

Open Letter about 'Black Music', 'Afro-American Music' and 'European Music'

by Philip Tagg

Preface to this reissue

The first version of this text was finished on 4 May 1987 and sent to certain popular music research colleagues for feedback. It was re-edited on 14 June 1987 and sent to *Popular Music* (Cambridge University Press) who published it in volume 8/3 (1989, pp. 285-298).

This open letter was intended as a debate article, directed primarily at white European and North American popular music research colleagues. Please note that the Soviet Union still existed in 1987 and that it was then still politically acceptable to say 'Afro-American'.

Preliminaries

Over the last few years I have found myself reacting with increasing irritation every time I stumble across terms like 'black music', 'white music', 'Afro-American music' and 'European music' in writings and discussions about popular music. Apart from hearing myself slip up on a few occasions, I have seen or heard one or more of these terms used or misused by students and by trusted and less trusted colleagues alike. I have been just as worried every time. Hence this letter which I have written with these mainly white European or North American students, friends and colleagues in mind.

Due to the sensitivity of matters cultural, ethnic and racial, I have chosen to write down what I want to say in the form of a letter. It is *not* an attack on any particular person or persons and will not assume the character of an academic slanging match where I quote, misquote, twist or attempt to outargue any other individual's opinion on the matter. However, what follows *is* intended for anyone interested in music who, like myself, has ever used terms like 'black music', 'white music', 'Afro-American music' or 'European music' without always having a clear idea of what the terms actually mean. The main aim here is to bring some of the important issues that I have felt to be lurking behind the use of these terms out into scribal daylight. If readers have already considered the ideas in this letter, I apologise in advance for having offended their sensitivity and intelligence and for having wasted their time. In other cases, I hope that the following will provide some points for a constructive discussion on music, race and ideology.

Why?

I must start by declaring that I do *not* feel comfortable questioning such widely accepted terms as 'European' and 'Afro-American' or (worse) 'black music'. Initially, the very notion of taking my scepticism seriously caused the white man's burden of guilt to flash messages like **** RACIST THOUGHT ERROR **** on to the monitor of my brain. However, realising the extensive contribution actually made *by* the Protestant operative system of collective guilt *to* the cause of racism, I lost confidence in that idea and wrote off the error messages as system failures in themselves. Then I wondered if I wasn't just getting old and grumpy. I discarded that notion too because I'm

going through quite a cheerful period at the moment. So, if I haven't always been a racist and if I'm not turning into one and if it isn't some rare version of a male menopause allergy symptomised by aversion to of terms like 'Afro-American music' and 'European music', what can it be? How can anyone find these terms dicey or even insidious when they have been in extensive circulation for such a long time?

One reason is that the meaning of the terms seems to be taken for granted. We are all implicitly expected to know exactly what everybody else means and to have clear concepts of what is black or African about 'black music' or 'Afro-American' music, just as we are presumed to have a clear idea about what is white or European about 'white' or 'European' music. I just get confused. Very rarely is any musical evidence given for the specific skin colour or continental origin of the music being talked about and when evidence is presented, it usually seems pretty flimsy to me from a musicological viewpoint.¹ Another probable reason for my discontent with the use of the terms under discussion is that I have helped propagate them. I am not the only white middle class intellectual with an interest in forms of music outside those taught in conservatories to have reacted viscerally against the absurd aesthetic dictates of elitist European bourgeois music culture with its canonisation of some musics and its deprecation of others. Many of us championed noble and unjustly neglected or despised cultural causes by writing with respect about the music of ethnic and social groups excluded from the European 'Art' music education tradition. A few of us studied the music of the European proletariat while others studied the music of African peoples, the blues or the music of women. We saw important values in these musics, values ignored or declared taboo according to the elitist notion of European classical music propounded by most university music departments. We wanted to draw attention to other valid forms of musical expression and to criticise the tradition which ignorantly seemed to want them kept quiet.

In this process we had to draw up musical — and cultural — boundaries which may have been necessary from a tactical viewpoint at that time, but which were really the same sort of dividing lines as those drawn by the very tradition we sought to criticise. Studying 'folk' or 'popular' or 'black' music from the other side of the fence did *not* mean we had got rid of the real trouble — the elitist, colonialist or racist 'fence' — but that we had merely changed sides in a game with dubious rules. Perhaps there was no alternative strategy at that time than to profile the music we wanted to draw attention to by calling it 'folk', 'popular' or 'black'. But when such terms are still used today as though everyone knew exactly what they meant and as if their meaning was static, I feel considerable irritation, because I am partly to blame for having perpetuated their use in the past and because it is frustrating to see others regurgitating concepts which may once have made a valid point but which at a later stage might turn into conservative mystification. But I am jumping the gun: what are these concepts and why is it necessary to criticise them?

1. Of course there is 'no smoke without fire' and the terms would not exist if there were not some need for distinguishing one set of musical practices from another. The point here is to find out which fire the smoke we see is coming from, i.e. to discuss which needs for distinction give rise to the terms.

'Black music' and 'white music'

Although these colourful terms are rarely seen in print, they often turn up in discussions. 'Black music' is much more common than 'white music', probably for the same sort of reasons that expressions like 'women's history' or 'women's music' would cause far fewer eyebrows to be raised than 'men's history' or 'men's music' (if ever the latter were ever to be used at all in our part of the world). Such terms are relative to the hegemony of the culture of their user, so 'men's music' and 'white music' will sound stranger in a culture dominated by white males than 'women's music' or 'black music': they are the exception and we are the rule. They need identification cards, we don't. But if we are not totally satisfied with the culture we belong to — and this is shown by a choice of terms disclosing our sociocultural habitat — we had perhaps better be clear about why we use such terms and what we mean by them.

Common sense definitions

'Black' is a colour. Its opposite is 'white'. 'Black' with a capital 'B' is defined by my dictionary as:

'a member of a dark-skinned race, especially a Negro (=a member of any of the dark-skinned indigenous peoples of Africa and their descendants elsewhere) or an Australian Aborigine'.²

'Black' — also with a capital 'B', though we shall be using lower case 'b' in this sense³ — can also be used as an adjective meaning: 'of or relating to Blacks'. According to these definitions, 'black music' would mean music of or relating to members of a dark-skinned race, especially of one of the indigenous peoples of Africa and their descendants elsewhere, or of one of the Aborigine peoples.

'White' (with a capital 'W') is defined as:

'a member of the Caucasoid (=denoting or belonging to the light-complexioned racial group of mankind, which includes the peoples indigenous to Europe, North Africa, South Western Asia and the Indian subcontinent or a member of this racial group) race'.

'White' — with a capital 'W', though we shall be using lower case 'w' in this sense — can also be used as an adjective meaning: 'a person of European ancestry or denoting or relating to a White or Whites'.

According to these clearly racial (not racist) and common sense dictionary definitions of 'black' and 'white', it would be necessary, if using terms like 'black music' or 'white music', to establish physiological connections between the colour of people's skin and the sort of music they make. I will not insult readers by suggesting that they or I harbour racist hypotheses of this type, but it should be clear that if we use 'black' or 'white' as adjectives qualifying 'music', and if we define 'black' and 'white' in no other way than that provided by the dictionary, we will have to establish connections between the racial (common sense, dictionary) and thereby physiological qualifiers

2. *The New Collins Concise English Dictionary*. London, 1982.

3. We shall be using lower case for both 'black' and 'white' in the *adjectival* meaning of pertaining to Blacks or Whites (these latter defined according to the dictionary). Upper case will be used in conjunction with adjectives qualifying populations only when the adjective qualifies a geographical proper noun.

'black' or 'white' and the sets of cultural artefacts 'music' as produced and used by Blacks or Whites. If we have no clear *cultural* definition of 'black' or 'white' and if we consider 'music' as something to be heard rather than seen — this implying that the music itself possesses neither 'black', 'white' nor any other colour — then we have no logical grounds for a *cultural* definition of either 'black music' or 'white music'. The evidence we shall have to produce must in this case be physiological, not cultural. In short, failing to provide *cultural* working definitions of 'black' or 'white' when talking about 'black music' or 'white music' is tantamount to posing the racist hypothesis that there are physiological connections between the colour of people's skin and the sort of music people with that colour of skin produce.

Taking 'black music' to mean the common denominators of music made by Negroes, we will find ourselves running into musicological incongruities galore. It will mean that we must consider a range of musics as heterogeneous as that covered by 'Asian' or 'European' or 'white' or 'yellow' musics. It will also mean that a lot of musical traits frequently labelled as typically 'black', such as 'blue notes' (as in the blues) and/or polyrhythm (e.g. Nilo-Sudanic traditions) and/or birhythm (e.g. *kwela*) and/or pentatonic melismas (e.g. gospel), will all have to be excluded as common structural denominators of 'black music' because one or the other or more of these traits do not occur in certain Mauretanian, Ethiopian and South and South-East African musics. If we are still not prepared to abandon the idea of such musical traits epitomising negritude, we will just have to be imperious and disqualify a large number of black people, both in Africa and in other parts of the world, as white or of some other hue.⁴

'Black' as some black people and not others

It would be restricting the meaning of the term 'black music' quite severely to make it denote the music of dark-skinned people in the USA and nowhere else in the world. However, this is precisely the sort of meaning implied — seldom openly declared and even more rarely defined — on every occasion that I have come across the term. This implied meaning of 'black' is not only restrictive; it is also ethnocentric.

The idea that 'Black'='US-Black' has the same excruciatingly gormless sort of arrogance found in other instances of word magic in post war American English. I am referring here to words like 'world', as in 'The World Trade Center', 'Miss World' or 'The World Bank' — none of these three 'worlds' include the socialist 35% of the actual world's population — or 'Trans World Airways' who fly neither to Irkutsk nor Maputo.⁵ The magic 'World=USA' no-

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4. This should be about as popular with black people as it would be if a middle aged, middle class, employed white European male like myself were to tell some women they were not female because they showed no stereotypic feminine traits! It's also a bit like those who regard the blues as *the* authentic musical expression of black US-Americans deploring the fact that US-Afro-Americans have largely abandoned the genre and that blues audiences are mostly white. For an interesting account of this change in orientation, cf. Michael Haralambos, *Right On: From Blues to Soul in Black America*. London: Edison Blues Books (1974).
 5. There must be thousands examples of this 'World=USA' fetish. Sky Channel's relaying of 'The World Wrestling Championships' provides another astoundingly megalomaniac illustration. This 'wrestling' may well involve about two Mexicans and five Canadians but no-one else. Moreover this US-American notion of wrestling is not shared by much of the rest (95%) of the world.

tion recurs frequently in US-popular song, too, as in *Dancing in the Street* where the 'world's' cities are enumerated as Chicago, New York, L.A., New Orleans, Philadelphia and the 'Motor City',⁶ and in that recent aid singalong where the equals signs were most embarrassingly obvious: 'USA for Africa' (the group, the effort) 'was'⁷ 'the world', actually singing *We Are The World*.⁸ Using 'black' to denote people of African descent living in the USA and nowhere else seems to be yet another instance of 'World=USA'. It is as disrespectful to the cultural identity and integrity of all other Blacks (the majority) as the U.S. American meaning of 'world' is to the rest of us (also the majority).⁹

Putting aside the absurdity of all these 'World=USA' fetishes for a moment and swallowing our pride as residents of the remaining 95% of the world (in its real meaning), it should be clear that the meaning of 'black' as described above is almost identical to the dictionary definition of 'Afro-American'.

'Afro-American music'

My dictionary defines 'Afro-American' (adj.) as: 'denoting or relating to American Negroes, their history or their culture'. It is clear that this must be narrowed down considerably, if by 'Afro-Americans' we mean black people living in the USA We will have to exclude everyone from Tijuana and Santiago de Cuba southwards (the majority of Afro-Americans), perhaps even Canadian Afro-Americans too.¹⁰ But even this might not be restrictive enough if we do not want to include the musical practices of middle class U.S. Afro-Americans in New England as part of 'Afro-American music'. We might also take it upon ourselves to exclude The Fisk Jubilee Singers, Scott Joplin, Paul Robeson, Charlie Pride and Nat King Cole. We might even be considering banishing Prince and Lionel Richie — not to mention all the 'b-boys' of hip-hop influenced by Kraftwerk,¹¹ to the realms of the Euro-American or white. If this, in part or whole, is what we wanted, we would have to restrict the meaning of 'black' and 'Afro-American' even further, zooming in on only certain groups of people with dark skin at only certain times and only in certain places in the USA Reading between the lines of what frequently seems to be implied by 'black' or 'Afro-American', we might find ourselves concentrating on black US-Americans living in the South or on those whose ancestry can be found in that part of the USA This may well be a bit nearer what writers

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6. Martha Reeves and the Vandellas: *Dancing In The Street* (M Stevenson, M Gaye). State-side SS 345 (UK/45)
 7. The use of the verb 'to be' in US-American advertising and video film trailers seems to replace the usual copula function of equivalence or identity, e.g. 'Stephen is a man' or 'Stephen is my brother'. When stressed in advertising, the verb 'to be' takes on the meaning of 'to pretend so convincingly' (in whose opinion?) 'that you might almost think him/her/it to be', as in 'Gene Wilder *is* Fletch' or 'Diana Ross *is* Billy Holiday' (heaven preserve us!). Sometimes the magic copula is not even stressed, e.g. 'We Are The World', 'Coca Cola *is it*'. What *it* might be and where *it* might be at are matters I will not discuss here, though perhaps footnote 26 might be germane to the issue.
 8. The similarities between the 'USA for Africa' (*We Are The World*) event and fake U.N. image advertising campaigns like 'The United Colors of Benetton' are striking. Greil Marcus draws convincing parallels with a Pepsi Cola multinational singalong commercial and unveils a lot of the insidious ideology behind the event in his article 'We Are The World?', *Re Records Quarterly* 1/4 (1986): 36-39. London: Recommended Records.
 9. Readers are at liberty to repress this objection as a case of exaggerated cultural sensitivity if it makes them feel more comfortable. Before doing so, however, they are advised to read Greil Marcus's article 'We Are The World?' (see footnote 8).

seem to take for granted by way of definition but it is a bit of long shot from the dictionary definitions of 'Black' and 'Afro-American' to: the rural or urbanised rural proletariat of African descent living in the USA, mostly with a cultural tradition from the Southern states.

So now we have the racial concept 'black' and the ethnic concept 'Afro-American' not only directly or indirectly referring to the colour of skin of people producing the music being qualified by the adjective, but also denoting geographical, social and historical locations which, with the exception of 'African descent' are not specially 'black' (the USA, the South, 'rural', 'urban', 'proletariat', 'cultural tradition'). If this is what was meant, it would have been nice to have it clear from the outset.

Even so, the historical implications of this new definition are also problematic. At what time(s) and in which place(s) is or was the music 'truly black' or 'most genuinely Afro-American'? In Charleston, South Carolina, in 1760 when second generation slaves were sought after as jig and reel fiddlers? In 1850 at a Baptist camp meeting in Georgia? Around the turn of the century in the ragtime bars or on the streets of New Orleans? In 1920 when Bluebird were recording Atlanta street blues played on violin and banjo or in the Jug Band Music of the thirties in Memphis? Or do we find the 'truest' expressions of 'black' or 'Afro-American' music in the area around the Yazoo river in the twenties and thirties? As a black teenage fan of Lionel Richie in Minneapolis, Omaha or Seattle, does my father or his father have to have been to a club on the Chicago South Side in the fifties or have worked at Dockerey's in the forties? Does my grandad have to have been in the pen at Parchman in the twenties for my music to be considered 'black' or 'Afro-American'? As that inmate of Parchman Farm, do my great-grandparents have to be descendants of the Awuna, the Senufo, the Wolof, the Ga, the Ewe, or the Ashanti peoples or can I be a mixture, or do I have to have *griot* blood in me in order for my music to warrant the qualifier 'Afro'? (This is starting to sound like South Africa round the other way). As a black teenager in Boston today,

10. The 'World=USA' syndrome has a more particular *American* symptom. My dictionary has the following to say about 'American' (note the order of the two meanings shown): '1. of or relating to the United States of America, its inhabitants, or their form of English. 2. of or relating to the American continent'. This means that if we don't accept that the USA is the world, we at least have the chance of taking a more 'moderate' option, i.e. that by saying 'America' we really only mean one of its twenty-seven constituent nations, or one third of its total population (the 'America=USA' syndrome). Even stranger is the phenomenon that the English language possess no adjective corresponding to the first definition of 'American' presented by my dictionary, i.e. there is no equivalent to the Italian adjective *statiunitense* as in *il governo statiunitense*, unless we use 'US' as in expressions like 'the US government' or 'the US army'. However, although it might be possible to say 'US Blacks', 'US Whites', or even 'US popular music', and while I have tried to consistently use the noun 'US American' to mean an inhabitant of the USA, thereby avoiding the ambiguity between 'America=USA' and 'America=America', it would sound strange using semantically adequate but clumsy expressions like 'Afro-US music'. This is why I have used longer turns of phrase like 'of black US-Americans' and once or twice 'US-Afro-American'. It is just a matter of respect. Are Latin Americans disqualified from being American? And what about the Eskimos, Amerindians and the Québécois? It is also important to note that 'the other side' (the Soviet Union) is never named by the continent(s) of which it is part but frequently referred to, not by the name of nation state that it actually is, but by one of that nation's constituent parts ('Russia'), this diminishing its size and power through verbal magic. It should moreover be noted that the Soviets living in a nation called 'Sovetskii Soyuz' have never referred to their territory as 'Evropa', 'Azii' or 'Evrazii'.

11. cf. David Toop, *The Rap Attack*: 128-131. London: Pluto Press (1984).

as a factory worker in East Saint Louis just after the war or in Atlanta in the twenties or even as a tobacco plantation slave in South Carolina in the seventeenth-eighties, what is the relationship of my music, if it is not to be qualified as truly 'black' or 'Afro', to whenever and wherever 'black music' or 'real Afro-American music' are supposed to have existed? And if *all* these musics at all those times are 'black' or 'Afro-American', including Nat King Cole at Las Vegas, Prince in Portland or Lionel Richie in Bakersfield, what do they all have in common musically? And if the answer is 'not much', what is the point of using the terms? And if I am missing the point by asking these questions, what *is* the point of the terms?

Some musicological misconceptions

When the terms 'black music' or 'Afro-American music' are used and implicitly or explicitly opposed to 'white' or 'European music', a few typically 'black' or 'African' musical traits will occasionally get mentioned. The most popular musical characteristics to cite are: (1) 'blue notes', (2) call and response techniques, (3) 'syncopation' and (4) improvisation.

'Blue notes'

'Blue notes', as used in blues and jazz, can be either slides from what the classical European tradition of music theory calls 'minor' to 'major' intervals in a scale (mostly 3rd and 7th, in certain variants also from diminished 4th to perfect 5th) or the placing of a tone somewhere between those intervals without a slide. Such traits, can be found in the music of some West Sudanic tribes today but also occurred on a regular basis in folk music from Scandinavia and, more importantly, from Britain at the time of the main colonisation of the New World.¹² Such traits are commonly heard in old recordings of 'thoroughly White' — as opposed to the equally silly notion of 'thoroughly Black' — music from the Appalachians.¹³ Now, whether this American rural vocal tradition practised by Whites came wholesale from Britain or whether it is the result of early acculturation with West Sudanic musical elements or whether it is a bit of both is all beside the point. If groups of people with white skin in the USA have been singing between the cracks on the piano, even only over the last hundred years — a conservative estimation —, it is illogical to conclude that 'blue notes' are exclusively 'black'/'Afro' or exclusively 'white/Euro'.

Call and response

Call and response techniques can be antiphonal or responsorial. They are as African as they are European as they are Indian or Jewish. Antiphonal psalm singing and responsorial *responsoria* between priest and choir or congregation have, to say the least, been pretty common over the past two thousand years in the Middle East and Europe. Quite a few people have been to church in Europe over the last nineteen hundred years in this part of the world. No mean number of these Europeans took their cultural luggage with them when they settled in the New World. Lining out and evangelical Hallelujahs are two such examples. This means quite simply that even though there may be lots of call and response in West Sudanic musics too, it cannot logically be cited as characteristic of 'black music' or 'Afro-American music'.

Rhythm

It is with even greater confidence that 'syncopations' or 'downbeat anticipations' are quoted as typically 'black' musical traits. Now, if we were talking about the *polyrhythm* of many West and central Sudanic musics, this would be understandable, because I know of no European musics using rhythmical structures like a metric unit of, say, twenty-four sub-beats being consistently used to produce a complex of simultaneous metres like 3/8, 2/4, 3/4, 6/8, 4/4, 2/2, 3/2, 4/2 (and possible additive asymmetric subdivisions of these) on top of each other. That would be a valid musical trait distinguishing one type of African music not only from European music in general but also from a lot of other African musics. It would unfortunately also distinguish these polyrhythmic African music traditions from most of the music made by US-Afro-Americans, including those with their cultural roots in the Southern states. So what rhythmic traits *are* being hinted at but not de-

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12. Apart from mentioning the obvious aesthetic desirability of intervallic swooping and of bending notes when singing English folk rock (e.g. Maddy Prior in *The Female Drummer* [Yorkshire trad. via P Grainger, A L Lloyd & The Watersons] on the Steeleye Span album *Please To See The King* [United Artists UAG 29244, 1971]) which, I hear the Afro-American purist say, all comes from exposure to blues based traditions and not from any traditions via groups like The Watersons, nor to any knowledge of what old men and women from Suffolk or Dorset do on recordings, I would like to recount some of my own experiences of musical socialisation into the bourgeois world. In singing lessons and choir practices we were always discouraged from what must have been pretty natural tendencies to 'swoop'. We were in other words told not to perform certain intervallic leaps using our own *portamenti* and to sing the notes 'clean', i.e. not to 'slide' or bend in and out of what the music teacher heard, or rather saw, to be fixed pitches in a score. Bends, slides and swoops were considered vulgar and impure by our music teacher and we were admonished to socialise pretty darn quick out of such musical behaviour. Where these bends, slides and swoops of ours came from is unclear. None of us rural Northamptonshire lads growing up in the early nineteen fifties had been extensively exposed to anything much bluesier than Glen Miller, Teresa Brewer and Humphrey Lyttleton. I even remember once being told off (musically) in choir practice for 'sliding and swooping around', not because it was like blues or jazz but because I sounded to the music teacher like a Music Hall artist. A far more unequivocal instance of European 'blue notes', though this has very little to do with US-American popular music, can be found in the Lutheran churches of eighteenth century Sweden, where the monochord and organ were introduced to stop the congregation from singing notes foreign to well-tempered tuning and from performing melodic ornamentation and improvisation. How the cowherds and smallholders of central Dalarna were influenced by the blues and West Sudanic music traditions in 1770 still remains to be researched. More serious points for musicological research should include: (1) the relationship between, on the one hand, what the central European music theory tradition ethnocentrically calls 'false relations' — be they simultaneous (mostly Tallis but also Weelkes, Tomkins and Byrd) or slightly staggered (e.g. the 'English cadence') found in practically every extant Tudor manuscript — and, on the other hand, the popular music practices of the Tudor composers' contemporaries. This should include sections on tuning and temperament, a historical account of the *tierce de Picardie* and a comparison with folk tunes using flat 7 or flat 3 as pendulum points to the main tonal (melodic and/or harmonic) centre (e.g. Farnabye's *Dream*, Dowland's *The King of Denmark's Galliard*). (2) Accompaniment and harmonisation practices for the 25% of English folk song which, according to A.L. Lloyd's assessment of the Child ballads, were in Dorian or Aeolian modes. (3) The (non-) treatment or, more frequently, absence or avoidance of what Central European music theory would call 'leading notes' and how these were harmonised at later stages in the USA (cf. shape note singing and P.A. Westendorf's complaints about the unharmonisability of Irish ballads for parlour use). (4) A detailed account of early acculturation between West African and British music traditions in Virginia and the other American colonies. (5) What happened when the banjo and guitar were used as accompaniment for US-American folk song of British or West African origin or in an acculturated state.
13. e.g. *The Lost Soul* as recorded by the Doc Watson Family in 1963 on Folkways FTS 31021.

scribed when the terms like 'black music' and 'Afro-American music' are being used? Syncopation? The *Harvard Dictionary of Music* (ed. W Apel, 1958) has 'this to say about that':

'Syncopation is ... any deliberate upsetting of the normal pulse of meter, accent and rhythm. Our system of musical rhythm rests upon the grouping of equal beats into groups of two and three, with a regularly recurring accent on the first beat of each group. Any deviation from this scheme is felt as a disturbance or contradiction between the underlying (normal) pulse and the actual (abnormal) rhythm'.

Apel then goes on to quote excerpts from typically *dance* inspired movements from works by Beethoven and Brahms. He is on home ground there but when he gets into examples of 'syncopation' from late fourteenth century *Ars Nova* pieces his step is not so sure, probably because he is no longer dealing with monorhythmic symmetric meter but with manuscripts attempting to notate folk improvisation devices of the time. That is to say, the more the music diverges from the ideal monorhythmic 'norm' of the old-style musicologist's notion of Viennese classical music, the more we move (1) in space — away from Central Europe, (2) in time — away from (a caricature of) the late eighteenth century and (3) in social status — away from aristocratic or *haut bourgeois* milieus. We move, seeing things from Adorno's perspective, towards geographical, historical and social *Randgebieten* (= 'marginal areas' or 'borderlands'). It is obvious that there are far more references to 'popular' European traditions when Apel deals with 'abnormal' (for who?) rhythm practices than when he has to define sonata form and even clearer (in the former case) that he is treading on thin conceptual ice. For example, some of Apel's 'syncopation' citations are simplified hemiolas and expurgated rhythm patterns from Galliards (very popular in sixteenth and early seventeenth century Britain). The problem is that 'syncopation' presupposes that only one rhythm and metre can be dominant at any one time (as in the Viennese classical music which forms the basis of old-style musicology). However, medieval, baroque and Tudor music performance practice, with its use of *tactus* instead of metric conducting, shows that the fixation on symmetric monorhythm — graphically represented in *later* types of notation by the omnipresent bar line — is totally foreign to the music of that time. In fact the term 'syncopation', applied to consistent hemiola shifts (as in the Galliard or in Elizabethan madrigals and anthems), is highly questionable, especially in polyphonic sections where different metres occur in different voices and can be experienced simultaneously by both listener and performer. Further evidence of the inadequacy of the term 'syncopation' and of the obvious popularity of birhythmic practices in Europe can be found *passim* in the *Fitzwilliam Virginal Book*, compiled in the '*Randgebiet*' of England in the early seventeenth century. Considering the popular ('folk') origin of practically every other piece in that collection, it would be no rash speculation to suppose that European (at least British) colonists possessed some competence in birhythmic devices when they arrived in the New World in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Moreover, they brought with them the rhythmic idiosyncrasies of the English language which, in comparison with most other European languages, favours certain 'offbeat' (whose beat?) settings in music. Apart from the frequent need of triplets (as in the songs of Vaughan Williams) or of triple metre superimposed on duple or quadruple (as in madrigal settings by Byrd) it is important to mention the 'Scotch snap'¹⁴ about which the *Harvard Dictionary of Music*, in its inimitable, cul-

turally non-relativist manner, has the following to say under 'Dotted Notes III — *Inverted Dotting*': '... the reverse of the ordinary (*sic*) dotted rhythm... It is a typical feature of Scottish folk tunes... (and)... of American Negro Music and of jazz... Inverted dotting is also very frequent in Oriental and in primitive (*sic*) music, where the normal (*sic*) dotted rhythm is rather rare... This rhythm also figures prominently in the English music of the seventeenth century (John Blow, Henry Purcell), in which it is used effectively in order to bring out the short, but unaccented, first syllables which occur in so many English dissyllabics'.¹⁵

Looking and listening through early minstrel songs,¹⁶ there seems to be some truth in Apel's observation about the 'Scotch snap' being 'a typical feature of American Negro music'. However, that presupposes that early blackface minstrels actually did manage to copy (and caricature) the musical devices they thought warranted the burnt cork and that the sheet music (and other sources) on which modern performances of mid nineteenth century minstrel songs are based are reliable. Whatever the case may be, it should be clear that it is *unclear* whether 'inverted dottings' came from what Apel calls 'primitive' (in this case West African) music or from (what Apel does not call 'primitive') 'Scottish folk tunes' or from the rhythmic idiosyncrasies of English language dissyllabics. It should moreover be clear from the preceding paragraphs that it is *unclear* whether the birhythmic character of much North American popular music should be traced back to Europe or Africa.

Improvisation

'Improvisation' is sometimes used as a word of honour in discussions about jazz. At worst, the word seems to refer to a vaporous musical practice which Blacks are expected to do better than Whites. Taking 'improvisation' to mean making music without *consciously* trying to perform — from memory or notation — an already existing piece or other performance, it is hard to see how anyone can say it is more typical for Blacks than Whites or people who take shoe size 9' (=42) or larger. Postulating that there is less improvising in European music traditions must stem from an uncritical acceptance of late nineteenth century bourgeois elitist concepts of European music traditions (about which more later). One guiding light in this school of 'thought' was to canonise the individual composer's (The Artist's) score as the music's purest form of concretion. Such notions negated some of the historically most important creative practices of the European classical music tradition — Landini, Sweelinck, Buxtehude, Bach, Händel, Mozart, Beethoven, Liszt and Franck were all renown not only as composers but also as *improvisers*. The ideological aim of this notation fetish (notation being the only concrete form of musical storage and commodification at the time) was to forestall

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14. The 'inverted dotted' rhythms of English were probably influenced by the inflections and accentuations of Celtic speech (cf. the rhythms of both Scottish and Irish Gaelic). Hungarian also contains such rhythms.
 15. Please excuse all the *sics*, but the ethnocentricity of this entry in the *Harvard Dictionary of Music* is beautiful in its unintended self parody. It's nearly as funny as the 'world' in *We are the World* to suggest that most musics of the world do not use the 'normal' type of dotting!
 16. cf. the Dan Emmett, George Christy and Cool White titles on the 'Early Blackface Minstrelsy' side of The Yankee Doodle Society's triple album *Popular Music in Jacksonian America* (dir. Joe Byrd, Musical Heritage Society MHS 834561).

sacrilege upon the 'eternal values' of immutable Masterworks so that the cultural (and social) status quo of yesteryear might be preserved *in aeternam*. This strategy was so successful that it finally managed to suffocate the living tradition it claimed to hold so dear — a dirty deed indeed, effectuated by putting the loved one into institutional preserving jars called 'conservatories'. One sequel to this murder was that improvisation had been virtually eradicated from the classical arena by 1910.¹⁷

Notwithstanding the dearth of improvisation in the European art music tradition over the last seventy years — however deplorable that might be —, it is absurd to use this sad fact as conclusive evidence supporting notions implying that improvisation is more 'black' or 'African' than 'white' or 'European'. This is not so much because 'improvisation'¹⁸ was a central part of the European classical tradition during the most important periods of Northern European emigration to the New World (1628-1890) as because many European and most early British immigrants brought along non-classical musical traditions in which 'improvisation' — in the sense of 'making music without consciously trying to perform an already existing piece or other performance from memory or from notation' — was far from being an exceptional trait.

'African' questions

If after all these objections we still want to use terms like 'black music' and 'Afro-American music' when talking about popular music in the USA, we could have a shot at the African connection to see if we can be at least a little more stringent than just 'improvisation', 'blue notes', 'call and response' and 'syncopation' when it comes to *musically* determining what really is 'black' or 'African' about the music we are referring to through those terms of ours. In order to know what differences there were between European and African traditions, and thereby establish real musicological evidence for the viability of our terms, we would have to go back to the seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries and find out *what sort of* improvisation, *what sort of* call and response techniques, *what sort of* rhythmic and melodic practices, etc. were common in Britain and the Savannah areas of West Africa. I am sure we could find some important differences if we could answer *these* questions.

Taking the African connection first, we would have to find out what the slaves brought with them to the New World and how this interacted with what the Europeans had brought with them. In order to know this we would have to know which African peoples were actually brought to the New World, in what numbers, where they ended up and which Europeans they had to have dealings with. Then we would need to know whether the music used in Africa today by those peoples supplying the New World with slaves in the

17. The art of improvisation never died out among church organists in Germany, France or Britain. You had to play *until* the bride or coffin or priest deigned to show up and you had to round off suitably neither before nor after that moment. No compositions with full cut and end functions every twenty seconds (what you would have needed as an organist) existed: they would have been musical absurdities and highly unsuitable! There was no other alternative but to improvise.

18. Whether we are referring to *ex tempore* composition *in toto* or to *ex tempore* ornamentation or alteration of existing melodic, rhythmic or harmonic patterns improvisation was part and parcel of the European classical music tradition, especially at the time of the largest emigration of Northern Europeans to the New World.

eighteenth century is the same now as it was then or whether it has undergone any changes. We would then have to know the social conditions of newly arrived slaves, the processes of assimilation and acculturation, in various parts of the South and on that basis isolate strictly African musical elements in the fast acculturating genres of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Now, if that seems like a lifetime research job for a staff of over one hundred competent enthusiasts working full time, we could always opt for a more pragmatic solution, starting from the hypothesis that 'Afro-American music'¹⁹ is the set of the musical common denominators found in recordings labelled by the US music business as 'Race', 'R&B', 'Soul', 'Blues', etc. This would be defining 'Afro-American' in the same way as the industry defines its target group (music *for* US-Afro-Americans). This might sound convenient, but we would run up against exactly the same problems as mentioned earlier on, especially if using the term 'black music'. Would we include traditional jazz which has had a predominantly white audience since the war? What about Motown and its majority of white listeners since the mid sixties? What about bebop, cool and modern jazz? Would Lester Young qualify and not Stan Getz? What do we do with Bix Beiderbecke, Django Reinhardt, Gene Krupa and Benny Goodman? If they are 'white', why is Duke Ellington 'black'? Where is (once again) Lionel Richie and (for once) Michael Jackson? Is only Bessie Johnson's *voice* 'black' and her black musicians all 'white'? Is ragtime 'black' music?

Incongruities like these make the term 'black music' as hopeless as 'white music' and I think it is time to agree to differ and part company with anyone who still wants to use it. However, difficulties of unestablished continental origin for the various styles feeding into the mainstream of US-American popular music raise doubts about the validity of the term 'Afro-American music' too. One reason for such doubts is that as long as no-one really knows what musics Africans actually brought with them to the USA — a very important research priority — it is impossible to say what is specifically 'Afro' in 'Afro-American' music. Moreover, the term begs the question of what was 'American' when the slaves started being shipped into the colonies en masse. Didn't there have to be some 'African' in the music before it became 'American'? Or had English, French and Celtic traditions become so widespread and acculturated by 1720 in North America that they now had musical common denominators enabling them to be distinguished as 'American' rather than as English, French or Celtic? A rhetorical question indeed, for how could (another one) such acculturation take place so quickly in these far flung colonies on a huge continent without much by way of roads, railways, telephones, radio or television? In fact 'Afro-American' implies that people of African racial origin played no part in the creation of the 'American' part of 'Afro-American' music, just as 'Euro-American' would imply that European music styles are grafted on to an already fixed set of 'American' musics which were neither Amerindian nor, as we have just seen, African in origin. The point is: at what point in history and in which area of the USA did (U.S.) 'American' music exist so that it could be distinguished from music of other (sub-) continents and thereby become qualifiable by the prefixes 'Afro-' or 'Euro-'? What characteristics does the main set of music called 'American' possess so that the terms 'Euro-' and 'Afro-American' music can have any

19. I shall soon be abandoning 'black music' as a conceivably viable term on the grounds of arguments presented up to and immediately following this point.

substance?

'European' questions

It is important to remember that most work on the music of black U.S. Americans is written by middle class whites, mostly liberal or radical, and mostly European. As answering to this description, I feel it is somehow historically understandable, though far from excusable, if we know very little about West African history and culture — it was, after all, *our* forefathers, not theirs, that did the colonising and ran the slave trade.²⁰ However, although we are able to deplore the oppressive deeds of our ancestors against people distinguishable from ourselves at a glance by the darker colour of their skin, we seem to remain strangely insensitive to the various types of oppression within our own continent and to the fact that both forms of oppression are inextricably linked together. We seem either to misunderstand or know very little about our own continent and while it seems legitimate to feel solidarity and sympathy for the people our forefathers enslaved, we do not seem to expound the same amount of philanthropic energy on ourselves. Would we be insulted by our own philanthropy and, anyhow, what does this waffling have to with the matter in hand?

'European music'

Although 'white music' is sometimes used as an opposite pole to 'black music', the counterpart most frequently provided by white writers on 'Afro-American music' is 'European music'. Now, the strange thing about the use of this term — apart from its being just as nebulously defined as 'Afro-American music' — is that its *implied* meaning coincides with the most reactionary, elitist, bourgeois, conservative and non-dynamic view of European music imaginable. What in fact seems to be meant is no less than the abhorrently false view — propounded by a small but powerful clique of cultural patriarchs —, not of European music, but of a small part of one out of several hundred important European music traditions. That is to say that many a knight of the 'Afro-American music' cause and champion of both anti-elitism and anti-authoritarianism uses the expression 'European music' in the same erratic way as their elitist and patriarchal adversaries. By so doing, they do not even refer to the heyday of Viennese classicism,²¹ but to what the untalented theory teacher in a fourth division conservatory has been told to think that the Viennese classical school *ought* to be. The garbled version of our continent's and its peoples' music is that it is all Ein-Schwein-Drein-Fear beats to the bar, well planned crescendi, diminuendi, rallentandi (rarely accelerandi for some reason), four square Teutonic periodicity, pompously farting woodwind sections, jaded brass sound, claustrophobic quartets, sickly grace notes, syrupy strings, bombastic piano solos, ego tripping conductors, self-controlled straight-laced audiences, no dancing (except ballet), no fun, no glamour, no humour, all Spiritual Respect, Greatness and, consequently, Utter Boredom.²²

20. My Ghanaian friend and colleague, Klevor Abo, successfully embarrasses me every time he quotes Chaucer, Shakespeare and the rules of cricket in perfect English. This is because I am painfully reminded of the fact that I only speak a handful of European languages and am totally ignorant of Ewe, Ibo, Yoruba, Hausa or Ashanti and cannot quote from any of their great epics.

21. See above under 'Improvisation' for further comments.

How such a caricature of a once living and extremely popular music tradition came into being is a matter which cannot be discussed here. In *this* context the curious thing is that many of us ('we' still defined as above), professing to be in opposition to such ignorant elitism, seem nevertheless, when talking of 'Afro-American music', to have opted for a mindlessly elitist view of the music of our *own* continent. It is a view which not only makes a total parody of the music it canonises (by the actual process of canonising it) but also sneers at musics in proportion to how near they are in time and place to the condition of our own proletariat.²³

This distorted image of European music has had tragic consequences. It has meant, for example, that we know almost as little about British popular ('folk') music of the late seventeenth century as we know about West African music from the same time and that we cannot establish any clear picture of popular performance or dance practices (improvisation, birhythm, ornamentation, drone treatment, popular harmonisations of modal tunes, agogics, vocal timbre and inflection, etc.) — knowledge which would have come in handy here in trying to discover what 'Afro-American' or 'European' music might be. Of course, it also means that conservatories still see fit to buy two handmade harpsichords for the price of fourteen DX7s or a recording studio and that teachers (even a few students) still laugh when you propose a Jimi Hendrix memorial guitar scholarship or suggest a series of workshops on the accordion (one of Europe's most widely used instruments) or try and start a course in Country and Western ensemble playing. Naturally, by setting this sort of aesthetic taboo on certain genres,²⁴ the conservative music college will ultimately commit cultural harakiri.

At the same time, I am willing to bet that quite a few white European fans of 'Afro-American music' reading these lines would probably approve of the Jimi Hendrix scholarship but feel less sympathy for the accordion or C&W ideas. If I win this bet, it means that the most ironical effect of the twisted view of European music has been to perpetuate the rules of a 'better-than-thou' game in the field of musical aesthetics, so that even those of us trying to beat the ancien regime actually end up by playing the same game as our rivals, instead of changing the rules or moving to another sport altogether. The reason for this intellectual debacle is that when we speak of the 'European tradition' and mean — without saying so of course — the reactionary caricature of European music presented to us by patriarchal bourgeois figures and institutions, we are not only misunderstanding and falsifying the historical position and role of this continent's classical music tradition, we are also, by acting 'little boy in opposition to naughty authorities', playing into the hands of the reactionary tradition of learning we seek to improve upon. By falling into a mechanistic anti-authoritarian position, we perpetuate the ideas of the hated authorities with whom we live in an unresolved Oedipal relationship of dependence: we are the disobedient son who sees no

22. For a rollicking verbal showdown with conservative music education in general and untalented music theory teachers in particular, see Paul Hindemith, *A Composer's World*: 216-221. New York: Doubleday (1952).

23. Proletariats suffering elsewhere in place or time are usually O.K. as objects for our philanthropy. When they get too close or powerful they are of course less welcome into the drawing room.

24. I mean 'genre' in the sense described by Franco Fabbri in 'A Theory of Musical Genres: Two Applications', *Popular Music Perspectives*: 52-81, ed. David Horn and Philip Tagg. IASPM: Göteborg and Exeter (1982)

value in himself without the habitual presence of an authoritarian father.²⁵ In this way, instead of understanding the interrelationship of popular (folk and later) traditions with art traditions and instead of criticising the way in which the people are constantly banished to the periphery of traditional accounts of culture, we feel compelled to adopt our hated authoritarian father's definition of where the 'middle' is and of what it contains. We seem to be either unwilling, blind or too lazy to see that music history creates other patterns than those of the bad old music department, the record company boardroom or history lessons at school. We find ourselves thinking in the terms of Adorno or some Chinese emperor, imagining ourselves inhabiting an elitist and Eurocentric *Chung Wa*²⁶ we do not like. Rather than move to what we ignorantly imagine to be a deserted 'borderland' — *Randgebiet dieses Reiches der Mitte* to continue this Adorno + China mixed metaphor — we project our hopes and frustrations on to a distant people the emperor once enslaved. By turning our gaze elsewhere, we do not see that what were termed 'borderlands' or 'marginal areas' (*Randgebieten*) by the old regime (symbolised here by Adorno, the emperor and the fourth division music theory teacher) were in fact always potential centres of power. In other words: just because we have experienced European music history teaching through books that devote two hundred pages to a garbled version of what Bach, Mozart and Beethoven were all about and zero pages to popular traditions, it does not follow that we must agree with this view or accept it as a valid definition of 'European music' or use it as the starting point or centre for our own discussions about European, let alone US-American, music. Nor do we need to accept that the dominant music culture in our part of the world today should necessarily have its origins in European history traced to a geographically and socially warped concept of where the 'centre' of our continent's music traditions are to be found.

The reasons for this objection are simple. Music develops within and between people and groups of people, with their conditions of life and with their position in the productive forces of society, not according to aesthetic taboos, be they elitist old hat or elitist hip. It is therefore totally logical that what Adorno considered as two of Europe's *Randgebieten* — British folk music (way out in the left hand margin somewhere) and central European *gesunkenes Kulturgut* (rock bottom in relation to Adorno's omphalos [navel]) — have combined so fruitfully with the even more marginal (exotic to boot!) musical habits of slaves descending from West Sudanic peoples, thereby laying the foundations for the dominant global music culture of our own time.

Perhaps one of the main obstacles to this sort of reasoning has been that those of us who deplored the old 'True Genius' and 'Art' *Wertästhetik* have found new masters to serve by coining new epithets for 'Authenticity' and 'Truth'. We convert the 'classical' concern for 'real art' or the 'folk' fetish for 'genuineness' into 'popular' equivalents like 'street credibility', 'intrinsic

25. Our father which art in New York? Washington? Harvard? L.A.? London? Oxford? Cambridge? Vienna? Frankfurt? Wittenburg? Geneva? Dunfermline? Rome? Amsterdam? Strömstad? At home? At school? In church? At university? On TV? In books on 'Afro-American music'?

26. *Chung Wa* is Chinese for 'China' and means 'Centreland' or the land in the middle (i.e. the land where the middle is, or the land where it's at, or, in Coca Cola's terms, the land which is *it*). All the other places and people are out(side): we are in(side): the middle, the centre, the omphalos (=navel). Everything and everybody else circles round us, not we round it or them.

ephemerality', 'real rock and roll', 'genuine popular expression', 'really popular', 'the latest', 'no.1 on the charts', 'really commercial', 'anti-authoritarian', 'genuine working-class expression', 'singable', 'danceable', etc. Musical 'proof' of the excellence of these often mutually contradictory concepts is then presented and no-one is any wiser than after musical 'proof' of the superiority of Schönberg over Respighi. I think 'black music' and 'Afro-American music' are also terms running a severe risk of this type of aesthetic fetishisation. This fetishisation or idealisation process contains other ingredients which need some discussion.

Projection and compensation

In order to get a better picture of some of the possible mechanisms involved in white idealisation of the 'Afro-' in 'Afro-American music', let us suppose that a fictitious ancestor of mine, a shoemaker's apprentice and small-time poacher from Northamptonshire, after serving a short sentence in prison, enlists and gets sent to the American colonies. After a few years of herding slaves and massacring Indians, he decides to make a fresh start in the backwoods of Virginia where he clears some woodland and starts a small plantation. He borrows extensively for the property, for equipment and building materials. He marries and has three children in quick succession. He has four mouths to feed as well as his debts to pay. He has to work from dawn to dusk every day of the year. He had better plan things more carefully: no more heavy expenses, better crop rotation, but maybe a new barn would solve storage problems?... If only he could get some extra labour he could produce and sell more. So he buys his first slave. Production increases notably. So he invests in two more slaves, one male, one female. If they have children quickly and often, he won't have any more capital expenditure for slaves. Lack of labour is now the only thing holding him back...

... 'apart from their work, they (Negroes) were required to beget more slaves; as the men laboured the women were in labour. Love played little part in this: couples mated at the orders of the plantation owner'... 'Slaves were classified below the level of cattle and when they were sold at the auction block they had to undergo the most humiliating and dehumanising examinations which were primarily designed to ascertain their strength and potential procreativity. With the stud Negro came the conception of the big buck nigger which inferred a distinctly subhuman status. Fecund mothers and fertile males were assets to the slaveholder who bred his slaves as he bred livestock'.²⁷

So, if my ancestor's profits were to increase, he would have to save and plan carefully himself and at the same time try to get his slaves to breed like rabbits. Since procreativity amongst the slaves was, for business reasons, such an important factor and since first Puritan and then Victorian views on sexuality dominated amongst Whites in the rural South, it is hardly surprising that my ancestor projected much of his own sexual fantasies on to the Blacks. Although 'do unto others as ye would have them do unto you' fell fair and square by the wayside, he lived in considerable awe of the strict moral edicts of his church. Bearing the 'white man's sexual burden' so nobly, he used a sort of circular cart-before-the-horse argument to doubly justify his treating black people like animals. Disregarding the fact that he had encouraged and forced them into promiscuity, he felt at liberty to reason that since

27. Paul Oliver, *The Meaning Of The Blues*: 131-133. Toronto: Macmillan, (1960), providing historical some historical background to the sexual poetry of the blues.

he was such a chaste man and since they were so immoral and promiscuous, then they must be animals and that since they were animals it must be quite O.K. for him to force them into further promiscuity.

This can hardly have been the easiest psychological equation to solve. There, on your doorstep was your 'big buck nigger' sowing his proverbial oats in one field after the other while you had been brought up as a 'one woman man', living with a 'one man woman' who had also been brought up with goodness knows how many fears and guilts about sex. No wonder our forefathers credited black males with bigger cocks as well as greater desires and sexual potency than we thought we were allowed to have or even think about. No wonder either that we projected on to black females the sort of insatiable nymphomaniac attributes which we were afraid God might discover if we even dreamt of them. This was used as yet another link in the circular argument of racial 'superiority'. It meant we could see ourselves even more ascetically and even further removed from 'their' status as animals. They did all the 'naughty' and 'dirty' things — both in labour and in sex — and our sexual desires were often stifled, perverted or criminalised. One good way of ridding ourselves of this guilt was to project it on to our slaves. In that way we could stay 'clean' and they would stay 'dirty' in the eyes of the cultural, social and political authorities we thought we had to obey. Conversely, if we had been encouraged to respect and enjoy our own sexuality instead of fearing it, there would have been one reason less for treating slaves like cattle. The oppression of sexuality among Whites and its projection²⁸ on to Blacks seem therefore to have been vital links in the chain of oppression making slavery in the New World into a going concern. Thanks to his own sexual oppression, my fictitious ancestor 'knew' all too well where he stood morally in relation to his superiors (a miserable sinner with unclean thoughts) and — through his projection of guilt and longing — in relation to slaves. In this way the status quo of a racist class society could be preserved and perpetuated more efficiently.

I think there is a risk that a similar sort of projection process can come into play when terms like 'Afro-American music' and 'European music' are used without clear definition. Sometimes we seem to credit people with dark skin — Africans as well as Afro-Americans — with all the dirty-and-naughty-but-nice notes, timbres and rhythms which we imagine some mysterious Our-Father-Which-Art-White-And-European has forbidden us miserable, petty, foursquare European mortals from making. We even imagine, thanks to this father figure's historical falsifications — which for reasons unknown we still seem to believe —, that people of our sickly hue have never ever made any 'dirty-and-naughty-but-nice' notes, timbres and rhythms and that we (staid and sexless little Whities as we think we are supposed to be) cannot possibly have played any major part in the creation of all those 'sinful' (but nice) sounds we bop around to these days. No: we prefer to believe that we have exclusively people of black African descent to thank (or reproach) for every ounce of 'sinful' music we enjoy.

There is in other words the risk that by laying the trip so heavily on black people of African descent we embark on the same sort of projection process

28. It is also possible to put the idea of projection into Stierlin's concept of 'delegation', in the sense of handing over to others what you cannot or do not want to handle yourself. In this case we would be talking about an 'id level delegation' from the slaveholder to his 'big buck nigger'.

as described earlier. By disowning responsibility for our own musical corporeality we force black people into absurd court jester (house nigger?) positions and use music we imagine to be little or none of our own doing as a corporeal panacea for own problems of subjectivity, powerlessness and alienation. Perhaps this is why some of us are disappointed if black artists do not live up to the stereotype behaviour we expect of them, like constant arse wiggling, pelvis grinding and jive talk.²⁹ Perhaps that is also why some of us do not count Paul Robeson, Charlie Pride, Nat King Cole and Milt Jackson as truly 'black' or 'Afro', or why we never seem to expect a black musician to write a symphony or opera or anything else in which long thematic processuality is the order of the day.³⁰ In cases like these, where our stereotype expectations are not fulfilled, we may feel insecure because the status quo of race, culture and society are all being challenged.

Conclusions

In summing up both 'the European question' and this letter as a whole, I think my scepticism towards the supposed pair of opposites 'African' or 'Afro-American music' versus 'European music' has two main grounds: (1) musicological, because no satisfactory definitions of any terms are provided, and (2) ideological. The latter is particularly important because not only does the implied dichotomy preordain certain sets of feeling and behaviour for one race and deny them to the other, it also turns the overriding question of class into a matter of race or ethnicity.³¹ So, if we do not resolve the Oedipal conflict we seem to have with Our-Father-Which-Art-In-Europe, we shall never understand how the situation and ideas of the European (rural and urban) and African (rural becoming urban) proletariats, as expressed in music, were able to acculturate so productively in eighteenth, nineteenth and twentieth century North America, thereby laying the foundations of what was to become US popular music — the dominant musical tradition of our time. Instead, we will present ethnic dichotomies showing the mirror image of the apartheid we profess to hate and concealing the system which uses racism as one of its most iniquitous mechanisms for perpetuating a class society.

29. Jimi Hendrix detested the stereotype 'bad dude' behaviour that white audiences expected of him. See Chris Welch, *Hendrix*. London: Ocean Books (1972).

30. For example, Scott Joplin's *Treemonisha* (1911-1915) failed, not because there was anything wrong with the work, but because no (white) impresario was willing to stage an opera written by a black man. Cf. Peter Gammond, *Scott Joplin and the Ragtime Era: 98-100*. London: Sphere Books (1975).

31. This does *not* mean to say that racial and ethnic oppression are unimportant parts of US-American class society. Read on to the end!