Trouble Songs: A Musicological Poetics

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Occupied

Does trouble recognize us, or merely occupy our minds? Barthes’ notion of hysterical history (applied) would suggest that we project ourselves onto/into trouble, leaving our selves behind. To which let’s add that trouble is a story we tell to make ourselves (or, paradoxically, our troubles) disappear. As if the generic (and genre) will save us (or spare us, or spell us).

If [as] we pass through the Trouble Song, we pass through trouble. Does the song know we are there? This depends on the nature of the audience. The singer is audience to the song, particularly the received Trouble Song. But if he plays to an expansive audience, we can imagine no individual comprises the audience, or the transmission. Does the singer recognize each [other] member of the audience? Not necessarily. Nor is it necessary for him to do so for trouble to be passed around. Does trouble know it is sung? What’s the trouble?

The Trouble Song lets us know trouble is there. It allows us to [safely] recognize trouble. It is a secure invitation. We [are allowed to] know trouble by its song. Let us ask again: Does trouble know us? If we are responsible for trouble, if we bring it to the table at the bar, does it rely on us?

We cannot know trouble, can only know its sign, under the Trouble Song. This is why the song is allowed into the party. We allow the song to get hold of us because we trust that trouble cannot keep us while we have an invocation to its double in play (the fake authentic jukebox at our table, both recalling and replacing the communal interface).

Does trouble recognize us? We hope not. We carry on under the disguise of revelry, or the pantomime of sentiment, the performance of trouble that keeps it at bay. We sing to have “trou-

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54 Thanks to Chris Stroffolino for positing this question, regarding the Roland Barthes’ epigraph from another Trouble Song (“Trouble With History”): “History is hysterical: it is constituted only if we consider it, only if we look at it — and in order to look at it, we must be excluded from it.”

55 an answer in the form of a question, and vice versa
ble” in mind. If trouble remains anonymous, perhaps we can be anonymous to trouble.

Does trouble occupy our minds? In either form, in both: yes, but never merely so.