with each of its end time proclamations—at least, not yet. And to make axiomatic London's endless obliteration, imagined or otherwise, is also to risk occluding the many and particular dispossessions perpetrated by this fatalism. For "catastrophe," as China Miéville (2012, 57) is quick to remind us, often also "generates the beasts it needs". To this extent, the city's end time imagination is rarely ever just descriptive. Take by way of example Reece Auguiste's *Twilight City* (1989), which in profiling a place forever caught between the dog and the wolf, as the saying goes, also uncovers the predatory violence through which the end time city organises itself. Whether in the sense of impossible belonging felt by its migrant characters or the asphyxiations of Thatcherite regeneration, under Auguiste's eyes, London's "long apocalypse" (Sandhu 2013, 7) reveals itself to be a technique not just of accumulation by dispossession, but, more particularly, of racialized dispossession.[1] In other words, its end times are not experienced uniformly, but unevenly. In June 2017, this inequitable distribution was given grave legibility in the flames that wasted Grenfell Tower, a municipal tower block (mis-)managed by the city's wealthiest local authority, Kensington and Chelsea. Tragically, seventy-two of its predominantly poor, black and migrant ethnic minority residents perished in the fire. For Ida Danewid (2019, 7), this loss constituted both a specific injustice and a more general one, the terminal logic of some "four decades of deregulation, privatisation, financialization, cuts to public services and outsourcing". In other words, Grenfell made explicit the racial violence latent to the neoliberal organisation of the city at large, a place in which the zero-hour has come to mark not just a set of imaginative criteria but an entire mode of catastrophic urban governance. After all, it is not for nothing that the city's bourgeoning gig

[1] In *London Calling*, Sandhu (2004) provides a vital account of London's black and Asian literary history that challenges Sinclair's broadly white tradition of writing the city.

economy has found a way to produce an unliveable, futureless form of employment—the zero-hour contract—out of this doomy, threnodial phrase. Nor is it without significance that workers racialized as non-white are twice as likely to be employed in such an insecure form (Trades Union Congress 2015). As I understand it, then, the zero-hour is much more than a method for making the cost of labour uncountable. It is also a cipher for London in this, its latest and arguably most fervently financialized phase. It is a way of making systematic the racialized, dispossessive logic upon which the city's end time progress implicitly depends.

But if the zero-hour gives expression to the terminal contradictions under which London now, paradoxically, survives, it also demands that we query the residual value that the city's end time writing more generally upholds. For as symptom as much as a diagnosis, this outwardly disruptive tradition now finds itself in close, potentially corruptive proximity with a conception of the city that does more to hasten than contest its catastrophic demise. Sinclair's "left melancholia" is arguably typical in this (Brown 2002, 458). Outwardly belligerent, his writing of London is also entirely dependent upon the city's interminable end, pressed on by its irreparable defeat. Indeed, at times, Sinclair (1997, 239) even seems to crave its collapse so that the city might "work on memory, displace its own volume". This end time writing of the city is, to cite Wendy Brown (2002, 460), "not only sorrowful but also self-destructive", capitulating before the inevitably of its ruin. In this article, I do not suppose a straightforward remedy. For at its most corruptive, the zero-hour also threatens to appear "as the only alternative to cataclysms that it itself creates—[…] as the most reasonable cure for its own diseases", to follow Jane Elliot and Gillian Harkins (2013, 7) in their account of neoliberal economics. Except, of course, it is only ever a provisional analgesic, not a remedy for the city's regime of temporal regulation. As becomes clear, then, the basic logic of pathogen and antidote is entirely inappropriate to the corruptions of the zero-hour city.

In searching out a method appropriate to such a catastrophic progress, Brown's (2002, 464) caution against those critiques "falsely ground[ed]" in either the promise of "total revolution" or the "automatic progress of history" is vitally instructive. But where she strikes out, too, at the inhibitive, depressive attachments often induced by this political "traditionalism", as Stuart Hall (1988, 194) also

has it, I attempt to retain something of this melancholy way of thinking.[2] More specifically, my aim is to reckon with the radical charge that might be rescued from melancholy's attachment to loss. Hall (2009, 494) gestures at this possibility when he characterises this feeling of loss as also a regret for everything "that wasn't realised", granting it an epistemic anteriority that resists melancholy's backward seeming slide. And it is precisely this vision of the city's lost future that I wish to target in D.S. Marriott's *Duppies*, a poetic elegy "for the end of grime" (2018, 22). Quite separate from the fatalism that animates Sinclair's writing of London, however, Grime's "grief / speaks volumes", Marriott (2018, 20) insists. In one sense, then, this article is stirred by the melancholy rhythm laid down for the city by Grime, by the beat it provides for London's progress as much as its defeat. Implicit in this, however, is a more searching critique of the zero-hour as a regulatory condition. And in elaborating upon Marriott's melancholy account of Grime, this article discovers a type of immanent, end time epistemology, a way of writing London, that is, which might contest, without also redeeming, its endless catastrophe.

The City at its Zero-Hour

Amid the flux of urban change, the temporal divestments of the city are regularly relegated before its abundant spatial division. But with neoliberalism's irresistible intensification in recent decades, critical interest in its coercive teleologies has also been rising. Ben Anderson *et al*'s (2019, 1) recent claims over the proliferating "slow emergencies" through which late capitalism proceeds are particularly telling. Drawing from what Rob Nixon (2011, 2) identifies as its "slow violence" and Lauren Berlant (2011, 4) its "crisis ordinariness", there is an apocalyptic order to this analysis, one that thinks with rather than against capital's "cancellation of the future", to borrow from Franco Berardi (2017, 1). But it is not a retreat into some dystopian mode. There are no scenes of sudden devastation here that might allow us to conceive of such emergencies as exceptional. Instead, it is the torpid and everyday, rather than absolute, quality of this cruelty that claims attention. Berlant (2011, 99, 95), for instance, details the "ongoingness, getting by, and living on" that defines so much of

[2] For an indicative critique of Iain Sinclair's traditionalism, see Barker (2006).

today's "crisis ordinariness". This Anderson *et al* (2019, 12) describe similarly as its "dispersed […] seemingly disconnected effects". But, congruently, it is the "durative temporality of decline" as much as its general ordinariness that contributes to the lethality of this slow emergency (3). So whether understood as crisis or catastrophe, the point here is that such neoliberal violence threatens to circulate *out of time*. In other words, it finds ways to refuse itself the temporal progression, the relation to past experience and future expectation, that would otherwise make mobile an urgent response in the present. Disaster is made to appear elsewhere, in a space and time other than the here and now. And it is in this, its gradualist, latent temporal action that the catastrophic becomes durable, tolerable even, despite the intolerance through which it regularly proceeds. For how do you call time on the out of time?

Much of this is similarly true of the zero-hour. Whether taken to define a pernicious scheme of employment or extrapolated to contain an entire urban system, as I propose here, the zero-hour assumes an endlessly expanding present. Not quite the "dead-end" time that reigns for David Scott (2004, 1), it still risks much of the same collapse in "social and political hope" that he recognises elsewhere in today's neo-imperial matrix of power. But where the dead-end gestures towards the terminal and inert, the zero-hour structures itself as a comparatively dynamic temporality. It supposes the permanent provisionality of the here and now, its "absolute liquidity," to borrow from Neferti Tadiar (2013, 28). It is, as such, dependent upon a cruel optative claim, a kind of "if only" time that attempts to make the future appear abundantly possible, even as it consistently and often also violently resists its materialisation. In this, any notion of a durational telos, however slow or morbid, drops away in favour of the zero-hour's "infinite horizon", a hyperactive *terra nova* patterned to the point of distraction, if not also desperation, by instances of "inversion, reversion and shifting focal points", as Jane Guyer (2007, 416) puts it in her playful reading of neoliberalism as evangelical prophecy. Indeed, Guyer is particularly instructive here. Not only does she account for the "disorienting and yet internally logical" short-term horizon around which Hayekian growth theory turns, but she also sets out its millenarian faith in a "long run" yet to arrive, in an end point always and forever in anticipation (411). Without reprising in detail her argument, it is enough to understand

this “evacuation of the near-past and the near-future” as a primer for the zero-hour, not least in its confluence of the economic and the eschatological (410).

Reliant on a comparable sense of endlessly deferred deliverance, there is, undoubtedly, much bound up commercially as well as conceptually in the zero-hour’s quasi-theological suspension of the future in favour of the contingent demands of the now. Economically, it is defended as a necessary flexibility before uncertainty, a strategic response to a system of production in which spontaneity, autonomy and informality have become determinate (Spencer 2016, 79). Individually, too, it is internalised as an essential condition for survival, an allowable defeat of long term reason by the inconstant but also insurmountable demands of the present. But socially, it repeats itself in a variety of negative, decidedly depressive symptoms. These are not merely metaphorical. For in this collision of “economic behaviour and mental pathology”, “alienation is exploding,” Berardi insists (2015, 46; 2017, 1). Compelled according to the prescripts of the zero-hour to subsist in a state of “permanent transience” (Tadiar 2013, 32), neoliberalism’s subjects have been made “to self-manage according to market principles of discipline, efficiency, and competitiveness,” Aiwa Ong (2006, 4) affirms, the dictates of profit reconceived as mantras of self-care. And it is under these conditions that public health analysts like Ted Schrecker and Clare Bambra (2015, 20) provide evidence of the serious range of epidemics that this zero-hour logic has so far exacerbated. From chronic musculoskeletal pain and obesity to increased morbidity and mortality, today’s rising economic inequalities are reflected, they contend, in similarly widening health inequalities. And while they do not pay particularly sustained attention to mental ill-health or, indeed, its racialised asymmetries, their study does include a crude measure of the rising depression and anxiety that austerity, in particular, has produced, with the daily use of anti-depressants almost doubling in the UK between 2002 and 2011 (Schrecker and Bambra 2015, 54).

But London’s zero-hour atmosphere also induces disorders that augment such strictly epidemiological analysis, particularly when traced in spatial, rather than strictly social, terms. Take, for example, the sense of “territorial nihilism” that Malcolm James (2015, 709) observes in East London’s resident rap culture. Set amidst a much longer local history of “racialized and classed marginalisation” (James

2015, 710), this despairing, even self-destructive mode of aesthetic expression is arguably also a sonic indictment on the process of "decanting and demolition" that preceded the area's redevelopment for the 2012 Olympics (Hubbard and Lees 2018, 11). Walking the district in late 2011, Miéville (2012, 35) finds this former industrial landscape undergoing a transformation "on a biblical scale". To configure the zero-hour as an urban complaint, then, is not to presume the end of the city. Rather, it is to reckon with its incessant reconfiguration according to the proceeds of a present that forever promises but also postpones any future reckoning. And elsewhere in the city, this zero-hour atmosphere finds itself expressed in an architecture designed to accommodate and obscure those very same displacements precipitated by catastrophic developments like the Olympic site. Amongst the most pernicious is perhaps a 1960s office building atop a multi-story car park in the satellite town of Harlow, the aptly named Terminus House, recently subdivided into small single-occupancy studios under amendments to permitted development rights. As a half-way house designated for recovering addicts and former overseas prisons as well as a temporary housing unit for low-income families from London council waiting lists, the building serves as little more than a "human warehouse", one resident affirms, a makeshift storage unit for those made victims to the city's zero-hour progress (Sturdy and Precey 2019). And at around 18m2, the smallest units are around half the size recommended for human habitation.

But such developments are not just about the planned lack of municipal housing in London. They are also about the zero-hour city's many dispersals, temporal as much as spatial. Scattered geographically, in sites like Terminus House and, lately, converted shipping containers, such acts of displacement refuse co-ordination, detaching their pernicious cause from their dispossessive effects. In the zero-hour city, injustice is deterritorialized, more generally placeless than emplaced. At least, even as we plot its symptomatic traces, its disorientations disrupt the strictly spatial organisation of municipal representation and responsibility, with vulnerable residents exported beyond the terrain of catastrophe and outside the time of crisis. And so, just as "the once enduring temporalities of past-present-future […] no longer line-up so neatly, so efficiently, […] *so teleologically*", to return to Scott

(2014, 6), so, too, has the city at its zero-hour begun to dissolve the communities of place and personhood that otherwise animate its everyday continuities.

Melancholy Futures

In working out the pernicious structure of the zero-hour city, it not my intention to advance further its collapse into defeat. Much like Berardi, in fact, I am motivated by the affective interventions that are available, or not, within this end time urbanism. But where Berardi (2017, 21) cites the possibility for "emotional reactivation" amid this fading future, my own aim, as noted already, is to explore the possibilities that might emerge by maintaining something of a doomy, specifically melancholy view of things. In other words, I want to explore the inconsolable, rather than redeemable possibilities that the city's zero-hour atmosphere arguably induces, or what a melancholic thinker like Mark Fisher (2009, 80) might call its "captured discontent". In this, he gestures towards the complex, even contradictory affective life of such melancholy feelings. Rarely ever reducible to singularities like sadness or torpor, for critics like Fisher, melancholy comprises a range of coincident emotional states, some defensive, others more aggressive. And so just as the "depressive side of melancholy" might lead to "desymbolization and acedia," as Jean-Philippe Mathy (2011, 182) explains, "its manic phase can be quite hyperactive, militant and loquacious", wielding its "intolerance towards those […] responsible for what has gone irreversibly wrong". Without presuming to separate its mania from its militancy, critics from Walter Benjamin (1968) to Judith Butler (1997) have found melancholy to be a potentially revolutionary feeling. But when faced by the infinite horizon of the zero-hour, it is important to remain cautious about such radical claims. For in its "long-drawn-out and gradual" affective life, to borrow from Freud (1917, 256), melancholy also risks endorsing something of neoliberalism's demand for resilience. It is neither strictly opposed to, nor altogether outside this broadly depressive structure. And, in this, its proximity to neoliberalism's own attachment to loss and catastrophe, it is perhaps better understood as a necessary "insufficiency", as Robin James (2014, 20) explains, rather than a reliable route to insurgency.

To maintain melancholy's "nascent political protest" (Eng and Han 2000, 1280), then, must be to find a way to make operative its constitutive ambivalence, which is to say, its "continuous double take on loss" (Eng and Kazanjian 2002, 2). And while critics like James prioritise its affective doubleness, in mobilising an immanent critique of London at its zero-hour, melancholy's temporal ambivalence proves just as vital to its epistemic method, I want to suggest. Interminable in its attachment to the terminal, it is precisely melancholy's stubborn sense of loss, unrelieved and unbounded by time, that makes it congenital with, and at a critical distance from, the contemporary city in its catastrophic progress. It is at once immanent to the zero-hour city and incompatible with it. Both emerge from a space out of time, each similarly endless in their irredeemable anticipations. But, crucially, where the "infinite horizon" of the zero-hour is corruptive, melancholy retains the potential to make radical this liquid temporality. Its "non-stop inertia" may prove comparable with the depressions that define neoliberal London, but it is also invulnerable before the palliatives, medicinal and otherwise, that help make this system tolerable across time (Southwold 2011, 1). Melancholy is, in short, a zero-hour affect at odds with the zero-hour's many coercions.

That said, this consonance between the futural evacuations perpetrated by the zero-hour city and melancholy's own impossible progress also depends upon a partial reorientation in the way this immanent feeling has been elaborated, temporally speaking. At least, in the psychoanalytic theories that still determine much of the field, it is more often the past, rather than the future, that serves as the object of melancholy's grievance. Expanding upon Freud, Nicolas Abraham and Maria Torok (1994, 136) insist, for instance, that "melancholics cherish memory as their most precious possession", walling it up in a "crypt built from bricks of hate and aggression" that both safeguards and defines its affective expression. But such a "preservative repression" is by no means restricted to the unfolding of the ego. As Anne Alin Cheng (2001, 103) avers, it animates, too, the "deep wound of race". This is not to undo the lessons of the intrapsychic in favour of the intersubjective. Rather, it is to establish the violent history of disavowal that both enables and disables the production of a coherent racial subject. "Confronted by ghosts it can neither emit nor swallow", racial subjectivity is inherently melancholic, Cheng (2001, 133-4) argues, dependent upon the insistent "denial of a remembrance that refuses to be

forgotten". In other words, there is no "*getting over*" the past (Cheng 2001, 103), either for those made subject to racial violence or, indeed, in the context of London's colonial remains, the "melancholic island race" who uphold it (Gilroy 2005, 90). The "history of brutalization" merely repeats in a "self-brutalizing" present (Cheng 2001, 136), its "transgenerational haunting" (Singleton 2015, 57) defining and delimiting the subversive possibilities to come.

Without repudiating this spectral logic, my aim in contemplating the racial dispossessions of the zero-hour city is to reckon with the cognate function that a lost, impossible future upholds in melancholy's radical epistemology. Doubtless, this is an ambition not without precedence, especially when understood as a critique of the "cruel optimism" that structures neoliberal forms of governance more generally. Indeed, anticipating something of Berlant's vital criticism here, queer theory has sought with similar acuity to disrupt society's normative allegiance to what Lee Edelman (2004, 4) calls the "Ponzi scheme of reproductive futurism"—a descriptor not without significance given the promissory economics of the zero-hour. Indeed, there is much in this encounter between optimism's "structuring fantasy" and the "future-negating queer" to threaten the "constantly anticipated future reality" upon which a system like the zero-hour city also depends (Edelman 2004, 26, 5). Sustained by its melancholy "insistence on repetition" and "stubborn denial of teleology", this queer critique conceives of the future as little other than a return of the past "by displacement" (Edelman 2004, 27, 30). And under these terms, the endless deferral that governs the zero-hour city might be seen similarly as merely making "good the loss it can only ever repeat", to borrow from Edelman (2004, 134). In other words, much like the past, there is no getting over the future, no grieving its endlessly deferred loss.

But where this queer critique finds succour by insisting that "the future stops here", the zero-hour works hard to constrain such absolute demands. Dispersing and disaggregating its many anticipations, the zero-hour city maintains few of the totemic future fantasies against which Edelman's queerness rallies. To launch a melancholy critique of London at its end time, then, is not simply to give up on the future. Rather it must be to make operative, imaginatively and representationally, its repeated loss. It is, to follow something of José Esteban Muñoz's (2009, 1) anticipatory and, indeed, vitally

interracial outlook, to think regretfully about the "then and there" impeded by the zero-hour's relentless here and now. Such a melancholy future is not to be confused with the end time redemption that otherwise thrives when thinking in such parousiac terms. Nor is it a necessary end, as Marriott's *Duppies* will attest, to the racial and other dispossessions that the zero-hour has so far enabled. Rather, this melancholy future only ever serves as expression of its impossible achievement. But it also understands this abandonment as radically abundant, as maintaining in its evacuation of time a "strange fecundity", to borrow from Butler (2002, 469). It is, therefore, to contemplate in all its profusion the possibility that the city's lost future fails to bring about. Joseph Winters (2016, 22) puts this separately but suggestively when he cites the "agony of progress" that, in the history of black radicalism, melancholy induces. An avowal of "the disavowed relationship between freedom and violence", between "power and subjugation", this "double-consciousness"—to remodel a vital epistemic tenet of the black tradition—understands such antagonisms in close proximity rather than insuperable opposition, Winters affirms (2016, 22). And it is under similar such terms that London's end time imagination might, therefore, be understood as also radical, the lost, ungrievable future that it cites an equally plausible object in its militant melancholy epistemology.

From the Ends

Not without its stagnations, the zero-hour's deliquesced, liquid time also pools in those voided spaces in the city. And in its own linguistic patter, London's end time is perhaps better characterised as its ends time. Unevenly distributed amidst deprived inner-city districts—or, ends—that include, for instance, the Olympic borough of Newham in the east of the city, to the north, Tottenham, where the 2011 riots were instigated, and, in the west, Ladbroke Grove where Grenfell Tower stands, its racial dispossessions correlate for the most part with an established pattern of territorial neglect. But it is also here, in London's ends, that the city's melancholy future finds an expressive form. Whether in Ben Okri's "Grenfell Tower, June, 2017", which serves as a poetic elegy for "the poor who die in flames without warning", or as a condition of the nihilism that Malcolm James (2015) charts in Newham's contemporary rap scene, aesthetically, at least, the ends maintain an immanent critique of their own exploitation. And as a similar co-ordination of the sonic with the spatial, the Grime scene

that has grown up in and around London's ends over the past two decades offers up an especially instructive example. Born in the Crossways Estate in Bow, East London just as the city's neoliberal expansion was gathering pace, it is the vernacular for those places excluded from a "gleaming […] and glowering" future (Hancox 2018). Looking out from "decaying tower blocks" over the luxified horizon of places like Canary Wharf, Grime has come to mark "the final spluttering cries of the informal city", Dan Hancox affirms (2018, 6). In other words, it stages another iteration of London's end time, "an end of world beat", playing tunes that "sound like judgment day", to borrow from the various ad-libs of its break-out star, Dizzee Rascall (quoted in Hancox 2018, 69).

Grime, however, is not a manifestly melancholy genre. At least, this is not exactly the terminology through which its largely cold, austere and antagonistic sound, its "machine gun snares and adolescent yelps" proceed (Hancox 2018, 6). Take, for instance, Wiley, since dubbed the Godfather of Grime, whose earliest experiments with his foundational "eskibeat" in tracks like "Eskimo", "Ice rink" and "Avalanche" gesture at the genre's dispassionate rather than depressive beginnings. Sonically, too, its "sparse arrangements" and "futuristic, ice-cold synths" react to the hostility with which the city treats its poor, black residents, this future-oriented vision more galvanising than weltering (Hancox 2018, 67). "Whether as furious anger, ebullient energy, hollow bravado or callous nihilism, so much of its emotional range," Hancox (2018, 140-1) insists, "can be seen as a cathartic expression of pain". For Grime's most ardent opponents, however, this negativity is exclusively thematic, rather than environmental or affective. The so-called war chat and conspicuous consumption that animate its lyrics were perceived to be continuous with criminal gang culture (Day and Gibson 2006). Such moral panics over black music and culture are, of course, nothing new. But with the invention, say, of Anti-Social Behaviour Orders (ASBOs) and the launch of the Promotion of Event Risk Assessment Form 696, both designed to police youth culture just as Grime was gathering pace in the late 2000s, this moralising "alchemis[ed] culture into crime", Lambros Fatsis (2018, 451) affirms. In other words, it produced the legal circumstance by which Grime's aesthetic negativity could be rendered illicit. And it is in tension with this prejudicial policing, which both precedes Grime and exceeds it, that its cold, combative sound also acts.

But as a release primarily from the claustrophobia of growing up black and poor, Grime is also structured around “an ethic of self-sufficiency”, as Richard Bramwell (2015, 120) elsewhere describes. From its initial rise on pirate radio stations to its informal circulation on mixtapes and homemade DVDs, for the most part, the genre succeeded as a condition of its distance from commercial studios and record producers. For Joy White (2017), Grime thus served as an informal apprenticeship for black youth from the ends. Out of necessity, “grime artists became experts in the use of social media and online and digital TV channels”, using “their creativity to establish ways to learn and earn”, and, ultimately, “exit”, Joy (2017: 38) insists. The entrepreneurial demand made of Grime is in abundant evidence lyrically. Take, for instance, Dizzee Rascal’s unvarnished celebration of material excess in “Dreams, Is This Real?”: “The aims only one: / Make money, everyday, any how, any way”. But as Grime’s performance of excess has over the past decade garnered commercial success, much of its oppositional potential has also begun to evaporate. “Grime’s awkward steps towards the mainstream are culturally disempowering”, Jeffrey Boakye (2018, 327) insists in his innovative history of the genre, song by song, “instigating a dilution of Grime’s core values, a misalignment of its fundamental energies and a blurring of its spirit”. And while some, like Bramwell and White, maintain its potential for adaptation and development, Boakye (2018, 327) is adamant: “The damage has been done. […Grime] has been shelved”.

Reverential, regretful, and partially reconstructive, D.S. Marriott’s latest collection of poetry, *Duppies* (2017), establishes itself in melancholic relation to Grime.[3] It is abundantly aware of the genre’s expired origins and it is here, in the collection’s articulation of this loss, that London’s melancholy future arguably also emerges—at least, that is, for its ends. Marriott gestures at this plaintive stance in his title, evoking the ghostly form adopted by the “duppy” or malevolent spirit in Jamaican folk storytelling—a form arguably also haunting Grime’s expressive roots—but also nodding mournfully towards the freestyling rap or spitting typical of Grime’s original performances. And each of these traditions are arguably at stake in the poetry that follows. Opening the collection with “Preface: 16 Bars”, for instance, Marriott gives allusive definition both to its combative style and its cultural

[3] *Duppies* was first originally by Materials in 2017. For recent reviews, see Hancox (2019) and Grundy (2020).

inheritance—making abundant what it once was so that we might better lament what has been lost. "Grime is late shift, zero hour", he begins, insisting first upon the precarious conditions from which it emerges (Marriott 2018, 13). It "is post-work, post-Brexit", Marriott further contends, the declarative present tense tending towards the definitional. But in thinking proleptically about its fidelity with the tumult to come, his avowals also speak to Grime's spectral survival into the future, whatever its commercial vicissitudes. This is not to find consolation in the lyrical duppies that now haunt Grime's seeming end, much like their folkloric homonyms. Indifferent, inhospitable, its sound "makes a bee line for bare life, but what / it lays bare leaves everyone cold", Marriott maintains. Even in its lost origins, Grime proves revelatory. Its "riddims respond to the necessity in which I exist", the poet continues, invoking something of Dizzee's claim upon its situated imperatives (13).

In its ampliative reasoning, then, Marriott's preface embeds Grime within a set of conceptual paradigms that challenge any of its seemingly limited territorial horizons. At its most expansive, it is "the thread that links afro-pessimism to afro-futurism", the poet claims, surmounting the antipathies that otherwise separate these trans-continental black traditions (13).[4] Such syndications are speculative but also explanatory. As an "adhesive", as Boakye (2018, 235) elsewhere explains, for the "complicated mesh of heritages and cultures" in millennial London, from Nigerian Afrobeat to Jamaican reggae, Grime is, Marriott seems to suggest, similarly entangled within black diasporic theories of and for itself. Nonetheless, the poet's method here is more indicative than summative, relying on an accretive, catalogue verse form to theorise this mesh in obversal turns and evocative propositions. Grime's poeticism is "disjunctive, a useless meditation on parataxis", Marriott contends by way of illustration. But it is also, and more prosaically, "payback for n-words and asboes". Blending the irresolvable and the instrumental, then, without suggesting where each begin or end, Grime offers "neither use-value nor / beauty", he continues. And yet its beauty also appears to lie in its lack of utility. It is precisely in upholding, rather than ending, these asymmetries that Marriott bring us closest both to Grime's formal procedures and, it seems, its melancholy method. In its

[4] There is scope to read Marriott's poetry alongside his many critical and theoretical interventions. For more on Afro-pessimism, for instance, see Marriott (2007).

conditional insufficiency ("it refuses everything but *possibility*"), its negative self-relation ("music from a manor that is not-me"), and its icy affective conditions ("in which only the coldest excel"), Grime is made to theorise its own melancholy possibility. "Its real is / dispossession, and is inconsolable without knowing it", Marriott (2018, 13) affirms by way of conclusion, aligning the genre epistemically with melancholy's constitutive "double consciousness", to return us to Winters's choice phrase.

Where this prefatory account intimates something of the anguished, melancholy sensibility from which the genre emerged, the poems that follow in "Part One", bearing elegiac titles such as "In Memory of the Rascal" and "Back in the Ends (after Kano)", make abundant the loss within which it now survives. Even as they appeal formally to the genre's rhythmical energy and atmospheric heat, lyrically these early poems lament "the end of grime", its "studios cold inside" (22, 24). In "Murking (after Stormzy)", for instance, which opens this first part, the poet spits his own bars. Staccato lines rise as they flow free of end stops or pauses. "A pulse / leads us on / into an unaccustomed light", proclaims the opening stanza as it swells rhythmically. But as the lines progress, they do more to enervate than animate, for the poem is also surging with defeat. This "moment exploding" is met barely a stanza later with a "sudden implosion". Whatever the cacophony of its "thousand cellular voices", it is the "unerring cold" in the gaps between that rules atmospherically. Ultimately, "there is no one here," the poem confesses as its early fervour begins to stumble, no one "still embracing still linking / the downs that made us give up / the towns". Again, seeming to climb momentarily in this anaphora only to wane as the line runs on into territorial exile, the verse is made to prosper in its constitutive defeat—in "the downs that made us", as it were. Simultaneity is integral to Marriott's expressive method. And here, the poem depends on the close, even claustrophobic proximity of the possible and impossible. The phrasal verb "give up" is entirely typical in this: two broadly encouraging movements, the former ostensibly benevolent, the latter ascendant, and both stressed by the scansion, each ultimately corrupt one another, conspiring, instead, to collapse the line into anguish. London's Grime scene is conjured into being only as a condition of its evacuation, its loss, it seems. And to this extent, "Murking" offers an object lesson in the making and melancholy unmaking

of the genre, tacking between anticipation and despondency. "That is how it is," the poem concludes in characteristically disjunctive terms, "the infinite / always dissolving into leaven / like ash".

Contained within these contradictions is, I aver, an analogous judgment on London in its end, or ends, time. For much like grime's achievement, made dependent upon the dissolution of its origins, it is the ends that are conscripted in the city's catastrophic progress, but only so that they may be given up more resourcefully. This is, of course, entirely typical of the zero hour's dispossessive method, producing profit from the city's pursuit of its own impossible future. And elsewhere in "Part One", Marriott makes manifest the inducements that not only anticipate Grime's popular appeal but also insist upon its formal defeat. For instance, "In Memory of the Rascal" draws censorious attention to the "hundred percent profit" extracted by "ballpoint duplicates" (22). "It's a big deal", the poem concedes, feigning sympathy for Dizzee's commercial success as it also condemns this corruptive capital for hastening the genre's more general expiration. Such criticisms are nothing new. Indeed, for many critics, Grime "is an allegory of class destiny", which, as Fisher (2012, 39) explains, makes it "possible to rise out of grime", but not "for anyone to succeed as a grime artist". And while others like White (2017, 224) defend the genre as "an emancipatory disruption", for Marriott more pressing than Grime's entrepreneurial liberties is the carceral space into which the genre has been alternatively made to flow. "How many lives / are held up at the station?", his speaker asks reproachfully as "In Memory of the Rascal" turns its focus from Grime's mercantile "leeches" to its so-called "ill-fit[s] [….s]tripped and searched / just long enough to accrue a fine" (22-3). In "Murking", too, Marriott envisions the defeat of London's overheated rave scene as it gives way to the cold, fearful sweat of detention:

> The walls bathed in sweat.
>
> Bodies in a heap forgotten in the basement.
>
> Dis is no joke, star.
>
> How many "yous knows-me"? are in this place? (17)

The city's end time dispossessions are not just economic, it appears; what was liberated rhythmically has also been seized.

These are the bare facts of London's racial injustice, with black, Asian and minority ethnic (BAME) men and women grossly overrepresented in the prison system, according to the Lammy Report. The statistics are especially stark for young BAME people, who make up some forty percent of those incarcerated (Lammy 2017, 3). But Marriott (2018, 23) also orients us towards the temporal procedures of this injustice, the city's detentions "without time", to borrow from "In Memory of the Rascal". Arguably, then, it is the future, or rather, its apprehension—in all senses—that animates *Duppies*' melancholy form. Take "Grimaces", which concludes "Part One". A comparatively sparse piece, comprised more or less of a dozen couplets, it is dense, nonetheless, with provocations on time as "either paused or slowly disappearing" (41). The "single beat" that launches the poem neither gives way, nor proceeds. Rather, it appears "suspended between what happens & / never stops happening". We are made witness to a captured sound, a sense of Grime's defeat stuck on repeat. Styled parenthetically as "the colour of molasses", however, the poem's stalled movement also gives form to the inhibitive, almost viscous history of black enslavement that, for Marriott, foretells Grime's own doomed end. And as the beat sinks "below decks" in the fifth couplet, the tempo and, with it, the poem's lament for the lives, past as well as future, lost to this gross injustice begin to intensify. Envisioned "in their cocoons [...] motionless as they sleep, / weaving a world where everything is possible", the poem's forbidding "tribute" registers those traumas of the Middle Passage that precede and return, for example, in the treatment of the Caribbean émigrés who arrived into London in 1948 and, now, once more in Grime's exported, seemingly evacuated form:

> whatever the morning promises
>
> it will end in three denials—
>
> one for the possession
>
> two for the possessor
>
> three for the dispossessed (41)

Crucially, unlike the messianic redemption referenced here, time offers no remedy to these denials.[5] Instead, the racial dispossessions of the past, as well as those to come in the future, are disavowed by the present, with the "mixed-tape" that once defined Grime's militant sound reduced to "re-enacting / the endless intervals of day" that structure, too, the city at its zero-hour (41).

Without End: a Conclusion

Grime's end provides for a stark, melancholy account of London's ends time, a place where even "future life is nothing but residue (all black)", as Marriott has it in "Information is Nothing (after Visionist)" (36). Indeed, *Duppies* is almost expectant with such enervated, desiccated projections. But if Grime's dispossessed future provides a beat for the city at its zero-hour, this irredeemable loss also draws from and depends upon the fall that, for Marriott, blackness has been forced to contain. Its "late-shift, zero-hour" sound encloses what the poet describes elsewhere in his critical writing on black subjectivity as "a void that falls without end" (Marriott 2019, 186). By this, he means to suggest a conception of blackness that "must not only act out the loss of any origin; it must also refuse the consolation […] of a black arrival" (181). In other words, blackness is made to constitute "a fall that occurs even before its advent", that is, "a fallenness always awaited" (180). Coincident, in some senses, then, with the always already lost futures of the zero-hour city, this fall offers "[n]o salvation […], no redemption for its advent, no recognition for its nothingness", to borrow again from Marriott's criticism (180). It is a lapse that begets no rescue. "[P]roduced […] to be dispossessed", the fallenness around which blackness gathers is, however, also "what transgresses and what conforms", he insists (210). And it is in capturing this ambivalent sense of fallnness, as neither precisely revolutionary, nor necessarily redemptive, that Marriott also provides us with an exemplary account of Grime's own end—that is, its own "fall without an ending" (Marriott 2013, 219).

Certainly, this ambivalence offers no necessary corrective to the coercions of the zero-hour city. But as a condition of its insufficiency, this fallen view arguably unveils all the better the exploitative antinomies upon which this end time logic thrives. To refuse to frame Grime as anything other than a

[5] I am grateful to an anonymous peer-reviewer for pointing to this Biblical reference.

melancholy expression of an end "that permits no ending" is to draw into clearer sight the dispossessive double bind of the city at its zero-hour (Marriott 2018, 87). It is to recognise the interminable loss it induces as much as the remedial promise it forever betrays. But it is also, and more importantly, to grant immanent expression to the racial dispossession through which it proceeds. In accordance with the black falleness from which it arguably speaks, Grime's melancholy "double consciousness" anticipates its own end, even as it struggles against it. As Marriott (2018, 66) has it in "Barrow Boy", Grime's loss stings like a wound "repeatedly washed by loss". It remains faithful, in other words, to the sense of "loss *and* survival, absence *and* presence" at the epistemic root of melancholy in general and blackness in particular (emphasis added; Winters 2016, 50). As mode of critique, however, its melancholy consciousness offers little of the polemic censure that a structure as corruptive and devitalizing as the zero-hour arguably also demands. But, as I understand it, this is also the precise point of its immanent end time writing of the city. Any of its residual militancy proceeds not by lapsing into a traditionalist, teleological calls for transformation but by offering up a rhythm in the here and now for the then and there of its own future defeat. As a zero-hour sound, its disavowal by the zero-hour city is also what enables the melancholy critique contained by its bars to endure. A tempo out of time, Grime is, in short, endless in its end. And how do you call time on the out of time?

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