Trouble Songs: A Musicological Poetics

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“Trouble” vs. “Remember”

Without an object, there is a generic metonymy, which is to say, without a referent, the sign becomes (replaces) the object. “Remember,” sings David Bowie, in a song (“Blue Jean”) in which speaking and singing are conflated, as are remembering and memory, so that what he is saying is what he says. This is history as trouble, or “history” as “trouble.” Thus “Remember” is left to hang, but is self-contained, a generic sensuality, self-reflection. It is the word that speaks itself and goes nowhere.

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98 or perhaps refer back to the line “I just met a girl named Blue Jean,” so the song’s pointing is a pose that indicates itself, just-only and just-now. Or perhaps (also) “Remember” refers not to the spoken throwaway “they always let you down when you need ’em” that follows after the chasmal pause, but the preceding revelation that “she got a camouflaged face and no money.” What is there, then, to remember but the coin of the refrain, if it is locatable (in the pocket)?