

THE  
STUFF  
*of*  
SONG

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RAIN WOLF ZINES  
*a division of monster house press*  
BLOOMINGTON COLUMBUS





# RAIN WOLF ZINES

(a division of monster house press)

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# WHY?

*scrawlings from the editor, an introduction*

THIS ZINE BEGAN as a goal-less conversation between three friends about *songs*: those amorphous encapturings of time that live as perpetual presences (how Louise Glück describes poems existing: *as presences not objects*) in our lives. What is one to do w/ all the songs they encounter / disencounter? Fragments of every song we've ever heard are still somewhere in our brains, ostensibly, floating amongst cerebrospinal fluid, ready to jump on the closest synapse of memory to gain access to the conscious world. In the same way that anything alive strives to keep living (humans being a possible anomaly here), the melodies, the blood of songs, lie in wait to be reborn, retold. I remember lyrics and notes from a song I heard when I was five years old, can recount them here, now, if I had to. Every vapid pop song I heard on the radio lives amongst my most intimate memories. To live on w/ these musical ghosts of very specific provenance is to be haunted by melody, by the will and language of the others who wrote the songs, who lived and listened to songs before that. And even before that. To be transplanted endlessly to the places where our memories were created. A palimpsest of sound collects across vast landscapes of time in every being. Even the word *song*, spectral and other-worldly in its tone, incites my mind to a distinct plane of understanding, somewhere not here, above us maybe, a cloud or presence undoubtedly eerie. Like memories, we forge and forget songs, re-appropriate and re-understand our idea(s) of them. Songs accumulate and fester in us to one day manifest on our tongues as opinings (openings). Doors to relation that open and shut w/ as much intention as non-intention. And, but rarely do we ever actually speak to these songs. We sing them back. We might say that we like such and such song because of such and such things. But to stop the song's flowing, its fueling inside of us, no, we do not do that. I suppose this zine then is an attempt at pausing that flow, however briefly.

Like everything that needs to be said, that everything seeks a speaker. So, here we are. Writing about songs. About music and how deeply it has inhabited our world-being. All of us avid listeners and show-goers / players (or at least something in some sense of those words), this reflects a collective understanding of the world of song (as disparate or similar as each of our writings / experiences may be) we grew up in and in which we continue to exist. Like language, music has been there, almost like it never could have not been; parallel to our relation, housing intractable purpose and meaning for our days.

In the world of DIY punk that I grew up in, music took the form of meeting places for the unconscious. Locations of growth, renewal, breadth. The shows where music was played held in them a possibility undeclared. Unfinalized being-with. We could meet in a house and something almost magical would happen. A reason for gathering outside of utility. Respite from work and mundanity, house shows filled our desire for feeling. Feeling like you were connected w/ others. W/ the world. Our own kind of (non)-religion. I don't know who I would know if I had not traversed the various houses that dot this country. I don't think I could / would want to know who I would be if I hadn't.

In sum, these are writings about life. Music is the common theme. The songs, elucidations on the theme, are our passage, our ways of passing. I originally had the idea that these were supposed to be deconstructions of songs, breakings down of meaning and parts, the wood rafters of a house exposed; but what each contributor's writing effuses is something much more than that. Yes, we deconstruct. But then there are our lives. The songs written about herein re-construct our lives, inform us, incite us to ideation and action. And so, w/ all the stuff we carry around, here is another piece we've picked up, paused and captured for the time being.

In transit as we are, we pause our lives at times to say hello or goodbye, to recall how something feels, to position our concomitance. Songs trill along and beside us, shunting us towards each other, engendering our stories, sparkling our time shared. Listening.

*Richard Wehrenberg, Jr.  
Bloomington, IND.  
14 September 2012*



## Did They Even Name the Songs?

Ryan J. Eilbeck

*on New Eilbeck's "Blue Collar Man"*

WE DIDN'T TRAVEL as a family without a cassette playing on the car stereo. On the road, my six member family enjoyed (debatable) repeat plays of classics like the *Footloose soundtrack* and Green Day's *1039 Smoothed Out Slappy Hours*. There were the unfortunate Amy Grant times and the more tolerable Twila Paris times. Since my dad drove most, he had the power to fully veto everyone and take over the tunes. That usually meant he was going to listen to himself.

My dad has been a musician from as far back as I can remember up to the present. Before kids came along, he and my mom sold their stick-shift Subaru to buy a piano. I grew up with him sporadically dabbling at those keys, playing through half formed songs and scratching notes onto staff paper. We sang his songs in church. We sang his songs around the holidays. We were kind of a smack dab in the middle class Von Trapp family, everyone singing and playing an instrument.

My dad home recorded a lot of his work. He'd figure out a way to get decent sound through a couple of mics running into a 4-track and off he'd go. He has shoe boxes full of tapes, each one a scribbled on time capsule of his inspiration. Children's music, educational music, hymns, ideas for musicals and so on; but it was a secular set of songs he did that always fascinated me. They captured a dad I didn't know. The dad that appreciates Prince. The dad that had an Al Jarreau t-shirt from one of his 80's tours (black with wild pink font). The pop dad. The guy who dreamed of giving that cocky Billy Joel a run for his money.

I know very little about these songs beyond how much I like them. Like a lot of family history, you come into knowing something through small fragments, unchronologically presented and sometimes accidentally. You are sheltered from some

pieces and so you hunt to help make sense of your life connected to others. You may infer and alter details for the sake of a sturdy story. So here is what I think I know. There are songs from a demo my dad made in his friend's living room in Elyria, OH. His friends and their two boys lived on a farm; wood floors in the house scratched up by many dog paws. I imagine them to be the last friends my dad partied with (in this case, party means to stay up late and drink beers (A or NA) while rocking out.) This took place sometime in the 80's close to me and my brother's birth in '84. I believe the demo is 100% serious. I believe my dad had the intention of shopping this demo around to labels and radio stations. This tape is meant to represent his skill as a populist song writer. Aside from one track with his friends on gang vocals and off time hand claps, my dad does everything on the demo. He sings leads and back ups. He plays the trumpet and is in charge of the piano, keyboard and beats played on the keyboard. Did they even name the songs? As far as I know, it has never been distributed in any capacity aside from him giving each of his kids a burned CD for Christmas that said "Dance" on it next to a little stick figure, well, dancing.

This song in particular captures a few elements that are key in what I love about pop music. Simplicity. Repetition. Memorability. Attitude. The tempo is pushing for more. It's minimal but still hits a nerve that makes you want to move, makes you say, "YEAH, I feel this." I think it's in his delivery and the little trumpet flares that set an undeniable groove. That steady bass line that runs up doesn't hurt either. I rarely hear my dad swear so when he lends a healthy "DAMN" for the sake of the common people getting through the hell of a 40 hour blue collar work week; I can't help but smile.

I listen to this song and think wow, this is my dad. This is his unrefined feelings, raw and catchy as hell. These are relatable songs of life that more than one person might like (my definition of pop music.) Very few people have had the privilege of hearing these classics. The beauty of them lies in their lo-fi, use what you have access to production. D.I.Y. with the tools nearby and with what you know. Don't wait. Make it now. This is the kind of 'product' a record exec. would laugh at and throw in the trash, which the kid who puts up posters as an intern for the label

grabs out of the trash and find something really real in it and know the genius of it; knows the importance of it existing by no one's standard except the ones of those who made it. I think my dad had fun making it. He had to have judging by the sound captured on it. I find joy in imagining the small group of friends creating this in a living room, presumably lost in the fun and energy of imagining a yet to be determined audience delighted by their hours of labor. Are you that audience? The audience of Nev?

## Surf Beat

Paul Baribeau

*on surf music, in general*

WHEN SURF MUSIC found me I was a Midwestern teenager. It became my soundtrack. Matching my own restless rhythm. There was always surf music on in my car. Tapes of tapes of scratched records. It was impossible for my friends and I to imagine that our parents ever listened to this stuff.

Once, after school, there was a group of us driving around, blasting surf music from my horrible car stereo. We saw a TV set on the side of the road, the big old kind, with wood all around the screen. Pulled over and grabbed it. A unanimous decision. Working quickly as a team, lifting together, like EMTs, we slid it on its back into the trunk of my station wagon. Drove out from the suburbs to the country, remembering a bridge near Mandy's house. We pulled over on the bridge and left the car running. One guy pushed the TV from inside the car and I stood under the open hatchback trying to get a solid grip on it. A speaker pointed down, straight at the top of my head just as a impulsive guitar solo began. A solo played with the abandon that only a truly amateur musician can achieve. The television slammed to the ground, and then, with a heave, we had it over the bridge railing. When it hit the rocks, the side came flying off and the screen smashed in a little. Not as satisfying as we had imagined, so we scrambled down to the wreckage. We took turns with a baseball bat, rocks, and a tree limb. Hooting as another nice chunk of wood came off the side. I took the bat for my turn and cranked it hard against the screen, caving it in further. Above us the music stopped. The tape flipped sides and soon a more somber number started. A guitar played sad slow notes, so buried in reverb that it sounded a thousand

miles away. We looked down at the splintered wood and broken glass. The guts of this old heap smashed out across the ground. All of us breathing heavy. Our hands bright red and sore, we climbed back up the hill to the road. Peeled out. Howling like idiots. The relentless surf beat egging us on.

## Intangible Coolness

Kari Jørgensen

*on Prince's "Raspberry Beret"*

ONE TIME I watched this Korean movie on an airplane. It was a romantic comedy. I was in that fragile state of suspension between two faraway places and was feeling the funkiness of what is basically time travel, which probably heightened the tremendous grip the story had on me. The part of the movie that really got me was when the romantic guy told the romantic girl that he knew how special she was as soon as they met because he noticed she had dirt under her fingernails. I remember being mesmerized by how humans can hone in on these little details we first see in someone and then use them to construe such a complex and cool person under the surface. We see microscopic dirt and turn it into a macroscopic landscape. It's like sorcery.

Similarly, in "Raspberry Beret," it's not even her hat, but the fact that the woman subtly "walked in through the out door," that initially gets our narrator's attention. Technically, any average bozo could walk in the wrong entrance of a five-and-dime, and it ordinarily might not be anything worth mentioning. The thing is that this person already has a magnetizing presence; her neglect of the proper protocol just serves as a tangible witness to her intangible coolness.

I think we can easily and unsurprisingly deem this lady a symbol of desire, but, zooming out, it all gets seismically more interesting. Prince ends up comparing desire to an unstoppable, unpredictable force. Weather, specifically. Our heroine is physically powerful ("Built like she was/she had the nerve 2 ask me/if I planned 2 do her any harm") and is described all atmospheric, like, "overcast days never turned me on, but something about the clouds and her mixed."

Their romantic encounter at Old Man Johnson's farm has weather imagery as well, where "the rain sounds so cool when it hits the barn roof / and the horses wonder who U are / Thunder drowns out what the lightning sees / U feel like a movie star." And, of course, our dubious hero makes assumptions about what this person would wear, "if it was warm..."

It's not like this comparison is groundbreaking (Scorpions' "Rock You Like a Hurricane" immediately comes to mind), and Prince's songs are definitely not asking anyone to pseudo-intellectualize them. But, for me, thinking about this song was like when you're walking downhill somewhere in the Midwest and all of a sudden the perfect breeze catches you, obstructs the familiarity of your environment, and transports you to the California coast for a second. Desire, I guess, lets us levitate in between the layers of the worldly and the otherworldly, exposing us to the elements where every minute thing is potentially worth collecting.



## ***I'm Gonna Miss Everybody: Ephemeral Wor(1)ds***

Andy Gardner

*on Bone Thugs N Harmony's "Tha Crossroads"*

IN A TIME when most rap lyric themes entail the objectification of women, celebrations of garish amounts of money, and guns spraying bullets all over creation, it's always refreshing to be able to listen to something one can actually identify with. Let's go back a few years, to the '90s; E. 1999 *Eternal* to be exact.

Bone Thugs N Harmony, a rap group hailing from Cleveland, Ohio, released the album *E. 1999 Eternal* in 1995 with the late Eazy-E as the executive producer. On the album there are definitely a plethora of great songs i.e. "1st of the Month," "We Crept and We Came," and "Budsmokers Only," just to name a few. But the song that was held the deepest meaning and really catapulted Bone Thugs into popularity was the melancholic yet quick paced track dedicated to fallen friends, family, and most specifically Eazy-E entitled, "Tha Crossroads."

Depending on whether you are listening to the song on the album, or are watching the music video, the song starts a little differently. In the music video, the song starts off in a rather unorthodox fashion, with a woman singing the old spiritual "Mary Don't You Weep." The listener instantly gets the feeling of attending a funeral as the singer hits the high notes with such grief in her voice. She goes through a couple verses of the spiritual, and then suddenly, an almost hypnotic keyboard sounds and the Bone Thugs chime in, introducing themselves with "Bone, Bone, Bone, Bone, Bone, Bone, Bone, Bone, Bone." In the album version, there is no woman singing the spiritual and it just kicks in with the aforementioned "Bone" introduction. After the introduction, they waste no time in asking one of the deepest questions that can

be asked: “Tell me what ya gonna do when judgment comes for you?” The beat then proceeds to kick in and it’s on from there.

A barrage of sentimental lyrics are spit by both Bizzy and Layzie Bone right off the bat. Bone Thugs N Harmony are well known for their speedy rap delivery and this song is no different. However, their rhymes in this song are spoken with a rather affectionate tone. This becomes apparent when Bizzy says lines like, “Lil Layzie came to me, told me if he should decease/ well then please bury me by my Gran Gran/ and when you can come follow me.” After the first two verses the first chorus hits and sings, “Hey, and we pray every day.” The song breaks down to just a slow keyboard part and drums for a split second, then Krayzie and Wish Bone get their chances to spit some lyrics.

Krayzie and Wish continue to pull on the heart strings of the listener. It’s hard to not feel some sort of emotion when Wish raps sorrowfully, “Why’d they kill my dog?/ Damn man I miss my Uncle Charles y’all/ he shouldn’t be gone.” The verses continue until the first chorus (we pray every day, etc.) then the main chorus hits and everyone sings, “See you at the crossroads, so you won’t be lonely.” And it continues with, “I’m gonna miss everybody, I’m gonna miss everybody.” This repeats for a while and really gives the listener a chance to nod their head to the beat and just think of people they might miss or hope to meet up with again, perhaps in another life. Then one more quick verse pops in and talks about living in a hateful world; touching on such a crucial point.

It’s a crazy world we live in and sometimes we just need to remember to stop and think about people who are close to us, or people who have maybe passed away. We need to continue to share stories of our loved ones and cherish all the good times spent together. The final verse ends with Wish Bone saying, “Can anyone tell me why we die? I don’t wanna die.” Then the song goes back into the main chorus (“See you at the crossroads/So you won’t be lonely”) and plays it until it fades out, leaving the listener in a reflective state. Thinking about life and death and what it all means. One of the reasons “Tha Crossroads” by Bone Thugs N Harmony is so poignant is because it isn’t about all the fake nonsense that rappers have a tendency to rap about these days; it’s totally real and from the heart and that has to be respected.

Life isn't about being tough all the time. It's about being kind and being there for others and remembering good friends and family. Wish Bone said it best when he said, "When the day come, better believe Bone got a shoulder you can lean on."



***So Much For the Afterglow:***  
**An Analysis of My Two Least Favorite Songs**  
**From My Most Favorite Record**

Spoonboy

*on Everclear's "I Will Buy You a New Life" & "Father of Mine"*

one of my all time favorite records is "so much for the afterglow" by everclear. i can't count the number of road trips i've rocked this record on, how many late night drives i've kept myself and company awake singing along to "everything to everyone," how many times i've detailed my appreciation for it song by song to skeptics who inevitably come to see the record through my eyes. the record is a coming of age story, a reflection on the traumas of childhood, the struggles of hopeless teenagers and 20 somethings all wrapped up in perfect punky pop rock 90's production. frontman art alexakis stands back and watches the characters in his stories rise and fall with detachment. he describes their depths empathetically, but pulls no punches lyrically eviscerating bullshitters, sellouts, absentee parents and the like.

every time i put this record on and the beach boys-esque a cappella intro kicks it off, i... feel... good. i tend to think of it as a perfect record, but that usually only lasts until i get to tracks 5 and 6, two of the biggest singles off the record: "i will buy you a new life," and "father of mine." that's when i'm reminded that like the characters who populate the songs the record is not without its flaws. i will usually either skip these tracks (as not to disrupt the rockage), or make a conversation out of it. and having had many opportunities to formulate my arguments, i'll try to lay them

out here.

first, the song “i will buy you a new life.” lyrically, it’s an appeal to one of alexakis’s ex-lovers who has moved on to date a “handsome man with athletic thighs,” and an “obsessive little rich boy.” it’s about how alexakis intends to win her back by listing all of the things he will buy for her: a garden (“where [her] flowers can bloom”), a new car (“perfect, shiny, and new”), a big house (“way up in the west hills”), and finally... “a new life.” now, most romantics will recognize this premise to be flawed off the bat. the beatles said famously “money can’t buy me love,” and the conflation of wealth and happiness has been recognized as doo doo by people with beating hearts for centuries upon centuries.

if he left it as a silly song about buying a girl’s love, i probably wouldn’t have such strong feelings about it, but early on in the song alexakis politicizes his view in a way that really irks me. alexakis sings “i hate those people who love to tell you money is the root of all that kills. they have never been poor. they have never known the joy of a welfare christmas.” its this one line that does it for me. i can understand being frustrated by people who come from privileged backgrounds who make bold condescending statements about poverty and capitalism without recognizing their privilege. totally. however, alexakis plays up his poverty like it’s a trump card. it’s like because he came from poverty, his views are automatically validated, like no poor person would be critical of the role money plays in the world. as some one who was raised by single mother who earned well below the poverty line, i personally think that money (or the pursuit of economic gain) is the root of A LOT of what kills. wars are fought over oil and territory. coercive economic policies leave millions homeless and starving. i personally look at this as the destructive nature of capitalism, but alexakis seems to imply that anyone who is critical of capitalism must not really know what it’s like. and it’s exactly this attitude that keeps capitalism going. many working class people will consistently vote against their class interests because they believe in the myth of the american dream. they identify more with rich people than people from their own background, because they believe they will one day be

rich themselves, one day they will be like art alexakis, a self made rock star who can buy love. the truth is the overwhelming majority of us will not become rich, and in the meantime that capitalist dream of economic inequity is what keeps the majority of us poor. this one line in the song brings all of this up for me and it ruins everything else i like about the song! for example there's a great line later on: "i moved in with the strangest guy, can you believe he actually thinks that i am really alive?" it's great, but usually i don't make it that far.

(side note: alexakis has been divorced three times, went bankrupt and lost his rights to his own songs, if that indicates how far his strategy of love-buying got him in the long run.)

so "i will buy you a new life" fades out and the trademark everclear guitar rhythm kicks in for their most popular song off the record, "father of mine." as a huge everclear fan and someone who has written songs about my own absentee father, my friends are sometimes surprised when i tell them i hate this song. it's addressed to alexakis's father, reminiscing about a time in his childhood before his father left him and lamenting his absence later in life. it's all very touching and sad and i'm sure it's true to alexakis's experience, but the thing that rubs me the wrong way is that it reinforces the idea you need a father figure to have a healthy childhood. "i will never be safe," he sings, "i will never be sane. i will always be weird inside. i will always be lame." he credits this all implicitly to the absence of his father. again, as the child of a single mother, i never felt incomplete for not having a father, and i think you can grow up just fine so long as you have a good parent or good parents, whether they be a single mother, father, two fathers, two mothers, traditional hetero couples, or parents with various other gender identities. i don't think alexakis means to make this point, but in the desire for a traditional nuclear family that he expresses, it feels like an endorsement of that heteronormative idea rather than a condemnation of his shitty dad.

but like the previous song, i probably would let this song slide if it weren't for one line that again subtly reinforces a problematic social idea... this time it's racism. while

painting his picture of childhood, alexakis sings, “i was ten years old, doing all that i could. it wasn’t easy for me to be a scared white boy in a black neighborhood.” again, this very well might have been alexakis’s experience, but in phrasing it like that he evokes a lot of racial assumptions. why was he a scared white boy? because he lived in a black neighborhood? what was so scary about living in a black neighborhood? an uncritical listener is going to fill in the blanks with violent stereotypes of people of color. alexakis attaches that fear of violence to race and not poverty, and all of a sudden alexakis’s whiteness grants him innocence. if he had only grown up in a white neighborhood his childhood would have been so much easier.

so ultimately, i don’t think art alexakis is a sexist, racist capitalist, (well he is actually an unabashed capitalist), but i do think these few lines carelessly reinforce some of the most negative social ideas out there. but i’m not writing this to condemn him, because really, he’s just some rock star dude, and most rock star dudes suck at least a little. and the thing is, i love this record so much that i’ve noticed every little detail good and bad. i could write a whole other essay praising his criticism of the overprescription of antidepressants in “normal like you” or how much i love that “california king” is one of the meanest most bitter songs i’ve ever heard, and it was written about billy corgan! (what?) because the thing is, when “father of mine” ends and the drumbeat for “one hit wonder” (a scathing critique of the record industry) kicks in, you know i’m turning that shit up and singing along.

## Honest Summer

Bella Bravo

*on Nico's "I'll Keep It With Mine"*

### *preface*

BOB DYLAN CRITICIZED capitalism – often and infamously – but in “I’ll Keep It with Mine,” he offers a possible out, an affable, alternative remedy. He describes three characters caught up in the archetypal example of capitalism’s reach, the standardization of time. The conductor – “he’s weary, he’s still stuck on the line” – is who we all don’t want to be: a worker subject to and his essence changed by his boring, life-sucking job. The narrator addresses the “babe,” a friend who fears a life like the conductor’s and searches for something beyond such. The narrator, through whom Dylan speaks, tries to calm Babe who feels a certain malaise that manifests as a constant searching. The narrator offers friendship to alleviate the pressures of searching and assures the help of others: “some people are very kind,” “everybody will help you discover what you’ve set out to find” and “if I can save you any time . . . I’ll keep it with mine.” Dylan’s intercessions are simple: kindness and sharing time together.

Dylan wrote this song, but Nico, hot damn, Nico did it. Her voice makes this song feel slow and warm like a small town settling in the leas of summer, and then the violins come in like the anticipation of the upcoming fall, or the next phase of life.

The following lays out a narrative for this song. I wrote a story, because Dylan’s version of the song is like a monologue to a friend, but Nico’s cover version is like a conversation. She sings along, and then the violins create a counterpart voice by coming in at the end of the measures to fill out the song between her verses. With

Nico the song tells a story about a moment shared by two people.

The following is a story about two 18-year-olds who during the summer after high school in Wortham, Pennsylvania grapple with the melancholic search and ameliorative offering described by Dylan – and all too better carried out by Nico.

### *Honest Summer*

When Liv lived in town, we used to play a game called “what you got?” We would play while we walked home from the train station just mumbling and laughing to ourselves about every little thing we passed: “what you got?” “ah, you got some broken concrete slabs over there!” “what you got?” “ah, you got an empty Dorito bag!” “ah, you got a broken umbrella?”

The town was busy being the summer after high school; some poised for college and the rest for the rest of our lives. Every morning Liv and I walked to the train station and in the evening we walked home. Somewhat anachronistically, we worked as seasonal motel maids one town over. Our peers either worked in food service jobs around town, or their parents paid for them to gallivant away their last young summer. At the time I was pretty settled on not knowing what my next step was. Real Dasein. Liv wouldn't ever talk about the Fall. She had a special kind-of honesty about her; she wouldn't say anything that she didn't mean. We'd group up at night with the rest of town's kids in the parking lot of the all-night burrito place on Redwood Road, the three-lane one-way that halved the town. While we hung out the open backs of our hand-me-down station wagons eating vegetarian burritos and cactus tacos and drinking cheap Kroger orange juice spiked with something from someone's father's liquor cabinet, we only worried when a white car drove by, but that faded with each car's taillights at the end of the vast lot. All everyone else ever wanted to talk about was the future. I felt a special kind of sadness when Liv could only joke about what she wanted to say. Whenever someone asked what she's doing in the Fall, Liv would talk demonstratively and with an upwards tilt of the head, tight jaw, and eyes pierced into the bright streetlight at the edge of the lot, she'd say, “I'm going out

to California . . .” Her smile would slip prematurely, and she’d finish her thought with an overblown laugh, “. . . searching for something.” Liv would always round off this joke with an ever-rotating noun like “happiness,” “vim & verve,” or “fresh air.” Juxtaposed the neon “open” sign, the empty wind trailing in from Redwood, and the litany of liberal arts colleges, service jobs and vocational training programs, the lot laughed at Liv’s joke.

A few months prior Liv and I were in English class and, as tended to be, Liv was talking and I was listening. We always sat in the back corner under the wall of windows. Liv would rest her forehead on the windowpane and I’d prop my elbows on the sill. Lazy style. That winter Liv’s sadness had been more present than she was. That afternoon she mentioned that her uncle owned the motel off the highway one town over. She brushed her hair out of her face and held her hand over her eyes briefly: “I’ve been a maid there ev’ry summer . . . since forever.” I waited until Liv’s hand fell back into her lap, and told her that we could spend that time together at least. “I’d do that.” That summer we met at 10 a.m. every Friday through Wednesday on the corner of her street and mine, and had a walk-together to catch the train at half-past.

We started playing “what you got?” because the conductor on the line at Wortham would ask for our tickets every day by asking just that question. He had a coarse, provincial tone that we mocked tirelessly throughout the day—which became throughout the summer. Wheeling trolleys filed with towels and small soaps down vacant hallways, we’d ask each other in his one-hoarse voice, “what you got?” and exclaim, “ah, you got a dirty lint trap!”

Every morning a chorus of his creaky voice greeted us on the line—echoing through the small, tunnel-shaped station from patron to patron, rippling images indistinct from origin. The conductor stood a little bent-with-wear posted up next to the turnstile. Inevitably he only asked the question, what-you-got, and moved to tear the corner of the ticket. Each summer Liv carried on with daily trips to the train station and this man carried on his asking. Although their relationship spanned Liv’s entire adolescence, only three words passed between them. On our last day at the station, we were running a bit late and ran up to the conductor who stood in the fixed

position with the bent posture, but was a different man. Breath cut, Liv paused when he asked her “what you got?” I pushed us headlong up and along into the cabin.

Liv laid her forehead against the cabin window and looked out along the rails. Breathing against the sky, she said, “I came back one summer and his hands had a tremble,” and wrung her hands. Her mind was always searching for her opinion, her idea, her ideal situation, anything that was hers. Not much of the Summer felt that way, just about ever. It was all fixed between the stations, along the rails, on the corner, weighted by what-you-got, and the answers always made of the residue of a town at work. Liv and I hung weightless in the window. She never hid her sadness, but it was often hard to see among jokes and gestures. In that moment her weariness reflected in the window, unmistakable and sincere.

On the walk home I interceded—breaking our shuffling silence. I asked quietly, but with my voice, “what you got?” Breathing slowly, Liv moved her index finger back and forth along the button on her jacket, searching. When we got to our street corner, I told her that there is someone like me in every city. I tried to tell her more things—like you’ll do fine with or without, or I’d walk you the rest of the way—but only that little promise came out. Kept, yeah?



## Why Is It Always Like This?

Ginger Alford

*on Jawbreaker's "Bad Scene, Everyone's Fault"*

IF YOU'VE EVER spent any time in my company then the one thing you may know about me is that I'm a consummate enthusiast. I love the feeling of allowing yourself to truly enjoy something to its fullest satiating potential, and then picking apart why you're enjoying it so much. I want to gently slide by its faults, and then discuss in great detail each point on which it succeeds. (I really connected recently when I read a quote by John Green that said being a nerd allows you to be "unironically jump-up-and-down enthusiastic about stuff.") Well, I think it was some night outside on my porch last summer that I was telling Richard that Jawbreaker's "Bad Scene Everyone's Fault" is one of the most perfect songs ever written. The album which contains it, *Dear You*, is full of long, complex, and morose songs for a punk record. The song just before it is over 5 minutes long and ends with the bleak line "I need you to bury me." It fades out with a droning dark guitar tone and a sampled movie quote about wrecking a car...but then BOOM, in comes "Bad Scene, Everyone's Fault," a two minute long strictly narrative story wrapped around an upbeat sounding pop song. It feels like the breath of fresh air that everyone needs at that point in the album. Even though it seems to be a lighthearted song about going to some trashy party, its story is so concisely potent that despite there being few adjectives to go by I picture the "scene" it describes so vividly and often on nights out. You know how it is. Once you have a line or an image in your head you begin to see it everywhere, and I began to see the party from this song at all my friends' houses and in everything they said.

The thing about a pop song is that creating something that is meaningful within the limitations of the format is doubly effective. Like the Golden Mean ratio that shows up in art and architecture and nature everywhere, I think there something so inherently “right” that activates our brain pleasure sensors about the standard short pop song structure. I guess the same could be said for using the standard dramatic plot progression from rising action to climax. Maybe it’s just enjoyment through repetition. Regardless, the pop song and the short form novel...these things endure and most of us feel more connected to them than any other art. We absorb them and we perceive our world differently afterwards.

I was re-reading The Great Gatsby last summer too. This is another bit of art that I’ve quite literally pawed through and dogeared when I’m trying to figure out how to write simply and strongly. Somehow, once I started ranting about these two things on some late night like I will, it hit me that the parallels between that song and this book were overwhelming. I still don’t know whether I was finding these correlations because they were there or because they were both versions of a popular culture narrative that’s been told over and over in different formats. Either way, I couldn’t stop thinking about it.

“I ran into this guy I knew, but hadn’t seen in years.”

First off, let’s talk about The Great Gatsby. For those unacquainted the novel is about a man who finds himself drawn into the interpersonal drama of a group of high society partiers over the course of one eventful summer in the 1920s. At the center of the book is Jay Gatsby, an incredibly rich and affable man who has been throwing massive parties at his mansion. These are wild, lavish galas that attract all sorts of people, and a lot of the book is devoted to describing the “sick things” that go on at them. It turns out he is planning these parties just to get the attention of an old flame, Daisy, who lives nearby. Gatsby was poor when he and Daisy originally dated and has since spent years amassing his fortune mostly because he believed it would allow him to win back Daisy. For a brilliant moment it seems like Gatsby’s plan has worked and he regains

her affections, but in fact it's a delusion. She's moved on and married a rich asshole named Tom, and despite Gatsby's unerring belief that Daisy is the ideal his life has been headed towards, we see she isn't nearly as perfect as he thinks and he loses her and everything else in the end. (Sorry, spoilers have got to be admissible for an 80 year old novel.)

“Reserving judgements is a matter of infinite hope.”

The thing that I loved from the very opening passage is that the narrator lets you know that he is not the main character around whom most of the action centers. Instead the narrator is a minor fellow, an outsider who is present for most of the major events of the novel but spends the time in his head trying to understand why people act how they do. He says in the beginning of the book that because of that people often seek him out to tell him their secrets: “Most of the confidences were unsought—frequently I have feigned sleep, preoccupation, or a hostile levity when I realized by some unmistakable sign that an intimate revelation was quivering on the horizon.” The book is not only a vignette of the fabulous but ultimately ridiculous lives of these rich people; it is our narrator's continuous inner monologue on love and class and people's motivations. It's hard not to be taken in by this. The guy who is always confided in but rarely speaks is finally talking about all the crazy shit that's he's heard.

Gatsby has been waiting years for this narrator to come along. He says he wants the narrator to be an involved go between because he is Daisy's cousin, but mostly it seems like Gatsby's just been waiting for someone he could unburden himself to in regards to his pining love.

“I went to this party last night, what sick things I saw: make-out sessions, bicycle messengers, punks, and art school drop outs.”

The narrator of “Bad Scene Everyone's Fault” is also somebody who seems predisposed to being the hesitant confidant of his friends. Soon after arriving at the Gatsby-

esque party in question, he runs into a guy he hasn't seen in years, and goes with him "into the neon kitchen, [ to steal ] a couple beers." So we see some punk kids moving in this house, painting their kitchen bright orange, and then throwing a party for their misfit stereotype friends. The fridge is packed with PBR tallboys in plastic bags hidden behind the leftovers and the Sriracha bottles. Maybe the narrator pulled a few High Lifes out of the crisper drawer. They crack open the sneakily stolen beers and His Friend immediately launches into his sob story. It's a story we all know, and it goes like this: so he recently dated a girl, and tonight she's at the same party with a new guy she's dating. He still likes her, even though she dumped him. He's having a hard time. We can all just agree with him here. That sucks. Oh buddy, I'm sorry, maybe you should have a few beers, but probably you should just get out of here.

"I had taken two finger bowls of champagne and the scene had changed before my eyes into something significant, elemental and profound."

Immediately after The Friend's story we hit the chorus of the song and the only thing the narrator can say is "Why is it always like this? Either you're too mean or you're too nice." This is classic stuff. This is the eternal question, but it's not thrown at us in a slow indie rock song as the sleepy self-absorbed whine of a kid talking about himself. This is just an interjection in the story Jawbreaker is telling. This is the declaration to your friend mid-conversation when you figure out what you've been trying to explain to them. God, the situation is bad. Why is it always like this?

"We went into the living room. Someone was blasting Zeppelin. It sounded good, I felt ashamed, I knew every drum fill."

Digression: what else is happening at this party? Is the narrator going to be stuck talking to his lonely friend the rest of the night? He escapes into the living room but he's still in his head. Gatsby's narrator spends a lot of time at parties, half ashamed of what he is participating in but guiltily enjoying himself regardless, and here even though

Jawbreaker's narrator isn't the only one at the party who likes Zeppelin (clearly somebody else put the record on) he's still ashamed in a room full of punks to expose himself as knowing it so well.

Anyway, the party goes probably wouldn't have noticed as there's something a lot more notable going on in the room at that moment. "Anyway, there she sat, totally kissing this guy. They looked good, I mean like in love." The narrator takes a second for impartial judging. The girl and her new guy look happy, so who's to blame here? Should she have stayed with The Friend, presumably remaining less happy? No one could make that argument. Love is something we're all looking for, and like success, when its appearance is a near miss to us there's bound to be jealousy, but when it's authentic it's childish not to acknowledge it.

"But then I remembered my friend."

Some modicum of loyalty or maybe sympathy brings the narrator back to The Friend's viewpoint. But here's the question we ask ourselves: what's so great about this girl that his Friend is moaning over? Not only is she necking at a party in front of strangers, she lacks the decency to moderate it even in front of a recently dumped lover. If the implication is that she dumped him for being "too nice" she doesn't seem worth fighting over. But we all know that attraction is something that can't be logically explained. We want people who aren't right for us. We pine away for something that just isn't going to happen. We'd amass a large fortune and spend it all on a spectacle if it would just get our loved one to notice. We'd do anything to get what our heart wants.

The climax is coming, and it's time for The Friend to speak here. He's finally going to have his moment to step out from the "lonely guy in the kitchen" role that he's undoubtedly been playing in different venues since their break up. It's certain he's been working up to this moment for a while. "How could you do this? You said that you needed your space. He's wearing the shirt that I gave you!" Points, lonely guy. Most

folks were probably on your side in this situation anyway, and wouldn't we all like to finally confront someone who mistreated us. But we rarely get the last word like that. Maybe you won Daisy back over briefly, maybe you exposed her husband Tom as a shallow idiot.

“He had come a long way to this blue lawn and his dream must have seemed so close that he could hardly fail to grasp it.”

There's a point in The Great Gatsby where it seems like he will get to be with the girl that he's been idealizing for so long. She says she loves him, and Gatsby seems to believe it's all been worth it. But Daisy turns on him when he expects too much from her. I think most readers cringe at Gatsby's naivety in this part of the book. He's so all-consumed with the idea of the love he and Daisy should have that he's blind to the reality of how shallow she is, and that she already has exactly the life she deserves with her equally vapid husband. “He began to talk excitedly to Daisy, denying everything, defending his name against accusations that had not been made. But with every word she was drawing further and further into herself, so he gave that up and only the dead dream fought on as the afternoon slipped away.” At this point Gatsby's insistence is as desperate but pointless as *The Friends*. Too much time has passed. She's moved on, man.

“Whenever he sees I'm having a good time he wants to go home.”

Back in “Bad Scene,” Jawbreaker's “Daisy” is about to finally to speak up for herself too, and I think this is the whole moment the song hinges on. She makes a single important point, and it's the closer of the argument. “Then she said: Why are you always like this? If I'm having fun then it's breaking your heart. Besides you said I could have it.” That's just it. It doesn't matter if he's right. It never did. It's no good being right when she's having fun with someone else. He may believe that they were perfect together, but there is no factual argument for love. It's there or it isn't, and the guy arguing why he deserves love is no more likely to get it.

In fact, if he's willing to monopolize the ear of the narrator who he "hasn't seen in years" to bemoan his luck, then he's probably been driving everyone else around him crazy as well. Both Gatsby and The Friend work as an extreme version of what we do with a situation of rejection. They've both turned their loves into objects of obsession instead of people with valid reasons for making the decisions that they can't live with, and once the girls speak up we can see that both guys have been pretty delusional in their understanding of the relationships.

But I've gotta say, in both "Bad Scene Everyone's Fault" and The Great Gatsby I'll root for the hopeless romantic, even if he's wrong. No one wants to root for the person that got what they wanted. The whole reason I listen to songs and read books is for solace when I feel more like the other guy, like Gatsby or The Friend, the one that confronted the girl, gambled everything, and lost.

"Then the cops showed up."

So. That's it. The night is over and it seems like after that confrontation The Friend's hope of winning his ex back is too. Daisy has gone back to Tom. The cops show up and the summer's party has ended for both Gatsby and The Friend. End of scene. It's always like this, and it's everyone's fault, but there's nothing anything anyone can do but write about it.

## Big Nothing

Steve Ciolek

*on Elliot Smith's "Ballad of Big Nothing"*

WHEN A SONG becomes familiar, I mean really familiar, to the point that it reaches 'this is my jam' status, hearing it transports you to an immediately gratifying mind-state. It's a place in your head where you might find some semblance of the idea of home, of being somewhere, alive, human, whatever. It's like driving up to my childhood house and seeing my parent's dog roll weirdly on her back in anticipation of a potential petting visitor. It's what my best friend would simply describe as 'seww good'. Dryly put, it's the presence of dopamine in the reward centers of your brain. All of this, however, is based on the assumption that you think the song is in fact good. The listener reaches an ultimate conclusion about the song, a positive affirmation that it somehow is it. So how do you know?

When I first heard "Ballad of Big Nothing" by Elliott Smith, I'm pretty sure I knew. I knew I liked it, and furthermore, I understood it. In my first encounter with it, the song fell into my palette of musical tastes and was instinctually sorted to be pleasurable and right. Instantly. Now there are limitless reasons for why a person might argue any particular song to be good, be that the point in the artist's career, the time period in which the song emerged, the purpose it serves within the bigger picture of an album, or even the technical proficiency of the musicians. I believe, though, that the ability for a song to be gratifying on first listen is due to its relation to songs that existed before it. Very simply, all songs, and I should clarify here that by songs I mean pop songs in America in the past 60 years or so, are referential to each other. So when you take that first listen, if it's a style you're familiar with, it's more

like taking a third of a first listen, kind of.

Consider this: if the songs you heard on the radio growing up all consisted of 6 or 7 distinctly different parts, never returning to the same musical phrases or sequences of notes, you would come to know songs to be these non repetitive streams of notes. So if you were to hear, say The Beach Boys “Wouldn’t it Be Nice” or “Surfin’ USA” or something, you would be left waiting for it to move to a 4th or even 5th new melody of the song, probably leaving the listener feeling uninterested and annoyed, or at least slightly judgmental of the apparently child-like song craft of Brian Wilson. The experience of the modern American, though, is starkly the opposite. Everyone is aware of the pop structure. It’s drilled into our consciousness the moment we’re plopped into a cradle next to a Sony TV (err iThing?). And people love Brian Wilson. We crave that structure, and are searching for it when we hear a new song. And when it fulfills that role, it feels seww good.

To me, “Ballad of Big Nothing” is a shining example of a song that strikes the perfect balance between pop familiarity and creative expression. The chords sound like they were plucked right from the hands of George Harrison, using several chord variations that the Beatles became known for. Elliott Smith doesn’t shy away from his love for Classic Pop, and this embrace allows for his 70’s rock influence to seem more like part of who he is rather than some contrived attempt at Big Star nostalgia.

The song itself is a mover, with an acoustic guitar opening that invites the listener to tap their Chucks along right from the gate. From there on, the song shifts between two parts; a verse with grim portrayals of individuals down on their luck, or due to the indisputable evidence in their life, individuals who simply don’t believe in luck, juxtaposed with a refrain of “You can do what you want to, whenever you want to.” And Elliott’s shaky vocal delivery (that’s a good thing) drives home the melancholic reality of how little freedom your own wants allow you to have. The song eventually builds to an ultimate payoff, a payoff that really makes it feel as if the song were on a crescendo the entire time. For me, its pretty much the entire reason why I listen to the song, and I think that can be attributed to the gratification that comes with the tension of the unstable moments of the song getting completely resolved.

The idiom at play here revolves around the idea of a fundamental tonic, or root note in a song. For the key of G, the note G (which corresponds to a specific frequency) is the root/fundamental tone, and other notes have specific relationships with this note depending on the ratio between its frequency and the frequency of note G. In general, melodies feel like they should return to this root note, so when a song spends a lot of time away from the root note, as is the case with the minor-note heavy “Ballad of Big Nothing”, it builds a considerable amount of anticipation. And Smith triumphantly accents the return to the root note of the song with the biggest bitter taste of reality, that “you can do what you want to whenever you want to, though, it doesn’t mean a thing, big nothing.” The huge musical payoff is juxtaposed with the most non-transcendental lyrical idea in the song, essentially a re-imagining of the notion that no matter how monumental one’s life may feel, in the larger picture of life on earth, of all the living things present and past, it is inconsequential. And just as the song celebrates the continuity of music, with its nods to classic pop music of old, it affirms the circular nature of existence. Life continues. Big nothing.



## Keeping, Holding, Being-With

Richard Wehrenberg, Jr.

*on The Weakerthans' "Pamphleteer"*

### *Preface I*

IT WOULD BE daunting and unwise for me to attempt to articulate in full complexity my thoughts on this song. To relate the immeasurable amount of times it has collected and echoed into my inner ear for my brain to process its meaning. Every time listened coalescing in a fog of forgetting, a ream of remembrance. A whittling down and stocking up of comprehensions, confusions, epiphanies. All the convoluted paths I took walking and listening, the headphones and speakers I listened through in a room or car, on a street in another city. The language of it washing-machining through my skull as I fell asleep from a day or awoke to a new one. I can imagine if you and I were listening to *Left and Leaving* together right now, I would pare these poetics down to a conversational vernacular and say, stalely, *This song is really good*. The function of this preface (and perhaps the essay as a whole) then is to say more precisely what I mean by the reductionist phrasing *really good*: to entertain and challenge our creative and expansive-expanding minds. To elucidate a personal trace of learning / knowledge. To communicate what I hear and think about and really feel when I listen to a song and all of its intricacy. A deconstruction of routes taken, turned back on, found by accident or w/ intention. Intimate beholdings from me to you.

## Notes on the Instrumentation

\*These notes inspired partly by the writing on the back of a Hugo Wolf record.

### *Introductory Phrase*

A finger-picked guitar riff ascends, filling up the beginning of the song like a gas until a snare-tom fill and cymbal crash call in fellow instruments. A lead guitar and bass sound their notes. Chords strike and switch quickly for a few measures. A melody leaks from the lead, slightly reverberated, to a forte which then slowly departs, ringing out into the verse. The main chord progression is discursive yet circular, winding away and back into itself. The song, if listened to while walking, is about the pace of a contemplative meandering; too sluggish for intentional, utilitarian walking and too punctuated to be sitting or standing still. A dejected andante. A hands-in-your-pockets kind of amble. It maunders, uncertain of where to go, wanting to go somewhere.

I imagine a person walking down a street kicking acorns into sewer drains, looking up occasionally when the wind blows to make something inanimate look like life.

### *Verse*

The lead guitar fades out for the first few phrases of the verse, joining back in after three measures with melodious, diminished versions of the chords played by the rhythm guitar, which is light in sound and tone, unadorned in its playing. The general tone is melancholic, pensive. Only a slight distortion is noticeable. Space and time are outlined by the simplicity of the high-hat's fours, the gentle tap of the rim shot hits. Visible and audible is the negative space created by the band, which functions tonally and lyrically perfectly with the other parts of the song. Here and there the lead guitar plays a melody that twists into and departs off of lead singer John K. Samson's vocal melodies. Like water overturning water in a wave.

### *Bridge into Chorus*

Rim shots change to snare hits. Everything feels more actualized; more *alive*. Fewer notes and chords are exchanged, giving this part of the song a more urgent sense of directness. Complexity is striving to communicate its simplicity. Before switching into a wordless chorus, Samson firmly, but not w/o a hint of uncertainty, utters his communique: *I am your pamphleteer*.

### *Chorus*

An intensified version of the introductory fugue. Chords strike more decidedly, perhaps now only because the vocals have given new life to the instruments. Everything is heavier feeling. Gravity arrives.

### *Verse II / Bridge into Chorus II / Chorus II / Outro*

The second verse bellows similarly as the first. New words emote and flow to the same old chords. The weather is the same, but the clouds, the breeze, the sun, all illuminate an unprecedented space. We are left w/ the feeling that this is the same song and that also it is not. John K. throws in a few extra *I am your pamphleteer*'s as the outro fingerpick ascends and descends, echoing into itself.

Our acorn-kicking friend has paused to look at something. You might hear a wind blowing. A thought process has unfurled and folded back up. An endless cleaving and bundling: comings-together and peelings-apart.

## Notes on the Language

### *Preface II*

*For personal, historical, and epistemological lucidity:*

When I first heard this song, I thought it was a love song. Some time later, I realized it was a political song. Finally, I understood it to be both.

The epigraph for *Pamphleteer* comes from Marx & Engels' Communist Manifesto (this snippet probably written by Engels, the poet to Marx's scientist), suggesting straightaway that this song be interpreted w/ political implications. It goes: *All that is solid melts into air, all that is holy is profaned, and man is at last compelled to face with sober senses his real conditions of life, and his relations with his kind.* Heavy, right? Def. But listen. In the context of this song the meaning of Engels' prescient exclamation morphs into something quite new and different. It's not entirely obvious what this quote is pointing to, and its not completely clear what *Pamphleteer* is 'about'. I realized after some time that this is one of the main reasons the song works so well. The uncertainty and blending of worlds makes ostensibly separate realms of life glow w/ pieces of each other: what is Political becomes Personal, what is Personal is rendered Political and everyone is in relation to one another, set w/ a backdrop of the City, embedded in the language and poetics of the Everyday.

In the song, we follow the motions of a pamphleteer, one who passes out pamphlets—most always political / edifying in their nature—to people on the street: people most likely on their way to or from work, or otherwise in that very particular post-eight-hour-shift-and-feeling-drained-seeking-something mode. In this peripatetic, this-could-be-any-day routine, perceptions become (to oversimplify) cynical. John K. Samson begins the song with a scene that echoes the jaded realization that not many of the people in the City, probably drained or draining from another work week, would care to have another thing to look at, read, analyze, or care about.

(Though, it is crucial to note, Samson's writing in general is *not* cynical. He has a way of imbuing his tone and language w/ fatalistic sadness and indefatigable hope at one and the same time.) From the perspective of the pamphleteer, we see how the seemingly simple Everyday task of speaking w/ one another, w/ sharing w/ each other even the smallest piece of our day, has become foreign (*fremnd*): *I'm standing on this corner / can't get their attention...I clutch my stack of papers, press one to a chest, / then watch it swoop and stutter to the ground.* In Samson's world, we cannot even share a simple sheet of paper w/ one another. *Pamphleteer* evokes a sense that when we demarcate a space specifically for Politics, ie. within predetermined roles and responses, we lose the ability to truly be together w/ one another. When the Political is defined inexorably by actions like handing out flyers, voting, marching, occupying (et al.) those actions become obsolete, mundane, and get subsumed into a larger discourse that is normalized and incorporated into the reproduction of the relations of production (ie. capitalism.) Alienation is the precedent. We have become strangers to ourselves—and more significantly—to one another. But there's hope here. Like I said, don't worry.

Samson punctuates the song w/ various political argot, doing a nonchalant re-claiming of language. He transfers words usually included / intended for use solely in the Political lexicon and discourse into the Personal. Lines like *I walk this room in time to / the beat of the Gestetner* (one of the earlier Xerox machines used, commonly, to re-produce political pamphlets) / *contemplate my next communicate* and *Help me with this barricade / No surrender, no defeat* are the more obvious re-appropriations. Localizing these words into the context of a single life, into the Everyday, re-conceptualizes their power and allows the listener to harness new ways of understanding their world. When we contemplate our next communicate (an official, usually political, statement), rather than just our next, mundane same-old thought, something different occurs in our thought process, something changes in how we measure the meaning and weight of our language, our lives. It's like saying, *Think about what you're about to say, it's always (usually, most-likely) important. Viz. Almost all of our actions, our sentences, our thoughts, have political ramifications, assumptions, and affect-effects.* And there's more Political referencing here. There's the quoting of a line from *Solidarity Forever* (quite possibly the most well-known protest song) and there's the nod

to the first line of The Communist Manifesto, again, appropriated and localized to a single street in Samson's City, instead of all of Europe: *A spectre's haunting Albert Street*. There should be no confusion here. We are in relation to one another: *I am your pamphleteer*. The *your* in those lyrics is key. Our being is a being-with, and it starts on a street, in the place where we live, w/ you and w/ me. It begins there, in that moment, and goes off into a multitude of paths, routes, lives, deaths and re-births. Samson gives us an empowering poetics that engenders autonomy and wonder.

What is important here is that Samson's appropriation of Political language does not trivialize that language, unlike much of the appropriating going on in the world. On the contrary: when Samson localizes and personalizes large, seemingly amorphous / esoteric, and utterly dormant political words and ideas, the work that is happening is immensely important. By re-locating abstruse language into the Everyday, Samson is letting the listener in on a secret. The secret deals w/ our ability to understand our world through new ways of seeing. It is a secret b/c right off it is not really clear how the work being done will change you. It's a process. Language is one of many enigmatic keys that unlock new ways of seeing and understanding. Samson's gift, like that of any poet's, is the gift of transference, of revealing to the listener / reader / whoever, where that key, and further keys, may lie. The other half of the deal is that you must do the unlocking. Seeing isn't enforced here. We are simply supplied w/ the lenses.

What *Pamphleteer* (and the *Weakerthans* / Samson as a general musical / poetic presence in my life) has elucidated for me, over many years, is the idea that there is an Individual in the Mass, and that when we as Individuals treat and care for one another as Individuals of Ourselves and not as Individuals of the Mass, life becomes more relatable. The Mass manifests after we do this basic work. We can begin to talk to each other again, to communicate complex ideas when this initial, simple Everyday work is done. The greater work of the Political manifests from the Personal, out of our Everyday relations. When you start to know the people in your community, everything we communicate w/ each other becomes pertinent. The doors and windows of our lives are opened and we can know each other again. Of course, at least, hopelessly, that is the hope. I'll leave you w/ the song:

*Sing: Oh, what force on earth could be weaker than the feeble strength of one?*

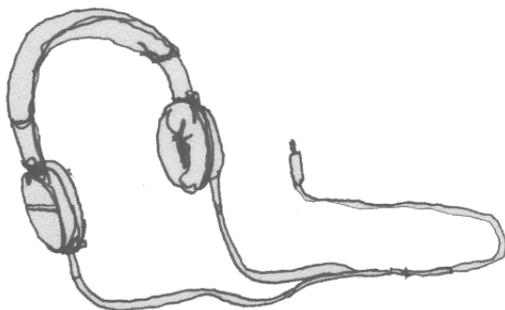




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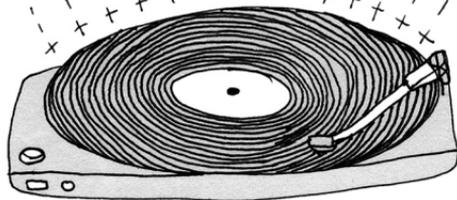






your  
skin  
brown  
red  
sun  
soft hands

music  
music  
eyes that  
look



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