

**CULTURAL TRANSFERS WORKSHOP
JANUARY 26, 2012**

BLACK ATLANTIC CROSSINGS IN MUSIC AND FILM

Matthew Rushton

The curious case of “le cochon de lait”

Matt Rushton recounts the story of one object’s colonial travel in the 1930s, from a rural village in Mali to the museums of Paris. With photographs from travel journals, ethnographies, and museum & gallery catalogues, Rushton tells of and illustrates the object’s sudden transformation from religious fetish to masterpiece of African art. He concludes his talk by discussing how an editorial slip involving two of these photographs inspired his current research.

Pius Adesanmi

I'm Endowed: Musical Collaborations and Transfers in the Black Atlantic

Black musical internationalism is often discoursed in postcolonial scholarship as a “roots and routes” phenomenon, which saw the movement of musical aesthetics “Mali to Mississippi”, and led to the emergence of new forms and cultural ages. The musical traditions of the sub-Saharan African sahel, with its koras and balafons, morphed into blues and jazz in the in the plantations of America’s antebellum south, coalesced, along with other modes of aesthetic expression, into the Harlem Renaissance, and occasioned a European “Jazz age” in London and Paris in the 1920s and 1930s.

The roots and routes approach became even more prominent as the age of globalization and increased investment in culture and the arts in postcolonial Africa led to a culture of musical tours to Western sites of cultural actuation – music festivals, carnivals – by African musical orchestras and groups. This practice led to the canonization of artists like Fela Anikulapo Kuti, Mariam Makeba, Cesaria Evora, Hugh Masekela, Ladysmith Black Mambazo, Papa Wemba, Youssour N’dour, Habib Koite, Baba Maal, Asa, and a host of others, in Western musical circuits.

This necessarily inexhaustive list makes obvious an immediate limitation of the routes and roots approach: there is a focus on artists and musical forms that hark back to the idea of a “traditional Africa”. This presentation aims to overcome this problem by examining the modes of Black Atlantic transfers and collaborations in the age of the hip-hop/R&B musical video. What is Africa to Snoop Dog, Fifty Cent, and Kanye West? How do their imaginaries of Africa’s contemporaneity – as opposed to her ancestrality - inflect their modes of collaboration with African artists of their generation? What spaces of agency and forms of identity politics emerge from collaborations on musical videos between African American rap/R&B artists and their continental African spin-offs? As a twittertainment culture emerges between these artists, what is the role of social media in mediating these new modalities of the Black Atlantic? The presentation will propose answers to these interrogations using video clips and twitter logs.