

Floating verses

The American primitive guitarist John Fahey described the Mississippi blues singer Charley Patton, who recorded between 1929 and 1934, as “a pioneer in the externalization, through music, of strange, weird, even ghastly emotional states.” Patton’s lyrics—which toggled between nonsensical and bawdy, delivered in a carnal bark—weren’t entirely his. Like many bluesmen, Patton used what historians call “floating” verses—remembered (or, more likely, half-remembered) bits of other songs, which he picked up on the street, in bed, around a campfire, or in a juke joint, in an era before music was recorded and therefore frozen. Back then, performers were always collectors: of sounds, melodies, grudges, psychic states. The country blues was a wildly inventive idiom, but it was also rooted, like many vernacular traditions, in assemblage.

Musically, Oneohtrix Point Never could not be more distant from the coun-

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