

UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA SAN DIEGO  
UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA IRVINE

Singing About the Dark Times: Alienation and Countercultural Performance in the Long Sixties

A Dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction of the requirements  
for the degree Doctor of Philosophy

in

Drama and Theatre

by

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2024

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University of California San Diego

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2024

## DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to H Nicholas and Cynthia Hyora, my grandparents.

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## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

While I have a bit of a reputation for being succinct in my writing, if there was ever a moment to be effusive, it would be in my acknowledgements. Though these thanks will be far from comprehensive, I would like to speak to the immense amount of support and love I have received throughout the dissertation and graduate school process, and to express my gratitude. To Anthony Kubiak, my chair—I am so grateful for the ways in which you found resonance and excitement in my work, and pushed me to continue growing personally and academically throughout my time in graduate school. To my entire committee—Steven Adler, Julie Burelle, Grant Kester, M. Myrta Leslie Santana, and Lamar Perry—you are all my academic role models. The generosity of your feedback and comments, your willingness to lend an ear (and an eye on the work), and the ways in which you all urge me to become better versions of myself are what I aspire to as I walk my own academic path. I could not have picked a better, more supportive group, and I am honored that you all said yes to joining my committee. To Mysia Anderson, Rishika Mehrishi, and Jade Power-Sotomayor—you are all inspirations. I am so amazed by your scholarship and pedagogies, and I look forward to continuing to learn from, with, and alongside you all. A special thanks goes out to Janet Smarr, who rescued my application to UC San Diego from the incomplete folder—without you seeing my potential and advocating for me, my time at UCSD would never have been possible. I am forever grateful.

This dissertation project was made possible in no small part through the support I received as a recipient of the Phil Ochs Fellowship, a partnership between the Woody Guthrie Center Archives and A Still Small Voice, Inc. The time I got to spend in Tulsa, poring through the archives of an artist whose work has been so impactful on my artistic, academic, and musical knowledge, was one of the highlights of my graduate student experience. To Frank Gototweski

IV—thank you for introducing me to the music of Phil Ochs all those years ago. We didn't know then how life-changing your recommendations would be, but I am so grateful for their impact, and for your friendship.

To the friends who have read chapter drafts in the late hours of the night, to those with whom I have worked on countless productions, to my UAW 2865 bargaining team comrades with whom I shared deep stress, laughter, and tears, to all who have offered kindness within and beyond the walls of Galbraith Hall—thank you for your good humor, support, and love. An incomplete list of these dear friends includes Agyeiwaa Asante, Nick Bradbury, H.B. Bergeson, Joey Bordeau, Emma Clarke, Caleb Cook, Nick Cruz, Jeremy Doroski, Pablo Doder, Rachel Forgash, Rosie Glen-Lambert, Amara Granderson, Janna E. Haider, Dave Harris, Harper Justus, Jazmine Logan, Raphael Mishler, Max Schaffer, Mia Van Deloo, Eleanor Williams, and Mark Woodall. To Alison Urban, Jon Reimer, and Kristen Tregar, fantastic PhDs who graduated ahead of me—thank you for being great role models, and for the advice, support, and generous offerings throughout my time navigating the program.

To Rabbi Cantor Arlene Bernstein and the Congregation Beth Israel community—thank you for welcoming me in with such generosity and kindness. Thank you for seeing me, for encouraging me to learn, reflect, and ask questions, and allowing me to grow as I continue to navigate my path. Every time I think of CBI, I am reminded of the words that Rabbi Bernstein said to me the first time I entered the sanctuary—“welcome home.” To the entire Folk Arts Rare Records fam (Brendan Boyle, Dylan Brown, Allyson Gonzalez, Jason Guilliani, Harrison Miller, Stef Perricone, and Sergio Valdes), and the amazing crew at Part Time Lover (especially Bianca Torres and Tony Bautista), thank you for immediately inviting me into these spaces with warmth



and kindness, for exchanging musical knowledge with enthusiasm, and creating a space where I have made friends for life.

To Anne Healy, my best friend—thank you for your unwavering support and love. I am so glad you are in my life. Being separated by oceans for almost a decade straight is no small challenge; the fact that we continue to face it head on and stay as connected as we have been makes it all worth it. My day one friend, forever and always. To Desmond Hassing, my cohort mate—thank you for the commiseration across six long years, for your breadth and depth of knowledge that you so willingly share, and for the insightful ways you show your support to others. To Jesse Marchese—ultimate concert buddy, fellow folkie, and brilliant artist-scholar—I am amazed by the ways in which you push me to think more deeply about the art and artists I love. Getting to spend time with you is an immense privilege, and I am so grateful to have you and Jeremy in my life. To Michelle Huynh, who has been with me throughout all the extreme peaks and valleys of the intensity of the dissertation process—the list of all the things you deserve thanks for is too numerous to include here. You are the best office mate, writing partner, and friend I could have had by my side during this process. I am incredibly proud of you for your own work, and am so in awe of you, your academics, your artistry, and your generosity. To my roommate Ilana Waniuk—through a pandemic, an apartment move, and countless obstacles we both have navigated throughout our time at UC San Diego, you have been a rock. I am so lucky that we were assigned to the same apartment back in 2018; I am honored to know you and be your friend, and I am so proud and excited to see what you do next as we both begin the next stage of our lives outside the walls of graduate housing.

Finally, to my family, who have been the driving force behind so much of my work—thank you for the unending love and encouragement. Without your unconditional support,

cheering me on from the other side of the country, I would have been so adrift three thousand miles away from home. You all are what have made my work meaningful, and I am so grateful to be able to celebrate with you. I love you all so much. Thank you, thank you, thank you.

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## FIELD OF STUDY

American musical theatre, the Black Power/Arts movements, endurance art, horror and the uncanny, performance for children, the films of Stanley Kubrick and John Cassavetes

ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

Singing About the Dark Times: Alienation and Countercultural Performance in the Long Sixties

by

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Doctor of Philosophy in Drama and Theatre

University of California San Diego, 2024

University of California Irvine, 2024

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“Singing About the Dark Times: Alienation and Countercultural Performance in the Long Sixties” examines performances enacted and created during the Long Sixties using the concept of alienation as a tool of theoretical and creative insight. The approach to alienation resonant in counterculture(s) of the Long Sixties—a term used to describe the era of sociocultural

transformation spanning from the late 1950s to the early 1970s—was not only interested in the act of “making strange,” but also in the act of making the strangeness of the state and affect of alienation visible within itself. Pulling from theorization foregrounded by Bertolt Brecht, Karl Marx, and Antonin Artaud, among others, the use of the term “alienation” throughout this project integrates its sociopolitical, creative, and affective meanings. Drawing from performance studies, musicology, and Marxist theory, this dissertation considers why artists of the counterculture were drawn toward alienation in their performance practices and tactics, and offers a rereading/relistening of subjects underexamined in current scholarship. Through historical materialist-based close readings of case studies, this dissertation demonstrates how using alienation as a lens increases our understanding of both the immediate and long-term impacts and consequences of this era, as well as foregrounds theoretical terminology that can be used in broader countercultural studies.

## INTRODUCTION

“There’s something happening here,” Stephen Stills sings on the 1966 Buffalo Springfield track “For What It’s Worth,” opening one of the most famous protest songs of all time with a call for the listener to pay attention to “what’s going down.” Written after the Sunset Strip curfew riots of November 1966, the song quickly became an anti-war anthem, often cited as the most influential tracks of the counterculture. However, Stills and the band never intended for the song to take on the life that it did, leading him to later reflect, “We didn't want to do another song like ‘For What It's Worth.’ We didn’t want to be a protest group. That’s really a cop-out, and I hate that. To sit there and say, ‘I don’t like this, and I don’t like that’ is just stupid.”<sup>1</sup> Even if Stills didn’t expect or want his track to be treated as the protest song of all time, I am interested in theorizing what it was that was “happening here” in the Long Sixties, even if “what it is ain’t exactly clear.” What was the sentiment of the young people protesting that is captured in a few simple lines by Stills, and how can it be thought through in terms of performance of counterculture? I suggest that the “what it is” is a new engagement with alienation as aesthetic, sentiment, and strategy that opened a new world of performance and worldmaking from a tactical and generic standpoint.

This introduction explores intersecting theoretical aspects of alienation as foregrounded by Karl Marx and Bertolt Brecht that I argue are most relevant when examining countercultural performance. I am less interested in a strict Marxist or Brechtian reading of countercultural performances and art objects of the Long Sixties; instead, I am interested in a material analysis that utilizes alienation as a lens of intersecting theories that allow for new insight into the rise of

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<sup>1</sup> John Einarson and Richie Furay, *For What It's Worth: the Story of Buffalo Springfield* (New York: Cooper Square Press, 2004), 168.

countercultural performance in the sixties. The second section of this introduction surveys key cultural objects and performances of pre-sixties counterculture that I examine through a material analysis-based approach.

## Marx

Marx spends a significant portion of his *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844* defining alienation. Building on the work of Hegel, he uses the term *entfremdung* to examine social and economic relations under the structure of capitalist society, naming four key aspects that lead to alienation of the worker. Marx begins with a discussion of the worker's alienation from the products of their labor. The products that workers produce are not their own; they are made for, distributed by, and consumed by others, capitalists who underpay workers in order to make a profit. This exploitative relationship between owners and workers leads to a type of labor that “produces itself and the worker as a commodity”<sup>2</sup>—these commodities are cheaper than the products the workers produce but never have control or ownership over. Marx states that “it is clear that the more the worker spends himself, the more powerful becomes the alien world of objects which he creates over and against himself, the poorer he himself—his inner world—becomes, the less belongs to him as his own.”<sup>3</sup>

Marx then discusses alienation of the worker from the act of production itself. He posits that if “the product of labour is alienation, production itself must be active alienation, the alienation of activity, the activity of alienation. In the estrangement of the object of labour is

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<sup>2</sup> Karl Marx, *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844* (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1977), 68.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

merely summarised the estrangement, the alienation, in the activity of labour itself.”<sup>4</sup> The workers do not have control of either their products or the means of their production, and thus their labor is both coerced and unfulfilling. The denial of the self in this type of work means that the labor is external to the worker’s nature; in other words:

the worker therefore only feels himself outside his work, and in his work feels outside himself. He feels at home when he is not working, and when he is working he does not feel at home. His labour is therefore not voluntary, but coerced; it is forced labour. It is therefore not the satisfaction of a need; it is merely a means to satisfy needs external to it.<sup>5</sup>

Alienation from both the products of labor and the act of production itself causes the worker to relate “to his own activity as an alien activity not belonging to him”<sup>6</sup>; this loss of a sense of connection to labor leads to the third type of alienation Marx names, alienation from “species-essence” or human nature.

Marx names “conscious life activity” as the key behavior that separates the human race from animals. Humans are complex beings with passions, desires, and creative endeavors; one of the ways these are expressed is through the act of producing and forming objects that form our reality. The purpose of this labor is “the objectification of Man’s species-life: for he duplicates himself not only, as in consciousness, intellectu-ally, but also actively, in reality, and therefore he sees himself in a world that he has created.”<sup>7</sup> However, under a capitalist system in which workers gain no real sense of purpose or joy from their labor, they are estranged from their “species-life,” or meaningful existence. As I will expand upon in chapter two, I am frustrated

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<sup>4</sup> Ibid, 70.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid, 71.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid, 72.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid, 74.



with readings of Marx that end their analyses with the labor aspects of species-essence. As Paul Santilli points out in the essay “Marx on Species-Being and Social Essence,”

talking about alienation in terms of process, product, species, and sociality is not dealing with four different facts, which can be designated as 'primary' or 'derivative', but rather with four aspects of the same human essence. Thus he says, to repeat a text already cited, “that man is alienated from his species existence *means* that one man is alienated from another...” (italics [Santilli]), not that one leads to or is the result of the other.”<sup>8</sup>

This ties directly into Marx’s fourth aspect of alienation; alienation from other people. He suggests that

what applies to a man’s relation to his work, to the product of his labour and to himself, also holds of a man’s relation to the other man, and to the other man’s labour and object of labour. In fact, the proposition that man’s species-nature is es-tranged from him means that one man is estranged from the other, as each of them is from man’s essential nature.<sup>9</sup>

When workers competing to sell their labor to owners are treated as cogs in a machine of production with no fulfillment in their work, it forms a systemic, practical state of alienation that prevents collectivization and class consciousness to form. It is important to note that these four aspects of alienation are inherently tied to one another. It is of additional interest that Marx notes that “everything which appears in the worker as an activity of alienation, of estrangement, ap-pears in the non-worker as a state of alienation, of estrangement.”<sup>10</sup> While he does not expand on this idea in this first manuscript, I am obviously interested in exploring what this state of alienation marks beyond the context of mid-nineteenth century relationships between workers and non-workers. In what forms can this state of alienation be traced as capitalism and labor evolves and shifts? How can this concept be read in cultural and artistic objects? These questions

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<sup>8</sup> Paul Santilli, “Marx on Species-Being and Social Essence,” *Studies in Soviet Thought* 13, no. 1/2 (June 1973), <https://doi.org/10.1007/bf01044329>, 78.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid, 75.

<sup>10</sup> Marx, 80.

are ones that prompted later generations of Marxists and other theorists to explore alienation beyond Marx's specific lens—one notable figure being Bertolt Brecht. However, before discussing Brecht's take on alienation, it is necessary to unpack the development of his dramaturgical approach that led to his use of the term.

## Brecht

Marx's influence on Brecht can be traced throughout both his plays and his theoretical writings. Brecht first started engaging with Marx in the mid-1920s as a young artist and found a deep connection between his creative work and Marx's theory, stating in a 1926 note that "When I read Marx's *Capital*, I understood my plays [...] this man Marx was the only spectator for my plays I'd ever come across."<sup>11</sup> Brecht would soon after find meaningful friendship and professional collaboration with Erwin Piscator and Kurt Weill, two similarly politically-minded creative forces of the burgeoning epic theatre. Through his work with Piscator and Weill, Brecht began developing a dramaturgical approach to theatre that fit the goals of the "epic, political, confrontational, documentary,"<sup>12</sup> and perhaps most importantly, collective-driven work that Piscator was facilitating. We can see key aspects of Marxist analysis taken up in Brecht's writing beginning in the late 1920s, during what prominent Brecht scholar and translator John Willett describes as "the period of Brecht's most sharply communist works."<sup>13</sup>

In his key essay "The Modern Theatre is the Epic Theatre," Brecht begins with a discussion of opera in its current form and calls for a radical overhaul of the apparatus. Brecht

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<sup>11</sup> Bertolt Brecht, *Brecht on Theatre: The Development of an Aesthetic*, ed. John Willett (London: Bloomsbury, 2015), 23.

<sup>12</sup> John Willett, *Brecht in Context: Comparative Approaches* (London: Methuen, 2003), 103.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid*, 33.

argues that the issue with the existing theatrical model is that “at present the apparati do not work for the general good; the means of production do not belong to the producer; and as a result his work amounts to so much merchandise, and is governed by the normal laws of mercantile trade. Art is merchandise, only to be manufactured by the means of production (apparati).”<sup>14</sup> According to Brecht, artists have tricked themselves into believing that they have control of the apparatus of theatre, but only to the extent that their innovations and new works do not distract from or threaten its goal of providing entertainment; work that “threaten[s] to change its function, possibly by fusing it with the education system or with the organs of mass communication,”<sup>15</sup> are forbidden. Though Brecht does not specifically name capitalism in this essay as the structure that prevents more radical work from being produced, it is clear that he is pulling from Marxist thought in regard to alienation from meaningful product and labor (in this case artistic in nature).<sup>16</sup> Brecht calls for a restructuring—what he would later formalize as *umfunktionierung*, or “refunctioning”<sup>17</sup>—of elements of contemporary theatre. Brecht was uninterested in the *gesamtkunstwerk*, or “total work of art” as theorized by Richard Wagner in his 1849 essays “Art and Revolution” and “The Artwork of the Future”, as well as the 1851 book *Opera and Drama*. Instead, Brecht was interested in creating art that “radically separates” the elements of music, text, and setting to bring the audience’s attention to a work’s political goals. As Brecht describes in “On the Use of Music in an Epic Theatre,” epic theatre is a form in which

human behaviour is shown as alterable; man himself as dependent on certain political and economic factors and at the same time as capable of altering them [...] The spectator is

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<sup>14</sup> Brecht, 35.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid.

<sup>16</sup> Brecht does discuss capitalism as the factor that “killed” Shakespeare’s plays in the 1927 essay “Shouldn’t We Abolish Aesthetics?”

<sup>17</sup> Elizabeth Wright, *Postmodern Brecht: a Re-Presentation* (London: Routledge, 2016), 45.

given the chance to criticize human behaviour from a social point of view, and the scene is played as a piece of history.<sup>18</sup>

One of the dramatic techniques Brecht utilized to push audiences toward critical engagement with epic works is through the use of dramatic alienation, first detailed in his 1936 essay “Alienation Effects in Chinese Acting” and developed in other later essays.<sup>19</sup>

The *verfremdungseffekt*, commonly translated as the alienation, distancing, estrangement, or defamiliarization effect,<sup>20</sup> is a dramatic concept that prevents the audience from “simply identifying itself with the characters in the play. Acceptance or rejection of their actions and utterances were meant to take place on a conscious plane, instead of, as hitherto, in the audience’s subconscious.”<sup>21</sup> Brecht first explores the concept through analysis of Chinese acting, but develops his theory across many essays to consider how theatrical elements and techniques beyond acting theory—including the aforementioned radical separation of text, music, and setting, gestic music, historicization, and use of comedy—can achieve an alienating effect. By using these tools in the act of “making strange,” the *verfremdungseffekt* is used to “treat social situations as processes, and trac[e] out all their inconsistencies in order to move the audience to a place of “understanding things so that we can interfere.”<sup>22</sup> In other words, the purpose of the alienation effect is to turn the subject of inquiry from something familiar to something “strange and surprising” so that it can be critically examined.

## Critiques

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<sup>18</sup> Brecht, 86.

<sup>19</sup> These include, most notably, “The Street Scene,” “Short Description of a New Technique of Acting which Produces an Alienation Effect,” and “A Short Organum For the Theatre,” among others.

<sup>20</sup> Despite John Willett’s later regrets about the use of “alienation” in translating Brecht’s work, these terms are all used interchangeably in this paper.

<sup>21</sup> Brecht, 91.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid, 193.

When considering the usefulness of each of these uses of the term alienation—and despite deploying their multiple meanings throughout this project—it is necessary to make clear that Brecht is not exploring alienation in the same way as Marx, as their theoretical contexts are very different. In a 1966 article titled “Alienation According to Marx and According to Brecht,” theorist, director, and dramaturg Hugo Klajn suggests that the major difference between the two uses lies in that Marx focuses on alienation as “a condition or a quality that results from an action” such as “alienation of labor or commodity” whereas Brecht uses alienation as a tool, a “process, or the very performance of an action,”<sup>23</sup> distilling their definitions into clear points in a way that I believe is ultimately useful. However, I believe that these uses of the term are not mutually exclusive, and though they should not be thought of as interchangeable, they can be considered in conversation with one another. Indeed, I use multiple meanings of alienation throughout this project, often at the same time, but make clear what aspect(s) of alienation are being examined or deployed. John Willett blames himself and fellow Brecht scholar Eric Bentley for much of the popular confusion of Marx and Brecht’s uses of “alienation” in English translations of Brecht’s work, stating the use of the word leads “people [to] think that because Brecht was a Marxist he must be meaning it in Marx’s sense.”<sup>24</sup> While I agree with Willett’s point that they are not using the term the same way, I argue that Brecht’s dramatic approach to alienation is inseparable from the influence he took from Marx. Roland Barthes argues a similar point in his essay “The Tasks of Brechtian Criticism”:

In a Marxist like Brecht, the relations between theory and practice must not be underestimated or distorted. To separate the Brechtian theater from its theoretical foundations would be as erroneous as to try to understand Marx’s action without reading

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<sup>23</sup> Hugo Klajn, “Otudenje Po Marksu i Po Brehtu,” *Borba*, June 12, 1966, n.p., quoted in Branislav Jakovljević, *Alienation Effects: Performance and Self-Management in Yugoslavia, 1945-91* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2016), 16.

<sup>24</sup> Willett, 235.

*The Communist Manifesto* or Lenin's politics without reading *The State and the Revolution*.<sup>25</sup>

Peter Brooker offers a different but related reading of Brecht's engagement with Marx's use of alienation in *The Cambridge Companion to Brecht*, suggesting that the *verfremdungseffekt* has the potential power to "uncover and reveal" alienation in the Marxist sense, therefore "encouraging a knowledge of the conditions of alienation as historically produced and open to transformation in the real world."<sup>26</sup> This resonates with Theodor W. Adorno's analysis that Brecht "sought to translate the true hideousness of society into theatrical appearance, by dragging it straight out of its camouflage. The people on his stage shrink before our eyes into the agents of social processes and function, which indirectly and unknowingly they are in empirical reality."<sup>27</sup>

Adorno is more critical of Brecht's theories than he is supportive, stating that if we are to judge Brecht's works by the effectiveness of their ability to create "real" social change, they are ultimately unsuccessful. However, the presumption that a singular play or poem should be judged by its ability to reframe the "ideological superstructure" of a society on its own is a critical trap that many critics of epic theatre fall into; Brecht wrote of the epic theatre as a "highly skilled theatre with complex contents and far-reaching social objectives,"<sup>28</sup> but not as one that he believed would create instantaneous social change. The epic theatre was about "a

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<sup>25</sup> Roland Barthes, *Critical Essays*, trans. Richard Howard (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1972), 73.

<sup>26</sup> Peter Brooker, "Key Words in Brecht's Theory and Practice of Theatre," in *The Cambridge Companion to Brecht* (Cambridge University Press, 2006), pp. 209-224, 217.

<sup>27</sup> Theodor Adorno, "Re-View: 'On Commitment,'" trans. Francis McDonagh, *Performing Arts Journal* 3, no. 2 (1978): pp. 3-11, <https://doi.org/10.2307/3245195>, 9.

<sup>28</sup> Brecht, 128.

striving towards an entirely new social function for the theatre”<sup>29</sup>—striving being the key term. He expands on this point in the 1959 essay “On Experiment Theatre,” asking, “So is this new style of production the new style; is it a complete and comprehensible technique, the final result of every experiment? Answer: no. It is a way, the one that we have followed. The effort must be continued.”<sup>30</sup>

One of the ways that the effort was and is continued was by considering how Brecht’s theories can be applied to work beyond the epic theatre. Josette Féral challenges popular readings and interpretation of Brechtian alienation as solely an acting theory, and repositions the *verfremdungseffekt* as a process (rather than a method) through which critical thought upon both reality and performance can occur. While acknowledging that there is no singular process of creating this effect, Féral cites the text/art object itself as the source of alienation, and details how processes that evoke this effect can be read through multiple forms of performance media. Reflecting on the relationships between reality, representation, spectatorship/audience, aesthetics, and politics. Féral’s intervention complicates both Marx and Brecht’s definitions of alienation, suggesting that

alienation is the process or principle (not the method) that allows the author to pass from reality to the stage; it is also the process that permits the spectator to cast a critical eye upon the reality that is to be represented as well as a critical eye on the theatrical process underway.<sup>31</sup>

Similarly, in *Rethinking Brechtian Film Theory and Cinema*, Angelos Koutsourakis presents an examination of Brecht’s theoretical writing within the context of cinema studies. He clarifies and

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<sup>29</sup> Ibid, 131

<sup>30</sup> Ibid, 135.

<sup>31</sup> Josette Féral, “Alienation Theory in Multi-Media Performance,” trans. Ron Bermingham, *Theatre Journal* 39, no. 4 (1987): pp. 461–472, 466.

frames Brechtian theoretical principles within a cinematic context, examines what he considers “Brechtian film practices” (which are not limited to breaking the fourth wall, non-linear narrative, etc. but are practices that engage with a Brechtian dialectical method), and offers close readings of films with a variety of aesthetic and cultural approaches that all utilize Brechtian film methodology. Koutsourakis’s approach is explicitly founded in the argument that “Brecht needs to be understood as a multimedia theorist in the tradition of other modernist artists,”<sup>32</sup> which is particularly useful to this project. I argue that countercultural performances of the Long Sixties that engage with alienation, regardless of form, take up Brecht’s aim of “render[ing] immediately apparent events into phenomena newly alien to the spectator,”<sup>33</sup> opening a new space of social, political, and artistic becoming.

### Pre-Countercultural Context

Having established the contexts in which I am engaging with alienation, I now turn to a survey of significant pre-countercultural history and performance objects relevant to this project and its broader context. If, as Adorno suggests, “the forms of art reflect the history of man more truthfully than do documents themselves,”<sup>34</sup> I believe it is useful to examine cultural objects that precede the counterculture of the sixties as a way of thinking through the material conditions that led to its creation. While I am not attempting to argue that all youth culture was a precursor to the evolution of the sixties counterculture, it is important to engage in an analysis of the pre-countercultural media landscape centering young people’s experiences and media. Young people

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<sup>32</sup> Angelos Koutsourakis, *Rethinking Brechtian Film Theory and Cinema* (University: Edinburgh University Press, 2018), 16.

<sup>33</sup> Brecht, 11.

<sup>34</sup> Theodor W. Adorno, *Philosophy of Modern Music*, trans. Anne G. Mitchell and Wesley V. Blomster (London: Continuum, 2003), 43.



were the driving force of the counterculture, and examining the conditions that led to its birth feels particularly necessary for my project.<sup>35</sup>

Leading up to World War Two, young people—specifically teenagers—were not originally granted the same agency or treatment as a class as adults were. The existence of a larger generation of what we now know as teenagers, a classifying term that did not exist until 1941,<sup>36</sup> in the late 1930s/early 1940s and the American economy coming back to life after the Great Depression led advertisers and marketers to recognize a new group to whom products could be marketed and sold. In *Teenagers: An American History*, historian Grace Palladino points out the fact that the term “teenager” quickly grew in popularity as a marketing tool, denoting a group of young people whose economic demographic “was not necessarily bound by adult standards or taste.”<sup>37</sup> The world of “teenage leisure” sold by marketers to young people was white, middle to upper middle class, and presented a variety of respectful activities and desires; the world sold was one that still valued teenage independence and experience, but was overall wholesome (the term would not yet hold the weight of rebellion and angst it would be associated with in the decades to come). However, these adolescent desires did not entirely translate to popular culture that was targeted for family consumption.

The fact that teenagers did not have any real involvement in the creation of popular art about them is certainly evident in popular media of the day. Due to the structure of the studio systems of Old Hollywood, young actors were often not involved with choosing the projects they

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<sup>35</sup> While I use them somewhat interchangeably here, I also do not mean to conflate the terms “teenagers,” “adolescents,” and “young people.” Jack Weinberg’s 1964 statement to “never trust anyone over 30” feels relevant for determining a cutoff for my own use of the phrase “young people,” but given that at the time of this writing I am twenty seven years old, I may reconsider this in later revisitations to this phrase.

<sup>36</sup> Rosanne Welch, *Why the Monkees Matter: Teenagers, Television and American Pop Culture* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland & Company, Inc., Publishers, 2016), 12.

<sup>37</sup> Grace Palladino, *Teenagers: an American History* (New York, New York: Basic Books, 1996), 52.

were contractually obligated to appear in, and teenage stars like Mickey Rooney, Judy Garland, and Shirley Temple appeared in films that, while lighthearted and entertaining, were far from realistic in terms of their depiction of teenage life. The Andy Hardy films, in which Rooney starred between 1937 and 1946, presented an idyllic view of small-town American life and the adventures of Rooney as the title character. While the films would usually feature Andy getting into mild trouble—usually having to do with his crushes on girls—the stakes were never high, Andy was never treated as a “bad kid,” and the conflict was always neatly resolved by the end of the film. These films would rocket Rooney to stardom as a film persona known for his innocence and earnestness in performance, but even his own lived experience was in conflict with his screen image; Rooney would spend much of his adolescence drinking, smoking, and having sex,<sup>38</sup> a far cry from his Andy Hardy persona.

Temple, who was one of the first child film stars to grow into adolescence on screen, played a similarly sanitized character in *The Bachelor and the Bobby-Soxer* (Irving Reis, 1947)<sup>39</sup> in one of her more well-known teenage performances. In the film, Temple plays a high school girl who develops a crush on a local playboy artist, played by Cary Grant, who in turn falls for her older sister (a judge played by Myrna Loy). In a July 1947 *New York Times* review of the film, Temple is described at various points as a “fanciful high-school girl,” a “willful child,” and a “bashless tot”<sup>40</sup>—all odd descriptions for a young woman who had been married for two years at the time of the film’s release, and would give birth to her first child the year after.

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<sup>38</sup> *Ibid*, 57.

<sup>39</sup> *The Bachelor and the Bobby-Soxer* was filmed after World War Two, but it feels most useful to talk about in comparison to the Andy Hardy films.

<sup>40</sup> Bosley Crowther, “The Bachelor and Bobby-Soxer, in Which Cary Grant, Myrna Lay and Shirley Temple Are Principals, at the Music Hall,” *The New York Times*, July 25, 1947.

Films like the Andy Hardy series, *The Bachelor and the Bobby-Soxer*, and *Babes In Arms* (Busby Berkeley, 1939), as well as radio programs like *The Aldrich Family*, explored relationships and coming of age from a teenage perspective, but young people experienced a cognitive disconnect with the overtly “goody two-shoes,” safe, happy-go-lucky presentation of teenage life meant to appeal to audiences of all ages. The young people in these films and radio shows were the ideal teens, and posed no real threat to the establishment. Palladino writes that teenagers experienced a type of alienation in that teenagers of the era

loved the music, the movies, the clothes, and the language that advertised their separation from adults, but they did not inhabit the wholesome, asexual, yet somehow totally fulfilling teenage world that adults regularly envisioned for them, and they were not always willing to accept the state of suspended animation their elders [and the media] prescribed.<sup>41</sup>

In other words, because young people did not control or even have input into the ways their images were presented in the media, they did not always see themselves and their experiences as adolescents represented on screen, leading to a feeling of distancing.

It is also necessary to note the significance of World War Two in relation to youth culture and its relationship to labor. WWII essentially put the evolving youth culture on pause as young people were expected to do their part in regard to the war effort, becoming part of the workforce to serve their country in what was viewed as a just war. Teenagers became defense workers alongside adults, many as part of the National Youth Administration, and young men enlisted in the armed forces en masse. Young people became as much of a part of the war machine as grown adults, and the defense industries made huge profits off of their labor. Many teenagers were eager to participate in the work, for both patriotic and economic reasons, but felt alienated from both the products of and any reward from their labor. They “resented their total exclusion from

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<sup>41</sup> Palladino, 57.

the glamor and excitement of war,”<sup>42</sup> and performed labor that was often not, as Marx discusses, done for the satisfaction of any personal need or goal. On the other hand, the war had also opened the minds of young people to “new ideas, new aspirations, and new social and spiritual concerns,”<sup>43</sup> planting the seeds for the growth of a counterculture proper.

During the late 1940s and early 1950s, the image of the teenager began to shift with the birth of rock and roll and the growing “problem” of the teenage rebel, neither of which can be discussed without mentioning the other. Juvenile delinquency had been viewed as a temporary issue during WWII,<sup>44</sup> with experts originally blaming the hostile environment of the war as the reason teenagers were “acting out.” Postwar teens, especially those who were not white and/or upper-middle class, had grown disillusioned with the images of “nice kids” that were pushed on them in marketing and in mainstream media. They were in the unique position of being constantly marketed products meant to appeal to teenagers as a demographic, but said products did not necessarily resonate with their real life experiences, further contributing to feelings of alienation. This led to a major shift in youth culture, one that pushed back against the image of the “good teenager” that had been constructed as a tool to sell to a teenage market and celebrated the aesthetic of the rebel.

Rock and roll was a large part of the new culture; with its origins in rhythm and blues, jazz, soul, jump blues, and other Black genres, the new genre appealed to young (often white) listeners for whom the music was fresh, exciting, and provocative. Rock and roll was also immediately viewed as a threat by the establishment; it was a form that had the potential to

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<sup>42</sup> Palladino, 73.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid, 92.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid, 158.

change the purpose of music as an apparatus beyond simple entertainment. Palladino writes of views of rock and roll contemporary to its emergence:

Rock ‘n’ roll was the musical expression of a delinquent street culture, critics charged, which had to be nipped in the bud. It celebrated the wrong kind of values (and the wrong kind of people) and promoted a hedonistic view of life that mocked the very notion of wholesome adolescence. When lower class teenagers set popular styles, teenage culture began in the streets, and that could only distract “nice” kids from the hard work of growing up.<sup>45</sup>

Of course, rock and roll would quickly become commodified, whitewashed, and marketed for as wide an audience as possible, but it is important to note its specific origins in relation to the way alienation resonates throughout the material conditions that made the genre possible in the first place. With that, it is also important to discuss the rebel aesthetic that began to emerge. The idea that “teenagers were potential delinquents at heart”<sup>46</sup> was tied to young people’s engagement with rock music, rebellious styles of dress, cruising (and parking), and overall growing disillusionment with expectations established for them by their parents. Films like *The Wild One* (László Benedek, 1953) *Blackboard Jungle* (Richard Brooks, 1955), *Rebel Without a Cause* (Nicholas Ray, 1955), *Crime in the Streets* (Sidney Lumet, 1956), and *West Side Story* (Robert Wise and Jerome Robbins, 1961) explored a type of rebellious angst<sup>47</sup> that was meant to appeal to contemporary teenage sentiment, and positioned young actors like Marlon Brando and James Dean as idols of the rock and roll generation.<sup>48</sup> However, like rock as a genre, adults blamed

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<sup>45</sup> Ibid, 127.

<sup>46</sup> Ibid, 159.

<sup>47</sup> It is interesting that angst has its etymological roots in “fear;” it may be useful to consider theorizations of teenage angst in relation to alienation.

<sup>48</sup> I find it fascinating that Sidney Poitier, who played boundary-pushing roles in *Blackboard Jungle*, *Edge of the City* (Martin Ritt, 1957), and *The Defiant Ones* (Stanley Kramer, 1958) early in his career would be found on the opposite—read: square—side of the counterculture in films like *In the Heat of the Night* (Norman Jewison, 1967) and *To Sir, With Love* (James Clavell, 1967).

these films for encouraging teenagers to relate to/see themselves as alienated, troubled delinquents.<sup>49</sup> Films were meant to entertain, not radicalize the youth to rebel against older generations; the fear of the establishment resonates with the issues that Brecht had named in “The Modern Theatre is the Epic Theatre” in that a transformation of the social function of an artistic apparatus was a real threat.

The “original teens” of the early 1940s having children during and post-World War Two would lead to the “baby boom,” creating a wave of teenagers in the late 1950s and early 1960s. These young people were coming of age in an era marked by sociopolitical organizing and youth engagement on a level that had not been seen before. The emergent civil rights movement, which began in the mid-fifties and continued to grow throughout the sixties, was rooted not only in alienation in an economic sense, but in cultural, political, and social senses. Black organizers and activists sought to resolve issues based in decades of disenfranchisement, discrimination, and segregation; many figures in the civil rights and Black power/arts movements, such as Stokely Carmichael and Angela Davis (themselves building off of the work of W.E.B. Du Bois) were engaging explicitly with Marxist theory in their organizing. Perhaps the most important aspect of the counterculture—to the point that it is often described as synonymous with the counterculture itself, though this is not always applicable—the anti-war movement was also driven by a deep feeling of alienation that can be traced through the four aspects Marx names. Reasons for opposing the Vietnam War were varied, but perceived unfairness of the draft, moral opposition to intervention, belief that Vietnam had the right to self-determination, and a growing general peace movement were all key factors in the movement. In a speech given at the Spring Mobilization to End the War in Vietnam in April of 1967, Stokely Carmichael famously said,

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<sup>49</sup> Palladino, 159.

“The draft is white people sending black people to make war on yellow people in order to defend the land they stole from red people.” Carmichael’s quip summarizes the way the military-industrial complex created the ultimate state of alienation; being drafted and forced to fight/potentially kill other human beings in a war popularly viewed as unjust where the defense industry profits off of the labor of soldiers produces the soldier and his ability to fight as a commodity while simultaneously alienating him from his fellow man and his humanity.

While I have spent much of this chapter discussing aspects of what I have called the “pre-countercultural” sociopolitical landscape, I am aware that I do not spend much time in this introduction mentioning the major figures of the countercultural movement itself. This is not out of any impulse to be cursory in my analysis. Tracing all of the major players, artistic interventions, key moments, subcultures, and organizations within a decade-long evolving movement is not only extraordinarily difficult, but also is not particularly useful for my specific, fairly narrow lens into select artists and art objects. This does not mean that I do not consider what insights can be found in applying my theoretical lens to the movement more broadly—in fact, this is part of the focus of my fourth chapter—but found it important to name this in the context of explaining my method here.

## Conclusion

In the 1927 essay “The Epic Theatre and its Difficulties,” Bertolt Brecht states that “the radical transformation of the theatre can’t be the result of some artistic whim. It has simply to correspond to the whole radical transformation of the mentality of our time [...] it is precisely theatre, art and literature which have to form the ‘ideological superstructure’ for a solid, practical

rearrangement of our age's way of life."<sup>50</sup> In this introduction, I have considered the "something happening here" that I trace through alienation's multifaceted form; I am equally as interested in the ways we can move beyond simply looking at "what's going down" and consider how countercultural performances engaged with Brecht's efforts of creating a new social function for art. Perhaps a useful theorization comes from folk and protest singer Phil Ochs' 1965 track, "Days of Decision." From his sophomore release, *I Ain't Marching Anymore*, the song explores themes of societal oppression, and the need for young people to take up the mantle in creating meaningful political change. In the song's final verse, Ochs sings:

*There's a change in the wind, and a split in the road  
You can do what's right or you can do what you are told  
And the prize of the victory will belong to the bold  
Yes, these are the days of decision.*

If Marx points out "what's happening here" in terms of material analysis of the conditions that lead to a state of alienation, Brecht is beneficial in tracing how artists of the counterculture did what was "right" rather than doing what they were "told" in their own "days of decision."

Through close readings of films, soundtrack albums, folk and soul music, cults, and other performing objects and modes of cultural production, I argue that centering alienation in my analysis enhances our comprehension of the short-term and enduring social, political, and creative impacts of this period. While many scholars across arts and humanities disciplines have studied aspects of counterculture(s), an exploration of countercultural theory and production is growing in contemporary studies of the Long Sixties. My research utilizes performance studies methodologies in order to fill a gap in sixties scholarship that has not accounted for an intersectional materialist analysis of the counterculture's influences and long term effects on

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<sup>50</sup> Brecht, 23.



American artistic production. These case studies, though seemingly disparate, reveal that alienation was widely employed by artists in the Long Sixties: For some alienation was triggered materially, through an encounter with an object, for others, alienation operated in the multiple public personas they embodied. Taken together, the chapters of my dissertation offer an expansive exploration of alienation and its worldmaking capabilities within the unique sociopolitical and creative landscapes of this turbulent era. Ultimately, my work urges readers to consider an intersectional and interdisciplinary theoretical framework through which we study countercultural production and impact.

Chapter one, “Can You Dig It?: The Monkees and the ‘Epic Album’ *Head*,” gives focus to the Monkees’ 1968 album and film project *Head* and offers a rereading of the Monkees’ deconstruction of their “manufactured” image in the conception, creation, and impact of the project. This chapter also theorizes the “epic album,” examining how Brechtian performance techniques that evoke a feeling of alienation can be applied to the form of the vinyl album. Using Robin Bernstein’s concept of “scriptive things” as a theoretical touchstone, I trace how the *Head* soundtrack—from its packaging to the sonic content itself—sets the listener up to engage in an active critical response to the album, rather than a passive listening experience.

Chapter two, “Leaning Out For Love: Nina Simone’s *To Love Somebody* and Black-Jewish Sonic Solidarity,” analyzes Nina Simone’s covers of songs by Jewish songwriters throughout her career, with focus given to Leonard Cohen and Bob Dylan. I give consideration to the cover song as a culturally productive and generative form that connects artists across temporal and identity-based boundaries, and borrow Daphne A. Brooks and Gayle Wald’s metaphor of the cover song as a sonic kiss to think through Simone’s work. Situating my analysis within a deeper examination of how we theorize Marx’s conception of “species-

essence,” I argue that Simone’s covers of Cohen’s “Suzanne” and Dylan’s “I Shall Be Released” (recorded for her 1969 album *To Love Somebody*) function as a cross-ethnic and interfaith performance of resistance to alienation.

Chapter three, “Alienation and Its Doubles: Phil Ochs, Identity, and Performance,” focuses on examining the life and work of folk singer Phil Ochs through the theoretical lens of “doubling,” a performative practice which I argue both creates an affective state of alienation and functions as an attempt to escape it; I focus on Ochs’s attempts to embody traits and practices of other musicians whom he idolized—namely Bob Dylan and Elvis Presley—throughout his career, as well as the creation of the John Butler Train persona that arose during the period of mental instability in the months before he took his own life in 1976. I consider how Ochs’s attempts at doubling move beyond performative mimicry or copying and reflect a broader journey exploring identity and subjecthood, traced through his performance practices and art.

Chapter four, “Cease To Exist: Charles Manson, Cults in Popular Media, and Failed Performances of Utopia” opens a broader approach to performance through an examination of cults as failed performances of utopia. Grounding my approach in José Esteban Muñoz’s theorization of the utopian, I suggest that the worldmaking practices that cults deploy end up creating further alienation for its members—specifically, they create a dynamic in which cults are both alienating to and alienated from others. I provide a survey of how cults are depicted in media before and after the Tate and LaBianca murders committed by Charles Manson and members of the group the Family in August of 1969, with particular focus given to episodes of *Star Trek* and *Starsky & Hutch* as case studies. I aim to give focus to the ways in which the impact of the Tate and LaBianca murders caused a massive phenomenological shift in the American psyche, which led to the overall death of the countercultural movement.

## CHAPTER 1: CAN YOU DIG IT?: THE MONKEES AND THE “EPIC ALBUM” HEAD

### “Here We Come...”

After the conclusion of the second season of their television show, the 1960s music group the Monkees embarked on a journey of self-destruction that culminated in the release of their 1968 film *Head*. Originally a critical and commercial failure, *Head* served as “a crucial part of the Monkees’ ongoing project to reconfigure the group’s cultural identity by explicitly interrogating the terms by which it had come to be defined.”<sup>51</sup> Marketed on the poster as “a fun-movie that encompasses every other movie form - western, desert saga, war film, musical, horror film, science fiction,” the project certainly is, as advertised, extremely “memorable” in the group’s attempt to interrogate their manufactured identity. It is difficult to describe the plot of the film given its fragmented structure and lack of linearity; the Monkees themselves summarize the premise of the film best in the lyrics from the featured track “Ditty Diego – War Chant”– “We hope you like our story/Although there isn't one/That is to say, there’s many/That way there is more fun!” Described by director Bob Rafelson as “utterly and totally fragmented,”<sup>52</sup> the film consists of a series of vignettes that satirize and critique the aforementioned film genres as well as the Vietnam War, the Monkees’ teenybopper fans, the film, television, and music industries, and the group’s own commercialization. The movie is contemporarily praised as a countercultural artifact that didn’t quite resonate during its time, but the soundtrack is often overlooked.

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<sup>51</sup> Paul B. Ramaeker, “‘You Think They Call Us Plastic Now...’: The Monkees and *Head*,” in *Soundtrack Available: Essays on Film and Popular Music* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2001), 76.

<sup>52</sup> John Russell Taylor, “Staying Vulnerable: An Interview with Bob Rafelson,” *Sight and Sound* 75, no. 4 (October 1976).

While much has been written on the importance of film music and scoring, there is less writing on the film soundtrack in general as a separate space of performance. A soundtrack, unlike a standard pop album or concert recording, is an object that functions as both a curated collection of tracks used in the film it accompanies and as a product of promotional merchandise. Soundtracks are ways for audiences to engage with both the film and the music in a way that I argue requires a different type of participation. The act of purchasing an album, looking at the album art, and placing a turntable needle on a vinyl record is a tangible listening experience that requires the listener to engage with the recorded performance differently than one would while watching a film in a theater. I borrow from Robin Bernstein’s theorization of scriptive things, which she suggests “structur[e] a performance while simultaneously allowing for resistance and unleashing original, live variations that may not be individually predictable,”<sup>53</sup> to consider the ways in which audience reactions to the *Head* soundtrack are both shaped by its form and allows for *active* individual critical response. In an interview reflecting on the making of the *Head* soundtrack for Andrew Sandoval’s seminal guidebook, *The Monkees: The Day-by-Day Story of the '60s TV Pop Sensation*, bassist and keyboardist Peter Tork reflected that the album is “a different trip from the movie [...] It wasn’t just a pale ghost of a copy. It was a different artistic experience.”<sup>54</sup> As a performance object, *Head*’s soundtrack is an album that itself pulls deeply from Brecht’s idea that rather than being drawn into the world of a performance, audience members should be forced to think critically about the enactment of the world before them and use the drama to critique their own societies—using the “thing” as a script for action.<sup>55</sup>

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<sup>53</sup> Robin Bernstein, “Dances with Things: Material Culture and the Performance of Race,” *Social Text* 27, no. 4 (2009): 67–94, 69.

<sup>54</sup> Andrew Sandoval, *The Monkees: The Day-by-Day Story of the '60s TV Pop Sensation* (San Diego: Thunder Bay Press, 2005), 204.

<sup>55</sup> Bernstein, 69.

While alienation can be achieved through many modes, Brecht emphasizes that the “radical separation of the elements” of music, words, and production, tied to the goal of invocation of the “strange and surprising,” are necessary for the audience to be spurred to action. This “radical separation” does not solely refer to having distinction between these elements; montage and collage of visual and sonic elements are utilized frequently in epic media. In the book *Brecht: A Choice of Evils*, theorist Martin Esslin writes that in epic theatre, “the musical numbers are no longer smuggled in at the point when the emotional charge of a scene rises to a climax and speech merges into song – but are introduced as entirely distinct ingredients of the play, which interrupt its flow, break the illusion, and thereby render the action ‘strange.’”<sup>56</sup> The music and sound used in *Head* pushes the audience away from the illusion that they are consuming just another pop album, and relies on the strange and expository to evoke critique of the band and the consumers themselves. This is not to say that there are no aspects meant solely for entertainment in *Head*. One of the great myths that has developed regarding Brechtian performance is the idea that it prioritizes cold didacticism over any emotional elements; Brecht makes clear in his essay “The Modern Theatre is the Epic Theatre” that the differences between the dramatic and the epic are not “absolute antitheses but mere shifts of accent [...] we may choose to stress the element of emotional suggestion or that of plain rational argument.”<sup>57</sup> *Head* is a combination of sentiment, rebellion, and didacticism that positions both the Monkees and their audience as objects of inquiry.

This chapter looks at alienation as both inspiration for and technique in the creation of the *Head* soundtrack, as well as the effects produced in the listener-consumer. Using close reading

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<sup>56</sup> Martin Esslin, *Brecht: a Choice of Evils: A Critical Study of the Man, His Work and His Opinions* (London: Mercury Books, 1980), 118.

<sup>57</sup> Brecht, 36.

(and listening) of the tracks, along with archival research and analysis of the film, I demonstrate how the *Head* soundtrack functions as a mode of alienating performance and is a key example of the interdisciplinary form that I name as an “epic album,” achieved through the Monkees’ sonic exploration of alienation. The term “epic” is used here not as a reference to large-scale rock operas or concept albums, à la the Who’s *Tommy* (1969) or Andrew Lloyd Webber’s *Jesus Christ Superstar* (1970); instead, I use the term in the Brechtian sense to refer to a form of captured audio performance that uses dramatic tools commonly associated with epic theatre. The epic album functions as a scriptive media form that demonstrates how alienation can be explored through nonvisual performance. Here, the Monkees and “album coordinator” Jack Nicholson incorporate sound collage, didactic and gestic lyrics, and even the packaging of the album itself to create a feeling of “strangeness” in the listener. By estranging themselves and their listeners from the typical experience of consuming a commercial pop album, the Monkees use the *Head* soundtrack as an attempt to seize the means of the production of—and ultimately destroy—their commodified “pre-fab” image and force their audience to think critically about their identities as passive consumers of media.

#### “A Manufactured Image with No Philosophies”

Before analyzing the project of *Head* overall, it is necessary to provide a brief history of the Monkees as a group before the film and soundtrack were released. From their origins, both the Monkees the group and *The Monkees* television program were viewed as unconventional.<sup>58</sup> Much has been written on producers Bob Rafelson and Bert Schneider’s nontraditional construction of the group, beginning with their casting call placed in *The Hollywood Reporter*

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<sup>58</sup> Note for clarity: *The Monkees* refers to the television program; the Monkees refers to the band.

and *Daily Variety* looking for “four insane boys” for their new television program. The four young men selected—Davy Jones, Micky Dolenz, Michael Nesmith, and Peter Tork—had varied levels of acting experience, but all had significant performance backgrounds. At the time of casting, Jones had already been nominated for a Tony award for his performance as the Artful Dodger in the 1963 Broadway production of *Oliver!*, recorded a mildly successful solo album, and signed a contract with Screen Gems to appear in television programs.<sup>59</sup> Dolenz had been a child star on the NBC television program *Circus Boy*, and gained musical experience as the frontman of his own group, “Micky and the One-Nighters,” in the early sixties while attending college in Los Angeles. He learned of the *Monkees* auditions through his agent, who set up his audition. Nesmith had been working as a musician and songwriter since 1963, and was performing and writing in the LA country-and-western/folk scene before auditioning for the *Monkees*. He had found success in selling some of his songs (most famously “Different Drum,” which would become Linda Ronstadt’s first major single recorded with the Stone Poneys in 1967), but had not yet found widespread success. Tork was the most musically trained of the group, with proficiency on piano, harpsichord, bass, guitar, and banjo, as well as skill with music notation and reading. He had gained performance experience in the Greenwich Village folk scene in the early sixties, and was recommended to the *Monkees* producers by his friend Stephen Stills, then a member of Buffalo Springfield, who had auditioned for the group himself. After being officially cast, the men went through weeks of improv practice and music rehearsals before filming began for the pilot in 1965, and continued their training in the summer of 1966 for the filming of the first season. Micky Dolenz stated in a 2013 interview with *Guitar World* that

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<sup>59</sup> Sandoval, 25.

Rafelson and and Schneider—or “Bob and Bert,” as they are often fondly referred to by the Monkees members,

cast four guys that had different talents and different voices but could all sing and act, to some degree. When we started singing together and blending, we weren't starting from square one. We had fundamental skills; then it came down to arrangement and harmonizing, and then we sort of got lucky, especially in terms of the blend Mike [Nesmith] and I had. I always thought that was really kind of cool.<sup>60</sup>

In the same interview, Peter Tork added, “I refute any claims that any four guys could've done what we did. There was a magic to that collection. We couldn't have chosen each other. It wouldn't have flown. But under the circumstances, they got the right guys.”<sup>61</sup> *The Monkees* debuted on NBC on September 12, 1966, and would go on to win two awards at the 1967 Primetime Emmys ceremony—one for Outstanding Directorial Achievement for a Comedy (won by James Frawley, who would go on to direct *The Muppet Movie*, among many others) and one for Outstanding Comedy Series.

*The Monkees* was a unique program in the television landscape of the mid-1960s. The show was not the first sitcom to attempt to capture—and market—the experiences of young people for a teenage audience; precursors to *The Monkees* such as *The Many Loves of Dobie Gillis*, *Peyton Place*, *The Patty Duke Show*, and *Gidget* featured teenagers in leading, if relatively sanitized and clean-cut, primetime roles. Roseanne Welch discusses in *Why the Monkees Matter: Teenagers, Television and American Pop Culture* that up to this point, teenagers on television were relegated to roles in three types of programs: “family friendly sitcoms, on ensemble

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<sup>60</sup> Damian Fanelli, “Michael Nesmith, Micky Dolenz and Peter Tork Talk Monkees Tour, 'Headquarters' and Jimi Hendrix,” *Guitar World* (July 26, 2013), <https://www.guitarworld.com/artists/michael-nesmith-micky-dolenz-and-peter-tork-talk-monkees-tour-headquarters-and-jimi>.

<sup>61</sup> *Ibid.*



dramas, and on music shows.”<sup>62</sup> *The Monkees* began to push the envelope in terms of content; the program showed four young men living in a California beach house without adult supervision, performing their music and going on adventures that reflected themes and ideas of contemporary youth culture. Through the tactics of camp television—namely self reflexivity, parody and satire, stylization and exaggeration, and experimentation with form, often deployed through artifice—episodes of *The Monkees* showcase critiques of the entertainment industry, authority figures, politicians, and current sociopolitical events. Interviews included as tag segments when episodes ran short were a space for the cast to share contemporary topical and political opinions as themselves; other tags included performances by respected countercultural figures such as Tim Buckley and Frank Zappa, who were invited onto the program by the cast as featured guests. Though the show may read as very tame in terms of content as compared to shows of today, *The Monkees* was very successful in exploring the “anti-war, anti-authority, anti-capitalist attitude”<sup>63</sup> of the growing counterculture. This influence often came from the cast themselves; Dolenz noted that the band “had much more control on the set, when we were acting. We improvised and made a lot of contributions.”<sup>64</sup> *The Monkees* very quickly resonated with young audiences; Peter Tork noted frequently in interviews that *The Monkees* “represented a new kind of egalitarian, ‘we’re all in this together.’ I can’t tell you how many people have said they had half an hour of sanity every week, and that was in front of the television watching *The*

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<sup>62</sup> Rosanne Welch, *Why the Monkees Matter: Teenagers, Television and American Pop Culture* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland & Company, Inc., Publishers, 2016), 15.

<sup>63</sup> Welch, 23.

<sup>64</sup> Fanelli.

*Monkees*. The kids felt seen. They felt here was a show about living life anyway. And I think that was a terribly important thing.”<sup>65</sup>

With their quick rise to fame, the Monkees found themselves struggling to establish themselves as both performers and musicians. Marketed for a preteen and teenage audience, the merchandise featuring their images—including sweatshirts, trading cards, lunchboxes, dolls, comics, puzzles, gum, and even underwear—that grossed an estimated twenty million dollars in the first four months the show was on the air was created, marketed, and sold without the men’s input.<sup>66</sup> The band also lacked control musically and were originally not allowed to play instruments on their records; the producers relied heavily on the efforts of a group of session musicians called the Wrecking Crew to provide the backing tracks to the band’s songs, even ones the band had written themselves. A few of Michael Nesmith’s compositions, such as “Mary, Mary” and “Papa Gene’s Blues,” were allowed on the group’s early records, but these were few and far between, and recorded under the supervision of notorious producer Don Kirshner.

Matthew Stahl writes in his critical essay “Authentic Boy Bands on TV? Performers and Impresarios in *The Monkees* and *Making the Band*” that Rafelson, Schneider, and Kirshner

had a very good idea of what could inspire identification and loyalty in fans; their dual product of television show and records, each advertising the other, and both deepened by clusters of fan merchandise, was a master-stroke of marketing... [The group was] charged to provide “authentic” objects of identification for their audience. Contradictions felt by the band members, simultaneously compelled to express themselves personally but suppress themselves musically, caused tremendous tension between the producers and the band members, and arguably led to the cancellation of the show and the commercial demise of the band.<sup>67</sup>

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<sup>65</sup> Welch, 27.

<sup>66</sup> Ramaeker, 77.

<sup>67</sup> Matthew Stahl, “Authentic Boy Bands on TV? Performers and Impresarios in *The Monkees* and *Making the Band*,” *Popular Music* 21, no. 03 (2002): 313.

Ironically, “authenticity,” a moving target for the group as their personal growth was suppressed by their producers, was the marker the Monkees were supposed to achieve in order to be successful participants in the capitalist system. I suggest that while this labor was meant to *appear* spontaneous in order to be read by the Monkees’ audience as genuine and authentic, it ultimately fits Marx’s definition of alienated labor in that it is labor in which the band “alienate[d] themselves], [was] a labor of self-sacrifice, of mortification” and “the external character of labor for the worker[s] appear[ed] in the fact that it [was] not [their] own, but someone else’s, that it [did] not belong to [them], that in it [they belong], not to [themselves], but to another”<sup>68</sup>—in this case, their producers.

While the band was able to gain more direct input into *The Monkees* show during its second season—Dolenz would even write and direct the show’s final episode, “The Frodis Caper,” which featured explicit countercultural imagery and content—Tork and Nesmith were especially frustrated by the lack of musical control the group held, and fought to wrest it away from their producers. At a meeting with Kirshner during the height of the tension in January 1967, Nesmith famously punched through a hotel wall and, according to Dolenz, yelled “that could have been your face, motherfucker,” threatening to quit unless the group gained complete control over the recording process and release of their music.<sup>69</sup> (Nesmith describes the incident in his autobiography, *Infinite Tuesday*, as follows; “I lost my temper and slammed my fist through the wall, as much for effect as anything, and said words to the effect that he should be

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<sup>68</sup> Karl Marx, *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844 / and the Communist Manifesto ; Karl Marx and Frederick Engels* (Buffalo, NY: Prometheus Books, 1988), 74.

<sup>69</sup> Micky Dolenz and Mark Bego, *I’m a Believer: My Life of Monkees, Music, and Madness* (New York: Cooper Square Press, 2004), 115.

careful about questioning my integrity.”<sup>70</sup>) This, Kirshner’s subsequent firing,<sup>71</sup> and the hiring of producer Chip Douglas set the stage for the production of the albums *Headquarters; Pisces, Aquarius, Capricorn & Jones Ltd.*; and *The Birds, The Bees, and The Monkees*, all of which were controlled by the group.<sup>72</sup> The group moved away from the uniform image and sound associated with the first season of the television show and their first two albums, embracing a shift in sound that leans experimental and psychedelic, with emphasis to personal style and individuality reflected in both their imagery and the music itself.

Despite the quartet actually writing, singing, and playing their own songs (as well as the tracks written for them by such songwriters as Tommy Boyce and Bobby Hart, Gerry Goffin and Carole King, Barry Mann and Cynthia Weil, Harry Nilsson, and Neil Diamond), the group found it hard to shake the notion that the “pre-fab four” were incapable of creating their own music. The group turned to the teenybopper magazines that their young fans consumed, such as *Tiger Beat* and *16*, to combat the persistent myth. In the 1967 *Tiger Beat's Official Monkee Spectacular!*, the group clarified that “they knew that as soon as people found out that session musicians were used on some of their records, they would be knocked and everyone would say that they didn’t have any talent,” and emphasized that “there was never any question of whether or not [they] could play the instruments.”<sup>73</sup> It was important for the band to be—and to be *seen* as—controlling the means of their own production.

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<sup>70</sup> Michael Nesmith, *Infinite Tuesday* (New York: Three Rivers Press, 2018), 96.

<sup>71</sup> Kirshner was fired for many reasons, this incident being just one aspect.

<sup>72</sup> Though the group had control over the creation of these albums, they did still both utilize session musicians and record songs by other writers.

<sup>73</sup> Benner, Ralph. “Do They Play Their Own Instruments?” *Tiger Beat's Official Monkee Spectacular!*, April 1967, 66-67.

While the Monkees' fanbase became divided over rumors that painted the band as "plastic," critics continued to dismiss the group as manufactured products of the Hollywood "media machine," which significantly contributed to a decrease in their overall popularity. In response to the cancellation of their television show and their waning commercial power, the Monkees—with the help of Rafelson, Schneider, and a then-unknown actor recruited to help write the screenplay named Jack Nicholson—set out to create a film and soundtrack that served to destroy the familiarity and comfort in the image that had been created<sup>74</sup> to sell the Monkees and their merchandise to an uncritical commercial audience.

### "We're Here To Give You—"

This examination of the *Head* soundtrack begins with the advertising and packaging of the album itself.<sup>75</sup> The Monkees themselves were barely featured in the promotions for the film and album, and aren't even on the front cover of the record. The album was released in a shiny silver mylar sleeve<sup>76</sup> that was meant to reflect the purchaser's head back at them.<sup>77</sup> When the (potentially fanatic) listener looks at the record sleeve, the objects of their obsession aren't even present, creating the space for the consumer to recognize themselves as an object of consumption. Michael Nesmith remarked in a 1969 *Rolling Stone* article about rock groupies:

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<sup>74</sup> Mathew J. Bartkowiak and Yuya Kiuchi, "Searching for the *Real Times, Baby: Head* and the Unmaking of the Monkees," in *The Music of Counterculture Cinema: A Critical Study Of 1960s and 1970s Soundtracks* (NC: McFarland & Company, 2015), 41.

<sup>75</sup> The Monkees, *Head*, The Monkees and Gerry Goffin, 1968, Colgems Records, vinyl recording.

<sup>76</sup> The sleeves proved to be problematic in production by jamming the presses at the factory, so the 1985 vinyl re-release of the album featured sleeves with reflective foil paper.

<sup>77</sup> There is no figure included here because it is difficult to capture the effect of seeing one's reflection in the shiny foil of the album cover in a printed photo. I highly encourage readers to locate a copy of the album on vinyl and experience the effect for themselves—directly engaging with the scriptiveness of the encounter.

“Chicks hear Jimi [Hendrix] and they want to ball him. They hear us and what they hear in us is themselves. We’re a reflection. There’s no need to ball us when they can take the record home and it’s like balling themselves every twenty minutes.”<sup>78</sup> While Nesmith’s analogy is somewhat extreme, his sexualization of the way audiences react to the Monkees speaks to the specific commodification of the self in listening to their music. To Nesmith, when the listener is consuming the Monkees, it is set up to be a self-reflexive idolatry. Thus, if, as the Monkees satirically proclaim in the track “Ditty Diego – War Chant,” they are indeed “a manufactured image with no philosophies,” their audiences perform a worship of their own emptiness through their uncritical listening and buying.

Turning to the back of the record sleeve, the Monkees themselves are finally present. Jones, Nesmith, Tork, and Dolenz are shown against a black background, referencing the Black Box that the four find themselves trapped in throughout the film.<sup>79</sup> The design is also visually similar to the photo of the Beatles used for the back cover of their 1966 release *Revolver*. This design choice is both a tribute to the Beatles and a conscious commentary on the way the two groups were constantly compared by critics. The Monkees and their producers were all fans of the Beatles, and held great respect for them; Michael Nesmith wrote of his admiration for the group during this period in his memoir *Infinite Tuesday*, stating that

For me, the Beatles were writing the songs of my life. The bar they had set for pop music was in the stratosphere. They were singing about subjects that required sophistication and had a clear point of view that required high artistry to express [...] Once, a pop song could be fatuous and banal and still very popular, but that was changing. Popular music was coming from the hymnal of a new church. These new popular artists like [Bob] Dylan and the Beatles were delivering their own point of view, influenced by what the

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<sup>78</sup> John Burks, Jerry Hopkins, and Paul Nelson, “The Groupies and Other Girls,” *Rolling Stone*, February 15, 1969, 21.

<sup>79</sup> Peter Mills, *The Monkees, Head, and the 60s* (London: Jawbone Press, 2016), 245.

masses might think.<sup>80</sup>

When the Monkees toured England in 1967, the Beatles hosted a party for the group and invited them to a recording session for *Sgt. Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band*. There was no rivalry or competition between the two groups on the personal level; while the conception of the Monkees was certainly in response to Beatlemania, the Beatles enjoyed the Monkees for both their musical and comic talents and expressed appreciation for their work.<sup>81</sup> It is also interesting to note that in this photo, there are no smiling faces like the ones that grace the group's previous record sleeves. The cute, carefree boys of the television show with their matching double-breasted colorful shirts are gone, replaced here by pensive, somewhat unfamiliar, men. The Monkees' choice to both parody and pay homage to their biggest musical comparison in their album art functioned as an attempt to reframe the way the relationship between the two bands was popularly viewed—not a derivative copying, but a “making strange” of their connection itself. The back of the record sleeve also features the track listing, with each of the seven songs per side denoted with the labels of Bands A through G. Who are these mysterious seven bands—the Monkees themselves, the studio musicians the band infamously used in their early days of recording, someone else entirely? Although these details may seem trivial, to the Monkees fan base, many of whom couldn't even see the movie due to age restrictions,<sup>82</sup> these elements would read as odd. Before the needle is even dropped onto the record, the Monkees are setting the listener up for an unfamiliar listening experience.

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<sup>80</sup> Nesmith, 81.

<sup>81</sup> George Harrison invited Peter Tork to contribute banjo to the *Wonderwall* (1968) soundtrack, and Tork's playing is featured in the film.

<sup>82</sup> Although officially rated G, posters marked the movie *Head* as “Not Suitable for Children,” and many members of the Monkees' core demographic couldn't get in. The soundtrack was a way for fans of the group to gain some aspect of the band's latest project.

The sonic experience opens with “Opening Ceremony,” a sound collage made up of clips from a radio ad promoting *Head*, Dolenz repeatedly moaning the word “Head,” snippets of all the songs, sound effects, and dialogue from the opening scene of the film. While the title of the track evokes celebration and fanfare, it is simultaneously very dull and ultimately unceremonious; the simplicity of the title reveals next to nothing and yet is alienating to pop audiences in its formality. Peter Mills writes in *The Monkees, Head, and the 60s* that “Opening Ceremony” serves as an abstract that, through Nicholson’s smart editing choices, show an “understanding of the strange logic (or, perhaps, anti-logic) of the film’s narrative” and introduces the album in such a way that “when we hear the songs in full we both recognise them and experience them as stranger, more avant-garde than they might have otherwise sounded.”<sup>83</sup> The group is not only addressing commercialization head-on, but are shaking the foundation of what a pop album is. “Opening Ceremony” segues into “Porpoise Song (Theme from “Head”),” written by Gerry Goffin and Carole King. The track, inspired by the Beatles’ “A Day In The Life,” frames the opening and closing of both *Head* the movie and *Head* the soundtrack. Director Bob Rafelson said of the song:

[It] was critical to me. “A face, a voice, an overdub has no choice.” In other words, the whole synthetic process of making The Monkees’ records was about to be [examined] in the movie. They are constantly being picked up, used, transplanted, subjected to influence by the [guru], by the war, by the media, and all of these things are exposed. They are always [portrayed] as the victims of their own fame.<sup>84</sup>

In the film, the song accompanies the scenes in which Micky Dolenz, and later, the whole group, interrupts a dedication ceremony at the Gerald Desmond Bridge, leaps off, and falls to his apparent death in the water below. The slow, surreal drift of the track is creepy and dirge-like;

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<sup>83</sup> Mills, 246.

<sup>84</sup> *Head* liner notes.



the unfamiliar psychedelic sound reflects the elegiac nature of its lyrics. The group is “wanting to be/to hear and to see/crying to the sky” for something beyond the constraints of their previous image. Living lives that are tied so directly to blind capitalistic consumption is “a lie” that has driven the group to sonic suicide. It is a rather dour album opening for a group that was singing songs like “The Kind of Girl I Could Love” and “I’m a Believer” the year before. With its repetitive and haunting “goodbye, goodbye,” “Porpoise Song,” the song named as the key to capturing the theme of the overall project, is a farewell to the bubblegum image the group had become associated with.

The next track on the album, “Ditty Diego – War Chant,” written by Bob Rafelson and Jack Nicholson, hits the listener with sonic whiplash. There is no pause or segue between the tracks—the listener is immediately launched into the chant, a parody that darkly satirizes the familiar tune fans of the group heard open *The Monkees* television show every Monday night. “(Theme From) *The Monkees*,” written for the show by longtime collaborators Tommy Boyce and Bobby Hart, is a simple tune with rhyming verses about the group being “too busy singing to put anybody down.” The band states that they are “just trying to be friendly” and invites their audience to “come and watch us sing and play.” “We’re the young generation and we’ve got something to say” is perhaps the most memorable line from the theme song, reflective of the group’s connection to the growing youth counterculture and teenagers beginning to find their own voices. “Ditty Diego – War Chant” flips these sentiments on their head in a deeply cynical manner. The nine rhyming verses describe the confusing structure of the film and record and the supposedly ambiguous meaning of the project as a whole (“For those who look for meanings/And form as they do fact/We might tell you one thing/But we’d only take it back”) in between brutally attacking the band themselves. The group acknowledges the role that capital

plays in the construction of their performance (“The money’s in, we’re made of tin/We’re here to give you more”) while attempting to simultaneously lean into and subvert this through the project of *Head* itself. The deeply cynical track is uncomfortable to listen to; the track speeds up and slows down randomly, and ends with a startling scream<sup>85</sup> that shifts into the War Chant, a clip from the film that satirizes the call-and-response of pop concerts and the Monkees’ call for audience participation in their own live performances.<sup>86</sup> The track cannot really even be described as a “song,” much less anything formally recognizable to the group’s audience; it is much more a destruction of the performance mode of the commercial pop song that the band had become so familiar with. The band distances their audience from the safety and familiarity of how they were previously packaged, continuing to question how consumer identity is constructed in relation to the objects being sold.

“Ditty Diego – War Chant” transitions into “Circle Sky,” the only track on the album written by Michael Nesmith. The song was performed live in concert for the film, but rerecorded with session musicians for the album release (though subsequent releases of the soundtrack feature the live version, which I discuss here). “Circle Sky” is one of the most garage rock-inspired the group released commercially; the track’s proto-punk sound was unlike any previously released Monkees track.<sup>87</sup> In a 2016 *Rolling Stone* article reflecting on the history of the Monkees’ discography, Michael Nesmith said of the song:

I wanted to explore the power trio of us. In a strange way, we were actually pretty good. Micky was a real garage-band drummer. I was a real scream-and-shout guitar player and

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<sup>85</sup> Mills asks, “Is she screaming at the band or something terrifying beyond words?”

<sup>86</sup> Much of this is captured on the Monkees album *Live 1967* (released in 1987) and the season one *The Monkees* episode, “The Monkees On Tour.”

<sup>87</sup> One possible exception worth briefly noting is “Saturday’s Child,” which was recorded for the Monkees’ self-titled debut and featured in the first season of the television show. However, this song was written for the group by David Gates, and does not hold strong significance in the Monkees catalogue.

Peter was a very precise player. He could play interesting lines and fills on the bass. The power trio that existed between us was seldom explored. The lyrics are about television and the corporate man.<sup>88</sup>

While still very listenable—as in, accessible to the average listener, unlike the sound collages and “Ditty Diego – War Chant”—“Circle Sky” abandons the innocent bubblegum pop sound the group had been previously associated with and introduces a dirtier and more raw sound than the Monkees audience was used to. As well as lyrically examining the dual search for truth by the group and their listeners (“But what you have seen you must believe/If you can, if you can”) within the cycling falsity of the Monkees’ image (“it looks like we’ve made it once again”), “Circle Sky” demonstrates the group’s core talent. The band is fully capable of creating their own work; although this had been demonstrated on previous records, the Monkees are no longer “telling lies” and “stand[ing] at demand” of the corporate producers who controlled their image before. They are no longer taking the passive route, and encourage their listeners to look at what the group “telling more than before” does to their own consumption of the band’s work.

The final full track on the first side of the record, “Can You Dig It,” is sandwiched between two sound clips from the film that add to the absurdity, “strangeness” and “surprise” of the project. “Can You Dig It” itself was inspired lyrically by Tork’s reading of the Tao Te Ching and his own hippie philosophies,<sup>89</sup> and sonically by changes found in Indian and North African music.<sup>90</sup> The track opens with the question, “Something doesn’t change/There is only one/Always changing inside/What does it become?” The Monkees ask this question not only to themselves, but to the listener; as the group moves away from the constraints their producers

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<sup>88</sup> Andy Greene, “The Monkees: Our Life in 15 Songs,” *Rolling Stone*, August 23, 2016, <https://www.rollingstone.com/music/music-lists/the-monkees-our-life-in-15-songs-103726/circle-sky-1968-107791/>.

<sup>89</sup> Sandoval, 164.

<sup>90</sup> Mills, 256.

placed on them, where does this leave their art and the people who appreciate it? The men then turn their questioning solely to the listener via the chorus, which is repeated in the song four times:<sup>91</sup> “Can you dig it? Do you know? Would you care to let it show?” is a direct interrogation regarding the listener’s ability to keep up, appreciate, or “dig” the move away from the “media machine” that previously controlled the way the Monkees were marketed. This concludes the first side of the album and prompts the vinyl listener to turn over the record to the B side in search of answers, scripting a physical engagement with the questions the band poses to their audience.

After “Superstitious (Dialogue from *The Black Cat*),” another brief snippet of film dialogue from the *The Black Cat* (1935), “As We Go Along” is the first full song on the second side of the record. “A bitch to sing,”<sup>92</sup> according to Micky Dolenz, the Carole King and Toni Stern-penned track is the most “Monkee-esque” track on the album. King had composed quite a few previous tracks for the Monkees with Gerry Goffin; “Sometime In The Morning,” “Take A Giant Step,” and most famously, “Pleasant Valley Sunday,” all featured Dolenz on lead vocals. After half an album of tracks unlike any other previously released Monkees songs, we are returned to relative familiarity with a song that wouldn’t sound out of place on the group’s previous album *The Birds, The Bees, and The Monkees*, or even King’s own 1971 masterpiece *Tapestry*. It is certainly the most commercial song on the album (though, ironically, it failed to chart on as the B-side to “Porpoise Song”). Nicholson and the Monkees wisely opt to give the listener a reprieve from the cynicism and intensity of the first half of the album (and perhaps try to prevent them from just turning off the record) by choosing to emphasize “the element of

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<sup>91</sup> Once for each member of the group?

<sup>92</sup> Mills, 259.

emotional suggestion.”<sup>93</sup> Nesmith commented on this track for the Criterion Collection release of the film, stating that “[Bob Rafelson] said, 'You know, the thing is so manic and so hyper and carrying on so much that we need this interlude,' and I thought, 'Why? What are people going to do with an interlude in a movie that's moving at this pace?' I guess people just wanted to linger over the Tiger Beat images.” However, in the context of the soundtrack, I argue that the track still serves the album’s aims of critiquing consumption. Brecht writes in the 1957 essay “On Gestic Music” that

a good way of judging a piece of music with a text is to try out the different attitudes or gesticulations with which the performer ought to deliver the individual sections: politely or angrily, modestly or contemptuously, approvingly or argumentatively, craftily or without calculation [...] In this way one can judge the political value of the musical score.<sup>94</sup>

In “As We Go Along,” it is more effective to shift the generic tone; the didacticism is still there, but it is presented in a more familiar tone for the song’s three minute and fifty three second run time, before diving back into the sound collages and keeping the listener awaiting the next sonic intervention.

The running themes of identity and self-discovery that begin when the listener picks up the record sleeve are continued in the band and the listeners’ attempts, as referenced in “Porpoise Song,” to know what is real (“I can tell by your face/That you’re looking to find a place/To settle your mind, and reveal who you are”). The constructed nature of identity is never fully discarded (“We’ll make up our story as we go along”), but is instead presented as a positive in contrast with the negative “pre-fab” label. The group is advocating for a critical reframing of how both their identity and the listeners’ identities can be celebrated outside of the narrative of capital and consumption through individual control of said narrative. Dolenz’s soft direction to “open your

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<sup>93</sup> Brecht, 36.

<sup>94</sup> Brecht, 105.

eyes, get up off your chair” is a tender call for action; there really is “so much to do in the sunshine” when you “give up your secrets and let down your hair,” moving away from the perils of blind capitalistic consumption and allowing the listener to free themselves from the passivity they have been taught to identify with.

Next up is the sound collage “Dandruff - ?”. The forty second long track features more film dialogue, including a section in which the Monkees are instructed to act like dandruff in Victor Mature’s hair for a commercial; throughout the record, identity is continually tied to marketability and capital. The track leads into the group’s version of Harry Nilsson’s “Daddy’s Song.” The song is notably the most “Brechtian-sounding” track on the record, pulling from Brecht and composer/collaborator Kurt Weill’s common practice of pairing depressing lyrics—in this case, of a boy abandoned by his father—with an upbeat, brassy arrangement. “Daddy’s Song” is similar in form to many of Weill’s compositions, specifically reminiscent of “Tango Ballad” from *The Threepenny Opera*. Originally intended to be a Nesmith-sung track, the song was given to Jones, whose performative Broadway-rock singing style fits the contrast between music and lyrics that makes it extremely difficult to be drawn into the world that the song creates. While not explicitly exploring the themes of identity and consumption in the same way as the other tracks on *Head*, “Daddy’s Song” still serves as a contribution to the general unfamiliarity and “strangeness” of the album overall. This is followed by “Poll,” another sound collage consisting of dialogue snippets, a reprise of “Circle Sky,” and a brief cameo by Frank Zappa, who had previously appeared on the group’s television show.

The sound of a creaking door leads into the final full track, Peter Tork’s “Long Title: Do I Have To Do This All Over Again.” The song was originally intended for the Monkees fifth album, *The Birds, The Bees, and the Monkees*, but took on a new life when it was included on

the *Head* soundtrack. Tork had contributed a few compositions to Monkees projects before “Long Title”; his track “For Pete’s Sake,” a sweet reflection on love, understanding, and freedom, was featured on the group’s third album *Headquarters*, and replaced “(Theme From) *The Monkees*” as the show’s closing theme in its second season. However, Tork’s growing frustration with his lack of power within the “Monkees machine” would be reflected in his songwriting. Looking back on the composition of the track, Tork stated:

The funny thing is that the lyric [to ‘Long Title: Do I Have To Do This All Over Again’] just came to me right out of the air. I was playing those chord changes on the guitar and I just opened my mouth and that’s what popped out. Once I had the first verse, the second verse followed the theme for the first. The weird thing is that the song has been prophetic. I had no idea when I wrote the song that that was going to be my attitude about anything to do with music. It just came out that way. It just fell out of my mouth.<sup>95</sup>

Featuring Buffalo Springfield members Stephen Stills and Dewey Martin on guitar and drums respectively, the track is considered to be one of Tork’s strongest Monkees compositions. For a song that is very upbeat, the lyrics show the exhaustion and anger that the group has in performing their fabricated image. Tork is practically “screaming with frustration”<sup>96</sup> as he asks over and over, “Do I have to do this all over again?/Didn’t I do it right the first time?” However, the questions are not only introspective, but meant for the group’s audience as well. This is clearest in the song’s second verse:

*Can I see my way to know what’s really real?  
They say time can fix things by itself  
I know life’s more than just some kind of deal  
Yeah, why won’t you tell me what all, when my soul comes off the shelf?*

Tork is returning to the theme of the search for truth and reality within representation and self-fashioning. Life is more than the monetary deals made between the group and their producers,

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<sup>95</sup> Sandoval, 163.

<sup>96</sup> Andrew Hickey, *Monkee Music* (United States, 2011), 147.

the group and their fans, and the individual fan and the capitalist system. By “see[ing the] way to know what’s really real,” the Monkees and their fans can have an exchange that moves toward a genuine critical listening of the band’s work.

The album closes with “Swami – Plus Strings,” Nicholson’s final sound collage, which brings the listener back to the beginning of the album. After a recitation of a monologue by the Guru (played in the film by Abraham Sofaer), the track reprises selections from “Opening Ceremony” featuring Dolenz moaning the word “Head,”<sup>97</sup> and the eerie “goodbye, goodbye”s from “Porpoise Song” before suddenly dropping into composer Ken Thorne’s jaunty string quartet instrumental.<sup>98</sup> The album closes with a silly juxtaposition of lines from the movie; after her finger is stung by a snake, Teri Garr’s character Testy True begs Micky, “Quick, suck it before the venom reaches my heart!” Although Testy True’s request in the film is ignored, Nicholson edits in a section from a different part of the film where Micky declares, “Okay, I will.” The sexual joke deflates the grandiosity of the finale and takes us back to the strangeness of the top of the album. The circularity of *Head* speaks to its overall interrogation; as long as the Monkees “have to do this all over again,” the listener is made to as well—unless the two can consciously critique and take action against mindless consumerism.

“It looks like we’ve made it to the end!”

In the *Head* film, a critic, played by Frank Zappa, tells Davy Jones, “you should spend more time on [your music], because the youth of America depends on you to show the way.” The

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<sup>97</sup> According to Micky Dolenz, *Head* (which was originally titled *Changes*, later *Untitled*) got its name partly because Bob Rafelson and Jack Nicholson wanted potential sequels to the film to have the tagline, “From the Producers Who Gave You ‘Head.’”

<sup>98</sup> Thorne also contributed music for the Beatles’ movie *Help!* (Richard Lester, 1965).



Monkees were aware of the influence that they have on their fans, and positioned their album as a mode of presenting their message. It is important to note that Davy Jones' proclamation in "Ditty Diego – War Chant" that "we'll rejoice in never being free!" rings true. The Monkees' attempt to control the production of their own image was ultimately a failure; the band never totally freed themselves from their prefabricated image, and because they essentially killed what was left of their career as a group, nor did they continue the work they set out to do. The film debuted in November of 1968 to widespread negative critical response, and the soundtrack failed to reach higher than #45 on *Billboard's* Top LP's chart.<sup>99</sup> Peter Tork would quit the group at the end of the year, and the Monkees would limp along as a trio until Michael Nesmith left in 1970, leaving Micky Dolenz and Davy Jones to carry on the group's name until their official dissolution in 1971. Though *Head* didn't fully realize its didactic goals in its time, the Monkees succeeded in prompting later conversation about how they and their audience should both resist mindless consumerism and the group's previous manufactured image through critical listening and consumption of their contemporary work. Thinking about *Head* through the lens of alienation allows us to consider not only why the project failed during its time, but why it is worth critically revisiting—not only as part of the Monkees' legacy, but as a key art object of countercultural performance.

Writing for the Criterion Collection release of the film in 2010, critic Chuck Stephens describes *Head* as "archetypically of its time—even as it was way, way ahead of it."<sup>100</sup> This

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<sup>99</sup> Sandoval, 220.

<sup>100</sup> Stephens, Chuck. "Head-Zapoppin'!" The Criterion Collection, November 23, 2010. <https://www.criterion.com/current/posts/1665-head-zapoppin>.

I also cannot help but be reminded of the well-known quotation from *Back To The Future*—"I guess you guys aren't ready for that, yet. But your kids are gonna love it."

comment on the project's ambivalent nature is interesting to consider in conversation with its form. If, as McLuhan suggests, the medium is the message, considering why the "epic album" was both of and ahead of its time may allow us to understand its impact. *Head* was not the first album to utilize either sound collage or gestic music, but it is significant that it was one of the first albums by a widely popular group that served as a deconstruction of its own form.<sup>101</sup> The message of *Head*, simply put, was that the Monkees project as the public had come to know it was over, and this is inseparable from the album's construction; the cynicism of the lyrical content, the explicit critique of corporate production and greed, and the bitterness of the project can be traced from the second the listener sees their face reflected back at them in the shiny album cover. The Monkees of yesterday are gone, so exactly who and what are being consumed?

Brecht writes in "On Gestic Music" that "the musician's attitude to his text, the spokesman's to his report, shows the extent of his political, and so of his human maturity."<sup>102</sup> The Monkees' cynical attitude toward their image, their fans, and the project itself are key to understanding *Head*'s significance as an "epic album." Positioning "the human being" as "the object of inquiry"<sup>103</sup> by estranging the audience member from the work itself allows for critique of both the art/artist and the individual's response and (re)action. By rooting their sonic performance in epic techniques, the Monkees' *Head* is a vehicle that explores the alienation effect in action; from the reflection of the listener's face on the record sleeve itself, to the explicit farewell to their previous image that opens and closes the sonic experience, the Monkees are

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<sup>101</sup> It is interesting to note that the Beatles, the group the Monkees were most frequently compared to, were exploring similar techniques on *The Beatles* (the White Album); *Head* was released a week and a half after the White Album, and, of course, did not do nearly as well critically or commercially speaking.

<sup>102</sup> Brecht, 104.

<sup>103</sup> Brecht, 37.

demonstrating the importance of positioning themselves and the individual fan as “alterable and able to alter”<sup>104</sup> their relationship to the Hollywood “media machine” through a confrontation of the way they consume media.

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<sup>104</sup> Ibid.

## CHAPTER 2: LEANING OUT FOR LOVE: NINA SIMONE'S TO LOVE SOMEBODY AND BLACK-JEWISH SONIC SOLIDARITY

In her 1991 autobiography, *I Put A Spell On You*, Nina Simone said, “It’s always been my aim to stay outside any category. That’s my freedom.”<sup>105</sup> To try to fit the music and artistry of Nina Simone into a singular category—even the nickname of the High Priestess of Soul only touches on one genre of music she played—is not only to do a disservice to her depth and breadth of musical knowledge, but is also a flattening of the interventions Simone brought to twentieth century music on the whole. Beginning as a classical performer, then infusing her style with jazz, folk, blues, R&B, soul, pop, showtunes, and beyond, Simone carved through the constraints of genre and expectations of what a Black female performer was and sounded like—and who else’s art she deliberately and skillfully enters into sonic relationship with. As Daphne A. Brooks writes, in Simone’s music “liberation is thus derived, in part, not only from her more overt protest songs but also from the sheer ideological and generic mobility manifested in her material.”<sup>106</sup> Her reputation as one of the most skillful interpreters of the twentieth century (which is no knock to her equally strong talent in songwriting) was born from purposeful engagement with songwriters across racial, ethnic, and gender barriers in whose art Simone found an opening to not only express herself, but to begin a conversation and mutual exchange of artistry with these creators. This chapter focuses on Nina Simone’s covers of songs by Jewish male songwriters—namely Leonard Cohen and Bob Dylan<sup>107</sup>—with focus given to her 1969

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<sup>105</sup> Nina Simone and Stephen Cleary, *I Put A Spell On You: The Autobiography of Nina Simone* (New York, NY: Pantheon Books, 1992), 90.

<sup>106</sup> Daphne A. Brooks, “Nina Simone's Triple Play.” *Callaloo* 34, no. 1 (2011): 176–97.

<sup>107</sup> Cohen and Dylan both had/have complex relationships to faith and religious practice. I am thinking specifically of Dylan’s born-again Christian phase of the late seventies/early eighties (during which he produced three gospel records), as well as Cohen’s brush with Scientology and his five years at Mt. Baldy Zen Center, where he would

album *To Love Somebody*. Through close reading (and listening) of Simone’s performances of “Suzanne” and “I Shall Be Released,” I aim to elucidate how these collaborations create a new space of cross-ethnic and interfaith sonic solidarity, one that centers “species-essence” and celebration of human connection in performance.

### Covering As Cultural Production

The art of covering (performing and/or recording the work of another artist) is a practice that has been around as long as people have been writing and performing music—thus, unsurprisingly, the reasons why one might cover the work of another artist are nearly infinite. To pay tribute to an artist, engage in an exercise of artistic reinterpretation, hone one’s skills in mimicry, (potentially) capitalize on the popularity of a specific song, and/or transform a work for a new audience are just a few reasons why an artist might take on the art of another artist or group. However, in both critical and colloquial circles, there is a discourse surrounding covers that paints the form as reductive or less authentic than originals. Writing for *Rolling Stone* in 1973, Ralph J. Gleason denotes the “relative absence of ‘cover’ versions of hit songs” as “one of the most interesting developments of the past decade” in connection with “the predominance of the performer/composer.” More specifically, he writes that “the drive for individuality in recent years has prevented most possible instances of this and it’s something to be thankful for.”<sup>108</sup>

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become ordained as a Buddhist monk in 1996. While these parts of their respective journeys are important to acknowledge in studies of their artistry and relationships to identity, I believe that each artist has put it very clearly how they felt about how their Jewish identity and art: in a 1985 television interview, Cohen stated “My songs are always Jewish, they can’t be anything else but Jewish [...] I write out of my own tradition. My heart was circumscribed in the Jewish tradition.” Similarly, during a trip to Israel in 1971, Dylan said “I’m a Jew. It touches my poetry, my life in ways I can’t describe.”

<sup>108</sup> Ralph J. Gleason, “Perspectives: ‘Cover’ Versions and Their Origins,” *Rolling Stone*, June 7, 1973, 7.

Why is this so? Why do we view covers as lesser art than originals, and why is the singer-songwriter who writes and performs their own work afforded more legitimacy than those whose songs are written for them? (It is interesting that, where jazz and blues have “standards” and classical music has “repertoire,” it is pop, rock, and other similar genres of popular music where the often derisive use of the term “cover” is most applied.)

Perhaps this philosophy and its long-term impact on the music industry can partially be blamed on Bob Dylan, who—while far from being the first recording artist to record and perform his own work—was an initial catalyst for the shift in critical thought framing singer-songwriters as auteurs. This can also be partially ascribed to the Beatles and the immense influence of Lennon-McCartney as a powerhouse songwriting duo. John Lennon was quoted multiple times describing how he and Paul McCartney “wanted to be the Goffin-King of England,”<sup>109</sup> aiming for their work in the Beatles to surpass the Brill Building duo’s already legendary success in writing hit singles.<sup>110</sup> Of course, Lennon-McCartney would become one of the most successful songwriting teams of all time, further legitimized by their talent in performing their own work. The personal approach to songwriting associated with the early singer-songwriter era of the sixties also afforded many artists more critical acclaim. Moving beyond simple love songs of the vocal pop era, or overtly political and topical folk, the (seemingly) confessional and personal nature of these artists’ lyrics resonated with audiences seeking more depth in their popular music. In its July 14, 1969 issue, *Newsweek* published an article titled “The Girls—Letting Go,” focusing on the careers of a group of newly successful women singer-songwriters, including Joni

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<sup>109</sup> Jann Wenner, *Lennon Remembers: The Full Rolling Stone Interviews from 1970* (London: Verso, 2001), 47.

<sup>110</sup> Today, Carole King is respected as a singer-songwriter in her own right; it is notable that despite her immense success in writing songs for others, she did not initially break through as a recording artist until the release of her 1971 album, *Tapestry*.

Mitchell, Melanie, and Laura Nyro, among others. The article praised them for their intervention into the male-dominated rock world with “the personalized songs they write, like voyages of self-discovery, brimming with keen observation and startling in the impact of their poetry.”<sup>111</sup> These artists were not only recording and performing their own work, they were recording and performing work that was read as deeply honest, personal, and more authentic than singing the words of others—regardless of if any objective truth was actually being expressed in their artistry.<sup>112</sup>

On December 3, 1965, Bob Dylan held a press conference at KQED in San Francisco in anticipation of the five Bay Area concerts he would give over the next twelve days. Known even at this early stage in his career for mocking the press, Dylan gave a mix of serious and teasing answers to the questions posed to him. When asked about listening to other people’s recordings of his songs, however, he offered what seems to be a moment of sincerity when describing the experience as “more or less like a heavenly kind of thing.”<sup>113</sup> Leonard Cohen would share similar sentiments, stating in a 1991 interview, “I’ve never gotten over the pleasure of someone covering one of my songs. My career has really been quite modest in the world and not many people have done so. Somehow my critical faculties go into a state of suspended animation when I hear

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<sup>111</sup> Hubert Saal, “The Girls—Letting Go,” *Newsweek*, July 14, 1969, 68.

<sup>112</sup> I would be remiss to not point out the gendered difference in the ways critics discuss the work of male singer-songwriters versus the work of women. It is of critical interest that male singer songwriters (such as Bob Dylan and Leonard Cohen) are praised for their masterful ability in storytelling, whereas female singer songwriters are often relegated to the realm of the confessional, as if they only know how to talk about the personal. I do not think it is a coincidence that songs written by women—especially songs associated with the breakdowns of relationships—are seemingly dissected and analyzed in an attempt to find out who the songs are “about,” rather than treated as pieces of potentially fictional storytelling. (See: Joni Mitchell’s “A Case Of You,” Carly Simon’s “You’re So Vain,” etc.) Mitchell summarized the problem in a 1997 *Rolling Stone* interview with Morrissey (after they discussed their shared disdain for the term “female songwriter”): “I put a lot of truth in my songs, and still they’re always poking at me to ferret out hidden meanings. But there aren’t any [...] I don’t think of myself as confessional. That’s a name that was put on me.”

<sup>113</sup> Bob Dylan, “Bob Dylan San Francisco Press Conference 1965,” interview, December 3, 1965, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wPIS257tvoA> (accessed May 30, 2024).

someone's covered one of my tunes. I'm not there to judge it, just to say thank you."<sup>114</sup> This type of "heavenly" connection between artists and those who cover their songs provides a jumping off point for my fascination with covers as a mode of cultural production. I push back against the type of discourse which categorizes the cover song as limiting or requiring less genuine artistry than performing original songs. Regardless of why a covering artist picks a specific track, I suggest that to cover is to inherently engage in an act of sonic collaboration. Covering creates an indelible but specific tether between the "canonical" or original version and its covered interpretation; this connection, I argue, also extends to the artists themselves, placing them in a larger creative relationship (even if unconscious or less deliberate). Thus, the act of covering a song—even when it comes to what we might view as mimicry—is a deliberate, active choice, placing artists in conversation across time, space, genre, audiences, identities, and creative approaches. While the term "cover" may suggest a potential obscuring or hiding of a *prima facie* song or artist, I view the form as one that opens up new lines of creative expression—maybe we should really be calling these types of performances "discovers" for what new insights can be revealed in their devising.

In their chapter on women's covers of Dylan songs in *Highway 61 Revisited: Bob Dylan's Road from Minnesota to the World*, scholars Daphne Brooks and Gayle Wald offer a particular moving metaphor; speaking about Odetta's covers of Dylan's songs, they suggest:

If we think about singing as an embodied act—as air being pressed through the lungs or the diaphragm or the throat, and passing through the mouth and lips—we might think of the cover song as a kind of kiss. A kiss at some distance, to be sure, but a kiss

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<sup>114</sup> Leonard Cohen, *Leonard Cohen on Leonard Cohen: Interviews and Encounters*. Edited by Jeff Burger (Chicago, IL: Chicago Review Press, 2015), 251.



nonetheless, and just as immediate, just as electrifying.<sup>115</sup>

Keeping this metaphor in mind, I am interested in the uniqueness of the Black woman's cover—the Black woman's sonic kiss—and what we can gain from privileging their approach to interpretation. “If we think of Black women as ‘adaptor[s], transcriber[s], orchestrator[s],’ as the kind of ‘arrangers’ that sound theorist Peter Szendy has in mind,” Brooks posits in her seminal text *Liner Notes for the Revolution: The Intellectual Life of Black Feminist Sound*, “we might better recognize the ways that their active forms of listening”—and I would add performing—“both produce and record modern life.”<sup>116</sup> Part of that production of modern life that I am most fascinated with concerns a response to alienation's multifaceted forms I have discussed throughout this project. More specifically, I am interested in the way covers created by Black women create sonic openings which bring us closer back to our species-essence.

### Species-Essence, Erotics, and Religion

As alluded to in my dissertation introduction, it is my contention that typical readings of Marx's explanation of species-essence are too concerned with privileging labor as the key factor that separates humans from animals. Thomas E. Wartenberg aptly points out that “despite the fact that Marx continues to speak of labor as constituting, at least potentially, a process of human fulfillment, in his later work, Marx does not speak of such activity as constitutive of the human

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<sup>115</sup> Daphne Brooks and Gayle Wald, “Women Do Dylan: The Aesthetics and Politics of Dylan Covers,” in *Highway 61 Revisited: Bob Dylan's Road from Minnesota to the World*, ed. Colleen J. Sheehy and Thomas Swiss (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 2009), 176-177.

<sup>116</sup> Daphne A. Brooks, *Liner Notes for the Revolution: The Intellectual Life of Black Feminist Sound* (Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2023), 13.

species.”<sup>117</sup> If we consider that “our species-character lies in our ability to create our lives for ourselves in a conscious manner,”<sup>118</sup> we can consider different paths in combating the alienation from all four elements that Marx names. In “Excerpt-Notes of 1844,” Marx notes that the key to understanding what makes us human is the concept of “common life, a social essence which is no abstract universal power opposed to the individual, but is the essence or nature of every single individual, his own activity, his own life, his own spirit, his own wealth.”<sup>119</sup> This type of communal essence can be constituted through multiple “conscious life activities”; here, I am interested in thinking about species-essence through the erotic and the religious as tools of worldmaking, of social connection, and of expressing that difficult-to-express-thing which makes us uniquely human.

In her key essay “Uses of the Erotic: The Erotic as Power,” Audre Lorde redefines the concept of the erotic, considering its associations with sexuality and desire but ultimately encompassing a broader and more profound source of power, self-knowledge, and human connection. Rejecting the objectification and alienation of true intimacy associated with the pornographic, Lorde focuses on the erotic as a source of deep, creative, and transformative power. The erotic “provid[es] the power which comes from sharing deeply any pursuit with another person. The sharing of joy, whether physical, emotional, psychic, or intellectual, forms a bridge between the sharers which can be the basis for understanding much of what is not shared

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<sup>117</sup> Thomas E. Wartenberg, “‘Species-Being’ and ‘Human Nature’ in Marx,” *Human Studies* 5, no. 1 (December 1982), <https://doi.org/10.1007/bf02127669>, 82.

<sup>118</sup> Ibid.

<sup>119</sup> Karl Marx, *Writings of the Young Marx on Philosophy and Society*, ed. Loyd David Easton and Kurt H. Guddat (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1967), 271-272.

between them, and lessens the threat of their difference.”<sup>120</sup> Considering the erotic as both a personal and political force, Lorde asks the reader to consider how “our erotic knowledge empowers us, becomes a lens through which we scrutinize all aspects of our existence, forcing us to evaluate those aspects honestly in terms of their relative meaning within our lives.”<sup>121</sup> Lorde also aptly names the false dichotomy between the spiritual and the political, which she views as

resulting from an incomplete attention to our erotic knowledge. For the bridge which connects them is formed by the erotic — the sensual — those physical, emotional, and psychic expressions of what is deepest and strongest and richest within each of us, being shared: the passions of love, in its deepest meanings.<sup>122</sup>

Examining Black-Jewish creative collaborations through the erotic is a lens that—while I do not aim to suggest is summative in solving intercommunity issues, nor do I wish to present as fetishistic of this dynamic—opens up a new mode of understanding where we “share the power of each other’s feelings,”<sup>123</sup> reduce the distance between ourselves, and work collectively towards getting back in touch with our species-essence.

It may seem contradictory to include religion as a key element in a Marxist analysis; after all, one of the most-quoted lines from Marx’s vast bibliography comes from the introduction to “A Contribution to the Critique of Hegel’s Philosophy of Right,” in which he states, “Religion is the sigh of the oppressed creature, the heart of a heartless world, and the soul of soulless conditions. It is the opium of the people.”<sup>124</sup> Even though the argument (as suggested by Anton Pannekoek in the 1942 essay “Materialism And Historical Materialism”) that religion is “the

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<sup>120</sup> Audre Lorde, *Sister Outsider: Essays and Speeches* (Berkeley, CA: Crossing Press, 2015), 57.

<sup>121</sup> Ibid.

<sup>122</sup> Ibid, 56.

<sup>123</sup> Ibid, 58.

<sup>124</sup> Karl Marx, *Critique of Hegel’s “Philosophy of Right,”* ed. Joseph O’Malley (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1970), 131.

inherited tradition which keeps the masses in submission to the old powers”<sup>125</sup> holds some weight, I do not argue that a complete abolition or fall of religion is ultimately liberatory. I agree with Pannekoek’s analysis that “historical materialism does not struggle directly against religion; from its higher position it understands and explains religion as a natural phenomenon within definite social forms.”<sup>126</sup> Viewing religion as a cultural system created in response to material conditions has a clear logic. However, I resist his argument (his hope?) that religion will “disappear with the proletarian revolution.” Pannekoek notes that the primary concern of historical materialism “is a question of the relationship of the ideas in our mind to the phenomena which we view as the external world,” and specifies that “man’s position in society is not purely that of an observing being but that of a dynamic force which reacts on his environment and changes it.” Jonathan Wolff and David Leopold’s suggestion that religion is “a response to alienation in material life”<sup>127</sup> is a more useful line of critical thought; for many, the benefits of practicing a religion include connecting aspects of spiritual and social life through shared ritual. I am reminded of the mitzvah of *tikkun olam*—the Jewish concept of “repairing the world” defined by a commitment to improving the world through ethical behavior, social justice, and acts of kindness. I am reminded of the work of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference, the Christian civil rights group whose early work was foregrounded by Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. I am reminded of the multitude of interfaith organizing groups who aim to reduce the distance between those of differing religious practices, engage in productive dialogue, and build coalitions. Though these examples are far from being definitive, I posit that religion

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<sup>125</sup> Anton Pannekoek [as J. Harper], “Materialism And Historical Materialism.” *New Essays* 6, no. 2 (1942). <https://www.marxists.org/archive/pannekoek/1942/materialism.htm>.

<sup>126</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>127</sup> Jonathan Wolff and David Leopold, “Karl Marx,” ed. Edward N Zalta, *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, December 21, 2020, <https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/spr2021/entries/marx/>.

and religious practice, despite being “the ideology of past conditions”—and, like any cultural system, has potential for harm—can be a catalyst for liberatory sociopolitical change.

Furthermore, if we suggest that an additional purpose of religion is grounded in humanity’s search for meaning and further comprehension of our existence, it would follow that aspects of religious practice and ritual also serve as an expression of our species-essence. I do not wish to argue that humans *need* erotics nor religion in order to express species-essence; rather, I am interested in how their use can be productive sites of creativity. For many Jewish and Black artists in the Long Sixties, these intersecting connections to religion, erotics, identity, artistry, and justice allowed for deeper exploration of their own relationships to these subjects, as well as sites for intercultural exchange and solidarity.

### Nina Simone’s Black-Jewish Musical Relations

Simone’s own encounters with Jewishness throughout her life were not superficial, with close collaborations with Jewish artists dating early in her career. Jewish guitarist and musical director Al Schackman would be Simone’s longest and closest collaborator, playing in her band for over forty years. Describing the first time she and Schackman played together, Simone recalled:

Al was right there with me from the first moment, as if we had been playing together all our lives. It was more than that even: it was as if we were one instrument split in two — I, the piano, Al, the guitar. I had never felt so much freedom in playing, knowing that someone knew where I was going and I knew where he was going. It was like telepathy — we couldn’t lose each other.<sup>128</sup>

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<sup>128</sup> Simone and Cleary, *I Put A Spell On You*, 58-59.

Simone also developed a close friendship with Rabbi Shlomo Carlebach in the mid-1950s (a relationship explored in the highly dramatized 2013 Broadway musical *Soul Doctor*) while performing in Greenwich Village. At her headlining debut at Carnegie Hall on April 12, 1963—the culmination of years of work to achieve her childhood dream of becoming the first Black woman classical pianist—Simone performed four Hebrew songs. One of the four songs, “Eretz zavat chalav” (composed by the Israeli musician, choreographer, and educator Eliyahu Gamliel), was featured in her live sets as early as 1961. Notably, more than half of Simone’s studio albums (and many of her live albums) include songs by Jewish songwriters, written by artists such as Richard Rogers, Oscar Hammerstein II, Lorenz Hart, Jerome Kern, George and Ira Gershwin, Benny Goodman, Charles Strouse, Abel Meeropol, Burt Bacharach and Hal David, Bob Dylan, Leonard Cohen, Leonard Bernstein, Barry Mann and Cynthia Weil, and Randy Newman, among others. Simone was proud of the diversity of her musical taste and resisted the label of jazz singer, which she viewed as a racist flattening of her musicianship. In *I Put A Spell On You*, she expressed her frustration:

I didn’t like to be put in a box with other jazz singers, because my musicianship was totally different, and in its own way superior. Calling me a jazz singer was a way of ignoring my musical background because I didn’t fit into white ideas of what a black performer should be. It was a racist thing; ‘If she’s black she must be a jazz singer.’ It diminished me [...] If I had to be called something, it should have been a folk singer, because there was more folk and blues than jazz in my playing.<sup>129</sup>

Simone’s skill at interpretation was not limited to any one genre or composer, and reflected the vastness of her musical interests. Al Schackman commented in the documentary *What Happened, Miss Simone?* that “Nina had a wonderful way of taking a piece of music and not

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<sup>129</sup> Ibid, 69.

interpreting it but metamorphosing it, morphing it into her experience.”<sup>130</sup> Simone’s choice to consistently cover Jewish songs throughout her career—from religious to folk, from Broadway to pop songs—reflected the ways in which she “forged her own form of musical integration and performative agitation, crossing the lines of musical genres as well as, on certain occasions, performative propriety, and defamiliarizing cultural expectations of where black women can and should articulate their voices and musicianship aesthetically and politically.”<sup>131</sup> These encounters of cross-cultural musical exchange set the stage for her thirteenth studio album, 1969’s *To Love Somebody*.

*To Love Somebody* was recorded quickly after the initial success of 1968’s *Nuff Said!*, a live album recorded three days after the assassination of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. The album was a tribute to King—whom she was friends with—and became an unexpected hit; Simone’s next album, 1969’s *Nina Simone and Piano!*, was a commercial failure.<sup>132</sup> Despite this, Simone was experiencing success in England with a single release of her cover of the Bee Gees song “To Love Somebody.” Her label, RCA, wanted to put together an album that would both capitalize on this newfound international interest and reignite domestic sales. What would emerge was *To Love Somebody*, a collection of majority cover songs (the exception being Simone’s composition “Revolution,” written in response to the Beatles song of the same name) that “continued [Simone’s] tradition of finding tunes that expressed her feelings about the social conditions of the day.”<sup>133</sup> Songs written by Bob Dylan make up a third of the album; the other songwriters

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<sup>130</sup> Liz Garbus, dir., *What Happened, Miss Simone?* (Netflix, 2015), <https://www.netflix.com/title/70308063>.

<sup>131</sup> Brooks, “Nina Simone’s Triple Play,” 179.

<sup>132</sup> Sylvia Hampton and David Nathan, *Nina Simone: Break Down & Let It All Out* (London: Sanctuary, 2004), 61.

<sup>133</sup> *Ibid*, 209.

were Leonard Cohen, Barry and Robin Gibb, and Pete Seeger. The album art for *To Love Somebody* features an illustration of a white man and a light skinned Black woman sitting together on a sofa, their hands clasped together. Before the listener even puts on the album, the design itself suggests an engagement with interracial exchange of love and solidarity—a fitting visual backdrop as Simone takes us down into the world of Leonard Cohen’s “Suzanne.”

### “Suzanne Holds The Mirror”

Cohen’s tribute to dancer Suzanne Verdal began as a poem, “Suzanne Takes You Down,” published in his 1966 poetry collection *Parasites of Heaven*. He would describe the text as “a matter of reportage,”<sup>134</sup> aiming to accurately capture imagery of his life in Montreal and the (ultimately platonic) activities he shared with Verdal. As the lyrics describe, Cohen would visit Verdal in her loft apartment by the St. Lawrence River in Montreal, where she served him “Constant Comment tea, which has little bits of oranges in it.”<sup>135</sup> The two would walk by the harbor, past the chapel of Notre-Dame-de-Bon-Secours—known as the Sailors’ Church—where the statue of the Virgin Mary known as Our Lady of the Harbour sits on top.<sup>136</sup> And, true to life despite the implication of the text—and Cohen’s reputation as a philanderer—Verdal and Cohen were never lovers. In a 1994 BBC interview, Cohen said, “the boats were going by, and I touched her perfect body with my mind, because there was no other opportunity. There was no other way that you could touch her perfect body under those circumstances.”<sup>137</sup> Still early in his

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<sup>134</sup> Cohen on Cohen, 286.

<sup>135</sup> Leonard Cohen, interview by Kevin Howlett, *Leonard Cohen: Tower of Song*, BBC Radio One. August 7, 1994.

<sup>136</sup> Freedman, 113.

<sup>137</sup> Cohen, *Leonard Cohen: Tower of Song*.



songwriting career (though well established in Canada as a poet and novelist), “Suzanne” would first be popularized by close friend and collaborator Judy Collins. Recalling her friendship with Cohen for the American Songwriter website, Collins said:

Leonard came to see me. His words were, “I can’t sing, I can’t play the guitar and I don’t know if this is a song.” Then he sang me “Suzanne.” He also sang “Dress Rehearsal Rag.” I loved them both. I had almost finished my album, *In My Life*, and [label executive] Jac Holzman said, “You know, it’s terrific. But it really needs something.” And the something was Leonard. I recorded both songs.<sup>138</sup>

Collins was one of Cohen’s earliest and biggest champions; already a folk star in her own right, she invited him to perform with her in the Greenwich Village folk scene and helped him overcome his stage fright.<sup>139</sup> When it came time to record his debut album, 1967’s *Songs of Leonard Cohen*, Cohen would open the record with his own rendition of the song that brought him into the public eye as a musician.

Cohen’s descending fingerpicked guitar riff, centered around an E chord, opens the album with weight and melancholy. The simplicity of the arpeggiation coupled with the repetition of the musical phrase rolls in a way that evokes the movement of water—fitting for a song that centers river and sea imagery in its lyrics. The intimacy of his deep, yet slightly nasal vocals is underscored by the moody guitar, with lush strings and female vocal harmonies that drift in from on high. (Interestingly, Cohen was disappointed with many aspects of production of *Songs of Leonard Cohen*—helmed by producer John Simon—including the orchestration on “Suzanne, which he felt was over the top.<sup>140</sup>) The melody and rhythm are simple, but Cohen’s delivery is rich and sensual, as if he’s inviting the listener to have their earthly, spiritual, erotic,

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<sup>138</sup> Paul Zollo, “Behind the Album: Leonard Cohen, ‘Songs of Leonard Cohen,’” *American Songwriter*, March 3, 2021, <https://americansongwriter.com/behind-the-album-leonard-cohen-songs-of-leonard-cohen/>.

<sup>139</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>140</sup> Sylvie Simmons, “Quiet Revolution,” *Mojo*, March 2012, 84.

ultimately *human* desires fed by his muse. In fact, Cohen may have put it best during his introduction to the song while performing at the third Isle of Wight Festival in 1970—“it’s not that I want to be coy standing up here, you know, but I know that it’s late and—I don’t know, maybe this is good music to make love to.”<sup>141</sup>

Like Cohen, Simone also opens her album with “Suzanne”; however, the tones of her piano immediately suggest a lighter, more joyous approach than Cohen’s rather introspective recording. Her riff, featuring an arpeggiated B major chord punctuated by a B octave ornament, is lighter, almost buoyant. As indicated in the *To Love Somebody* liner notes, “there is a constant barrage of new musical concepts and expressions in her piano playing. The instrument comes alive. It flowers.”<sup>142</sup> Simone plays the phrase twice before the percussion and vocals kick in, and instantly transports the listener into her groove. Overall, the energy of the track is more playful than Cohen’s recording, with a more active sexiness resonating in her vocal delivery. She stretches words and phrases, allowing some to linger and build tension while coloring others with ad-libs. Distinctly, Simone ends each chorus placing the word “mind” on a high B natural, the tonic note ringing out brightly over Al Schackman’s acoustic rhythm guitar and a shuffling, percussive backbeat provided by Charles D. Alias. She throws in little variations on the rhythm, syncopating her vocals and ornamenting the melody with improvisations on Cohen’s base melody. While Cohen is pulling the listener down, sonically sinking us beneath his wisdom like a stone, Simone lifts us upward.

The second-person point of view in the lyrics creates a sense of direct address to the listener, evoking a type of intimacy that blurs the line between observer and participant. (As AV

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<sup>141</sup> Murray Lerner, dir., *Leonard Cohen: Live at the Isle of Wight 1970*, DVD (Sony Music Entertainment’s Legacy Recordings, 2009).

<sup>142</sup> Claude Hall, liner notes to *To Love Somebody*, by Nina Simone. RCA Victor, 1969. Vinyl LP.

Club journalist Josha Alston points out, it also makes it easy for artists of any gender to cover the song.<sup>143</sup>) However, where Cohen still seems to have a level of distance (reflective of the longing and desire expressed in the lyrics), Simone’s interpretation feels much more embodied. Praising her talent for “rendering complex female characters” in her songs, Alston puts “Suzanne” in conversation with Simone’s composition “Four Women.” Where Simone becomes Aunt Sarah, Saffronia, Sweet Thing, and Peaches to analyze the legacies of slavery and complexities of Black womanhood, she similarly embodies Suzanne to explore intertwining spiritual and physical desire. As Alston says, “she breathes such life into [Suzanne], she might as well be Simone’s own creation.”<sup>144</sup> Returning to Brooks and Wald’s metaphor of the cover song as a kiss, we might say that Simone kisses Cohen and with his words “passing through her body with each exhalation,”<sup>145</sup> becomes the character of Suzanne.

The lyrics begin with an introduction to Suzanne, who takes the narrator down “to a place by the river” where “you can hear the boats go by, you can spend the night forever.” If Cohen sounds like he’s standing in Suzanne’s doorway, tentatively waiting to enter, Simone is actively inviting the listener in, ready to begin the intimate ritual of “fee[ding] you tea and oranges that come all the way from China.” The use of water imagery throughout the song suggests a deeper, more fluid connection—one that moves across temporalities between the sacred and the secular through shared knowledge and connection. Simone’s vocals ebb and flow like the river which “answer[s] that you’ve always been her lover,” the warmth of her delivery accented by the soft groove of the rhythm guitar and drum kit. When the narrator wants to travel with her (and

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<sup>143</sup> Joshua Alston, “In ‘Suzanne,’ Nina Simone Claims Leonard Cohen’s Witchy Woman as Her Own,” AV Club, March 27, 2015, <https://www.avclub.com/in-suzanne-nina-simone-claims-leonard-cohen-s-witchy-1798277990>.

<sup>144</sup> Ibid.

<sup>145</sup> Brooks and Wald, 177.

“want[s] to travel blind”), Simone explains that the trust in their relationship is inherent because the narrator “has touched her perfect body with [their] mind.” Cohen’s delivery of this line feels self-reflexive, as if the “you” in “Suzanne” is more himself than an outside listener. On the other hand, Simone’s declarations shift subjectivity and places herself-as-Suzanne at the heart of the storytelling. Simone herself becomes the muse, leading the narrator through a journey that intertwines the spiritual with the sensual; “you,” the listener—potentially even Cohen himself—can trust her, as she touches our bodies with her musical mind.

As we move away from the mystical world of Suzanne’s Montreal apartment and take to the shoreline, the focus of the lyrics shifts to a meditation on the figure of Jesus Christ.<sup>146</sup> As Harry Freedman details in *Leonard Cohen: The Mystical Roots of Genius*, “Christianity [held] a spiritual attraction for Cohen” that was not in conflict with his Jewish identity.<sup>147</sup> Cohen drew upon a variety of belief systems in his work, and saw different faiths as “part of a greater unified whole, a unity [Cohen] devoted his life to seeking.”<sup>148</sup> Though still making reference to the miracle of his walk across the Sea of Galilee, Jesus is described in the more earthly role of a sailor, observing mankind from his “lonely wooden tower.” It is only when Jesus knows “for certain only drowning men could see him” that he offers the pronouncement that “all men will be sailors until the sea shall free them.” Here, water is not only a symbol of knowledge and

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<sup>146</sup> In an interview published in *Leonard Cohen: In His Own Words*, Cohen said, “I’m very fond of Jesus Christ. He may be the most beautiful guy who ever walked the face of this earth. Any guy who said ‘Blessed are the poor. Blessed are the meek’ has got to be a figure of unparalleled generosity and insight and madness... A man who declared himself to stand among the thieves, the prostitutes and the homeless. His position cannot be comprehended. It is an inhuman generosity. A generosity that would overthrow the world if it was embraced because nothing could weather that compassion. I’m not trying to alter the Jewish view of Jesus Christ. But to me, in spite of what I know about the history of legal Christianity, the figure of the man has touched me.”

<sup>147</sup> Freedman, 115.

<sup>148</sup> *Ibid*, 116.

connection, but of transcendence from suffering (a metaphor which is expanded upon in the third verse). Like Suzanne, the narrator wants to travel with Jesus, and has also had their “perfect body” touched by his mind. Cohen’s vocal delivery of this verse is much like the rest of the song—even, grounded, still sensual and sensitive. On the other hand, Simone, the High Priestess of Soul, kicks the energy up a notch and takes her listeners to church. Though “Suzanne” is slower in tempo on the whole than a typical praise break one might hear in a Black church, Simone’s delivery of the second verse brings forth a similar feeling of exaltation. Tapping into her roots as the daughter of a preacher, Simone approaches Cohen’s lyrics as if she’s giving testimony. This energy is captured well on the studio recording but is even more evident in live performances, during which Simone comes out from behind her piano and dances, points to the audience, and preaches directly to the listener.<sup>149</sup> As the lyrics use the same language to describe Suzanne and Jesus Christ as something physically untouchable, it places them as similarly disidentifiable subjects of desire.

While Cohen described the third verse as exploring “the compassionate attention that a man looks to receive from woman,”<sup>150</sup> I expand beyond the more simple, gendered dynamic he names to examine a more universal pursuit of love and meaning as a defining element of the human experience. With the third verse we return to Montreal as Suzanne takes the narrator’s hand and leads them to the river,<sup>151</sup> revising their initial site of connection. The “rags and

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<sup>149</sup> Simone’s October 4th, 1969 live performance of the song at UMass Amherst best captures this energy. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MAWnWDhkBUE>

<sup>150</sup> Ira Bruce Nadel, *Various Positions: A Life of Leonard Cohen* (London: Bloomsbury, 1996), 125.

<sup>151</sup> I cannot help but be reminded of (the Reverend) Al Green’s “Take Me To The River” for its similar exploration of erotics and religious imagery.

feathers from Salvation Army counters”<sup>152</sup> Suzanne wears combined symbols of both the spiritual and the earthly; while the “rags” evoke imagery of Jesus’s human appearance, the “feathers” suggest an angelic, transcendent figure. Suzanne is now an almost sacred figure, inverting Cohen’s description of Jesus as “almost human.” It is at the river that Suzanne “shows you where to look among the garbage and the flowers,” inviting the narrator (and the listener) to find meaning and transcendence in everyday experiences and human connections—in other words, to allow these things to bring out our species-essence. This verse is the emotional core of Simone’s recording; the energy from the previous verse increases as her vocals soar. She emphasizes “the heroes in the seaweed” and the “children in the morning” who are “leaning out for love”; the power of her delivery reflects a desire to resolve that longing, that reaching toward something greater on a perpetual quest for emotional and spiritual fulfillment. It is through Suzanne holding the mirror up that the narrator is able to not only see the world reflected back, but to see the role of human connection in it. This is what drives the narrator’s desire to travel with her, to travel blind; Suzanne is the vessel through which “species-essence” flows.

In a 1985 interview, Cohen stated that “the basic function of popular music is to create an environment for courting, lovemaking, and doing the dishes. It’s useful because it addresses the heart in the midst of all these activities, and it will always be useful in this very important way.”<sup>153</sup> These simple activities Cohen names are, I suggest, perhaps the most basic examples of the ways we tap into elements of the “communal life” that we are so often alienated from. Simone’s interpretation of “Suzanne” creates the perfect score by intertwining her spiritual and

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<sup>152</sup> Very proletarian; also very *Saint Joan of the Stockyards*-esque.

<sup>153</sup> Leonard Cohen, *Leonard Cohen on Leonard Cohen: Interviews and Encounters*, ed. Jeff Burger (Chicago, IL: Chicago Review Press, 2015), 173.

erotic desires with Cohen's, offering the listener an interfaith blending of the sacred with the everyday.

### "I See My Light Come Shining"

The impact that blues, gospel, and Black folk music has had on Bob Dylan throughout his life and career has been well documented by Dylan scholars and music historians alike.<sup>154</sup> Less commonly discussed are the ways in which Black women's sound was specifically transformative and influential on his own approaches to music making, though Daphne Brooks and Gayle Wald offer important insights in their essay on the aesthetics and politics of Dylan covers, referenced throughout this chapter. There has been some attention given to Dylan's eroticized relationship to Black women by journalist David Yaffe; writing for *Slate* in 2006, he described "a long line of black female singers who have besotted Dylan since his youth," claiming that "Dylan has long worshiped at the shrine of the black female voice, a source of musical inspiration, erotic obsession, and even religious conversion."<sup>155</sup> In a 1978 interview with *Playboy*, Dylan said, "the first thing that turned me on to folk singing was Odetta."<sup>156</sup> He was drawn to the "vital and personal" nature of her music, and immediately traded his electric guitar for a flat-top Gibson acoustic guitar—the same model she played. He instantly set out to learn her songs, which became his entry point into the world of folk performance. Dylan was similarly

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<sup>154</sup> See, for example, Colleen J. Sheehy and Thomas Swiss, *Highway 61 Revisited: Bob Dylan's Road from Minnesota to the World* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2009); Dylan's autobiography, *Chronicles: Volume One* (New York, NY: Simon and Schuster, 2004); Ari Katzora, *Stairway to Paradise: Jews, Blacks, and the American Music Revolution* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2023).

<sup>155</sup> David Yaffe, "What Does Bob Dylan Want with Alicia Keys?," *Slate Magazine*, August 11, 2006, <https://slate.com/culture/2006/08/what-does-bob-dylan-want-with-alicia-keys.html>.

<sup>156</sup> Ron Rosenbaum, "Playboy Interview: Bob Dylan," *Playboy*, March 1978, <https://www.playboy.com/magazine/articles/1978/03/playboy-interview-bob-dylan/>.

moved by the music of Mavis Staples and the Staple Singers. Recalling the first time he heard their gospel music as a teenager for AARP’s website in 2015, Dylan detailed how much Staples’ artistry moved him:

One night I was lying in bed and listening to the radio. I think it was a station out of Shreveport, Louisiana. I wasn’t sure where Louisiana was either. I remember listening to the Staple Singers’ “Uncloudy Day.” And it was the most mysterious thing I’d ever heard. It was like the fog rolling in. I heard it again, maybe the next night, and its mystery had even deepened. What was that? How do you make that? It just went through me like my body was invisible. What is that? A tremolo guitar? What’s a tremolo guitar? I had no idea, I’d never seen one. And what kind of clapping is that? And that singer is pulling things out of my soul that I never knew were there. After hearing “Uncloudy Day” for the second time, I don’t think I could even sleep that night. I knew these Staple Singers were different than any other gospel group. But who were they anyway? [...] I managed to get down to the Twin Cities and get my hands on an LP of the Staple Singers, and one of the songs on it was “Uncloudy Day.” And I’m like, “Man!” I looked at the cover and studied it, like people used to do with covers of records. I knew who Mavis was without having to be told. I knew it was she who was singing the lead part. [...] Mavis looked to be about the same age as me in her picture. Her singing just knocked me out. I listened to the Staple Singers a lot. Certainly more than any other gospel group. I like spiritual songs. They struck me as truthful and serious. They brought me down to earth and they lifted me up all in the same moment. And Mavis was a great singer — deep and mysterious. And even at the young age, I felt that life itself was a mystery.<sup>157</sup>

Dylan’s anecdote, though lengthy, is noteworthy for the earnestness of the connection he felt with Staples through the power of her musicality even “without having to be told” who she was. His crush on Staples—highly significant in that it led to the two developing a romantic and musical relationship years later<sup>158</sup>—was rooted in the ways in which her artistry opened up new

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<sup>157</sup> Robert Love, “Bob Dylan Uncut,” AARP, 2015, <https://www.aarp.org/entertainment/celebrities/info-2015/bob-dylan-magazine-interview-history.html?intcmp=AE-ENT-CEL-NXT-BDYL>.

One of my favorite Dylan anecdotes not mentioned in this article comes from a 1962 recording session, during which he found himself flirting with blues legend Victoria Spivey in an attempt to convince her to let him play harmonica for her record. “Moms, you want a little white boy on one of your records?” he sweetly asked. She told him they’d get together.

<sup>158</sup> In a 2015 interview with AARP, Dylan said of Staples, “So I had seen this picture of the Staple Singers. And I said to myself, “You know, one day you’ll be standing there with your arm around that girl.” I remember thinking that. Ten years later, there I was — with my arm around her. But it felt so natural. Felt like I’d been there before, many times. Well I was, in my mind.”



paths of musical discovery and understanding for him. I am interested in the “truthful and serious” threads that Dylan picked up in the gospel of Mavis Staples, as well as how he found influence in the “vital and personal” nature of Odetta’s folk. As evidenced by Dylan’s relationship to the Black women artists he found significant in his youth, Black women’s sound not only is innovative in its own right, but opens space for others to create in conversation with their sonic interventions. I am interested in reading (or rather, listening to) Simone’s cover of “I Shall Be Released” as the fulcrum of both Dylan and Simone’s cross-ethnic musical lineages. As Dylan took influence from gospel and folk in creating his rock hymn, Simone repoliticizes the song by infusing it with the sound of the Black church and a more urgent political weight, particularly resonant in the context of the civil rights movement.

Dylan and Simone’s relationship began in the early sixties, during Simone’s time in Greenwich Village performing at the Village Gate. Paying tribute to Simone during his speech at the 2015 MusiCares gala, where he was honored as their Person of the Year, Dylan said:

She was an artist I definitely looked up to. She recorded some of my songs that she learned directly from me, sitting in a dressing room. She was an overwhelming artist, piano player and singer. Very strong woman, very outspoken and dynamite to see perform. That she was recording my songs validated everything that I was about. Nina was the kind of artist that I loved and admired.<sup>159</sup>

Simone spoke equally as highly of Dylan throughout her career. In an interview with *Ebony* in 1969, Simone spoke of her frustration with white musicians who capitalized on the creative efforts of Black artists by imitating them without giving them credit. The one artist she viewed as an exception was Bob Dylan, offering the following praise: “He has his own thing, and I respect him and I really admire him [...] The man is his own man, has his own statement to make and

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<sup>159</sup> Rolling Stone, “Read Bob Dylan’s Complete, Riveting Musicares Speech,” Rolling Stone, June 25, 2018, <https://www.rollingstone.com/music/music-news/read-bob-dylans-complete-riveting-musicares-speech-240728/>.

makes it. He's a universal poet. He's not trying to be white or colored. The man is just a great poet. And I admire him very much."<sup>160</sup> *To Love Somebody* was not the first time Simone had covered Dylan's work; she had previously recorded "The Ballad of Hollis Brown" for her 1966 album *Let It All Out*, and often included the song in her live performances. For *To Love Somebody*, Simone selected three Dylan songs: "I Shall Be Released," "Just Like Tom Thumb's Blues," and "The Times They Are A-Changin'." In the liner notes for *To Love Somebody*, journalist Claude Hall states that through Simone's interpretation, "Just Like Tom Thumb's Blues" "becomes a clear story, perhaps for the first time to be understood in full-depth."<sup>161</sup> In addition, he notes that her take on "The Times They Are A-Changin'" "graphically dramatizes the history of our times [...] emerg[ing] as a plea for all mankind, bound to shock, bound to innervate, bound to capture not only your interest but your fire, especially when the funeralistic organ thunders down the hallway of your mind."<sup>162</sup> But it is on "I Shall Be Released," I argue, that Simone most effectively takes up the work of Bob Dylan to reflect and critique the conditions of alienation and the struggle for freedom. I suggest that Simone's transformation of the song can be seen as an articulation of a longing for a restoration of species-essence that Black people had/have been specifically alienated from.

"I Shall Be Released" was written in 1967 during Dylan's period of recuperation after crashing his motorcycle in Woodstock, New York the July before. That year, four members of Dylan's backing band, the Hawks—Robbie Robertson, Rick Danko, Richard Manuel and Garth Hudson, who, alongside ex-Hawk Levon Helm, would soon be reborn as The Band—joined

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<sup>160</sup> Phyl Garland, "Nina Simone: High Priestess of Soul," *Ebony*, August 1969, <https://www.ninasimone.com/1960-1969/legacy-1969/>.

<sup>161</sup> Hall.

<sup>162</sup> Ibid.

Dylan in upstate New York and took up residence in a West Saugerties house they dubbed Big Pink. Between March and October 1967, Dylan would record about thirty new compositions with The Band. Despite his reclusiveness during this era, the Basement Tapes sessions proved to be one of the most prolific periods of Dylan's songwriting career. Dylan was no stranger to the civil rights anthem, but he took a less explicit route in writing "I Shall Be Released." Moving away from the wordy imagery associated with his albums *Highway 61 Revisited* and *Blonde on Blonde*, Dylan's lyrics to "I Shall Be Released" are shorter and much more simple (though still just as evocative and moving as ever). Historians cite Johnny Cash's "Folsom Prison Blues" and Brendan Behan's "The Banks of the Royal Canal"—covers of which were also recorded during the Basement Tapes sessions—as potential influences on Dylan's own "prison song."<sup>163</sup> Put simply, "I Shall Be Released" is about a prisoner yearning to be set free. While there is critical debate about the deeper meanings of the metaphor—is the song about a literal release from prison? Is it about finding spiritual freedom in salvation? Is it about an old man finding freedom in death?—the themes of longing for freedom and redemption has made the song a powerful anthem for those seeking change and liberation, as well as one of the most covered Dylan songs of all time.<sup>164</sup>

The two primary takes of "I Shall Be Released" recorded during the Basement Tapes sessions would not be made commercially available until the release of *The Bootleg Series Volumes 1–3* in 1991. (The Band would release one of the earliest covers on their debut studio album, *Music from Big Pink*, in July 1968.) The first take is the rougher of the two; Dylan

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<sup>163</sup> Clinton Heylin, *Revolution in the Air: The Songs of Bob Dylan 1957-1973* (Chicago, IL: Chicago Review Press, 2009), 348.

<sup>164</sup> As of this writing, there are over 220 versions of "I Shall Be Released" cataloged on SecondHandSongs, a site which maintains a comprehensive archive of cover songs.

mumbles, Richard Manuel's harmonies are a little uncertain, and the lyrics are clearly still in development. But the instrumental backbone of layered piano and electric organ is present and emotionally evocative; the group would add new colors on the second take with Robbie Robertson's electric guitar and a more confident three-part harmony in the chorus. The lyrics are also much more set in stone, matching those included in Dylan's officially published sheet music.<sup>165</sup> Despite the fact that the Basement Tapes tracks were later circulated as demos for interested recording artists, the second take of "I Shall Be Released" sounds remarkably complete as is. We do not know if Simone heard Dylan's original recordings through RCA or made the decision to cover the song based on The Band's version (or any of the other covers that were commercially released before her own, for that matter); regardless, Simone's "pure and unadulterated" gospel takes us out of the Big Pink basement and into the Movement, with a revelatory take on Dylan that "thunders in the mind" and "stirs the soul."<sup>166</sup>

Opening the second side of *To Love Somebody*, Simone notably shifts the time signature of "I Shall Be Released" to better support her vocal embellishments and improvisations on Dylan's melody. While his recording is in 4/4, Simone's version is in 12/8. Her use of a gospel blues rhythm allows for expressive phrasing and more emotional delivery. The combination of piano and electric organ—with Weldon Irvine's Hammond B3 replacing Garth Hudson's Lowrey—is supported by Gene Perla's dynamic bassline and accented by Charles D. Alias on drum kit. As the song begins, Simone's band sounds like they are playing from the church pulpit, waiting for Simone to start her testimony. "They say everything can be replaced," Simone begins almost conversationally. "They say every distance is not near." Though material things might be

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<sup>165</sup> Bob Dylan, *I Shall Be Released* (New York, NY: Warner Bros. Publications Inc., 1970). Sheet music.

<sup>166</sup> Hall.

replaceable, the spiritual and emotional impacts of many experiences are not so easily overcome; thus, the narrator cannot forget the individuals who played a role in this imprisonment. When Simone “remember[s] every face of every man who put [her] here,” she imbues the line with the metaphorical figures from her protest songs and beyond. She (and the listener) remembers “Old Jim Crow” from the song of the same name, “Mr. Backlash” of “Backlash Blues,” and “The Man” (the slang term referring to authority) who have created the systems of oppression that keep Black people alienated and disenfranchised. Despite these circumstances—and buoyed by the rich harmonies provided by Doris Willingham and Viridia Crawford—Simone offers a message of faith and determination in the chorus. She sees her light come shining “from the west unto the east,” the symbol of liberation transcending the geographical and temporal limits of the cell. Whereas Dylan’s vocal delivery is almost a plea, Simone has no doubt that “any day now, [she] *shall* be released.”

In the second verse, the narrator addresses the dichotomous beliefs that while “every man needs protection” (whether physical, emotional, or spiritual), “every man must fall.” If we are unable to meet our basic need for protection (perhaps from the injustices and violence of society itself), the inevitability of failure or downfall under the current system is inherent. In Dylan’s version, the narrator imagines a transcended vision of the self, beyond the barriers of the prison—he plaintively sings, “yet I swear I see my reflection somewhere so high above this wall.” Simone includes a subtle but distinct lyric change; she sees her reflection “somewhere inside these walls,” conveying a more grounded and introspective point of view. Her spiritual reflection and political awakening are found within the confines of the struggle, not from a distanced vantage point. Another shift occurs in the third verse, which focuses on “a man in this lonely crowd” who “swears he’s not to blame.” The lonely crowd can be read as a metaphor for

humanity itself—despite physical proximity, we grow farther apart as our alienation from one another and our species-essence increases. Both Dylan and Simone hear the man’s cries (Dylan hears him “shouting,” while Simone observes a more raw “hollering”); however, whereas the man in Dylan’s lyrics cries out that “he’s been framed,” Simone repeats that “he’s not to blame.” The phrase “he’s been framed” implies an individual type of injustice, the culmination of a conspiracy or plot to make a singular person look guilty. Simone changing this to “he’s not to blame” broadens the scope of the man’s pain and protest to an assertion of innocence in the face of mass societal injustice. The man as an individual is not at fault for the failures of society, and his “hollering” and depth of pain reflect the impact of this systemic violence. In the context of “I Shall Be Released” as a “prison song,” I am immediately reminded of the impact of mass incarceration on Black communities, and of the fact that in the 1960s, Black men were five times as likely to be incarcerated than whites.<sup>167</sup> Though Simone as the narrator is alienated from the man by the metaphorical walls of the prison, by systemic racism, it is in the final chorus that she sonically reaches out in an attempt to shorten the distance between them. We might read the final moments of the song as an offering of connection between prison cells, or as a nondenominational call to prayer. The chorus is at its most energetic the third time around, with Irvine’s organ shining in the mix like the beacon toward redemption of Dylan’s lyrics. In the *ritardando* at the end of the song, the fervor and tension increases, culminating in a collective cathartic declaration of the final line. Simone’s immense vocal power, bordering on a wail, evokes Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.’s final speech, given on April 3, 1968 (the night before his assassination) in Memphis, Tennessee:

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<sup>167</sup> Bruce Drake, “Incarceration Gap Widens between Whites and Blacks,” Pew Research Center, September 6, 2013, <https://www.pewresearch.org/short-reads/2013/09/06/incarceration-gap-between-whites-and-blacks-widens/>.

Well, I don't know what will happen now. We've got some difficult days ahead. But it really doesn't matter with me now, because I've been to the mountaintop. And I don't mind. Like anybody, I would like to live a long life. Longevity has its place. But I'm not concerned about that now. I just want to do God's will. And He's allowed me to go up to the mountain. And I've looked over, and I've seen the Promised Land. I may not get there with you, but I want you to know tonight, that we, as a people, will get to the promised land. And so I'm happy tonight. I'm not worried about anything, I'm not fearing any man. Mine eyes have seen the glory of the coming of the Lord!<sup>168</sup>

Simone, like her recently deceased friend and comrade King, knows that despite our struggles, we will reach the world to come where alienation, violence, and injustice can be overcome. She conveys both the pain of alienation from our species-essence and the strength of the will to supersede it. On the last repetition of "I shall be released," Simone, Willingham, and Crawford's combined vocals call forth a demand, a rally, a desperate cry, and a celebration in one; though all sing the word "I," the sentiment espoused really is, *we* shall be released.

### "Any Day Now"

As this chapter has aimed to demonstrate, Simone's deliberate covers of songs by Jewish artists on *To Love Somebody* and throughout her career served to bridge diverse experiences and foster a mutual creative language rooted in shared struggles and aspirations. The exercise of considering the cover specifically as a space of cultural production and exchange has proven useful in broadening my own understanding of the long history of Black-Jewish relations, musical and otherwise. The analysis of the tracks I have covered here (no pun intended) are meant to serve as a suggestion on how to read and re-read relationships between songwriters and covering performers not only as "links on the chain," as Pete Seeger might put it, but perhaps as part of a more intimate exchange. The confluence of Cohen, Dylan, and Simone's artistry and the

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<sup>168</sup> Martin Luther King Jr., "I've Been to the Mountaintop" (speech, Memphis, TN, April 3, 1963), American Rhetoric, <https://www.americanrhetoric.com/speeches/mlkivebeentothemountaintop.htm>.

historical context of broader Black-Jewish relations underscores the transformative power of music as a unifying force, reminding us of the enduring potential for cross-cultural solidarity. “Don’t put nothing in it unless you feel it,” Simone declares in the beginning of an outtake of “I Shall Be Released.” This powerful directive embodies the essence of her sonic kiss to Cohen and Dylan, providing an entry point into a musical path towards understanding, empathy, and a reconnection to our species-essence.



### CHAPTER 3: ALIENATION AND ITS DOUBLES: PHIL OCHS, ARTISTRY, AND IDENTITY

On March 27, 1970, folk singer Phil Ochs confused his audience at Carnegie Hall when he took to the stage clad in a gold lamé Nudie suit.<sup>169</sup> Initially reacting with laughter at the singer's appearance (wildly differing from the pedestrian streetwear of collared shirts and shabby sport jackets he usually wore for concerts), the humor of the crowd quickly waned as Ochs launched into playing a range of covers. Concertgoers expecting renditions of the topical and satirical songs that Ochs had built his career on heckled and booed the singer in between his renditions of songs written by Merle Haggard, Buddy Holly, and Elvis Presley. After playing a rearranged version of his own "Tape From California," Ochs finally offered his baffled audience the following explanation of his new appearance and song choices:

As you know, I died in Chicago. I lost my life and went to heaven because I was very good and I sang very lyrical songs. And I got to talk to God and he said, 'Well it's all over here on Earth and you can have a couple of days left, what do you want to do? You can go back and be anybody you want.' So I thought in my inner soul, who do I want to be? I came up with the answer—the guy I wanted to be was the man who was the King of Pop, the King of Music, the King of Show Business, Elvis Presley. And if there's any hope for this, for America, it lies in a revolution. And if there's any hope for a revolution in America, it lies in getting Elvis Presley to become Che Guevara. Because if you don't do that, you're just beating your head against the wall—or the cop down the street will be beating your head against the wall. And that's Elvis Presley, you know, so the thing is we've gotta discover where he is. He, I think, is the ultimate American artist, he has the root of American music. I've lost my voice now, but I'm gonna try to sing him anyway.

Despite the explanation offered by Ochs, audience reactions at the two Carnegie Hall shows that night ranged from mixed to mostly unreceptive. After catcalling and jeering, a called-in bomb threat that cut the first show short, and Carnegie Hall temporarily cutting the power during the

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<sup>169</sup> Nudie Suits, originally made by Hollywood tailor and sartorial star Nudie Cohn, are decorative, often rhinestone-covered, suits associated with country music stars of the 1950s through the 1970s. Cohn made scores of custom suits for stars, and the outfits became status symbols.

second midnight show, the Carnegie Hall shows were considered a marked failure in Ochs's career.

Ochs's career as a "singing journalist," folk musician, and anti-war activist was shaped by his desire to combine his politics with his artistry in his search for identity. After a difficult childhood marked by familial dysfunction, Ochs became a noteworthy figure in the Greenwich Village early sixties folk scene. His songs, such as "I Ain't Marching Anymore," "Changes," and "There But For Fortune," would become anthemic to a generation searching for meaning amidst the chaos of the Vietnam War. His work was covered by artists ranging from folk contemporaries and friends such as Pete Seeger and Joan Baez, to pop superstars, including Cher. Though he never reached the levels of success of friend and sometimes rival Bob Dylan, Ochs's work was highly influential during his short life and in the decades since his death.

In this chapter, I examine the life and career of folk singer and activist Phil Ochs through a framework which I have named *doubling*. The performative action of doubling involves an attempt to perform and embody traits, personality, and identity of others—which I theorize as others-as-self—in relation to, and in connection with, the self. Beyond simple copying, imitation, or mimesis—all key terms and points of debate in the fields of theatre and performance studies—I argue that doubling has an uncanniness which lies in its inherent failure to fully achieve the creation of the self-as-other. Informed by analysis of the archetypal symbols of the double and doppelganger, as well as additional theory foregrounded by Antonin Artaud, Gilles Deleuze, and Félix Guattari, this framework is based on three premises:

1. The act of doubling concerns an attempt to perform the *other-as-self*, not a perfect replication of the other.

2. The uncanniness of doubling lies not in a perfect recreation, but instead in its *failure* to fully embody the other-as-self and become the self-as-other.
3. Doubling is a performative act that both creates an affective state of alienation *and* functions as an attempt to escape it.

I look at Ochs's attempts to double other musicians—namely Bob Dylan and Elvis Presley—throughout his career, as well as the creation of the John Butler Train persona that arose during the period of mental instability in the months before he took his own life in 1976. Considering Ochs's career through this framework, I argue, allows for a deeper understanding of his performances, writing, and relationality to his peers and influences, as well as providing a much-needed academic lens into his place in folk and countercultural performance history. In addition, the theorization of the double broadens understanding of performance and identity, allowing us to understand these more deeply as both separate and connected ideas and entities.

In order to explore doubling as a framework, I first turn to the symbol of the double as both a locus of theoretical and performative grounding and as a place of departure. Much has been written about the double's endurance as an archetype; to give a comprehensive overview of its literary, psychological, and artistic symbolism is beyond the scope of this chapter. Instead, I provide a survey of the theoretical analyses and interventions surrounding the symbol that have proven most useful for the development of my theory. The double has appeared in literary and visual art for centuries; its roots as a symbol of uncanny otherness can be found in cultures worldwide, from fairy tales to religious myth. Fascination with and fear of the symbol seems to be tied to something primal, a tradition that has been theorized to predate written record.<sup>170</sup> The double was later formalized in German linguistic tradition as the *doppelgänger*, with the first use

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<sup>170</sup> Gordon E. Slethaug, "Doubles and Doubling in the Arts." *Journal of the Fantastic in the Arts* 6, no. 2/3 (22/23) (1994): 100–106. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/43308211>.

of the word attributed to Jean Paul in his 1796 novel *Siebenkäs*. His use of the word—originally spelled *doppeltgänger* and defined in one of the novel’s footnotes—refers to “the name for people who see themselves”<sup>171</sup>; what is noteworthy about Paul’s definition is its suggestion of self-recognition outside of one’s own body. Despite having tools like mirrors, photography, video, artistic representations, and other modes of capturing images of the body at our disposal today, it is impossible for us to *truly* see ourselves—we cannot with our own eyes fully see our own bodies the same way we look at others. So what does it mean to “see” the self outside of the self? While *Siebenkäs* features what we might call a more traditional use of the doppelgänger trope—the novel features two characters who are described as looking exactly alike—I am more interested in pushing the archetype beyond similarities in appearance, considering what it means to “see the self” in a non-literal double. In premises detailed in *The Doppelgänger: Double Visions in German Literature*; Andrew J. Webber writes of the doppelgänger as “an inveterate performer of identity,” potentially representing “the performative character of the subject. Selfhood as a metaphysical given is abandoned here to a process of enactments of identity always mediated by the other self.”<sup>172</sup> The “other self,” which exists in the doppelgänger literary tradition, is a concept I expand on for this theory as the “other-as-self.”

The “other-as-self” refers to the framing in which the self views the person or personas they are attempting to double. The other’s aspects of personality, style and physical appearance, expressions and gestures, and modes of creative expression, among other elements that contribute to identity, resonate with the self as things to emulate in their own self-expression.

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<sup>171</sup> Paul Fleming, *The Pleasures of Abandonment: Jean Paul and the Life of Humor* (Würzburg: Königshausen & Neumann, 2006), 126, footnote 13.

<sup>172</sup> Andrew J. Webber, *The Doppelgänger: Double Visions in German Literature* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2003), 3.

Though one might think of performances like those by Elvis Presley impersonators in Las Vegas, who make their living imitating and attempting to perfectly replicate Presley's performance style and mannerisms, this type of mimicry is not, I argue, a true attempt at doubling. Impersonators are doing a job, engaging in a type of extended "make believe" which commodifies the self—or rather, the performance of another—as a product. Beyond this type of mimicry (which, while involved and requiring effort, is very simple in its performative aims), there is a deeper need being fulfilled by the attempt at doubling the other. In "The Return of Negation: The Doppelgänger in Freud's "The 'Uncanny,'""" Dimitris Vardoulakis recontextualizes the figure of the doppelgänger as "a form of relationality that is not only a condition of possibility, but also a reflection of and on that condition," positioning the symbol as "aligned to a notion of modernity as interruption."<sup>173</sup> I suggest that the "other-as-self" interrupts the separation of the self and the other; because the individual is not enough, the other-as-self—which does not exist—needs to be incorporated into the self to fulfill that lack. The attempt to incorporate the other into the self through a performance of the imagined other—the other-as-self—is what I describe as "doubling."

Of course, the act of doubling does not end in the self becoming an exact copy of the person being doubled. (On the physical level, this is obviously unachievable.) Unlike the symbolic tradition of the doppelgänger—which involves a perfect, though uncanny, double of the self—the strangeness of the act of doubling comes from the *attempt* to become the other, an impossible task. Doubling becomes a performance of liminality, neither the self nor the other fully embodied, and leads to the performance of the "self-as-other." My distinction of the self-as-other as different from the core self resonates with Webber's description of the doppelgänger as

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<sup>173</sup> Dimitris Vardoulakis, "The Return of Negation: The Doppelgänger in Freud's "The "Uncanny,'""" *SubStance* 35, no. 2 (2006), 100.

“a prime figure of the uncanny precisely in that it is an original resident in the ‘Heim’ and embodying a constitutive, domestic split in subjectivity.”<sup>174</sup> This split, this interruption, this disruption of subjectivity and subjecthood, operates in the spaces between the self and other, and between the other-as-self and the self-as-other. Attempting to reach the self-as-other resonates with Charles Deleuze and Felix Guattari’s explorations of the body without organs in *A*

*Thousand Plateaus*:

You never reach the Body without Organs, you can't reach it, you are forever attaining it, it is a limit. People ask, So what is this BwO?—But you're already on it, scurrying like a vermin, groping like a blind person, or running like a lunatic: desert traveler and nomad of the steppes. On it we sleep, live our waking lives, fight—fight and are fought—seek our place, experience untold happiness and fabulous defeats; on it we penetrate and are penetrated; on it we love [...] The BwO: it is already under way the moment the body has had enough of organs and wants to slough them off, or loses them.<sup>175</sup>

Like the Body without Organs, the self-as other, the *true* double, is unattainable. Continuing to borrow Deleuze and Guattari’s language, as the desiring-machine strives to reach the potentiality of the Body without Organs, the desires of the self operate, intersect, and morph in this liminality, forming new assemblages of identity—like the other-as-self—through the performative mode of doubling. The performance of the other-as-self “echoes, reiterates, distorts, parodies, dictates, impedes, and dumbfounds,” as Webber writes, creating new openings and possibilities of subjectivity. In other words,

Turning my focus to the performative aspect of doubling, I also utilize theory foregrounded by Antonin Artaud, with attention given to the 1938 essay collection *The Theatre and its Double*. Arguing that theatre and reality are metaphysical doubles of one another, Artaud details the power of mimetic gesture, positing that

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<sup>174</sup> Webber, 8.

<sup>175</sup> Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, trans. Brian Massumi (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 2014), 150.

theatre can reinstruct those who have forgotten the communicative power or magic mimicry of gesture, because a gesture contains its own energy, and there are still human beings in theatre to reveal the power of these gestures. To practise art is to deprive a gesture of its reverberations throughout the anatomy, whereas these reverberations, if the gesture is made in the conditions and with the force required, impels the anatomy and, through it, the whole personality to adopt attitudes that correspond to that gesture.<sup>176</sup>

While Artaud argues for a rejection of superficial, representational performances that dampen the power of these gestures, he advocates for a return to a more authentic and powerful form of expression. He suggests that this can be achieved through a theater that utilizes the raw primality of these gestures which impact an individual's entire being, influencing their attitudes and shaping their subjectivity through performance. I maintain a focus on the power of performative gesture as one that shapes subjectivity in my theorization, shifting from the narrowness of mimesis to consider the broader interruptions caused by these gestures. Artaud hints at this potentiality in the first Theatre of Cruelty manifesto, where he writes that theatre

ought to pursue a re-examination not only of all aspects of an objective, descriptive outside world, but also all aspects of an inner world, that is to say man viewed metaphysically, by every means at its disposal [...] Neither Humour, Poetry nor Imagination mean anything unless they re-examine man organically through anarchic destruction, his ideas on reality and his poetic position in reality generating stupendous flights of forms constituting the whole show.<sup>177</sup>

These questions of internal and external positionality that Artaud raises help shape my metaphorical framework in analyzing Ochs's life and art; I move beyond Artaud's boundaries of the stage, and consider how performance of subjectivity is shaped by an affective state of alienation. The recent biography *That Man in the Gold Lamé Suit: Phil Ochs's Search for Self*, by Jim Bowers, focuses on aspects of self psychology—namely twinning and alter ego—to provide a lens into aspects of Ochs's continual quest to find meaning and belonging as both an

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<sup>176</sup> Antonin Artaud, *The Theatre and Its Double*, trans. Victor Corti (Richmond: Alma Classics, 2013), 58.

<sup>177</sup> *Ibid.*, 65.

artist and as a person. However, whereas Bowers’s analysis mostly emerges from examining Ochs’s childhood traumas as the root cause of the “deficiencies in the development of the self”<sup>178</sup>—and I concur that this does play a part—I argue that this is just one factor that impacted Ochs’s life and career.

As discussed in previous chapters, the ways in which I examine alienation are multifaceted, and refer to historical-materialist based readings of alienation under capitalism as well as the affective feeling of isolation and otherness. This sparks a desire to resolve the overwhelming sense of estrangement; as Deleuze and Guattari see desire as a productive force that continually seeks connection, I suggest that the urge or impulse to double is driven by a desire to connect the self back to our true species-essence. However—ironically—this sense of alienation is reinscribed in doubling; the fragmentation of an individual’s identity is embodied, and the attempt to escape the feeling of being estranged from one’s true subjectivity ultimately reinscribes a sense of emptiness and lack of fulfillment. Fritz Pappenheim writes in *The Alienation of Modern Man: An Interpretation Based on Marx and Tönnies* that

There is something uncanny in the condition of man when he has become a stranger to himself; but it is a fate which shapes the lives of many of us. We seem to be caught in a frightening contradiction. In order to assert ourselves as individuals, we relate only to those phases of reality which seem to promote the attainment of our objectives and we remain divorced from the rest of it. But the further we drive this separation, the deeper grows the rift within ourselves.<sup>179</sup>

Soviet psychologist Aleksei Nikolayevich Leont’ev, who was one of the forefathers of Marxist psychological theory, described the key principle of the approach as an understanding of consciousness as “a product of those special – that is, social – relations into which people enter

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<sup>178</sup> Jim Bowers, *That Man in the Gold Lamé Suit: Phil Ochs’s Search for Self* (Mount Pleasant, SC: Palmetto Publishing, 2023), 15.

<sup>179</sup> Fritz Pappenheim, *The Alienation of Modern Man: An Interpretation Based on Marx and Tönnies* (New York, NY: Monthly Review Press, 1968), 12-13.



and which are realized only by means of their brains, their organs of feeling, and their organs of action.”<sup>180</sup> If we view our social relations as being directed shaped by our material reality, it is no wonder that uncanniness bleeds into these types of performances; perhaps doubling can be thought of as a performative type of coping mechanism or way of understanding and processing the intersections of these states of alienation—after all, as Artaud declares in “Van Gogh: the Man Suicided By Society,” “no one has ever written, painted, sculpted, modeled, built, or invented except literally to get out of hell.”<sup>181</sup> Unlike Bowers, I suggest that the “hell” Ochs endured was caused not only by his psychological struggles, but that his very consciousness was shaped by the ongoing hell of the reality in which he lived. In other words, understanding Ochs’s attempt to double, to resist alienation by disrupting subjectivity and relationality themselves, must be approached from a dialectical materialist understanding.

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<sup>180</sup> A. N. Leont’ev, *Activity, Consciousness, and Personality* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1978), 19.

<sup>181</sup> Antonin Artaud, *Antonin Artaud, Selected Writings*, ed. Susan Sontag (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1988), 497.

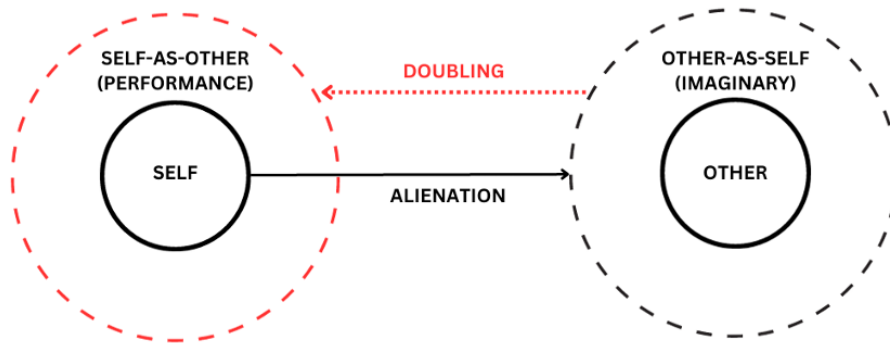


Figure 1: Diagram of doubling theory.

It is also important to note that the extended metaphor of doubling is not meant to serve a diagnostic purpose, nor is it meant to be dismissive of the very real traumas and mental illness that Ochs suffered from. The intersection of the personal and the political in Ochs's performative doublings is, of course, tied to his struggles with his mental health throughout his life. However, to reduce Ochs's doubling to a symptom of mental illness is an overly simplistic reading of his complicated life. Returning to Vardoulakis's theorization of the doppelganger as a form of relationality, I focus my analysis on Ochs's relationships with whom he attempted to double, and the impact on his writings and performances. In other words, I am much more interested in what new understandings of otherness, selfhood, and the spaces between are revealed through Ochs's life and work.

Philip David Ochs was born in El Paso, Texas in 1940, into a middle-class Jewish family. His father, Jacob Ochs, known as Jack, was born into the Polish Jewish immigrant community in

Manhattan; at the age of four, his family moved to Rockaway Beach in Queens. Gertrude Phin, Ochs's mother, grew up in an affluent family in Edinburgh, Scotland.<sup>182</sup> Jack Ochs attended the University of Virginia as a pre-medical student; however, he was not admitted to medical school in the United States due to the fact that universities had hit their quotas for the maximum number of Jewish students accepted.<sup>183</sup> Jack Ochs applied to medical schools overseas, and would move to Scotland to attend the University of Edinburgh. There he met Gertrude through her younger brother Harry Phin, his best friend at school. The two were married in 1936 and their first child, Phil's older sister Sonia (nicknamed Sonny) was born the next year. In 1938, the family moved back to the United States, settling in Manhattan; less than two years later, Jack Ochs would be drafted into the army, prompting the family's move to a Civilian Conservation Corps camp in Columbus, New Mexico.<sup>184</sup> Gertrude, who was already disenchanted with the new life she was living in the United States, refused to have her next child in what she viewed as subpar medical facilities in Columbus; the closest hospital that met her standards was in El Paso, where she traveled to give birth to Phil alone.<sup>185</sup> Ochs's younger brother Michael was born in 1943 in Austin, Texas, shortly before Jack was sent overseas.

Ochs's early life was, to use the language of his sister Sonny, dysfunctional.<sup>186</sup> Gertrude was both distant and controlling, and resentful of her life and family; Jack suffered from bipolar

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<sup>182</sup> Michael Schumacher, *There But for Fortune: The Life of Phil Ochs* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 2018), 14.

<sup>183</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>184</sup> *Ibid.*, 11.

<sup>185</sup> *Ibid.*, 12.

<sup>186</sup> Sonny Ochs, interview with Tori Nelson, "Legacy: Interview with Sonny Ochs," *God Help The Troubadour*, podcast audio, April 9, 2021, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jOg1NIBaRkY>.

disorder (then known as manic depressive disorder), which affected his ability to hold down hospital jobs and caused the family to move frequently. Their relationship was extremely distant, and this coldness was mirrored in their relationships with Sonny, Phil, and Michael. Ochs was also naturally shy, found it difficult to make and maintain friendships, and was easily distracted at school. Though the Ochs family was Jewish, they were unobservant; Sonny Ochs said in a 2011 interview, “We knew we were Jews, but nobody went to shul. The religiosity of my mother’s shul in Edinburgh was determined by which Rabbi they could get.”<sup>187</sup> However, Phil and Michael still faced prejudice and bullying. Michael Ochs noted in the 2010 documentary *Phil Ochs: There But For Fortune*, “We went to the local school, which was primarily agricultural, and I believe we were the only two Jews in the school. And so we learned what it was like to be Jewish. Oh, you’re Jewish... [mimes a punch] pow! So we learned how to fight.”<sup>188</sup>

These combined early encounters with otherness and isolation led Ochs to seek solace in the movies, a habit that continued into his adulthood. He found connection with John Wayne’s heroes in western films—the cowboys who not only faced dangerous obstacles, but were able to overcome them to ensure justice and triumph. In an interview recorded by *Broadside*, Ochs named the importance of Wayne’s symbolic impact not only to himself but “to America in terms of image, in terms of the conception of America [...] when America needed heroes for World War Two, John Wayne was very convenient because he was there, he was a great man. No

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<sup>187</sup> Susie Davidson, “Friday Film: Phil Ochs Finally Gets His Biopic,” *The Forward*, February 19, 2011, <https://forward.com/schmooze/135541/friday-film-phil-ochs-finally-gets-his-biopic/>.

<sup>188</sup> Kenneth Bowser, dir., *Phil Ochs: There But For Fortune* (DVD; First Run Features, 2010).

matter what you think of his politics, he happens to be a great screen figure.”<sup>189</sup> Ochs was also a fan of James Dean, and was affected by the young rebellious actor’s death in 1955. He would go on to eulogize the young rebel actor in song on the 1970 track “Jim Dean of Indiana”; his description of Dean’s role in *Rebel Without A Cause* (1955) as “a boy without a home, torn with no tomorrow/reaching out to touch someone, a stranger in the shadow” may as well have been a description of himself at that age. However, the figure from Ochs’s adolescence that would have perhaps the greatest impact on both his career and sense of identity was Elvis Presley.

Ochs’s admiration of Presley began in high school; he described himself during this period as

an American nebbish, being formed by societal forces, completely captivated by movies, the whole James Dean-Marlon Brando trip. I was about sixteen. My brother was heavy into rhythm and blues. I was into country and western music. I memorized all those songs, my music teacher being the radio. There was Webb Pierce, Ray Price, Johnny Cash, Faron Young. And then I really fell for the Elvis image.<sup>190</sup>

The sexuality and danger of the rebellious King, along with his working class roots, appealed to Ochs, and Presley became one of his idols. He would hang posters of Presley and Wayne in his bedroom and dormitory, and eventually created a collage of Presley photos that was displayed in the living room of one of his New York apartments. As Ochs would note to the *New York Times*, to him “Elvis [was] America and that music is the music of America.”<sup>191</sup> These masculine, ultra-American celebrities were the basis for Ochs’s understanding of effective symbolic performance—the archetypes of the king, the rebel, and the cowboy hero were the basis for many Ochs performances to come.

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<sup>189</sup> Phil Ochs, *Broadside Ballads, Vol. 11: Interviews With Phil Ochs*, Paul Kaplan, 1976, Folkways Records, vinyl recording.

<sup>190</sup> Bruce Pollock, *In Their Own Words* (New York, NY: Macmillan, 1975), 54-55.

<sup>191</sup> John S. Wilson, “Phil Ochs Fans Are Won Over By Rock,” *The New York Times*, April 3, 1970.

As Jack moved from hospital job to hospital job, the Ochs family relocated from Far Rockaway, Queens to upstate New York, before eventually settling in Columbus, Ohio. During this period, Ochs's skills on the clarinet began to develop; not only was he talented enough to study and play with the Capital University Conservatory of Music orchestra, he became principal soloist at the age of sixteen.<sup>192</sup> Ochs viewed films and his music as his way of “escaping, probably, from some psychological problems.”<sup>193</sup> After Gertrude sought to transfer Phil and Michael out of the small country school they attended (which was not up to her educational standards), Phil attended the Staunton Military Academy in Virginia for his junior and senior year. It was at Staunton that Ochs began working out; he had never been satisfied with his physical appearance—he was uncomfortable with his lack of athleticism, ears that stuck out, and his need for eyeglasses—and aimed to gain muscle and strength like the screen and music stars he admired. He began slicking his hair back to look more like Elvis.<sup>194</sup> Shortly after his graduation, he even underwent plastic surgery on his nose, getting physically closer to the image of the ideal American archetype he was so focused on.

In 1958 Ochs enrolled at the Ohio State University, and—after a disappointing first semester and a brief diversion to Florida, which led to an arrest for vagrancy—decided to major in journalism. He became more involved with organizing on campus and wrote for multiple student papers, eventually forming his own newspaper, called *The Word*, which published material too controversial for the other campus publications.<sup>195</sup> It was also as an undergraduate

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<sup>192</sup> Schumacher, 26.

<sup>193</sup> *Phil Ochs: There But For Fortune*.

<sup>194</sup> Mark Brend, *American Troubadours: Groundbreaking Singer-Songwriters of the '60s* (San Francisco, CA: Backbeat Books, 2001), 101.

<sup>195</sup> Schumacher, 37.

when Ochs became aware of the impact and power of folk music, his growing interest twinning with the expansion of his political awareness. The folk musical revival, which began in the 1940s and hit its zenith in the early 1960s, was a period of renewed interest and popularization of traditional folk music. During this era, folklorists and music enthusiasts embarked on collecting and recording traditional folk songs in an effort to preserve the musical heritages of different regions and cultures. The folk revival coincided with various social and political movements, including the civil rights movement, and anti-war protesting. Folk music, with its emphasis on storytelling and social commentary, became a powerful medium for expressing dissent and advocating for social change. Artists like Woody Guthrie, Pete Seeger, Joan Baez, Judy Collins, and—most famously—a young Bob Dylan played significant roles in popularizing the genre. Ochs became familiar with the music of Guthrie and Seeger during his time at Ohio State through his friendship and collaborations with fellow student and musician Jim Glover. Glover, who would later achieve success as half of the folk music duo Jim and Jean (and would introduce Ochs to his future wife, Alice) was the one who first taught Ochs how to play guitar. He would begin his songwriting and folk performance career with Glover in a short-lived duo called the Sundowners (né the Singing Socialists) before moving to Greenwich Village in 1962. Ochs viewed the role of the folk singer as one with great responsibility. Writing for *Broadside* magazine in March 1963 in an article called “The Need For Topical Music,” Ochs argued that

the folksingers of today must face up to a great challenge in their music. Folk music is an idiom that deals with realities and not just realities of the past as some would assert. More than ever there is an urgent need for Americans to look deeply into themselves and their actions and musical poetry is perhaps the most effective mirror available.<sup>196</sup>

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<sup>196</sup> Phil Ochs, “The Need For Topical Music,” *Broadside*, March 1963, 2.

For Ochs, it was necessary to write and perform topical music, even at risk of “alienating” potential audience members, to document or archive political movements and struggles and to bring messages to as broad an audience as possible. Positioned as one who re-performs the truth, he urged his audiences to critically examine their positions and identities through the “mirror” of his performances.

As Ochs was establishing himself as a “singing journalist” in the local Greenwich Village coffeehouse scene and at the 1963 and 1964 Newport Folk Festivals, comparisons to Dylan began almost immediately. These comments didn’t emerge out of nowhere; as Dylan’s influence and popularity quickly grew, imitations were actively being performed by many other contemporary musicians within and beyond the Greenwich Village folk circles.<sup>197</sup> Ochs himself immediately recognized Dylan’s innate talent and influence; quoted in the January 9, 1974 issue of *Melody Maker*, Ochs reflected, “I met [Dylan] the first week in New York when I got here. I’d looked around the folk circuit and found a lot of amateurs, so I was thinking it would be easy pickings and I might be THE guy. But it didn’t happen. As soon as I saw Dylan I knew he was THE guy.”<sup>198</sup> However, Ochs aimed to avoid the trap of Dylan mimicry; in a 1966 article entitled “Phil Ochs -- His Own Man Now,” he described the need he felt to distance himself from his peer:

Because what I had to do, to learn my craft, was to keep an island under myself. I had to protect myself against Dylan because Dylan was so great and so stylistic that there had to be a distance there. I could see myself falling, so I kept a distance. Then some people came along, other writers, through Dylan, some were bad Dylan but a few were

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<sup>197</sup> One notable example is John Lennon; see the Greek fisherman’s cap Lennon wore after Dylan popularized the style on the cover of his 1962 self-titled debut album, his use of harmonica on Beatles tracks which emulated Dylan’s sonic style, the Beatles’ citations of Dylan as a major influence on their own, etc.

<sup>198</sup> Chris Charlesworth, “Home Thoughts Of Phil Ochs,” *Melody Maker*, January 9, 1974.



legitimate talents, formed through Dylan but themselves.<sup>199</sup>

Some of Ochs's early songs did seem to be influenced by Dylan's topics and thematic choices; consider Dylan's "Song To Woody" from his first album *Bob Dylan* (1962) in conversation with Ochs's "Bound for Glory" (titled after Guthrie's autobiographical novel of the same name) from his own debut, *All the News That's Fit to Sing* (1964). Both Dylan and Ochs were heavily influenced by and had immense personal and political respect for Guthrie; one of Dylan's first actions upon arriving in New York in 1961 was to visit Guthrie in the hospital where he was suffering from Huntington's disease (Ochs too would visit Guthrie), and Ochs was a contributor to the August 1963 issue of the Marxist magazine *Mainstream* which included essays focused on Guthrie's life and work.<sup>200</sup> It is only fitting, then, to find both songwriters—"Woody's children," as Pete Seeger described many singers in the folk revival who followed in Guthrie's footsteps—paying homage to his legacy on their debut albums. The similarity in lyrics is notable; "Song To Woody" begins with Dylan "walking a road other men have gone down" and "seeing [Guthrie's] world of people and things," while Ochs's lyrics open with a reflection on how Guthrie himself "walked all over his own growing land" and "saw all the people that needed to be seen." Each song is exceedingly earnest in its tribute to Guthrie's life and work. But whereas Dylan is content to end "Song To Woody" introspectively and humbly conceding that none of his hardships compare to Guthrie's, Ochs is much more interested in ending on an active note. He observes that "so few remember what [Guthrie] was fighting for," and asks his listeners, "why sing the songs and forget about the aim?/He wrote them for a reason, why not sing them for the same?" Not content to idly reminisce, Ochs's lyrics echo the famed labor expression "Don't mourn—

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<sup>199</sup> Ralph J. Gleason, "Phil Ochs -- His Own Man Now," *San Francisco Chronicle*, June 29, 1966.

<sup>200</sup> Ronald D. Cohen, *Woody Guthrie: Writing America's Songs* (New York, NY: Routledge, 2012), 64.

organize!”—associated with songwriter and activist Joe Hill—and set the stage for how his approach to political songwriting would develop.

Ochs viewed Dylan as a peer, an inspiration, and a major force in the folk revival with whom he found both competition and collaboration. His admiration of Dylan was effusive—though often critical—and overt. In an interview entitled “Ochs: It Ain’t Me, Babe,” published in the August 12, 1965 edition of *The Village Voice*, Ochs pushed back against journalists and folk enthusiasts pitting himself against Dylan in the wake of Dylan’s controversial Newport set:

I’d like to straighten out a couple of other misconceptions that have been floating around. Dylan and I are not in competition with each other; we’re in competition with our individual creative processes, trying to stimulate our minds to produce the greatest amount of quality we can. Of course, I hope someday to write ten times better than Dylan, but I also sincerely hope that Dylan will someday write ten times better than Dylan. We’re trying to grow if you’ll only give us room.<sup>201</sup>

However, Ochs had a sense of humor about his proximity to Dylan, often working it into his writing, interviews, and performances. “Bobby Dylan Record,” recorded for a 1963 demo session, includes lyrics in which Ochs tells an ex-lover that he doesn’t mind that she’s completely broken his heart—just as long as she gives him back his Dylan record. Writing for *Cavalier* in December 1965, Ochs describes a “new game called Album Titles, which you can apply to your favorite or unfavorite folk performer.”<sup>202</sup> The game pokes fun at Ochs’s contemporaries in the Greenwich Village folk scene (as well as himself), and involves coming up with albums that satirize their previous releases and public personas. Ochs references Dylan’s second album—1963’s *The Freewheelin’ Bob Dylan*—and proposes that a cover featuring “a

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<sup>201</sup> Phil Ochs, “Ochs: It Ain’t Me, Babe,” *The Village Voice*, August 12, 1965.

<sup>202</sup> Phil Ochs, “That Was The Year That Weren’t,” *Cavalier*, December 1965, 39.

dungareed half-smiling, long-haired boy walking down a snow-covered street with Susie [*sic*] Rotolo” (Dylan’s then-girlfriend) should be titled “The Free-Stealin’ Phil Ochs.”<sup>203</sup>

More humorous takes on the Dylan rivalry would come in the performances captured on the 1966 album *Phil Ochs In Concert*. In the introduction to “Canons of Christianity,” Ochs jokes about the voice of God coming to him and announcing, “Ochs, wake up, this is God here, over.” Ochs responds, “I said, ‘you’re putting me on, of course, Dylan,’” the tongue-in-cheek comparison to the divine speaking to Dylan’s lionization within the folk movement. Before singing “Ring of Revolution,” Ochs paints a picture of the current American political scene as a cinematic landscape:

This is a fictional song, a cinematic song. You’ve got to picture this mansion—on the top of a hill, housing the last of the idle rich, the last of the bourgeois, the last of the folk singers, as they are being encircled tighter and tighter by the ringing of revolution. All the people on the inside spiritually resemble Charles Laughton, and all the people on the outside physically resemble Lee Marvin. As a matter of fact, this song is so cinematic that it’s been made into a movie directed by Otto Preminger. It stars Senator Carl Hayden as Ho Chi Minh, Frank Sinatra plays Fidel Castro, Ronald Reagan plays George Murphy, John Wayne plays Lyndon Johnson, and Lyndon Johnson plays God. I play Bobby Dylan—a young Bobby Dylan.

Notably, it is deliberately the young, still overtly-political Dylan that Ochs compares himself to; by the recording of the performances captured on *Phil Ochs In Concert*, Dylan had already shocked audiences at the 1965 Newport Folk Festival by going electric, and had begun to abandon the more overtly political persona associated with the early stages of his career. While the Dylan of “The Times They Are A-Changin’” was shifting into a new era, Ochs was more interested in “playing” the Dylan he was originally inspired by.

Despite these more deliberate references Ochs would make in the early stages of his career, the push and pull between deliberately drawing inspiration from Dylan and resisting

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<sup>203</sup> Ibid.

comparison would become a challenge. This was also complicated by the fact that Ochs and Dylan were sometimes-friends; while they had grown fairly close in 1963 and Ochs consistently defended Dylan in print, their approaches to songwriting and artistic philosophies were seemingly at odds. Ochs wanted to hear—and create—“work that is so good poetically, so exciting musically, so original in arrangement and execution that it can turn me inside out with the communication of feeling,” stating, “It is perhaps the foundation of my career to utilize the highest levels of artistic social realism to carry topical songs to that point and beyond. Can an artist be satisfied with any less of a goal?”<sup>204</sup> Dylan, on the other hand, did not have faith in the topical song as an effective mode of communication, and wanted to push his own artistry further, eventually telling Ochs, “The stuff you’re writing is bullshit, because politics is bullshit. It’s all unreal. The only thing that’s real is inside you. Your feelings. Just look at the world you’re writing about and you’ll see that you’re wasting your time. The world is, well... it’s just absurd.”<sup>205</sup> Dylan was not shy about harshly critiquing his fellow songwriters, In one of Ochs’s many interviews with *Broadside*, even as he discusses how Dylan’s critiques have upset him, his adoration and need to impress him still bleeds through:

I’m quite sure Dylan despises what I write. I’ve talked to him about this at some length—and I get the impression he can’t accept what I’m doing. Because in his mind it’s political and therefore bullshit. Because I’m not writing about myself and my deepest emotions, he feels. And I’m not facing the thing as brutally honestly as he is — in other words, he thinks that I could be much more honest with myself. And this is the disturbing thing. Here’s the man I most respect in the world, Dylan, telling me that — “hey, your writing is bullshit”, essentially. And I keep on writing it, after him telling me this. And I have to search myself all the time, ask myself what am I doing, am I kidding myself, is Dylan kidding himself about politics, and the more I think about it the more I’m convinced we’re both valid. I think Dylan's telling me I’m writing the wrong thing has been a help to me in a sense, because it’s made me look at myself in the deepest way — because, here’s one of my main sources attacking me and I have to look at myself and question

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<sup>204</sup> Phil Ochs, “Topical Songs and Folksinging, 1965,” *Sing Out!*, September 1965.

<sup>205</sup> Schumacher, 83.

what my reasons are for writing these songs. Am I a complete phony as he thinks — is that true? “<sup>206</sup>

Ochs saw in Dylan the other-as-self he most wanted to impress and embody; the accusation of phoniness coming from a friend who had previously said of his work, “I just can't keep up with Phil. And he just keeps getting better and better and better”<sup>207</sup> was particularly hurtful. The fear of inauthenticity would become a theme that haunted his more introspective lyrics and poetry. Though eventually Dylan would return to his topical roots in the early seventies with “George Jackson” and other songs, and Ochs’s artistic growth would include writing about more personal topics, the two were at a crossroads when it came to the next stages of their artistic careers. Their interpersonal tension came to a type of peak in the mid-sixties; the apocryphal story goes that Ochs’s lackluster response to a new song<sup>208</sup> Dylan played for him led to Ochs being kicked out of the limousine they were sharing, with Dylan yelling after him, “You’re not a folk singer, you’re a journalist!” Though there is debate about the exact details of the incident—especially given Dylan’s tendency to insult and reject Ochs and his peers on many occasions—Ochs was excised from Dylan’s inner circle, and the two wouldn’t speak for nearly a decade to come.

Amidst the breakdown of his relationship with Dylan, Ochs was still achieving success. His songs were covered by many artists in the folk scene ranging from up-and-coming duos like Jim & Jean and Joe & Eddie to heavy hitters like Pete Seeger and Joan Baez. Always willing to play a benefit, protest, or rally, Ochs performed at dozens of concerts throughout the mid-sixties, including his debut solo show at Carnegie Hall. His first three albums, recorded for Elektra

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<sup>206</sup> Sis Cunningham and Gordon Friesen, “An Interview with Phil Ochs,” *Broadside*, October 15, 1965, 4.

<sup>207</sup> Karl Dallas, “Dylan Said It—I Can’t Keep Up With Phil,” *Melody Maker*, November 27, 1965, 10.

<sup>208</sup> Though biographers have named the song as “Can You Please Crawl Out Your Window,” Ochs’s recollection in a 1971 *Rolling Stone* article identifies the song as “One of Us Must Know (Sooner or Later).”

Records, achieved modest commercial success and significant critical acclaim. A review for the *Toronto Globe & Mail* praised both Ochs's artistry and its impact, noting "with his compositions, Ochs projects a great deal of imagery. He is the kind of performer who sends chills down your back, not because of a great musical talent, but because what he says is the frightening truth — and he makes you think about it."<sup>209</sup> However, Ochs still had Dylan's critiques in mind as Ochs's songwriting evolved to include more personal and poetic content.

During this period of creative output—preempted by a split from his wife and daughter Meegan, a 1967 move to California, brother Michael taking over his management, and signing with A&M records—Ochs's continual search for and examination of identity became more explicitly reflected in his artistry. On his next release, 1967's *Pleasures of the Harbor*, Ochs's sonic landscape took a shift; enlisting producer Larry Marks, the album draws from Dixieland jazz, baroque pop, elements of classical music, and more experimental rock and roll threads. As Ochs's lyrical subject matters deepened, his production became more lush and deliberate. Take "The Party," which satirizes the social gatherings of the snobby bourgeoisie and new radical chic. Over loungey jazz piano (arranged and played by close collaborator Lincoln Mayorga) that sonically evokes the type of party he is critiquing, Ochs's narrator takes on the role of the entertainer at the party, commenting on the superficiality and hypocrisy of the attendees. In the final verse of the song after commenting on the absurdity of the guests, Ochs offers a moment of self-criticism, realizing his own participation in the social structure he aims to critique:

*Ah, the party must be over, even the losers are leaving  
But just one doubt is nagging at my caustic mind  
So I snuck up close behind me and I gave myself a kiss  
And I led myself to the mirror to expose what I had missed  
There I saw a laughing maniac who was writing songs like this*

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<sup>209</sup> Joseph Lewis, "A Journalistic Singer: Ochs Sings the Frightening Truth," *The Globe & Mail*, August 26, 1965.

*And my shoulders had to shrug as I crawled beneath the rug and retuned my piano*

The imagery of the narrator sneaking up to kiss himself evokes the symbolic weight of a Judas kiss. This sets up the ironic self-betrayal of the narrator seeing himself as a “laughing maniac” who, despite criticizing the system, is ultimately still a participant—a phony. The title track from 1968’s *Tape From California* continues these explorations of otherness and selfhood and explicitly places Ochs in conversation with a double he encounters, diving into the epic saga of Ochs’s real life cross country move. He sees “a sailor from the sea” who “looks a lot like me/I’d know him anywhere, had to stare,” and describes his double’s appearance:

*Feathers on his fingertips  
A halo ‘round his spine  
He must have lost his mind  
He should be put away, right away  
In the corner of the night  
He handed me his water pipe  
His eyes were searching deep inside my head*

Ochs’s lyrics evoke the feeling of confusion and loss; trying to break away from the futility of doubling the other, Ochs turns inwards, searching deep inside himself for some type of truth. After multiple verses of self-criticism and veering into topical material discussing the draft, hippies, and the space race, by the end of the song Ochs’s double has “a fire ‘round his fingertips/A song around his spine”; he suggests that his double “must have found his mind” but “should be put away, anyway”:

*Surrounded by the slaughter  
Now I’m boarding at the border  
When the echoes of my ecstasy appear—wish I was here*

The theme of feeling lost continues on the track “Half a Century High,” in which Ochs explores a dystopian future. The narrator runs “through the dots” of the new electronic world, “looking for

a man that looked like [him].” The chase for the (double(d) self continued, and Ochs would remain on the run through the tumult of the late sixties.

Ochs remained politically active as a performer and soon tried to find meaning and impact in organizing. He wrote “The War is Over,” one of his most harsh anti-war songs, as a piece of protest art inspired by the performative idea that the Vietnam War could be ended simply by the American public declaring it over. He organized two War is Over rallies in Los Angeles and New York in 1967, and became more interested in a growing theatre politics. This led Ochs to get involved with the Youth International Party (YIP), commonly referred to as the “Yippies.” The Yippies were formed by Abbie and Anita Hoffman, Jerry Rubin, Nancy Kurshan, and Paul Krassner in December 1967 in New York, and were known for their radical theatrics and leftist organizing. Describing the group’s formation, Krassner recalled that the quintet “needed a name to signify the radicalization of hippies, and I came up with Yippie as a label for a phenomenon that already existed, an organic coalition of psychedelic hippies and political activists.”<sup>210</sup> Ochs would describe the group’s activism as “a form of theater politics, theatrically dealing with what seemed to be an increasingly absurd world and trying to deal with it other than just on a straight moral level. They wanted to be able to act out fantasies in the street to communicate their feelings to the public.”<sup>211</sup> Ochs would become close with Rubin and Hoffman, and found that many of Yippie political and artistic sensibilities resonated with his own—using absurd theatrics to point out the absurdity of political injustice was, in his mind, an effective performance tactic. He was, however, wary about Yippie organizing being reduced to

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<sup>210</sup> Paul Krassner, “‘60s Live Again, Minus the LSD,” *The Los Angeles Times*, January 28, 2007.

<sup>211</sup> Patrick O. Thomas, *Did It!: From Yippie to Yuppie: Jerry Rubin, an American Revolutionary* (Seattle, WA: Fantagraphics Books, 2017), 87.



“hippie theatre” by mainstream media, and was both earnest and deeply serious about creating meaningful protest art.<sup>212</sup>

Earlier in 1968, the Yippies had performed two large-scale anti-war demonstrations in Central Park, and had plans for a large-scale “Festival of Life” to be held in counterprotest to the Democratic National Convention, held in Chicago from August 26 to 29. Leading up to the convention, the Democratic Party was already split over the Vietnam War, with anti-war sentiment gaining national momentum. President Lyndon B. Johnson had announced in March 1968 that he would not seek re-election, and May 1968 peace talks in Paris had failed; by late spring, the front-runners for the Democratic nomination were Vice President Hubert Humphrey, whose politics were more aligned with Johnson’s policies, and Senators Eugene McCarthy and Robert F. Kennedy, both of whom opposed the war. When Kennedy was assassinated in Los Angeles on June 5, 1968 after winning the California primary, turmoil within both the Democratic Party and the nation increased as the convention approached. Organizers from various anti-war and civil rights groups—including the Yippies—traveled to Chicago to voice their discontent; Chicago Mayor Richard J. Daley’s response to the protestors was marked by disorder in the streets. One of the stunts the Yippies pulled amidst the chaos leading up to the convention was nominating a pig (named Pigasus) as a presidential candidate. Ochs was responsible for selecting the pig and purchased him; Ochs was subsequently arrested on August 23 along with six other Yippies (and Pigasus himself) for disorderly conduct and disturbing the peace.<sup>213</sup> Ochs and the others were quickly released after posting bond, and he would perform

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<sup>212</sup> *Last Summer Won’t Happen*, directed by Peter Gessner and Tom Hurwitz (Icarus Films, 1968), <https://icarusfilms.com/if-happ>.

<sup>213</sup> Rubin was reading out Pigasus’s acceptance speech at the time of their arrest.

during the main day of Festival of Life activities on August 28. However, the violence would explode that afternoon, with the day being memorialized as “Bloody Wednesday”; after clashes between demonstrators and police in Grant Park escalated, the Yippies and thousands of other protestors rushed out of the park only to find them themselves trapped and surrounded near the Conrad Hilton Hotel, where Humphrey and many delegates were staying. Hundreds were beaten and arrested, and Ochs witnessed the worst of it on the front lines, narrowly avoiding being attacked himself.<sup>214</sup> He was seeing the rot of America fully exposed through senseless violence, and became disenchanted with the childish, ineffective politics of the Yippies. Politically and artistically lost, Ochs frequently described himself as having died after Chicago,<sup>215</sup> and fell into a deep depression. Despite his sinking mental health, he channeled the anger and despair into his penultimate and darkest album, 1969’s *Rehearsals for Retirement*.

*Rehearsals for Retirement* was a sharp pivot for the normally optimistic Ochs. The album art displays a tombstone with a photo of a sardonic-looking Ochs standing in front of an American flag, wearing a cowboy hat and carrying a shotgun; the text on the stone identifies Ochs as an American, “born: El Paso, Texas 1940” and “died: Chicago, Illinois 1968.” Thematically, the hopeful, even occasionally patriotic notes of earlier works (such as his pro-America anthem “Power and the Glory,” which—bizarrely—would be covered by notoriously conservative singer and personality Anita Bryant) were missing, instead replaced by pessimism and bitterness. Ochs would explain that the songs on the album “were about the new paranoia, police brutality, the escape into drugs, Chicago itself, people coming to the West—another escape route—thoughts of suicide, thoughts of revolution; and then finally pulling back and

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<sup>214</sup> Schumacher, 203.

<sup>215</sup> Ibid, 235.

saying all this has been our rehearsals for retirement.”<sup>216</sup> As Ochs biographer Michael Schumacher points out, there is almost no humor in any of the songs, their violent lyrics reflecting the aftereffects of exhaustion and brutality Ochs was trying to cope with post-Democratic National Convention.<sup>217</sup> Ochs was essentially doubling the death of America through his own artistic and metaphorical death. Though the album received positive critical attention, *Rehearsals for Retirement* was the weakest selling album in Ochs’s discography up to this point, and A&M removed it from circulation months after its initial release.<sup>218</sup>

Ochs was frustrated and listless after the commercial failure of *Rehearsals for Retirement*; though he stayed busy with live performances, topical music as a popular genre was on the wane, and his audiences weren’t as robust as they’d been earlier in his career. His growing alcoholism and dependence on Valium were also concerning to friends and family, and were not positive contributions to his already tenuous mental health. In 1969, in an attempt to bring some cheer to his brother, Michael Ochs purchased tickets to Elvis Presley’s comeback residency in Las Vegas for Phil. Ochs was blown away by the show; here was his idol from his 1950s adolescence reinventing himself for a late sixties audience by infusing his own catalogue with fresh and inventive contemporary pop and swamp rock covers—and revamping the impact of the Elvis phenomenon on the American public in spades. A new connection formed in Ochs’s mind—describing where the seed of his next attempt at doubling emerged, Ochs told the *New York Times*, “I thought, ‘Wouldn’t it be funny to come out in a gold suit like Elvis Presley?’ It was a leap into fantasy, into a musical area that I really like. Suppose it was Elvis who became

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<sup>216</sup> “NZUAC Presents: Phil Ochs,” *Salient* (Wellington), 35, no. 16, 1972, 18.

<sup>217</sup> Schumacher, 209.

<sup>218</sup> *Ibid.*

the Vietcong to America. Elvis Presley is America and that music is the music of America. Imagine—the man in the gold suit who sang ‘I Ain’t Marchin’ Anymore!’”<sup>219</sup> Ochs believed that in terms of American political change, reaching the working class was the most important approach; to him, “Elvis Presley, in retrospect, [was] like a giant commercialization of the working-class singer”<sup>220</sup> whose symbology Ochs could infuse with a leftist approach. Ochs, in a way, was attempting to articulate theoretically and performatively what writers for the Marxist journal *Workers Viewpoint* would describe in 1977 (shortly after the King’s death):

The real lessons [about Presley] are to be found in the analysis of the basis of his popularity and what that implies for revolutionary cultural work. The combination of Country and Western music and Rhythm and Blues in Presley’s music reflected some of the contradictions in American capitalist society, due to the reactionary nature of bourgeois culture and Presley himself. However, combining the working class seeds within both cultures itself is not a bad thing. On the contrary, injected with more class conscious, communist understanding and promoting its working class content, it is a very good thing.<sup>221</sup>

In Ochs, Presley’s symbolic power “accidentally touched [that] hidden proletarian chord,”<sup>222</sup> providing a performative model for Ochs’s own; though his approach would be highly theatrical in nature, Ochs viewed this type of *gestus* as a serious part of political performance, and threw himself—literally—into a doubling of Elvis Presley merged with Che Guevara.

For *Greatest Hits*, Ochs completely transformed his image in homage to Presley’s influence as an icon, wanting to re-politize his symbolic power to better communicate leftist ideals to a broader audience. The cover design of *Greatest Hits* includes references to the 1959

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<sup>219</sup> John S. Wilson, “Phil Ochs Fans Are Won Over By Rock,” *The New York Times*, April 3, 1970.

<sup>220</sup> Bruce Pollock, *By the Time We Got to Woodstock: The Great Rock ‘n’ Roll Revolution of 1969* (New York, NY: Backbeat Books, 2009), 89.

<sup>221</sup> Workers Viewpoint Organization, “Elvis – Shake, Rattle and Roll to Pacify the Workers,” *Workers Viewpoint Journal* 2, no. 9 (October 1977), <https://www.marxists.org/history/erol/ncm-3/wvo-elvis.htm>.

<sup>222</sup> *Ibid.*

Elvis Presley compilation album, *50,000,000 Elvis Fans Can't Be Wrong: Elvis' Gold Records, Volume 2*. The front cover features Ochs standing onstage in front of red curtains, wearing a gold lamé suit and holding a red Hagstrom Viking II Deluxe electric guitar. The suit was made for Ochs by tailor Nudie Cohn, who had made the suit worn by Presley on the cover of *Elvis' Gold Records, Volume 2*. Similarly, Ochs's choice of the Hagstrom Viking II Deluxe guitar was in reference to Presley's use of the same model in his 1968 NBC television concert program *Singer Presents... Elvis* (frequently referred to as the '68 *Comeback Special*). The back of *Greatest Hits* features the parodic slogan "50 PHIL OCHS FANS CAN'T BE WRONG!" over a photograph of Ochs with his hair slicked back into a pompadour, looking equal parts Presley and James Dean in a black leather jacket and sunglasses. Images of ten gold records, corresponding with the ten tracks on the album, are below the photograph and above the album credits. This type of doubling is a step further from the more lighthearted (though pointed) Dylan jokes of Ochs's early career; here, he takes on the physical, attempting to merge the body of Ochs with the body of the King.

*Greatest Hits*'s production moved away from both the acoustic folk of Ochs's first two albums and the orchestral baroque rock-inspired sounds he had been exploring on *Pleasures of the Harbor*, *Tape from California*, and *Rehearsals for Retirement*. The stripped-back production associated with folk as a genre was no longer serving Ochs's artistic vision, nor was the protest-meets-art song approach resonating with audiences. Recorded in an intense, near-manic two day session (produced by Ochs's neighbor and highly respected Beach Boys collaborator Van Dyke Parks), *Greatest Hits* reflects a vibrant mixture of Ochs's artistic influences. He returned to the musicians of his youth—Hank Williams, Lefty Frizzell, Faron Young, and Webb Pierce<sup>223</sup>—as

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<sup>223</sup> Schumacher, 224.

touchstones, as well as Presley and Merle Haggard. Elements of country rock, rockabilly and the Bakersfield Sound were brought together by a team of session musicians; collaborators included Elvis guitarist James Burton, legendary singer Merry Clayton on backup vocals, and well-respected guitarist Ry Cooder, among others. Ironically, despite the nature of the “Elvis-Che” project, most of the songs on *Greatest Hits* are not overtly political. Topics include Ochs’s domestic life in Los Angeles (“Bach, Beethoven, Mozart, and Me”), an extended eulogy for James Dean (“Jim Dean of Indiana”), and growing up in Ohio, coupled with a desire to return home (“My Kingdom For A Car” and “Boy In Ohio”). Ochs’s lyrical journeys delving into the past feel less about a focus on saccharine nostalgia than an attempt to bring forward the most important elements of his youth in his doubling. This bringing forth—reconjuring—almost (re)doubling of the music, experiences, and idols that were so impactful to Ochs’s adolescent self-fashioning heightened the personal stakes just as much as the political ones.

Perhaps the most telling songs on *Greatest Hits*, though, are “Chords of Fame” and “No More Songs.” In the country-and-western-inspired “Chords of Fame” which opens the second side of the album, Ochs finds himself in lyrical conversation with a drunken failed troubadour who warns him against the perils of fame. Though the song is not explicitly about a double figure, it is easy to read the lyrics as Ochs encountering himself, cautioning him to keep his artistry protected from those who would commodify and exploit him. “God help the troubadour who tries to be a star,” he warns (himself), and wonders “who I [he?] left behind the other side of fame.” “No More Songs” concludes the album on a haunting premonition; Ochs plaintively calls out to his waning audience, apologizing over dirge-like horns and drums for the fact that he has no more songs to sing. It is an incredibly difficult listen, and nearly impossible to view as anything but an ominous hint of what would come—at any rate, “No More Songs” would be the

last studio track released by Ochs during his lifetime, a harrowing conclusion to his recording career.

After recording the album, Ochs ignored the pleas from his brother and from A&M to title the project anything but *Greatest Hits*. The title had initially started as a joke—in trying to come up with an album title, Ochs thought, “‘Wouldn’t it be funny if I put it out as Greatest Hits, since I never had any hits.’ It would also be a spoof of the industry, because everybody keeps putting out ‘greatest hits’ and ‘best ofs’—you know, repackaging their songs again and again.”<sup>224</sup> Both Michael and A&M representatives (rightly) pointed out that the absurdity of packaging a record of completely new material under the guise of a “best of” compilation album could be confusing to fans and detrimental to sales. However, under his A&M contract, Ochs retained complete creative control over his work, and the record went ahead as he had envisioned it. Like *Rehearsals for Retirement*, it too would be a commercial flop, charting for two weeks on the Billboard 200 before being pulled from distribution as the lowest selling album in Ochs’s entire discography. Ochs’s friends, family, and collaborators were skeptical about the new Elvis-Che era, though many understood why he turned to such extreme tactics. Abbie Hoffman reflected that

Phil was really a singer for the masses, that was one of his great frustrations, and of course his great idol was Elvis Presley, and, uh, [he] always wished that he could be, he could have his mind inside almost a body of Elvis Presley, almost a suit, the dress, you know, the whole apparatus surrounding Elvis Presley so that he could bring to millions and millions of people the, what he felt in his heart, and what he felt the hopes for America were, rather than singing about tutti frutti, bubblegum, jerk-off songs.<sup>225</sup>

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<sup>224</sup> Ibid, 226.

<sup>225</sup> Abbie Hoffman, interview transcript, Phil Ochs Archive, The Phil Ochs Papers collection, Series 6, Box 02, Folder 01, Woody Guthrie Center Archives.

Eulogizing Ochs for the 1981 annual issue of *Broadside*, Randy B. Hecht aptly points out the “dilemma” of Ochs’s doubling:

He still remembers the vital, revolutionary force of encountering the early Presley. It changed his world (and our world too) — tonight Phil has become the image to cry out for the spirit. He confronts his audience with a desperate plea, iconic, wrapped in an irony. “I am America. I am Gold...” and it is true as he speaks, he is America, he *is* Presley. By actually becoming them he tries to force out what he believes to be their realness. The violence and criminality of competitive individuality, the pocket mannequin with his soul stolen - these are just surface. however pervasive. Freedom and Sacrifice (in the sense of giving everything) are the truth — and they are Ochs, his life with all its contradictions.<sup>226</sup>

The problem lay in that Ochs’s audiences weren’t quite ready for such extreme contradictions.

The revolutionary shift in appearance and material from the man known for grounded topical songs like “I Ain’t Marchin’ Anymore” and “Draft Dodger Rag” didn’t land with even his most devoted fanbase. After a try-out show at the Troubadour in Los Angeles in (with mixed audience response), the gold lamé suit-era would culminate in the aforementioned Carnegie Hall shows on March 27, 1970. The first show, cut short by a bomb threat, was captured along with chanting from the second, three-hour long drunken midnight show on the 1974 album *Gunfight at Carnegie Hall*, initially released only in Canada and Japan. The short tour that followed was a failure, and Ochs’s drinking, drug abuse, and mental illness worsened.

Artaud wrote that “all true effigies have a double, a shadowed self. And art fails the moment a sculptor believes that as he models he liberates a kind of shadow whose existence will unsettle him.”<sup>227</sup> This quotation resonates deeply with Ochs’s lifelong struggle with doubling. He believed so deeply in the performative artistic and political power of what I have termed the self-as-other, and its potential to unsettle the wrongs of the world, that the failure of his performances

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<sup>226</sup> Randy B. Hecht, “Phil Ochs Returns,” *Broadside*, 1981, 8.

<sup>227</sup> Artaud, 6.



were overwhelming and crushing. In a poem entitled “Who Was That Man in the Gold Lamé Suit,” unpublished in his lifetime, Ochs reflects on the deep crisis of personal and artistic alienation he had tried to navigate for years. He describes his own feelings of unworthiness and insanity, describing his “true escape” as “the house of cinematic sequels.” Though Ochs wants so badly to be a star, “that right is only reserved for worthy auctioneers”—instead he

*dares dreaming desperate dreams  
of answers which lie inches above paranoia’s pillow  
and experiments with frozen feelings from frigid beds  
while visions of mutant mice crawl through his diluted head[.]*<sup>228</sup>

The poem—again, hauntingly prophetic—concludes with a callback to the warnings of “Chords of Fame”:

*The minstrel then painfully exits laughing and dying  
wearing the costume of his earlier prophets  
and alcoholically rushes to scream at the faded image  
in the carnival mirror  
For who would dare appreciate the truth  
from a non-commercial disbeliever.*<sup>229</sup>

The Elvis-Che experiment was the culmination of all of Ochs’s fears and failures intersecting, and the fallout would have immense impact on the rest of his life.

The early to mid-seventies for Ochs were again marked by listlessness and writer’s block, though with occasional periods of inspiration. He would perform alongside Joni Mitchell and James Taylor at a Greenpeace benefit concert at the Pacific Coliseum in Vancouver on October 16, 1970. He traveled to Europe with Rubin and Hoffman (and was deported from multiple countries). He wrote a few pieces for the *Los Angeles Free Press* and threw himself back into his obsessive movie-going habits. Perhaps most impactful was the inspiration he found in Salvador

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<sup>228</sup> Phil Ochs, *I’m Gonna Say It Now: The Writings of Phil Ochs*, ed. David Cohen (Guilford, CT: Backbeat Books, 2020), 182.

<sup>229</sup> *Ibid.*

Allende and the new Chilean democratic socialist government; Ochs traveled to Chile in 1971 and became close with activist and singer Victor Jara, with whom he would perform. Ochs would be arrested and detained in Bolivia and Uruguay during the rest of his South America trip, adding to his increasing paranoia. This paranoia would come to a head during a trip to Africa in 1973; during his time in Dar es Salaam, Tanzania, Ochs was attacked, beaten, and choked to the point of unconsciousness by a group of three men while walking along the beach. He would be found the next morning and taken to the hospital, but the damage to his vocal cords was irreparable, causing him to lose the top three notes of his already somewhat limited register.<sup>230</sup> Already frightened by the idea that he was being surveilled by the Federal Bureau of Investigation—who did, in fact, maintain an over 400-page file on Ochs both during and after his lifetime—it was not outside of the realm of possibility for Ochs that the FBI, CIA, or another international agency could have orchestrated the attack.<sup>231</sup> With his alcoholism worsening, and now tasked with struggling through performances with a damaged voice, things did not bode well long-term.

Upon returning to the United States, Ochs learned of the Chilean coup d'état that had overthrown Allende's government and led to the torture and death of Jara by the *Caravana de la Muerte* death squad. He channeled his anger and grief into organizing the benefit concert *An Evening with Salvador Allende*, which took place in New York on May 9, 1974. Arlo Guthrie, Pete Seeger, Melanie, Dave Van Ronk, The Living Theater, Dennis Hopper, Melvin Van Peebles, and Joan Jara (Victor Jara's widow) all participated in the concert—as did Ochs's old friend and rival Bob Dylan. Dylan had agreed to participate to boost ticket sales for the benefit,

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<sup>230</sup> Schumacher, 280.

<sup>231</sup> Ibid.

eventually leading to it completely selling out. It was also Ochs and Dylan's first public reunion in almost a decade; in photos from the concert, both men look awkward (and slightly drunk, as both had been imbibing throughout the night), but the joy in reconnecting with Dylan is evident on Ochs's face. Dylan had also appreciated the experience of the evening, and he and Ochs began rudimentary plans for a series of small double-bill concerts for charity.<sup>232</sup> While these plans would never actually materialize, the idea set the stage for what would eventually become Dylan's Rolling Thunder Revue tour the next year. Meanwhile, a familiar feeling of listlessness began to creep back into Ochs's psyche. He was at his best when there was a cause to rally around, justice to fight for, and being distanced from meaningful creation coupled with his continued writer's block was detrimental. When the Vietnam War came to an officially negotiated end in April of 1975, Ochs threw himself into one last War Is Over rally—the title no longer absurd. Over one hundred thousand people would gather in Central Park on May 11, 1975 to celebrate the end of what had felt like a never-ceasing global nightmare. It was a triumphant moment for Ochs, but also a bittersweet one—not only for him as an individual, but for the entire left and anti-war movement. Without a cause—and with a new frightening type of psychological alienation beginning to envelop him—Ochs's mental health came to a crisis in the summer of 1975 with the emergence of a new persona he dubbed John Butler Train.<sup>233</sup>

Ochs's excessive drinking, suicidality, and paranoia caused what he would describe in retrospect as a nervous breakdown. Interviewed by Harry Smith in June 1975, Ochs (as Train) described where the new entity had come from:

On the first day of summer, 1975, Phil Ochs was murdered in the Chelsea Hotel, room 714 by Luke Train, who is now speaking. I killed Phil Ochs. The reason I killed him was,

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<sup>232</sup> Ibid, 298.

<sup>233</sup> This persona is occasionally referred to as Luke Train.

he was a sometimes genius, but he drank too much and was a boring old fart. For the good of societies, public and secret, he needed to be gotten rid of. Although he had brilliant ideas, i.e., *An Evening with Salvador Allende* and a couple of good songs like “Crucifixion” and “Changes,” he was no longer needed and useful. [...] Train was laying for Ochs in the bar, watching him come home drunk every night. The second night, when he was drunk at home passed out in his living room, with a Bruce Lee shot, Train killed him, painlessly, one split second he was dead. Goodbye, Phil Ochs, and good riddance. Still around, though, for sale, from Train, if they want him.<sup>234</sup>

The “real” Ochs was both dead and for sale—in Train’s eyes, Ochs was the ultimate phony, a fake persona that needed to be excised. Train was violent, fearful, unhygienic, loud, threatening, and more often than not, incoherent. Ochs (as Train) was banned from a multitude of bars across Los Angeles and New York. He was arrested multiple times for drunk driving and causing fights, and found himself sleeping on the streets or crashing with friends who were quickly frightened by this new persona. Ochs’s loved ones attempted to get him help—Michael Ochs tried to have Phil committed; Jerry Rubin came very close to convincing Ochs to check himself into psychiatric care, only for Ochs to get nervous and back out at the last minute—but there was no getting through to him. Ochs had alienated and become alienated by nearly every meaningful aspect of his life—disconnected from his family, from his creative ability, from the organizing and performing that had impassioned him. Pappenheim writes that

the individual’s alienation from everything which has no bearing on the pursuit of his interests does not necessarily enter into his consciousness; nor does he always become aware of the estrangement from his own self or feel it as a disquieting experience. As a result of his detachment, the alienated man is often able to achieve great successes. These, as long as they continue, engender a certain numbness, which makes it hard for him to realize his own estrangement. Only in times of crisis does he start to sense it.<sup>235</sup>

Ochs’s sense of his own estrangement, I suggest, led to the final stage in Ochs’s attempt to double in his search for identity. Rather than doubling an other, Ochs attempted to double

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<sup>234</sup> Phil Ochs, “Phil Ochs Interview.” Interview by Harry Smith, June 27, 1975. Audio. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UWmaF1DEEoA>

<sup>235</sup> Pappenheim, 13-14.

himself, causing a psychic split that reflected the intensity of his estrangement. Artaud wrote that “there is in every lunatic a misunderstood genius whose idea, shining in his head, frightened people, and for whom delirium was the only solution to the strangulation that life had prepared for him.”<sup>236</sup> Ochs’s “delirium” was essentially explained by Train—“Phil Ochs was killed by Train, but Train kept his body around to use him for political purposes.” The “delirium” came from a failed attempt to become a body without (Phil Ochs’s) organs—a body without the heart, brain, or soul of the man who had psychologically died after Chicago. “The Ballad of John Train,” one of Ochs’s last songs, reflects the state of his mental crisis:

*Phil Ochs checked into the Chelsea Hotel,  
There was blood on his clothes and they were dirty.  
I could see by his face he was not feeling well,  
He'd been to one too many parties.  
He walked in the lobby a picture of doom,  
It was plain to see he'd been a-drinkin'  
I had to follow him up to his room,  
To find out what he was thinking  
“Train, Train, Train”  
From the outlaw in his brain  
But he's still the same refrain*

*He walked in his room and he fell on the floor  
Hanging in his hangover  
Now the act from the stage he plays on the street  
Handing out piles of money  
His audience now is the bums that he meets  
Is he a phony or funny?<sup>237</sup>*

Ochs would start to come out of the Train persona by the fall of 1975. Ochs’s friends and family understood that he had gone through an extreme mental health crisis and wanted to help him; however, Ochs was ashamed by how horribly he had treated people as Train, and did not believe

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<sup>236</sup> Artaud, 492.

<sup>237</sup> Phil Ochs, “The Ballad of John Butler Train (1975 Demo),” audio recording, 1975, [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=\\_ivXauhFz0](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_ivXauhFz0).

there was any chance for true forgiveness for his actions.<sup>238</sup> His suicidality became an explicit topic of conversation for him, further scaring his loved ones; it seemed that he had decided the impact of his actions as Train called for a permanent resolution.

Ochs's final public performance, the lead up to which is captured in Dylan's film *Renaldo and Clara* (1978), took place at a surprise birthday party for Mike Porco (the owner of the venue Gerde's Folk City) which also served as the de facto kickoff to Dylan's Rolling Thunder Review tour.<sup>239</sup> In the film, Ochs is seen wearing Dylan's hat<sup>240</sup> in some final attempt to both impress and embody Dylan. Mutual friend Mayer Vishner noted that the encounter was "the story of Phil's life [...] It would have been fine if Phil had taken the guitar, but he wanted the hat—as in crown, as in tiara, as in title. He wanted to be Elvis; he wanted to be Dylan. He wanted the hat, but he should have taken the guitar."<sup>241</sup> In *Renaldo and Clara*, the shot cuts away before we hear Ochs begin to play, but accounts of the party report that Ochs played no songs of his own that night. Instead, he played a medley of older folk songs in a performance described by music journalist Larry Sloman as "stunning and sensitive" which excited Dylan and moved all of the Rolling Thunder members to stand.<sup>242</sup> Towards the end of his performance, Ochs grew nervous when he thought Dylan was leaving, calling out to him, "Where you going, Bobby, c'mon onstage and sing this with me"; Dylan reassured him, telling him he wasn't leaving, only

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<sup>238</sup> Schumacher, 340.

<sup>239</sup> Ochs would audition for the Revue during the Train period, but was not performing well enough—nor was he mentally healthy enough—to make the cut.

<sup>240</sup> This appears to be the same hat that Dylan wears on the cover of his 1976 album *Desire*.

<sup>241</sup> Schumacher, 343.

<sup>242</sup> Larry Sloman, *On the Road with Bob Dylan* (New York, NY: Three Rivers, 2002), 25-26.

going to the bar.<sup>243</sup> The last song that Ochs would play in public was Dylan's own "Lay Down Your Weary Tune," a 1963 song that invites the listener to "lay down the song you strum/And rest yourself 'neath the strength of strings/No voice can hope to hum." Dressed in Dylan's hat, singing to/as his friend and rival, Ochs nearly touched that impossible horizon line of doubling his "friend, enemy, jealousy figure, rival in poetry."<sup>244</sup> Ochs's final act of doubling ended with one of the largest standing ovations of the night—punctured only by Dylan's performative insistence on retrieving his hat before Ochs walked off with it.

Ochs stayed in New York through the end of 1975, eventually moving in with his sister Sonny in Far Rockaway, Queens in January of 1976. His depression was at its worst; Sonny described his behavior in this period as "just totally, totally passive."<sup>245</sup> He would play cards with Sonny's two sons or aimlessly watch television; true to the lyrics from *Greatest Hits*, there were no more (new) songs. "He just slipped into this other world," Sonny would recall for the *There But For Fortune* documentary, "and he used to sit at the piano day after day, playing "Jim Dean of Indiana," a song he wrote, which has such a beautiful haunting melody. And he would just sit at the piano and play it over and over."<sup>246</sup> On April 9, 1976, in the bathroom of the house in Far Rockaway, Phil Ochs committed suicide by hanging himself. He was thirty five years old.

Phil Ochs, like Vincent van Gogh before him, "did not die of a state of delirium properly speaking," but of having, too, been "bodily the battlefield of a problem around which the evil

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<sup>243</sup> Ibid.

<sup>244</sup> Ibid.

<sup>245</sup> Schumacher, 345.

<sup>246</sup> *Phil Ochs: There But For Fortune*.

spirit of humanity has been struggling from the beginning.”<sup>247</sup> Ochs searched for his “place of the human self” throughout his life with an equally “strange energy and determination.”<sup>248</sup> Eulogized by poet Yusef Komunyakaa in the poem “Chair Gallows,” I am particularly moved by the image of Ochs as “a man lost between railroad tracks/& crossroad blues, with twelve strings/two days out of hock.”<sup>249</sup> Ochs was one of the “men who swallow themselves in mirrors” that Komunyakaa names, caught up in the glass, trying to find himself. Though his search was unfinished and marked by tragedy (nor I am not arguing that his art was worth the cost of his life), I argue that Ochs’s creative impact remains politically relevant and inspirational to artists and activists beyond his time. Ochs’s doublings, in his attempts to disrupt notions of subjectivity and subjecthood, were urgent and raw, equal parts performance tactic and earnest attempts at connecting with others. To dismiss his relationship with Dylan as solely a competitive rivalry is to do a disservice to their complicated, but deeply intertwined, relationality. Similarly, elucidating the reasoning behind the “gold-lamé era” allows for a richer understanding of Ochs’s performance tactics—and, ultimately, how and why they didn’t land the way he intended them to. Understanding Ochs’s work through the framework of doubling allows us to look beyond what could be read as simple parody performed in the Elvis-Ché era, or the frightening uncanniness of Ochs’s John Butler Train persona, and understand these doublings as part of a larger journey concerning performance and the self that Ochs was on throughout his entire short life. When speaking on the phone with his brother Michael, Ochs’s most often repeated question

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<sup>247</sup> Artaud, 487.

<sup>248</sup> Ibid.

<sup>249</sup> Yusef Komunyakaa, “Chair Gallows,” in *Pleasure Dome: New and Collected Poems* (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 2001), 47.



was, “Do you think my songs will survive?”<sup>250</sup> The question underscores not only his quest for personal relevance but also a deep-seated concern about the enduring power of his artistry. The answer to Ochs’s question, as I have aimed to answer with this chapter, is a resounding yes. In grappling with his own identity, Phil Ochs created a personal and artistic legacy that transcends his lifetime, resonating across temporal boundaries to audiences today.

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<sup>250</sup> Schumacher, 351.

## CHAPTER 4: CEASE TO EXIST: CHARLES MANSON, CULTS IN POPULAR MEDIA, AND FAILED PERFORMANCES OF UTOPIA

### Cults, Utopia, Worldmaking

This chapter broadens the project’s explorations of both performance and alienation, and examines cults as failed performances of utopia which reinscribe the affective state of alienation cult members seek to escape. I then offer a critical survey of media representations of cults before and after the Tate and LaBianca murders committed by members of the Family (the cult formed by Charles Manson), giving particular focus to episodes of the television series *Star Trek* and *Starsky & Hutch*. I argue that the violent explosion of the alienated/alienating dynamic created by Manson and the Family was a phenomenologically symbolic act that directly contributed to the prolonged death of the counterculture. My use of the term cult to describe the groups I will analyze here (as opposed to using the more neutral-sounding sociological term “new religious movement,” the weighty but unspecific “high-control group,” or the highly charged “destructive cult”) is deliberate and carries specific baggage. Scholars across multiple fields of study—sociology, psychology, anthropology, history, and performance studies, to name a few—have long debated what a clear operational definition of a cult is. These debates have played out amidst navigating a multitude of usages and popular meanings both lay and scholarly. Religion scholar Megan Goodwin has noted that the use of the word “cult” is often shorthand for a “religion I don’t like”<sup>251</sup>—while quippy and speaking to the pejorative use of the word, I find this definition very limiting and ultimately unhelpful. In my work, I utilize World Religions scholar Robert Ellwood’s breakdown of key traits of cults included in his 1986 article “The

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<sup>251</sup> Megan Goodwin, interview with Michael Altman, “Turkey Ritual,” *Study Religion*, podcast audio, March 21, 2017, <https://podcasts.apple.com/us/podcast/ep-2-turkey-ritual/id1210939134?i=1000382920735>.

Several Meanings of Cult” to foreground my use of the term. In relatively neutral language, he states that a cult is:

1. A group that “presents a distinct alternative to dominant patterns within the society in fundamental areas of religious life.” This includes a small size with “distinctly different” forms of belief and practice, carried on by a uniquely organized group [...]
2. Possessing “strong authoritarian and charismatic leadership,”
3. Oriented toward “inducing powerful subjective experiences and meeting personal needs,”
4. Is “separatist in that it strives to maintain distinct boundaries between it and the ‘outside,’” and “requiring a high degree of conformity and commitment,” [and has]
5. A tendency “to see itself as legitimated by a long tradition of wisdom or practice of which it is the current manifestation.”<sup>252</sup>

All of the groups discussed in this chapter, both real and fictional, will be read through this operative definition of cult. However, I would like to add an additional key trait to this list for this analysis—the cults I am examining create a dynamic that is both alienated and alienating. Many cults create a dynamic where their members are further alienated from society by isolating individuals from their previous lives (physically, financially, emotionally, and otherwise), transforming their identities, and fostering a sense of fear and distrust among members. At the same time, cults may alienate outsiders through unconventional behavior and/or espousing of beliefs that may seem harmful, whether towards those not in the group or to themselves. This dual dynamic reinforces the separation between cult members and broader society. I am less interested in tracing a sociological explanation for why individual cult leaders choose to form these groups. Though I do give critical focus to Charles Manson and his motivations in starting the Family, to attempt to form a comprehensive explanation of why cult leaders are drawn to positions of influence and control of others is beyond the scope of this chapter. I am much more interested in reading cults as a symptom or attempted solution to what they deem as bigger

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<sup>252</sup> Robert Ellwood, “The Several Meanings of Cult,” *Thought* 61, no. 2 (June 1986), <https://doi.org/10.5840/thought19866123>.

societal issues. Borrowing from queer theorist José Esteban Muñoz I utilize his theorization of utopia as foregrounded in the seminal *Cruising Utopia: The Then and There of Queer Futurity* to consider what cults are ultimately aiming to achieve.

Muñoz's theorization of utopia is not of a distant ideal or an unreachable state, but rather a performative and imaginative space that hints at the possibility of a better future. "The present is not enough," Muñoz says, and turns to the idea of utopia to explore visions of a "collective futurity" that has extant traces in the present (albeit in a nascent or emergent form).<sup>253</sup> This utopia is embedded in the present through cultural practices and performances where the future is envisioned as a space of potential and possibility. These quotidian acts of creation that offer hope and alternatives to the present are the mode by which we can touch the utopic. In other words, utopia is an ongoing and embodied process, rather than a final destination. While Muñoz uses utopia to imagine queer futurity, I extrapolate the worldmaking aspect to consider how we might read aspects of cults through this performative lens. Cults are essentially ongoing and embodied performances of worldmaking; they are a "doing" in and of themselves. As Camille Paglia notes, cults "are symptoms of cultural fracturing in cosmopolitan periods of rapid expansion and mobility[,] consisting of small groups of the disaffected or rootless";<sup>254</sup> people who find themselves in cults often are seeking respite from overwhelming feelings of disaffection and alienation. Cults present themselves as embodying a better alternative than what mainstream society has to offer individuals; however, the stakes of reaching that (ultimately imagined) utopian ideal hinge upon a group of participants beginning to embody that world through their

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<sup>253</sup> José Esteban Muñoz, *Cruising Utopia: The Then and There of Queer Futurity* (New York, NY: New York University Press, 2009), 27.

<sup>254</sup> Camille Paglia, "Cults and Cosmic Consciousness: Religious Vision in the American 1960s," *Arion: A Journal of Humanities and the Classics*, Third, 10, no. 3 (Winter 2003), 59.

alternative ways of living. Theoretically speaking, many cults align with the suggestion that utopia involves a radical transformation of existing social relations. But it is important to note that more often than not, cults fail in this regard and end up replicating (re-performing) the same power dynamics and inequities they criticize—or worse, further reduce members’ agency and freedom under the influence of highly charismatic and controlling leadership. Cults’ utopian aspirations—rather than leading to a positively transformative future—become distorted by the performative processes meant to enact them, and the disconnect between a cult’s vision and the lived experiences of members often leads to disillusionment and collapse. Even if, as Muñoz puts it, “utopian performativity suggests another modality of doing and being that is in process, unfinished,”<sup>255</sup> cults ultimately do not even achieve the modality of doing, due to the harm and further alienation caused in the process.

### Cults in Film and Television Pre-1970: *Star Trek*’s Space Hippies

Media about cults—both serious and what we might read as more campy—has been in the popular imagination for decades. The tone of what threat the cults depicted posed ranged in the variety of stories told, but the bigger symbolic meaning was often tied to internal threats to upper class white hegemony. Whether set rurally or in urban environments, depictions of cults often were of seemingly normal, usually white Americans whose connections to evil—sometimes supernatural in nature—are uncovered. Oftentimes these groups were depicted specifically as Satanists, centering cultural Christianity as the moral good.

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<sup>255</sup> Muñoz, 99.

*The Seventh Victim* (1943) is often considered to be the prototypical cult film (the term here used to describe a film about cults, rather than a film that has a cult following).<sup>256</sup> Set in Greenwich Village, the plot revolves around Mary Gibson (played by Kim Hunter), a young student who is searching for her missing older sister Jacqueline (Jean Brooks) who owns a cosmetics company in the city. Mary investigates throughout New York, trying to track her sister down; in the process, she learns that her sister has sold her company and joined a Satanic cult called the Palladists, whose influence extends into various aspects of Jacqueline's life. (It is revealed that her assistant Esther—to whom she sold the company, and with whom she has an extremely close relationship—was the one who got her involved with the cult.) *The Seventh Victim* is notable for its genre exploration of psychological horror-meets-noir, as well as its explorations of queerness. Other examples of cult media focused more overt supernatural elements, like the late Hammer Horror entry *The Devil Rides Out* (1968). Starring horror icon Christopher Lee (in a rare non-villainous role), the film takes place in late 1920s England; Nicholas, Duc de Richleau (Lee) and his friend Rex Van Ryn (Leon Greene) learn that the son of one of their friends, a young man named Simon Aron (Patrick Mower) has gotten involved with the occult. De Richleau and Van Ryn are tasked with rescuing Simon, and find themselves in an extended black magic battle with cult leader Mocata (the perfectly cast Charles Gray). Interestingly, Roman Polanski's *Rosemary's Baby* (1968) is a key film that inverts some of these tropes, providing commentary on the evils of late-stage capitalism and greed through the depiction of a Satanic cult that sets up Rosemary Woodhouse (played brilliantly by Mia Farrow) to use her baby for their rituals. Rosemary's husband, Guy (John Cassavetes) has made a literal deal with the devil in order to gain success as an actor; in exchange, he allows Rosemary to be

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<sup>256</sup> "10 Great Films about Cults," BFI, June 28, 2018, <https://www.bfi.org.uk/lists/10-great-films-about-cults>.

raped and carry the spawn of Satan. The film explores themes of control, paranoia, and the loss of personal and bodily autonomy, paving the way for the more nuanced and disturbing exploration of these topics in horror media to come.

Hippie exploitation, on the other hand, had been a burgeoning genre throughout the second half of the Long Sixties. The term “hippie” itself came into popular use around 1965 to describe the young people associated with the nascent movement growing in the Haight-Ashbury area of San Francisco. As quickly as hippies came into existence, mainstream media quickly began portraying hippies as dangerous for their free love, use of drugs, resistance to authority, and general threat to the “American Way Of Life.” Films like Edward Mann’s *Hallucination Generation* (1968) aimed to shock and awe viewers in the tradition of *Reefer Madness* thirty years before (though showing a sensationalized seedy underbelly of the growing hippie movement rather than the dangers of marijuana). In the interview tag to *The Monkees* episode “The Monkees’ Paw,” Peter Tork noted, “the hippie movement is dead. It was buried in San Francisco and has been replaced by free men.” When asked why the movement is now dead, Tork delivered his explanation with stuttering, self-effacing humor, but the point he made is revealing—“It was done because of the bad publicity the hippie movement has been getting. Now it’s clear that every time that the hippies come up with something really vital and intelligent and interesting, the establishment will take it over and put down the people who originated it.”<sup>257</sup> Even media that was read as countercultural during its time, like the original series of *Star Trek*, took shots at hippies and communes.

*Star Trek* (1966-1969) was groundbreaking for its social commentary and for the ways in which it broke racial and gender barriers in sixties television. Created by Gene Roddenberry, the

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<sup>257</sup> James Frawley, dir., “The Monkee’s Paw,” *The Monkees*, season 2, episode 19, NBC, 1968.

show featured a racially diverse cast during a period when actors of color were rarely given roles of substance in mainstream media. In addition, one in five episodes of *Star Trek* were written or co-written by women during a time when it was even more difficult for them to break through in the industry as screenwriters than it is today. Its use of allegorical storytelling to explore complex themes such as racial equality, war, and ethical dilemmas relevant to audiences in the mid- to late sixties also set standards for speculative fiction storytellers to come, and was highly influential during its original three year run and beyond. In addition, *Star Trek* pushed the boundaries of science fiction storytelling by presenting a future where humanity had overcome many of its contemporary prejudices and conflicts. Apparently, however, society had not overcome its disdain for hippies and communes by the writers' imagined twenty-third century. There are a few episodes exploring groups that live on communes whose societies end up being upended by the arrival of the USS *Enterprise*.<sup>258</sup> However, there is only one episode infamously referred to as the “space hippies” episode—season three’s “The Way To Eden,” considered by many *Star Trek* fans and scholars to be one of the worst episodes of the original series.<sup>259</sup> Despite its sillier aspects, I think this episode has been unfairly maligned; in this close reading, I trace the nuanced ways in which it offers surprising commentary and insight on the “hippie problem.”

The episode opens with the USS *Enterprise* chasing the *Aurora*, a stolen Federation starship with six passengers aboard. After the ship refuses to follow Captain James Kirk

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<sup>258</sup> See: “The Return of the Archons,” in which the *Enterprise* discovers a planet whose inhabitants are “of the Body” and followers of Landru, which is revealed to be a machine; “This Side of Paradise,” in which the *Enterprise* visits a colony whose inhabitants are under the influence of (read: high on) strange spores; or “The Apple,” in which the *Enterprise* discovers a planet of seemingly happy locals who are “the people of Vaal,” Vaal being a mystical being they worship which is later also revealed to be a machine (this is a bit of a trope on *Star Trek*).

<sup>259</sup> The number of polls, articles, and think pieces that make this claim are too numerous to mention here, but examples include: Hollywood.com Staff, “Ranking All 79 ‘Star Trek: The Original Series’ Episodes from Worst to Best,” Hollywood, April 4, 2024, <https://www.hollywood.com/tv/ranking-star-trek-original-series-79-episodes-best-worst-59094091>;



(William Shatner)'s directives to stand down, the *Enterprise* locks the ship in a tractor beam and transports the passengers aboard (the *Aurora* is unfortunately destroyed in the process). When Kirk calls down to the transporter room to ask if the group is aboard, Chief Engineer Montgomery "Scotty" Scott (James Doohan) confirms the group's arrival with the sarcastic statement, "They are, and a nice lot too." The camera cuts to the transporter, where a group of psychedelically-dressed young people stand on the platform, holding their hands in a triangle shape in greeting. As derisively as the term "space hippies" has been used by *Star Trek* fans, it is also an extremely accurate description of these characters' appearances. As the cold open fades to black before the opening credits, the viewer knows nothing about this group's motivations—or even who these individuals are—but both the characters and the episode itself are setting up the audience to view the group with disdain.<sup>260</sup>

Through Kirk's captain's log (a voice-over provided by Shatner), we learn that one of the six members of the group is the son of the ambassador from the planet Catualla. Kirk and the *Enterprise* have been instructed to "handle him with extreme delicacy" as to not disrupt the treaty negotiations currently in process between the Federation and Catualla. When Kirk instructs Scotty to take the group to the briefing room, one of the young women shouts, "We're not in the mood, Herbert!" "Herbert" is the group's internal slang word that essentially means "square" or "member of the establishment," and is used throughout the episode, mostly directed at Kirk (who is not pleased by this).<sup>261</sup> Ensign Chekov (Walter Koenig) thinks he recognizes the voice as belonging to a woman named Irina. Meanwhile, the group refuses to leave the transporter room,

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<sup>260</sup> We are of course also meant to view the group with disdain for stealing the starship, but it seems like that crime is secondary to the evidently worse offense of being a hippie.

<sup>261</sup> The use of the name "Herbert" for the pejorative may have been a reference to *Star Trek* producer Herbert F. Solow (who was not known for being particularly uptight; it is more likely that it was just an in-joke).

and begins chanting “No go! No go!”—their actions mirror real life sit-ins and protests, but are presented in a much sillier manner. Kirk and Spock (Leonard Nimoy) head down to talk to the group. After the ambassador’s son, Tongo Rad (Victor Brandt), identifies himself, Kirk gives him a full dressing down, telling him that the only reason the group isn’t under arrest is because of the influence of his father. “In addition to piracy, you’ve left yourself open to charges of violating flight regulations, entering hostile space and endangering the lives of others as well as your own,” he reprimands Tongo Rad. “In addition, you’ve caused an interstellar incident which may have destroyed everything that’s been negotiated between your planet and the Federation.” Entirely unfazed, Tongo Rad offers no explanation of the group’s actions to Kirk, and returns to smugly sitting in silence.

After Kirk orders Spock to take the group to sickbay, Spock takes a different tack in attempting to communicate with the group. Raising his hands in the same triangle symbol of greeting the group uses, he opens with the word, “One.” Instantly, the group lights up, returning the hand gesture. “Are you One, Herbert?” one of the men (played by a young Charles Napier) asks. “I am not Herbert,” Spock replies. The man, whose name is later revealed to be Adam, lights up with a warm smile. “He is not Herbert. We reach.” (This exchange is ornamented with one cutaway of Kirk barely restraining from rolling his eyes.) It is significant that Spock—the character most obviously marked as other throughout *Star Trek* given the lack of emotion, focus on logic, and differences in appearance associated with Vulcans as a species—is the character who is able to best communicate with the group. By using their language and meeting the group where they’re at, Spock demonstrates a more socially liberal and open approach to “dealing with” hippies as opposed to Kirk’s conservative scolding.

Spock asks the group what their goals are and a different man—clearly the leader—answers, a little more firmly, “if you understand One, you know our purpose.” Spock would prefer that he state the purpose; it is then revealed that the group is looking for the planet Eden. After Kirk reminds the group that the planet is a myth, the leader of the group declares that they do not recognize the authority of the Federation, and that they protest against the ways they are being treated. Kirk argues back that “whether [they] recognize authority or not, [he is] it on this ship,” and that the group members will be brought back to their respective planets. The leader requests multiple times that they be taken to Eden. Outwardly annoyed, Kirk tells the group that he has orders to the contrary. He then restates his order to take the group to sickbay and says to Spock, “you seem to understand these people. You will deal with them.” Shatner’s delivery of the phrase “these people” communicates just about as much disdain as if he’d called them “dirty hippies.”

Back on the bridge, Chekov tells Kirk that he thinks he recognizes the woman whose voice we heard over the intercom—her name is Irina Galliulin, and she and Chekov attended Starfleet Academy together before she dropped out. “One of *those* was in the Academy?” Kirk asks incredulously; nonetheless, he grants Chekov permission to go and see her. Spock returns to the bridge as Chekov exits. When Kirk asks him if the group really believes in the existence of Eden, Spock points out that “many myths are based on truth,” and that the members of the group are quite intelligent in their own right. Not only is Tongo Rad extraordinary in the field of “space studies” (whatever that is) and Irina talented enough to have attended Starfleet, their leader, Dr. Sevrin—whom Kirk has actually heard of—is “a brilliant research engineer in the fields of acoustics, communications and electronics on Tiburon. He was dismissed from his post when he started this movement.” Sevrin is obviously based on Dr. Timothy Leary, the psychologist and

writer who became a prominent figure in sixties counterculture. Leary's research at Harvard University—alongside colleague Richard Alpert (later known as Ram Dass)—involved administering psychedelics to volunteers in controlled settings. The program, known as the Harvard Psilocybin Project, aimed to investigate the potential therapeutic and transformative effects of these substances. After being dismissed from Harvard in 1965, Leary became a vocal advocate for the use of psychedelics, promoting them as tools for personal growth, spiritual awakening, and cultural transformation. One of his most enduring impacts is his phrase “turn on, tune in, drop out,” embraced by young people of the counterculture as a call to embrace psychedelic experiences and reject conventional societal norms.<sup>262</sup> At the time of this episode's airing, there was significant mainstream contempt for Leary, which is infused into the writing of Sevrin's character.

Kirk still can't seem to wrap his brain around why the group rejects contemporary society and technology in favor of a “primitive” life. Spock notes that “there are many who are uncomfortable with what we have created. It is almost a biological rebellion. A profound revulsion against the planned communities, the programming, the sterilized, artfully balanced atmospheres. They hunger for an Eden where spring comes.” This sentiment would not be out of place in a sixties pamphlet advocating for back-to-the-land movements and, even with the poeticism, has a clear logic. Kirk considers this, but points out that even those who long for this type of life “don't steal space cruisers and act like irresponsible children.” When asked why he sympathizes with the group, Spock puts it simply: “It is not sympathy so much as curiosity,

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<sup>262</sup> In February of 1969, when this episode first aired, Leary had not yet fled the country—with the help of members of the radical leftist organization the Weathermen (later known as the Weather Underground Organization)—to avoid drug charges. However, the parallels between this episode and Leary's later real life flight from imprisonment are interesting to consider.

Captain. A wish to understand. They regard themselves as aliens in their own worlds, a condition with which I am somewhat familiar.”

When we next see the group, we get the first musical interlude of the episode. The execution of the music is admittedly one of the flaws of the episode, though I do not think the songs are as terrible as many critics and fans describe them. The songs were written by Napier and Deborah Downey (who portrayed the blonde group member that plays an instrument which looks like a bicycle wheel) while on set; though the lyrics are sometimes clunky, the melodies are serviceable and sound like average pop-rock songs circa 1968, when the episode was shot. This first song, about the group’s search for Eden, details how they’re “looking for the good land,” are “gonna live, not die,” and find their utopia in the new land one day. Chekov enters, looking for Irina, and they proceed to have an extended conversation recounting their relationship, typical of archetypal “former love interest” plots. They discuss why they broke up, why they grew apart, and how different they are as people now. Though Chekov is often portrayed as more bold and brash as compared to the other *Enterprise* crew members, he is still a member of a paramilitary organization, and it makes sense that when compared to the deeply anti-establishment characters in this episode, he ends up coming across as much more conservative. Irina attempts to convince Chekov to “give into himself” and consider other ways of thinking, but he rejects her. Irina leaves, and a sudden commotion breaks out in the corridor—Nurse Chapel (Majel Barrett) and the members of the security team are trying to keep the group out of sickbay as they chant, “Free Doctor Sevrin! Free Doctor Sevrin!”

After the act break, we re-enter sickbay to find Sevrin surrounded by security. Doctor Leonard McCoy (DeForest Kelley) explains the situation to Kirk—Sevrin is a carrier for a disease called synthecoccus novae, which developed out of the “aseptic, sterilized civilisations”

of the twenty-third century. McCoy will have to check everyone on the ship to make sure that they're up to date on their immunizations, and Sevrin will need to be placed in isolation. Kirk gives the order, and Sevrin is taken away. Meanwhile, the group has started chatting with members of the *Enterprise* crew and, as Scotty puts it in a call to the bridge, are attempting to "incite [them] to disaffect." Since they have been on board, the group has been a nuisance to crew members, but not outwardly dangerous; now, with Sevrin identified as a carrier of a harmful disease and the potential for mutiny brewing, the danger the group poses becomes much more real. Spock heads off to talk to Sevrin, and offers him a mutually beneficial plan: if Sevrin is able to get his followers to lay off, he can use the resources of the *Enterprise* to "determine whether or not Eden actually exists and to plot its exact location," and present a plan to the Federation to allow Sevrin and his people to take up residence there. In their conversation, Sevrin reveals that he has in fact known that he is a carrier of *synthecoccus novae*, and (in a moving performance from Skip Homeier) articulates his justified anger with Federation life:

This is poison to me—this stuff you breathe, this stuff you live in, the shields of artificial atmosphere that we have layered about every planet. The programs in those computers that run your ship and your lives for you, they bred what my body carries. That's what your science have done to me. You've infected me.

Sevrin's points are understandable, and resonate with many ecologically-focused movements of the sixties. After the suffering that living with the disease has caused him, the viewer can empathize with his want to live among the "primitives," whom he views as the only ones who can cleanse him of the painful artificiality of contemporary twenty-third century society (even if, as Spock points out, as a carrier of the disease, interacting with the unvaccinated "primitives" will kill them). Eventually, Sevrin seems to agree with Spock, and states that he'll talk to the group members and try to convince them to behave. In perhaps the most whiplash-inducing moment of the entire episode, back on the bridge Spock reveals that Sevrin is insane. (He hasn't

confirmed this with Dr. McCoy, but he “has no doubt of it.”) No evidence is provided storytelling wise to prove this at this point; the viewer is obviously meant to view Spock as a reliable source—and evidence will be provided later—but this is a jarring piece of information to provide with little context storytelling-wise. Regardless, the impact of the statement in damaging our view of Sevrin is done. It also isn’t really lessened by Spock’s statement that “there is no insanity in what [the group] seek[s]” or his decision to follow through on his promise to locate Eden (which he recruits Chekov to help with, sending him to auxiliary control). To the viewer, it doesn’t matter; Sevrin—and by extension, his followers—are now marked as “crazy.”

As Spock is working in his quarters, Adam comes to visit, and is taken with Spock’s Vulcan lute. In a genuinely sweet moment of musical exchange, Spock lets him try out the instrument, and then demonstrates the proper way to play it; the episode continues to position Spock as the only character who makes an effort to treat the “Eden Seekers” (as the *Mission Log* podcast names them) like normal people. Delighted, Adam asks Spock to join the group for a jam session later, and Spock accepts the invitation. Meanwhile in auxiliary control, Irina comes to visit Chekov, who accidentally lets slip that the entire ship can be controlled from the room where he is working. When Sevrin’s followers regroup, they report back on their efforts to sway members of the Enterprise crew to their cause; with Irina’s newly discovered information, they can put Sevrin’s larger plan in place. The act ends with a shot of Sevrin in isolation, smiling menacingly at the camera before we fade to black.

The third act opens with the second musical number of the episode, with the group performing their music for members of the crew in one of the ship’s recreation rooms. Kirk is even allowing the concert to be broadcast over the ship’s intercom. This song is is much better

than the first—the lyrics are more developed, reflect a generally uplifting message of connection and hope in overcoming interpersonal alienation:

*If a man tells another man, “out of my way—”  
He piles up trouble for himself all day  
But all kinds of trouble come to an end  
When a man tells another man “be my friend.”  
Well, what’s it going to be?  
There’s a mile wide emptiness between you and me—  
Can’t reach across it, hardly even see.  
Someone ought to take a step one way or other—  
Let’s say goodbye, or let’s say brother.*

After the song ends, Spock joins the group on his lute. The crew is drawn in, seemingly almost hypnotized by the music; this is probably due to Sevrin’s expertise in acoustics. The guard standing outside of Sevrin’s room is distracted by the music, and thus, does not see Tongo Rad sneak up behind him and incapacitate him, freeing Sevrin. On the bridge, as the vibe of the music spreads, Scotty comments, “At least we know where they are and what they’re doing. I don’t know why a young mind has to be an undisciplined one. They’re troublemakers.” It seems that even Kirk has warmed up to the group a little, as he says, “I used to get into a little trouble when I was that age, Scotty, didn’t you?” Ironically, as the crew’s acceptance of the group increases, so does the group’s capacity for evil. This comes to a head as Sevrin and his followers take over all ship functions from auxiliary control, including life support. If Kirk and the crew interfere at any point until the ship reaches Eden, Sevrin will destroy the *Enterprise*. The stakes are further heightened by the fact that the course the *Enterprise* is now on will lead them into Romulan space, an unprotected area where Federation ships’ presence is viewed as “a military intrusion and attack.” Spock provides Sevrin’s psychological records to the group in an attempt to get the group to understand the stakes of his actions. “Adam—you know I reach you,” Spock says, trying to reason with the group member he is most connected to. “I believe in what you seek. But there is a tragic difference between what you want and what [Sevrin] wants.” Adam, Sevrin, and



the rest of the group ignore Spock, as Sevrin reveals the next stage of the plot—he has built an ultrasonic auditory weapon which will stun everyone on board, giving the group time to escape.<sup>263</sup> As Kirk, Spock, and Scotty try to break into auxiliary control, Sevrin deploys the weapon and everyone on the Enterprise is rendered unconscious.<sup>264</sup>

As the final act begins, Kirk, Spock, and Scotty come to and are able to turn off the ultrasonic weapon, though they still do not have control over the Enterprise. They also discover that Sevrin and the group have taken a shuttlecraft and made it to the planet Eden—which is real. Kirk, Spock, McCoy, and Chekov beam down to the surface and discover that the planet, despite its beautiful landscape, is no paradise. All the plant life is acidic; the quartet quickly find Adam lying dead under a tree, having eaten one of the poisonous fruits. The rest of the group are in the shuttlecraft, their bare feet burned by the planet’s surface. The entire group prepares to beam up, but a crazed Sevrin refuses to cooperate—he climbs a tree, eats of the poisoned fruit, and dies instantly. It is both a highly dramatic and oddly anticlimactic ending to his story. Later, in orbit around a starbase, the crew prepares to send the four survivors off. We do not know what happens to the remaining members of Sevrin’s group after this episode, but Spock offers a kind message to Irina—“It is my sincere wish that you do not give up your search for Eden. I have no doubt but that you will find it, or make it yourselves.” The final line of the episode is said by Kirk to Spock—without sarcasm or mocking in his tone, he says simply, “We reach, Mr. Spock.”

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<sup>263</sup> The storytelling conventions of *Star Trek* and of sixties television in general lead the viewer to know that Kirk, Spock, and the rest of the *Enterprise* crew will always emerge alive (if not entirely unscathed) at the end of the week’s episode. At this period in time, main characters were never killed off by writers on network television. (Henry Blake’s death at the end of the third season of *M\*A\*S\*H*, groundbreaking for the time, was still years away.) While occasional side characters are killed off on *Star Trek*—this is where the trope of the “red shirt” always dying comes from, after all—there is never any real danger to the leads.

<sup>264</sup> The image of the Enterprise crew slumped over consoles and collapsed on the floor of the Enterprise is genuinely disturbing, conjuring the photographs taken after the aftermath of the 1978 massacre at Peoples Temple Agricultural Project, better known as Jonestown.

The problem with hippies that “The Way To Eden” exposes is less about “what they seek,” as Spock puts it, but about their mentality itself. The actual messages the group has about peace and trying to “reach” others are positive, but these are immediately undercut when it is revealed that they are functionally a cult (following Ellwood’s definition). Sevrin’s charisma and ability to control the group is explicitly rooted in insanity, and the episode is underscored by a conflation of mental illness with evil, which is a dated and uncomfortable aspect of the storytelling that does not hold up. Though a fairly reactionary episode on the whole, “The Way To Eden” does offer methods of connecting across countercultural and more mainstream ways of living, demonstrated through the scenes with Spock and Sevrin’s followers. The sharing of music and language increases empathy between the group and the crew members, and helps the viewer view the hippies as more human. In another world, the Enterprise crew might have left the “Eden Seekers” alone on the planet to meet their doom—but as Rachel Carrington, writing for the official *Star Trek* website, puts it, “in a world where violence is met with violence, this episode begs us to consider mercy,”<sup>265</sup> asking us to consider the ways we can increase our capacity for empathy for those with whom we disagree. However, soon after the airing of this episode, even slightly sympathetic portrayals of hippies in popular media would begin to fade into the past. The intersection of cult media and hippie-sploitation would dramatically shift toward the negative after the violence perpetrated by Charles Manson and members of the Family exploded in August 1969.

### Charles Manson and the Family

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<sup>265</sup> Rachel Carrington, “Lessons Learned on ‘The Way to Eden,’” *Star Trek*, February 21, 2024, <https://www.startrek.com/news/lessons-learned-on-the-way-to-eden>.

To try and condense every detail of the story of Charles Manson and the Family into one chapter is an impossible task, and is not entirely relevant to the scope of this project. In this abbreviated biography, I have aimed to highlight the information that I have deemed most relevant to understanding how and why the events of August 1969 came to happen. Ultimately, this chapter is not really “about” Manson. The man was opportunistic, manipulative, and caused many people extreme harm, and his actions led to the deaths of at least nine people—I do not have any interest in rehabilitating his image. What I am interested in are the experiences and societal structures in place that helped shape Manson into who he was, both as a person and as an eventual symbol of the death of the counterculture itself. In addition, I am concerned with understanding the reverberations of his and the Family’s actions, and how we can trace those consequences, both in the aftermath of the counterculture and today.<sup>266</sup>

Charles Manson’s early years were marked by chaos, instability, and neglect. He was born “No Name Maddox” on November 12, 1934 in Cincinnati, OH to a sixteen-year-old girl named Kathleen (who also had a history of abuse and criminal behavior). The last name Manson came later from his stepfather, William Manson. After Kathleen was arrested and sentenced to five years in prison for robbing a gas station, Manson was sent to live in a series of different

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<sup>266</sup> On a note that will likely be unsurprising to readers—Charles Manson had a general reputation for manipulating the truth. The book *Manson In His Own Words*, Manson’s life story as told to Nuel Emmons, is heavily edited and inconsistent, as Emmons was not allowed to record any of his hundreds of hours of interviews with Manson. This, combined with the fact that Manson was not a reliable source himself, has led me to not give it weight in my research. District attorney and Manson prosecutor Vincent Bugliosi wrote his own book, *Helter Skelter*, after the conclusion of the trial. Given his closeness to the material, he provides an interesting—if heavily biased—take on Manson’s story, though it also often veers into sensational territory. Thus, the majority of the biographical information in this section comes from Jeff Guinn’s *Manson: The Life and Times of Charles Manson* (New York, NY: Simon & Schuster Paperbacks, 2014) and Nikolas Schrek’s *The Manson File: Myth and Reality of an Outlaw Shaman* (London: Crossbank Publishing Ltd., 2022). These two sources are widely considered to be the best researched and most comprehensive Manson biographies. In addition, the documentary series *Helter Skelter: An American Myth*, produced by Epix in 2020, has also proven a highly useful and detailed resource.

homes and institutions, beginning with his aunt and uncle in West Virginia.<sup>267</sup> Even as a child, Manson was known for being a liar and generally difficult to deal with; in addition, two of his main interests that developed while living in West Virginia were knives and guns. The third interest, however, which would help shape the rest of his life, was music; he enjoyed singing in church, and was apt at playing piano by ear.<sup>268</sup>

After Kathleen was released from prison (paroled after serving three years), Manson returned to living with her, though the two would end up frequently relocating as she searched for steady work and a husband to gain some stability. These searches were further complicated by both her alcoholism and Manson's behavior growing increasingly worse. Though they eventually ended up in Indianapolis (where Kathleen married a man named Lewis), by this point, Manson was stealing, skipping class, running away from home, and constantly lying to and about everyone and everything. At her breaking point, Kathleen put Manson into the Gibault School for Boys in Terre Haute, Indiana, in 1947—the first in a series of abusive institutions that Manson would be placed in throughout his adolescence.<sup>269</sup> After fleeing the Gibault school twice, Manson fled back to Indianapolis but did not return to live with his mother. It was while he was living on his own in the city that he was arrested for the first time, on charges of theft. He was initially sent to a juvenile facility in Nebraska but, after stealing a car with a fellow student and getting arrested for a different robbery in Illinois, was sent to the Indiana Boys School outside of Plainfield, Indiana.<sup>270</sup>

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<sup>267</sup> Jeff Guinn, *Manson: The Life and Times of Charles Manson* (New York, NY: Simon & Schuster Paperbacks, 2014), 22.

<sup>268</sup> *Ibid.*, 31.

<sup>269</sup> *Ibid.*, 37.

<sup>270</sup> *Ibid.*, 41

Manson's experience at the Indiana Boys School was marked by constant abuse from staff members and other students alike. Always small and underweight, Manson was almost immediately sodomized and raped by other students.<sup>271</sup> It was here that Manson developed a defense tactic he would later call the "insane game." As Jeff Guinn describes, "in dangerous situations where he could not protect himself in any other way, he would act out to convince potential assailants that he was crazy. Using screeches, grimaces, flapping arms, and other extreme facial expressions and gestures, Charlie could often back off aggressors."<sup>272</sup> After an escape from the school in 1951, Manson caught his first federal charge for driving a stolen car across straight lines. He then was transferred through a series of institutions, including the minimum security Natural Bridge Honor Camp. However, it was here where Manson would be caught raping another boy while holding a razor to his throat.<sup>273</sup> He immediately lost his chance for early parole and was sent to the maximum security Federal Reformatory in Petersburg, Virginia. Here, he would commit more infractions, some sexually based; as Guinn notes, Manson "now played the 'insane game' well enough to act as predator much more often than victim."<sup>274</sup>

After Manson was finally released from his last reformatory in 1954, he quickly got married to a woman named Rosalie Willis. Any potential marital bliss would quickly end, though, as Manson was shortly arrested for driving yet another stolen car across state lines. After failing to appear in court for a similar charge in Florida, he was sentenced to three years in prison

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<sup>271</sup> Ibid.

<sup>272</sup> Ibid, 42.

<sup>273</sup> Ibid, 45.

<sup>274</sup> Ibid, 56.

at Terminal Island Prison in San Pedro, California. At Terminal Island (where he would be incarcerated twice), Manson learned how to pimp women out from his fellow inmates, who taught him to prey on vulnerable women; he was taught to seek out young women with self-esteem issues, to isolate them from family and friends, and manipulate them through a combination of violence and what we today might call “love bombing” (showering another person with attention and affection in an attempt to influence them). While Manson was in prison, he also learned that Rosalie was pregnant with his child and was living with another man; when he was paroled in 1958, they divorced, and he never saw his former wife and child again. A series of charges, including violating the Mann Act and attempting to cash a forged check, would have Manson back in prison until 1967. During his time at the United States Penitentiary on McNeil Island, Washington, Manson took guitar lessons from Alvin “Creepy” Karpis, one of the leaders of the famed Barker-Karpis gang in the 1930s.<sup>275</sup> He also grew interested in Scientology, and was heavily influenced (pardon the pun) by Dale Carnegie’s *How To Win Friends and Influence People*, finding in both “the kind of psychological tool[s] he could use to impress.”<sup>276</sup>

It is significant that by the time Manson was released in 1967, more than half of his life (sixteen of his thirty two years) had been spent in incarceration. Given the trauma and instability of his childhood and the extreme violence he experienced in these institutions—violence that he himself perpetuated on others, continuing the cycle of abuse—Manson was not set up for success. Manson also reentered society during one of the biggest sociopolitical and cultural shifts

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<sup>275</sup> Nikolas Schrek, *The Manson File: Myth and Reality of an Outlaw Shaman* (London: Crossbank Publishing Ltd., 2022), 71.

<sup>276</sup> “The Seed,” episode, *Helter Skelter: An American Myth* (Epix, 2020).

of the twentieth century. Coming out of prison and moving first to Berkeley, then San Francisco—the then-epicenters of the counterculture movement—may have felt like landing on another planet. However, he quickly made the most of the Summer of Love, experimenting with LSD and developing his own “guru rap” that was “cobbled together from Beatles song lyrics, biblical passages, Scientology, and the Dale Carnegie technique of presenting everything dramatically.”<sup>277</sup> It was during this time period in the Bay Area when Manson would meet his first follower, twenty three year old conservative librarian Mary Brunner. Charming his way into her apartment, then her bed, Manson convinced Brunner to quit her job and the two began traveling across California together. The second follower would be Lynette “Squeaky” Fromme; while she was not involved with the Tate and LaBianca murders, she would eventually go on to try to assassinate Gerald Ford. The burgeoning Family would eventually travel south to Los Angeles—picking up more followers, mostly young women and teenage girls—along the way. These young people drawn in by the Family were those who felt alienated by their parents, by society, by the government, and were seeking connection in a time marked by violent upheaval at home and abroad. When the family settled in Topanga Canyon, Manson would try to transition his skills as a street philosopher into a successful recording career—enter Dennis Wilson of the Beach Boys.

Wilson became involved with Manson and the Family after picking up two of the female Family members hitchhiking.<sup>278</sup> When Wilson left and came back to his house after a recording session, he was startled to see Manson there with the rest of the Family. After Wilson asked if Manson was there to hurt him, Manson said that he wasn’t, and got on the ground and kissed

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<sup>277</sup> Guinn, 95.

<sup>278</sup> David Griffiths, “Dennis Wilson: ‘I Live With 17 Girls.’” *Record Mirror*, December 21, 1968.

Wilson's feet. Drawn in by Manson's "guru rap" and the many beautiful, often topless, women that followed him around, Wilson allowed the Family to stay in his house for over six months (before his landlord evicted them, and the Family moved to Spahn Ranch).<sup>279</sup> Notably, there was legitimate interest in Manson as a potential recording artist during this period. Much of this aspect of his story has been downplayed (by district attorney Vincent Bugliosi in his book *Helter Skelter* and otherwise). Manson recorded multiple demo tracks—including some in Brian Wilson's home—during his friendship with Dennis Wilson, participating in additional sessions in 1968 helmed by Gregg Jakobson, and ended up auditioning for producer Terry Melcher, who declined to sign him. (The Wilson tracks have never been released to the public, and may have possibly been destroyed.) Wilson said in an interview with *Record Mirror*—titled "Dennis Wilson: 'I Live With 17 Girls'"—that "When I met [Manson] I found he had great musical ideas. We're writing together now. He's dumb, in some ways, but I accept his approach and have [learned] from him."<sup>280</sup> When listening to Manson's extant recordings, which were released on the 1970 album *Lie: The Love and Terror Cult*, his legitimate (if rudimentary) talent is evidenced. However, his basic folk-rock stylings are not particularly groundbreaking, especially amidst a sea of late sixties musicians with similar sounds, so it is not particularly surprising that he never broke through in the industry. Regardless, three of the more interesting tracks, "Your Home Is Where You're Happy," "Look At Your Game, Girl" and "Cease To Exist" are useful to examine in terms of what they reveal about Manson's tactics in manipulating his followers. "Your Home Is Where You're Happy," written about the Family's time at Spahn Ranch, might be through the same quotidian worldmaking view that Muñoz reads Frank O'Hara's "Having A

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<sup>279</sup> Guinn, 170.

<sup>280</sup> Griffiths.



Coke With You.” In the song, Manson suggests that elements of the utopic—expressed through the simple terms of “happy” and “free”—are touched within their communal living. There are no expectations or demands in the world they’ve built; “your home is where you can be what you are/ ‘cause you were just born to be.” More telling is the directive to “burn all your bridges and leave your old life behind”; however, the song ends on a more positive suggestion that

*anywhere you might wander  
You could make that your home  
And as long as you've got love in your heart  
You'll never be alone*

Despite the overall uplifting message of the song, traces of Manson’s rhetorical strategy can be found, and paint “an eerily accurate picture of the methods he used to manipulate the members of his cult..”<sup>281</sup> This is made explicit in “Look At Your Game, Girl” and “Cease to Exist.” In “Look At Your Game, Girl,” Manson attempts to convince a young, female follower to think about the ways in they are living in a “mad delusion” and consider his worldview (the better path):

*Think you're loving, baby  
And all you do is crying  
Can you feel?  
Are those feelings real?  
Look at your game, girl  
Look at your game, girl*

*What a mad delusion  
Living in that confusion  
Frustration and doubt  
Can you ever live without the game?*

Perhaps most revealing is “Cease To Exist,” which the Beach Boys would later repurpose as their song “Never Learn Not To Love.” It is the most overt—and haunting—example of

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<sup>281</sup> Mark Savage, “Charles Manson’s Music Was a Macabre Sidenote,” BBC News, November 20, 2017, <https://www.bbc.com/news/entertainment-arts-42051100>.

Manson's manipulative tactics. In the first verse, musicalizing the tactics of pimping he learned while in prison, he appeals to a "pretty girl, pretty, pretty girl" and tells her to

*Cease to exist  
Just come and say you love me  
Give up your world  
Come on, you can be*

The Family would literally give up their world and become further isolated with their move to Spahn Ranch in August 1968. Manson and the Family were given living quarters in exchange for doing chores around the ranch, and for the women providing sexual favors to owner George Spahn (under Manson's orders).<sup>282</sup> Notably, this is also when Charles "Tex" Watson joined the Family, and Bobby Beausoleil became close with Manson; these would change the course of the Family's path.

Things would get darker for the group during their time on Spahn Ranch. The less-than-ideal living situations on Spahn Ranch, near constant use and abuse of lysergic acid diethylamide (LSD), increasing paranoia from Manson, and generally difficult way of life contributed to the crisis. Add to this Tex Watson's drug dealing, the additional presence of the biker gang the Straight Satans, the introduction of speed into the group's already high drug use, and Manson's frustration over his lack of a record deal (which he believed would come through from Terry Melcher at any point), all of which contributed to the crisis point which would leave nine people dead.

On July 25, 1969, Bobby Beausoleil, along with Family members Mary Brunner, Susan Atkins, and Bruce Davis held UCLA PhD student and music teacher Gary Hinman hostage and tortured him before stabbing him to death (supposedly under the orders of Manson) and writing

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<sup>282</sup> Guinn, 173.

the words “Political Piggy” on the wall in his blood. Beausoleil stole Hinman’s car, and was arrested on August 6 later after Los Angeles police found him sleeping in it—in addition, they found the murder weapon (a knife) hidden in the tire well. Potentially motivated as a deliberate copycat in an attempt to clear Beausoleil of the Hinman murder, and again allegedly under the direct order of Manson, Family members went out to kill again on the night of August 8. Atkins, Watson, Patricia Krenwinkel, and Linda Kasabian (who was present but did not participate in the murders), would arrive at 10050 Cielo Drive in the Benedict Canyon neighborhood of Los Angeles. Inside the house, they would find actress Sharon Tate, as well as four other people—Abigail Folger, Voytek Frykowski, Jay Sebring and Steven Parent. All five would be murdered in the early hours of August 9—beaten, stabbed, or shot—and the word “Pig” was written on the front door in Tate’s blood.<sup>283</sup> The next night, Leslie Van Houten, Watson and Krenwinkel would attack Leno and Rosemary LaBianca in their home in Los Feliz. The Family members tied up the couple and stabbed them to death, carving the word “War” into Leno’s stomach. They then wrote “Helter Skelter” (misspelled) on the refrigerator and the words “Rise” and “Death to Pigs” in blood before making their way back to Spahn Ranch, slipping away into the night.<sup>284</sup>

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<sup>283</sup> There are many detailed—even moment-to-moment—descriptions of the crimes themselves available in the reputable Manson biographies cited here. For those who feel the need to see visual representation of the brutality of these murders, crime scene photos are featured in the *Helter Skelter: An American Myth* documentary series. Given the scope of this chapter, I have not felt the need to recreate this work, though obviously key details are mentioned. To go into every moment of the Tate and LaBianca murders for this chapter would be to border on the sensational. However, as previously mentioned, the details I highlight throughout the story of Manson and the Family are meant to set up the analysis of what sociopolitical and creative shifts we see that occur post-murders.

<sup>284</sup> In addition to the eight other murders, Spahn Ranch foreman Donald “Shorty” Shea was killed on August 26, 1969 by Manson, Davis, and Steven “Clem” Grogan. A note: I am not giving much space to discussing the motives of the murders in the body of this chapter. The “Helter Skelter” theory of events—that the murders would have ignited a race war that Manson was rapping about to the group, now under his nearly -magical control—is the one put forth by Vincent Bugliosi; it has definite holes in its logic. As Nikolas Schreck points out to those who subscribe to this theory—“if you took a few seconds to think about all this, the fact that the killers didn’t continue their random snuff spree of rich white pigs until the race war their cult leader supposedly yearned to spark actually started didn’t make a whole lot of sense. And if the point of all this mayhem was to inspire black to start slaughtering honkys by providing a prototype, why did Manson’s marauders leave such easily misinterpreted cryptic graffiti as

## Cults in Film and Television Pre-1970: Manson Aftermath and *Starsky & Hutch*'s Copaganda Meets Mansonsploitation

The violence perpetrated by Manson and the Family symbolized a profound expression of despair and rage. It was a radical, extreme manifestation of the alienation they felt, and of their growing, drug-fueled paranoia coming to a peak. The impact of the murders and of Manson himself on the American sociopolitical and cultural imagination was immediate. The media sensationalized Manson's acts, framing them as emblematic of the counterculture's perceived dangers. The brutality of the murders starkly contrasted with the broader counterculture's focus on peace and love; despite this, they would become symbolic of all issues associated with the counterculture, condensing the various threads of the "hippie problem" into one distinguishable event. I argue that the impact of the Family's actions effectively was the thing that phenomenologically and symbolically killed the countercultural movement. Joan Didion, in her influence 1978 essay "The White Album," said

Many people I know in Los Angeles believe that the '60s ended abruptly on August 9, 1969, ended at the exact moment when word of the murders on Cielo Drive traveled like brushfire through the community, and in a sense this is true. The tension broke that day. The paranoia was fulfilled."<sup>285</sup>

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HEALTER SKELTER, PIG, RISE, WAR, and DEATH TO PIGS behind when a simple but eloquent KILL WHITEY would have done the trick much more efficiently? But then, we were dealing with a cult of acid-head Satanists who thought the Beatles were divine messengers. [Note: the previous sentence is meant to be read sarcastically.] Who knows? Maybe maniacs like that didn't commit their crimes according to the logic we'd expect from normal criminals." There are scores of other conspiracies and theories proposed by scholars and true crime aficionados alike. To trace each one is beyond the scope of this chapter. Many scholars have dedicated entire careers to unpacking the competing accounts of what actually happened in the lead up to August 1969; I have here tried to distill the most basic version of a agreed upon events and details.

Schreck, 27.

<sup>285</sup> Joan Didion, *The White Album* (New York, NY: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2009), 47.

Though hippies would of course exist after the Tate and LaBianca murders and elements of the counterculture would soon become part of general cultural lexicon, they became the ultimate Other, the “hippie problem” one that could now not be avoided. The Family members were young people who saw themselves as outcasts or victims of societal failure, alienated by the mainstream, and now found that their actions created a crisis of alienation that would have repercussions beyond what they likely ever imagined. Writing for *Rolling Stone* in June of 1970 as the trials were beginning, David Felton and David Dalton articulated the fear that Manson instantly created in the public imagination, noting that

clearly Charles Manson already stands as the villain of our time, the symbol of animalism and evil. Lee Harvey Oswald? Sirhan Sirhan? Adolf Eichmann? Misguided souls, sure, but as far as we know they never took LSD or fucked more than one woman at a time.<sup>286</sup>

Bernadine Dohrn, one of the founders of the radical leftist group the Weathermen, famously said during a December 1969 Students for a Democratic Society meeting, “Dig it. First they killed those pigs, then they ate dinner in the same room with them. they even shoved a fork into the victim’s stomach! Wild!”<sup>287</sup> Dohrn’s declaration—which she would describe years later as an “ironic joke”—is obviously one that was made in poor taste. However, her 2009 explanation of why she made the statement she did reveals a more salient point about the impact Manson had on the American psyche:

Charles Manson had captured the American public imagination, and that you couldn’t get enough of Charles Manson. It was on the front page of the papers. [...] We were like, Fred Hampton and Mark Clark just had been murdered by the FBI and the Chicago police department, thousand people a day or being killed in Vietnam, pay attention to the real issues—and you couldn’t, because of the Manson thing. So I ironically gave a speech

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<sup>286</sup> David Felton and David Dalton, “Charles Manson: The Incredible Story of the Most Dangerous Man Alive,” *Rolling Stone*, June 25, 1970, <https://www.rollingstone.com/culture/culture-news/charles-manson-the-incredible-story-of-the-most-dangerous-man-alive-852335/>.

<sup>287</sup> Guinn, 334-335.

saying, “Dig it, Charles Manson.”<sup>288</sup>

As America was fixated on the Manson trials, and rightfully horrified by the actions of the Family, innocent portrayals of hippies began to disappear. They became symbolic shorthand for dangerous cult members. Manson became the face of the evil underbelly of the counterculture, which finally had been exposed, and the remains needed to be excised. For example, around a month after the conclusion of the Manson trial, advertisements for the 1971 film *I Drink Your Blood* (which focuses on a group of Satanic hippies—oxymoronic, but I digress—who enter into ideological and literal combat with residents of a small town) featured the ad copy, “Did you ever imagine what would happen if your community were invaded by hippies? You can now see what happens to a town when hippies go wild!”

*Manson* (1973) was the first major nonfictional film documenting the Family. For many people, this was the first long-form exposure to the group outside of newspaper coverage and shorter form television news footage. Filmed during the trial process (with participation from Bugliosi in the filmmaking), the documentary features interviews with almost all members of the group, including Manson himself. The film itself is poorly edited—and the long music sequences take the viewer out of the storytelling—but to hear the firsthand accounts from members of the Family so close to the events themselves makes it significant. In addition, the footage of the Family on Spahn Ranch and in the desert proves insightful to understanding the group’s way of life. The members themselves, however, do not do much in their interviews to either endear themselves to the American public or put up much of a defense for Manson and the murderer’s actions. They come across as flippant, deluded, stoned, or simply uncaring—which, to be honest

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<sup>288</sup> “Professor Bernardine Dohm Remarks on Her Manson Family Remarks.” C-SPAN, June 9, 2007, <https://www.c-span.org/video/?c4460430%2Fuser-clip-professor-bernardine-dohm-remarks-manson-family-remarks>.

in this assessment, many of them probably were. Statements like the following from Fromme are difficult to interpret as anything other than combative:

Whatever is necessary to do, you do it. When somebody needs to be killed, there's no wrong. You do it, and then you move on. And you pick up a child and you move him to the desert. You pick up as many children as you can and you kill whoever gets in your way. This is us.<sup>289</sup>

In addition to discourse like this from the Family throughout, the documentary is also heavily shaped by the heavily biased voiceover narration, which even goes so far as to claim that Manson fashioned himself after Hitler.<sup>290</sup> No evidence is provided for this and other similarly inflammatory claims meant to push viewers' fears to the extreme; directors Robert Hendrickson and Laurence Merrick—who would be nominated for Best Documentary Feature at the 1973 Academy Awards—pick and choose the most inflammatory soundbites and footage to paint Manson and his followers as entirely unrepentant and amoral. Similarly framed is the television docudrama *Helter Skelter* (1976), which was based on Bugliosi's 1974 book of the same name. Like its source material, it leaves out many of the nuances of the story of the Family in favor of a simple storyline with Manson's ability to manipulate his followers bordering on magical levels of control. It is, however, significantly better acted than many of the exploitation films that take details from the case wholesale to paint a broader picture of all hippies and alternative/commune styles of living as inherently dangerous, almost always to the point of murder.

In his compendium *The Manson Family on Film and Television*, Ian Cooper uses “Mansonsploitation” to describe a particular subgenre of exploitation films whose plots were

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<sup>289</sup> Robert Hendrickson and Laurence Merrick, dirs., *Manson*, 1973, DVD.

<sup>290</sup> Ibid.

directly inspired by the actions of the Family.<sup>291</sup> In researching for this chapter it was more difficult to find examples of media featuring cults and hippies in the immediate aftermath of the Manson trial that do *not* fall under this category. One of the most egregious examples is 1972's *The Cult*. The sexploitation film follows the flashbacks of cult leader Invar as his coterie of young female followers dumpster dive, have a lot of softcore sex, take drugs, and pull him around in a coffin. Entirely unserious and nearly unwatchable<sup>292</sup>—with additional scenes featuring rape, incest, and murder that do almost nothing to further the plot—the film was ridiculously advertised as “so close to the Manson story... it’s scary!”<sup>293</sup> Aside from its utter inaccuracy, this type of advertising is particularly insidious for its attempts to capitalize on the brutal crimes of the Family and further cement all hippies in the public imagination as violent, insane rapists. (Even worse, the film was then rereleased under the absolutely tasteless title *The Manson Massacre* in 1976.)

Partially in response to the perceived threats posed by groups like Manson's—regardless of any actual danger—American society became more conservative throughout the decade. There was also a marked increase in general violence throughout the seventies, but this was not specific to hippies as a demographic. The convergence of these two shifts can be traced culturally through the beginning of the rise of “copaganda.” A portmanteau of “cop” and

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<sup>291</sup> *The Manson Family on Film and Television* is laudable for its aims of documenting a canon of Manson and Family-related cinema and television, and has proven a solid reference compendium; however, it is often cursory in its examination of the films and television programs themselves. With this chapter, I do not aim to duplicate Cooper's work, but to instead give a more focused analysis to those works that I argue best reflect the phenomenological shift I explore throughout this chapter. Also, Cooper leaves the episode of *Starsky & Hutch* I analyze out of his book, which I view as a surprising oversight given the range of films and television shows he discusses.

<sup>292</sup> Admittedly, the version of the film I saw was a version dubbed in German with no subtitles—so it's possible I missed some of the more subtle storytelling elements here, though I am extremely doubtful.

<sup>293</sup> *The Cult*, advertisement, *The Clovis News-Journal*, March 23, 1972, 10.



“propaganda,” the term is used to describe media portrayals that promote a positive image of law enforcement while downplaying or ignoring complexities and real life issues related to policing.

*Starsky & Hutch*, which aired from 1975 to 1979, was one such program that set to portray cops as the “good guys.”<sup>294</sup> Paul Michael Glaser’s Starsky and David Soul’s Hutch were simultaneously portrayed as down to earth and hyped up in print media as sex symbols, meant to increase their appeal to a wide range of audience demographics. *Starsky & Hutch* emphasized heroic portrayals of its detective protagonists, oversimplified crime resolution (admittedly somewhat necessary for the storytelling constraints of a fifty minute long television program), and minimized potential for critique of policing practices, helping to shape public perceptions in a way that supported and normalized the image of police. The season two episode “Bloodbath,” directed by Glaser, offers a unique intersection of copaganda and “Mansonspoitation” through which we can trace this a distinct post-Manson change in media representation of cults.<sup>295</sup>

After a short humorous scene concerning the repair of Hutch’s car by Merle the Earl (a recurring mechanic character known for his over-the-top car customizations), Glaser takes us outside a Southern California courthouse through the lens of a television reporter’s camera. Clearly imitative of the news coverage of the Manson trial, we see throngs of hippies sitting on the courthouse steps, many of whom have an inverted cross drawn on their foreheads. The reporter tries to engage a few of the hippies, asking one, “what are your feelings about this trial?” The group ignores his questions and instead chants the name “Simon.” Starsky and Hutch quickly make their way into the courthouse, dodging the reporter and a group of press

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<sup>294</sup> *Dragnet*, which began airing in 1951, is the prototypical example of this type of program; other highly influential examples include *Hawaii Five-O*, *F.B.I.*, *Hill Street Blues*, and—perhaps the most impactful of them all—the *Law & Order* franchise.

<sup>295</sup> This episode is additionally interesting as a piece of “Mansonspoitation” in that the plot takes place after the villainous guru has already been arrested for mass murder (as opposed to following the initial takedown of the cult).

photographers; it is then revealed that our heroes (along with their captain, Harold Dobey, played by Bernie Hamilton) are present for a sentencing hearing. Starsky runs to the bathroom—a superstitious habit that he believes will bring the harshest possible sentence—and the judge begins the proceedings.

It is with a crash zoom on his entrance that we then meet the villain of the episode, Simon Marcus, played by the fabulously named Aesop Aquarian. (Aquarian, bizarrely, was himself connected to the Family in the late sixties—he briefly lived on Spahn Ranch, drove members to attend Manson’s trial, visited Manson in prison, and was nearly caught up in a supposed plot to assassinate Vincent Bugliosi before immediately cutting ties with the group.)<sup>296</sup> Looking like a dead ringer for Manson with long, dark hair, a full beard, and haunting eyes, Simon, too, has an inverted cross on his forehead—a slightly more broadcast-friendly reference to the swastikas Manson and a few Family members carved into their skin during the trial. As the judge rambles through the proceedings about Simon’s lack of remorse for the nine deaths he has been found responsible for, Hutch is handed a note by the bailiff reading *Where is Starsky?* Hutch exits the courtroom and speeds to the bathroom, only to discover Starsky missing and his name written on the mirror in blood (a la “Healter Skelter” or “Political Piggy”). As Hutch and Dobey frantically continue their search for Starsky, Hutch labels the hippies as “freaks” and “creeps”; a moment later, two of those “freaks” call the courthouse and make their demands clear—free Simon within twenty four hours, or Starsky dies.

The two-hander scenes with Hutch interrogating Simon are the most interesting ones of the episode, not only for Soul and Aquarian’s great performances, but for what they reveal about

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<sup>296</sup> Gary Baum, “The Many Lives and Dying Words of Aesop Aquarian,” *The Hollywood Reporter*, December 24, 2022, <https://www.hollywoodreporter.com/news/general-news/aesop-aquarian-life-story-manson-family-1235180433/>.

the archetypes of the evil cult leader and hero cop. Notably, Simon comes across as significantly less outwardly crazed than Manson—soft spoken and calm, Aquarian plays him as much more grounded, even despite the mystical dialogue. (Interestingly, in an interview with the Hollywood Reporter, Aquarian noted that he thought Manson “played crazy really well.”)<sup>297</sup> Simon is consistently shot in darkness and shadow from higher camera angles, while Hutch—the blonde all-American WASP-y detective-to-the-rescue—is well lit and shot from a lower camera angle, framing him as more powerful. Even when Hutch snaps in an overt abuse of power—shoving Simon against the wall of the interrogation room and demanding to know where Starsky is—we are reminded through Simon’s coolly mystical dialogue that Hutch is the “White Knight,” the archetypal good guy to the rescue, and won’t actually cause him any harm. After Hutch is given the vague direction to “start at the end” in order to find Starsky, we cut to the kidnapped Starsky, who is bound, blindfolded, and surrounded by chanting black-hooded followers of Simon. As Starsky struggles against his bonds, he yells at the group:

Shut up! You’re wasting your time! Do you hear me? Grabbing me ain’t gonna get you a fixed parking ticket! And you can quit that chanting, that ain’t gonna save Marcus either. What’s the matter? You run out of children to molest, you gotta pick on a cop? Huh? Huh? Why don’t you let me see you? Why don’t you take off this blindfold and let me see you? I know you’re out there! I can smell you! I can smell every one of you!

Starsky reveals that not only are Simon and his dirty, smelly followers mass murderers, they sexually violate children. This is extreme, especially for 1970s network television, and the detail serves to further solidify hippies in the minds of the viewer as truly unredeemable evil figures.

After a cut for the commercial break, Hutch parks Starsky’s red Torino and makes his way back to the abandoned storefront where he and Starsky arrested Simon. Inside, he encounters more of Simon’s followers kneeling in front of an altar and continuing to chant

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<sup>297</sup> Ibid.

Simon's name. He immediately starts assaulting members, shaking them and screaming for answers, then weakly begging for them to help him. After reminding the group that they too will be charged for Starsky's kidnapping the members are looking at "ten to twenty years for accessory to kidnapping, or life, if that police officer doesn't make it"), Hutch takes a different approach. Standing in front of a multicolored glass window, with a white lamp shining above like a halo, he embodies the role of a preacher trying to bring this flock of misguided sheep back into the fold of humanity:

Don't you see, I'm giving you the chance to be free of Simon Marcus—become human beings again! Don't you understand? He's done for! He's gone. Who's gonna take care of you while he's rotting in jail, because he's never coming back! Forget about him. Help yourselves!

Like a more hip Billy Graham, Hutch is offering the group the path to freedom and enlightenment; it's all in vain, though, as the group ignores him and continues their chanting as Hutch leaves in defeat. A black van—not unlike the black schoolbus the Family used as transportation in their early days—pulls away as Hutch notices a ticking black box sitting on the driver's seat of the Torino. When it pops open, it is revealed to be not a bomb, but a creepy clown jack-in-the-box with Starsky's badge inside. Back at headquarters, the blood on the mirror in the courthouse bathroom has been tested; the lab results reveal it is thankfully not Starsky's, but likely from a cow or bull. This prompts Hutch to remember that "Simon camped his followers on a ranch. The owner let them stay there because he wanted to get close to some of Marcus's crazy ladies," details lifted directly from the Family's Spahn Ranch experience. Unlike the Family, though, Simon's followers were thrown off the ranch for animal mutilation—adding to the list of awful crimes being associated with hippies on the whole. Hutch finds the name of the group's former home—Pinyon Pine Ranch—and leaves to investigate.

We then jump to a tight shot of a young woman, dressed in a lacy white dress, who is revealed to be staring at an unconscious Starsky, now beaten and bloodied. As he comes to, we see that he is trapped in the bottom of a cave. The woman introduces herself as Gail, and after some character-typical flirting from Starsky, starts cutting his clothes off with a knife so she can give him a bath “to purify [him] before the ceremony.” We as viewers do not know what type of ceremony as of yet, but it certainly cannot be a positive one. Meanwhile, back at the ranch (pardon the joke), Hutch tracks down R.J. Crow, the owner, and finds that Simon’s followers have in fact killed one of Crow’s animals. Hutch tries to get Crow to help him, offering police protection against retaliation from Simon’s follower if Crow talks, but Crow refuses. It’s too late for Crow, though—barely a moment after he enters his barn, it explodes, knocking Hutch to the ground. After collecting himself, he spots the black van again, and gives chase in the Torino, only to find the van abandoned in the California hills. Glaser’s camera lingers on Hutch as we see the anguish and pain on Soul’s face. In an episode with incredibly high stakes, the directorial choice to pause and focus on our hero as we experience the depth of his pain with him is deliberate.

This tension carries into the following, incredibly baffling scene; back with Starsky in the cave (post-bath), he dons the robe that has been left for him by Gail (black, with a red inverted cross painted on the back) and stumbles across a black bear, which is not seen again for the rest of the episode. “Welcome, pilgrim,” one of Simon’s followers says, menacingly peering down at Starsky from the top of the cave. “Welcome to Simon’s dream.” Starsky picks up a rock to defend himself, but suddenly, the bear and the follower are gone. Continuing his search for a way out of the cave, Starsky is then burned in the face with a long-staffed torch by a different Simon follower. “I am the keeper of the flame, and Simon dreamed we’d get together,” the man

declares, in a genuinely creepy echo of Tex Watson’s pronouncement upon arriving at the house on Cielo Drive—“I’m the devil, and I’m here to do the devil’s business.”<sup>298</sup> Starsky is able to overpower the man and find an exit, but is stopped by a third follower before he is able to escape.

Meanwhile, after a consultation with Dobey, Hutch is back for a second round with Simon. He is visibly more defeated, and more reserved in his questioning (though he does briefly lunge across the table at Simon at the beginning of the scene). “There must have been a time in your life when you felt the way others do, about human life,” Hutch says wearily, laying his hands on the table. “Remember that time? Remember that time when you had a soul...and tell me where my partner is.” As *Starsky & Hutch* fan blogger Merle the Earl (who gets their pen name from the character in this episode) points out, “at the moment Hutch lays his hands on the table he puts himself deliberately at a disadvantage. He lays his weapons down. He surrenders.”<sup>299</sup> It briefly seems that he might be getting through to Simon when he tells Hutch an anecdote about being bullied as a child for having prophetic dreams. But this moment passes quickly, and Simon is back to spouting cryptic messages. Perhaps most striking is his statement that he and his people are now “everywhere. Once in ebony and granite—now, in the trees, in the water.” Though this statement will shortly be revealed as part of an actual clue to Starsky’s location, the line resonates with the fear simmering within the American public that people like Simon and his followers walk hidden among us, permeating every corner from concrete jungles to nature itself with evil. Back to Starsky—he is yet again bound, this time severely weakened. Gail helps him drink water, handed to her by an unnamed male follower standing guard. When

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<sup>298</sup> Guinn, 249.

<sup>299</sup> “Episode 34: Bloodbath.” The Ollie Report, August 2, 2023.  
<https://merltheearl.wordpress.com/2010/05/21/episode-34-bloodbath/>.

Starsky starts gagging, Gail realizes that something has been put in the water, and is upset with the man. “You put something in the water and didn’t tell me! Why must it always be so cruel?” she protests. The unnamed follower strikes her in the face, knocking her to the ground. It is revealed that Gail has also been kidnapped by the cult, and brainwashed into committing these violent acts. Gail’s character was likely based on Patty Hearst, the granddaughter of newspaper baron William Randolph Hearst who had been kidnapped by radical leftist group the Symbionese Liberation Army (SLA) in 1974. There has long been debate about whether Hearst was brainwashed or a willing accomplice in the violent actions the SLA committed. Contemporary scholarship gives more weight to the perspective that she participated in the actions of the SLA as a way of endearing herself to the group long enough to keep herself alive. However, the myth that Hearst was brainwashed persists, and was still at a height when this episode aired on January 1, 1977 (less than a year after her trial). With this revelation of this new information, Gail shifts in the viewer’s mind from unrepentant blind follower of Simon to a more sympathetic victim of his manipulation. The man hypnotizes Gail and puts her to sleep, telling her to “dream the way it was, when [they] first took [her].” The last image before the final act break is of the follower leaning into the camera, his face filling up the entire screen as we see him through Starsky’s distorted point of view. He whispers—“and you dream, too, pig...dream and make it good. For at sunrise, the dream is ending, and so is your life. You’re going to die.”

“It’s a game,” Hutch reflects back in Dobey’s office. He and Dobey have been joined by friend and local informant Huggy Bear (played by Antonio Fargas) overnight as they puzzle through hours of tapes of Simon’s mysticisms. “Begin at the end means start where he finished. Whatever he dreams is his way of—whatever he says he dreams is his way of saying what his plans are, so his words are clues, and so are the words in that tape. We

just gotta find the key.” After a conversation about synonyms, the trio are able to crack Simon’s code by coming up with alternative words in Simon’s phrases that reveal his deeper meaning; Starsky is being held at an old zoo where two drug dealers (who may have been stabbed to death by Simon’s followers—a la Gary Hinman) used to process cocaine.<sup>300</sup>

Morning has broken, and Starsky is now strung up by his wrists like a cow waiting to be butchered by Simon’s followers (who never seem to stop chanting his name). As the camera jumps from hooded cult member to hooded cult member, it is intercut with tight shots of Starsky’s face, as we see fear begin to creep into his expression. Gail, sadly wielding her knife, explains to Starsky that everything happening was prophetically dreamed by Simon. She is briefly able to tap into her good Christian faith and break through her brainwashing by repeating one of the ten commandments—“thou shalt not kill.” It is short-lived, however, and soon she raises the knife over her head, sobbing as Starsky attempts to reason with her to stop. As all of this is happening, Hutch, Dobby, and other policemen pull up at the bottom of the hill where Starsky is about to be ritually sacrificed. As Hutch runs towards the group, Gail struggles against her programming; Starsky reminds her and the viewer that this brainwashing “i[s] Simon. It’s not [her, she doesn’t] want any part of this.” The chanting, musical underscoring, and tension reach a climax as Gail brings the knife down—not to kill Starsky, but to cut the rope binding his wrists. Hutch arrives at the same moment and makes quick work of beating up the remaining cult members. The scene concludes with Starsky and Hutch emotionally embracing each other, with Gail collapsed in Starsky’s lap.

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<sup>300</sup> This scene barely makes any sense storytelling-wise—why was Huggy invited to help with this case, how does our trio know with such certainty that this is the correct solution to Simon’s puzzle, why are coke dealers suddenly being thrown into the mix, etc.—but given the conventions of the cop drama, in which our leads always save the day, the audience is presumably expected to ignore these potential plot holes.



There is no follow through with what happens to Simon or his followers (presumably his sentencing goes as planned, or more charges are added to his sentence for the events of this episode). More strikingly, we get no resolution to Gail's storyline—like Patty Hearst, would she be charged as an accessory to Simon's crimes, or would she not be found responsible? The episode tag sends Starsky and Hutch back to Merle's to pick up Hutch's car, which now has an extravagant custom interior that Hutch despises. Despite the symmetry with the first scene, the choice to end on another humorous moment is a strange way to conclude the episode given the intensity of the main plot. However, maybe this choice is symbolic of the larger takeaway we are meant to have after viewing "Bloodbath"—even faced with the insidious evil that simmers beneath the surface everyday American life, law enforcement will always emerge triumphant, able to bounce back with minimal trauma, face the aftermath of these violent events head on.

#### "Remember For The Rest Of Your Life"

Interest in Charles Manson and the Family has never ceased since news of their crimes broke in 1969. Sparking countless conspiracy theories, endless analyses of Manson and the Family's motivations, the Tate and LaBianca murders ripped open the dark side of the counterculture, beginning its slow death throughout the seventies. There were many death knells to come—I think particularly of the events of May 4, 1970 at Kent State University—and other factors that would contribute to the waning movement. The generation leading the protests on campuses and in the streets began to grow up, their priorities shifting from the "we" to the "Me Generation"—as baby boomers were dubbed long before millennials were assigned the label. But Charles Manson, his long term "insane game," and the actions of the Family still evoke fear and disdain today. If there is any useful takeaway to be had from the immense tragedies of the

actions of the Family, it is that critical examinations can help provide a window into the ways these events have reverberated for over fifty years, and the violent ways in which groups like these are symptoms of a deeply alienating society. This point is not meant to be reflective of any viewpoint which aims to reduce the culpability of Manson, Atkins, Beausoleil, Brunner, Davis, Kasabian, Krenwinkel, Van Houten, and Watson for their horrific actions. What I hope that this chapter helps to shed light on are the ways in which society fails its vulnerable, most alienated members, and what happens when utopian visions are co-opted and manipulated for ill intent. During his trial testimony, Manson said simply, “These children that come at you with knives—they are your children. You taught them. I didn’t teach them. I just tried to help them stand up.”<sup>301</sup>

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<sup>301</sup> Guinn, 374.

## CONCLUSION

On September 29, 1968, activist, singer, and actor Harry Belafonte was one of the featured guests on the first episode of the third season of *The Smothers Brothers Comedy Hour*. Hosted by left-leaning comedians and folk singers Tom and Dick Smothers, the comedy-variety show was known for its edgy political satire and for providing a performance platform for outspoken and countercultural musical artists. Belafonte, no stranger to pushing the envelope with his own politically-driven art, recalled for *Dangerously Funny: The Uncensored Story of the Smothers Brothers Comedy Hour* that “since the Smothers Brothers’ show was not only a format of music, but also a format of social and political satire, it seemed to us the most appropriate thing to do would be to comment on the way the conventions were behaving, and the political situation in America was unfolding.”<sup>302</sup> Teaming up with the brothers Smothers and their writers to write satirical lyrics, Belafonte and the group selected “Don’t Stop the Carnival,” a calypso song about the wild, “Creole bacchanale” celebrations of Mardi Gras. The song is, as Shane Vogel details in *Stolen Time: Black Fad Performance and the Calypso Craze*, “a demand that carnival continue in the face of state repression and voices the long history of resistance to governmental attempts to regulate carnival festivities in Trinidad from the nineteenth century on.”<sup>303</sup> The song was a fitting choice to rework as satirical commentary about that year’s Democratic National Convention (DNC) one month after the events in Chicago exploded.

The performance begins with Belafonte standing under an overhang of orange, yellow and red patterned glass. He sings the first two verses of the songs with few modifications to the

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<sup>302</sup> David Bianculli, *Dangerously Funny: The Uncensored Story of The Smothers Brothers Comedy Hour* (New York, NY: Simon & Schuster, 2009), 195.

<sup>303</sup> Shane Vogel, *Stolen Time: Black Fad Performance and the Calypso Craze* (Chicago, IL: The University of Chicago Press, 2019), 206.

normal lyrics (other than the shift that “Carnival’s an *American bacchanale*”). It is when the footage of the DNC appears on the green screen behind Belafonte that the viewer realizes that this isn’t your average prime-time network musical performance. As the film rolls, Belafonte expresses his reactions to the events of the convention: “Oh, Lord, I feel so low, about that town—old Chicago. Humphrey, Muskie, McGovern, Eugene McCarthy split the party—now nobody be happy. Tell the whole population, we’re having a confrontation.” As the footage moves from inside the convention to the streets of Chicago, the performance becomes a calypso medley. Pulling lyrics from “Mama Look a Boo Boo,” “Jump in the Line,” “Marianne,” “Sly Mongoose,” “Zombie Jamboree,” and “Matilda,”<sup>304</sup> Belafonte repoliticizes key lines by juxtaposing them with the harrowing footage playing behind them.

“Mama Look a Boo Boo” is about a father who is so ugly that his children view him as a “boo boo” (an ugly inhuman creature, like a goblin); angered by the lack of respect, he beats them. Belafonte casts the National Guard as “boo boos” and the protestors as the children:

*“Mama, look, a boo boo,” they shout  
Their mama tell them,  
“Shut your mouth, look away, that is your country!”  
Oh, no—my country can be ugly so!*

“Won’t you jump in the line, rock your body in time,” Belafonte repeats over clips of Chicago cops beating protestors and shoving them into police vans, holding on one high note that borders on a wail. “Shake, shake, shake, America, shake,” Belafonte sings . Though no footage of Mayor Richard M. Daley plays in this performance, it is clear that he is being called to task as the “sly mongoose” who “puts on his wooden gloves [and] go[es] out hunting for flock of doves.” Belafonte then paints the DNC as a celebration by/of the undead with lyrics from “Zombie Jamboree”:

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<sup>304</sup> Ibid, 207.

*Back to back, belly to belly  
Don't give a damn, done dead already  
Uh-oh, back to back, belly to belly  
At the Zombie Jamboree*

“Matilda,” one of Belafonte’s first and biggest calypso hits, would have been a natural choice to include in this medley. However, here is where Belafonte loses his always-charming (but in the context of this performance, sarcastic) smile, pain crossing his face as he explains why the song has been left out:

*I can't even sing "Matilda."  
I can't even sing "Matilda."  
I tell you why I can't sing "Matilda"—  
These ain't the times to sing "Matilda."  
Times like these would have almost killed her.  
If she comes here, they'll probably jail her.  
I keep Matilda down in Venezuela.*

As Vogel points out, “Belafonte invokes ‘Matilda’ in order to mark its absence from the performance. The refusal to sing this song (and in doing so, figuratively protect Matilda from the police)”<sup>305</sup> reflects the intensity of the context in which Belafonte is performing the entire medley. These ain’t the times to sing “Matilda,” it’s the moment to sing about the dark times. Unfortunately, this version of “Don’t Stop the Carnival” never made it to air in the US (though it was included in the episode for the Canadian broadcast).<sup>306</sup> The performance was censored by CBS, who “added insult to injury by replacing it with a five-minute campaign ad from Republican presidential nominee Richard M. Nixon.”<sup>307</sup> The aftermath of CBS’s decision to not air the performance caused the “rapid, total disintegration of the relationship between the

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<sup>305</sup> Ibid, 211.

<sup>306</sup> The first time the footage was made publicly available was on a 1993 E! Entertainment documentary; it has subsequently been released on *Smothers Brothers* DVDs, and can be watched on YouTube at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QFE4N57ibUQ>, accessed July 30, 2024.

<sup>307</sup> Bianculli, xii.

network and the *Comedy Hour* staff,”<sup>308</sup> eventually leading to the cancellation of *The Smothers Brothers Comedy Hour* the following year.

As I rewatch Belafonte’s performance in 2024 amidst this current and latest moment of national and international chaos, I cannot help but feel as if we are in a temporal loop, experiencing a frightening remix of events leading up to a potential explosion of violence not unlike that which scarred the year 1968 worldwide. Belafonte declaring that “freedom’s gone and the country is not our own” over footage of Democratic delegates waving banners which read END THE WAR and riot police beating protestors in the streets of Chicago is disturbingly reminiscent of current news footage and rhetoric. It is a devastating piece of performance protest art, made even more poignant by the fact that almost no one who would have been its intended audience got to view it in its time. And yet, as I watch this video again, and again, I find myself experiencing a strange sense of comfort in Belafonte’s performance—*why*? What is at the root of this strange affective response to this performance which expresses a profound sense of alienation in the face of violent chaos?

In this study, I have aimed to trace the ways in which the Long Sixties counterculture—  
itself a sociocultural response to the senses of alienation experienced by young people—used performance to grapple with alienation and its doubles. Though this project constitutes an eclectic (one might say unusual) grouping of topics, I endeavored to trace through a material analysis how and why the creative subjects I have explored turned to alienation as a performance tactic, a site of inquiry, or mode of expressing responses to crises within and beyond the self. I argue that reading these topics through Marxist, Brechtian, and other intersecting viewpoints on alienation not only allows to better articulate what these performances were doing within their

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<sup>308</sup> Ibid, 194.

time from a historical point of view, but also helps us to trace their reverberations beyond the short period when the counterculture was at its peak.

I have thought much about temporality and my own senses of alienation (personal and otherwise) in the process of writing this dissertation. In my research, in my creative work, and in the art I engage with for pleasure, I find that I am most frequently drawn to the past. This has sometimes led to me feeling alienated in a temporal sense, as if because of my interests I am a woman out of time and out of sync with my peers. José Esteban Muñoz might call my fascination on/with the past a temporal disidentification of sorts. In a sense, I reconfigure the dominant temporal structure of history as a closed, finite temporal space that we access only through the archive to create an alternative understanding of how it affects not only the present, but that which is not-yet-here. (Here we might also borrow William Faulkner's oft-quoted line from his 1950 work *Requiem for a Nun*— "The past is never dead. It's not even past.") Like Muñoz, I wholeheartedly believe that "the present is not enough" *and* "the idea is not simply to turn away from the present. One cannot afford such a maneuver, and if one thinks one can, one has resisted the present in favor of folly. The present must be known in relation to the alternative temporal and spatial maps provided by a perception of past and future affective worlds."<sup>309</sup> By looking at these aspects of counterculture which I believe have been overlooked or misrepresented in contemporary scholarship, I have aimed to consider how they can help us deploy more worldmaking strategies not only in the here and now, but for those to come.

I return to Artaud's statement in "Van Gogh: the Man Suicided By Society" that "no one has ever written, painted, sculpted, modeled, built, or invented except literally to get out of hell." I might add the verbs "performed" and "sung" to this list. It is notable that none of my subjects

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<sup>309</sup> Muñoz, 27.

were able to escape their own respective hells, so to speak, through their acts of creation. After the failure of *Head*, the Monkees project would disintegrate in bits and pieces over the next year and half before dissolving completely in 1970. Nina Simone, despite her critical and commercial success, struggled with abuse, alcoholism, and mental illness. Phil Ochs, with no more songs to sing, ended his own life. The actions of Charles Manson and the Family ripped open a wound in the counterculture, leaving it to bleed out as the country began a shift to the political right and Manson himself became a permanent, searing brand on the American public consciousness. While it would be easy to write off much of the art discussed throughout this project as “failing,” I am much more interested in reframing critical conversation to consider what they are doing beyond a model of success or failure. W.H. Auden said that poetry (and I would argue, all art) is “a way of happening, a mouth”<sup>310</sup>—one that I believe speaks across temporal and other boundaries to provide an entry point into a better understanding of our world. Art creates an opening through which we can begin to imagine the utopia Muñoz imagines. Art provides opportunities for critical thought to develop, for conversations to happen, and for a praxis-based approach to worldmaking to occur. And perhaps most importantly, art and artmaking as a “conscious life activity” helps us to navigate alienation from ourselves and from each other.

But back to Belafonte—on the surface level, I am drawn to this performance because of Belafonte’s immense skill and charisma as a performer, as well as his extraordinarily important impact as an activist. Another answer might be found in the fact that people have been grappling with similar sociopolitical issues in their art for decades, and there is something oddly comforting in tracing a history of political protest art as part of a legacy of like-minded, social justice driven artistry. But perhaps the answer to my question as to why I am so drawn to (in an

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<sup>310</sup> W.H. Auden, “In Memory of W.B. Yeats,” in *Selected Poems* (New York, NY: Vintage Books, 1979), 82.



almost disidentificatory manner) this performance is best encapsulated at its end. After a more quiet, somber repetition of the chorus, “People should not live under the big gun./You know, there’s another song we can all hum.” Belafonte then evokes the power and long history of American civil rights protest and resistance by singing “We Shall Overcome.” His smile returns, no longer sarcastic, but quietly hopeful. Belafonte knows that the chaos of the carnival is unlikely to stop, but it is through the power of the collective that we will resist its frenzy. It is in this moment of counterpoint with the “Don’t Stop the Carnival” melody underscoring the message of determination to be free that I find a locus of my critical intervention with this project. In the face of overwhelming alienation—even when that affect is being evoked as a performative tool in order to better articulate the sense of alienation itself—the spark that drives creation is to “get out of hell,” to push back against the societal structures which keep us separate, and overcome that which keeps us alienated.

I close with the poem “Motto,” written by Bertolt Brecht in 1939, from which this dissertation gets its title:

In the dark times,  
Will there also be singing?  
Yes, there will also be singing  
About the dark times.<sup>311</sup>

In just four short lines, penned during his exile while Germany moved closer to the tipping point of World War Two, Brecht articulates both a tribute to our ability to resist darkness with creativity *and* a duty to articulate the darkness through that creation. In times of upheaval and struggle, not only will we process through our artistic creation, but it is in fact necessary to preserve, document, and create from that place of darkness. Writing in response to this Brecht

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<sup>311</sup> Bertolt Brecht, *Poems, 1913-1956*, ed. John Willett and Ralph Manheim (New York, NY: Routledge, 1997), 320.

poem, William Ayers, one of the founders of the Weathermen (later Weather Underground Organization) and Distinguished Professor of Education at the University of Illinois at Chicago, shared these thoughts in a 2008 article written for the *Journal of Educational Controversy*:

Our work here and now is in part to sing the dark times. We begin by waking up, by opening our eyes to the reality before us, the beautiful and the hopeful no less than the difficult, the tragic, the ugly. We cannot separate our own lives from the concentric circles of context—historic flow and economic condition, political situation and cultural surround—that make them more fully understandable and meaningful.<sup>312</sup>

This duty—detailed by Ayers and Brecht, and embodied by subjects discussed throughout this dissertation—is a responsibility I take seriously. It has ultimately been the throughline of all my artistic and academic work. To borrow from Brecht and Phil Ochs—you won't find me singing about the dark times when I'm gone, so I guess I'll have to do it while I'm here.

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<sup>312</sup> William Ayers, "Singing In Dark Times," *Journal of Educational Controversy* 3, no. 1 (2008), <https://cedar.wvu.edu/jec/vol3/iss1/7/>.

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