Discomfort & the Cover Condition

Where do “I” stand in relation to trouble and Trouble Songs? Am I the prying I from which the singer protects herself, or am I the I to whom the singer offers protection from or commiseration for trouble?

The speaker in a Trouble Song, or in Trouble Songs, performs a related discomfort. S/he is out of place, caught (done) wrong. S/he doesn’t belong there. Neither do we.

This relates to the trouble of the speaker in a Trouble Song, but perhaps primarily as fantasy. The singer may be unsure whether to reveal (or unleash) trouble, but as singer, s/he cannot help it. The listener does not know if the song is for him, but he grasps it, or has the song in his power, or is under the spell of the song, whether it acknowledges him or not. Can he justify his apprehension? The recording is always a simulacrum of communion. The singer is and is not there, and to the extent that the singer is there, the listener may be there, but there is somewhere else. This is part of the cover condition, in which the appropriator of trouble discourse must question her stake in trouble, and must also invest herself in or charge trouble to bring off the Trouble Song (or risk being an inadvertent charm against trouble, by getting nowhere near it, or by calling faintly to it).

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103 and where does “I” stand
104 again, we hover in generica, genre space, part of a contingency
105 As in our preliminary visits to the graveyard, where we might as well already be ghosts, we haunt the Trouble Song as much as we sing or listen to it.
106 Or: The singer and song are real, but the recording is a simulation — it fakes it(self).
107 There is no apparent risk of conjuration as Edie Brickell sings of troubled — that is, shallow — water in “What I Am” (1988); and as Natalie Merchant of 10000 Maniacs calls trouble me (“Trouble Me,” 1989), seeking an edge (disturb me with all your cares); and as Cat Stevens is set free of “Trouble” (1970) when he renounces music (and, presumably, “Trouble,” along with “Cat Stevens”) ca. 1977, though he (as Yusuf Islam) has troubled that disavowal with his gradual return to music beginning in the 1990s. Later, Kristin Hersh will recast the spell in her 2001 cover.