

“Imagine”

An anthem for peace and solidarity, 1971-2018

MA Thesis, Cultural History of Modern Europe, Utrecht University

Irene Garofalo, student number: 6038735

Date of submission: 20 August 2018

Contents

Preface.....	2
Introduction.....	3
Chapter 1 Presenting a dream: 1971-1980.....	9
Chapter 1.1 The features of an anthem.....	11
Chapter 1.2 “Imagine” within Lennon’s and Ono’s oeuvre.....	20
Chapter 1.3 Promoting “Imagine”.....	25
Chapter 2 Lennon’s legacy and Ono’s mission: 1980 and onwards.....	33
Chapter 2.1 In Lennon’s memory.....	35
Chapter 2.2 Charity, collaborations and activism.....	45
Conclusion.....	55
Bibliography.....	58

Preface

In 2015 Europe and France shook after a series of terrorist attacks in Paris. The most shocking one being the attack at the Bataclan theater on Friday 13 November. The ensuing morning an – at the time – anonymous pianist dragged his instrument to the location of the attack and started playing an instrumental version of “Imagine”. Cellphone videos of his performance went viral, and I personally remember Dutch radio stations playing the song repeatedly in the following weeks. Working at a local radio station, I even recall broadcasting the song myself as a way to express solidarity and process the trauma of what had happened so relatively close to home. That year, the Dutch NPO Top 2000 (the main New Year’s chart of the country), which generally features Bohemian Rhapsody of Queen on first place, uniquely featured “Imagine” as number one hit.¹ This event triggered my questioning why, almost fifty years after its original release, “Imagine” is as relevant as ever. Through this thesis I aim to start tackling the complex factors that made “Imagine” into the long lasting cultural phenomenon it has become.

¹ 2015, NPO Top 2000, accessed on August 17, 2018, <https://www.nporadio2.nl/top2000>.

Introduction

The song “Imagine” was performed and written by Lennon (and now is argued: co-written by Ono), produced by Lennon, Ono, and Phil Spector. It was first released by Apple Records in 1971, and distributed by EMI/Capital as single and as title song of Lennon’s album *Imagine*.² Over the years the original version has been (re)released multiple times and in different formats, ranging from the vinyl to the digital. All the while, authorized and non-authorized musical covers have continued to appear. Both little known, upcoming artist and stars with worldwide fame – such as David Bowie, Lady Gaga, Coldplay, and Emily Sandé – have taken it upon themselves to perform and reinterpret the song. Radio stations worldwide have been broadcasting the original and its various covers for decades. Undeniably, “Imagine” is first and foremost a product of the music industry.

At the same time however “Imagine” has developed into a transnational, if not global, cultural phenomenon with a remarkable longevity. In the last two decades “Imagine” has repeatedly been linked to situations of humanitarian crisis and armed conflict, mainly as a way to express solidarity and hope for a better future. This use of “Imagine” does not limit itself to England and the United States, or even to “the West”. Campaigns of NGO’s and nonprofits such as Amnesty International and Unicef have employed the song globally for fundraising and increasing awareness. In multiple occasions individuals, artists, and radio stations have also spontaneously reacted to crisis through performing and/or broadcasting “Imagine”, for example after the terrorist attacks of November 2015 in France.³

The reutilizations of “Imagine” in such instances go beyond the simple reproduction of a famous pop song to imply a set of additional cultural connotations. This thesis argues that “Imagine” has developed into an empowering, unifying, and utopian anthem for peace and solidarity. While different types of anthems exist, the core characteristic of all is that they unite people underneath a

² “‘Imagine’ receives NMPA Centennial Song Award, credits Yoko Ono as co-writer,” Archives, Imagine Peace, accessed on August 17, 2018, <http://imaginepeace.com/archives/23102>.

³ Press Association Mediapoint, “Pianist Plays John Lennon’s Imagine Outside Bataclan Concert Hall,” November 14, 2015.

collective ideology and/or concept.⁴ This unifying aspect is central in the original message promoted by “Imagine”, and in the way it has been applied throughout the years. In speaking of national anthems, J. Martin Daughtry noted how anthems are often renegotiated and contested through time and thus are in fact polysemous texts.⁵ The same could be argued for “Imagine”, which has been reutilized and reinterpreted in many different ways.⁶ Compared to national anthems, however, “Imagine” is of a more inclusive nature. The song does not impose boundaries to whom may identify with it and with its ideology. On the contrary, “Imagine” contains the lyric, “I hope someday you will join us”. Since it is not bound to any geographic location, the song additionally has the potential to resonate globally.

“Imagine” originated as a socially and politically engaged song, with clear influences from the ideologies and historical context of the sixties and early seventies. These decades witnessed an increase in the production of socially, culturally, and politically engaged popular music, especially regarding rock and roll. Countercultural movements, such as the New Left, the hippie culture, and the Civil Rights movement, were in the front lines of this trend.⁷ Indeed, Lennon and Ono too, released not only “Imagine”, but many other socially engaged songs as well in that period (e.g. “The Luck of the Irish” and “Gimme Some Truth”). However, many engaged songs from the sixties, seventies, and from later decades, either were not received as well as “Imagine”, or did not manage to stay relevant past their original context. For instance, Sting’s critique of the Cold War in “Russians” (1985), lost momentum after the resolution of the hostilities between the West and the Soviet Union.

Admittedly, “Imagine” is not the only engaged song that continues to be referred to with regard to situations of conflict and crisis. The most obvious examples are: Bob Dylan’s “Blowing in the Wind” (1962), USA for Africa’s “We Are the World” (1985) and the more recent “Where is the

⁴ J. Martin Daughtry, “Russia’s New Anthem and the Negotiation of National Identity,” *Ethnomusicology* 47, no. 1 (Winter 2003): 42; Shana L. Redmond, *Anthem: Social Movements and the Sound of Solidarity in the African Diaspora* (New York: New York University Press, 2014), 2.

⁵ Daughtry, “Russia’s New Anthem,” 42.

⁶ Janne Mäkelä, *John Lennon Imagined: Cultural History of a Rock Star* (New York: Peter Lang, 2004), 222-224.

⁷ Andy Bennett, “Reappraising ‘Counterculture’,” in *Countercultures and Popular Music*, ed. Sheila Witheley and Jediah Sklower (Farnham: Ashgate, 2014), 18.

Love” (2002) by the Black Eyed Peas.⁸ Nevertheless, these songs generally do not have the same level of applicability – or simply have not been applied as broadly – and/or do not fit the definition of anthem, but should be categorized as protest songs. According to popular music scholar Deena Weinstein, a protest song is “an opposition to a policy, an action against the people in power that is grounded in a sense of injustice”. “Where is the Love”, for example, contains the general message of love, but in essence is a protest song because it primarily denounces racism, hate, and armed conflict. While “Imagine” contains indirect critique against the establishment, it never explicitly opposes anything, but rather puts forth a new utopia and a unifying ideology.

This thesis aims to start unraveling why and how the song “Imagine” by John Lennon and Yoko Ono has acquired and maintained its cultural status as anthem for peace and solidarity in times of (mass reported) conflict and in the face of humanitarian crises between 1971 and 2018. On the one hand the micro-history of popular music through the case study of “Imagine” can contribute to academic discussions on transnational and global cultural phenomena. These phenomena are increasingly common in world which is not only globalizing economically, but also culturally through increased transnational communication opportunities. Popular music scholar Negus noted how already in the eighties globalization was impacting the entertainment and music industries.⁹ The analysis of “Imagine” can also contribute to the understanding of the relationship between music, culture, society and politics. Ian Peddie argued in the introduction of *The Resisting Muse* that in a way, “music emerges as always already grounded in the social, as an avenue of cultural contestation or social and political engagement”. Indeed, popular music and art can be considered as cultural products emerging from a discursive practice. What should also be considered, however, is how popular music can impact culture after being released, promoted and received by audiences.

In order for “Imagine” to become a popular anthem, it had to be integrated in popular culture by carrying one or more collective meanings. The process of communication and reception of meaning

⁸ “We Are the World,” USA for Africa, accessed on August 17, 2018, <http://usaforafrica.org/we-are-the-world/>; “The Black Eyed Peas - #WHERESTHELOVE ft. The World”, Black Eyed Peas, YouTube, accessed on August 17, 2018, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YsRMoWYGLNA>.

⁹ Keith Negus, *Producing Pop: Culture and Conflict in the Popular Music Industry* (London: Edward Arnold, 1992), 5-7.

through mass media (and thus in popular culture), has been theorized in the seminal work by Stuart Hall, *Encoding/Decoding*. His approach is rooted within the semiotic paradigm (Ferdinand de Saussure's and subsequent theories) and in mass communication theories by Karl Marx. Hall looked at the process of communication as "a structure produced and sustained through the articulation of linked but distinctive moments – production, circulation, distribution/consumption, reproduction." According to him, communication takes place between these different moments, through the process of coding and decoding meaning. Codes are constructed and decoded within cultural discourses, and composed following systems of signs relative to the used medium. While codes in some cases can be naturalized (automatically linked to one specific meaning), they often are simply part of cultural order containing dominant or preferred meanings.¹⁰

In figure 1, the process analyzed by Hall is freely adapted for the discussion of the communication, reception, and (re)construction of meaning within popular music. This figure can be used as guiding principle throughout the analysis of "Imagine" as cultural phenomenon. "Imagine" has been produced and promoted through actors operating within the music industry. Then, it has been received by the audiences. Finally, in order to integrate within popular culture, the cultural connotations linked to the song have been adopted and/or reutilized by the audiences, which put forth new products as well. The center of the figure features the text "popular culture", showing how all the while, meaning has been encoded and decoded in relation to discourses in popular culture.

¹⁰ Stuart Hall, "Encoding/Decoding," in *Media and Cultural Studies: Keywords*, ed. Meenakshi Gigi Durham and Douglas M. Kellner (Malden: Blackwell Publishing, 2002), 163-173.

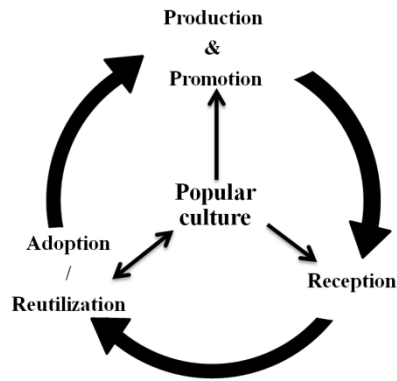


Figure 1 Transfer of meaning with regard to anthems in popular music

The “cultural phenomenon of ‘Imagine’” should not be understood as just the song in itself, but as its cultural connotations, or as the idea of “Imagine”. This is shaped not only by the song itself, but by all related cultural products, including visual and audiovisual artworks. Indeed, D. Hesmondhalgh and K. Negus, identify the analysis of “popular music as multitextual cultural phenomenon” as one of the approaches of popular music studies, especially in relation to studies about its mediation and meaning.¹¹ Because of this multitextual approach and the width of the cultural phenomenon of “Imagine” a great variety of primary sources have been used, including audio, visual and audio-visual cultural products. All these products have been tackled from the framework of semiotics and discourse analysis. The second chapter also contains analysis of events that have been analyzed in a similar way, although in those cases much of the primary information has been achieved through the LexisNexis Academic database of newswires.

While “Imagine” has often been discussed in popular literature, magazines, and blogs, the academic world has so far not produced an in depth historical analysis of “Imagine” as a cultural phenomenon. Strikingly, it has only sporadically been referred to in academic literature concerning Lennon, Ono and/or the Beatles more generally, such as *The Cambridge Companion to the Beatles*,

¹¹ David Hesmondhalgh and Keith Negus, “Introduction: Popular music studies: meaning, power and value,” in *Popular Music Studies*, ed. David Hesmondhalgh and Keith Negus (London: Arnold, 2002), 5.

Kevin Concannon's article "Yoko Ono's Dreams", or Janne Mäkelä's *John Lennon Imagined*.¹² Only little literature about Ono is available, mainly focusing on her role as avant-garde artist or as feminist. However, literature about Lennon and the Beatles is very extensive, both from a musicological, cultural, and sociological point of view.

Instead, the value of focusing specifically on one or a few songs, in the research of popular music has already been established in the field. Case studies have been used to elucidate theories, for instance by Greil Marcus in *The History of Rock 'n' Roll in Ten Songs*.¹³ More importantly however, case studies of songs enable researchers to look at processes within cultural music studies in particular depth. They have the potential to put forth new insights, such as in various contributions to *Play it Again*, which research the cultural and social processes around the cover song phenomenon.¹⁴ Nothing exactly like this "Imagine" study has done previously however. This might be explained by the great variety of studies, and the interdisciplinary nature of the popular music field (including musicological, cultural anthropological, and historical approaches), which allows for dispersed approaches to similar topics.¹⁵

Since the phenomenon of "Image" has never before thus been academically tackled, this research starts at the beginning of the process which constructed the status of "Imagine" as an anthem for peace and solidarity. It focusses on the production, promotion, and authorized reutilizations of "Imagine". Especially the influence of, and initiatives by the primary actors in the first two phases are considered: Lennon, Ono, and to a lesser extent the institutions they were collaborating with. The first chapter analyzes how the historical context of the song, the early promotion and the position of "Imagine" within Lennon's and Ono's oeuvres has influenced the construction of the cultural connotations of "Imagine". The second chapter goes on to see how Lennon's death in 1980 and Lennon's remembrance by Ono, impacted the status of the song. Finally, it also considers the more recent authorized applications of the song, both in collaboration with non-profit and non-

¹² Kenneth Womack, ed., *The Cambridge Companion to the Beatles* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009); Kevin Concannon, "Yoko Ono's Dreams," *Performance Research. A Journal of the Performing Arts* 19, no.2 (2014): 103-108; Mäkelä, *John Lennon Imagined*.

¹³ Greil Marcus, *The History Of Rock 'n' Roll in Ten Songs* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2014).

¹⁴ Georges Plasketes, ed., *Play it Again: Cover Songs in Popular Music* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2010).

¹⁵ Hesmondhalgh and Negus, "Introduction," 1-10.

governmental organizations, and through Ono's solo projects. As "Imagine" has an exceptionally broad and long history with regard to promotion and reutilization by the music industry this thesis will not provide an in depth analysis of the reception and adoption of the song by audiences. This would however make an excellent topic for future complementary research, granting an even better overview of how "Imagine" became the cultural phenomenon it is today.

Chapter 1 Presenting a dream: 1971-1980

In June 2017 the National Music Publishers Association (NMPA) set a process in motion in order to grant Yoko Ono co-authorship rights to the song "Imagine". The NMPA pleasantly surprised Ono and her son Sean Ono Lennon, by awarding the Centennial Song Award to "Imagine" to Ono and Lennon alike. This was the first time, almost forty years after the release of the song, that Ono's contribution was officially acknowledged. However, the steps taken by the NMPA had mainly symbolic value. Ono already oversees and controls much of the access to Lennon's solo work under the copyright disclaimer Lenono Music, currently administered by Downtown.¹⁶ Moreover, it has been known by the general public since the eighties that the inspiration for "Imagine" came from Ono's poetry book *Grapefruit*. This book was originally published in 1964 and then published again in 1970 close to the release of "Imagine".¹⁷ Lennon explicitly mentioned this during two 1980 interviews, one for Playboy Magazine and one for BBC Radio One.¹⁸ In fact, during the BBC Radio interview, Lennon went as far as to state: 'actually, that ["Imagine"] should be credited as a Lennon/Ono song, a lot of it – the lyric and the concept – came from Yoko'.¹⁹

¹⁶ John Kimsey, "'An abstraction, like Christmas': the Beatles for sale and for keeps," in *The Cambridge Companion to the Beatles*, ed. Kenneth Womack (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 243-244; Algemeen Nederlands Persbureau, "Imagine van John Lennon – de tekst," November 27, 2015; "John Lennon," Roster, Downtown, accessed June 4, 2018, <https://www.dmpgroup.com/artist/john-lennon/>.

¹⁷ Yoko Ono, *Grapefruit*, 2nd ed. (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1970).

¹⁸ David Sheff, *The Playboy Interviews with John Lennon and Yoko Ono*, ed. G. Barry Golson (New York: Playboy Press, 1981), 179; *The Lennon Tapes: John Lennon and Yoko Ono in Conversation with Andy Peebles 6 December 1980* (London: British Broadcasting Corporation, 1981), 43-44.

¹⁹ The NMPA played fragments from the BBC interview during the ceremony of the Centennial Song Award, see Imagine Peace, "'Imagine' receives NMPA Centennial Song Award;" "Yoko Ono Will Share Credit for John Lennon's 'Imagine': NY Times," NMPA, accessed on May 30, 2017, <http://nmpa.org/yoko-ono-will-share-credit-for-john-lennons-imagine-ny-times/>; *The Lennon Tapes*, 43.

Lennon and Ono performed the song together on various occasions between 1971 and 1973, and co-directed, co-starred and co-produced (with Phil Spector as third producer) the video for the song. This video was part of a bigger collaborative music film called “Imagine”, which also contained other Lennon and Ono songs.²⁰ The video even overlapped with one of Ono’s exhibitions, which would open at the Everson Museum of Art, Syracuse, NY, just a few months after its release. The text ‘THIS IS NOT HERE’, which appears at 01:26 min, was the title of Yoko’s exhibition (see image 1 and 2). This shows how the song “Imagine” was from the start, or became soon after its release, part of a bigger multimedia project.



Image 1 Screenshot from the “Imagine” video at 01:27 min



Image 2 Poster of Ono's exhibition THIS IS NOT HERE

Lennon and Ono not only collaborated for this specific song, but worked closely together on many of their projects in the late sixties and early seventies. While it would be difficult to measure the actual extent of Ono’s contribution to the song “Imagine”, it is clear that the intentions, goals and (promotional) actions of Lennon and Ono were strongly interconnected during the greater part of that period. Therefore, to consider the impact of these early years in the construction of the iconic status of “Imagine”, their joint efforts are a natural place to start.

The original intentions of the two artists can most objectively be researched by looking at the meaning embedded in the text and the music of the song, and also in the video of “Imagine”. As Janne Mäkelä and Keith Negus rightly note, popular songs cannot be reduced to a single

²⁰ “John Lennon Imagine Yoko Ono: Imagine the Film,” [Imaginejohnyoko](http://imaginejohnyoko.com/the-films/), accessed August 15, 2018, <http://imaginejohnyoko.com/the-films/>.

interpretation of their meaning.²¹ It would indeed be simplistic to state that songs have one singular, clear message that is both transmitted, received and understood in a linear way. Through time, meanings of popular songs can be constructed and superimposed to one another, due to different contexts, and by different people. Moreover, the intentions of those involved with the promotion of the song can change. However, analyses of popular songs properly contextualized culturally and historically can prove insightful. The following analysis should not be considered as a definitive reading of “Imagine” but as an indication of the values embedded in the song and the video, within the context and timeframe of their original release. Looking directly at these two connected cultural products, through textual, musical, and semiotic analysis, represents the most unmediated course of action.

Chapter 1.1 The features of an anthem

“Imagine” can be considered as an anthem that unifies people underneath a collective, but not static, and inclusive ideology. This ideology was strongly influenced by the countercultural movements from the sixties and the socio-political situation of the seventies. Especially the British and American contexts were influential, as those were the countries of residency of Lennon and Ono around the years that “Imagine” was written. The goal of this sub-chapter is to show the extents to which the features and original context of “Imagine” contributed to the song’s longevity through a cultural and historical analysis. They have enabled the song to broadly resonate, both after its first release and in later years. Thus features and context were pivotal factors in constructing the status of “Imagine” as an anthem for peace and solidarity.

When listening to “Imagine” a few central themes can be identified. These themes are strongly influenced by countercultural movements from the sixties but are put forth in a unique configuration. While some countercultural ideologies and philosophies could be quite contrasting, “Imagine” reflects elements from different sections of countercultural thought. This is not truly out of the ordinary as “Imagine” was written in the early seventies, only after the peak of sixties ideals, such as those advocated by hippie culture and the New Left. Moreover, countercultural movements

²¹ Mäkelä, *John Lennon Imagined*, 222.

were of a fluid nature and fragmented into a great variety of groups already in the sixties – more than generalizing historical terms such as hippie culture and the New Left suggest.²²

In fact, the various countercultural factions were often influencing each other and collaborating or forming alliances, for example uniting within the peace movement. In multiple instances groups arose with hybrid ideologies, like the diggers or the yippies, which can be situated somewhere between hippie philosophies and New Left ideologies.²³ Despite of the fluidity of sixties counterculture, some key points can be identified for the different movements, as historians like W.J. Rorabaugh and John McMillian, show. Considering the scope of the thesis, and in order to facilitate comparisons between the song and its historical background, the following analysis of “Imagine” will contain some generalizations about the different sixties countercultural movements and sixties counterculture as a whole.

First of all, and in line with most sixties countercultural philosophies, “Imagine” contains a strong emphasis on a utopia. In the lyrics this is communicated through the anaphora (repetition) of the word “Imagine” and by the multiple suggestions of what a better, idealistic future would be like: “Imagine all the people living for today”/“living life in peace”/“sharing all the world”. This emphasis can also be found in the visual and multimedia extensions of the song: in the “Imagine” video and in the cover art of the *Imagine* album.²⁴ In the video, Lennon and Ono arrive at a light and spacious mansion after a long walk. The mansion is presented as a spiritual, dreamy place to be. The neoclassical entrance reminds of a Greek or Roman temple, and the couple magically enters through a fade-out without ever opening the door. Moreover, the interior décor contains futuristic elements: the mansion is almost empty but houses two installations of transparent and white cubes. Lennon and Ono symbolically enter their utopia.

²² W.J. Rorabaugh, *American Hippies* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2015), 11, 132-166; John McMillian, “‘You didn’t have to be there’: revisiting the New Left consensus,” in *The New Left Revisited*, ed. John McMillian and Paul Buhle (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2003), 5-6.

²³ Rorabaugh, *American Hippies*, 11, 132-166; McMillian, “the New Left consensus,” 5-6.

²⁴ Video directed by John Lennon and Yoko Ono, produced by John Lennon Yoko Ono and Phil Spector, ©2010 Calderstone Productions Limited (a division of Universal Music Group), and first released 1971, see “Imagine,” VEVO, accessed on May 11, 2018, <https://www.vevo.com/watch/john-lennon/imagine/GB0401000155>; Cover design and photos by Yoko Ono, ©1971 Bag Productions Inc., see “Album Artwork,” Imagine, Johnlennon, accessed on July 19, 2018, <http://www.johnlennon.com/music/albums/imagine/>.

Unlike the video, the original Imagine LP cover, which contains two artworks, does not focus on the looks of the utopia itself. It rather accentuates the act preceding and enabling the existence of the utopia: the act of imaging. The artwork on the front of the cover shows Lennon's face pensively staring ahead, in a sky blue light and surrounded by white clouds. On the back of the cover, Lennon is lying down and looking through his sunglasses at a blue sky similarly containing some white clouds. The bottom left side of this artwork additionally contains the quote: 'imagine the clouds dripping, dig a hole in your garden to put them in, yoko '63'. Both artworks thus contain signifiers of the act of dreaming, fantasizing or indeed imagining, which the quote also confirms. Hence, it could be argued that the cover indirectly reflects the utopian element contained in "Imagine" as well.

The earlier mentioned anaphora of the word "Imagine" throughout the lyrics of the song, not only emphasizes this utopia, but also indicates the role of the creative mind or of creative thoughts in achieving a better future. In fact, hippie culture similarly focused on change from within and on a revolution through feelings and thought. This idea started out through experiences related to the use of psychedelic drugs. However, according to social historian W.J. Rorabaugh, who analyzed hippie culture extensively in his book *American Hippies*, it 'later permeated counterculture'.²⁵ In "Imagine" this translates into the empowerment of individuals. Empowerment was an important feature of other countercultural movements as well but in different ways. The New Left, for example, also envisioned empowered individuals, but from a political perspective: as part of a participatory democracy.²⁶ From Lennon and Ono's point of view in "Imagine", empowerment meant that everyone's imagination, everyone's feelings and mind, could seriously contribute to the achievement of a blissful future.

The utopia put forth by "Imagine" is defined by a few different features, a number of which strongly recall hippie culture. The lines 'Imagine all the people, living for today' are in line with the hippie philosophy of fully living and feeling the 'now'. This might seem in contrast with

²⁵ Rorabaugh, *American Hippies*, 67-68.

²⁶ McMillian, "the New Left consensus," 3-5; Wade Matthews, *The New Left, National Identity, and the Break-up of Britain* (Leiden: Brill, 2013), 10-12.

utopian ideas, since those are necessarily positioned in the future, but in practice the two concepts did go together as hippies were trying to ‘live their utopia’.²⁷ Moreover, Lennon and Ono’s utopia is characterized by peacefulness and simplicity. While the concept of simplicity was not necessarily embedded in hippie philosophies, peace and love certainly were. Also, hippie philosophies were anti-intellectual and based on feelings, and were therefore theoretically accessible. Since “Imagine” is musically a simple song, written within the pop/rock genre – which was well known by the seventies – it was very accessible too.

Peacefulness and simplicity are primarily reflected by the choices in composition and production, which create the sound of the song. “Imagine” does not have many instruments, catchy solos or unexpected turns, and a general harmony of sound reigns throughout. Additionally, the lyrics do not contain intricate poetic verses or other complex language. The video confirms this feeling of peace and simplicity. It visually evokes these features through the cleanliness of the mansion and the extremely long shots taken inside of it. The longest shot lasts as much as 53 seconds. Another signifier is the chirping of the birds at the beginning and the end of the video. This feeling is strengthened even more by the ongoing harmony and love between Lennon and Ono, symbolized by their holding hands and kissing. Moreover, the moment the couple enters the mansion, the original dark coats they were wearing throughout the first part of the video are exchanged. Their new clothes resemble those of a hippy culture inspired bride and a groom. Ono is wearing a long white dress, a necklace with white shells, and two strings of just slightly darker pearls around her forehead. Lennon wears a necklace as well and his dark blue jacket is adorned with many tiny colorful flowers.

²⁷ Rorabaugh, *American Hippies*, 11-12.



Image 3 Screenshot of the “Imagine” video (3.14 min) Ono and Lennon behind a white piano

Peacefulness can signify a general state (of mind) within the utopia but it can also indicate a more concrete wish for peace, which is explicitly formulated in the lyrics of “Imagine”. This especially resonates in the second verse, which doesn’t just call for peace, but also challenges a number of cultural and political constructs by implicitly outing them as causes for violent conflict: the nation state, nationalism, religion and religious institutions.

Imagine there’s no countries
It isn’t hard to do
Nothing to kill or die for
And no religion too
Imagine all the people
Living life in peace

The song does not link these challenges to a specific government, or its wish for peace to any specific conflict or war. However, considering the engaged nature of the song and of Lennon and Ono as public figures, it is likely that Lennon’s statements in “Imagine” were influenced by its historical context. In 1971 the ongoing war in Vietnam was still a major motivator throughout American counterculture, and the sixties’ wish for peace had not yet faded away. Moreover, countercultural groups from the sixties and seventies, including the hippies and the New Left, were rooted in the conviction that the western political system (either of the American government or that of other western countries) was unjust, corrupted and oppressive.²⁸

²⁸ Rorabaugh, *American Hippies*, 133-136.

The last verse of the song suggests a more direct link between the utopia and leftist ideology. Through its lyrics Lennon implicitly criticizes consumerism and capitalist individualism, causing greed and hunger, and asks the audience to imagine a world without possessions.

Imagine no possessions
I wonder if you can
No need for greed or hunger
A brotherhood of man
Imagine all the people
Sharing all the world

However, the verse is too vague to state with certainty that it was inspired by leftist ideology or by a specific section of leftist thought. It would just as well fit in communist movements, as in the New Left, or in the anti-materialist philosophy promoted by the Diggers (a hybrid countercultural movement with strong ties to hippie culture).

In his 1980 interview with *Playboy Magazine*, however, Lennon did speak of his early contact with socialism through the environment he grew up in. In this account he talks of instinctively taking the side of socialists growing up, although later not necessarily identifying as one anymore.²⁹ Around the release of “Imagine”, Lennon moreover, got involved with radical politics linked to Yippie philosophy, the civil rights movement, and the New Left.³⁰ All considering, it is likely that the abovementioned verses of the song were – at least in part – influenced by leftist principles. Putting aside the origins of the verse, these statements certainly are in line with leftist ideologies. Moreover, with regard to the status of “Imagine”, it is of more consequence that they are not conflicting with many of the sixties countercultural movements, which to different extents embraced the idea of sharing and having no or little possessions (e.g. New Left, hippies, and diggers).

Finally, unity and collectiveness resonate throughout the entire song. The lyrics express a wish to take away all that causes divisions (the abovementioned countries and religions, and capitalist

²⁹ Sheff, *The Playboy Interviews*, 80.

³⁰ Anthony Elliott, *The Mourning of John Lennon* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999), 108-114; Micheal Frontani, “The solo years,” in *The Cambridge Companion to the Beatles*, ed. Kenneth Womack (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 170-173.

individualism) in order to create a world that is owned by all equally. Unity, like peace, is both a goal, and a means to an end, namely: a peaceful world wherein all of mankind can be united. The search for community can be linked to countercultural movements as well. In combination with the search for authenticity it was an important motivator. In this case the emphasis lies on community, which has a clear function in the realization of the song's utopia. Lennon and Ono's utopia can only become reality if all of mankind participates in the act of imagining. The song, in fact, is a call to join Lennon in imagining this bright future. In the video Ono is already imagining by Lennon's side; it would seem that the couple is symbolically paving the way.

Summing up, the initial intentions of Lennon and Ono were to show the way to a better future, where peace, simplicity and equality would reign. Through "Imagine", they called for a general end of conflict and inequalities, which could be achieved by changing personal attitudes and by daring to dream collectively. Ono voiced her personal commitment to this cause in a conversation with Lennon and Mike Douglas during their first cohosted episode of *The Mike Douglas Show*.³¹ After Lennon was asked what he wanted to talk about, the duo started mentioning various social issues and themes from their art and activism (love, peace, communication, women's liberation, racism, war, prison conditions, and drugs), but Ono finally said: "And also to show the future direction, you know, because the future direction is actually beautiful, you know, because people are getting very pessimistic these days, but actually it's gonna be very beautiful, I wanna show that to people."³²

³¹ Lennon and Ono cohosted a series of episodes of *The Mike Douglas Show* between 14 and 18 February 1972. The footage from these episodes was released on VHS in 1998: *The Mike Douglas Show with John Lennon and Yoko Ono*, see: Allan Kozinn, "Widow of Lennon, Guardian of Myth," *New York Times*, November 15, 1998; However, this officially authorized release is not accessible through Dutch public or University Libraries, nor available on authorized streaming websites. A YouTube user (manipeb) has however published a version of this footage on his channel. This is a fairly unedited version of the first episode of the show, although most likely the format was adapted to fit YouTube standards. After the ending credits the user also added extra footage from a different episode. After careful consideration, and with some caution, manipeb's post is referred to in this thesis as primary source. This is justified as follows: firstly, there is a lack of other means, secondly no evident major manipulation of the video is visible, and thirdly the video on its own does not constitute the grounds for any of the main arguments proposed in the thesis but is a supporting and elucidative source. See "john lennon at mike douglas show 1971 full," manipeb, YouTube, accessed on July 27, 2018, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zqLSJNCv5Ng&t=3038s>.

³² YouTube, "john lennon at mike douglas show."

The pessimism that Ono refers to might actually have aided the positive reception of “Imagine”, due to the song’s hopeful perspective on the future and the way it merges various ideals into a new utopia. In the early seventies, this pessimism increasingly was a factor for many (former) countercultural supporters, especially with regard to hippie philosophies and the New Left. Both these movements were dealing with growing disillusionment and gradually faded out during the seventies. Originally, hippies believed that their lifestyle would be so appealing that everybody would eventually join, but reality showed that this was an unlikely turn of events. Additionally, in American cities, hippies were dealing with more hostile living environments and a lot of the remaining hippies retreated to more isolated communes outside of urban areas in the seventies.³³ The New Left was dealing with similar disillusionment, but instead of retiring from society it tended towards radicalization. In his introduction to *The New Left Revisited*, one of the reasons John McMillian gives for the eventual disintegration of the movement is internal conflict between on the one side “‘critical reflection’ and long term strategy”, and on the other “‘militancy’ and immediate ‘action’”.³⁴ The latter was taking the upper hand in the late sixties and early seventies.

Despite of the eventual fading away of the sixties’ counterculture, the ideals of the abovementioned movements would impact (especially Western) culture in the decades to come. As can be deduced from the analysis of Lennon and Ono’s song, they certainly were a major influence for “Imagine”, which is still part of popular culture in the twenty-first century. The song reflects the general critique to mainstream society, culture and politics that resonated throughout the counterculture. It is striking however, how strong the influence of hippie philosophies was on “Imagine” compared to the influence of other countercultural factions. However, it would not be correct to claim that “Imagine” is promoting the hippie worldview fully or solely.

According to Rorabaugh, hippie culture was motivated and influenced not only by the search for authenticity and community and by hostility to authority – which are in different degrees reflected

³³ Rorabaugh, *American Hippies*, 165-166 and 205.

³⁴ McMillian, “the New Left consensus,” 3-4.

by the song – but also by notions of magic and spirituality and by drug experimentation.³⁵ The relationship between the song and magic and spirituality is questionable, although imagining might be interpreted as mystical act. Drug experimentation, instead, is not reflected at all in “Imagine”. An even more conflicting factor is that the majority of hippies turned their backs to politics and did not actually follow a coherent ideology based on rational thought.³⁶ The utopia promoted by “Imagine”, is based on clear ideological concepts and follows one philosophy. It puts forth a plan, which may or may not be realistic, but has a logic to it. The song is more anarchist than political, in the sense that the plan it puts forth operates outside of the political systems that were in place. On the other hand, it is more political than general hippie philosophies, as it engages with many different aspects of society, and promotes an inclusive idea of how all those should change, without shying away from the problem. This attitude reduces the distance between “Imagine” and political movements such as the New Left, the yippies and the Civil Rights movement.

Thus, while “Imagine” integrates a number of hippie ideals and is also influenced by other movements, it does not perfectly align with any. This way, “Imagine” presents an alternative interpretation of countercultural philosophies and ideologies. Combined with its general, mild, non-aggressive, and inclusive nature, it might have given a fresh breath of hope to disillusioned sixties counterculture supporters from different ideological backgrounds. Moreover, even for mainstream audiences, the song contained patterns of thought and concepts they had already familiarized with during the sixties, and were therefore more likely inclined to connect with. This might partly account for the song’s initial success.

According to Michael Frontani’s contribution to the *Cambridge Companion to the Beatles*, the *Imagine* album ‘was generally well received by the press and public, reaching number one in the US and UK charts, while the single from the album, “Imagine”, was a number three hit in the USA.’³⁷ Indeed “Imagine” was present in Billboard’s Hot 100 chart for 8 weeks, and reached the

³⁵ Rorabaugh, *American Hippies*, 11-13, 49-90.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 132.

³⁷ Frontani, “The solo years,” 171; The album reached the US top spot on the Billboard 200 chart on 30 October 1971, see “Billboard 200 – 1971 Archive,” Billboard Charts Archive, Billboard, accessed July 27, 2018, <https://www.billboard.com/archive/charts/1971/billboard-200>.

third spot on 13 and 20 November 1971.³⁸ While “Imagine” did very well, it was never Lennon’s bestselling single according to RIAA certification data. It did not reach a gold certification after its release. The album however, did reach gold certification already in on 1 October 1971, meaning that it had sold half a million copies in just fifteen days (it was released in the United States on 15 September 1971).³⁹

The general nature, or ‘vagueness’ of the song has been noticed by other scholars as well. Janne Mäkelä, who researched the rock star phenomenon of Lennon from a cultural and historical point of view, noted Keith Negus’ suggestion that songs like “Imagine”, with a certain ambiguity and with lasting appeal are likely to be interpreted in many ways and applied to different contexts.⁴⁰ Mäkelä himself wrote in this regard: “it is arguable that partly because of its affinity with so many situations and its adaptability to many forms, ‘Imagine’ has remained a classic pop song and been a source of inspiration and encouragement to many.”⁴¹ It is indeed very likely that this feature of “Imagine” contributed to keep the song relevant in the decades after its release as well. Lennon’s status as a major rock ‘n’ roll figure by the time of the release of “Imagine” undeniably also was an important factor with regard both to the initial success and the longevity of the song.

Chapter 1.2 “Imagine” within Lennon’s and Ono’s oeuvre

Nevertheless, the content, format and original context of the song on their own do not yet satisfactorily explain the longevity of “Imagine” in popular music culture and especially its recurring reutilizations related to situations of conflict and crisis. One of the factors that still need to be considered is the position of “Imagine” within Lennon’s and Ono’s large oeuvres. Why did specifically “Imagine” survive the test of time and stand out as an anthem for peace and solidarity,

³⁸ “Hot 100 – 1971 Archive,” Billboard Charts Archive, Billboard, accessed on July 27, 2018, <https://www.billboard.com/archive/charts/1971/hot-100>.

³⁹ Understanding the reasons behind the sales difference between the single and the album would necessitate a closer look to marketing strategies and consumer behavior. In a BBC interview it does come to the fore that EMI only released the single in the UK in 1975, in order to push album sales. see: *The Lennon Tapes*, 43. A similar factor could have played a role in the United States with regards to marketing. The single, however, was released in 1971 there, suggesting that might not have been the case. An in depth analysis reach be beyond the scope of this thesis, but might prove insightful if pursued in further research. For RIAA data see “Imagine,” Gold & Platinum, RIAA, accessed on August 12, 2018, https://www.riaa.com/gold-platinum/?tab_active=default-award&ar=JOHN+LENNON&ti=IMAGINE.

⁴⁰ Mäkelä, *John Lennon Imagined*, 222.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 224.

and not another one of their songs? “Imagine” certainly is not the only socially engaged song in Lennon and Ono’s individual or collective repertoires. Both of them are known for their socially engaged art and broader involvement with social issues and (peace) activism. Their joint efforts in this regard started shortly after they met in the late sixties. Their famous 1969 bed-ins for peace come to mind, where they promoted world peace and wrote their ‘other’ peace anthem “Give Peace a Chance”. They also performed together in a number of benefit concerts between 1969 and 1972 (a benefit for UNICEF, the *Ten for Two* concert for John Sinclair, a benefit concert for the victims of the Attica state prison riots, and the *One to One* benefit concerts to raise money for disable children).⁴²

On the one hand, “Imagine” can then be seen as deeply embedded in Lennon and Ono’s socially engaged repertoire, as it not only emphasizes the possibility to create a better future, but also contains indirect social critique. At the same time, however, the song is also slightly different from much of their work. “Imagine” covers a broad spectrum of social injustice in one song, it is a general anthem against all that suppresses and divides people. Instead, the couple’s other socially engaged works are mostly critiques of a specific situation and/or calls to action related to a specific issue. The abovementioned concerts, for instance, are dedicated to particular causes. The same can be said of the album *Sometime in New York City* (1972) – while the majority of songs on this album are Lennon’s it also contains a number of songs by Yoko. The songs are mostly protest songs, covering a number of very different issues: e.g. ‘John Sinclair’ (the imprisonment of countercultural figure John Sinclair), ‘The Luck of the Irish’ (conflict in Northern Ireland), and ‘Sisters, O Sisters’ (feminism).

Even the bed-ins for peace of Lennon and Ono, and their song “Give Peace a Chance” were specifically situated within the protest of armed conflict and violence in the context of the anti-war/peace movement.⁴³ Lennon and Ono’s famous pacifist Christmas hit “Happy Xmas (War is Over)” might be the closest song to “Imagine” in their collective repertoire (it was released only a

⁴² *The Lennon Tapes*, 179, 258.

⁴³ Jon Wiener, “Pop and Avant-Garde: The Case of John and Yoko,” *Popular Music Studies* 22:1 (1998) 1-16, 7-10.

few months after “Imagine”). It points out inequalities and stresses the power of believing in, or wanting, peace in obtaining it: ‘War is over, if you want it, war is over now’. This is similar to the process of imagining peace and a world without divisive factors. However, Happy Xmas (War is Over) is focused explicitly and solely on war, and does not encompass the variety of themes that “Imagine” does.

Perhaps “Imagine” would be most in line with Ono’s solo work. After all, the inspiration for the song did come from her work *Grapefruit*. *Grapefruit* is a collection of instructive poetry, which among other things contains the instruction “to imagine” but not to Imagine the utopia described in the song.⁴⁴ Ono’s other work from the sixties, her visual and performative art, was avant-garde and therefore stylistically very far apart from “Imagine”.⁴⁵ In the late sixties and seventies she also started recording her own experimental music albums. In her early album, *Plastic Ono Band* (1970) and *Fly* (1971) she used a particular screaming technique, which resulted in these albums not being very accessible to the general public. Her work was also not supported by the majority of media publications.⁴⁶ As a consequence, and also because neither of them contained a straightforward utopian dream, they could not have a similar impact as “Imagine”.

Later on, Ono’s albums did become more accessible, with song structures closer to mainstream popular music and better understandable lyrics, for example in *Approximately Infinite Universe* (1973) and *Feeling the Space* (1973). These albums contained socially engaged songs, but mostly focused on specific issues, especially on feminism. An interesting case is “Now or Never” (1973), which does tackle a number of different issues, including (parental) authority, war, police/army brutality, greed, and passive attitudes. Like “Imagine”, it is a call to action and it even contains and a bit of hope in the end. However, it mainly voices critique on American society: it is a protest song. It does not promote a dream like “Imagine” does. A final element with regard to Ono’s solo music, is that the reach of her songs could never meet Lennon’s. Lennon, being an ex-Beatle, had

⁴⁴ Ono, *Grapefruit*.

⁴⁵ Wiener, “Pop and Avant-Garde,” 3-5.

⁴⁶ Shelina Brown, “Scream from the Heart: Yoko Ono’s Rock and Roll Revolution,” in *Countercultures and Popular Music*, ed. Sheila Whiteley and Jedediah Sklower (Farnham: Ashgate, 2014), 182.

already conquered his place in the top section of the popular music hierarchy by the time he met Ono.

Lennon's solo works differed from "Imagine" in a similar way as Ono's. His socially engaged songs mainly focused on specific issues as well. Examples of these type of songs are: "I Don't Wanna Be a Soldier Mama I Don't Wanna Die" (1971) against war, and "Bring on the Lucie (Freda Peeple)" (1973) against the establishment. *Mind Games* (1974) does contain a silent conceptual track of 4 seconds called "Nutopian International Anthem", referring to an earlier written statement by Lennon and Ono related to the case of Lennon's deportation. In this statement he and Ono ask for diplomatic immunity on they declare themselves to be ambassadors to Nutopia. They defined Nutopia as follows (quoted by John Wiener): "a conceptual country, NUTOPIA," which "has no land, no boundaries, no passports, only people" – and "no laws other than cosmic." While it can be interpreted as critique against the government of the United States, it also is similar to the concept of no countries put forth by "Imagine". "Nutopian International Anthem" is a conceptual statement rather than a protest song like Lennon's other socially engaged works. However, it still just focuses on one issue.

Finally, "Imagine" also strikes a different note in comparison with Lennon's work with the Beatles, despite of the fact that the band had been an important influencer of engaged rock music.⁴⁷ The Beatles provided social, cultural and political commentary through many of their songs and expressed critique on the state of things in the world. However, they did not directly involve themselves in protest or directly call for revolutionary action through their songs. The band also did not offer solutions to the issues they were commenting on and uncovering, other than the general attitude of love ("All You Need is Love", 1967).⁴⁸ This is not surprising since the Beatles were much influenced by hippie culture, especially in the late sixties. Hippie culture did not aim to operate in mainstream culture or offer mapped out solutions for its issues. It rather focused on personal and emotional journeys and intuition. The link between this culture and the Beatles can

⁴⁷ Andy Bennett, "Reappraising 'Counterculture'," 17-26, 18.

⁴⁸ Sheila Whiteley, "The Beatles as zeitgeist," in *The Cambridge Companion to the Beatles*, ed. Kenneth Womack (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 212-215.

also be found in both their 1967 albums, *Sgt. Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band* and *Magical Mystery Tour*, which were strongly influenced by psychedelics and the metaphysical.⁴⁹

To a certain extent, the Beatles oeuvre does show similarities with "Imagine". The song is very distant from militant revolution and close to hippie ideology on many levels – although it does not refer to drug culture. However, in contrast to the Beatles oeuvre, "Imagine" does offer a rationalized solution to ongoing issues in the world, namely: imagining collectively. Also, by writing "Imagine" in first-person, and through lines like "you may say I'm a dreamer" and "I hope someday you will join us", Lennon involves himself with, and personally supports the ideology or plan that the song puts forth. This could be seen as just a stylistic/artistic format. Nevertheless, considering the level of commitment that Lennon and Ono had shown to peace activism in the years preceding the release of "Imagine", the song can more likely be interpreted as containing a personal statement. Beatles' song "Revolution 1" contains a similar type of personal statement, although not sustaining but critiquing a type of action.⁵⁰ "Revolution 1" is against militant revolution, and while it hints to freeing one's mind as a better course of action, it does not provide a rationalized solution like "Imagine". Whereas with the Beatles Lennon limited himself mainly to provide commentary and critique, in "Imagine" he went as far as to explicitly call his audience to a (non-militant) action.

Thus, as "Imagine" is a general, leftist and pacifist pop-anthem, which is not about any specific conflict or crisis but contains a clear statement from the artists, it has a unique position in Lennon's and Ono's repertoires. The features that provided Imagine with this unique position may very well have been pivotal in assuring the song's longevity as an anthem for peace and solidarity in times of conflict and crisis. The fact that it touches upon various themes and is not too specific about anything, results in the easy applicability of the song to different causes. "Imagine" certainly seems

⁴⁹ Rorabaugh, *American Hippies*, 78, 79.

⁵⁰ Sheila Whiteley mentions that at the time this was interpreted by some as 'a total disregard of serious political issues', see: Whiteley, "The Beatles as zeitgeist," 212-215. This critical reaction from part of the audience should be considered in its historical context. At the time, there were contrasts between less radical countercultural groups, mainly the hippies, which over all were against militant revolution, and the radicalizing factions of the New Left, which instead gravitated towards it (see e.g.: Rorabaugh, *American Hippies*, 132-166). The Beatles tended towards hippie ideology at the time, and took a clear stance.

to be felt – both by audiences, by artists covering the song, and by broadcasters – to be an appropriate anthem in the context of a variety of crises and conflicts, such as worldwide hunger and poor conditions of children, terrorist attacks, and armed conflict, for instance in Darfur.

Chapter 1.3 Promoting “Imagine”

Lennon himself only once explicitly dedicated the song to a special cause. This was at the One to One benefit concerts at New York’s Madison Square Garden in 1972, where he performed with Ono and the Plastic Ono Elephant’s Memory Band. In the later released footage, Lennon tells the audience when announcing “Imagine”: ‘This song is more about why we’re here, apart from the rocking and that. I hope they get what we came for, that’s the money’.⁵¹ The goal of the concerts was to raise money for children with disabilities. The way Lennon and Ono presented the song on this occasion was in many ways in line with their original intent. During this song the stage lighting showed only Lennon and Ono playing two keyboards side by side at the center of the stage (the band was darkened), which indicates their equal involvement with the song. Moreover, most of the other songs they played during those nights were of a more aggressive/rebellious, rock and roll nature, topped off by a powerful and extremely political closing performance of “Give Peace a Chance”.⁵² Instead, for “Imagine” Lennon took the time to reflect upon the actual goal of the evening, which was to help children in need. “Imagine” indicated a simple, concrete way to do something positive, to help those in need, with less rebellious connotations than most other songs they performed.

⁵¹ Footage of the One to One concert was released in VHS in 1985: *John Lennon Live in New York City*. However, this authorized footage is not accessible through Dutch public or University Libraries, nor available on authorized streaming websites. A YouTube user (LosBeatlesTube) has published a copy of this footage on his channel. The footage seems complete and fairly unedited by the LosBeatlesTube, although most likely the format was adapted to fit YouTube standards. After careful consideration, and with some caution this post is referred to in this thesis as primary source. This is justified as follows: firstly, there is a lack of other means, secondly no evident manipulation of the video is visible, and thirdly the video on its own does not constitute the grounds for any of the main arguments proposed in the thesis but is a supporting and elucidative source. See “John Lennon – Live in Madison Square Garden,” LosBeatlesTube, Youtube, accessed on July 31, 2018, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pyisavj9iV4>.

⁵² Yoko Ono opened the performance of “Give Peace a Change” by making a big political statement with regard to the Cold War. She read a speech against communism, student revolts, and Russia, and then explained to the audience that the speech was given by Adolf Hitler in 1932, see Youtube, “John Lennon – Live.”

The One to One concert was one of the very few times that Lennon performed “Imagine” live. Sporadic performances of the song include a performance at Apollo Theater in 1971 at a fundraiser for the relatives of the Attica State riots victims and a TV performance on the Mike Douglas show (1972).⁵³ Lennon’s last public performance of the song was at an event in honor of Sir Lew Grade, *A Salute to Sir Lew. The Master Showman* (1975).⁵⁴ The 1975 performance was a quite unique one - Lennon is wearing all red, which makes his look more aggressive, he plays the guitar instead of the piano, performs without Ono, and the musicians in his band wear masks on the back of their heads so that it looks like they have double faces. Instead, the performance on the Mike Douglas show is more like the performance at Madison Square garden, featuring Ono playing a tambourine. The live performances are slightly more bluesy/playful and lively than the recorded version of the song. However, the core message which is transmitted through the song remains unaltered in all performances.

The reason why live performances of the song by Lennon are so scarce, is that Lennon did not tour to promote the album *Imagine* or any other album he released in the seventies. He did do some promotion of “Imagine” on TV. He and Ono not only appeared on the Mike Douglas Show but also on the Dick Cavett Show. Strikingly, in both these instances “Imagine” was not the focus. On the Dick Cavett Show most of the footage recorded on 8 September 1971 and broadcasted on 11 and 24 September 1971 was dedicated to showing other artistic endeavors of Lennon and Ono alike. Cavett, Lennon and Ono for instance discussed Ono’s *Grapefruit* and showed clips from short films by both artists. Since this was also Lennon’s first TV-appearance after the break-up of the Beatles became official, the break-up was a recurring theme as well. Only near the end of the episode was “Imagine” briefly presented and was the video of “Imagine” broadcasted.⁵⁵ Lennon and Ono did perform the song live on one of the episodes of the Mike Douglas show that they co-hosted. But the hot topics they discussed and the, sometimes controversial, guests they invited

⁵³ Elliott, *The Mourning of John Lennon*, 113; YouTube, “john lennon at mike douglas show.”

⁵⁴ *A Salute to Sir Lew. The Master Showman* has first been broadcasted on TV by ABC in 1975. The footage of Lennon’s performance of “Imagine” has been rereleased in 2003, see *Lennon Legend. The Very Best of John Lennon*, Special Features, “Imagine” (Parlophone, 2003) DVD.

⁵⁵ *The Dick Cavett Show: John & Yoko collection*, Disc 1, “September 11, 1971: John Lennon & Yoko Ono,” “complete interview” (Daphne Productions, Inc., 2005) DVD.

seem to have taken a more central position.⁵⁶ The general impression these shows give, is that the duo used the momentum generated by the break-up of the Beatles and the release of *Imagine* to shine light on their other artistic endeavors and on a variety of social causes they supported.

However, this does not automatically mean that the song and its meaning was not of significance to Lennon and Ono. In a 1980 interview for *Playboy Magazine*, Lennon told David Sheff about an instance in which he explicitly denied permission for a cover version of the song which changed the lyrics from “no religion” into “one religion”: “The World Church called me once and asked, “Can we use the lyrics to “Imagine” and just change it to ‘Imagine *one* religion’?” That showed they didn't understand it at all. It would defeat the whole purpose of the song, the whole idea.”⁵⁷ Apparently, Lennon cared for promoting a precise message through the song. In this case about a world without denominations of religions, and without the ‘my-God-is-bigger-than-your-God thing’.⁵⁸ Interestingly, some of Lennon’s fans took over an attachment to the original lyrics to that regard. In 2011 this resulted in a lot of (online) criticism when artist Cee Lo Green changed the lyrics from ‘and no religion too’ to ‘and all religion’s true’ during his TV performance at NBC's New Year's Eve concert.⁵⁹ In authorized, recorded covers of the song the verse ‘and no religion too’ seems to have remained unchanged as well, and the lyrics seem to follow the first released version of the song.⁶⁰ This may be because Lennon’s estate, in accordance with his and/or Yoko’s instructions, handles the copyright so that the original message remains intact, no matter who is covering the song.

⁵⁶ YouTube, “john lennon at mike douglas show.”

⁵⁷ Sheff, *The Playboy Interviews*, 179.

⁵⁸ Ibid.

⁵⁹ Sean Michaels, “Cee Lo Green criticised for changing lyrics to John Lennon's Imagine. Forget You singer apologises to fans for New Year’s Eve performance in which he changed line criticising religion,” *The Guardian*, January 3, 2012, <https://www.theguardian.com/music/2012/jan/03/cee-lo-green-john-lennon>; Matthew Perpetua, “Cee Lo Green Outrages John Lennon Fans by Changing Lyrics to ‘Imagine’”. Performed on New Year’s Eve broadcast from Times Square,” *Rolling Stone*, January 2, 2012, <https://www.rollingstone.com/music/news/cee-lo-green-outrages-john-lennon-fans-by-changing-lyrics-to-imagine-20120102>.

⁶⁰ A great variety of authorized covers of the song is available on multiple musical platforms. While a really large amount of the covers available through Spotify and YouTube have been considered with regard to this argument, it cannot be guaranteed that no cover has been overlooked. It can be deducted however, that the trend is for artists to follow the lyrics from the original release in authorized, recorded covers.

On the other hand, in certain contexts, such as select live performances, Lennon did change some of the lyrics of the song himself. This way he broadened the scope of the social issues touched upon. At the One to One concert, Lennon sung: “brotherhood and sisterhood of man” instead of “brotherhood of man”.⁶¹ In interviews for the promotion of *Sometime in New York City* and later for *Double Fantasy*, Lennon discussed his growing sensibility to feminist issues in the seventies. On the Dick Cavett Show he explained how Ono’s point of view helped trigger his change in attitude towards women and women’s struggles.⁶² Ono did indeed become an established feminist artist herself. Together they wrote “Woman is the Nigger of the World”, released on *Sometime in New York City* (1973). This song epitomizes Lennon’s involvement with the feminist movement. Also, in the 1980 *Playboy Magazine* interview, Lennon discussed how not only living with Yoko but also reading books like *The First Sex* (1971) inspired him to this regard.⁶³

Lennon sung these feminist lyrics during his performance of “Imagine” at the Sir Lew Grade event as well. In that occasion Lennon also replaced “no religion too” with “no immigration too”, and “I wonder if you can” became “I wonder if we can”.⁶⁴ Most probably, he included the migration issues due to his own negative experience with American immigration policies. He had been struggling for permission to enter, and later to live in, the country since the end of the sixties. The state even issued a deportation order against him in 1972, but finally the U.S. court of appeals overturned this order in 1975. Lennon got a green card eight months later.⁶⁵ Timewise, it is interesting however, that this alteration of the lyrics was also parallel to immigration debates in the United States with regard to refugees from Vietnam. In 1975 the Indochina Migration and Refugee Assistance Act was passed in the United States. It seems that Lennon was keen on including other themes in the lyrics as they became relevant to him: feminism in the early seventies and migration issues later on. The last minor alteration “I wonder if we can”, may reflect Lennon’s own struggles

⁶¹ YouTube, “John Lennon – Live.”

⁶² *The Dick Cavett Show: John & Yoko collection*, Disc 2, “May 11, 1972: John Lennon & Yoko Ono, Shirley MacLaine,” (Daphne Productions, Inc., 2005) DVD.

⁶³ Sheff, *The Playboy Interviews*, 36-39.

⁶⁴ *Lennon Legend. The Very Best of John Lennon*, Special Features, “Imagine” (Parlophone, 2003) DVD.

⁶⁵ Mäkelä, *John Lennon Imagined*, 185; Wiener, “Pop and Avant-Garde,” 14.

with wealth and possessions. He and Ono discussed these struggles during their 1980 interview with the *Playboy Magazine*.⁶⁶

Considering the very limited amount of live performances, the few performances discussed above are a mere indication of Lennon's and Ono's attitude in presenting the song after its release. They show some flexibility in dedicating the song to different causes, as long as that does not affect the song's original intent. More interesting, however, is the fact that Lennon and Ono did not do a lot of promotion of *Imagine* specifically and personally in the seventies; especially after the initial months of its release they did not do much effort to keep the song in the spotlight. Also, while the song was part of their pacifist repertoire, at that time they did not focus on it as the center of their efforts. Regardless, "Imagine" became a major hit. In 1980, BBC Radio One interviewer Andy Peebles went as far as to state to Lennon and Ono that "if you were to say to most music programmers around the world, which would be the John Lennon track they would instantly pick to play, I think it would be *Imagine*, it's had fantastic airplay."⁶⁷

Especially in the United States, a lot of mainstream commercial radio stations (which worked according to the Top 40 format) refused to play controversial music in the seventies.⁶⁸ Lennon and Ono's songs have for this reason often been denied airplay in the United States but also on multiple occasions in Britain.⁶⁹ With "Imagine" this was not the case, it was not perceived as too controversial a song. Although "controversial music" was a fluid concept for these radio stations, "Imagine" probably avoided censorship – once again – because of its general nature and because its critique was not explicit. This enabled "Imagine" to reach a very large audience. This factor might have influenced Lennon and Ono in the writing process too, as one of their goals with regard to their activism had been to make commercials for peace.⁷⁰

⁶⁶ Lennon told David Sheff that in time he came to consider transcendence of possessions as a mental thing instead of a physical rejection of possessions. However, he had often felt guilty about his wealth. See Sheff, *The Playboy Interviews*, 79-84.

⁶⁷ *The Lennon Tapes*, 43.

⁶⁸ Deena Weinstein, "Rock protest songs: so many and so few," in *The Resisting Muse: Popular Music and Social Protest*, ed. Ian Peddie (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2006), 6.

⁶⁹ *The Lennon Tapes*, 23, 29, 42-43, 59-60.

⁷⁰ Kimsey, "The Beatles for sale," 234; *The Lennon Tapes*, 23.

At the time of the release of “Imagine”, Lennon was under contract with EMI and Capitol. These were extremely well established, and big record companies, which had previously handled the Beatles’ releases. Their networks further enabled a (world)wide distribution of “Imagine”. Lennon and Ono’s contact with EMI and Capitol, however, had not always gone smoothly. Both EMI and Capitol have forced some restrictions especially with regard to the artworks on the covers of *Unfinished Music no. 1: Two Virgins* and *Sometime in New York City*, because of the nudity they showed. However, recording under the Beatles’ own label Apple did guarantee Lennon and Ono a bigger amount of creative freedom than they would have had otherwise.⁷¹ *Imagine* did not create big issues for the record companies and was distributed quite regularly, although EMI did decide to postpone the release of the single until 1975 in Britain in order to push album sales.⁷² This might have contributed in keeping “Imagine” relevant in the second half of the seventies as well. In the United States both the single and the album were released in 1971.

Soon after the release of *Imagine*, Lennon moved on to other projects. Lennon released his next album *Sometime in New York City* already in 1972. After a separation from Ono for a short period between 1973 and 1975, and the release of three more albums by 1975, Lennon took a break and disappeared from public life almost completely. Unfortunately, it is not possible to know which other causes Lennon would have dedicated the song to, whether he would have continued to alter the lyrics, and which alterations he would have allowed in covers after the seventies. In 1980, Lennon and Ono were planning a musical comeback with a new collaborative album entitled *Double Fantasy*. They did multiple interviews to promote this. In what may have been Lennon’s very last interview, on 8 December 1980 with RKO Radio Network, Lennon showed a slight shift of attitude with regard to “Imagine”: “What I'm saying is now, now, let's ... show how we're trying to imagine there's no wars, to live that love and peace rather than sing about it only.”⁷³ Lennon expressed the need to put the ideals of “Imagine” in practice, but he still stood behind what he sung in 1971. This narrative does not explicitly come to the fore in other interviews he did that year,

⁷¹ Bruce Spizer, “Apple Records,” in *The Cambridge Companion to the Beatles*, ed. Kenneth Womack (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 147.

⁷² *The Lennon Tapes*, 43.

⁷³ United Press International, AM Cycle, Domestic News, New York, December 13, 1980.

although they do generally support this conclusion. Just hours after the RKO interview Lennon was tragically shot.

Before the release of *Double Fantasy*, the Lennons had made one more major statement together. In May 1979, during their retreat from public life, they published a letter in the New York Times and the Sunday Times, replying to inquiries about what had happened to them.⁷⁴ This letter is striking because in it Lennon and Ono take their distances from big symbolic gestures like flashing the “V sign”, which have been typical of their activism during the late sixties and early seventies. Instead, in the letter they write that they have been focusing on the more personal and spiritual act of ‘wishing’ and explain themselves as follows: “We are not doing this because it is simpler. Wishing is more effective than waving flags. It works. It’s like magic. Magic is simple. Magic is real. The secret of it is to know that it is simple, and not kill it with an elaborate ritual which is a sign of insecurity.”⁷⁵

While “Imagine” could be seen as one of the symbolic products Lennon and Ono are distancing themselves from, the attitude reflected in the letter actually shows continuity with different aspects of the song. “Imagine” too, calls for a personal approach to change. Moreover, the acts of “imagining” and “wishing” are similar. Lennon mentioned in the 1980 Playboy interview that “Imagine” was based on the concept of positive prayer, partly inspired by a prayer booklet he and Yoko received from activist and comedian Dick Gregory.⁷⁶ This concept sounds a lot like the wish fulfillment philosophy that the couple subscribed at the time of the interview and in the letter. Lennon told the interviewer that this philosophy has influenced them since the late sixties, and also sustained the bed-ins for peace.⁷⁷ Moreover, the letter conveys a sense of peacefulness, bliss and hope, which can also be found in the song and video of “Imagine”. Finally, the letter subtly refers to unity between people and communicates a positive image of the future, while stressing an

⁷⁴ “A Love Letter From John And Yoko To People Who Ask Us What, When And Why”, Archives, Imagine Peace, accessed on June 16, 2018, <http://imaginepeace.com/archives/2579>; In Frontani’s, “The solo years,” 175, is stated that part from the New York Times and the Sunday Times, the letter was also published in a newspaper in Tokyo, although the name of the newspaper is not mentioned.

⁷⁵ Imagine Peace, “A Love Letter.”

⁷⁶ Sheff, *The Playboy Interviews*, 33-35.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, 179.

individual responsibility for positive change: “First they [miracles] come in a small way, in every day life, then they come in rivers, and in oceans. It’s goin’ to be alright! The future of the earth is up to all of us.”⁷⁸

In the 1980 album *Double Fantasy* Lennon and Ono maintained their distance from activist symbols. The songs in the album are mostly about their relationship and their personal lives (e.g. “Dear Yoko”, “Cleanup Time”, “Beautiful Boys”, “Yes, I’m Your Angel”). The album did not explicitly touch upon political themes, let alone contain a political anthem. The vinyl of the of the 12-inch single “(Just Like) Starting Over” did nevertheless contain the slogan “one world, one people”.⁷⁹ And therefore, even this album has a subtle reference to the philosophies that the couple had subscribed during the late sixties and seventies. Moreover, as mentioned earlier, the interviews that Lennon and Ono gave for the promotion of the album did confirm that both still generally supported the ideals behind “Imagine”. This is especially true with regard to peace. In fact, on 5 December 1980, Lennon told Rolling Stones editor Jonathan Cott: “‘All You Need is Love’: It’s damn hard, but I absolutely believe it. We’re not the first to say ‘Imagine No Countries’ or ‘Give Peace a Chance,’ but we’re carrying that torch, like the Olympic torch, passing it hand to hand, to each other, to each country, to each generation...”⁸⁰

While support for peace is present in the 1980 *BBC Radio One* and *Playboy Magazine* interviews, it has a marginal place.⁸¹ In contrast to their media appearances in the seventies, in these interviews Lennon and Ono barely used their momentum to shine light on specific causes. Apart from peace, only feminism came into the conversation, mainly in relation to Ono’s and Lennon’s lifestyles; Lennon identified with his new role as househusband and Ono came across as quite the businesswoman.⁸² No causes specifically ongoing in 1980 were promoted by the couple. Instead, their new work was central in the interviews, as was their musical oeuvre generally speaking, and their activities during the five years preceding *Double Fantasy*’s release.

⁷⁸ Imagine Peace, “A Love Letter.”

⁷⁹ Jonathan Cott, “John Lennon: The Last Interview,” *Rolling Stone*, December 23, 2010, <https://www.rollingstone.com/music/music-news/john-lennon-the-last-interview-179443/>.

⁸⁰ Ibid.

⁸¹ *The Lennon Tapes*, 23 and 51; Sheff, *The Playboy Interviews*, 96-100.

⁸² *The Lennon Tapes*, 72-78; Sheff, *The Playboy Interviews*, 3-62.

With regard to their future plans, the interviews contain no links to activism whatsoever. Lennon even looks back negatively to the benefit concerts he performed in during the late sixties and seventies: “The show is always a mess and the artist always comes off badly.”⁸³ His negativism seems to have been partly caused by a debacle surrounding George Harrison’s concert for Bangladesh and the way the concert’s money was donated. Lennon was not considering doing benefit concerts any time soon, and instead was talking of donating a percentage of what they earned directly to the causes they felt like supporting. While the 1979 letter definitely had a more blissful air than the latter statement, the interviews are in line with the letter’s claim that Ono and Lennon decided to take their distance from big activist gestures. After the tragic events of 1980, this trend was broken by Ono, who returned to a more active promotion of the causes she supports. Among other things, she expanded the “Imagine” oeuvre, reutilized the song, and authorized the adoption of the song by NGO’s.

Chapter 2 Lennon’s legacy and Ono’s mission: 1980 and onwards

After Lennon’s death Ono became the primary actor for the Lennon estate. As such, she played a central role in the promotion of Lennon’s work and myth. Currently, she still has both personal and commercial interests with regard to her late husband’s oeuvre, which she, among other things, has regularly employed for activist purposes. This can also be said of “Imagine” – until 2017 still just credited as a Lennon song. Ono has been pivotal in constructing and guaranteeing the longevity of “Imagine” as a cultural phenomenon. She has been extremely prolific, putting forth new products, campaigns and initiatives related to the song. Additionally, Ono supported various musical covers and broadcasts proposed by others. In fact, her efforts can be divided into two categories: reutilizations of the song through her own initiatives, and authorization of initiatives and products by third parties adopting the song. This chapter will look more closely at the way Ono, leading the Lennon estate, interpreted and renegotiated the song’s role and meaning throughout the years. It

⁸³ Sheff, *The Playboy Interviews*, 68.

focuses on how she reutilized and promoted “Imagine” in different contexts, in support of different causes, and in collaboration with a variety of actors.

A few trends can be traced throughout the years. First of all, Ono’s initiatives related to “Imagine” were frequently in the context of the remembrance of her late husband and his art. Remembrance was a particularly central factor in her efforts during the first decade after his death. Only sporadically in the eighties and nineties did she employ the song in promotion of other causes. Around the turn of the century she also used it a couple of times to the benefit of Lennon and Ono’s own Spirit Foundation, which donated money to a variety of charities. Starting in 1999, her initiatives shifted to cover various different causes in collaboration with non-profit organizations. These involved “Imagine” or related products in fundraising or campaigning. Furthermore, she expanded the “Imagine” oeuvre by creating new artworks related to the song, such as the Imagine Peace Tower in Iceland.⁸⁴ On her website Imagine Peace, she still promotes her new works and shares news related to her own and Lennon’s oeuvre.⁸⁵

In order to trace Ono’s initiatives throughout the years, the LexisNexis media archive has proved extremely useful.⁸⁶ Since Ono’s initiatives with regard to Lennon’s memory and legacy were so many however, database searches resulted in an extremely large amount of media products. A better overview of her efforts with regard to “Imagine” appeared when limiting the search to newswires and press releases from the “All news (English)” section containing the words “Yoko Ono” and “Imagine”. As a consequence the overview is slightly biased, as it mainly contains the perspectives of English speaking countries. But, even English language news agencies report major happenings in non-English speaking countries. Thus, it can be assumed – especially considering Ono’s fame – that all major initiatives involving Ono have been reported and are now included in figure 2. While newswires are generally more factual and thus less biased than newspaper or magazine articles, they still are media products and accurateness cannot be fully guaranteed. To limit inaccuracies with regard to the analysis of Ono’s initiatives, individual newswires have been

⁸⁴ Imagine Peace Tower, accessed August 19, 2018, <http://imaginepeacetower.com/>.

⁸⁵ Imagine Peace, accessed August 19, 2018, <http://imaginepeace.com/>.

⁸⁶ LexisNexis Academic, accessed June 1, 2018 to August 19, 2018, <http://academic.lexisnexis.nl.proxy.library.uu.nl/>.

routinely double checked and contextualized using mainly newswires from other news agencies, related articles (especially from the Rolling Stone magazine), secondary literature about Lennon’s posthumous career and about Ono, and where possible, other primary sources related to their content. Moreover, most newswires are from long established news agencies.

Solo projects	Year	Collaborative projects
	1985	Strawberry Fields opening
<i>Starpeace</i> tour	1986	
	1986	<i>A Conspiracy of Hope</i> final concert
Imagine All the People broadcast	1990	
	1997	First John Lennon Songwriting Competition
	1999	MSN “Imagine” auction
Post-9/11 “Imagine” campaign	2001	Spirit Foundation poster auction
“Imagine” campaign Iraq War	2003	Amnesty International “Imagine” campaign
Imagine Peace Tower	2007	<i>Instant Karma</i> album Darfur
Imagine Peace Billboard	2008	
Imagine Peace Billboard	2009	Imagine There’s No Hunger Campaign
Imagine Peace Billboard	2012	
	2013	Artists Against Fracking Campaign
	2014	Unicef #IMAGINE project
	2017	Amnesty International “Imagine” book

Figure 2 Timeline "Imagine" projects

Chapter 2.1 In Lennon’s memory

Lennon’s death in 1980 triggered a wave of transnational mass mourning of an extent previously unknown with regard to pop stars.⁸⁷ Even Elvis Presley’s death had not triggered such an extreme reaction. In fact, scholars such as Janne Mäkelä and Anthony Elliott have compared the reaction to Lennon’s death to the reactions to the deaths of political and religious leaders. Especially in the United States, the violent death by a gunman recalled the assassination of President John F. Kennedy, or as Mäkelä put it, ‘immediately evoked parallels with the political assassinations of the 1960s.’⁸⁸ It also triggered a long list of publications (both new and reissues) of Lennon’s own books and interviews with him, (re)releases of his music, documentaries and books about his life, and all kinds of other authorized and unauthorized tributes to, and reflections on, his life and art.⁸⁹ This is especially true for the eighties, but until this day new cultural and commercial products are

⁸⁷ Elliott, *The Mourning of John Lennon*, 141-143; Mäkelä, *John Lennon Imagined*, 207-208.

⁸⁸ Elliott, *The Mourning of John Lennon*, 141; Mäkelä, *John Lennon Imagined*, 214-215.

⁸⁹ Elliott, *The Mourning of John Lennon*, 148-150.

put forth. Even Lennon's death and his public mourning were thus deeply intertwined with the workings of the music industry and mass media.

Yoko Ono too, quickly got involved with Lennon's posthumous publications and releases, and as a consequence, with the discourses of his remembrance. Ever since Lennon's death, she has been controlling access to much of his music and other material and has been granting permission for reutilization to selected projects.⁹⁰ Additionally, Ono has been presenting her own narratives of Lennon's life and death through her active involvement in the release of books, documentaries, albums and singles, and art of, and about Lennon. Nevertheless, she has never had absolute control over the, sometimes controversial, narratives that have been promoted throughout the years.⁹¹

One of the narratives that she has promoted focuses on the love story and collaboration between her and Lennon. For instance, according to Elliott she authorized a collection of essays by Rolling Stone titled *The Ballad of John and Yoko* (1982).⁹² This narrative was not new, but rather a continuation of the image that the couple had been promoting to the media before Lennon's death. It proved to be a lasting narrative, which was reflected in various projects in the twenty-first century as well. It had a central place in the 2000 documentary *Gimme Some Truth: The Making of John Lennon's "Imagine" Album*, and in an authorized 2018-2019 exhibition at the Museum of Liverpool.⁹³ Ono has also been showing Lennon as a versatile artist, especially through the promotion of his drawings (e.g. in exhibitions and on imaginepeace.com).

The narrative that is most relevant with regard to "Imagine" is the one that portrays Lennon as a peace activist and visionary. Mäkelä rightly notes how through the years of Lennon's life, his public image has been varied: e.g. Lennon the Beatle, the peace activist, the revolutionary, the househusband, and the survivor.⁹⁴ After Lennon's death, as Lennon was often depicted as sixties hero, the peace narrative became predominant. Within this narrative Lennon's pacifist songs took a

⁹⁰ Kimsey, "The Beatles for sale," 243-246.

⁹¹ A well-known example of an alternative narrative is the iconoclastic biography by Albert Goldman, *The Lives of John Lennon* (1988). See also Mäkelä, *John Lennon Imagined*, 219-221.

⁹² Elliott, *The Mourning of John Lennon*, 148.

⁹³ "Double Fantasy: John and Yoko: 18 May 2018 to 22 April 2019," Liverpoolmuseums, accessed on August 7, 2018, <http://www.liverpoolmuseums.org.uk/mol/exhibitions/double-fantasy/>.

⁹⁴ Mäkelä, *John Lennon Imagined*, passim.

central position. “Imagine” and “Give Peace a Chance” reportedly were played repeatedly on American radio stations in reaction to Lennon’s death.⁹⁵ Newswires also mentioned multiple instances already in the early eighties in which gathering fans linked their public mourning to these songs by referring to their slogans, or by singing them.⁹⁶ Journalist Lawrence Kilman for example, wrote that on Lennon’s second anniversary: ‘A van with a loudspeaker mounted on the roof stopped in front of the Dakota and blasted the Lennon song “Imagine.” The crowd sang along, and kept singing even after the truck’s generator died.’⁹⁷ This narrative – from now on the ‘peace narrative’ – thus seems to have appeared rather naturally at the beginning of the eighties, regardless of the actions of Ono and the Lennon estate.

Nevertheless, Ono’s initiatives have authorized it and presented it over and over again, aiding its longevity and also fixing a central place for “Imagine” therein. Ono first promoted this narrative in connection to the Strawberry Fields memorial in Central Park, New York City. This is a permanent memorial, which consists of around three acres of teardrop shaped land and contains a mosaic spelling “Imagine”. The project started in 1981, when city council member Henry Stern sponsored a measure to name the area in Central Park ‘Strawberry Fields’. The name was borrowed from the song “Strawberry Fields Forever”, which Lennon wrote while still with the Beatles. Ono endorsed the project early on, got deeply involved in it, and eventually decided to donate one million dollars for its creation and upkeep. She also asked countries from all over the world to contribute to Strawberry Fields through the donation of plants; 123 countries participated. Moreover, Ono addressed the attending people both during the groundbreaking ceremony on 21 March 1984 and at the official opening ceremony on 9 October 1985, which would have been Lennon’s forty-fifth birthday.⁹⁸

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, 215, 237.

⁹⁶ See for instance Associated Press, “NEW YORK: Mr. Lennon,” December 10, 1980; Associated Press, AM Cycle, Domestic News, December 8, 1981.

⁹⁷ Associated Press, “Fans Mark Second Anniversary of Lennon Killing,” December 9, 1982.

⁹⁸ Associated Press, “Landmarks Commission OKs John Lennon Memorial,” April 6, 1983; United Press International, AM Cycle, Domestic News, New York, March 21, 1984; Associated Press, “Fans Stream into Strawberry Fields,” October 9, 1985.

Arguably, ‘Strawberry Fields’ was the first major remembrance project that Ono actively involved herself with. Other major projects of Ono during these years, were the releases of her two new albums: *Season of Glass* and *It’s Alright (I See Rainbows)*. While these albums too reflected on Lennon’s death, they do not fit the definition of remembrance as intended here: a practice that, while still containing the element of death, focuses on the memory of the life of the deceased, if not even on symbolically celebrating that life. Differently from Strawberry Fields, the albums come across less as a remembrance of Lennon, than as an expression of the horror of his death and of Ono’s mourning process. The horror is reflected by the crude cover of *Season of Glass*, which shows Lennon’s glasses covered with blood.⁹⁹ The mourning process, instead, comes across through many of the lyrics in the albums.

Both the shape of a teardrop and the location of Strawberry Fields do recall the mourning and death of Lennon. In fact, Strawberry Field is located just across the street from Lennon and Ono’s apartment, in front of which Lennon was shot. However, the Strawberry Fields initiative did not focus on the violent nature of Lennon’s death or the mourning process itself, but shifted the attention towards the remembrance/celebration of Lennon’s life and art. Indeed, Ono framed the location within a positive memory. According to an Associated Press newswire (1985), she found the location quite fitting, as ‘it was the place where she and Lennon took their last walk together.’¹⁰⁰ It was also not a coincidence that the opening ceremony took place on the forty-fifth birthday of Lennon. Around that time Ono was trying to shift the public focus on the remembrance of Lennon from the anniversary of his death to the date of his birthday.¹⁰¹ Moreover, through the central place of the mosaic, the narrative of Lennon as a pacifist visionary was emphasized. “Imagine” was an important signifier for a positive and hopeful remembrance of Lennon.

While not geometrically at the center of the teardrop, the “Imagine” mosaic functions as the heart of the Strawberry Fields memorial. The mosaic lies on the intersection of the three main paths and

⁹⁹ Elliott, *The Mourning of John Lennon*.

¹⁰⁰ Associated Press, “Fans Stream into Strawberry Fields,” October 9, 1985.

¹⁰¹ United Press International, PM Cycle, Domestic News, New York, October 9, 1984.

is surrounded by benches, as it was originally envisioned as a meeting place.¹⁰² When the memorial was opened, no signs were placed that identified the area as “Strawberry Fields”.¹⁰³ Although that changed in later years, originally the mosaic was the only thing linking the area directly to Lennon. As a consequence, the mosaic came to signify not only the song/album, but also Lennon himself. Esthetically the mosaic is simple: black and white, circular, with geometric patterns. According to Strawberry Fields’ landscape architect Bruce Kelly it is an abstract rendering of a starburst.¹⁰⁴ At the center “Imagine” is spelled out, and through a sunray-like structure it looks like the word reaches outwards. The mosaic could be interpreted as signifying Lennon’s dream and legacy spreading with the power of a starburst, not only to the border of the mosaic, but even beyond. As it is positioned at the intersection of the three main paths it could be seen as spreading into the teardrop, central park, and perhaps even into the rest of the world.

Thus, the mosaic, and Strawberry Fields as a whole, focus on the act of imagining. By symbolizing the spread of Lennon’s vision, the mosaic conveys the possibility of a better future through the power of imagination. Additionally, Strawberry Fields symbolizes international solidarity and cooperation. The many countries that participated through donations of plants, all expressed their solidarity towards those mourning Lennon’s death, and collaborated – even if just a little bit – in enabling something positive (the renovation of a park). The plants were to symbolize all the countries in the world.¹⁰⁵ The Associated Press reported that at the 1985 ceremony, Yoko Ono thanked for all the donations that helped ‘make this island a garden of peace and love as a growing monument to John's spirit’.¹⁰⁶ Indeed, Yoko Ono not only linked Strawberry Fields and Imagine to Lennon’s remembrance, but also to peace and love and solidarity – all of which are recurring elements in the song “Imagine”.

Strawberry Fields can also be considered as an attempt to locate Lennon’s memory in a physical place. Mäkelä gives examples of posthumous attempts to locate Lennon’s star identity in

¹⁰² Associated Press, “Lennons Dedicate Garden to Slain Ex-Beatle,” March 21, 1984.

¹⁰³ United Press International, AM Cycle, Domestic News, New York, March 21, 1984.

¹⁰⁴ Associated Press, “Lennons Dedicate Garden to Slain Ex-Beatle,” March 21, 1984.

¹⁰⁵ Associated Press, “Fans Stream into Strawberry Fields,” October 9, 1985.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid.

Liverpool, London, Tokyo and New York – mainly cities in which he lived.¹⁰⁷ These ‘memory politics’ are of importance for the involved cities because they can better their status and increase commercial opportunities (e.g. through enhancing tourism). In this case, the involvement of the City Council of New York in locating Lennon’s memory in Central Park reflects the momentum that Lennon’s remembrance had in the early eighties. Furthermore, the official groundbreaking and the opening ceremony were attended by various foreign dignitaries, attesting to the status of the memorial.

Many photographers too, reportedly were at the groundbreaking ceremony.¹⁰⁸ News regarding the project was published not just locally, but in international papers as well, such as the Dutch *Het Parool* and *De Telegraaf*.¹⁰⁹ The initiative thus reached a varied international audience. Anno 2018, Strawberry Fields and the mosaic are still intact. Tourists from all over the world pass through, either to pay tribute or simply out of curiosity. In more recent times the area has become more contested, with the city of New York and street musicians not always agreeing on the performances taking place at Strawberry Fields.¹¹⁰ Regardless, gatherings at the anniversary of Lennon’s death have continued, although, following Ono’s lead, fans have also remembered Lennon there on his birthdays. The memorial confirmed Central Park as the first authorized location of Lennon’s remembrance and indefinitely linked it to “Imagine”.

During the rest of the eighties Ono kept working on, and authorizing, other projects related to Lennon’s legacy, which did not necessarily focus on the song “Imagine”. Most importantly, in 1984 she released the *Milk and Honey* album: a new collaborative record in the style of *Double Fantasy* containing tracks of Lennon and of herself. This album received RIAA gold certification

¹⁰⁷ Mäkelä, *John Lennon Imagined*, 228-231.

¹⁰⁸ Associated Press, “Lennons Dedicate Garden to Slain Ex-Beatle,” March 21, 1984.

¹⁰⁹ “Aardbeien veld in Central Park,” *Het Parool*, April, 11 1983; “Strawberry Fields,” *De Telegraaf*, April 21, 1982.

¹¹⁰ Corey Kilgannon, “Lennon Fans Complain Police Won’t Allow Vigil to Rock Around the Clock,” *New York Times*, December 8, 1999; Corey Kilgannon, “At Strawberry Fields, Feuding Musicians Give Peace a Chance,” *New York Times*, May 31, 2016, <https://www.nytimes.com/2016/06/01/nyregion/at-strawberry-fields-feuding-musicians-give-peace-a-chance.html>.

in the United States, selling half a million copies.¹¹¹ In 1988 the documentary *Imagine: John Lennon* was released, which was authorized by Ono, who granted access to many hours of unreleased footage to director Andrew Solt, producer David L. Wolper, and writer Sam Egan. While the title does refer to “Imagine”, the song is not central in the storyline, which is constructed to narrate Lennon’s life.¹¹²

On 9 October 1990, Ono organized a remembrance event, centered around a worldwide broadcast of “Imagine”, which might have been pivotal in rooting “Imagine” as anthem for peace and solidarity. This event, called ‘Imagine all the people’, was in honor of Lennon’s fiftieth birthday. The song was broadcasted from the United Nations Trusteeship Council Chamber and was preceded by a recorded statement by Lennon. Ono, introduced by the wife of the UN Secretary General, Marcela Perez de Cuellar, also gave a short speech. According to newswires of The Associated Press and United Press International, the broadcast reached an estimated radio and television audience of one billion people, spread over 130 countries. Like the “Imagine” mosaic in Strawberry Fields, the event connected the peace narrative with “Imagine”. Because of the full broadcast of the song, however, in this case Lennon’s remembrance was even more explicitly and strongly connected with it – not just with the act of imagining.¹¹³

Imagine all the people stressed the status of “Imagine” as an anthem for peace firstly through the chosen statement of Lennon, which directly preceded the song:

You have the power, you know, you have the vote, (...). Just show your neighbors that you’re trying to be peaceful, however hard it is. It’s hard for us all. Just pass the word around.... Just have one word, Peace, in the window. And even if you don’t exactly know why you’re putting it in the window, it can’t harm you. And then you’d come across other people that have put Peace in the window. They’re

¹¹¹ RIAA certification data, see “Milk and Honey,” Gold & Platinum, RIAA, accessed on August 12, 2018, https://www.riaa.com/gold-platinum/?tab_active=default-award&se=milk+and+honey#search_section.

¹¹² Associated Press Imagine: “A John Lennon Elegy ‘I believe in fairies, the myths, dragons. It all exists, even if it’s in your mind. Who’s to say that dreams and nightmares aren’t as real as the here and now? Reality leaves a lot to the imagination.’ – John Lennon,” October 8, 1988.

¹¹³ Associated Press, “Lennon’s ‘Imagine’ Broadcast Worldwide on 50th Birthday,” October 9, 1990; United Press International, “John Lennon remembered on 50th birthday,” October 9, 1990.

all hoping for peace. We're all together on this thing. We all want peace, whatever sort of job we have.¹¹⁴

This partial citation – taken from a Rolling Stone article, shows how the statement focused on peace and collectiveness, and on the empowerment of the individual through the act of wishing. It foremost and clearly presents the link of the song to the peace narrative, but does not mention how the song envisions this peace: no countries, no possessions, no religion etc. The statement nevertheless is very much in line with the core values originally promoted by the song: peace, unity, love, and solidarity and empowerment in the achievement of a better future.

The choice of the United Nations (UN) as broadcasting location for “Imagine”, also strengthened the peace narrative. The main mission of the UN is to maintain (universal) peace and security, and the UN promotes “co-operation in solving international problems of an economic, social, cultural, or humanitarian character”.¹¹⁵ The location thus signifies international efforts to achieve a better future and maintain peace, and emphasizes international cooperation and solidarity in order to get there. The involvement of the UN additionally gave the event an official air, and indicated an international endorsement of Lennon’s peace narrative with “Imagine” at its core. Interestingly, the choice for the UN, could be seen as in slight contrast with the original intent of “Imagine”. The song namely critiqued cultural and political constructs, including nations. The UN instead supports the organization structure that nations provide to the world and is a construct as well. Moreover, while the song stresses a general solidarity between people, the nuance of the UN is on solidarity between countries. To a lesser extent, through the plants initiative Strawberry Fields focused on international solidarity as well. This reflects a general flexibility with regard to the application and interpretation of the song, because of – or in this case perhaps in spite of – its nature.

Strictly speaking, Ono’s contextualization of “Imagine” through her speech, implied a differently nuanced worldview than the one put forth by “Imagine” as well. She linked the potential of dreams to the possibility of people living together harmoniously regardless of gender, creeds and religions,

¹¹⁴ Anthony Decurtis, “Yoko Ono discusses the Legacy of John Lennon. A decade after his death Yoko Ono senses John Lennon’s positivity even in troubled times,” *Rolling Stone*, December 13, 1990.

¹¹⁵ “Chapter 1,” Charter of the United Nations, accessed on August 12, 2018, <http://www.un.org/en/sections/un-charter/chapter-i/index.html>.

and races. The general promotion of harmony is very much in line with the song. Nevertheless, while the song imagines a world in which differences are not a factor, Ono is imagining one that embraces them: “Let’s dream of all races praising one another in the knowledge that the differences are what makes the human race”.¹¹⁶ She also spoke of “people embracing each other regardless of their creed and religion”, not of a world without religion.¹¹⁷ Furthermore, some themes she connects the event with – race, gender, and the environment – were not originally covered by “Imagine”. This once again confirms and also authorizes flexibility in applying the song. To a certain extent, it could be seen as a continuation of a trend started by Lennon himself, who (as mentioned before) had added new themes to the song during life performances, including gender.

No specific ongoing armed conflict was focused on during the event. At least, no newswire mentions any specific conflict being referred to by Ono or in Lennon’s statement. This is striking since in a press conference preceding the event, and in an interview with *Rolling Stone Magazine* just a few days later, Ono did link the broadcast to ongoing conflicts in Eastern Europe and the Persian Gulf. The Associated Press reported her saying: “When this [the event] was discussed, we had no knowledge of what would happen in Iraq and Kuwait, you know. And now it seems very appropriate that this be sung all over the world”.¹¹⁸ It might have been done intentionally, in order to avoid controversies. In fact, controversies were also avoided by promoting the event as somehow pure, separated from monetary interests. According to Jeff Pollack (media consultant for the event) the broadcast would have no commercials nor sponsors.¹¹⁹ Ono also told *Rolling Stone*: “A lot of business ventures were suggested to me, but what I was looking for was one special event that would really unite Lennon fans throughout the world”.¹²⁰ The broadcast indeed stood out between other remembrance projects that same year, such as the commercial release of a Lennon boxset, and a series of (benefit) concerts involving Ono. This might have enhanced the perceived

¹¹⁶ Associated Press, “Lennon’s ‘Imagine’ Broadcast Worldwide on 50th Birthday,” October 9, 1990.

¹¹⁷ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁸ Associated Press, “Worldwide Broadcast of ‘Imagine’ for Lennon’s 50th,” 4 October, 1990.

¹¹⁹ *Ibid.*

¹²⁰ Decurtis, “Yoko Ono discusses the Legacy of John Lennon.”

authenticity of Lennon's image as peace visionary – not out for personal gain, adding strength to the core message delivered by the event.

This core message framed "Imagine" as an anthem for peace and solidarity. While, the context in which it was presented might not have been fully in line with the original intent behind the song and while Ono added new causes to the song, elements from a number of core message had been promoted: peace, solidarity, collectiveness, unity. The only new factors were: international cooperation, race, and the environment. Moreover, once again, the song, since it was linked to many themes, but was not connected to one specific conflict, enabled a general and flexible interpretation. The official location and the broad reach of the event gave further power to Ono's statement, as she anchored "Imagine" as a central signifier of the peace narrative of Lennon's remembrance.

While Ono was not the first to link "Imagine" to Lennon's remembrance, as it was also reflected in the early reactions to Lennon's death by the general public and the media, she certainly did embrace this trend and give it extra momentum. By authorizing and promoting it, initiatives such as Strawberry Fields and 'Imagine all the people' helped anchor the narrative of Lennon as peace visionary and the central place of "Imagine" therein. "Give Peace a Chance" and "Happy Xmas (War is Over)", the two Lennon songs most related to "Imagine" thematically, have also been referred to by Ono in relation to the peace narrative. In fact, she even quoted the latter at the Imagine all the People event: "Remember, war is over if you want it".¹²¹ However, compared to "Imagine", they generally had a secondary position in the remembrance initiatives. In the years ensuing 1990, the peace narrative lost some momentum, probably mainly to rereleases. The nineties witnessed a major Beatles Anthology project, starting in 1995, and also the release of a Lennon anthology in 1998. However, in the twentieth century Ono picked up the peace narrative again. She mainly used it in relation to new campaigns regarding specific conflicts and crises and her expansion of the "Imagine" oeuvre.

¹²¹ Associated Press, "Imagine All the People Listening to John," October 9, 1990.

Chapter 2.2 Charity, collaborations and activism

Ono and the Lennon estate did not limit the employment of “Imagine” to projects regarding Lennon’s remembrance. As “Imagine” was a relatively general socially engaged song, it was easy to apply as slogan, means, and/or promotor for initiatives benefitting various charities and causes. Ono also employed it to spread the more general message of peace. Indeed, during the first two decades of the twenty-first century, efforts focusing primarily on this instead of on the remembrance were numerous. This is in striking contrast to the eighties and nineties, in which these discourses were marginal. While a few projects can be mentioned in which “Imagine” was used primarily in the context of conflict or crisis, those projects were either really small or “Imagine” had a secondary role. A telling event is the final concert of the *A Conspiracy of Hope Tour* (1986), which celebrated Amnesty International’s twenty-fifth birthday and promoted Amnesty’s work. This concert was broadcasted by MTV, and starred a cast of famous musicians. Ono performed both her own “Walking on Thin Ice” and “Imagine”. Thus, she highlighted “Imagine” as a socially engaged song, but the song did not have a central place in the event.

Ono also used the song to promote an end to hostilities between the West and the Soviet Union. In 1985 Ono released an album called *Star Peace*. The name of the album (as well as of track eleven) was a critique to the United States’ Strategic Defense Initiative, which in the media was nicknamed Star Wars after George Lucas’s film. The album, among other things, promoted unity, peace, love, and an ecologically healthy world. While all the songs on *Star Peace* were Ono’s, a 1997 rerelease of the album also contained a live version of “Imagine”, which was recorded during the 1986 tour.¹²² This tour was promoted as a ‘peace tour’ going to both sides of the Iron Curtain. It explicitly involved Lennon’s legacy and confirmed the discourse of “Imagine” as anthem for peace and solidarity. According to Sam Havadtoy, at the time Ono’s business manager, every concert was supposed to end with a performance by Ono of “Give Peace a Chance” and “Imagine”.¹²³

¹²² “Starpeace”, Muziekweb, accessed on August 16, 2018, <https://www.muziekweb.nl/Link/JK88011/Starpeace>.

¹²³ United Press International, “Yoko Ono want to go to Moscow,” February 6, 1986.

In a couple of instances around the turn of the century “Imagine” was also used to the benefit of the Spirit Foundation, ushering in a shift in the use of the song. The Foundation was set up by Ono and Lennon in 1978 as a way to donate money to projects they endorsed without further mediation.¹²⁴ It supported multiple charities contemporaneously, related to various social causes, such as children in need, the elderly, the homeless, AIDS support, and public media.¹²⁵ In 1997 a performance of “Imagine” by multiple stars, including Carole King and the Spin Doctors, opened the first John Lennon Songwriting Contest; participation fees would go to the foundation. Additionally, in 2001 a limited-edition poster of the Imagine album was auctioned to the benefit of the foundation.¹²⁶

While many other authorized fundraising initiatives for the Spirit Foundation have taken place preceding and following the abovementioned instances, none used specifically “Imagine”.¹²⁷ This is striking, since the foundation had already reached broad media attention in 1980 in relation to Lennon’s death.¹²⁸ Moreover, the Spirit Foundation would seem a logic receiver for Ono’s efforts relating “Imagine” to specific causes. It confirms that during the eighties and nineties the use of “Imagine” was deliberately focused within the remembrance of Lennon as peace visionary, not directed to charities. It also indicates that even in later decades specific choices were made about how to employ the song. In hindsight, it would seem that these turn of the century fundraising events, became stepping stones toward collaborations between Ono and external non-profit organizations, which employed “Imagine” in relation to specific conflicts and crises. Another minor initiative or stepping stone during those years was a 1999 auction of customized “Imagine”

¹²⁴ While he does not explicitly mention the Spirit Foundation, Lennon speaks of his and Ono’s intentions to donate part of their profits directly to causes they support without always having to deal with outside requests for funding. Geffen Record’s own David Geffen, confirmed to the media that this was what motivated Lennon in founding the Spirit Foundation. See: Sheff, *The Playboy Interviews*, 67-69; Associated Press, “Widow Asks Memorial Donations Go To Spirit Foundation,” December 11, 1980.

¹²⁵ Business Wire, “‘Imagine’ Poster of John Lennon, Autographed by Yoko Ono, Will be Auctioned On eBay to Benefit the Spirit Foundation,” September 28, 2000; Associated Press, “Widow Asks Memorial Donations Go to Spirit Foundation.” December 11, 1980.

¹²⁶ Business Wire, “‘Imagine’ Poster of John Lennon, Autographed by Yoko Ono, Will be Auctioned On eBay to Benefit the Spirit Foundation,” September 28, 2000.

¹²⁷ United Press International, *AM Cycle*, Domestic News, New York, December 9, 1980.

¹²⁸ Ono had asked people to donate money instead of sending flowers, see Associated Press, “Widow Asks Memorial Donations Go to Spirit Foundation.” December 11, 1980.

sleeves in collaboration with nine artists and MSN. This would benefit Shelter, a non-profit organization aiding the homeless without first having to pass through the Spirit Foundation.¹²⁹

The first major collaboration that involved “Imagine” was a 2003 Amnesty International human rights campaign. The initiative was conceived in the United States – originally proposed by actor Gabriel Byrne – as a public education campaign covering multiple media, centered around “Imagine”. It included a music video, print advertisements and inserts, and online content. Ono granted Amnesty recording rights to “Imagine”, and shortly after to the rest of Lennon’s solo catalogue.¹³⁰ She publicly supported Amnesty and specifically this campaign, reportedly saying that Amnesty’s work “embodies the spirit of ‘Imagine’”.¹³¹ It rooted a long lasting relationship between Ono and Amnesty, that had already started with the 1986 concert. The campaign lasted two years and was launched at the Tribeca Film Festival 2003 with the screening of the music video of Amnesty’s cover of “Imagine”, arranged by Hans Zimmer. In May 2003 the campaign went international, with multiple initiatives taking place in 25 to 30 different countries.¹³² Through the broad reach of Amnesty International and its wide network, this campaign gave new life to “Imagine” as an anthem.

Unity and solidarity were clearly reflected in the Amnesty music video of “Imagine”. It featured children from around the world singing “Imagine” and expressing their own hopes for the future.¹³³ By having children singing the song, it framed the wish voiced by “Imagine” as very pure. Furthermore, the campaign once again confirmed the broad applicability of the song to different themes, and also increased the specificity of such themes. In fact, the visuals from the campaign focused on defined issues: “the civil war in Chechnya, child soldiers, the trafficking of underage

¹²⁹ AAP Newsfeed, “That’s Showbiz!,” December 23, 1999.

¹³⁰ PR Newswire, “Amnesty International USA Uses Yoko Ono's Gift of John Lennon's Music to Further His Vision,” December 2, 2005.

¹³¹ *Ibid.*

¹³² U.S. Newswire, “Gabriel Byrne Addresses Tribeca Film Fest Audience at Premiere of Amnesty International Short Film Based on Lennon's Imagine,” May 11, 2003; Business Wire, “Yoko Ono Lennon, Gabriel Byrne to Address Tribeca Film Festival Audience at May 11 World Premiere of Amnesty International Short Film Based on John Lennon’s ‘Imagine’,” May 7, 2003.

¹³³ Business Wire, “Yoko Ono Lennon, Gabriel Byrne to Address Tribeca Film Festival Audience at May 11 World Premiere of Amnesty International Short Film Based on John Lennon’s ‘Imagine’,” May 7, 2003.

sex workers and domestic civil rights”.¹³⁴ This initiative linked “Imagine” to a more practical goal: the promotion and protection of human rights. However, this goal too, went hand in hand with the promotion of peace and solidarity, as human rights are endangered and violated in situations of armed conflict and of social and political distress.

PR newswire reported an infectious interest for Amnesty’s Imagine campaign. In fact, after this campaign was concluded, Amnesty International decided to keep using Lennon’s legacy to promote its cause.¹³⁵ This resulted in the release of *Instant Karma. The Amnesty International Campaign to Save Darfur* (2007), a music set of 2 discs containing covers of Lennon’s songs. Multi-artist tribute records, like this one, were no novelty at the time, as they became established as subgenre already in the mid-nineties.¹³⁶ Proceeds from *Instant Karma* would go to Amnesty’s campaign dedicated to ending the armed conflict in Darfur. While the album did not focus solely on “Imagine”, it did rely on and promote Lennon’s myth as peace visionary. *Instant Karma* shows how sometimes the myth surrounding Lennon could be more important than the content of the songs used in campaigns. The album not only contained socially engaged songs, but also personal ones like “Mother”. However, it also reflected the central position of “Imagine” within this myth, since it was the most covered track of the project, exceeding even the title track “Instant Karma” and the other peace songs “Give Peace a Chance” and “Happy Xmas (War is Over)”. The extended digital release contained six different versions of the song.¹³⁷

Finally, Amnesty has released an illustrated children’s book entitled “Imagine” in 2017. The guiding text throughout the book are the lyrics of the song. The visuals follow the journey of a pigeon spreading hope and tolerance.¹³⁸ This project goes back to a more general concept of peace

¹³⁴ U.S. Newswire, “Gabriel Byrne Addresses Tribeca Film Fest Audience at Premiere of Amnesty International Short Film Bases on Lennon’s Imagine,” May 11, 2003.

¹³⁵ PR Newswire, “Amnesty International USA Uses Yoko Ono’s Gift of John Lennon’s Music to Further His Vision,” December 2, 2005.

¹³⁶ George Plasketes, “Introduction: Like A Version,” in *Play it Again: Cover Songs in Popular Music*, ed., George Plasketes (Farnham: Ashgate, 2010), 1,4.

¹³⁷ The six versions were by: Afroreggae, Avril Lavigne, Jack Johnson, James Stewart, Meshell Ndegeocello, and Willie Nelson.

¹³⁸ “A New Picture Book Inspired by the John Lennon Song,” Amnesty USA, accessed on August 13, 2018, <https://www.amnestyusa.org/imagine/>; “John Lennon – IMAGINE book for Amnesty International,

and solidarity. The foreword by Ono however contains all the main concepts originally referred to by “Imagine”: peace, love, solidarity, equality, collectiveness, unity, and also empowerment of the individual. The foreword ends as follows: “[W]e can all help to make a difference every day. Every small good thing that we do can help change the world for the better. You can do it, I can do it, we all can do it. Imagine. Together we can make peace happen. Then the world truly will live as one.” Empowerment of the individual is actually an implicit factor whenever the song is linked to Amnesty, since this organization follows a grass-root structure and aims towards activating people to support human rights.

Through these campaigns and projects, the collaboration between Amnesty and Ono has kept “Imagine” relevant for over a decade. While the contexts in which Amnesty used the song differ, in all cases Amnesty promoted “Imagine” as an anthem of peace and solidarity. Amnesty campaigns aimed at attracting new supporters and were therefore generally accessible and broadly promoted through the organization’s international network. Additionally, the initiatives during the first decade of this century have broadened the authorized applicability of the song even more, by linking it to ongoing conflicts and social issues. Ono’s collaborations with Amnesty paved the way for new collaborations with different non-profit organizations. The two major ones were the Imagine There’s No Hunger campaign and the Unicef #IMAGINE project. These campaigns were very different from one another for what concerned organization and the use of the song.

Imagine There’s No Hunger started in 2009 as a collaboration between the non-profit WhyHunger, Hard Rock and Ono, and is still ongoing. Throughout the years it focused on fundraising and increasing awareness for initiatives to counteract hunger and promote sustainable communities both in the United States and globally. This was done through ‘Imagine there’s no hunger’ merchandise such as bracelets and t-shirts, music events, and the use of “Imagine” and/or the campaign’s slogan in promotion material.¹³⁹ None of the campaign’s material seems to focus on

illustrated by Jean Jullien,” Archives, Imagine Peace, accessed on August 13, 2018
<http://imaginepeace.com/archives/23146>.

¹³⁹ “Imagine There’s No Hunger 2012 #IMAGINENOHUNGER,” Archives, Imagine Peace, accessed on August 14, 2018, <http://imaginepeace.com/archives/18836>; PR Newswire, “Yoko Ono Lennon Joins Hard

the full song, but rather on the idea of the song. The current opening video on the homepage of WhyHunger for instance, is accompanied just by an instrumental fragment of the song and the opening text “Imagine there’s no hunger”.¹⁴⁰ Combined with visual material of WhyHunger initiatives, the slogan and a few recognizable notes seem sufficient to evoke a sense of solidarity, motivate people to contribute to the cause, and promote hope for a future without hunger. In other words, a slight connection to the song seems sufficient to promote the main connotations connected to *Imagine*: unity, solidarity, hope for a better future, and a sense of collective action/an empowerment of people – in this case with regard to a specific cause.

It could be argued that in this campaign the cultural meaning of “*Imagine*” had a more central place than the song itself, relying just on references to it. This was not a totally new phenomenon. Already with regard to Lennon’s remembrance at Strawberry Fields a similar thing had occurred. In the mosaic the word “*Imagine*” was sufficient to signify Lennon’s myth as peace visionary. However, in the twenty-first century “*Imagine*” increasingly was perceived as a trademark that went beyond the sole memory of Lennon and could be applied to a variety of causes and projects. It could implicitly signify hope for a better future, a sense of community and solidarity and/or peace. A similar link to the song’s cultural meaning was provided by the Artists Against Fracking Movement (2013). This political, environmentalist movement opposed an initiative for fracking in New York State, and was initiated by Ono and Sean as a collaboration between multiple artists. One of their slogans was: “*Imagine There’s No Fracking*”.¹⁴¹ Through billboards and newspaper advertisements highlighting the sentence ‘*Imagine there’s no fracking*’, the cultural meaning of song was reflected in its slogan in a condensed form.

The most recent major campaign authorized by Ono, was the Unicef #IMAGINE project, which started in 2014. This campaign was conceived as a way to raise awareness for the rights of the child, regarding food, education, equal opportunities, security, health, and more generally the chance to be happy. It had a special emphasis on refugee and migrant children. The campaign

Rock and WhyHunger to “*IMAGINE*” a World Without Hunger; *IMAGINE THERE'S NO HUNGER* Campaign Invites Fans to Fight Poverty and World Hunger,” November 5, 2014.

¹⁴⁰ WhyHunger, accessed on August 14, 2018, <https://whyhunger.org/>.

¹⁴¹ Artists Against Fracking, accessed on August 14, 2018, <http://artistsagainstfracking.com/>.

consisted of a global open call to singers, actors, but really anyone who wanted to express solidarity, to send in a video with their cover of “Imagine”. People from over 140 countries, from all continents participated and the videos were released through an online platform. Unicef also created regional videos and a final compilation as promotion material. The final edit of the collaboration was directly linked to the myth of Lennon, as it contained footage from the original “Imagine” video featuring both him and Ono. The peace remembrance narrative was thus integrated without shifting the focus from the promoted cause. Together with the cultural meaning of the song, it added emotional depth to the campaign.¹⁴² Furthermore, #IMAGINE was not limited to its slogan or hashtag, but positioned the whole song at the center of the campaign.

The campaign’s idea of a multi-star cover video of the song was not particularly innovative. This format had already gained momentum in the eighties with the very successful Band-Aid record of “Do They Know It’s Christmas?” (1984) and USA for Africa’s “We Are the World” (1985). Ono, Sean and Lenny Kravitz had even organized a similar version of “Give Peace a Chance” in 1991, critiquing the Gulf War. This went parallel to an increase in the mid-eighties and nineties of the use of popular music in fundraising and promotion of social causes, at least in the United States.¹⁴³ The interesting thing about the #Imagine project however, is that not just celebrities could participate, but the audience as well. Schools and choirs participated, but for instance also a firefighter from the United States, and a chef from Saudi Arabia sent in a video. This participatory format empowered the audience to contribute to the narrative of “Imagine” – much more than earlier authorized initiatives had done, even considering the impact of Unicef in shaping the discourse around #IMAGINE.

In conclusion, the collaborative projects have so far been extremely varied, involving different non-profit organization and levels of involvement by Ono. The projects had different scales, aims (political, fundraising, awareness campaigns), and relationships with the audience. Regardless all linked Imagine to solidarity between people (not explicitly between nations), unity, collectiveness,

¹⁴² Unicef #IMAGINE project, accessed on August 15, 2018, <http://vast.am/Imagine>.

¹⁴³ Reebee Garofalo, “Pop Goes to War, 2001-2004: U.S. Popular Music after 9/11,” in *Music in the Post-9/11 World*, ed., Jonathan Ritter and J. Martin Daughtry (New York: Routledge, 2007) 4.

empowerment and most importantly hope for a better future. The Amnesty projects, however, were the only ones explicitly linking the song to peace. But, Ono's solo initiatives helped keep the peace discourse surrounding "Imagine" alive as well. As mentioned earlier, "Imagine" as a cultural product was from the start not limited to music but expanded into other media as well. In the twenty-first century Ono actively promoted peace through a new expansion of this "Imagine" oeuvre.

Firstly, she produced a number of (art) advertisements, posters and billboards since 2001, which mainly focused on promoting peace, sometimes with regard to ongoing violent conflicts. On 19 September 2001 she published a full page advertisement in the New York Times, containing the text: "Imagine all the people living life in peace". This was in reaction to the terrorist attacks of 11 September 2001 and can be positioned within a wide reaction throughout the American popular music industry that had been triggered by the attacks.¹⁴⁴ It is possible that these attacks might have contributed generally to motivating Ono to refocus on "Imagine", and to locate her efforts with regard to the song to situations of conflict and crisis. Indeed, it might not be a coincidence that the first major collaboration with Amnesty took place just 2 years after the attacks. Ono's short campaign promoting peace and solidarity included subsequent billboards in London, Tokyo and New York.¹⁴⁵

After the 2001 campaign, Ono similarly took action against the war in Iraq in 2003, and just generally to promote peace, at least in: 2008, 2009, and in 2012 on Peace Day.¹⁴⁶ Interestingly, these were not the first billboards Ono put up. Lennon and Ono had already placed 11 billboards around the world in 1969 referring to "Happy Xmas (War is Over)", with the text "WAR IS OVER! IF YOU WANT IT. Happy Christmas from John and Yoko".¹⁴⁷ Currently, the WAR IS

¹⁴⁴ Jonathan Ritter and J. Martin Daughtry, ed., *Music in the Post-9/11 World* (New York: Routledge, 2007) passim.

¹⁴⁵ Agence France Press, "Yoko Ono Spreads Lennon's Peace Message," March 5, 2002.

¹⁴⁶ Japan Economic Newswire, "Lennon would have been angry with Iraq war, Yoko Ono says," April 9, 2003; "Yoko Ono's IMAGINE PEACE Billboards in Times Square on Peace Day (Sept 21st)," Archives, Imagine Peace, accessed on August 15, 2018, <http://imaginepeace.com/archives/18503>; "Imagine Peace", Downloads, Imagine Peace, accessed on 15 August 2018, <http://imaginepeace.com/projects/downloads>.

¹⁴⁷ Concannon, 'Yoko Ono's Dreams,' 106; 'WAR IS OVER!', Imagine Peace, accessed on August 15, 2018, <http://imaginepeace.com/warisover/>.

OVER! campaign is actively promoted through Ono's Imagine Peace website. This campaign preceded and influenced the Imagine campaigns. It shows how cultural products related to different Lennon songs have overlapped and influenced one another through time, especially those related to Lennon's three peace songs. At the moment, WAR IS OVER! is promoted as a secondary project within the broader Imagine Peace framework. This framework became central for Ono in the twenty-first century; she was even granted the trademark "Imagine Peace" by the United States Patent and Trademark Office in 2013.¹⁴⁸

The Imagine Peace website has become the main communication platform for all of Ono's projects, emphasizing those socially engaged and related to "Imagine", but also containing links to the rest of both Ono's and Lennon's oeuvre. The name and slogan of this website, "Imagine Peace", both refers to the song "Imagine" and to Lennon's and Ono's peace activism. This is further confirmed by the visuals of the homepage. The blue sky with white clouds on its background recall the cover of the Imagine album, while the alternating images in the upper part of the page link the platform to their activism during the sixties and seventies and to Ono's more recent activist and commercial initiatives. The visuals show products yet to be released, such as the new 'Imagine John Yoko' book; pictures of young Ono and Lennon, for instance raising their fists; and peace and remembrance initiatives by Ono mainly centered around "Imagine", such as the Imagine mosaic, the Imagine Peace poster, and most importantly the Imagine Peace Tower in Reykjavik, Iceland.¹⁴⁹

This tower is the opening image of the website and has physically located Ono's peace efforts since its 2007 unveiling. It has for instance hosted the award ceremonies of the Lennon-Ono (Imagine) Grant for Peace.¹⁵⁰ It is an outdoors artwork, projecting a tower of light into the sky, which integrates the cultural meaning of "Imagine", with Lennon's remembrance, Ono's (participatory) art, and the couple's peace activism. The Imagine Peace Tower, was dedicated to Lennon and unveiled on the day of his 67th birthday. It is yearly lit between the date of Lennon's birthday and

¹⁴⁸ Plus Patent News, "USPTO grants trade mark 'IMAGINE PEACE' to Lennon, Yoko Ono (NEW YORK)," October 12, 2013; Plus Media Solutions, "USPTO grants trade mark 'IMAGINE PEACE' to Lennon, Yoko Ono (INDIVIDUAL) (NEW YORK)," October 31, 2013.

¹⁴⁹ Imagine Peace.

¹⁵⁰ The grant had already been inaugurated in 2002, see "Lennon Ono Imagine Grant For Peace," Archives, Imagine Peace, accessed on August 15, 2018 <http://imaginepeace.com/archives/21717>.

the anniversary of his death and on a number of festive days.¹⁵¹ The main aim of the tower, however, is to promote a message of peace, in the words of the website: ‘It communicates awareness to the whole world that peace & love is what connects all lives on Earth.’¹⁵² Indeed, Lennon’s remembrance and the cultural connotations of the song (peace and solidarity) are particularly intertwined in Ono’s expansions of the “Imagine” oeuvre.

Finally, Imagine Peace is also a participatory artwork, storing wishes from people all over the world, which have either been sent in directly to the tower following the website’s instructions, or placed on one of Ono’s wish trees. The wish trees have been showcased in multiple locations worldwide since 1996.¹⁵³ Since the creation of the Peace Tower, wishes are eventually redirected to and stored in Reykjavik, adding symbolic power to the artwork and conveying a sense of global unity. The tower thus combined Ono’s empowering conceptual artistic methods with the connotations linked to “Imagine” as well. The two initiative actually fit well together, as both seem to have originated from the concept of positive prayer or wish fulfillment philosophy that influenced Lennon and Ono since the sixties.¹⁵⁴

In the more recent decades, “Imagine” initiatives have thus been more strongly linked to humanitarian and peace activism, although the peace narrative (remembrance) continued to resonate as well. Despite the great variety of initiatives, all to some extent promoted solidarity, unity, collectiveness, and often also peace. The most important overlapping factor between initiatives, seems to have been the hope for a better future culturally conveyed through “Imagine”, often this went hand in hand with the empowerment of the individual in achieving that future. Furthermore, the abovementioned connotations have become increasingly instinctively connected to the song. So much so, that a small reference to “Imagine” can suffice in conveying them. A very important factor for this has been the repeated exposure of the audience to the song in relation to those connotations. As a consequence, slogans containing one or a few words of “Imagine” have

¹⁵¹ These days are: between the winter solstice and new year, the first week of spring (the wedding and honeymoon dates the couple), and on Ono’s birthday as a tribute to her from the city. See, Imagine Peace Tower.

¹⁵² Imagine Peace Tower.

¹⁵³ Concannon, “Yoko Ono’s Dreams,” 107.

¹⁵⁴ Sheff, *The Playboy Interviews*, 33-35, 179.

become much used in collaborative initiatives and in Ono's expansion of the "Imagine" oeuvre. Nevertheless, projects containing the full song, such as #IMAGINE also remain relevant.

Conclusion

Forty years after the release of "Imagine" the originally encoded values of the song still resonate, even though the cultural phenomenon of "Imagine" has taken many different forms through the decades. Peace, solidarity, unity, community, love, harmony, and empowerment have all been reflected in the promotion and in reutilizations of the song. However, the emphasis within the authorized "Imagine" discourse has been flexible: not all of these values were always central. This flexibility existed already during the early promotion of "Imagine", and increased in the years after Lennon's death. The one, always fundamental, feature communicated through cultural products and initiatives linked to the cultural phenomenon of "Imagine" was hope for a better future.

The authorized promotion and communication of "Imagine" was not constant throughout the years. It peaked right after the release of the song, to practically disappear at the end of the eighties. After Lennon's death, "Imagine" was promoted again as a central element of the remembrance narrative of Lennon as peace visionary. This lasted until the early nineties, when "Imagine" fell to the background and the popular music market was temporarily saturated by Lennon and Beatles anthology projects. Around the change of the century the "Imagine" discourse was picked up again by Ono and organizations collaborating with her, perhaps with an even bigger intensity than before. To a certain extent, this might be related to the shock effect of the terrorist attacks of 11 September 2001. Indeed, one of the first reutilizations of "Imagine" by Ono was as a slogan, calling for peace, in a newspaper advertisement reacting to the attacks. On the other hand, it can also be seen as a more gradual process, starting with small stepping stones, using the song in relation to humanitarian causes. This process was given an extra boost by the collaboration with Amnesty International on its 2003 human rights campaign. Since then, the "Imagine" phenomenon has shown no sign of slowing down again. On the contrary, the applications of the song and the slogans referring to it have increased and now include a great variety of initiatives.

In a way, it were then the historical developments that repeatedly triggered the reutilizations of “Imagine” and kept the cultural phenomenon relevant. However, a number of other factors can be identified as well, which constructed and maintained the cultural status of “Imagine” as anthem for peace and solidarity in times of (mass reported) conflict and in the face of humanitarian crises. First of all, the features of “Imagine” translated into a general and accessible pop-anthem, which still provided a strong and positive message of hope. It resulted in excellent reception and large distribution of “Imagine” right after its release, and enabled the song to be applied in later, different contexts. Indeed its alternative interpretation to countercultural ideologies resonated well with audiences in the seventies. Furthermore, some central aspects of the countercultures that resonate through the song, such as individual empowerment, were in time integrated in mainstream western culture.

Throughout the years Lennon and Ono applied “Imagine” to different contexts, adding specific topics to the song’s narrative as they became relevant to them. The same was later reflected by collaborations with nonprofit organizations, which supported a variety of different causes. Additionally, Lennon’s high position in the popular music hierarchy helped “Imagine” to initially reach its fame. After his death, his legacy became and remained influential, due to both Ono’s efforts and a spontaneous cultural reaction. Ono rooted “Imagine” at the core of the long lasting remembrance narrative of Lennon as peace visionary, aiding its central position in Lennon’s collective remembrance. Finally, the repeated exposure of audiences with narratives of “Imagine” emphasizing peace, solidarity and hope for a better future has been pivotal in maintaining the phenomenon relevant in the course of half a century.

The wide use of “Imagine” slogans in initiatives from the last two decades suggests that the cultural code of “Imagine” has been increasingly automatically connected to narratives of peace, solidarity and hope for a better future. The peace and solidarity/hope for a better future narrative could then be considered the dominant meaning, at least in western culture. However, the process of negotiation and renegotiation shaping the cultural meaning of Imagine is far from concluded. Ono is again putting forth new material at age 85. On 9 October 2018, a new book, *Imagine John Yoko*,

is scheduled to be published, and Ono is in the process of releasing her new album *Warzone*, which features a brand new cover of “Imagine” as final track. In the meantime, some of the collaborative initiatives are still ongoing – and new ones likely on the way.¹⁵⁵ Hence, future research on the phenomenon would be very worthwhile, especially research focusing on the reception and adoption of “Imagine” by audiences. Considering the recent nature of the phenomenon, methodologies might include oral history interviews, focus groups and/or surveys. Furthermore, comparative studies of similar songs might indicate patterns for transnational cultural phenomena.

¹⁵⁵ ‘Imagine John Yoko – new book about the making of Imagine’, Imagine Peace, <http://imaginepeace.com/archives/23338>, accessed on 16 August 2018; Yoko Ono *Warzone*, <http://yokoonowarzone.com/>, accessed 16 August 2018.

Bibliography

Academic literature

- Bennett, Andy, "Reappraising 'Counterculture'." In *Countercultures and Popular Music*, edited by Sheila Witheley and Jedediah Sklower, 17-27. Farnham: Ashgate, 2014.
- Brown, Shelina, "Scream from the Heart: Yoko Ono's Rock and Roll Revolution." In *Countercultures and Popular Music*, edited by Sheila Whiteley and Jedediah Sklower 172-186. Farnham: Ashgate, 2014.
- Concannon, Kevin, "Yoko Ono's Dreams." *Performance Research. A Journal of the Performing Arts* 19, no.2 (2014): 103-108
- Daughtry, J. Martin, "Russia's New Anthem and the Negotiation of National Identity." *Ethnomusicology* 47, no. 1 (Winter 2003): 42-67.
- Elliott, Anthony, *The Mourning of John Lennon*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999.
- Frontani, Micheal, "The solo years." In *The Cambridge Companion to the Beatles*, edited by Kenneth Womack, 153-182. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009.
- Garofalo, Reebee, "Pop Goes to War, 2001-2004: U.S. Popular Music after 9/11." In *Music in the Post-9/11 World*, edited by Jonathan Ritter and J. Martin Daughtry, 1-26. New York: Routledge, 2007.
- Hall, Stuart, "Encoding/Decoding." In *Media and Cultural Studies: Keywords*, edited by Meenakshi Gigi Durham and Douglas M. Kellner 163-173. Malden: Blackwell Publishing, 2002.
- Hesmondhalgh, David and Keith Negus, "Introduction: Popular music studies: meaning, power and value." In *Popular Music Studies*, edited by David Hesmondhalgh and Keith Negus, 1-10. London: Arnold, 2002.
- Kimsey, John, "'An abstraction, like Christmas': the Beatles for sale and for keeps." In *The Cambridge Companion to the Beatles*, edited by Kenneth Womack, 230-254. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009.
- Mäkelä, Janne, *John Lennon Imagined: Cultural History of a Rock Star*. New York: Peter Lang, 2004.
- Marcus, Greil, *The History Of Rock 'n' Roll in Ten Songs*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2014.
- Matthews, Wade, *The New Left, National Identity, and the Break-up of Britain*. Leiden: Brill, 2013.
- McMillian, John "'You didn't have to be there': revisiting the New Left consensus." In *The New Left Revisited*, edited by John McMillian and Paul Buhle, 1-8. Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2003.
- Negus, Keith, *Producing Pop: Culture and Conflict in the Popular Music Industry* (London: Edward Arnold, 1992).
- Plasketes, George, "Introduction: Like A Version." In *Play it Again: Cover Songs in Popular Music*, edited by George Plasketes, 1-10. Farnham: Ashgate, 2010.
- Plasketes, Georges, ed., *Play it Again: Cover Songs in Popular Music* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2010).
- Redmond, Shana L., *Anthem: Social Movements and the Sound of Solidarity in the African Diaspora*. New York: New York University Press, 2014.
- Ritter, Jonathan and J. Martin Daughtry, ed., *Music in the Post-9/11 World*. New York: Routledge, 2007.
- Rorabaugh, W.J., *American Hippies*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 2015.
- Spizer, Bruce, "Apple Records." In *The Cambridge Companion to the Beatles*, edited by Kenneth Womack, 142-152. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009.
- Weinstein, Deena, "Rock protest songs: so many and so few." In *The Resisting Muse: Popular Music and Social Protest*, edited by Ian Peddie, 3-16. Aldershot: Ashgate, 2006.
- Whiteley, Sheila, "The Beatles as zeitgeist." In *The Cambridge Companion to the Beatles*, edited by Kenneth Womack, 203-216. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009.
- Wiener, Jon, "Pop and Avant-Garde: The Case of John and Yoko." *Popular Music Studies* 22, no.1

(1998): 1-16.

Primary Sources

Print (general)

Ono, Yoko, *Grapefruit*, 2nd ed. New York: Simon and Schuster, 1970.

Sheff, David, *The Playboy Interviews with John Lennon and Yoko Ono*, edited by G. Barry Golson. New York: Playboy Press, 1981.

The Lennon Tapes: John Lennon and Yoko Ono in Conversation with Andy Peebles 6 December 1980. London: British Broadcasting Corporation, 1981.

Newspaper and magazine articles

“Aardbeien veld in Central Park.” *Het Parool*, April, 11 1983.

Cott, Jonathan, “John Lennon: The Last Interview.” *Rolling Stone*, December 23, 2010.

<https://www.rollingstone.com/music/music-news/john-lennon-the-last-interview-179443/>.

Decurtis, Anthony, “Yoko Ono discusses the Legacy of John Lennon. A decade after his death Yoko Ono senses John Lennon’s positivity even in troubled times.” *Rolling Stone*, December 13, 1990.

Kilgannon, Corey, “At Strawberry Fields, Feuding Musicians Give Peace a Chance.” *New York Times*, May 31, 2016. <https://www.nytimes.com/2016/06/01/nyregion/at-strawberry-fields-feuding-musicians-give-peace-a-chance.html>.

----- “Lennon Fans Complain Police Won’t Allow Vigil to Rock Around the Clock.” *New York Times*, December 8, 1999.

Michaels, Sean, “Cee Lo Green criticised for changing lyrics to John Lennon's Imagine. Forget You singer apologises to fans for New Year’s Eve performance in which he changed line criticising religion.” *The Guardian*, January 3, 2012. <https://www.theguardian.com/music/2012/jan/03/cee-lo-green-john-lennon>.

Perpetua, Matthew, “Cee Lo Green Outrages John Lennon Fans by Changing Lyrics to ‘Imagine’.” Performed on New Year’s Eve broadcast from Times Square.” *Rolling Stone*, January 2, 2012. <https://www.rollingstone.com/music/news/cee-lo-green-outrages-john-lennon-fans-by-changing-lyrics-to-imagine-20120102>.

“Strawberry Fields.” *De Telegraaf*, April 21, 1982.

Newswires

AAP Newsfeed, “That’s Showbiz!” December 23, 1999.

Agence France Press, “Yoko Ono Spreads Lennon’s Peace Message,” March 5, 2002.

Algemeen Nederlands Persbureau, “Imagine van John Lennon – de tekst,” November 27, 2015.

Associated Press, Domestic News, AM Cycle, December 8, 1981.

----- “Imagine: ‘A John Lennon Elegy “I believe in fairies, the myths, dragons. It all exists, even if it's in your mind. Who's to say that dreams and nightmares aren't as real as the here and now? Reality leaves a lot to the imagination.” – John Lennon,” October 8, 1988.

----- “Fans Mark Second Anniversary of Lennon Killing,” December 9, 1982.

----- “Fans Stream into Strawberry Fields,” October 9, 1985.

----- “Landmarks Commission OKs John Lennon Memorial,” April 6, 1983.

----- “Lennons Dedicate Garden to Slain Ex-Beatle,” March 21, 1984.

----- “Lennon’s ‘Imagine’ Broadcast Worldwide on 50th Birthday,” October 9, 1990.

----- “NEW YORK: Mr. Lennon,” December 10, 1980.

----- “Widow Asks Memorial Donations Go To Spirit Foundation,” December 11, 1980.

----- “Worldwide Broadcast of ‘Imagine’ for Lennon’s 50th,” 4 October, 1990.

- Business Wire, "Imagine' Poster of John Lennon, Autographed by Yoko Ono, Will be Auctioned On eBay to Benefit the Spirit Foundation," September 28, 2000.
- "Yoko Ono Lennon, Gabriel Byrne to Address Tribeca Film Festival Audience at May 11 World Premiere of Amnesty International Short Film Based on John Lennon's 'Imagine'," May 7, 2003.
- Japan Economic Newswire, "Lennon would have been angry with Iraq war, Yoko Ono says," April 9, 2003.
- United Press International, AM Cycle, Domestic News, New York, December 9, 1980.
- AM Cycle, Domestic News, New York, December 13, 1980.
- AM Cycle, Domestic News, New York, March 21, 1984.
- "John Lennon remembered on 50th birthday," October 9, 1990.
- PM Cycle, Domestic News, New York, October 9, 1984.
- "Yoko Ono want to go to Moscow," February 6, 1986.
- U.S. Newswire, "Gabriel Byrne Addresses Tribeca Film Fest Audience at Premiere of Amnesty International Short Film Bases on Lennon's Imagine," May 11, 2003.
- Plus Media Solutions, "USPTO grants trade mark 'IMAGINE PEACE' to Lennon, Yoko Ono (INDIVIDUAL) (NEW YORK)," October 31, 2013.
- "USPTO grants trade mark 'IMAGINE PEACE' to Lennon, Yoko Ono (NEW YORK)," October 12, 2013.
- Press Association Mediapoint, "Pianist Plays John Lennon's Imagine Outside Bataclan Concert Hall," November 14, 2015.
- PR Newswire, "Amnesty International USA Uses Yoko Ono's Gift of John Lennon's Music to Further His Vision," December 2, 2005.
- "Yoko Ono Lennon Joins Hard Rock and WhyHunger to "IMAGINE" a World Without Hunger; IMAGINE THERE'S NO HUNGER Campaign Invites Fans to Fight Poverty and World Hunger," November 5, 2014.

Webpages

- Amnesty USA, "A New Picture Book Inspired by the John Lennon Song." Accessed on August 13, 2018. <https://www.amnestyusa.org/imagine/>.
- Artists Against Fracking. Accessed on August 14, 2018. <http://artistsagainstfracking.com/>.
- Billboard, "Billboard 200 – 1971 Archive," Billboard Charts Archive. Accessed July 27, 2018. <https://www.billboard.com/archive/charts/1971/billboard-200>.
- "Hot 100 – 1971 Archive," Billboard Charts Archive. Accessed on July 27, 2018. <https://www.billboard.com/archive/charts/1971/hot-100>.
- Charter of the United Nations, "Chapter 1." Accessed on August 12, 2018. <http://www.un.org/en/sections/un-charter/chapter-i/index.html>.
- Downtown, "John Lennon," Roster. Accessed June 4, 2018. <https://www.dmpgroup.com/artist/john-lennon/>.
- Imaginejohnyoko, "John Lennon Imagine Yoko Ono: Imagine the Film." Accessed August 15, 2018. <http://imaginejohnyoko.com/the-films/>.
- Imagine Peace. Accessed August 19, 2018. <http://imaginepeace.com/>.
- "A Love Letter From John And Yoko To People Who Ask Us What, When And Why," Archives. accessed on June 16, 2018. <http://imaginepeace.com/archives/2579>.
- "Imagine Peace", Downloads. Accessed on 15 August 2018. <http://imaginepeace.com/projects/downloads>.
- "'Imagine' receives NMPA Centennial Song Award, credits Yoko Ono as co-writer," Archives. Accessed on August 17, 2018. <http://imaginepeace.com/archives/23102>.
- "Imagine There's No Hunger 2012 #IMAGINENOHUNGER," Archives. Accessed on August 14, 2018. <http://imaginepeace.com/archives/18836>.
- "John Lennon – IMAGINE book for Amnesty International, illustrated by Jean Jullien," Archives. Accessed on August 13, 2018. <http://imaginepeace.com/archives/23146>.
- "Lennon Ono Imagine Grant For Peace," Archives. Accessed on August 15, 2018. <http://imaginepeace.com/archives/21717>.

- ‘WAR IS OVER!’ Accessed on August 15, 2018. <http://imaginepeace.com/warisover/>.
- “Yoko Ono’s IMAGINE PEACE Billboards in Times Square on Peace Day (Sept 21st),” Archives. Accessed on August 15, 2018. <http://imaginepeace.com/archives/18503>.
- Imagine Peace Tower. Accessed August 19, 2018. <http://imaginepeacetower.com/>.
- Johnlennon, “Album Artwork,” Imagine. Accessed on July 19, 2018. <http://www.johnlennon.com/music/albums/imagine/>.
- Liverpoolmuseums, “Double Fantasy: John and Yoko: 18 May 2018 to 22 April 2019.” Accessed on August 7, 2018. <http://www.liverpoolmuseums.org.uk/mol/exhibitions/double-fantasy/>.
- Muziekweb, “Starpeace.” Accessed on August 16, 2018. <https://www.muziekweb.nl/Link/JK88011/Starpeace>.
- NMPA, “Yoko Ono Will Share Credit for John Lennon’s “Imagine”: NY Times.” Accessed on May 30, 2017. <http://nmpa.org/yoko-ono-will-share-credit-for-john-lennons-imagine-ny-times/>.
- NPO Top 2000, 2015. Accessed on August 17, 2018. <https://www.nporadio2.nl/top2000>.
- RIAA, “Imagine,” Gold & Platinum. Accessed on August 12, 2018. https://www.riaa.com/gold-platinum/?tab_active=default-award&ar=JOHN+LENNON&ti=IMAGINE.
- “Milk and Honey,” Gold & Platinum. Accessed on August 12, 2018. https://www.riaa.com/gold-platinum/?tab_active=default-award&se=milk+and+honey#search_section.
- Unicef #IMAGINE project. Accessed on August 15, 2018. <http://vast.am/imagine>.
- Universal Music Group, “Overview,” EMI, Our Labels & Brands. Accessed on August 18, 2018. <https://www.universalmusic.com/label/emi/>.
- USA for Africa . “We Are the World.” Accessed on August 17, 2018. <http://usaforafrica.org/we-are-the-world/>.
- VEVO, “Imagine.” Accessed on May 11, 2018. <https://www.vevo.com/watch/john-lennon/imagine/GB0401000155>.
- WhyHunger. Accessed on August 14, 2018. <https://whyhunger.org/>.
- YouTube, “john lennon at mike douglas show 1971 full,” manipeb. Accessed on July 27, 2018. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zqLSJNCv5Ng&t=3038s>.
- “John Lennon – Live in Madison Square Garden,” LosBeatlesTube. Accessed on July 31, 2018, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pyisavj9iV4>.
- “The Black Eyed Peas - #WHERESTHELOVE ft. The World,” Black Eyed Peas. Accessed on August 17, 2018, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YsRMoWYGLNA>.

DVD’s

- Lennon Legend. The Very Best of John Lennon*, Special Features, “Imagine” (Parlophone, 2003) DVD.
- The Dick Cavett Show: John & Yoko collection*, Disc 1, “September 11, 1971: John Lennon & Yoko Ono,” “complete interview” (Daphne Productions, Inc., 2005) DVD.
- Disc 2, “May 11, 1972: John Lennon & Yoko Ono, Shirley MacLaine,” (Daphne Productions, Inc., 2005) DVD.

Databases

- LexisNexis Academic, accessed June 1, 2018 to August 19, 2018, <http://academic.lexisnexis.nl.proxy.library.uu.nl/>.