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An Examination of the Visual and Textual Influences on the Anthology of American Folk Music

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State University of New York
College at Buffalo
Department of History

An Examination of The Visual and Textual Influences on
the *Anthology of American Folk Music* by Harry Smith

A Thesis in
History

By
Benjamin Stuart Collier

Submitted in Partial Fulfillment
Of the Requirements
for the Degree of

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Introduction

The *Anthology of American Folk Music* is a collection of eighty-four recordings of largely southern vernacular music produced between 1927 and 1932 for commercial record labels.¹ The tracks were collected on 78 rpm records and assembled into a cohesive whole by painter, filmmaker, collector, musicologist, and occultist Harry Smith, who worked with Folkways Records to release the six-LP set in 1952. Immediately facing poor sales and legal troubles, the *Anthology* faded into the background of the Folkways catalog.² Yet by the coming of the folk revival of the 1950s and 1960s in the United States, musicians, scholars, and critics viewed the release a foundational document and perennial well of inspiration.³ When John Cohen, member of the New Lost City Ramblers and influential figure within the folk revival, published in *Sing Out!* an interview with Harry Smith in 1969, the counterculture was given its first printed introduction to the editor of the *Anthology of American Folk Music*. Cohen described Smith as the “unheralded genius behind the scenes of the folk music movement in America”.⁴

Following the acquisition of the Folkways catalog by the Smithsonian Institute after the death of proprietor Moe Asch, a second iteration appeared in the form of a 1997 CD reissue. The release received two Grammy awards and came packaged with an essay collection extolling the

¹ “Anthology of American Folk Music,” Edited by Harry Smith, 1927-1932, Folkways Records, 1952, LP.

² Katherine Skinner, “Must Be Born Again: resurrecting the Anthology of American Folk Music,” *Popular Music* 25, no. 1 (2006), 63.

³ Moe Asch, “The Birth and Growth of the *Anthology of American Folk Music*,” In *A Booklet of Essays, Appreciations, and Annotations Pertaining to the Anthology of American Folk Music*, edited by Harry Smith (Washington, DC: Smithsonian Folkways Records, 1997), 32.

⁴ John Cohen, “Interview with Harry Smith from *Sing Out!* Magazine 1969,” In *Think of the Self Speaking Harry Smith: Selected Interviews*, ed. Rani Singh (Seattle: Elbow/Cityful Press, 1999), 66.

impact of *Anthology* and its visionary qualities.⁵ Musicians John Fahey, Dave Van Ronk, Peter Stampfel, and others offered autobiographical accounts of their relationship to the *Anthology*, while critics, historians, and contemporaries of Smith provided contextual perspective and interpretations of the impact the set has had on popular music and culture. The consensus among devotees was one of reverence, comparing the *Anthology* to the Talmud, the Rosetta Stone, and the Bible, and viewing Rock and Roll and developments in popular music that followed as flowering out of the soil tended by Smith through his editorial work.⁶

While the 1997 reissue exposed the *Anthology* to a new generation of listeners, the 1952 release appeared quietly on the newly formed Folkways label, bearing the strange glyph-stamp of Harry Smith, a twenty-nine-year-old painter and filmmaker with a lifelong interest in ethnography and collection. Smith lived his life in obscurity, dwelling in boarding houses, men's shelters, and the homes of friends while remaining intensely committed to his work, study, and artistic practice. Scholarship on Smith since the 1990s has helped to synthesize his wide range of activities in filmmaking, visual art, and recorded sound while solidifying his influence on the post-war counterculture. His paintings, films, and collections have been shown at the Museum of Modern Art and the Whitney Museum in Brooklyn and several books of primary source material have been published.⁷ Following his death in 1991, poet and filmmaker Paola Iglori compiled *American Magus*, an interview collection with close friends in 1995.⁸ Shortly after, Rani Singh, who runs the Smith archive at the Getty Institute, compiled *Think of the Self*

⁵ John Parles, "Moe Asch, Who Founded Folkways Records, Dies at 81," *New York Times* (New York City, NY), October 21, 1986.

⁶ Greil Marcus, "The Old Weird America." *A Booklet of Essays, Appreciations, and Annotations Pertaining to the Anthology of American Folk Music*, edited by Harry Smith (Washington, DC: Smithsonian Folkways Records, 1997)

⁷ Raymond Foye, "Delineators: Jordan Belson and Harry Smith," *Gagosian Quarterly*, Spring 2021, <https://gagosian.com/quarterly/2021/04/30/essay-delineators-jordan-belson-and-harry-smith/>.

⁸ Paola Iglori, Introduction to *American Magus Harry Smith, A Modern Alchemist*, ed Paola Iglori (New York: Inandout Press, 1996), i.

Speaking in 1997, a series of interviews with Smith from the sixties through the eighties that initially appeared in small presses.⁹ In 2012 a symposium, titled Harry Smith: The Avant-Garde in the American Vernacular, formally established an archive of his extant papers and writings while 2018 saw the publication of *Harry Smith's Anthology of American Folk Music: America Changed through Music*, the first academic effort to study the *Anthology* specifically as a historical document.¹⁰ Despite a growing body of scholarship, aspects of the life and work of Harry Smith, specifically his occult and spiritual orientation towards the creative process and artistic creation, remain insufficiently explored as it relates to the *Anthology of American Folk Music*.

Smith saw himself not as an artist in the popular sense but as a delineator, a collector, an ethnographer, and a synthesizer of vast amounts of cultural information. An analysis of the form, nature, and sources of inspiration of the *Anthology* as a visual and aural document reveals a distinct process practiced by Smith based in collection, documentation, and sequence. Smith gave his remixing, collage, and collection activities a cosmological character that distinguished them from other collections of older recordings of vernacular music. While the musical recordings contained in the set have drawn the most scholarly and popular attention, the visual, textual, and epistemological aspects of the *Anthology* and their relation to the sounds contained reveal the synesthetic quality of the work Smith produced where oral culture operates in webs of correspondence. Smith lined up forms of expression across the aural and visual spectrum to center a transcendent and otherworldly quality within his work and position himself closer to the nexus of creativity itself, a universal expression he spent his life seeking to understand to various

⁹ Rani Singh, forward to *Think of the Self Speaking Harry Smith: Selected Interviews*, ed. Rani Singh (Seattle: Elbow/Cityful Press, 1999), iii.

¹⁰ Foye, <https://gagosian.com/quarterly/2021/04/30/essay-delineators-jordan-belson-and-harry-smith/>.

degrees of success. His practices were tightly wound up with his occult studies and anthropological training, a point of great significance in understanding the charge contained within the *Anthology of American Folk Music* as an influential historical document.

The *Anthology* operates on multiple levels, simultaneously scholarly and surreal, cosmological and commercial, distant and foundational. The eighty-four recordings are an early expression of remix culture approached through both an alchemical and anthropological lens.¹¹ Commercial 78 rpm recordings of the late twenties and early thirties, argues Smith in the opening piece of the handbook liner notes, captured the disappearing regional distinctions that could be found if one were to compare various field recordings of folk music, yet on a larger scale.¹² Smith mined an outdated medium in the trash stratum of fifties popular culture, then twenty-year-old 78 rpm records, to create as he put it, "...a collage. I thought of it as an art object. It took a long time to do."¹³ In doing so Smith created a canonical document, which continues to define how people understand American folk music. For Smith, the set was, "not an attempt to get all the best records (there are other collections where everything was supposed to be beautiful), but a lot of these were selected because they were odd."¹⁴ Through his pursuit of the weird Smith paid particular attention to context and origin, reading widely in available scholarship on folk song, yet his process of sequence and collection was admittedly based on an, "epistemological, musicological set of reasons."¹⁵

Smith began acquiring 78 rpm records in his high school years in the Pacific Northwest, following sounds from one shellac disc to another while developing an encyclopedic knowledge

¹¹ Margie Borschke, *This is not a remix: Piracy, Authenticity, and Popular Music* (New York, NY: Bloomsbury, 2017), 148.

¹² Smith, *Handbook*, 1.

¹³ Cohen, 81.

¹⁴ Cohen, 67.

¹⁵ Cohen, 69.

of their origins, intended audience, and position in relation to contemporary material. His record collection project followed him through moves to Seattle, San Francisco, and ultimately New York City, where the collection was synthesized into the 1952 Folkways release. “After I assembled the *Anthology* and sold the remaining records to the public library, that was the end of the project.”¹⁶ Outside of the eighty-four selections on the *Anthology*, much of the larger collection Smith acquired would be covertly cataloged and taped by Mike Seeger and Ralph Rinzler, architects of the folk music revival, creating a parallel stream of influence stemming from an underground set of bootleg tapes derived from his collection.¹⁷ The activities and associations held by Harry Smith in Seattle, Berkeley, and New York in the 1940s and early 1950s are essential to properly contextualize qualities of the *Anthology of American Folk Music* often labeled as bizarre, otherworldly, and mystical by scholars of folk music and the folk revival.

The *Anthology* came encased in an engraving of the ‘Celestial Monochord’ by Johann Theodor de Bry (1561-1623), which first appeared in a 1617 work by alchemist, philosopher, and Paracelsian physician Robert Fludd. The cover art invokes Renaissance philosophy, esoteric color theory, and astronomical correspondence, echoing the cosmological hierarchies of Neoplatonism in its structure of the universe. In the printed engraving, the hand of God reaches down to tune the lone peg of a monochord, whose singular string vibrates among interlocking circles, astronomical symbols, and musical notation to bring forth existence. The relationship between macrocosm and microcosm is central in the engraving, as is the interpenetrating presence of sound and vibration. By using Fludd, Smith is yoking himself to a philosophy of

¹⁶ Cohen, 74.

¹⁷ Bill C. Malone, *Music of the True Vine: Mike Seeger’s Life and Musical Journey* (Greensboro: University of North Carolina Press, 2011), 4.

nature akin to Paracelsus and Albertus Magnus, who sought to map and understand the correspondences between an individual microcosmic soul and a macrocosmic universe. Smith instead maps the universe of American folksong, documenting it as one would map a physical territory or transcribe a lost language.¹⁸

Structured into six LPs, the *Anthology* was organized into three volumes respectively titled *Ballads*, *Social Music*, and *Songs*, each encased in a color corresponding to an element. The categorization used mirrored that employed by Cecil Sharpe in his collections of Child Ballads, with the added esoteric dimension.¹⁹ The first volume, *Ballads*, printed in green, bears an association with water. The second, *Social Music*, encased in red, denotes fire while the third volume, *Songs*, in blue, represents air. There is no effort to classify artists based on location or race, making the set unique editorially for its time period. Tucked inside the three volumes behind the celestial monochord engraving came a handbook of liner notes functioning as a guide and visual counterpart to the collection. The handbook opens with an essay by Smith grounding the *Anthology* in the styles of the modern era of folk music after the first world war. He states his official bookends to be between “...1927, when electronic recording made possible accurate music reproduction, and 1932 when the depression halted folk music sales.”²⁰ Smith believed that this five-year period contained accurate reproductions of regional styles captured before mass media integrated them into a singular whole. The bulk of the booklet is comprised of individual entries for each track laid out in notecard fashion. The entries contain a bibliography, discography, set of historical anecdotes, and surreal poetic interpretations of each song’s lyrics.

¹⁸ Nicholas Goodrich-Clarke, *Western Esoteric Traditions: A History Introduction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 162.

¹⁹ John Szwed, “How the Folkloric Sounds of Rural America Reached the Mainstream,” *Lit Hub*, August 23, 2023, <https://lithub.com/how-the-folkloric-sounds-of-rural-america-reached-the-mainstream/>.

²⁰ Harry Smith, *Handbook to the Anthology of American Folk Music* (Smithsonian Folkways, 1952, 1997), 2.

Resembling a card catalog laid out in sequence, the track numbers stand embossed in large bold font, reminding the reader of the deliberate sequence and importance of number in relation to the creative material. Decorated with various printed ephemera culled from early twentieth century musical catalogs and record pamphlets, the handbook becomes a piece unmoored from any single historical context, skipping between decades in an assemblage of broadside sheets, record covers, musical instruments diagrams, and portraits of performers. The profane and cheap newsprint feel of the handbook is set alongside the alchemical cover art, scholarly depth of the entries, and web of bibliographical material undergirding and interlocking the songs.

Following the individual track entries, Smith includes a panel of four quotations which he states, “aided the editor in preparing the notes for this handbook.”²¹ The words of renaissance alchemist Robert Fludd, French Anthropologist R.R. Marrett, British occultist Aleister Crowley, and German idealist philosopher and social reformer Rudolf Steiner comprise a curious quartet of influences on a collection of folk song. John Szwed, lone biographer of Smith, refers to the set of quotations as “theosophical hints”, delving no further.²² These four thinkers will be used as guideposts towards an exploration of the biography of Harry Smith as it relates to the inception, creation, and reception of the *Anthology of American Folk Music*.

The handbook culminates in a unique and exhaustive index of correspondences. The focus is on the occurrence and repetition of certain phrases, words, and lyrical passages, with track numbers listed as reference entries which aid to illuminate some of the numerical symmetries and thematic sequences contained in the collage. Entries in the *Anthology* index span a range of categories such as artist names, first lines, song titles, themes, and reference

²¹ Harry Smith, *Anthology of American Folk Music Handbook*, New York: Folkways Records, 1952, 18.

²² John Szwed, *Cosmic Scholar: The Filmmaker, Folklorist, and Mystic who Transformed American Art* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2023), 152

points. Biblical place names follow those of American cities, singing patterns come along with topics such as murder, Satan, and railroads and listings of records featuring jugs, harmonicas, mandolins, kazoos, and washboards tallied by appearance. Taken in its entirety, a reader can absorb the bulk of the lexicon of the American folk song revival in the latter half of the twentieth century through a continuous loop through Smith's eighty-four selections. The kind of diagrammatic organizational tendencies on display in the index reflect the importance of correspondence and interconnection in the work of Smith, echoed in his jazz paintings, early animated films, and linguistic studies of the Kiowa and Lummi cultures of the Pacific Northwest.

Speaking directly upon the *Anthology* in 1969 in *Sing Out!*, Smith states, "The problems that I'd set myself on have to do with correlating music into some kind of visual thing, into some kind of a diagram... my essential interest in music was the patterning that occurred in it - intuition or taste only being a guide to directions where the patterning might occur."²³ Here the index of the *Anthology* presents itself as an attempt to explore and navigate emergent patterns and correspondences among the eighty-four tracks. "The whole purpose is to have some kind of a series of things. Information as drawing and graphic designs can be located more quickly than it can be in books."²⁴ Engagement and participation with the work was intended by Smith in the form of new interpretations of the songs contained. Unanticipated but significant for the folk revival were the efforts to locate and revive the careers of a handful of musicians on the *Anthology*, many of whom were aging among southern rural communities with their musical careers having slowed significantly following the depression. Dock Boggs, Clarence Ashley, Bascom Lamar Lunsford, Belle Reed, Furry Lewis, and Mississippi John Hurt all found new

²³ John Cohen, "Interview with Harry Smith from *Sing Out!* Magazine 1969," In *Think of the Self Speaking Harry Smith: Selected Interviews*, ed. Rani Singh (Seattle: Elbow/Cityful Press, 1999), 85.

²⁴ Cohen, 82.

audiences within the clubs, campuses, and cafes of the folk revival thanks to their inclusion by Smith on the *Anthology*.

Chapter one, titled, “Early Years and Influences in the Pacific Northwest”, will investigate the self-driven anthropological study Smith engaged in while being raised in a household of theosophical and occult influences. His time in both Anacortes and Bellingham, Washington saw the beginnings of his record collection activities while his semesters in Seattle at the University of Washington provided him with formal Anthropological training that would guide his activities. Chapter two, titled, “Bay Area Bohemia and Otherworldly Patronage” tracks the numerous literary and artistic associations Smith held that deepened his practices in filmmaking and painting as it relates to a decidedly esoteric understanding of creativity. Encounters with ballad scholar Bertrand Bronson and poets Jack Spicer and Philip Lamantia shaped not only his understanding of folk music but also methods of organization concerning vast amounts of cultural information. Chapter three, titled, “Mystics of the Lower East Side” follows Smith to New York City where his study with poet-mystic Lionel Ziprin and Polish yogi Count Walewski provided the intellectual context in which he assembled the *Anthology*. Chapter four, titled “Moe Asch, Crusader of People’s Music ” explores the collaboration with Moe Asch and Folkways records where his collection became consolidated into a cohesive whole. Attention will be given to the legal justification held by Asch and Smith in their creation of the set as well as the character and context of the Folkways office and mission. Chapter five, titled “From Smith to Smithsonian” tracks the reception and interpretations of the *Anthology* following its release with particular attention placed to the gaps in understanding concerning the biography of Smith and the centrality of his occult practice as it relates to the process of canonization.

Chapter One: Early Years in and Influences in the Pacific Northwest

"Civilized man thinks out his difficulties, at least he thinks he does,
primitive man dances out his difficulties."

R.R. Marrett, The Threshold of Religion (1909)

Harry Everett Smith was born in coastal Oregon to Theosophical parents in 1923. The only child of a schoolteacher on the Lummi Indian Reservation and a manager in the local canning industry, his childhood was steeped in pantheism and alternative spiritual currents.²⁵ The Theosophical Society sought to offer a third way to its followers outside of materialistic science or dogmatic religion, advocating for an integration of the two into a pantheistic worldview. Drawing on both eastern spirituality and the western esoteric tradition, Theosophy presents a complex and sometimes contradictory cosmology that underwent a series of schisms since its founding in 1876 by Helena Blavatsky and Henry Steele Olcott. By the 1920s, when Smith was moving about the Pacific Northwest with his family, Theosophy was beginning to decline in popularity in the United States. Nonetheless, the influence of his upbringing on his search for hidden knowledge was profound, directing his pursuits and introducing Smith to traditions rooted in Neo-Platonism that he would draw on for his entire adult life. Discussing his upbringing, Smith notes that "because of my grandfather's interest in mysticism, the basement

²⁵ Rani Singh, "Harry Smith, An Ethnographic Modernist in America," In *Harry Smith: The Avant-Garde in the American Vernacular*, edited by Andrew Perchuck and Rani Singh, 15-62. (Los Angeles: Getty Research Institute, 2010), 17.

was full of books on whether Bacon wrote Shakespeare's plays, alchemy, and so forth. I had a whole blacksmith shop. I spent a lot of time trying to transmute lead into gold."²⁶ Mystical and occult studies would be a lifelong pursuit for Smith, with the *Anthology* demonstrating his continued interest in the works of thinkers such as Fludd, Steiner, and Crowley.

The proximity of the Lummi Indian Reservation to his home in coastal Washington provided Smith an avenue for self-directed anthropological study at an early age and exposure to indigenous cultures. Anacortes, where Smith was raised, was settled by Europeans during the 1890s, late by comparison to remainder of the nation. The high school in Bellingham Smith attended had several Lummi students who lived on the reservation. Smith was able to travel by bus to conduct ethnographic fieldwork among the Lummi, swiftly earning the trust from the elders at a young age through methods that remain undocumented.²⁷ Drawn in by the visual patterning and designs of the architecture, basketry, and weaving, Smith soon shifted the focus of his fieldwork to the aural landscape, carting a wire tape recorder onto the reservation to document dances, songs, and rituals. His experiences with the Lummi provided him an opportunity to record live sound and preserve it for analysis long before his record collecting practice took hold. Smith felt sound captured cultural depth in a fashion his field notes simply could not. His early years with the Lummi are documented in a 1943 *American Magazine* piece which displays a photograph of a young Smith hunched over a wire tape recorder capturing the sounds of the Lummi rituals unfolding in front of him.²⁸ The scene in the photograph was not, however, the sweat lodge of the Lummi, as is suggested, but the Smith living room in

²⁶ Cohen, 76.

²⁷ Szwed, 35.

²⁸ Szwed, 51.

Bellingham. The article was problematic for Smith, who bemoaned the attitude of the author which suggested he was an expert on indigenous lifeways.²⁹

As Smith engaged in fieldwork, he also became enamored with the work of French Anthropologist Claude Levi-Strauss.³⁰ Structuralism, developed by Levi-Straus, links cultural expression to larger structural systems, a form which Smith would embrace in his artmaking and occult studies. While the Theosophical society embraced a connection between a microcosmic soul and the macrocosmic universe, Structuralism was making parallel observations on how cultural practices were linked to societal structures. This kind of relationship was greatly influential on the approach Smith took to his artmaking and collage work. Equally influential on his developing practices and interests was Kathleen Haddon's 1934 *String Games for Beginners*.³¹ The text deepened the interest Smith had in universal forms of expression like folk songs, later remarking that "as far as I know, string figures are the only universal thing other than singing."³² In his youth, drawing and painting accompanied collection activities, with the mystical inclinations of the household leading Smith toward *The Art of the Spiritual Harmony* by Wassily Kandinsky and *Thought Forms* by the Theosophists Annie Besant and C. W. Leadbeater.³³ Rooted in the occult revival of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, Kandinsky would provide Smith with the drive to investigate the spiritual sources of creativity while his ethnographic work illustrated the interrelation between culture and structure. For Smith, folk music and record collection would become a vehicle in which both could be combined in a cohesive fashion.

²⁹ Vance Packard, "Injuneer," *American Magazine*, March 1943, 118.

³⁰ Szwed, 41.

³¹ Szwed, 47.

³² Cohen, 96.

³³ Szwed, 49.

Smith was introduced to folk music by his parents, who both sang songs in the house. His mother favored Irish tunes, leading him towards the Appalachian music which would dominate his record collection, while his father sang cowboy songs that he remembered from his years ranching at the turn of the century. Among the many books which the elder Smith would bring home from the public library, *American Songbag* by Carl Sandburg made a significant impression, introducing Smith to the ballads collected by Frances James Child in England and Scotland in the latter half of the 19th century. Smith would include twelve selections from *American Songbag* on the *Anthology*, with tracks spanning all three volumes. The younger Smith sought out the music of John Jacob Niles, a balladeer and folk singer who had done extensive field collecting of folk songs during the height of the depression in Kentucky.³⁴ The *Singing Fiddler of Lost Hope Holler* by Jean Thomas, published in 1938, was also a book of influence for Smith. The text documented the life of Jilson Setters, a blind fiddler who became a fixture in folk song festivals and revivals of the pre-war era. Smith included *The Wild Wagoner* by Jilson Setters as track twenty nine on the *Anthology*, featuring cut outs of Setters in his handbook collage. As would often be the case for Smith, the search for Setters records led him towards sounds further afield, leading to the beginning of his collection. During high school in Bellingham, his pursuits began to take the form they would constitute for the remainder of his artistic life revolving around a practice of collection, documentation, and sequence.³⁵ He described his record collecting activities at the time as, “an obsessive, investigative hobby or something.”³⁶

³⁴ John Jacob Niles, introduction to *The Appalachian Photographs of Doris Ulmann*, ed. Sam Maitin (Highlands: The Jargon Society, 1971), 7.

³⁵ Cohen, 69.

³⁶ Cohen, 74.

Through records and his fieldwork, Smith searched for landscapes and experiences that took him outside of his milieu in the Pacific Northwest by spending time with indigenous elders or hunting down bizarre sounds on shellac. In Bellingham he had heard “New Highway No. 51” by blues artist Tommy McClellan, who recorded over a dozen sides for Bluebird Records beginning in 1939 through the late 1940s. Smith felt that the record had likely, “got into this town by mistake. It sounded strange so I looked for others and found Memphis Minnie.”³⁷ The records Smith sought out in his collection were originally marketed towards specific regional and ethnic audiences, with blues records by Tommy McClellan and Memphis Minnie rarely appearing for sale to the largely white communities of the Pacific Northwest Smith frequented. The emphasis on the weird, odd, or unusual demonstrates his attempt to get outside of his own cultural context and pursue other forms of expression. Moe Asch, writing in the liner notes to the 1952 *Anthology* echoed this by describing Smith’s selections as, “produced for the purpose of sale to one group such as the Shape note singers, the Arcadians, the rural dwellers, etc.”³⁸ If Smith wanted to seek out these niche records, specifically recordings of black artists, or race records, as they were labeled, he had to travel to urban areas. His collection journeys took him first to Portland, then Seattle, Berkeley, and Oakland. Stray blues records led him towards hillbilly music, a stand-in label for white Appalachian music, a major feature of the *Anthology* that had little commercial market share in the northwest. Smith wanted records that he perceived to be, “exotic in relation to what was considered to be the world culture of high-class music.”³⁹

The editorial choices made in sequencing the *Anthology* were distinct in his avoidance of any racial categorization, a practice common among the schools of early anthropology and

³⁷ Cohen, 70.

³⁸ Asch, afterward to Handbook, 31.

³⁹ Cohen, 70.

collections of folk song on LP. Unlike collection of field recordings from the same time, often organized by region, racial background or genre, the *Anthology* intermixed white and black musicians and featured black songs sung by white performers and the reversal as well. Smith sought to demonstrate the interconnected nature of American vernacular music where, despite the development of regional styles, influence crossed geographic and racial lines.

An encounter with the *Report of the Committee of the Conference of Inter-American Relations in the Field of Music* led Smith to a list of several hundred songs assembled by folklorist Alan Lomax titled *List of American Folk Songs on Commercial Records*.⁴⁰ In the mimeographed list, Lomax, who worked at the Library of Congress, informs readers that he combed through over three thousand commercial recordings to select the three hundred and fifty discs featured.⁴¹ Similar to Smith, Lomax admits that his reasons for selecting the tracks descend from personal tastes that cannot be fully explained. In the list Lomax developed a symbolic code system of letters to indicate the style, region, and background of the singers which would be echoed by the index of correspondences Smith created.

The Lomax list introduced Smith to the Carter Family, a group of artists that would be featured more than any other on the *Anthology*, being tracks 17, 23, 53, and 67. Smith would later meet Sarah Carter in the late 1940s after a period of musical retirement in California through his bay area connection to fellow record collector, bohemian, benefactor, and racecar enthusiast Griffith Borgeson. The approach Smith took to studying the work of Sarah Carter is distinct, reflecting his interest in patterning and structural frameworks. He analyzed her quilting patterns and attempted to compare the names she applied to the quilts to the names and lyrical

⁴⁰ Alan Lomax, *List of American Folk Songs on Commercial Records* (Washington, DC: Library of Congress, 1942), 1.

⁴¹ John Szwed, *The Man Who Recorded the World: A Biography of Alan Lomax*. (London: William Heinemann, 2010), 338.

content of recordings by the Carter Family. The inquiry involved peyote ingestion by Smith and an ultimately confused Sara Carter, demonstrating the non-traditional fieldwork practices Smith employed along with a clear focus on correspondence-based ethnography reflected in the *Anthology*.⁴²

Upon graduation from high school Smith left Bellingham to study Anthropology at the University of Washington for six semesters, without receiving a degree, from 1943-1944.⁴³ He had made several trips North to Seattle during his high school years with his early work among the Lummi earning him a reputation with Erna Gunther and Melville Jacobs, both professors in Anthropology at the University of Washington who studied under Franz Boas. In a letter describing the work Smith had completed in his adolescence, Jacobs wrote, “He did impressive work, all by himself, in attempting to record the sounds and words of the difficult native Indian language... he is a grand fellow.”⁴⁴ Despite the glowing assessment and recommendation, his performance at the University of Washington was sub-par, resulting in mostly C’s and B’s, eventually leading to his dropping out of the university.⁴⁵ While he was enrolled, Smith became involved in the American Friends Service Committee and the Fellowship of Reconciliation, working to aid Jewish immigrants fleeing Nazi persecution.⁴⁶

Through his anthropological studies, Smith encountered the work of R.R. Marett, whose 1909 lecture series *The Threshold of Religion* is quoted in the handbook of the *Anthology* as a source of inspiration. Smith, who by adulthood had spent significant time among indigenous populations of the Pacific Northwest, would have found resonance with the idea that, “Civilized man thinks out his difficulties, at least he thinks he does, primitive man dances out his

⁴² Cohen, 74.

⁴³ Szwed, 59.

⁴⁴ Szwed, 51.

⁴⁵ Szwed, 58.

⁴⁶ Szwed, 59.

difficulties." A comparison of his upbringing among a boom bust canning family who oversaw the depletion of the salmon population of the Columbia River with the Lummi and Salish who had stewarded a relationship with the species and its habitat for centuries is stark. Similarly, the choice of subject matter for the *Anthology*, recordings produced at the hinge point between regional markets and nationwide musical consolidation, reflects fast disappearing pockets within American culture where musical expression was indeed an attempt to dance out difficulties rather than commercial cultural traditions into profit.

Marett comes from the first generation of anthropologists in Europe, many of whom had background in classical scholarship and sought to investigate the origin of religion within the new discipline. Despite this, Marett differed from Tylor and Frazer, who saw a linear and progressive development from savage magical thinking to the pure light of scientific reasoning. Marett remarked, "It is a mark of crude evolutionism to assume that more complex stands for better all around. So let us as far as we can be content to note that the mental life of the simple society is different from that of the complex society, without being necessarily better or worse on that account."⁴⁷ For Marett, evolution then is a process of increasing complexity, not progressive enhancement. Smith sought to demonstrate the complexity of American musical traditions through his *Anthology* while his work with string figures throughout his lifetime can be seen as an attempt to showcase the complexity of an artform whose medium is the deceptively simple, yet endlessly complex, a single piece of string. The resonance here with the monochord which occupies the cover art should also be noted.

Marett doesn't see the beginning stages of religion being bound in a metaphysical or naturalistic origin; instead, he situates his work in exploring a consciousness of religion as

⁴⁷ R. R. Marett, "Psychology and Anthropology" in *Psychology and the Sciences*, ed. William Brown (London: A. and C. Black) 38.

expressed in the emotional dimension of the participants. He developed the concept of mana as a designation for, “that positive emotional value which is the raw material of religion”⁴⁸. Marett goes against the dominant forces of positivism, determinism, and reductionism in his work seeking to reconcile religion and science while expressing idealist tendencies of human freedom and universal experience. His influence lay mostly in his training of a generation of anthropologists at Oxford who would prioritize fieldwork over book publishing and speculative writing on the origin of religion. Similarly, Smith sought direct expression of early religious experience through gospel recordings, which feature prominently on the *Anthology* and provide another direct link between the set and metaphysical concerns. The precise midpoint of the collection, track 42, marks a shift to the higher realms of religiosity when Smith includes two selections by Reverend J.M. Gates, *Must be Born Again* and *Oh, Death Where is Thy Sting*. He writes in the liner notes that these tracks represent, “one of the earliest modes of Christian religious singing in this country”⁴⁹, being lining hymns, where Bible phrases are chanted where one note corresponds to one syllable in a slow fashion.

Smith remained in the Seattle area through early 1946, advertising to purchase and sell 78 rpm records in *The Record Changer* magazine under an address at E. 50th Street.⁵⁰ The Record Changer was an obscure monthly journal focused on jazz recordings, offering catalog listings, essays, and illustrations. The publication was produced between 1941 and 1957, coinciding with the creation and dissemination of his record collection. The visual layout of the *Anthology* handbook draws heavily from style of *The Record Changer*, where Smith had access to catalog reprints and jacket covers which he cut up to include in his work. Additionally, Moe Asch

⁴⁸ R.R. Marett, *The Threshold of Religion* (London: Methuen & Co, 1909), xxxi

⁴⁹ Smith, 10.

⁵⁰ Harry Smith, “Advertisers Whose Addresses Are Not Listed Elsewhere,” *The Record Changer Magazine*, January 1946, 6.

advertised in the publication for his releases on his pre-Folkways endeavors, Disc and Asch Records, introducing Smith to his future collaborator. Through *The Record Changer*, Smith built his collection while becoming familiar with the vastness of available catalogs of recordings from major labels. Exchanging artifacts long out of print, Smith and his fellow collectors correctly identified these as culturally significant. Another visual influence on the *Anthology* handbook were the Bureau of American Ethnology reports which Smith would have encountered as a student of Anthropology at the University of Washington. Franz Boaz, mentor to many of the professors Smith studied under, was the editor. The green volumes contained the type of linguistic pattern documentation that Smith would emulate in his index of correspondences in the *Anthology* handbook.

While in Seattle and out of academia, Smith was employed at a Boeing aircraft facility as an engine degreaser operator, having been labeled unfit for military service due to a spine curvature.⁵¹ His small frame was conducive to the mechanical work required to assemble large aircraft, providing Smith with a period of comfortable living within a larger life of abject poverty. His salary from full time employment allowed him to invest heavily in his growing record collection, which during the war were being amassed by the federal government. Shellac, the material used to produce 78 rpm records, was in demand for airplane construction during the war. A shortage had been ongoing due to the Pacific conflict, leading manufacturers to seek out domestic reserves of shellac found in unwanted records. Both Smith on the west coast and Asch in New York City capitalized on the situation, acquiring large amounts bound for the incinerator.

Smith approached his collection activities imbued with a desire to assemble massive amounts of information to reveal patterns of cultural expression. Concerning recorded commercial music, Smith often searched for sounds that simply sounded novel, weird, obscure,

⁵¹ Foye, 6.

or unusual. The songs became secondary to the music as a representation of a larger structure that became the true object of his studies. He envisioned his collection to be something of musicological importance that would engender participation from scholars, academics, and folk music enthusiasts alike. Instead of simply preserving what was lost or capturing a period of sound for passive listening, Smith sought to encourage participation in the process of folk song creation, accurately recognizing the role that changes in technology played in this ongoing transformation. Smith emphasized later in life that the tracks which were eventually selected for the *Anthology* had “to be ones that would be popular among musicologists, or possibly people who would want to sing them and maybe improve the version.”⁵²

Obsessive record collecting and investigations into specific recordings for Smith was always, “part of something else, but I wouldn’t know what though. It has something to do with the desire to communicate in some way, the collection of objects. Now I like to have something around me that has a lot of information in it, and since then, it seems to me that books are an especially bad way of recording information.... so I’ve been interested in other things that gave a heightened experience in relation to the environment.”⁵³ For Smith, records served this function as jewels of information to be strung together into a constellation of ethnographic material. As his listings in *The Record Changer* from 1946-1947 indicate, Smith was collecting regional styles and representations not available to popular culture in the post-war landscape. In September 1946, Smith advertised for, “Pre-1940 Race and Hillbilly Vocals” including several artists who would be featured on the *Anthology* such as Bascom Lamar Lunsford, Uncle Eck Dunford, Dock Boggs, Grayson and Whitter, and Roosevelt Graves. In Seattle and his childhood years his collection and understanding of culture took shape, but it would be the Bay Area which

⁵² Cohen 79.

⁵³ Cohen, 79.

would be formative in deepening the associations Smith had with esoteric study and literary circles.

Chapter Two: Bohemia in the Bay Area and Otherworldly Patronage

"The in-breathing becomes thought, and the out-breathing
becomes the will manifestation of thought"

Rudolf Steiner, *Man in the Stars* (1922)

Anthropological study and deeper record collecting drew Smith south to the Bay Area sometime during 1946. He had begun corresponding with Professor Paul Radin at the University of California at Berkeley with the intention of continuing his formal studies in Anthropology. Smith also visited Berkeley previously on record collecting journeys which led him to a Woody Guthrie concert held in support of the Longshoreman's Union and organized by labor activist Harry Bridges in 1942.⁵⁴ Moe Asch of Folkways was responsible for releasing records by Guthrie on his earlier Asch Records, contributing to his status as an influential figure within the folk revival. Witnessing the folk movement firsthand, Smith later reflected that the scene, "wasn't the sort of stuff I was interested in... too involved in social problems." His September 1946 advertisement in *The Record Changer* lists his address as 5^{1/2} Panorama way, where he occupied a small apartment underneath Bertrand Bronson, scholar of Child Ballads and professor of English at the University of California at Berkeley.⁵⁵ Berkeley would provide Smith the environment in which to continue his painting and develop a unique method abstract hand-painted animation. Rustic in character by comparison to other urban centers, Berkeley was home

⁵⁴ Szwed, 60.

⁵⁵ Harry Smith, "Advertisement," *The Record Changer Magazine*, September 1946, 23.

to a theosophical lodge and the Vedanta temple. Avoiding the leftist circles encountered in the earlier brush with Guthrie, Smith gravitated instead towards poetic and avant-garde groups, interested not in immediate political action but rather individual explorations of consciousness and transcendence that would in turn have their own impact on the character of the counterculture. Smith associated with the San Francisco Literary Renaissance, experimental cinema, early psychedelic culture, spiritual exploration, and the department of Anthropology at Berkeley, where Jamie de Angulo and Paul Radin, two junior faculty members, taught. His constellation of associations included friendships with Jordan Belson, Jack Spicer, Philip Lamantia, and Bertrand Bronson, who contributed to the understanding of folk music which shaped the *Anthology* and continued investigations into the interrelationship between sound and image which defined his artistic practice.

Bertrand Bronson and Smith developed a neighborly friendship on Panorama Way, sharing a bond over collecting records and the scholarship which undergirded their understanding of the discs. Bronson published the four volume *Traditional Tunes of the Child Ballads* in 1959, which would become a foundational in ballad scholarship. Smith first encountered Child ballads himself in *American Songbag* by Carl Sandburg during his Washington youth. He included Henry Lee by Dick Justice, Child ballad number sixty eight, as the opening track of the *Anthology* on the *Ballads* volume. “It’s not a good record”, Smith commented, but being the lowest available Child ballad in his collection, he felt its significance merited inclusion.⁵⁶ This demonstrates a commitment to historical significance by Smith rather than simply aesthetic concerns. The first five tracks of the set comprise a quintet of Child ballads moving chronologically through time, each being a commercial recording that remains faithful to the versions collected by Frances James Child. Smith cites Phillips Barry in each,

⁵⁶ Cohen, 67.

referencing his *British Ballads in Maine* as a source of historical context. Barry advocated a theory of communal recreation concerning ballads, where each individual singer modified the tune rather than carry it on in a rigid fashion.⁵⁷

Smith was also introduced to recordings by Buell Kazee, a collector of folk song and a banjo player, by Bronson in Berkeley.⁵⁸ Smith would include two selections by Kazee which follow the five Child Ballads which begin the set. “The Butcher’s Boy” and “The Wagoner’s Lad”, both by Kazee and released on Brunswick records, represent amalgamations of banjo playing and ballad lyric structure described as ‘folk-lyric’ by scholar H.M. Belden, cited heavily by Smith in the liner notes.⁵⁹ Smith pinpoints the origin of these songs to the latter half of the 19th century, placing them after the first five Child Ballads chronologically. Here a pattern in the first volume of the *Anthology* emerges, where Smith begins in Europe with the quintet of Child Ballads, moves into composite amalgamations of American and Anglo influences in tracks six through ten, and then settles into ballads of distinctly American character in tracks eleven through twenty-seven. The volume moves in a westward direction as it advances in time to include novel instrumental innovations and rhythmic changes. Thematically, the *Ballads* volume is broken into a series of triads that include death, loss of a spouse, courtship, deception, murders, disasters, and agricultural misery. The triads carry through both all four sides of the two LPs for a total of twenty-eight tracks.

Bronson also produced LPs on ballads in collaboration with Alan Lomax and the Library of Congress.⁶⁰ Like Smith with the first volume of the *Anthology*, Bronson sought to

⁵⁷ George Herzog, “Philips Barry,” *American Folklore Society* 51, no. 202 (1938): 440.

⁵⁸ Cohen, 78.

⁵⁹ Smith, 3.

⁶⁰ *Child Ballads Traditional in the United States*. Edited by Bertrand Bronson. 1965. The Library of Congress Recording Library, LP.

demonstrate the vitality of Child ballads as reflected in recorded material. Bronson was one of the few folklorists at the time who took commercial recordings seriously as expressions of folk tradition, although his selections for his Lomax collaboration came not from commercial material, like Smith, but rather the Library of Congress collection of field recordings.⁶¹ Additionally, Bronson keen on utilizing the latest technology in presenting and studying materials.

In 1949 while Smith was still living in the Bay Area, Bronson published a paper entitled, “Mechanical Help in the Study of Folksong”, which outlines the methods he used concerning the IBM 5801 punch card system to sort and categorize large amounts of data concerning the Anglo-American ballad tradition. Bronson addresses humanities scholars and their reticence to embrace mechanical aid in their research, suggesting that techniques like the one he outlines could be used not simply for aesthetic judgement but for the calculation of necessary facts and figures to produce sound research. Taking in a large body of material from the Anglo-American ballad tradition, Bronson notes that range, modal characteristics, time signature, number of phrases, and the pattern of the refrain provided useful characteristics for sorting by IBM punch card.⁶² Smith would later express a desire to document rhythmic changes and study lyric content in his proposed fourth volume of the Anthology. “I made phonetic transcriptions of all the words in the songs, but those notebooks got lost. The content analysis was like how many times the word ‘railroad’ was used during the depression and how many times during the war.”⁶³ The effort would see the light of day in 2000 thanks to efforts by Revanant Records. The fourth, earth,

⁶² Bertrand Bronson, “Mechanical Help in the Study of Folksong,” *Journal of American Folklore* 62, no. 244 (1949): 81.

⁶³ Cohen, 84.

volume would be colored yellow and mirrored the intentions of Smith based on his available notes. Smith and Bronson both approached folksong as a vast catalog of cultural information to be mined and studied in a structural fashion. Bronson employed his early computational punch card system while Smith developed the complexities of his index with clear plans to expand on this content analysis in future volumes.

In March of 1947 Bronson offered the opening remarks to a performance by Bascom Lamar Lunsford on Appalachian mountain folksong and ballads at the University of California at Berkeley. Here, like Smith, Bronson demonstrates a commitment to folksong not in printed form but rather in physical performance. In his opening remarks to the concert Bronson states, “Folksong does not live in a book. It is alive, really only truly alive, when it is being sung.”⁶⁴ Bascom Lamar Lunsford, whom Bronson was introducing, was a lawyer by profession and an avid collector of folksongs in North Carolina and Virginia. Lunsford was responsible for founding the Mountain Dance and Folk Festival in Asheville, North Carolina in 1928, seen as the first folk festival in the United States. Smith cites 30 and 1 Folksongs of the Southern Mountains by Lunsford in his bibliography, containing entries on Henry Lee and seven other discs included in the set.

Smith would also include two recordings by Lunsford, *Dry Bones* and *I Wish I Was A Mole In the Ground*, on the *Anthology*, both originally released on Brunswick Records. Curiously, the remarks Bronson made at the concert in 1947 were included in the liner notes of the 1953 Folkways release by Lunsford entitled, *Smoky Mountain Ballads*. The circumstances around this recording are somewhat mysterious. How Asch acquired the statements by Bronson made six years earlier is unknown, although Smith seems a likely conduit, living at the time next

⁶⁴ Bertrand Bronson, “Introductory Remarks” (Bascom Lamar Lunsford’s Folksong Program at the University of California (Berkeley) March 21, 1947).

to Bronson and later working with Asch closely at Folkways in 1952. Smith gave lectures on jazz at the University of California at Berkeley and would have been aware of performance by Lunsford, likely being in attendance.⁶⁵ The recordings featured on *Smoky Mountain Ballads* were not the same 78 rpm records Smith collected and included in the *Anthology*, but a session recorded by Eagle Records in 1947 while Lunsford was on the same tour in which he encountered Bronson. The Eagle Records sessions were also sent to Asch and re-released on Folkways as *Smoky Mountain Ballads*, including an newer version of *I Wish I was a Mole in the Ground*.⁶⁶

The academic associations Smith kept with Bronson and UC Berkeley were overshadowed by connections to artists and poets. When Smith arrived in the Bay Area in the late forties, Kenneth Rexroth, whose transcendental poetry was published primarily by New Directions, was the leading figure of the San Francisco literary world. Although no sources indicate a direct association between Smith and Rexroth, they clearly moved in overlapping circles surrounding KPFA radio, literary salons, and Circle magazine. Rexroth hosted a Friday night salon series and a Wednesday libertarian discussion group which acted as a meeting place for the emerging bohemian intellectuals of the city. Discussions ranged from medieval mystical philosophies to contemporary political Anarchism and attracted a wide-ranging group of participants that by some accounts numbered over one hundred.⁶⁷ Smith befriended poets Philip Lamantia, an early devotee of Rexroth, and Jack Spicer, whose Berkeley renaissance with Robert Duncan was an outgrowth of the literary declarations of Rexroth of a San Francisco renaissance.

⁶⁵ Cohen, 78.

⁶⁶ Jones, Loyal. Letter to Kip Lornell. 9 February 1990. Moses and Frances Asch Collection, Ralph Rinzler Folklife Archives and Collections, Smithsonian Institution.

⁶⁷ Lawrence Ferlinghetti, forward to *High Poet: The Collected Poems of Philip Lamantia*, by Philip Lamantia (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2019), xxxi.

Rexroth and Lamantia were described as, “the glue that held that West Coast scene together,”⁶⁸ by Gerd Stein, a filmmaker, poet, and contemporary of Smith.

Rexroth also hosted a book review program on KPFA-FM, a listener supported radio station which pioneered the model. KPFA was established by the Pacifica foundation shortly after the second world war, steering its programming in opposition to the profit driven nature of commercial radio. Classical and folk music dominated the airwaves alongside political and cultural analysis, not unlike those of the salons organized by Rexroth. The founders were a collection of pacifists and artists who found one another on the west coast after the second world war. Smith, who had spent his high school years in Oregon organizing on behalf of Japanese population rounded up during the war, tuned in and participated as a guest host on the weekly Folk Music Series, hosted by poet Jack Spicer.⁶⁹

Folk Music Series focused on the Anglo-American ballad tradition. Poet Jack Spicer was enrolled in graduate studies at the University of California at Berkeley, taking classes under the medievalist Ernst Kantorowicz and poet Josephine Miles, studying Old Norse, German, and Anglo-Saxon. His Folk Music Series featured recordings of ballads, live performances by local musicians, guest hosts such as Smith, and academic commentary from Spicer which shifted suddenly between satire and scholarship. In 1949 Smith began sharing portions of his collection to KPFA listeners and discussing historical and farcical aspects of ballad tradition on air with Spicer. In addition, Spicer accompanied Smith as he went looking for many of the 78s that would culminate in the *Anthology*. The two connected through a commitment to the historical

⁶⁸ Raymond Foye, “Interview with Gerd Stein,” *The Brooklyn Rail*, July-August 2019, <https://brooklynrail.org/2019/07/art/GERD-STERN-with-Raymond-Foye>.

⁶⁹ Peter Gizzi, introduction to *My Vocabulary Did This to Me: The Collected Poems of Jack Spicer*, ed. Peter Gizzi (Middletown: Wesleyan University Press, 2010), xxi

ballad tradition, surrealism, and an attitude towards folk music that was both scholarly and irreverent.⁷⁰ Spicer also shared with Smith a mystical or spiritual interpretation of the creative process in which the artist is merely a conduit for creative forces. Spicer playfully referred to this as ‘martian’ transmissions and eschewed tradition by refusing to copyright his poetic works, a decision Smith would find inspirational in his disregard for copyright law in completing the *Anthology*.⁷¹

Spicer shared an apartment with Robert Duncan, literary secretary to linguist and anthropologist Jaime De Angulo, who taught summer classes at the University of Berkeley. De Angulo had a great impact on Smith, who continued to discuss the importance of his work until his death in 1991.⁷² Duncan aided De Angulo in the transcription of collected oral material that resulted in a KPFA program of his own titled Indian tales, which aired in 1949 just months before his passing.⁷³ Smith was in contact with De Angulo while in Berkeley, drawn to him through his earlier studies in anthropology and adolescent work with the Lummi.⁷⁴ *Indian Tales*, marketed as a collection of stories for children, was a synthesis of stories De Angulo collected through decades of living among the Shasta, Modoc, Pomo, and Karok tribes of California, among others. Primarily a linguist, he transcribed dozens of nearly extinct languages. *Indian Tales* was conceived as an explicit contrast to the depictions of indigenous populations available at the time in the popular culture while also critiquing armchair anthropologists who De Angulo felt didn’t properly understand their subject matter. In 1949 mainstream audience were introduced to Tonto, the native American sidekick to the Lone Ranger. “I welcomed the

⁷⁰ Gizzi, 430.

⁷¹ Gizzi, xxiii

⁷² Raymond Foye, Interview with Gerd Stein,, <https://brooklynrail.org/2019/07/art/GERD-STERN-with-Raymond-Foye>.

⁷³ Andrew Shelling, *Tracks Along the Left Coast Path* (New York: Catapult, 2018), 155.

⁷⁴ Foye, *Delineators* ,8.

opportunity,” De Angulo wrote, “to show the children what real Indians were like, how unromantic, how realistic, how tolerant.”⁷⁵

KPFA audiences who tuned into *Indian Tales* and Folk Music Series did so because they felt the programs carried currents of authenticity not found on the commercial airwaves. Audiences in the folk revival would feel similarly about the *Anthology*. For Berkeley listeners, De Angulo was participating in and continuing the oral tradition of indigenous mythology. His collection of stories, like the *Anthology*, was an assemblage or collage of disparate elements which was itself an, “artifact of inscriptive technology operating in a feedback loop.”⁷⁶ The presentation and performance of oral tradition by De Angulo was mirrored in the language used by KPFA to describe the understanding of folk music held by its staff members who, “share an...emotional wish to get at the indigenous in their own culture and the archetypal in human life”.⁷⁷ Smith would echo this sentiment in his introductory essay to the *Anthology* when he explains his editorial parameters of 1927-1932 were required to successfully capture regional sounds before they succumbed to the transformations of commercialization. Spicer different from this reverent authenticity, instead viewing American folk music as a, “constructed avant-garde assemblage.”⁷⁸ To support this view, he often changed the lyrics of ancient ballads to reflect contemporary language, made up songs entirely, or lied about the origin, age, and authenticity of a recording. Although Smith would remain rooted in ballad scholarship in his work with the *Anthology*, his association with Spicer and the Folk Music Series was influential in informing Smiths view of folk music as an evolving tradition to be participated with and not an attempt to capture a lost romantic notion of authenticity.

⁷⁵ Gui De Angulo, *The Old Coyote of Big Sur: The Life of Jaime de Angulo* (Berkeley: Stone garden, 1995), 423

⁷⁶ Lisa Hollenbach, “Jaime De Angulo’s *Indian Tales* and KPFA-FM,” *Chicago Review* 68, no.1-3 (2021): 90.

⁷⁷ “Folk Music Quid Est?”, KPFA Interim Folio, Jan 29-Feb 11 1950, Pacifica Radio Archives.

⁷⁸ Hollenbach, 90.

After Smith left Berkeley, he moved to the Filmore, a predominately African American neighborhood of San Francisco where he resided in an efficiency apartment inside Jimbo's Bop City, a waffle shop which became a prominent venue for bop musicians by night. During this period Smith spent significant time with Philip Lamantia, often identified with the beat generation of poets coalescing on the West Coast in the late 1940s.⁷⁹ Lawrence Ferlinghetti described Lamantia as, "bridging the gap between European surrealism and the radical American cultural revolution begun by the beats."⁸⁰ Often described as a visionary poet, Lamantia sought to intellectualize transcendence within his writing, sharing with Smith a desire to synthesize artistic creation within a personal philosophy. The harmonies between the two are palatable. Lamantia, like Smith, was immersed in indigenous cultures, spending time with the Washoe Indians of Lake Tahoe in his youth. He also combined his poetry with jazz music for live performances much like Smith would do with his films at the same time. The two also shared a deep interest in esoteric streams of renaissance hermeticism and Jewish Kabbalah. They shared an interest in surrealism. Lamantia would later reflect that, "surrealism was what brought me to what you call hermeticism... the key for me was my weekly lunch with the [first European surrealists to have taken up residence in New York] painter-engraver Kurt Seligmann, who graciously allowed me to look at his many volumes of very early, amazing, alchemical texts. This was an amazing experience."⁸¹

Lamantia had been a friend and student of Rexroth and attended the literary salons frequented by Jack Spicer and Robert Duncan. He also had contact with Jaime De Angulo, living for a time in a house that contained his library of ethnographic material, a collection which

⁷⁹ David Meltzer, *San Francisco Beat: Talking With the Poets* (San Francisco: City Lights, 2001), 136.

⁸⁰ Ferlinghetti, xx.

⁸¹ Meltzer, 137.

would surely have been of interest to Smith.⁸² Lamantia held a passion for jazz and rhythm and blues, which he and Smith witnessed the emergence of on the West Coast during their time in Berkeley as regular audience members in the clubs of the Bay Area. In his papers Lamantia references Smith in a 1948 journal entry as a ‘genius’ whom he conducted important exchanges with regarding magic, gnosis, and music, reflecting a deep involvement with esoteric currents by Smith during his time in Berkeley in the late forties.⁸³ The two frequented the clubs of San Francisco, specifically Jimbo’s Bop City, where Smith showed films and created non-objective murals in exchange for rent for his efficiency apartment. Lamantia appears to have been particularly floored with the ability Smith possessed in finding rare alchemical texts. The next year Lamantia would leave the Bay Area for New York City, a move Smith would himself make shortly thereafter, stopping off at the farm of George Andrews, a friend of Lamantia. Unlike Smith, Lamantia returned to the west coast frequently, participating in 1955 in the famed Six Gallery reading memorialized in Jack Kerouac’s *The Dharma Bums*.⁸⁴ The event is often commemorated as the beginning of a new chapter in California literary history or colloquially termed the ‘birth’ of the beat generation, a term that is somewhat limited in its ability to capture the literary shifts underway. Despite his involvement, Lamantia, like Smith, was a step removed from the inner-beat circle. His focus on transcendence, spirituality, and esotericism that brought him closer to Lamantia distinguished him from the more popular beat writers such as Kerouac, Allen Ginsberg, and William Burroughs who followed paths of Buddhist and Hindu thoughts as they developed as popular personalities within American literary culture.

⁸² John Suiter, *Poets on the Peaks: Gary Snyder, Philip Whalen and Jack Kerouac in the Cascades* (Berkeley: Counterpoint, 2003)

⁸³ Ferlinghetti, xxxi.

⁸⁴ Jack Kerouac, *The Dharma Bums* (New York: The Viking Press, 1958), 11.

Bill Morgan, biographer of Allen Ginsburg, who would encounter Smith in New York in 1960 and support him for much of his later life, stated that Allen believed, “Lamantia’s writing was too focused on Kabbalistic themes”⁸⁵, a point mirrored by Nancy Joyce Peters who sees a distinct concertation on, “hermetic, symbolic, and magical themes”⁸⁶ in his work. Smith, who was familiar with the works of German Anthroposophist Rudolf Steiner and raised in a household more than familiar with the Theosophical Society, felt at home with Lamantia, who had visited Manly P. Hall at his Philosophical Research Society during his teenage years in Los Angeles in 1943 through a connection with theosophical relatives.⁸⁷ Robert Fludd, who Smith cites in the *Anthology*, was a subject of study for Hall, whose *The Secret Teachings of All Ages*, published in 1928, did much to popularize currents of occultism in the latter half of the twentieth century and was influential on both Lamantia and Smith. Smith would later seek out many of the alchemical manuscripts references by Hall during his time working on the *Anthology* while at the New York Public Library. Hall includes a detailed study of ‘A Table of Sephirothic Correspondences’ created by Robert Fludd who Hall describes as, “among the most eminent Rosicrucian and Freemasons.”⁸⁸

Attention to higher realities led Lamantia and Smith to seek out transcendent experiences through psychedelic plant substances, specifically the cactus peyote, which Asch would later comment he provided to Smith while he put together the *Anthology* in the Folkways office.⁸⁹ Smith would continue to study the culture surrounding the peyote plant with his 1964 Folkways Recording *Kiowa Peyote Meeting*, being the earliest effort to document the song tradition of

⁸⁵ Bill Morgan, *I Celebrate Myself: The Somewhat Private Life of Allen Ginsberg* (New York: Penguin, 2007), 151.

⁸⁶ Ferlinghetti, xxxiii.

⁸⁷ Meltzer, 137.

⁸⁸ Manly P. Hall, *The Secret Teachings of All Ages: An Encyclopedia outline of Masonic, Hermetic, Quabbalistic, and Rosicrucian Symbolic Philosophy* (Los Angeles: Self Published, 1928), 376.

⁸⁹ Szwed, 144.

peyote rituals. It is somewhat safe to assume that Smith was introduced to peyote by Lamantia, although he may have been familiar with the plant through his anthropological studies by encountering the work of Weston LaBarre. In 1950, while Smith was still living in the bay area, Lamantia joined filmmaker Christopher Macline on a journey to Mexico partly inspired by an encounter with *Voyage to the Land of the Tarahumara*, a 1936 account by Antonin Artaud of his visit with the Tarahumara and their use of peyote cactus. Although acquisition of the cactus on the trip is uncertain, upon his return to Berkeley Lamantia began ordering seeds from catalogs and propagating the use of the plant around the Bay Area. John Suiter claims that Lamantia and a handful of associates introduced the Bay Area to the use of the psychedelic plant.⁹⁰ Smith states in an interview that he first encountered Peyote in San Francisco. “Someone had bought the proper type of cactus in the floral department of a department store, so we ate it. Anything that changes the consciousness to a degree I think is useful.”⁹¹

While living in the Filmore and spending time with Lamantia and Spicer, Smith produced his jazz paintings, which represent a body of work prior to the *Anthology* based on an intense study of visual and aural interrelationship. By taking a single piece of jazz music like *Ko Ko* by Charlie Parker or *Algo Bueno* by Dizzy Gillespie, he produced a visual work where each brush stroke corresponded to a single musical note or phrase. Completed paintings could then be diagrammed by Smith standing, professor-like, with pointer in hand moving between motifs on the canvas. Filmmaker Jordan Belson, who Smith became involved with through the Art in Cinema series, captured several of the jazz paintings in slide form before they were lost along with much of the work produced by Smith. Close associates during the bay area years, Belson and Smith contacted Hildegard Anna Augusta Elisabeth Frein Rebay von Ehrenwiesen, known in

⁹⁰ Suitor, 144.

⁹¹ Cohen, 86.

the art world as Hilla Rebay, in pursuit of patronage for their paintings and filmmaking activities. Rebay would cofound the Guggenheim Museum in 1939 and contribute to bringing Smith across the country to New York City in 1951 where he would connect with Moe Asch and Folkways Records.

Belson recounts that he first encountered Smith in 1947 when he and a group of his art school friends peered into the window of a strange studio apartment in Berkeley occupied by Smith. Belson described him as, “a very mysterious but intriguing character” who played, “very antique jazz recordings. He didn’t have very many records around – he had a huge collection somewhere... old and scratchy, a lot of hillbilly music.”⁹² Both visual artists, Belson and Smith were influenced by an earlier generation of non-objective painters like Wassily Kandinsky, a student of Anthroposophist Rudolf Steiner, and Rudolf Bauer, a major contributor to the Guggenheim collection curated by Rebay. When Belson describes his impression of early visual work by Smith, he observes that, “most of the work he was doing was somewhat along the lines of... cut-out collage work. He’d also done the same thing with copy or text and cut it up and rearranged it so that it took on a different meaning than originally intended...collage was a medium he worked in all his life.”⁹³ The emphasis on remixing, rearranging, and resequencing materials to create new artforms would be central to the ideas of the *Anthology* and his visual work in filmmaking, painting, and the sequencing of audio material.

A 16mm film titled *Autobiography* produced by Belson in 1951 provides a rare visual snapshot of the Berkeley scene in which Belson and Smith were immersed. The black and white footage shows Philip Lamantia alongside filmmaker Chris MacLaine, who had both recently

⁹² Paola Iglori, “Interview with Jordan Belson,” in *American Magus: Harry Smith, A Modern Alchemist*, ed. Paola Iglori (New York: Inandout Press, 1996), 21.

⁹³ Belson, Interviewed in *American Magus*, 21.

returned from their peyote obtaining journey to Mexico, alongside Smith and Belson in a typical bohemian apartment. Belson, like Smith, possessed archival tendencies, although his efforts were successful largely because of more focused and healthier pathway through life. His copy of the *Anthology of American Folk Music* purchased at (Record store here) insert in (date here) insert was obtained after Smith had left Berkeley for New York City. Belson acquired all three volumes, each encased in the hinged cardboard folios which Folkways later replaced with simpler cardboard packaging.⁹⁴

At the Art in Cinema series at the San Francisco Museum of Art, Belson and Smith showed films and were introduced to the work of filmmaker Oskar Fischinger. A October 1947 program for the Art in Cinema series lists *Allegretto* and *Composition in Blue* by Oskar Fischinger alongside *Film Number Five* by Harry Smith, described as “a purely visual sequence with themes and rhythms for the eye, completely independent of the musical score which augments what is on the screen, without determining its direction of commenting upon it.”⁹⁵ A 1950 painting by Smith entitled, *Homage to Oskar Fischinger* preserved by Belson, exemplifies non-objectivity in the work of Smith through its decontextualized forms of interpenetrating color, heavily influenced by Kandinsky. Smith contacted and visited Fischinger in Los Angeles while in the Bay Area, leading to Fischinger recommending the Belson and Smith to Rebay, his patron. The heiress and non-objective art champion traveled by plane to visit Smith and Belson in 1948. After touring their studios and spending time in their shabby apartments and the surrounding neighborhood puttering around in an old car driven by Belson, Rebay offered

⁹⁴ Anthology copy of Jordan Belson, Courtesy of private collection of Philip Smith.

⁹⁵ Art in Cinema, Series 3, Program Notes, October 24 1947. Courtesy Pacific Film Archive Library and Film Study Center, University of California Berkeley Art Museum and Pacific Film Archive.

stipends for several years on the condition that the two remained committed to the principles of non-objective art.⁹⁶

An influential figure in twentieth century art, Hilla Rebay had arrived in the United States in 1927 and began giving painting lessons, showing artwork, and seeking portrait commissions from wealthy patrons. One such commission was a portrait of Soloman Guggenheim. Upon developing a rapport, Rebay urged him to seek out and collect non-objective art, leading to a vast array of artists within her orbit becoming assembled into a cohesive collection under the Guggenheim name, eventually culminating in the Museum of Non-Objective Art. Opened in a former auto showroom in 1939, the museum housed the growing Guggenheim collection with Rebay as curator. Featuring works by Rudolf Bauer and Wassily Kandinsky, the vision Rebay held for the collection was defined by her ideas concerning abstract, or non-objective art. She saw non-objective art as an intuitive way of communicating higher realities beyond material nature. The spiritual bent of this perspective often put Rebay at odds with sectors of the art world and members of the Guggenheim family, leading her further afield to artists such as Smith and Belson on the west coast to further her aims.⁹⁷

Rebay and Smith began corresponding shortly after the death of Soloman Guggenheim and the visit Rebay took to the west coast. His death spurred a fissure between Rebay and the developing museum. Although she facilitated much of the design with architect Frank Lloyd Wright of the current Guggenheim Museum, Rebay stepped away from the project in 1952, ending a key funding source for Smith shortly after he settled in New York. Despite the short-lived patronage, the letters penned by Smith to Rebay in 1950 reveal his thoughts on the

⁹⁶ Belson, interview in *American Magus*, 21.

⁹⁷ “Hilla Rebay,” Guggenheim Museum, accessed September 3, 2023, <https://www.guggenheim.org/history/hilla-rebay>

philosophical and artistic aims of his films, albeit shaped by a conscious attempt to secure financial backing for future projects. Rebay was committed to an esoteric tradition, having studied with Rudolf Steiner in 1906 and continuing to associate with the Anthroposophical movement throughout her life.⁹⁸ A June 1950 letter reveals Smith expressing a sentiment that resonates with the anthroposophical cosmology developed by Rudolf Steiner in his book *Theosophy*, a text that was a significant influence on *Concerning the Spiritual in Art* by Wassily Kandinsky. Smith writes, “To me the soul is expressed in the relation that exists between the rhythm of the physical world and the rhythm of the spiritual world. In worldly life, limits imposed by the material state keep us from comprehending the ultimate physical unit or the ultimate spiritual unit however our intuitive perception of the ever-changing relation between the two clarifies them both. My films so far have been examinations of these forces...”⁹⁹

Smith viewed his filmmaking and collage practices such as the *Anthology* as spiritual investigations into creativity, a sentiment shared by Rebay and Kandinsky. The use of the word soul by Smith here is akin to that used by Steiner in his threefold conception of the human being outlined in his work within Anthroposophy, or human wisdom. A prolific author and social reformer, Rudolf Steiner produced hundreds of lectures on a dizzying array of subjects including cosmology, agriculture, education, medicine, dance, and architecture. He sought to apply the scientific method to spiritual inquiries in what he termed spiritual science. In the conception of the human outlined by Steiner, the soul acts as a bridge and mediator between experiences of the body and the spirit. In *Theosophy*, Steiner writes,

⁹⁸ Ann Braude. “Paths to Abstraction: Spirituality in the Work of Three Women Artists,” *Harvard Divinity Bulletin* (Autumn/Winter 2019): 3, <https://bulletin.hds.harvard.edu/paths-to-abstraction-spirituality-in-the-work-of-three-women-artists/>.

⁹⁹ Harry Smith. Letter to Hilla Rebay June 17, 1950. *Hilla von Rebay Foundation Archive*. M0007. Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum Archives, New York, N.Y.

“By body is here meant that through which the things in man's environment reveal themselves to him; as in the above example, the flowers of the meadow. By the word soul is signified that by which he links the things to his own being, through which he experiences pleasure and displeasure, desire and aversion, joy and sorrow in connection with them. By spirit is meant that which becomes manifest in him when, as Goethe expressed it, he looks at things as a 'so to speak, divine being'. In this sense the human being consists of body, soul and spirit.”¹⁰⁰

Steiner and Smith are both diagramming the human soul as an intermediary between material and spiritual reality. Smith was surely familiar with Theosophy and related Anthroposophical writings by Steiner, despite their narrow distribution in the United States during the 1940s and 1950s.

After having served as the general secretary of the German chapter of the Theosophical Society, Rudolf Steiner broke away from the organization founded by H.P. Blavatsky and Colonel Henry Steel Olcott in 1876 and formed the Anthroposophical society. The organization would directly lead to the development of Waldorf Education, Camphill Village Communities for individuals with special needs, Biodynamic Farming, and Eurythmy, a school of sacred dancing. Having grown up in a theosophical household, the influence of Steiner and Anthroposophy on Smith is evident in his use of a quote from a 1922 lecture series titled, *Man in the World of Stars* in the Anthology handbook.¹⁰¹ The quote, which reads, “The in-breathing

¹⁰⁰ Rudolf Steiner, *Theosophy: An Introduction to the Spiritual Processes in Human Life and the Cosmos* (Hudson: Anthroposophic Press, 1994), 24.

¹⁰¹ Rudolf Steiner, *Man and the World of Stars: The Spiritual Communion of Mankind* (Hudson: Steiner Books, 1982), Lecture VII.

becomes thought, and the out-breathing becomes the will manifestation of thought"¹⁰², builds off the conceptions illustrated in the earlier statements by Smith to Rebay. Just as the individual is the midpoint between in breathing thought and outbreathing action, the soul sits between body and spirit, or the 'rhythm of the physical and the rhythm of the spiritual' as Smith put it in the above letter. Similarly, the collage that is the *Anthology* can be seen as a midpoint between the listener influenced by Smith and the American musical tradition the work is drawn from. Kandinsky would reflect a similar view of the artistic process when he wrote, "A work of art consists of two elements, the inner and the outer. The inner element on its own is the emotion of the artist's soul. This emotion is able to bring out a basically corresponding emotion in the soul of the viewer. As long as the soul is attached to the body, it can, as a rule, only receive vibrations transmitted by feelings. Feeling is also a bridge from the non-material to material (the artist) and from the material to the non-material (the viewer)."¹⁰³

The use of a quote by Steiner in the *Anthology* is an unusual reference to Anthroposophy outside of the movement itself, which largely has remained insular. In the early 1950s English translations of Steiner were in low circulation in the United States. New York state contained some of the earliest expressions of the Anthroposophical movement outside of Europe, with the first Waldorf School opening in New York City in 1928 followed by several agricultural settlements in the 1930s that would have pressed and distributed lectures by Steiner in English.¹⁰⁴

Early in the same letter quoted above to Rebay from June of 1950 Smith describes his recent efforts to show his films, "at the museum here using live musicians, improvising from the

¹⁰² Harry Smith, *Anthology of American Folk Music Handbook*, New York: Folkways Records, 1952, 18.

¹⁰³ Wassily Kandinsky, *Concerning the Spiritual in Art*, trans. Michael Sadler (New York: Dover, 1977)

¹⁰⁴ Geoffrey Ahern, *Sun at Midnight: The Rudolf Steiner Movement and Gnosis in the West* (Cambridge: James Clarke & Co, 1984), 57.

images rather than from a score.”¹⁰⁵ Belson describes Smith as constantly connecting disparate fields and credits the Art in Cinema series with inspiring Smith to connect moving pictures to sound in a novel way. Belson claims that Smith was, “trying to analyze and study the phenomenon of creativity”¹⁰⁶, and adding that he often revolted at being labeled an artist. “He sort of thought of himself as an anthropologist or something of that sort.... From his point of view [artists] were just pathetic misfits.”¹⁰⁷ Smith echoes this in his correspondence with Rebay excitedly informing her that he, “luckily borrowed a tape recorder and made records of about thirty different performances of musicians following the films. By comparing these tapes with each other and with the films it has been possible to make a start toward an investigation of intuitive creation.”¹⁰⁸ Smith bonded with Rebay not just in his artistic output of paintings and films, but in the explorations of creativity and consciousness that were bound up within them. He carried these sentiments with him through the curation of the Anthology.

Smith traveled to New York sometime in 1951 in order to pursue additional patronage from Rebay. His landing in the city was defined by the literary and esoteric associations he kept in the bay area. His involvement with Moe Asch and Folkways Records would directly stem from his inability to secure sufficient funding to continue his study and artistic practice. When he arrived in New York, Smith began to operate in two worlds simultaneously while constructing the *Anthology*, the Bohemian Salon of the Ziprin household and the Folkways offices.

¹⁰⁵ Harry Smith. Letter to Hilla Rebay June 17, 1950.

¹⁰⁶ Belson, Interviewed in *American Magus*, 26.

¹⁰⁷ Belson, Interviewed in *American Magus*, 26.

¹⁰⁸ Harry Smith. Letter to Hilla Rebay June 17, 1950.

Chapter Three: Mystics of the Lower East Side

“In elementary music the relation of earth to the sphere of water is 4 to 3,
as there are in earth four quarters of fridity to three of water.”

Robert Fludd, 1617

“Do as thy wilt shall be the whole of the law.”

Aleister Crowley, 1904

Harry Smith traveled from San Francisco to New York City in 1951, stopping at a waypoint in rural Missouri to visit writer and farmer George Andrews with whom he had exchanged letters through a mutual connection to Philip Lamantia.¹⁰⁹ In Drury, Missouri, Andrews raised row crops and wrote books such as *Drugs and Magic* and *The Book of Grass*, sharing with Smith an interest in esoteric topics and altered states. Andrews gifted Smith a pair of shoes said to belong to a high member of the Belgian Rosicrucians, of whom Robert Fludd was often associated, which he carried with him east to New York City in pursuit of an address Andrews provided for Lionel Ziprin and Joanna Eashe, a recently married couple living in an

¹⁰⁹ Szwed, 123.

apartment on the lower east side.¹¹⁰ Ziprin, a friend of Andrews and Lamantia, showed Smith hospitality and gave him access to his library which contained works by Aleister Crowley and Robert Fludd, among others. Smith embraced the atmosphere of the Bohemian enclave he encountered and established himself in the social nexus of their apartment, connected with Moe Asch of Folkways, and completed the *Anthology of American Folk Music* over the course of the next several months while being supported by Ziprin. Smith was later employed by the Ziprins as a designer through Inkweed Arts, a greeting card company they operated from 1951 to 1954 out of their kitchen, which would also employ Jordan Belson, who like Smith ended up heading east to New York. Inkweed and its later iteration the Qor Corporation produced bizarre and otherworldly greeting cards that sold poorly despite attempted innovations in three dimensional cards and interchangeable collage tiles.¹¹¹

While working with Folkways on the *Anthology*, Smith would study the Kabbalah with Lionel Ziprin and begin a yet unreleased recording project with Rabbi Naftali Zvi Margolies Abulafia, grandfather to Lionel who Smith met at a neighborhood Yeshiva. This led to Smith recording over fifteen LPs worth of material of the Rabbi which began in 1952, unfolding concurrent with the completion of the *Anthology*.¹¹² Smith also began a study of yoga within the circle surrounding Count Walewski alongside poet Garret Lansing and worked extensively with the written works of Robert Fludd and Aleister Crowley available to him at the New York Public Library. The atmosphere in which the *Anthology* was assembled was one of highly charged occult activity building on associations and practices developed by Smith on the west coast among his literary and artistic associations.

¹¹⁰ Szwed, 124.

¹¹¹ Szwed, 134.

¹¹² Szwed, 127.

Smith told Ziprin that he moved to New York City because he wanted to meet Marcel Duchamp and see Thelonious Monk play live. Monk at that time was restricted from leaving the city because of drug charges. Closer proximity to Hilla Rebay, then his primary source of patronage, was likely the greatest factor.¹¹³ Funding from Rebay ended almost as soon as Smith arrived east leading to more time with Ziprin around the kitchen table engaging in conversation and cooperative artmaking. Both Ziprin and Smith shared a deep interest in the transcendent. A series of sketches from the period of esoteric diagrams by Ziprin and Smith demonstrate two minds in joint exploration of geometric number diagrams and cosmological patterns.¹¹⁴ Ziprin observed that Smith was interested in, “everything that could made geometric, diagrammatic. Whatever you couldn’t put in a diagram wouldn’t interest him. So he was more of a philosopher.”¹¹⁵ The Ziprin household in the lower east side was an epicenter of bohemian activity and creativity.¹¹⁶ Describing Smith, Lionel recalls that “Harry was a sibling, you see. He would hang around married couples. Then he would start splitting them up and making trouble.”¹¹⁷ Carl Bove, a sculptor who currently houses the Ziprin archive in her studio and curated a 2023 exhibition of work by Harry Smith at the Whitney Museum, describes the Ziprin zone as a, “...meeting point, a sort of salon or avant-garde nerve centre that has not been very well documented or even known about in art-historical records. Lionel Ziprin was somebody who people went to, to learn from. He was a stop on the agenda.”¹¹⁸

¹¹³ Lionel Ziprin, “Lionel Ziprin,” interview by Paola Iglioni, *American Magus: Harry Smith A Modern Alchemist* (New York: Inandout Press, 1995), 39.

¹¹⁴ Philip Smith, introduction to *Songs for Schizoid Siblings*, ed. Philip Smith (New York: The Song Cave, 2017), xii.

¹¹⁵ Ziprin, 41.

¹¹⁶ William Grimes, “Lionel Ziprin, Mystic of the Lower East Side, Dies at 84,” *New York Times* (New York, NY), March 20, 2009.

¹¹⁷ Smith, Philip, xii.

¹¹⁸ Andy Battaglia, “Today is an Example,” Features. *Frieze*, May 2014. <https://www.frieze.com/article/today-example>.

Ziprin primarily wrote poetry that remained unpublished during his lifetime. He worked as an editor and comic book writer to make ends meet. Philip Smith, who posthumously published *Songs for Schizoid Siblings* by Ziprin in 2017, comments on the difficulty of contextualizing Ziprin and Smith in the typical rubrics of the beat movement and countercultural history. “There are certain types of figures that are more amenable to historiography, but these guys [Ziprin and Smith] are really hard to pin down. In fact, when you pin them down you’re almost spoiling the sample. It’s like a quantum art history: if you’re observing them, you can’t figure out both their position and velocity at the same time.”¹¹⁹

Smith was studying the work of Manly P. Hall, specifically *The Secret Teachings of All Ages: An Encyclopedic Outline of Masonic, hermetic, Qabbalistic and Rosicrucian Symbolical Philosophy*, encountered through Lamantia in Berkeley. Ziprin describes his movements during his early time in New York City, “Harry would go every day to the library and on parchment – parchment – he would copy out all the magical engravings. I don’t know. He had like a thing like a photographic reproduction. He could do with his hands anything. This was before the alcohol. Then he would make translations of the Latin. At night he would bring them to the house and the whole night goes...every night he would come and bring all the work and lay it out to me and give me all these lectures.”¹²⁰ Ziprin cites Althansius Kircher and Robert Fludd as the primary influences on Smith concerning his studies in European magical traditions and Christian Cabalism. This is reiterated by filmmaker P. Adams Sitney, who conducted the earliest known interview with Smith in 1965 for his book *Visionary Film*, writing “...Smith regards his work in the historical tradition of magical illusionism, extending at least back to Robert Fludd, who used mirrors to animate books, and Athanasius Kircher who cast spells with a magic

¹¹⁹ Battaglia, <https://www.frieze.com/article/today-example>.

¹²⁰ Ziprin, 41.

lantern.”¹²¹ Fludd influenced Smith in his *Anthology* work as well as his filmmaking, animations, and paintings.

Both the engraving by De Bry and the quote by Fludd that Smith chose to include appear in a 1617 work by Fludd titled *Utriusque Cosmi Maioris Scilicet et Minoris Metaphysica, Physica atque Technica Historia, De Macrocosmi Historia in Duos Tractatus Divisia* (*The metaphysical, physical, and technical history of the two worlds, namely the greater and the lesser*), encountered by Smith at one of his many excursions described by Ziprin to the New York Public Library. Divided into two volumes corresponding to the macrocosm of the universe and the microcosm of man with a theme of harmony and music, the tome provides elaborates on the cosmology of Fludd. The monochord offers a complete, if unlikely, metaphor for the kind of work Smith sought to embody in his collection of folk song. Smith describes it as, “forming earth, air, fire, and water and the different astrological signs.”¹²² The quote from Fludd that appears in the *Anthology* handbook reads, “In elementary music the relation of earth to the sphere of water is 4 to 3, as there are in earth four quarters of frigidity to three of water.”¹²³ Fludd sought to create numerical relationships between the elements which he felt made up the natural world. Similarly, Smith sought to establish connections between the *Anthology* tracks, their themes, one another, and larger statements on folk music as a whole. It is also interesting to note that the musical ratio of 4 to 3 on the C major scale provides two of the most common chords used in folk music.

¹²¹ P. Adams Sitney, *Visionary Film* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 235.

¹²² Cohen, 81.

¹²³ Robert Fludd, *Utriusque Cosmi, Maioris scilicet et Minoris, metaphysica, physica, atque technica Historia*, (*The metaphysical, physical, and technical history of the two worlds, namely the greater and the lesser*), (Oppenheim and Frankfurt: J. T. de Bry, 1617-1621), 187.

Fludd worked as a physician in the tradition of Paracelsus and drew his influence from the Venetian Franciscan Francesco Giorgio (1466-1540), who also employed the monochord as a device for relating the divine with the human.¹²⁴ The late fifteenth century was distinguished by a rising interest in the relationships between the body and sound, musical practice and the composition of beings. The conception and interest Fludd had in music went beyond audible music to include the inaudible music of the spheres Frances Yates writes of Fludd that, “At a very late date, after the Hermetic have been dated and when the whole Renaissance outlook is on the wane and about to give way before the new trends of the seventeenth century, Fludd completely reconstructs the Renaissance outlook.”¹²⁵

Fludd, like Smith, felt that visualization, diagrams, and representations provided a more accurate method of communicating his ideas than written work. Fludd’s *De Templo Musicae* contains another engraving by de Bry titled ‘Temple of Music’. In a caption below the engraving Fludd writes, “If you examine keenly the parts of the temple, you will be a sharer of all its mysteries and an extremely experienced master in this preeminent knowledge”.¹²⁶ A premium is placed on visualizations as conveyers of vast amounts of information.

Fludd goes on to then discuss the celestial monochord, echoing the cosmology espoused earlier by Rudolf Steiner in Anthroposophy of a threefold conception where soul is a force between opposing forms of body and spirit, “In this picture we see the miraculous harmony in which the two extremes, the most valuable and the meanest, are chained together and are in harmony, we see how the intermediary world spirit, the vehicle of the souls, is the tie which links the two extremes in joyful harmony and we see how God is the player of *musica humana*, the

¹²⁴ Roseen H. Giles, “The Inaudible Music of the Renaissance: From Marsilio Ficino to Robert Fludd,” *Renaissance and Reformation* 39, no. 2 (2016): 150.

¹²⁵ Frances Yates, *Giordano Bruno and the Hermetic Tradition* (London: Routledge, 1964), 406.

¹²⁶ Robert Fludd, *The Temple of Music*, ed. Peter Hauge (London: Routledge, 2010), 148.

player of the string of the monochord, the inner principle which, from the center of the whole, creatures the consonant effects of life in the microcosm.”¹²⁷

The universal musicality of existence would have appealed to Smith, who saw the *Anthology* as a study of song, a universal form of expression. Again, we see the threefold conception continued, with Fludd adding that, “the string which by its vibration spreads the luminous effect of the inspirer through macrocosm and microcosm as accents and sounds of love, as it were, is the luminous spirit which participates in the two extremes, and which joins them together. This string equally denotes the system of notation, or staff, in man by which the soul descends from the higher spheres and reascends towards them after death, when the ties of the body, the meanest of all places, have been dissolved.”¹²⁸

When Smith writes in his 1950 letter to Rebay of our inability to comprehend ‘the ultimate unit’ and the efforts of his artmaking to penetrate this veil, the work of Fludd and specifically the drawing of the celestial monochord resonate strongly, suggesting a similar threefold conception of the universe and the individual fixed between body and spirit, between vibration and silence, between life and death. By encasing the *Anthology* Smith laid out his metaphysical framework, or an aspect of it, supporting it with citations to Fludd, Steiner, and Crowley in the liner notes.

Upon closer inspection, much of the compositions on the cover of the handbook is dominated by repetitions of three and references to triangular forms reminiscent of the tripartite cosmology espoused by Steiner and Fludd. The three volumes of the *Anthology* sit titled above three repetitions of a wave form and below the triad of horse, eagle, and bee hive. The three

¹²⁷ Fludd, *Utriusque Cosmi*, 209.

¹²⁸ (Fludd, *Utriusque Cosmi*, 209.

worded title is bookended by a blacksmith working a forge and a piper in performance in triangulation. Encased in a square below this descending triangle of images is a description of the handbook itself in three sections; track listings, index, and bibliography. The border of the collage is adorned with the Rosy Cross, a symbol of the Rosicrucians, of which both Fludd and Steiner have been associated. Fludd publicly defended the Rosicrucians after the publication of the writings of Christian Rosenkranz in the early 17th century.¹²⁹

The involvement between Smith, Aleister Crowley, and movements surrounding Thelema begin somewhere between his lives in New York and the west coast. Crowley was also employed by Smith in order to mythologize his own biography, inserted playfully as a potential biological father to at times while at others being an associate of his mother. Regardless, the claim was dismissed by most close to Smith. Ziprin claims to have introduced Smith to Crowley through his copy of John Symonds *The Great Beast*, published in 1951.¹³⁰ Smith claims to have encountered Crowley and his work through Charles Stanfield Jones, who died in 1950 while living in Vancouver, British Columbia.

Regardless of the introduction to the work of Crowley, Smith includes the maxim of Thelema, the religious movement developed by Crowley, which reads, “Do what thou wilt shall be the whole of the Law.”¹³¹ This quote appears in *The Book of the Law*, which Crowley penned in 1904 in Cairo, Egypt while practicing ceremonial magical rituals.¹³² According to his account, the text was transmitted to him through his wife. He considered the text revelatory and a signification of a dawning of an ‘Age of Horus’ that would coincide with a new type of

¹²⁹ Hereward Tilton, “Chapter 9: Rosicrucian Manifestos and Early Rosecrucianism,” in *Occult World*, ed. Christopher Partridge (London: Routledge, 2015), 136.

¹³⁰ Ziprin, 40.

¹³¹ Harry Smith, *Anthology Handbook*, 18.

¹³² Henrik Bogdan, “Chapter 28: Aleister Crowley,” in *Occult World*, ed. Christopher Partridge (London: Routledge, 2015), 295.

consciousness based on his teachings of ‘Thelema’ or will. Crowley coined the term ‘Magick’, describing it as the ability to cause change in accordance with will.¹³³ The propagation of Crowley and Thelema by Smith, like his nod to Steiner and Anthroposophy, comes at a low point in popularity for each of these respective movements. Over a decade and a half later he would appear on the cover of Sgt. Peppers Lonely Hearts Club Band and be embraced by rock musicians such as the members of Led Zeppelin and David Bowie. Crowley had a profound influence on the new age movement of the sixties and seventies, with many of his ideas developed in the early twentieth century emerging in wider cultural contexts decades later.¹³⁴ Smith himself would become active in the Order Templi Orientis, a religious body based upon the teachings of Crowley. A memorial service and tribute for Smith at St. Marks Church in February of 1991 included a Gnostic Mass carried out by William Breeze and readings by Allen Ginsberg, Gregory Corso, P. Adams, Sitney, Jonas Mekas, and Sam Charters along with recordings from the *Anthology*.¹³⁵

The interest Smith had in Crowley and occult circles led to an involvement with Count Stefan Walewski, who owned Esoterica, a shop of curiosities in New York City. There, studying a system of yoga developed by the Count, Smith befriended poet Garrett Lansing, with whom he spent long hours at the rare book room of the New York Public Library. Lansing was also connected to Lamantia and was in the process of completed an MA on seventeenth century alchemist and magician Henry Vaughn in whom Smith was also interested.¹³⁶ Lansing composed a poem about Smith that was printed the collection, *Heavenly Tree, Northern Earth*

¹³³ Bogdan, 296.

¹³⁴ Bogdan, 301.

¹³⁵ Harry Smith Memorial Service Sunday Program, Feb. 9, 1992. Moses and Frances Asch Collection, Ralph Rinzler Folklife Archives and Collections, Smithsonian Institution.

¹³⁶ Garrett Caples, “Casting Spells,” Poetry Foundation, June 15, 2023, <https://www.poetryfoundation.org/articles/148770/casting-spells>.

titled, “The Dark Grammarian.” Lansing describes Smith as embracing the ‘left hand path’ often associated with Crowley while describing the how his, “Garret overhangs the green subtle slum” in reference to the often poor living conditions Smith dwelled within in the name of his creations.¹³⁷

The life of Harry Smith while he was producing the *Anthology* was steeped in occultism and studies of esoteric philosophies. His spiritual practice and artistic practice reflected one another, as demonstrated by the elements of his biography mirrored in the *Anthology*. Robert Fludd and Aleister Crowley were two influences he explored deeply while living and working alongside Lionel Ziprin and Garrit Lansing.

¹³⁷ Garrit Lansing, *Heavenly Tree, Northern Earth* (Berkeley: North Atlantic Books, 2009), 49.

Chapter Four: Moe Asch, Crusader of People's Music

“If by some magic a man who had never known it were to compose a new Keats’ ‘Ode on a Grecian Urn,’ he would be an ‘author’ and if he copyrighted it, others might not copy that poem, though they might of course copy Keats.” -Judge Learned Hand, 1936.

Harry Smith was an expert in extracting patronage from upper class individuals through his erudition and knowledge of esoteric topics. His relationship with Hilla Rebay was based on a shared interest in the cosmology of Steiner, Theosophy, and non-objective art. In New York City, Smith found patronage through Mary Gorham who ran Gateway Books due to their shared study of the work of Aleister Crowley. He managed to survive without a steady job for decades through this kind of activity alongside outright begging and panhandling for assistance from friends. Regardless of this uncanny ability, income was spotty and inconsistent. For Smith, his record collection was a lone asset that could be exchanged for smaller sums to be depended on. Fellow record collector Pete Kauffman provided Smith with his connection to Moe Asch and Folkways Records as a buyer of 78 rpm records. Kauffman and Smith met through *The Record Changer* and Kauffman believed Asch would be willing to purchase large portions of the collection, even paying for the expensive cross country shipping.¹³⁸

¹³⁸ Cohen, 68.

Folkways Records was formed in 1949 by Moe Asch and Mary Distler, distinct in a crowded post-war market for its practice of releasing small runs of obscure, non-commercial recordings falling under the loose umbrella of ‘people’s music’. Asch set out to document the world of sound in its entirety and took pride in releasing records that other labels would simply ignore, including, in the case of the *Anthology*, long out of print recordings from the vast catalogs of the major record labels. The Folkways catalog would, over the decades, become expansive, eventually including nature and city soundscapes, poetry readings, and early rock and roll, alongside countless documents of international musical traditions. Folkways releases in the late forties and fifties at the time of the *Anthology* generally fell into several lanes. Recordings by contemporary folk singers such as Peter Seeger, Leadbelly, Woody Guthrie, and Ella Jenkins ran alongside a sprawling and globetrotting collection of field recordings produced under the *Ethnic Folkways Library*.

At first Smith sold Asch individual records, which he planned to issue as part of various releases. Paying anywhere from thirty-five cents to two dollars, a 78, depending on the quality, several items ended up on various reissue collections under the *Ethnic Folkways Library*. A Columbia recording by Turkish musician Osman Bey in his collection appeared on *Music of the Mediterranean* produced by composer Henry Cowell in 1952. Cowell was working on the five disc, *Music of the World’s People* when Smith arrived at the Folkways offices and several of his international tracks ended up on that collection.

Once Asch began to get a grasp of the scale of the collection available to him he suggested a more cohesive project on American folk music to build off of the ongoing jazz series curated by Fred Ramsey and Charles Edward Smith. Asch was struck particularly with the interrelatedness in the understanding Smith possessed regarding the material. “He understood the

content of the records. He knew their relationship to folk music, their relationship to English literature, and their relationship to the world.”¹³⁹ In May of 1952, just six months after heading east, Smith signed a contract with Asch for two hundred dollars to sequence and annotate a multi-volume collection of American music. In addition, he’d receive twenty cents per record sold while giving Asch the ability to mine his collection for continued releases. After Asch issued any discs, Smith could still sell his copies to collectors.¹⁴⁰

Provided with office space, access to layout tools, and a supply of peyote buttons, Smith produced the liner notes and album layout largely independently. Asch was pleased with his vision and results. “Harry Smith is an authority. He is not only the collector, he knows the record, he knows what he wants to say in what form he wants to do it and he has a concept of the complete package. He comes to me and we discuss it. And I say ‘Harry, I love it. You just give me finished manuscripts and give me the form that you want it and I’ll issue it exactly the way you want it.’”¹⁴¹ Peter Bartok worked as mastering engineering on the *Anthology*, transferring the eighty-four 78s to LP format. Bartok also contributed to the *Ethnic Folkways Library*, with recordings for 1950s Hungarian Folk Songs made by his father, composer Bela Bartok.¹⁴²

Asch and Smith took influence from folklorist Alan Lomax, who produced two collections of commercial recordings through Brunswick records titled *Panorama of American Balladry* and *Mountain Frolic*, predating the *Anthology* by several years. Both efforts by Lomax were sets of 78 rpm records later re-released on LP in the early fifties just as Folkways was making the transition between mediums. A key difference between the work of Asch and Smith

¹³⁹ Moe Asch, “The Birth and Growth of the *Anthology of American Folk Music*,” In *A Booklet of Essays, Appreciations, and Annotations Pertaining to the Anthology of American Folk Music*, edited by Harry Smith (Washington, DC: Smithsonian Folkways Records, 1997), 32.

¹⁴⁰ Szwed, *Cosmic Scholar*, 144.

¹⁴¹ Gary Kenton, *Interview with Moses Asch by Gary Kenton November 1982*, in the Gary Kenton Collection #20321

¹⁴² Szwed, *Cosmic Scholar*, 145.

and Lomax lies in the legal framework surrounding their releases. Lomax sought full permission from the original labels while Asch and Smith justified their work through interpretations of copyright law and a belief in the right of the people to have access to the music, regardless of legal status.¹⁴³

When the *Anthology* was released in November of 1952, Folkways had produced over 120 records in small runs, making the transition from shellac 78 rpm discs to the new long-playing records pioneered by Columbia in the late 1940s. The *Anthology* was among the first wave of LPs Folkways released, embracing the format for its possibilities in sequential curation. Compared to 78 rpm records, LPs were better suited to handle the nature of folk music. Artists were no longer limited to three and a half minutes of recorded material per side, allowing lengthy ballads to be reproduced in a more faithful manner, a point of particular importance to Moe Asch, while collections of materials from a singer or region could now be presented to more fully document a tradition.¹⁴⁴

Asch ran Folkways as an independent label, which can be defined as one that is smaller in scale and dependent on other firms for the pressing and distribution of its releases.¹⁴⁵ The business practices Asch embraced were viewed by many as delusional. He kept an enormous amount of material available to record buyers, eschewed detailed bookkeeping, and made deals

¹⁴³ Moe Asch, afterward to Handbook to the *Anthology of American Folk Music*, ed. Harry Smith (New York, Folkways Records, 1952), 31.

¹⁴⁴ Gary Kenton, *Interview with Moses Asch by Gary Kenton November 1982*, in the Gary Kenton Collection #20321, Southern Folklife Collection, Wilson Library, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.

¹⁴⁵ R. Serge Denisoff, *Tarnished Gold: The Record Industry Revisited* (Oxfordshire: Routledge, 1986), 87.

with collaborators and artists on a seemingly random basis.¹⁴⁶ Typically he didn't favor royalty agreements, opting instead for one off payments with others who he compiled recordings with.¹⁴⁷

Harold Courlander, editor of the *Ethnic Folkways Library*, saw the various collaborators Moe maintained as all having a specific angle with Folkways, forming a composite or constellation. The *Ethnic Folkways Library* was the result of a network of individuals who submitted field recordings for potential release to Folkways. Courlander and Asch shaped the series based on what was available from their associates in the social sciences and museum circuit, releasing a staggering amount of material from Indonesia, India, the Middle East, and the Caribbean region, with many tapes produced by Courlander himself while working abroad.¹⁴⁸ The *Ethnic Folkways Library* comprised the bulk of the Folkways catalog from its founding in 1949 through the early fifties, shaping the context in which the Anthology appeared and in which Smith completed his work. Through the *Ethnic Folkways Library*, Folkways became established as a label of interest to collectors, libraries, researchers, and institutions rather than the larger popular record buying public. Similarly, Smith saw his efforts in record collection, culminating in the *Anthology*, as a scholarly work. He felt that his collection would one day be housed in a museum.

Courlander was one of the first to conduct international field recordings outside of early shellac material pressed commercially to disc. Courlander didn't consider himself an anthropologist, but a writer with a special interest in this sort of thing.¹⁴⁹ He suggested to Asch early on that the international material should be put in a special series. "Anything that was

¹⁴⁶ Anthony Allan Olmstead, "'We Shall Overcome' Economic Stress, Articulation and the Life of Folkways Record and Service Corp., 1948-1969." (doctoral thesis, University of Alberta, 1999), 5.

¹⁴⁷ Olmstead, 41.

¹⁴⁸ Gary Kenton, *Interview with Harold Courlander by Gary Kenton May 1989*, in the Gary Kenton Collection #20321, Southern Folklife Collection, Wilson Library, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.

¹⁴⁹ Gary Kenton, *Interview with Harold Courlander*.

interesting we would put out...The next one to come out was what was available, what we had, so we'd jump around a bit from the west indies to some good African material. This was supposed to be separated from the 'pop' or 'more popular' records he was putting out. American players reproducing traditional material."¹⁵⁰ Here Courlander identified the two lanes of Folkways, the scholarly museum pieces and the folk revival material. Smith and Courlander both felt the material they collected, field recordings and commercial discs, would have historical significance. Asch provided the support and housing for such an effort, despite being a business, the work of Folkways supported a larger cultural project of documenting the world of sound in its entirety and keeping it in print to inform the public understanding of art, history, and culture.

Smith used the recordings on the *Anthology* to study the linguistic and cultural patterns held within as demonstrated by his index of correspondence. Courlander similarly comments on his desire to study not just the music but, "The textual content of the song and what it related to – was it religious, secular, how it related to African material." Of special interest to Courlander was the study of the relationship between African and American music, which became the study *Negro Folk Song U.S.A.* Published in 1966 after the *Anthology* had gained underground notoriety but prior to the Sing Out! Interview, Courlander cites the set as being, 'a general collection containing good Negro examples.' In an interview with historian and University of North Carolina Professor Gary Kenton, Smith comments on *Negro Folk Song U.S.A.*, which for him contained novel and useful transcriptions of folk songs due to their provision for improvisational variation. Smith compares the notational system Courlander uses to those of 12th century Byzantine chants which provide the musician or interpreter calls to move the

¹⁵⁰ Gary Kenton, *Interview with Harold Courlander*.

direction of the material. Smith describes his impressions of Courlander in the Folkways office as a kind of ‘metaphysician’ and ‘aloof’, but nonetheless identifies him as a kindred spirit working in his vision and work.

Asch released the *Anthology* as part of the Folkways catalog under serial numbers FP 251-253. In his essay under, ‘general notes on the series’ he is credited as production director, speaking directly to the diversity of the catalogs of major labels and lamenting the availability of much of this material contained to the larger metro record buying public. Asch makes it clear that the first three volumes which his essay accompanies are intended to be part of a larger tapestry and remain an effort to present southern and eastern material. He provides interrelations to other selections of the Folkways catalog, referencing the Jazz series of Charles Edward Smith and Fred Ramsey while directing listeners to The Spanish and Mexican Folk Music of New Mexico for music of the southwest United States. He frames future releases by stating that, “later with the depression a different type of folksong emerged, which we hope to show in future releases of this series.”¹⁵¹ This would be put on hold for reasons not entirely clear, although Smith speaks to a differing of opinion with business manager Mary Distler.

While the *Anthology* was being assembled at the Folkways offices, the legal climate was shifting under pressure from the Recording Industry Association of America, or RIAA. John Bennet, a New York State Senator, put forward a bill to make it illegal to distribute commercial recordings without permission from the original label. Folkways, looking to reissue out of print 78s, would find themselves pressured by larger labels to halt production and remove certain items, including the *Anthology*, from their catalogs. Surprisingly, in 1952, the bill was vetoed by

¹⁵¹ Moe Asch, “The Birth and Growth of the *Anthology of American Folk Music*,” In *A Booklet of Essays, Appreciations, and Annotations Pertaining to the Anthology of American Folk Music*, edited by Harry Smith (Washington, DC: Smithsonian Folkways Records, 1997), 32.

then Governor Thomas Dewey largely due to pressure from representatives of classical music labels. Like Folkways, several classical labels were in the business of re-pressing obscure and out of print recordings of classical performances that would immediately halt with the enactment of the bill into law. The governor's veto empowered Asch in his release of the *Anthology*, which he knew would be given legal challenges.¹⁵² Asch cites these court cases in his essay in the handbook, clearly attempting to establish his case for legal permission to distribute before any legal snags had descended on him. From the perspective of Asch and Smith, the same logic used by the classical world could be applied to out-of-print commercial recordings of folk music. Since the labels themselves clearly had no intention of making these available, there was an issue of cultural significance at stake.¹⁵³

An anonymous quote reading, "Really is it yours? I had supposed it was something old" printed below the essay by Asch is revealing in its suggestion that the idea of copyrighting the material contained on the *Anthology*, which Smith demonstrates through his bibliography, are part of a larger folk and ballad tradition stretching back several centuries, is on its surface ridiculous. The point is sent home further by a quote from Judge Learned Hand on the same page reading, "wrote '[I]f by some magic a man who had never known it were to compose anew Keats's 'Ode on a Grecian Urn,' he would be an 'author,' and if he copyrighted it, others might not copy that poem, though they might of course copy Keats's.'" The quote comes from a 1936 ruling in *Sheldon v. MGM Pictures Corp* concerning the copyright and use of film material. The quote was included in a book published in 1952, where perhaps it was encountered by Asch and Smith, titled *Plagiarism and Originality*.¹⁵⁴ The confidence of Folkways would have been additionally

¹⁵² Barry Kernfield, *Pop Song Piracy* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2011), 138.

¹⁵³ Harry Smith, *Anthology of American Folk Music Handbook*, New York: Folkways Records, 1952, 27.

¹⁵⁴ *Sheldon v. Metro-Goldwyn Pictures Corp.*, 81 F.2d 49, 54 (2d Cir. 1936).

boosted by a 1952 ruling by Chicago judge which ruled that pressed issue of a phonograph record constituted an entrance of that piece of material into the public domain. This thinking was overturned in the appeal process, but while the legal situation unfolded, news of the ruling would have bolstered Asch and Smith and their sense of purpose.¹⁵⁵

Despite his bold stance on copyright law and clear dedication to his mission of releasing records that held cultural and historical significance, Attempts were made by Asch to contact record companies to secure licenses for the tracks contained. In February of 1952, in the early stages, Asch wrote to Columbia Records regarding Blind Willie Johnson's masters, "As you may know we are attempting to document something of the American scene through phonograph records."¹⁵⁶ The swift reply states there are future plans for the masters, and Columbia does not wish to authorize another label. Smith would include the hypnotic and apocalyptic, "John the Revelator" as track fifty-two. Clearly these curt responses did not deter Smith or Asch, who operated on principles beyond typical economic frameworks. Pete Seeger, a collaborator of Asch and associate of Smith commented in an interview with historian Gary Kenton that, "copyright law wasn't invented for somebody like Moe and its shouldn't be."¹⁵⁷ Seeger put Moe in a different category, serving a different function, echoing the historical and cultural mission of Folkways. Asch even goes on to explain the negative responses he received from major labels, arguing in his essay that it doesn't economically pay for these businesses to reproduce several hundred copies to serve a narrow slice of market share or the interests of avant garde audiences. Asch, on the other hand, vowed to keep everything he released in print, playing the long game in terms of economic returns.

¹⁵⁵ Kernfield, 139.

¹⁵⁶ Asch, Moe, Letter to Columbia Records, January 15, 1951. Moses and Frances Asch Collection, Ralph Rinzler Folklife Archives and Collections, Smithsonian Institution.

¹⁵⁷ Gary Kenton, *Interview with Peter Seeger by Gary Kenton 1983*, in the Gary Kenton Collection #20321

Because of the legal tangles, Folkways opted not to heavily promote the *Anthology*. In July of 1957 Folkways produced a list of recordings they had released that were approved by the Board of Education. The *Anthology* is absent, yet Cowell's *Music of the Worlds People* and the *American Folk Song* collection of 10" records was included. In addition, a collection of Folkways titled promoted by Scholastic magazine in 1966 neglected to contain the *Anthology*, despite its obvious educational merit. Despite these omissions, business activities by Asch demonstrate an immense investment in the *Anthology*. Plylite Corporation, who created the molds for the *Anthology* LPs and completed the vinyl printing had molded seven hundred copies of each volume of the *Anthology* with several hundred labels on hand. This shows a substantial investment in the *Anthology* on the part of Asch, being that seven hundred is the highest number of pressings ordered of any release in the catalog. Although sales numbers remained low as demonstrated by the work of Kathleen Skinner, it is likely that sales may have operated on an illicit or underground level. Clearly this demonstrates an immense investment in the record not reflected in the on the books sales numbers.¹⁵⁸

¹⁵⁸ Olmstead, Appendix 7.

Chapter Five: From Smith to Smithsonian

“Really it’s yours? I had supposed it was something old” -Unknown

Little attention was paid to the *Anthology of American Folk Music* upon its release. The set was expensive by the standard of the day and was poorly distributed when compared to efforts of major record labels. In August 1952 a small column in *Billboard* magazine informed its readers that “Folkways Issues Anthology Series” containing, “early American ballads, social music including dance tunes and religious songs, and various types of folk songs about work, marriage...love, murder, politics, gambling, traveling, prison, the Bible, courtship, hunger, etc.”¹⁵⁹ Capturing the scope and emotional intensity of the set, the blurb mentions Harry Smith by name and emphasizes that the recordings were “originally waxed in the late 20s”. Over the next seven decades, the set would undergo a transformation within the public consciousness. The nature of this transformation is little understood or documented in academic presses, instead unfolding in the backwaters of the counterculture and through word-of-mouth transmission. None the less, the occult and esoteric aspects of the *Anthology* continued to set it apart from its parallels. What follows is an attempt to elucidate some of the waypoints and positions of influence both within printed material and among folk revivalists. Today there is a consensus that the *Anthology* is a significant document of cultural history.

¹⁵⁹ “Folkways Releases Anthology,” *Billboard Magazine*, August 9 1952, 44.

By the time of the 1997 reissue its place had seemingly already been cemented. Singer Dave Van Ronk called the *Anthology*, “Our Bible.” Guitarist John Fahey said, “I’d match the *Anthology* up against any other single compendium of important information ever assembled. Dead Sea Scrolls? Nah. I’ll take the *Anthology*.”¹⁶⁰ . Musician Peter Stampfel stated that, “Hearing all these [musicians] for the very first time, it was as if a veil was lifted, and I was finally aware of what seemed to me to be the very heart of American music.”¹⁶¹ All of these musicians were active as early as the late 50s during the formative years of the folk revival. Speaking in religious terms, the musicians echo a common sentiment of when referencing the work. Reviewing the 1997 reissue in *Spin Magazine*, rock critic Robert Christgau observed how, “Smith’s commitment to overlaying the surreal on the commonplace has been absorbed into rock, undercutting shock appeal for a new audience that now knows the gestalt even if it has never heard a minute of this specific music.”¹⁶²

Canonization is often viewed as a social process of aesthetic organization owed to an active engagement of creation and maintenance. Here the form, rather than the content of the *Anthology* is paramount to understanding why and how it becomes canonized among certain audiences. I contend that the mystical and bizarre aspects of the *Anthology* aided heavily in its status as a canonical document of folk music easily transmitted among enthusiasts.¹⁶³ The Folkways Recording label and the editorial work of Harry Smith himself are both highlighted as factors of canonization by Kathleen Skinner.¹⁶⁴ The title *Anthology of American Folk Music*,

¹⁶⁰ John Fahey, “Untitled.” *A Booklet of Essays, Appreciations, and Annotations Pertaining to the Anthology of American Folk Music*, edited by Harry Smith (Washington, DC: Smithsonian Folkways Records, 1997) 9.

¹⁶¹ Peter Stampfel, “May 1997.” *A Booklet of Essays, Appreciations, and Annotations Pertaining to the Anthology of American Folk Music*, edited by Harry Smith (Washington, DC: Smithsonian Folkways Records, 1997) 23.

¹⁶² Robert Christgau. “Anthology of American Folk Music.” *Spin Magazine*, October 1997. Pg. # needed

¹⁶³ Skinner, 59.

¹⁶⁴ Skinner, 69.

denoting encyclopedic authority and historical significance through its composition, and the later acquisition of Folkways by the Smithsonian Institute in 1986, both helped to solidify notions of the *Anthology* as a cultural document of importance. These were intermixed within the context of the rise of Americana music in the late twentieth century, which provided the climate necessary for increased reverence for the *Anthology* as canon. Building upon these, the inclusion by Smith of surreal, non-objective occult, and esoteric themes separates the *Anthology* from similar work by Lomax for Brunswick records or even other Folkways releases which documented similar periods of musical history. What Smith brought to bear from his spiritualized understandings of the creative process helped to differentiate the work significantly.

Attempts by scholars to investigate the growth of the popularity of the *Anthology* have left more questions than answers with the process of canonization not completely understood. The use of the ledger books of Moe Asch reveals fifty copies sold in the first year of the release in 1952, forty-seven of which ended up in institutions. Although this reflects the wishes of Asch and Courlander, who favored museums and institutional settings for their work, the numbers leave scholars wondering how such low distribution resulted in immense cultural influence, leading to theories of incomplete books or perhaps intentionally inaccurate accounting and the anecdotes that follow will support. A small blurb by Philip Miller appeared in the Music Library Association Notes in the fall of 1952.¹⁶⁵ Following these few reviews, a lawsuit brought by RCA Records in 1953 took the *Anthology* off the public market temporarily. The set remained missing from published Folkways catalogs for much of the remaining fifties, appearing again for public sale from the sixties onward.¹⁶⁶

¹⁶⁵ Philip L. Miller, "Recorded Americana," *Music Library Association Notes*, September 1952.

¹⁶⁶ Skinner, 60.

From the period of the fifties through the eighties, as sales numbers trickled along and word of mouth spread, there was a general hostility among academic folklorists towards commercial recordings as sources of study. This resulted in a serious lack of reviews or published accounts in journals and academic presses on the *Anthology*. Exceptions lie in the work of folklorists D.K. Wilgus and Alan Lomax.¹⁶⁷ The sentiment among academic folklorists, who seemed to favor field recordings over commercial releases, is expressed clearly in the liner notes to *Folk Ballads of the English Speaking World* University of Pennsylvania Folklorist Kenneth Goldstein, who writes, “The best texts and most accurately noted tunes are inert and insipid beside the exciting renditions of folksong that Folkways and other companies are making available in increasing number and variety. For the purist, only recordings made in the field will do.”¹⁶⁸ Commenting on the reception of the *Anthology* by those in the folk revival, biographer John Szwed notes that “folk singers and scholars of folk song alike were suspicious of what was then being called country and western music. Neither they nor the public were aware there were other kinds of working-class commercial recordings. The anthology made it possible for anyone to hear a stunning variety of musical genres, content, singing styles, and emotions montaged together as old-time music.”¹⁶⁹

The community of American folklorists didn’t begin to seriously consider and absorb the backgrounds of commercial recordings until 1965 when the *Journal of American Folklore* published its issue on ‘Hillbilly Music’.¹⁷⁰ Prior to this, Wilgus was a leading champion of commercial records and the academic study of hillbilly music. His thesis in 1947 was titled, “A Catalogue of American Folk-Songs on Commercial Records”, which, although groundbreaking,

¹⁶⁷ Skinner, 71.

¹⁶⁸ Paul Clayton, “Folk Ballads of the English-Speaking World”, ed. Kenneth Goldstein, Folkways Records, 1956.

¹⁶⁹ Szwed, 149.

¹⁷⁰ D.K. Wilgus, “An Introduction to the Study of Hillbilly Music,” *The Journal of American Folklore* 78, no. 309 (1965): 201.

did not result in continued attention from academics. Wilgus reflected in 1971 that, “unfortunately, the folklore journals managed to overlook the important 1952 reissue of hillbilly and race recordings by Harry Smith, *Anthology of American Folk Music*. ”¹⁷¹

While the set was largely ignored by academics, movers and shakers in the folk revival embraced it. Sam Charters, author of *The Country Blues* and collaborator of Folkways and Asch reflects that he encountered the set in 1952 in New Orleans from banjo player Billy Fairer. Charters writes that he acquired a copy himself in 1957, commenting somewhat cynically that he didn’t see anything unique about the collection when compared to the Folkways jazz series and other releases. During the late 1950s as he was learning to play guitar in southern California, future member and leader of the Grateful Dead Jerry Garcia played along with the *Anthology* as a method of instruction. Later when approached by Allen Ginsberg for financial support for Smith in his later years from the Rex Foundation, Garcia commented that, “I owe a lot to Harry Smith for that six LP collection.”, providing Smith with an annual stipend of ten thousand dollars a year for the remainder of his life, which helped to keep Smith alive.¹⁷² During the late 1950s the set also reached the ears of the Kingston Trio, Neil Young, and Bob Dylan, who was loaned the set of LPs by Alan Lomax.¹⁷³ Nonetheless, sales numbers were low. An average of thirty-seven units were sold annually which brought total sales by 1962 to just over five hundred individual discs.¹⁷⁴ In 1963 another review appeared in *Jazz Monthly* by blues scholar Paul Oliver.¹⁷⁵

The work of folk documentarians, popularizers, and musicians such as Ralph Rinzler, Pete Seeger, and John Cohen contributed to shift the popular understanding of folk song to

¹⁷¹ D.K. Wilgus, “Introduction,” *Western Folklore* 30, no. 3 (1971): 174.

¹⁷² Szwed, 338.

¹⁷³ Szwed, 159.

¹⁷⁴ Szwed, 158.

¹⁷⁵ Paul Oliver, “String Ticklers and Skillet Lickers,” *Jazz Monthly* 8, no. 12 (1963): 8.

include the type of commercial recordings found on the *Anthology*. John Cohen specifically captured deep reflections by Smith in his *Sing Out!* Interview from 1969, focusing intensely on the bizarre, mystical, and esoteric aspects of the *Anthology* and the life of Smith. At the time of the interview by Cohen, the De Bry engraving had been replaced by Folkways with a photograph of depression era farmer by Ben Sahn, changing the entire context in which listeners would encounter the collection. Cohen is keen to point this out in his interview and manages to highlight the esoteric, occult, and otherworldly character of the set continuously, probing Smith on his collection, documentation, and sequence techniques as they related to his occult studies and other artistic projects.

A striking admission in the *Sing Out!* Interview is the orientation Smith took towards the future and potential outcomes that may result from his musicological collage. It is clear from the way Cohen orients the interview that the influence of the *Anthology* is at that point greatly felt in the counterculture among movers and shakers. Seeking an answer to the question of influence, Smith comments that he, “had been reading from Plato’s Republic. He’s jabbering on about music, how you have to be careful about changing the music because it might upset or destroy the government...Of course, I thought it would do that... I imagine it having some kind of a social force for good. It was very hard to say why those things happened, because the sources I derived my material from had been already analyzed by the Library of Congress checklists and a few other books that i’d found.”¹⁷⁶

Smith is right in noting that, nearly twenty years prior to the interview, Lomax had documented and published lists of many of the very same recordings he released. Familiar with the records from an early point, Lomax would have acted as a conduit for transmission,

¹⁷⁶ Cohen, 83.

popularizing the records both in his publications and private correspondence. In a letter to the Folkways offices from March of 1954, Lomax excitedly requests volumes two and three, suggesting he had already gotten a hold of the ballads copy.¹⁷⁷ In an earlier letter he extends an olive branch to Asch, suggesting there is room for them to work together and share material. He goes on to make another appraisal of the *Anthology* stating that the reprints of commercial records are superior to any of the field material he is collecting in Europe.¹⁷⁸ Additionally, Lomax would celebrate the *Anthology* in 1965 with his publication of *Folk Songs of America*, where he mentions the *Anthology* in the discography calling it, “the best single collection”.¹⁷⁹ Predating the interview by Cohen by several years, the quote by Lomax suggests that folk revivalists had already grown fond of the collection by the mid-sixties.

For Cohen and other revivalists born in the 1930s and 1940s, the *Anthology* “told [us] where traditional music came from and predicted everything that followed in popular music. It was the first opportunity many of us had to hear the country blues, early hillbilly, and Cajun music.”¹⁸⁰ Characterizing the position of Cohen as solely a player of traditional music neglects his avant-garde associations and inclinations which would have aligned him close with Smith and his transformative intentions with the *Anthology*. Cohen felt the work “anticipated the popular rock and roll music which followed.”¹⁸¹ In studying Cohen as a figure of the avant garde and the old time, Brian Jones establishes the connection between movements of folk revivalism and avant garde art production, situating Cohen and his relationship to *Anthology* era performers

¹⁷⁷ Alan Lomax Letter to Mary Distler, March 31, 1954. Moses and Frances Asch Collection, Ralph Rinzler Folklife Archives and Collections, Smithsonian Institution.

¹⁷⁸ Alan Lomax Letter to Moe Asch, March 17, 1954. Moses and Frances Asch Collection, Ralph Rinzler Folklife Archives and Collections, Smithsonian Institution.

¹⁷⁹ Alan Lomax, *Folk Songs of North America* (Garden City: Doubleday, 1960), 609.

¹⁸⁰ Cohen, 70.

¹⁸¹ Cohen, 84.

such as Roscoe Holcomb and Clarence Ashley.¹⁸² The juxtaposition of high art aspirations with low culture song forms provided a contrast mined by future musical movements laid out by Cohen. Cohen saw his pursuit of folk forms as a kind of mystical journey not dissimilar to the path Smith took in marrying mystical symbolism with depression era hillbilly music. Like Smith, Cohen did not see folk music as simple emotional expression, but as an avenue for delving into deeper existential questions of meaning, existence, creativity, and the force of music itself, advocating the transformative powers of individual explorations of sound and song. A glance through the index of correspondence in the handbook affirms this, as the themes contained therein and interlocked by Smith are primordial and everlasting: death, loss, heartache, god, meaning, love, disaster, agriculture¹⁸³

By 1991, six years before the influential Smithsonian reissue, the impact of the set was recognized with the reception of a Grammy lifetime achievement award by Smith for his editorial work on the *Anthology*. Hobbling up to the stage after traveling from his position as shaman-in-residence at the beat generation linked Naropa Institute, the small man in a rumpled suit who hobbled up to the podium to receive the award was known by few in the larger viewing public. Following the Grammy award and the passing of Smith, a body of critical work emerged parallel with the 1997 reissue that elevated his position of cultural significance. Two key texts, *When We Were Good* by historian Robert Cantwell and *Old Weird America* by scholar and critic Greil Marcus argued for the placement of the *Anthology* as a central document within the post war folk revival and larger popular music culture. In both, the biography of Smith is

¹⁸² Brian Jones, "Finding the Avant-Garde in the Old Time: John Cohen in the American Folk Revival," *American Music* 28, no. 4 (2010): 404.

¹⁸³ Jones, 411.

obscure and mythologized, with the music itself as the subject of study.¹⁸⁴ The occult and esoteric activity that came to define much of the biography of Smith is alluded to, but little explored.

For Cantwell the *Anthology* is a central document of the post-war folk revival. Taking a wide historical survey of music traditions to track the roots of American folk music from minstrelsy to transatlantic balladry, he argues that the 1952 release played a role in reforming conceptions of folk music from prewar to postwar forms while demonstrating a progressive attitude toward race, which Smith significantly reconfigures by sequencing black and white artists alongside one another, performing material traditionally associated with the alternate group.¹⁸⁵ Cantwell also argues that the *Anthology* represents an example of a memory palace, or memory theater, a tool of classical oratory used to catalog immense amount of information through visual correspondence.¹⁸⁶ Approaching the work through the influence of Marshall McLuhan, Cantwell contrasts Smith with other collectors to deconstruct ideas of ‘the folk’. He specifically argues that Smith and his *Anthology* play a role in the transition from a populist folk revival of the 1930s and 1940s that is ideologically charged to the later revival of the 1950s and 1960s which remained rooted in individual expression of folk song typically devoid of hard political edges.¹⁸⁷ Here we see echoes of the early sentiments by Cohen concerning the search for meaning beyond individual expression and Smith’s frustrations with the political context of the late 1960s.

¹⁸⁴ Greil Marcus, *Old Weird America* (New York, NY: Picador, 1997), 90.

¹⁸⁵ Robert Cantwell, *When We Were Good* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1996) 13.

¹⁸⁶ Robert Cantwell, “Smith’s Memory Theater: The Folkways Anthology of American Folk Music,” *New England Review* 13, no. 3 (1991): 365.

¹⁸⁷ Cantwell, 120.

Old Weird America explores the process and transformations at work in a series of sessions recorded by Bob Dylan and the Band known as *The Basement Tapes*. Recorded in a basement outside of Woodstock in the summer of 1967, the collection contained a wide range of gospel, country, and bluegrass standards alongside blues, jazz, and other traditional materials from the 1920s onward. Marcus sees the recording as creating a landscape and partaking in an alchemical process of transformation that reconfigures and shuffles musical pieces in a manner similar to that of Smith in his *Anthology*. Marcus devotes several sections of the book to the *Anthology* as an earlier echo of the sensibility expressed in *The Basement Tapes* regarding process and structure. He also is keen to note the influence the *Anthology* had on the musicians involved participating in *The Basement Tapes*.¹⁸⁸ Bob Dylan, for instance, used half a dozen songs from the *Anthology* on his self-titled release for Columbia Records in 1961. Marcus returns to the idea of the *Anthology* as a landscape or a physical place, in his case ‘Smithville’, echoing the visual-aural connections Smith was so bent on exploring through the index and his earlier jazz paintings. The ideas of the *Anthology* as landscape or physical realm coincides with the emphasis Cantwell placed on memory theatre, an explicitly visual method of recalling information that was quickly losing favor with the advent of print culture during the renaissance. In both cases the writers seem to have tapped into the intention of Smith to visualize or make physical something that is not, an approach he took to his artmaking throughout his career.

Marcus describes the *Anthology* as a mystery he deems the ever-present but hidden ‘Old Weird America’. His work is an attempt to map this landscape through a study of *The Basement Tapes*. The phrase term would come to be employed by twenty-first century musicians who borrowed heavily from the sensibilities and song choices of the *Anthology* in what some critics

¹⁸⁸ Marcus, 85.

characterized as a folk revival of a ‘New Weird America’. Marcus notes how the *Anthology* was not just a collection of material to be copied or emulated, but a mystery to be encountered and inherited not unlike an initiatory process or religious tradition. “As a mystery, though, the *Anthology* was disguised as a textbook; it was an occult document disguised as an academic treatise on stylistic shifts within an archaic musicology”¹⁸⁹. Marcus emphasizes how the *Anthology* enacts a process of transformation upon the listener through its unique composition and structure as a reframing of older recordings into a new context. The familiar becomes strange while lost recordings reconstitute into a newly formed canon. Highlighting the contrast between the bizarre contents of the *Anthology* and its birth within the conservative environment of the Eisenhower fifties, Marcus sees Smith’s work as a rejection of Americanism through an embrace of the mysterious and the weird.¹⁹⁰

Cantwell and Marcus both approach Harry Smith and the *Anthology* through the lens of cultural and musical history, using it as a piece of a larger argument about the development of popular culture. Distinctions should be drawn between those who sought to study Smith from the perspective solely of the *Anthology*, like Marcus, Cantwell, and Skinner from those who seek to synthesize Smith into a whole, and in turn approach the *Anthology* to demonstrate the patterns evident across Smith’s disciplines of musicology, visual art, and collection. By the end of the 1990s with his place in cultural history rising and the position of the *Anthology* established through reissues and publications, the Harry Smith Archive was formed at the Getty Institute. Headed by archivist and close associate of Smith in his Boulder years Rani Singh, the archive has become a collection of collections. Singh published *Think of the Self Speaking*, a series of interviews conducted between 1965 and 1988. Ginsburg characterized Singh as a motherly

¹⁸⁹ Marcus, 94.

¹⁹⁰ Marcus, 97

figure who lovingly bullied Harry in his final years into getting on public assistance and archiving his existing work after decades of maltreatment and self-destruction. Singh produced a 2007 documentary film about the Anthology titled *The Old Weird America*, carried over from Marcus, while also co-producing several tribute concerts in the 2000s.¹⁹¹

Published in 2018, *Harry Smith's Anthology of Folk Music: I Saw American Changed Through Music* is the only scholarly collection devoted solely to the *Anthology*. In the collection, scholars simultaneously emphasize and dismiss the occultism of Smith as it relates to the *Anthology*. Much of the writing rests on citations to Marcus, Cantwell, and Skinner to provide context on the canonized collection, with Ross Hair and Roy Crutchfield offering parallel historiographies.¹⁹² A close link is established between Smith and Ginsberg with the work of Geoff Ward and R. Bruce Elder, who both closely associate Smith with beat circles and occult sensibilities. Seeking to understand Smith's intentions, Ward makes a useful insight by observing that the “forward looking social orientation is powered by backwards attention to very old materials.”¹⁹³ Elder echoes McLuhan and Cantwell by putting Smith in a larger context as a visual artist who embodied the process of cultural transformation in which, “emergence of the new culture renders visible the old environment”.¹⁹⁴ Hence Smith's role in the transformation of folk music from the political to the mystical. Elder calls to have Smith's work with folkways

¹⁹¹ Allen Ginsberg, introduction to *Think of the Self Speaking Harry Smith: Selected Interviews*, ed. Rani Singh (Seattle: Elbow/Cityful Press, 1999), 12.

¹⁹² Rory Crutchfield, “Harry Smith's *Anthology of American Folk Music: the critical heritage*,” in *Harry Smith's Anthology of American Folk Music: America Changed Through Music*, ed. Ross Hair (New York: Routledge, 2018) 42.

¹⁹³ Geoff Ward, “*Spun in a wheel of vertigo: Harry Smith and the magic of history*,” in *Harry Smith's Anthology of American Folk Music: America Changed Through Music*, ed. Ross Hair (New York: Routledge, 2018) 36.

¹⁹⁴ Bruce Elder, “*Harry Smith: collecting thought forms and programming the aerial computer*,” in *Harry Smith's Anthology of American Folk Music: America Changed Through Music*, ed. Ross Hair (New York: Routledge, 2018) 107.

placed alongside his visual creations and occultism in order to understand his impact.¹⁹⁵ Elder is a sole voice is focusing on the occultist of Harry Smith as a crucial context in understanding the *Anthology*.

Crutchfield examines critical debate around the *Anthology* and its relationship to the folk revival of the 1950s and 1960s, presenting a thorough historiography. Like Skinner he notes that the historical record is largely mute on the presence of influence of the *Anthology* until the 1997 Smithsonian reissue. A tension exists between those who characterize Smith as seeking to present and archive a form of authenticity through the *Anthology* and those who view his work as an attempt to study structure and patterning in cultural expression. Crutchfield views and argues for authenticity through dissecting several layers of historical processes in the creation and absorption of the work. The record scouts, he argues, sought authentic sounds that represented southern music that would sell to regional markets of record consumers. Similarly, Smith purposely sought out strange and bizarre recordings that were outliers he believed future musicologists would appreciate. Lastly, the record buying folk enthusiasts of the revival sought out the *Anthology* for its representation of what they were told folk music should embody, rubber stamped with approval by the Folkways label itself.¹⁹⁶ This triple layer of authenticity characterizes the *Anthology*, casting a wider analytical net than simply the collage artist and his creation to include the source material and the future listeners Smith had in mind.

Alternatively, Justin Parks argues “Smith’s collecting habits constitute an artistic practice in their own right.”¹⁹⁷ Collecting absolves Smith of being pinned as simply seeking

¹⁹⁵ Elder, 121

¹⁹⁶ Rory Crutchfield, “Discovering authenticity? Harry Smith’s *Anthology* of American Folk Music,” *Popular Music History* 4, no 1. (2010), 6.

¹⁹⁷ Justin Parks, “*Harry Smith, the Anthology, and artist as collector*” in *Harry Smith’s Anthology of American Folk Music: America Changed Through Music*, ed. Ross Hair (New York: Routledge, 2018) 67.

romanticized authenticity. By noting how Smith abandoned finishing the remaining planned records for Folkways or engaging in works of a similar kind of tenor. Instead, Parks notes, Smith shifted his collecting patterns to other forms including Ukrainian easter eggs, found paper airplanes from Manhattan office buildings, Seminole patchwork quilts, and books of esoterica. For Smith collecting functioned as a means of addressing modernity. The paradoxical status of the collecting practice, which is neither public nor private, allows the collector to move between worlds.¹⁹⁸

I Saw America Changed By Music also includes several dives into specific song selections on the *Anthology* including Fatal Flower Garden¹⁹⁹ and Moonshiner's Dance.²⁰⁰ A reflection by musician Sharon Krauss acts as a compliment to Paola Ferrero's study of the *Anthology* and Americana music, a central aspect of canonization of the work. Krauss' reminiscences upon the folk revival of the early twenty first century provide context for the release of the once lost volume four. Appearing at the turn of the millennium through Revenant Records, the label of guitarist and *Anthology* acolyte John Fahey, quoted above, the extension both expanded the work and represented a current that was blossoming in variations of folk music including free folk, psychedelic folk, and freak folk.²⁰¹ These movements became the subject of Ferrero's work, taking the influence of the *Anthology* beyond the folk revival of Cantwell and up to the first two decades of the twenty-first century.²⁰² The *Anthology* also

¹⁹⁸ Parks, 70

¹⁹⁹ Robin Purves, "Fatal Flower Garden," in *Harry Smith's Anthology of American Folk Music: America Changed Through Music*, ed. Ross Hair (New York: Routledge, 2018) 125-143.

²⁰⁰ Gegenhuber, "Smith's Amnesia Theater: Moonshiners's Dance in Minnesota," in *Harry Smith's Anthology of American Folk Music: America Changed Through Music*, ed. Ross Hair (New York: Routledge, 2018) 144-171.

²⁰¹ Sharon Krauss, "Interlude 2. How weird is folk?," in *Harry Smith's Anthology of American Folk Music: America Changed Through Music*, ed. Ross Hair (New York: Routledge, 2018) 197-204.

²⁰² Paola Ferrero, "The 'other lives' of Harry Smith's *Anthology of American Folk Music*" in *Harry Smith's Anthology of American Folk Music: America Changed Through Music*, ed. Ross Hair (New York: Routledge, 2018) 247.

illuminates the changing nature of forms of media. Margie Borshke characterizes the *Anthology* as an, “analog antecedent to mp3 blogs and other online practices of collection and social distribution.” With circulation as a cultural practice, the *Anthology* becomes a kind of ‘magical encyclopedia’ worthy of probing.²⁰³ The celestial monochord and temple of music engravings by Robert Fludd are similarly described as visual encyclopedias, while the concept of a memory palace also places a paramount on visualization of vast amounts of information.

In discussing art, religion, and forms of media, scholar of counter culture and religion Erik Davis notes how, “esotericism, magic, and the occult play an important role, articulating something about the epistemic framework that placed an emphasis on correspondences, associations... how do you link things together to give yourself some kind of map you can use.”²⁰⁴ Here Davis could be describing the process Smith employed in creating the *Anthology*, which function as a series of associations and correspondences between a set of players, places, themes, soundscapes, and contexts that birth a new cohesive forms and experiences embedded in the world of folk song. This mysterious allure continues to attract attention to the *Anthology* and represents an area of inquiry for future study.²⁰⁵ John Kanis hints at the significance of the 78 rpm record as Smith’s medium of expression, commenting that “If you take the *Anthology of American Folk Music* as a collage of found objects, it is easy to dig how much Smith could interpret phonograph records as occult symbols. Because when they are experienced in the proper spirit, phonograph records provide a very special form of time travel, capable of

²⁰³ Margie Borschke, *This is not a remix: Piracy, Authenticity, and Popular Music* (New York, NY: Bloomsbury, 2017), 148.

²⁰⁴ Erik Davis, “Weird Gnosis Lecture,” Dec 2, 2021, IMPAKT TV Online Event, 23:00.

²⁰⁵ Amanda Petrusich, “Harry Smith’s Musical Catalog of Human Experience,” *The New Yorker*. October 2020.

transcending the third dimension.”²⁰⁶ The work Smith produced does more than skip between eras, connecting listeners of the present to sounds of the past and undergirding the set with philosophical, cosmological, and epistemological associations of several different milieus. While the discreet and underground word of mouth spread which contributed to the rise of the set among the counterculture remains somewhat elusive, the biography of Smith as it relates to the creation of the *Anthology*, and specifically its textual and visual influences, helps to contextualize the work in the wider world of post-war counterculture and a rising interest in occultism and the esoteric.

²⁰⁶ Jon Kanis, “Between Fact and Friction: Hanging out in the ozone with Harry Smith,” *San Diego Troubadour*, November 2022.

Conclusion

The transformation of the *Anthology of American Folk Music* from obscure Folkways release to influential and canonical historical document is partially due to the perspective Smith brought to bear on his editorial process of collage and creation. As Harry Smith explored and integrated the cosmologies of esoteric thinkers of the renaissance and occult revival during his creative development during the period the post-war era such as Robert Fludd and Aleister Crowley, he built upon his upbringing and embrace of the work of Rudolf Steiner and early anthropological thought as reflected by R.R. Marett. The cosmology Smith developed and his attitude towards the creative process as one of spiritual significance is reflected by the reference he made to these four thinkers within the handbook liner notes alongside the engraving of the celestial monochord and unique index of correspondence. These qualities taken together provide the set with a charge of mystery which was layered upon the dense scholarship brought to bear on the collection. As the *Anthology* became canonized throughout the latter half of the twentieth century, the otherworldly and weird quality of the work distinguished it from more austere collections of field recordings or re-released commercial records. Smith was intent on visualizing the complex cultural patterns available in a period of American folk music which he hoped would allow musicians and artists to participate in an ongoing tradition. He saw his record collecting project and the culmination in it in the form of the *Anthology* as part of a continuous participatory process aided and transformed by technological change, creative exploration, and spiritual understanding.

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