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Electric Ladyland: And the Gods Made Love

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Electric Ladyland: And the Gods made Love

par

Sheila Whiteley

Abstract: My discussion of *Electric Ladyland* relates to narratives of gender and sexuality – sometimes misplaced, sometimes elusive – an exploration that relates to the liminal quality of Hendrix’s musical language. More specifically I discuss how he communicates the erotic, the supernatural and the extraordinariness of experience through his relationship to his guitar, his Electric Lady. As bluesman, Tom Attah, observed, ‘with Hendrix the physical becomes a frame of reference for the quality of the extra-ordinary experience. Time and again this is not only represented but actually given to us in his music; instrumental music becomes voices, voices become percussion, percussion becomes time; time becomes stretched and condensed and the whole becomes a Proustian rush that is a remembrance of the future’¹, ‘a spiral in which every curve inspires and propels the next arc of itself forward, downward and/or outward’. (Foucault, 1988: 35) What follows is my interpretation of the spiral, prefaced by earlier excursions into the Hendrix ‘experience’. It is hoped that this will lead to a broader debate on the ways in which the historical, demographic, sociological context itself determines other perceptions, representations and appropriations.

Keywords: *Hendrix – Experience – Language – Sexuality – Electric Ladyland – Electric Lady – Erotic*

Résumé : Mon analyse d’*Electric Ladyland* porte sur ses logiques narratives de genre et de sexualité – parfois décalées ou fuyantes –, une exploration qui est en rapport avec la qualité liminale du langage musical de Jimi Hendrix. Plus précisément, mon objectif est de comprendre comment il véhicule une expérience érotique, surnaturelle et extraordinaire par le biais de sa relation à sa guitare, l’*Electric Lady*. Comme l’écrit dans ces pages le bluesman Tom Attah, « avec Hendrix, la dimension physique devient un cadre de référence pour déterminer le caractère extra-ordinaire de l’expérience. À maintes reprises, ceci n’est pas seulement représenté, mais concrètement offert dans sa musique ; la musique instrumentale se mue en voix, les voix en percussions, les percussions en temps ; le temps s’étend et se condense et l’ensemble devient une réminiscence proustienne qui est souvenir du futur », « une spirale dans laquelle chaque courbe inspire et propulse son prochain arc vers l’avant, le bas et/ou l’extérieur » (Foucault, 1998 : 35). Ce texte est ma propre interprétation de cette spirale, elle poursuit d’autres excursions que j’ai pu faire dans « l’expérience » Hendrix. J’espère qu’elle ouvrira un débat plus vaste sur la manière dont le contexte historique, démographique et sociologique conditionne d’autres perceptions, représentations et appropriations.

Mots-clés : *Jimi Hendrix, expérience, langage, sexualité, Electric Ladyland, Electric Lady, érotique*

As Andy Ellis observed, ‘The story of the electric guitar will forever be told in two parts: Before Jimi and After Jimi’ (1995: 57) and in today’s eclectic world, it’s impossible to appreciate just how radical he appeared in 1967. Not least, he expanded the concept of sound itself and ‘his revolutionary guitar technique and innovative use of the recording studio as a compositional environment have had a greater impact on rock music than the work of any other musician’. (Picarella, 1986: 370). *Are You Experienced* (1967), *Axis, Bold as Love* (1968) and *Electric Ladyland* (1968)² offered the evolving counterculture highly developed psychedelic music, complex and skilful arrangements, multi-tracked guitar melodies and rhythms, chilling sound effects, freedom of form, evocative lyrics, extraordinary soundscapes, voluminous sustain, political overtones, and a vocal style rooted in blues and soul. For many, he reached his highest level of artistic maturity at Woodstock where his interpretation of ‘The Star Spangled Banner’ created ‘a vision of cultural crisis, structural breakdown and chaos’ (Hicks, 1970: 19). He died on September 18, 1970 aged 27. His legacy (he has been voted No.1 lead guitarist in numerous polls) is indicative of why he should be included in *Counterculture(s) and Popular Music*.

Introduction

Tempting as it is to return to the psychedelic haze that surrounded my earlier analysis of Jimi Hendrix (Whiteley, 1992), my paper takes a different, albeit complementary direction, viz. the ways in which the album, *Electric Ladyland* (1968), constructs a gendered space for the exploration of the erotic.

Thus, while the guitar hero is most often situated within a machismo culture, it is suggested that *Hendrix demonstrated a more nuanced and capricious eroticism*. His electric sexually-charged soundscapes whereby mystical, hallucinogenic, and sexual themes are interlinked within a complex web of imagery, provide ‘a *theatrical, erotic and dialogical conversation between the socially acceptable and the socially transgressive* – the safe and the wild’. (Liepe-Levinson, 2002: 42) His status as guitar hero also demonstrates that the wielding of power frequently makes visible, rather than conceals, the contradictory and oscillating desires and subject positions that make up even the most common sexual fantasies and erotic play. Like the time-telling rabbit in *Alice in Wonderland*, Hendrix provides the listener ‘with the necessary passport to a fantasy realm that is itself predicated on shifting relationships and pleasures’ that relate to sexual desire.³

As such, my initial analysis of the English LP sleeve of *Electric Ladyland* and my subsequent discussion of the album relate to narratives of gender and sexuality – sometimes misplaced, sometimes elusive – an exploration that relates to the concept of ‘a spiral in which every curve inspires and propels the next arc of itself forward, downward and/or outward’. (Foucault, 1988: 35) What follows is my interpretation of the spiral, prefaced by earlier excursions into the Hendrix ‘experience’ and informed by the writings of Annette Kuhn (1985), Charles Shaar Murray (1989), David Henderson (1990), Chris Potash (1996), Marina Warner (1995), Carl Jung (1971), Katherine Liepe-Levinson (2002), and I.M. Lewis (1971) – not least her timely reminder that ‘*pour soulever les hommes il faut avoir le diable au corps*’.

Take 1: Constructing Ladyland

The staging of erotic fantasies is an integral ingredient of the *mise en scène* and implied narratives of pornography and strip club culture. Inviting voyeurism and auto-erotic pleasure, 'they trade in images that challenge established social and personal boundaries'. (Liepe-Levinson, 2002: 57) As a theatrical event, the experience is, however, transitory, albeit that the scenes may remain in the mind, remembered and replayed. In contrast, photographic images produce meaning by constructing an apparent authenticity, drawing on an ideology of the visible as evidence of the 'real world'. Thus, despite the obvious artifice in pornographic photographs (the creative intervention on the part of the photographer in the formal arrangement of the body and the specific inflections of the implied narrative) the idea that 'seeing is believing' invokes both a sense of 'truthfulness' and voyeuristic pleasure. 'The conventionalised display of bodies to the spectator, the fetishising of certain bodily attributes, the come-on look, all give pornography an exhibitionistic quality'. (Kuhn, 1985: 43)

There is, then, a definite sense of 'knowing what it's about' in the English album sleeve for *Electric Ladyland*⁴. The arrangement of the naked bodies and the highlights on the breasts imply a fetishised representation of the female body, reflecting pornography's preoccupation with signifiers of sexual difference and sexuality. This preoccupation is evidenced in the way in which the image is composed (the lighting, the postures, the framing) and the repetitiveness of the poses themselves, the bodies angled towards the camera, the bosom thrust forward, the breasts accentuated by the placement of arms and elbows. While

such poses are commonplace in softcore magazines, the communal setting (emphasised by the fragmentation of the bodies) suggests that those on display are only a part of a much larger grouping. It is no big surprise, then, to find twelve more women, in similar poses, on the back of the album sleeve. Drawing on the 'orgy's aura of aristocratic exclusivity and secrecy [which] revolves around a magnitude of pleasure reserved only for an initiated class of persons', they are, in effect, a 'manifestation of "too much" or "more than enough" pleasure... and are often expressed and experienced through fantasy or fantasy situations'. (Toepfer, 1991: 10)

While 'scopophilia' (the desire for pleasurable looking) is implied by the arrangement of the bodies as display, the conventions of pornography are heightened by the 'come-on' looks which are acknowledged by the direct gaze at the camera. Signifying sexual invitation, the gaze suggests that the bodies are purposely displayed for the spectator, that each and every one knows that he/she is there and is openly inviting him/her to 'take a good look'. The exhibitionist stance, the connotations of eliciting the voyeuristic gaze⁵ is integral to the dynamics of 'looking' played out in the strip show of adult magazines. Here, the tease of sexual desire relies, to a large extent, on constantly shifting attention to different parts of the female anatomy, and while the bared breasts provide one focal point, it is significant that the genitals, the ultimate mark of difference, are both concealed by the top lighting and heightened by an album sleeve of Jimi Hendrix, which lies across the thighs of the figure on the extreme right, his face turned towards her body. Significantly, his eyes are closed and, as such, there are connotations of sleeping (and its play

on erotic dreams)/disinterest and/or sexual exhaustion. Either way, his identity becomes part of an ironic play on representation, so raising the question of what was at stake in this theatrical staging of the exotic erotic.

It is an established fact that Hendrix was against the cover photograph. It is also known that its soft-porn imagery led to many retailers selling the record under a plain, brown cover. While Hendrix's stage performances provide some insights into the stereotyping of racialised sexual fantasy⁶ there is little doubt that he was 'reinvented as the essential image of what English audiences felt a black American should be'. (Shaar Murray, 1990: 68) As Hendrix's rival guitarist, Eric Clapton, stated at the time, 'Everyone and his brother in England still think that spades have big dicks. And Jimi came over and exploited that to the limit... and everybody fell for it' (Eric Clapton, interviewed in *Rolling Stone*, and cited in Shaar Murray, 1990: 68).

It is tempting to suppose that the images on the album sleeve are an imaginative response to the connotations of *Electric Ladyland* as an exotic realm where the lead guitarist, the ultimate sex symbol, would be surrounded by his harem-groupies. As a spokesman for Track Records told the *Sunday Mirror* (November 1, 1968), 'The cover should be looked at from an artistic point of view. In view of the title, we thought it appropriate to have nude women on the sleeve. I don't think it's pornographic.' (cited in Henderson, 1990: 179) Three weeks later, Christopher Foss, secretary of the British Gramophone Retailers' Association retaliated, claiming that such 'vulgarity' would 'lower the industry's image in the eyes of the public and that the album sleeve would almost certainly "reduce the sale of records"'. (cited in Hender-

son, 1990: 179) He was, of course, mistaken. 35,000 copies had been sold within four days of its release.

In 1968, the vision of Hendrix caressing and attacking his guitar, his Electric Lady, spinning out wild erotic fantasies and sexual dreamscapes, had assumed mythical status⁷. The Daughters of the American Revolution in San Francisco had blocked his appearance with the Monkees on the grounds that it was 'too erotic'. (Potash, 1996: 14) Fed by images of his stage performances (writhing on the ground in orgasmic fury while having mock intercourse with his guitar, pelvic-thrusting it up against the wall while making it wail psychedelic melodies above a wall of feedback, playing with his teeth, behind his back' (Goertzel, 1991: 91), the relationship between sex and his 'Electric Lady' became explicit. What is evident, however, is that sex is not confined to the machismo imagination, and Hendrix's relationship with his guitar also embraced the tender and the mystical. The implied slaves and groupies of the British album sleeve had little in common with his feminine ideal. Rather, as Charles Shaar Murray observes, 'she is a spirit, sometimes a fantasy, sometimes a woman as solidly, palpably physical as he is... She is stronger and wiser than he is, and she is his only hope of peace and salvation... she is the Electric Woman who can cast out all doubt and fear'. (1989: 74) This is also my experience of Jimi Hendrix, and my analysis of *Electric Ladyland* explores the eternal phantom presence of his muse.

Take 2: Make love make love make love make love

'When Hendrix first played the melody 'Electric Ladyland' in the Record Plant studios, it had only a spare solo guitar feel. It sounded acoustical, crooning out a Manhattan rhapsody. The polished grace notes trilling and turning between the winsome melody. Alternating chops between the bass line and the chord, and descending steps downward to break out in garlands of incredible gypsy-flavored trills... In the final recording the solo intro and also the initial feel is sacrificed for instant vocal choir-like overdubs and layered guitars refraining the vocal' (Henderson, 1978: 171). Prefaced by 'And the Gods Made Love', where simulated thunder claps, reverse tape-loops, and an enveloping crescendo that pans outwards and upwards into sonic space, the listener is wrapped into an electric soundscape. Drawing on the psychedelic and mystical connotations of 'Purple Haze', 'Love or Confusion' and 'Are You Experienced' (Whiteley, 1992: 16-27) the tremors of sound, the associations of pulsating timbral colour, and the incoherent vocal re-create the sensations of movement into space and alternative time-zones. As the lyrics to 'Have You Ever Been (to Electric Ladyland)' reveal, the intention of the album is 'to show you, I want to show you, good and evil lay side by side'. Track 2 thus works like a touch-stone. The flight of fantasy moves upwards over 'the love-filled seas' accessed by 'the electric woman' who is set beside the angels, embodying the mythical and soulful dimensions of the poetic muse. Invoked by his fingers, the harmonics of the guitar strings work like a rosary, penetrating the sky. It is a sound that invites a heightened sensual response, negotiating power and intimacy through the circulation of desire.

This, then, is no simple 'Manhattan Rhapsody'. Rather, the tension between the layered guitars and Hendrix's overdubbed falsetto provide a musical metaphor for the power/pleasure/intimacy of mystical union. Produced by relaxing the throat and using the diaphragm, 'the suppression of head and chest resonance creates a *sotto voce* (literally, "under the voice") and suggest[s] a "fourth voice, a fourth sex, not properly housed in the body"' (Wood, 1994: 31). It is, in effect, 'a synthesis', a sonic merge of male authority and feminine ambiguity, an acceptance and integration of male and female, suggesting that both gender and sexuality are transferable. By going beyond the so-called limits of the natural voice, it transverses sonic possibilities, vocalising inadmissible sexualities and engaging with the erotics of risk and defiance, a desire for desire itself (Wood, 1994: 32-33), or, as the lyrics imply, 'different emotions', 'electric love'. The falsetto duetting on 'electric woman waits for you and me', 'while we fly over the love-filled sea', and the repeated 'I wanna show you' thus create a sense of trinity: he is she is he suggestive of the anima/animus of the soul-image⁸.

As Hendrix observed, the first track is an attempt to 'give a sound picture of the heavens – what happens when the gods make love' (cited in Walsh, 1968: 5) and Track 2 provides a particular insight into his 'Electric Lady'⁹. She is both powerful and problematic, seductive and sensual, challenging the boundaries of gender and sexuality as they are normatively constructed. Embodied both in his 'guitar/electric lady' and expressed through the self-harmonizing falsetto vocal, she confounds Hendrix's 'perceived mythic status as a swaggering macho *thing*' (Shaar Murray, 1989: 74) and re-situates him as the 'fire

elemental, the salamander that lives and glows in all that is fire – including the greatest fire of all – electricity’. (Henderson, 1978: 178)

In contrast, the ‘bouncy back-beating boogie’ of ‘Crosstown Traffic’ (track 3), situates the ‘hit and run’ girls within the codes of rock ‘n’ roll. She, it seems, relates to the numerous women in Hendrix’s life and his general aversion to saying ‘no’ to his legendary on-tour encounters, also hinted at in ‘Little Miss Strange’ (Track 5¹⁰). This time, however, he recognises her for what she is: ‘You’re just like crosstown traffic... all you do is slow me down’. Evocative of the decision making ‘Cross Roads’ of the blues, the jamming between instruments (‘Traffic jam ahead’, with the inference of jamming up the works), and the initial scattling with the strings of the guitar, work as musical metaphors for a change in attitude. Older and wiser, the days when ‘he would mime cunnilingus on stage, directing his attention to a woman in the audience and rapidly lapping his tongue (at a time when it was still considered an exotic sexual activity that only wicked, depraved men would perform, and even wickeder and more depraved women would want)’ (Shaar-Murray, 1989: 69) were, it seems, past. ‘My signals turn from green to red’, and in track 4, the ‘Voodoo Chile’ of his alter-ego emerges, laying claim to his supernatural origins, situating him among the legendary blues gods of the guitar, the supernatural (‘The night I was born, you know the moon turned a fire red’) and the metaphysical of William Blake (‘Well my arrows are made of desire...’) ¹¹.

The emphasis on transformation, as Hendrix moves through a chronological guided tour of blues styles, is a 15 minute homage that ranges from ‘earliest

recorded Delta blues, and travelling through the electric experiments of Muddy Waters in Chicago and John Lee Hooker in Detroit, to the sophisticated swing of B.B. King and the cosmic blurt of John Coltrane, eventually arriving at a glorious free-form noise which onomatopoeically evokes the blurring and collapse of history and category’ (Shaar Murray, 1989: 147). Past heroes swirl into a psychedelic melting pot that invokes metamorphosis, situating Hendrix as a privileged channel of communication between man and the supernatural. As Shaman ¹² the gods enter at his bidding ‘and are thus brought into confrontation with society and its problems’ (Lewis, 2003: 169) ‘I’m a million miles away and at the same time I’m right here in your picture frame’.

The first, second and fourth tracks ¹³ are thus an integral part of the larger picture. By ‘dragging the gods down to his level as much as soaring aloft’ (Lewis, 2003: 170) Hendrix reimposes order on chaos and despair, affirming his control of destiny and fate. (‘I see the love land. Soon you will understand.’ ‘Electric Ladyland’) He is both independence and hope, and by incarnating the spirits he embodies the intrusion of the gods into the realm of human society. By mastering these powers he dramatically asserts his claim to his blues heritage ¹⁴ and his supernatural origins. He can thus treat the gods on terms of equality: ‘Lord knows I’m a voodoo chile’.

While voodoo situates the gods among the metamorphic of the Black Creole ¹⁵, the combination of pagan magic and erotic fantasy is brought into alignment through the intervention of Venus and the gift of a ‘witch’s ring’. As the archetypal goddess of love ¹⁶ her ring confers sexual potency (a reference both to Hendrix’s reputation as a well-endowed male, and his

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assumed status as the voodoo chile/shaman). At the same time, she becomes part of the 'fantasy spiral'. (Foucault, 1988: 35) As Venus Aphrodite, the goddess who rises from the sea and wrings out her long hair, she incarnates the final metamorphosis ('1983 (A Merman I Should Turn To Be)'. In Greek mythology, Venus is also associated with the Sibyl, thus combining erotic fantasy with prophecy and the telling of tales. As a pagan presence from the past, 'she is also the protagonist of legends, bridging history and bringing with her the suggestion that she can cross different places and languages (Warner, 1994: 11) A wise woman and a traveller, she comes in many guises, foretelling Hendrix's birth as the 'voodoo chile' (my mother cried out, "Lord, the gypsy was right") before emerging as his beloved 'Gypsy Eyes'.

The heavily punctuated guitar riff that introduces track 8, 'Gypsy Eyes', returns the listener to the wild child of Hendrix's dreams. This is a pounding, hypnotic love, heightened by an initial sense of loss and need ('Where are you when it's a long hot summer night?' track 6) and synonymous with the 'good times' ('Come on, sugar, let the good times roll', track 7). 'Gypsy Eyes' thus builds a dramatic and turbulent emotional feel rather than one of dynamic stability ('do you still think of me?') Unlike the falsetto of 'the gods made love', where his Electric Lady assumes the mantle of celestial love, 'Gypsy' is invoked by an assertive guitar riff and earthed by blues inflections. She is situated as his past ('I remember the first time I met you'), present ('I walk up to your rebel roadside... searching for your loving') and future ('My Gypsy Eyes is coming and I've been saved'). This sense of redemption is also resonant in what Shaar Murray terms 'the life-giving waters

of the blues' (1989: 129) and draws on allusions to rootlessness and a cry for love. It is also there in the brief guitar reference to 'Spanish Castle Magic' ('hang on my darling')¹⁷ so situating 'Gypsy Eyes' within the extra-ordinary dimensions of experience. Gypsy's eyes are hypnotic and, as such, there is the implication of returning to a state where forgotten memories can be recovered and where she can cure him of his ills. It seems, however, from 'The Burning of the Midnight Lamp' (track 9) that his reprise is temporary ('the smiling portrait of you, is still hanging on my frowning wall') and while the anticipatory snow-sniff and coke-cough of track 10, 'Rainy Day, Dream Away' – 'see what you mean, brother' – provides a momentary sense of well-being in the laid back groove, track 11, '1983... (A Merman I Should Turn to Be)', frames the descent to the aqua world of Neptune against the 'killing noise' of Armageddon, the symbolic battlefield of the Apocalypse, and the scene of the final struggle between the powers of good and evil alluded to earlier in 'Have You Ever Been (to Electric Ladyland)'.

Held together by a bass run that extends throughout the work, it plunges the listener into the impressionistic sounds of war: 'Every inch of Earth is a fighting nest'. The devastation of 'lands so battered and torn' and the description of 'giant pencil and lipstick-tube shaped things [that] continue to rain and cause screaming pain' anticipate the warnings later realised in 'Star Spangled Banner' (Whiteley, in Bennett, 2004: 18-28) and like his earlier psychedelic tracks, juxtaposes the destruction of reality through the mutations of sound and the possibility of an alternative experience presaged in his previous album. 'Up From the Skies' suggests flight, disori-

entation and the will to survive ('and I came back to find the stars misplaced, and the smell of a world that has burned. I can dig it'). 'Love or Confusion' plays on chaos and noise ('Oh my head is pounding, pounding') and hallucinogenic exploration (Will it burn me if I touch the sun, so big, so round'). 'Are You Experienced' invites a journey to the unknown ('We'll watch the sun rise from the bottom of the sea')¹⁸ and it is the sea that beckons, once again, in '1983'. After the devastation of war, the final studio fantasia¹⁹ 'which collages a variety of performances, embellished with sound effects and constructed on tape... is rock's premier work of science fiction.' As Shaar Murray observes, 'There is nothing like it anywhere else in pop; it steers a supremely sure-footed path between the fumbling abstractions of contemporary Pink Floyd records and the art-deco cartooning of The Beatles... Hendrix was the music's first and funkiest cyberpunk.' (1989: 216)

The journey from 'lands so battered and torn', the 'forever of escape' is accessed, once again, through a woman, 'my darling', 'my love, Catherina' so hinting at the potential loss of self through the *jouissance* of orgasm. As Liepe-Levinson wryly observes, 'If sexual desire is always at least partly about losing control, then play and fantasy allow us to have control over a time in which we can experience the sensation of being out of control' (Liepe-Levinson, 2002: 139). Death (the supposed outcome of mortals who subside beneath the waves) is not, then, the final outcome, but merely a transitional journey: 'not to die but to be reborn'. Welcomed by a 'smiling mermaid', the enchantress whose sexual appetites and siren song relate to the complex relationship between voice and water, there is a morphological echo between the

waves, the element of water, the flow of the song, and sound-waves that evoke the ebb and flow of the sea on a shingled beach (all that is left after the descent to Neptune's kingdom?) of 'Moon Turn the Tides'. As such, the sea also evokes the return to a life-giving force: *she* is both sea (*la mer*) and mother (*la mère*). The spiral, the move from the Arcadian gods of Olympus, through a warring middle earth, to the 'aqua world' also remind the listener that 'I can explain everything better through music' (Hendrix, cited in Hendrson, 1990: 181), and after the watery sounds of 'Moon Turn the Tides' (track 13), which remind us that the Lunar Goddess is symbolic of the indestructable forces of nature, 'Still Raining, Still Dreaming' (track 14) foregrounds a funky 'Electric Lady' with the connotations that Hendrix is still very much alive and kicking.

It would seem, then, that the four remaining tracks encode the final paradigm. 'Still Raining, Still Dreaming' suggests that '1983' and 'Moon Turn the Tides' are part of a visionary hallucinogenic dream-scape. 'House Burning Down' (track 14) showcases the Electric Lady at full throttle. The use of tone and volume controls, toggle switch and full amp show that Hendrix is once again in control, taking the listener through the 'sprongy sounds' earlier heard in 'Little Wing'²⁰, 'coming in and out of a tone', using his left-handedness to full advantage. (Menn, 1975: 12-13) The apocalyptic lyrics ('look at the sky turn a hell red') against full-on psychedelic sounds that whiplash across the stereo channels, create spirals of sound that ultimately end in despondency with his cover of Dylan's 'All Along the Watchtower' (1968). Set in motion by 'there must be some way out of here', the final track returns to the supernatural of

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'Voodoo Chile (slight return)' (track 16), where percussive scratches on the guitar, a psychedelic blues vocabulary, and the evocative sounds of the wah-wah pedal move the track into Hendrix's signature motif, estranged from the cruelties of the real word, consumed with passion for his Electric Lady.

Take 3... a slight return

And so I return to the notion that 'within the fluid structures and fields of fantasy, the fantasizer inhabits not only the roles of seducer and seduced, actor and acted upon, but also the part of an omnipotent nebulous presence bearing witness to the scene'. (Liepe-Levinson, 2002: 67) For me, Hendrix is that omnipotent presence who both shapes and responds to the demands of his 'Electric Lady'. As Charles Shaar Murray writes, 'It is not so much that he is helpless before her; it is more that only in her presence can he bring himself to accept and acknowledge the helplessness that he already feels'. (1989: 74) She is his muse, his elemental and, as he so often avowed, his 'Electric Lady'. As such, 'the gallery of female archetypes that emerge from Hendrix's writings' (the Foxy Ladies, the Dolly Daggers, the insipid clingers of Crosstown Traffic) ... by no means represent the female image most close to him'. (1989: 74)

I would agree with Shaar Murray's interpretation, and would simply add that Hendrix's 'gallery of archetypes' reveals the full complexities of his sexual encounters. What is more intriguing, however, is the way in which his musical interpretations (from funk-rock swagger, to hard rock, churning blues and psychedelic colourings) create the kaleidoscopic depic-

tions of sexuality that underpin his own turbulent and often desolate sexual escapades. Small wonder, then, that his live performances so often attracted a hostile response from those lacking the necessary 'experience'. But then, as Philip Brett observes, music has always been considered a dangerous substance, even without the intervention of drug-related scenarios. It has long been interpreted as 'an agent of moral ambiguity, always in danger of bestowing deviant status upon its practitioners'. (1994: 11) Interpreted as ravishing and seductive, transcendent and sublime, decadent and deviant, it carries with it 'the accusation of daydream, imagination, or masturbation'. (1994: 13) Such observations could, I believe be set against those interpretations of Hendrix, which fail to recognise that his desire to make love to 'music sweet music' involves his total self, and that this total self is as complex as his feminine muse.

What I am arguing here, is that the multiple meanings of woman explored in Hendrix's songs have all too often been 'frozen or ossified by phallogocentric concepts' of femininity' (Tong, 1992: 229). As Shaar Murray observes, 'pop mythology generally being a loose conflation of lies, rumours, old newspaper cuttings and snap judgement it is less than surprising that unrestrained sexuality and all-purpose King dickism remains one of the cornerstones of Jimi Hendrix's legend'. For many critics, his music was simply dismissed as 'cock-happy guitar heroics'. (Shaar Murray, 1989: 68) What those critics failed to recognise is that Hendrix was both 'knowing' and 'experienced'; that the complexities of his compositions/performances demonstrated an understanding that the feminine can combine both the Madonna and whore. Thus, while he was disparaged for his staged acts of

cunnilingus, the critics seemed blissfully unaware of his skills. This was no grudging going-down on his 'Electric Lady', nor an invitation to the macho imagination – a possible interpretation of their reaction. Rather it is playful, giving. His tongue is dexterity, and his erotic exploration is both pleasure and performance. He knows how to the 'touch the live wire', 'using a lingual, instead of a phallic function to mobilize the [dis]play of eroticism'. (Grosz and Probyn, 1995: 38) He is no macho stud, 'leering at a woman in the audience' (Shaar Murray, 1989: 69) Rather, his knowledge of the *petite vénus* (as earlier shown in the gift of a ring by Venus, the goddess of love) shows him to be a 'cunning linguist', a knowledgeable lover, rather than a disparager of women.

This, then, is the anima, the activating spirit of Hendrix's sexuality, which allows him access to his elemental muse who, in turn, arouses his own sex. The relationship between Hendrix and his 'Electric Lady' also relates to the power of the music itself, so raising the (unanswerable) question: what came first, the lyrics or the sounds? It was, perhaps, neither. Rather, it was just the feel of playing his guitar. As his father, Al Hendrix reminisced, 'He just taught himself. He just picked it up. It was just in him, and the guitar became another part of his anatomy... And his guitar began to love him and he began to love it like no other love he had known ... It understood his frustrations', his desires, and his visions. (Henderson, 1990: 19) In effect, Hendrix spoke through his guitar and his guitar spoke through him. As such, the mood of his music could only effect a reciprocal response. The making love to his 'Electric Lady' would thus

involve passion and tenderness, hard-grinds and playful eroticism. As his singular love, she embodied every aspect of woman – consciousness, freedom, subjectivity – and female sexuality in all its manifestations. The relationship, as discussed earlier, is an acceptance and integration of male and female, suggesting that both gender and sexuality are transferable. By engaging with risk and defiance, he/she/he embodies a desire for desire itself. His musical language thus combines male desire and feminine pleasure, female desire and masculine pleasure. It is both an exploration and confirmation of erotic sensuality in all its complex subtlety.

My love for Hendrix is shaped by my own sex(uality) and it is, as a woman, that I respond to his music. With him as my guide, anything is possible. 'By my voice I shall be known' is, surely, a fitting epitaph for such a storyteller. As Marina Warner observes, 'We continue to demand that stories be *told over and over*, we want them to metamorphose themselves from the receipts of the manuals into drama and poems, into novels and texts, we want them not only for themselves, but for how they seed storytellers' imaginations, and how they make other stories, how they change in different poets' hands into *poesis*'. (2002: 211) This is the sense in which I listen and respond to Hendrix. His shape-shifting universe embodies transformations and is also a way of telling the self, reaching into the anguish and passion of past, present and future and propelling his narratives beyond the earthly into the time zones of the metaphysical and the hallucinogenic – the imaginary realms of erotic desire and fantasy.

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Endnotes

1. With thanks to Tom Attah for his response to my thoughts on Hendrix, and to whom my paper is dedicated.
2. Hendrix recorded three studio albums with the Experience (with Mitch Michell on drums and Noel Redding on bass) and one live album with his Band of Gypsys.
3. Julia Kristeva insists that, in the novel, liminal characters such as foreigners are exciting because they can be read in more than one way. Kristeva states that such figures create 'a network of paddings', 'a concatenation of deviations oscillating between two oppositional poles'. (1969: 43) This does not rest on binary proposition. Foreign or alien exotic characters, like the time-telling rabbit in *Alice in Wonderland* provide the reader or fantasizer or spectator with the necessary passport or transit to a fantasy realm that is itself predicated on shifting relationships – that offers an entire scene of action, rather than clear-cut identification. This works at the level of dramatic uncertainty – a pleasure not unlike the suspense and tease of sexual desire. (Liepe-Levinson, 2002: 92)
4. This can be accessed on google images by typing in Jimi Hendrix Electric Ladyland English album sleeve.
5. Beneath the so-called active and passive stances of seeing and being seen, there is always a reflexive form of seeing oneself – a vision intrinsic to the plenitude of auto-erotic pleasure. (Liepe-Levinson, 2002: 67) There is, then, a dualistic pleasure of identification. Hendrix can provide access to his harem, but equally the harem has access to Hendrix and the viewer can identify with either or both scenarios.
6. 'Sexual desire in Western culture is rarely represented through signifiers of the "normal". Unlike sexual relations which can be regulated by the State through institutions such as marriage, sexual desire is often taken to be something beyond social organization or rational control. That is one reason why erotic arousal is so frequently experienced, theorized and portrayed as being downright "dangerous" as well'. (Liepe-Levinson, 2002: 25) It is not too surprising, then, to find that early critics dubbed Jimi Hendrix 'the Wild Man from Borneo', 'the Crazy Black Man'. As Mike Clifford pointed out at the time, 'Hendrix had everything going for him – he had a supremely cool vocal drawl, dope-and-Dylan oriented lyrics, the acid dandyism of his clothes, and the stirring element of black sexual fantasy'. (cited in Gillett, 1983: 385)
7. As Liepe-Levinson observes, 'sexually suggestive movements theatrically go somewhere, from sexual flirting to full-blown I'm going to die from desire, from desire to mimetic or real sexual satisfaction. Sexual desire and play in the West are rarely represented in terms of intact or unified subject positions for either male or female actants. Depictions of sexual desire – or what is considered sexy in our culture – usually trade in images that suggest a shattering of traditional social and personal boundaries. These violations are exciting because they stand for a sexual abandon and pleasure that cannot be quantified'. (2002: 135-6)

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8. As Jung observes, the animus is the archetype that completes women and represents the male-defined qualities of reflection, deliberation and self-knowledge. The anima represents the female traits that a man's persona lacks – generally the ability to form relationships and be related – and is always female. The relationship of the anima/animus to the individual is always emotional and has its own dynamic, because, as archetypes, the anima and animus are impersonal forces. The animus of a woman and the anima of a man take the form of a soul-image in the personal unconscious (as suggested by Hendrix's relationship to his 'Electric Lady'. See: http://academic.brooklyn.cuny.edu/english/melani/novel_19c/wuthering/psych.html [11/09/2012])
9. Hendrix's Fender Stratocaster 'became a three-dimensional sound machine – a second voice, capable of utterances beyond our comprehension'. (Ellis, 1995: 57)
10. As the track is composed by Noel Redding, I have not included this in my discussion of the Hendrix muse.
11. The track features Stevie Winwood on Hammond Organ and Jack Casady (Jefferson Airplane) deputising for Noel Redding on bass.
12. The shaman is contractually bound as a mortal partner to a divinity. Both are inseparably conjoined: each possesses the other. The image of conjugal union implies that the possessed shaman is both a product and a testament to the sexual potency of the gods (Lewis, 2003: 172-3) and a spirit-possessed guide.
13. 'And the Gods Made Love', 'Have You Ever Been (to Electric Ladyland)', 'Voodoo Chile'.
14. As Shaar Murray notes, 'It is no accident that virtually all the pre-eminent blues masters combine the functions of singer, composer and instrumentalist. (1989: footnote, p. 146)
15. Paul Gilroy (*The Black Atlantic*, 1993) argues for redrafting a history made in common after the migrations caused by empire and slavery. His approach moves away from a model of clashing oppositions to one of coalescence – turbulent, disgraceful, riven with inequalities but nevertheless mutual in the sense that those who are done to, also do. The territories of the African diaspora in the Americas became a cross-cultural space, a mercantile and political confluence of heterogeneous peoples, histories and languages, a shifting metamorphic and phantasmal zone where 'le merveilleux créole' made its appearance in different languages and different genres. Marina Warner observes that 'the argument that the contemptuous depiction of savage rites and superstitions gave the oppressor permission to oppress the subaltern as an inferior, a child, a barbarian does not take into account sufficiently the continuing and ever-increasing fascination above all with stories of metamorphosis and magic in evidence in ethnographic and literary texts'. (2002: 20-21) Liepe-Levinson extends this argument by reflecting that 'In Western society, the middle class uses the whole world as its theatre in a particularly instrumental fashion, the very subjects which it politically excludes becoming exotic costumes which it assumes in order to play out the disorders of its own identity' (2002: 91) By invoking the alien exotic figure of the creole or voodoo child, mainstream society can flirt with transgressive behaviours and desires, while it reasserts the presumption of its own 'normalcy'.
16. As Jung observes, 'It is a great mistake to treat an archetype as if it were a mere name, word, or concept. It is far more than that: it is a piece of life, an image connected with the living individual by a bridge of emotion' (8: 96 in *Psychological Reflections* (1971: 43) Contemporary Venus archetypes include, for example, Marilyn Monroe.
17. Track 3, *Axis, Bold as Love* (1967)
18. All three tracks from *Axis, Bold as Love* (1967).
19. This was put together on a studio mixing desk by Hendrix and his engineer, Eddie Kramer.
20. *Axis, Bold as Love* (1967)