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The Impact of Convergence Culture on Live Performance

In his book *Noise: The Political Economy of Music*, Jacques Attali writes, "What irony: people originally intended to use the record to preserve the performance and today the performance is only successful as a simulacrum of the record."[1] As this statement makes clear, our understanding of live musical performances is now deeply colored by our experiences with media. However, the rise of what Henry Jenkins has termed "convergence culture" has created a shift in this complex relationship between electronic media and live performance. As convergence culture is highly participatory - encouraging individuals to "to seek out new information and make connections among dispersed media content,"[2] it has created new modes of engagement with media. And by altering the media environment, this shift has impacted how were understand and experience live performance. While the participatory nature of convergence culture offers us new possibilities for engaging in politics, it may also enables us *dis*engage as well. In the following paper, I begin to explore the relationship between media and live musical performance in convergence culture by examining the Black August Hip Hop Project Concert. I look at how audience members, using small cameras or heir cell phones,

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[1] Jacques Attali, *Noise: The Political Economy of Music*, trans. by Brian Masumi (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1985), 85.
[2] Henry Jenkins, *Convergence Culture: Where Old and New Media Collide* (New York: New York University Press, 2006), 3.

record footage of the highly political Black August performances and transform them into apolitical posts on YouTube.

The Black August Hip Hop Project concert is a large benefit held each year in New York by the Malcolm X Grassroots Movement, the largest one of the largest Black Nationalist group active in the U.S. today. The goal is to raise awareness of political prisoners - activists still imprisoned or in exile for their political activities in the 1960s and 1970s, especially as members of Black Nationalist and Black Power organizations - and generate funds to advocate on their behalf. Each year, Black August features Hip-Hop artists ranging from relatively unknown underground or local artists to popular artists such as Grammy Award winner Common and rapper/actor Mos Def. Over the past decade, fan followings of the well-known headlining artists have allowed Black August to use the immense popularity of Hip-Hop to draw audiences of 500 to 2,000 people with the explicit goal of educating and politically mobilizing audience members. However, the audience, primarily in their 20s and 30s, enters the event conditioned by convergence culture not to simply accept, reject, or negotiate the messages they receive, but to actively engage with, select, alter, and circulate the material they encounter. Because our conceptions of live performance is so deeply imbricated with our media experiences, audiences bring and apply their frameworks for understanding media to the live concert performances.

Audience members seem to view the concert as a source of material from which to select, rework, and share just as they would a website, recorded song, or TV show. Using small cameras or their cell phones, they record sections of the performances and post the footage, sometimes edited, on YouTube. While the Black August Hip Hop

Project Concerts are explicitly political events, based in the radical political tradition of the Black Power Movement, the clips appear on the web as almost exclusively as apolitical musical performances. The focus is on the artist performing (usually the well-known and popular artists) and the quality of that performance (or other random commentary). This raises questions about how activist groups can use media and performances for political ends in the age of convergence culture. If the participatory nature of our contemporary media culture enables new strategies for resistance and politics, it may also allow individuals to avoid politics by depoliticizing the media and performance they encounter and insulating themselves from political content.

In this paper, I want to explore two intertwined ideas – the impact convergence culture has on live performance and the potential challenges to using media and performance for political activism in the age of convergence. Like most conference papers, this is a work in progress. My goal here is not to offer a fully formed argument or to make firm assertions, but to raise and begin to explore a series of questions that have emerged as I research at the intersection of media and performance.

First, I will first briefly discuss the deep connection of media and live performance, especially in the case of popular music (my focus here). I argue that given the strong relationship between media and the live performance of popular music, the cultural shift of convergence culture also shifts our relationship to and understanding of live performances. I will then move onto Jenkins's theory of convergence culture, its political potential, and the possible obstacles to the realization of this potential. Here I raise the question: Does the participatory nature of convergence culture create new opportunities not only for people to engage politically, but also to *dis*engage politically?

Jenkins points to the politicized use of popular culture and entertainment as "serious fun"; I ask, if can make the "fun" political, can we also purge politics and just be entertained? Finally, I will end with a discussion of how these issues focusing on the Black August Hip Hop Project concerts and the footage of the concert found on YouTube.

Media and Live Musical Performance

I begin this piece with the Attali quote because it points to the deep imbrication of electronic mediation and live musical performance. This relationship means that a cultural shift in one will deeply impact the other, as they are difficult to separate. It is important to note that the very category of "live performance" by definition requires the concept of "non-live performance," or technological recordings and mediations.[3] Most people understand these "non-live performances" or recordings as a means to preserve and circulate otherwise ephemeral live events. Given this conception, a good recording is one that captures the performance well. This presupposes that performances come first and recordings then capture whatever was created live. However, because of technological changes in the music industry, the recording now usually predates any live performance.

The contemporary recording process is now more akin to the process of composition. Between the 1960s and the 1980s, multitrack recording became the norm in the music industry. This meant that each part was of a song could be recorded separately and mixed together to form the master recording. The advent of samplers, MIDI, and

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[3] Jan Assman, "Collective Memory and Cultural Identity," *New German Critique* 65 (Spring-Summer 1995): 81.

other digital technology (most recently AutoTune) allowed for sound to be created, stored, and manipulated digitally. As a result, in today's recording studio, "control of the computer amounts, musically speaking, to control of the entire performance."[4] These technologies of production are not a means to preserve but to create performances. After the recording is created, any live performance must then be reverse engineered to match – a process that often also requires use of digital recording technologies.[5]

Additionally, audiences generally know an artist and her music through media objects such recordings, music videos, interviews, or even MySpace before ever attending a live performance. Thus to meet audience expectations, the performance must not only replicate the recording, but the performer must also replicate her media crafted and circulated image. Thus, media frames audience expectations and understandings of live performances in everything from how the music should sound to who the performer is and how she should perform.

What I have offered here is a shallow description of a complex set of relations. But, it illustrates the imbrication of media and live performance in popular music. Media plays an important roll in both creating live musical performances and framing our reading of those performances. If, as Jenkins argues, there has been (or currently is an ongoing) shift in our contemporary media culture, there are potentially meaningful ramifications for our relationship with live performance.

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[4] Andrew Goodwin, "Rationalization and Democratization in the New Technologies of Popular Music," in *Popular Music Studies Reader,* eds. Andy Bennett, Barry Shank and Jason Toynbee (New York: Routledge, 2006), 277.
[5] Philip Auslander, *Liveness: Performance in a Mediatized Culture,* 2nd ed. (New York: Routledge, 2008).

Convergence Culture

In his book *Convergence Culture,* Henry Jenkins argues that we have entered an era of what he calls media "convergence." He asserts that recent technological changes have led to the, "circulation of media across different media systems, competing media economies, and natural borders"[6] Convergence, however, is not just a technological intersection of multiple media, but a cultural shift in the way we understand our relationship to media. In the age of convergence, the producer/consumer divide breaks down and people begin to both produce and circulate media as well as consume it. Audiences are "encouraged to seek out new information and make connections among dispersed media content."[7] He argues that instead of "new" media replacing "old" media (as was often predicted in the 1990s), old and new media now interact in increasingly complex and unpredictable ways.

A central component of the cultural shift of convergence is its collective nature. Jenkins argues that we may be moving from individualized consumption toward media consumption as "a networked practice" in which people are beginning to consume and produce media together. This allows people to "pool their insights and information, mobilize to promote common interests, and function as grassroots intermediaries ensuring that important messages and interesting content circulate more broadly."[8] Jenkins asserts that while we are initially making this shift in our relationship to popular culture, "the skills we acquire through play may have implications for how we learn, work, participate in the political process, and connect with other people around the

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[6] Jenkins, 3.
[7] Ibid.
[8] Jenkins, 255-256.

world."[9] And he points to a growing connection between popular culture and the political.

Jenkins argues for popular culture's increasing role in our political lives. Offering a variety of examples ranging from Russell Simmon's Def Jam to World Wrestling Entertainment, he writes, "More and more, groups with ties to the entertainment community are using their visibility and influence to push young people toward greater participation in the political process."[10] Further, entertainment industry outlets have increasingly become a source from which young people get news and other information about the world. *The Daily Show* and *The Colbert Report* are two prime examples. But this also includes "music videos and rap songs, *Saturday Night Live* sketches and stand-up comedians, the plots of prime-time dramas and gags on sitcoms."[11] Jenkins puts this in terms of "serious fun," in which serious topics are raised and explored in entertaining ways, and argues that it represents a trend of "popular culture taking its pedagogical potential more seriously."[12] Popular culture creates space for audiences to engage with issues because it lacks the ironclad and seemingly indisputable authority of newscasts and expert analysis that so often works to make audiences feel alienated and unqualified to participate in debate. Thus, shows like *The Daily Show* offer a blend of political critique with entertainment that "demand[s] an active and alert viewer to shift through the distinctions between fact and fantasy."[13]

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[9] Jenkins, 22-23.
[10] Ibid., 234.
[11] Jon Katz, "Media's War on Kids: From the Beatles to Beavis and Butthead," *Rolling Stone* (February 1994): 31-33. Cited in Jenkins, 235.
[12] Jenkins, 236.
[13] Ibid. 238.

Jenkins argues that the increased ability of audiences to participate in popular culture coupled with popular culture's increased focus on politics points the possibility of a new mode of political engagement. People now have a greater ability to participate in popular culture and are slowly turning popular culture into an arena of political struggle. Further, this participation in popular culture is developing strategies for sharing, creating, circulating, evaluating, and contesting knowledge that can later be applied to politics.[14]

But, before we become overly celebratory about the possibilities of convergence, we should consider some of the challenges to its effective use as a tool for social and cultural change. Jenkins himself notes that "…pointing to… opportunities for change is not enough in and of itself. One must also identify various barriers that block the realization of those possibilities" (with the end goal of finding a route around them).[15] In the following section, I begin to explore two of these potential obstacles. First, approaching the political as "serious fun" runs the risk that audiences will take away only the fun and leave "serious" aspects behind. And, second, participatory freedoms created by convergence culture may provide people as many ways to avoid politics as to participate in them.

Challenges to Convergence Culture as a Mode of Politics

"Serious fun" is not only an appealing but also an important mode of political engagement. Satire has long been central to political critique and processes of social transformation. Whether it is the critique inherent in the absurd inversion of social

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[14] Ibid. 237
[15] Ibid. 258.

hierarchies in carnivalesque festivals[16] or the use of humor to soften a controversial message,[17] play and satire have enabled social critiques and debates since the times of the ancient Greeks. While this power of play has significant potential that we should consider (and exploit), it may also have significant drawbacks. It is possible that the play may diffuse controversial critiques too much, allowing the audience to remain comfortable and their worldview unchallenged The audience can laugh at the gags and enjoy being entertained without ever really questioning their own political position or the dominant order. How many people watch *The Daily Show* or *Saturday Night Live*, laugh, enjoy seeing our elected officials lampooned, turn the TV off, and never think about it again? Placing something in the category of "entertainment" may invite audience participation and interaction. However, placing something too firmly in this category may allow for its dismissal, allowing us not to take it too seriously. One can laugh at jokes about Bush being a C student wannabe cowboy and never really stop to think about the implications of such a man being President or question his policies. In short, with "serious fun" there is always the possibility that the fun will overshadow the seriousness, allowing us to ignore the less enjoyable, more challenging parts of the message.

This phenomenon can be illuminated Stuart Hall's encoding/decoding model of media production, circulation, and reception/consumption and the light it sheds on audience reading practices. For Hall, various discourses are encoded into media at the production level and decoded by the audience during consumption. Hall offers three ways in which audiences read media texts– dominant, negotiated, and oppositional. Dominant

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[16] Victor Turner, *The Forest of Symbols: Aspects of Ndembu Ritual* (New York: Cornell University Press, 1967); Turner, *The Ritual Process: Structure and Anti-Structure* (New York : Aldine de Gruyte, 1969).
[17] Dwight Conquergood, "Poetics, Play, Process, and Power: The Performative Turn in Anthropology," *Text and Performance Quarterly* 9, no. 1 (1989): 82-95.

readings draw on "preferred meanings," discourses that "have the institutional/political/ideological order imprinted in them and have themselves become institutionalized."[18] They are within the parameters of the dominant ideology and do not challenge the hegemonic order. Conversely, oppositional readings resist and oppose the preferred meaning and the dominant ideology. And the negotiated readings lie somewhere in between – taking part of the preferred meaning while being partly oppositional.

According to Hall, audience members can decode using a different code than that intended by the producers. Meaning that a media object can be encoded using preferred meanings that reiterate the dominant order and can be decoded in an oppositional or negotiated way. For example, the dominant reading of the television series *Xena: Warrior Princess* understands Xena as traversing ancient Greece and fighting evil with her friend and sidekick Gabrielle. The oppositional reading of this same series views Xena and Gabrielle not as friends, but as lovers. However, not all media are encoded with dominant codes. Media producers can encode using negotiated or oppositional codes, which may or may not be read as such by the audience. For example, the video for the Pet Shop Boy's 80s hit "Domino Dancing" is arguably oppositionally coded - the story of two young gay men (one of whom is involved with a woman) who end up tumbling shirtless into the surf, during which there is a brief and barely visible kiss. Given that the Pet Shop Boys are openly gay, this seems likely that the counter-hegemonic reading is the intended one. However, the majority of U.S. viewers at the time read the video using preferred

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[18] Stuart Hall, "Encoding/Decoding," in *Culture, Media, Language,* eds. Stuart Hall, Dorothy Hobson, Andrew Lowe and Paul Willis, (London: Hutchinson, 1980),172.

meanings - two young men are fighting over the woman, ending with a final confrontation during which they fight (not kiss) in the surf.

Given that media consumers are able to decode to create readings that differ from the reading intended by the producer, whether that intended reading is dominant, oppositional, or negotiated, we need to interrogate what it means that popular culture is becoming a more fertile ground for the political. Whether the audience's reading is consciously oppositional (as with Xena) or dominant simply because their worldview causes them to read it through a specific lens (as with the heteronormative reading of "Domino Dancing"), audience decoding practices have a significant impact on what they take away from media. When confronted with media that are encoded with negotiated or oppositional discourses, there is no guarantee that audience will read these messages as such. In fact, all too frequently they seem to produce dominant readings of such media, readings that allow them to enjoy being entertained while remaining comfortably complacent.

While Hall's model is by no means a closed or unidirectional (from producer to audience) system, it is significantly less participatory than convergence culture. In Hall's model, production processes draw "topics, treatments, agendas, events, personnel, images of the audience, 'definitions of the situation' from other sources and other discursive formations within the wider socio-cultural and political structures."[19] Thus, the audience's ability to engage with media is limited to decoding and indirect influence. If the entertainment aspect of "serious fun" threatens of overshadow political potential in Hall's more traditional media model, what about in convergence culture? The participatory nature of convergence culture allows audience members to actively engage

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[19] Hall, 167.

with media; in convergence culture "everyone's a participant" (though not everyone holds equal power to influence)[20] and producers and consumers wrestle for control of media objects. If audiences are apt to ignore the politics in their decoding practices, what about when they are producer/consumers in the age of convergence?

With convergence culture, audiences are not only able to decode using dominant, oppositional, negotiated codes, but are also able to *code* using them as well. In essence, Jenkins's hope is that audiences, who have now also become media producers, will expand their political engagements via the participatory opportunities afforded them by convergence. This will allow them not only to decode, but to *en*code and *re*code in ways that reject preferred meanings. However, it is important to remember that the process can work the other way. Political messages in popular culture can and often are easily ignored by audiences. And, it seems likely that this erasure will carry over into their creation and circulation of media.

Black August Hip Hop Project Case Study

The Black August Hip Hop Project is a prime example of the pedagogical use of popular culture and "serious fun" discussed by Jenkins. Black August is a project of the Malcolm X Grassroots Movement (MXGM), a contemporary Black Nationalist group that grows directly out of Black Power Movements such as the Black Panther Party and the Republic of New Afrika. The primary focus of the Black August Hip Hop Project concert is to create awareness of and support for current and former political prisoners, including those who are currently in exile. The MXGM defines political prisoners as anyone who has been "targeted for their political activity in support of struggles for self-

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[20] Jenkins, 137.

determination, or for their affiliation with organizations promoting liberation, or for resisting the racist and classist policies of the government,"[21] particularly as a result of persecution by COINTELPRO.[22] This includes not only prisoners, but also people who have fled the U.S. and live in exile rather than be incarcerated, such as Assata Shakur and Nehanda Abiodun, both currently living in Cuba. The use of Hip-Hop, especially with the participation of popular artists such as Common, the Roots, Talib Kweli, and Mos Def, draws a much larger crowd than such an event would otherwise. And the musical performances entertain and energize the crowd, much more than any political rally or well-delivered speech ever could.

The concert lasts between 4 and 5 hours and in addition of featuring well-known artists, also features little known underground artists and local acts as well as artists who are famous in the underground Hip-Hop world. The first Black August concert in 1997 drew 400 attendees to a small club named Tramps,[23] and by 2007 it was a sold out show in the Nokia Theater on Times Square. Featured artists have included Erykah Badu, David Banner, Common, Dead Prez, Fat Joe, the Roots, Jean Grae, Les Nubians, Chuck D, Gil Scott-Heron, Dave Chapelle, Black Thought, The Roots, Mos Def, Talib Kweli, Q Tip, Immortal Technique and EPMD.[24] Also featured are legendary DJs such as DJ Scratch and DJ Evil Dee.

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[21] Malcolm X Grassroots Movement, "Political Prisoners," http://mxgm.org/web/biographies/index.html.
[22] COINTELPRO is an abbreviation for Counter-intelligence Programs. During the1960s and 1970s, the FBI used COINTELPRO operations to infiltrated and undermine activist groups in the U.S. Targets included Civil Rights movements (everyone from Martin Luther King to Malcolm X to the Black Panthers), the American Indian Movement, the Women's movement, and the Gay and Lesbian movement. CONINTELPRO tactics included anonymous letters to sow seeds of distrust within an organization, arrests (often on false charges) and imprisonment of key leaders (often using fabricated evidence), and even outright assassination.
[23] Black August Hip Hop Project, "Black August 2007," http://www.mxgm.org/blackaugust/2007/.
[24] Black August Hip Hop Project, "Black August 2008," http://www.mxgm.org/blackaugust/what-is-the-black-august-hip-hop-project.html.

Many audience members take footage of the Hip-Hop artists performing at Black August and post this footage on YouTube. In this practice, we see the impact of convergence culture on live musical performances. First, by recording, the audience is fundamentally altering their experience of the performance. Live performances are places in which performers and audiences together create, negotiate, and circulate social meanings. Much of this work takes place the audience/performer interaction. Recording introduces a new element into this scenario. The audience member is no longer there to simply participate in a live performance event; the intention is to record and share the performance. Even when attending live performances, capturing and circulating their experience to others seems to be an important consideration for many audience members. To do this, the audience member must split her attention between the performance and the act of recording, and this alters her participation in the performance. She must be thinking about what part of the stage to shoot and how far to zoom in. She must hold the camera or phone still, limiting dancing and other gesturing such as waving your hands in the air (both key parts of Hip-Hop concerts).

The Black August Hip Hop Project is an explicitly political event. Each year at the Black August concert, the crowd is told the story of iconic political prisoners such as George Jackson and Assata Shakur.[25] Information is provided about current and former political prisoners, who are honored throughout the evening. This includes some who

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[25] Assata Shakur is a former Black Panther currently living in exile in Cuba. She was accused of robbing a Brinks truck and was arrested in 1973 while driving on the New Jersey Turnpike. During the arrest, there was a gunfight, (accounts are vague on this aspect of the story). Shakur was shot while her hands were raised above her head, and one of her companions, Zayd Shakur, and a New Jersey state police officer, Werner Forster, were killed. Shakur was arrested, held in a male prison, and beaten unmercifully. She was sentenced to life in prison for the murder of Forster. But, in 1979, the Black Liberation Army "liberated" her from prison, and she eventually made her way to Cuba where she was granted political asylum and has been living since 1986. In May of 2005, the U.S. federal government and the state of New Jersey began offering a one million dollar bounty on Shakur's head, and she has been placed on the terrorist "watch list."

have been released from prison such as Geronimo Pratt or Fred Hampton Jr. (son of

assassinated Chicago Black Panther Party leader Fred Hampton) as well as others who

remain incarcerated like Mumia Abu Jamal and Dr. Mutulu Shakur. Yet others, who have

died in prison, such as George Jackson or Albert Nuh Washington, are remembered as

important political heroes. The purpose of Black August is to remember the work and

sacrifices of these people and promote a movement to free those still incarcerated.

Additionally, former political prisoners come and speak to the crowd each year.

During the 2007 concert, Tarik Haskins, Dhoruba Bin Wahad, Ahmed Obafemi, and

Ashanti Alston spoke. In 2008, the speakers were Kazi Toure, Tarik Haskins, Adubl

Majid, and Francisco Torres of the San Francisco 8. [26] Haskins, Bin Wahad, Alston,

Toure, and Torres are all former Black Panthers who were incarcerated on various gun

and/or murder charges largely believed to have been manufactured by the FBI. Ahmed

Obafemi is a former member of the Republic of New Afrika, a Black Nationalist group

founded in 1968 which advocates the creation of an autonomous Black nation on land

currently part of the U.S.

When the former political prisoners address the crowd at the Black August

concerts, they emphasize that the struggle for freedom is still ongoing and charge the

younger generation in the audience to take up the revolution. Often the audience is called

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[26] The San Francisco 8 are eight Black activists, many former Black Panthers, who have been charged for
the murder of San Francisco police officer John V. Young in an attack on a polices station on August 29,
1971. In addition to Torres, the accused are Richard Brown, Richard O'Neal, Ray Boudreaux, Hank Jones,
Harold Taylor, Herman Bell and Jalil Muntaqim. Charges were initially brought against Harold Taylor,
John Bowman (recently deceased) as well as Ruben Scott (now thought to be a government witness) in
1975. The case was thrown out because a judge ruled that the men were tortured when arrested and held by
New Orleans police. The men have asserted they were subjected to electric shock, cattle prods, beatings,
sensory deprivation, and the use of plastic bags and hot, wet blankets for asphyxiation. The case was
reopened in 1999. The San Francisco police assert this was due to advances in forensic science that could
shed new light on the crimes. Torres, Richard Brown, Richard O'Neal, Ray Boudreaux, Hank Jones, Harold
Taylor were arrested on Jan. 23, 2007. Herman Bell and Jalil Muntaqim were already serving sentences for
other charges.

on to organize and join the struggle for social justice. For example, at Black August 2008, a former Black Panther admonished the crowd, "What we have to do is, we have to understand that no one will liberate us but this generation. This generation should show no more compromise, no more cop-outs!" And during Black August 2006, MXGM representative Monifa Bandele urged the crowd to "do the work… out there, in the street, in the trenches *organizing."*

Clearly, Black August is working draw, educate, and politically mobilize the audience through the use of Hip-Hop. But, we need to consider the extent to which the audience deflects these efforts. If we look at the footage from Black August that is posted on YouTube, we begin to see what audience members may be taking away from the event based on what they choose to post and share with others.

All of the YouTube videos posted by audience members are of musical performances. To date, I have found about 60 clips spanning the past 3 years of Black August concerts. None of the speeches given by the former political prisoners or the statements made by MXGM representatives appears in any of the footage. The YouTube posts are identified as footage Black August Hip Hop Project, but the politics that are central to the event are never mentioned.

The only political content that can be found in these clips is in the performances of the artists who performed at Black August, some of whom are highly political. For example, Peruvian born rapper Immortal Technique, whose song *3rd World* goes, "[I'm] From where the only way democracy's acceptable/ Is if America's candidate is electable/ And they might even have a Black president, but he's useless/'Cause he does not control the economy, stupid!" Overtly political content in the performances of individual artists

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such as this is retained. But, the overall politics of the Black August event are erased.

Even when performances of containing political messages are posted on YouTube, the

political content is largely ignored. Those posting the footage do not mention it, and

comments posted by those watching the footage focus almost exclusively on the quality

of the performance ("THANKS MUCH 4 POSTING...HE IS THE SHIT"[27]) or other

random commentary ("Damn!!!! I knew Evil [Dee] was a lil thick back in the day. But

shit.....that dude done blown up!!!!"[28]). I have yet to encounter any comments that

address the political aspects of the concert event itself.

The consistently apolitical nature of footage taken at such an explicitly political

event leads me to wondering about the choices people are making while operating in

convergence culture. If we are moving toward a collective consumption of media that is

highly participatory, what does it mean that the only discussion on the web that I have

found about Black August chooses to eschew the politics that are the very foundation of

the event? Nina Eliasoph, in her book *Avoiding Politics*,[29] shows how people actively

work to avoid seeming to care about politics in their interpersonal interactions. She

argues that our public culture in one of political apathy and avoidance. This leads me to

ask - if convergence culture can allow people to "pool their insights and information,

mobilize to promote common interests, and function as grassroots intermediaries

ensuring that important messages and interesting content circulate more broadly,"[30] can it

also allow them to pool their apathy and avoidance, mobilize to depoliticize common

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[27] "Coldstaind" (username). Comment post. http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MAdvLwbJ6Ns (accessed 4-16-2009).

[28] "Daillmeskin" (username), Comment post, http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uQLxH2tv53o (accessed 4-16-2009).

[29] Nina Eliasoph, *Avoiding Politics: How Americans Produce Apathy in Everyday Life* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1998).

[30] Jenkins, 256.

interests, and function as grassroots intermediaries ensuring that important message and interesting content *don't* circulate more broadly?

As I waited for the Black August 2007 concert to begin, I heard the woman standing behind me talking on her cell phone. Referring to the crowd, she told the person at the other end of the line, "Yeah. Well, you know. It's just a bunch of righteous people and wannabe righteous people…" Like me, she had gotten there before the doors opened to line up in hopes of getting a good spot at the standing-room only event. But, she clearly wasn't motivated by a burning commitment to radical politics. We should not underestimate Americans' ability to avoid, erase, or dismiss the political. As our media terrain shifts and we have more opportunities to interact with and control the media we encounter, we find new possibilities to effect social and cultural change. But, we must begin to ask, if convergence allows for new modes of politics, does it also enable new forms of apathy?

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