

Panoramas and Labyrinths: June 29, 2015: I'm not even sure when and where

I first encountered the panorama and the labyrinth, when I first started thinking about these ways of seeing. They are prominent ways of seeing the city. The panorama provides a bird's eye view from above, enclosing the city in a broad sweep. Depicting the city as a legible and rational unity of civic and material progress, the panorama gives visual expression to the urge to control and rationalize the city and its processes. The labyrinth offers a mole's eye view from below, enclosing the spectator in what appeared as a maze. Depicting the city as dark and mysterious, the labyrinth evokes despair in the face of an illegible and fragmented terrain of misery and deception.

While I was still feverishly teaching this (in "movies and cities") in the summers, I used to say I thought it was something basic, an element *in the head*, that you can quite clearly feel the difference, *in the head*. I still see and feel that, the labyrinth leading down, inward, brooding, the panorama beckoning upward, outward, confident. In my reading it first came to me as mastery and surrender, from Wyn Kelley's startling study of *Melville's New York*. An anonymous editor, outraged that I would reduce the street-level, mole's eye view to surrender, pointed me to Michael de Certeau's "Walking in the City." De Certeau described walking – the street level, mole's eye view - as not surrender but as life, asserting our own positions against the programmatic plan imposed from above. In image culture, a striking illustration of this is Hitchcock's *North By Northwest*, a film obsessed with grids and authority imposed from on high in which the central character – Cary Grant as vacuous advertising executive Roger Thornhill – learns to embrace life and love by slanting (walking, running, climbing, diving) across the grid. It's precisely the contingent, the unpredictable, the idiosyncratic, not the grid, the panorama, and the drive for mastery and order, that gives city life its value.

So this isn't like most of my liner notes, I know. I may be in a creative coma. But that's no reason to deny my fans their music. And am I myself adopting a panoramic stance in delaying this until I come up with the perfect, the masterful, liner notes? When really all I can do is stumble around the best I can, making my way through the labyrinth. The initial songs on the mix are about the mobile, digital world. That is as good an illustration of the panorama and the labyrinth as anything. The panoramic sense of mastery, of immediate access to all associates, all information, all choices close to hand. But it sucks you into a maze at the same time, imposing tunnel vision as the world goes by without you. Perhaps we can slant across the digital world and make our own lives. Finally, the subtitle, something in the head, is my comic reference to the last couple of mixes that focused on a headache, my headache. After a labyrinthine trip through the medical establishment, I've decided the headache is just something in my head.

Side One: Turn it off – Phantogram: As the second year of John's smartphone begins, a few songs about the facebook world. "I've got your name/Got your notebook/

Cellphone look.” I feel bad for kids growing up today. **Rill Rill – Sleigh Bells:** I don’t know; is it six lines of coke in the bathroom or not? It’s the “ring ring call em on the phone/tell them bout all the new trends” that gets me. Young women juggling demands in the digital era. “You breathe in the deepest part of the water.” Nice line. **Undertow - Warpaint:** doesn’t that opening really feel like an undertow? “Better not to be the first person diving in.” Love as a zero sum game. **Almost crimes – Broken Social Scene :** Yes, this has been on a previous mix, but a different version (more haunting) plus I now understand the lyrics; he’s married, she’s up for another fling, maybe (demonstrations lack caress) but nothing long-term; he’s desperate and she’s telling him to go home to his wife; “she’s waiting.” **Tuxedos – cold war kids:** He’s missed the boat and feeling the fraud. Ah, weddings. **Present of future end – the most serene republic:** as we end side one, a last jeer at the world of television, internet, email, and phones that has only made us more alone **Side Two: Don’t move – phantogram:** I do like this band. But I’m not sure I trust this woman. I think she’s trying to tell me everything is ok. Shake shake shake. **The peacock – Beirut:** from the internet: “When I first listened to this song, I was struck with the impression of a soldier at war, made bitter by the weather, the war, and the relentless calls of a bird nesting near their camp. He and his fellow soldiers would gladly kill the annoying creature but it represents some form of hope or optimism in a place where there is none, so they let it be; without this horrible bird's song, no one would be singing. This song may in part refer to Trench Fever, an unusual disease spread by lice among soldiers living in the squalor of the trenches in the Great War. The condition causes a sudden-onset of fever, severe headaches, giddiness, depression, exhaustion, pronounced muscular soreness & stiffness, and a characteristic shin pain often so severe that patients fell down. The Peacock to whom the title refers, could be Alexander David Peacock, an entomologist in the Royal Army Medical Corps whose research into the condition identified the cause and helped develop methods to control its spread during the First World War.” There is intelligence in the universe and, more unexpected, on the internet. **Teenage wasteland – Wussy:** I’ll never be anything but a teenager, angst right there on the sleeve, always available (did you know Salinger carried the first six chapters of *Catcher in the Rye* onto Omaha Beach on D-Day?). **Wild – Beach House:** About a death in the family, perhaps from excessive drinking (father won’t come home because he’s seeing double; the black hearse, hood black and gleaming). But you got to keep going, life is wild and we don’t have much time. De Certeau would like this line: “One chance to fall behind the lines that will not let you.” **Death is the easy way – my morning jacket:** who chose this weenie song? But, hey, it’s really affirmative. Because you know we’re not taking the easy way. **You are Free –Mates of State:** The big possum walks late. Whose voice is that? **Bonus Track: Ecology: A Day in John’s Life:** a snippet from my environmental survey course, this bit on the history of ecology and urban ecology. Talk about labyrinths. But a day in the life, or rather four minutes out of a day in the life. I don’t recall leaving this class thinking I’d done a particularly good job. I do recall not wanting to teach that day. Having listened to the full class now (I only

occasionally record my classes), I'm confident I've given plenty of classes worse than this one. But I've also given some that were better. I'll say this one is in the 85 percentile. I usually think I'm a fraud but this (and least the full 75 minute version) calls that into question.