

Album review – *Dreaming in the Drain* by Lucien Silt

The first time I met Lucien Silt was in a very particular corner of Paris's 3rd arrondissement, two or three minutes from the Saint-Paul metro, in front of a Chinese restaurant specializing in Shanxi cuisine, one of those establishments whose façade initially seems interchangeable, until you discover that behind the fogged-up windows and the slightly worn décor, there exist absolutely exceptional liang pi: those thick, elastic cold noodles bathed in chili oil that produces the simultaneous sensation of being slapped and comforted (1). I had been the one to suggest the place, mainly because I love liang pi, but also because there is something intimately revealing about watching someone eat a dish you yourself love enormously, the way they mix the sauce, whether they leave cucumber at the bottom of the bowl, whether they pretend to enjoy the black vinegar, and ultimately, the way the person leaves at the end of the meal with a white t-shirt dotted with tiny chili oil stains.

(1) But that belongs to the past: today, the restaurant has lost its lustre and the food disappoints on every level.

By that point, Lucien and I had already been exchanging messages on Instagram for several weeks, which is to say: replies to concert stories, YouTube links sent at various hours of the day, unnecessarily long voice notes about almost entirely unknown artists, and occasionally some obscure memes dredged up from the furthest reaches of the internet. Lucien wanted us to meet "in real life", always a strange expression when you think about it, since it implicitly assumes that everything preceding it wasn't entirely real. At the time, he was living between Montreal and New York, which in some people immediately becomes an insufferable personality trait, but which in him resembled more a kind of permanent floating state, as though he belonged to all of those cities, yet ultimately to none of them at the same time.

It was Bruno, from the Montreal label Audio Bambino, who had told him about me. And that is how it all began, somewhere around 2022, an era that already feels incredibly distant, even though objectively it isn't at all.

Since then, we have grown close. Genuinely close. The kind of closeness that is measured less by the number of years than by the number of absurd conversations held at one in the morning outside a bar that's closing, somewhere in the 19th arrondissement. Lucien calls me *canaille*, a word that theoretically no one under seventy is supposed to use in earnest, and he sometimes introduces me to his friends as someone "larger than life" or as "quite the character", qualifiers that always make me slightly uncomfortable, as they give the impression that I spend my time barging into rooms, knocking over potted plants and launching into grand, laudatory tirades about some music-related anecdote. Which is false... or at least eighty percent false. But it makes me laugh all the same, mainly because there is in Lucien an extraordinarily sincere way of handing out compliments, as though he entirely refuses the ironic distance that so many people of our generation now use to avoid appearing vulnerable.

Lucien is also the kind of friend who messages you every Tuesday, more or less, to ask: "What are we doing Thursday? Anything dropping Friday? And what concerts are on Saturday?" Which may seem trivial, but actually reveals a very particular way of inhabiting the world, one that holds that there is always something to see, something to listen to: a

basement venue, a tiny room, a DJ set that's a disaster but potentially brilliant, a Slovenian noise band or an American indie sleaze group playing to twenty people in a bar that smells of spilled beer and damp metal. He also sends endless voice notes on WhatsApp and Instagram, sometimes just to ask what I'm up to, sometimes to check in, sometimes to recount something that happened at the concert he saw the night before.

Because, it must be said, music for him is not simply a point of interest. It is an interior structure. A kind of emotional and intellectual backbone. Music already occupied an enormous place in his childhood, which gave him that almost remarkable musical culture possessed by certain people who can connect, in three sentences, an obscure 1998 indie rock twelve-inch to a cloud rap track from the 2010s. He often told me that when he was a child, his parents took him to concerts constantly. The first "big" concert he ever attended, the one he had lobbied for with the obsessive intensity that only children can summon, was Suprême NTM. He must have been ten years old. Imagine a ten-year-old physically absorbing the sonic and symbolic violence of NTM; imagine above all what that can later produce in a brain already attuned to music. He has seen bands that no longer exist, scenes long since dead, forgotten artists, shuttered venues, entire movements rise and vanish. And that is probably why we get along so well: we almost never reach the end of our conversations about music and its thousand sub-genres, whose names today sometimes sound like medical diagnoses.

We have seen a great many concerts together. And above all, perhaps even more important than the concerts themselves, we love to debrief them afterwards, generally with a beer in hand, on a bar terrace or walking slowly toward the metro on our way home. There is in these discussions something that constantly oscillates between sarcasm and absolute faith. We can spend twenty minutes mocking a pretentious singer or a bad chord we heard earlier, then suddenly tip into a very serious conversation about a drum passage or a thirty-second synthesizer swell that genuinely moved us. Because at bottom, and this may be one of the few things we still believe in with complete sincerity, music remains something one never entirely jokes about.

In early March 2026, I stopped by his place. We live a few streets apart in the 19th arrondissement, which creates that dangerous proximity where it becomes all too easy to turn "let's just go for a walk" into a conversational drift lasting several hours and several pints of beer. As sometimes happens, we had simply planned to go out for a stroll before getting a few drinks. But before we left, Lucien said something like: "Wait, I need to play you something."

His apartment was bathed in that early-afternoon Parisian light, extraordinarily pale, that sometimes gives the impression everything has been coated in a thin layer of white dust. I remember the sofa, the amp on the floor, his half-empty desk, a cup sitting on the coffee table, and above all that very particular silence just before a track begins, that silence charged with quiet anxiety that every musician knows when showing something important to someone whose opinion genuinely matters.

Then he pressed play.

Almost immediately, I sensed that something significant was here. Not merely "promising," not merely "accomplished for a debut project." No. There was something else. A strange

emotional density. A sense of clear vision. The feeling that a person had finally found the right way to translate their inner world into sound. I said to him almost instinctively: "This is the album that's going to take you far." And I meant it sincerely, even as I know, perhaps precisely because I know, that an album doesn't "go" anywhere on its own. Music is full of invisible masterpieces: magnificent records heard by forty people, talents crushed by senseless algorithms or simply by chance.

I told myself nonetheless that I could perhaps help in my own way. Because I believed deeply in what I had heard. Because this album seemed to me at once fragile, ambitious, and strangely necessary. But writing about the work of one's friends remains an extraordinarily complicated exercise. Affection acts as a permanent optical distortion. You always begin by asking yourself: does this work genuinely move me, or do I simply love the person who created it? And that question quickly becomes a moral labyrinth with no way out. So I wrote nothing. At least, not right away.

Then, in early April, the album came out.

I bought it on Bandcamp and listened to it a few days later while I was in Shanghai, walking along the long commercial avenues of the Changning district, those vast urban corridors saturated with LED screens, vertical shopping malls, the smell of frying oil, silent electric scooters, and white light. I was walking with no particular purpose when the music began to produce that extremely rare effect, almost impossible to explain rationally: a subtle displacement of reality itself.

Everything around me was identical. Literally identical. People kept walking, shops stayed open, traffic lights cycled from red to green, someone was eating skewers beneath a fluorescent sign. But the emotional texture of the world had changed. The city now seemed charged with a kind of cinematic gravity. As though Shanghai had begun to play its own role in a film about itself. I know how pretentious that sentence sounds; and yet it is precisely what I felt. The music was altering the way I saw things, and so the things themselves seemed to alter in return.

I remember that moment with great precision: the temperature of the air, the reflections of illuminated signs in shop windows, the rhythm of my footsteps synchronised unconsciously with the track. It was a turning-point moment. One of those exceedingly rare moments when you physically sense that a piece of work has shifted something inside you, if only slightly.

And it was at that moment that I understood I finally had to write about this album. About these tracks. And above all, about that strange capacity music sometimes has to reconfigure reality for a few minutes, long enough, at least, to remind us that we are still capable of being profoundly affected by something.

So here is what I managed to write.

Album review – *Dreaming in the Drain* by Lucien Silt

It is hard to know where to begin, so many incalculable images and singular references does this album evoke, references that could, from the very outset, make me lose the thread of my analysis.

Dreaming in the Drain (Lucien Silt's debut album, released on the fledgling label American Southwest) is nothing like a statement album. It resembles instead a collection of emotional fragments whose edges remain deliberately visible, in the manner of those memory-images that, with each recollection, awaken something in us.

From this posture emerges something eminently contemporary: the record unfolds like a mosaic of memory residue, simultaneously in the process of disintegrating and reconfiguring itself.

Dreaming in the Drain is therefore a record to be listened to as the exploration of those damp fragments discovered in the pockets of a coat forgotten on the back seat of a car driving through the night between El Paso and Queens. A record in transit, in the literal sense, moving from highways and their exit ramps to run-down motels where, at the heart of their rooms, dying televisions flicker. But make no mistake: *Dreaming in the Drain* is not only that, and it is not a nostalgic album. It documents, rather, precise instants in which nostalgia itself has begun to rot.



The album runs twenty-four minutes. Eight tracks. And the titles alone already tell you something: *I-25 (panamerican)*, *Ferric Memories*, *End of Century TV*, *Slacker's Kiss Goodbye*.

In the Bandcamp description, Lucien Silt himself speaks of a "scrapbook" recorded between Texas, New York, and Paris, and that word is essential. Because *Dreaming in the Drain* operates exactly like a material collage: tracks begun at one point in time and finished years later, textures added like annotations on an old photograph, songs that seem to have passed through several lives before reaching us. You constantly hear time inside the tracks, not only in the lyrics, but in the very substance of the sound, in the way it flows, the way it *drains*. I will return to this.

Before that, I would like to talk about the influences that seem to move through the record, because they directly illuminate this logic of the memory fragment.

New York art rock of the 1970s appears first as a way of treating the song as an unfinished object. There is something of Television, or of the early Velvet Underground, in these guitar lines left almost bare, these structures that refuse the classical climax, these tracks that prefer drift over resolution. But Lucien Silt strips this tradition of all triumphant energy. Where New York art rock still possessed a taut urban nervousness, *Dreaming in the Drain* seems constantly slowed down, as though passed through dense heat or a tired magnetic tape. The fragments, understood here as the album's track titles, make no attempt to reassemble themselves into a whole. They remain fragments. That is their natural condition.

This is also where the dusty trip-hop referenced in the album's description comes in. But unlike today's revivalists, who use lo-fi textures as mere aesthetic nostalgia, Lucien Silt treats sonic degradation as a form of physical memory, as if the deterioration of the sound were itself a residue, the material trace of time elapsed between recording and listening. One is sometimes reminded of Portishead, especially in the almost organic slowdowns of certain tracks, but also of Dean Blunt, for that capacity to leave deliberately incomplete spaces inside songs. (And I know Lucien is a great admirer of Dean Blunt, so finding a few similar patterns here comes as no surprise.)

Without quite making it an exact comparison, the record also calls to mind the more drifting work of Cocteau Twins, Spiritualized, or even Godspeed You! Black Emperor, that way of transforming rock into an atmospheric environment rather than a frontal narrative. This is particularly present in *I-25*. You sense Texas in the empty spaces, New York in the no-wave residue, Paris in certain more abstract textures that are almost disembodied.

And that is probably the key word of the record: *disembodied*. The songs on *Dreaming in the Drain* often give the impression of having lost their human centre. Voices appear as memories of voices, vocal residue, almost. Lyrics surface then disappear into the mix like phrases overheard through a partition wall. Even when a track seems "complete," it remains covered in a kind of material fog, what the Bandcamp description so aptly calls the *confit*: songs preserved in their own temporal fat, their own residue.

In the way the sound is treated, the vocals sometimes seem trapped behind the mix; the guitars emerge as afterimages rather than riffs. One inevitably thinks of *Heat*, with its way of letting chords collapse into their own resonance, and into Desvelada's angelic voice. There

is something of the order of the spectral, of the echo left behind, of the residue that continues to emanate an aura even after time has done its work.

This obsession with residue runs through the entire album, and it is here that I return to what I announced earlier. The word "drain" in the title becomes its very heart. The drain is not merely the sewer: it is the place where remnants converge. Dirty water. Washed-out memories. Fragments of worn-down identities.



Dreaming in the Drain could almost be understood as a record about the invisible infrastructures of late capitalism: roads, screens, temporary rooms, the permanent circulation of bodies without any true destination. Take, for example, the I-25, the highway running through New Mexico, Colorado, and Texas, which becomes here an extraordinary symbol, an American vanishing line where the immense space paradoxically ends up producing both the aura of a past and a feeling of asphyxiation in a world that continues to exist regardless.

Lucien Silt's genius lies precisely in his capacity to transform these geographical motifs into psychological states. *I-25 (panamerican)* and *I-25 (exit)* function as twin tracks: entry and exit of one and the same dissociative dream. Between them, *Casino Red* acts almost like a neon hallucination, an elliptical instrumental ballad, another suspended fragment, an interlude that explains nothing and has no obligation to.

Throughout the album, one has the impression of listening to songs amputated from their bodies, atomised titles, psychic backdrops, interrupted thoughts, isolated and residual still. There is something cinematic about it, but not in the sense of a constructed film; rather in the sense of a modernist novel destroyed and then reassembled out of order. There is something deeply close to Denis Johnson, or even to David Lynch's *Lost Highway*, in this way of allowing recurring motifs to surface without ever explaining them. Let us venture the grand statement: the record refuses explicit psychology. It favours associative drift. Images emerge then disappear: heat, metal, roads, televisions, anonymous rooms, weary kisses. Residue, always residue.

The most moving track remains, without doubt, *Heat*. Yes, I return to it again. *Heat* is five minutes long, the album's longest track, and it is here that the project finally reveals its emotional core, or rather what remains of it. The track advances with that slowness typical of 1990s slowcore, but contaminated by something more contemporary: an almost digital informational fatigue. Lucien Silt uses reverb and layering as a way of making visible a civilisational symptom, a depth characteristic of our time. This textural treatment of the voice is no longer a breath, it is an evaporation. An evaporation of our own retained fragments. And behind this aesthetic of decomposition there persists nonetheless a strange, almost awkward tenderness. *Amor Vagante*, which opens the record, already contains this fundamental ambiguity: affective wandering, nomadic love, an inability to settle anywhere while continuing regardless to seek some form of human warmth. One might almost say that *Dreaming in the Drain* is a romantic album made after the disappearance of the material conditions of romanticism, a romanticism slowly draining away, finding its way to the drain. But that would be to miss the idea I am trying to describe. Because the "drain" is not a metaphor for failure. It is a metaphor for persistence, for everything that remains, even after being washed away.

The other remarkable aspect of the album concerns the spatialisation of sound. Contemporary productions often compress space to maximise immediate impact; here, by contrast, everything seems distant. The instruments appear as though recorded in different rooms, sometimes even in different temporal registers. This choice is not merely aesthetic: it participates in the scrapbook logic invoked by Lucien Silt himself, this album having been composed across three territories, three places, three memorial spaces. The record thus becomes a discontinuous emotional map: not a diary, but the debris of a diary. The residue of an interior geography that no one other than Lucien Silt could have fully inhabited, but which everyone can partially recognise.

So is that truly what one hears? Or is it simply a record of edges, peripheries, and nocturnal highways? An album that seems constantly to be watching illuminated signs from the far end of a car park?

In its way of holding itself at a slight distance from the world, does *Dreaming in the Drain* not touch something rarer?

I venture an answer, and here it is: *Dreaming in the Drain* touches on the very contemporary sensation of inhabiting one's own life as a temporary place.

To my mind, this is precisely what makes the album so singular: it reaches a sensation familiar to everyone, without ever yielding to easy irony or to an encroaching nostalgia.

Lucien Silt seems to understand something that many artists today miss entirely: the problem is no longer that the world is false, the problem is that even our melancholy has become prefabricated. His album proposes another path: to recover an emotion that is still rough-edged, still incomplete, still unstable. Still residual, precisely.

Few recent albums understand as well the geographical solitude of the twenty-first century, that impression of always being somewhere between two cities, two screens, two versions of oneself. Lucien Silt transforms this in-between into a musical language, not with grandiloquence, but with that detuned reticence that belongs to records destined to leave a trace rather than to conquer celebrity.

Dreaming in the Drain resolves nothing, offers no consolation, provides no clean catharsis. It does something rarer and more honest: it makes audible what the drain carries away without destroying, those fragments of ourselves that continue to circulate somewhere, washed out but intact, in the dirty waters of time. Those damp scraps recovered from the pocket of a coat one had forgotten, that still smell of something one can no longer quite name.

– Album cover by *Mélanie Graveleau*

Link to Bandcamp : <https://luciensilt.bandcamp.com/album/dreaming-in-the-drain>