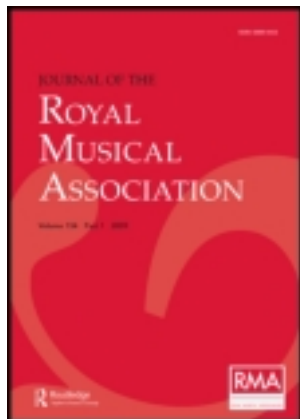


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Review. Music, Modernity, and the Global Imagination. Veit Erlmann

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outside Denmark, for whom the lack of historical information about Nielsen is particularly acute.

In Nielsen's final newspaper interview, before his relatively early death from heart failure in 1931, he expressed his views about music in terms that might have seemed familiar to a contemporary theorist such as Schenker:

It has often been said of me that I was hard-hearted in my art. That is to say, mood has never been of decisive importance in what I have produced. Mood is merely a personal feeling, whereas art, that is a universal feeling, a remarkable state, raised above both will and impression ['Vilje og Indtryk'], where *all* feelings are genuine. Only in that state do we approach the innermost and deepest in art. One should have the same feeling about an artwork as when one stands at the side of a stream[;] the place where one stands is a link in a whole, and contains within itself the source and the sea, and every point along the length of the stream. One should not pursue ideas, ideas are without importance beside the ability to follow a thing through from its beginning to its end, so that every part of it speaks of beginning and ending, and it seems to me that these days we lack that ability, just as we lack any sense of form.⁴⁰

Underlying Nielsen's apparently weary aesthetic pessimism is an optimistic faith in the integrity of art that seems to have sustained many twentieth-century musicians. And, arguably, the seemingly paradoxical mix of the utilitarian and the idealistic that permeates Nielsen's work is one of the most distinctively northern characteristics of his music. Nielsen's vision of the musical work is not of a preordained or teleological progression towards a single harmonic goal, but of a chain of events that contains both its own source and its final point of arrival. From this discursiveness we might also develop a more sensitive historical context for his music. By perceiving twentieth-century music in a genuinely pluralistic way, we should begin to understand why Nielsen's work, which has been so critically marginalized, is in fact central to our musical experience. The rich variety of historical material presented in these volumes offers not a summation, but a point of departure from which we can bring Nielsen into the critical mainstream for the first time.

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Veit Erlmann, *Music, Modernity, and the Global Imagination*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1999. viii + 312 pp. ISBN 0 19 512367 0.

VEIT Erlmann's *Music, Modernity, and the Global Imagination: South Africa and the West* begins with a complicated truism and moves towards a simple truth. First, Erlmann thinks it has become a 'truism' that 'the world in the global age has become a smaller place and . . . hence, everything that happens in one place always and in some unpredictable and disordered way conditions what happens in other places' (p. 3). Of course, there is nothing self-evident about

⁴⁰ 'Det er ofte blevet sagt om mig, at jeg var haardhjertet i min Kunst. Stemningen har nemlig aldrig faaet afgørende Betydning i, hvad jeg har frembragt. Stemningen er jo en personlig Følelse, og Kunsten, det er en kosmisk Følelse, en mærkelig Tilstand, hævet op over Vilje og Indtryk, og hvor alle Følelser er ægte. Kun i dette Tilstand naas det inderste og dybeste i al Kunst. Man skal over for et Kunstværk have den samme Fornemmelse, man har, naar man staar ved en Bæk, det Sted, man staar ved, er et Led i et Hele, og det rummer i sig baade Kilden og Havet og alle Steder langs Bækken. Der skal ikke jagtes ikke efter Idéer, Idéer er uden Betydning imod dette at kunne føre en Ting igennem fra Begyndelse og Ende, og det synes mig, at vi nu til Dags mangler denne Kraft, som vi mangler Formsans.' Interview by Ole Vinding, *Politiken*, 4 October 1931 (Fellow, pp. 614–15).

either the fact that happenings ‘conditioning’ other happenings are always unpredictable and disordered or the fact that all happenings condition others (that is to say, some are predictable and some do not significantly condition others). Indeed, these interactions are context-dependent and negotiable. Second, Erlmann asserts that ‘the twentieth century, like the nineteenth century, was quite clearly an age of fiction’ (p. 176). But the truth about the ubiquity of fiction in modernity (‘a truly panoptical era’) creates the condition of its own undermining (*ibid.*). It is, in fact, a truism that wholesale fiction cannot be true. How, for instance, does Erlmann’s text sufficiently elude the panopticon to know this? By what inscription? In short, we are asked to accept what is probably not true as a truism and then to accept an impossible claim as a truth. In a text framed by mind-bending pairings such as these, Erlmann takes us on a journey into the imaginations of massive groups of people (Europeans, black South Africans, and African Americans), through periods of time that span entire centuries (from the late nineteenth century to the present and even the future) and in terms that inextricably link these groups via an ‘epistemological symbiosis’ of global proportions (p. 4). Erlmann calls their ‘articulation of interests, languages, styles and images’ the ‘global imagination’ (p. 3). This imagination is the central concern of his book.

As paradoxical as it sounds, the pursuit of an impossible global imagination (in the context of such contradictory rhetorical exaggerations) frequently flushes out new perspectives and fascinating insights about cultural phenomena in a global frame. Through a close reading of various autobiographies, diaries, concert stagings, critical writings, musical styles and music videos, Erlmann imagines the way various historical groups imagined one another at various points in time and space. For example, Erlmann shows how African members of a nineteenth-century choir, like Charlotte Manye and Josiah Semouse, described their lives and their travels in ways strikingly beholden to colonial discourse (thereby underscoring their basic sameness with the colonizers), while nineteenth-century English critics described the African choristers in brazen Victorian stereotypes ‘such as those of Africans’ mimetic capabilities’ (thereby underscoring their essential difference from Africans); and how, in the context of a single twentieth-century pop song, Paul Simon sings music that evokes ‘some universal ecumene of human rights and free enterprise’ (a fictional ‘new inclusiveness’), while Bhekizizwe Joseph Shabalala, Simon’s collaborator on *Graceland*, sings in more political tones about ‘gender-troubled Zululand’ in a colonial context (pp. 89, 170–1, 182). In short, Erlmann elaborates Africa as seen through European and American eyes and Europe and America as seen through African eyes. The book is concerned with the lopsided way these imaginings were/are mediated through certain dominant imperial tropes that organize knowledge, and is therefore vigilant about the position these hybrid fictions take in dominant relations of power. Although the introduction briefly holds out the promise of creating useful ‘alternative fictions’, the argument largely exposes the ideological dimensions of various existing ones (that is, the way in which cultural inventions obscure the drastic economic imbalances and inequality in the late modern world). In general, the focus remains on what traditional Marxists would call the ‘superstructure’. Erlmann’s ‘global reality’ is ‘an imagined totality – a totality united not so much by things such as international trade, multi-lateral agreements, or the institutions of modern society as by a regime of signs and texts’ (p. 4). The book explores the way these signs and texts produce ‘worlds’ (or ‘create a sense of certainty about the world’) in colonial and post-colonial contexts (*ibid.*). It is an analysis that dislodges the economic ‘base’ as the last instance without forgetting the relations of power that surround cultural practices. Erlmann’s singular achievement lies in his ability to bring various cultural signs (such as microscopic musical details) into contact with

international phenomena (such as the flows of global capital) and to examine their interaction critically.

This intensely interdisciplinary approach, coupled with a sustained transnational perspective, leads Erlmann to some startling suggestions. Instead of situating Western music within the traditional rhetoric of a cumulative evolutionary narrative, for example, Erlmann suggests that the colonial rupture was itself constitutive of Western music as an object of study. It is only in relation to colonial encounters, that is, that certain 'musical givens', such as 'European music' itself, emerged (p. 8). Drawing on the writing of Mary Louise Pratt, Erlmann elaborates this kind of paradoxical interaction on the terrain of Josiah Semouse's travel diary in the late nineteenth century.¹ In a context in which a kind of Hegelian conception of history and progress was to the fore (and thus in which 'travel came to be employed as an allegory for progress as such'), Semouse's travel diary offers a peculiar blend of 'Western thinking', such as a linearly conceived progress-narrative, and a precolonial 'African thinking', such as a matter-of-fact attitude to the landscape he encounters on one of his travels (pp. 61, 79). On the one hand, Semouse's embrace of the former literary codes enacts an early version of 'black elite politics' that upholds various universal liberal premisses in order to resist settler racism, and, on the other, his resistance to these codes illuminates the contingency of their apparent universality upon the local Victorian context (p. 74). Through cases like this, Erlmann demonstrates how African thinking was mediated by the colonial encounter no less than how Western thinking was mediated by it. While there were significant internal discrepancies, both types of imagination were inextricably linked in the context of an emergent 'global ecumene' (p. 83). Erlmann's position thereby encourages a much-needed revision of current methodological orientations that take for granted the split between West and the rest in the field of music studies at large.

In addition to these sophisticated general theoretical contributions, *Music, Modernity, and the Global Imagination* also offers fascinating historical accounts of various specific cultural phenomena. For example, Erlmann's account of African Christianity during a period when the colonial state gradually retreated from its 'civilizing mission' because of the changing demands of 'mining capital' is particularly impressive (pp. 147, 149). In the words of Erlmann, 'If, in the early days of empire, difference had been the *raison d'être* for the civilizing mission, scientific racism destroyed the moral justification on which imperial expansion rested' (p. 131). No longer able or willing to uphold the Christian promise of redemption, liberty and thus equality, the colonial state increasingly adopted the tenets of 'scientific racism' to buttress the economic exploitation of black South Africans. In this conjuncture various African churches broke their ties with white missionaries and formed independent churches (a development sometimes referred to as 'Ethiopianism'). In step with Theodor Adorno, Max Horkheimer and Paul Gilroy, Erlmann thus recognizes 'the complicity of racial terror with reason' (that is, that racist practice is not the aberrant exception to enlightenment reason but one of its logical possibilities; p. 154).² To my mind, this is interesting because it offers an important perspective on recent developments in the South African political scene. Black nationalism in South Africa (whose 'prevailing goal [in the nineteenth century] was a color-blind, universal nation based on principles of equality and human rights' paradoxically predicated on the Christian values of 'progress and incorporation') ultimately effected a strategic reconstellation

¹ Mary Louise Pratt, *Imperial Eyes: Travel Writing and Transculturation* (London, 1992).

² For an extended account of this complicity, see Theodor W. Adorno and Max Horkheimer, *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, trans. John Cumming (New York, 1997).

of various regulative political concepts ostensibly derived from the West (such as constitutionality, democracy, nationhood, citizenship and so on) to define a new political scenario in post-apartheid South Africa (p. 155). As Jacques Derrida has noted, Nelson Mandela (in the Rivonia Trial) effectively held a deconstructive mirror to the apartheid regime and insisted on a political stake in its humanitarian principles.³

Erlmann describes another interesting event at the time of the schisms in the Christian church, namely the visit to South Africa by the black American Virginia Jubilee Singers, led by Orpheus McAdoo. On the one hand, many black South Africans identified with the message of the Jubilee Singers, which, broadly speaking, articulated the prospect of liberation for black people. Concomitantly, on the other side of the Atlantic, numerous black Americans (such as Alexander Crummell, Edward Blyden and Martin Delaney) advocated missionary work in Africa. Erlmann notes that 'by the late nineteenth century, African evangelization had generally become accepted as essential for the emancipation of the black race as a whole' (p. 151). Erlmann argues that the South African appropriation of aspects of African-American sacred music is explained by the shared struggles for emancipation in America and South Africa respectively. Both sought 'the affirmation of life in the face of adversity and the quest for the wellsprings of correct living in a world of darkness and oppression' (p. 161). What makes this historical account important is that it challenges the commonplace figuration of Christianity in Africa as a mark of superstructural colonization and thus insists on a degree of complexity and ambiguity often lacking in ethnomusicological accounts of African music. Akin Euba, for example, has noted a general lack of interest in non-'authentic' forms of African music, notably church music, in scholarly studies of African music.⁴ In contrast, Erlmann's argument explores the complexities of Christian cultural forms in South Africa and so resists the ethnomusicological rush to place Christianity in non-alignment with African religious and cultural practice.

On the other hand, Erlmann's imagined alignment of South African cultural practices (because of shared political aspirations) with African-American ones seems overdrawn. Erlmann invents a concept – 'the black global imagination' – to unify these practices rhetorically (p. 147). But in the absence of any concrete musical evidence, one is left wondering whether his account amounts to any more than a formal similarity between struggles (with little foundation in historical fact) that answers to another ideological need today. Not surprisingly, despite his remarkable breadth of references, Erlmann completely ignores the argument made by Antonio Gramsci, Gayatri Spivak and others that 'American expansionism would use African-Americans to conquer the African market and the extension of American civilization'.⁵ By taking for granted a shared struggle without the complicating encroachment of divergent historical specifics, Erlmann risks reifying a collective on the basis of how its members look. Thus, a concept-metaphor like 'black ecumene' (introduced at a later point in the text to dramatize black music's apparently peculiar interest in foregrounding 'style') in fact functions as a generalized fiction for projecting ethnic difference (p. 251). Indeed, Erlmann increasingly, and with disconcerting ease, invents unwieldy constructions (like the generic community of 'black performers at the end of the century') as the argument

³ For *Nelson Mandela*, ed. Jacques Derrida and Mustapha Thili (New York, 1987).

⁴ Euba's remarks were composed as talking points for a symposium entitled 'Revitalizing African Music Studies in Higher Education', University of Michigan, Ann Arbor, April 2000.

⁵ Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, *A Critique of Postcolonial Reason: Toward a History of the Vanishing Present* (Cambridge, MA, and London, 1999), 376.

unfolds (p. 271). The text bears the marks of this bias throughout. For example, after carefully deconstructing the structural imbalances that beset the Paul Simon/Ladysmith Black Mambazo collaboration, Erlmann suddenly invests Joseph Shabalala and Ladysmith Black Mambazo with absolute agency in their encounter with black American collaborators. Rather than analysing the latter collaborations in terms of the 'two totally opposed regimes of truth' that coincide under conditions of drastic inequality (as was the case with Simon), Erlmann rhetorically grants Ladysmith Black Mambazo an ideologically unmarked initiative in the latter encounter. For example, 'their interest in black vocal traditions deepened as they came into contact with African-American performers' (pp. 171, 264). While this may be partially true, it becomes disconcerting when all black performers in this text seem to be 'interested in' (p. 264) and 'fascinated by' (p. 271) the same kinds of musical things, while no white performer in the text does. It also becomes disconcerting when black audiences in the text seem to find the same kinds of things uninteresting or difficult to understand. For example, Joseph Shabalala's 'lavish praise' for Paul Simon's voice is trumped by Erlmann's unverified speculation that African male audiences hear Simon's voice differently (p. 190). When patterns of behaviour repeatedly come out looking the same, their resemblance to the empirical facts of the matter begins to dwindle. Perhaps this reified version of a black collective is the price paid for suspending analytical attention to 'international trade, multilateral agreements, or the institutions of modern society' in quest of a cultural 'regime of signs and texts' (p. 4).⁶ And perhaps this kind of overlooking is a structural condition of American Cultural Studies in a post-Soviet age. While traditional Marxists may have overvalued the role of the economic base, the dialectical tension between economics and culture cannot be spirited away by an exaggerated embrace of culture and its 'fictions' (such as the 'black imagination').

Before turning to a more sustained critique of it, let me illustrate another rewarding section of Erlmann's book, namely his account of the history of *isicathamiya*, a form of singing and dance that emerged at the turn of the nineteenth century in Natal, South Africa. This was a time when Zulu-speaking migrant workers were increasingly drawn to the urban centres to find employment in the emerging industrial economy. *Isicathamiya* reflects an intersection between two worlds – 'the world of rural homesteads, warfare, ancestor spirits, and wedding ceremonials on the one hand and the realm of factories and urban popular culture on the other hand' (p. 201). Erlmann describes two distinct phases in the development of this expressive genre. The first phase, which occurred in the first third of the twentieth century, was indebted to various rural, urban and hybrid expressive categories. First, the texts of *isicathamiya* songs (which comprised commentary on issues pertaining to gender, parental authority, etc.) were derived from traditional wedding songs. The latter body of songs had themselves adopted various Christian stylistic traits into their fabric, resulting in a sonic blend that combined traditional call-and-response form with Christian hymnody. Second, *isicathamiya* drew on

⁶ Erlmann repeats the fact of his methodological preoccupation with cultural dimensions to the exclusion of structural-economic ones at numerous points in his text. For example, in Chapter 2 he writes: 'the effort to illuminate the emerging global imagination of colonizers and colonized at the end of the nineteenth century must be embedded less in the analysis of the overall power structures, economic strategies, and political discourses of the colonial world than in the interpretation of its rituals, routines, and representations' (p. 35). What Erlmann fails to acknowledge is that without setting the economic/political analysis actively to work in his text, the hermeneutic/cultural analysis becomes unconsciously beholden to some version of the former without bringing it into thematic focus. By creating a lack of critical interest in itself, the economic/political scenario becomes a surrogate absolute driving the argument.

various war anthems and dances, thereby metaphorically conjuring pre-colonial Zulu military power. Third, the songs and dances of the nineteenth-century minstrel and vaudeville theatre in urban centres offered a powerful inspiration for *isicathamiya* performance. In the words of Erlmann, ‘Minstrelsy, and here especially the “coon”, provided images of urban sophistication and modernization and by simultaneously deriding black elite idiosyncrasies offered a means of distancing oneself from modernity’s discontents’ (p. 202). Thus, *isicathamiya* owes its origins to two opposed social worlds which had become inextricably entangled with one another. Cognates like *imashi* (march), which refers to the single straight line of the *isicathamiya* dance, and *amakhoti* (chords), which refers to a genre of wedding songs, betray the culturally intermingled character of this music. Thus, *isicathamiya* was a uniquely modern African form. The second phase in the development of *isicathamiya* began in the mid-1930s in the context of a burgeoning recording industry in South Africa. This development involved further adaptations of urban motifs. Solomon Linda’s Evening Birds, for example, appeared on stage in the latest fashions, and their music largely employed Western triadic harmonies. It is in this later context of *isicathamiya* that the unique sound of Ladysmith Black Mambazo emerged. The strength of Erlmann’s analysis lies, first, in his careful demonstration of the specific stylistic strands upon which *isicathamiya* drew at various historical times (thus avoiding the perilous figurations of African culture in the metaphors of primordiality and purity) and, second, in his ability to tease out the political implications of this expressive form (thus avoiding the mistaken belief that stylistic hybridity – the use of Western idioms – somehow undermines African political ambitions). In short, Erlmann’s capacity to sustain numerous methodological dimensions is impressive and wide-ranging. This alone makes *Music, Modernity, and the Global Imagination* an exemplary contribution to the field of ethnomusicology.

However, the book is also frustratingly confusing, replete with argumentatively irrelevant tangents, logical inconsistencies, contradictions, rhetorical complications and arbitrary conclusions. The book is written in two parts. The first part is set in the nineteenth century, the second in the twentieth. Ostensibly an account of two tours to the North Atlantic by two black South African choirs in the 1890s, the first part is really about many quite different topics. For example, Chapter 1, promising a sketch of ‘some of the cultural dynamics of th[e] era’, is in fact an engagement with a debate between two philosophers of the Frankfurt School (p. 14), while Chapter 2, an interpretation of some autobiographical fragments of members of the ‘African Choir’ that travelled to England in 1891, is largely mediated by recent anthropological writings of the ‘reflexive’ sort. It is not that Adorno and Walter Benjamin or John and Jean Comaroff and Partha Chatterjee are uninteresting, but that the amount of time Erlmann spends rehearsing other writers’ respective positions in order to reposition his own views takes on monumental proportions. In fact, this book often reads like a disembodied theoretical dialogue between Erlmann and some of his colleagues in American Cultural Studies. For example, a chapter entitled ‘Hero on the Pop Chart: Paul Simon and the Aesthetics of World Music’ largely consists of paraphrases of sections of Edward Said’s *Culture and Imperialism*, Will Straw’s article in *Sound and Vision*, Lawrence Grossberg’s *We Gotta Get Out of this Place: Popular Conservatism and Postmodern Culture*, John Shepherd and Peter Wicke’s *Music and Cultural Theory*, and other sources.⁷

⁷ Edward Said, *Culture and Imperialism* (New York, 1993); Will Straw, ‘Popular Music and Postmodernism in the 1980s’, *Sound and Vision: The Music Video Reader*, ed. Simon Frith, Andrew Goodman and Lawrence Grossberg (London, 1993), 10–11; Lawrence Grossberg, *We Gotta Get Out of this Place: Popular Conservatism and Postmodern Culture* (New York, 1992); John Shepherd and Peter Wicke, *Music and Cultural Theory* (Cambridge, 1997).

It is not only that Erlmann's readings of these critics are often ill-digested (and even incoherent, severed from their contexts), but that their respective positions occasionally seem diametrically opposed. On the question of the changing nature of the music industry in the late twentieth century, for example, Will Straw argues that 'while in the 1970s mainstream performers' individual identity provided the dominant grid through which new records were marketed, the proliferation of discourses about pop celebrities in the 1980s is in inverse proportion to the importance of the musical message itself' (Erlmann, p. 183). Erlmann links this analysis (the declining role of the musician 'as a culture hero' in this era) to a shift in the audience's reception of pop music from 'interpretation' to 'lateral reception' (p. 184). That is, 'the very identity and social role of cultural intermediaries such as the Paul Simon of *Graceland* is now [in the 1980s] a matter of the linkages that performers and their audiences establish between different musical practices' (*ibid.*). The intrusive role of theory can be registered here in a number of ways. First, Paul Simon functions as little more than an instance of a generalization about new forms of reception. Second, in order to sustain his theoretical speculation about these new forms, Erlmann's deconstructive vigilance about the opposition between 'interpretation' and 'lateral reception' recedes. Not only does he provide no account of what he means by the latter, but it is unlikely that 'establishing linkages between different musical practices' is any less a case of 'interpretation' than of 'lateral reception' or vice versa. This is not to say that there is no operative distinction between modes of reception over this time period, but that in the absence of concrete elaboration the distinction becomes wholly vague and speculative. But the main problem with his reading of Straw is that Erlmann's paraphrase of Lawrence Grossberg in the next paragraph, ostensibly functioning as a supportive 'parallel argument', is actually in a tension with Straw's position (p. 185). Grossberg argues that the post-Vietnam period in the USA ushered in a 'radically different model of mobility that was centered on the accumulation of wealth' that ultimately drove the music industry to produce individual stars (*ibid.*). In Erlmann's words, 'Rather than a hit or an album, it is the star him- or herself who becomes the primary commodity, "delivering the audience to a particular market or product appeal"' (*ibid.*). Now, it is not necessary but it is certainly possible to think that Straw and Grossberg have reached opposite conclusions about the same era. The first argument emphasizes the 'linkages established between different musical practices' (a kind of post-modern pastichism), while the second emphasizes the production of 'a particular market or product appeal' (a kind of pluralized niche marketing); the first argument narrates the decline of the 'musical hero', while the second heralds her/his ascent, and so on. There may be points of affinity between these theorists as well, of course, but the author does not elaborate the specifics. The point is that by running its argument on categories provided by different theorists, Erlmann's text frequently risks becoming a clutter of information that can lapse into incoherence. It is as if reading Erlmann's text risks becoming the very 'lateral reception' that is the object of its critique. My general point is that the overwhelming presence of Western-trained cultural theorists and continental philosophers alters the complexion of the book's chapter titles considerably. Readers expecting the work of Paul Simon or the aesthetics of world music to be the central concern in the chapter discussed above, for example, will be largely disappointed. Could it be that the countless interlocutors and the hyperbolic reflexive methodological awareness in Erlmann's text has suddenly turned against itself, paradoxically leaving behind the object of its study? Is this a case of methodological depth becoming methodological drivel? Much more important, however, the preoccupation with North Atlantic theory urgently raises the question of the usefulness or even relevance this kind of work has in an African context today.

In his discussion of *isicathamiya*, for instance, Erlmann resists notions of pure identity at one level of argument but then frequently succumbs to them on another, perhaps more insidious, level. Thus, Erlmann reckons with bogus categories like 'African thinking' in this section to erect vivid dichotomies between Western and African epistemologies (p. 205). He writes: 'The contrast between th[e] heroic notion of individual being and Western ideas of rootedness and existential depth can hardly be more pronounced. As can, of course, the contrast between the parallel ideas of the name and performed identity' (*ibid.*). It is not only that Erlmann inaugurates a set of unstable stereotypes in this binary (for example, an essentialized 'Western' model opposed to a 'non-Western' performative one), but that this stage of the argument about *isicathamiya*, an essentially Zulu art-form, precariously depends upon Erlmann's account of Basotho verbal arts in Chapter 2. It is as if these distinct non-Western art-forms can be self-evidently affirmed. In fact, Erlmann even harnesses support for his hypothesis about the importance of style in *isicathamiya* from Michael Herzfeld's work on 'the poetics of manhood' in Crete! The 'non-Western' subject is a rhetorical blank that emerges only in the contours of a peculiar 'non-Western' theoretical model. It is worth questioning whether both proposed models of identity formation are not, in fact, more 'Western' than 'non-Western' in light of their shared articulation in the discourse of anthropology as it intersects with a certain brand of continental philosophy. In other words, the 'performative' model of the self is, in fact, a product of a certain European philosophical turn of mind (involving thinkers like Friedrich Nietzsche and Sigmund Freud as well as Jacques Lacan, Julia Kristeva and Judith Butler). Not only is this model intended as an account of Western subjects (at least as much as of non-Western ones), but Erlmann's anthropological story surreptitiously sustains a certain Western philosophical orientation as the central subject in the name of 'African thinking'. Erlmann does show some awareness of this possibility, especially when he unmasks the ideology of Western figurations of African behaviour at various points in the text. For example, in his critical assessment of various interpretations of an incident involving Kate Manye's loss of consciousness in London in 1891, Erlmann illuminates a certain 'orientalizing' Victorian gaze (pp. 108–9). But ultimately this kind of analysis leaves the reader puzzling over how Erlmann's generalized notion of 'African thinking' is different from, say, Alexel-Ivar Berglund's concept of 'Zulu thought patterns', which the author dramatically exposes as an orientalist production of ethnic difference in his discussion of the Manye incident (p. 109).

The sections of the book that give the most detailed ethnographic account of precolonial African notions of selfhood are mostly perilously thin and logically flawed. Ostensibly an account of the way the African choir came into a tense 'engagement with Europe, empire, and modernity', the chapter entitled '“Spectatorial Lust”: Spectacle and the Crisis of Knowledge', for example, devotes only one paragraph to social life in precolonial societies of southern Africa. Instead, the chapter is preoccupied with, first, an English review of the choir's performance in London (which sheds light on a certain Victorian mind-set); second, the logic of consumer society and the commodity form as it applied to the circulation of non-Western goods in England; and, third, the peculiarities of the choir's dress and dramaturgy ('as crucial sites for staging the spectacle of imperial space and time') in England. In this last section, Erlmann presents his brief foray into precolonial African society. And even in this lone paragraph, precolonial Africa emerges only through the grammar of negating the ways of Western societies:

In the precolonial societies of southern Africa, social life and the place of objects within it were governed by a set of rules in which things and bodies entered into a variety of

associations with each other that . . . were not mediated by commodity signs. Thus these associations did not form a code separate from the things themselves. . . . Nor did the notion of a thing per se occur. In a sense, there was even no 'nature' (and hence no natural body) . . . (pp. 100–1)

This kind of accounting of African societies is unacceptable. First, it is in potential conflict with various previous claims about the commodity form. The claim that Western 'codes' under the sway of commodity logic are separate from 'the things themselves' needs to be carefully disentangled from the earlier claim that Western 'aesthetics and production' under the sway of commodity logic 'had become indivisible', or that commodities 'magically dissolv[ed] boundaries and local identities' (pp. 92–3). In short, by leaving different levels and perspectives of his analysis undifferentiated, Erlmann's text becomes a maelstrom of potential contradictions. Second, the text, straining to account for a precolonial moment, simply negates the West in the name of Africa, thereby paradoxically granting the West the scope and authority as a central point of reference. Again, the interlocutors at this point in the text are Max Weber and Jean Baudrillard. There are no African voices, precolonial or otherwise.

Third, where the account is unhinged from reference to the West, it defaults into generalized commonplaces that border on meaninglessness: 'What was there [in precolonial Africa], by contrast, were social relations that worked through numerous and complex concatenations of sameness and difference that permeated the world' (p. 101). But this accounting is 'numerous and complex' in word and not deed. It is a rhetorical naming of complexity (without specific elaboration) that masks itself in the tones of apparent praise. Not surprisingly, Erlmann appropriates this sentence from Timothy Mitchell's book on Egypt as if southern Africa and Egypt self-evidently had something in common (perhaps because the land mass on which they are found shares a proper name in modernity?). Finally, where Erlmann's account of precolonial Africa becomes most specific, it seems to apply equally to Western modes of social practice. Erlmann writes: 'by wearing a certain item of clothing a[n] [African] person became part of a field of practice in which the bodies physical and social and the garment as "social skin" mutually actualized each other without either of them being the primary source of meaning' (p. 101). This sentence, while difficult to make precise sense of, does not distinguish African from Western modes of social behaviour sufficiently to assert the vivid dichotomy required by the argument. How exactly is the 'mutual actualization' that renders neither garment nor body 'the primary source of meaning' different from the aforementioned 'dissolving' borders between sign and thing under commodity fetishism? There might be distinctions worth making, of course, but Erlmann's text does not concretely take on the challenge. In fact, the under-representation of African society cannot fail to produce homogenized reality-effects of precolonial Africa in the hyperbolic language of non-commodified heterogeneity. It is not that Erlmann is strictly obliged to give such an account, but that as the argument intensifies its project of polarizing Western from African culture the obligation increases. Failing this, the story becomes what the African philosopher Paulin Hountondji might call an ideological desire to have Africans think only 'African' thoughts. In other words, Europe is represented by the genuinely multifaceted perspectives of an abundance of commentators and critics while Africa is represented as a vague, disembodied and somewhat static system of cultural practices and ways of 'thinking' that are the logical antithesis of the former. As Hountondji and Mahmood Mamdani have pointed out, anthropological writing tends to figure 'African thinking' as a more-or-less interchangeable set of world-views, while 'Western thinking'

is figured as a distinct and contradictory set of critical tools.⁸ Thus, Erlmann's treatment of African subjects (often disconcertingly referred to in the first person) is woven into the textual fabric in a very different way from his treatment of Western ones.

While it is exactly what Erlmann hopes to resist, this process of Othering unwittingly and increasingly haunts the progress of his narrative. The very form of the argument is patterned by a rhetorical trick. On Africans' supposed interest in the 'self-reflexive stylisations of life', for example, what begins as an issue emerging among 'mission-educated black South Africans' applies by the end of the paragraph to 'black South Africans' in general and by the end of the book to 'black ecumenes' writ large (pp. 39, 251). In other words, the trope of synecdoche facilitates an easy transition from a generalization about a handful of people to universal black 'communities of style' (p. 251). Likewise, a particular conception of the hero in 'Basotho society' (in the singular) becomes a conception shared by 'preindustrial societies' (in the plural) a few sentences later, and a general case of 'African thinking' in the next sentence (p. 41). 200 pages later, Erlmann recalls this apparently already verified 'African thinking' in service of his transatlantic claims about black approaches to style (pp. 205–6). Thus, highly localized generalizations balloon into global proportions. Relatedly, and through an analogous rhetorical trick, coexisting contrasts between Africa and the West quickly freeze into irreconcilable dichotomies. On the question of linguistic consciousness in a colonial world, for example, the 'coexist[ence]' of old and new transmutes in the next paragraph to 'opposite linguistic worlds', and by the end of the page to 'radically different epistemologies' and 'fundamentally opposed ways of thinking' (p. 40). The problem is that the escalating dichotomy cannot be sustained by the empirical data advanced to support it.

So, for example, Erlmann's bogus concept of 'African thinking' is primarily elaborated on the terrain of Basotho heroic poetry. Here are some of the characteristics of African-ness as Erlmann sees it: 'Whereas the [bourgeois individual] entails the concept of the individual as ultimately defining itself through the continuous display of extraordinary powers of self-assertion and what Weber calls "hero ethics", the hero in the pre-industrial societies is essentially a social creation' (p. 41). Here Erlmann upholds the shorthand view that European society is 'essentially' individualistic and African society is communitarian. Not only does even the most naïve account of the 'individual' in Western philosophy entail an aspect of the 'social creation' Erlmann reserves for African thinking, but it would be mistaken to reduce away completely an aspect of individual 'self-assertion' in the Basotho order of things. Erlmann continues: 'Unlike Western bourgeois liberalism, and within it, the missionaries' disdain for pomp and ostentation, the hero, in African thinking, is a kind of social summation that excels in the overtly extravagant performance of a given social role' (p. 41). This is where Erlmann starts to fantasize about an African thinking in terms of a preferred reflexively performative model (as against a despised static Western one). Again, this figuration of global culture is implausible in terms of the evidence proposed to support it. For example, turn-of-the-century Victorian culture (its codes of behaviour, dress, speech, etc.) were the match of any Basotho 'pomp and ostentation'. In fact, only four pages before the section on Basotho poetry, Erlmann offers evidence of a specifically British version of what must surely count as an 'overtly extravagant

⁸ See Paulin Hountondji, *African Philosophy: Myth and Reality*, trans. Henri Evans (London, Melbourne, etc., 1983), and Mahmood Mamdani, *Citizen and Subject: Contemporary Africa and the Legacy of Late Colonialism* (Princeton, NJ, 1996).

performance of a given social role'. He quotes a passage from a biography written in 1908 about the renowned missionary James Stewart: '[Stewart] felt Africa to be the sphere of action for which he was fitted, that from Africa came the call for such powers as he was conscious of – powers of hardihood and endurance, with stern joy in committing himself to the toils and hazards needed there for humanity's sake' (p. 37). It is possible to estimate this passage in a way that has affinities with Basotho praise poetry – the heroic staging of power and the overcoming of adversity, the figuration of an object as possessing a magical power over the individual, the masculinist imagery, and so on – but Erlmann's commentary on it takes on an opposite complexion to his commentary on Basotho poetry. I am not saying that the cultural production of Africa and Europe is identical, operating under similar rules of practice. It is not. Rather, the problem lies in resting contrasts between African and European conceptions of the self, language, music, etc. on an aprioristic notion that claims them necessary.

Of course, Erlmann's effort to historicize the global imagination is an attempt to resist this very methodological impulse. But the facts he advances to separate African from European thinking tend on close inspection to apply equally to both sides of the binary. The fact of equal applicability is downplayed by shrinking the complexity of one or other side of the binary (thereby succumbing to the exaggerations of what Adorno might call self-identical thinking). Thus, Erlmann maintains, the Western subject is 'a mind that inhabits the body', whereas the mind and body in African subjects are 'conjoined realms of human existence'; the Western notions of corporeality, spirituality and intellectuality are 'assigned to different hierarchical positions', whereas the parallel African notions are 'a richly interwoven field of matter, meaning, and movement'; Western language (intrinsically a 'neutral medium') is a matter of 'code and form', whereas African language (intrinsically 'metaphoric') is a matter of 'richly interwoven realms of subject, the word, and the object'; and so on (pp. 41–3). On the last of these binaries, it is an irony that Erlmann describes the inherently metaphorical nature of African language in a no-nonsense realist tone (a reminder of his Western structural position?). But, more problematically, Erlmann caricatures Western thought to get his account of African thought off the ground. Descartes's mind/body split, for example, which is a good deal more complex and dialectical than Erlmann's account would have us believe, has been routinely discredited precisely by thinkers and philosophers of nineteenth- and twentieth-century modernity (from Hegel to Derrida). And Erlmann's 'African thought' takes on the strange character of this Western critical stance towards the Western subject. It is as if the metaphoricity of Africa's languages dramatizes a Derridean model of language; or as if the many 'richly interwoven fields and realms' dramatize a reflexive Bakhtinian model of dialogical interplay. This peculiar affinity between African thought and a certain tradition of Western thought leads the text to some unintended consequences.

First, it is an irony, for example, that the very churchmen who, according to Erlmann, 'believed language to be a neutral medium indifferent to the social context in which it was used' were so finely attuned to its radically context-dependent performative power to invent tradition in different parts of Africa (p. 43).⁹ It is unlikely, then, that John Philip of the London Missionary Society was subscribing to the 'neutral-medium' theory of language when he argued that 'by increasing [the Africans'] artificial wants, you increase their dependency on the colony' (p. 64). Is 'linguistic colonization' not a performance

⁹ On the imperial interest in the strategic invention of tribalism in Africa, see Terence Ranger, *The Invention of Tribalism in Zimbabwe* (Gweru, Harare and Gokomere, 1985).

par excellence (p. 71)? The point I am trying to make is that, as Nietzsche might say, the 'neutral-medium' theory of language is not so much a contrast to as a refinement of the 'performative' theory, and that it is therefore perilous to divide entire cultures on this level of generality. What is required is a detailed constellation of affinities and differences that is not driven by the metaphors of difference. Second, if African languages tend to be more metaphorical and African cultural practices tend to be more reflexive and stylized, then why are Josiah Semouse's bland descriptions of the Cape that Erlmann discusses in connection with a peculiarly African relation to landscape not constructed in the metaphorical mode, one that creates a 'distance' between 'viewer and landscape' (p. 79)? And why are the wedding dances that Erlmann discusses in connection with a peculiarly African attitude to ritual proceedings not elaborated in a stylized mode (p. 202)? On the contrary, Semouse's descriptions are practical presentations of the landscape, and the wedding dances 'are the wedding itself' (p. 202). This kind of attitude is, in some crucial respects, the opposite of metaphorical and stylized thinking. Thus, there are aspects of both performance and transparency in African languages and culture. As a result, comparison with European languages and culture involves a detailed analysis that takes into account both aspects. In other words, while African thinking and its Western counterpart cannot be reduced to each other, the former seems to be a good deal more complex than Erlmann's text (despite the nods in the direction of 'complexity' and 'richness') will allow.

Partha Chatterjee, Ranajit Guha, Gayatri Spivak and others have recognized the difficulty (and the embedded bias) of reconstructing a history of colonial territories through either traditional empirical means or traditional concepts such as 'peasant consciousness'.¹⁰ In 'Subaltern Studies: Deconstructing Historiography', for example, Spivak shows how the effort to construct a full subaltern consciousness or a 'way of thinking' is doomed to failure.¹¹ At best, the term 'subaltern' can be used as a strategy – a mobilizing slogan signifying both trickery and artifice, and implying the presence of an enemy – that attaches to a specific political situation. In this sense, the risk of essentialism, if mobilized strategically, may be worth taking. For Spivak, the Subaltern Studies Group retheorizes the history of colonial India as confrontations in a context of domination and exploitation. The Group theorizes change in terms of a functional transformation in sign systems: 'bondsmen' becomes 'workers', 'criminal' becomes 'insurgent', and 'insurgent' becomes 'agent of change'. While this functional transformation is necessarily violent, operated by the force of crisis, implicit in the prior sign system there was some space for such change. So the necessary 'cognitive failure' (the failure, for instance, to access the 'pure consciousness' of the subaltern) does not automatically entail the impossibility of rewriting the history of India from another perspective. While both share the burden of accounting for traditions against all empirical odds, what distinguishes a project such as this from Erlmann's story is that the former is motivated by a concrete political predicament. Erlmann spends a great deal of time exposing the ideology of North Atlantic colonialism and neo-colonialism, but he does not envisage political strategies. Thus his constructions about African ways of thinking float free from all political commitment. This is why, despite the innoculatory provisos, exceptions and disclaimers, the account essentially recapitulates the dominant view of African consciousness and culture. The last section of my review will focus on the musical analyses which most disturbingly bear the marks of this view.

¹⁰ See *Selected Subaltern Studies*, ed. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak and Ranajit Guha (New York and Oxford, 1988).

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 3–32.

The first point I should make is that the musical content of this book is uncharacteristically scant. In a 282-page book (ostensibly about music) there are at most 50 pages addressing musical examples in some way or another. This alone raises a question about the usefulness the book might have for music studies in Africa. In a time when there is a desperate need for musically orientated approaches to African music (in the form of theory books, histories and textbooks) in most parts of Africa, it is disconcerting to find another text written by a Western specialist (for other like-minded specialists) that holds African music at arm's length in the paradoxical name of cultural sensitivity. With characteristic ease, Erlmann joins the ranks of musicology's moral high-ground in this regard and distances himself from formalist approaches to African music. He repeats the increasingly hackneyed idea that the more 'enlightened brand of musicology' (as opposed to the 'discipline's more parochial concerns') assumes that 'music's meanings are not intrinsic to the work of art but are constituted in the social and cultural practices of individuals engaging with music in a variety of ways' (p. 186). This view falsely assumes that there are no 'intrinsic' dimensions to various African cultural practices and thus denies one of the 'variety of ways' with which it can be engaged. While it is not the place of this review to rehearse these dimensions, it is worth observing, first, the vortexes of taboo that are produced when 'social processes' are advanced as a kind of panacea to immanent thinking and, second, the way in which African music in global modernity is politically punished when it is denied access to a certain (formal) discourse of music and its attendant social power. This is the logical consequence of reifying the 'social' as the last methodological instance. That is, Erlmann resists immanent considerations of African music on the mistaken grounds that it is 'inherently a social process' and nothing more (p. 186). But, as Akin Euba recently remarked: 'I have often wondered why ethnomusicologists shy away from music theory. . . . We in Africa should seek to promote musical literacy rather than discourage it.'¹² One is left wondering why elaborating an epistemological African difference (through descriptions of African music's social processes) that reflects no commitment to such political predicaments in Africa today is valuable.

On the other hand, in his 1993 article 'The Politics and Aesthetics of Transnational Musics', Erlmann recognizes the problems with the 'basically anti-aesthetic stance of cultural studies' and suggests that at a time 'when everything has turned into matrix' music might be usefully seen as an 'Other of discourse'.¹³ In other words, Erlmann grants music a degree of partial autonomy in his method, and it becomes 'extractable out of its interactional setting'.¹⁴ Indeed, in keeping with this perspective, *Music, Modernity, and the Global Imagination* is not entirely given to fetishizing the 'concrete social processes' of African music and does, in fact, make excursions in some of the music's 'structural minutiae' (p. 125). Alas, these music analyses tend to be meagre, flawed, and truncated by various musical clichés about African and European music. Take the first account of musical material: in a chapter entitled 'B Flat or B Natural?: The "Great Hymn" and the Rule of Colonial Difference', Erlmann offers an analysis of Ntsikana's hymn and its relation to European interpretations of it. The actual analysis is but one paragraph long (p. 124). In this hyper-abbreviated space, Erlmann manages to trace the 'Western elements' in J. K. Bokwe's published version and S. T. Bokwe's recorded version of the hymn in contrast

¹² This remark was one of the talking-points for the symposium entitled 'Revitalizing African Music Studies in Higher Education', University of Michigan, Ann Arbor, April 2000.

¹³ *The World of Music: Journal of the International Institute for Traditional Music*, 35 (1993), 3–15 (p. 11).

¹⁴ *Ibid.*

to a 1957 Hugh Tracey recording, which acts as a kind of surrogate reference to 'Ntsikana's original composition' in the nineteenth century (*ibid.*). Along the way, he is able to sum up an entire tradition of 'Xhosa musical grammar' and thus show how the piece is not an authentic expression of it (*ibid.*). The argument that follows is odd. First, because Bokwe's transcription does not reflect Xhosa musical grammar as Erlmann sums it up, it cannot be 'the only authoritative version' of Ntsikana's hymn (as asserted by Jacques P. Malan in an encyclopedia of South African music). This does not follow. Why can a hybrid form not be an (available) authoritative version? Second, because the multiple versions of the hymn reflect the 'essentially endogenous vitality of African performance practice', nothing can be gained by 'attempting to canonize' it (p. 125). Again, this does not follow. Why can canonization not realize the vitality of performance practice? I am not claiming that Bokwe's transcription is authoritative or that canonizing the piece is necessary (even though there are probably politically urgent reasons for constellating culture strategically along these lines). Rather, I am drawing attention to a sloppy form of argument that relies upon a vague commonsense feeling of inherent cultural differences.

Most disconcertingly, however, this kind of sloppiness overwhelms Erlmann's take on what he calls 'the structural minutiae of the text' (p. 125). Erlmann's comparative analysis is given in two sentences:

Thus, aside from a number of rather more obtrusive features ['Western elements'] such as the stolid 3/4 meter, the heavily distorted speech rhythm in bar 1, and the awkward disparity between Xhosa prosody and the melodic contour on beat 4 of bar 1 and beat 1 of bar 2, I would like to draw particular attention to two melodic and harmonic details. The first of these is a perfect fourth (b flat) in bar 1 and the second a dominant in bar 5. (p. 124)

Erlmann's text continues by showing how the latter details do not line up with traditional Xhosa musical grammar. One problem is simply that Erlmann is not clear about which text he has in mind here. Pages 122–5 display three distinct extracts from different versions of the hymn (given as Examples 5.2, 5.2(!) and 5.3) and, while speaking as if he were referring to one of them, Erlmann magically conjures all three. Given that the first diagram is in 4/4 and the second and third are in 3/4, presumably Erlmann has one of the latter examples in mind. But there is no 'beat 4' in 3/4 time. And there is no 'bar 5' in either of these two examples (which are only four bars in length). Perhaps Erlmann has the first example in mind after all. If so, there is obviously no '3/4 meter', but there is also no 'perfect fourth' in bar 1 because it is a unison passage. Moreover, there is no account of Xhosa prosody to buttress the claim that this musical example is awkwardly disparate from it. Nor is there an effort to figure the anomalous 'dominant' in terms of a variant that draws on both the F and G chords (permitted in Xhosa *uhadi* bow grammar), a liberty Erlmann paradoxically takes in his estimation of African ways of hearing 'Diamonds on the Soles of her Shoes' some 70 pages later (p. 195).

I am making an issue of this analytical negligence because, first, this is the only fragment of musical analysis in the entire first half of the book and, second, because its vague findings are interpreted as concrete historical evidence for other people's projection of a 'rule of colonial difference' on African music (pp. 126ff.). Thus, when a British reviewer in 1891 remarks that the 'musical capabilities displayed by the African choir . . . must have been a surprise to many' and that the supposition that Africans are 'undeveloped' has arisen 'from ignorance rather than knowledge', Erlmann notices only the 'Victorian obsession with an all-embracing system of knowledge' and ignores the challenge the reviewer poses to that system (p. 131). This all-embracing system is rhetorically affined instead to the 'preordained narrative structure' of Western principles of reason (p. 126). And these principles ultimately guide

the 'rule of colonial difference' which produce, amongst other things, 'negative European viewpoints towards African music' (pp. 126–7). But, of course, the 1891 review is rather more affirmative than Erlmann's text will admit. Even where it distinguishes African from Western music on potentially evolutionary grounds, the reviewer's language is guarded. The reviewer writes: 'the notes, to their minds, have no relation to each other as with us. Hence they avoid our mi, fa, and fa sharp' (p. 131). Erlmann overlooks the fact that the African avoidance of mi (that is, probably the leading note if the two-chord Basotho pattern is, as claimed, the operative harmonic terrain) casts a doubt on the authenticity of the 'dominant' in Bokwe's transcription of Ntsikana's hymn. But Erlmann also avoids the full import of these sentences in another sense when he reduces them to markers of 'racial and temporal alterity' (p. 131). Still worse, he claims that fa# is a musical sign of something 'falling outside the human realm altogether' (p. 132). Erlmann explains: 'It is a regression into something less than nature, something without "relation", without rationality' (*ibid.*). But the reviewer does not say that the notes are 'without "relation"' *per se* but rather that they are without 'relation to each other as with us' (p. 131). His stance is comparative – these notes do not behave according to traditional Western tonal syntax. Nor does the reviewer assign the music to the non-human as such. In fact, the review can be read as an attempt to figure the sound of this African music in the only terms available to the reviewer. The latter's position of compromise (which Spivak might call 'cognitive failure') is a general methodological condition guiding the possibility of any interpretation of any music, Erlmann's interpretation included. Indeed, it is not easy to see why the fa# (Bb in this musical context) in the reviewer's text is starkly accused of concocting racial alterity, while the same note in Erlmann's analysis (functioning as a moment of indigenous African grammar) is not. In this way, the rough-shod analysis of the review turns out to match the analysis of the music. Both are a reflection of little more than a desire to figure different people's imaginations in neat shades of black and white. It is as if Erlmann's demonstration of a musical case of the 'rule of colonial difference' is an uncanny doubling of that into which it inquires. Without allowing the singularity of the musical and textual details to impose themselves on the phenomenon produced by such a doubling, the inquiry must lapse into imaginary phantasms. The general remains unaffected by the particular, that is, Erlmann's analysis becomes a 'blocked dialectic'. It should go without saying that the act of naming one's interest in the 'structural minutiae of the text' does not amount to the act of effectively discovering anything within them (p. 125).

There are other problems with the short analysis cited above in connection with Bokwe's version of Ntsikana's hymn. Notice, for instance, how the ostensibly 'obtrusive' Western rhythmic element is described as 'stolid'. Throughout the book Erlmann's references to Western rhythm are elaborated in false platitudes of this sort. Thus, in connection with wedding songs in Natal, the Western impact is measured by 'a certain squareness of the melodic contour and metrical form'; in connection with John Curtin's transcription of Paul Simon's 'Diamonds on the Soles of her Shoes', the African choral response is pressed into 'the corset of a Western 4/4 meter'; and, in the Western reinterpretation of Solomon Linda's 'Mbube', the music sounds 'more accentuated and marchlike' or more 'stultified, immutable' than the original (pp. 201, 194, 259). In these statements, Erlmann not only succumbs to the dubious Western invention of African rhythmic complexity (to coin a phrase from Kofi Agawu), but also to the equally dubious invention of rhythmic simplicity in the West.¹⁵

¹⁵ On the invention of African rhythm, see Kofi Agawu, 'The Invention of "African Rhythm"', *Journal of the American Musicological Society*, 48 (1995), 380–95.

On the one hand, many songs by Ladysmith Black Mambazo, for instance, are unambiguously in a (so-called) Western 4/4, and, on the other hand, a decent performance of a simple 4/4 chorale hymn by, say, J. S. Bach is hardly rhythmically stolid, square, or trapped in a corset. But to make his large claims about the peculiarly 'African' preoccupation with 'style' as the text unfolds, Erlmann's argument depends on this kind of caricature (complete with Victorian metaphors) of Western musical practice. For instance, in Linda's recording of 'Mbube', Erlmann describes a 'tension between the squareness of the repetitive groundwork' given in 'stodgy-sounding crotchets' and the 'near miss' effect of 'falling behind the beat by a few split seconds' (p. 257). It is these 'participatory discrepancies' that ostensibly illuminate the 'specific African elements' of the music (p. 256). Western revisions of this song, in contrast, inevitably fail to register these rhythmic 'microdynamics of African repetitive musical forms' (p. 263). In Erlmann's view, it is these discrepancies that ultimately reflect an 'African mode of interaction for the demonstration of character' (p. 266). And, in almost Roland Barthesian postmodern deconstructive tones, the African thereby performs a 'self-referential move that foregrounds the process of communication itself and the pleasure of endotropic listening that it affords' (*ibid.*). I have already argued against this characterization of 'African' consciousness as one peculiarly enthused by performative stylization. Here I simply want to point out that, in Erlmann's final analysis, a microscopic musical detail that is erroneously predicated on a caricature of the West magnifies into an omnivorous 'black ecumene' that unifies the cultural practice of all black people across the globe under the sign 'communities of style' (p. 251).

This impulse to caricature cultural activity in the West permeates practically every analytical level of Erlmann's text. In the chapter devoted to harnessing 'musical figures of black diasporic identity' to articulate black 'communities of style', Erlmann allows Henry Louis Gates's concept of 'signifyin(g)' practically to run his argument (p. 249). He writes:

The most important characteristic . . . of the cyclic nature of African music and the main point where it differs from western types of repetition lies in the fact that repetition must be thought of here as *practice*. The cycles of African music focus attention on how things are being done rather than on what externalities are being signaled and pictured by them. African music works by implication, not by explication. It emphasizes manner rather than matter, and temporal flow is more important to it than static representation. (p. 250)

Thus Erlmann erects a series of related binaries that irreducibly divide African music and Western music: African music is cultural 'practice', while Western music is 'purely aesthetic'; African music focuses attention on 'how things are being done' (their 'manner'), while Western music focuses on the 'externalities . . . signaled and pictured by them' (their 'matter'); and African music values 'temporal flow', while Western music values 'static representation'. This checklist of differences is a travesty of the truth. On the one hand, it is emphatically false that repetitions in African music have no 'purely aesthetic dimensions' or that it never focuses attention on 'what externalities are being signaled and pictured by them' (the 'matter' of music). The 'cyclic' music performed at *mbira* spirit-possession ceremonies in Zimbabwe, for example, has strict aesthetic protocols that are observed to conjure various specifiable ancestral spirits.¹⁶ On the other hand, it is emphatically false that repetition in Western music is any less a cultural 'practice' or that it does not focus attention

¹⁶ For a detailed analysis of the aesthetic dimensions of *mbira* music and their relation to ancestral spirit worship, see my 'Negotiating the Music Theory/African Music Nexus: A Political Critique of Ethnomusicological Anti-Formalism and a Strategic Analysis of the Harmonic Patterning of the Shona Mbira Song Nyamaropa', *Perspectives of New Music* (forthcoming, 2001).

on 'how things are being done' (the 'manner' of music). In fact, the idea that music should 'signal' or 'picture' certain 'externalities' has been thoroughly discredited in the aesthetics of Western music since about 1800 (precisely the locus of Erlmann's analysis). The Western principle of musical autonomy (in the sense of a tradition of music that was no longer tied to practical or moral purposes, and existed instead in an abstract realm of self-sufficient signification) was a rejection of the very categories Erlmann uses to characterize Western music. That is, Western music in global modernity placed a high premium precisely on 'how things were done' musically, their 'manner' and their 'temporal flow', rather than on 'picturing externalities', their 'matter' and their 'static representations'.

Erlmann uses John Miller Chernoff's 'Africanist' account of 'African rhythm and aesthetics' to validate his case (p. 250). He quotes the following dichotomy in Chernoff's text: 'The aesthetic point of this exercise [of communal organization in African music] is not to reflect a reality that *stands behind* it but to realize a reality that is *within* it' (*ibid.*). Again, Chernoff reinscribes the myth that Western music is interested in things 'standing behind' music (when a certain construal of the aesthetics of autonomy rejects just this idea) and that African music is never concerned with an aspect of what 'stands behind' music (when certain cultural practices in Africa embrace just this idea). Both theorists underplay the fact that there are bits of both in both musical traditions. Moreover, 'repetition' played a crucial role in releasing Western music from the 'external' obligations of the latter categories. At the opening of his massively influential tract *Harmony*, for instance, Heinrich Schenker describes the crucial role of repetition in the creation of form. He writes: 'the significance of a small series of tones results clearly only after it has been repeated'.¹⁷ In other words, not unlike Erlmann's account of repetition in African music, for Schenker the 'individuality and meaning' of a series of notes is achieved through the mechanism of repetition.¹⁸ And, again in step with the African case, these repetitions rise to the ranks of art via subtle 'deviations' that do not 'jeopardize the effects of association'.¹⁹ In this way, the manner of the music's temporal flow is elaborated by 'its own means'.²⁰ It is a giant interpretative stretch to understand this way of thinking as an interest in music's 'externalities', 'matter' or 'static representations'. Again, while it is true that there are substantial differences between African music and Western music, Erlmann's platitudes cannot hope to capture them. It is time to realize that African music deserves the scrutiny of close music-theoretical examination if it is to escape the hazardous fate of a foreclosed fiction produced by anthropological truisms about it.

This is where Erlmann's apparently progressive anti-formalism turns into its intimate conservative opposite. By failing to apply the same standards of analytical rigour to the musical dimensions of African music (as Western practitioners do for Western music and as Erlmann does for the arguments of his mainly Western interlocutors), the music cannot take the findings of the study in unanticipated directions. Unable to encroach on argumentative relevance,

¹⁷ Heinrich Schenker, *Harmony*, trans. Elisabeth Mann Borgese (Chicago, IL, and London, 1954), 9.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 10. In his book *African Rhythm: A Northern Ewe Perspective* (Cambridge, 1995), Kofi Agawu also argues against the idea that subtle deviations are somehow peculiar to African music. He makes the argument in the context of the politics of using staff notation to represent African music: 'The idea that notes are "fixed" on the staff, and that this somehow distorts the African practice of sliding between notes (or of singing quarter tones, for example) is undermined by the fact that within Western practice itself, in particular in the string and vocal repertoires of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, the note as represented and the note as heard are invariably different' (p. 187).

²⁰ Schenker, *Harmony*, 11.

then, the music itself cannot fail to reflect the analyst's initial preconceptions. Let me illustrate this process with reference to the second music analysis in Erlmann's text, namely that of Paul Simon's 'Diamonds on the Soles of her Shoes'. Erlmann introduces Ladysmith Black Mambazo with glowing credentials: 'the music of Ladysmith Black Mambazo embodied everything that was essential about South Africa's oppressed black masses – their traditions, travails, tribulations, and aspirations' (p. 169). Erlmann then argues that Paul Simon's *Graceland* 'softened the more strident tonalities of the antiapartheid struggle by stressing the idea of cross-cultural dialogue and by evoking . . . the hazy feeling of some universal ecumene of human rights and free enterprise' (p. 170). Additionally, Simon's English lyrics 'stand in a stark contrast to the Zulu section' (p. 171). Erlmann writes that the English lyrics 'appear to convey something of the spectacular opulence and hallucinatory character of late-twentieth-century consumer society', while 'Shabalala voices his perplexity ("awa awa") at the unusual state of gender relations in Simon's story' (*ibid.*). There are numerous problems with this formulation. For instance, in the next paragraph what 'appeared to convey something' transmutes into a secure pole of 'two totally opposed regimes of truth'. In other words, an interpretative speculation takes on the dimensions of a grand epistemological certainty. Like the factual overstatement of Ladysmith Black Mambazo's political ambitions, the logical steps of the argument are prone to unwarranted hyperbole.

Erlmann contends that, while the singers' lyrics contrast starkly, Simon's music 'unobtrusively blends with the flow' established by Ladysmith Black Mambazo, and therefore that 'the music disavows what the words proclaim' (p. 171). Presumably this is one way in which *Graceland* 'softened the strident tonalities of the antiapartheid struggle'. But this analysis contradicts both Erlmann's ensuing interpretation of 'Diamonds' and his interpretation of the unique aesthetics of Ladysmith Black Mambazo. First, Erlmann invents a concept called the 'sono-dramatic', which, broadly speaking, involves a radically 'a-semantic' interpretation of music (that is, a situation, it seems, where listeners do not understand what the music means; p. 188). The sono-dramatic is that in which 'Difference itself is the [music's] meaning' (p. 189). For Erlmann, 'Diamonds' is a good example of the sono-dramatic because 'for U.S. audiences . . . the lines sung in isiZulu mean just that: they are the zero degree of difference. The *are* pure Otherness' (*ibid.*). Now, the problem is not only that the very possibility of a concept of an absolute zero degree of difference is open to question and doubt, but that the expression of 'cross-cultural dialogue' and 'hazy feelings of a universal ecumene' are not possible if the music is really a case of 'pure Otherness'. That is to say, if indeed the music 'erases the opposition signaled in the first three stanzas by enfolding . . . within a single affective idiom two totally opposed regimes of truth', how can the lyrics still be heard at the 'zero degree of difference' (pp. 171, 189)? Why does the music not 'mediate' the meaning of the words, as suggested by Erlmann's earlier view that the music expresses cross-cultural dialogue (p. 170)? And, if the music does not so mediate the words, then the music's apparent disavowal of 'totally opposed regimes of truth' is, in fact, an avowal *par excellence* of such a total opposition.

Second, the 'softening' of Ladysmith Black Mambazo's ostensible anti-apartheid sentiment coupled with the disavowal of their words about 'gender-troubled Zululand' in 'Diamonds' is in a tension with Erlmann's later descriptions of the group's aesthetics and their relation to the political scene. Erlmann explains that Shabalala's decision to "bring the range down" by getting the choir to sing what were essentially '*mbombing* and *isikhwela Jo* tunes in feathery, velvety voices' effectively 'cut against the grain of some of apartheid's most entrenched mythologies . . . by undermining their aesthetic premises' (p. 209). This is the only time Erlmann actually addresses the

political challenge posed by Ladysmith Black Mambazo. The argument on its own terms is compelling. On a more general level, Erlmann argues that *isicathamiya* performers, 'contrary to the prevailing and apparently indelible image of migrants as politically conservative and culturally introspective, eagerly sought to assimilate the old with the new, the indigenous with the foreign, the home with the diaspora' (p. 210). The problem is that, at this point in the argument, Erlmann locates Ladysmith Black Mambazo's political resistance in a certain aesthetic hybridity (the blending of transhistorical and transcultural genres), while in his earlier pronouncements (on Ladysmith Black Mambazo's collaboration with Simon) he situates political resistance in a kind of Africanist aesthetic purity (the 'totally opposed regime of truth') that the music is said to 'disavow' and 'soften'. The question arises: is the blending of genres one of the 'more strident tonalities of the antiapartheid struggle' (by undermining notions of racial purity) or does the blending of genres amount to the 'softening' of these tonalities ('by stressing the idea of cross-cultural dialogue'; p. 170)?²¹ Erlmann could make the point, of course, that resistance is radically dependent on the local context in which it operates, but the book's overdrawn interest in the global dimensions of all cultural practice ultimately discourages it. Moreover, the anti-apartheid struggle is no longer as relevant a referent for thinking the global imagination today as it once was. Perhaps this is why *Music, Modernity, and the Global Imagination* is silent on some of the complicating details of its picture, such as the fraud and theft by a leading anti-apartheid cleric, Allan Boesak, involving \$37,000 from a \$96,000 donation by Paul Simon for an aid agency under Boesak's control.²²

As far as the actual musical analysis of 'Diamonds on the Soles of Her Shoes' goes, Erlmann plays another trick on the reader. The analysis begins with a description of the layering of vocal parts, which according to Erlmann 'conform to the standard rules of *isicathamiya* polyphony' (p. 192). The remainder of the analysis explores the intrusion of 'Western' elements in the song. When Simon sings 'Sing ta na na', Erlmann argues, 'a more Western song format [appears to be put into place] complete with a I-IV-V chord progression and an organization of the vocal parts that abandons the polyphonic layering of the beginning and turns everything else into an accompaniment of Paul Simon's solo line' (p. 193). I do not hear this in the music. Instead, when Paul sings 'Sing ta na na', I hear the tenor and bass parts imitate him three beats later at octave transpositions. Far from being 'abandoned', the polyphony is sustained in a kind of call-and-response. Also, the use of a I-IV-V progression would hardly sound foreign to the members of Ladysmith Black Mambazo. Indeed, this is by far the most ubiquitous progression found in the vast repertory of their own songs. It is mistaken, then, to figure these musical features as 'Western song elements' in the sense of disagreeing with 'the rules of *isicathamiya* grammar' (pp. 193, 192). The rhetorical trick is that for the analysis to gain interpretative leverage, Erlmann must posit a somewhat static and timeless set of 'rules of *isicathamiya* grammar', which he then refers to as 'deep-Zulu musical grammar' (p. 192). But recall that the political resistance imparted by this music involved its 'radically syncretic course, boldly restating

²¹ Symptomatically perhaps, the clause with the musical metaphor of 'strident tonalities' appears again later in Erlmann's text with the referent 'antiapartheid struggle' excised. He writes: 'the more strident tonalities of *isicathamiya* . . . are being excised from contemporary discussions of *Graceland*' (p. 211). The practice of strategic 'excision' seems to bedevil more contemporary discussions of *Graceland* than the author realizes!

²² In May 2000 the Supreme Court of Appeal upheld the conviction of Boesak and sentenced him to three years in prison. This conviction halved a sentence given in 1999. I should add here that Paul Simon's contributions to the preservation of African music were considerable and included the funds for setting up Ghana's Folklore Board on Copyright.

the intermingled character of South Africa's social and cultural landscape' (p. 210). In his discussion of this political aspect of *isicathamiya*, Erlmann contests the view held by various 'authors in the West' and 'the genre [is] encapsulated in some sort of cultural quarantine of timelessness and uncontaminated authenticity' (*ibid.*). This "'Orientalist" legacy', he claims, will be revealed 'by bringing to the fore the fundamental historicity of *isicathamiya* and by highlighting a number of interlocking themes in its rich history of hybridity and intertextuality' (*ibid.*). Thus, the once argumentatively necessary dichotomy between 'the rules of *isicathamiya* grammar' and 'Western song elements' is menaced by this later analysis of the music's political import. The text deconstructs itself.

The remainder of the musical analysis of 'Diamonds' (afflicted as it is by the false dichotomy mentioned above) is, musicologically speaking, drastically in error. Again, Erlmann makes an issue of a suggested I–IV–V progression towards the end of the introduction. It is worth quoting the argument in full:

Perceived with a Western ear, the chord movement could indeed be interpreted as oscillating between I and V, with a subdominant being hinted at intermittently. In reality, of course, things are somewhat more indistinct. While perfect cadences are common in *isicathamiya* and can be traced to the strong admixture of Christian hymnody in the genre, 'Diamonds' is much less easily classified as falling within this category of songs. . . . The reason for this ambiguity is that the 'chord' structure in 'Diamonds' might be better understood as a form of root progression in which the tonal material of the three chords E–B, A–F#, B–F# is derived from the third and fourth partials of only two shifting fundamentals: A and B. The only note that is not accounted for by this sort of bow music-derived harmonic progression is the F#, occurring with the root A. The fact that it is sung in the introduction by Paul Simon might suggest that the Western-trained singer is thinking of his melodic line in terms of the I–V progression implicit in the harmonic framework of the song, rather than – as African performers inevitably would – in terms of a root progression. In this interpretation, then, the F# could be seen as V^v or as a suspension of E. (p. 195)

Despite the ubiquity of cadential figures in *isicathamiya*, Erlmann figures the cadential hearing of the passage as the perception of a 'Western ear' which he vividly opposes to an African perception (that is introduced as the 'reality' of the matter). This is a logical leap and a logical flaw. First the leap: what begins as something that 'might be better understood as a form of root progression' condenses into an 'inevitable' African perception. And the flaw: the song is removed from the African tradition on the grounds that it does not feature something that it does in fact feature. Restated as a question, if 'Diamonds' is the exception to the rule concerning *isicathamiya* songs that characteristically draw on perfect cadences, how does the appearance of such a cadence count as an exclusively Western aspect that African performers inevitably would not hear? It is as if the Zulu performers in the song, consummately versed in the creative potentials of I–IV–V, suddenly block their ears to a particular elaboration of I–IV–V in the song and open them instead to a deviant version of a progression found in Xhosa bow music.²³ And this miraculous reversal of logical probability takes on the indubitable certainty of 'inevitability'.

Most pressingly, Erlmann's invented African way of hearing is factually impossible as well. Let me explain. Music of the *uhadi* bow tends to oscillate between two triads (whose constituents derive from the notes of the harmonic series), which are separated by an interval of approximately a major second. Thus, the music's resultant note collection is analogous to a hexatonic scale

²³ Erlmann's description of 'this sort of bow music' has no definite reference at this point in the text and thus probably recalls the Xhosa *uhadi* bow music discussed in the first section of the book.

built on the Lydian mode. For example, if the bow is tuned to A, the resultant tones are A, B, C#, D#, E and F#. But because these notes are produced by harmonics of the string they do not combine freely in the music. That is, the notes A, C# and E do not occur concurrently with B, D# or F#. The accordion-like principle of pitch-class complementarity is built into the physical structure of the instrument, even though it is sometimes carried over into other musical settings as well. The well-known song *uGqongqothwane* ('The Click Song'), for example, elaborates this principle in a vocal setting. Now, although he uses *uhadi* bow music to support the point, what Erlmann is claiming these African performers hear is in fact something quite different. That is, to hear 'Diamonds' in an *uGqongqothwane*-like manner really requires that the listener abstract two shifting chords (built on the fundamentals A and B) and then orientate the music's anomalies towards this back-and-forth. But, suspensions and passing notes notwithstanding, the section of 'Diamonds' under investigation plainly sounds only one of these chords. Therefore, that which does not tally with Erlmann's proposed model of hearing flagrantly overshadows that which does. How much deviation can the African ear accept before it abandons the model for another one (to which it is equally well accustomed)? What Erlmann has done is to abstract the notes of the hexatonic scale (in a purely formalistic way) and then to recombine them freely (in a starkly non-*uhadi* way) to permit simultaneities like A-F# and E-B within the model. The point is that these sonorities cannot occur according to the practical logic of the Xhosa bow even if they are hypothetically 'accounted for' in abstract formal terms. Furthermore, Erlmann thinks that the 'only note that is not accounted for by this sort of bow music-derived harmonic progression is F#' when, in fact, his model cannot account for the frequently sounded third degree of the tonic chord, G#, either. It seems far-fetched that the imagined African way of thinking would hear the tonic chord (E-G#-B) of 'Diamonds' as an anomalous moment in a double sense: first, the E-B sonority as an abstract non-*uhadi* derivation and, second, the added G# as a wholly extraneous note in this paradigm. This way of hearing is implausible (if not impossible), let alone inevitable.

There is a final irony in the fact that Erlmann thinks the anomalous 'F# could be seen as V^v or as a suspension'. It is unclear from the sentence whether Erlmann is referring to the 'Western' or the 'African' interpretation here. Since the F# is the one note 'not accounted for' by the African scheme (and since the F# is not really anomalous in the proposed Western scheme), I will assume that it refers to the African one. While I am not sure what 'V^v' means (surely not the dominant of the dominant in either scheme!), both interpretations are thoroughly lodged in Western theoretical terms. The irony is that, of all the notes that fall outside the logic of complementarity in traditional *uhadi* bow music, the sixth degree of the hexatonic collection (i.e. F# in this example) is the most prevalent. As mentioned, while F# cannot be produced by the bow itself when it is sounding the complementary chord (A-C#-E), it is characteristically sung together with the latter. In fact, David Dargie argues that the sixth degree sounding together with the lower of the two chords is considered a harmonic consonance in Xhosa tradition. Dargie writes: 'the principles of consonance in song however do not derive solely from bow-theory. Intervals acceptable to the ear as consonant are constantly used in song.'²⁴ Using the chords F and G as a reference, Dargie remarks: 'Again and again in the transcriptions it is clear that the tone D (and especially the high D¹) is treated as being consonant with both triads (G-B-D and F-A-C). . . .

²⁴ David Dargie, *Xhosa Music: Its Techniques and Instruments, with a Collection of Songs* (Cape Town and Johannesburg, 1988), 79.

The D¹ is a fifth above G but it is also a major sixth above F; hence it may be sung against F or G.²⁵ Paradoxically, then, the A–F# sonority in ‘Diamonds’ can in fact be theoretically accounted for in *uhadi* bow terms. But Erlmann misses this single plausible opportunity. While I think it is worthwhile opening up as many different modalities of hearing this music as possible, if only to encourage a creative training of the ear, Erlmann’s proposals are logically impossible, aurally implausible and factually wrong. A genuine history of the fascinating relations between indigenous southern African harmonic processes and Western tonality has still to be written. Such a study would involve an inquiry into the formal and perceptual differences and affinities between these systems coupled with a historical survey of actual musical cases that straddle them. In contrast, one issue made visible by Erlmann’s kind of analysis is the problem of verification in ethnomusicology in general. It would appear that, because of the relative scarcity of specialists working in a given geographical area, there is a great deal of room for opportunistic fact-making. And it is an exceedingly serious matter when these analytical improbabilities and falsehoods are used to erect black ‘identities’ and ‘ecumenes’ of an increasingly global sort. In this dubious effort, a little music theory can be a very dangerous thing.

Erlmann’s analysis of Ladysmith Black Mambazo’s collaboration with Michael Jackson takes on an almost opposite political significance. He examines how the full-length video *Moonwalker* ‘figures the more visceral, unspoken levels of the black experience by foregrounding body styles as the primary site of black identity work’ (p. 270). I cannot take up a full critique of Erlmann’s position here, except to note that Erlmann raises the stakes on an imagined non-discursive connection between black people in the field of global signifying practice in this analysis. Hence, Gates’s concept of ‘signifyin(g)’ is recalled for the purpose of affining the attitudes of Michael Jackson and Ladysmith Black Mambazo, and then of defining a correct methodological agenda for examining black performance in general. In the hands of Erlmann, for example, ‘repetition, in the hands of black performers, must be understood as formal revision, as signifyin(g)’ (p. 275). To my way of thinking, however, it is as odd that this collaboration is analysed only in terms of the self-conscious ‘play of signifiers’ (‘signifyin(g)’) as is the fact that ‘signifying(g)’ plays no role at all in Ladysmith Black Mambazo’s collaboration with Paul Simon (p. 276). This is because recent black African collaborations with white non-Africans have often produced self-consciously performative musical results, while collaborations with black non-Africans have occasionally produced fairly unself-conscious ones. Examples of the former include the *mbaqanga* guitar riffs performed by Bakithi Khumalo and Ray Phiri on Laurie Anderson’s song ‘My Eyes’ (on the CD *Strange Angels*) and, in contrast, the contrived wash of Western harmonies produced by Michel Sanchez of the group *Deep Forest* on Wes Welenga’s song ‘Awa awa’ (on the CD *Universal Consciousness*). On the other hand, Dumisani Maraire’s collaboration with the Oakland Interfaith Gospel Choir on his song ‘Kutambarara’ (‘Spreading’) on the Kronos Quartet CD *Pieces of Africa*, for example, is a less self-conscious reinterpretation of a *mbira* song using Western harmonies, while Jennifer Kyker’s collaboration with Musekiwa Chingodza on the song ‘Nhemamusasa’ (on the CD *Hungwe*) is a straightforward rendition of the traditional *mbira dza vadzimu* song of that name. What I am suggesting is that the dialectic between ‘signifyin(g)’ and ‘non-signifying(g)’ is an open question that cannot be foreclosed by the dynamics of race alone. Moreover, recent developments on the South African music scene offer an array of influences and references from the north and

²⁵ Dargie, *Xhosa Music*, 79–81.

south that cut across the contours suggested by Erlmann's 'black ecumene'. The hugely successful South African *kwaito* group T K Zee Family, for example, presents a fusion of various North Atlantic styles (techno, rave, rap, salsa) and homegrown styles (*mbaqanga*, *mbube*). And Vusi Mahlasela's CD *Wisdom of Forgiveness* is substantially indebted to the work of Paul Simon. Right down to the 'boy-next-door' vocal timbre (of which Erlmann's Africans apparently could not make much sense) and the hopeful lyrics embracing a 'hazy feeling of some universal ecumene', Mahlasela's intriguing CD sounds practically like a follow-up album to *Graceland*. I raise these cases not only because of their undeniable popularity in South Africa today but because they present a challenge to Erlmann's dichotomizing habit on the terrain of style.

I would like to end this review with a general comment about the inflated claims that are manufactured by a concept-metaphor like 'the global imagination' (p. 3). For example, Erlmann spends an entire chapter ('Figuring Culture: The Crisis of Modernity and Twentieth-Century Historical Consciousness') trafficking in universals about the overall nature of the previous century. Again, these speculations are made in relation to various existing theories of global modernity in the twentieth century. For example, Erlmann rejects the Marxist mode of production analysis as well as the modernization theory of the twentieth century because both fail to break the spell of an essentially 'Eurocentric' cumulative-evolutionary thinking. In these views, the twentieth century is characterized by 'something like a sense of finality', the final moment, as it were, in an 'evolutionary totality' (p. 174). In contrast, Erlmann proposes alternatives that seemingly recall the crucial role played by the colonies in this 'evolution'. He writes: 'the twentieth century shares with its predecessor a concern with the making of a global order whose very essence consists in the messy entanglement and at times parallel articulation of different idioms of power, concepts of historical process, notions of selfhood, and constructions of racial identity. But precisely because it proceeded from such shifting and hybrid cultural grounds, this order was an uncertain project from the start' (p. 175). Aside from the unfortunate anthropomorphism of the century itself, Erlmann's own version of the twentieth century does not bear the weight of this uncertainty. Indeed, his various characterizations about the century outstrip the generalizing impulse of Marxists and modernizers alike. Erlmann asserts: 'For instance, compared to its predecessor, the twentieth century cannot be said to have been a century of the genre. Similarly, it might be argued, the twentieth century was a century of sound and not, like the nineteenth century, one of sight' (p. 176). These massive statements are made without a trace of explanation or verification. Are they supposed to be self-evident? They are certainly odd news to me.

Erlmann's most significant claim about the essence of the twentieth century hinges on the elevated role played by images:

Thus, in my view, the twentieth century, like the nineteenth century, was quite clearly an age of fiction. In an oddly inverted sense, it was a truly panoptical era in that it was images that supervised people rather than humans who controlled images. A continuous logic and aesthetics of the surface links the panorama of the nineteenth century and the WYSIWYG and cyberspace of our time. Thus what is truly 'post' about the postmodern is perhaps not so much that the days of the panoramic gaze are over but that they are not. What had begun in the mid-nineteenth century was brought to a conclusion in the twentieth century. It was then that the lives and thinking of large numbers of people were beginning to be wholly enclosed, structured, and even governed by the images they had created for themselves and of themselves. (p. 176)

The first thing to notice about these ideas is that they recapitulate the very evolutionary logic criticized in the thinking of Marxists and others only two pages before. That is, like the 'sense of finality' registered in Marxist theory,

Erlmann's version involves a certain process begun in the nineteenth century that was 'brought to a conclusion' in the twentieth. And, again like the Marxist theory, Europe largely remains the central referent. Cyberspace, for example, is hardly a widespread phenomenon in most parts of Africa. The economics of internet access, for example, are prohibitive in Africa. Only the most basic services are available free, and there are very real costs associated with the hardware, physical space and technical expertise necessary to support internet-serving equipment. The tenth anniversary edition of the United Nations Human Development Report (1999) has a chapter on technology which highlights the unequal spread of new technologies such as the internet. Internet users in sub-Saharan Africa amount to fewer than 1% of the total population of Africa. As Diane Coyle, Economics Editor for *The Independent*, remarks: 'Only in the richest countries is Internet access widespread, and even there it is mainly a white, male, upper income group phenomenon'.²⁶ How 'large', then, is the number of people that are 'wholly enclosed' by the images of cyberspace? In my estimation, Erlmann's theoretical interpretation is out of step with the sociological facts. Ironically, the 'uncertainty' Erlmann felt to be the missing piece in Marxist theory has eroded in his own theory and is replaced with an easy 'continuity' (effected by the reification of the image sphere) between the last two centuries.

The most serious problem with this kind of figuration of the century, however, is the locked structure of the argument. Erlmann echoes the 'wholly enclosing' power of the image throughout the book. Thus, in the chapter entitled "'Spectatorial Lust'" we read: 'What the panoptic view reveals is everything there is; the world that opens up before it is not the real world but a world made for visual consumption, a world of commodity images' (p. 97). A little further on we read: 'The result of this ["visualism"] was a perfectly closed world' (p. 98). And in the chapter 'Hero on the Pop Chart' we read: 'the interplay between the digitalization of the media and the dynamics of consumer society has profoundly altered on a global scale traditional notions of identity, personhood, and society and led to an aestheticization of social relations' (p. 181). In the last quotation Erlmann echoes Walter Benjamin's notion of the 'aestheticization of politics' (which Benjamin located in Europe in the 1930s). Benjamin thought that Stalin's use of art for political purposes amounted to an aestheticization of politics in the manner of the Fascists, whereby the need for social change was falsely satisfied.²⁷ But, unlike Benjamin in this context, Erlmann does not suggest that the age of technological reproducibility holds an emancipatory potential. More in the spirit of Adorno and Horkheimer than of Benjamin, Erlmann believes that the image-sphere is 'wholly enclosed', even 'governing' the lives of people. But it is problematic to claim that the aestheticization of social life via the production of wall-to-wall images leaves no space for transgression or resistance. Such a view ignores the fact that social struggles happen not only in the context of political movements but also through the strategic mobilizations of signs and images. For example, representations of members of the working class, blacks, women, gays and lesbians in the culture industry (Hollywood film, television shows, etc.) are also a site of concrete struggles over signifying practice in the social world.²⁸ Ironically, the general form of Erlmann's analysis overvalues the role of cultural

²⁶ Diane Coyle, 'Internet helps make the world more unequal than it has ever been before', *The Independent*, 12 July 1999, 10.

²⁷ Walter Benjamin, *Illuminations*, trans. Harry Zorn (New York, 1968), 241.

²⁸ As one writer put it during Gay Pride 2000 in New York City, 'Today's gay boy is . . . a self conscious commodity, willing to accept objectification if the compensation is fair' (Richard Guichard, 'I Hate Older Men', *Village Voice: The Queer Issue*, 27 June 2000, 75).

over socio-political developments. This is why his 'global' world becomes 'perfectly closed'. In other words, by bloating the significance of culture, its analytical hold eventually becomes absolute. Thus, Erlmann's methodology is unable consistently to differentiate segments of culture that might be more or less controlled by hegemonic economic and political structures. The dialectical interplay between cultural particularities and the social totality wanes in this analysis, and the 'image' becomes socially overwhelming. While there might be reasons to be critical of the upsurge of the modern image cult (in the form of advertising, film, photography and so on), it will not do to reduce the image to the unmediated affirmation of a social fiction. Erlmann misses the fact that images too have an indexical function. They too need to be read.

About 30 years ago, the humanities in the US experienced a 'linguistic turn' whereby everything seemed to have become 'text'. In the last ten years, we might talk about a 'pictorial turn' whereby everything seems to have become 'image'. The problem is that when technologies like cyberspace are figured in terms of the triumph of the fiction-producing image, we are constructing the most totalizing fiction of all. Not only do we overlook the obvious fact that cyberspace (internet, e-mail, etc.) is more language-centred than it is image-centred, but we overlook the fact that the image-sphere is itself embedded in language. It is neither entirely 'two-dimensional' nor an all-governing totality (p. 275). Perhaps in our scholarly accounts, instead of incessantly fictionalizing the real, it behoves us to realize some fictions in this conjuncture, to essentialize strategically about political solutions to social predicaments in Africa. Failing that, perhaps it behoves us to take seriously the fictional side of our grand fiction about the nature of the globe today; to sustain a deconstructive vigilance about imagining what 'black' people collectively imagine. But the crucial point is to understand the social relations forged by these image-spheres rather than become apocalyptic – 'wholly enclosed', that is, 'structured, and even governed by the images' (p. 176).

At least it has to be said that *Music, Modernity, and the Global Imagination* is in style with the exaggerations of our times.

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