

Sketches of the Inchoate

My Song for America - Analysis



By Charles Davi

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The role of coincidence in the arts

I plainly make repeated use of the word “baby”, in songs, and in the text itself, without out any obvious explanation, or justification.

As an artistic device, the word, “baby” serves as a unifying trope across a huge range of genres, from the bronze sculpture at the Met, to Led Zeppelin and Fetty Wap.

This is also clearly planted to contrast with the expectations of people in modern relationships, who are likely offended by the use of the word in these contexts, despite the frequent use of the word in contemporary music, including by a woman, Mø, who’s from a highly gender-conscious society, Denmark.

The implication being that superficially unrelated artists are perhaps a bit more honest about their feelings, and that this creates a unifying coincidence, forming a trope -

“Baby”.

This is also a play on associations, and what I think is a perfectly normal tendency to infantilize a partner, since it signals the ability to care for children, which is obviously a huge component of any long-term relationship.

As a practical matter, for the reader, it’s a signal that once observed gives an otherwise unrelated group of artists something in common -

“Baby”.

This is an exogenously realized variant of the same instant familiarity I allude to when I first meet Ida, which I took to an absurd, and realized level with the horse, deliberately creating a shared experience for both of us.

It is nonetheless as if we had something in common even before we met, though this is disrupted by external events -

Food guy and shoe guy.

Further, I realized after writing the, “London Grammar” sequence, that it’s plausible that Ida in fact made the work that I describe, “The Beach Just Beyond the Woods”, though this was totally unintentional.

This kind of coincidence nonetheless suggests deliberate action, by someone, to the reader -

The work is obviously similar to the painting that I made for Ida, and the gallery as described sounds a lot like our apartment in Oslo, and I even focus on the door of the gallery, just like I did for our apartment.

The work arguably serves as a mood-changer for me in that sequence, solidifying my fidelity to Ida, since the memories it conjures color the rest of my night, though this is unstated, and implied.

This is an absurd variant on the idea that artists share ideas, without communicating -

In this case, I invented a character, Ida, who somehow, as a character in my head, arguably shared her work with me, and this was genuinely unintentional on my part.

Taking this idea of coincidence even further, I have a somewhat lazy and misshapen right eye, Biggie Smalls plainly has a lazy eye, Dale Chihuly has an eye patch, and Fetty Wap also has a damaged eye.

Noticing this, I intended this intersection in appearance to operate as a symbol for coincidence in the arts generally, except this time, as a symbol for the idea that artists can almost see each other's works, and that we share ideas without knowing it, elevating the role of coincidence in the arts, as if chance altered our physical appearance, to let us know that perhaps we have something in common -

This is symbolized by the color blue, which serves the role of the light of mankind, and the light of ideas, with New York a powerful source of this light, symbolized by the Empire State Building.

And that this light is the invisible medium that facilitates this spooky, otherwise unexplained communication among artists.

This is plainly alluded to in the cover art, which is a work of street art, featuring an encircled eye, that I've noticed as a reoccurring theme in street art around lower Manhattan.

This is also plainly alluded to by, "Blue Train", by, "So What?", from, "Kind of Blue", and Ida's ability to suddenly see, "the music beneath the page", which is also written in blue.

This is also consistent with, "The broken frame" sequence, presenting the body itself as art, that is both a conscious work by the person in question, but also subject to chance.

In this case, a group of otherwise unrelated artists including myself all have a similar physical feature, that is unusual, and I'm clearly putting myself in the role of the observer, who through mutual appreciation of a group of otherwise unrelated artists, creates the opportunity for a single narrative to reference all of our work, alluding to the intersection of our appearance, reducing both to a common physical feature, that operates as a symbol for coincidence in the arts.

In this case, a physical feature that we all have in common -

Eye problems. †

The role of music

The fourth book repeatedly makes use of song lyrics that are explicitly incorporated into scenes, creating an artistic device that is tough to manage, since the lyrics are rarely a perfect fit for the scene, outside of the few moments referenced.

The overall idea is to take the use of music beyond how it's used even in film, which is typically an emotional match for the scene, and instead elevate it to a technical match on the subject matter as well.

Ramble On

“Mine’s a tale that can’t be told”, alluding to some mystery as to my ultimate origin, with Ida noting the obvious similarity in appearance between my uncle and myself, and only naturally asking about the matter.

Then, “magic filled the air”, providing her with an answer, as he performs his version of, “The Beast Sonata”, which is plainly alluded to by Ida hesitantly asking the question, twice.

He also has an absurd, black t-shirt, referencing me, and is smoking a cigar, referencing both Ida and I, and a shared experience we had at a cigar bar earlier in our relationship.

Ida is of course astonished, and this connects to the next scene, where we’re driving back, again alluding to poorly understood connections between artists, as Jimi Hendrix plays, and so the car is filled with, “shadows and ghosts”:

Both the outlines and the souls of the past, that made the music we’re now listening to -

The past as immutable, and a light that shines upon those who listen closely.

Shadows represent prior events, and ghosts represent the force that allows for the current realization of a prior event, despite the event being in the past.

The idea of music as driven by a ghost is specifically alluded to in the scene in the studio, where Emilie Nicolas’ music animates the air around us, like a ghost, bringing physical reality to what I view as the substance of a human soul:

The force that ultimately animates our bodies.

This is indirectly alluded to in many scenes, where we appear as, “lit up cutouts”, suggesting this force can at times be observed.

Message in a Bottle and Blind Faith

Though the lyrics aren't explicitly referenced, the plain implication is that I'm sending out an SOS -

That art is in danger.

I think this is serious, and I think artists are also in personal danger, as the political enemies of reason and art use economics to stifle the arts, and perhaps worse.

The scene is meant to operate as a reclaim -

Where did the arts move?

Right here, in the middle of the street -

The kids show up, and own Bowery, again.

The What

I did both -

The dialogue of the text references the lyrics, and the lyrics foreshadow events in the text.

Christine references the lyrics, which I suggest was inappropriate, because she should know that I'm married -

I'm presumably wearing a ring.

Further, if you unpack what she said, it's, "What do you ask the world for?", and the corresponding lyrics are, "Fuck the world".

As a result, her statement arguably changes the context of the song, suggesting quite plainly, in my character's imagination, that she is saying that she wants to have sex with me, which I allude to in my response.

Further, the lyrics, "Like trees to branches", my favorite line in the entire song, save for Method Man's intro, over his first verse, foreshadow the artwork to come, which is comprised at least in part of fallen wood and leaves.

The selection of, "The What" and, "Trap Queen", was also deliberate, to follow the evolution of hip hop, from the sampled, looped beats of early hip hop, to the highly produced, cinematic beats that we're now accustomed to, that are often performed by live bands, arguably blurring the line between pop and hip hop, which I'm sure at least in part explains its commercial success.

Wicked Son

This is intended to operate twofold -

My character is obviously a bit wicked, and male, and so the song clearly references me.

There's also a subtle reference to another Biggie song -

"He's gonna be a bad boy."

However, Christine is certainly wicked, arguably malevolent, totally indifferent to the fact that I'm married, and it therefore fits well with her character as well, in part in title, not in substance, since she is clearly a woman.

Deja Vu

This is wonderfully self-explanatory, and oddly enough, the image of the video on YouTube looks exactly what I imagined for Christine's character -

A Swedish Ava Gardner.

Just Ride

This is intended to suggest that the environment is pointing me into indiscretion, that I should, “Just Ride”, as if Christine had selected the song, and is seducing me through it, though my conduct suggests that’s not likely to happen.

The song is also intended to convey my non-zero temptation, as she is incredibly beautiful, and aggressively interested.

I am aware that I say, “which I like”, which references the shopping scene with the Mikkeller beers, but there’s no deliberate connection -

You could argue it means I’m thinking of Ida, having just seen a work of art that references our relationship, but that was not my intent.

You could perhaps argue it means the song is somehow like indie beer?

Clark is definitely indie, and music is intoxicating, but, no -

It doesn’t mean anything, and it’s just how I talk in real life, and I actually like the song, and beer, so, there it is.

Most of the symbolism in the text is overt, e.g., using the color blue to convey the concept of the light of ideas -

This kind of thinking can always go too far, but it’s also a natural part of literary analysis, and I don’t want to tell people how to think, even about my own work, but I have no problem telling people what I actually meant:

It means I like the song, and beer.

Finally, there is a reference in the lyrics to discussion without words, so I thought the song was an excellent fit for the scene overall, since there’s clearly quite a bit of communication through music in the scene -

He also says, “baby”, repeatedly, so, that’s obviously an in.

Trap Queen

The title, “Trap Queen” itself works for the scene, though not the song on substance, and actually sets the stage for a fantastic misunderstanding:

Christine thinks I acknowledge the song, because I like her, whereas I think she looks at me, because she’s admitting that she’s a trap -

We split the title of the song, I take, “Trap”, she takes, “Queen”, causing both of us to look at each other, creating perfect misunderstanding, given the same set of environmental facts.

This is something I allude to several times -

The news coverage of the Andreas sequence;

Thai food;

The Mø misunderstanding.

The general point being that having the same information could still lead to errors, if you don’t share a context.

It also alludes to the power of art, which is to create a shared context for life itself.

This is why I wrote this story:

It’s for every American, precisely because the breadth of genres addressed is insane, and deliberately pedagogical in drafting, allowing anyone to simply pick up the book, and learn about everything, from information theory, acoustics, Zen Buddhist theories of psychological well-being, to Ravel and Fetty Wap, all in about 200 pages, while unconsciously learning about Scandinavian culture, which is a part of the world I think Americans could learn from, despite the fact that they’re obviously basically all about as white as you can get -

They take care of each other, and don’t fight over nonsense, which is something that Ida and I are supposed to represent as a couple throughout the text.

Paper or plastic?

Who gives a shit -

We’re speeding home, because car, baby powder.

My opinion is that American life is deliberately over-complicated, to ensure that we fight over nonsense, because it makes the U.S. less competitive economically, and that if instead every American knew they’d be cared for, the way

they are in Scandinavia, life would get a lot simpler here, just like it is there.

Let You know

I knew I wanted a London Grammar remix for the scene, and when I was listening to, “Let You Know”, I said to myself, I know her voice, but I don’t know the song, and instantly realized, that’s the story of the sequence -

It’s the same ghost from my past, and so I leave.

Said otherwise, I’ve been with this woman before, in different forms, and though I don’t know this particular person, I know where my time with her goes, because I already know who she is, in some sense. †

Musical references*Note that song titles are hyperlinks*

1. Elton John, “[Your Song](#)” (1970). †

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Seeing

What I've found,
Inside my mind,
Has found its own way out -
Its own path through time.

It bounced back round to me,
Like moonbeams from the Sun,
Round like echoes,
Mirrored by your minds -
Sights and sounds of your designs.

Like morning's light on tired eyes,
It wakes me up,
All at once.

Diffraction breaks distraction's rut -
We've found our way out,
Now it's obvious.

The path is long,
Though its end is clear -
A home for us -
Better suited here.

Bright, diffracted morning Sun,

Cuts through curtains towards our eyes,

Illuminates the way out,

Showing that which must be done. †

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For America -
If you disappoint me,
I swear to God,
I will find a way ... †



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