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ELVIS: A BODY OF CONTROVERSY

ALIVE: THE DISRUPTIVE BODY

Elvis Presley has always formed a body of controversy. In life and in death, his body has been a constant terrain of struggle between the power-bloc and formations of the people, a point where imperializing and localizing powers face up to each other. His body was not just muscle and movement but a point of intersection for the social axes of age, gender and race, and as such a strategic point of control where power was applied and contested.

When, in 1956, the young Elvis erupted onto the US public scene, attention focussed immediately on what he did with his body and then on how he could be stopped from doing it. His nickname, Elvis the Pelvis, identifies the part of the body that caused the trouble. His performance of "Hound Dog" on the *Milton Berle Show* of 5 June 1956 was more than adult America could endure in dignified silence.[1] So it erupted in disciplinary fervor. The uproar had little to do with the song, but everything with the body of the singer. The performance of his hips was widely seen as one of offensive sexual abandon. His young body was "loose" and its physical looseness was quickly taken as a sign of moral laxity. The fluidity of his pelvis did not so much simulate the movements of sex as display a body that had loosened the strings of social control. To adult America, Elvis was out of control.

The performance, of course, was far from uncontrolled, for not only does it require physical control to make a body move as loosely as Elvis's, but his body and song were tightly choreographed together. The principles

which ordered the body-song came from outside the control of the power-bloc and constructed an order which was not theirs and which they did not "know." Not knowing the order, the power-bloc saw it as disorder, but Elvis and his fans knew exactly what his body was doing and why, and that, of course, was the real problem. The body of Elvis was not a site where human "nature," particularly its sexuality, escaped social control and produced "mass hysteria," it was a site where a subordinate social formation contested the power of the dominant to order and control their lives.

The two sides of the struggle were made explicit in an exchange on the TV talk show *Hy Gardner Calling*:

> GARDNER You create a sort of mass hysteria among the audience of teenagers—is your shaking and quaking a sort of involuntary response to this hysteria?
> ELVIS (long, baffled pause) Will you say that again, sir?
> GARDNER When you shake and you quake when you sing, is that a sort of involuntary response to the hysteria of your audience?
> ELVIS (pause) Involuntary?
> GARDNER Yeah.
> ELVIS Well, ... I'm aware of everything that I do at all times ... it's just the way I feel.

Hy Gardner, the adult, and Elvis, the youth, both identify the body as the site of the experience being discussed, but for Gardner the bodies of the fans and/or performer are "hysterical," their actions "involuntary"—they epitomize the body out of control. For Elvis, however, his actions are well within this control; they express bodily what he feels.

Hy Gardner's word "hysteria" is part of the gender politics of the Elvis panic. Foucault has shown us that "hysteria" was produced as a concept in the nineteenth century as a way of putting women's sexuality under patriarchal control through both discourse and medical practice.[2] The TV cameras of the 1950s continue this discursive control: the rock-'n'-roll fans they show are almost exclusively teenage girls. The male performer and the hysterical female fan become the conventional way of representing rock music for adult America. The Elvis panic (like the James Dean panic) was integral to that major social anxiety of the period—the "juvenile delinquency" problem. In the public imagination this took the form of male socially delinquent behavior backed up by female "hysteria" (read "sexually delinquent behavior"). The hysterical female fan figured, literally, the body out of control, and her constant public representation "proved" that the loose individual body of Elvis "loosened" the multiple bodies of his fans until they threatened the body of society. The body of the

female fan was the canvas upon which adult society could see and thus verify its own panic.

But these teenage bodies were not out of control. They may have been breaking out from a disciplinary system, but their "hysteria" was not an example of the entropic principle of disorder in nature: it was rather evidence of a bottom-up, subordinated power contesting its normal restraints. The order of Elvis's performance orchestrated the order of his fans' "disorder." The bodies of the fans and the body of Elvis participated mutually in a carnivalesque escape whose "looseness" they exploited to form a *communitas*, a social formation whose links were horizontal and thus under the control of the subordinate and beyond the disciplinary reach of vertical individuation.

Such social formations inevitably galvanize the power-bloc into action. In the case of Elvis its forces quickly allied themselves across the domains of entertainment, politics and religion. In the world of entertainment, the critics launched the first offensive: his performance of "Hound Dog" on the *Milton Berle Show* was widely taken as proof that Elvis was a "no-talent performer" who could neither sing nor dance and was merely riding the wave of a short-lived and superficial trend. The TV networks joined the critics in the drive to re-establish control over the teenage body. A petition of 18,000 signatures, and large public demonstrations by teenagers carrying banners such as "We Love Gyratin' Elvis" gave commercial alliances within the power-bloc motive enough to rebroadcast him, but to maintain the links between these and more moralistic alliances the TV industry controlled his representation as tightly as they could. His next appearance was to be on the *Steve Allen Show*: NBC kept one eye on its profits by refusing to bow to the pressure to cancel his appearance and the other on its "public" (read "power-bloc" not "popular") reputation by announcing that Elvis would not be allowed to "bump and grind." A few months later Ed Sullivan exerted a similar control: Elvis could appear on his show only if the cameras never strayed below his waist. For the *Steve Allen Show*, which, in Steve's words, was "Elvis's first come-back," Elvis was dressed in a tux and tails; the studio was set with back-lit Grecian columns and candelabra; he was provided with a soft, melodic backing by an unseen crooning chorus; and, as introduction, Steve Allen said "It gives me great pleasure to introduce the *new* Elvis Presley. ... I think your millions of fans will get a real kick out of seeing a different side of your personality."

Held in this disciplined station of setting, dress and body movement, Elvis sang the offending "Hound Dog" to a lugubrious basset hound also dressed in a tux, as a clear sign of submission to the adult order. His other song on the show was the crooning ballad "I want you, I need you, I love

you." George Kline, a lifelong friend of Elvis, says that Elvis told him that this was the first time that he felt he had really "sold out." But the sell-out was not total. In both numbers Elvis's performance contained residual traces of his pelvic abandon that the discipline could not repress entirely; from them those who knew the original could reconstruct it and thus "see" what was repressed as well as its repression. Steve Allen's introduction gave Elvis a similar opportunity to refer to this particular instance of the opposition between the people and the power-bloc:

ELVIS It's not too often that I get to wear a suit and tails, but I think I have on something that's not quite correct for evening wear...
STEVE ALLEN Not quite formal, what's that Elvis?
ELVIS Blue Suede Shoes.

At the reference to one of his "disruptive" hits, Elvis and Steve Allen both look down at the offensive footwear, but the camera is not allowed to carry their affront into the suburban home and they remain unseen by the viewers. Similarly, on his second, waist-up-only appearance on *The Ed Sullivan Show* Elvis still moved wildly, his audience screamed enthusiastically and he constantly looked down, so by sharing his gaze, his fans "saw" what the camera was not allowed to show them. Controlling the camera did little to control Elvis.

The fan response to Elvis was probably more multiaccentual than that of the power-bloc. The power-bloc homogenized Elvis and in their panic saw only his threat. But Elvis also carried the traces of the social order he apparently threatened. He frequently insisted that he lived "a clean, straight life"; he didn't smoke, he didn't drink, he wanted to meet the right girl, marry her and raise a family. He stressed how much his own parents, particularly his mother, meant to him. Similarly, although his first gold record was the rocking, disruptive "Heartbreak Hotel," it was quickly followed by his second—the ballad he crooned so submissively for Steve Allen "I want you, I need you, I love you." This was (almost) as sweetly inoffensive as anything that Perry Como was singing on the hit parade at the same time. Neither popular culture, nor the lives of the people, can ever be untouched by the power-bloc, but both must contain that from which they differ.

Even the offending performance of "Hound Dog" was shot through with contradictions that the offended social formations missed entirely. Its body movements were so exaggerated as to open them up to self-parody. On the sound track we can hear at least as much laughter as screams from the studio audience and the young woman who had been preselected to stand for "the hysterical female fan" (the cumbersome studio cameras of the time could not move freely about the audience but had to be pre-

positioned) laughed delightedly at least as much as she screamed. The self-mockery, which Bakhtin identifies as a feature of carnivalesque laughter, is heteroglossic for it carries within itself, if not a representation of that which is being offended, at least a recognition of what the offending performance might look like from the social position which it offends. The difference of Elvis fans from the mature social order was never total and was not meant to be. The traces of the social formations from which they differed were what allowed the fans to negotiate their social relations. They had no desire to emigrate but rather instead to establish their own territory within the mother country.

But moral panics and demonizations work best when the threat is straightforward and uncontradictory. The newsreels of the day have recorded for us some of the voices allied within the power-bloc to discipline this demon. An overweight politician (dark suit, white shirt, bow tie, leather chair, polished desk, emphatic voice):

> Very frankly, we're lovers of music in Jersey City, and we've gone out of our way to bring music concerts and dances to the teenage people in order to keep them entertained. We feel, based upon the experiences throughout the country, that this rock and roll rhythm has been the seat of trouble, and we want to keep trouble out of Jersey City.

The benignity of the control over teenagers exercised by "keeping them entertained" by music chosen by the controllers is fractured by the power-laden othering of the phrase "the teenage people." The politician's linking of rock-'n'-roll with civil disorder is continued and given a moral dimension by a preacher (not much older than Elvis, thin faced, tight lipped, no jacket, shirt as white as his congregation, tie precisely centered, impassioned voice and gestures):

> These men come down here from New York and Florida to find out my reason for opposing the rock and roll music, and why I preach against it. I believe with all of my heart that it is a contributing factor to our juvenile delinquency of today. I one hundred per cent believe it. Why I believe it is because I know how it *feels* when you sing it, I know what it *does* to you, I know of the *evil* feeling that you *feel* when you *sing* it, I know the *lost* position that you get into ... the *beat*. Well, you talk to the average teenager of today, and you ask them what it is about rock-'n'-roll music that they like—the first thing they'll say is "The Beat! The Beat!! The Beat!!!"

The crescendo of his voice and the gestures of his hands leave little doubt that "the beat" is that of the body in evil (that is, sexual) abandon, the body out of control. At times even the law joined the disciplinary efforts: a judge in Jacksonville, Florida, issued a restraining order banning Elvis

from "offensive gyrations" during his concert there. On stage, Elvis mocked the order by moving only his little finger—and his fans still went wild.

The struggle to control Elvis was a struggle between the power-bloc and the people, or rather between alliances formed within each. These alliances are not formed by organized groups or individuals, but through a recognition of common interests. The preacher, the Jersey City politician and Ed Sullivan had never met and had not agreed on a common strategy, but their social interests overlapped, and in promoting them they formed an alliance of interests. Similarly, there was no organization of teenagers across the nation but there were "teenage interests" that underlay a common pattern of belief, taste and behavior. These alliances may be based in social categories such as class, gender, race and age, but they are not confined to them and can cross their boundaries with comparative ease depending on the issues around which they are formed and the conditions within which they operate. These alliances can also transcend the boundaries of the individual and promote struggles between different formations of the power-bloc (or the people): the TV producers formed economic alliances to profit from Elvis which contradicted the socio-ethical ones to restrain him. These alliances can split not only individuals but also class interests or those of social groups. The interests of capital were served by promoting Elvis and encouraging the teenagers to spend money on establishing their (threatening) social identity. But other interests of that class—interests of order, control and morality—were served by repressing Elvis. The power-bloc, while less heterogeneous than the people, is not a completely homogeneous formation, and its internal contradictions, as much as those between it and the people, mean that its power is exerted through issue-based rather than class-based alliances.

The struggle of these alliances to control the social body through the body of Elvis had both an explicit dimension and a repressed one. Explicitly the power-bloc attempted to control the new social category of the "teenager." The fifties were when US society reshaped itself after World War II. The returning male workforce pushed the women back into the household, the growing prosperity moved the household into the ranch house in the suburbs, and this reconfiguring of the urban landscape reconfigured the social relations of those who lived within it. The suburban single family house on its individuated block of land enclosed the terrain within which the nuclear family could re-establish itself and discipline its members. The new media of communication—cars, telephones, radio and, crucially, television—made the individuation of these new domestic stations possible and bearable by connecting them in a limited and controllable way to society at large, and, to a much lesser extent, to each

other. Suburbs individuated the nuclear family more efficiently than city streets, and life within them could become as clipped as their lawns. Lynn Spigel has shown how hard the TV industry in the 1950s worked to cast television as a pro-family force.[3] Advertisements claimed not only that TV would educate children but, by making them want to stay home to watch it, would keep them within the family space and therefore control. When the kids are watching TV the parental purchaser of the set will know what they are up to.

Mary Beth Haralovich recounts how the suburb was produced as a disciplined homogenized place through a conjuncture of social forces.[4] The Federal Housing Authority, through zoning, loan policies and "protective" covenants, aimed to produce "harmonious, attractive neighborhoods" which excluded, according to Hayden, the single or divorced, the white working class, the elderly and racial minorities in general. The harmony of the neighborhood was the white prosperous middle-class family singing in tune with its neighbors.[5] The new house sang the same melody. Its open floor plan where living, dining, kitchen and recreational areas flowed into each other, encouraged a lifestyle of family togetherness. Haralovich shows us how two popular sit-coms of the period, *Father Knows Best* and *Leave it to Beaver*, showed this built environment working to construct ideal families in ideal suburbs.

Television played a crucial role in this, not only by showing the suburb to itself, but by enhancing the individuation and therefore discipline of each household by ensuring that its links with the outside world would be made within the place "held" by the house—the *household* space. The women, who were as held by this household as firmly as they participated in its hold over their children, were advised on how to rearrange their furniture and routines not just to make room for television as though it were a guest but to treat it as a family member. Seating was rearranged, new TV chairs and TV tables were purchased, and new TV dinners were devised to be eaten together around the set. The schedule of television was to be used to enhance the routines of domesticity, the return of the husband/father from work, the evening's relaxation of the family together, the bedtimes of its younger members, the more mature shows after these times. Television was to be integral in the ordering of family life, in both space and time.

So when this new agent of order invaded the family with images of pelvic disorder, parental outrage was inevitable. Under the outrage lay a deep anxiety about what was going on outside the household order. The social forces which individuated the suburbanized family produced also a threat to it—the teenager. Those in this new social category had a new sense that their social identity was actually theirs: that they could possess a time

outside the control of school, work and the family. Besides the time, which its routines allowed teenagers to claim as theirs, the suburb provided space also. The material prosperity built into the ranch house resulted in new spaces such as individual bedrooms and basements which teenagers could lay claim to. The individuation of the house meant that parents had to go "out" to socialize and thus to leave whole houses which could become teenage territory for an evening. The prosperity also put older teens on wheels. The car, filled with rock-'n'-roll, was not only a teenage locale in itself, particularly well suited for social and sexual encounters, but was also a means of controlling other places: to cruise was to control. The teenage body-in-the-car could drive parents sleepless by driving out of their territory and into his or (more rarely) her own.

The "teenage problem" was not one of age only, but also of gender. As postwar suburbanization repositioned the woman into the household, it also repositioned her into femininity. Rosie the Riveter in her boiler suit had to be turned back into June Cleaver in her pinafore. The suburban household space was homogenized through gender difference. The kitchen was Mom's, the den Dad's: the shared family lifestyle was one in which girls grew up into women and boys into men. Men left the house-suburb to enter the masculine sphere of paid labor, whereas women worked to maintain the domesticity the men paid for. The house-suburb was thus feminized, and while the men were in it they could accept the feminine influence without threat to their masculinity, because there was a masculine sphere of work, politics and public life that was exclusively theirs. The suburb domesticated and privatized the feminine: it made the place of feminine labor into that of masculine leisure and it disciplined differences into harmony.

This renewed femininity was central to suburban respectability and to the disciplined order of the nuclear family. Teenage daughters screaming at Elvis and using bodily excess to challenge the tight-lipped respectability of the suburban feminine had to be brought back in line. Calling their bodily release from discipline "hysteria" and thus pathologizing it was a discursive disciplinary strategy which had the effect of locating both the disease and the cure in the teenager. Adult society could then view itself as the doctor and not as the environment that spawned and nourished the virus. In relation to the male rock-'n'-roller, the female fan may appear reactive and disempowered, but when the fan and performer are seen as interdependent partners in the rock-'n'-roll experience, and this experience is set against the norms of suburbia, her bodily passion may seem both an evasion of, and a challenge to, an even more disempowering sense of the feminine.

In their study of the gender politics of "Beatlemania" (which peaked in

1963, just seven years after Elvis erupted onto the cultural scene), Barbara Ehrenreich and her colleagues cast the young female fan as a key player in the social changes that were brewing around the turn of the decade and that gathered momentum as it wore on.[6] Indeed, they provocatively argue that the "hysterical" female fan was a precursor of the women's movement. The 1950s and 1960s were equally sexualized and sexist, and in this steamy atmosphere the "good" teenage girl was expected to be not only "pure" herself but to enforce purity upon others. Advice books charged her with the responsibility of ostracizing "easy" girls, and, more importantly, of regulating the advances of the overeager boy as he attempted to progress from kissing (acceptable), through necking (still OK), to light petting (doubtful) and heavy petting (*not* what nice girls did). The bodily behavior that lay beyond here was, of course, so totally unacceptable that it wasn't even articulated. Good girls did not "give in" to their own or their boys' bodies; they never "let themselves go" but "saved" themselves for their wedding night. The teenage girl's body should be held as securely in its suburban station as any TWA operative's.

It is hardly surprising, then, that in these conditions of aroused sexuality but repressed behavior, rock-'n'-roll offered the teenage girl a locale where she could shake off the docility of her disciplined body and assert her own right to its pleasures and emotions. Rather than being the site of sexist manipulation by the male rock-'n'-roll performer, her body became the locality of freedom from the gender power of the suburbs. So girl fans screamed in unison, pummeled police who tried to hold them back, peed in their pants and, in extreme cases, lost consciousness (perhaps the ultimate evasion):

> To abandon control—to scream, faint, dash about in mobs—was in form if not in conscious intent, to protest the sexual repressiveness, the rigid double standard of female teen culture. It was the first and most dramatic uprising of *women's* sexual revolution.[7]

Ehrenreich et al. underscore this point by noting how rebellious it was for girls to display their own desiring sexuality which made the male singer into the object of their desire.

> To assert an active, powerful sexuality by the tens of thousands and to do so in a way calculated to attract the maximum of attention was more than rebellious. It was, in its own unformulated, dizzy way, revolutionary.[8]

And this active sexual desire rejected marriage—the appeal of Elvis and the Beatles lay in part in their unmarriageability and their image of a life free

from marital constraints. Two adult Beatle fans, recalling their youth, make the point clearly:

> A. I didn't want to grow up and be a wife and it seemed to me that the Beatles had the kind of freedom I wanted: no rules, they could spend two days lying in bed; they ran around on motorbikes...
> B. I liked their independence and sexuality and wanted those things for myself... Girls didn't get to be that way when I was a teenager—we got to be the limp, passive object of some guy's fleeting sexual interest. We were so stifled, and they made us meek, giggly creatures think, oh, if only *I* could act that way, and be strong, sexy and doing what you want.[9]

The erupting female fan did break from social discipline and this "break" disrupted and weakened the sexism of the fifties. It was therefore a key component of the social conditions which nourished the new women's liberation movement (Betty Friedan's book *The Feminine Mystique*, often identified as a founding moment in the movement, was published in 1963). The adult social order was quite justified in panicking at the sight of Elvis's loose hips and their ecstatic fans, for the looseness and ecstasy were real threats to its hegemonic control.

The teenage body was the heartland of the teenage territory. So fashion, hairstyles and make-up, postures, gestures, and behavior (often while listening, moving, dancing to music) were what teenagers used to embody their control over their immediate social conditions. These cultural commodities produced financial profit for the power-bloc but cultural profit for the people – economic power-bloc interests can often be allied with cultural popular ones, much to the consternation of other power-bloc formations. Rock-'n'-roll is one of the most contested and contradictory cultural commodities, for music, with its ability to fill space and time simultaneously, is a particularly effective localizing resource. The 1950s teenager, surrounded by rock-'n'-roll, could keep adult society at bay. Within these loud locales teenagers could, and many did, extend and enhance their bodies by exploiting their chemistry—hormonally via sexuality and pharmaceutically via drugs. The teenagers' control over this entity of body-locale through the infamous trio of sex, drugs and rock-'n'-roll caused deep anxiety in adult social formations.

This anxiety was not entirely groundless. Rock-'n'- roll movies, such as *Rock around the Clock* or *Blackboard Jungle*, provoked (in adult eyes at least) uncontrolled, anti-social behavior. Teenage audiences used their music to extend their control over the place of the cinema for the time that they occupied it. They left their seats and danced in the aisles; at times they even tore up rows of seats (the signs of order) to make room for their dancing (the signs of disorder).[10] Such behavior was readily knowable by

adult social formations as "juvenile delinquency" and they could make their sense of it by inserting it into a continuum which linked an individual teenager's sulky rejection of family discipline through public forms of social disorder in the streets and cinemas to illegal, criminal behavior. The juvenile delinquent figured the extreme towards which rock-'n'-roll was leading the more normal teenager away from the manicured ideals of suburban lifestyles and their lawns. When not even their grass was allowed to grow wild, it is small wonder the sight of their daughters abandoning themselves to "jungle rhythms" should have driven parental America into disciplinary fervor: Jailhouse Rock was what their offspring would end up breaking if they continued to listen to it.

James Dean was, to adult eyes, as delinquent a juvenile as Elvis, and the movie *Rebel Without a Cause* caused as much moral panic as Elvis's pelvis. Elvis admired James Dean and reportedly knew by heart all his lines in the movie. The adult moral panic had social roots: there was an alliance of teenage interests that challenged those of the adult power-bloc. Putting this behavior into discourse as "juvenile delinquency," then, was a strategic way of making sense of the "problem" in general and of Elvis in particular. His pelvic thrust into the bodies and minds of the young was a threat to the future of society and so, in the interests of mature responsibility, it had to be countered as decisively as possible.

The challenge of Elvis's loose body was not confined to the axes of gender and generation alone: the pelvis may have been young, but it was also Black. The explicit anxiety over generational disorder masked an equal, if repressed one, of a racial threat. Elvis had gained his start in the recording industry because, when he walked into Sun Records in Memphis, Sam Phillips, the proprietor, had been on the lookout for a white boy who could sing black. "Race records" (as Black music was called) was becoming increasingly popular on independent radio stations, and Sam Phillips had spotted the trend. He felt that white teenagers were ready for Black music, if not Black people, for Black music had the rhythm and vitality lacking in the white crooners of the day but central to the emerging lifestyle of "the teenager." Elvis fitted the bill precisely. Elvis's "Blackness" is highly problematic. Greil Marcus claims that he had a greater ability to hear Black music and to remake it than any other white musician. His early songs such as "Heartbreak Hotel" and "Jailhouse Rock" were hits on Black radio stations, and before he made any records at all, Elvis was a regular performer in the Black clubs of Beale Street. But very quickly, his audiences became almost entirely white. His "Blackness" was translated into white language; it was not, with a few exceptions, a Blackness for Blacks.[11]

If Elvis's career began because of his links with Black culture, it may be

no coincidence that the links emerge again at its end. As we shall see in the next chapter, one of the most controversial photographs "proving" that Elvis is alive after his alleged death shows him with two leading figures in contemporary African American culture, Mohammed Ali and Jesse Jackson. Before his "death" Elvis became friends with Ali, and one account of his life after "death" has him living in Ali's well-guarded estate in Michigan. To support this account there have been a number of reported "Elvis sightings" in Kalamazoo, Ali's local town.

Be that as it may (and it may well be), the Black dimension of Elvis and his music underlay much of the anxiety he caused in mature white America. His "Blackness" was more than musical, it was physical. "Hound Dog" was a Black number, but the offense of Elvis's performance lay in his body as much as the music. No white body had ever moved in public like that before. In the US of the 1950s, racial segregation was still legal, civil-rights protests were growing, Martin Luther King was emerging as a leader and there was a sense that the Black body politic was stirring and flexing its muscles. In this context, Elvis's loose body could be seen to incarnate racially disruptive forms of the American social body. The new teenage consciousness and the new Black consciousness were made flesh in the body of Elvis; its looseness, its immense energy, its unprecedented movements, all evoked the terror of the new and the sense of loss of control by the old. The music, the body, the grain of the voice, while not in themselves Black, had Black inflections and carried the threat of an oppositional Blackness into the heartland of white culture arguably for the first time. The racial relations of Blacks to whites spoke with a threatening, disruptive accent in Elvis's body music in a way that they did not in that of, say, Paul Robeson or Nat King Cole. And the threat was all the greater because it was embodied under white skin.

So, for his reappearance on television, Elvis had to be not only disciplined, but whitened. On the *Steve Allen Show* the tuxedo and the basset hound tried to erase the Blackness of "Hound Dog," and Elvis's other song, "I want you, I need you, I love you," was a white melodic ballad sung by a white crooner. Elvis's move, later in 1956, from Memphis music to Hollywood cinema, also involved whitening him. In *Love Me Tender*, his first movie, he was tamed into the all (white) American, good-hearted farm boy. The whitewashing of Elvis on the screens of America may have prefigured that of Black footballers in its endzones, but neither the taming nor the whitening were total. His success still had a Black enough tint to open the door for Black rock-'n'-roll musicians to reach significant sections of the white audience, and to insist on their right to contribute to and profit from white popular culture. The flip side of this, of course, is that Elvis also established the practice of white singers

covering Black original numbers and making enormous profits from them while killing the Black original. Whites making money out of Black talent is not a new story, but Elvis certainly revivified it.

Elvis may have been a white impersonation of Black, but traces of the Blackness were essential parts of his appeal (and, incidentally, have been brought to an ironic full circle in the person of Clarence Giddens, a currently popular African American impersonator of Elvis). The meanings of Blackness for white US society have always intersected complicatedly with those of class and sexuality; meanings of subordinated races and classes are consistently associated with and expressed in the body, and the body is where the appeal and the threat of sexuality is most clearly located.

The body of the Black male in the imaginary of the white middle class carries the wild energy and strength of natural, pre-civilized masculinity whose appeal and threat depend upon the fear that the civilized white male has "lost something." (One Black account of what he has lost is given by "The Cress Theory," summarized in Chapter 11.) Preserving this ordered, but in some way emasculated, white society from the potentially disordered, but highly masculine, Black society of the white imagination has often historically and viciously been performed by white men castrating and killing Black men for supposedly violating white women. A similar sexualization of racial fear and guilt lies only just below the surface of the threatening image of the "Black" Elvis and the hysterical white female fan. The fear that "Blackness" can reach areas of human nature (typified by female sexuality) which are inaccessible to the white is as deep rooted as it is disturbing to white consciousness.

In the 1950s these Black traces in the body of Elvis and in the voice of rock-'n'-roll were clearer than today: they were readily available to be taken up by white youth to perform and embody their sense of their own difference from the white mature order that dominated both them and Blacks (the domination in each case, of course, was neither equal nor similar, but it was still domination). In the explicit attempt to control its own young, the mature white order was, if less overtly, attempting to extend this control racially. The deep social anxiety over "juvenile delinquency" was fed by an even deeper anxiety that Black social formations, too, were beginning to demand greater control over their social conditions. It is not merely coincidental that the progress achieved in race relations by the Civil Rights Movement in the sixties was achieved in part by social allegiances formed between Black activists and young whites who had grown up with rock-'n'-roll. The traces of Black culture and Black identity carried by rock-'n'-roll into the white suburbs may well have been one formative component of the young white consciousness that

eventually resulted in direct social action in the Civil Rights Movement. The alliance of these young whites with Black interests showed that the panic of the power-bloc over the control of its young was not groundless. The power-bloc knows well the importance of age politics, for two of the most effective of recent popular movements (the other was over the Vietnam War) have been strongly influenced by youth.

In pointing out that the decade after Elvis did bring significant disruptions to the traditional social relations of race, gender and age, I do not imply that Elvis was a cause of these disruptions, but only that his popularity was conjunctural with the social conditions within which they developed. His body and his body of fans were sites where repressed forces within the social body could be experienced as alive and kicking. They were sites where the socially general and abstract could be turned into the particularity, vitality and public visibility of actual people and actual behavior. That is why Elvis mattered so much.

NOTES

1. He had, of course, been performing both locally and nationally before this, but it was this performance that made him into a figure of general controversy.
2. Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality* Volume I (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1978).
3. Lynn Spigel, *Make Room for TV: Television and the Family in Postwar America* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1992), and Lynn Spigel, "Installing the Television Set: Popular Discourses on Television and Domestic Space, 1948–1955," in Lynn Spigel and Denise Mann (eds) *Private Screenings: Television and the Female Consumer* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1991), pp. 3–40.
4. Mary Beth Haralovich, "Sit-coms and Suburbs: Positioning the 1950s Homemaker," in Spigel and Mann, pp. 111–42.
5. Dolores Hayden, *Redesigning the American Dream: The Future of Housing, Work and Family Life* (New York: Norton, 1984), in Haralovich.
6. Barbara Ehrenreich, Elizabeth Hess and Gloria Jacobs, "Beatlemania: Girls Just Want to Have Fun" in Lisa Lewis (ed.) *The Adoring Audience: Fan Culture and Popular Media* (London: Routledge, 1992), pp. 84–106.
7. Ehrenreich et al., p. 85.
8. Ibid., p. 90.
9. Ibid., p. 103.
10. Thomas Doherty, in *Teenagers and Teenpics: The Juvenilization of American Movies in the 1950s* (Boston: Unwin Hyman, 1988). Chapter 5 gives a good account of the "juvenile delinquency" panic and its relation to movies. He cites a *Variety* article (25 November 1953, p. 19) which illustrates clearly the clash between teenagers and official control:

    > Damage runs into thousands of dollars each year. M. Idzal, managing director of the 5,900 seat Fox Theatre [in Detroit], states that most of the trouble is caused by teenagers traveling in gangs.... "Our problem is not out of control," Idzal said. "We try to screen them out, but it is a difficult job and they frequently get by us. Some sneak in through the exits and cause trouble. They are rough and tough. They descend on the theater in packs, usually on Sunday afternoons. Their ages are from 10 up."... Another exib said seat repairs is a never-ending job in his six houses. A crew is kept constantly busy repairing seats slashed by hoodlums. This theatreman stopped the sale of suckers because youngsters were throwing them through the screens.

11. Interview in *Lingua Franca*, August 1991, p. 29.
12. Terry Teachout, review of *Dead Elvis* by Greil Marcus (New York: Doubleday, 1991) in *The New York Times Book Review* (3 November 1991), p. 11.
13. Michel de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984).
14. In the tabloids we can trace the social contest over Elvis's death, for in them we can hear multiple voices, those of the fans who know, in various ways that Elvis is not "really" dead, those of anti-fans who turn their skepticism on other formations of the people, and those of the power-bloc. But the voices one hears least clearly in them are those of the fans, for the discourse of these tabloids is that of media-populism rather than of

the people. The distinction between the popular and media-populism is an important one: by "the popular" I refer to the knowledge and interests of the people in their various and multiple formations; by "media-populism" I refer to the commercial media's attempt to speak with their version of a popular voice. Media-populism is, then, a strategy of mediation and, like all mediations, is crisscrossed with the discursive traces of the social formations between which it mediates. It is not "of the people," but we can trace in it echoes of the speech of the people: populism may be a strategy of the power-bloc to exploit the popular, but the exploitation can only succeed to the extent that it offers the people some space for their own voices.

15. *The Star*, 25 December 1990, p. 43.
16. Charles Thompson II and James Cole, *The Death of Elvis* (1991).
17. *The Sun*, 19 December 1990, p. 10. This is a populism addressed to a distinctly different popular formation from that of the fan, that of the anti-fan. It takes the body away from the fan and, by emphasizing its offensive, degraded reality it implies that the fan's body of knowledge is idealized and unreal. The popular skepticism of the anti-fan is turned against another popular knowledge rather than the official knowledge which is its more normal target. Media-populism, used here to mediate between different formations of the people, appropriately turns Elvis into the inverse of a Bakhtinian carnivalesque body: in carnival bodily excess, the pleasure in bodily functions, grotesque corporeality and the reduction of experience to the plane of the body upon which all are equal, are signs of the vitality of the people; here they are signs of death. The carnivalesque is itself an inversion of the official; it is a "world upside down": by inverting the grotesque corporeality of carnival, this account returns Elvis to the official body of knowledge: the anti-body is made anti-popular.

    It is significant that *The Sun* in this report is not mediating the book directly, but the *Chicago Tribune*'s version of it. And when the *Tribune* attemps to speak to some of the people rather than to the power-bloc, those it addresses will, in its own estimate, be significantly different from the popular formations of Elvis fans, and therefore a different populist accent will be adopted in order to reach them.

18. *The Globe*, 8 November 1988, pp. 8–9.
19. Hazell Brock, of Fort Payne, Alabama, taking to Susan Hacker.
20. Gail Brewer-Giorgio, *The Elvis Files* (New York: Tudor Publications, 1988), p. 127.
21. *National Examiner*, 4 November 1989, p. 20.
22. *Weekly World News*, 19 May 1992, pp. 4–5.
23. *National Examiner*, 1 May 1990, p. 17.
24. *Weekly World News* 4 April 1989, p. 47.
25. *Weekly World News*, 7 July 1991, pp. 24–5.
26. Letters to Minneapolis *Star Tribune*, 6 October 1991.