Trouble Songs: A Musicological Poetics

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Published by Punctum Books


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Not Wanting to (Formally)\textsuperscript{53} Listen to Trouble Songs\textsuperscript{54}

Do Trouble Songs resist analysis? I would rather talk about trouble (and “trouble”) and Trouble Songs than analyze a Trouble Song. Is this like explaining a magic trick?\textsuperscript{55} Worse: explaining magic? Yes and no. This is the ambivalence of the music writer.\textsuperscript{56} The song gives itself to the listener: Even in its reticence, it gives its reticence.\textsuperscript{57} Here is the extant link between poetry and song. Analysis is betrayal in a way that conversation, especially sacramental conversation, is not. Academic prose is an abomination, except in that it unabashedly disregards the constraints of genre — it rejects the pre-eminent eloquence of linguistic art while disavowing its own art (except in moments of excess, e.g., Harold Bloom’s poem at the end of \textit{The Anxiety of Influence}, which if not a work of art, is the pretense of a work of art).\textsuperscript{58} Besides, it is better (or just as good) to remember a Trouble Song than it is as a matter of research practice — taking notes (hip static\textsuperscript{4}) vs. listening as Allen Ginsberg referred to audience feedback during poetry readings in which you and I appear together, as a veil is lifted.

In conversation, Ira Livingston relays a parable of (and for) postmodernism, a string from which to hang: We can show how a magic trick works without ruining the magic (or the trick). And we can tell the future without spoiling the plot. If all this foot dragging drags you down, translocate to Part Two, where we get over it.

The music writer we call to task wants to distinguish herself from “music journalists … who move ever more quickly toward the domestication of radical sound” (Moten, \textit{In the Break}, 224). But we call attention as well to what Moten describes as “that resistance of the object — to dis/appearance or interpretation — that constitutes the essence of performance” (225). Trouble Songs typically arrive as records of a performance, which we stage as a re-appearance of song, singer, audience, and “trouble.” And “it is this resistance that demands analysis” (Moten 226).

Less defensive gestures might also trouble the line between academic criticism and art. Rachel Zolf has commented (in conversation) on the linguistic beauty of theory. Is the work of Deleuze and Guattari, Butler, Derrida, Barthes, Jameson, Kristeva, and/or your favorite theorists a product of or assimilable in the academy, and what is the academy, and what is art, and criticism, etc., &/but here we are mooning over theory in an investigation of song which owes its blood flow, should there be any, to poetics (and linguistics, &c.). RIP and long live theory.
to listen to one, and it is better by far to listen than it is to speak. And if one must speak (and this ought to be one's only appearance here), s/he ought to listen first.