



## GRIME-TIME

Jeffrey Boakye has penned the fabulously textural polemic *Grime, Black Masculinity & Millennials*, published now on the brilliantly diverse Influx Press. The book is phrased around 50 records. *Off The Floor* asked him a few questions about it...

**If you had to select five tunes that tell the story to our readers, what would they be, and why?**

"Cutty Ranks 'Retreat'. Simply because this is a near-perfect example of the soundclash culture that grime is linked to. There are way too many soundclash ragga hits from the '90s to count, but I've always thought that this one is a neat example of competitive conflict and soundclash bravado that we still see right up to this day in modern grime.

"Shy FX featuring UK Apache 'Original Nuttah'. Shy FX owned the '90s. Jungle is one of the first genres that shook me up and put me on to underground music. All that soundclash energy over these mental breakbeats. That's the template, that's the energy, that's what grime is all about.

"Wiley 'Wot Do U Call It'. He's the godfather. And he asked the most pertinent question just before the genre really existed, which is perfect. What is this music? Exactly. Fist emoticon.

"Meridian Dan 'German Whip'. Because this one kind of represents the start of the resurgence after years in the wilderness. It's sick that it came from someone like Meridian Dan, who (like so many artists in the scene) was quietly plugging away when no-one mainstream seemed to care.

When 'German Whip' dropped, a LOT of people started paying attention. "Skepta 'That's Not Me'. It's a perfect modern grime anthem that's all tied up in nostalgia, sampling Wiley's 'Ice Rink' riddim. This is where grime is like a reflection of itself. I talk about that a lot, how new grime is interlocked with early grime. Look at Stormzy remixing 'Serious' and 'Functions On The Low', or Chip using Ruff Sqwad classics, or Jammz remixing 'I Luv U'."

**It may surprise our readers, but you start in 1969...**

"Yeah, I've always felt that grime is part of a much wider musical heritage. I grew up listening to garage, electronica, jungle, ragga, dancehall, reggae... it's all in the DNA. Modern music is this complex web of influences and heritages, and grime's a key meeting point. I love that, it's wicked."

**Do you watch GRM Daily?**

"Yeah. That's another great thing about millennial culture, how there are so many channels to experience grime. It used to be Channel U, a few forums online and pirate radio. A lot of the kids I teach don't even buy music — that must terrify the industry but is super-healthy for the audience."

**There's a real fun element that you pinpoint in the book — how much of the content has been inspired by classroom moments?**

"Lots! These kids were talking about J Hus about three years ago, while I was still scratching my head. Now he's Top 10. I have a few sick MCs in my Year 9 class in particular. Hold Tight Reaper — he's going to go far. Getting kids to make video essays and write traditional essays on grime and take a hip-hop education approach to their studies keeps everything alive and vibrant. I love it."



HERE IS AN EXTRACT OF AN ESSAY FROM THE BACK OF THE BOOK: **KEEPING IT REAL: GRIME & EXTRA-ORDINARY STYLE**

The intersection of democratisation and style is nothing new in pop culture. Hip-hop veered away from its early tendencies towards theatricality with the onset of streetwear, thanks largely to LL Cool J and Run DMC. Punk invited devotees to undergo a DIY image makeover with gel and safety pins. Grunge asked you to stop washing your clothes. And so on. For as long as pop culture can be said to have existed as part of wider youth culture, it has drifted towards verisimilitude on its way to authenticity.

Grime has followed this pattern. The tracksuit has completely democratised a grime look, offering an attainable level of 'roadman chic' for anyone within reasonable geographic access to a Sports Direct. Grime's elite look very much of the same universe as their fans, decked out in the attire of real mandem from actual ends, and it shares an image code with any other genre borne of real people; whereby authenticity is sacrosanct. Yes, there are overblown egos and outrageous levels of bravado, but never at the expense of verisimilitude.

Arguably, this downplayed image confirms the fact that grime's biggest stage is the street. The theatricality of stadium-level pop would be out of place in grime, despite grime's newfound ability to fill stadiums. The genre has evolved beyond the confines of basement clashes and pirate radio, but its dependency on street credibility stifles moves towards opulence. Even the relative low-key ballerism of UK garage has been shunned by grime, with bait designer labels having largely been binned in favour of sportswear. UK garage was about club attire, characterised by the 'no hat no trainers or you're not coming in' dress code. In the early noughties, grime threw such codes away and replaced them with a moneyed anti-glamour. Akademiks tracksuits, Avirex leather jackets, exclusive trainers, exclusive fitted caps, all with an import US aesthetic.

It's telling that Skepta, finally in a position to lean into the opulence of high fashion, brags about donning a black tracksuit (brand unspecified) in the front row of a fashion show. Understated style is in, gaudy fashions, out.

That said, it's not that simple. Grime's preoccupation with wealth acquisition alongside street authenticity creates a contradiction that we see in the evolution of roadman chic. Streetwear, by association with success and wealth, is suddenly not the clothing of poverty. It's gained a status and allure of its own, an exclusivity. This stems back to the early days of hip-hop, in which emerging artists of the mid '80s turned street brands into hot commodities. Think LL Cool J and Kangol, Run DMC and Adidas. Being cool meant spending money on streetwear and dressing it up with flashy accessories like gold chains. Grime is in a similar place now — looking expensive and street at the same time, nodding to its heritage as a street culture whilst acknowledging its inherent aspiration. Compare this to US hip-hop, which (due largely to the fashionista inclinations of Kanye West) has branched off into experimental regions of fashion and style (one potent example being the gender-bending provocations of Young Thug, alongside the high-end couture adopted by A\$AP Rocky).

For the majority of its existence, grime has existed in a largely inecentric state. Its realness has been rooted in a level of ordinariness, despite the quirkiness of grime's early personalities. The flamboyance that might widen the narrow field of blackness that grime operates in is absent, despite the fact that Afro-Caribbean cultures are often typified by a flamboyant stylishness designed to showcase wealth and status. The conflict between street authenticity and showy displays of wealth and self is captured in grime's dress code. Look like the road, but splash out on the brands. Don't be too showy, but let everyone know you're here. [influxpress.com/hold-tight/](http://influxpress.com/hold-tight/)

## INCOMING

Kraftwerk: 3-D The Catalogue is out now, ja. Get in Ralf Hütter's VW Beetle and drive down the Sim City Autobahn to see Florian Schneider's Mercedes — yes, that's the experience offered in amongst this collectable merch from the Kling Klang Studio in Düsseldorf. If you want to see the backdrops that took these Robot Man Machines around the world's best art institutions, look no further than jumping aboard this Trans-Europe Express... whether you want DVD, CD or printed word, take the trip, enjoy the ride... (ace stuff to sample here too, VJs!).

