ABSTRACT  In 1986, Janet Jackson forever changed the direction of pop music and its music videos with the release of her third and breakthrough album, Control. Working with producers Jimmy Jam and Terry Lewis, choreographer Paula Abdul, and director Mary Lambert, Jackson created songs and videos that conveyed a new kind of feminist affect that intertwined individual stories of endurance, the forcefulness of relatively new digital music technology, and Black and female collectivity. In this article, I chart how Jackson transmitted this feminist affect through what I call hyperaurality, or sounds and vibrations that work in excess of the limitations of visual representation. Through tracing the affective excesses of Jackson’s visuals, sounds, and movements, I unpack how hyperaurality both intensifies and reintegrates the senses of sight, hearing, and feeling. In the process, I posit that vibration, or sound’s materially felt oscillations, works as a point of connection across these three aspects of hyperaurality. By demonstrating its connective power, I assert that vibration is a source of affective politics within popular music, one with the power of repurposing capitalism’s excesses.

KEYWORDS  sound studies, gender/sexuality, technology

By the end of the 1980s, Janet Jackson was considered one of the most successful pop stars in both America and the world. Following the release of her 1989 album Janet Jackson’s Rhythm Nation 1814, music critics, interviewers, and other media figures marveled over the artist’s ability to both sell millions of copies and deliver a “socially conscious” message that addressed themes such as “poverty, injustice, drug abuse, racism, and war.”1 In an interview with a British journalist during the 1990 tour of the album, Jackson herself explained, “[The album is about] people uniting through dance and music dealing with a lot of the social problems, capturing the public’s attention, the audience’s attention through the dance and music.”2 Twice in one sentence, Jackson uses the phrase “through [the] dance and music.” Even given its politicized lyrics, Jackson emphasizes how “dance and music” drive the message home. For Jackson’s socially consciousness-

oriented career as a pop artist, the “dance and music” were just as much a part of the political potential of her musical work as the lyrics.

Despite the extensive media coverage of the political content of *Rhythm Nation*, Jackson had a similar motivation for her 1986 album, *Control*. In various televised interviews, Jackson discussed how *Control* was a story of both her exterior life (of breaking free from industry and familial expectations) and her interior life (of the emotions she felt from navigating her world as a young Black woman). In a 1986 interview on the Swedish talk show *Jacobs Stege*, the 20-year-old Jackson responds to the description of her album as a “feminist mantra” by saying,

> A lot of people ask me “Am I a feminist?” And I ... a lot of people have a lot of different definitions of feminists. So I ... just say if it’s someone, a woman who’s taking control of her life as well as your career and just getting into, into the things like that then I say that I am a feminist.³

Using the buzzwords of “control” and “career” that were on the minds of many women in the 1980s, Jackson recalls a popular narrative of feminism as breaking the glass ceiling in industries that are dominated by (white) men. But this was not the only way Jackson conceptualized the album. In a 1987 interview on a Miami talk show, the Black male host asks for the source of inspiration behind “What Have You Done For Me Lately,” to which the singer responds, “The entire album is autobiographical. It’s me just putting my feelings on, on record. I wanted to let a lot of women know out there that they weren’t alone, I know they had experienced a lot of things that I have.”⁴ Occurring within the context of what some described as her “feminist mantra,” Jackson’s “just putting my feelings on record” would be a political act, one that did not require a politically explicit message. In this sense, *Control* would be an album of tension, one that attempted to hold (white) feminist narratives of shattering the glass ceiling and Black feminist calls to investigate how institutional racism and sexism affect Black women’s psychic lives.⁵

In addition to existing in this space of tension between neoliberal resilience narratives and Black feminist responses to them, *Control* was also a unique album in the 1980s due to the way it channeled sounds associated with Black masculinity into the sonic Black womanhood presented by Jackson on the album. Through working with her collaborators


⁴ When the host later remarks, “It’s been said that song [“Control”] is your own personal declaration of independence,” he asks Jackson if that’s true. In response, Jackson proclaims, “Well, it is a declaration of independence. But, uh, while I was writing it, I wasn’t trying to declare anything. It, it was just what I was feeling, like I said, just putting my feelings on record” (emphasis mine). See Jarrylfo, [Is there a first name?] [Response: No, that is the YouTube user’s name] *Janet Jackson 1987 Control rare interview*. YouTube (2013). https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CRUUV01AzNA (Accessed 30 December 2019).

on the album and subsequent music videos, Jackson located a feminist affect in this space of tension, one that created something in excess of both Black respectability and the tropes of the hypersexualized Black woman. Pulling from traditions of Black feminism and Black musics, this feminist affect would mobilize a politics of feeling—and extend this affective politics to her audiences through sound and vibration. Teaming up with producers—and Prince collaborators—Jimmy Jam and Terry Lewis, Jackson sought to craft a sound that was unique to her, a sonic Black womanhood that would amplify her lyrical narrations of life as a young Black woman. Where Jam and Lewis experimented with new digital music technologies, such as the Ensoniq Mirage sequencing synthesizer and the LinnDrum drum machine, Jackson pushed herself to sing along with—or even surpass—the intensity level of these machines, combining feminist affect and politics across the album’s nine songs. Moving her body to choreography crafted by Paula Abdul and narrative stories mapped out by director Mary Lambert, Jackson used the music videos for “Nasty” and “Control” to showcase the power of collectivity between women and/or Black people. From hanging out with her girlfriends in “Nasty” to rocking out with Jam and Lewis (as they play keytars) in “Control,” Jackson tapped into a feminist affect via collaboration. Through the sounds and vibrations resulting from these collaborations, Jackson turned her personal stories on Control into a politics of loud, assertive, and emotionally aware Black womanhood.

In the process of linking her feelings with the instruments’ vibrations, Jackson put her own spin on the mantra that the personal is political, making feeling something that could be affectively shared with—and experienced on—the bodies of those listening. Against Reagan era stereotypes of Black women (the welfare queen, the crack mother) and Black respectability, Jackson’s songs created a sound and accompanying vibration in excess of hypervisibility, or the circulation of images of Black criminality and deviance that, upon repetition, propagate the idea that Black people are by nature or essence always already other. By singing along with the abrasiveness and loudness of the synthesizers and drum machines on Control, Jackson’s music tapped into and harnessed sound and vibration, interrupting and then rerouting these reductive visual images of Black people. I term this aurality—and accompanying vibration—that arises in excess of both ocularcentrism and stereotypes of Blackness and Black people hyperaurality. By dedicating each section of this article to Jackson’s visuals, sonics, or movements, I trace the pop star’s use of hyperaurality throughout Control. I also investigate how sight, sound, and feeling work together to create a feminist affect that intervenes in visual and sonic stereotypes. Through unpacking
how Jackson mobilizes the interlinked pieces of hyperaurality, I explore how the pop star channels her songs’ sonic and vibrational excesses to circulate a feminist affect calling her audience to pay more attention to women’s—and especially Black women’s—feelings.

A Vibrational Approach to Visuality, Sound, and Movement

As the point of connection between hyperaurality’s visuals, sounds, and movements, vibration is at the heart of this study. My conceptualization of vibration both pulls from and expands upon recent work in sound, affect, and Black studies. Within the past decade in sound studies, scholars have theorized vibration as a component of sound that, at the same time, exists in excess of it. In his work on sound systems in Jamaican dancehall spaces, Julian Henriques defines sound as “auditory vibrations” ripe for being received on what he describes as “sonic bodies,” or bodies where audition is “distinct from, yet integrated with, the other senses.” In being attuned to what oscillations sound like, sonic bodies are also attuned to how sound feels.9 In his book on sound’s affects, meanwhile, Steve Goodman describes vibration as the “in-between oscillation, the vibration of vibration, the virtuosity of tremble.” Writing in a Deleuzian lineage, Goodman posits that vibration ultimately exists beyond sound, a virtuality that separates subject and object.10 Finally, Nina Eidsheim proposes that vibration disrupts the “figure of sound,” or the assumption that music can be reduced to only what we can hear. Eidsheim asserts that these “tactile, spatial, physical, material, and vibrational sensations” exist within and beyond music.11

While these studies sometimes risk reifying vibration as a new privileged ontological (and isolated) starting point for thinking about music,12 recent work in Black studies mobilizes affect as a means to (re)integrate the senses and explore the racialization and sexualization of the sounds associated with stereotypical images. In her work on sensual excess, Amber Musser proposes that sitting with the surface of fleshiness (versus the “depth” of sound) allows us to best navigate the “complex matrix of race, gender, and sexuality.”13 Musser posits that lingering with the affective excess of Black female fleshiness as surface helps us understand how ideas of selfhood arise in tandem with objectification—and with a plurality of selves.14 In a similar vein, Uri McMillan describes what he calls surface reading as “epistemologies rooted in the body” that break down binaries such as interiority versus exteriority. Concerned that Black studies has become too reliant

14. Ibid., 3—5. Musser additionally unpacks how this emphasis on surface and affect differs from Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari’s notion of becoming-woman, which she contends misses the overlap between race, gender, and sexuality, and buries the affects of Black femininity under the guise of race and gender neutrality.
on the study of sound, McMillan turns to the affects of surface as an entry point for histories—and bodies—that might otherwise be lost. Finally, in her book on listening to images, Tina Campt calls for an attention to visuals’ “lower frequencies.” Through building on Fred Moten’s work on the “sound before the photograph,” Campt grafts a study of vibration onto the study of surface. In the process, she suggests that an attention to images and their lower frequencies ultimately inspires an analysis of the vibrations of frequency—and of history.

My conceptualization of vibration emerges from the intersection of sound and Black studies. On a mechanical level, vibration is both the oscillation of sound waves and the feltness of sound. It is a material force that we experience physically (and sometimes also emotionally) on our bodies at the time of coming into contact with sound. At the same time, vibration is an accompaniment to sound that also lingers in affective excess after the oscillations no longer literally resound. In this vein, vibration is also a feeling that lingers in our bodily and/or emotional memories—and that might prompt us to modify (however so slightly) our movements through the world. Ultimately, vibration influences how we see our world and how we move through the world that the vibration’s affects help us visually to re-imagine. In this sense, vibration takes us back to the surfaces about which Musser and McMillan write. Vibration does not sever us from the trappings of visuality but rather nuances our navigation of an ocularcentric world by adding a renewed attention to hearing and feeling. In the hyperaural plane, vibration accentuates how visuals, sounds, and movements are surfaces that intersect and put us into contact with both the buried histories and future possibilities contained within their materially felt oscillations. In Jackson’s work on Control, vibration is the point of re-imagining sight, sound, and movement. For the remainder of this article, I move from sight to sound to movement. Although all three are interconnected, focusing on the visual, aural, and physical elements of hyperaurality shows how vibration intensifies each of the senses as it accentuates their interrelatedness.

Sight: Visual and Sonic Expansions of the Politics of Respectability

When Janet Jackson released her 1986 breakthrough album, Control, she was already one decade into navigating the intricacies of being Black and female on television. More so, various Black communities were already 25 years into debating the power of images to influence (white) Americans’ ideas about Black people. In 1951, the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People released a bulletin against Amos ‘n’ Andy, stating, “It tends to strengthen the conclusion among uninformed and prejudiced people that Negroes are inferior, lazy, dumb, and dishonest.” Noting that there were no positive

15. Uri McMillan, “Surface, Sensation, Form: Disco, Grace Jones, and the Expressive Black Body,” (University of Texas at Austin), 25 October 2016. [Please supply complete publishing information.] [Response: This was a talk that McMillan gave at the University of Texas at Austin.]


images of Black people to counter those portrayed on *Amos ’n’ Andy*, the NAACP called for the show to be taken off air.¹⁹ In 1972, meanwhile, the Black Caucus, a Democratic group in Congress, issued its report, “The Mass Media and the Black Community.” In their statement, the group declares, “[The media] have not communicated to whites a feeling for the difficulties and frustrations of being a Negro in the United States” (emphasis mine).²⁰ By bemoaning the lack of “a feeling for” the complexities of Black life in post-civil rights America, the Black Caucus recognized the affective power of images on television to (potentially) change white America’s perception of Black people. In both cases, the groups advocated for respectability politics, or what Evelyn Brooks Higginbotham describes as the pressure to “disavow . . . the expressive culture of the ‘folk,’ for example, sexual behavior, dress style, leisure activity, music, speech patterns, and religious worship patterns.” As she notes, this pressure to uplift the race disproportionately fell on Black women, who had to try to embody Black respectability politics in the wake of the sexualization of Black women.²¹

As a young Black girl on television in the late 1970s, Jackson had to navigate this tension between respectability and hypersexuality in the realms of sitcoms and televised musical performances. From her roles as Penny Gordon on *Good Times* to Charlene DuPrey on *Diff ’rent Strokes* to Cleo Hewitt on *Fame*, Jackson was cast as the girl next door—and, in the case of Charlene and Cleo, as someone’s girlfriend. The difficulty of maintaining Black respectability politics as a young Black girl was most apparent in her role as Penny, a young child who is rescued from an abusive single mother and adopted by Wilona Woods (a neighbor to the Evans family on which the show focuses). Often, Jackson’s Penny was juxtaposed with the character Michael Evans (who was played by Ralph Carter), who in Christine Acham’s words expressed a militant response to his family’s focus on Black uplift that starkly contrasted with Penny’s sexual unknowingness that was deemed in need of protection.²² In her televised musical performances with members of the Jackson family, however, Jackson simultaneously embodied the respectable role of the kid sister and illustrated the dangers of the sexual unknowingness blossoming into a sexual awareness. At age seven, Jackson joined one of her brothers onstage to impersonate Groucho Marx and Mae West. After her brother as Marx asks for a kiss, Janet as West responds, “I’ll kiss you when I’m good and ready . . . better make that


²². Christine Acham, *Revolution Televised: Prime Time and the Struggle for Black Power* (Minneapolis and London: University of Minnesota Press, 2004), 130. In an episode titled “Stomach Mumps,” Wilona continuously puts off talking about sex with Penny until she runs to her for help after a friend’s brother tries to force himself on her. With encouragement from Penny’s Aunt Flo (Florida Evans) to tell her about what a “beautiful thing” sex is when saved until marriage, Wilona attempts to shield Penny from being placed into the stereotype of the sexually available Black woman while still a young child. While Penny, like Michael, expresses an alternative to Black respectability, the possibility of her (someday) becoming sexual is ultimately demonized in a way that Michael’s rebellions are not.
bad and ready.”23 As Margo Jefferson notes, Black children on television in the 1970s often vocalized what adults were not themselves willing to express—and “turn[ed] all complications of age, race or sex into pure entertainment.”24 While embodying the tension between respectability and hypersexuality, Jackson also showcased how the conundrum of Black girls growing up too quickly was something to be set to a laugh track.

The impossibility of Black respectability for a young Janet would be best encapsulated in her performance with the Jackson 5 on The Carol Burnett Show in 1975. As the host Burnett is about to begin a duet of Sonny and Cher’s “The Beat Goes On” with Jackson’s brother Randy, an eight-year-old Janet appears and declares, “Uh un, that’s my part!” to a laugh track. After the Jackson sister continues to pester Burnett, the host finally concedes, “Ladies and gentlemen, introducing . . . Sonny and Cher,” as she points towards Randy and then Janet—and introduces them into the lineage of suggestive childhood innocence encapsulated by the Jacksons 5’s Black respectability politics.25 At the same time, Jackson also playacts adults in the act of seduction as she waves around a feather boa as she sings. When she belts out the line “The miniskirts, the current thing, uh huh,” Jackson bats her eyes downward and lifts up the left side of her dress as if she were hiking up a miniskirt in a moment of stereotypical hypersexual Black femaleness. In 1975, even eight-year-old Janet cannot perform in public without being entangled in this policing of Black women’s sexuality as old as America itself—revealing the complexities of attempting to be “respectable” while also Black and female.26 Nevertheless, the Jackson sister gets the final word as she sings, “Yes the beat goes o-o-o-o-on!” Only eleven years into the future, Jackson will harness the power of the beat that affectively goes on—and locate a feminist affect that both eschews respectability politics and contests the stereotypes of Black women as hypersexualized.

Before she could locate this feminist affect, Jackson would have to harness the power of hyperaurality, or what I conceptualize as sounds and vibrations that do work in excess of the representation of visual images. Jackson’s performance on The Carol Burnett show in 1975 would be her first encounter with hyperaurality. As I will demonstrate throughout this article, hyperaurality is both an aurality that exists in excess of (hyper)visible stereotypes of Blackness and that which exists beyond (“hyper”) aurality—in this case the physical vibrations that accompany every production of sound. Because it

26. Higginbotham, “African American Women’s History and the Metalanguage of Race,” 265–64. Higginbotham traces how Black women have been excluded from Western conceptions of respectability even as overall images of women began to change in the sixteenth to nineteenth centuries. More so, she notes how Black women were socially punished for trying to be both Black and respectable at the same time, as if the combination had been deemed utterly impossible.
eludes capture by visual images, hyperaurality functions as a means of intervening in hypervisibility, or what Nicole Fleetwood describes as “processes that produce the overrepresentation of certain images of Blacks and the visual currency of these images in public culture.”27 Through molding and moving herself along with both sound and vibration, Jackson presents a version of herself that exceeds—and thus undermines—the image of the kid sister fashioning herself in the model of her older brothers. When Jackson went into the studio at age 20 to record her third solo LP, Control, in 1986, she would look to break free from this image as a child star to harness the power of hyperaurality to assert her control. At the same time, she also tapped into a long tradition of tradition of Black women seeking to counter images of hypersexuality with their sights, sounds, and vibrations.

From the blues in the 1920s to Motown in the 1960s to disco and funk in the 1970s, Black female singers had long sought to harness the hyperaural potential of (hyper)sexuality into a feminist affect that created alternatives to respectability via sound and vibration. As Angela Davis writes in her study of Gertrude “Ma” Rainey, Bessie Smith, and Billie Holiday, “What gives the blues such fascinating possibilities of sustaining emergent feminist consciousness is the way they often construct seemingly antagonistic relationships as non-contradictory oppositions,” adding that the blues enact an “historical politics of Black sexuality.”28 For Davis, the music of blues women was a site of tension, a place where Black women could locate sexual and affective autonomy within the context of heteropatriarchal romantic relations—and societal structures.29 This tension would take on a new charge in the 1960s, when the Motown Black female trio The Supremes navigated the “crossover” from Black to white (mainstream) audiences. Writing about their performances on The Ed Sullivan Show from 1964 to 1969, Jaap Kooijman traces how The Supremes’ look evolved away from the Motown Charm School standard of respectability over time. Through widening their sound outside of the scope of pop/R&B, The Supremes were, by the end of the 1960s, considered “too commercial and too superficial, or ‘not soulful enough,’”30 the power of their feminist affect of merging the language of the Civil Rights Movement (such as a monologue about Martin Luther King Jr.31) with a “hip” look lost on most critics. In the 1970s, meanwhile, disco diva Donna Summer and funk pioneer Betty Davis created music that combined the promiscuity of 1920s blues women with the social and/or cultural

---

29. Davis notes that Black feminists’ writing on the female artists of yesterday is what first inspired her to write.
31. After the assassination of Martin Luther King Jr. on 5 April 1968, The Supremes incorporated a monologue about Dr. King into their performance of “Somewhere (There Is a Place for Us),” a show tune from West Side Story. In this monologue, Diana Ross declares, "Yes, there’s a place for each of us, where love is a like a passion that burns like a fire. Let our efforts be as determined as that of Dr. Martin Luther King, who had a dream that all God’s children, Black men, white men, Jews, Gentiles, Protestants and Catholics, could join hands and sing that spiritual of old: Free at last, free at last, thank God almighty, free at last." See Kooijman, “From Elegance to Extravaganza,” 12.
awareness of the 1960s Supremes. Releasing what Emily Lordi describes as a trio of “exquisitely raw, libidinous” albums in the 1970s, Davis’s music was banned from radio play as she frankly sang about everything from sadomasochism to racial discrimination. For her 1977 single “I Feel Love,” meanwhile, Summer received harsh criticism for sounding mechanical, emotionless, and not authentically Black for singing along to the first number one single created entirely on an analog synthesizer. As Davis and Summer both illustrated, the line between hyperaurality and hypersexualization was a fine one, the aural and vibrational excesses of singing outside the expectations for Black women one subject to strong pushback from both the white mainstream which set the terms of stereotypes and the Black male critics who helped uphold them.

While walking a fine line, Jackson would attempt to harness a feminist affect to circumnavigate this tension, placing her sexuality within a context of (Black) women asking for what they (collectively) wanted. This was a big change from her first two albums, Janet Jackson and Dream Street, which were released by A&M Records and presented Jackson as a bubblegum pop star who also dabbled in the “adult” genres of disco, synthpop, and R&B. For her third album, Control, the head of the Black music department at A&M Records, Jerry McClain, paired Jackson with producers and Prince collaborators Jimmy Jam and Terry Lewis to help create a sound that was unique to her—and that reflected her experiences as a young woman. Through “just putting my feelings on record,” Jackson sought to channel what Ann Cvetkovich describes as “the felt experience of everyday life,” or how the individual and structural hardships of navigating a white and heteropatriarchal society emotionally and materially feel in and on bodies. Although not explicitly referencing political thought, Jackson’s emotional mantra on Control would recall how some Black feminist writers in the 1980s were finding inspiration in the Black female musical artists of the past. As African American playwright hattie gossett writes in an essay from 1981, “when i go see her [billie holiday] i am gonna ask her if she could give some of us weekly lessons cuz i know some other sisters that want to learn how to use their voices the same way billie did on this record.” For Black

34. In the 1980s, A&M Records invested heavily in R&B acts, going so far as to create a separate Black music department headed by John McClain. In the words of Eric Weisbard, one of McClain’s main jobs was “shepherding Janet Jackson into commercial success comparable to her brother Michael’s.” See Top 40 Democracy: The Rival Mainstreams of American Music (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 2014), 149.
38. hattie gossett, “billie lives! billie lives” in This Bridge Called My Back: Writings by Feminist Women of Color, Cherríe Moraga and Gloria Anzaldúa, eds. (New York: Kitchen Table Women of Color Press, 1981), 111. Four years prior, Combahee River Collective Statement, a group of self-identified Black, socialist, feminist, and lesbian women
women in the 1980s, the blues singers were lessons on how to make their voices heard, a lesson that Jackson would learn her own way.

In simultaneously sharing an individualized narrative of control and seeking collectivity with other (Black) women who “had experienced a lot of the things that I have,” Jackson’s Control would embody a tension between neoliberal resilience and Black feminist solidarity. In her work on pop music within the context of neoliberalism, Robin James warns of the dangers of capitalism’s folding resilience narratives and their accompanying affects back into the projects of profit generation and population management. James expounds,

Resilience discourse thus follows a very specific logic: first, damage is incited and made manifest; second, that damage is spectacularly overcome, and that overcoming is broadcast and/or shared, so that, third, the person who has overcome is rewarded with increased human capital, status, and other forms of recognition and recompense, because: finally, and most importantly, this individual’s own resilience boosts society’s resilience.40

In this quotation, resilience results from an individual recycling damage into a narrative that is culturally and economically profitable. James posits that while such “broadcast” narratives of overcoming are supposed to feel good and inspire others to work through trauma and hardship, what resilience actually reinforces is capitalism’s imperative to accumulate “capital, status, and other forms of recompense”—and to drive individuals to want and desire the same thing. As James also notes, this funneling of resilience narratives through pop music also reifies racism and sexism, as race and gender become “an effect or outcome of one’s response to underlying background conditions.”41 Nevertheless, the possibility of a feminist affect arises in this space where resilience and “the felt experience of everyday life” collide. Rather than trying to (impossibly) exist outside of resilience and neoliberalism, music’s feminist affect instead repurposes stereotypical visuals, sounds, and movements for the project of creating a vibrational excess that escapes (some of) capitalism’s hold on transforming personal narratives into personal—and corporate—profit.42 On song after song on Control, Jackson, Jam, and Lewis would seek to create such a feminist affect, one that could power a nuanced Black womanhood.

41. Ibid., 7, 15.
42. For Jackson, there was pressure from A&M Records to have a commercially successful album after her first two LPs were flops. As for many musical artists in the 1980s, it would be Jackson’s success as a music video star that would help make her a successful recording artist. In this way, having the space to continuously challenge stereotypes of Blackness and femaleness on MTV was contingent on her also being profitable on capitalism’s terms.
This is a story about control
My control
Control of what I say
Control of what I do
And this time I’m gonna do it my way (my way)
I hope you enjoy this as much as I do
Are we ready?
I am
Cause it’s all about control (control)
And I’ve got lots of it

-Intro to “Control”

At the beginning of “Control,” the first song and title track on the album of the same name, Jackson delivers the above monologue over Jam’s synthesizers that sound like electronic wind chimes. Not yet singing, the monologue is a spoken introduction to the theme of the album: control—and how Jackson has “got lots of it.” What Jackson has “control” over is left vague, her “story” seeming that it could be either a familiar feminist narrative of overcoming or a Black woman’s account of getting her voice out into a racist and sexist music industry—or something else entirely. While the exact content of the “story” remains unclear, the affective strength of her collaboration with Jam and Lewis shines through in this moment. Molding her delivery along with the synthesizer sounds, Jackson’s voice ripples with and beyond the constraints of the song, providing a vibration that affectively lingers even as she moves to the next line. After she delivers the last line in the monologue, Jackson momentarily cedes control of the song to Lewis, who enters with a hard-hitting drum machine beat that Jam soon joins by sliding down the keys of his synthesizer. In this moment, the vibrational feel of the instrumentation takes the spotlight. Yes, Jackson is telling a story—but more than anything, she is creating a sound and a feeling that is unique to her. Through her collaboration with Jam and Lewis, Jackson would make Control an album of sonic Black womanhood and feminist affect.

Jackson’s lyrical and affective call for “control” was significant in a historical moment when controlling images of Black women still circulated on television. In Patricia Hill Collins’s formulation, controlling images are stereotypes of Black people that are circulated to keep them in the position of perpetually being other, with Black masculinity and Black femaleness both being coded as hypersexualized.44 In the early 1980s, Vanessa

43. While working with Jam and Lewis in the studio, Jackson played synthesizers and received a co-production credit on the album, a level of involvement in the recording process that was previously unknown to her. See ClassicSoulRadio, Janet Jackson been interviewed by Don Cornelius on Soul Train. YouTube (2012). https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4MFAn-b5Sas (Accessed 30 December 2019). In the music video for “Control,” this collaborative process is put front and center of the performance, such as when Jam and Lewis slide down to the front and center of the stage in sync with a synth slide in the chorus to physically and sonically back Jackson up. See JanetJacksonVEVO, Janet Jackson – Control. YouTube (2009). https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LH8xgDGv7oY (Accessed December 30, 2019).

Williams’s slippage from an American darling to a demonized Black woman demonstrated how no amount of respectability politics could completely eliminate controlling images of Black women. In 1983, Williams, a light-skinned woman from New York, became the first African American to be crowned Miss America. Singing “Happy Days Are Here Again,” a song from the 1930 musical *Chasing Rainbows* (that Franklin Delano Roosevelt adopted as his campaign song at the 1932 Democratic National Convention), Williams won the judges over with her talent and love of America. When Williams was forced to resign her title after news of nude photos that she had taken for *Penthouse* leaked in July 1984, the complexity of trying to make herself sound familiar to white people only to be reduced to the image of a naked Black body became clear. For young Black female celebrities like Williams, the pressure to be markers of simultaneous innocence and sexuality was a tightrope walk waiting to break, a walk that Jackson would seek to control.

While working on *Control*, the creative team sought to craft a sound—and accompanying vibration—for Jackson that did work in excess of controlling images of Black women. As producers, Jam and Lewis signed onto the project because they were interested in helping Jackson develop a new sonic identity for herself. By inviting Jackson to work with them in their hometown, the duo exposed her to the richness of the Minneapolis sound, a synth- and drum machine-driven genre that was most stereotypically associated with Prince—and Black sexuality. In 1986, some saw Prince as a hypersexualized (and possibly queer) figure, as evidenced from an encounter that Jam had with Jackson’s father (and recently fired manager) Joe Jackson while they were recording in the studio. As Jam recounts,

---

hypersexualization in relation to the “hoochie” stereotype, which she ascribes to Black female dancers and models in hip hop music videos.


50. Many people in the mid-1980s associated Prince’s music with his flamboyant physical appearance. Connected with androgyny and sometimes also with queerness, Prince, for many during the Golden Age of the Music Video that was the 1980s, stood in opposition to the pseudo-embrace of Black respectability politics that had made the Jackson 5 so successful and beloved by audiences. See Joseph Vogel, “Freaks in the Reagan Era: James Baldwin, the New Pop Cinema, and the American Ideal of Manhood,” *The Journal of Popular Culture*. 48, no. 3 (2015).
I always remember one thing her dad said. He asked us, “You guys are from Minneapolis?” We responded, “Yes, Mr. Jackson.” He said, “Prince is from Minneapolis.” We responded, “Yes, He is, Mr. Jackson.” He said, “Don’t have my daughter sounding like Prince.” [laughs] 51

By voicing a concern that his daughter might “sound . . . like Prince,” Joe Jackson worried aloud that his daughter would be read as hypersexualized. Between the lines, Joe Jackson feared that his daughter would feel like Prince, i.e. would utilize vibration in a way that worked in excess of the sounds and images of Black respectability—and in excess of various binaries. Meanwhile, this desire for affective excess would be what was so appealing about the Minneapolis sound for the creative team. As former Prince collaborators, Jam and Lewis were familiar with the hyperaural potential of synthesizer and drum machine music—and how it granted Black artists the space to challenge controlling images. While in the studio with Jackson, they would help her harness this hyperaurality to create a sonic Black womanhood—and subsequent feminist affect.

On song after song—and later video after video—on Control, Jackson would emphasize three interconnected aspects of this sonic Black womanhood: digitality, aggressiveness, and loudness. Jackson would tap into this first aspect, digitality, via the digital music technology utilized by the creative team: the LinnDrum, a drum machine released by Linn Electronics in 1982 and the Ensoniq Mirage, a sampler/sequencer workstation released in 1985 and considered a cheaper alternative to the Fairlight CMI or Synclavier. 52 As Jam recalls of the recording process, “We had a bunch of new toys and they added to our inspiration because we were trying to make something sound different and unique for Janet. These sounds have sort of become her trademarks.” 53 With Donna Summer’s “I Feel Love” only nine years in the past, the act of a Black female singer layering her voice atop (analog) synthesizers was not brand new.

What was “new” about Jackson’s sound on Control, however, was how she repurposed sounds and instrumentation typically associated with hip hop and funk. 54 At 0:35 into “Control,” the LinnDrum enters the mix, amplifying the volume of the song—and, soon, Jackson’s vocals. The album begins in this moment of hyperaurality, with Jackson sonically exceeding what is familiar from Black female artists in this moment in time by matching the intensity of her talking voice with the intensity to the aggressiveness of the instrumentation. As Nina Eidsheim observes, the “natural” Black female voice is assumed to be soulful—and to exist a priori to any training. 55 Instead of trying to emulate contemporary Whitney Houston’s soulful voice, Jackson worked with both the digital

51. Williams, “Key Tracks: Jimmy Jam on Janet Jackson’s Control.”
53. Ibid.
54. This was especially true of the Roland TR-808, the drum machine that was produced from 1980 to 1983 yet became a staple sound of hip hop during this era and beyond. See Themba Kriger, “A Brief History: The Roland TR-808 Rhythm Composer,” Red Bull Music Academy (2018). https://www.redbull.com/za-en/History%20of%20The%20Roland%20TR-808%20Rhythm%20Composer (Accessed 30 December 2019).
music technologies and timbral limitations of her voice to give her music a different feeling than the general public expected from a Black woman.56

Through interfacing with the harsh drum machine sounds typically associated with Black masculinity, Jackson additionally mobilized aggressiveness, or the second aspect of her sonic Black womanhood. Reflecting on the album thirty years later, Jam recounts, “[I]t was very aggressive for a female singer. To me, the tracks we did for this record sounded like they could’ve been for a male artist or a rap artist. But we thought that she would have the attitude to pull those kinds of songs off. And we were right.”57 These words from Jam recall how Robin James theorizes that embracing Black masculine sounds and vocal delivery enables Black female pop stars to create alternatives to resilient narratives of overcoming.58 On Control, Jackson maps her declarations onto the “aggressive” instrumentation. To the sounds of a forceful drum machine beat on “What Have You Done For Me Lately,” she loudly declares, “I never ask for more than I deserve.” On “The Pleasure Principle,” meanwhile, Jackson states, “I’m not here to feed your insecurities” over the sounds of a funky synth bass line. Through repurposing sounds typically associated with Black (hyper)masculinity, Jackson emits a feminist affect from a space of tension between resilience narratives and hypersexualized images of Black women. By using the hyperaural excesses of this tension, Jackson embraces sonic aggressiveness.

Through molding her vocals with the digital music technology, Jackson additionally embraced loudness, or the third aspect of her sonic Black womanhood. Taking a leaf out of Prince’s book, Jackson, Jam, and Lewis went for pure loudness when recording and mixing Control. Jam recounts how the sound ended up being even louder than anticipated:

[W]e recorded everything in the red . . . [The tape machine] was actually six DB’s [decibels] louder than what the meter was showing. When we recorded the album, we were recording at a +6 and we were totally in the red, so at that point, it was a +12. We were totally doing it wrong.59

The extent of the sonic excess of the album was the result of tape saturation, or a “giant mixture of barely audible distortion” that creates an analog warmth.60 A result of distortion on the recording tape, the increased volume of the recording simultaneously increased the intensity of the vibrations from all the bass—from the drum machines, synthesizers, and bass guitars. On the songs on Control, Jackson’s vocals are literally amplified by this distortion. This would be another moment of feminist affect, of a generative tension

---

56. In this way, Jackson would work as a complication of bell hooks’s observation in her early 1990s essay about Madonna that “the vast majority of Black women in the United States, more concerned with projecting images of respectability than with the idea of female sexual agency and transgression, do not often feel we have of female sexual agency and transgression, do not often feel we have the ‘freedom’ to act in rebellious ways in regards to sexuality without being punished.” See bell hooks, “Madonna: Plantation Mistress or Soul Sister?” in Black Looks: Race and Representation (Boston: South End Press, 1992), 160.
57. Williams, “Key Tracks: Jimmy Jam on Janet Jackson’s Control.”
58. James expounds that by refusing to recycle their damage into profit, Black female pop stars also refuse respectability politics. See James, Resilience & Melancholy, 155–58.
59. Ibid.
between resilience narratives and Black and feminist collective possibilities. On the one hand, Jackson was raising her voice to attempt to break the glass ceiling (in the music industry), reinforcing the emphasis on career and individuality of resilience feminism. On the other hand, Jackson was adding her voice as a Black woman to the cultural mix, as Black feminists were doing in various anthologies in the 1980s. From this space of tension, Jackson would channel the songs’ hyperaurality into feminist affect.

In the music videos for *Control*, Jackson would illustrate how a feminist affect could unfold in life away from the studio. Although a visual genre on the surface, Jackson used the six music videos she made for *Control* to (re)introduce her audience to variants of her sound: assertive and confident vocals, pulsating drum machine beats, accenting synthesizer notes and chords. Her music videos became repositories not only for sounds, but also for vibrations, for ideas about how bodies might move with—or be moved by—those material oscillations from music technology’s sound waves. As a medium utilized to increase record sales, her videos would be yet another space where neoliberal resilience and feminist collectivity would collide; more specifically, they would illustrate how navigating racism and sexism as a young Black woman is an ongoing project, one where moments of supposed overcoming are followed by new instances of oppression to traverse. Using sound to map her dance moves within the visuality of her music videos, Jackson foregrounded the listening aspect of watching (music videos) as a means of rethinking movement. It was not just that sound’s vibrations could compel bodies into moving differently. Rather, it was that vibration could inspire people to feel differently—and to move their senses of sight and sound in accordance with these felt acknowledgments of Blackness and femaleness. In visualizing the sounds and vibrations of cross-racial feminist collectivity in the music video for “Nasty,” Jackson would accentuate the role that the movements that sound’s vibrations inspire have in transmitting and circulating a feminist affect.

**Movement: Affective Interweavings of Timbre, Vibration, and Dance**

In Jackson’s music videos, dance worked as a visualization of the song’s hyperaural vibrations—and as a display of what a feminist affect might look in everyday movements in life. While developing the six music videos for *Control*, Jackson’s creative team grew to include multiple people specializing in visuals and movements: music video director Mary Lambert and dancer and choreographer Paula Abdul. Both women were critical to cultivating Jackson’s music video presence. As the director behind Madonna’s “Borderline,” “Like A Virgin,” and “Material Girl” in the mid-1980s, Lambert was well-versed in using the medium of the music video to interweave sound and movement

---

61. See Gloria T. Hull, Patricia Bell Scott, and Barbara Smith, eds., *All the Women Are White, All the Blacks Are Men, But Some of Us Are Brave: Black Women’s Studies* (New York: The Feminist Press, 1982); Cherrie Moraga and Gloria Anzaldúa, *This Bridge Called My Back: Writings by Radical Women of Color*, 2nd ed. (New York: Kitchen Table: Women of Color Press, 1983). In both anthologies, multiple authors write essays about musicians (such as hattie gossett’s essay on Billie Holiday in *Bridge*), suggesting that music can be a source of feminism.

into expressions of assertive female sexuality. She was also, like Jam and Lewis, attuned to Jackson’s desire to find control—and therefore a fitting choice for directing the videos for “Control” and “Nasty.” As Lambert recounted in an interview, “[Janet] is really driven to be—I don’t want to say better than Michael—but to create her own image... And [Control] was a time of independence and growth for her.”63 With Lambert’s video editing, Jackson would harness hyperaurality to create her own sonic and affective image that landed somewhere between the Jackson 5’s respectability and controlling images’ hypersexuality. In this way, Jackson would demonstrate how an embodiment of sound and its vibration could affectively interrupt static notions of Blackness and femaleness.64

As the choreographer for “Nasty,” Paula Abdul helped Jackson locate the movements for her feminist affect. After “Nasty,” these dance moves that would become just as associated with Janet Jackson in the 1980s as the “sound” that Jam and Lewis co-created with her. Similar to Lambert, Abdul recognized the high stakes for the moving images in Jackson’s music video:

I felt like I had a chance to create something really big for [Jackson]... You don’t hear “Nasty” and go, “Oh, this is a dance jam.” It was a very different kind of song, kind of like how “Straight Up” was for me: This could define an artist completely, and I wanted to create something that would be signature for her but also define her as being in charge.65

As an artist who was herself on the rise in the mid-1980s, Abdul acutely understood Jackson’s desire to use music to be “in charge”—and not have the entirety of her success attributed to the Jackson brothers. After appearing in the musical film Junior High School in 1978, Abdul was selected as a dancer for the Lakers Girls in 1982 and soon became head choreographer. Her time with the L.A. Lakers would give her practice in leaving her mark in a predominantly white-owned industry (the National Basketball Association) that profited from the hypersexualization of Black men through seeking out the spaces of affective excess. As Abdul recounts of her time with the Lakers Girls, “It was the perfect outlet to just experiment with different ideas that I had,”66 a place for her to begin to synthesize her love for jazz dance (especially Bob Fosse) and contemporary dance into her own unique style.67 Abdul was soon approached by the Jacksons to choreograph one of their music videos, followed by Janet Jackson’s rep at A&M records.68 Through working with (Janet) Jackson, Abdul was able to cultivate “the Paula Abdul [thing], the really hot

63. Hilburn, “Janet Jackson Finally Learns to Say ‘I.’”
66. Ibid.
67. Parker, “Paula Abdul’s Favorite Choreography Moments.”
snappy thing,” a “thing” that Jackson would incorporate as a component of her feminist
affect. Through working with Abdul, Jackson came to move along with—or at times
asymmetrically to—the sonic and vibrational excess of hyperaurality, using dance as yet
another way to assert control as she navigated everyday instances of racism and sexism in
her videos.

Jackson’s collaboration with Abdul and Lambert on the music video for “Nasty,” the
second single from Control, highlights how dance and image can amplify the affects of
a sonic Black womanhood. But before she can harness the power of hyperaurality in the
music video, she must first navigate a familiar scene of harassment. At the beginning of
the music video for “Nasty,” a drum machine beat on loop sets the stage for the encounter
with sexism and racism that is to come. The first visual of the video, the word “NASTY”
written out in black letters against the white neon lights of a movie theater sign, mimics
the swiftness of microaggression as it flashes in and out with the first drum beat. After
zooming out to a shot of the movie theater entrance, the lens moves inside to a frame of
Jackson walking past a group of Black, Latino, and ethnic white men harassing her. As in
the music video for “Control,” Jackson exudes a reserved and androgynous yet feminine
sexiness through rocking yet another black jacket with big shoulder pads, big hair, flowing
jewelry, and light makeup. “Mmm, you’re coming with me,” one man lewdly jeers before
Jackson reaches the Black movie theater usher—who ogles her breasts with his flashlight.
Jackson, her Black female friend, and her white-passing female friend (Paula Abdul) all
stare the usher down as they continue to move inside the theater and sit down. While
Jackson and her friends are clearly frustrated, what is salient about this scene is the
spectacular ordinariness of it all. The scene is an example of what Robin James calls
multi-racial white supremacist patriarchy (MRWaSP), where Black men are enfolded into
the project of reinforcing racism and sexism. In other words, these are the men who
Jackson is supposed to overcome via resilience. In this vein, the movements of Jackson
and her friends seem practiced, as if they’re already been through such sexist and racist
encounters may times before.

As Jackson and her friends move inside the movie theater, the pop star keeps her ear
on the beat, waiting for the moment to tap into the sounds and vibrations—and release
a feminist affect. Initially, even the supposed escape of the theater offers Jackson and her
friends no respite. The harsh sounds of the men’s harassment continue even once they are
inside, the looping drum machine beat the fuel for their sustained taunting. More so,
these sounds are racialized, as the absence of Anglo whiteness in the scene casts racism as
the domain of men of color. “I know you want me,” one man says as another proclaims,
“You’re the finest thing I’ve ever seen.” Even after Jackson pushes her harasser’s hand
away, another one dares to ask, “Whatcha doing after the movie?” Finally, Jackson gets
up, turns around to the group of leering men, and yells, “Stop!” All sounds from both the

com/watch?v=uMQVzVRzo_a (Accessed 30 December 2019).
movie and the song drop out as audible gasps fill the air. In this moment, Jackson breaks the men’s reliance on the drum machine beat—and prepares to repurpose it for herself. Through connecting to the digitality, aggressiveness, and loudness of the drum machine’s vibrations, Jackson begins to affectively reroute the encounter—and to reveal the relational dynamics and origin points lurking behind MRWaSP.

After yelling, “Gimme a beat!,” Jackson moves with the next LinnDrum beat to kick off both the song and her sonic Black womanhood. Throughout the video, these sounds are closely intertwined with her movements. As the drum machine beat picks up in volume, Jackson begins to move with it—and push back on the harassment from the men in the movie theater. Beginning in a classic jazz pose with her right arm raised in the air and her weight leaning on her right leg, Jackson quickly reverses her arms before falling into a halfway jazz split. Throwing her left arm to the ground, Jackson forcefully cocks her head up before moving through a series of poses that start and stop along with the drum machine beat. Using her body and its movements, Jackson gains control of the scene in this space where the sounds and vibrations affectively exceed the men’s harassment. Jackson continues to dance until a slide down the keys of the Ensoniq Mirage from the recorded track prompts her to do a backflip. As she lands on her feet, she breaks through the green screen and lands in the film, accompanied by male dancers. With some staccato playing on the keyboard, Jackson and her male dancer entourage quickly scissor their feet in sync with the key switches before transitioning into a pirouette, or the ballet move of turning in one spot. Unlike in the movie theater, the men move along to her beat. In the compressed temporality of the music video, Jackson uses movement to reroute—and then begin to transform—the objectification of Black women as conduits of sexual (and also menial) labor into a source of personal power in under a minute’s time. Through affectively seizing control of the moment through dance and singing, Jackson accentuates the complexity of her Black female person: assertive, sexual, and virtuosic—and between respectability and hypersexuality.

For her movements, Jackson taps into jazz and hip hop dance to accentuate the racialized aspects of this feminist affect. In the portion before the backflip, Jackson draws from jazz dance, a genre known for its emotional expressivity.72 To choreography that Abdul described as “things that are like reaching, hitting hard angles with lots of isolations, movements and things like that that just really hit the body at different angles,”73 Jackson performs these hard-hitting reaches in sync with the intensity of the drum machines. As a result, Jackson enacts a complex Black femaleness in tandem with the beat, bringing Blackness and femaleness to a genre of dance often associated with (feminine) white men.74 Once Jackson backflips into the movie’s street set, however, she begins to embody hip hop dance. As her body postures become sterner, she moves with the synthesizer instead of the drum machine, such as when Jackson does the snake as she

72. Parker, “Paula Abdul’s Favorite Choreography Moments.”
73. JSteedfast, Paula Abdul - Choreography Interview (1989).
74. For example, Bob Fosse is often the first person that comes to mind when some or many think about jazz dance.
tightens up and then slithers her shoulders. Through embracing the Black masculinity of hip hop dance, Jackson mobilizes what Thomas DeFrantz names a “dynamic amalgamation of pleasure and critique.” Through combining a type of dance associated with whiteness, virtuosity, and femininity (jazz) with one associated with Blackness, “the street,” and masculinity (hip hop), Jackson crafts a feminist affect that both touches down in Black musical and dance traditions and critiques the hierarchies of dance and sound that foreground whiteness and maleness. By presenting feminist affect as a body movement that can be learned through practicing along with her music video, Jackson invites her audience to move through the world in a different way with her.

In moving with the feminist affects of the song’s vibrations, Jackson puts pressure on the supposed staticness of stereotypical gender roles. The hyperaural moments in the video, where sound exceeds image (and vibration exceeds both), highlight how identity is formed away from the space of pop music and the music video set: in a context of relationality, with push and pull, and to the vibrations circulating between us. During the vibrational intensity that is the song’s bridge, one of the male dancers engages in a familiar courting scene with Jackson. Pulling up in his car, he opens the door for Jackson and then takes her for a ride. As the synthesizers and drum machines climb to their highest volumes in the song, Jackson pushes her vocal timbre as far as it can go. When she sings, “So close the door if you want me to respond,” she delivers the line in her most stereotypically sensual voice so far. After it seems like Jackson is about to go home with her suitor, she suddenly cuts off her singing and resorts to talking. When Jackson declares “No my name ain’t baby” as she gets out of the car, she is practically yelling. It is not only her voice but also her breaking her delivery away from the realm of singing (by yelling) that shakes up both endpoints of the stereotypes of Blackness (respectability and hyper-sexuality) grounded in the realm of visuality. During the bridge, Jackson sounds off the revelation that what seems “real” in terms of gender and race is where discursive forces impose a cutoff point in the everyday film of people’s day-to day lives, pressuring them to align themselves with roles predefined by hypervisibility, such as the hypersexual and sexually available—or sexually closed off—Black woman. Together, her movements and her voice affectively make this critique.

The closing moments of the video accentuate how Jackson interweaves her hyperaural vocal timbre with the song’s digital music technology to both reroute assumptions about Black voices (and the Black bodies that produce them) and transmit a feminist affect. As the aggressive drum machine clashes return yet again to the sonic forefront, Jackson proclaims in a low yet strong voice, “I like this part.” The scene switches to Jackson on top of a pyramid of male dancers, where she screams, “Who’s that thinking nasty thoughts?” In sync with her yelling “thinking” and “thoughts,” the staccato synth chords punctuate her vocals. Jackson is not singing in this moment; she is making a declaration. As a group of white men in trench coats appear in the video for the first time, Jackson

exposes the original source of multi-racial white supremacist patriarchy. Mouthing “nasty boys” along with the male dancers as the pyramid falls, Jackson remains on top. She repeats this “Who’s that thinking nasty . . .” line of inquiry three more times before calling out “Ladies!” As she sings “Nasty boys” with her two female friends at the movie theater, Jackson tightens her face and struts out towards the green screen as she adds, “Don’t mean a thing.” After the trio, now dancing on the movie theater stage, sing “Oh, you nasty boys,” they turn around to find the men trapped behind the green screen. It is the voices of Jackson, and her one Black female and one white passing female friend, who have the final say. Jackson’s vocal timbre, which moves from whispering to screaming to singing, provides the cutoff point for this scene. And the synthesizer sounds and drum machines both accentuate and forward that moment of cutting off. The technology of her voice (as something able to be molded and create an interruption) melds with the technology of the song (the digital synthesizers and drum machines) to create a hyperaural and feminist affect that inspires movement through the multiplicities of both Blackness and femaleness.

Conclusion: A Musical Lineage of Feminist Affect

In the late 1980s and 1990s, Janet Jackson would release three more albums using sound and vibration to explore the intersections of Blackness and femaleness in her lived experiences: Janet Jackson’s Rhythm Nation 1814 (1989), janet. (1993), and The Velvet Rope (1997). From exploring the state of the world in Ronald Reagan’s America to the politics of being an African American woman to the interiority of Black women’s sexual and emotional experiences, Jackson and her creative team would continue to utilize digital synthesizers and drum machines to craft and circulate a feminist affect. While Jackson was recently (finally) inducted into the Rock ‘n’ Roll Hall of Fame on account her catchy songs and virtuosic dance moves, I have argued in this article that we also credit Jackson for bringing a feminist affect to pop music—one with the power to leave a lasting imprint on people’s lives even once the music has ostensibly ended.

A decade following the release of Control, a young Beyoncé Knowles began to reach towards grabbing the torch from Jackson when Destiny’s Child released their debut album in 1997. Although it would take Beyoncé another 15 years before appearing at the MTV Video Music Awards with the word “FEMINIST” emblazoned behind her in giant white letters in 2014, one cannot help tracing the points of overlap between Jackson’s and Beyoncé’s musical journeys. When Beyoncé released her self-titled album in 2013 that inspired her 2014 VMAs performance, she and her creative team incorporated vibrationally powerful synthesizers and drum machines in a way her music never had up until that point. Through singing with and against the digital music technology, Beyoncé, too, ultimately declared, “Yes, I’m a feminist.”

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I thank the journal editors for including my work and the anonymous reviewers for generous feedback that made the article stronger. I am also thankful to Dan DiPiero for
reading multiple drafts of the article and Dana Venerable for helping me sharpen the
dance analysis. Finally, I am grateful to Ann Cvetkovich, Shirley Thompson, Stephen
Marshall, and Matt Sakakeeny for reading early versions of the work and Ayanna Dozier,
Linde Murugan, and Alyx Vesey for many illuminating conversations about Janet Jackson
and pop music in general.

WORKS CITED

www.redbull.com/za-en/History%20of%20The%20Roland%20TR-
808%20Rhythm%20Composer.

Acham, Christine. Revolution Televised: Prime Time and the Struggle for Black Power. Minneapolis


https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=phTFAdSzNXQ.


Capetola, Christine. ““Starting Something: Synthesizers and Old/New Orientations in Michael
Jackson’s 'Billie Jean.’” Souls: A Journal of Critical Politics, Culture, and Society. 21, no. 1

www.youtube.com/watch?v=4MFAn-jBSas.

Coleman, Robert M. Means. “African Americans and Broadcasting.” In A Companion to the History


Cvetkovich, Ann. An Archive of Feelings: Trauma, Sexuality, and Lesbian Public Culture. Durham,


v=w4do3sLFVq_e.

Davis, Angela Y. Blues Legacies and Black Feminism: Gertrude "Ma" Rainey, Bessie Smith, and Billie


DeFrantz, Thomas F. “The Black Beat Made Visible: Hip Hop Dance and Body Power.” In Of The


Eidsheim, Nina Sun. Sensing Sound: Singing & Listening as Vibrational Practice. Durham, NC, and

———. “Synthesizing Race: Towards an Analysis of Performativity of Vocal Timbre.” Trans no. 13
(2009).

Fleetwood, Nicole. Troubling Vision: Performance, Visuality, and Blackness. Chicago and London:
The University of Chicago Press, 2011.

Gabler, Jay. "‘Prince Shaped Minneapolis’: Symposium Panel Explores Prince’s Pivotal Impact.” Local
blog.thecurrent.org/2018/04/prince-shaped-minneapolis-symposium-panel-explores-princes-
pivotal-impact/.


Hull, Gloria T., Patricia Bell Scott, and Barbara Smith, eds. All the Women Are White, All the Blacks Are Men, But Some of Us Are Brave: Black Women’s Studies. New York: The Feminist Press, 1982.


jarrylfo. Janet Jackson 1987 Control Rare Interview, 2013. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CRUVU1AzNA.


Kooijman, Jaap. “From Elegance to Extravaganza: The Supremes on The Ed Sullivan Show as a Presentation of Beauty.” The Velvet Light Trap 49, 2002, 4-17


McMillan, Uri. “Surface, Sensation, Form: Disco, Grace Jones, and the Expressive Black Body.” University of Texas at Austin, 25 October 2016. [Please give complete publishing information.]


