Fugue on Anthology Minor

Or, Nobody Here but Us Ghosts

What are you looking for?

Don’t say the word, we’ve already heard it.

You’d be the echo.

When you start coming after yourself…

Well then, what’s the trouble?

The very word [the] is an ellipsis.

Some songs can’t even say it.

The Anthology of American Folk Music, or Smithsonian Folkways, or The Harry Smith Anthology. Any way you call it, one man’s records, or many people’s records collected — captured — by one man. Seems like the whole chest, but even then, the coins were spilling out. Or — let’s make it a coffin — here are some of the bodies.

Pity no one, really, can listen to the acetates. On headphones, the digital files carry static.
Resistance to Social Music, going on 13 years.\textsuperscript{50} As if religion doesn’t span the mass of them.\textsuperscript{51}

All we have is introductions.\textsuperscript{52} All we offer is same.

Totality vs. selection. \textit{Who’ll rock the cradle when I’m gone? I’ll rock the cradle when you’re gone.}

Drawn in & out. Drawn aside.

Thought: I can drink all night. This is history.

\textsuperscript{50} On a personal note: Social Music, Vol. Two of The Anthology would have pristine grooves, if the vinyl was available all those years ago, when I (at last the I reopens! — and inverts) picked up the Smithsonian CD set. In 2009, a three-volume vinyl edition was finally reissued. My first priority was obtaining Vol. Three, Songs. Next came Vol. One, Ballads. I have yet to pick up the Vol. 2 reissue.

\textsuperscript{51} The Anthology as a [riddled] whole is shot through with the power and fury of the Lord — God trouble. “Social Music” gathers spirituals and turn of the [19th-]century instrumental dance music. Perhaps an aversion to the tenor of this volume, rather than a secular bias, is cause for minimum rotation. As Greil Marcus sets the mood, “Smith’s two lps of ‘Social Music’ are a respite, a place of simple pleasures where the most troubled heart is filled only with a gentle yearning” (\textit{Invisible Republic} 107). If you’re looking for trouble, you’ll head for the outer volumes.

\textsuperscript{52} As Marcus describes in his indispensable “The Old, Weird America” chapter from \textit{Invisible Republic} — so vital that a subsequent edition became \textit{The Old Weird America}, and the eponymous chapter was included in the supplementary liner notes to the Smithsonian Anthology CD set, and Marcus taught an undergraduate lecture course at The New School about the folk lyric tradition under that name — Smith included a wealth of information, alchemically arranged, in his liner booklet. Along with the sharing and sequencing of his records, it is part of his contribution to (and gift of) the collection. More than that, it’s a collaboration with the musicians whose performances are gathered here. It is just as deeply inscrutable, immediate, and troublesome as the music. It is a part of the music, and the booklet makes for transporting accompaniment to the records. And yet, it’s another surface — a deep one. Just so, each song is a how-do-you-do from the beyond, even when the singer is talking to himself. As we listen, we respond in kind. \textit{How do you do}, we sing along, with whatever words we find.
I wish I was a mole in the ground.

History as Harry Smith’s record collection.

Yes I’ve been in the bin so long.

Some mistakes made to be made.

Know what I’m missing.

Yes I wish I was a mole in the ground.

Hear the material over the matter.

Or the matter over material — no difference.

Material : Matter

Well I didn’t know you had any children.

Material song weather.

Material : Medium

No sir No sir No sir No sir

Did anyone say / Did anyone say that word

That word, you know.

I can’t sleep for dreaming & I can’t stay awake for

I wish my man

Did someone say

The word, you know.
Once you become your own echo…

Loneliness is the self-same chorus.

We don’t know what trouble

But heard her sing

She’s going where she please.

Can we tell

Can we tell these people

Can we tell these people are real?\(^\text{53}\)

What they talk about in another language

That we recognize.

Cf. Sonny Boy Williamson, “Keep It to Yourself”

Trouble is what gets you.

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\(^{53}\) Yes, we should tell: These people are real. And so gone.