Sounding Like a No-No

Royster, Francesca T.

Published by University of Michigan Press

Royster, Francesca T.
Sounding Like a No-No: Queer Sounds and Eccentric Acts in the Post-Soul Era.
Project MUSE. muse.jhu.edu/book/21092.

For additional information about this book
https://muse.jhu.edu/book/21092

For content related to this chapter
https://muse.jhu.edu/related_content?type=book&id=758557
Notes

Introduction

3. In a Jet retrospective of Prince’s career, journalist Rashod Ollison, in “Prince and His Evolution” (Jet, July 5, 2010), quotes Mark Anthony Neal, who suggests that Prince capitalized on the trends of androgyny in rock, especially glam rock, while also opening up spaces for new black performances of masculinity.

“It’s always important to put Black male performers of that generation into a certain context. . . . Prince is doing his gender-bending thing. Rick James has the braids and glitter and Michael Jackson has the androgynous thing going. And they’re all trying to cross over to what is White rock at the time, which is heavily pushing androgyny. So it made sense that all of them tried to push the envelope in that regard. What is interesting about Prince is that there was not a lot of feedback about some of his gender-bending. But I don’t think anybody saw Prince’s androgyny in the way they saw Michael’s, because Prince was always clear about his heterosexuality.”

As hip-hop pushed its way into the mainstream in the late ’80s, just as Prince’s reign in pop was beginning to wane, a decidedly more thuggish image of Black masculinity became the norm. But the influence of Prince, his synthesis of Little Richard’s flamboyant theatricality and James Brown’s sweaty funk, was still strong. As Neal says, Prince proved that “we didn’t have to have these two positions: the soft R&B balladeer versus the hard-core hip-hop thug. In other words, he’s saying there is no actual script for Black masculinity except whatever you choose to perform. You don’t have to choose between being Chuck D or Luther Vandross.” (28)


11. Ibid., xiv–xv.


17. Brooks, Bodies in Dissent, 4–5.


20. Moten, In the Break.


22. Cynthia Fuchs, writing at the moment when the conflict with Warner was still unresolved, suggests that “a e uncertainty of [the glyph], as a marker for a post-Prince identity, extends and complicates what was already visible in then-Prince’s performances, his differences from a variety of bodies, selves, and identities, including male and female, black and white, queer and straight. Unfixed over time, at each moment determined in relation to another performance, [the glyph] marks (and unmarks) an
identity which is at once full and void of meaning. He/it challenges the representational system where bodies are visible indices of ‘identities’ which exist prior to acts, insisting on the simultaneity of signs, selves, and fantasies.” Cynthia Fuchs, “‘I wanna be your fantasy’: Sex, Death, and the Artist Formerly Known as Prince,” Women and Performance: A Journal of Feminist Theory 8, no. 2 (1996): 140.

23. See Harvey Young, Embodying Black Experience: Stillness, Critical Memory, and the Black Body (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2010). Young complicates the ways that we might read such acts of reclaiming of the black body by insisting on the simultaneous experience of present and pastness in these acts: “Re-claiming does not require that we erase the past and script a new one. The prefix tells us this. To re-claim is to take something back. It is to possess something in the present while knowing that it has only recently been back in your possession. It is to remain aware of the previous ‘claims’ even as you articulate your own. It is to know the past in the present as you work toward creating a future” (135).


25. I fear that as “Post-Soul” has circulated, there has been a kind of reduction of the potential of the moment, and of its politics, by those who chart it primarily as identified with the consumption of hip-hop. In Buppies, B-Boys, and Bohos: Notes on Post-Soul Black Culture (New York: Harper Collins, 1992), Nelson George embraces the rise of renegade filmmaker Melvin Van Peebles as the prototype of the most innovative aspects of the Post-Soul moment in its early days, which then was carried through to a fuller extent even in early hip-hop: “homegrown heroes with larger-than-life personas” like Grandmaster Flash, Afrika Bambaataa, and Kurtis Blow. The problem here is that Nelson limits his view of Post-Soul’s most transformative spirit as one that is also traditionally macho and relatively limited in its scope of racial, gender, or sexual reinvention. Van Peebles might well be seen as the re-embrace of patriarchy for black manhood through his Sweetback, but he does not characterize what to me might be some of the most imaginative and even fierce aspects of Post-Soul culture—the edge of the edge. Instead, the book presents as the heart (and heat) of Post-Soul rebellion and critique a particular and more traditional model of masculinity.

While Nelson George includes in his Post-Soul taxonomy the Boho, the bohemian figure of black intellectualism, experimentation, and exploration that might open up a discussion of more eccentric performances, his discussions of this figure are limited. Indeed, George’s Bohos are characterized as flaky and politically ineffective, and more often than not they are fictional constructions: the figure of gentle derision in sitcoms such as Cree in A Different World or Lisa Bonet’s Denise in The Cosby Show. The Boho in George’s taxonomy is vague and ineffective: “relatively color blind children” of a “race-neutral environment” (7) rather than engagingly experimental.


and Vanessa D. Dickerson (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2001), xii.
29. Ibid., xii.
31. As Alexander G. Weheliye has pointed out quite brilliantly, in Phonographies: Grooves in Sonic Afro-Modernity (Durham: Duke University Press, 2005), tensions between technology and authentic black sound—particularly oral culture—have been a part of discussions of modern blackness since the first recorded sounds of black voices (6–7).
34. Quoted in Gilroy, à e Black Atlantic, 98.
35. For example, see Barbara Smith’s critiques of homophobia and black respectability in her essay “Home,” Cheryl Clarke’s essay “à e Failure to Transform: Homophobia in the Black Community,” and Pat Parker’s Poem “Where Will You Be?,” all included in the 1983 anthology Home Girls: A Black Feminist Anthology, edited by Barbara Smith (New York: Kitchen Table–Women of Color Press, 1983).
36. In In a Queer Time and Place: Transgender Bodies, Subcultural Lives (New York: New York University Press, 2005), Judith Halberstam defines “queer time” as those ways that queer relationships and living necessitate a logic of being in the world outside of the constraints to heteronormative time, birth, marriage, reproduction, and death. She uses it to think about community and bonds, subcultural lives, and an “epistemology of youth.” Queer temporality is a way of thinking about ways of living and connecting within queer subcultures that “disrupt conventional accounts of youth culture, adulthood, and maturity” (2).
37. For a discussion of “post-liberation” identity, see Greg Tate’s “Cult-Nats Meet Freaky-Deke,” in Flyboy in the Buttermilk: Essays on Contemporary America (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1992), 198–209. Like Post-Soul, post-liberation suggests that the life-and-death struggles for freedom and civil rights have already been won. I’m arguing here, though, that the quaring of this moment repoliticizes it.
38. For example, despite years performing an outrageous persona that was markedly queer in his own neighborhood and underground spaces in Georgia, once Little Richard gained his first hits with “Tutti Frutti,” “Long Tall Sally,” and “Rip It Up,” he describes a careful and strategic reframing of his eccentricity.

We were breaking through the racial barrier. à e white kids had to hide my records ’cos they daren’t let their parents know they had them in the house. We decided that my image should be crazy and way-out so that the adults would think I was harmless. I’d appear in one show dressed as the Queen of England and in the next as the pope. (Charles White, à e Life and Times of Little Richard: à e Authorized Biography ([London: Omnibus Press, 1984]), 66).

As Little Richard moves into the larger public sphere, his unpredictable oddness at best gets shaped into more recognizable and perhaps containable codes of outrageousness, at worst is censored and erased. Despite his profound influence on the music of
the time, from Pat Boone to the Beatles to James Brown, Little Richard’s career went
dormant until the 1980s, when he found some space in which to reclaim his role as one
of rock and roll’s chief architects and outrageous cultural icons, suddenly appearing
in commercials for margarine, and in cameo roles in Down and Out in Beverly Hills

39. Here, I’m calling on Gramsci’s idea of the organic intellectual as a scholar whose
work is connected to everyday struggles of the people and their experiences, which
he details in his essay “Hegemony, Intellectuals, and the State” in his Prison Notebooks
(Antonio Gramsci, Selections from the Prison Notebooks, translated by Geoffrey N.
10). While recent scholars of black culture have used the term organic intellectual
to describe some hip-hop artists, I haven’t seen this term applied to Michael Jackson,
Grace Jones, or the other pop artists discussed here—perhaps because of the ways that
their performances and lyrics often move away from realism or the explicitly political.
But we might indeed think of these artists’ embodied exploration of identity as hav-
ing an overlooked political dimension. On hip-hop artists as organic intellectuals, see
Robin D. G. Kelley’s characterization of gangsta rap in “Kickin’ Reality, Kickin’ Bal-
listics: Gangsta Rap and Postindustrial Los Angeles,” in Droppin’ Science: Critical Es-
says on Rap Music and Hip-Hop Culture, edited by William Eric Perkins (Philadelphia:

40. See Mahon, ø e Right to Rock, especially the chapter “œ e Post-Liberated Gen-
eration” (33–58).

41. Cultural historian Todd Boyd writes that Soul Train, the longest-running syndi-
cated show on television, “showed a generation what it meant to be cool. ø ere’s some-
thing about it that suggested hipness. And if you wanted to be hip, you watched ‘Soul
Train.’ . . . In the ’70’s, there was no other place to see this in the mainstream” (quoted
in Christine Acham, Revolution Televised: Prime Time and the Struggle for Black Power
[Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2004]). As both Christine Acham and
Christopher Lehman point out, Soul Train gave visibility to black artists, black dance
moves, and styles that had important commercial as well as political ramifications,
creating a black cultural space and also capturing the imagination of the mainstream
public (54–66; Christopher P. Lehman, A Critical History of Soul Train on Television
influential premier of Michael Jackson’s dance, the Robot, during a 1973 performance
of “Dancing Machine” on the show as an example of Soul Train’s nationwide, and even
global, influence as a cultural phenomenon. And he points to Don Kirshner’s Rock
Concert’s second season premier, which featured only black artists, as evidence of the
influence of Don Cornelius and Soul Train (104). Significantly, just about every artist
that I discuss in this study, from the most visible Michael Jackson to the less infamous
Meshell Ndegeocello, has performed on Soul Train, which ran from 1970 to 2006.

42. In his discussion of post-Soul intellectual debates, and particularly Trey Ellis’s
“New Black Aesthetic,” Mark Anthony rightly traces the NBA movement to the oppo-
sitional writings of previous and contemporary queer and feminist black intellectuals
not mentioned by Ellis, including Anna Julia Cooper, Bayard Rustin, Audre Lorde
and James Baldwin: “Cooper Rustin and Lorde in particular have been instrumental
in rearticulating notions of blackness along an axis of gender and sexual preference—
constructions that remain at odds with dominant representations of blackness and
challenge popular motions that increasingly posit patriarchy and heterosexuality as
the foundations for acceptable social constructions of blackness” (Neal, Soul Babies,
114).

43. Chela Sandoval, Methodology of the Oppressed: Every Out of Bounds (Minne-
apolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2000). As I’ll discuss further below, the third
space is also an important concept in José Esteban Muñoz’s framework of “disidenti-
fication.”

44. Essex Hemphill, “Heavy Breathing,” Ceremonies: Prose and Poetry (San Fran-


46. Ibid., 7.

47. Muñoz notes:

Disidentification is the third mode of dealing with dominant ideology,
one that neither opts to assimilate with such a structure nor strictly op-
poses it; rather disidentification is a strategy that works on and against
dominant ideology. Instead of buckling under the pressures of dominant
ideology (identification, assimilation) or attempting to break free of its
inescappable sphere (counteridentification, utopianism), this “working
on and against” is a strategy that tries to transform a cultural logic from
within, always laboring to enact permanent structural change while at
the same time valuing the importance of local or everyday struggles of
resistance. (Ibid., 12)

48. Joshua Gamson, Fabulous Sylvester: The Legend, the Music, the Seventies in
San Francisco (New York: Henry Holt, 2005), 149.

49. Sylvester’s challenge reminds me, too, of the life and death of Jean-Michel Bas-
quiat, who challenged notions of black identity while at the same time keeping the
community itself at a studied distance, even in death. Note Greg Tate’s confession after
Basquiat’s death: “I remember myself and Vernon Reid being invited to Jean-Michel
Basquiat’s loft for a party in 1984, and not even wanting to meet the man, because
he was surrounded by white people.” Greg Tate, “He Is Truly Free Who Is Free from
the Need to Be Free: A Survey and Consideration of Black Male Genius,” in Black


51. Ibid., 221–22.

52. For an extended discussion of becoming and the reanimation of desire, see my
Becoming Cleopatra: Shifting Image of an Icon (New York: Palgrave Macmillan,
2003).

53. LaShonda Katrice Barnett, I’ve Got under: Black Women Songwriters on eir

54. Moten, In the Break, 1.
55. Ibid., 26.
56. A brilliant example of Moten's uncovering of political passion underneath the grain of the voice is this reading of Billie Holiday's recording Lady in Satin.

α e lady in satin uses the crack in the voice, extremity of the instrument, willingness to fail reconfigured as a willingness to go past, through the achievement or arrival at the object is neither undermined by partiality or incompleteness nor burdened by the soft, heavy romance of a simple fullness. α e crack in the voice is an abundant loss, the strings of a romance with what she don't need and already has. α e crack is like the laugh in the voice of “My Man”—trace of some impossible initial version or inaugurative incident and effect of the resistance and excess of every intervening narrative and interpretation. α e last records, when leaned into, into the depth of the grain, grain become crack or cut (you can lay your pen in there; upon what is this writing before writing inscribed? What temple?), undermine any narrative of life and art that would smoothly move from a light business (busyness) to spare tragedy. Willingness to fail goes past; new coefficients of freedom. (Ibid., 107–8)

57. I find it noteworthy that at least three of the performers discussed in this book—Eartha Kitt, Grace Jones, and Janelle Monáe—all studied theater on either the high school or college level, and this speaks to their interest in theatricality and their ability to effectively create character in their voices, movements, and personae.


59. In her description of virtuosity, Jones continues, “α e vocalizations, the gestures, the thinking, and the beauty are honed through repeated experiences that support solo gifts and the development of a personal voice.” Such development of personal voice is intimately connected to embodiment, where “cellular thinking is linked to emotional and intellectual learning” and “experience is passed on, person to person.” Omi Osun Joni L. Jones, “Making Space: Producing the Austin Project,” in Experiments in a Jazz Aesthetic: Art, Activism, Academia, and the Austin Project, edited by Omi Osun Joni L. Jones, Lisa L. Moore, and Sharon Bridgforth (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2010), 6.

60. Moten, In the Break, 39.

61. While I am certainly interested in self-consciously queered spaces of interpretation and community, much can be learned from L. H. Stallings’s inclusion of multiple arenas in black culture under the umbrella of “queer,” from black femininity in general (in its inability to never quite or at least conditionally achieve the state of ideal black womanhood) to the space of the Chitlin’ Circuit (here a specifically classed notion of sexuality where hidden truths of black life could/can be voiced boldly through the comedy of Lawanda Page and others) to black folktales of Brer Rabbit and Sister Goose. Stallings’s use of queer is not just a blanket statement but rightly argues for the bridges always present between so-called straight black and gay cultures. See L. H. Stallings, Mutha’ Is Half a Word: Intersections of Folklore, Vernacular, Myth, and Queerness in Black Female Culture (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 2007).

Chapter 1


2. For example, when Kitt performed “I Want to Be Evil” and “Santa Baby” for the Greek king and queen in 1953, Los Angeles mayor Norris Poulson called the songs “risqué, filthy and off-color,” though reportedly the king and queen said that they enjoyed the songs very much. “Eartha’s ‘Evil’ Song Causes Row,” Chicago Defender, November 28, 1953, 1.


5. White and black press sources debated her manners, the acuity of her analysis, and the sincerity of her motives (some in the black press speculating that this was a self-serving publicity stunt.) The Chicago Defender printed Martin Luther King Jr.’s praise of her actions, though a later story suggests that her “emotional outburst” was not only “a shocking exhibition of bad manners, it was obviously a raw, naked quest for publicity.” “Eartha Kitt’s Outburst,” Chicago Defender, January 23, 1968, 13. New York Amsterdam News wrote with a hint of admiration that she “got her claws in the Whitehouse.” Cathy Aldrige, “The Ladies and Eartha: Pro-Con,” New York Amsterdam News, January 27, 1968, 1.

6. Kwakiutl Dreher, in Dancing on the White Page: Black Women Entertainers Writing Autobiography (New York: State University of New York Press, 2008), gives a fantastic analysis of how Kitt embodies her critique of the Vietnam War as well. She suggests that Kitt not only gives the lie to the White House’s euphemistic descriptions of war deaths as casualties, but she does so using the authority of her own body as a woman and mother, and in language that directly confronts the propriety of the white southern womanhood of Lady Bird Johnson.

As a privileged guest of the First Lady, Kitt’s candor sullies Lady Bird’s invitation. A veritable changeling, appearing as a well-behaved guest then transforming into a serious sociopolitical critic—Kitt essentially spills the dirt on the White House carpet. The dirt, or a black woman’s daring to convey her awareness of sociopolitical cruel realities, disorders Lady Bird’s universe. (113)

8. Thomas Postlewait and Tracy C. Davis suggest that “Melodramatic drama and performance are faulted not only for the surplus of emotionalism and spectacular dramatic action but also for the lack of truth representation. And yet this surplus may be precisely what makes theatre (or opera and dance) gripping, providing the thrill of difficult accomplishment and uncommon talent that catapults a viewer into pleasures that derive from the abandonment of certain restraints.” Tracy C. Davis and Thomas Postlewait, eds., Aestaticity (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 21.

9. Shane Vogel provides a powerful reading of Lena Horne’s aloof style of cabaret performance as a means of negotiating the pressures of black respectability in his chapter “Lena Horne’s Impersona” in his book A Scene of the Harlem Cabaret: Race, Sexuality, Performance (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2009), 167–93. In his study, Vogel characterizes Horne’s performed elegance as one that often tips into coldness: “She offered not love but hostility, not warmth but aloofness, not presence but absence, not immediacy but hesitation, not touch but distance, not an old friend, but a stranger” (167). Indeed, within the strictures of the cabaret space, Horne’s performances might share much with Kitt’s contrariness that I discuss here. Vogel historicizes the Harlem cabaret space as an intimate space of racial crossing, and as a space in which black performers could both expand and constrict subjectivity.


12. Ibid., x.

13. Here, my thinking is informed by Daphne A. Brooks’s persuasive analysis of Nina Simone’s performances, and the importance of Simone’s memoir, I Put a Spell on You, as a form of theorization in line with her performances. Brooks says in a note in this essay that in this formulation she is following the lead of the work of Shane Vogel and Thomas Postlewait by “reading Simone’s autobiography as a ‘document’ not of performance history but of ‘performance theory’ in which we can hear and see her making sense of a complex web of racially, gendered, class, and sexually charged politics that made her career.” Daphne A. Brooks, “Nina Simone’s Triple Play” Callaloo 34, no. 1 (Winter 2011): 194, n. 4.

14. Cheng, A e Melancholy of Race, x.

15. Dreher, Dancing on the White Page, 110.

17. Ibid., 17.
21. Ibid., ix.
22. Ibid., 28.
24. Ibid., 14.
25. Ibid., 243.
27. Ibid., 123.

Now that we’ve got a post-black president, all the rest of the post-blacks can be unapologetic as we reshape the iconography of blackness. For so long, the definition of blackness was dominated by the ’60’s street-fighting militancy of the Jesses and the irreverent one-foot-out-the-ghetto angry brilliance of the Pryors and the nihilistic, unrepentantly ghetto, new-age thuggishness of the 50 Cents. A decade ago they called post-blacks Oreos because we didn't think blackness equaled ghetto, didn't mind having white influencers, didn’t seem full of anger about the past. We were comfortable employing blackness as a grace note rather than as our primary sound. Post-blackness sees blackness not as a dogmatic code worshiping at the altar of the hood and the struggle but as an open-source document, a trope with infinite uses. (1)

If, as Touré suggests, we are in the age of Post-Blackness without shame, Kitt embraced a Post-Blackness that centered that feeling of discord and contradiction. Hers was a Post-Blackness with critical purpose.

29. Kitt defends herself against the accusation that she is only interested in dating nonblack men in *Alone with Me*.

Over the years, I have been asked thinly veiled questions about the loves of my life, with an emphasis on color and the implication that, perhaps (amateur psychologists all), I was searching for my lost white-father figure. In truth, on society’s skin-color scale, my relationships would reg-
ister about fifty-fifty, or at least sixty-forty. And considering the ratio of white to black in the west, it's a wonder that I haven't registered a ninety-ten. But I haven't. Some of you will understand when I say that I don't see people as white or nonwhite. I see them as human beings, male or female, friendly or hostile, and so on. . . I'm a human being with a full complement of needs and desires and drives. And needs and drives are colorless. (216–17)

30. Kitt, Still Here, 57.
32. Kitt, Alone with Me, 4.
35. Kitt, Alone with Me, 50.

Chapter 2

5. Quoted in ibid.
6. I think it's noteworthy that Wonder's own view of his “blindisms” has been good-natured acceptance. Indeed, as Terry Rowden points out, while Wonder had been pressured by Motown early in his career to stop his swaying movements because they were feared to be too conspicuous or “odd,” they have instead become a trademark of his persona, especially as television appearances became an increasing way for Americans to get to know African American performers. Terry Rowden, e Songs of Blind Folk: African American Musicians and the Cultures of Blindness (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2009), 114–15.


10. Werner writes, “Where Aretha and Curtis kept their best music firmly grounded in the African American church, Stevie Wonder lit out joyously for territories usually associated with ‘white’ music. a at’s not to say he wasn’t ‘black enough.’ His early hits ‘Fingertips, Part 2’ and ‘I was Made to Love Her’ infused Motown with pure gospel fervor at a time when the label was aggressively pushing a pop crossover strategy. It’s just that Wonder’s idea of blackness was as comfortable with the Beatles and New Age mysticism as it was with Duke Ellington and Detroit’s Whitestone Baptist Church, where he sang in the choir. By the time he embarked on his beautifully baffling *Journey through the Secret Life of Plants* at the end of the Seventies, he’d made it clear that he was a true American original. Stevie took America at its word, and like Walt Whitman, set about remaking it in his own quirky and charismatic image.” Craig Werner, *Higher Ground: Stevie Wonder, Aretha Franklin, Curtis Mayfield, and the Rise and Fall of American Soul* (New York: Crown Publishers, 2004), 6.

11. Ibid., 8.

12. Ibid., 6.

13. a e revenge of the black nerd has been caught on film recently, as in the film *Drum Line*, in which a bookish band professor blows his improvisational street drummer student out of the water with old school rescorings of Wonder’s “As If” and Earth Wind and Fire’s “Getaway.” And if we scoff at Urkel, the fictional preteen nerd on ABC’s black family sitcom “Family Matters,” we must in some ways acknowledge and perhaps fear the savvy rise to power of supernerd Condoleezza Rice, concert pianist and Russia wonk, who might represent another revenge of the black nerd. (On the often unexamined cultural construction of nerds as white, see Benjamin Nugent, “Who’s a Nerd Anyway?,” *New York Times Magazine*, July 29, 2007, 15.) Nugent suggests that while the nerd is the object of derision he or she is, at the same time, an important part of the narrative of the insistence and naturalization of white intellectual superiority. I would like to suggest that Wonder claims the space of nerdiness for black and brown people, something that has been furthered recently by Junot Díaz in *a e Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao* (New York: Riverhead Books, 2007).


21. Douglas C. Baynton’s “Disability and the Justification of Inequality in American
History,” in *New Disability History: American Perspectives* (New York: New York University Press, 2001), 33–57, links disability and justification of inequality in the big citizenship debates of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries: women’s suffrage, African American freedom and civil rights, and the restriction of immigration. “When categories of citizenship were questioned, challenged, and disrupted, disability was called on to clarify and define who deserved, and who was deservedly excluded from, citizenship” (33). Illustrative is Edmund Burke’s attack on the French Revolution rhetoric that contrasts the natural constitution of the body politic and the monstrosity caused by the revolution in ways that are both gendered (as Joan Scott has argued) and reliant on notions of disability. See for example, the repeated use of blindness to evoke the ignorance of the people: “blind prejudice,’ actions taken ‘blindly,’ ‘blind followers,’ and ‘blind obedience’ (35). While blind schools, organizations, and institutions emerged in the twentieth century to help train blind people to be functional citizens, they were often discouraged from marriage and independent living.

Developing evolutionary discourse, and its emerging standardizations of “normal” and “abnormal” bodies, became a regular tool of racism, in which blacks and other nonwhites were often linked to people with disabilities as “evolutionary laggards and throwbacks” (3). Baynton points to prominent doctors, as well as politicians, who used the language of disability in the defense of slavery. John C. Calhoun, a senator from South Carolina, for example, “thought it a powerful argument in defense of slavery that the ‘number of deaf and dumb, blind, idiots, and insane, of the negroes in the States that have changed the ancient relation between the races’ was seven times higher than in the slave states” (37–38). In the international eugenics movement of the early twentieth, racial and bodily deviances were often conflated, resulting in theories and policies to classify disabled bodies and restrict their access to public institutions and privileges like marriage, reproduction, jobs, immigration, and the right to live in unsegregated communities. Susan L. Snyder and David T. Mitchell, *Cultural Locations of Disability* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2006), 113. Films like *Black Stork* (1917) warned early cinema audiences of the moral dangers of attempting to save the lives of “defective” babies, including crippled black children. One such baby in the film was the product of a hereditary disease passed along in a white family line by a grandfather’s liaison with a “vile filthy slave.” See Martin S. Pernick’s study of this film and its context, *Black Stork: Eugenics and the Death of “Defective” Babies in American Medicine and Motion Pictures since 1915* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996), 144. Pernick points out that in its 1927 release, the “filthy black slave” is replaced with an “unclean white servant girl” (144). Likewise, Garland-ömson suggests, “[J]ust as the dominant culture’s ideal self requires ideological figures of the woman to confirm its masculinity and of the black to assure its whiteness, the figure of the disabled body becomes an important definitive tool for white, normative sexual citizens, from Venus Hottentot to Captain Ahab: a freak, the cripple, the invalid, the disabled—like the quadroon and the homosexual—are representational, taxonomical products that naturalize a norm comprised of accepted bodily traits and behaviors registering social power and status.” Rosemarie Garland-ömson, *Extraordinary Bodies: Figuring Physical Disability in American Culture and Literature* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1997), 44.


27. Jason King, “Toni Braxton, Disney, and ἀ ermodynamics,” *TDR: ἀ e Drama Review* 46, no. 3 (Fall 2002), 54–81; see especially 55–58.

28. In their recent study of Miles Davis and John Coltrane, *Clawing at the Limits of Cool* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 2008), Farah Jasmine Griffin and Salim Washington compare the two musician’s contrasting responses to the persona of cool in their performance styles and philosophical and spiritual trajectories.

29. In Brenda Dixon Gottschild’s, *Digging the Africanist Presence in American Performance: Dance and Other Contexts*. New York: Praeger, 1998, she differentiates between a European aesthetic of cool aloofness and detachment and a specifically Africanist aesthetic that I also see in the work of Davis and Glover: “It is seen in the asymmetrical walk of African American males, which shows an attitude of carelessness cultivated with a calculated aesthetic clarity. It resides in the disinterested (in the philosophical sense, as opposed to the uninterested), detached, mask-like face of the drummer or dancer whose body and energy may be working fast, hard, and hot, but whose face remains cool. Conversely, it may be expressed as a brilliant smile, a laugh, a grimace, a verbal expression that seems to come out of nowhere to break, intercept, or punctuate the established mood by momentarily displaying its opposite and, thus, mediating a balance. It is through such oppositions, asymmetries, and radical juxtapositions that the cool aesthetic manifests luminosity or brilliance” (17).


31. Indeed, Terry Rowden points out that Eddie Murphy was even considered for a starring role in a biopic about Wonder, reflecting the degree to which Wonder’s iconography has become entangled with Murphy’s. ἀ e film has not yet come to fruition, a possible reflection, Rowden suggests, of “Murphy’s and his consultants’ realization of the potential for embarrassment and critical backlash that a feature-length extension of Murphy’s controversial impersonation of the singer might have caused. ἀ e project’s failure may also have been influenced by the growing power of the disability rights community to bring negative attention to such cavalier disregard of their sensibili-
ties and concerns as Murphy's performances seemed to reveal” (Rowden, α e Songs of Blind Folk, 115).


34. Garland-α omson, αe Politics of Staring, 57.


39. If in traditional views of film soundtracks and scores the music is a modifier of the image, music scholar Royal S. Brown has pointed out that postmodern theory has challenged the patriarchal hierarchy of signifier over signified. Brown suggests a shift in the 1960s of the relationship between film image and preexisting music on a non-diegetic music track. Brown considers the use of classical music scores in post-1960 films like Ingmar Bergman’s α rough a Glass Darkly (1961, Bach’s Solo Cello Suite No. 2) or Stanley Kubrick’s 2001: A Space Odyssey (1969, diverse works) where the scores “no longer function purely as backing for key emotional situations, but rather exist as a kind of parallel emotional/aesthetic universe.” Royal S. Brown, Overtones and Undertones: Reading Film Music (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994), 239–40. Reconsidering the relation between soundtrack and image is especially pertinent to Journey to the Secret Life of Plants given the unavailability of the film to most audiences after its initial limited release.


41. See of course, Orlando Patterson’s Slavery and Social Death: A Comparative Study (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1992), for the definitive discussion of social death in slavery; and Sharon Patricia Holland’s Raising the Dead: Readings of Death and (Black) Subjectivity (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2000), for a discussion of its continued and often generative relevance in black culture.


44. Greg Tate, “Cult Nats Meets Freaky-Deke,” first published in the Village Voice in

45. She stakes Billie Holiday’s place in the pantheon of black, mostly jazz geniuses in Farah Jasmine Griffin, *In Search of Billie Holiday: If You Can’t Be Free, Be a Mystery* (New York: Ballantine Books, 2001), 1–2.


48. Quoted in Tate, “He Is Truly Free,” 111.


52. Wonder’s use of ARP, Moog, and other synthesizers to expand his sound is documented in Trevor Pinch and Frank Trocco’s cultural history of the synthesizer, *Analog Days* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2002), esp. 182–86. Wonder was even featured in an advertisement for the ARP 2600 in the early 1970s, along with rocker Peter Townshend (267).

53. In a Post-Soul, “cultural mulatto” move, Wonder cites the Beatles’ *Sergeant Pepper’s Lonely Hearts Club Band* and Marvin Gaye’s “What’s Going On” as two of his most important inspirations for expanding his sound and structure in his 1970s work. Of the Beatles, Wonder writes, “I just dug the effects they got, like echoes and the voice things, the writing, like ‘for the benefit of Mr. Kite.’ I just said, why can’t I? I wanted to do something else, go other places” (quoted in Werner, *Higher Ground*, 148).


55. Wonder worked with film producer Michael Braun for three years on the creation of the score. Wonder would sit at a piano or synthesizer with a pair of headphones. In one ear, Braun would explain the film sequences in meticulous detail. In the other ear, an engineer would count down the time for each scene. At the same time, Wonder would play his musical ideas, taping them as he went (Peisch, *Stevie Wonder*, 120–21). Once the film was edited, Wonder himself remixed the soundtrack, adding an additional layer of ambient sounds from nature. Since Wonder lost his sight at birth, he was creating a soundtrack for plants and other creatures that he had never seen. But this freed him from a more literal interpretation. Michael Braun comments that this score would be an especially challenging process for any musician because it deals with things rarely seen onscreen: “[T]here are no standard ways of composing music for those things, like seeds sprouting or the Venus flytrap catching a bug. I bet a lot of veteran composers wouldn’t know what to do with those sequences—except in the most mundane, literalistic way. But Stevie did. He’s uncanny” (Davis, *Stevie Wonder*, 128).

56. E. Patrick Johnson points to the risks involved in Riggs’s inclusion of his nakedness in *Black Is, Black Ain’t* and ways that Riggs’s nakedness is open to the dangers of misreading as “hypermasculine,” on the one hand, and fragile and the site of (AIDS)
trauma, on the other. At the same time Riggs's performance insists on reminding the film's viewers of his fleshiness, his status as a site of being as well as becoming (Johnson, “‘Quare’ Studies,” 145–46).

Chapter 3

1. I see in this film a yearning for freedom in public space that was becoming increasingly rare in cities like New York in the Post-Soul era. Robin D. G. Kelley, in Yo’ Mama’s Disfunktional! Fighting the Culture Wars in Urban America (Boston: Beacon Press, 1997), points to the ways that budget cuts in the post-civil-rights era, as well as as “the militarization of urban life,” have shrunk such spaces for free play in parks, schoolyards, and other spaces.

Beginning in the 1970’s, a wave of public recreational service employees were either furloughed, discharged, or allowed to retire without replacement; the service and maintenance of parks and playgrounds was cut back substantially; many facilities were eliminated or simply deteriorated; and the hours of operation were drastically reduced. During the mid-1970’s, for instance, Cleveland’s recreation department had to close down almost $50 million dollars worth of facilities. In New York City, municipal appropriations for parks dropped by more than $40 million between 1974 and 1980—a sixty-percent cut in real dollars. Staff cutbacks were even more drastic: between the late 1960’s and 1979, the number of park employees dropped from almost 6,100 to 2,600. To make matters worse, a growing number of public schoolyards in inner city communities have become inaccessible during after-school hours. (50–51)

2. “α’e One,” coined by James Brown, is one of THE central musical aspects of funk: the use of the downbeat at the beginning of every bar. But as Arthur Kempton points out, its meaning acquired wider symbolic meaning over time: “By the late 1970’s, ‘on the one’ was a descriptor as well—applied to a good meal, a favorable outcome, a beat, a timely insight, an admired performance, or life in a balanced state.” Arthur Kempton, Boogaloo: α’e Quintessence of American Popular Music (New Y ork: Pantheon Books, 2003), 394.

3. P-Funk’s often futuristic theatricality and gender-bending aesthetics could quite possibly have been influenced by the simultaneous emergence of glam rock in the late 1960s and early 1970s, though I haven’t found any writings or interviews explicitly making the connection. On glam’s theatrical spirit and gender contrariness, see Philip Auslander’s Performing Glam Rock: Gender and α’eatricality in Popular Music (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2006). George Clinton includes punk and sometimes glam rocker Iggy Pop as a friend and collaborator in P-Funk’s early days, and for a time they shared a manager. Iggy and Clinton even joked about staging a marriage between the two of them for publicity, but the story was never picked up by the media. See Dave Marsh, For the Record: George Clinton and P-Funk, An Oral History (New York: Avon Books, 1998), 38.

4. George Clinton, quoted in Marsh, For the Record, 8.
5. In the music of Outkast, we see the strong influence of Parliament/Funkadelic in the band’s use of psychedelic and rock, as well as funk, in their carnivalesque stage performances and sexually playful lyrics. André 3000 has cited Funkadelic’s “Maggot Brain” as one of his biggest musical influences. He has even been spotted wearing a diaper onstage, like Gary Shider. But I’d argue that while the members of Outkast have the sartorial and musical playfulness of George Clinton, they differ in their business sense, and in their commitment to the truly funky, found/dirty/grimy fashion of the earlier group. In many ways, I see P-Funk as courting a kind of improvisational style—a bit of “country” that is not afraid to show its seams. (Here I’m thinking of a parallel to José Muñoz’s discussion of Vaginal Cream Davis’s embrace of “country” in Disidentification.) André 3000, on the other hand, openly embraces a slicker entrepreneurial spirit—see, for example, his luxury clothing line, Benjamin Bixby. à anks to Deborah Whaley for her suggestions on the Outkast/P-Funk connection.

6. According to Dean Rudland’s liner notes to the 2005 reissue of Cosmic Slop, for many in the band, including lead singer Gary Shider, Cosmic Slop attempted a more commercial departure from the earlier Maggot Brain and America Eats Its Young. Shider recalls that the song “Cosmic Slop” was a big hit in Washington, DC, and that there was even a dance to it, though the single released as a 45, never made the charts.

7. Funk scholar Amy Nathan Wright notes the centrality of identification with working-class blackness in P-Funk’s music in her essay “A Philosophy of Funk: à e Politics and Pleasure of a Parliamentfunkadelicent à ang!,” in à e Funk Era and Beyond: New Perspectives on Black Popular Culture, edited by Tony Bolden (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008), 33–50. Wright argues that P-Funk’s vision of “individual and collective freedom and equality” linked spirituality, sci-fi images, and psychedelia to a worldview privileging black working-class experiences. She points to the song “What Is Soul,” which she says “celebrates images typically associated with poor blacks, defining soul as ‘a hamhock in your Cornflakes,’ ‘rusty ankles and ashy kneecaps,’ ‘chitlins foo yung,’ and finally, ‘you baby.’” à e band’s message of black working-class pride, challenged government officials and social scientists such as Patrick Moynihan, “who had deemed blacks a ‘pathological’ ‘underclass’ trapped in a ‘cycle of poverty’ that resulted from this population’s values and behaviors” (38).

8. Ronald “Stozo” Edwards, quoted in Marsh, For the Record, 73.
9. Sidney Barnes, quoted in ibid., 40.
11. We might note that Haki R. Madhubuti’s thinking about black LGBTQ politics has evolved and opened over the course of recent years. In his 2009 poem “Liberation Narratives,” Madhubuti writes against the closeting of same-sex desiring men and women within the black community, concluding, “à ey were born that way, / enough said.” Haki R. Madhubuti, Liberation Narratives: New and Collected Poems, 1966–2009 (Chicago: dir d World Press, 2009), 25.
12. In his essay “Tearing the Goat’s Flesh,” Robert F. Reid-Pharr speaks to the terror for Cleaver and others represented by the black gay male subject, in his ability to give voice to the larger idea that black masculinity is conceptually queer, writing that “black gay men represent in modern American literature the reality that there is
no normal blackness, no normal masculinity to which the black subject, American or otherwise, might refer. Indeed, Orlando Patterson, Henry Louis Gates, and Paul Gilroy, among others, have argued that the black has been conceptualized in modern (slave) culture as an inchoate, irrational nonsubject, as the chaos that both defines and threatens the borders of logic, individuality, basic subjectivity. In that schema, all blacks become interchangeable, creating among the population a sort of continual restlessness, a terror.” Robert F. Reid-Pharr, Black Gay Man: Essays (New York: New York University Press, 2001), 103. I’d argue that P-Funk’s play with gender norms takes this moment of inchoateness and runs with it, pushes it forward as a space of imaginative freedom.


15. Ibid., 196.

16. Ibid., 298.

17. Ibid., 297.

18. DeWayne “Blackbyrd” McKnight, quoted in Marsh, For the Record, 45.


21. See Patricia Williams, “Meditations on Masculinities,” Callaloo 19, no. 4 (Fall 1996): 814–22. Williams meditates on journalist Brent Staples’s description in his memoir Parallel Time of his coping strategy of “Scattering the Pigeons”—watching and laughing as fearful white couples scatter to opposite parts of the sidewalk when he fails to cross the street or step aside. Williams laments, “a e gentle journalist who stands on the street corner and howls. What upside down craziness, this paradoxical logic of having to debase oneself in order to retrieve one’s sanity in this remaindered marketplace” (816). a s “Scattering the Pigeons” game becomes a touchstone for queer black male critic E. Patrick Johnson as well, in his stage show Strange Fruit. See E. Patrick Johnson, “Strange Fruit: A Performance about Identity Politics,” TDR: a e Drama Review 47, no. 2 (Summer 2003): 88–116.


23. See John Corbett’s comparative analysis of Clinton, Sun Ra, and Perry and their strategic embrace of “disorientation” in his chapter “Brother from Another Planet: a e Space Madness of Lee ‘Scratch’ Perry, Sun Ra, and George Clinton,” in Extended Play: Sounding Off from John Cate to Dr. Funkenstein (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1994), 7–25. Corbett says that all three share an iconography built on an image of disorientation, which then becomes a space to critique social marginalization: “Staking their claim on this ec-centric margin—a place that simultaneously eludes and frightens the oppressive, centered subjectivity—the three of them reconstitute it as a space of creation” (18).

24. George Clinton once said, “Soul is from Church. But funk came from the people who didn’t have enough money to buy shoes to go to church, and had to work on Sun-
day.” Quoted in Tony Green, “Tracing Funk’s Sources,” St. Petersburg Times, November 27, 1994, 1F.

25. These references are deep within the DNA of P-funk’s music, but George Clinton explicitly references the importance of recognizing funk’s deep roots in black culture in the face of the pressures of crossover on his 1986 satiric solo album R & B Skeletons in the Closet. When interviewed about the album, Clinton comments, “In order to have that crossover appeal, the companies tell the artists to use less bass or don’t say the word “funk” or something like that. So you can get played on pop radio. Once you do that to sell all those records you start gearing your music for that market. Before you know it, all the R & B that you had in you is completely hidden.” Quoted in a review by Robert Palmer, “The Pop Life: Clinton’s Satire Has a Bite,” New York Times, May 7, 1986, C26.


27. P-Funk’s melding of funk and psychedelia could also have a disquieting effect on normative notions of black nationhood. In Turn On Your Mind, Jim Derogatis characterizes psychedelic sound as including often ambivalent, playful lyrics and a sound that brings “a loss of ego or depersonalization and sense of physical connection to everything one sees or hears.” Jim Derogatis, Turn On Your Mind: Four Decades of Great Psychedelic Rock (New York: Hal Leonard, 2003), 11.


29. For a cogent analyses of black manhood, gender, and heterosexuality, see Mark Anthony Neal, New Black Man (New York: Routledge, 2006); Athena Mutua’s collection Progressive Black Masculinities (New York: Routledge, 2006); Rudolph P. Byrd and Beverly Guy Sheftall, Traps: African American Men on Gender and Sexuality (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2001); and Harper, Are We Not Men?

30. George Clinton, quoted in Marsh, For the Record, 10.


33. I owe much inspiration from Kodowo Eshun’s writing on P-Funk’s instrumen-
Notes to Pages 101–2 213

tality and the music’s effects on our relationship to our bodies in More Brilliant à an the Sun: Adventures in Sonic Fiction (London: Quartet Books, 1998). Eshun captures the erotics of abduction in P-Funk’s Clones of Dr. Funkenstein, stating that “P-Funk compels you to succumb to the inhuman, to be abducted and love it. Funk gets drawn out of the body, an entelechy harvested by an alien force. . . . P-Funk is the gladallover suffusion of Funkentelechy, the enjoyment of mutation. Instead of resisting alien extraction, dancing turns it into a gift, turns into the joy of being abducted” (14). Ricky Vincent’s definitive chapter on the P-Funk empire in Funk: à e Music, the People, and the Rhythm of the One (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1996) takes some time to note the disconcerting sexiness of Bootsy Collins’s music, as an important contribution to the band. He calls the period that Bootsy and Rubber Band joined the P-Funk empire “the nastayest and most liberated form of P-Funk, symbolically the exposed genitals of the P-Funk vibe.” In Vincent’s description, in songs like “Munchies for Your Love,” Collins combines “a giddy, childlike geepiness” with the “orgiastic bass effects” of “an erotic troubadour”—certainly an eccentric combination (243). Ann Danielsen’s Presence and Pleasure: à e Funk Grooves of James Brown and Parliament (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 2006) takes an ethnomusicological approach to beats, time, and pleasure in P-Funk’s music. In “A Philosophy of Funk: à e Politics and Pleasure of a Parliafunkadelicment à ang!” in à e Funk Era and Beyond: New Perspectives on Black Popular Culture, edited by Tony Bolden (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008), Amy Nathan Wright discusses the band’s sexual politics postsexual revolution. But these writers don’t discuss the implications of P-Funk’s experiments with gender for their constructions of pleasure.


36. Indeed, later in “Confessions of a Nice Negro,” Kelley glances at but doesn’t fully engage the sometime gender incongruity of black gangster style: “Some of the hardest brothas on my block in West Pasadena kept their perms in pink rollers and hairnets. It
was not unusual to see young black men in public with curlers, tank-top undershirts, sweatpants, black mid-calf dress socks, and Stacey Adams shoes, hanging out on the corner or on the basketball court. And we all knew that these brothas were not to be messed with. (ἀ e rest of the world probably knows it by now, too, since black males in curlers are occasionally featured on ‘Cops’ and ‘America’s Most Wanted’ as notorious drug dealers or heartless pimps.)’ (15).


38. See Danielsen’s analysis of “Give Up the Funk,” in Presence and Pleasure, 122. While she doesn’t offer a specifically gendered reading of funk performance, Danielsen usefully suggests that funk has been read uncritically as a “primativist” sound, or “body music,” affirming a notion of a “pure blackness” that nonetheless overlooks the rhythmic complexities of the style. Such readings confirm the idea of black music as “unmediated bodily expression” and reduce the black body as merely sexual (20–28).


44. See, for example, Gil Scott Heron’s “Comment #1,” on his first album, Small Talk at 125 and Lenox (1970): “America was a bastard the illegitimate daughter of the / mother country whose legs were then spread around the / world and a rapist known as freedom—free doom.” Heron’s “Comment #1” was recently sampled in Kanye West’s “Who Will Survive in America” on My Beautiful Dark Twisted Fantasy.

45. Still, I suspect that any confessional aspect of the song is overshadowed by its sheer, lusty coolness. ἀ e song’s hip rhythmic panting, deep-voiced “Dawg,” and “bow
wow wow yippee yay” have been sampled by an amazing number of artists, most notably Snoop Dogg in “Who Am I.” In fact, this song has been sampled in over fifty songs and was subject of a 2007 copyright lawsuit between Clinton and his former producers, Bridgeport (formally Westbound Records).

46. In his essay on quadruple consciousness and Funkadelic’s Cosmic Slop in the context of US imperialism, “Hard Core Jollies in the Himalayas,” Michael C. Ladd writes:

   It can be argued that black Americans are the only four-dimensional people on the planet. Double-consciousness is whipped up and beat down in every essay; I maintain that triple consciousness is the view that black American has of him-or-herself in a neocolonial context. One examines one’s self as an oppressed person of color who, in a “third world” context shares an imperialist position with whites of the United States. Ugly but true. A fourth consciousness, however, allows the black American to re-invent him-/herself from space and therefore rearrange her/his gaze to that of the ultimate outsider and simultaneously insider. A fourth consciousness allows one to bypass the other three. . . . Fourth consciousness view exposes the absurdity of race and simultaneously continues to focus on the Diaspora. It runs the risk of slipping into universalism—“space people universal lover”—but the tradition is deeply connected to home and the soul. (79)


48. Corbett, Extended Play, 147.

49. Original Funkadelic bassist William “Billy Bass” Nelson and George Clinton recall a particular moment of revenge on Berry Gordy and Motown, while Clinton was apparently on LSD.

   Bill y Bass: “We found out that everybody from Motown was at that gig [at the Twenty Grand in Detroit one Christmas]. Berry Gordy’s whole family had the front row. Well, nobody told George not to trip, ‘cause we had a green light to do whatever we wanted to do in the Twenty Grand. He took off his clothes and jumped right down on Berry Gordy’s table, and Berry Gordy’s wife was there, and his mother and father. And told Berry to kiss his ass. ‘You didn’t sign me before, now kiss my ass!’”

   Geor ge: “No, hell naw. . . . Naw, I ain’t do no ’kiss my ass’. Everbody tells those lies. . . . I was naked, probably. And I probably poured some wine over my head, then it dripped all down my dick, and as I run across all the tables in there—I don’t know if Berry was there, but I know the family was there—I would run up and down the table, up the bar, and wine would drip down so everybody say it looked like I peed in everybody’s drink. But I was too out of it to even know if I did it or not.” (Marsh, For the Record, 62–63)


though various modes of “conjuring,” through gothic, grotesque, and absurdist comedies of the body, through stinging, satirical narrative defamiliarization, through hyperbole, burlesque and perhaps most important, through what Hortense Spillers might call the “cultural vestibularity” of racial stereotype itself, these black humorists have enacted oral, discursive, and corporeal rituals of redress with respect to the breach of slavery. (11–12)


53. Bob DeDeckere, quoted in Marsh, *For the Record*, 109. At the same time, in songs like “U.S. Custom Coast Guard Dope Dog” and others, Clinton offers an explicit and heated critique of institutional powers of policing and commerce, suing and countersuing Warner Brothers to have control over the masters of his music, and at several points forming his own label to have more economic and creative control over his music. Clinton comments on his own, sometimes indirect strategies of critique.

I keep it tongue in check, ’cause I ain’t into preachin’ and anything people got to get they got to be able to get it and able to think about it, they can’t get it, jump up and do nothin’ about it other than think, ’cause the minute you start to go crazy, they prepared to tear this country up. They don’t care nothing ‘bout this country. They people that’s in charge is a very small number of bankers, federal reserve, secret organizations and shit like that. They don’t care which country stand and which country go. They could care the fuck less about that. Matter of fact there’s more money, ’cause they usually have a bank financin’ both sides of any war. At’s all it is. So it’s a waste of hip-hop or rap or kids’ energy to be pissed at a cop. Cop is a broke motherfucker! My thang is, I ain’t gonna be mad at no motherfucker! . . . There’s always somebody pullin’ strings in black and white situation. (Corbett, *Extended Play*, 283–84)


56. Anthropologist Aimee Cox, in her study of gender and the sexuality of black women and girls, notes the use of the phrase “turned out” to mean opening oneself up to the possibilities of a fluid sexuality in her essay “The Ugs, Black Divas, and Gendered Aspirations,” *Souls* 11, no. 2 (2009): 113–14. She writes, “Getting turned out does not necessarily mean that a young woman has taken on a new sexual identity but that she has . . . become open to the possibilities” (132).

57. See Eric Lott’s classic *Love and left: Blackface Minstrelsy and the American Working Class* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995), on white fetishization and
desire for blackness through minstrelsy, as well as Glenda R. Carpio’s cogent analysis of resistant redress of such thievery in *Laughing Fit to Kill*, especially 24–25, on minstrelsy and black humor in particular.

58. Billy Bass Nelson describes in more detail this experience of being altered by listening to and playing with white rockers Vanilla Fudge (great name!) in an interview with Dave Marsh.

We were playing at Sacred Heart College in Connecticut, and something happened that our equipment got delayed on the road, it never made it to the gig. Just so happened that Vanilla Fudge was on the gig with us—opening for us, okay? Vanilla Fudge, the opening act. And they let us use their equipment. à e guitar player had a double-stack of Marshalls, and the bass player was using a triple-stack of S.V.T.s, amps, and the drummer had some set of great big oversized—I think those were the first fibes that we’d ever seen, fiberglass drums. à t’s how we found out we’d been using the wrong equipment all along for the sound we had and what we were trying to approach. We needed that Marshall, and I needed them S.V.T’s. And within a few weeks, we had ‘em. à t’s when we really changed from rhythm and blues, Motown wannabees into what we evolved into, the real Funkadelic. à ose amps, and that big oversized set of drums Tiki had. (Marsh, *For the Record*, 33)


60. Marsh, *For the Record*, 41–42.


64. hooks, *Black Looks*, 116.


66. Ibid.


69. Ellis, “From the Crib to the Coliseum,” 92.
70. Indeed, in his queerly theatrical performance style, musical innovation, offbeat theories about the universe, often communal approach to bandleading, and longevity, George Clinton has much more in common with futuristic jazz great Sun Ra than with James Brown—a connection made by John Corbett in Extended Play, especially on pages 7–24. See also John Szwed’s fantastic analysis of Sun Ra’s life and performances in Space Is the Place: å e Lives and Times of Sun Ra (New York: Da Capo Books, 1998).

71. Ellis, “From the Crib to the Coliseum,” 95.

Chapter 4


2. Ibid., xii.


4. By the time Michael Jackson and his brothers signed with Motown, in 1968, his hometown of Gary, Indiana, had elected its first African American mayor, Richard G. Hatch, who would work on reversing Gary’s institutionalized racism for the next twenty years. On the other hand, following the national pattern of Post-Soul deindustrialization happening nationally, over the arc of Jackson’s career, Gary has seen a shaken economy, marked by white business flight and U.S. Steel’s divestment of jobs. In 1987, the same year that Jackson recorded Bad, U.S. Steel jobs in Gary had shrunk from thirty thousand in the 1960s to six thousand. Encyclopedia of Chicago, http://encyclopedia.chicagohistory.org/pages/503.html. Since Jackson’s death, tourism in Gary has increased, and a memorial and museum honoring him is in the works.


12. Ibid., 1.

13. Ibid., 4.

14. Philip M. Royster, personal Interview, September 10, 2004. For more on the spiritual roots of black popular musical performance, see also Philip M. R oyster, “Hammer’s ‘You Can’t Touch åi s’: Rapper as Shaman for a Band of Dancers of the
21. Ibid., 70.
22. We might note the dominant themes of control, loss, and paranoia haunting several of the love songs sung by male vocalists that made *Billboard*’s Top 25 Hot Hits of 1969, the year that the Jackson 5 recorded “Who’s Lovin’ You”: the Temptations’ “I Can’t Get Next to You” (#3), the Rolling Stones’ “Honky Tonk Women” (#4), Tom Jones’s “I’ll Never Fall in Love Again” (#8), the Foundation’s “Build Me Up Buttercup” (#9), â ee Dog Night’s “One” (#11), and Elvis Presley’s “Suspicious Minds” (#18).
23. Certainly anyone fully alert and using the Internet for at least the last decade would be aware of the link between Michael Jackson and children, whether in terms of the 2003 accusations of child molestation and his trial and acquittal, or his own embrace of childlikeness and the culture of childhood at the Neverland Ranch, and the connection between the two, explored in Martin Bashir’s documentary interview *Living with Michael Jackson: A Tonight Special* (2003). Still, Jackson’s use of childhood as a space of freedom is a topic ripe for analysis. Certainly one could look at Jackson’s fantastic construction of childlike home spaces, including Neverland Ranch; his official and unofficial participation in children’s charities; his fierce (and sometimes odd) protection of his own children; and his use of children as images of innocence and integrity in songs/videos like “Black or White” and “â e Earth Song.” Margo Jefferson’s *On Michael Jackson* has a highly suggestive final chapter on the child molestation trial and Jackson’s own ghosts (106–38).
27. âís experience is confirmed in Maureen Mahon’s oral history of members

“I really got into rock just probably—honestly—by the old association breeds assimilation. I was surrounded by Caucasian teenagers who were listening to that and I dug it. . . . I had grown up on that kind of music. I was not into soul music or funk. â e only time I really heard funk and soul was when I [visited] my father’s side of the family, his brothers and sisters. . . . I would go to my aunts’ houses and they would be listening to funk and they used to watch Soul Train—I used to watch American Bandstand. . . . One day I was just dancing—probably arrhythmically—and my aunt looked at me and she went to my mother. She said, ‘You know, we got to get some rhythm into Angela. She dances like a little white girl.’” (57)

30. In his recent study of Michael Jackson’s biography and the material culture that surrounds him, *Michael Jackson’s Treasures*, Jason King includes multiple photos that capture Jackson’s stunning ability to create shifting selves that nevertheless convey a sense of intimacy before the camera: cherubic and bubbly as a twelve year old; pensive and somewhat rebellious on the cover of *Ben*; as an outsider observer staring through an instamatic camera; GQ elegant and open-smiled at a photo shoot for *Off the Wall*; or fedora pulled down like Bogart, face masked in shadow. King also includes a telling anecdote, first told by biographer Dave Marsh, of Jackson strategically striking a pose in the face of the sometime violence of hysterical fans: on a San Francisco promotional tour in the Jackson 5’s early days, young fans became so enthusiastic that they shattered a store window. Some of the fans were injured, blood and glass everywhere. Rather than panicking, Jackson froze, “much like the robot he portrayed in ‘Dancing Machine,’ in an attempt to convince the hysterical fans that he might be a store mannequin.” Jason King, *Michael Jackson’s Treasures: Celebrating the King of Pop in Memorabilia and Photos* (New York: Fall River Press, 2009), 46. While it might be tempting to see this gesture as a sign of Jackson’s movement toward the bizarre and paranoid, as Marsh does, this moment might also demonstrate the seamlessness of Jackson’s theatrical skills at this point, his ability to move to a new and more effective self when needed—in this case, to save his own life.
31. Perhaps even more than any of the other performers examined in this book, Michael Jackson inhabited the space of Post-Soul integrationist *communitas* awkwardly. On the one hand, in his songs, public performances, and charity work, as well as in his personal life and even his appearance, he was consistently interested in blurring racial lines. While he seemed to uphold the general idea of interconnectedness in his songs and in his public work—“We Are the World” and “Earth Song” being a visible examples—Jackson seemed notoriously uneasy in community and spent much of his time secluded, save for an inner circle of family and friends.
Chapter 5

4. Lyle Ashton Harris, personal interview, April 23, 2005.
10. See José Esteban Muñoz, *Disidentifications: Queers of Color and the Performance of Politics* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1999), 185.
the deep thread of antiracist resistance and incendiary tactics of Post-Soul black humor, including the works of Kara Walker and Dave Chappelle. In both Brooks's and Carpio's analyses we see ways that black performers use laughter as a means of unmasking histories of racism sometimes sublimated in the assimilated spaces of Post-Soul artistic success.


23. Ibid.

24. Ibid., 22.

25. Ibid.


27. Here Jones brings to mind the work of African American visual artist Fred Wilson, which frequently uses racial kitsch collectables. Wilson’s video installation Me & It (1995) uses two screens, one showing a racial kitsch figurine like a mammy doll, the other showing Wilson twisting his own body to imitate the inhuman gestures, postures, and facial expressions that the figurine depicts.


29. Ibid., 28.

30. Ibid., 29.


32. Ibid., 102.

33. See Francette Pacteau, the Symptom of Beauty (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2004), especially 123–43. Pacteau sees Goude’s relationship with Jones as grounded in the dynamic of fetishization of, anxiety about, and desire for African feminine beauty. She draws on Homi K. Bhabha’s essay “the Other Question,” which discusses the ways that the mask has been a product of colonial discourse, a campaign to “fix” the living body of the other into fetish. As Bhabha suggests, “is a defensive strategy of disavowal: the acknowledgement of ‘otherness’ and its reduction to open specific characteristic, culturally intelligible, familiar” (quoted in Pacteau, the Symptom of Beauty, 136). Many thanks to Jennifer Brody for calling Pacteau’s work to my attention.

34. Goude, Jungle Fever, 103.

35. Ibid.

36. Ibid., 107.


39. In its grotesque version of ballet, the video seems to be commenting on the construction of the black dancing body as the antithesis of the classical, and white, ballet body. See Brenda Dixon Gottschild, *A Black Dancing Body: A Geography from Coon to Cool* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005).


41. In Ramon Lobato’s salute to Grace Jones, “Amazing Grace: Decadence, Deviance, Disco,” he documents Jones’s fascination for a new generation of musicians and consumers in the first decade of the twenty-first century, noting her recent appearance as special guest at London’s avant-garde Triptych Festival in 2003, covers of her tracks by electro artists like Germany’s DJ Hell, and her still steady schedule of appearances with DJ gigs at nightclubs and launchings around the world. Lobato suggests that Jones’s most salient appeal for consumers right now might be a nostalgia for a “premillennial decadence”; her work “conjures up all the most heady excesses of a debouched decade, all the sartorial style that was the currency of 1980s mainstream club culture but is nowhere to be found of late, having gone back underground or decamped to the more fertile pastures of hip-hop and R&B. Ramon Lobato, “Amazing Grace: Decadence, Deviance, Disco,” *Camera Obscura* 22, no. 65 (2007): 134–38, 135. We might consider what other narratives might be found beneath the surface of this image of decadence—perhaps here, the labor of keeping the image polished and in place?


À e courage with which they fight is amazing: their battles never end except through death of bloodshed, for they do not even understand what fear is. Each one carries back as a trophy the head of the enemy that he has skilled, and hangs it up at the entrance to his home. After having treated their prisoners well for a long time, giving them all the provisions that they could want, he who is the chief calls a great assembly of his acquaintances. He ties a rope to one of the arms of the prisoner and on the other end, several feet away, out of harm’s way, and gives to his best friend the arm to hold; and the two of them, in the presence of the assembled group, slash him to death with their swords. À at done, they roast him and eat him together, sending portions to their absent friends. À ey do this, not as is supposed, for nourishment as did the ancient Scythians; it represents instead an extreme form of vengeance. (238)


Chapter 6


3. As Alondra Nelson suggests in her introduction to Social Text’s special issue on Afrofuturism, “the ‘myth of black disingenuity with technology,’ to borrow a phrase from historian of science and medicine Evelynn Hammonds, does not account for the centrality of black people’s labor in modernization and industrialization as well as the historical truths of black participation in technological development. Examples of such participation include the contributions of Garret Morgan, who invented the traffic light in 1923; the vernacular chemistry of Madame C. J. Walker, who created a multi-million-dollar black beauty business; the creation of the Lingo computer language by programmer John Henry ompson; and pioneering music production techniques.” Alondra Nelson, “Introduction: Future Texts,” Social Text 20 (Summer 2002): 6.

4. Although John F. Szwed doesn’t take up the issue of Sun Ra’s sexual identity in a sustained way in his book-length study Space Is the Place: á e Life and Times of Sun Ra (New York: Da Capo Press, 1998), he certainly presents him as queer in performance, bringing out his slanted view of the world. Slate writer Adam Schatz, in his review of Szwed’s book, offers that Sun Ra’s complex sexuality might help explain “his repudiation of physical reality as a ‘prison,’ his conviction that our bodies are mere vehicles, his obsession with secret layers of meaning” (“Brother from Another Planet: á e Cult and Culture of Sun Ra,” Slate, September 10, 1997, http://www.slate.com.id/3159).


8. Martha Mockus argues that while Ndegeocello might fittingly be called “queer,” given her ability to cross boundaries, “To the best of my knowledge, Ndegeocello has never used that term about herself in public. Instead, she has emphatically criticized the white male connotations of ‘gay,’ ” Martha Mockus, “Meshell Ndegeocello: Musical Articulations of Black Feminisms, in Unmaking Race, Remaking Soul: Transformative Aesthetics and the Practice of Freedom, edited by Christa Davis Acompora and Angela L. Cotton (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2007), 91. Ndegeocello has publicly complained that mainstream images of gay life are patterned on a white gay male aesthetic.


11. Ibid., 245.
12. Ndegeocello describes this ability to be the pulse of the music and the ability to move in a 2007 interview with Bill Murphy in *Bass Player* magazine: “My favorite bass player is Prince. . . . I love how he made ‘Controversy.’ It’s a straight beat, but his bass is moving and shifting and feeling good, and it makes you dance. Gene Lake was always telling me, ‘the moment you start counting bars, you’ll lose the groove.’ So I just find myself grating to the pulse, and I try to make the bass line—which is a separate thought—float along that grid. that’s what works for me for now.” Bill Murphy, “Mack Diva MeShell Ndegeocello,” *Bass Player*, November 2007, 36. this issue of *Bass Player* featured Ndegeocello on the cover—the first woman to ever grace the cover of this magazine.


14. On black music’s relationship to the posthuman, see Alexander G. Weheliye’s “‘Feenin’: Posthuman voices in Contemporary Black Popular Music,” *Social Text* 20, no. 2 (Summer 2002): 21–47. Weheliye discusses the ways in which black popular music has negotiated the status of the posthuman with a difference. For black artists, the posthuman is always fraught with the ambivalent status of black as human. He suggests that we think of ways that technologically heightened and/or disembodied vocal expressions, in vocoders, for example, add new ways of thinking about this tarrying with the human and/or posthuman.


19. For an insightful discussion of Ndegeocello’s use of the Bible, see Farah Jasmine Griffin’s “Adventures of a Black Child in Search of Her God: α e Bible in the Works of MeShell N’Degeocello,” in *African Americans and the Bible: Sacred Texts and Social Textures*, edited by Vincent L. Wimbush (New York: Continuum, 2000), 774–81. Griffin suggests that Ndegeocello uses the Bible to “tamper with the boundary between the sacred and the secular, body and soul, the erotic and the spiritual” (775).


21. In contrast, see Jason King’s insightful analysis of Toni Braxton’s use of gospel-inflected “heat” in “Toni Braxton, Disney, and α ermodynamics,” *TDR: α e Drama Review* 46, no. 3 (Fall 2002): 54–81. See also Daphne A. Brooks’s smart analysis of the confessional mode in 1990s women’s R&B, and its often undervalued importance to our understanding of changing material conditions shaping race, class, and sexuality in the post-Soul era, in “‘It’s Not Right but It’s Okay’: Black Women’s R&B and the House α at Terry McMillan Built,” in *New Black Renaissance: α e Souls Anthology of Critical African American Studies*, edited by Manning Marable (New York: Paradigm Publishers, 2005), 168–82.
22. See, for example, Butler’s dislocated black female narrator, Renee, in her final novel, *Fledgling*. Renee’s very first words are “I awoke to darkness.” Octavia E. Butler, *Fledgling: A Novel* (New York: Seven Stories Press, 2005), 1. Renee’s identity and history have been wiped out through a systematic campaign of violence and erasure. Over the course of the novel, Renee recovers a partial history and identity as a black vampire through the lessons of her body’s desires and her coalitions with others.

23. See Butler’s discussion of post-9/11 censorship of dissent: “Because it would be heinous to identify as treasonous, as a collaborator, one fails to speak, or one speaks in throttled ways, in order to sidestep the terrorizing identification that threatens to take hold. As strategy for quelling dissent and limiting the reach of critical debate happens not only through a series of shaming tactics which have a certain psychological terrorization as their effect, but they work as well by producing what will and will not count as a viable speaking subject and a reasonable opinion within the public domain” (ibid., xix).

24. While here I consider the possibilities of music to explore desires and identity still in formation, Kara Keeling potently explores the productive impulse of the “not yet” in black and queer conceptions of the future in film. In her analysis of temporality in recent black queer films *Looking for Langston*, *Brother to Brother*, and especially the *Aggressives*, she explores the ways that such films anticipate the still unrecognizable and unintelligible of queer experiences and identities still in formation—the moments that she calls “poetry from the future.” She writes that “Poetry from the future interrupts the habitual formation of bodies, and it is an index of a time to come in which what today exists potently—even if not (yet) effectively—but escapes us will find its time.” Kara Keeling, “Looking for M__: Queer Temporality, Black Political Possibility, and Poetry from the Future,” *GLQ: A Journal for Lesbian and Gay Studies* 15, no. 4 (2009): 567.

25. Moraga and Anzaldúa famously define “theory in the flesh” as “one where the physical realities of our lives—our skin color, the land or concrete that we grew up on, our sexual longings—all fuse to create a politic of necessity.” Cherríe Moraga and Gloria Anzaldúa, eds., *This Bridge Called My Back: Writings by Radical Women of Color*, 3rd ed. (Berkeley, CA: air d Woman Press, 2002), 23.

26. On the erotic as a wellspring from which we might shape intentional engagement with the world, Lorde writes, “[O]nce we begin to feel deeply all the aspects of our lives, we begin to demand from ourselves and from our life-pursuits that they feel in accordance with that joy which we know ourselves to be capable of. Our erotic knowledge empowers us, becomes a lens through which we scrutinize all aspects of our existence, forcing us to evaluate those aspects honestly in terms of their relative meaning within our lives.” Audre Lorde, “The Uses of the Erotic: The Erotic as Power,” in *Sister Outsider: Essays and Speeches* (Freedom, CA: Crossing Press, 1984), 59.

27. Chela Sandoval’s differential consciousness is very much grounded in the idea of eccentric negotiation of community through the space of the margins, and the performance of strangeness that is at the center of this book. She explains, “Differential consciousness is linked to whatever is not expressible through words. It is accessed through poetic modes of expression: gestures, music, images, sounds, words that plummet or rise through signification to find some void—some no-place—to claim their due. As mode of consciousness both inspires and depends on differential social
movement and methodology of the oppressed and its differential technologies, yet it functions outside speech, outside academic criticism, in spite of all attempts to pursue and identify its place of origin. In seeking to describe it, Barthes wrote toward the end of the end of his life that this mode of differential consciousness ‘can only be reached’ by human thought through an unconformable and ‘intractable’ passage—not through any ‘synthesizing term’—but rather through another kind of ‘eccentric’ and ‘extraordinary’ term.” Chela Sandoval, *Methodology of the Oppressed* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2000), 139.

**Epilogue**

6. *a e manifesto can be found on the collective’s website, Wondaland.blogspot.com.*