Notes on World Beat

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"It is simply incontestable that year by year American popular music has come to sound more and more like African popular music." Charles Keil's bold pronouncement in Urban Blues (1966) was certainly true, but it just reflected the A side of the emerging world beat record, because at the same time, on the B side, African popular musics had come to sound increasingly like American popular music (a term which, in large measure, is just a euphemism for Afro-American popular musics). This complex traffic in sounds, money and media is rooted in the nature of revitalization through appropriation.

Musical appropriation sings a double line with one voice. It is a melody of admiration, even homage and respect; a fundamental source of connectedness, creativity, and innovation. This we locate in a discourse of 'roots', of reproducing and expanding 'the tradition.' Yet this voice is harmonized by a counter-melody of power, even control and domination; a fundamental source of maintaining asymmetries in ownership and commodification of musical works. This we locate in a discourse of 'rip-offs,' of reproducing 'the hegemonic'. Appropriation means that the issue of 'whose music?' is submerged, supplanted, and subverted by the assertion of 'our music.'

This duality of appropriation is typically located in stories like this: Mick Jagger and The Rolling Stones obviously contributed to the fame, income, and recognition of Muddy Waters when they recorded his song, Mannish Boy, which was co-written with Bo Diddley, utilizing many aspects of his original recorded performance style from the 1950's. Jagger said that he idolized Muddy Waters and wanted to record great songs associated with him to draw attention to rock's debt to blues. For his part, Muddy Waters' later recordings of the tune, and his performances of it (largely for audiences of young white people), incorporated a few Jaggerisms of vocal inflection, as well as some rock instrumental influences. And Waters said he liked the versions recorded by the Stones, and the seriousness with which British rockers played blues.

For some, the homage paid to Waters by the Stones' use of his material speaks to the true affection white rockers had for Black urban blues styles.
They also point out that Waters' record sales, concert tours, and record contracts were greatly helped by the 'free' publicity spinoff from the Stones' cover version, and that white rock created a spotlight and larger market generally for Black music. On the other side, however, it is clear that the economic rewards and artistic status that accrued to The Rolling Stones from their cover recording greatly outnumber those that accrued to Muddy Waters for the original recording. Additionally, there is an arrogance that goes with the notion that it takes a recording by The Rolling Stones to bring recognition to the artistic contributions of a Muddy Waters. How then does one measure appropriation of original creative product by primary tradition bearers for a trade in symbolic respect and possible marketplace crossover/advancement, when it is always accompanied by a lesser trickle down of economic payback mixed with a reproduction of marketplace domination from above?

These issues are particularly poignant when we look at the international music scene, where worldwide media contact, amalgamation of the music industry toward world record sales domination by three enormous companies, and extensive copyright controls by a few Western countries are having a riveting effect on the commodification of musical skills and styles, and on the power of musical ownership. These issues add a complicated layer to the simpler recognition that American music is Africanizing while African music is Afro-Americanizing, a recognition that is 'simpler' only because of the exact, identifiable, concrete nature of the waves of musical products, influences, styles, genres, and musicians that have circulated back and forth in the African and Afro-American sphere.

Take, as a brief example of both the overt traffic in style reinvigoration, and the complexities of appropriation, Paul Simon's Graceland record. Released in the Fall of 1986, and an instant international success story since then, Graceland has won awards on every continent, sold at least seven million copies, and been celebrated variously as: a melding of mainstream 'world' pop and African 'folk' musics; the major anti-apartheid consciousness-raising and publicity event of 1987; and a major international market breakthrough for the South African musicians whose local pop styles (e.g., Soweto township jive, mbaqanga, kwela, ingoma ebusuku, Zulu choral music) form the instrumental and general musical bases for much of the record's distinct sound.

"These are the days of lasers in the jungle," sings Paul Simon; "this is the long-distance call." These 'connecting/us and them' images in the opening song on the Graceland record are part of the gestalt of a postmod-
ern African/Afro-American/American musical synthesis that overdubs quirky 1960's Long Island/Brill Building Simon lyrics, pedal steel guitar riffs from a Nigerian jùjù band player via Nashville recordings, vocals from Senegalese Youssou N'dour on break from recording projects with British pop star Peter Gabriel, and everything else from Synclavier samplers and drum machines to the Everly Brothers and Linda Rondstadt – all over the voices and instruments of South Africa's best known township musicians – bands like Stimela, Buyoyo Boys, General M.D. Shirinda and the Gaza Sisters, and the best known a capella chorus, Ladysmith Black Mambazo. What makes it all fit together? Simon tells us in the record liner notes and in interviews (like the following one from Rolling Stone, October 23, 1986) that when he heard South African township music "it sounded like very early rock and roll to me, black, urban, mid-fifties rock and roll like the great Atlantic tracks from the period ... the way they play the accordion it sounds like a big reed instrument. It could almost be a sax." Of course, the reason it sounded that way had much to do with the steady stream of Afro-American rhythm and blues records that circulated widely in South Africa, and the way South African pop styles emerged in the larger context of a record industry with very strong links to the American jazz, blues, gospel and soul markets. These influences are unmistakable in the styles of the South African groups, and it is not surprising that the music sounded familiar and not at all exotic to Simon. South African pop music is full of Afro-American soul, rhythm and blues, gospel, and jazz influences, largely from 50's and 60's American recordings.

It is clear that there is more than familiarity in Simon's attachment to South African pop. There is energy, vitality, and some mysterious politically transcendental dimension about which he is at a loss for words. Simon's respect for these various South African forms is obvious, and the fit between his fast-moving imagist poetics and the bouncing up-tempo grooves of the South African bands is clear. The strongest collaboration of musical forms on the record, the a capella "Homeless" with words (in English and Zulu) and music co-written with Joseph Shabalala (leader of Ladysmith Black Mambazo) is also the most political ("Strong wind destroy our home/Many dead, tonight it could be you.... We are homeless, homeless/Moonlight sleeping on a midnight lake"). Add to this that for the record Simon worked with many South African groups, paid them top price plus standard royalty cuts, gave co-writing music credits, then toured the world with the groups plus Black South African musicians Hugh Masakela and Miriam Makeba, went on to produce a record for Ladysmith Black Mam-
bazo on his label (Warner Bros., a major move for LBM from an independent small label Shanachie, with material licensed from Gallo in South Africa), and has donated lots of money from these projects to African and Afro-American causes.

At the same time we must scrutinize the nature of Simon's role from the point of view of the overall ownership of the product (Paul Simon-Graceland, produced by Paul Simon, all songs copyright Paul Simon) and how this ownership maintains a particular distance between his elite art status and the status of the musicians with whom he worked. All of the performance styles (the grooves, beats, sounds, genres) are South African in makeup (whatever influences they synthesize and incorporate). While the contribution of Simon's lyrics is clear and important, the contribution of the music, its unique and distinct and formative influence on the quality and particularity of the record, is clearly downplayed. This is because the musicians are in the role of wage laborers. Of course, one could not find musicians in New York or London to do what they do because they are not just wage laborers, they are the bearers and developers of musical traditions and idioms. That no ownership of this product is significantly shared with them (beyond their wages for recording studio time – triple union scale, same price that the best players in New York receive) reflects the rule of elite artistry. What statement does this make about the role of Paul Simon the international pop star vis-à-vis the roles of the musicians without whom the record would have been impossible? It seems to draw the boundary line of participation and collaboration at ownership. Whose music? Paul Simon's music.

To look at the situation from another angle we might turn to the last two cuts on the record, recorded in the USA, with exemplars of zydeco (Black Southwest Louisiana cajun blues) and East Los Angeles Chicano rock and roll – both connected to the South African cuts by the central presence of the accordion as a melody and rhythm instrument. "That was your mother" was recorded in Louisiana with the popular zydeco singer/accordionist Alton Rubin (Rockin' Dopsie) and his band, the Twisters. The lyrics of the song are from Paul Simon's pen and are sung by him. The entire instrumental accompaniment is provided by the Dopsie and Company, and the music is clearly the kind of uptempo straight zydeco groove with which Dopsie has been long associated. In fact, careful inspection shows that the music is virtually an exact copy of a tune called "Josephine" which Dopsie has recorded before. Why then does the disc say "Words and Music by Paul Simon" and why does Paul Simon hold the copyright? The musical dimension of the song – the melodic line, chord progression, zydeco rhythmic
groove, instrumentation, performance quality in the best zydeco tradition – is entirely the contribution of Dopsie's band. They are the tradition bearers of zydeco, the ones who have created a zydeco sound that Paul Simon has overdubbed with his words.

Similarly, "All around the world, or, the myth of fingerprints" is recorded with the popular group Los Lobos. Again the lyrics are entirely by Paul Simon and sung by him, occasionally with Cesar Rosas and David Hidalgo of Los Lobos. The basic instrumental material is by Los Lobos, with some additional guitar and percussion parts added later by Simon and studio percussionists. Again the song is credited as Words and Music by Paul Simon, and the copyright is held by Simon. In the April 1987 issue of Musician magazine, Los Lobos members Cesar Rosas and Louis Perez spoke about the process of the recording session with Simon. "So we got into the studio, there were no songs. After a while we started feeling like idiots: 'when is he going to show us the song?'.... We expected him to have a song ready for us to interpret when we met him in Los Angeles, but he said, 'You guys just play,' and we said 'Play what?' We just worked up a bunch of stuff that he eventually got a song out of, and that was it...we felt a little detached from the finished piece; we didn't have any real involvement in it."

In both cases the actual musical contribution – the structure and performance of the song materials – seems to owe much more to the bands than to Simon. He was using them much like he used the Boyoyo Boys music for "Gumboots" earlier on the record. And there (as with "I know what I know" and "The boy in the bubble") the music writing credit is shared with the band members. While Simon's recording studio technique and tune credits (not unlike the reggae 'dub' artists who create lyrics and perform them to existing basic melody and rhythm tracks) at least acknowledge the musical contributions of the African bands, they do not do so with the American groups. Perhaps, being closer to these pop traditions, Simon felt that these songs were in fact more his own, or at least, less someone else's. Or perhaps the fact that variants of the first nine songs had been recorded earlier in South Africa marked the obviousness of the prior original contributions, leading to the co-credit lines.

All of these forms and processes of appropriation – some more direct, some more subtle; some more overtly arrogant and linked to control over the means of production, others more complex and contradictory due to the way they suit both parties, or even strike each as fair tradeoffs – could be detailed song by song, and style by style for this record. Recent recordings by
other major international pop stars (for example Peter Gabriel's *So*; Talking Heads' *Naked*) can be approached in the same way — through a kind of archaeological stylistic stratigraphy showing layers and varieties of appropriation, circulation, and traffic in musical grooves, and concomitant embeddings, solidifications, and encrustings in the pop rock of musical ownership.

Ultimately, of course, Paul Simon and other powerful pop stars can't do much about the fact that the profit in, and artistic value structure of, their work precisely reproduces the typical three-cornered hat of the music business: Record Companies make the most money from single products with extremely high sales volume (seven million copies of one record makes very much more money than seven records that each sell one million copies). Major Contract Artists are only granted the possibility of producing their own work and taking economic/artistic risks commensurate with their sales. Musicians are laborers who sell their services for a direct fee and take the risk (and have little expectation) that royalty percentages, spinoff jobs, tours, and recording contracts might follow from the exposure and success of records with enormous sales.

This structure has particular consequences in the international marketplace, where the flow or infusion of new life-blood into the veins of the record business (which involves the vertically and horizontally integrated and aligned control of the technologies that record and reproduce, the media of recording and reproduction, and the publication rights to texts and music involved) simultaneously drains and distances those whose creative labors are centrally involved in making the music. Talent/labor can be imported, commodified in appropriated form, then exported with a new label, asserting the artistry, cleverness, and uniqueness of the star who brought it all together.

Getting back to Keil's old assertion, and how the A and B side of the old disc are now all on one side — appropriately, increasingly on that non-sided and non-grooved new laser in the jungle, the CD — it seems that the Africanization of world pop music and the Afro-Americanization of African pop are complexly intertwined, particularly since the Second World War. At the same time that world music is homogenizing and human musical diversity is shrinking, clearly the mark of the new, the exciting, the revitalized, the 'long-distance call' is still the mark of otherness, no more strongly epitomized on the world musical map than by Africa. Elite pop artists are in the strongest artistic and economic position in the world to freely appropriate what they like of human musical diversity, with full support from record
companies and often with the outright gratitude of the musicians whose work now will appear under a new name.

What is most clear is that the flow of products and the nature of ownership is differentiated by market valuation factors. When James Brown breaks down complex African polyrhythms and incorporates them into dense funk/soul dance tracks, we don't speak of a powerful Afro-American star moving in on African musical turf. Ten years later, when Fela Anikulapo Kuti seizes the essence of the James Brown scratch guitar technique and makes it the centerpiece of his Afro-Beat, we don't speak of a powerful African star moving in on Afro-American turf. The economic stakes in this traffic are small, and the circulation has the revitalization dynamic, of roots. But when the Talking Heads move in on both James Brown and Fela Anikulapo Kuti and use scratch, funk, Afro-Beat and jùjù rhythm as the basic grooves for *Remain in Light*, something else happens. The economic stakes – however much attention is drawn to the originators as a result – are indeed different, the gap between the lion's share and the originator's share enlarged, and the discourse of race and rip-offs immediate and heated.

I'm suggesting then that the revitalizing cycle of Africanization/Afro-Americanization in the world beat comes to be increasingly located in issues of power and control because of the nature of record companies and their cultivation of an international pop music elite with the power to sell enormous numbers of recordings. These forces tend to draw upon and incorporate African/Afro-American materials, products, and ideas, but stabilize them at the labor/talent/influence levels, the levels at which they can be continually manipulated for export and recirculation, in their made-over forms. The politicized aesthetic of a record like *Graceland* will then look more and more like an ink-blot test whose projection is a much too literal map of the black and white of world music.