

Depth

written by Adolf Alzuphar | December 18, 2016



In the past, iconic status was conferred by history. Today, an artist may see no reason to wait, and will try to preempt the ratification process—by going straight to spectacle. Spectacle is a form of illustration—it illustrates an idea, usually a big one. Shock and awe, indeed.

- David Salle

In the end, despite its title, J Cole's new album *4 Your Eyez Only* was much more about how we listen. Say it to yourself thrice and a history of what a commerce entails (having paid for it,) the magna carta, and the constitution should underlie the fact that you liked it or not because you liked it or not.

When it hits you, it's always more about subjective feeling than objectively being "good music" as per the leading music critic; good music is not necessarily some sort of Proustian Madeleine (perfect weight,) f*ck that, though it can be. For some, listening to a good song is you cracking open and eating a pomegranate in what ends up being a pretty sloppy, vernacular, experience, despite the cost of the fruit. For others listening to a good song is like staring at a sculpture of a red, white, and blue pumpkin, silently, waiting for it to explode. It's up to you is what it comes down to.

It comes to you as antagonism sometimes: like eating an entire pomegranate and not just the seeds. Listening to it is a feat and as a feat a life

experience: you cherish your life experiences and your life has been that much more splendid because of it. How does one even go about dancing antagony is not a question is neither a question for a bear, a bird, or a seal – whichever your inner spirit may be. You just get up and do it, as if a city mounted on ground. You dance to antagony both for others to see you and to feel it for there's never been anything wrong with *being*.

It comes to you as fences: fences placed between those who play the music and listen to it and those who have either taunted or hurt you, or are indifferent to your individuality as a human being. Fences are bad sometimes but sometimes fences protect. The bad sort of fences are those that do not seek the wellbeing of those fenced in. You are fenced in and make a life out of a world that you know very well, enough to be fodder for an interesting memoir or at least a memory.

Curiosity: is what for you to listen to the music more than twice, plain and simply. You felt curious about life, day, night, sun, stars, and sometimes about a tale that you subconsciously believe about a group of boys and girls, girls and boys, who danced and listened and had so much fun that they became these giant, beautiful, butterflies.

Once upon a time, at a party, in a very well regarded city, a group of friends danced and laughed so much that they became a whole bunch of giant butterflies flying the friendly skies. There was no more a need to pay for rent and transportation.

You have not been writing that story but you have been mulling its images over for quite some time now. No, no, no: you might never write it down but the metaphor speaks to you because it is you.

Mexican poet Tedi Lopez Mills has written about beings like you and I and our condition – about human beings.

our lot as human beings is inconstancy, / perpetual change

– tedi lopez mills

She gets it (us,) as much as she understands what listening at night is like: a subject she's written not one but two magnificent poems about.

Night (Cynical)

*at night they bark
so many dogs*

they bark tied
to the splintered post

they bark at the cat's leap
on the dry shrub
branches crackling
under claws

they bark at whistles

they bark at their stakes
ripping wood

they bark all night
under the withered tree

they bark I think
as I listen wide awake
because the second dog could not keep quiet
because of rage for order
because they will not break the circle
the choir of muzzles

Let dogs be a metaphor for music and, girls and boys, boys and girls, we have now entered a galaxy named ourselves. It is an odd galaxy, wherein its citizens sometimes forget where it is that they are. They forget to think about what they are feeling. In this galaxy, puppies hold a very honorable place.

To ourselves, 21st century Hip Hop, a pomegranate for some, can be listened to in a multitude of ways. Some will lay awake thinking about what it being spoken about in the song and some will not.

Writer Dany Laferriere has rightly observed that women have for a long time not been allowed to enjoy night as fully as men. They were obliged to attend parties with chaperones and call night quits after their wedding night. For some, it is an end to that interdiction that is the bark that one is listening to: a new night for both women and men, that nonetheless needs to be progressed.

When two villagers had a falling out, the whole community would accompany them to a special enclosure, in whose center were two raised stones set in the earth at a certain distance from one another. Armed with small sacks of rocks, the enemies faced off from atop these stone-age pitching mounds and took turns hurling their projectiles at each other's head. The Guanches' aim was legendary, so deadly that the excitement of the contest came not from the combatants' striking each other but from seeing who was best able to dodge the rocks.

- Alvaro Enrigue

What about listening has one tune in to contest of agility? The ability to rap seems to fascinate many of us. The music burst into the annals of our living in the 1970's and never has quite gone away, despite how decadent rap music sometimes is.

Sometimes the music is conscious (it's now so often decadent that any sort of non-decadence is heroic positivity.) *4 Your Eyez Only* means to be a new album of positivity: a vase of beautiful red flowers placed on a lacquer black table in every person America.

Is the positivity that has one listening attentively however or is that and something else, something deeper? Is it depth? Depth: a word often used in relation to bodies of water, like lakes and pools. When water is deep it is dangerous. A girl jumps into a lake while her mother watches from her beach seat. Be careful, her mother screams. Don't go anywhere that's deep. Her little brother jumps in after her, because of the word deep. He screams back that I won't mom.

Depth is mysterious, isn't it. Once a reason to visit a Delphic oracle, since the enlightenment vowed to be understood scientifically, depth is a reason to live. It asks of us to pay attention to ourselves and to the world around us. Depth is what we read when we read Colson Whitehead's novels: the depth of a man's communication and language when exploring a theme that is dear to him. Depth begs us to listen to details and to be aware of those details: what J. Cole said and what he meant by that. For those who have braved depth, in both Whitehead and J. Cole's instances but inner depth and the depth in artistry, have well contributed to our existences. So we listen, sometimes even numb to the world arounds ourselves: because we *are* and always will *be*.

4 *Your Eyez Only* is a great album of expected but appreciated strategy: the beats are good Hip Hop and so are the singing and the raps.