

The Crane Wife 3, 'One and a Half Stars', and the phenomenological experience of listening to music

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Abstract

The feeling of oppression linked to the rise of totalitarianism moved me to start exploring in greater depth how listening to music can support me. This was my starting point. In this paper I am exploring two main functions attributable to music: the song as an instrument of support, and the song as a way of accessing the implicit. I begin this paper with stories about my experience of listening to two songs in particular. These set the scene to move onto an exploration of the phenomenological experience of listening to music. I describe examples of Gestalt creative experimentation using songs and how these helped me become more aware of my experience, existence and humanity. I showcase how I use music in my coaching practice, exploring how it fulfils its support function, but also how it can leave you in that stuck place (the echo chamber). I hope that Gestalt practitioners will find this paper useful and encouraging in how they might want to use music more explicitly in their work.

Key words

Gestalt experimentation, phenomenology, totalitarianism, music, musical event, dialogue, creative writing for therapeutic purposes, Wilco, The Decemberists

'The power of music lies [...] in the direct moments of actually listening.'

Sheku Kanneh-Mason (2025, p. 189)

Introduction

I sit in silence.

In that silence I am holding that the words I write only represent a fraction of what I feel and what the body perceives; and I am myself only a fraction of what exists in this world, the whole. These words have cluttered my brain for over two years. The process of writing this paper has helped me metabolise the clutter.

I am keeping in mind Jean-Marie Robine's observation that Gestalt therapists might prefer to improve their understanding of how human beings function, and not be so keen to better their knowledge about our societal environment (Robine, 2011). This paper engages with the wider social, cultural and political environment,

specifically the rise of totalitarianism. The online Cambridge Dictionary defines totalitarianism (2026) as 'a political system in which those in power have complete control and do not allow anyone to oppose them'. Personally, I best grasp the concept of totalitarianism when I think of it along those lines: the total exploitation of human beings.

My understanding of totalitarianism stems mainly from the work of these philosophers: Günther Anders¹ (1902–1992), Hannah Arendt (1906–1975), Ariane Bilheran² and Byung-Chul Han. I believe that a philosophical understanding of totalitarianism is necessary for our Gestalt practice. The philosophical approaches I shall use in this paper are necessarily concrete and prosaic. Notwithstanding, it may make an emotionally difficult read for some.

Intentions

My intentions are threefold.

Firstly, to make visible and palpable the workings of the totalitarian system that is spreading across the globe and impacting us in our daily lives. This paper is intended to present variations on the same theme – each variation shining a light on the question (of totalitarianism), akin poetic work, as Joseph Zinker writes, ‘each attempt a new way of experiencing the process of one’s thoughts’ (1977, p. 4).

Secondly, to explore the phenomenological experience of listening to music. I will start with two stories to give a sense of how my field conditions led me to being more curious about the process of listening to music. I will describe how using the ubiquitous song creatively helped me cope with my experiencing of a world that feels increasingly inhumane. Then I will explore music as a transformational instrument, through my own Gestalt creative experimentation and by showcasing work with my clients – using the song as an instrument to access support and to access the implicit – but also using the song to find the words to denounce, to shout and to hope. You might have recognised, here, Perls, Hefferline and Goodman’s ‘Verbalizing and Poetry’ sentiment (1951), which very much stands as ground for this paper.

Thirdly, to introduce music sociologist Professor Tia DeNora’s theoretical framework, ‘the triple time (and multiple spaces) of a musical event’ (2016), in order to elucidate the often conferred transformational powers of music.

Turkish-British novelist and essayist Elif Shafak writes: ‘Stories bring us together, untold stories keep us apart’ (2020, p. 9). This paper is my untold story that seeks to bring us together through my phenomenological experience of listening to music. It is a story that, in truth, started in therapy years ago.

Crane Wife

In 2018 – a few months into my Gestalt therapy as a client, I wrote a short piece entitled *Crane Wife* in my therapeutic journal as I was listening to the song *The Crane Wife 3* by American band The Decemberists (2006).

I invite you to listen to the song.

In 2018, I wrote this in my journal:

‘I have been crooning along to Colin Meloy’s subdued and poignant delivery of the lyrics “And I will hang my head, hang my head low” for some days now. At times the sadness reached a point when only tears could put a stop to it. I rest my head on a cushion and let my body process the auditory experience. I am keeping my breathing slow and notice my belly taking over as the breathing gets even slower. The gentle pace resists my being sucked into the affecting climax of the song. I enjoy being at odds with it. Is it the old Korean tiger pacing inside my head and short-circuiting my synapses? Sometimes I ask too much of myself, too much of a moment, I want to understand the true nature of things; I want to strip them to the bare bones.’ (Giordano, 2018)

I offer this excerpt from my journal to show what was going on for me then: using music to extricate myself out of an emotionally difficult moment. I needed that narrative anchor to construct some meaning in order to appease the pull of my trauma.

I had made it a weekly practice to write in-between sessions and would bring my writings for my therapist to read. To this day, listening to music by The Decemberists brings back warm memories of my therapeutic journey with my Gestalt therapist, as well as tears of sadness.

I re-worked my journal entry a few years later when taking part in a series of workshops on ‘Totalitarianism and Writing’. We were tasked to read *Animal Farm* by George Orwell and then write.

Recently, triggered by personal and world events I felt the need to go back to my writings, and I set out to re-write my take on the Crane Wife.

The Crane Wife is an old Japanese folktale. Amélie Nothomb (2023) starts her book *Psychopompe* with it. I hold the book in my hands. The back cover reads: ‘Ecrire, c’est voler’ (‘To write is to fly’). Reading a book for no other purpose than to immerse yourself in someone else’s world, and discovering that they have written about your own is intoxicating, mysterious, and challenging.

Some see kindness in the tale – from the man’s perspective in the act of rescuing the crane. He is not particularly greedy or cruel – he is just human (I read online). Others see gratitude in the crane repaying the man for kindness received. How else would the crane offer herself to him? I think we must ask a different

question: How else would she dutifully weave toward her own destruction?

‘Each feather it fell from skin
Til threadbare while she grew thin
How were my eyes so blinded?
Each feather it fell from skin
And I will hang my head, hang my head low
And I will hang my head, hang my head low’

(Meloy, 2006)

The Crane Wife produced exquisite fabrics at the man's request, which he sold at an exorbitant price. The man thought of his Crane Wife as market value. The human flaw is not so much greed, but our capacity to destroy the other blindly in the name of an ideology – in the man's case: market economy. And the crane's body – bloody, sick and exhausted – as revealed to the man eventually, offers him the opportunity to access what he has deep inside his body. When he sees his Crane Wife, it is himself that he should have seen: *threadbare*, dehumanised – no longer a human being. Did he?

I doubt it.

The Crane Wife plucked her feathers and fed them in the loom, night after night, after night. Weakened by her nocturnal incessant labour, and isolated, she turned her creativity into a standardised mode of production. Ultimately the production would have been her own death rather than hand-made fabrics. Indeed, ‘automatism and repetition... should warn us... that this standstill... is not the forward movement of life’ (Bergson, 1919, pp. 53-54).

‘A gray sky, a bitter sting
A rain cloud, a crane on wing
All out beyond horizon
A gray sky, a bitter sting’

(Meloy, 2006)

At the end of the tale, the crane soars up in the sky.

I go for a walk. I notice the birds singing, the shrieks of a little girl playing by the bridge, the sound of dog paws on gravel. And I can still hear the melody and the lyrics in my head.

I would like to hope that the reason the Crane Wife soared into the sky is because she had become aware of her new condition: conformity, servitude, mental alienation. And I believe that in order to regain her human dignity she had to revert back to being a bird.

For the last one hundred years, we have been warned about the ‘monotonization of the world’ (Zweig, 1925), our alienation from nature, the crisis of mass isolation; and of late, algorithmic homogenisation (Pelly, 2025) and the instrumentalisation of emotions and subjectivity (via big data) for the total exploitation of populations (Han, 2017). Now, the rapidity with which the field is erasing our capacity for relationality and ethical presence (Chidiac & Denham-Vaughan, 2020) is unprecedented.

We live in the information age – rather, under an ‘information regime, that works not through repression but through seduction’ (Han, 2024, p. 7). In today's context, the Crane Wife folktale points to the instrumentalisation and dehumanisation of human beings.

In a totalitarian system, the body is instrumentalised excessively. Human beings are stripped bare of their humanity, reduced to market value first, to then be considered of no value, for bodies are replaceable and finally deemed superfluous (Bilheran, 2022). And yet, in these times, French philosopher Ariane Bilheran (ibid) contends, the suffering of our bodies is testimony of our humanity.

Negating one's or someone else's embodied dignity is not only denying ourselves and the other, but also destroying any possible relations between one another (Bilheran, 2023). It is easy then for the not-so-legitimate powers to make it their monopoly to declare *arbitrarily* who is an enemy and who is not (who is deemed human and who is not), to decide which lives can be bettered, impoverished or massacred.

I want to posit that the submissive act of the Crane Wife is the sounding of the death knell and the extermination of humanity. When the world becomes inhuman, it is incapable of meeting the (human) needs of people. It is in these dangerous times that the masses (including intellectuals) turn to a self-proclaimed saviour who will brandish mass responses, such as persecution and war (ibid).

'Each feather it fell from skin
Til threadbare while she grew thin
How were my eyes so blinded?
Each feather it fell from skin'

(Meloy, 2006)

One and a Half Stars

I recently came across the song *One and a Half Stars* by the American band, Wilco (2019). The straightforwardness of the song hit me instantly. I heard Jeff Tweedy's voice and felt in my body the warmth of his humanness, as well as his weariness. I noticed my eyes filling up with tears as the song was playing on repeat.

I invite you to take a pause and listen to the song with me.

One and a Half Stars (Wilco, 2019) is for me that special song that Jeff Tweedy writes about in the context of songwriting: 'the kind of song that you ... can fall in love with, and a song that feels like it's capable of loving you back' (Tweedy, 2020, p. 2). Of course, Tweedy speaks from the songwriter's perspective but I have often asked myself the same question from a listener's standpoint. Is a song capable of loving me back?

The song, *One and a Half Stars* (Wilco, 2019) was shaping my experience at the same time as my situation was shaping my listening, and thus my listening experience. At the time the song hooked me, I had just moved 140 miles into a new home in the Midlands (UK) and my best friend was living through his diagnosis of 'ten months to live' in the south of England. I longed for a connection which I felt uneasy about. My friend had aged twenty years in six months. It was heart-wrenching to see. I was listening *with* rather than listening *to* the song – listening *with* deep sadness, with fear of losing my friend, with anger (at my friend's condition). And the song, in particular Jeff Tweedy's vocals and lyrics, held me.

Much of the song's lyrics applied to my friend's life – or rather to how I would have described my friend's life at the time of his health deterioration. I felt connected to my friend in spirit and sharing this piece of music with him was my attempt for an existential encounter, a Buberian I-Thou meeting, to keep that human thread alive when communication was impaired.

And so I experienced the song as a poetic form which 'takes place in the encounter with an Other, in the

secret of the encounter, in the face of a counterpart' (Han, 2018, p. 63). For Han, the poem enters into a dialogical relationship with the other and brings us to Lévinas' 'call of the other' (ibid). I am convinced that my Wilco song listening experience was a much-needed reparative contact experience (the song that is capable of loving me back).

The phenomenological experience of listening to music

Robine writes that the expressive act (and I would like to include the act of listening to music) 'is an act constituted within the field' (2011, p. 77). For me, listening to music is a meeting of experiences and an invitation to be changed not only by a lyric, a guitar riff, or a vocal timbre but also by the whole song – and to be changed by the experience of listening.

Anders (1930) takes a phenomenological approach to the question of how we listen to music. He asks: How do we simultaneously live in the world and in music? Anders contends that listening to music carries with it existential possibilities in the form of co-realisation. Music opens up a dimension that the world and the individual co-create. The experience of listening to music invokes a simultaneity of being-in-the-world and being-in-music. I am simultaneously here and somewhere else (ibid). On the one hand, I live and understand my world and life (however possible that is) and, on the other, my fundamental characteristics are shaken out of me. I become transported/transformed, propelled into another mode of being, 'thrown into another existential domain' (Nancy, 2020, p. 18, citing Anders, 1930).

Music offers possibilities of being in the world anew in our everyday reality – and I ought to have been careful what I had wished for. Indeed, when revisiting my Crane Wife piece, I was regurgitating the many pages of political philosophy I had been reading. In so doing, I was reshaping my sonic experience of *The Crane Wife 3* (The Decemberists, 2006). It turned out that I was distancing myself from myself. I became a workshop participant, a passive subject, fulfilling a task assigned to me.

With both the Wilco and Decemberists songs, I created a whole world for myself and as Tweedy contends, a 'world within a song' (2024). For Tweedy, songs 'absorb and enhance our own experiences' (2024, p. 13). With each song I was creating an experience which was field-specific – an experience which the song amplified. The song is more than the sum of its musical notes,

voice timbre and rhythm. 'Music', Marie-Anne Chidiac contends, 'amplifies aspects of the field' (2025). And here lies the challenge as these existential possibilities are context-dependent.

For example, music streaming services have the technology to mediate our human condition, and crank up what Dave Mann refers to as 'the process of (...) pathological I-It relating, in which the person is never seen as an equal (or even as a person)' (2024, p. 118). Indeed, one such music streaming service fabricates life-spaces by pushing playlists with spurious and confusing names (e.g. solipsynthm) to their customers, mostly containing songs by artists that do not exist (Pelly, 2025). Amid the 'noise of hypercommunication' (Han, 2018, p. 69), the song takes place without a you, without an other. In doing so, music streaming services are on the cusp of changing how musicians create music and how listeners listen to music. In this life space, musicians and listeners are becoming passive subjects in a global commercial project.

But in the experience of listening to music, I can also dare to grasp what singing teacher Marie-Louise Aucher called the 'perceived and re-created expressive substrate' of human beings – daring to hold a sacred-like construction of self, as receiver and transmitter and, as such, resonant beings (1977, p. 43).

The musical event: time and space

Music carries itself and us with it – it transforms us, Anders argues (1930); this is the ontologic privilege of music (ibid). Professor Tia DeNora's framework, known as 'the triple time (and multiple space) of a musical event' (2016, pp. 93-96), maps the mechanisms by which music can become an instrument for change and may be 'health-promoting (or health-demoting)' (p. 95).

DeNora's (2016) musical event is composed of three-time phases:

- Time 1 is the past and 'includes everything/anything associated by an individual with music prior to the present moment' (p. 93). It includes personal associations and memories.
- Time 2 is the present moment. It is the here-and-now contextual situation, when one is listening to, performing with, talking or writing about music. Time 2 is the interconnected situation; i.e. 'what is paired with music and how, when and where' (p. 94). For example, it is my listening to the song *One and a Half Stars* (Wilco, 2019) in my new home while concerned about my friend.
- Time 3 is some time in the future that can be linked in some way to a Time 2 musical event.

Let me give one example. The swap song experiment with my therapist:

- Once, while in therapy, I invited my therapist to swap a song with me. I would name a song and then she would name one in exchange.
- I did not know the song that my therapist named. I might have heard it on the radio but had never paid attention to it or the artist who sings it. Back home, I listened to the song on repeat and wrote while keeping my therapist in mind (Time 2). As I listened to the song I was opening my feelings, going places in my imagination that looked familiar but felt unfamiliar. At our next session, as we talked about what I had written and initiated dialogue (Time 3), it struck me that this experiment led to a powerful evocation of the other. Still now, when I listen to the song, time stops, I feel anchored and calm. This Time 2 experiment is now a Time 1 musical event: the memory of the safe place.

Time 1 crystallises my personality function. The song that I am listening to now (Time 2) takes me back to a past event, i.e. the memory of when I listened to the song then (Time 1).

A Time 2 musical event takes me to the inner zone, the place where I am feeling, not thinking. A Time 2 musical event experiment helps me to reconnect with sensations. The outer world (e.g. the workshop on totalitarianism) influences my middle zone. Listening to a piece of music helps me to be in touch with my inner zone of awareness and sensations (the place of creativity). A Time 2 musical event puts me in touch with aspects of my past, aspects of my present, and my id process.

As we will see in the vignettes below, the musical event is an unfolding gestalt over time. It can re-organise the field, at times quite dramatically and with little or no warning because the draw of Time 1 (e.g. an unfinished business) can be stronger than the draw of the current position. I have experienced this myself and with my clients: a lyric or a guitar riff that takes me to a different place, time and set of circumstances. As a client of mine said after listening to a song during a coaching session: 'So much in that song... that's about me and my life... the pain that wasn't taken care of, that I kept hidden'.

As previously noted, my field of experience when re-writing the Crane Wife piece was my taking part in the 'Totalitarianism and Writing' workshops, for which the environment had not been conducive to dialogue. We (workshop delegates) were focusing on reading – and performing – the words that we and others had written. We were not in dialogue. The workshop conditions were a strong pull and I ended up writing a five-thousand-word monologue on totalitarianism (precursor to this

paper). This is an illustration of how the field impacted me and how I responded to it at first. But, as the song was playing on repeat, I was eventually able to also tap into the Time 1 musical event (i.e. my therapeutic work). And thus, listening to the song also enabled me to access support for myself, while writing about an upsetting topic.

People think of the power of music to lift them, to support them and even to give them hope. And in many ways music can fulfil all those functions. But we must be cautious when using music in our work. Listening to music can help us access support, and I shall outline how below. But music as an amplifier of aspects of the field (Chidiac, 2025) can also act as an echo chamber where nothing new comes in, when one is not in touch with self.

Listening to music to access support

DeNora writes of music 'as a resource for creating and sustaining ontological security and for entraining and modulating mood and levels of distress' (2000, p. 16). The song, *One and a Half Stars* (Wilco, 2019) and the way Tweedy sings it performed a protective role. I could safely hear Tweedy's voice while I was creating a plane holding pattern in my head – delaying the inevitable with regards to my friend's condition. This is what I made of the song. I was assigning my lived experience to the song as it was playing in a loop.

Listening to music is a means to produce and recall emotions; in other words, music acts as 'a container for feeling' (DeNora, 2000, p. 74). It would be easy to continue in that vein and say that music helped me stay in dialogue with feelings. Indeed, music, especially the music of The Cure, does exactly that for me (Giordano, 2023), but it also does something else: it holds me while I pursue an idea. The closer I get to an idea, the closer I find myself to a precipice. When this happens, music holds me. Amid the murmur of ideas forming and dissolving, *The Crane Wife 3* (The Decemberists, 2006) carried me as I tried to make sense of the baseness of man; and what carried me was in fact my previous association between the music of The Decemberists and my Gestalt therapeutic work (now a Time 1 musical event).

When I work with clients, I use the song experimentally, to stay in sensation, to heighten awareness – in a Time 2 (listening *with*) musical event.

A client came to coaching with a feeling of overwhelm and a difficult decision to make. Balancing work and life

commitments had been increasingly problematic for my client and she was reporting feeling exhausted. This is a client who is good at self-care, usually. She has a list of self-care activities that she draws upon when needed. We went through the list, listening to music being one of them, I asked her what song she had been listening to, and I invited her to listen to it together. When the track ended, my client said that she liked it because, as she said:

'From what I understood I think it's quite a positive song and I like that there's laughter in there and I imagine what could be her friends and it's a calming melody. Also, her voice is just so beautiful and it's a bit ethereal. And I think also I feel happy for her that she's... that she's doing what she loves... at least that's how I perceive it and that makes me happy'.

As she said this, I noticed her voice tremble and tears in her eyes. We explored what the tears meant for her and I asked: 'If the song carried on, what message might you hear?'

She responded, 'It's going to be ok, you're being taken care of.' She hummed the melody and said 'It is cradling.' As I invited her to hum her own words to the 'cradling melody', she said:

'It's funny, I had started doing that but "you're going to be ok" doesn't really carry. It's more like... what comes to mind is "Life is life. Let it be". I kind of see it as a wave. "Life is life" [her voice went up as she hummed her lyrics to the tune of the melody]. "Let it be" [her voice went down]. I know that this is just a wave. This is a phase in life.'

She repeated her own lyrics several times.

The song experiment opened up the creative process and helped my client remind herself to trust her process – to trust life. My client was then able to make connections between her beliefs, her social entourage back home and her new professional role (away from home). In so doing my client developed a new whole that felt coherent to her. Indeed, music has the power to 'create, change and sustain the lifeworlds' (DeNora, 2016, p. 138) and it does so in the 'actual social environments that we inhabit' (ibid). Moreover, this Time 2 musical event experience would then, over time,

become a Time 1 musical event, e.g. the memory of a safe place.

Listening to music to access the implicit

Neuroscientist and cognitive psychologist Daniel Levitin contends that 'safety plays a role for a lot of us in choosing music', and that we 'surrender to music when we listen to it', allowing ourselves to 'trust the composers and musicians with a part of our hearts and our spirits' (2007, p. 242).

Sometimes I reach for music that resonates with how I feel now, that intensifies how I feel – not necessarily for support, but just because I want to feel more. Remember: 'music amplifies aspects of the field' (Chidiac, 2025). Listening to certain songs helps me feel the feeling more fully.

The Wilco song helped me feel the feeling of losing my friend more fully. The more I listened to *One and a Half Stars* (Wilco, 2019) the more I felt attuned to the suffering of my friend. It helped me get in touch with my feelings and emotions. But the sadness for my friend was still unprocessed. As such the song held me, but nothing more. Though, truth be told, I did not wish for more to happen.

Sometimes I intuitively know that listening to a song will be supportive. Familiarity with the song plays an important part in this. When I reach for that song, I reach for a support mechanism. The question here is: Is it the past shaping the here-and-now or the actual process of listening to music? In other words, which of Time 1 or Time 2 musical event has more traction?

In a Time 2 musical event experiment, I assume that I know the draw of music: there is something about the familiarity that is anchored in me. But caution needs to be exercised. Indeed, the ground is infinite and we cannot assume that a song is or will always be a resource.

A client was reporting that her week had gone well. She had ticked important boxes on her to-do list – mainly sitting down with her spouse to go through the divorce papers. This was a huge weight off her shoulders. The sun was shining and she was feeling very positive about her achievements. I wanted to anchor the positive feeling, and asked her: 'If there was a song that captured how you feel in this moment, which would it be?' My client named a song without hesitation. She said that she used to listen to this song a lot when she was on holidays – 'happy times!' I invited her to listen to it. We did. Half way through the song I saw her face

change and tears rolling down her cheeks. The song had taken her to a very different place. She felt grief. The song reminded her of a friend for whom she had feelings and had recently passed.

Unbeknown to me, I took my client to a place that was not processed, and before she knew it, she was back there. The pull of her Time 1 musical event was stronger because of her unfinished business. Given that music enables an id process – taking you to feelings and sensations – when aspects of the field have not been processed (or processed well enough) then music can act as an echo chamber, repeating the feeling – repeating the same narrative. In this instance, music took my client to the there-and-then rather than the here-and-now.

In a fixed gestalt, I am not connecting to a Time 2 musical event; i.e. to the present moment, because I am listening with the lens of the past. I am not present – the song is only giving me access to the personality function and I have lost the here-and-now contextual situation.

End note

I do not like conclusions. There is a finality engrained in them that feels uncomfortable. But it is time to bring this paper to a close.

Here, I have used storytelling as a way to explore my phenomenological experience of listening to music. I have tried to remain in inquiry while engaging in an intimate connection with reality – and with you.

I have presented how music can travel through both poles of human relating, from I-Thou to I-It (Buber, 1937). Music can touch our hearts and it can objectify us. I have also presented how I was able to focus on my musical events and track my own representation of reality and my relationship to a world that is changing fast; and how listening to music supported me in this process. Indeed, while confronted with what is happening in the world, I have found that music helps me feel supported, empowered and brave. As a coach I have observed that listening to music and *listening with* can help my clients articulate what matters to them.

In these challenging times that we are living, it is important that we hold onto our capacity to think for ourselves, to feel for ourselves and to imagine for ourselves (Bilheran, 2023). As we know, emotions move us into action. Let music and the arts in general be the instrument for this – and for resistance as Hannah Arendt wrote in *The Origins of Totalitarianism*:

‘Intellectual, spiritual, and artistic initiative is as dangerous to totalitarianism as the gangster initiative of the mob, and both are more dangerous than mere political opposition.’ (1951, p. 339)

Ariane Bilheran (2023) contends that as the world becomes more brutal and violent it is vital that we keep a light inside us and shine it. This light is ‘the intelligence of the heart... that binds a civilisation’, as French poet and critic André Suarès (1868–1948) argued (Bilheran, 2023, p. 286, citing Suarès, 1920).

I wish to close this paper with the last verse of a poem that I wrote as homework for one of the ‘Totalitarianism and Writing’ workshops. I wrote this poem as I was listening to the song *Right Where It Belongs* by American band Nine Inch Nails (2005). I offer it in service of shining a light. This is not a great poem and I feel vulnerable sharing it. But it is in this vulnerable act that I feel my humanity might continue to shine a light.

The deported without a home
They hear the creaking wagon
They sing and they play
To the gutter
... right where we belong

(Giordano, 2024)

I dedicate the poem and this paper to all the musical artists and lyricists whose art nourishes me, be it with their down-to-earth lyrics, bold sound, low-fi production, agonising cries or delicate melodies, while the ‘Mood Machine’ that is Spotify (Pelly, 2025) rips them of their livelihood.

I also dedicate this paper to my Gestalt therapist who listened to the songs I brought to my therapy sessions and read my writing about those songs. I remember fondly her referring to me as a fledgling then. When I saw Amélie Nothomb’s words (2023) ‘To write is to fly’, I knew it was time to take the pen. The dialogical (thus therapeutic) relationship continues through the phenomenological experience of listening to music and my writing.

Finally, I wish to name those female artists I was listening to while writing this paper – their voices carrying me to the next sentence. They were many, but the songs by these artists particularly held me. They are

Sharon Van Etten, Tor Maries (Billy Nomates), Alynda Segarra (Hurray for the Riff Raff), Rebecca Lucy Taylor (Self Esteem) and Adrienne Lenker (Big Thief). Thank you.

‘The path that leads from the mountains to the ocean
often takes surprising detours.’
(Corinne Morel Darleux, 2025, p. 21)

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Notes

1. The young Günther Anders was a student of Edmund Husserl and Martin Heidegger. Anders was also a critical theorist, political activist, and a writer of poems, short stories and novels.
2. Ariane Bilheran is also a clinical psychologist and doctor in psychopathology.
3. All the translations from the French language into English are the author’s and solely for the purpose of this paper.

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