The Black Atlantic

Modernity and Double Consciousness

Paul Gilroy

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"Jewels Brought from Bondage": Black Music and the Politics of Authenticity

My nationality is reality.
Kool G Rap

Since the mid-nineteenth century a country's music has become a political ideology by stressing national characteristics, appearing as a representative of the nation, and everywhere confirming the national principle . . . Yet music, more than any other artistic medium, expresses the national principle's antinomies as well.
T. W. Adorno

O black and unknown bards of long ago,
How came your lips to touch the sacred fire?
How in your darkness, did you come to know
The power and beauty of the minstrel's lyre?
Who first from midst his bonds lifted his eyes?
Who first from out the still watch, lone and long,
Feeling the ancient faith of prophets rise
Within his dark-kept soul burst into song?

Heart of what slave poured out such melody
As "Steal away to Jesus"? On its strains
His spirit must have nightly floated free,
Though still about his hands he felt his chains.
Who heard great "Jordan Roll"? Whose starward eye
Saw chariot "swing low"? And who was he
That breathed that comforting melodic sigh,
"Nobody knows de trouble I see"?
James Weldon Johnson

THE CONTEMPORARY debates over modernity and its possible eclipse cited in the last chapter have largely ignored music. This is odd given that the modern differentiation of the true, the good, and the beautiful was conveyed directly in the transformation of public use of culture in general and the increased public importance of all kinds of music.[1] I have suggested that the critiques of modernity articulated by successive generations of black intellectuals had their rhizomorphic systems of propagation anchored in a continued proximity to the unspeakable terrors of the slave experience. I argued that this critique was nurtured by a deep sense of the complicity of racial terror with reason. The resulting ambivalence towards modernity has constituted some of the most distinctive forces shaping black Atlantic political culture. What follows will develop this argument in a slightly different direction by exploring some of the ways in which closeness to the ineffable terrors of slavery was kept alive—carefully cultivated—in ritualised, social forms. This chapter begins a shift that will be developed further in Chapter 4, where my concern with black responses to modernity begins to be complemented by an interest in the development of black modernisms.

The question of racial terror always remains in view when these modernisms are discussed because imaginative proximity to terror is their inaugural experience. This focus is refined somewhat in the progression from slave society into the era of imperialism. Though they were unspeakable, these terrors were not inexpressible, and my main aim here is to explore how residual traces of their necessarily painful expression still contribute to historical memories inscribed and incorporated into the volatile core of Afro-Atlantic cultural creation. Thinking about the primary object of this chapter—black musics—requires this reorientation towards the phatic and the ineffable.

Through a discussion of music and its attendant social relations, I want to clarify some of the distinctive attributes of black cultural forms which are both modern and modernist. They are modern because they have been marked by their hybrid, creole origins in the West, because they have struggled to escape their status as commodities and the position within the cultural industries it specifies, and because they are produced by artists whose understanding of their own position relative to the racial group and of the role of art in mediating individual creativity with social dynamics is shaped by a sense of artistic practice as an autonomous domain either reluctantly or happily divorced from the everyday lifeworld.

These expressive cultural forms are thus western and modern, but this is not all they are. I want to suggest that, rather like the philosophical critique examined in Chapter 2, their special power derives from a doubleness, their unsteady location simultaneously inside and outside the conventions, assumptions, and aesthetic rules which distinguish and periodise modernity. These musical forms and the intercultural conversations to which they contribute are a dynamic refutation of the Hegelian suggestions that thought and reflection have outstripped art and that art is opposed to philosophy as the lowest, merely sensuous form of reconciliation between nature and

finite reality.[2] The stubborn modernity of these black musical forms would require a reordering of Hegel's modern hierarchy of cultural achievements. This might claim, for example, that music should enjoy higher status because of its capacity to express a direct image of the slaves' will.

The anti-modernity of these forms, like their anteriority, appears in the (dis)guise of a premodernity that is both actively reimagined in the present and transmitted intermittently in eloquent pulses from the past. It seeks not simply to change the relationship of these cultural forms to newly autonomous philosophy and science but to refuse the categories on which the relative evaluation of these separate domains is based and thereby to transform the relationship between the production and use of art, the everyday world, and the project of racial emancipation.

The topos of unsayability produced from the slaves' experiences of racial terror and figured repeatedly in nineteenth-century evaluations of slave music has other important implications. It can be used to challenge the privileged conceptions of both language and writing as preeminent expressions of human consciousness. The power and significance of music within the black Atlantic have grown in inverse proportion to the limited expressive power of language. It is important to remember that the slaves' access to literacy was often denied on pain of death and only a few cultural opportunities were offered as a surrogate for the other forms of individual autonomy denied by life on the plantations and in the barracoons. Music becomes vital at the point at which linguistic and semantic indeterminacy/polyphony arise amidst the protracted battle between masters, mistresses, and slaves. This decidedly modern conflict was the product of circumstances where language lost something of its referentiality and its privileged relationship to concepts.[3] In his narrative, Frederick Douglass raised this point when discussing Gore, the overseer who illustrates the relationship between the rationalism of the slave system and its terror and barbarity:

> Mr Gore was a grave man, and, though a young man, he indulged in no jokes, said no funny words, seldom smiled. His words were in perfect keeping with his looks, and his looks were in perfect keeping with his words. Overseers will sometimes indulge in a witty word, even with the slaves; not so with Mr Gore. He spoke but to command, and commanded but to be obeyed; he dealt sparingly with words, and bountifully with his whip, never using the former where the latter would answer as well . . . His savage barbarity was equalled only by the consummate coolness with which he committed the grossest and most savage deeds upon the slaves under his charge.[4]

Examining the place of music in the black Atlantic world means surveying the self-understanding articulated by the musicians who have made it,

the symbolic use to which their music is put by other black artists and writers, and the social relations which have produced and reproduced the unique expressive culture in which music comprises a central and even foundational element. I want to propose that the possible commonality of post-slave, black cultural forms be approached via several related problems which converge in the analysis of black musics and their supporting social relations. One particularly valuable pathway into this is provided by the distinctive patterns of language use that characterise the contrasting populations of the modern, western, African diaspora.[5] The oral character of the cultural settings in which diaspora musics have developed presupposes a distinctive relationship to the body—an idea expressed with exactly the right amount of impatience by Glissant: "It is nothing new to declare that for us music, gesture, dance are forms of communication, just as important as the gift of speech. This is how we first managed to emerge from the plantation: aesthetic form in our cultures must be shaped from these oral structures."[6]

The distinctive kinesics of the post-slave populations was the product of these brutal historical conditions. Though more usually raised by analysis of sports, athletics, and dance it ought to contribute directly to the understanding of the traditions of performance which continue to characterise the production and reception of diaspora musics. This orientation to the specific dynamics of performance has a wider significance in the analysis of black cultural forms than has so far been supposed. Its strengths are evident when it is contrasted with approaches to black culture that have been premised exclusively on textuality and narrative rather than dramaturgy, enunciation, and gesture—the pre- and anti-discursive constituents of black metacommunication.

Each of these areas merits detailed treatment in its own right.[7] All of them are configured by their compound and multiple origins in the mix of African and other cultural forms sometimes referred to as creolisation. However, my main concern in this chapter is less with the formal attributes of these syncretic expressive cultures than with the problem of how critical, evaluative, axiological, (anti)aesthetic judgements on them can be made and with the place of ethnicity and authenticity within these judgements. What special analytical problems arise if a style, genre, or particular performance of music is identified as being expressive of the absolute essence of the group that produced it? What contradictions appear in the transmission and adaptation of this cultural expression by other diaspora populations, and how will they be resolved? How does the hemispheric displacement and global dissemination of black music get reflected in localised traditions of critical writing, and, once the music is perceived as a world phenomenon, what value is placed upon its origins, particularly if they

come into opposition against further mutations produced during its contingent loops and fractal trajectories? Where music is thought to be emblematic and constitutive of racial difference rather than just associated with it, how is music used to specify general issues pertaining to the problem of racial authenticity and the consequent self-identity of the ethnic group? Thinking about music—a non-representational, non-conceptual form—raises aspects of embodied subjectivity that are not reducible to the cognitive and the ethical. These questions are also useful in trying to pinpoint the distinctive aesthetic components in black communication.

The invented traditions of musical expression which are my object here are equally important in the study of diaspora blacks and modernity because they have supported the formation of a distinct, often priestly caste of organic intellectuals[8] whose experiences enable us to focus upon the crisis of modernity and modern values with special clarity. These people have often been intellectuals in the Gramscian sense, operating without the benefits that flow either from a relationship to the modern state or from secure institutional locations within the cultural industries. They have often pursued roles that escape categorisation as the practice of either legislators or interpreters and have advanced instead as temporary custodians of a distinct and embattled cultural sensibility which has also operated as a political and philosophical resource. The irrepressible rhythms of the once forbidden drum are often still audible in their work. Its characteristic syncopations still animate the basic desires—to be free and to be oneself—that are revealed in this counterculture's unique conjunction of body and music. Music, the grudging gift that supposedly compensated slaves not only for their exile from the ambiguous legacies of practical reason but for their complete exclusion from modern political society, has been refined and developed so that it provides an enhanced mode of communication beyond the petty power of words—spoken or written.

Paradoxically, in the light of their origins in the most modern of social relations at the end of the eighteenth century, modernity's ethnocentric aesthetic assumptions have consigned these musical creations to a notion of the primitive that was intrinsic to the consolidation of scientific racism. The creators of this musically infused subculture and counter-power are perhaps more accurately described as midwives, an appropriate designation following Julia Kristeva's provocative pointers towards the "feminisation" of the ethical bases from which dissident political action is possible.[9] They stand their ground at the social pivot of atavistic nature and rational culture. I want to endorse the suggestion that these subversive music makers and users represent a different kind of intellectual not least because their self-identity and their practice of cultural politics remain outside the dialectic of pity and guilt which, especially among oppressed people, has so often governed the relationship between the writing elite and the masses of people who exist outside literacy. I also want to ask whether for black cultural theory to embrace or even accept this mediated, tactical relationship to the unrepresentable, the pre-rational, and the sublime would be to sip from a poisoned chalice. These questions have become politically decisive since these cultural forms have colonised the interstices of the cultural industry on behalf not just of black Atlantic peoples but of the poor, exploited, and downpressed everywhere.

The current debate over modernity centres either on the problematic relationships between politics and aesthetics or on the question of science and its association with the practice of domination.[10] Few of these debates operate at the interface of science and aesthetics which is the required starting point of contemporary black cultural expression and the digital technology of its social dissemination and reproduction. These debates over modernity conventionally define the political instance of the modern social totality through a loose invocation of the achievements of bourgeois democracy. The discrete notion of the aesthetic, in relation to which this self-sustaining political domain is then evaluated, is constructed by the idea and the ideology of the text and of textuality as a mode of communicative practice which provides a model for all other forms of cognitive exchange and social interaction. Urged on by the post-structuralist critiques of the metaphysics of presence, contemporary debates have moved beyond citing language as the fundamental analogy for comprehending all signifying practices to a position where textuality (especially when wrenched open through the concept of difference) expands and merges with totality. Paying careful attention to the structures of feeling which underpin black expressive cultures can show how this critique is incomplete. It gets blocked by this invocation of all-encompassing textuality. Textuality becomes a means to evacuate the problem of human agency, a means to specify the death (by fragmentation) of the subject and, in the same manoeuvre, to enthrone the literary critic as mistress or master of the domain of creative human communication.

At the risk of appearing rather esoteric, I want to suggest that the history and practice of black music point to other possibilities and generate other plausible models. This neglected history is worth reconstructing, whether or not it supplies pointers to other more general cultural processes. However, I want to suggest that bourgeois democracy in the genteel metropolitan guise in which it appeared at the dawn of the public sphere should not serve as an ideal type for all modern political processes. Secondly, I want to shift concern with the problems of beauty, taste, and artistic judgement

so that discussion is not circumscribed by the idea of rampant, invasive textuality. Foregrounding the history of black music making encourages both of these propositions. It also requires a different register of analytic concepts. This demand is amplified by the need to make sense of musical performances in which identity is fleetingly experienced in the most intensive ways and sometimes socially reproduced by means of neglected modes of signifying practice like mimesis, gesture, kinesis, and costume. Antiphony (call and response) is the principal formal feature of these musical traditions. It has come to be seen as a bridge from music into other modes of cultural expression, supplying, along with improvisation, montage, and dramaturgy, the hermeneutic keys to the full medley of black artistic practices. Toni Morrison eloquently states her view of this important relationship.

> Black Americans were sustained and healed and nurtured by the translation of their experience into art above all in the music. That was functional . . . My parallel is always the music because all of the strategies of the art are there. All of the intricacy, all of the discipline. All the work that must go into improvisation so that it appears that you've never touched it. Music makes you hungry for more of it. It never really gives you the whole number. It slaps and it embraces, it slaps and it embraces. The literature ought to do the same thing. I've been very deliberate about that. The power of the word is not music, but in terms of aesthetics, the music is the mirror that gives me the necessary clarity . . . The major things black art has to have are these: it must have the ability to use found objects, the appearance of using found things, and it must look effortless. It must look cool and easy. If it makes you sweat, you haven't done the work. You shouldn't be able to see the seams and stitches. I have wanted always to develop a way of writing that was irrevocably black. I don't have the resources of a musician but I thought that if it was truly black literature it would not be black because I was, it would not even be black because of its subject matter. It would be something intrinsic, indigenous, something in the way it was put together—the sentences, the structure, texture and tone—so that anyone who read it would realise. I use the analogy of the music because you can range all over the world and it's still black . . . I don't imitate it, but I am informed by it. Sometimes I hear blues, sometimes spirituals or jazz and I've appropriated it. I've tried to reconstruct the texture of it in my writing—certain kinds of repetition—its profound simplicity . . . What has already happened with the music in the States, the literature will do one day and when that happens it's all over.[11]

The intense and often bitter dialogues which make the black arts movement move offer a small reminder that there is a democratic, communitarian moment enshrined in the practice of antiphony which symbolises and anticipates (but does not guarantee) new, non-dominating social relationships. Lines between self and other are blurred and special forms of pleasure are created as a result of the meetings and conversations that are established between one fractured, incomplete, and unfinished racial self and others. Antiphony is the structure that hosts these essential encounters. Ralph Ellison's famous observation on the inner dynamics of jazz production uses visual art as its central analogy but it can be readily extended beyond the specific context it was written to illuminate:

> There is in this a cruel contradiction implicit in the art form itself. For true jazz is an art of individual assertion within and against the group. Each true jazz moment . . . springs from a contest in which the artist challenges all the rest; each solo flight, or improvisation, represents (like the canvasses of a painter) a definition of his [*sic*] identity: as individual, as member of the collectivity and as a link in the chain of tradition. Thus because jazz finds its very life in improvisation upon traditional materials, the jazz man must lose his identity even as he finds it . . .[12]

This quote offers a reminder that apart from the music and the musicians themselves, we must also take account of the work of those within the expressive culture of the black Atlantic who have tried to use its music as an aesthetic, political, or philosophical marker in the production of what might loosely be called their critical social theories. Here it is necessary to consider the work of a whole host of exemplary figures: ex-slaves, preachers, self-educated scholars and writers, as well as a small number of professionals and the tiny minority who managed to acquire some sort of academic position in essentially segregated educational systems or took advantage of opportunities in Liberia, Haiti, and other independent states. This company spreads out in discontinuous, transverse lines of descent that stretch outwards across the Atlantic from Phyllis Wheatley onwards. Its best feature is an anti-hierarchical tradition of thought that probably culminates in C. L. R. James's idea that ordinary people do not need an intellectual vanguard to help them to speak or to tell them what to say.[13] Repeatedly, within this expressive culture it is musicians who are presented as living symbols of the value of self-activity.[14] This is often nothing more or less than a question of style.

The basic labours of archaeological reconstruction and periodisation aside, working on the contemporary forms of black expressive culture involves struggling with one problem in particular. It is the puzzle of what

analytic status should be given to the variation within black communities and between black cultures which their musical habits reveal. The tensions produced by attempts to compare or evaluate differing black cultural formations can be summed up in the following question: 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? This question serves as a receptacle for several even more awkward issues. They include the unity and differentiation of the creative black self, the vexed matter of black particularity, and the role of cultural expression in its formation and reproduction. These problems are especially acute because black thinkers have been unable to appeal to the authoritative narratives of psychoanalysis as a means to ground the cross-cultural aspirations of their theories. With a few noble exceptions, critical accounts of the dynamics of black subordination and resistance have been doggedly monocultural, national, and ethnocentric. This impoverishes modern black cultural history because the transnational structures which brought the black Atlantic world into being have themselves developed and now articulate its myriad forms into a system of global communications constituted by flows. This fundamental dislocation of black culture is especially important in the recent history of black musics which, produced out of the racial slavery which made modern western civilisation possible, now dominate its popular cultures.

In the face of the conspicuous differentiation and proliferation of black cultural styles and genres, a new analytic orthodoxy has begun to grow. In the name of anti-essentialism and theoretical rigour it suggests that since black particularity is socially and historically constructed, and plurality has become inescapable, the pursuit of any unifying dynamic or underlying structure of feeling in contemporary black cultures is utterly misplaced. The attempt to locate the cultural practices, motifs, or political agendas that might connect the dispersed and divided blacks of the new world and of Europe with each other and even with Africa is dismissed as essentialism or idealism or both.[15]

The alternative position sketched out in this the rest of this chapter offers a tentative rebuke to that orthodoxy which I regard as premature in its dismissal of the problem of theorising black identity. I suggest that weighing the similarities and differences between black cultures remains an urgent concern. This response relies crucially on the concept of diaspora,[16] which will be discussed in more detail in Chapter 6. For present purposes I want to state that diaspora is still indispensable in focusing on the political and ethical dynamics of the unfinished history of blacks in the modern world. The dangers of idealism and pastoralisation associated with this

concept ought, by now, to be obvious, but the very least that it offers is an heuristic means to focus on the relationship of identity and non-identity in black political culture. It can also be employed to project the plural richness of black cultures in different parts of the world in counterpoint to their common sensibilities—both those residually inherited from Africa and those generated from the special bitterness of new world racial slavery. This is not an easy matter. The proposition that the post-slave cultures of the Atlantic world are in some significant way related to one another and to the African cultures from which they partly derive has long been a matter of great controversy capable of arousing intense feeling which goes far beyond dispassionate scholastic contemplation. The situation is rendered even more complex by the fact that the fragile psychological, emotional, and cultural correspondences which connect diaspora populations in spite of their manifest differences are often apprehended only fleetingly and in ways that persistently confound the protocols of academic orthodoxy. There is, however, a great body of work which justifies the proposition that some cultural, religious, and linguistic affiliations can be identified even if their contemporary political significance remains disputed. There are also valuable though underutilised leads to be found in the work of the feminist political thinkers, cultural critics, and philosophers who have formulated stimulating conceptions of the relationship between identity and difference in the context of advancing the political projects of female emancipation.[17]

UK Blak

The issue of the identity and non-identity of black cultures has acquired a special historical and political significance in Britain. Black settlement in that country goes back many centuries, and affirming its continuity has become an important part of the politics that strive to answer contemporary British racism. However, the bulk of today's black communities are of relatively recent origin, dating only from the post–World War II period. If these populations are unified at all, it is more by the experience of migration than by the memory of slavery and the residues of plantation society. Until recently, this very newness and conspicuous lack of rootedness in the "indigenous" cultures of Britain's inner cities conditioned the formation of racial subcultures which drew heavily from a range of "raw materials" supplied by the Caribbean and black America. This was true even where these subcultures also contributed to the unsteady equilibrium of antagonistic class relationships into which Britain's black settlers found themselves inserted as racially subordinated migrant labourers but also as working-class black settlers.

The musics of the black Atlantic world were the primary expressions of

cultural distinctiveness which this population seized upon and adapted to its new circumstances. It used the separate but converging musical traditions of the black Atlantic world, if not to create itself anew as a conglomeration of black communities, then as a means to gauge the social progress of spontaneous self-creation which was sedimented together by the endless pressures of economic exploitation, political racism, displacement, and exile. This musical heritage gradually became an important factor in facilitating the transition of diverse settlers to a distinct mode of lived blackness. It was instrumental in producing a constellation of subject positions that was openly indebted for its conditions of possibility to the Caribbean, the United States, and even Africa. It was also indelibly marked by the British conditions in which it grew and matured.

It is essential to appreciate that this type of process has not been confined to settlers of Afro-Caribbean descent. In reinventing their own ethnicity, some of Britain's Asian settlers have also borrowed the sound system culture of the Caribbean and the soul and hip hop styles of black America, as well as techniques like mixing, scratching, and sampling as part of their invention of a new mode of cultural production with an identity to match.[18] The popularity of Apache Indian[19] and Bally Sagoo's[20] attempts to fuse Punjabi music and language with reggae music and raggamuffin style raised debates about the authenticity of these hybrid cultural forms to an unprecedented pitch. The experience of Caribbean migrants to Britain provides further examples of complex cultural exchange and of the ways in which a self-consciously synthetic culture can support some equally novel political identities. The cultural and political histories of Guyana, Jamaica, Barbados, Grenada, Trinidad, and St. Lucia, like the economic forces at work in generating their respective migrations to Europe, are widely dissimilar. Even if it were possible, let alone desirable, their synthesis into a single black British culture could never have been guaranteed by the effects of racism alone. Thus the role of external meanings around blackness, drawn in particular from black America, became important in the elaboration of a connective culture which drew these different "national" groups together into a new pattern that was not ethnically marked in the way that their Caribbean cultural inheritances had been. Reggae, a supposedly stable and authentic category, provides a useful example here. Once its own hybrid origins in rhythm and blues were effectively concealed,[21] it ceased, in Britain, to signify an exclusively ethnic, Jamaican style and derived a different kind of cultural legitimacy both from a new global status and from its expression of what might be termed a pan-Caribbean culture.

The style, rhetoric, and moral authority of the civil rights movement and of Black Power suffered similar fates. They too were detached from their

original ethnic markers and historical origins, exported and adapted, with evident respect but little sentimentality, to local needs and political climates. Appearing in Britain through a circulatory system that gave a central place to the musics which had both informed and recorded black struggles in other places, they were rearticulated in distinctively European conditions. How the appropriation of these forms, styles, and histories of struggle was possible at such great physical and social distance is in itself an interesting question for cultural historians. It was facilitated by a common fund of urban experiences, by the effect of similar but by no means identical forms of racial segregation, as well as by the memory of slavery, a legacy of Africanisms, and a stock of religious experiences defined by them both. Dislocated from their original conditions of existence, the sound tracks of this African-American cultural broadcast fed a new metaphysics of blackness elaborated and enacted in Europe and elsewhere within the underground, alternative, public spaces constituted around an expressive culture that was dominated by music.

The inescapably political language of citizenship, racial justice, and equality was one of several discourses which contributed to this transfer of cultural and political forms and structures of feeling. A commentary on the relationship of work to leisure and the respective forms of freedom with which these opposing worlds become identified provided a second linking principle. A folk historicism animating a special fascination with history and the significance of its recovery by those who have been expelled from the official dramas of civilisation was a third component here. The representation of sexuality and gender identity, in particular the ritual public projection of the antagonistic relationship between black women and men in ways that invited forms of identification strong enough to operate across the line of colour, was the fourth element within this vernacular cultural and philosophical formation dispersed through the musics of the black Atlantic world.

The conflictual representation of sexuality has vied with the discourse of racial emancipation to constitute the inner core of black expressive cultures. Common rhetorical strategies developed through the same repertory of enunciative procedures have helped these discourses to become interlinked. Their association was pivotal, for example, in the massive secularisation that produced soul out of rhythm and blues, and it persists today. It can be easily observed in the bitter conflict over the misogynist tone and masculinist direction of hip hop. Hip hop culture has recently provided the raw material for a bitter contest between black vernacular expression and repressive censorship of artistic work. This has thrown some black commentators into a quandary which they have resolved by invoking the rheto-

ric of cultural insiderism and drawing the comforting cloak of absolute ethnicity even more tightly around their anxious shoulders. The most significant recent illustration of this is provided by the complex issues stemming from the obscenity trial of 2 Live Crew, a Florida-based rap act led by Luther Cambell, a commercially minded black American of Jamaican descent. This episode is not notable because the forms of misogyny that attracted the attention of the police and the district attorneys were new.[22] Its importance lay in the fact that it was the occasion for an important public intervention by black America's best known academic and cultural critic, Henry Louis Gates, Jr.[23] Gates went beyond simply affirming the artistic status of this particular hip hop product, arguing in full effect that the Crew's material was a manifestation of distinctively black cultural traditions which operated by particular satirical codes where one man's misogyny turns out to be another man's parodic play. Rakim, the most gifted rap poet of the eighties, had a very different perspective on the authenticity of 2 Live Crew's output.

> That [the 2 Live Crew situation] ain't my problem. Some people might think it's our problem because rap is one big happy family. When I make my bed, I lay on it. I don't say nothin' I can't stand up for. 'cause I seen one interview, where they asked him [Luther Cambell] a question and he started talkin' all this about black culture. That made everybody on the rap tip look kinda dense. He was sayin' "Yo this is my culture." That's not culture at all.[24]

It is striking that apologists for the woman-hating antics of 2 Live Crew and other similar performers have been so far unconcerned that the vernacular tradition they rightly desire to legitimise and protect has its own record of reflection on the specific ethical obligations and political responsibilities which constitute the unique burden of the black artist. Leaving the question of misogyny aside for a moment, to collude in the belief that black vernacular is *nothing* other than a playful, parodic cavalcade of Rabelaisian subversion decisively weakens the positions of the artist, the critical commentator, and the community as a whole. What is more significant is surely the failure of either academic or journalistic commentary on black popular music in America to develop a reflexive political aesthetics capable of distinguishing 2 Live Crew and their ilk from their equally authentic but possibly more compelling and certainly more constructive peers.

I am not suggesting that the self-conscious racial pedagogy of recognisably political artists like KRS1, the Poor Righteous Teachers, Lakim Shabazz, or the X Clan should be straightforwardly counterposed against the carefully calculated affirmative nihilism of Ice Cube, Tim Dog, the Ghetto

Boys, Above the Law, and Compton's Most Wanted. The different styles and political perspectives expressed within the music are linked both by the bonds of a stylised but aggressively masculinist discourse and by formal borrowings from the linguistic innovations of Jamaica's distinct modes of "kinetic orality."[25] This debt to Caribbean forms, which can only undermine the definition of hip hop as an exclusively American product, is more openly acknowledged in the ludic Africentrisms of the Jungle Brothers, De La Soul, and A Tribe Called Quest, which may represent a third alternative—both in its respectful and egalitarian representation of women and in its more ambivalent relationship to America and Americanism. The stimulating and innovative work of this last group of artists operates a rather different, eccentric conception of black authenticity that effectively contrasts the local (black nationalism) with the global (black internationalism) and measures Americanism against the appeal of Ethiopianism and pan-Africanism. It is important to emphasise that all three strands within hip hop—pedagogy, affirmation, and play—contribute to a folk-cultural constellation where neither the political compass of weary leftism nor the shiny navigational instruments of premature black postmodernism[26] in aesthetics have so far offered very much that is useful.

In dealing with the relationship of race to class it has been commonplace to recall Stuart Hall's suggestive remark that the former is the modality in which the latter is lived. The tale of 2 Live Crew and the central place of sexuality in the contemporary discourses of racial particularity point to an analogous formulation that may prove equally wieldy: gender is the modality in which race is lived. An amplified and exaggerated masculinity has become the boastful centrepiece of a culture of compensation that self-consciously salves the misery of the disempowered and subordinated. This masculinity and its relational feminine counterpart become special symbols of the difference that race makes. They are lived and naturalised in the distinct patterns of family life on which the reproduction of the racial identities supposedly relies. These gender identities come to exemplify the immutable cultural differences that apparently arise from absolute ethnic difference. To question them and their constitution of racial subjectivity is at once to be ungendered and to place oneself outside of the racial kin group. This makes these positions hard to answer, let alone criticise. Experiencing racial sameness through particular definitions of gender and sexuality has also proved to be eminently exportable. The forms of connectedness and identification it makes possible across space and time cannot be confined within the borders of the nation state and correspond closely to lived experience. They may even create new conceptions of nationality in the conflictual interaction between the women who quietly and privately repro-

duce the black national community and the men who aspire to be its public soldier citizens.

These links show no sign of fading, but the dependence of blacks in Britain on black cultures produced in the new world has recently begun to change. The current popularity of Jazzie B and Soul II Soul, Maxi Priest, Caron Wheeler, Monie Love, the Young Disciples, and others in the United States confirms that during the eighties black British cultures ceased to simply mimic or reproduce wholesale forms, styles, and genres which had been lovingly borrowed, respectfully stolen, or brazenly hijacked from blacks elsewhere. Critical space/time cartography of the diaspora needs therefore to be readjusted so that the dynamics of dispersal and local autonomy can be shown alongside the unforeseen detours and circuits which mark the new journeys and new arrivals that, in turn, release new political and cultural possibilities.[27]

At certain points during the recent past, British racism has generated turbulent economic, ideological, and political forces that have seemed to act upon the people they oppressed by concentrating their cultural identities into a single powerful configuration. Whether these people were of African, Caribbean, or Asian descent, their commonality was often defined by its reference to the central, irreducible sign of their common racial subordination—the colour black. More recently, though, this fragile unity in action has fragmented and their self-conception has separated into its various constituent elements. The unifying notion of an open blackness has been largely rejected and replaced by more particularistic conceptions of cultural difference. This retreat from a politically constructed notion of racial solidarity has initiated a compensatory recovery of narrowly ethnic culture and identity. Indeed, the aura of authentic ethnicity supplies a special form of comfort in a situation where the very historicity of black experience is constantly undermined.

These political and historical shifts are registered in the cultural realm. The growth of religious fundamentalism among some Asian-descended populations is an obvious sign of their significance, and there may be similar processes at work in the experience of the peoples of Caribbean descent for whom an equivalent retreat into pure ethnicity has acquired pronounced generational features. Their desire to anchor themselves in racial particularity is not dominated by the longing to return to the Victorian certainties and virtues of Caribbean cultural life. However, in conjunction with the pressures of economic recession and populist racism, this yearning has driven many older settlers to return to the lands in which they were born. Among their descendants, the same desire to withdraw has achieved a very different form of expression. It has moved towards an overarching

Africentrism which can be read as inventing its own totalising conception of black culture. This new ethnicity is all the more powerful because it corresponds to no actually existing black communities. Its radical utopianism, often anchored in the ethical bedrock provided by the history of the Nile Valley civilisations, transcends the parochialism of Caribbean memories in favour of a heavily mythologised Africanity that is itself stamped by its origins not in Africa but in a variety of pan-African ideology produced most recently by black America. The problems of contemporary Africa are almost completely absent from its concerns. This complex and sometimes radical sensibility has been recently fostered by the more pedagogic and self-consciously politicised elements within hip hop. The "college-boy rap" of the more edutainment minded groups represents one pole in the field that reproduced it, while the assertive stance of hip hop's narrow nationalists represents the other. This political change can be registered in the deepening splits within hip hop over the language and symbols appropriate for black self-designation and over the relative importance of opposing racism on the one hand, and of elaborating the symbolic forms of black identity on the other. These necessary tasks are not synonymous or even co-extensive though they can be rendered compatible. What is more significant for present purposes is that in the Africentric discourse on which both sides of opinion draw, the idea of a diaspora composed of communities that are both similar *and* different tends to disappear somewhere between the invocations of an African motherland and the powerful critical commentaries on the immediate, local conditions in which a particular performance of a piece of music originates. These complexities aside, hip hop culture is best understood as the latest export from black America to have found favour in black Britain. It is especially interesting then that its success has been built on transnational structures of circulation and intercultural exchange established long ago.

The Jubilee Singers and the Transatlantic Route

I want to illustrate these arguments further by briefly bringing forward some concrete historical instances in which the musical traditions of the black Atlantic world can be seen to have acquired a special political valency and in which the idea of authentic racial culture has been either contested or symptomatically overlooked. These examples are simultaneously both national, in that they had a direct impact on life in Britain, and diasporic, in that they tell us something fundamental about the limits of that national perspective. They are not, of course, the only examples I could have chosen. They have been selected somewhat at random, though I hope that the

fact that they span a century will be taken as further evidence for the existence of fractal[28] patterns of cultural and political affiliation to which I pointed in Chapter 1. In rather different ways, these examples reflect the special position of Britain within the black Atlantic world, standing at the apex of the semi-triangular structure which saw commodities and people shipped to and fro across the ocean.

The first relates to the visits by the Fisk University Jubilee Singers[29] to England, Ireland, Wales, and Scotland in the early 1870s under the philanthropic patronage of the Earl of Shaftesbury. The Fisk Singers have a profound historical importance because they were the first group to perform spirituals on a public platform, offering this form of black music as popular culture.[30] In the story of this choir we can discover that the distinctive patterns of cross-cultural circulation, on which the rise of more recent phenomena like Africentric rap has relied, precede the consolidation of coherent youth cultures and subcultures after the 1939–1945 war.

I believe that these circulatory systems can be traced right back to the beginnings of black music's entry into the public domain of late-nineteenth-century mass entertainment. The world-wide travels of the Fisk Jubilee Singers provide a little-known but nonetheless important example of the difficulties that, from the earliest point, attended the passage of African-American folk forms into the emergent popular-cultural industries of the overdeveloped countries. At that time, the status of the Jubilee Singers' art was further complicated by the prominence and popularity of minstrelsy.[31] One review of the earliest performances by the group was headlined "Negro Minstrelsy in Church—Novel Religious Exercise," while another made much of the fact that this band of Negro minstrels were, in fact, "genuine negroes."[32] Doug Seroff quotes another contemporary American review of a concert by the group: "Those who have only heard the burnt cork caricatures of negro minstrelsy have not the slightest conception of what it really is."[33] Similar problems arose in the response of European audiences and critics: "From the first the Jubilee music was more or less of a puzzle to the critics; and even among those who sympathised with their mission there was no little difference of opinion as to the artistic merit of their entertainments. Some could not understand the reason for enjoying so thoroughly as almost everyone did these simple *unpretending* songs" (emphasis added).[34]

The role of music and song within the abolitionist movement is an additional and equally little known factor which must have prefigured some of the Jubilees' eventual triumphs.[35] The choir, sent forth into the world with economic objectives which must have partially eclipsed their pursuit of aesthetic excellence in their musical performances, initially struggled to win

an audience for black music produced by blacks from a constituency which had been created by fifty years of "blackface" entertainment. Needless to say, the aesthetic and political tensions involved in establishing the credibility and appeal of their own novel brand of black cultural expression were not confined to the concert halls. Practical problems arose in the mechanics of touring when innkeepers refused the group lodgings having taken their bookings on the assumption that they were a company of "nigger minstrels" (that is, white). One landlord did not discover that "their faces were coloured by their creator and not by burnt cork"[36] until the singers were firmly established in their bedrooms. He still turned them into the street.

The choir's progress was predictably dogged by controversies over the relative value of their work when compared to the output of the white "minstrel" performers. The Fisk troupe also encountered the ambivalence and embarrassment of black audiences unsure or uneasy about serious, sacred music being displayed to audiences conditioned by the hateful antics of Zip Coon, Jim Crow, and their odious supporting cast. Understandably, blacks were protective of their unique musical culture and fearful of how it might be changed by being forced to compete on the new terrain of popular culture against the absurd representations of blackness offered by minstrelsy's pantomime dramatisation of white supremacy.

The Fisk Singers' own success spawned a host of other companies who took to the road in Europe, South Africa, and elsewhere offering a similar musical fare in the years after 1871.[37] Their success is especially significant amidst the changed cultural and ideological circumstances that attended the remaking of the English working class in the era of imperialism.[38] In explicit opposition to minstrelsy, which was becoming an established element in popular culture by this time,[39] the Fisk Singers constructed an aura of seriousness around their activities and projected the memory of slavery outwards as the means to make their musical performances intelligible and pleasurable. The choir had taken to the road seven years after the founding of their alma mater to raise funds. They produced books to supplement the income from their concert performances, and these volumes ran to more than 60,000 copies sold between 1873 and the end of the century. Interestingly, these publications included a general historical account of Fisk and its struggles, some unusual autobiographical statements from the members of the choir, and the music and lyrics of between 104 and 139 songs from their extensive repertoire. In my opinion, this unusual combination of communicative modes and genres is especially important for anyone seeking to locate the origins of the polyphonic montage technique developed by Du Bois in *The Souls of Black Folk*.

The Singers' texts describe an austere Queen Victoria listening to "John Brown's Body" "with manifest pleasure," the Prince of Wales requesting "No More Auction Block for Me," and the choir being waited upon by Mr. and Mrs. Gladstone after their servants had been dismissed.[40] These images are important, though the history of the choir's performances to enormous working-class audiences in British cities may be more valuable to beleaguered contemporary anti-racism which is struggling to find precedents and to escape the strictures of its own apparent novelty. It is clear that for their liberal patrons the music and song of the Fisk Jubilee Singers offered an opportunity to feel closer to God and to redemption while the memory of slavery recovered by their performances entrenched the feelings of moral rectitude that flowed from the commitment to political reform for which the imagery of elevation from slavery was emblematic long after emancipation. The Jubilee Singers' music can be shown to have communicated what Du Bois called "the articulate message of the slave to the world"[41] into British culture and society at several distinct and class-specific points. The spirituals enforced the patrician moral concerns of Shaftesbury and Gladstone but also introduced a specific moral sensibility into the lives of the lower orders who, it would appear, began to create jubilee choirs of their own.[42]

The meaning of this movement of black singers for our understanding of the Reconstruction period in the United States also remains to be explored. It will complement and extend work already done on representations of blackness during this era[43] and promises to go far beyond the basic argument I want to emphasise here. Black people singing slave songs as mass entertainment set new public standards of authenticity for black cultural expression. The legitimacy of these new cultural forms was established precisely through their distance from the racial codes of minstrelsy. The Jubilee Singers' journey out of America was a critical stage in making this possible.

The extraordinary story of the Jubilee Singers and their travels is also worth considering because it made a great impression on successive generations of black cultural analysts and commentators. Du Bois, who was a student at Fisk, devoted a chapter to their activities in *The Souls of Black Folk*. He discovered a symbol with which to reconcile the obligations of the talented tenth with those of the black poor and peasantry in the way that the Jubilees were able to turn the black university into a place of music and song. We shall see in the next chapter that *The Souls* is a key text. It underpins all that follows it, and its importance is marked by the way Du Bois places black music as the central sign of black cultural value, integrity, and autonomy. Each chapter was introduced with a fragment of slave song

which both accompanied and signified on the Euro-American romantic poetry that comprised the other part of these double epigraphs. *The Souls* is the place where slave music is signalled in its special position of privileged signifier of black authenticity. The double consciousness which *The Souls* argues is the founding experience of blacks in the West is itself expressed in the double value of these songs which are always both American and black. In his essay on the songs in *The New Negro* anthology which supplied the manifesto for the Harlem Renaissance, the philosopher Alain Locke makes this point clear:

> The spirituals are really the most characteristic product of the race genius as yet in America. But the very elements which make them uniquely expressive of the Negro make them at the same time deeply representative of the soil that produced them. Thus, as unique spiritual products of American life, they become nationally as well as racially characteristic. It may not be readily conceded now that the song of the negro is America's folk song; but if the spirituals are what we think them to be, a classic folk expression, then this is their ultimate destiny. Already they give evidence of this classic quality . . . The universality of the spirituals looms more and more as they stand the test of time.[44]

This doubleness has proved awkward and embarrassing for some commentators since it forces the issues of cultural development, mutation, and change into view and requires a degree of conceptual adjustment in order to account for the tension that is introduced between the same and the other or the traditional and the modern. This has caused problems, particularly for those thinkers whose strategy for legitimating their own position as critics and artists turns on an image of the authentic folk as custodians of an essentially invariant, anti-historical notion of black particularity to which they alone somehow maintain privileged access. As Hazel Carby[45] has pointed out, Zora Neale Hurston was one black intellectual who favoured these tactics. She too recognised the story of the Fisk Jubilee Singers as an important turning point in the development of black political culture, but the lesson she drew from the allegory that their travels could be made to generate was very different from what the same story offered Du Bois and Locke. For Hurston, the success of the Fisk choir represented the triumph of musicians' tricks over the vital, untrained, angular spirit of the rural folk who "care nothing about pitch" and "are bound by no rules."[46] She dismissed Du Bois's suggestion that the body of spirituals could be described as "sorrow songs" as "ridiculous" and hinted that he had his own doubtful reasons for needing to represent them in this unre-

mittingly mournful guise. She attacked the choir's performances as inauthentic in one of her rich and thoughtful contributions to Nancy Cunard's anthology *Negro:*

> In spite of the goings up and down on the earth, from the original Fisk Jubilee singers down to the present, there has been no genuine presentation of Negro songs to white audiences. The spirituals that have been sung around the world are Negroid to be sure, but so full of musicians tricks that Negro congregations are highly entertained when they hear their old songs so changed. They never use the new style songs, and these are never heard unless perchance some daughter or son has been off to college and returns with one of the old songs with its face lifted, so to speak.
>
> I am of the opinion that this trick style of delivery was originated by the Fisk Singers . . . This Glee Club style has gone on for so long and become so fixed among concert singers that it is considered quite authentic. But I say again, that not one concert singer in the world is singing the songs as the Negro song makers sing them.[47]

I should emphasise that as far as this chapter is concerned, whether Hurston was right or wrong about the Fisk Singers is not the primary question. The issue which interests me more than her correctness is her strongly felt need to draw a line around what is and isn't authentically, genuinely, and really black and to use music as the medium which makes these distinctions credible. Hurston's sometime adversary and competitor Richard Wright was yet another who became absorbed by the story of the Jubilee Singers. In the early forties, when both writers were trying to make the leap from literature to Hollywood, he produced a film script, "Melody Limited," which was based on the singers' travels in Europe. He explained that the aim of the film "would be to depict the romantic and adventurous manner in which the first Negro Educational Institutions were built and the part and role Negro Folk songs, religious and secular, played in their building."[48] Wright, who felt that the impression left by the singers was "still extant in Europe and America," presented their music as mediating the relationship between an outmoded abolitionist politics and the nascent struggles of ex-slaves towards citizenship and progress through education. He felt that the film would "give vent and scope to Negro singing talent," "refresh the memory of the nation with a conceptual sense of the Negro in our society," and "recapture some of the old dignity and barbaric grandeur of the songs." His travelling singers are refused passage to Europe on a segregated steamer but make their way eventually to England. Their popular triumphs there lead to prestigious performances in front of the royal

family and the prime minister, who are held spellbound by their sublime art. In the script's central scene, the black choir competes against a similar Irish ensemble who on purely racist grounds are awarded the victor's trophy for an impressive but inferior performance. This illegitimate result precipitates the sudden death of one elderly member of the black group, and in their mourning for her the Jubilee choir improvise a "half African, half slave" song which even the watching Mr. Gladstone recognises as capable of conquering death itself: "The ring shout mounts, and as it does so, it transforms itself into a song of wild, barbaric beauty to death."

Almost one hundred years after the Jubilees set sail from Boston for England on the Cunard ship Batavia, another black American musician made the transatlantic journey to London. Jimi Hendrix's importance in the history of African-American popular music has increased since his untimely death in 1970. The European triumph which paved the way for Hendrix's American successes presents another interesting but rather different case of the political aesthetics implicated in representations of racial authenticity. A seasoned, if ill-disciplined, rhythm and blues sideman, Hendrix was reinvented as the essential image of what English audiences felt a black American performer should be: wild, sexual, hedonistic, and dangerous. His biographers agree that the updated minstrel antics of his stage shows became a fetter on his creativity and that the irrepressible issue of racial politics intervened bitterly in his fluctuating relationships with the English musicians who provided the bizarre backdrop to his blues-rooted creativity.[49] Jimi's shifting relationship to black cultural forms and political movements caused substantial problems when he returned to play in the United States and was denounced as a "white nigger" by some of the Black Power activists who could not fathom his choices in opting to cultivate an almost exclusively white, pop audience that found the minstrel stance a positive inducement to engage with his transgressive persona if not his music. Charles Shaar Murray quotes the following diagnosis of Hendrix's success by the rival English blues guitarist Eric Clapton: "You know English people have a very big thing towards a spade. They really love that magic thing. They all fall for that kind of thing. Everybody and his brother in England still think that spades have big dicks. And Jimi came over and exploited that to the limit . . . and everybody fell for it."[50] Sexuality and authenticity have been intertwined in the history of western culture for several hundred years.[51] The overt sexuality of Hendrix's neo-minstrel buffoonery seems to have been received as a sign of his authentic blackness by the white rock audiences on which his burgeoning pop career was so solidly based. Whether or not Hendrix's early performances were parodic of the minstrel role or undeniable confirmation of its enduring potency, his

negotiation of its vestigial codes points to the antagonism between different local definitions of what blackness entailed and to the combined and uneven character of black cultural development. The complexity of his relationship to the blues and his fluctuating commitment to the politics of racial protest which had set American cities on fire during this period extend and underscore this point. The creative opposition in his work between obvious reverence for blues-based traditions and an assertively high-tech, futuristic spirituality distils a wider conflict not simply between pre-modern or anti-modern and the modern but between the contending definitions of authenticity which are appropriate to black cultural creation on its passage into international pop commodification. Nelson George, the respected historian and critic of African-American music, resolves this problem in his assessment of Hendrix by expelling the innovative guitarist from his canonical reconstruction of the black musical idiom and making Hendrix's racial alienation literal: "Jimi's music was, if not from another planet, definitely from another country."[52] In a thoughtful and solidly intelligent biography, the only book to treat Hendrix's political sensibilities seriously, another black American writer, the poet David Henderson, is more insightful and more tuned in to the possibilities for innovation opened up for Hendrix simply by his being in London rather than New York. The multiple ironies in this location come across not only in Henderson's account of Hendrix's relationship with Rahsaan Roland Kirk but in his outsider's attempts to place the guitarist's image in a wider structure of cultural relationships perceived to be shaped by class rather than race and ethnicity: "The Hendrix Hairdo, frizzy and bountiful, was viewed by many cultural onlookers as one of the most truly remarkable visual revolts of London. For the British trendy public, who hardly ever outwardly acculturated another race's appearance, another culture, to have their youths sporting bouffant Afros and digging blues was a bit much."[53] Hendrix would later rationalise his ambivalence towards both blackness and America through the nomadic ideology of the gypsy that appeared in his work as an interestingly perverse accompaniment to the decision to play funkier and more politically engaged music with an all-black band.

Authenticity is not so hotly contested in my third example of transnational, diasporic cultural innovation centred on London. It is provided by a song that circulated across the black Atlantic network rather than an individual artist or group. It is included here precisely because the right to borrow, reconstruct, and redeploy cultural fragments drawn from other black settings was not thought to be a problem by those who produced and used the music. This is also a more contemporary example, though it relates to the piece "I'm So Proud," originally written and performed by

the Chicagoan vocal trio the Impressions, at the peak of their artistic and commercial success in the mid-1960s. The group's sixties hits like "Gypsy Woman," "Grow Closer Together," "Minstrel and Queen," and "People Get Ready" were extremely popular among blacks in Britain and in the Caribbean. In Jamaica, the male vocal trio format popularised by the band inaugurated a distinct genre within the vernacular musical form which would eventually be marketed internationally as reggae.[54] The Wailers were only the best known of many groups that patterned themselves on the Impressions and strove to match the singing of the Americans in its rich harmonic textures, emotional dynamics, and black metaphysical grace.

A new version of the Impressions' hit "I'm So Proud" topped the reggae charts in Britain during 1990. Retitled "Proud of Mandela," it was performed in interperformative tandem by the Brummie toaster Macka B and the Lovers' Rock singer Kofi, who had produced her own version of the tune closely patterned on another, soft soul version that had been issued by the American singer Deniece Williams in 1983. I want to make no special claims for the formal, musical merits of this particular record, but I think it is a useful example in that it brings Africa, America, Europe, and the Caribbean seamlessly together. It was produced in Britain by the children of Caribbean and African settlers from raw materials supplied by black Chicago but filtered through Kingstonian sensibility in order to pay tribute to a black hero whose global significance lies beyond the limits of his partial South African citizenship and the impossible national identity which goes with it. The very least which this music and its history can offer us today is an analogy for comprehending the lines of affiliation and association which take the idea of the diaspora beyond its symbolic status as the fragmentary opposite of some imputed racial essence. Thus foregrounding the role of music allows us to see England, or more accurately London, as an important junction point or crossroads on the webbed pathways of black Atlantic political culture. It is revealed to be a place where, by virtue of local factors like the informality of racial segregation, the configuration of class relations, and the contingency of linguistic convergences, global phenomena such as anti-colonial and emancipationist political formations are still being sustained, reproduced, and amplified. This process of fusion and intermixture is recognised as an enhancement to black cultural production by the black public who make use of it. Its authenticity or artificiality was not thought to be a problem partly because it was content to remain inside the hidden spaces of the black cultural underground and also because of the difference made by the invocation of Nelson Mandela. The name of Mandela became a paternal talisman that could suspend and refocus intra-racial differences that might prove difficult and even embarrassing in other

circumstances. His release from prison projected an unchallenged, patriarchal voice, a voice rooted in the most intense political conflict between blacks and whites on this planet, the final frontier of white supremacy on the African continent, out across the relay systems of the black Atlantic. The heroic, redemptive authenticity that enveloped the image of Mandela in these locations was nicely deconstructed in a speech that he himself made in Detroit on his first visit to the United States. Mandela answered the Africentric expectations of his audience by confiding that he had found solace in listening to Motown music while in jail on Robben Island. Quoting from Marvin Gaye's "What's Going On?" he explained, "When we were in prison, we appreciated and obviously listened to the sound of Detroit."[55] The purist idea of one-way flow of African culture from east to west was instantly revealed to be absurd. The global dimensions of diaspora dialogue were momentarily visible and, as his casual words lit up the black Atlantic landscape like a flash of lightning on a summer night, the value of music as the principal symbol of racial authenticity was simultaneously confirmed and placed in question.

Music Criticism and the Politics of Racial Authenticity

The problem of cultural origins and authenticity to which these examples point has persisted and assumed an enhanced significance as mass culture has acquired new technological bases and black music has become a truly global phenomenon. It has taken on greater proportions as original, folk, or local expressions of black culture have been identified as authentic and positively evaluated for that reason, while subsequent hemispheric or global manifestations of the same cultural forms have been dismissed as inauthentic and therefore lacking in cultural or aesthetic value precisely because of their distance (supposed or actual) from a readily identifiable point of origin. In his book-jacket comments on Nelson George's *The Death of Rhythm and Blues,* Spike Lee, a well-known exponent of cultural protectionism, makes the obvious contemporary version of these arguments. "Once again Nelson George has shown the the direct correlation between the music of black people and their condition. It's a shame that the more we progress as a people, the more diluted the music gets. What is the answer?"[56]

The fragmentation and subdivision of black music into an ever-increasing proliferation of styles and genres which makes a nonsense of this polar opposition between progress and dilution has also contributed to a situation in which authenticity emerges among the music makers as a highly charged and bitterly contested issue. The conflict between the trumpeters Wynton Marsalis and Miles Davis is worth citing here as yet another example of how these conflicts can be endowed with a political significance. Marsalis argued that jazz provides an essential repository for wider black cultural values while Davis insisted upon prioritising the restless creative energies that could keep the corrosive processes of reification and commodification at bay. Marsalis's assertive, suit-wearing custodianship of "jazz tradition" was dismissed by Davis as a safe, technically sophisticated pastiche of earlier styles. This was done not on the grounds that it was inauthentic, which had been Marsalis's critical charge against Davis's "fusion" output, but because it was felt to be anachronistic:

> What's he doin' messing with the past? A player of his calibre should just wise up and realize its over. The past is dead. Jazz is dead . . . Why get caught up in that old shit? . . . Don't nobody tell me the way it was. Hell, I was there . . . no one wanted to hear us when we were playing jazz . . . Jazz is dead, God damn it. That's it finito! its over and there's no point apeing the shit.[57]

There are many good reasons why black cultures have had great difficulty in seeing that the displacements and transformations celebrated in Davis's work after "In a Silent Way" are unavoidable and that the developmental processes regarded by conservatives as cultural contamination may actually be enriching or strengthening. The effects of racism's denials not only of black cultural integrity but of the capacity of blacks to bear and reproduce any culture worthy of the name are clearly salient here. The place prepared for black cultural expression in the hierarchy of creativity generated by the pernicious metaphysical dualism that identifies blacks with the body and whites with the mind is a second significant factor. However, beyond these general questions lies the need to project a coherent and stable racial culture as a means to establish the political legitimacy of black nationalism and the notions of ethnic particularity on which it has come to rely. This defensive reaction to racism can be said to have taken over its evident appetite for sameness and symmetry from the discourses of the oppressor. European romanticism and cultural nationalism contributed directly to the development of modern black nationalism. It can be traced back to the impact of European theories of nationhood, culture, and civilisation on elite African-American intellectuals in the early and mid-nineteenth century.[58] Here, the image of the nation as an accumulation of symmetrical family units makes a grim appearance amidst the drama of ethnic identity-construction. Alexander Crummell's endorsement of Lord Beaconsfield's views on the fundamental importance of race as "the key to history" should sound a cautionary note to contemporary cultural critics who

would give artists the job of refining the ethnic distinctiveness of the group and who are tempted to use the analogy of family not only to comprehend the meaning of race but to make these rather authoritarian gestures: "Races, like families are the organisms and the ordinance of God; and race feeling, like family feeling, is of divine origin. The extinction of race feeling is just as possible as the extinction of family feeling. Indeed race is family. The principle of continuity is as masterful in races as it is in families—as it is in nations."[59]

Du Bois pointed out long ago that "the negro church antedates the negro home,"[60] and all black Atlantic appeals to the integrity of the family should be approached with his wise observation in mind. The family is something more than merely a means to naturalise and expel from historical time relationships that should be seen as historical and contingent. This link between family, cultural reproduction, and ethno-hermeneutics has been expressed eloquently by Houston A. Baker, Jr., the leading African-American literary critic who has advanced the trope of the family as a means to situate and periodise the whole history of black cultural production and more importantly as a kind of interpretive filter for those who would approach black cultures.

> My tale, then, to say again what I have said, is of a complex field of sounding strategies in Afro-America that are part of a family. The family's history always no matter how it is revised, purified, distorted, emended—begins in an economics of slavery. The modernity of our family's sounding strategies resides in their deployment for economic (whether to ameliorate desire or to secure material advantage) advancement. The metaphor that I used earlier seems more than apt for such salvific soundings—they are, indeed blues geographies that can *never be understood* outside a family commitment.[61] (emphasis added)

Baker's position is in many ways a sophisticated restatement of the absolutist approach to "race" and ethnicity which animated black nationalism during the sixties but which has run into trouble more recently. This position has not always found it easy to accommodate the demands and priorities of feminisms, many of which see the family relations that sustain the race as playing a less innocent role in the subordination of its female members. This position has also failed when faced with the need to make sense of the increasingly distinct forms of black culture produced from different diaspora populations. It bears repetition that even where African-American forms are borrowed and set to work in new locations they have often been deliberately reconstructed in novel patterns that do not respect their originators' proprietary claims or the boundaries of discrete nation states and the supposedly natural political communities they express or simply contain. My point here is that the unashamedly hybrid character of these black Atlantic cultures continually confounds any simplistic (essentialist or anti-essentialist) understanding of the relationship between racial identity and racial non-identity, between folk cultural authenticity and pop cultural betrayal. Here the idea of the racial community as a family has been invoked and appealed to as a means to signify connectedness and experiential continuity that is everywhere denied by the profane realities of black life amidst the debris of de-industrialisation. I want to ask whether the growing centrality of the family trope within black political and academic discourse points to the emergence of a distinctive and emphatically post-national variety of racial essentialism. The appeal to family should be understood as both the symptom and the signature of a neo-nationalist outlook that is best understood as a flexible essentialism. The relationship between this ideal, imaginary, and pastoral black family and utopian as well as authoritarian representations of blackness will be considered again in the concluding chapter.

Pop culture has been prepared to provide selective endorsements for the premium that some black thinkers wish to place on authenticity and has even set this special logic to work in the marketing of so-called World Music. Authenticity enhances the appeal of selected cultural commodities and has become an important element in the mechanism of the mode of racialisation necessary to making non-European and non-American musics acceptable items in an expanded pop market. The discourse of authenticity has been a notable presence in the mass marketing of successive black folk-cultural forms to white audiences. The distinction between rural and urban blues provides one good example of this, though similar arguments are still made about the relationship between authentic jazz and "fusion" styles supposedly corroded by the illegitimate amalgamation of rock influences or the struggle between real instruments and digital emulators. In all these cases it is not enough for critics to point out that representing authenticity always involves artifice. This may be true, but it is not helpful when trying to evaluate or compare cultural forms let alone in trying to make sense of their mutation. More important, this response also misses the opportunity to use music as a model that can break the deadlock between the two unsatisfactory positions that have dominated recent discussion of black cultural politics.

Soul Music and the Making of Anti-Anti-Essentialism

As I argued in the opening chapter, critical dialogue and debate on these questions of identity and culture currently stage a confrontation between two loosely organised perspectives which, in opposing each other, have be-

come locked in an entirely fruitless relationship of mutual interdependency. Both positions are represented in contemporary discussions of black music, and both contribute to staging a conversation between those who see the music as the primary means to explore critically and reproduce politically the necessary ethnic essence of blackness and those who would dispute the existence of any such unifying, organic phenomenon. Wherever the confrontation between these views is staged, it takes the basic form of conflict between a tendency focused by some variety of exceptionalist claim (usually though not always of a nationalist nature) and another more avowedly pluralistic stance which is decidedly sceptical of the desire to totalise black culture, let alone to make the social dynamics of cultural integration synonymous with the practice of nation building and the project of racial emancipation in Africa and elsewhere.

The first option typically identifies music with tradition and cultural continuity. Its conservatism is sometimes disguised by the radical nature of its affirmative political rhetoric and by its laudable concern with the relationship between music and the memory of the past. It currently announces its interpretive intentions with the popular slogan "It's a Black thing you wouldn't understand." But it appears to have no great enthusiasm for the forbidding, racially prescriptive musical genres and styles that could make this bold assertion plausible. There has been no contemporary equivalent to the provocative, hermetic power of dub which supported the radical Ethiopianism of the seventies or of the anti-assimilationist unintelligibility of bebop in the forties. The usually mystical "Africentrism" which animates this position perceives no problem in the internal differentiation of black cultures. Any fragmentation in the cultural output of Africans at home and abroad is *only* apparent rather than real and cannot therefore forestall the power of the underlying racial aesthetic and its political correlates.

This exceptionalist position shares elitism and contempt for black popular culture with the would-be postmodern pragmatism which routinely and inadequately opposes it. Something of the spirit of the second "anti-essentialist" perspective is captured in the earlier but equally historic black vernacular phrase "Different strokes for different folks." This notional pluralism is misleading. Its distaste for uncomfortable questions of class and power makes political calculation hazardous if not impossible. This second position refers pejoratively to the first as racial essentialism. It moves towards a casual and arrogant deconstruction of blackness while ignoring the appeal of the first position's powerful, populist affirmation of black culture. The brand of elitism which would, for example, advance the white noise of Washington, D.C.'s Rasta thrash punk band the Bad Brains as the last word in black cultural expression is clearly itching to abandon the ground

of the black vernacular entirely. This abdication can only leave that space open to racial conservationists who veer between a volkish, proto-fascist sensibility and the misty-eyed sentimentality of those who would shroud themselves in the supposed moral superiority that goes with victim status. It is tantamount to ignoring the undiminished power of racism itself and forsaking the mass of black people who continue to comprehend their lived particularity through what it does to them. Needless to say, the lingering effects of racism institutionalised in the political field are overlooked just as its inscription in the cultural industries which provide the major vehicle for this exclusively aesthetic radicalism passes unremarked upon.

It is ironic, given the importance accorded to music in the habitus of diaspora blacks, that neither pole in this tense conversation takes the music very seriously. The narcissism which unites both standpoints is revealed by the way that they both forsake discussion of music and its attendant dramaturgy, performance, ritual, and gesture in favour of an obsessive fascination with the bodies of the performers themselves. For the unashamed essentialists, Nelson George denounces black musicians who have had facial surgery and wear blue or green contact lenses, while in the opposite camp, Kobena Mercer steadily reduces Michael Jackson's voice first to his body, then to his hair, and eventually to his emphatically disembodied image.[62] I want to emphasise that even though it may have once been an important factor in shaping the intellectual terrain on which politically engaged analysis of black culture takes place, the opposition between these rigid perspectives has become an obstacle to critical theorising.

The syncretic complexity of black expressive cultures alone supplies powerful reasons for resisting the idea that an untouched, pristine Africanity resides inside these forms, working a powerful magic of alterity in order to trigger repeatedly the perception of absolute identity. Following the lead established long ago by Leroi Jones, I believe it is possible to approach the music as a *changing* rather than an unchanging same. Today, this involves the difficult task of striving to comprehend the reproduction of cultural traditions not in the unproblematic transmission of a fixed essence through time but in the breaks and interruptions which suggest that the invocation of tradition may itself be a distinct, though covert, response to the destabilising flux of the post-contemporary world. New traditions have been invented in the jaws of modern experience and new conceptions of modernity produced in the long shadow of our enduring traditions—the African ones and the ones forged from the slave experience which the black vernacular so powerfully and actively remembers. This labour also necessitates far closer attention to the rituals of performance that provide prima facie evidence of linkage between black cultures.

Because the self-identity, political culture, and grounded aesthetics that distinguish black communities have often been constructed through their music and the broader cultural and philosophical meanings that flow from its production, circulation, and consumption, music is especially important in breaking the inertia which arises in the unhappy polar opposition between a squeamish, nationalist essentialism and a sceptical, saturnalian pluralism which makes the impure world of politics literally unthinkable. The preeminence of music within the diverse black communities of the Atlantic diaspora is itself an important element in their essential connectedness. But the histories of borrowing, displacement, transformation, and continual reinscription that the musical culture encloses are a living legacy that should not be reified in the primary symbol of the diaspora and then employed as an alternative to the recurrent appeal of fixity and rootedness.

Music and its rituals can be used to create a model whereby identity can be understood neither as a fixed essence nor as a vague and utterly contingent construction to be reinvented by the will and whim of aesthetes, symbolists, and language gamers. Black identity is not simply a social and political category to be used or abandoned according to the extent to which the rhetoric that supports and legitimises it is persuasive or institutionally powerful. Whatever the radical constructionists may say, it is lived as a coherent (if not always stable) experiential sense of self. Though it is often felt to be natural and spontaneous, it remains the outcome of practical activity: language, gesture, bodily significations, desires. We can use Foucault's insightful comments to illuminate this necessarily political relationship. They point towards an anti-anti-essentialism that sees racialised subjectivity as the product of the social practices that supposedly derive from it:[63] "Rather than seeing [the modern soul] as the reactivated remnants of an ideology, one would see it as the present correlative of a certain technology of power over the body. It would be wrong to say that the soul is an illusion, or an ideological effect. On the contrary it exists, it has a reality, it is produced permanently around, on, within the body by the functioning of power that is exercised."[64]

These significations can be condensed in the process of musical performance though it does not, of course, monopolise them. In the black Atlantic context, they produce the imaginary effect of an internal racial core or essence by acting on the body through the specific mechanisms of identification and recognition that are produced in the intimate interaction of performer and crowd. This reciprocal relationship can serve as an ideal communicative situation even when the original makers of the music and its eventual consumers are separated in space and time or divided by the technologies of sound reproduction and the commodity form which their

art has sought to resist. I have explored elsewhere how the struggle against the commodity form has been taken over into the very configurations that black mass cultural creation assumes. Negotiations with that status are revealed openly and have become a cornerstone in the anti-aesthetic which governs those forms. The aridity of those three crucial terms—production, circulation, and consumption—does scant justice to the convoluted outernational processes to which they now refer. Each of them, in contrasting ways, hosts a politics of race and power which is hard to grasp, let alone fully appreciate, through the sometimes crude categories that political economy and European cultural criticism deploy in their tentative analyses of ethnicity and culture. The term "consumption" has associations that are particularly problematic, and needs to be carefully unpacked. It accentuates the passivity of its agents and plays down the value of their creativity as well as the micro-political significance of their actions in understanding the forms of anti-discipline and resistance conducted in everyday life. Michel de Certeau has made this point at a general level:

> Like law [one of its models], culture articulates conflicts and alternately legitimises, displaces or controls the superior force. It develops in an atmosphere of tensions, and often of violence, for which it provides symbolic balances, contracts of compatibility and compromises, all more or less temporary. The tactics of consumption, the ingenious ways in which the weak make use of the strong, thus lend a political dimension to everyday practices."[65]

Some Black Works of Art in the Age of Digital Simulation

I suggested in Chapter 1 that hip hop culture grew out of the cross-fertilisation of African-American vernacular cultures with their Caribbean equivalents rather than springing fully formed from the entrails of the blues. The immediate catalyst for its development was the relocation of Clive "Kool DJ Herc" Campbell from Kingston to 168th Street in the Bronx. The syncretic dynamics of the form were complicated further by a distinctly Hispanic input into and appropriation of the break dance moves which helped to define the style in its early stages. But hip hop was not just the product of these different, though converging, black cultural traditions. The centrality of "the break" within it, and the subsequent refinement of cutting and mixing techniques through digital sampling which took the form far beyond the competence of hands on turntables, mean that the aesthetic rules which govern it are premised on a dialectic of rescuing appropriation and recombination which creates special pleasures and

is not limited to the technological complex in which it originated. The deliberately fractured form of these musical pieces is worth considering for a moment. It recalls the characteristic flavour of Adorno's remarks in another, far distant setting:

> They call [it] uncreative because [it] suspends their concept of creation itself. Everything with which [it] occupies itself is already there . . . in vulgarised form; its themes are expropriated ones. Nevertheless nothing sounds as it was wont to do; all things are diverted as if by a magnet. What is worn out yields pliantly to the improvising hand; the used parts win second life as variants. Just as the chauffeur's knowledge of his old second hand car can enable him to drive it punctually and unrecognised to its intended destination, so can the expression of an up beat melody . . . arrive at places which the approved musical language could never safely reach.[66]

Acoustic and electric instruments are disorganically combined with digital sound synthesis, a variety of found sounds: typically screams, pointed fragments of speech or singing, and samples from earlier recordings—both vocal and instrumental—whose open textuality is raided in playful affirmations of the insubordinate spirit which ties this radical form to one important definition of blackness. The non-linear approach which European cultural criticism refers to as montage is a useful principle of composition in trying to analyse all this. Indeed it is tempting to endorse the Brechtian suggestion that some version of "montage" corresponds to an unprecedented type of realism, appropriate to the extreme historical conditions which form it. But these dense, implosive combinations of diverse and dissimiliar sounds amount to more than the technique they employ in their joyously artificial reconstruction of the instability of lived, profane racial identity. An aesthetic stress is laid upon the sheer social and cultural distance which formerly separated the diverse elements now dislocated into novel meanings by their provocative aural juxtaposition.

Ronnie Laws's recent instrumental single release "Identity"[67] is worth citing here. Produced in a low-tech setting for an independent record company, the record is notable not just for its title but as an up-to-date case of the more radical possibilities opened up by this new form of the old genre which demands that the past be made audible in the present. The architect of the tune, the eccentric Californian guitar player Craig T. Cooper, utilises an ambient style that recalls the oversmoked dub of the Upsetter's Black Ark studio at its peak. The track combines a large number of samples from a wide range of sources: a fragment lifted from the chorus of the Average White Band's "Pick up the Pieces" (already a Scottish pastiche of the style

of James Brown's JBs) struggles to be heard against a go-go beat, half-audible screams, and a steady, synthetic work-song rhythm reconstructed from the sampled sound of the Godfather's own forceful exhalation. Having stated an angular melody and playfully teased out its inner dynamics, Laws's soprano saxophone embellishes and punctuates the apparent chaos of the rhythm track. His horn is phrased carefully so as to recall a human voice trained and disciplined by the antiphonic rituals of the black church. "Identity" is the product of all these influences. Its title offers an invitation to recognise that unity and sameness can be experienced fleetingly in the relationship between improvisation and the ordered articulation of musical disorder. The chaos which would have torn this fragile rendering of black identity apart is forestalled for the duration of the piece by the insistent thumping of the bass drum's digital pulse on the second and fourth beat of each bar. The producers of the record underscored its political point by pressing it on white vinyl.

It bears repetition that the premium which all these black diaspora styles place on the process of performance is emphasised by their radically unfinished forms—a characteristic which marks them indelibly as the products of slavery.[68] It can be glimpsed in the way that the basic units of commercial consumption in which music is fast frozen and sold have been systematically subverted by the practice of a racial politics that has colonised them and, in the process, accomplished what Baudrillard refers to as the passage from object to event:

> The work of art—a new and triumphant fetish and not a sad alienated one—should work to deconstruct its own traditional aura, its authority and power of illusion, in order to shine resplendent in the pure obscenity of the commodity. It must annihilate itself as familiar object and become monstrously foreign. But this foreignness is not the disquieting strangeness of the repressed or alienated object; this object does not shine from its being haunted or out of some secret dispossession; it glows with a veritable seduction that comes from elsewhere, having exceeded its own form and become pure object, pure event.[69]

From this perspective, the magical process whereby a commodity like a twelve-inch single, released from the belly of the multinational beast, comes to anticipate, even demand, supplementary creative input in the hidden spheres of public political interaction that wait further on up the road seems less mysterious. We do, however, need an enhanced understanding of "consumption" that can illuminate its inner workings and the relationships between rootedness and displacement, locality and dissemination that lend them vitality in this countercultural setting. The twelve-

inch single appeared as a market innovation during the late seventies. It was part of the record companies' response to the demands placed upon them by the dance subcultures congealed around the black genres—reggae and rhythm and blues. Those demands were met halfway by the creation of a new type of musical product which could maximise their own economic opportunities, but this had other unintended consequences. The additional time and increased volume made possible by the introduction of this format became powerful factors impelling restless subcultural creativity forwards. Once dubbing, scratching, and mixing appeared as new elements in the deconstructive and reconstructive scheme that joined production and consumption together, twelve-inch releases began to include a number of different mixes of the same song, supposedly for different locations or purposes. A dance mix, a radio mix, an a capella mix, a dub mix, a jazz mix, a bass mix, and so on. On the most elementary level, these plural forms make the abstract concept of a changing same a living, familiar reality. Record companies like this arrangement because it is cheaper for them to go on playing around with the same old song than to record additional material, but different creative possibilities open out from it. The relationship of the listener to the text is changed by the proliferation of different versions. Which one is the original? How does the memory of one version transform the way in which subsequent versions are heard and understood? The components of one mix separated and broken down can be more easily borrowed and blended to create further permutations of meaning. The twelve-inch single release of LL Cool J's rhythm and blues–hip hop hybrid hit "Round the Way Girl" came in five different versions: the LP cut, built around a sample from the Mary Jane Girls' 1983 Motown pop soul hit "All Night Long," and several remixes that extended and transformed the meaning of the original rap and this first sample by annexing the rhythmic signature of Gwen McCrae's "Funky Sensation." This funky southern soul record from 1981 was an original B. Boy cut, used by the old-school DJ's and rappers who originated hip hop to make breaks. These borrowings are especially noteworthy because they have been orchestrated in pursuit of a means to signify Cool J's definition of authentic black femininity. The record's mass appeal lay in the fact that his definition of authenticity was measured by vernacular style reviled on the one hand by the Afrocentrists as preconscious because it didn't conform to the stately postures expected of the African queen and disavowed on the other by the entertainments industry in which bizarre, white-identified standards of feminine beauty have become dominant. To be inauthentic is, in this case at least, to be real:

> I want a girl with extensions in her hair
> bamboo earrings at least two pair
> a Fendi bag and a bad attitude
> that's what it takes to put me in a good mood.[70]

The hybridity which is formally intrinsic to hip hop has not been able to prevent that style from being used as an especially potent sign and symbol of racial authenticity. It is significant that when this happens the term "hip hop" is often forsaken in favour of the alternative term "rap," preferred precisely because it is more ethnically marked by African-American influences than the other. These issues can be examined further through the example of Quincy Jones, whose personal narrative of racial uplift has recently become something of a cipher for black creativity in general and black musical genius in particular. The identification of black musical genius constitutes an important cultural narrative. It tells and retells not so much the story of the weak's victory over the strong but the relative powers enjoyed by different types of strength. The story of intuitive black creative development is personalised in the narratives of figures like Jones.[71] It demonstrates the aesthetic and commercial fruits of pain and suffering and has a special significance because musicians have played a disproportionate part in the long struggle to represent black creativity, innovation, and excellence. Jones, an entrepreneur, preeminent music producer, record company executive, arranger of great skill, sometime bebopper, fundraiser for Jesse Jackson's campaigns, and emergent TV magnate, is the latest "role model" figure in a long sequence that descends from slavery and the racially representative heroism of men like Douglass.

Jones is untypical in that he has recently been the subject of a biographical film, "Listen Up: The Many Lives of Quincy Jones," supported by a book, and a CD/Tape sound track and single. In all these interlocking formats "Listen Up" celebrates his life, endurance, and creativity.[72] Most of all, it affirms black participation in the entertainment industry, an involvement that Jones has summed up through a surprising invocation of the British Broadcasting Company's distinctive corporate code: the three E's, "Enlightenment, Education, Entertainment."[73] The process which culminated in this novel commemorative package was clearly encouraged by Jones's growing involvement with television as producer of "The Fresh Prince of Bel Air" and "The Jesse Jackson Show." But it began earlier with the release of his 1990 LP "Back on the Block."[74] This set made use of rap as its means to complete the circle of Jones's own odyssey from poverty on Chicago's South Side through Seattle, New York, Paris, Stockholm, and

thence to Los Angeles and mogulhood. The positive value of "Back on the Block" is its powerful and necessary argument for the seams of continuity which lie beneath the generational divisions in African-American musical culture. However, there were other more problematic elements at large in it also. One track, a version of Joseph Zawinul's composition "Birdland," typifies the spirit of the project as a whole by uniting the talents of old- and new-school rappers like Melle Mel, Kool Moe D, Ice T, and Big Daddy Kane with singers and instrumentalists drawn from earlier generations. George Benson, Dizzy Gillespie, Sarah Vaughan, Miles Davis, and Zawinul himself were among those whose vocal and instrumental input was synthesized by Jones into an exhilarating epic statement of the view that hip hop and bebop shared the same fundamental spirit. Jones put it like this: "Hip hop is in many ways the same as Bebop, because it was renegade-type music. It came from a disenfranchised sub-culture that got thrown out of the way. They said, 'We'll make up our own life. We'll have our own language.'"[75]

Rap provided this montage (it is tempting to say mélange) with its articulating and framing principle. Rap was the cultural and political means through which Jones completed his return to the touchstone of authentic black American creativity. Rapping on the record himself in the unlikely persona of "The Dude," he explained that he wanted the project "to incorporate the whole family of black American music . . . everything from Gospel to Jazz that was part of my culture." Brazilian and African musical patterns were annexed by and became continuous with his version of black America's musical heritage. They are linked, says Jones, by the shared "traditions of the African griot storyteller that are continued today by the rappers." The delicate relationship between unity and differentiation gets lost at this point. Old and new, east and west simply dissolve into each other or rather into the receptacle provided for their interaction by the grand narrative of African-American cultural strength and durability. However compelling they may be, Jones's appropriations of Brazilian rhythm and African language become entirely subservient to the need to legitimate African-American particularity. The promise of a truly compound diaspora or even global culture which could shift understanding of black cultural production away from the narrow concerns of ethnic exceptionalism and absolutism recedes rapidly. The potential signified in the inner hybridity of hip hop and the outer syncretism of the musical forms which makes Jones's synthesis plausible comes to an abrupt and premature end. It terminates in a portrait of the boys, back on the block where they ride out the genocidal processes of the inner city through the redemptive power of their authentic racial art.

Young Black Teenagers Then and Now

Quincy Jones tells us that "the times are always contained in the rhythm." Assuming for a moment that most black cultural critics do not want simply to respond to the end of innocent notions of the black subject with festivities—whether they are wakes or baptisms—do we attempt to specify some new conceptions of that subjectivity that are less innocent and less obviously open to the supposed treason which essentialism represents? Or do we cut ourselves off from the world where black identities are made—even required—by the brutal mechanics of racial subordination and the varieties of political agency which strive to answer them?

When I was a child and a young man growing up in London, black music provided me with a means to gain proximity to the sources of feeling from which our local conceptions of blackness were assembled. The Caribbean, Africa, Latin America, and above all black America contributed to our lived sense of a racial self. The urban context in which these forms were encountered cemented their stylistic appeal and facilitated their solicitation of our identification. They were important also as a source for the discourses of blackness with which we located our own struggles and experiences.

Twenty years later, with the sound tracks of my adolescence recirculating in the exhilaratingly damaged form of hip hop, I was walking down a street in New Haven, Connecticut—a black city—looking for a record shop stocked with black music. The desolation, poverty, and misery encountered on that fruitless quest forced me to confront the fact that I had come to America in pursuit of a musical culture that no longer exists. My scepticism about the narrative of family, race, culture, and nation that stretches down the years from Crummell's chilling remarks means that I cannot share in Quincy Jones's mourning over its corpse or his desire to rescue some democratic possibility in the wake of its disappearance. Looking back on the adolescent hours I spent trying to master the technical intricacies of Albert King and Jimi Hendrix, fathom the subtleties of James Jamerson, Larry Graham, or Chuck Rainey, and comprehend how the screams of Sly, James, and Aretha could punctuate and extend their metaphysical modes of address to the black subject, I realise that the most important lesson music still has to teach us is that its inner secrets and its ethnic rules can be taught and learned. The spectral figures of half-known or half-remembered musicians like Bobby Eli, Duck Dunn, Tim Drummond, Andy Newmark, Carol Kaye, John Robinson, and Rod Temperton appeared at my shoulder to nod their mute assent to this verdict. Then they disappeared into the dusk on Dixwell Avenue. Their exemplary contributions to rhythm and blues

have left behind a whispered warning that black music cannot be reduced to a fixed dialogue between a thinking racial self and a stable racial community. Apart from anything else, the globalisation of vernacular forms means that our understanding of antiphony will have to change. The calls and responses no longer converge in the tidy patterns of secret, ethnically encoded dialogue. The original call is becoming harder to locate. If we privilege it over the subsequent sounds that compete with one another to make the most appropriate reply, we will have to remember that these communicative gestures are not expressive of an essence that exists outside of the acts which perform them and thereby transmit the structures of racial feeling to wider, as yet uncharted, worlds.

66. Toni Morrison's version of the story seems to have been prompted by a contemporary account reproduced in Harris Middleton et al., eds., *The Black Book* (New York: Random House, 1974), p. 10. Morrison would have been responsible for editing this volume during her employment at Random House.

67. *Annual Report Presented to the American Anti-Slavery Society,* New York, May 1856, pp. 44–47. Levi Coffin, *Reminiscences of Levi Coffin, the Reputed President of the Underground Railroad* (Cincinnati, 1876, rpt. New York: Augustus Kelley, 1968), p. 560. Most of the references to newspapers are given by Julius Yanuck in "The Garner Fugitive Slave Case," *Mississippi Valley Historical Review* 40 (June 1953): 47–66. See also Herbert Aptheker, "The Negro Woman," *Masses and Mainstream* 2 (February 1949): 10–17.

68. *Reminscences of Levi Coffin,* p. 562.

69. Stanley W. Campbell, *The Slave Catchers: Enforcement of the Fugitive Slave Law, 1850–1860* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1968).

70. *Reminiscences of Levi Coffin,* p. 560.

71. *New York Daily Times,* February 16, 1856.

72. This version is reprinted in *The Black Book.*

73. *Annual Report Presented to the American Anti-Slavery Society,* p. 45.

74. *New York Daily Times,* February 2, 1856; see also *Cincinnati Commercial,* January 30, 1856.

75. *Cincinnati Daily Gazette,* January 29, 1856.

76. Alice Stone Blackwell, *Lucy Stone: Pioneer of Women's Rights* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1930), pp. 183–184.

77. Coffin claims to have been in the court when these words were spoken. This report is taken from his account. A further version of this episode is given by Alice Stone Blackwell in *Lucy Stone,* p. 184: "While visiting Margaret Garner in prison, Mrs. Stone asked her, in case she should be taken back into slavery, if she had a knife. In court, Mrs. Stone was asked if it was true that she had offered Margaret a knife. She answered, 'I did ask her if she had a knife. If I were a slave, as she is a slave, with the law against me, and the church against me, and with no death dealing weapon at hand, I would with my own teeth tear open my veins, and send my soul back to God who gave it.'"

78. *Reminiscences of Levi Coffin,* p. 565; *Cincinnati Daily Gazette,* February 14, 1856.

79. "A Coloured Lady Lecturer," *Englishwoman's Review* 7 (June 1861): 269–275; Mathew Davenport Hill, ed., *Our Exemplars, Poor and Rich* (London: Peter Cassell and Co., 1861), pp. 276–286 (I am grateful to Clare Midgeley for this reference); Ruth Bogin, "Sarah Parker Remond: Black Abolitionist from Salem," *Essex Institute Historical Collections* 110 (April 1974): 120–150; Dorothy Porter, "Sarah Parker Remond, Abolitionist and Physician," *Journal of Negro History* 20 (July 1935): 287–293.

80. *Journals of Charlotte Forten Grimké,* ed. B. Stephenson (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988), pp. 116–117 (entry for December 17, 1854). Partly because of their common vocation as physicians, Remond's odyssey from New England to Rome marks an interesting counterpoint to the life of Martin Delany discussed in Chapter 1.

81. *Warrington Times,* January 29, 1859; see also C. Peter Ripley, ed., *The Black Abolitionist Papers,* vol. 1 (Chapel Hill and London: University of North Carolina Press, 1985), pp. 437–438.

82. Douglass, *Narrative,* p. 49.

83. William L. Andrews, *To Tell a Free Story* (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1986).

84. H. L. Gates, Jr., *Figures in Black: Words, Signs, and the "Racial" Self* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1986).

85. Andrews, *To Tell a Free Story,* p. 103.

86. Douglass, *Narrative,* p. 56.

87. W. E. B Du Bois, *Black Reconstruction in America* (New York: Atheneum, 1977), p. 703.

3. "Jewels Brought from Bondage": Black Music and the Politics of Authenticity

1. Andrew Bowie, *Aesthetics and Subjectivity* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1990), p. 68.

2. These views are echoed by Richard Wright's insistence on the blues as merely the sensualisation of suffering.

3. "The threshold between Classicism and modernity . . . had been definitely crossed when words ceased to intersect with representations and to provide a spontaneous grid for the knowledge of things." Michel Foucault, *The Order of Things* (London: Tavistock, 1974), p. 304.

4. Frederick Douglass, *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, an American Slave, Written by Himself* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1960), p. 46.

5. St. Clair Drake, *Black Folks Here and There,* Afro-American Culture and Society Monograph Series no. 7 (Los Angeles: University of California, 1987).

6. Edouard Glissant, *Caribbean Discourse,* trans. J. Michael Dash (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 1989), p. 248; John Baugh, *Black Street Speech* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1983).

7. Robert Farris Thompson, *Flash of the Spirit* (New York: Vantage Press, 1983) and "Kongo Influences on African-American Artistic Culture," in J. E. Holloway, ed., *Africanisms in American Culture* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1990).

8. bell hooks and Cornel West, *Breaking Bread* (Boston: South End Press, 1991).

9. We may follow Kristeva too into the idea that the condition of exile which partially defines the experience of these artists also compounds their experience of dissidence. "A New Type of Intellectual: The Dissident," in Toril Moi, ed., *The Kristeva Reader* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1986).

10. Robert Proctor, *Value-Free Science? Purity and Power in Modern Knowledge* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1991); Donna Haraway, "Manifesto For Cyborgs," in Linda Nicholson, ed., *Feminism/Postmodernism* (New York and London: Routledge, 1990).

11. Paul Gilroy, "Living Memory: An Interview with Toni Morrison," in Paul Gilroy, *Small Acts* (London: Serpent's Tail, 1993), pp. 175–182.

12. Ralph Ellison, *Shadow and Act* (New York: Random House, 1964), p. 234.

13. C. L. R. James, *Notes on Dialectics* (London: Allison and Busby, 1980).

14. C. L. R. James, "The Mighty Sparrow," in *The Future in the Present* (London: Allison and Busby, 1978); Kathy Ogren, "'Jazz Isn't Just Me': Jazz Autobiog-

raphies as Performance Personas," in Reginald T. Buckner et al., eds., *Jazz in Mind: Essays on the History and Meanings of Jazz* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1991).

15. Kobena Mercer, "Black Art and the Burden of Representation," *Third Text* 10 (Spring 1990), and "Looking for Trouble," *Transition* 51 (1991).

16. This concept is suggestively explored by Glissant in *Caribbean Discourse* and by St. Clair Drake in his two-volume study *Black Folk Here and There* (1987 and 1990).

17. Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble* (New York and London: Routledge, 1990); Jane Flax, *Thinking Fragments* (Berkeley and Oxford: University of California Press, 1990); E. Spelman, *Inessential Woman* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1988); Sandra Harding, "The Instability of Analytical Categories in Feminist Theory," in S. Harding and J. O'Barr, eds., *Sex and Scientific Enquiry* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1988).

18. These processes have been examined in Gurinder Chudha's film *I'm British But* (British Film Institute, 1988).

19. On Apache Indian see John Masouri, "Wild Apache," *Echoes,* February 1, 1992, p. 11; Laura Connelly, "Big Bhangra Theory," *Time Out,* February 19–26, 1992, p. 18; and Vaughan Allen, "Bhangramuffin," *The Face* 44 (May 1992): 104–107.

20. For example Malkit Singh, *Golden Star (U.K.),* "Ragga Muffin Mix 1991," remixed by Bally Sagoo, Star Cassette SC 5120. Thanks to Chila Kumari Burman for this reference.

21. I am thinking here of the way in which the street funk experiments of the Los Angelino band War paved the way for modernist reggae experiments. Play War's "Slippin' into Darkness" back to back with the Wailers' "Get Up Stand Up" and you will see what I mean.

22. Dennis Wepman et al., *The Life: The Lore and Folk Poetry of the Black Hustler* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1976).

23. Henry Louis Gates, Jr., "Rap Music: Don't Knock It If You're Not onto Its 'Lies,'" *New York Herald Tribune,* June 20, 1990.

24. Eric Berman, "A Few Words with Eric B. and Rakim," *Crossroads Magazine* 1, no. 4 (December 1990): 10.

25. Cornel West, "Black Culture and Postmodernism," in B. Kruger and P. Mariani, eds., *Re-Making History* (Seattle: Bay Press, 1989).

26. Trey Ellis's piece "The New Black Aesthetic (N.B.A.)," *Callaloo* 12, no. 1 (Winter 1989): 233–247, exemplified the perils of casual, "anything goes" postmodernism for black cultural production. It was striking how, for example, profound questions of class antagonism *within* the black communities were conjured out of sight. Apart from his conflation of forms which are not merely different but actively oppose one another, Ellis did not seriously consider the notion that the N.B.A. might have a very particular and highly class-specific articulation within a small and isolated segment of the black middle class which has struggled with its dependency on the cultural lifeblood of the black poor.

27. Edward Said, "Travelling Theory," in *The World, the Text and the Critic* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1983).

28. I am thinking of fractal geometry as an analogy here because it allows for the possibility that a line of infinite length can enclose a finite area. The opposition between totality and infinity is thus recast in a striking image of the scope for agency in restricted conditions.

29. Peter Linebaugh has recently discussed the etymology of the word "jubilee" and some of the political discourses that surround it in "Jubilating," *Midnight Notes,* Fall 1990. Reviews of the Singers' performances in England can be found in *East Anglian Daily Times,* November 21, 1874, and the *Surrey Advertiser,* December 5, 1874.

30. John M. MacKenzie, ed., *Imperialism and Popular Culture* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1986).

31. Joel Boskin, *Sambo: The Rise and Demise of an American Jester* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986); R. C. Toll, *Blacking Up: The Minstrel Show in Nineteenth-Century America* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1974).

32. L. D. Silveri, "The Singing Tours of the Fisk Jubilee Singers: 1871–1874," in G. R. Keck and S. V. Martin, eds., *Feel the Spirit: Studies in Nineteenth-Century Afro-American Music* (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 1989).

33. D. Seroff, "The Original Fisk Jubilee Singers and the Spiritual Tradition," pt. 1, *Keskidee* 2 (1990): 4.

34. J. B. T. Marsh, *The Story of the Jubilee Singers with Their Songs* (London: Hodder and Staughton, 1875), p. 69.

35. Sam Dennison, *Scandalize My Name: Black Imagery in American Popular Music* (New York and London: Garland Press, 1982). See also William Wells Brown, comp., *The Anti-Slavery Harp: A Collection of Songs for Anti-Slavery Meetings, Compiled by William W. Brown, a Fugitive Slave* (Boston: Bela Marsh, 1848).

36. Marsh, *The Jubilee Singers,* p. 36.

37. Seroff's research lists more than twenty choirs in the period between 1871 and 1878.

38. Gareth Stedman Jones, "Working-Class Culture and Working-Class Politics in London, 1870–1900: Notes on the Remaking of a Working Class," in Gareth Stedman Jones, *Languages of Class* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983).

39. An "Eva Gets Well" version of Uncle Tom's Cabin was doing excellent business on the London stage in 1878. See also Toll, *Blacking Up;* Barry Anthony, "Early Nigger Minstrel Acts in Britain," *Music Hall* 12 (April 1980); and Josephine Wright, "Orpheus Myron McAdoo," *Black Perspective in Music* 4, no. 3 (Fall 1976).

40. These events are described in Gladstone's diaries for 14 and 29 July 1873. Apart from the Singers' own text, there is a lengthy description of these events in the New York *Independent,* August 21, 1873. See also Ella Sheppard Moore, "Historical Sketch of the Jubilee Singers," *Fisk University News* (October 1911): 42.

41. W. E. B. Du Bois, *The Souls of Black Folk* (New York: Bantam, 1989), p. 179.

42. In his essay on the Fisk Singers in Britain, Doug Seroff cites the example of the East London Jubilee Singers of Hackney Juvenile Mission, a "Ragged School" formed after an inspirational visit by the Fisk Singers to Hackney in June 1873. John Newman, the manager of the Mission, "felt that such singing from the soul should not be forgotten, and speedily set to work to teach the children of the Mission the songs the Jubilee singers had sung." See R. Lotz and I. Pegg, eds., *Under*

the Imperial Carpet: Essays in Black History, 1780–1950 (Crawley: Rabbit Press, 1986).

43. H. L. Gates, Jr., "The Trope of the New Negro and the Reconstruction of the Image of the Black," *Representations* 24 (1988): 129–156.

44. Alain Locke, ed. *The New Negro* (1925; rpt. New York: Atheneum, 1968), p. 199.

45. Hazel Carby, "The Politics of Fiction, Anthropology and the Folk: Zora Neale Hurston," in Michael Awkward, ed., *New Essays on Their Eyes Were Watching God* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990).

46. Zora Neale Hurston, "Spirituals and Neo-Spirituals," in Nancy Cunard, ed., *Negro* (1933; rpt. New York: Ungar Press, 1970), p. 224.

47. Zora Neale Hurston, "The Characteristics of Negro Expression," in Cunard, *Negro,* p. 31.

48. Various drafts of this unpublished script as well as the reader's report on it by Emily Brown, the Hollywood script editor who rejected it in 1944, are held in the James Welson Johnson Collection at the Beinecke Archive, Yale University. Brown felt that the script lacked the simplicity and dignity that its theme deserved. See "Jubilee" JWJ Wright 219.

49. "Noel and Mitch would sometimes use racial slurs when they talked. They would use 'nigger' and 'coon' in banter." David Henderson, *'Scuse Mē While I Kiss the Sky: The Life of Jimi Hendrix* (New York: Bantam, 1981), p. 92. For the banterers' side of all this cheerful chat see Noel Redding and Carol Appleby, *Are You Experienced: The Inside Story of the Jimi Hendrix Experience* (London: Fourth Estate, 1990); and Mitch Mitchell with John Platt, *Jimi Hendrix: Inside the Experience* (New York: Harmony, 1990). See also Harry Shapiro and Caesar Glebbeek, *Jimi Hendrix: Electric Gypsy* (London: Heinemann, 1990).

50. Charles Shaar Murray, *Crosstown Traffic* (London: Faber, 1989), p. 68.

51. Marshall Berman discusses the form that this relationship took during the Enlightenment in *The Politics of Authenticity* (London: George Allen and Unwin, 1971).

52. Nelson George, *The Death of Rhythm and Blues* (London: Omnibus Press, 1988), p. 109.

53. Henderson, *'Scuse Me,* p. 92.

54. The phenomenon of Jamaican male vocal trios is discussed by Randall Grass, "Iron Sharpen Iron: The Great Jamaican Harmony Trios," in P. Simon, ed., *Reggae International* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1983). Key exponents of this particular art would be the Heptones, the Paragons, the Gaylads, the Meditations, the Itals, Carlton and the Shoes, Justin Hines and the Dominoes, Toots and the Maytals, Yabby Yu and the Prophets, the Gladiators, the Melodians, the Ethiopians, the Cables, the Tamlins, the Congoes, the Mighty Diamonds, the Abyssinians, Black Uhuru, Israel Vibration, and of course the Wailers, whose Neville O'Reilly/Bunny Livingstone/Bunny Wailer does the best Curtis Mayfield impersonation of the lot.

55. Nelson Mandela, speech in Detroit, June 29, 1990. I am grateful to Suzy Smith of Yale University for this reference.

56. George, *The Death of Rhythm and Blues,* book jacket.

57. Nick Kent, "Miles Davis Interview," *The Face* 78 (1986): 22–23. "They got Wynton playing some old dead European music . . . Wynton's playing their dead shit, the kind of stuff anybody can do. All you've got to do is practice, practice,

practice. I told him I wouldn't bow down to that music, that they should be glad someone as talented as he is is playing that tired-ass shit." Miles Davis with Quincy Troupe, *Miles: The Autobiography* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1989), pp. 360–361.

58. These issues are discussed in a different context by John Hutchinson in *The Dynamics of Cultural Nationalism: The Gaelic Revival and the Creation of the Irish Nation State* (London: Allen and Unwin, 1987).

59. Alexander Crummell, *Africa and America* (Springfield, Mass.: Willey and Co., 1891), p. 46.

60. Du Bois, *The Souls of Black Folk,* p. 139.

61. Houston A. Baker, Jr., *Modernism and the Harlem Renaissance* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987), pp. 105–106.

62. Kobena Mercer, "Monster Metaphors: Notes on Michael Jackson's 'Thriller,'" *Screen* 27, no. 1 (1986).

63. A similar argument has been made in the context of feminist political theory by Judith Butler in *Gender Trouble* (New York and London: Routledge, 1990).

64. Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish* (London: Penguin, 1979), p. 29.

65. Michel de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life* (Berkeley and London: University of California Press, 1988), p. xvii.

66. T. W. Adorno, "On The Fetish Character in Music and the Regression of Listening," in A. Arato and E. Gebhardt, eds., *The Essential Frankfurt School Reader* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1978).

67. Ronnie Laws, *Identity* (Hype Mix), A. T. A. Records LSNCD 30011, 1990.

68. ". . . we must consider the rendition of a song not as a final thing, but as a mood. It won't be the same thing next Sunday." Hurston, "Spirituals and Neo Spirituals," p. 224.

69. Jean Baudrillard, *Fatal Strategies* (New York and London: Semiotext(e), 1990), p. 118.

70. LL Cool J, *Round the Way Girl,* Def Jam 4473610 12".

71. Raymond Horricks, *Quincy Jones* (London: Spellmount Ltd./Hippocrene Books Inc.), 1985.

72. Quincy Jones, *Listen Up,* Qwest 926322-2 compact disc.

73. Jones made these remarks in an interview for British Channel 4 TV's Media Show item "Black Prime Time," directed by Mandy Rose and shown in October 1990.

74. Quincy Jones, *Back on The Block,* Qwest LP 26020-1.

75. Quincy Jones, *Listen Up: The Many Lives of Quincy Jones* (New York: Warner Books, 1990), p. 167.

4. "Cheer the Weary Traveller": W. E. B. Du Bois, Germany, and the Politics of (Dis)placement

1. Immanuel Geiss, *The Pan-African Movement* (London: Methuen, 1974).

2. W. E. B. Du Bois, *The Souls of Black Folk* (New York: Bantam, 1989), p. 154.

3. W. E. B. Dubois, *Dusk of Dawn* (New York: Library of America, 1986), p. 590.

4. Frederick Douglass, "The Negro Exodus from the Gulf States," *Journal of Social Science* 11 (May 1880): 1–21.