

CASH RULES EVERYTHING AROUND ME: Reading the Recuperation of Hip-hop through Rancière's Political Aesthetics and Attali's Distinguishing of Signal and Noise

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Abstract

Since Rancière, critical, cultural and social theorists have broadly accepted that aesthetics are inherently political. For instance, while the normalization of certain marginal voices can be understood as a distinguishing of signal and noise, the way in which aesthetic homogenization can become compulsory within certain communities is often cited as a mode by which accepted aesthetic paradigms can enforce social or ideological positions. As such, it would seem that the ability to broadcast/popularize minority or radical aesthetic paradigms would be a potent way to normalize those voices and forward alternative ideological agendas. However, the Situationists noted that aesthetics are also easily co-opted by the hegemony and can thus be stripped of their revolutionary potential; they dubbed this process, "recuperation." Illustrating this co-optive process, this paper identifies the aesthetic norms of hip-hop culture through the application of Rancière's "distribution of the sensible" and then traces how those norms have been co-opted, ultimately undermining hip-hop's aesthetics-based revolutionary potential. However, and in order to suggest an alternative mode of radicalism, we combine Rancière's aesthetic taxonomy with Attali's, proposing a shift in focus away from "pure aesthetics" as a mode of radicalism and towards distribution as a future potential mode of revolutionary cultural production.

Introduction

In 2013, for the MTV Video Music Awards (VMA), Miley Cyrus (a white, female, pop singer launched by Disney) performed her now infamous 'twerking' spectacle. 'Twerking' is a dance style that, while popularized by pop stars like Cyrus, originated in the New Orleans Bounce music scene (a subgenre of hip-hop) in the 1990s. [1] Internet commenters responded to Cyrus' performance with critiques ranging from, commenters who were scandalized by Cyrus' overt sexuality and apparent tastelessness [2] to politically and racially charged critiques of Cyrus' appropriation of black culture and objectification of black bodies [3].

The range of these critiques exemplifies the multi-vocal network of micro-communities engaging in their own specific identity politics which characterizes the current landscape of cultural production and consumption in the network age. For Rancière, such a multi-vocal network would seem practically utopian, owing to the privileged position he affords to speech as an a priori condition to participation in government. This privileged position is

based on an Aristotelian reading of citizenship as defined by having a stake in government, and thus a requirement to not only to speak, but to be heard/recognized as speaking, hear-able.¹ [4] For Rancière, aesthetics "is a delimitation of spaces and times, of the visible and the invisible, of speech and noise." [5]

Moreover, the disparate critiques of Cyrus' performance also reflect Rancière's politics in that each of these critiques is premised on a general acceptance of an aesthetico-political paradigm which, as Rancière suggests in *The Politics of Aesthetics*, is represented by "the trajectory of Situationist discourse -- stemming from an avant-garde artistic movement in the post-war period, developing into a radical critique of politics in the 1960s, and absorbed today into the routine of the disenchanting discourse that acts as the 'critical' stand-in for the existing order." [6]

By characterizing this discourse in this way, Rancière roots the current aesthetico-political paradigm in Situationist ideology/discourse. This ideology can be identified by the use of avant garde artistic practices to undermine 'the spectacle,' as described by Guy Debord in his *Society of the Spectacle*. In his text, Debord considers how spectacular aesthetics blind a population to the undemocratic reality of their existence by directing their attention toward the normalized activity of consumption. Thus, the spectacle is instrumental in forwarding the capitalist agenda as it relays the message that consumption is the individual's proper role in a society. [7] To combat the power of the spectacle, the Situationists staged avant garde art events (situations), which were meant to disrupt the normalized aesthetics of the spectacle, to present potential contra-narratives, and to build communities

¹ Of course, in practice, the seemingly democratic nature of online communication is undermined by the forces of uneven technological access, the rise of web 2.0, and the subsequent re-emergence of portal-based browsing (among others). However, while these conditions undermine the inherently democratic structure of internet technology, the internet still lends voice to a much wider population than in previous epochs -- and is thus, more democratic in structure, if not in practice). Furthering the principality of heard-ness within his philosophy, Rancière situates the political nature of aesthetics in the ability of aesthetics to create communities based on the social construction of shared aesthetic forms (to socially distinguish signal from noise.)

around those narratives. In essence, the Situationists sought to undermine the hegemonic sign system perpetuated by capitalism by injecting the voice of a radical 'Other.'

But, as the theorist McKenzie Wark points out, almost as soon as this mode of radicalism was formalized, it was already being 'recuperated' – co-opted by the capitalist hegemony and integrated back into the spectacle:

Recuperation began from the very moment the Situationist International was founded... the organization was dissolved precisely because its recuperation was by 1972 already complete. ... It had become merely a collective celebrity, part of the spectacular consumption of 'radical chic.' [8]

Thus, the toothlessness Rancière associates with this mode of criticality can be ascribed to this recuperation, or making clichéd, of the Situationist discourse.

Recuperation then, as a process of capitalism's colonization of radical voices, offers another reading of Cyrus' performance. In this case, Cyrus' performance can be read as a symptom of this process of 'recuperation,' "the activity of society as it attempts to obtain possession of that which negates it." [9] As such, Cyrus' performance would suggest an alternative reality to the hypothesis forwarded by the Situationist mode of radicalism, one in which capitalism absorbs radical voices and ultimately renders them mute through their resulting ubiquity.

Shortly after Cyrus' VMA performance, 'twerking' was added to the online Oxford English Dictionary as: "[to] dance to popular music in a sexually provocative manner involving thrusting hip movements and a low, squatting stance." [10] Strikingly, this definition completely divorces twerking from its ethnic, urban, and cultural roots in the New Orleans Bounce scene and removes any potency it may have had as a symbol of those roots. This breaking of the relationship between the sign (twerking) and the referent (low-income, urban, black, southern culture) is realized through the appropriation of the sign by an increasingly broad cross-section of the population which impregnates it with more significance than is sustainable. Thus, we see how the sign, 'twerking,' once associated with a particular micro-identity, is subject to a degradation of meaning through ubiquitous use; ultimately rendering the signifier entropic, static, or without a discernable referent. This process results in a signifier that ceases to have any continued political or cultural valence. Furthermore, twerking was not simply rendered "mute" (Rancière), but through this process was commodified and integrated into the spectacle.

Much of the criticism launched at Cyrus in the wake of her 2013 performance was premised on Cyrus' (mis)appropriation, resulting from her privileged position as an attractive, cis-gendered, white celebrity. However, while Cyrus is certainly complicit in the process of recuperation, in so far as she is an object of the spectacle, the actual tension within Cyrus' performance might be less the result of cultural insensitivity on the part of Cyrus, and more symptomatic of the culturally systemic process of recuperation, as it is realized today. Since, this example reveals how the process of recuperation silences radical

voices by making them into cliché, for the revolutionary, activist, or activist artist, there lies an inherent tension between the political promise of aesthetics to create and to give voice to communities, and the recuperation via appropriation that will undoubtedly follow the emergence of that voice, normalize the voice, and, ultimately, render it again invisible and powerless.

Broadening the frame from the single incident of Cyrus' VMA performance, we can see how this process of recuperation through appropriation is realized throughout the history of American hip-hop. By tracing the lineage of hip-hop in terms of Rancière's "distribution of the sensible," we will be able to not only show how cultural products are inherently political, in that they give voice to the disenfranchised, but also to draw out those aesthetic elements of hip-hop which are appropriate-able and thus recuperable. Furthermore, we will be able to show how within Rancière's "aesthetic regime of the arts," the necessary link between signifiers and their referents has been broken [11] and that the resulting "aesthetic free play," which for Rancière reflects "a kind of liberty and equality," [12] actually necessitates that we look outside of Rancière's aesthetic taxonomy towards transmission as a more effective means by which a cultural product might actually forward an "anti-spectacle" agenda without being silenced by the forces of recuperation.

Rancière's Concretization of Forms

Thus, to trace the lineage of the hip-hop aesthetic, it is also necessary to explicate Rancière's aesthetic taxonomy and to relate that taxonomy to hip-hop's initial construction of an aesthetic language. Hip-hop was born in the African and Jamaican neighborhoods of the Bronx, during the mid 1970s, as a form of folk music. As the musical form matured, it grew beyond being just light hearted party music and, by the 1980s, had developed into a vehicle for sociopolitical commentary. Accompanied by a slowing United States economy, this politicized hip-hop had a ready-made audience in the youths of low-economic areas. Throughout this period, hip-hop's ability to reflect the social, economic and political realities of the disenfranchised launched it as a popular musical genre and (ironically) contributed significantly to its growing commercial viability. While, since the 2000s, there has been a steady decline in the production of hip-hop music, [13] the language, musical forms, fashion, dance styles, and history have been reclaimed by – and now frequently appear in – many alternate facets of mass/popular culture; for instance, in the example of Cyrus' VMA performance.

It is these same elements which Rancière identifies as defining the aesthetic of the cultural product, in the process of its concretization as a recognizable cultural artifact. Rancière defines aesthetics in terms of a "distribution of the sensible" or "what presents itself to sense experience." [14] Extending this definition, artistic practice for Rancière becomes, "ways of doing and making" that intervene in the general distribution of ways of doing and making as well as in the relationships they

maintain to modes of being and forms of visibility.” [15] Thus, for Rancière, artistic practice not only manifests new modes by which cultural objects are produced, new aesthetic forms, and new ways of creating those forms, it also allows those forms to become recognizable or visible as a cultural object within a given society. When new art forms are coming into being, it is these aesthetic traits that are being concretized, formalized, or distinguished from noise, and it is also these aesthetic traits that will define that cultural object – for instance, by genre (under Rancière's regime of representation, at least). Generally summarizing this process, Rancière writes:

The principle regulating the external delimitation of a well-founded domain of imitations is thus at the same time a normative principle of inclusion. It develops into forms of normativity that define the conditions according to which imitations can be recognized as exclusively belonging to an art and assessed, within this framework, as good or bad, adequate or inadequate... [16]

In order to further outline definition of aesthetics, Rancière, drawing on Plato, proposes a specific trio of sense-able aspects inherent to cultural objects: “the surface of ‘depicted’ signs, the split reality of the theater, [and] the rhythm of a dancing chorus.” Each of these sense-able aspects “structure the manner in which the arts can be perceived and thought of as forms of art and as forms that inscribe a sense of community.” [17] The first of these three experiential aspects of the cultural object, “the surface of ‘depicted’ signs,” encompasses the object's formal qualities and works, for Rancière, as an “interface.” [18] Further in Rancière's aesthetico-political framework it becomes important to recognize that these signs are not linguistic in that they do not represent *meaning* but instead manifest a system of doing and making which makes the cultural object identifiable *as* an artistic gesture. [19] Meaning ascribed to these signs under the representative regime of the arts wherein a consistency is maintained between subject, form, and author breaks down under the “aesthetic free play” that is realized in the aesthetic regime of the arts. This consistency, essential to the work of art under Rancière's “representative regime of the arts,” is referred to as an “adequation between ways of being, ways of doing, and ways of speaking” and should be apparent in the initial formation of an aesthetic -- owing to the fact that, that aesthetic is in the process of emerging from and inscribing the community to which it belongs. [20]

The development of hip-hop in 1970s New York is a prime example of this communities are created through the concretization of socially agreed upon formal attributes. The birth of the ‘breakbeat,’ which became the backbone of hip-hop music, is credited to DJ Kool Herc, a ‘hard funk’ disc jockey (DJ). ‘Hard funk’ is distinguishable by the ‘break,’ short percussive measures that act as transitions between different parts of the song. Kool Herc realized that these ‘breaks’ elicited elevated levels of excitement in his audience, and in order to prolong this excitement, Kool Herc would isolate and only play these transitions. [21] Thus, the ‘break’ – which was

originally just a functional element of musical progression – was lifted out of its original context and reorganized into a new musical form; Kool Herc lifted the *noise* (the funk break) from the *signal* (the funk song) to create a new signal.

Kool Herc, and other breakbeat pioneers, invented this technique by using multiple turntables. By playing the break on one turntable while cueing up subsequent breaks on other turntables, a DJ is able to rapidly switch between records being played. However, this early technique had its drawbacks in that each time the DJ wanted to start a new break, the stylus had to be lifted and dropped at (roughly) the desired location on the record where the break began. This process was slow, imprecise and generated much extraneous noise (pops/hisses). DJ Grandmaster Flash however, made improvements on this technique by muting whichever turntable was being cued, nullifying any undesired noise. Furthermore, instead of lifting and dropping the stylus, Flash would leave the needle on the record while manually rewinding the record to the beginning of the break. This combination of muting and pulling back records allowed for a seamless blend of breaks. Finally, Flash selected records with similar beats per minute; thus, he was able to create more rhythmically seamless mixes. Flash's less ‘raw’ techniques garnered the attention of disco DJs, who were used to smoothly segueing between unaltered tracks; and, these DJs began to emulate the beat-mixing style.

As well as creating a technique for the seamless mixing of breakbeats, Grandmaster Flash and other second generation DJs (Grandwizard Theodore) forwarded the ‘art’ of hip-hop DJing by injecting additional agency into the act of playback. These DJs began to use the turntable as an instrument as opposed to simply as ‘playback equipment.’ They added techniques such as ‘scratching’ (in which the sound that results from a record being pushed and pulled while in contact with the needle is performed rhythmically to the music) and punch phrasing (which is the playback of small segments from one record on top of another already playing record). With these techniques a DJ was able to create completely new compositions. Finally, as sound equipment evolved, the use of monitoring headphones, audio mixers, and cross faders, gave DJs the ability to more accurately isolate and cue breaks, layer tracks, and add effects – which in turn allowed an even more polished form of hip-hop to emerge. This new (refined) version of hip-hop was more palatable to a wider audience and paved the way for hip-hop's commercial viability. [22]

In addition to pioneering multi-turntable based DJing, Kool Herc is also associated with introducing the hip-hop vocal style of ‘rapping’ – the practice of rhythmically speaking lyrics over an assembled breakbeat. This rhythmic vocal style has its origins in the older African griot traditions of ‘boasting’ and is closely related to the practice of ‘toasting’ in Jamaica, ‘talk over reggae.’ While early forms of rapping consisted of relatively simple and repetitive interjections meant to ‘fire up’ the crowd, disco DJs created elaborate verse-like routines as they brought the practice into mainstream dance clubs. These routines

would eventually become more popular than the fragmented chants of Kool Herc and his crew. [23] Thus, this Afro-Caribbean practice was formalized into what we now recognize as 'rapping.' Finally, as the spoken component of this overlay increased in complexity, the 'MC' (Master of Ceremonies, rapper) came to be distinguished from the DJ (disc jockey, creator of breakbeats), thus formalizing a division of labor within a distinct musical form.

Therefore, DJ Kool Herc, along with his New York contemporaries, drawing upon African, African-American and Afro-Caribbean roots, enacted Rancière's definition of sign formation as the concretization of a process of doing and making that is inherently different from other processes of doing and making through the invention and formalization of the stylistic elements we now understand as hip-hop – the layered breakbeat with lyrical content spoken over it.

The Split Reality of the Theater

Rancière contextualizes the formal attributes of an aesthetic through his second sense-able aspect of the cultural object, "the split reality of the theater." Herein meaning (either narrative or sign-based) is conveyed through the exchange between sender and receiver, between artist and audience. [24] Moreover, distinguishing formal elements and speech signs (narrative intentions) Rancière writes:

This is how the 'planarity' of the surface of depicted signs, the form of egalitarian distribution of the sensible stigmatized by Plato, intervened as the principle behind an art's 'formal' revolution at the same time as the principle behind the political redistribution of shared experience. ... Politics plays itself out in the theatrical paradigm as the relationship between the stage and the audience, as meaning produced by the actor's body, as games of proximity or distance. [25]

Narrative signs, thus, are not just the linguistic or explicitly representational images/text within the cultural object; narrative signs can also be found in the relationships created between the artist and the audience as well as in the mode of performance or in the presence that emerges from the performance. Thus, cultural or political messages can be embedded explicitly, but they can also arise in an indirect fashion as references to, or as the result of, the cultural context in which the artwork exists, or which the artwork creates.

In hip-hop we can see these discursive modes beginning to be formalized in the lyrical content of the songs as well as through the personas which were universally adopted by hip-hop artists. The proto-rap of Kool Herc and his contemporaries established repertoires of phrases and chants. Steffan "Mr. Wiggles" Clemente, a member of the legendary breakdancing crew Rock Steady Crew, refers to this in his description of routines from rappers of that era:

You had somebody come up grab a mike and just start gettin' busy. First thing they always said is, "Yes, yes, y'all / To the beat, y'all / It's Hip-Hop, y'all / Ya don't

stop / Keep, keep it on / Till the break of dawn / Keep – keepin' it on – ha! / Now, while I'm singin' my song." [26]

Thus, these largely meaningless, but repeated phrases became not about relaying an explicit message, but about signaling to the audience the position of the performer/performance as hip-hop -- much like the formal elements revealed in Rancière's first sense-able dimension.

However, while this lighthearted, often meaningless, and largely boastful banter remained the narrative content of early rap at live parties, with the move into recording, producers of hip-hop began to explore the more serious narrative potential of the form. In 1982, Grandmaster Flash and the Furious Five's "The Message" was released on Sugar Hill Records. "The Message" – widely considered the first sociopolitical hip-hop song – gained recognition from critics and established the genre as a musically and politically progressive sound. [27] The lyrics of socially conscious hip-hop generally address the racism, poverty, and violence that the urban poor experience, and are extended in the hardcore hip-hop genre, "gangsta rap," which also references these 'urban' themes to comment on social problems or expose issues of urban life. [28] In support of this sociopolitical gestalt, hip-hop also began, in the 1970s, to develop a unifying political narrative of 'authenticity' or "keeping it real;" "hip-hop became about staying close to one's roots and being true to oneself." [29]

Moreover, these narratives are not expressed solely through the lyrical content of the music, but through the attitudes and stylistic decisions made by the performers. For instance the gestures and postures performed by 'gangsta' rappers tend to exhibit a hypermasculine aggression which can be interpreted to be a reaction to their marginalized social environment. [30] While, for hip-hop's more ubiquitous call towards "authenticity," socio-cultural symbols such as: being black as opposed to white; having come from the inner city as opposed to the suburbs; or having cultural roots in the "old school" as opposed to the mainstream are visually realized through the appearance and projected identities of hip-hop artists. [31] Thus, these modes by which hip-hop uses representational symbolism (both lyrical and visual) to relay both genre-defining narratives and sub-genre specific politics reflects Rancière's second sense-dimension "the split reality of the theater," as well as Rancière's "representational regime of the arts," wherein intentional (and sometimes unintentional) messages are discursively passed from the artist to the audience.

Creating Communities

It is within the tendency of audiences to take ownership of these relayed signifiers that Rancière situates the third, and final, sense-dimension of aesthetics, "the rhythm of the dancing chorus." [32] In this dimension, Rancière refers to the community which is created around, and in response to, a specific cultural object. This community

(audience) is a reflection of the prior two dimensions as it is a response to those dimensions, but it also follows its own emergent logic, resulting in its own socially-constructed coherence. [33] In the case of hip-hop, we recognize this dimension through the audience's adoption of certain clothing, language, and lifestyles as a signification of one's membership in the community.

Just as other musical subcultures develop specific fashion traditions, hip-hop's 'street' fashion was made visible through the icons and stars that led the movement. Hip-hop groups (such as Run-DMC) adopted 'street' fashion, such as baseball caps, gold chains, and sneakers. As a result, and combined with the commercialism of Run-DMC's single "My Adidas," the hip-hop community embraced the gold chains and unlaced sneakers that their heroes wore. [34] Far from a totally coherent style though, at this point in the history, the hip-hop community defined by these cultural signifiers was fractured into region-specific sub-genres, adopting small permutations depending on the region or city the performers/fans were from. West coast hip-hop audiences donned Lakers' caps and sunglasses, while the practice of sagging one's jeans was an inner city trend.

As the commercialization and materialism of hip-hop grew, the genre moved further away from its humble (poverty-based) roots and towards success-based narratives. As artists became more affluent, they prompted the genre to shift focus away from the plight of urban poverty and towards an aspirational model of capitalist wealth accumulation and consumption; in short, hip-hop artists rewrote "The American Dream" for a minority, urban population. With this shift away from poverty as the primary narrative, the fashion or style of the genre also moved more towards the outward display of material wealth as the new genre identity. In the words of hip-hop artists Outkast, "It's not how much you make, but how much you spent." [35] Thus, through surrounding oneself with name brand cars, alcohol, and clothing, hip-hop devotees signify their membership in the culture of monetary success that hip-hop has come to represent. This shift was possible (did not undermine hip-hop's 'authenticity' narrative) because it did not emerge from a single artist or song, but instead was a socially constructed amalgam, inspired by the audience's response to the body of work in dialogue with the shifting priorities of the artists themselves. Thus, we can see how this construction of a genre 'style' reflects Rancière's conception of the "rhythm of the crowd" in that it reflects what Rancière calls a "unanimous consensus of the citizenry." [36] This final aesthetic dimension is perhaps the most visible manifestation of the mode by which aesthetics are political (construct communities) as it results in communities that are immediately recognizable as 'Other' to those outside.

The Aesthetic Regime of the Arts

Therefore, we can see how, through its development as a dominant cultural genre, hip-hop has created both a formal

and a symbolic language, recognizable to those who follow it – which creates a community that, in response to the messages relayed by the performers, becomes a self-determining crowd, adopting its own set of symbols to distinguish its members from those outside.

While Rancière does not consider this tri-fold distribution to be an exhaustive account of the sense-able (aesthetic) dimensions of cultural objects, he sees this delimitation of the sense-able as indicative of the mode by which we must approach cultural objects. In essence, for Rancière, "the important thing is that the question of the relationship between aesthetics and politics be raised at this level, the level of the sensible delimitation of what is common to the community, the forms of its visibility and of its organization." [37] With the hip-hop community then, these become the consumption of hip-hop (most likely within the context of urban poverty), the breakbeat and the spoken word rapping over it, popularized and ultimately adopted by a larger (pop) community through the formalization of various beat-mixing techniques, and the fashion and personas adopted by fans of hip-hop to outwardly signify themselves as belonging to the hip-hop community.

The problem arises though at this stage of an aesthetic concretization, when the trifold distribution of the sensible has been achieved, and is recognizable to those outside of the community. For it is at this stage that the genre comes under the aesthetic regime of the arts, which is the characterizing regime of postmodern society, and which leads to a dissolution of the consistency held between artist, subject and audience in the representative regime. On the one hand, the aesthetic regime seems democratizing because it releases art from the formal constraints of genre -- as defined by the aforementioned consistency. However, there are also paradoxical dangers associated with this freedom.

Foremost, Rancière situates the seeming failure of modernism within its inability to recognize the community-building (political) aspect of art which is still apparent under the aesthetic regime even though direct lines of signification have been complicated.

The idea of modernity is a questionable notion that tries to make clear-cut distinctions in the complex configuration of the aesthetic regime of the arts. It tries to retain the forms of rupture, the iconoclastic gestures, etc., by separating them from the context that allows for their existence... The notion of modernity thus seems to have been deliberately invented to prevent a clear understanding of the transformations of art and its relationships with the other spheres of collective experience. [38]

For instance, the third sense dimension, the rhythm of the chorus, remains intact under the aesthetic regime as Rancière suggests in his discussion of intentionality and appearance of characters in aesthetic literature. "Now, when meaning becomes a 'mute' relation of signs to signs, human actions are no longer intelligible as successful or unsuccessful pursuits of aims ...They are intelligible through the clothes they wear, the stones of their houses or

the wallpaper of their rooms;” affinity replaces intentionality. [39]

However, while signification might exist for an individual or a community, signifiers under the aesthetic regime are free-flowing and subject to appropriation; Miley Cyrus can adopt the dance style ‘twerking’ or wear rhinestone studded trucker caps just as easily as producers of her music can appropriate the now normalized breakbeat. It is towards this free exchange of signifiers that Rancière and Attali refer when they discuss ‘mute signs’ or ‘primitive sounds,’ respectively. Hence, it is at this level, the level of mute signs or formalizations that aesthetics become susceptible to recuperation.

Recuperation

The problem then for radicalism under the aesthetic regime however lies in the thermodynamic path the aesthetic regime creates for the voice of the ‘Other.’ The normalization of a community’s aesthetic, which occurs through appropriation undermines the community’s ability to be heard as a result of its voice no longer seeming radical in the larger social landscape; once integrated into the spectacle, it can no longer disrupt the spectacle, which is the definition of recuperation.

Within a given community, the appropriation of aesthetic elements by a larger community might not affect the coherence of the community. For instance, hip-hop’s ongoing culture of ‘authenticity,’ which representationally requires a consistency between the hip-hop artist, their subject matter, and their audience ensures that the hip-hop community regularly self-regulates and expels artists or individuals who do not maintain that consistency. Furthermore, the rise of both the ‘hood and the bling aesthetics show how the community maintains perspective towards authenticity while allowing for material success among its members.

However, we can see how the emergence of the breakbeat, rapping, ‘street’ fashion, ‘bling,’ etc... -- as the concretization of a (black) counter-narrative aesthetic identity -- manifests Miley Cyrus as a potent symbol of the recuperation (colonization) of that counter narrative.

There is a catch-22 inherent to this understanding of recuperation as a means of capitalism’s colonization of radical (or alternative) voices. While the appropriation of alternative cultures does eventually lead to their recuperation, appropriation still remains necessary in the struggle against hegemonic (specifically white patriarchy’s) dominance of popular culture. Hence, minority voices must be appropriated in order for minorities to be heard/hear-able within dominant cultural (and subsequently political) discourse. This catch-22, then, suggests that as the injection of alternative voices into the spectacle can only disrupt the spectacle for a short time, capitalism itself must be fought on a different plane of the cultural object.

Dissemination

It is towards Attali, then that we can turn for a potential plane in which radicalism might still be able to effect change. Attali and Rancière share similar perspectives towards the formal concretization of an aesthetic. Both recognize that individual elements have no inherent meaning and that meaning is attributable through social forces and the relations created between the elements. However, Attali simplifies his aesthetic discussion in order to allow a discussion of ‘transmission’ (or distribution) as another dimension of the cultural object. Transmission is not sense-able, but is inherent to capitalist modes of production/consumption and potentially provides a more direct pathway by which alternative voices might insinuate themselves into the socio-cultural consciousness while directly attacking the capitalist structures of our society.

In *Noise*, Attali distinguishes four networks of musical distribution. Each of these networks reflects a socio-economic structure and is correlated with a specific technology. Beginning with ‘Sacrifice,’ or “the distributive network for all of the orders, myths, and religious, social, or economic relations of symbolic societies,” Attali describes a network of distribution which is centralized ideologically (around religion) and decentralized economically. [40] In this network, music is shared through the repertoires of griots, jongleurs and minstrels. The second network Attali describes is ‘Representation.’ In ‘Representation,’ the performance of music adopts a use-value – becomes spectacle/entertainment – and is played by specialists in spaces specifically designated for musical production, such as concert halls. The third network is called ‘Repetition’ and appears with the invention of recording at the end of the 19th century. As recording technologies allowed for the storage of ‘Representation’-based live performance, they also allowed for solitary consumption and collection of music. Under ‘Repetition,’ music becomes a tradable commodity object. The final network, ‘Composition,’ for Attali, lies outside of the capitalist exchange system, as the music is performed by the self, for self enjoyment. Thus, in this as-yet-unrealized utopian network, music could only be experienced by others (audiences) as a by-product of a musician’s self enjoyment. [41]

By referencing the emergence of free jazz in reaction to modal jazz, Attali illustrates how those oppressed by the network of ‘Repetition’ make progress towards attaining political and economic freedom through the creation of new languages and paradigms. In the 1950s and 60s, record companies ostracized black musicians by only hiring white musicians that ‘sounded black.’ In response to this, the free jazz movement was organized independently in order to grant black musicians a means of production. These musicians developed a unique and expressive style and, as a result, were able to fund the production and distribution of their music within their own community. For Attali though, while this re-capture

of creative autonomy resulted in a more improvised and unconventional musical style, the decision to distribute the music through concerts and record releases parallel to, but independent of, the major labels trapped the musicians in the formal networks of 'Representation' and 'Repetition.' Free jazz's failure to actually divorce itself from the capitalist mode of distribution arrested free jazz's potential transcendence of 'Repetition' while placing free jazz in direct competition with the more popular 'Repetition' network of the major labels. For Attali, free jazz's eventual silencing was a direct result of free jazz's inability to overcome its designation as 'noise' precisely because it was "inscribed on the same level as the messages circulating in the network of repetition." [42]

The history of hip-hop parallels Attali's characterization of free jazz; Hip-hop also emerged independent of the recording industry, and was also experienced via live performance (hence representative of 'Representation'). However, by 1970s, hip-hop musicians did not face the racial stigma that free jazz musicians had, thus the move into the studio (towards 'Repetition') was quicker. In 1979, Fatback Band's "King Tim III" and Sugarhill Gang's "Rapper's Delight" were released commercially. "Rapper's Delight" achieved mainstream success and thus paved the way to major labels for artists Kurtis Blow, Ice-T and Run-DMC. Corporate endorsement led to hip-hop's mainstream exposure, but also cemented it in Attali's network of 'Repetition' (thus still impotent as a vehicle for radicalism) and, in Rancière's terms rendered it cliché (via appropriation). For Attali, 'Composition' is the way beyond this entropy, however 'Composition,' the solitary enjoyment of playing music by musicians," would, by removing the music from the social sphere, render it again invisible by stripping away the audience required for its recognition as art in the first place. Drawing from that though, it is precisely this necessary trio of artwork, artist, and audience that manifests a way forward. In short, Attali's 'Composition' can (and may have already) be achieved if we expand the frame of the musician to include the community; Attali's conception of the solitary musician is transformed into a body corporate, consisting of musician, music, and audience.

Radical Modes of Distribution

Capitalism's most basic structure is the exchange of commodity objects for currency in which the bourgeoisie, through ownership of the means of production, set both the price of exchange and the price of labour. Profit is maximized by setting wages as low as possible and commodity prices as high as the market will bear. [43] As Attali points out, music only becomes beholden to this system of object exchange under 'Repetition,' as it is only under 'Repetition' that the means of production must be leveraged to produce music. However, in the 1970s the cassette tape afforded audiences and communities the means to independently record, duplicate and share audio recordings without access to high-cost recording studios. Niche musical movements of the time took advantage of

this new technology to grow beyond their localized scenes. Hip-hop DJs used the cassette tape to record mixes -- originally created only as backups or filler material for live events. Some DJ's however, responding to audience demands, began to sell their mixtapes, even producing custom mixes for those willing to pay a premium. [44] However, mixtapes did not represent simply the independent commodification of the music as many were made by the audience for consumption or sharing. 'Bootleggers' brought tape recorders to live parties and captured whichever routine or set happened to be on for the evening. As hip-hop also began to receive radio play, enthusiasts would also record directly from the radio. Hence, the mixtape allowed the audience to enact Attali's 'Composition' through the ease with which recordings could be 'dubbed' (copied and/or modified) and shared.

'Dubbing,' or 'to dub,' used in the context of mixtapes, originated in Jamaica, where it means to make a copy, or to 'double,' and includes instances of re-recording where generative changes are made to the original. For the Jamaicans, the act of taking recorded material, modifying it, and then re-recording it is understood to be the same as copying ("doubling") the original. [45] Thus, the lack of differentiation between copying and remix that exists in the etymological roots of 'dubbing' suggests that, despite legal arguments forwarded by the recording industry, for hip-hop 'dubbing' points to one mode by which the community engages in collective action. Owing to the perceived consistency between the musician and the community throughout hip-hop's development (the musician was seen in the community, and the community in the musician), which is realized in the call and response model performed during live events, sampling, dubbing, and remixing become an essential extension of that model into asynchronous (recorded) space in support of the communal project of hip-hop.

Hence, the mixtape exhibits how the spirit of Attali's 'Composition' can be enacted not by transcending 'Repetition,' but rather by creating 'Composition' within a decentralized 'Repetition' that directly challenges the capitalist system of production/consumption. This decentralized 'repetition' is only furthered by the rise of the internet. Digital music recordings can be sampled, edited, replicated and distributed with greater ease and at lower cost than ever before. Certain contemporary hip-hop artists such as Chancelor Bennett and Felipe Andres Coronel take advantage of this expanded access to the means of production in order to further undermine the established system of production and consumption. Chancelor Bennett, a.k.a. Chance the Rapper, does not contract with record labels, but distributes his music freely. His vision is centered on hip-hop's community-building power, thus he endeavors to create, in his music, a space wherein the line between creator and consumer is regularly blurred. Towards this end, he focuses on improving his musical quality rather than the potential profits of capitalist distribution. [46] Felipe Andres Coronel, also known as "Immortal Technique," famous for focusing on issues such as class struggle and institutional racism, approaches alternative mode

exchange in an even more confrontational manner. Recognizing that record companies siphon profit from musician's labour and that those same companies act as the arbiters of who is potentially heard and who is not, "Immortal Technique" encourages his audience to digitally steal his music, but caveats this with a call to each fan's personal responsibility as an inductee into the community of hip-hop. He charges his fans with the responsibility to broadcast those pirated tracks into the very eyes, ears, and situations with which his music grapples: the face of injustice, in front of police, in front of racists, etc... In this way, "Immortal Technique" hopes to inject his activist message into all aspects of society while ensuring that the voice of social awareness is not silenced. "Because, [in the words of "Immortal Technique"] that is the true spirit of hip-hop." [47]

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