

## William S. Burroughs: A Man Within

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Image courtesy flickr/Christiaan Tonnis

Normally, having the filmmaker present at the screening of the film is something that adds to the experience. They usually have something interesting to say about the film that adds to our understanding or appreciation of the film (this was the case with the Louder Than a Bomb screening.) I remember going to a screening of the film Road by Leslie McCleave. McCleave and the music composer for the film, Chris Brokaw, were present for the screening at Facets Cinematheque, and there was an engrossing conversation that lasted more than half an hour about the circular nature of the film's narrative, and by extrapolation the circular nature of time.

In the case of Yony Leyser's William S. Burroughs: A Man Within there was no such gain from having the filmmaker be at the screening. His answers were mostly evasive, adding little or nothing to the film, and in essence not doing a lot to explicate the questions raised by the film. The film itself is a disappointment, made in a choppy editing style, with distracting music rising up at odd times while a person on screen is speaking, in a sense, complimenting the strange animations and other "artistic" artifacts that showed up from time to time, serving as it were to break the general lack of focus by adding something else into the music. The film bears a number of parallels with the documentary Gonzo. The trailer looked similar, and so was the film. It's true that there were elements of life that were remarkably similar:

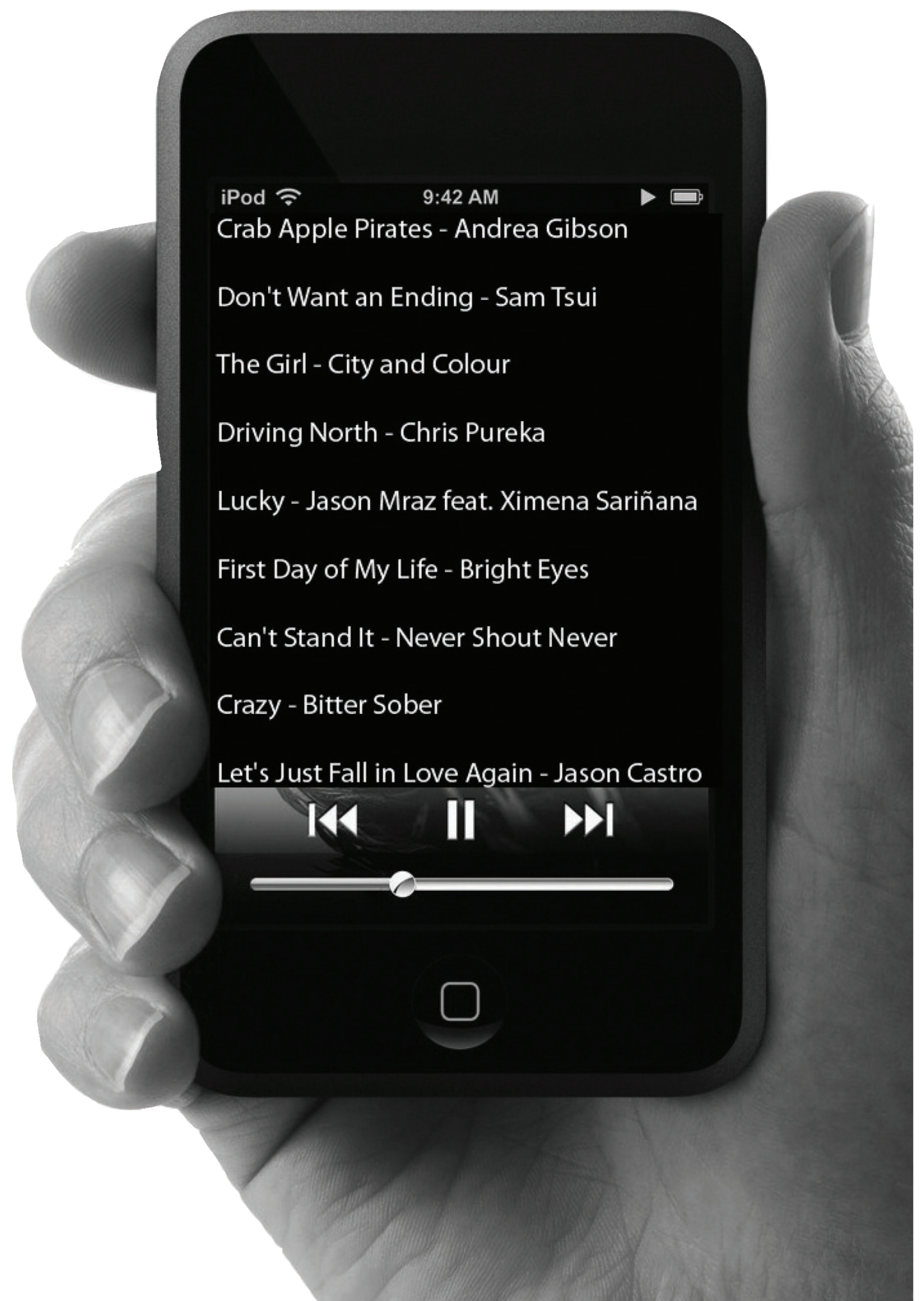
the obsession with drugs, the obsession with guns, but I feel like with such people there is perhaps a great deal that remains hidden from the public view, which it is the task of the documentarian to bring to light.

Leyser's film, as was the case with Gonzo, is really interested in the public persona of these individuals: something that is well-known, well-documented, and well-abused. There is no interest in probing deeper. No interest in the personalities. The title says Man Within, but we do not learn much, if anything at all about the man within.

Burroughs is considered to be a far superior writer to Hunter S Thompson, often cited as one of the most influential writers of the 20th century. Some of this influence is traced, as for example his influence on punk rock, but not in terms of what is most important, that is literary influence. We get a lot about his pop culture influence, largely due to his public persona, but little about influence on the art of writing. You might hear a name or two; you might hear a who, but never a how.

All this ends up making the documentary far less than it could have been, particularly when you consider all the people who were at Leyser's disposal. It is interesting watching to an extent for these people, but the distractions, and the 'aha' moments by the director are far too many and far too grating for this to be worth recommending to anyone but the most ardent Burroughs fan. What a lost opportunity.

what's playing on *Rachel Walker's* playlist?



What's playing on *your* playlist?  
Email [ae@technewsit.com](mailto:ae@technewsit.com)!

## Akron/Family II: The Cosmic Birth and Journey of Shinju TNT



Image courtesy fleshytemple.wordpress.com

By **Karl Rybaltowski**  
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The circumstances surrounding Akron/Family's latest release, *Akron/Family II: The Cosmic Birth and Journey of Shinju TNT*, sound too surreal to be true. Written in a mountain-side shack in Hokkaido, Japan, and recorded in an abandoned train yard in Detroit, the album was delayed time and time again before the band's record label, Dead Oceans, received a mysterious cardboard box. That box contained four recorded bits of song on a CD-R (in a zip-loc bag), a typewritten note (containing phrases such as "f\*k s\*\*t up," "flourish.flourish.flourish." and "I was AK"), three pictures, dead leaves, and a "sincere but poorly made diorama." Weird enough for you yet?

But the album's production is just part of what makes it so surreal. When Akron/Family first made their way onto the scene in 2005, their material was full of haunting chants, tribal drum parts, bizarre samples, and a freak-folk grounding that combined to form a unique psych-folk act that some derided as inaccessible. However, over the years the band has been absorbing more rock and pop influences, and the gentler, more guitar-driven sound indicates as much. With the departure of one of the group's founding members in 2007, their sound has expanded in pretty much every direction, with their last couple of albums incorporating a number of eclectic influences. *Akron/Family II* is no different, from Brazilian-inspired rhythms to the heavy influence of Japanese noise music that the band delved

deeply into in the lead-up to this album. At the same time, the album hearkens back to some of the more abrasive material from the band's youth. The mix manages to walk the tightrope between pleasing fans old and new.

Despite the name, *Akron/Family II* is not a sequel to a previous album in any real sense. Nor is the subtitle, *The Cosmic Birth and Journey of Shinju TNT*, related much to the content of the album. The band members themselves admit to having "no idea" what the title means. But the album itself is a mix of vivid imagery, portrayed through disarmingly simple lyrical constructions. These mix in with songs that go from being gentle and airy to plodding along through thick guitar riffs. The jubilant "Another Sky" mixes fast-paced guitar riffs and frantic drums with melodic vocals - one can't help but draw comparisons to groups like Tokyo Police Club. In contrast, "Fuji II (Single Pane)" starts out fuzzed-out and sample-heavy but delves into calmer, then drone-inspired territory. The aptly named "A AAA O A WAY" mixes wordless harmonies with a grab-bag of samples, only to drop into a meandering pace with '60s freak-folk overtones.

All throughout the album, Akron/Family manages to tie these disparate and wandering musical concepts into a strong whole. Those who have enjoyed the work of bands like the aforementioned Tokyo Police Club or Tapes 'n Tapes will feel just as comfortable with these tracks as more folk- or psych-oriented listeners. In an album that seems to have such a short attention span, perhaps that's the most pleasant surprise of all.