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Race and the re-embodied voice in Hollywood film

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ABSTRACT

As linguistic anthropologists and others have argued, the development of modern sound technologies led to the disembodiment of the voice; the resulting ideologies of voice, however, concerned embodiment rather than disembodiment. By contrast, in late-modern media regimes, essentialized voices have been recontextualized and linguistically re-embodied via crossing and stylization. This article demonstrates that the re-embodiment of voice reasserted naturalized boundaries of gender and race in Hollywood 'wigger' films from the mid-1990s to the early 2000s. The ideological effects of such representations both locally and more widely point to the importance of examining mediatized practices and products through a linguistic-anthropological lens.

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1. Introduction

As part of a broader inquiry into the cultural and historical formation of language ideologies (e.g., Bauman and Briggs, 2003; Kroskrity, 2000; Schieffelin et al., 1998), linguistic anthropologists have been increasingly concerned with the question of how ideologies and technologies of the voice emerged as defining tools of modernity. This process depended heavily on the affordances of mediatization, as shown by scholars examining how the late-19th-century development of phonographic recordings (Bauman and Feaster, 2005; Weidman, 2006), and the transition from silent to sound film (Taylor, 2009), among other innovations, enabled the consolidation of new social subjectivities via new ideologies linking voices to bodies. The ability of sound technology to capture and circulate the voice made it possible for a wide audience to scrutinize the details of embodied vocal activity in performance, including such elements as accent, intonation, and voice quality. At the same time, the technological separation of voice and body in these new, mediatized forms spurred anxieties regarding the embodied authenticity of the projected voice and its propriety with respect to gender, class, race, ethnicity, and other parameters of social difference. Many of the representations produced under this technological regime both foregrounded and alleviated such anxieties by unsettling, then restoring, an essentialist connection between the 'right' body and the 'right' voice.

As several studies have shown, the mapping of specific voices onto specific bodies became the naturalized evidence of authentic modern—and, often, gendered—identities, as for example when mediatized voices brought about new configurations of femininity. Weidman (2003, 2007) demonstrates that in South India in the early twentieth century, upper-caste women assumed nontraditional roles as classical singers in which an idealized femininity was tied to a vocal style that was physically enabled by the gramophone and the microphone, yet was viewed as transcendent of the body. Similarly, in her study of the highly ideologized 'Japanese women's language' as a translation device for rendering English in novels of the same period, Inoue (2003) finds that these dislocated uses of the register by non-Japanese characters were naturalized through realist representations typical of the modern novel. Thus, although technologies of mediatized reproduction allowed

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for the disembodiment of the voice, in the modern period producers, performers, and consumers jointly engaged in an ideological project of vocal reattachment, anchoring the voice to socially definable embodied subjects.[1]

The voice has likewise attracted increasing attention in film theory and criticism (e.g., Beach, 2002; Kozloff, 2000). Film theorist Michel Chion argues that the development of modern sound technologies both entailed the disembodiment of the voice and enabled the exploitation of this disembodiment for cinematic effect. Indeed, he maintains that technologies severing the physical link between the body and the voice are the foundation on which modern—and, increasingly, contemporary—film rests:

> The voice is ceasing to be identified with a specific face. It appears much less stable, identified, hence fetishizable. This general realization that the voice is radically other than the body that adopts it (or that it adopts) for the duration of a film seems to me to be one of the most significant phenomena in the recent development of the cinema, television, and audiovisual media in general. (Chion, 1999, p. 174)

For Chion, then, the disembodiment of the voice, its status as 'radically other', is not always as easily resolved as it was in earlier historical periods documented by linguistic anthropologists.[2] The governing ideologies of voice under earlier stages of modernity were rooted in essentialization and authentication, which comfortably imposed and reasserted hegemonic ideologies of social subjectivity. By contrast, in the media regimes of the late-modern period, already-essentialized voices have become further recontextualized through a process of linguistic re-embodiment, whereby such voices are detached from expectably raced, gendered, and classed bodies and jarringly reassigned to 'inappropriate' bodies via language crossing and stylization. Indeed, such practices have been said to be the quintessential linguistic reflex of late modernity (Coupland, 2007; Rampton, 2006).

Yet despite the linguistic remapping of gender, race, and other social categories via crossing and stylization, these practices may reinscribe rather than subvert essentialized mappings of body and voice, particularly when a conservative cultural force such as the Hollywood film industry undertakes to represent them in mediatized form. In late 19th- and early 20th-century popular entertainment, racialized voices were frequently disarticulated from racialized bodies as European Americans engaged in performances of blackness through minstrelsy, an anomaly that was symbolically reconciled through the visual device of blackface (Lott, 1993; Rogin, 1996). Originating alongside blackface, its vocal counterpart, 'blackvoice'—that is, nonblack speakers' use of linguistic features indexical of blackness—proved to be a potent vehicle for the circulation of a specifically linguistic form of minstrelsy (Bucholtz and Lopez, forthcoming). As in blackface, blackvoice often highlighted rather than erased dissonant indexicalities of race (e.g., Stras, 2007).

In this article, I document the indexical recontextualization of blackvoice at a pivotal moment in late-modern US popular culture: the emergence of a white, suburban audience for hip hop. Drawing on ethnographic fieldwork conducted in the San Francisco Bay Area from 1995 to 1996 as well as Hollywood teen comedy films produced soon after this period, I trace the trajectory of blackvoice from an as-yet unmediatized yet ideologically saturated index within the European American youth culture of a California high school to a highly mediatized and reified vocal object. This transformation allowed local styles of white hip hop and similar styles around the country to circulate much more widely, but only within strictly defined ideological limits. I focus in particular on how the re-embodiment of voice reasserted the naturalized boundaries of gender, race, and age in the local ethnographic context as well as in Hollywood blackvoice films from the mid-1990s to the 2000s featuring comical white hip hop characters. In both contexts, blackvoice is ideologically represented as an inauthentic racial transgression used by emasculated European American teenage boys to authorize their illegitimate claim to a physically powerful African American hypermasculinity. The mediatized amplification of a previously unmediatized racial and gendered ideology of white hip hop style served as a strategy of containment of this contested youth identity at a moment when it was just emerging on the national stage.

2. White hip hop and the wigger figure

When white American teenagers and young adults began to embrace hip hop culture in the 1990s, they were taking the most recent step in a series of cross-racial appropriations of black musical and cultural forms spanning from jazz and blues in the 1920s and 1930s to rock and roll in the 1950s to soul in the 1960s to disco and reggae in the 1970s (e.g., Daley, 2003; Hall, 1997; Jones, 1988; McMichael, 1998). Thanks to the ever-expanding reach of the popular media, to an even greater extent than with these previous black sources of white youth cultural styles, hip hop has shaped not only the musical tastes and leisure practices of young European Americans but also the embodied semiotics of their hairstyles, their dress, their gestures, postures, and movements, and their speech. White youth who embrace this style typically view themselves as members of the multiracial Hip Hop Nation, but they are often labeled by others, more ambivalently, as *wiggers* or *wiggas*, a neologism created as a blend of the strongly negative term *white nigger*.

[1] Agha (2003) describes a similar process whereby 18th- and 19th-century British print media discourses resulted in the ideological hardening of a collection of specific phonological variants into a rigid class marker, Received Pronunciation.

[2] In the same vein, Dolar (2006) draws on Chion's work in outlining a Lacanian philosophy of the voice as an analytic object that is neither fully linguistic nor fully material.

The origins and valence of *wigger* are contested. Although it has been attributed to trendspotter Marian Salzman, who commented on the phenomenon on the 'Oprah Winfrey Show' in 1992 (Hoggard, 2003), other evidence suggests that by the early 1990s it was already in widespread use both as a racist insult—a 'culturally based white-on-white slur'—and as a neutral or even positive descriptor, particularly in its nonrhotic form (*wigga*) when used by African Americans, in parallel to the resignified form *nigga* (Roediger, 1995, p. 660). Although the term is problematic on many levels, I use it here because its wide use both within and beyond hip hop culture concisely captures the ideological stakes of this youth style. Like the 'white Negro' of the Beat generation, celebrated by Mailer ([1957] 1959), white hip hop style is highly controversial. It has been argued to be a symbol of racial transcendance and interracial harmony on the one hand and of inauthenticity and cultural theft on the other (Kitwana, 2006; Wimsatt, 1994). In Hollywood films, however, especially those targeting the youth market, the wigger figure as a stock character is all but overdetermined: a white male hip hop fan, typically middle-class and suburban, often laughably inauthentic. The wigger character's inauthenticity stands in stark and usually humorous relief to hip hop culture's strong ideological commitment to a street-based authenticity, captured in the phrase *keep it real*.

This typification (Agha, 2003) inevitably erases the complexity of white engagement in hip hop (see also Cutler, 2003). Small numbers of working-class white youth certainly participated in hip hop culture from its earliest days due to their friendships with more racially legitimated youth of color, but it is middle-class white teenagers, who adopted hip hop much later and often indirectly through rap music, who are represented as wigger figures. There is likewise a crucial difference between white youth of any class background who claim a more central place in hop hop through active cultural production in artistic forms such as rap, graffiti, and break dancing and those—the vast majority of white hip hop fans—who remain at the cultural margins as consumers of highly commercialized products such as gangsta rap. Moreover, white youth who affiliate with hip hop are often subjected to the strongest critique and mockery not from their peers of color, but from other white youth who do not affiliate with hip hop.

The wigger figure's entry into mediatized circulation thus appears to replicate on a larger scale a type of discursive derision that many white hip hop fans were already experiencing. European American teenagers' and young adults' diverse forms of on-the-ground engagement in hip hop were recontextualized and restricted within Hollywood's representations to buffoonery, emasculation, and racial inauthenticity. I term this sort of reconfiguration *indexical regimentation*: the process whereby a previously broad indexical field of potential semiotic meanings (Eckert, 2008) is narrowed to a much smaller set of strongly ideologized and semiotically inflexible meanings. The indexical regimentation of white hip hop in Hollywood films beginning in the mid-1990s did not simply limit the semiotic possibilities for European American characters affiliated with hop hop; more importantly, it also ideologically contained the racially unruly identities of white hip hop fans emerging in local cultural contexts around the nation.

3. Revoicing white hip hop at Bay City High School

The term *wigger* was not in general circulation at Bay City High School during the time of my ethnographic fieldwork between 1995 and 1996. A large, urban, public high school in the San Francisco Bay Area, Bay City High had no ethnoracial majority; the two largest groups were European Americans and African Americans, who were widely viewed both at the school and in the local community as separate and antagonistic (Bucholtz, 2011). Because of the ideological force of the black-white racial dichotomy at the school, white participants in hip hop were challenged or ridiculed by their peers for their engagement in linguistic and cultural practices that were generally perceived as black (or at least—given the greater acceptability of Latino and Asian youth involvement in hip hop culture during this period—as nonwhite). The basis of such attacks was that as white boys, they lacked an authentic claim to hip hop culture.[3] Their musical tastes were usually not the focus of these challenges, for due to the rise in the white youth audience for rap in the 1990s, many European American students with a variety of stylistic affiliations, especially boys, listened to some rap along with other musical genres. What was problematic about white hip hop fans from the perspective of other students was instead the extent of their engagement with hip hop, including 'dressing baggy' or wearing hip hop fashion, participating in core hip hop activities like graffiti and DJing, and using the resources of African American youth language. For hip hop fans themselves, however, their use of features of African American English (AAE), along with other stylistic practices, was not a form of racial crossing but an index of their membership in hip hop culture. Indeed, some of these students saw themselves as transcending the school's racial divisions through their involvement in hip hop.

Example (1) illustrates the racialized and gendered ideology of hip hop as well as the extremely negative view of white hip hop fans held by many other European American students at Bay City High. The example is taken from an ethnographic interview with Mr. Frisky, a white teenager with a generally 'alternative' or nonmainstream youth style, which in his case combined goth, punk, and skater influences. The topic arose during a discussion of one of Mr. Frisky's friends, a European American participant in hip hop.

[3] White girls did not participate visibly in hip hop at Bay City High School during the period of my study.

(1)

1	Mr. Frisky:	They just look,
2		really goofy,
3		and really dumb looking.
4		and then they try and be all fresh and be like,
5		'Aw,
6		dude!
		<[ɑ: d̥u:ʔ]>
7		Yeah,
8		you talking that shit now.
		<jæ ju 'tʰɔ̥kɪn æʔ ʃɪʔt naʊ>
9		Watch me and my homies roll up on your ass.
		<[wɑtʃ mi n̥ maj 'hoʊmiz ɹoł ʌp ɑ̃n joʊ æs]>
10		With my mama borrowed car' and shit.
		<[wɪd mɑ: 'mɑmə 'bɑɹoʊʔd kʰɑɹ æ̃n ʃɪʔ]>
11		So,
12		you know,
13		<calling prosody> {'Be back in a little while,
14		Mommy!'}
15		You know,
16		<calling prosody> {'Got to go beat some ass!'}

Mr. Frisky's mock performance of white hip hop fans' speech combines lexical, phonological, and grammatical resources. He uses an abundance of slang expressions originating among African American youth, including *talk shit* 'speak in an insulting or hostile way, make an exaggerated or false boast' (line 8), *homies* 'friends' (line 9), and *roll up on* 'attack, approach by car' (line 9).[4] He also uses more general African American lexical items such as *ass* in emphatic negative person reference in lines 9 and 16 (Spears, 1998) and *mama* (line 10) rather than the more common term for one's mother among white Bay City High School students, *mom*. The address term *dude* in line 6 is more difficult to account for. Though of African American origin, *dude* when used as an address term or discourse marker is currently often associated with a laid-back, surfer-inspired style of youthful white masculinity (Kiesling, 2004), an association that was less robust at the time and place of my fieldwork; it is therefore unclear which indexicality underlies Mr. Frisky's use of this term.

In addition, Mr. Frisky draws on numerous stereotypical AAE features, particularly in his first performed utterance in lines 5 through 10. At the phonological level, these include the glottalization of final /d/ (*dude* [d̥u:ʔ], line 6), postvocalic /ɹ/ vocalization (*your ass* [joʊ æs], line 9), fortition of the interdental fricative /ð/ (*with* [wɪd], line 10), and the pronunciation of the diphthong /aj/ as a monophthong (*my* [mɑ:], line 10). Grammatical features of AAE include zero auxiliary (*you talking that shit now*, line 8) and zero possessive marking (*my mama borrowed car*, line 10). Mr. Frisky also uses a dental pronunciation of the alveolar stops /t/ and /d/ (*dude* [d̥u:ʔ], line 6; *talking* [tʰ̥ɔkɪn], line 8), which is not a feature of AAE phonology; either its stereotypical connection with East Coast working-class speech or its use in Chicano English, or both, may have led him to include it in his performance as an index of (spurious) masculine toughness. Despite Mr. Frisky's focus on stereotypical features of AAE, many (but not all) of the phonological and grammatical features that white hip hop fans at Bay City High employed as part of their style were not distinctive to the variety but were more general nonstandard features, which nonetheless could be heard as 'black' in the local context of the school.

Mr. Frisky's skepticism about the masculinity of white participants in hip hop is central to his parody. The slang he uses is associated with aggression and violence, but his performance goes on to represent this braggadocio as mere fronting (i.e., presenting a false self). Hence he constructs the imagined white hip hop fan as projecting a tough masculine persona through threats and boasts, but he also implies that this aggressive stance is fraudulent, as suggested by his references to a mother figure whose teenage son is still tied to her apron strings. This scornful representation draws on a racial and gendered ideology of hip hop style. Mr. Frisky's performance here suggests that European American adherents to hip hop use African American youth language to claim a masculine toughness that they in fact lack. The initial characterization of white hip hop fans as trying 'to be all fresh' (line 4), though in Mr. Frisky's own voice, also contributes to this mockery. At the time of the study, *fresh*, a positive evaluative term of hip hop origin, was falling out of use; thus Mr. Frisky's lexical choice creates a double-voiced discourse that implies that white hip hop fans' efforts to be trendy are doomed to failure.

[4] Given the extensive influence of African American youth culture on European American slang, not all of these slang terms were necessarily seen as exclusively reserved for use by black youth. In fact, Mr. Frisky used the phrase *talk shit* in his own ordinary speech style.

4. White Hollywood AAE

In film representations, the wigger character is usually male, a gendering of white participation in hip hop that I also observed in my ethnographic research. But it would be a mistake to view the gendered dimension of Hollywood's cultural representations simply as a reflection of the "real-life" demographics of white hip hop fans, for gender is key to the semiotics of how the wigger figure is understood and deployed in both mediatized and unmediatized discourses. Such discourses do not simply comment on cross-racial appropriation but more fundamentally offer a cultural ideology of inadequate white masculinity. In the version of this ideology that I examine in this article, the appropriation of black culture is held to be a form of fronting. In such story lines, the white male character's claim to black language and culture shores up his failed masculinity and is deemed inauthentic and illegitimate. This narrative rests on a widely circulating ideology of black masculinity as hyperphysical and hypersexual (hooks, 1992) and of white masculinity as physically awkward, uptight, and emotionally disconnected (Pfeil, 1995).

While the visual dimension of wigger style as portrayed in Hollywood films is often quite flamboyant (Figs. 1a and 1b), language is even more central in the production of such characters, for it is through the deployment of an imagined version of urban African American youth language that European American actors can project most forcefully their characters' claims to being playas and gangstas—hard, cool, and down. This mediatized linguistic style, like the version offered by Mr. Frisky above, is far from the complex and flexible linguistic system of AAE that has been extensively documented by sociolinguists (e.g., Green, 2002; Mufwene et al., 1998; Rickford, 1999). Rather, it is a stereotyped and highly simplified fiction that draws heavily on intertextual references to previous representations of this speech style circulating in popular culture. Thus the wigger linguistic style as represented in Hollywood films is quite remote from its supposed source in African American speech: as with many other cinematic portrayals of AAE (Harper, 2006), the rich and systematic source variety is reduced to its most recognizable elements, while as with many other white representations of AAE (Ronkin and Karn, 1999), the language of wigger characters is generally based on a distorted version of hip hop linguistic style (Alim, 2006), one that is both grammatically and phonologically improbable and heavily larded with profanity (see also Lopez, 2009). For convenience, I term these and similar representations *white Hollywood AAE*, but linguistically, this style bears very little resemblance either to AAE itself or to how most European American participants in hip hop actually speak. White Hollywood AAE, then, is not a window on an emergent youth style of the 1990s but a conservative representation that perpetuates both racist language ideologies associated with AAE and essentialist racialized and gendered stereotypes of blackness and whiteness.

The data are taken from a larger data set of over 56 films featuring one or more European American characters who use phonological, syntactic, and/or lexical elements associated with AAE. The earliest of the films in the data set are from 1980 and the most recent are from 2008. The films, which include genres from comedies to dramas to action to horror, portray numerous different forms of white Hollywood AAE, ranging from humorously incongruous uses of African American slang by older white female characters (e.g., Jive Lady, played by Barbara Billingsley in *Airplane!* [1980]) to latter-day blackface performances (e.g., the protagonist in *Soul Man* [1986], played by C. Thomas Howell). Fourteen films in the data set involve the use of white Hollywood AAE by wigger or wigger-like characters that is highlighted and problematized in some way. Although the films from which the data are taken differ widely in genre, release date, and quality, they share a number of similar features, both structural and semiotic, in their representation of the use of AAE by white characters.



Fig. 1a. B-Rad, the wigger character played by Jamie Kennedy in *Malibu's Most Wanted* (2003).



Fig. 1b. Kenny, the wigger character played by Seth Green in *Can't Hardly Wait* (1998).

Hollywood AAE of both the black and the white varieties appears to differ from many other dialects represented in film in that actors required to use it in a screen performance often do not receive any special training from a dialect coach. Directors appear to assume that African American actors are 'naturally' able to use AAE, while European American actors seem to be expected to be able to easily 'pick it up.' Consequently, each actor must decide for himself or herself how to devise a speech style that is recognizable as drawing on AAE. In some cases, the script specifies grammatical and lexical elements and may even use orthography to indicate the intended phonology. However, many scripts are revised extensively throughout the production process, and it is difficult to obtain a final copy; it is thus unclear whether discrepancies between early scripts and the final film were introduced by the scriptwriter or improvised by the actor. In some cases (most notably *Black and White* [1999]) the director required a great deal of improvisation from the cast, and it is likely that both the grammatical and the phonological elements of white Hollywood AAE in such films are mainly the actors' invention.

Regardless of their source, however, different manifestations of white Hollywood AAE have a number of similarities, presumably because both screenwriters and actors draw on similar intertextual resources, including earlier films, to create a black-influenced white speech style. As a stylized performance rather than a complete linguistic variety, white Hollywood AAE varies widely and unsystematically both at the level of the individual and across speakers, although stereotypical features associated with AAE and African American youth culture regularly recur in the data. Several actors in the films I analyzed use relatively little distinctive phonology or grammar to index their characters' wigger identity or do so only sporadically. But even so, they are recognizable as 'talking black' through their use of slang items associated with African American youth culture and particularly hip hop. The focus on sex and violence in such terms gives some indication of the entertainment industry's ideological assumptions regarding the preoccupations of participants in hip hop culture, and perhaps particularly white male participants. In addition, white Hollywood AAE, especially in R-rated films, is often liberally peppered with profanity, especially *fucking* and *motherfucker*, which together with many slang terms ideologically represents hip hop culture as misogynistic, violent, and aggressive – although, as discussed below, white characters who participate in hip hop may not measure up to these standards.

The lexical item that is most commonly used in Hollywood films to index a wigger character is *yo*; it appears extensively in nearly all the films I examined. Another term, by contrast, is always clearly off-limits to white characters in Hollywood films: *nigga*. The taboo nature of this term does not render it unavailable for use, however; on the contrary, it is in hypercirculation in the films in the data set precisely because of its semiotic power. The term is generally used by wigger characters not with obvious racist intent but in emulation of its use by some African Americans, especially men, as a neutral or even affiliative term of address and reference. Example (2) illustrates this sort of use of the term, as well as the wigger speech style more generally. It is taken from *Drive-Thru*, a 2007 horror film set in a Southern California fast food restaurant called Hellaburger. The film opens with two wigger characters and their Valley Girl girlfriends heading to the restaurant:

(2) Drive-Thru

Tony:	Yo, (Breezeside), where we going, playa?
Brandon:	Motherfuckin Hellaburger, yo. Gonna get a double chili cheese all up in here, nig^ga.

The term is often used to demonstrate the wigger character's oblivious violation of racial boundaries: in a number of films, wigger-type characters get into trouble for their use of the word with African Americans.[5] The following example from the 1998 teen romantic comedy *Can't Hardly Wait* is typical. The interaction focuses on two minor characters, friends of the main wigger character played by Seth Green:

(3) Can't Hardly Wait

Homeboy #2:	(Addressing a group of black male students) How's my bo::ys?
Homeboy #1:	Yo, whassup wit my niggas, man?

(Homeboy #1 smiles, then stops smiling. He and Homeboy #2 run away, pursued by black male students.)

At times, even when the use of this term is not problematized within a film it may be disturbing to many moviegoers. One such instance is *Havoc*, a highly sensationalistic drama featuring upper-middle-class white teenagers in Los Angeles who embrace black culture, despite the fact that there is not a single African American character in the film. In Example (4), one of the wigger characters, Sam, played by Joseph Gordon-Levitt, uses the rhotic pronunciation of *nigga*, which is generally viewed as far more racist than the nonrhotic variant. However, this pronunciation apparently reflects not the character's racist views (the film's protagonist, played by Anne Hathaway, smiles indulgently immediately following his utterance, and earlier in the film Sam has averred the superiority of African American culture). Rather, the pronunciation appears to be due to the actor's unusually high degree of linguistic incompetence in the imitation of AAE phonology. Indeed, Gordon-Levitt's phonological style in his portrayal of Sam is so bizarre that it is often difficult to understand what he is saying.

[5] By contrast, at Bay City High School, white hip hop fans never used the term *nigga*, while some white students who did not affiliate with hip hop used the term publicly (Bucholtz, 2011).

(4) Havoc

Sam: Yo, we're/where the (B L V D), son. We're/where the Hollywood. Yo, whe:re Hollywood at? I'm talking about the wax museum, nigger. <[nɪgəɹ]>

(Allison shakes her head, smiling)

This example also illustrates another phenomenon that is often characteristic of white Hollywood AAE: actors performing this style may use linguistic forms that are apparently intended to index AAE but do not reflect any actual structural characteristic of the variety (see also Mr. Frisky's performance of white hip hop style above). In this scene, both Sam and another wigger character, Toby, shift the stress of *Hollywood* to the final syllable, a pronunciation that may have been motivated by a misinterpretation of the stress patterns of AAE.

Such examples indicate that structurally speaking, white Hollywood AAE is often a crude, stereotypical, and highly distorted linguistic representation of a very limited aspect of African American language and culture. But as already noted, the goal of white Hollywood AAE in the films examined here is not to replicate the phonology and grammar of AAE, nor even to approximate the equally stylized performance register of black Hollywood AAE. This style is instead designed to index both AAE and its appropriation by European American youth while making clear that this appropriation is neither accurate nor acceptable. The cross-racial linguistic performances in these films function largely to police and maintain a sharply polarized racial and gender order.

5. 'Wigger, please!': fronting and White Hollywood AAE

The wigger figure is an object of ridicule in most Hollywood films, appearing primarily in comedies or as comic relief in action and horror films. In the horror film *Drive-Thru*, the ill-fated trip to Hellaburger that begins in Example (2) above ends with both wigger characters dying violently at the hands of the homicidal restaurant mascot, Horny the Clown. Indeed, the slaughter of such characters has become a staple of horror films, generating as much as reflecting a public antipathy for white hip hop style. In dramas, too, things tend to end badly for wigger characters.

The problem with such characters, from the point of view both of other characters and, often, of the screenwriter and director, is their inauthenticity: they claim an illegitimate affiliation with blackness. The script itself often makes clear to the director, actors, and others involved with the production how to understand these characters. Thus in the shooting script for *Go!*, a 1999 ensemble comedy about a drug deal that goes awry, a secondary character played by Breckin Meyer is described as follows: 'TINY (19) is not black, but thinks he is'. And in an early version of the sequel horror film *I Still Know What You Did Last Summer* (1998), the script introduces a wigger-like character in a similar way: 'They turn to see TITUS, white guy, dreads, full-Rasta demeanor. He's a phony, but sincere about it'. Although Titus, played by Jack Black in an uncredited performance, retains the dreadlocks assigned in the script, the character is rather incoherently portrayed in the film as a more generalized wigger-like figure. (He too dies horribly at the hands of a serial killer.)

Wigger characters often explicitly disavow white culture and embrace blackness. Two dramas, the 1999 film *Black and White* and the similar 2006 film *Havoc*, use the framing device of a documentary on wigger culture to motivate such declarations (here Gordon-Levitt uses almost a Cockney version of AAE in his portrayal of the wigger Sam):

(5) Havoc

Eric: How long have you identified with uh gangsta culture?

Toby: I mean I hate fuckin, rich-ass, white culture. That shit's fuckin wack. You know?

Eric: So are you guys just, wiggers, trying to borrow from the blacks?

Sam: Nah. (The) whole world (sucks #), sayin all the good shit came from black people.

Eric: You like anything white?

Sam: Yeah. I like my skinny white ass, playa.

This disaffiliation with whiteness can also be found in wigger characters' use of derogatory terms for whites such as *cracker* and *whitey*. Example (6), from *Can't Hardly Wait*, features one of the same homeboy characters as seen in Example (3) above:

(6) Can't Hardly Wait

Band member: (Carrying amp, bumps into Homeboy #2) Watch out, guys. Coming through here.

Homeboy #2: Hey, yo, white boy. You better check yourself, man.

In Example (7), this phenomenon is taken one step further. The example is drawn from the 2005 gross-out comedy *Waiting...*, set in a Bennigans-like national chain restaurant. The two wigger figures, Nick and T Dog, are busboys at the restaurant who spend their days fantasizing about sex. In (7), Bishop, the African American dishwasher, chastises them:

(7) Waiting. . .
Bishop: Nick. T Dog. You guys are so (pause) one-dimensional.
(Nick and T Dog look at each other)
T Dog: ^Oh, ^fuck you, whitey.

This example represents wigger characters as being just as willfully blind to others' race as they are to their own. Yet in many films, such claims to blackness do not go unchallenged. In the following example, taken from *Go!*, the wannabe character of Tiny discussed above defends his subcultural identity against repeated challenges; although in the script the African American character Marcus, played by Taye Diggs, gets the last word, in the film Meyer ad-libs Tiny's final line:

(8) Go!
Tiny: (Yo, man,) why don't you give a nigga a [break]?
Singh: [O::h.]
Marcus: [^Nigga?] What nigga? This ^nigga?
Tiny: Yo, man, I told you, my mother's mother's mother [was black.]
Marcus: [Your mo]ther's mother's mother fa- This ain't "Roots," mother—
Singh: @@@
Marcus: Now I want to see a picture of this Nubian princess, [okay?]
Singh: [Oo:!]
Marcus: [#### pictures.]
Tiny: [I don't carry pictures of my mother's mother's mother] in my wallet!
Marcus: If you were any less black you would be clear.
Tiny: That bitch was black as night.
Singh: Okay, STOP! Truce!
Tiny: I grew up—
Simon: Shut up!
(Pause)
Tiny: (looking at his arm) Yo, man, I see black. 'Cause I know I am. See, color's a state of mind, Marcus.
Marcus: You know what, you're right. Thank you, Rhythm Nation.
Singh: @@@
Tiny: Well, ^fuck you, Vanilla Ice.

In a number of films, disapproval of wigger characters is voiced by other characters not through direct criticism as in Example (8) above but through a mock performance of wigger style, much as Mr. Frisky does in Example (1). In Example (9) from *Waiting. . .* the wisecracking waiter Monty has annoyed Nick and T Dog and pretends to try to make amends. Here Monty voices—or rather, double-voices—a white hip hop fan through his ironic use of hip hop slang.

(9) Waiting. . .
Monty: Aw::. Come on, now, dog. You know I'm just fuckin with you. You know I give you the mad, (pause) ph:at, s:uperfly, s:tupid-dope, (pause) dumb-ass, retarded, bomb-shit props.

It is clear, then, that the perceived inauthenticity of wigger characters hinges in large part on their use of language. Indeed, while characters in these films who are critical of the wigger figure may complain about his clothing and his rapping and dancing skills, it is his language use that is represented as pivotal to his transformation from inauthentically black to authentically white. Example (10) illustrates the beginnings of this transformation in the character of Kenny in *Can't Hardly Wait*, a wigger who is trapped in a bathroom with a (white) former childhood friend, Denise, during a graduation party. As this example opens, the two have been arguing.

(10) Can't Hardly Wait
Kenny: Damn, woman. Why you gotta be such a raging bitch?
Denise: Oh, please. Listen to you. Look. There's a mirror right there. Why don't you take a look, okay? You're white!
(Kenny looks at her, Denise nods)
Kenny: (exhale/laugh) What's ^that supposed to mean?

(Denise lifts hands, exhales, smiles)
Kenny: (in 'real' voice) I don't always talk like that.
Denise: Oh, I guess you're okay, then.

This rapid and total linguistic transformation is further evidence, from the film's point of view, of Kenny's inauthenticity as a wigger and his movement toward reclaiming a past, more authentic white self. Two other moments in the film in which Kenny styleshifts offer additional semiotic evidence of the ideological meanings of white Hollywood AAE.

A few minutes later in the same conversation, Kenny again objects to something Denise has said:

(11) Can't Hardly Wait
Kenny: Damn, you got no i-
(Denise looks at him)
Kenny: You have. No idea what you're talkin about.

Here even slight divergence from a white standard linguistic norm elicits a disapproving look from Denise, and Kenny quickly repairs to standard grammar.

While the racialized ideology linguistically separating blackness and whiteness clearly emerges in these examples, the gendered implications of this ideology only become obvious in a later stylistic switch. Kenny had hoped to use the party as an opportunity to lose his virginity; when he and Denise are unexpectedly trapped in the bathroom together, they eventually move from bickering to airing grievances to, finally, having sex. Example (12) occurs after their sexual encounter, which has been disappointingly short; Kenny is eager to shift the blame to Denise.

(12) Can't Hardly Wait
Kenny: I mean you said yourself you know you'd only done it what like, one time before? Like what, does that made you some kind of expert?
Denise: (exhalation/laugh) I never said I was an expe@rt.
Kenny: I mean, 'cause my shit could have been slammin with somebody else.
Denise: What?
Kenny: (sucks teeth) (creaky voice) Look, baby. @ I m@ean, it @ain't your fault you lack the flava.
Denise: (pause) You (pause) asshole.

Kenny's shift into white Hollywood AAE is accompanied by a shift from sensitive and tentative teenage lover to the laughably overconfident player that viewers have seen in previous scenes. It becomes evident that his borrowed black style is a flimsy front against his anxieties in the heterosexual market. By the end of the film, he has not completely abandoned his wigger ways, but he and Denise have resolved their differences—in Standard English.

A final example of the wigger figure's linguistic transformation away from white Hollywood AAE is found in the 2003 comedy *Malibu's Most Wanted*, a Jamie Kennedy vehicle about a post-adolescent, B-Rad, from a wealthy Jewish family, whose delusional attempts to live the thug life in Malibu lead his politician father to hire two black actors (one again played by Diggs and the other by Anthony Anderson) to pretend to be gangsters and kidnappers in order to 'scare the black out of him.' In the following example, Sean pulls a gun on B-Rad and threatens him.

(13) Malibu's Most Wanted
Sean: Aight. I'm sick of playing games with you, Snowflake. Aight, now I'ma give you five seconds for you to be real, or I'ma beat that ass to the curb.
B-Rad: What you mean, be real?
Sean: You know what I mean, be white. Five,
PJ: Don't do it, Bloodbath.
Sean: Four,
PJ: Don't do it, Bloodbath!
Sean: Three,
PJ: He gon' do it, white boy.
Sean: Two,
PJ: Kill him! Kill him!
B-Rad: Okay, aight! (in 'white' voice) Okay, fellas, look, I'm really sorry, okay? I don't mean to offend you, you know, I don't mean to fro:nt, or act like a thug. I'm sorry.

Like Kenny in *Can't Hardly Wait*, B-Rad's ability to shift rapidly and completely from white Hollywood AAE to a more unmarked white style appears indicative, according to the semiotics of Hollywood, of the inauthenticity of his wigger identity. Yet the film's narrative is in fact a bit more complex than this scene might suggest. In the next scene, Sean and PJ take B-Rad to a horror film to see whether he is able to maintain his newfound white style (the scene also draws on stereotypes of African American moviegoers). B-Rad fails the test, screaming at the screen in white Hollywood AAE. 'I'm sorry, y'all, but this is who I am,' he says to his kidnappers, who respond in unison, 'Wigger, please!' (a play on the AAE negative evaluative expression 'Nigga, please!'). The film suggests that precisely because of B-Rad's cultural inauthenticity, a cross-racial linguistic style is part of his 'true' identity, a postmodern take on wigger identity that has led African American critics such as Kitwana (2006) to view this film as both the apotheosis and the subversive defeat of the wigger film.

Notwithstanding Kitwana's argument for the radical potential for *Malibu's Most Wanted*, it is abundantly evident that in all of Hollywood's wigger films of the late 1990s and early 2000s, inauthenticity is the very point of the wigger figure. In dramas, the white hip hop fan's use of blackvoice foreshadows impending tragedy, or at least trouble; in comedies, his linguistic minstrelsy betrays both ludicrous self-confidence and deficient masculinity. In every case, the (largely white, youthful) audience is immediately able to recognize the wigger figure's racial confusion, even his self-delusion, while in no case is it invited to identify with him in any substantive way. The hypercirculation of such characters, coupled with the near-total absence of any positive mediatized portrayals of white hip hop fans, semiotically reduces European American teenagers who orient to hip hop to mere caricatures, wannabes who illegitimately borrow blackness in order to overcome an inadequate white masculinity. Thus the most important consequence of these films, in the end, is not the further restrictions it places on Hollywood's already limited repertoire of characters and plots, but the narrow indexical field that it cedes to the semiotic practices of real-life white participants in hip hop.

6. Conclusion

In this article, I have examined the representation of the white hip hop fan at two critical moments in the cultural formation of this social type: in the local ethnographic context of a racially divided high school in the mid-1990s, and in subsequent mediatizations in Hollywood films. When wigger films first emerged in Hollywood, they unmistakably signaled the racial politics of hip hop to a wider—and whiter—audience at a time when this newest form of black youth culture was just entering the European American mainstream. Through the process of indexical regimentation, the uneasy and uneven local positionings of white youth within hip hop culture in the 1990s were very quickly reduced in Hollywood films to tidy parables of racial transgression and inauthenticity.

In this way, wigger films were crucial to the cultural containment and ideological management of the racially problematic identity of the European American hip hop fan, not only among white adults panicking over baggy clothing and R-rated rap lyrics but also among white youth seeking to maintain the established racial and stylistic order in their own local peer contexts. Building on a tension that already existed locally in many schools and neighborhoods around the nation, wigger films reconfigured the white hip hop fan as the ridiculous wigger figure and thus mitigated the racial threat that white involvement in hip hop potentially represents.

White Hollywood AAE, and blackvoice more generally, is part of a much larger and ongoing racial project to enforce essentialized boundaries between blackness and whiteness by activating longstanding ideologies of race, gender, and language. The voice in film may be 'radically other' than the body, as Chion has argued, and it may even be possible to celebrate this radical difference through the postmodern embrace of inauthenticity, as Kitwana suggests. Yet the wigger films of the last decade, like most other mediatized and commodified products of cultural representation, insist upon the re-embodiment of the voice along predictable lines of race and gender. They thus constitute ideological acts of indexical regimentation that reduce rather than expand the possibilities of identity.

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