Trouble Songs: A Musicological Poetics
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Kristin Hersh sings to trouble. There is no cover.

There is a room between singing trouble and singing to trouble. There is a summoning, a spell and counter-curse: to sing trouble under the guise of influence. And there is a lullaby beseeching trouble to lie still, go easy. Singing to trouble, Hersh lets it come close, knows it’s already in her heart. Her song is not a speech act, but an acknowledgement.

The song’s placement at the middle of the track list for *Sunny Border Blue* (2001) cannot be arbitrary. Covers often go early or late in an album, but this is not a cover, it’s a bedfellow. A crypt-mate. Tucked in, shielded.

*Trouble, oh trouble set me free.*

What does the face of trouble look like? *Death’s disguise hanging on me*? That face that covers death. The one that curdles in the mirror.

In that room between singing trouble and singing to trouble is the song. No one agrees which song it is, and no one cares who sang it first.

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67 Thanks to Keala Ramos for direction.
68 as though trouble can hear, and will listen
69 knowing well trouble is in attendance
70 Cat Stevens renounced it, though he only ever had “Trouble.” Hersh takes the song where it has never been, gives it trouble, makes it ache. Even the treacly see/me and wine/mine rhymes can’t take the edge off Hersh’s delivery.
71 Edith Scob as Christiane checks her new face after her father, Dr. Génessier, encourages her to “smile… not too much” in Georges Franju’s *Eyes Without a Face* (1960).