

“Caterpillars and Butterflies”

**The Process of Self-Realization and Unity
in Kendrick Lamar’s *To Pimp a Butterfly***

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Abstract

Etter sitt kommersielle gjennombrudd med *good kid, m.A.A.d. city* i 2012, ble Kendrick Lamar regnet som den store frelseren av hip hop. Det var med andre ord store forventninger da han utga oppfølgeren *To Pimp a Butterfly* i 2015. Lamar levde opp til forventningene med et album som ble hyllet av både fans, kollegaer og kritikere. Resepsjonen var positiv både i lys av hans musikalske evner, men like mye for å lage musikk som gir introspektive skildringer av hvordan det er å være afro-amerikaner i nåtidens USA. Han har blitt studert i mange forskjellige fakultet i Akademia og konseptalbumet er komplekst nok til å engasjere mange forskjellige fagfelt. Til tross for at det er et konseptalbum, er det få som ser på albumet i sin helhet. Denne oppgaven tar denne retningen, og ser på hvordan *To Pimp a Butterfly* viser en mann i en selv-realiserende prosess. Etter å ha introdusert min problemstilling, albumet og dets resepsjon, ser jeg i andre kapittel på hvordan denne prosessen blir presentert i to dikt som Lamar leser høyt i slutten av albumet. Jeg viser hvordan det ene diktet, som jeg har kalt «spoken-word poem», strukturerer albumet ved å gradvis tilføye nye linjer som skildrer Lamar sin personlige utvikling. Det andre diktet, «Poem of the Caterpillar and the Butterfly», skildrer det han har lært om samfunnet han vokste opp i. Dette diktet beskriver allegorisk den selv-realiserende prosessen. Videre utforsker jeg sjangrene ‘konseptalbum’ og ‘sang syklus’ og hvordan albumet svarer på disse. Jeg sammenligner også Lamar sin fortelling med den tradisjonelle sjangeren for personlig utvikling, bildungsromanen. Videre viser jeg hvordan de to diktene konkluderer med temaet ‘samhold’. Sangen «Alright» er kjent for sine forenende egenskaper. Derfor velger jeg å analysere musikkvideoen til denne sangen gjennom multimodal teori i kapittel tre. Her viser jeg hvordan musikkvideoen gjensker metaforene fra diktene gjennom det visuelle. Ved å se på samspillet mellom lyd, tekst og bilde utforsker jeg hvordan videoen skaper ny mening og dybde. Samspillet gjør at videoen både oppsummerer og bygger videre på Lamar sin store suksess, *To Pimp a Butterfly*.

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Preface

Hip hop was the first taste of music I had that was actually my own. After undergoing a classic musical identity crisis throughout my teens, it has now developed into one of my favorite genres. I first heard *To Pimp a Butterfly* the day it came out, March 15th, 2015. That year I spent studying music production. The ‘rawness’ of the instrumentals and intensity of the lyrics were extremely captivating. Since my first listen it has been an album that has followed me since. With every listen I feel I learn and understand more about the genre, the U.S., and about the injustice of racism that has too long plagued this earth. The fact is, I am a white man from Norway. However, the rhythm, wordplay, cleverness, sensation of otherness and social insight that the hip hop provides I could not stay away from. One day I read an interview of Lamar, where he stated that he believed and wished that one day *To Pimp a Butterfly* would be taught in colleges. When the day came for me to choose a topic for my thesis, I had no doubt of what I wanted to write about. Given my background, I cannot say that I will ever totally understand the narrative of the album. However, it has taught so much more about the American society, the injustice of racism, and the situation of African Americans, than perhaps any other work could. My contribution then, is to add to the study of this important work. I know that in my future as an English teacher, this album will be revisited and studied many times to do my part in fighting for social justice and racial equality. The genre naturally appeals to the younger generations, and this work carry an important narrative.

In the process of establishing my thesis, I understood that I was not alone in the fascination of Lamar’s work. The path shifted many times as I read more of the scholarships regarding his work, but I knew that I wanted to somehow investigate its totality. At a point where I was looking at the music videos for the album, I saw the video of “Alright” in a new light. Then, with better understanding of the work, I realized how Lamar had concretized the album through the interplay of different modes of communication. However, grasping the

totality of the work, as well as accounting for the amount of information that is found in the video forces me to make sacrifices. I have not accounted for every lyrics or sentiment that is present in the album. Given the fast rhythmic of rapping, the body of lyrics is huge, so I am far from it. However, the present thesis presents the overall process of self-realization that I interpret the album to be about, and shows how the poems structure and summarize it. This thesis can be read as a close reading of the video “Alright” where it demonstrates how it concretizes and extends the poems that I argue hold the essence of the album. However, Lamar released four other music videos for *To Pimp A Butterfly* (2015), and it would be interesting to see what these music videos portray by connecting them to the overall narrative. The songs that have music videos, “King Kunta”, “These Walls”, “i”, and “For Free?”, in the album represent very different stages of the self-realizing process. Multimodal analyses of these videos could reveal new information and nuances to the complexity that is *To Pimp a Butterfly* (2015).

Chapter One: Introduction

The contemporary hip hop artist Kendrick Lamar is one of the genre's most respected voices. His album *To Pimp a Butterfly* (2015) not only answers profoundly to hip hop's traditions and criteria, but also contributes to bring depth and nuances to the modern African American narrative. Through the use of musical samples from black artists throughout history, it appears that Lamar wishes to create a work that celebrates and contributes to the African American culture. *To Pimp a Butterfly* (henceforth referred to as *TPAB*) is a concept album of the genre hip hop, which uses a great variety of musical beats, rhythm, rapping and singing.

The album consists of lyrics that critiques different aspects of American society regarding race and issues affecting black lives. Furthermore, it also refers to historical events and figures, such as the treatment of slaves, and leaders like Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. and Nelson Mandela. Additionally, it comments on contemporary events, such as the shooting of Trayvon Martin in 2012. Lamar provides introspective commentary and reflections on how it is to be African American in today's U.S.

TPAB is complex, but briefly told, the album is a narrative of self-growth. The album starts with a song of an artist who has experienced success and is attempted lured into an expensive lifestyle. The pressure of spending money is everywhere and personified by the characters 'Uncle Sam' and 'Lucy'. Furthermore, Lamar asserts his status in the rap game, and comments on being a successful black artist in the 3rd song, "King Kunta". He then changes the perspective of the narrator in the next song "Institutionalized". This song contemplates on being physically and mentally trapped in 'the hood' and he expresses a temptation of violent consumption, like stealing and killing. It then transitions over to an erotic song about him using his status to have revenge-sex with the baby mother of a man that killed his friend and is now in jail. Misusing his influence leads Lamar into a deep depression, portrayed by the following

song “u”. The song expresses self-loathing rage from survivor’s guilt, his peers dying in the streets back home, and he dwells on not being able to reach his niece and others close to him. The next song “Alright”, is, in contrast, lighter and more optimistic. It refers to the racism and police brutality that is used to destroy the African American community, but the chorus is a comforting message that in the end everything will be ‘alright’. He continues to battle the temptation of consumption, and to escape he travels to South Africa in “Momma”. Here Lamar gains new perspectives on his life back in the U.S. Gaining new insight on race, his former self and how the American society works and manipulates its citizens. He then wants to go back to educate and tell everyone what he has learned. The following four songs present his new perspectives on race (“Complexion”, “The Blacker The Berry”), wealth and poverty (“How Much A Dollar Cost?”) and chasing status and power (“You Ain’t Gotta Lie”). Consequently, he reaches a point of self-love in the second last song “i”. In the last song, “Mortal Man”, he reflects on himself being a leader in the work for justice. After the journey, he is inspired by black leaders like Nelson Mandela, Malcolm X and Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. At the very end of the song he has a conversation with the late rapper Tupac Shakur. Tupac is resurrected through samples of interviews he did before his death. This conversation starts with Lamar reading a spoken-word poem for Tupac. The poem presents his process of self-growth and how he ultimately learns the importance of ‘unity’ in order to better the situation for African Americans in the U.S. In the present thesis, this poem is referred to as the “spoken-word poem”. The last thing heard in the conversation is Lamar reading another poem. I refer to this last poem as the “Poem of the Caterpillar and the Butterfly”. I argue that the two poems form “the poetic foundation of *TPAB*”. The spoken-word poem is gradually elaborated throughout the album. It appears first after the 3rd song, “King Kunta”, only with the first stanza “I remember you was conflicted, misusing your influence” (Lamar, 2015). This poem then continues to be extended as Lamar grows personally throughout the album.

The “Poem of the Caterpillar and the Butterfly” is more traditional, with poetic imagery and metaphors portraying a caterpillar that struggles in order to become the butterfly. The three stages of ‘caterpillar’, ‘cocoon’ and ‘butterfly’ are used as an allegory for growth. While the spoken-word poem expresses Lamar’s personal development, the “Poem of the Caterpillar and the Butterfly” is more general. It is an allegory for growing up as an African American in today’s U.S. I will investigate how Lamar’s narrative challenges traditional literary tropes in order to create an African American narrative of self-growth, and argue that the two poems carry the thematic essence of the album. I will thus analyze the two poems’ connection to the overall narrative and show how they conclude with and educate on the importance of unity.

The song “Alright”, is by many considered the album’s anthem of unity, and a music video for the song was released 15 days after the album. After an analysis of the two poems’ relationship to the overall narrative, I will investigate how the music video of “Alright” presents the entire narrative, carried by the two poems. However, before going into more detail about my analysis, I will present an overview of Lamar’s work.

Kendrick Lamar’s *To Pimp a Butterfly*

Kendrick Lamar experienced his commercial breakthrough with his 2012 album *good kid, m.A.A.d. city*. This is a concept album that depicts Lamar’s experiences with growing up in the streets of Compton, CA., and delivers a first-person narrative of his own city through the lyrics and music. After this success, he was labelled by his peers, as well as *New York Times Magazine*, as the hip hop ‘Messiah’ of this generation (Kang, *New York Times Magazine*, 2015). However, *TPAB* presents a different ‘Kendrick’ than the one the listener got to know through *good kid, m.A.A.d. city*. This is a young, black artist who has experienced commercial success, and no longer resides in the streets of Compton. The album portrays him as conflicted about his

success. The ‘Kendrick’ presented in *TPAB* ponders upon how he influences the American society and is conflicted about what he has learned growing up in Compton, and what he learns from leaving it. He has experienced success in the ‘white mainstream’, while his peers still fall victim to the streets of Compton, structural racism and poverty. During its nearly 79 minutes, divided between 16 tracks, the album expresses an artist that dwells on his success in various ways, but overcomes the trouble his fame brings and is ready to fight and lead in the battle for racial equality.

Since its release in 2015, Lamar’s *TPAB* has been praised immensely by music critics, political and public figures for its storytelling and depth of cultural, musical, political and historical references. In 2018, Lamar was awarded the Pulitzer Prize in Music for the *TPAB* follow-up album *DAMN*. (2017). The Pulitzer award was another addition to the long list of awards for Lamar as a music artist, ranging from Grammy awards to MTV Video Music Awards. It is safe to say that his impact in music and hip hop has truly been asserted. *TPAB* prospers by its range of intertextuality and cultural references, not to mention its societal insight and description of today’s U.S. In the current literary discourse, with musician Bob Dylan winning the Nobel Prize in Literature, a justification of music’s literary value is no longer needed, at least with musicians that are praised for their story-telling abilities (Dylan, *The Nobel Prize*, 2016). Lamar, however, belongs to a different generation of artists.

Contemporary artists use a more varied range of media to promote and express their message, like music videos. However, as this thesis will show, Lamar’s video for “Alright” does far more than only promote his music. It captures the overall narrative of the album and concretizes *TPAB*’s poetic foundation. Reading the music video in connection to the overall narrative of the album will provide insight in modern artists’ possibilities to deliver complex narratives through different modes of communication.

Jay Caspian Kang, in “Notes on the Hip-Hop Messiah” for *New York Times Magazine*, praises the album as “a thicket of inspirational, historical references; you’ll find critical race theory, George Clinton, Nelson Mandela, Richard Pryor, Exodus 14, respectability politics and six separate levels of meta-analysis about the meaning of Lamar’s success and messiah status” (Kang, *New York Times Magazine*, 2015).

TPAB’s 7th song, “Alright”, has been connected to the *#BlackLivesMatter* movement. The movement protests the police brutality against African Americans and works for racial equality. There are reports of demonstrators singing the chorus of the “Alright” at the 20^{-year} anniversary for the “Million Man March” in Washington (Hendicott/Williams, *NME*, 2015). The timing of the release of *TPAB* made the album’s overall message of unity relevant for social justice movements. By the end of February 2015, the US Justice Department announced that there would be no civil rights charges against George Zimmerman, the policeman infamous for the murder of Trayvon Martin, a young, unarmed African American (Perez, Prokupecz, Botelho, *CNN*, 2015). This triggered an outburst of protests, and the creation of *#BlackLivesMatter*. The movement’s website reports that “In 2013, three radical Black organizers — Alicia Garza, Patrisse Cullors, and Opal Tometi — created a Black-centered political will and movement building project called *#BlackLivesMatter*. It was in response to the acquittal of Trayvon Martin’s murderer, George Zimmerman” (Cullors/Garza/Tometi, *#BlackLivesMatter*, n.d.). The fact that “Alright” was sung in the protests alludes the unifying force that the song has.

Despite Lamar’s success and popularity, politics is not the most frequent theme in popular music. Yet, he has achieved pop music numbers in sales and attention, both nationally and internationally. He manages to produce an overtly political and societally critical album that reaches pop music-levels of attention and sales. The album is indeed political, but even more is it significant in creating a relatable and inspirational narrative of self-growth for African American youth. *TPAB* debuted at number one on charts in the UK, Australia and the U.S.,

where in the latter, it sold approximately 324,000 copies the first week (Rosales/Gervino, *Billboard*, 2015), and selling 850,000 copies by the end of March 2016, and was subsequently certified platinum by the Recording Industry Association of America (RIAA) the 1st of February, 2016 (RIAA, 2016). One can then assume that Lamar's album has contributed to this wave of politics and activism in pop music the last decade, as he has proven that a brutally honest and societally critical album does not necessarily decrease revenue.

Lamar achieves recognition in both the music critical discourse in daily press, as well as in reviews from respected music critics and magazines, such as *Pitchfork.com* (Jenkins/Patel, *Pitchfork*, 2015). Another *Pitchfork* article from 2019 argues for Lamar's important influence, alongside Beyoncé and a list of various artists, for bringing activism and politics back into pop music (King/Patel, *Pitchfork* 2019). But seemingly, Lamar wants to avoid his music being labelled as pop, as an interview on the hip hop radio show *Hot 97* reveals. He responds to fans and critics labelling his single "i" as pop music, and him going 'mainstream'. The reasoning behind his statements is that the song uses a sample from the Soul group *The Isley Brothers*. He states: "I want to revamp that whole thing, and put it back to its original origins ... and not be scared to say: "This is not that, this is black! Young kids gotta know this!" (Lamar, *Hot 97*, 2014). Lamar here refers to the state of music, where a song that heavily relies on its soul sample, which historically is black music, is now considered mainstream pop music. Pop music avoids sub-cultures and minorities, as it all belongs to the overall American culture, where the majority is white. This may indicate that Lamar is afraid that his music, which he wants to use to develop and sustain African American culture, is blended into the white mainstream, rather than contribute to the history of African American music and culture.

This introduces the present thesis' weight on *TPAB* and its creation of an African American narrative. In chapter two; "The Poetic Foundation of *TPAB*", I will investigate how the album responds to the criteria of the bildungsroman. Ian Buchanan describes the genre as

“a sub-genre of the novel focusing on the personal development of the protagonist, usually from childhood to adulthood” (Buchanan, 2010, 58-59). In a comparison with Charles Dickens’ famous bildungsroman *David Copperfield* (1850), this thesis will show how Lamar challenges the traditional topos of the genre. Lamar’s story changes the premises of the ‘journey of self-growth’, commonly found in the bildungsroman, turning the traditions around in order to make a narrative that is relatable for African Americans that listen to him. In the typical journey of the bildungsroman, as read in *David Copperfield*, the protagonist leaves his home, gains new perspectives and then returns to apply said perspectives in order to find meaning and happiness in his life. Lamar, on the other hand, challenges the tropes of ‘home’ and ‘away’ and presents a different kind of journey for him to gain new perspectives on his life back ‘home’. Nevertheless, his journey teaches him the importance of unity and is the base of how his preaching message is conceived. Additionally, the journey also presents to him the inspiring ideals of Nelson Mandela and prepares him to become the black leader that he aspires to be. To better understand Lamar’s reception, I will present some of the academic work that has been done. The discipline of Theology has produced many articles on his work, and many take interests in the songs that present the ideas of the more ‘enlightened’ Lamar, after his journey. They highlight the messages of these songs, but generally avoid the process of getting there.

Some scholars investigate religious characters in the lyrics, such as the appearances of the character “Lucy” in *TPAB*, that represents the devil, and different types of temptations that present themselves to Lamar. Other critics also take interest in the use of Christian symbolism. Generally, these articles include breaking down the symbolism and biblical references that Lamar employs in his lyrics, alongside the social messages found in the overall analysis of the lyrics. An example of this is Jane Adams’ theological analysis of the song “How Much A Dollar Cost?”, which is the 13th song on *TPAB* (Adams, n.d.). Adams uses this track to exemplify how the Church should handle income inequality and poverty. She uses the lyrics to highlight how

society uses “scapegoats” as targets of violence and oppression as a way of “feeling some kind of relief” (Ibid.). The scapegoat presented in “How Much A Dollar Cost?” is a homeless man that Lamar encounters on his journey to South Africa. Adams showcases how “scapegoats” lead humans into taking part in a systematic oppression of poor people, by refusing to give him a dollar because of the fear that he would only use the money on drugs. Adams interprets Lamar’s own character in this song as “the church at its worst” and the homeless man as “the gospel of Jesus Christ” (Ibid., 10). As a critique of the Church’s history she states that “The Church (Kendrick) frequently struggles with their identity when faced with economic systems of oppression; they participate in scapegoating of the homeless and poor, perpetuate selfishness and the prosperity gospel...” (Ibid, 10).

Generally, theological readings of Lamar’s lyrics in Academia focus on grasping the social or political message and making a connection between the lyrics and biblical writings. Other scholars find interest in the fact that hip hop and Lamar present “music of oppression” and how dealing with oppression or systematic injustice leads humans into taking different decisions or longing for salvation and consequently what religion offers to victims of oppression (McLeod Jr., 2017). Another interest of theological scholars’ analysis of Lamar’s lyrics is creating a link between religion and the youth by bringing elements from hip hop narratives into the Church, such as creating opportunities for the future (Zanfagna, 2015). Commonly, theological criticism and Lamar meet in the existentialism that embeds his work, finding hope and the will to live in the face of death (violence in the neighborhood or depression) and oppression, as Lamar’s lyrics thoughtfully reflects. How Lamar presents aspects on oppression and other social issues concerning black lives is also a much-discussed topic in other disciplines.

In culture studies, readings of Lamar are in general interested in the narratives presented to highlight the many incidents of police brutality against African Americans, as well as the

connection between Lamar's lyrics and civil rights movements, such as *#BlackLivesMatters*. Hip hop's influence on society is often debated, and one scholar has taken interest in modern hip hop's position in terms of civil rights (Craig, 2015). Todd Craig comments that "...very few commercially viable artists are making conscious efforts to create, produce, and commercially distribute thought-provokingly conscious music about the state of Black culture in contemporary society, Lamar gets labeled as a Black hip-hop radical of sorts" (Craig, 2015, 52). This article emphasizes on the mission hip hop artists have in providing conscious narratives to African American culture in contemporary U.S. He addresses both Lamar's ability to do this, as well as his critique of those who try to stop him from doing it, demonstrated through lyrics from *TPAB*'s "For Sale?" (Ibid.). This song is labelled anti-materialistic by Craig, as he reads the lyrics as a critique of African American artists selling the content of their lyrics in favor of income. Craig believes in conscious hip hop artists ability to stop the "open season hunting of African American youth through their message" but calls for the famous contemporary artists to take that responsibility and not hide behind the premise that "it's just entertainment" (Ibid, 53).

Other critics have also taken interest in Lamar's ability to create a conscious narrative to Black culture and history. Natalie Graham addresses Lamar's reinvention the narrative of "Kunta Kinte", from the Book and TV-series *Roots: The Saga of an American Family* (1977), in the song "King Kunta" (Graham, 2017). She shows how Lamar criticizes how traumas are used, especially in narratives about African Americans, and functions as entertainment rather than presenting the actual traumas and injustice that Black Americans have had to endure. She also highlights how "for Kendrick, power is both a shield and a liability" and how he criticizes the "viability of the black martyr as an ideal figure and the desire to make a martyr out of visible black men by continually reminding listeners that power has always posed a threat to black men who have it" (Graham, 2017, 129). The brief conclusion of Graham's article is that "*To Pimp*

A Butterfly offers complex meditation on power that includes, critiques and subverts the particular slave iconography and slave/master dichotomy created in *Roots*”, and that Lamar reinvents formerly static images and polarities by reading them in opposition to their historical meaning “where freedom is differential and experienced in a local context, heroic morality is upended, and the memory is suspect” (Graham, 2017, 131-132). Lamar is further praised by this scholar for reworking the *Roots* narrative where “Viewers consumed the narrative as history wherein individuals succumbed to evil vices (often represented by hypocritical white Christians), instead of a system of capital or oppressive social structures.” (Ibid. 123). As this thesis will show, the music video of “Alright” provides more detail on Lamar as “King Kunta”. The song’s chorus’ lines “everybody wanna cut the legs off him” is given more layers through the video, as it concretizes the threat that black leaders for social justice are under.

An important feature in hip hop is “sampling”. This includes, but is not limited to, taking a sentiment, quote, sound effect or clips of other songs, and use it to create something new. This is what Lamar does, by taking the character ‘Kunta Kinte’, and using it to create a new character, Lamar himself, as “King Kunta”. As music theorist Will Fulton points out “hip-hop recordings have historically had an intertextual relationship with the past through references, via digital sampling, interpolation and lyrical quotation” (Fulton, 2015, 6). Furthermore, he investigates how Lamar and R&B artist D’Angelo, with their albums *To Pimp a Butterfly* (2015) and *Black Messiah* (2014), use the history of black music and culture to create something new (Ibid.). Fulton investigates the cultural historicism through samples of black music, poetry and literature to evoke and critique previous eras of African American cultural history (Ibid.). He examines how the intertextuality used in these albums function as historians of black culture to provide new narratives, just like scholar Todd Craig (2015) asks of hip hop artists in the aforementioned article. Fulton’s work is interesting for my focus on *TPAB* as an African

American narrative of self-growth. As he explains, Lamar brings attention to his predecessors, which strengthens the album's connection to the African American cultural discourse.

Lamar is most frequently studied in the musicological branches of Academia. Music theorist John J. Mattessich in his sample interpretation of the “flow” of the tracks “King Kunta”, “Momma” and “For Free? – Interlude” makes an interesting hypothesis to “...demonstrate how these relationships between flow and instrumental track function in a larger discourse, and how they might be brought into dialogue with existing cultural literature” (Mattessich, 2018, n.p). To avoid confusion, “flow” is defined by Kyle Adams as “all of the rhythmical and articulative features of a rapper's delivery of the lyrics” (Mattessich, 2018; Adams, 2009). Mattessich provides a musicological analysis of these flows, and how they complement the themes of *TPAB*. His article opens for more work to be done on the dialogue between these flows and the cultural literature, as the cultural literature mentioned lacks substance. I do not directly engage in the specific relationship of advanced musicology and literature; however, this thesis does bring Lamar's lyrics and themes into dialogue with literary traditions.

Yet another music theorist, James Bungert, investigates the dialogue between music theoretical choices and cultural literature of the track “King Kunta” on *TPAB*. Here, Bungert's analysis illustrates how the song's structure indicates a DuBoisian double consciousness where “King Kunta (Lamar) ‘strives’ to achieve and maintain a position of ‘king’ within the rap game, a striving from which his ‘Negro’ identity ostensibly arises. On the other hand, he ‘strives’ as an ‘American’, but as a black man facing social, racial, and economic obstacles, he remains a ‘slave’”. These two “warring ideals”, rapping and participating successfully in mainstream American society, are mutually opposing” (Bungert, 2018, n.p., chap. 5). This thesis does not bring attention to the DuBoisian double consciousness. I argue, however, that the music video for “Alright” gives insight to what Bungert investigates about “remaining a ‘slave’”, although

without this exact wording. As I will show, the video portrays how Lamar is still under the threat of violence and racism, despite his success, wealth and power.

As we see, much has been written on Lamar and his music. Scholars have done interesting work connecting Lamar to established critical theory, however, less is done to thoroughly analyze the self-realization process that *TPAB* presents. The present thesis looks at how the album portrays this process, in comparison to the ‘white’, traditional literature of self-growth. This is done in order to demonstrate how Lamar creates a different narrative from ‘the mainstream’. This gives nuance to the literary tradition and shows how different narratives are important to relate to different human fates and cultures. Through such a comparison, I will highlight the importance of Lamar’s work and how it relates to modern American culture and society.

Scholars, moreover, commonly refer to *TPAB* as a concept album, as it is the most established term. However, through my analysis of the two poems’ role in the structure and message of the album, this thesis demonstrates how the album answers better to a predecessor of the concept album, the song cycle. Through establishing the significance of the poems regarding the album’s themes and structure, this thesis shows how the album responds better to a genre whose criteria are stricter than the concept album. The spoken-word poem is, as mentioned, gradually extended throughout the album. The present thesis will show how it is strategically unveiled with new stanzas at deliberate points in the album to highlight the process of self-growth. The spoken-word poem is personally connected to Lamar’s own character, while the “Poem of the Caterpillar and the Butterfly” is general. Nevertheless, both poems address the process of self-growth where the ultimate stage is the lesson of respect and unity. This is found in the concluding lines of the two poems and will be demonstrated in chapter two. I will furthermore show how “unity” works as the motive behind Lamar’s 2015 album. This is not done by having 16 tracks that tell the listener to unite, but mostly addressing and criticizing the

many things that stops or slows down the process of African American unity. Chapter two will demonstrate how *TPAB* functions as a song cycle, of which thematic weaving is found in ‘unity’ concluded through the spoken-word poem and the “Poem of the Caterpillar and the Butterfly”. Due to the scope of this thesis, this section will not have room for extremely detailed textual evidence, but indications will be thoroughly presented. I do, however, not pay much attention to the musical harmonic progression and key succession, which is a criterion of the song cycle¹. I will furthermore emphasize the importance of the two poems in the album’s creation of an African American narrative and the structure of the album. The album is commonly regarded as a concept album, but I argue that due to *TPAB*’s poetic foundation, the album responds well to an older musical tradition; the song cycle. Through an analysis of these two poems, I interpret the album’s message to be about ‘unity’.

I furthermore argue that the music video for “Alright” presents the essence of Lamar’s *TPAB* through the interplay between what is seen and heard. Catching the core of an album in less than seven minutes would be a hard task. However, I argue that Lamar can do this because the multiple strands of the album has already been captured in the “Poem of the Caterpillar and the Butterfly” and the spoken-word poem. Since *TPAB* highlights the process of self-growth, reading some songs individually can be problematic. Individual songs present attitudes that he wishes to criticize, but that is carried by Lamar’s own voice and persona, where he uses the first-person pronoun “I”. Therefore, the present thesis’ focus on how the two poems illustrate the process of self-growth is significant. Lamar presents himself as having been at stages where he acts destructively against unity. However, this highlights the self-realizing process that *TPAB* and the two poems are about. Lamar presents the idea that African American men are born and tricked by the society into adopting a certain way of thinking and acting, which disables them

¹ Some of the cited musicological articles have interesting perspectives that may strengthen *TPAB*’s connection to the song cycle

from becoming united and stronger as a social group. He raps from a mindset that he questions, in present tense and a striking seriousness. Lamar's lyrics claim himself as vulnerable through the embodying of others (Goldstein, 2015, 74). A prime example is the song "Institutionalized", where Lamar arrogantly speaks about killing fellow African Americans. The reason he presents this mindset so brutally honest may be because he has been in this state of mind himself but has realized the damage it does. It is, no matter how unfortunate, a stage in the self-realizing process of this narrative. Chapter two will elaborate on how exactly this process is portrayed in *TPAB*.

The 7th song on the album, "Alright", is the album's anthem of unity and the thesis is therefore specifically interested in this song. I therefore choose to close read the video through multimodal theory. The analysis in chapter three will investigate how the music video for "Alright" uses the interplay of sound, visual images, and lyrics in order to concretize and give depth to the album's overall message of unity, the two poems and Lamar's role as a black leader. Consequently, the music video works as an extension of the album itself. The poetics of the album also makes its way into the music video of "Alright". As powerful as poetry can be, images also bring a captivating force. There is an interplay of the poems and the music video that is brought out through the visual and textual. "Alright" is, as mentioned, the album's anthem of unity. Being sung at the protests of the #BlackLivesMatter-movement, the song's unifying capabilities are to some extent established. Only one scholar, Noriko Manabe, brings attention to "Alright"'s music video, the poems and the lyrics. Her article is, however, most interested in the musicological aspects of the song, which is not the focus of this thesis. She too brings up the metaphor of the "Poem of the Caterpillar and the Butterfly", and a few scenes from the music video and its connection to the #BlackLivesMatter-movement (Manabe, 2018, chap. 3, 9). Her work is important to the study of "Alright" and Lamar, and provides interesting musicological arguments for how the song and video can be read. However, Manabe does not investigate thoroughly the interplay of the different modes of communication and only scratches

the surface of the meaning created in the visual mode of the video. Here, as well as in the comparison to the tradition of the bildungsroman and the connection to the song cycle is where this thesis provides new perspectives to the study of Lamar.

The use of several modes is present throughout Lamar's 2015 album, as it thrives on intertextuality, cultural and political references, instrumentals, a capellas, a spoken-word poem and samples to name a few. For this reason, I will use multimodality theory to analyze the music video for "Alright". *Oxford English Dictionary* defines multimodality as "the use or the availability of several modes, methods and systems" ("multimodality, n.", *OED Online*, 2020). The elaborate multimodal analysis in chapter 3 will show how the video, through the interplay of different modes, concretizes the metaphor of the caterpillar, the cocoon and the butterfly in the video for the album's anthem of unity.

Chapter Two: The Poetic Foundation of *To Pimp a Butterfly*

Concept album or song cycle?

Concept albums as an artistic expression was popularized in the 1960's with The Beatles' release of *Sergeant Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band* (1967) and is very generally described as albums where songs are connected by either a common theme or narrative (Coffey, 2020). Concept albums became the recipe for British rock bands after 1960's, but its use in British and American popular music diminished as the art form developed. It was later viewed as pompous and pretentious (Ibid.).

However, hip hop has a strong tradition for concept albums. Writer and artist Kieron Byatt, in his article for *Djbooth.net*, breaks down hip hop's concept album tradition and notes two approaches rappers use to make concept albums: narrative cohesion and thematic cohesion (Byatt, *Djbooth.net*, 2019). The narrative approach is "... when the album tells a story", and the thematic approach is "albums employing thematic content... exploring one or a series of connected themes and ideas" (Ibid.). Additionally, concept albums are in hip hop commonly divided into two forms: the low-form and the high-form. They are described accordingly: "Whether narrative or thematic, the content form a body of work takes on will reveal the art. In high-form, the album deals with the concept. In low-form, the concept informs but doesn't dominate every second of the record" (Ibid.). Lamar has been creating concept albums since his debut with *Section.80* (2011), with the exception of the EP *untitled unmastered.* (2016). Byatt has categorized his catalogue and claims *Section.80* (2011) to be "a low-form thematic affair", *good kid, m.A.A.d. city* (2013) as a "high-form narrative", and *To Pimp a Butterfly* (2015) and *DAMN.* (2018) as "high-form thematic". *TPAB* is considered both by scholars and music journalists as a concept album, however, I will demonstrate how the album also respond

to the criteria of a song cycle. As we will see, this genre, unlike the concept album, includes specific criteria for the progression of the themes, summary statement and a central poetic theme.

Scholars commonly connect concept albums to the song cycle. Susan Youens describes song cycles briefly as “a group of individually complete songs designed as a unit, for solo and ensemble voices, with or without instrumental accompaniment” (Youens, 2001, n.p.). The difference between concept albums and song cycles, pointed out by Katrina Gingerich, in her article “The Journey of the Song Cycle”, is that concept albums often use more than one vocalist, and that concept albums are commonly a recorded musical form, whereas song cycles can be performed live and also be recorded (Gingerich, 2010, 71). Both of these differences are vague, because a concept album could also be performed live chronologically (even though that is rare). Also, the use of different vocalist should not necessarily break the narrative, if the vocalist used is able to express a feeling or sentiment in the manner that the main artist wants and cannot do himself. This would rather be an enrichment of the song cycle rather than failing to follow the criteria. If the goal of a song cycle is to present a narrative, then using different artists to communicate specific emotions would be ideal. Nevertheless, the tradition of song cycles is more than a hundred years older than the concept album, as the term was first introduced lexicographically in 1865, but works as old as *Beowulf* can be argued to fit the criteria (Youens, 2001, 70).

However, newer principles for song cycles exist. Gingerich describes the modern characteristics of the song cycle as making use of “the cross reference of a motive, harmonic progression, or harmonic/contrapuntal complex;...cross reference and/or pattern completion at strategic points to define formal boundaries;...a logical key succession;...the association of key and character, or, of musical character with the ongoing progress of the work;...the use of mode for expressive (and often ironic) effect;...cyclic closure by means of pattern completion,

summary statement, or other means.” (Gingerich, 2010, 65). I will demonstrate how Lamar’s *TPAB* responds to these characteristics. I argue that *TPAB* responds better to the song cycle because of the specifications of the criteria. Because of the strict boundaries and history of the genre, this adds to the appreciation of *TPAB*. Lamar’s genre is considered to be far away from classical music (most common genre for song cycles), and the fact that he creates a work that answers both to the strict criteria of hip hop, as well as the song cycle adds to the appreciation of his work and the potential of hip hop.

To Pimp a Butterfly as a song cycle

First, the “cross reference of a motive” and the “cross reference and/or pattern completion” that define the song cycle, are in *TPAB* connected to the spoken-word poem which interweaves the songs. The first stanza is presented after the third track, “King Kunta”, saying “I remember you was conflicted, misusing your influence”. This is where the motive first appears. Up to this point in the album, Lamar has presented himself in his vanity, through the perspective of ‘Uncle Sam’ in “Wesley’s Theory”, where money and fame are his priorities, and by asserting his status in the rap game in “King Kunta”. The first stanza works in contrast to the songs before it as the listener suddenly hears Lamar talking to, at this point, a stranger about “misusing their influence”. The two next songs thematically explore entrapment in different kinds. In “Institutionalized”, Lamar presents himself as being “trapped inside the ghetto” and in a consumption mindset where he will consume everything in order to stay alive and grow (Lamar, “Institutionalized”, 2015). One way to describe this consumption is through murder, as he alludes to committing murder and unapologetically asking “so what?”. The next track, “These Walls”, is initiated by the further unfolding of the motive of the spoken-word poem, saying “I remember you was conflicted, misusing your influence / Sometimes I did the same”. In Lamar’s

first verse (second verse of the song, the first is sung by Anna Wise), “These Walls” are a metaphor for a woman’s vagina; “interior pink, color coordinated”. However, in the fourth verse, Lamar reveals that the woman he rapped about having sex with in the first verse is the mother and girlfriend to a man that killed his friend and is now in prison for life: “Killed my homeboy, God spared your life / dumb criminal got indicted the same night / so when you play this song rewind the first verse / about me abusing my power so you can hurt” (Lamar, “These Walls”, 2015). The new addition to the motive; “sometimes I did the same” is now concretized as the listener knows that Lamar misused his influence for revenge. “These Walls” thus ends with an extension of the spoken-word with the new lines: “Abusing my power, full of resentment / resentment that turned into a deep depression / Found myself screaming in a hotel room”. This transitions into a horrifying scream and the song “u”, where Lamar in a drunken rage attacks himself and alludes to committing suicide.

By showing examples of Lamar’s deliberate elaboration of the spoken-word poem, we can see how Lamar uses it to connect the songs to his personal development. It works as the recurring motive throughout the album and creates a pattern. It starts with the simple phrase “I remember you was conflicted, misusing your influence”, but is strategically extended throughout the album. The songs themselves speak to the unfolding of the spoken-word, as we see e.g. in the start and the end of “These Walls”. “Sometimes I did the same” comes before “These Walls” start, the lyrics then shows how Lamar misused his influence and the spoken-word at the end shows what happens to him as a result of abusing his power; his depression. The song “u” then reveals details of his depression and what leads him to suicidal thoughts.

TPAB reaches the “cyclic closure” when the spoken-word piece is revealed in its entirety, at the very end of the last track “Mortal Man”, in Lamar’s conversation with the late rapper and major influence Tupac. The conversation begins with Lamar reading the full length of the spoken-word. The concluding lines of it say: “Forgetting all the pain and hurt we caused

each other in these streets / If I respect you, we unify and stop the enemy from killing us” (Lamar, “Mortal Man”, 2015). He shows his determination to educate his peers, in which the goal is to unite. This line works both as the pattern completion and as the summary statement, however, the process of becoming the ‘butterfly’ is in every song, but also allegorically presented in the last segment of *TPAB*, “The Poem of the Caterpillar and the Butterfly”.

***TPAB* in a literary tradition**

As shown, *TPAB* fulfills the song cycle’s criteria of “cross reference of a motive” and “cyclic closure” and “summary statement”. One of the main reasons it responds so well to such an old musical tradition is because of the spoken-word poem that structures the pattern and unfolds at strategic points. Another example is when the line “Until I came home” is added after the song “Momma”. The following songs are strongly influenced by and referring to his journey to South Africa in 2014. This journey is of strong significance to Lamar’s process of personal growth. I will also investigate how this journey relates to a literary tradition of travel and leaving the situation you were born into. This will be done by examining how Lamar’s journey is presented in the “Poem of the Caterpillar and the Butterfly” and selected songs, and compare it to how journeys are portrayed in a typical bildungsroman. Ian Buchanan describes the genre as “a sub-genre of the novel focusing on the personal development of the protagonist, usually from childhood to adulthood” (Buchanan, 2010, 58). I will use Charles Dickens’ *David Copperfield* (1850) as it is one of the most famous books from the genre (Ibid.). Due to the scope of the thesis I will not use textual examples from Dickens’ novel, but only refer to it very briefly and compare it to Lamar’s journey. Journeys traditionally have a strong symbolic presence in literature and are often connected to personal growth. Seeing how Lamar’s journey responds to the literary tradition will give greater insight into “The Poem of the Caterpillar and the

Butterfly” and how the journey affects his process of self-growth. It will become clear how the poem’s allegorical metaphor of ‘caterpillar-cocoon-butterfly’ correspond with the traditional topos of ‘childhood-adolescence-adulthood’. Comparing Lamar’s journey to the literary tradition of personal growth will come when analyzing the part of the poem where the journey is relevant. Before investigating the role “Bildung” plays in my analysis, I will briefly consider how the two poems connect with the genre of the song cycle.

How the spoken-word poem is elaborated in line with Lamar’s personal growth has been shown in the previous section. Returning now to Gingerich’s definition of the song cycle, one of the important principles is the cyclic closure “...by means of pattern completion, summary statement, or other means.” (Gingerich, 2010, 65). It is in this principle the “Poem of the Caterpillar and the Butterfly” and the spoken-word poem connect, as they work together to complete the pattern as well as summarizing the album. Gingerich also how song cycles also are defined by a “central poetic theme”. Through my analysis of the “Poem of the Caterpillar and the Butterfly” I will demonstrate how this poem holds the central poetic theme and the concept of the album: the process of self-realization of a modern African American man where what he ultimately learns is the importance of unity. In *TPAB*, unity is presented as a goal, and Lamar battles everything that works against it by telling his own story of becoming a ‘butterfly’. The thematic, structural and poetic principles of the album lie in the allegorical caterpillar and butterfly, and the relationship between the two.

The Caterpillar

The caterpillar consumes everything in order to survive, while the butterfly has survived and reached another level of understanding its own world (Lamar, “Mortal Man”, 2015). A listener of *TPAB* follows Lamar’s process throughout the album. I will analyze how Lamar uses his

own example of becoming a butterfly and how the poem carries this narrative. First, I will read how different songs reflect the different stages of the “Poem of the Caterpillar and the Butterfly” to make clear the allegory of personal growth that it carries. This allegory must be examined because of its significant presence in the music video for “Alright”. I emphasize again that this poem is performed at the very end of the album, in Lamar’s conversation with the late rapper Tupac Shakur, just like the spoken-word poem. The difference between the two is that the spoken-word poem works as a part of the conversation, where Shakur responds and gives his take, but “the Poem of the Caterpillar and the Butterfly” is the very last thing the listener hears. Lamar reads the poem for Shakur, but after he is finished reading, Shakur is not answering anymore.

This poem portrays a metamorphosis that is undergone through personal and mental growth. It consists of one stanza and twenty-five lines that are accompanied by an intensifying jazz instrumental. The metamorphosis is the poetic imagery for development, where the caterpillar, cocoon and butterfly are the three stages. The poem has some internal rhymes but no firm rhyme pattern. It does not have a specific rhythmic meter, but the vocals glide and stop to control the poem’s pauses. Many of the words used in the poems can be found in the song titles in *TPAB*, such as “Institutionalized” and “These Walls”. Every song on the album give detailed insight into the different stages of becoming a butterfly. The first stage of the process, being a caterpillar, is found in the first four lines of the poem where consumption is a leading motif. The caterpillar must consume in order to survive. Lamar also presents himself in the consumer mentality in the first song of the album, “Wesley’s Theory”, and describes the “pimping” of the butterfly, that the album has its name after. White corporate America is personified by “Uncle Sam” and tries to lure Lamar into the consumer mentality by offering material goods. In the second verse of “Wesley’s Theory” Lamar raps in the voice of Uncle Sam:

“What you want you? A house or a car?
/ Forty acres and a mule, a piano, a guitar? /
Anythin’, see my name is Uncle Sam, I’m your dog /
Motherfucker, you can live at the mall /
I know your kind (that’s why I’m kind) /
Don’t have receipts (oh, man that’s fine) /
Pay me later, wear those gators”.

(Lamar, “*Wesley’s Theory*”, 2015)

Lamar is offered various material goods for his rapping, among those things forty acres and a mule. This is a reference to the order that African Americans were to be provided forty acres after the Civil War as a material band-aid for their participation in the War (Sherman, *Headquarters Military Division of the Mississippi*, 1865). This order is considered to have had little effect, and being a false promise, which may also be a reason for Lamar’s reference to it. Lamar is attempted lured into consumption, buying everything without considering taxes and the cost, as the two lines of Wesley’s Theory read “I know your kind (that’s why I’m kind) / Don’t have receipts (oh, man that’s fine) / Pay me later, wear those gators”. Uncle Sam says he knows Lamar is kind, but the line plays with the homophony of ‘kind’, and the difference between ‘your’ and ‘you are’. The sentence can thus be read in two ways: “I know you are kind” (that’s why I’m kind)”, telling Lamar that he is charitable and that is why he is offering him material goods and is acting nicely towards him to trick him into consumption. ‘Kind’ can also mean a ‘type of person’, and may refer to the racial stereotype of African American lavishly spending money on material goods. Lamar is therefore the type to want material goods and to foolishly spend his money, and Uncle Sam knows this is a way to exploit him. The song’s title

comes from the tax fraud case of the actor Wesley Snipes, who served three years in prison. Lamar criticizes the entertainment industry of luring African Americans into spending money they do not have, when they have little knowledge of tax laws because of the lack of education. Lamar raps “Uneducated, but I got a million-dollar check like that”, which refers to the possibilities African Americans have to make a good income. To make this idea more clear one can look at the lyrics of another contemporary rapper, J. Cole, often juxtaposed with Lamar as the prototypes of conscious rappers²: “They tellin’ niggas sell dope, rap or go to the NBA/ In that order...” (Cole, “*Immortal*”, 2016). Drug dealers, basketball players and rappers rarely achieve success due to education and are therefore vulnerable to prosecution because they do not learn how to manage their money and are lured into the consumer mentality by the industry. After experiencing success and money, the frivolous consumption is used to send them back to jail, exemplified by the case of Wesley Snipes.

Going back to “The Poem of the Caterpillar and the Butterfly”, Lamar’s reason behind African Americans being tricked into consumption is shown through the description of the caterpillar: “Its only job is to eat and consume everything around it in order to protect itself...” (Lamar, “*Mortal Man*”, 2015). Lamar himself battles this materialism presented through the characters Uncle Sam and Lucy in the song “For Free? (Interlude)”. This is a significant scene in Lamar’s process of personal growth, because in order to defeat Uncle Sam and Lucy, he must leave behind the mindset of consumption. The poem defines the caterpillar by exactly this mindset, as “its only job is to eat and consume everything around it in order to protect itself...” (Lamar, “*Mortal Man*”, 2015). Naturally, leaving behind what defines it leaves it subject to a change.

² Sometimes referred to as ‘political hip hop’, conscious rap is a sub-genre of hip hop with “reflections on and intellectual engagement with pressing social issues” (Murray, 2010, n.p)

“Institutionalized” gives the listener insight into a caterpillar that is still in the streets with Snoop Dogg’s bridge placing the story in “West Side Compton”. The song takes on a different perspective than “For Free?”, and Lamar is rapping as a caterpillar trapped in the streets of a mad, but beautiful city. The song provides insight into the consumer mentality of the caterpillar as it shows how it is willing to commit murder in order to survive, and how violence and murder is part of the consumption. It also gives interesting details of the relationship between the caterpillar and the butterfly that Lamar wishes to change. From the perspective of the caterpillar he raps: “One more sucker wavin’ with a flashy wrist / My defense mechanism tell me to go get him quickly because he got it” (Lamar, “Institutionalized”, 2015). The caterpillar sees a peer flashing his success and is immediately told by his mentality to rob him of it. This is one of the ways that the poem describes the caterpillar to see “the butterfly as weak and figures out a way to pimp it to his own benefit” (Lamar, “Mortal Man”, 2015). Interestingly, “Institutionalized” follows the song “King Kunta”, where Lamar is the one that is experiencing success and is the king of the rap game. In this song Lamar highlights how “everybody wanna cut the legs off him” (Lamar, “King Kunta”, 2015). These two songs give the listener both sides of the story in order to portray the relationship between the caterpillar and the butterfly. “Institutionalized” shows a caterpillar that wants to pimp “King Kunta” for his own gain, where “King Kunta” shows a successful caterpillar that must deter the attacks from the caterpillars that sees him a resource for consumption. “Institutionalized”, however, provides detail to the stage of the process in the poem where the caterpillar starts working on its cocoon which the “Poem of the Caterpillar and the Butterfly” describes as “already surrounded by this mad city” and going “to work on the cocoon which institutionalizes him” (Lamar, “Mortal Man”, 2015). These two lines present the two different forms of being institutionalized, “surrounded by this mad city” implies the physical state of entrapment as the city surrounds the caterpillar physically. However, that the caterpillar is the one that “goes to

work on its cocoon” implies that the caterpillar also plays a role in the entrapment through its institutionalized state of mind.

Building the cocoon

In order to reach its final state, the butterfly must undergo its time in the cocoon. It is an unfortunate state to be in, however necessary to morph into a butterfly. The cocoon is presented in various ways throughout the album. First, it is presented as the streets. As the poem states: “the caterpillar is a prisoner to the streets that conceive it” (Lamar, “Mortal Man”, 2015). Being born into an institution is what traps the caterpillar, but what keeps it trapped is the mentality it learns. The poem expresses this through the homophony of “conceive”. It is not only giving birth to the caterpillar and placing it physically into the streets, it also forms an idea in its mind. Once the caterpillar can reflect on its own mentality it enables itself to break out of the cocoon. The institutionalized state of mind is found in both the poem and the lyrics of “Institutionalized”. In the intro, Lamar raps “Trapped inside the ghetto, and I ain’t proud to admit it / Institutionalized, I could still kill me a nigga, so what?” (Lamar, “*Institutionalized*”, 2015). The sentence “I ain’t proud to admit it” transfers nicely into what the poem says about the caterpillar. It notices that “the world shuns him but praises the butterfly” (Lamar, “Mortal Man”, 2015). In “Institutionalized”, Lamar raps from the point where the caterpillar works on its cocoon. We see him being self-aware of being trapped and feels the need to tell everyone that he’s not proud of his situation. However, in the very same line, he confesses to the mentality that keeps him trapped: the violent consumption, represented through “I could still kill me a nigga, so what?” (Lamar, “Institutionalized”, 2015). In the poem, the caterpillar “institutionalized, can no longer see past his own thoughts” and Lamar may want to communicate that the cocoon is bound to the institutionalized state of mind and in order to

evolve it must leave behind the mentality of the caterpillar. In other words, one cannot underestimate how systemic racism plays part in shaping the caterpillar's institutionalized state of mind. However, a caterpillar does not have the means to change where it was born and the situation it is born into, so what Lamar describes is what a caterpillar can do in order to evolve. The implicit and obvious meaning is that systemic racism birthed the caterpillar into a rough world, but Lamar describes the less obvious, how it is to survive and evolve in that world.

Lamar continues to explain how breaking the cocoon does not come in materialistic form through the first three songs on the album. Money is not a freeway to becoming a butterfly because getting rich while still being in the state of mind of the caterpillar leaves you vulnerable to being trapped again, now physically in a prison cell, as shown in "Wesley's Theory". The mind continues to be one of the strong institutionalizing forces, as the listener follows Lamar's journey of becoming a butterfly. He is facing depression and survivor's guilt, which is expressed through the song "u". This song shows how Lamar must fight his own demons and self-loathing thoughts in order to survive. His own voice is telling him that even though he "preached in front of a hundred thousand" he couldn't support his pregnant sister and that he "left Compton for profit" while his friends are still dying in the streets (Lamar, "u", 2015). These self-loathing thoughts almost pushes him over the edge of suicide.

Breaking the cocoon

After battling his demons and the temptations of Lucifer in "u" and "For Sale?", Lamar reaches a point of self-realization in "Momma" and talks about everything he has learned from his struggle: "I know everything, I know Compton / I know street shit, I know shit that's conscious" (Lamar, "Momma", 2015). Lamar braggingly proclaims that he has seen both sides of the world, Compton and the streets where consumption prevails, and he has learned about himself. In the

last line he confesses that he was humbled in his knowledge the day he “came home”. The “Poem of the Caterpillar and the Butterfly” highlights the importance of this journey as it is presented as a leading motive for breaking the cocoon: “when trapped inside these walls certain ideas take root, such as going home, and bringing back new concepts to this mad city. The result? Wings begin to emerge...” (Lamar, “Mortal Man”, 2015).

To bring depth to Lamar’s journey I will in the following paragraphs provide a comparison to a journey’s significance in the genre “Bildungsroman”, a genre known for specifically depicting a character’s personal growth. I will present a brief summary of Dicken’s bildungsroman *David Copperfield* for comparison purposes.

This novel follows the protagonist and narrator “David Copperfield” from his childhood to maturity. He grows up without a father, and his mother dies during his time at a disciplinary boarding school. At the school, David befriends two young men, one of them he starts idolizing. After his mother’s death he travels to London for work. His boss is arrested, and David runs away to Dover where his great-aunt names him “Trotwood Copperfield”. He then attends a better school, eventually apprentices to become a proctor, and befriends Agnes, the daughter of a lawyer who he lodges with during this term. After some time, David picks up writing fiction and experiences fame and fortune is the occupation. He marries Dora Spenlow who dies early in their marriage due to a miscarriage. To escape and heal the grief of the many deaths of the people he has loved, David travels to Switzerland. Here, David realizes his love for Agnes and moves back home to clumsily find out she loves him back. In marriage with Agnes he finds true happiness and meaning.

To begin with, there is a striking difference between Lamar and David’s journeys. David experiences his true happiness after getting time to reflect during his stay in Switzerland. Switzerland to David is away, where England is home. In Lamar’s case the idea of home and away is very different. In *TPAB*, his hometown Compton is referred to as the “mad city”, both

in the poem and in the songs, whereas Africa is referred to as home. The song “Momma” is one of the songs where Lamar reflects on the new perspectives he gained during his trip to Africa. The song’s title transfers the characteristics of a mother to the continent of Africa. It is the place that birthed him and where he feels safe and at ease. Where David’s significant realization comes from the journey of home-away-home, Lamar’s journey is reversed. Compton is to some extent his “away”, where Africa is the home, which defines his journey to be ‘away-home-away’. Furthermore, the ‘childhood-adolescence-adulthood’ in Lamar’s are tied to the metaphors ‘caterpillar’, ‘cocoon’ and ‘butterfly’, but is not as connected to age, but rather the inner process of self-realization. Lamar’s journey is consequently a reversal of the traditional recipe for the Bildungsroman. To try to understand why, one must look at the situation of African Americans in the U.S. in general. Historically, the protagonist of the national narrative has mostly been white men³, which continues to be unrelatable for people with other ethnic backgrounds, such as Lamar. In the U.S., Lamar, as many other African Americans, continue to be the “other”⁴, and does not fit the mainstream story of the white male. As mentioned in the first chapter, he is firm in stating the “blackness” of the album and adding to an African American narrative. Lamar’s version of a journey of personal growth is one of the ways that he is able to create a narrative in line with a literary tradition, but for the African American audience. In “Momma”, a young boy that “resembles his features” tells him how much he wishes Lamar to tell his friends to come back home (Lamar, “Momma”, 2015). It is presented as significant in the process of self-realization that Lamar is portraying. However, because of the history of lack of diversity and representation, and being “the other”, Lamar has not really been presented this opportunity before. Inside the cocoon, the “Poem of the Caterpillar and the Butterfly” explains that “certain ideas take root, such as going home” (Lamar, “Mortal Man”,

³ This is the base of several literary theories such as Imperialism, Ethnic Studies and Postcolonial Criticism

⁴ Which is also the base of the literary theory of Othering

2015). It becomes clear that this is a realization from one's own mind, rather than through a book or other means. However, Lamar's voice is one of the few that is actually heard in 'the streets', as he is known for making relatable music that reflects Compton and other troubled neighborhoods.

Descriptions of physical entrapment is also found in older African American narratives. Looking at W.E.B. DuBois's chapter "Of Our Spiritual Strivings", he writes: "... Why did God make me a stranger in mine own house? The shades of the prison-house closed round about us all: walls strait and stubborn to the whitest, but relentlessly narrow..." (DuBois, 1903, 221). Lamar too uses the prison cells and walls as figuratively describing the institutionalization. "These Walls" specifically uses prison walls both literally and symbolically and is connected to the stage of 'working on the cocoon'. DuBois, additionally, brings notions of a 'journey' through "book-learning" (Ibid., 223). He presents the religious metaphor of a path to Canaan, the holy land promised by God to Abraham. He further writes: ... the journey at least gave for reflection and self-examination; it changed the child of Emancipation to the youth with dawning self-consciousness, self-realization, self-respect" (Ibid.). DuBois' 'Canaan' and Lamar's 'Momma' are similar in the way they are both connected to the ideas of self-examination, realization and respect. DuBois, or other African American narratives, for whatever reason, do not necessarily reach the caterpillars that Lamar worries about, however his story does. Lamar's audience is wide, but he is loved in his hometown, Compton. The city has a long tradition of hip hop and is also one of the most troubled cities concerning violence and gang activities (Goldbaum/Murphy/Jones, *Vice*, 2016). To this audience, Lamar shines the light on an idea that they have not considered: going home. *TPAB* can be considered a very important perspective regarding the complexity of othering, as it helps fill the void or lack of African American representation in narratives of self-growth. The idea is that for African Americans, the

important journey for self-realization is not going away, it is going home, and this idea now reaches a broader audience.

The Butterfly

The “Poem of the Caterpillar and the Butterfly” describes the butterfly as representing “the talent” and the “thoughtfulness within the caterpillar”, where the butterfly is the final state. The poem describes this state as “free” and as no longer “feeling stagnant”. The butterfly furthermore “sheds light on situations the caterpillar never considered, ending the internal struggle” (Lamar, “Mortal Man”, 2015). This definition describes the important task of the butterfly, to “shed light on situations”, which can be interpreted as influencing the caterpillar to move in the right direction and as showing the world how vulnerable and mistreated the caterpillar is. This is another aspect where *David Copperfield* and Lamar’s stories relate. Julia P. Brown, in her article, addresses the characters that are left behind in David’s process of personal growth. She mentions especially “the children left behind in the blacking factory” and David’s doppelganger, Heep, who “has been deformed by the same impulses driving David—personal and professional ambition” (Brown, 2013, n.p.). Lamar’s song “King Kunta” is easily transferable to Heep, as it emphasizes how power and ambition can manipulate people into wrongdoings. Brown also claims that “these images haunt the novel like guilty dreams”, which may resemble the haunting images that causes Lamar’s survivor’s guilt expressed especially through the song “u” and mentioned in the spoken-word poem. David, though, becomes a successful writer, and Brown categorizes the novel as an “autobiographical rendering” which indicates a connection between the novel’s protagonist and the author himself (Ibid.). Bringing back now the “Poem of the Caterpillar and the Butterfly”’s metaphor of the butterfly that “sheds light on situations”, both David and Lamar are successful, however, what haunts both stories

are the ones left behind. If both David and Lamar are considered butterflies, their story of personal growth also accentuates the less fortunate. David's story sheds light on the dark destiny of the child laborers, whereas Lamar's shows the tragedy of all the young black men that die in 'the streets'.

During his journey, Lamar is humbled by the "little boy" that "resembles his features" who questions his perspectives (Lamar, "Momma", 2015). The boy, as mentioned, tells him to advice his friends to come back home for new perspectives. Lamar is furtherly humbled in "How Much A Dollar Cost?", where he shuns a beggar for asking for money and who eventually reveals himself as God. In "The Blacker the Berry" he attacks an unidentified racist "you" that wishes to destroy the beauty that is Lamar's culture and ethnicity, but in the end he turns the attack towards himself and his own hypocrisy. He realizes that he and his peers themselves have been acting after violent racist principles in gangbanging. In "You Ain't Gotta Lie (Momma Said)" he criticizes fellow African Americans that lie in order to be perceived a certain way, often lying about what Lamar himself has learned are values that is forced upon his peers by society such as women, money and fame. Lamar is rapping from a point where these things no longer have significance in his life. All the many realizations that he has experienced lets him reach the point of "i", where he praises himself and his black skin, loves himself and consequently breaks out of his cocoon. All these songs represent what the poem says about the butterfly "bringing back new ideas to this mad city". He is now ready to return and educate the caterpillars about what he has learned, to perhaps turn the situation around and make the mad city and the country itself worthy of being called a home.

In "Mortal Man", Lamar stands up to this task and questions the integrity of his followers and asks for his words "to be your Earth and moon, you consume every message" (Lamar, "Mortal Man", 2015). He is ready for the task, but aware of the risk he is taking, he asks his followers if they will continue to support him whenever someone is trying to strip him

of his power and obscure his message. He consults his fellow butterfly, Tupac Shakur, on the state of the Black Community and proves his inspiration from black leaders and aims his voice to continue in lines with the “Ghost of Mandela”. One can assume that the task of the butterfly is to inspire every caterpillar, like Shakur, Mandela and Malcolm X inspired Lamar. Lamar is now giving his take and leaves a resonating message of unity in the “Poem of the Caterpillar and the Butterfly: “although, the butterfly and the caterpillar are completely different, they are one and the same” (Lamar, “Mortal Man”, 2015). This line asserts the connection between all members of the African American community. Ultimately, they are “all one and the same”, and the respect builds upon remembering that. Lamar asks, “maybe I’m just another nigga”, claiming that what separates the ones that are praised and the ones that are shunned are not necessarily clear, however their foundation remains the same. They all started out as caterpillars, because that’s how their world works. To make the best out of the world they are born into the caterpillar must respect the butterfly, - and vice versa because only then do they “unify and stop the enemy from killing” them. This sentiment remains at the summary statement for the album. Looking back at the spoken-word poem, we find what Lamar wants to teach the caterpillars: “the word was respect, just because you wore a different gang color than mines, doesn’t mean I can’t respect you as a black man. Forgetting all the pain and hurt we caused each other in these streets, If I respect you, we unify and stop the enemy from killing us” (Lamar, “Mortal Man”, 2015). Through the concept of respect, Lamar wishes to unify the Black community. Following his personal journey, the listener has learned that “respect” comes from abandoning the state of mind of consumption that you learn to adopt. It is to celebrate the caterpillars and butterflies that move forward, instead of pimping them to your own benefit. It comes from being humble and grateful, rather than judgmental. And importantly, it comes from being able to love oneself first.

I return now to the cyclic closure of the song cycle, which is done by means of “summary statement” and “pattern completion” (Gingerich, 2010).”. “Pattern completion” on *TPAB* is realized through the spoken-word poetry being performed in its entirety for Shakur, and his take on it. The last lines of the “Poem of the Caterpillar and the Butterfly” is the summary statement: that “they are one and the same” and is what resonates when the album is done playing. Lamar is, however, asking for Shakur’s perspective. The lack of response can be understood as Lamar already having found the answer in the unity that the poem concludes. Gingerich (2010, 65) furthers the definition of the song cycle as: “a musical form with three or more defined sections that uses text painting and a logical sequence of tonicities to express a single poetic theme”. The songs expressing the stages ‘caterpillar’, ‘cocoon’ and ‘butterfly’ can be read as the “three or more sections” that make the “central poetic theme”. The poetic foundation of *TPAB* is what allows it to fulfill the criteria of the song cycle so well. The spoken-word poem, as shown previously, works as the pattern and controls the sequencing of the album, the allegorical poem works as the summary statement. Both poems conclude with underlining the importance of unity.

I have in this chapter connected the two poems to various songs on the album, however the analysis is only a brief insight in the connection between the individual songs and the poems as it only scratches the surface of the body of lyrics in *TPAB*. Additionally, I have compared the significance of the journey in the protagonist’s process of personal growth and self-realization in a brief comparison with the well-known bildungsroman *David Copperfield*. The spoken-word poem from describes Lamar’s personal growth which he shares with Tupac Shakur and fulfills the criteria of the ‘pattern principle’ of the song cycle. The “Poem of the Caterpillar and the Butterfly”, on the other hand, describes the general process for the caterpillar and makes the central poetic theme and summary statement that a song cycle requires. The last lines of both poems put emphasis on unity, through similarity in situation and through respect.

Lamar raps from different points of view in the process of becoming a butterfly, and therefore builds a connection between himself and requires his listeners to be cautious about what he is saying, and from what point of view it is being said. He plays on a fine line between critique and the actual opinion, where an opinion may be presented in sincerity, only to then later be read as a critique. Nevertheless, the concluding lines that describes the similarity between the caterpillar and butterfly is not challenged. They are concluded as “one and the same”, which speaks to the unity Lamar emphasizes. Given the poem’s metaphorical nature, the unity is of course more figurative. However, read together with the final lines of the spoken-word poem, which concludes “If I respect you, we unify and stop the enemy from killing us”, the message of unity becomes crystal clear. The ‘butterfly’ must respect the ‘caterpillar’, and vice versa, for them to “unify and stop the enemy from killing” them (Lamar, 2015).

The emphasis on unity, that the two poems conclude with, is the reason for this thesis’ focus on “Alright” and its video. As mentioned in the introduction, “Alright” as a song is commonly regarded as an anthem of unity. The music video, through different modes, does not only promote unity. It also concretizes the two poems and uses the interplay of the different modes to expand their meaning. I will demonstrate how the viewer is shown real life presentations of the metaphor of the ‘caterpillar’ and the ‘butterfly’, how they are affected by police brutality and how Lamar’s position as the ‘butterfly’ is further explained. Finally, I will bring back this chapter’s focus on *TPAB* as an African American narrative of self-growth to show how the video portrays Lamar’s character as an inspiration for future generations.

Chapter Three: Case Study: Multimodal Analysis of Kendrick Lamar's music video "Alright" (2015)

When listened to in its CD-format, Lamar's lyrics in "Alright" is a narrative on its own. However, I aim to investigate how the narrative of the lyrics is complemented by additional modes of communication when they are juxtaposed in a music video. The aim of this chapter is to analyze the multimodal resources in effect in the music video and to see what new meaning is created through the interplay of the different modes of communication. Last chapter demonstrated how the concept of the album lies in the allegorical metaphors of the caterpillar, cocoon and butterfly. I also showed how Lamar's journey teaches him the importance of unity and how he wants to teach his peers back in the mad city the same lesson. "Alright" on its own is, as mentioned in the introduction, a unifying anthem. Its lyrics made its way into the protest marches of the #BlackLivesMatter-movement which in itself proves the unifying capacities of the song. However, "Alright"'s music video holds new information and detail that is not found in the lyrics, but in the visual presentation of the song.

In my following investigation of the music video I will demonstrate how the video captures the poetic foundation that the concept of the album builds upon. I argue that the caterpillar, the cocoon and the butterfly all have a significant presence in the video. The "Poem of the Caterpillar and the Butterfly" presents a metaphorical depiction of the state of African American young men in the place they are born into, but the visual images of the music video work as a concretization of this metaphor. The aforementioned consumer mentality of the caterpillar, the institutionalized state of mind that makes the cocoon, and the butterfly wishing to educate his community on the importance of unity are all represented in the music video through audio (lyrics) and image. The song's lyrics carry the message of the butterfly's lecture but is enhanced through images that further the sensation of unity. Through the interplay of

images, sound and lyrics, Lamar is able to capture the concept of the album. In order to thoroughly establish how the video works as a concretization and a presentation of the album's poetic foundation, I will apply a theory that specializes on the interplay between text and image: multimodality.

I choose to follow Ruth Page's definition of a semiotic mode as simply "a system of choices used to communicate meaning" (Page, 2009, 6). She claims that "what might count as a mode is an open-ended set, ranging across a number of systems including but not limited to language, image, color, typography, music, voice quality, dress, gesture, spatial resources, perfume and cuisine." (Ibid.). I follow Page's definition because of her insistency on semiotic modes being broad and open-ended. Many of the semiotic modes mentioned above will found the basis of my analysis as I will explore how the incorporation of these in the music video extrapolates the meaning that is communicated.

For methodological approaches I will follow the methodology presented in Carmen D. Maier and Judith L. Cross' "A multimodal analysis of the environment beat in a music video" (2014). While Maier and Cross' analysis of Michael Jackson's music video for "Earth Song" investigates the video's ability to address and "facilitate public understanding of irreversible environmental changes" (Maier, Cross, 2014, abstr.), I will investigate the "Alright" video's ability to address and facilitate public understanding of racism and social injustice in African American communities in the U.S. Additionally, their analysis is a part of a broader set of multimodal analyses where a variety of texts and productions from popular discourse are investigated. I choose to follow Maier and Cross' approach to a multimodal analysis of a music video, firstly because of their use of tables that makes analyses of different events in a video clear, that is to say the tables present clearly which modes are active and how they relate to each other. Secondly, the goal of their analysis is similar to mine in how it investigates what happens to a song and its lyrics once put in a music video format, and how new meaning is created when

different modes are juxtaposed with the lyrics. I also follow the general multimodal approach which insists that “each mode is partial in relation to the whole of meaning” (Kress, Jewitt, 2003, 3) because a multimodal analysis would be insufficient without this principle. This implies that in my analysis of Lamar’s music video for “Alright”, I will not treat one sample of the lyric as the only way of meaning being conveyed, but investigate how it relates to the other modes that are active at the same time, which hypothetically would be the audio mode (music and lyrics) and the visual (includes e.g. colors, gestures and human actions).

Multimodality scholar Kay L. O’Halloran shows how Multimodal Discourse Analysis can reveal how multimodal semiotic choices function inter-semiotically which ultimately enables them to create and respond to larger patterns of social context and culture (O’Halloran, 2011, 135). In this analysis I will investigate how the incorporation of different modes enables the video to also answer to social and cultural patterns of American society. This will be done by analyzing the representation of spatiality and temporality across the semiotic modes in “Alright”. I argue that such representations are embodied in both the participants and the geographical locations in the music video. As Maier and Cross before me, I here follow Van Leeuwen’s concepts of ‘synchronization’ and ‘recurrence’ (Van Leeuwen, 2008, 81). Maier and Cross, in their analysis, highlight how both time and space are “... considered in terms of both what is represented and how it is represented through various semiotic modes” (Maier, Cross, 2014, 6). Further, they explain that “representation of time and space is crucial for achieving continuity and unity in the music video [Earth Song] and thus for its overall effect as a ‘green anthem’” (Ibid.). Interesting for the present thesis is that “Alright”, similarly to “Earth Song”, also uses representations of unity through its use of time and space in “Alright”. I will investigate how the interplay between sound and the representations of temporal and spatial continuity through the visual mode come together to create a sense of African American unity. “Alright” differs from Jackson’s “Earth Song” in how its unity is primarily aimed towards a

specific social group, which is the African American community, whereas “Earth Song” promotes unity across social groups by connecting them all to a common cause, which is the environmental challenges of the globe. This could explain some of the factors as to why “Alright” became the anthem to the #BlackLivesMatter-movement and how it is contributing to the work against racism and social injustice. Maier and Cross create a table for the multimodal transcription of the music video, and I aim to create a similar table for “Alright” when analyzing a specific frame in the video (Ibid.). This table will include columns for each mode active at the specific time of video: visual modes (photographic and animated images, camera movements and special effects), audio modes (lyrics, music and other sounds), and multimodal effects (what happens when the former two are juxtaposed).

My analysis furthermore contains commentary on longer parts of the video that consists of different sequences that have an important connection to one another. The character(s) that are presented may not be connected in the narrative through actions, but thematically they are relevant to each other. These parts may last over 20 seconds and may be separated from each other in the chronologic sequencing of the video. When connected scenes are separated by other scenes and are the points of analysis, this will be made clear. The tables will be used for specific frames in the video that are close-read in the analysis of a specific event. Here, I follow Bordwell and Thompson’s definition of a ‘frame’ as “a single image on the strip of film” and ‘shot’ as “one uninterrupted image with a single static or mobile framing” (Bordwell, Thompson, 2001, 431-433). Screenshots (images) from the video will be provided as needed.

“The Prologue”

The first one minute and fifty seconds of “Alright” is playing without music, with Lamar’s voice performing parts of the spoken-word poem. I have named it “The Prologue” for that

reason, as it presents a spatial unfolding of the video and placing the story in a geographical location through what is presented and how it is presented. The first half minute of “Alright” is, as I will show, a representation of spatiality and temporality as it visually situates the action geographically and establishes its temporal rhythm.



Image 1

The first frame of the video, as seen in Image 1, is a shot of the Bay Bridge from afar. The Bay Bridge connects Oakland and San Francisco. The bridge is far out in the distance, separated by the water which is smoothly floating in small waves. A seagull is flapping its wings slowly, headed towards the bridge. There is a crooked lantern out in the water. We see the city and its tall buildings in the distance to the left of the frame, and two boats are slowly heading towards it. There are thick, impenetrable and dark skies hanging threateningly over the city, but over them, in the upper right of the frame, there is a vivid light shining. There are no colors in this frame, everything is in black and white, with photographic effects that create contrasts in their shade. The water is dark, so dark that it almost resembles tar or oil. The city is overshadowed

by the huge, dark clouds that lay over it, and is not touched by the little light that shines above the clouds in the upper right corner.

The video thus begins by giving the viewer a location. There is no doubt as to where we are, as we see the San Francisco-Oakland Bay Bridge. However, the shot is taken far away from the bridge, and indicates a point of view from somewhere else. Later in the video, more detailed information is given about where the action takes place. Nevertheless, through the camera's point of view, the Bay Bridge is seen from Oakland, which indicates the geographical location to the viewer. Van Leeuwen states that "visually, positions are realized by what, in film language, is called an 'establishing shot,' a picture that shows the whole of a location, insofar it is relevant to the action" (Van Leeuwen, 2008, 91). This shot of The Bay Bridge is the establishing shot for "Alright". It is a well-known architectural construction, that most viewers immediately connect to the Bay Area in Northern California. Through this shot, Lamar positions himself in a historically black town. Oakland is infamously known for its high crime-rates and several incidents of police brutality (Levin/Viner, *The Guardian*, 2016). It is also known for being the birth city of the Black Panthers. Oakland can be read as a symbol of African American culture and history, but also as a symbol of the injustice that African Americans experience in the U.S. From Oakland, as seen in this frame, the viewer can see some of San Francisco's Financial District's skyscrapers. The spire-shaped building seen is the Transamerica Pyramid, formerly headquarters for the Transamerica Corporation known for insurance business (Mullin, *Transamerica*, 2020). Close to the Transamerica Pyramid is the Bank of America. These are two of the most famous building around the Financial District in San Francisco. They symbolize corporate wealth, job-opportunities and a road to riches.

However, the Financial District, and what it symbolizes is in the frame presented as distant and unavailable because of the dark and dangerous waters that separate the bridge from the viewer's point of view. This is a phenomenon described by Alison Gibbons as 'occlusion',

a cognitive-psychological notion where in “figure identification, one object occluded by another results in the latter being perceived as being further away” (Gibbons, 2012, 43). If the Skyscrapers from the Financial District symbolize a road to riches, this road is a lot more dangerous and harder to get on for the ones situated by this frame’s point of view. The waters that divide them are dangerous with waves and big machinery that fare in them. The crooked lantern might add to this idea; as even robust metal is damaged by the waters. What is seen visually in this frame is furthermore accompanied by the sound of the ocean. There are many different emotions that may be triggered by the sound of the ocean. It can be soothing and relaxing, and perhaps viewed as one of the sounds that is closest to silence. The sound and sight of the ocean presents a great contrast to the frames that are later presented. It may be read as Oakland and San Francisco being separated by a long distance of silence, which is a contrast to what is shown from the neighborhoods that are introduced in the following frames. The first frames thus present different time-passing signifiers: the seagull gliding through the air, and the ships drifting slowly across the ocean gives a perception of a normal day. Time-passing signifiers and signifiers of every-day life are continued in the following frames.



Image 2

In the next frame in the “Prologue”, shown in Image 2, we see a machinery from the Port of Oakland, which symbolizes something more relatable for the ones that live in poverty. The Port of Oakland in 2017 generated around 73,000 jobs in Northern California (Wan, *Port of Oakland*, 2017). Many of these jobs include manual labor and may be connected to the social class that Lamar is displaying throughout “Alright”. The following shot continues the idea of normality and time-passing as it shows a closer shot of one of the boats drifting slowly across the sea. The Port of Oakland is a port with a lot of traffic, as it has 6 marine terminals, 33 ship-to-shore cranes, and spreads over 1,300 acres (Ibid.). The ships in motion continues the signification of normality. The sound that accompanies these frames adds further to this, as we hear knocking on a door, and a Latina woman announcing carefully: “housekeeping! housekeeping!”. This implies a woman on her job, which again furthers the idea of the video showing the viewer events from everyday life in this city. However, the jobs that have so far been presented do not offer great opportunities for advancement or promotion and in contrast to the jobs presented through the Bank of America and Transamerica Pyramid. The first frames

are in fact infused with monotony, which is further enhanced by the black and white-effect and the color contrast that highlights the darker colors of the images.

Continuity in color and tone

The choice of color, or the lack of it, is an interesting effect in “Alright”. In Image 1, we saw the Bay Bridge, which normally is a spectacular architectural construction with vivid lighting across it, here looking dark and sad, as it is portrayed as just another shade of gray to the rest of the dark colors of the city. The gray mist overtakes the city and the bridge and the beauty they may hold, but it also creates an even stronger contrast when you see the light above the dark clouds. The light carries a holy attribute, as something that watches over the city. A presence of the godlike is not presented in the lyrics at this point, but in the chorus, Lamar sings “If God got us, then we gon’ be alright”. The light presented in Image 1 may consequently refer to precisely the God that Lamar hopes watches over him and his peers.

The black and white effect continues into the next images of the Port of Oakland and the ships in the sea. As mentioned, the video signifies to the viewer a sense of everyday life. Black and white coloring are aesthetically very monotone as they only consist of different shades of gray, black and white. This effect furthers the notion of the entrapment connected to everyday life and manual labor. The jobs presented in the video thus far, through different modes, are at the dock and housekeeping, both often low-income and very monotone because they offer little opportunity to do things that are not practically the same. For instance, as a housekeeper, the house you clean may change, but the work you are doing remains the same – cleaning. Also, as mentioned, it offers little opportunities for advancement. This brings forth a sensation of being trapped in a situation in such a black and white and depressing situation. Being trapped in such

a situation may drive one crazy, which through the audio mode is being presented through Lamar's scream and the new images of the neighborhoods are introduced.

As discussed in the previous chapter, the institutionalization presented in *TPAB* is both a mental and physical condition. The images shown so far start to revoke the sensation of both these conditions. Visually, the black and white effects provoke an almost claustrophobic feeling through images of the sky. The clouds are gray and dark, and the sky behind them is white. In natural coloring, where clouds are white or gray and the sky is blue, the contrast of these colors create space between them, however, in black and white, the sky and clouds blend into each other, which then removes the space that a contrast in color creates. What happens then is that the sky feels closer to the ground, where the shot is taken from, and makes it cramped and thus contribute to creating the physical condition of institutionalization.

When new frames are presented, the cutting between them is separated by a loud and panicking scream, as of someone having woken up from a nightmare, and flashing lights from a tunnel moving rapidly. The scream we hear is the same that is in the song "u", where Lamar is struggling with battling his own thoughts. This is quite significant as "u" describes a moment where he is experiencing institutionalization from his own mind himself. The spoken-word poem we hear in the video of "Alright" is, as mentioned previously, what is used to structure and bridge the various songs. It describes Lamar's own evolution from a caterpillar to a butterfly. The spoken-word poem in "Alright" also describes Lamar's moment of mental and physical institutionalization in the line: "Found myself screaming in a hotel room, I didn't wanna self-destruct". First, the scream and the word "institution" are compatible as they together allude mental illness. If the scream represents the illness, the institution is where the illness is treated. The two are mutually dependent, which may be a significant interpretation if this is transferred over to the reason behind Lamar's mental illness. "u" tells the listener that Lamar is troubled by the fact that he made it out of the neighborhood, but his friends back in

Compton are still struggling with the things that Lamar got famous rapping about. This is the stage that the “Poem of the Caterpillar and the Butterfly” describes as when the caterpillar is “trapped” and “cannot see past his own thoughts” (Lamar, “Mortal Man”, 2015). Lamar personally is mentally trapped in his own thoughts and physically in “a hotel room”. One of the reasons that causes him to be mentally confined is the fact that his peers are still, as “Institutionalized” describes it, “trapped inside the ghetto”. It becomes clear that the institutionalization, in Lamar’s case, is the opposite of a treatment, it is catalyst of the illness itself. If this is now transferred back to the video, the scream’s presence is now clearer. What the viewer is about to see is the facilitator of Lamar’s self-loathing and suicidal tendencies: the situation of the African American community that he managed to escape. It is what institutionalizes both Lamar mentally, and his peers both mentally and physically.

Going back now to the video, when Lamar is screaming and different frames of a neighborhood is presented, is when the video unfolds its spatiality further, as we are invited into neighborhoods and areas where people live. The sound effects presented alongside these images suggest that the place is perhaps not the most joyful place. The visual mode elaborates the spatiality through shots of streets around Oakland. Another image shows a parking lot without cars in a dusty street. Both streets are seen in a dark and dirty coloring, through the black and white effect. It can be assumed that both places are related to each other, because of the continuity in color represented through the visual modes. The preceding frames are all from different geographical locations in California, this suggests that we have moved closer to the neighborhoods and residents near the Bay Bridge. Van Leeuwen states that an establishing shot (like that of The Bay Bridge) “allows subsequent detail shots to be ‘placed’ in the whole by the viewer” (Van Leeuwen, 2008, 91). These shots bring detail to the area that is presented in the ‘establishing shot’.

The presentation of the shots that depict the neighborhood is separated by the same scream and claustrophobic sensations that the aural mode provides, and therefore these streets are connected through continuity in both the visual and aural mode. In one frame we see smoke from tires slowly levitating, there are marks on the road from tires where a car has been doing donuts accompanied by gray sky and coloring from the previous frames. Through the aural mode we hear a helicopter, but it is not seen in the visual mode in the frame. Two men are standing on the sidewalks witnessing whatever happened. When the frame cuts to the next, the bypassing lights and nightmare-like scream appears in the audio and the visual. The scream is accompanied by a synthesizer effect with light tones in rapid succession, adding effect to the tunnel lights that move rapidly on the screen. The frames that separate the images of different streets add to the sensation mentioned earlier about being trapped, as it now shows a narrow tunnel, and the camera moving towards the end of the tunnel. The shot from the tunnel is applied in a reverse effect which creates a sensation of being drawn back inside. This effect may add further to Lamar's mental condition in "u", as he is mentally being drawn back into the struggle of his peers. It regenerates the claustrophobic sensation that connect the representations of daily life in the neighborhood that were seen and heard in the start of the video. The theme of entrapment is enforced by the monotony that comes from the black and white effects when showing these neighborhoods. More details about the situation that troubles Lamar now follows as the video reaches the thirty-second mark.

In this part of the "Prologue", Lamar's voice enters and becomes an important feature in addition to what is presented visually. Therefore, what he says will be investigated together with what we see. I quote the spoken-word poem at some length:

I remember you was conflicted
Misusing your influence
Sometimes I did the same
Abusing my power, full of resentment
Resentment that turned into a deep depression
Found myself screaming in the hotel room
Lucifer was all around
So I kept running
Until I found my safe haven
I was trying to convince myself the stripes I got
Making myself realize what my foundation was
But while my loved ones was fighting the continuous war back in
The city, I was entering a new one
A war that was based on apartheid and discrimination

(Lamar, "*Alright*" music video, 2015)

In this part of the video, the first human characters enter the story, as we see different persons with difference fates. In this section, I am interested in the synchronization of representations of different people, and how they create the effect of everything happening throughout a 'normal' day. It is natural that the sensation of 'everyday' follows the viewer as the video progresses, since there are no abrupt changes in its rhythm and tone. As I have pointed out, in the song "Mortal Man", where the spoken-word piece is performed in its entirety, Lamar simulates a conversation with the late rapper Tupac, known for his socially conscious rapping and a wish for change for the poor neighborhoods in California.

Lamar added this part of the spoken-word piece to the beginning of the video of “Alright” (In the album it comes after the song is done playing) and the lyrics thus have an interesting interplay with the visuals presented in the last part of its Prologue. The scenes are accompanied by the melancholic melody of “How Much a Dollar Cost?” from the album. There are a few specific frames where the interplay between the audio and visual mode is worth investigating. For these I choose to use tables to present what is seen and heard in more detail. I choose to use tables for frames that contain important information in different modes and when the synchronicity of elements from the audio mode and visual mode together create new meaning. I then use tables in order to divide the different segments to their respective modes to make it clearer how they work together to create meaning. Frames where the synchronicity is not as important will be discussed, but not presented in tables. The tables follow Maier and Cross’ method of presenting multimodal interplay.

Caterpillars in their habitat: continuity in spatiality and temporality represented through characters

Julian Murphet makes an interesting statement as he claims that film always “unfold in real time” and that “the simultaneous tense is the most typical temporal location of filmic narrative voice” (Murphet, 2005, 78). The simultaneousness of the different frames so far in “Alright” stays true to this idea as they are similar both in their tempo and color. There are signifiers of time passing in the earliest images investigated, for instance, through the shot of the boats drifting slowly on the ocean. The feeling of “everyday-life” is continued by the new shots of the neighborhoods and their residents. Several characters are introduced: one is the African American described in the table below, lying unconsciously on the ground with his hand flat on

the pavement and three kids riding their bike downhill. These frames show us events that are part of the daily life through the actions of the characters.

Visual Mode (image/frame)	Aural Mode (lyrics/sound effects)	Synchronicity	Multimodal connections
Young African-American man lying unconscious on the ground with his hand flat on the pavement (00:36)	Lyrics: “I remember you was conflicted. Misusing your influence. Sometimes I did the same	“Abusing my power full of resentment” synchronic with the sound of the police helicopter.	Visual effects appearing synchronically with the lyrics create a sensation of lyrics and image being related to each other.
Police helicopter flying in the air at (00:47) Policeman scouting (00:48)	Sound Effect: Helicopter sound effect (00:46) Lyrics: “abusing my power, full of resentment. Resentment that turned into a deep depression” (00:45-)	“Resentment that turned into a deep depression” – Lamar’s voice appears just as the camera cuts to the police officer	Abusing power becomes related to the police officer. “Resentment” appearing simultaneously with the police officer indicates who Lamar feels resentment for.

Table 1

I have here used tables to more evidently show the synchronicity of the different modes active and to prove their significance. Reading the frames through multimodal theory makes it clear how the spatial unfolding and temporal unfolding plays out through what is presented in the table.

We see the helicopter that we heard briefly before Lamar’s screams, and the next person we see is a white middle-aged police officer, moving his head slowly from one side to another, clearly looking for someone. Gang members are celebrating, drinking liquor and throwing money around the flaming car. Finally, we see the same young man that we saw laying face-down on the pavement earlier, running from a group of men dressed in black, and then another man being arrested by the same police officer we saw scouting from his car earlier. The

recurrence of the same characters in different spatial representations suggests a temporal unfolding. However, the different spatial representations also suggest that the unfolding of time is still in the span of a day, because there is a similarity in the geographical locations from where they are first presented to the second time they are presented.

As seen in Table 1, the frame of the young man on the pavement is presented directly after the lyrics “I remember you was conflicted, misusing your influence”. The next frame of the boy is where he is being chased by a gang. These two are clearly connected because of the recurrence of the character. This brings additional meaning to the lyric itself. As mentioned, the spoken-word that is narrated by Lamar at this time, is from a fictive conversation between Lamar and Tupac from the song “Mortal Man”. Lamar says to Tupac that he remembers Tupac being conflicted about misusing his influence. Hip-hop has long endured the critique of glorifying gang activity and violence. This may be what Lamar refers to when he says: “sometimes I did the same”. The boy is first seen face-down on the pavement, and later running from a gang. There is an implied connection between these two frames, and it becomes likely that the young man has been interacting with the wrong people, perhaps getting himself caught up in gang activities. This information is not given in either the visual nor aural mode, but there are hints. As Lamar confesses his conflict about misusing his influence just before the frame of the unconscious young man, Lamar may be referring to influencing young men to resort to gang activity and a criminal lifestyle through his music. The visual mode shows the consequences of his influence as the young man is now unconscious, and perhaps even dead as a result of his alleged gang affiliation and thus new meaning is provided to the lyrics. Important to note is that “misusing influence” in the narrative of the album strictly refers to him having revenge sex with the baby mother of a man that killed his friend. Here, the interplay of different modes provides additional meaning to the line.

The 'misused influence' alone, does not directly refer to anything for a viewer (if the viewer has no prior knowledge of the entirety of *To Pimp a Butterfly* or Lamar as an artist). However, through the visual mode Lamar provides additional information of what exactly his misuse of his influence results in, which is young black men resorting to criminal activities and gang affiliation. The events happening to this boy, are connected to the other characters in the intro of the music video, as they all represent social issues around the neighborhood which will now be investigated further.

Around one minute into the video, we are introduced to the criminal activities that plague the area that is presented. A window is being crushed by a crowbar and behind, one man is unconscious on the floor dressed in a balaclava, in front of the burning vehicle. In the next frame, one man is chugging a bottle of liquor, and another is waving his hand towards him while standing on top of the flaming vehicle. Around these two men, people are running, seemingly in panic. A Molotov explodes towards the wall and flames surround them. The frames that present these gang members shows a chaotic and violent environment. The fires presented through the visual mode and the sound effects of glass breaking and sound of explosives contribute to the chaotic effect. There is a recurrence of Lamar's scream from earlier, which carries on the nightmare-like feeling. The sound of glass breaking can be heard twice and contribute to creating an experience of destruction. In the background there are horns playing ominously creating a dramatic and doomsday-like effect.

Flames dominate the visual mode of this frame and carry different symbolism. First, flames are often connected to destruction. The gang members are untroubled by the flames around them, chugging liquor and hyping each other up. This may refer to Lamar's knowledge and perception of gang affiliation and activities, as the flames are spreading and destroying the place around them, they are concerned with the success of their heist. They are causing destruction around them, while the things they cherish are money and alcohol. However, the

interplay between the lyrics and the visual provides additional meaning. In the spoken-word lyrics, Lamar says: “Lucifer was all around me, so I kept running. Until I found my safe haven”. The word “safe haven” is shown synchronically with the frame of the gang members drinking and celebrating. The simultaneity introduces the idea of gangs functioning as a safe haven for young men. Lucifer is all around them, in forms of violence, substance abuse and abuse of power by the police, young men might find safety by joining a gang. Safety and unity are two strong arguments for gang recruitment. This does not necessarily imply Lamar’s stance on gang activity but may imply his understanding of why young men join local gangs. However, due to the continuity of chaos and violence in how gang activity is presented in “Alright”, it is safe to say that they have a demolishing impact on the neighborhoods we see.

Through both the visual and audio mode these frames in “Alright” depicts the aforementioned consumer mentality of the caterpillar that the “Poem of the Caterpillar and the Butterfly” allegorically describes. An obvious example is the man chugging the bottle of liquor as this is directly connected to consumption. As mentioned in the previous chapter, the “Poem of the Caterpillar and the Butterfly” tells the listener is that young black men are forced by society to adopt this mentality. The video of “Alright” visually concretizes the consumption of the caterpillar through these frames. One frame shows how money is the ultimate goal of the caterpillar as it allows it to live on. Through the gestures of the gang-members we can see how the caterpillar celebrates the consumption. They are jumping and dancing enthusiastically as the money is thrown in the air and a hip hop beat is pounding. In *TPAB*, vices, such as the consumer mentality, are often presented through the names of “Uncle Sam” and “Lucy”. Right before the frame of the gang-members celebrating Lamar speaks the part of the spoken-word that says “the evils of Lucy was all around me”. “Lucy” has tried to lure Lamar into consumption in, for instance, “For Free? (Interlude)”, but also lures his peers into gang activities. The interplay between the audio of this part of the spoken-word poem and what is

shown visually indicates that Lucy is not only present in the entertainment industry, but also in the troubled streets of Oakland and contributes to driving the caterpillars into the consumer mentality.

Gibbons highlights the “Gestalt Principle”, where one of the principles, “The Principle of Proximity” says that “Elements which are closer together are generally perceived as belonging together” (Gibbons, 2012, 44). Through this principle the consumer mentality and the destruction it causes meet, as the gang members are surrounded by catastrophic elements like fire and explosions while simultaneously, they are happy and celebrating. This frame then speaks directly to how the “Poem of the Caterpillar and the Butterfly” describes the caterpillar as being “trapped” and unable to “see past his own thoughts”. These caterpillars are trapped by their mindset of consumption and are unable to see the destruction around them as the only thing that catches their attention are dollar bills and liquor. Important to note is that Lamar portrays himself in the same mentality in “Institutionalized”. Money and liquor is strongly tied to the consumption in *TPAB*. If one now connects this frame to the video as a whole it becomes clear that there is a continuity in the visual mode of catastrophic elements such as fire, explosions and violence.

Visual Mode (image/frame)	Aural Mode (lyrics/sound effects)	Synchronicity	Multimodal connections
<p>Man slammed face-first onto the ground and handcuffed. Runs away from the police officer seen earlier. Which pulls the trigger and the bullet flies in slow motion (01:31)</p>	<p>Lyrics: “While my loved ones was fighting a continuous war back in the city I was entering a new one A war that was based on Apartheid And discrimination”</p> <p>Sound effects:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Amplified sound effect when the man is slammed in the ground by the police - Gun shot sound effect 	<p>“Continuous war back in the city” after all the images of crime and violence and appearing synchronically with the man being slammed to the ground presumes a connection of lyrics and image.</p> <p>“Apartheid” appears synchronically with the police officer aiming his gun at the arrested man running concretizes the new war that Lamar is entering.</p> <p>“Discrimination” appears just before the trigger is pulled and the bullet is flying with a dramatic pause right before the shot.</p>	<p>Visual mode concretizes the aural mode by giving referents to the two war that Lamar is speaking about in his lyrics. One war is between those who commit crimes in the area, as we see people victim to violence and a young man running from a group of men dressed in black.</p> <p>The other war, which Kendrick enters after leaving Compton, is the war against racism. Racism that often leads to death through police brutality which is shown by the shot of the police brutality.</p>

Table 2.

The police brutality, gang activity, violence and destruction that the viewer has seen thus far is also affected by the aforementioned sensation of the daily that the video creates through time-passing elements and continuity in its spatiality. These events are described by Lamar, through the spoken-word, as “a continuous war” in the last phase of “the Prologue”. The word “continuous” strengthens this idea, as it indicates that these events are not rare or happens only this one time. The last lines of the spoken-word piece tell the viewer the situation that Lamar himself is in, as he says: “But while my loved ones was fighting a continuous war back in the city, I was entering a new one. A war that was based on apartheid and discrimination”. This sequence concludes the introduction of the video and the lyrics are concretized by the visual

mode. Here, Lamar lyrically confirms the state of the city in his choice of words. The situations of the people we have seen so far is described as “a continuous war”.

Lamar’s situation, however, is different. He is entering a new war. Based on “apartheid and discrimination” and is further concretized by the visual mode which presents a young man being arrested by the police. As he pushes the police officer away, and tries to escape, the police officer quickly pulls up his gun and fires it. We then see the bullet flying a short distance in slow motion. This is a good example of how the visual mode contributes to creating new meaning when in juxtaposition to the lyrics. The war that Lamar is entering is visually presented through the racism and more specifically the racially based police brutality. The word “apartheid” is furthermore uttered simultaneously as the cop pulls up his gun. This implies that there is a connection between the word “apartheid” and what is seen: a cop shooting towards a fleeing perpetrator of color. It becomes obvious for the viewer that the cop is trigger-happy and racist. He chooses to use his gun when violence was not necessary.

The last decade the news networks have been occupied with the several shooting incidents where white police officers shoot and kill unarmed African Americans without repercussions. Most infamous was the murder of Trayvon Martin, where the shooter and police officer was acquitted of the charges. This event sparked the #BlackLivesMatter-movement, which “Alright” unofficially became the anthem for. The visual presentations of police shooting in the “Alright” video share similar circumstances with the shooting of Trayvon Martin. Consequently, this concretizes the war that Lamar is entering, which is racism and police brutality in the U.S. His weapon of choice is clearly his voice and influence, and this part shows a Lamar that is set to take his influence seriously and apply it to make America a better place by fighting social injustice and criticizing structural racism in the U.S.

This speaks directly to Lamar’s duty as a butterfly which the “Poem of the Caterpillar and the Butterfly” describes as “to shine light on new situations” (Lamar, “Mortal Man”, 2015).

He is no longer a resident of the streets that the video show, however, he is still fighting the war based on discrimination. Lamar has the opportunity to shine light on the injustice that African Americans experience daily due to the color of their skin. Lamar as a butterfly also appears visually later in the video. But before that, however, I will consider the frame that follows, which provides depth to Lamar's situation of being a rapping butterfly. Hip hop has a long tradition of criticizing the police, and modern-day rappers have been successful in attracting mainstream attention to their music. The frame in image 3 satirically shows the relationship between rappers and the police and brings up interesting perspectives on how the social injustice presented through police brutality creates the content of rappers' lyrics.



Image 3

As the video approaches the two-minute mark, the mood and brightness change away from the catastrophic events presented in the introduction of the video. We see Lamar and his friends driving around in a car. The color and tone of the video has undergone a change, as the frame is now a lot brighter, and the effect highlights the lighter colors over the darker ones. The instrumental that starts playing at 02:10 adds to this lighter tone the viewer sees through the

visual, as it plays in a major scale, which often triggers more happy emotions, as opposed to the horns that were playing earlier, which played in a minor scale, often connected to sad or dramatic emotions. In the video, Lamar is accompanied by his friends, who are also rappers and signed to the record label Top Dawg Entertainment. In the front seat, next to Lamar, is Schoolboy Q and in the backseat sit Ab-Soul and Jay Rock. The frame that is most significant for this analysis is the frame shown in Image 3 where the car is revealed to be carried by cops, rather than wheels.

Visual Mode (image, frame)	Aural Mode (music, sound effects, lyrics)	Synchronicity	Multimodal connections
<p>Close-up shot of Lamar and his friends head-bopping to the music, while Lamar is driving and rapping. Brighter color shade and hints of daylight (01:55-02:30)</p> <p>The camera zooms out, while Jay Rock is pouring liquor out the window. The frame now shows four police officers that have replaced the wheels of the vehicle and are struggling to carry the vehicle forward.</p>	<p>Music:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Synthesizer arpeggio - Drum beat - Groovy bass <p>Sound Effects:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Sounds of vehicles - White noise to resemble generic city sounds <p>Lyrics: “To Pimp a Butterfly, another classic CD Ghetto lullaby for every one-day MC (Bluh! Bluh! Bluh! Bluh!) Nigga, now R.I.P My diligence is only meant to write your eulogy”</p>	<p>Heads bopping to the beat of the music.</p> <p>Camera zooms out to reveal the cops working as wheels synchronically with Lamar’s lyrics.</p>	<p>Interplay between aural and visual mode. Implied connections between the cops carrying the car, and meaning provided in lyrics</p>

Table 3.

The fact that all the men sitting inside the car are rappers, opens for interpretations created through the interplay of different modes. A close reading of the last two sentences shows how the interplay of different modes creates new meaning.

“Nigga, now R.I.P./ My diligence is only meant to write your eulogy”. Looking at the word ‘diligence’ in *OED*, there are two different definitions that apply to what Lamar is saying in his lyrics: diligence, *n.1* “constant and earnest effort to accomplish what is undertaken; persistent application and endeavor; industry, assiduity” (diligence, *n.1*, *OED*, 2020). With this definition in mind, the lyrics now suggest that Lamar’s hard work and success is meant to write eulogies to those who died from the violence in their neighborhood. Lamar may find honor and pride in telling stories and realities from where he grew up. This, unfortunately, includes eulogies, as death has a strong presence in these neighborhoods. However, if we combine this reading of the lyrics with what is seen through the visual mode a new meaning emerges.

Racial violence from police in black communities has long been a topic for rappers. Rapping about what happens around their neighborhood has allowed Lamar and his peers to be successful and wealthy. Therefore, the police brutality has paradoxically allowed Lamar and his friends to move forward and become successful because of the music it has led to. Every wheel of the car has been replaced with a white police officer which now embodies the role of the wheels – to move them forward, however at the expense of lives lost in the process. In film, according to Van Leeuwen, movement “is typically accompanied by the camera panning or tracking along with the movement” (Van Leeuwen, 2008, 91). This camera-effect enhances the perception of Lamar moving forward, both figuratively and literally. Lamar’s diligence (hard work) is then meant to write the eulogy of those who have died as the result of police brutality. However, since eulogies are written because of the police brutality, which is one of the topics that Lamar got famous rapping about, there is an indirect connection between the injustice that allowed Lamar to gain power and influence, and what he is now fighting to stop. In “Mortal Man”, Shakur, in the conversation with Lamar, says “We ain’t even really rappin’, we just letting our dead homies tell stories for us” (Lamar, “*Mortal Man*”, 2015). This sentiment is captured in the frame above through the interplay of the visual and the audio.

Looking at the other definition of “diligence” makes an analysis of visual modes in this frame more interesting in terms of what meaning is created. *OED* provides the secondary definition: “diligence, *n.2*: a public stage-coach” (“diligence, *n.2*, *OED*, 2020). This definition of the word is rarely used but is interesting when combining Lamar’s lyrics with what is seen in the frame. “Diligence” as a stagecoach complements the visual image of the police officers being the wheels of the car that brings Lamar and his peers forward in life. “My diligence” then refers to this particular car, which is powered by four white police officers. If we combine the meaning provided by the lyrics and the visual, the video creates a new meaning: the white police officer is only meant to write your eulogy. With this new meaning, “write your eulogy” may

work as the motive behind the lyrics that Lamar write about police brutality. The video has shown police in violent and hateful acts previously in the video, so the connection between police, violence and death is already established. Consequently, there is a new meaning created by the interplay of the aural and visual mode: The police is only meant for death (eulogies). Double entendre is a common feature of hip-hop lyrics, so the two versions are an example of Lamar's use of double entendre through the interplay of different modes. Common for double entendre, is that there is one meaning that is more obvious, whereas the other requires more thought. Given that "diligence" is rarely used as 'stage-coach' in present-day English, this reading may perhaps be the insinuation. Police officers should be the ones that offer safety, but a statement that "police only leads to death" may be the reality of being black in the U.S. today that Lamar wants to portray.

Through investigating another branch of the visual mode, human gestures, there is more detail to find about the latter interpretation. The police officers are struggling to keep the car moving forward. While the rappers that sit in the car are bouncing their head in a traditional hip hop rhythmic, their gestures also remind of someone riding something (in this case a car) and wanting it to go faster. The rapper Jay Rock, hanging out the window and pouring liquor down at the police officers also resembles filling up the gas of the car which would be done for it to go faster. The police officers are indeed moving the rappers forward, but not as fast as a normal car with an engine would. Perhaps then, this frame displays how police officers slows the progression of the African American community. The stagecoach (white police officers) is only meant for eulogies, not for bringing them forward.

Creating unity through the visual, textual and audio

Earlier in this chapter I have shown how “Alright”, through its continuity in spatial and temporal unfolding, creates the perception of every-day for the viewer watching and listening to the video. The everyday life is something that connects all humans, however what your everyday life includes may vary. Lamar presents a reality that connects the people who live under these exact circumstances that the video shows. Therefore, the continuity in the spatial unfolding is essential for “Alright” to create unity. Continuity is maintained by shots that have similar shades of color (black and white), recurrent shots of African Americans residents that are victim to social injustice in various forms and similar geographical landscapes. The video never breaks its spatial convention located in neighborhoods around the Bay Area. This is maintained in the cutting technique used in the video which is parallel cutting/montage. Konigsberg defines this as “cutting between two or more related actions occurring simultaneously at different locations or occurring at different times” (Konigsberg, 1998, 254). This technique enables “Alright” to show different people around the neighborhood at the same time, but at different locations. They are representations of different people with different fates, but part of the same community. The characters are therefore connected by the parallel cutting meanwhile they also portray different societal issues for this area. The synchronization of the cuts between different actions across different narrative strands suggests that there are many people that live under horrible conditions in neighborhoods around California.

Unity through music

Unity has so far been represented by each character being involved in something negative or dreadful, such as gang violence and police brutality. In “Mortal Man”, Lamar mentions that he feels the only thing the African American community has left are “music and vibrations”. The mood and tone of the video changes after the Prologue, however, and this is where the song, as

heard on the album, starts to play. Here, Lamar truly combine the aural and visual presentations in order to create unity.

Once the music starts to play after the Prologue in “Alright” it is initiated by a sample of different voices singing harmonic tones. This is the first element for creating unity through the music. The leading instrumental element of the instrumental is the choir-sample which is created by different voices singing in harmony. Voices in harmony may be considered as a symbol of unity in and of itself, as they work together to create something aesthetically pleasing which may connote the sensation of unity for the listener. During Lamar’s first verse, he is only accompanied by these harmonic voice samples and a saxophone. The simplicity of the instrumental in the first verse allows the lyrics to be easily heard and interpreted. In the first chorus that follows, several instruments accompany the voice-sample, most importantly the drums and bass. This create a contrast to the simple instrumental in the first verse and makes the chorus ‘hit’ harder in loudness and tension. There are also unifying linguistic deixis used throughout the lyrics which promotes the sensation of unity. Looking at the first verse, Lamar raps:

Alls my life I has to fight, nigga

Alls my life I...

Hard times, like “Yah!”

Bad trips like, “Yah!”

Nazareth, I’m fucked up

Homie, you fucked up

But if God got us then we gon’ be Alright

(Lamar, “*Alright*”, 2015)

Lamar specifically connotes unity through admitting his faults claiming that both himself and the unidentified “you” are “fucked up”. “Fucked up” is vague, and possibly this is Lamar’s intention. “Fucked up” may refer to any issue one is dealing with in their life, be it substance abuse, racism or poverty. Nevertheless, Lamar assures ‘you’ that “if God got us then we gon’ be Alright”. The use of the perceptual deixis “us” furthers the idea of unity and solidarity. Following this verse is the chorus, which is a straight-forward repetition of the same phrase “nigga, we gon’ be alright”, sung by artist Pharrell Williams. It should be noted how Lamar and Williams chose to use the n-word very frequently in the chorus, which may signify that they are primarily speaking for black people. After all, much of the social injustice that Lamar presents earlier in the video is aimed at black people specifically, and the police brutality is a demolishing force in achieving racial equality. It may therefore be likely that this song’s goal is to unify African Americans for them to stand in solidarity against racial inequality. There are other indicators of Alright being aimed at the inequality of people of color in the U.S. seen in the lyrics below:

Wouldn’t you know
We been hurt, been down before
Nigga, when our pride was low
Looking at the world like “where do we go?”
Nigga, and we hate po-po
Wanna kill us dead in the street fo sho
Nigga, I’m at the preacher’s door
My knees getting weak, and my gun might blow
But we gon’ be alright
(Lamar, “*Alright*”, 2015)

“Wouldn’t you know” is an idiom that may express dismay or discontent towards a situation. The perceptual deixis “we” continues to recur throughout the lyrics, and Lamar makes it clear that “we” are united in the inequality they are experiencing. The line “We been hurt, been down before” may refer to the history of racism and racial inequality in the U.S. Likely, Lamar refers to the physical and psychological hurt experienced by anyone being colored in America. The racism is so present that the hurt is something that unifies all black Americans. Lamar follows up with distress over not belonging somewhere. “When our pride was low, looking at the world like ‘where do we go?’” suggests that, speaking on behalf of black communities, he feels like there is no place for them. This suggest that racism perhaps cannot be run from, only fought, as this question is not given any answer in the song. Looking back at the album, however, Lamar has rapped about how his journey to Africa assured his self-growth⁵. This invites back the previous chapter’s discussion of ‘home’ and ‘away’ in the narrative. The treatment of African Americans in the U.S. creates conditions that are not worthy of being called a home. Looking back at *TPAB* as a whole, however, Lamar finds that visiting the ‘motherland’ of Africa provides him with new perspectives to apply to his life in the U.S. This gives “Alright” additional layers. The song chronologically comes before Lamar’s realizations in South Africa, however, especially if read through the music video, it also preaches the unity that Lamar learns the importance of from his journey.

The line “We hate po-po, wanna kill us dead in the street fo sho” received a lot of attention. Fox News’ Geraldo Rivera stated on television, after seeing Lamar performing “Alright” on the BET Awards, that “hip-hop has done more damage to young African Americans than racism in recent years” (Stutz/Gervino/Billboard, 2015). Lamar answered Rivera’s critique in an interview saying:

⁵ For more information on how the music contributes to creating unity, see Manabe’s musicological article (Manabe, 2018)

“Hip-hop is not the problem. Our reality is the problem of the situation. This is our music. This is us expressing ourselves. Rather [than] going out here and doing the murders myself, I want to express myself in a positive light the same way other artists are doing. Not going out in the streets, go in the booth and talking about the situation and hoping these kids can find some type of influence on it in a positive manner. “

(Lamar, *TMZ*, 2015)

Lamar emphasized in the interview how this song shows his reality and his world. He states that Rivera’s statement is an attempt to delude the real problem, which is “the killing of these young boys out here”. Lamar claims that it is not the hate towards the police in hip-hop lyrics that caused the flux in police brutality, but that the police brutality caused the hate towards the police. The lyrics are a result of the reality black Americans live in, and the feeling that police want to kill them in the streets. And this feeling is something that unites African Americans today, which is seen by the song’s popularity and the use of the song in #BlackLivesMatter protests, many of which were against police brutality.

The instrumental in the chorus is moreover amplified by drums and bass which significantly increases both loudness and tension. The addition of drums and bass contributes to a head-bopping effect as the hi-hat and the snare drum triplets add more rhythm to the song. The vocal sung by Williams is variations of the same line “we gon’ be alright”. The simplicity of the lyrics in the chorus may also contribute to the unifying effects of “Alright”. The pitch of the vocal is neither high nor low, which also makes the chorus easy to sing along to, while the rhythm of the vocal makes it catchy.

To accompany the unifying elements in the lyrics of “Alright”, Lamar also uses other techniques. The most important can be seen in the frames presented below. I want to note how

the sensation of the daily still follows the narrative when the song starts, as there are no significant breaks in color, tone, spatiality or temporality. An example of the continuity of the everyday through spatiality and temporality can be seen specifically in frames that show typical daily activities like one where a man is eating, and another is smoking by the pavement. Van Leeuwen addresses how time in discourse can be presented through “social activities that are timed in relation to other activities” and how time can be represented and punctuated e.g. through “the rhythms of daily activities” (Van Leeuwen, 2008, 78). One man eating and another man smoking connotes the rhythm of everyday life. This image is not affected by dramatic sound effects and mood that surrounded the introduction of the video, and clearly has a more positive tone which is amplified through the hopeful lyrics and music. In these images we see sunlight reflecting from the car’s windshield, something that would be edited away if this image was a part of the introduction. This sequence promotes unity, as the next image will show, where sunlight is used to bring a joyous sensation.

Carol Vernallis addresses how normally, music videos frequently use low-angle shots “partly because they reproduce the relations among audience, performance and stage” (Vernallis, 2001, 28). Interestingly, Lamar chose to more frequently use high-angle shots in order to create unity. The reason behind this, is to avoid the viewer of seeing him as a single black American, but as a part of a greater community, where he is simply one of the others. This builds on the sentiment of unity that concludes the “Poem of the Caterpillar and the Butterfly”; “although the caterpillar and the butterfly are completely different, they are one and the same” (Lamar, “*Mortal Man*”, 2015).



Image 4

In Image 4, we see a concrete image of unity and togetherness. In this frame all the local residents are gathered to a party and Kendrick is the front man. They dance and jump to the beat while singing to the lyrics. The shot allows the viewer to see the facial traits of everyone in the frame and empowers the sensation of unity. It appears important for Lamar that not only his face is shown, but all the faces that represent the neighborhood are visible for the viewer.

The idea of ‘power in numbers’ is furthermore important for “Alright” to work as an anthem for racial equality. In protests, it is the group of people asking for change that makes it powerful, not the one voice that addresses the wish. For “Alright” to be a protest song, it must evoke the feeling of a protest, which is naturally done by showing unity through a group of people fighting together for a cause. By looking back at the concluding statement of the spoken-word poem in its entirety, it becomes clear how this video continues to concretize the poetic foundation of the album. The last line of the spoken-word poem says “If I respect you, we unify and stop the enemy from killing us” (Lamar, “*Mortal Man*”, 2015). “The enemy” has been concretized both by the white police officer shooting an unarmed black man, but also in the consumer mentality that many of the human participants recreate.

Looking at Image 4, the dollar bills are still there, however they lie on the ground and do not get the attention from the participants, they all look upwards towards the camera. The lyrics of the chorus sings: “If God got us, then we gon be alright”. The camera-angle may allude the idea that they have changed their attention to the non-materialistic and the spiritual, rather than their vices.

Additionally, a side-statement is necessary to emphasize the level of detail in the video for “Alright”. The frame in Image 4 reappears several times throughout the video, and in one of them Lamar is being carried by the group in a stage-dive-like fashion. This scene bears significance to the album’s title *To Pimp a Butterfly*. One of the things that derives from the consumer mindset is the caterpillar’s wish “to pimp the butterfly”. In the “Poem of the Caterpillar and the Butterfly”, this is described as when “the caterpillar sees the butterfly as weak and figures out a way to pimp it to its own benefits”. If the participants in the video are read as caterpillars, and Lamar as a butterfly, the frame where he is being carried and celebrated opposes this “pimping”. In the frame Lamar is cherished for his work, rather than seen as a resource to continue their consumption. This idea can be transferred to e.g. African Americans stealing from other African Americans that are successful, like how Lamar depicts himself in “Institutionalized” when his “defense mechanisms” makes him want to steal from another man that is flashing his success (Lamar, “*Institutionalized*”, 2015). It is safe to say that Lamar is truly against this behavior, because he has learned that it counteracts the unity that he is working for. This idea is also presented textually in “Alright”, and is how Lamar starts his first verse: “Uh, and when I wake up / I recognize you lookin’ at me for the pay cuts / But homicide be lookin’ at you from the face down” (Lamar, “*Alright*”, 2015). The beat stops as he raps these lyrics, which indicates that Lamar wants this line to get attention. It is a common trick for hip hop artists to let the beat stop when they want to draw attention to a specific line they rap. The lyrics thus provide more depth to the idea of “pimping the butterfly”. It underlines how the

consumer mentality does not save you from the racially based police brutality. Lamar recognizes how people (both fellow African Americans and the white entertainment industry) look at him for his economic value, but not for his traits as a human or work as an artist. In other words, people want a piece of his cake.

The next line starts with the contrasting conjunction “but”, which dismisses the preceding line. As proven earlier, Lamar has learned that wealth does not save you from how the country treats you because of the color of your skin. Even though your wallet is thick, the homicide department will look at you “from the face down”. Lamar highlights again the presence of death in the lives of African Americans. The line can be read as simply as addressing how African American young men’s cause of death is homicide, either as a result of gang violence or police brutality. An even more interesting aspect of this line are the words “face down”. They indicate how the homicide department of the police only see the back of the head of a murdered young man. The ones that die of police are thus anonymized. It perhaps speaks to how America as a whole deal with the many tragic deaths of young African American men. They are simply just one of many, without respect for the individual that has been murdered, his family and friends.



Image 5 (History.com Editors, 2013)

Protests from the #BlackLivesMatter-movement has however counteracted this tendency. Image 5 shows how one face is able to unify the African American community and others to battle against this injustice. Giving the victim a face and a story is an important tool to enhance the perceived seriousness of this social issue. Behind Trayvon Martin’s face tragically also lies a vast amount of similar cases. How the face of a victim of police brutality can create such a unifying force emphasizes the tragic reality that Lamar’s lyrics portray: that the police and white America only see victims of police brutality as a nobody. The threat that African Americans live under, also finds its way in the concluding segment of the video of “Alright”.

Visuals of *TPAB*’s central poetic theme: The Butterfly

Lamar visually appears several times with effects that create an image of him as a butterfly. The several frames of him flying through the streets that the viewer is now familiar with. Lamar is only standing on the ground in one frame, which is the frame that Image 4 shows. Later in a

similar shot, he is also seen hanging upside-down above the group dancing and singing. This can be interpreted as imitating a cocoon. I return now to what I have labelled *TPAB*'s poetic foundation based on the spoken-word poem and the "Poem of the Caterpillar and the Butterfly". As stated previously, the latter poem's definition of the butterfly is that it "shines light on situations that the caterpillar never considered". I will now explore how this definition makes its way into the video of "Alright" and creates the base for Lamar's role in the video, thus proving how significant the poem is to the concept of the album.

I will begin by considering how the video portrays the vulnerability of the butterfly. The threat that the butterfly lives under is highlighted in many of the songs on the album, but specifically in "King Kunta" and "Mortal Man". In the latter, through comparisons to other black leaders, like Nelson Mandela, Lamar indicates that to work against the structural injustice that is racism he is under the risk to be demonized, incarcerated or at worst even killed. Nevertheless, he claims that he is up for the task, but asks his fans to stand behind him when, as he calls it, "shit hits the fan" (Lamar, "Mortal Man", 2015). An example of this is the aforementioned Fox News reporter Geraldo Rivera's using Lamar's lyrics and live performance of "Alright" to argue that hip hop has done more harm to African American youth than racism in the last years. This situation proves that there truly are forces working against Lamar's work for unity and racial equality. Moving back to the video now, I will show how the multimodal interplay of the last scenes in the video captures the metaphor of the butterfly, what Lamar expresses about the power he possesses and the forces that work against him.



Image 6

The image above, is a frame from the last scene in the video of “Alright”. It shows Lamar standing on top of a lamppost, singing the chorus and the outro of the song. First, this image captures the metaphor of the butterfly. Lamar has previously been flying through the city, made a stop on a traffic light post for the second verse, and is now standing on top of a lamppost.

Looking at this image with the poem’s definition of the butterfly in mind it becomes apparent how the video visually recreates the poetic foundation of the album and the butterfly’s ability to “shine light”. The lamppost is what literally lights up the neighborhoods that the video has portrayed. Lamar figuratively lights up the streets. This frame concludes the video and there is a reason for it. Earlier, the video has shown different events through the course of a day in these streets. The prologue has shown the viewer how an instance of police brutality can occur. There is done little to highlight the details of the man being arrested by the police. He may be guilty; he may not be. Nevertheless, the video emphasizes the lack of justification that the police officer has to pull the trigger. Furthermore, the video has concretized the consumer mentality of the caterpillars and thus connected the consumer mentality up to the oppression. Looking back at the album, Lamar has provided a narrative that the young African American men can

look to for finding meaning to their lives and to escape “the feeling of being stagnant” that the poem portrays. He concludes with taking his influence seriously in order to help the future of African American kids that grow up in poverty.

The events prior and after Lamar is first shown on top of the lamppost will now be discussed. First of all, I want to bring back how Lamar portrays the threat African American men are under when they get what everyone wants: money and power. When Lamar is singing from atop of the lamppost, a police car pulls up. Out of the car steps another police officer that has not appeared in the video before. He sees Lamar and takes his shotgun with him out of the car. The video shifts back to Lamar for a brief second, and then back to the police officer that no longer has his gun out. Instead the police officer looks up at Lamar and makes a finger pistol with his right hand and aims at Lamar as the song ends. When the music stops, he pulls the trigger on his finger pistol, but to the sound of a real gun. A bullet penetrates Lamar’s chest and blood spills out of his back. He falls off the lamppost in slow motion, and the same part of the spoken-word poem that was in the prologue is heard in the audio mode. This scene recreates how the album depicts the threat that black men in power are under, most exemplary in the songs “King Kunta” and “Mortal Man”.

It is important to remember that Lamar plays himself. He is a successful artist with all the money, fame and power that comes with it. Yet, he is still murdered by the police officer. This scene proves how Lamar does not differ himself from the caterpillar and displays how racism does not have boundaries when it comes to the victim’s income or fame. This idea is highlighted by the concluding lines of the “Poem of the Caterpillar and the Butterfly”: “Although the butterfly and the caterpillar are completely different, they are one and the same”. This principle transfers over to experiencing racism and police brutality as the video both portrays how both the caterpillar and the butterfly end up in front of a police officer’s firing gun.

I want to also highlight another detail of this scene that connects the caterpillar and the butterfly. In this scene, the bullet clearly hits Lamar from another angle than the police officer's finger pistol is aiming. The blood spills out in a way that would happen if he was shot by a bullet coming straight towards his chest and not from below. Additionally, the police officer is pointing a finger pistol, and not a real gun. Looking back at the scene where the other police officer shoots towards the fleeing suspect, this sequence never shows the young man being hit by the bullet. Additionally, when the spoken-word reappears, there is a new instance of synchronicity between the visual and the audio. As the line "misusing your influence" is read, the camera shows the police officer. This may indicate how older, racist police officer influence the younger ones with their evil attitudes. There may thus be a connection between these two sequences that highlight the sameness of the caterpillar and the butterfly. The butterfly is shot by the same bullet that is aimed towards the caterpillar. This may be an indication that Lamar sees the issue of police brutality and racism still concerning him. The death of the caterpillar is the death of him, so to speak, as they are "one and the same".

This idea brings back the concept of unity that the song "Alright" is all about. Through this scene Lamar stands together with everyone less fortunate than himself. The issue is not concerning low-income African American neighborhoods, it also concerns him. Lamar was born and raised in a similar neighborhood and it created the content for what made him reach his level of influence. Naturally then, he wants to continue to give back to his foundation and still feels strongly connected to it. One of his ways of giving back, is by shining light on what is destroying these neighborhoods, which is exactly what the video of "Alright" does. The connection between these two scenes may in other words be a way to connect himself to the cause of ending racial inequality in the U.S. He preaches unity and knows well he must himself partake in the unification of the African American community.

The last scene thus portrays a man willing to die for the cause, which again raises historical connotations to other civil rights activists, more specifically Martin Luther King Jr. Another ‘butterfly’ that shined its light onto the darkness of the injustice that African Americans were and are still born into. Remembering the last lines of the spoken-word poem in “the Prologue”, Lamar is fighting “a war based on apartheid and discrimination”. “Apartheid” connects him to Nelson Mandela, while “discrimination” connects him to Martin Luther King Jr. The metaphor of the butterfly is easily applicable to all of the black leaders that have influenced Lamar, where many of them are referenced in Lamar’s final song about influence, “Mortal Man”. What Lamar then does through this scene, is to further the “other” narrative, which was described in the previous chapter. The African American narrative that he then constructs and conveys is that no power, money or influence can, yet, abolish the presence of violence in their lives. The video thus far has presented different fates, where violence is the outcome that connects all of them. The young man that lies face down on the pavement, the man shot by the officer after attempting to escape his arrest, and the peaceful butterfly of Lamar, that only through his presence and words brings attention to the others, all ultimately share the same fate.

This then raises the question to the audience: what would you rather die doing? As Lamar hits the ground, his eyes close, but at the very end they open, and he smiles towards the camera. The smile at the end may have different interpretations, but if read in lines with the question asked above, it might come from Lamar knowing that he fought back against the injustice and that ultimately it is going to be “alright”. Lamar has contributed to the African American culture, creating something inevitably “black” that young kids can look up to and take inspiration from as they develop their lives. Lamar’s previous album, *good kid, m.A.A.d. city* biographically portrays a young man growing up in an area where gangs rule the street and trying to avoid being caught by this lifestyle. *TPAB* further builds the story of this man, that has

now learned to see his adolescence from the outside, that has found answers to the questions his adolescence raised. Now he begins to fight another war, what the spoken-word poem describes as, “the war based on apartheid and discrimination” that is the structural racism that ravishes in the country.

In the final part of the analysis below, I will return to Lamar’s insistency on developing this narrative. Through the presence of kids in white t-shirts, the video of “Alright” highlights the importance of Lamar’s own narrative. The following analysis will demonstrate how one of Lamar’s weapons in “the war based on apartheid and discrimination” is his influence and his narrative.

The Butterfly’s great example

In the introduction, I mentioned an interview on the radio show *Hot 97*, where Lamar addresses the topic of his single “i” being labelled pop music. Lamar insists on turning labelling back to its origins. The song uses a Soul sample from The Isley Brothers and Lamar tells the radio hosts about how the new generation hears an Isley Brothers’ sample and labels the song pop, rather than highlighting how the sample is from Soul music. He continues saying that he tries to “revamp that whole thing, and put it back to its original origins ... and not be scared to say: “This is not that, this is black! Young kids gotta know this!” (Lamar, *Hot 97*, 2014). *TPAB* without exception uses main samples from a variety of historically black music genres and artists. What Lamar touches upon in this interview is how everything is drawn into the mainstream culture, which is dominated by white people. He wishes to create another narrative, one that does not fit the mainstream, and is relatable for the ones who cannot find themselves in the culture of the majority. Significantly, he wants this to be clear for every young African American growing up, because he knows that this brings them a step closer to becoming the

'butterfly', which every caterpillar has the potential of becoming. I will now explore what role the "young kids" play in the video of "Alright" and how their role relates to Lamar's creation of a narrative for "the other". I will use two different images to discuss how the video emphasizes the importance of alternative narratives and how it shows how different narratives create different paths that kids can choose to follow. I will also interpret how "Alright" depicts the consequences of the different paths accordingly.

In the video, there are several young men that participate. Certain participants wear white t-shirts. Some may consider the white t-shirt as a sort of a 'hood uniform'. It is a regular piece of clothing to wear for young men growing up in neighborhoods like the streets that the video depicts. However, I will argue that the white color of the t-shirts in "Alright" speak to something greater, it portrays the innocence of the kids that wear them. The way the video portrays this innocence is through the traits of the characters that wear them. There are only specific participants that wear white t-shirts, the others wear black. By looking back at the scene of the gang members' violent consumption, one can see that they all wear black clothes. The prologue shows a certain set of characters that wear white t-shirts. At 0:36 the young man lying face down on the pavement is wearing a white t-shirt. Shortly after the video also shows three kids are riding their bikes down a hill while wearing white t-shirts. Later, the prologue shows the young man being chased downhill by a group all wearing black.



Image 7

This frame shows how the video visually differentiate the participant's clothing to create meaning. As mentioned, Page's definition of semiotic resources also includes "color", "dress" and "human gestures" as a way of creating meaning (Page, 2009). The interplay between colors, their clothes and their actions here contribute in the creation of new meaning. The colors of the participants' clothes communicate something more than what they actually wear. It tells the viewer something about the individual characters that wear them. Through human gesture, we see the relationship between these two colors and what they represent. The young man in white is looking behind him and running away from the ones that wear black. The gang members shown earlier also wear black, so one assume that these two groups of people belong to each other. The black color then represents affiliation of gangs and the consumer mentality. The young kids riding their bikes earlier in the prologue also wear white t-shirts, so this young man then is connected to what they symbolize. They are very young, and riding their bikes around, clearly implying innocence. Now, the young man in image 7 is clearly older than the ones that ride their bikes, and perhaps is at a point where he has to make his own decisions for the future

of his life. The “Poem of the Caterpillar and the Butterfly” tells the listener how the caterpillars are forced into adopting “a harsh outlook on life” and learns to “consume everything around it” (Lamar, “Mortal Man”, 2015). What image 7 then portrays may be a concretization of how this mindset chases the caterpillar. The group of young men wearing black, representing the consumer mentality, are chasing a young man that has not yet adopted this mentality. The image now creates two options for the young man in white: to keep running or to embrace what the group in black represent. Returning to the words of the Butterfly himself, Lamar, and his spoken-word poem during the prologue: “The evils of Lucy was all around me, so I kept running” (Ibid.).

Looking at other semiotic resources in image 7, the ground itself may contribute to the creation of meaning. Hills appear in different frames in the video and the participants either go down the hill or up the hill throughout. The prologue that portrays the consumer mentality and the mad city only show participants going down a hill. Uphill or downhill are commonly used metaphors for describing the hard way or the easy way. These metaphors can be applied the video of “Alright”, as both “uphill” and “downhill” are presented under different circumstances in the video. Downhills appear in the prologue, and the uphill in the last scene, which will be discussed later. The prologue, however, represents the destroying forces in the neighborhood. The young man then running downhill, may represent “the easy way”, which is to succumb to the consumer mentality. The fate of choosing the easy way is presented even before the viewer sees him running downhill, as he is previously seen face-down on the pavement. The scene that follows the frame that image 7 shows, is of the man being thrown to the ground and arrested by the police. The video thus presents two different outcomes of choosing the easy way. The first is shown earlier in the prologue where the young man lies on the pavement, possibly dead as a result of gang violence. The other one follows immediately after image 7, where a man is being arrested. This frame implies the two results: either death by the gun of a police officer, or prison.

These two different fates are both infused by the concept of institutionalization. The first by the mental institutionalization, as “The Poem of the Butterfly” describes, as not being able to “see past his own thoughts”. The other through physical institutionalization through prison or death.

Now we return to the ones whose fate has not been decided, the kids in white t-shirts riding their bikes. The kids ride downhill during the prologue, but luckily, through the appearance of a butterfly, another path is enlightened for them to take.



Image 8

Many things happen between image 7 and 8, but most significant for this discussion is the appearance of the butterfly, visually represented by Lamar flying through the streets, rapping and singing his wisdom. When the butterfly flies before the people, they look up at him, smiling with a sense of pride in their look. Lamar symbolizes the impossible made possible, and what the poem describes as “the talent, the thoughtfulness and the beauty within the caterpillar”. What is most significant in applying this definition of the butterfly over to the video of “Alright” is how the caterpillars see themselves in the butterfly. The choice of wording of “inside the caterpillar” is significant, as it immediately connects the two. Both the caterpillar and the

butterfly are thus described as talented, thoughtful and beautiful. But one caterpillar must evolve in order for other caterpillars to follow. This is how Lamar's role in "Alright" works, true to the poetic foundation of the album and to his insistency on creating a relatable African American narrative of Bildung. Further into the interview on *Hot 97*, he gives detail on his single "i" and tells the hosts how he wants to be an example of self-love and pride for the ones that are locked up in penitentiaries, and for the kids that go to his shows with marks of self-harm (Lamar, *Hot 97*, 2014). It becomes clear that Lamar wants to lead by example, and this is what the concept of *TPAB* is really about. Going back to image 8 now, I want to consider the meaning-making capabilities of the white t-shirts and the uphill metaphor.

Before the kids make a return in the video, the viewer sees Lamar singing from atop of the lamppost, as seen in Image 6. What triggers their enthusiasm is clearly Kendrick Lamar, but what he represents is more important than who he is. Here, the double meaning behind the white t-shirt is significant. It must be read as both a 'hood uniform' and as a symbol of innocence. The 'uniform' characterizes the kids by situating them socially and geographically. It tells the viewer that they are growing up in a neighborhood like the one the video depicts, troubled daily by the presence of violence and police brutality, and just like the streets of Compton where Lamar grew up. The importance behind this lies in his credibility as a narrator. The path he symbolizes is not relatable if he has not grown up under the same circumstances, as his narrative must describe their reality. The innocence that the t-shirts symbolize thus highlights the importance of Lamar's story, which is to provide a narrative to kids of the future that will grow up in the same environment and that still have a choice to make.

As the kids make their return, the ground beneath them has changed. Seeing and chasing Lamar leads them uphill. This then refers to how hard it is to take another path; however, the path is enlightened by his example. Throughout *TPAB*, he provides the necessary tools for the hard way. The tools include getting new perspectives on things by "going home", to avoid how

society is structured to make you behave, and to start loving yourself. Lamar as a butterfly “shines light on situations that the caterpillar never considered”, and thus presents an alternative path. Following his example, one can find comfort in his songs too, as each song describes the different stages of self-growth as an African American.

In this chapter I have investigated how using different modes of communication, Lamar is able to capture and convey the concept and message of unity of the album to a viewer in the span of under seven minutes. Through juxtaposing the unity presented in the lyrics and music of “Alright” with visual representations of the two poems, he is able to concretize the album itself. The video highlights the importance of representation and positive influence and provides a narrative for every good kid that is born into a ‘mad city’. It gives a realistic image of growing up in certain neighborhoods around the U.S., as it does not censor the presence of violence. Rather, it uses the interplay of different modes to emphasize what *TPAB* presents as the most important: unity. Additionally, there is a great amount of respect towards all the characters that “Alright” presents. Lamar, respects ‘butterflies’ and ‘caterpillar’s alike, as the album and the video highlights how society forces African Americans into a certain mindset. The last scene of the video connects them all, as it expresses how the community must stand together against the unjust treatment from society that both ‘butterflies’ and ‘caterpillars’ experience. Now, how this music video should be read in connection to the totality of *TPAB* has become clear: it stays true to the themes, poetics and messages that the album presents.

Conclusion

This thesis has investigated several aspects of Lamar's 2015 success album, *To Pimp a Butterfly*. Other scholars tend to examine isolated topics of the album and "Alright", such as religious symbolism, and musicological aspects of Lamar's rapping. This thesis is more interested in the totality of the narrative and how it complements the culture of African American narratives. All of the aspects that other scholars investigate are important in their own right; I am interested in how they all work together in order to create a narrative. For instance, psychological readings of the song "u" give important insight on the song itself, but this thesis, however, reads each song as stages in the process of self-growth and connected to the overall narrative. I consider that the overt 'blackness' of the album should be emphasized. Not only do I argue this on the basis of interviews of Lamar, but also the textual, auidial and visual evidence that underline this statement. Fulton addresses how Lamar uses the African American culture and history in order to create something new (Fulton, 2015). The present thesis furthers this aspect and proves how it creates a narrative that challenges the traditional literary topos of self-growth. This thesis demonstrates how Lamar problematizes what African Americans could call 'home' and 'away'. As the lyrics of "Alright" says, they are: "Lookin' at the world like 'where do we go?'" (Lamar, "Alright", 2015). The narrative presented in *TPAB* differs from the 'white mainstream' in the realization that in order to grow personally Lamar has to travel 'home', as opposed to the traditional journey 'away'. In the "Poem of the Caterpillar and the Butterfly", Lamar's narrative also connects to the topos of 'childhood-adolescence-adulthood'. The poem's metaphor is similar to the traditional topos in how it presents the process of self-growth, however, the conditions that *TPAB* describes are specifically relatable for African Americans. The conditions are unique in the way the protagonist is lured into a certain mindset. The consumer mentality increases the presence of violence, but as *TPAB* and the video for "Alright"

show, it does not disappear after reaching the final stage of the process. What the protagonist learns in the final stage is the importance of unity. This thesis demonstrates how the two poems connect to this process.

I have devoted most space and time to the music video of “Alright” in this thesis in order to show how the song connects to the final stage of the process’ emphasis on unity. The video has an interesting relationship to the narrative, which is created through the interplay of different modes. In a music video, several modes of communication are active. This allows it to grasp more aspects from the album, in a short amount of time, than only audio would. Through the visual mode, the different stages of the metaphor in the “Poem of the Caterpillar and the Butterfly” are represented. It is not a coincidence that Lamar chooses “Alright” to be accompanied by these images. As scholars have shown, the song itself has musicological and textual elements that gives it a unifying power (Manabe, 2018). This thesis, however, has not profoundly investigated the musicology of the song. Some work has been done already by scholars with more knowledge about musicology than I have. The same point applies to *TPAB*’s connection to the song cycle. There are musicological definitions of the song cycle that the present thesis has not investigated, such as “harmonic progression, or harmonic/contrapuntal complex; ...a logical key succession; ...the association of key and character, or, of musical character with the ongoing progress of the work.” (Gingerich, 65, 2010). This is not to say that the album necessarily would fail to meet these requirements. As skilled musicians as Lamar and his co-workers are, there is undoubtedly more information to be retrieved from looking at the musicological aspects of *TPAB* as a song cycle. Regardless of genre, I wanted to highlight how Lamar created a work that contributes to making a future where caterpillars and butterflies live in unity.

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