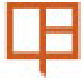

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Goal-Directed Soul? Analyzing Rhythmic Teleology in African American Popular Music

ROBERT FINK

In memory of Norman Whitfield (1943–2008)

> One aspect of maturity both of the individual and of the culture within which a [musical] style arises consists then in the willingness to forgo immediate, and perhaps lesser, gratification for the sake of future ultimate gratification.[1]

> Berry [Gordy] was that kind of guy. He was a businessman and he wore a suit. He had a chauffeured Fleetwood, but nothing extravagant. He did not wear a lot of jewelry; he did not project an image of wealth—he projected his work ethic.[2]

Prologue: "Way Over There"

For most chroniclers, the story of Motown Records begins, at least symbolically, with the release of Berry Gordy's hit single "Money (That's What I Want)" in the late summer of 1959.[3] The combination of wised-up materialism with barrelhouse rhythm & blues was clever and new; it has also been, in retrospect, an irresistible emblem of Gordy the impatient hustler, whose ruthless avarice and sharp business practices would soon become legendary both inside and outside the black music world.

But in Gordy's own memory, his first national release—a very different-sounding record—better captured the impulse that launched Motown, even though he had nothing to do with its writing. William "Smokey" Robinson constructed the song "Way Over There" on what was by 1960 a familiar soul template, signifying on standard gospel imagery about "crossing the river" and "climbing the mountain" in the context not of salvation but of romanticized sexuality:

1. Meyer, "Some Remarks on Value and Greatness in Music" (1959). References in the present essay are to the reprint of the article in Meyer, *Music, the Arts, and Ideas*, 22–41; this quote is on 33.

2. Taylor, *Motown Music Machine*, 119.

3. Barrett Strong, "Money (That's What I Want)." All release information about early Motown singles from Dahl and Hughes, Liner notes for *The Complete Motown Singles*, Vol. 1, *1959–1961.*

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I've got a lover way over there on the mountainside
And I know that's where I should be;
I've got a lover way over there across the river wide
And I can hear her calling to me . . .[4]

Over uptempo gospel piano and hand clapping, the song's call-and-response highlights Robinson's clear, high tenor, stabbing up into the falsetto register as the "sanctified" energy builds. The style would have been familiar to black audiences, and by 1960 the use of Pentecostal musical tropes to enact sexual tension was no longer as exciting and transgressive as it had been when pioneered by Ray Charles. Still, as Gordy reports in his autobiography, the song meant something special to *him*. With its strong sense of yearning, its displacement of imagined pleasure and satisfaction to some future encounter "way over there," it seems to have spoken directly to both his own longing for financial success and his determination to do whatever it took to get (way over) there: " 'Way Over There' will always be a special song. For the guy in the song Smokey was singing about, it was where his lover was, but for me 'way over there' was where my dreams were—for Motown, for happiness, for success." The budding mogul was so caught up in the song's private message of *embourgeoisement* that he splurged on a second recording session for the Miracles when the original seemed poised to become a hit. Adding strings gave the new version an upper-middle-class sheen.[5]

Nobody outside his immediate family was going to give Berry Gordy Jr. money, no matter how much he wanted it. Yet, as his reaction to "Way Over There" shows, he knew that, if the economic door was open, he could get it

4. The Miracles, "Way Over There"; song credited to William "Smokey" Robinson. On the commercial gospel roots of soul, see Ward, *Just My Soul Responding*, 183–200.

5. Gordy, *To Be Loved*, 130. A note on sources: from a scholarly perspective, the history of Motown is largely unwritten. Pop criticism and serious musicological work alike are forced to rely on (often unreliable) memoirs from interested participants, and the strict division of musical labor central to Motown's mode of production means that most accounts, even from those who were there, day after day, tell only part of the creative story. Of the secondary sources, Posner's *Motown* is based on extensive primary source research in archives and government records, but his account focuses more on uncovering scandal than interpreting musical texts. Suzanne Smith does valuable historical work placing Motown Records in sociological context in *Dancing in the Street*; but again, her main interest is not musical texts, and she appears to have done little research into the actual workings of the company. The first musicological work of note is only now forthcoming from Jonathan Andrew Flory, whose forthcoming monograph, *I Hear a Symphony*, promises to raise the level of analytical discourse. (I make appreciative use of his investigation into Motown's "psychedelic soul" productions below.) The interpretive study that follows does not escape this historiographical bind; all I can promise the reader is that I will not reproduce disputed accounts of Motown's creative process without critical comment. In this particular case, there is no reason to doubt Gordy's reminiscence about "Way Over There"—and no way to verify it independently. As for the two versions of the song, they share a catalog number, and can be compared on *The Complete Motown Singles*, Vol. 1. Ironically enough, as Gordy ruefully notes, the delay in producing the new track actually hindered this regional hit from reaching the national charts. See Gordy, *To Be Loved*, 132–33.

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himself. This was a lesson in self-sufficiency which had been drilled into the members of the Gordy clan for decades. In 1936, during the depths of the Depression, Berry and Bertha Gordy were able to purchase a commercial building on Detroit's East Side and fill it with family businesses, including a grocery store that matriarch Bertha proudly named after the apostle of Negro economic self-determination, Booker T. Washington. The Gordys were prominent in the Detroit chapter of Washington's National Negro Business League, and by 1949 were so multifariously successful as entrepreneurs that *Color* magazine ran a feature article on what they dubbed, with some justification, "America's Most Amazing Family." Photographed in their living room with Berry Jr. at the family (grand) piano, the Gordys—all fourteen of them—present a model image of bourgeois domesticity (Fig. 1).

Color magazine declared the Gordy family "ideal," because it was "tireless" in pursuit of "ideals and goals that it drives to reach."[6] In a powerful meditation on the meaning of the Motown story, the African American critic Gerald Early places the Gordys in a long line of Booker T. Washington–inspired black entrepreneurs, goal-directed strivers whose ideology fused the toughening experience of discrimination with a distinctively American worship of "getting ahead":

> If there has been a myth of white American energy and enterprise that is generated by a history of national expansion, there has been a corresponding mythical urge of black American nationhood built on the notions of black energy and self-sufficiency, an urge to separation stimulated by the African-Americans' history of segregation and an urge to achievement fueled by America's own preoccupation with success and ambition and blacks' need to disprove their perceived and storied inferiority.[7]

The gospel roots of a song like "Way Over There" reach deep down into this bourgeois stratum. The inventors and codifiers of the "gospel" style were pioneers of black musical capitalism, successful publishers, performers, and promoters like Thomas A. Dorsey and his onetime business partner, Sallie Martin.[8] African American gospel music has often been essentialized—not least by its practitioners—as an unworldly, ecstatic music which lifts the marginal above their oppression. But the spiritual thrust of the style has also fostered, in actual practice, a cool head for business, what Early identifies as a characteristically African American aspiration to "rectitude and cunning bourgeois thrift."[9] The drive to achieve salvation, and to lead others to it,

6. *Color*, June 1949, 6.

7. Early, *One Nation Under a Groove*, 41–42.

8. Dorsey and Martin were instrumental in founding the National Convention of Gospel Choirs and Choruses in 1932. Sallie Martin, who owned the publishing firm of Martin & Morris, was reputed by the 1960s to be the richest woman in gospel music, surpassing star performers like Mahalia Jackson. See Boyer, *Golden Age of Gospel*, 62–63; Heilbut, *Gospel Sound*, 3–20.

9. Early, *One Nation Under a Groove*, 37.

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Figure 1 The Amazing Gordy Family. From *Color*, June 1949.

"way over there," often correlated to a lifestyle—as well as a musical style—valorizing extreme goal direction and heroic delay of gratification.

Rhythm and (the ideological) blues. There is no generally accepted hermeneutic framework within which a musicologist might move from Gordy's aspirational reading of "Way Over There" to specific details of the song's structure. Most music theorists—whether or not they study popular music—would first ask about the song's tonal form, since they tend to argue that it is the presence of coherent melodic and harmonic progressions that primarily determines whether a musical work can organize experiential complexes of sound into the orderly, syntactic progressions of "linear musical time."[10] "Way Over There" does not provide much scope for this kind of argument, however. Like the Isley Brother's 1959 gospel-inflected classic

10. The term is Jonathan Kramer's; see *Time of Music*, 23.

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"Shout!" (upon which it was likely modeled), Robinson's song is built on the simple oscillation between tonic and submediant that soul musicians of the time called the "major-minor" changes.[11] As the name suggests, the point of this weak root progression is not to create motion toward a goal, but to alternate modal types. Tonally speaking, "Way Over There" does not really go over there at all.

Perhaps what Gordy was hearing was not compositional, but performative teleology: the directed manipulation of what a music theorist might deem "secondary" parameters—rhythm, timbre, articulation—in the recorded performance itself. If truth be told, "Way Over There" is not exceptional in this regard either, and one is left to admit that Gordy's reading of the track, though it does resonate with larger gospel tropes, was still an idiosyncratic one for the time, more about his own goals and drive than the song's. But if we try to imagine how the secondary parameters of a soul music track—in particular, the patterning of rhythm its practitioners call the "groove"—might actually be mustered to communicate a sense of goal direction to the listener, we stumble into a deep and interesting *aporia* in the contemporary critical study of Afro-diasporic music. Secondary parameters like beat and groove are of course highly variable in this music, but these variations have not been conceptualized by most hermeneutics as having goal-directed syntax, which is a structuring potential usually reserved, even within popular-music scholarship, for pitch relationships.[12] To put it bluntly, the large number of musical analysts who have been interested in musical teleology have not, in general, been very interested in grooves; and the smaller number who have been very interested in grooves have not been at all interested in musical teleology.

Between these two sets of interests falls the shadow of racial ideology. In a much-cited polemic, V. Kofi Agawu dismissed the notion of an essentialized "African music," apprehended, studied, and evaluated solely in terms of its rhythm, as "an invention, a construction, a fiction, a myth, ultimately a lie."[13] Ronald Radano has made the same point in an African American context, tracing the long historical process of projection and identification across the color line ("lying up a nation") that constructed modern musical blackness and yoked it irrevocably to a secondary musical parameter like "hot" rhythm: "In jazz, swing, bebop, and rhythm 'n' blues, in the inventions of cool and soul jazz, in the popular forms of soul and funk, and in the later innovations of

11. "The first time we appeared in Chicago was at the Regal Theater. The Isley Brothers were on the show. Those guys were terrific. Their song 'Shout' kind of gave Smokey the idea of doing 'Way Over There.' It's what we called in those days a 'major-minor' type thing." Miracles member Pete Moore, quoted in Dahl and Hughes, Liner notes, 27.

12. In fact, Meyer, whose work will be a central focus of this essay and whose designation of primary and secondary parameters in music has been most influential, makes this distinction foundational. In his view, secondary or "statistical" parameters of music like timbre and groove are secondary precisely because they do not create a syntax. See *Style and Music*, 209.

13. Agawu, "Invention of 'African Rhythm,' " 387.

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hip-hop, black America introduced modern versions of racial distinctiveness that many Americans would seek to claim. . . . Rhythm would supply the basis on which 'black essence' was enacted, affirming the mythology of black and white."[14] Both authors allow that, indeed, blacks and whites alike have mythologized African rhythm.

I do not read either Agawu or Radano as claiming that the ascription of distinctive power to African-inspired grooves is simply false. African American musicians and publics have made real affective connections between the distinctive rhythmic practices of the African diaspora and positive, empowering images of racial difference. A majority-white discourse, however, entails the more subtle danger that this kind of musical appreciation can shade unwittingly into cultural separatism, however well intentioned. If Afro-diasporic rhythmic practices are constructed by academics not just as different in emphasis from those of the European canon, but as radically different, different in a way that indexes the radical otherness of African bodies from those of Europeans, then an essentialized ideology of racial difference enacts unwitting symbolic violence against the culture(s) celebrated as different. Any aspects of the culture under discussion that display too much commonality with "ours" are bound to be suppressed, ignored, argued away. Agawu asks, "When was the last time an ethnomusicologist went out to discover sameness rather than difference?"[15]

The same question could be put to popular-music studies, equally implicated in the symbolic violence attendant on assertions of radical difference. The structure of a Motown single is certainly different from that of a symphonic movement by Beethoven; but is it radically different? Might they not both encode direction toward a goal, though using a different constellation of musical parameters? Cultural essentialism tends to derail musical interpretation, leaving it to drown in a morass of fantasy and projection about groovy "African" culture that has been pooling on the dominant side of the color line since the heyday of the minstrel show.[16] Thus it is all too easy to assume, along with the great African American sociologist E. Franklin Frazier, that the painfully internalized bourgeois values of that stiff, well-dressed family in *Color* magazine cannot be authentically "black," or to postulate that it is no wonder the youngest Gordy grew up to sell their musical inheritance out to white corporations on his way "over there," where goal-directed strivers (like those of us doing the interpretation) belong.[17] In a discourse still dominated,

14. Radano, *Lying Up a Nation*, 276.

15. Agawu, "Invention of African Rhythm," 389.

16. The key texts here are Lott, *Love and Theft* (1995), and Cockrell, *Demons of Disorder* (1997). A more recent and wide ranging treatment for the general public is Strausbaugh, *Black Like You* (2006).

17. This is not a pitfall marked by the race of the assumer; the harshest expositions of this thesis came, famously, from within the African American community. As I note in the text, the classic example is E. Franklin Frazier's 1955 *Bourgeoisie noire* (trans. as *Black Bourgeoisie*, 1957). Here is

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like musical academia itself, by the white racial imagination, African American popular music is not supposed to have goal direction, nor is it usually imagined to encode musically the embrace of capitalist modernity and rationalization associated with normative whiteness. Musical blackness is expected to be different, to be about existential freedom, about the joy of the intensely felt moment, about what a passionately committed recent study identifies as the "presence and pleasure" of the "state of being in funk."[18] Our music must exhibit goal direction, this line of reasoning goes, while their music is free to groove.

The logic of this racialized binarism not only assigns Afro-diasporic music to a secondary epistemological position; it reappropriates the secondary parameters of music, now valued instrumentally for what they might do for us white folk, that is, liberate us from the teleological burden, all too easily confused with the existential burden, of being white:

> In our culture (and perhaps in others where repression and oppression must be fought) it may be that music whose goal is engendered feeling, spontaneity, and the conquest of inhibition is of far greater value than music which aims to reflect our civilization and the repression-sublimation-Protestant-ethic syndrome upon which it is based simply because, like much great art, it offers an antidote, a strategy for dealing with our situation . . . , rather than reinforcing it.[19]

The history of Motown seems to falsify this articulation by Charles Keil of what is still a widely held truism about the value of Afro-diasporic music in majority-white culture(s).[20] First, every account of the Gordy family and the

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a mordant analytical sample, focused on race relations at a historically black college: "From the standpoint of their values the Negro teachers could have found more congenial association with the prejudiced white middle class than with [their] white liberal [colleagues]. In fact, in their struggle to attain American middle-class ideals, they gave the impression of being super-Americans" (83). To be fair to Frazier, his quarrel with the black bourgeoisie was not that they were too goal directed, but that they had "sold out" the struggle over racial-political equality for a fantasy version of American consumerism, a charge that might indeed plausibly be laid at Motown's door. This indictment echoes the perennial vernacular epithet "bougie" within African American culture, an accusation that still has the power to sting, but has in recent years been the subject of intense scholarly reconsideration. See the collection edited by James E. Teele, *E. Franklin Frazier and "Black Bourgeoisie."*

18. Danielsen, *Presence and Pleasure*, 144–49.

19. Keil, "Motion and Feeling Through Music," 75.

20. Simon Frith identifies this argument as a deep ideological blind spot for both ethnomusicology and popular music studies: "The spontaneous, human expression of African communities contrasts positively with the alienated rationalism of the European bourgeoisie; improvised musical creativity is valued over rule-bound musical interpretation . . . [but] what's still taken for granted in these arguments—that African music's 'simplicity' is a sign of its superiority; that African music is complex-in-its-own-way—is that African and European musics do work and mean differently. And this assumption . . . is still rooted in ideology rather than musicology." *Performing Rites: On the Value of Popular Music*, 133.

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Motown record label—the latter largely staffed, at least at first, with members of the former—attests to the fact that they had deeply internalized "the repression-sublimation-Protestant-ethic syndrome." The Gordys were in this respect typical of successful soul entrepreneurs like James Brown, Otis Redding, Aretha Franklin, and Curtis Mayfield—all of whom were famous for their discipline, drive, and leadership skills, not for laid-back spontaneity.

Goal-directed people do not have to produce goal-directed music, of course; but African American music has been taken for so long as a metonym for the souls (and lifestyles) of black folk that abandoning stereotypes about "spontaneous," "uninhibited" African American culture should change the way musicologists interpret and analyze its popular (or classical) music.[21] I propose to turn the table on this form of racialist hermeneutics by reconfiguring my music-theoretical framework to question this binary, not reify it. I will be taking a close analytical look at several pieces of African American popular music, focusing on the singles "Cloud Nine" (1968) and "Runaway Child, Running Wild" (1969), as performed by the Temptations and masterminded by Motown writer-producer Norman Whitfield. As we will see, these studio productions use systematic modulations of the rhythm arrangement to create, sustain, and ultimately release musical tension; though their harmonic language is indeed static, they are fundamentally goal-directed in temporal structure. And, although Keil could not have anticipated it (his observation was originally published in 1966 and addresses modern jazz), and though he might well dismiss my formulation as politically naive, these exercises in rhythmic teleology consciously instruct a rising black middle class, filled with assimilating strivers like Berry Gordy and Whitfield himself, in the internalization of bourgeois values, especially goal direction, inhibition, and self-control. I will present a reading in which groove-based music acts out, through the semiotic and syntactic use of "African" rhythms, the negative cultural consequences of spontaneity and lack of inhibition for late-1960s urban African Americans. A musical response to pervasive anxieties about drug use and runaways in the black public sphere, these tracks do indeed seem to make the familiar correlation between the power to delay musical gratification and aspirational bourgeois conceptions of "maturity."

On the way to this revisionist hermeneutic, I will take time to survey representative critical responses to an unexamined boundary myth which bedevils

21. Recent discussions of African American concert music show that this essentializing tendency can cross the popular-classical divide, ready to be invoked even for a "serious" composer like William Grant Still. Catherine Parsons Smith sees the use of blues material in the first movement of Still's *Afro-American Symphony* leading inevitably to "harmonic stasis," which, "in the context of a symphony, was a novel practice for 1930." The notion that the symphony is inherently teleological and that the blues are not, a binarism constructed primarily on the basis of pitch relationships, may serve in this case to burnish Still's reputation as a modernist ahead of his time; but it still essentializes a difference that in Still's own life and music is much harder to maintain. See Smith, *William Grant Still*, 49.

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the study of both popular and classical music: the pernicious notion that Western classical music's prestige rests on an actual difference in cultural value, which can be justified analytically by reference to uniquely teleological forms. The invidious linkage between goal direction, value, and "greatness" in music has been subjected to withering critique inside popular-music studies for several decades; but a logically prior assumption—that Western art music is defined by teleological forms and that Western popular music is not—has stood unassailed and largely unremarked. In this analytical essay, I hope to show that rhythmic structure in groove-based popular music can indeed be syntactic, and that hermeneutic analysis of rhythm might productively begin not by parsing musical repertories as life-affirming or body-denying according to their degree of goal direction, but by exploring the pervasive, multiparametric tension between *telos* and presence, between goals and grooves.

It remains hermeneutically audacious to assert, as did Keil in 1966, that any aspect of sonic experience could "reflect" the values of an entire civilization, or that one might pin down those values (or anything at all about the intentions of its creators) through structural analysis of the sounds themselves. It is well beyond the scope of this essay to proffer a theory of music as communicative action, or to mediate between formalist, semiotic, reader-response, and deconstructive approaches to the problem of musical meaning.[22] Still, we can begin by asking: where would a budding ethnomusicologist have picked up the idea that Western art music is considered great in the academy largely because it "aims to reflect our civilization" through its goal-directed, syntactic formal structure?

I. "Do You Know Where You're Going To?" Goals and Grooves in Popular Music Studies

The young Charles Keil first encountered this notion in the 1960s, in a graduate seminar at the University of Chicago taught by the music theorist, aesthetician, and critic Leonard B. Meyer. His response was visceral and negative: "[I had] a kind of angry reaction, over the first five or six weeks of his course, to hearing Lenny spin out his theories of syntax and style and meaning and music having to earn itself by delayed gratification. It was driving me nuts. . . ."[23]

The animal is becoming a man. Keil was reacting to a thesis laid out in Meyer's "Some Remarks on Value and Greatness in Music," a 1959 essay that

22. I can do no better than to refer the interested reader to a recent and wide-ranging synoptic study in the epistemology of common-practice tonal art music, Mark Spitzer's *Metaphor and Musical Thought*, esp. 54–91. For a shorter but pithy discussion that focuses more on pop, see the chapter "The Meaning of Music," in Frith, *Performing Rites*, 249–68.

23. Keil and Feld, *Music Grooves*, 11.

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has since become notorious within popular music studies. Meyer's formulation is anything but crude (and I do not have space to do him full justice here), but his central claim remains controversial even today: that it is possible, using structural analysis of pitch relationships, to assign objective value to various types of musical experiences. Meyer's cross-cultural criterion of aesthetic value is a characteristic of the musical experience which he calls "resistance." A good piece of music engages us with its goals and moves towards them in a way that allows us to perceive the patterns of inhibition and gratification that constitute, in Meyer's view, the basic content of music. By controlling patterns of expectation, a creator of music can maximize information density in a work, and, since both information and time are valuable, the artwork that most efficiently manages teleology is the best.

Couched in the neutral, precise language of *Gestalt* and information theory, Meyer's seems like an unexceptionable hypothesis, the starting point of what would become a lifelong fascination with the cognitive bases of musical perception.[24] But as the argument shifts from cognition to culture—to the larger questions of "value and greatness" promised by the essay's title—its burden might well make a lover of Afro-diasporic music nervous. Meyer hypothesizes that information theory can distinguish between "sophisticated art music" and more "primitive" forms of musical expression, since the primitive rejects complex patterns of tendency inhibition, favoring "immediate gratification" of his impulses. This is the reason why, according to Meyer, the "tonal repertory of the primitive is limited, not because he cannot think of other tones. It is not his mentality that is limited, it is his maturity."

Meyer casts the evolution of sophisticated, highly teleological styles of music from their primitive forbears in a broadly Freudian light: "Understood generally . . . self-imposed tendency inhibition and the willingness to bear uncertainty are indications of maturity. They are signs, that is, that the animal is becoming a man. And this, I take it, is not without relevance to considerations of value."[25] Wary, perhaps, of a racialist reading of his thesis, he points out that he is not contrasting classical music with what he calls "real" jazz, nor—and he is careful to spell this out—with the complex and sophisticated music characteristic of indigenous peoples in cultures wrongly dubbed "primitive."

What music, then, is considered primitive? Meyer's article, published in early 1959, seems of a piece with the media indignation over the domination of America's airwaves by the "primitive" sounds of rock-and-roll. This moral panic climaxed in 1958 Senate hearings actually designed to take down the upstart licensing firm BMI, which had built its business representing rhythm & blues artists. The hearings gave national publicity to a sustained assault on the quality of BMI's catalog by music industry insiders and academic experts.

24. Meyer's work is seen as foundational by the current generation of cognitive musicologists; see in particular Huron, *Sweet Anticipation*, 2–3.

25. Meyer, "Some Remarks." The passages above appear on 32–33.

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The consensus, voiced with typical panache at the hearing by cultural critic Vance Packard, was that rock-and-roll, "inspired by what had been called race music," was designed to "stir the animal instinct in modern teenagers." This was a well-worn trope: back in 1956, the *New York Times* had gravely reported that the teenage embrace of rock-and-roll was a "cannibalistic and tribalistic" phenomenon.[26] Although he did not deign to mention Elvis Presley, Meyer's remarks on value and greatness could have explained to the parents (and Senators) of 1959 why otherwise smart kids seemed to like what professional musicians routinely dismissed as a "cretinous," and "imbecilic" music.[27] It was not their mentality that was limited, it was their maturity. Rock-and-roll, a supposedly "primitive" musical style often characterized by its critics as unbearably "monotonous" or "obsessive" (i.e., as lacking in pitch-based teleology), was popular with a generation of middle-class white adolescents whose own inability to delay gratification was thereby highlighted. The little animals were evidently too busy rocking and rolling to become men.

One can well understand how this introduction to musicology might radicalize the young Keil, a skilled jazz drummer who deeply loved all types of Afro-diasporic groove; following his lead, ethnomusicologists and popular music scholars have been rebelling against Meyer's thesis ever since. Nevertheless, we are faced with the surprising tenacity of the argument that groove-based music: (1) has no real teleology, no discursive structure in time; (2) is thus, unlike art music, unable to acculturate subjects to a regime of delayed gratification plus sublimation of instincts; and (3) is, for this reason alone, of lesser value. Lest one assumes that I am flogging some pretty old horses here, consider how popular music is constructed in a more recent defense of "sophisticated art" music. It was when I read the following in composer Julian Johnson's 2002 manifesto, *Who Needs Classical Music?*, that I realized the problem of popular music teleology had, if anything, become more pressing since 1959:

> Inevitably, the most popular musical forms today are not only miniatures, rarely more than a few minutes long, but are also effectively seamless in structure.

26. The most detailed account of the ASCAP–BMI battle that gave rise to Senator George Smathers's attempt to amend the Communications Act of 1934 to force BMI out of business is Sanjek and Sanjek, *American Popular Music Business in the 20th Century*, 110–28 and 165–69. Packard's testimony, and an excellent historical account of the 1958 Smathers hearings in the context of the battle over segregation, can be found in Ward, *Just My Soul Responding*, 116–22. Connecticut psychiatrist Francis J. Braceland's opinion that rock-and-roll was "a communicable disease" was quoted in an unsigned *New York Times* article on 28 March 1956, under the headline "Rock-and-Roll Called 'Communicable Disease' " (33), and was widely reported at the time. It has become a staple of social histories of the 1950s, and Ward quotes it in *Just My Soul*, 107; see also Brackett, *Pop, Rock, and Soul Reader*, 101.

27. The famous characterization is from Frank Sinatra, quoted in a 12 January 1958 feature by Gertrude Samuels on "Why They Rock and Roll," in the *New York Times Sunday Magazine*. See Brackett, *Pop, Rock and Soul Reader*, 102.

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> They tend to do a single, essentially static thing that might repeat indefinitely or stop at almost any point. The fade-out thus remains a standard ending because seamless music, having no inward formal tension, can have only an arbitrary ending.[28]

Obviously this does not describe Pink Floyd's *Dark Side of the Moon*; but it is not even relevant to whatever bubblegum track is hovering at the top of the pop charts on the day you read this sentence. Johnson was writing in the backwash of 1990s electronic dance-music culture, and thus he may be partially excused for assuming that all groove-based music functions like minimalist techno, exaggerating the monotonous, seamless, and nonteleogical side of musical experience.[29] But as his language makes clear, Johnson is not out to document an extreme mutation of musical temporality and explain its significance as cultural resistance or reaction; he is fighting a fierce rear-guard action in defense of delayed musical gratification.

Taking his cue from Adorno's cultural dialectics, and following the path laid out by Meyer, Johnson's argument focuses not on the superficially transgressive content of popular music, but on its underlying formal "deficiencies," in particular its supposed lack of teleology. This allows him to turn the tables on reverse snobs who take pop's messages of freedom and pleasure at face value: "Music that outwardly signifies fashionable modernity may be utterly conventional internally. Music that outwardly signifies a tolerant, liberal lifestyle may inwardly exhibit repressive tendencies." A dialectical flip like this epitomizes the attraction of using "purely formal" criteria to buttress the distinction between "high" and "low": one can freely disparage the taste of social groups one does not like without taking responsibility for a direct attack on their cultural politics.[30] Johnson is somewhat more intemperate in his criticism than the norm, but the bias in favor of music that displays complex "internal structures" is not just self-defense on the part of a contemporary modernist composer; it is deeply embedded in musical academia itself. Meyer-style syntactic arguments linking teleology and cultural value still seem integral to musicology as a discipline, and thus present a perpetual disciplinary affront to advocates of popular music as culture.[31]

28. Johnson, *Who Needs Classical Music?*, 54.

29. Ibid., 36. I have critiqued at length the idea that dance music actually works this way in *Repeating Ourselves*, 38–47.

30. Johnson, *Who Needs Classical Music?*, 41. Given the complex racial politics that swirl around the art-popular divide in music, it is worth noting that Johnson's principal target is not Afro-diasporic music *per se*, but what he perceives as the fashionable cultural politics of a white liberal elite. (His book was published during the ideological high-water mark of Tony Blair's "New Labour" politics in Britain.)

31. While I do not agree with the entire thrust of his argument, John Covach outlines some of these disciplinary issues with admirable clarity in a summary article irresistibly titled "Popular Music, Unpopular Musicology."

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The critical response to this deep-seated line of musicological self-definition is understandable, but unfortunate: it leads to a dismissal in some academic quarters of syntactic analysis itself as elitist and culturally imperialist, a tendency that I once characterized as the "scorched-earth" defense of popular music studies.[32] When subcultural theory and anti-formalism become mutually reinforcing intellectual tendencies, groove-based music is sometimes imagined as the perfect sonic text of antisyntactic, antiteleogical *jouissance*: "Dance music as it is perceived now—soul, disco, funk, techno and the many mansions of house—is, I believe, the one form of music which, even in its most degraded form, is bound up in something that closely resembles Roland Barthes's notion of *jouissance*, that is, rapture, bliss, or transcendence."[33]

Much of this critique is theoretically elegant, morally rigorous, and shows a deep love for the intricacies of musical sound. But there is a hermeneutic price to pay for the ideological flight from syntax. Insulated thereby from a particular kind of essentializing value judgment, one must concede the entire domain of musical structure to the defenders of high art, and reify a problematic distinction by agreeing with them that the rhythmic matrix of a piece of popular music should best be approached as a deterritorialized zone, in which the controlling forces of structure and signification no longer hold.

Theorizing the groove. What then of those who do counter formalist dismissals of groove-based music in analytical terms? Is it in fact possible to outflank Leonard Meyer on his own music-theoretical turf? Keil's response to Meyer, first published in 1966 as "Motion and Feeling Through Music," has been paradigmatic for popular-music studies. Troping off the title of his onetime professor's major formulation of expectation-realization theory, *Emotion and Meaning in Music*, Keil begins, as one might expect, by reframing Meyer's epistemological question ("meaning in music") in anthropological terms ("feeling through music").

Keil also shifts the focus decisively from pitch to rhythm. In Meyer's model, meaningful musical tension is embodied in (often composed) pitch sequences and leaps, giving rise to the expectation that melodic patterns will be continued and gaps filled. Keil counterpoises to such moments of musical resistance the "vital drive" of groove-based music, a pervasive feeling that arises from the continual process of realizing rhythmic figures against a steady pulse during a particular (often improvised) performance.[34] This engendered feeling is not

32. Fink, "Elvis Everywhere," 150.

33. Gill, *Queer Noises*, 134; quoted in Gilbert and Pearson, *Discographies*, 63–67.

34. "In composed music . . . , broadly speaking, melody rests upon harmony and embellishment on melody. . . . To the extent that an artfully embellished melody inhibits the tendency toward an expected harmonic resolution, we have embodied meaning. . . . In improvised music . . . , to the extent that the rhythms conflict with or exhibit the groove without destroying it altogether, we have engendered feeling, and for a solo to grow the feeling must accumulate"; Keil, "Motion and Feeling," 66–67.

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dependent on a generative or transformational grammar of rhythm—as Keil notes, "[a jazz drummer's] straight-four technique may be as dull as dishwater syntactically but electrifying as part of a process."[35] And since the groove process, in swinging music, is always going on (seamlessly, Johnson might add), articulation of the sonic surface is rare; there is thus little purchase for reductive techniques of analysis that track tension-relaxation structures across plateaus of linear musical time. Instead, Keil urges us to concentrate on "careful, even microscopic, observation of the movements associated with music making, particularly the motions of those entrusted with the creation of vital drive"; he even advocates the use of quasi-scientific means to measure objectively the microdeviations between, say, the drummer and the bassist in a jazz combo.[36] Keil would later formalize this approach into a theory of "participatory discrepancies," a methodological rubric under which ethnomusicologists have done exacting experimental work, quantifying intuitive understandings of groove by measuring minute deviations from an underlying pulse created by the attack, sustain, and decay of individual musical events.[37]

The resultant irony—that a theory which links the power of music to the contagious joy contingent on "the capacity of human beings to defy logic" leads to a hyperrationalized objectification of music as timing data, a dogged attempt to capture smokestack lightning in a jar—has been noted by a later generation of ethnomusicologists.[38] But what is the alternative, if one wants to devote sustained attention to the rhythmic subtleties of groove-based music? Two recent analytical monographs dealing with maximally groove-intensive repertoires—Anne Danielsen on classic funk grooves, and Mark Butler on electronic dance music—provide a hopeful view of the path(s) forward for popular music studies.[39] Both are excellent, systematic treatments grounded in close listening to musical recordings, and each makes a sophisticated case for isolating and dissecting in detail the rhythmic structures of its chosen "texts." For both authors, though, there is much more at stake than the liberating power of the groove. Rhythms, it seems, do work differently than pitch to organize musical time—but this difference is perhaps less radical than it is complementary, Therefore, any previously assumed absence of syntactic transformations is by no means a given.

35. Ibid., 61.

36. Ibid., 73, 67. Significantly enough, Keil envisions something like Charles Seeger's melograph, repurposing a device designed to capture microstructures of pitch for the microanalysis of rhythm.

37. See Keil, "Participatory Discrepancies and the Power of Music"; a revised version appears in Keil and Feld, *Music Grooves*, 96–108.

38. The methodological and cultural issues around participatory discrepancy were thoroughly aired in Titon, ed., "Participatory Discrepancies," special issue of *Ethnomusicology* 39 (1995); it includes a propaedeutic essay by Keil, two extended case studies adducing quantitative data on microdeviations of rhythm, and a fascinating set of responses by musicologists of all stripes, including Leonard Meyer himself. The quoted phrase comes from Keil, "Participatory Discrepancies," 276.

39. Danielsen, *Presence and Pleasure*; Butler, *Unlocking the Groove*.

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Danielsen is openly impatient with musical theorists who, enthralled with radical difference, erase the actual differences among the diverse musical repertoires imagined as proceeding outside of linear teleological time: "All nonlinear music tends to appear the same, because the interesting thing about it is exactly its nonlinearity, and the fact that it may work as an antithesis of Western tonal art music. . . . Nonlinear musical time might include funk, but only if one leaves out all of the significant internal differences within nonlinearity" (154–55). Danielsen's model of the funk groove is circular, a complex intermediation of goal direction and stasis that becomes clear only at extreme levels of analytical magnification: "A groove does not stand still . . . even though the groove is not proceeding toward a definite goal, it is—to the last second—in motion" (155). This tendency to microanalyze the groove is indebted to Keil, and Danielsen does in fact base her phenomenology of funk on a "sensitivity to the small-scale musical gesture, to displacements and variations on a micro-level" (71).

But these displacements, the "minimal differences and seemingly insignificant nuances" (72) that make a track funky, have been epistemologically reconsidered in Danielsen's work. For Keil, participatory discrepancies are objectively there in the material traces of music, in the actual temporal and timbral relationships between musicians who, at a given moment, are playing "out of time and out of tune," as he memorably put it.[40] Danielsen takes a more abstract, even metaphysical position: in her reading, the discrepancies are not social, but conceptual. At the risk of oversimplifying a highly complex analytical framework, one might summarize her basic understanding of "funkiness" as the interaction between one or more reference structures of virtual beats, and an actual set of rhythmic gestures that simultaneously realizes and challenges them (47–48). In her way of hearing, a single riff can present both rhythm and counterrhythm at the same time, and an entire musical texture can be played so as to be discrepant with a virtual rhythm that is never actually stated. The resulting rhythmic multiplicity creates what she calls a "stable unstable" (135), a repeated virtual pattern that is never actually repeated, and which, under performative pressure, fragments into a constellation of "small [rhythmic] spaces, which can then be manipulated or played with" (71).

To invoke a structuralist binarism that Danielsen herself employs, one might imagine Keil as fixated on the intricacies of *parole*, the "way people phrase things," which structural linguistics contrasts to the idealism of *langue*, "language," imagined as a referential set of syntactic rules and transformations.[41] What Danielsen sees—and lays out in crystalline analytical detail—is that *langue* and *parole* have a contradictory, even deconstructive relationship in the music she is studying: persistent, structured "deviations" from a constantly

40. Keil, "Participatory Discrepancies," 275.

41. Danielsen reads Saussure's distinction through the subsequent work of Bakhtin (sentence vs. utterance), and Ricoeur's reading of Hjelmslev (schema vs. usage); see *Presence and Pleasure*, 48–50.

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implied reference structure do not negate its syntax; they actually create a new syntax by subjecting the reference structure itself to constant syntactic pressure. Analyzing how clipped horn notes give a "downbeat in anticipation" feeling to James Brown's "Papa's Got a Brand-New Bag," Danielsen outlines the process by which "a [particular] way of phrasing . . . eventually comes to characterize figures of rhythm in general and then spreads to whole layers of rhythm" [75]. In the funk groove, *parole* becomes *langue*; deviations from the norm (phrasing) become normative, and then (perhaps) syntactic in their own right. Fanatically precise transcription of participatory discrepancies uncovers not a groovy world blissfully outside the symbolic order, but a groove whose business is the constant disruption and reformulation of that order, a never-ending process of *jouissance* which makes funk both intensely pleasurable and intensely meaningful.

But once Danielsen moves beyond the charmed circle of the (micro)groove, her analytical grasp loosens. Though she takes her stand on an antiteleological reading of the extended funk jams laid down by James Brown's backing bands around 1970—music that seems as though "it could go on forever" and thus reward listening in the "groove mode," Danielsen is forced to admit that most listeners in the developed world still listen syntactically, according to a "song-based" set of formal expectations (147–48). Her traversals of larger stretches of funk music are thus situated uneasily "between song and groove" (172), and it is clear which side Danielsen thinks the Funk is on: "Some [James Brown] songs seem to . . . [use] form to overrule the expectations inherent in the dominating mode of listening within the Western pop and rock audiences, making the song into the desired negation of form" (179).

From the perspective of a Motown scholar, the view of post-1960 pop-song forms in *Presence and Pleasure* is strikingly impoverished. Danielsen presents the conventional rock-soul song as built over a "repetitive layer" of rhythm where the "groove runs non-stop." The "totally leveled out" procession of short rhythmic units has no form-building power; a listener is cued into expectation and realization only by a conventional "hierarchy of [pitch] sequences" that chops up the flow into symmetrical tonal phrases (172). Danielsen's account of what James Brown's ensemble was trying to accomplish in long explorations of the groove like "Soul Power" or "Sex Machine" is complex and compelling. But the syntactic background against which these explorations are supposed to be appreciated, the "typical" song in which rhythm is wallpaper-flat and simple pitches create simplistic form, is as problematic a caricature as was ever drawn by dismissive partisans of classical "art" music.[42]

42. It is thus not surprising that Danielsen's aesthetics tend toward Kantian idealism ("this right feeling [of the groove] recalls Kant's analysis of aesthetic judgment, or what he calls 'the satisfaction in the beautiful' "; ibid., 198).

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The erotics of the orderly. Perhaps because the tracks in which he is interested are so clearly unrelated to traditional verse-chorus forms, music theorist Mark Butler does not feel the need to demonize the pop song when he takes up the question of "rhythm, meter, and musical design" in electronic dance music (EDM). Nor does he take refuge in a microtheory of participatory discrepancies, since one of his most challenging claims about EDM—that, by analogy with Schoenberg's atonal music, it works to "emancipate the rhythmic dissonance"—takes for granted the power of sequencers and drum machines to *eliminate* discrepancies, to construct elaborate, mathematically precise complexes of "dissonant" rhythms that never falter.[43] In a striking departure from previous critical appreciations of dance-music culture, Butler unapologetically analyzes EDM as composed-out music, music that encodes information, syntactically and teleologically, at all levels from the individual loop to the "epic" (177) scale of the overnight set.

Like Danielsen, Butler locates the vital force of a groove in the tension, at the microlevel, between abstract, fluctuating temporal grids that a listener projects onto the musical flow ("meter") and the actual patterns of sound, realized in complex overlapping layers, that are constantly materializing ("rhythm"): "I would like to claim that certain types of rhythms are defined by a dynamic tension between our perception of a note's position and our sense of where it *should* be. This interplay creates a kind of gravitational pull toward the beat, a sort of negative emphasis on the position from which the note is displaced" (87; emphasis original). This tension, or "pull," finds its counterpart at the largest level, where "DJs use a variety of techniques to create growth and climax" (251), and where, as informants aver to Butler, "the importance of shaping *energy* or *intensity* within a set" is paramount, since it is "the glue that holds a set together" (254, emphases original).

It is at the middle level, the level of the individual track, that the hermeneutic power of treating rhythmic structures syntactically becomes most clear. There is something refreshing in Butler's matter-of-fact assertion that "the activity of the bass drum can have significant formal implications" for an EDM track (182). Though it may come as a surprise to some critics that groove-based music even has form, let alone formal implications, Butler is, as any dance-floor denizen can attest, exactly correct. It is important to distinguish this "signaling" function of the bass drum from the complex adjustments that a master drummer makes as he leads a West-African-style percussion ensemble. When a DJ "drops the bass," he is not attempting to change the participatory character of the groove, to negotiate in the moment how it is played; he is reaping the syntactic benefits of withholding the basic groove altogether for dramatic effect on an audience:

> [DJ Stacey] Pullen cuts the bass drum out. The audience turns to him expectantly, awaiting its return. For one measure, and then another, he builds their

43. Butler, *Unlocking the Groove*, 174.

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> anticipation, using the mixing board to distort the sounds that remain. As the energy level increases, he gauges their response. A third measure passes by, and a fourth, and then—with an instantaneous flick of the wrist—he brings the beat back in all its forceful glory. As one the crowd raises their fists in the air and screams with joy. (p. 3)

Cutting out and then reintroducing a track's "four-on-the-floor" beat is a structural gesture, a teasing kind of communication with a dancing audience. It is a classic example of what Leonard Meyer, if one could imagine him at a rave, might recognize as musical "resistance" to listener expectation, the same kind of structured resistance that, when realized as a pattern of melodic gaps and fills, can determine the information content of Western tonal music. Butler concedes that EDM does not use tonal cadences to create traditional phrase structures, and he is not prepared to argue that a single goal-directed process of varying rhythm or texture organizes an entire EDM track in the way tonality is imagined to organize classical symphonic forms. But he argues systematically that teleology need not be an all-or-nothing affair; that rhythms can be consonant or dissonant on a larger scale than the circular ambit of the groove; and that directed motion away from and back to the basic 4/4 beat of the bass drum can organize medium-range listener expectation in this style, and define structural spans somewhat as modulation does in common-practice classical music ("withholdings most commonly occur at the end of a metrical unit") (92). Butler's DJ informants, who "spoke about form frequently and spontaneously" (221), seem to understand the prototypical EDM song structure this way, as a series of increasingly intense builds and releases, one going so far as to sketch its double rise and fall in bar-graph form on a scrap of paper (223).[44]

Perhaps, after all is said, the key is not to deny the life-affirming pleasures of "groove as niche," Robert Walser's epigrammatic summing up of the bodily attractions of African American rhythm. Nor is it useful to argue that funk can be understood, in Julian Johnson's Adorno-accented coinage, entirely according to the austere dictates of "music-as-art."[45] In fact, musical syntax and control can be a source of pleasure, even if that pleasure has been "sublimated," according to a centuries-old European pattern, into goal-directed striving. (Pioneering black music researcher Samuel Floyd once used precisely that word, "sublimation," to suggest that Berry Gordy had submerged Motown's

44. As Gilbert and Pearson might predict, these techno DJs are uncomfortable with tracks that seem to manipulate too obviously what I have dubbed "the teleology of the dance floor" (see Fink, *Repeating Ourselves*, 38); they find such tracks anti-intellectual: "[*sarcastically*] Yeah, we're all about just bringing you up and smashing you down, and not making you think anywhere along the way" (227). Instead, they are thinking about communication: removing and then restoring the bass is, like opening up and then filling a melodic gap in Meyer's theory, a way to encode information. It is supposed to make you think about what will come next.

45. See Walser, "Groove as Niche"; and Johnson, *Who Needs Classical Music*, 48.

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"African" roots on the way to mainstream success.[46]) Groove-based popular music is undeniably erotic; but it has little to do with *jouissance* as the collapse of (musical) discourse, an erotic self-abandonment more attractive to cultural theorists than pop-music producers and consumers. African American rhythm has a complex, structured erotics which, under analysis, reveals itself to white ears as an uncanny reflection not of difference, but of sameness. It relies on the same iron (capacity for maximizing pleasure through) self-control that we think we run to grooves to escape. In a memorable turn of phrase for which we have critic Simon Frith to thank, popular-music rhythm displays, and demands to be discussed as, "an erotics of the orderly."[47]

II. "Cloud Nine": Norman Whitfield and the Delay of Rhythmic Gratification

As studio guitarist Dennis Coffey tells it, producer Norman Whitfield went through a research-oriented phase in late September 1968: "One day Norman came to the workshop with a song called 'Cloud Nine.' He wanted to experiment with the groove."[48] The workshop in question was the short-lived Motown Producer's Workshop, which took place nightly in Motown's Studio B, the old Golden World recording studios that Berry Gordy acquired when he bought out his main Detroit rhythm & blues competitor in 1967. Here a second string of local musicians like Coffey mixed with moonlighting Funk Brothers to provide a forum where budding producers could learn their trade and more experienced ones could test out new musical ideas without worrying overmuch about the judgments of Motown's notorious "Quality Control" department. Whitfield was one of the most experienced and successful producers at Motown, perhaps its dominant musical force at the time; that he would show up at this after-hours hangout to work on the rhythm tracks for a new Temptations song hints at a strong desire to stretch the boundaries of the Motown sound, perhaps by putting some physical distance between his musicians and the hothouse atmosphere back at "Hitsville USA."[49]

46. Floyd, *Power of Black Music*, 205, quoted in an excellent discussion of Motown and "crossover" by Flory, "I Hear A Symphony," 130.

47. "This makes it all the more striking that the pleasures of rock music continue to be explained by intellectuals in terms of *jouissance*, the escape from structure, reason, form, and so forth. . . . It may seem to follow [from the rejection of this view] that the erotics of pop has nothing to do with rhythm at all. But my argument is, rather, that it is an erotics of the orderly." Frith, *Performing Rites*, 144.

48. Coffey, *Guitars, Bars, and Motown Superstars*, 54.

49. "Hitsville" was the nickname for Motown's original home at 2648 W. Grand Blvd., which contained in its converted garage the recording studio that was called (after 1967) "Studio A." The cramped quarters of this converted four-bedroom house were famous among the label's

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In late 1968, after writing and producing "I Heard It Through the Grapevine," the label's commercially most successful single of all time, Whitfield was considered something of an avant-garde genius, the least formulaic producer at Motown. He was explosive in temperament, demanding and unpredictable in the studio. Gordy, who would later take credit for recognizing the complex groove of "Cloud Nine" as "another of Norman's innovations, another example of his refusal to stay in one place creatively," was at the time also quite ready to rein in even his most successful writer-producer if he tinkered too much with the hit-making machinery.[50] That is why Whitfield chose to work with the Temptations, who in 1968 were going through a prolonged fallow period after the departure of their charismatic lead singer. He believed that with a new, tougher sound, they could dominate the charts as thoroughly as they did when the silky-voiced but mercurial David Ruffin was singing lead.

Whitfield, himself a more than competent drummer, described in 1991 the experimental impulse behind his late-sixties rhythm arrangements for the Temptations: "I started studying African rhythms on my own, and I wanted to know how to make a song have as much impact without using a regular 2/4 or 4/4 backbeat."[51] Whitfield did not see his research leading in the direction that Leonard Meyer would have recognized as "mature": that is, toward more complex, extended tonal forms featuring elaborate modulations. As Andrew Flory has noted, Whitfield's "psychedelic soul" compositions with Barrett Strong tended to the bluesy, repetitious, and riff-based; they were actually less tonally driving than the elaborate gospel-derived chord progressions being used by Valerie Ashford ("Ain't No Mountain High Enough") or Lamont Dozier and Brian Holland ("I Hear a Symphony").[52]

But Whitfield was indeed interested in exploring the delay of musical gratification; his chosen parameter, however, was rhythm. At Studio B, he began an extended series of hands-on experiments to determine precisely how long a producer could inhibit one of Motown's most fundamental rhythmic tenden-

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songwriters for encouraging collaboration, kibitzing, and, by the late 1960s, undermining, snitching, and backstabbing. See Hank Cosby as quoted in Edmonds, *What's Going On? Marvin Gaye and the Last Days of the Motown Sound*, 99.

50. Gordy, *To Be Loved*, 276.

51. Zollo, interview with Norman Whitfield, *Songtalk*, 1991, repr. in *Calling Out Around the World*, 146. I have been unable to find out in more detail what Whitfield might have meant in practice by "studying African rhythms."

52. "Whitfield's psychedelic soul songs were often riff-based (or groove oriented) and did not rely on vertical harmonic progressions to provide forward motion through the form. While it was not out of the bounds of expectation for a Motown hit from the mid-1960s to have a harmonically static verse—'Dancing in the Street' and even 'Ain't too Proud to Beg' are good examples of this—these earlier songs always exhibited some sort of harmonic change in their chorus section. For the most part Whitfield's psychedelic soul songs offer very little in the way of harmonic motion throughout the entire piece, and those that do change vertical harmonies do so at a very slow harmonic rhythm." Flory, "I Hear a Symphony," 161–62.

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cies. After a long apprenticeship in Studio A, Whitfield had come to realize that Motown had conditioned its listeners to expect a strong 2/4 or 4/4 pattern, the so-called "four-on-the-floor," hammered out by snare drums, tambourine, chains—even, as in the massive 1964 hit "Where Did Our Love Go," four *literal* stomps on the amplified floor—as the foundation of every uptempo track.[53] Beginning with "Cloud Nine," Whitfield's late-1960s productions demonstrate how the Motown four-on-the-floor could be made to function like a *tonic rhythm*, and how a sophisticated producer could create powerful structural tension by delaying it, deviating from it, and finally "resolving" more complex rhythmic patterns back down to its basic 1–2–3–4.

Theoretical interlude: on the metaphor of tonic rhythm. "Very clever," I can imagine the perspicacious reader protesting, but does the concept of a tonic rhythm not smuggle back all of Leonard Meyer's invidious distinctions, tacitly confirming that the primary framework within which to understand musical teleology remains (something like) pitch? As it happens, the propriety of this metaphor, built on the intuitive sense that listeners respond to a rhythmic "dissonance" (whatever that might be) the way they react to dissonant constellations of pitches, has been exhaustively debated by music theorists working on rhythm in common-practice tonal music.[54]

The discourse can become labyrinthine, but any metaphor of rhythmic dissonance rests on the assumption that listeners mentally project a regular metrical grid onto music; "dissonant" rhythms are those which cut across this grid and are thus "anti-metrical." Rhythmic dissonances "resolve" when the actual attack patterns of music realign themselves with the projected grid—or when the grid itself is remapped to align with a particularly stubborn pattern of attacks. Butler, for example, identifies this process of "turning the beat around" as a basic structural dynamic in EDM.[55] The congruence with Meyer's theory is clear: the metrical grid provides the expectations, and deviations from the grid the resistance that encodes information. "Turning the beat around" is, in some sense, akin to a metric modulation.

Disputes occur over how far the metaphor can be extended: must rhythmic dissonance resolve syntactically? And is it to be conceived of as embellishing more structural rhythmic consonances, perhaps even those of the bare grid

53. References to the time signatures "2/4" and "4/4" follow a nonstandard terminology that was common at the time with pop musicians. Meters were not distinguished according to the number and length of beats in a notated measure, but according to the number of offbeat snare drum hits (backbeats) in a perceived groove cycle. The "2/4" beat is equivalent to the standard rock backbeat, with *two* snare hits every *four* beats; "4/4" implies, in the Motown context, a "four-on-the-floor" pattern with snare hits on every beat. I have taken over this nonstandard rhythmic terminology in my own analyses below.

54. Butler has an excellent overview of the most influential formulations by Krebs, Cohn, Covach, Hasty, and others. See *Unlocking the Groove*, 97–116, 166–75.

55. Ibid., 141.

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itself? This last issue presses with particular exigency on the study of Afro-diasporic grooves, since they let us hear the 4/4 grid directly as sound, and yet they also foreground persistent, pervasive cross-rhythms, creating multiple "dissonant" rhythmic layers where metrical and anti-metrical patterns seem quite cheerfully to coexist. For some popular-music scholars like Walser, this is reason enough to discard a metaphor that artificially constrains and makes hierarchical what should remain irreducibly complex and open;[56] but I believe it is possible to annex some of the syntactic orientation Western music theory associates with the consonance–dissonance distinction, and to imagine that varying the rhythmic texture can organize expectations and create goal direction, without dragging along the entire unwieldy apparatus of tonal hierarchy and voiceleading.

One can do no better here than follow Butler, who struggles productively in *Unlocking the Groove* with the relation of "classical" hypermetric tonal theories and groove-based music. He points out that in EDM, technologically enabled independence of layers and the heritage of Afro-diasporic drumming practice combine to normalize the metaphorically dissonant clash of duple and triple rhythms (this is his "emancipation of the rhythmic dissonance"). Borrowing another term from pitch theory, he dubs mixed patterns of two and three—the familiar 3–3–2 *clave* pattern, for example—"diatonic" rhythms, and argues that they are as stable in EDM as pure triple or duple rhythms are in Western art music.[57] Yet—and here I move, on my own recognizance, beyond Butler's theorizing—there *is* a difference between any of the many regular diatonic divisions of the quadruple pulse and the limit case of pure four-on-the-floor, the beat that accents every single division of the listener's projected metrical grid. The distinction here is not precisely between rhythmic consonance and dissonance, but more akin to what happens during the larger process of tonal modulation, wherein one might perceive as a release of tension the move from a more-or-less stable situation within a range of such situations (diatonic) to the maximally stable situation within that range (tonic).

Butler notes that "dropping the bass" in EDM can function as a return "home." DJs use this gesture to structure the experience of dance music, to articulate its spans, and to channel and release musical energy. It is, in effect, the tonic rhythm of much EDM. Sometimes, when the kick drum re-entrance "turns the beat around," relocating the downbeat after it has been "lost" in

56. "Terms like 'metric dissonance' and 'dissonant strata' suggest that rhythmic conflicts must always be resolved. . . . There seems to be no place for tensions that remain unresolved, differences that can co-exist." Walser, "Rhythm, Rhyme, and Rhetoric," 214n20.

57. "[Diatonic rhythms] create their own kind of evenness, through their distinctive structural properties." The terms "pure" and "mixed" are taken by Butler from rhythmic theories first proposed by Richard Cohn. The pure span uses only rhythms generated from a single prime (all twos, all threes); mixed spans use more than one prime to generate rhythmic clashes. See Butler, *Unlocking the Groove*, 81–90; the quote is on 89.

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syncopation, the return is thoroughly syntactic, as a metrical dissonance "resolves" back to consonance with the underlying perceptual grid.[58] On the other hand, producers can successfully drop the bass even in situations where it "does nothing," simply reinforcing the already implied beat of the music. EDM listeners have learned to pay attention whenever the steady 4/4 boom is taken away, and to await the moment when it returns. The bass drop—like the tonic cadence in tonal music—has become a convention of the style.

In the analyses that follow, I will show that in the psychedelic soul grooves of Norman Whitfield, a heavy tonic groove laid down with snare-drum attacks on every pulse functions like the bass drop in EDM. By 1965, this pounding beat was recognized by Motown sound engineers as one of the "standard Motown sounds," the particular calling card of Detroit's most famous producing team: "Most of Holland-Dozier-Holland's music had a 4/4 drumbeat, a snare hit on every beat in the measure."[59] If a producer strayed too far from the signature four-on-the-floor he was in trouble; in the mid-1960s, some tricky rhythmic innovations simply failed to pass Quality Control: "When Smokey Robinson recorded 'Get Ready' by The Temptations, his first version featured a very complicated drumbeat, which was different from the signature Motown rhythm. At the Friday Meeting, it was suggested that he record a more standard drumbeat, which he did. It was the first time I remember overdubbing drums."[60] Whitfield had already tested the limits of Motown's tolerance for complicated drumbeats, most notably with "I Heard It Through the Grapevine";[61] the crux of the argument that follows that in his late 1960s–early 1970s experiments with The Temptations, Whitfield deliberately broke with the studio's standard sound. As tracks like "Cloud Nine," or the epic nine-and-a-half minutes of "Runaway Child, Running Wild," unfold, the house Motown style, with its strong tendency towards a steady tonic 4/4 rhythm, is repeatedly frustrated in unpredictable ways. This rhythmic tonic, much like the tonic key area in a tonal work, will be visited sparingly, and definitively achieved only after complex syntactic processes have run their course.

Up, up, and away. In memoirs by insiders, the narrative aspect of Whitfield's producing style, his ability to control teleology in the studio, is consistently highlighted as atypical of Motown. Dennis Coffey, whose fuzz box and

58. Butler avoids the loaded term "tonic," but is it not implicit in his description of "the [4/4] beat, which represents the music in its most essential form" (ibid., 92)? His discussion of "turning the beat around" can be found on 149.

59. Taylor, *Motown Music Machine*, 21, 40.

60. Ibid., 11–12.

61. Whitfield, of course, did not rerecord the drum parts to Marvin Gaye's famous hit after it was rejected by Gordy at a Friday Quality Control meeting. He did, however, record an entirely different version with Gladys Knight and the Pips that featured a strong 2/4 backbeat throughout. This track was released without incident and became a #2 Pop hit. See among others Edmonds, *What's Going On?*, 27–32.

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wah-wah pedal gave "Cloud Nine" its psychedelic edge, called Whitfield "a master of dynamics" who "built up each song to match what he had in mind." Beginning arrangements without the full drum kit (just bass and auxiliary percussion), Whitfield would "start adding instruments on each verse until the song built up to a crescendo of sweaty, raunchy funk!"[62] Motown engineer Harold Taylor notes Whitfield's penchant for rhythmic diversity and contrasts his dramatic approach with the "traditional" sound of Motown records: "Norman could use complex rhythms, like double time or half time. If you listen to 'Papa Was a Rolling Stone' and 'Car Wash,' you will find that the rhythms are very complicated. His arrangements always build to a climax, where traditional Motown arrangements were very constant."[63]

The very first track Whitfield based on his workshop experimentation set the template: as finished, "Cloud Nine" was a funky, Sly Stone–influenced track which gave every member of the Temptations a chance to shine, each taking a turn as the dark narrative of inner-city desperation was divided between their intricate, interlocking vocal parts.[64] Much has been made of Whitfield's decision to feature a distorted guitar run through an effects box, an effect so foreign to Motown's guitar section that it required a white guitarist (with his own bag of electronic equipment) to pull it off.[65] More germane to the current discussion is the way Whitfield designed the percussion arrangement, the guts of which was split between two kit drummers: Spider Webb played, on the hi-hat, a tricky 16-beat pattern (Ex. 1) that he and Whitfield had invented at the workshop, whereas Studio A regular Pistol Allen filled in bass, tom, and snare drum parts as the track progresses.[66] Dividing up the drumming this way allowed for a strikingly elaborate groove that was irreproducible unless one knew the secret; it was also a canny control strategy for a studio in which the in-house rhythm section tended not to brook interference with their groove: in this case the producer, not the drummer, would decide when and how that groove would build. Carefully holding Allen's full weight in reserve, Whitfield set out to delay the gratification provided by Motown's tonic 4/4 until "Cloud Nine" was almost over.

62. Coffey, *Motown Superstars*, 53–54.

63. Taylor, *Motown Music Machine*, 73.

64. Flory notes the unusually large number of Sly Stone covers done at Motown during this period, arguing that the Family Stone's crossover success drew producers like Whitfield to attempt the fusion later called "psychedelic soul." See "I Hear a Symphony," 138–48.

65. Bassist James Jamerson at the workshop: "We ready to play the funk tonight, Coff. You bring your stuff?," Coffey, *Motown Superstars*, 51.

66. See Coffey, *Motown Superstars*, 57–58, for a description of the session. Richard "Pistol" Allen, born in Memphis, was one of the original Funk Brothers, as the nucleus of Motown studio musicians called themselves; he played for Motown from the early 1960s until the company moved to Los Angeles in 1972. He died in 2002. "Spider" Webb was born Kenneth Rice in Detroit, and, though not an official member of the Motown studio group, played sessions for the label in the late 1960s. He went on to become a respected 1970s session and jazz drummer in New York City.

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Example 1 Spider Webb's hi-hat cymbal pattern in "Cloud Nine"

o	x	o	x	o	x	o	o	x	o	x	o	o	x	x	x

Note: o = open hi-hat cymbal
x = closed hi-hat cymbal

The record does eventually arrive at the standard Motown four-on-the-floor, but it takes fully two-thirds of the song to get there. Whitfield's arrangement builds steadily for more than two minutes, during which the four snare-drum hits per bar are systematically assembled atop a bed of pulsating diatonic rhythms. (Appendix A [p. 231] provides a tabular overview of the process correlated with the song's lyric structure.) After a short introduction, we are presented with what one might understand as a series of large-scale rhythmic "key areas": first Webb's ragged cymbal pattern interlocking with Eddie "Bongo" Brown's congas, punctuated by occasional bass-drum kicks on select downbeats; then, after slightly less than a minute ("My father didn't know the meaning of work"), the first half of a groove from Allen (*boom-boom-thwack* : *<rest>*); next, thirty seconds or so later ("They say give yourself a chance, son . . ."), the half-backbeat expanded to fill the entire rhythmic space (*boom-boom-thwack* : *boom-boom-thwack*); and finally, after a return to the opening pulsation and a sudden rush of floor toms, the first real imposition at 2:13 ("Up, up, and away") of the complete Motown tonic rhythm with four snare hits per bar (*thwack* : *thwack* : *thwack* : *thwack*).

A million miles from reality. Berry Gordy recalls in his autobiography how impressed he was by "Cloud Nine" when Whitfield first played it for him: he liked the drama and excitement of the story, the brilliant rhythm arrangement, even the way the vocal parts interlocked to make the Temptations sound like a "group" again after the departure of David Ruffin. He also liked the way the lyrics began, with a story about growing up poor in the ghetto. But he was adamant that releasing a song which seemed to excuse running away and drug use as a consequence of poverty was "taking artistic freedom a little too far." Whitfield's response, that much more explicit runaway and drug references were commonplace in white pop music, was dismissed by Gordy as irrelevant; Motown had a responsibility not to send out messages to the black community that "could be interpreted the wrong way."[67] Gordy eventually bowed to the consensus at the next Quality Control meeting and released the track over his own misgivings, which promptly evaporated as the song became a major hit and garnered a rare accolade from the white music establishment, the 1969 Grammy for Best Rhythm & Blues Performance by a Group. (This was, amazingly enough, the first Motown record honored in any way by the National Academy of Recording Arts and Sciences.)

67. Gordy, *To Be Loved*, 276.

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But Gordy had entirely missed the point of Whitfield and Strong's "Cloud Nine," which is anything but a glorification of drug use. Unlike the song itself, the junkie protagonist of "Cloud Nine" is not a credit to the race; the character the Temptations collectively vocalize is not a proud striver, like Whitfield or Gordy himself, but a bitter, self-loathing failure, spewing out despair and rationalization in equal measure as he simultaneously mocks and extols the illusory pleasures of getting high. This ironic conceit motivates the track's complex, ambivalent relation to musical teleology. On the one hand, large sections of the song avoid the heavy, driving rhythm—the "vital force"—of the standard Motown beat, and the absence of a strong backbeat is correlated to the drugged-out absence of goal direction up there on "Cloud Nine." On the other hand, the rather obvious word-painting provides a clue to the much more complex way the tonic Motown beat functions in the song when it does finally appear. Most of the song is spent waiting anxiously for four-on-the-floor to show up and deliver its rhythmic "fix," but its delayed arrival coincides with the negative climax of the lyrics, as the stoned fantasies of the song's protagonist ("You can be what you want to be . . . You ain't got no responsibilities . . . It's a world of peace and harmony . . .") collapse in the face of lead singer Dennis Edwards's pitiless, rasping wake-up call ("You're a million miles from reality"). The irony is stark, and the tonic 4/4 backbeat is explicitly positioned as a "relic" from an earlier, perhaps more innocent, but certainly more immature time, when hippie slogans filled the air and the Sixties were "groovy."

Two sly gestures of signification make this disillusionment plain: just as the Funk Brothers crank up into the familiar Motown backbeat, the Temptations intone the title phrase of the 5th Dimension's massive pop hit "Up, Up, and Away," reframing the earlier song's wide-eyed innocence as a snide drug reference. Two bars later, when the pounding four-on-the-floor is fully established, tenor Eddie Kendricks wraps his angelic falsetto around a bitter paraphrase of a famous line from Junior Walker's 1966 rave-up "(I'm a) Road Runner": "I'm gonna love the life I live /And I'm gonna live the life I love . . . or be on Cloud Nine!"[68] A more brutal critique of self-serving junkie logic was never committed to tape.

Focusing on the groove thus opens a critical hermeneutic window into psychedelic soul. The first two minutes of "Cloud Nine" represent the drive of addiction *musically*, as a strongly teleological musical process. Whitfield treats

68. The 5th Dimension's recording of Jimmy Webb's "Up, Up, and Away" had reached #7 on the pop charts in 1967; they also won the 1968 Grammy for Best Rhythm & Blues Group Performance that the Temptations would receive for "Cloud Nine" in 1969. "(I'm A) Road Runner," which includes the couplet, "I'm gonna live the life I love / And love the life I live," was written for Junior Walker by Holland-Dozier-Holland and recorded in early 1965. It was released in early 1966 on Motown's "blacker" rhythm & blues imprint, Soul Records, implying that even within the parameters of the Motown style, Walker's funky roadhouse sound was being marketed as "primitive" and authentically unsophisticated.

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Motown's tonic groove as a negative rhythmic goal, and by inhibiting and then indulging the generic tendency towards that goal, creates a musical experience rich in information. In fact, he is harnessing the generic expectations of Motown's audience to create what Adorno would have identified as "negative critique." Whitfield presents his teleological argument for self-control by making his music drive, ironically, toward the sound of instant gratification.

A small, but telling detail can be gleaned by following the cymbal line through to the song's climax: as the quadruple snare strokes of four-on-the-floor lock in, Spider Webb is made to abandon his funky and uneven hi-hat pattern—the "experimental" diatonic rhythm whose complexity represented such a break with Motown convention—and fall in with Pistol Allen. The two of them bang out a steady pattern of eighth notes that would be child's play for even the most ham-fisted hi-hat player. It is, to poach a phrase from Keil, "as dull as dishwater syntactically"—and, unlike straight-ahead jazz drumming, it was meant, ironically, to sound that way. No matter how strong the drive toward it, by 1968 Motown's listeners could no longer luxuriate in the straight Motown backbeat, the uncomplicated sound of immediate musical gratification, as they had, once upon a time, back in . . . 1966. It was a quick and vertiginous fall from the naïveté of soul to what we might call, following Schiller, the ironic sentimentality of funk. By 1968, Motown, which had made its fortune by providing upbeat sounds for an affluent "Young America," was beginning, like that American generation, to question how long the fun could last.

A brand new bag? Before we turn to the reception of Whitfield's new soul sound, my larger argument requires that we place a song like "Cloud Nine" in music-historical context. Whitfield was definitely seen as an outlier at Motown, respected (and sometimes feared) for his willingness to tinker with the surefire mechanisms that had generated so many three-minute hit singles. But the range of African American popular music is obviously much broader than Motown. In that wider musical world, is Whitfield really an isolated phenomenon? A skeptical reader might accept my teleological reading of his work and still question its relevance to general questions of sameness and difference in cultural readings of African American rhythm. Is "Cloud Nine" exemplary, or a singular exception that proves the rule?

Let me be clear on one point: I do want to claim special status for Whitfield, a soul-music producer working self-consciously with goal direction to make popular music carry emotion and meaning relevant to social issues of his day. Keil's countervailing analytical emphasis on motion and feeling might well be recuperated by arguing that "Cloud Nine" is not just an unusually clear example of one possible Afro-diasporic musical practice, but completely atypical of such practice, and thus not decisive for fundamental analytical questions about it. Historiography and theory work at cross purposes here: as will become increasingly clear below, the final goal of this investigation is to

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ground Whitfield's musical teleology in a specific historical moment, the late 1960s, when middle-class values were being openly contested in the public discourse of the African American community. But how much evidence is there in the historical record for the claim that black music can be structured by deliberate teleological development of a groove? Just how unusual *is* a track like "Cloud Nine"?

The exigencies of recording culture make any definitive answer impossible. The vast majority of surviving musical performances before the advent of the long-playing record in the early 1950s were either truncated, divided into pieces, or prearranged to fit within the roughly three-minute length of a 10-inch phonograph record. It is only because we still live in a musical world centered on the teleology of pitch that we recognize Count Basie's commercial recording of "Red Bank Boogie," which clocks in at 2:39, as having anything at all to do with the actual performance practice of his band at the time; certainly one could not extrapolate the teleological possibilities of the latter from the former.[69] There are key African American musicians from the 78-rpm era—Robert Johnson, for example—of whom there is no trace of live performance to analyze for goal direction. One interesting slice of evidence from the swing era is the type of extended jazz performance considered "special" enough to justify being released, like classical music, on multiple 78-rpm sides; usually these tracks featured a carefully arranged teleological ground plan, like the famous "Diminuendo and Crescendo in Blue" recorded by the Duke Ellington Band in 1937.[70]

Of course, the longer time-scale enabled by the LP format was not immediately made available to African American musicians. By the early 1960s, some advanced jazz musicians like John Coltrane and Miles Davis were taking full advantage of the twenty-minute album side to capture extended jam sessions and sectional compositions. Here we might draw a boundary, for the avant-garde orientation of modal and free jazz included a deliberate refusal of "middle-class" conventions like AABA song forms, teleological chord changes, and driving grooves. But while Coltrane explored *Interstellar Space*, most African American popular musicians were still working within the earthbound orbit of the three-minute single. Jerry Wexler's decision to re-launch Aretha Franklin as a black soul artist who recorded *albums* was unusual enough to be risky in 1967—and it is worth noting that none of the tracks on her first Atlantic album lasts longer than four and a half minutes. Motown was exceptionally slow to adapt to the LP, but by 1968 it had unbent enough to allow Whitfield to cut ten- and twelve-minute album tracks, which were then

69. Count Basie and His Orchestra, "Red Bank Boogie," Columbia 33956-1, recorded 6 December 1944.

70. "Diminuendo and Crescendo in Blue" was recorded on 20 September 1937 and released as the two sides of Brunswick 8004.

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edited down to single length.[71] It is fair to say that carefully arranged tracks like "Cloud Nine" and "Runaway Child, Running Wild" represent the first wave of what we might call "album-style" soul, forerunners of classic 1970s soul-funk records by James Brown, Marvin Gaye, Isaac Hayes, and Parliament-Funkadelic that made full and flexible use of the long-playing format.

Norman Whitfield was thus one of the first generation of soul musicians in a position to reproduce on record at least some of the large-scale temporal patterns of live gospel and soul-music performance. As the surviving sonic documentation makes clear, such performances had always involved extended exercises in applied musical teleology during which the cyclical structure of the composed "song" was merely a pretext. Soul differs fundamentally from blues and jazz in this regard, and one might concede to Keil that in live situations where blues musicians "stretch out," they do not tend to emphasize the "drive," the welding of repeated groove cycles into larger goal-directed spans, to the same degree that gospel and soul musicians do. As I noted at the beginning of this essay, the drive of gospel-inflected soul seems to correlate well with aspirational middle-class culture, and thus presents the interpreter of black expressive culture with a conundrum: though this goal-directed music connects directly with a fundamental constituent of African American culture, the black Pentecostal Church, it also defines itself both culturally and musically in opposition to the blues, usually seen as *the* master trope of black life. The Jook and the Church, or, as Albert Murray memorably opposed them, the Saturday Night Function and the Sunday Morning Service, have been at odds in black culture since Reconstruction; but as Murray notes, "many of the elements of blues music seem to have been derived from the downhome church in the first place."[72]

Insofar as any kind of African American music derives from the gospel drive of the downhome church, one could argue that it partakes in a mechanism of uplift that implies goal direction at an almost metaphysical level. Not all African American music does this, of course: there are one-chord Delta blues directly descended from work chants, and modern jazz excursions that wander in the symmetrical patterns of the whole-tone scale. But the excitement of much black popular music—and Motown is exemplary in this respect—derives from the compression of expansive teleological performance tropes into the cramped quarters of a three-minute single. This is obvious in the Isley Brothers' frantic "Shout," and Smokey Robinson's "Way Over There" was just the first of many uptempo Motown singles that continued to work this vein, catapulting the listener into a hectic three or four minutes from the middle of a longer gospel drive already in progress. Whitfield's album-length soul tracks are not fundamentally different in their relation to gospel, but by 1969 he had the technical and economic means to realize a more complete gospel

71. See Flory, "I Hear a Symphony," 159–65.
72. Murray, *Stomping the Blues*, 27.

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pattern of build, drive, and release on a pop record without truncation or drastic foreshortening. This *was* new, and commentators within the black community took notice of what were immediately recognized as fierce "sermons in tones" aimed directly at footloose black youth.

III. "Runaway Child, Running Wild": Motown Teleology and the Black Counterpublic Sphere

The 7 August 1969 issue of *Jet*, the "weekly Negro news magazine," took bemused note of a Los Angeles minister and his theatrical take on the parable of the Prodigal Son:

> *People Are Talking About* . . . Los Angeles' imaginative preacher, the Rev. Tim Chambers, Jr., and how he dramatized the biblical story of the prodigal son in his church one Sunday recently. Using the theme of the run-away-child-running-wild, Rev. Chambers stripped off his elegant continental suit and revealed to a startled audience the tattered clothes underneath. He then got into a hog pen built especially for the purpose and complete with pigs he brought in from the outside, and wallowed around to the audience's merriment to emphasize his story's theme.[73]

Regular readers of *Jet* would have recognized the "run-away-child-running-wild" theme, even if they were not listeners to the latest psychedelic soul records; earlier that spring, *Jet* noted that people had also been talking about Dennis Edwards, the lead singer of the Temptations, and how he pointed out his mother, Mrs. Idessa Patton, at a show in his hometown of St. Louis, dedicating the performance of his new hit record to her: "Anybody know Dennis . . . the kid who played hookey just once in his life and never forgot it . . . anybody know Dennis's mom? . . . Well, mom, this is from that little kid, Dennis, to you." The track, written and produced by Whitfield and Strong, and charting that week at number six on *Jet*'s Soul Brother Top 20, was called—this is where the preacher got his theme—"Runaway Child, Running Wild." The all-black crowd is reported to have greeted the gesture with a wild standing ovation.[74]

These two glimpses of reception adumbrate the way a socially conscious message song like "Runaway Child" was taken up into the cross-currents of what political scientist Michael Dawson has, adapting Habermas, identified as the "black counterpublic" in American life. Dawson notes that it is all too easy to subsume the black counterpublic into a factitious mainstream, since "the

73. "People Are Talking About . . . ," *Jet* 36, no. 18 (7 August 1969): 47.

74. "People Are Talking About . . . ," *Jet* 36, no. 7 (22 May 1969): 45. The actual title of the song varied somewhat at the time of its release. The single was released under the title "Run Away Child, Running Wild"—and this is the way the song is listed in the *Jet* SBT 20 (22 May 1969), 65.

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hidden transcript of a subaltern people" leaves few traces in the historical record. But, as Dawson also points out, clues can be sought, among other places, in the discourse of the church, the black press and (musicologists take notice) "the production and circulation of socially and politically acute popular black music."[75] During the period under discussion, the white public and black counterpublic spheres were closer than they had ever been (and arguably closer than they would ever be), and, as we will see, it is clear from the journalistic record that anxieties from the larger public sphere, specifically a white middle-class moral panic over "runaway youth" in the wake of the Summer of Love, penetrated deep into the collective consciousness of the black counterpublic. Whitfield and Strong's "Runaway Child, Running Wild" is evidence of this anxiety. Yet it was also a skillful intervention in the black counterpublic sphere, its sophisticated dramatic structure and elaborate manipulation of musical teleology the discursive equivalent of a powerful Sunday sermon or a stark photo-editorial spread in *Ebony* magazine.

The track's message is simple, cautionary, and would have been read as socially conservative, even right-wing, within the white public sphere of early 1969: "Runaway child, running wild, better go back home, where you belong." (The complete lyrics of "Runaway Child" can be found in Appendix B, p. 232.) It is tempting to read this sonic embrace of matriarchy and the family in the mode of Frazier's *Black Bourgeoisie*, as evidence of late-sixties social conservatism from Motown's insular musical middle class; but, as Dawson notes, the position mainstream Americans would recognize as "conservative"—family-oriented, yes, but also individualist, market-focused, and suspicious of government intervention—simply did not exist in the black counterpublic sphere before the middle of the Reagan era, and has been marginal within it ever since.[76] In fact, the heedless individualism of the runaway child is precisely the issue, his drive towards what had been redefined by early-1960s social welfare professionals not as adventuring or juvenile delinquency, but as a disorganized grasping for premature autonomy.[77] "Runaway Child" is, in effect, a musical argument against this sympathetic therapeutic view, and against premature autonomy itself, from within the black counterpublic sphere; it aims to show the prospective runaway child how quickly the immediate gratification that comes from leaving home, running wild, and feeling "free" can dissipate—especially for an African American—leaving in its wake trauma and terror.

75. Dawson, *Black Visions*, 30–35.

76. Ibid., 19–20.

77. Liberal social scientists often signaled open sympathy with the autonomy seeking of late-1960s runaway youth: "Runaways are frequently among those adolescents who are too shrewd, too questioning to accept comfortably the mere promise of adulthood in the indefinite future while pacified with privilege in the present." See Shellow et al., *Suburban Runaways of the 1960's*, 34.

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If you're going to San Francisco. . . . In her definitive study of the "runaway problem" as a social construction of the 1960s, Karen M. Staller places a crucial inflection point in the mainstream public sphere about eighteen months before the composition of "Runaway Child, Running Wild": "The public discussion of runaway behavior moved from private matter to social problem status between 1966 and the early 1970s. The pivotal year, however, appears to be 1967, perhaps because of the media attention given to Haight-Ashbury's Summer of Love." As Staller documents, growing anxiety about the counterculture lent a new urgency to media coverage of runaway adolescent girls that quickly blossomed into a full-blown moral panic.[78]

In the context of a burgeoning underground street culture, running away was now imagined as both more dangerous and more radically antiestablishment than it had seemed just a few years earlier. Staller notes the relaxed, amused tone of early-1960s stories about runaway "adventurers," resourceful tykes (usually boys) who were drawn to benign attractions like the World's Fair, and whose short journey invariably ended happily, safe at home. But by 1967–68, when runaways were pictured heading for hippie havens like the Haight-Ashbury or the East Village, it seemed nightmarishly possible that they would "vanish in the underground counterculture abyss and disappear forever."[79] Not only were hippie red-light districts, awash in drugs and the danger of sexual exploitation by older dropouts, objectively more dangerous, but a network of countercultural "crash pads" also gave runaways the resources to stay away from home much longer, perhaps indefinitely.

Yet more problematic was the new countercultural ideology of the hippies, which remapped the relation of "running away" to the middle-class values of maturity and delayed gratification. In the early 1960s, the runaway's premature autonomy was understood as impulsive behavior, but the impulse itself pointed toward traditional adult mores, toward wanting to be grown up and act like a "big person." Stories of runaways usually took an admiring stance toward the ingenuity shown by adolescents as they navigated the adult world and avoided detection; social workers, as we noted above, often endorsed their flight as an implicit demand to be "emancipated" from the infantilizing structures of school and home life. Running away to see the World's Fair seemed like the act of a future go-getter; but running away to an East Village hippie crash pad was not only a one-way ticket to addiction and prostitution, it was

78. Staller, *Runaways: How the Sixties Counterculture Shaped Today's Practices and Policies*, 39. The following discussion is indebted to Staller's thorough research at many points.

79. "In the early part of the 1960s, runaway adventures were characterized as safe, harmless, and predictable. . . . In the mid-to-late 1960s (with a crisis year in 1967), runaway discourse commingled with that on hippies. During this period, the story frame of the safe adventurer imploded as it mixed with discussions about wandering long-haired youth of the counterculture and its underground. Adventures were no longer safe. Children were drawn to counterculture areas (rather than to fairs and carnivals). Children could be gone for long periods of time, and they were not easy to identify because they blended into the counterculture scene . . . runaway children could vanish in the underground counterculture abyss and disappear forever." Ibid., 49–50.

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also understood as an absolute and categorical rejection of mature adulthood, a dropout into the countercultural abyss with no way back. Even sympathetic writers portrayed the hippie world as one of instant gratification and arrested development: Joan Didion, who scornfully dismissed the mainstream press that had "report[ed] 'the hippie phenomenon' as an extended panty raid," was herself shocked by the social chaos of the Haight, "the desperate attempt of a handful of pathetically unequipped children to create a community in a social vacuum."[80] In the mainstream public sphere, the response to this social crisis was investigation, demands for police action, and ultimately, more humane child welfare legislation to replace outdated "wayward youth" statutes that criminalized the very act of leaving home. No one, we can be certain, expected popular musicians to help solve the "runaway crisis." They were, by most accounts, a big part of the problem.

Many readers will be able at this point to supply from memory an entire playlist of pop songs from 1967 that glorify the runaway lifestyle, from the Beatles ("she's leaving home, bye bye") to Simon and Garfunkel ("it took me four days to hitchhike from Saginaw") and the Grateful Dead ("laughing in her eyes, dancing in her feet, she's a neon diamond, she can live on the street").[81] It may not have occurred to white listeners at the time that the runaway trope might be racially marked, but Bay Area bands like the Dead were in fact busily mixing up racial impersonation, extended nonteleological jams, and a farrago of road clichés from folk, country, urban, and postwar African American blues. They were working on a musical version of the provocative argument that Yippie impresario Abbie Hoffman first tried out in a 1968 sketch called "Runaways: The Slave Revolt."

> Runaways are the backbone of the youth revolution. . . . A fifteen-year-old kid who takes off from middle-class American life is an escaped slave crossing the Mason-Dixon line. They are hunted down by professional bounty hunters, fidgety relatives and the law, because it is against the law to leave home (translate: bondage) until you have finished your servitude. . . . An underground railroad exists. . . . Are the runaways going back? I don't know. Ask them. I'll tell you one thing—I sure as hell ain't, they'll have to kill me first.[82]

Forty years on, the revolutionary self-pity sounds mawkish, even puerile. But by linking hippie crash pads to the Underground Railroad, Hoffman points to an incipient contradiction in the post-1967 image of the "runaway" in the black counterpublic sphere. Let us explore this contradiction in some detail, on our way to grounding an analytical reading of "Runaway Child, Running Wild" as musical object lesson within the black community.

80. Didion, "Slouching Towards Bethlehem," 121–22.

81. The Beatles, "She's Leaving Home," *Sgt. Pepper's Lonely Heart's Club Band*, 1967; Simon and Garfunkel, "America," *Bookends*, 1968; The Grateful Dead, "The Golden Road (To Unlimited Devotion)," *The Grateful Dead*, 1967.

82. Hoffman, "Runaways: The Slave Revolt" (1968), repr., 74–75.

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Runaways and rebels in the black counterpublic sphere. Hoffman's voice did not reverberate within the black counterpublic sphere; his name never appeared in the pages of *Ebony* and *Jet*, which can function as a rough-and-ready index of what the late-1960s black counterpublic was likely to know about the white counterculture. Judging by what was written about hippies and their rejection of middle-class values in *Ebony*, most of its readers would have been deeply offended by Hoffman's appropriation of an experience and a choice unique to their own history of oppression. Through the 1960s, the word "runaway" appears most often in *Ebony* not as a noun, but as an adjective modifying "slave" in accounts of the Negro past. The runaway slave was the earliest and prototypical African American hero, and his or her journey from helpless chattel to free and independent subject the basic narrative trope of black history and literature. (*Ebony* serialized a number of historical surveys by editor Lerone Bennett Jr. in the 1960s; tales of runaway slaves and the Underground Railroad could be found in almost every issue.) Running away had always had a deeply positive association for the black counterpublic precisely because it was understood as a teleological act: in "dropping out" of the slave system, exceptional blacks asserted agency and free will, and took the first steps toward the collective goal of uplifting the race. This trope was so deeply engraved that in the typical *Ebony* profile of a successful black artist, professional, or entrepreneur, the adolescent act of running away from the depths of (usually) Southern poverty was often read, retroactively, as a first sign of outstanding enterprise and self-possession.[83]

Hoffman's syllogism thus opened up a dangerous possibility: if running away was an epidemic in white middle-class society, to the point that privileged white teenagers felt themselves the contemporary equivalent of runaway slaves, might a younger generation of middle-class blacks, descended from those same runaways and proud of it, be tempted to drop out of a racist, materialist society and become hippies, too?

The theme of the "run-away-child-running-wild" had already been developed at length in the black counterpublic sphere, as a direct response to the hippie explosion and the Summer of Love. The August 1967 issue of *Ebony* was a special number devoted to "Negro Youth in America."[84] Its articles ranged widely, from teen pregnancy, the hopelessness of inner city schools, and the allure of urban gangs, to the rise of radical politics at historically black colleges and the dead-end life of a young boy in the still-segregated rural South. But several pieces dealt topically with the changes sweeping through

83. A classic example appeared in the January 1969 issue of *Ebony*, just as "Runaway Child, Running Wild" was entering the charts. The headline: "Runaway Rises to Top Designer." The lede: "When Alvin Paige was 15 years old, he missed his high school graduation in La Grange, Ga. And he was the salutatorian." See *Ebony* 24, no. 3 (January 1969): 41.

84. *Ebony* 22, no. 10 (August 1967), special issue on "Negro Youth in America: Anxious, Angry, and Aware."

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what was called variously in its pages the "new" or "now" generation of (white) youth.

An extended photo-essay on "The Hippies of Hashberry" hits all the notes sounding in the mainstream white press: hippies don't wash, they dress strangely, take drugs, are sexually promiscuous, reject conventional careers, and function in the Bay Area as an ongoing "freak show" that attracts sensation-seeking tourists. A few black faces appear in every shot, per *Ebony* editorial practice, but the accompanying text makes it clear that these white cultural rebels have little in common with the struggle of their black neighbors in the Fillmore slum, or, indeed, with African Americans in general: "Unlike the Beats, their spiritual hero is not the Negro but the American Indian or the Oriental mystic. '. . . most Negroes are just like white folks . . . or trying to be,' a hippie told a Chicago newsman. 'Either they're imitating sick white Americans or else they're getting caught up in the race war bag . . . that's the same thing.' " As the editors of *Ebony* dryly note, "Those sentiments might have bearing on why there seem to be few Negroes among the hippies."[85]

The next story in the issue seems designed for maximum contrast: under the headline, "A Profile in Juvenile Decency," we are introduced to Ronald James, a teen from Chicago's gang-ridden West Side who is "unusually serious and humorless for his age." Ronald is struggling to better himself almost singlehandedly, handicapped by childhood trauma, poverty, a broken home, and bad schools. He does not particularly like the sterile work environment of his after-school job at an insurance company (he wants to be an artist), but he knows that it is the only way out of the so-called ghetto trap. The "racial pride of his mother" proclaims a prominent pull-quote, "spurs Ron's will to 'make it,' " as a juxtaposition of article subheads allows the larger point to sink in: while Ron "faces uphill struggle to escape slum trap," the "new generation" of white teenagers in the Haight has the luxury to "[flee] the fabled American dream."[86]

But what of those African American youth who did have the resources to rebel, the college-bound sons and daughters, perhaps, of the middle-class blacks who read *Ebony*? The magazine brought in a black educational expert from ground zero of the student and hippie revolts, an assistant Dean of Students at the University of California, Berkeley, to report on the situation, and its editors did not bury the lede: the subheading of Donald R. Hopkins's "Negro Youth and the 'Now' Generation" flatly declared that "problem-ridden Negro youngsters shun the ranks of white rebels without cause." For

85. Brown, "Hippies of Hashberry," *Ebony* 22, no. 10 (August 1967): 118. The concentration on presenting a few blacks interacting with hippies is dissonant with the editorial text, but can be explained as a deeply rooted integrationist trope in *Ebony*, which regularly featured pictures of pioneering blacks excelling at "white" recreational and cultural activities like Alpine skiing and sailboat racing.

86. "A Profile in Juvenile Decency," *Ebony* 22, no. 10 (August 1967): 122–26, at 122; Brown, "Hippies of Hashberry," 118.

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Hopkins, the youth rebellion is a sign that the institutions of white America have become decadent, "unable or unwilling to construct a pastiche of moral and economic values which could command the respect and loyalty of their youth." But, notes this African American educator, the hippie's complete rejection of goals and direction leads only to an even more decadent culture of instant gratification: "he seeks an existence in which he is committed neither to past values nor future causes. With his focus on the present he is determined to experience everything he can: his sex life is often promiscuous; his devotion to marijuana and occasionally to more potent drugs takes on a religious intensity."[87] African American youth might also take issue with the middle-class complacency of their elders, but their minds were concentrated on real problems within the black community like endemic poverty and structural racism. They had no time to drift into the hippie lifestyle, since "to realize their goals these black students realize they cannot afford the luxury of 'dropping out,' or of intermittent social involvement."[88] (Recall how the same language was used, almost two decades earlier, to praise the aspiring Gordy family, "tireless" in pursuit of "ideals and goals that it drives to reach.")

Evidently there was no runaway problem in the African American community, at least in the pages of *Ebony*. Poor kids were hearing a message of black pride from strong matriarchal figures, and exerting all their will to succeed; those who rebelled against their bourgeois parents did not run away or drop out—they stood their ground and dropped back *in* to the ghetto to work, as the vanguard of the liberated had always done, to uplift the race. There was thus no need for a song called "Runaway Child, Running Wild," or any reason for black audiences to react so strongly to it.

And yet . . . there is a level of rhetorical overkill in *Ebony*'s "Youth" issue that invites suspicion. Unwittingly endorsing the aesthetic theories of Leonard B. Meyer, editor John H. Johnson's signature photo-editorial juxtaposes a call for every black youth to "strive mightily to achieve his goals" with a full-page photo-representation of what Meyer would have called "sophisticated art music": a serious little black violinist intently following an unseen conductor (Fig. 2). Johnson notes that although young blacks have more opportunity than ever, they are dropping out of school and taking to the street life in large numbers. Earlier in the issue, Hopkins's scholarly diagnosis of the "now" generation had projected an anxious, visceral rejection of white youth culture, especially the popular music that mixed black rhythms with stoned-out celebrations of aimless self-indulgence. He rushed to reassure *Ebony* readers that black kids would not fall for something so un-hip as the hippie street culture:

87. Hopkins, "Negro Youth and the 'Now' Generation," *Ebony* 22, no. 10 (August 1967): 110–11. Hopkins is quoting University of Wisconsin psychiatrist Seymour L. Halleck.

88. Ibid., 112.

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Figure 2 Black Youth, Art Music, and Goal Direction. From "A Challenge to Youth," From *Ebony* 22, no. 10 (August 1967): 144–45, at 145.

> On the streets of the Haight-Ashbury in San Francisco, only a few black faces are to be seen in the crowds, even though the community is the most integrated in the city and stands on the border of the black ghetto. The very few who are there can generally be seen observing the inelegance and inexcellence of the dancers with a curious disdain. The argot of the hippie seems square to the Negro youth who invented it and who is simply moved to invent a subterranean language somewhat more obscure.[89]

According to this view, white psychedelia and black soul simply do not mix. Why would even the most footloose black youth run away without a plan, to a dead-end hippie district like the Haight where the people had no goals and no

89. Ibid., 111.

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rhythm? If white moral panic over runaways and hippie culture was seeping into the black counterpublic sphere, here was a magazine-length example of defensive denial of the problem. Run away? Not *our* kids. They are black—they are goal directed—and they are proud.

Runaway child. . . . One takes away from the "Youth" issue of *Ebony* a sense that by late 1967, the slowing economy, the collapse of civil-rights euphoria, and the rise of the counterculture were changing the conventional wisdom on runaway boys within the black community. Leaving home was no longer to be excused as the first step on a path out of modern-day peonage; it was now the sign that a black child had lost direction, and that, without racial pride, he or she would be easy prey for drug pushers, pimps, hippies and other denizens of the street. This is, as we can now see, the back story of the deeply flawed protagonist of "Cloud Nine," whose cautionary tale astringently revamps the black runaway story for harder, post-countercultural times. It begins where many *Ebony* profiles of successful men had begun in the 1960s, with "hard times" in a "one-room shack that slept ten other children beside me." But times have changed: running away is no longer a way to achieve economic mobility ("I left home looking for a job I never did find"), instead beginning a downward spiral that leads to drug addiction ("depressed and downhearted, I took to Cloud Nine"), and, ultimately, to the hippie's excuse that the "straight" world, with its bourgeois striving, is oppressive and meaningless ("the world around you is a rat race, where only the strong survive").

This song portrays the runaway as aimless, self-destructive dropout, an ominous and extremely topical figure haunting the public sphere in late 1968, when "Cloud Nine" was produced and released to general acclaim. There are traces in the historical record that "Cloud Nine" and the Temptations' next big hit were being read topically in the African American community as a response to this "new" crisis of youth and identity. At least one black political journalist, Dr. Carleton Goodlett of the (*San Francisco*) *Sun-Reporter*, saw the tracks as a dialectical pair that together laid out the responsibility of African American youth—to themselves and to the race—at a moment of profound cultural-political upheaval:

> The Temptations have a new record out this week called "Runaway Child, Running Wild." This record is an addendum to their last record, "Cloud Nine." "Cloud Nine" is the latest controversial record depicting black people in their fight for identity.
>
> "Runaway Child, Running Wild" is exactly the opposite of "Cloud Nine." "Cloud Nine" is a discussion of leaving home and doing what you please and not facing reality. . . . Black people must start facing reality, if they haven't already. Black people must start sticking together for power.
>
> It seems now that in all the Temptations' records, the lyrics are about leaving home. "Runaway Child, Running Wild" is about a child who played

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hookey from school and has been caught. He is put on punishment and feels it's unjust and runs away from home. The Temptations point out just the opposite of what is said in "Cloud Nine," by stating in their lyrics, "Runaway child, running wild, you better go back home where you belong." The lyrics are concerned with making the child face reality and showing him that he was stupid to leave home where he had a roof over his head and food in his stomach.

So like I said this is opposite to "Cloud Nine" as it tells youths to face their responsibility.[90]

In both songs the ironic use of teleology is a brilliant musical device for laying bare this responsibility, not all that different from the dialectical struggle between runaway musical themes and the responsibilities of form that underpins Adorno's influential reading of Beethoven's late works as negative critique. In the heroic, middle-Beethovenian model that defines Meyer's notion of art music, goal direction is firmly identified with the (musical) protagonist. But the possibility does exist for antiheroic musical forms, in which the strict teleology of musical structures works against the individual, crushing him into conformity (Tchaikovsky) or insanity (Berg's *Wozzeck*).[91] Whitfield and Strong's "Cloud Nine" and "Runaway Child" follow this antiheroic pattern: the songs have definite goals, but their protagonists, crucially, do not.

Those brought up on the dialectic of Enlightenment may find the resolute anti-individualist stance taken by these musical object lessons in African American middle-class values quite unfamiliar. As Michael Dawson puts it, "Black ideologies . . . generally do not celebrate individual virtue." Therefore, music in the black counterpublic sphere is rarely read as taking the side of the atomized or alienated individual.[92] Whitfield appropriates the sound of psychedelic alienation, but uses the Motown beat, as the negative goal of a reverse teleology, to rail against it. He constructs an ironic and topical musical commentary that signifies on white hippie music, reproducing the same harsh critique of hippie culture as aimless and self-indulgent ("you're a million miles from reality") that a contemporary reader would have found in *Ebony*'s diagnosis of Negro youth and the "now" generation. The fact that one or other of

90. Carleton B. Goodlett, publisher's note in the (*San Francisco*) *Sun-Reporter* 27, no. 4 (22 February 1969): 19. The *Sun-Reporter* had served the African American community in the Bay Area in various incarnations since 1944; it was "a fighting, crusading newspaper designed to take on all the social and political battles raging in post-war America." The paper was run by Goodlett, who was also a practicing physician, out of his medical offices on Turk Street; his upstairs Community Room was a gathering place for black activists in the 1960s. See www.sunreporter.com/history.html (accessed 25 May 2009). I have reproduced Goodlett's distinctive prose style without editorial correction.

91. The seminal explication of Adorno's antiheroic take on musical form was provided in Subotnick, "Adorno's Diagnosis of Beethoven's Late Style."

92. Dawson, *Black Visions*, 49.

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these songs were in the *Jet* Soul Brother Top 20 from late 1968 well into the summer of 1969 demonstrates the effectiveness of musical interventions in the black counterpublic sphere, especially if one wanted to reach the kind of "at risk" teens who would hardly sit still for a lecture on responsibility in the pages of *Ebony* or *Black World*.

. . . *Running wild*. Norman Whitfield and Barrett Strong began laying down the tracks for "Runaway Child, Running Wild" about a month after "Cloud Nine," and had finished recording the song with the Temptations by mid-December 1968. Campus unrest in Ann Arbor, some thirty miles to the west of Detroit, had begun to spiral over the spring and summer, with pitched battles between police and student protesters accompanying the rise of the radical-hippie White Panther Party, linked to bombings of military-industrial targets on and around the University of Michigan campus. Chillingly, a mysterious serial killer who preyed on young girls, often those hitchhiking or out walking at night, also burst into the public consciousness of eastern Michigan that spring, after the discovery on 30 June 1968 of the second of what would soon be referred to as the "Co-Ed Murders." In this threatening atmosphere, it is perhaps not surprising that Whitfield and Strong moved beyond the coded analysis/critique of the hippie lifestyle to craft a direct address to runaway black youth. "Runaway Child, Running Wild" is, in the tradition of James Brown's "Don't Be a Drop Out" (1966), a self-conscious intervention in the counterpublic sphere, linking the masculine power of funk to a strong, clear message of self-control and empowerment aimed directly at the community's teenagers and young men.

The track's portrayal of the black male runaway is reasonably accurate from a clinical perspective. It is extremely unlikely that Norman Whitfield and Barrett Strong consulted a monograph like Robert Shellow et al., *Suburban Runaways of the 1960's*, published by the Society for Research in Child Development in 1967, but several key features of their narrative can be correlated with the empirical data on young runaways gathered by Shellow's team of researchers in Prince Georges County, a mixed-race suburban area just outside Washington, DC.[93] Shellow found that most boys ran away from home because of problems in school, particularly the alienation evidenced by high rates of absenteeism ("you played hooky from school and you can't go out and play"); that the proximate cause of running away was usually a spike in family conflict over bad behavior ("now you feel like the whole world is picking on you"); and that most runaway episodes were impulsive and poorly

93. Shellow et al., *Suburban Runaways of the 1960's*. Shellow does not provide a racial breakdown of his sample, and I have been able to find almost no empirical data from the period that correlates running away and racial background. To dramatize the problem: one researcher, combing the 1967 and 1972 National Surveys of Youth for data, was able to find only *eleven* interviews (out of 2,242) with runaways who were also black—too few, he noted, to draw any solid conclusions. See Rankin, "Family Context of Delinquency."

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planned ("it's getting late, where will you sleep . . . you forgot to bring something to eat . . . lost with no money, you start to cry . . .").[94]

The song's lyrics do also touch on the early-1960s understanding of running away as "inept" self-actualization ("remember you left home wanting to be grown . . .")—the premature attempt, in Shellow's sympathetic turn of phrase, to "escape from the nowhere of adolescence into the somewhere of adult status."[95] But the story of *this* runaway black child is filled with dread, informed not by clinical sociology but by the post-1967 moral panic over teenage runaways seeping into the black counterpublic sphere, where it mixed with long-standing anxieties about youth, crime, and ghetto streets. The runaway ends up not at the World's Fair, or back in his mother's arms after a few hours (as most did, even in 1969), but "all alone in the great big city," and not just any part of it, either, but the kind of urban red-light district ("sirens screaming down neon-lighted streets . . .") where hippies set up shop, and where predatory adults lurk behind every lamppost. Down those "dark and deserted streets" wanders the terrified child, crying for his mother; but, in a surreal touch, all he hears is a radio, which broadcasts from within the song the journalistic panic that gave it birth ("You heard some frightening news on the radio, about little boys running away from home and their parents don't see them no more"). There is no happy ending: his mother is too far away to hear the runaway child crying for help, and the song leaves him, "heart beating much too fast," peering over the edge of the countercultural abyss.

The story arc is as clear as it is grim, a long upward spiral of terror in the mind of a lost and frightened child. It was just the kind of musical narrative Norman Whitfield loved to orchestrate. As in "Cloud Nine," his arrangement begins softly, far away from the straight backbeat, with offbeat ticks from the hi-hat and a hollow thumping of kick drum, joined eventually by loose "African" rhythms in the congas. Over the next minute or so, as the song's verses begin, the rhythm section again produces a lopsided build-up: first thuds on one and three; then rim-shots on two and four, but without the kick; then finally, both together. (See Exx. 2a–c; note that the reductions eliminate melodic parts, so the pattern buildup is easier to see.)

As in "Cloud Nine," it takes almost two and a half minutes of delaying—enough time for an entire song in Motown's early days—for the tonic rhythm finally to crash in, and again it is the classic Hitsville four-on-the-floor with snare pops on every pulse. For the rest of the song—whose verse-chorus structure, as Appendix B diagrams, is quite irregular—the rhythm section

94. From ibid.: "School records show that runaways, in contrast to other adolescents, were absent more often, had lower grades, and were more likely to have been retained . . . boys are more likely than girls to run away because of school difficulties" (21); "Runaway episodes were impulsive and poorly planned . . . in only one-third of the cases did the children have more than a dollar with them. Many left without food or extra clothing and had to seek makeshift sleeping arrangements in hallways, Laundromats, or parked cars" (14).

95. Ibid., 33.

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Example 2 Assembly of basic groove in "Runaway Child, Running Wild"

(a)

[0:36] ("you played hooky from school and you can't go out to play")

1		+		2		+		3		+		4		+		1		+		2		+		3		+		4		+	
o	x	x	x	o	x	x	x	o	x	x	x	o	x	x	x	o	x	x	x	o	x	x	x	o	x	x	x	o	x	x	x
k		k						k		k						k		k						k		k					

(b)

[0:55] ("now you feel like the whole world's picking on you")

1		+		2		+		3		+		4		+		1		+		2		+		3		+		4		+	
				r								r								r								r			
o	x	x	x	o	x	x	x	o	x	x	x	o	x	x	x	o	x	x	x	o	x	x	x	o	x	x	x	o	x	x	x

(c)

[1:28] ("runaway child, running wild, better go back home, where you belong")

1		+		2		+		3		+		4		+		1		+		2		+		3		+		4		+	
				r								r								r								r			
o	x	x	x	o	x	x	x	o	x	x	x	o	x	x	x	o	x	x	x	o	x	x	x	o	x	x	x	o	x	x	x
s		s													s	s		s													s
k		k													k	k		k													k

Note: k = kick drum
o = open hi-hat cymbal
r = rim shot
s = snare drum
x = closed hi-hat cymbal

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moves away from the tonic rhythm into proto-funk sixteen-beat patterns with an "African" feel, and then back to the tonic rhythm with increasing urgency and force. Whitfield piles on electric and acoustic piano, guitars, and tambourine—as well as crash cymbals on certain key downbeats—to create repeated arrivals on this 4/4 rhythmic tonic (see Exx. 3a–c) that rival any set of cadences by Beethoven one might care to adduce as tonality's teleological pinnacle. At about four minutes into the track, the climactic four-on-the-floor, with each beat pounded out by all available percussion instruments, rhythm guitar, and some truly menacing minor triads hammered down by band leader Earl Van Dyke with both hands on the studio's long-suffering Steinway Model B, ratchets up the standard Motown beat until its intensity transcends any question of "formula" (Ex. 3c). Lawrence Kramer once summed up the drama of Beethoven's Fifth as the search for a tonic C major so syntactically and sonorously impressive that it "cannot be followed";[96] surely here is an attempt to create a version of the Motown tonic rhythm so fierce and implacable that it has the same unanswerable effect.

But on the *Cloud Nine* album, the track "Runaway Child, Running Wild" continues for another four and a half minutes. The liner notes of the CD reissue characterize this postlude as an "extended jam," but those expecting to hear individual Funk Brothers stretch out and take virtuosic solos will be sorely disappointed. Nor does the harmony change even once. Instead we hear three *more* tense crescendos from the opening diatonic funk groove into the straight tonic backbeat. Each crescendo is slightly different, spanning a different number of bars, adding instruments in a different spacing and order, and exhibiting small but important differences in the ways riffs and solo lines are piled onto each other.

This four-minute coda for unaccompanied rhythm section (I would encourage the interested reader to cue up the track at 5:11 and follow Examples 4a–c as it unfolds) is tightly controlled, controlled to the point of minimalism. Van Dyke's three keyboard "solos," on the Hammond B-3 organ, are each simply the reiteration of a minor triad, held until the dissonant beating of its electromechanical vibrato becomes a spooky sound effect; James Jamerson's bass playing is kept strictly in check; and the three guitarists do little more than bend a few notes and strum repeated chords. This is funk playing of a singularly anhedonic character. But each of the stripped-down gestures, though it gives little pleasure *in the moment*, is well suited to work syntactically within a clear teleological process, a relentless, three-fold crescendo of rhythmic intensity.

But what is the point? The story is over; the vocal performance, with its crescendo of urban fear and alienation, is already complete. Why would a producer ask the rhythm section to keep playing—and keep playing as a rhythm section, not the collection of expert jazz improvisers they could turn into at

96. Kramer, *Music and Poetry*, 235.

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Example 3 Arrivals on *rhythmic tonic* of “Runaway Child, Running Wild”

(a)

[2:16] (“you want your mama”)

1		+		2		+		3		+		4		+		1		+		2		+		3		+		4		+	
cr				cr																											
x		x		x		x		x		x		x		x		x		x		x		x		x		x		x		x	
g				g																											
s				s				s				s				s				s				s			s	s	t	t	
k		k		k		k		k		k		k		k		k		k		k				k			k	k		k	

(b)

[4:04] (“I want my mama . . . she’s much too far away”)

1		+		2		+		3		+		4		+		1		+		2		+		3		+		4		+	
cr				cr																											
g				g																											
tn		tn		tn		tn		tn		tn		tn		tn		tn		tn		tn		tn		tn		tn		tn		tn	
o	x	x	x	o	x	x	o	x	o	x	x	o	x	x	x	o	x	x	x	o	x	x	o	x	o	x	x	o	x	x	x
				C								C								C								c			
c		c			c	c	C		c	c			c	c	c	c		c			c	c	C		c	c			c	c	c
m				m				m				m				m				m				m				m			
s				s				s				s				s				s			s		s		s	s	s	t	t
k				k				k				k				k				k				k				k			

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(c)

[and eventually]

1		+		2		+		3		+		4		+		1		+		2		+		3		+		4		+	
cr				cr																											
g				g																											
tn		tn		tn		tn		tn		tn		tn		tn		tn		tn		tn		tn		tn		tn		tn		tn	
o	x	x	x	o	x	x	o	x	o	x	x	o	x	x	x	o	x	x	x	o	x	x	o	x	o	x	x	o	x	x	x
				C								C								C								c			
c		c			c	c	C		c	c			c	c	c	c		c			c	c	C		c	c			c	c	c
m				m				m				m				m				m				m				m			
s				s			s	s				s				s				s			s	s				s			
k		k		k			k	k		k		k			k	k		k		k			k	k		k		k			k

Note: c/C = conga drum/accented conga
cr = crash cymbal
g = rhythm guitar
k = kick drum
m = minor chord
o = open hi-hat cymbal
r = rim shot
s = snare drum
t = tom-tom
tn = tambourine
x = closed hi-hat cymbal

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the drop of James Jamerson's trademark Tyrolean hat? One hypothesis would be formal closure: given the rhythmic complexity of the rest of the song, especially the prolonged withholding of tonic 4/4 rhythm, this series of increasingly intense rhythmic "cadences" (note the 8–16–32 progression of kick drum upbeats) might be heard to function like the extended codas that ground symphonic allegros in Beethoven's heroic period. Just as in the classical period, we need a lot of arrivals on the tonic (pitch or rhythmic) to discharge the tension of a large-scale form.

But listen all the way to the end of the song, and you may pick up a subtler interpretive clue to the expressive function of those three crescendos, each slightly different in length and pacing. When the Temptations, in the final seconds of the track, sing "listen to your heart beat—it's beating much too fast—go back home," it is hard to escape the feeling that Whitfield is pointing at his own talent for tone-painting. The three irregular crescendos can be read as three rushes of adrenalin; the standard Motown beat, here simulating the pounding of a panicked heart, now represents not security, but abject terror. It intrudes into the song during its most nightmarish moments, moments when the runaway child is stripped of the illusion that he is grown-up enough to make it on his own, when he regresses to infancy and cries out for his "mama." (The song's first four-on-the-floor snaps into place precisely on that word, at the end of the stark couplet "Sirens screaming down neon lighted streets/you want your mama . . .") For Whitfield and Strong in 1969, the naked four-on-the-floor was a stylistic regression; in the world of "Runaway Child" it also functions as an objective correlative of psychological regression, its palpitations those of a terrified young child. Twice more the song's lyrics return to the phrase "I [you] want my [your] mama"—and each time, the pounding of four snare-drum beats per bar nails down the association. Whitfield was willing to turn the screws as tight as they would go: at the almost unbearably manipulative climax of the track, the crescendos of terror detailed in Example 4 start ramping up while the wailing of a hysterical child (voiced by countertenor Eddie Kendricks), begging over and over for his mama, still echoes in the listener's ears.

If Carleton Goodlett was correct about "Cloud Nine" and "Runaway Child," and if—superficial differences in story aside—the deeper message of both songs is, as he put it, that "black people have to face reality," then the teleological progress from the unreal to the real can perhaps be mapped onto the musical path Whitfield's arrangements take from a haze of African-inspired cross rhythms to the repeated imposition of the crushing Motown backbeat as (negative) goal. This interpretive frame does not necessarily falsify Keil's claim that complex, subtle rhythmic grooves can be correlated to "spontaneity and the conquest of inhibition" in the African American imaginary; but it does put such correlation into a tenser dialectical relationship to the actual social meaning of such grooves in the African American community at any given place and time. At a moment when the conquest of inhibition, so easily lauded within

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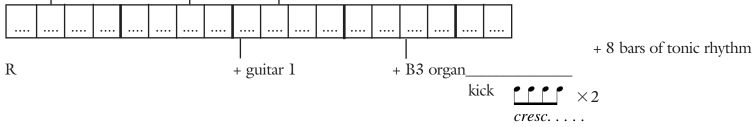
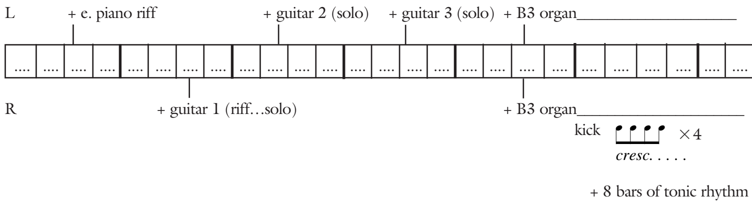
Example 4 Rhythm builds in coda of "Runaway Child, Running Wild"

(a) Cresc 1 [5:11–5:50]

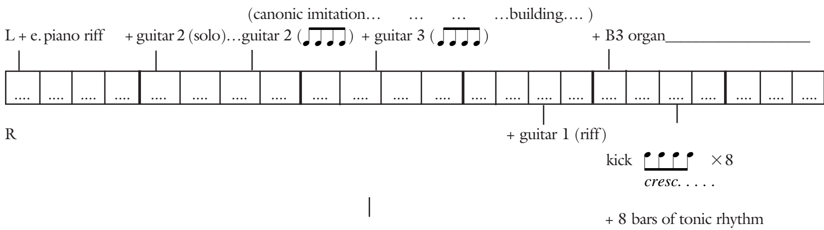
L "I want my mamma" + e. piano riff…octaves



(b) Cresc 2 [6:06–7:02]



(c) Cresc 3 [7:18–8:05]



Note: .... = quarter-note beats
B = bass guitar
e. piano = electric piano
L = left stereo channel
R = right stereo channel

the white counterculture, was viewed within the black counterpublic sphere as a destructive "running wild," the power of the four-on-the-floor Motown beat to lock things down could take on a grim but reassuring duty, which was to represent the social reality ("go back home") that African Americans had to face.

Epilogue: The Black Man's Burden

In a recent historical survey of African American popular music as political commentary, James B. Stewart divides the rhetorical ground into nine basic approaches, from angry Jeremiads and Revolutionary Manifestos to laid-back

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Explorations of Spiritual Transcendence and earnest calls for Collective Self Help. Stewart categorizes songs like "Cloud Nine" and "Runaway Child, Running Wild" as Documentaries, a kind of musical reportage that "describes negative conditions" and is "designed to document the magnitude of problems and possible causes."[97] As we have seen, there was definitely a journalistic groundswell behind Whitfield and Strong's choice of topic; but Stewart's focus on the documentary aspects of psychedelic soul leads him to downplay the extent to which these songs are prescriptive as well as descriptive. He argues that they "offer little guidance for overcoming the problems dramatized in the lyrics," a claim that might hold for "Cloud Nine," but which seems strikingly inappropriate for "Runaway Child," whose guiding message was clear enough to Carleton Goodlett in 1969 (see above, pp. 216–17).[98] Perhaps it is hard to hear these songs as Manifestos, because they are so clearly *Counter*-revolutionary, and because the solution proffered to black cultural problems like drug addiction and juvenile delinquency is just a little bit more of that old middle-class standby, "the repression-sublimation-Protestant-ethic syndrome." What is wrong with those runaway teens? As Meyer might have put it—and here, though he lost Keil, he would have had Goodlett, Gordy, and Whitfield on his side—"it is not their mentality that is limited, it is their maturity."

As the decade turned, Motown's musical arguments for what Meyer called "self-imposed tendency inhibition" became even more explicit. The next Temptations album, 1970's *Puzzle People*, is famous for the protest songs "Slave" and "Message from a Black Man." But alongside the demand for racial dignity sent out to mainstream white America ("No matter how hard you try, you can't stop me now") stood the deep-rooted Booker T. Washington message of economic self-discipline, designed to be heeded *inside* the black community. Whitfield and Strong's "Don't Let the Joneses Get You Down" is a roof-shaking, gospel-tinged paean to thrift and the avoidance of conspicuous consumption. Delayed gratification is presented here in its traditional bourgeois financial aspect, as the ability to plan purchases carefully, stay out of debt, accumulate capital, and thus accumulate economic and (ultimately) political power: "If you see something you want / And you know you can't afford it / The first thing you should do / Is start saving for it." Bertha and Pops Gordy could not have taught the lesson any more clearly. "Runaway Child, Running Wild" had already made the same point in a different context; it concerned itself not with fiduciary responsibilities, but with the family values of the African American middle class: respect your mother; do your schoolwork; accept parental discipline if you transgress; stay at home, stay safe, and never get into trouble.

Listening to this kind of "message" song, it is tempting to deem the late 1960s a socially conservative moment in the middle-class black public

97. Stewart, "Message in the Music," Table 1, p. 204.

98. Ibid., 215.

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sphere, adducing also, for example, the embrace of patriarchal family structures as "African" by black nationalist theorists; the creation of the winter Kwanzaa festival as a explicitly didactic ritual of family unity and economic self-determination; and the appeal of Nixon-style "black capitalism" over bruising attempts to eliminate poverty or integrate schools and labor unions.[99] But it is worth reiterating that pure neoliberalism, with its denial of class solidarity and its radically individualist worldview, has never appealed to more than a fringe of the black community, which persists in imagining itself *as* a community, even as it reacts to the general atomizing force of late-capitalist society. If a song like "Runaway Child, Running Wild" transmitted a version of what we might now recognize and label as socially conservative values, it transmitted them through a medium and to an audience that necessarily refracted such values through the communitarian lens of the black counterpublic sphere.

The late 1960s were a key inflection point in the historical development of a true "black middle class." (Frazier's "black bourgeoisie" had never been more than a small fraction of the African American population.) The proportion of blacks entering the American middle class had more than doubled between 1960 and 1970, from 13 percent to 27 percent of all black workers—but this rise was about to slow precipitously. Only 31 percent of African American workers would be considered middle class in 1976, compared to 53 percent of white workers.[100] William Junius Wilson noted in 1978 that the civil rights revolution had had a complex dialectical relationship to class solidarity within the African American world: "As race declined in importance in the economic sector, the Negro class structure became more differentiated and black life chances became increasingly a consequence of class affiliation."[101] Before the 1960s, middle and lower classes were linked by pervasive segregation:

> In the 1940s, 1950s, and as late as the 1960s such communities featured a vertical integration of different segments of the urban black population. Lower-class, working-class, and middle-class black families all lived more or less in the same communities (albeit in different neighborhoods), sent their children to the same schools, availed themselves of the same recreational facilities, and shopped at the same stores.[102]

But as the decade progressed, changes in housing and employment practices began to allow this rising African American middle class to escape the

99. The key figure in "conservative" black nationalism was undoubtedly Ronald "Maulana" Karenga, the inventor of Kwanzaa. By far the best study of this controversial figure is Scot Brown, *Fighting for US: Maulana Karenga, the US Organization, and Black Cultural Nationalism.* On black capitalism, see Weems and Randolph, "Ideological Origins of Richard M. Nixon's 'Black Capitalism' Initiative."

100. Garrow, review of *The New Black Middle Class* by Bart Landry, 156.

101. Wilson, *Declining Significance of Race*, 153.

102. Wilson, *Truly Disadvantaged: The Inner City, the Underclass, and Public Policy*, 7.

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urban ghetto, while deindustrialization and redlining of inner-city neighborhoods continued to force the remaining black working class down into permanent destitution.

Motown Records, a gigantic black wealth-creation machine, epitomized this growing split. In the early 1960s, Gordy and his new family lived over the business at 2648 W. Grand Avenue, in what was at the time a rapidly integrating middle-class neighborhood adjacent to the inner city. By the long, hot summer of 1967, Grand Avenue had become part of the ghetto, and Hitsville, ten blocks or so from the epicenter of the Detroit riots, narrowly escaped the flames. Gordy, however, along with most of his star performers and senior executives, had already fled the 'hood. In 1968, when "Cloud Nine" was being laid down at the old Golden World Studios on funky West Davison, Motown's corporate headquarters were in a downtown office building, and Berry Gordy commuted there from Detroit's Boston-Edison district, an enclave of gracious mansions once inhabited by pioneering captains of the auto industry. The days when an enterprising inner-city black kid like Norman Whitfield could take time off from working at a gas station, walk over to 2648 W. Grand, track down Berry Gordy, and get himself hired for $15 a week, were long gone.[103]

Wilson made the influential argument that, as early as the late 1960s, the physical absence of an African American middle class was depriving inner-city communities of direct contact with key middle-class values: "the perception that education is meaningful, that steady employment is a viable alternative to welfare, and that family stability is the norm, not the exception."[104] Whether or not he is correct to argue that the loss of contact between the newly stratified classes of black society is to blame for the persistence of African American poverty and unemployment—and not institutionalized racism and the general decimation of the working class by deindustrialization—it is certain that spokesmen for the African American middle class in the 1960s worried publicly about it. As early as 1963, Whitney M. Young identified "the great problem of the emerging Negro middle class" for the readers of *Ebony:* "As we who consider ourselves social engineers see it, [the Negro middle class] is not identifying with the lower-class Negro; the gap between the two groups is not only great but it is growing."[105] In the August 1967 issue of *Ebony*, devoted to the youth "problem," columnist Carl Rowan challenged the black middle class to pass on its values to the next generation: "There ought to be some way that Negroes could forbid cursing Whitey, or making gallant orations against

103. For an incisive discussion of Motown's position in the Detroit of the "Great Rebellion" of 1967, see Smith, *Dancing in the Streets*, 181–208. She notes the complexity of Berry Gordy's position as an upper-middle-class black entrepreneur in a city increasingly roiled by racialized class divisions, and dissects the somewhat half-hearted attempts by Motown to help the city's impoverished blacks in the aftermath of the riots.

104. Wilson, *Truly Disadvantaged*, 56.

105. Young, "Role of the Middle Class Negro," *Ebony* 18, no. 11 (September 1963): 68.

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Jim Crow, by colored adults who buy scotch but do not buy books; who fork out installments for Buick Rivieras and T-Birds but won't put an installment in the savings account for their children's tuition."[106]

Six years later, in 1973, *Ebony* devoted its annual special issue to an examination of the black middle class. But as he summarizes his field research on class stratification and black politics in Harlem, political scientist Charles V. Hamilton is a cool voice from an entirely new era: "It is not politically relevant that middle-class blacks do not socialize with the black lower class or want, even, to live next door to them." Hamilton was empirically documenting the emergence of a "public sector–based middle class" whose clients were drawn almost entirely from the African American lower classes. This interdependence, he argued, made traditional class analysis obsolete: a substantial majority of the African American community (fully 62 percent, if one considered both donors and recipients of aid) was now inextricably linked by a complex network of government anti-poverty programs.[107] The most pressing need in the African American community, argued Hamilton, was not for more role models from the entrepreneurial middle class, but a new breed of public-sector intellectual able to transform this "patron-recipient" relationship into a shared project of economic self-determination.

Whether the black middle class is—or ever was—in danger of drifting away from the rest of the race is not the point. For the cultural historian of African American popular music, it suffices to note the many versions of the question being tossed around within this newly self-conscious part of the black counter-public sphere as the Summer of Love turned into a winter of black discontent. Tracks like "Cloud Nine" and "Runaway Child" must be read within this context; they represent an attempt to use music to inculcate middle-class values, an attempt by self-made African American men to speak clearly and directly about "making it" to young people trapped in the dysfunctional ghetto life they had outgrown. Throwing the gauntlet down in the August 1967 youth issue, *Ebony* columnist Carl Rowan and editor-publisher John H. Johnson each pledged $10,000 of their own money to support underprivileged young African Americans who wanted to enter journalism, and challenged black doctors, dentists, contractors, and even entertainers to do the same for their own professions. We do not know whether any musicians at Motown took up the challenge;[108] but we do have at least one piece of evidence that Norman Whitfield thought about the goals he was striving for in

106. Rowan, "An Answer to Youth's Challenge," *Ebony* 22, no. 10 (1967): 141.

107. Poinsett, "Class Patterns in Black Politics," *Ebony* 28, no. 10 (1973): 36. Hamilton was a potent authority: a co-author, along with Stokely Carmichael, of the influential 1967 manifesto *Black Power*, he was one of the first black men to hold a professorship at an Ivy League university.

108. Smith notes that in the aftermath of the Detroit riots, Motown did publicize (in *Jet*) its determination to devote more energy to "public service." And in October 1967, Gordy announced two initiatives that might well have been inspired by Rowan and Johnson's challenge in the August issue of *Ebony*: he endowed a music scholarship at the United Negro College Fund

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Motown's Studios A and B as a concrete way to uplift the next generation. In an interview shortly before his death in 2008, Whitfield recalled the 1970 rerecording of his classic "War," originally written as yet another message song for the Temptations in 1969 and first released on their album *Psychedelic Shack* the next year. When Gordy, with characteristic political caution, refused to authorize the popular track as a Temptations single, Whitfield shopped it around (even Rare Earth, Motown's white "rock" band, turned it down), and finally inveigled Edwin Starr, an unknown newcomer, into singing it over a new, heavier set of backing tracks he had just laid down. Starr's impassioned performance made the song a huge hit and an instant antiwar anthem for the white counterculture; but Whitfield, almost forty years later, remembered another, homelier audience for his music, and the lessons about goals and drive he hoped they might take away from seeing it made right there in person: "When we got ready to dub it in, I got a couple of school kids to share the experience with him, of them coming to Motown. I did that from time to time, because I realized there was no vision there, because of the poverty." Norman Whitfield, who had gotten into pop music because he saw Smokey Robinson driving a Cadillac and wanted one too, now wanted to pass on that desire, a "certain tenaciousness inside of me," to the next generation.[109] And—with *no* apologies to Leonard Meyer or Charles Keil—this, I take it, is not without relevance to considerations of value.

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and set up the Loucye Gordy Wakefield Business Career Clinic in Detroit's inner city, designed "to make it possible for bright young Negroes to pursue a rewarding career in business." See Smith, *Dancing in the Street*, 205–6.

109. Perrone, "Norman Whitfield."

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Appendix A "Cloud Nine" (Norman Whitfield/Barrett Strong, 1968)

Intro

V1 Childhood part of my life wasn't very pretty—
You see, I was born and raised in the slums of the city.
It was a one-room shack that slept ten other children beside me.
We hardly had enough food or room to sleep.
It was hard times,
Needed something to ease my troubled mind.

x	–	–	–	x	–	–	x	–	x	–	x	x	–	–	–

[+ kick drum on some downbeats]

V2 *Listen!*
My father didn't know the meaning of work.
He disrespected Mama and treated us like dirt.
I left home seeking a job that I never did find,
Depressed and downhearted I took to Cloud Nine.

x	–	–	–	x	–	–	x	–	x	–	x	x	–	–	–
K		K		S											

R I'M DOING FINE . . .
UP HERE ON CLOUD NINE. *(Listen—one more time)*
I'M DOING FINE . . .
UP HERE ON CLOUD NINE.

V3 *Folks down there tell me—*
They say give yourself a chance, son, don't let life pass you by,
But the world around you is a rat race, where only the strongest survive.
It's a dog-eat-dog world, and that's no lie,
It ain't even safe no more to walk the streets at night.

x	–	–	–	x	–	–	x	–	x	–	x	x	–	–	–
K		K		S				K		K		S			

R I'M DOING FINE . . .
ON CLOUD NINE.
Let me tell you about Cloud Nine . . .

C1 *(Cloud Nine)* You can be what you want to be—
(Cloud Nine) You ain't got no responsibility—
(Cloud Nine) And every man, every man is free—
(Cloud Nine) You're a million miles from reality.
(Reality)
I wanna stay *(up up)*
Higher *(up up)*
Cloud Nine . . . *(up up and away)*
Cloud Nine

x	–	–	–	x	–	–	x	–	x	–	x	–	–	–	–
K												K			

(Cloud Nine . . .)

[kick and toms build to . . .]

X I wanna say I love the life I live,
And I'm gonna live the life I love—
Or be on Cloud Nine . . .
I, I, I, I, I, I'm riding high, on . . .

x		x		x		x		x		x		x		x	
S				S				S				S			
K		K		K		K		K		K		K		K	

[tonic 4/4 rhythm]

C2 *(Cloud Nine)* You're as free as a bird in flight—
(Cloud Nine) There's no difference between day and night
(Cloud Nine) It's a world of peace and harmony—
(Cloud Nine) You're a million miles from reality.
(Reality)
I wanna stay *(up up)*
Higher *(up up)*
Cloud Nine . . . *(up up and away)*

[as C1, before]

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Appendix B "Runaway Child, Running Wild" (Norman Whitfield/Barrett Strong, 1968)

Intro
V1 You played hookey from school
And you can't go out to play,
Mama said for the rest of the week
In your room you got to stay.
Now you feel like the whole world's picking on you
But deep down inside you know it ain't true.
You've been punished cause your mother
Wants to raise you the right way
But you don't care—
Cause you already made up your mind
You wanna run away.
C RUNAWAY CHILD, RUNNING WILD
BETTER GO BACK HOME, WHERE YOU BELONG
V2 Roaming through the city
Going nowhere fast
You're on your own at last.
Hey . . . it's getting late, where will you sleep?
You're getting kinda hungry,
But you forgot to bring something to eat.
Lost with no money, you start to cry.
But remember you left home
Wanting to be grown,
So dry your weeping eyes.
X Sirens screaming down neon lighted streets,
(You want your mama)
There's nothing here for you,
You're frightened and confused.
(I want my mama)
But she's much too far away,
She can't hear a word you say.
V3 You heard some frightening news on the radio
About little boys running away from home
And their parents don't see them no more.
You wanna hitch a ride, and go home,
But your mama told you never trust a stranger
And you don't know which way to go.
Streets are dark and deserted,
Not a sound nor sign of life.
How you long to hear your mother's voice
'Cause you're lost and alone.
But remember you made the choice.
C RUNAWAY CHILD, RUNNING WILD
BETTER GO BACK HOME WHERE YOU BELONG
V4 You're lost in this great big city
(Go back home where you belong)
Not one familiar face, ain't it a pity?
(Go back home where you belong)
C OH RUNAWAY CHILD, RUNNING WILD
YOU BETTER GO BACK HOME WHERE YOU BELONG
X Mama, mama please, come and see about me!
But she's much too far away—
She can't hear a word you say *(I want my mama)*
You're frightened and confused—
Which way will you choose?
C RUNAWAY CHILD, RUNNING WILD
BETTER GO BACK HOME WHERE YOU BELONG
Outro
[crying] *"I want my mama! I want my mama!"*

[instrumental crescendos . . . see Ex. 3]

(Listen to your heart beat—
It's beating much too fast—
Go back home, where you belong.)

Note: Underlined passages feature "standard" Motown beat.

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Abstract

A theoretical consideration of teleology in African American popular music, focusing on the late-1960s output of Motown Records. The question of goal direction and musical value in popular music is traced back to the theoretical dispute between Leonard Meyer and Charles Keil, who stand in for the two poles of an outmoded binarism: a "classical" music defined by control of teleology and delayed gratification, and a "popular" music defined by a liberating feeling of groove in an endless present. Soul music and culture, steeped in the

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aspirational drive of the black middle class, falsifies this view of African American popular music. Drawing on more recent analytical work on grooves (Butler, Danielsen), a model of rhythmic teleology is developed and then tested on two seminal tracks produced by Norman Whitfield and sung by the Temptations. In both "Cloud Nine" (1968) and "Runaway Child, Running Wild" (1969), Motown's signature "four on the floor beat" functions as a *rhythmic tonic*. Reception study supports the proposition that Whitfield's control of rhythmic teleology, combined with socially conscious lyrics about drug use and the counterculture, represent a powerful intervention in favor of goal direction and delayed gratification at a pivotal moment for the African American middle class.

Keywords: teleology, Motown, popular music, Norman Whitfield, rhythm

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