



Fantasies  
of

Nina  
Simone

JORDAN ALEXANDER STEIN

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# Fantasies of Nina Simone

JORDAN ALEXANDER STEIN

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DUKE UNIVERSITY PRESS

*Durham and London* 2024

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Printed in the United States of America on acid-free paper ∞

Project Editor: Ihsan Taylor

Designed by Courtney Leigh Richardson

Typeset in Warnock Pro and Sophillia by

Westchester Publishing Services

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Names: Stein, Jordan Alexander, author.

Title: *Fantasies of Nina Simone* / Jordan Alexander Stein.

Description: Durham : Duke University Press, 2024. | Includes bibliographical references and index.

Identifiers: LCCN 2023046391 (print)

LCCN 2023046392 (ebook)

ISBN 9781478030706 (paperback)

ISBN 9781478026471 (hardcover)

ISBN 9781478059684 (ebook)

Subjects: LCSH: Simone, Nina, 1933–2003. | African American women singers—Biography. | Women singers—United States—Biography. | Singers—United States—Biography. | Feminism and music—United States—History—20th century. | Womanism—United States. | BISAC: SOCIAL SCIENCE / Ethnic Studies / American / African American & Black Studies | SOCIAL SCIENCE / Women's Studies

Classification: LCC ML420.S5635 S74 2024 (print) | LCC ML420.S5635 (ebook) | DDC 782.42164092 [B]—dc23/eng/20240429

LC record available at <https://lccn.loc.gov/2023046391>

LC ebook record available at <https://lccn.loc.gov/2023046392>

Cover art: Nina Simone, ca. 1960. Photo by Herb Snitzer/Michael Ochs Archives. Courtesy of Getty Images.

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*WHAT DO BLUES DO FOR YOU?*  
IT HELPS ME TO EXPLAIN WHAT  
I CAN'T EXPLAIN.

—GAYL JONES,  
*CORREGIDORA*

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# Something

Listen for the ways Nina Simone signifies.

Listen from the beginning—to the rising, flowering tempo of her rendition of “Mood Indigo” or the Baroque counterpoint her dexterous piano infuses into a Broadway tune like “Love Me or Leave Me.” Listen to the rich and billowy tones of “Feeling Good” and maybe hum along as they pepper your mood with their eager mischief; or else, listen to the aching downbeat of “Stars” as its melancholy slowly stresses your body, constricting your breath with a pain that isn’t yours and also, now, isn’t not. Listen to Simone’s astonishing contralto as it rides across the bars of instrumental melody, intimating meaning beyond what any voice could ever just say. Listen to nearly any Nina Simone recording and hear it unfurl a legend told in real time.

Listen from now—to more than a dozen concert recordings and remixes posthumously released since 2003, feeding the fans’ yearning for yet more from this someone who has already given so much. Listen to the nearly thirty compilations that remaster Simone’s sound, tinker with its levels, and revise the order of her albums’ tracks, offering up a fresh syntax in an old grammar

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that hints at the promise of meanings both new and familiar. Listen to the clips and sound bites that compress hours of interviews into viral, ten-second highlights: “That blackness,” “No fear.” Listen to the controversies that exploded in rapid succession as the Oscars snubbed the hit documentary *What Happened, Miss Simone?* (2015) and as the Hollywood biopic *Nina* (2016) cast the comparatively light-skinned Zoe Saldana as its lead. Listen to the black intellectuals who found resources, again, to name that pain—for example, Ta-Nehisi Coates, observing that Simone’s dark skin and flat nose are caught up in the shameful logic by which “even today a young Nina Simone would have a hard time being cast in her own biopic”; for example, Daphne Brooks, contending that “until recently, the cards have been overwhelmingly stacked against black women musicians telling their own uncompromised, amanuensis-free stories—and importantly, telling stories that place craft at the center of their life ambitions and concerns.”<sup>1</sup>

Listen to the then and the now, to their push and pull. To the ways Nina Simone is taken to be representative, even as she is also recognized to be in a class by herself. To the ways the past lays groundwork for the present, and the present, for its own reasons, can’t help but renovate the past. To the ways the contradictory desires swirling around Simone’s race, gender, and history re-fract the contradictory things that black womanhood, then and now, has been made to bear: beauty and dignity, but also abjection; empowerment, but also myriad forms of restriction; expansive room for individual talent, but structurally finite opportunity; authenticity, sincerity, realness, but also the ordinary emotional scars that heal and accrue as any person adapts to their world.<sup>2</sup>

Listen to the multiple rhythms being played simultaneously, to the ways *history* is another name for what happens when everybody is talking all at once.<sup>3</sup> It’s no secret that US culture has long burdened blackness, and black womanhood especially, with such contradictory desires, though only lately has that same culture nominated Nina Simone as a candidate for the task of resolving them.<sup>4</sup> Something is taking place here. Our task will be to listen for it.<sup>5</sup>

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THE SHELF OF BOOKS about Nina Simone grows heavy. In addition to Simone's autobiography and the documentaries and interviews in which she participated, a flurry of biographies, reams of scholarship, who knows how many exhibits, and a handful of both narrative and documentary films have appeared in the two decades since her death—in English, French, Dutch, Portuguese, German, Italian, Spanish, and Japanese—aimed variously at the uninitiated and the connoisseur, including fans, researchers, and children. Opportunities abound to learn the facts of Simone's story. And yet, though these facts certainly matter, the whole truth is almost never just a matter of fact. Truth is motivated, adumbrated, and expressed by and through irrational things too, like desire. Anybody who has wanted, which is also to say anybody, knows that wanting can make things real. So, in all that's already been said and seen and heard about Nina Simone, what else is true? What might still be worth listening for?

We might begin to hear an answer in "Please Read Me," Simone's cover of the Bee Gees' guitar-forward, psychedelic rock track about being a patient in treatment—the imperative of its title requesting explanation from a psychotherapist. Simone first recorded the song for *'Nuff Said!* (1968), altering the opening line (such that Barry Gibb's "Many years ago I was a simple man" becomes "Many years ago I was a sinful girl") and stripping the psychedelic instrumentation all the way down to naked, with a tensely scaling piano and a voice that deliberately and plaintively holds its notes, delivering the titular line as an intimate, yearning, starving demand.

This performance is pretty clearly a matter of fact. Whether in the grooves of vinyl or the sequence frames of an MP3, the recording that archives the performance makes it difficult to dispute that it happened. But that facticity runs aground when we do nothing more imposing than consider the chorus. Is Simone actually asking to be "read"? On the one hand, her biographers incline toward no, documenting her ambivalent experiences and cautious suspicions of psychotherapy.<sup>6</sup> On the other hand, ambivalence and caution are not precisely what Simone's "Please Read Me" plays up, at least insofar as her arrangement and performance of this song brim instead with eloquent wanting and unassailable urgency.

But here's the thing: both can be right. The hunger of Simone's "Please Read Me" is something she expresses, maybe fictitiously in the first-person guise of a character, maybe authentically as herself, probably in combination, but in any case through her own conscious and, inevitably, unconscious process.<sup>7</sup> Behind

both the biography and the performance is a person, and what's contradictory at the level of fact can nonetheless at a personal level be true.

It starts to make sense in psychological terms, where a person can express longing without having any clear object in sight, or where a person does not have to want literally to be read or analyzed by a professional in order to want to be attended to, to be understood, to feel attached in or to her life and her world. Or it can make sense in linguistic terms, where even propositionally unequivocal and to all appearances resolute statements of desire, of the kind for which Simone was and remains so widely admired, will inevitably be shaped by ambivalence and contradiction.<sup>8</sup> One consequence of the ordinary workings of both psychology and language is that anyone's conscious and deliberate expressions of feeling do not, and likely cannot, equal all that they themselves might feel. And such is the case not least because a person can feel more than one thing at a time—for instance, when a suggestion of hopefulness or optimism layers longing into the otherwise bargaining mood of "Please Read Me," as Simone shifts her emotional delivery from the hedging defection of Gibb's lyric "Maybe I've been lying on your couch too long" to the petitioning conditional of the next one, "I'll stay if you will see me through."<sup>9</sup>

Contradiction is a problem when you're sifting among facts, so let's not. The truth that exists beyond the facts might be found, instead, if we take contradiction seriously, not as a problem to be solved so much as an inexorable part of being a person. The work of this yet-one-more book on Nina Simone will, accordingly, be to listen when she expresses these kinds of contradictions. Doing so will be a way to learn something about Simone and, more generally, to learn something about listening for the operations—what psychologists sometimes describe with the more technical-sounding name "psychic mechanisms"—that hold these contradictions together. One of the principle such operations is fantasy.

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THE THEORY OF FANTASY that animates *Fantasies of Nina Simone* draws from the existing literature, mostly by psychoanalysts, psychologists, and others in conversation with them.<sup>10</sup> Why psychoanalysis? It's here as a framework, a heuristic, a way of thinking through the knots of language and affect in the human psyche. It is not the only way to do that work, but, through the accidents of education and experience, it is the space my understanding of these concepts happens to have grown in. As I suspect I am not alone there, I have hoped it would make for a decent intellectual scaffold for a study concerned with fantasy.<sup>11</sup>

Preliminarily, though, it's worth stressing that one reason there isn't much need here for any truly original theory of fantasy has to do with how extensively psychoanalytic theories of fantasy already reach into some of the most fundamental aspects of human experience. In the pages that follow, we will encounter theories and examples of both conscious and unconscious fantasies:

- concerning the bounds around the experience of being an individual (for example, fantasies of a person's omnipotence; of a person's relation, connection, and estimation of themselves relative to others; of the distinction or integrity of one's self; or of how we can be consumed by others or they by us, even to the impossible degree of "if I were you")
- concerning the scale and scope of agency (for example, fantasies that grandiosely exaggerate, masochistically diminish, or indulgently excuse the significance, potential, or impact of a person's actions, including their capacity, aptitude, talent, or influence)
- concerning objectivity, or how much can or should be inside or outside any one person's experience (fantasies that a person or their actions can be comprehensive, total, impartial; or, by corollary, fantasies of the satisfaction that accompanies adequacy, being good enough)
- concerning violence (fantasies of our own or someone else's destruction and/or survival of destruction)
- concerning the habitation of space (fantasies of proximity or partition; of belonging or feeling at home in one's body or the world; or of what it might mean to get lost or be found)
- concerning the perception of time (fantasies of continuity, or of clearly delimited history, origin, telos; or, by corollary, fantasies that bend a linear perception of time around traumatic experience).

Because fantasies can have unconscious aspects—that is, because they can often go unrecognized in conscious thought or unrealized in social action—psychoanalytic theories have usually found that it makes little sense to hold them to moral designations like good or bad. Nor, for the same reason, is there much insight to be gained from pressing individual fantasies into diagnostic categories like normal or pathological, or from intellectualizing them into cryptonormative distinctions between something utopian like a relational subject or something flavorless like a liberal subject.

What makes fantasy matter analytically isn't its relation to goodness or normalcy—nor, as we saw with “Please Read Me,” to any literal truth—so much as its almost invariable expression of honesty. Fantasies always express something that is at some psychic level genuine to the person expressing them. Yes, fantasies can contain lies, falsehoods, misdirections, deceptions, and any number of other conscious or unconscious delusions; yet the appearance of these dishonesties in our fantasies nonetheless tends very much to reflect things we honestly wish or desire. This is so because the unconscious does not abide negation, and so the presence of any refusals or denials is still a presence.<sup>12</sup> Thus, to commit a whole book to the study of fantasy is to commit to the astonishment of fantasy's capacity for expressive honesty—even when fantasy is unconscious, even when the person having a fantasy may not be aware that they are being honest. Listening for fantasy helps us hear the presence of a *something* that enables a person to bear any number of the contradictions attendant upon existence—which is to say, to bear the experience of being a person in the first place.

These preliminary and fairly sweeping points require some elaboration, but before we get there one final preliminary to keep in mind is that, in the case of a public figure like Simone, traffic on fantasy's street runs in both directions. We have already begun to see how our contemporary moment is busy wanting so many contradictory things from her, and so it can become too easy to forget that Simone wanted a lot of contradictory things herself. The pages that follow explore the very real possibility that those things she may have wanted for herself are not identical to the things we may want from her; that her coherence as a fantasy figure stands in tension with her desires and contradictions as an ordinary person. This study will, accordingly, insist on thinking through the space between our fantasies of Nina Simone and Nina Simone's fantasies of Nina Simone.<sup>13</sup>

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LET'S WORK IT OUT through an example. For a consummate fantasy of Nina Simone, consider her cameo in the third season of the HBO serial *Insecure*. Protagonist Issa Dee (played by Issa Rae), reluctantly and in the wake of some significant personal setbacks, undertakes the abject task of cleaning out her apartment. To face her work, she dresses in a white T-shirt printed with an image of Nina Simone from the 1969 Jack Robinson photo shoot; the glamorous black-and-white Simone perches on a red rectangle, in which white letters spell out "MOOD."<sup>14</sup>

Issa's sartorial statement expresses a fantasy in that it holds together the contrast between the powerful image on the shirt and the menial tasks of domestic upkeep the woman sporting that image is obliged to perform. It's a scene of fantasy, moreover, because that suspended contrast is emotionally laden—some longing that dwells otherwise unspoken in Issa's mind or body, psyche or soma, finds outward expression, albeit through the fairly minimal gesture of an ironic caption that at once holds open and collapses the space between what is and what could be.<sup>15</sup> It's a scene of fantasy too because it disregards the ordinary rules of linear time, pulling 1969 into 2018, figuring Simone as both Issa's antecedent and her aspiration, fostering multiple connections and kinship between two women who otherwise lived history's permutations and possibilities differently. Above all, it's a scene of fantasy because it expresses itself without claiming or even necessarily knowing precisely what that expression amounts to, making something happen without doing any more than articulating, in Lauren Berlant's needful phrase, "something about something to someone."<sup>16</sup> The fantasy has meaning, but to ask what the fantasy really means is to ask the wrong question; the point, rather, is to recognize its meaningfulness.

Fantasy is a protean thing. Not all fantasies unerringly share these same qualities of suspended contradiction, emotional freight, temporal disregard, and meaningfulness without precision—but, however it happens, whatever its qualities, *fantasy* names the psychic process that secures your sense of the continuity of the world.<sup>17</sup> No matter what form a particular fantasy takes, in other words, that fantasy—its meaningfulness—helps to supply the person having it with coherence in an existential sense. *Fantasy* names the impulse, and at least one means, to continue existing in relation to a world whose phenomenal occurrence is fundamentally indifferent as to whether you do so.<sup>18</sup> More succinctly, we might say that fantasy's impetus and actions—for example, Issa's

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From *Insecure* (2018).

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outfit and whatever it helps her to bear—condense into what D. W. Winnicott called the psychological operation of “going on being.”<sup>19</sup>

Fantasy can help people to go on being in more ways than one. Even when the term is circumscribed within the fairly specialized registers of psychoanalysis or psychoanalytically inflected discourses, *fantasy* still has multiple referents, including conscious fantasies or daydreams, primal fantasies, and unconscious fantasies like those uncovered in analysis as the structures underlying a manifest content.<sup>20</sup> The German word *Phantasie* means “imagination,” though less in the Kantian sense of the faculty of imagining (his term is *Einbildungskraft*) than in the sense of the world of the imagination, its contents and the creative activities that animate it.<sup>21</sup> When Sigmund Freud borrowed the plural, *Phantasien*, for his own writing, he most often used it to refer to daydreams, “scenes, episodes, romances or fictions which the subject creates and recounts to himself [*sic*] in the waking state.”<sup>22</sup> In these conscious forms, fantasy tends to be able to work with, or be worked on by, logical thought.<sup>23</sup> Yet Freud also made allowance for the possibility that some fantasy could be unconscious, particularly in cases with children and in his late speculative anthropological writing.<sup>24</sup>

What fantasy isn’t is desire. The condition of longing for an object or an outcome, desire is often theorized in terms of repetition, where it does not seek to capture the object of our longing so much as it seeks to recapture what the object of our longing stands in for.<sup>25</sup> Desire is by most accounts a ruthless and primal part of psychic life, and though the objects of our desire may change, desire’s force is itself perduring, always running toward a finish line it never crosses, sometimes unfinishing us in the process.<sup>26</sup> Desire exerts its force at both conscious and unconscious levels, fixating on objects that can contraindicate one another, existing in tandem with other desires that contradict. The formula for desire is *who wants what*, and there’s no question mark at the end. Its drive, however, belongs to time. The only rule that desire is bound to respect is difference in time: wanting anticipates, and therefore exists in temporal distinction from, satisfaction. Desire’s watchword is *yet*.

Indeed, the very possibility of some ultimate satisfaction is, Freud conjectured, where desire comes from.<sup>27</sup> In his account, the body’s needs drive our disposition toward things like water, food, and sex, but once we learn that our needs can be satisfied, we find we can long for a satisfaction that we do not yet feel. Enter desire. As proximate to the realm of necessity as this story of desire’s origin might seem, once we’ve mastered the move of wanting something we don’t yet have, we can just as easily desire things we don’t yet have *and* don’t yet need. And insofar as there is very likely more than one thing we

don't have and for whose satisfaction we therefore could long, it is possible to desire more than one thing—even contradictory things—at once. Desire motivates, impels. Those impulses are multiple, messy, often uncompromising, and they heed only the distinction between the now-time of longing and the horizon time of satisfaction.

Freud tended to see fantasy's role as desire's helpmeet, its assistance made necessary by the fact that people "cannot subsist on the scanty satisfaction which they can extort from reality."<sup>28</sup> While desire can be ambivalent—it can, literally, pull in opposite directions—fantasy is not usually, in itself, ambivalent at all. On the contrary: fantasy takes the ambivalence of desire and makes it cohere. That coherence is typically comprehended by leaning on spatial metaphors. Freud locates fantasy in a "scene [*szene*]."<sup>29</sup> Jean Laplanche and J.-B. Pontalis call it a "setting [*mise en scène*]."<sup>30</sup> Cora Kaplan calls it a "presence" or even a "favoured spot."<sup>31</sup> For Nicolas Abraham and Maria Torok, it overlays, "mask[s] [*masquer*]."<sup>32</sup> Jacqueline Rose grants it viscosity: "Like blood, fantasy is thicker than water."<sup>33</sup> Joan Wallach Scott regards it as something "staged."<sup>34</sup>

Fantasy, we might say, is the stage on which desire's plot is rehearsed; it dramatizes the actions around wanting and getting or not.<sup>35</sup> Fantasy does more than complement desire by ordering it, however; that ordering can also loosen desire's obeisance to linear time.<sup>36</sup> Fantasy brings temporally distinct things like wanting and satisfaction into coherence by structuring the plot that shows them to coexist, just as the beginning of a story, in order to be identifiable as a beginning, requires lining up next to a middle or at least an end. In so doing, fantasy lends the actions around wanting and getting the coherence of an order or a narrative, in that sense making satisfaction seem real and thus making unsatisfied desires seem bearable.<sup>37</sup> Fantasy hews and orders the unruliness of desire; whether by reining it in or by letting it expand, fantasy gives desire, however provisionally, a shape.

In the earlier example, Issa, like all people, at all moments, wants something, but in this scene donning an image of Nina Simone isn't it; her outfit is not what satisfies her desire. Rather, her sartorial expression plots whatever she happens to desire—to be somewhere else, to be doing something else, to feel something else, to be someone else—into the present experience that is not anything else, that by definition does not contain what it lacks, and therefore that does not satisfy. Her fantasy resolves the distance between what is happening to her and what is not, connecting desire's dots into a line that smooths the roughness off its more jagged edges. Fantasy makes it possible not to be destroyed by the structuring, or else broken and unrepaired, conditions that create deficiencies in our experiences of satisfaction.<sup>38</sup>

Where desire may lead us to a questionable decision, an impulsive act, an indulgent flourish, fantasy picks us up and dusts us off and allows us to say to ourselves—certainly or guiltily or however we best recognize ourselves; the *how* matters—I am not (or, as the case may be, I am) that kind of person, this action is not (or, again, is) part of the pattern, often called a personality, that adds up to me as the person I recognize myself to be.<sup>39</sup> By the time we can narrate a fantasy to ourselves or others—as when, for example, we can imagine the details of a sexual fantasy, a dream job, a best-case scenario, a happy ending—fantasy has already built its bridge between the propelling force of desire and the world of social and linguistic conventionality. Such conscious narration is not, however, a requirement; fantasy’s coherence can equally assume, and find articulation in, less linguistic, often more unconscious forms like intuition or vision. It all goes toward the same effect. The world that desire makes is urgent, immediate, but the world that fantasy makes belongs to a more durational timeline.

If all this makes fantasy sound like a generative resource, it may be surprising to recognize how often that generativity is characterized as a defense. In their authoritative dictionary of psychoanalytic vocabulary, Laplanche and Pontalis gloss *phantasy* as an “imaginary scene in which the subject is a protagonist, representing the fulfillment of a wish (in the last analysis, an unconscious wish) in a manner that is distorted to a greater or lesser extent by defensive processes.”<sup>40</sup> Laplanche and Pontalis contribute to a consensus view that understands fantasy as proximate to, or even as a species of, defensive process; meanwhile, many more psychoanalytically inclined thinkers grant that in psychic life defensive processes—as the updated term *adaptive behaviors* already suggests—are a feature of the landscape. Nonetheless, both *defensive* and *adaptive* underdescribe the generative power of fantasy to shape people and the worlds they make, to add definition to the lives they live by exploring the ones they don’t, to stretch the social baseline of reality, and to work apart from the ordinary rules of time. Clinical language like Laplanche and Pontalis’s tells us from the perspective of the analyst what fantasy is, not, as in the more evocative scene of Issa wearing her Nina shirt, how, from the perspective of the person having it, fantasy can be sustaining, meaningful.

The meaningfulness of fantasy expression will be what matters for the pages that follow, but it’s important to say up front that meaningfulness does not necessarily point to any unequivocal meaning. While fantasy lends desire the coherence of story and plot, some fantasies like some stories can still be unfiltered, disorganized. They can trail off. . . . There are also edges along which the categories “desire” and “fantasy” seem to blur, as, for example,

when the kind of coherence that fantasy provides is itself the object on which your desire sets its sights. Who has not at moments wanted incoherently, wistfully, to feel organized by a coherence that has gone missing or, perhaps, didn't arrive at the expected time—why can't I get a break, why can't I meet someone, why isn't my life more together? Additionally, the relationship between what or how we fantasize and what or how (if anything) we act on or do with that fantasy is open-ended, variable, possibly contradictory. Freud sometimes implied that there was an element of wish to fantasy. Much like dreams—what he called the fulfillments of repressed wishes, shown to us in the theater of our minds as we sleep—fantasies can satisfy our wishes for coherence, even as our desires threaten to make us incoherent.<sup>41</sup> Fantasy, from this vantage, is very much the realm in which desire takes place.

But, you might reasonably ask, where doesn't desire take place? If people carry the potential incoherence of desire everywhere they go, it would follow logically that fantasy would be operative in the background everywhere as well. If you are committed to the notion that there is something called reality that's opposed to fantasy, this may be where you'll want to stop reading.<sup>42</sup> Notwithstanding, saying that fantasy operates everywhere doesn't mean that everything is a fantasy, so much as it means that fantasy is a part of, rather than opposed to, reality. Fantasy constitutes reality not as a conceptual opposite that lends reality definition but as a working partner in a person's psychic apprehension and expression. How much, how explicitly, how intensely fantasy operates in a given instance has to do with any number of factors, including how incoherent a person feels, how great their longing, how many directions their desire happens to be pulling them.

Fantasy may be able to suture a break in the world, but the nature of that break matters too. The world's fracture lines tend to have been designed long in advance of their break by structures that distribute risk and harm unequally, usually in the interest of protecting the powerful. In the United States, for those like Issa in the present tense of this writing, as well as for



Nina Simone's reflection  
(March 19, 1965). Photo by Sam  
Falk/New York Times Co./  
Getty Images.



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those like Nina Simone who shaped and are shaped by its historical past, the pernicious, self-reproducing, and historically accumulating forces of racial capitalism have been among the more prominent things that etch the world's fault lines into place.<sup>43</sup> These forces enable anyone paying attention to recognize structural racism generally and antiblackness specifically as limiting factors on the horizon of life's possibilities. These forces, accordingly, unavoidably shaped Nina Simone's fantasies, for the same reasons, if not in exactly the same ways, that they shape and will shape Issa's as well as our own fantasies of Nina Simone. All people are capable of fantasy, but history is among the reasons why not all people have the same ones.<sup>44</sup>

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ALREADY THERE'S SOME TENSION here. *Fantasy* belongs to a psychological vocabulary that appeals to universals, whereas *Nina Simone* belongs more to a tradition of black feminist thought and expression that critiques such aspirations to universality. The motive behind putting these terms together is that, for the disciplines in which fantasy is studied—psychoanalysis, literature, and critical theory, among them—Simone is not a canonical object and is not, therefore, the inevitable choice.

This study sits with that noninevitability in an effort to align itself with the corrective Hortense Spillers has described her own scholarship as aiming toward: undoing the circumstance by which “the history of black people was something you could use as a note of inspiration but it was never anything that had anything to do with you—you could never use it to explain something in theoretical terms. There was no discourse that it generated, in terms of the mainstream academy that gave it a kind of recognition.”<sup>45</sup> Or, as Jennifer Morgan’s paraphrase of Spillers’s work succinctly summarizes, “There are people there who this entire field has attempted to erase. I just want to put them back out there.”<sup>46</sup> That “just,” though, indicates nothing simple because apart from some horrifying episodes in medical history, where a person gets stripped down until all that’s left is a body, black women are rarely taken by academic knowledge-making practices as the starting point for broad claims about how aspects of being human work.<sup>47</sup> Such precedents alert us to the danger of instrumentalizing Simone, the possibility of reproducing the structures that use black women’s lives and labors without compensation.

*Fantasies of Nina Simone* forces the point by imagining that what’s specific or irreducible about Simone’s life—including the intersection of her identities as an original genius and a black woman of her generation—is no more an obstacle to generalization than it would be for anyone else’s.<sup>48</sup> The complex representational terrain through which Simone moved and struggled will certainly not be treated here as though it were beside the point, but neither will it be treated as if were the whole story.<sup>49</sup> Without ignoring any number of particular or even idiosyncratic aspects to Simone’s life, work, and fantasy scenes, this study’s method wagers that the detailed work of a case scales up to reveal itself as part of a pattern.

The assumption of case study-based research is that the single example is not a singular example, that instead it offers specifics on the basis of which something more general can be located, teased out, theorized, and tested against subsequent cases. Yet what counts as a legitimate case is always inflected by

the consensus norms of the academic disciplines that build on them—what counts as a case, in other words, affects what counts as knowledge.<sup>50</sup> Accordingly, one of the utopian fantasies behind the present study and its choice of Nina Simone as a case is that committed antiracist scholarship could contribute to there being less racism in the structure of our knowledge but not thereby less of the human variety for which, especially in the contemporary United States, race is overwhelmingly, and reductively, the figure.<sup>51</sup> Part of what I understand antiracist scholarship can accomplish is that the full human complexity that shines through a black woman's expressions ought to be able to serve as a basis for knowledge about aspects of broadly human experience wound tight in the skeins of history and feeling. The fantasy here, which is also to say, one of the premises, is that all of us have something to learn from Nina Simone's example.

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*FANTASIES OF NINA SIMONE* draws on existing theories of fantasy, but it assembles an original archive.<sup>52</sup> Necessarily so, as no collector has as yet put together a Nina Simone museum, and no library holds a collection called something like “The Nina Simone Papers,” though at the time of this writing such things are in the works.<sup>53</sup> Accordingly, this book’s archive consists of Simone’s many albums and recordings, concert footage and documentaries, clippings and reviews, photographs in the public domain, published interviews, and declassified FBI documents. Additional consultations included the unofficial Nina Simone Database (<http://www.boscarol.com/ninasimone>), maintained by Mauro Boscarol; the Nina Simone clippings file at the New York Public Library for the Performing Arts; as well as what’s been collected by Getty Images, put on YouTube, or tucked into the cataloged papers of others—Langston Hughes, Amiri Baraka, and James Baldwin among them.

The choice to rely on publicly available materials should make it easy for any reader who wants to follow up on or check my work. But this reliance also aims to defeat the idea that a diary, a letter, or a “private” document could, somehow, tell us the real truth behind the public figure. To say so is not entirely to deny that Simone came of age during a period in the twentieth century when the distinction between public and private selves was constructed and enforced very differently than now, nor entirely to concede the observation that Lisa Simone Kelly makes in *What Happened Miss Simone?*, that even offstage her mother was “Nina Simone 24/7.”<sup>54</sup>

Rather, it is to dispute the idea that the archives and artifacts of private life tell the truth of the self—to dispute this idea because it contradicts the likelihood that however much we may construct our public selves, our images, and our self-presentations, in doing so we are, nonetheless, still expressing ourselves, consciously and otherwise. Think about it this way: the person committed to lying about who they are or what they do is not, of course, being truthful; but the act of lying turns out, itself, to be an honest expression of who they are and what they do. Every story told has a true history, even when that story isn’t itself true.

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THERE IS, INEVITABLY, a personal story. One impetus for centering a study of fantasy on Nina Simone is the Black Lives Matter Global Network (a member of the coalition Movement for Black Lives), a line of whose statement of self-declaration caught my eye sometime about 2014: “We affirm our contributions to this society, our humanity, and our resilience in the face of deadly oppression.”<sup>55</sup> The same emphasis on humanity rings through in many subsequent statements. As Alicia Garza argued in her herstory of the movement: “Black Lives Matter is an ideological and political intervention in a world where Black lives are systematically and intentionally targeted for demise. . . . We’ve created space for the celebration and humanization of Black lives.”<sup>56</sup> Or, again, as Patrisse Khan-Cullors writes in her memoir of the movement’s emergence, black people “deserve to be our own gardeners and deserve to have gardeners. Mentors and teachers who bring the sunlight, the rain, the whispered voices above the seedling that says, *Grow, baby, grow.*”<sup>57</sup>

As a humanities-based scholar, a central part of whose career had been devoted to studying, analyzing, and interpreting race in the United States, I found myself, upon reading these sentences, rather totally at a loss to locate what in my scholarly tool kit existed primarily or even effectively to do the work of affirming black humanity. My critical repertoire concentrated instead on analytics around structural racism, investigations into the politics of representation, and histories of racialization. These tools can and do generate all kinds of valuable knowledge, but though they may be compatible with the affirmation of black humanity, they do not exist to do the affirming. By their measure the claim for black humanity is, precisely, a claim.<sup>58</sup> It must be asserted because it cannot, in scholarly terms, be proven.

It’s not clear what would solve this problem of proof—it’s not inevitable that you think it is a problem in search of a solution—and the project of the book you are reading isn’t to try. Yet one underlying assumption of this writing is instead that what can’t be proven can still be elaborated.<sup>59</sup> Since about 2014, when I first read the initial Black Lives Matter statement, the interdisciplinary academic field of black studies has produced a robust critical and creative literature that makes, debates, and refines connections between structures of racism and antiblackness, on the one hand, and the claims of black humanity, on the other—a literature that the following pages cite, engage, learn from, and express gratitude toward. Such, then, is one conversation these pages seek to engage, and such is part of the decision to center Nina Simone in this study, for, what cannot be proven not only can be elaborated but also can most defi-

nately be scrutinized in metacritical terms. We can ask why we might already “know” that Nina Simone doesn’t exemplify the study of fantasy, why our knowledge has been arranged and received in such a way that would designate looking for a connection as a pretty foolish enterprise. We can wonder why, when disciplinary knowledge encourages us to dismiss foolish things, it so determinedly overlooks the awkward fact that the fool is usually the one who gets to tell the truth. We can and should ask, too, though, with our eye on this question of humanity, what it might take for such writing to create adequate space to really hear what Simone has to say honestly, without cryptically making her speak *as*?<sup>60</sup>

Of course Black Lives Matter is not the only available path to such questions. One might, for example, find one’s way there through Sylvia Wynter’s critical explorations of the human—the category, she argues persuasively, for which Western thought has over the last four centuries substituted and over-represented the white, Euro-colonial category of “Man,” with the consequence that “all other modes of being human would instead have to be seen not as the alternative modes of being human that they are ‘out there,’ but adaptively, as the lack of the West’s ontologically absolute self-description.”<sup>61</sup> Following from Wynter’s analysis, one way into the question of what it might mean to investigate fantasy in terms of Nina Simone’s humanity would be to draw out some of the alternative modes of being human, “with respect to ourselves and the nature-culture laws that govern our modes of being, of behaving, of mind, or of minding,” and which our received ways of regarding fantasy have, therein, occluded.<sup>62</sup> Wynter gestures toward those alternatives, beyond the epistemological norms of rationality and thereby tied to a meaningfulness that isn’t captured by scientific explanation, calling them at moments “invention” or “liminal.”<sup>63</sup> Developing Wynter’s alternatives, Alexander Weheliye has concurred that “enfleshment,” the stripping away of multidimensional humanity until all that is left is a fungible body, gives meaning to the modern, capitalist, colonial version of “race,” yet he argues that flesh and its “racializing assemblages of subjection . . . can never annihilate the lines of flight, freedom dreams, practices of liberation, and possibilities of other worlds.”<sup>64</sup> It’s not purely a question of alternatives in Weheliye’s account; the way out is through.

This somewhat more dialectical development of Wynter’s argument points to the likelihood that humans (let alone the category “the human”) contain difference within themselves.<sup>65</sup> That capacity for self-difference, for the self to be in conflict with itself and the world, takes expressive forms like convolution, ambivalence, antagonism, or resistance, and these expressive forms can make the complexities of human psychic experience legible. In less philosophical

terms, we might also note that even otherwise mundane activities undertaken while a person goes on being can, and often necessarily do, likewise involve more than one thing happening in the background. Self-difference registers at the levels of play, of gesture, of spontaneity, of creativity, of showing up—or, inversely, in the meaningfulness of failing to. Yes, fantasies can be grandiose, but they can also, like Issa's previously discussed, take the form of ordinary improvisations. Fantasy expression can assume a form no more or less complicated than getting dressed because, whether we consciously intend to or not, we are almost always expressing something.

Analysis of such ordinary expressions of the working of human minds often reveals the ordinary to be meaningful and, in its way, quite extraordinary. It's at this point, though, that things on the ground may stop looking dialectical. The contradictions we humans experience do not inevitably progress, transform, and settle into coherent epistemologies, instead often persisting as muddled truths.<sup>66</sup> Something can be—often is—meaningful without thereby resolving into something in particular. And it is on these lower frequencies that fantasy may speak for you.<sup>67</sup>

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FANTASIES ARE SAYING SOMETHING, and so *something* is a significant term for the study of fantasy. Simone evoked *something* at her Westbury Music Fair performance on April 7, 1968, three days after Martin Luther King Jr. was assassinated in Memphis, Tennessee. With lilting alternations between what is specific and what cannot be specified, she told her audience, "I hope that we can provide some kind of, something, for you, this evening, this particular evening, this Sunday evening, at this particular time in 1968."<sup>68</sup> This *something* is a placeholder, a situation without precise specification, a happening on its way to becoming an event.

There are many reasons why a place might need to be held. *Something* can be tentative, an observation whose details stick out against the terrain of the expected or predictable, but whose significance isn't clear.<sup>69</sup> *Something* can also be tentative in a way that stokes excitement, a sense that the "half-formed trajectories are always the most compelling."<sup>70</sup> Or *something* can turn that tentativeness toward risk, toward making a demand, "not [as] the unvarnished truth of the unmediated real but rather something else riskily underdefined. The word that stands in for the pressure on *something* here is *need*."<sup>71</sup> *Something* can hover before consciousness as one of those things "our language has no words to describe, or even to indicate," which nonetheless "are there when the subject is not completely alone."<sup>72</sup> *Something* can name an unfamiliar synthesis of otherwise familiar components, a sign with the "capacity to absorb and organize all of these quite distinct anxieties together."<sup>73</sup> *Something* can instead be alternative, "the ephemeral instantiation of *something better than this*."<sup>74</sup> *Something* can be uncertain, "a frame for assuming responsibility even when one does not know with certainty that one has caused harm."<sup>75</sup> *Something* can also be inflected by longing, holding the place of "what you wanted but couldn't name, the resolute, stubborn desire for an elsewhere and an otherwise that had yet to emerge clearly, a notion of the possible whose outlines were fuzzy and amorphous, exerted a force no less powerful and tenacious."<sup>76</sup> Tentative, risky, demanding, hovering, alternative, unfamiliar, uncertain, desirous: Simone's "something" is any, maybe all, of these. The way she evokes *something* is the same way these pages will: to knowingly draw a circle around some of what can't be known.

When it comes to other people's fantasies, *something* is a way to hold the place of what isn't ours to know. Fantasy is an ineluctable part of psychic experience, and psychic experience, in V. N. Vološinov's impressively compact summary, "is something inner that becomes outer," just as social experiences,

like language and ideology, are “something outer than becomes inner.”<sup>77</sup> *Subjectivity*—that lofty philosophical word for the experiential condition of being a person—amounts to the weaving together of the inner and outer, the intrinsic and the extrinsic, the personal and the impersonal. The premise of psychoanalysis is that this weaving can be interpreted and discoursed upon, just as the premise of much humanistic scholarship is that any text can.<sup>78</sup> (*Text*: from the Latin *textus* “style or texture of a work,” literally “thing woven,” from the past participle stem of *texere* “to weave, to join, fit together”).

It’s tempting to think interpretation looks like unweaving. A number of bread-and-butter knowledge-making activities instruct that any text can be read closely by isolating its most elemental words or notes or brushstrokes—the idea being that understanding its composition will tell us about its meaning. This method has good uses, but nonetheless the study of people runs it head-on into its limit, for although people can be read closely and their most elemental components, the inner and the outer, can be identified, those components cannot really be isolated.

Clinical psychoanalysis faces this challenge through the dynamic relationship between the analyst and the analysand, the doctor and the patient, which usually takes for granted that not all of a patient’s interior world is, or is representable in terms of, language or narrative, and that analysis therefore must rely on the meanings made in the dance of transference and countertransference.<sup>79</sup> So let me be as clear as possible in stating that this clinical method is not mine: I am not, nor would I ever claim to be, a practicing analyst—Nina Simone’s or anyone else’s. Nor did I ever meet her, see her in person, or share space with her. Any relation between Simone and me is and will have to remain a fantasy of mine.

Instead, I am approaching Simone much as I have approached many of the other historical objects I have written about in my erstwhile career as a book historian—and, I would wager, much as many historians, literary critics, and other scholars who study texts approach their objects, and their fantasies of them, as well. The unusual challenge here is that my object was also a subject, a person. Accordingly, the main difference between this study and others I have elsewhere attempted isn’t in approach so much as in, as it were, the final analysis: how well defended any interpretations of Simone can be.<sup>80</sup>

It’s true that a person is a weaving together of psychic experience and social or ideological signs, yet equally true that the meaningfulness of that relation does not depend on their being disentangled—often, in fact, depends on their *not* being disentangled.

How can we understand people if we can't unweave the ways they have been woven together? At some level, of course, we can't. There are things about other people that will always remain theirs, irreducible to them. There is a level of precision at which our knowledge of others rarely if ever arrives, because people are so unavoidably different from each other.<sup>81</sup> However, there are also aspects of other people that approximate aspects of our own experience and understanding, aspects about which we can therefore make solid guesses, thanks to some well-practiced tools like sense, observation, empathy, imagination. What results is a level at which our knowledge of others is approximate, general, but still accurate. How can we understand people if we can't take them apart in the ways they have been put together? We can commit to accuracy without precision. We can know *something*.

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ANOTHER WORD FOR *something* might be *symptom*. The latter word belongs to a storied Marxist tradition, at the center of which sat Louis Althusser in the first months of 1965, reading *Capital* with students at the École Normale Supérieure, not only between the covers of Marx's volume but also, as he writes in the introduction to the book this seminar fostered, "transparently, in the dramas and dreams of our history."<sup>82</sup> Althusser's poetic opening prefigures the method of symptomatic reading that subsequent pages of his book develop, a reading that "divulges the undivulged event in the text it reads, and in the same movement relates it to a *different text*, present as a necessary absence in the first."<sup>83</sup> Symptomatic reading pursues a method of identifying these undivulged events—also called "lacunae"—in the text before rereading the same text again in their terms, a "second reading [that] presupposes the existence of *two texts*, and the measurement of the first against the second. But what distinguishes this new reading from the old one is the fact that in the new one the *second text* is articulated with the lapses in the first text."<sup>84</sup>

Symptomatic reading in Althusser's sense is not, as it is sometimes mistaken to be, the more general operation of uncovering meanings that are "hidden, repressed, deep, and in need of detection and disclosure by an interpreter"; its energy, rather, is more dialectical, a way of holding space for what history could not yet articulate, the future world that the present contains inchoate.<sup>85</sup> When Althusser writes of *meaning*, he does not use the usual French noun *sens* or the verb *signifier*; rather, the phrase translated as *meaning* is *vouloir dire*, literally, what the text *wants to say*.<sup>86</sup> Symptomatic reading holds the place of something.

There is every indication that Althusser and Simone were unaware of each other, even though it happens that she made her first tour of Europe in the summer of 1965 shortly after Althusser's seminar on *Capital* wound down. And though this coincidence may invite idle speculation as to the time, street, or café in which they could have brushed past each other like so many of history's strangers, it nevertheless remains the case that it was not Althusser who brought Simone to Marx, but Lorraine Hansberry. By all accounts the friendship between these two women was significant for each of them, and by Simone's own account, she and Hansberry "never talked about men or clothes or other such inconsequential things when we got together. It was always Marx, Lenin and revolution—real girls' talk."<sup>87</sup>

Citations to this last line appear endlessly in the scholarship on both Simone and Hansberry, and the line itself ranks easily among the most quoted



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"Singing in small group with  
Lorraine Hansberry and Nina  
Simone" (1963). Music Division,  
New York Public Library.

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that Simone ever wrote, spoke, or sang. Its arch irony is perhaps one reason that it attracts the attention of scholars, as the discourse for which Marx and Lenin synecdochically stand by nearly no other account goes by the name “girls’ talk.” The fact that nevertheless this discourse was what these two “girls” talked about—the fact, in other words, whereby Simone’s quip at once holds open and collapses the space between what is and what could be—suggests that we may be proximate to a scene of fantasy.

Or, likely, more than one. Simone’s fantasies may be here, but so may fantasies attached to and projected on Simone. The scholarly repetition of the line rereads Simone’s fantasy wish, identifying the contradiction between “Marx, Lenin and revolution” and “girls’ talk,” and so marking the present absence that Simone’s irony (creates, yes, but mainly) suspends. This abundance of quotation, in other words, performs an aggregative kind of symptomatic reading as it holds space for a future where “Marx, Lenin and revolution” would actually be the stuff of “girls’ talk.” Insofar as our present is not yet that future, quoting the line may also perform something of the scholars’ own wishes to turn Simone’s irony a few degrees closer toward truth by holding on to her initial fantasy and perpetuating it, making it last through our acts of citation, iteration, and, quite possibly, pleasure. The fact that when we’re done, the dialectical turn isn’t complete, and Simone’s irony has not alchemically transformed into accuracy, doesn’t make it not true, not meaningful. It still means *something*.

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*FANTASIES OF NINA SIMONE* unfolds three closely related arguments. The first follows from a fairly straightforward historical observation. Beginning about 1968, the substance of Nina Simone's performance and recording material shifted away from early twentieth-century songbook standards, folk ballads, and jazz covers, as performed by an array of artists, and toward rearrangements and covers of songs by contemporary artists (including George Harrison, the Bee Gees, Randy Newman, Leonard Cohen, Pete Seeger, and especially Bob Dylan), nearly all of whom were white men. This shift takes place in adjacency to climactic moments in the mid-twentieth-century struggle for civil rights; in proximity to the dissolution of Simone's marriage to her second husband and full-time manager, Andy Stroud; and on the approach to the height of the international fame she achieved in her lifetime. My interpretation of this shift will be that Simone was exploring something about voice and authority, something about speaking to and through the power that adheres in race and gender privilege. Following quickly on these developments, beginning about 1971, her work evolves again, toward exploring Caribbean, African, and Afro-diasporic music, imagery, and sound (including a new emphasis on percussion, significant covers of three songs by Exuma, and multiple tributes to Bob Marley). I interpret all these shifts in her performance and recording material as fantasmatic expressions of her wanting—attempts at pursuing *something*.<sup>88</sup> For reasons that should already be clear, the emphasis will be on the act of exploration, not what it leads to. This first argument concentrates into the sections of this book titled "Covering," "1972," and "Obeah."

Second, this study makes a historiographical argument. In the past two decades or so, and as we have already begun to see, Simone has been the subject of an astonishing number of rereleased, remastered, and remixed albums and compilations, as well as biographies; films; cameos in theater, television, and fiction; scholarly studies; sound and music samples; multimedia citations; and a small cottage industry of artisanal crafts (shirts, pillows, posters, mugs, pins, keychains) sold and traded on websites like eBay and Etsy. Nearly all of these texts—here the previously mentioned example from *Insecure* is typical—identify Simone as a black woman, a powerful symbol of black womanhood, and, especially, an antecedent, as someone ahead of her time, as someone whose time has finally come. That is to say, I interpret these contemporary texts about Simone too as expressing fantasies, ones that allow them to locate themselves in the present by anchoring race and gender identities and related forms of social power in a usable past. The necessity

and meaningfulness of these contemporary fantasies is not up for debate, but the following pages seek to unpack and understand the discrepancies between our contemporary fantasies of Nina Simone and Nina Simone's own historical fantasies of Nina Simone. Or, to put the issue in more concrete terms, these pages aim to sit with the likelihood that Nina Simone, in the wake of any number of significant personal setbacks, didn't have among her historically available resources a Nina Simone T-shirt to help set and sustain the atmosphere of her mood. This second, historiographical argument, then, will gather significance in this story from its tension with the first, historical argument. It is most clearly highlighted in the sections of this book titled "Audience" and "Fantasies."

The third argument frames both the historical and the historiographical points, and it concerns interpretation. Fantasies are meaningful—in the most basic sense, they contain something, and what they contain is usually significant somehow, more than incidental—but it would not be correct to insist that knowing what a fantasy *means* is necessary to its significance. Fantasies can be unconscious, unrealized, dreamed, misrecognized, denied, disavowed, or simply forgotten, all without mattering less for it. Armed with a meaningfulness whose precise meaning may be unavoidably obscure, fantasies can upset the more positivist or even descriptive claims about *what happened* that historically minded scholars and biographers tend to want to be able to make. Fantasy thereby differs from a lot of scholarly knowledge in that for scholarly knowledge to count as knowledge it must typically be social, shared. In the realm of knowledge we often speak of *explanation, demonstration, interpretation*. In the realm of fantasy, these things don't apply in the same ways. This third argument sustains the most focus in the early section of this book titled "Biography" but is threaded throughout.

These three arguments make up the backbone of *Fantasies of Nina Simone*, but by design they do not drive this study at a page-by-page level. The pace and motive of these pages are instead exploratory, and their aim is to raise questions, develop associations, and consider possible connections in the ranging and arguable evidence of another person's life and work. Nothing here is meant to be the last word on Nina Simone or anything else, and the success of this writing should be measured by whether some of what it suggests helps animate more sustained investigations down the road.

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LASTLY, A NOTE on the form, which, you have probably begun to notice, fragments the larger narrative into chunks of varying length, grouped by theme. This chunkiness tries to capture something about the ways that fantasy's value is sustaining without necessarily being durational, even though these fragments do, by design, add up to a longer narrative, a larger interpretation, or rather a series of them. Nonetheless, it seemed worthwhile to pursue a short form that "gesture[s] to the so-much-more out there," that doesn't hide in the template of three or five chapters of six thousand to eight thousand words, each chapter with a coherent argument, a roughly equal number of endnotes, and a frame that disputes another critic or else claims fidelity to a grand theorist.<sup>89</sup> Such generic parameters serve a purpose, but one that is not identical to, and may not indeed be conducive toward, the present study's goal of trying to hold meaningfulness without trying to resolve exactly what it might mean. Therefore, it felt important to clear some space in this writing at a formal level, which would let interpretations more organically assume their size and shape instead of deciding long in advance which confines would make them legible. Imagine, if you will, that the form of these narrative chunks demonstrates an approach.

The stakes of this approach follow from the fact that if fantasy is psychically inevitable and unconsciously omnipresent for all people, that would include this author, me; and if fantasy bears ambivalence and contradiction, that would include this writing, mine. One contention behind the formal choices in *Fantasies of Nina Simone* is that even highly successful, generically normative works of scholarship and criticism are nonetheless domains in which fantasy successfully holds together subjective contradictions, though with the result of often making the presence of fantasy disappear.<sup>90</sup> The goal of writing in a formally nonstandard way is to see what happens when one makes that invisible labor visible.

The periodic recourse to first person in these pages likewise marks my attempt to call out some of how, when, and where my own scenes of fantasy get imposed on the fantasies already, inevitably lodged in the archive. It accordingly feels relevant to acknowledge at the outset that the lived experience of being black is not mine, that there are things about Nina Simone I can see but things I don't or couldn't or, more to the point, things that are not mine to see. Said the other way around, undoubtedly my own personal contradictions and the fantasies that resolve them are part of what led me to gravitate toward and identify with the moments in Nina Simone's life and career

where she gravitates toward, arguably identifies with, but in any case gives voice to, kinds of power and authority that don't line up with the social consequences of her biographical accidents, either.<sup>91</sup> Part of my fantasy of Nina Simone, part of what I slowly realized I was trying to write my way into, was an identification with her own proclivity for cross-racial and cross-gendered identifications.<sup>92</sup> If this announcement makes you, the reader, feel as though you're being held hostage by my, the writer's, ego, the point here is something like: that would have been true even if I had not announced as much. It is a curious thing that academic writing often seems most self-indulgent at the moments it is being honest about its motives.

Be that as it may, and despite this awareness of my positionality as a writer, this writing proceeds with the assumption that what's true about me in this case is likely true about people who aren't me too: that what's at stake in any of our fantasies of Nina Simone is us as much as her. Our desire to know another person—to be adjacent to them, to be intimate with them, to listen to them, to celebrate them, to recover them, to narrate them, or even to condemn them—tangles them with us in complicated (sometimes mutual, sometimes very one-sided) fantasies. The point of what follows is not to speak for Nina Simone; rather, it is to understand how, among Nina Simone's many other gifts, she has become someone who enables us to speak for ourselves.

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## SOMETHING

- 1 Coates, "Nina Simone's Face"; Brooks, "'Ain't Got No/I Got Life.'"
- 2 Here and throughout I have learned from Vaillant, *Adaptation to Life*.
- 3 Brown, "'What Has Happened Here,'" 297.
- 4 On the longer history, see, for starters, Davis, *Women, Race, and Class*; Carby, *Reconstructing Womanhood*; Wright, *Black Girlhood in the Nineteenth Century*; Field and Simmons, *Global History of Black Girlhood*.
- 5 *We* is meant as a figure, not an assertion. *We* is used here and in what follows to evoke patterns and behaviors that are associated with or resulting from unconscious process, as broadly construed within psychoanalytic theories. It seemed meaningful to build in a rhetorical *we* because identification is a big part of the story that follows. At the same time that *we* presumes shared aspects of human consciousness, it is my view that there is no such thing as a universal subject, and so *we* will not be used to describe what I am able to recognize as historically contingent or culturally specific positions.
- 6 E.g., Brun-Lambert, *Nina Simone*, 87; Hagan, "I Wish I Knew How It Felt to Be Free," 11.
- 7 My sense that fantasy happens at the unconscious level is consistent with canonical psychoanalytic understandings, from Freud to Laplanche, as elaborated later in this section. However, my sense that unconscious fantasy is expressive—that its expression is not just mental or affective but also expressive in social action, including creativity—is informed by the account put forth by Michael Balint, who posits the existence of a "creative" area of the mind, in which mental constructs he designates as "pre-objects" become the mental constructs more conventionally designated as objects. The dynamics of the creative area are distinct from that of the Oedipal (where three figures compete) and the transference (where two figures engage) but are also not precisely the place where one is alone. This study shares in Balint's assumption that "it is probable that more primitive interactions—congenial to the level of the basic fault and of creation—take place all the time" (Balint, *Basic Fault*, 25).

- 8 Lauren Berlant: "Statements are fantasy in drag" ("Poisonality," 451).
- 9 Nina Simone, "Please Read Me," *Nuff Said!* (RCA, 1968).
- 10 It's perhaps worth noting, though, that fantasy has rarely commanded an entire volume in the psychoanalytic literature, perhaps because the kinds of problems that send patients into therapy are almost always ones for which fantasy isn't a strong enough solution. One major exception is Hanna Segal's attempt to supplement Freudian metapsychology with a Kleinian-inflected account of unconscious fantasy that "Freud never worked out in full" (*Dream, Phantasy, and Art*, 16). Many of Segal's examples are drawn from her own clinical practice, though, again, fantasy is not for these patients the presenting symptom.
- 11 Most of this psychoanalytic scaffolding will happen in this book's endnotes, however, in an effort to keep the focus on Simone. In these notes there will be a lot of Freud, plus some of the British post-Freudians who pull in the direction of what became object relations and attachment theory, some nods to the twentieth-century French "linguistic" tradition, as well as psychoanalytically inflected scholars of other things, like Frantz Fanon and Hortense Spillers. The range of reference, in other words, is eclectic, a nonsystematicity that I justify with the fact that eclecticism is a much vaunted orientation within clinical psychoanalytic practice. For a particularly lucid testament to this effect, see McWilliams, *Psychoanalytic Psychotherapy*, 20–23. I've also learned a lot from Luepnitz, "Thinking in the Space between Winnicott and Lacan."
- 12 Freud, "Negation." One way to understand the difference here is as between an unknown (a negative, something that was never there) and something forgotten (a positive, an absent presence).
- 13 There are many reasons, however, why the latter fantasies can be difficult to pin down, and I can tell you right now that I do not know and won't try to guess at the truth of who Simone was. This study instead falls back on the assumption that the person who called herself Nina Simone carried through her days that mess of only partially expressible processes, memories, interests, and motivations that Freud taught us to call the unconscious. Presumably, like that of all people, Simone's psychic life was animated by the ruthless, unfiltered, and ambidextrous force called desire, and, also like those of all people, her desires were hewn by the mechanism called fantasy. I'll elaborate a method for interpretation later, but no matter the methods in play, I want these interpretations to be ethically sound. For any claims I make about what Simone may have thought or felt or fantasized, I'll offer evidence and approach it with care. When it comes to the unconscious, nobody gets the last word, least of all me.
- 14 "Fresh-like," episode 3.4 of *Insecure* (dir. Stella Meghie, 2018, HBO).
- 15 The precise definitions of *emotion* and *affect* are matters of some ongoing debate, but within modern psychology the latter term at least broadly refers to a postcognitive but largely involuntary somatic response; affects register in the body, in response to stimuli, but they are not necessarily expressive or social. Anger, for example, might be my affective response to, say, a frustration. My body might register anger through a clenched jaw, a frown, a reddening of

the face, an increase in blood pressure. I can have an anger response without being conscious of it or without being able to communicate it to another person with any self-awareness. The ability on my part to recognize, identify, interpret, communicate, or perhaps disguise my affect would belong to the realm of emotion. Rei Terada provides an elegant summary of this distinction: “By *emotion* we usually mean a psychological, at least minimally interpretive experience whose physiological aspect is *affect*. *Feeling* is a capacious term that connotes both physiological sensations (affects) and psychological states (emotions)” (*Feeling in Theory*, 4). More expansively, Jonathan Flatley writes, “Where *emotion* suggest something that happens inside and tends toward outward expression, *affect* indicates something relational and transformative. One *has* emotions; one is affected *by* people or things” (*Affective Mapping*, 12 [all emphases in original]).

The confusion of terms is at least in part a problem of inheritance. The Latin noun *affectus* can be translated as “affect,” but also “emotion,” “passion,” or less exactly “mood.” It can also be translated as “affection” or “fondness” or even “goodwill,” suggesting a generally positive connotation that makes it an inappropriate descriptor for the parts of contemporary affect theory that now go by the names “negative affects” or “ugly feelings.” Meanwhile, the Latin verb form *afficere*, legible in the French *affecter* and the English verb *to affect*, connotes a pervious state, to be susceptible to influence (as in Flatley’s definition, earlier in this note). A similar pervious sense adheres in the most influential classical account of emotion, Aristotle’s *Rhetoric*, where the preferred term is *pathos* (πάθος), sometimes translated as “suffering.” For a useful guide to the evolution of these terms, see Rorty, “Explaining Emotions.” Teresa Brennan surveys the meaning of negative affects in Egyptian, Hebrew, and early Christian writings in *The Transmission of Affect*, 97–115. On “ugly feelings,” see Ngai, *Ugly Feelings*. Little of this scholarship theorizes how processes of racialization inform structures of feeling; on this point, see Hong, *Minor Feelings*, esp. 56–57. Gregory J. Seigworth and Carolyn Pedwell map out the terminology of related but nonidentical genealogies for affect (*affectio/affectus/immanence*) in “A Shimmer of Inventories,” though they also thoughtfully refuse to resolve the differences: “One of the lingering side-effects of spending serious time wandering in and through ‘the affective’ is its capacity to render the act of theorization itself (whatever its basis) haptic, multi-sensory, synesthetic” (10).

16 Berlant, *Female Complaint*, 160.

17 Fantasy, writes Lauren Berlant, is a “way to move through the uneven field of our ambivalent attachments to our sustaining objects, which possess us and thereby dispossess us of our capacity to idealize ourselves or them as consistent or benign simplicities”; it is “about the plotting of intensities that hold up a world that the unconscious deems worth living in” (*Desire/Love*, 69, 72). Similarly, Joan Wallach Scott advocates consideration of “fantasy as a formal mechanism for the articulation of scenarios that are at once historically specific in their representation and details and transcendent of historical specificity” (*Fantasy of Feminist History*, 49).

- 18 Fantasy, Dariack Scott helpfully reminds us, names “both the process and its product” (*Keeping It Real*, 10).
- 19 Winnicott, *Home Is Where We Start From*, 107. While Winnicott stresses the relational nature of subjectivity and the crucial role that fantasy plays for individual development, the psychic relationality of fantasy—the ways we relate to one another’s fantasies, or our own fantasies of what those might be—is more strongly articulated in Berlant, *On the Inconvenience of Other People*, and in other of Berlant’s work, cited throughout.
- 20 On the distinction between manifest and latent content in dream interpretation, see Freud, *Interpretation of Dreams*, esp. 311–85.
- 21 Laplanche and Pontalis, *Language of Psychoanalysis*, s.v. “Phantasy.” Kant’s discussion appears in his writings on transcendental deduction; see *Critique of Pure Reason*, esp. 219–66.
- 22 Laplanche and Pontalis, *Language of Psychoanalysis*, s.v. “Phantasy.”
- 23 Segal, *Dream, Phantasy, and Art*, 16.
- 24 Debates about the significant historical and moral argument about Freud’s “seduction theory”—the argument outlined in his paper “The Aetiology of Hysteria” (1896) that hysterical symptoms were a result of sexual abuse (that is, violence inflicted on the child from an external source), a position he later abandoned in favor of the idea of imaginary seductions that take place in unconscious fantasy (that are, as it were, inflicted by an internal source)—exceed the scope of the present argument. Freud discussed this change of position in a letter to Wilhelm Fliess dated September 21, 1897 (in *Complete Letters of Sigmund Freud to Wilhelm Fliess*, 264–67), a shift that is widely taken to be a key point for the development of psychoanalysis. When a new English translation of this letter came to light in the 1980s, it was the subject of a public reckoning due to Jeffrey Moussaieff Masson’s dramatic account in *The Assault on Truth*. Among the many responses was Janet Malcolm’s *New Yorker* profile of Masson, “Trouble in the Archives,” expanded into *In the Freud Archives*.
- 25 “Repetition,” writes Berlant, “is what enables you to recognize, even unconsciously, your desire as a quality of yours” (*Desire/Love*, 20). Freud’s best-known theorization appears in “Remembering, Repeating, and Working-Through.” But repetition is a major motif in much post-Freudian thought as well.
- 26 Belcourt, *History of My Brief Body*, 81.
- 27 “The first wishing seems to have been a hallucinatory cathecting of the memory of satisfaction” (Freud, *Interpretation of Dreams*, 637).
- 28 Freud, *Introductory Lectures on Psycho-Analysis*, 419. Strachey’s translation captures the pathos of Freud’s German but not the compassion: “Es ist kein Zweifel, daß das Verweilen bei den Wunscherfüllungen der Phantasie eine Befriedigung mit sich bringt, obwohl das Wissen, es handle sich nicht um Realität, dabei nicht getrübt ist,” more literally rendered into English: “There is no doubt that dwelling on the wish-fulfillments of the fantasy brings with it a satisfaction, although the knowledge that it is not about reality is not thereby clouded” (Freud, *Vorlesungen zur Einführung in die Psychoanalyse*, 416).

- 29 Freud tended to use the word in compound nouns, as in primal scene (*Urszene*) or scene of seduction (*Verführungsszene*). The former term is theorized in "From the History of an Infantile Neurosis," the so-called Wolf-Man case. For the latter term, see *Complete Letters of Sigmund Freud to Wilhelm Fliess*.
- 30 Laplanche and Pontalis, *Language of Psychoanalysis*, s.v. "Phantasy." See also Laplanche and Pontalis, "Fantasy and the Origins of Sexuality."
- 31 Kaplan, "Thorn Birds," 149, 150.
- 32 Abraham and Torok, "Poetics of Psychoanalysis."
- 33 Rose, *States of Fantasy*, 5.
- 34 Scott, *Fantasy of Feminist History*, 51.
- 35 There are props too—Melanie Klein calls them phantasmatic objects or "part-objects." See, for example, "Oedipus Complex in the Light of Early Anxieties," 408–9. The quiddity of the Kleinian object was important to Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick's attempts to pivot queer theory away from representation and toward affect. See "Melanie Klein and the Difference Affect Makes," esp. 629. See also Green, *Fabric of Affect in Psychoanalytic Discourse*, 184–85.
- 36 On the "loosening" of attachments, see Berlant, *On the Inconvenience of Other People*, 27–29.
- 37 Berlant, *Desire/Love*, 70.
- 38 Berlant, *Desire/Love*, 69–70.
- 39 A coherent self, or a broken one, the acknowledgment of whose condition the ego cannot abide. Fantasy thus occupies a place in Heinz Kohut's theorization of narcissism, a condition whose extreme forms develop in relation to deprivations, and whose subjects often use fantasy as a compensatory space for staging various kinds of scenes that deny deprivation, including grandiosity, self-satisfaction, and other enlivenments. See *Search for the Self*, esp. 427–60. More generally, see Berlant: "recognition is the misrecognition you can bear" (*Cruel Optimism*, 26).
- 40 Laplanche and Pontalis, *Language of Psychoanalysis*, s.v. "Phantasy."
- 41 Freud, *Five Lectures on Psycho-Analysis*, 36.
- 42 Given these working definitions of fantasy, there won't be much to say in what follows about Jacques Lacan's writings, which generally privilege desire in psychic life and dismiss fantasy as a defense against desire. For the curious: Lacan, in his fourth seminar (1956–57), understood fantasy as defensive posture, screening the threat of castration (*Object Relation*). By the eighth seminar (1960–61), he spoke of the "fundamental fantasy" against which all of a subject's myriad expressions were defenses, and he argued that the work of the analyst was to traverse the fundamental fantasy, to expose to the analyst what this subject was organized to avoid, modifying the subject's mode of defense and also its mode of jouissance (*Transference*). By the fourteenth seminar (1966–67), titled "The Logic of Fantasy," Lacan, riffing off Benedict de Spinoza's claim in the *Ethics* that "desire is the essence of man [cupiditas est ipsa hominis essential]," argues that "desire is the essence of reality [*le désir, c'est l'essence de la réalité*]" and that fantasy becomes one of the ways we veer away from reality (*Le séminaire livre XIV*, 6).

Lacanian fantasy is a tall order. Saying so does not mean Lacan's theories are without value—I elaborate the opposite view in *Avidly Reads Theory*, 99–124—but it's worth noting for the present discussion that Lacan's place in literary theory is considerably greater than his place in contemporary clinical analytic practice, at least in the United States. For forceful attempts to reconcile Lacan with black studies, see Marriott, *Lacan Noir*, and Edelman, *Bad Education*, esp. 1–34.

- 43 The most magisterial history of this concept remains Robinson, *Black Marxism*. For a succinct summary, see Melamed, “Racial Capitalism.” The entwined histories of race and modernity, including global capitalism, are powerfully articulated in Mbembe, *Critique of Black Reason*. In addition to those of many of the works cited in what follows, I’m indebted to the analyses in Puar, *Right to Maim*.
- 44 It may be worth stressing here that fantasy is not the only juncture where history meets the unconscious. For one, Jean Laplanche theorizes that unconscious expressions by adults (e.g., a shift in tone or mood, body language, alterations in the firmness or pressure of a touch) are registered by infants in rudimentary ways as meaningful, and that this meaningfulness can become introjected as the child develops, despite the inevitable gap between the meaning the child unconsciously ascribes and the meaning the adult may unconsciously have expressed. Laplanche calls these expressions “enigmatic signifiers” and describes the process of their communication as “translated” from adult to infant (*New Foundations for Psychoanalysis*, 45, 130–31). Such a process can account for a subject’s impossible-to-fully-uproot internalization of historical and social phenomena like homophobia or racism. One can also locate junctures where history meets in the unconscious in more sociological terms, for example, in the personal-historical conjunction of Kathleen Stewart’s “ordinary affects,” defined as “public feelings that begin and end in broad circulation, but they are also the stuff that seemingly intimate lives are made of” (*Ordinary Affects*, 2).
- 45 Spillers et al., “‘Whatcha Gonna Do?’” 300. In a related though more focused critique, Jennifer C. Nash argues that in the United States the field of women’s studies is “organized around the symbol of the black woman, even as the field retains little interest in the materiality of black women’s bodies, the complexities of black women’s experiences, or the heterogeneity of black women’s intellectual and creative production” (*Black Feminism Reimagined*, 3–4).
- 46 Spillers et al., “‘Whatcha Gonna Do?’” 302.
- 47 The secondary literature on black women as medical subjects is extensive, and the following list represents points of departure only. On anatomy, see Fausto-Sterling, “Gender, Race, and Nation.” On gynecology, see Owens, *Medical Bondage*. On genetics, see Skloot, *Immortal Life of Henrietta Lacks*. On nineteenth-century environmental sciences, see Schuller, *Biopolitics of Feeling*.
- 48 On the perennial “lack of fit between discourse and example,” see Spivak, *Outside in the Teaching Machine*, 28.
- 49 Sharpe, *Ordinary Notes*, 97.
- 50 Abbot, “What Do Cases Do?”; Berlant, “On the Case.”

- 51 Terada, *Metaracial*.
- 52 What's an archive? Good question: I use the term here to mean (1) a physical or metaphoric location of artifacts or objects, frequently noncirculating or not commonly circulating, on the basis of which one can make historical claims; and (2) the same, but as a site where consciously or not meaning gets made. In that second sense, Ann Laura Stoler has done perhaps the most to get scholars to think about the "distribution of sentiments" and the emotional textures of archival constitution (*Along the Archival Grain*, 58). Arlette Farge's *Allure of Archives*, while published quite a bit earlier than Stoler's work (1989) was translated into English later (2015). See also Arondekar, *For the Record*, which draws on the influential account laid out in Derrida, *Archive Fever*; and for elaborations of Derrida's argument that lead back in the direction of my working definition number 1, see Steedman, *Dust*; Fleming, *Cultural Graphology*. On archival longing, see Singh, *No Archive Will Restore You*. For useful challenges to the presumptively evidentiary quality of my working definition number one, see Vogel, *Scene of Harlem Cabaret* (esp. 104–7); Edwards, "Taste of the Archive." While all of these accounts are thinking about human emotion in relation to the constitution of archives and what is subsequently found in them, only Derrida lays emphasis on the unconscious *per se*.
- 53 Preservation plans for Simone's childhood home at 30 East Livingston Street, in Tryon, North Carolina, are discussed in a later section, "Fantasies."
- 54 *What Happened, Miss Simone?* (dir. Liz Garbus, Netflix, 2015).
- 55 "All #BlackLivesMatter. This Is Not a Moment, but a Movement," accessed January 8, 2024, <https://web.archive.org/web/20150109182206/http://blacklivesmatter.com/about>.
- 56 Garza, "Herstory of the #BlackLivesMatter Movement."
- 57 Khan-Cullors and Bandele, *When They Call You a Terrorist*, 200.
- 58 For a moving meditation on this predicament, see Quashie, *Black Aliveness*.
- 59 For a development of this claim in relation to black studies, see Stein, "Present Waver."
- 60 Spivak, "Psychoanalysis in Left Field and Fieldworking."
- 61 Wynter, "Unsettling the Coloniality of Being/Power/Truth/Freedom," 282.
- 62 Wynter, "Unsettling the Coloniality of Being/Power/Truth/Freedom," 317.
- 63 Wynter, "Unsettling the Coloniality of Being/Power/Truth/Freedom," 331; Wynter, "No Humans Involved," 66–67.
- 64 Weheliye, *Habeas Viscus*, 2. Zakiyyah Iman Jackson conceptualizes the problem similarly: "Antiblackness has also been diasporically challenged and refused, making it central to what comprises the very notion of the African diaspora and of blackness. It is precisely *through* rather than *against* historically demarcated regional, national, linguistic, and state preoccupations that this discourse cyclically reorganizes itself" (*Becoming Human*, 19). In a related argument, C. Riley Snorton has theorized that fungible flesh can become the basis for fugitive actions and possibilities (*Black on Both Sides*, 55–97).
- 65 I'm a longtime reader of early Derrida, which has oriented my thinking about phenomena toward self-difference; I value the apprehension of the self in

phenomenological terms, and the kinds of psychoanalysis I'm drawn to and that I draw on tend in this direction. Those are my cards, and now they're on the table.

Such an orientation is compatible with but arguably contrasts one through line in much recent and influential work in black studies, which has been around the question of ontology. Black studies, as Fred Moten cogently argues, sets as its task "the critique of Western civilization" ("Black Op," 1743). Blackness often designates the limit of what is possible in this domain, and so, by this line of thinking, it would be the attempt to ascertain the nature of that limit, its character and contour, its properties and contents, that sends black studies toward ontology. Rightly or wrongly, I register this interest in ontology as well in the coordinates of black studies that argue the point from the other direction, identifying not (or not just) blackness as the limit of Western civilization, but antiblackness as its structuring condition. Thus, as Frank B. Wilderson III argues, "Afro-pessimists are theorists of Black positionality who share Fanon's insistence that, though Blacks are indeed sentient beings, the structure of the entire world's semantic field . . . is sutured by anti-Black solidarity" (*Red, White, and Black*, 58); or again, in Calvin L. Warren's assertion that "the form of antiblackness might alter, but antiblackness itself will remain a constant—despite the power of our imaginations and political yearnings" (*Ontological Terror*, 3).

I recognize antiblackness as historical and social, embedded in institutions and reproduced unconsciously, and in these ways as pervasive and often apparently intractable. Christina Sharpe's generative metaphor "the weather is the total climate; and that climate is antiblack" helpfully envisions antiblackness as a condition in which we all exist (*In the Wake*, 104). But I think her claim's power and efficacy has to do with the fact that it is a metaphor, not a causal or necessarily a metaphysical claim. And though many interdisciplinary scholars now do use "ontology" to encompass relational or subjective aspects of the world including knowledge and perception (more traditionally treated by epistemology and phenomenology, respectively), my sense is that there are other ways of apprehending relation that may have still broader applicability. The turn to fantasy in these pages is a way of smudging the edges of ontological questions.

In general, and at least by comparison with classically ontological questions of priority, identity, or modality, *relation* in psychoanalytic discourse tends to describe contact or interpenetration—it uses words like *consume*, *include*, *enclose*, *incorporate*, *introject*, or *occupy*. These kinds of relations take forms like breastfeeding, fucking, mouthing, metabolizing, learning language or behavior or custom or style as absorbed into your mind, your ear, your eye. (I suppose you could think about these relations as ontologies, but it seems to me that road leads to something like Chomsky-esque universals.) Whatever else fantasy relations are, then, they will tend to function more like a phenomenal incorporation than a relation between two metaphysically distinct entities. Accordingly, part of the heuristic value of fantasy for this study is that it

is pervasive without being total, inevitably just one part of a process by which someone hitches a ride on their way to being something that they aren't yet. We are always in proximity to what we are not yet but might to some extent become, and I presume that this phenomenal reality is what makes possible the invaluable task in which many black studies scholars are engaged, to recuperate some of what antiblackness relegates to the unthought.

Those skeptical of routing concerns from black studies through notions of fantasy, or of psychoanalysis more generally, might consider another route toward a similar conclusion as outlined by Achille Mbembe in the context of a critique of Martin Heidegger's account of ontology: "In ancient African traditions, for example, the point of departure for the questioning of human existence is not the question of being but that of relation, of mutual implication, that is to say of the discovery and the recognition of a different flesh from mine" (*Necropolitics*, 28).

- 66 Wynter's most fascinating discussion of objectivity happens in the context of what she calls the sociogenic principle: "The natural scientific description of the human experience of *sound* as a 'wave phenomenon' provides an extra-human viewpoint description which does not, in any way, negate the reality of the human's *subjective* experiencing of the phenomenon as *sound*, is also able to provide the possibility of an objective description of these two opposed yet parallel qualitative mental states or modes of subjective experience. . . . Unlike the 'common reality' of a wave phenomenon, however, the sociogenic principle is not a natural scientific object of knowledge" ("Towards the Sociogenic Principle," 58–59).
- 67 Ellison, *Invisible Man*, 581.
- 68 Nina Simone, "Sunday in Savannah," *'Nuff Said!* (RCA, 1968).
- 69 Žižek, *Sublime Object of Ideology*, 108.
- 70 Stewart, *Ordinary Affects*, 112.
- 71 Berlant, "'68 or Something," 145.
- 72 Balint, *Basic Fault*, 25.
- 73 Jameson, "Reification and Utopia in Mass Culture," 142.
- 74 Chambers-Letson, *After the Party*, 8.
- 75 Singh, *The Breaks*, 85.
- 76 Hartman, *Wayward Lives, Beautiful Experiments*, 46.
- 77 Vološinov, *Marxism and the Philosophy of Language*, 39.
- 78 For a lucid account of how psychoanalysts gain evidence of mental process, by way of observations of behavior, context, and detail, see Isaacs, "Nature and Function of Phantasy." Or, as Hortense J. Spillers elaborates, "Inasmuch as classical psychoanalytic practice works to transform symptomaticity into a narrative, I take it that discourse constitutes its primary value. The raced subject in an American context must, therefore, work his way through a *layered* imperative and impediment, which deeply implicates History in any autobiographical itinerary" ("All the Things You Could Be by Now If Sigmund Freud's Wife Was Your Mother," 732). In a generative historiographical move, Tara A. Bynum has recently argued for attention to expressions of personal pleasure,

including in writing, as a means of understanding the interiority of another person (*Reading Pleasures*, esp. 1–4).

- 79 Bollas, *Shadow of the Object*, 9. Transference, an often unconscious but frequently intense emotional investment by the patient or analysand in the analyst, was first theorized by Freud in *Fragment of an Analysis of a Case of Hysteria*, the so-called Dora case, though the phenomenon itself was detected earlier in Freud and Breuer's *Studies on Hysteria*. Freud's accounting for transference in analytic technique was revisited many times over the course of his career, particularly in a series of metapsychological essays, "Dynamics of Transference," "Remembering, Repeating, and Working-Through," and "Observations on Transference-Love."

Subsequent to Freud, transference is widely understood to be central to analytic technique, but the nature, attributes, and ethical best practices associated with psychoanalytic transference are subject to ongoing consideration. The idea that transference could serve as a "working alliance" between analyst and analysand was popularized by Greeson, "Working Alliance and the Transference Neurosis." A history of the concept in analytic practice, particularly the late twentieth-century debates within Freudian circles between Leo Stone and Charles Brenner, is neatly summarized by Malcolm in *Psychoanalysis*, esp. 35–47. My own thinking has been deepened by the theoretical account in Davies, "Erotic Overstimulation and the Co-construction of Sexual Meanings in Transference-Countertransference Experience." On the clinical side, a particularly interesting exploration of the use of the therapist's countertransference can be found in the case studies that constitute Orbach's *Impossibility of Sex*.

- 80 As the book historian-turned-psychoanalyst Ben Kafka writes, "For reasons personal and professional, I am committed to the idea that people are ruled by unconscious processes, which is simply not true of even the most 'agentic' things" (*Demon of Writing*, 14. His citation is to Johnson, *Persons and Things*.

81 Sedgwick, *Epistemology of the Closet*, 22; Pratt, *Stranger's Book*, 7, 81.

82 Althusser and Balibar, *Reading Capital*, 13.

83 Althusser and Balibar, *Reading Capital*, 29 (emphasis retained).

84 Althusser and Balibar, *Reading Capital*, 29 (emphasis retained); on "lacunae" see 19, 28.

85 Best and Marcus, "Surface Reading," 1. See also the account of Althusser detailed in Rooney, "Live Free or Describe."

86 Althusser and Balibar, *Reading Capital*, 16.

87 Simone, *I Put a Spell on You*, 87.

88 This emphasis on shifting contexts for Simone's performance and source material is distinct from, but should not be read as antithetical to, studies that work to embed her performances in thick histories of Afro-diasporic and Afro-American musical expression. See, for example, Herbert, "Rhythm and Blues, 1968–1972"; Bratcher, *Words and Songs of Bessie Smith, Billie Holiday, and Nina Simone*; Barnett, "'Learning How to Listen'"; in the context of music education, see McCall, Davis, Regus, and Dekle, "'To Be Young, Gifted and Black'"

- 89 Tsing, *Mushroom at the End of the World*, viii.  
 90 Berlant, "Genre Flailing."  
 91 I remain intrigued and persuaded by Elizabeth A. Povinelli's account of subjective identifications that proceed without legible identities:

"That's me, I thought, when I saw two women kissing in Santa Fe, New Mexico. "This is me," I thought when I went hunting with a group of women and men from Belyuen [Northern Territory, Australia]. But what is "this" and "that"?—an identity, a mode of life, a form of association? Surely I was hailed in both. But as surely, I was not hailed into an equivalent social form or mode of being. When I said, looking at Codey and Tasha kissing, "That's me," I found waiting at the end of the demonstrative an intelligible identity organized by a language game, widely available to others with whom I interacted. I am gay; this is homosexuality. When I said, "This is me," as I slogged through a dense mangrove with friends from Belyuen cooperatively and competitively looking for mud crabs, what identity dangled at the end of this? . . . But no matter how these nativity scenes overdetermined the identifications that felt like recognition when I first showed up at Belyuen, they do not provide me with an available name for this mode of social being. Nor do I think that they should—that the ethical, political, or social task is to find an identity that can retroactively constitute the truthful name of this mode of life that so rivets me." ("Disturbing Sexuality," 567–68)

- 92 On writing one's way into something, Svetlana Boym offers the term *graphomania* in her study of the copying, list making, and obsessive writing practices of ordinary citizens in post-Soviet Russia (*Common Places*, 168–214), and Kathleen Stewart develops the urgency of the concept, glossing *graphomania* as "the incessant practice of recording the details of the everyday in order to gain access to it" ("Still Life," 412).

#### BIOGRAPHY

- 1 The official album count is thirty-one, though it depends a bit on how you count, since rights for Simone's earliest recordings were not hers and consequently some of these thirty-one albums were released without her control or in some cases even her knowledge. In addition, during Simone's lifetime, nearly two dozen unauthorized or bootleg albums were released. The number of posthumous authorized albums that include previously unreleased material, plus remixes and compilations of previously released material, or some combination, is more than thirty. For those keeping track, all this means that as of the time of this writing, there are north of seventy-five Nina Simone albums in circulation across vinyl, cassette, CD, VHS, DVD, and audio and audiovisual streaming platforms.
- 2 Simone, *I Put a Spell on You*.
- 3 Feldstein, "'I Don't Trust You Anymore,'" esp. 1355–56.