

The Things We Forget to Remember

My copy of Dinosaur Jr.'s album *You're Living All Over Me*, taped onto a TDK SA 90 cassette, played in my car constantly during my last year of high school. It was recorded over Paul Simon's *Graceland*, an earlier favorite, which was in turn recorded over some static drenched hard rock I taped off of the radio. In my head, I still hear Simon's "Under African Skies" as the natural conclusion to "Poledo", Lou Barlow's own exercise in tape hiss excess that ends *You're Living...* A well-worn tape is geological. Layers of recordings and re-recordings, messy dubs, bleed-throughs, hisses, accidental erasures, wow and flutter mark time and shape sound subjectively and organically. Often adorned with stickers, magic marker and collaged cases, tapes, especially mix tapes, were an intensely personal way of collecting and distributing recordings.

Patented in 1964 by Phillips, the age of the cassette tape began in the late 1970's, when the Walkman was invented. Tapes flourished in the indie rock and hip-hop cultures of the mid to late 1990's, only to die in 2001, when CD burners and CDRs became affordable and the Ipod was introduced. Immediately, an entire recording medium was forgotten. Unlike vinyl, whose high production costs, object-ness and association with DJ culture has kept the form afloat, lowly tapes, if they are lucky, are resigned to a life collecting dust in our closets.

There is something in Simon Evans's drawings - modest, hand-y lists, charts, diagrams, & maps - that revives the just-past but already forgotten cassette golden age. His spliced together materials, methods and subjects feel just slightly outdated. In a good way. The work is not so much homemade as it is *analog*, reveling in the smears and irregularities that digital culture has since wiped clean. A lot of today's "fashionable" art conjures aesthetic ghosts from the 1980s, finding in its glossy, antiseptic, moneyed surfaces an echo of our own times. Evans's work, on the other hand, makes palpable a time in the 1990s when artists put on their own shows, musicians flourished outside of major labels, and earnestness and irony were not mutually exclusive. I don't mean to say that it is nostalgic. Rather, the crappy but painstakingly constructed scotch-taped, graph paper and notebook and whatever-scrap-happen-to-be-on-the-floor surfaces are a remedy for the accelerated amnesia that accompanies the rapid progression of ever shinier, faster, hipper technologies. Or artwork.

A while ago, Dan Graham, informed by Walter Benjamin, said that, "The task of the artist is, in part to resuscitate the just-past- that period made amnesiac by commodity culture – and to apply it as an anti-aphrodisiac." Graham goes on to quote the Rolling Stones's song "Yesterday's Papers" – "Who wants yesterday's papers? Who wants yesterday's girl? No one in the world,"¹ as an example. I'm surprised that more artists don't take up this task. Evans does. At a time when no Internet connection is fast enough, business is taken to the beach, and music is once again made ephemeral, Evans reminds us of the value of such a residual, sedimentary project.

¹ Dan Graham, "Legacies of Critical Practice in the 1980s", *Discussions in Contemporary Culture*, Hal Foster, ed., Bay Press, Seattle, 1987