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"The People Inside My Head, Too": Madness, Black Womanhood, and the Radical Performance of Lauryn Hill

Hill and Horizon

Heralded by a hip hop beat, crooning love songs and rally cries, beaming black pride, and clamoring womanist wisdom, Lauryn Hill scaled the treacherous summit of global pop stardom in the late 1990s.[1] Already famed as the lone female member of popular hip hop trio the Fugees, Hill released a solo debut album in 1998 that poignantly proved her creative and commercial viability apart from her bandmates. *The Miseducation of Lauryn Hill*—a masterpiece of message-heavy hip hop infused with rhythm and blues, reggae, gospel, and an occasional rock guitar—burst upon the international music market and swiftly became one of the most acclaimed and mega-selling hip hop albums in history.[2] Atop that peak, Hill was hailed as musical genius and pop-culture prophetess.[3]

Just three years later, Hill fell from the favor of the mainstream market and—to have many media pundits and mainstream consumers tell it—veered across the proverbially thin line that separates genius from madness or prophecy from lunacy.[4] There, she was promptly and widely assailed as madwoman. Remarkably, though, whether pundits and publics impute to Hill the supposedly sublime intellect of a genius, the purportedly divine discernment of a prophetess, or later, the madwoman's radical oddity—they consistently set her apart from psychic and epistemic normativity. Not merely object, but also outspoken subject and agent of these ascriptions, Hill herself has pondered her plight in the context of "how the world treats its prophets" (qtd. in Grunitzky), has announced "I'm crazy" (Hill, "Outro"), and has willfully, strategically manifested each persona in this trio of epistemic alterity. Hill repeatedly locates herself at a distance from most of humankind, traversing mental horizons where few others tread. To have her tell it, "I was never normal" (qtd. in Grunitzky).

Notwithstanding the significance of Hill's black womanly command of "genius" and "prophecy" within racist/sexist pop cultures and public spheres in America, I turn my attention to the controversial case of her craziness.[5] After all, to embrace madness is risky business for a black woman musician operating within those racist/sexist milieus, where black womanhood is double-crossed by myths of female hysteria and myths of black savagery and subrationality.[6] Confronting this conundrum, this essay explores how pop-cultural imaginaries impute madness to Hill. Most significantly, this essay illuminates how Hill herself produces, claims, and instrumentalizes madness for radical art-making and self-making. Her voice tuned to a mad pitch, Lauryn Hill sings truth to power with a sound that sometimes booms and sometimes sputters.

In the pages that follow, I chart Hill's career after she allegedly crossed that fine line. I carefully watch and listen for madness within her musical performances, especially her 2001 *MTV Unplugged No. 2.0* concert; I examine a number of interviews

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and interludes wherein she explains her mad art and conduct; and I analyze narrative and photographic portraits of Hill published in mainstream media and touted as evidence of a mind askew. Among the specific phenomena I ponder are Hill's commiserations with, in her own words, "the people inside [her] head" (Hill, "Intro"); her self-avowed emotional instability (Hill, "Interlude 3") and derangement (Hill, "Outro"); her eruptions and breakdowns on stage; her voice, described as "malicious, inarticulate rasp" (Harvilla) and "rambling" (Tyrangiel 70) by pundits; her allegedly outrageous and "monstrous" (Jean qtd. in Hiatt 30) conduct; her eccentric "bag lady" (Hildebrand) attire; and, by her own admission, her "crazy" countercultural praxis (Hill qtd. in Hardy). All of these examples can be indexed within a rubric of madness I presently propose.

Any critical theory of madness in modernity and postmodernity must pivot upon two truths: On one hand, "madness" is both a floating and wildly flitting signifier. On the other, the phenomenon of madness entails lived experiences that demand critical, ethical attention. With these exigencies in mind, I forward a provisional and operational theory of madness: provisional, because it is not intended as a totalizing account, but rather announces its status as inevitably incomplete; operational, because it effectively circumscribes madness as an object that may be held (slippery though it may be) up to light for sustained gaze.

I contend that madness entails four overlapping entities in the modern and postmodern West. First is *phenomenal madness*: a severe unwieldiness or chaos of mind—producing fundamental crises of perception, emotion, meaning, and selfhood—as experienced in the consciousness of the "mad" subject. Second is *clinical madness*: an informal shorthand for any range of psychotic, psychopathic, or severely neurotic disorders (as diagnosed or misdiagnosed by clinicians) that may or may not coincide with phenomenal madness. Third, madness as *anger*: an affective state of intense and aggressive displeasure (which is surely phenomenal, but is here set apart for its analytic specificity).

Fourth, and most capacious of these categories, is *psychosocial alterity*: radical divergence from the "normal" within a given psychosocial context. This iteration of madness functions as variable foil to normative notions of reason and order. Indeed, any person, idea, or behavior that perplexes and vexes dominant psychosocial logics is vulnerable to the ascription of "crazy." In this fourth category, madness is less a measure of a "mad" mind than it is an index of the limits of a "reasonable" majority in processing radical difference.[7]

Using this rubric, I suggest that Hill has evoked phenomenal, clinical, and psychosocial madness, and "black rage" in her performances since 2001. In elaborating this claim, I frequently read against the grain of dominant pop-cultural punditry concerning Hill: I read for ideology and philosophy where others have examined only for symptomology and pathology. I seek insurgent praxis where others have found only unseemly misbehavior. I find poignant message where others have discerned only incoherence. Throughout, I recognize that philosophy can come from pathology, insurgent praxis through misbehavior, and message from within mess. Throughout this essay, in fact, I exercise an ethic and hermeneutic that performance theorist David Román calls "critical generosity." That is, I interpret Hill's work generously, sympathetically, and optimistically—often weighting political resonance over formal aesthetic considerations—in order to highlight its counterhegemonic efficacy. Although it is sometimes solipsistic and occasionally oblique, Hill's mad praxis is robust with black feminist, Afro-affirmative, antiracist, and populist verve. Ultimately, a critical meditation upon Hill's life and work yields rich insights on madness, black womanhood, performance, and protest in American popular culture.

Rather than recite a generic synopsis of Hill's career, I want to locate her œuvre within three pertinent genealogies of black American performance. First, Hill stands within a lineage of twentieth- and twenty-first-century African American popular female performers whose spectacular talent is shadowed and sometimes overshadowed by spectacular suffering.[8] These women's public pain—evinced in widely publicized personal traumas which seem to bear out heartbroken love songs—captivates popular imaginations as much as it does their performance prowess itself. Billie Holiday, Nina Simone, Whitney Houston, and Mary J. Blige have inhabited this black-woman-in-pain persona, as Hill has, especially since her *Unplugged* phase.[9] When such traumas are narrated in songs or interviews, they might educate popular audiences to peculiar perils confronting black American womanhood in racist/sexist cultural spheres. However, the pornotropic mass-circulation of the figure of black-woman-in-pain perpetuates what cultural theorist Saidiya Hartman calls "the spectacular character of black suffering" (3).[10] This process coarsens audiences to the lived reality of such pain, romanticizes and aestheticizes that pain, invites audiences' narcissistic projections onto it, and fetishizes it for voyeuristic consumption.[11]

Second, Hill is a practitioner of "conscious" hip hop, a highly politicized subgenre often entailing progressive social commentary and calls to radical action. Black pride, black nationalism, antiracism, feminism, and womanism are among the world-views frequently articulated in conscious hip hop.[12] Hill is preceded in this tradition by such musicians as Public Enemy, Sister Souljah, KRS-One, Queen Latifah, and Black Star. In the mid-to-late 1990s, conscious hip hop contended with increasing commercialization of the broader genre and growing market demand for depictions of crude materialism, spectacular hypersexuality, and black intraracial violence. *Miseducation* eschewed those hegemonic market values and maintained a generally progressive message that incorporated black pride, feminist ethics, and populist solidarity with poor and working-class people. Throughout, the album contained enough crossover pop appeal (and enough neoliberal messages about personal responsibility and respectability) to achieve mainstream success.

During and beyond her *Unplugged* incarnation, Hill belongs within a third trajectory of black performance. She is among a cohort of African American popular performers since the twentieth century who have mobilized "madness" as method and metaphor in art-making, self-making, and world-making. Along with Hill, this group includes Thelonious Monk, Charles Mingus, Sun Ra, Nina Simone, Richard Pryor, and Dave Chappelle, among others. Like Hill, each ignited controversy; each decisively shifted the paradigm in his or her field of performance; and each famously consorted with madness.[13]

Remarkably, the conjunction of madness and art, both symbolic and lived, has captivated the Eurocentric Western canon from Aristotle to Shakespeare, from Nietzsche to Poe.[14] Residing at this juncture, the figures of the mad genius and tormented artist are stock characters in the dramas of modernity and postmodernity. Significantly, the intersection of madness and art is especially charged when inhabited by African-descended subjects. Under colonial, slavocratic, and white-supremacist regimes, African-descended people have been consistently coded as savage, mentally defective, psychically unsound, always already, or almost mad.[15] Contemporary African American artists must contend with—and must also be able to draw from—an enduring set of cultural associations of blackness and madness imbricated with those generic associations of genius and madness.

From these panoramic views of black popular performance, I zoom back in upon several key moments in Hill's individual trajectory. She gained global celebrity with the Fugees' 1996 breakthrough sophomore album, *The Score*. *Miseducation* set a record for the highest first-week sales for a solo female debut in the history of the American Billboard Chart (Gundersen 1D), another for the most Grammy wins in a

single year for any female artist, and another as the first hip hop album in the Recording Academy's history to win its highest honor, Album of the Year (Grammy.com). *Spin*, *Rolling Stone*, and *Time* all named *Miseducation* the Best Album of 1998 in 2003 ("Spin Albums"; "Rolling Stone"; "Best of Music" 84); VH1 ranked it the Thirty-Seventh Greatest Album Ever (Hoye 94-95); and in 2008, *Entertainment Weekly* deemed *Miseducation* the Second Best Album of the preceding twenty-five years (Geier 14). As of 2011, the album had sold approximately nineteen million units worldwide (Gale).

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Describing Hill's *Miseducation* incarnation, the *Village Voice* proclaimed: "She's almost forbiddingly perfect, but so thanks-to-god about it that it's impossible to begrudge her" (Michel); the *New York Times* proclaimed Hill to be a "visionary" who issued "a prophet's voice" and crafted a "miraculous" album (Powers); *Essence* retrospectively anointed Hill "the hope of hip-hop, pure and simple" (Morgan 156); *The Source* crowned her "the flyest MC ever" (qtd. in Farley 70); and *Time* gushed, "[l]isten to her voice and hear a new world" ("Best of Music" 84). Hill was charismatic, gracious, intelligent, lyrically and vocally impressive, and praised for her brown-skinned, dreadlocked beauty in a mainstream that tends to prefer Eurocentric looks. Furthermore, she was the conscience of millennial hip hop: genius, prophetess, and exemplary race-woman.

Within three years of *Miseducation*'s release, Hill would allegedly snap, would supposedly transition from genius to madness, from prophetess to madwoman. She would leap—or else stumble, depending upon who tells it—into the psychospiritual drama below.

The Voices

I had to work through that voice telling me, "People don't want to hear that. You ain't got no beat. Who do you think you are, playing that guitar?" I had to talk back to that voice and say, "You know what? Just because I have a guitar, it doesn't mean that changes me. I still rhyme, I still sing." —Lauryn Hill in Sway, "Lauryn Hill: Redemption Song" (2001)

[speaks:] This is what that voice in your head says when you try to get peace of mind . . . [sings:] I gotta find peace of mind. . . . —Lauryn Hill, "I Gotta Find Peace of Mind" (2001)

You do have to do something with the insecurity, ghosts and demons that have been programmed in us for centuries. You have to master the voices. . . . —Lauryn Hill in Joan Morgan, "They Call Me Ms. Hill" (2006)

On July 21, 2001—nearly three years after that auspicious solo debut, and following a year-long sojourn from national media spotlights—Lauryn Hill recorded her second solo LP, the acoustic *Unplugged No. 2.0*, before a live audience at MTV's Times Square studios. Released as both audio album and concert DVD, *Unplugged* unveiled a dramatically transformed Hill: she had shorn her trademark voluminous locks, abandoned her pristine vocal and visual presentation, removed that "forbiddingly perfect" armor, dismissed a massive entourage, emphatically repudiated her former persona, and picked up a new set of accoutrements: a guitar, a stool, a frequently hoarse voice, solitude on stage, a proclivity for self-deprecation,

a radical critique of celebrity culture, spectacular sorrow, and by many accounts—including her own—craziness. Stories of staggering heartbreak, profound disillusionment with fame, rage at allegations of intellectual theft leveled against her, spiritual revelation, and a nervous breakdown variously circulate as explanations for Hill's metamorphosis.[16]

The resulting live album contains thirteen songs (eleven are original compositions, while two are covers), an expository "Intro," an expository "Outro," and seven interludes. Hill is the sole performer, and the only instruments heard are her voice and her guitar. Presenting a more radical world-view than *Miseducation*, *Unplugged*'s songs and interludes address a range of personal and structural issues, including racial injustice, capitalist exploitation, political corruption, intimate partner abuse, police brutality, neocolonialism, organized rebellion, mental health, and madness. Indeed, madness is a recurring motif and modality of *Unplugged 2.0*, manifesting most dramatically on four occasions: the "Intro," "Interlude 3," a nine-minute song entitled "I Gotta Find Peace of Mind," and the "Outro," each of which I examine at length.

Within two minutes of her arrival on stage, during the "Intro" that precedes her first song, Hill inquires, "You guys are cool?" When an affirmative murmur comes from the crowd, she responds "I'm talking to the people in my head, too." Hill and her studio audience—and maybe the people in her head, too—chuckle together. Tellingly, in a 2002 *Essence* article entitled "Looking for Lauryn," poet and novelist Pearl Cleage recounts a similar exchange during a 2002 performance in Atlanta, Georgia. Cleage narrates, " 'You guys cool?' [Hill] asks the audience, and when we clap an enthusiastic yes, she laughs and points to her head. 'I'm talking to the people in my head, too' " (Cleage 90). On the most literal and logical level, Hill refers to sound technicians who speak to her via her earpiece. On another register, she provocatively conjures madness.

Within a Western psychiatric paradigm, a person who talks to "people" inside her head may seem to suffer from schizophrenia, a psychotic condition that often entails the impression of sounds, often "voices," in the affected mind. Hill's statement also evokes dissociative identity disorder, a clinical psychosis that manifests as multiple personalities inhabiting a subject's psyche. I am not suggesting that Hill is clinically schizophrenic or dissociative, nor am I claiming that Hill actually hears voices other than the technicians'. Instead, I am asserting that Hill—well aware that she had been diagnosed as crazy by the tabloid press—is signifying (upon) her alleged madness.

In other words, whether or not Hill *phenomenally* perceives multiple "people" inside her head, she summons *clinical* madness to cast herself as *psychosocial* other. In the process, she reminds audience members that they are not privy to her psychic and epistemic interior and that they cannot facilely presume her performance to be exclusively for their consumption; there are other constituencies who warrant her attention. Wired with a microphone (primed for utmost audibility), Hill announces what evades her audience's hearing. Perched on a stage (primed for optimal visibility), she announces what hides in broad daylight, or beneath bright spotlight, as it were. If madness renders the madwoman inscrutable to a normative sensibility, Hill exploits this condition for a *radical concealment* that thwarts microphones and spotlights.

In her capacity as "conscious" hip hop artist, Hill has claimed to speak to and for various counterpublics: "black youths" and "poor people" ("Howard Stern Interview"), "the have-nots" and "the voiceless" ("Rhyme and Reason 5"). In this "Intro," Hill invokes the "people inside [her] head" as a symbolic counterpublic: outside the dominant public sphere, inaudible to dominant hearing, but heard by Hill, who concerns herself with their welfare, with whether they are "okay." These "people" form a critical mass of madness, and serve as personifications of alterity. What more poignant way to code oneself countercultural than to publicly consort

with “the people inside my head, too”? That Hill repeatedly invokes the “people inside her head” suggests more than spontaneous interjection; it indicates her deliberated, concerted project of counterpublicity and oppositional performance through madness.

People—or more precisely, voices—inside Hill’s head are agonists in *Unplugged*’s longest and most emotionally fraught performance, “I Gotta Find Peace of Mind.” Before Hill begins to sing the song, she announces “See, this is what that voice in your head says when you try to get peace of mind.” She describes at least two voices (sometimes seeming to originate outside her head and sometimes within it) that are adversaries in a Manichean battle for mind and spirit.

At the start of “I Gotta Find Peace of Mind,” Hill strums her guitar and softly, dreamily describes a figure who afflicts her:

> He says it’s impossible, but I know it’s possible.
> He says it’s impossible, but I know it’s possible.
> He says there’s no me without him.
> Please help me forget about him.
> He takes all my energy,
> Trapped in my memory
> . . . .
> I need to tell you all,
> All the pain he’s caused.
> (“I Gotta Find Peace of Mind,” Lauryn Hill © 2002 Columbia Records. [ASCAP] All rights reserved.)

In these opening lines, as she describes “[a]ll the pain he’s caused,” she positions herself within that cohort of black women performing (in) pain. “He” hinders her progress, eats away her energy, and infects her with insecurity.

The identity of this figure is ambiguous. Within the idiom of the heartbreak ballad, “he” may register as a hurtful, abusive man with whom she remains in pathological union. Within Hill’s avowedly Judeo-Christian cosmology, “he” resembles the devil who tempted Eve and taunted Job: stoking doubt; undermining faith; intending to cause ruin.[17] Within the milieu of madness, “he” would seem to be Hill’s anguish condensed into a phantasmic, heckling voice (evoking symptoms of schizophrenia). Within a specifically psychoanalytic sensibility, this figure resembles what I call a *talking wound*. The antithesis of the psychoanalytic *talking cure*, a talking wound is a trauma that clamors again and again in the consciousness of its victim, that echoes like a sinister refrain, that inflicts hurt with each iteration.

Thankfully for Hill, there is another figure in this songscape: the righteous nemesis of he who “says it’s impossible.” This benevolent being redeems and uplifts Hill, whereas the other degraded and oppressed her. Hill cries out “Oh you inspire me, to be the higher me / You make my desire pure . . . You are my peace of mind / That old me is left behind.” If that other figure is a pit of fear and insecurity, this being is a wellspring of love and “peace of mind.” If that other figure resembles the devil, who leads to damnation, this figure favors God, who delivers salvation.

As Hill flees the one who “says it’s impossible” and embraces the one who brings her “peace of mind,” her volume rises and her passion swells. In fact, the song is a prolonged musical and affective crescendo in which Hill tremulously moves “higher,” toward peace of mind. Once at its threshold, she cries out, addressing the “he” who is the keeper of “peace of mind”:

> Please come free my mind!
> Please come be my mind!
> Can you see my mind?!
> Won’t you come free my mind?! (*Ibid.*)

When Hill entreats him to “come be my mind,” she seeks to surrender her discrete, autonomous self for the comfort that merging with “him” will bring. As Hill

articulates it, this surrender is not female self-abnegation before sexist domination. Rather, it appears to be joyful, consensual, and beneficial assent.

As Hill utters these pleas, she begins to weep. Her voice strains and quivers as she repeatedly proclaims, "free your mind!" and "it's possible!," and later, "you're my peace of mind," and "he's my peace of mind." Chanting these phrases like mantras, Hill seems to soothe herself, now lulling to lower register and quieter volume. That calm erupts into one final paroxysm at the song's end: As Hill thanks the "wonderful, merciful God" who brings her peace of mind, she erupts in another rush of tears that finally disintegrate language. Unable to sing or speak, she ends the song with a stammer and sob.

The term "madness" cannot wholly caption this song. It is also a testimony of heartbreak and healing, a parable of good conquering evil, a conversion narrative crooned in real time, and a confessional speech act that not only narrates her deliverance but also *does* her deliverance from despair to redemption. Nevertheless, the matter of madness is central to this performance. The song, after all, depicts a war in mind (ironically under the sign "Peace of Mind") commensurate with the chaos of meaning, affect, and selfhood that I label phenomenal madness. Hill seems to "snap" in the course of the performance: hailing the voice(s) inside her head, reliving trauma, bursting into tears, losing language, coming undone.

Furthermore, Hill repeatedly references madness in her *Unplugged* concert. In "Interlude 3," Hill refers to herself as a "mad scientist" and muses that "the view is that I'm, like, emotionally unstable which is reality—*like you aren't*." When she declares "like you aren't," she interpellates her audience as "emotionally unstable" alongside herself (a marked contrast from her tendency to label herself epistemically and psychically exceptional, as in "I was never normal"). Murmuring assent, audience members seem to approve her suggestion of shared instability. An empathetic community coheres around Hill, affirms affinity with her, celebrates her transformation, and eagerly receives her insights. Ultimately, "I Gotta Find Peace of Mind" is the scene of *radical revelation*: Hill reveals her hurt to her audience and discovers "peace of mind" for herself.

A remarkable inconsistency pervades *Unplugged*. Several songs depict "God" as a repressive figure who demands ascetic, self-flagellating religiosity.[18] To the contrary, "I Gotta Find Peace of Mind" portrays God as a being who breaks through repression and abolishes inhibition. The song bears out Hill's declaration in the album's "Outro" that "We think that's God telling us 'feel guilty.' God is saying 'get free.' Confess, man. . . . It's just a bunch of repression. . . . Life is too valuable, man, for us to sit in these boxes all repressed, you know, afraid to admit what we're really going through."

Hill's notion of "repression" differs from the standard psychoanalytic definition. Whereas Freud defines repression as the ejection of unacceptable memories and desires into the unconscious ("Repression" 568-71), Hill uses the term "repressed" to describe a conscious and concerted process of self-stagnation. Its resolution is not the Freudian excavation of memories from the unconscious into the conscious, but rather the excavation of our real selves out of the "boxes" that imprison us. In sum, "I Gotta Find Peace of Mind" is the site of an emotional *breakdown* that is also a spiritual *breakthrough*, and a *breakout* from those "boxes."

Hill offers herself as a model of escaping "boxes" and "get[ting] free." *Unplugged*'s "Outro," she further ponders such freedom:

> Yeah, I'm crazy and deranged, you know, and *I'm free*. . . . I might play these songs and twitch a little bit just so people know. . . . Y'all think that's a curse, I'm telling you, it's a blessing. . . . When I was a politician, boy, everybody: just all over me, you know, I didn't have a private moment at all. Not one private moment. Now that people think that I'm crazy and deranged, we have peace. Total peace. And so, listen: As far as I'm concerned I'm crazy and deranged. As far as all y'all know I'm crazy and deranged, you know, I'm emotionally unstable. ("Outro")

During her "forbiddingly perfect" *Miseducation* incarnation, Hill held considerable power, endured intense scrutiny, meticulously regulated her public comportment, and thus felt like "a politician." *Miseducation*'s Hill was a "politician" of respectability—that is, an influential proponent of black American respectability politics. No longer "a politician," now openly "crazy and deranged," unleashed from the pressures of polite society, Hill suggests she eludes surveillance, gains privacy, and finally achieves freedom.

Significantly, Hill's formulation of freedom-through-madness reflects her privilege as a prominent musician. For the majority of black women—neither famous nor wealthy—to be viewed as "crazy and deranged" is to be vulnerable to stigmatization, institutionalization, incarceration, assault, even murder. Such fates may entail ubiquitous surveillance, nullified privacy, and thwarted freedom—all quite contrary to Hill's account.

I want to touch, again, delicately, upon "all the pain he's caused." This hurt was not fresh in 2001. Hill's "I Gotta Find Peace of Mind" performance on *Unplugged* was presaged by several confessions of profound man-induced pain in her earlier work.[19] What follows are Hill's verses in "Manifest/Outro," the thirteenth track on The Fugees' 1996 sophomore album, *The Score*:

> You see, I loved hard once, but the love wasn't returned
> I found out the man I'd die for, he wasn't even concerned
> In time it turned, he tried to burn me like a perm
> Though my eyes saw the deception, my heart wouldn't let me learn
> From, um, some dumb woman was I
> . . . .
> Nothing left, he stole the heart beating from my chest
> I tried to call the cops, that type of thief they can't arrest
> Pain suppressed, will lead to cardiac arrest
> . . . .
> I was blessed, but couldn't feel it, like when I was caressed
> I spent nights clutching my breasts overwhelmed by God's test
> I was God's best contemplating death with a Gillette
> But no man is ever worth the paradise manifest.
> ("Manifest/Outro," Lauryn Hill © 1996 Columbia Records/Ruffhouse Records. [ASCAP] All rights reserved.)

The verses traverse Hill's body, detailing the effects "hard" and unrequited love wreaks upon it. The burnt scalp, the breathless lungs, the excised and still-beating heart, the clutched breasts, the unspecified stretch of skin threatened by razor blade—these are all corporeal points at which pain gathers, and from which pain emanates. Furthermore, in the context of the song, they are also epistemological coordinates where knowledge gathers and where wisdom originates. In fact, "Manifest/Outro" illuminates another sort of talking wound: one that speaks counsel. Hill bares her battle wounds and scars in order to communicate the trauma of abuse and the importance of self-esteem and self-love. Notably, her mention of "a perm" invokes black female embodiment; the use of caustic chemicals to alter hair texture is a familiar process for many black women and girls.

The track's verses crescendo to a climax with the word "Gillette"—the instrument of her would-be self-destruction. And then, in the next instant, her cadence and volume suddenly recede as she coolly offers axiomatic advice: "But no man is ever worth the paradise manifest." She will not allow a neglectful or abusive man to be her undoing, to steal her salvation. Nor should anyone else, if they heed her closing words.

In "Manifest/Outro," Hill evinces black womanhood driven to a crisis of meaning, affect, and selfhood that resembles phenomenal madness. She testifies to the agony of abuse and to the triumph of breaking free, proffering herself as role model for lovelorn women and girls (and men and boys). She speaks with the authority of a woman who has careened along the edge of destruction, and survived to tell her cautionary tale. What results is an exquisite depiction of black feminine pathos and an articulation of black feminist ethos.

Losing It

In the aftermath and critical reception of Hill's *Unplugged* performance, American mainstream media outlets rewrote Hill in their archives as "brainwashed" and "inexplicable," as per *Fox News* (Friedman); "Tore up. Tired. Lost[,]" and "unwound" according to the *San Francisco Bay Guardian* (Chan); "unhinged" in the *Los Angeles Times* (Hilburn); "unglued" and "rambling," to have *Time* tell it (Tyrangiel 70); "bizarre," "baffling," and "perversely fascinating" according to *Entertainment Weekly* (Browne 76, 77); and plainly "crazy" by *Vibe*'s standard (Murphy). Hill manifested psychosocial alterity—and perhaps seemed to exhibit clinical symptoms—and thus registered as mad to many pundits. While a few commentators expressed concern with her mental health and spiritual welfare, most seemed to relish the drama of such a steep and spectacular fall from favor.[20] Hill's former Fugees bandmate and former lover, Wyclef Jean, later declared to *Rolling Stone*:

> I felt sorry for her, because I think she needs psychiatric help. I felt like she's bipolar. You can't get angry with someone who's sick. So I even called her mom, and I stressed to her, "Yo, you need to get her psychiatric help." But I think they all fear her to death. She wasn't always like this—but if someone has the ego and you keep feeding the ego, it's going to turn monstrous. (Wyclef Jean qtd. in Hiatt 30)

Jean begins with the clinical language of "psychiatric help," "bipolar [disorder]," and concern for "someone who's sick," as though proposing an intervention. Before long, he shifts from therapeutic idiom to the language of the grotesque. He suggests that Hill's ego, bloated with hubris, has deformed into a monstrosity that terrorizes even her loved ones. One wonders whether Jean's comments are inflected by the scorn of an ex-bandmate and ex-lover with whom Hill allegedly endured a painful breakup.

Notably, Hill's early exaltation and subsequent fall from favor evoke the story of Cassandra, a tragic Trojan prophetess and madwoman of classical Greek mythology. As narrated in Aeschylus' *Agamemnon*, Cassandra is a celebrated prophetess until she rebuffs the sexual advances of Apollo, the god of prophecy, and refuses to bear his offspring. To spite her, the vindictive god turns her gift into a curse, her adulation into abjection; she retains her powers of divination, but no one thereafter believes her prophecies. Haunted by ghastly visions of her own murder and Trojan doom, Cassandra is dismissed and reviled. Alas, her prophecies come true and Troy falls.[21] Hill's "prophetic" womanhood, the praise she received from powerful cultural arbiters, her spurning of power's advances, and the subsequent dismissal of her vision as incoherent and crazy, reflect the attempted Cassandrafication of Hill by Apollonian pundits and publics.[22] However, Hill is no Cassandra. The ire of dominion, the disapproval of mainstream media, does not thrust her into perpetual abjection.[23]

Hill embodied a dramatically different prophetic archetype—but was again assumed to be mad—at a 2003 Vatican Christmas concert. Interrupting her scheduled, invited performance to denounce Vatican leaders for sexual abuse coverups, Hill enacted a prophetic intervention in the biblical tradition. Like exemplary Judeo-Christian prophets Moses and Christ, Hill fearlessly challenged a powerful religious regime in the interest of radical upheaval.[24] Her temerity earned her accusations of madness. The American-based Catholic League reported that she "flipped her lid," disparaged her comments as "rants," labeled her "pathologically miserable," and claimed that "[h]er fans are just as mad" (Catholic League).

Another of Hill's most confrontational performances took place August 6, 2007 at the Twenty-Fifth Annual Martin Luther King, Jr. Concert Series in Brooklyn, New York. The years between Hill's 2001 and 2007 performances beheld her continued repudiations of her former persona, increasing reclusion, tardy performance starts, vocal struggles, and rumors of outrageous "diva" behavior.[25] At this remark-

able summer performance, Hill took the stage two hours late and met a cantankerous audience. In a *Village Voice* concert review entitled "The Disorientation of Lauryn Hill," Rob Harvilla describes the tense scene:

> "Where Brooklyn at?" she asks. Brooklyn is at wit's end. "What took you so long?" demands one voice. "Sing something we know!" thunders another.
>
> Lauryn: "We gonna do some new things!"
>
> Crowd: "Uh-uh!"
>
> Lauryn [hurriedly]: "And we gonna do some old things!"
>
> Crowd: "Yeahhhhhh!"
>
> Lauryn then launches into an old thing that sounds new, as in unfamiliar, as in undesirable, as in uh-uh. (Harvilla)

In Harvilla's account, someone disrupts Hill to ask that she account for her tardiness. Another insists that she perform "something we know" (presumably something from her immensely popular *Miseducation* album). Still more resist her bid to perform "some new things."

The audience craves *Miseducation*'s songs and most likely hungers for *Miseducation*'s incarnation of Hill. By demanding that she perform a familiar song, audience members demand that she channel "that old" her she "left behind" years ago. Harvilla colorfully recounts that "[f]or a half-hour, this show is absolutely terrifying, a volatile star versus a sweltering, irritated crowd. Apocalypse looms." He dramatizes the clash between the audience's demand for the familiar and Hill's insistence on the strange; between the audience's alienation at this new Hill and Hill's repudiation of her former self; between the audience's nostalgia and Hill's melancholia for "that old" her.[26]

To have Harvilla tell it, Hill nominally indulges, but substantively refuses the audience request. She does perform something they know—including the upbeat doo-wop-meets-hip hop anthem "Doo Wop (That Thing)," the heartbreak ballad "Ex-Factor," and the reggae-rap diss track "Lost Ones," all from *Miseducation*—but they are so radically altered that they are no longer familiar. In much of her concert footage from this period, Hill performs songs at accelerated tempos and dramatically changes vocal arrangements; she scats, raps, slurs, shrieks, or pauses to catch breath during stanzas sung with melodic and rhythmic precision on their original tracks. Some of her revamped renditions incorporate blaring drums and electric guitars played so hard and fast that they give performances—especially her "Lost Ones" redux—a heavy-metal edge.[27]

I propose that Hill's MLK performance—and much of her persona since 2001—instantiates what black feminist performance theorist Daphne Brooks labels an "Afro-alienation act." Proposing a theory of late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century "black(ened)" diasporic performance, wherein "the condition of alterity converts into cultural expressiveness and a specific strategy of cultural performances" (4), Brooks asserts that

> Just as Brecht calls for actors to adapt "socially critical" techniques in their performances so as to generate "alienation effects" and to "awaken" audiences to history, so too can we consider these historical figures as critically de-familiarizing their own bodies by way of performance in order to yield alternative racial and gender epistemologies. By using "performance tactics to signify of the social, cultural and ideological machinery that circumscribes African Americans, they intervene in the spectacular and systemic representational abjection of black peoples. (5)

Hill's overhaul of the song is a latter-day Afro-alienation act. On many occasions since 2001, Hill has worked at "de-familiarizing" her body as it emits screeches, darts restlessly and frantically across stages, gesticulates wildly at band members, dons garish makeup and eccentric clothing, and evinces "crazy" black womanhood.

Hill attempts to parlay her ailing voice into an Afro-alienating sound, a shrill alarm intended to jolt listeners out of complacency and "awaken audiences to history":

the dramatic history of her own career; the sordid history of celebrity and tabloid culture in the twentieth-century United States; and, as I will soon elaborate, the fraught history of black female artistry in America. Harvilla describes Hill's vocals as "angry, vicious, unpleasant *by design*" (emphasis added). While physiological deterioration has likely contributed to Hill's vocal vagaries, Harvilla rightly perceives that "design" is also at work. In an interview immediately after her 2001 *Unplugged* performance, Hill had disclosed to MTV that "[i]t used to kill me, but not anymore. It got to the point where I was like, 'Oh my God, it's reality.' My voice being raspy doesn't change the words. I'm sorry that I can't run up the scale and back, but this ain't about me. It's about people receiving encouragement to jump that battery and start living" (qtd. in Sway). Alas, although her "voice being raspy doesn't change the words," it effectively drowns out the words for listeners like Harvilla. So distracted is Harvilla with Hill's hoarse vocals that he is largely inattentive to her message.

Harvilla also characterizes Hill's voice as a "malicious, inarticulate rasp." If her voice is malicious, this is because it assaults dominant pop-music aesthetics, which favor smooth harmony and "easy listening." If her voice is "inarticulate," this is because it rejects the prevailing pop-music logics and thus—within such contexts—ceases to make sense. Harvilla further suggests that Hill's struggling voice is a metonym for her life and mind. He declares that "Lauryn wails, sounding not a little crazy herself. [She performs] a song of passion and desperation now sung by someone with plenty of both, who realizes she's losing a crowd that probably assumes she's losing her mind—and maybe she is." To have him tell it, Hill is suffering an existential dispossession before his eyes and ears: losing her audience, losing her mind, and losing her voice.[28] For her part, Hill would likely claim that despite all she is losing, she is gaining liberation: losing the whole world to gain back her soul.

Many of Hill's performances since 2001 also manifest "spectacular opacity," Brooks's related formulation; as "a kind of shrouding, this trope of darkness paradoxically allows for corporeal unveiling to yoke with the (re)covering and rehistoricizing of the flesh. . . . [S]pectacular opacities contest the dominative imposition of transparency systematically willed on to black figures" (8). Acts of spectacular opacity disrupt dominion's gaze and incite a reckoning with the histories embedded in and emanating from the corporealities of subjugated peoples. While Brooks's formulation of "spectacular opacity" invokes "corporeal unveiling"—most literally, the exposure of flesh—I want to deploy the formulation to include affective unveiling as well. Cartesian mind/body dualism exalts the cerebral and rational, while debasing the corporeal and affective. Furthermore, the public exposure of "too much" flesh or "too much" emotion are both viewed as vulgar within such logics.

To supplement Brooks's formulation of "spectacular opacity," I propose the notion of *poignant translucence*: an emission of critical light and heat that illumine and impassion audiences—even and especially when the precise meaning of that emission is unclear. This process allows audience members confounded by Hill's *Unplugged* performance to be nonetheless—in fact, all the more—moved by it. As the camera pans audience members during Hill's breakdown in "I Gotta Find Peace of Mind," some spectators' faces register shock and confusion. And yet, those faces are utterly transfixed and absorbed by her performance.

Comprehensibility is not a fundamental condition of performances with impact; audience members needn't wholly understand what transpires before them to be deeply affected by it. Indeed, it is possible that a performance achieves greater impact because of its enigmatic quality. Such a performance compels the viewer to long for what it withholds, to ponder its mysteries, imaginatively fill its gaps, speculate as to its meaning. Poignant translucence allows "mad" performance to forego cognitive clarity, even as it achieves affective power over "rational" audiences.

Introducing Ms. Hill

Since about 2005, Lauryn Hill has demanded that she be addressed as "Ms. Hill." Though dismissed by many as a symptom of pathological egotism and delusional grandeur (McGee and Tresniowski), this mandate accrues symbolic value when considered within a history of degrading naming and interpellation practices to which blacks have long been subject in the United States and elsewhere. Hill responds to a history in which "boy," "gal," "Uncle," "Auntie," and even one's given first name were supplements to "nigger" in arsenals of antiblack speech. While some of these appellations may appear to be endearing, within the broader matrix of title in the West—where, for example, deference is articulated by formal prefix—refusals to grant blacks "Mr." and "M(r)s." prefixes often work to belittle them. By demanding a formal prefix, Hill admonishes the public against a presumptuous familiarity that rehearses—consciously or unconsciously, overtly or obliquely—this hegemonic (mis)naming.

At the beginning of "Mama's Baby, Papa's Maybe: An American Grammar Book," black feminist cultural theorist Hortense Spillers recites a litany of interpellations: " 'Peaches' and 'Brown Sugar,' 'Sapphire' and 'Earth Mother,' 'Aunty,' 'Granny,' God's 'Holy Fool,' a 'Miss Ebony First,' or 'Black Woman at the Podium. . .' " (65). These epithets

> are markers so loaded with mythical prepossession that there is no easy way for the agents buried beneath them to come clean. In order for me to speak a truer word concerning myself, I must strip down through layers of attenuated meanings, made an excess in time, over time, assigned by a particular historical order, and there await whatever marvels of my own inventiveness. (Spillers 65)

Spillers describes an "American grammar" replete with nominative protocols that systematically distort black womanhood. Though "Hill" is likely an Anglophone patronym bound to a history of enslavement, Hill attempts to claim it—preceded by formal prefix—as keyword in her own self-making and "inventiveness." Hill declares of her self-nomination, "I'm Ms. Hill because I know I'm a wise woman. That is the respect I deserve" (qtd. in Morgan 160).

Another of Hill's mandates: Do not touch her. In a 2006 *Essence* article, she recounts that

> I was at a store one day when this woman started touching me and I said, "Listen, ma'am, I don't like to be touched." And she was offended. "You don't like to be touched?!" Five years ago I would have said, "Okay, touch me." Now I'm like, "I don't like to be touched, get off me!" I didn't always have the strength to do that. It's especially hard when you have the desire to be liked and make everyone happy. (qtd. in Morgan 160)

Hill experiences this touch as a violation—and though the "Lauryn" of old would have abided it for the sake of decorum, "Ms. Hill" rebuffs it to protect her personal corporeal boundaries. There is no indication that this stranger means the musician any physical harm. Instead, it is the intrusive license the woman takes that antagonizes Hill. The musician's comments bring to mind innumerable contexts in which black female bodies have been touched—pulled, prodded, poked, caressed, and battered—without permission. Auction blocks, slave quarters, alleyways, schoolyards, prison yards, doctor's offices, and yes, stores, have been sites of repeated violation of black female corporeal security.

Spillers also theorizes interrelations between word and flesh, between naming and touching, between nominative practices and corporeal conditions: "Even though the captive flesh/body has been 'liberated,' . . . dominant symbolic activity, the ruling episteme that releases the dynamics of naming and valuation, remains grounded in

the originating metaphors of captivity and mutilation so that it is as if neither time nor history, nor historiography and its topics, shows movement, as the human subject is 'murdered' over and over again" (261).

Spillers describes an epistemic violence and captivity which has outlasted the institution of slavery, a system of reductive and distortive significations of and upon black bodies which functions perpetually to recapitulate those bodies backward to their "former" abjection. (I place "former" between quotation marks because Spillers's intervention calls into question the pastness of slavocratic racial abjection.) Spillers reminds us that epistemic violence and corporeal violence are conjoined processes within arsenals of antiblack racism. Accordingly, a process of self-naming and a process of corporeal defense may stand shoulder to shoulder in a praxis of black feminist autonomy and reclamation. If we contextualize Hill within racist/sexist sociocultural matrices in the U. S.—and caption her behaviors with Spillers's insights—Hill's alleged divadom accrues counterhegemonic import.

When Hill demands that intruders leave her alone, she vents long-suppressed frustration and anger. Six years after that *Essence* interview, Hill would instrumentalize anger in a powerful song entitled "Black Rage." Debuting in autumn 2012, the tune masterfully samples and signifies upon the melody of Rodgers and Hammerstein's iconic tune, "My Favorite Things," from *The Sound of Music*. Performing the song on October 31, 2012, in Houston, Texas, Hill retains Rodgers's basic melody, but otherwise radically rearranges the song. Her rendition entails an accelerated tempo: a hard, driving drumbeat; a cacophonous, staccato piano, and blaring electric guitar as accompaniment; and a breathless, strident vocal delivery.[29] Indeed, she performs a jarring sonic dissonance to convey the agonizing cognitive dissonance of "black rage." Most poignantly, Hill subverts the original song's cheery disposition with these woeful new lyrics:

> Black rage is founded on two-thirds a person
> Rapings and beatings and suffering that worsens
> Black human packages tied up in strings
> Black rage is founded on these kinds of things
>
> Black rage is founded on blatant denial
> Squeezed economics, subsistence survival
> Deafening silence and social control
> Black rage is founded on wounds in the soul
>
> So when the dogs bite and when the beatings and when I'm feeling sad
> I simply remember all these kinds of things and then I don't fear so bad. . .

No longer a litany of delightful objects and childlike fancies, the song is recast as a tragic inventory of brutality, injustice, abjection, and death. Hill offers a devastating indictment of white supremacist dominion—deftly invoking slavery, lynching, rape, psychic violence, capitalist exploitation, state-sanctioned police brutality, soul-wounding, and more. If the original song is a confection of lily-white, syrupy-sweet dreams, Hill suggests that the labor of enslaved and abjected black bodies has cut the cane to provide such sweetness.

Remarkably, the recitation of these atrocities comforts Hill; she proclaims, "I simply remember these kinds of things and then I don't fear so bad." To know the origins of black rage empowers her to critically address it and perhaps use it. The song is not simply a description of rage; it is rather an explosive *act* of rage mobilized for pedagogical and inspirational effect—to "awaken audiences to history," as it were. Hill realizes the efficacy of black madness—its simmering and volatile energy—and harnesses her own for radical performance.[30]

Call Me Crazy: A Subversive Embrace

I earlier suggested that Hill projects an Afro-alienating voice in order to jolt complacency and "awaken audiences to history." I now ponder how she seeks to awaken audiences to critical theory, too. At a Los Angeles concert with the briefly reunited Fugees in February 2006, Hill declared, "[l]adies and gentlemen, I'm not crazy. I'm just a black woman who's super-smart, who can't be bought and who can't be bribed. I'm not a machine. I give my people the truth. Today, if you're all of those things they think you're crazy. If that's the definition of crazy, then I'm crazy" (qtd. in Hardy). Hill indicts a racist, sexist, capitalist order that would commodify her, purchase her wholesale, and use her as "machine" to mass produce a hegemonic order at the expense of "the truth." Moreover, she recognizes that "crazy" is often used to describe subjects who defy co-optation by hegemonic power and resist intelligibility to hegemonic gaze.

Significantly, Hill moves from a transgressive disavowal of the signifier "crazy" ("I'm not crazy") to a subversive claim of it ("then I'm crazy"). In her transgressive disavowal, she rejects the "crazy" title that has been assigned to her but reifies the basic premise that "crazy" is negative. In contrast, Hill's subversive embrace of madness undermines the fundamental logic of madness-as-derogatory. She suggests that craziness is desirable in the hegemonic world order that deems itself sane, virtuous, and normal. Hill embraces "crazy": If a black, female, smart, truthful, and defiant person is "crazy," then "crazy" she is. Hill proposes "crazy" as signifier of political resistance and countercultural epistemology. Within the subversive account, madness is remade from invective to title of resistance.

Despite her emphatic disavowal, Hill is not entirely free of those market forces. Her contract with Columbia Records is still binding, her image is still commoditized and circulated within the global mainstream musical industrial complex, and she still reaps royalties from the labor of "that old [her]."[31] Nonetheless, Hill has relocated to the margins of a pop-cultural matrix whose center and peak she once inhabited. In the process, she relinquished significant praise, profit, and popularity in the interest of countercultural principles and praxis.

This essay has illuminated how Lauryn Hill wields madness as a multivalent technique of countercultural performance. On one hand, she invokes "the people inside her head" and exploits the confounding, cryptic quality of madness for a sort of *radical concealment*. On the other, it is through "madness" that Hill abandons the affective self-restraint mandated by respectability, and performs a sort of indecent exposure and *radical revelation*. Daphne Brooks's formulation of "spectacular opacity" and my own theory of poignant translucence speak to the complex interplay of these practices. Hill flickers from radical concealment to radical revelation; among opacity, transparency, and translucency; between mystery and (counter)publicity. She also harnesses black rage for radical, confrontational protest music. In the process, she disrupts prevailing values of black womanhood, performance, celebrity, and madness in global popular imaginaries and public spheres.

As I compose these words, Hill's much-anticipated return to pop culture's good graces has not taken place. It may never. After brief and ill-fated Fugees reunions in 2005 and 2006, Hill tours irregularly in international music festivals and occasionally performs at charity events—her concerts often panned for tardy starts, her performances checkered with vocal failures and triumphs. Hill's now legendary lateness—to take the stage at individual performances and to produce a studio album follow-up to *Miseducation*—is regularly derided as "divadom," or else, arrested artistic development. Debates rage among pundits and publics—on radio stations, in mainstream press

editorials, on blogs—about the meaning and measure of Hill's legacy and futurity.[32] Meanwhile, she maintains a committed community of fans and compatriots who identify with her mad blackness, admire her audacity, and treat her with critical generosity.

In 2002, Pearl Cleage had pondered Hill alongside a group of gifted black women performers who died young: "The life [Hill] had constructed was not the one she wanted to live. It had become more weight than she could carry without becoming a madwoman or a sadwoman or just one more name on a list that includes Billie Holiday and Florence Ballard and Dorothy Dandridge and all the sisters whose vibrant artistry couldn't save their lives" (Cleage 90). Cleage recites a tragic litany of "vibrant" artists to which we might add the late Phyllis Hyman and Whitney Houston, among others. Cleage recognizes Hill's affinity to these women, who were all endangered by sexism and racism; encumbered by the dictates of market forces, public whims, and political pressures; enduring private pains and sorrows all the while. Of course, for all that Hill has in common with the musical martyrs above, she lives and thrives and thus does not belong on that somber list.

In a 2006 interview, Hill offered her own meditation upon perils assailing black womanhood.

> It's really about the Black woman falling in love with her own image of beauty. I know that I've been in a fight to love myself and experience reciprocity in a relationship. I thought that a perfectly reciprocal relationship was an impossibility. That's that "Black woman is the mule of the world" thing. It says she can't get what she deserves, no matter how dope she is. And, you know, you have to go through the fear. You do have to do something with the insecurity, ghosts and demons that have been programmed in us for centuries. You have to master the voices, all the insecure and inadequate men who put garbage in a woman's mind, soul, spirit and psyche just so they can use her. (qtd. in Morgan 160)

Hill's commentary is dense with womanist, Afro-affirmative, antimisogynist, antiracist, and anticolonial insights. She cites a centuries-long history of epistemic violence, psychological terror, and spiritual assault endured by black women. She repudiates the "mule of the world" creed that potentially naturalizes black female abjection and endorses a culture of self-defeat and foregone surrender. She rebukes false prophecies that black women cannot find reciprocal love, political autonomy, or spiritual fulfillment. She instructs black women to "go through the fear," "to do something with the insecurity" in order to move toward liberation. Significantly, Hill counsels black women to "master the voices," but does not propose silencing them; her notion of liberated black womanhood can subsume those voices.

Hill insists that her journey to madness is not a descent to destruction, but a bridge to convey her beyond it. As she disclosed during her *Unplugged* performance, "I had created this public persona, this public illusion, and it held me hostage. I couldn't be a real person, because you're too afraid of what your public will say." Much of the praxis that freed Hill from "public illusion" was the very same behavior that earned her the label "crazy." Soon after her self-proclaimed emancipation from that illusion, Hill would rejoice "I don't have to check with nobody. I can stop. I can pause. I can mess up. I can start again. I can go to another song. I can do anything" (qtd. in Sway).

Notes

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1. For critical discussions of black woman-empowering ethics and praxis within hip hop, see, for example, Janell Hobson and R. Dianne Bartlow, Introduction to *Representin': Women, Hip-Hop, and Popular Music*, Janell Hobson and R. Dianne Bartlow, eds., spec. issue of *Meridians* 8.1 (2008): 1-14; Cheryl L. Keyes, "Empowering Self, Making Choices, Creating Spaces: Black Female Identity via Rap Music Performance," *Journal of American Folklore* 113.449 (Summer 2000): 255-69; Joan Morgan, "Fly-Girls, Bitches, and Hoes: Notes of a Hip-Hop Feminist," *Social Text* 45 (Winter 1995): 151-57; and Tricia Rose, "Never Trust a Big Butt and a Smile," in *That's the Joint!: The Hip Hop Studies Reader*, Mark Anthony Neal and Murray Forman, eds. (New York: Routledge, 2004), 335-54.

2. *Miseducation* set the record for the highest first-week sales for a solo female debut in the history of the American Billboard Chart (Gundersen 1D).

3. The *Amsterdam News* touted "the creative genius of Lauryn Hill" (Okoampa-Ahoofe); R&B musician John Legend would later declare "[s]he's truly a genius" (qtd. in Sony Urban Music/Columbia Records); *Rolling Stone* would retrospectively refer to Hill's status as "self-contained musical genius" (Touré); and *Ebony.com* would later label her "one of the greatest musical geniuses to come out of New Jersey" (Abrams).

The *New York Times* would designate Hill a "visionary" issuing a "prophet's voice" and characterize *Miseducation* as "miraculous" (Powers). Of Hill's *Unplugged* album, the *Village Voice* would declare "months before [the 9/11 attacks]—on the Fourth of July, no less, at an African Arts Festival in Brooklyn—Lauryn was the lone hiphop voice making prophetic pronouncements: *I don't respect your system. I won't protect your system. The system is a joke. You'd be smart to save your soul, and escape this mind control. These traditions are a lie*" (Lewis; emphasis in original). *Trace* magazine would publish a feature on Hill entitled "The Prophet: Lauryn Hill" (Grunitzky).

4. Concerning Hill's supposed transformation to madwoman, see, for example, Chan, Friedman, Hilburn, Murphy, and Tyrangiel 70.

5. Griffin astutely asserts that "[s]ince the earliest days of our nation, black women were thought to be incapable of possessing genius; their achievements were considered the very opposite of intellectual accomplishment. All persons of African descent were thought to be unfit for advanced intellectual endeavor. Black women in particular were body, feeling, emotion and sexuality" (14). Also aware of the racist/sexist logics informing the dispensal of the genius title in American popular culture, Hill herself suggests, "[t]hey'll never throw the genius title to a sister. They'll just call her a 'diva' and think it's a compliment" ("Lauryn Hill Speaks Out").

6. The sexist imputation of madness to womanhood is most poignantly indexed in the etymology of the word "hysteria." See Dianne Hunter, "Hysteria, Psychoanalysis, and Feminism: The Case of Anna O," *Feminist Studies* 9.3 (Fall 1983): 464-88; Maria Ramas, "Freud's Dora, Dora's Hysteria: The Negation of a Woman's Rebellion," *Feminist Studies* 6.3 (Fall 1980): 472-510; and Laurie Layton Schapira, *The Cassandra Complex: Living with Disbelief: A Modern Perspective on Hysteria* (Toronto: Inner City Books, 1988).

7. Although my work focuses upon *insurgent* madness within black art, I hasten to acknowledge the *hegemonic* madness at the core of white supremacist racism. In an interview with journalist Charlie Rose, Toni Morrison elegantly excoriates that racism. She proclaims

> the people who do this thing, who practice racism, are bereft. There is something distorted about the psyche. It's a huge waste and it's a corruption and a distortion. . . . it's a profound neurosis that nobody examines for what it is. It *feels* crazy. It *is* crazy. (Morrison)

Morrison diagnoses white supremacist racism as a crisis of meaning and selfhood—commensurate with what I label phenomenal madness. See also Alvin F. Poussaint, "Is Extreme Racism a Mental Illness?: Yes," *Western Journal of Medicine* 176.1 (January 2002): 4. Poignantly, though, white supremacist racism is not psychosocial alterity in contemporary America. Such racism does not transgress, but rather upholds, extant white supremacist regimes and norms.

8. My insights on Hill's performance of pain are in conversation with Daphne Brooks's lecture, " 'Bring the Pain': Post-Soul Memory, Neo-Soul Affect and Lauryn Hill in the Black Public Sphere," which she delivered at Columbia University's Institute for Research in African American Studies on December 4, 2009. Notably, Brooks's primary objects of inquiry were Hill's *Miseducation* album and performance on *Dave Chappelle's Block Party*. I am primarily concerned with Hill's *Unplugged* album.

9. Regarding Billie Holiday, perhaps the quintessential icon of black-woman-in-pain in popular music, see Monica J. Casper, "On Race, Trauma, and 'Strange Fruit,' " *The Feminist Wire*, 7 Apr. 2012, Web.

10. Spillers coins the term "pornotroping" in her influential essay "Mama's Baby, Papa's Maybe." She suggests that within prevailing symbolic regimes in the United States,

> (1) the [black female] captive body becomes the source of an irresistible, destructive sensuality; (2) at the same time—in stunning contradiction—the captive body reduces to a thing, becoming *being for* the captor; (3) in this distance *from* a subject position, the captured sexualities provide a physical and biological expression of "otherness"; (4) as a category of "otherness," the captive

> body translates into a potential for pornotroping and embodies sheer physical powerlessness that slides into a more general "powerlessness," resonating through various centers of human and social meaning. (67)

For extensive descriptions of "pornotroping," see Alexander G. Weheliye, "Pornotropes," *Journal of Visual Culture* 7.1 (April 2008): 65-81, and Tamura Lomax, "Changing the Letter: Theorizing Race and Gender in Pop Cultural 'Media' through a Less Pornotropic Lens," Diss., Vanderbilt U, 2011.

11. At the outset of *Scenes of Subjection*, Hartman explains her refusal to depict a scene of Aunt Hester's beating: "I have chosen not to reproduce Douglass's account of the beating of Aunt Hester in order to call attention to the ease with which such scenes are usually reiterated, the casualness with which they are irculated, and the consequences of this routine display of the slave's ravaged body. Rather than inciting indignation, they too often immure us to the pain by virtue of their familiarity . . . [and] reinforce the spectacular character of black suffering" (3). The circulation of images of black pain persists not only in recountings of slave narratives, but in popular iconographies of black bodies. For an extended discussion of this persistence, see Elizabeth Alexander, " 'Can you be BLACK and Look at This?': Reading the Rodney King Video(s)," *Public Culture* 7.1 (Fall 1994): 77-94, and Debra Walker King, *African Americans and the Culture of Pain* (Charlottesville: U of Virginia P, 2008), 5-7.

12. See, for example, Tricia Rose, *The Hip Hop Wars: What We Talk About When We Talk About Hip Hop—and Why It Matters* (New York: Basic Civitas, 2008); and Greg Tate, "HipHop Turns 30: Whatcha celebratin' for?," *Village Voice* 28 Dec. 2004.

13. Note that Nina Simone appears as Hill's predecessor in two of the genealogies I sketch: black women performing (in) pain and mad black performers. Though Simone was not a hip hop artist, her extensive body of protest performance and her involvement in the American civil rights movement position her as one of the most "conscious" black performers of the twentieth century. Indeed, Simone's prophetic persona, her widely recognized musical genius, her alleged madness, and her black radical womanist performance praxis position her as Hill's most poignant foremother. For further information on Simone, see Nadine Cohodas, *Princess Noire: The Tumultuous Reign of Nina Simone* (New York: Pantheon, 2010).Notably, Thelonious Monk, Charles Mingus, Sun Ra, and Nina Simone were all clinically diagnosed with mental illness. However, considering the overt racism that pervaded contemporaneous psychiatric practices, we must approach all of these diagnoses with careful skepticism.

14. See Emma Bell, "Imagine Madness: Madness, Revolution, Ressentiment and Critical Theory," Inter-disciplinary.Net 1st Global Conference, September 2008, Mansfield College, Oxford, Web.

15. Concerning the psycho-pathologization of Africanity and blackness, see, for example, William H. Grier and Price M. Cobbs, *Black Rage* (New York: Basic Books, 1968); Sander Gilman, *Difference and Pathology: Stereotypes of Sexuality, Race, and Madness* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell UP, 1985), esp. 131-49; Uzo Esonwanne, "The Madness of Africa(ns): Or, Anthropology's Reason," *Cultural Critique* 17 (Winter 1990-91): 107-26; Laura Briggs, "The Race of Hysteria: 'Overcivilization' and the 'Savage' in Late Nineteenth-Century Obstetrics and Gynecology," *American Quarterly* 52.2 (June 2000): 246-73; and Jonathan Metzl, *The Protest Psychosis: How Schizophrenia Became a Black Disease* (Boston: Beacon, 2010).

16. In a *Rolling Stone* exposé of the legal drama around the album's credits and royalties, Touré writes that "[t]he album was released crediting Hill with having produced, written and arranged all the music except one track, and Hill was established as a self-contained musical genius." Four *Miseducation* musicians filed suit against Hill and alleged that they had not received proper credit or remuneration for the album. The case was resolved out of court for an undisclosed financial settlement, and Hill has been reticent and guarded in addressing it ever since.

17. See, for example, "Oh Jerusalem" and "Adam Lives in Theory" on Hill's *Unplugged* album.

18. See "Adam Lives in Theory," "The Mystery of Iniquity," and "Oh Jerusalem" on Hill's *Unplugged* album.

19. In "Bring the Pain," Brooks examines Hill's expression of pain on *Miseducation*—particularly in "Ex-Factor" and "I Used to Love Him." Notably, the first two lines of *Miseducation*'s "I Used to Love Him" (Brooks's object of inquiry) appeared first on *The Score*'s "Manifest/Outro," my object of inquiry in this passage.

20. Cleage and Morgan, both black feminists who wrote *Essence* magazine features on Hill, belong on that brief list.

21. See Aeschylus.

22. Cassandra incarnates the abjection that feminist psychoanalytic critic Julia Kristeva theorizes in her *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection* (New York: Columbia UP, 1982): Cassandra is neither wholly object nor subject, neither insane nor sane, both howling and silenced, teetering on the edge of liveness and ghostliness, doggedly present and yet helplessly absent, cast-off and yet hauntingly near. Laurie Layton Shapira explores how Cassandra's fate is invoked in contemporary clinical and cultural contexts to analogize

several phenomena: the intrapsychic process by which a subject ignores his own intuitive sense of doom or danger; the punitive measures meted against those who resist power's advances; and the tragic dismissal and subjugation of female imagination, wisdom, and intuition. See Shapira, *The Cassandra Complex: Living with Disbelief: A Modern Perspective on Hysteria* (Toronto: Inner City Books, 1988).

23. Hill is not consigned to abject isolation or solitude. Instead, she participates in other modes of sociality and other fields of belonging. Hill has described, for example, the fulfillment she achieves in her role as mother. While many pundits decry that Hill has stalled creatively in the twenty-first century, she has thrived *pro*creatively. She has concertedly chosen family over career, children over LPs. Subsequent to *Miseducation*, Hill has released no studio albums. However, Hill has given birth to five children (in addition to her eldest son, Zion, born before her solo debut) and has reveled in motherhood. Further unlike Cassandra, Hill retains a critical mass of supporters, like her *Unplugged* studio audience, who defend, celebrate, and heed her proclamations.

24. Hill interrupted her scheduled concert set to proclaim: "I realize some of you may be offended by what I'm saying, but what do you say to the families who were betrayed by the people in whom they believed?" (Associated Press).

25. For an account of Hill's putatively difficult behaviors, see Zoe Chace, "The Many Voices of Lauryn Hill," *NPR: Music*, 28 June 2010, Web.

26. Melancholia is a useful hermeneutics for reading this woman who insists that "that old me is left behind." According to Freud, melancholia is "pathological mourning" that takes place when a subject loses something dear to her. She attempts to keep it with her by identifying with it, by incorporating it—and the cathexis, or emotional energy, and investment attached to it—into her ego. All the while, she feels resentment and anger toward the lost object because it has deserted her. Simultaneous identification with and resentment of the lost object manifests as melancholic self-reproach (Freud, "Mourning and Melancholia"). In the case of Lauryn Hill, the lost object is a former incarnation of her own self, extant circa 1998.

27. Video of Hill's radical revamping can be viewed on *YouTube*: "Lauryn Hill - Ex-Factor at Bobfest Hawaii 2007"; Lauryn Hill - Ready or Not (live in Porto Alegre)"; "lauryn hill live @exit festival 007"; and "LAURYN HILL - UK - LIVE - LOST ONES/NATTY DREAD." For an extended description of Hill's hard-edged performances, see Charles Richards, "Lauryn Hill Moves Her R&B toward Progressive Rock," *Washington Post* 1 Mar. 2012, Web.

28. Ironically, Hill loses her singing voice at the same time that she ostensibly gains voices inside her head. Thanks to Sylvia Chong for pointing out this irony.

29. Footage from this performance can be viewed at mcoast, "Lauryn Hill in Houston Texas 0ct 31 2012 live new sing Black Rage/and Explain [*sic*]," *YouTube.com*, 1 Nov. 2012, Web.

30. Also recognizing and honoring the efficacy of anger, Lorde writes that "[e]very woman has a well-stocked arsenal of anger against those oppressions, personal and institutional, which brought that anger into being. Focused with precision, it can become a powerful source of energy serving progress and change" (280).

31. This is the case as of October 2012.

32. For an especially moving account of this nostalgia, see J. Victoria Sanders, "Lauryn Hill: MTV *Unplugged 2.0* (The Death of L. Boogie)," *Popmatters.com*, 7 June 2002, Web.

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