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## Look at Where You Listen: A Study of Commercial Music and Mediation

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*Look at Where You Listen:*  
*A Study of Commercial Music and Mediation*

A joint senior project submitted to  
the divisions of music and social studies  
of Bard College.

By:  
Tom Moore

Annandale-On-Hudson, New York  
May, 2017



# A C K N O W L E D G E M E N T S

This project would not have been possible without the infinite patience and critique of my advisors, Laura Kunreuther and Maria Sonevytsky. With their help I was able to grow a messy idea into a complete project beyond what I had ever expected. This project also rested on the infinite patience and input of Tom Mark, who spent hours with me in the Bard recording studio teaching me to hear differently and critically as I gradually put together my album which is itself an essential part of my senior thesis.

My board, consisting of my advisors with Alex Kitnick and Peter L'Official, encouraged me to explore angles I otherwise would not have considered and helped guide me away from a potential shipwreck in the depths of over-told pop music histories.

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Commodities, and things in general, are of independent interest to several kinds of anthropology. They constitute the first principles and the last resort of archaeologists. They are the stuff of "material culture," which unites archaeologists with several kinds of cultural anthropologists. As valuables, they are at the heart of economic anthropology and, not least, as the medium of gifting, they are the heart of exchange theory and social anthropology generally. [...] But commodities are not of fundamental interest only to anthropologists. They also constitute a topic of lively interest to social and economic historians, to art historians, and, lest we forget, to economists, though each discipline might constitute the problem differently. Commodities thus represent a subject on which anthropology may have something to offer to its neighboring disciplines, as well as one about which it has a good deal to learn from them.

Arjun Appadurai, *The Social Life of Things*, 1986

# I N T R O D U C T I O N :

*Records Retold*

In the Spring of 2014, vinyl records were a constant in my collegiate social life. On evenings, in a small dorm room in disarray, friends and strangers would gather in one particular room in Bard College's Tewksbury residence hall. Two friends, Alex and Mango, lived here. Their room had tall windows, with blinds haphazardly thrown about, slightly yellowed from years of sun (and likely smoke, too). Their two twin beds doubled as couches that fit as many as 5 people per while records were spinning atop the dresser next to the door. The smell, though palpable, never deterred the gatherings that ensued.

We would sit quietly, numbering around seven or eight people on most nights. Almost always two were talking in whispers in one corner about a book, one of Alex's drawings, or

sometimes about the album that was playing. Otherwise, any extramusical sounds were just the quiet ambience of the HVAC system and the footsteps outside.

Mango's speakers were computer speakers, retro-fitted for use with a turntable. Unlike the stereo hi-fi system I would usually associate with vinyl, these speakers were sleek, black, curvaceous, and had just two knobs: volume and "bass boost." The bass boost function was almost always off because its resonance shook the turntable, creating a low hum that would often turn into a bass-y feedback drone. We listened to rock, mostly, a music that typically does not beg for enhanced low-end response anyway. I remember we listened to about three albums each night.

Alex and Mango's room was a welcomed escape from the hyperactive sociality of being at a new school with an impression to maintain. Socializing with the records was easy, predictable, and often more rewarding. Every night spent in that room left an impression, and each record we played was key part of that impression. I hardly remember what I heard, though.

These evenings stood out because of what they were not. From the outside, it would appear that nothing was happening. Today I cannot remember what specific records, save two, that we would listen to. The understanding of that space as an escape was evident and that was a shared understanding among all its visitors. It might have been the real reason many of us frequented. On one night, after a traumatic day for the whole school, I remember we all ended up there, the usual group. Every visitor seemed to arrive as if they had been summoned there; each of us came alone, uncoordinated and unannounced.

Without discussion we put on a record and it was perfect. It was Neutral Milk Hotel's *In the Aeroplane Over the Sea*.<sup>1</sup> That album did not exactly describe the trials of that day, but it did provide us an alternative focus. That night, what was unforgettable was *how* we listened to—and saw—that record together. It wouldn't have been anything alike if we all had headphones, or some other alternative. The importance of the medium across which we listened was paramount to that feeling of appreciation for music and for each other.

These evenings, which occurred one-to-two times every week for about three months, were where I first and last witnessed something I had always imagined surrounding vinyl, namely a kind of rapturous listening, a unique form of aural attention not characteristic of radio-listening, iPod-listening, or live performance-listening (this is not to say that I thought vinyl records necessarily got more attention than those other media, I just imagined a *different* form of attention). Since I was a kid, my parents described such scenes from their younger years, where the record player was, in memory-space, always at the center of the room, surrounded as if it were a bonfire, demanding a profound, shared attention given to one thing. This bonfire-vision has been described to me innumerable times and in many variations by older friends and family who lament the “death” of ‘albums’ as they were known to these 1960s and 1970s fanatics.

Alex and Mango's dorm was on the south end of campus where noise and festivities were constant. Their room was a sanctuary, where, unlike anywhere else in that building, a calm-cool reigned and attracted anyone desiring a brief escape from the sure chaos outside.

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<sup>1</sup> *Aeroplane*, it should be noted, is a very celebrated record, one that deals specifically with a vague sense of temporally displaced affection, a feeling of having lost something loved but never actually had. The music speaks eloquently to that.

The room was also at the very center of the residential hall, on the first floor, across from the commons and the kitchen, sandwiched in-between two bathrooms. Foot traffic was constant. Outsiders stepping-in were inevitable.

Their room was the eye of a hurricane or, alternatively, the center of a spinning record. Movement within it was relatively nil and this was where one could collect their bearings in preparation for the outside world, which was mad, spinning, and high-energy. A small number of individuals had the right to choose the albums: if anyone else chose one, it was almost unfailingly cut-off before side A was completed. These were Alex and Mango's records, Alex's turntable, and only their few trusted comrades were permitted to flip through the milk-crate of sleeves. I was not ever given the privilege of choosing a record—which never really bothered me. I was, however, always welcome to subject myself to them.

The LP-induced calm of Alex and Mango's room is still unexplainable to me. It was almost too ideal, too in-line with how my parents had described albums to me. It was exactly what I had imagined as I grew-up and caught-up on decades of recorded popular music through the consumption of iTunes downloads, CDs, and, later, vinyls. Because of the absence of vinyl in my childhood, along with its near legendary status as a musical medium, I learned to understand that black plastic as different from my own music in an almost strictly social capacity; I had music, but I did not have vinyl, the idol-object that called for an *experience*.

At around twelve-years-old, I acquired a CD of Jimi Hendrix's *Are You Experienced*—what I lacked, however, was the portal that Jimi had made for his music, the record that puts me there, that lets me “experience” it just as he had intended. Fittingly, some of the first vinyl records I bought were Hendrix records, despite my fandom having waned since I first listened

to the CD. When I bought the vinyls, all with scratched-up grooves and deteriorating sleeves, I never had the intention of putting them on a record player (I didn't own one yet).

I bought those records because they represented a *relationship* that I lacked, one that my parents enjoyed and described to me regularly. On one trip to a used-book store around the age of 15 (2010), I put a vinyl record of a contemporary band (I cannot remember who) into my shopping basket. My dad told me to put it back. He couldn't see to the point in buying a record on vinyl that was not of the 'vinyl era.' Clearly, to him, vinyl was not so much about what it stored in its grooves but was rather about its social history and the particular social importance it had for a generation of recorded-music-making and consumption. What his statement implied was, that if I wanted to listen to that band, I should not get a vinyl. Vinyl was not worth buying for what sound it contained, but was worth his money if I was buying something else, namely the experience to go along with a particular music. My dad's actions suggested that the popular acts of my own youth could not possibly understand this, that they were subject to new media and should be consumed and understood as such. I could listen to my classic rock MP3s, meanwhile holding the real thing in my hands. To him, this was what it meant to buy a vinyl record in 2010.

Alex and Mango's room, then, was of profound importance for me not because of the music (they played old and new vinyls) but because that social interaction with a record happened before my eyes. I was amazed that this experience, one that I had tried to prepare myself for through the gradual amalgamation of record-artifacts, was suddenly appearing in front of me, exactly as it had been described, no matter the music that was being played. For the first and last time I had the kind of relationship with vinyl that one is supposed-to.



## *Part I: The Question of Sociality as Mediated in Recorded Music Objects*

Since first seeing it with my own eyes, I have asked myself this question: How are albums social, and why does this matter? Vinyl records, specifically in the form of an LP, are treated as socially agentive forces, with which individuals and groups interact. This project aims to explore possible understandings of that social role in records new and old, physical and virtual. Here, I propose a theoretical framework through which this question could be tackled, provide a few case studies of commercial albums that epitomize this social function, and explore three possible routes through which I can release my own album—one that I made as I worked on this written portion of my senior thesis. My work rests on a fundamental tension between the ideas of albums “being” music (as many musicians I have worked with have claimed when asked) and being something else—a kind of socialized exterior, a context for recorded sounds. This seems, to me, a more fitting definition considering what I have witnessed in places like Alex and Mango’s room—or what my dad had seemed to unknowingly suggest as he asked me to put a record back on a shelf.

First, however, I must explore some fundamental terms and questions that serve as a background to my work throughout. These fundamental questions include, (1) *What do I mean when I say “music?”* (2) *Why am I talking more about albums as objects/commodities, and less about albums’ contents, ‘music?’* (3) *Why is ‘packaging’ a term suited for discussion of recorded music objects? Why is it especially important to explore packaging when attempting an understanding of commercial music?* and (4) *What is the role of a record label, or record-making firm, today?* These questions serve as background because they are the questions that

have guided me towards or spawned from my central question about the sociality of albums. They are also the questions that, in writing this thesis, have come up repeatedly as peers and advisors have critiqued my work. I unpack these questions with my experiences in album-making, interviews, observations, and professional work experience in labels and venues in mind. These assumptions are the distillations of those experiences along with considering the texts I've read this past year, and none of them are directly tied to any one such reading or experience.

1) The problem of defining 'music' is of central concern to musicologists and ethnomusicologists. One particularly compelling suggestion is Christopher Small's one that 'music' not be considered a noun but instead a verb.<sup>2</sup> In this intervention, all the activities that surround various events of "musicking" can and should be included in one's understanding of what it is 'to music.' When I say 'music' I refer not to a recording, performance, or transcription of music, but rather the idea of music in the abstract and all the activities surrounding it. When I aim to to be more specific, I will preface the term with descriptors like "commercially recorded music," or "performed music." In its most abstract sense, music is an artificially defined attention to changes in air pressure around the human ear and includes all that goes into shaping that attention. In other words, if someone has an idea of a sound that can be created—either by guiding your attention towards it (think of *4'33"* by John Cage) or by creating it with the help of instruments, sheet music, and a concert hall (most any music)—that is music. Music is necessarily variable because it occurs in space and in time. A recorded music is a freezing of a

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<sup>2</sup> Small, 1998

‘musicking’ and the ‘music’ that was captured continues to exist separate of that recording. When people listen to a record, they are also “musicking” because they are participating-in and defining a musical state-of-being. This redefining of music as a verb also makes clear the importance of the social when it comes to musical happenings.

- 2) I talk about albums as objects and not as ‘music’ because albums, by definition, only store recorded music. In this, they are involved in recorded-musicking, but should not be considered music in the sense of that word being a noun. The same ‘music’ printed, carved, or coded on an album can exist elsewhere, and most often does. Because an album is only an instance of a commoditized ‘music,’ it is an unsteady claim to make that the album *is* the music. Exploring albums is exploring media, not only the contents of media, and such a conflation of the two, while common, is problematic from the perspective of anyone attempting a holistic approach to exploring these objects. Beyond “object,” albums can be better defined as “socially affective storage devices” because they are simultaneously storing music, providing visual/social context for music, and are devices in that they are objects that must be activated (played) for ‘use,’ therein requiring an element of interactivity.
- 3) Recorded music packaging is fundamental to my work, and my idea of it is very much in dialogue with the above idea of albums as “affective storage devices.” Package design is the way in which such “storage devices” become affective, and such packaging can be considered both physical and/or virtual throughout my writing herein. More than recording processes themselves, I argue that changes in musical media have almost always been changes in packaging; recorded musical sound is the constant, the thread

that ties it all together. The formats of musical media, in a word, *are* packaging. The vinyl record, the tape, and the MP3 all store music. The importance of packaging is in how its ability to store makes it an object that is affective for producers and consumers. Later, I will invoke some of the early writings of the anthropologist Arjun Appadurai in exploring this “affect” of commoditized things such as the recorded music object.

- 4) Finally, the record label (i.e. a company that makes records out of music) is important today for the same reasons it has always been important; it makes and promotes recorded music. When asked, I like to say that record labels are in the business of image-making, which is why recording musicians need them. Musicians make music, labels make images to contain musics. Concretely, record labels make records, which are packages of the music that songwriters write and musicians then perform. The label’s interest is in making records—as objects—affective so they can speak for themselves and be sold as both socially capable and agentive. In other words, the role of the record, as object and as package, is to commoditize, which itself requires a kind of case-by-case social engineering, one that is most often in the domain of a label’s responsibility. A record’s particular socially affective qualities are what distinguish it from the masses of like objects produced on a constant basis. This kind of social character in commodities is not unique to the recording as commodity.

I fully expect my baseline assumptions to offend some music fans—particularly music-makers—who might not see it fit to so thoroughly and unapologetically brand all such record-objects as commodities (almost anyone will accept the commodity status of some pop music, and all muzak) (cf. Sterne, 1997). Often, the relationships these objects promote are so

intimate that using the word “commodity” to describe them is grounds for offense. Such offense is often argued by claiming a number of things about recorded music. First, musicians I interviewed regularly argue that records are direct artistic projects, they are ‘pieces’ crafted by artists, with vision and control; that they are sold—and explicitly made to be sold—by labels does not requisitely have consequence on any original artistic intent. Second, other musicians have argued that while much music is commoditized, some records can exist outside the capitalist hegemony of commoditization, those being “independent” releases, or DIY (do it yourself) modes of release that have boomed in recent years with sites like SoundCloud and Bandcamp. Finally, other musicians and non-musicians argue that records might be commodities, but that music transcends its commodity form<sup>3</sup>.

In response, I would (and will) argue that “vision” and “control” are often aimed towards commoditization (to some, that itself might be the ‘art’); that any release, “independent” or not, follows the distribution and production models set in place by major, corporate labels (because such form is the dominant one, the one that consumers know how to relate with); and that to say the contents of a commodity can transcend the particular qualities of commoditization is absurd (even ‘subversive’ recorded music *must be bought*, most often, as we will see with Bow Wow Wow’s infamous cassingle from 1980 in Chapter Two). Following Raymond Williams’ reading of Antonio Gramsci’s idea of Hegemony, the commodity form (in a hegemonic understanding) permeates all levels of sociality in a capitalist world. To suggest that something could possibly transcend this order of things

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<sup>3</sup> Such “transcendence” is derivative of bourgeois ideas of ‘art for art’s sake’ and seeps into many levels of casual discussion surrounding art, music, and recorded-music-as-art.

would be to claim a much greater instability within the capitalist system overall (cf. Williams, 2009, 110)

All of these questions together inform my general exploration of albums as socially affective storage devices, both in my writing and in my work composing, recording, producing, and releasing an album. My interest and inspiration for this project comes not only from my reading and recording practice, however. The consumption and collection of recorded music looms large in the American public's imagination, and this informs the viewpoints of many people I interviewed for this project. Even for those who do not collect and consume physical recorded music objects, they are undoubtedly informed by the commoditized sociality developed across this industry's history.

Records, for that reason, continue to be social in their new, virtual packages, too. This claim is central to much of the work throughout this project. The new paradigm of commoditized sociality is one emphasized in recent practice in mass music, as can be seen with Beyoncé's *Lemonade* (initially released on HBO as a feature-length film, totally alternative to normal music media) and Frank Ocean's *Blonde / Endless* (a project where film, print, and music-streaming all came together to create a social landscape in which one could relate to the artist's landmark work). To explore this social world has pushed me to break (to the extent that I can) with my own subjectivity as a music-maker and consumer in order to see beyond the inhibiting focus on music for music's sake, a focus that a traditional music education and vocabulary suggests. In exploring records, I am consciously exploring representational, commoditized, and 'low' music. To do that well requires that I hold nothing sacred.

## *Part II: My Life with Music: The Origins and Direction of this Project*

It is hard to set a start date for this project, as it surrounds a question that has been more or less central to my work in music-making throughout my life. I have been making music since I was seven-years-old. I have been collecting recorded music objects since around the age of fourteen. When I was twenty-one, I began working on a new body of songs that would eventually become my third (but in many ways my first) album, one that I consider part and parcel of this written project overall. I was nineteen when I witnessed, in awe, the magic of vinyl records in Alex and Mango's room, and I was twenty when I finally became comfortable enough in a studio environment to begin producing other peoples' records. I have had innumerable conversations over the course of my life about albums, and have internalized a massive body of assumptions regarding what earns a record the status of 'album.' I have also started a record label,<sup>4</sup> put together concerts for well over 100 acts, written album reviews, and more. In a sense, my interest in albums and album-making has guided my whole life in music and has been the cause of even my explorations outside of recorded music (namely publishing and the affect of its materiality). It has been a kind of context through which I have understood many of my projects both inside and far-from the studio. It has also, however, sent me down a life-path in which I found myself becoming a subject of the very thing I wish to study herein.

In being a musician and a fan of recorded music I am someone who, if it were not for my project, would be the subject of a like project. From an anthropological standpoint, such a subjectivity is difficult to work around. In order to conduct my research it became fairly clear

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<sup>4</sup> <http://www.dpimusic.com/>

soon after I began this project that serious effort would need to be put towards breaking from my own subjectivity so that I could more properly explore my thesis as both a clear-minded outsider *and* as an embedded interlocutor. I would need to be able to both be and see what I would study, which was challenging considering that I would so thoroughly *be* it.

Fortunately, this process was not as difficult as I thought it would be for two reasons: I was not exploring this subjectivity *per se* and, as became clearer over the course of my research, I was managing to break from my own subjectivity anyway in internalizing the information that I gathered in conducting textual research for what I wrote here. The very conducting of this semi-ethnographic project denaturalized many of the assumptions I had about recorded music and its affect.

In a strict “this is my project” sense, I have made an album and written a largely theoretical project that incorporates ethnographic, musicological, art-criticism, sociological, and media-theory approaches into a two-part, joint venture in music and anthropology. In a strict “this is *for* my project” sense, I have done a lot. I have conducted fieldwork and have observed many hours of album/recorded-music consumption. I have read a wide array of different perspectives on commodity, sociality, music, and media. I have made an album of my own. Lastly, an integral part of my project has stemmed also from casual discussion regarding my thesis. Nowhere else, oddly enough, were my preconceptions more frequently challenged and nuanced by matter-of-fact statements of friends and associates. These conversations often exposed new ways of discussing recorded-music I would have otherwise been totally oblivious to.



Ethnographically speaking, the project is informed by countless hours of studio time, interviews (in large part, the most recently-conducted few), participant observation of album-consumption, and casual discussion. Regarding the discussions, interviews, and experiences that ethnographically informed this project, I'd roughly assume that about half my informants were students, all around my age (a group of six teenagers, my youngest sister's friends, were also consulted). A quarter of those I worked with were adults coming from various backgrounds outside of music, but who nonetheless were fans of music. Another quarter were recording/music industry professionals, who varied in age, occupation, and roles played (musicians, engineers, desk-workers, etc.). Of the students I interviewed, maybe ten per-cent were musicians themselves. I tried to have as many non-musicians as possible because, as I argued above, my interest is in consumers, and musicians' subjectivity in regards to records is something I am yet to find a way to crack: musicians tend to conflate record with 'music,' which is a conflation worth exploring in itself, but does not fit within the scope of this particular project.

### *Part III: I am a Musician and a Traitor: Breaking from my own Subjectivity*

This project, although inspired by my many years of curiosity surrounding albums, was sparked by two books I read in the winter of 2015-2016. Both of the books were written by art critics/curators, and both were published by the same art-house publisher in Holland, Onomatopée. These two books were *Can You Hear Me: Music Labels by Visual Artists* by Francesco Spampinato and *The Magic Circle: On The Beatles, Pop Art, Art-Rock, and Records* by Jan Tumlir. While both of these texts were heavily used in my early writings, they have all but

fallen from my citations as of late. However, their approach to commercially recorded music with an art-world vocabulary has remained significant in the writing to come. Tumlin emphasized packaging, visuals, and discourse among The Beatles and artists including Peter Blake and Richard Hamilton. Spampinato explored the phenomena of visual artists who start record labels. Both of these critics' central arguments were concerning context, packaging, and (of central importance) relationality. Both of them did not speak so much to the recorded music that The Beatles and these labels actually produced and subsequently stored on their releases.

These two writers' works led me down a rabbit hole of art theory and criticism,<sup>5</sup> which then led me to explore Marxist perspectives on commodity as well as some media theory read prior to the making-of this project. Overall, the major contribution these critics made to my understanding of recorded music was their insistence on the social agency of things. Using their lexicon, I was better equipped to regard the album as a socialized art-*object* and track its evolution into the virtual socialized object I focus on later. In the particular body of text I surveyed it is argued that objects, both physical and virtual, are designed with sociality being an integral part of their make-up. The social design of things is fundamentally tied to their commoditization, as many of these critics I worked with posit. To explore an object's social design is effectively an exploration of its commoditization in that social *design* implies an intended future for said object in the world of exchange and presentation.

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<sup>5</sup> Femke De Vries' work on ornament in the fashion industry (also *Onomatopée*, 2015), Jacques Rancière's essay on critical art (2004), Nicolas Bourriaud's and Lars Bang Larsen's exploration of relational/social aesthetics (1996 and 1999), Dan Graham's *Rock/Music Writings*, Guy Debord's work with spectacle (1967-72), Micah Silver's essays towards a philosophy of audio (2014), and Andy Warhol's oeuvre in 'pop' recorded music make up a small but indicative sample of the art-world texts/projects I studied.

Jacques Rancière states that, “art no longer wants to respond to the excess of commodities and signs, but to a lack of connections” (Rancière, 2006, 90). The transformation that Rancière outlines in art, from the commodity-art of Warhol and others (which itself could be understood socially, especially considering Debord’s idea of the spectacle, which is a social relation mediated by the consumption of things and images) to the social/relational art of Rirkrit Tiravanija and others (more difficult to objectify, bound to time, place, and interactivity) is a transformation that is reflected in commercial music production as well. In my second chapter, I trace the experiments conducted in Kanye West’s stream-only album, *The Life of Pablo* back to The Beatles’ own experimenting with vinyl in *Sgt. Pepper’s Lonely Hearts Club Band*. These case studies would not have been nearly as successful without the critical vocabulary provided by these thinkers.

Additionally, a heightened attention to media seemed fitting for my own work in musical media, and understanding the importance of the inevitable social questions that media raise would become the primary route through which I explore particular musical media. In exploring this subject in general, I have worked with Marshal McLuhan, Lev Manovich, Mark Katz, and Lisa Gitelman who all together inform my work with media, both new and old, outside of an art criticism context. Their most essential contribution to my work is their heightened attention to mediation as a sight of affective capacity and impact on the contents and consumption of various media forms. Media and commodity, particularly so with recorded music, are often one in the same thing; a record is at once a medium and a commodity. That, considered along with the contributions of the art critics I mention above, has provided me a navigable path I follow in pursuit of an understanding of the recorded-

music-commodity as a site of its own, worthy of analysis beyond what the typical musicological vocabulary permits.

These art critics discuss art objects and the focus of analysis tends to be on objects. The ‘object,’ in their terms, can be a social phenomenon. This finding points to the complexity of the object while providing no real analysis of the social. In coming across this shortcoming, I felt the need to return to other texts by anthropologists and other social theorists. In these works I sought a definition of the kind of sociality that the aforementioned thinkers only dance around.

After reading art critics’ various takes on commodities, music, and the art therein, it became clear that a general weakness in much of the art criticism and media theory I’d worked with was in their apparent lack of input from (or concern with) consumers (or in their terms, viewers). This tendency showed itself as a complete favoring of the agentic capabilities of commodities and art objects, while substantially devaluing the necessary reflexivity of any social interaction. The record object, while certainly affective, does not have within itself alone the agency to create the myths and practices surrounding albums; its social agency relies, like any sociality, in a two-way relationship. This realization rekindled my interest in a number of social theorists whose focus on this other side of ‘the spectacle’ of commodities would become the spine of my theoretical framework that I build throughout Chapter One. Those most central are Jean Baudrillard and Arjun Appadurai. I spend particularly large amounts of time with Baudrillard’s idea of objects’ primary (use) and secondary (social) functionalities, which are further entangled in a participatory sociality using Appadurai’s idea of “scapes,” both to be explored in more depth in the next chapter.

Generally, however, my work with these thinkers could be seen as an appendage to the one-sided focus of the works of art critics aforementioned.

Finally, I consulted many music publications, historians, and other sources in order to build a foundation and timeline that I had only had a loose idea of prior to this project. The histories I have internalized over my years of exposure often go against the media history and commercial history that I have uncovered over the course of this project, a history in large part provided by the music industry historian, David Suisman. Other histories provided within other texts have also challenged and enlarged my understanding of how the recorded music industry came into being and how it brought with it a particular understanding of ‘music’ and ‘commodity.’ I also consulted archives of pop music journalism as primary sources in my exploration of recorded music consumption. Such journalism is central in my analysis of the case studies I explore in Chapter Two, and in my personal experimenting in Chapter Three.

#### *Part IV: Three analyses of the Recorded-Music Commodity: Setting-up my Project*

My project is divided into three chapters with an introduction and conclusion, a number of images, a glossary, my album credits complete with lyrics, and an extensive bibliography. There is not a true linear argument developed across these chapters, but they are meant to inform one another in the order in which they are presented.

Beyond the writing, I wrote, recorded, performed, and produced an album. It is scheduled for release Spring/Summer 2017 on a label I started also while working on this project. The contemporaneity of the founding of this label and the making of this joint project call for the label’s mentioning here. The label is called Dots Per Inch Music, and it is a label

that aims to shine more light on artists' images than typical labels might, and the roster<sup>6</sup> suggests as much. The label, whose creation is loosely tied to this project, will release my album, which is central to this project. This label might call for, but does not receive, a chapter of its own, a lost fourth one at that.

My first chapter serves as my theoretical framework. Here, I open with my central question regarding the sociality of albums and shortly thereafter begin with a history of 'buying' music within the music industry. This history aims to provide an essential background establishing the grey areas in copyright, recording industry terminology, and the odd kind of consumer "ownership" that is somewhat unique to the economics of the recorded-music-industry. After identifying the particular kind of ownership legally awarded to the purchasing consumer, I will then consult Jean Baudrillard's idea of primary and secondary functionality, which explodes the commodity-form into two somewhat distinct things: one part useful and another part social. The social function of the commodity is here argued to be key in understanding recorded music because the packaging of a record is at once all the purchaser formally owns and is understood by the producer as a site of relationality and the complex intimacies of consumption.

Later in the First Chapter, I will explore such functionality as it relates to sociality within identity-formation, giving particular attention to a number of interviews I had with friends and associates regarding this project. Herein I employ the writings of Arjun Appadurai to explore the affectivity of commodities within their environments of exchange. In this section I briefly go into representations of recorded-music-listening as portrayed in the media

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<sup>6</sup> <http://www.dpimusic.com/artists/>

which more concretely make the case for a two-way sociality among people and things/media.

I close Chapter One by “setting the stage” for the kinds of experimental approaches to sociality in commodities that are explored in chapter two. By referencing the sites of consumer ownership created within industrial models of music distribution, I argue that, in this site of ownership, some recording artists seize the opportunity to communicate via the medium that stores their work in addition to communicating via their records’ recorded-musical contents.

In Chapter Two I explore three “case studies” of commercial recorded music releases that are exemplary of the kind social engineering I explore throughout Chapter One. These three releases are Kanye West’s *The Life of Pablo*, Bow Wow Wow’s ‘cassingle’ *C30, C60, C90, Go!*, and The Beatles paradigmatic work, *Sgt. Pepper’s Lonely Hearts Club Band*. Particular attention is given to *Pablo*. The aim of this chapter is to provide the reader with concrete examples to which my theoretical framework can be applied. This chapter also aims to set up the following chapter in which I imagine three provisional media for the release for my own project.

Chapter Three is divided into four parts. The first part explores the idea behind my record, each other part is dedicated to exploring a particular kind of release for three different mediations of my album. The first part is an exploration of vinyl, which aims to communicate a feeling of property, ritual, and distinct presence in space. The second is an exploration of streaming, which aims to aid in emphasizing the sensation of having borrowed a music in recorded form from the artist(s) responsible for its making. Finally, the third is an exploration

of flexidisc,<sup>7</sup> across which I hope to communicate a intermingling of the qualities of the two other media aforementioned. Each section in this chapter will feature artwork and other archival documentation of each particular mediation.

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These three chapters will wrap up in a brief conclusion which is followed by a glossary of relevant terms, the full credits and lyrics for the album I made, and a works cited. The glossary was compiled over the course of writing and resultantly contains some terms that are now outside the scope of this endeavor, but which are included still as they might be useful to the reader just as they were useful to me.

This project will distinguish the package from its contents in regards to recorded music so as to explore the importance of the sociality suggested and communicated in packaging. I hope to draw attention to the fact that album-making and music-making should be considered interrelated but distinct practices in most discussions surrounding albums-as-art.<sup>8</sup> The album-as-art project rests both in making music and in making an object to store *that* music. There is no such thing as a passive mediation, and without attention given to the medium, a music can be substantially distorted in its path to the consumer in ways beyond the artist's intent. Such distortion might occur in a poorly outlaid particular "musicking" for the record in question. The recording artist, like most any musical artist, must respond to their listeners just like their listeners respond to the music. When a mediation is required, as it

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<sup>7</sup> Flexidisc is a cousin to the vinyl record. Pressed onto a thin sheet of flexible vinyl plastic, these records were often inserted in magazines in the 1970s and 1980s. They had short lifespans, usually offering fewer than ten plays before deteriorating to unlistenable noise and scratch. They were a kind of "iTunes preview" before iTunes existed.

<sup>8</sup> One exception being track listing, where these two practices collide.



obviously is in recorded-music-making, a musician's choices regarding how their music is represented are of great consequence. This is because their project can *only* be represented.

# C H A P T E R 1 :

## *Look at Where You're Listening: Albums and Music Therein*

The recorded music object has never only been about music. It is an affective storage device, whose affect has evolved alongside developments in recording technologies of format and distribution. The very idea of 'album' evolved out of such storage devices, which themselves arose out of a complex intermingling of economic systems, industrial practice, and the experiential realities of particular media. Today, as media change, the idea of 'album' does not die; it evolves. For much of the form's history, these evolutions have been subtle adaptations towards more effective means of communicating across a particular platform (cf. Gitelman, 2006, 4-5). This kind of experimental communication is not only being carried out through music and lyric, as one might assume, but instead in the packaging of music and in shaping

the experiences a fan might have with a specific media. In this particular sense the ‘album’ continues to exist, even thrive, in our time. Central to this and the following chapters is this question: how, all this considered, are albums made social today?

The long tradition of adaptive media development in the recorded music industry means that the album of 2017 likely follows suit, despite its lacking tangible qualities characteristic of the physical formats of previous generations. This kind of development is nothing new for recorded music, which has undergone substantial changes in media format approximately every ten years since Thomas Edison’s invention of the phonograph in the late 19th century.

This new object, the “album” of 2017, is the streamable album. The effects of this latest development are not so simply a result of material evolution, as it were with LPs, CDs, and cassette tapes (all of which were changes that hardly challenged prevailing notions of what an “album” was). This latest development has inspired a fresh and rigorous exploration of new media by some popular artists, who resultantly fit neatly into a history of such exploration that is truly characteristic of the ‘album.’ In order to understand the exploratory moves these artists are making, one must first have a working definition of what an album is in terms of its media past and present. Therefore, to begin this chapter I will offer a very brief and selective history of these formats.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> For more on media format and commercial music, see Jonathan Sterne’s *MP3: The Meaning of a Format*, David Suisman’s *Selling Sounds: The Commercial Revolution in American Music*, and Mark Katz’ *Capturing Sound: How technology has changed music*.

## Part I: Formats

The idea of an ‘album’ came into being in the era of vinyl, which had a particular carrying capacity, sound quality, and physically-acted-listening-ritual surrounding it (i.e. removing a vinyl from its sleeves, placing it on a turntable, and lowering the needle with precision). In a number of oral accounts of album consumption I have collected or remembered, people often describe in great detail the practices of putting a record on. Todd, a recording engineer and teacher remembers this as such:

Todd: ...It was a big deal. It was a lot of money, at the time, if you’re fifteen. You’d make a whole, uhhh, there were guys that were very particular about whether you took the sleeve out and turned it around, so that the record, you know what I mean? So that the record can’t fall out, you know, just trying to respect that—it wasn’t always my record! Like somebody had the new Jimi Hendrix album before me. I could just think about how you’d pass the artwork around ‘cause it was nice to look at, and we wouldn’t speak the whole time.

Often in greater detail than in talking about musical recorded sound, people speak of their particular choreographies of music-listening when speaking of vinyl. An ‘album’ was a term synonymous with an LP, or Long-Play record, and only after a number of years did the idea of an ‘album’ become more conceptual and less concretely tied to the black plastic that made it self-evident. The conceptual artifacts of vinyl albums become what I will term ‘the vinyl effect,’ to be discussed shortly hereafter.

With cassette tapes, for which vinyl was predecessor, albums still had two sides, about the same carrying capacity, but could be erased, overdubbed, and turned into ‘mixtapes.’ The malleability of tape signified a democratization of recording technology, but the low fidelity of cassettes meant that vinyl remained relevant. Cassette tapes, in large part, coexisted with

vinyl LPs and were favored by some communities while vinyl was favored by others.<sup>2</sup> Most consumers continued to buy tapes like they bought vinyls, too, and I must assume that one of the few truly significant changes that tapes brought about was increasing the portability of recorded music (car players, the Sony Walkman, etc.).

Later, CDs, which proudly had twice the capacity of vinyl and equal or improved sound quality, did not really change the practices surrounding album-making either. While consumers could now easily skip songs and swiftly comb over albums for their own preferred ‘singles,’ CDs still meant that artists were to continue releasing long-play projects, and despite the eighty-five minute play time, most releases still hovered around 40 minutes, a typical vinyl’s playtime. When the 1970s band Pink Floyd re-released their “double album” *The Wall* on CD, they released it on two CDs, despite the fact that music could have fit on one.

This goes to show the odd permanence of that aforementioned “vinyl effect,” or the holding on-to ideas of what constituted an album well past the time of the vinyl’s predominance. This “vinyl effect” is seen in the lasting impacts of the vinyl medium on recorded music. This includes general ideas of length-of-play-time, a square cover image, the idea of ‘two sides,’ and, most importantly, its particular incarnations of object fetishism. The “vinyl effect” is the responsible party in elevating pop music to a higher art form where media converge and interact to convey more complex ideas of aesthetics, sound, and culture, but is also a form spawned of a deeply commercial context, which I will discuss in the following section of this chapter. The “vinyl effect” also made possible the pop music auteur, who, like

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<sup>2</sup>Later, I will explore one artist’s exploration of the cassette tape as a conceptually new platform for album release.

film auteurs, received a special status given her/his/their special command over the medium.<sup>3</sup> Recorded music media, in other words, turned the elusive, contemplative, and inspired composer into a publicly celebrated polymath, fundamentally shifting the relational position of the artist.

After these physical developments throughout the 20th century, the album would become virtual, but, at first, no more than a virtual rendering of the “vinyl effect” mentioned above. On online marketplaces the MP3 album was still treated as an object and still met many of the key criteria in the makeup of what defined an album in the terms of said “vinyl effect.” Albums on iTunes, for example, were still marketed as albums, and artists continued to release such “albums,” despite sales reflecting an increased demand for singles, which iTunes had effectively turned all albums into.

The album of 2017 is quite far away from the “albums” sold on iTunes or other digital marketplaces starting back in 2001, when digital property was conceptually akin to physical property, and “buying” albums on iTunes or at a record store were virtually the same in terms of exchange and the “ownership” that buying a record implied. The album of 2017 is hard to understand because it is no longer material and it is no longer bought. It is instead subscribed-to in the form of a virtual rendering, along with almost all other albums, all available at once. The album of 2017 stands apart in the history of album-making because it is no longer a distinct object reproduced for individualized consumption and is thus not meant to *feel owned* like vinyl and many of its descendants were.

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<sup>3</sup> This pop music auteur is a kind of bourgeois individual creator/artist category. Tied to romantic ideas of artistic inspiration and materialization, this category would include the likes of Michael Jackson, Led Zeppelin, or The Beatles.

## Part II: Buying 'Music'

Central to an understanding of the importance of media in commercial music (and therein the idea of 'album') are the economics that establish the recorded music object as not only a passive media device, but also a site of artistic and relational potential for design. Such design is a corrective effort, responding to the kind of alienation that Marx describes in his work regarding labor, production, and exchange. From Marx to Baudrillard and beyond, the reality of the social capacity of commodities has been a base assumption of much capitalist critique.<sup>4</sup> In his essay, "The Fetishism of Commodities and the Secret Thereof," Marx states that in commodities,

...the social character of men's labor appears [...] as an objective character stamped upon the product of that labor; because the relation of the producers to the sum total of their own labor is presented to [the consumer] as a social relation, existing not between themselves, but between the products of their labor.<sup>5</sup>

and,

...since the producers do not come into social contact with each other until they exchange their products, the specific social character of each producer's labor does not show itself except in the act of exchange.<sup>6</sup>

The "secret" that Marx outlines is a system in which social value is added to commodities in an effort to correct for the estrangement that mass production results in. Marx locates this need for sociality in the presentation of labor, which is obscured in mass produced goods by the mechanisms of industrial production. Within the industrial production paradigm, social character is added to commodities to make up for the lack of basic producer-consumer

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<sup>4</sup> See Benjamin, Adorno, Marx, DeBord, Baudrillard, among others.

<sup>5</sup> Marx, 1978, 320

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, 321

sociality that would be present in a craft good. Therefore, instead of relating to the very craft of commodities, consumers in the fetishism paradigm relate via acts of exchange. I am going to explore how such sociality is appended to recorded music commodities to compensate for their particular kind of alienation, resultant of industrial modes of reproduction. In order to explore the social lives of albums, one must first understand how they exist and are exchanged as property.

Commodities, in their exchange, have intrinsic social capacity and the recorded music object is no exception. This sociality can be understood using the framework of 'brand.' Since the middle-nineteenth century, pursuits of brand (or, equivalently, product identity) have consciously tied commodity production to relational development and outreach (cf. McLuhan, 2008; De Vries, 2015). In the recording industry, the key difference when compared to the typical understanding of brand is that there are an infinity of brands. A recording industry brand is sometimes so small as a single song, and sometimes so large as an oeuvre or whole genre. Multiple such brands can converge and coexist, which only further complicates this mess. To further explore these different sites in which a consumer relates personally to the products of the recorded music industry, I will first outline how these sites arise and situate themselves in this industry's history.

As the scholar David Suisman has noted in his book, *Selling Sounds: The Commercial Revolution in American Music*, understanding the recorded music industry asks a basic knowledge of its preceding paradigm, the sheet music industry, otherwise known as the 'Tin Pan Alley' (Suisman, 2009, 3). In this industry, New York City sheet music publishers would buy, often for as little as a small sum of cash and some liquor, a songwriter's 'publishing



rights' for a particular piece of music (Suisman, 2009, 10, 15).<sup>7</sup> When sold, the vast majority of these publishers' revenues would go directly to the publishers, with small royalties occasionally awarded to the Bowery musicians who produced the contents of these companies' products (Suisman, 2009, 5). By arguing that they did not sell a song but instead a representation of said song, these companies were able to net huge profits selling 'not-songs' for relatively insignificant cost and responsibility to their sources.

When mass-produced recordings became possible, the same skeletal vocabulary of the sheet music publishing industry was applied to the new technologies' new realities (Suisman, 2009, 3-4). Regarding these 'representations of songs,' Suisman states, "[Early 20th century] musicians, as a rule, did not make records. Musicians made music—which phonograph companies turned into records that they reproduced, marketed, and sold" (Suisman, 2009, 15). Record companies, or labels, sold *recordings*, not 'music,' and in doing so were able to have a similarly sweet deal in terms of cost-revenue distribution. The gradual transition from the Tin Pan Alley model to the 20th century model is the reason why much of the sheet music industry's lexicon is still commonplace in contemporary record industry discourse, as we will see below (cf. Byrne, 2012; Suisman, 2009).

A record, like sheet music, is a mere representation of musical sound despite the fact that it convincingly 'creates' musical sound out of air. Central to the very functioning of the recording industry is the idea that recordings are not music, but documentations of musics. In particular, the recording industry accomplishes this by owning, again, 'publishing rights' for

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<sup>7</sup> It is safe to assume that this abstraction, 'publishing,' was often not fully understood by Tin Pan Alley's songwriters. It is also important to emphasize that this was not buying a song *per se*, but rather buying the right to publish and distribute sheet music, a representation of a song, often targeted at homes with pianos for familial enjoyment.

recorded material. This is accomplished via the break down of musical recorded sound into a number of metaphysical strata where multiple sites of potential ownership emerge. Of central importance to my work is the particular ‘ownership’—or lack thereof—on part of the purchasing consumer. Below, I have included a graph that details a relatively simplified break-down of how these sites of ownership work out:

<u>Music'</u>	<u>Who Owns It? What is it?</u>	<u>Metaphysical Status</u>
<i>A Song</i>	The songwriter owns it upon creation, but it can be sold to a publisher or another private individual and/or added to the creative commons. It is intellectual property.	Abstract, immaterial, it is intellectual property
<i>A Performance</i>	The songwriter, so long as it has not been sold to a publisher. The event promoter is responsible for paying the performing musicians and paying royalties to the owner of the copyright of the song. It is also intellectual property, 'leased' for performance.	Abstract, immaterial, it is intellectual property
<i>Sheet Music / Publishing Rights</i>	A sheet music publisher, who, like a normal publisher, can sell reproductions ad infinitum while still maintaining control of publishing rights. 'Publishing' in the sheet music days of the music industry set the stage for the property break-down of recorded music in the 20th century. It is a document.	The publishing rights are immaterial, but the product sold is material. The material is not the property <i>per se</i> , meaning that the product can be sold ad infinitum without the seller losing ownership. "Publishing" music can mean allowing reproductions to be distributed in record or paper format, and it can mean allowing performances of music to take place where royalty payments are arranged.
<i>Master Recording</i>	A label, or publisher. This is a particular recording from which reproductions are cast. There could be multiple such "masters" for one piece of music. Labels own the right to "publish" a particular master. It is the particular recording of a piece that a label decides to distribute. The end of the recording process.	A real thing. Be it the master tape of a Beatles record from a reel-to-reel, or the .AIF bounce from a ProTools session, this is the recording slated for reproduction. This is what labels maintain ownership of while selling recordings ad infinitum.
<i>A Record (i.e. An Album)</i>	Think of this as a recording of <i>the</i> recording (the master). Thus, the label owns this, like intellectual property—proxy—by owning the master. The package, however, is owned by the purchasing consumer.	Whether virtual or physical, this is a 'materialization' of a master, the composition, the performance, etc. Legally speaking, it is a license to consume the master, which the label (or simply put, <i>not</i> the consumer) maintains ownership of. The consumer instead owns the media here that imply the "album-as-music."

As the reader can see, these strata of ownership are thoroughly convoluted and quite invisible to the average consumer. A 'master' is a key stratum for much of the recording industry and is where the transported logic of 'publishing' lands in the recording industry's appropriation of its predecessor's lexicon. Record companies 'publish' this master, which, understood legally, is the content proper of recorded music packages. What this translates to is a product (the record) that is a mediation of music *via* the construct of 'master.' In its primary function; it is a record, an object that reproduces a sound, that sound being an index

of the ‘master.’<sup>8</sup> However, since the recording (the record’s content) is itself a mediation and concretization of music in the abstract (i.e. the intellectual property of the composer), a record, in final form, is actually a double mediation. *The record mediates the master recording*, which is itself a mediation of *a* music. This is an important distinction because it distances the record-object from the contents it is often assumed *to be*.

This commodity’s charge, then, is to provide the consumer a way of relating to its commoditized form that obscures the profound lack of intimacy this industrial process results in. A leased—not owned—double-mediation is all the consumer is left with in the end.

Often, in the act of recording there is a resulting archival sterility; plain recording is a zone of specialists and historians who analyze recorded time. Recording commercially is to engage in a pursuit of an enhanced sociality for the recorded object; it is to launch the record beyond its archival object-ness into the affective mass-spectacle of socially able commodities and their consumers. Transforming the record into commoditized property, via this double mediation outlined above, is not only a fundamental alteration of content (from passive document to active commodity), but is also a manipulation of aura in the opposite sense of Walter Benjamin’s use of the term (Benjamin, 1986, 217-52). Such “auratic value” is in the unique presence of *an* art object in time and space, which Benjamin thought was ruined by mass-reproducibility. Benjamin welcomed this loss because he saw it as destabilization of bourgeois private consumption. Records, however, were packed with an artificial aura, one

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<sup>8</sup> This adds some nuance to Friedrich Kittler’s idea of indexicality in recorded music in that what is directly represented in a recording is not music, but *an* incarnation thereof (cf. Kittler, 1987, 101-118).

that emphasized the presence of the record-object in time and space despite its not-being a unique thing.

Records, and particularly so with albums, are objects for which a need for auratic value is paramount to their construction and consumption. Above, in the excerpt from an interview with Todd, the audio engineer and teacher, this value is clear even as he spoke generally of albums (the excerpt below was printed earlier):

Todd: ...It was a big deal. It was a lot of money, at the time, if you're fifteen. You'd make a whole, uhhh, there were guys that were very particular about whether you took the sleeve out and turned it around, so that the record, you know what I mean? So that the record can't fall out, you know, just trying to respect that—it wasn't always my record! Like somebody had the new Jimi Hendrix album before me. I could just think about how you'd pass the artwork around 'cause *it was nice to look at*, and we wouldn't speak the whole time.

Todd's experience with albums details an image of painstaking care and attention, understood primarily in the context of property and ownership. What he describes is less so the cult-object of bourgeois contemplation and pleasure, in the sense of Benjamin's work, but it is rather the 'cult-commodity.' The 'cult-commodity' achieves cult status in its particular acts of consumption among isolated groups, but nonetheless exists as a mass-produced object. In the acts of consuming it, the cult-commodity obscures its own ability to be easily replaced. When discussing Benjamin's idea of auratic value and music, Mark Katz, author of *Capturing Sound: How Technology has Changed Music*, states, "Benjamin was certainly right about the increased accessibility of mass-reproduced art, yet he was wrong about the emancipation from ritual" (Katz, 2010, 17). This ritualistic, cultish consumption, whether arising organically or not in the case of the album, was eventually to be encouraged by record companies. As Suisman, the aforementioned historian of the music industry, states,

Music ... came to be manufactured, marketed, and purchased like other consumer goods—in fixed, durable objects, available in dazzling, unprecedented variety and at a cost affordable to millions of consumers in all parts of the country. Paradoxically, however, music was also becoming dematerialized at the same time, severed from the tangible realm by the metaphysics of sound recording and by copyright law, which came to recognize property rights in music that were unconnected to physical forms.<sup>9</sup>

Suisman interestingly associates the metaphysical severance from tangibility in recorded musical sound with the advent of elaborate packaging; the accoutrement on the consumer end of the double mediation described above is a correction for such lost tangibility (cf. De Vries, 2015). The particular kind of not-music (like the not-songs sold by the Tin Pan Alley) that record companies sold was elaborately wrapped up in the consumer's auratic gaze and in the commodity fetishism potential of these commercial goods. Recorded music, however, was uniquely trans-physical when compared against other commodities in that the object itself (the etched plastic) was not meant to be center of attention but rather a portal through which a relation could be experienced. In other words, records (and thus albums) were especially relational objects in their nature as double-mediations. Their sole purpose as commodities was to bridge consumers to their contents. Such bridging, as we will see, has been sought and accomplished in a great variety of ways in many artists' many experiments with media. Nonetheless, for much of the industry's history exchange, ownership, and consumption were the primary contexts through which relation was experienced.

While Todd and others of his generation often emphasize ideas of property and the feelings surrounding ownership in commercial music consumption, people of the digital era, my era, rarely can state with such ease that ownership is their base relation to music. Carrie, a student, non-musician, and fan of music, put this well:

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<sup>9</sup> Suisman, 2009, 9

Carrie: I have never felt like I owned music. I shared an iTunes library with my dad, so that wasn't *mine*, and besides that I downloaded some stuff, through Limewire, or whatever those sites were called, ripping from youtube videos. I never considered it owning music, I was... cultivating a library, kind of. But then I guess what I was saying with CDs —its a physical thing—it's property because you could hold it in your hands—it's "this thing is mine." I don't collect CDs. I guess I am speaking from memory, when I was a kid and I had CDs...

[...]

Me: If you don't own the music, then what is your relationship to it?

Carrie: It doesn't feel like borrowing... It's a weird grey area between owning and borrowing.

What Carrie describes is no less than a revolution in relationality for recorded music. What this means is that commercial recording artists have a new realm of relation to explore. In other words, cultish, isolated consumption is out, and networked, common subscription is in. Comparing this against Todd's explanation of relation included above, one can see that these interviews bracket a revolutionary shift in relation. The lack of the feeling of ownership will be explored in the first case study of the next chapter, in which I unpack the significance of Kanye West's experiments with his latest album, *The Life Of Pablo*.

"Buying" and "owning" recorded music in the form of a physical record is central to narratives of music consumption, particularly so with vinyl, in the oral accounts of album-listening-practice I have collected. However, all things considered, no listener has ever really bought music when buying an album. This 'ownership' always has always actually been a "weird grey area between owning and borrowing;" the digital moment reveals relationships that have been hidden and obscured through commodity fetishism. As Carrie makes clear, this sense of a grey area is often intuitive to many music-listers of my generation, for whom the cult-commodity experience was lost in recorded music's new virtual home. The complexities of these new relations to commercial music ask for new relational designs on the

parts of recorded music producers and this new challenge, however, still emphasizes the role of economics in human relation to recorded music.

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Understood in a legal/financial vocabulary, “music” can be understood as a number of metaphysical strata converging with multiple sites of possible “ownership” and relation. Such ownership and relation, as one can see above, is thoroughly convoluted. My work, however, focuses on the designed relationality of albums, which is to deal with only that bottom right quadrant of the graph I included above.

When I say that the media “imply the ‘album-as-music’” I mean to suggest that, since the album-as-commodity is not “music” in that no ‘music’ is bought, an album, purely defined, is a suggestion of music through a relationship created between a consumer and a commodity. When the commodities develop in technological form, these ‘suggestions’ must adapt in their own form. The recorded music commodity’s subject, in this case, is not its own content, but the affective quality suggested in its mediation.

A consumer “buying” an album is (and always has been) actually buying a license to listen. That ‘license’ is not cleanly a legal portal into the music, but is sold as context through which the recording can be understood by those who have not yet heard it. This context is the social, visual, and textual supplement thanks to which unheard music can be sold-to and understood-by potential buyers and fans, but its affect does not stop there. In other words, that portal’s requisite wrapping is a ripe opportunity for some artists who care to provide a *particular* context or framework for their music, before and after the act of exchange.

### Part III: The Primary and Secondary Functionalities of Albums

Using the works of cultural theorist Jean Baudrillard (*The System of Objects*) and of music historian David Suisman (*Selling Sounds: The Commercial Revolution in American Music*) I will establish two functions that recorded music commodities enact for consumers. In using the works of these thinkers I hope to explode the ‘album’ into two somewhat distinct ideas: an album is at once a musical idea and is additionally a package that concretizes said idea. The importance of this distinction must not be downplayed.

Above, I argue that record labels, publishers, and (less often) artists are the ones who ‘own’ music while fans ‘own’ licenses to listen. To make money, these licenses are sold (which include/are made up of media, physical or otherwise, that bridge listeners to music) for private consumption of recordings which are reproductions of a ‘master.’ The ‘master’ is the particular recording from which all its reproductions are cast. All of this is packaged as per the specs of release, and can be in the form of an album (or a single, an EP, etc.). The “master” is a central concept in the record industry, and it functions much like owning rights to a image (consider the business model of Getty Images). Licensing the reproduction of such a master to varying degrees of public use is where albums, or recordings in general, turn into the recording *industry* (Suisman, 2009, 5). This industrial model has significant consequence on the subsequent production of musical recordings.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> To elaborate: a master is much like the publishable musical score. It is, by definition, singularly authorized by artists and their cohorts and allows for a particular kind distribution, be them performances of a written music or reproductions cast from a recording. While sheet music and recorded masters can coexist, they do not need to. Especially with the advent of digital audio workstations (DAWs) the recording interface becomes a surface where compositional and recording efforts can exist simultaneously through capabilities such as sample manipulation and MIDI. These abilities allow the editing of a recording much like one could edit a sheet-music-in-progress. Particularly with computers and DAWs, the visual interface is paramount and, as it is with sheet music, a musician can see their work and manipulate it accordingly. See Sterne, 2012; Silver, 2014.



Jean Baudrillard, in his book *The System of Objects*, writes of models and series, which are reproducible objects understood systemically as ideas/unique objects—i.e. the “model”—and the reproductions of said model/idea—i.e. the series (Baudrillard, 2005, 147-150, 156-168). Baudrillard argues that this distinction has socio-political implications, and that economic practices such as designed obsolescence and personalization distance the production of goods from their use value and enter them into the domain of style, subsumed cultural impact, and a consumer’s identity politics as consumer-citizen (Baudrillard, 2005, 148, 151, 153, 164-165). Baudrillard argues this by establishing an object’s “primary” and “secondary” functionalities. The first, the “primary” function, is what could simply be called ‘function;’ it is within the commodity’s general use. With a chair, this functionality is its ability to aid in the process of sitting—with recorded music, it is the record’s aid in reproducing sound. “Secondary” functionality is the object’s social function; it is the level at which the object is personalized (Baudrillard, 2005, 151).

With the chair this might be, among other things, how that chair’s design is understood socially (in the context of other chairs, and the other ‘tastes’ those other styles imply). Particularly with industrially reproduced chairs, the secondary function must be dealt with more consciously as relating to design and build in a reproduced item are less automatic sites of relation than they are with the intimacy of craftsmanship. With recorded music, secondary functionality is especially clear. The secondary function of recorded music is, as with chairs and other commodities, at the level at which the object is personalized. This is materialized in the packaging of a record. As I outlined above, feelings of ownership demarcate specific kinds of relationships to recorded music in that recorded musics are

double mediations; the object is more directly a site of relation in that its content is itself a relation to a musical idea. With albums, secondary functionality—the object’s sociability—takes center stage.

The primary function of an album—as device—is to reproduce sounds. Like a chair, it is a functional commodity that has a use. Baudrillard tends to focus on furniture, cars, and other household goods, but his claim still applies to recorded music, in which the record’s “primary function”—reproducing sounds—is not the primary site of social effect and relation in a record’s commoditization.

It is rather the “secondary function”—the way in which the record, as commercial object, is designed to relate personally with its purchaser—thanks to which an album can have the broad cultural importance it can sometimes achieve. Paradoxically, the album, like other commodities, must achieve this intimacy with a critical mass of people consuming it. This paradox brings us back to the cult-commodity idea explained in Part II of this chapter.

Baudrillard states, “the psycho-sociological dynamic of model and series does not ... operate at the level of the object’s primary function, but merely at the level of secondary function, at the level of the ‘personalized’ object” (Baudrillard, 2005, 151). The “level of the personalized object” is the level at which a product is related-to; it is the object’s mediation and display of itself. This means that the design of the secondary function must be given significant attention if it is to relate to its consumer in the way an artist or label might intend. It must be emphasized that essential to the establishment of the secondary function is its design and the intentionality behind said design’s capacity for relation. Such design is seen in

how the commodity is displayed and interconnected with its social world through packaging, visual association, and the creator's identity as mediated through packaging.

Later, referencing his own division of model and series, Baudrillard states that "every single object claims model status," which is especially important in an understanding of recorded music, where the master-reproduction paradigm is hidden from consumers in order to promote the ideas of a reproduced object's authority, originality, and fetish character (Baudrillard, 2005, 152). This is what Katz described above in his critique of Benjamin. An album certainly claims such model status in its fetishization. This could explain why original pressings of famous albums from the the golden years of vinyl can today sell as collector's items; their temporal proximity to the model is directly reflected in monetary value and in assumed closeness to the model off of which subsequent re-pressings and remasters are based. Despite improving the quality or increasing the supply of a recording, the original pressing of an album is valued as superior only for its proximity to conception. It is clear that this value has little to do with the musical content, which is a constant across many re-pressings,<sup>11</sup> and everything to do with how the consumer relates to the record's secondary function as vessel of some kind of relational social context. The original pressing, which is already a mass-produced commodity, is valued because of what it is connected to, not because of what it is.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> Sometimes, a re-pressing means a re-master. This is, technically speaking, a change in the content of the master's finer details. To some, different masters can have radically different values to consumers. The Beatles in mono is a classic example of such a desire. More often, a "repressing" is just that—a copy—with no actual changes made to the contents/portrayal of the record.

<sup>12</sup> Briefly jumping back to Benjamin, this 'connection' is closely related to the particular ritualistic consumption of recorded music objects. They are portals to relations otherwise impossible to experience, which makes them somewhat resemble the typical understanding of other cult objects that signify divine connection, etc.

I will frame the ‘album,’ all of this considered, as an ongoing experiment in “secondary functionality.” Recorded music, particularly, rests on this functionality in recorded form because it has to—and for more than just the reasons of being a double-medium consumed in cult-like fashion, outlined above. It also has to because musical sound itself, by definition, focusses on one node of the human sensorium when so much media today has left the consumer accustomed to a more intertwined visual/aural experience. And as a recording’s primary functionality is the reproducing of an event of sound contained in the medium, its secondary functionality is at the level at which the object, not its content, is personalized and made communicative in form. If commodities must be social in order to be sellable, recorded music needs a kind of supplement to make its social ability more absorbable. It needs to be interactive as a commodity in form and not only in content. It also must achieve commodity status beyond its direct use. Recorded music’s base visual existence, conveniently, is somewhat of a *tabula rasa* that almost begs for embellishment, even with none of the above considered. Jan Tumlir, the art critic and curator who writes of albums and The Beatles whom I mentioned in the introduction, makes the argument that visual supplement in recorded music is determined by this sterility of early music media:

The image, which initially appears as a crutch-like support to the gramophone record, a substitute for the former presentation of music in the act of performance, will increasingly come to take precedence. This image is absolutely ubiquitous now, the record cover being only the first circle, as it were, in a spiraling system that will come to include videos, promotional films and TV programs, magazine and books, posters, T-shirts, stickers, and so on.<sup>13</sup>

While perhaps a bit excited, Tumlir’s claims also suggest, like I am, that recorded sound has to rest on something beyond itself in order to participate in the world of commodities. Designing

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<sup>13</sup> Tumlir, 2015, 14-15

this role for a particular album is part and parcel of album-making itself. He goes on to say that, “in effect, the music presently underlies the image like a soundtrack, as though a mere supplement to it in turn” (Tumlir, 2015, 15). The ‘image’ he cites is ‘image’ in the abstract. I’d suggest it is part and parcel of the secondary functionality that Baudrillard describes, given Tumlir’s description of said “spiraling system” invokes a system of consumer participation. His particular work, however, argues that The Beatles masterfully employed image as a tactic to maintain their fans’ engagement once they abandoned live performance and became the the first super-celebrity studio act. After this point, their work with mediation and the secondary functionality of their objects became ever sharper and more effective in harnessing particular relations among fans and products. This will be explored in greater depth in Chapter Two.

Such context creation begins as marketing, and thus reflects general trends in the marketing of each medium’s time. Music-marketing kicks off such evolution with the general marketing and advertising of the 1950s to become more personal and socially associative (up to and through this point, it must be noted, music marketing followed the mold of most any other commercial good such as kitchenware or automobiles and only later—in the late 1960s—did it come to include artists, and not just marketers, to fully or partially be involved in the marketing process).

As Marshal McLuhan writes in, *The Mechanical Bride: Folklore of Industrial Man*, advertising, at this same moment in the 20th century, becomes less focused on announcing the availability of products and more focused on selling products in terms of how the buyer relates to said products (McLuhan, 2008). In a particularly poignant essay in the aforementioned book, “Love Goddess Assembly Line,” McLuhan examines a number of

advertisements that, instead of selling clothing, cosmetics, or household goods to the archetypal ‘housewife’ consumer of 1950s America, actually seem to be selling to women *parts of their own bodies* that they presumably might have a desire to exchange for norms established within each advertisement’s seductive imagery.

Advertisements, and thereby products, become reciprocal systems in which they sell themselves in terms of social positioning and are thus self-affirming. In this particular essay, an example of such an exchange is an offer in the guise of body parts, but actually sells “proportioned girdles” and laundry detergent. This shift, from selling products to selling the consumers their own selves and bodies, was a radical relational shift in terms of commercial advertising. McLuhan provides countless examples of such advertising throughout *The Mechanical Bride*.

Likely triggered by propagandist and patriotic imagery and PR of the war era, the American consumer learned, between 1929 and the mid 1950s, that economic participation and especially consumerism were to become fundamental to identity politics.<sup>14</sup> Buying commodities thus became an accumulation of extensions of oneself, echoing another claim made by Marshall McLuhan, that “all media are extensions of some human faculty—psychic or physical” (McLuhan, *The Medium is the Massage*, 1967, 26). While McLuhan’s use of the word “media” is not meant in the particular sense, as in *a* medium (or *an* album), his claim still rings true in that records in general had to function as such extensions in order to do their job as media. However, despite McLuhan’s determinist tone, he remained optimistic about the

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<sup>14</sup> Not only was this argued by McLuhan, but various corporations and individuals actively promoted this idea of consumerist-citizenship in the post-war years. See Edward Bernays’ *Crystallizing Public Opinion*, an excellent primary source exemplifying this brand of scientific optimism.

social effect of media so long as those subject to it are willing to examine it critically. Such “examination” could be an artist’s exploration of media and employment of it therein to make a statement within an album. Next I will explore how such identity formation and subsequent relation might show itself in accounts of consuming recorded music.

#### *Part IV: Me and My Records: Albums as Identity*

“The product now in demand is neither a staple nor a machine, it is a personality,” writes David Riesman, whom Baudrillard cites in his essay cited above (Riesman, 1950, 46). Such a claim that products serve as extensions of the person would, in the years after Riesman’s publishing, come to be popularly recognized in Marshal McLuhan’s *The Medium is the Massage*. Understanding that such an extension, or personalization, happens within the object not in its “primary function” but instead in the “secondary function” that Baudrillard describes means that records might not be only about music and that shovels might not be only about digging holes. If this secondary function is in not the music but, rather, is in the experienced form of the album, then the album-as-art is not “art” in its musical composition *per se*, but is art in how the experience of consumption is designed to relate to its consumer. This all begs the question: how *does* and album relate to the consumer?

In eliciting a conversation around listening rituals and albums with friends and close associates of mine, the importance of secondary functionality is often clear, especially among those not acclimated to the recording studio environment and the kind of situational knowledge one might acquire therein. Below, one will see how, when discussing their

experiences with albums, people often describe much more than aural receptivity. Ordinary speech describing experiences of various media and music highlights not only musical listening experience as integral to the recorded music but also how rituals of listening and the particular relations among listeners and their recorded-music-objects are integral to their memories of ‘music.’ Todd, the recording engineer and teacher quoted above, and Rachel, a staff member of Bard College’s film department, describe listening to records (or watching people listening to records) as such:

Me: How would you describe the room, from maybe a bird’s eye view?  
Todd: My room?  
Me: Or any room that this would happen in. How would you sit around?  
Todd: Oh, well in my house it was, I had four speakers, it was just double stereo, but it sounded great, so they were in the four corners, up on milk cartons, probably totally bullshit, if you looked at it today, there was something wrong with it. It was great reproduction, though, I was always into those KLH speakers, which were a really nice, dry, kind of sound.

*[Rachel walks in, looking for Todd]*

Me: Where was the record player?  
Todd: Off to the side.  
Me: So would you sit looking at the record player?  
Todd: You’d sit in the middle. The fight was to be in the middle. The closer you could be to the middle, the better. But one hypnotic thing about records is watching the label. So somebody was doing that.  
Rachel: I just set up my daughters’ [record player] the other day with my old Lifesaver suitcase turntable. [I] opened it up and I still have these two Charlie Brown vinyls, that came with the book so you could follow the story. Oh my god, [my daughters] were raptured, and I’m crying watching them listening to the record. They were, like, “let’s just close our eyes and listen,” and I was [makes a crying sound].  
Todd: That’s so sweet!

*[Laughing]*

*[Here I asked Rachel for her permission to let me use her recollections in my project, as she walked into this room mid-interview and began to participate].*

Todd: [To Ruthie] He’s recording these recollections about records, and how did that [play a] role in our lives.  
Rachel: Yeah.



- Todd: I mean you're too young [to Ruthie] and you're WAY too young [to me] to remember when you got cereal in the 50's, you could get records, and you had to save box tops, and you mailed them in, and you'd get these colored records. They were red, yellow, blue, green.
- Rachel: They were bright! I remember those.

There are number of things worthy of unpacking in this excerpt. First, there is the description of Todd's sound system and the resultant competition among Todd and his friends vying for the sweet spot. Then there is the 'hypnotic' spinning label. After that there is Rachel's description of her daughters' presumably intuited performance of proper vinyl-listening etiquette. Finally, there is the nostalgia felt for a '50s marketing campaign that underscored a very present nostalgia for vinyl that was taking over the room as these 'recollections' went on happening. Regarding that last point, the convergence of childhood memories, records, and identity make clear the relational capacity of recorded music objects. The record, here, is central to the above people's formulations of coherent narratives of selfhood through the device of constancy in described behaviors around recorded music.

Todd's "totally bullshit" sound system is the only direct mention of "sound" in the excerpt printed above. His double-stereo setup clearly assists in the creation of a space and Todd's memory of that system clearly downgrades the importance of the sound it was capable of producing (i.e. "totally bullshit"). In an odd way, Todd, an audiophile and professional recording engineer, implied that the sound did not matter so much as to infringe on his experience of a record. That the record made sound at all was enough to serve as the supplement to the scene he described.

In the above case, the space created by his setup was "the middle," a space and relationship (to the record) that was fought over. Given the double-stereo setup, Todd's room

was also especially dominated by sound when records were on. A typical stereo setup is one-dimensional (two speakers, facing one direction); his setup was immersive. Here, the primary function of the album was activated in the record's reproducing of sound—but secondary functionality seems to be particularly absent in his account, despite the lack of particular aural details (i.e. what music was he playing?). Even the person absorbing the hypnotic powers of the spinning label was not really interacting with the album's secondary functionality, which, again, is the site of an *intended* relationality and intimacy-creation in reproduced objects.<sup>15</sup> What Todd describes is, however, an echo of secondary functionality in that he outlines a social relation among people and an object, and R's response to his description confirms this.

Rachel describes her daughters' "rapture" in listening to Charlie Brown records, in immediate response to Todd's mention of the "hypnotic" quality of the label. This visual description reminded Rachel of her daughters' intuiting a proper etiquette when listening to vinyl. This etiquette is exactly where the secondary functionality of albums might reside, if at all, in that albums suggest a behavior of their listeners (something alike the auratic, ritualized, cult consumption mentioned above), and this behavior is tied to the sociality of commodities in general, not the recorded music *per se*.

That Rachel's daughters close their eyes is interesting in that it paints the picture of special attention asked-for by vinyl (which is only reinforced by the medium's delicate nature and the necessity of flipping a record at the half-way point). Their behaviors are standard, too,

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<sup>15</sup> The spinning label could be a "tertiary functionality," in that it is an unintended secondary functionality in most cases (exceptions being labels designed to be visually interesting when spinning, like a spiral, perhaps, which could create a unique, medium-based experience for the consumer. The spiral example might denote a kind of psychedelic subtext, other designs might denote other subtexts).

even among consumers of my generation who have no reason to listen to vinyl if not for the particular attention and choreography of listening that it asks for. This attention is echoed by other informants as well:

George: I guess when I listen to vinyl I'll sit down and I'll listen to it, 'cause that's the clichéd thing you're supposed to do with it. You know, I'll put it on and pay attention to what I am listening to. But usually I just have [music] playing in the background, doing whatever other things I was planning on doing. Usually through the crappy iPhone headphones that come with your phone. (Student, 21, non-musician, fan of music)

The idea of a particular experiential behavior and ritual surrounding vinyl highlights its secondary functionality over its primary one. If one is asked what a record is, she/he might simply say “music,” however, if asked to describe the experience of consuming a record, music takes the supporting role in favor of the listener’s relationship to the *object* as interlocutor. Without the object, as is made clear by George, the experience of listening to music is substantially different and less determinedly attentive. Appadurai, in the introduction he wrote for his edited volume, *The Social Life of Things*, states,

Commodities represent very complex social forms and distributions of knowledge. In the first place, and crudely, such knowledge can be of two sorts: the knowledge (technical, social, aesthetic, and so forth) that goes into the production of the commodity; and the knowledge that goes into appropriately consuming the commodity.<sup>16</sup>

Appadurai describes this ‘appropriateness’ of consuming a commodity as a behavior mediated culturally and directly through both the witnessing of other individual’s consumptive habits as well as through the very consumption of media (which I will specifically explore below).<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> Appadurai, 1986, 41

<sup>17</sup> That other knowledge, the producer’s knowledge, also deserves some attention. Commodity-producers (or thing-producers) have widely displayed intermingling of technical know-how and cosmological layers in their production discourse. Even outside capitalist paradigms this is evident. Appadurai points to the work of E. Evans-Pritchard, Michael Taussig, Nancy Munn, and others whose work all explores this widespread phenomenon of the incorporation of an implicitly social character in thing-making.

The question of just how Rachel's daughters intuited the proper vinyl etiquette is another interesting issue. Ruthie is not a vinyl enthusiast; her collection is long gone or unused. However, her daughters have grown up in an era where US vinyl sales have consistently grown around 10% annually (reaching a 25-year-high in 2016, *The Nielsen Year-end Report*, 2017). That growth, however, starts from a historical low-point in 2005. Still, the medium that R's daughters interacted with was somehow known by them as a medium that asked for a particular kind of consumption, seemingly a particularly attentive and focused one at that. It is hard to ignore the silliness of closing one's eyes to *really* pay attention to what a Charlie Brown record has to offer musically, but it could also be argued that is as silly to pay such attention to most any commercial recorded music. The attention described here, common well beyond Rachel's daughters' rapture, is one evidently directed towards the medium, not its content proper.

Outside an academic paper like this one, such a silliness is not evident because it is a norm, an assumed cultural value and behavior that hardly appears so strange there as when it shows its face here, in this more critical context. When I was talking with Rachel and Todd, and when Rachel described her daughter's "rapture," no one found it funny. Rachel's narration of her daughters' socializing with a commodity was basic, even banal. Rachel claims she was brought to tears, and Todd and I believed it—we probably internalized it too. Only in listening back to our conversation a week later did I realize the bizarreness of Rachel's story where two young girls related to a commodity in such a way that was tear-jerking, and plainly so at that. It is only in writing this, some months later, that I realize the oddness of *my* taking that story as banal, plainly agreeable, and not worthy of unpacking while I was in the thick of

researching for this project. In observing her daughters' interaction with vinyl (and not a particular musical recording) Rachel was raptured herself, probably brought to tears over memories of her own interactions past, and Todd and I likely were not surprised by this because we, too, had had similar enough experiences to make this story somewhat platitudinal.

Such a code of behavior is likely absorbed from mainstream media and advertisement, where images of quasi-religious tranquility and concentration surround images of vinyl (*The Shawshank Redemption*, *High Fidelity*), where images of car-bound teenagers listen to nothing but cassette albums and mixtapes (*Wayne's World*, *Guardians of the Galaxy*), and where images of virtual iTunes albums are seamlessly integrated into pockets (Apple Computer's commercials featuring dancing silhouettes).<sup>18</sup> Musical commodities are almost unfailingly treated as sociable commodities in the media. These images and others cater themselves to a particular audience's relationship with recorded music, and these images are repeated and confirmed through television, film, advertisement, and practice. Like social knowledge, Rachel's daughters absorb how to interact with sound in witnessing others' interactions.

Such absorption of behaviors, likely through visual media, brings to mind the work of anthropologist Arjun Appadurai. In his book, *Modernity at Large: Cultural Dimensions of Globalization*, Appadurai introduces his idea of 'scapes.' For my purposes herein, his idea of the "mediascape" is specifically useful in discussing Rachel's daughters' learned relational behaviors surrounding vinyl. Appadurai writes, that "[Mediascapes] provide large and

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<sup>18</sup> Side note: progression of representing music media in the media seems altogether pointed, over time, towards greater mobility and freedom of movement. Another project.

complex repertoires of images, narratives, and ethnoscaapes to viewers throughout the world, in which the world of commodities and the world of news and politics are profoundly mixed” (Appadurai, 1996, 35).<sup>19</sup> While perhaps one could argue that Appadurai’s argument is dated in its assumptions of cultural fluidity in globalized modes of exchange (it was written twenty years before this project), I’d suggest that his particular ideas about scapes still make sense outside of a globalization-studies context. Behaviors surrounding albums, interestingly, are taught through the mediascape (as is seen in the embedded images below<sup>20</sup>), while



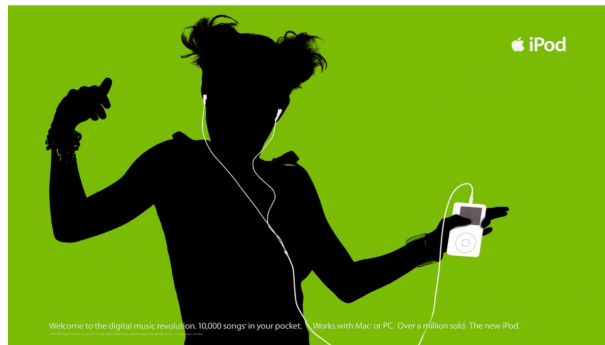
Wayne’s World, “Bohemian Rhapsody” scene featuring cassette



The Shawshank Redemption, Opera scene featuring vinyl



Guardians of the Galaxy Cassette scene. Marvel Studios



iPod Commercial still, pronouncing “10,000 songs in your pocket.” Apple Computer, Inc.

<sup>19</sup> Going back to Marx and Baudrillard, this concatenation fits well into their understandings of commodities.

<sup>20</sup> From top left, clockwise: (1) *Wayne’s World*, a *Saturday Night Live* spin-off Wayne, Garth, and the crew lose it to Queen’s “Bohemian Rhapsody.” This scene epitomizes the fetish surrounding cassette tapes, in which social architectures and emotions are perceived to be bound up in plastic, the pinnacle of portable context-creation. (2) *The Shawshank Redemption*, in which Andy Dufresne locks the Warden out of his office and broadcasts a Vinyl recording of Mozart’s “Sull’aria...che soave zeffiretto,” from the opera *The Marriage of Figaro*. This scene epitomizes the behaviors associated with vinyl-listening, namely attention and rapture. The broadcast effectively brings the entire prison to a standstill as they absorb the transcendental might of Western Art Music. (3) “Awesome Mix Vol. 1” from *Guardians of the Galaxy*. This cassette tape follows the film’s heroes as they travel through space, a kind of sci-fi update of the choreographies displayed in *Wayne’s World*. Uniquely, however, this cassette was a visual concretization of the film’s soundtrack, and when the soundtrack was released in the ‘80s, it was released in the form of a mass-produced film prop, so fans could have the same experience, proxy, of exploring the galaxy in their own car. (4) Finally, the famous dancing silhouettes from the aughts’ iPod commercials. These images displayed unprecedented mobility for recorded music consumption, where choreographies of listening were greatly more individualized and freed from stationary technologies like vinyl.

albums—like TV shows, films, and newspapers—are also instances of said mediascape (in that they are themselves repertoires/concatenates of such forces). Thus, the media reflexively confirm their own social import by being in relation to one another and to the nodes of their absorption. In other words, they display themselves as social actors, and in doing so affirm this agency.

The means of internalizing such behaviors (a central question to Appadurai's work) is done through imagination. Appadurai states that, "the world we live in today is characterized by a new role for the imagination of social life" and that, "the imagination is now central to all forms of agency, is itself a social fact, and is the key component of the new global order" (Appadurai, 1996, 31). Such "imagination" can be seen as the consumer's reception of Baudrillard's "secondary functionality," in which sociality, real in effect, must be imagined on part of the consumer who applies social agency upon commodities in the act of exchange, much as Marx describes in the quotes included above. "Imagination" is the glue of these "scapes," where instances of media are cultural capital and resource that amalgamate into something more alike a "scape" in scale. The glue that imagination provides is within the act of consuming objects' secondary functionalities. Consuming a commodity socially (which is unavoidable even in private confines), to however limited an extent, is to tie oneself into the social network of commodities and thus to associated means of consuming such commodities.

Finally, Todd and Rachel's discussion with me wrapped up in talking about the special, mail-order vinyl records that they both collected as children using coupons cut from cereal boxes. The nostalgia that Todd, particularly, exhibited for these discs was clear. Coming from

a record engineer, I could also tell that this story was significant to his own identity some 50 years later as he reminisced.

It is safe to assume that Todd learned how to consume—in the sense of being subjected to a capitalist hegemony (in the Gramscian sense)—through “buying” recorded music media. Todd learned how to buy, which by proxy is how to exist, within the world he was raised-in through recorded music commodities. Children, who most often have zero buying power independent of their parents (especially at the age Todd was talking about, that being younger than ten years-old) resultantly have zero ability to form their own identities through consumption like the normal capitalist subject might. This, of course, is assuming that cash is the only means of purchasing.

Cereal box tops provide an alternative for children in that they set up an economy outside the interests of adult consumers; there, a child’s currency buys a child’s goods, giving the child an agency theretofore unrecognized. That Todd’s first experience within the capitalist paradigm was with recorded music objects was clearly of great significance to him: it meant that he could begin to form himself—quite literally in his case—into the relational node in the network of musical/commodity communication. Todd, of course, has spent his life, since then, making records and teaching others how to make records. He approaches the practice with studied diligence and internalized means of navigation. More than anyone, he communicates across records and does so because that is how he communicates. Following what Suisman stated above of musicians, Todd is not on the side of the industry that makes music, he is on the side of it that packages it and makes it communicable across technological



platforms. He formed his own identity in the paradigm of recorded music distribution and continues to do so as a means of exploring sociality as he knows it.

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Considering the above interview along with the thinkers I worked with, a particular understanding of what characterizes an album begins to emerge. It is more fitting, all things considered, to understand the album as not distinctly musical but instead as medium between music and listener—it is one of many particular ways in which the recording industry connects listeners to music. The severance from the tangible in recorded music was the removal of the relationality determined by live performance’s once-held (pre-recording) monopoly on musical context (cf. Small, 1988). A musical event no longer *happened* in the room of the listener, but the record ‘re-happened’ it instead—experienced relation becomes proxy in the distribution and consumption of commercial recorded music. The paradoxical materialization and dematerialization of music in the early years of the recording industry allots a new space for context-creation on the part of labels, publishers, and eventually for artists as well. This is the site in which that “secondary function” that Baudrillard explores becomes central in the production of albums.

### *Part V: Space Is Created: Setting the Stage for Relational Experimentation*

The understanding of albums outlined above illustrates a separation key to my work with the idea of album-as-art, that being that the “album” and the “music” are not to be conflated. Thereby, to claim that the “album-as-art” is a reference to the artistic quality of the *music* is

not a given and is often missing key aspirations in an album's making. The assumed one-in-the-same-ness of object and music is likely a result of the predominance of physical media in the record industry over its 20th century history, where once an album was sold, the music on an album could not and would not change. This resulted in an almost irreversible cohesion of content and form. Accordingly, in the pre-digital era, the primary and secondary functions of an album as commodity were irreversibly tied and bound up in one another. The album, like all physical media, promoted a specific relationship among the consumer and artist that was tactile, intimate, consistent, and possessive (cf. Larsen, 2016). This was all in spite of the fact that fans did not, as I mentioned earlier, ever actually *own* the music contained within their record collections.

The art of album-making, then, can be understood not only as music-making but also a making of specific "social architectures."<sup>21</sup> Such architectures can be aided by the design of an album's secondary functionality. The 'album' described above requires such social architectures, too, in order to sell the unheard. Examples of these architectures are boundless, appearing as early as 1967 with *Sgt. Peppers Lonely Hearts Club Band* (where an album insert included cut outs that made a costume for fans to dress-as and thus join the Lonely Hearts Club Band) and as recently as this past year, where Beyoncé and Kanye West both experimented with what it meant to make a streamed album relationally exciting for their fans.

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<sup>21</sup> (Silver, 2016, 59). I borrow and appropriate this term from the sound artist and curator Micah Silver, who uses the term to describe the social effect of audio in air. He uses the example of Jimi Hendrix's albums and their effect on Silver and his friends growing up. While what Silver refers to is more specifically aural, his terminology applies well to my subject of research.

It must be mentioned that while an album’s “secondary function” is a quality inert to the album, just as it is inert to other commercial goods (and is therefore experienced and impactful no matter the amount of attention given to its design and construct), an album’s makers are not always interested or even aware, in whoever’s terms, of Baudrillard’s separation of an object’s primary and secondary functionality. Many artists might believe that focussing on the music (and recording of it) alone (which is common in many amateur circles especially) is the best route towards making an album, loosely following the long tradition of ‘absolute music.’<sup>22</sup> I, however, believe that the idea of an album being an artistically viable object evolved out of a distinctly market-driven context in which pop icons started wanting to make statements instead of platitudes, that they wanted to explore social landscapes instead of blindly contributing to them, and that the very irony of such a commercial-aesthetic explosion is extremely interesting to an artist—or celebrity—of our time.<sup>23</sup> These interests can be explored and pursued in both music-making and, considered separately, album-making, as we shall see in the next chapter.

It is undeniable that artists and producers have worked with these “secondary functions” whether they have known it or not, and that consumers are effected by these

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<sup>22</sup> ‘Absolute Music’ is an idea of music devoid of referentiality or indexicality. From an anthropological standpoint, it is impossible. However, the idea was the beginning of a powerful tradition in Western Art Music which has had effects lasting through the 20th century. This is not to say that pop music for music’s sake is ‘absolute.’ Absolute music cannot have lyrics as words are representational.

<sup>23</sup> The transitional moments of Kanye West and The Beatles are clear examples of such shifted focus, and for that reason they will book-end my exploration of some albums that are socially-conscious-and-commercial art objects. With West, the change came likely with *808s and Heartbreak*. Following the death of his mother, *808s* marked the beginning of Kanye-the-artists after hitherto being Kanye-the-rapper. He even suggested that the album be considered the first example of a new *musical* genre he termed “pop art.” Following *808s*, West’s exploration of media became fundamental in his creative output, culminating in genre-bending output that challenged, confused, and excited fans with *My Beautiful Dark Twisted Fantasy*, *Yeezus*, and *The Life of Pablo*. With The Beatles, their ‘shift’ happened with *Sgt. Pepper’s Lonely Hearts Club Band*. Shortly before the release of this seminal LP, the fab four had decided to never play live again, meaning all their energy and focus would thereon be dedicated to studio time and their increased involvement in the production of their own releases. Like Kanye, this step announced a focused turn inwards, and they way they figured they’d best accomplish this was through commodity-mediated relations, not direct ones. Many pop artists have displayed similar shifts in focus. I hope to illuminate such shifts by exploring in greater depth the albums whose analysis will make up the bulk of my second chapter.

functions, whether as per the artist's intent or not. As Baudrillard and others argue, one's understanding of her/his own identity is tied fundamentally, whether consciously or not, to their relation with the world as mediated by certain media, commodities, and media-commodities. To aesthetically and aurally explore this area and contribute towards its development is not a constant in commercial music, but it is regular enough to render it worth exploring. In the next chapter, I will explore a few albums that are landmarks in the history of this art of designing the secondary function of albums. I start in 2016 and work my way back to the late 1960s, where a moment of media maturation for recorded music unfolded, much like the moment we live in today.

# C H A P T E R 11 :

## *Relational Aspirations for the Post-Physical Album*

The “album” is not dead in 2017. Rather, it has evolved into a new kind of object. In this chapter, I will explore a few albums/artists that have used commercial music media as a means of communication with their audience, specifically in the form of album.

The breakout development of the past few years is the streamable album. I can make this claim not only because of statistical growth in streamed-music consumption (52% growth in 2015, 31% over four years [2012-2015])<sup>1</sup>, but also because both fans and artists have shifted their practices away from those required by the physical album and its virtual counterpart (the iTunes-form LP). Upon release, an album is now inserted into a library that is (usually) already subscribed to—it is not “bought” nor is it even actively received, it simply shows up.

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<sup>1</sup> *News and Notes on 2015 RIAA Shipment and Revenue Statistics*, accessed online. <https://www.riaa.com/wp-content/uploads/2016/03/RIAA-2015-Year-End-shipments-memo.pdf>

Considering the discussion of ownership in the first chapter, streaming is perhaps more true to form for the music industry in that it clearly suggests commercially-recorded music-listening is a licensed permission, not an owned property.

This change marks a fundamental shift in the means of relating to commercial recorded music, and artists are exploring new ways in which to take full advantage of this new relationality. At one point in time fans could hold, touch, and care for their recordings like valued property (that word, “property,” comes up repeatedly when informants discussed *caring* for their collections. Think of Todd, “So that the record can’t fall out, you know, just trying to respect that—it wasn't always my record!”). Today such treatment is decreasingly common. Younger people do not feel like they *own* music in today’s market, and it is probably no longer the hope of music marketing professionals to create that feeling of ownership anyway. Remember Carrie and the “grey area between owning and borrowing.”

The kind of relationship that exists between artists and fans, historically mediated by property, is now mediated by virtual subscription and, more importantly, *attention* (such attention was once a pipe dream of the music industry, as David Suisman notes, that dates back as far as the pre-recording music industry of the Tin Pan Alley). In the age of Twitter, Snapchat, Facebook, and Instagram such a demand for constant attention is normalized by the saturation of social media into everyday life. Resultantly, album ‘packaging’ and all of its secondary functionality has become more self-consciously evanescent, immaterial, social, and, as always, of its time—all of which is to say: the ‘album’ lives on. As has happened before, the media of commercial music have raised the question: how will the artistry of relation adapt?

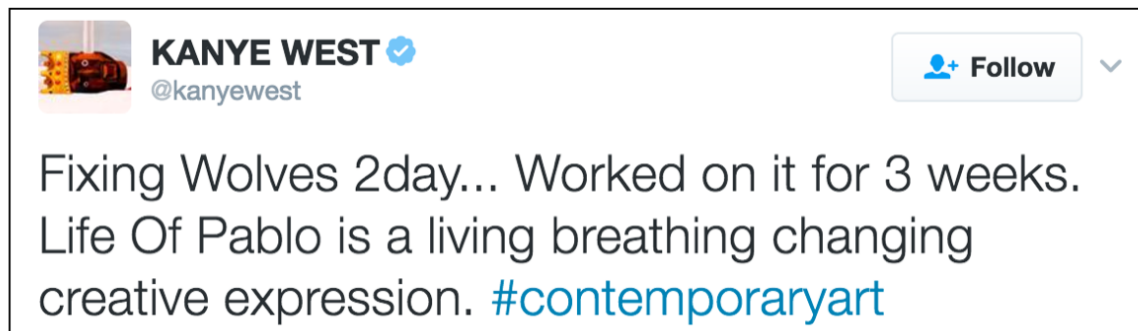
## Part I: Post-Physical Design

In early 2016, an historical challenge to the established means of relational design in pop music distribution was conducted over the course of four months. This was Kanye West's *The Life of Pablo*. With this release, West would upset the norms of object permanence in recorded music consumption by editing the album, post-release, in the public eye. This highlighted the immateriality of his LP and required a continued attention on the part of West's fans. Released between February 14th and June 14th of 2016, West challenged ideas of artist/object authority, record/object permanence, and the ways in which fans are expected to relate to an artist's release.

*Pablo* was released, originally unmastered and poorly mixed, exclusively through a streaming service, Tidal, owned by his friend and once-collaborator Jay-Z. In the week before release the name of the album changed (marking the 4th change), and then the album cover changed (the newer cover featuring the repeated text "which/one"). Both of these changes (bearing in mind the fact that the changes were a matter of public knowledge) suggested, at first, an unsteadiness to fans and media outlets that was heavily discussed in the days leading up to and immediately following the release of *Pablo*. Such unfinished features were considered unprofessional, sloppy, and tell-tale signs of his rumored writer's block. Some critics went so far as to suggest that this unsteadiness alone meant that West was losing his cool and his spot in the limelight.

These updates meant that fans would, without warning, find themselves listening to different sounds than those they thought they had clicked-on. This required that they

repeatedly check-in to see if what they were listening to was *Pablo* and not *old Pablo*. If one gives West the slightest bit of credit, it must be assumed that he expected exactly this kind of response—given that the public presentation of the album’s fluidity was, obviously, *public*. Such last-minute decision-making was only possible, however, considering the exclusive deal



Kanye West’s Tweet making his case for the changes he made to *The Life of Pablo*.

West had secured with Tidal, meaning that the album was not to appear in stores physically, and that the primary means of listening did not suggest, like the iTunes store before it, that the listener “owned” the music in any way. Streaming through Tidal, or other services like it, is a media-usage more true-to-form given the master/reproduction/licensing industry layout described earlier.

*Pablo*, however, doesn’t stop there. Over the following months it was updated multiple times with new lyrics, new guest vocalists, new production, mastering, and two new tracks.<sup>2</sup> This was a radical departure from the standards of commercial music prior, where released recordings were permanent, set in plastic (or at least imagined to be—i.e. the ‘vinyl effect’), unable to change after public release. West took advantage of a freedom that only music streaming could offer artists, and made it a defining characteristic of what *Pablo* signified. The

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<sup>2</sup> One of these two new songs is cut from what was originally one song on the February release of *Pablo*. The other was premiered at West’s Yeezy launch on February 11, 2016 at Madison Square Garden along with an unreleased version of the album. The Yeezy event was live streamed, meaning many fans heard this second addition to the album in bootlegs taken from the event four months prior.



ultimate success of *Pablo* was its ability to relate to fans in its mediation. Like the consumer's streaming services themselves, updates to *Pablo* tied music fans into a reciprocal system that demanded attention and regular check-ups. *Pablo*, in this sense, was simply true to form.<sup>3</sup>

In terms of relationality, the edits West made to the album presumably were made in the context of media critique and fan reception. Fans could critique *Pablo* online, in its home turf. Once published, West could see that critique and respond to it. This is a significant empowerment of the fan, where despite no longer "owning" music in ways they once had, they could now, *en masse*, influence its production as long as they kept up their listening (another testament to the immense power of Twitter in 2016). See another excerpt from my interviews below, where this very feeling is registered by a listener of my own generation,

Jay:           The thing is, it's permanently his. He owns it. You could take it and put on a playlist but he decides what the album is. He can still change it if he wants to, and he did that, for months. He has such an ownership over it. You can't distribute it. (Student, 21, non-musician)

This interpretation of *Pablo* is common among those who gave West the attention he presumably asked for as he released the album. There were a number of conversations I had where people were either not aware of the changes or were only aware of one instance of the updates. For them, the 'attention-capital' they had was not secured by West's model. Among those who did notice, however, the changes made to *Pablo* signified no less than an affront on the base assumptions they had about what albums are. *Pablo* was still music, still broken into songs, still needing to be played in order, but packaged, distributed, and related-to differently.

Again, George puts it nicely:

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<sup>3</sup> It is likely too soon to tell whether or not *Pablo*'s boundary-pushing concept has resonated across the recording industry. If it does, *Pablo* might go down in history like *Sgt. Peppers* did given its seminal role in the history of vinyl albums. However, *Pablo* is no less or more successful because of its impact or lack of impact. The intent is clear.

George: I think playlists function a lot like albums, like *Views*, or *The Life of Pablo*. These are albums made up of singles. They still need to be played in order, though. [...] I hate to give The Beatles too much credit, but they kind of invented the “album” with *Sgt. Pepper’s*.

Me: What was an album before that?

George: I guess just a playlist... I have this record, *I Love The 60s*, which is just a lot of ‘60s music, and all my other records are albums. [*I Love The 60s*] is not an album, there’s no vision there, it doesn’t come through. It doesn’t come from the same era.

Me: How long is an album?

George: [Strongly] thirty-nine minutes and fifty-five sec<sup>4</sup>— um no, I think it can be as long or as short...

Me: Why’d you say thirty-nine?

George: Because that’s pretty standard...

Me: Why is that standard?

George: Because anything less is an LP, no, an EP, rather. [...]

George’s distinction of playlists and albums brings back to mind the ‘vinyl effect’ described in the first chapter. He considers *Pablo* an album, but struggles to do so. George can distinguish *I Love the 60s* from *Sgt. Pepper’s Lonely Hearts Club Band*, but the playlist/album conflation makes him hesitate and pull from his memory various qualifiers of what an album is. The specificity of “39 minutes and fifty-five seconds” is case and point. He defines the album in terms of its media and how the design of the album conforms to the media actively or passively. George’s difficulty is in bridging the aforementioned “vinyl effect” with what he witnesses in contemporary recorded music production.

West’s work on *Pablo* was a challenge to—and perhaps a critique of—object fetishism. Such fetishism has been fundamental to the conception of the album-as-art. When, back in February of 2016, I had originally (and unofficially) acquired the album digitally, and did not “update” my version because I did not subscribe to Tidal—the then-exclusive provider of *Pablo*—I felt I had an inauthentic version, that it was “cracked,” illegitimate, and incomplete. The true success of *Pablo* follows suit. Any version of *The Life of Pablo* lacks the kind of

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<sup>4</sup> George was only three seconds off from the exact run time of *Sgt. Pepper’s*!

legitimacy ascribed to most albums; in *Pablo*, originality and authority are no longer key. Kanye could still update it again, now or in ten years. He could delete-from, add-to, and change the track listing. The album cover could change, as could the name of the album. Not to mention, West could even delete the album if he wanted to. What, then, would be made of previous versions? All of this goes against the material permanence of LPs, CDs, and cassette tapes that left a wake of record-object authority in their unyielding object-content cohesion.

In a *Pitchfork* article published in March of 2016 discussing West's edits, senior editor Jayson Greene claimed that if Kanye were to continue updating *Pablo* that, "it seems likely that the magic will start to drain away" (Greene, 2016). Greene may be right, the "magic," presumably a derivative of Walter Benjamin's idea of "aura," might very well begin to leak away—but what does this mean? And what is the magic of the album if not the quality of the music, which, in most of the updates, was improved in response to a new democratized base of critics who, presumably, also desired this 'magic'? Given that so many of the edits made to *Pablo* were updates in response to fan and media reception and critique, why would such catered edits make the project lose its magic? Clearly it is not the music, but the challenges to the norms of musical media and the prevention of any feeling of ownership. Altering the way in which a critic or fan is supposed to relate to the album is challenging that person, devaluing their initial experience and instead favoring the artist's ability to overcome such critique by changing the facts upon which the relationship was originally based. *Pablo* stands apart, therefore, and does so not because of musical quality but instead in its challenging of

consumers' habits built around an album's traditional "secondary functionality."<sup>5</sup> The album's success is in its challenge to the "vinyl effect' that it evidently sought to destabilize.

Habits surrounding the experiencing of commercial music are important for a number of reasons, and uprooting these habits can mean creating an unsuccessful release (in that a consumer cannot understand a release relationally) or a refreshing one (in that a consumer can learn a new and exciting way of relating to an album). In the case of vinyl, including an insert can demand extra attention to the physical and visual elements of an album, and consumers might have an enhanced social experience of an album, through visuals, therefore (cf. Hebdige, 1987; 1988). Taking any kind of change too far, however, can result in a confusing object where a consumer might struggle to connect the dots. An album, like all commodities, cannot come with (or even need) instructions for use if it is to be consumed in its secondary functionality, which is requisite to the albums I speak of herein. Instructions draw too much attention to primary functionality and uproot the ease of object/person relationality. If, however, a consumer can experience a new commodity on her/his own terms, and the slight challenges to habit do not read too heavily, then habits can become malleable and artists can delicately play with these in order to create a more catered experience as per the demands of their projects. Such a delicate balance is evidenced in G's claim that *Pablo is* an album, even while he can't define it in the terms he had internalized theretofore.

*The Life of Pablo* can, despite its challenges to norms, be categorized as an album in the traditional sense; any version, despite the fact that there *are* versions, can be an album in

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<sup>5</sup> West's work also reflects a general trend in contemporary art, too, the puts focus on the media at presentation rather than content-as-separate-from media.

its own right and consumed as such.<sup>6</sup> A number of songs, a square image to represent these songs, and the legal/commercial/critical terms which describe the object all fall into place and say so.<sup>7</sup> Lurking underneath these fundamental qualities, however, is a demand for a new kind of attention, one that is constant because the album is no longer permanently defined post-release in terms of musical make-up. The mediation of this project is a clear example of the malleability of new (i.e. digital) media, which result in a simultaneous instability and confluence of forms (cf. Manovich, 2002, 27-49).

More than challenging the album, West draws attention to what the album *is* in today's context. His subtle changes actually expose, rather than challenge. In this sense, despite its radical departure from norms, the "change" was fundamentally conservative—he adapted to the times. West, with *Pablo*, simply nudged the habits of his fans. This 'nudging' can expose and propagate major changes in album-making and album-consumption, and has been carried out before in similarly timely experiments.

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This album's name, *The Life of Pablo*, deserves one final piece of attention and analysis. In a review of this album that I wrote for a school paper in March of 2016 (before having any idea that the album wasn't done being released) I argued that "Pablo" was meant to represent the Apostle Paul. This claim was solidified by the then-unreleased but widely bootlegged track, "Saint Pablo," (this song would be appended to the album that June). The unofficial existence of this track at the time gave it a kind of gaze of its own, contextualizing the album from afar.

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<sup>6</sup> My 'unofficial' February copy being case and point.

<sup>7</sup> For *Yeezus*, West's previous release, rumor has it he wanted to have the iTunes version of the album feature a GIF (a lo-res moving image) for a cover instead of a typical image. Reportedly, Apple denied his request.

Following 2013's *Yeezus* (a clear reference to Jesus Christ), *Pablo* served to do as St. Paul did and turn the death of an idol into history. In the act of writing, the apostle Paul translated event into meaning. After only the first update to *Pablo* I took this to mean that West considered this album a text, one that would inform and lead by example. With this in mind, the subsequent updates to *The Life of Pablo* gained a new significance, one that eventually grew into the curiosity that would be explored in what you have just read.

*Pablo* aims to translate the work of *Yeezus* into something communicable: that being the album is dead and nothing can be the same. In form, *Pablo* offers up an alternative, and hopes to lead by example.

In taking advantage of the medium across which *Pablo* was dispersed, West was able to communicate more than just recorded music: he was able to suggest a new way of relating to recorded music. Despite its radical nature, *Pablo* can be situated in a precedent of such harnessing of media in relationally-engaged commercial release. While examples of this practice are bountiful, I include just two below for their specific and self-evident interest in two previous media paradigms, namely cassette tapes and vinyl.

### *Part II: Playing with Secondary Functionality*

Bow Wow Wow, a musical group tail-ending the 'New Wave' movement in the early 1980s, made their debut on a cassette with a blank B-side, effectively encouraging their fans to pirate music from the radio for their own use and distribution. This "encouragement" was only reified by the lyrics and music video paired with the song, that directly encouraged such

piracy. This release could not have happened any other way; it was defined by its media and the kind of relationship that its media dictated.

The release in question is the infamous “cassingling” *C30, C60, C90, Go!* (1980). This release, while not an album in form (it was single), similarly engaged with questions surrounding relationality and mediation of recorded music. Of note is that Bow Wow Wow were managed by Malcolm McLaren<sup>8</sup> who wrote, produced, and conceptualized the group and managed them for their short, three-year career.

Bow Wow Wow’s release, in form and content, suggested an action beyond listening, much like West’s *Life of Pablo* did some thirty-six years later. This example is far from the start of this ‘tradition’ in playing with such relational aspirations, though. *C30, C60, C90, Go!* emphasized its own status as a mediation in suggesting an alternative relation to the object as a commodity beyond its functional sound-playing. That it emphasized a kind of hijacking of commodity-form only plays into a state-of-mind largely prompted by punk and then-popular

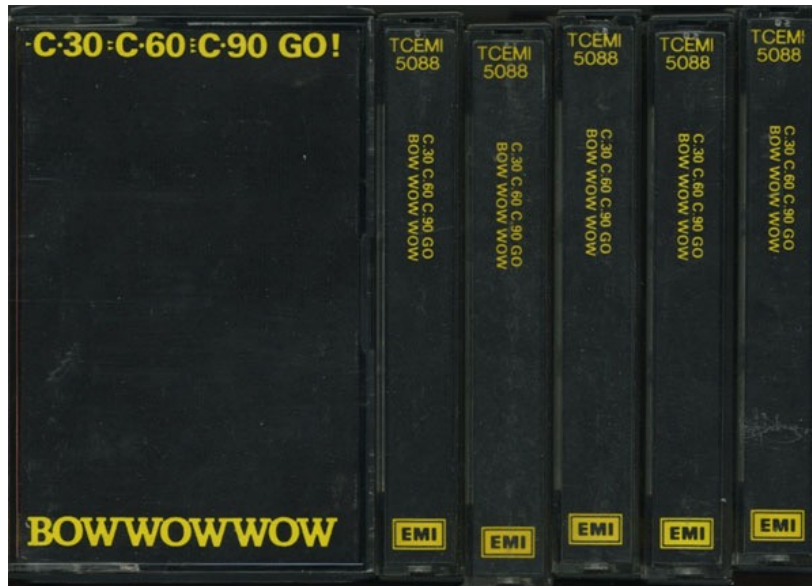
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<sup>8</sup> Malcolm McLaren is arguably one of the most important figures in the history of experimenting with commodity in the recorded music industry. Because this project is not a history, he will only be mentioned in brief. For context I will provide a short history here: He trained as an artist in 1960s Britain, making him intuitively ‘pop’ and compulsively situationist. Together, along with his sharp eye for trend-setting, these qualities made him a perfect candidate to fill the shoes of ‘infamous rock manager’ he came to fill over his twenty chaotic years in the recorded music industry. He was the bridge between British punk and the mainstream, and only could exist at such a paradoxical intersection in being a paradox himself. He was the ‘punk entrepreneur:’ a self-identified swindler and manipulator of image.

His projects, including musical acts, films, clothing stores, and exhibitions, would regularly focus on the manipulability of secondary functionality in commodities, often in the form of a media event. He and Vivienne Westwood (his long-time partner through much of his career), are credited with introducing the punk aesthetic into high fashion. He managed The New York Dolls, The Sex Pistols, Adam and the Ants (he briefly hired Boy George as Adam Ant’s replacement), and Bow Wow Wow (who were ‘The Ants’ fronted by the final replacement of Adam, Annabelle Lwin). He also had a solo career, and briefly considered managing the Red Hot Chili Peppers before they were recognizable, in 1985.

Understanding McLaren’s role in the groups he managed/created is integral to understanding the groups themselves. As the artist and writer Dan Graham argues—and as many have reiterated—McLaren epitomized the idea of ‘artist-as-producer’ in occupying more the position of commodity producer, less music-maker (following the logic Suisman outlined within music/commodity production in the previous chapter). His acts almost always took the ethos of Roxy Music in portraying popular music as a state-of-mind mediated through commodities and image, rather than mere musical sound (cf. Bracewell, 2008; Fox, 2016); he embodied the contradictions paraded by DEVO in their hyper-corporate synth-pop affront to punk rock in the late 1970s (Graham, 2016); he had actors ‘play’ rockers, whose primary goal was to look good, not play well (Taylor, 1988). This is all because McLaren’s primary concern was relationality, and music was a means (among many) for creating such relation.

For more, see *Impresario: Malcolm McLaren and the British New Wave* (1988) (An exhibition catalog from the New Museum’s 1988 retrospective of his work) and Dan Graham’s essays “The End of Liberalism,” “McLaren’s Children,” “Untitled,” and “Artist as Producer” in *Rock/Music Writings* (2016).



Bow Wow Wow's *C30, C60, C90, Go!* cassette single. 1980

music overall. This was a sociality particularly present in that era's youth: that of teenage identity-formation through rebellion, a rebellion understood in the terms of commodity consumption (cf. Graham, 2016). Appadurai, whose work I cited in the introduction and first chapter, states,

From the point of view of demand, the critical difference between modern, capitalist societies and those based on simpler forms of technology and labor is *not* that we have a thoroughly commoditized economy whereas theirs is one in which subsistence is dominant and commodity exchange has made only limited inroads, but rather that the consumption demands of persons in our own society are regulated by the high-turnover criteria of "appropriateness" (fashion), in contrast to the less frequent shifts in more directly regulated sumptuary or customary systems. In both cases, however, demand is a socially regulated and generated impulse, not an artifact of individual whims or needs.<sup>9</sup>

Appadurai's claim here is that demand is a socially regulated feeling, relegated upon the consumer in a producer's employment of abstract technologies such as fashion and taste-making. The sociality undermining Bow Wow Wow's work is exactly this kind of "appropriate" sociality. The example of *C30, C60, C90, Go!* is of particular interest because it appears to

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<sup>9</sup> Appadurai, 1986, 32



undermine itself while actually reaffirming itself through hegemonic modes of consumer identity-formation.

While perhaps one could argue that *C30, C60, C90, Go!* was a kind “anti-commodity,” the consumer still had to buy this cassingle in the first place. With that in mind, the whole Bow Wow Wow project could be a case study for how a record label (like any number of companies) imparts an illusion of empowerment and agency on the purchasing consumer. The only way to participate in Bow Wow Wow’s ‘punk’ ethos was to *buy first* and then steal: sociality still exists in an exchange of capital. This relationship, as the artist Dan Graham argues is central to all rock music (and therein pop music), is one of paradoxical rebellion and conformity through capitalistic social hegemony (again in the Gramscian sense) and perceived transcendence thereof.

In *C30, C60, C90, Go!* relation is mediated through the commodity, not only the music. In this case the recorded music is almost a crutch to the commodity. The particular relation mediated by the release is one that would not be communicated without the particular commodity-form of cassette. In *C30, C60, C90, Go!* everything seems to dance around the commodity as if it was truly the main event; there is nothing to suggest otherwise.

I don’t know (nor could I) how many consumers actually used the cassette to pirate radio broadcasts but the specificities of particular consumptions of *C30, C60, C90, Go!* does not matter so much as its obvious symbolic value. As an object, this cassingle played into social desire for rebellion and abjection. This lends itself well to an analysis of this release as exactly the kind of socialized art-object that responds to an excess of commodities via artistic participation therein: a practice dominant within late 20th century artistic work. *C30, C60, C90,*

*Go!* is like one of Warhol's Brillo Boxes; it is a commodity, slightly altered, drawing heightened attention to its existence within a market. It exists socially because it is a commodity in a cultural paradigm in which commodities have social agency.

McLaren's Bow Wow Wow is what pop-art is to art but instead interacts with 1980s pop music. It mutates its commodity form to better situate and comment-on itself. The awareness of this in the production of *C30*, *C60*, *C90*, *Go!* makes it all the more a socially affective storage device that not only stores recorded music but also promotes a relationship beyond music listening: a relationship that is a kind of punk ethos bound with the social associations contained therein.

Such a relationship was only able to be completely mediated through a heightening of media proper. Bow Wow Wow did this in many ways beyond the implications contained within their cassette debut. Firstly, the name *C30*, *C60*, *C90*, *Go!* references media plainly. A *C30* tape is a thirty-minute tape, a *C60* is sixty-minutes, and so on. Considering the contents of the song, the name is almost a crescendo of theft: 'Steal thirty-minutes! Steal sixty-minutes! Steal ninety-minutes! RUN!' Even the name "Bow Wow Wow" is rumored to be a reference the RCA Victor Records logo of a dog listening to a phonograph. The band seems oddly over-concerned with their mediation, and such concern is likely the result of the input of their manager, McLaren.<sup>10</sup>

Bow Wow Wow's hyper-plastic New Wave pop project was hardly concerned with writing and recording music alone. They were a meta-pop spectacle that disappeared with an arbitrary end amid a falsified scandal created, again, by their infamous manager. Their

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<sup>10</sup> See previous footnote.



RCA Victor's famous dog logo.

existence was a show and every inch of it was organized by a half-invisible hand famously concerned with all there is beyond recorded musical sound in the recorded music industry. McLaren created a social world by mediating Bow Wow Wow without a detail spared.

### Part III: The Beatles' Alter Ego

Long before McLaren invented his meta-pop spectacle, Bow Wow Wow, The Beatles had to tackle issues of relationality in their recorded music projects. In August, 1966, they completed the last tour of their career, only to appear live in concert one time thereafter in January of 1969.

While today the idea of a studio-only pop group is less radical, The Beatles' departure from the stage was nothing short of tectonic at the time. Records, until then, were in large part only considered promotional objects for popular groups. What these records promoted was often assumed to be the tours, where a 'personal' relationship was obvious in that the music was played by people, for people. When The Beatles decided to shift their musical practice, they saw in that an imperative that they shift their relational practice as well. Just two months

after their last show, they began recording *Sgt. Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band*, a layered relational epic in which The Beatles sought a new relationship by becoming new people.

To do this, The Beatles decided that they had to reinvent themselves as a group that wouldn't be missed if they were to leave the stage. The concept behind *Sgt. Peppers* was that they were now 'The Lonely Hearts Club Band.' To accomplish this, they made a record in the form of a concert, with sampled audience cheers, an introduction to the band, and an encore. The album insert featured cut-outs that, if used, would allow the consumer to partially dress



The interior fold and album-insert for *Sgt. Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band*

up as if they themselves were in the band too (also, "You're such a lovely audience—We'd love to take you home with us—We'd love to take you home!"). The cover featured a wide number of famous people that most anyone could never meet, people whose relationships to the masses were famously mediated and indirect. *Sgt. Peppers* was profoundly relational, and it sought said relation through avenues beyond music and lyric.<sup>11</sup>

*Sgt. Pepper's* concern with relationality informed not only the music but the medium across which the music would be listened-to, or, equivalently, the medium across which the

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<sup>11</sup> See Jan Tumlir's *The Magic Circle* for an in-depth exploration of all the extra-musical work of The Beatles in the making of *Sgt. Pepper's* and *The White Album*.

music would be related to. Above, when discussing *The Life of Pablo* by Kanye West, I included this interview excerpt:

George: I think playlists function a lot like albums, like *Views*, or *The Life of Pablo*. These are albums made up of singles. They still need to be played in order, though. [...] I hate to give The Beatles too much credit, but they kind of invented the “album” with *Sgt. Pepper’s*.

Me: What was an album before that?

George: I guess just a playlist... I have this record, *I Love The 60s*, which is just a lot of ‘60s music, and all my other records are albums. [*I Love The 60s*] is not an album, there’s no vision there, it doesn’t come through. It doesn’t come from the same era.

George suggests that albums are defined by musical cohesion and vision, but there are a number of that do that released before *Sgt. Pepper’s*. The Beatles themselves made two such records prior to *Pepper’s*. How is, then, it that The Beatles “invented the album” with *Sgt. Pepper’s*, as George suggests? *Rubber Soul* and *Revolver* (the two previous Beatles albums) featured songs that were also meant to played together and appear in each other’s contexts.

As George Melly, a musician, writer, and critic of music and art, posits:

Up until [*Rubber Soul* (1965)], the British pop LP had been of little interest, a string of single hits with a few ‘standards’ added for good measure. The Beatles set about altering that. They not only composed and performed more experimental pieces on their long-playing records but also, whether consciously or not, they gave the impression of working towards the creation of an internal unity or at any rate a musical and and emotional balance. [...] While the ‘happy little rockers’ were perhaps losing their grips on their single releases, The Beatles, as mature and conscious artists, were maturing on LP. (83-84)

What separated *Sgt. Pepper’s* from its predecessors, then, was not its musical make-up and ordering, as George assumes. Such ordering and structure pre-dates The Lonely Hearts Club Band’s introduction. The only discernible difference is the emphasis on concept and relationality. *Sgt. Pepper’s* broke from the two preceding Beatles records not in its musical structure but in its beyond-musical harnessing of the medium their recorded music was

subject to. This was a relational effort, as can be seen with the insert, imagery, and overall concept behind the album.

Like I mentioned above, only months before this release The Beatles had decided that they were from then on to be only a studio band, newly hidden from the public eye that loved them and followed them so completely for years prior. Their first album after this point, *Sgt. Pepper's*, was an exploration of how to relate to their fans after this unprecedented move away from the stage. Without the packaging, historical context, and album insert, *Sgt. Pepper's* would have been a very different statement and much less of a statement at that. The “art” of *Sgt. Pepper's* was not so much musical artistry as it was social artistry and the navigation of a fresh relationship The Beatles were trying to build. In considering the vinyl with its packaging a socially affective storage device, The Beatles sought to expand their artistic work into commodity production,<sup>12</sup> a realm theretofore untouched by commercial recording artists.

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Pop musicians have since followed in the footsteps of *Sgt. Pepper's* and other albums that have reinvented commercial music's social standards. Punks aggressively pursued authenticity and intimacy in their scale-models of the record industry (often called DIY); 70's stadium rockers produced heavily fetishized album-objects that had photo books, multiple gated folds for panoramic interior covers, and “exclusive” merchandise—like photographs, posters, or reproductions of the loose-leaf paper that lyrics or music were written on; in 1980,

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<sup>12</sup> At this same time The Beatles founded Apple Corps, their Warholian production house/corporation that would subsequently release Beatles-affiliated and other projects under their supervision

Bow Wow Wow released *C30*, *C60*, *C90*, *Go!*. All of these decisions/actions described above can be arguably defined as decisions geared towards the planning of a social architecture for a music to exist within. Such a social architecture is an art form arguably as compelling for the anthropologist as it is for the art historian or musicologist because these albums, as art, are experiments in community, communication, and culture-creation. Recorded music is, quite simply, these objects' content. The development of the album over the later 20th century can again be seen as a development and repeated experimental engagement with musical media and thus in relating consumers to recorded musical sound.

# C H A P T E R   I I I :

## *Presenting the Representative: Planning my own Release*

Throughout this paper, I have pointed to the distinction between content and package in commercial recorded music in order to focus on its packaging—in many of its variant forms. This chapter will continue that larger exploration through a provisional exercise in imagining different mediations—or packagings—of an album I made while writing this project. My album is an essential part of this exploration overall, and in addition to exploring media, this chapter also seeks to bridge the conceptual work the reader has read so far with the conceptual work of the album to be discussed below.



My album features twelve songs that I wrote, performed, recorded, mixed, and produced. From the very beginning of this project I considered this record and my writing closely tied: the record-making being a hands-on study of what I theorize and explore within my writing.

For this third chapter, I will explore three routes of mediating this record. I hope each of these planned mediations will clearly take into consideration the particular affects of their storage and reception, with my work in the previous two chapters in mind. I will pitch here a vinyl release, a stream-only release, and, finally, a ‘flexidisc’ release. None of these are yet actualized, and they may never be. The goal of this chapter is to encourage the reader to imagine how my album would make relational sense of itself across very different platforms.

To do this is to place myself in the position of both music-maker and record-maker. My practice is equally both of those things. In conducting this exercise, I am implicitly acknowledging that a significant part of the ‘message is in the medium’ when it comes to recorded music release (c.f. McLuhan, 2015). These exercises are an effort to synthesize my music with its packaging in three provisional scenarios. In taking its medium seriously, I hope this project will contribute to the tradition of multidisciplinary approaches to recorded music-making, like those discussed in Chapter Two.

Of course, I cannot totally predict the particularities of my record’s consumption. This could be read as a minor critique of McLuhan’s claim that the medium *is* the message. Despite the many consistencies observed in recorded-music-listening throughout the conducting of my field work, people do not consume music, or anything, uniformly. For that reason the work within this chapter speaks to more general design features and the provisional affectivity of

these features. There is not a simple cause and effect relationship between secondary functionality and the kind of agency-forming imagination that Baudrillard and Appadurai outline. There is, nonetheless, some kind of relation between imagination and said functionality that is certainly worth exploring.

While this project, in large part, considers the medium as message, it does not aim to devalue a record's contents as a meaningful part. Rather, it aims to shine a needed light on the affect of packaging, which is an integral part to the recorded music commodity. The understanding pursued throughout my research is an augmented one of recorded music, not an alternative one. To do this, I will first introduce the reader to the contents of my album so that the bridging of media and contents can actually be understood. After that, I will explore three different mediations as impactful contextualizations for the music I made.

### *Part I: 'Spectaclist' As An Album About Itself: Content and its Relay*

I wrote, performed, recorded, engineered, produced, and mastered a record for this project. It is not a concept record, but does include somewhat consistent themes and characters. In large part, it was inspired by a collaborative art installation and a book, namely *Easternsports* (2014) by Jayson Musson and Alex Da Corte, and *The Society of the Spectacle* (1967) by Guy Debord. Both of these sources are not traditional academic ones. Debord writes a impassioned manifesto and *Easternsports* is an art project.

It is with these sources in mind that I came to name my album *Spectaclist*.

The word "spectaclist" is taken from Debord's text and my interpretation of it is understood in the context of Da Corte and Musson's work, whose project I will discuss below.

“Spectaclist” signifies a kind of inevitability of being within what Debord terms “the spectacle.” Debord states,

In societies where modern conditions of production prevail, all of life presents itself as an immense accumulation of *spectacles*. Everything that was directly lived has moved away into a representation. [...] The spectacle in general, as the concrete inversion of life, is the autonomous movement of the non-living. [...] The spectacle is not a collection of images, but a social relation among people, mediated by images.<sup>1</sup>

“*Spectaclist*” is the state-of-being within the “spectacle” that Debord describes. It is a profound and vast sociality wrapping-up in and affirming itself. In that it is also tragic, which is what drew me to connect Debord with *Easternsports*. The element of tragedy that I located within Debord’s work was in his describing the spectacle as a kind of autonomy of things and images, much like a materially understood form of fate, as it would operate in a tragic play. It is a condition which makes subjects of its creators.<sup>2</sup>

Commodities subjectify consumers, who *en masse* create commodities through demand and exchange. Being within such a system is a condition of sociality that is mediated through the consumption of images and things. With this considered, my album could not feature plain ‘subjects’ but rather subjects who are responsible-for and complicit-in their own subjectivity. My lyrics, which I include as an appendix to this paper, serve to explore this subjectivity in the characters they describe.

The decision to explore Debord’s work by creating characters that live within the world he describes was inspired by the characters portrayed in *Easternsports*. This piece is a four-channel video installation with installation-specific carpeting, neon signs, glossy polymer

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<sup>1</sup> Debord, 1977, paragraphs 1-4

<sup>2</sup> It is also worth mentioning that Debord had a profound influence on Malcolm McLaren, who proudly waived the flag of Situationism (the movement associated with Debord in which he was central) over his many projects.

folding chairs, and citrus thrown about the floor. Da Corte made the video and installation while Musson wrote the subtitles that make up the bulk of what was within the piece-specific book. I refer to both the book and the piece when I refer to *Easternsports*. The piece, in part, is very loosely based off of the story of Don Quixote. In Da Corte and Musson's update, the Quixote-esque protagonist/narrator explores a vaguely hyper-capitalist world where everything is understood in terms of the perfect commodifiability of pop iconography, a perfection whose ghost is always present but never truly shows itself.

The text portrays a profound faith in this perfection, a belief that I interpret as a kind of hubris. This perfection is sought by the protagonist, whose absurd situation is made repeatedly clear to the viewer by her<sup>3</sup> inability to successfully mold herself in accordance with what she seeks. Her struggle is made evident in her isolation, one that she repeatedly attempts to remedy via the consumption-of and belief-in commodity and image; she employs these things in her making of unfulfillable plans and assertions. The attitude (an often humorous one, it should be noted) with which Musson and Da Corte's project explores this sociality captures a sense of the tragicomic feeling that I seek to create in my own album's characters. This particular tragicomic feeling is evoked in an awareness-of and complicity-with one's subjectivity in a world of commoditized relation. Musson writes:<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> The protagonist is female throughout most of the narrative, and then becomes Don Quixote in the last scene.

<sup>4</sup> Da Corte, Musson, 2014, 162-163

*For now:*

*Your bills are irrefutable truth.*

*Your credit score is irrefutable truth.*

*Capitalism is irrefutable truth.*

*The Party is irrefutable truth, comrade.*

*Our Dear Leader is irrefutable truth.*

*The violence needed to maintain daily operations is irrefutable truth.*

*And the image that masks this violence, is irrefutable truth.*

*This is a place where consumer culture is simply called shopping, and shopping is simply what we do.*

*And please, please, please, don't bring up "The Spectacle" or fucking historical materialism.*

This excerpt displays the awareness, complicity, and total subjectivity of *Easternsports'* protagonist. It is expressly apolitical in its general apathy and attitude. The complexity in the apathy is that it communicates a subjectivity in which the subjects would generally rather be left undisturbed.

In my album there are number of characters whose lives never cross paths but who reference one another in externalized images that they each seek to embody. There is the 'pop-song-singer,' a commodity-person, deity, and unknown, whose image is continually referenced in moments of passing euphoria or struggle. There is 'the man with a pocket knife' who holds his friends hostage by reminding them of what they cannot see. There is a nameless couple who can't understand themselves or each other and seek, repeatedly, to correct one another in referencing something more perfect, located outside of their relationship. In the last song of the album, one of them breaks from their struggles and decides to reject any kind external meaning overall. This results in a new kind of isolation, only substitutive for what had been communicated prior. All of these characters, whose roles together form little to no cohesive narrative, are meant to symbolize a kind of tragicomedy of

self-induced isolation *within* coexistence, materialized in short-lived euphorias with reliable disappointments. On *Spectaclist* there is a group of these individuals, all on lonely, mediated adventures. They frequent the same places, but at just the wrong times.

These characters, quite obviously, paint a bleak picture of their commoditized sociality. They dance around one another but never quite meet—at any moment they could interact but never quite get to saying “hello.” All of this considered, I don't intend for this album to appear as a critique of this sociality, but rather a picture. It is a display and recognition of itself; it does not aspire to ‘transcend’ anything, including its commodity form. In a way, my album has naturally evolved into a project with contents that are hyper-concerned with their mediation, but it stops there. The characters within my album are subjects of mediations, much like the media that will carry my own record. A listener's understanding of them is only accomplished indirectly.

This brings me to the concept behind album's cover art. The development of these images (a front and back) was the result of a collaboration between myself and a photographer and fellow Bard alum, Sam Youkilis. Our collaboration was conducted over email, where I sent him a list of thoughts and relevant quotations regarding what came to mind when I thought of the state-of-being that is *Spectaclist*. Of note, too, is that I did not encourage Sam to listen to the album, and he never asked to hear it. In my email I requested that he strive to represent a relationship between not the contents and consumer but rather between the *producer*, or system of production, and the consumer. This made representing the music of less concern. This representation of a relation is one meant to both exist-within and comment-on the sociality that is mediated by “the spectacle.”

Sam took my request and created the images embedded below. After he sent these to me, we briefly discussed why and how he came up with the images he did. In short, Sam had recently created a tagging system for his hard drive where he could search key terms and pull up any images that he had, at some point prior, tagged with those terms. He searched “spectacle” and “reflection.” These queries pulled a series of vintage advertisements he’d scanned that sold a mysterious drug that prevented eyesight loss over one’s life. These images featured women joyfully using their eyes, often paired with luxury products like the glasses and lipstick pictured below.

In addition to the use of a visual advertisement that sold better eyesight, Sam also sought to create images that portrayed the very act of sight. He did this by digitally altering the images he found and making the subject’s glasses opaque with moss (I will discuss the moss shortly). He wanted an image in which the beholder could see “sight,” which is implicitly a commodification of said sense and required that the field of sight be limited so that it could be seen in its totality.

The subject of the photograph is also a woman, and it resultantly plays into the common practice of the commoditization of the female body in both advertising and in album artwork. When I first emailed Sam I made no request or comment regarding the gender of the cover’s subject, and when I asked him about it later he said it was not necessarily an intentional move. He said it was likely indicative of the large amounts of vintage advertising he had on his hard drive from other projects more explicitly concerned with such retro content. The result, however, is an image that again comments clearly on its own commoditization. The significance of this issue of gender as represented on the cover is, in

large part, unresolved and further speaks to the provisional nature of the exercises that are to follow.

I also specifically requested that he incorporate green moss into whatever image he developed for two reasons: its visual suggestion of a kind of base, amorphous natural thing and as a visual form of dedicating the album to my grandpa who used to take naps on moss beds on family trips to Canada when I was a kid. The sentimental value of the moss is an appended signifier which has little or nothing to do with the idea of spectacle conveyed otherwise.

The album artwork is also the shared start-point of the three mediations I will explore later in this chapter. Album artwork is perhaps the most permanent and still-relevant result of the ‘vinyl effect’ described in Chapter One. A square image is the result of needing to package a circular disc. It has had a stay-power, however, that has left it integral to album-making today. An album, plastic or not, cannot exist without its cover.

The result of our collaboration is an image of a young, retro, woman wearing glasses, clearly admiring something with pleasure. It is a found, black and white image that has been digitally altered and edited to be red-scale and include the bright green moss. Instead of glass occupying the frames of her glasses, the moss is there instead. This prevents the beholder’s ability to see this pictured woman’s eyes. The ‘nature’ (i.e. moss) present in the image is one that prevents direct contact between the viewer and the woman pictured. She cannot see out nor can we see in. She is also happy, which, when contextualized by the digital editing that is rather conspicuous, conveys a creepiness that begs the questions: “why is she so happy?” and “should she be so happy?”





*Spectaclist's* front cover.

This image conveys the kind of interpretation of *Spectaclist* I sought because it portrays an exposing, but closed, gaze, implying both visual contact and isolation. It also delicately positions itself between being critical and complicit with itself, its own state-of-being. In this image there is both a pleased, self-assured individual and, as seen from the outside, a subjectified and trapped consumer.





*Spectaculist's back cover.*

Youkilis also created the back cover of *Spectaculist*. Back covers are a result of the 'vinyl effect' that has not lasted the updates in recorded musical media over the years. For that reason, this image would only appear on a vinyl-record version of *Spectaculist*. In this image the same woman uses her glasses as a mirror as she applies lipstick. Here, one frame is obscured by moss, but the other shows her face, fully functional as mirror. This suggests a

one-way-ness of her gaze and further suggests the kind of isolation implied by the record's front. However, it adds nuance to the idea conveyed on the front where she simply cannot see. The back is a counterpoint to the conveying of the "trapped-ness" of this woman in her subjectivity. On the back, her subjectivity is called into question by her plain ability to both remove her glasses and use them, clearly able to see that they are obscured by that festering green. The back implies an awareness, on her part, of her own subjectivity and nonchalant complicity with it.

Together, these covers are meant to suggest a question that is explored in this album, that being the question of how one should feel about the sociality they are subject-to, especially if they are aware of said subjectivity. Is it something to protest? Is it something to resign-towards and accept? Commoditized sociality goes well beyond recorded-music consumption; it is endemic and fundamental to our everyday. Because my interest in media spawned from my interest in music, I see it fit to explore the affect of these musical media—these storage devices—as a node in something much greater than the particular outputs of "The Culture Industry" (cf. Adorno, 2001). My larger project and the exercises that follow all aim to elucidate one thing: that recorded music's particular sociality goes beyond what it might lyrically and musically reference. Recorded music objects communicate in both their forms and contents.

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Considering that album artwork stems from the vinyl medium, my first provisional exploration of media will be in considering the particular design of a vinyl release of *Spectaculist*. Thereafter, I will explore a stream-only release. To conclude this chapter, I explore

a flexidisc release that aims to synthesize the particular successes of my vinyl and stream-only approaches. Again, the goal of each of these exercises that follow is to navigate the provisional affectivity of my designs and of design in general. With vinyl, I seek to create possible sites of intimacy, possession, and ritual. In the design of the streamed version of *Spectaculist*, I intend to emphasize the feeling in the consumer of having borrowed something that is not their own. With the flexidisc exercise, I hope to bridge these mediations and see if their affectivity can be mixed to create a unique object that sits at the crossroads of virtual and physical recorded music relationality.

### *Part II: It Has To Feel Like a Spectacle: Spectaculist on Vinyl*

With vinyl, three essential qualities resurfaced as integral qualities of the medium throughout my research, namely its function as property, its tactility, and its suggestion of ritual. The term, “vinyl effect,” is one meant to contain these central qualities and understand how they pan out across other media. For that reason, it is fitting to start these sections exploring vinyl even though I have no intention of releasing my music on this medium. Vinyl, in many ways, set the foundation for what can be considered an album. These effects can be seen today both in contemporary interest in packaging as an especially novel site of fan/producer relation and in vinyl’s lasting effects on other media. The ability of other media to conform-to or go beyond vinyl’s essential qualities also directly relate to how one might define a recorded music that they listen to, evidenced by George’s sarcastically confident assertion that an album is “thirty-nine minutes and fifty-five seconds.”

*Spectaculist* on vinyl would be a traditional two-side record with six songs per side. At thirty-six minutes, it is a little shorter-than (but still within range-of) what George suggested an album should be. The back cover will feature a track listing split into “A” and “B” sides. It will also be a traditional sleeve-cover (i.e. one that does not open like a book). This is meant to draw attention to its function as package make it appear as a more traditional vinyl release (many contemporary vinyl releases open like books, which was less common practice when vinyl was the dominant recording medium in the 1960s and ‘70s).

With vinyl and its packaging, tactility is a given. However, in releasing a vinyl today such a given cannot be taken for granted. Different inks, papers, etc. should all be taken into account because a vinyl record in 2017 is a commodity bought for more than the recorded sound it contains. If contents were the only desire, there are many alternatives to vinyl that offer greater mobility of use and a lower cost of acquisition. In other words, contemporary vinyl production is not a response to demands for recorded music, it is a response to demand for *vinyl*. This is a demand for what makes vinyl unique beyond its particular sound-contents, which are always available elsewhere.

*Spectaculist* should feel like a spectacle. I think this could be accomplished through a rubberized matte laminate because it would present the consumer with a tactility that could not be represented on a computer screen, thus emphasizing its presence in space. The rubberized matte laminate would also better compliment the pastiche quality of the images used for the artwork (as opposed to gloss, for example). The interior of the sleeve would be a flat black. The black would create a sense of depth, of contents beyond contents that exist inaccessibly embedded within the record’s packaging.





*Spectaculist*, vinyl design. Front and back views. Complete with its covers, the interior sleeve, and a record coming out of the packaging.

A B	
<i>Launch</i>	<i>Where Do I Go?</i>
<i>Pocket Knife (Time's Up!)</i>	<i>Not Impossible / Damaged Goods</i>
<i>Wear Your Heart On A Sleeve</i>	<i>Optimistic</i>
<i>Parking Lot Polemics</i>	<i>Tell Me I'm So Good At It</i>
<i>Diamond Cutter</i>	<i>With Feeling</i>
<i>The Sense of Humor</i>	<i>Holiday!</i>

There would also be an insert that would feature track and album credits with lyrics. A black ink relief would show this text as plain paper with a black background. This insert would also be printed on a fibrous, white paper with, again, a flat black back-side to match the interior of the outside sleeve. When folded, the back-side would face outwards so as not to distract from the monochrome black within.

Finally, the interior, protective sleeve will feature a collage of personally meaningful imagery. This is intended to be an incompressible accoutrement to the album. The incompressibility is key because of the depth it adds to the consumer's relationship with the product and it takes it beyond identifiable representation. It will also contrast the minimal design of the insert. It is important to emphasize that these images will be *inside* the package but outside the contents, i.e. the record. This will ideally communicate the sense that the music is a making-sense-of the the complexities conveyed across the packaging.

In regards to its functioning as property, particular attention must be paid to a record's display of itself. If *Spectaculist* is to be released on vinyl, it would have to feature some kind of detail inaccessible to other platforms. This would also go hand-in-hand with how this record suggests a ritualized, private, and auratic consumption in its form. I believe that the multiple sites of imagery (cover, back cover, insert, interior sleeve) would provide the purchaser with a commodity distinct from how it would appear elsewhere, likely in virtual form (anywhere else it would only bear the front cover as sole visual descriptor).

The affect of the layered materiality in this package design would fit *Spectaculist* into the mold of typical choreographies surrounding vinyl consumption. A single, two-sided record, multiple sleeves that contain visual information, and an insert that details the making-

of and lyrical contents should altogether suggest to the listener that all these quiet (i.e. visual and textual) things be consumed along with the recorded sound. They mediate a relationship between the producer and consumer immediately following the act of exchange. The record is personalized when the shrink-wrap is torn off and the more personal and incomprehensible interior design is revealed.

Buying *Spectaculist* on vinyl would provide an intimate relationship for the purchaser, one activated by a ritualized, superficially private (in that other, identical copies will be distributed to other, distant consumers), and auratic consumption. Its many faces provide many blank slates on which imagery can, and often must, be provided. Images ‘must’ be provided because the surfaces pre-exist them. It is hard to imagine a vinyl record with a blank cover. The necessity of images in a physical release set up the base of what defines an album beyond recorded musical sound for generations of media-consumers to come.

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The vinyl record fell out of wide use by the early 1990s. Like I mention above, it did eventually make a comeback, and such a comeback was not a demand for music but was rather one for *vinyl*. Vinyl exists today as an alternative, or supplement, to the virtual two-dimensionality of contemporary recorded music storage. This only emphasizes the importance of an elaborate package design, that being what the purchaser is asking for.

The question of why vinyl has made this comeback, however, illuminates not only the particular qualities of the vinyl medium, but therein also illuminates its new counterparts’ qualities. The immateriality of a virtual release suggests less and less actual ownership as its existence has evolved from ‘iTunes store’ and piracy models to the ‘lending’ models based



around monthly payments and memberships in streaming communities and services. The resurgence of vinyl confirms the absence of particular feelings surrounding the consumption of physical recorded music. These absences in new media are of great interest in their own right in that they can alternatively suggest new forms of relation that are opposed to the assumptions of deficiency within post-vinyl recorded music.<sup>5</sup>

### *Part III: The Sensation of Having Borrowed Something: A Stream-Only Release*

If *Spectaculist* were to be distributed in a stream-only model, I think it would be imperative that it display its capacity for implying a sense of borrowing on the consumer in its dispersion. Unique to streaming is the fact that every node of the streamed content is less so a content than it is a mini-website. It is such in that it is a query that pulls from a data base and arranges discrete code into something privately consumable, but not actually private. This suggests a complete upheaval of the model/series distinction that Baudrillard outlines in his analysis of mass-reproduced goods, because the consumer is quite literally consuming the “model” in a kind of on-demand broadcast system. However, that is not to say that “the level at which the object is personalized” is no longer present or of consequence. The new kind of relationality for the non-reproduced mass good is one that explores a consumer’s relationship to what is patently not theirs. Kanye West did this by changing the contents of a release after it was out in the world. This brought into focus the authority he had over his record that was theretofore unprecedented. I would like to communicate something similar in the streamed mediation of *Spectaculist*.

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<sup>5</sup> Such assumed deficiencies are a reference to the repeated claim that albums are “dead.”

Today, clicking on a song is not playing something off of one's own private hard drive, it is playing something off of *the content's* hard drive. Because of this, the consumer never obtains, in the traditional sense, the music that they listen to. This, again, is a model of distribution more true-to-form considering the ways in which copyright laws define a consumer's 'ownership' of recorded musical sound. Streaming recorded music does not suggest that the consumer ever owns their content in the first place.

To comment on this sense of borrowing, *Spectaculist* would have to exist in both a unique (the master) and dispersed state. The coexistence of these states-of-being would emphasize the inferiority of the latter in the shadow of the former. There would have to be the source and then its channels of dispersion. However, many streaming platforms allow for the building of individual consumer's libraries (a major exception being Spotify). *Spectaculist* would have to combat this feature as it would have to display in its dispersion that it is not owned by its consumers, no matter the platforms across which it is distributed. This would be accomplished by manipulating the album's artwork in an automated fashion.

The artwork, as I mentioned above, is a digital altering of a black and white image. This altering makes the black pixels red, and in that act of altering it makes the manipulability of this image particularly evident. In order to destabilize a consumer's feeling of properly owning *Spectaculist*, I would like to set up its distribution so that each IP address that queries the content should receive a unique album artwork to go along with their query. Each variant of the album artwork would also remain consistent per every device the music is consumed on. This would be done by storing the IP address of the initial request and then pairing that

address with a particular iteration of the image. This program would also prevent the automated creation of any red version of the album cover that approximates the original.

The unique artwork would also be printed with a unique numerical code. Each code would begin with the digits “789,” which represent “unclassified” music in the Dewey Decimal System.<sup>6</sup> Using this particular system is meant to reference library loaning systems where things are routinely borrowed and returned, but never properly acquired. This visual interference with the cover will be especially registered by consumers because all official presentations of the album’s artwork, including online reviews, official social media, my artist’s website, its appearance when initially searched, etc. will feature the ‘unaltered’ red version of *Spectaculist’s* cover.

The stream-only rendition of *Spectaculist* would, in the end, better communicate its medium by playing with the precedent of album artwork in commercially recorded music. This is a play with the ‘vinyl effect.’ Effectively, the stream-only version of this project would make itself known in emphasizing what it is not and cannot be: private property.

Naturally, all this work could be ignored by a consumer. Like I said when I started off this chapter: not all people consume in like ways. This is the nature of mass mediation and its affect: the effects should only be understood on a spectrum. With this in mind, the final provisional exercise in exploring mediations for my album will be of an unusual mediation. I do this because, in choosing an unusual mediation, there are no habits-of-the-masses to

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<sup>6</sup> The Dewey Decimal System is a proprietary library classification system, used to organize books in terms of subject matter. The 700s are arts and entertainment, the 780s are various forms of music.

navigate in terms of the particularities of individuals' consumption patterns. Providing an unknown is asking for a clean slate.



**This Month**

**Spectraclist**  
tesh  
Unknown Genre • 2017

12 songs [Shuffle](#)

Track Number	Track Name	Duration
1	Launch	1:28
2	Pocket Knife (Time's Up!)	5:02
3	Wear Your Heart on a Sleeve	2:24
4	Parking Lot Polemics	4:00
5	Diamond Cutter	2:28
6	The Sense of Humor	3:27
7	Where Would I Go? (Feat. Jack)	3:55
8	Not Impossible / Damaged Goods	3:21
9	Optimistic	1:20
10	Laundry Eyes (Tell Me I'm so Good at it)	2:39
11	With Feeling	1:43
12	Holiday!	4:01

12 items, 36 minutes, 231.3 MB

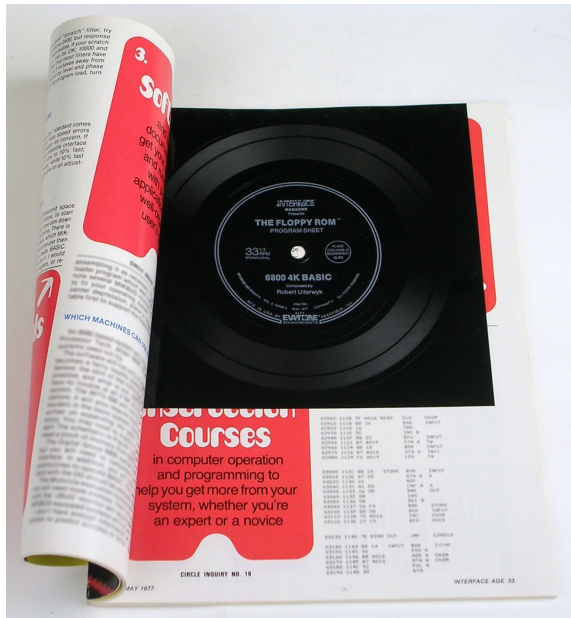
*Spectraclist*, as it would appear as a streamed album. Also shown in the context of Apple Music's "library" window.

#### *Part IV: A Disposable Impression: The Flexidisc*

Flexidisc is not a standard avenue of distribution, especially not today. It is a thin, often transparent, engraved record pressed onto a flexible piece of vinyl plastic. It is a low-resolution storage device, and has an extremely short lifespan: it lasts maybe 10 plays before the character of the recording is near completely degraded. It was originally used by record labels to make singles widely and freely available as inserts in magazines where they could be torn out and put on a record player. However, once the consumer would go through her/his few free listens, she/he would have to go and formally buy the music on a more traditional and pricey medium if they wanted to keep hearing it.

I find this medium compelling because it is a physical medium that walks the walk of both physical and digital media. It exists in space, requires traditional, material packaging, yet it is fleeting, qualitatively un-owned, and demands attention beyond the initial act of acquisition.

*Spectaculist* on flexidisc would not appear in a magazine, but instead online as a kind of “deluxe” version of the LP. It would coexist with a streamed version and a downloadable version available on different websites and services. Since flexidiscs are seven-inch squares, the packaging would be, in large part, a scaled down version of the vinyl packaging described earlier. However, there would be no insert or interior protective sleeve, and the back cover would not feature a track listing. The disc itself would feature only the first track of the album, “Launch,” and the face of the disc would be printed with a hand-stamped, unique download-code. The downloaded version of the album would lack the track that was pressed to the flexi.



Flexidisc as it would appear in a magazine and on a record player. Images not my own. Both left and right images taken from: <http://www.vinylmeplease.com/>

Without that first track, the purchaser's full version of the album would permanently reference its source: the physical medium from which it spawned but which also no longer exists, due to its short lifespan. It is also interesting to provide a physical medium that destroys itself in that it de-fetishizes the physical commodity form in heightening its own cheapness and secondary status to what it contains. The affect of flexidisc is one that communicates the possession of an appendage of a thing beyond *the* thing.

In being this kind of appendage, flexidisc, like I said, is de-fetishized. However, it is also hyper-present as a medium in that it presents itself as such. Historically, this medium is also one that was characteristically not desired, it was given-out. Desire is key to the fetishization of commodities in their exchange. In its self-presentation as a medium (and in that being less-so the actually desired thing) the flexidisc makes apparent its not-thingness. It does this to a greater extent than the other media explored, and such medium-transparency is likely why the medium did not last: it was too difficult to embed into the everyday, base sociality that vinyl and streaming so seamlessly exist within. It presents itself as *a* thing, not *the* thing.

I believe that the same technology used to make flexidiscs is the one used to carve recordings into the backs of cereal boxes that Todd and Rachel describe in Chapter One. Their narratives surrounding this medium heightened my interest in flexidiscs' ability to mediate a unique kind of relationship in their own right. That as a medium—in all its cheapness and pliability—illuminated the desire for other, commoditized and superior media. The intimacy of Todd and Rachel's narration is one that shows the cheap medium they remember as a kind of primordial medium, one that launched them into a practice of consumerism that is at once genuinely expressive and subjectifying. The flexidisc is, in many ways, a mere advertisement for something outside itself. In that, it can spark a relationship to less transparent media that, comparatively, appear to be the real deal.

\* \* \*

This chapter has hopefully demonstrated that with one content, namely my album *Spectaculist*, various media can have profound effects on the ultimate affect of each “album” as it would appear in final form. The experiences that each medium foster can have transformative effects on the contents they represent. This highlights the fact that, while the recorded music contents are significant, so are the various media that bring these contents into a social world of exchange. I would also posit, all of this considered, that any analysis of a recorded music, specifically in album form, should require an analysis of its media, considering that ignoring that is quite plainly ignoring a lot.

## C O N C L U S I O N :

Three years after I was sitting in Alex and Mango's room listening to vinyl records, I was sitting in Mango's car, testing out my mix on his notoriously broken car stereo system. Listening to *Spectraclist* on broken speakers, among other sound systems, has been an integral part of the final mixing stages for the music I have been working on this year. With every new mix, I test out the recordings on broken speakers, low fidelity speakers, bluetooth speakers, headphones, and earbuds. Each of these sound systems can have a profound effect on the recordings I've made, and after each listen I often returned to the Bard recording recording studio for fine-tuned adjustments and other edits.

Recording studios are extremely high-fidelity environments that are also highly unusual in the world of recorded-music consumption. It is for that reason that it is common



practice for producers and engineers to do as I did and “take their music outside.” This practice displays an interest in the technologically-caused qualia of media that their mixes will inevitably be subject-to once they pass the production stages. The subjectivity of recorded music to these technological discrepancies is a subjectivity that is rather easy to recognize as recorded-music maker. It is also a topic of conversation that often takes precedence over other things such as composition in the record-making process. In other words, the technicalities of a sound’s reproducibility in various spaces is a defining consideration in the making of a recording.

My project aims to add to that recognition another dimension to consider in recorded-music-making. Namely, this is the contextually-caused qualia of distributional media that simultaneously represent, advertise, and contain recorded musics. More than “sound” goes into representing sound in the recorded music industry, and this additional representation is social in nature. ‘The level at which the object is personalized,’ again invoking Baudrillard, is also a level at which such personalization can define what is being made personal. Recorded-music-makers must take such an effect into consideration as they make their records.

\* \* \*

This project aimed to distinguish package from content in various recorded-music media paradigms in order to focus-in-on and explore the affectivity of packaging in relation to its contents. Using the writings of art, cultural, and media theorists I sought to first establish this distinction and then illustrate it in three case studies of particularly relevant albums. After establishing and exploring this distinction, I used what I had learned to conduct an exercise in imagining three provisional mediations of my own album, *Spectaculist*.

Perhaps one of the most challenging aspects of this project was deciding what not to include. Often, for the sake of clarity and cohesion, I decided to leave out topics that deserved attention in their own right. This was almost always because of my decision to avoid talking about the particularities of musical sound *per se* in favor of exploring the affectivity of devices that contain recorded musical sound. Another topic that I left unexplored was the phenomenon of many musicians' belief that recorded music can transcend commodity form. This is fascinating in that it highlights a tendency of many musicians to distance their own creative output from productive labor. This phenomenon also illuminates the profundity of recorded music's relation to commodity: despite its being produced explicitly for a life of distribution and exchange, peoples' investments in musical transcendence displays a desire for music to transcend this economically based social condition. If this project were to have a "Part Two," exploring this would be its taking-off point.

To wrap up this project, I include one final thought: that being an exploration of the obstacles encountered in the making-of this project. I include this because, in elucidating these obstacles, I hope to make clear that this project is nowhere near finished and will likely be carried out over years to come in both written and unwritten explorations. It is important to state, however, that while there is an incompleteness to my work, I also feel the discovery of these new directions is a testament to the success of this project. What started as a vague curiosity has unfolded into a new key for navigating my life's work. If this project was completable at all, I do not think I would be nearly as happy as I am with it today.

## Part I: Obstacles

Originally, I wanted to “reverse-engineer” an album, meaning that I would, given the album credits of contemporary pop projects, try and fill the many, often non-musical, roles that go into the production of a record. I intended to fill these roles with fellow students, most of whom declined my request due to their own work loads. This led me to a complete a relatively individual studio project.<sup>1</sup> While the individual nature of my project gave me a creative liberty that was enjoyable, it also meant that my own work was likely less indicative of the studio environment I imagine surrounds the records I thought about as I wrote this project. For example, two recent releases make clear the collaborative nature of studios that I failed to come even close to recreating. These were Kanye West’s *The Life of Pablo* and Beyoncé’s *Lemonade*. Both, conveniently, were released with album-credits of extraordinary detail. *Pablo* was written by 106 people, *Lemonade* was the result of sixty-one songwriters’ work. These figures do not even mention the producers, engineers, and many others integral to an album’s production.

Since my project ended up being so relatively individual, I decided for that reason (among others) that it was not a fair ethnographic experience to tie to the project’s theoretical arch. These artists (as well as the others discussed above, with the exception of Bow Wow Wow) were also working with existing fan-producer relationships—their albums were not introductions but rather markers in existing social worlds. *Spectaculist* stands apart from these

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<sup>1</sup> I was, however, able to outsource album artwork, hear the critiques of a wide array of different ears, and work in a typical studio environment under the invaluable supervision of a number of dedicated Bard faculty. See album credits for a full list of contributors.

in that it has no relationship with any fans to take as a jumping-off point. To highlight this positionality: I am an unpopular pop music-maker trying to make a statement about pop.

I also spent a long time figuring out exactly what this project was, and because of that I was only able to have clear questions for my interviewees in the later stages of my work. Resultantly, I have fewer useful transcriptions than I would have otherwise liked to have and my project was basically written in four months, not twelve. It is also the nature of the music industry, as an industry, to be constantly changing and outputting its product. Given another month, this whole project could have changed again. This brings me to my last point.

The kind of 'album' I became most concerned with over the course of this project was the contemporary album, the 'Album of 2017.' Streaming music has fundamentally altered the ways in which consumers listen to music, and we are barely starting to see the effects of this new medium. My exploration of Kanye West's *The Life of Pablo* (2016) in Chapter Two is where this concern truly comes to the forefront. It is, naturally, too soon to truly register and understand the impact of this release (and others like it) and in that the success of the affectivity suggested or registered in its mediation. I expect that new and creative ways of mediating other, newer, particular musics in the streaming paradigm will arise in the coming years, ones that I cannot guess to now nor surely place within the frame of my own research as it stands.

Overall, the issues and challenges in this project, both those overcome and not, have made themselves especially clear only in the last four months of this year-long endeavor. Any project, so it goes, could be made better with an extra month; ethnographic ones with an extra year. Having to wrap it up, though, has also brought to the forefront significant findings I

might have missed otherwise—ones that have become increasingly central to my overall project throughout the editing process.

# G L O S S A R Y

Absolute Music: The kind of music not explicitly about anything, non-representational, devoid of social context and influence, impossible from an anthropological viewpoint. Derived from high Western ideals around music. In the scope of this paper the term will hardly be used, but is a useful as an antipode to the musical ideals of the industry/community I focus on. Imagery, marketing, and even lyrics alone disqualify music from being considered “absolute.”

Albums-as-Art (thing): As understood as a specific kind of recorded release. The first examples of this came in the late sixties (*Pet Sounds*, *Sgt. Peppers*, *Freak Out!*) but can be seen developing from an earlier point.<sup>1</sup> Albums-as-Art are albums where artists control, completely or to a great extent, the means of production beyond composition, including, but not limited to: recording/engineering, distribution, marketing, merchandising, publicity, and PR. The control of these extra-musical elements is used by these artists to have greater control over the whole of the project, and an album-as-art reflects aesthetically informed employment of the extramusical elements listed above.

Album-as-Art (idea): The idea of albums held in a particularly high esteem by the recorded-music-listening public. Also the belief that albums *can* be art and should be treated with some kind of auratic respect as such. The idea of albums-as-art can also be a high tier of rock journalism’s value system. Finally, “albums-as-art,” the idea, can be a marketing device for certain albums, i.e. reference to such albums as “a piece of art,” often validated by critical approval as such.

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<sup>1</sup>The Lomax’s edited volumes of folk music, meant to serve as indexical social documents of American authenticity and heritage might be the first example of albums being seen as opportunities/media across which “complete statements” could be made (the Lomaxes would go as far as re-writing their performer’s lyrics, re-working their dress, and manipulating their images in numerable other ways in order to match the social imaginary of “authentic” music. [Benjamin Filene, *Our Singing Country: John and Alan Lomax, Leadbelly, and the Construction of an American Past*])

Album-making: The multi-faceted process of producing a commercial record release. The term is meant to be separate from, but in dialogue with, the composing of popular music for a commercial LP release. Album-making includes not only composition, but recording/engineering/mastering, the choice of media platforms (streaming, tape, vinyl, CD, video), distribution, merchandising, touring (in some cases), photography, industrial design, etc. The term is meant to include all efforts on part of the artists and their cohorts to have complete aesthetic control over their projects. Many of the elements of album-making listed above, when not in the artists' control, can have huge impact on the project over all, and can often decontextualize music in ways the artists never intended.

Art-Rock: A kind of rock music that functions as an avant-garde to rock music. Seeks to elevate rock music from mere pop to an artistic statement, employing experimental, modernist, or other unconventional means to do so. Sometimes limited to small number of groups, the term is meant here to include basically any music groups who demand to be considered "artists." For the scope of my project, I am only interested in this conflation of 'art' and recorded music for how it implies a kind of appendage to music.

Artist: Often the main name featured on a record, can be a band, individual, or a combination of the two. The artist does not necessarily write the music. Sometimes the artist might not even perform the music. The artist is the marketed face behind the music, and can play no role or many roles in the record production process. The only consistency here among all such recording "artists" is the functioning of artist as relational focus for the consumer.

Avant-Pop: A kind of avant-garde music that does not deny melodic or rhythmic catchiness but nonetheless aspires to weld more creative elements into the design of the music. Many art-rockers have been included under the umbrella of avant-pop (Grimstad, 2007, accessed online).

Album-makers: Those who engage in one or more of the many roles involved in the practice of album-making.

Composer: The individual who writes the music. Many commercial songs have a "team" of writers. The writer is not necessarily the artist, and might be completely unknown to the average listener.

Concept Album: An album expressing a consistent theme or idea across its songs and extramusical supplement. Can involve narrative and theatrics, and spawns from itself rock-operas and other cohesive album-forms.

Engineer: The individual responsible for the technical aspects of record making. Often has numerous employees that work under the head engineer who are also called engineers, or technical assistants. Their role is to accomplish the desired sound within the limitations of what contemporary technologies offer. Tasks include mic placement, mixing, choosing of different effects/processors, employment of psychoacoustic principles, etc. Today, these roles are less commonly played out to the extent they were when analogue technologies were in vogue.

Extramusical: Everything that is beyond the existence of music in the performed form. Music is largely limited to the confines of time and space, and extra-musical elements aim to expand and breach these confines. The 'extra-musical' includes sheet music, album covers, music

videos, recordings, the socio-economics of concert-hall seating, etc. The “extra-musical” can include activities surrounding music as well, such as those introduced by Christopher Small in his book *Musicking*.

Manager: One who ‘runs’ (in the sense of “running” a business) a recorded-musical act. As can be seen in the work of Malcolm McLaren or Brian Epstein, an artist’s manager can be of great consequence to the relational and musical outputs of an artist.

Pop-Art: An art movement of the 1960s that introduced commercial imagery into the world of high art. Typical media included collage, print-making, record and film production, and event hosting. Key artists include Eduardo Paolozzi and Andy Warhol. Works of the movement often worked with kitsch and employed an element of irony in said workings.

Producer: The individual who directs the record-making process. Can co-write music, engineer, alter instrumentation, or even simply be a spiritual guide. Many bands self-produce or have long-time relationships with producers, while others might have different producers on different albums, or even on different tracks per album. The role of producer is highly fluid and is forever up to interpretation. In contemporary hip-hop and pop music, “producer” can mean the individual who made a track that a vocalist performs over.





# A L B U M   C R E D I T S

## S P E C T A C L I S T

*"It's not really anyone's choice"*  
*An album by Tom Moore (tesh)*  
*Spring/Summer, 2017*  
*DPI MUSIC*

*Engineered/mixed/produced by Tom Moore*  
*with the help of Tom Mark, Peter McCormack, and Matt Sargent*

*Recorded in Annandale, Tivoli, New York, and Chicago*  
*Feb. 2016 - Apr. 2017*

*Artwork by Sam Youkilis*

*Mastered by Tom Moore*  
*with the help of Matt Sargent and Tom Mark*

*Thanks to:*  
*Paris, Peter, Tom, Dylan, Avery, Johnny,*  
*SMOG, EUGENE, BUMP, DPI,*  
*and Bard.*

## LAUNCH

Tom Moore - Software  
Music by Tom Moore  
Produced and engineered by Tom Moore  
Published by DPI Music

## POCKET KNIFE (TIME'S UP!)

Tom Moore - Guitar, vocals, Korg MS20, Software  
Dylan Greene - Percussion  
Peter McCormack - Software  
Words and music by Tom Moore  
Produced and engineered by Tom Moore  
Co-Produced with Peter McCormack, Dylan Greene, Paris McGarry, and Izzy Leung  
For Grady  
Published by DPI Music

*Some time last year we thought we'd go that way  
But there's a man with a pocket knife  
Oh, convincing, it's just too late*

*There are people in theaters  
Promised the silver screen  
Don't you misbehave there  
Where you're surrounded by light*

*There's a man with a pocket knife*

*There's always something somewhere*

*But I  
Don't think of  
This  
Other thing  
That you do  
No,  
I don't*

## WEAR YOUR HEART ON A SLEEVE

Tom Moore - Vocals, software, claps  
Dylan Greene - Percussion, claps, vibraphone, piano  
Peter McCormack - Software  
Words and music by Tom Moore  
Vibraphone, claps, and outro co-written by Dylan Greene  
Produced and Engineered by Tom Moore  
Engineering assisted by Matt Sargent  
For Paris  
Published by DPI Music

*This mess that hangs loosely from my shoulders  
It's a civil war of our memories' decisions to mean different meanings, yeah  
I contort  
But is this some kind of romancing  
That I haven't seen before  
Before...  
Before...*

*I think I'll lay down here  
At risk of warmth and comfort  
Resign and turn myself in  
Or make another effort?*

## **P A R K I N G   L O T   P O L E M I C S**

Tom Moore - Vocals, OP1, sample manipulation, piano,  
Dylan Greene - Temple bowls, house keys, miscellaneous ringing percussive objects  
Peter McCormack - Volca Sample, Kaleidolooper, Volca Kick, OP1, Moog Mother 32, Korg MS20, Homemade synthesizer  
Chris Beroes-Haigis - Cello  
Words by Tom Moore  
Music by Tom Moore with Peter McCormack and Dylan Greene  
Produced and engineered by Tom Moore  
Published by DPI Music

*Something's happened  
I'm not where I've been before  
It sees me sitting  
Forceless spine curving towards  
An open passage  
Of shapeable light*

*Forming stories  
Which enjoy being told  
To formless people  
Who don't seek guidance anymore*

## **D I A M O N D   C U T T E R**

Tom Moore - Vocals, software, sample manipulation, homemade guitar string ondes martenot  
Peter McCormack - Software  
Words and music by Tom Moore  
Produced and engineered by Tom Moore  
Co-produced by Peter McCormack and Paris McGarry  
Published by DPI Music

*Step outside  
Just for a minute, friend  
Hear me out—it's been tough  
And here's what I've got down*

*She says "stop—  
I can see you like a diamond cutter  
You're rough around the edges*

*Unorganized  
With running thoughts  
There are three steps to solve this..."*

*(1)  
I need to know how to say it—  
If I can't...  
I'll take a diagnosis I'll only half understand  
I want to speak your language*

*(2)  
I'll think of pop song singers  
Oh, they live to sing about it  
They will even dance for me!  
They make maps of our problems*

*(3)  
Once I have taste  
I'll make my friends  
  
Among like-minded company  
I won't stand out  
(Stand out)  
(I'll be solved!)  
I'll be solved!  
I won't stand out  
I'll be solved!  
Ooooooooooooo solved...  
I won't stand out  
I won't stand out...*

## *T H E   S E N S E   O F   H U M O R*

Tom Moore - Volca sample, guitar, vocals, OP1, software  
Peter McCormack - Korg MS20  
Words and music by Tom Moore  
Produced and engineered by Tom Moore  
Published by DPI Music

*Point me in the right direction  
Take a sip, take a hit*

*But  
There's  
Something  
Else...*

*A quick history of me in one thing  
Trynna get a story made out of me  
I could actually use that*

*All my efforts end in purchasing  
Another hat, another part of me  
I could actually use that*

*We were talking in code—still  
About opening up*

*This is how nothing happens  
This is how nothing happens*

*We tell the truth, yeah?*

*(Nothing happens)*

*What I don't mind is  
A little bit of story-telling  
Telling things as they are  
Is quietly staring  
At the same scene unable  
To express relation*

*About opening up*

## **WHERE DO I GO? (Side B)**

Tom Moore - Software, vocals, OP1, Volca Sample  
Jack Whitescarver - Vocals  
Peter McCormack - Software  
Words and music by Tom Moore  
Whitescarver wrote his own (words)  
Produced and engineered by Tom Moore  
Co-produced by Paris McGarry  
Published by DPI music

*Stories stop  
It's not mysterious  
John is on his way home*

*He passes his old school  
But there's no magic as he'd expected*

*There're just bricks and windows  
A lawn too easy to see across*

*The traffic, the traffic  
The traffic and the firefighters*

*It's not mysterious  
There's not a story here*

*There's not a story here*

*(Where do I go?)*

*The traffic  
The traffic and the firefighters...*

*Firefighters*

*(Where do I go?)*

*(It's a sign)*

*(You're do or die)*

*(Where do I go?)*

*NOT IMPOSSIBLE / DAMAGED GOODS*

Tom Moore - Piano, sample manipulation, vocals, volca sample, software

Peter McCormack - Software

Words and music by Tom Moore

Produced and engineered by Tom Moore

Published by DPI Music

*Your soul mate is wrapped up in too much description  
But you want a friend?  
With with whom you'd stand against the world?  
That kind of person...  
Who would philosophize your disgrace*

*But it doesn't really work like that  
No it doesn't really work like that*

*Let's be cool  
And think of one another, now  
Let's be civilized  
And reflect on our own positions*

*(It's not impossible)*

*It's not impossible  
It's not impossible  
It's not impossible*

*You've been tangled in your words some time  
(Your disgrace)*

*You've been tangled in your words some time  
Working on my english—  
Working on my... english*

*You've been tangled in your words sometime  
(Your disgrace)*

*(It's not impossible)*

*Here, I'm alone*

*With everything all of the time*

*(It's not impossible)*

*You've been tangled in your words  
some time*

*(It's not impossible)*

*Here, I'm alone*

*(ahhhh)*

*With everything all of the time*

*I, think of pop song singers*

*I, think of pop song singers*

*(It's not impossible)*

*You've been tangled in your words some time*

*Here, I'm alone*

*But I am just a damaged good*

*(Impossible)*

*If I am just a damaged good,*

*You've been tangled*

*You've been tangled in your words some time, now*

## *O P T I M I S T I C*

Tom Moore - Piano, vocals, sample manipulation, drums, software  
Dylan Greene appears for one second playing kit  
Words and music by Tom Moore  
Produced and engineered by Tom Moore  
Published by DPI Music

*We're not there yet  
But we're dancing in the living room  
Picking our future like a rug  
We're being careful, but decisive*

*We're being people that we are not*

*This feels optimistic  
While I'm sitting in the corner  
Pulling hangnails  
How could we have missed it?  
Rigged doors with school alarms*

*They don't stop ringing 'til we call ourselves in...*

*I might be living in a fantasy  
With the most beautiful woman!  
Together, we dress humbly  
To prove our comfort with cool*

*Come with me!  
Won't we go out tonight?*

*This place we've built together—  
I could die here  
Which is to say that really love it!*

*That I really love it!  
That I really love it!*

## *T E L L M E I ' M S O G O O D A T I T*

Tom Moore - OP1, volca sample, vocals, software  
Words and music by Tom Moore  
Produced and engineered by Tom Moore  
Co-produced by Peter McCormack  
For Lily and Jack  
Published by DPI Music

*Stories I have written  
Feelings not yet had*

*You see,  
I had a plan for this...*

*Washing machine windows*



*Works in progress*

*To be a pop song singer  
And be unknown*

*Tell me I'm not good enough  
Tell me this could work*

## **W I T H F E E L I N G**

Tom Moore - Volca sample, Vocals, Kaleidolooper, sample manipulation  
Words and music by Tom Moore  
Produced and engineered by Tom Moore  
Published by DPI Music

*I don't know  
How to make this*

*What's the recipe?  
For contentment*

*What's your number?  
What's your number?  
...Your name?*

## **H O L I D A Y**

Tom Moore - Vocals, OP1, software, piano, sample manipulation  
Dylan Greene - Percussion  
Words and music by Tom Moore  
Produced and engineered by Tom Moore  
Co-engineered with Matt Sargent  
For my enemies  
Published by DPI Music

*It's so easy to say you're sorry  
But it won't go away  
(No, no, no, ah!)  
I don't wanna hear what you have to say*

*I don't, I don't  
There's a dream I have—*

*Where you go somewhere  
So far away  
I stay right here  
For a holiday  
Like I'm sixteen  
Spring break at home  
I'm all right*

*You've the really good friends that don't know you  
Don't you get too proud  
What am I singing about?*

*It's just a melody!  
IT DOESN'T MEAN A THING!  
It's here to make the song better!*

*I'm not even thinking about where it goes  
Now I am!  
Yes, it's spring, it's spring in  
TEN DAYS!*

*The clocks, speed them up...  
The clocks, speed them up!*

*There's a dream I have—*

*Where you go somewhere  
So far away  
I stay right here  
For a holiday  
Like I'm sixteen  
Spring break at home  
I'm all right*

*I find it easy  
To think of other ways this could have turned out  
But coded messages and polite displays  
It's too much, it's just too much to— stop now*



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