

## collecting amber

Perhaps the afterlife, or that infinite moment right before you finally surrender your consciousness, is an endless party that is the sum of all the parties you have ever experienced. Everyone who you've been in the same party with will be there, and they will be toasting to the good times, reliving memories, dancing their faces off, playing card games, throwing pasta at each other.

They will be writing and puking on the walls of the club, they will be smashing understuffed piñatas in the backyard, they will be dancing to the cheesiest retro music in chronologically inaccurate costumes after the wedding ceremony, they will be drinking expensive wine as the utterly boring introductory speech has finished, they will be appreciating the empty dada pedestals and talking about their latest pet project, they will be teary-eyed while giving cheap gifts to your friend who is leaving for another country, they will be counting down the seconds until the earth has completed another cycle around the sun. It will be like a dream, where you move from one location to another in a seamless and instantaneous fashion.

There will be a multitude of doors and windows that you can access. Behind each door and outside each window will be places you can go to if you need a brief respite from the grand celebration. There, You will find all the quiet, intimate parties.

When you had that tub of cookie dough ice cream as a reward for lasting the year in a meaningless job, When you saw your nephew take his first clumsy steps, when you stood on a cliff and looked at the world for the first time without thinking about throwing yourself off, when you went skydiving and almost pissed in your pants, when you made love with a stranger outside your front door, when your father came home from his six-month business trip, when you waited in a desert with minimal light pollution to see the Milky Way more clearly.

It's all about those jubilant moments that become frozen in amber, the ones that place themselves at the precipice of infinity. The things that become unstuck in time. The things that persist in our evolving mental earth.

Perhaps life is all about collecting amber; taking pieces of film that will be played back to you at its end.

in vinyl

"Are you recording?"

"Yep." I say.

He narrows his eyes at me.

I point the camera from the ground to his face. "It's going to be an experimental film about the neighborhood, you know, objects and people just doing boring everyday stuff."

He begins thumbing through a shelf of vinyl records. "Oh. Well, that's underwhelming. I thought you were more creative than that." He pulls out a record, inspects it, and returns it. "Hasn't that been done, I don't know, a billion times already?"

"No, no, this is going to be different! I'll be talking to people, and I'm going to post-process it heavily. I'm going for David Lynch but more, down-to-earth and more like a documentary. And I promise I'll keep plastic bag moments to a minimum." I say.

"Alright, if you say so." He says. "So what do you want me to do?"

"Just do what you normally do. I'm just a camera. A talking camera."

"I'll look through these custom-duped records?"

"Yeah, and, can you tell us where we are?" I shift the aim of the handheld camera from the records to his face.

"Okay, we are now in, inside this record shop whose name isn't on display outside, and I don't bother to remember—"

"The Endless Play."

"The Endless Play." A furrow

appears in between his eyebrows. "what kind of a name is that? I mean what were they thinking?"

"I think it's a play on *Long Play*." I reply.

"Yeah, but it sounds so tacky and New Age." He snickers.

"I think it's not so bad. You probably think that way because your father is New Age. It's like, you're conditioned or something. Confirmation bias." I say. I shift

I walk up to the front porch, to the door, to the house of Dr. Gryl. I've got a vinyl record with me, in its original packaging. I borrowed the record from Dr. Gryl last week; he said it was a good one, something I ought to listen to. And "definitely in its original format", not in "those digital CD's or mp3's that don't have soul." He insisted.

Honestly, I wouldn't be able to tell between a vinyl recording, and a digital recording given an analog treatment. But I suppose there is a certain charm to the crackling of the sound when I play it. Maybe, it's those random glitches in the way the vinyl is played that make it seem less – doctored or cold, or artificial, what have you. And they're never the same place each time. And this gives it "soul"? I don't know. That's just my theory. Maybe we could have purposefully glitching music players to make music sound more "organic" in the future.

*"When I was at Dr. Gryl's last week, I thought I smelled something familiar. And, there it was, just sitting in his bathroom cabinet. A bottle of it."*

*"Really? I thought they discontinued that line ten years ago."*

I knock on the door, finally. His house does have a doorbell, but it stopped working. After all these years, it finally gave in to the sheer force of time. It isn't long before Dr. Gryl answers the door.

"Yes?" he asks. He is in very good shape for an old man, and is very strict about diet and exercise. He would do it daily; He

my weight and focus the camera on his worn, pale blue shirt.

He shrugs. "Alright, So right now, we're in a vinyl record shop, The Endless Play. It's a big place, and they've got master copies of vinyl records in the basement. Those are not for sale. They specialize in reproducing vinyl records from the master and selling those copies." He looks into the camera. "I suppose that's why it's called The

Endless Play, because they can just keep copying the records."

I give him a thumbs up. "Can you show us around? What do you normally do here?"

"Well, I buy one of these, on average, maybe, once a week? I'm an analog fan. There's always something in these records that gets lost in digital translation. Optical discs? Practical, but there's always something missing."

"What about the advent of high definition DVD's? I think, at some point, the human ear would no longer be able to tell the difference between analog and digital."

"It's all good, but I don't hear it happening just yet. And until that day comes, I'm sticking to my PVC records."

I follow him as he walks past racks and shelves of LP's. Each record had been packaged in passable knock-offs of the original packaging, which look authentic until you give one a closer look.

"Ah!" He pulls out a record with a white vinyl case from a nearby shelf. "This. This is part of history." He holds the record up.

I focus the camera on the record, with *Trixie Smith: Complete Recorded Works Volumes 1 & 2.* typewritten on the top right corner of the case. "What is it?"

"The phrase *rocking and rolling* used to be used by sailors way back in, the Sixteenth century I think? I'm pretty sure Shakespeare used it at some point."

"Okay," I say. "Go on."

would stretch, lift, sprint; even more so after his wife died. "Oh, it's you. Come in, then." Stepping through the door is always like entering some sort of museum. There are very few things in Dr. Gryl's home that would remind you that yes, we are living in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Most of the furniture and items around the home are old, and are made before the 90's. But they are all still useful, and kept in very, very good condition. Dr. Gryl

never owned a computer, and still uses snail mail. He does have a computer in his office, however, and relies on the technology on campus to keep him wired. But it was as if his home is sacred museum, that he should keep things made after the 90's away from it.

*"Maybe you can buy it from him."*

*"I don't know, I'll try. I'm sure it has some sentimental value for him, like all perfumes do for people."*

*"Yeah, that's because the olfactory system is near the limbic system, the emotion system or something."*

I follow Dr. Gwyl to the kitchen, where he seems to be preparing lunch, fixing himself a salad with oil dressing.

I'm just here to return your record. I have to leave soon."

"Sure, just leave it there, at the coffee table." He points. He continues chopping the vegetables.

I go over to the coffee table in the living room, and leave it there, on top, near a black-and-white picture of himself and his wife when they got married. I remember that day, the day his wife died. I learned about it only in the next morning; she had finally

"Anyway, African Americans started using it in their spirituals, in a spiritual context."

"How's that? It sounds pretty sexual and blasphemous to me."

"Rocking and rolling in the arms of God maybe? I don't know, ask history?"

"Are you sure about this?"

"I'm pretty sure about that part." He puts the record down to reveal his face. "Anyway, it was in the domain of the divine for a while, until Trixie Smith—" he holds the record up to the camera again. "-performed *My Man Rocks Me.*" He sets the record down on the shelf. "And memexplosion! After that, everyone kept using *rock and roll* and that's where it got its name." He looks into the camera and gives a big, broad grin.

"Were you always into vinyl recordings?" I ask.

He looks at me, and then momentarily, at the camera. "Not really. I only started collecting five years ago. My ears only opened up to the wonder of hi-def that time."

"You weren't a born audiophile?"

He shifts his weight. "To tell you the truth, I don't think anybody is suddenly born craving hi-definition sounds. It's something you get *enlightened* into."

"Enlightened into?"

"Yeah, like, cigarettes and wine, and blue cheese, and uh, good taste in fashion. You know, that kind of stuff. You learn to like them." He says. "For me, it was like my ears just suddenly opened up. Before I didn't really care whether the music came out of those shitty earphones that come with an iPod when you buy it or a 7.1 system. But I just woke up and one day I just saw the light. Heard it, I mean."

"So how were you introduced to vinyl?" I ask.

"Well, five years ago. I can't give any more details." He says, shrugging.

"Why not?"

succumbed to her Non-Hodgkin's Lymphoma. It was shocking, only because deaths are always shocking, but we all knew, every Dr. Gwyl, despite our optimism, and hope, and faith in science, that it was only a matter of time. She had carried the disease for years, and she was alive for longer by the miracle of modern medicine.

I return to the kitchen, and I set a tiny package on a nearby table.

"I bought you a little something. It's a vacuum tube, for your stereo system. It's the latest model."

"The latest model?" he asks, mixing his crab salad in the bowl.

"Yes, can you believe it? I tracked down a small business that still makes these things, and they're improving on them, even."

"That's quite interesting!" he says.

I open the box and show him the vacuum tube, and he peers over, then walks over, taking it from its Styrofoam packaging, then holding it up against the light like he was appraising a gem. "I bought it for quite a steep price too. But that's expected, since this is a bit of a niche market. I thought you'd like it."

He returns the tube very carefully into the package. "I love it! Aren't you so thoughtful! If you want, I can install it after lunch, and we can listen to something together."

"Oh, no, I might be late for a meeting I have to go to."

*"See, that's why I never used up the crayons I got as gifts when I was a kid. Because when it's gone, it's gone!"*

*"Well, don't they live on in the drawings that you draw?"*

"Okay so I heard on this podcast that, you know how memory changes every time you access it?"

"I've heard of that."

"Every time you access a memory, you change it. Okay, those Gundam building kits. It's like that. When you remember something, you piece it together from parts, and when you're done with it, you piece it apart and return it storage. But every time you piece it together, you might put a wrong piece on, and the memory is different. Was that an alright analogy?" He asks.

"I don't know."

"Ok, our memory, it's not carved in stone. It's more of—" He pulls out a record. "-it's in vinyl. Every time you put on the record to play the music, you have a chance of scratching the grooves, and changing the sound a bit."

"That's pretty interesting. You got a copy of the podcast?"

"Yeah. I'll have to dig through my folders though." He slides the record back in the shelf.

"So what does this have to do with your introduction to the

supercolafragim magical world of hi-definition music?" I zoom the camera on his shoulder.

"I made a vow with myself never to access the memories I don't want to change. At least until I die."

"So you keep your memories in mint condition?"

"Yeah, at least until I die. So I can remember it all exactly how it was when it happened. When my whole life flashes before my eyes."

"How do you do that? Not remember? If someone asked me not to think of an elephant spinning plates on Saturn, it would pop up in my head." I say.

"That happens to me, but I choose not to dwell on the memory. The moment it flashes, I push it back. It's not perfect, but I

"You'd better get to it then." He smiles at me.

I nod, and start walking out to the front door, and I peer into a door ajar, the bathroom door. Perhaps, he wouldn't mind if I would freshen myself up a bit. I enter the bathroom and head for the sink, the heat or cold of the day really doing a number on my skin. I turn on the faucet and wet my face and hands, letting the water soak into my skin.

I opened the drawer at the side, and there it was. The perfume.

*"That's one way of looking at it. But I don't draw well, and most of that would end up in the trash anyway. Besides, I want the crayon, as a crayon, with the shape and feel of a crayon you know? The original object."*

*"I was planning to keep the perfume for a long time, but we had to sell it online when we were financially strapped."*

*"Why did you sell it?"*

*"At that time, we needed whatever money we could muster. Besides, it's just perfume."*

*"Yeah, but it's... nostalgic perfume. Anyway, I tried to preserve these markers as well, but they dried up over time. Useless."*

I take the perfume from the drawer and set it on the table. I look at its bottle and its liquid. The bathroom tiling is a vibrant

robin's-egg blue. I hold the perfume up against the light. I just need to smell it again, just a little bit, before I go. After all these years.

Then, I hear a noise behind me, the bathroom door opening.

"What are you doing with that?" he says

try to keep it as close to what happened as possible."

"But how do you live, if you don't remember the memories most important to you?"

"I guess I'm an alright example of it being done." he says. He pulls out another record. "Ahh, this one!"

He shows the vinyl record to the camera. On the label area of the vinyl disc, *The Winstons and Color Him Father*.

"This is another historical piece."

I focus the camera on the label. "And what's special about this one?"

"Well, this is the A-side of this EP, which went gold back in 1969. Which is all good, but what's more interesting is this EP's B-side." he says.

He turns the record over, showing *Amen, Brother*.

"This track, Amen, Brother, is the source of the legendary Amen Break." he grins.

What? I make a gesture at him, trying to tell him to go on.

"Ah right. The Amen Break, so you you've heard breakbeat and drum n' bass right? Most of those beats that they cut up and fuck up are the Amen Break. It was used first in the 80's hip-hop community and it spread everywhere from there. You'll hear it now in drill n' bass, breakcore, jungle, I can't name them all. But imagine that: a six-second drum loop, it spawned whole musical cultures. It changed the world."

I zoom my camera in on the vinyl EP. This would be a good time for a long pause.

I look behind me, and it's Mr. Gwpl,  
looking both afraid, and mad.

"I- I was just going to smell it again."

"You GIVE THAT BACK!" he says,  
suddenly enraged. I stand surprised, shocked.  
This is the first time I've heard him raise his  
voice.

"Alright, but I was just going to –"

And he leaps at me, his strong claws  
clutching around the bottle, him trying to pull it  
away from me, me trying to pull it back almost  
out of reflex, "I'll put it back, I promise!", us  
pulling the bottle back and forth until we both  
felt a warmth.

The bottle broke, the liquid inside  
spilling into our hands and unto the floor. The  
shards of glass cutting and embedding  
themselves into our now bleeding hands. The  
liquid, the perfume, the perfume, the perfume.

The flow of time had been interrupted.  
We stopped, and were silent for a very long  
time. I looked at him, and he looked at me,  
and we both knew what was happening to the  
other. We were remembering.

"Do you think I should put a breakbeat song using the Amen Break on this part?" I ask.

"Up to you." he tosses up and catches an unsolved Rubik's cube.

"This film is going to be the worst."

"Trust me, I've seen much worse."

"I think I should just use the breakbeat and segue into my interview with Mrs. Ywpl."

"That's, that's great." He plays with the Rubik's cube again. He rises from the beanbag. "I think it will make a great contrast between the old and the new."

I move the window with his interview beside the window of Mrs. Ywpl's interview. "But, wouldn't she be, well a teenager at around the same time as the Amen Break was put into records?"

He squints his eyes. "Yeah, but her culture hasn't caught up. Amen Breaks are 80's onwards. Besides, it started in the U.S. The spread of culture then isn't as fast as it is now."

"Sure, sure." I move an mp3 file of an early jungle track into the project space.

"Should I fade them out?"

"Fade what?"

"I mean the transition. You think it should be a fade out from one scene to another? Or what?"

He sits back down on the beanbag chair.

"I'll cut it all up in tune with the breakbeat. As a segue. Like Chris Cunningham! Fuck, genius!"

---- - m e for a long pauseeeeeeee.

vinyl	vinyl	mem	me	me	vin	vin	mem	mem
Trix	Trix	flash	fla	fla	Tri	Tri	fla	fla
arms	arms	wine	arm	ar	win			wine
play	light	light	play	play	play	light		play

I: Mrs. Ypwl, Good morning.  
R: Good morning! Oh let me get that for you.  
I: Thanks, Mrs. Ypwl. You've lived here for  
R: I've lived here all my life, actually.  
I: Oh, really? Well, can you tell us a bit on how the town has changed, over the years?  
R: Ah, It's really hard to describe, if I could just show you, I would.  
I: Well, you can just tell us about it.  
R: But, well.. come to think of it... changed... I don't think it's really changed at all.