

EASA Media Anthropology Network e-Seminar Series

<http://www.media-anthropology.net/workingpapers.htm>

E-Seminar on Carsten Wergin's working paper "World Music: A medium for unity and difference?"

(22 – 29 May 2007)

Abstract:

The aim of my paper is to discuss the existence of World Music within and beyond its economic dimension. It focuses on the question of how a musical space, in which various actors intonate their visions of transcultural unity and difference, can be analysed ethnographically. The paper is meant to give a written ethnographic account of such a space, referring to a specific version of a popular song that probably none of my readers have ever listened to. In this sense, I present an actual working paper, as this constitutes an experiment, in which I herewith invite you to take part.

Central to my argument is the fact that World Musicians mediate local images of authenticity for global audiences. They invent traditions to signify unique forms of identities and cultures. Simultaneously, they draw on musical references from different parts of the world. On Réunion Island, an Overseas-Department of France in the Indian Ocean, this process becomes even more apparent. Before its colonisation the island was uninhabited. Traditions here are not original or rooted, but are indicators of cultural transition and routedness. Réunionese Musicians use traditions to (re)territorialise themselves within a translocal soundscape, a World Music scene where Réunion Island becomes one of many points of reference. This is exemplified in a version of Bob Marley's "Redemption Song" played by a Réunionese band called Bastèr. Their specific musical mediation of culture and identity, to my understanding, offers a different perspective on what a World Music might sound like.

Subject: [Mediantthro] Wergin e-seminar opens now

From: John Postill <jpostill@usa.net>

Date: Tue, 22 May 2007 09:35:03 +0100

Dear All

Welcome to the EASA media anthropology network e-seminar series. For a period of a week we shall be discussing on this list a working paper by Carsten Wergin (Bremen University) titled "World Music: a medium for unity and difference?". Carsten Wergin teaches at the Institutes for Social and Cultural Anthropology at Free University Berlin and the University of Halle-Wittenberg, in Germany. Earlier this year he defended his PhD thesis at the University of Bremen, based on a study of musicians and other cultural actors on La Réunion. A PDF of the paper is available at

<http://www.media-anthropology.net/workingpapers.htm>

The discussant will be Jo Haynes (Bristol University), a sociologist who specialises in the articulation between local and global musical forms within the music industry. Jo is currently writing about music and migration in relation to jazz and world music in Europe and is exploring facets of the consumption and production of music in Bristol (UK).

I would now like to invite Jo to post her comments on Carsten's paper, after which Carsten will have the chance to respond to these comments before we open up the discussion to everyone on the list.

John

Subject: [Mediantthro] Comments

From: Jo Haynes <Jo.Haynes@bristol.ac.uk>

Date: Tue, 22 May 2007 16:35:06 +0100

Comments on "World Music: a medium for unity and difference?" by Carsten Wergin

The empirical identification and description of local music processes as enacted by the band Bastèr from La Réunion makes a very interesting case study of world music. As a sociologist with an interest in the social organisation and cultural significance of music, whether world or not, I believe it is essential that this type of empirical work is carried out, as world music literature is dominated by theoretical and abstract concerns, especially in relation to globalisation debates. Moreover, accounts of its empirical meaning help to provide further purchase on it as a cultural process that reflects both local and global influences.

The following questions arose in my reading of this article. I have first tried to explain the thinking process behind some of the issues that stimulated such queries.

It is argued here that world music is demonstrably an artistic genre and not simply a marketing concept, achieved through a particular kind of musical practice, with a style defined by its expression and representation of ideas about culture and identity. The typical understanding of the history of world music as a marketing concept is shaped by the idea that music industry movers and shakers at a point in the 1980s needed a more convenient label for heterogeneous music in order to sell more units to western consumers and thus, unlike jazz or hip hop, there is no one identifiable sound or style. Often this leads to some taking the perspective of world music that it is an empty or meaningless creative category. However, I think that the relationship between industry and creative practices that shape what eventually comes to be called world music are fraught with tensions and ambiguities.

Inglis and Robertson (2005: 157) suggest that music per se "is one of the

most geographically portable of all artistic and cultural forms" that are "particularly prone to syncretisms and fusions of different styles". In this sense, apart from the particular locally inscribed political references and aspirations of Bastèr, surely the combination and reworking of their sounds and contrasting of instruments and voices through Bob Marley's 'Redemption Song' is typical of what musicians (mostly?) always do.

1. What makes the practice of world music making as described here qualitatively distinct from any other kind of music making that may also deal with issues of identity and culture? For example, hip hop also is constructed around ideas of culture and identity and is usually associated or taken up by urban groups on the periphery in a social, economic or political sense, often reinterpreting the original cultural formation of hip hop by combining with local or traditional music, politics and languages.

In fact, the one thing that would (does) cast a different light on this process is the ideas associated with the label world music itself, i.e. the fact that from the end of the 1970s the fledgling world music industry began to notice the 'authentic' music of La Réunion and it is from this point that they tried to make their music fit within a certain global aesthetic that valorised authenticity and the exotic or hybridity, which are both key aspects of the commercial definition of world music. The ideas underpinning world music as part of a 'genre culture' (Negus, 1999), which includes the practices of the industry, is in fact how the musicians discussed here proceed to orient their music. This shows how world music is not simply reflecting but actually contributing to the transformation of the relations between music and ethnic/identity and music and geographical space, such that world music is global in nature (Inglis and Robertson, 2005). This means that it is difficult to separate the 'artistic' or creative aspects of what constitutes world music as a genre from how the music industry has shaped the possibilities for creative practices as described here.

2. Would these changes to the expression and representation of La Réunion music from maloya through to the reworking of Bob Marley and beyond, exist without a global (world) music industry?

3. What therefore is the relationship between the dynamic genre practices as described here and creative constraint brought about by transformations in habits of consumers, market categories and audience expectations music making, marketing and consumption practices that produce the genre of world music? In other words, what is the relationship between creativity and industry that underpins this account of the music making practices of this band?

Some musicians are perhaps more self-conscious than others about the relationship between creativity and industry, depending on how genre savvy the musicians are or want to be in relation to their ultimate orientation to music making, i.e. can they simply make vibrant 'Creole' Réunionaise music without wanting to 'reterritorialise' themselves within a global musical aesthetic as 'world music'? What relationship does the reception of the music have with the reading of the song described here, in other words, to what extent does world music require some form of expertise in order to deliver the cultural politics integral to the band's music making mission?

In short, I guess I am questioning what is being imputed to the Bastèr musicians and their creative output and their imagined audience/market, as well as questioning the extent to which we can make a special case for well as questioning the extent to which we can make a special case for world music in terms of what it might constitute as a social and cultural process.

Overall, I found this paper to stimulate further questions about how music is used to portray social and political concerns from a musician's and the relationship between creativity and industry. My questions are based on my interests in world music and are meant to (hopefully) stimulate further

discussion in this regard.

References

Inglis, D. and Robertson, R. (2005) 'World Music and the Globalisation of Sound' in *The Sociology of Art: ways of seeing* London: Palgrave Macmillan.

Negus, K. (1999) *Music Genres and Corporate Cultures* London: Routledge.

Dr. Joanne C. Haynes,
Department of Sociology
University of Bristol
12 Woodland Road
Bristol. BS8 1UQ

Subject: [Mediantro] Over to Carsten
From: John Postill <jpostill@usa.net>
Date: Tue, 22 May 2007 19:50:15 +0100

Many thanks for those comments on Carsten's paper, Jo. It's over to Carsten now for his response.

John

Subject: Re: [Mediantro] Over to Carsten
From: Carsten Wergin <wergin@uni-bremen.de>
Date: Tue, 22 May 2007 23:04:18 +0200

First of all I thank Jo Haynes very much for her thorough comments to my paper! This can only be a first attempt to respond to her really thought provoking questions and queries that add very important aspects. I therefore very much look forward to other comments, maybe examples from other musical fields, that jump in and pick up on related issues.

Especially Jo's comments in relation to Keith Negus's notion of 'genre culture' to me are important aspects that I would like to discuss further with regards to what world music is and how Bastèr positions itself/is positioned in it.

First of all, as Jo pointed out, yes, there is the great impact of the world music industry on the musical production on La Réunion from the end of the 1970s onwards. Another part in the paper that adds to this is the interview excerpt from Thierry Gauliris where he states that in 1992 he set to 'professionalize' the band. This hints at how he, as a musician, identified the global culture 'world music' as a 'genre culture', influenced by the music industry. He made a choice to change the direction of the band to become part of it.

The relationship between industry and creative practice becomes visible here. It is very important. I thank Jo for pointing towards the interrelationship between a world music industry 'discovering' Réunionese music, helping artists to perform abroad and at the same time implementing certain categories with regards to, for example, what kind of music sells best. Today, this has wider consequences on what and what is not present as Réunionese music on a global scale (Séga music, for example, which has a very long tradition on La Réunion, is basically limited to performances for tourists in hotels and restaurants on the island, or at tourist fairs abroad)

I also agree with Jo and wonder to what extent Bastèr is performing

World Music. I think the characteristics I am describing are in many respects applicable to other music genres. The difference in Bastèr's performance for me, though, lies in their intention to mix their own music with that of another Creole context. Does Maloya, in conjunction with other musical styles from the Indian Ocean (Séga, for example), then maybe form a 'genre culture' of its own? This mixing of it would then represent a deliberate attempt to connect different musical genres associated with very distinct cultural imaginaries. It would happen within a global music market, but also demonstrate that it is not solely influenced by market criteria.

On the one hand, the connection with reggae makes Bastèr's music more accessible for global audiences, which is important in order for them to gain access to the global music market. On the other hand, this artistic practice is also a musical way to conceptualize a relationship with another life-world that the musicians consider linked to their own. Here, they expand their identity, culture and music geographically. One might talk about musicians as geographers and of a music-geography through which new and alternative linkages between musical genres and spaces are drawn.

Another point then is the question of what constitutes the artistic quality of world musicians. This for me is related to who sets the criteria for artistic quality but also a musician's involvement in concrete socio-political and cultural contexts. Bastèr's 'Redemption Song' is an example for the quality of music as identified by Inglis and Robertson. I agree that in this respect Bastèr does something that other musicians do also, but they do it for certain reasons. These reasons constitute their difference from others. There are certain reasons for why such a performance as 'Redemption Song' is and can be produced in the first place. What are these reasons and intentions behind it, the musicians' reasons and intentions to perform such a linkage?

It is this aspect that constitutes a difference between musical performances and performers, and in relation to ethnographic writing it is this aspect that interests me. If these differences exist, then yes, I would argue that changes to the expression and representation of Réunionese music would also exist without a global (world) music industry. They would exist in a different form.

Today, musical exchange is intertwined with a (world) music industry. But there is more to it. Reggae, for example, became popular on La Réunion via Mauritius, the neighbouring island's most famous musician in this context being Kaya. He initiated a genre called Séggae, a mix of Séga and Reggae styles. A global music industry took part in the spread of reggae music to Mauritius. But there are also the religious, Creole and African connotations of the music. These give a distinct local, Creole audience in the search for its roots a possibility to identify with a music that originated at the other end of the world. Their connector is a similarity in a violent historical past. The meaning of reggae music for the musicians performing it and for an audience listening to it in these contexts is different from that of others and, I think, not fundamentally linked to a global music industry.

The last aspect I want to pick up on is that of 'expertise'. For me a certain expertise is fundamental with regards to a reading/interpretation of 'Redemption Song'. First, the musicians have a certain expertise. They make use of the song to geographically move from La Réunion into a global 'world music'-genre, and in doing so inscribe La Réunion in its musical map. Second, the audience has a certain expertise through which it understands the song. Third, actors within the global music industry set certain standards, which triggers another form of expertise through which it is partly decided whether or not Bastèr's music is 'fit' for a global market. Finally, there is the expertise of the ethnographer.

In response to Jo's questions I think that all of these 'impute something to the Bastèr musicians and their creative output and their imagined audience/market'. Therefore, possibly all the various processes that give rise to these different forms of expertise should be addressed in an analysis of 'world music' and what it might entail as a genre, artistic practice and marketing concept. Especially the expertise of the ethnographer (as it concerns me and what I have done in my paper) is something that I find difficult not only to grasp, but also fear of running the danger to underestimate. Here, I also hope that the discussion will bring further clarification.

In conclusion, I would like to repeat the second of Jo's concluding questions, and add three more:

To what extent can we make a special case for world music in terms of what it might constitute as a social and cultural process?

How can ethnographic writing demonstrate how the criteria for world music as a 'genre culture' are implemented on a local level, adopted, but also changed and made use of productively? But also: is there a world music beyond that of a 'genre culture'?

And finally: What about the utopian aspect within Bastèr's performance: 'Redemption Song' taken from one Creole cultural imaginary and connected with another ' is there not, after all, a search for unity and difference in there?

I hope that my response has not been too confusing and now very much look forward to hopefully many comments and suggestions in the discussion.

Carsten

Subject: [Mediantro] Other views and comments

From: John Postill <jpostill@usa.net>

Date: Tue, 22 May 2007 22:13:51 +0100

Many thanks to Carsten for that prompt response.

The discussion is now open to all. To post your comments or questions, please write directly to medianthro@easaonline.org with a brief subject line that captures the gist of your post.

John

Subject: Re: [Mediantro] world music debate

From: "J.A.Toynbee" <J.A.Toynbee@open.ac.uk>

Date: Wed, 23 May 2007 11:16:53 +0100

We've had a great start to the debate I think. Thanks very much to Carsten and Jo for setting this up. For me three broad issues emerge from their initial round of contributions and the specific questions raised: 1) the relationship between creativity and industry, 2) the problem of the distinctiveness of world music, 3) créolité as socio-cultural process.

On 1) I think that Jo rightly points to the intertwining of music making with industrial systems and priorities. There is no genre without industry. Nevertheless I'd say a real distinction exists between musical creativity as an autonomous social practice, and as a form of labour exploited by the global music industry. It's a distinction which we can tap to some extent through ethnography. Studies from across the world suggest that musicians have an ambivalent attitude to the music industry -suspicious, supplicant, resentful, and admiring by turns. However beneath these 'tensions and ambiguities' as Jo

describes them, there is often a strong utopian and emancipatory dimension in local music scenes whereby musical creativity is understood to be opposed to marketing and the 'bottom line'. That the two things (creativity and industrial production) are mixed up in practice is surely testament to the contradictory nature of the capitalist world system - real distinctions are obscured, emergent social forces are repressed.

Concerning 2), the problem of the distinctiveness of world music, what marks out it out as a genre is a specific ensemble of spatial, class and race asymmetries. The genre was constituted, and persists, as a repertoire produced in postcolonial or semi-peripheral regions of the world which is then packaged and sold to a middle class niche market in the core. I'd say that there is invariably a 'primitive gaze' (Foster) at play in the marketing of world music - it is to be heard as exotic and Other. This is often combined with a sentimental ascription of resistance, the point that Martin Stokes makes in a passage quoted by Carsten. Meanwhile for local audiences in the country or place of origin of a particular style the music is, to begin with anyway, Our music. Its politics may be more or less overt, its affirmation of identity more or less explicit (like 'local' music anywhere).

For me the key question raised here is how far anything like a dialogue is being conducted between the two constituences - metropolitan and local. Firstly, and this is a key point which surely inflects all others, power is at play. I mean power not in the Foucauldian sense, but in terms of power over, or domination. World music is premised on domination. Its very formation in a North London conference of music entrepreneurs is emblematic of this. That said, world music is surely *also* a 'contact zone' (Pratt), a means of inter-cultural communication or 'hearing through difference' as I have described it. What is to be avoided here is a dichotomy between tough critique of the systemic inequality at stake on the one hand, and exploration of the cosmopolitan imaginary which suffuses the genre on the other. Both need to be done, together. Central to this will be more ethnographic work on how musicians around the planet working in the world music market conceive their metropolitan audiences - something Carsten starts to address in his response to Jo. Also research on metropolitan WM audiences is going to be vital. It's a complex and fraught question: how far can we have a trans-global music of mutuality, given the brutal inequality of the world system?

The issue of créolité (3) follows from this. Rightly, I think, Carsten emphasises the 'Creole context' of music making in local world music scenes like that of La Réunion. The impact of Bob Marley is hugely important here. Through his exemplary agency and creativity, a momentary window of opportunity in the music industry of the core (the destabilisation of musical values in the late 60s/early 70s associated with rock), and sheer contingency (Bob met Island boss and white Jamaican, Chris Blackwell, almost by chance when he was stranded in London) Bob Marley became a global music superstar. He remains the only such star to originate from the postcolonial world. His impact has been enormous in the global south. As Carsten points out many versions of 'Redemption Song' have been made here. But actually this is true of much of Bob's repertoire. More broadly, reggae has taken on the function of a creolising banner style - its characteristic offbeat 'chop' providing a genre marker which sings of the world, but a world which is preeminently postcolonial, southern, peripheral; a world where the margin is at the centre as Stuart Hall put it. At the same time local inflections (as in Mayola) mark particularity - 'this is our music - right here, right now'. Transglobal reggae (and perhaps transglobal hip hop too) are thus ultimately creole forms, in which musical ingredients from the local and the global, core and periphery, colonisers and colonised are mixed. This makes for innovation and creativity, and gives creole forms a special place in the world music market place (it would be interesting to compare sales across the categories of 'relatively tradition and monoglot' and 'relatively creolised and hybrid'). Yet by the same token there is a danger that creolised music is rendered as a kind of cosmopolitan easy listening. Paradoxically, all those creative and convivial aspects of créolité may enable it to be marketed as a form in which difference is eradicated. Put it another way: créolité is an important cultural process, but it is not necessarily (pace Glissant) an aesthetic or political good. We ought not to over-value creolisation as an end in itself, but rather understand it as a strategy, which calls for uncommitted

analysis.

This is far too long so I'll finish now, and simply observe that all three issues I've tried to get at here suggest the profound contradiction of world music, a contradiction which will only be resolved when we transform the world system - that may be beyond the scope of an email debate I realise.

Jason Toynbee
Department of Sociology
Open University
UK

Subject: [Mediantro] socialist origins
From: John Postill <jpostill@usa.net>
Date: Thu, 24 May 2007 10:34:21 +0100

Following on from Jason's first point about world music in relation to the capitalist world system, I was very interested to read in Carsten's paper about maloya as a symbol appropriated by the local communist party in the 1950s, then how in the 1970s maloya performers became 'militants culturels' and were 'discovered' by the fledgling world music industry (before the term world music was coined). Carsten suggests that the mixture of revolution and exoticism made these Reunionese musicians appealing to this nascent industry. Have similar processes of ideological transformation from a local revolutionary origin to world music recognition been documented and compared in other regions, particularly in sub-Saharan Africa, I wonder? I'm thinking here of Orchestra Baobab (Senegal) who seem to have gone from a socialist, Cuban-influenced origin in the 1960s to a more recent (1990s?) rebirth as a band in search of its authentic African roots ' while riding the Buenavista Social Club wave while it lasted.

Meanwhile, in the 1960s, in regions such as Southeast Asia similar ideological and musical struggles were unfolding during the height of the Cold War. In Sarawak (Borneo), where I have done fieldwork and historical research among the Iban, the so-called communist terrorists (CTs) were defeated in part through a wide-ranging propaganda effort that included anti-communist, patriotic indigenous pop broadcast on the radio. On the whole, however, Iban pop has remained 'apolitical', non-Creole, bland and unappealing to the world music industry. It is very popular, though, with Sarawakians of all ethnic origins. In contrast, 'traditional' musical genres from the interior of Borneo are a regular fixture at the Rainforest World Music Festival, no sign of Creolisation here either, see

<http://www.rainforestmusic-borneo.com/>

John

Subject: [Mediantro] from Carsten Wergin
From: John Postill <jpostill@usa.net>
Date: Fri, 25 May 2007 17:50:02 +0100

** Message forwarded from Carsten Wergin **

Jason,

Thank you very much for your intervention. I think that you are right to point out that there is a repertoire produced for a world music market, which is very much related to postcolonial regions and deliberately makes reference to these regions. Interesting in this context is also that it is not only produced in these regions, in the periphery, but also very much in studios in the centres, Zouk music in Paris, for example. Then, in the peripheral regions, you find imitations of what is produced in the centre.; feedback-loops of the

criteria applied in the centre, which change the local music traditions in peripheral regions and what is represented as 'Our Music'. So I would add that world music is as well produced in the so-called centres! There is no real distinction, but it is produced AS IF it would come from an imagined periphery. Plus, there is a form of home-made exotism, as it is copied and turned into criteria for music-making in so-called peripheral regions ' a form of 'self-orientalising'.

In this context, my experience is that Bastèr's music was once perceived as 'Our music', meaning music of La Réunion. Its reggae-mixing is not any more. It is more of an entertainment also to a Réunionese audience and less a political statement with which the local population identifies.

Turning to John's comment, which nicely broadens the discussion, I wonder as well whether there are other examples for 'ideological transformation from a local revolutionary origin to world music recognition,' and also for the use of music to mediate political agendas in certain regions and how this use has changed with regards to global music audiences. This does not only relate to left wing movements for independence, but also when one looks at something as 'hate-music', styles related to, for example, neo-fascist scenes in Germany.

Music then transports certain political and ideological messages, not necessarily related to creolisation, left, or right wing issues. But it caters to all of them. Might we identify differences in style depending on what issues are addressed? Are there certain styles, genres, that are more related to the one than the other, or are they also overlapping or interchangeable? World Music, proclaiming an affirmation of difference (left politics) vs. or equal certain folkmusic proclaiming a strong national identity?

Carsten

Subject: [Medianthro] London Symphony in Lisbon

From: Carsten Wergin <cwergin@gmx.de>

Date: Mon, 28 May 2007 15:10:51 +0200

Dear all,

Thank you very much to Jo, Jason and John for their comments so far. There were some very important perspectives addressed, through which one can look at music. I am sure that there are lots more and have to admit that I was hoping a bit for this discussion to bring these together, to get a more general idea on what others in the network are working on in relation to music. But nevertheless, I think that this has been a good start and that there will hopefully be more possibilities for this in the future.

I would like to share an experience with you that I had last evening and in doing so raise one more issue: music, its concert halls and their architecture.

I spent the last five days at a workshop on interdisciplinarity in the Humanities, organised by the European Science Foundation. It was held in Costa da Caparica, at the outskirts of Lisbon. Yesterday, we went into town and by chance I ended up in the Coliseo, which is a large concert hall in the town centre. The inside is similar to Royal Albert Hall. It is round, with many and high balconies, a lot of wood, rich ornaments and a ground floor whose chairs can be taken out to make room for peoples standing.

Apart from the hall reminding me of TV broadcasts from the Last Night of the Proms, the other reference to England was the London Symphony that played Dvorak, Ravel and Berlioz's Symphonie Phantastique that night. It was a great concert. The conductor was Daniel Harding. He is now in his mid thirties, I

think. For a while he was head of the Deutsche Kammerphilharmonie Bremen. So I knew him already from when I was in Bremen myself, and it was great to see him in Lisbon.

Isabelle, a friend from Quebec who works in psychology was with me and since the last days we had spent together with twenty others discussing interdisciplinarity and writing up a "Humanities Manifesto", we could not help but start looking for possible interdisciplinary research topics. To make a long story short, what we found interesting was nothing special but that through which an audience at a classical concert always draws lots of attention to itself: the applause and the coughing.

We were wondering why, especially after a slow movement, there were so many people coughing and whether this had to do with the emotions piled up inside oneself - the more moving the interpretation, the more coughing afterwards. Concerning the applause, Isabelle was saying that, from her experience in Montreal the audience has now made a habit of giving standing ovations at the end. When the concert is over, practically everybody would get up from their seats - always. Last night, there were also some people standing up, but more shouting "Bravo", "Bravissimo" and the like. What seemed to be appreciated the most was the encore. A slow piece with voluminous string arrangements and a very romantic theme. I could not help but think that the orchestra chose to play it as an homage to Portugal and its Fado tradition.

There were many things happening at that concert. The obvious class differences in the audience, this specific concert hall that was making its own noise, doors opening and closing, a security guard on his rounds on the Gallery floor during the performance, old wooden seats squeaking and so forth.

The acoustic was not great, the place was noisy - why to hold a concert like this there and not in another place more suited to it? One reason for it, Portugues friends said, is that the Coliseo has a long history. It is a landmark, which was first build for Opera performances but has now become an important piece of architecture in which everybody, from classical to hiphop musicians wants to perform, or shoot music videos. It is old, it is noisy and it is not the most suited place for classical music, but it carries a history that makes it unique, like the Royal Albert Hall. I think it would be interesting to keep an eye open for places like this, their history, use and the audiences they draw together today.

Carsten

Subject: [Mediantthro] e-seminar closed; participation
From: John Postill <jpostill@usa.net>
Date: Wed, 30 May 2007 08:32:54 +0100

Dear All

Slightly behind schedule, I'd like to close the e-seminar on Carsten Wergin's world music presentation by thanking Carsten, our discussant Jo Haynes, and our only other poster, Jason Toynbee, for taking the time to participate.

In view of the uneven participation in these sessions of late, this may be a good time to think about what, if anything, we may want to change in how they are run. I think it would be a pity if we had to discontinue these seminars, as they provide a rare venue for the discussion of media anthropological research, but we do need to have a more regular flow of contributions. All suggestions welcome off-list at jpostill@usa.net

Many thanks

John

Subject: Re: [Medianthro] Fwd:
From: Mark Pedelty <pedeltmh@umn.edu>
Date: Wed, 30 May 2007 11:26:07 -0500

Ditto. These seminars are wonderful and I, for one, pledge to take a more active role in the future. In fact, I believe conferencing of this sort is the future. Your work is much appreciated, John, as is the forum you have created and facilitated.

Speaking of which, if it is not too obnoxious to provide commentary after the conference deadline past, here were my thoughts on Carsten's engaging paper. I had planned on submitting these comments before, but was in Italy assessing study abroad programs:

I enjoyed reading Carsten Wergin's paper on Baster and the music of La Reunion as articulated through the World Music "genre" (for lack of a better term). I suspect that one reason for lack of commentary on the piece is that it presents a thick, descriptive introduction to a band, musical form, and even place with which few are familiar (self included). It was a welcome introduction.

With this and almost all writing on music, I am reminded of the quote (attributed to a multitude of musicians, from Laurie Anderson to Elvis Costello): "Writing about music is like dancing about architecture." Good music writing provides context and insight, but also makes the reader want to experience the music, a necessary prerequisite for completing the work. This piece made me want to experience Baster's music and that of Gauliris, whose personality seems paramount in this story.

One aspect of the work that seemed to be missing, based on the promise of the abstract, was an argument for "different forms of ethnographic enquiry" demanded by the music and cultural contexts in which it is made. Given the narrative depth of Carsten's piece, he would have much of value to say about methodology.

As for theory, I kept picturing those airline flight maps with large nodes in the metropolises, with convergent links that, when traced backwards, go to smaller and smaller peripheral locations. In this case, even Jamaica becomes a central node en route back to La Reunion. Nicely complicating that fairly canonical map of the world is Carsten's more rhizomatic analysis, wherein the center does not hold, partly thanks to the creative interventions of musicians. While I am not as optimistic on this count--given that the creative interventions rarely seems to translate to significant material remapping--Carsten gives us an excellent sense of the musician as cultural agent.

The line about "mixing of a mixing of a mixing" is wonderful. It applies not only to this case, but culture in general. There is never a "there there" when it comes to fixing genres in time. It is a moving target. The folklorizing language of preservation is a necessary fiction that some feel must be maintained in order to forge a sense of collectivity, resistant or otherwise. Musicians, while sometimes playing into that discourse, tend to ignore such conceptions of culture and go about the creative mixing, creating new amalgams, mixes that contemporaries will cite as cultural pollution, but future scholars will eventually laud, fix, and kill as folkloric "tradition." Ironically, only through continued "mixing" can a tradition remain vital, alive, and popular. In sum, I think that this case resonates not just with peripheral articulation into World Music, but represents the creative conundrums of musical culture, in general.

I do wonder about our orientation to the ethnographic informant, and how that influences what we can, and do say about the subject. Our informants seem to always be the subaltern struggling against difficult odds, and ultimately succeeding. It is a narrative I distrust. In this case, "local references, notably to maloya, are not lost but gain in use-value as a guarantee of the uniqueness of Baster's performances" (17). Is it possible

that the power of markets, marketable genres, anglophone centrality, etc., are downplayed for sake of elevating the informant-protagonist? This is not a critique of this piece, but something that we all seem to struggle with as ethnographers.

In this example, I am struck somewhat by the similarity to the discourse of jazz. Claims are made as to the uniqueness and freedom of the form, ignoring the many ways in which jazz, like any music, is only free within relatively defined structural idioms (or it would be incomprehensible, even to fellow bandmates). Furthermore, grand claims are made for musical liberation and distinctiveness (genre-busting), rarely challenged, even in the scholarly literature. The top paragraph on p.18 may present the same sort of over-reach? What Laura Nader calls "harmony ideology" seems to be a prevailing ethos binding ethnographers and informants, perhaps limiting what we can say about the cultural world in question?

To end where I started, this is a fascinating case study. It is excellent ethnography. This sort of writing is what makes anthropology interesting and useful. While there is no "there there" when trying to fix a tradition in time and place, there is great substance to be gleaned from ethnographic explication of the messy and wonderful work of cultural production. Carsten proves that by providing an analytical window into a specific time, place, and people that, in its specificity, allows us to better understand the systems within which artists and audiences create music. I hope that this continues on to become a longer study.

Thanks for sharing this, Carsten.

Mark Pedelty
Associate Professor
School of Journalism and Mass Communication
University of Minnesota
(612) 625-6383
pedeltmh@umn.edu