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Exchanging the Currency of Authenticity:
Live Performance and Mediatization in Hiphop Culture

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Welcome to the wonderful
World of entertainment
Where art imitates life
And people get famous
Welcome to the world
Of show-biz arrangements
Where "lights, camera, action"
Is the language.
-Jurassic 5

Performance studies in the last few years has begun to reject essentialist notions of live performance as ontologically distinct from the influence of recorded media, or mediatization. Philip Auslander deconstructs the traditional binary of live versus mediatized forms in his recent study, Liveness: Live Performance in a Mediatized Culture. Since hip-hop culture and rap music originated in a post-industrial urban setting, they have always been inherently mediatized to some degree. However, if there is no unmediatized performance in hip-hop culture, a huge premium is still placed on immediacy. Since the appearance of rap records in the late seventies and MTV rap music videos in the mid-eighties it has become increasingly easier for rap artists to achieve success without having to first build a local following. In response to this phenomenon, music critic Nelson George has made a political analogy: recorded media "has made rap more democratic--but is democracy good for art? Hip-hop was, at one point, a true meritocracy"(George 113).¹ Hip-hop culture struggles between its status as meritocracy and its status as democracy, and this dichotomy has created an aesthetic division, manifested both in the lyrics and in the critical response. For those who see hip-hop as a meritocracy, respect as an artist necessarily precedes commercial success, and the response of hip-hop-savvy audiences to local live performance is essentially a regulating mechanism. In hip-hop as a democracy, record sales count as votes; promotion,

marketing, music videos, crossover appeal and slick production bypass the grassroots genesis of artists, and success is measured only in financial terms. However, most artists are too dynamic and idiosyncratic to assign to either party with concrete certainty, and all distinctions are necessarily relative or provisional. Instead of categorizing, I intend to locate the role of live performance in this conflict, giving special attention to the phenomenon of freestyle. Freestyle is unwritten improvisational rhyming, and requires considerable skill and practice to perform convincingly. For many, freestyle is the ultimate test of authenticity, and the definition of liveness in hiphop culture. For others, anyone complaining about success and who deserves it is jealous and a "player hater." It is into the crossfire of this dialogue that I propose to extend Auslander's concept of liveness in mediatized culture.

The anticipation arose as time froze
I stared off the stage with my eyes closed
And dove into the deep cosmos
The impact pushed back the first five rows
But before the raw live shows
I remember I was a little snot nose...
-Black Thought

Historically, the relationship between live performance and the media has been one of parasitism and encroachment. According to Auslander, the concept of live performance only became intelligible after the invention of recording technologies, aural and visual. It would be anachronistic to say that all performance was live two hundred years ago, because liveness can only be understood in opposition to mediatization. "It was the development of recording technologies that made it possible to perceive existing representations as 'live'"(Auslander 51). With the advent of recorded media, mainly in the form of television, film and music recordings, events previously only accessible through a direct transfer between performer and audience became subject to mass

distribution and commodification. The greater convenience and accessibility of these recordings has given them a distinct edge over the live performances they represent. Auslander's Liveness details the parasitic relationship between live performance and the media, in which mediatized forms compete for the audiences of live events, inevitably siphoning-off significant percentages of attendance and revenues. In response to this imbalance, live performances have begun to incorporate and deliberately resemble forms of media, from rock concerts staged as reproductions of music videos to camera-ready theatre. Because of this nearly ubiquitous phenomenon, Auslander rejects the possibility of any unmediatized live performance existing in our culture, in so far as every live performance seems to either imitate or else anticipate media recordings. Instead of looking for essential ontological distinctions, he argues, we must locate our discussions of live performance in specific cultural contexts and sites of production.

What I am suggesting is that any distinctions need to derive from careful consideration of how the relationship between the live and the mediatized is articulated in particular cases, not from a set of assumptions that constructs the relation between live and mediatized representations *a priori* as a relation of essential opposition. (Ibid 54)

You gotta pay your dues
In this hiphop game
You gotta make a name
Before you get the fortune and fame
You gotta pay dues and earn respect
By workin' harder than the next
Over...night...success.
-Foreign Legion

Auslander takes his own advice in the third chapter of Liveness, "Tryin' to Make it Real," in which he analyses the relationship between live performance and mediatization in the rock music industry. Although rap music is a distinct genre from rock, with its own set of sign systems and cultural norms, some similarities arise when the two are

compared in the context of live performance. Specifically, Auslander is interested in the function of live performance as a signifier of authenticity in rock, where recordings generate the bulk of revenues. Instead of privileging one or the other as the strict measure of authenticity, Auslander sees authenticity as, "produced through a dialectical or symbiotic relationship between live and mediatized representations of the music, in which neither the recording nor the live concert could be perceived as authentic in and of itself"(Ibid 160). This dialectic has developed in response to shifting pressures within the genre, coming both from artists and from rock consumers. Auslander's analysis of the role of live performance in rock's history can be divided into two eras, separated by the advent of music video. Originally, live performance had to precede recording contracts in order for a rock group to be seen as authentic.

To be considered an authentic rocker, a musician must have a history as a live performer, as someone who has paid those dues and whose current visibility is the result of earlier popularity with a local following.... Musicians are chosen to record by industry scouts on the basis of live performances. (Ibid 76)

Fans who were outside of this original local following were assured that the recordings were authentic only when they too got to see the group live. "The rock recording calls up the desire for a live performance that will serve to authenticate the sounds on the recording"(Ibid 82).

I feel like I'm one of the livest
One of hiphop's finest
Elite rhymer
And I plan to graduate
With honours
-Canibus

After the appearance of music videos on MTV, the video became the referent of authenticity instead of the live performance, and henceforth rock consumers could *see* artists playing their music without actually attending live events. Live rock performances

have responded to the displacement of authenticity onto music video by attempting to mimic video themselves.

Now, the music video occupies the place formerly held by the sound recording as the primary musical text *and* has usurped live performance's authenticating function. The function of live performance under this new arrangement is to authenticate the *video* by showing that the same images and events that occur in the video can be reproduced onstage, thus making the video the standard for what is 'real' in this performative realm. (Ibid 93, original emphasis)

In this second era, the original requirement that rock artists establish a local following is discarded, and authenticity is lost in an imitative loop with no origin or centre, where

"live performance now imitates music video imitating live performance"(Ibid 92). The

loss of a mimetic origin caused inevitable changes in the way rock was produced.

Gradually, "paying your dues' took on a new meaning," and artists increasingly found

that, "instead of struggling with a band year after year, performing in bars and nightclubs,

the purchase of suitable recording equipment seemed a more viable route to a successful

career"(Ibid 91).

Overachiever...I go in it deeper...
Impregnate the world
When I 'come' through your speakers
-Jay Z

If industry rock music can be seen as the mediatized recordings of an independent culture of live performance,ⁱⁱ then rap music recordings play a similar role in hip-hop culture. Hip-hop culture began in the South Bronx neighbourhood of New York in the mid-seventies as a dance party phenomenon. It was catalyzed by the stylistic innovations of a few DJs who began mixing records from diverse musical genres using only the "break beat" or percussion breakdown section of each song. Rap is the post-literateⁱⁱⁱ oral expression of hip-hop culture. Before rap lyrics were ever recorded, DJs would hook microphones up to their mixers and have someone (or themselves) attempt to hype up the

crowd with simple rhymed phrases like, "throw your hands in the air, and wave 'em like you just don't care." Competition over who would control the microphone quickly elevated the criteria of what defined a good rapper, first in the Bronx neighbourhood, then in New York city, then America, and today lyricists the world over have arguably entered this same competition. The core elements of hip-hop culture: turntablism,^{iv} rapping, break-dancing, beat-boxing, and graffiti art all evolved around this time, all characterized by the need to find an outlet for creative energy (musical, literary, artistic, kinetic) using the extremely limited resources of the urban ghetto.

Once for breath,
The rest, as you feel it.
Fuck what you've done,
If you've got skills reveal it.
-Evidence

What is important to the question of live performance in hip-hop culture is that rap music was originally a question strictly of the DJ's skill with the beat, and the MC's skill with the rhyme.

Hip-hop began explicitly as dance music to be appreciated through movement, not mere listening. It was *originally designed only for live performance* (at dances held in homes, schools, community centers and parks), where one could admire the dexterity of the DJ and the personality and improvisational skills of the rapper. Not intended for a mass audience, for several years it remained confined to the New York City area and outside the mass-media network. (Shusterman 63, my emphasis)

The origins of rap music come from deep within Auslander's "mediatized culture," and the only necessary components for its production, two turn-tables and a microphone, inherently resist any possible claims of unmediatized ontological purity for its use of live performance. "As soon as electric amplification is used, one might say that an event is mediatized"(Auslander 24). Hip-hop has always been a culture that celebrates and embraces media technology as crucial to its existence. However, hip-hop's origins seem

to contradict Auslander's concept of live performance as necessarily either anticipating or reproducing a mediatized recording. Early hip-hop performance also seems to escape the diluted status of live performance in rock: "in rock, the live performance is a recreation of the recording, which is, in fact, the original performance"(Ibid 84). This is an important distinction between rock and hip-hop: even though the music was stitched together from fragments of previous recordings, and the lyrics were derived from generations of black oral tradition,^v early hip-hop performances neither anticipated nor recreated any recording, representing only themselves.

Yo I'm strictly about skills
And dope lyrical coastin'
Relyin' on talent,
Not marketing and promotion...
Stop wastin' your money
On marketing schemes
And pretty packages
Pushin' dreams to the fiends
A dope MC is a dope MC
With or without a record deal,
All can see.

-KRS-One

The ghetto-Edenic origin of hip-hop, in which both the music and lyrics were performed only as immediate entertainment, was short lived. With the release of "Rapper's Delight" in 1979, the entire culture was changed irreversibly. The significance of "Rapper's Delight" was not that it represented hip-hop culture very accurately; it was released by the New Jersey label Sugar Hill and featured the lyrics of some slick uptown rappers, hardly representing the gritty Bronx. Still, "'Rapper's Delight' changed everything; most important, it solidified rap's commercial status"(Rose 56). The importance of "Rapper's Delight" was its financial success, which proved rap recordings

could sell, setting off an avalanche of record contracts and permanently shifting the aspirations of artists from live performance to recording. As Auslander reminds us, "by being recorded and becoming mediatized, performance becomes an accumulable value,"(Auslander 26) instead of remaining limited by the audience capacity of a particular venue. Rap recordings did not replace live performance in hiphop's center; instead, recording became the primary source of hard currency for artists, while live performance remained central to the culture as the main currency of authenticity. Hiphop culture was given a much more powerful voice by recorded media, "through the recording media of records, tapes and compact discs, rap has been able to reach out beyond its original ghetto audience and thus give its music and message a real hearing"(Shusterman 68). The appearance of commercially successful recordings also created the important conceptual division in hiphop culture between underground artists and crossover or commercial artists. In this division, underground hiphop is grounded solidly in live performance, existing as a countercurrent to mainstream acts that rely mainly on record sales. KRS-One articulates the underground definition of authenticity, "Real is an art. Real doesn't necessarily sell. Sometimes it sells. Sometimes it doesn't. The only way you can really be real is not to equate your art with your financial success"(Ehrlich 96). Underground hiphop plays the role of Socratic gadfly to mainstream sensibilities, criticizing them, but occasionally crossing over when the opportunity to sign a record deal arises.

To hard-core purists almost all [hit records] are crossover crap and not "true hip hop," a stance that, like a great many purist positions in all art, is short-sighted and ahistorical. Throughout the last twenty years these hits kept the general population excited or at least aware of the music and, within the industry, constantly proved non-believers wrong. (George 65)

As George makes clear, both underground and commercial rap artists are important to the culture, since hit records increase the culture's range and visibility while the demands of local live performance ensure artistic standards of authenticity. The combination of these diverse elements ideally produced the hip-hop meritocracy. "You battled in the park. You rocked the house on stage. You made 12-inches that created your audience. You toured and built a rep. If you survived all these stages, you became a rap star with some level of fame"(Ibid 113).

Writin' rhymes tryin' to find
Our spot up in that light
Light up in that spot
Knowin' that we could rock
Doin' the 'hole in the wall' clubs
This shit here must stop
Like "freeze"
We makin' the crowd move
But we not makin' no Gs
-Outkast

Rap recording changed things for both the rapper *and* the DJ. Rappers are generally the most visible aspect of hip-hop and therefore assume the status of synecdoche for the culture: "a synecdoche is a Part so powerful symbolically as to be eligible for the conceptual absorption, containment, and representation of what it's Part of"(Costello 38). However, DJs were the pioneers of hip-hop, and have remained central to the culture, especially in the sphere of live performance. Although DJs use fully mediated technology, turntables and mixers, the art of turntablism has evolved into a well-recognized musical genre, and DJs are understood as live performers in so far as they are able to engage audiences in a live setting. In fact, hip-hop DJs subvert Auslander's view of the historical relationship between live and mediated forms: "initially, the mediated form is modeled on the live form, but it eventually usurps the live form's position in the cultural economy"(Auslander 158). If records represent virtual live music performances

that have been usurped and mediatized by recording technology, then DJs re-appropriate mediatized forms to create a live performance. The traditional binary of live and mediatized that Auslander is deconstructing sees the mediatization of live performance as an attempt to "pry an object from its shell, to destroy its aura"(Ibid 50). I would argue that DJs resurrect this aura from its mediatized grave when they recombine vinyl records in a live setting. However, the status of DJs as live performers was affected by the "growing sophistication of rap recordings," which had the effect of:

shifting DJs from the center of the culture as they were replaced first by MCs and, finally, producers. On stage, the change was manifested by the popularity of DAT tapes, whose superior quality made live DJs superfluous, because the tracks came across clean with no chance of the inadvertent record scratches or turntable shaking that hampered live shows. Unfortunately, lost in the translation was the interplay between a live DJ... and the audience. (George 112)

The displacement of the DJ as a live performer by rap recordings and later by rap video resulted in a further division between underground and commercial artists. While commercial emphasis shifted towards beat production, DJs continued to perform live, supported by the premiums of authenticity still placed on live performance by underground hiphop.

I'm sick of that fake R&B rap scenario
All day on the radio
Same scenes in the video
Monotonous material
Ya'll don't hear me though.
These record labels
Sling our tapes like dope.
You could be next in line and signed
And still be writin' rhymes and broke.
Would you rather have a lexus or justice?
A dream or some substance?
A beamer, a necklace or freedom?
See, a nigga like me don't player hate
I just stay awake, it's real hip hop...
-Dead Prez

The effect of rap videos on hiphop culture was significantly different from the effect of music video on the rock music industry in Auslander's analysis. As in rock, live performance was further displaced from its once-primary role: "the saddest consequence of hip hop video is that its prominence has removed live performance from the center of [hiphop's] aesthetic"(Ibid 111). Just as recorded rap had done five years earlier, MTV further increased hiphop culture's audience and impact, "through its images, the attitude and obsessions of urban America have been broadcast around the world, igniting fascination and fear, indignation and imitation"(Ibid 97). With the increase in visibility, however, came a further divorce of success from authenticating live performance.

Video has made it possible for [artists] whose appeal has little to do with real rhyme skills, to become national stars without having built a loyal grassroots following. Suddenly hip hop stars are created before they have true fans--a concept typical of pop music for decades but not introduced to hip hop culture until videos. (Ibid 113)

The further alienation of commercially successful artists from underground performance sensibilities did not have the same effect on hiphop culture as it did on rock. Rather than imitating or recreating the aesthetic of rap videos in live performance settings, underground artists began to define themselves increasingly in *opposition* to the mainstream, championing the live performance skills that originally defined the culture. The more democratic the mainstream current of hiphop culture became, the louder and more adamant were the voices criticizing those aesthetics and calling for the acknowledgement of hiphop's status as meritocracy. Since underground artists have no financial incentive to change their tune, at least until they sign a record deal, the underground has consistently been the vanguard for authenticity in hiphop culture. For this reason, it is inherently impossible for records and videos to ever fully eclipse live performance in hiphop culture.

Hip-hop fans you're like
The woman in my house,
No matter how loyal I am,
You still have y'all doubts
Talkin' about, 'is he real
In this relationship?
Or did he go pop
And on the side get a mistress?
-Wyclef

Although many purists view hip-hop authenticity as an essentialist notion, in the sense that authenticity is "an essence that is either present or absent in the music itself," (Auslander 70) or perhaps present to various degrees, it is important to note that all definitions of authenticity are produced dialectically within the genre. Auslander remarks of rock authenticity:

rock authenticity is performative, in Judith Butler's sense of that term: rock musicians achieve and maintain their effect of authenticity by continuously citing in their music and performance styles the norms of authenticity for their particular rock subgenre and historical moment, and these norms change along with the changes in the prevailing discourse of authenticity. (Ibid 72)

Auslander's view of authenticity as performative is also applicable to hip-hop culture, since it involves live performance. In the introduction to Bodies that Matter, Judith Butler defines performativity as "the reiterative and citational practice by which discourse produces the effects that it names" (Butler 2). One important difference between rock and rap is that instead of simply "citing in their music and performance styles the norms of authenticity," (Auslander 72) rap lyrics are inherently self-referential in their content. Rap artists not only embody the norms of authenticity in their style, they explicitly engage with these concepts in their content, constantly naming what is and is not authentic. This has the effect of considerably amplifying the performativity of the genre. Since "discourse produces the effects that it names," (Butler 2) it should follow that in cultures where the intensity and frequency of discursive interactions are increased, the production

of effects through naming will increase in response. In hiphop we see exactly this; in barely twenty-five years the genre has evolved and diversified in both the styles it incorporates and the range of its discourse, spreading from an isolated phenomenon in the South Bronx neighbourhood of New York to a global influence and multi-billion dollar industry. This is not to say that hiphop's popularity is a direct product of its performativity. Rather, I would argue that hiphop's ability to articulate its ideology explicitly in the lyrics has enabled it to spread much more quickly than if this ideology were merely stylistic, or its content were distinct from its form. There is certainly no other musical genre (and possibly no other art form) that is as inter-responsive and dialogic^{vi} as rap, where songs are often published in rebuttal to other songs or attacks from the media within a matter of weeks. Since hiphop's ideology of authenticity is produced through lyrical dialogue, it is also possible to address it directly, rather than relying only on interviews with artists and critical response, as Auslander has done.^{vii} The most marked effect of this amplified performativity, however, is that it has made the defining norms of hiphop culture notoriously difficult to determine, since definitions become subject to change so quickly. It is much easier to talk about the history of hiphop culture than its current state, since, "any definition of the culture must be understood to be a working definition--always subject to reworkings and readjustments...the culture is constantly recreated and redefined from the bottom up"(Pihel 251).

From an environment
Where freestyle's the requirement
I bought every album
My parents had to hide the rent.
-Wordsworth

With the exception of certain flagrant examples of commercially produced artists with no history of live performance, hip-hop culture is still produced from the bottom up. Video does play a key role in defining the culture, but most artists who achieve commercial radio and video play only get there after a difficult screening process, central to which are freestyle and battling. Freestyle is central to the underground concept of hip-hop as a meritocracy, since it is how artists and consumers ultimately determine merit: "freestyling--rapping spontaneously with no pre-written materials--is how MCs battle each other to see who is the best rapper"(Pihel 252). Freestyle battle competitions elevate the most skilled individuals and eliminate the least skilled, "it isn't a tragedy; it is the survival of the fittest--a concept integral to hip hop's competitive nature"(George 196). Various definitive elements combine to ensure freestyle's central role in hip-hop's continuing evolution; these elements include inherent liveness, resistance to commercialization and the presence of clear standards for judgement, where, "power is defined by a way with words"(Dorsey 340). Freestyle is inherently live because, "it is composed and performed simultaneously,"(Pihel 252) and although it is possible to record a freestyle, recording considerably undermines a rap's status as freestyle.

Memorized raps that have been pre-written (which would include any rap with a chorus, a single theme, or a second rapper emphasizing certain words or phrases) are not freestyles. Even a rap that is freestyled in a recording studio cannot be considered a freestyle because the rapper is able to do a limitless number of takes before he or she decides on the final version. A freestyle, then, is a *live performance in front of a live audience*--whether an audience at a club or listeners to a freestyle competition on live radio. (Ibid 252, my emphasis)

Although most hip-hop artists would recognize this distinction as valid, Pihel offers us the narrowest possible definition of freestyle. Within hip-hop culture, the term is used more flexibly than this, sometimes indicating improvised raps performed live, and sometimes indicating recordings of improvised raps, regardless of the number of takes. Occasionally

the term "freestyle" is even used to describe pre-written raps that rhyme more erratically, making them sound improvised. However, it is a major *faux pas* in hip-hop culture to attempt to pass off memorized rhymes as freestyle, and the term is generally understood to mean unrehearsed live lyrics, composed and performed in the same moment.

Angel on my main shoulder
Tellin' me "remain sober,"
Told me, "Nigga, game's over
Ain't no payola in freestyle"
In battles I'm warrin',
Like a G-child.
-Common

The failure of recording technology to capture live freestyle gives it the greatest edge as the measure of hip-hop authenticity, simply because this shields freestyle from commodification. Whereas it has often been possible to "buy" the number one spot on the music charts, increasing record sales through expensive high-end production, slick videos, marketing and promotion, it is never possible to buy first place in a live freestyle competition. Freestyle is authentic because it is virtually invulnerable to corruption. This is because "the winner of a freestyle competition is determined by the audience. Audiences of competitions become wildly exuberant for def freestyles and mercilessly unforgiving toward wack performances"(Ibid 253). Originality of rhyme, rhythmic flow and comprehensibility are the main criteria for judgement. Freestylers "must come up with as unexpected a rhyme as possible because predictable rhymes create dull poetry and a freestyle audience craves the unexpected"(Ibid 255). Although the ability to freestyle rarely confers financial gain directly on artists, freestyle battling is understood as part of the dues paying process that eventually leads to commercial success.

There are local amateur shows or talent shows which feature competition amongst rappers. They get their experience by freestyling and battling other rappers in jam sessions.

Freestyling is the primary mode of competition for rappers before they come to a label. Freestyling is not really a commercially viable style of rap--it is more of a training ground. There might be some tapes of freestyling that that would make it onto underground radio, but that's a precommercial market. It is very important in terms of their development as artists. (Rose 123)

Because it is understood in hip-hop culture that freestyle is not a "commercially viable style of rap," freestyle skill alone is generally not enough for an artist to achieve financial security; they must also be able to compose lyrics. Many artists never make this transition, since, "an ability to improvise does not confer an ability to write,"(Dorsey 341) and vice versa. Although they will always have street credibility, without the aid of recording technology the audience for strictly freestyle artists remains limited.

True I got more fans
Than the average man
But not enough loot to last me
'Til the end of the week
I live by the beat
Like you live check to check
If you don't move your feet
Then I don't eat
So we like neck to neck.
-Outkast

It is a popular belief that the media now rules hip-hop culture, and that recorded rap and video have rendered live performance modes like freestyle and turntablism virtually obsolete. "Rap is now being recorded and distributed worldwide, and freestyle competitions are no longer the most common site of cultural production...Video images and record contracts threaten to pull rap away from its roots in freestyling skills"(Pihel 266). However, this is an illusion of visibility, more deceptive than descriptive. For every rapper who makes a video, or releases a hit record, there are literally hundreds worldwide who are practicing in their basement every day, battling in the park, doing shows at small venues, and generally building the skills necessary to succeed in the hip-hop meritocracy. Consistent with its ethos of resistance and rebellion, hip-hop

culture's ideology of authenticity completely reverses Auslander's appraisal of the present relationship between live and mediatized forms.

This is exactly the state in which live performance now finds itself: its traditional status as auratic and unique as been wrested from it by an ever accelerating incursion of reproduction into the live event... I might argue that live performance has indeed been pried from its shell and that all performance modes, live or mediatized, are now equal: none is perceived as auratic or authentic; the live performance is just one more reproduction of a given text or one more reproducible text. (Auslander 50)

Although certain aspects of hip-hop have manifested Auslander's view of live performance and mediatization, diving beneath the glossy surface of rap music and video reveals a living culture that is sustained by live performance. Instead of seeing the vulnerable, ethereal spirit of live performance as retreating terrified from the cold tyranny of media technology, doomed to eventually succumb to a cybernetic hybridization, hip-hop seizes media technology (turntables, mixers, mics) as its basic tools, *immediatizing* them on stage. In hip-hop, live performance usurps media, not the other way around. Through direct interactive engagement with live audiences, MCs and DJs dialectically create hip-hop culture, priming it for lucrative media recording while simultaneously ensuring its survival as an authentic art form through the regulatory competitive practices of turntablism and freestyle battling.

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Footnotes:

ⁱ "Meritocracy: 1 - government by those selected for merit. 2 - group selected in this way." "Democracy: government by the whole population, usually through elected representatives." (Oxford)

ⁱⁱ Independent only in so far as artists are able to establish themselves without the financial support of the record industry. Let me acknowledge, however, that these "independent" artists are usually fueled by the desire to record and become mediatized and commodified as soon as possible. They are creatively dependent on their anticipation of mediatization, but remain independent of actual support until they sign a record deal.

ⁱⁱⁱ "Post-literate orality" is a concept of Walter Ong's that Tricia Rose has applied extensively to rap lyrics. Rose explains: "the concept of postliterate orality merges orally influenced traditions that are created and embedded... revised and presented in a technologically sophisticated context"(Rose 86). Although the question of orality and literature is closely tied to that of liveness and mediatization, it is not relevant to this discussion. I will accept Auslander's distinction: "I do not consider writing to be a form of recording in this context... Written descriptions...are not direct transcriptions through which we can access the performance itself, as aural and visual recording media are"(Auslander 52).

^{iv} I use "turntablism" as a term encompassing all aspects of hip-hop's vinyl DJ culture, scratching, mixing, sampling, punch-phrasing, juggling, etc.

^v Hip-hop's roots in African American oral tradition has probably been the subject of more academic critical response than any other aspect of the culture. Although critics assume different positions about specifics, David Toop provides a useful overview:

Rap's forebears stretch back through disco, street funk, radio DJs, Bo Diddley, the bebop singers, Cab Calloway, Pigmeat Markham, the tap dancers and the comics, The Last Poets, Gil Scott-Heron, Muhammad Ali, a cappella and doo-wop groups, ring games, skip-rope rhymes, prison and army songs, toasts, signifying and the dozens, all the way back to the griots of Nigeria and Gambia. (Toop 19)

^{vi} I use "dialogic" here in the Bakhtinian sense, where "the speaker...is oriented towards an actively responsive understanding...he expects response, agreement, sympathy, objection, execution, and so forth"(Bakhtin 69). To develop this concept much further would be another essay entirely.

^{vii} In fact, in Auslander's entire discussion of the rock industry he only once quotes from rock lyrics to make a point. Rap criticism, on the other hand, tends to draw heavily on the lyrics themselves, an approach that I find more authentic in a number of ways.