



Dragon Dance: A Japanese jazz kissa-inspired listening experience in the heart of East Belfast.

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Riffs

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Experimental writing on
popular music

Volume 6
Issue 2



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Riffs

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Riffs

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Popular Music Materialities

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Riffs

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Iain Taylor

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Iain Taylor

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EDITORIAL

Iain A. Taylor

VOL 6 ISSUE 2

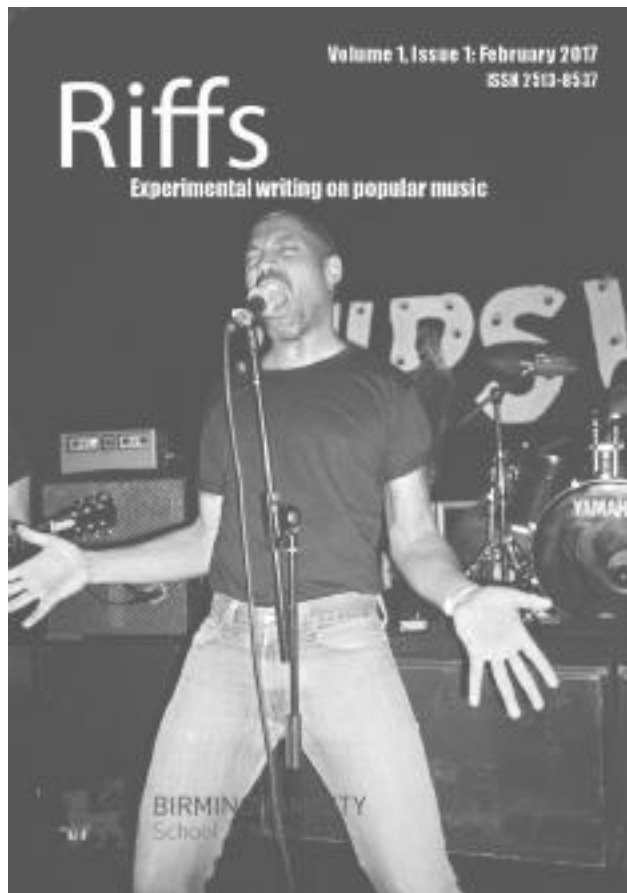
What we had thought to be an object was revealed as what I would call a *thing*. And the thing about things, if you will, is that far from standing before us as a *fait accompli*, complete in itself, each is a 'going on'—or better, a place where several goings on become entwined.' (Ingold, 2010: 96)

'Repelled by commerce and commodities, the romantics became wary of *things* in general. Repelled by what we have come to call materialism, they lashed out at materialist science, at the analysis of the lived world into objects and more objects. Music seemed to resist that analysis.' (Eisenberg, 2005: 12)

When we started creating *Riffs* in 2016, there wasn't any question in our minds that the journal should exist as a physical *thing*, as well as an online, open-source publication. Thinking back on it now, I'm not sure that there was even much of a discussion about whether we'd print it. It just seemed obvious to us – a foregone conclusion, or as Ingold might put it, a *fait accompli*. In spite of the fact that we, as postgraduate students studying and working at the Birmingham Centre for Media and Cultural Research (BCMCR), had most likely not accessed a single physical journal over the course of our studies, a physical journal was always a significant part of our collective vision. Regardless of the advanced (and ever advancing) digitalisation of music, culture, and indeed academia, it just *felt* important somehow that this thing that we were creating needed to exist outside of the digital intangibility that we had become accustomed to, and be given form and matter in the corporeal world. Maguadda (2011: 16) notes that the digitalisation of music and culture, perhaps paradoxically, might be seen as a 'process in which the reconfiguration of the relationship between materiality and culture leads to a renewed role played by material objects in people's life and activities' (Maguadda 2011: 16). A such, our approach to the development of *Riffs*, to my mind at least, might be seen as an outcome of such reconfigurations – a refocusing on the material meanings of things in *relation to* (as opposed to in opposition to) their digital counterparts.

And so, in February 2017, the inaugural edition of *Riffs: Experimental Writing on Popular Music* was launched, with physical copies going into physical hands at our physical launch event in Birmingham City University's Parkside building. *Riffs* had become a *thing*. And, as Ingold reminds us in the above quote, the thing about *things* is that they are best understood as 'goings-on', or better 'a place where several goings on become entwined' (2010: 96).





Riffs: Experimental Writing on Popular Music,
Volume 1, Issue 1. Published February 2017

The framing of *Riffs* as a 'place where several goings on become entwined' is an apt one. Across the journal's existence, its materiality has been a core (if generally unexamined) aspect of the *Riffs* project. Inspired by DIY arts and activist practices, we set up 'zine-making workshops, working with festival attendees, conference goers and students alike to materialise their musical ideas, experiences and ambitions in the form of short-run printed fanzines. The first such activity, a 'zine-in-a-day workshop at *Surge in Spring II* festival in 2016, prompted a whole host of 'zine-making activities and events. From the special risographed 'zine edition of the journal drawn from the work of attendees of the 2018 *Crosstown Traffic* IASPM conference, to 2019's collaboration with the *Home of Metal* project on the *To Break a Wall* 'zine, which explored heavy metal in Cold War era Eastern Europe, these short-scale projects, aimed at materialising knowledge and experience, became a core part of our practice, and came to shape the form, format, and identity of *Riffs* as a publication, as a team, and as a *thing*. While the journal undeniably exists as (and is, for the most part,

consumed as) an online, digitalised publication, its meaning is also produced and shaped through its materialisation via corporeal practices within physical spaces - forms of 'hybrid arrangements between old and new', each with its own 'dynamic of cross-fertilization' (Bartmanski and Woodward 2015: 165).



Create / Review / Print – A Special IASPM Edition of Riffs. Published September 2018

So, when I was asked to take on editorship of the journal for this special issue, the decision to focus on materiality seemed a similarly forgone conclusion. Coming to the end of a book project on *Media Materialities*, and off the back of a post-doctoral project on *Material Reflections*, as well as a series of publications on the spatial materiality of live music spaces (co-authored with *Riffs* co-managing editor Sarah Raine, and former co-managing editor Craig Hamilton) I found myself starting to suspect that my own thinking on the materiality of music and media was at risk of becoming rigid and solidified – standing still, complete in itself, like Ingold's *fait accompli*. What better way to reinvigorate and activate that sense of curiosity about the material world than by curating a range of new perspectives, and bringing them together in a place where each as a 'going-on' can become newly entwined?

To my delight, the call was met with a torrent of enthusiasm and an abundance of vibrant, innovative and creative takes on the nature of popular music's materiality – so much so, in fact, that rather than choose between them, we've opted for this to be the first of a special double-issue on Popular Music Materialities. As Hoder (2012) notes, the material meanings of things are never fixed or final, as these things themselves are constantly in motion. The contributions that make up this issue first issue are very much representative of the polysemy and flux of materiality as a concept that Hoder describes, and the breadth and plurality of musical materialities which constitute music as a thing in the corporeal world. We open with Philip Arneill's account of communal listening to Japanese jazz in East Belfast, a reflection on the materiality of music listening spaces, recorded music objects, and indeed the spatial-geography of cities as shaping our relationship with musical moments and media. Next, Ian Sinnott reflects upon the material memory of hip-hop, offering an analysis of the ways in which cultural memory is both stored within and objectified by popular music forms and formats. Niccolò Galliano offers us a thoughtful provocation as to the material and musical meanings of a vinyl record without sound in his reflection on the unconventional 2015 reissue of Francisco López's *La Selva* album. Meanwhile, Tyler Sonnichsen explores the psycho-geography of listening in his playlist-accompanied photo essay overlaying Suede's *Singles* atop of a biographic journey around Madrid. Erin Cory and Bo Reimer's ethnography of 'Too Cute to Puke' – a 'strictly female-fronted dance party' based in Malmö, Sweden – outlines the role of vinyl records as boundary objects which materialise the socio-cultural values inherent to the scene's participants. Finally, Yorgos Paschos' contribution considers the materiality of heritage in grassroots venues, reflecting upon the materiality of the venue as a space comes to act as a living archive of popular cultural heritage.

This issue, then, becomes a place where these article as *things*, or goings-on, become usefully and idiosyncratically entwined. It also comes, perhaps serendipitously, at a moment where the editorial team are in the process of reflecting upon the future shape and form of *Riffs*. The decentralisation of the journal from the BCMCR in Birmingham, and the migration of the editorial team to new cities, countries, and careers, brings about material change to the processes and practices through which *Riffs* is produced. Likewise, the resulting emergence of a truly international team located across the UK, Europe, Australasia and North America, coupled with a sensitivity around the impact of the printing and shipping on our carbon footprint, confronts us with the reality that *Riffs*' materiality as a physical printed *thing* is increasingly impractical and incompatible with the internationalised aspirations of the editorial team.

As such, the debates and explorations of the materiality of music and culture contained within this special issue act also as a reflection upon the ongoing changes to the form, format, and materiality of *Riffs*. If you find yourself reading this, and thinking that you might be interested in shaping the materiality of this next phase of *Riffs* as a *thing* then do, please, reach out.

Because the thing about *things* is that they are constantly in motion.

Iain A. Taylor is a Senior Lecturer in Music at University of the West of Scotland, and co-managing editor of *Riffs*. His research is concerned with the changing materialities of music and media forms, formats and spaces. He is co-editor of the forthcoming edited collection *Media Materialities: Form, Format and Ephemeral Meaning*, which will be published by Intellect Books in the autumn of 2023.

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DRAGON DANCE: A JAPANESE *JAZU KISSA*- INSPIRED COMMUNAL LISTENING EXPERIENCE IN THE HEART OF EAST BELFAST

Philip Arneill

Side A

1. Origins

Music cafés existed in Tokyo as far back as the 1920s and were dedicated to the enjoyment of an eclectic range of music styles. [1.] The subsequent evolution of dedicated audio listening spaces, where quiet focused listening is the norm, may not be wholly unique to Japan, but they are by far the most ubiquitous there. The creation of silent spaces for quiet, reflective listening to music in Japan seems fitting: based on my personal experience as a resident of Tokyo from 1997–2017, Japan is a country that is more than comfortable with silence. While many of us fear the dreaded ‘awkward silence’ in social settings, silence plays an important part in effective communication where it has been “institutionalized and where social behaviors have become cultural”. [2.] Although classical music cafés exist, by far the most common of these listening spaces are those dedicated to jazz music, traditionally played on vinyl through high-end audio equipment. Known colloquially as *jazu kissa(ten)* – a vernacular fusion of “the Japanese pronunciation of ‘jazz’ and an abbreviation of the word *kissaten* (喫茶店), which translates literally as ‘tea-drinking shop’” [3.] – these spaces grew hugely in number and popularity throughout Japan in the post-war period, due in part at least to the financial and economic barriers to listening to music in domestic settings. [4.] One key element in achieving the silent, deep listening experience so characteristic of the traditional *jazu kissa* – from the late 1950s to 1970s in particular – was talking bans that were regularly enforced for periods of each day to allow customers to focus solely on the music. Although talking bans have now largely disappeared, except for a few notable exceptions such as Tokyo’s Eagle and the demarcated listening seats in Kobe’s Jam Jam, experiencing what Schwarz calls the “sonorous envelope” of being completely immersed in sound is still a possibility in many *jazu kissa*. [5.]



The focus of this paper is Tokyo Jazz Joints: Belfast, a listening event inspired by the culture of Japanese *jazu kissa* that took place over the course of two hours on 5th December 2021 (Figure 1). The event was hosted by me, Philip Arneill, a Northern Irish photographer and researcher. The inspiration for the event was Tokyo Jazz Joints, an audio-visual project which has documented the unique world of Japanese jazz listening spaces since 2015, which I conceived and co-created with American broadcaster and writer James Catchpole. Designed to create a lasting document of Japanese *jazu kissa* before they vanish forever from the musical landscape, Tokyo Jazz Joints has visited and photographed 162 of these spaces (jazz coffee shops and bars) across Japan. The project can be found on tokyोजazzjoints.com, accompanied by a podcast series, produced since 2020, that further contextualises the images by sharing some of the stories that lie behind them and situates them in a wider Japanese sociocultural context. The sense of entering one of these spaces as accessing a hidden world is described by Fadnes: “Walking through the *kissa* door is an invitation to enter a fascinating subcultural niche – on the one hand inwardly welcoming, on the other outwardly exclusive.” [6.] While there is no doubt that *jazu kissa* may seem for some intimidating from the outside, there is also no guarantee that they will necessarily be welcoming on the inside. This sense of ‘intimidation’ may be personal perception as much as anything else, and may also depend on one’s age, gender, jazz knowledge, reasons for visiting or, indeed, Japanese language ability. [7.] Rather than attempt to replicate a *jazu kissa*, however, the aim of this event was to create an experience *inspired* by the spirit of these listening spaces, augmented by displaying large photographic prints from the project and sharing personal anecdotes to resituate *jazu kissa* culture within a localised setting. Although ticket numbers were necessarily limited for logistical reasons, arguably creating a sense of ‘exclusivity’ for those unable to secure one, the event was welcoming and inclusive of all, regardless of any of the aforementioned factors. [8.]



Figure 1. Tokyo Jazz Joints: Belfast flyer (© Philip Arneill 2021).

2. Space

The space for the event was chosen for several reasons. Sound Advice is a new record shop opened in 2021 by Belfast-born DJ, collector and co-creator of pioneering queer club night Ponyhawke, Marion Hawkes, within the confines of the recently opened Banana Block, a community and cultural centre in the heart of a slowly gentrifying area of East Belfast (*Figure 2*). It is a traditionally working-class Protestant district, sitting in the shadows of the famous yellow cranes of Harland & Wolff shipyard in which the infamous Titanic was built. This intersectionality presented a perfect focal point for the event: a place where a diversity of local people, the culture of Japanese *jazu kissa*, photography, vinyl and active listening could meet. The shop became an enclosed space when its large metal door was slid across, separating the event from the outside and ensuring an undisturbed listening experience. It could be argued that in this respect it represented one example of Kun's concept of the audiotopia – inspired by Foucault's earlier conceptualisation of the heterotopia – in that it was a space, sonically and socially,

where disparate identity-formations, cultures, and geographies historically kept and mapped separately are allowed to interact with each other as well as enter into relationships whose consequences for cultural identification are never predetermined. [9.]

Sound Advice was also sufficiently sized to host 36 participants safely, as some COVID-19 protocols were still in effect, albeit in a less restricted form than before. It was agreed in advance that no more than 36 tickets would be available to guarantee not only the safety of attendees, but also the intimacy and intensity of the experience. A ticketed event, in combination with the expected etiquette, satisfies Foucault's fifth principle of a heterotopia, namely,

a system of opening and closing that both isolates them and makes them penetrable. In general, the heterotopic site is not freely accessible like a public place ... To get in one must have a certain permission and make certain gestures. [10.]



Figure 2. Sound Advice, Belfast (© Philip Arneill 2022).

Doors opened at 7 pm and once everyone was seated and comfortable, I gave a brief welcome to the event and introduction to the origins of Tokyo Jazz Joints. The rationale and expectations for the evening were then explicitly established: three jazz tracks had been chosen for focused, deep listening and, as such, the audience was encouraged not to talk, to put their phones away, and to refrain from documenting the event for social media during these tracks. Each track would be introduced before communal listening. I also explained that between the three curated tracks, a selection of jazz would be played on vinyl (at a lower volume) while the audience chatted, ordered drinks, or used the bathrooms, to offer a counter to the dedicated listening sections. These rules were not intended to restrict enjoyment, rather to facilitate complete immersion in the music, create an exclusive communal experience, and encourage active listening to jazz. I felt that clarity was key here as most of those present could not have known what to expect otherwise, and although the event was intended to be a little challenging, its foremost purpose was nevertheless to provide a unique and enjoyable experience. The three tracks were chosen for their connection to the Tokyo Jazz Joints project. Length was also a consideration, as I wanted to choose tracks long enough to facilitate immersion but not so long that attendees may have become bored or distracted. Placing to one side the subjectivity of taste in jazz (or indeed any music), it can be argued that they are tracks with an evocative atmosphere and impeccable musicianship: all three have a similar feel and may be loosely classified as part of the ‘spiritual’ jazz genre. Before listening, each track was prefaced by a story of their anecdotal significance to the evolution of the project. Based on comments from some participants, the discovery of jazz artists not previously known to them – even those considered part of the canon – was also a by-product of the overall experience.

3. The Awakening

A solitary, haunting sax cuts through the cold December air. The sound of Billy Harper soars above bowed heads, invisible – not only to the closed eyes – as it spills through the space. Faithful to the track’s name the gradual crescendo is reminiscent of a large, soporific animal rousing itself from sleep. I’ll forever associate it with the image of a rhino, rising slowly and steadily, building towards eventual action. Captivating.

The inspiration to play ‘The Awakening’ by the Billy Harper Quintet from the 1979 album of the same name was a rhinoceros. Not the mammal of Asian or African origin, however. Bénédict Berna, the owner of Rhinoçéros, Berlin’s only *jazu kissa*-inspired bar, situated in the eastern district of Prenzlauer Berg, described the signature track for his lovingly crafted space in these very terms (Figure 3). He likens the slow controlled way in which Harper builds the track to his bar’s eponymous animal waking gradually from a slumber on the African savannah. [11.]



Figure 3. Rhinoçéros jazz bar, Berlin (© Philip Arneill 2021).

Rhinoçéros is just one example of a growing number of audio listening spaces springing up globally, often based on the model long established in Japan by traditional *jazu kissa*. [12.] A fully functioning audio bar from Tuesday to Saturday, Rhinoçéros regularly hosts listening sessions on a Monday evening under different guises, e.g. ‘Astral Traveling’ and ‘No Room for Squares’. These are advertised as such, and no walk-ins are allowed. Admission is by reservation only to encourage active listeners with a love of the music, and the evening is centred on the appreciation of a specifically chosen record that begins playing at the pre-advertised ‘needle drop’ time. Introducing active listening to recorded music in a public space to a German audience – one so specific to the Japanese *jazu kissa* – has not been without its challenges, and for many customers was a new experience; some had simply come to Rhinoçéros for a drink and to socialise. This required clarifying the rules and rationale explicitly before the ‘needle drop’, which were repeated until the norms and etiquette were established. Berna described this process thus: “It’s a thin line, but eventually after a while, if you stick with your own rules people get it.” [13.] Jali Wahlsten, owner of *kissa*-inspired Black Forest in Buenos Aires, describes a similar culture clash:

In the beginning it was random ... you know, people can’t behave as you ask them to. But then, we organised a booking system that you have to be on the guest list to get in ... I got to know the people personally and you could tell the profile ... these people come in for the music, they will listen and there will be enough of them ... the critical mass, those [people] set up the mood for the evening. [14.]

The gradual establishing of accepted norms, i.e. that the event is primarily a listening experience and people should not talk during the chosen record being played, may have been accelerated somewhat in Rhinoçéros by Berna’s characteristically direct approach. When asked how to get this finer message across to those who persist in talking over music, he summed up his strategy in no uncertain terms, declaring, “if people talk, one of us will tell them to shut the fuck up and get out”. [15.]

Side B

4. Dahomey Dance

I might’ve imagined the autumn leaves. I’m not even sure how the album came into my possession but in the story of my life, that first day when I dropped the needle, I was lying on a cheap double bed as the Glasgow autumn rattled the old tenement windows that framed the high ceiling and worn floorboards of the room. I will forever connect the twists and turns of Coltrane’s solos with swirling leaves in burnt orange, reds and yellows, a colour palate mirrored in the beautiful cover of the album itself.

‘Dahomey Dance’ is the first track on the B side of John Coltrane’s 1961 Atlantic Records album, *Olé Coltrane*. Taken from one of my favourite jazz albums, it was a suitably atmospheric choice for an audience to be enveloped in for ten minutes and 48 seconds, and a shorter option than the almost twenty-minute title track, something that felt like a risk for a first-time event audience. The album also has a distinct association with Tokyo Jazz Joints: it will always remind me of photographing the sleeve propped up in a small serving hatch as it played at peak volume in the impossibly dark and loud Down Beat, in Yokohama’s historic nightlife district of Nōge (*Figure 4*).



Figure 4. Down Beat, Nōge, Yokohama (© Philip Arneill/Tokyo Jazz Joints 2015).

5. Dragon Dance

My camera rises and falls in time with the music, attempting to frame the frenetic motion of the moment. Tucked tightly in a small square in Japan's largest and unapologetically commercial Chinatown, a crowd watches the procession gleefully. The music shifts back and forth from its insistent, hypnotic rhythm to sudden chaotic bursts of sound, during which the dragon comes violently to life, head twisting and turning, eyeballing excited onlookers. Like a geyser, as quickly as the burst of energy erupts, it dissipates again, led ever by the music, into another slow snaking motion, until it builds again.

'Dragon Dance' is a track by Makoto Terashita and American saxophonist Harold Land, originally released in 1983 on the *Topology* album. It was chosen not only for its beauty and my own love of the track, but also so that the huge contribution Japanese musicians have made to jazz culture might be recognised at the event. The track I played was not from the *Topology* album (although it is the same version), but from BBE Records' second instalment in their trilogy of Japanese jazz compilations by Tony Higgins and Mike Peden: *J Jazz Volume 2 – Deep Modern Jazz from Japan 1969–1983* (Figure 5). All three albums in this compilation series use multiple images from the Tokyo Jazz Joints project, providing a satisfying circular connection from *jazu kissa* to the project and back again through the creation of this event.



Figure 5. *J Jazz Volume 2 – Deep Modern Jazz from Japan 1969–1983* artwork proofs

(© BBE Records, used with permission) [16.]

6. Revelations

Tokyo Jazz Joints: Belfast was an experiment in every sense. An untested concept, there was no guarantee of success – or even indicators of what success might look like. However, my feeling was that an appetite existed for something different. To maximise the impact of the audio and facilitate the sense of being fully immersed in sound, a large speaker stack was placed in each of the four corners of the space. These were connected to a pair of Technics 1210 turntables through an Allen & Heath mixer. Being surrounded by sound is one manifestation of what Schwarz calls “oceanic fantasy”, among which he includes sex and swimming. [17.] The three curated tracks were played at a volume that, while it would not cause discomfort, would discourage talking at least, if not rendering it impossible altogether. The effect was disarming at first when combined with the expectation to sit and listen in silence. Even as the event organiser, what I found most difficult – as did others perhaps – was to stop, breathe and just listen to the music. As the needle finally dropped on ‘The Awakening’, I found I reached almost instinctively for my phone, a reflex I had to resist. I’m certain I was not alone in this but on the few occasions when I felt brave enough to look up, everyone, without exception, was still – some had their eyes closed, absorbed in the music as the rich strokes of jazz painted new colour on the white brick walls of the venue. People seemed to have agreed to the rules, bought wholly into the experience, and given themselves over to the music.



Michael (voice note)

All tickets sold out within 24 hours of being advertised, with multiple requests for more to be released. Everyone stayed until the event finished at 9 pm, despite the biting cold of a poorly heated warehouse space on a Belfast December night. Feedback from participants, who

completed a simple survey on Google Forms, and in some cases shared the voice notes embedded here, elaborated further on the experience. While unique events will always have a novelty factor that may ultimately wane, it is my belief that an interest in Japan, the revival of vinyl as a commodity and a desire for analogue experiences in response to the intangibility of music in the digital streaming age will sustain further iterations of Tokyo Jazz Joints listening events. The event created what Bartmanski and Woodward characterise as an

engagement with ritual [that] renders vinyl a carrier of deeper aesthetic and political meanings, an antidote to the hegemony of digital listening cultures' reliance on multinational conglomerates which provide the homogenous platform and means for music listening. [18.]

In 2022, the ability to have a communal experience where personal silence is the pervading dynamic is increasingly difficult. It is no longer unusual for the darkness of the cinema to be interrupted by the glare of phones. Live concerts are documented with phones throughout for sharing online. The quiet of nature is punctuated by the ping of incoming messages. Even the solemn, regimented church services of my youth have been largely supplanted with worship bands, coffee bars and an improvised running order.

Theatre remains one of the few spaces now in which the prevailing expectation is silence, and singular engagement without phones, snacks and (in many cases) even drinks. Even this last bastion of a communal audio-visual experience is under threat from the multi-tasking and short-attention-span culture. Acclaimed actor Michael Sheen recently had to stop a performance of *Under Milk Wood* at London's National Theatre to chastise an audience member, after their phone rang five times in 45 minutes. [19.]

As well as being a celebration of Japanese *jazu kissa* culture, Tokyo Jazz Joints: Belfast can also be read as a reaction to these trends. It provided an opportunity for a group of people of different ages to congregate and appreciate three jazz recordings, simultaneously as one communal body and as individual listeners. Although it is my proposition that this was the first time a Japanese *jazu kissa*-inspired deep listening event had taken place in Belfast, it also draws a through-line to a lineage of similar listening-focused events. In the 1960s, record collector Gerry McQueen "would host 'listening nights'", to which he would invite different audiences to discuss the blues and jazz music he played to them. [20.] In bringing a flavour of Japanese *jazu kissa* to the city sixty years later, Tokyo Jazz Joints: Belfast has added to this rich legacy through its curated communal listening experience in the heart of a changing East Belfast.



Julie (voice note)



Aoife (voice note)



Catherine (voice note)



David (voice note)

7. Outro/Reprise

As I wrap up by thanking people for coming, it blows my mind that I'm here. Here in a city that I've spent 30 years running from, here imparting to strangers my passion for a project started in a country 6,000 miles away, that I ended up in by chance and then grew to love as my home for nearly 20 years. A bit of a dragon dance of my own really.



Figure 6. Jam Jam, Kobe (© Philip Arneill/Tokyo Jazz Joints 2022).

Philip Arneill is a Belfast-born photographer and AHRC Northern Bridge PhD Researcher at Ulster University. Co-creator of the audio-visual documentary project 'Tokyo Jazz Joints', his work explores the illusory ideas of home and culture by exploring insider-outsider dynamics, interstitial spaces and autoethnographic issues of place and identity. His current research is a subjective exploration of inherited Protestant identity, through the creation of a multi-faceted image and text-based archive of Orange Halls in Ireland and beyond. His work has been published and exhibited worldwide and can be found at www.philiparneill.com.

Sleeve Notes

1. Atkins, E.T., 2001. *Blue Nippon: Authenticating Jazz in Japan*. Duke University Press, p. 49.
2. St. Clair, R., 2003. The Social and Cultural Construction of Silence. *Festschrift for Masanori Higa*. San Antonio, Texas: Trinity University, p. 3.
3. Arneill, P., 2021. Tokyo Jazz Joints: Japanese jazz kissa as heterotopia. *Jazz-hitz*, (04), pp. 81-96, p. 84.
4. Ibid.
5. Schwarz, D., 1997. *Listening subjects: Music, Psychoanalysis, Culture*. Duke University Press, p. 7.
6. Fadnes, P.F., 2020. *Jazz on the Line: Improvisation in Practice*. Routledge, p. 136.
7. For a new visitor in particular, the sense of intimidation on entering a small, unfamiliar space to drink or listen to music, and the necessity (for non-Japanese at least) to communicate in another language, is not restricted to *jazu kissa* by any means: Japanese cities and towns are full of multi-level complexes which contain a dizzying array of themed snack bars, eateries and places to drink coffee or alcohol.
8. This is one of the wider purposes of the Tokyo Jazz Joints photography project, podcast, and indeed this paper: to create an access point to the world of jazz *kissa* for people who may not otherwise have it due to geographical, physical, musical or financial reasons.
9. Kun, J., 2005. *Audiotopia: Music, Race, and America* (Vol. 18). University of California Press, p. 23.
10. Foucault, M. and Miskowiec, J., 1986. Of other spaces. *Diacritics*, 16(1), pp. 22-27, p. 26.
11. Berna, B. 2022. Personal interview.
12. Black Forest, Buenos Aires; Spiritland, London; Bar Shiru, Oakland, CA; and Goldline Bar, Los Angeles are some other notable examples of these.
Rhinoçéros owners Bénédict Berna and Martina Carl had not yet been to Japan themselves when they discovered the world of jazz *kissaten* on the recommendation of a friend. An internet search brought them to the Tokyo Jazz Joints project, and so in lieu of personal experience, the look and feel of Rhinoçéros was modelled on images from the project.
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14. Wahlsten, J. 2020. Episode 27: From the Black Forest to Buenos Aires. *Tokyo Jazz Joints Podcast*. Available from: <https://soundcloud.com/tokyojazzjoints/from-the-black-forest-of-buenos-aires> [Accessed 29 August, 2022]
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Links

Tokyo Jazz Joints website: www.tokyojazzjoints.com

Tokyo Jazz Joints podcast: <https://soundcloud.com/tokyojazzjoints>

Voice notes available from:

<https://on.soundcloud.com/SaE1> (Michael)

<https://on.soundcloud.com/mS7Z> (Julie)

<https://on.soundcloud.com/9Zu3> (Aoife)

<https://on.soundcloud.com/qPX1> (Catherine)

<https://on.soundcloud.com/3E9o> (David)

“ONCE AGAIN BACK IS THE INCREDIBLE”: HIP-HOP SAMPLING AND MATERIAL MEMORY

Ian Sinnett

In the book *Making Beats: The Art of Sample-Based Hip-Hop* (2004), Joseph Schloss outlines the act of “digging in the crates,” explaining the process in which hip-hop producers and deejays engage of tirelessly searching through countless boxes of old records with the hopes of unearthing a rare treasure: A previously untapped reservoir of unique samples that will set a producer’s composition apart from the rest. This method of cultural excavation is a fundamental aspect of hip-hop, as the genre relies on these sonic and material archives to compose new beats. At the same time, these material artefacts, these vinyl records passionately scoured for by producers and deejays, act as forms of cultural memory through which elements of the past are evoked into the present.

In this paper, I will explore links between cultural memory, material culture, and popular music. I argue that music is deeply connected to various forms of memory: cultural, social, and personal, and one way in which music and memory interact is through materiality. To support this argument, I will analyse the material culture of hip-hop, and the ways in which sampling (the act of locating and isolating various audio fragments and manipulating them in order to fit a new musical or audio composition) represents an engagement with both material culture and cultural memory. I contend that, through sampling, producers collaborate with a material form of music (the record) to conjure up elements of the past, making the past relevant within the present, and influencing possible moves towards the future.

Material Culture

Theorists of material culture contend that objects not only act as tools for the use of living organisms, but that they also become extensions of ourselves, shaping our perceptions and experiences of the world. Regarding cultural production, Tim Ingold (2010) argues that material objects have as much agency in the artistic process as the artist/producer. He claims that, while agency is often theorized to be solely found within the producer, the material used for a work of art directs the artist in how the object is created. The skill of the “practitioner,” he argues, is not solely



found in their ability to force a preconceived idea upon material, but rather, “in their ability to find the grain of the world’s becoming and to follow its course while bending to their evolving purpose” (Ingold 2010: 92). Through the practitioner’s reciprocal encounter with the material, their perception is changed; the typical subject/object dichotomy is switched, with the practitioner becoming the object of the material subject (ibid: 95). Carl Knappett argues similarly, acknowledging agency for the material. In *Thinking Through Material Culture* (2005), Knappett asserts that the living organism and material are not completely separate. Rather, the object intertwines with the organism on a perceptual, cognitive, social, and psychological level shaping how they experience and conceive of the world (Knappett 2005: 17-18).

Knappett also points to how material culture helps to create symbolic maps of meaning in which people locate themselves. He likens a culture’s material assemblage to a sort of language in which one needs to be immersed to understand their symbolic codes (ibid: 7). In “Exhausted Commodities” (2000), Will Straw analyses this material culture through the lens of popular music. With a focus on vinyl records, Straw considers how records maintain cultural value and significance after their economic value has decreased on the first-hand market by persisting and circulating through various cultural circles and second-hand markets like thrift shops and yard sales. This build-up of exhausted commodities creates a cultural framework and archive, representing an assemblage of cultural memory in material form upon which people draw. Iain A. Taylor (2020) argues that, although these commodities may have become “exhausted” in an economic sense, they are reimbued with cultural meaning and value once they are taken up again by collectors. These commodities, these records, hold social and cultural significance, and once a collector imbues the commodity with personal value, they locate themselves within the record’s cultural history.

Straw (2012) contends that there are two distinct ways of analysing the materiality of music. First, he articulates that the material objects involved in the creation, recording, or consumption of music, or objects surrounding the music, can act as an analytical point. Second, he indicates the materiality of musical sound as a site of analysis, pointing to theorists like Jacques Attali (1977) and Lawrence Grossberg (1984, 1986, 1992). In this short paper, I will attempt to bridge the two. Taking cues from material culture, I will depict the ways in which the records themselves are key in shaping the producer’s musical composition, and how these compositions, in turn, act to transmit forms of cultural and social memory.

Memory Studies

As with material culture studies, memory studies also considers various forms of materiality, and in particular, the ways in which the material world interacts with personal and collective memory. The philosopher Henri Bergson, in the formative memory studies text *Matter and Memory* (1919) theorises that memory and the material world are intimately linked. Bergson asserts that there is no memory without experience, and there is no experience without perception, perception that is brought about through interaction with objects and other physical bodies. These moments of perception and object interaction subconsciously embed collections of images and encounters from which we draw. However, memory is not simply an inactive storehouse of images and past experiences to pull from. For Bergson, memory is actively evoked into the present and, through interaction with the body, becomes “a synthesis of past and present with a view to the future” (Bergson 1919: 294).

Memory, however, is not solely located within the individual but, rather, is transmitted throughout and between distinct social spheres. Maurice Halbwachs (1980) articulates the concept of the collective memory, claiming that all individuals are located within social milieus, and

thus, individual memories are always positioned within an assemblage of collective memories. In this way, individual memories are never completely isolated, but are deeply embedded within and influenced by social and collective circumstances. For Halbwachs, these forms of social memory are transmitted locally, through interpersonal interactions like rituals and traditions, and through subtle cues like body language.

While Halbwachs argues that collective memory is communicated primarily within the immediate social sphere, Jan Assmann (1995, 2011) considers how the transfer of memory transcends the local setting, and travels across space and time. Assmann asserts that while Halbwachs' theory is important, it is only part of the discussion, especially in the rapidly changing technological and cultural landscape that was the 20th century. He theorises the concept of "cultural memory," a form of memory that is not tied to an enclosed social/cultural sphere. Rather, cultural memory refers to the set of objects, images, and cultural forms that articulate and communicate the identity and history of a group, area, era, and/or social setting:

Cultural memory is a kind of institution. It is exteriorised, objectified, and stored away in symbolic forms that, unlike the sounds of words or the sight of gestures, are stable and situation-transcendent: They may be transferred from one situation to another and transmitted from one generation to another. External objects as carriers of memory play a role already on the level of personal memory. Our memory, which we possess as beings equipped with a human mind, exists only in constant interaction not only with other human memories but also with "things," outward symbols. (Assmann 2011: 110-111)

These cultural "things" that Assmann refers to are considered objectified cultural forms: cultural forms that are tangible, observable, and, while not solely solid objects (as types like songs fall under this category), can be considered discernibly shaped and extant.

Many scholars have considered the ways in which memory interacts with objectified cultural forms (see, for instance, Dijck 2007, Erll and Rigney 2009, Hoskins 2011, Landsberg 2004, Sturken 2009, Young 2000). While the theories and forms studied by these scholars are vast and nuanced, a common thread is that cultural memory and objects are complexly entangled. Objects act as means of narrativising the cultural history, identity, and circumstances of a group. They allow for the transmission of memory between distinct communities both spatially and temporally, through what Lucy Bond (2017) refers to as mobile memory or, what Astrid Erll (2011) calls travelling memory. Memory, though often historically theorised as something self-contained and static, is alive, constantly travelling, shifting, and resurfacing in the present at different conjunctures for myriad purposes. Walter Benjamin asserts the political importance of seizing upon a memory "as it flashes in a moment of danger" (1940, 2010). This moment, which Benjamin refers to as the dialectical image, is the instant when an image of the past flashes up during a moment of the present. It is through the dialectic between past and present that people can be moved forward ideologically, to be mobilised towards political change.

Hip-Hop and Material Memory

There is an important connection between material culture and hip-hop. In *Making Beats* (2004), Joseph Schloss dives into the history of hip-hop with a specific focus on the practice of sampling and its status as a fundamental aesthetic and compositional method of the genre. Beginning in the Bronx, New York, in the 1970s, hip-hop was essentially born in local parties and dance clubs during which a deejay would isolate a break in a recording (a primarily rhythmic instrumental moment in a

song that the crowd could easily dance to) by looping that part of the record between two different turntables (playing the break on one turntable and, once it was over, playing it on the other turntable and switching between the two). Sampling, Schloss argues, is the logical evolution from this procedure: the process of isolating a specific moment of a recording and placing it within a new context. The advent of sampling technology took this method to a new level, allowing for the isolation of multiple elements from prior recordings to be manipulated and glued together to make completely unique and complex compositions.

For the sake of brevity, I will not delve too deeply into the intricacies of the birth of hip-hop and hip-hop culture (for more on this see Hill Collins 2006, Neal 1999, Rose 1994, Watkins 2005). I will, however, turn to the importance of material culture in hip hop, and the ways in which a collection of records creates a Black cultural archive upon which producers draw in order to create unique musical compositions while also articulating and recontextualising Black cultural history and tradition into the present moment.

Memory studies scholar Michael Rothberg refers to memory as “the past made present” (2009: 3). I contend that sampling is a direct example of this. Sampling allows producers to interact with the past, actively contextualising earlier moments into the present to display their continuing relevance. Houston A. Baker Jr. (1991) argues that the active nature of sampling and deejaying works to reconstruct the texts of the archive – to reconfigure them into a shape that is tangible and meaningful within the present moment. He describes the act of deejaying (and by extension, sampling) as an active weaving of sounds together that “produced a rap DJ who became a postmodern, ritual priest of sounds rather than a passive spectator.” Baker asserts that this active nature of hip hop also speaks to its counter-hegemonic capabilities, referring to deejaying and sampling as a “deconstructive hybridity” (Baker 1991: 220) that challenges the “state line” through which hip hop is “an audible ... space of opposition” (ibid: 226).

Susan McClary continues this line of analysis. In her formative work on popular musical analysis, *Conventional Wisdom* (2000), she directly connects hip hop sampling to archival and cultural memory, asserting that the act of sampling shows the genre’s “obsession with cultural memory.” She claims that “one of the most important features of rap involves its intense concern with reference – the actual incorporation of moments from the history of recorded Black music, made possible through sampling.” This incorporation of history through the act of sampling depicts, for McClary, the “desire to transmit traces of the past as still-vibrant elements of the present” (McClary 2000: 160). This transmittal, I argue, is not solely done to maintain an archive for cultural reference. It is a way to maintain the continuing relevance of past challenges, struggles, and forms of resistance. Sampling acts as a means of recontextualising past forms of resistance and activism, articulating their importance for the current conjuncture and generation. Additionally, there is radical power in being able to seize state-line narratives and reconstruct them, to challenge their meaning, their hegemonic nature, and reform them into tools of political resistance for the historically disenfranchised.

Analysis: “Bring the Noise”

Joseph Schloss, through first-hand interviews of prominent hip hop producers, explains that there are a variety of concerns that producers have when picking records to use and store in their archives. What influences them during their “crate digging” excursions are not just the bands, composers, or the genres of the records, but also their total aesthetic: The image on the cover, the contents of the inner sleeve, the record’s overall style. What is found within these material objects are traces of the past, aspects of Black cultural expression, history, aesthetics, and politics. I

believe that the material of the record-object – the sounds that emanate from the grooves on the record, the images on the sleeve and the written content within – coalesce with the capabilities of the sampler to drive the producer towards their final composition. The archival aspects of the object are experienced sonically by the producer when the album is listened to. These sonics contain certain elements of cultural memory, materialised within the musical aesthetics of the composition. These elements are then seized by the producer, rearticulated and contextualised for the present composition. We see in this sense the past being made present. Through the synergy of technology and creativity, the producer seizes these moments of the past, manipulating them to fit the newly made beat. In this sense, samples of the past are reconstructed to fit not only the musical aesthetics of the new composition, but also the social, cultural, and political concerns of the present.

To display this process in action, I will provide a brief analysis of the Public Enemy song “Bring the Noise.” I argue that the song, through its sampling choices (as well as lyrics, vocal style, and other elements) is an example of what Cedric Robinson (1983, 2000) refers to as the Black Radical Tradition – an intergenerational tradition of resistance against the capitalist-imperialist exploitation of the African diaspora that has developed “a collective consciousness informed by the historical struggles for liberation and motivated by the shared sense of obligation to preserve the collective being, the ontological totality” (Robinson 2000: 171). I assert that Public Enemy’s “Bring the Noise” interacts with material objects of collective memory thus representing a continuation and evolution of this tradition of radical resistance.

The song begins with a sample from Malcolm X’s 1963 speech “Fire + Fury – Grass Roots Speech,” addressing the need to maintain Black militancy in the face of white supremacy and, specifically, fighting against white attempts to water down or co-opt Black revolutionary figures. The quote is simple: “Too Black, too strong,” but lends itself clearly to the Black Radical Tradition. By beginning the song with this speech, Public Enemy is immediately linking resistance movements of the past to the present moment, showing that, while the speech may have occurred in the 1960s, there was still a need for this radical activism in 1988, and that the issues raised by Malcolm X were still relevant.

Another key sample is from the Marva Whitney song “It’s my Thing”. Marva Whitney was an integral soul singer of the early days of soul and funk, also known as “Soul Sister #1.” The sample Public Enemy uses is taken from a longer horn line from the original song occurring at approximately 1:40. In “Bring the Noise,” the horn groove is intensified and acts as the driving melody through the verses. Whitney’s song is thematically about challenging hegemonic social norms. In the chorus, she says “It’s my thing/I can do what I wanna do / It’s my thing / You can’t tell me who to sock it to”. We can think about this as a direct challenge to dominant hegemonic narratives telling Whitney who she had to be, and how she had to act. The phrase “sock it to” in this context had a romantic or sexual connotation, so she is also fighting for sexual freedom. By sampling this song, Public Enemy is directly invoking the memory of its themes by using a specific moment of the horn section. Through intensifying this horn melody, they are maintaining the resistant nature of the original song but reassembling it into a form of direct action – The driving horn of the verse can be seen as a motivation towards political action. Additionally, we can consider the term “sock it,” and how its meaning changed over time to mean a punch or aggressive action. Public Enemy is invoking the memory and resistant nature of the song “It’s my Thing,” while rearticulating it into their present by making it feel more combative.

A sample from the Funkadelic song “Get Off your Ass and Jam” is another crucial element. The sample used – a high-pitched alarm-like sound – comes from the very beginning of Funkadelic’s piece. In “Bring the Noise,” the sample occurs at the beginning of the verse and lasts for two

measures and reappears after a two-measure break within a sixteen-measure verse, sounding akin to a continual alarm that begins the verse and reappears intermittently. It takes a similar form in the original song by acting as an alarm at the beginning. However, the alarm is used for different purposes in each piece. The Funkadelic song is primarily an instrumental song in which musical virtuosity and groove are the focal point. For Funkadelic, the alarm acts as a call to action for the audience to “get off your ass and jam.” Or in other words, to get up and dance and feel the groove. Public Enemy is taking this alarm and resignifying its meaning and purpose into a different type of call to action. Public Enemy’s call to action is to get up and fight, to engage in forms of radical resistance. The alarm – the call to action – for Public Enemy is ongoing and repeated, symbolising the need for continual action, to continually “get off” one’s “ass and jam.”

Lastly, at 1:21 Public Enemy invokes Reverend Jesse Jackson’s call to “Brothers and sisters” from the beginning of the Soul Children song “I Don’t Know What This World is Coming To,” a protest song in the genre of a Black Spiritual. Released in 1972, the Soul Children song is openly protesting the Vietnam War, calling for racial equality, and challenging various aspects of white supremacy and the hegemonic order of the time. We can hear an immediate arousing of the activist theme of this song and the call to community action through this sample. When the sample is played, rapper Chuck D simultaneously calls towards “brothers and sisters.” Here, we have the call to the community of 1972 coming into immediate relief with the call to community in 1988, in what I am dubbing as a form of dialectical sound in the Benjaminian sense. Through this moment, Public Enemy is concretely linking the past to the present – the issues that are sung about and challenged in “What is this World Coming to” in 1972 are still prevalent, taking similar yet unique forms in 1988.

Through this analysis, I contend that there are direct connections between material memory and the ways in which this form of memory manifests through sampling. Public Enemy’s producers – The Bomb Squad – utilised material objects from their past to maintain and reconstruct instances of collective memory, political activism, and cultural heritage. While my current analysis is relatively limited in understanding exactly how and in what ways The Bomb Squad was informed by certain elements of Black cultural iconography (like album covers, liner notes, and other various aesthetic components of the records and recordings they chose to use), I argue that their exposure to these Black cultural materials informed their use of samples and, specifically, connected to their sense of continuing political urgency and activism. These materials, and the technological objects with which the producers interacted, drove them forward in a particular direction, which we can see in the finished composition.

Concluding Thoughts

Throughout this paper, I analysed some ways in which cultural memory is housed in and evoked by objectified popular musical forms. I showed how cultural history and memory are called into the present through sampling and lyrics, and how this process can work to both continue and evolve prior forms of radical political activism. Although my analysis is linked immediately to the historical moment of 1988 – a time when sampling records was the primary means of attaining samples – I believe there are ways in which similar analysis could be utilised for the present moment. Since the height of Public Enemy’s prominence, there have been numerous ways in which the sampling process has evolved and grown. Producers now are not solely beholden to vinyl records for discovering their samples; they are able to access a seemingly endless array of songs and recordings (and by extension, forms of cultural memory) through the digitisation of music. Although the analysis of this digitisation is outside of my immediate scope, I believe this offers a clear avenue through which further theorisation and analysis of this topic could be done.

Ian Sinnett is a PhD candidate in Cultural Studies at George Mason University. His research interests are in cultural memory and its politics, popular music with an emphasis on hip-hop, affect theory, aesthetics, media and technology, and Marxian political economy. He is particularly interested in the ways in which music and collective memory interact, and how these interactions can aid in various forms of progressive social and political change—a topic he is exploring further in his dissertation. His writing has appeared in *Lateral*, and he has presented research on these topics at multiple national conferences within the U.S.

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THIS IS NOT A VINYL RECORD: MATERIALITIES OF SOUND AND FORMAT IN FRANCISCO LÓPEZ'S *LA SELVA*

Niccolò Galliano

In 2015, sound artist Francisco López released a vinyl reissue (Sub Rosa, SRV346) of his 1998 album *La Selva (Sound Environments from a Neotropical Rain Forest)*. Despite the subtle care that usually characterises all his outputs, the vinyl version of this work didn't meet the expectations of fans and collectors, mostly due to its unusual form: this edition of *La Selva* consists in fact of a blank LP that doesn't provide any sound at all, while the full-length audio track is stored on a USB flash drive sold together with the album.[1] To explain the decision-making behind this release, López included the following statement as its liner notes:

The proposal from Sub Rosa to reissue my sound piece *La Selva* (which was previously released on CD by V2_Archief in 1998 and then Kairos in 2009) as a shorter version, vinyl LP release, stumbled upon the somewhat hidden, "Emperor's New Clothes", reality of the intrinsic limitations of vinyl. After two years of failed attempts with multiple test pressings from the best plants and cutting engineers in Europe, the inherent constraints of vinyl led to an unavoidable conclusion: this audio piece cannot be released on vinyl. These constraints are not – as many people wrongly assume – a simple matter of range, but a combination of frequency and amplitude, with limits that the grooves cannot take without producing distortion. [...] Despite popular myths, delusions and fads, analog etching is no match for the dynamic range, frequency-amplitude response, detail, subtlety, brightness and presence of digital encoding. That is why this 'natural' sound piece has been finally reissued digitally, in its entirety, and with the best possible sound. (López 2015)

It goes without saying that, for a composer so passionate about the sonic qualities of his work, this kind of compromise wouldn't have been acceptable. Yet, a question remains: why did López still release the vinyl reissue, while the artefact that should have reproduced the music stayed silent? As I will argue, far from being a mere mockery of contemporary vinyl-mania, this format configuration raises issues about the relationship between recorded music and records as material artefacts; it is also deeply rooted in López's personal musical aesthetics and his understanding of the essence of reality, sound and listening. Having acknowledged that, the question above – starting from a simple commercial point of view – turns rather into "How can one listen to a record lacking sound?", allowing for a shift in our perspective on the materiality of musical experience. The vinyl version of *La Selva* seems to work as an ambiguous interface for its musical counterpart, engaging the listener in ways that go against the concept behind the original audio piece. But before we get to the specific issues of materiality emerging from this release, let's delve into López's own approach to sound as a physical and material element.

The Materiality of Sound

Spanish composer, electroacoustic musician and biologist, Francisco López has been around the international experimental music scene since the early 1980s. He is mostly known for having produced a vast number of works that strongly revolve around field recording as the primary (often the only) technique employed to generate musical material. His albums present recordings made all over the globe, in places such as the Amazon rainforest, Argentinian Patagonia, Mount Athos (Greece), the Hverfjall crater (Iceland), the Mmabolela Reserve (South Africa), but also in urban spaces and cities including Madrid, New York, Lima, Panama City and Warsaw. Although this list shows a heterogeneous variety of locations, it is inevitably incomplete. Most of the time López deliberately avoids giving information about where and when a particular soundscape was recorded. He does that because he strongly rejects the idea of recording as a way of documenting reality. As he explained during his Red Bull Music Academy lecture, “I am not interested in representation. I’m not interested in soundscapes that represent reality. I’m not doing recordings because I want to simulate or re-enact or recompose or listen again to this reality” (López 2011).

Instead, López is interested in exploring the sonic textures of reality as a way to access new sensory dimensions. He engages with the sound matter he records without imposing any preconceived form on it and dismissing any extra-musical element, but developing specific skills to deal directly with its sonic substance. According to anthropologist Tim Ingold, “the role of the artist [...] is not to give effect to a preconceived idea, novel or not, but to join with and follow the forces and flows of material that bring the form of the work into being” (Ingold 2010: 97). Similarly, López does not intend to force any specific meaning to his pieces or to trace them back to the context where they supposedly belong; his artistic goal is to “follow the flows” of recorded sound, experiment with its malleability and respond to its peculiarities. To him, sound is basically a material – in the sense of “the stuff that things are made of” (Ingold 2007: 1) – that can be shaped into musical form through various transformational procedures. It can be highly processed and deconstructed, or presented bare as it was captured by the microphone. Either way, the composer’s emphasis is never on its representational dimension. He defends the idea of sound having its own identity for artistic sake, an identity detached from what generated it in the first place: “there’s no such thing as the sound of a frog, if you know what I mean” (López 2011).

La Selva is arguably Francisco López’s most known and celebrated composition. The recordings were originally made at La Selva Biological Station, a reserve of more than 1500 hectares of rainforest located in the region of Sarapiquí (northern Costa Rica), where López – who works also as an entomologist – conducted research between 1995 and 1996. Consisting of a single 71-minute track, the album features many sounds from both biotic (insects, frogs, birds, plants) and non-biotic sources (wind, rain, waterfalls) converging in an extremely dense and layered sound web that captures the sonic environment of the rainforest as a whole. In compositional terms, López organized the recorded material in ways that do not encourage the recognition of individual sound sources or the distinction between foreground and background. The result is “a powerful acousmatic broad-band sound environment” (López 1998), where complex sonic textures constantly alternate in a thrilling musical experience.

Even though the recordings made in the forest weren’t processed at all – López limited himself to their editing – and therefore they present a certain degree of similarity with the “real place”, the liner notes for the original CD release clearly specify that “*La Selva* (the music piece) is not a representation of La Selva (the reserve in Costa Rica)” (ibid.). Once again, López shows no interest in representation, while his focus is on experimenting with the materiality of these astonishing natural sounds. But the very fact that at the heart of the record there’s an interest in

the sonic aesthetics of Nature – which semiotically triggers specific ideological implications – challenges the ability to concentrate on the pure sound matter. What we need is a different conceptual framework to deal exclusively with the materiality of sound. As I said, in López's production sound is shaped into music through different transformational processes: in *La Selva* this is not achieved by altering the materiality of recordings, but simply by *listening* to them. The act of composing – of selecting the recorded material and organizing it in a musical way – can give birth to new sonic dimensions; what's more important though is that it's up to the listener to decide how to explore it. According to López (2001), "composition or performance are not essential for music creation; listening is". The creative act, shared by both the musician and the audience, is thus constantly developing and never complete, because every listener may experience different relations between representation and sound matter – shaping *La Selva* into a unique and personal form.

In regard to López's approach Makis Solomos (2019) talks about a *phenomenological experience of sound*, explicitly referring to the philosophy of Edmund Husserl and pointing out how both the composer and the philosopher seek a comprehension of reality that excludes any *a priori* assumption. They both aim to reach a pure and subjective experience of the matter that constitutes the world. For Husserl, the first step into a phenomenological reconfiguration of experience is *epoché*, a process of "abstaining from all judgments that rely upon the general positing of the world" (Russel 2006: 66). This phenomenological reduction establishes a sense of transcendental consciousness through which we might catch the essence of reality as it appears: by *bracketing our knowledge*, the world is reduced to a phenomenon to be explored with new eyes (or ears). Within the realm of sound, practicing *epoché* means listening without any preconceived conception of the source or context of sonic elements. López refers to this activity as an act of *transcendental listening* (or *profound listening*), "that doesn't negate what is *outside* the sounds but explores and affirms all that is *inside* them" (López 2004: 82-83). Transcendental listening enables one to assume a phenomenological attitude to experience sound in its pure material form, to be with the sound, and to follow its flows.

In order to listen *phenomenologically* to the materiality of sound, one must dismiss any other *non-strictly-sonic* element that revolves around the work of art. Of course – because of the cultural connotations of musical listening – this is not an easy task. To López giving titles to his pieces, having artworks for his albums or even imposing a specific format (such as vinyl) to an audio work means forcing the transcendental experience of sound into a conventional activity. In response to these intrinsic limitations, he developed different strategies to raise listener awareness about the various possibilities of involvement in his work.[2] Much of the information here reported about the philosophy behind *La Selva* derives from the liner notes the composer wrote for its first release. In this case, the principles of *epoché* are instilled by the fact that the booklet is sealed and comes with the indication not to open it. If someone looked inside it, they would find a warning message: "now that you have decided to access this contextual and relational level of information concerning this piece you will enter a new conceptual and perceptual domain [...]. It will lead you to face an unavoidable challenge with an uneasy way back: that of the recovery of the undissipated profound listening experience" (López 1998). López uses the word *dissipative* to describe any "visual and conceptual element 'polluting' the pure sound essence of [his] work" (López in Van Peer 2002: 15). The dissipation of music occurs when transcendental listening is contaminated with non-sonic elements that constrain sound into a specific meaning – despite the "malleability" of its material. These dissipative elements are inherent to the form of recorded artefacts but they can also be used for artistic purposes; that is the case with the vinyl version of *La Selva*, in which there's nothing left but dissipative forces. In the next paragraph I will address the

form of this reissue, analysing how its own (*im*)materiality interacts with the lacking materiality of sound.

The Immateriality of Vinyl

In 1934 German philosopher Theodor W. Adorno wrote a brief essay called *The Form of the Phonographic Record* [*Die Form der Schallplatte*]. As suggested by the title, it focuses exclusively on the material properties of the recorded artefact, which Adorno describes in vivid detail:

One does not want to accord it any form other than the one it itself exhibits: a black pane made of a composite mass which these days no longer has its honest name any more than automobile fuel is called benzine; fragile like tablets, with a circular label in the middle that still looks most authentic when adorned with the prewar terrier hearkening to his master's voice; at the very center, a little hole that is at times so narrow that one has to redrill it wider so that the record can be laid upon the platter. It is covered with curves, a delicately scribbled, utterly illegible writing, which here and there forms more plastic figures for reasons that remain obscure to the layman upon listening; structured like a spiral, it ends somewhere in the vicinity of the title label, to which it is sometimes connected by a lead-out groove so that the needle can comfortably finish its trajectory. In terms of its "form", this is all that it will reveal. (Adorno 1990: 56)

Although sound formats evolved so much through the course of time – from shellac to vinyl, from CDs to MP3 – it is striking to realize how the form of records changed so little since the time Adorno wrote these words, almost a century ago. He thought recorded artefacts could be valuable tools to investigate music as a material thing and “the contours of its thingness” (ibid: 58). Indeed, Adorno considered the materiality of the phonograph medium to be an utterly new characteristic of the musical language. Through the gramophone, music overcame the arbitrary system of notation, becoming itself a form of writing: the curves pressed on the record are seen as hieroglyphic inscriptions unintelligible to humans but, at the same time, they are “inseparably committed to the sound that inhabits this and no other acoustic groove” (ibid: 59). The phonograph record is then a sort of *petrified music* – music that has turned into a material object by the merging of its content and form.

Now, let's take a moment to carefully revisit the form of the vinyl reissue of *La Selva*. Two different kinds of formats appear in this edition: one 24-bit/48kHz USB flat memory card (numbered and hand-signed by the author) where the remastered record is stored [3], and one blank, non-audio vinyl LP. The latter presents no grooves at all: on one side there's a digital etching of a detail from the front cover (depicting an intricate tangle of branches and lianas), while the other is completely smooth. The “circular label in the middle” shows laconically only the title of the composition – affirming this way the “petrification” of *La Selva*, with the vinyl artefact as its objective correlative. On the back sleeve, an epigraph reads “phenomenological *epoché* listening is highly encouraged”. But if one places the record on the turntable there's no sound to be heard.[4]

It follows that the form of this record does not encourage true *epoché* – at least, as we have considered it so far. If the process of petrification, as suggested by Adorno, transforms music into “an archaic text of knowledge to come” (ibid: 60), it also undermines the possibility of a pure phenomenological experience. As we said, it is through the materiality of recorded artefacts that the dissipation of music occurs. This is especially true for a piece such as *La Selva*, for which the vinyl format (just as the CD or the cassette) appears somehow defective: it frames the work of art within a material object that conceptually cannot contain it in its purest undissipated form. The LP

affects the endless possibilities of profound listening, imposing a definite shape on a once creative, individualistic and ever-changing musical experience. As a result, music is not only petrified but also *objectified* by the form of the record; or, as López himself puts it, the “materialization of music through machines of perception and memory [i.e., the recording technologies] gave rise [...] to the philosophical/perceptive ‘objectification’ of music” (2010: 97).

However, there’s one fundamental difference between the form of the record described by Adorno and the one given to *La Selva* by López: here the record is unplayable, its purpose of sound reproduction is not fulfilled. This groove-less vinyl record may be considered one of a kind, but it’s actually part of a long history of silent LPs that stretch the very idea of what musical recording is.^[5] Examples of this practice are found in Christian Marclay’s *Record Without a Groove* (1987), the 7-inch *Record1* (1991) by Telium Group, Ives Klein’s *Prince of Space/Musik der Leere* (1959) – which was conceived by German artist Charles Wilp – and Marcel Marceau’s “mime record” *Ruhe Im Spiegelbild* (1980). All these albums have covers, titles and tracklists, but – materially speaking – their artefacts do not show any groove embodying the sound of their work. In other words, there is no sign of their recorded/written *musical text*, while they exhibit only their *paratext*. French literary theorist Gérard Genette (1997) came up with this concept to describe anything within a book (or a music record) that is not part of the actual text (or the recorded audio track), but it’s attached to it to define its meaning, ensure its reception, and ultimately present it to the world. Reframing it from the textual to the material domain, the entire recorded artefact can be considered as a paratext, an interface for the petrification/objectivation of a musical work: it transforms sound into an object, narrowing down its essence on behalf of the audience.

According to Genette, paratexts constitute “a zone not only of *transition* but also of *transaction*: a privileged place of a pragmatics and a strategy, of an influence on the public [...]” (ibid: 2). Still, López’s whole phenomenological approach is completely opposed to exerting any influence on his audience. The paratextual dimension of *La Selva* works more as an *interference* than an *interface*, blocking with its pervasive action the possibility of pure transcendental listening. There are no curves, no abstract “plastic figures” as a representation of the acoustic event. What’s pressed on the record side is an etching of the same image portrayed on the front cover – in a continuous and redundant play between signified and signifier. Paradoxically, all we need to experience the recorded artefact is just the dissipative representation of the work, not the actual sound. There’s a complete merger between the Genettian paratext and the Adornian writing: all we’re left with is just the album cover, which is inexorably expanding from the sleeve onto the record itself. The vinyl artefact thus becomes a liminal space where the inside and the outside of the work of art overlap – namely what Jacques Derrida would call a *parergon*, something that is “no longer merely around the work” but rather “*gives rise*” to it (1987: 9). Just like a frame surrounding a painting, the parergon “does not stop disturbing the internal order” of the work (ibid) and transforms its very concept and essence. However, in this instance the transformational process turns even more radical: here the work that is given rise to differs materially and conceptually from the original audio piece. It is not *La Selva* anymore.

It’s possible that López orchestrated this whole operation to prove his phenomenological point: the original sound work needed to be sacrificed so that the dissipation of music could reveal itself in all its pervasiveness. In such a way, *La Selva* became a martyr for the fight against the merciless objectification of music. Strikingly, in doing so, the essence of this musical work changed completely. Through the LP it is now impossible to experience the materiality of sound, what we do encounter is a different kind of matter that – although self-explanatory – is only apparently more immediate. The lacking materiality of sound was turned into some sort of “reversed materiality”, an (im)materiality that is completely disembodied from the transcendental sound matter that

comprises the original work; the quasi-immaterial, digitally encoded track was stored on a rewritable USB drive that doesn't stand out as an autonomous format and clearly isn't where the focus of this reissue is. The combination of the two gave rise to a brand-new work, showing how the transcendental experience could be broadened from sound to any kind of material. Paraphrasing its author, La Selva (the reserve in Costa Rica) is not *La Selva* (the music piece), which is neither *La Selva* (the vinyl artefact) – they're all made of different "materials", such as concrete reality, sound and vinyl.

Going back to the opening question, one could still wonder how to deal with the odd characteristics of this release. As López himself explained, he always had a certain concern for contemporary material culture: "I'm not an object-oriented person. I have problems with physical objects. I have psychological problems with material things" (López 2011). Perhaps this concern ultimately shaped the form of the record. Due to how it was conceived, this vinyl reissue forces the listener to experience *epoché* in new and unexpected ways, based on the idea that "when listening is a profound act of will upon sound, music unfolds naturally" (López 2015) – even when music stays permanently silent. In the end, this is the fundamental lesson we should learn from López's philosophy. No matter what we consider to be the essence of the work, if we practice focusing on the pure materiality of recordings, we may find a way to listen to a record lacking sound.

Niccolò Galliano is a PhD candidate in musicology at the University of Milan. He has worked for the Leverhulme-funded research project "Anonymous Creativity: Library Music and Screen Cultures in the 1960s and 1970s", which investigates the production and use of library music in film and television in Britain, France and Italy. He is interested in the cultural history of 20th-century music publishing and the production and consumption of recorded artefacts.

Endnotes

1. On the Discogs page of the release one comment (among others) states: "this is a snobby and stupid unnecessary reissue". <https://www.discogs.com/release/7418182-Francisco-L%C3%B3pez-La-Selva> [accessed 22 July 2022].
2. Many of his compositions are untitled and most of his discography comprises CDs with transparent packaging and no artwork. Moreover, during live performances López seeks to bracket sonic encounters by keeping the audience (voluntarily) blindfolded and in complete darkness.
3. The full-length audio track can be downloaded for free on the label website at <https://www.subrosa.net/en/catalogue/soundworks/la-selva---sound-environments-from-a-neotropical-rain-forest> [accessed 12 November 2022].
4. Curiously, when this reissue was released a new digital edition of *La Selva* appeared on streaming platforms presenting a shorter version made of two separate tracks, each one lasting approximately 20 minutes (most likely this was the version originally edited for the LP).
5. A list with almost 100 silent releases can be checked at <https://www.discogs.com/lists/Silent-Records/16205> [accessed 8 November 2022].

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TRASH IN EVERYTHING WE DO: SUEDE'S *SINGLES* AND PSYCHOGEOGRAPHY IN MADRID

Tyler Sonnichsen

February 2004, Calle de Fuencarral, Madrid. I slide a blank CD-R out of its crudely photocopied sleeve, click it into my Sony Walkman, and press Play.



Link to accompanying playlist

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The First Half (All Killer / Movements)

TRACK 1: "The Beautiful Ones"

Richard Oakes' shimmering guitar blares into my ears and I start walking north up the pedestrian mall off Gran Vía, passing the jet set boutiques and designer shoe stores.



Figure 1. Gran Vía (April 2004)

One brisk evening in early 2004, I bought a bootleg CD-R of Suede's 2003 compilation *Singles* off a peddler on Madrid's Calle de Fuencarral, just north of Gran Vía. The compilation crammed 21 songs onto one disc that clocked in at over 78 minutes, which wasn't bad considering the €2 I paid for it (1). It was the first piece of their music I ever owned, and equally likely the first time I ever heard their music.

TRACK 2: "Animal Nitrate"

A squall of what sounds like guitar feedback or a subtle synth line before the jangling chords come crashing in. I see the fountain at the center of La Glorieta de Bilbao in the distance.



Figure 2. La Glorieta de Bilbao (May 2004)

No matter where and when I was walking that Winter, I almost always had my Sony Discman providing a private soundtrack, affecting "patterns of how to move around urban space and encounter others" (Weber 2014: 157). At the time, I was not yet, consciously, a geographer (cf. Cosgrove 1989). I spent most evenings wandering the streets of Chamberí and adjacent neighborhoods in *flânerie*, a decade before I had any idea what the word meant. Though the concept emerged in nineteenth century Paris, twenty-first century Madrid and her long hours provided a perfect arena for me to "wander without aim" (Bauman 1994).

TRACK 3: “Trash”

“The Rastro is above all, more than a place of things, a place of images and associations of ideas, associations of emotions, of things suffered, tender and intimate, which, in order not to betray themselves, once formed, disintegrate into white, transparent, floating and volatile ironies...” – Ramón Gómez de la Serna, 1961 (p. 2)



Figure 3. Sunday morning at the Rastro (March 2004)

All of these affiliated memories in italics are personal memories – some captured on camera – from my life in Madrid (early 2004, with some interjections from later visits in 2009, 2015, and 2022). The CD-R of *Singles* was the first one I purchased, and one of few still in my possession. I spent much of that semester with Suede in my Discman and have revisited their hits on iPods and Smartphones as technologies changed. Suede’s first decade of singles (1993-2003) are inextricable from my psychogeography of Madrid (3), proof-positive of that affective relationship between materialities of music, technologies of hearing and practices of memory (Anderson 2004; Keightley and Pickering 2006).

TRACK 4 “Metal Mickey”

I sit down by the lagoon in Casa de Campo. A prostitute with a parasol sits down the road behind me, baring her breasts for motorists.



Figure 4. Casa de Campo Lake (May 2004)

In my life as a Geographer, I came to Guy Debord's trademark of psychogeography, drawing upon my lifelong preoccupation with the intersection of popular music and place. Regretfully, I did not take much advantage of Madrid's underground music in 2004, but I moved to another capital city (Washington, DC) the following year, equally due to my newfound love of urban living and curiosity about DC's seminal underground scenes (cf. Sonnichsen 2019, Sonnichsen 2022). So, it suited my research well that "popular music has been associated with cities and with people's fears, hopes, desires, and dreams about them" (Cohen et al 2010: 106). Western perceptions of psychogeography are largely "committed to the development of the relationship of the urban environment and the psychic, daily lives of individuals... both [depending] heavily on walking as practice and method" (Long 2014: 50). Just as in Madrid, my early familiarity with DC as my new home came intertwined with the affective influence of my Discman. It wasn't until 2007 that a friend gifted me his old iPod. I could not bring myself to get rid of the Discman, though.

TRACK 5: "So Young"

A couple of small children exit a small bodega and run past me as I approach Bar Arco Iris. I can't hear what they're saying over my headphones. The only lyrics I register are references to being young, but this band's songs absolutely seem like they're about heroin. (4)



Figure 5. Arco Iris Bar, Madrid (July 2009)

Any reading on psychogeography must tend to traditional geography. Madrid, like Spain at large, is off-center from modern imaginaries of Europe. Unlike most cities in Europe, though, its present is more interesting than its past, as Deborah Parsons (2003) argued in her examination of the city's modernism. London and the United Kingdom at large have gone to great lengths to distance themselves politically and culturally from Europe. Physical geography, too, mandates that one has to scale the Pyrenees and the other has to swim the Channel/drive the Chunnel to arrive at the heart of the European Union. Still, being a cosmopolitan city in league with Barcelona, Paris, and London, Madrid's streets provided a fertile landscape in which media "gray markets" could circulate.

TRACK 6: "The Wild Ones"

I slowly do a lap around la Plaza de Olavide. Maybe I do a few. This is a longer song, and I really like this place. It feels tucked away; traffics runs underneath it and the playground lends a familial, familiar ambiance.



Figure 6. A quiet day at Plaza de Olavide (May 2004)

Prior to my exposure to music markets (both official and bootleg) like the Sunday flea by Tirso de Molina station, I was not too familiar with Spain's place in punk history. When the punk movement coalesced in the mid-1970s, the UK and Spain were in quite different political situations. For a few years, punk was a genuine pop music phenomenon in much of the English-speaking world, presenting a "distorted reflection of... post-war subcultures" (Hebdige 1979: 26). Spain was still embracing a newly minted Third Republic in the wake of General Franco's 1975 death. Spain's lack of World War II involvement and totalitarian repression under Franco forced subcultures into a different framework. Though Madrid did later birth counterparts to the Ramones or the Clash (perhaps most prominently Los Nikis, founded in 1981), punk landed differently on that urban canvas.

TRACK 7: “Obsessions”

I suppose it's time to go home. It's a good place to hit 'Stop' and put my Discman away as I approach my apartment building.



Figure 7. The front door of my building (February 2004)

The result was called *la movida Madrileña* (the Madrid scene/movement). La Movida did include punk and new wave music (5), but it was a wider conglomeration of painters, writers, and weirdos enjoying their newfound freedom of expression. One prominent denizen was filmmaker Pedro Almodóvar, who would later win two Academy Awards (6) and become a household name in the US by the time I moved to Madrid in 2004. Almodóvar once said “we imitated everything we liked and had a great time doing it... the more we plagiarised, the more authentic we were” (quoted in Parsons 2003: 106).

TRACK 8: “Film Star”

In 2011, Madrid inaugurated its urban plagiarism of the Hollywood walk of fame on Calle Martín de los Heros. When my friend walked me by it in 2015, somebody had recently drawn a crude penis in red ink on Almodóvar's star.



Figure 8. Pedro Almodovar's star (with phallic graffiti), Calle Martin de los Heros (July 2015)

It follows, then, that both *La Movida* and the Britpop tradition heavily leveraged penchants for fashionable plagiarism. Plagiarism had always been a hallmark of working-class art/rebellion in the UK, but Britpop deluged the mainstream with Noel Gallagher's blatantly borrowed riffs (7) (Niven 2014) and Damien Hirst's derivative pop-art (see James 2007). Like their Madrilenian antecedents, nobody gave a shit what their critics said about originality (or anything, really). What mattered was how much plastic you moved, and because CD bootlegging was still extremely

expensive (8) in the mid-90s, the top British rock bands sold compact discs in unimaginable numbers throughout Europe.

TRACK 9: “Can’t Get Enough”



Figure 9. Jóvenes walking down Fuencarral (July 2009)

Though Suede were hardly working-class icons and quickly grew to resent the term, Brett Anderson’s obvious David Bowie inspiration/emulation fell right into that Britpop groove. Anderson co-founded Suede in London in the late 1980s, and the band’s art-school androgyny made them a perfect face for what came to be characterise Cool Britannia of the mid 90s. Indeed, they enjoyed a decade of phenomenal success in the United Kingdom, as the *Singles* collection would document in light of their dissolution in 2003.

TRACK 10: "Everything Will Flow"

This song is immaculate, and exactly what I need to hear at this point in my life.



Figure 10. Madrid from my window (February 2004)

To this American coming of age in the mid-nineties, Cool Britannia only made a handful of mainstream dents (9). Most of the biggest bands affiliated with Britpop, including Suede and Blur, were marketed more aggressively toward music nerds than teenyboppers (Cavanagh 1997). I have no memory of ever seeing Suede on MTV. I had no first-hand exposure to any British press at the time, so the hype that journalists built around Suede was wholly unfamiliar. For example, it wasn't until after I listened to *Singles* that I knew of Anderson's antagonistic relationship with original guitarist Bernard Butler, who split halfway through recording *Dog Man Star* (1994). In 2004, I was studying film so, ironically, I was more familiar with *Dog Star Man*, the masterwork by American avant-garde filmmaker Stan Brakhage, who had died the previous year. The band insisted the title was a coincidence. However, the front and back cover photos featured photographs of a nude figure lying on a bed by the American artist Joanne Leonard (10) – *a tender and intimate image... tied to floating and volatile ironies...*

The Middle Tracks (Some Filler / The End of the CD Era)

TRACK 11: “Stay Together”

The reference to “two hearts under the skyscrapers” hits home, for some reason.



Figure 11. The Four Towers gaze over a pile of rubble near Chamartín station (May 2022)

TRACK 12: “Love the Way You Love”

Eh, this song sucks. I hit skip.



Figure 12. Graffiti in a vacant lot near Chueca (July 2009)

Back in my American hometown in the years before I moved to Madrid, I knew somebody who moonlighted as a clerk in a CD shop in a puke-colored, soul-sucking, highway-adjacent outlet mall. He and I got along well, despite disagreements over whether it was ever justifiable to charge \$18 (11) for a Compact Disc. He said yes, but I would never be convinced. The costs of the materials that went into a Compact Disc (casing, disc, and artwork) were roughly one to two percent of the standard MSRP (Strauss 1995). My misgivings also stemmed from how quickly things were changing; a lot of my friends at college now had converted their whole music collection into digital formats, encased in the iTunes program. I thought it was odd how quickly the American middle class was divorcing itself from music materiality, particularly once Apple opened the iTunes store in 2003.

TRACK 13: "The Drowners"

I don't yet know it, but this was the first single that Suede released, ushering in Britpop. I also do not yet know of Supersonic (12), a Britpop club a few blocks from my flat. Granted, I'm not yet the US drinking age, and I'm an awful dancer, so clubs are new terrain for me. What I do know upon first listen, however, is that this song sounds massive and that it could easily have birthed a movement. I listen to it on repeat on my walk home from class.



Figure 13. The sign outside Supersonic, Madrid's original Britpop club (July 2009)

Indeed, while I was arguing with my friend over CD prices, file-sharing services like Napster, KaZaa, and Limewire made spending money on music ostensibly redundant for anybody with a reliable internet connection and free time. There was still a fertile market for the production and distribution of bootleg compact discs, though. Not everyone was in a financial position or even enthusiastic to unload their physical media in favour of MP3s at first.

TRACK 14: “New Generation”



Figure 14. Estadio Santiago Bernabeu after Real Madrid v. Celta de Vigo (February 28, 2004)

No matter how much persistent music consumers were being ripped off, the bootleg market has always existed for reasons reactionary to industry overreach (see Heylin 1994). Though it seems anachronistic now, peddlers, predominantly recent immigrants from Africa, laid out a patchwork of CD-Rs and DVD-Rs across blankets which could easily be cinched in a moments' notice whenever a suspect authority figure approached. I never witnessed any arrests or out-and-out harassment of these vendors, but I'm sure it happened enough so that, as I was thumbing through crudely Xeroxed covers of new releases, the quilt would disappear from under me and the vendors would hide behind a nearby corner.

TRACK 15: “Lazy”



Figure 15. Perrito, descansando al lado del bar Arco Iris (July 2009)

I never knew exactly how illegal these bootlegs were. The high mobility of disc vendors, a lack of quality control, and a lack of visible police harassment all converged to form more of a “grey market” (Karaganis 2011; Sezneva 2012) than anything critically enforceable in 2004. One year prior, the Ayuntamiento de Madrid had significantly updated their citywide peddling ordinances (13). Several articles emphasised codification of National ID or Passport for licensure (No. 11), the city’s heavy hand in enforcing sanitation and prices (21-23), and a gaping range in penalties for violation (14), none of which were clearly defined. Absent from the city’s peddling laws were any explicit references to music or electronic equipment, further blurring the points of intersection between the power of street vendors and the power of the government (Milgram 2015).

TRACK 16: “She’s in Fashion”

I walk out of the Alonzo Martinez Metro and cross by la Plaza de Santa Bárbara. A small production crew surrounds a woman, who is posing into a TV camera. I remember seeing Zinedine Zidane filming a French lottery ad in that same spot five years ago.



Figure 16. A crew films a make-up advert by la Plaza de Santa Bárbara (July 2009)

In early 2008, a satirical column in the Minneapolis Star Tribune unceremoniously eulogised the format (Riemenschneider 2008). Around the same time, *The Independent* affixed a CD by Minneapolis demigod Prince to an issue at newsstands throughout the UK. In 2009, Will Straw wrote of this promotional stunt that “it was difficult to tell while almost-extinct cultural form was propping up the other” (p. 82). Ouch.

TRACK 17: “Attitude”

It's not awful, but this song still feels like filler. I hit “skip” after the first chorus.



Figure 17. Anarchist graffiti on a road sign near the Madrid Opera House (January 2004)

In his 2009 book *Appetite for Self-Destruction*, journalist Steve Knopper credited a panoply of factors in the compact disc crash of that decade: price gouging which heavily favored major labels and manufacturers (the former often owning the latter), poor marketing/merchandising decisions, and coked-out music executives (15) running to their lawyers and lobbyists to battle the tide of music file-sharing via those aforementioned platforms. As punk scholar Ellen Bernhard (2019) recounted, the CD glut did influence punk labels like Epitaph and Fat Wreck Chords to break newer bands via compilations sold for \$4-6, a solid \$10 below the standard price of most albums at the time.

TRACK 18: “Electricity”



Figure 18. A Record shop near la Plaza del Callao (April 2004)

By the mid-2000s, even the bootleg CD market was grappling with impending obsolescence:

“Only a few years ago, the street commerce in pirated music...was held up as convincing proof of the bleak future facing the cultural industries. Now the reliance of this commerce on digital discs, and on the quasi-artisanal labor needed to make and transport them, seems quaintly heroic, a means of resisting music’s final loss of physical artifactuality. Those who buy pirated CDs are now considered deviant less for their support of piracy than for their outmoded attachment to the CD as an object.” (Straw 2009: 78)

Touché.

TRACK 19: “We are the Pigs”

I hear a crowd chanting, “Por España! Por Espana!” while walking by el Templo de Debod. I walk over to the railing and see a crowd assembled, flying Falangist flags and holding up their arms in fascist salutes. It terrifies me.



Figure 19. Falange (far-right) rally by el Templo de Debod (July 2015)

Furthermore, Straw reflected that by 2005, street vendors in Mexico City were “[competing] less with the legal vendors of entertainment software than with the archives of downloadable music available for free on the internet” (2009: 80). Bootleg CD-Rs of specific albums (complete with artwork and intact track lists) were giving way to CD-Rs loaded with MP3s covering entire discographies. I do not recall seeing any full discography packages mixed in with Xeroxed bootleg reproductions of official albums in 2004 Madrid, and when I returned in 2009, music and movie bootleggers were already starting to vanish from the familiar corners they once crowded.

The Two Concluding Tracks

TRACK 20: “Positivity”

I walk out of my building and see the street has been closed off. It's marathon day. I watch runners pass by the Bilbao Metro station for a few minutes. I'm about to go meet some friends in Retiro. This will be one of the most beautiful days of my life.



Figure 20. Marathon runners on Calle de Sagasta (Sunday April 25, 2004)

It started with an impulsive bootleg CD purchase that could only have happened in a specific era and, based on how much I still connect the *Singles* to Madrid, a specific place. In those days, I knew very little about Suede and assumed their greatest years were behind them. Today, my collection now includes more records by Suede than almost (16) any other band. Toward the end of a 2018 NME interview, Anderson and bassist Mat Osman commented that the reason they have thrived artistically over this past decade was because they *aren't* superstars anymore (17). The pressures and conditions that willed their *Singles* into existence, especially to a level of demand as a bootleg all over the streets of Madrid, are no more. Several tracks from 2013's *Bloodsports* have supplanted several older songs in their live sets; “Barriers” and “It Starts and Ends with You” sound better than most of the *Singles* (18).

TRACK 21: “Saturday Night”

‘If I ever see Suede live, I hope they close with this. What a wonderful fucking song’, I think to myself as the Metro Linea 1 pulls into the station at Bilbao and I step off the train onto the platform(19), trying to decide which exit to take. I could take the one closest to my apartment, but I’m not ready to go home yet. I head toward the other exit.



Figure 21. Bilbao Metro Platform on a Saturday night (July 2009)

Chamberí has changed, there is not enough demand for digital media to dominate grey markets anymore, and the vendors of second-hand ephemeral goods, always transient in the first place, are long gone. No matter how much better Suede get with age, no material piece of their music could mean as much to me as the cheap knockoff CD-R that started everything. As easy as CDs are to duplicate, and as simple as the Xeroxed liner notes are to reprint, it’s the one item I could never genuinely replace.

Tyler Sonnichsen teaches Geography and Environmental Studies at Central Michigan University. He is a cultural geographer with interests in music, transit, and media history. He published his first book, *Capitals of Punk: Paris, DC, and Circulation in the Urban Underground* (Palgrave Macmillan) in 2019, and recently founded *Postcards from Irving*, a zine chronicling the travels and vaudeville career of his great-grandfather. More information is available at SonicGeography.com.



Figure 22. The author on the platform at Chamartín (July 2015)

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Endnotes

- 1) I would later buy a legitimate copy of *Singles* at a used CD store in Washington, DC, netting exactly as much money to the band (\$0.00) as my bootleg purchase did.
- 2) Translation by Deborah Parsons, 2003.
- 3) Of course, my material-psychogeographic relationship with Suede is not limited strictly to Madrid. I often recall a moment on Portobello Road market in 2009 when I foolishly passed on an original vinyl pressing of their debut album for £10. In 2019 in Paris, I purchased their hefty B-side collection *Sci-Fi Lullabies* at an FNAC by Gare du Nord, wrongly convinced I would never find it in the States.
- 4) They were.
- 5) Radio Futura's 1980 single "Enamorada de la Moda Juvenil" ("In Love with Youth Fashion") became one of the flagship anthems of La Movida and remains one of Spain's great early punk songs. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=t00n9tbnKd8>
- 6) Best Foreign Language Film for *Todo Sobre Mi Madre* (1999) and best original screenplay for *Hable Con Ella* (2002).
- 7) <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=asPX9UllGn0>
- 8) According to Bob Starrett's article in a 2000 Roxio Newsletter (accessible at <https://web.archive.org/web/20030202233907/http://www.roxio.com/en/support/cdr/historycdr.html>), it was not until September 1995 that the first CD writer that cost under \$1,000 was made available to consumers.
- 9) As I remember 1994-1996: Oasis, The Spice Girls, and *Trainspotting*. Blur and the Verve both became one-hit-wonders stateside in 1997.
- 10) <https://www.discogs.com/master/10069-Suede-Dog-Man-Star/image/SW1hZ2U6MTlwMzQ4Mw==>
- 11) Roughly \$27 in 2022 purchasing power.
- 12) In the words of Martin DiBergi, "don't bother looking for it; it's not there anymore."
- 13) Full text available at <https://sede.madrid.es/portal/site/tramites/menuitem.5dd4485239c96e10f7a72106a8a409a0/?vgnextoid=069d7b3cb0e4f010VgnVCM1000009b25680aRCRD&vgnextchannel=245e5d53be9a0210VgnVCM100000171f5a0aRCRD&vgnextfmt=pda>
- 14) Artículo 43 warned of potential *apercibimiento* (a verbal reprimanding), up to €6,010.12 for *faltas muy graves* (very serious violations).
- 15) <https://www.hollywoodreporter.com/news/music-news/walter-yetnikoff-former-cbs-records-president-and-industry-titan-dies-at-87-1234995762/>
- 16) Blur.

17) This article's early genesis was as an essay praising 2016's *Night Thoughts*, which I felt reestablished the band's artistic ambition and relevance for a 'New Generation.' 2018's *The Blue Hour* was even better. In 2022, they released *Autofiction*, which appeared on many year-end critics' polls and fomented a successful international tour.

18) <https://www.nme.com/news/music/suede-blue-hour-new-album-interview-brett-anderson-mat-osman-video-2377804>

19) I did not see the music video for "Saturday Night" (1997, Pedro Romhanyi, dir.) video until years after I first heard the song. It's setting in a London Tube station fit in well with my Metro-centric Madrid psychogeography: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wEWn0aVcuSM>



ECHOES OF THE CLUB: AFFECTIVE MATERIALITY & VINYL RECORDS AS BOUNDARY OBJECTS

Erin Cory and Bo Reimer

Grand Öl & Mat, a fixture in Malmö's nightlife, is not easy to find. It does not announce itself from the street, sitting nestled two stories above a car park on a quiet avenue near Folkets Park, a 120-year-old public space in the centre of the city. A pool hall with a similarly understated façade occupies the space upstairs. This section of the street offers itself up to people who know what to look for, where they are going.

It is November 24, 2017, and it is the 7th anniversary of Too Cute to Puke (hereafter TCTP), a self-described 'strictly female-fronted dance party', founded by DJ and club arranger Daniel Novakovic. Eight women DJs will spin records, and two all-women Swedish punk bands will perform. We are here to mingle and dance with(in) the crowd. Using field recorders, we will also conduct impromptu, semi-structured interviews with willing guests and performers, and we have brought with us two MA students from the Media & Communication Studies programme at Malmö University who will film the evening. Our objective is to investigate the role the physical environment and its objects played in creating the specific affective atmosphere of the club, and also to create a material object that will keep the club evening alive (1).



Figure 1: Flyer for Too Cute to Puke's 7th anniversary party. Design: Daniel Novakovic.

Imagining the Scene: On Affective Atmospheres & Affective Materiality

While affect is a notoriously challenging concept to pin down, it can be used to understand what happens in moments of encounter, not only between bodies but also through objects. Stewart (2007) describes it as ‘a kind of contact zone...more directly unpredictable than symbolic meanings’ (p. 3). As such, it can include many things alongside bodies: events, conditions, technologies, and experiences that take place together (ibid.). This ‘taking place’ cannot be mapped as something fixed, but rather must be understood, or felt, through ‘the actual lines of potential that a something coming together calls to mind and sets in motion...[as]the pressure points of events’ (ibid: 2). This coming together, according to Ahmed (2010), happens because affects are something ‘sticky’ that circulates not only via bodies, but also through objects. Affect is ‘what sticks, or what sustains or preserves the connection between ideas, values, and objects’ (Ahmed 2010a: 29). While Ahmed focuses on how one particular affect – happiness – circulates, we might substitute any other affect as something that can be ‘catchy...a kind of brimming over that exceeds what [we] encounter’ (2010b: 575). An object can carry an affect around and eventually become inextricably associated with that affect, a phenomenon that accounts for how social bonds are, at their core, sensational: if we are similarly oriented towards objects, we might be directed towards each other.

Ash (2015) argues that affect is not only relational (constituted through an encounter between two bodies, or a body and an object), but can be examined less anthropocentrically by paying attention to the capacities and properties intrinsic to non-human objects *before* their encounters with human bodies. Dealing specifically with sound, Ash argues for considering affects as material objects transmitted through their ‘perturbations’ (Bryant 2011) or selective encounters with other objects. Objects retain affect, but the specific affect produced in an encounter depends on the specific qualities of an object that emerge in its encounter with another object. These encounters – between objects or between objects and humans – produce affective atmospheres, those ‘feelings and moods that circulate through particular spaces’ (Ash 2013: 22). As we shake off our umbrellas and leave the rainy night behind for the warmth of the packed club, these ideas are forefront in our minds. What sorts of affective atmospheres and objects will we encounter, or perhaps be part of producing?

Joy and Struggle: Too Cute to Puke’s 7th Anniversary Party

Grand consists of two main rooms. One holds the stage and dancefloor, which sits under a rotating light fixture adorned with paper vines and decorative birds. The larger room is bordered by a series of cozy booths along one side, bars at either end, and a middle lounge area set up with shag carpeting and retro furniture. The golden-orange lighting is warm and welcoming, the vibe straight out of a 70s film.

Decks have been set up in both rooms for the eight DJs on the bill. Each DJ or DJ team touts their own styles, ranging from old school country to indie to electronica, the common factor being that every song in rotation is performed by women musicians. Most of the DJs play vinyl. People dance in the lounge area, relax in booths, chat while waiting at the bar, and carefully navigate the crowd to deliver drinks to their friends. In the stage room, musical equipment is set up by the stage, awaiting the two bands playing that night. Before they go on, and between their sets, the dancefloor is a crush of bodies dancing and singing along to the DJs’ tunes.

The party's milieu is largely made up of women, dressed in such a way that they can be 'read' as part of the scene. Faux fur coats, vintage dresses, winged eyeliner, and carefully curated hairstyles (whether beehives or shaved heads) are in abundance, marking their wearers as connoisseurs of a particular aesthetic. This is particularly true of the evening's performers. However, many clubgoers can also be read as more mainstream and, similarly, the mix of ages is evident from the outset: teenage girls sit at the bar next to women in their 30s and 40s.



Figure 2: Band Katthem plays Too Cute to Puke's 7th anniversary party at Grand, Malmö. Photo: Daniel Novakovic.

During the night, bodies, sonic technologies, and sound itself mix, collide, and collaborate, creating an exuberance within the space of the club. Several clubgoers explicitly mention to us the atmosphere, which they describe as unusual, social, happy, and safe.

Cornelia, in her mid-20s, is sitting with two friends near the lounge area. She notes the novel mix of music which, in its embrace of both old and new sounds, is nevertheless grounded in an overall *feeling*.

I think the music is very joyful in a way that it's not usually in clubs... And it creates a kind of atmosphere that you don't see usually, and people are dancing spontaneously in a way that you don't see all the time... [It's] the rhythm of the music, I guess, and the energy it gives.

Several interviewees connect this joyful atmosphere to the DJs' practice and the material objects with which they work. Ellen, part of a trio sitting in the lounge, describes her excitement at finding a DJ she liked:

I think nine out of ten times it's a man DJing... and we really found a favourite DJ here tonight. We asked about her name so that we could at least go listen again because she was really, really good.

While Ellen and her friends tap into the affective atmosphere produced by how a DJ deployed vinyl records to create a specific mood in the club, other clubgoers link these objects to spaces beyond

the club. Ulrika, a TCTP regular, connects the male-dominated indie music scene to both her work as a creative, and to the record stores she and the DJs frequent.

...where I work, it's in advertising, and it's only men and I'm so tired of it, especially because I really love music and when I go to concerts or record stores, it's the same. When I go to my favourite record store, it's like me and maybe someone's girlfriend, and it's only men. It's like we discussed with the DJs playing tonight. They also said that you have to be really dedicated to find other stuff. They went to a record store in Malmö today and they said there's like only records by guys.

These reflections correspond to Novakovic's reasons for starting TCTP, and the potentials he saw in bringing 'girls to the front', to echo Bikini Kill's Kathleen Hanna:

The club's theme is to promote female-fronted music, to promote more girls and women to start DJ-ing and start their own clubs...The reasons I started the club, is that I was compiling a mixtape for a friend of mine like '77 punk, and she got it and she was like, 'There are only dudes on this.' And I was like, 'Yeah, you're right.' So I thought, well ok, I'm going to challenge myself because...it's kind of the same every time... [I'm going to] see if I can do a set with just female fronted [bands]. So I did it at a small bar, and that went really well. And then I started doing it at a place with a dance floor, and that went really well, so I started booking female friends, and they would play fantastic stuff, which like a dude would never play...I learnt so much.

Vinyl Records as (Research/Scene) Archives: Affective Materiality and Boundary Objects

Vinyl records are material objects that collect the affective atmospheres of a community and the struggles at its heart: they can be deployed to produce affective atmospheres in the context of a club – to *sound* a feeling back to a community. As DJ Louise reflects on the importance on playing vinyl:

I am not going to exaggerate. There is a lot of nerdiness in relation to these genres. But I have to say: It does give a certain feeling. And if you compare the originals – I am not the nerd of nerds – but if you compare the sound, it is much, much better on the original recordings than on many reissues.

To better understand *how* vinyl records can produce and archive these affective atmospheres through many spaces and contexts; to what novel uses they may be put; and how they might signify the gender politics of the scene, which link the personal lives of its members *beyond* the club, it is helpful to consider them as boundary objects. Star (2010) theorizes boundary objects as inherently flexible, 'at once material and processual...[both shaped and shaped by] conventions of a community of practice' (p. 604-611). Ahmed (2014) has likewise written of affects as always in-process, the 'effect of surfacing, as an effect of the histories of contact between bodies, objects, and signs' (p. 86). Understanding vinyl records as affective material objects that both shape and are shaped by (human and non-human) actors affords human participants not just the capacity to fall into affective atmospheres, but, to push Ash's (2015) argument further, the *agency* to notice them, engage them, transmit them, and shape them, in the context of the club and also into the future.

With this agency comes the potential that different actors will *use* records differently, a perspective that opens up the possibility of using vinyl records beyond the communal (clubs,

record shops) or personal (homes) spaces related to a scene and its members. Indeed, this perspective allows space for the use and *production* of vinyl records beyond the scene entirely.



Figure 3: TCTP clubgoers embrace. Photo: Daniel Novakovic.

As Bartmanski and Woodward (2018) argue, music is not only about communication of sound: 'It is also an *experience* of objects and emplaced performance'; and captured on vinyl it becomes a conglomeration of tactile, haptic, visual, and even olfactory experiences (p. 173). Experiences of such objects can be quite fundamental. As a vinyl collector states in an interview study: Records are people too (Fernandes and Beverland 2019: 1164).

Scholars have discussed how this conglomeration functions through exploring sonic boundary objects in relation to podcasts (Cory and Boothby 2021), game music (Redecker 2022), music theory (Chow 2020) and digital music (Nowak and Whelan 2016). However, scant work exists on the vinyl record as such an object (2).

Our attempt was to *produce* a vinyl record as a boundary object that transmits a co-created affective atmosphere. Although literature exists regarding the circulation of sound archives between and amongst archivists, researchers, and communities (e.g., Brinkhurst 2012, Lobley 2012), the purpose here was to create not only a sonic archive, but an archive of the *feeling* of the night, to knit together the explicitly feminist ethos of TCTP with the sounds of its happening by deploying one of the objects central to the related scene.

Out of the roughly 60 minutes of audio material that we recorded, we selected clips, edited them together, and produced a vinyl 45 consisting of an 'A' side with clips from Swedish interviews with some of the DJs and with the TCTP founder Novakovic, and a 'B' side with clips from English interviews with participants at the club. The sleeve was designed by Novakovic, who selected

photos he felt expressed the party's feeling, and formatted these in a striking black-and-white palette reminiscent of iconic punk and indie records. One hundred copies were pressed.



Figure 4: Vinyl cover and record. Photo: Maria Hellström Reimer (3).

What stands out on the record is its ethnographic content. The voices are archived in physical form. But it is not only the voices that are present. The intensity of the evening is captured through the background noise from other visitors, and from the music played by the DJs. As such, it is a text that preserves not only the grain of the voice (Barthes 1984) but also, we might claim, the texture of the night – that joy and awe (and even cynicism) that gave it its shape and sound. The intimacy of the audio format communicates this feeling in a way a standard written research text could not possibly do, affording the scene a resonance, and the reader/listener an intimacy with the sound that is not bound by time or space (Lacey 2013). The recording also illuminates the role that interviewing at the club plays. There is a performative aspect in making the interviews while things are happening; the visitors formulate what they experience in a way they may not have been able to do the day after. As the young woman who ends the 'B' side reflects on the night:

we're both feminist, so we want females to be fronting everything, I feel. I just find it so empowering to see, especially the last band. Like I haven't seen them before, but I just feel so strongly about them all being girls. And it just makes me feel like I could do anything, and

I just wanna do everything, like seeing them I just like wanna start a band with all girls, or not men anyways. I want it all!

QR Link: Vinyl video – Too Cute to Puke. Video by Maria Hellström Reimer.

The Release Party and the Afterlife of the Record

A club night does not normally leave any lasting physical traces. And yet, this time there was the vinyl. In the early days of March 2020, we threw a record release party with Novakovic at a small gallery in Malmö, where we gave away the record to attendees. The space was wallpapered with huge blowups of the photographs collaged on the album's cover, all taken by Novakovic himself. A DJ who spun at TCTP's anniversary party performed, and the place was just as packed as Grand had been on that night nearly two and a half years earlier. The night was a reprisal of the anniversary party – sonically, physically, and culturally similar – echoing its atmosphere through social interactions and music, with the actual echoes of the party distributed through the album itself. In retrospect, the echoes of this intimacy ring especially poignant in light of the fact that we were on the pandemic's doorstep and would be isolated from each other in various levels of restriction for the next two years.

With only 100 copies of the vinyl pressed, and most of them given away at the release party, this object might have taken on the patina of a collector's item, which one could argue did not connect the object to a particular local scene, but instead relegated it to the often gendered (male) practice of record collecting (Straw 1997, Maalsen & McLean 2018). We cannot either ascertain whom these sounds reached, or what effect they had, what inspirations or feelings they evoked, or what calls to action and community they led to.

That was, however, not the main point. Releasing a record means letting go. What happens afterwards is up to the users, who are free to make use of this boundary object in whichever ways they like. Maybe the record wound up on various turntables, creating memories of that evening and strengthening a community feeling during the COVID-19 pandemic, playing to the 'stickiness' of the affects and affective atmospheres accumulated in the object itself (Ahmed 2010). Maybe not. It opened up these possibilities, at least. And by distilling the evening's feelings to vinyl – with all its warmth, imperfection, and scratchiness – we imbricated ourselves in the communicative potentials of the research object, sonically doing what we typically do in our research and writing (that is, selecting for the most evocative moments). In this way, we were also part of the political and cultural work of TCTP, ensuring in a small way that its affective atmosphere (Ash 2015) would be carried into the future on the very material object that made this atmosphere possible in the first place.

We ourselves have listened and re-listened to the vinyl, remembering the feeling of being in the space of the anniversary party and the record release party. If we can count our own experiences of engaging the record as an object over the last two years, it has served as an archive tethering us to the sounds, people, and politics of not only a particular scene, but a particular *night*. The vinyl is a testament to a night during which the sounds and objects of a scene could not be co-opted or dominated by men, but rather were artfully wielded by women, to the delight and relief of



an appreciative crowd. The experience of holding the object, decorated in joyful images of the night, and listening to its sounds, provokes in us not only nostalgia, but a visceral memory of an atmosphere and scene to which we feel dedicated. It is our ethnographic research made public, material - an offering to a community that continues to push back, exuberantly, against the sexism that still encroaches on its liberation.

Erin Cory is a media scholar committed to arts-oriented activist media praxis. She has taught and researched in the US/Mexico border region, Denmark, Sweden, and Lebanon. She earned her PhD in Communication from the University of California, San Diego, in 2015. After completing a postdoc in Media Studies and Refugee Migration at Malmö University, she was awarded a grant from Riksbankens Jubileumsfond for the solo research project, *Performing Integration: Participatory Art and New Publics* in Malmö. She is Senior Lecturer in Media & Communication Studies at Malmö University and has performed in bands and DJ'd in the US, Scandinavia, and Lebanon.

Bo Reimer is Professor of Media and Communication Studies at the School of Arts and Communication, Malmö University, and the founding director of *Medea*, a research lab dealing with collaborative media, design, and public engagement (<https://mau.se/en/research/research-platforms/medea/>). He is the author of *Collaborative Media. Production, Consumption, and Design Interventions* (The MIT Press 2013, with Jonas Löwgren), and *The Politics of Postmodernity* (Sage, 1999, with John R. Gibbins). He has also written *The Most Common of Practices. On Mass Media Use in Late Modernity* (Almqvist & Wiksell International, 1994).

Endnotes

1. Thirteen clubgoers were interviewed over the course of the evening, some of them in small groups. To ensure their consent, we explained what we were doing, asked for verbal consent, and gave out cards with our contact information, in case they had follow-up questions. We had Novakovic's permission to record the night, and he also agreed to let us use his own photographs of the event for future exhibitions and publications. Interviews with visitors and Novakovic were conducted in English by Cory, interviews with DJs by Reimer in Swedish.

2. The extant work does not appear to use core theories on boundary objects (e.g., Star 2010, Star & Griesemer 1989). Instead, this work either does not cite any theory (e.g., Sarpong et al, 2016) or uses an institutional studies framework (e.g., Thompson 2018).

3. Record produced by Bo Reimer, mastered by Martin Hennel.

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EXPLORING THE FORGOTTEN: THE EVIDENTIAL HERITAGE VALUES OF GRASSROOTS MUSIC VENUES

Yorgos Paschos

The opening lyrics of “Elocution” by Sleaford Mods sung by Jason Williamson in his poshest, indie-est, and phoniest voice, brilliantly capture the state of British independent, grassroots music venues. In principle, scholars and industry professionals alike acknowledge the importance of grassroots music venues (GMV) with regard to local talent development, conceiving them as vital elements of the urban live music ecology (Van der Hoeven & Hitters 2019), understood as the local or broader networks of venues, audiences, music professional and their environment (Webster et al., 2018; Banks et al., 2000), and as “beacons of live music” (Music Venue Trust 2015). However, in reality, their nature is often primarily transitional. Many artists and bands pass through independent venues with the underlying goal of global, commercial success. It is the first step of their career. And often, once that goal is achieved, they do not return, forgetting the venues that once supported their initial musical explorations. This situation puts GMVs in a continuously precarious position that undermines their actual role within the music night-time economy – that is, the development of local talents and the planning of community-driven activities – and future development plans. In this night-time economy dominated by ‘mainstream’ places of segregated entertainment, hybrid and counter-dominant cultural outlets such as GMVs are neglected. More specifically, such outlets are overshadowed “by the dominance of a more ‘mainstream’ form that exploits existing cleavages in the population and segregates adults into particular spaces and places” (Hollands 2002:154). Moreover, their long heritage, which can provide rich evidence about local scenes and subcultures, is also undermined due to the constant precarious conditions that such venues are in.



Critically examining the importance of GMVs and challenging pre-constructed, dominant music industry views decried by artists such as Sleaford Mods, it is essential to broaden the understanding of their significance. This requires moving from the exploration of GMVs' role in talent development to a deeper focus on the heritage which exists in their material environment. With that in mind, and through a White Rose College of Arts and Humanities (WRoCAH) funded research project, I pose and explore the following questions: what if GMVs are approached as heritage sites within which local audiences and communities attach values and leave personal traits? What if GMVs are understood as “symbolic anchors in regions, as signs of community, belonging and a shared past” (Lewis 1992b: 144 in Miller & Schofield 2016: 138) based on their subcultural heritage significance?

The aim of this article, then, is to examine the importance of the Grassroots Music Venue by adopting a heritage significance lens. In doing so, I aim to forward the understanding of such venues as heritage sites which produce temporal and ephemeral heritage embedded within counter-cultural narratives. Through a series of photographs captured in The Fulford Arms – a small (180 cap.) GMV, situated in York, Northern England – and by rethinking GMVs as heritage sites, this article examines the evidential value of such venues. By providing this empirical evidence, I explore how GMVs retain evidence of past gigs and other cultural activities. Such exploration can communicate the temporal and ephemeral nature of live musical performances, as well as reveal a certain interior design style, which, by evoking past performances' remnants through material artefacts such as photographs, posters, stickers, and other ephemera, re-enacts and recreates embodied memories for audiences, performers and stakeholders.

These memories are strongly connected to the materiality of GMVs, which is characterised by a unique stylistic tone through a constantly shifting interplay between people and space. In other words, space is not approached as a fixed entity, but rather, as a fluid materiality which can be altered by people. This tone set by the material artefacts of venues within the space, having established its particular, unique style, is representative of the culture that thrives within GMVs while providing a rich, illustrative connection to each venue's past. That being said, the use of photos to capture the evidential value of GMVs in this article divulges the alteration of the built environment, responsive to the material surroundings of those that construct it by shedding light on the material artefacts of such spaces. Hence, this photo-based article vividly evokes the temper and texture of the subcultures that thrive in grassroots music venues. The heritage of GMVs is materialised and articulated through the counter-cultural narratives that are produced within these spaces. Such narratives, as explained below, often move against the authorised heritage discourse (AHD) which mainly considers the aesthetic beauty of a heritage site (Smith 2012: para.5). The notion of AHD is clarified in a later section where the evidential value as a marker of heritage significance is discussed.

By adopting a stance questioning the dominance of AHD and advancing a counter-authorised perception of heritage, this article places the process of heritage value attachment to venues by audiences at the heart of this debate. This approach to assigning and articulating value opens up further space for understanding GMVs as spaces that are produced through the ascription of heritage values, based on an interplay and interaction between people and objects (Low 2016). This synthesis of objects and people, taking place in spatial arrangements, illustrates the ways in which the physical location of the venues can alter the relation between cultural activities per se and the built environment within which, every day, lived heritage is produced (van de Hoeven and Hitters 2020).

Evidential Value of Grassroots Music Venues as Heritage Sites

Explorations of the importance and cultural significance of grassroots music venues through a heritage lens should be grounded in a theoretical framework that forwards their understanding as heritage sites. Through this frame, GMVs can be defined in terms of their characteristics and activities – as alternative urban playscapes of nightlife (Chatterton & Hollands 2003: 93) which, by offering niche and accessible cultural events, attract national and local communities. They can be distinguished from mainstream and profit-driven commercial venues on the basis of their accessible status. Big commercial venues such as O2 Arenas tend to be “profit-oriented places of capital accumulation, targeting cash-rich groups” (Chatterton & Holland 2003: 93). GMVs, on the other hand, are typically small, social hubs that play a significant role in the formation of personal and collective identities by facilitating the nurturing of the relationship between live music, performers and audiences. In terms of their capacity, they are small venues (100-650 cap.) while their interiors follow a similar form: posters, worn-out paint on the walls, and tired toilet facilities. Finally, some GMVs have different former uses such as working men’s clubs, social clubs, industrial warehouses, railway arches, and libraries.

This definition is based on an understanding of the development of personal relationships within venues, their historical and architectural merit, and their distinctive interior style that is altered by the presence of audiences and performers. These traits reveal the venues’ significance as heritage sites by highlighting the communal, historical, evidential and aesthetic values that audiences attach to them.

Evidential value as a marker of heritage significance

Following this line of argumentation, this article’s focus is on the evidence and traits that audiences and performers leave to GMVs. Such traits are acquired through the a venue’s capacity to gather information on these past human movements (Historic Englands n.d) and in doing so, evidencing value. While discourses of *evidential value* are interdisciplinary, they are mainly grounded within the field of archaeology, and through the discipline’s close connection to heritage studies. More broadly, different sets of values can be applied to heritage sites, ranging from aesthetic values to economic and symbolic ones. Based on the ambiguity and plurality of heritage values and the need for the development of a value toolkit that will enable the assessment of different sites, English Heritage’s Conservation Principles (2008) provides a framework that includes four core heritage values: the aesthetic, evidential, communal and historical (Mason 2002). Evidential value, that is, “the potential of a place to yield evidence about past human activity” (English Heritage 2008: 72) is an integral part of this toolkit and linked to traditional understandings of heritage which focus on the material aspect of sites.

Building upon the discussion around heritage values in relation to GMVs, it can be said that groups of people and communities revisit and reproduce the materiality of GMVs based on “the active negotiation of identities, as well as social and generational memories (Byrne et al., 2003: 58-59). This active negotiation on the grounds of a place’s materiality opens the way for the establishment of a dialectic relationship between the notion of evidential value and cultural memory. Cultural memory is understood as a “field of cultural negotiation through which different stories vie for a place in history” (Sturken 1997: 1). It is also an activity that produces new stories and social relations without only preserving the stories of the past (DeCesari & Rigney 2014). Hence, “it attaches itself to sites” (Nora 1989: 22). If the physical spaces of GMVs are re-approached as culturally constructed (Brunow 2019) and, accordingly, a result of cultural memory, then the evidence of people’s existence in the venues is constantly re-negotiated. In other words,

cultural memory, hinged on people's negotiations, turns the spotlight on different evidence of human traces in different periods of time. It can be "adapted, reworked and appropriated within multiple contexts" (Brunow 2019: 11). Hence, the evidential value of heritage is not fixed but ever-changing since its cultural memory is constantly re-negotiated.

The exploration of evidential values as an outcome of cultural memory indicates the continual development of GMVs, a development that, while looking towards the future, bears echoes of the past. And these evidential values are grounded on non-static, material heritage practices. Subsequently, within GMVs, evidential value can be manifested through heritage-as-praxis, or as Roberts and Cohen (2014) would call it, 'little-h heritage', that is, "a form of memory work encompassing everyday social and cultural practices, and a process of tracing influences, connections, and "inheritance tracks" (p.235)

This understanding of the ever-changing evidential value through everyday heritage practices highlights the direct conflict with authorised heritage discourse (AHD). Stemming from the field of traditional archaeology, such discourse tries to silence counter-cultural heritage values, imposing a dominant approach to heritage as "aesthetically pleasing material objects, sites, places and/or landscapes that are non-renewable" (Smith 2012: para. 14). The notion of non-renewability highlights a hegemonic understanding of static and fixed heritage values that should be inherited by future generations unchanged. Hence, AHD claims the existence of inherent heritage values within aesthetically beautiful objects that should be preserved and, in their passing on to new generations unchanged, guarantees that the dominant culture they represent will remain unchallenged.

Despite that, this article focuses on the often forgotten evidential heritage value of GMVs while trying to contradict any hegemonic, authorised heritage discourse attempts to silence counter-cultural narratives. It should be noted that by approaching GMVs as heritage sites, this article does not signify any attempts of appropriation by including them in an authorised heritage discourse which could be derived from the fact that evidential value is traditionally linked to AHD. On the contrary, by using the authorised heritage tools in counter-authorised terms and case studies, it challenges the dominant perceptions of heritage significance. As an outcome, posters, worn-out paint on the walls bearing performers' signatures, heavily used toilet facilities, old carpets, tired bar stools and damaged floors are approached as heritage and explored as signifiers of the evidential heritage value of Grassroots Music Venues.

Case Study

In making claims to GMVs significance as sites of evidential heritage, this study draws upon a close examination of The Fulford Arms – a venue which has a long and interesting history both as a pub and a music venue. Situated in the City of York, North Yorkshire, England and more specifically in the Ward of Fishergate, the premise was built in 1801 under the name 'The Barrack Tavern' in order to provide leisure activities for local troops stationed at the neighbouring Cavalry Barracks (figure 1).

Slowly, the pub's popularity started to diminish, and in 2014, proprietors Chris Tuke and Chris Sherrington took on the tenancy and decided to create a music venue, following the closure of other venues in the city and their experiences of running venues and events in the York³. The Fulford Arms (figure 3) quickly established a good reputation for developing local young artists and welcoming acts of different genres, ranging from indie and folk to death metal and punk. On a more practical note, based on Music Venue Trust guidelines, The Fulford Arms can be categorised as a small grassroots music venue based on 4 criteria: Capacity, activity, infrastructure, and amenities. It is a 180-cap venue which has hosted more than 200 entry-level musicians and established acts headlining or supporting gigs. As far as its amenities and infrastructure are concerned, it has a big stage, mixing desk, PA system, stage microphones, lighting rig and dressing rooms. Moreover, it employs sound engineers and collaborates with promoters.



Figure 3: the Fulford Arms, 2019 (personal archive of Chris Sherrington).

Evidential Heritage Value at the Fulford Arms

Thinking about the unravelling of heritage practices and memories in a venue, I visited the Fulford Arms on the 27th of September 2022 for the event *Hoersfest* which offered a tapestry of electro-punk and drum and bass acts. During this all-day festival, the venue provided significant evidential markers that reveal the continual presence of audiences and performers on its premises. The richest marker of heritage values appears to be the black-board painted walls around the venue's interior which are signed by a selection of acts that have performed in the venue since 2014 (figure 4).



Figure 4: Wall signed by performers, 2022. Taken by author.

A closer look at the walls reveals the evidence of past events and gigs that have been hosted by the Fulford Arms through the eyes of the acts that performed. For example, Glass Mountain signed the upper right part of this wall during their show in the venue on the 9th of September 2018. On the same note, heavy metal band Pariah, who has performed in the venue several times, signed the wall on the 23rd of February 2018 and the Molochs on St. Valentine's Day, 2018. Hence, this 'wall of fame' plays a significant role in the production of the venue's heritage by providing evidence about past activities. More specifically, it does so through an unconventional and niche tangible heritage format which not only encloses the heritage practice of signing the wall by performers but includes a selection of acts that have performed in the venue. Hence, it appears as an in-situ collaborative archive of democratised heritage by creating a sense of the venue's situatedness in the local collective memory. This characteristic directly contradicts authorised heritage commemoration schemes. Such schemes can be understood as acts of consecration that "separate the great from the good while imposing discrete distinctions and producing 'discontinuity out of continuity'" (Bourdieu 1991 in Allen and Lincoln 2004: 873–874).

Moreover, as far as the materiality of these heritage practices is concerned, it also highlights the ephemeral and ever-changing nature of the venues' evidential value as opposed to static AHD perceptions of heritage. Names of new performers are added to the walls almost every day, enriching the value of the Fulford Arms as a site of heritage. Such enrichment is ephemeral due to the fact that all signatures are written with chalk. And in a venue that welcomes audiences, too often, evidence of past gigs vie for a place in the Fulford Arms' history and memory as they can be easily erased or accidentally destroyed. As an outcome, the signatures' fragility, manifested as a glimpse of cultural heritage ephemera, underlines the fact that this form of evidential value can be as temporary as the performers it represents (Strong & Whiting 2018). This situation however is not a direct threat to the evidential value of the venue since it is perceived as a non-static heritage practice that resists any attempts of authorised 'museumification' (Roberts & Cohen 2014).



Figure 5: Interior of the venue, 2022. Taken by author.

Capturing the venue's history of live performances, the signed walls function not only as unauthorised archival resources which connect the past with the present but as sites of heritage-as-praxis which provide tangible evidential memorialisation of the venue (fig. 6). While the 'Sherlocks' sign the upper part of the stage at the Fulford Arms after their show, they are engaging in the production of the venue's heritage by attaching evidential value to its material environment. Subsequently, it can be understood that the evidential value appears as an outcome of heritage-as-praxis which is rooted in the everyday activities of the venue. More specifically, since The Fulford Arms hosts multiple shows almost every day of the year, the act of signing the walls enables heritage practices to be an integral part of the day-to-day performances in the physical space. This practice-oriented activity indicates a high level of engagement between performers and heritage-as-praxis since it is produced so as to capture a specific moment in the history of the venue.



Figure 6: The Sherlocks sign the walls at the venue, 2021. Copyrights: Rhona Murphy. Photograph publicly available on <https://www.thefulfordarms.com/gallery.html>

Finally, as far as their aesthetics are concerned, the signed walls seem to connect the Fulford Arms with a variety of musical identifiers that enable a visual representation of the venue's heritage. These musical identifiers provide rich information about the acts that have been hosted in the venue and their unravelling can reveal important traces of the subcultures that thrive in the venue. This is succeeded through the identification of the music genres presented in the Fulford Arms and their connection to local subcultural scenes. Hence, as an essential part of the site's interior design and decor, the walls materially depict the plurality of musical genres and subcultural aura that exists in the venue, represent its unique stylistic tone and distinctive identity and ultimately suggest how the venue is going to be remembered.

Limitations

While this examination of the Fulford Arms offers an example of the evidential value of GMVs, it is important to provide insights regarding the limitations of the research. Firstly, the sample is by no means representative of all independent music venues in the UK. Hence the analysis can only offer a deeper look into the Fulford Arms and its distinctive evidential value. Secondly, the act of signing the walls was not discussed with artists. As a result, this article is unable to provide a full sense of what it means to sign the wall as a performer, instead exploring this act through a heritage-as-praxis lens. Thirdly, it should be acknowledged that having opened in 2014, the Fulford Arms is relatively new as a music venue. This comparatively short lifespan of the venue could be considered as a possible limitation, given that notions of 'heritage' are more conventionally associated with the exploration of a more distant past (see Bennet and Rodgers 2016; Strong & Whiting 2018; Graves-Brown 2012). These points notwithstanding, as Harvey (2001) notes, heritage does not only concern the past. It is manifested, shaped, negotiated and produced completely in the present while aiming to reproduce itself in the future by looking critically towards the past. Hence, the years that a venue is open do not seem to directly influence its heritage production and significance. Such traits are influenced by audiences, stakeholders and performers who inhabit the venue, attach values and offer rich information about the venue *per se*. As such, this article can be understood as the first stage of a more developed, intensive dive into the heritage values of GMVs, which will address several other important questions regarding the collection, curatorship and preservation of ephemera, and the aspect of forgotten cultural memory.

Conclusion

Focusing on the Fulford Arms, a grassroots music venue in York, UK, this article has explored independent music venues as heritage sites. Through examination of their evidential heritage value, it has explored the potential of GMVs to carry material evidence of past performances and gigs – evidential heritage value of their physical spaces. In this case study, evidential value is manifested in a particular and niche way via the signatures of a selection of past performers which adorn the walls of the venue.

In the series of photographs presented above, the venues' walls become a rich marker of evidential heritage value in three key ways. Firstly, they provide a unique material heritage format that functions as a cooperative physical archive. As a result, by giving the opportunity to bands to sign the walls through unofficial curatorial activities, the Fulford Arms participate in a counter-authorised, democratised form of evidential heritage values that goes against the authorised heritage discourse and hegemonic, top-to-down, commemoration schemes. As an outcome, the co-produced evidential value exists in a physical space in which memories and experiences can be acknowledged and made material. Secondly, the act of signing the walls is linked to the notion of heritage-as-praxis, embedded in the everyday activities of the venue and producing evidential heritage value through the collaboration of performers and the venue. Thirdly, the evidential value of the Fulford Arms is also manifested through the understanding of the signed walls as an interior design and decor which represent the subcultural vibe of the venue, highlighting the unique aesthetic identity and stylistic tone at the heart of collective memories of the Fulford Arms.

As such, this article explores the forgotten. It examines the physical environment in order to find evidence about people's activities. Finally, it argues that the evidential value of grassroots

music venues has the capacity to shape notions of musical space and place, while highlighting the embeddedness of the venue in the musical collective memory of local scenes and communities.

Yorgos Paschos is a WRoCAH- funded Ph.D. Researcher at the Department of Archaeology, University of York (UK) in partnership with York Music Venue Network and a member of the Punk Scholars Network. His current research focuses on the exploration and assessment of the subcultural heritage significance of Grassroots Music Venues in Yorkshire. Other research interests include subcultural theory, countercultures, spatial and auditory experiences of music venue audiences, and participatory research methodologies.

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Riffs

Experimental writing on popular music

Riffs is a peer-reviewed interdisciplinary journal which provides a space for experimental ways of thinking and writing about popular music research. It is a space for creatives of all backgrounds, experiences and interests.

Riffs emerged from a writing group at Birmingham City University, established in 2015 by Nick Gebhardt and supported by the Birmingham Centre of Media and Cultural Research. As popular music scholars, many of the original 'Write Clubbers' straddled disciplines: music; sociology; media studies; anthropology; dance. Some felt adrift, on thin ice.

'Write Club' offered an opportunity of 2,000 words and the space of a table and eight chairs to explore what it meant to research popular music, to write about it, to construct an argument, a description, a song, a line. Once nerves were finally quashed and it became comfortable to watch another read your work, the writing became better and better until it seemed a crime to keep them under wraps, hidden away from curious eyes on a private blog.

In the founding issues of *Riffs*, we offered up some of our thoughts and writing in the hope that we would be able to read yours, and that each of us will in some small way change the ways in which we think and write about popular music. We have not been disappointed.

Our Editorial Board has now expanded from its BCU origins, and includes PhD researchers, ECRs, mid-career, and senior academics based at universities in the UK, Bulgaria, Canada, Australia, Ireland, and the US. Many of the editorial board are also practicing musicians, composers, artists, dancers, designers, curators, and writers.

We hope that you will consider this your official invitation to Write Club.

Contributor guidelines and further journal information can be found on our website: [**www.riffsjournal.org**](http://www.riffsjournal.org)

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Experimental Writing on Popular Music

Popular Music Materialities

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