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Bass 101: Miami, Rio, and the Global Music South[1]

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[By 1985], the idea of putting a heavy bass drum in the mix to intensify the beat was well established. From party DJs turning their bass knobs way up to rap producers laying down 808 kick drums, the boom had become ubiquitous. (Sarig 16)

[RICK] RUBIN: Like, fast hip-hop, 808.
DIPLO: 808, you know, the ghetto bass music . . . If you listen to Trick Daddy—that stuff was basically Miami bass broken down. His records were the ones that made me say, "I want to make music!" Because I loved the way they were broken and crazy. And I loved the energy of them.

RUBIN: Me too.
DIPLO: And that was Florida music and the Atlanta music, like Lil Jon's early stuff . . . It had so much energy and was so futuristic to me.

RUBIN: It was, like, scary!
DIPLO: It was super-scary. But I came from that era, and that was what got me into wanting to produce . . .

Bass is a pivotal marker in the popular music of the United States and Global South.[2] In this article, I consider Bass through processes of abstraction: *musical* abstraction by which genres can be defined by sounds, tonal forms, or rhythmic patterns; *rhetorical* abstraction by which words lose old meanings and acquire new ones, or new terms are coined; *historical* and *political* abstraction by which real people and places become myths and symbols; and *cultural* abstraction—now an active verb—by which cultural materials are removed or detached from people or places.

Designating Miami as the point of origin for Bass music, I begin by tracing a brief history of the musical genre as it developed during the 1980s and early 1990s, foregrounding local history and the music's association with black communities. From this admittedly and unapologetically Miami-centric point of departure, I explore a more recent process by which Bass has become a musical kaleidoscope whose complex, vague dimensions tend to obscure vital historical context. Notional versions of Bass have crossed

the Atlantic several times and moved back and forth between esoteric undergrounds and a ubiquitous mainstream. Here, I follow the migration of Miami Bass in two complementary directions: moving North, it blended into a generic black, Southern, and US musical lexicon which infused a legion of the last decade's most popular music; moving South, it was reconstituted in Rio as Funk Carioca and flowed back into the North by way of (vaguely) foreign, cosmopolitan Global Bass.

What does Bass mean? The word itself is an abstraction. As a proper name for genres and subgenres, Bass has acquired an exquisite ambiguity, referring to a variety of US-based rap and hip hop, as well as a myriad of music emanating from the UK.[3] Like Funk or Jazz, the taxonomy and discourse of Bass shapeshift constantly: it is characterized by paradox, ambiguity, and abstraction. But these musical and cultural phenomena seem to follow a distinct pattern: genres radiate outward from local communities; genres' musical features become more clearly defined while their roles as cultural emblems of identity become increasingly obscure; and genres' connections to their points of origin become increasingly obscure. Instead of codifying a linear, moralistic, or cut-and-dry mechanism for the phenomenon of Global Bass, abstraction suggests a layered and multifaceted view that accounts for both historical specifics and ambiguous symbolism. While other writers have approached various Bass genres from valuable critical perspectives, this article explicitly connects the genres to each other, thereby drawing connections between the genres' various—and generally implicit—racial, local, and cultural origins. In other words, I adopt abstraction as a tool to understand relationships between evident and opaque aspects of cultural phenomena.

My account extends a narrative arc drawn in Robert Farris Thompson's 1986 article "Hip Hop 101," which prophetically insisted that the new music was "likely to reverberate for years and years" (211).[4] During the 1980s, Miami Bass was intimately associated with the city's black inner city, and it became *the* sound of Miami. And while Rap and Hip Hop have indeed become an increasingly strong center of gravity for much of the world's popular music, Miami Bass has come and gone as a distinct genre, a fad whose rise and fall are now decades old. Beyond musical taxonomy, these dynamic curves—variations in the attack, decay, sustain, and attenuation of distinct sounds and genres—suggest a contrast between enduring and transient elements in popular music.

My initial intention is to register a foundational context that grounds Bass in Miami's history and politics, emphasizing the role of

race in the transformation of musical and cultural materials as they radiate outward from local points of origin. I begin this story of Bass in Miami's black neighborhoods, a cultural crossroads: geographically, politically, and culturally, it is music from the far end of the US South *and* the edge of the Global North and South. Processes of abstraction offer a valuable way to understand some of the larger forces at work. In this respect, two complementary types of abstraction are particularly useful: (i) *generalizations distinct from concrete realities*, and (ii) *withdrawal or separation*. Applying both senses of the word, the gradual abstraction of Bass represents a detachment of musical materials from their cultural, historical, and geographic sources, as well as a detachment of musical materials from explicit notions of blackness. In this respect, clichés and caricatures function as vital and meaningful forms of musical and cultural abstraction: paradoxical in nature, they help define musical genres and cultural identities and often reveal connections at the edge of consciousness, yet they also threaten the integrity of the very things they define.

In what follows, I explore Bass as a multifaceted paradox in which musical and cultural abstractions—formulae with an inherent tendency to become clichés or caricatures—play a crucial role in the definition, diffusion, and disintegration of genres. The paradox at the heart of the article is that processes of abstraction might encourage us to consider real sounds and people in a more intimate and thoughtful way. Let us consider that a prelude and begin properly, like so much mythology, with The Sound.

"... might as well be in a foreign country...": (Miami) Bass

The name of Miami Bass—also known more simply as Bass or Booty Bass—makes its focus on the low end of the sound spectrum explicit: the entire genre is arguably a frequency-based fetish. Since the 1980s, electronic percussion and synthesizers in the very low frequency spectrum have come to characterize a number of musical genres and subgenres. Amplified by large loudspeakers dedicated to relaying low frequencies (subwoofers), the physical qualities of these sounds—sine waves whose synthetic vibrations operate in a range at the edge or below hearing—map between 20 and 60 Hz. Although this spectrum of sound can contain fascinating melodic material, it is usually more tactile than auditory. It is felt more than heard, and it depends on amplification—a *lot* of amplification. These far-reaching, amplified, low-end frequencies have gradually become one of the defining features of

public spectacles, including music concerts, dance clubs, sporting events, and movie theaters. There is something intrinsically public about music that places low frequencies in the foreground: deeper sound waves travel further and more persistently, asserting themselves in the environment.[5]

The sounds of the Roland TR-808 Rhythm Composer electronic drum machine—better and more simply known as the 808—are the most iconic element of this low-end tradition. Heard and (more to the point) felt through subwoofers, the pure electronic sine waves of the 808's bass drum are synonymous with Miami Bass. More recently and much more generally, the sounds of the 808 have become a ubiquitous ingredient in the music of the so-called Dirty South and a motley, ever-growing assortment of other genres, subgenres, and subsubgenres.

While low-frequency sounds are the most iconic feature of Miami Bass, other 808 electronic drum sounds also contribute to the genre's unique sonic fingerprint: conspicuously synthetic cowbell, conga, and clave sounds work as stylistic analogs for Miami's image as artificial and generically Latin; tight snare drums and handclaps give a mechanized, futuristic accent to the backbeats prevalent in almost every genre of American popular music since the 1950s. Additionally, short loops of samples (often higher in pitch than the original versions), a hyper tempo (anywhere from 125–180 beats per minute), call-and-response vocals, and a slack rapping style all combine to make a genre that is easy to appreciate, mimic, and caricature. Like any other musical genre, Miami Bass can be distilled to the point of abstraction—in other words, it can be reduced to a formula and a set of (stereo)typical and essential elements.[6]

Based on its prevalence in mass media, it is easy and practical to situate Miami Bass in a relatively narrow historical frame—roughly speaking, between the mid-1980s and the mid-1990s. The musical DNA sequence of Miami Bass is clearly a composite of Disco and Funk, but it also descends more or less directly from two seminal tracks: Afrika Bambaataa's resounding, one-two knockout combination, "Planet Rock" and "Looking for the Perfect Beat." Bambaataa's sound continues to exert a discernible influence on Hip Hop and Rap, but it formed the cybernetic core of Electro and a constellation of other genres that continues to expand more than three decades later. Regardless of their points of origin, some elemental percussive patterns—music abstractions—offer connections. For Miami Bass and Electro, a simple sequence of bass and snare drum sounds conjures a dense musical network (Figure 1):

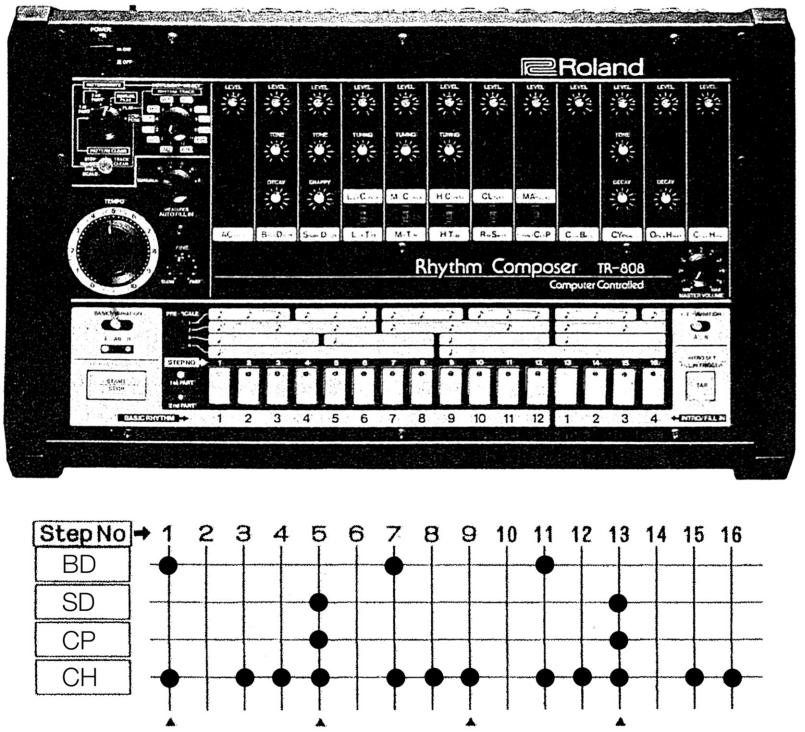

Figure 1: The Roland TR-808 Rhythm Composer and an elemental Miami Bass pattern visualized in its original manual's notation system: BD-Bass Drum, SD-Snare Drum, CL-Hand Clap, and CH-Closed Hi-Hat. Tempo: quarter note ≈ 110–180 bpm.

These musical circuits radiate outward from machines, people, and places in hypnotic fractal patterns, regardless of one's point of origin. Regarding Freestyle—a lighter, more Latin, and saccharine cousin of Miami Bass—Alexandra Vazquez writes, "Feel free to be at a complete analytical loss regarding those who have swum through the Kraftwerk-to-freestyle-to–Miami Bass continuum" ("Can You Feel the Beat?" 111). Vazquez's embrace of being "at a complete analytical loss" emphasizes the historical and cultural nuance at work here, flowing between high- and low-brow registers and diverse cultural and geographic backgrounds. Similarly, I would like to continue to "swim through" this continuum, following the historical and musical current after Bass made its way from Miami to acquire regional, national, and international prominence.

Roni Sarig's "map of the Crossroads" locates Miami Bass as "the South's original style . . . the convergence of old-school rap from the North and a Caribbean spirit from the South" (xix).[7] Notably, Sarig makes it clear

that the Caribbean influence on Miami Bass is primarily West Indian, not Latin—a point few writers have articulated. For the moment, it is important to recognize that Miami's socioeconomic and racial fault lines during the 1980s and 1990s divided the city into three demographic blocks—Black (including West Indian), White, and Hispanic, none of which accounted for more than 50% of the population. In the racial algebra of the US South, Hispanics might be either Black or White, but Black and White are mutually exclusive.

To both insiders and outsiders, Miami represents a particularly complex, layered cartography: the city is variously and simultaneously North and South. The city's superficial, glitzy, tourism-friendly image obscures more than it reveals. As Sam Beebe pointed out recently, Miami is "a paradox in motion" that lends itself to caricature. Indeed, scratching away at the surface layers of Miami's cultural history quickly reveals a city that is both profoundly connected to a global network *and* isolated into narrowly-bounded local sectors. Bass simultaneously expands and recedes as a cultural emblem of Miami at various scales—local, regional, national, international. But beyond Miami, permutations of Bass remain emblematic of more subtle, malleable symbolism identified with Miami—most prominently, hypersexual tropical exoticism. In this sense, Bass is a vivid example of a subtle, racially charged cultural flux that characterizes North-South dichotomies.

Miami has a well-deserved reputation as the northernmost Latin American city, a bright beacon beckoning both tourists and retirees from the North and immigrants from the South with force magnetic. It is a refuge from points further Up and Down on the world map and the social ladder. Miami is also the southern-most city of the US South, perpetually divided by insidious racial politics that characterize the region. From the earnest fantasy of Akon's "I'm So Paid" to the satire of Lonely Island's "I'm On a Boat," music videos often frame Miami's waterfront urban core as a symbol of transient, tropical luxury.[8] However, the city's contributions to popular music often remain obscure. What do we find behind backdrop of music videos, beyond the city's compact collection of shiny skyscrapers at the edge of Biscayne Bay's blue-green water?

Within the city, inside it since at least the time people started talking about an "inner" city, there is another, more isolated, much-less-global Miami. Maurice Young—much better known as Trick Daddy—describes it in his autobiography: "It's a stone's throw away from downtown Miami,

but [it] might as well be in a foreign country judging by the way cabbies warn visitors to stay away" (1–2). By setting the stage for the Dirty South, the sound and symbolism of Miami Bass made a lasting impact on popular music, the genre's essential features blending into popular music as a whole in a polished, commercial way. A basic understanding of the historical context which gave rise to Miami Bass is essential to understanding its formation and legacy. Even a very rough sketch of Miami's history makes it clear that the city's black community constituted a population whose subaltern status was typical of foreign immigrants: African-American residents of Miami lived within an internal Global South at the heart of the US South's southernmost city.

In the 1960s, the construction of the I-95 and I-395 highways divided African-American neighborhoods in the heart of Miami. The highways ran through Overtown, allowing traffic to pass over the once-thriving neighborhood without stopping, effectively strangling the neighborhood geographically and economically. Crime and poverty increased dramatically throughout the 1960s and 1970s as low-income African-American families moved en masse from Overtown to Liberty City (just north and adjacent to Overtown and Miami's oceanfront commercial center), thereby triggering an exodus of higher-income African-Americans to the suburbs.[9] Overtown and Liberty City declined and took shape as Miami's "inner city," and racial tensions in the city escalated as black communities became increasingly isolated and beleaguered.

In December of 1979, a black motorcyclist named Arthur McDuffie was beaten to death by police officers near the Overtown section of Miami. In May 1980, an all-white jury acquitted the four police officers involved of all wrongdoing in McDuffie's death, sparking a massive riot that consumed the city's center and left eighteen more people dead and more than $100 million in damage in their wake.[10] Throughout the rest of the decade, a staggering influx of capital flowed into Miami via the cocaine trade between Latin America and the United States. In fact, the city's cocaine-based economic boom was essential to its manic emergence as a world-class city. But in Miami's black communities, the cataclysmic 1980 riots were soon followed by the ravages of crack cocaine and the US government's War on Drugs. Taken as a whole, the early 1980s were a grim, apocalyptic time for Miami's black communities.

In this climate, it seems reasonable to expect the music of black Miami to reflect the city's pervasive uneasiness, directly mirroring the tenor

of current events—perhaps a Miami version of NWA or Public Enemy. Instead, Miami Bass emerged as the definitive musical emblem of 1980s and 1990s black Miami. The attitude, lyrics, and values of the music are lighthearted: it is essentially party music. In its early days booming over outdoor parties and roller skating rinks full of teenagers, the music was a continuation of the Roller Disco craze of the late 1970s. But as the genre became more distinct and gathered momentum during the 1980s, its lyrics became more explicit, playfully pushing raunchiness into the red, and black musical entrepreneurs from Miami found their way to the center of the US South's musical map.

In 1989, Luther Campbell and 2 Live Crew released *As Nasty As They Wanna Be*, setting a new standard in terms of popularity and raunchiness: the double platinum album—which included "Me So Horny," "Dick Almighty," and "The Fuck Shop"—became the subject of lengthy legal struggle, arguably the most recent and most prominent legal test of obscenity in the United States.[11] The trial included testimony from historian Henry Louis Gates, Jr., who argued 2 Live Crew should be understood within the context of African-American traditions of coding and parody. Quoted in a *New York Times* report, Campbell emphasized the distance between 2 Live Crew and the jury members who would help decide the group's fate: "It's like bringing people from Mars down to explain how we function here on Earth" (quoted in Rimer).[12]

Although other exponents of Miami Bass were not so fixated on sensational themes, the hypersexual aspect of much of the music became inseparable from the genre as a whole. Despite 2 Live Crew's light-hearted music and lyrics, the controversy surrounding them points to the group's symbolic position at the center of an antagonistic moment in US history. There is nothing "light" about casual misogyny in music, but it is fair to say that most Miami Bass lyrics are not intended to be taken very seriously. Nonetheless, the dissemination of Miami Bass had serious consequences: songs like "Pop That Pussy" (or its radio version, "Pop That Coochie") may be gimmicks propelled by teen libidos and short-lived dance moves, but they tapped into a serious and fiercely contested cultural current in which music, sexuality, and race converged. Aside from its role in mainstream popular music and culture, it is worth considering some of the less popular, insular aspects of Miami Bass, several of which continue to resonate in subtle ways more than two decades later.

Interlude: (Real-Time and Historical) Sounds of Ducking, Feedback, and Compression

Local histories tend to recede and fade surprisingly quickly from collective memory, but they offer listeners a capacity to fathom musical sounds—and their echoes—more deeply. Miami Bass was and (at least in some ways) remains both widely known and ultra-local: it enjoyed a brief period of regional and national prominence, but awareness of its cultural and historical role appears to be receding rapidly. There is no doubt that the decades immediately preceding the emergence of Miami Bass can be characterized by conspicuous racial conflicts. Establishing the historical origins of Bass in Miami, we can discern some of the symbolic patterns that persist in later iterations of Bass: tangible places and events become abstract afterimages of tropical urban landscapes, infused with sexuality and danger.

On the ground, the most vibrant "real-time" outlets for Miami Bass were live events and pirate radio.[13] While more powerful FM stations broadcast relatively polished, professional versions of Miami Bass music to wide audiences, pirate stations transmitted a lesser-known sound and sensibility that is more organic and spontaneous than their more legitimate counterparts. Limited in broadcast range (often only 1 or 2 miles from a transmitter) and largely undocumented, pirate radio broadcasts of Miami Bass are characterized by three conspicuous audio effects: ducking, compression, feedback.[14] Despite being routinely dismissed as little more than inconvenient or crude audio debris, these effects are intrinsically interesting. But these local sounds themselves also deserve to be understood as meaningful elements of the music and culture: strictly speaking, the sounds are more than incidental byproducts (effects); for local listeners, they are sonic features that define the musical culture, yet they are virtually unknown beyond local communities. These sounds are made even more noteworthy by virtue of being absent from commercial recordings: seldom recorded or archived, they are liable to be forgotten. Significantly, these audio effects are also compelling metaphors for historical and political abstractions, sonic cognates of local histories at the edge of living memory.

Ducking allows real-time talking, rapping, and chanting by DJs to automatically, drastically lower the volume of recorded music: whenever a DJ talks over music, the sound of their voice immediately causes a reduction (ducking) in the volume of the music. The coarseness with which DJs talk over music recordings suggests that "live" sounds take priority over recorded sounds: the intermittent, "real" and "real-time" voice of a DJ occupies the

sonic foreground. Listeners' calls to pirate radio stations almost inevitably create a piercing audio feedback known as the Larsen effect: because callers are listening to an amplified signal of the live radio broadcast when they call to talk with a DJ, the signals of the phone call and the radio transmission reinforce each other, thereby creating echoes and feedback tones that escalate quickly and are usually resolved by a DJ yelling at the caller to turn their radio down. There is a symbolic, process-based way to hear this howling anomaly as a technical flaw in the real-time communication between a transmitter and a receiver, a predictable glitch that amplifies resonances between DJs and their listeners.

Overall, the relatively faint and noisy signals of pirate radio stations are also characterized by compression (or, more specifically, "dynamic range compression"): quiet sounds are amplified, loud sounds are moderated, and emissions that exceed the equipment's threshold produce saturated, blown-out textures. Compression thereby results in an overdriven sound that makes a broadcast simultaneously "low" in volume and "loud" in texture. These dynamics suggest a profound irony: actual "bass"—the powerful, percussive, low-frequency content that defines Miami Bass—in pirate radio broadcasts is often obliterated by dissemination and amplification on the music's most populist, low-fidelity medium.[15] These broadcast signals were limited—by physics, laws, and aesthetics—to Miami's inner city. As its popularity and range increased, Miami Bass underwent a dual process of abstraction, gradually becoming detached from its exclusive association with black Miami and acquiring an increasingly generic, cartoon-like image.

Caricatures (and Histories): Dancing Bananas, *Jock Jams*, and "Your Mama's on Crack Rock"

Have you seen the dancing banana? *Which one*? Accompanied by the track "Peanut Butter Jelly Time," the dancing banana is now a classic, early example of an Internet meme.[16] The song—credited to the Miami-born Buckwheat Boyz (aka Marcus Bowens and Jermain Fuller)—is quintessential Miami Bass, and it provides an alchemically perfect soundtrack to an absurd moving image: first in a pixelated GIF animation on the Internet, then in a deeply embedded series of cultural references on the television series *Family Guy*. The lyrics of "Peanut Butter Jelly Time" are formulaic to the point of being blank and surreal. ("Where you at? There you go!")[17] An entirely euphemistic approach to the raunchiness typical of

Miami Bass allows the song to be heard in a plain, even wholesome way: it becomes easy to imagine a child dancing and shouting, "Mommy, they're singing about my sandwich!" Indeed, another Buckwheat Boyz track—"Ice Cream and Cake"—employed the same formula and accompanied a 2009 advertising campaign for Baskin-Robbins ice cream.

As a caricature, the transformation of "Peanut Butter Jelly Time" involved three steps: from (i) Miami Bass music to (ii) an Internet meme to (iii) an oblique reference on television. Each step involves a form of abstraction—the removal, transformation, or replacement of elements and context. In this instance, the animated dancing banana is a literal caricature.[18] But Miami Bass already lent itself to caricatures much earlier, and much more broadly. There is a conspicuous farcical dimension to a lot of Miami Bass music: its lyrics are not intended to be taken too seriously, and its sex-obsessed and juvenile aspects are often derided by critics and fans. Put another way, there seems to be very little room for critical comparison between the rhetoric of 2 Live Crew and Public Enemy or KRS-One, but a critical view of Miami Bass suggests that caricatures—for better and worse—played a defining role in its dissemination and repercussions.

Throughout the 1980s, the sound of Bass spread north, taking root in Orlando, Jacksonville, Atlanta, elsewhere in the US South, and beyond.[19] Sarig notes that Miami Bass was a historical avant garde for Southern Rap; it was the first instance of an influential surge that came to be known as the Dirty South. In the mid-1990s, a handful of novelty hit tracks became the general public's prototypes for Miami Bass: songs like Tag Team's "Whoomp! (There It Is)," 95 South's musical twin "Whoot, There It Is," or 69 Boyz's "Tootsee Roll" represented an explosion of the sound into mainstream national consciousness. This movement into a larger public arena was epitomized and propelled by the appearance of several tracks on several *Jock Jams* compilation albums, collections of music produced by the television sports network ESPN. Two decades later, the Miami Bass sounds in *Jock Jams* still provide a familiar soundtrack, an aural ABC's at massive athletic spectacles throughout the United States. I suspect that these tracks function—like much symbolism surrounding college and professional sports in the US—as paradoxical, generic musical expressions of both blackness and racially diverse sociability.[20]

Regardless, Miami Bass is perfectly suited to massive sporting events: its hyper, chant-driven, and viscerally low-end percussive sounds virtually insist on huge PA systems and spectacle. But despite numerous layers of removal (i.e., abstraction) from their local origins, the sounds

themselves seem to carry trace elements of their previous contexts. The massively popular *Jock Jams* tracks were definitely *not* the most extreme, raunchy iterations of Miami Bass. The symbolism in each of the ubiquitous tracks is obvious, but not explicitly or inescapably so: 69 Boyz's "Tootsee Roll" might be just a candy, at least as far as children and (perhaps more importantly) censors are concerned.

But the hypersexual element in Miami Bass never recedes very far into the background, and it certainly lends itself to caricature. How do we make sense of the music and context when both are so obviously, profoundly racialized *and* sexualized? When it is treated as a caricature, even affectionately, the music can become a strange type of minstrelsy, exemplified recently by Miley Cyrus's infamous "twerking" performance at the 2013 VMA awards: a brightly-lit, severely unflattering caricature of black music and bodies.[21] Admittedly, there is a danger in taking these things "too seriously": the loose, loud, and messy reality of music, dance, and history is liable to collapse under the weight of too much analysis, becoming even more obscure. But sometimes the technicolor saturation of caricatures illuminates scenes that are otherwise convoluted or ambiguous.

"Your Mama's on Crack Rock" by The Dogs was a pre-Internet, "viral" hit whose title is chanted as a chorus. Musically, the song adheres closely to the formula of Miami Bass, but its lyrics represent an unusual provocation aimed simultaneously at both cheap laughs and deep pathos. The video for the track dramatizes the song literally: a small girl is surrounded and taunted viciously by other kids; her addict mother prostitutes herself and is physically abused. It is a brazen and cruel sort of caricature, and unmistakably racial. A two-part comment on a YouTube version of the video epitomizes the absurd, culturally specific collision of nostalgia, humor, and tragedy.

> april montgomery: hahahaha! I remember this song from wayyyyy back in the days! they always used to play this on all the 'hip' stations. this is the 1st time I ever saw the video tho. Damn. I was so young when it came out, I really didnt trip off it but now tht Im older and can see/hear it for what it is & understand it z
>
> april montgomery: it is really a very sad song & sadder video. I actually felt teary eyed at the end. poor little kid :-([22]

How should we understand these lyrics when they are heard or chanted by adults? Or—even more problematically—by children? How is listening affected by a person's proximity to the scourge of a so-called War on Drugs? How should we hear this song when it is amplified *into* or *from* privileged locations *outside* an apocalyptic war zone? Several other YouTube viewers' comments make it clear that the song's poignance is not lost on them.

> Shonda Miller: There's nothing cute about this mess.
>
> LRO1986: This song is super fucked up. It's really not funny.
>
> Ms Iam Everythang: This song is deeper than many people realize.

The act of listening might simply draw our attention to some of the profoundly serious dimensions of caricatures—ostensibly playful cultural artifacts.[23] Musically formulaic and thematically extreme, "Your Mama's on Crack Rock" replaces sexuality with the ravages of the Drug War, thereby making the music's racial and gender elements—undertones, stereotypes, cruelty, and humor—unusually explicit, and unusually vexing, even *without* "explicit language." The song might represent the extreme logical and affective limits of Miami Bass.

By the mid-1990s, Miami Bass had evolved from local to regional and national prominence. As *Jock Jams*-style hits gave the genre an unprecedented level of exposure, its sounds and formulae were also woven into a host of other, local scenes throughout the US South. Matt Miller marks the mid-1990s as the definitive "decline of the Miami Bass style . . . which had saturated both the local and national markets" (599). Similarly, Sarig specifies the mid-1990s as "The Fall" of Miami Bass, but he offers an interesting coda: "And then, bass was pretty much over . . . Make no mistake, the style continues in some form—as dance-club nostalgia, in the cars of the still-thriving car audio genre . . . and in the unlikely appearance of a Brazilian music style" (34).

(Baile) Funk (Carioca) and (Global/Tropical/Ghetto) Bass

Aside from its pervasive, if sometimes latent influence on most Rap and Hip Hop since the mid-1980s, Miami Bass has also transmitted its sonic DNA to a variety of other genres. In particular, Brazilian Funk Carioca music—aka Funk or Baile Funk—derives a great deal of its sound from Miami Bass.[24] While the term "carioca" refers to Rio de Janeiro, the music

itself bears little resemblance to Funk *a la* James Brown or The Meters; rather, the name seems like an abstract linguistic nod to American-ness, like the autonym of one of its most famous and innovative exponents, DJ Marlboro. The sounds of Funk Carioca are unmistakably derivative of Miami Bass, an instance of two processes of abstraction: musical abstraction by which a new genre was created directly from a previous one, including lyrics in an entirely new language; and cultural abstraction by which a musical genre in decline was detached from one location (Miami) and transplanted in a new, more welcoming environment (Rio).

Rhythmically, Funk Carioca is much more "Latin" than "Funk," relying heavily on a musical figure known variously as 3-2 Son Clave or the "Bob Diddley beat," a segment of musical DNA found in a legion of musical genres on both sides of the Black Atlantic (Figure 2):

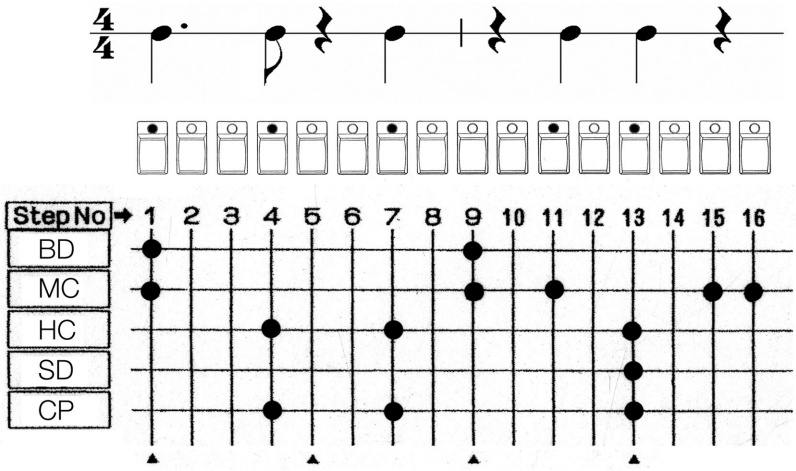

Figure 2: "3-2 Son Clave" visualized in Western notation and as a step sequence native to the TR-808, and an elemental Funk Carioca pattern visualized in the original TR-808 manual's notation system: BD-Bass Drum, MC-Mid Conga, HC-High Conga, SD-Snare Drum, and CL-Hand Clap. Tempo: quarter note ≈ 110–135 bpm.

Considering its provincial underground origins, Funk Carioca received a surprising amount of international attention from journalists and critics whose narratives are remarkably consistent: all of them mention Miami Bass as a musical precedent, and all of them emphasize associations between music, sex, poverty, violence, and blackness.[25] In "Ghetto Fabulous," Alex Bellos writes from the perspective of a daring explorer, venturing into the music's volatile natural habitat.

> Rio de Janeiro is the glamorous city of carnival, the statue of Christ the Redeemer and Copacabana beach. But the poorest (and blackest)

> fifth of its residents—about a million people—live in the favelas, the claustrophobic brick shanty towns that cover the hills and spread chaotically out for miles into its outskirts . . . The music of choice in the favelas is "Rio funk." A hard-edged dance style of screeching rap and booty-shaking beats, this is the bastard child of Miami bass, which arrived here in the mid-1980s and went native.

Bellos draws direct connections to Miami Bass ("the bastard child"), but he also contextualizes the music in ways that run directly parallel to the earlier, local context in which Miami Bass originated: blackness, poverty, crime, and "booty-shaking" (ibid). Meanwhile, the US-based Sublime Frequencies label contributed to the circulation of Funk Carioca in characteristically radical fashion: their compilation *Proididão C.V.: Forbidden Gang Funk from Rio de Janeiro* was named after one of Rio's most powerful drug cartels, and all its tracks were attributed to "Anonymous Artists."[26]

Circa 2004, Funk Carioca became closely associated with American DJ/producer Wesley Pentz, aka Diplo—that is, at least outside of Brazil. His *Favela on Blast* mixtape and Funk Carioca-inspired production for M.I.A. helped define him as a globe-trotting, genre-mixing musical "tastemaker."[27] The neocolonial aspect of blonde-haired Diplo's xenophilia became a focal point for concerns regarding musical appropriation from the Global South. In a very quick series of chain reactions, Diplo's success seemed to inaugurate Global Bass, a concept whose inherent, underlying tensions are conveyed succinctly by Marcus Boon:

> Global Bass (a.k.a transnational bass or sometimes tropical bass) is . . . a sonic collage of digital dancehall styles from around the world, topped off with an anti-globalization rhetoric that celebrated the dancehall pleasures of subaltern populations around the world.

Ironically, just as Diplo gained traction to join a global musical elite, he also became a symbol for What is Wrong with voracious (and/or promiscuous) appetites for "new" genres from the Global South.

In May 2013, the parody Web site *Rap Insider* claimed that Diplo had signed an "Entire South African Slum" to his label—the satirical crest of a wave of generic, moralistic criticism aimed at Diplo. By contrast, a cover feature on Jace Clayton—aka DJ /Rupture—in the British music magazine *The Wire* described him as "the conscience of the transglobal urban

music underground, or perhaps the government in exile waiting for Diplo's cult-of-personality reign to immolate itself in a rhinestone fire at a Moombahton party in Singapore" (Shapiro 50). /Rupture himself is quoted:

> With the global Bass blogs and stuff, people will just be obsessed with the end products of all these things happening everywhere: "OK, just download it, grab it, eat it really quickly, going from cumbia to Moombahton to whatever's next." Ultimately, it's boring, dreary, consumeristic and shallow. (53)

Earlier, well-rehearsed critiques of World Music were thus effectively transposed to the Internet age by a cohort of Global Bass cognoscenti, some of whom work as writers and scholars in addition to DJing, promoting, and producing music.[28] Unlike the timeless, rural, and acoustic tropes of World Music, the image of Global Bass is forthrightly fashionable, urban, and electronic. (The euphemistic association of "urban" and "black" in the popular music of the US is a distinct but closely-related matter.) The prevalence of the word "ghetto" descriptions of Global Bass styles, scenes, or genres is irrefutable evidence of these extra-musical associations. Along these lines, Angus Finlayson writes,

> There's a long history of affluent white Western audiences repackaging music to remove any traces of "blackness," "foreignness" or whatever else happens to make them uncomfortable. In the context of the "global ghetto," this practice takes on unpleasant connotations of neo-colonialism: successive scenes, generally in third world countries, former colonies or the poorer regions of the Western world, are plundered for inspiration, providing fuel for the kind of main room-friendly club sets that homogenise their diverse sources into a caricatured, trans-genre mulch. (2012)

Although I agree with Finlayson's sense of predatory, neocolonial elements at work in Global Bass, my own sense is that "traces of 'blackness,' 'foreignness,' or whatever else" are *not* removed. Rather, those traces and caricatures play a vital, albeit subtle role in the dissemination of all of these musical genres. Racial, local, and cultural origins are framed and transformed through various forms of abstraction. In this process, the mythical origins of some "traces" remain relatively conspicuous ("ghetto"), while others are more ambiguous ("global," "urban," "bass," etc.).[29] This

type of abstraction is recognizable, a familiar theme recurring throughout the history of African-American music: as genres like Blues, R&B, Jazz, Rock, and Funk become more rigidly codified, they become less rigidly associated with black identity, eventually becoming detached from US national identity.

The entire notion of Global Bass depends on an open-ended, fractal-like approach to genres emanating from locally-, ethnically-, and/or racially specific scenes. In this framework, genres from black communities inside the United States occupy roughly the same types of discursive fields as genres from the Global South. African-American music has been an international lingua franca since the early 20th century, and Rap is arguably the world's most widely-disseminated genre at the beginning of the 21st century. Yet black music retains a persistent exotic allure both *within* and *beyond* the national borders of the US. As Trick Daddy says, black neighborhoods in Miami and elsewhere in the United States "might as well be a foreign country" (Young 2). It follows that music from those neighborhoods is treated in much the same way as other music from foreign countries.

The "About" page of the the blog Tropical Bass exemplifies this enthusiastic embrace of a diversified world of digital music:

> We are living in a new musical and cultural age, a constant mashup of the western and tropical world. No folklore kitsch, no fake-authentic traditional music with funny hats on. Global Bass with influences crossing continents on a daily basis. Contemporary and real-time.[30]

In a striking example, Marlon Bishop's recent article on Global Bass describes DJ Zhao: "a Chinese-born DJ who lives in Berlin focuses on playing African electronic music. (Think about that last sentence for a moment: it pretty much describes a lot of what the scene is about)." I find it especially telling that Zhao takes a zealously Afro-centric approach to dance music:

> To me, it's a reawakening from this Eurocentric view of the world that we've inherited from not only "world music 1.0" but from the entire history of colonialism and the worldview it has implemented [. . .] In reality, Western dance music is just the small tiny branches of the huge, 100,000 year-old oak that is African music traditions.

How do we make sense of the ambiguity and complexity embedded in these thorny, tangled paradigms of Bass?

"Real": Place/Race/Bass/Space

In 2012, a panel discussion among cognoscenti pivoted between two themes: discussions of the myriad genres crowded under the umbrella of Tropical Bass, and ethically charged appeals to "best practices" among DJs and promoters.[31] Larissa Mann (aka DJ Ripley) cut through the noise:

> All of the geographical metaphors in this issue—distance and closeness—are interesting ways to talk about music when you're telling a story . . . a narrative, to get a picture in your head. But in terms of thinking about what should or shouldn't be done, or in terms of what we think of as good practices, it's really about race and power . . . It's not about geography.

Mann draws a sharp, crucial distinction between *metaphors* of space and *actual* space. By extension, she insists on focusing on real people rather than generalizations or abstractions; this amounts to a devastatingly direct attack on "cultural production that is afraid of the culture it's borrowing from . . . like when homeless people start camping out at Occupy." Later in the conversation, Boima Tucker (aka Chief Boima) offers an insightful twist by suggesting that Tropical Bass can be understood as a sort of gentrification in which existing communities are made invisible and inaudible—a process by which privileged elites *consume then replicate* music emerging from less-privileged communities, thereby effectively displacing originators of musical culture.[32]

I cannot presume to synthesize these issues, much less resolve them: cultural phenomena like Bass require us to recognize paradox, nuance, and abstraction inherent in culture; likewise, they make it clear that simplistic evaluations of authenticity or moral superiority are usually short-sighted. There is no singular definition of Bass: for more than 20 years, it has been a mutating constellation of musical sounds, histories, and symbols; like a pattern of stars in the sky, it can be given form by drawing a near-infinite variety of connections and shapes. This abstract pluralism appeals to me, and I think it offers a valuable counterweight to monolithic, authoritative canons or "secret" histories.

But I find it troubling that Miami is increasingly, conspicuously absent from recent discussions of Global Bass. Through a process of rhetorical abstraction, Bass appears to have been transformed from a musical emblem of black Miami to a vacuous "global" designation. In turn, this leads to a process of historical abstraction by which collective

memory is quickly washed away: an erudite, hour-long discussion of Tropical Bass by Marshall, Mann, Tucker, et al. did not mention Miami once; Brandon LaBelle's theory-driven discourse on bass, subbass, and acoustic environments quotes Public Enemy lyrics at length and lists the track titles of a Bassman album, but it makes no reference to Miami Bass; and *Sonic Warfare*—an expansive meditation by Sam Goodman (aka kode9)—only mentions Miami Bass once, and only in passing as raw musical materials for Brazilian Funk, in his discussion of "global ghettotech" (174).[33] Hopefully, this article imprints another few unambiguous lines in the historical record to assert the lasting significance of Black Miami on the popular music of the early 21st century. Ideally, it is also consonant with the broader aims articulated by Thomas and Clarke:

> Our goal is to build upon recent historical and ethnographic theorizations of transnationalism, diaspora, and globalization that chart contemporary processes not merely from the top down but also from the inside out in relation to historically complex and uneven regional formations ... In doing so, we hope to demonstrate the ongoing power of blackness while still debunking racial essentialisms. (3-5)

The relentless and bewildering abstraction of Bass epitomizes this type of historical process: its terminology and sounds retain traces of its origins in black Miami despite being detached from explicit local contexts and histories; in the process, it is also saturated by vague, technologically mediated notions of exoticism, authenticity, tradition, and novelty.[34]

From my vantage point, Bass represents an instructive break in what Paul Gilroy describes as the relational network of the Black Atlantic, a web in which culture materials seem especially susceptible to radical reductions. Aesthetic abstractions and neologisms seem capable of displacing and detaching cultural materials, reducing them to "timeless" cultural data that can be exchanged without the direct human relationships or embodied senses of history. Bass also represents an intersection of two closely-related discourses regarding authenticity in music (and, by extension, culture): one grounded in Hip Hop, the other grounded in World Music. And while questions about authenticity in either vein may indeed "seem quaint" (Neal 69), they also seem persistent. Bass exemplifies the difficulty in providing a single answer to Gilroy's challenge: "Can there be a blackness

that connects, articulates, synchronizes experiences and histories across the diaspora space?" ("It's a Family Affair" 308). Through the prism of Bass, answers to this question—plural, layered, and varied—insist that we recognize complex, intimate relationships between blackness, the US South, and the Global South.

Within a cartography defined by socioeconomic, political, and cultural divides between North and South, Bass offers an oblique but compelling reminder that Miami's black community—the city's most "Southern" demographic—has made a deep, enduring impact on the popular music of the late-20th and early-21st century. Perhaps more importantly, Bass also outlines processes by which musical sounds, genres, and terminology become increasingly obscure.[35] If we map musical genres as bounded and modular cultural artifacts, their history can be perceived as a linear motion—from past to present to future—based on continuity and innovation: from Funk and Disco to Miami Bass to Dirty South and Funk Carioca to Tropical Bass, and so on. By contrast, the constellation of musical genres that proliferate as Bass suggests a fractal pattern whose overwhelming complexity and various scales tend to obscure a fundamental, defining form.

In the absence of a clear center or definitive origin, we might be left with nothing more than a flood of trivial, short-lived musical fads and overblown theorization: overwhelmed by complexity and ambiguity, even specialists become unmoored in their attempts to map the flow of musical microcultures. With enough detachment, we become susceptible to cultural amnesia: reduced to listening to "just music" without a sense of history made by real people in real places; reducing cultural emblems to stereotypes while dismissing musical sounds (and the people who make them) as laughable caricatures; and oversimplifying intricate questions of cultural transmission and identity to moralistic formulas. Alternatively, Bass also suggests that historical grounding is able to enrich and clarify various scales and types of cultural continuity and fragmentation, revealing patterns that might otherwise remain latent, invisible, or silent.

Notes

1. An online version of this article is enhanced by multimedia and links. Please see http:// popmusicstudies.org/?p=217. For their generous contributions to the research and development of this essay, I would like to thank Jessica Gentile (aka DJ Jubilee), Joshua Clark Davis, Omar Angulo, Eric Lyle, Dave Tompkins,

Wayne Marshall, Luis Othoniel Rosa, Meghan Drury, and—most notably—issue editors Ali Colleen Neff and Justin Burton. The essay's anonymous peer reviewers also earned my sincere gratitude through their diligent and insightful feedback on earlier drafts.

2. While the US South refers to portions of the nation below the Civil War-era Mason-Dixon line, the term Global South should be understood as a euphemism for the underprivileged majority of the world's population outside of North America and Western Europe. Global South is often synonymous with Third World, if only semantically. In the absence of the Eastern Bloc (i.e., Second World), the notion of a Global South becomes an even more coarse distinction as a worldwide North-South divide that figures prominently in theories of globalization (cf. Steger and Thompson). More subtly, it is also important to discern an "internal South" among socioeconomically disadvantaged areas and groups *within* the borders of the industrialized Global North; likewise, cities in the Global South contain elites whose wealth and lifestyles typify the Global North.

3. Bass music in 1980s Miami is analogous to Dub music in 1970s Jamaica. Like Bass Dub, became a type of musical *lingua franca* whose defining features and terminology radiated outward from Jamaica, becoming an essential—and extremely tangled—thread in the aesthetics of popular music in the late 20th century. And like Bass, Dub became gradually dissociated from Jamaica: its linguistic, sonic, and cultural DNA has been subjected to increasingly distant and abstract mutations (e.g., Dubstep), cultural echo chambers that somehow connect Lee "Scratch" Perry to Pole and Skrillex along a musical and cultural continuum, even if the connections are crude and superficial. The history and influence of Dub have been documented in depth and detail by Veal, Partridge, and others. Dub also had a lesser known, direct influence on Miami Bass which I mention briefly but remains outside the scope of this article.

4. Notably, Thompson was also the first scholar to coin the term "black Atlantic," later developed and popularized by Gilroy.

5. Although it remains outside the scope of this essay, it is worth considering that bass produced by subwoofers in "home theater" audio and video systems evokes a latent public quality associated with public address (PA) systems. Although most of us take it for granted, this "sub-bass" spectrum of sound was presumably an exceedingly rare experience for humans before the industrial revolution, especially in expressive or musical contexts. cf. LaBelle, Goodman, and Henriques.

6. Distilling genres through this sort of reductive process is deeply problematic, but there can be little doubt that it is a significant and very popular method. Certainly, the distinctive features of musical genres can be caricatured.

For a more refined consideration of musical genres from an ethnomusicological perspective, see Blum. Also note Nettl's entry-level observations on the matter:

> Through most of the history of ethnomusicology, the most important factor in providing information has been "location, location, location." Just as in real estate. The first thing one has been told about an instrument, a musical style, or a genre has been "where" it is found on a map ... [Now] communication is instantaneous and the location of communicators or recipients of information may be known to neither, talking about an abstract and ephemeral phenomenon such as music in geographic terms loses much of its significance. (320)

7. Thankfully, a handful of authors have already produced a body of excellent writing about Miami Bass. Sarig's (2007) account of Southern Rap contains the most germane historical context. Joe Gonzalez—better known as Pappa Wheelie—has collected a massive amount of material on the his Miami Bass History website (n.d., 2005), and he is reportedly developing a book project. He also claims to be the cocreator of the first version of the megahit "Who Let the Dogs Out?" (See http://www.miamibasshistory.com/author/admin/.) See also Grem, Miller, Neff, *The Source*, Toop, Sokol, and Tompkins. Tompkins' recent articles and lectures consist of surreal, research-intensive prose poems that previews to that preview a forthcoming book he describes as "a natural history of Miami Bass."

8. The 1980s television show *Miami Vice* left an indelible impression on the city's image, but Will Smith's "Miami" remains the most egregious caricature of the Miami-as-Luxury musical trope. Neff argues convincingly that Akon's "I'm So Paid" should be understood in terms of more subtle, broader of notions of mobility.

9. This is concurrent with the construction of the Cross Bronx Expressway (CBE) in New York, which had similarly devastating consequences on the city's African-American communities and preceded the emergence of Hip Hop (cf. Rose).

10. This pivotal episode in Miami's history is described in "Back to the Movement (1979 to mid 1980s)," the last episode of a 14-part documentary series "Eyes on the Prize." Billy Corben's films *The U* and *Cocaine Cowboys* offer germane and vivid portraits of Miami.

11. See Campbell's recent biography and interviews. See Miller for a detailed, insightful account of this episode.

12. This was foreshadowed by Miami-based artist Clarence Reid (aka Blowfly), whose outlandish, explicit recordings and performances have stretched and broken boundaries since the 1950s. Blowfly established a local precedent for 2 Live Crew, including sex-based parodies of popular songs. See the recent documentary on Reid, *The Weird World of Blowfly*. In a daydream, I imagine

Blowfly wearing a Darth Vader-themed version of his customary mask and cape paraphernalia, standing over Campbell and intoning, "Luke, I am Your Father."

13. cf. Marshall's "Love That Muddy Ether."

14. One exception is a cassette tape recording of pirate radio broadcast made by Eric Lyle (aka Iggy Scam) and archived in the University of Miami Libraries Special Collections. ("Item 13—Audio Tape —Miami Bass Pirate Radio, 1997" in "Box 15—Audio-Visual materials" of the "Eric Lyle papers, 1991–2010.")

15. See Marshall's recent work on "Treble Culture," which observes that inaudible bass content can be implied and/or imagined by listeners to compensate for the limitations of small transducers in mobile phones, earbud-style headphones, and laptop computers. See also Sokol's poignant account of DJ Uncle Al (aka Albert Moss), a luminary of Miami Bass and pirate radio whose murder on 10 September 2001 represents the symbolic death of Miami Bass.

16. For more on Internet memes, see *Spreadable Media* (Jenkins, Ford, and Green), which introduces the concept with an especially apt metaphor: "Perhaps peanut butter isn't such a bad way to represent spreadable media after all: content remains sticky even as it is spread" (9). NB, there is a Web site dedicated exclusively to "Peanut Butter Jelly Time": http://peanutbutterjellytime.net/

17. Many listeners will recognize a repertoire of formulaic chants used by Miami Bass DJs, especially on pirate radio broadcasts. My personal favorite is "ride," which could be understood—literally and/or symbolically—in terms of music, dancing, sex, and/or mobility. Again, cf. Neff.

18. The maraca-playing banana also looks—unmistakably—like a caricature of "tropical Latin" imagery, evoking the sounds and images of Carmen Miranda, Harry Belafonte, et al. A critically acclaimed documentary on Miranda—who is permanently associated with her "fruit hat"—is titled *Carmen Miranda: Bananas is My Business*. Belafonte's iconic "Day-O (The Banana Boat Song)" was first performed for American television audience on *The Muppet Show*.

19. These regional movements also lead inevitably to an "analytical loss" (Vazquez 111). A musical taxonomy of Miami Bass *(c/w/sh)ould* consider the complex affinities and connections between Miami Bass and artists in other regions, such as Los Angeles-based Tone Loc and Philadelphia-based Schoolly D.

20. The video for Trick Daddy's "Take It To Da House (featuring Trina)" illustrates some of these connections between music and sports through a very Miami-centric lens. Generally speaking, sports offer valuable insights into the US's perpetually nascent "postracial" ideal. cf. Starn's analysis of sports and mass media ("postracial fantasies, racial realpolitik") (67).

21. The first recorded use of the word "twerk" appears on the 1993 track "Do the Jubilee All" by New Orleans' Bounce icon DJ Jubilee (aka Jerome Temple). New Orleans' DJ Jubilee should not be confused with Jessica Gentile (aka DJ Jubilee, "Miami's Bass Sweetheart"). The word "twerk" was also popularized (briefly) by the Atlanta-based Ying Yang Twins' 2001 track "Whistle While You Twurk." cf. Kyra Gaunt's "Black Girls Twerking YouTube Project" and Sarig (257). On minstrelsy, see Lott.

22. http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=38_MwcGDNhQ

23. In his testimony during the 2 Live Crew trials and a *New York Times* op-ed piece ("2 Live Crew Decoded"), Henry Louis Gates, Jr. makes an explicit connection between Miami Bass and "signifying" and "playing the dozens."

24. See Palombini and Cruz-Uribe.

25. See Strauss and Frere-Jones.

26. See Cruz-Uribe, Bishop, and Scruggs.

27. cf. Rubin and Gentile and DJ Ayres.

28. See Feld, Guilbault, Meintjes, Stokes, Théberge, and Zemp.

29. Wayne Marshall describes this as "World Music v2.0" and—with an irony that was lost on many—"Global Ghettotech." See his "Nu Planetary Wot-U-Call-It 2.5.5," a multimedia essay whose convoluted title and virtuosic, hyperlinked format epitomize its subject. Also, see Mueller for two excellent essays in a similar vein.

30. http://www.tropicalbass.com/

31. See http://wayneandwax.com/?p=6595

32. See Tucker.

33. According to Goodman, "From Brazil, the strain of these mutant musics that has attracted most attention overseas is known as baile funk or favela funk ... splicing Miami Bass with any music whatsoever pillaged from film soundtracks and American pop" (174). In another particularly ambitious and relevant passage, he writes:

> What makes these Afro-diasporic music cultures key here, aside from their content as music, is that they generate bass ecologies within underdeveloped zones of megapolpian systems. As such, they have cultivated, with Jamaican sounds system culture as the prototype or abstract machine, a diagram of affective mobilization with bass materialist foundation. (175)

Again, the near-total absence of Miami Bass in Goodman's narrative is conspicuous.

34. See also Brown, Burton, Font-Navarrete, Neal, and Novak.

35. Recently, Luis Manuel García's "Alternate History of Sexuality in Club Culture" addressed the historical origins of (electronic) Dance music in similar terms.

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