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"Ain't nobody's business": The public text of Michael Jackson

Markowitz, Robin, Ph.D.

City University of New York, 1992

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"AIN'T NOBODY'S BUSINESS": THE PUBLIC TEXT OF MICHAEL JACKSON

by

Robin Markowitz

A dissertation submitted to the Graduate Faculty in Sociology in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy, The City University of New York

1992

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Robin Markowitz

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This manuscript has been read and accepted by the Graduate Faculty in Sociology in satisfaction of the dissertation requirement for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

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date

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Abstract

"Ain't Nobody's Business":
The Public Text of Michael Jackson
by

Robin Markowitz

Advisor: Professor Stanley Aronowitz

The public text of Michael Jackson, as it's presented in this study, is an understandable narrative reconstructed from mass-mediated fragments of everyday life experience which, quite literally, "ain't nobody's business."

This is not a study of the electronic and print media, but is instead a study of the ways in which the power relations of everyday life are maintained or resisted. The modes of power relations this study engages are primarily patriarchal, racist, and capitalist.

Those relations are struggled over, in part, on the terrain of discourse. People in subordinated positions of power have less opportunity to talk about and gain an understanding of their everyday lives from within the contexts of everyday life. It is not safe for them to do so.

For such people (most people, actually), making meaning entails moving outside those contexts and producing texts of their experience. A text is understood here as a bounded space outside the domain of everyday power relations. A public text is a space which is accessible to almost anyone, including those who ordinarily lack power in their private, everyday contexts. Following Bakhtin, it is a space where divergent voices can speak without drowning out one another.

One space where such text-making can take place is that of the electronic and print media. The public text of Michael Jackson consists of electronically and mechanically reproduced voices of both resistance to power and voices of domination. The narrative constructed in this study takes shape at the points where those voices diverge.

The study includes, but is not limited to, published first-person accounts, commentaries from the electronic and print media, artifacts of Jackson's public presentation such as songs, music videos, performances, published interviews, and descriptions of televised appearances and photographs.

These and other documents are transformed in this study into a multi-voiced narrative which interprets the fragments so that they form an understandable social and historical story.

Dedicated To

Lucy Etnis Markowitz
and
Eli Markowitz

Acknowledgements

The making of this study is as "multi-voiced," as Bakhtin would say, as the public text of Michael Jackson itself. I would like to introduce some of those voices here.

First of all, my mother and father, to whom this work is dedicated, not only made it possible for me to accomplish my work, but also contributed valuable and intriguing suggestions and comments on the study itself. (I'd also like to thank them for never mentioning any doubts about my essential sanity when I told them what I'd chosen to write about. To say they approached it with good humor is an understatement.) I thank them with all my heart.

Professor Chang Boh Chee gave me the chance to enter the graduate program in sociology at the C.W. Post Center of L.I.U. I want to thank him for that and for his teaching brilliance which laid the foundation for everything I accomplished since.

While at C.W. Post, I was introduced by Dr. Chee to Professor Eric Lichten. Prof. Lichten became my one-on-one mentor at Post, not only leading me into new areas of thought and commitment, but also giving me a variety of opportunities to learn the intellectual craft. It was Eric who encouraged me to come to CUNY and try for the Ph.D. There really aren't words to thank him for his confidence

and inspiration.

Professor Stanley Aronowitz is undoudtedly the most generous, adventurous, and insightful advisor anyone couldhope to have. He always sustained a sense of excitement about the project and made sure my enthusiasm never flagged. I want to thank him most of all for never discouraging any of my ideas, even when they were somewhat "Off The Wall." Cultural Studies is about creating and nurturing new intellectual spaces and Stanley's dedication to that mission is unswerving. Under his guidance, I worked, I explored, I learned, and I had more fun than any graduate student has a right to expect.

One of Professor Aronowitz's most important accomplishments is his guidance in the formation of the CUNY Committee for Cultural Studies which began as a study group attached to one of his courses in the Fall of 1985. It survived the course to become the MassCult Research Group which met regularly to study and hear students' work in a friendly, supportive setting. I want to thank all the original members of MassCult, especially Bill DiFazio, Kimberley Flynn, and Hugh Geenen.

Hugh Geenen helped make this particular study possible. Hugh planned a radio program for WBAI and asked me to collaborate on the first installment. We were to have a discussion of the work of Bruce Springsteen and Michael

Jackson. My preparation for that program formed the basis for this dissertation. I only wish we'd have gotten on the air. I thank him for his insight and generosity.

Professor Michael Brown always gave me challenges and respect. He knows how much I appreciate everything he's done over the years to encourage me. I can only hope I at least partly lived up to his challenges.

Thanks to Professor Lindsey Churchill for both his helpful criticism and for his incredibly generous and kind praise.

During the cultural studies workshops (one of which he conducted) Professor Juan Flores provided illuminating insights which made this dissertation better.

Author/Sociologist Donna Gaines spoke aloud an idea I'd considered only in my mind: "Why don't you do Michael Jackson?" she asked. Jonathan Laing also insisted that one must follow one's desire in a project of this nature.

I want to thank Betina Zolkower for her help and friendship. Thanks also to Wayne Wai for his support.

This dissertation would not have been possible without the assistance and generosity of my wonderful friend Linda Schorr. Thanks, with love.

I want to thank Lori Byler and everyone from the Michael Jackson Observer Fan Club. Thanks to the Committee for Cultural Studies for the travel grant to go the Michael-

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Thanks to Mrs. Sandra Black of Montgomery, Alabama and Mr. Theodore Screws of Russell County, Alabama.

One more thank you. Carol Hebert is the best friend anyone could have. I love you.

"...I love rats! You know, like in 'Ben.' I really do feel like I'm talking to a friend when I play with them. I used to raise them at home but now I've gotten out of it because rats have a real weird thing between themselves.

"We used to live high up in Beverly Hills, where there's a lot of snakes and they came down to check out the rats -- I had about 30 of them in a cage outside. I almost got bit by a rattlesnake one day because of the rats. There was a strange mist around, a rainy type of coldness, and the snakes started coming out of the ground to get the rats. I guess I got caught in the middle of this.

"Then I came home one night and looked in the cage and the rats had started eating each other. The father was eating the babies. I got sick of looking at it all. I left their cage outside. I didn't realize how cold it was and the rats still alive froze to death."

Michael Jackson,
1978

Actually, it is half the art of storytelling to keep a story free from explanation as one reproduces it. ...The most extraordinary things, marvelous things, are related with the greatest accuracy, but the psychological connection of the events is not forced on the reader. It is left up to him to interpret things the way he understands them, and thus the narrative achieves an amplitude that information lacks.

Walter Benjamin,
Illuminations

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Part I: Theory and Methods

CHAPTER ONE

"VICTORY"?: THEORETICAL CONSIDERATIONS

> "I was thinking something crazy today. You know how people have said Michael is trying to escape into a fantasy world? Well, what if Michael was really trying to escape *from* a fantasy world. Could be a connection here with why he uses the word 'real' in his songs. Just thinking."
>
> Carol Hebert,
> Connecticut, 1991

In the summer of 1984, rhythm & blues/"pop" singer Michael Jackson and his brothers went on a national concert tour together as the "Jacksons," the name of their family singing group. Michael, the group's lead singer for twenty years, was then riding the crest of a wave of popularity unseen in pop music since the heydays of the Beatles and Elvis Presley. His most recent solo album, *Thriller*, was approaching sales figures of forty million units, almost

three times that of the previous largest-selling album. Although it was well-known that Michael didn't want to do this tour, he'd relented. What followed was an avalanche of publicity more unprecedented than Jackson's success itself. Everyone who followed popular culture had an opinion on the orgy of hype and exploitation. Many fans were disappointed because ticket prices were much too high for them to afford. Journalists began to turn against Jackson, accusing him personally of greed and insensitivity. Jackson himself wanted nothing more than for the whole episode to come to end, conscious as he was of "overexposure."

On the tour's opening night, Greil Marcus, a well-known rock critic from the Berkely area, appeared on ABC Television's Nightline program and told host Ted Koppel that the Jacksons' concert was a "standard show" for which no one should feel pressured to secure tickets. "It's not the end of the world, and I don't think it's the beginning of the world either," he declared.

This study grows out of a (correspondence) debate I engaged in during the pop singer's 1983-84 rise to megastardom with Marcus, a profoundly influential critic whose work during the late 1960's and 1970's helped to shape the form of rock criticism (see Marcus, 1975, 1982). For Marcus, Jackson's "popular explosion" amounted to nothing more than a compulsive exchange of commodities motivated by a kind of

"consumer-terror," or a fear of not possessing what seemed so desired by others. It was, Marcus wrote, "a mobius strip of pure capitalism," and he was relieved when the "long year" of Michael Jackson had ended in a torrent of bad press. In his view, the fable of "The Emperor's New Clothes" had been played out and Jackson, the merely talented, counter-subversive fraud was revealed in all his vacuity. (Marcus, 1989, pp. 96-112)

Feeling as though I had participated in the events of that year (which to me did not seem quite so long) with the same degree of critical intensity as Marcus, his comments left me somewhat shocked and saddened. Marcus's work had served as the model and inspiration for my own and I was greatly affected by this disjunction in our outlooks. Writing about rock and roll music was the first genuine writing that I'd engaged in; it served as the initial impetus for me to engage in any sort of intellectual work. And Greil Marcus's writing in particular spoke to my desire to take a critical look at the world. His writing was passionate, beautiful, and most importantly, assured. In much of his work, Marcus wrote as an outsider; a white academic who involved himself in the musical worlds of people with whom he had no genuine social connection: African-American blues legends like Robert Johnson or sub-working class white southerners like Elvis Presley. For me, I suppose there

was pleasure in making connections in my own world of disconnection. In the world of the music and the musicians, my own chronic unfashionableness didn't matter; unconnected as I was to these people whom I wrote about, I could write whatever I felt and they couldn't talk back. This was a new and satisfying experience. Although I didn't admit it at the time, criticism was not purely about the love of music or about spiritual renewal, but about having a sense of power over other people.

It was not until Marcus began writing about Michael Jackson that I felt a need to consider any of this. Unlike many of the other performers I'd found connections with in the past, Michael Jackson seemed to belong to no community with which I could symbolically connect. His rootlessness, in fact, appeared far more extreme than my own. Either in spite of, or because of this, Jackson's presentation moved me intensely. I found Jackson both terrifying and compelling; there was an articulation of human suffering and joy in his presentation that I needed to understand. And, to paraphrase Jackson, I couldn't stop 'till I got enough.

Greil Marcus, undeniably, felt differently. Since I continued to draw pleasure and insight from Michael Jackson's presentation, it was clear that Marcus included me among the fools who couldn't (wouldn't) see the emperor's nakedness. It became necessary at this juncture

to conduct a re-examination of the premises upon which my own perspectives as a fan and cultural critic were based. Those perspectives could no longer be reconciled.

Although Marcus later devoted some sixteen or so pages of his 1989 book Lipstick Traces to discussing the "long year" of Michael Jackson (1983-84), neither Jackson nor his audience constituted the subject of his analysis. Instead Marcus wrote to celebrate one heroic act and its consequences: ostensibly that of "an 11-year-old black girl" from Texas named LaDonna Jones who wrote an open letter to Michael Jackson in the care of a Dallas newspaper. In the letter, Jones, who is white, asked "Is your appearance in Texas Stadium only for the rich?" "How could you, of all people, be so selfish?" The little girl said she had saved money from odd jobs in order to afford the price of a $30 ticket to see the Jackson brothers perform before finding out that one had to purchase four tickets -- no more, no less -- through a mail-order lottery system, using a money order. She did not have enough money. So, unlike many other equally disappointed fans, she decided to take some action. On July 5, 1984, the day before the first "Victory Tour" concert, Michael Jackson held a press conference to announce that the system would be changed. One no longer had to buy four tickets, use a money order, or participate in a lottery. "No one will pay money unless they get a

ticket." Then, as three of his brothers stood silently behind him, Jackson said that "finally, and most importantly" he would be giving away "all my money" accrued from the tour to charity. He thus acknowledged that any profit he might gain from this enterprise would amount to blood money. He also seemed to be trying to suggest that the whole blasted thing was not his idea in the first place. As Marcus correctly points out, it did not work. The tour collapsed: no one knew where the group would be performing from week to week and soon concerts failed to sell out. The chief promoter, who shelled out tens of millions to the Jacksons, had a mild heart attack. Michael Jackson "went away" for three years, afraid to complete his next album for fear that no one would want to buy it. Greil Marcus was relieved: the fable of "The Emperor's New Clothes" had been played out. "He's not wearing anything!" the "eleven-year-old black girl" had shouted. The "long year" had ended.

Although Michael Jackson is certainly not a hero for Marcus, neither is he a villain. During the long year he was nothing actually, an object, not a subject of history and all those who participated in his explosion made themselves happily into objects as well. Marcus generously yet awkwardly includes himself in this, although any enjoyment he took from it made him feel "humiliated." He assumes

everyone else felt pretty much the same way. It was a rape -- and everyone relaxed and enjoyed it. What's more, the participants believed they were subjects, that they were choosing to enjoy Thriller, when in fact they had no choice. Marcus says what they enjoyed most, unbeknownst to them, was not having to choose at all. This makes sense if we see LaDonna Jones's action as isolated, but my experience tells me it was not. As I remember it, potential concert-goers all over the country (including myself and my friends) reacted the same way to the money-order scheme (scam): Jackson can go fuck himself (or his brothers can go fuck themselves -- there was debate at the time about who was ultimately to blame); 'nobody's that good that I'll humiliate myself on his behalf.'

Since, in Marcus's view, people never had to choose to be thrilled by Thriller, Michael Jackson's popular explosion didn't "count." The popular explosions that counted (Elvis, The Beatles, the Sex Pistols), Marcus insists, were different: they subverted economic, racial, and normative barriers while at the same time dividing the mass audience between those who loved the act and those who hated it. They inspired others to say what was on their minds, while Jackson did not. Marcus claims that this part of the equation did not take place in "Jacksonism;" everyone had to like him.

He assumes that everyone who bought Thriller did so because they liked the "Jacksonism" image, when that may be very far from the truth. Many adolescent boys who bought Elvis records in the fifties both liked and feared, even hated Elvis, but nevertheless found him too compelling to ignore. With Jackson, this ambivalence was even more pronounced. Years ago, carnivals and circuses used to have real freak shows (although one could never be quite sure how real), and these were always the most popular attractions. Many people showed up just to see the freaks. These people did not do so necessarily because they "liked" what they saw, but because this looking provided a dangerous erotic satisfaction; they were compelled to look at what was unsettling, yet they enjoyed it. Looking into the eyes of the person, they might feel an admixture of guilt, superiority, and cold fear, but they could not turn away.

In any event, lots of appointed and self-appointed authorities, including the Rev. Louis Farrakhan and the Rev. Jerry Falwell denounced Jackson outright: their primary reason, as Farrakhan pointed out, was that Jackson was "cissified;" it was just not healthy for youngsters to come under his sexually ambiguous influence. Although I have little right to suggest it, it may be that this factor is part of what made Marcus feel "loosed from one's moorings," and "both excited and humiliated." It may just

be coincidence that this describes so well one's feelings at a ten-in-one exhibit (see Leslie Fiedler's Freaks): the sensation that the "other" may really be the self.

Except for a cryptic chance comment ("voice alteration devices" in the list of Thriller detrius that proliferated at the time), no one would know from Marcus's account that there was anything the least bit unusual about Jackson. He seems to characterize him as merely wholesome and gentle (a somewhat funky Donny Osmond type) when part of Jackson's appeal has always been his seemingly ingenuous (and therefore truly threatening) oddness. "The things I say can seem strange to other people's ears," Jackson remarked on why he hated to do interviews (which, contrary to Marcus's assertion, he nevertheless did at the time). People read, heard, and gossiped about these interviews (which appeared in early 1983 to promote Thriller) and became intrigued, even fascinated, and it is my view that they played a crucial part in the genesis of his popular explosion. People listened to Jackson's music differently after they knew something about him: the "anxiety and doubt" that Marcus notes in Jackson's lyrics became inextricably intertwined with the strange, disturbing things he said in the interviews (not to mention the peculiar way he said them). Perhaps Jackson connected with an unconscious current of feeling in a large segment of the mass audience: it might

have been that they could give voice their own repressed terrors and weaknesses if they were projected onto this strange black man-child.

Perhaps that is why both the media and Jackson himself talked of his success in "objective" rather than "subjective" terms: maybe the nature of the subjective response to Jackson was just unspeakable (but not necessarily nonexistent). When Eddie Murphy told his first homophobic Jackson jokes in 1983, the audience burst with volcanic roars and screams as if someone had finally said what everyone was thinking but was afraid to say. Undoubtedly, people in different positions saw him in different ways. But at a time when being called a "wimp" (as was the doomed democratic presidential nominee Walter Mondale), amounted to certain death in the popular arena, Jackson's success remains sort of mysterious.

Marcus, for his part, didn't want to know about any of this. The explosion, he says, took on a life of its own, unconnected to any real notion of "form and content." It could have been Jackson, or anyone. The signifier -- a thin, soft-voiced young black man with a white glove and high-water pants -- became loosed from anything like its original signified(s) and referent(s). And he takes these in the narrow sense of just the Thriller album itself (musical genre, Jackson's lyrical messages), leaving aside

Jackson's physical appearance and public manner. In Marcus's account, the signifier is emptied of meaning by the commodification process. Through it all, he doesn't seem to admit the possibilities of overdetermination and ambivalence on the part of those who participated in the Thriller explosion. Is it not possible that many who enjoyed having Michael Jackson around might also have found him threatening and were glad for any excuse to be pulled away from him? It might be rather like viewing a corpse: you can't help but look, but you can't wait until they close the lid. Marcus talks about this himself in Mystery Train -- he says that when Elvis was drafted into the Army (as when the politics of the sixties faded), he felt a sense of relief: "he made demands on me." Michael was, in effect "drafted" into the Victory Tour, and many people probably were glad for the excuse. The demands Michael Jackson made on his critics and fans are socially and historically specific; they can't ever be extricated from the contexts of racism and homophobia within which those demands were made.

In any case, Marcus feels very proud of himself: unlike the mass audience, he was able to see through the "society of the spectacle" to the "real relations" underlying it. Those real relations are also historically specific to the relations of "political division and social

exclusion" of the 1980's, "a glamorization of the new American fact that if you weren't on top, you didn't exist." (Marcus, 1989, p. 110) Michael Jackson's popularity signified the ugliest, most crass sort of capitalistic exploitation: nothing more or less than that. People identified and orgasmically celebrated the fact that Jackson was a "winner." What was won, how it was won, or even who won it did not matter. The whole business turned back on itself: Jackson was successful, in Marcus's view, because of his success. All the rest of Jackson's public presentation consisted of ideological subterfuge. The music, the "image" were all otiose sound and fury, signifying nothing. Of course, he doesn't credit himself in this recognition; he credits an "eleven-year-old black girl" named LaDonna Jones.

Alright, so LaDonna is a projection (the real LaDonna is not even black) and Marcus has made himself one of the heroes of his book, so what? It is not my purpose to mock him for this (although I suppose I've already done so), but to call into question important theoretical assumptions about popular culture and everyday life in late capitalist society. What is the nature of the "behind-the-backs-of" relation of consumers to capital? How far can we go in questioning the integrity of people's choices? Of course signifiers lie, but in what manner and about what? Who is

lying to whom? Marcus says that in Jackson's case "subjectivity is killed off." (Marcus, Artforum, September, 1984, p.98) But who decides when subjective productions only "seem" that way, and on what basis?

"Standardization" and Everyday Life

Although I scarcely realized it at the time, our debate was really a very old one, nearly identical in many ways to the Theodor Adorno-Walter Benjamin debate of the 1930's, transferred wholly to a new arena: now the debate was popular. Walter Benjamin, Frankfurt Institute of Social Research associate (and dissident), found that certain technological advances such as photography and cinematography created what he described as a "tremendous shattering of tradition" in the realm of cultural practice, resulting in the possibility of democratization of culture. Now the power-laden "aura" of a work of art (the experience of it in a particular time and place) could be dissolved, and the new spatial and temporal contexts in which the object would be reproduced could "reactivate" the object in terms of its specific contexts of reception. In discursive terms, the technology could allow almost anyone to "expropriate the expropriators." Taken to its furthest extreme, owning the "means of consumption" could substitute for ownership of the means of production, although profit would not be

measured in terms of the same kind of "capital." ("The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction," 1968, pp. 219-253)

Adorno, a social researcher with the "Frankfurt School" who took mass culture as a serious and vital object of study, disagreed vehemently. His 1936 essay on jazz is both famous and infamous for its charge that popular music served only to enable listeners to cooperate in their own oppression. ("Perennial Fashion -- Jazz," 1981, pp. 119-132) Its repetitive rhythm matched the faceless repetition of mass production and in many ways, emasculated its (male) listeners by suppressing their capacity for free expression. The improvisational character of jazz, for Adorno, was a con: listeners felt most free precisely when their true freedom was being removed from them. In the years following other theorists like fellow Frankfurt School member Herbert Marcus made similar arguments. (1955, 1964, or 1978) In order to possess any genuine subversive capacity, art needed to autonomous, that is, not an integral part of what they called the culture industry (Horkheimer and Adorno, 1972).

Adorno's perspective was profoundly influenced by the atmosphere of European fascism from which he emerged. He, along with his associates were forced to flee the Nazis during the 1930's for the United States, but the experience

and consequences of fascism never left Adorno. He felt that history, as a sequence of possibilities, had finally come to a virtual end. People in post-war society merely made their daily contributions to the ongoing death of possibility.

The only proper response was to refuse to take part at all, to be explicitly critical of anything which society valued, to call everything into question including hope and joy. This was the nature of Adorno's "critical theory," a particular perspective on everyday life experience within the structures of capitalistic (and other, related) forms of domination. It is, at its root, a withering examination of the contemporary version of what Marx originally described as the alienated society, a set of social relations where people experienced no direct connection between their own creative, productive capacities and the commonsense daily experience of living. (Marx, 1983, pp. 131-145) Adorno, more so than any of his Frankfurt School colleagues, took the argument beyond Marx's conception. Society was not merely alienated, hiding life within death (and death within life), it was already dead. One had but to recognize this fact in order to establish a critique. Herbert Marcus (1955, 1964) looked for other "dimensions" of genuine, non-alienated experience which were repressed beneath the structures of everyday life, such as fully real-

ized sexuality. Marcus maintained hope. Adorno did not look for signs of life, but simply for recognition that life did not exist. This is where Adorno's aesthetic theory can be located. True "autonomous" art revealed the totality of modern non-existence. It made no compromises with the practices of everyday life. This autonomous art worked on a plane of pure and total negation. This kind of art could not, of course, emerge as a product of the culture industry.

Although these arguments drew on Marx's notion in The German Ideology (for an excerpt, see Marx, 1983, pp. 162-189) of culture as a fetishized (often inverted) reflection of the real, material relations of production, the Frankfurt School's perspective went beyond this somewhat limited base-superstructure argument in suggesting that some forms of culture did not emerge from the culture industry and therefore had subversive potential. For Adorno, art produced within the culture industry which appeared liberating was the most sinister: it contained, in negative form, the most oppressive features of capitalistic domination. All one needed was the capacity and the courage to read through it. It was necessary to resist the seduction.

The pleasure of Thriller, in Marcus's view, came from one's transformation from subject to object. It was a

pleasure derived from submission. (Adorno wouldn't have hesitated to note the psycho-sexual implications of this transformation: a move from a masculine to a feminine position.) That is, one's capacity for free expression was willingly forfeited in the rush to consume anything connected with Michael Jackson. "By July 6," Marcus wrote in his 1984 article, "Jacksonism" (Artforum, September, p.98), "the members of Jackson's public were less consuming commodities as such things are conventionally understood ... than they were consuming their own gestures of consumption. That is, they were consuming ... themselves."

"The aim of jazz," Adorno wrote, "is the mechanical reproduction of a regressive moment, a castration symbolism ... The subject which expresses itself expresses precisely this: I am nothing, I am filth, no matter what they do to me, it serves me right." (1981, pp.129 and 132)

When Adorno first came upon Benjamin's "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction," he was infuriated. (Buck-Morse, 1977, chs. 9-10) He felt that once and for all, Benjamin revealed himself as one who would embrace appearances at the expense of critique. Benjamin had argued that mass production of culture could potentially democratize some aspects of social life precisely by dissolving the autonomy of art. This autonomy, represented by a work's "aura," reinforced power relations of domina-

tion. Aesthetic autonomy at its most pure, for Benjamin, did not necessarily negate these social relations. Benjamin's argument could only be taken seriously if one allowed that a multiplicity of historical and social relations were still of value, that those who are dominated still retained genuine oppositional standpoints. A work of art, for Benjamin, could have a different significance in a different social and historical context. His conception of "reactivation" is of great importance in this connection.

On the surface of it, as Benjamin makes clear, there is no immediate sense of context attached to cultural products received in these new ways. The "private" context of a given work's creation appears to have dissolved in favor of the new "public" context of its reception (which in turn fractures into millions of new "private" contexts of reception). One might be moved to suggest that now cultural products attain meaning only in terms of these new separate contexts, but the media apparatus have actually returned more of the "original" context than Benjamin might have expected. Through the same media out of which we hear or see a cultural product, we can hear or see something of the context of its production, often independent of what the cultural producers might want us to know. We are then left with something like a double exposure of "private" contexts: that of each specific context of reception upon that

of what is known in that context of the "original" context of production. Cultural producers also in turn are able to obtain an image of the contexts in which their works are received, also filtered through through the mass media -- there is at all points in the process of production the implied reader, just as for the reader there is an implied creator. We are then left with a multiplicity of socially layered images.

Since the advanced media allow us to receive cultural products produced entirely out of our view, people seem to have a desire to know what it is that goes on in the places they cannot see. So stories are told of what takes place in the hidden worlds where cultural products' auras still exist, and these stories are told, as was pointed out, by means of the same media which obscured our view in the first place. Does this mean that the aura has been returned, that the shattered pieces have been repaired? Benjamin insists this can't be so. Or could it mean that the denied aura has itself has become the most treasured commodity?

For Benjamin, in "The Work of Art...," real social and historical contexts still have meaning in the modern world despite conditions of alienation which make it difficult for many people to reclaim their places in those contexts. Cultural processes in the age of mechanical reproduction

can be, in his view, sites of struggle. The desire for the aura can result in a process of the reconstruction of social and historical narratives which might otherwise not take place.

Feeding into this process are the many organs of officially sanctioned and unofficial gossip which tell us "secrets" about people we do not know simply because these people are cultural producers of one kind or another. It becomes impossible in this situation to separate word-of-mouth gossip from that which is mechanically reproduced, and gossip which, as Benjamin insists, is fostered by corporate interests from gossip which might be damaging to those interests -- there is a continuous interchange. We want to know these secrets from the hidden, private worlds of the producers because the real historical and social life which actually constitutes the "artworks" or cultural products is what creates our interest in "art" in the first place. This is the true source of the erotomania of the obsessed fan and the calmer joy of youngsters who tool around city streets with "beat boxes" hoisted upon their shoulders. They're both searching for and affirming a way of speaking about the conditions of their existence in the world.

The aura that Benjamin speaks of is really the genuine social context of a given text -- a sense of definite place

and time, a feeling of integration between the work and its context coupled with a sense of real distance between that context and the context of its reception. When this original aura is retained and the work can be understood wholly in terms of this unified context, it makes clear and obvious sense. What's more, the sense-making process is more under the control of the producers. When the aura is cut off from the work, its sense has to be reconstructed in one way or another. The chief questions now are how, why, and by whom this reconstruction takes place.

For Benjamin, the answer was simple: it was in the interests of the capitalists who made the movies to create a sense of "personality" around a movie star. He sees this as self-evident. But one might be moved to question why this is so. In Benjamin's time the means of mechanical reproduction were not as ubiquitous as they are today, but were instead quite limited. The introduction of television has been crucial in this connection. It is the great crucible where media interactions are played out. It brought the movies out of the theaters and allowed people to witness far-off events in the environment of their own home as the events took place. Soon the electronic media were fully portable, radios (and later televisions) could fit in the palm of one's hand. If one had to, one could be secretive in the use of these new media: children, for ex-

ample, could listen to and watch things their parents would not know about or at least not be able to easily control. That is the real source of the mischievous grin on Elvis's face as he shimmied on the Milton Berle Show in 1956: we're doing it, and they can't stop us -- we'll make them look like fools if they try.

In Benjamin's time, it probably was easier for a major motion picture studio to thoroughly control the personal image of its stars; the stars themselves possibly had as little to say about the character of their "personalities" as did the public. That is really no longer the case. In recent years the advent of television and the spread of other mass-oriented media organs such as the tabloid press and drive-time radio (a direct response to television's appropriation of full-length radio "programs") has made it very difficult for stars or their corporate sponsors to maintain control of image construction. The production of an image for a given star is now less a very deliberate "artificial build-up" than a contentious struggle between competing interests to arrive at an image of a star. The public has its own reasons for wishing to find out something of the real social context of the stars, for attempting to make some sense out of what they come across.

The present concern is that the interests of many elements in the mass audience may and often do conflict with

those of the stars themselves and with the corporations the stars are aligned with. A certain amount and kind of scandal may be acceptable or even necessary, but there are limits. From the time movie stars have existed, careers have been ruined by this process going too far. Often a movie studio either couldn't have cared less about or actively participated in the destruction of individual stars. (see Edmonds, 1991) These days the stars themselves have a greater degree of influence over the messages the public is able to receive and, as always, their intentions often deviate from those of the companies that sponsor their product. Certainly CBS Records could not have been too pleased in 1988 when Bruce Springsteen, then just separated from his wife (with whom he was supposed to have had such a fulfilling, committed relationship -- a mirror of his public concerns), appeared on a hotel balcony in Europe clad only in pair of BVD's along with a new girlfriend, attired in her slip. The tabloid press printed the photos in a spirit of nearly orgasmic joyfulness. An image had been shattered; one narrative (artificially built-up?) had been replaced by another, conflicting one. If this image had been "artificially built-up," by whom, then, had it been sundered? By the individual who, it seemed, stood most to benefit financially from it? But Springsteen, it is clear, found his sainted image too great a burden and so

deliberately jettisoned it. He had his own story to tell. Executives at his record company undoubtedly did not find his old image a burden and consequently were probably left in a state of perplexity. Although they must also have been quite annoyed, there was nothing they could do about it.

It is easy to see how Benjamin's perspective so conflicts with Adorno's basic premises: what is the point, Adorno might want to know, in cultural objects reactivating themselves within differing social and historical contexts if those contexts obscure the negative totality? For Adorno, those differing social and historical contexts are illusory; they only obscure the death of history which marks social relations in the modern era. In Adorno's view, there are no longer any more real stories to tell. So in this connection, the "aura" of a work of art becomes important for Adorno; it insures the work's isolation from the ongoing lifelessness of everyday social relations. The aura maintains a cultural product's autonomy, and autonomy reveals the real relations of production which are now unchanging, "standardized." This standardization appears as a cultural product's form, but is really a metaphor for everyday social relations in general.

Standardization[1] of culture is a key concept for

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1. In July, 1984, I'd wondered why Greil Marcus called the

Adorno, since it refers to the mass production of art: the capacity of "identical" cultural objects to find their way into any context, thus standardizing those contexts which affirm those objects. Mass-produced art is cheap and available; it is no longer precious. Mass production, for Adorno, forecloses the possibility of individual producers and consumers realizing their potential as actors, as makers of history.

Popular music, he felt, was standardized both in form and content. The products themselves, as they do for Marx, assume a (n appearance of) subjectivity that the real, living consumers lack. Any deviations from the standard form could be seen as "pseudo-individuality," or a con perpetrated upon listeners to help them feel like unique subjects. Pseudo-individuality is manifested in any attempt by the cultural producers to mark their work as unique or individualized. In his view, there is no true subjectivity expressed in the products of popular music. All popular culture was, for Adorno, rather like the "cabbage patch doll," a toy baby doll popular in mid-1980's. Each mass-produced doll had a slight, almost imperceptible, "unique"

Jackson's "Victory" show a "standard show." The phrase was so unlike Marcus's usual dramatic, lyrical prose. It was a dry, colorless phrase and I wondered where it came from. I had, rather foolishly, given up reading Adorno soon after reading the jazz essay.

characteristic. Children were led to believe that no two dolls were alike, when, in fact, the differences were negligible. The toy manufacturers had self-consciously crafted pseudo-individuality into their product in pure form. For Adorno, all mass culture is standardized in this manner (albeit with more subtlety). Deviations from the standard are only apparent.

Critiques of Adorno (see, for example, Middleton, 1990 or Gendron, 1986) often seek to look for leaks and holes in fabric of Adorno's theory, while sidestepping its underlying premises. Many seem to feel that Adorno merely limited himself; he failed to pay attention to the details of popular art, either in terms of its content or the manner of its production. Texts, Gendron insists for example, are not produced in the same manner as soap flakes or tomato soup. (Gendron, 1986, pp. 27-28) Adorno made theoretical "mistakes," they contend. "The problem with the arguments inspired by the Frankfurt School is their abstraction," according to rock critic cum sociologist Simon Frith. "The actual use of music by pop fans is scarcely examined -- passivity is assumed." (Frith, 1981, p.45) In such critiques, while the theory remains imperfected, its premises are left intact. They ignore, to an extent, the genuine differences between what Adorno described as "autonomous" culture and culture which is "standardized."

There are very real differences between the products of avant-garde cultural producers and mass culture. Mass culture is the culture of everyday social relations, while avant-garde producers aim to destroy both those relations and what they view as the struggle-free culture which springs from them. Avant-garde theorist Peter Burger captures the "radical" artist's position succinctly: "Only an art the contents of whose individual works is wholly distinct from the (bad) praxis of the existing society can be the center that can be the starting point for the organization of a new life praxis." (It should be pointed out that Adorno, unlike Burger, doubted the possibility of this "new life praxis.") (Burger, 1984, pp. 49-50)

Those differences are vital to the debate between Benjamin and Adorno (and various popularizations of that debate) and should be taken seriously. When Adorno refers to the process of standardization, he's talking about an approach to cultural production which mirrors that of the production of everyday social relations in the modern western world, a world which lived through, but, in his view, did not survive fascism. Producers and consumers of standardized culture allow themselves to be <u>implicated</u> in the maintenance of those social relations, whereas those responsible for autonomous culture do not. Autonomous art expresses the negative totality of modern life because it ex-

ists outside of that life, both in terms of its content and its production. Those who can produce autonomous art are those who either have no stake in keeping everyday social relations going or those who have surrendered their stake in the process. They refuse the privileges, such as they are, of everyday life. Autonomous artists don't think about the everyday consequences of their actions, and so are able to achieve a sense of pure negation in their work. They do not worry about the product's capacity for reproducibility. For Adorno, this achievement cannot occur in non-autonomous art, that is, art which is produced within and for the culture industry. There can be no exceptions. If we are to take Adorno's theory seriously, even as we might expand its scope (see Marcus, 1989, pp. 68-77), this is irrefutable. The only art which can express the negative totality, that is, the only art which lives because it expresses death, is art which rejects culture industry implication. Anything else is merely an expression of pseudo-individuality. Marcus (1989) uses the example of British "punk rock" music in its pure, 1977 incarnation. Not only were these punks (exemplified by the group, the "Sex Pistols") not interested in building a career in the culture industry, their stated aim was to destroy it. According to Marcus, they mounted their own Frankfurt School critique of mass culture using the tools of the industry,

and in doing so, expressed a negation of the totality. The fact that their "product" was made available through that industry is incidental. Dick Hebdige takes a similar position in his study of post-war British youth subcultures (including punk). True subcultures, for Hebdige, represented a break with the reproduction of common sense which sustains social relations in their present state. They represent "a kind of temporary blockage in the system of representation." (Hebdige, 1979, p. 90) Yet the productions of these subcultures can be encountered through the culture industry. After all, our only access these days to Beethoven (much of whose work is privileged by Adorno as autonomous) is through the culture industry.

There is an underlying question, though, which must be posed. Is there a fundamental difference in the social positions of those who would make and consume autonomous art and those who would not? Is there a dimension of social power involved in the processes of cultural production? In order to come up with an answer, an examination of the motivation behind the standardization process is required.

Why would people want to use identically produced, predictable cultural products in the first place? Who <u>are</u> these people? Adorno tells us that they are, fundamentally, those who wish to negate themselves. To paraphrase

Marx, with a twist, they say: I am nothing, and that is the way it must be. In the modern world, in Adorno's view, the world after fascism, most people feel this way. They weakly, passively accept what the culture industry has to offer out of blind trust; they've given up. If the industry says the emperor is wearing the finest raiment, then it must be true. "Isn't it beautiful, isn't it exciting?" they'll shout as the emperor passes by, negating trust in their own judgment just to feel at one with all those who seem to know better. After a time, this sense of judgment itself atrophies.

If we overlook the degree to which Adorno's aesthetic theory is infused with his experience of fascism and its aftermath, it is impossible to understand his theoretical propositions. We must accept his premises if we are to deal seriously with his theory. Adorno is not merely a "flawed giant." (Middleton, 1990)

For Adorno's aesthetic theory is merely one aspect of a broader theory of everyday modern social life. Adorno's perspective is interested not only in our cultural life, but in the way we work, play, deal with our children and families, and with what Marx would call our "animal functions," eating and procreating. In all these areas, in Adorno's view, our approach is "standardized." We've learned to expect and even yearn for a certain predict-

ability of everyday social relations. Since we are easily bored with this, we are allotted a bit of pseudo-individuality. Thus, there are no differing contexts, no truly individual "cultures." These are all echos of a history which no longer exists. This is how Adorno's alleged "ethnocentricism" can be understood. Was Adorno really unaware of the African origins of the improvisitory character of jazz and the "pseudo-individualized" blue notes that came with it? Adorno's musical knowledge was extensive enough that this notion is hard to accept. African-originated cultures, like all other contemporary cultures, no longer have any meaning for Adorno once they've been incorporated into the structures of the culture industry.

In Adorno's formulation, we lose any sense that some groups still must assert social power over other groups, and that oppressed groups (exploited economic classes, women, racial, ethnic, religious, and sexual minorities, and oppressed age groups) can ever resist this power. In other words, for Adorno, there really is no more politics. In this formulation, we lose any sense of the dynamics of domination and are left with a notion of an all-enveloping sense of inertia as characterizing the modern world. Modern life had turned into, for Adorno, the "iron cage" that Max Weber earlier feared it would become. (Weber, 1958, pp. 181-182)

Although Adorno was explicitly critical of all popular music for its participation in this process, he also examined the differences between various types of "serious" musics to support his position.

In The Philosophy of Modern Music, Adorno sets out to account for what he sees as the oppressive features of the work of the 20th century's most celebrated composer, Stravinsky. He does not see the composer's neo-classical decline as an aberration, but as rooted in the structure of Stravinsky's approach from the beginning. The apparently chaotic "infantilism" of Stravinsky's early approach was not initiated in an attempt to create disorder as a disturbance of all too ordered bourgeois social relations, but as something of an objective, organic manifestation which came to disturb Stravinsky himself. Adorno refers here to Stravinsky's many early ballet scores and to the famous "Rite of Spring," a work which, as many are aware, disturbed audiences and critics to the point of violence.

Adorno's point is that Stravinsky did not create this disturbance as a product of his subjective musical will, but submitted somewhat naturally to recreate uncontrollable "primitive" impulses. Even here though, in Adorno's view, Stravinsky is so disturbed by these impulses that he portrays the collective participating in a rite of sacrifice which purges the collective of its disorder. In

other words, in the very content of the piece, Stravinsky creates disturbance in order to vanquish it. For Adorno, Stravinsky's (radically?) reactionary approach can be noticed very early.

Adorno compares Stravinsky's artistic approach with that of the chaotic productions of the schizophrenic. Like the schizophrenic, Stravinsky does not sever contact with adult, rational "reality" out of a desire to transform that reality, but instead because for him it is an objective phenomenon which he cannot resist. (Adorno, it should be pointed out, does not see any true subjectivity in the actions of genuine schizophrenics, but that's another story. Or is it?) Stravinsky does not aim manipulate the illogic of his infantilism and allow it to follow its full musical development, but instead seeks to find a way to bring it under control.

For Stravinsky, in Adorno's view, the infantilism comes as an outside force, an objective phenomenon which frightened him as much as anyone else. For Adorno, Stravinsky lacked the artistic will to allow his musical development to become fully realized. Adorno writes about Stravinsky in a tone of disgust and indignation that such an artistically hollow presentation should be accorded the status of genius. It is instead something of a false perversion of genius.

In Adorno's view, the advent of Stravinsky's neo-classicism is the natural and appropriate outcome of this artistic process. In this phase, Stravinsky finally tells the truth. It is his true musical vision. Neo-classicism serves as the "cure," the anti-psychotic drug for his early work. Adorno sees this process as the expression of musical fascism: pleasure in domination and submission.

For Adorno, music embodies and reveals social relations without having a direct, active role in those relations. It serves, quite literally, as a "prism" through which the social totality reveals itself. Therefore, any real analysis of power relations in the production and consumption of musical works is missing from Adorno's analysis. This sidestepping of the issue of power is, in fact, what compromises his otherwise deeply insightful look at Stravinsky's work.

"The rigidity of Sacre makes it insensitive to all subjective impulses, as does ritual against pain in initiations and sacrifices ... In so doing, it promises the subject an ontological footing..." (Adorno, 1973, pp.173-174) In this passage, Adorno gets to the heart of what he sees as the process of Stravinsky's work. It is, a "ritual against pain" for a subject (collective and/or individual) which lacks an "ontological footing." It seems clear to me, however Adorno may view this creative situation, that

what is expressed here is a representation of struggle by those who lack power to control the uncontrollable forces of their lives. That Adorno will not see Stravinsky's work in this way is a testament to his view of social relations of domination as more of a static, unchanging (standardized) structure than as the product of a living process of struggle as in Antonio Gramsci's theory of hegemonic social relations.

For Gramsci, domination (including, especially, ideological domination) is a product of struggling forces. Hegemony has always to be sustained on a continuous basis, lest "counter-hegemonies" move in and exert power. But Gramsci, unlike Adorno, did not view society as an inert structure, but as a living thing.

If we were to study the work of an artist like Stravinsky in this way (and in a moment I will take a similar look at a snippet of the work of Michael Jackson) the important questions which arise are different than those which Adorno raises. First of all, we'd want to know not only why the creative subject (producers and receivers) lacks this "ontological footing," but truly, who this subject is. For Adorno, it appears as though there really is a unified alienated subject in contemporary society. This is not, I think, what Marx had in mind in "Estranged Labor." If my memory serves me correctly, Marx pointed out

that owners of the means of production did things to workers that they did not do to themselves. The proletarian "subject" was therefore not identical to the subject of capital (even if they did fall victim to what would later be described as a "false consciousness").

The fact that Adorno brings up this question of ontological footing shows that he's actually on to more than he might know. A more overtly Gramscian analysis would likely show that some subjective positions in contemporary (first-world) society stand in different relation to this footing than do others. The radical psychiatrist R.D. Laing has developed this notion of what he called "ontological security" as fully as anyone. (Although Laing speaks of interpersonal relations, it is easy to extend his perspective to a social analysis. Also, since Adorno uses schizophrenia as a metaphor for Stravinsky's creative approach, I find it impossible not to bring in Laing.) "In his life situation [social and historical situation, we could say], the person [creative social subject] comes to feel he is in an untenable position." (Laing, 1967, p.115) For Laing, what gets labeled as "schizophrenia" by those in tenable positions is actually "a special strategy that a person invents in order to live in an unlivable situation." (Ibid.) In other words the productions of schizophrenics are the products of struggle. If Stravinsky's music is

metaphorically analogous to schizophrenia, then it can't be seen as anything other than a form of (possibly self-destructive) resistance.

As I hold no strong opinions one way or the other regarding the Stravinsky/Schoenberg opposition, I really can't hold this position with certainty. So, I'd rather choose an opposition I'm more at home with: Michael Jackson and Prince, two rhythm & blues-pop-rock performers with whom I am somewhat more familiar.

Now, while it will be admitted that Adorno himself would undoubtedly find either performer repulsive and hopelessly in the grip of bourgeois "standardization," I'll draw on the conclusions of what can be called "popular critical theory" to make the opposition clear. Since the beginning of his career Prince has been (and, to a large degree, remains) the darling of many of the more influential rock critics. Prince is viewed by critics as spontaneous and daring ("an experimenter"), a recording and performing genius, an incitement to the creativity of others, and, as Greil Marcus so bluntly put it, a "black Elvis to Jackson's black Johnny Ray." (Although Marcus noted the bleak racial irony of the anologies, he let the comparison itself stand as correct.) ("The Dead and The Quick," Artforum, February, 1985, p. 70) In other words, Prince

was both free and imaginative, while Jackson was, as newspaper critic Stephen Williams put it, a "sterile puppet." ("Jackson Bounces Back at the Garden," Newsday, March 4, 1988, p. W/3) Prince's presentation was viewed as open while Jackson's was seen as closed. Jackson was careful and cautious with his every creative move whereas Prince didn't care if he landed on his face (which he literally once did on live television). It is, in fact, Jackson's cautiousness which causes many critics to conclude that his approach doesn't fit the rock 'n' roll canon which Prince defines. This definition refers to the free unfolding of the subject which, for Adorno, defines "radical music." It should be clear, at this point that the rock critics' approach (not all rock critics, of course) is not Gramscian, but Adornoesque (although not pessimistically so). Jackson's cautiousness (as was "disco music") is viewed as an emasculation of the rock 'n' roll spirit. His place in the rhythm & blues tradition (which often values careful repetition and tight, "cool" choreography) is often not even taken into account.

I really don't know about Stravinsky, but at his best, Michael Jackson is the "coolest" performer R&B has ever produced. The importance of the concept and practice of cool (and its lack of inclusion in the rock 'n' roll canon) cannot be underestimated in understanding either Jackson or

the premises of popular critical theory. "Cool" refers, basically, to restraint under pressure. The pressure referred to in this connection is, for the most part, that of the world of everyday life, a world which Adorno and many rock critics see as a tamed, deadened realm where all practices are woefully predictable. Great art, for them, resists this version of everyday life and replaces it with its negation: insecurity (usually violence of one sort or another).

If this version of everyday life represents life as it is actually experienced and lived, then playing it cool represents total affirmation, not struggle. It is my position that the text of Michael Jackson (along with many other texts) challenges this perception of everyday life experience. In this alternative view, everyday life is experienced as very nearly a minefield of insecure existence for those whose burden it is to keep everyday life going. Those who live within the structures of everyday life are not those who control its movement, (see Smith, 1987) and are therefore the ones who must struggle to survive within it.

This is not a simple matter. A working class white man, for example, may live within everyday life on his job, but control some of its flow when he is home. For a management-level white woman, the equation may be just the

opposite. At work, she may direct the flow of the everyday lives of minorities and some men, while at home, she may be subject to the whims of her male partner, whom she feels desperate to please. Children may escape everyday life on the playground (while seizing control of the everyday lives of younger and weaker children), but not at home or in the classroom (two spheres they may find colluding to wrest control from them). (And children must remain within their everyday lives, because violence against them is legally sanctioned. Their struggles are, consequently, largely symbolic.) Feminist sociologist Dorothy Smith feels that the structures which work to create and form everyday life are not visible to those who operate within it, but are, nevertheless woven into its experience. And so she chooses to begin her work from the limited vantage point of those subjective experiences.

Michael Jackson's text (in this case, his "artistic presentation") offers a representation of an everyday life struggle, that is, in Laing's words, "a special strategy that a person invents in order to live in an unlivable situation."

"Cool" is a style invented by young African-American men who migrated from the rural south to urban inner-cities. Florette Henri (1975, p. 91) points out that "when blacks ventured out of the ghetto, therefore, they

'could never be certain when they might be embarrassed or humiliated by discriminatory practices.' Such uncertainty would become a facet of the ghetto mind." Pulling a mask over one's true feelings in such situations not only served to enhance one's chances of survival, but came to be valued as an admirable skill in and of itself. A "cool" individual could be more dangerous than a hot one, but maintaining cool was a product of hard work. Eventually, black urban (male, for the most part) art began to incorporate cool as part of its fundamental make-up.

It seems reasonable to suggest that the stronger one's emotions raged, the more difficult it would be to keep them under control. So, the more intensely cool performances were the ones most prized in this regard. Michael Jackson's 1983 performance of his hit record "Billie Jean" on the "Motown 25 -- Yesterday, Today, and Forever" television special is almost universally recognized as the consummate achievement of his career. He unveiled his famous "moonwalk" (sliding backward while appearing to make forward motion) for the first time, spun as if on ice skates, and perched precariously on his toes for the briefest moment. He glared fiercely at each camera and pursued his dance in a sort of calamitous rage. When the dance was through he was greeted with ecstatic applause and a backstage cheering section of fellow performers. But Jackson

himself said he despaired over the performance. "I had planned to do one really long spin and to stop on my toes, suspended for a moment, but I didn't stay on my toes as long as I wanted," he explained. "I did the spin and I landed on one toe. I wanted to just stay there, just freeze there, but it didn't work quite as I'd planned.

"When I got backstage, the people back there were congratulating me. I was still disappointed about the spin." (Jackson, 1988, p. 211-212)

Only in a situation where everyday life presents deadly danger if one's cool is broken ever so slightly can such an attitude make sense. It is not a rock 'n' roll attitude, nor is it it the attitude of radical music. In rock 'n' roll and in the avant-garde, one can isolate oneself from everyday life and act like a male adolescent on the prowl, (temporarily) free from the burdens of everyday life -- even standing over it and seeing it for what it is. This supposedly radical position is not one borne of everyday struggle, but of freedom from that struggle. Adorno's fatalism is just one logical consequence of such a stance.

CHAPTER TWO

"BEAT IT": EVERYDAY LIFE

The perspective which sees everyday life and culture as "standardized" did not by any means begin and end with the work of the Frankfurt School. The work of the French sociologist Henri Lefebvre in Everyday Life in the Modern World paralleled and, in many ways, expanded upon Adorno and Horkheimer. Using everyday culture as his point of departure, Lefebvre formulated a devastating critique of western middle-class life (which, in this work, he posits as universally representative of modern life in general) as a self-satisfied delusion. In Lefebvre's view, the inertia of ordinary life appears as action. Lefebvre's outlook is deeply nostalgic for a time when he feels that concepts such as love, sexuality, and tragedy had real meaning: when "everyday life" as it was now lived by the majority of people did not exist. So Lefebvre felt the answer was to somehow bring about the end of everyday life. Unlike Adorno, he felt this was a possibility. In order to do so,

it was necessary for him to undertake a detailed study of the "systems" of everyday life. In particular, he concentrated on what he called the "bureaucratic society of controlled consumption," a dull, still world of illusory freedom.

Although Lefebvre's theory and its premises, as it was expressed in this particular work, bear much similarity to those of the Frankfurt School's interpretation of Marx, his more detailed method attempts to approach the way the way he imagines everyday life is experienced by ordinary people. His method is by no means ethnographic, but could instead be called empathic. He tries to capture the <u>feel</u> of everyday life and in so doing find ways of altering those social relations. Lefebvre is by no means a pessimist. Unfortunately, in <u>Everyday Life in the Modern World</u>, Lefebvre maintains a distance from the way everyday life is experienced by those who live within its structures. Like Marcus and others who've adopted Frankfurt School stances, he approaches everyday life from the vantage point of one who is not directly oppressed by the challenges of everyday life, that is, from the point of view of someone who lives outside its realm, and he therefore does not depict the full scope of the social relations which comprise it.

In this view, everyday life is a realm where most

people are "terrorized" into accepting social relations of domination and submission without question or complaint. In return for this complicity people are offered the illusory pleasures of consumption of objects (or of objectified ideas). They take a sort of pleasure in automobiles, "idols" (celebrities), femininity, and the like. But, as Lefebvre sees it, it is a pleasure without a sense of genuine risk and adventure, and so is therefore hollow, empty. It is a theory of hegemony without struggle (which isn't a theory of hegemony at all).

Everyday life, in this formulation, has been denuded of its "poetic" aspects, of its tragedy. The experience of it is instead, benumbing and oppressive. It was Lefebvre's goal, he said at this point in his work, to formulate "a revolutionary plan to recreate a style, resurrect the Festival and gather together culture's scattered fragments for a transfiguration of everyday life." (1984, p. 38) He more or less dismisses the notion, which he derides as "populism," that "there is something extraordinary in (everyday life's) very ordinariness." (Ibid., p. 37)

In "the bureaucratic society of controlled consumption" (or what Lefebvre would later describe as the locus of "abstract," rather than historical space), everyday life is not itself an arena of struggle and the only way it can be transformed is by transcending it and returning to so-

cial relations a sense of genuine "style" or a representation of real historical agency.

One problem with such an outlook, according to feminist sociologist Dorothy Smith, is that Lefebvre, in this work, seeks "to grasp the everyday world as an object. From this perspective, its essential organization escapes. History, for example, is viewed as erupting into the everyday world as if the two somehow existed alongside one another, largely independent except for occasional collisions." (Smith, 1987, p. 90) The "essential organization" of everyday life is one of the domination of some social groups by others. "Everyday life" is only lived by those who are dominated. It is clear that, for Lefebvre, everyday life is an object of study because he does not examine it from the perspective of an everyday subjectivity. He does not study everyday life from the subjective position of those who live it. His empathic method, as a result, collapses under the weight of its contradictions; there is no way for him to understand everyday life in the way he wishes to if he subsumes the genuine experience of it on the part of real people under his own imaginings of their experiences from his perspective.

This is why Lefebvre can make the remarkable assertion that driving an automobile is about the only everyday activity remaining which retains an element of genuine risk

(1984, p. 101). Lefebvre specifically identifies with the driver: "when I overtake a more powerful car than that which I am driving ... my achievement becomes a topic of conversation with my passengers..." In this realm, there is an opportunity to engage in performance "requiring foolhardiness, ability and cunning, therefore freedom." Freedom for whom, though? The social position of the passengers, who occupy a subaltern position in relation to the driver in this rare realm of "adventure," is not even taken into account. (Ibid., p. 102)

Nevertheless, can we even agree with Lefebvre's assertion about the singular status of the automobile within everyday life? While this may perhaps be true for a white, male, heterosexual upper-middle-class individual ("the driver," actually), for most others, everyday life is not an endless stretch of boredom leading up to those moments when they can rev their engines. For women, simply walking down a street in the darkness of a clear evening involves great risk. For people of color, any routine contact with law enforcement officials could risk life and limb. For workers, a chance mistake could result in the loss of their livelihood. Children, of course, are subject to the whims of almost all adults, almost all the time. For such people (most people), life is experienced as an inherently risky, moment-to-moment proposition.

There are reasons, though, why the experience of everyday life is not immediately apparent in Lefebvre's observations. Life, as it is ordinarily practiced, is not what Russian literary analyst Mikhail Bakhtin would call "dialogic." As Lefebvre admits, "if tragedy still exists it is out of sight." (1984, p. 65) Everyday life is, as Lefebvre would later describe it in The Production of Space, "abstract," that is, it is only life as it is "conceived of." (Lefebvre, 1991, p. 51) The voices of those who are oppressed by everyday life are not heard in opposition to the voices of those who stand beyond the everyday. For "subaltern" (see Spivak, but for our purposes, we mean those whose experience is quite literally below the surface of everyday appearances; alive, but silent and invisible) peoples, though, and for those who are superordinate in relation to them, the experience of social life is dialogic. This experience is enforced into silence in order that life, as it is ordinarily practiced within abusive relations of power, can proceed.

The experience of these practices is quite different for those who are oppressed by them than it is for those who profit by them. As Dorothy Smith has pointed out, the everyday world lived by most women is "problematic" because to live that everyday world is to not know it. It is not merely a question of oppressed classes of people lacking

knowledge of the structures which dominate them (although this is certainly a component of their not knowing), but moreover, of quite literally not knowing what is going to happen next in the carrying on of their everyday lives. Not knowing is what lacking power feels like.

And when someone in a subaltern position does occasionally find out what is to happen next in their everyday life, he or she may find themselves punished for their discovery (or at least for the manner in which they acted on that discovery). A battered wife most often has no idea when the next explosion will occur from her tormentor, but if she can somehow gain the power to predict when they'll happen, she will now find herself even more under his control. She'll find herself ducking, hiding, holding her tongue -- trying to control the uncontrollable. And she can never let him know that by controlling herself, she's trying to control him. Her experience of her life struggles must remain silent or she'll be punished some more.

The silence of everyday practices is maintained by the "noises" of the powerful, which, as Barthes points out, are also the same noises made by those who are not powerful. He calls these "noises" mythological speech. It is the speech subaltern, or subordinated peoples make "in order to live." It is the noises people make when they live in a

space that is not their own (de Certeau). Everyone speaks the same monologue of power, the same noise of subordination on the surface of ordinary life so that they may be able to live at all.

But since life is experienced so differently by those who control the flow of ordinary life, and those who are controlled by it, that experience can only be revealed outside the realm of ordinary life practices (which appear to be a repetition of the monologue, a "standardization," as Adorno would have it, of living): specifically, this can happen in the realm of a free space created, yet concealed within ordinary life, the carnival (in Bakhtin's Rabelaisian vision), or in the enclaves where the powerless and the powerful can be entirely separated from one another. This is the world of gossip between women, the deceitful practices like "wearing the wig" which are described by de Certeau (working for oneself on the boss's time, for example), and the covert use of the monological domain to recount the story of subaltern experience. This requires speaking in parables, throwing out riddles, the whole world of covert discursive action described by Henry Louis Gates, Jr. that African-Americans have entered into for hundreds of years. These are everyday noises which are either indecipherable to those who control everyday discursive practices, or considered unimportant by them. Every

time a plane of discourse is discounted as inconsequential (by those who feel they've a right to judge such matters), a plane of freedom is left open.

The electronic and print media, which de Certeau describes as a false, positivistic rendering of an agreed-upon reality, is for the most part, a monological domain as well. But it is within such monological spaces that those who are subaltern in relation to them can carve out free spaces. These divergent free spaces are often hidden very near or at the surface of the monological space.

The monologue is repeated by subaltern people (and by those who dominate their space) to avoid death, but however real the repetition of the monologue may come to be, it only exists to drown out the sounds of the real <u>experience</u> of ordinary life, which are not repetitive sounds at all, but are instead the noises of a moment-to-moment struggle against assault, exploitation, extinction.

The "standardization" or "mythologizing" of everyday social living is actually only one dimension, the audible portion, of the fight for everyday life. Since it is the only dimension which <u>is</u> audible, it is rather easy to assume that it is the only one. But when it is revealed as just part of an ongoing, contested dialogue, then it becomes possible to asses just how it is that power is maintained and/or resisted. The dialogue exists not merely be-

tween social groups, but within them as well. Even individuals become torn between the reality of their experiences and the real process of mythologizing or standardizing that reality in order to carry it on.

Telling the truth overtly about one's everyday experience of lack of control of one's own destiny, of lack of knowledge about the domain of one's activities, which belongs to someone else, is incompatible with <u>living</u> that experience. But the struggle is multi-faceted: it involves fighting to gain control and knowledge to alleviate the suffering of everyday life, while at the same time facing down further suffering which that struggle creates. The subaltern are not offered peace in return for participating in the mythologizing process precisely because it is <u>their lack of peace</u> which they are pressed to mythologize. Thus, the making of texts of subaltern experience must both include and somehow surmount this contradiction.

Aside from significant advances in French poststructuralism (like de Certeau's), much of the most convincing work challenging the premises of the Frankfurt School's critical theory of culture has come out of the engagement of British cultural studies with recent feminist theory.

The interdisciplinary movement to cultural studies in the U.K. began in the early 1950's with the work of Richard Hoggart on the culture of the working classes and continued

with Raymond Williams and Stuart Hall's founding work with the University of Birmingham's Center for Contemporary Cultural Studies. Cultural studies came about, in part, as a critique of American mass communications research which remained in the positivistic vein then prevalent in American social science. This critique had much in common with Horkheimer and Adorno's similar argument in Dialectic of Enlightenment. Cultural Studies did not concern itself so much with the ostensibly measurable "effects" of the the new mass communications media, but instead with the social experiences of people engaged in practices associated with mass communications. Much of the center's work in the sixties and seventies revolved around sociological fieldwork studies on youth subcultures. (see Hall and Jefferson, 1976)

One important insight of the work in the cultural studies mode has been its increasingly direct challenge to the notions of the Frankfurt School that the meanings of popular texts are imposed upon consumers by those in positions of power. As Fiske points out (1987), work like that of Stuart Hall's has demonstrated that meanings are struggled over and negotiated by individuals and groups from within their own dominated cultures. The center's work from the seventies into the eighties became increasingly interested in the phenomena of popular culture and has, sig-

nificantly, been informed by recent feminist theory. (see McRobbie and Nava, 1984 and Fiske, 1987)

That the present study is informed by feminist theory is crucial for several reasons, not least of which is Michael Jackson's own overt public critique of masculinity (and notions of conventional "adulthood," which are closely linked with masculinity in any case). As an African-American man, his critique is fraught with more than the usual degree of tension and personal suffering. More critically, feminist critiques within British cultural studies have unalterably changed the character of the field of cultural studies. For Angela McRobbie, "the point is that this absence of self and the invalidating of personal experience in the name of more objective social science goes hand in hand with the silencing of other areas ... If we look for structured absences in this youth literature, it is the sphere of family and domestic life that is missing." (Frith and Goodwin, 1990, p.68) The sphere McRobbie speaks of is the sphere Lefebvre would call the "bureaucratic society of controlled consumption." A cultural studies informed by feminism opens the way toward seeing the sphere of personal everyday experience within a consumer society as an arena of struggle. That is, such a perspective may be able to reveal the historical and the political within the "abstract."

Although there is much feminist theory which has remained in the Frankfurt School mode, what is significant is the recognition that the power struggles of "personal" everyday life, the sphere of "controlled consumption," are the products of the real, conscious activity of the women, men, and children who keep that everyday life going and not the product of a mysterious "terrorist" (Lefebvre) structure into which they can have no self-conscious input. There is usually at least a shadowy recognition, in feminist studies of women in consumer culture and other aspects of everyday life, that women do resist (though often in tragic and terrifying ways), that politics takes place (see, for example, Gordon, 1988, McRobbie and Nava, 1984 or Elshtain, 1981). The aim of Lefebvre's critical theory is to politicize what he sees as the politically deficient sphere of private life. Feminist theory, almost of necessity, has to view the private sphere as already political. A feminist theory which regards women's activity as the product of patriarchal puppeteering quickly reveals itself as unworkable: women calling other women fools or victims, it becomes clear, is itself a form of patriarchal condescension, that is, to put it more bluntly -- macho superiority. Such a theorist, in order to make her claim, would have to consider herself neither foolish nor victimized, that is, above the struggle. A tossed-off

comment by Lefebvre (1984, p.92) is of more than passing interest.

> We have already noted the ambiguity of women's status. Everyday Life, to which they are consigned, is also their stronghold from which they try, nevertheless, to escape by the roundabout method of eluding the responsibilities of consciousness; whence their incessant protests and clumsily formulated, directionless claims.

Of course: women who critique everyday life from their own perspective are, ultimately, "irresponsible." They care nothing for what Lefebvre considers their proper responsibilities, that is, to see the situation the way he sees it. Lefebvre, naturally, is a responsible man who thinks clearly; nothing, so far as he can tell, goes on behind his back. This attitude of independence of thought, of being one's own man (even if one is a woman: i.e. Madonna), and of possessing a certain critical authority is vital to the assumptions of critical theory. A critical theorist knows the "real relations" of a society even when others, who are engaged in those relations, do not: his thought is not muddled like that of a woman, a child, an oppressed person; he is not "clumsy."

Popular Critical Theory and the Public Text of Michael Jackson

The earlier juxtaposition of a rock critic who loves popular music and mass culture critics who despised it was not meant as a mocking assault intended to shame the the former to his senses. Instead, Marcus would himself find the comparison apt. Much of Lipstick Traces demonstrates the surprising and thorough popularity of the kind of critical theory of culture the Frankfurt School and Lefebvre originally espoused. It is true that much recent research within academic circles almost entirely rejects these arguments (see especially the assessment by Fiske, 1987, pp. 309-326; for an exception to this trend see historian Stuart Ewen, 1976, 1982, and 1988) in favor of the approach of the Italian theorist Antonio Gramsci which gives some validity to what can be called "organic" resistance to ideological domination.

Outside the academy, nevertheless, this approach (similar, in many ways, to Lefebvre's) has become the very sign of hip cachet. Gramscian theory, which serves as the foundation of contemporary cultural studies, insists that resistance to the dominant ideology (or what he called "hegemony") must come, to an extent, from within the dominated groups themselves. Gramsci proposed the exis-

tence of counter-hegemonies within the theory and practice of dominated groups. Adorno's view of popular culture, of course, wholly precludes this possibility. Any life which the dominated express themselves must be seen in its negative form, as death. Subjectivity, in this account, is only illusory. While most others see the situation in a less gloomy light, these accounts nevertheless view everyday life as it is actually lived as devoid of historical possibility. Benjamin's analysis, on the other hand, gives an inkling of how resistance can come from within dominated groups. It is in the contexts of reception that the cultural object can be "reactivated," taking on a shape and form which speaks to the concerns of that context. Much recent work in cultural studies examines how that reactivation takes place.

Many of those analyses question some of the earlier work in cultural studies itself. There have been for example, incisive feminist critiques of the work on youth subcultures which highlight the theoretical deficiencies that caused the work to overlook the areas of personal everyday life as particular sites of struggle.

The debate has not disappeared, nor has it lost any of its original force; it has, as if to bear out Benjamin's argument, simply dispersed. Marcus, whose work grows indirectly out of Lefebvre's (via "situationist" theorist Guy

Debord), is the rage-filled outsider, the crank, the punk. He can see the print in the negative. He wants to "scream," he says, and with his scream, negate the world as we know it, reduce it to ashes -- if only for a "moment."

My argument was essentially that Jackson's audience was not the monolithic entity depicted by Marcus but, as I experienced it, a multi-hued texture of meaningfully divergent desires and outlooks (of which Marcus and I were but two parts). Individual fans (not unlike Marcus and Adorno in their relation to Jackson and jazz respectively) were themselves ambivalent, both loving and fearing their idols. One cannot help feeling that Adorno's castration anxiety and Marcus's fear of "humiliation," of losing his subjectivity, were somehow of a piece.

There were, after all, some important elements which distinguished Jackson from the other significant contemporary pop culture heroes like Elvis, James Dean, John Lennon, Dylan, Monty Clift, Prince, Johnny Rotten: all compelling, self-possessed heterosexual (or daringly bi-sexual) males, and save for one, all white. (A more recent example like Madonna, although a woman, nevertheless conforms to the pattern: she's white, gives mischievous hints of a daring bi-sexuality, and is often described as "ballsy." One record industry executive recently described her as "a true rebel." [Chuck Phillips, "Contract Players," Los An-

geles Times, April 8, 1992, p. F4]) Every one of those heroes had permitted young men (and women, for that matter) who identified with them to feel a sense of rebellious autonomy from the stifling, repetitive everyday world in which they were forced to live.

Those heroes were powerful, adventurous, spontaneous in both their successes and failures. Their presentations, however much they may have played around with sexuality and sex roles, were models of masculine virility and power. In a word, they were potent. Consequently, their Oedipal rebellions served in many respects to further bolster patriarchal domination. Their rebellions did not, in truth, turn out to be subaltern rebellions, but were instead the sound of engines revving in the midst of quiet certainty. In Rebel Without a Cause, James Dean's attempt to restore the world to one worth living in (even worth dying for) is actually a reactionary revolt against what he sees as a castrated society. (With Madonna, Natalie Wood becomes James Dean, grabs the steering wheel, and plays "chicken" herself.) Lefebvre would recognize the society Dean was rebelling against as the "bureaucratic society of controlled consumption;" a social order taken over by women who drained it of life, of "style." It was the nature of those rebellions, however, which most white male critics and fans found most appealing (see Sue Wise, "Sexing Elvis," in

Frith and Goodwin, 1990, pp. 390-398). It was, Marcus once wrote, Elvis's "sinfulness that brought him to life." (Marcus, 1982, p. 285)

Jackson, of course, appears to have made it his life's task to avoid sin, adventure, and unpredictability. (Even the explosion of rage in the now-suppressed version of his 1991 video "Black or White" is carried out on the run: Jackson casts furtive glances in every direction before each act of vandalism. The authorities may be right around the corner, watching. He's destructive, alright, but he's careful.) His public appearance is soft, fearful, and often awkward. He says he is too shy to speak publicly and when he does speak, it is with a voice so high and soft that, to many, it does not seem to be that of an adult male. He's implicated that he believes premarital sex is wrong; the widespread assumption is that Michael Jackson, into his thirties, is still a virgin. He wears a great deal of make-up at all times and has had plastic surgery more than once. His hair, once a large, round "afro" or "natural," is now relaxed into long, delicate waves.

Jackson's live concert performances are rehearsed down to the smallest gesture: he strives to make each night identical to the last (but only if that last night was "perfect"). His only public displays of exercising power and control over others occur in the service of avoiding

risky situations. Unlike other "gender-bender" stars as David Bowie, Annie Lennox, and even Boy George, his sexuality (or apparent "asexuality") does not appear as merely a suit of clothes he slips on one morning and off the next. Instead, his public display of this aspect of his life appears as part of an attempt to make sense of his own actual experience; it's part of a story he feels he needs to tell. This is clear even to Jackson's critics; Marcus claims his real undoing came when the media revealed him as a "celibate zombie." (Frith and Goodwin, 1990, p.476)

As a fan would know, for Jackson, the accomplishment of everyday life (of knowing what's going to happen next) has never been something he could afford to take for granted. His often vain (and often ludicrous) attempts to impose order on the swirling chaos of his life are what compel, amuse, and sell tickets. Even his "art," his singing, dancing, songwriting, so apparently graceful and accomplished, appears as the product of a difficult struggle against a fundamental awkwardness (Jackson was distraught when one toe landed out of place in a televised dance performance [Jackson, 1988, p. 211-212]). For Jackson, the world seems an overwhelmingly unpredictable, dangerous place; his stunningly "cool," graceful performances serve only to underscore that sensibility. But these attempts to make order out of chaos, these public actions of Jackson's

do more than just increase the gross national product; they tell a story, a story some just do not wish to hear. It is a story of an individual who lives in terror of ordinary life, of someone for whom the experience of ordinary life is never really "ordinary." Our question becomes: who finds the telling of this story significant and why?

Marcus, like many of Jackson's critics, finds these attempts to tell the story insignificant: why would anyone want to know about the dull details of everyday life experience when it is precisely those details we all wish to escape? Isn't everyday life really quite a bore?

The work of the text process in revealing the Jackson narrative shows this experience of oppressive banality to represent only the experience of people who may be less oppressed with the burdens of keeping everyday life going. Most minorities, women, children and working people do not necessarily find their everyday lives boring. Instead, it is for them a constant struggle to stave off unpredictable, devastating assaults on their minds, souls, and bodies.

A "moment" from Michael Jackson's ghostwritten autobiography:

> We left the Garrett (sic) Elementary School building for the short walk home, but we had to hurry. I remember getting anxious as a car swept by, then another. Randy took my hand, and we waved to the crossing guard. (Jackson, 1988, p.54)

Nothing much here really, unless you tried to place yourself in the little boy's shoes on that day that was like so many others, unless you understood that he did not know what would be waiting for him if he were a moment late. (On one such occasion, for instance, biographer J. Randy Taraborrelli was told that Michael walked in the front door of his Gary, Indiana home and was promptly hurled into a set of drums. [1991, p. 22]) It is clear that for the narrator of this story, everyday life was not a dull tedium, wanting for "tragedy."

Some stories are more difficult to tell than others. For those storytellers who <u>live</u> everyday life, who are burdened with its upkeep, turning a fragmented, oppressive context into a coherent narrative is daunting. "Texts" are created at the moments when contexts are actually seen and understood, and thus surpassed. The making of texts from within the perilous contexts of everyday life is always an act of social resistance.

Michel de Certeau analyzed such texts of everyday life in a manner quite differently from Lefebvre's mid-1960's work. Inspired by the further explorations Lefebvre made in the 1970's into "the production of space," de Certeau actually took a look inside everyday life as real people actually lived it. In <u>The Production of Space</u>, Lefebvre saw the arena of everyday life (that is, everyday bourgeois

life) as merely the realm of "abstract space," or the repetitive, positivistic surface of the modern world. It was a world as "conceived of," not a world as lived. This is an important departure from Everyday Life in the Modern World, because in the earlier volume, Lefebvre dealt not with "life" at all, but with an ideal of life, a mythologizing process, that was not actually experienced by most people who are "users of this space." This is why he later stresses the importance of the silence of those who inhabit abstract space. If the "users" are silent, they clearly have much to be silent about. And what their silence conceals is, in fact, their "lived experience." This experience is not "abstract" at all, but the genuine experience of power enforced through silence. "Everything" which does not concern this lived experience can therefore be spoken about "freely" in the realm of abstract space. It's a very noisy space, Lefebvre feels, but the noises exist only to drown out the historically rooted lived experience of the users of abstract space. The voices which speak through abstract space are, for the most part, a jumble of pointless, directionless static.

Abstract space, that is, the bureaucratic society of controlled consumption, is thus an imagined space with real consequences. Abstract space, for Lefebvre, was actually the space of state power and was enforced violently, though

its violence was often not immediately apparent. In this work, Lefebvre sees history as ongoing, as living on the spatial margins of the modern world. The tendency of abstract space, in Lefebvre's view, is to absorb such marginal spaces of resistance into the abstract center. But he sees open revolt from the margins as a possibility. His conception is by no means identical with de Certeau's, but it offered a conceptual framework from which de Certeau was able to work.

de Certeau saw that some social actors worked from a social context that was their own: some actors owned and were able to control the context of everyday life (without living it). Those in positions of domination simply do not live everyday life. They own it: it is their "place" to dispose of at their will. And others live in the place they do not own and make their own "space" out of it through their experiences. Those who "own" everyday life carry out what de Certeau called "strategies" or ways of preventing and surmounting resistance on the part of those who live everyday life. This resistance consisted in "tactics" practiced by subordinated peoples which resisted their domination and allowed them to create spaces of genuine freedom within the larger "place" of domination.

So, for instance, while the "place" of the electronic media is dominated by private capitalist organizations who are able to control its content and form, the "space" of that media is lived by those who use it and make it worth owning in the first place. So the content and form such electronic commodities take is shaped by the competing strategies and tactics of those who own the "place" of it and those who make the "space" of it. Since the owners are able to dominate and have real power, the making of spaces is very often carried out covertly. Such space-making is not generally immediately apparent precisely because it cannot be. If it were overtly apparent, space-making tactics would be powerless against the strategic forces set in place to overwhelm such tactics.

(And tactical resistance is often filled with painful contradiction; makers of space can often aim their tactics against one another rather than only against those who dominate and own the places of domination. If, for instance, Michael Jackson resists patriarchal authority by whitening his complexion because patriarchy is, for him, symbolized by a (particular) black man, he may at the same time assist racist domination by whites who own the "places" of minority space. One such space is the "black" body, his black body. For Jackson, in his own lived experience, that body, that place, is owned by patriarchal

domination, and so he resists by recasting and reclaiming it. But, in doing so, he may sign over that space to another dominating force. Resistance of this nature is not a simple matter; it can be both heroic and tragic at the same time [for more on this theme, see Toni Morrison's 1970 novel about the struggle over the racial and familial self, The Bluest Eye].)

For de Certeau, unlike Adorno and beyond Lefebvre, history had not come to an end, but was carried on in the only way possible: in silence and invisibility. de Certeau agreed that the monological positivism of everyday life, or "abstract space" was very much in evidence, but nevertheless set about to see how that monologism was both maintained and resisted. Abstract space (everyday life), for de Certeau, is an ongoing product of struggle, not a given condition of the modern world.

These tactical subversions were not the sudden, noisy ruptures of subordinated existence carried out by the situationists in an attempt to wake the sleeping masses, but were an ongoing part of the struggle for everyday life practiced by those who are subordinated. (The larger political implications of such a theory are clear: while the possibility of "the revolution" is discounted, everyday

life represents revolution and counter-revolution on a daily basis so long as the the people who live in the spaces of everyday life do not possess them.)

The public text of Michael Jackson is a public discourse on private life which acts primarily to reveal and and critique the complex of patriarchal values and practices which form an important part of the accomplishment of social life both in the distinct cultural milieu from which Jackson emerged and in the new contexts in which his story found itself implicated -- specifically the cultural arena of the electronic and print media in late capitalist western society. Since the text of "Michael Jackson" is mechanically reproduced, an important concern here will be with the ability of people to use the electronic and print media to transgress the physical boundaries of these discursive spaces in ways which were previously impossible. (Benjamin, 1968, pp. 219-253) That is, the study should show how people transform the dominated "places" of mechanical and electronic reproduction into "spaces" of everyday text-making. These transgressions can then serve to reveal and possibly critique power relations as they exist in socially and historically discrete spheres. In the age of advanced mechanical and electronic reproduction and dissemination of discourse, the realm of the private cannot, in

any case, remain inviolable: the barriers of space and time shielding it from view have been pierced by the public media.

The key theoretical problem this study engages is to re-examine whether Adorno's view of everyday life and culture as "standardized" is valid or if there is, indeed, a very different story to tell.

CHAPTER THREE

"AIN'T NOBODY'S BUSINESS...": METHODOLOGICAL CONCERNS

The methodological problem of this study has been discovering a means of defining and analyzing texts. For the purposes of this study, a text is not seen as an entity separated from the contexts surrounding and making it up. In fact, a text is seen as constituted by context. This does not mean it is determined by it. In producing texts people act on the contexts in which they find themselves. People live their contexts by producing texts. The following narrative text is a text of lived everyday experience which has been mechanically and electronically reproduced. The ordinarily silent and invisible work of everyday text-making is made public. What Walter Benjamin might describe as the "aura" of everyday power relations, which depends on this silence and invisibility, is disturbed by this process of publicity. The power relations which really "ain't

nobody's business" are now transformed into everyone's business.

Of the variety of approaches to studying texts, one of the most progressive and productive of recent years has been that of British cultural studies which has tried to reconcile phenomenological approaches with ideological ones. In this perspective, people act on a world which acts on them. The method most often used is participant observation or ethnography. Groups of individuals with shared political interests are studied making or remaking their constricted and oppressive worlds. In Paul Willis's well-known study of working-class British schoolboys, text-making is actually seen as bolstering existing power relations. Although Willis's "lads" lampoon and protest the oppressive school culture, their cultural struggle actually benefits those who will dominate them the rest of their lives. Willis sees such protest as tragically impotent, rather in the manner in which Karl Marx saw religion as both a form of protest and as a social "opium." In such text-making, all political potential is lost because power relations are left undisturbed. For Willis, the schoolboys' protests are ultimately non-political.

In such analyses, the researchers generally do not see any emergence of what Gramsci called "organic intellectuals," that is, genuine, self-conscious leaders of

dominated social groups who are also members of those groups. There is apparently a tendency in British cultural studies to view the emergence of such political leadership as a necessary component of any social movement. In these accounts, political activity, when left purely to the agency of ordinary people, can actually do more harm than good. Such people lack a knowledge of the structural conditions which produce their domination and this lack of consciousness allows their actions to become tools of those who would dominate them. Willis, among others, uses his study as an argument for the creation of some sort of political program which would produce organic intellectuals to lead people to consciousness.

Some of the the limitations of the ethnographic approach are quite clear from this standpoint. One problem with such studies is the assumption that the observed surreptitious political resistance on the part of dominated groups is seen emerging almost independent of knowledge on the part of those who resist of the structures of their domination. This need not necessarily be the case. Although it may not be immediately clear to the observer, such resistance may actually appear out of a knowledge that overt resistance will be met with overt force. It is somewhat specious of Willis (and others) to assert that overt political resistance would create more disruption of power

relations than the "lads'" covert resistance. Their resistance may be part of an ongoing struggle for power which is not so easy to win regardless of the means used. This devaluation of everyday political resistance is evident not only in Willis' work on the schoolboys, but has been somewhat pervasive both in British cultural studies and in much structural and post-structural criticism. The development of a critical methodological stance which deals with the implications of such resistance has thus been hampered by this devaluation.

There has been some recognition of this in more recent work in cultural studies. In some of this work, covert resistance is seen as a means of working towards political consciousness while avoiding direct confrontation with the structures of domination. Of course, most people do not think about their text-making in these terms; for them text-making is merely a means of getting through each day with one's dignity intact. They are, nevertheless, engaged in political processes and are aware of it even when different terms of analysis are employed. In these accounts, organic intellectuals are produced not as a result of any political "program" but from the politics of everyday life. Angela McRobbie sees text-making as the creation of a utopian space of resistance within the existing structures of domination.

> For both the black and much of the white working-class populations (male and female), sport, art, leisure and entertainment have provided this utopian space, carved out between, against and amidst stronger forces of domination and control. Such gestures do not then exist outside dominant cultural forms. They are rather continually locked into a slow moving love-hate relationship with them. (McRobbie, "Dance and Social Fantasy," in McRobbie and Nava, 1984, p. 136)

What is critical here is that McRobbie acknowledges that the forces of domination and control are "much stronger" than the attempts to resist them. It is precisely because of this power imbalance that such resistance is covert, played out within a cordoned-off free space where the forces of domination have less power (and less interest). When the cultural practices of women, minorities, workers and kids are deemed frivolous and unimportant by society at large, those practices can then operate with much more freedom simply because no one seems to care.

Such spaces of freedom, which Russian literary theorist Mikhail Bakhtin saw in the archaic rituals of carnival, allow resistance to be voiced in ways that are otherwise impossible. In the course of his work, Paul Willis makes the assumption that overt political resistance is possible for the lads, when that may not be the case under the circumstances.

While many British cultural studies were concerned

with ethnographic observations of everyday text-making, there has been an increasing interest in electronically and mechanically reproduced text-making. Such studies are concerned with what has often been described as the "mass media." Stuart Hall, in particular has devoted a great deal of his work to the observation of audience response to such texts. Initially, Hall (in collaboration with Paddy Whannel) sought to determine ways to ascertain the relative "values" of different works of popular culture. His aim was to refute the assertions of "effects" theory which dismissed any reference to the aesthetic value of popular artifacts in favor of their empirically measurable social effects. He wanted to show how some pop culture was genuinely populist in spirit, while other pop artifacts ought, in fact, to have been dismissed. The ultimate aim of this early work was to develop a canon of popular culture.

In The Popular Arts, Hall and Whannel asked "in what terms is it possible to establish even rough standards of judgment about this kind of music?" They'd just concluded a discussion of the workings of the youth music business in the U.K. and the U.S. and were searching for some sort of justification.

They decided that a time would come when such standards could be established. "It differs," they wrote, "in

character, but not in kind, from other sorts of popular music ... If we are unable to comment on its quality and to make meaningful distinctions, it is largely because we lack a vocabulary of criticism ... We need that vocabulary very much indeed now, since this is the area in which the new media are at play." (Hall and Whannel, 1964, pp. 294-295)

Hall and Whannel were not the only ones in the mid-sixties who felt the "need" to make what they described as "meaningful distinctions" between light popular music (non-jazz music) that was insightful, artful, and even illuminating, and that which was useless and counterproductive.

At around the same time, in response to the various social movements which had recently gained force and momentum, young journalists who'd been swept up in those movements began to write about the kind of culture they loved while they were growing up: principally about music. Some members of the young, vulnerable, somewhat heedless audience Hall and Whannel had earlier observed were now college boys (and it was primarily boys) who could match their knowledge of high art and intellectual canons with anyone.

The intellectual roots of many of these young journalists were planted in earlier American critical traditions such as the myth-symbol analysis of Henry Nash Smith or Leo Marx. Such critical perspectives sought to grasp key symbolic ideas which seemed to run through American his-

tory and culture as they found it. Certain American ideas were fully realized in particular literary works. Such literary works actually helped critics understand the nature of these symbolic representations of what they interpreted as the nation's spirit. Left-leaning critics of this school who looked to the literary realization of these American ideas (or ideals) found a representation of hope for resistance and change. This school of literary criticism formed the basis of the new "American Studies" curriculums which were developed in many universities in the sixties and seventies. Some of the more prominent rock critics were weaned on this tradition and formed their own critical approaches, in large part, on this basis.

These young writers now decided that "their" own music (produced primarily by people who did not go to college and who made "meaningful distinctions" without regard to existing standards established by Europeans) best exemplified the spirit of the age and could be canonized accordingly.

The journalists were generally young, white, and politically active: mirror images of members of the new left who led the social movements of the sixties. They claimed to reject what they considered mainstream values like materialism and competition. They considered themselves set apart from the world their parents had left them, and this extended most certainly to their notions

about what constituted art and entertainment.

They didn't write about show business as it had been conventionally understood: instead they described a kind of show art -- a melding of entertainment and spirituality which could serve as an inspiration to their political activism as well as point towards a utopian future. It became their responsibility to make distinctions between music which affirmed capitalistic values and that which subverted those values.

They began writing about the music in underground publications before larger journalistic enterprises realized that there was a market for this sort of material. Soon national magazines appeared with "counter-cultural" names like "Crawdaddy" and "Rolling Stone." These outlets provided a forum for what came to be recognized as "rock criticism." The rock critics, freed from many earlier journalistic conventions by their involvement with the counter-culture, wrote in a looser, hipper, more conversational style than their predecessors. But they also felt an intense need to establish standards and make distinctions between music which "mattered" and that which did not.

The music had somehow to embody the values and objectives of the counter-culture -- it had to point (however symbolically) to the new world which would rise from the ashes of the old. The standards were basically of the

romantic variety: bold authenticity of emotion, spontaneity of expression, and, fundamentally, a lack of utilitarian purpose: such music stood outside of, above, and often against everyday life. "The music," as it came to be known, would be autonomous. They drew inspiration in this regard from the later Frankfurt School work of Herbert Marcuse's One Dimensional Man. What was important to the rock critics was that the music, if indeed it mattered, belonged to the counter-culture, to them. Only under such circumstances could such music point to the utopian multi-dimensional future they, and they alone, were working towards. If anyone else was to understand it, they'd have to learn the rules of the canon for themselves. And if any artists wanted to join in, they'd have to both learn the rules and play by them. Not everyone was welcome. The monological nature of the canon was predicated on the exclusion of perspectives which were not seen to embody counter-cultural ideals.

Sometime in the late 1960's, the production of the rock 'n' roll canon began. Just as the anti-war movement of the time borrowed tactics, strategies, and momentum from the movements of African-Americans to gain civil rights and social and political equity, the new rock music coming out of Britain and the U.S. utilized the conventions of black American music in its production. Often the artists, like

the Beatles and the Rolling Stones were considerate enough to mention this and express gratitude. Bob Dylan, the proclaimed "poet laureate" of the era, called Smokey Robinson a poet. One assumes Robinson was supposed to be overwhelmed by the honor.

The popular canon grew in size and stature to the point that there is now a "Rock 'n' Roll Hall of Fame," where those who made their mark according to the standards are honored annually.

Ralph J. Gleason, a writer who was one of the co-founders of Rolling Stone magazine, elaborated the goals of the new kind of cultural criticism early. Gleason was older than most of the other writers and was thrilled at the sense of new possibility they seemed to embody. Gleason, along with several other influential critics, was convinced that music, in particular, was an essential, even determining force in the social movements of the time. Music which "mattered" had a virtually universal quality of revolt, a liberating force which transcended any social determinations.

Rock 'n' Roll was originally a music created by working-class and poor blacks and whites -- mostly blacks. For the first ten years or so, there was no formal canon of rock 'n' roll music. Middle-class white adults tended to dislike it (some more vehemently than others), while

teenagers of various races and classes tended to love it. Divisions of race and class in the music's reception mattered little, then. But the kids grew up. And some went to college and learned about art and history and protested U.S. intervention in Southeast Asia. And others went to work and went to war.

Some of the ones who went to college began to make decisions about what kind of music mattered to the social movements they were involved in and which did not. Their newly acquired knowledge of European art criticism and American literary criticism helped them to make these decisions. The critics started out as a relatively small group -- Gleason was a key figure; Greil Marcus, a young Berkeley teacher, was Rolling Stone's first reviews editor. Marcus received an M.A. in American Political Thought and, at the time, worked thoroughly within the American Studies tradition. Langdon Winner was a buddy of Marcus from school and Lester Bangs was a college student who wrote wild and fascinating letters to Marcus about the music which impressed Marcus enough to give Bangs a shot at a writing career. Bangs went on to become a legendary figure of sorts, the Hunter S. Thompson of the rock critics. Yet, unlike Thompson, Bangs was a more sympathetic figure who wrote with unusual compassion and earnestness for a "new journalist." His early drug-induced death in 1982 served,

naturally, to cement his legend. Dave Marsh, another influential critic, who nevertheless operated somewhat outside the Rolling Stone circle and cultivated strong populist tendencies, was a founder of Creem magazine, which portrayed itself as somehow even "truer" to the rock and roll spirit. It was "America's Only Rock and Roll Magazine."

During the late sixties, the new critics began to develop standards, criteria by which to judge the music. They felt very passionate about these standards; beyond the wit and irreverence of the critics' work, there was always an overriding, fundamental seriousness. Their work was, in many ways, a mirror of the Frankfurt School's commitment to taking the work of popular culture and everyday life seriously. There was often a humorous pseudo-religious fervor to the early work of some of the critics. They were what might be described as practical romantics.

From Dave Marsh's biography of Bruce Springsteen:

> ... over the past decade rock has betrayed itself. It gnaws at my marrow to recall a hundred sellouts ... The inevitable result was that records were made not with feeling but because there was a market demanding a product, concerts performed with an eye only toward the profit margin. Rock became just another hierarchical system in which consumers took what was offered without question. Asking who was fake and who was real used to be half the joy of the thing. Losing that option was our own fault of course, but that doesn't make it hurt less. Rock saved my life. It also broke my heart.
>
> So then the advent of Bruce Springsteen, who

> made rock and roll a matter of life and death again, seemed nothing short of a miracle to me. (Marsh, 1981, p. 10)

Soon others wanted to join in the process. At Rolling Stone, Marcus would often accept reviews from free-lancers and completely rewrite them himself. As he once explained to a writer, "Most of the people I was working with couldn't write. So because I was a control fetishist I'd sit down and completely rewrite them. They didn't know enough to be pissed off." (Draper, 1990, p. 87) A music which was created principally by African-Americans was systematically discounted (though expropriated) as influential on a movement which was also originally inspired by an African-American social movement. Now British and American middle-class kids could make reformulated black music and only their reformulation would be valued as politically significant. Now the movements and the voices which fueled the movements were theirs, and anyone who wanted to wanted to play by their rules would count, would become part of the canon. Jimi Hendrix, yes, James Brown -- no.

It's not that the voices of marginalized people were excluded entirely -- simply that they'd have to accept their place in the canon as marginal. And this is how it progressed into the seventies until black music and black voices were relegated to the periphery of popular culture.

Did the canon matter at all? Well for one thing, the narrow-casting of radio formats in the seventies and early-eighties was pretty much based upon the standards set originally by the rock critics: there was soul & disco for blacks and gays and women, easy listening for grownups, rock for young white males. This pattern of segregation made it difficult, if not impossible, for marginalized voices to be heard as part of any kind of social movement. "Punk" was privileged by critics principally because it was a nostalgic hearkening back to the days when angry white male voices reigned supreme. Records were produced differently because of this pattern of hyper-segregation. The voices of subordinated groups often made their most popular work when they expressed the least anger and resistance. Who was listening anyway?

This process resulted in the exclusion of the perspectives of African-American, working-class, female and sexually divergent musicians from key slots in the canon. Their experiences, as they were represented culturally, were silenced and/or dismissed as insignificant. Cultural subjects emerging from such perspectives were, for a long time, largely denied a forum to speak to society at large in their own voices about their own concerns. Rock critical values simply denied the importance of the experience of subaltern subjectivity.

Many structural and post-structural analyses have paralleled the methods of aesthetic analysis used by the first, most influential rock critics. Though originally inspired by the Frankfurt School's later version of ideology critique as exemplified by Herbert Marcuse's One Dimensional Man, these critics used a method which bore striking similarities to the radical post-structural critique of culture elaborated by Roland Barthes during the 1950's and 1960's.

Jouissance and Pop Music

> "To find practical music in the West, one has now to look to another public, another repertoire, another instrument (the young generation, vocal music, guitar)."
>
> Roland Barthes, 1970 (1977, p.149)

While Frankfurt theorist Theodor Adorno may have seen the possibilities for historical transformation in the modern world as virtually foreclosed, Lefebvre's theoretical project in Everyday Life in the Modern World was to find possibilities for the disruption of an all-pervasive ideological structure. This was also also the project of the situationists (who were inspired by Lefebvre), some early British cultural studies, and of many of the founding rock critics (particularly Marcus and his first acolytes).

The methodological approach to studying popular texts which most parallels Lefebvre's theoretical directions is represented in the work of Roland Barthes.

For Barthes, a French semiologist who did most of his work during the mid-20th century and shortly thereafter, there is no such thing as a "dominant" ideology at all; such a phrase is redundant.

> For what is ideology? It is precisely the idea <u>insofar as it dominates</u>: ideology can only be dominant. Correct as it is to speak of an "ideology of the dominant class," because there certainly is a dominated class, it is quite inconsistent to speak of a dominant ideology, because there is no dominated ideology: where the "dominated" are concerned, there is nothing, no ideology, unless it is precisely -- and this is the last degree of alienation -- the ideology they are forced (in order to make symbols, hence in order to live) to borrow from the class that dominates them. The social struggle cannot be reduced to the struggle between two rival ideologies: it is the subversion of all ideology which is in question. (1973, 1975, pp. 32-33)

Barthes is interested in discovering the means by which this subversion takes place (as well as how it is prevented from taking place). Although in this view the dominated class <u>makes</u> its own domination through the making of symbols which function to maintain their social position, they so so, he says, <u>in order to live</u>. For Barthes, as ultimately for Paul Willis, the dominated have no choice; they cannot make meaning for themselves without

benefiting their oppressors. Subversion, on the other hand, represents the negation of this "life," or in Althusser's terms, the dissolution of the interpellated subject: the subject as it knows itself through the recognition of others. All meaning must be dissolved. Power, in this formulation, works without resistance. We must ask, of course, why power would need to be exerted if there were no resistance to it? Barthes' perspective in this case lacks a view of power as a dynamic relation. Power is sedimented into structure, which can only be ruptured by invasion from outside the structure. The repetitive practice of ideologically determined symbol-making which people engage in "in order to live" must be interrupted in order that subversions might take place.

A text of pleasure was not, for Barthes, produced as an understandable result of social and historical relations, but was an alien force set in unpredictable, irrational opposition to these relations. This text was not a product of any kind of rational self-consciousness on the part of its creators. Although it had political consequences, it was not a political act.

Russian literary analyst Mikhail Bakhtin's understanding of cultural texts is very different indeed. It is precisely acts of rational interpretation, of figuring out and choosing between the languages of others which con-

stitutes his text. His text, like Barthes' in some ways, is a process, an active experience, but unlike Barthes' text, Bakhtin's process is aimed at the "difficult and complicated" struggle for sense-making, not the inscrutable, almost miraculous process of sense-breaking.

"Language," Bakhtin has written, "is not a neutral medium that passes freely and easily into the private property of the speaker's intentions; it is populated -- overpopulated -- with the intentions of others. Expropriating it, forcing it to submit to one's own intentions and accents, is a difficult and complicated process." (1981, p.294) Bakhtin, a literary scholar who examined literary texts for their ability to disclose social relations, searched for texts which were able to reveal the heteroglot (multi-voiced) nature of real living discourse. In the novels of Dostoevsky, Rabelais (particularly in the depiction of the carnival), and some others, he found this image of discourse.

In these novels, the author of the text did not assume a single-voiced authority over the languages to which he gave voice. The "voices" diverged from one another; they had subjective intentions which often contradicted one another, but did not cancel one another out. Each of the text's divergent voices had a meaningful validity. Although some voices had great power over others, in the

medium of a heteroglot text, even and perhaps especially, the powerless voices could, for once, be heard. In such a text, the voices may subjectively wish to compete with one another, to silence one another, but the textual medium prevents this from happening: crucially, there is no victor and no vanquished in this sort of text.

Barthes' analysis as a method of textual analysis stands in bold opposition to that of Bakhtin's. It is also the method most frequently used in popular critical analysis. In any daily newspaper in the United States, it is possible to find a representation of a Barthesian method of interpretation, while a Bakhtinian analysis of the heteroglot nature of cultural texts is rare indeed.

In Bakhtin's view there are discourses (he doesn't refer explicitly to ideology) which are indeed dominated. The text, for Bakhtin, does not serve to reproduce an image of discourse as it is ordinarily heard in situations where authority relations are fixed; instead, it produces an image of discourse that is most often unheard. The text reveals discourse that is not immediately apparent, but that is nevertheless ongoing, real. The "artificial" text (whether of the novel, or the depiction of carnival within the novel) displaces, but does not negate, oppressive relations of discursive power. There is no negation of structural power relations because, for Bakhtin, structure is

only an illusion (an illusion with real consequences, nevertheless). Life, including discursive practices, is ongoing, always in the making, and power relations, as for Foucault (1980, p.95-96), are dynamic relationships of force and resistance. Discourse, in this understanding of it, then, is not an apocalyptic war for negation, but an ongoing, everyday struggle to be heard. Bakhtin is not arguing, with Lefebvre (Everyday Life in the Modern World) that everyday life must be remade, but instead that it must be revealed, that is, heard.

But Barthes method is of great importance because it is so representative of the work of the popular critical theorist and of many praticioners of contemporary cultural studies. As a result, it requires closer examination.

In The Pleasure of the Text and in various other essays (including an important one for our purposes, "The Grain of the Voice"), Barthes aims to find this subversion or lack of subversion in a study of pleasure, specifically what he calls the pleasure of the "Text." A text, Barthes says, "is experienced only in an activity of active production... What constitutes the Text is... its subversive force in respect of the old classifications" (1977 [Essay:1971], p.157). A text is a work which is active, it "coincides with a liberation of symbolic energy," and is "radically symbolic." "A work," Barthes says, "conceived,

perceived and received in its integrally symbolic nature is a text" (Ibid., p.159). A text then, for Barthes, is a work engaged in the process of symbol-making. Symbol-making cannot take place, however, without dissolution of the structures of meaning which enable meaning to be made on an everyday basis. A "text," for Barthes, is a destructive force: the force which dissolves ideology.

Barthes, like most rock criticism, thinks that a vital means by which this subversion occurs (or does not occur) is through the realm of pleasure. And this pleasure is viewed as an almost socially neutral category; pleasure, for Barthes is an <u>essential</u> category of human experience.

There is, for Barthes, more than one kind of pleasure, and the distinctions between these types are, for him, of importance. They are not, nevertheless, social distinctions. There is, to begin with, the <u>text of pleasure</u>. "The text that contents, fills, grants euphoria; the text that comes from culture and does not break with it, is linked to a comfortable practice of reading." This is the pleasurable text which does not disrupt "ideology" and the making of symbols which are in tune with it. This text (a "work," really -- but Barthes does not promise that his definitions will not blur and run into one another quite often) does not lead to the production of what Gramsci might call the cathartic moment. This work confirms the

present oppressive, repetitive structure of things. This sort of pleasure "mythologizes" (Barthes, 1957) culture as it is ordinarily produced. It is a pleasure confirmed by "common sense."

Then there is the most crucial concept in Barthes' study of pleasure, the text of jouissance. The text of jouissance "imposes a state of loss" (1975, p.14). In Miller's 1975 translation of Pleasure of the Text, jouissance, a French word for which there is no proper English equivalent is mistranslated throughout as "bliss." Steven Heath, in his translator's notes to Image, Music, Text, points out that "not only does 'bliss' lack an effective verbal form (to render the French jouir), it also brings with it connotations of religious and social contentment ('heavenly bliss,' 'blissfully happy') which damagingly weaken the force of the original French term." Jouissance is not a state of being, but an experienced activity. The French use the word to refer to the active experience of sexual climax and to other experiences which bear some similarity to it. It means to actively enjoy something, but that does not convey the full essence of the term. It refers to ecstatic, rapturous, thrilling, wholly engaged enjoyment -- enjoyment (enjoying, we should say) which acts on the world. More to the point, as Barthes himself continually insists, jouissance creates "a loss," it destroys

something even as it creates. To experience jouissance, one must quite literally, "lose it," lose control of how one appears in the eyes of others: vitally, it is to lose one's cool. It is what rock critic Dave Marsh refers to as "fun," which to him means "letting go, finding a release: giving it up." (Marsh, 1985, p. 181)

In appropriate contexts, Barthes feels it is a means of producing signifiance (another French word which Miller continually and grievously mistranslates throughout the work as significance), the simultaneous destruction of signs and creation of symbols. Words like "pleasure" and "bliss" refer to significance, that is, that which already constitutes a sign system in place, an existing structure. Jouissance transforms a closed work-like structure into an open text. The oppressiveness of common-sense, of the taken-for-grantedness of cultural pleasure is shattered into senselessness. Jouissance, like sexual climax, represents an actively experienced and created explosion in which the ground is cleared. Since there can be no "dominated ideology," the only path left is to destroy the only one that already exists. In Barthes view, there is a universality to this experience; it can happen to anyone, anywhere. All contextual social dimensions are dissolved.

Since Barthes says he is interested only in signifiance and not in expression (that is, the expression of

significance), he is aware that many will assume that this signifiance has no relationship to social structures or sign systems that already exist. This is absolutely not the case. He clearly roots his intentions in "the social struggle" and says that jouissance "unsettles the reader's historical, cultural, psychological assumptions, the consistency of his tastes, values, memories, brings to a crisis his relation with language." (1975, p. 14) Who this "reader" is, though, is clearly not a concern for Barthes. For him, all readers have equal access to the process of signifiance.

Barthes does not want to deal only with signifiers at the expense of the signifieds; he wants to show how the relationship in which the signifieds are arranged can be exploded. He is not interested in what something <u>expresses</u> because to be interested in that confirms the relationship in which the signifieds are expressed. To give the signifieds credence also gives credence to the significance system as a whole. Barthes asks us to:

> Imagine an aesthetic... based entirely (completely, radically, in every sense of the word) on the <u>pleasure of the consumer</u>, whoever he may be, to whatever class he may belong, without respect to cultures or languages: the consequences would be huge, perhaps even harrowing..." (1975, p. 59)

It seems as if this was intended as a vision of revolu-

tion within and against the significance system of the consumer society. Such a vision, fully carried out, would, within Barthes' terms, implode that significance system. This is precisely the way in which Barthes' notion of signifiance would confront the system of significance and dissolve it.

The scenario which Barthes imagines above was, in fact, just the sort of aesthetic to which the popular critical theory of the original rock critics aspired. All social categories could be eradicated, in this view, in the rock revolution. Thus pop music could confront (or, on the other hand, merely express) itself, or sexuality, or religion, family, work, politics, law, (systems of power, of dominance) or whatever significance systems come its way. The music itself, not the people who made it or listened to it, had a subjective power all its own. It was "the magic that can set you free." The early popular critical theorists believed in music (to paraphrase John Sebastian). It can be said that, in many ways, Barthes was the first rock critic.

Barthes, like many of the rock critics, was interested in signifiance in music through what might be called "corporeal" means, that is, the very sound of it (particularly that of the human voice) because in this way the signified is not expressed (expression being the op-

posite of signifiance).

When listening to singing that created signifiance through the active experience of jouissance, Barthes said that what produced this experience for him was the "grain" of the voice. A voice has a grain only when, through the very "materiality of the body" in it, it produces jouissance.

Barthes says that the experience of pleasure can be called a "subjective" experience, because some might experience it and some might not (and any given individual might experience it at one time and not at another). This is not the case with jouissance. It is, Barthes says "precocious," it does not come when one is ready for it, but appears even when one least expects it (driving one's car, for instance, one might find oneself running off the road [see Marcus, 1975, p.94]). It affects an engaged listener in roughly the same way no matter what context in which they encounter it: jouissance specifically destroys the context.

Barthes' method of seemingly subjective (yet actually objectively empirical) pleasure can be described this way: if a listener experiences jouissance, he can be sure the creators did. It does not always work the other way around, however; a listener must actively engage the experience. A listener cannot, though, collaborate in an ex-

perience of jouissance with a creator who has not experienced it in the production of the work. Barthes theory, like popular critical theory, is not a true reception theory at all. It is, instead, a means of assessing the subjective (fetishized) power of cultural productions. Jouissance and the grain through which it passes are non-negotiable; it is not, in truth, a "subjective" experience -- just as every woman knows for certain whether or not "it" has occurred (regardless of whether her male partner knows it or not).

Barthes' method is actually an "effects" theory dressed up in post-structuralist attire and should be treated as such. It is not a method of cultural analysis rooted in the discordance of social subjectivities.

My study should demonstrate that the public text of Michael Jackson is not a monologue, an expression of what Roland Barthes called mythological speech (Barthes, 1957, 1972), but is instead a discursive process that becomes a thickly layered web out of which meanings emerge and are resisted.

The post-modern languages we speak today are seemingly fragmentary, disjointed, asocial, and ahistorical. As Jameson has often pointed out (1984), we are caught in sort of maelstrom of scattered information. Baudrillard even

suggests (1983) that we no longer lead "real" lives in this fragmented world. Alienation has not only become total, but has often been embraced in some quarters as pleasurable.

While this pleasure in disconnection may well describe the situation of many in the contemporary first world, it does little justice to the experience of those for whom this fragmentation of meaning causes suffering. While for some there is pleasure in "not making sense," for others, there is gnawing, unnamable, unplaceable pain. For those who can be located socially and historically as members of "subaltern" groups (most people, actually), there remains a need to make sense in order to make it through every day. It is precisely the members of such groups who speak in the most fragmentary languages, because social and historical language has been expropriated from them.

It is my position that the public text of Michael Jackson is part of an ongoing struggle to speak social and historical language beginning from subaltern positions within the field of post-modern discourse.

To begin from such a position is to start with nothing but fragments: shards of history and experience which, taken separately, make no sense. But if there is a way that the pieces can be woven together into something like an understandable social and historical story, then pain

can be transformed into pleasure and this pleasure can have a specifically political meaning for those who lack discursive power (as well as for those who posses it, and thus resist the sense-making process).

So this story is woven from the fragments into a text which makes social and historical sense. It becomes a political story told for political reasons; it is about the experience of powerlessness as incessant fear of the unknown. It also about the attempt to overcome that powerlessness through the act of knowing.

The present study approaches the text of Michael Jackson in narrative form because the text is produced as a result of a struggle to make sense of the textual fragments, that is to make sense of what at first appears senseless. The result is the construction of a narrative: a meaningful story which can be told by someone to someone and understood. Such a fragmented text does not form a smooth, monological narrative, nevertheless, but instead takes shape precisely at the points where the textual fragments diverge from one another. These points of divergence are social, historical, and ultimately, political. They are the points where power asserts itself and is resisted. As a result, no one, including myself, can escape implication in the process: this study is itself a part of of the process of the text.

Sense-making through the making of narratives can be a way for those who have had their stories appropriated from them to reappropriate their understanding of their social and historical position. Such narratives are constructed out of the shards of experience which confront people as disconnected and non-sensical. Individuals and groups then work together and against one another to make stories out of the scattered fragments.

This narrative approach, most importantly, takes account of history in a way that structuralist (and many post-structuralist) accounts do not. This denial of the importance of history is stated most clearly by Levi-Strauss in his critique of Sartre. (1966, pp. 245-269) While the democratic, leveling aspects of the post-modern approach to culture is certainly not to be discounted, it remains that all social groups do not stand in the same relation to the "post-modern condition." For some, this condition, characterized by a freedom from conventional practices of sense-making, is liberating, while for others it is unequivocally oppressive.

Some social groups know where they stand in relation to other groups in society precisely because that is the essence of their privilege. There are those who choose to celebrate this privilege and those who want to undermine it. That conflict (between right and left) is not at issue

here. What is of significance is that other social groups lack this privilege altogether and have to fight, moment to moment, to make sense. This is where feminist and non-western critiques of post-structuralism's yearning for the "death of the (bourgeois) subject" take on force. Such critics have justifiably pointed out that many social groups in modern society have been denied access to subjectivity in the first place: that is, they have never been "bourgeois."

So a narrative analysis of an ostensibly "post-modern" text (or set of textual fragments) represents an attempt to show the struggle for sense-making which is latent in the post-modern text. This form of analysis shows how a story is woven together out of the fragments against resistances of all kinds. These resistances include attempts to thwart the story-telling process as well as attempts to tell different versions of the story. There are, therefore, many "voices," as Bakhtin would have it, which go into the making of a narrative.

A) The voices forming the narrative begin with those associated with Michael Jackson's own biographical history as they are disclosed in published (or broadcast) first-person accounts. The emphasis here in this sharply focused examination of the Jackson biography(ies) will be on the responses of the people involved toward the values and prac-

tices of their everyday private lives. I will specifically want to find out what it is that people in this context work to keep out of public view, since the study should clearly show that it is Jackson's mechanically and electronically reproduced experience of his private history that is the object of the desire and fear which motivate the textual activity. It is important to stress at this point that this study is neither a psycho-history nor a biography, so these elements will be engaged directly only insofar as they contribute to an understanding of Michael Jackson's public text.

This biographical context serves as a particular site of the more generalized relations of (patriarchal, racist, and capitalist) domination with which the Michael Jackson narrative is concerned. The text is concerned with the creation and resistance to the creation of a narrative of Michael Jackson's experience, but it is not "experience" as an abstraction unconnected to a particular history. This history, lived through competing "voices," is contained within the production of the text itself. My investigations in this area will necessarily be limited to that which seems most relevant to the content of the text and to the form of the text process. My objective in this work is to find out what the public discourse of the text is ultimately about, so I will be consequently more interested

in what people do not wish to reveal, than in what they're actually eager to tell. Since this biographical sphere of Jackson's text is the place where discourse is most rigorously silenced, I want to capture what it is that "should" not be spoken about. As a result, any attempts by interested parties (Latoya Jackson's 1991 account of her life as a Jackson, for example, or Frederic Dannen's 1990 exposè of corruption and exploitation in the recording industry) to "blow the lid off," so to speak, this enforcement of silence are not as interesting, theoretically, as the denials which these attempts elicit.

It is this private context of power enforced through silence (Jackson's biographical history as I have found it) that, in essence, everyone is talking about -- in public. With the advent of Jackson's public success, this context is submerged beneath (and contained within) Jackson's mechanically reproduced public responses. It is through the interpretive activity of the public text that the web of responses and counter-responses reveal and resist social and historical understanding of this context. In this case those meanings primarily concern the values and practices of everyday private life: that is, the consequences of patriarchal modes of power relations.

B) The story of Jackson's experience first came to be told publicly when he began, as a young child, to sell on

the open market his thoughts and feelings in the form of cultural artifacts. These artifacts include live performances before audiences (some of which are preserved on film and tape), filmed narratives which accompany songs ("videos"), and sound recordings. These artifacts, which appear as textual fragments, are crucial documents toward the process of making an understandable narrative from the fragments.

When these artifacts gained value as commodities, Jackson became part of the star-making system of Western show business. His "personality," as it was revealed publicly, also became another artifact for sale and thus, public examination. Once Jackson became a celebrity, every publicly observable action or gesture was transformed into a commodity to be broadcast, sold directly, or published. So any of these electronically and mechanically reproduced public actions can be considered documents of the public text.

C) During this period, more voices entered the text process. Some of the more important ones came from print media outlets including fan magazines like Right On and Black Beat, Rolling Stone magazine and the Village Voice, other rock magazines like Crawdaddy and Spin, and daily newspapers. The electronic media, as well, have contributed enormously to forming the text.

This area of research may actually be the most important line of inquiry. These media contributions are rich with strong and loud-voiced opinions; this is where most of the overtly noisiest discourse concerning Jackson takes place.

Sometimes, though, the noise is made in order to re-establish silence and thus help maintain the context of domination out of which the text originally emerges. Much of the text takes shape with the commentaries, interpretations, ridicule, and, occasionally, celebrations which emanate from the electronic and print media. It should be pointed out that these contributions most often stand in opposition to the responses of Jackson's fans.

D) It should be clear, at this point, that my own voice is very much a crucial element in the narrative process of this study, but is, by no means, the only one. The text process takes place beyond my own construction of it here. This study, then, could be considered <u>one</u> public text of Michael Jackson.

My concern in this study is to explore the ramifications of very different theoretical and methodological perspectives on the study of mechanically reproduced public texts in the late twentieth century; the text of Michael Jackson in particular offers a superb opportunity to engage these conflicts in theory and method at their greatest de-

gree of intensity because Jackson's text represents a critique in the flesh which embodies the theoretical challenges originally made by Bakhtin and Benjamin.

Part II: The Public Text of Michael Jackson

THE PUBLIC TEXT OF MICHAEL JACKSON

"I'm told that my great-great-grandfather was a slave, and he used to sing in the church in Russell County, Alabama where I was born. People told me that when the church windows were open, you could hear my great-great-grandfather's voice ringing out all over the valley," Katherine Jackson, Michael's mother, told People magazine in 1984. "Our favorite music was Country & Western, because the radio stations my father listened to played Suppertime Frolic and the Grand Ole Opry programs. In those days we didn't have television.

"I had no illusions about getting into the business. Times were hard, and who ever heard of a black person getting anywhere by singing Country & Western back in the '40's?" (K. Jackson, People Extra, November/December, p.

10)

In 1990, years after several of her children had become extraordinarily famous entertainers, Katherine wrote a book chronicling the family's story. The book was not written as an ordinary tale of struggle and triumph by a proud show-business parent, but was instead a pre-emptive strike fired against other versions of the story which were soon to appear. In Katherine's book, her daughter Latoya (b.1956) is portrayed as living out the only real tragedy the family had ever known: public shame. In a fit of rebellion, Latoya left the family home at the age of thirty-two and promptly dismayed the family by posing nearly nude in Playboy magazine. That was not the end of it, though: to several family members' horror, Latoya claimed to be writing a book which would reveal the "true" story of the Jackson family.

This action, in turn, sent other writers in search of a story and soon several works were in progress which threatened to shatter the twenty-year long image of the Jacksons as the ideal American family: loving, loyal, hard-working and proud. Although Latoya denied none of these attributes to her family in numerous pre-publication interviews, she viewed the Jacksons' version of the American Dream as a nightmare from which she had finally awakened. The family found out (or made the assumption) that the book

was to include tales of exploitation, extreme violence, sexual betrayal, and possibly even incest (which Katherine called "the Biggest Lie of them all"). (K. Jackson, Ebony, October, 1990, p. 64) In other words, Latoya would reveal the ideal American family as the typical American family.

But set in a social context in which African-American families struggled against popular perceptions to prove that their families could be just as well-adapted to American middle-class mores as any other social group, Latoya's bombshell could be viewed as a betrayal of her people as a whole as well as just her individual family. It would be entirely accurate to suggest that some would read the revelations as the story of "just another" dysfunctional black family (even though she didn't threaten to portray them as anything less than functional in terms of most conventional standards for judging such functionality: no drugs, no prison [that is, until Randy Jackson's 1991 sentencing to a domestic violence rehab], and plenty of adored grandchildren). On the other hand Latoya's story could work to reveal the ideals of patriarchal familial nobility as themselves false and destructive. None of this, though, could concern Latoya and those who also clamored to get the news; there was a story waiting to be told. One question remains for us: why? What created interest in the telling of this story in the first place?

After trying and failing to prevent Latoya's version of their story from coming out, the best some of the other Jacksons could do was to mount a defense and attempt to discredit their daughter as a source (claiming, for instance, that she was a dupe of her exploitative manager). (Joseph Jackson's "denial" of his daughter's allegation that she and her siblings were often beaten with fists was both amusing and frightening: "Maybe I should've punched Latoya, like any other normal parent would do, but Latoya stayed quiet and never did get into any trouble or nothing." ["Latoya's Dad Explains," Orange County Register, November 15, 1991, p.A2])

In her 1990 book (K. Jackson, 1990, pp. 8-12), Katherine tells her story (again, the "true" story) from the beginning.

Katherine Scruse and her family left rural Russell County, Alabama when she was four years old and settled in East Chicago, Indiana, not far from Gary. She says that her father, Prince Albert Scruse, a Pullman porter for the Illinois Central, and her mother, Martha Upshaw, a domestic, divorced. The parents split the children, Katherine living with her father and her sister Hattie with her mother. Katherine missed her mother and her mother apparently felt the same, because she was kidnaped at the age of nine and they all found themselves back in Alabama.

When Prince Albert agreed not to come after Katherine anymore, Martha took the girls back up North. Martha eventually remarried a man named Johnny Bridges. (According to Latoya, Bridges was beloved by his step-grandchildren who called him "Papa." [L. Jackson, 1991, p. 20]) Although Katherine was a sick child since contracting polio as a baby, she and her sister were responsible for the upkeep of their home. As a domestic, Martha didn't want to have to do any cooking and cleaning when she returned home. "My least favorite chore," Katherine remembers (1990, p. 10) "was taking the lace curtains down and washing, starching, and stretching them with those old curtain stretchers we had. Gosh, I used to hate doing that."

In 1949, Katherine married Joseph Jackson, a 20-year-old crane operator at a Gary steel mill. Although Joseph had been married briefly, Katherine had always had her eye on him, and when he and his wife split up, they hit it off. They were soon married. Michael, their seventh child, once told an interviewer that he was never told how his parents met.

"They won't! Kitty (mistranscribed: "Katy" is Katherine's nickname) starts blushing over the whole thing, I mention it, and she starts blushing. She says, 'Now why you wanna ask that?' I think it was in high school or something, when he was young.

"I don't know anything about it. They won't discuss it. [giggles] It's hard to picture." (White, 1990, p.474)

Joseph's father, Samuel, was a school teacher in Arkansas before he and his wife Chrystal divorced. "My father was very strict," Joe said in an early interview. "He really went to us. I'm glad that happened. I might not have been able to do the things I've done without a strict raising." (White, 1990, p.462) After the divorce, Samuel moved with Joseph, then in his early teens, to Oakland, California, leaving the rest of his siblings with their mother who moved to Gary, Indiana. It is not clear why Samuel chose Joseph to come with him. According to Katherine (and also according to relatives Latoya has spoken to over the years), Joseph was a loner as a boy, virtually friendless, and often cut school to spend the day by himself. One can only speculate as to how Samuel, the teacher, reacted to this, or as to the reasons why the teacher's son avoided school. Samuel remarried twice in Oakland. As soon as he was old enough, Joseph rejoined his mother. (K. Jackson, 1990, p. 14) Samuel later came to Gary and remarried Chrystal.

Joseph, his brother Luther, and three others spent their spare time playing in a rhythm & blues blues band they called the Falcons. (K. Jackson, 1990, p. 16) Unlike Katherine, he did have illusions of making it in the music

business. The group performed acapella R&B ("doo-wop"), backed by a hired band, at various dates around Gary during the very early 1950s. Katherine says the group included James "Pookie" Hudson, who later became lead singer and songwriter for the influential doo-wop group "The Spaniels," which had a major hit with "Goodnight, Sweetheart, Goodnight." (20 Rockin' Oldies, Trip Records TOP-50-6) (Ibid., p.17)

The Spaniels were made up of singers from Roosevelt High School in Gary (Shaw, 1978, p. 315), which is located directly in back of Joseph and Katherine's old house there. They were one of the premiere early doo-wop groups, noted for their extremely cool and restrained sound. Their records were direct precursors to the cool sound of 1960's Chicago soul music forged by Jerry Butler, Curtis Mayfield, and the Impressions. (The Impressions -- The Vintage Years, Sire Records re-issue SASH-3717-2, 1976) This music wasn't the raucous electrified blues sound of the earlier post-war black migrants from the south, but instead the work of the children of migration: those who found themselves learning to live in a new, somewhat unpredictable and frightening urban environment where one restrained one's emotions in order to survive. Many of the later records had a powerful spiritual component which related strong messages about maintaining one's grace under pressure and, more crucially,

maintaining hope in the face of despair. Katherine says that when Hudson left the Falcons, the group disbanded. Hudson and his new group signed a recording contract with Vee Jay records (one of the very first successful black-owned record labels) and went on to a relatively successful career, while Joseph ended up putting his old guitar in a bedroom closet.

Michael later told an interviewer that he and his father never discussed Joseph's old show business career. "No. I don't think he needs to talk about it. He's never talked about it. All we know is that he had a group." After the group disbanded, Joseph and his brother would still sometimes jam around the house before an audience of Joseph's small children. Michael remembers that they played "the blues and stuff." (White, 1990, p. 473)

By 1960, Joe and Katherine had seven children, five boys and two girls. Michael was born on August 29, 1958. There were difficult times during this period: Joe was laid off during the recession, and one of the boys, Jermaine (b.1954), had a serious kidney ailment from which he almost died. According to Katherine, at one point they thought of pulling up stakes and moving to the west coast, where Joseph had lived as a teenager. All this time the family maintained their interest in music. Katherine sang country songs to the children (Michael says this is his first

memory of his mother) and Joe kept his guitar in a closet as "memory piece." The boys were warned never to touch it.

Michael has told the story of the founding of the Jackson Five several times. Each time he's told it, he's left out one or more elements of the sequence of events, so it's useful to present the differing accounts. First, in a 1977 interview, Tito (eight or nine years old at the time) is presented with a challenge.

"See, my father had a group, with his brothers, the Falcons. And Tito (b.1953) would get in so much trouble for playing Dad's guitar. One day Tito broke a string, and my father got so mad at him, so angry, he said, 'Lemme see what you can play! If you can't play that, I'm a really beat you.

"Tito was scared, but when he could play, my father was shocked. He was so good, by just sneaking and playing. My father thought, Well, there's some kind of talent here, and he started saving up money, buying up instruments and microphones and amplifiers." (White, 1990, p.472)

In 1983, Michael added that something took place prior to the challenge.

"When he found Tito playing it, he whipped him, let him have it," (Marsh, 1985, p. 23), "Then he said to Tito, 'Let me see what you can do.' And he meant it." Once again, in this account, Tito acquits himself admirably.

As for Tito himself, he simply reported that "He caught me and tore me up." (Ibid.)

In his 1988 ghostwritten memoirs, Moonwalk, Michael tells the story once more, leaving the visual details to the reader's imagination, while concentrating on what the experience felt like.

> Of course, something had to give sooner or later, and one day a string broke. My brothers panicked. There wasn't time to get it repaired before Dad came home, and besides, none of us knew how to go about getting it fixed. My brothers never figured out what to do, so they put the guitar back in the closet and hoped fervently that my Dad would think it broke by itself. Of course, Dad didn't buy that, and he was furious. My sisters told me to stay out of it and keep a low profile. I heard Tito crying after Dad found out and went to investigate, of course. Tito was on his bed crying when Dad came back and motioned for him to get up. (M. Jackson, 1988, p.20)

Once again Tito responds to his father's challenge with an excellent performance. After Joseph finds himself pleasantly surprised with his son's musical abilities, a new character enters the tale in Michael's account. "At this point," Michael recalls in his memoirs (p. 21), "my mother stepped in and voiced her enthusiasm for our abilities. She told him that we boys had talent and he should listen to us."

Katherine freely admits that she knew that the boys had been playing the guitar for some time before the inci-

dent and had promised not to tell, but in her version of the story, the denoument is quite different. She not only includes herself as a central character, but in her account, she protects her son from his father's wrath.

"'Who did this?' he demanded, holding up his now five string guitar.

"'Tito,' the brothers immediately replied.

"At that moment I spoke up.

"'I gave Tito permission to take out the guitar,' I lied." (K. Jackson, 1990, p. 49)

In Katherine's account, Joe confronts her before asking Tito what he could play on the guitar. Here Tito is neither beaten nor threatened, thanks to his mother's intervention. Both Michael's oft-repeated story of the overtly threatening challenge and Tito's own testimony of getting "torn up" are discounted by their mother. There were apparently no tears, because she adds, "Tito calmly proceeded to perform some of his favorite riffs." (emphasis mine, Ibid.)

Retelling stories or anecdotes of everyday events is an act of reclamation for those who are subordinated. It revitalizes vanquished discourse. Physical violence is a discursive act; when a child, woman, or any physically weaker individual is struck physically, their vantage point is, at that moment, destroyed. A dialogic relation is

transformed into a monologue through violent negation of the subordinated person's subjectivity. The child may begin with an explanation: 'Mom let us play with it, we were just, we were only trying to' ... BAM. End of story. The parent never really wanted an explanation because the child's vantage point was never accorded any validity. A parent (or a husband or boyfriend or cop) only requests the explanation to vanquish it. For the subordinated person in this relation to attempt to maintain the validity of their point of view is to ask for more violence. To retell the incident from one's own point of view is to reclaim one's subjective discursive position, that is, to bring it back into existence.

Katherine's version of the tale is important because it expresses counter-resistance to this reclamation of the boys' subjectivity. Her retelling is an attempt to end the story once again (and once and for all). But so long as the story is retold, the "original incident" is still going on: the dialogic relation continues resisting the monologue of power (in this case patriarchal power).

After the incident, everyone agrees that Joseph encouraged the boys to practice on the guitar. Michael was about three-and-a-half at this time and didn't do much more than watch at first. Soon Joseph (as he wished to be addressed by his children; according to LaToya he never

wanted to be called "Dad" [L. Jackson, 1990, p. 6) bought Tito a shiny new red guitar and announced that anyone who agreed to practice could play it.

Although Michael didn't get much, if any, time at the guitar, he soon began to copy the older boys' singing. At some point the idea occurred to Joe that he could try entering the kids in talent contests. He began to set aside serious time to train them. By the time Michael was five, he was installed as the group's lead singer. From the beginning, everyone found him astonishing and Joe probably considered the novelty value of having such a tiny front man.

Apparently Joe now spent much of his time thinking seriously about cooking up an image and style for his singing group. He went often to Chicago to keep up with what was happening in the music business, catching the Temptations, James Brown, Jackie Wilson, all the top new acts. He'd then come home and see to it that his boys could replicate what he saw.

"My father was a great trainer," Michael says in his memoirs. "He'd sit at home with us every day after school and rehearse us. We'd perform for him and he'd critique us. If you messed up, you got hit, sometimes with a belt, sometimes with a switch." (M. Jackson, 1988, p. 29)

Michael says that while his brother Marlon was always

getting it for missing a step or a note, he had a relatively easy time in rehearsal. It was at other times that he had the most trouble with his father.

> ...I'd get beaten for things that happened mostly outside of rehearsal. Dad would make me so mad and hurt that I'd try to get back at him and get beaten all the more. I'd take a shoe and throw it at him, or I'd just fight back, swinging my fists. That's why I got it more than all my brothers combined. I would fight back and my father would kill me, just tear me up. Mother told me I'd fight back even when I was very little, but I don't remember that. I do remember running under tables to get away from him, and making him angrier. We had a turbulent relationship. (Ibid., pp. 29-30)

"And these songs," Berry Gordy, Jr., owner and founder of Motown Records, wondered later on, "sung with a certain amount of pain -- he was a kid, so where did he get that pain from?" (Rolling Stone, August 23, 1990, p. 77)

"Nowadays," according to Katherine, "when you spank a child a little bit too much, the public calls it child abuse." (K. Jackson, 1990, p. 40)

During the 1970's, after Joseph's group (now called the Jackson Five) achieved a considerable degree of popularity, the Jackson family was often lauded for the "positive image" of family life which they represented. Biographer Nelson George points out that, "in attitude (Joseph and Katherine) weren't very different from any typi-

cal middle-American couple." Since a "typical middle-American couple" is actually not African-American, but white, we can assume that this is the comparison George wishes to make. And what, in George's view, are the attributes of that "typical couple" who are white and "middle-American"? "He (the father) was the strong-willed provider;" George insists, "she (the mother) was the family's comforter who both stood behind her husband and guided him at the same time." (George, 1984, pp. 26-27)

This is all true. Joseph was certainly strong-willed, and he provided in many ways. And Katherine stood behind her husband.

> One day Joe had returned from working the swing shift at Inland Steel, and had gone to bed. Rebbie (b. 1950) was already asleep in her crib. I went into the backyard to hang some clothes on the line, saw my neighbor Edna Humphrey in her backyard, and walked over to chat with her. A few minutes later, Joe stormed into the backyard in his pajamas.
>
> "Why don't you come in and see about the baby?!" he yelled. "She's screaming."
>
> Joe returned inside. I was a few feet behind him.
>
> "I didn't know you had awakened," I said.
>
> Suddenly Joe lost it. He wheeled around and struck me on my right cheek. My cheek went numb. (K. Jackson, 1990, pp. 114-115)

And guided him. She says, in fact, that she retaliated, "slashed his right arm," and, as a result, he never hit her again.

> As ugly as that incident was, I managed to put it behind me. Our marriage was young and otherwise good, and we were starting to build our family. In addition, I was committed to keeping my childhood vow to stay with my husband, so that my children would be reared by both their natural parents. (Ibid., p. 115)

So, "in addition," she would stay with him, regardless of whether she was struck again or not. In 1989, nearly forty years after the "ugly incident," she wrote that "he still was prone to moodiness. Sometimes he'd get so mad about something or other that his forehead would sort of raise up and he would change color -- a tip that I should take the day off and go shopping." (Ibid., p. 198-199) In 1985, Katherine was given an award by Essence magazine (a magazine targeted at African-American women) as woman of the year "... for victoriously upholding the value of the unified family and for being a radiant example of how spirituality moves mountains." (Ibid., btw. pp. 110-111)

Nelson George's characterization of the Jacksons as the ideal family is rooted in an historical context where "the black family" is viewed by many as what Daniel Patrick Moynihan referred to in his controversial, yet influential study, "The Negro Family: The Case For National Action,": a "tangle of pathology." This pathology was represented basically by families without fathers. In such a family, there is no "strong-willed provider," and since mother worked to

support the children, no "comforter who both stood behind her husband and guided him at the same time." Such a family, in Moynihan's view, could not inculcate the values associated with economic success and domestic serenity which, according to him, were commonplace in white families. (Rainwater and Yancy, 1967, p.51)

While most of the first critiques of the report (see Rainwater and Yancy, 1967) expressed outrage that blacks were being blamed for the consequences of white racism, the fundamental observation that "matriarchal" families were inherently inferior went largely unchallenged. Feminist critiques did challenge this argument later on, but saw the report as a whole as an attack on black women. "Your problem, buddy, he seemed to suggest," Michele Wallace wrote (1978, p.110), "is that black woman of yours." It was not an attack aimed at <u>women</u>, though, it was an attack on <u>mothers</u> -- mothers sans fathers -- and a broadside launched in the name of the importance of fathers and patriarchal practices.

There were, in the assumptions of the report, certain aspects of family life which could only be performed by fathers. But history, Moynihan said, "worked against the emergence of a strong father figure." Moynihan discusses the attraction of military service to young black men.

> ... it is an utterly masculine world. Given the strains of the disorganized and matrifocal family life in which so many Negro youth came of age, the armed forces are a dramatic and desperately needed change: a world away from women, a world run by strong men of unquestioned authority, where discipline, if harsh, is nonetheless orderly and predictable, and where rewards, if limited, are granted on the basis of performance. (Rainwater and Yancy, 1967, p. 88)

It was important for boys to be impressed by the imposition of male authority over women and children if those boys were to become successful men. Women, clearly, could not fill in and perform this role. A boy needed a "mother" too, though, to see how patriarchal domination is supposed to work. A boy needed a father in order to become a father himself. In Moynihan's view, if a black boy was able to accomplish that, nothing in American society would stand in his way. For Moynihan, it was not contemporary racism that created social obstacles for blacks, but instead the dissolution of patriarchal practices in a large segment of their community. Moynihan was addressing not blacks alone, but was, more importantly, sounding a warning to society at large.

Here Moynihan was working within the traditions of American social science. For many years sociologists (Parsons and Bales, 1955) had insisted on the importance of maintaining the nuclear family. In this perspective, the nuclear family (characterized so aptly by Nelson George) is

vital to the functionality of society as a whole. During the 1960s, this model of family organization was challenged by various alternatives. There was a growing sense that partriarchal authority structures (as they were represented, for example, by the military) were under siege.

Most of the critiques of Moynihan did not, however, pick up on this sense of anxiety over changing orders of social authority. One critique (Gutman, 1976), for instance, was able to show that Moynihan got the fundamental historical facts about black families wrong, but was unwilling to challenge the report's basic assumptions about the importance of fathering practices. Another justifiably famous critique, Carol Stack's All Our Kin (1974), showed how the practices of "fathering" and "mothering" could be carried out by many different family members, but did not critique the conventionally accepted practices of fathering and mothering themselves (which included, in Stack's study, extraordinarily abusive treatment of children [note the "scenes" depicted on pages 74-82 wherein anyone with culturally legitimate "rights in children" is permitted to strike or otherwise terrorize children. One child's loose tooth is pulled ferociously from her mouth without success ["scene one," p. 74-75]; the child screamed, kicked, and even bit her aunt during the abortive tooth-pulling). For Stack there were a cluster of parental "rights and duties

in children" which were shared equally by various female kinsmen, not split sharply between the two members of the conjugal unit. She gives a description of the exercise of some of those rights and duties.

> Economic providers are expected to share in providing subsistence and scarce goods, daily meals, food stamps, a bed, a blanket, clothes and shoes. Discipliners (primarily women) are allowed to participate in the control of children. At their own discretion, they may beat -- usually with a green branch stripped of leaves -- threaten, terrify, blame, or scare children for unacceptable social behavior. Trainers not only discipline but teach moral values and respect for adults. The consequences are taught by trainers by harsh, clear example. One afternoon Ruby's four-year-old daughter and my son Kevin were bored from being kept indoors on a cold winter day. The four-year-old grabbed a book of matches from the kitchen and was lighting them one by one, and both children were blowing them out with great joy. Ruby and I were talking in the dining room. She saw what was happening, rushed over, and held a burning match to her daughter's arm, slightly blistering the skin. (Stack, 1974, p. 84-85)

Stack is clearly trying to prove a point by going into such gruesome detail: women, she appears to be saying, are most definitely not faint-hearted in the discipline and training of children. The teaching of "moral values and respect for adults" are not neglected one iota in the matriarchal black community derided by Moynihan as "weak." She defends matriarchy on the terms of patriarchal domination. She doesn't question whether these conventionally accepted (that is, patriarchal) practices are necessary,

just, or even good for those who are subject to them. Fundamental questions about the nature and kind of authority relations which are carried out within all kinds of family organizations go unaddressed.

More importantly, what goes unaddressed in even the best of the critiques of Moynihan is the report's trembling anxiety over the dissolution of patriarchal domination in society as a whole, not merely for lower-class blacks. This is the real motivation for the report: a sense that the old conventions might very well be slipping away in a sizable sector of the population. This is also the source of Katherine Jackson's annoyed confusion that "the public" will "nowadays" call conventional patriarchal practices of child-rearing a crime. She thought she'd "victoriously (upheld) the value of the unified family." How could "the public" begin to question what she and Joseph had all along been applauded for? But Moynihan had seen it all coming.

It is in the context of this social anxiety that the Jackson family eventually appeared in 1969 as a group of dedicated, hard-working young black boys who bowed and scraped before the authority of their "strong-willed" black father. They lived in "an utterly masculine world" run by a strong man of "unquestioned authority." In terms of the report's assumptions, this family would not only be able to

reproduce patriarchy in their personal lives as they matured, but would set an example for others. The Jackson Five had always been (and would always remain) Joseph Jackson's personal project, that is, a production of patriarchal authority.

During the sixties, while Joe was busy buying a growing supply of professional quality equipment (over his wife's objections), the boys enjoyed that part of the day when they were in school. "We loved going to school," Jermaine said, "because it was the only time when we could play and let off steam doing things like physical education." (Marsh, 1985, p. 21) Michael recalls that he adored his teachers so much that he would steal his mother's jewelry to give them as gifts. He was eventually caught. As each school day ended, though, the boys returned to that world of utter masculinity and harsh discipline that Moynihan thought young black boys yearned for. Michael remembers not yearning, though, but dread.

"We left the Garret (sic) Elementary School building for the short walk home, but we had to hurry," Michael remembers. "I remember getting anxious as a car swept by, then another." (M. Jackson, 1988, p. 54) The boys were required to be on time for rehearsals or preparations to leave town for appearances.

By 1966, there were two more young children in the

house (a boy, Randy [b. 1962] and a new baby girl, Janet [b. 1966]), and the five oldest boys had started to make a name for themselves locally. According to legend, they almost always won whatever contest they entered. Soon they were playing black theaters in Chicago, Detroit, Philadelphia, and finally New York. They occasionally performed on the lower rungs of a bill that included James Brown and his Famous Flames. Brown remembers that Joe tried to get him to make the group part of his traveling revue, but felt he had to turn him down in spite of his admiration for Michael's talents. Brown couldn't see taking five young children out of school -- he didn't think it was right. (Brown, 1986, p. 154) Joe was only working part-time now at the steel mill and the out-of-town trips were expensive, so he began booking the boys into local nightclubs, the first of which was called Mr. Lucky's. Still rehearsing for several hours every afternoon, according to Michael they did five sets a night, six or seven nights a week.

Several of the clubs they worked in were strip-joints. The boys, including nine-year-old Michael, were permitted to watch everything. "My father wouldn't mind." (M. Jackson, 1988, p. 38) In addition to the stripping, Michael saw transvestism and possibly sex acts on stage involving the strippers and the customers. "... she was one of those stripteasers, and she would take her drawers off, and a man

would come up, and they'd start doing -- aw, man! She was too funky! Ugh! That, to me, was awful!" (White, 1990, p. 484) Michael still remembers a New York transvestite with "gorgeous eyelashes." When "she" pulled the oranges out of her bra, he was, he says, "blown away." (M. Jackson, 1988, pp. 38-39) Katherine says she knew nothing of this until Michael's book appeared in 1988 (even though he recalled the experience in a national magazine ten years earlier). Apparently she was never curious to find out what sort of nightclub Mr. Lucky's actually was. (K. Jackson, 1990, p. 59) Perhaps she thought it was out of the range of her authority to question her husband's choices in these matters.

Michael loved playing the theaters on what was called the "chitlin' circuit," especially the opportunity to watch and learn from acts as powerful and compelling as Brown, Jackie Wilson, Sam and Dave, and all the Motown performers. Michael says he roamed unsupervised all around each theater, watching the performers from backstage ("crouching real low, holding on to the dusty, smelly curtain" [M. Jackson, 1988, p. 48]) and figuring out how some of the stage technology worked. Microphones disappeared beneath the floorboards and Michael would race down the steps to see where they went. Most of all, he wanted a pair of glistening patent leather shoes like the ones Jackie Wilson wore.

Sometimes, though, his experiences were less than thrilling. Joe was trying to get into a management partnership with Sam Moore of Sam and Dave, offering a percentage of the group, but Moore turned him down. He was, Dave Marsh reports, a big fan of Michael's, but his memories of Joseph are not fond. "Moore remembers Joe locking Michael into the group's dingy dressing rooms so that the old man could go off and play cards or carouse. Michael would simply sit and tremble..." (Marsh, 1985, p. 53)

Sometime in early 1968, Joe got the boys an opportunity to record for a small Gary label called Steeltown Records. Although they cut several singles for the label, Joe knew that these would only be of promotional value. It was important to have a record out if one wanted get better paying gigs, but the record did not necessarily have to sell very well. Their first single, "Big Boy," was a Chicago soul ballad about a boy ready to throw away his toys after finding love for the first time. "Fairy tales, fairy tales," he sings with great yearning, "have lost their charm." He passionately begs his new love to believe that he really has grown up. There's a pained desperation in his voice that makes the simple tune sound almost profound. He was able to convey, with a certain grace, what a little boy really feels when trying to convince others of the seriousness of his intentions and emotions.

(The Jackson 5 and Johnny -- Beginning Years 1967-68, S.D.E.G. Records, 1989)

The afternoon rehearsal sessions continued and intensified during this period and the group began to get gigs as far away as Arizona. In Chicago, their shows were becoming a staple of the local scene.

Somehow, in spite of all this activity, several of the oldest boys managed to excel in high school sports. The eldest bother, Jackie, had a shot at a professional baseball career before the group was signed to Motown. Michael, on the other hand, appeared to show little or no interest in anything other than show business (although he did regularly accompany his mother to the local Jehovah's Witnesses Kingdom Hall). When not performing or practicing (even in school he'd stand in front of the boysroom mirror going over dance steps), he disappeared into the television, engrossed in old Hollywood musicals and cartoons. He particularly loved the sado-masochistic bungling of The Three Stooges.

"Escapism," Michael would later call it, and consider his duty to provide it to an audience. Michael's commitment to success in this world of "escape" now exceeded anything Joseph could enforce upon him. His father even expressed some bewilderment that Michael, unlike his brothers, took no interest in sports, but was instead, ac-

cording to Joseph, "strictly show business." (White, December, 1978, p. 50) After the group won the Apollo Theater's talent contest, Michael was convinced he could no longer lose. "There was something changing in me," he recalls. (M. Jackson, 1988, p. 60) On stage, he would always feel invincible. "For me, it's the safest place in the world," he said in 1983. "I can't be hurt on stage; I could sleep on stage. I hate to leave stage." (television interview, America's Top Ten)

By late 1968, the group was thoroughly professional and poised to go nationwide. Although they did not yet have a recording contract with a substantial label, they were invited to appear on a new syndicated talk show called The David Frost Show which was to begin taping in New York. Michael was ecstatic at the prospect of "look(ing) into a television camera." (M. Jackson, 1988, p. 53) What happened next is not entirely clear: either the group was already on their way to New York for the taping, or, according to Michael, the news came before they left. In any case, fate, as they say, intervened: "Motown called." Motown would later tell the world that Diana Ross discovered the group at a benefit concert in Gary for Mayor Richard Hatcher, but none of this actually happened. Both Gladys Knight and Bobby Taylor of the Vancouvers recommended the group to Berry Gordy (the founder of the most

successful black-owned business in America, Motown Records) and the group was finally asked to come to Detroit for an audition.

Before they left for Detroit, Jermaine told Michael he had an idea: "we ought to take off for Motown ourselves and leave Dad." It seemed that Jackie had a learner's permit and a set of keys. Michael laughed at the suggestion, thought it was nice idea, but nevertheless figured it wouldn't make any difference. "...deep down I couldn't imagine going without Dad. Even on the occasions when Mom led our after-school rehearsals because Dad hadn't come home from his shift on time, it was still like having him there because she was his eyes and ears. It seemed they almost gave each other signals or something." (M. Jackson, 1988, p. 57-58) Ten-year-old Michael apparently understood something his older brother did not: one could perhaps escape an individual father without escaping the system of domination which he represented.

So they all got into the V.W. minibus for the trip to Detroit. Michael says he no longer became nervous in situations like this; he expected to pass the audition. According to those who've seen the full tape of it made for Gordy, Michael was a knockout. He was out front the whole time, going through his entire repertoire, while his brothers kept a low profile behind him. They seem to have

been instructed not to draw attention to themselves.

When Gordy met with the group for the first time, he was very excited. He told the children that they would become The Next Big Thing, would have three number one records in a row and be as big as the Supremes. He immediately took the kids from Joe and Katherine and moved them into his homes in Detroit and later in California. After a brief time when the kids were put up by the company in an inexpensive West Hollywood motel frequented primarily by drug addicts and prostitutes (Gold, 1989, p. 36 and Taraborrelli, 1991, p. 43), Gordy took them to his neighborhood where he shared looking after them with Diana Ross (this part of the Diana tale appears to be true).

Within a short space of time the act had to be polished enough to be considered one of the major Motown groups in league with the Temptations and the Supremes. Although the kids worked hard, they now had more free time than they imagined existed. Michael loved California so much that he describes himself as almost dizzy with happiness when he first arrived. The weather was so warm, he got to see Disneyland and Hollywood, and, of course, the tension of Joseph's rehearsal sessions was obliterated. He also adored Diana who seemed to take a special interest in the little boy, teaching him to paint, taking him shopping and to museums. He never mentions being homesick or miss-

ing his parents. (M. Jackson, 1988, pp. 67-69)

After a while, Gordy felt they were ready to cut their first record. Staff songwriters Fonce Mizell and Freddie Perren had written a new song for Gladys Knight when Gordy was looking for something to record with his important new group. The song was originally called "I Want To be Free" before Gordy had the writers alter the lyrics in a more juvenile mode. The brothers spent a long day and night cutting take after take of "I Want You Back" (Motown re-issue, 1986, MCD08019MD) before the producers felt they'd come up with an acceptable performance. When the song was presented to Gordy, he announced "You guys are getting ready to blow a hit." (George, 1984, p. 62) The kids went back in the studio under Gordy's direct supervision this time. Gordy remembers how determined Michael seemed at the time. "He stared at me all the time. The other kids would play around, hit each other. But Michael would sit there and pay attention." (People, November 7, 1988, p. 144)

Before the record was released, however, Gordy spent time crafting an image for the group. In the manner of Motown tradition, they were instructed how to talk, act, and dress in public. As much time was spent designing stage costumes and hairstyles for the group as was spent making the record. The boys let their hair grow into

naturals. It was sort of decided that no one in America would have a finer, more perfectly round Afro than Michael Jackson. The Jackson Five's image would be post-sixties hip, but clean and wholesome enough for the middle-class black teeny-boppers who would buy their records.

Just as Brian Epstein freshened up the Beatles' dingy background, erasing their Hamburg Starclub days as if they never were, so would Gordy suppress the Jackson Five's past as headliners at Mr. Lucky's. At a high-level meeting, it was decided that Diana Ross had discovered the new group and that their first album would be called Diana Ross Presents the Jackson Five. (Motown re-issue, 1986, MCD08019MD) "Diana" wrote in "her" liner notes that what she liked most about the group was their "honesty." Eleven-year-old Michael was then told the story of his discovery which he would have to offer to curious reporters and talk-show hosts in the near future. Michael would always tell the story and then suddenly shut up -- the reporters always found this rather frustrating. Originally Motown decided that the ten-year-old lead singer they'd hired ought to be eight-years-old, so for a few years, Michael found himself lying (albeit inconsistently) about his age. In 1970, he told American Bandstand host Dick Clark he was nine, then, a year later, he told another host he was eleven (he was almost thirteen). The Jackson boys

were being "standardized." And the kids, including young Michael, were well aware of the nature of the process.

> I remember Suzanne (de Passe, Motown talent coordinator) showing us these charcoal sketches of the five of us. In each sketch we had a different hairstyle. In another set of drawings we were all pictured in different colors that could be switched around like Colorforms. After we all decided on the hairstyles, they took us to a barber so he could match us with our pictures. Then, after she showed us the clothes, we went down to a wardrobe department where they gave us outfits to try on. They'd see us in one set of clothes, decide the clothes weren't right, and we'd all go back to the Colorforms to "try on" some more. (M. Jackson, 1988, p. 73)

The standardizing also had a significant impact on the boys' performances, particularly Michael's. He says that it was routine procedure for producer Suzy Ikeda, who Michael describes as "my other half," to stand next to him as he sang in the studio and make "sure (he) put the right emotion and feeling and heart into the composition." (Ibid., p. 87) But there were times when the "right" emotions weren't Michael's at all, but those of the Motown production team, and he soon began to feel somewhat straight-jacketed. It was several years though, before the young singer staged a rebellion.

> ... in those early days "The Corporation" (Gordy's nickname for the Jackson Five production team) produced and shaped all our music. I remember lots of times when I felt the song should be sung one way and the producers felt it should be sung another way. But for a long time I was very obedient ... Finally it reached a point where I got fed up with being told exactly how to sing. So (in 1972) I called Berry Gordy and complained.

> I said they had always told me how to sing, and I had agreed all the time, but now they were getting too ... mechanical. (third ellipsis, Jackson's)
>
> I think he told them to let me be more free or something. I'd do a lot of ad-libbing, like twisting words or adding some edge to them. (Ibid., p. 81)

The early Jackson Five singles were beloved by fans and critics alike, so it seems the Motown producers came up with a vision of what reception theorist Wolfgang Iser might call "the implied audience" which matched the real one very well. But, judging by his subsequent remarks, Michael's vision may well have been different, perhaps at odds with the audiences which loved those early records. The early records, particularly the singles "I Want You Back" and "The Love You Save," were praised and adored for their feeling of exhilaration and enthusiasm. Michael bubbled over with thrilling, audacious shouts of joy and triumph. The records were optimistic, full of life. There were only hints that Michael was capable of representing something different. One critic (Vince Aletti, Rolling Stone, July 22, 1971, p. 39) was somewhat awed that a young boy could put over a song with the words "anguish and doubt" in the lyrics and make it believable (in "Never Can Say Goodbye" [Third Album, Motown re-issue, 1986, MCDO8011MD]). Aletti couldn't have known at the time that, for Michael, it was the expression of uncomplicated joyous-

ness which he may have (successfully) strained to reproduce for the Motown staffers. Critic Dave Marsh later commented that the great early records really did represent a kid "just doing what comes naturally." (Marsh, 1985, p. 193) But since Michael claims he didn't experience the process that way at all, it's more difficult to assess the authenticity of these records' emotional representations.

What the records do confirm, for observers like Marsh, Aletti, and Berry Gordy (who never could figure out where the small boy singer got "that pain from") is that childhood is "naturally" a condition where one lives free from care, responsibility, and genuine suffering. Michael Jackson himself is not immune from accepting such ideological presuppositions. In 1990, after perusing a special edition of Life magazine devoted to "The World of Children," he felt compelled to write the editors and tell them of his strong feelings about the issue. After letting them know how grateful he was for the issue, he said he "wandered mentally through (his) childhood" and "laughed, cried and envied" the children featured in the special edition. ("Their Thriller," New York Daily News, June 5, 1990)

"The World of Children" features pages upon pages of kids laughing, playing, getting their shots, jostling their friends, hugging pets, dancing, visiting the dentist, and on and on. There is a small smattering of children who'd

been in accidents, or were sick, or were victims of crime. There is only the slightest mention of the one-third of American children who live in poverty or of the many abused and neglected kids whose numbers continue to spiral upward year after year. They are seen as aberrations by Life, as sad blotches on the happy face of "childhood."

"The World of Children" does not feature a photo of one of the best-known children of the past decade: six-year-old Lisa Steinberg, whose 1987 beating death at the hands of her adoptive father made international headlines and whose vacant-eyed photo taken at a school Halloween party shortly before her murder was given much attention in earlier Time-Life publications. She, and the many others like her, are not really part of Life's "World" of children, yet we are encouraged by the editors to believe we are getting something like a full picture of this "world." Michael could only "envy" these children, since he had not been part of their world of serenity and freedom. He had to assume that he had grown up in a quite another world from the one Life assures us most children know. Any reader who knows or had known a world of responsibility, struggle, fear, uncertainty, and pain as a child would feel quite alone if they took the Life portrayal seriously. Michael took it seriously enough to thank the editors for making him feel this way.

After his liberation from the Motown producers' authority, Michael's singing gradually returned to the impression of tormented desire originally heard on 1968's "Big Boy," the first Steeltown single. One could speculate that if Michael had been given complete freedom of expression in the beginning of his Motown career, the group may well have occupied only a marginal, arcane place in pop history. The group might well be remembered only by soul historians as an unusual deep soul act composed entirely of children: a fascinating, yet obscure curiosity. But Gordy was not a foolish man, and that did not happen.

In late 1969, the Jackson Five appeared on the "Miss Black America" pageant singing an Isley Brothers' song. It was their first time on television. Soon after, they appeared on a variety show called "The Hollywood Palace" and "The Joey Bishop Show." Their record hit the charts and went straight to number one. So did their next record, "ABC." And their next, "The Love You Save." And so did "I'll Be There." They'd been on "The Ed Sullivan Show" by now ("the little fella in front is incredible," said Ed), and "American Bandstand" and countless others. They were featured in Look magazine (August 25, 1970) and then Life (November 27, 1970). By the end of 1970, the family had moved from one large home in Beverly Hills to a spacious ranch-style estate in the San Fernando Valley. They needed

to get away from the crowds.

Michael had everything a twelve-year-old boy could dream of: a dirt bike, his own state-of-the-art stereo, a professional darkroom and photographic equipment, a back-yard with a swimming pool and orange trees. Although he had accumulated more toys than he knew what to do with, he spent virtually no time with other children outside of the family. He either worked or played with the toys.

In 1971, the Jackson Five went on a big national tour which culminated with a televised homecoming performance in Gary before which they received the keys to the city, their street temporarily renamed in their honor, the whole bit. Michael didn't like touring. The young girls mobbed him, tearing his clothing, scratching his skin and sticking their fingers in his eyes. He was bored in the hotels but enjoyed the practical joking that came with the boredom. The kids dumped water on everyone's head. Michael says he never stopped doing this sort of thing while on tour, even as an adult. What bothered him most about touring, though, was his father's official capacity as the children's guardian.

> He would take the room next to ours, which meant he could come in to check on us anytime through the connecting doors. I really despised this arrangement, not only because he could monitor our misbehavior, but also because he used to do the meanest things to us. Jermaine and I would be

> sleeping, exhausted after a show, and my father would bring a bunch of girls into the room; we'd wake up and they'd be standing there, looking at us, giggling. (M. Jackson, 1988, p. 95)

It was after their first spate of touring success that the Jackson Five became a vehicle for a Saturday morning cartoon series. None of the Jacksons were actually involved in the program's production, but the older boys kept a close watch on "their" ratings. Michael, naturally, was overawed at watching himself as a cartoon character. "I loved being a cartoon." (Ibid., p. 99)

In 1971, Michael recorded his first solo album, Got To Be There (Motown M5-130V1, 1971), as an attempt to counter the teeny-bop success of Donny Osmond of the Osmond family. As often happens (witness Pat Boone's fifties covers of Little Richard records), the white Osmond Brothers began recording Jackson Five-sound-alike records soon after the success of "I Want You Back," with great success. Thirteen-year-old Donny had solo hits before Motown began recording Michael. Michael's album was a moderate, though not astounding success and he quickly recorded more singles with his brothers.

By 1972, Gordy's interests turned to the development of Motown Productions' film division which was centered at the time on the making of the Billie Holiday biography, Lady Sings The Blues, starring Diana Ross. Michael had a

big solo hit that year singing the title song of the trash-horror sequel to Willard, "Ben," which was actually a love song to a murderous rat. (Ben, Motown M5-153V1, 1972) Today Michael says the story reminds him of E.T. He remembers watching the film over and over again just to see his name on the credits. (M. Jackson, 1988, p. 99-100)

Despite the success of "Ben," though, Gordy had lost interest in the group. They no longer received top quality material to record and their records stopped hitting the top. To make matters worse, during the winter of 1972-73, Michael's voice broke. Though everyone tried to carry on as if everything was fine, there seems little doubt that Motown had moved on to other things. The boys despaired over the poor material they were being offered to sing and implored the company to allow them to write their own songs. Stevie Wonder and Marvin Gaye both fought for and gained this right from Gordy and both had great success with albums of highly personalized social commentary. Apparently the Jackson Five wanted the same opportunities, but Motown wouldn't hear of it. It was only a matter of time before the group would think seriously of breaking their contract (which ran through 1976).

According to his memoirs, it was Michael himself (not yet sixteen years old) who presented Berry Gordy with the ultimatum: either let us have creative control or we're

gone. In 1974, the family held a press conference at which time they announced that they would be signing a new record contract with Epic Records, a division of the CBS Records conglomerate. They also announced a change in the group's line-up: twelve-year-old Randy would replace Jermaine and the group would now be called simply the Jacksons. It seems Jermaine had married Berry Gordy's daughter Hazel in 1973, and decided that he couldn't leave the company. For a few years, Jermaine was shunned by the family, treated as the prodigal son.

In late 1974, Joe Jackson got the group signed up to play Las Vegas and Lake Tahoe casinos. The entire family (save for Jermaine) would be in the act, including all three girls. In addition to their usual program of greatest hits and R&B classics, all the kids engaged in comic skits which these audiences ate right up. Since they couldn't record for Epic until 1976, these shows were the main source of income for the family. The royalties they got from Motown were among the lowest in the industry, so they couldn't depend on sales of old records. (Frith, 1981, p. 83) In the end, Motown sued the group for breach of contract and won. It's an old story in the record business, the only difference being that Motown was black-owned and operated.

The mid-1970's were a bad time for the Jackson Five,

but they weren't alone. Black music was sequestered in a disco ghetto during this period; radio formats became increasingly segregated and the driving, politically-oriented material of acts like Sly and The Family Stone, Marvin Gaye,Stevie Wonder, and Curtis Mayfield lost clout in the r&b market. The calm, "uplifting" music of Earth, Wind, and Fire became the most popular sound on black radio.

It was a period of silence and invisibility for black music (and politics). For Michael Jackson, though, being seen and heard publicly had served over the years to almost justify his existence. "To a great degree," he wrote, "my identity as a person was tied to my identity as a celebrity." (M. Jackson, 1988, p.95) In private, though, he now strove to be as silent and invisible as possible.

Associates like Motown promotion man Weldon McDougal, III remember that Michael became much quieter than before. Michael was apparently no longer the talkative, curious kid he'd once known. "No more jokes," McDougal said. (McDougal, 1984, p. 104) Others also noticed that he now often chose not to speak in public situations ("Leaving Motown," The New Yorker, July 14, 1975, p. 26). Observers, like the reporter from The New Yorker, sometimes noted that, in contrast to his siblings, "Michael looked very shy." His father seemed impressed that "Michael likes to lay back. He's not the type who wants to be out front."

(Louie Robinson, "Family Life of The Jackson Five," Ebony, December, 1974, p. 42) According to his sister Latoya, as a child Michael had been the most "supremely confident" (1991, p. 18) of all the Jackson kids, but by his mid-teens, he'd changed dramatically. He was now, she says, the most fearful of the four siblings who remained at home, and he no longer fought back against his father's physical assaults. "...he finally accepted that Joseph would always win." (Ibid., p. 84)

Katherine speculated often on the possible reasons for the "change" in her son. In a 1980 episode of ABC television's 20/20 newsmagazine program, she remarked that "Michael is quiet now. When he was younger he wasn't that quiet. But I don't know, I think the stage might have done that to him." In another interview with Right On magazine, she speculated that "I think a lot of it had to do with his adolescence. He had acne." (Right On Focus, Fall, 1984, p. 56) When talk-show host Sally Jesse Raphael asked Katherine in 1990 why Michael became so shy and "closed-up," Katherine's eyes welled up with tears and she was silent for a long moment before she said, simply, "I don't know."

During this time, Michael says in his memoirs that he became quite depressed. Not only had he lost his soaring soprano, but his whole appearance changed: he suddenly grew

tall, his facial features became more prominent and his skin broke out. He may have regarded the group's problems as his own fault; he no longer presented the image that sold the group. In any case, the focus of Michael's displeasure became his physical appearance. He phoned a television reporter in 1988 (whose station had just aired a damning story on Michael's multiple plastic surgeries) to explain that during those years, he felt so bad about the way he looked that he'd wash his face in the dark. "... it (his teenaged complexion) messed up my whole personality. I couldn't look at people when I talked to them. I'd look down or away. I didn't feel I had anything to be proud of and I didn't even want to go out. I didn't do anything." (M. Jackson, 1988, pp. 96-97)

What he actually did do during this period may be somewhat mysterious, but when he talked to reporters, he often mentioned his interest in and identification with certain classic Hollywood personas. He said his favorite star was Charles Chaplin. (In the liner notes of his 1991 album Dangerous, he writes, simply, "Charlie Chaplin, I love you.") Michael said that what he liked most was that Chaplin's "Tramp" character "was his whole life. He was born in London, and his father died an alchoholic when he was six. His mother was in an insane asylum. He roamed the streets of England, begging, poor hungry ... and that's what I like

to do, to bring all those truths out." (George, 1984, p. 125)

Michael once posed for photographers in the "Tramp" costume on a Hollywood sound stage, his Afro sticking out of his derby, looking every bit the bewildered, yet guileless misfit the character represents. He looks about ready to take on the character, to go about silently disrupting the lives of the powerful and protecting the weak before shambling back down the road. In one pose, though, he seems to read the tramp character quite differently than the usual interpretations. Michael, with his derby, cane, and outsized shoes, is collapsed against the corner of two brick walls, his legs and arms pressed up in a fetal position, his eyes wide with terror. Viewing the shot, one feels as though one's trapped a deer in one's headlights. (Brown, 1984, p.101) There's no humor in the pose, no distancing. Unlike Chaplin's, Michael's "tramp" cowers. In Michael's interpretation, all the quiet heroism of the tramp is obliterated, and what we're left with is a portrait of total helplessness and fear.

Beyond his love for the "tramp" character, Michael seemed to take a special interest in other silent outcasts of the movies, once mentioning his admiration for Jackie Gleason's portrayal of the taunted mute "Gigot." (Richard B. Stolley, "Editor's Note," Life, September, 1984, p.4)

In 1974 and '75, the family's Vegas act turned out to be a smash; it went over so well, in fact, that CBS television cut a deal with the family for a summer replacement series. The shows, which began in 1976, consisted of music, comic vignettes, and guest stars. Michael was miserable doing these shows and tried to get his family to cancel. "We had to dress in ridiculous outfits and perform stupid comedy routines to canned laughter. It was all so fake." He felt it amounted to career suicide. The program did well in the ratings, but arena shows failed to sell out. Michael got desperate and finally told his family that they must pull out. The series, which ran again in the spring of 1977, was not put on the fall schedule. (M. Jackson, 1988, p. 118-121)

At the same time they were taping the television series, the Jacksons were cutting their first two albums for CBS. Although the group originally came to the new label with promises of creative control, Epic welched on the deal and assigned Kenny Gamble and Leon Huff of Philadelphia International Records to write and produce for the Jacksons. It was a blow, but Gamble and Huff were a nearly legendary production team (Jerry Butler's late sixties classics, Teddy Pendergrass, the O'Jays) so at least the group would have an opportunity to learn from the best.

Although Michael's new voice had matured tremendously by 1976 -- lots of low moans and floating falsetto wails -- the material was not compelling. There was some irony in hearing Michael's sad, foreboding treatment of songs called "Enjoy Yourself," "Think Happy," and "Good Times," but that was about it. The music was good, run-of-the-mill disco, but it didn't garner enough interest to sell especially well. The Jacksons wrote a couple of songs themselves, "Different Kind of Lady," and a cryptic, ominous tune by Michael called "Blues Away," which was, Michael says, "...a light song about overcoming a deep depression" which he says was inspired by Jackie Wilson's "Lonely Teardrops." (M. Jackson, 1988, p. 126) "I got a problem, due any hour/ But I got the feelin' that I got the power," he sings with an odd mixture of conviction and despair. "You can't take my blues away, no matter what you say." (Epic EK 34229, 1976)

"Different Kind of Lady" got a lot of play in the discos and the Jacksons would use this as evidence that they were ready to make their own album. In 1977, Michael and his father arranged a meeting in New York with the CBS brass to plead the group's case. (For some reason, Joseph felt no need to bring any of the other group members along with him.) The label finally agreed to give them one try. Soon after this, Joe hired the management team of Ron Weis-

ner and Freddy DeMann to co-manage the group with him. They soon assumed virtually all the responsibility for managing the group; Joseph remained co-manager in name only. Jackson said later that he did this because he needed "white help" in order to deal with CBS. (Paul Grein, "Who Guides Jackson's Career," Billboard, June 25, 1983, pp. 3 and 62) It was clear that both the ingrained institutionalized racism in the music industry and CBS's displeasure with Joe Jackson's abrasive personal style played a part in his decision to essentially step down as his sons' manager at this time.

It was during this time that odd rumors about Michael's personal life began to circulate. One story claimed that he was undergoing a "sex change operation." Michael was as devastated and confused by all this as any teenager might be expected to be. "I was in a Sears store buying some records while on tour when I first heard about it. This one girl came up to me saying, 'It isn't true, it isn't true!' I said, 'What isn't true?' and she said, 'You're not a girl!' I said 'What? Where did you read that?' She said, 'It was in Jet magazine that you had a sex change.' I felt like I didn't knew who I was at that moment." (Soul, 1977: reprinted in Taraborrelli, 1991, p.198; Taraborrelli was editor of Soul)

The source of this odd rumor seems simple enough. Al-

though Michael's singing voice had changed as suddenly and considerably as any other boy singer's, his speaking voice was extremely high and soft. As his mother explained to People magazine in 1988 (August 8, p. 55), it's inherited: his older brother Jackie and both his grandfathers have the trait. But unlike many other young men with similar vocal characteristics (including his own brother), Michael generally never tries to "masculinize" his tone. His chronic shyness tends to make him either whisper or get overly enthusiastic, so his speaking timbre appears similar to that of a teenage girl.

From the time he was fifteen through the time when the rumors began to gain momentum, Michael's appearance and attitude seemed to some to become increasingly "effeminate." In addition to the high softness of his voice, he seemed in a perpetual state of embarrassment, always averting his eyes and grinning sheepishly. When enthused over something, he often seemed to squeal with excitement. He was also quickly moved to tears. Reporters who were polite to him when they met him in person while interviewing him obviously changed their tone when they returned to the home office with tales of their stunning encounters with this peculiar young man. Soon, the whispering grew louder until it finally reached back to Michael one day in a Sears store and caused him to question his own sense of identity.

When Michael was eighteen, he had an offer to act in a major motion picture, Gordy's production of the Broadway hit The Wiz. He was asked to play The Scarecrow opposite Diana Ross's aging Dorothy. Michael still thinks she was perfect for the part. The movie was produced by Motown's film division and Michael was Gordy's first choice for the Scarecrow; he didn't have to read for the part. His brothers were not thrilled by this development. They finally had the chance to write and produce their own album and their lead singer was going to be on location for six months making a movie. From Michael's comments in his memoirs, it seems apparent they used any means necessary to try to talk him out of it. In discussing the character he was about to play, he describes the crows taunting the scarecrow: he sings a song called "You Can't Win." "The song was about humiliation and helplessness -- something that so many people have felt at one time or another -- and the feeling that there are people out there who don't actively hold you back so much as they work quietly on your insecurities so that you hold yourself back." A paragraph later, he mentions "When I told my brothers and father I had gotten this part, they thought it might be too much for me, but the opposite was true." (M. Jackson, 1988, p. 140-141)

"The whole Wiz period," he says, "was a time of great

stress and anxiety for me, even though I was enjoying myself." Around the time he was set to arrive in New York, he collapsed on the beach, unable to breathe. He says today that a blood vessel burst in his lung, stemming from pleurisy. Although he was told to take it easy, he went on with the picture. (Ibid., p. 138)

While in New York (strangely, although he was old enough to vote, his older sister Latoya was sent along to stay with him in the apartment Motown had rented for him), Michael was introduced to all the glitterati; Liza Minnelli became a friend and through her, he met the cadre of show biz friends -- Jane Fonda, Katherine Hepburn, Elizabeth Taylor -- for whom he would later become a sort of mascot. Minnelli took Michael to all the discos, including Studio 54. He's never talked about what he thought of this sort of nightlife, but he never went back to it. Latoya insists they avoided becoming involved in the cocaine culture of that time and place. (L. Jackson, 1991, p. 79-80)

By the time he was through with The Wiz, production on the new album was already way behind schedule. Everyone, including Michael, was upset about it, but somehow the project worked out very well. The album, called Destiny (Epic EK 35552, 1978), contained the disco classic "Shake Your Body (Down to the Ground)," several other terrific dance tracks, and some very personal and unusual lyrics

(for which Michael was largely responsible). "Sometimes I cry cause I'm confused/ Is this a fact of being used?/ There is no life for me at all/ 'Cause I give myself at beck and call," from "Bless His Soul." The album also included the cryptically titled "That's What You Get (For Being Polite)," wherein Michael explains with some desperation that the protagonist "cries because he's scared." The principal lyrical concern was, as with "Blues Away," with the vulnerability associated with powerlessness. Instead of typical R&B macho boasting, the singing often sounded pained and desperate, Michael borrowing here and there from Marvin Gaye (the scary, joyful whoops), David Ruffin ("I Wish It Would Rain") or Stevie Wonder, but nevertheless forging a style of his own.

While finishing the movie, Michael gave a number of interviews intended to promote both the picture and the album (including one with Andy Warhol: Michael thought Warhol was a poet and Warhol knew nothing about the Jackson Five or soul music. Warhol, naturally, said he had a marvelous time.) Timothy White of the rock magazine Crawdaddy was assigned to interview Michael and found him quite amusing: "a textbook case in arrested development," according to White. He said Michael appeared "to be in some sort of daze." Eating in a ritzy French restaurant in Manhattan, White was astounded that Michael had never heard of

"queech, what's queech?" He asked Michael if he'd like to try some of his and White reported that "he samples it, with his fingers, and exclaims, 'It's like ham and eggs!'" White also reported that Michael ate everything with his fingers. Although White was quite obviously appalled and embarrassed in the restaurant, he seemed delighted to have encountered this noble savage. The final Crawdaddy piece, called "Blame It On The Boogie?" (a song, sans question mark, from Destiny), was clearly intended to amuse the largely hip, white readership. Bits and pieces from this article appeared in gossip columns around the country and Michael was outraged at what he saw. He felt his remarks, like the one about wishing to see the poverty in India in person, were totally misrepresented. (White, December, 1978, pp. 48-51)

After the release of the new album, the Jacksons once again began a national tour which was intended to re-establish the group to a level of popularity comparable to what they experienced in the early part of the decade. Michael, unfortunately, got a throat infection midway through the tour and it had to be cut short. Even after he was able to resume touring, he had to rely on others in the group to hold down notes he couldn't make.

Soon, though, Michael was back in the recording studio -- this time to record his first solo album for Epic. The

new project was the label's idea; Michael says they wanted to insure their investment in case the group efforts didn't pan out. (M. Jackson, 1988, p. 129-130) Apparently the label entrusted him with the job of scouting his own producer, since it was Michael who first asked Quincy Jones if he could think of anyone who might be right for him. Jackson met Jones initially on the set of The Wiz where the well-traveled jazz/pop composer and arranger was working on the score. Jones was convinced that Jackson actually wanted him to produce the album and so offered his services before he was actually asked. Michael insists he would never do anything that sneaky. (Ibid., pp. 145-146)

When the label was told about this arrangement, they were very much against it. They assumed Michael needed a funkier backdrop for his music, but eventually decided to give the go-ahead to what they considered a mismatch. Jones admits that Michael was a little unsure of his ability to succeed without the group. For one thing, Jackson was busy touring while Jones prepared most of the record. The only tracks Jackson ever gets directly involved in, Jones said in a 1988 British television interview (re-run on the USA (cable) Network in the States), are the ones he's written, and he only wrote two songs on the album called Off the Wall (Epic EK 35745).

In one sense, the doubters at Epic had a point: the

album turned out to be smooth as silk, Jones applying sandpaper to Jackson's rough edges. Many of the songs on the record exploited a craze which remained popular for a few minutes near the end of seventies: roller disco. So the tracks conformed to a soft, pleasant, cascading beat underneath the rich, erotic yearning of Michael's voice. As each single was released, the album moved more and more copies. Without benefit of much hype, it turned out to be the biggest-selling album in a year of seriously slumping record sales. Even as it finally sold nearly ten million copies world-wide, most critics ignored its presence. It wasn't necessarily that the music was abhorrent to critics, because it certainly did command a kind of respect, but it seemed too much an overt corporate product to consider seriously. It was the age of "post-punk," of critics looking nostalgically back at the summer of '77, at safety-pins stuck through cheeks and spit gobs hurled at audiences. Michael Jackson was just some corrupt R&B star, dipped in sequins, whose only stated goal, aside from making lots of money and winning awards, was "making people happy." Critics considered such an artist a throw-back, not worthy of their interest. Paging through a Rolling Stone of the time, it was as if Michael Jackson and those who bought all those records did not exist.

Back in 1967, Rolling Stone co-founder and guiding

light Ralph J. Gleason published what amounted to a manifesto on the new musical culture of the disaffected young. Titled "Like A Rolling Stone" after the Bob Dylan song of the same name, it sought to define the purpose and essence of rock culture as it was then just coming into existence. Gleason had this to say about contemporary "Negro" music.

> ... we find a curious thing happening.
> The Negro performers, from James Brown to Aaron Neville to the Supremes and the Four Tops, are on an Ed Sullivan trip, striving as hard as they can to get on that stage and become part of the American success story, while the white rock performers are motivated to escape from that stereotype.
> The drive behind all American popular music performers, to a greater or lesser extent ... has been to sound like a Negro. The white jazz musician was the epitome of this.
> Today's new youth, beginning with the rock band musician but spreading out into the entire movement, into the Haight-Ashbury hippies, is not ashamed of being white.
> Today the electronic music by the Beatles and others ... exists somewhere else from and independent of the Negro. (Ralph J. Gleason, "Like A Rolling Stone," in Leap Into Reality -- Essays for Now, edited by Richard Peck. New York, Dell, 1973, pp. 167-169) Originally: The American Scholar, Volume 36, Number 3, Autumn 1967.)

So, within this formulation, James Brown ought to have been looking to the Beatles, perhaps even to Mick Jagger for creative ideas -- that is, if he was interested at all. These notions of Gleason's ought not to be taken as anachronistic. However unspoken, these ideas formed one of

the ruling principles of the rock culture aesthetic from the sixties to the present day. From the day the Beatles landed on American shores (singing Smokey Robinson and Chuck Berry songs), whites would now claim proprietary rights over rock 'n' roll. Blacks would be admitted to the festivities (and to the social movements of the time which happened to have been originally inspired by African-American social movements) only if they played by the rules, white rules. It didn't take long before radio became segregated according to color and blacks were told that their music, regardless of style, didn't fit the format. In 1989, for instance, a "classic rock" format station in New York, K-ROCK, presented what it called "The Official History of Rock 'n' Roll." And that is what it is.

By the late 1970's, radio was strictly segregated. After the "death" of disco, Top Forty seemed to be a dying format, so black artists generally had little hope of reaching a large white audience. The successful rock'n'roll format at the time was called Album Oriented Radio or AOR. Stations had begun to hire consultants who helped them target a narrowly defined, yet dollar-rich vein of listeners. AOR (later described by some as Apartheid Oriented Radio) aimed its advertising at white male adolescents almost exclusively. Music by black artists or dance music that

might appeal to females was not allowed on the air. The particular enthusiasms of rock critics tended only to exacerbate this tendency.

Just prior to the release of the album, crucial decision were being made regarding the direction of Michael's career and the crafting of an image. According to John Branca, Michael's attorney of ten years (1980-1990), as soon as Michael turned twenty-one, he hired legal representation separate from that of his family's. Branca has often lauded Jackson's independence and decision-making tenacity. He's called Michael "his own Rasputin." (Marsh, 1985, p.11) Branca detailed his observations on Jackson in a special promotional section of Billboard magazine in the summer of 1984.

> He came to the meeting with this accountant just after the release of Off the Wall. He was 21 at the time and wanted to establish independent representation. He seemed very shy, but also very observant. In the meeting, he was trying to read and gather every piece of information he could. Behind his sunglasses, he studied the entire conversation, which was conducted primarily by the accountant ...
>
> I soon learned that Michael is the kind of person who always makes his own decisions and he makes them very well. The genius of his artistry speaks for itself. His business acumen isn't necessarily as obvious because it is conducted behind closed doors. But he is equally as brilliant in running his career as he is in recording his music. ("Attorney John Branca," Billboard, July 21, 1984, p. MJ30 and MJ52)

In almost every biographical account of Michael Jackson's career, from personality profiles to full-length biographies (to Jackson's own statements to reporters), he's depicted as a hard-hearted taskmaster when it comes to business aspects of his show-business life. This reputation, which stems primarily from the above quoted statement from John Branca and other comments from Branca, has formed the basis of the myth of the "two Michaels," one the shy genius manchild who "comes alive" only on stage, the other a boardroom tough-guy who reads every line of a contract before signing it. What most writers do not take notice of, however, is that such myth-making often has very definite aims and specific consequences for those who encourage the process. Myth-making is a collaborative discursive practice. But collaborators often add to the process for different reasons and out of different interests; many "voices," following Bakhtin, go into the production of a single myth. For Michael Jackson himself, the promotion of the myth helps him to resist the public perception of him as a manipulated, powerless human commodity. That is, the myth-making is part of an effort on Jackson's part to resist his own dehumanization and the general dehumanization of the pop process. Despite any "facts" which might clearly belie such a myth, the myth remains "true" inasmuch as the practice of social resistance which helped produce

it is real.

Those "facts" are not, however, irrelevant to the myth-making practice, since they represent the interests of other voices in producing the myth: the voices against which Jackson and others offer resistance. A myth, then, can be a seen as a form of social struggle fought on the terrain of public discourse. This is not clear, though, in a circumstance where all sides of the process are not made apparent. Thus, those "facts" which are ordinarily described as "myth exploding," are of importance to any myth-making practice. The myth is not exploded, though; it is merely better understood as a myth. In Frederic Dannen's 1990 bombshell expose of criminal and near-criminal activity in the music business, attorney Branca's account of his relationship with Michael Jackson finally comes under some challenge.

According to Dannen's carefully documented account, Michael Jackson had another attorney prior to his association with John Branca. Branca, not long out of law school (where he specialized in tax law), worked in the offices of David Braun, who until October 1980, represented Michael Jackson. Dannen details the manner in which Branca became connected with Michael Jackson.

> ... (CBS Records president) Walter (Yetnikoff)'s good fortune in seeing Jackson become Branca's

> client was not entirely a coincidence. Up until 1980, Jackson had been a client of attorney David Braun, a man Walter considered an enemy. Braun had the chutzpah to represent United Artists in a suit against CBS and Yetnikoff. Then in, in October, 1980, Braun abandoned his practice to begin his ... stint as president of PolyGram. John Branca, a former tax lawyer who was then one of Braun's young associates, wound up with Jackson. Branca was twenty-nine at the time.
>
> When Braun's reign at Polygram ended a year later, he attempted to regain Jackson, without success. Walter, according to (label executive) Dick Asher, helped John Branca hold on. Yetnikoff found in Branca an attorney more to his taste, a man not unlike Allen Grubman (another music attorney who, Dannen insists, will never sue labels and label executives with whom he negotiates [and Michael Jackson's current -- 1992 -- attorney]). A member of the music bar quoted in The American Lawyer summed up the Branca credo: "Controversy is bad. It loses you clients."
>
> Said attorney Eric Kronfeld, "John is a power-broker because he makes most of Michael's decisions. People will come to him because they want a piece of Michael." (Dannen, 1990, p. 232) (parentheses mine)

According to Dannen, in the wake of the monopolization of the record industry in recent years, it is common practice for attorneys and managers to have business ties to both their clients and the labels their clients are contracted to. "The pioneers of the rock business learned that the best defense against being sued by a wised-up artist was to hire his attorney to do corporate legal work," according to Dannen. "Some labels went one better, in fact, appointing an attorney or manager for the artist, someone completely under the company's control." (Ibid., p. 142) The rationale of many attorneys and managers who ac-

cept this arrangement is the stability of the labels in comparison with the fickle careers of artists. A renegade attorney told Dannen, "Do you think lawyers fail to understand that artists come and go, but RCA is forever?" (Ibid.)

After his business affairs had been realigned, Michael's image became the focus of concentration. After what was reported as an on-stage fall during which his nose was broken, Michael went to a plastic surgeon and had his nose reshaped. After this he had detailed discussions with Weisner and DeMann (Joseph was still putative co-manager, but he didn't interact much with his partners) about his appearance on the album's cover. The managers decided that wearing a tuxedo would give Michael some sophistication and distance him from his previous image as a child star. Michael himself had an idea to add to this. It seems that for years his brothers chided him about his penchant for wearing white socks and high-water pants. "They called me a dip," he recalls in his memoirs. (M. Jackson, 1988, p. 217-219) On the new album cover, his white socks would glow.

Epic tried to get Michael on the cover of Rolling Stone as part of the album promotion, but Michael, like most black artists at the time, was deemed unsuitable. The agreed to conduct an interview, but not for a cover. Both

Jackson and Epic demurred.

In late 1979, the ABC-TV newsmagazine, "20/20" ran a profile of the Jacksons, who were just then riding the crest of Off The Wall's success. A reporter asked Michael if perhaps he hadn't been away from what she called "the real world" for too long. Although he attempted to remain unruffled, he ended up a little defensive. He did not, of course, directly challenge her presumptions about his world. Anyway, the show provided most of the white pop audience with a chance to see the new, grown-up Michael Jackson for the first time, and many were still talking about it the next day. "He talks like a girl," some white college students remarked, astonished at the change in the cute, yet tough little boy they remembered. Gathering momentum, they went on: "He even sort of looks like a girl!" "It's so weird!" But then that audience went back to its business, and left Michael Jackson alone for a while.

Early in nineteen-eighty, Michael was riding along with the car radio on (not driving; he still didn't know how and didn't want to. His parents soon "forced" him to learn, he said later.) when the Grammy Awards nominations were announced for that year. Michael was expecting to clean up. It was announced that Off The Wall had received one nomination, for best R&B recording. MIchael, who did

not show up for the event, was devastated. "I was weeping about it so much, my family thought I was going crazy," he told a reporter a year later. (Robert Hilburn, "The Saga of MIchael Jackson," Billboard, July 21, 1984, p. MJ12) According to sources close to him (Mikal Gilmore, "The Invisible Man Returns," Rolling Stone, May 19, 1988, p. 36), Michael did not miss the racial implications of the snub. In his memoirs, he says he kept telling himself "next time." He became convinced that his next record would be one "they" could not ignore.

The awards business notwithstanding, Michael's album became increasingly successful through 1980, and his brothers may have have started getting a little uneasy. Joe Jackson fired off angry letters to both CBS and Weisner and DeMann complaining about his own diminishing role in running his sons' careers and strongly implicating that too much time and effort was being spent on this solo album resulting in the group being disregarded. He wrote these letters as his son, who lived in the same house with him, was still basking in the glow of his success.

Soon, though, Michael would have another Jacksons album to complete with his brothers. (Triumph, Epic EK 36424, 1980) On it appeared a song which Michael wrote, produced and arranged himself, called "Heartbreak Hotel." (No, Michael did not know that there already was a rather

well known song of that name by a fellow named Elvis Presley. Radio segregation cut both ways.) "It came from a dream I had. I dream a lot," he told a reporter. (Kamin, 1984, p. 38)

The song concerned a certain haunted hotel run by "wicked women" who appear suddenly in groups of two or three, trapping the singer in the web of his own deceit. He's confronted by "faces staring, glaring, tearing through me." "Live and sin," the song begins, the narrator's guilt apparently an overwhelming and permanent condition. No one could be trusted in this place: "Every smile's a trial thought in beguile to hurt me." Everyone in the hotel knows the protagonist's "sin": "then they smiled with eyes that looked as if they knew me." There was no escape: he spots other victims, trapped in the place for years -- "this is scarin' me." At one point in the narrative, the singer declares bluntly, "hope is dead."

In his memoirs, Michael indicates that he felt the lyrics might have been a little too strong, so he cheered things up a bit with goofy sound effects and an ending where we actually hear the protagonist "wake up" breathing heavily after his dream. Nevertheless, there are few popular songs which capture the sheer terror of a truly dreadful nightmare so uncannily. The critics actually liked this one enough to make mention of it, although they

were careful to note its mysogynistic tendencies.

The brothers wanted, of course, to go on tour in support of the new album, called Triumph (the Jacksons' album titles were becoming increasingly portentious), but Michael was less than enthusiastic. It was at this time that the city of Atlanta was in the midst of a crisis: young black children in the poorer sections of the city were being randomly murdered. Michael wanted to show some support for the people, so a benefit concert was arranged. He was and remains quick to respond when he hears of children in trouble. (I won't, at this point, go into the issue of whether such stars do these things for "publicity" value, but will mention that Jackson's choices in these matters are not generally those held in high esteem by rock critics.) He said later that this benefit was the only reason he agreed to do the tour.

While in Atlanta to do the benefit concert, Michael had a disturbing experience while shopping in the fashionable and predominantly white suburb called Buckhead. He entered an antique store near closing time, in disguise. The white store owner quickly told him that his store was now closed and he would have to leave. Michael ignored him and headed for the back of the store. The owner advanced on him at this point and apparently Michael panicked. He climbed inside an antique armoire and barricaded himself

inside it, clearly terrified. The man said he thought of upending the closet, but he knew it had interior mirrors and so decided against killing the young black man whom he did not want in his store. When the owner threatened to call the police, Michael emerged from the armoire and tried to block the man's path to the phone. The owner punched Michael in the face, knocking him to the ground and called the police. When Michael managed to get to his feet, he ran for the door but the owner grabbed him in a headlock and they both went hurtling into the glass doors, shattering them. During the conflagration, the store owner allegedly hurled racial epithets at Michael. A member of the Jacksons' security team had been shopping across the street when he heard the glass shatter and ran over, but the owner insisted on awaiting the arrival of the police. Although one officer claims that Michael was arrested, no charges ended up being filed against either man for fear of further fanning the flames of racial tension in the city at one of the most difficult times in the city's history. Michael's associates have said that the incident remains fresh in his memory. (Taraborrelli, 1991, p. 245 and Gold, 1990, p. 206-207)

(This was not the only time Michael was the victim of racist violence and harassment. Latoya says her brother was beaten bloody and called nigger throughout an assault

in a gas station in his mother's hometown of Hurtsboro, Alabama. The station's owner accused Michael of trying to steal a candy bar. Again, no charges were filed even though there were several witnesses to the beating. (L. Jackson, 1991, p. 144-145) Katherine Jackson tells of the time her son was stopped and arrested in Van Nuys for driving what the white officer said "looked like a stolen car." Once it was established that the luxury car belonged to it's driver, a check was made for outstanding tickets. Michael was handcuffed and jailed. (K. Jackson, 1990, p. 156) Then, in 1989, while shopping in disguise in a Simi Valley, California Zales jewelry store, Michael was detained and questioned by police because he looked "suspicious." Once his identity was established, Michael asked if he was free to go. He was told he had to wait for the police, which he did. Three police cruisers drove up to mall to question the "suspicious" black man. Michael was questioned in some depth about his activities at the mall before he and a young companion were released. [Phillip Gollner, "Even In Disguise, Michael Jackson Gets Attention," The Los Angeles Times, May 3, 1989, sec. 1, p. 3])

The 1981 tour turned out to be a something of a blockbuster; although the Jacksons still had not crossed over to the white audience (attendance remained over 90% black),

critics began to get excited about Michael Jackson. Not only did the tour receive more than the usual attention from the white media, most of the reviews were raves. Michael was lauded as one of the all-time great rhythm & blues performers. Rolling Stone, however, still passed over the tour and its attendant publicity and hype. The only person underwhelmed by all this seems to have been Michael himself. He told Los Angeles Times reporter Robert Hilburn that he never wanted to tour again. "I feel like I should be seventy by now." ("The Jacksons -- Hail and Farewell?" September 13, 1981, Calendar, p. 1) Michael was eager to get back into the studio to begin work on the follow-up to Off The Wall, the album that would be called Thriller.

Quincy Jones was actually busy at the time, finishing a Donna Summer project, so starting production on Jackson's new album was delayed. Michael started out by contacting his sometime friend Paul McCartney about collaborating on some songs for both their upcoming albums. Michael flew to London, woke up from a dream, he said, and sang "The Girl Is Mine," a sentimental "silly love song" (as McCartney might suggest) into a tape recorder. (In 1985, he played the tape in court when he was accused of pilfering the tune. The jury believed him.) McCartney at least got to collaborate on a couple of other tunes. McCartney took

some time, he says, to give the young star some business advice: get into music publishing, that's where the money is. He showed him a catalog of songs he owned. Michael quietly studied the booklet and then told his friend, "I'm going to buy your songs one day." McCartney laughed. (Anthony DeCurtis, "Paul McCartney," Rolling Stone, November 5, 1987, p. 44)

Michael went back to the states and, according to McCartney, refashioned his nose once more. By the time the work in England was finished, the project was on a tight deadline. Jones shopped around for suitable material and had Michael record what he'd found. Aside from "Wanna Be Startin' Somethin'," a peculiar, unsettling song which finds the protagonist in a bewildered rage over exploitation, jealousy, betrayal, and hatred which Michael had written years earlier, the songs they recorded were simply not good enough. (He says he was afraid Jones wouldn't have liked "Startin' Somethin'," so he kept it to himself. [M. Jackson, 1988, p. 185])

One day, Jones asked Jackson if he would be disappointed if this record didn't match Off The Wall's popularity. It "had to," Michael said he told him. (M. Jackson, 1988, p.181) Jones apparently got a little tense at this point and asked Michael if he'd written anything else that he was holding back. Jackson then brought in a

tape of "Beat It." (on Thriller, Epic EK 38112) According to Michael, Jones and Jackson had decided to go for a "rock"-oriented type of sound (read: white, male, adolescent) so Jackson wrote a song about having the courage to back away from a fight and risk one's image of masculinity among one's fellows. "They'll kick you, then they beat you, then they'll tell you it's fair. So Beat It, Beat It." He concludes that "it doesn't matter who's wrong or right." Michael decides that a trial by water is simply not worth winning.

Though "Beat It" did not represent typical heavy-metal sentiments, Jones crafted the song as a collection of slicked-up heavy-metal cliches. (It's nothing, for instance, like "Give In To Me," Jackson's rather frightening 1991 collaboration with metal band Guns 'N' Roses guitarist Slash, which passionately and almost sympathetically presents the viewpoint of a rapist. [Dangerous, Epic EK 45400]) Without the strong, seriously-intended lyrics, "Beat It" works almost as a parody of the genre by someone excluded from it.

For Jackson, the pragmatic lyrics and impassioned vocals of "Beat It" seemed to come earnestly from his own life experience. Undoubtedly in the course of his childhood battles with his own father's machismo, he'd learned that discretion was the better part of valor. (If

"Beat It" is any indication, there must have come a time when Michael decided to stop swinging back. In her 1991 autobiography [p. 84] and in numerous interviews, Latoya confirms this: for as long as Michael lived in the Jackson home, she says, he took whatever Joseph felt like dishing out without retaliating [thus reducing the severity of the assaults and making life easier for himself].)

By 1982, Jackson suggests that fighting for one's pride in the face of certain defeat is both pointless, foolish, and fundamentally immature. The song works very well as a pacifist manifesto, with all the strengths and weaknesses of the pacifist ideal: "Beat It" begs the question of whether there are times when it does indeed matter "who's wrong or right." (By 1987, Michael apparently changed his tune; in "Leave Me Alone," he declares "there's a time when you're right and you know you must fight." (Bad, Epic EK 40600) As pacifists often do, he'd found that there were things worth dying for.)

For Jones, though, the song was something else: an experiment in cracking open "rock" radio's policy of excluding black artists on the grounds that they did not record genuine rock 'n' roll. Jones contracted heavy-metal titan Edward Van Halen for the song's guitar break in the hope that this would solidify "Beat It"'s position as a "real" rocker.

On receiving the song from Jackson, Jones was somewhat relieved, but still pressed Michael for one more song. This time he went back and wrote something from scratch.

According to what he told soul music chronicler Gerri Hirshey, he'd been harassed many times by young female fans who had visions of themselves in romantic situations with him, but there was one fan in particular he couldn't forget. This fan accused Michael, through the mail, of impregnating her and later suggested that he quell his "guilt" by committing suicide. Hirshey says she mailed him the means to accomplish it. Apparently her actions caused her to be institutionalized, but Michael remained shaken. He always kept her photo (which Hirshey saw) tucked into the corner of a picture frame wherever he went. "I want to memorize her face," he told Hirshey. "In case she ever does turn up someplace. I need to recognize that face instantly." Hirshey says Michael never told Quincy Jones the story of the real "Billie Jean." In his book, Michael denies the song has any basis in fact, but Hirshey, suspecting Michael may have been fantasizing, checked the story out with Katherine Jackson later that day and it was confirmed. ("The Sound of One Glove Clapping," Rolling Stone, December 19, 1985, p. 112)

"Billie Jean" is now one of those things they call "classics," a song, like Elvis' "Hound Dog" or Marvin

Gaye's "I Heard It Through The Grapevine," firmly embedded in the official rock 'n' roll canon. Most critics adored it from the start; Dave Marsh felt it was the most "rocking" thing Jackson had ever done. ("An Open Letter To Michael Jackson, Record, June, 1984, p. 64) But Greil Marcus was left unsatisfied. The song sounded too finished, too polished, dissolving itself into a work of craft, not art. It "announces itself as a masterpiece," Marcus complained. ("Airtime," Artforum, September, 1983, p. 66) Which was, of course, precisely Jackson's intention. It had been his experience that he could make good work that sold millions and still be ignored. This time the records themselves would be constructed in such a way that listeners would be, as they say down south, smacked upside the head. The drums, the strings, the interweaving of background voices all smack of the dread Professionalism -- not only are they too perfect, but there are times during the song when the arrangement just cannot (or won't) keep up with the singer's passion. "There were times during the Thriller project," Michael now says, "when I would get emotional or upset because I couldn't get the people working with me to see what I saw. That happens to me sometimes. Often people just don't see what I see." This may be the case with "Billie Jean" -- the singer's frenzy is barricaded by the cool, solid majesty of the arrangement. The

fervor of Jackson's lead vocal, nevertheless, went unassailed by any critic. He really does sing as if lives depended on listeners believing his story. The magic of the song is, of course, that the singer isn't really sure if he believes himself.

By the time "Billie Jean" was completed and the finished album mixed and mastered, the project had already passed its deadline. After listening to the finished record, Jones, Jackson, and the rest realized that a mistake had been made -- the songs were too long to fit an LP. "'Thriller' sounded crappy," Michael remembers, and so the whole album had to be remixed. (M. Jackson, 1988, p. 198) Michael left the room in tears, according to Quincy Jones. (Zan Stewart, "The Quincy Jones Interview," Downbeat, April, 1985, pp. 19 and 49)

By this time, Jackson and Jones had another project to work on; Michael was to narrate a "storybook" audio version of Stephen Spielberg's blockbuster movie E.T. with Spielberg himself looking on. Michael was very happy to be making this recording ("The next day, I missed him [E.T.] a lot. I wanted to go back to that spot I was at yesterday in the forest. I wanted to be there." [Hirshey, Rolling Stone, February 17, 1983, p. 14]), but the pressure to finish was intense. Finally, on December 25, 1982, Thriller hit the Billboard chart.

It was during this time that Katherine filed for divorce from Joseph. According to many accounts, Joseph Jackson had maintained another family -- a mistress and their daughter -- throughout the seventies. There were, as well, many other affairs and liasons. (Gold, 1989, Taraborrelli, 1991, L. Jackson, 1991) Today Katherine says that although she did file for divorce, they never actually separated; according to Katherine (as well as other accounts), Joseph refused to leave the home in Encino. Although Katherine was told by her lawyer that Joseph could be forcibly removed from the home, she declined to take this action, she claims, because she feared negative publicity. (K. Jackson, 1991, p.117)

Michael told a reporter at the time that if he left his mother's home he felt he "would die of loneliness." (Marsh, 1985, p.12) In 1981, after youngest brother Randy had moved out and around the time Katherine first seriously considered filing for divorce, Michael was offered a half-share in his parents' house and paid a half-million dollars for it. By 1982, Michael must have found the tense situation at home unnerving, so he used this opportunity to remodel the Encino house. The remodeling process was complete enough to make it impossible for anyone to live there at the time. (Although Joseph, not wanting to leave the property, remained in the guest-house.) His goal was to

transform it into a Disney-style storybook castle, complete with a scaled-down replica of the "Pirates of the Caribbean" ride at Disneyland. In interviews, he told reporters that when it was finished, he would live there with his mother and sisters until he got married "and move(d) to Switzerland." (Sanders, Ebony, 1983, p. 128) Joseph never did leave and Katherine annulled her divorce action the following year -- a few months after everyone moved back into the newly remodeled house.

Although he found the whole process revolting, Michael did a lot of interviews at the time of the album's release. In addition to Ebony, he spoke to reporters from Newsweek, Interview, and Rolling Stone (who finally deemed him worthy of their cover). He filled out written questionnaires for other publications like Creem. He did television shots for Entertainment Tonight, Ebony/Jet Showcase, and America's Top Ten. He did these interviews clear through the middle of 1983. It was clearly not something he enjoyed doing. One reporter asked if he had any friends. Michael could not come up with an answer, so finally he said "Quincy Jones is a friend," then paused and offered that "Jane Fonda is a good friend." Michael fell silent, perhaps hoping the reporter would move on. The reporter wouldn't let it go at that, though. He wanted to know if these friends were "all in show business." Michael didn't know

what to say. He sat there, humiliated by a television reporter, without a clue as to how he might defend himself. The viewing audience, though, found it all transfixing. (Ebony/Jet Showcase, 1983)

The interview that everyone was talking about, however, was the cover story for Rolling Stone (February 17, 1983). "Michael Jackson -- Life as a Man," the cover taunted with what the editors must have thought was wry irony. (The cover appeared not long after a Village Voice cover story about a woman who dressed in drag to find out what living as a male was really like. It was a sort of "male like me" experiment and the writer ended up with a T.V. movie deal out of it. On that cover, alongside a picture of the woman, in woman's clothes, the title read, "My Life as a Man." [October 5, 1982])

Inside, Michael showed that after almost twenty years in show business, he had not mastered the art of sidestepping overcurious onlookers (or, for whatever reasons, he did not want to). He told writer Gerri Hirshey things even she probably did not want to know. "I'm the type of person who will tell it all, even though it's a secret. And I know that things should be kept private," Michael explained, neatly encapsulating the "secret" of his success as well.

Hirshey described him as extremely nervous and

flighty; he suffered the interview as if he were getting stitches. He didn't like talking about his past, or about his work, so she tried to let him take the interview where he wanted. He told her lived an ascetic life: he'd become a vegetarian and he fasted and danced every Sunday until he collapsed -- it was his way of relieving tension. (Hirshey noticed that he was was so "painfully thin" that his ribs and shoulder blades protruded frighteningly from beneath his clothing. "I think he exists on just air," his mother explained, somewhat perturbed. Hirshey, 1986, p. 222 and Rolling Stone, Feb. 17, 1983, p. 11)

He said he liked to watch cartoons and explained why: "It's like everything's all right. It's like the world is happening now in a faraway city. Everything's fine." Hirshey informed her readers that Michael was a Jehovah's Witness and thus believed in an impending apocalypse.

When Jackson told her that he makes all his career decisions, the myth of the Two Michaels was born: one shy and vulnerable, the other a take-no-prisoners businessman. The interview, she says, remained tense until he relaxed when talking about his animals; he even forced Hirshey to play with his boa constrictor. Then, unbidden by Hirshey, he asked, "Know what I also love?" No, said Hirshey, what do you love? "Manikins." He told Hirshey that when his house was finished, his room would be peopled with store

dummies.

"I guess I want to bring them to life," he went on. "I like to imagine talking to them. You know what I think it is? Yeah, I think I'll say it. I think I'm accompanying myself with friends I never had." Michael began engaging in a little self-analysis for public consumption. "That's what it is. I surround myself with people I want to be my friends. And I can do that with manikins. I'll talk to them."

It may have been with those lines that Thrillermania really began. It wasn't just that Michael Jackson sounded or even looked peculiar; he'd marked himself as irrefutably "other," a stranger in a strange land. Even the audience that had stayed with him over the years wasn't ready for this. Now even the songs sounded a bit different. One was moved to drag out old albums and pore through lyrics for clues. The desperate quality to his singing was now lifted into a different context and given a new weight. The power of the presentation was that Jackson didn't appear sophisticated enough to be faking it -- he wasn't going for any ironic distancing, and so far as one could tell it was not a shtick. He didn't <u>want</u> to do these interviews.

As he declared in the filmed narrative accompanying the title song of <u>Thriller</u>, Michael Jackson was "not like other guys." There were more strange revelations that

year. Discussing his adoration for the movie E.T., Jackson told Newsweek that people really could fly, one just had to "think the right thoughts to levitate yourself off the ground." (p. 52) He said the same thing to Ebony; it was, he told them, his most fervent wish. (December, 1982, p. 128) He explained to a Creem reporter that he didn't care if people still thought of him as a child star: "I feel I'm Methuselah as well as a child." (p. 61) Almost every interview contained at least one of these little oddities, and every reporter who met him also commented on his paralyzing shyness.

Almost everyone in the official media, though, avoided comment on Jackson's obvious effeminacy; it just wasn't polite to discuss it. No one asked Michael if people ever gave him a hard time because of his voice. No reporter spoke of his or her own urge to snicker or marvel at Jackson's appearance or at the things he said. Comedian Eddie Murphy (who had earlier met Jackson) did snicker, though, and his audience roared and screamed volcanically as if finally the unspeakable had been said.

In these interviews and in the way he spoke and carried himself, Jackson worked at slipping himself from any notion of a fixed identity. His androgyny was clear, but his denials of homosexuality and claims of virginity seemed ingenuous, he'd changed his facial appearance so

that with his new, slimmed nose, he no longer conformed to any stereotype of what an individual of African descent ought to look like, and he insisted that he did not identify with any particular generational group: he would be both aged and immature. Therefore, to both men and women, blacks as well as whites, children and adults, gays and straights, Jackson was still different, something "other" than themselves. He occupied no social role. Michael Jackson purposefully wished to identify himself as what P.T. Barnum called a "human oddity," or what everyone else would call a freak. (I do not use "freak" here in the sense of the occasionally-used homophobic slur. It's meaning may contain that one, but is much broader.)

As the intensity of Jackson's popularity grew, so did the intensity of the public's relation to his freakiness. The experience of non-freaks in the presence of such individuals can only be called what Sigmund Freud described as "uncanny," or something so terrifyingly familiar that it appears alien or strange. What is uncanny, for Freud, is more than merely familiar; it is instead something made so familiar that it is not for public viewing. It is the familiar made secret, buried, repressed so deeply beneath ordinary experience that it no longer appears familiar at all. An uncanny experience, for Freud, is one where that which has been made strange suddenly appears in the world

of ordinary life. This appearance is terrifying and, yes, thrilling.

People are terrified by or attracted to freaks because, says Leslie Fiedler, they present to the "normal" among us an image of "the secret self," or an identity which is somewhat less than rigidly bounded by socially appropriate parameters of gender or race or age (or, in other cases, even humanness). (Fiedler, 1978) This "secret self" which Fiedler alludes to in his study of "freaks" is actually the genuine <u>experience</u> of the self which most subordinated people (that is, most people: women, kids, minorities, working people, non-heterosexuals) live everyday, rather than an openly-presented mythologizing (in Roland Barthes' sense) of the self which is carefully established in order for most people to successfully carry on their everyday lives. Michael Jackson provided a subversion of the mythologizing of everyday experience which was uncanny. Jackson publicly revealed the "secret self" of everyday experience which is normally denied, repressed, buried.

This is why it was not possible to "identify" with Michael Jackson directly in the sense that one would identify with the forceful, fully realized personnas of, say James Dean, or Madonna. To identify with Jackson would have been to obliterate one's already established sense of

sexual, racial, or generational identity; in fact, "identifying" with Michael Jackson would be oxymoronic since Jackson had renounced identity. To do so would be to admit that one's "secret self" (those experiences of subordination and struggling against subordination: situations where one is helpless to maintain one's sense of identity before one's subordinators and the small, vital daily attempts to "moonwalk" over those situations) had a genuine existence. To get caught up in the chills and thrills of Michael Jackson's burgeoning popular success in 1983 and '84 was to experience the joy and fear of validating one's secret, suppressed "self," the "other" lurking inside a safely situated identity. "I'm the type of person who will tell it all, even though it's a secret," Michael complained. "And I know that things should be kept private."

Experiencing the uncanny works to provide pleasure, though, only so long as one's established identity does not come under direct, conscious challenge, that is, until the repressed returns and announces itself for what it is. The free plunge into the Michael Jackson experience could only last so long the unspoken largely remained so. This was the story of Thriller.

By early spring of '83, "Billie Jean" literally skyrocketed to number one on the Billboard charts, and remained there for seven weeks. In the early eighties,

with record sales still stagnating, it was not uncommon for records to remain on top for long periods, but "Billie Jean" was followed almost immediately by Jackson's own "Beat It" which stayed on top four weeks. Thriller also reached number one and stayed there. At one point in early 1983, Michael Jackson had the top record on four charts: pop singles and albums, and black ("soul" had recently been declared obsolete) singles and albums. This was unprecedented.

CBS had meanwhile taken the trouble to finance a very expensive "video" to promote "Billie Jean": a little film set to the tune which dramatized the protagonist's efforts to avoid being pinned down. The chief outlet for airing these videos was the cable channel founded in 1981 called Music Television or MTV. MTV told CBS that they wouldn't be able to air "Billie Jean," in spite of its across-the-board popularity. "Billie Jean," they said, was not rock 'n' roll and they only played rock. In keeping with the existing policies of rock radio at the time, it seems that most performers with black skin were not rock 'n' roll enough for the channel, but this time too much was riding on a particular video for the label to let it pass. It was reported (then denied, of course) that much screaming went on before CBS decided on their options. At one point they explained to Michael that he may have to go on the "CBS

Morning News" to declare that MTV is racist. (Howard Polskin, "MTV Rocks and Rolls Over Its Rivals," T.V. Guide, September 22, 1986, p. 41) Michael, it is said, did not want to do this. So, the now suppressed story goes, CBS threatened to pull all its videos from the cable channel. At this point, "Billie Jean" became a rock 'n' roll song.

In April, Michael took part in a televised reunion of Motown performers in celebration of the company's twenty-fifth anniversary and stole the show with an exhibition of dancing which robbed the breath from nearly everyone who saw it. He unveiled his famous "moonwalk" for the first time, spun as if on ice skates, and perched precariously on his toes for the briefest moment. He pursued his dance in a sort of calamitous rage. It was as if Michael realized that this was his chance to escape the confines of mere stardom and become something quite different: not the "star" he'd been for fifteen or so years, but an iconic signifier on the order of Marilyn or Elvis. The show aired in May, with "Beat It" and Thriller already laying waste to the charts. After this, there was a buzz surrounding Michael Jackson, an excitement suggesting that each new gesture could supply something like a revelation. When "Beat It" aired on MTV, with a scaled-down version of "West Side Story" (complete with real street gang members), people who rarely or never paid attention to R&B performers were now

getting interested: what's next from this strange new creature who was once known as an ordinary (albeit talented) black child?

Each new single entered the top ten, breaking Jackson's own record for the most top tens from an album by an individual artist (Off The Wall had four). Since Michael was most concerned with proving himself to the (white) world through these sorts of statistical measurements, with legitimizing himself, he should have been quite literally walking on air at this point. But, really, there were other things on his mind. Both Joe Jackson's and Weisner and DeMann's management contracts had just run out and despite (or, as a result of) Michael's great success, Joe Jackson wanted his partners out.

The battle between the elder Jackson and his partners was fought publicly in the pages of Billboard magazine, the industry trade paper. The June 25, 1983 issue featured comments by Joseph, Michael, Weisner and DeMann. (Paul Grein, "Who Guides Jackson's Career," p. 3 and 62) "There are a lot of leeches trying to break up the group," Joe told the paper. "A lot of people are whispering in Michael's ear. But we know who they are. They're only in it for the money. I was there before it started and I'll be there after it ends." He went on, claiming he'd only hooked up with Weisner and DeMann in 1978 "because there was a time

when I felt I needed white help in dealing with the corporate structure at CBS." Michael was contacted by Billboard directly and informed of his father's remarks. Apparently he exploded. "To hear him talk like that turns my stomach. I don't know where he gets that from." Michael was referring to Joseph's "white help" remark and quickly drafted a formal statement for the press: "Racism is not my motto," he declared.

Since his father's statements were actually pretty matter of fact (institutional racism is an intrinsic part of the music industry), it seems clear that Michael's anger stemmed from other aspects of the statement, particularly his being treated as an object who had nothing to say about his own affairs. He tried to make it clear that he had "the final word on every decision." Less than two weeks later Weisner and DeMann received word that they would no longer be working for Michael Jackson. They took a back page ad thanking the record label for their work through the years.

Since most of the press and public were unaware that Michael's parents had reconciled (it was routinely reported that Michael lived only with his mother and sisters), they were therefore unaware, as well, of the context of Michael's strong statements about his father's remarks (particularly that what his father had said "turns my

stomach"). Even though Michael did fire Weisner and Demann almost immediately after the Billboard fracas was published, his statements to Billboard were acts of remarkable courage.

Much earlier Michael told Gerri Hirshey that he would be working on a new group album and although he didn't want to, he knew he'd probably join them on another tour. By mid-1983, the tour was the family's primary preoccupation. With his recording career going through the roof, Michael tried again to get out of it. "I fought against it," he wrote in his book. (M. Jackson, 1988, p.238) Several of his brothers had been in financial difficulty and they needed this tour. (Rusty Cutchin, "Tour is Over But Battles Remain," Cashbox, December 15, 1984, p.27) Michael apparently told his close associates that Katherine cried to him and this was what sealed it (Schindehette, People, August 8, 1988, p. 55). Katherine claims she used "gentle persuasion." (K. Jackson, 1990, p. 138) Latoya says of the events leading up to "Victory": "the more my brother tried to distance himself from Joseph professionally and personally, the more obsessed Joseph became with getting Michael back." (L. Jackson, 1991, p. 154)

Joseph set about looking for a promoter and a maybe a corporate sponsor. Somehow, Don King, the notorious boxing promoter, got in touch with Joe and told him he could hook

them up with a major sponsor. Eventually, King helped cut a deal with Pepsi-Cola. Everyone, including Joe and Katherine, would get a piece of the pie.

While this was going on, the public knew little or nothing about the backstage rancor; by the fall of 1983, Thriller was still strong -- singles continued to ride the charts, and it was announced that Michael would start work on yet another spectacular video. Instead of working on the Jacksons' album, he was in L.A. preparing a million-dollar video for his album's title tune: The Video To End All Videos. It was all a big secret at the time -- except that everyone knew about it. Since he would be financing it himself, his lawyer and business advisor John Branca (Michael had no manager yet) suggested they put it out for sale as a home video with behind-the-scenes footage of Michael at work, being -- good God -- himself. It all became too much for the mass audience to stand. There was now a hunger for Michael Jackson. The idea of seeing what this human oddity was "really like" was titillatingly irresistible.

Though the 14-minute long Thriller video remains one of the most entertaining of all rock videos -- witty, playful, and just a little scary -- the behind-the-scenes footage which accompanies it is far more compelling. His on-set relationship with director John Landis (Animal

House, The Blues Brothers) was a matter of discussion for quite some time. Landis entertains Michael on the set as if he were a child. Landis plays with him, picking him up, holding him upside down (Michael didn't weigh very much in 1983 and Landis was able to do this with one arm), and tickling his feet. After this last bit of oddly affectionate horseplay, Michael giggles, saying "you did that yesterday." Michael appears in these scenes like a love-starved little boy, and Landis plays along, even seeming to enjoy it. There seems to be no consciousness at all that Michael is twenty-five years old. The video quickly became the biggest-selling music video thus far.

Still, in 1983, David Bowie made the cover of Time magazine for his contributions to the record industry's resuscitation. It's not hard to imagine Michael's reaction on seeing Bowie's (white) face on the cover. Anyway, that would all change soon.

The Jacksons signed the contract with Pepsi. According to Pepsico president Roger Enrico, there was much reluctance on Michael's part; he finally signed the contract one morning -- at four a.m. "It took King several days, with a lot of help from Michael's family, to get that last name on the contract," says Enrico. (1986, p. 100) They all appeared at a November press conference in New York to announce the upcoming tour. Don King did most of the talk-

ing.

Then in December, Michael tried to renege on the deal with Pepsi. It seems the Quaker Oats people had a good offer to line the Jacksons up with granola bars and Michael thought it was a better product with which to be associated. Pepsi representatives held a meeting with Joe Jackson and Don King, but came away with nothing until Jackson said, "I think I know how to resolve this." He invited them to lunch with his wife. At the lunch meeting, Joe and Katherine agreed with the Pepsi officials that raising children who possess a sense of integrity is the most important accomplishment of one's life. Katherine told them she would talk to Michael. It's impossible to speculate, of course, as to what magic words Katherine might have used to bring Michael around, but once she let him know whose side she was on in this matter, he acted immediately. Within "a day or so," Michael agreed to cooperate. (Enrico, 1986, p. 108-109)

The long form video was aired in January, exclusively on MTV. It may sound cliched, but there really was a sense of excitement in the air: there is no other way to describe it. Overhearing or participating in conversation among the young during early January, all one heard about was Jackson. People plotted with some desperation to get off their shifts the night of the showing. Thriller began to rack up

unprecedented sales. Soon, Saturday Night Fever was no longer the biggest selling album of all time. Michael later said he predicted it, though he describes his reaction at the time as ecstatic.

In Raymond Williams's terminology, the popular arena underwent a change in the "structures of feeling." By structures of feeling, Williams meant "meanings and values as they are actually lived and felt." (1977, p. 132) Williams suggested that an alternative term might be "structures of experience." In the case of Michael Jackson's popular watershed of 1983 through '84, those newly articulated meanings and values were largely unspoken. They were articulated by the experience only: the pleasure of Thriller was a pleasure without words, it's verboten subjectivity submerged beneath statistics. Time magazine tried to find out "Why He's a Thriller," and came away with nothing substantial. "A 'good friend' (of Michael's) is right," they declared, 'when he suggests that ultimately, Michael's appeal is universal less because of his music than because of who he is.'" (Jay Cocks, [reported by Denise Worrell], "Why He's a Thriller," Time, March 19, 1984, p. 59) Time then apparently gives up any attempt to determine "who (Jackson) is," except to agree with the conventional wisdom that, yes, Jackson is androgynous, and lives an isolated existence. That this

does not distinguish Jackson from many other pop stars is not an issue for Time.

In January of '84, Dick Clark's American Music Awards gave Michael, who was 25 at the time, a "lifetime achievement award." After an unbearably hype-filled introduction (Barry Manilow even sang a medley of Jackson hits -- it had to be seen to be believed: several audience members sitting behind Michael Jackson appear ready to double over with laughter), Michael shyly mounted the stage and, unexpectedly offering a momentary bit of dance, blew the hype away. It was a pure representation of what Georges Bataille described as "the gift," or an act which so exceeded existing social determinations as to actually diminish their force. He was utterly disarming. Softly and somewhat awkwardly, he thanked his parents for bringing him into the world and he thanked the "disc jockeys," obviously unaware that programming consulting firms, not DJs, picked the records these days. He forgot to thank people and then apologized, blushing. It was all irresistible. Thriller picked up more momentum. The "pop explosion" (Greil Marcus's term) was at its peak.

Then, on the set of the Pepsi commercial that he didn't want to do, there was an accident. Fireworks exploded a few feet from Michael's head and a spark caught his hair on fire. He spun around, lifted his jacket over

his head and cried out for help. A bodyguard came to smother the flames, singeing his own fingers. Michael fell to the ground, kicking and screaming. This all happened before a full audience of extras waving cans of Pepsi. Crew members placed some ice on his head and removed him to the hospital where TV crews rushed to await the wounded star's arrival. Noticing the television lights glaring through the ambulance windows, Michael told the medics to please not take off his white glitter glove. From the stretcher, he remembered to wave with the now-famous glove. (M. Jackson, 1988, pp. 235-238, Carl Arrington, "Thriller Chiller," People, February 13, 1984, pp. 24-27, and Us, "Jackson Sisters," June 4, 1984, pp. 36-43) That night, after a radio reporter who was there reported that "his hair was completely torched," the female DJ played an old Jackson Five song from, she said, "before his voice didn't change."

The Pepsi people were, they claimed, panicked that this could be a public relations disaster for them, although they were assured that at least there were acceptable takes of the commercial in the can. Two corporate representatives entered the waiting room looking apprehensive and grim. Joseph and several Jackson brothers were there, relaxed and even cracking jokes. Joseph walked over to the Pepsi people and asked "Why the long faces? The burn's the

size of a half-dollar." (Enrico, 1986, p. 117) Latoya, on the other hand, remembers "an angry-looking mass of scorched tissue about the diameter of your palm. It was hard not to wince." (L. Jackson, 1991, p.136) Michael says today that the third degree burn in the center of the larger palm-sized second degree wound almost went through to his skull. In the hospital that night, Michael watched a videotape of "Close Encounters of the Third Kind" and watched Richard Dreyfuss walk away with the aliens forever.

Instead of a disaster, the incident made the commercials events unto themselves. Pepsi paid Michael off in the end, and did great business, catching up with Coke. Saturday Night Live did Michael-burning skits. Thriller's sales continued to mushroom.

Three paperback biographies of Jackson appeared simultaneously on the New York Times best-seller list. (March 18, 1984, Book Review, p. 34) Andy Warhol was commissioned by Time magazine to prepare the cover art for their "Why He's a Thriller" issue. It was difficult to avoid hearing Michael Jackson's voice or seeing images of his face if one ventured in public in early 1984. It seemed as though radio stations blared the seven top ten singles from Thriller continuously, interrupting the flow occasionally for old Jackson Five songs or cuts from Off The Wall.

Swinging the dial around at any given moment, a Jackson song (or two or three) could be located at will. Top Forty radio was re-established as the dominant format and rhythm & blues and dance records began to routinely make the top ten. White teenagers actually began to pause before the "soul" bins in record shops. In one record store where Jackson posters hung prominently inside and out, the owner bemoaned having to allot so much space to a "nigger."

After the Pepsi accident, Michael appeared in public only sporadically, but when he did, it was with a flourish. Decked out as if for a coronation in a glittering band-leader jacket, shades and the single, shimmering beaded white glove, he received a record eight Grammy awards, made it into the Guinness Book of World Records, and received a citation from the President at the White House for donating a song to an anti-drunk driving campaign. The President said Michael epitomized the American Dream, or something to that effect. He was no longer ignored.

Naturally, most rock critics (who had themselves just voted Thriller record of the year in all the polls) found all this ceremonial reverence for a pop star revolting. "But what really drove the nail into the coffin is that Jackson appeared at the White House with Reagan," one critic lamented. (see Mikal Gilmore's "Michael: Why Are You So Bad?" for a sampling of several critics' revulsion. All

the critics who spoke to Gilmore did so anonymously. Right On Class, January 1985, pp. 18-20 and p. 60.) It is clear, though, that before the White House ceremony, this particular critic had already constructed and closed the coffin's lid -- all that was needed was one last motivating factor: "what really drove the nail ...," he told Gilmore. On the other hand, no coffin nails were driven when the sexually mischievous black rock 'n' roller Prince endorsed Ronald Reagan for president in 1980. Prince's reasoning may have saved him from the critics' wrath: it seemed, according to Prince, that Governor Reagan had "bigger balls" than President Jimmy Carter. (Greil Marcus, "Charts of the Gods," New West, November, 1981, p. 130)

However repulsed some members of the media were at all the veneration Michael received at the time, Michael may have experienced even more revulsion at home. Joseph had been troubled over Michael's success overshadowing that of the Jacksons since Off The Wall, and these lofty displays may have been just too much for him to bear. Latoya would later remember her father's reaction. "You know all those big awards shows?" Latoya told Associated Press reporter Dana Kennedy in September of 1991. "Michael would go, get all these awards and go home and get beaten up by Joseph. It was embarrassing." (The Day (Connecticut), September 11, 1991, p. A2)

(It should be pointed out that in the numerous interviews she's given during which she's repeated this story, Latoya does not specify whether this sort of thing was triggered particularly by any awards presentations, or whether this violence was a routine part of life in the Jackson home. In any case, Latoya's point is that what she calls "the whole bit," that is, the glittering public display of pride and success seen on these television programs, was sharply at odds with the everyday private life she remembers experiencing at the time. What Latoya may not realize, nevertheless, is that Michael's "whole bit" consisted of a more complicated public presentation than merely a glamorous success story.)

Throughout all the Thriller hoopla, several observers remarked that Michael himself remained oddly grim-visaged. When appearing at award ceremonies, for example, he rarely broke into a smile and when he did, it appeared to many to be a difficult act. Dave Marsh, in his collection of epistolary essays to Jackson, was mystified by Jackson's public attitude.

> ... Hidden behind your sunglasses, you almost never smile in public. On stage, you bear down as hard as anyone I've ever seen -- if your show is unsatisfying, it's not because you're not trying. Up there, it's easy to believe that "Working Day and Night" is how you feel about life. It's a job. It was the same when the TV news showed you at Madame Tussaud's Wax Museum, weeks after the

> Victory tour ended. Looking over the likeness of yourself, you gave a quick, dutiful grin for the cameras then immediately went back to pursed lips.
>
> Is this what your obsession with control is ultimately all about? "Fun" (whatever that is -- it's an abstraction whose precise meaning isn't very well understood) means letting go, finding a release: giving it up. You can't, not because you don't want to, but maybe because you don't know how. (Marsh, 1985, p. 181) (parentheses, Marsh's)

Although it was routinely reported that this public reticence of Jackson's was because he was very "shy," it became, however, a source of disturbance to some observers. Dave Marsh, certainly, found it unsettling. Pop stars, he felt, ought to be seen as enjoying the experience or why else would we identify with them? But Michael did not appear to be having "fun." This made his success somewhat mysterious to many. It perhaps didn't occur to such critics that drawing pleasure from the mass-media could be a many-faceted process. Everyone need not seek pleasure through "fun," in Marsh's understanding of it.

Michael's cautious approach to the pop experience appeared as much in his singing, songwriting, and dancing as in his public gestures. There is no more perfect revelation of this than in his performance of "Billie Jean," both on record and on stage. The version of the dance which he performed on "Motown 25" created pleasure through the achievement of mastery over chaotic forces, not through the

traditional rock 'n' roll approach of creating chaos in the midst of oppressive serenity. Michael, clearly, worked from a position where there was no fundamental assumption of serenity to shatter. There were, instead, masses of threatening, chaotic, unknowable forces which presented a clear and present danger. Michael's solution within the piece itself was to corral the forces, then, quite literally, glide over them. In Greil Marcus's words, he "walk(ed) the television stage not as if he owned it, not as if if was built for him, but as if his very presence had called it into being." In Marcus's view, "he shocked the nation." (Marcus, 1989, p. 97)

For an observer like Marcus, Jackson's display was a representation of pure, unlimited power: a power which was shocking. But what, indeed was shocking about it? What did this performance subjectively feel like to this "nation" which was "shocked" by it? To some, the answer lay not in the realm of experience, but in ideology. For Anthony DeCurtis ("Victory On The Road," Musician, October, 1984, pp. 24-30), the tense control that Michael exerts over his performance emerges from keeping various ideological contradictions in "balance" instead of "exploding ... in fragments." For DeCurtis, Jackson reflects the contemporary cultural struggle to be both hyper-sexual and innocent, to be true to one's roots (in Jackson's case -- his

African-American heritage) while trying make it and assimilate, to be eternally youthful yet wized-up enough to succeed in a society which rewards self-interest. "That the same oppositions stretching and straining Michael," DeCurtis says, "struggle in less compelling ways within every member of his audience only strengthens the pull of that contradiction -- this is the real magic of Michael Jackson -- and hardens the kick." (Musician, October, 1984, p. 30)

As with Marcus, there are problems with DeCurtis's approach. To begin with, it cannot be assumed that everyone in the viewing audience experienced this "shock" (Marcus) in the same way. If the subjective experience of the performance turned on the issue of power (a point Marcus more astutely grasps), then the experience of any one viewer would depend on that viewer's relationship to power in his or her own life. Since most Americans live in subordinated relations of power in most aspects of their lives, Jackson's "powerful" display could only be shocking if he, too, appeared subordinated in the context of the performance. The explosion of "cool" could be experienced as shocking only if the performance contained intense contradictory significations of ease and constraint. Then the subjective experience of watching Jackson glide "shock"ingly across the stage would suggest what it might

be like to see a drowning man begin to swim. DeCurtis was able catch this from Michael's presentation, where Marcus may have "moonwalked" over this point. The performance piece produced excitement precisely when success did not come easily, but through a hair-raising struggle.

In the case of the dance, those uncontrollable forces were signified by Jackson's occasional lack of grace, combated with hard-won gracefulness which was truly nothing less than thrilling. When he sang (or, here, lip-synched the record), there was an outright admission of sheer confusion, a doubting of everything in the world (of the song) expressed in anguished low moans and fear-filled, high-pitched lamentations. When he sang with anger, it was often drawn back into his throat with a sense of trepidation. The anger in "Billie Jean," as Marcus pointed out (1989, p. 112), was not "fierce," but, instead, overcome by dread. And the lyrics about a paternity suit (no paternity suits were ever filed against Michael Jackson until after the release of this record) are a classic study in paranoid confusion complicated by guilt: "the smell of sweet perfume/This happened much too soon/ ... Billie Jean is not my lover/ And the kid is not my son." He both tries and tries not to remember what happened on the night he danced with "Billie Jean" at a disco. The entire performance represents a titanic and only partially successful struggle to

control the dangerous, unknowable forces surrounding the performer, some of which emanate from his own desire.

The most important question is how it could feel so good to watch and listen to someone struggle to gain control over the uncontrollable. The only answer to this is a social one: to some, this was pleasurable because they actually wanted to identify with the protagonist's struggle -- it was something they lived out every day -- while for others who either didn't share or rejected this identification (once they became aware of the nature of it), it was simply incomprehensible, or worse than that, disturbing. For some, it was a satisfying validation of their knowledge that ordinary life (which Michael dramatizes in his song about an unexpected sexual encounter in a disco) could be experienced as terrifying and unknowable, while others refused to accept this knowledge, even as they may have felt pleasure while watching and enjoying the performance. It was for critics like Marsh and Marcus, an ego-dystonic pleasure which created an equal degree of displeasure. Such observers must have felt that they did not live their lives in dread; instead, they lived fearlessly, always courting the edge. This they could be sure of, that is, until <u>he</u> came along, and through their own fascination, made them wonder who they really were.

It was not a matter of mere sexual anxiety, but

anxiety rooted in the premises upon which sexuality in our society is based. Even gay men, lesbian women, and other sexual outsiders could experience this anxiety if they lived their lives feeling as though control over the uncontrollable was theirs for the taking. Their outsider status wouldn't matter as long as they considered themselves self-possessed men and women. But in his performance Michael posed a weakness that was too complete; a weakness which suggested that self-possession was something he could perhaps only hope for. Rather like the helpless children with whom he claims to identify, he had to struggle for it every moment in order to live. Under these circumstances, then, it wouldn't be all that easy to smile.

By early 1984, there were quite a few voices of dissent. Minister Louis Farrakhan denounced Jackson as "cissified." Jerry Falwell agreed. (People Extra, November, December, 1984, p. 78) The New Republic ("The Prisoner of Commerce," April 16, 1984, p. 4) and The Wall Street Journal ("Who Is Michael Jackson," March 6, 1984, p. 34.) wondered about the state of public taste. School principals ejected students for wearing white gloves. The Jehovah's Witnesses decided that the "Thriller" video was sacrilegious and threatened Michael with ex-communication if he didn't disassociate himself with it. An "interview" with Michael appeared in an issue of Awake!, the Witness

publication, in which he declared "No more "Thriller." (May 22, 1984, quoted in Marsh, 1985, p.117) MTV and other video outlets were warned never to air the clip again and they complied. On a special Halloween program of "scary" music videos hosted by Vincent price, "Thriller" (on which Price's voice is featured) was replaced by "Billie Jean." After this, it appears that Michael remained on a sort of probationary status with the Witnesses. He made sure to maintain his door-to-door rounds even while on his summer tour.

These dissenters were soon to have plenty of company as Thriller transformed into "Victory."

Back in L.A. plans for the upcoming tour were in chaos. Joe Jackson knew that Don King couldn't handle the operation, so at first it was decided that a tour "consultant" would have to be brought in. There was great concern over tour security since Michael's most devoted fans were young and fanatical. Michael and his advisors wanted Tom Hullet, who arranged many of Elvis Presley's mid-seventies tours. Hullet was very well thought of in the business. (Elvis, it is now said, once seriously considered replacing Colonel Tom Parker with Hullet as his manager.) Joseph simply overruled his son. (Goldberg, Rolling Stone, June 21, 1984, p. 46) In most of the other decisions, all six Jackson brothers voted democratically.

Although Michael almost always lost, he accepted the arrangement. As a result, he gave up all decision-making power.

It is, of course, entirely unclear why he would do such a thing during such a crucial period in his career. (What is clear is that he didn't seem to see any way out of the situation.) Soon the Jacksons were looking for a promoter who could guarantee the group a large sum of money in advance -- they were looking for over $40 million. Various promoters were auditioned, given tentative agreements, then abandoned. One decided to sue.

By early Spring, Michael had found himself a new manager, former Epic promo man Frank Dileo, who had no management experience, but was on very friendly terms with CBS Records president Walter Yetnikoff. (Dannen, 1990, p. 232) (It was later revealed [Ibid., p. 230] that Dileo had been convicted twice in his hometown of Pittsburgh of bookmaking shortly before joining Epic in 1979 as head of the promotion department.) It was Dileo who was influential in the choice of New England Patriots football team owner Chuck Sullivan as national promoter. Sullivan also had almost no experience in the music business. Still every decision Sullivan made had to be voted on by the six brothers (Jermaine was now back with the group). Michael, who says he was "outvoted on a number of issues," finally stopped

going to meetings. Irving Azoff, the president of MCA records was hired by Michael's "camp" (as Rolling Stone characterized it) to make his point of view heard. Don King tried to jump over to Azoff's side, but was unconvincing -- Michael hated King.

Soon the national press was reporting every detail of the backstage mess. Almost all of their information came from Michael's lawyer John Branca. For whatever reason, it seems that Michael had authorized Branca to leak everything. Since Michael would not establish his authority over the operation of the tour in private, was this leaking of information an attempt to protest publicly by exposing the internal disorder to the press? Of course, the only individual who could be actually damaged by this information was Michael himself: it would have ultimately been to his advantage to keep things quiet. It is possible he felt the public would understand that he was being treated unjustly. This was not how it turned out.

When Sullivan took over, things went from worse to even worse. Sullivan, it is clear, wanted only to make a killing from the tour; if he had to lay out $41 million, then ticket prices were going to be steep. Michael and his associates were uneasy about this aspect, but still did not act. Finally, some dates were announced (although later canceled and revised) and plans for selling tickets were

formulated.

In the June issue of Record, a Rolling Stone satellite publication, critic Dave Marsh issued an "open letter" to Michael Jackson, warning him that the tour, as it was presently arranged, would lead to disaster (he only knew this because Michael leaked the information to the press in the first place). Part of Marsh's letter "predicted" what would happen to Michael's personal credibility if the tour was "conceived greedily."

> Demands will be made upon you this summer that almost no one else has ever faced. And that's appropriate. When someone reaps as you have reaped, the stakes are raised. And when that person happens to be black and unconventional, the media raises them further. They've taken the gloves off and you can't dance fast enough to escape their blows. If you do this tour as presently planned, it's the biggest setup in showbiz history. You'll take a fall, with almost nothing to win (unless, of course, you need the money) and a world of credibility and affection to lose. (p. 64)

Marsh, for some reason, thought it "appropriate" that a black and "unconventional" superstar face demands that white, conventional (that is, those whose sexuality appears straight) stars need not. The question was never posed to Elvis (who was seen as a victim of his lucrative, yet tawdry movie career, not a perpetrator) or the Beatles (with their 20-minute-long stadium shows of the mid-sixties) as to whether their projects were "conceived greedily" or not. Those demands were not made of those

stars, and in Marsh's view, that's appropriate. And it's unclear whether Marsh considers himself a part of "the media" which will raise the stakes for Jackson. In any case, it's hard to tell whether Marsh's prediction of coming events was a prediction made out of concern for Jackson, or a threat.

As soon as Marsh's letter was published, Jann Wenner, owner and founder of Rolling Stone, removed Dave Marsh's name from the masthead He was being fired, allegedly over the issue of the open letter. Although it was possible that CBS Records pressured Wenner into taking this action, actually Wenner had other axes to grind with Marsh (Marsh was, at the time, savaging Rolling Stone on a monthly basis in his new newsletter Rock and Roll Confidential. L'affaire Jackson may have served as a convenient excuse for Wenner to finally give Marsh the axe). It was nevertheless bizarre that Rolling Stone, which had never evidenced much interest in Michael Jackson, would suddenly queue to his defense. Now, in counter-defense of the pilloried Marsh, the rock press (including Rolling Stone) was prepared to open fire. The mainstream media would follow immediately with their own rather heavy artillery. Michael and his brothers would soon have over plenty of ammunition.

Sullivan announced that all tickets would be purchased through a mail order lottery system. One could only buy

four tickets -- no more, no less -- and one had to send the money through the mail using a money order filled out at the post office (using a particular grade of pencil) and wait to see if any tickets came back. The money would be held in an account, gathering interest which Sullivan and the Jacksons would keep. Sullivan claimed the interest would probably only pay expenses. It was also announced that the individual ticket price would be $30. It's not difficult to imagine the reaction of the press and public. The unburdened joys of Thriller were soon to be crushed under this weight of unwanted knowledge.

Before the announcement, Michael tried to stop it. He said the price should be dropped to $20 and he would then personally underwrite the tour. His brothers voted against that. He leaked this to the press one more time. (Connelly, Rolling Stone, July 19, 1984, p. 9) The press was unmoved by Michael's apparently impotent whining that he was not responsible. Apparently he never told his brothers to lower the price or tour without him. For whatever reasons he couldn't bring himself to do it; the tour simply had to take place.

At this point, the press was eager to reveal that many fans all over the country had had their fill of Michael Jackson. Long Island Newsday critic Wayne Robbins went to Kansas City and reported that, after conducting "random

street interviews," he observed a noticeable "erosion of affection." (July 6, 1984, p. 31) Marsh's "prediction" was right on the money, even down to the language used by "the media." One young fan, an eleven-year-old girl from Texas named LaDonna Jones, wrote Michael her own "open letter." She told Michael bluntly, "now you've taken my dream away." The letter was seized upon by newspapers and television news outlets across the country. According to the Cable News Network, Jackson's fans were telling him to "Beat It." By this time Thrillermania vanished into the sour abyss of Victory (the new album for which tour was named), never to return. At least, it would never be quite the same again.

Michael had to know that he'd let much of this happen by his own inaction. He tried a last ditch effort to bring back the magic. On July 5, 1984, the day before the first "Victory Tour" concert, Jackson called a press conference to announce that the system would be changed. Frank Dileo introduced Michael, who explained the changes to reporters himself. One no longer had to buy four tickets, use a money order, or participate in a lottery. "No one will pay money unless they get a ticket." Then, as three of his brothers stood silently behind him, Jackson said that "finally, and most importantly" he would be giving away "all my money" accrued from the tour to charity. He apparently wanted everyone to surmise that he felt any profit

he might gain from this enterprise was blood money. He also seemed to be trying to get across the point that the whole blasted thing was not conducted for his sake in the first place. As they left the conference room, his brothers seemed sullen; they'd been paraded before the press as gougers by their own brother. Michael waved to the crush of reporters and Randy pushed in front of him, knocking his arm down. Randy had been reading the written statement over his brother's shoulder as he read it to the press.

By the time Michael read his statement, the tour was already a monumental failure in terms of the Jackson brothers' intentions. Hoping to capitalize mightily on the intense interest of the public in their brother's intriguing public career, the other brothers helped to shatter that intrigue by shoving the private malignancy of the family's interaction into the public domain. Now virtually nothing was left to the imagination. The others did nothing to disguise their jealousy and resentment of the brother who made this tour a possibility. "Michael has had great success with Thriller," Tito Jackson explained. "The radio has been playing Michael. Everybody knows how Michael sounds. Now it's the Jacksons' turn. We just don't want it to be all of Michael again." ("Tito -- The Common Man," Creem Close Up, September, 1984, p. 47)

Michael himself said nothing aside from leaking information to the press through his attorney.

Still, the familial and industry-wide exploitation of Michael Jackson's success was transformed by much of the electronic and print media into Michael Jackson's personal exploitation of his own public. Jackson was portrayed as greedily exploiting the selfless love of his young fans out of calculating self-interest. "How could you, of all people, be so selfish," Ladonna Jones asked of Michael Jackson, who'd turned over his labor in the summer of '84 to his family out of a sense of obligation. Did most of the press know why Michael Jackson did this tour? Everyone who read Rolling Stone's "Trouble in Paradise" cover story in February (March 15, 1984, pp. 23-28) certainly knew. This information was more than readily available, but made no difference. As Dave Marsh pointed out, it was a set-up. But even Dave Marsh went merrily along with this portrait in greed.

> The tragedy is that the audience you'll keep is exactly the audience that your tour betrayed, the audience that you never had the time for, the people that you never made your other fans pay attention to. They aren't mad at you. Why should they be? You only treated them the way that everyone else does: sucked their pockets dry, and walked away. At least you gave them something to dance to, so they still love you. (Marsh, 1985, p. 207)

Aside from the obvious racism of Marsh's comments

(give those Negroes something to dance to and you'll keep 'em happy) and the buried homophobia of the metaphor (Michael Jackson, "pocket-sucker"), it is quite simply a misrepresentation that Jackson sucked anyone's pockets dry on the Victory Tour and "walked away." Yes, pop stars working within capitalist systems do indeed work to suck as many pockets dry as possible -- this much is irrefutable -- but this was not Michael Jackson's principal goal for this tour that he didn't want to do. His "goal" in this case, as Marsh was well aware, was to allow members of his family to suck his fans' pockets dry. Since Jackson actually lost money on the tour (in addition to taking no proceeds, he helped settle numerous tour-related lawsuits to avoid court appearances), it certainly can't be asserted that he "walked away" from Victory without a thought and richer for his troubles. It is also disingenuous, in light of the "Beat It" video where Jackson expressed his solidarity with and concern for young men involved in street gangs (most of whom are African-American and Latino), for Marsh to insist that Jackson never made his "other fans" pay attention to minorities. In the end, Marsh comes to the conclusion that Jackson's whole presentation amounted to nothing more than a personal accumulation of wealth and power for one man. His "story," Marsh insisted, remained ephermeral. (Marsh, 1985, p. 257)

As soon as Victory got underway, the essential "ephemerality" of Michael Jackson became a favorite plea of critics who decided that Michael Jackson was not a true culture hero. Such critics passed over more obvious reasons (race, sexual representation) why Jackson couldn't qualify. Jackson's vulnerability to charges of this nature did not emerge, in the view of these critics, from his blackness or his epicene presentation. It was simply that he really was vacuous, empty, and ultimately "unthreatening." (Although these critics seemed fairly well threatened.) It was only necessary that the general public be made aware of this. After Ladonna's letter appeared, Greil Marcus wrote, "That was all it took ... it was all over ... Jackson fought against the fable of the Emperor's New Clothes, but no one ever beats a fable. He was all through." Jackson's music, he insisted, was unlike that of, say, Elvis Presley's. "Thriller was simply not rich enough to sustain (it's) publicity, to trivialize it -- as, in 1956, everything said about Elvis Presley was trivialized by one minute of 'Don't Be Cruel.' Thriller was not rich enough to sustain itself." ("The Dead and The Quick," Artforum, February, 1985, pp. 69-70) In Marcus's view, Elvis's status as a white male heterosexual cultural icon, of course wouldn't have had anything to do with his relative lack of vulnerability in the popular marketplace. It was

simply that his music alone had a "rich"ness Jackson's lacked. All four-and-a-half minutes of "Billie Jean," for Marcus, wouldn't mean a damn thing in the the face of the publicity firestorm of Victory, because, compared to, say, "Don't Be Cruel," it didn't mean a thing to anyone. That the white critics and members of the press (for whom Jackson's music meant little) generally did not share Jackson's social status was of no significance in this account. If his music meant nothing to them, then it couldn't possibly mean anything to anyone else either. (No matter that performers like Prince, Madonna, and Terrence Trent Darby were inspired by Jackson to, as Marcus put it, "say whatever it was they had to say." Marcus insists this is just what never took place during Thriller's heyday. "I want to be like Michael Jackson," Madonna said in 1984. [Right On, November and Anderson, 1991, p. 114 and 319)

Agreeing wholeheartedly with Greil Marcus, Marsh (and other, less influential, observers) went on to say that the Victory performances themselves proved that Michael Jackson wasn't even an artist at all, but someone whose great physical talents were conjured by video illusion into appearing as art. (Marsh, 1985, p. 254) Marsh wrote as if he'd never been to a Jacksons' live performance before, and perhaps he had not. Had he seen Earth, Wind, and Fire at their seventies peak, or perhaps any of the top mainstream R&B

acts of recent years? While it might actually be that he did, these acts and their traditions were for the most part completely ignored by the white critics and mainstream white press who were surprised at how different Jackson's show was from a white "rock" concert. It is, of course, difficult to speculate as to whether this ignorance was merely unfortunate or simply willful. It was, nevertheless, plain.

As Gerri Hirshey pointed out in her Rolling Stone review of the concerts, the Jacksons' gaudy stagecraft was really little different from R&B acts like George Clinton's Parliament-Funkadelic shows of the late seventies or even the Rolling Stones' elaborate mid-seventies productions (wherein Mick Jagger rode atop a giant inflatable phallus). ("Michael's Magic Show," August 16, 1984, p. 32) But most of all, the brightly lit, glittery ambiance was in the tradition of mainstream rhythm and blues performance. In this case, however, Michael Jackson was working with a bigger initial bankroll and so was able to afford a fancier theatrical production.

The show began with a bit of childish fairytale bluster: a re-enactment of the sword in the stone ceremony. The Jacksons' mission was to save the world from evil creatures called "Kreetons" (who looked like gigantic Muppet puppets). A costumed Michael (not Randy, as it was often

reported) pulled the sword from the stone and shouted: "Behold the Kingdom!" After this, the Jacksons appeared as themselves, rising from beneath the stage to pose momentarily before removing their sunglasses and beginning their show. Aside from one other bit of expensive theatrics near the end of the show (where Michael is set upon and killed by a robotic spider before levitating off his bier to his resurrection), the show proceeded as a routine Jacksons' concert. Michael sang lead throughout (except for a rest spell when Jermaine performed a medley of his own solo numbers), and the brothers busied themselves in one way or another behind him, often in shadow.

Michael pursued some shows on the tour with more energy and commitment than others, but on the whole he sang with conviction and danced bewitchingly from one hype-burdened night to another. If for Greil Marcus, it was a "stiff, impersonal, over-rehearsed supper club act blown up with lasers and sonic booms," (1989, p. 111) for others, it was merely one among many chances (1978, '79, '80, '81, '84, '87, '88) to catch Michael Jackson's brand of original, edgy, highly personalized rhythm and blues. (Yes indeed, many old soul singers <u>do</u> end up in "supper clubs," but this takes nothing away from what they have to say -- just who they can say it to.)

Marcus's implication here was clear: Michael Jackson

was, after all, just some talented black act; he didn't warrant all this hype, all this talk, all this notice. (In fact, he belonged in a supper club.) And the Victory Tour would rightly return him to his place. He'd been around so long without anyone (white) paying attention to him -- why on earth should that have changed?

There were many complaints at the time that the shows were very similar to one another -- Michael Jackson was accused of lacking spontaneity. Many white critics much preferred Bruce Springsteen with his long, between-song monologues about his adventurous youth. Springsteen loved to tell shaggy-dog stories about, for instance, pleading with his girl from a phone booth ... in the rain. It did not occur to such critics that perhaps Michael Jackson's youth was possibly too truly adventurous to talk about. His "adventures," most of which were now fully covered by the press, couldn't be laughed off. The Jacksons even attempted a spoof of their "democratic" style of squabbling with one another ("let's take a vote"), but quickly removed the routine from the show. As close as it was to the unpleasant reality that everyone in the audience was privy to, the joke was decidedly not funny. Actually, this very public "inside joke" might have been a little scary at the time. In any case, the show was peppered with several rehearsed routines which varied little from show to show.

Critics like Long Island Newsday's Wayne Robbins were "left wondering how much better they could be if they triumphed over their inhibitions." (July 31, 1984, p. II/3) Michael did not speak freely from the stage. (Possibly the critics yearned for merely the appearance of spontaneity, because, in the case of Springsteen, that is all they could be truly assured of.)

The virtual collapse of the Victory Tour resulted in a volcanic loosening of tongues concerning Michael Jackson and his recent notoriety. A roll of Bakhtinian-style laughter now followed Jackson wherever he was a topic of conversation. "What did the doctor find during Brooke Shield's pap smear? Michael Jackson's other glove!" Jokes of a sexual nature followed concerning Jackson's young friend, short-statured T.V. actor Emmanuel Lewis. There were leering, often homophobic jokes about Michael's activities with his menagerie of pets and collection of mannequins. As Bakhtin pointed out (1968, p. 39), fear can be drowned out with laughter. "Victory" opened an opportunity for this to take place. Jackson could now be treated as a fool, a "celibate zombie," in Greil Marcus's phrase. But was this laughter liberating to those who are genuinely oppressed by power, or, is it the type of laughter Freud talked about when he described jokes as the triumph of the punishing, powerful superego over internal insecurities?

(Freud, 1960) In a social sense, such jokes would justify the oppression of one group by another. The largely unspoken thrills of Thriller could now be articulated -- but only because they'd been held at bay by the official condemnation of "Victory." Now that Michael Jackson was officially declared a dirty rotten scoundrel, one could speak freely about all he signified. Any fear that such talk would mark one as identifying with Jackson was purged.

The tour went on amid much hype, but in essence it col lapsed. No one knew where the group was performing from week to week. Beyond the dates which were secured in Knoxville, Tennessee (the fifth stop on the tour), all the other deals for previously announced dates were up in the air. There were no contracts. By the time of the Madison Square Garden concerts in early August, the tour was in danger of completely folding up its tent. The two concerts in Knoxville had sold so well, though, that another date was added. So there was hope (for Sullivan and the other Jackson brothers).

But the night of the last New York show, the FBI sent word to the Jacksons that death threats Michael had received from a Tennessee individual were very serious indeed. Michael immediately decided not to go to Knoxville (perhaps attempting to seize an opportunity to stop "Victory" in its tracks). The entire tour was now in real

jeopardy. On the afternoon of Monday, August 6, it was announced on local radio stations in Knoxville that all the concerts had been canceled and that refund plans would be announced shortly. "We confirmed that it had been postponed and ran announcements to that effect," Knoxville DJ Bob Anderson told author Mark Bego, "it was all over the six o'clock news. At a little after eleven o'clock we were informed that the shows were on again."

Sometime between the two broadcasts that evening, Joseph said he had a "talk" with Michael about the shows that his son was steadfastly refusing to do. "After I talked to him, he changed his mind and he was there. We're used to these kinds of things. The whole thing was my sons were there to do a show and that's what they had to do." (Associated Press reports, "Death Threat Doesn't Stop Jackson," August 29, 1984)* After receiving word about the concerts being rescheduled, local television and radio news reported that night that ticketholders needn't worry about getting refunds. The shows would definitely be on. And they did go on. (Bego, 1984, pp. 123-124)

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*Joseph Jackson's understanding of the expression "talked to" is most interesting. In 1977, he explained how he trained his sons for success in the early days: "I saw potential in them being stars, big stars. And so we worked toward that goal, and they had to be talked to all the time, with a skillful hand. With an iron hand." (White,1990,p.462) Apparently Joseph "talks" with his hands.

On the advice of the FBI, Michael stayed at a private home in the area at an undisclosed location and was not permitted out of doors except to be transported to the shows.

But the scheduling problems worsened. Sullivan had a difficult time closing deals and tickets went on sale for dates just days before performances. Soon concerts failed to sell out. Sullivan eventually began bouncing the group's checks. Marathon meetings were undertaken in the Encino house to decide what action should be taken. Don King emerged on one such occasion to declare that slavery had been abolished and the Jacksons would not play for nothing. Michael must have enjoyed the irony. (David Adelson, "L.A. Shows Go Off Despite Some Doubts," Cash Box, December 15, 1984, p. 27)

By tour's end Michael had disengaged himself from the Jacksons; he did not participate in the music videos for the new songs (it was reported that a fight of some sort broke out on the set of the first one which resulted in Michael walking out. The remaining brothers actually replaced Michael with a wax dummy.), and in December, from the stage, he announced that he would no longer tour with his family. "It's been a long twenty years," he said.

In his memoirs, Michael says that there were nights when it was hard to go on stage, but that he did the best

he could under the circumstances. He said he often thought to himself "I don't know how I'm going to get through the show. I can't perform like this," but convinced himself he would make up for it, later. (M. Jackson, 1988, p. 242)

In January, Michael signed a movie contract with David Geffen's film division and agreed to help write a song to benefit victims of the famine then devastating East Africa. Along with Lionel Richie, Michael composed "We Are The World," which was recorded by a chorus of all-stars, including Bruce Springsteen, Bob Dylan, Diana Ross, Willie Nelson, Cyndi Lauper, Stevie Wonder, and, as they say, many more. Quincy Jones produced the session. During the recording of the chorus, the other Jackson brothers and Latoya stood stage right while Michael stood on the other side of the platform, holding Diana Ross's hand.

It was reported that Michael bought himself a house in Malibu and that he would be moving from Encino by summer, but he never actually moved out. Instead he remained in the Valley with Joseph, Katherine, and Latoya (youngest Jackson sibling Janet had recently eloped). The following year, Michael began once more to look in earnest for a home of his own. This time, though, he worked in an almost clandestine manner with real estate agent Gloria Berlin. Reporter Todd Gold was told of the difficulty she had in helping him locate properties. "When Gloria tried to

present properties, she was told she wasn't allowed to leave any packages with security outside his home." Berlin was told to call or write, but wasn't given any addresses or phone numbers. (Gold, 1990, p. 192) When Berlin finally was able to establish contact through a trusted "go-between," Michael remembered a ranch in the Santa Ynez Valley where he'd filmed a 1983 video with Paul McCartney and made arrangements to find out if it was for sale. The deal wasn't closed, however, and Michael didn't move until he was away on a concert tour in 1988.

In the summer of 1985 he began work on a musical short for Disney which was designed for showing in the theme parks. In it Michael plays a hapless version of Captain Kirk with one last chance to prove himself. With the help of a cast of strange, cute creatures and robots a la Star Wars, he saves a planet from evil domination. He also dances and sings two songs. It remains one of the parks' most popular attractions. He never did make a film for Geffen.

He spent the rest of 1985 in his home studio preparing demos of new songs for the follow-up to Thriller. The album was supposed to in stores by the early summer of 1986, at the earliest. Then in early '86, Quincy Jones became ill and went through a divorce. During the delay, it was said that Michael became increasingly anxious about appear-

ing once more before the public. Jones supposedly spent a good deal of time just trying to ease his mind. They did a lot of talking, so the stories go. Jones also arranged a meeting with Prince. Jackson and Prince had dinner together, but that was about it. (Troupe, Spin, June, 1987, pp. 45-49) The album was now on a sort of permanent delay.

While Michael was avoiding activity, his business advisors were very busy. Back in 1985, John Branca arranged the purchase of the entire Beatles song publishing catalog, winning a bidding war with now ex-friend Paul McCartney. Michael is said to have shelled out nearly $50 million for the songs, and for some reason, has remained friends with John Lennon's widow Yoko Ono. This move aroused the intense ire of the white rock community. It was feared that Michael would not have the proper respect for the revered songs. They were right. It seemed very disturbing to such critics (and to Paul McCartney) that Michael Jackson should even have such decision-making power. After decades of white exploitation of black music, it was this act of reappropriation that caused the most righteous moral indignation.

Then the licensing rights to Michael's name were offered up for sale on the open market -- to anyone with the right price. He sponsored a line of clothing, a set of

cheap colognes, a collection of stuffed animals modeled after his own menagerie. All these ventures (except the publishing catalog) quickly disappeared.

In the summer of '86, Michael unexpectedly re-upped with Pepsi-Cola. In New York for the press announcement, Michael created something of a minor sensation. It seems he was spotted around town wearing a surgical mask over his face. Reporters at the Pepsi announcement peppered manager Dileo with questions about "the mask." Dileo, ducking the questions, joked "Is there a doctor in the house?" (WNBC-TV News, New York, May 12, 1986) But the enthusiasm of the reporters must have left him intrigued.

In September, when the Disney film opened in Florida and Anaheim, Michael appeared on the cover of the National Enquirer (September 16, 1986) reposing in a coffin-like apparatus called a hyperbaric oxygen chamber. Pictures and stories about "Michael's Bizarre Plan to Live to be 150" appeared everywhere. The stories were practically hand-delivered by Dileo, who appeared on television to express his "disapproval" of Michael's "plan." Johnny Carson included oxygen chamber jokes in his monologue.

In the fall, according to Spin, Jones and Jackson finally went into the studio to begin work in earnest. After a few songs were finished, it was decided that a long-form video of the song "Bad" would be shot in New York

with director Martin Scorcese. It was to be a slice of street realism based very loosely on the awful story of Edmund Perry, a Harlem kid who graduated from a ritzy New England prep school, only to be shot down on a Harlem street by a confused and/or racist cop. In Michael's video, the prep school kid is tempted back into crime, but decides in the end to do the right thing. Michael told what he thought was the "true" story to a television interviewer in 1987.

> That was a true story that we had taken from Time or Newsweek magazine. This kid who went to school upstate - in the country, whatever -- who was from the ghetto, and he tried to make something of his life. And he would leave his old friends behind and when he came back -- Spring break or whatever, Thanksgiving break -- his friends became so envious, jealous of him that they killed him. But in the film I don't die, of course. (Ebony/Jet Showcase, Fall, 1987)

Michael hated the two months he spent in the cold of an early New York winter, and he and Scorcese fought constantly on the set. (Troupe, Spin, p. 49) Scorcese was said to have branded the experience "a nightmare." (Ibid.)

Back in L.A. in early 1987, work continued slowly on the album before Michael broke away once more to make another expensive video -- this time a science fiction/gangster musical/fairy tale. CBS executives, it is said, were fuming and ordered Dileo and Branca to order

Michael off the set, which they did. (Rolling Stone, September 24, 1987, p. 140) Rumors flew at the time of a rift between Jones and Jackson, but things seemed to have settled somewhat and by mid-summer, the long-awaited opus was finished. The numerous delays had raised expectations mightily.

In June, 1987 it was reported around the globe that Michael Jackson had offered the London Hospital Medical College one million dollars in return for the skeleton of John Merrick, the hideously deformed "Elephant Man" about whom books, plays, and a film had been devoted. Jackson's manager Dileo once again went on the air, "disapproving" his client's actions. Jackson had now thoroughly transformed himself into a national joke. Many onlookers (including agitated representatives of the London Hospital) had gone beyond laughing and found this sort of thing offensive. One letter-writer to People called Jackson's offer "the ultimate height of ... immorality." (Nancy J. Engman, July 6, 1987, p.2) Diane Umansky, editor of Tiger Beat observed that "there's a difference between being rebellious and being strange. He seems to cross that line." She apparently found strangeness far more threatening than rebellion. (Andrew Dale, Star, November 17, 1987, p. 7) If there was a method to these mad publicity stunts, it was somewhat hard to discern. If this was Michael's revenge on

the press for the years of harassment, he was once again throwing out sharpened boomerangs. Or maybe he wanted it this way.

In the summer of 1987, it was announced that Michael Jackson and the Jehovah's Witnesses had, once and for all, parted company. This took place just prior to the release of the first single from the new album.

Dileo decided to open the Encino house to hold a gathering of major record retailers for an album preview. The retailers were treated to a listening party at the Beverly Hills Hotel before being limoed to the Valley. At the house, the executives were given a tour and a gourmet cookout. At one point Michael came down, and according to Rolling Stone, posed for photos at each table, "Bar Mitzvah style." (September 24, 1987, p.56) In the following weeks, Dileo hauled Michael around to various trade paper offices to glad-hand with opinion leaders. (Ibid., p. 57) Jackson was shy as always, but polite and cooperative. Rolling Stone claimed Jackson agreed to do this sort of thing because it was his aim to move 100 million copies of his new album called Bad.

In July, photos of the album cover appeared. In it, Jackson, his face heavily made up (thick mascara and eyeliner, face drenched in an extremely light-colored foundation, a new cleft surgically cut into his chin), is

dressed in black leather and spandex, encircled from top to bottom in leather straps and buckles. With his fists clenched, his eyes glaring from beneath the lovely lashes, he makes himself a living parody of macho.

When the record was released, it was generally not reviewed; its maker's face was. The Village Voice titled their piece "What's Wrong With Michael Jackson? I'm White!" (September 22, 1987, p.15-17) The Association of Black Psychologists declared Michael a poor role model for black children. (Lewis Grizzard, "Michael's Bad -- And That's Good Enough," The Atlanta Journal, September 30, 1987, p. B1) His face was deemed an expression of shame. The New York Daily News (August 24, 1987) hired a plastic surgeon to determine through the use of photographs what Jackson had done to his face. The doctor ran down a litany of alleged and unsubstantiated surgeries. The piece was sold into syndication around the world. South African newspapers featured Dr. Howard Bellin's assessment of Michael Jackson's face. Michael was aware of all the clamor and would soon make a statement.

The piece which would cause the most consternation, however, was neither the record nor the "eccentric" publicity stunts which accompanied it. Instead it was the music video for the title tune, first aired on prime-time network television, that fanned the flames of a new Jackson

backlash. While some African-American critics, like Michele Wallace and Michael Dyson (both academics), saw a pointedly subversive, critical quality in the video, most reviled it. (Wallace, "Michael Jackson, Black Modernisms, and 'The Ecstasy of Communication,'" in Third Text, Summer, 1989, pp. 11-22; Dyson, "A Postmodern Afro-American Secular Spirituality: Michael Jackson," in Black Sacred Music, Fall, 1989, pp. 98-124) In the Voice, Greg Tate suggested that when Jackson yells at his friends after an aborted mugging in a New York subway: "You ain't nothing!" he was merely displaying his contented distance from the black underclass he'd left behind so long ago. Tate said the real message was: "Niggers ain't shit." (Ibid., p. 17) Les Payne wrote that, with that line, Jackson "further victimizes these victims." (Newsday, September 6, 1987, p. Ideas/9) No one at the time pointed out how unusual it was for any serious treatment of the lives of inner-city minorities to appear either in film or on television at all. If Jackson truly believed "niggers ain't shit" (and that he was not perceived as a nigger), then why would he have made such a video in the first place? Why not distance himself further by ignoring the existence of such social groups altogether? For Wallace and Dyson, it seemed clear that Jackson made the video in this way precisely because of his identification with and concern for the

problematic situation of black men in America. For both Wallace and Dyson, it is clear that when Jackson shouts "You ain't nothing!" with real desperation, anger and pain in his voice, he really follows it with an unsaid "but you should be everything." (Marx, "From 'Contribution To The Critique of Hegel's Philosophy Of Right,'" 1983, p. 222)

The most damning criticism came from Dave Marsh's newsletter, Rock & Roll Confidential in a piece by Marsha Mickens, president at the time of a bakery workers union local in Detroit. (October, 1987, p. 1-2) Mickens restates with clarity and force the anti-feminist argument originally proposed in the Moynihan report on the black family. After repeating Tate's argument that Jackson's aim is to suppress the strivings of the black underclass, she gets down to the core of the argument.

> He sees people who have nothing to lose as a threat to the social order that has allowed his enterprises to flourish. Finally, there's Michael's unsettling surgical metamorphosis into a macabre imitation of his own wax replica. With a noticeable feminization (a mockery of women's beauty), the crossover is now complete and every button has been pushed to make the villain in "Bad" into Michael Jackson's antithesis: a "real" black male. (Ibid., p. 1)

First of all, Mickens' assumption that the biggest threat within the social order to the success of Michael Jackson's enterprises comes from inner-city blacks is arguable, to say the least. It is, in fact, white businessmen

who have the most to gain from seeing to it that Jackson and others like him lack capital and power. Whatever capital and power Jackson may have gained from his enterprises was amassed through a difficult and ongoing process of struggle with those white businessmen. Michael Jackson can wear all the pale pancake make-up he wishes, but this will still never transform him into a white power broker in the entertainment industry. He may be able to exploit the rules of the industry to his advantage, but he cannot make or change them without risk of being cast into an entirely powerless position. That is, the "social order" has little interest in seeing a young black entertainer's enterprises "flourish," and there are, in fact, structures in place to see to it that they do not except under highly controlled circumstances. (See Dannen, 1990, pp. 137-144 and p. 232 for an examination of how those structures work.)

Mickens actually writes that Jackson is "no different from anyone else with 100 million dollars." Even if that 1987 estimate were true, her assertion is patently false. Since Jackson must depend on culture industry professionals to manage his enterprises, he is often in a profoundly dependent position. (see Dannen, 1991, especially pp. 338-339) What's more, he is well aware of this set of circumstances. He knows he's in an ongoing struggle for power in which he holds fewer cards than most of those he deals

with. According to Katherine Jackson, she and her son have spoken often of the humiliation of Joe Louis. (K. Jackson, 1990, p. 161) Jackson knows that having a talent to sell is not the same as having social power. Michael doesn't fear the wrath of inner-city minority youth. He fears, instead, the deceptions of powerful white men.

Most important to Micken's assessment is her insistence that masculinity and femininity are natural conditions and not social constructions of a patriarchal, racist, capitalist, homophobic society. This is precisely the formulation which Moynihan tried to sell the black community in the late 1960's and which today has gained wide currency among liberals, conservatives, blacks, and whites. Although research conducted in response to the report showed Moynihan's thesis to be fundamentally flawed (particularly Gutman, 1976 and Stack, 1974), his assertions have actually gained popularity. Moynihan held that contemporary social problems in the African-American community were the result of slavery's historical assault on and dissolution of black patriarchy. What the black community needed was a re-establishment of what Moynihan considered the ideal family: a strong, controlling father, a soft, obedient, stay-at-home mother, and thrifty, hard-working, very obedient children. Music writer Nelson George describes such a family in his biography of Michael Jack-

son.

> In attitude they weren't very different from any typical (white?) middle American couple. He was the strong willed provider; she was the family's comforter who both stood behind her husband and guided him at the same time ... Around the Jackson home he was the disciplinarian ... Katherine, in contrast to her aggressive and somewhat intimidating husband, is a calm, quiet woman whose strong heart "is the foundation families are built on," says a family friend.
>
> ...Moreover, Joe was always there to put down any explosions of ego with stern words and the swing of a thick belt if it became necessary. Even the Jackson Five had to live by family rules. (George, 1984, pp. 27 and 73) [parentheses mine]

The implications of Moynihan for black men are clear: they can either fight a losing battle for their manhood in the streets, declaring their freedom from feminized domesticity, or they can take their place as lesser men within a mainstream racist society, never really acquiring the rights to legitimate male power that many white men can take for granted. There really is, then, no other place for a black man to really assert his manhood with some degree of success except in his domestic relations with women and children. And this is what Moynihan offers black men: an illusory domestic power in place of genuine social respect and equity.

In Martin Scorcese's and Richard Price's construction of the Bad video, Michael Jackson (as black prep school student "Darryl" on scholarship at "Duxton") is asked to

assert this illusory power in his relation to the "bad boys" from back home who were his friends. In the world of "the ghetto" the video creates, only women and elderly people work and carry on the business of everyday life: they're seen riding the subway to and from work; "Darryl's" mother is away at work when the action begins. Boys and men in this world hustle. Their motions are slow; they can apparently afford to be lazy since women are taking care of the real business of life. There are no fathers in this video. Very much as Dorothy signifies the missing good witch of the South in The Wizard of Oz, Darryl is asked by Scorcese and Price to stand in for these boys' fathers. He even goes so far as to scold them to "watch your mouth, boy, watch your mouth," a line (probably ad-libbed by Jackson) clearly signifying fatherly speech. Jackson is asked by Scorcese and Price to fulfill the Moynihanian imperative, that is to restore patriarchy to the black underclass.

Although Jackson cooperates to the extent he is able (as his ad-libbed scolding bears out his partial complicity with their project), he cannot begin to complete the task. Instead, his physical appearance, nerdy manner, and his gestures which caricature machismo all serve to discredit the project. Jackson wilfully subverts the racist, sexist (yet neo-liberal) politics of his video because he cannot help

it. He's asked to symbolically recreate a social and historical ideal -- the patriarchal nuclear family -- which he finds loathsome, and he is unable to come through. After seeing the video, a white female college student commented that she couldn't take Bad seriously because "he (Jackson) was trying to look like a man." It seems pretty clear that Jackson knew this as well as she, spending the great lengths of time that he did making his face so pretty for this video ("he looks like his sister Janet," a young, white, female record-store clerk remarked on first seeing Jackson decked out in black leather and chains). Jackson's judgment on the video's politics rings clear: black men really cannot be men as manhood has been constructed within patriarchal domination and that is, without reservation, a condition to build upon, not fight.

Michael cannot be a "man," nor does he want to be. His gestures, in fact, are explicitly critical of this fighting for manhood which black men, especially, are encouraged to engage in. So he grabs his crotch defiantly, sensing the ridiculousness of his gesture, yet maintaining that while he too has a penis, his penis is constituted upon different premises than those of other men, of "real" men. His penis, he says with his gesture, is an instrument of healing, not a destructive weapon. He grabs his crotch in an attempt to redefine the politics of his video. His

gestures communicate a desire to put an end to the futile struggle for manhood among black men and instead reveal a desire to feminize his people and all people. The overt message of the video ("what these kids need is some discipline" or as Jackson puts it near the end in sung gospel cadences: "ask your mother, ask your brother, ask your sister, (pregnant pause), ask me") is subverted with his appearance and gestures. His display shows that he wants to dissolve patriarchal domination, not re-establish it. It is precisely this element of the video: Jackson's own negation of its premises, which was the true source of the ire it aroused. If Jackson had truly become the video's missing father, that is, a good "role-model" for young black boys, everyone from Greg Tate to the Association of Black Psychologists would have been satisfied.

Mickens is right after all, "unfortunately, but inevitably, the message of the video is tied to Michael's physical appearance." If Jackson had left off the thick make-up, grown his eyebrows, cut his Jehri-curls, and somehow surgically restored his "old nose," in her view the video would have worked. And it would have. The shock alone of seeing Michael Jackson as a "real" black man would overpower an audience with the message that he has remade his judgment on the world he lives in. Now he'd communicate his contentment with that world along with an un-

problematic desire to see others adjust to it.

But Michael Jackson does not live comfortably in this world and his discomfort is deeply "unsettling" (Mickens) to others.

In September Michael set off on his first tour as a solo performer, starting in Japan. His mother, father, and sister Latoya went with him. The Japanese adored him, dubbing him "Typhoon Mahkeroo." He met with dignitaries in Japan, toting his pet chimpanzee Bubbles with him wherever he went. In Japan, he was treated as some sort of deity, although some older Japanese found his new habit of grabbing his crotch on-stage offensive. (Dale, Star, November 17, 1987, p. 7) (A gesture which would later inspire Madonna and one which he carried to new extremes in a 1991 video which aroused a great, old-fashioned, Elvis-style public outcry in the United States.)

Back in the states, though, the backlash continued unabated. When the "Bad" video aired, it was roundly panned as racist and boring. Although the album and new single sold briskly, it amounted to what was called a "quick burn" on the U.S. charts. After six weeks, Bad left the number one spot, never to return.

Michael was most concerned about the publicity surrounding his plastic surgeries and his private life. After a show in Yokahama, a People magazine reporter asked him to

answer some of the criticism in a written questionnaire.

Prodded with the standard interviewer's opener "what is the biggest misconception about you?" Michael went back to his hotel in Tokyo after the show and the next day slipped a piece of hotel stationary to the reporter. People printed the statement as written, in Michael's own handwriting. (Michael Small with Todd Gold, "Michael's First Epistle," October 12, 1987, p. 103-104) In the states, DJs and others had a field day with Michael's misspellings, his awkward scrawl, and the seeming ridiculousness of his desperate tone.

"I must endure for the power I was sent forth, for the World, for My the children. But have Mercy, for I've been Bleeding a Long Time Now." (sic: strike-out part of original letter) The note brought up some troubling questions. Hadn't he asked for this in the first place? Didn't he pose in the oxygen chamber and announce his offer for the bones? And if this note was just another stunt, what good was it doing his career? And if it wasn't, then just who was flying the plane? What the hell was going on here?

In Australia, things were not as hospitable as they'd been in Japan. Militant Aboriginal leaders protested Michael as a black man who "lightens" his skin. They'd

seen Dr. Bellin's syndicated comments. Visiting a predominantly aborigine day care center, Michael and his entourage were almost overtaken by an angry mob. (Jeffrey Ressner, "Stand By Me," Rolling Stone, April 6, 1989, p. 56) Some concerts were canceled for lack of adequate ticket sales. Later, Michael inexplicably said that he wanted to go back to Australia. (Entertainment Tonight, February, 1988)

In January, Dr. Bellin appeared on ABC-TV's newsmagazine "20/20" and called Michael's face "a disaster." Hugh Downs ended the broadcast as always with "We're in touch, so you keep in touch." Michael called the "20/20" offices the next business day and got Barbara Walters on the phone. He told her he hadn't done all that Bellin alleged to his face. Just his nose and his chin. He also told her that as a teenager, he felt his complexion was so awful that he would not look in a mirror, even to wash his face: to accomplish this task, he told her, he turned off the lights. It was better now, he explained, and that is why he looked so different. After Walters related their conversation on the air, Downs said they hadn't meant any harm, of course.

In February, Michael went into rehearsal for the first American leg of his tour. He apparently left the Encino home for the final time, for it was soon announced in late

March that he'd purchased a $17 million ranch near Santa Barbara and that he would make a permanent move. Joseph and Katherine heard about this for the first time from a television news program. Joseph, especially, was in a rage. After they'd appeared at an awards dinner with him in early March, Joseph didn't hear from Michael for a long time. Michael was not speaking to him and Michael's security team would not allow Joseph any access to Michael during his concert engagement in New York. (Schindehette, People, August 8, 1988, p. 56) (Latoya Jackson says Michael even attempted to have Joseph barred from Madison Square Garden where he was performing. [L. Jackson, 1991, p. 217] He nevertheless managed to make his way into one of the shows anyway.) Joseph complained angrily and vociferously to the press about his son's lack of consideration. Joseph said he very much wanted to speak with his son, that their lack of communication was "his problem, not mine." (Durkee, People, May 9, 1988, p. 46)

The first reviews of the new tour were decidedly mixed. Except for the usual Michael partisans (Mikal Gilmore, principally), most compared his show unfavorably to the "honesty" and "passion" of Bruce Springsteen's concurrent tour. Jackson's show was, they claimed, too glittery, too showbiz. Newsday critic Stephen Williams called it "ultimately shallow." ("Jackson Bounces Back at the

Garden," March 4, 1988, p. W/3) The hegemony of old rock critical values remained strong. Jon Pareles of The New York Times, though, saw things a little differently. He said the show possessed a "surprising depth." (Odd that it should be "surprising," though.) Pareles described Jackson's performance as "richocheting from extreme to extreme without a chance for repose or ordinariness -- and (his contradictory messages of fear and mastery) are the core of his lasting popularity." Unlike Williams, Pareles saw fear, violence, tension, and "the threat of utter, devastating loneliness" beneath the bright, glittery surface of the show. ("Pop: Michael Jackson Opens Tour," February 25, 1988, p. C16) Later in the year, after seeing Prince's new show, Pareles retreated somewhat from his approval of Jackson's presentation and decided that Jackson's tense, almost desperate eagerness to please could become painful and that Prince's loose and joyful paean to spiritual and carnal freedom was ultimately more "fun," and wasn't fun what rock 'n' roll was supposed to be all about? ("Critic's Notebook," October 11, 1988, p. C16) Mikal Gilmore, Jackson's main critical supporter, seemed to have missed the contradictory aspects of Jackson's performance as a whole and felt that parts of the show were too stagy, while other portions were "straightforward" and "emotional." He took to defending Jackson on the other

critics' own terms. (Rolling Stone, "Michael Jackson Debuts His New Show in Kansas City," April 7, 1988, p. 15 and 20)

Bad had been nominated for four Grammy awards and Michael agreed to perform on the early March telecast the week he was in New York to play Madison Square Garden. Although his performance on the show was talked about for days afterward, it was quite different from the shattering display on the Motown 25 show of five years before. Michael appeared suddenly, without introduction, his figure in shadow behind an enlarging screen. The audience went wild. The screen was soon removed and there he stood, posing, tense, utterly self-conscious of his every movement. The audience shouted occasionally but mostly they were dumbfounded: his performance might now be as weird as his image. He rubbed his crotch slowly and thoroughly to the music and the crowd gasped a little, not knowing what to make of it. Then he sang his new single, a standard social consciousness tune called "Man In the Mirror" (a pop-gospel song in the same vein as Elvis Presley's "If I Can Dream"). Inexplicably, he lip-synched the first half of the song, then when the record dropped off, he went live into a devastating version of gospel testifying. He dropped dramatically to his knees, James Brown style, sometimes unable to utter a sound, other times begging

desperately for somebody to help. Although the whole routine was probably carefully rehearsed, it appeared as though Michael was out of control, as if he were unable to ever leave the stage. He seemed utterly lost in the passion of the performance. The audience was on its feet a long time, roaring their approval. Then he lost all four Grammy awards. The camera captured him moist-eyed and biting his lip, and the next morning the radio was full of sympathetic fans calling in their disapproval. One young fan at the Garden show complained, "he got dissed, he got dissed terribly." For the remainder of the tour, his audience (much blacker and younger demographically than on the Victory tour) was in his corner. Bad regained some momentum on the charts, and five of its singles hit number one, a record.

In April, Doubleday released Michael's autobiography, Moonwalk, allegedly edited by staffer Jackie Onassis. Long delayed, Jackson contacted the publisher while in Australia and asked for an editor to come and help finish the book. (Edwin McDowell, "Michael Jackson Writes His Story," The New York Times, April 18, 1988, p. C22) Two ghostwriters had already been ousted from the project (either for prying too deeply for Michael's taste or not deeply enough for the publisher's). When it came out, Joe Jackson was asked by reporters the proverbially impossible question "Did you

beat your son?" He said kids naturally remember things differently, but that, yes, he was always more demanding of Michael "because I wanted him to really be the best." (Durkee, People, May 9, 1988, p. 45) What he was really upset about at the moment, he said, was that Michael had arranged a party for the band and his associates at his new place and hadn't invited his mother and father. "I can always go drag him out of there," Joe insisted. "He ain't never going to get too big for me to go get him. And he knows I'll come get him, too." Joe promised he was going to "let him know he has a family still." He said these things after he had asserted that he was never violent with his children. (Schindehette, People, August 8, 1988, p. 55)

With his family fuming back home, Michael was having a grand time in Europe, causing a sensation during the hot summer of '88 roughly equivalent to the Thriller explosion in America years earlier. In fact Thriller itself started selling again in Europe. Critic Simon Frith bemoaned it all much as Greil Marcus had earlier. He said Jackson was a new kind of transnational pop star who was teaching his audience a new way of "not feeling things." Although he hadn't attended a show, he'd heard from others that it was really quite ordinary, although that wasn't the point, of course. (Frith, The Village Voice, "Wack Attack," August 16 1988, p. 67) The British tabloids, meanwhile, outdid

themselves in a rumor-mongering frenzy.

Returning to the states in the fall, the singles had stopped selling and Dileo was said to have blasted the promotion department at Epic. It seems Michael was very unhappy at having a record peak at #11. It was also reported that Michael himself began phoning the record label directly on annoyingly regular basis, wanting to know what was going on. (Gold, 1989, p. 205) Michael had also hired a new "director of communications," former Motown public relations man Bob Jones. There would no longer be any more officially sanctioned stories of Jacksonian weirdness, although Michael still occasionally gave the press something to ponder over: odd disguises, awkward behavior in public and so on.

Two weeks after the last concert in Los Angeles in January (which Dileo announced would be Michael's last ever), Frank Dileo was fired. (Michael remained without a manager for the next year-and-half until the conclusion of an apocalyptic war for control of the record industry between MCA's David Geffen and Sony's Walter Yetnikoff. Geffen won, and Michael Jackson, apparently, was one of the spoils: Michael's new manager, lawyers, accountant, and publishing administrators were all virtual Geffen appointees. At the height of the battle, Michael spent a week in the hospital with a malady which is still a topic of debate.

[Dannen, 1991, p. 339)

Also in January, a home video with the long-form Sci-Fi/Gangster Musical/Fairy Tale film and several shorter pieces was released. In one of the short clips, "Leave Me Alone," put together by animator Jim Blashfield, Michael burlesques the media and indicates that he really does have the power to subvert the "circus" he's allowed them to build upon him.

Blashfield's reading of Jackson's attempt at cultural praxis is illuminating. In the video for Jackson's song "Leave Me Alone" (Moonwalker, CMV Enterprises, 1989), the semi-animated Jackson's doorstep is assaulted with newspapers bearing headlines like "Michael Confides to Pet Chimp," "Michael Weds Alien," "Michael's Cosmetic Nose Surgery." The headlines keep dropping, we see his face on a $20 dollar bill, then suddenly he's catapulted from his home across a lake to an amusement park. Paddling his way through on a small boat, fragments from the headlines take real form. A giant nose and a scalpel pass by the boat. He makes a left turn and there he is, passing through "Michael's Shrine To Liz." Old movie shots of Elizabeth Taylor are brought to animated life as they wander about the shrine. Michael looks on approvingly.

As Michael paddles out of the shrine exhibit, we are given a long view of the park. We see that Michael has

just emerged from a larger version of his own head. It seems the entire park is constructed upon Michael Jackson's own body. He is kept tied down, Gulliver-like, by miniature dogs dressed in business suits. The small Michael in the boat rides around for a while, taking in the sights (which feature an exhibit of the Elephant Man's Bones, dancing, tied down with a ball and chain, alongside Michael who is also chained and dancing), joined by his favorite pets, when finally the Giant Michael, who's been sleeping, is awakened and breaks his bonds. He stands up, destroying the park. As the video ends, the little Michael whizzes by, free.

Blashfield's video is a remarkable look at power relations as they exist in contemporary popular culture, and suggests the subversive potential of Michael's gamesmanship. In the video, it's clear that the little (ordinary, everyday) Michael is a fan, and it is he who has awakened the sleeping giant.

The home video, called Moonwalker, hit number one on the Billboard home video sales charts and stayed there for the better part of half the year, finally challenged in June by a video called Michael Jackson -- The Legend Continues (Vestron Music Video, 1988).

In May, Michael made a cameo appearance on the Jacksons' new album, 2300 Jackson Street (Epic EK 40911) (their

old address in Gary) on a sentimental song about their foundations. "I'll always find my way back home," Michael moans near the end, "oh, no."

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