

EAT THE DOCUMENT

Music by John Glover

Libretto by Kelley Rourke

Based on the novel by Dana Spiotta

Directed and developed by Kristin Marting

Mila Henry, Music Director

World Premiere: HERE Arts Center, January 2025

Paul Chwe MinChul An (Henry, Newscaster, Dennis Wilson, Dr. Fieser)

Danielle Buonaiuto (Mary, Caroline, Miranda)

Adrienne Danrich (Mom, Mel, Gabi, Betsy, Rose)

Amy Justman (Louise, Beth, Dana D)

Michael Kuhn (Josh, Commercial Announcer, Pop Genius)

Paul Pinto (Nash)

Tim Russell (Bobby, Jason, Roland)

Natalie Trumm (Sissy, Berry, Kid)

Shayna Dunkelman (Drums)

Michiko Egger (Guitars)

Carrie Frey (Viola)

Mila Henry (Music Director, Piano)

Elena Moon Park (Violin)

Domenic Salerni (Violin)

Andrew Yee (Cello)

In the heyday of the seventies underground, Bobby DeSoto and Mary Whittaker — passionate, idealistic, and in love — design a series of radical protests. When one action goes wrong, the course of their lives is forever changed. The two must erase their past, forge new identities, and never see one another again. Now it is the 1990s. Mary lives in the suburbs with her fifteen-year-old son, Jason, who spends hours immersed in the music of his mother’s generation. She has no idea where Bobby is, whether he is alive or dead. A few towns away, an aging hippie calling himself Nash presides over an anarchist bookstore, drawing the disaffected youth of the next generation into a shifting series of “groups” and “collectives.” Miranda, alone among the kids who frequent the bookstore, takes Nash seriously. Shifting fluidly between the 1970s and the 1990s, *Eat the Document* explores the connection between the two eras — their language, technology, music, and activism.

ARTISTS' NOTE

When Kelley and John first encountered Dana Spiotta's *Eat the Document*, each of them was immediately struck by the novel's operatic potential. The complex and passionate inner lives of the main characters seemed to cry out for music. And in fact, Dana wove references to pop music — commercial hits and deep cuts — through the book. The music that accompanies the characters is as much a part of their identities as their individual responses to the world around them.

One of our great challenges — and delights — in writing this opera was figuring out how to channel the energy of Dana's musical references to create original "pop" songs that sit within the larger musical architecture of the piece. Over a series of workshops, with Mila at the helm, a collection of terrific musicians brought their best "garage band" sensibility and taught us how the songs worked.

Eat the Document is set in the early 1970s and late 1990s, exploring the connection between the two eras — their activism, language, technology, and music. As we considered how to use a small ensemble to portray a variety of characters spanning two distinct time periods, including younger and older versions of two central figures, it was Kristin's idea to put Louise and Nash, the older versions of Mary and Bobby, in conversation with the actors who play younger versions of each other in the 1990s. Thus, young Bobby of 1972 reappears as Louise's son in 1998, while young Mary shows up as Miranda, one of the kids who frequent Nash's bookstore.

Reimagining Dana's multilayered novel as an opera meant leaving behind so many great sentences, scenes and characters. Dana generously gave us the space and freedom we needed to do our work, which inevitably included cuts and confluences. As she pointed out early on, no matter what choices we made, her novel would continue to exist. (If you haven't read the book, we highly recommend it!)

We began work on the opera in 2019, a time when its conversations around activism felt almost unbearably relevant. In the time since then, each day's news has brought fresh horror — a global pandemic, fighting in Ukraine and Gaza, mass shootings that have become an everyday occurrence, the widening chasm between rich and poor. How do we exist within a broken system? What obligation — and what power — does any individual have to confront and change systems that lead to suffering? *Eat the Document* examines a kaleidoscope of responses and their potential effects: intended and accidental, positive and negative, political and personal, immediate and ever-unfolding.

Kelley, John, Kristin and Mila
January 2025

LIBRETTO

Prologue: A young person begins a protest song (“No More”) and is joined by others. Bobby and Mary emerge from the ensemble and discuss precautions they must take as they plan a radical action against the Vietnam War. As the song continues, Henry, a Vietnam vet, relives a traumatic memory.

1. No More

HENRY

A butterfly beats her wings
A storm gathers on a far-off shore
A mild-mannered man in a white lab coat
Manipulates a spore

They say we’ve never been so productive
They say weapons can deter a war
They say prosperity trickles down
Till a lone voice cries, “No more”

And the voice becomes a chorus
And the song becomes a roar
No more, no more, no more

ENSEMBLE

No more, no more, no more

HENRY

When money’s a form of speech
It’s easy to silence the poor
It’s easy to let it all slip past

ENSEMBLE

Till a lone voice cries, “No more”

BOBBY

You are no longer Mary from the suburbs
You are Freya from the edge

MARY

Will you call me Mary
When we're home in bed, at least?

BOBBY

Only Freya
And you have to call me Marco
Never Bobby
In these sorts of activities
You can't use your real name
If you want to change your life
First you change your name

MARY

A nom de guerre?
Isn't that sort of ridiculous?

BOBBY

All cultures have naming ceremonies
It's how you become an adult
You choose
You decide who you are

MARY

But I didn't choose that name
You did

ENSEMBLE

Acres of orchards are barren
Bodies are covered with sores
And nobody can remember
A time we weren't at war

And the voice becomes a chorus
And the song becomes a roar
No more, no more, no more
No more, no more, no more

HENRY

We are buzzing rice paddies and villages
I can see through the bottom of the plane
The spray of white aerosol trailing behind us
We are aiming for total saturation

ENSEMBLE

And the voice becomes a chorus
And the song becomes a roar
No more, no more, no more
No more, no more, no more

2. It Wasn't Supposed to Go Down That Way

MARY

It wasn't supposed to go down that way

BOBBY

The thing to do
Is get across state lines
As soon as possible

MARY

The house was supposed to be empty

BOBBY

Don't try to contact me
We'll meet at the end of next year
New Year's Eve
Venice Beach

MARY

It wasn't supposed to go down that way

1972: A motel room. Mary is alone onstage. Her hair is freshly cut and dyed. She tries out potential names ("My Name Is Caroline"). Once she has filled in the details of her new identity for herself, she turns on the television and catches the end of a news report, confirming her fears: One person has been killed in a recent bombing attributed to student radicals opposed to the Vietnam War.

3. My Name Is Caroline

MARY

Cheryl

Natalie

Sylvia

Agnes

Blythe

Valerie

How to choose?

Caroline

My name is Caroline

Caroline Sherman

From Hawthorne, California

Had to get out of a bad relationship

No one will question that

Caroline Sherman

From Hawthorne, California

California Social Security numbers start with 546 or 568

568-22-5853

My name is Caroline

I choose

Caroline Sherman

568-22-5853

NEWSCASTER

One person was killed in the blast

Which has been attributed to a group of student radicals

Opposed to the Vietnam War

One suspect, Tamsin Clark

Is currently being held for questioning

Any persons with further information

Are urged to contact their local FBI office

COMMERCIAL ANNOUNCER

It's easy to see why families by the millions are making movies
Home movies remember your happy times
As they really happened
In come-to-life action and gorgeous color

MOM

I had never even held a camera before

KID

Hi, Mom!

MOM

It's easy
Just pop in the cartridge and click a button

COMMERCIAL ANNOUNCER

Your travels, your holidays
your family's growing-up years
You can preserve them all
For as little as a dime a scene
Why not get started this weekend?

CAROLINE

Caroline

My name is Caroline

Caroline Sherman

From Hawthorne, California

BOBBY

You are Freya from the edge

CAROLINE

Caroline

BERRY

Caroline

Right on, right on

NASH
Mary

HENRY
You remind me of someone

CAROLINE
My name is ...

CAROLINE, LOUISE
Louise

WAITRESS
Louise

JOSH
Louise, okay

1998: Mary, now Louise, has a brief exchange with her teenage son, Jason, about his “Garage Sale Finds.” After she exits, Jason plays a record from the 1970s (“On Repeat”) and muses about his mother’s inscrutability.

4. Garage Sale Finds

JASON

Mom, hey

LOUISE

What’s all this, Jason?

JASON

Garage sale

Guy had no idea what he was sitting on

LOUISE

Dinner in 15 minutes, okay?

JASON

Okay

Whoa — 1967

Original pressing

Thirty-one years old

And still pristine

5. On Repeat

POP GENIUS

There are words I mean to say

But the moment slips away

There are deeds I mean to do

But all I know is true

Is when the needle drops

And it finds the groove

The moment feels so sweet

On repeat

On repeat

On repeat
On repeat
On repeat
On repeat
On repeat
On re —

JASON

She always starts with a third of a glass
Then a splash of club soda
Sometimes a twist
What her magazines call
A “wine spritzer”
Then, it’s back to the bottle
Again and again and again

ENSEMBLE

On repeat
On repeat
On repeat
On repeat
On repeat
On repeat
On repeat
On repeat
On repeat
On repeat
On repeat
On re —

1998: Nash leads a meeting at Prairie Fire, an alternative bookstore that serves as a gathering place for counterculture kids a generation younger than himself. Against the backdrop of an anti-capitalist performance (“Unsustainable”), Nash banter with Miranda, an earnest young woman. When Nash opens the floor to “Anyone Else?” Miranda takes her own turn at the mic (“Did It Ever Occur to You”). When the store closes, Nash reflects on his life — few possessions, fewer connections (“Unyielding”).

6. Prairie Fire

SISSY

The Bumbershoot Arts Festival
They’ve gone corporate now

JOSH

I hate books without indexes
I want to know their reference points
See what they are stringing together

HENRY

That stuff affects the metabolism

JOSH

Where they came from

SISSY

The Bumbershoot Arts Festival

HENRY

Overstimulation

SISSY

Plastic wristbands, come on!

HENRY

Annihilation

SISSY

Steel barricades, plastic wristbands
It's unsustainable
We are shutting it down!

HENRY

That stuff affects the metabolism

NASH

I'm calling this meeting to order
August 22, 1998
Any cops or members of the media
Identify yourselves
No?

HENRY

That stuff affects the metabolism

NASH

Okay

HENRY

Overstimulation

NASH

Looks like Sissy's up first

7. Unsustainable

SISSY

Seventeen million species on earth
We think we're the top of the heap
We cultivate a culture of such suffering
And what we sow we shall reap

All those bunnies crowded in cages
So some lady can wear fur on her back
All those hormones and antibiotics

Pumped in cows that become your Big Mac

Unsustainable, it's unsustainable

Unsustainable, it's unsustainable

Unsustainable, we keep making the same mistakes

Unsustainable, it's unsustainable.

Unsustainable, yeah, it's unsustainable

Unsustainable, wake up before it's too late

ENSEMBLE

Yeah, unsustainable

MIRANDA

I hate animal supremacists

NASH

I think they're called animal rights activists

MIRANDA

Yes, fur coats are offensive

But it is because of the cost

Not the animals

Somebody spends \$20,000 on a coat

While there are people

Without food and shelter

That's what's offensive!

ENSEMBLE

Yeah, unsustainable

NASH

I don't much like animals, either

SISSY, ENSEMBLE

Unsustainable, yeah, it's unsustainable

Unsustainable, yeah, it's unsustainable

Unsustainable, it cannot be sustained

Unsustainable, yeah, it's unsustainable

Unsustainable, yeah, it's unsustainable
Unsustainable, wake up before it's too late
Yeah, unsustainable

MIRANDA
What is this group, S-A-F-E?

NASH
I've never actually seen them here before
Scavengers Against Flat Effrontery?

MIRANDA
Or — fatuous effrontery

NASH, MIRANDA
“Meetings as needed, when necessary”

MIRANDA
Guess that's why you haven't seen them

SISSY
Got a sheepskin throw on your lame-ass sofa
Got a sack of goose-down under your head
Your refrigerator is a goddamn morgue
Packed tight with the shrink-wrapped dead!

ENSEMBLE
Unsustainable, yeah, it's unsustainable
Unsustainable, yeah, it's unsustainable
Unsustainable, we keep making the same mistakes
Unsustainable, yeah it's unsustainable
Unsustainable, yeah it's unsustainable
Unsustainable, wake up before it's too late

8. Anyone Else?

NASH

Anyone else?

MIRANDA

I thought we could infiltrate Nike Town

And slowly replace all the labels

Instead of 100% cotton —

60% Chinese prison labor

40% child labor

SISSY *interrupts*

Yeah, and I think product tampering

Is, like, a major felony

9. Did It Ever Occur to You

MIRANDA

Did it ever occur to you —

If you want to take down an immoral system

You might have to break its laws

If you want to make a difference

You have to put yourself on the line

How can we choose the comfortable path

In the midst of so much suffering?

How can we allow a few rich men

To reshape our world for profit?

This is the moment for action

Tangible, unequivocal action

If we cling to comfort and safety now

All our lives we will feel regret

If you want to make a difference

You have to put yourself on the line

I want to make a difference

I want to make a difference

10. That's All the Time We Have

NASH

Alright, that's all the time we have

See you next week

MIRANDA

I'm Miranda

NASH

Nash

MIRANDA

Are you the owner?

NASH

Nope

More like a kind of custodian

MIRANDA

See you around

NASH

See you around

Miranda

11. Unyielding

NASH

The last man standing

Like some kind of monk

No relationships

No property

No bank account

The kids look right through me most days

And that's okay

I wouldn't mind being one of those guys

Who spend twenty years

Twenty years building
Some massive land-work in the desert
A sculptural dream of the future and God
Of the future and God

One of those guys destined to die
Die in a tractor
Moving the never-ending piles of earth
Unfinished but still
One of those guys
Until his last breath
implacable, relentless
And alone

Alone, except perhaps
for the young acolyte wife, desert tan
a woman with braids and devotion
Her never-ceasing and only ambition
Being to help you —
A man thirty years her senior —
Help you realize your dream
Your lifelong project, monument, statement
Your unyielding testament to —
Unyielding

I'm no priest
I just slightly exist
I'm no priest
I just slightly exist
Lots of people in the world live like that
They're just more ashamed
And less deliberate about it

1972: Berry takes Caroline to a potluck meeting of a women's group ("Nixon/Nut Loaf"), where Mel leads "Write On," a song about changing the system from within. Afterwards, as Caroline and Berry share a joint, Berry speaks of her struggle with sexual politics ("Men"). Caroline lets a small detail from her past slip, then flashes back to her last conversation with Bobby ("Don't Try to Contact Me").

12. Nixon/Nut Loaf

MEL

And I say Nixon orchestrated the whole thing

You'll see

It will come out

BERRY

Hey, Caroline

Mel, this is Caroline

New member of the Co-op

CAROLINE

Hi

I brought a nut loaf

MEL

You can put it there

We're just getting started

CAROLINE

The Watergate thing

MEL

We have more important things to talk about

Let's go!

13. Write On

MEL

They fed us a formula
Since we were small
Knights in armor
Pink-cheeked dolls
They sold us a story
Gave us letters to trace

BERRY

Sweetie, show us a smile

BETH

Keep to your place

MEL

But I'm nobody's sweet little baby girl
No one's obedient student
I'm done with pledging allegiance
To rotten institutions
We're writing our own story now.
Pen to paper, ink to press
Write on! Right on!

MEL, ENSEMBLE

Write on! Right on!
Write on! Right on!
Write on! Right on!

MEL

To articulate the vision
Is to realize the project
A story where women
Are subject, not object
A collective of sisters
Fully equipped
With ideas, not guns
We will rewrite the script

MEL

Cause I'm nobody's sweet little baby girl

MEL, BERRY

No one's obedient student

MEL

I'm done with pledging allegiance

MEL, BETH

To rotten institutions

ENSEMBLE

We're writing our own story now

Pen to paper, ink to press

Write on! Right on!

Write on! Right on!

Write on! Right on!

Write on! Right on!

MEL

That old formula is poison

the knights in armor are jerks

If there's any chance of redemption

It'll happen through women's work

ENSEMBLE

We're writing our own story now

Pen to paper, ink to press

Write on! Right on!

Write on! Right on!

Write on! Right on!

Write on! Right on!

Write on! Right on!

Write on! Right on!

Write on! Right on!

Write on! Right on!

14. Men

BERRY

I don't think Mel respects me

CAROLINE

No?

BERRY

She thinks I'm too caught up on men

CAROLINE

Men

BOTH

Men

BERRY

Maybe too many men

Sometimes I wonder why —

I want to be open-minded

CAROLINE

But where do you draw the line?

BERRY

It's not that I don't want it

CAROLINE

But maybe not every time

BERRY

But most of the time, what I want —

BOTH

Is men.

CAROLINE

Maybe too many

BOTH
Men

BERRY
It seems like it's so much simpler for them
They want —

CAROLINE
And *we* want —

BERRY
But it means something different
We're s'posed to pretend

BOTH
Men
Men
Men

BERRY
So, tell me about him

CAROLINE
Who?

BERRY
The man who made you so sad

CAROLINE
He was —
He was a Republican

BERRY
I always had a thing for
David Eisenhower
Or Nixon

CAROLINE

Not him!

BERRY

What was his name?

CAROLINE

Bobby

BERRY

What happened?

CAROLINE

I — I can't talk about it

BERRY, CAROLINE

Men

15. Don't Try to Contact Me

BOBBY

Don't try to contact me

We'll meet at the end of next year

New Year's Eve

Venice Beach

1998: At Prairie Fire, a rousing anthem takes a violent turn (“Global Village/Blow It Up”). Nash tries to talk down the kids who are in favor of extreme tactics, imagining a whimsical, choreographed protest (“Because We Like to Dance”).

16. Global Village/Blow It Up

GABI

I’m calling this meeting to order

September 20, 1999

Any cops or members of the media, identify yourselves

No? Too bad, because I have nothing to hide

Everyone needs to understand what is at stake

What they’re after is global pillage

What I’m talking about is a global village

In a village we look after our neighbors

Am I right?

The first “free trade agreement”

Was written by the British Empire’s

East India Company!

The time has come to bear witness

Let’s go out there and let’s cause a ruckus

Be rigorous about our messaging

We want a front-page photo above the fold

ENSEMBLE

Build a sweatshop-free economy

Re-evaluate our vibe with technology

Make the planet safe for biodiversity

A sustainability sensibility

GABI

What they’re after is global pillage

ENSEMBLE

What I’m talking about is a global village

In a village we look after our neighbors, am I right?

GABI

We're at the dawn of a new millennium
It's time to correct our course
Time to channel all this energy
Into practical, powerful strategy

SISSY

Link arms and form blockades!

GABI

Surround the convention center
We will shut it down
We will shut it down

SISSY

Blow it up!
Blow it up!

ENSEMBLE

Blow it up!
Blow it up!
Blow it up!
Blow it up!
Blow it up!
Blow it up!
Blow it up!
Blow it up!
Blow it up!
Blow it up!
Blow it up!
Blow it all up!

GABI

No, we have to be strategic!

ENSEMBLE

Blow it up!
Blow it up!
Blow it all up!

Blow it up!
Blow it up!
Blow it all up!

NASH

I respect your positions
But I'm not sure extreme tactics
Are going to get you anywhere
To say nothing of the risk

SISSY

They are destroying the planet!
We are tired of protests!
We need to DO something!

NASH

Destruction — even of property —
Can have unintended effects
How can I put this?
I think it's cruddy for the soul

SISSY

I'll take that under advisement

17. Because We Like to Dance

NASH

I've been thinking of an action
An action downtown
At the fourth street "retail collection"
Thirty or forty of us
Dressed for success
Approach from every direction

At the signal, we begin
A synchronized dance
A Busby Berkeley hallucination
Serious, deadpan, briefcases aloft
A truly subversive demonstration

MIRANDA

The clothes will have to be perfect —
Pinstripes, starched collars

NASH

And pearls for the women

MIRANDA

We'll look like a million dollars!

NASH

We dance in the street and stop traffic
Not so the media will get behind our stance
We dance in the street and stop traffic
Because we like to dance!

NASH

And business as usual grinds to a halt
For a moment *we* detain *them*

MIRANDA

Not because we physically stand in their way
But because we entertain them

HENRY

Preaching is a turn-off

GABI

Chaos causes anxiety

MIRANDA

Nothing grabs attention
Like a moment of beauty and clarity

NASH, MIRANDA, ADRIENNE, HENRY

We dance in the street and stop traffic
Not so the media will get behind our stance

We dance in the street and stop traffic
Because we like to dance!

NASH

There among the glittering billboards
We make our intentions clear to the masses
As if for one brief shining moment
We didn't have AOL, Time Warner, or Viacom
Tattooed on our asses!

NASH, MIRANDA, ADRIENNE, HENRY

We dance in the street and stop traffic
Not so the media will get behind our stance
We dance in the street and stop traffic
Because we like to dance!

ENSEMBLE

We dance in the street and stop traffic
Not so the media will get behind our stance
We dance in the street and stop traffic
Because we like to dance!

1998: Henry is haunted by memories of Vietnam (“Smells”).

18. Smells

MEN

Apple blossoms

Apple blossoms

Apple blossoms

Apple blossoms

HENRY

Chloropicrin gas

MEN

Smells of apple blossoms

HENRY

Phosgene gas

Produces pulmonary edema

MEN

Smells of newly mown hay

HENRY

Lewisite gas is a

MEN

Smells of geraniums

HENRY

A blister agent and lung irritant

MEN

Hydrogen cyanide smells of

Chloropicrin gas smells of

Apple blossoms

HENRY

Irritating to the lungs and skin

MEN

Phosgene gas smells of newly mown hay

HENRY

Produces pulmonary edema

MEN

Lewisite gas smells of geraniums

HENRY

Blister agent

Lung irritant

MEN

Hydrogen cyanide smells of toasted almonds

HENRY

Halts cellular respiration

We are buzzing rice paddies and villages

We are aiming for total saturation

1998: Miranda has cooked Nash dinner for his birthday (“Thank You for Dinner”). He responds to a question with a song that says more than she realizes (“Plastic”). Slightly tipsy, Miranda admits her crush and kisses Nash. He is kind but will not reciprocate.

19. Thank You for Dinner

NASH

Thank you for dinner, Miranda

MIRANDA

What are all of these?

20. Plastic

NASH

Documents of days gone by
Cellulose acetate, slowly degrading
With a tell-tale sour smell
Someday there will be nothing left
Of these strange unstable relics
injection molded cartridges
Evaporating, dissolving into air
That’s what it means to be plastic
What it means to have plasticity

MIRANDA

Well

Happy birthday

(Miranda kisses Nash, who pulls back)

MIRANDA

I’m sorry

NASH

Don’t—

Don’t be sorry

MIRANDA

I think I have a little crush on you

NASH

I think you are terrific

MIRANDA

You think this is all very adorable, don't you?

NASH

Yes

MIRANDA

I'm only a little drunk, you know

That's not why I kissed you

NASH

No?

MIRANDA

I did not kiss you because I'm drunk

I got drunk so I could kiss you

NASH

I think you are terrific

1998: Jason rocks out in his room ("Anything Can Be Mine"). At dinner, when Louise asks Jason about the music playing in the background, he launches into a lecture about the importance of Dennis Wilson ("Sonsplaining"). She interrupts with a story ("I Met Dennis Wilson Once"). After Louise exits, Jason tries to reconcile this story with the few facts that his mother has told him about her past ("My Mother"). Something doesn't add up.

21. Anything Can Be Mine

JASON

Nineteen ninety-nine
Nothing is not available to me
With dedication and time and taste
Anything can be mine

It might look like isolation
But this relentless cultivation
Of a singular collection
Is how I feel connection
Anything can be mine
Anything can be mine

Bootlegs, demos, alternate versions
The more obscure the better
A track unnoticed at the end of a long silence
on a master tape in a safety deposit box in a basement somewhere
Unnoticed!
UNNOTICED!

It might look like isolation
But this relentless cultivation
Of a singular collection
Is how I feel connection
Anything can be mine
Anything can be mine

The future is here
And so is the past
Anything can be mine

22. Sonsplaining

LOUISE

Jason, dinner

JASON

Okay

LOUISE

Who's that guy singing?

He sounds familiar

JASON

Dennis Wilson

Dennis Wilson is significant for two reasons.

One —

He was the drummer for the Beach Boys

Two —

LOUISE

Honestly, Jason

I grew up during those days

I think I know who Dennis Wilson was

JASON

The Beach Boys' extreme commercial popularity
is precisely why very few people appreciate —

LOUISE

Nancy Reagan liked the Beach Boys

I'd hardly call Dennis Wilson a cult figure

JASON

Cult figures —

Let me see if I can explain it to you

Sometimes they are

Undiscovered pop geniuses

Who, for whatever reason,

Somehow fail to chart

But sometimes they are mainstream artists
Who, behind the scenes, in secret
Are making edgy, experimental work — Art!

LOUISE

I met Dennis Wilson once

JASON

Dennis Wilson was the double whammy —
Wait, what did you say?

23. I Met Dennis Wilson Once

LOUISE

I said I met Dennis Wilson once
It was 1979, I think, in a bar, in Venice Beach

This good-looking man walks in
Linen shirt, unbuttoned
He's very tan, and very trim
And there is something so familiar about him

There's a bloat around his eyes
Scraggly beard, tangled hair
His feet are bare, wide and dirty
And there is something so familiar about him

So familiar and so handsome
He sees me looking, comes over, sits down
He says "I'm Dennis"

JASON

No way

LOUISE

Asks if I want a drink

JASON

No way

LOUISE

I'm not hiding very well my thrill

JASON

Of course!

LOUISE

He asks if I want to dance

It was somehow a sweet moment
The afternoon light, the innocent song
This sad guy swaying with me

The world was going from bad to worse
I had been in LA too long
Ronald Reagan had just become president
But America was still a place
Where you could dance with a barefoot rock star
In a nowhere bar
In the middle of a weekday afternoon
A weekday afternoon

24. My Mother

JASON

My mother —
Dennis Wilson —
My mother
That's the first time
She's mentioned Venice Beach
Venice Beach
Ronald Reagan
Would've been 1980
What was my mother doing in L.A.
Three years before I was born?

1972. Mel pulls Caroline aside (“You Have No Right”); she has figured out Caroline’s identity and has arranged for Caroline to take refuge at a women’s commune in upstate New York. Berry, who still doesn’t know Caroline’s story, decides to go with her.

25. You Have No Right

CAROLINE

Hey, Mel

MEL

Caroline

Bobby wants you to know he’s okay

CAROLINE

What? How did you know?

MEL

I didn’t know

I just suspected

CAROLINE

Did you talk to Bobby?

MEL.

You have no right hanging out with us

It is dangerous

For you and for us

CAROLINE

Our *intentions* —

MEL

Look, I’m not a supporter of tactics

That give them an excuse for more harassment of the left

But what’s done is done.

I know someone who can help you.

She runs a tight ship

Rigor, discipline — skills you’ll need to survive

CAROLINE
Thank you
Mel?

MEL
Yeah?

CAROLINE
We never expected it to go down like that

MEL
You have got to be joking
Come on!

1998: Jason stumbles on an old movie that begins to unlock his mother's secret ("Lost Love Movie").

26. Lost Love Movie

1998: At Prairie Fire, Nash enacts a familiar ritual (“I’m Calling This Meeting to Order”). Miranda, still smarting from his rejection of her overture, tries to play it cool. Josh, a “Hacktivist,” describes hacking corporate websites to include information about corporate misdeeds, environmental damage, ongoing lawsuits (“Parasites/A Veneer of Normalcy”). Miranda is impressed. Nash notices and explodes (“Nicknames Are for Friends”).

27. I’m Calling This Meeting to Order

NASH

I’m calling this meeting to order

January 15, 2000

Any cops or members of the media

identify yourselves

No? Okay

Next up is Josh Marshall

With the Hacktivists

Hey, Miranda

MIRANDA

Hey

NASH

You haven’t been in for awhile

MIRANDA

I’ve been busy

NASH

Okay

28. Parasites/A Veneer of Normalcy

JOSH

I thought we could go over

How to create an alternate web site

That looks just like a corporate site

I call these parasites

The links are altered

The information rearranged
So that the truth can be disseminated

You might remember
How we hacked Allegecom's site earlier this year

MIRANDA
He doesn't seem like the type

JOSH
In these types of activities

MIRANDA
So ordinary, so normal

JOSH
The site must retain

MIRANDA, JOSH
A veneer of normalcy

MIRANDA
Normalcy so extreme
So extreme

JOSH
Extreme tactics get you nowhere

MIRANDA
Normalcy so extreme
So extreme it's perverse

JOSH, MIRANDA
On the surface

JOSH
On the home page
You can get away with small changes

“Greed World” instead of “Green World”
Stuff like that
It’s important not to shoot your wad all at once
We waited a week
Before we hijacked Allegecom’s little red wagon

JOSH, MIRANDA
“Just click the little red wagon
To learn what Allegecom
Is doing in your community
In communities around the world”
Click!

JOSH
A list of lawsuits against the company’s biotech arm

JOSH, MIRANDA
Click!

JOSH
A gallery of pictures of sick animals and children

JOSH, MIRANDA
Click!

JOSH
A history of Allegecom’s involvement
with chemical weaponry

MIRANDA
Good job, Josh

JOSH
Hey, old man, you want a Coke?

29. Nicknames Are for Friends

NASH

Did you just ask if I wanted a Coke?

Why would you say that?

Did he just ask if I wanted a Coke?

Why would he say that?

Did he just ask if I wanted a Coke?

Why would he say that?

Nicknames are for friends

Not corporations

Nicknames are for friends

And the *Coca Cola Company* isn't your friend

Do I want a Coke?

Why would you say that?

Did he just ask if I wanted a Coke?

Why would he say that?

Nicknames are for friends

And the Coca-Cola Company isn't your friend

Do I want a —

I never call those companies Coke or Pepsi

Not Mickey-Ds, but McDonalds

Not Mickey-Ds, but McDonalds

Not IHOP

But the International House of Pancakes

1998: Jason is investigating his mother. He follows her to work, a cooking class at the local community college. Seen through his eyes, the cooking class takes on a surreal quality ("Cooking Class").

30. Cooking Class

JASON

Today I spied on my mother at work
If you've never stalked anyone close to you
I can't recommend it enough
Check out how it transforms them
How other they become
Have you ever closed your eyes
And listened to the sound
Of your own mother's voice?

LOUISE

First, you must rinse
Inside and outside the bird
Pat the cavity and skin completely dry
Otherwise your seasonings
Will not adhere

JASON

What does she sound like?

STUDENTS

Otherwise your seasonings
Will not adhere

JASON

Midwestern? New England?
There is something a little bit off to my ear

LOUISE

You are an artist
Preparing your canvas

STUDENTS

We are artists
Prepare our canvas

LOUISE

Once you master the basics
You are free to create

STUDENTS

Master the basics
We are free to create

JASON

Midwestern? New England?
There is something a little bit off to my ear

LOUISE

You are an artist
preparing your canvas

STUDENTS

We are artists
Prepare our canvas

LOUISE

Once you master the basics
You are free to create

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Master the basics
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LOUISE

You are an artist
Preparing your canvas

STUDENTS

We are artists
Prepare our canvas

LOUISE

Once you master the basics

STUDENTS

Master the basics

LOUISE

You are free to create

STUDENTS

We are free

JASON

There's nothing attached to her past in our house

STUDENTS

We are free to create

JASON

No diploma, no photos
Who is my mother?
A total blank slate

LOUISE

Once you master the basics
You are free to create

JASON

Who is my mother?
A total blank slate

1998: Outside Prairie Fire, Josh lights a joint while explaining his philosophy (“You Control What People Believe to Be True”). He tells her that Allegecom, the company whose site he recently hacked, wants to fly him to New York. “New tactic: instead of prosecuting me, hire me.”

31. You Control What People Believe to Be True

MIRANDA

Out in the open?

What if someone sees you?

JOSH

Does this look like the face

Of a pot-smoking loser?

Miranda — let me tell you something

You control what people believe to be true

It’s easy

I got a letter from Allegecom

MIRANDA

Are they pressing charges for the hack?

JOSH

No, they want to fly me to New York

I think they want to hire me

MIRANDA

Did you tell them to fuck off?

JOSH

Miranda — let me tell you something

If there’s something in this world

That you want to do

it’s all about access

You control what people believe to be true

So you can do the things

That you want to do

It’s easy... it’s easy

1972: Caroline has found sanctuary in a women's commune ("How Did You Find This Place Again?"). She and Berry are weary of the commune's strict rules and decide to sneak out to go to a bar ("What Are You Thinking?").

32. How Did You Find This Group Again?

BERRY

How did you find this group again?

CAROLINE

Mel

BERRY

Figures

They are hard core

POP GENIUS

There are words I mean to say

CAROLINE

At least they allow music in this place

POP GENIUS

But the moment slips away

BERRY

This song is all right

CAROLINE

This song is great

POP GENIUS

There are deeds I mean to do

BERRY

They are completely not sexy

CAROLINE

Sexy is not the point

POP GENIUS
But all I know is true

BERRY
What else could be the point?

POP GENIUS
Is when the needle drops

CAROLINE
Loneliness

POP GENIUS
And it finds the groove

CAROLINE
Longing

POP GENIUS
The moment feels so sweet

CAROLINE
The sadness that leaks through
All that enforced sunny cheer

POP GENIUS
On repeat

CAROLINE
It's in the sound, not in the words
It's the feeling you get
Like slightly off, rancid America, you know?

POP GENIUS
On repeat

33. What Are You Thinking

BERRY

What are you thinking?

CAROLINE

At this moment?

I'm thinking I wouldn't mind

A beer and some men

BERRY

Really?

Because that is completely

What I'm thinking

Let's take a break

We can hitch down to Little Falls

And stay in a motel overnight

CAROLINE

Eat some hamburgers

Smoke and go to a bar

BERRY

Candy bars

CAROLINE

Men

BERRY

TV and newspapers and —

CAROLINE

Men

BOTH

Yeah

1998: Jason's room. He has solved the mystery ("My Mother Is Not Just My Mother").

34. My Mother Is Not Just My Mother

JASON

My mother

My mother is not just my mother

My mother

My mother is a revolutionary

My mother is a fugitive

My mother

My mother is a killer

My mother

My mother is a liar

My mother is not just my mother

1972: A motel room. Caroline and Berry are sprawled over the covers of the bed, still dressed, beginning to stir after what was clearly a long, late night, in which Caroline confessed her story to Berry (“Look, Berry”). As they begin to stir, Caroline tells Berry they must never, ever speak of it.

35. Look, Berry

CAROLINE

Look, Berry, what I told you last night
We must never, ever speak of it, no matter what

BERRY

Bobby made you do it, didn't he?
Men are always getting caught up in violence

CAROLINE

That's not it, not by a long shot
It was my choice
I'd had enough of peaceful protests
I had to *do* something
To put myself at risk
Tangible, unequivocal action
It was not necessarily the right tactic.
But I was sure it was right at the time

BERRY

It was a brave thing, honestly, I think it was brave

CAROLINE

It doesn't matter what you think
I didn't do it for you

Look, I gotta go. Thanks for everything

BERRY

What?
Where will you go?

CAROLINE

Good question

1998: Henry relives a memory of the war, the most brutal one yet ("Early Morning").

36. Early Morning

HENRY

Early morning

Blue sky

Blue water

Fly

Between water and sky

Between

Before

Be cool

Fly

Fly

Fly

We are buzzing rice paddies and villages

They take aim, trying to bring down the plane

A spray of white aerosol trailing behind us

A bullet catches a cannister

Sloshes me with defoliant

Heavy, oily, metallic

It slips between me and my sweat

Sinks into my skin, my cells, my future

Not an eating away, like acid

But an acceleration of growth

Overstimulating the metabolism

Until the organism is undone

This is moment of total annihilation

1972: Alone and on the run again, Caroline changes her identity once more, letting go of the last vestiges of her past life. The singer playing the 70s version of the character hands off her identity to Louise, the 90s version of the character ("Leave the Memory Behind").

37. Leave the Memory Behind

CAROLINE

Run away

Berry knows

Now it's just a matter of time

Big mistake

How could I make my friend

CAROLINE, LOUISE

A party to my crime?

This secret's too heavy

How could anyone hold it?

Can I will it from my mind?

Leave it here by the road

Leave the memory behind

Start again

Write a new story

Choose a name and construct a past

Shed my skin

Glide into the next life

However long it lasts

Another small town

Another small room

Another job in a kitchen somewhere

Let the past fall away

And it's like I was never there

Let the past fall away

Leave the memory behind

LOUISE

No one blinks

Nobody questions

Who I am or where I've been.
Let them think whatever they think
Just accept it and settle in
Every yes holds a no
Every choice a rejection
Another future never to be
And whatever it is will be

38. New Year's Eve

BETSY

You got plans for New Year's, Louise?

BOBBY'S VOICE

We'll meet on New Year's Eve

The Blue Cantina

Venice Beach

LOUISE

New Year's Eve

BETSY

Yeah

You got plans?

LOUISE

I —

No, no plans

2000: As Nash is closing *Prairie Fire*, Miranda appears (“And What Does Miranda Want with Me?”). He gives in, takes her home. The next morning, Miranda leaves Nash to meet Josh at a coffee/retail spot. At a display of activist-themed merchandise, Miranda is horrified by the commodification of human beings, while Josh is impressed by “the purity of capitalism.” Against Miranda’s protests, Josh buys her a deck of “Rebels, Outlaws and Fugitives” cards. When Josh tells Miranda that Allegecom is running with his idea for a franchised alternative community (“Green for What Is Seen”), she parts ways with him — for good. Flipping through the cards, she sees one for Bobby DeSoto: “Allegedly planted bombs at the summer homes of corporate board members. Still at large.” Miranda recognizes Nash, the first in a series of revelations that will propel us to the story’s end (“Unraveling/No More”).

39. And What Does Miranda Want with Me?

NASH

What does Miranda want with me?

I’m too old for you

MIRANDA

I know

40. Green for What Is Seen

MIRANDA

Hey Josh

Sorry I’m late

JOSH

Miranda, look at this place

It’s brilliant

An experiential retail environment

MIRANDA

A Weather Underground datebook?

A Zapatista shower curtain?

“Rebels, Outlaws and Fugitives” Playing Cards?

Counterculture, commodified

This is disgusting

JOSH

This is the purity of capitalism
Capitalism, the great leveler
Anything can be commodified
Rebels, Outlaws, Fugitives —
My treat

MIRANDA

Corporate Gold American Express?
Where did you get that?

JOSH

I got promoted
Allegecom loved my idea
For the franchised alternative community

A totally intentional community
Self-sustaining, but nothing extreme
Peaceful setting, high-speed connection
A totally intentional community
Green for what is seen
Green for what is seen

A diverse community of like-minded neighbors
A curated collection of cafes and shops
A totally intentional community
We will sell you anything you need
Tech among the trees
An ecology of ease

A bespoke, democratic, sustainable dream
A bespoke, democratic, sustainable dream
Green for what is seen
For residents

MIRANDA, JOSH

And shareholders

MIRANDA

And corporate execs

I am not going back to New York with you

JOSH

It is true that I like making money

Thing is, I feel the same

Green for what is seen!

MIRANDA

I said I don't want these!

JOSH, MIRANDA

Green for what is seen!

41. Unraveling/No More

MIRANDA

David Gilbert

Katherine Power

Eldridge Cleaver

Bobby DeSoto

Bobby Desoto, alt filmmaker and underground activist

Founded a collective

Secret Attack Fear Effort

A collective that planted bombs

at the summer homes of munitions producers

Still at large

Bobby Desoto

Of course

JASON

I was watching America's Most Wanted

An episode about this woman

A terrorist from the 70s

She is still at large

Her name was Mary Whittaker

LOUISE

There wasn't any show

JASON

Mary Whittaker was part of a collective
Secret Attack Fear Effort
A collective that planted bombs
At the summer homes
Of corporate board members of munitions producers
And then something went wrong
Or did it?

MARY

There wasn't any show
You're lying

JASON

I'm lying, Mom? *I'm lying?*

MARY

How did you figure it out?

JASON

I was watching VH1
"California Classic Rock: The Lost and Forgotten"
And suddenly, there you were
There you were
"Lost Love Movie"
I tracked down a copy
And right there in the credits:
Mary Whittaker, Interviewer
A film by Bobby Desoto

MARY

Excuse me, Dr. Fieser?
Can I ask you a question?
Why would you invent napalm?

DR. FIESER

I am a scientist

I solve problems

I don't ask what use they are put to

I am not responsible

Leave me alone

MARY

What use did you imagine jellied gasoline could possibly have?

DR. FIESER

I am not responsible

Leave me alone

MARY

Do you think the experts employed by the Nazis

Should have asked "what use"

For all that hydrocyanic acid they made?

Should they have asked what problem

They were solving in return for their generous wages?

DR. FIESER

I am not responsible

Leave me alone

JASON

Secret Attack Fear Effort

also known as S-A-F-E

At first they made films

But that wasn't enough

They started blowing shit up

LOUISE

This immoral war

was going on and on

JASON

They started blowing shit up

LOUISE

There had been years
of peaceful protests
I had to *do* something
To put myself at risk
Tangible, unequivocal action

JASON

How'd that work out for you, Mom?
Didn't that war last for like nine years?

LOUISE

No one was supposed to get hurt
That house was supposed to be empty
No one was supposed to get hurt

JASON

I can easily buy
That you were foolish enough
Not to realize someone would end up dead
I just can't believe you LIED to me for all these years

LOUISE

Ten years into it
I knew I couldn't hide anymore
I made a plan then
To resurface, to surrender

JASON

Then why?
Ten years?
I don't understand
1982?
Oh

LOUISE

I planned to tell you when you were old enough
The last thing I would ever want
Is for you to have to keep my secret

JASON

It was something, though
What you did

LOUISE

No, it was a miscalculation
A huge mistake

JASON

What a world that must have been
Where ordinary people actually did things

LOUISE

It was a miscalculation
A huge mistake
What's this?

JASON

Bobby Desoto's number
He's calling himself Nash Davis
And in a thrilling twist of fate
He lives not far from here

LOUISE

How did you find him?

JASON

On this anarchy board, online
I saw the acronym S-A-F-E
For some event at a bookstore "infoshop"
Led by this guy, Nash Davis
So I called him
Bingo

Louise leaves Jason to meet Nash. Meanwhile, we see their younger selves, Mary and Bobby, in the last hours before their lives were changed forever.

MARY

My name is Jeannie Morris
I have an envelope for Mrs. Benton

ROSE

Mrs. Benton isn't home right now
But I'll see that she gets it

MARY

I'm sorry to have missed her
May I use your washroom?

ROSE

Of course, right that way

(answering the phone)

Hello, sweetie.

No, Bentons are planning a big party
When they get home tomorrow
I just found out this morning
A couple of hours
If I'm not home by five
You can put the casserole in the oven
It's in the fridge, ready to go
Set the oven to 350 and —
I know you know
What? How wonderful
You know I'm proud of you
I'll see you later
Love you

LOUISE

I'm turning myself in
I thought I ought to warn you
Since Jason got in touch so recently.

NASH

It feels exactly the same
Being with you
Just the way I remember

MARY

Come on, pick up!

BOBBY

I don't understand
We've been watching for weeks
The housekeeper always leaves at two

MARY

Maybe she's vacuuming
And can't hear the phone
We have to call the cops

BOBBY

Not yet

NASH

It doesn't matter if they find me

LOUISE

What?

NASH

I decided a few years back
I wouldn't hide anymore
No more running away
No more name changing
No more cold sweats

No more making my so-called freedom a prison
But of course, you know exactly what I'm talking about

LOUISE

Goddamn it!
It would have been so much easier
if we could have talked, even once

NASH

You should tell them about me
Get yourself a better deal

LOUISE

I can't do that

NASH

You want to spend time with your son again, don't you?
Tell them it was all my idea

LOUISE

I thought you blamed me for what happened

NASH

There was a very clear moment
When I knew someone would end up dead
And still I was willing to do it

LOUISE

It wasn't supposed to go down that way
Our intention
Was to stop the killing

ENSEMBLE

And the voice becomes a chorus
And the song becomes a roar
No more, no more, no—

(Jason lifts the needle. Blackout.)