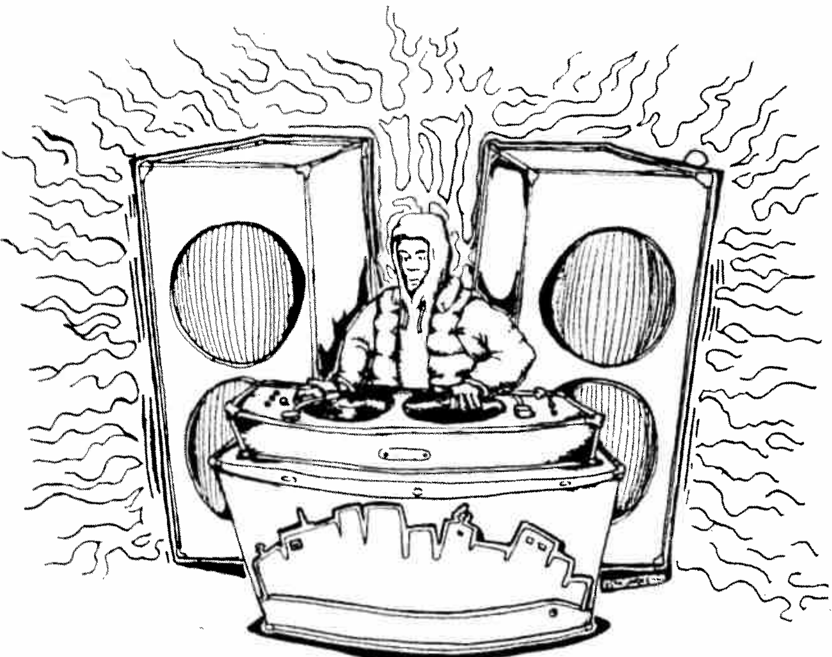

Esau Underhill

Soul Sonic Forces: Technology, Orality, and Black Cultural Practice In Rap Music

Tricia Rose

Rap music has inspired me because I know that when Chuck D tells you to 'bring the noise,' he's telling you that it's hard. And when you hear the tribal beat and the drums, they are the same drums of the African past that draws the communi- ty to war. The drum beats are just faster, because the condition is accelerating so they've got to beat faster. And when your feet are jumping, dancing...it's the spir- it attempting to escape the entrapment. When you feel that the children have gone mad, if you don't feel it, and when you look at the dances you don't see it and when you listen to the music and you don't hear a call, then you missed the jam.

—Sister Souljah[1]

'The sound,'I tell them, that's the final answer to any question in music—the sound.

—Max Roach [2]

In the spring of 1989, I was speaking animatedly with an ethnomusicology professor about rap music and the aims of this project. He found some of my ideas engaging and decided to introduce me, and describe my project to, the chairman of his music department. At the end of his summary, the department head rose from his seat and announced casually, "Well, you must be writing on rap's social impact and political lyrics, because there is nothing to the music." My surprised expression and verbal hesitation gave him time to explain his position. He explained to me that, although the music was quite simple and repetitive, the stories told in the lyrics had social value. He pointed out rap's role as a social steam valve, a means for expression of social anger. "But," he concluded, referring to the music, "they ride down the street at 2:00 A.M. with it blasting from car speakers, and (they) wake up my wife and kids. What's the point in that?" I immediately flashed on a history les- son in which I learned that slaves were prohibited from playing African drums, because, as a vehicle for coded communication, they inspired fear in slaveholders. I suggested that perhaps the music was more complicated than it seemed to him, that a number of approaches to sound and rhythm were being explored in rap music. He listened but seemed closed to such possibil- ities. Having had some experience with these sorts of "what I don't know can't penetrate me"

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exchanges, I knew it would be prudent to disengage from this brewing disagreement before it became a long and unpleasant exchange. The ethnomusicology professor who had introduced me ushered us out of the chairman's office.

For the music chairman, automobiles with massive speakers blaring bass and drum heavy beats looped continuously served as an explanation for the insignificance of the music and diminished rap's lyrical and political salience as well. The music was "nothing" to him on the grounds of its apparent "simplicity" and "repetitiveness." Rap music was also "noise" to him, unintelligible yet aggressive sound that disrupted his familial domain ("they wake up my wife and kids") and his sonic territory. His legitimate and important question, "What is the point of that?" was offered rhetorically to justify his outright dismissal of the music, rather than presented seriously to initiate at least a hypothetical inquiry into a musical form that for him seemed at once to be everywhere and yet going nowhere. Let us take his question seriously: What is the point of rap's volume, looped drum beats, and bass frequencies? What meanings can be derived from the sound rap musicians have created? How is the context for its consumption connected to both its black cultural priorities and its sociological effects? His dismissive question is a productive point of entry into understanding rap's sonic power and presence. Rap's distinctive bass-heavy, enveloping sound does not rest outside of its musical and social power. Emotional power and presence in rap are profoundly linked to sonic force and one's receptivity to it. As Sister Souljah reminds her audience at Abyssinian Baptist Church: "When you feel the children gone mad, if you don't feel it... when you listen to the music and you don't hear a call, then you missed the jam."

Rap's black sonic forces are very much an outgrowth of black cultural traditions, the postindustrial transformation of urban life, and the contemporary technological terrain. Many of its musical practitioners were trained to repair and maintain new technologies for the privileged but have instead used these technologies as primary tools for alternative cultural expression. This advanced technology has not been straight-forwardly adopted; it has been significantly revised in ways that are in keeping with long-standing black cultural priorities, particularly regarding approaches to sound organization. These revisions, especially the use of digital samplers, have not gone unnoticed by the music industry, the legal system and other institutions responsible for defining, validating, and policing musical production and distribution. Sampling technology and rap producers' commercially profitable use of sampled sounds have seriously challenged the current scope of copyright laws (which are based on notated compositions) and raised larger, more complex questions regarding fair use of musical property and the boundaries of ownership of musical phrases.

Rap's use of sampling technology, looped rhythmic lines, coupled with its significant commercial presence also raises questions about the relationship between industrial imperatives and their impact on cultural production (for example, formulas that streamline the sale of music as commercial radio's four-minute song cap or rap's reuse of previously recorded music). Or, are there cultural explanations for the musical structures in rap's use of electronic equipment?

At the same time as rap music has dramatically changed the intended use of sampling technology, it has also remained critically linked to black poetic traditions and the oral forms that underwrite them. These oral traditions and practices clearly inform the prolific use of collage, intertextuality, boasting, toasting, and signifying in rap's lyrical style and organization. Rap's oral articulations are heavily informed by technological processes, not only in the way such oral traditions are formulated, composed, and disseminated, but also in the way orally based approaches to narrative are embedded in the use of the technology itself. In this contentious environment, these black techno-interventions are often dismissed as nonmusical

effects or rendered invisible. These hybrids between black music, black oral forms, and technology that are at the core of rap's sonic and oral power are an architectural blueprint for the redirection of seemingly intractable social ideas, technologies, and ways of organizing sounds along a course that affirms the histories and communal narratives of Afro-diasporic people.

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> The organizing principle which makes the black style is rhythm. It is the most perceptible and the least material thing.
>
> —Léopold Sédar Senghor[3]

> Rhythm. Rap music is so powerful because of rhythm. —Harmony[4]

Rap's rhythms—"the most perceptible, yet least material elements"—are its most powerful effect. Rap's primary force is sonic, and the distinctive, systematic use of rhythm and sound, especially the use of repetition and musical breaks, are a part of a rich history of New World black traditions and practices. Rap music centers on the quality and nature of rhythm and sound, the lowest, "fattest beats" being the most significant and emotionally charged. As rapper Guru has said, "If the beat was a princess, I'd marry it."[5] Many of the popular "Jeep beats" feature dark, strong, prominent, and riveting bass lines.[6] These musical lines dominate production—even at the expense of the rapper's vocal presence. The arrangement and selection of sounds rap musicians have invented via samples, turntables, tape machines, and sound systems are at once deconstructive (in that they actually take apart recorded musical compositions) and recuperative (because they recontexualize these elements creating new meanings for cultural sounds that have been relegated to commercial wastebins). Rap music revises black cultural priorities via new and sophisticated technological means. "Noise" on the one hand and communal countermemory on the other, rap music conjures and razes in one stroke.

These revisions do not take place in a cultural and political vacuum, they are played out on a cultural and commercial terrain that embraces black cultural products and simultaneously denies their complexity and coherence. This denial is partly fueled by a mainstream cultural adherence to the traditional paradigms of Western classical music as the highest legitimate standard for musical creation, a standard that at this point should seem, at best, only; marginally relevant in the contemporary popular music realm (a space all but overrun by Afrodiasporic sounds and multicultural hybrids of them). Instead, and perhaps because of, the blackening of the popular taste, Western classical music continues to serve as the primary intellectual and legal standard and point of reference for "real" musical complexity and composition. For these reasons, a comparative look at these two musical and cultural forces is of the utmost importance if we are to make sense of rap's music and the responses to it.

Rhythmic Repetition, Industrial Forces, and Black Practice

Unlike the complexity of Western classical music, which is primarily represented in its melodic and harmonic structures, the complexity of rap music, like many Afro-diasporic musics, is in the rhythmic and percussive density and organization.[7] "Harmony" versus "rhythm" is an oft-sited reduction of the primary distinctions between Western classical and African-derived musics. Still, these terms represent significant differences in sound organization and perhaps even disparate approaches to ways of perception, as it were. The outstanding technical feature of

the Western classical music tradition is tonal functional harmony. Tonal functional harmony is based on clear, definite pitches and logical relations between them; on the forward drive toward resolution of a musical sequence that leads to a final resolution: the final perfect cadence. The development of tonal harmony critically confined the range of possible tones to twelve tones within each octave arranged in only one of two possible ways, major or minor. It also restricted the rhythmic complexity of European music. In place of freedom with respect to accent and measure, European music focused rhythmic activity onto strong and weak beats in order to prepare and resolve harmonic dissonance. Furthermore, as Christopher Small has argued, Western classical tonal harmony is structurally less tolerant of "acoustically illogical and unclear sounds, sound not susceptible to total control." Other critical features of classical music, such as the notation system and the written score—the medium through which the act of composition takes place—separate the composer from both the audience and the performer and sets limits on composition and performance.[8] This classical music tradition, like all major musical and cultural developments, emerged as part of a larger historical shift in European consciousness:

> [We see] changes in European consciousness that we call the Renaissance having its effect in music, with the personal, humanistic viewpoint substituted for the theocratic, universalistic viewpoint of the Middle Ages, expressed in technical terms by a great interest in chords and their effects in juxtaposition, and specifically in the perfect cadence and the suspended dissonance, rather that in polyphony and the independent life of the individual voice.[9]

Rhythm and polyrhythmic layering is to African and African-derived musics what harmony and the harmonic triad is to Western classical music. Dense configurations of independent, but closely related rhythms, harmonic and nonharmonic percussive sounds, especially drum sounds, are critical priorities in many African and Afro-diasporic musical practices. The voice is also an important expressive instrument. A wide range of vocal sounds intimately connected to tonal speech patterns, "strong differences between the various registers of the voice, even emphasizing the breaks between them," are deliberately cultivated in African and African-influenced musics.[10] Treatment, or "versioning," is highly valued. Consequently, the instrument is not simply an object or vehicle for displaying one's talents, it is a "colleague in the creation." And, most important for this discussion, African melodic phrases "tend to be short and repetition is common; in fact, repetition is one of the characteristics of African music." Christopher Small elaborates:

> A call-and-response sequence may go on for several hours, with apparently monotonous repetition of the same short phrase sung by a leader and answered by the chorus, but in fact subtle variations are going on all the time, not only in the melodic lines themselves but also in their relation to the complex cross-rhythms in the accompanying drumming or hand clapping...The repetitions of African music have a function in time which is the reverse of (Western classical) music—to dissolve the past and the future into one eternal present, in which the passing of time is no longer noticed.[11]

Rhythmic complexity, repetition with subtle variations, the significance of the drum, melodic interest in the bass frequencies, and breaks in pitch and time (e.g., suspensions of the beat for a bar or two) are also consistently recognized features of African-American musical practices. In describing black New World approaches to rhythm, Ben Sidran refers

to Rudi Blesh's notion of "suspended rhythm" and Andre Hodier's description of "swing" as rhythmic tension over stated or implied meter.[12] Time suspension via rhythmic breaks—points at which the bass lines are isolated and suspended—are important clues in explaining sources of pleasure in black musics.

Approaches to sound, rhythm, and repetition in rap music exhibit virtually all of these traits. Rap music techniques, particularly the use of sampling technology, involve the repetition and reconfiguration of rhombic elements in ways that illustrate a heightened attention to rhythmic patterns and movement between such patterns via breaks and points of musical rupture. Multiple rhythmic forces are set in motion and then suspended, selectively. Rap producers construct loops of sound and then build in critical moments, where the established rhythm is manipulated and suspended. Then, rhythmic lines reemerge at key relief points. One of the clearest examples of this practice is demonstrated in "Rock Dis Funky Joint" by the Poor Righteous Teachers. The music and the vocal rapping style of Culture Freedom has multiple and complicated time suspensions and rhythmic ruptures of the musical and lyrical passages.[13] Busta Rhymes from Leaders of the New School, reggae rapper Shabba Ranks, British rapper Monie Love, Trech from Naughty by Nature, B-Real from Cypress Hill, and Das Efx are known especially for using their voices as percussive instruments, bending words, racing through phrases, pausing and stuttering through complicated verbal rhythms.

These features are not merely stylistic effects, they are aural manifestations of philosophical approaches to social environments. James A. Snead, working along the same lines as Small, offers a philosophical explanation for the meaning and significance of repetition and rupture in black culture. As we shall see, musical elements that reflect world views, these "rhythmic instinctions," are critical in understanding the meaning of time, motion, and repetition in black culture and are of critical importance to understanding the manipulation of technology in rap.

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> The rhythmic instinction to yield to travel beyond existing forces of life. Basically, that's tribal and if you wanna get the rhythm, then you have to join a tribe.
>
> —A Tribe Called Quest[14]

> The outstanding fact of late-twentieth-century European culture is its ongoing reconciliation with black culture. The mystery may be that it took so long to discern the elements of black culture already there in latent form, and to realize that the separation between the cultures was perhaps all along not one of nature, but of force.
>
> —James A. Snead[15]

Snead suggests that the vast body of literature devoted to mapping the cultural differences between European—and African—derived cultures, which has characterized differences between European and black cultures as a part of "nature," are in fact differences in force; differences in cultural responses to the inevitability of repetition. Snead argues that repetition is an important and telling element in culture, a means by which a sense of continuity, security, and identification are maintained. This sense of security can be understood as, in fact, a kind of "coverage," both as insurance against sudden ruptures and as a way of hiding or masking undesired or unpleasant facts or conditions. Snead argues quite convincingly that all cultures provide coverage against loss of identity, repression, assimilation, or attack. Where they "differ among one another primarily [is] in the tenacity with which the 'cover-up' is main-

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tained...grafting leeway to those ruptures in the illusion of growth which most often occur in the déjà vus of exact repetition." He suggests that when we view repetition in cultural forms we are not viewing the same thing repeated, but its transformation, "repetition is not just a formal ploy, but often the willed grafting onto culture of an essentially philosophical insight about the shape of time and history.... One may readily classify cultural forms based on whether they tend to admit or cover up these repeating constituencies within them."[16]

Snead claims that European culture "secrets" repetition, categorizing it as progression or regression, assigning accumulation and growth or stagnation to motion, whereas black cultures highlight the observance of repetition, perceiving it as circulation, equilibrium. In a fashion resembling Small, Snead argues that Western classical music uses rhythm mainly as "an aid in the construction of a sense of progression to harmonic cadence (and) repetition has been suppressed in favor of the fulfillment of the goal of harmonic resolution." Similarly, musicologist Susan McClary points out that "tonal music" (referring to the Western classical tradition) is "narratively conceived at least to the extent that the original key area—the tonic—also serves as the final goal. Tonal structures are organized teleologically, with the illusion of unitary identity promised at the end of each piece."[17]

To the contrary, Snead claims that black cultures highlight the observance of repetition, perceiving it as circulation and equilibrium, rather that as a regulated force that facilitates the achievement of a final harmonic goal. Drawing on examples in literature, religion, philosophy, and music, Snead elaborates on the uses and manifestations of repetition in black culture. For our purposes, his analysis of the meaning of repetition in black music is most relevant, specifically his description of rhythmic repetition and its relationship to the "cut":[18]

> In black culture, repetition means that the thing circulates, there in an equilibrium.... In European culture, repetition must be seen to be not just circulation and flow, but accumulation and growth. In black culture, the thing (the ritual, the dance, the beat) is there for you to pick up when you come back to get it. If there is a goal... it is always deferred; it continually 'cuts' back to the start, in the musical meaning of a 'cut' as an abrupt, seemingly unmotivated break (an accidental da capo)) with a series already in progress and a willed return to a prior series.... Black culture, in the 'cut,' 'builds' accidents into its coverage, almost as if to control their unpredictability.[19]

Deliberately "repetitive" in force, black musics (especially those genres associated with dance) use the 'cut' to emphasize the repetitive nature of the music by "skipping back to another beginning which we have already heard," making room for accidents and ruptures inside the music itself. In this formulation., repetition and rupture work within and against each other, building multiple circular musical lines that are broken and then absorbed or managed in the reestablishment of rhythmic lines.

Rap music uses repetition and rupture in new and complex ways, building on longstanding black cultural forces. Advances in technology have facilitated an increase in the scope of break beat deconstruction and reconstruction and have made complex uses of repetition more accessible. Now, the desired bass line or drum kick can be copied into a sampler, along with other desired sounds, and programmed to loop in any desired tempo or order. Rap music relies on the loop, on the circularity of rhythm and on the "cut" or the "break beat" that systematically ruptures equilibrium. Yet, in rap, the "break beat" itself is looped—repositioned as repetition, as equilibrium inside the rupture. Rap music highlights points of rupture as it equalizes them.

Snead calls James Brown "an example of a brilliant American practitioner of the 'cut'" and describes the relationship between established rhythmic patterns and the hiatus of the cut in Brown's work as a rupture that affirms the rhythmic pattern while it interrupts it. "The ensuing rupture," Snead claims, "does not cause dissolution of the rhythmic; quite to the contrary, it strengthens it." Snead's reading of James Brown as a brilliant practitioner of the "cut" is a prophetic one. Published in 1981, a number of years before hip-hop producers had communally declared James Brown's discography the foundation of the break beat, Snead could not have known that Brown's exclamations ("hit me!"/"take it to the bridge!"), rapid horn and drum accents, and bass lines would soon become the most widely used breaks in rap music.

Snead's approach presumes that music is fundamentally related to the social world, that music, like other cultural creations, fulfills and denies social needs, that music embodies assumptions regarding social power, hierarchy, pleasure, and worldview. This link between music and larger social forces, although not widely held in the field of musicology, is also critical to the work of Susan McClary, Christopher Small, and French political economist Jacques Attali. McClary, Small, and Attali demystify the naturalized, normalized status of nineteenth-century classical musical structures and conventions, positing an understanding of music's role as a way of perceiving the world and suggesting that every musical code is rooted in the social formations and technologies of its age.[20] These historically and culturally grounded interpretations of technological "advances" shed light on naturalized aesthetic parameters as they are embodied in equipment, illustrating the significance of culture in the development of technology.

Grounding music as a cultural discourse dismantles the causal link between rap's sonic force and the technological means for its expression. Rap producers' strategic use of electronic reproduction technology particularly sampling equipment, affirms stylistic priorities in the organization and selection of sounds found in many black diasporic musical expressions. Although rap music is shaped by and articulated through advanced reproduction equipment, its stylistic priorities are not merely by-products of such equipment.

On the question of repetition as a cultural force, Attali and Snead part company. For Attali and other cultural theorists, repetition is primarily considered a manifestation of mass culture, a characteristic of culture in the age of reproduction. The advent of recording technology signaled the emergence of a society of mass production and repetition. Repetition is, therefore, equated with industrial standardization, Attali claims, music becomes an industry and "its consumption ceases to be collective."[21] Similarly, Adorno describes the "break" in pre-swing jazz as "nothing other than a disguised cadence" and explains that, "the cult of the machine which is represented by unabated jazz beats involves a self-renunciation that cannot but take root in the form of a fluctuating uneasiness somewhere in the personality of the obedient."[22] "In mass culture," Fredric Jameson claims, "repetition effectively volatizes the original object—so that the student of mass culture has no primary object of study."[23]

Repetition does, in fact function as part of a system of mass production that structures and confines creative articulation; along these lines Adorno, Jameson, and Attali offer vital criticisms of the logic of massified culture in late capitalistic societies. Yet, repetition cannot be reduced to a repressive, industrial force. Nor is it sufficient to understand repetition solely as a by-product of the needs of industrialization. I do not mean to suggest that any of the cultural theorists would claim that repetition was nonexistent in preindustrial society. However, their focus on repetition as an industrial condition encourages mischaracterizations of the black popular cultural phenomenon, particularly those forms that privilege repetition and are prominently positioned in the commodity system.

If we assume that industrial production sets the terms for repetition inside mass-produced

music, then how can alternative uses and manifestations of repetition that are articulated inside the commodity market be rendered perceptible? Rap music's use of rhythmic lines constructed with sampled loops of sound are particularly vulnerable to misreadings or erasures along these lines. Working inside the commodity market and with industrial technology, rap music uses rhythmic forces that are informed by mass reproduction technology, but it uses it in ways that affirm black cultural priorities that sometimes work against market forces. Yet, none of this is visible if all mass-produced repetition is understood primarily as a manifestation of mass culture. If rap can be so overwhelmingly mischaracterized, then what other musical and cultural practices have collapsed into the logic of industrial repetition, labeled examples of "cult-like" obedience? Adorno's massive misreading of the jazz break, beside betraying a severe case of black cultural illiteracy, is another obvious example of the pitfalls of reading musical structures in the popular realm as by-products of industrial forces.

Adorno, Jameson, and Attali, by constructing repetition as if it were a singular force, strongly suggest that mass production sets the terms for repetition and that any other cultural forms of repetition, once practiced inside systems of mass production, are subsumed by the larger logic of industrialization. Consequently, no other mass-produced or mass-consumed forms that privilege forms of repetition are accessible or relevant once inside this larger logic of industrial repetition.

Positioning repetition in the late capitalist markets as a consequence of that market, marginalizes or erases alternative uses of and relationships to repetition that might suggest collective resistance to that system. Repetition, then, is all too easily vilified, collapsed into the logic of the commodity system and is employed as a means by which to effectively erase the multiplicity of cultures and traditions present in contemporary Western societies. I am not suggesting that black culture supersedes the effects of commodification. Nor am I suggesting that black cultural priorities lie outside of (or completely in opposition to) mass cultural industries. Quite to the contrary, this is a call for readings of commodification that can accommodate multiple histories and approaches to sound organization. I am mostly concerned, here, with facile and all-too-frequent readings of repetition that apply and naturalize dominant cultural principles and consequently colonize and silence black approaches, which, in the case of American popular music especially, have significant and problematic, dare I say, racist, implications....[24]

Rap music is a technologically sophisticated and complex urban sound. No doubt, its forebears stretch far into the orally influenced traditions of African American culture. But the oral aspects of rap are not to be understood as primary to the logic of rap nor separate from its technological aspects. Rap is fundamentally literate and deeply technological. To interpret rap as a direct or natural outgrowth of oral African-American forms is to romanticize and decontextualize rap as a cultural form. It requires erasing rap's significant sonic presence and its role in shaping technological, cultural, and legal issues as they relate to defining and creating music. Retaining black cultural priorities is an active and often resistive process that has involved manipulating established recording policies, mixing techniques, lyrical construction, and the definition of music itself.

The lyrical and musical texts in rap are a dynamic hybrid of oral traditions, postliterate orality, and advanced technology. Rap lyrics are a critical part of a rapper's identity, strongly suggesting the importance of authorship and individuality in rap music. Yet, sampling as it is used by rap artists indicates the importance of collective identities and group histories. There are hundreds of shared phrases and slang words in rap lyrics, yet a given rap text is the personal and emotive voice of the rapper.[25] The music is a complex cultural reformulation of a

community's knowledge and memory of itself. Rap lyrics and the sampled sounds that accompany them are highly literate and technological, yet they articulate a distinct oral past.

Like many groundbreaking musical genres, rap has expanded popular aural territory. Bringing together sound elements from a wide range of sources and styles and relying heavily on rich Afrodiasporic music, rap musicians' technological in(ter)ventions are not ends in and of themselves, they are means to cultural ends, new contexts in which priorities are shaped and expressed. Rap producers are not so much deliberately working against the cultural logic of Western classical musics as they are working with and among distinctly black practices, articulating stylistic and compositional priorities found in black cultures in the diaspora. As has been made clear, these practices do not take place in a cultural and political vacuum. Raps sonic forces are often contested on the grounds that they are not creative, constitute theft, and are nonmusical. In other cases, these black approaches to the use and manipulation of new technologies are rendered invisible as they are joyfully appreciated. Sampling, as employed by rap producers, is a musical time machine, a machine that keeps time for the body in motion and a machine that recalls other times, a technological process whereby old sounds and resonances can be embedded and recontextualized in the present. Rap technicians employ digital technology as instruments, revising black musical styles and priorities through the manipulation of technology. In this process of techno-black cultural syncretism, technological instruments and black cultural priorities are revised and expanded. In a simultaneous exchange rap music has made its mark on advanced technology, and technology has profoundly changed the sound of black music.

Endnotes

1 Sister Souljah speaking at "We Remember Malcolm Day" held at Abyssinian Baptist Church in Harlem, New York, 21 February 1991.

2 Cited in Mitch Berman and Susanne Wah Lee, "Sticking Power," *Los Angeles Times Magazine*, 15, September 1991, pp. 23–50.

3 Léopold Sédar Senghor, "Standards critiques de l'art Africain," *African Arts/Arts d'Afrique*, Vol. 1, No. 1, (Autumn 1967), excerpted in John Miller Chernoff, *African Rhythm and African Sensibility: Aesthetics and Social Action in African Musical Idioms* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1979), p. 22.

4 Rose interview with female rapper Harmony, 14 June 1991.

5 GangStarr, "Step in the Arena," *Step in the Arena* (Chryalis, 1990).

6 Jeep beats are rap songs with especially heavy bass and drum sounds that are intended for play in automobiles, preferably with customized stereo systems. Album titles such as *Terminator X & The Valley of the Jeep Beats* (Columbia Records, 1991) and Marley Marl, *In Control*: Volume I, advertised as an album designed for "your steering pleasure," illustrate the centrality of heavy prominent beats in rap production. The August 1991 issue of *The Source*, a popular magazine that covers hip hop music culture and politics, also featured a Jeep slammers section that reviewed recent releases based in part on their value as jeep beats. Favored albums received comments such as, "fatter beats, thunderous beats, and street feel."

7 Chernoff, *African Rhythm*; Dick Hebdige, *Cut n Mix: Culture, Identity and Caribbean Music* (London: Methuen, 1987); Levine, *Black Culture, Black Consciousness*; Maultsby, *Africanisms*; Eileen Southern, *The Music of Black Americans* (New York: Norton, 1971).

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[8] Christopher Small, *Music, Society, Education: An Examination of the Function of Music in Western, Eastern and African Cultures with its Impact on Society and its Use in Education* (New York: Schirmer, 1977), pp. 20–21. See also Christopher Small, *Music of the Common Tongue* (New York: Riverrun Press, 1987).

[9] Small, *Music, Society, and Education*, pp. 9–10. See also John Storm Roberts, *Black Music of Two Worlds* (New York: William Morrow, 1974).

[10] Rap's "human beat box" shares many vocal sounds found in African vocal traditions. Mark Dery describes this link: "The hums, grunts and glottal atacks of Central Africa's pygmies, the tongue clicks, throat gurgles and suction stops of the Bushmen of the Kalahari Desert, and the yodeling, whistling vocal effects of Zimbabwe's *m'bira* players all survive in in the mouth of percussion of such 'human beat box' rappers as Doug E. Fresh and Darren Robinson of the Fat Boys." Marc Dery, "Rap!" *Keyboard*, November 1988, p. 34.

[11] Small, *Music, Society, Education*, pp. 54–55.

[12] See also Ben Sidran, *Black Talk New York*: Holt, Reinhart & Winston, 1971), and Olly Wilson, "Black Music as Art," *Black Music Research Journal*, no. 3, 1–22, 1983.

[13] Poor Righteous Teachers, "Rock Dis Funky Joint," *Holy Intellect* (Profile, 1990). See also Ice Cube, "The Bomb," *AmeriKKKa's Most Wanted* (Profile, 1990), and the Fu-schnickens, *Take It Personal* (Jive, 1992). Bear in mind that not all rap music deploys these characteris- tics equally. In particular, some of the earliest rap recordings used the instrumental side of a disco single verbatim as the sole musical accompaniment. This may, in part, be due to lim- ited musical resources, as disc jockey performances that predate these recordings demon- strate substantial skill and complexity in rhythmic manipulation.

[14] A Tribe Called Quest, "Youthful Expression," *People's Instinctive Travels and the Paths of Rhythm* (Jive Records, 1989/1990).

[15] James A. Snead, "On Repetition in Black Culture," *Black America Literature Forum*, Vol. 15, No. 4, p. 153, 1981. Special thanks to AJ for this reference.

[16] Snead, "Repetition," pp. 146–47. Culture is one of the most complex words in the English language. Culture, as I use it and as Snead uses it, is both a "whole way of life," which is manifest over the whole range of social activiities but is most evident in 'specifically cul- tural' activities—a language, styles of art, kinds of intellectual work; and an emphasis on a 'whole social order' within which a specifable culture in style of art and kinds of intellectu- al work, is seen as the direct or indirect product of an order primarily constituted by other social activities." From Raymond Williams, *The Sociology of Culture* (New York: Schocken, 1981), pp. 11–12. See also Raymond Williams, *Keywords* (Glasgow: Fontana, 1976).

[17] Snead, "Repetition," p. 152, my italics; Susan McClary, *Feminine Endings* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1991), p. 155.

[18] Snead also demonstrates that the recovery of repetition in twentieth-century European liter- ature (e.g., Joyce, Faulkner, Woolf, Yeats, and Eliot) suggests that the dominance of nine- teenth-century repression of European traditions that favored privileged uses of repetition and verbal rhythm in the telling "in favor of the illusion of narrative verisimilitude" may have "begun to ebb somewhat." Ibid., p. 152. For a range of discussions on form and mean- ing in black music and culture, see Graham Lock, *Forces in Nature: The Music and Thoughts of Anthony Braxton* (New York: Da Capo Press, 1988); Wole Soyinka, *Myth, Literature and the African World* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1990); and Gates, *The Signifying Monkey*. Gates affirms Snead's argument regarding the centrality of repeti- tion in black culture: "repetition and revision are fundamental to black artistic forms from painting and sculpture to music to language use," p. xxiv.

[19] Snead, "Repetition," p. 150.

[20] Susan McClary and Richard Leppert, eds., *Music and Society: The Politics of Compositio Performance and Reception* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1989), and McClar *Feminine Endings; Small, Common Tongue, and Music, Society, Education*; Jacques Atta *Noise: The Political Economy of Music* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1985

[21] Attali, *Noise*, p. 88.

[22] Theodore W. Adorno (with the assistance of George Simpson), "On Popular Music," i Simon Frith and Andrew Goodwin, eds., *On Record: Rock, Pop and the Written Word* (Ne York: Pantheon, 1990), p. 313. Also see T. W. Adorno, "On the Fetish-Character in Mus and the Regression of Listening," in Andrew Arato and Eike Gebhardt, eds., *The Essenti Frankfurt School Reader* (New York: Continuum, 1982), pp. 288–89.

[23] Fredric Jameson, "Reification and Utopia in Mass Culture," *Social Text*, Winter, 137, 197

[24] Richard Middleton's *Studying Popular Music* (Philadelphia: Open University Press, 199 attempts to grapple with the question of repetition in popular music in his chapter on ple sure, value, and ideology in popular music (see esp. pp. 267–93). He finds that "popul common sense tends to see repetition as an aspect of mass production and market expoit tion but often also associates it with the phenomenon of being 'sent,' particularly in relati to 'hypnotic' rhythmic repetition and 'primitive' audience trance.... How can we square psychology of repetition and the historically specific Adornian notion of repetition as a fun tion of social control?" (pp. 286–87). Middleton suggests that multiple determinations a operative at once. To illustrate his point, he compares Freud, Barthes, Deleuze, Guatta Jameson, Rosolato, and Lacan on the question of repetition. The multiple determinations offers cannot accomodate the kind of black approach to repetition as articulated by Sne and Small. In fact, none of the approaches he offers ground black practices in African trad tions. Although he is quite aware of black cultural influences in popular music, in his mi these influences do not reflect an alternative approach to cultrural production; they are di crete black practices that are not constructed as a part of a larger approach. So, although agrees that black musics privilege repetition (although not rhytmically complex uses of re etition, but "riffs, call-and-reponse, short unchanging rhythmic patterns"), it is a techniqu not a manifestation of an alternative approach.

[25] See *Spin* (October 1988) for a hip hop slang dictionary.