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## True, Valid Death Off a Movie Screen: Todd Haynes' I'm Not There

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## True, Valid Death Off a Movie Screen: Todd Haynes' *I'm Not There*

### **Abstract**

Todd Haynes' *I'm Not There* both analyzes and exemplifies the spiritual project implicit in Bob Dylan's art. By splitting its subject into six characters, the film enacts Dylan's refusal to adopt fixed descriptions of his art and identity. Its deeper interest, however, is in the reasons for that refusal. Chief among these is Dylan's religious regard for an essentially mysterious truth beyond form, often identified with death and realized, in his own case, through a kind of selfless immersion in traditional music. In passing, the article notes numerous parallels between Dylan's spiritual project and Emerson's.

In the director's audio commentary to *I'm Not There* — a film “inspired by the music & many lives of Bob Dylan” — Todd Haynes begins with a conclusion. “Only the dead can be born again. That's really what this film is about.”

OK. Maybe it comes down to something that simple. But like anything truly simple, Haynes' epigram needs to be earned.<sup>1</sup> Death, after all, is not something with which any of us should claim too firm an acquaintance. The idea always needs to be approached warily, openly, with an ear to how its changes are rung in any given context. So, for example, late in the film, a character using Dylan's words says that traditional music is “the only true, valid death you can feel today off a record player.”<sup>2</sup> Most likely nothing in our experience prepares us to understand that. Haynes' film, however, provides that preparation. By leading us through some of the issues of personal identity, authenticity, freedom, fate, and life in time that have shaped Dylan's career, *I'm Not There* is a guide, if not to the life of Bob Dylan, then to the spiritual project that underlies his achievement.

Two premises establish Haynes' starting point: first, the conviction that a film ostensibly about Bob Dylan can also, or principally, be a film about art—the kind of art that matters most to people for whom art is a primary means to human fullness, a matter of spiritual life and death. For Haynes and many others who grew up in America during the second half of the twentieth century, this equation comes almost naturally. Dylan's achievements, especially in the incandescent years from

1963 to 1968, were brave and astonishing. His impact was such that, as Greil Marcus has written, he seemed for a while “less to occupy a turning point in cultural space and time than to be that turning point.”<sup>3</sup> Thus, for many, Dylan serves as a kind of Emersonian representative man—one of those “lenses through which we read our own minds.”<sup>4</sup> His choices and accomplishments are reference points by which we still measure the risks, demands, pitfalls, and possibilities of the creative life. Todd Haynes, although he is too young to have been present for several of Dylan’s earliest incarnations, clearly shares this sense of Dylan as touchstone. Accordingly, his interest in Dylan is more than merely biographical—less concerned with representing Dylan than with Dylan as a representative artist. He strives, moreover, to make his film an example of the kind of art Dylan’s practice commends.

A second premise of *I’m Not There* is that the best way to make a film that takes Dylan seriously as a representative artist is to make a film in which Dylan himself is absent. Thus, in Haynes’ film, Dylan is literally not there. His name is not mentioned (except once, in the opening credits), and he is never directly presented as a character or in person (except once, again, in the film’s final image). This reflects a prevalent view in critical writing on Dylan: namely, that Dylan’s essence is to have no essence, or that he is most himself when he is playing with or evading the conventions of identity.<sup>5</sup> “I don’t think of myself as Bob Dylan,” he

said in 1985. “It’s like Rimbaud said, ‘I is another.’”<sup>6</sup> On one level, comments like this are just Dylan’s attempt to be honest about the ambiguities of actual life. Experience has taught him, as it might teach anyone, that the “I” is less coherent than we generally take it to be. “I wake and I’m one person, and when I go to sleep I know for certain I’m somebody else. I don’t know who I am most of the time.”<sup>7</sup> There is also a sense, however, in which this refusal to adopt a coherent description of himself becomes Dylan’s vocation—the heart of his whole artistic and spiritual project. Dylan becomes a representative artist precisely because he refuses to stand for anything—refuses, that is, to be used as a sign of anything other than the essential mystery of life as he lives it. Haynes film, in turn, investigates the logic and consequences of that refusal.

Thus, the most notorious feature of *I’m Not There* is actually, thematically, pretty straightforward. Instead of giving us a single representation of Dylan, Haynes uses six separate characters, six actors (of whom one is black and one is female), and six interwoven narratives to cover his subject. Each story, moreover, is filmed in a distinct visual style, drawing on the many languages of film in Dylan’s era. Like a cubist portrait, the film presents its subject in a way that not only stresses the subject’s various aspects, but calls attention to itself as a work of representation. Its subject is not just what we are looking at, but how we see, or more to the present point, how we are as persons.

By way of a quick summary, then, the film gives us:

1) “Woody Guthrie” (played by Marcus Carl Franklin)—the young Dylan as fabulist; a transparent fake who nevertheless strives for authenticity by channeling folk tradition. Reference style: a mix of conventions from Hollywood bio-pics, realist drama, and “American pastoral.”<sup>8</sup>

2) “Jack Rollins” (played by Christian Bale)—Dylan in his two most literal-minded phases, as protest singer and as Christian; a performer of message or “finger-pointing” songs who loses faith in one message after the Kennedy assassination, but soon finds new evangelical truths to promote. Reference style: documentary.<sup>9</sup>

3) “Robbie Clark” (played by Heath Ledger)—an actor who becomes a star by playing Jack Rollins, representing Dylan’s public face as celebrity and star of his own domestic dramas; a resolutely shallow hipster, all appearances and appetites, whose story of romance and break-up is shadowed by Vietnam-era politics. Reference style: Godard’s films of the mid-1960s.<sup>10</sup>

4) “Jude Quinn” (played by Cate Blanchett)—Dylan in his first electric phase, from 1964 to 1966; brilliant, muse-possessed, strung out, and more than a little inhuman in his desperate efforts to defend his art against all attempts to pin him down. Reference styles: Fellini’s *8 ½* (1963), with echoes of D. A. Pennebaker’s *Don’t Look Back* (1967).<sup>11</sup>

5) “Billy the Kid” (played by Richard Gere)—Dylan in retreat, recalling both his post-motorcycle-crash and post-divorce phases; seeking refuge in “the old, weird America” but ultimately expelled back into the world. Reference style: “hippie Westerns” of the late 1960s.<sup>12</sup>

6) “Arthur Rimbaud” (played by Ben Whishaw)—Dylan as primal poet; default narrator of the film; cryptic commentator on the lives of the other characters. Reference style: televised press conferences or congressional hearings.<sup>13</sup>

Haynes’ path to a “true, valid death,” then, proceeds through an examination of these characters and their interrelations.

First, Woody's story sets the trajectory for Dylan's subsequent development as interpreted by Haynes. The theme of this episode is the way authenticity and artifice become interrelated in the very act of striving to be real—striving, that is, to live up to fixed expectations of what a person should be. Woody is an 11-year-old black boy trying to pass as someone more like his namesake—an experienced entertainer, “voice of the people,” and hero of the open road. Incredibly, he seems to be pulling it off. Neither he nor the people he meets ever register the incongruity between what he so obviously is and what he claims to be. Nor does anyone seem to notice the disconnect between his proletarian persona and his ambition to become a Hollywood star, “a real singer on television.” Woody and his audiences, in other words, seem willfully oblivious to the distinction between authenticity and a good story. For as long as possible, they allow their interest in truth to be trumped by their desire to be entertained. Woody is thus allowed to pass because he and his world are in a kind of conspiracy to keep the game going—to sustain the illusion that we are what we pretend to be.

Woody's story certainly gets some of its resonance from Haynes' attunement, as a gay artist, to the social politics of disguise.<sup>14</sup> Its direct reference, though, is to Dylan in his first professional milieu, the folk music revival of the early 1960s. When Dylan was first finding his way into the growing folk subcultures of Minneapolis and Greenwich Village (in 1959 and 1961,

respectively), “authenticity” was a word to conjure with.<sup>15</sup> To folk purists, a song was authentic only if it was certifiably “of the people”—firmly rooted in the style and language of a given (preferably rural) time and place. Likewise, a singer was acceptable only if he or she seemed to be similarly rooted (like Leadbelly or Dock Boggs), or at least showed due reverence for received performance styles (like Pete Seeger or the young Joan Baez).<sup>16</sup> Thus, as a middle-class Jewish kid from Hibbing, Minnesota, Dylan had his work cut out for him. To become “authentic,” he would have to revise himself. He changed his name from Robert Zimmerman to Bob Dylan, affected the persona of Woody Guthrie complete with Okie accent, and exchanged his own rather conventional past for the story of a vagabond orphan raised by gypsies in carnivals and blues bars. To win recognition as the right sort of “somebody,” in other words, Robert Zimmerman went into hiding. To become credible, he became a fraud.

The blatant contradictions in this position could not be sustained for long, however. In Woody’s story, there is an abrupt unmasking that forces him to escape. In Dylan’s case, by contrast, the pressure to change came less from public demands for truth than from the way Dylan’s own consciousness was raised by his life in hiding.<sup>17</sup> His experience with masks was teaching him significant lessons, not only about the contradictions of the culture in which he found himself, but about the more general predicament of being human.



As has often been noted, the root concept behind the words “person” and “persona” is “mask”—a presence assumed for the stage. “Personality” thus has artifice at its core. To strive to be a “real person” is, as Alan Watts liked to point out, like trying to become a “genuine fake”—a contradiction in terms.<sup>18</sup> In line with this insight, then, what Dylan seems to have learned from his early attempts to become “authentic” was, first, that posing is actually a fairly profound feature of our humanity,<sup>19</sup> and second, that there is something deeply distorted about society’s insistence that things be otherwise. People are urged to be “sincere” and consistent, but it is precisely this expectation, along with the forms and labels it encourages us to impose on ourselves, that puts us in a false position.<sup>20</sup> We become unreal, not because identity is so changeable, but because we insist on pinning ourselves down. Accordingly, Dylan’s next move—his way to “get real”—was not to renounce artifice but to embrace it in a more conscious and playful way. If the self is at base a mask or a wearer of masks, that is, the truly honest thing to do is to acknowledge the fact and get on with the show. “It’s Halloween,” said Dylan at his 1964 performance in Carnegie Hall. “I got my Bob Dylan mask on.”<sup>21</sup>

Woody goes through a similar evolution once his artifice is exposed. Or rather, in the logic of the film, his character goes through a series of reincarnations. Soon after Woody runs off in disgrace, his place at the center of the film is taken by Jack Rollins, the protest singer, a more progressive and politically engaged

creature of the folk scene. When Jack's humorless earnestness hits a limit in the brutality of current events, however, he too is summarily recycled: spiritually as Pastor John, the evangelist, and metaphorically in the figures of Robbie Clark, his public career-face, and Jude Quinn, the more genuine inheritor of his art, who transposes "protest" into a whole new range of keys.<sup>22</sup> Meanwhile, "Arthur Rimbaud" drifts above it all as a kind of angelic commentator. He has no story that ties him to the other characters, but his insight into their predicaments is unflinching. As a pure poetic consciousness, he represents Dylan's best attempts to keep up with his own transformations.

Jude's story, like Woody's, is pivotal in the film, for Jude embodies the lessons Dylan learned about the trap of trying to "be somebody," and illustrates the perils of the attempt to put those lessons into practice. His principal motive—like Dylan's in his post-folk years—is to avoid being caught in anyone's narrative formula. Because he understands that all identities are masks, he will not permit anyone else to think that his identity at any given moment is anything more than provisional. Thus, in his verbal sparring with reporters and fans, Jude refuses to be categorized, labeled, or understood, whether as "folk singer," "protest singer," "conscience of his generation," or "poet." His integrity consists in rejecting coherence. "I am only an experimenter," he seems to be saying, "...with no Past at my back."<sup>23</sup> Jude's story also functions as a cautionary tale, showing how this

struggle to avoid labels puts him in another kind of false position. His shield against misunderstanding too often takes the form of a cloak of hip superiority. His revulsion from labels, at worst, leads him to deny that he feels common emotions and to avoid anything that might make him vulnerable. (“I refuse to be hurt.”) Drugs help to fuel his endless evasions, but cannot keep the show in the air for long.

And so, like all the other characters, Jude’s way of being reaches a limit. When the strains of his public trapeze act become too great, he escapes. This time, it is to be reborn as Billy, the outlaw in hiding, living partly in isolation (“invisible, even to myself”) and partly in the town of Riddle, a fluid dream-carnival of masked characters and circus animals where Halloween seems to be the natural state of things. Billy, it seems, is the all-purpose successor and refuge for failed life-projects. Riddle, in turn, is the matrix out of which new identities are born—a kind of bardo state between incarnations.

It is a mournful place to be, however, and hardly a safe one. In effect, Billy’s situation represents the costs of Dylan’s strategy of refusal. For one thing, Billy’s life is haunted by the guilt of repeatedly failing to meet peoples’ expectations,<sup>24</sup> and the sadness of not being “there” for others. “I’m Not There,” the song that gives the film its title and which plays on the soundtrack through the later part of Billy’s story, is a lament. A woman is in need, but the life the singer has chosen makes him unable (or perhaps just unwilling) to help. “I wish I was there to help her—but I’m

not there, I'm gone."<sup>25</sup> Moreover, even the fluid state of Riddle harbors a nemesis—someone who (like “Mr. Jones,” the BBC culture correspondent at Jude’s press conferences) is intent on pinning the artist down. This time it is sheriff Pat Garrett, traditional enemy of Billy the Kid, who now wants to put an end to all refuges—to see Billy unmasked and the whole town of Riddle paved over.<sup>26</sup> So Billy too has to move on—to escape from being identified as Billy, the one who escapes. And this time the only place to go is back into the world, back to the ambiguous position of Woody on the train where the whole drama began.

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Thus far, then, the point of death in *I'm Not There* would seem to be simply to keep things moving. When any particular game is up, one has to move on, assume a new mask. “Only the dead can be born again.” But once again, is that all? Or is there a deeper point to this elaborate game of hide and seek—some value that makes death worth the candle?

Perhaps the point is freedom. The term comes up frequently in the film, and in American life generally it is definitely another one of those words with which freedom is conjured. However, all of Dylan’s incarnations (apart from Robbie) seem to understand just how hollow it rings. Freedom, for example, implies detachment. According to Jude, however, detachment is exactly the opposite of

what he is trying to achieve through his evasions. As he puts it in his press conference, it is the people who buy into particular meanings of his songs—the people stuck in formulas—who are really disassociated from the life of the world. Real life is formless, a mystery. Labels and formulas falsify or reify it. Thus, Jude's refusal to be pinned down is a refusal to be disassociated from the formless truth of things. It is not that he does not care about the world, as "Mr. Jones" claims; rather, it is because he cares so much about the mystery at the heart of things that he refuses to violate it with a label. He chooses the path of negation because, like an apophatic theologian, he is trying to do justice to something beyond words.

Another problem with the idea of freedom is that it smacks too much of will and conscious choice. We commonly think of freedom as the liberty to choose one's way of life, as if freedom consisted in the choice itself. But as Billy points out, this is not what's really at stake. "People are always talking about freedom. Freedom to live a certain way, without being kicked around. Course the more you live a certain way, the less it feels like freedom." Will and choice alone, that is, by imposing form on the world, can only commit us to a succession of prisons.

By contrast, Dylan seems inclined to think that the freest moves in life are those that are entirely unmotivated—those accomplished "without knowing how or why."<sup>27</sup> With respect to his own creative process, for example, he has frequently stated in interviews that his most successful songs are those that seemed to come

out of nowhere, apart from any intention of his own. Anything produced intentionally, by contrast, “could be a lie.”<sup>28</sup> Artistic creation at its best, then, is not “free,” if freedom implies something willful. It is instinct-driven and muse-possessed. It is, in effect, a gift of fate—a product of environing powers that work above one’s conscious control.<sup>29</sup> The effect of fate in this sense, however, is not to imprison but to liberate. Its fluid, indefinable power makes possible a life without labels, without choice, and thus a life of “freedom” in a more substantive sense, a life lived in close harmony with the powers that make us what we are. “Even the birds are chained to the sky,” as Dylan remarked, but they are nevertheless as free as birds.<sup>30</sup>

The thing Dylan and his representatives in this film are holding out for, then, is something more mysterious than freedom—something, in fact, that might better go under the name “mystery” itself. For Dylan as artist, however, it mainly goes under a name that Jude introduces toward the end of *I’m Not There*: tradition.

“Tradition” is another concept from the folk revival that Dylan appropriates and transforms. For folk purists, the American folk tradition—comprising the ethnic musics of European immigrants, the regional styles that grew from them in America, and African-American spirituals and blues—was a legacy to be preserved. For Dylan, it is more like a living and overwhelming force. “A song,” says Arthur at the start of the film, “is something that walks by itself”—something,

that is, with a life of its own that might best be seen as a power that uses us as its instrument. This idea is reinforced by words from the real Arthur Rimbaud, quoted in the film by Robbie's wife, Clare: "It is wrong to say 'I think.' One should say 'I am thought.'" Dylan, likewise, felt himself less to be the inventor of songs than to be their mouthpiece. "Open up yer eyes an' ears an' yer influenced / an' there's nothing you can do about it."<sup>31</sup> Critical analysis of Dylan's work confirms the extent to which he draws on and reconfigures phrases, motifs, and melodies from the great inter-textual matrix of trans-Atlantic folk tradition and American blues.<sup>32</sup> In his most recent recordings, the tendency has become, if anything, even more pronounced and deliberate. And Haynes' film, once again, mirrors Dylan's procedures in the way it draws on film tradition, echoing the styles of directors from Dylan's era to the extent that, as Haynes remarks in the DVD audio commentary, "nothing in this film is my own."

Tradition, then, is the fatal power that gives form and substance to Dylan's art. The form it gives is not a trap, however, precisely because it operates unconsciously and above anyone's will. As Dylan frequently noted, traditional songs themselves are unconscious products, dreamlike and unfathomably weird: "songs about roses growing out of people's brains and lovers who are really geese and swans that turn into angels..." As such, they do not represent just another attempt to comprehend and control life, but life itself in its raw mystery. As he told

Nat Hentoff, “you’d think that the traditional music people could gather from their songs that mystery—just plain simple mystery—is a fact, a traditional fact.” Where the folk scene went wrong, he went on, was in trying to “own it. It has to do with a purity thing.” Tradition, however, is valuable precisely because it is “meaningless”—essentially incomprehensible and ungraspable. And to live possessed by this formlessness is to live in a state of grace. “Its meaninglessness is holy.”<sup>33</sup>

The fact that tradition is now mediated to us mainly through recorded media only adds to the mystery. Photographs, films, and recorded sound all take bits of the past and transpose them into the present, creating complex connections that short-circuit our ordinary sense of linear time.<sup>34</sup> Recorded media, that is, create imaginary spaces in which uncanny possibilities can emerge. Or as the film’s final line puts it: “it’s like you got yesterday, today, and tomorrow, all in the same room. There’s no tellin’ what can happen.” To listen to recorded music is to invite an eerily immediate past into the present. Likewise, to watch a film is to entertain a collection of vivid ghosts and vague possibilities—to bring a living past, present, and future together in the screening room. The absolute strangeness and the spiritual opportunity presented by this situation—the ways it is reshaping memory and our whole conception of what it means to have an inner life—is something that is still



just dawning on us. It is something that artists like Dylan and Haynes are helping us to explore.

Perhaps, then, we are now in a better position to understand how art can give us “true, valid death ... off a record player,” or as Haynes might prefer to put it, off a movie screen. Death, in Dylan’s lexicon, marks the end of everything willful and false. It is the end of linear time, or of the narratives by which we try to encapsulate the world and ourselves. The practice of art, like death, is also a way to “stop time.”<sup>35</sup> That is, as something over which we do not exercise conscious control, art returns us to fate. It embodies and expresses the power of tradition, or of history, or of life itself—the unconscious and ineffable force that chains the birds to the sky. The best art, in short, stops time, stops speech, stops the mind, and points to a dimension that precedes or transcends all three.

The way Dylan transposed this view of art into a spiritual program is apparent in “Lay Down Your Weary Tune,” an unreleased composition from 1963.<sup>36</sup> The song is a straightforward, perhaps overly formulaic call to self-transformation through surrender to the power of traditional music, metaphorically identified with nature.<sup>37</sup> “Lay down the song you strum,” it urges in its chorus. Give up whatever scene you are trapped in at the moment, that is, “and rest yourself ‘neath the strength of strings / no voice can hope to hum.”<sup>38</sup> The idealized, essentially ineffable power of song is thus like a pantheistic deity—a matrix that

sustains and informs life above and beyond our own wills and purposes.<sup>39</sup> Surrender to it or immersion in it, then, is Dylan's path to "true, valid death," the kind of death that returns us to living mystery, and which comes today, as often as not, "off a record player."

This formula for human fullness is hardly the only thing worth knowing about Dylan, or even the only thing worth knowing about the film. It is, however, at the heart of both, and it is, moreover, an idea that should resonate strongly with students of religion. The annals of world spirituality are full of parallels. Dogen, for example, notes that "to study the self is to forget the self," but that "to forget the self is to be actualized by myriad things."<sup>40</sup> Die to conceptual formulas, that is, and the world, like Dylan's "tradition," will be manifest through you. For parallels closer to home, we need only look to Emerson, who is arguably the godfather of the American version of these insights. "The way of life is wonderful," he writes in "Circles." "It is by abandonment."<sup>41</sup> Both the chill and the promise implicit in that statement are pertinent. To die requires discipline, and inspires sadness. But the renunciation of everything that is not life is also the means by which mystery comes into its own: the mystery of the world and of everything unnamable in ourselves. There may be other ways to get there, but this is the way of Dylan's art, to which Haynes' film bears witness.

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<sup>1</sup> Actually, Haynes takes the phrase from Greil Marcus, who applies it to the sound and spirituality of early Southern mountain ballads. See Marcus, G. 1997. *Invisible Republic: Bob Dylan's Basement Tapes*. New York: Henry Holt & Co. 114.

<sup>2</sup> From Dylan's interview with Nat Hentoff in *Playboy* (March 1966), in Cott, J. (ed.). 2006. *Bob Dylan: The Essential Interviews*. New York: Wenner Books. 98.

<sup>3</sup> Marcus. *Invisible Republic*. ix.

<sup>4</sup> Emerson, R. W. *The Collected Works of Ralph Waldo Emerson*. Spiller, R. E. et al., eds. 1971 - . 6 vols. to date. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 4:4.

<sup>5</sup> Studies of Dylan that represent this point of view include Day, A. 1988. *Jokerman: Reading the Lyrics of Bob Dylan*. New York: Basil Blackwell Inc.; Gray, M. 2000. *Song & Dance Man III: The Art of Bob Dylan*. New York: Continuum), and Stephen Scobie, S. 2003. *Alias Bob Dylan Revisited*. Calgary, Alberta: Red Deer Press.

<sup>6</sup> Bob Dylan, B. 1984. liner notes for Biograph.

<sup>7</sup> *Newsweek* interview with Gates, D. October 6, 1997. in Benjamin Hedin (ed.). 2004. *Studio A: The Bob Dylan Reader*. New York: W. W. Norton & Co. 236. Billy speaks the lines in the film.

<sup>8</sup> Haynes, in the DVD audio commentary, specifically cites Elia Kazan's *A Face In the Crowd* (1957) as a model for this segment. Frank Capra's *Meet John Doe* (1941) is the model for the memory montage when Woody falls into the river.

<sup>9</sup> Unlike Dylan, Jack goes straight from disillusionment with the folk scene to Christian preaching, eliding seventeen years of Dylan's career. Also, once he settles into his role as preacher, he sticks with it, unlike Dylan who drifted away from explicit evangelicalism after a couple of years. Martin Scorsese's source materials and interviews for the *No Direction Home* (2005) are the models for many scenes in this segment.

<sup>10</sup> Haynes, in the audio commentary, cites *Masculin féminin* (1966) and *Two or Three Things I Know About Her* (1966).

<sup>11</sup> Pennebacker's footage for *Eat the Document* (1972), by way of Scorsese's reconstruction, also figures frequently in these segments.

<sup>12</sup> Haynes, in the audio commentary, gives the genre this title, specifically citing *Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid* (1969) and Robert Altman's *McCabe and Mrs. Miller* (1971). "The old, weird America" is Greil Marus' phrase for the world reflected in early folk recordings, especially as represented in Harry Smith's *Anthology of American Folk Music*. See Marcus, *Invisible Republic*, 87-126.

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<sup>13</sup> Rimbaud's influence in freeing up Dylan's language is frequently cited. Dylan cites it himself in the *2004 Chronicles: Volume 1*. New York: Simon & Schuster. 288. The historical incident behind Rimbaud's "interrogation" here is the police inquest after he was shot by his lover, Paul Verlaine, an affair referred to in Dylan's lyrics for "You're Gonna Make Me Lonesome When You Go." See Bob Dylan, B. 1985. *Lyrics 1962-1985* New York: Alfred A. Knopf. 355.

<sup>14</sup> Haynes characterizes his work as "queerist" in an interview with Cameron Lee, "Haynes '85 Explains Dylan Film 'I'm Not There,'" *Brown Daily Herald*, April 2, 2008: <http://media.www.browndailyherald.com/media/storage/paper472/news/2008/04/02/ArtsCulture/Haynes.85.Explains.Dylan.Film.im.Not.There.At.Risd-3297479.shtml> (accessed May 23, 2008). He is the director of *Velvet Goldmine* (1998), a film about the art and politics of imposture set in the glam-rock era; and the writer and director of *Far From Heaven* (2002), which builds on the work of Douglas Sirk and Rainer Werner Fassbinder.

<sup>15</sup> See the excellent discussion of this term as it functioned in both folk culture and mid-century popular philosophy in Marqusee, M. 2003. *Chimes of Freedom: The Politics of Dylan's Art*. New York: The New Press. 36-42. For a vivid evocation of the aims and ideologies of the folk revival, see Cantwell, R. 1996. *When We Were Good: The Folk Revival*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

<sup>16</sup> There were, of course, others—Alan Lomax chief among them—who argued for a more fluid notion of "living tradition," recognizing that there is no "original form" to a folk song, and that the genres constantly interbreed. This is the stream on which Dylan drew. See Marqusee, *Chimes*, 21-22.

<sup>17</sup> Much is sometimes made of a *Newsweek* article in 1963 that exposed Dylan's various impostures, but in fact his disguise had already pretty well dissolved by then. As often happens in *I'm Not There* (e.g. in its depiction of audience reaction to Dylan "going electric" at the Newport Folk Festival in 1965), Haynes opts for legend over history.

<sup>18</sup> Watts, A. 1966. *The Book: On the Taboo Against Knowing Who You Are*. New York: Pantheon Books. 40.

<sup>19</sup> This seems to be a favorite theme of Haynes'. Note, for instance, the quote from Oscar Wilde used in *Velvet Goldmine*: "The first duty in life is to assume a pose. What the second is no one yet has found out."

<sup>20</sup> Jude dismisses "sincerity" in the film as an inappropriate ideal: "Whoever said I was sincere?" Or in other words, why should I want to be? His model in this might well have been Emerson, who said "I am always insincere, as always knowing that there are other moods." Emerson, *Collected Works*, 3:145. Likewise Emerson famously dismissed consistency as "the hobgoblin of little minds." Emerson, *Collected Works*, 2:33.

<sup>21</sup> Bob Dylan, B. 1964. The Bootleg Series, vol. 6: Live.

<sup>22</sup> Note that Jude in the film, when asked why he has abandoned protest songs, says “all I ever do is protest.” Marqusee in *Chimes* makes a persuasive case for the essential continuity between Dylan’s protest phase and his work later in the 1960s.

<sup>23</sup> Emerson, *Collected Works*, 2:188.

<sup>24</sup> See Dylan’s apology for his drunken rant at the National Emergency Civil Liberties Council award ceremony in 1963, a passage from which is spoken in the film by Jack:

“it is a fierce heavy feeling  
thinking something is expected of you  
but you don’t know what exactly it is...  
it brings forth a weird form of guilt.”

Quoted in Marqusee, *Chimes*, 89.

<sup>25</sup> See Marcus’ discussion of the song in *Invisible Republic*, 198-204.

<sup>26</sup> The back story for this collection of characters is Sam Peckinpah’s film, *Pat Garrett & Billy the Kid* (1973), for which Dylan wrote the music and in which, appropriately enough, he played a character named “Alias.”

<sup>27</sup> Emerson, *Collected Works*, 2:190.

<sup>28</sup> Dylan speaks of his preference for songs composed with no motive in the Hentoff Playboy interview in Cott (ed.), *Essential Interviews*, 100. An excellent discussion of Dylan’s thinking on this point, which includes the quote about conscious thought and lies, is Luc Sante’s “I Is Someone Else,” *The New York Review of Books*, March 10, 2005: 35-38.

<sup>29</sup> The extent to which Dylan thought of himself as defined by fate is indicated by the name he chose for the character he plays in *Masked and Anonymous* (2003), “Jack Fate.”

<sup>30</sup> See Clinton Heylin, *Bob Dylan Behind the Shades Revisited* (New York: William Morrow, 2001), 147.

<sup>31</sup> From “My Life in a Stolen Moment,” in Dylan, *Lyrics*, 72.

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<sup>32</sup> See the encyclopedic treatments of Dylan's uses of folk and blues tradition in Grey, *Song & Dance Man III*. See also Dylan's lovely account of his own working methods in an interview with Robert Hilburn from 2004, in Cott (ed.), *Essential Interviews*, 429-438.

<sup>33</sup> From the Hentoff Playboy interview, in Cott (ed.), **Essential Interviews**, 98.

<sup>34</sup> As Robert Cantwell writes of the experience of listening to early folk recordings, the records recover something remote "even as the nature of recording itself thrusts the performance away and into the past, opening in its absence an imaginary field in which all its sounds are immediately and urgently present." Cantwell, *When We Were Good*, 197.

<sup>35</sup> Dylan has frequently characterized the aim of his art this way. For instance, "Tangled Up in Blue" was intended to "defy time" by eliminating clear distinctions between past and present. (Heylin, *Behind the Shades*, 370) *Blood On the Tracks* as a whole, he said, was an album with "no sense of time." (Heylin, *Behind the Shades*, 369) In *Renaldo and Clara* (1978) he set out to "stop time," and thought he had succeeded: "We have literally stopped time in this movie." (Scobie, *Alias*, 237)

<sup>36</sup> A performance from 1964 was officially released on Biograph, 1985. See the extensive discussion of the song in Gray, *Song & Dance Man III*, 194-205. Gray sees the song as unique in Dylan's output, but I believe the spiritual program it outlines can be traced throughout his career.

<sup>37</sup> Nature resounds "like a bugle," "like a banjo," "like a hymn." See Dylan, *Lyrics*, 120.

<sup>38</sup> Dylan, *Lyrics*, 120.

<sup>39</sup> In recent years, Dylan has continued to attribute this same kind of mystical or sustaining religious significance to traditional music: "Here's the thing with me and the religious thing. This is the flat-out truth: I find the religiosity and philosophy in the music. I don't find it anywhere else. Songs like 'Let Me Rest On a Peaceful Mountain' or 'I Saw the Light'—that's my religion.... The songs are my lexicon. I believe the songs." (From David Gates *Newsweek* interview, in Hedin (ed.), *Studio A*, 236.)

<sup>40</sup> In Tanahashi, K. (ed.). 1985. *Moon in a Dewdrop: Writings of Zen Master Dogen*. San Francisco: North Point Press. 70.

<sup>41</sup> Emerson, *Collected Works*. 2:190.