STEVEN FELD

8 NOTES ON "WORLD BEAT"

"It is simply incontestible 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] 1991:45) was certainly true, but it reflected just 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. This complex traffic in sounds, money, and media is rooted in the nature of revitalization through appropriation.

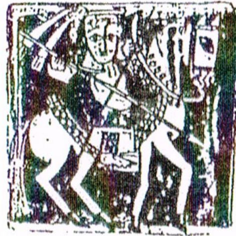
Musical appropriation sings a double line with one voice. It is a melody of admiration, even homage and respect, a fundamental source of connectedness, creativity, and innovation. This we locate in a discourse of "roots," of reproducing and expanding "the tradition." Yet this voice is harmonized by a countermelody of power, even control and domination, a fundamental source of asymmetry in ownership and commodification of musical works. This we locate in a discourse of "rip-offs," of reproducing "the hegemonic." Appropriation means that the question "Whose music?" is submerged, supplanted, and subverted by the assertion "Our/my music."

The dual character 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 (cowritten with Bo Diddley) "Mannish Boy," utilizing many aspects of his original, recorded performance style from the 1950s. 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's 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's record sales, concert tours, and record contracts were greatly helped by the "free" publicity spun off from the Stones' cover version and that white rock created a spotlight and larger market generally for black music. However, it is clear that the economic rewards and recognition of artistic status that accrued to the Rolling Stones greatly outweigh those that accrued to Muddy Waters for the original recording. Additionally, there is considerable cultural arrogance in 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 evaluate this type of trade, where original creative product by primary tradition bearers is appropriated in exchange for symbolic respect and possibly some lesser, trickle-down economic payback, advancement or crossover in the marketplace? Such a payback, when it occurs, itself reproduces the pattern of marketplace domination from above.

These questions are particularly poignant when we look at the international music scene, where worldwide media contact, consolidation of the music industry such that three enormous companies dominate world record sales, and extensive copyright controls in the hands of a few Western countries are having a riveting effect on the commodification of musical skills and styles, and 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 African-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, *Graceland* has been an ongoing international success; it has won awards on every continent, sold millions of copies, and been celebrated variously as a melding of mainstream "world" pop and African "folk" musics, the major antiapartheid consciousness-raising and publicity event of 1987, and a major international market breakthrough for the South African musicians whose local pop styles (Soweto township jive, *mbaqanga, kwela, mbube, isicathamiya*) form the instrumental and general musical basis for much of the record's distinctive sound.



Paul Simon, *Graceland*, cover, 1986. Warner Brothers Records.

Maskanda street musicians doing the Zulu blues; Umlazi Township, Natal, South Africa, 1993. Photo Charles

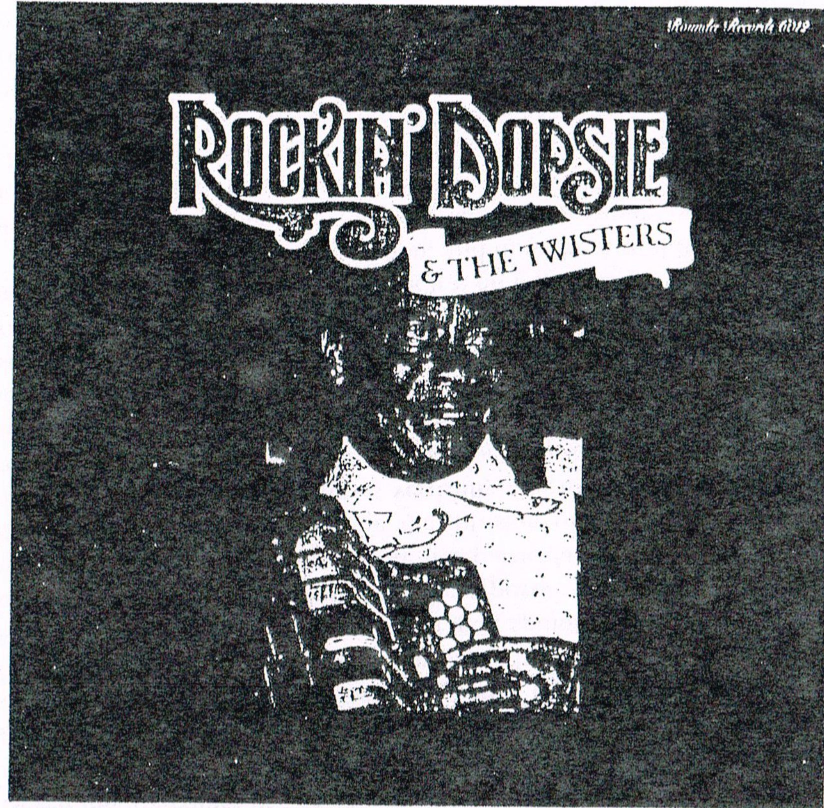
"These are the days of lasers in the jungle," sings Paul Simon. "This is the long-distance call." These connecting, us-and-them images in *Graceland*'s opening song are the gestalt of a postmodern African/African-American/American musical melange that overdubs quirky 1960s Long Island/Brill Building Simon lyrics; pedal steel guitar riffs from a Nigerian *jùjú* band player conversant with Nashville recordings; vocals from Senegalese Youssou N'dour, on break from recording projects with British pop star Peter Gabriel; and everything 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, Boyoyo Boys, General M. D. Shirinda and the Gaza Sisters, and a cappella chorus Ladysmith Black Mambazo. What makes it fit all together? Simon tells us in the record liner notes and in interviews (the following quotes come from one in *Rolling Stone*, 23 October 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 African-American rhythm and blues records that have circulated in South Africa and the way South African pop styles emerged in the context of a record industry with 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 African-American soul, rhythm and blues, gospel, and jazz influences, largely from 1950s and 1960s American recordings.

It is clear, however, that something more than the music's familiarity is involved in Simon's attachment to South African pop. There is energy, vitality, and some mysterious politically transcendental stuff about which he is at a loss for words. Simon's respect for these 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 blending of musical forms on the record—the a capella "Homeless," with words (in English and Zulu) and music cowritten 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 Simon worked with many South African groups, paid them top price plus standard royalty cuts, gave music credits to his cowriters, then toured the world with the participating groups plus black South African musicians Hugh Masakela and Miriam Makeba, produced a record for Ladysmith Black Mambazo on his label (Warner Brothers, a major move for the group from small independent label Shanachie, which had licensed material for North American release from Gallo, the South African state company that made all of LBM's recordings), and donated lots of money from these projects to African and African-American causes.

At the same time we must scrutinize Simon's role from the point of view of the overall ownership of the product (Simon's name above the title, "Produced by Paul Simon," "All Songs Copyright . . . Paul Simon") and how this ownership maintains a particular distance between his elite pop star status and the status of the musicians with whom he worked. All of the performance styles, grooves, beats, sounds, and genres are South African in identity, whatever other influences they synthesize and incorporate. The contribution of Simon's lyrics is clearly important and clearly acknowledged, but the distinct, formative influence of these appropriated musical forms on the quality and particularity of the record is downplayed, both conceptually, in the presentation, and physically, in the audio mix. The musicians fill 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 but the bearers and developers of specific musical traditions and idioms. That no significant ownership of the product is shared with them beyond base royalties and their wages for recording studio time (triple union scale, the 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 between 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 United States with exemplars of zydeco (black southwest Louisiana creole rhythm and blues) and East Los Angeles Chicano rock and roll—both connected to the South African cuts by the prominence of the accordion as a melody and rhythm instrument. "That Was Your Mother" was recorded in Louisiana with popular zydeco singer-accordionist Alton Rubin, Sr. (Rockin' Dopsie), and his



Rockin' Dopsie, *Rockin' Dopsie and the Twisters*, cover; 1977. Rounder Records.

band, the Twisters. The lyrics were written and sung by Simon, with instrumental accompaniment provided entirely by Dopsie and company. The music is clearly the kind of up-tempo straight zydeco groove with which Dopsie has been long associated. In fact, the music is virtually an exact copy of a tune called "Josephine" which Dopsie had recorded previously. Why then do the liner notes say, "Words and Music by Paul Simon," and why does Paul Simon hold the copyright? The musical dimensions of the song—the melodic line, chord progression, zydeco rhythmic groove, instrumentation, and performance quality—are all contributions of the zydeco tradition and specifically of Dopsie's band. These players are the tradition bearers, the ones who created the zydeco sound that Paul Simon overdubbed with his words.

Similarly, "All around the World; or, The Myth of Fingerprints" was recorded with the rock group Los Lobos. Again the lyrics were written

and sung by Simon, with occasional vocals by Cesar Rosas and David Hidalgo of Los Lobos. The basic instrumental material is by Los Lobos, with some guitar and percussion parts added later by Simon and studio percussionists. Again the credit reads, "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 music—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, as background material for his lyrics. Yet on that cut, and on "I Know What I Know" and "The Boy in the Bubble," the music writing credit is shared with the band members. While Simon's studio technique and tune credits are not unlike those of reggae "dub" artists who perform their lyrics to existing melody and rhythm tracks, it is curious that he acknowledges the unique musical contributions of the South African bands but does 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 anyone else's.[1] Or perhaps the fact that variants of the first nine songs had been previously *recorded* by local groups in South Africa marked those performers' original contributions more obviously, leading to the cocredit lines.

All these forms and processes of appropriation—some more direct, some more subtle, some more overtly arrogant and linked to control of the means of production, others more complex and contradictory in that they accommodate both parties and may strike each as fair trades—could be detailed song by song, style by style for *Graceland*. Recent

1. Simon may have found the zydeco musical form familiar to his project, but it is ironic if not bizarre that nobody pointed out to him how clearly the text of "That Was Your Mother" indicates ignorance of life in Louisiana. He sings of dancing with "Cajun girls" to zydeco music, but unless there have been big changes in Lafayette race politics recently, Cajun women are not the ones you're likely to meet at Creole bars that feature bands like Rockin' Dopsie and the Twisters.

recordings by other international pop stars, for example, Peter Gabriel's *So* or Talking Heads' *Naked*, could also be approached through this kind of archaeological stylistic stratigraphy, revealing layers and varieties of appropriation, circulation, and traffic in musical grooves, and concomitant embeddings and solidifications of musical ownership.

Ultimately of course, Paul Simon and other pop stars can't do much about the fact that the profit and artistic value structure surrounding their work precisely reproduces the typical three-cornered hat of the music business (as analyzed in Frith 1981): *Record companies* make the most money from single products with extremely high sales volume (seven million copies of one record make 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 and artistic risks commensurate with their sales. *Musicians* are laborers who sell their services for a direct fee and take the risk (with 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 infusion of new blood into the record business—which exercises vertically and horizontally integrated control over the media and technologies for recording and reproduction and over publication rights to texts and music—simultaneously drains and distances those whose creative labors are central to making the music. Talent as labor can be imported, commodified in appropriated form, and 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 one side—appropriately, increasingly on that nonsided and nongrooved new laser in the jungle, the CD—it seems that the Africanization of world pop music and the 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 shrinking, the new, the exciting, the revitalized, the "long-distance call," epitomized on the world musical map by Africa, is still the mark of otherness. Elite pop artists are in the strongest artistic and economic position in the world to 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 appears under a new name

It is clear, however, that the flow of products and the nature of ownership is differentiated by market valuation factors. When James Brown broke down complex African polyrhythms and incorporated them into dense funk and soul dance tracks, critics didn't speak of a powerful African-American star moving in on African musical turf. And when, ten years later, Fela Anikulapo Kuti seized the essence of the James Brown scratch guitar technique and made it the centerpiece of his Afro-Beat, critics didn't speak of a powerful African star moving in on African-American turf. That's because the economic stakes in this traffic were small, and the circulation had the revitalizing dynamic of roots. But when Talking Heads moved in on both James Brown and Fela Anikulapo Kuti and used scratch, funk, Afro-Beat, and *jùjú* rhythms as the basic grooves for *Remain in Light*, something else happened. The economic stakes, however much attention was drawn to the originators as a result, were increased, the gap between the lion's share and the originator's share enlarged, and the critical discourse on race and rip-offs was immediate and heated.

I'm suggesting then that the revitalizing cycle of Africanization/Afro-Americanization in world beat comes to be increasingly entangled with 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 and African-American materials, products, and ideas but stabilize them at the levels of labor, talent, or "influences," levels at which they can be continually manipulated for export and recirculation in made-over forms. The politicized aesthetic of a record like *Graceland* then looks more and more like an ink-blot test whose projection is a much too literal map of the black and white of world music.[2]

2. I wrote these notes in the months immediately following the release of *Graceland*. Since the piece was published, researchers with experience in South Africa have written equally anxious academic reviews of the issues treated here, analyzing the historical, biographical, and ideological situation of South African musicians. Their work should be consulted for details that extend and amplify the issues I raise about ownership and cultural equity. Materials I wish had been around in 1986–87 include Veit Erlmann's articles and book (1989, 1990, 1991), Charles Hamm's book (1988) and his exchange (1989) in *Popular Music* with Dave Laing (1990), Helen Kivnick's book (1990), and Louise Meintjes's superb analysis of *Graceland's* meanings in and out of South Africa (1990).