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Article

Graphic Music Memoir, Memory, and the Mixtape: The Hauntological Format of the Mixtape in Summer Pierre's *All the Sad Songs*

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Abstract

Mixtapes are a form of autobiography and are a tool for storytelling. Summer Pierre's graphic music memoir *All the Sad Songs* uses the mixtape to curate and deconstruct memories. Through a series of mixtapes discarded in her basement, Pierre details her relationships through music. The absence and presence of mixtapes haunt the narrative and create the scaffolding of Pierre's memoir. This article explores how the hauntological nature of cassette tapes structures narrative in graphic music memoirs. Music memoirs are about identity building for the music memoirist and the reader. The graphic memoir differs from the traditional memoir format as the author must show as well as tell. Pierre's graphic memoir demonstrates Pierre's changing music identity through both text and illustrations. Memoir writing is a performative act, and the author, similar to the mixtape creator, is the curator of the narrative the memoir presents. By using a 'dead media' to aid life writing, Pierre presents her journey as a musician through a lifetime soundtrack.

Keywords: music memoir; mixtapes; hauntology; Summer Pierre; graphic memoir

1. Introduction

Simon Reynolds considers the cassette tape 'a hauntological format' (Reynolds 2011, p. 143). The cassette tape is a reminder that it is a carrier of music as opposed to a live experience, as the mechanics of the tape can be heard during playback. Music evokes emotion in humans and aids memory recall. However, objects, and in this case music memorabilia, hold an additional importance to memory recall. Cassettes are a 'dead media' as digital music and vinyl revival dominate people's listening habits (Reynolds 2011, p. 143).¹ The cassette tape, then, is an object stuck in time and no longer has a practical purpose.

Mixtapes act as a timestamp of a person's life, symbolising the people, places, and feelings they were experiencing during the time of curation. The cassette is a ghost of the late-twentieth century and is an item of nostalgic value. Tracy Thorn, in a piece for the *New Statesman*, writes of searching her home for a device to play her old cassettes on before eventually finding a tape deck 'covered in a layer of dust' (Thorn 2022). Underneath this layer of dust is a collection of memories that can only be accessed via a now obsolete device. This article explores how the hauntological nature of cassette tapes structures narrative in graphic music memoirs, a term which I will define shortly. Focusing on Pierre's (2018) graphic memoir *All the Sad Songs*, this article explores how mixtapes are used in life writing to curate and deconstruct memories. Through a series of mixtapes discarded in her basement, Pierre details her relationships through music. The absence and presence of mixtapes haunt the narrative and create the scaffolding of Pierre's memoir.



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Before the narrative begins, Pierre outlines how the memoir will be structured: through mixtapes. The method of storytelling and narrative structure is at the forefront of the memoir. These mixtapes narrate Pierre's life in music, finding her musical identity, and the autobiographical connection to music. Through a series of mixtapes 'buried' in her basement, Pierre details her relationship with music and her relationship with others through music (Pierre 2018, p. 1). In Pierre's memoir, mixtapes act as archival items, establishing Pierre's taste maturing and musical development during young adulthood. Mixtapes and memoir both lock the memoirist in a moment in time, as the memories are cemented on the cassette tape or page. A past version of the author haunts the present.

Ultimately, this article argues that mixtapes hold Pierre's lost futures and the various versions of Pierre that could exist. Pierre translates these lost futures into the memoir writing and creates an archive of the self through the ghosts of mixtapes' past.

2. The Graphic Music Memoir

I define Summer Pierre's *All the Sad Songs* as a graphic music memoir. A music memoir 'use[s] music in all its cultural and material manifestations as the material through which new identities are constructed highlight just how rich the relationship between music and identity is' (Edgar et al. 2019, p. 5). *All the Sad Songs* centres Pierre's relationship with music, her multiple musical identities, and her journey to becoming a musician, therefore making the text a music memoir. Graphic memoirs are also not a new genre of autobiography, with Alison Bechdel's *Fun Home: A Family Tragicomic* (2007) and Marjane Satrapi's *Persepolis: The Story of a Childhood* (2003) as popular examples of texts in the genre. Robert Edgar argues that 'the conscious mimetic use of a comic book convention and associated reading patterns' highlights 'the contradictory nature of life stories' (Edgar 2025, p. 119). Pierre's music memoir adopts comic book conventions to (literally) illustrate the rememberings and misrememberings of her life story. Due to the use of these comic book conventions, I suggest that *All the Sad Songs* is a graphic music memoir.

The graphic memoir differs from the traditional memoir format as the author must show as well as tell. Will Eisner argues: 'The idea is the dominant element. Often a writer will reinforce the translation process by supplying "depth" descriptions not intended to be reproduced, but rather designed to give the artist guidance' (Eisner 1996, p. 112). In graphic memoir, '[t]he words and images entwine, but never synthesize' (Chute 2010, p. 5). The text requires both the words and the illustrations to be in conversation for the narrative to flow and add shape to the temporal complexity of the narrative. The words direct the drawings and evoke the emotions the author is choosing to convey. In the case of Pierre's graphic memoir, Pierre is both the author and illustrator. Pierre's present narrative voice is engaging with past versions of herself, and her illustrations are created by her present self and are her interpretations of past thoughts and feelings. These memoirs are '[w]ritten in the present about the past, memoirs offer carefully chosen elements of the writer's life to present to the public, so that—since remembering is an active act—many present factors may influence the way that memoirs are presented on the page' (Garrigós and Ahonen 2023, pp. 3–4). Memoir writing is a performative act, and the author, similar to the mixtape creator, is the curator of the narrative the memoir establishes. Pierre tells her story of getting into music in a non-linear fashion through a series of mixtapes she finds in her loft. An older Pierre reflects on her younger self, the relationships she had, and the music that documented it, and Pierre shares her life through music. From her first-year dormitory room at college to writing her first love song for her partner Graham, each milestone is documented through a series of mixtapes.

The graphic memoir shows rather than tells the reader what is important to the narrative. The illustrator has a choice of what to include and how the panel is illustrated.

Explaining the narrative structure of graphic novels, Hillary Chute explains that '[t]he frames—which we may understand as boxes of time—present a narrative, but that narrative is threaded through with absence, with the rich white spaces of what is called the gutter' (Chute 2010, p. 6). Whereas traditional memoir presents time through tense, graphic memoirs add an additional element of temporality through illustration. These illustrations, additionally, create the need for relational textual voices that span the temporal complexity of the graphic memoir. Details within the drawings on the page indicate which timeline is present and allow past and present versions of the memoirist to exist in the same timeline.

In *Women in Rock Memoirs*, Cristina Garrigós and Marika Ahonen argue: 'Memoirs are, moreover, often creative, at times combining reality and fiction, while as constructed pieces of one's life story, they are essentially selective' (Garrigós and Ahonen 2023, p. 3). The graphic music memoir allows for the visual representation of music on the page and demonstrates the memoirist's portrayal of events in multiple ways. The graphic memoir format acknowledges the gap between the memoirist experiencing the event and retelling the experience. This gap is created through the visual elements of the narrative. The skipping of time and the blurring of fiction and reality can be presented through abstract images that cannot be translated through the written word.

Mixtapes are a form of autobiography and are a tool for storytelling. Like memory, the cassette tape degrades over time. The mixtape is also a lifetime soundtrack and the sensory nature of listening to a curated mixtape transports the musician to specific points in their musical identity journey. Memoir writing is a performative act, and the author, similar to the mixtape creator, is the curator of the narrative the memoir presents. By using a 'dead medium' to aid life writing, Pierre authors her journey as a musician through a lifetime soundtrack.

The cassette tape acts as a puzzle for Pierre to decode and create a narrative thread. The cassette tape contains two meanings: the significance of what they meant when the musician initially used them and what they symbolize now that time has passed. Here, the mixtape exists both as an object of the past and a figure of the present. Whether the object is for private or public use, belonging to Pierre or to a loved one, Pierre, as the final author of the memoir, determines the meaning of the tape. Regardless of the original intent of the object for autobiographical archiving purposes, Pierre, at the time of writing *All the Sad Songs*, determines how the tape is presented to the reader. By selecting which tapes to include in the graphic memoir, Pierre claims ownership and asserts herself as the authoritative figure of her life narrative. Pierre chooses the ghosts of her life to present in her memoir and creates the narrative structure.

3. All the Sad Songs

All the Sad Songs begins in the Hudson Valley, New York, in 2017. Pierre depicts herself sitting at a desk looking for inspiration: 'I've been working on a comic about music that's not going well' (Pierre 2018, p. 1). Present-day Pierre searches her basement and uncovers a series of objects containing her memories:

They were there, buried among my journals, and old notebooks and all the other things I can't seem to let go of. Like a lot of people my age, I regard mixtapes like holy relics that once had the power to narrate my life. In a way, they still do just in the past tense. (Pierre 2018, p. 1)

Rather than using journals or old diaries to aid the writing of her memoir, Pierre uses her collection of mixtapes to narrate her life story. Pierre comments that the mixtapes narrate her life in 'past tense' as they are a hauntological object. In *Retromania*, Reynolds writes: 'Old stuff either directly permeates the present, or lurks just beneath the surface of the current, in the form of on-screen windows to other times' (Reynolds 2011, p. 57). The

mixtapes in Pierre's basement permeate the present as they are past objects existing in a present space. Although her journals and old notebooks are evidence of her past self, the mixtape transports Pierre back to shared experiences which define her identity as a musician and her relationship with music. Mixtapes are objects from the past that serve no practical purpose in the musician's present life. These objects are artefacts from the musician's former life. Mark Fisher acknowledges the 'dyschronia' of analogue music listening as 'it is no longer possible to securely delimit the present from the past, in which the traces of lost futures unpredictably bubble up to unsettle the pastiche-time of postmodernity' (Fisher 2013, p. 47). Mixtapes haunt 'the present from the past' and are 'an event, idea or entity whose moment is past but which continues to make its presence felt' (Coverley 2021, p. 1). A method of playing the mixtapes is not present in the text; therefore, these obsolete past objects haunt the present. Pierre, then, uses these haunted objects to unlock past versions of herself. Each mixtape unveils a lost future and versions of Pierre which no longer exist. The memoir becomes haunted by the memories attached to the mixtapes and the songs recorded on the cassette tape. After discovering the boxes of mixtapes, the narrative then transports back to a college dorm room in Plainfield, Vermont, in 1991 (see Figure 1).



Figure 1. (Pierre 2018, pp. 1–2). Reproduced with permission from Summer Pierre, *All the Sad Songs*; published by Retrofit Comics & Big Planet Comics, 2018.

First, as a 'new way to procrastinate', Pierre soon 'took to this idea [making mixtapes] with no problem whatsoever—soon I was making "to study" tapes or tapes celebrating the end of the semester' (Pierre 2018, p. 2). The mixtapes are linked to specific time periods. Studying is confined to the university dormitories or the bedroom. Pierre's early mixtapes are intertwined with the walls of college hallways. Pierre describes mixtapes as 'a perfect way to collect the songs I heard and borrowed in dorm life' (Pierre 2018, p. 2). As a lifetime soundtrack, a mixtape is not only compiled from music the individual enjoys. The mixtape is also a collage of songs playing on the radio that are associated with certain memories, music recommendations from friends, and songs for nostalgia. The mixtape speaks to individual subjectivity, yet it creates a sense of community. The mixtape contains borrowed songs from others in the dormitory, which then develop Pierre's musical interests. Lauren

Istvandity argues the lifetime soundtrack allows the individual to reflect ‘on musical memory’ and, ‘like any memory, has the potential to evoke feelings of nostalgia for both the narrator of the experience, and those listening’ (Istvandity 2019, p. 19). The early mixtapes are ‘unformed and seeking out new identities but not yet committing to one’ (Pierre 2018, p. 3). The lack of commitment to genre in Pierre’s early mixtapes mirrors her youth and finding herself during this period of her life. The tape being titled ‘Spring 1994’ and the music on it lacking a cohesive narrative transport Pierre to her college dormitory.

The connection to the making or receiving of the tape, or the memories associated with the songs on the tape, connects Pierre to past memories. The presence of the mixtape in the text creates a rupture in time, as an object from the past exists in the present. Without its contemporary technology, the mixtape is obsolete when faced with modern music listening. The presence of the mixtape on the page causes time slips which transport the present-day Pierre to past versions of herself. On the page, the illustration of the mixtape bleeds into other panels. Music and mixtapes ignore the conventions of graphic novels and panel barriers, suggesting that the power of music is dominant in the narrative. Musical notes also drift along the dormitory halls and into other rooms and panels. This motif continues through the memoir as the music allows Pierre to slip between timelines of her present self narrating the story and a past version of herself.

4. Mixtapes and Time Slips

The flashbacks in Pierre’s memoir are triggered by mixtapes and create time slips. Rob Sheffield states in his memoir *Love is a Mixtape* that ‘[e]very mixtape tells a story. Put them together, and they add up to the story of life’ (Sheffield 2010, p. 26). The series of mixtapes Pierre uses to structure her memoir tells the story of Pierre’s relationship, college experience, and her experience of her local folk scene. Reynolds continues to argue that ‘one lived most of the time in a cultural present tense, with the past confined to specific zones, trapped in particular objects and locations’ (Reynolds 2011, p. 57). Unlike digital streaming services on an individual’s phone, a conscious effort must be made to bring a mixtape somewhere. The music a person wants to play must be planned in advance of the trip. Pierre’s mixtapes are restricted to her basement, and each mixtape is trapped in the time it was created. The mixtapes act as snapshots of Pierre’s life, and the object of the mixtape draws the connection between music and memory.

Cassettes are a more convenient mode of listening to music in comparison to vinyl, which ‘must be cared for, maintained and, in some cases, repaired from heavy use’ (Greenberg 2023, p. 489). Although both cassettes and vinyl require maintenance and care, cassettes are more durable and their lightweight plastic casing allows them to be transported easily. The convenience of the cassette is that it is compact and portable. Outside of the college dormitory or home, the cassette tape would reside in the car. In *All the Sad Songs*, a number of transitional moments in Pierre’s story take place in a car. In *The Lifetime Soundtrack*, Istvandity argues for ‘the car as a listening environment’, and that the space is a ‘prime scenario for the creation of musical memories’ as the car holds ‘a captive audience for transmission of music between lifetime soundtracks’ (Istvandity 2019, p. 44). The car is a confined space and an active environment in which to listen to music. Whereas the music venue is a prime space to consume live music, the car is a space to consume recorded music. A teenage Pierre in *All the Sad Songs* is fighting for autonomy. Pierre is found in the car in multiple scenes in the memoir, further representing her move towards individualism in her musical identity. The car is a space for individual music listening, as well as a space in which to share the music experience. It is also a location that appears multiple times in Pierre’s flashback scenes and is a location for key music transformations.

The car becomes a pivotal space again in the next chapter when Pierre is in her friend Emily's car. Music drifts through the air, and Pierre discovers Liz Phair, a musician who began her career self-releasing mixtapes under the name Girly-Sound (see Figure 2). This moment is a revelation for Pierre as the music 'wasn't pop or grunge, the two most dominant modes of music at the time and (more importantly) it was *female*' (Pierre 2018, p. 15). The music written and performed by women in rock enlightens Pierre as, 'I had never heard so directly in music before: my own experience' (Pierre 2018, p. 15). Pierre finding herself in the music symbolises her gaining the adult autonomy she was searching for earlier in the memoir and initiates her journey to becoming a musician.

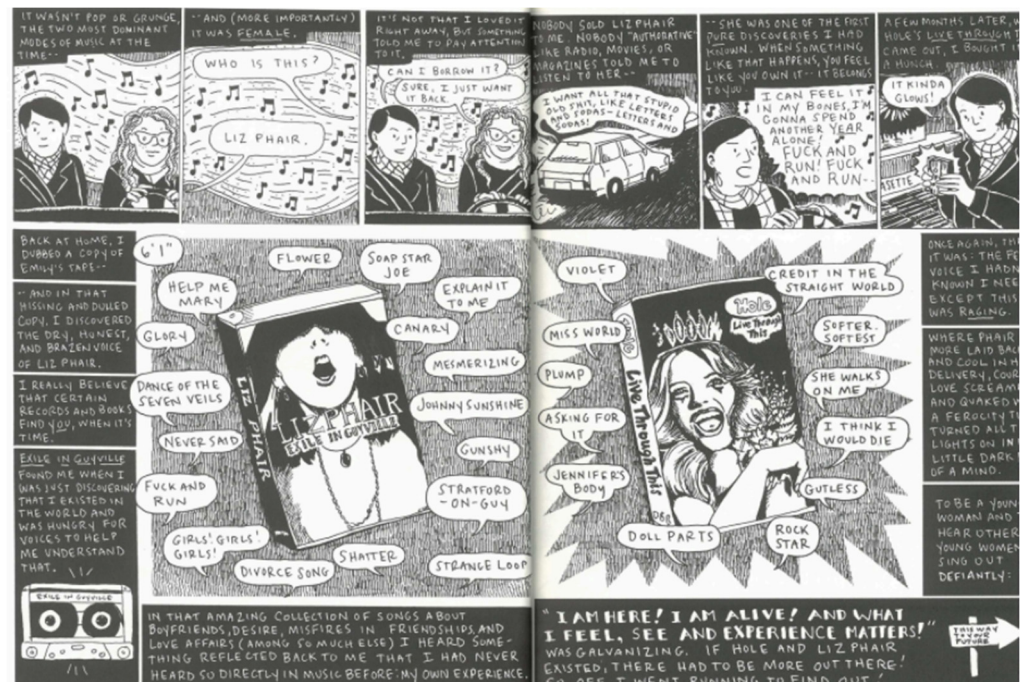


Figure 2. (Pierre 2018, pp. 15–16). Reproduced with permission from Summer Pierre, *All the Sad Songs*; published by Retrofit Comics & Big Planet Comics, 2018.

Discovering Liz Phair in Emily's car marks the beginning of Pierre crafting her own musical identity. Pierre writes: '[n]obody sold Liz Phair to me. Nobody "Authoritative" like radio, movies, or magazines told me to listen to her' (Pierre 2018, p. 16). From this moment, the structure of Pierre's graphic memoir becomes experimental. The story is no longer restricted to linear panels. The change in panel structure represents Pierre's newfound cultural agency. Pierre's narration borders the two centre panels across two pages of Liz Phair and Hole's albums. In the bottom corner of the page is an arrow reading 'this way to your future' (Pierre 2018, p. 16). Pierre, as the author, writes back to her younger self and to the reader that this moment in Emily's car leads to Pierre's future music journey. As the memoir progresses, Pierre's writing and illustrations become more experimental to embody the rhythm of music. By changing the panel layout at this moment, Pierre highlights the impact discovering alternative music by female artists has on her music journey. In *Understanding Comics*, Scott McCloud argues time is perceived spatially in comics and 'time and space are one and the same' (McCloud 1993, p. 100). During moments of epiphany, *All the Sad Songs* suspends reality as time and space blur. The memoir, from this point, becomes more experimental as Pierre explores new music scenes and develops her cultural capital. This discovery leads to the finessing of Pierre's mixtapes over the course of the memoir as she progresses from music fan to musician.

The beginning of *All the Sad Songs* is about Pierre finding her musical identity and borrowing sound from others in her life. This is reflected in the mixtapes as there is a lack of cohesiveness in Pierre's mixtapes. Genres clash, and the sides of the mixtapes do not exhibit a story being told. As mentioned earlier, the titles are more significant than the meaning of the songs on the mixtape. These mixtapes are filled with songs that remind Pierre of a certain time, such as 'end o'semester boogie', where the songs are linked to the experience rather than form the experience.

At the end of the second chapter, the selected soundtrack is more curated and demonstrates Pierre's increasing cultural capital as opposed to the first selection. Pierre's discovery of riot grrrl and punk music fills the mixtapes as she titles her mixtapes 'grrrls in rock...etc.' and 'breathe on sister, breathe'. The construction of the tapes is more thoughtful and curated. For example, the mixtape 'Pressure Drop' has The Clash's version of 'Pressure Drop' starting Side A and Jimmy Cliff's 'Pressure Drop' starting Side B. Pierre's previous mixtapes lacked curation, and as the memoir continues, Pierre revises and considers her musical narrative in her mixtapes, revealing her increased cultural capital and cultural autonomy. Marc Masters argues the '[t]ape has its own narrative, its own way of structuring narrative' (Masters 2023, p. 4). There is a finite amount of tape in a cassette tape, so timings and song order must be considered. The songs, the object of the cassette tape, and the person creating the mixtape all hold narrative structure. As the author of the text, Pierre has ultimate autonomy over what features in the memoir, as she is the curator of her memories and the illustrator of the book.

Fisher continues to write about the staining of time and ruptures in time. He argues:

Haunting can be seen as intrinsically resistant to the contraction and homogenization of time and space. It happens when a place is stained by time, or when a particular place becomes the site for an encounter with broken time. (Fisher 2012, p. 19)

Mixtapes are 'stained by time' and are objects with a purpose, as well as being memory collectors. A mixtape is not a mixtape unless each song has been carefully selected and the cassette case has been decorated. The end of each chapter of the memoir contains a mixtape and album selection curated by Pierre as the author. Each mixtape, at the time of creation, was carefully considered, and each song had a purpose and meaning as to why it featured on the mixtape. In Chapter 1 of *All the Sad Songs*, the mixtapes contain songs from Pierre's college days. Yet, in Chapter 2 of Pierre's graphic music memoir, the songs on the mixtapes relate to women in rock music and Pierre discovering Liz Phair, Hole, and other similar female-led bands. Two timelines exist in the text. The first is the mixtapes Pierre creates or receives at particular moments in her life. The second is Pierre as the author, and as an older woman, looking back at her mixtapes and choosing which ones to illustrate to signify that era of her life. Time is broken in the memoir as different versions of Pierre tell their connection to the mixtapes and paint a picture of Pierre's identity-building.

In *The Beastie Boys Book*, Michael Diamond and Adam Horovitz emphasise the physical labour of creating a mixtape: 'if the tape you were making was meant to be a gift for someone, it took serious focus. It was rarely just about sharing songs via a cassette. It's way bigger than that. Artistic decisions, emotional decisions, and, depending on who you're making it for, strategic decisions went into its making' (Diamond and Horovitz 2018, p. 41). The mixtape is thoughtful and intentional. Like the pages of a memoir, the mixtape must tell a story and depict a version of the creator to the receiver. A mixtape is a method of passing specific messages to others and suggesting a music persona of the creator. As Diamond and Horovitz argue, 'You don't just listen; you're very involved' (Diamond and Horovitz 2018, p. 44). The mixtape is an active method of consuming and curating music. As a result, the mixtape holds cultural capital and is a crucial element of communicating with other members of a subculture and exchanging music knowledge, which provides the owner

of the mixtape access to social capital. Unlike playlists created on streaming services, the mixtape has a finite length of tape, making each track intentional so no space is wasted. Over time, the tape degrades and becomes unplayable, only leaving the memories the object created.

The mixtape has a function as a curated selection of songs on a tape, which can only be accessed through speakers. If the tape no longer works, it is simply plastic and a magnetic strip. The cassette is accessible, cheap, and invites usage. Blank cassette tapes invite the user to create their own mixtapes and choose how these tapes are used. Marc Masters writes that '[t]he cassette tape is an audio medium that everyone can access and control and modify and remake and destroy and resurrect' (Masters 2023, p. 2). The mixtape enacts the ethos of indie culture set out by Simon Reynolds in its willingness to 'rip it up and start again'. In *High Bias*, Masters continues to argue:

Cassette tapes are personal, amateur, and subjective. They don't exist if someone doesn't hear them, and everyone hears them differently. They are for individual use and collective exchange. They have built communities, connected like-minded people over long distances, and passed along local and regional styles and innovations when no other means or medium would or could. They are do-it-yourself and do-it-ourselves. (Masters 2023, p. 3)

The cassette tape is a currency and a way to communicate with others. Taping a radio show or an album allowed the individual to select their favourite songs, or songs that symbolise something in their life, and create a unique and personal mixtape. The mixtape tells a story. The song titles, lyrics, and music all create a narrative about the person who created the mixtape or offer a message to the person receiving the mixtape. The mixtape shares similarities with the music memoir as they both embody a DIY aesthetic and are a collage of memories or memory creation. The hiss of the noise of the cassette tape 'reminds you constantly that this is a recording' (Reynolds 2011, p. 143). Similar to memory, the cassette tape degrades over time. The reduced quality of the tape cements it in a particular time and place. The plastic material of the cassette does not degrade in the same way as the tape in the mixtape, which places it as an object in the past existing in the present.

The mixtapes featured in *All the Sad Songs* are either ones gifted to Pierre, mixtapes Pierre has gifted to other people, or mixtapes Pierre has created to be the soundtrack of that specific period of her life. Pierre's mixtapes showcase her social mobility and gaining of cultural capital as they transition from songs her parents liked to songs she has shared with friends as she finds her music identity. As Pierre becomes more involved in her local folk scene at the end of Chapter 3, the mixtapes become a bricolage of folk music and songs written by women across the alternative rock genre (see Figure 5). Whereas the previous mixtapes at the end of each chapter have been heavily influenced by others around her, the mixtapes at the end of the third chapter become a bricolage of Pierre's personality, representing various aspects of herself displayed in the memoir so far.

Mixtape sharing is intimate and reveals how the mixtape creator feels about the person they share it with, as well as what they think the receiver would appreciate. Mixtapes can be for individual use, but they are also used as currency. The mixtape is autobiographical and a way to share thoughts and feelings with others through music. Pierre displays this at the end of Chapter 3 with the mixtape titled 'A tape I might have made u' (Pierre 2018, p. 36). The tape lists songs of both happiness and heartbreak, such as Liz Phair's 'Perfect World' and Deb Pasternak's 'One Regret'. The mixtape alludes to Pierre's relationship with Tom, introduced in Chapter 3, and features more prominently in Chapter 4. Here, the mixtape narrates Pierre's feelings about the relationship through song.



Figure 5. (Pierre 2018, p. 36). Reproduced with permission from Summer Pierre, *All the Sad Songs*; published by Retrofit Comics & Big Planet Comics, 2018.

6. The Missing Mixtape

Pierre's memoir is scaffolded by the mixtapes found in her basement. As the narrative unfolds, mixtapes are named and songs are shared, connecting the music to Pierre's life narrative. This is true for all mixtapes mentioned except for one: the missing tape. First referenced in part three, 'Just Like Heaven', the mixtape is associated with 'another boyfriend named Tom' (p. 24). A 'social justice major' who 'played guitar and piano' and 'spoke Spanish fluently', Pierre quickly reveals:

'I don't have the tape he made me because it all went bad rather quickly and I threw it out'. (Pierre 2018, p. 24)

The illustration depicts an outline of a mixtape, which has disappeared into thin air: a ghost of the relationship (see Figures 6–8). The object is a ghostly present lingering in the chapter and continues to haunt the rest of the memoir. Anastasia Udarchik argues that:

Cassette tapes are therefore objects of nostalgic and memorial value, evoking memories that are mediated by the format and the playback devices themselves just as much as—if not more—the music that is housed on them. (Udarchik 2018, p. 53)

For this reason, the mixtape is a tool for memoir writing, specifically music memoir writing, as the nostalgic value of the object links to memory recall. Mixtapes are signs of a specific time or theme: 'You couldn't just have the white TDK sleeve with song titles' (Diamond and Horovitz 2018, p. 41). The curatorship of the mixtape and the J-card inside the cassette is part of the experience and may suggest a prompt for memory. The physical object of the mixtape differs from a digital playlist. The Beastie Boys continue to argue that the 'touching, holding, caressing, and finessing' of a mixtape or cassette draws a deeper connection to the listening experience in comparison to listening to digital music (Diamond and Horovitz 2018, p. 44). The '[m]aking, listening to, and caring for cassettes is the most hands-on and personal music listening experience' (Diamond and Horovitz 2018, p. 44). Due to the care and patience required to create a mixtape, the personal connection allows for them to be a useful tool for storytelling.



Figure 6. (Pierre 2018, p. 25). Reproduced with permission from Summer Pierre, *All the Sad Songs*; published by Retrofit Comics & Big Planet Comics, 2018.

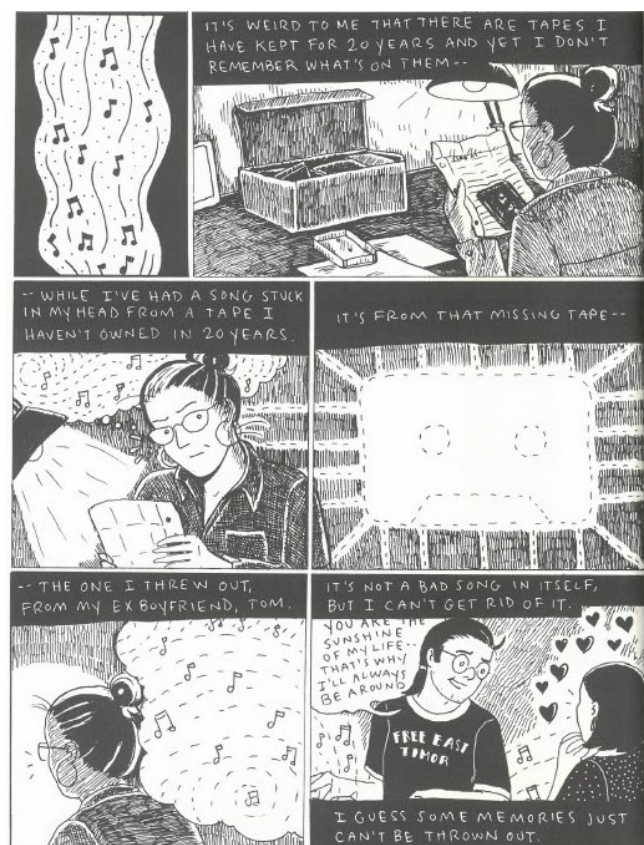


Figure 7. (Pierre 2018, p. 40). Reproduced with permission from Summer Pierre, *All the Sad Songs*; published by Retrofit Comics & Big Planet Comics, 2018.

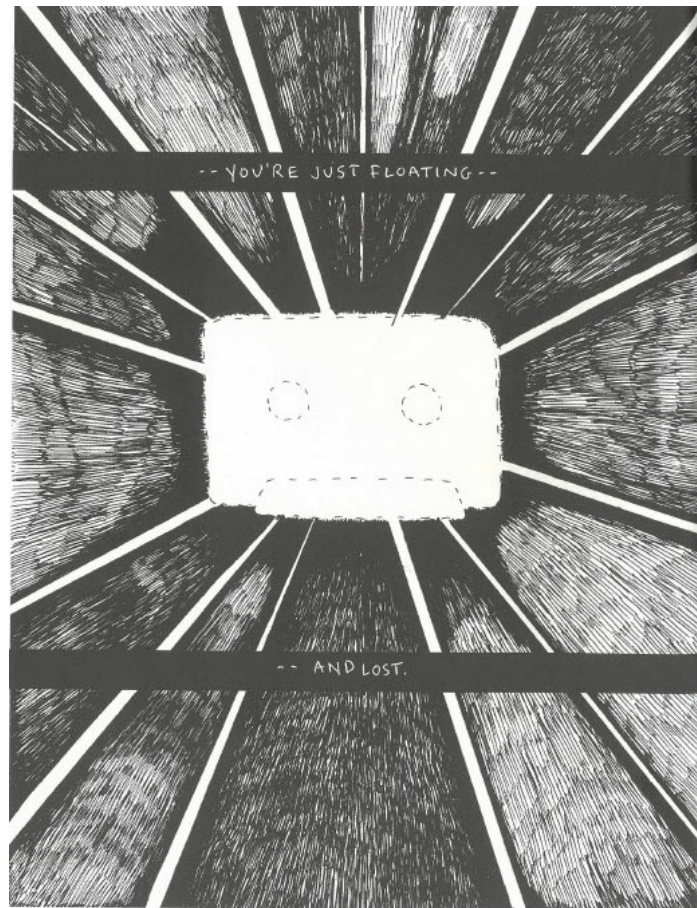


Figure 8. (Pierre 2018, p. 52). Reproduced with permission from Summer Pierre, *All the Sad Songs*; published by Retrofit Comics & Big Planet Comics, 2018.

Similar to the Beastie Boys, Reynolds's *Retromania* recognises the significance of the physical object of the mixtape. The ability to touch the object and curate both the music and the exteriors of the cassette is what brings memories. For Pierre, she cannot hold the mixtape as it no longer exists in her collection. Holding the object or looking at the track listing cannot bring back memories. Instead, its absence is the memory holder. Reynolds argues that '[o]ld stuff either directly permeates the present, or lurks just beneath the surface of the current (Reynolds 2011, p. 57). In *All the Sad Songs*, the missing mixtape permeates the text. The outline of the missing mixtape appears and reappears throughout the memoir to the point where its presence dominates and must be addressed.

All the mixtapes Pierre references in the graphic music memoir are illustrated in the text. However, there is a missing tape that haunts the book. When the missing tape appears on the page, Pierre is transported back to memories with her ex-boyfriend Tom. Pierre uses the same illustration in Chapter 3 and Chapter 4 of the graphic music memoir to emphasise Pierre falling in love with Tom. This is the only repetition of a panel in the text and echoes the haunting of the mixtape in the book. Both Tom and the mixtape return to Pierre as she is on her journey to find her musical identity. The missing tape creates time slips, which become more disruptive as the memoir progresses. Through the use of the graphic memoir format, Pierre showcases the rupture this relationship caused in her life and in crafting her identity as a musician.

As both the author of the text and the illustrator, Pierre has ultimate control over her life narrative. Within the graphic memoir genre, the story told is in conversation with both the author and the illustrator. Together, they are both in a relationship but never synchronised. However, here, the writer and the illustrator of the memoir are the same

person. Chute argues: ‘That the same hand is both writing and drawing the narrative in comics leads to a sense of the form as diaristic; there is an intimacy to reading handwritten marks on the printed page, an intimacy that works in tandem with the sometimes visceral effects of presenting “private” images’ (Chute 2010, p. 10). Pierre searching for the mixtape and uncovering fragments of her past to narrativize her life story echoes the diaristic form.

Despite not owning the mixtape, or it making a visual appearance in the memoir, Pierre remembers the music on it:

But I remember what was on it: selections from David Byrne’s Brazilian album, folk songs about El Salvadore—and a Stevie Wonder song he once serenaded me with when we first got together. (Pierre 2018, p. 24)

The music on this mixtape is slightly obscure. An eclectic mix of folk songs and lesser-known David Byrne work indicates Tom is a music connoisseur. The Stevie Wonder song on the mixtape links to Pierre and Tom’s relationship. However, the other songs mentioned reveal more of Tom’s personality rather than the relationship.

Musical notes fill the panel to compensate for the lack of a mixtape or visual depiction of a memory associated with that mixtape. Istvandity argues: ‘Whether through vivid or cloud memory, music relates back particular experience, though our evaluation of memories changes to align with current attitudes and subsequent experiences with the passing of time’ (Istvandity 2019, p. 27). Prior to the missing tape in the memoir, Pierre’s illustrations are representations of a version of reality. Musical notes flow through the panels, but the illustrations are structured. However, when discussing her relationship with Tom and the songs on the missing tape, the illustrations become more abstract as Pierre experiences trauma from that relationship. Despite not owning the physical mixtape, its content is present in the narrative thread of the memoir.

Chapter four is titled ‘The Missing Tape’ and reintroduces the missing mixtape. Pierre writes:

It’s weird to me that there are tapes I have kept for 20 years and yet I don’t remember what’s on them—while I’ve had a song stuck in my head from a tape I haven’t owned in 20 years. It’s from the missing tape—the one I threw out, from my ex boyfriend, Tom. It’s not a bad song in itself, but I can’t get rid of it. I guess some memories just can’t be thrown out. (Pierre 2018, p. 39)

Pierre references the physical mixtapes she discovered in her basement at the end of each chapter. Yet, the songs from the missing tape are what stick with her the most. In Chapter 3 and Chapter 4, Pierre repeats the panel of the missing tape, illustrated by a ghostly, dotted outline. As the tape reappears in these chapters, a beam of light bursts out of the cassette tape (see Figure 8) and intensifies each time it appears. Judith A. Peraino argues that ‘the mixtape’s miniature materiality and curated contents amplify the meaning of the songs held within its magnetized particles’ (Peraino 2019, p. 407). The materiality of the mixtape holds as much meaning as the songs. Even though the lost tape appears as a beam of light and dotted lines in the text, the presence of the object is felt. Unlike the other mixtapes where the track list can be found written around the mixtape or on the drawing of the cassette tape, the missing mixtape does not display this. The beams of light represent the amplifying nature of the mixtape and the influence it has on Pierre’s narrative arc for the memoir. Despite being the only mixtape absent in the text, it plays a crucial role in Pierre’s life narrative in this memoir.

7. Conclusions

The presence of the mixtape in the memoir is hauntological. The lost mixtape haunting the narrative is a reminder of lost futures. Fisher defines two different ways in which a

hauntological experience might be described, 'no longer' and 'not yet': the hauntological potential of these objects derives from their connection with the 'no longer' (Fisher 2012, p. 19). The cassette tape is no longer an accessible mode to consume music, as Pierre's mixtapes gather dust in her basement at the beginning of the memoir. However, the mixtape is hauntological as it symbolises the lost futures of Pierre and Tom's relationship. Although the mixtape no longer exists, the music remains stuck in Pierre's head. Gifted by Tom, the mixtape symbolises their relationship and their future together. The memory of the mixtape represents the past stuck in the present as their relationship ends. The mixtape suggests what was to be and becomes a relic of the past. Despite Pierre removing it from her possessions, the beams of light bursting out of the dotted outline of the mixtape on the page can be interpreted as a version of Pierre's life that could have existed.

The selected mixtapes in the memoir act as quasi-diary-entries. Masters continues to argue '[p]icking what music matters enough to you to share with someone can be an act of self-definition, or even self-realization' (Masters 2023, p. 148). Even if the mixtape is only for the creator, the act of selecting the soundtrack is an act of self-realization. The mixtapes Pierre selects for the memoir define her at different ages of her life and at different points of her career as a musician and music lover. Revisiting these mixtapes in the memoir foregrounds the fragmentary nature of memory and how the memoirist's former self narrates their life through music. The memoirist then takes these fractured selves to piece together a new narrative in their present voice.

Fisher argues that '[s]onic hauntology is exercised by the problem of memory and its imperfect recovery' (Fisher 2013, p. 45). The fractured selves existing in Pierre's mixtapes represent her lost futures. The mixtapes represent past versions of Pierre and her life through music and, as an extension, the version of herself she becomes. Each mixtape in the memoir transforms Pierre, whether it is by expanding her music knowledge or associating certain songs with people in her life. This, then, enables Pierre to create a life narrative through music and objects relating to music. Although Pierre's mixtapes are now merely objects in her basement, and unplayable without a cassette recorder, the physical object serves as a reminder of the past. Discussing analogue media, Fisher notes the '[c]rackle unsettles the very distinction between surface and depth, between background and foreground. In sonic hauntology, we *hear* that time is out of joint' (Fisher 2013, p. 48). The noise of the cassette tape cannot be heard in the written format; however, Pierre's use of mixtapes to structure narrative echoes time being out of joint.

Graphic music memoirs are currently an emerging genre, with artists such as CUD, Tegan and Sara, and the Wedding Present also publishing their life stories in a comic book format. The inclusion of graphic novel and comic book conventions in music memoirs allows authors to uncover the hauntological nature of music in the musicians' lives. Robert Edgar argues that the graphic memoir format 'allows for a visual presentation of the inevitable gap between the experience of an event and the recall and then retelling of the event' (Edgar 2025, p. 119). Presenting the author's relationship with music visually displays how music haunts a musician's life narrative and their music identity building. The spectre of the mixtapes and the non-linear use of them in the memoir ultimately represent the unreliability of memory and the self-curating a musician does in the memoir space to make sense of the self.

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Note

- ¹ In recent years, the cassette has experienced a revival with the introduction of Cassette Store Day in 2013. During the COVID-19 pandemic, vinyl production reduced and cassette production increased. Pop artists, as well as indie artists, opted to release their albums on limited-edition cassettes. Although cassette sales have increased in recent years, sales do not compare to the sale of vinyl as the cassette has a limited, niche audience. For example, Taylor Swift's *The Tortured Poets Department* cassette release contains an exclusive bonus track, "The Manuscript", encouraging fans to purchase the media to access the song (Browne 2022, n.p).

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