Trouble Songs: A Musicological Poetics

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Published by Punctum Books

T. Johnson, Jeff.
Trouble Songs: A Musicological Poetics.

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History, Continued

A cover song represents—and re-presents—history. In deed, “trouble” is a cover for trouble. How does the “original” song represent history? It changes as we move away from—and back toward—it. 94 It, which is history. We, who make (up) history.

The context of history travels with our perspective on history. 95 It rides the same train of thought. But there are other trains, other passengers, other compartments:

This “return to history” is ahistorical for three reasons: the context of history is disregarded, its continuum is disavowed, and conflictual forms of art and modes of production are falsely resolved in pastiche. Neither the specificity of the past nor the necessity of the present is heeded. Such a disregard makes the return to history also seem to be a liberation from history. And today [ca. 1985] many artists do feel that, free of history, they are able to use it as they wish. Yet, almost self-evidently, an art form is specific: its meaning is part and parcel of its period and cannot be transposed innocently. (Foster, “Against Pluralism” 16)

But we are never innocent in and around Trouble Songs. Whether we hear or sing them, 96 and despite what they withhold, or promise to withhold, Trouble Songs dispel any illusion of innocence. 97 The reassuring smile in profile conceals the knowing grin in shadow.

94 Angels of history, we face away from the future but back toward it, so we cannot see the future until it is past; we take the edge of history—the future—with us as we run back to the ruins.

95 A synchronic view from a diachronic train—where we sit in any car on a long, long trip

96 and we are always singing, always listening

97 We all know trouble, even if we didn’t know trouble when it walked in.