Steve Waksman, Instruments of Desire (1999)

company, but even he was led to split the royalties for his first release, "Maybellene," with two men who had no part in the writing of the song, disk jockey Alan Freed and an unknown person named Russ Fratto who was likely a cover for Leonard Chess's attempt to get in on the publishing rights to the song.

Despite these constraints, Chess proved a fruitful site for the production of sounds that moved the electric guitar, and American popular music, in new directions. The Chess sound was created out of the alternately cooperative and conflicting relationships between the Chess brothers, especially Leonard, and the musicians who worked with the company. In this relationship, Chess did not simply record the sounds that musicians brought with them to the studio, but worked to actively shape those sounds, adding echo and other sonic effects and using microphones to get the right balance between instruments, a balance that was itself influenced by the musicians' use of amplification. By the same token, the sounds of the city that Chess promoted were not exclusively studio creations, but had many of their origins in the clubs around Chicago and other urban centers of black popular music. Chuck Berry forged his unique blend of country music with blues, swing, and R&B at the Cosmopolitan club in St. Louis, and Muddy Waters built the sound of his fully amplified blues ensemble at clubs like the 708 in Chicago years before that sound was committed to record. More generally, African-American guitarists in clubs and in the studio expanded the range of the electric guitar through their experiments with amplification. In the next decade, these sounds and methods would capture the imagination of a new generation of guitarists, mostly white, who were as much intrigued with the African-American sources of the new sounds as with the sounds themselves. Amid this new wave of electric guitar activity, though, it was another African-American musician who would push the use of amplification to its furthest extremes and, in so doing, would dramatically enact the complex interaction between sound, race, and sexuality that took shape around the electric guitar during the 1960s.

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Chapter 5

Black Sound, Black Body

Jimi Hendrix, the Electric Guitar, and the Meanings of Blackness

A World of Sound

During the last year of his life, Jimi Hendrix opened a world of sound. Electric Lady, it was called, a state of the art thirty-two track recording studio where the guitarist could pursue all the sounds running through his head. And they were plentiful, those sounds, maybe too much for one guitarist to handle: "Most of the time I can't get it on the guitar, you know? Most of the time I'm just laying around day-dreaming and hearing all this music. And you can't, if you go to the guitar and try to play it, it spoils the whole thing, you know?—I just can't play guitar that well, to *get* all this music together."[1] Over the course of his brief career, recording studios assumed a special significance for Hendrix as the sites where he could enact his wildest fantasies of sound, and where he could work to exert the greatest amount of control over the sounds he produced with his guitar. By the accounts of his ex-bandmates, his attention to detail in the studio verged on obsessive, laboring for hours over a single effect, manipulating the various technologies at his disposal past their limits, exploring every parameter until he found the sound that was just right for the song, or the song that was just right for the sound.[2]

Electric Lady was Hendrix's effort to move his control over sound one step further, to actually own the means of musical (re)production. It was also his attempt to create a "total environment" in which physical design and visual appearance segued into the overarching purpose of making music. According to Curtis Knight, a musician and Hendrix biographer, Electric Lady was "designed to give an atmosphere of being in space," and featured "every electronic innovation that could be conceived."[3] An-

other biographer, David Henderson, provides a more detailed portrait of the setting: "The carpeted stairway led to an underground reception area that was shaped like a flying saucer. A low, round cubicled mini-office was encircled by a soft, low couch. Passageways led to the first studio and, curving around a bend, to the second. Curving passageways disappear in muted lights, spacey spectrum colors gave the effect of endlessness. A sound-buffered, upholstered, cozy underground lab."[4] Henderson goes on to point out that the construction of Electric Lady was testament to the willfulness of Hendrix, who saw the project through to its completion despite a range of hassles, financial and otherwise.[5] With the opening of the studio in 1970, Hendrix had achieved a degree of artistic control inaccessible to most African-American musicians of the time, including the many players who populated the Chess studios in Chicago. At the same time, though, this physical embodiment of Hendrix's desires was as much a product of the mounting pressures on the artist as it was a result of his musical vision. The sound-buffered underground laboratory of Electric Lady studios was also a sanctuary where Hendrix could escape the burdens of performing according to a set of expectations that he had helped to foster and yet had no ability to manage, expectations that came with the position of being a black hipster artist playing amid the predominantly white counterculture of the late 1960s.

> History arrives only when we don't know what has happened. Only when we forget. Only when people disagree on what has happened. That is why a theory of history must always come into being at the same time as history itself.
>
> —*Samuel Delany (1993), p. 494.*

> The Jimi Hendrix Experience happened fast, so fast that we didn't really know what was going on. As a result, Jimi-the-myth is hard to separate from James Marshall Hendrix/Jimmy James/Jimi Hendrix.
>
> —*Noel Redding (1996), p. 25.*

It might seem a bit perverse to begin a study of Jimi Hendrix, a musician widely remembered as one of the most compelling live performers in the recent history of popular music, with an evocation of his attachment to the recording studio. Setting aside quibbles about the problematic opposition between live and mediated performance in popular music, however,

I want to posit Electric Lady, and the recording studio more generally, as a crucial supplement to the more spectacular, better-documented dimensions of Hendrix's performing identity. If Hendrix on stage was a near-mythic presence who both drew upon and signified a complex history of racial representations, Hendrix in the studio was someone else, an almost insular figure who could lose himself in the seemingly endless sound possibilities afforded by electric technology. In neither case do we find a more authentic Hendrix, but rather in the sum of the two we find a story of the contradictions he embodied. The most public of African-American performers, he surrounded himself with a world of sound, which seemed more and more an attempt to escape the trap of his celebrity.

Certain truths about Hendrix have slipped beneath the surface of collective memory. In particular, I am concerned with Hendrix's relationship to blackness as a category of representation. When Jimi Hendrix stepped onstage or into a recording studio, when he sang and played his guitar in ways unlike any guitarist who preceded him, he put forth not simply a demonstration of his own talent but a particular conception of blackness embodied in his own person. What did this mean to his audience? What did it mean to him? And finally, what might it mean to us now?

To answer these questions, I will first consider the question of authenticity surrounding African-American music in general, and Hendrix's music in particular. Paul Gilroy has written astutely of the ways in which Hendrix's performance style and his peculiar brand of musical creativity exposed a conflict "between the contending definitions of authenticity which are appropriate to black cultural creation on its passage into international pop commodification."[6] Following Gilroy's observation, I will examine how Hendrix negotiated, through music, his status as a crossover artist, and how his creative strategies compared with the ideals of musical blackness constructed by African-American intellectuals during the 1960s, a time when such ideals were being voiced with new force. In the second half of this chapter, I will focus upon intersections of race and gender in Hendrix's public image and his performance style, with particular attention devoted to the guitarist's overtly phallic use of his instrument. The issue of crossover reappears in the analysis of how Hendrix used his body and his guitar in the framework of white perceptions surrounding African-American masculinity.

Both sections consider the relationships among music, race, and tech-

nology. Like his blues-playing forebears Muddy Waters and Buddy Guy, but perhaps to an even greater degree, Hendrix seemed to derive a significant amount of inspiration from the technological potential of his instrument. His musical innovations were largely predicated upon the new vocabulary of electronic sounds offered by the electric guitar. Moreover, in interviews he often enunciated the view that the music generated by such sounds might have the power to transcend racial and other differences. Indeed, there seems to have been a genuine mysticism underlying many of Hendrix's beliefs about electric technologies. In a 1969 interview with *Life* magazine, Hendrix stated:

> Atmospheres are going to come through music because music is a spiritual thing of its own . . . It's constantly moving all the time. It is the biggest thing electrifying the earth. Music and motion are all part of the race of man . . .
>
> I can explain everything better through music. You hypnotize people to where they go right back to their natural state which is pure positive—like in childhood when you got natural highs. And when you get people at that weakest point, you can preach into the subconscious what we want to say. That's why the name "electric church" flashes in and out.[7]

The concept of the "electric church" is one that appears consistently in interviews with Hendrix, and has occupied the attention of several of Hendrix's biographers and critics.[8] I prefer to leave the full implications of Hendrix's mysticism to others, while calling attention to his more basic, but no less essential, belief in the power of electronic sound.

Shades of Noise

> It's time for a new national anthem. America is divided into two definite divisions . . . The easy thing to cop out with is sayin' black and white. You can see a black person. But now to get down to the nitty-gritty, it's gettin' to be old and young—not the age, but the way of thinking. Old and new, actually . . . because there's so many even older people that took half their lives to reach a certain point that little kids understand now.
>
> —*Jimi Hendrix, quoted in Hall and Clark (1970), p. 25.*

"O say can you see . . ." Or rather can you hear that this version of the "Star-Spangled Banner" has no words. Only melody—coupled with some

of the most jolting noise one could ever hope to hear, all produced by a single electric guitar. Jimi Hendrix performed the "Star-Spangled Banner" on several occasions, including one tempestuous evening at the Los Angeles Forum in 1969.[9] Amid a teeming crowd made angry by police harassment of those nearest the stage, Hendrix plinks the opening notes of the anthem, and then announces, "Here's a song we were all brainwashed with." The melody moves through once, then twice, the guitar still at a quiet volume that defuses the song of any grandeur. As Hendrix completes the second melodic couplet, he interjects a single word: "Bullshit." And then the sparks begin. "And the rockets' red glare"—volume up, distortion overwhelms the melody as the guitarist deforms the song through the radical use of his Stratocaster's tremolo bar, shifting between high-pitched screams and dive-bomber bursts of low-end crunch. The rest of the song continues at this pitch of volume and intensity, with notes descending into electronic feedback shrieks and another fit of cacophony after the penultimate line ("O'er the land of the free") that forestalls resolution and disrupts progress toward the closing "home of the brave."

Of course, Hendrix's most famous rendition of the national anthem came later that year during his performance at Woodstock, and the contrasts between the two versions of the song are notable. Whereas the L.A. Forum version was largely parodic of the song's intent, at Woodstock Hendrix played the "Star-Spangled Banner" with a greater recognition of the anthem's symbolic force.[10] Gone are the verbal interjections; the Woodstock version was strictly an instrumental statement. Hendrix's guitar enters here not quietly, but at full volume, thus investing the melody with considerably more weight than in the earlier performance. Consequently, when the guitarist pushes the song in the direction of electronic noise, as he does once again on "rockets' red glare," the effect is less of a departure from the original melody than an extension of it, albeit a severely disorienting extension. Moreover, the intrusions of noise play a much larger part in this rendition. Another immaculate sheet of sound follows the line, "the bombs bursting in air," with Hendrix crafting the sound of his guitar into all manner of permutations through a combination of physical and electronic effects, his hands striking the guitar at various points along the neck and body to achieve multiple shades of noise. Hendrix's use of feedback in the last lines of the song evokes the earlier performance, but again the sounds here seem to flow from the

melody even as they disrupt it, so that by the time the guitarist converts the single note of "free" into a shrill bit of feedback that descends into a miasma of sound, one has the sense of having heard not just a rendition of the national anthem but a full-fledged reinvention of it, such that the original can never be heard quite the same way again.

When asked his opinion of D. W. Griffith's inflammatory film, *Birth of a Nation,* President Woodrow Wilson declared that the film was nothing less than "history written with lightning." The Woodstock version of the "Star-Spangled Banner" is also history written with lightning, but of a sort that neither Wilson nor Griffith could scarcely have imagined, an "Unbirth of a Nation" rooted not in the power of images but in mastery of sound. Charles Shaar Murray, the most astute of Hendrix's many critics and biographers, called the performance "probably the most complex and powerful work of American art to deal with the Vietnam war and its corrupting, distorting effect on successive generations of the American psyche."[11] Hendrix translated the fractiousness of the war at home and abroad and the damage it did to American patriotism into a war between music and noise that was at once a supreme act of defamiliarization and a stunning political critique. Meanwhile, Samuel Floyd offers another reading of the Woodstock "Banner," one that lays less emphasis upon the explicitly political dimensions of the performance, and instead highlights the extent to which Hendrix's musical approach remains embedded in the "core" practices of African-American culture. According to Floyd, Hendrix's juxtaposition of identifiable melody and sonoric excess stands as a classic example of call and response, with the guitarist "Signifyin(g)" upon the call of the original tune with responses that echo the methods of African callers and early bluesmen in their preoccupation with timbral distortion.[12] As the "Star-Spangled Banner" breaks with a particular tradition of nationalist sentiment, then, it retains strong connections to a distinct tradition of African and African-American musical performance.

Or does it? For Floyd's assertions regarding Hendrix are part of a broad and contentious discourse on the nature of black music, a debate that extends back several decades and that reached a crescendo in the years surrounding Hendrix's career. Within this discourse, Hendrix exists as a threshold figure who marks the point at which black music comes into contact with other forms, other traditions, and other audiences to the

extent that it risks losing its status as a singularly or identifiably black phenomenon.[13] Considered from this perspective, Floyd's analysis of Hendrix and the "Star-Spangled Banner" works on at least two levels. First, it functions as a means of reclaiming Hendrix as a black performer, which in turn allows Floyd to assert the priority of African-American musical influences upon the rock music of the 1960s. Second, it revises received notions of black music and black culture in order to admit a greater recognition of the value of cultural exchange. There is much in this framework that I find convincing, and also much that seems to me sympathetic with Hendrix's own revisionist tendencies where African-American music was concerned. Before assenting to Floyd's interpretation of Hendrix and the black musical tradition, though, we would do well to examine the terms of the discourse on black music more closely in order to understand why it is such contested terrain. To do so, I want to look back to Hendrix's contemporaries, the adherents of the Black Aesthetic movement, whose efforts to define a separate black cultural identity continue to resonate within contemporary culture and politics.

* * *

Perhaps the fundamental recognition of the artists and intellectuals who made up the diverse constituency of the Black Aesthetic movement was that what we know as black music is no simple matter of sonority, just as black art more generally cannot be defined purely by reference to aesthetic codes any more than it can by reference to the color of an artist's skin. The Black Aesthetic was the cultural movement that paralleled the drive toward political autonomy expressed by Black Power. Adhering to the black aesthetic involved accepting the maxim "black is beautiful" as the first step toward breaking away from white European aesthetic standards that had so long associated blackness with ugliness, depravity, and evil. Aesthetics were transfigured into a battleground in which black and white artists struggled over control of the images that shaped the collective racial consciousness. Larry Neal offered a striking articulation of this sensibility in his essay on the Black Arts Movement.

> The motive behind the black aesthetic is the destruction of the white thing, the destruction of white ideas, and white ways of looking at the world. The new aesthetic is mostly predicated on an Ethics which asks the question:

whose vision of the world is finally more meaningful, ours or the white oppressors? What is truth? Or, more precisely, whose truth shall we express, that of the oppressed or of the oppressors? . . . It is clear that the question of human survival is at the core of contemporary experience. The Black artist must address himself to this reality in the strongest terms possible . . . The Black Arts Movement believes that your ethics and your aesthetics are one . . .

[The black aesthetic] comes to stand for the collective conscious and unconscious of Black America—the real impulse in back of the Black Power movement, which is the will toward self-determination and nationhood, a radical reordering of the nature and function of both art and the artist.[14]

Programmatic as Neal's assertions regarding the social and political function of art might seem, the Black Aesthetic movement as a whole did not simply seek to subordinate aesthetic imperatives to political ones. Rather, it sought to create a space in which the avant garde tendencies that were so pronounced in black art of the 1960s would become relevant to the African-American community at large. Nowhere was the tension between cultural avant-gardism and sociopolitical populism more pronounced than in the movement's attitude toward "Black Music" (the title of one of Amiri Baraka's key critical works during the period). As Don Lee put it in an essay on black poetry, "Those black artists that are active and hip would gladly agree, I'm sure, that black music is our most advanced form of black art."[15]

Black music was seen to be most advanced in large part because it was the mode of expression that had best weathered the middle passage, and had provided the basis for cultural survival in a setting where language, art, and other cultural forms had been severely repressed. Amiri Baraka's groundbreaking study of African-American music, *Blues People* (1963), cast a shadow over the subsequent florescence of black artistic and critical activity with its argument that the black experience in the United States could be best understood through music, and more specifically through blues and jazz, the quintessential African-American forms.

I cite the beginning of the blues as one beginning of American Negroes. Or, let me say, the reaction and subsequent relation of the Negro's experience in this country in *his* English is one beginning of the Negro's *conscious* appearance on the American scene . . . There were no formal stories about the Negro's existence in America passed down in any pure African tongue. The stories, myths, moral examples, etc., given in African were *about* Africa. When America became important enough to the African to be passed on, in those *formal* renditions, to the young, those renditions were in some kind of Afro-American language. And finally, when a man looked up in some anonymous field and shouted, "Oh, Ahm tired a dis mess/Oh, yes, Ahm so tired a dis mess," you can be sure he was an American.[16]

Baraka's argument in this passage is by no means uncomplicated in its association of the blues with blackness. His argument is very much rooted in social and historical experience; he understands the blues to have arisen out of the specific set of social relationships in which Africans found themselves upon their displacement to America rather than out of an essential black cultural identity. Nonetheless, his location of the origin of a specifically African-American consciousness in the rise of the blues placed black music at the center of the African-American historical experience in such a way that music became *the* constitutive element of black American cultural identity.

Complementing this sense of the historical significance of African-American music, both in Baraka's text and in the Black Aesthetic movement more generally, was a sense of the specific relevance of contemporary black musical forms, especially jazz. Since the late 1950s, Ornette Coleman and a small but significant cadre of other musicians had been striving to break down the formal barriers of jazz, to turn the music into a forum for unfettered collective improvisation in which individual artistic freedom would be at once enhanced and balanced by the group-oriented nature of musical performance. This innovative trend, which came to be called free jazz after Coleman's album of the same name, struck many African-American intellectuals as the height of a specifically black artistic impulse. It was a music that, as jazz, maintained its ties to history, but at the same time was very much of the moment, a product of the artist's response to the immediate conditions of his existence. Such a conception of free jazz led critic Ron Wellburn to assert that

The black musician is ahead of everyone in the expression of true black sensibility. For him, negritude or soul or blackness has never been a matter for soapbox articulation . . . More than any other kind of black artist, the musician creates his own and his people's soul essence, his own negritude. He can also do more damage to the oppressor's image of himself than

> heavily armed urban guerillas . . . Black musicians do not really *think about* the aesthetic; they simply project it. Soul is a manner of dancing, walking, speaking, interpreting life as we see and know it . . . We should all, then, re-establish ourselves as musicians: every black American can at least become a drummer or learn to play on a simple reed flute, just as every black person can dance.[17]

The competing strains of thought running through this passage—avant-gardism, populism, racial essentialism—combine to form a rather stunning manifesto on the place of music in African-American culture. For Wellburn, music was at once a vanguard product played by a highly select group of black male performers (in keeping with the gender bias of 1960s cultural nationalism) and a form of expression accessible to all black people. Blackness in this context took shape as a set of natural qualities held by all black people, a "soul essence" that bridged the gap between the artist's free jazz experiments and the experience of ordinary black Americans. Music for Wellburn provided the common language for a unified and undifferentiated African-American consciousness liberated from the "oppressor's image" of negative black identity.

The essentialism that undergirds Wellburn's analysis assumes an added dimension as he outlines in bold relief the contrast between jazz (black music) and rock (white music). In opposition to the vitality of jazz, he describes rock as a decadent musical form reflective of the "spiritual, creative, and sociological weaknesses of white America."[18] White rock fed like a vampire upon African-American musical forms, according to Wellburn, using black music to satiate "white American psychosexual illusions."[19] Moreover, Wellburn asserted that rock music reflected the subordination of spirituality to science and technology so characteristic of Euro-American culture:

> White rock is a technology, not a real music. It is an affectation, not a felt experience. It is parasitic, not symbiotic, to black culture and lifestyles . . . Electronic music can make the black man blind from the sight of money and the white man rich on his deathbed, laughing absurdly at having fooled the niggers this last go-round. Black musicians should re-evaluate the technological intrusions now threatening our music; times may come when that technology will be useless. Our music is our key to survival.[20]

Wellburn's criticism concerning the exploitation of black music and musicians in a music industry run by whites certainly has more than a grain of truth to it. Yet truthfulness by any objective measure is not the issue. Wellburn, along with Baraka, Neal, and a host of other African-American artists and intellectuals, sought through the construction of a black aesthetic to create a myth of blackness that transcended social and historical specificity, that cut to the very soul of every black person. Within this movement, music was valorized because it possessed several qualities perceived to reflect the true meaning of blackness: orality, physicality, emotionalism, spirituality, and improvisation as a style of creativity that was derived not from rational calculation but from immediate lived experience. In black music, the past, present, and future of African-American life were perceived to intersect. It retained a connection to the past as it pointed the way toward the future.

* * *

Within such a conception of blackness, Jimi Hendrix would seem to have little place. Writing after Hendrix's death, Paul Carter Harrison made explicit the guitarist's separation from black modes of expression in terms similar to Wellburn. "Jimi Hendrix was a profoundly gifted blues guitarist," observed Harrison, who immediately qualified his praise of the guitarist by noting Hendrix's technological innovations, which he saw as "concessions to the American counter-culture mode . . . Those who listened attentively could hear the lingering intimations of traditional ethos," Harrison observed, "yet it could not penetrate the excessive electronic manipulations which obscured the subtlety of intonation which emanates from a black experience."[21] Like Wellburn, Harrison portrays technology as a threat to the purity of African-American cultural life. Hendrix, for his part, embraced those same sounds and technologies with his concept of the "electric church," envisioning not the assertion of difference but its transcendence through the overpowering influence of electronic sound. On a less grandiose level, Hendrix's decision to play rock music as opposed to a "blacker" style such as jazz, soul, or even straight electric blues clearly contradicted the presiding notions of musical authenticity held by adherents to the black aesthetic.

Hendrix's music, his performance style, and his career all force a reconsideration of the meaning of cultural tradition as defined within the Black Aesthetic movement. Samuel Floyd gestured toward such a shift in his analysis of Hendrix's "Star-Spangled Banner." Taking this line of analysis one step further, Paul Gilroy, considering "Black Atlantic" music, in-

quired, "How are we to think critically about artistic products and aesthetic codes which, though they may be traceable back to one distinct location, have been changed either by the passage of time or by their displacement, relocation, or dissemination through networks of communication and cultural exchange?"[22] Gilroy's question points not toward the complete deconstruction of cultural tradition, but toward the acknowledgment that it is subject to change, break, and rupture even as it retains traces of a distinct cultural or historical past. He further rejects the attempt to draw strict lines between "racial identity and racial non-identity" so characteristic of the work of African-American critics of the 1960s, preferring a notion of culture rooted in the recognition of hybridity rather a longing for racial or cultural purity.[23] His theorization of black culture is ultimately more useful for understanding the implications of Hendrix's aesthetic achievements.

Yet the Black Aesthetic movement remains crucial to my study on at least two levels. First, as a movement contemporaneous with Hendrix's career, it provides a cultural context for Hendrix's decision to play rock music, a decision linked to his refusal to describe his music in race-specific terms. Second, the impulse behind the black aesthetic toward strict racial definitions, an impulse that arose out of a sense of struggle against the hegemonic influence of whiteness, offers critical insight into what the stakes were and are in defining a racial image. What did it mean that Hendrix did not share this sense of struggle? What are the implications for claiming him as a symbol of the positive value of cultural hybridity when the positive value of an autonomous black, or African-American, culture remains largely unrecognized? The tensions between an essentializing cultural nationalism and an acknowledgment of the disruptive and discontinuous nature of racial and cultural identity will perhaps always remain unresolved. Figures like Hendrix, who refuse to contain themselves within a single cultural tradition, force us to reexamine the value of racial (and sexual and aesthetic) boundaries, and to understand what might be gained through their erasure as well as what might be lost.

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Of course, to suggest that a single artist might have the power to effect such an erasure of differences would be absurd. It is quite another thing,

however, to examine how an artist might envision this sort of erasure. Take, for instance, the following interview with Hendrix by Jay Ruby in 1968:

> *Hendrix:* You can have your own blues. It doesn't necessarily mean that folk blues is the only type of blues in the world. I heard some Irish folk songs that were so funky—the words were so together and the feel. That was a great scene. We have our own type of blues scene. We do this blues one on the last track of the LP (*Axis: Bold as Love*), on the first side. It's called "If Six Were Nine." That's what you call a great feeling of blues. We don't even try to give it a name. Everybody has some kind of blues to offer, you know.
>
> *Ruby:* What about the white/black scene. Is white blues really the blues?
>
> *Hendrix:* Well, I'll tell you. The Bloomfield band is really out of sight and you can feel what they're doing no matter what color the eyes or armpits might be. Because I can really feel it, I want it. I say, "O.K., they've got this white cat down in the Village playing harmonica, really funky." So we all go down to the Village and then, wow, he turned me on so much, I said, "Look at that." He was really deep into it and nobody could touch him there because he was in his own little scene. He was really so happy. I don't care like I said before, it all depends on how your ears are together and how your mind is and where your ears are.[24]

Blues, the expressive form said by Amiri Baraka to signify the origin of a distinctly African-American consciousness, for Hendrix had little to do with race; indeed, one might say his conception of blues had little to do with "the blues," strictly defined. Whereas for Baraka the blues emerged out of a specific set of social and historical relationships, out of the lived experience of African Americans, for Hendrix the blues seem almost to have a life of their own removed from any specific context (although the example of Ireland in the above passage is intriguing, perhaps a recognition by Hendrix of Irish people's status as the "niggers" of the British Isles). Hendrix's notion of the blues centered upon the degree of genuine emotional content; it was concerned less with where singers came from and more with their psychic and spiritual states. Thus could Irish folk songs be as funky and together as any "real" (read: black) folk blues.

Thus, moreover, could white musicians play the blues as authentically as blacks in Hendrix's perception. Hendrix's take on race is curious, not so much in his acknowledgment of the validity of white blues, but in the way he tries to all but discount the significance of race as a social factor. "No matter what color the eyes or armpits might be": Hendrix's language pokes fun at the notion that color might have anything to do with the quality of music, and in so doing casually elides the troubling issues of cultural appropriation and exploitation raised, however implicitly, by the interviewer's question concerning the authenticity of white blues.

Moving from these insights, I want to posit two hypotheses about Hendrix's attitude toward music and race, ideas that I do not plan to prove in any standard academic fashion but rather would like to assert as provisional truths according to which we might understand Hendrix's interpretation of the blues. First, Hendrix's understanding of race, at least insofar as it was expressed through his statements in interviews like the one above, cannot be separated from his understanding of music. Both musical and racial boundaries (which intersect in the division, say, between "real" blues and "white" blues, or between blues and rock) appeared to Hendrix to be similarly artificial constructs that served to limit the free play of the imagination as well as the ability of individuals to play freely with one another. Second, Hendrix's ideas about musical freedom (and by implication, racial freedom), the innovative impulse that underlay his music, cannot be understood apart from his exploitation of electronic technology.

That the electric guitar stood for Hendrix as the literal and symbolic instrument by which he could transgress musical and racial boundaries can be discerned from the guitarist's articulation, in a separate interview, of a "wish [that] they'd had electric guitars in cotton fields back in the good old days. A whole lot of things would have been straightened out."[25] Hendrix's strange wish may shed little light on the nature of slavery, but it says much about the great symbolic weight he invested in his favored instrument. The electric guitar was to exert a transformative effect upon the contemporary social landscape, and on a smaller scale, was to allow Hendrix to escape the restrictions normally imposed upon African-American performers within the music industry. Whether and to what extent he actually did escape those restrictions is still a matter for debate. I am convinced, though, that this was in large part what he sought to

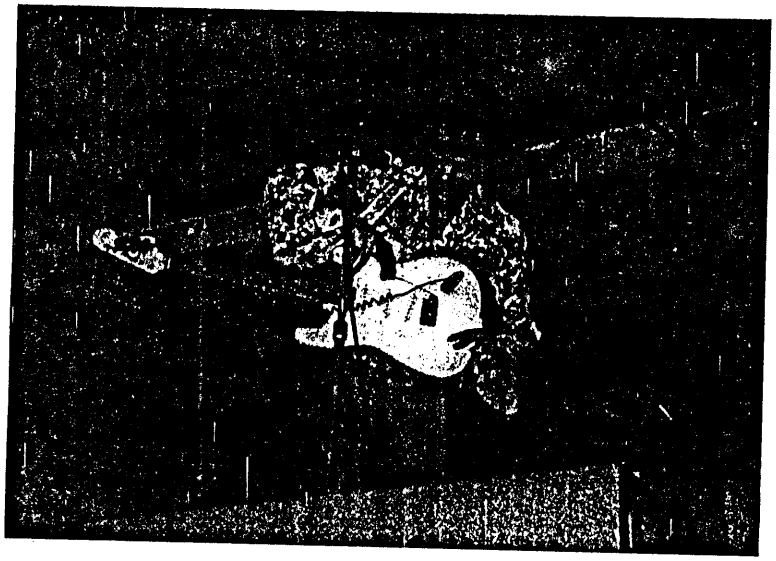
achieve, that he sought the freedom to experiment with musical ideas along with the power to reach a mass audience (a set of desires not so far removed from the avant-garde populism of the Black Aesthetic movement), twin desires that Hendrix articulated through his innovative use of the electric guitar.

* * *

> Question [posed by Albert Goldman]: What is the difference between the old blues and the new?
>
> Answer [by Hendrix]: Electricity.
>
> —*Albert Goldman (1992), p. 87.*

Question and answer in the form of a riddle: Hendrix's answer mocks the notion that there is any significant difference between blues old and new. The music is the same, his one-word response seems to imply, it only sounds different. Yet as I stated earlier, for Hendrix and for 1960s rock in general, that sound had significant transformative power in itself. Discussing the experience of playing at "little funky clubs," for instance, Hendrix observed that "Everything is sweating. It seemed like the more it got sweaty, the funkier it got and the groovier. Everybody melted together, I guess! And the sound was kickin' 'em all in the chest. I dig that! Water and electricity!"[26] Here the physical atmosphere of the club blends with the physicality of the sound to create a realm of intense sensation that, in Hendrix's mind, worked to bring people together. This notion of the extreme materiality of amplified sound was also put forth by Frank Zappa in a 1968 essay on "the new rock," in which Zappa raised the following series of provocative questions:

> Why does the sound of Eric Clapton's guitar give one girl a sensation which she describes as "Bone Conduction"? Would she still experience Bone Conduction if Eric, using the same extremely loud thick tone, played nothing but Hawaiian music? Which is more important: the timbre (color-texture) of a sound, the succession of intervals which make up the melody, the harmonic support (chords) which tells your ear "what the melody means" (Is it major or minor or neutral or what), the volume at which the sound is heard, the volume at which the sound is produced, the distance from source to ear, the density of the sound, the number of sounds per second or fraction thereof . . . and so on?[27]



5.1. Disfiguring virtuosity in action: Jimi Hendrix in performance at Woburn Abbey, tweaking the tremolo bar of his Fender Stratocaster. Courtesy of the Experience Music Project.

Zappa's questions remain unanswerable in the present context, but his emphasis upon the significance of sound, as well as its multidimensionality, points to the ways in which the sound of 1960s rock changed the experience of music as it changed the music itself. The "sound" became all-encompassing, and the experience of music became a jolting activity—the body a conductor of electric energy transmitted through amplified sound.

Can electricity be the basis of difference? It is a strange concept, and definitely leans too far to the side of technological determinism. Nonetheless, to understand Hendrix's simple answer to the question of the difference between the old blues and new is perhaps to understand at once how far he had come from the old blues and how much he remained rooted in its language. Hendrix's use of electronic sound significantly expanded the musical vocabulary of rock. Indeed, his array of bent, distorted notes teetering over the edge of tonality and feedback shrieks struggling to

avoid the inevitability of sonic decay introduced sounds that had really never been heard before in any musical setting. In doing so, he took advantage of two key sets of technological innovations that came about during the 1960s. First, in amplifier design, a British drummer and music shop owner named Jim Marshall and his partner, electronic engineer Ken Bran, responded to the demand among young British guitarists for adequate amplification with an amplifier that was inspired by the popular Fender Bassman (favored by many electric blues performers), but made with some significant changes in electronic components. Marshall amplifiers soon set a new standard for rock guitar amplifiers, with greater gain and more output power than their American counterparts, as well as a tone rich in harmonic frequencies. Hendrix took to visiting the shop regularly during his tenure in London, and had Marshall design for him some custom amplifiers with added gain so that he could more readily reach his equipment's output limit and move into the distortion- and feedback-filled realm of the clipped signal.[28]

To further facilitate his use of an overdriven electric sound and his general desire to expand the sonoric range of his instrument, Hendrix also drew upon a range of sonic effect devices that began to appear during the 1960s. Often referred to colloquially as "stompboxes,"[29] these were small metal boxes containing transistor circuits that, when connected between the line that ran from guitar to amplifier, altered the electronic signal delivered to the amp, changing the sound. The most common such device was the distortion-inducing fuzzbox, a staple of Hendrix's sound. Also prominent were the Octavia (which generated octaves of the note being played at higher frequencies, to give added dimension to the sound) and the wah-wah pedal (named for the way it abruptly shifted the tone of the guitar from low to high, creating a "wah"-like quiver in the sound). For many of his effects, Hendrix turned to another British electronics specialist, Roger Mayer, who custom-designed effects boxes for many of the leading guitarists on the British scene. Mayer shared with Hendrix a fascination with the many faces of distortion and sound modification, and once described his work as "an exercise in knowing what to do wrong . . . Once you deviate from a perfect amplifier, which, in essence, does nothing except make the signal larger, you are doing something incorrect in terms of theory. Designing electronic sound devices . . . becomes an exer-

cise in knowing exactly what to do wrong, because when you design a circuit and something is incorrect about it, there are an awful lot of complex changes that occur."[30] With Mayer's effects pedals in tow, Hendrix could more readily enact his own willful deviations from the norms of electronic sound design and capitalize upon the accidents made possible by amplification to push the sound of his guitar in new directions.

However innovative the *sound* of Hendrix's music may have been, its form typically stayed close to standard blues models. Moreover, the sounds themselves had their roots in the playing of earlier blues guitarists like Buddy Guy and Muddy Waters. Although he had more resources at his disposal, many of the effects that Hendrix sought to achieve, and that electronic engineers like Jim Marshall and Roger Mayer incorporated into their products, were extensions of the effects achieved a decade earlier by blues guitarists who were testing the limits of their own equipment. Thus did Hendrix recall in a 1968 interview that "the first guitarist I was aware of was Muddy Waters. I heard one of his old records when I was a little boy and it scared me to death, because I heard all of those sounds. Wow, what is that all about? It was great."[31] Hendrix himself sought to tap into a similar strain of musical expression, defamiliarizing standard song forms through the power of electric sound combined with his own disfiguring brand of virtuosity. With respect to Hendrix's interpretation of the blues, this combination of innovative style applied to traditional form was perhaps nowhere more apparent than in his recording of the song "Voodoo Child (Slight Return)," the final cut from his 1968 double album, *Electric Ladyland.*

"Voodoo Child (Slight Return)" was itself a revision of another track called "Voodoo Chile" that appeared on side one of the same album. The first "Voodoo Chile" is a long (about fifteen minutes) slow blues jam recorded "live" in the studio, which features guest musicians Stevie Winwood of Traffic on organ and Jack Casady of Jefferson Airplane on bass. Beginning with some spare vamping by Hendrix, who enters with the proclamation, "I'm a Voodoo Chile, Lord know I'm a Voodoo Chile," the song builds to a loping groove as the other band members join the guitarist. Hendrix's lyrics draw heavily upon the well-worn blues themes of masculine braggadocio framed by mysticism and black magic (the same combination of themes that made up many of Muddy Waters's best-

known recordings), which he updates with his own obscure brand of psychedelia:

> Well I'll make love to you in your sleep
> And God knows you'll feel no pain
> 'Cause I'm a million miles away
> And at the same time I'm right here in your picture frame
> 'Cause I'm a Voodoo Chile
> Lord knows I'm a Voodoo Chile

Each line is punctuated by Hendrix's bluesy guitar fills, and with his final vocal assertion the music surges forth, building in volume and density while Hendrix launches into an extended solo that at times turns into a musical dialogue with Winwood's organ. The guitarist's playing stays rather close to blues conventions throughout, and the tone of his guitar, deep and fluid, blends with the other instruments as often as it sets itself apart.

In "Voodoo Child (Slight Return)," by contrast, Hendrix's guitar *is* the song; the accompaniment by drummer Mitch Mitchell and bassist Noel Redding, however frenetic, is all but submerged beneath the presence of the guitarist's electrifying performance. Once again, the song begins with Hendrix's lone guitar. However, whereas in the earlier piece the opening strains were loose and almost casual, here the introduction is highly rhythmic. At first there are no notes, only the sound of Hendrix picking at his muted strings, a sound altered by a wah-wah pedal, which he uses to alter the timbre and place rhythmic accents. After a brief melodic statement also inflected by the wah-wah, the bass and drums enter the song while Hendrix's guitar assumes a harsh distorted tone that slashes and burns its way through the other instruments.

The basic musical figure of "Voodoo Child (Slight Return)" is a rather simple assemblage of bent notes and a droning E note bass string (actually an E♭, as Hendrix tended to tune his guitar down half a step). Between virtually every repetition of the figure, Hendrix plays some high-pitched improvisatory variation that transfigures the basic structure into something very different. The lyrics are closely tied to the first version of the song, continuing the singer's exploration of surrealistic blues imagery.

Well I stand up next to a mountain
Chop it down with the edge of my hand.
I pick up all the pieces and make an island
Might even raise a little sand.

Having once again declared his cosmic power, Hendrix plays a searing solo on the upper registers of his instrument, his guitar shrieking and crying like a witch burning at the stake. Long sustained notes melt into rapid runs that verge on chromaticism, while the sound of his guitar is electronically processed to shift in and out of earshot, composing a rhythmic alternation of sound and silence. The solo ends, the song quiets, and Hendrix sings a cryptic verse in which he bends the limits of space and time and envisions some sort of otherworldly reconciliation: "I won't see you no more in this world/I'll meet you in the next one—So don't be late." Another restatement of the chorus is followed by an apocalyptic guitar solo in which Hendrix's guitar emits sheets of sheer electronic noise, once again alternating between excess and virtual silence until, with a last fleet tremolo-bent trip across the fretboard, the song fades away to its end.

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About the two versions of "Voodoo Chile," Charles Shaar Murray has written that Hendrix's identification as the Voodoo Chile functions as his statement of black identity: "a staking of claim to turf that no white bluesman . . . could even hope to explore, let alone annex. Whether Hendrix intended 'Voodoo Chile' as an explicit challenge to the hegemony of Western rationalism and black American Christian culture is ultimately not the point. That Hendrix was announcing, explicitly and unambiguously, who he thought he was, is."[32] Murray goes on to call Hendrix "the first and last of the space-age bluesmen" whose distinctly modern blues style posed a challenge that subsequent musicians have failed to meet.[33] According to Murray, Hendrix stretched the blues well beyond its limits while still retaining its spirit; he updated the tradition without entirely removing himself from its confines. Greg Tate, an African-American writer, offers a similar judgment of Hendrix in his description of the influence of Hendrix and other black rock innovators upon Miles Davis:

> What Miles heard in the musics of P-Funk progenitors, James Brown, Jimi Hendrix, and Sly Stone, was the blues impulse transferred, masked, and retooled for the Space Age through a low-down act of *possession* . . . Where J. B. and especially Jimi and Sly took music isn't something that can be summed up in a few quotidian riffs any more than a Marquez novel can be experienced through synopses. It's at once a thought process, a textural language, and a way of reordering tradition and myth unto itself.[34]

Like Paul Gilroy, Murray and Tate are concerned with tradition not as a static entity but as a historical phenomenon subject to varying degrees of transformation. Both Murray and Tate locate in Hendrix the most radically revisionist of tendencies, and at the same time value him because even in his most innovative moments, Hendrix maintained a strong sense of musical roots. Perhaps Murray is right that the coupling of "Voodoo Chile" and "Voodoo Child (Slight Return)" stands as Hendrix's foremost articulation of blackness, that the songs stand as a sort of space-age blues in which the tradition gains strength even as it is denaturalized and technologized. I want to suggest, however, that Hendrix's articulation of blackness in these songs can also be read as a disarticulation, that the savage guitar rites of "Voodoo Child (Slight Return)" disfigure the more conventional blues sounds of the earlier version to such an extent that blackness itself is left as an empty category. Hendrix may indeed be asserting his blackness, but only if he can live it according to his own rules; and blackness therefore becomes a matter of individuality rather than a social condition. Hendrix proclaims he is a "Voodoo Chile," and one can only wonder what these lines might have meant to his audience; for Hendrix, the space-age bluesman, played his innovations to a mass of star-gazing white children.

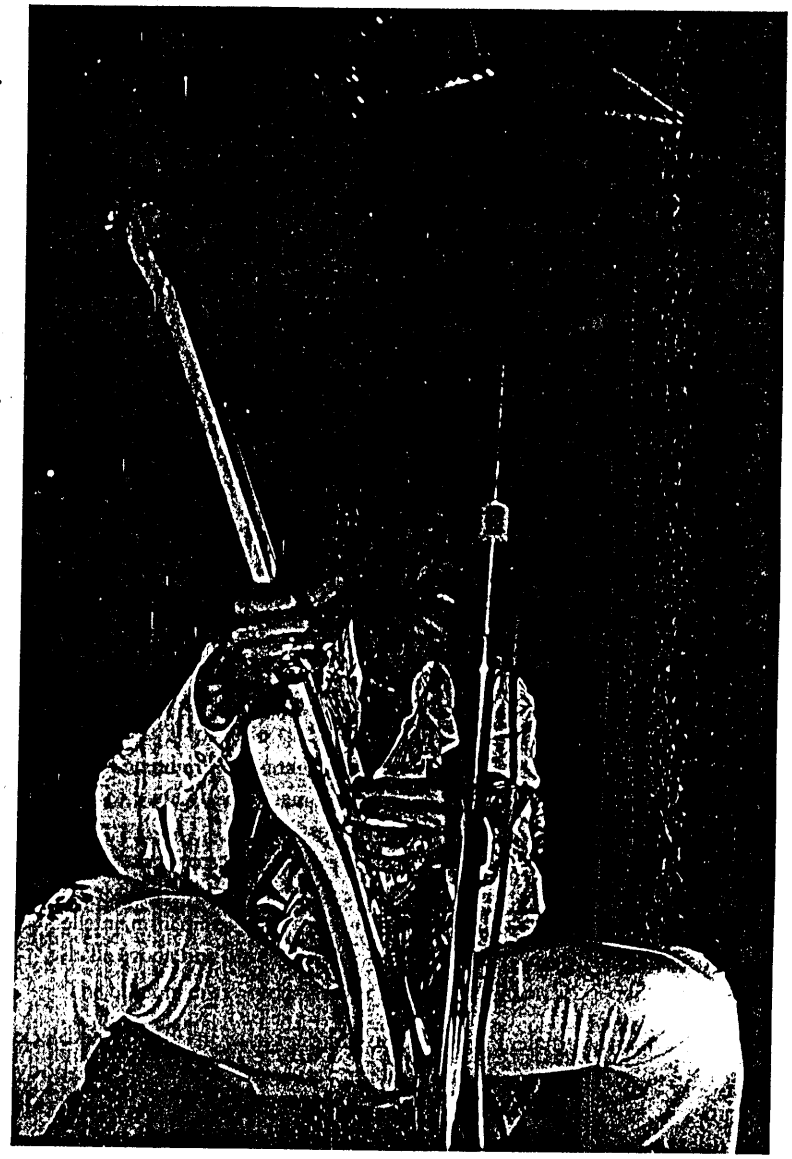
Bodily Sights/Bodily Sites

On June 18, 1967, at the Monterey Pop Festival, Jimi Hendrix enacted one of rock's most visceral moments with his performance of "Wild Thing." After playing the first half of the song relatively straight, the guitarist brings it to a prolonged, intense climax. "Wild Thing" descends into a fit of electronic noise as Hendrix turns away from the crowd to simulate intercourse with his guitar and amplifier, aggressively thrusting his hips at his "equipment." He then moves back toward the audience

and, after straddling his guitar for a moment, retrieves a can of lighter fluid from the back of the stage, which he proceeds to "ejaculate" onto his instrument. And next comes a match—the guitar is on fire at the foot of the stage, and Hendrix, kneeling over it, flicks his tongue and motions with his hands to conjure the flames higher. Picking up the tortured, still-burning instrument, he smashes it to pieces, and proceeds to fling its scorched bits into the crowd before stomping off the stage, amplifiers still squealing with feedback.[35]

Add to this scene a still image of Hendrix in the most obviously phallic of poses: his body arched slightly backwards as he plays the guitar behind his back, the neck of his instrument protruding through his legs like a surrogate penis, surrounded by his large black fist. In such instances, which were by no means isolated within the context of Hendrix's career, he specifically and intentionally manipulated his guitar so that it took shape as a technological extension of his body, a "technophallus." The electric guitar as technophallus represents a fusion of man and machine, an electronic appendage that allowed Hendrix to display his instrumental and, more symbolically, his sexual prowess. Through the medium of the electric guitar, Hendrix was able to transcend human potential in both musical and sexual terms. The dimension of exaggerated phallic display was complemented by the array of new sonic possibilities offered by the instrument, possibilities he deployed with aggressive creativity. Hendrix's achievement therefore rested upon a combination of talent and technology in which the electric guitar allowed him to construct a superhuman persona founded upon the display of musical and sexual mastery.

Hendrix's overtly phallic style of performance was just as crucial to his rock persona as his sound. Yet to say that Hendrix's appeal was sexual as well as musical is only to begin to understand the meaning of his sexuality for his audience. The bodily gestures that constituted Hendrix's performance style, and the ways in which those gestures were perceived, can only be understood when judged within the broad set of cultural meanings and discourses surrounding black male sexuality. Hendrix's music cannot be considered as separate from his physicality: his style of virtuosity was itself highly phallocentric, and his combination of musical and bodily flamboyance was perceived by many of his white guitar-playing peers to offer a unique challenge to their own talent and, by implication,



5.2. The electric guitar as technophallus: Jimi Hendrix. Courtesy of the Michael Ochs Archive, Venice, California.

their masculinity. But did Hendrix's performance style pose a similar challenge to stereotypes of black male potency and hypersexuality? Or did it simply represent his success in tailoring a "caricature" to fit the "mythic standards" of his audience (as Robert Christgau suggested in his review of the Monterey Pop Festival)?[36]

* * *

Perhaps no one has addressed the troubled white perception of black male sexuality more forcefully or more poignantly than Frantz Fanon. In his book, *Black Skin, White Masks,* written over forty years ago, Fanon described the damaging effects of what he termed the "epidermalization" of blackness under colonial relationships of power.[37] Epidermalization refers to the reduction of blackness to a matter of surface, a bodily effect that produces a thoroughly negative consciousness in the black individual. When Fanon recounts his own experience of race, the sight of blackness becomes all-important as he learns to view himself through white eyes.

> "Look, a Negro!" It was an external stimulus that flicked over me as I passed by. I made a tight smile.
>
> "Look, a Negro!" It was true. It amused me.
>
> "Look, a Negro!" The circle was drawing a bit tighter. I made no secret of my amusement.
>
> "Mama, see the Negro! I'm frightened!" Frightened! Frightened! Now they were beginning to be afraid of me. I had made up my mind to laugh myself to tears, but laughter had become impossible.
>
> . . . Assailed at various points, the corporeal schema crumbled, its place taken by a racial epidermal schema . . . I discovered my blackness, my ethnic characteristics; and I was battered down by tom-toms, cannibalism, intellectual deficiency, fetichism (sic), racial defects, slave-ships, and above all else, above all: "Sho' good eatin'."[38]

This final lapse into dialect conveys the full degradation of colonial black identity. As Fanon details his personal recognition of difference, his body becomes a trap "drawn tight" around his subjectivity. The sight of his own blackness in the eyes of (an)Other reduces him to an epidermal projection of essential blackness. Tamed into submission by a child's fear, he is compelled to forsake his individuality, and to assume his place in the white colonial imagination.

Difference, for Fanon, is born out of white anxiety. For the colonial black subject, consciousness of difference arises out of the confrontation with whiteness. For whites, on the other hand, the black as Other is a constitutive element of personality. Fanon invokes Jacques Lacan to assert that "only for the white man The Other is perceived on the level of the body image, absolutely as the not-self—that is, the unidentifiable, the inassimilable. For the black man . . . historical and economic realities come into the picture."[39] The recognition of difference affirms white sovereignty, but also raises the threat that whiteness can never be wholly unified. Anxiety is born out of this desire for wholeness, which leads to the reification and fetishization of blackness as a mark of *absolute* difference. The white fear of difference is therefore simultaneously a fear that difference may not be complete, that blackness might bear some similarity to the white self.

More than a desire for wholeness is at issue for Fanon, however, in his discussion of the white personality. As blackness is experienced as a negative body-image for the white man, so the black man is correspondingly reduced in the white imagination to a purely biological being. Fanon portrays this disturbing brand of objectification in a fascinating passage that begins with the question, "Can the white man behave healthily toward the black man and can the black man behave healthily toward the white man? A pseudo-question, some will say," Fanon continues. "But when we assert that European culture has an *imago* of the Negro which is responsible for all the conflicts that may arise, we do not go beyond reality." Fanon goes on to quote French author Michel Cournot on the matter of the threat presented by the black man's body as it is imagined by white men. Cournot's remarks are worth quoting at length, as is Fanon's response, which combines visceral anger with critical insight.

> "The black man's sword is a sword. When he has thrust it into your wife, she has really felt something. It is a revelation. In the chasm that it has left, your little toy is lost. Pump away until the room is awash with your sweat, you might as well just be singing. This is *good-by* . . . Four Negroes with their penises exposed would fill a cathedral. They would be unable to leave the building until their erections had subsided; and in such close quarters that would not be a simple matter . . ."
>
> When one reads this passage a dozen times and lets oneself go—that is, when one abandons oneself to the movement of its images—one is no

> longer aware of the Negro but only of a penis. He *is* a penis . . . The white man is convinced that the Negro is a beast; if it is not the length of the penis, then it is the sexual potency that impresses him. Face to face with this man who is "different from himself," he needs to defend himself. In other words, to personify the Other. The Other will become the mainstay of his preoccupations and his desire.[40]

According to Fanon, then, black masculinity occurs in the white male imagination as a threat; the black man's penis becomes a "sword," a weapon of assault always poised to strike, and to sever white corporeality. Fanon, through the words of Cournot, here portrays racial anxiety to be a fear of being penetrated by difference, as the ultimate boundary between self and other, the body, becomes the potential site of attack. He further suggests that behind such fears lay equally potent desires. Fetishization of black male potency and hypersexuality show the extent to which the black man has become the "mainstay" of the white man's "preoccupations and desires." White men wish to possess such qualities themselves even though they have been taught to associate such bodily excess with "Other"-ness. The desire for the black man must be opaque, beyond easy recognition, so it is turned into fear or otherwise displaced, but the desire persists.

* * *

To begin to understand how this field of racialized desire affected the career of Jimi Hendrix, I turn again to Frank Zappa, rock 'n' roll pundit. In an essay that attempts to explain "The Jimi Hendrix Phenomenon" to the readers of *Life* magazine, Zappa describes Hendrix's sound as "very symbolic" with its "orgasmic grunts, tortured squeals, lascivious moans . . . and innumerable audial curiosities . . . delivered to the sense mechanisms of the audience at an extremely high decibel level."[41] Ultimately, though, the source of Hendrix's appeal lay elsewhere. Despite the intensity of his sound and manner of performance, suggests Zappa,

> the female audience thinks of Hendrix as being beautiful (maybe just a little scary), but mainly very sexy. The male audience thinks of him as a phenomenal guitarist and singer . . .
>
> The boys seem to enjoy the fact that their girl friends are turned on to Hendrix sexually; very few resent his appeal and show envy. They seem to give up and say: "He's got it, I ain't got it, I don't know if I'll ever get it . . . but if I do, I wanna be just like him, because he's really got it." They settle for vicarious participation and/or buy a Fender Stratocaster, an Arbiter Fuzz Face, a Vox Wah-Wah Pedal, and four Marshall amplifiers.[42]

Zappa creates a dichotomy between Hendrix's sexual appeal and his musical appeal: girls like him because he is sexy, and boys like him because he is a great musician. Yet as his description proceeds the categories begin to collapse. The boys actually "enjoy" the fact of their girlfriends' excited response to Hendrix, they acknowledge their own deficiency at the same time as they long to approximate Hendrix's unique blend of musical and sexual prowess. Hendrix becomes an object of desire for the boys as well as the girls, an object "maybe just a little scary" in his ability to cross over both race and gender lines in his appeal.

Zappa displaces the suggestion of homoeroticism only to tacitly readmit the possibility of white male desire for black male sexuality. Hendrix's appeal is not simply a product of his flamboyance, but is intrinsically tied to cultural perceptions of black masculinity, as articulated by Fanon. But Zappa's words, along with Cournot's, should also force us to deal with what is generally absent from Fanon's account: the problematic role of white women's sexuality in this scenario. (Black women are strikingly and distressingly absent from all accounts.) For Fanon the colonial relationship was at its root homosocial, being a relationship between men. Thus did he all but overlook the ways in which the white female body, as the primary object of white male desire, became the screen upon which were projected the various fears and desires associated with black masculinity. Zappa's description of the white male fascination with their girl friends' excited response to Hendrix echoes Cournot's line about the "black man's sword": "When he has thrust it into your wife, she has really felt something." In both instances the white man is reduced to a voyeur forced to recognize his own impotence—unless he is somehow able to possess the black man's tools, as Zappa's boys seek to do with their purchase of Hendrix-related merchandise. Commodification as castration? Perhaps. Just as significant, though, is the way in which white women's imagined sexual gratification is taken as the true measure of black male potency.

A photo essay from the same June 1968 issue of *Life* magazine that

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5.3. Hendrix with fellow "Experience" bandmates, drummer Mitch Mitchell *(left)* and bassist Noel Redding *(right)*. Note the dueling afros of Hendrix and Redding. The look of the band played upon racial difference and similarity. Courtesy of the Experience Music Project.

contained Zappa's article further illustrates this point. The piece portrays "The flailing, wailing freakout of the Hendrix Experience" with a large photograph of Hendrix and his white bassist Noel Redding. The two are obviously caught in the act of performing. Redding, his afro as big as that of Hendrix, grimaces while his arm and bass are both blurs of motion. Hendrix strikes a similar pose, his guitar strapped securely across his body, his arm poised in the air as though he has just struck a massive flurry of notes and is now allowing the sound to play itself. Accompanying the image is a slyly suggestive text: "The Jimi Hendrix Experience is a fusion of shock, squealing static, earthy songs, erotic gestures. Hendrix . . . is an American Negro who plays with two white English sidemen (with him here is guitarist [sic] Noel Redding). The Experience is rock's miscegenation of black and white, of Beatles and soul, of taunting challenge and (next page)—response."[43] One turns the page to find that the "freakout" of the Hendrix Experience "whips flesh as well as soul"; and the flesh in question belongs to a young, blond white woman. The position of her body suggests that she is dancing: arms stretched into the air above her, head raised, hair tossed to one side, eyes closed as though she is in some sort of ecstatic trance, "whipped" by the monumental sound of Hendrix's music. Once again, it is the white woman's response that matters, her ecstasy that authenticates the power of Hendrix's "Experience."

These photos, like Zappa's descriptions, are largely played for fun. They are there primarily to amuse rather than to edify the reader. Yet the photo caption belies any notion of simple playfulness. Hendrix stands as a symbol of miscegenation, as the embodiment of desires at once threatening and titillating. Moreover, this implication of racial mixing is doubly signified in the images. While the text draws attention to the response of the white woman, the visual presence of white bassist Noel Redding provides further testimony to the supposed disruption of racial boundaries represented by Hendrix and his group. Indeed, Redding's physical similarity here is notable, making one wonder how accidental was the mistaken identification of him as a guitarist. Furthermore, Redding and Hendrix are positioned on the page as virtual mirror-images of one another, so that one need only flip the page in half to almost perfectly overlay one image onto the other. If we accept that the white female body serves as the mirror reflecting and displacing white male desire for black masculinity, we might add to this that the white male may himself mirror the black male (for Hendrix is certainly the controlling figure here), that he might incorporate onto his body the various artifacts (guitar, afro, style of dress, a set of bodily gestures) that outwardly signify the black man's own perceived prowess.

If this scenario has a ring of familiarity, which I hope it does, it is because I have tried to describe a situation that is essentially a form of minstrelsy. Gone, perhaps, is the blackface, but so many symbols of black masculinity, and specifically of Hendrix's masculinity, are visible on Redding's body that the process of literally "blacking up" is no longer necessary.[44] I would further suggest that this particular example is indicative of a much broader trend during the 1960s. Scores of white guitarists in the United States and Great Britain became infatuated with the blues, many

of whom had only come into contact with black music through recordings, and they found in Hendrix a living model for their own attempt to transgress racial boundaries. Hendrix's presence on the white blues-rock scene had a double-edged effect: on the one hand he lent white musicians an air of legitimacy; on the other hand, he threatened their own claims to authenticity. The threat posed by Hendrix was both sexual and musical, and on each count took shape on the contested terrain where race and masculinity intersect.

* * *

Written accounts of Hendrix have ranged from the explicit reduction of Hendrix to his penis to grudging envy to enthusiastic praise for his bluesman heritage. The following four quotations express this range, reimagining what Hendrix's audience might have perceived when they watched him perform. The first, drawn from David Henderson's biography of Hendrix, *'Scuse Me While I Kiss the Sky,* recounts the guitarist's encounter with infamous groupies the Plaster Casters, a pair of young Chicago women who made plaster casts of rock star genitals. The story of Hendrix's meeting with the women has been told and retold in various books about him, and has thus acquired mythic status. The latter three quotes are drawn from three white blues guitarists: Eric Clapton, Michael Bloomfield, and John Hammond, who recount their impressions of watching Hendrix perform.

> We needed a ratio of 28:28 and found this barely sufficient. He has got just about the biggest rig [penis] I've ever seen! We needed to plunge him through the entire depth of the vase. In view of all these dodgy precedents, we got a BEAUTIFUL mold. He even kept his hard for the entire minute. He got stuck, however, for about fifteen minutes (his hair did) but he was an excellent sport—didn't panic . . . he actually enjoyed it and balled the impression after it had set. In fact, I believe the reason we couldn't get his rig out was that it wouldn't GET SOFT!
>
> —*From the diary of the Plaster Casters, quoted in Henderson (1983), pp. 180–181.*

> Everybody and his brother in England still sort of think that spades have big dicks. And Jimi came over and exploited that to the limit, the fucking tee. Everybody fell for it. Shit. I fell for it. After a while I began to suspect it. Having gotten to know him, I found out that's not where he's at, not at all. The stuff he does onstage, when he does that he's testing his audience. He'll do a lot of things, like fool around with his tongue and play his guitar behind his back and rub it up and down his crotch. And he'll look at the audience, and if they're digging it, he won't like the audience . . . If they don't like dig it, he'll play straight 'cause he knows he has to.
>
> —*Eric Clapton, quoted in Fong-Torres (1981), p. 28.*

> You couldn't even tell what Hendrix was doing with his body. He moved with all those tricks that black guitarists had been using since T-Bone Walker and Guitar Slim—playing behind his head and with his teeth. He took exhibitionism to a new degree. He used to crash his guitar against his hip. It was a bold gesture, and he would get a roaring, fuzzy, feedback sound. His body motion was so integrated with his playing that you couldn't tell where one started and the other left off.
>
> —*Michael Bloomfield (1975), pp. 56–57.*

> [Hendrix] was playing a Fender Stratocaster upside down and left-handed—one of those things that just boggles your mind. I just could not believe it—playing with his teeth, and doing all those really slick techniques that I had seen in Chicago on the south side on wild nights. But here was this guy doing it, and he was fantastic playing blues. He really dug me, and I really dug him.
>
> —*John Paul Hammond (1975), p. 20.*

For Hammond and Bloomfield, Hendrix was a real bluesman whose set of techniques—musical as well as bodily—evoked the history of black music, or the atmosphere of South Side Chicago. Michael Bloomfield went on in the same interview to assert that "Jimi was the blackest guitarist I ever heard. His music was deeply rooted in pre-blues, the oldest musical forms, like field hollers and gospel melodies. From what I can garner, there was no form of black music that he hadn't listened to or studied, but he especially loved the real old black music forms, and they just pored out of his playing."[45] This remark becomes all the more striking when one considers how far removed it seems from the notions of blackness put forth by the Black Aesthetic movement. Whereas Hendrix went

against the grain of musical authenticity as it was conceived by advocates of 1960s-era cultural nationalism, to Bloomfield, himself something of a fetishist on issues of musical purity, he is the "blackest" of musicians.

How can one account for such a disparity of perception? Perhaps by recognizing that Bloomfield, and other white musicians like him, themselves had something at stake in claiming Hendrix's blackness, maybe even more at stake in some ways than Hendrix himself. Acknowledgment of Hendrix's authenticity can also be read as a strategy of self-authentication, a point borne out by the closing line of Hammond's statement: "He really dug me, and I really dug him." Hammond was a regular performer in the Greenwich Village clubs where Hendrix was "discovered," and at one point even employed Hendrix as his guitarist. As he reminisced about Hendrix in *Guitar Player* magazine, Hammond pushed this strategy to almost absurd limits. Describing his first meeting with Hendrix, Hammond recalled:

> He knew me and had my albums, and he was just knocked out that I was there. See, I had all these Muddy Waters and Howlin' Wolf tunes on the *So Many Roads* album, and he had gotten them from my record—at least, this is what he told me. He was hanging out in the Village where I was very popular at that time, and he had been turned on to my album, and he went from there. I'm sure as he got more and more well known, I became less important to his reality, and he had to say, "Oh, I got this thing from Muddy Waters and Howlin' Wolf" which I can understand. But Robbie Robertson's guitar playing on that album is what really inspired him.[46]

Hammond rather remarkably constructs a history of Hendrix's musical life centered around himself. For just a moment he expresses a well-founded doubt about this scenario—"at least, this is what he told me"—but this doubt quickly recedes, and he is left suggesting that Hendrix really did not understand the blues until he moved to the Village and learned about it from white bluesmen like Hammond. There is some truth to the observation that the bohemian setting of the Village gave Hendrix a sense of artistic freedom he had not experienced earlier in his career.[47] Yet Hammond's narrative has much broader implications that ultimately have far less to do with the facts of Hendrix's biography—which do not bear out Hammond's story—than with the ways in which he

was viewed by the white musicians who were at once his audience and his peers.

Eric Clapton takes us a bit deeper into the problem of Hendrix's reception. Here is a response, not to the actual sight of Hendrix's penis, but to the sight of his performance, which according to Clapton was overshadowed in the minds of the British public by the idea of his penis. Ample evidence for such an assessment can be found in the depiction of Hendrix among the British press, where, as Charles Shaar Murray recounts, "the national daily tabloids treated him like a freakshow, dubbed him the 'Wild Man of Pop,' and generally trotted out the would-you-let-your-sister-marry-this-man ritual greeting with which new pop phenomena have traditionally been welcomed since the invention of Elvis Presley in the fifties."[48] The mainstream American press was also no harbinger of moderation in its response to Hendrix. Along with the aforementioned responses from *Life* magazine (the photo essay and article by Zappa), there was *Newsweek*'s description of the Hendrix Experience as a "nasty looking trio with its triptych of smirking simian faces;"[49] another *Life* article that made reference to "the Helenic [sic] sculpture of [Hendrix's] trousers;"[50] and, most colorfully, a *Time* magazine review that recounted how Hendrix "slung the guitar low over swiveling hips, or raised it to pick the strings with his teeth; he thrust it between his legs and did a bump and grind, crooning: 'Oh, baby, come on now, sock it to me!' Lest anybody miss his message, he looked at a girl in the front row, cried, 'I want you, you, you!' and stuck his tongue out at her."[51]

Clapton's remark concerning how Hendrix played to the public's idea that "spades have big dicks" is well-documented by such reactions from the popular press. However, his comments push in other, more ambivalent directions. Clapton's suspicions and revelations about the extent to which Hendrix was "putting on" his audience tapped into a broad discourse among 1960s musicians and critics concerning the relative value of putting on a show. For Clapton, Hendrix's way of catering to certain racial stereotypes was part of the guitarist's extreme flamboyance and physicality, which distracted audiences from his exceptional musicianship.[52]

Whether such demonstrative behavior added to or detracted from the value of a given performance was one of the great unsettled issues of the

1960s rock subculture. Those like Clapton who were concerned above all with maintaining a certain authenticity felt that the showiness of a figure like Hendrix rubbed against the grain of a good performance. Others were less sanguine in their judgments. Michael Rosenbaum, for instance, put the matter in some perspective in an article in 1968, "Jimi Hendrix and Live Things." He deciphered two sorts of act styles among 1960s rock performers: the "internal," which involved "spontaneous emotional movement by a performer or group"; and the "external," which was essentially "theater set apart from the music."[53] Rosenbaum perceived Hendrix to embody a fusion of these different styles, but also noted the tendency of many in the rock audience to get upset by the "external" mode, to which the writer offered the counter, "You are what you pretend to be . . . it's sometimes hard to decide if something is natural or not."[54]

Both Clapton and Rosenbaum viewed Hendrix as acting unnaturally, although they drew different conclusions from their perceptions. Many others in the blues-centered counterculture of the 1960s saw no pretense in Hendrix's performing style at all, however. Recall, once again, the impressions of Hammond and Bloomfield: though neither described Hendrix in especially phallic terms, both highlighted the role of the guitarist's bodily gestures in conveying what they perceived to be Hendrix's authenticity. For Bloomfield in particular, Hendrix's sound was inseparable from his body. Considering the highly coded nature of the black male body, Bloomfield's observations carry far more weight than (I assume) he intended.

Michael Bloomfield also gave voice to the sense that Hendrix's presence posed a challenge, if not an outright threat, to the legitimacy of the white male guitarists who were so caught up in playing the blues. For a time in the mid-1960s, Bloomfield was considered to be *the* hot young American blues guitarist, a figure who had absorbed the lessons of black Chicago blues and successfully moved them into a new expressive context. According to Bloomfield, all of that changed when he came upon Hendrix performing at Greenwich Village's Cafe Wha? in 1966.

> The first time I saw Jimi play he was Jimmy James with the Blue Flames. I was performing with Paul Butterfield, and I was the hot shot guitarist on the block—I thought I was *it*. . . . Hendrix knew who I was, and that day, in front of my eyes, he burned me to death. I didn't even get my guitar out. H bombs were going off, guided missiles were flying—I can't tell you the sounds he was getting out of his instrument. He was getting every sound I was ever to hear him get right there in that room with a Stratocaster, a Twin (amplifier), a Maestro fuzz tone, and that was all—he was doing it mainly through extreme volume. How he did this, I wish I understood. He just got right up in my face with that axe, and I didn't even want to pick up a guitar for the next year.[55]

Bloomfield, himself a talented guitarist, was almost shamed by his own claims to virtuosity after seeing and hearing Hendrix perform. He was awed by Hendrix's talent, and by the amazing array of sounds Hendrix produced. Perhaps he responded as much to what he perceived to be Hendrix's overwhelming blackness and masculinity as he did to his music. Whatever Bloomfield may have felt, his story gives evidence of the way in which the electric guitar became both the instrument and the symbol for a highly gendered and racialized form of virtuosity in which the individual player asserted his masculinity as he demonstrated his talent. As a white bluesman who had strong ideas about both musical and racial authenticity, Bloomfield could not conceive of matching Hendrix's "in your face" performance.

Bloomfield's feelings of humiliation were echoed by Pete Townshend, guitarist for yet another British blues/R&B influenced band, The Who. Indeed, it is in Townshend's story that the convergence of Hendrix's musical and sexual effects gain their clearest articulation. In a 1989 interview with *Guitar Player* magazine, Townshend recounted his earliest experiences with Hendrix, when he and his friend Eric Clapton would go to see the guitarist perform.

> I suppose like a lot of people, like Eric, for a while there I think we gave up [after having first seen Hendrix play], and then we started again and realized . . . it was very strange for Eric and me. We went and watched Jimi at about 10 London shows together, and he [Clapton] wasn't with a girl at the time, so it was just me, my wife-to-be Karen, and Eric, going to see this monstrous man. It got to the point where Eric would go up to pay his respects every night, and one day I got up to pay my respects, and he was hugging Eric, but not me—he was kind of giving me a limp handshake—just because Eric was capable of making the right kind of approach to him. It was a difficult time. You have to remember the other thing about him, that he was astonishingly sexual, and I was there with my *wife*, you know,

> the girl I loved. And you could just sense this whole thing in the room where every woman would just [claps] at a snap of a finger.[56]

Townshend's story describes something very different from mere musical humility. For Townshend, Hendrix was a "monstrous" man whose presence threatened the integrity of his relationship with "the woman he loved." Townshend's anxieties hinge upon the possibility that his wife may be violated, or maybe even worse, that she might simply succumb to Hendrix's overpowering sexual aura. Either way, Townshend feels as though he has suffered a blow to his masculinity (note the "limp handshake" offered by Hendrix), a blow that is built out of a combined sense of musical and sexual inadequacy.

Despite this perceived sexual threat, or perhaps even because of it, Townshend, like the other musicians cited, remained fascinated with Hendrix. He, too, could not escape the perception that Hendrix, as a black performer, was true to the music in a way that neither he nor any of his white counterparts could ever be:

> [Hendrix had] been in the black milieu as the sideman for this musician and that musician and this was his chance to not only draw himself out of the mire of mediocrity but also to do something for the black cause . . . there was a tremendous sense of him choosing to play in the white arena, that he was coming along and saying, "You've taken this, Eric Clapton, and Mr. Townshend, you think you're a showman. This is how *we* do it. This is how we can do it when we take back what you've borrowed, if not stolen. I've put it back together and *this* is what it's all about, and you can't live without it, can you." And the terrible truth is that we *couldn't* live without it. There was a real *vengeance* that we *couldn't* live without.[57]

Townshend gives dramatic expression to the sense in which Hendrix's decision to play rock was perceived as a deliberate act of reappropriation, a vengeful attempt to beat the white guitarists by reasserting African-American ownership of the symbols from which rock performers drew their power. Even more telling, though, is Townshend's suggestion that he and his peers "couldn't live without" what Hendrix had to offer, that they needed his enactment of blackness not simply to justify their endeavors but to remind themselves of what they lacked. Townshend thus forcefully articulates a version of Fanon's insights concerning the constitutive role of black masculinity within the construction of white manhood, a relationship that was central to the rock counterculture of the 1960s. White rock musicians in particular sought to replicate a certain style of blackness that bolstered their masculinity while it shaped their musicianship. Hendrix's move to join their ranks, in turn, gave them a figure onto whom they projected received notions of racial and musical authenticity. In the words of Hendrix biographers Caesar Glebbeek and Harry Shapiro, then, "Jimi Hendrix was treated as superhuman and subhuman, but rarely just human."[58]

* * *

While the preceding analysis says much about how Hendrix was perceived by others, it offers only the vaguest of clues as to how Hendrix understood himself. Although all answers to such a question are hypothetical, the effect he had upon his audience was surely at least partly intentional. Certainly, Hendrix specifically and intentionally manipulated his guitar to create an air of phallic potency. In interviews, he tended to characterize his more flamboyant gestures, such as burning his guitar, as a simple and natural outgrowth of the musical moment: "We just get excited by the music, and carried away."[59] Such a casual attitude is belied, though, by his stylized movements on stage. Perhaps he experienced each performance as a unique, spontaneous act, but the repetition of gestures over time suggests a more conscious and more complicated process. Hendrix's body language fills the silence left by his words.

Of course, Hendrix's bodily motions were never a thing unto themselves, but were always tied to musical effects. With this confluence of the musical and the bodily, Hendrix enacted a rather sophisticated version of what Henry Louis Gates has called "Signifyin(g)." Focusing upon African-American literature, Gates suggests that "whereas black writers most certainly revise texts in the Western tradition, they often seek to do so 'authentically,' with a black difference, a compelling sense of difference based on the black vernacular."[60] According to Gates, black writers construct their difference by "Signifyin(g)" upon both white and black texts. As opposed to white ways of signifying, of representing an object or idea through signs, "Signifyin(g)" within the African-American tradition is based upon a constant play of signs that focuses attention upon the sound of a text rather than its literal meaning.[61] Literary "Signifyin(g)" employs principles of repetition and difference, which Gates links to jazz improvi-

sation: preexisting texts (novels or songs) serve as the starting point for the artist (writer or musician) to display his own mastery of language by interrupting or transforming the original source through the devices of his own creativity.[62] The practice of "Signifyin(g)" as defined by Gates therefore stands as a crucial strategy by which African-American artists can challenge culturally dominant aesthetic forms at the same time as they might choose to participate in dominant modes of artistic production.

Whether Hendrix ever did anything authentically is, of course, highly questionable, as is Gates's own move to authenticate certain elements of African-American expressivity. Nonetheless, there is much in his framework that can help us to understand Hendrix's achievements. As a crossover artist who opted to play in a predominantly white medium, Hendrix carved a distinct space for himself through a combination of bodily flamboyance and musical innovation. His "Signifyin(g)" gesture was thus twofold. With his body, he "Signified" upon the preexisting text of black male potency and hypersexuality, and with his music, he "Signified" upon the various traditions that contributed to his own style.

One can see these processes at work in Hendrix's performance of "Wild Thing" at the Monterey Pop Festival. He disfigures and defamiliarizes a song his audience would have recognized through his use of excessive feedback. Even more striking, though, is the bodily dimension of his performance, and particularly his final sacrificial act, when he destroys the very symbol of his own prowess, perhaps only to further assert that he has nothing left to prove. Hendrix's act was nothing if not contradictory, but I think it is a mistake to say that he was simply playing to the expectations of his audience. He was also playing upon those expectations, using preexisting material to demonstrate his own creativity and virtuosity.

Hendrix's performance of "Johnny B. Goode," taken from a 1969 show at the Berkeley Community Theater, is another example of his "Signifyin(g)" style, in which both the sound and the image of the electric guitar disrupt one of the founding songs of rock 'n' roll. Musically, Hendrix repeats Chuck Berry's original melody, but also transforms it through distortion and sheer volume. Meanwhile, the song's guitar solos show Hendrix employing extended feedback wails and rapid blues lines that virtually abandon the structure of Berry's performance, moving the song into a realm of electronic effects and flamboyant virtuosity that would have been all but impossible to produce ten years earlier. Such musical exhibitionism is complemented by the physical aspects of the performance, in which Hendrix plays the guitar with his teeth and, at one point, swings himself around 180 degrees with his guitar at crotch level while holding a sustained, distorted note, his face grimacing, his guitar protruding like an oversized phallus ejaculating sound onto the audience. That the song was itself originally written and performed by an African-American is not incidental. Rather, his choice of text, combined with the fact of his own blackness, show Hendrix refiguring the rock tradition in the face of its increasing whiteness during the 1960s.

Some have chosen, as I have, to locate some liberatory or deconstructive potential in Hendrix's "Signifyin(g)" style. Hendrix himself, though, ultimately came to feel somewhat trapped in his own definition of blackness. He came to realize, gradually, that it was in many ways a role already defined for him. Toward the latter part of his brief career, he began to deemphasize the bodily dimension of his style and portray himself as a musician first, not a performer:

> As long as people come to listen rather than to see us, then everything will be all right. It's when they come to expect to see you doing certain things on stage that you can get hung up.[63]

> [T]he main thing that used to bug me was that people wanted too many visual things from me.
>
> I never wanted it to be so much of a visual thing. When I didn't do it, people thought I was being moody, but I can only freak when I really feel like doing so. I can't do it just for the sake of it. I wanted the music to get across, so that people could just sit back and close their eyes, and know exactly what was going on, without caring a damn what we were doing while we were on stage.[64]

For Hendrix, as for Fanon, the sight of blackness in the eyes of others had become oppressive, and so he expresses a desire to heard, not seen; listened to, not watched. The most "visible" of black performers, he yearns for a sort of invisibility. He wants to remove himself from the demands of his public into a realm of pure music where both he and his audience can lose themselves in the power of sound.

Utopia Unfulfilled

> Almost anyone who has the power to keep their minds open listens to our music. Black kids think the music is white now, which it isn't.

> The argument is not between black and white now. That's just another game the establishment set up to turn us against one another. But the black kids don't have a chance too much to listen—they're too busy trying to get their own selves together. We want them to realize that our music is just as spiritual as going to church.
>
> —*Jimi Hendrix, quoted in Henderson (1983), p. 206.*

Somewhere amidst the words and the music of Hendrix lies a vision of utopia, an imagined transformation of the world into an "electric church" where all differences would submerge beneath a wave of electronic sound. Somewhere, but not here; someday, but not today: as much as Hendrix might have wanted the black kids to realize the spiritual potential of music, he realized that utopia was far from an achieved state, and that blackness stood to separate people from one another. He was continually striving to push against the boundaries of both music and race, boundaries that were inextricably tied within his outlook. Yet through this process he was also perhaps forced to recognize that certain boundaries can be intransigent, that to imagine alternative realities is not to bring them into being. A tragic lesson, as one can only imagine, for someone who seemed to live through his music. Tragic, but maybe necessary: Had Hendrix lived, would he have moved his art to a whole other level of commitment? This we can never know, but we can continue to draw our own lessons from Hendrix, to keep our own imaginations alive, and realize that to do so can never be enough.

Chapter 6

Kick Out the Jams!

The MC5 and the Politics of Noise

A Riotous Noise

In early 1968, that most momentous of years according to chroniclers of the 1960s, the MC5 released their second single, "Looking at You," a mutinous creation said by Chuck Eddy to have been recorded in downtown Detroit "sometime circa the [1967] riots or World Series."[1] Eddy's comment concerning the circumstances of the song's creation is probably a half-truth at best, but says much about the myth surrounding the MC5, in which the band were a group of "rock 'n' roll guerrillas" who both fomented and embodied disorder with their rousing performances. Moreover, Eddy's association of the song with the riotous Detroit cityscape speaks to the unrest conveyed by "Looking at You," unrest present in so much of the band's music. The track tumbles forth like a bull released from its pen, the bass and drums rolling atop one another while the guitars issue forth a screeching chaos that threatens to engulf Rob Tyner, the singer. John Sinclair, long-time manager of the band and producer of the single, offers a more hands-on account of its recording:

> It was really a non-existent production job, since I "produced" it and didn't have any idea of what I was doing. I just knew that the music was killer and that we had to get it down, but I didn't know the first thing about mixing, and consequently the record was never really mixed, it was just released unmixed. I wanted to make sure that all the high sound got in there because I had noticed that when records were played on the radio the high sounds dropped out, and I loaded them on to *Looking at You* to the point that the record was worthless for standard record-player playing.[2]